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UNESCO World Heritage brand from the tourists' perspective: A Customer-Based Brand Equity Approach

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Resumo

Vários estudos foram realizados sobre a marca Património Mundial da UNESCO. No entanto, as opiniões dividem-se sobre se se trata de uma marca turística verdadeiramente bem-sucedida, e se a inclusão de um local à Lista do Património Mundial pode ter impacto na chegada de visitantes. Dados os pontos de vista divergentes sobre o valor da marca Património Mundial e o seu impacto no comportamento turístico, esta investigação propôs um quadro para avaliar o valor da marca Património Mundial a partir de uma perspectiva turística. O objetivo desta pesquisa é investigar a marca Património Mundial da UNESCO recorrendo a um modelo de valor da marca (em inglês “brand equity”) baseado no cliente, desenvolvido por Aaker (1991) e aplicado a um destino por Konecnik e Garther (2007) e Boo et al. (2009). Em particular, o estudo centra-se nas formas como as diferentes dimensões do valor da marca (imagem da marca, notoriedade da marca, lealdade à marca e qualidade da marca) afetam as intenções de viagem e o valor da marca no contexto do Património Mundial. A análise PLS-SEM (Mínimos Quadrados Parciais – Modelagem de Equações Estruturais) foi realizada com base nos dados obtidos no inquérito. O IPMA (Análise do Mapa de Importância-Desempenho) foi também utilizado para expandir os resultados da PLS-SEM. Os resultados mostraram que apenas duas dimensões do valor da marca do destino (a qualidade da marca e a lealdade à marca) têm uma influência positiva no valor da marca do destino e nas intenções de viagem. O IPMA mostra também que a fidelidade à marca de destino e a qualidade da marca têm um desempenho relativamente bons nas construções de destino. O valor da marca do destino, por outro lado, não tem influência significativa nas intenções de viagem. Esta investigação contribui para a literatura sobre a marca de destinos, e oferece conselhos práticos para a melhoria da gestão e para a promoção dos locais do Património Mundial.

Palavras-chave: Valor da marca baseado no cliente (CBBE); Valor da marca do destino; Intenção de viagem; UNESCO; Património Mundial.

Classificações JEL: Z32 Turismo e Desenvolvimento; Z33 Marketing e Finanças;

Abstract

Several studies have been conducted on the UNESCO World Heritage brand. However, opinions on whether it is a truly successful tourism brand and whether adding a location to the World Heritage List can influence visitor arrivals are divided. Given the conflicting views regarding the value of the World Heritage brand and its impact on tourist behavior, this research proposed a framework for assessing World Heritage brand equity from a tourist perspective. The aim of this research is to investigate the UNESCO World Heritage brand using a Customer-Based Brand Equity model developed by Aaker (1991) and applied to a destination by Konecnik and Garther (2007) and Boo et al. (2009). Particularly, this study focuses on the ways in which different dimensions of brand equity — brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand quality—affect travel intentions and brand value in the context of World Heritage. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) analysis was performed on data obtained from the survey. The Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) was also employed to expand on the PLS-SEM findings. The results showed that only two dimensions of destination brand equity—brand quality and brand loyalty—have a positive influence on destination brand value and travel intentions. The IPMA also shows that destination brand loyalty and brand quality have both relatively good performance and effect on the target constructs. Destination brand value, on the other hand, has no significant influence on travel intentions. This research contributes to the literature on destination branding and offers practical advice for the improvement of the management and promotion of World Heritage sites.

Keywords: Customer-based brand equity (CBBE); Destination brand equity; Travel intention; UNESCO; World Heritage.

JEL Classifications: Z32 Tourism and Development; Z33 Marketing and Finance;

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List of Abbreviations

CBBE - Customer-based brand equity

CBDDBE - Customer-based destination brand equity

HTMT - The Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio of correlations

CR - Composite reliability

DBA - Destination brand awareness

DBI - Destination brand image

DBL - Destination brand loyalty

DBQ - Destination brand quality

DBV - Destination brand value

IPMA - Importance-Performance Map Analysis

PLS-SEM - Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model

TI - Travel intention

UNESCO - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WH – World Heritage

WHS – World Heritage Site

Introduction

Branding in tourism plays a crucial role in attracting visitors and shaping the perception of a destination. Given the tourism sector's growing significance for economic development, many destination managers and local stakeholders start to focus more on creating and promoting local brands to gain a competitive advantage (Fyall & Rakic, 2006). One of the ways for many developing countries to get an established, and widely recognized in the tourism sector, international brand “at a lower cost” (Ryan & Silvanto, 2014) is to get their tourist attractions included in the World Heritage List. The World Heritage List was created in 1972 by UNESCO as part of the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, which primarily aims to protect sites of outstanding universal value. Since the first sites were inscribed in 1978, the number of sites included in the list reaches 1223 sites across 168 countries (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2024). The constantly increasing number of sites as well as the number of sites added to the Tentative list (sites considered for nomination) can be explained by a number of reasons, but one of them is the widespread belief that World Heritage status can boost tourism (Ryan & Silvanto, 2009, 2014). Moreover, UNESCO in its reports also occasionally supports these assumptions by stating that the inscription of a site on the World Heritage List increases tourist activities at the site due to a rise in public attention and calls the World Heritage a “quality brand,” whose value can be maximized to attract tourists (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2008).

The World Heritage brand has been the subject of many studies. Some authors describe the WH brand as a top brand, a strong brand, and a powerful marketing tool (Hall & Piggin, 2003; Fyall & Rakic, 2006; Buckley, 2018). Other authors question the value of this brand (Poria et al., 2011; King & Halpenny, 2014; Adie et al., 2017). The impact of the inclusion of a site on the World Heritage List on international and domestic tourist flow has been studied by a large number of authors. However, while some studies have found an increase in tourist flow to the site (Yang et al., 2010, Su & Lin, 2014), others have found no such effect (Huang et al., 2012; Ribaud & Figini, 2017). At the same time, some authors have found that the WH brand has a greater impact on tourism development in developing countries (Yang & Lin, 2014; Su & Teo, 2008) compared to developed countries. Additionally, a number of researchers have covered the topic of WH brand awareness among tourists (Poria et al., 2011; King & Halpenny, 2014), noting the low level of brand awareness.

Studies of the WH brand conducted by numerous authors were largely devoted to the economic benefits of obtaining WH status for a site and the impact on the tourist flow.

Moreover, much of the existing research has primarily focused on what effects designation have on local destinations (Mariani & Guizzardi, 2020; Carreira et al., 2021), where UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS) are located, rather than analyzing WHS as a destination.

Considering the opposite views on World Heritage brand value and its influence on tourism behavior, it is necessary to propose a comprehensive framework for evaluating World Heritage brand equity from the tourist's perspective. Many different Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) models have been developed and widely applied to commercial and destination contexts, but their application to the UNESCO World Heritage brand remains limited. Some studies have examined some dimensions of brand equity of World Heritage brand, particularly awareness; however, there is limited understanding of how all dimensions of brand equity interact within the specific context of UNESCO World Heritage sites and how they influence brand value and travel intentions. Addressing this gap is crucial, as it can provide valuable insights for destination managers and shareholders on how to enhance the attractiveness of World Heritage sites for tourists, ultimately contributing to the promotion and preservation of these unique and historically significant places.

This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the destination brand equity of UNESCO World Heritage sites and investigating how the dimensions of destination brand equity and brand value affect travel intentions. The research questions guiding this study are: 1) What role do different dimensions of brand equity play in shaping the brand value of UNESCO World Heritage sites? How do different dimensions of brand equity, particularly brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand quality, and brand value of UNESCO World Heritage sites, influence travel intentions?

To address these questions, this research will employ the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, developed in the works of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) and applied to a destination by Konecnik and Garther (2007) and Boo et al. (2009). This model will be instrumental in examining the variables related to brand equity and brand value. Methodologically, this research will utilize surveys to gather data from tourists who have visited UNESCO World Heritage sites, capturing their perceptions of the brand. Then the gathered data will be analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The research findings will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on destination brand equity by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between different dimensions of brand equity and brand value and travel intentions. Moreover, they will contribute to the studies on World Heritage by providing data regarding how tourists value the World Heritage brand as a destination brand and how that view affects their plans to visit it. Additionally, this research

will provide practical recommendations for enhancing the management and promotion of World Heritage as a travel destination.

The structure of the thesis will be the following: the first chapter introduces the literature review that will assist in determining the dimensions of the brand equity of the UNESCO World Heritage brand and formulating the hypotheses about the relationship between the travel intentions and the dimensions of the brand equity; the second chapter includes the proposed model for this research; chapter 3 describes the methodology for the data collection and data analysis; chapter 4 presents the results; and chapter 5 includes discussion of the results. Theoretical and practical implications of the research will be covered in the final chapter of the dissertation (Chapter 6). The study will also include the list of references and annexes.

1. Literature review and research hypotheses

1.1 Customer-based brand equity and destination brand equity

1.1.1 Destination branding

Destination branding has emerged as a crucial aspect of destination marketing, particularly as global competition among tourist destinations intensifies (Pike, 2005). As an extension of product branding, the concept of destination branding has its roots in marketing theory, which indicates that tourists perceive a destination as a product (Boo et al., 2009). However, destinations are far more multidimensional than traditional consumer goods or services, presenting unique challenges in branding (Pike, 2005). A destination brand is not only about tangible elements like logos and slogans but also involves intangible aspects, including the emotional and experiential value that influences consumer perception and decision-making (Aaker, 1991; Blain et al., 2005; Boo et al., 2009). Blain et al. (2005) define destination branding as a set of marketing activities aimed at creating a unique identity for a destination through a name, symbol, logo, or other graphic elements that distinguish it from others. At the same time, these activities are intended to create a memorable and unique travel experience, strengthen the visitor's emotional bond with the destination, and lower the expenses associated with consumer search (Blain et al., 2005).

The scholarly discussion on destination branding began in the 1990s, and the following decades have seen increasing academic interest in the area, with a noticeable increase in publications and research dedicated to understanding and strengthening destination brands (Pike, 2010). While destination branding theory has evolved from focusing solely on destination image to a more complex understanding of branding as a multidimensional process involving various elements that contribute to the overall attractiveness of a destination, challenges remain in defining the specific components of a destination brand and measuring the effectiveness of branding efforts (Cai, 2002; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Kaushal et al., 2019). Dedeoğlu et al. (2019) suggested that brand effectiveness can be assessed from a customer perspective, considering factors such as brand equity, which enhances both customer experiences and the competitive advantage of the destination. Positive brand equity can result in enhanced brand loyalty and greater effectiveness of marketing programs, which contribute to the success of a destination's branding initiatives.

1.1.2 Customer-based brand equity

In both academic and marketing contexts, brand equity is regarded as an important concept since it can play a major role in determining a brand's strength and position in the market (Lassar et al., 1995). Generally, brand equity refers to “value added to a product by its brand name” (Yoo & Donthu, 2001, p.1). This value can be evaluated from both financial and consumer-based perspectives (Lassar et al., 1995).

Aaker (1991, p. 15) defines brand equity, commonly referred as Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a producer, by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers”. Moreover, Aaker (1991) identifies five dimensions of brand equity: brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and other proprietary brand assets.

Keller (1993) further developed the concept of brand equity by focusing on the consumer perspective. He defines CBBE as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (Keller, 1993, p. 8). Keller's (1993) CBBE model is structured as a pyramid that illustrates four stages of brand development: brand identity, brand meaning, brand response, and brand resonance.

Though they both emphasize the importance of brand equity, Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) take distinct approaches to it. Aaker's model (1991) is commonly applied to measure and manage brand equity by focusing on tangible assets like brand loyalty and perceived quality (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019). Keller's model (1993), on the other hand, is more focused on brand knowledge, particularly how brand knowledge affects consumer behavior.

Despite the significant contributions by Aaker and Keller, the measurement of brand equity remains a topic of debate (Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Lassar et al., 1995). In order to address the lack of agreement on brand equity measurement, Yoo and Donthu (2001), recognizing the complexity of the concept, developed a multidimensional brand equity scale that integrates ideas from both Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Lassar et al. (1995) further expanded the understanding of brand equity and proposed alternative dimensions such as performance, social image, price/value, trustworthiness, and identification/attachment.

1.1.3. Destination brand equity

Since destination branding has become a significant focus within tourism research, scholars recognize the importance of brand equity in managing tourism destinations (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pike, 2010; Boo et al., 2009). The application of CBBE to destinations makes it possible to assess the destination's brand performance, which is essential for influencing brand development and evaluating marketing effectiveness (Chekalina et al. 2018). Konecnik and Gartner (2007) were first in applying the CBBE model to tourism destinations. Their study demonstrated how brand dimensions may be used to assess destination brand equity from the tourist perspective (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Bianchi & Pike, 2011).

The CBBE model has been employed to a variety of tourism locations and destinations since it was first implemented, demonstrating its adaptability to a number of different tourism contexts. For example, studies have applied the CBBE model to hotels (Kim & Kim, 2005), restaurants (Kim & Kim, 2005), museums (Liu et al., 2015), cities (Boo et al., 2009; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014), regions (Kaushal et al., 2019), and countries (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pike & Bianchi, 2016; Im et al., 2012).

Furthermore, a number of studies have attempted to determine the CBBE dimensions and the connections between them in the context of destination brands. (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Boo et al., 2009; Pike, 2009; Bianchi & Pike, 2011; Im et al., 2012; Bianchi et al., 2014; Chekalina et al., 2018).

1.2 Dimensions of destination brand equity

Similar to CBBE research, destination brand equity studies are greatly challenged by a lack of universally accepted measurement tools (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Dedeoğlu et al., 2019).

Early studies, such as those by Konecnik and Gartner (2007) and Pike (2009), primarily focused on core dimensions adopted from Aaker (1991) without incorporating any tourism-specific measurement scales. The majority of destination brand equity studies employed the same framework. Recent studies have tried to expand it by incorporating additional dimensions like brand value, brand experience, and trust (Boo et al., 2009; Chekalina et al., 2018; Dedeoğlu et al., 2019). Ferns and Walls (2012) and San Martín et al. (2019) expanded the application of the CBBE model by exploring the relationships among brand equity dimensions, travel involvement, satisfaction, and visit intentions. Their studies highlighted the complex interplay between brand equity and tourist behaviors, emphasizing the need for a deeper understanding of these relationships. Highlighting the importance of cultural brand assets, Kladou and

Kehagias (2014) expanded Aaker's brand equity model to cultural heritage sites. This study shows how the CBBE model may be modified and applied to specific destination contexts, indicating that it can be useful for analyzing UNESCO World Heritage brand.

Table 1.1 showcases the brand equity dimensions that have been employed in CBBE models across various destination brand equity studies. Furthermore, an expanded overview of the brand dimensions utilized in this study is provided below.

Author/Year	Dimensions of destination brand equity (CDBBE)
1. Konecnik and Gartner (2007)	- destination awareness - destination image - destination quality - destination loyalty
2. Boo et al. (2009)	- destination brand awareness - destination brand image - destination brand quality - destination brand loyalty - destination brand value alternative model: - destination brand loyalty - destination brand value - destination brand awareness - destination brand experience
3. Pike (2009)	- brand salience - brand associations - brand loyalty
4. Bianchi and Pike (2011)	- destination brand salience - destination brand quality - destination brand image - destination brand value - destination brand loyalty
5. Im et al. (2012)	- brand awareness - brand image - brand associations - brand loyalty
6. Kladou and Kehagias (2014)	- awareness - associations - quality - loyalty - assets.
7. Chekalina et al. (2018)	- destination brand awareness - destination brand loyalty - value-in-use - value-for-money - destination resources

8. Kaushal et al. (2019)	- destination brand awareness - destination image - social self-image - perceived value - perceived quality - destination loyalty
9. Dedeoğlu et al. (2019)	- destination brand value - destination brand loyalty - destination brand quality - destination brand awareness - destination brand trust - destination brand satisfaction

Table 1.1. The brand equity dimensions employed in CBDBE studies.

1.2.1 Destination brand image

The concept of brand image, defined as the perceptions and associations consumers hold regarding a brand, is crucial in shaping consumer behavior and building brand equity (Keller, 1993). While destination branding is a relatively recent concept, Cai (2002) pointed out that there are a lot of studies on destination image, some of which date back to the early 1970s. Though there are clear distinctions, early on there was a lot of overlapping between the development of destination image and destination branding (Cai, 2002). These days, most research employs a more balanced approach that examines every dimension of destination brand equity, including brand awareness, brand quality, and other elements (Im et al., 2012).

Destination image can be described as “a set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of a place or destination” (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 87). A customer's connection to a destination will be greater depending on how many unique and positive images they can recall (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). The dimension image is the most important component of destination brand equity, according to Konecnik and Gartner (2007).

Despite its importance, the destination image lacks a universally accepted definition and measurement scale, which makes it more difficult to use in tourist marketing and research (Gallarza et al., 2002). Echtner and Ritchie (1991) provide a foundational framework for understanding destination image by identifying such dimensions as functional (tangible) and psychological (intangible). The functional attributes refer to tangible aspects such as attractions and infrastructure, while psychological attributes include intangible perceptions like the atmosphere and emotional responses (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Authors such as Lee and Back (2008) and Boo et al. (2009) chose a different approach by focusing on social image and self-

image. Lee and Back (2010) proposed that tourists with higher levels of image congruence—the alignment between the user image of a product or brand and one's own self-image—have higher brand satisfaction than visitors who exhibit lower image congruence.

Nonetheless, it appears that the notion that destination image is a major determinant of travel decisions and one of the most significant elements influencing tourist destination selections is widely accepted (Murphy et al., 2000; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Im et al., 2012). Research shows that travel intentions are influenced by attractive and memorable destination images (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Baloglu et al., 2014; Ferns & Walls, 2012; Prayag, 2009). Furthermore, a positive destination image can enhance tourists' loyalty, increase the likelihood of destination choice, and positively influence their overall satisfaction (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Brand image was also found to be significantly related to destination brand value by Boo et al. (2009). However, little research has been done to connect destination brand image with value.

For the context of the World Heritage brand, one can argue that the UNESCO World Heritage designation can be viewed as a "seal of approval" (Ryan & Silvanto, 2009, p. 291) or an "externally recognized quality" marker (Fyall & Rakic, 2006, p. 171), which can enhance the brand image. Nevertheless, not enough study has been done on how travel intentions are affected by the WH brand image. After the review of the literature, the following hypotheses can be proposed:

H1. Destination brand image has a positive influence on destination brand value

H2. Destination brand image has a positive influence on travel intentions

1.2.2 Destination brand awareness

Brand awareness is an important aspect of destination marketing and an essential component of the brand equity model (Aaker, 1991; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Boo et al., 2009). According to Aaker (1991), brand awareness is the degree to which customers are aware of a brand and how much that recognition affects their ability to make purchasing decisions. Brand awareness can be expressed as brand knowledge, brand recognition, and brand recall (Im et al., 2012).

In the context of destination marketing, creating brand awareness is very important, as it serves as the first step in building destination brand equity and influences consumer travel intentions (Yuan & Jang, 2008). Effective destination marketing aims to enhance tourists' awareness of a destination through strategic advertising and branding to ensure that the destination is on top of mind of potential tourists when they are considering travel options (Jago

et al., 2003; Bianchi & Pike, 2011). Moreover, it is important for the destination not only to be well-known but also to immediately come to mind to a potential visitor when they are thinking about a particular trip (Pike, 2009). However, while brand awareness is an essential first step in building brand equity, it does not always directly translate into purchase or travel decisions, as it may only generate consumer curiosity (Fesenmaier et al., 1993; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Milman and Pizam (1995) even argue that those who are aware of a tourist destination have no greater interest or likelihood of visiting it than those who are not.

Buil et al. (2013) also suggest that brand awareness can contribute to brand value but didn't provide any empirical evidence for that claim. Boo et al. (2009), on the other hand, while testing his proposed model for destination brand equity, discovered that there was no significant relationship between destination brand awareness and destination brand value.

Researchers that looked at visitor awareness of the WH brand and its influence in the decision to visit, such as Dewar et al. (2012), Marcotte and Bourdeau (2006), Poria et al. (2011), Reinius and Fredman (2007), and King and Halpenny (2014), came to the conclusion that the brand has low awareness and little to no effect on travel intentions. However, according to Yan and Morrison (2008), the World Heritage status did have an impact on travelers' visit decisions.

In light of the contradictory results of previous studies on the relationship between destination brand awareness and travel intentions, and brand value, it is necessary to test these relationships in the context of the UNESCO World Heritage brand. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3. Destination brand awareness has a positive influence on destination brand value

H4. Destination brand awareness has a positive influence on travel intentions

1.2.3 Destination brand quality

The significance of brand quality as an important element of brand equity, as well as destination brand equity, was emphasized by Keller (2003), Aaker (1996), and Boo et al. (2009).

Perceived quality, as defined by Aaker (1991, p. 87) as "a customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service concerning its intended purpose, relative to alternatives," has long been used interchangeably with brand quality in many studies (Pike et al., 2010). Destination brand quality is a multidimensional concept. Chen and Chen (2010) distinguish experiential aspect of destination quality and service quality, stating that the quality perceived by visitors is often more closely associated with their experiences during the visit rather than the services provided. Lewis and Chambers (1989) share a similar view, suggesting

that brand quality is often shaped by visitors' opinions based on comparison between their expectations and the actual performance of services encountered during their stay. Other scholars link destination brand quality to perceptions of the quality of a destination brand's attributes (Bianchi et al., 2014). It encompasses the perceived quality of various attributes associated with a destination, such as accommodations, safety, cleanliness, and infrastructure, which directly influence visitors' experiences and judgments (Bianchi et al., 2014; Žabkar et al., 2010). These attributes are often controllable and can be managed to enhance visitors' perceptions, thus reinforcing the destination's brand equity (Žabkar et al., 2010).

Measuring destination brand quality is complex due to its subjective nature, but it is essential for understanding destination brand equity (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Studies have utilized various metrics to assess this construct, including evaluations of price fairness, service quality, and the overall destination experience (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Chen & Tsai, 2007). Boo et al. (2009) suggest that brand quality should be assessed through the lens of brand performance, which involves how well a destination meets tourists' functional needs (Keller, 2003), taking into account elements such as the environment and service infrastructure.

Considering brand quality when analyzing brand equity and tourist attitudes towards the brand is important because many researchers suggest that perceived quality significantly affects consumer behavior, including purchase and travel intentions, and directly influences perceived value, loyalty, and satisfaction (Low & Lamb, 2000; Murphy et al., 2000). Dedeoğlu et al. (2019) claim that the quality of services has a major impact on how visitors perceive a destination's functional value since they believe that their time, money, and effort have been well spent on high-quality goods and services. Additionally, studies by Dabholkar et al. (2000) and Yuan and Jang (2008) show the relationship between brand quality and behavioral intentions is mediated by satisfaction. However, the relationship between perceived quality and satisfaction is not universally accepted, as some studies, such as that by Chen and Tsai (2007), found no direct link between quality, satisfaction, or behavioral intention. But little research has been done on the direct impacts of brand quality on brand value and travel intentions. Moreover, perhaps due to the multifaceted nature of the concept of brand quality, the lack of a unified approach to the quality of services, including tourist services, on the WHS, and the great diversity of these sites, studies on the influence of WH brand quality on brand value and travel intentions have not been conducted. Thus, the following hypotheses are presented:

H5. Destination brand quality has a positive influence on destination brand value

H6. Destination brand quality has a positive influence on travel intentions

1.2.4 Destination brand loyalty

Destination brand loyalty, a concept emerging from traditional brand loyalty in marketing, is defined by the attachment and commitment a consumer feels toward a particular destination. Aaker (1991) describes brand loyalty as the attachment a customer has to a brand, which effects their engagement with the brand, perceived value, and brand equity (Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999; Boo et al., 2009). Lassar et al. (1995) suggest that brand equity, derived from consumer confidence, can enhance loyalty and justify premium pricing.

In tourism, destination brand loyalty can significantly impact repeat visitation and word-of-mouth recommendations, thus benefiting travel destinations (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Existing research predominantly explores the relationship between brand loyalty and other brand equity dimensions (Bianchi & Pike, 2011; Buil et al., 2013; Im et al., 2012; Kaushal et al., 2018; Boo et al., 2009). Studies have also examined how different factors like motivation, attachment, expectations, experience, satisfaction, and emotional connections can influence brand loyalty (Baloglu, 2001; Bigne et al., 2001; Back & Parks, 2003; Yuksel et al., 2010; Wu, 2016). However, within the framework of destination brand equity, there is still no commonly accepted definition and measurement scale of destination brand loyalty, despite the fact that it has significant implications for a destination (Oppermann, 2000; Baloglu, 2001; Boo et al., 2009).

Destination brand loyalty is often studied in terms of behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty (Boo et al., 2009; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Behavioral loyalty mostly refers to repeat visits to a destination (Bianchi et al., 2014). Behavioral approach to loyalty, while easier to implement using available data like purchase history, do not always capture the underlying motivations for repeat behavior, such as habit or psychological attachment (Oppermann, 2000; Odin et al., 2001). In contrast, attitudinal loyalty reflects a consumer's positive feelings or commitment towards a destination, which may influence their intention to revisit or recommend it to others (Bianchi et al., 2014). However, this approach is also challenged since both the data collected and attitudinal measures are not always reliable (Prayag & Ryan, 2012).

This paper explores destination brand loyalty through the lens of attitudinal loyalty, focusing specifically on how tourists' attitudes toward UNESCO World Heritage Sites influence their travel intentions. The purpose of it is to examine whether these attitudes lead tourists to visit other WHS. However, there are certain similarities between the two concepts since, according to certain writers, visit intentions can constitute attitudinal loyalty (Baloglu, 2001). In order to distinguish between these two constructs in this study, tourists' willingness

to recommend a destination and positive feelings towards a destination are used as indicators of destination brand loyalty.

Moreover, little research has been done on the influence that destination brand loyalty has on destination brand value. Consequently, two hypotheses are put forward:

H7. Destination brand loyalty has a positive influence on destination brand value

H8. Destination brand loyalty has a positive influence on travel intentions

1.2.5 Destination brand value

The concept of destination brand value is rooted in the broader understanding of brand value, which is defined as “the perceived brand utility relative to its costs, assessed by the consumer and based on simultaneous considerations of what is received and what is given up to receive it” (Lassar et al., 1995, p.13). Applying this definition to destination brand equity, Chen and Tsai (2007, p. 116) described destination brand value as “the visitor's overall appraisal of the net worth of the trip, based on the visitor's assessment of what is received (benefits) and what is given (costs or sacrifice)”.

A common approach to brand value is to view it as a complex construct that encompasses several key dimensions (Boo et al., 2009; Williams & Soutar, 2009). However, there are neither universally accepted dimensions nor measurements to assess brand value. The most common value dimensions in tourism research are functional, monetary, emotional, epistemic, and social value dimensions (Williams & Soutar, 2009; Luo et al., 2020). Functional value corresponds to practical benefits, such as quality and reliability, while monetary value involves price considerations (Luo et al., 2020). Emotional value relates to the affective experiences associated with the destination; social value concerns the enhancement of one's social self-concept; and epistemic value involves the novelty and knowledge gained from the experience (Chekalina et al., 2018). Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) proposed approach to perceived value includes emotional, social, quality/performance, and price/value for money dimensions. Dedeoğlu et al. (2019) divide value into functional and hedonic value.

Several studies have also identified key dimensions for measuring destination brand value, such as value for money, reasonable pricing, and overall bargain perception (Boo et al., 2009). Aaker (1996) noted that one way to measure perceived value is to ask consumers if a brand offers better value than its rivals.

Some authors incorporate destination brand value into a CBBE model (Boo et al., 2009; Pike & Bianchi, 2016; Kaushal et al., 2019). A similar approach, based on the model and measurements proposed by Boo et al. (2009), was chosen for this research.

Furthermore, it is widely recognized in destination branding research that brand value has a positive influence on brand loyalty, either directly or through the mediation of satisfaction (Boo et al., 2009; Bianchi et al., 2014; Pike & Bianchi, 2016; Luo et al., 2020). Brand value itself also serves as an important mediator between brand experience or brand quality and loyalty, with brand quality having a significant impact on brand value (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Liu et al., 2015). Moreover, studies demonstrate that brand value not only affects customer satisfaction and brand loyalty but also positively impacts future travel intentions, occasionally even bypassing satisfaction as a mediator (Williams & Soutar, 2009; Chen & Chen, 2010; Kaushal et al., 2019).

Consequently, in accordance with the findings of previous studies, the following hypothesis regarding the World Heritage brand was developed:

H9. Destination brand value has a positive influence on travel intentions

1.3 Travel intentions

According to Hennessey et al. (2010), travel intentions are the subjective probability of a customer's decision to take or not take specific actions connected to a particular travel product or service. Another opinion is that travel intentions could be a unique idea that potential customers have about the likelihood of visiting a particular location in a given amount of time (Woodside & MacDonald, 1994).

Numerous studies are conducted to determine what factors affect travel intentions. Jang and Namkung (2009) highlight the significant impact of motivation and previous experiences on future purchase and visit intentions. Mazursky (1989) extends this by suggesting that travelers' perceptions of brands, shaped by their past experiences, are crucial in determining future travel behaviors. According to Bian and Forsythe (2012), behavioral intentions can be directly influenced by personal attributes, suggesting that individual characteristics influence travel choice processes. Huang et al. (2023) contribute to understanding tourist behavior by highlighting the role of perceived benefits and social influences in decision-making processes. This perspective suggests that tourists' intentions are influenced not only by personal motivations but also by social factors, like “travel shaming” during COVID-19 (Huang et al., 2023), and perceived benefits associated with travel.

Horng et al. (2012), by examining culinary tourism, find a direct positive relationship between brand equity and travel intentions. His finding is supported by Boo et al. (2009) and Kim and Kim (2005), who emphasize the importance of measuring tourism awareness and identifying brand equity elements that influence travel intentions.

2. Conceptual Model

In order to build a solid and reliable model for evaluating how tourists perceive the UNESCO World Heritage brand and how it impacts their travel intentions, first, a literature review was conducted to identify the dimensions of the destination brand equity. Then, nine hypotheses were proposed once the most suitable dimensions and variables had been determined.

This study proposes that all dimensions of destination brand equity—destination brand awareness (DBA), destination brand image (DBI), destination brand quality (DBQ), and destination brand loyalty (DBL)—have a positive impact on destination brand value (DBV) and travel intention (TI). In turn, destination brand value has a positive influence on travel intention. Figure 2.1 illustrates the conceptual model of the research, which is based on the model suggested by Boo et al. (2009) and Ferns and Walls (2012).

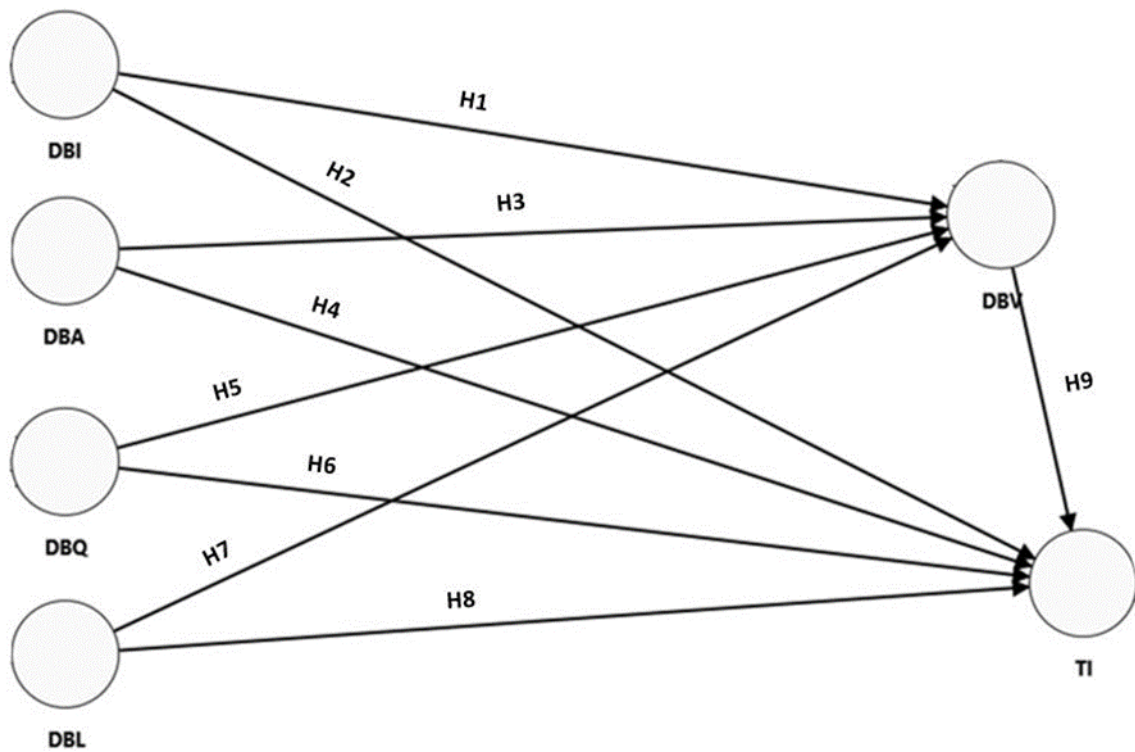


Figure 2.1 Proposed conceptual model

3. Methodology

The research adopts a deductive approach, and quantitative methods were used to analyze the conceptual model and hypotheses. In the early stages of the research, the deductive method was employed to derive theories from previous studies. Hypotheses were then developed based on those concepts. Subsequently, the relationships between destination brand equity, value, and travel intentions were tested through the use of quantitative methods.

When it comes to tourism behavior, qualitative methods are frequently used in tourism studies to help draw valid conclusions and support well-informed decisions based on the data (Dwyer et al., 2012). This is especially true for the studies examining tourism perceptions of destination images, travel motivation, and behavioral intentions (Dwyer et al., 2012).

Furthermore, because of its widespread application in studies on customer-based brand equity and customer-based destination brand equity, as well as its ability to handle smaller sample sizes and estimate complex research models with numerous variables (Chi et al., 2020), the structural equation model—specifically, PLS-SEM—has been identified as the most suitable method for this particular research.

The quantitative approaches utilized in this study are outlined in detail below.

3.1 Survey design

The survey was created to collect the data required for the research. It has two sections, each of which contains measuring scales adapted from past research within the relevant research framework.

The common demographic questions (age, gender, nationality, education, and current occupation) and the questions on the number of prior visits to UNESCO World Heritage sites were included in the first part. The respondents were given an option to reply that they have never visited any of the WHS, but their further responses in the section two were not considered in the results.

Then, in the survey's second section, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements, which corresponded to the different destination brand equity dimensions: brand image, quality, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand value, as well as to their travel intentions related to WHS.

The measurement of destination brand awareness is composed of four items, adapted from the studies of Boo et al. (2009), Yoo and Donthu (2001), and Konecnik and Gartner (2007). Five destination brand image items derived from studies of Grace and O'Cass (2005), Boo et

al. (2009), and Lassar et al. (1995). Destination brand quality was calculated using five items formulated from Boo et al. (2009), Pappu and Quester (2006), Konecnik and Gartner (2007), Sweeney and Soutar (2001), and Lassar et al. (1995). Three destination brand loyalty items were adapted from Boo et al. (2009) and Konecnik and Gartner (2007). Three travel intention items were based on the work of Lam and Hsu (2006) and Ryu and Jang (2006). Five items of destination brand value were derived from Boo et al. (2009), Oh (2000), Sweeney and Soutar (2001), and Lassar et al. (1995). All of the items used in the survey were measured using 5-point Likert-type scales, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 - strongly agree.

All proposed measurement items are presented in Table 3.1.

Dimension	Code	Item	Reference
Destination Brand Awareness (DBA)	DBA1	When I am thinking about cultural and natural heritage, UNESCO World Heritage sites come to my mind immediately	Boo et al. (2009)
	DBA2	UNESCO World Heritage sites are very famous	Yoo and Donthu (2001)
	DBA3	UNESCO World Heritage sites have good name and reputation	Konecnik and Gartner (2007)
	DBA4	The unique characteristics of UNESCO World Heritage sites come to my mind quickly	
Destination Brand Image (DBI)	DBI1	My friends would think highly of me if I visited any UNESCO World Heritage site	Grace and O'Cass (2005) Boo et al. (2009) Lassar et al. (1995)
	DBI2	When I hear about a UNESCO World Heritage site, I immediately think of unique and authentic place	
	DBI3	The image of UNESCO World Heritage sites is consistent with my own selfimage	
	DBI4	Visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites corresponds to my interests	
	DBI5	Visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites reflects who I am	
Destination Brand Quality (DBQ)	DBQ1	UNESCO World Heritage sites provide tourism offerings and facilities of consistent quality	Boo et al. (2009)
	DBQ2	When visiting UNESCO World Heritage site, I expect superior quality services	Pappu and Quester (2006)
	DBQ3	UNESCO World Heritage sites provide high-quality experiences	Konecnik and Gartner (2007)
	DBQ4	From UNESCO World Heritage sites' offerings, I can expect superior performance	Sweeney and Soutar (2001)
	DBQ5	UNESCO World Heritage sites perform better than other similar places	Lassar et al. (1995)

Destination Brand Loyalty (DBL)	DBL1	I enjoy visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites	Boo et al. (2009) Konecnik and Gartner (2007)
	DBL2	I would advise other people to visit UNESCO World Heritage sites	
	DBL3	UNESCO World Heritage sites would be my preferred choice for a vacation	
Destination Brand value (DBV)	DBV1	Visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites worth the price	Boo et al. (2009) Oh (2000) Sweeney and Soutar (2001) Lassar et al. (1995)
	DBV2	UNESCO World Heritage sites have reasonable prices	
	DBV3	Considering what I would pay for the trip, I will get much more than my money's worth by visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites	
	DBV4	Visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites is a good deal	
	DBV5	The costs of visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites are a bargain relative to the benefits I receive	
Travel intentions (TI)	TI1	I wish to visit any UNESCO World Heritage site	Lam and Hsu (2006) Ryu and Jang (2006)
	TI2	In the following year, I plan to visit any UNESCO World Heritage site	
	TI3	In the following year, I may visit any UNESCO World Heritage site	

Table 3.1 The items included in the survey.

After initial selection of items for each dimension, the pre-testing was conducted to ensure clarity of the questions and their appropriateness for the research. A group of fifty respondents, who have previously visited at least one WHS, completed an initial draft of the survey and gave feedback regarding chosen items. A total of 25 items were used in the pretest survey. No issues were found regarding wording, clarity of questions, or layout of the survey.

3.2 Data Collection

The survey was conducted between April and June 2024 and distributed online via various channels. It was designed using Google Forms—a well-known platform with a user-friendly interface. This platform was chosen because of its connection to a popular and widely-used search engine, which helped increase the response rate from the email distribution of the survey, as people assumed it was legitimate. Respondents were encouraged to share the survey through their personal connections and social media pages to help increase the number of responses. Additionally, the survey link was shared in groups related to travel and education, as well as in relevant discussion threads on social media sites like Facebook and Reddit. A small number of

responses was collected in person and later manually introduced into an online survey form for further analysis.

The survey was voluntary, anonymous, and was submitted upon its full completion. Survey respondents had to be over 18 years old and had to visit at least one UNESCO World Heritage Site. However, in the survey, respondents were also asked questions related to their age and a number of visits to the WHS to ensure validity of their responses. All invalid responses were excluded from further analysis.

In total, 195 questionnaires were distributed, and after eliminating incomplete or useless questionnaires, the final sample comprised of 152 valid responses. Thus, the response rate was 78%.

3.3. Data Analysis

The raw data received from the survey was uploaded into SmartPLS 4.0 software (Ringle et al., 2024) to validate the proposed model and test the hypotheses. The data was analyzed using the PLS-SEM method. According to Sarstedt et al. (2022), the PLS-SEM method works well with complicated models, small samples, and formative constructs, making it an appropriate choice for prediction-oriented research. This makes it the optimal method for this study, considering the structure of the research model and the size of the sample.

Evaluation of the results was carried out in two stages. Firstly, the measurement model's validity and reliability had to be evaluated because the structural model estimates would be useless if the measurement model did not show sufficient levels of validity and reliability (Henseler, 2017). Composite reliability (ρ_c) and Cronbach's alpha as an alternative measure were used to evaluate the construct and variable reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) was employed to measure the convergent validity. Discriminant validity was measured by using two most informative criteria (Henseler, 2017): the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) (Henseler et al. 2015).

After determining that the measurement model is of adequate quality, the evaluation moved on towards assessing the structural model. As a first step, it was necessary to look at the endogenous constructs' R^2 values as an indicator of the predictive accuracy of the model (Henseler, 2017). After that, an evaluation was made of the structural paths' significance and relevance. A path coefficient was deemed significant if the p-value is below the pre-defined alpha level (0,05) and if the confidence interval does not contain the value zero (Henseler,

2017). Based on the path coefficients and their significance, the research's hypotheses were either approved or rejected.

Additionally, the importance-performance map analysis (IPMA) was conducted to extend the results of PLS-SEM. The IPMA has been used in many studies within the PLS-SEM framework because it provides valuable insights by making it possible to analyze the performance of the constructs and their significance for the target construct simultaneously (Hauff et al., 2024). The x- and y-axes of the importance-performance map represent the importance and performance values of the antecedent constructions, respectively (Hauff et al., 2024). By analyzing the IPMA results, it is possible to discover variables with comparatively poor performance but high relevance in regard to certain target constructs. These are significant constructs that require improvement, and management or advertising initiatives need to concentrate on them (Schloderer et al., 2014).

The results of the data analysis are presented in the next section.

4. Results

4.1 Sample description

The detailed description of the sample is presented in Table 4.1. Due to the exclusion of invalid responses, 152 total survey responses were considered. In general, there was an overrepresentation of women (82%), and male respondents made up only 15%. The sample is predominantly composed of adults aged between 18 and 44 years (86%), of which nearly half were between 18 and 27 years (48%). In terms of nationality, the sample is dominated by Europeans (88%) with very limited representation from Asia (11%) and North/South America (1%), and no representation from Africa or Australia and Oceania. This suggests a potential geographic bias in the sample collection process. With most respondents having completed their education beyond high school (80%) and nearly half holding a postgraduate degree (47%), the sample was well-educated. 72% of the sample are employed, and 23% are students. The smallest group, comprising only 5%, includes those who are not currently working, either due to unemployment or retirement. More than a half of the respondents (69%) had visited at least one UNESCO World Heritage Site in the past year. The majority of the sample has visited between 1 and 5 World Heritage Sites, with 72% of respondents falling into this category. A smaller portion, 13%, has visited between 6 and 10 sites, while 15% have visited more than 10 sites. In addition, among people with postgraduate education, 36% have visited more than 6 WHS, while only 13% people with only high school education did the same. This suggests that individuals with postgraduate education may be more intentional in their visits to World Heritage sites, while those with lower levels of education tend to be more occasional visitors. This observation suggests the need for further research on this topic to better understand the motivations and behaviors of different educational groups in relation to their engagement with cultural and historical sites.

n=152

Characteristics		n	%
Sex	Female	125	82,2
	Male	23	15,1
	Prefer not so say	4	2,6
Age	18 - 27 years	73	48,0
	28 - 44 years	57	37,5
	45 - 64 years	22	14,5

Nationality	Asia	17	11,2
	Europe	133	87,5
	North/South America	2	1,3
Education	Complete school education (High school)	30	19,7
	Postgraduate degree	72	47,3
	Undergraduate degree	50	32,9
Occupation	Employed	110	72,3
	Student	35	23,0
	Unemployed/retired	7	4,6
Did you visit any WHS in the past year?	No	47	30,9
	Yes	105	69,1
How many WHS have you visited?	1-2	57	37,5
	3-5	52	34,2
	6-10	20	13,2
	More than 10	23	15,1

Table 4.1 Sample characteristics

4.2 Measurement model

Firstly, the IBM SPSS® Statistics software was used to conduct Harman's single-factor test analysis for common method bias. The results showed that the overall variance explained by a single factor accounted for 35,727%, which indicates that common method bias likely does not impact the study's result (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Then, the measurement model was evaluated by analyzing the reliability of individual indicators, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Six items (DBI2, DBI3, DBQ5, DBA2, DBA3, and DBL3) related to four research variables (destination brand image (DBI), destination brand quality (DBQ), destination brand awareness (DBA), and destination brand loyalty (DBL)) were dropped from the analysis because of low correlations with their respective dimensions.

All remaining items had standardized factor loadings greater than 0,6, with the lowest being 0,66, and all were significant at $p < 0,001$. These results support the reliability of the individual indicators (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Internal consistency reliability was assessed using the Cronbach alpha and composite reliability (CR). Cronbach's alpha is commonly used in studies as an indicator of instrument or scale reliability or internal consistency (Taber, 2018). As it is evident from Table 4.2, all variables show results higher than 0,64, with the lowest value of 0,65 for destination brand image. Even though an alpha value of 0,70 is considered to be the

most desirable and a sufficient measure of reliability, values ranging from 0,64 can be considered adequate (Taber, 2018). The composite reliability results confirm internal consistency, with most constructs having CR values exceeding 0,7. The exception is destination brand image (DBI), which has a CR value of 0,66; however, this result can still be considered acceptable (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Overall, the model demonstrates adequate internal consistency reliability for all constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0,64 and CR values mostly exceeding 0,7.

Furthermore, the measurement model has good convergent validity since the average variance extracted (AVE) of each variable ranges from 0,518 to 0,794, all of which are above the acceptable threshold of 0,5 (Henseler, 2017).

Variable	Items	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
DBA	DBA1	0,911	0,747	0,760	0,887	0,797
	DBA4	0,874				
DBI	DBI1	0,725	0,654	0,665	0,810	0,587
	DBI4	0,801				
	DBI5	0,772				
DBL	DBL1	0,850	0,694	0,709	0,866	0,764
	DBL2	0,898				
DBQ	DBQ1	0,694	0,698	0,717	0,811	0,518
	DBQ2	0,664				
	DBQ3	0,767				
	DBQ4	0,749				
DBV	DBV1	0,720	0,812	0,817	0,869	0,572
	DBV2	0,705				
	DBV3	0,739				
	DBV4	0,776				
	DBV5	0,834				
TI	TI1	0,801	0,766	0,798	0,856	0,666
	TI2	0,820				
	TI3	0,825				

Table 4.2 Measurement model.

Discriminant validity was examined by applying two approaches that have been shown to be informative: the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (Henseler et al. 2015). Table 4.3 shows that the square root of each AVE, indicated on the diagonal in bold, exceeds the highest correlation with any other

construct, thereby meeting the requirements for discriminant validity based on Fornell and Larcker's criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) criterion involves comparing HTMT values to a predefined threshold, for this research, the value of 0,85 (Henseler et al., 2015). None of the HTMT values exceeds this threshold, thereby confirming discriminant validity.

	DBA	DBI	DBL	DBQ	DBV	TI
DBA	0,893	0,563	0,288	0,469	0,445	0,337
DBI	0,563	0,766	0,474	0,539	0,487	0,463
DBL	0,288	0,474	0,874	0,529	0,583	0,560
DBQ	0,469	0,539	0,529	0,720	0,644	0,476
DBV	0,445	0,487	0,583	0,644	0,756	0,381
TI	0,337	0,463	0,560	0,476	0,381	0,816

Table 4.3 Fornell-Larcker criterion

4.3. Structural model analysis

First, the structural model was examined for any collinearity issues. All of the study's constructs have variance inflation factor (VIF) values below the threshold of 3, which was adopted from Sarstedt et al. (2022). Therefore, it can be concluded that the model did not exhibit collinearity.

The bootstrapping method was applied to test the relevance of the path coefficients in the model in order to validate hypotheses H1 through H9. The bootstrapping method was carried out with 5000 resamples, as recommended by Hair et al. (2024). Results of the significance tests for the structural model hypotheses are shown in Table 4.4, along with the path coefficient and t-value for the significant structural correlations between the variables.

To assess the prediction accuracy of the structural model, the R^2 value of the endogenous variables was used as the main criterion. The R^2 usually ranges from 0 to 1, with higher levels indicating a higher degree of explanatory power (Sarstedt et al., 2022). The study's bootstrapping results showed that the latent variables' R^2 values range from 0,390 (for travel intentions) to 0,519 (for destination brand value), all above the 0.10 threshold, which is considered satisfactory (Sarstedt et al., 2022). Considering that both R^2 values are higher than 0,10 but still fairly distant from 1, it is possible to assume that the structural model has a moderate degree of predictive accuracy.

Validation of the hypotheses relied on the path coefficient being positive and the p-value being less than the predetermined alpha threshold of 0,05, which indicate statistical significance of the relationships (Sarstedt et al., 2022). Since the p-values for hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4,

and H9 were less than the expected $p < 0,05$, these hypotheses were rejected. On the other hand, Table 4.4 indicates that destination brand loyalty has a significant positive impact on destination brand value ($\beta = 0,316$, $p < 0,05$) and travel intentions ($\beta = 0,415$, $p < 0,05$). These results provide support for H7 and H8, respectively. In turn, destination brand quality also has a positive effect on destination brand value ($\beta = 0,382$, $p < 0,05$) and travel intentions ($\beta = 0,196$, $p < 0,05$), which supports H5 and H6, respectively.

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	Standard deviation (STDEV)	t-statistic	P values	Result
H1. DBI -> DBV	0,047	0,085	0,560	0,576	Rejected
H2. DBI -> TI	0,167	0,100	1,669	0,095	Rejected
H3. DBA -> DBV	0,148	0,083	1,796	0,073	Rejected
H4. DBA -> TI	0,077	0,080	0,968	0,333	Rejected
H5. DBQ -> DBV	0,382	0,089	4,283	0,000	Accepted
H6. DBQ -> TI	0,196	0,100	1,966	0,049	Accepted
H7. DBL -> DBV	0,316	0,078	4,052	0,000	Accepted
H8. DBL -> TI	0,415	0,090	4,609	0,000	Accepted
H9. DBV -> TI	-0,103	0,102	1,003	0,316	Rejected

Significant at $p < 0,05$

Table 4.4 Results of structural model and hypotheses test.

4.3 Importance–performance matrix analysis

The IPMA was also employed in this research to extend the PLS-SEM results by taking into account each construct's performance, which was measured on a scale from 0 to 100 (Schloderer et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2024; Hauff et al., 2024). Then the average values of the latent variable scores (performance) and the total effect (importance) for a particular criterion construct were evaluated in order to identify important areas where management actions need to be improved (Schloderer et al., 2014). The two target constructs chosen for an importance-performance matrix analysis are travel intentions and destination brand value. Table 4.5, Figure 4.1, and Figure 4.2 show the IPMA results of these two target constructs.

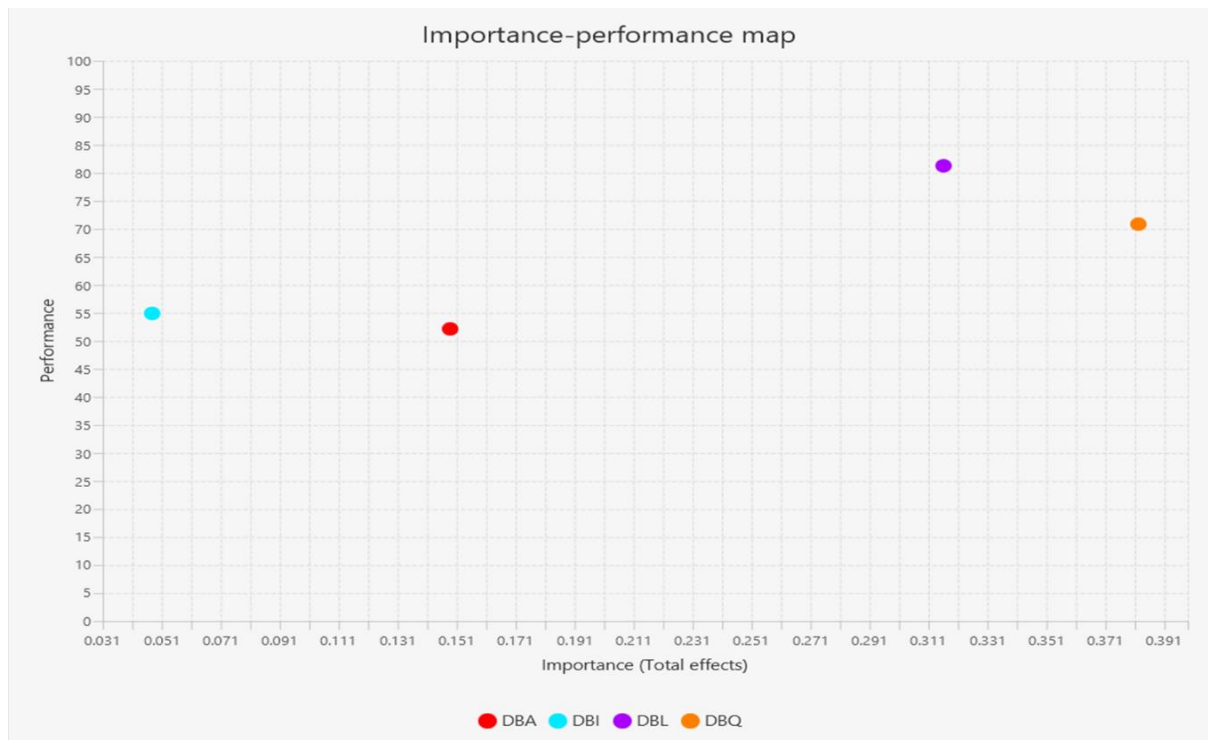


Figure 4.1 Results of the IMPA on destination brand value

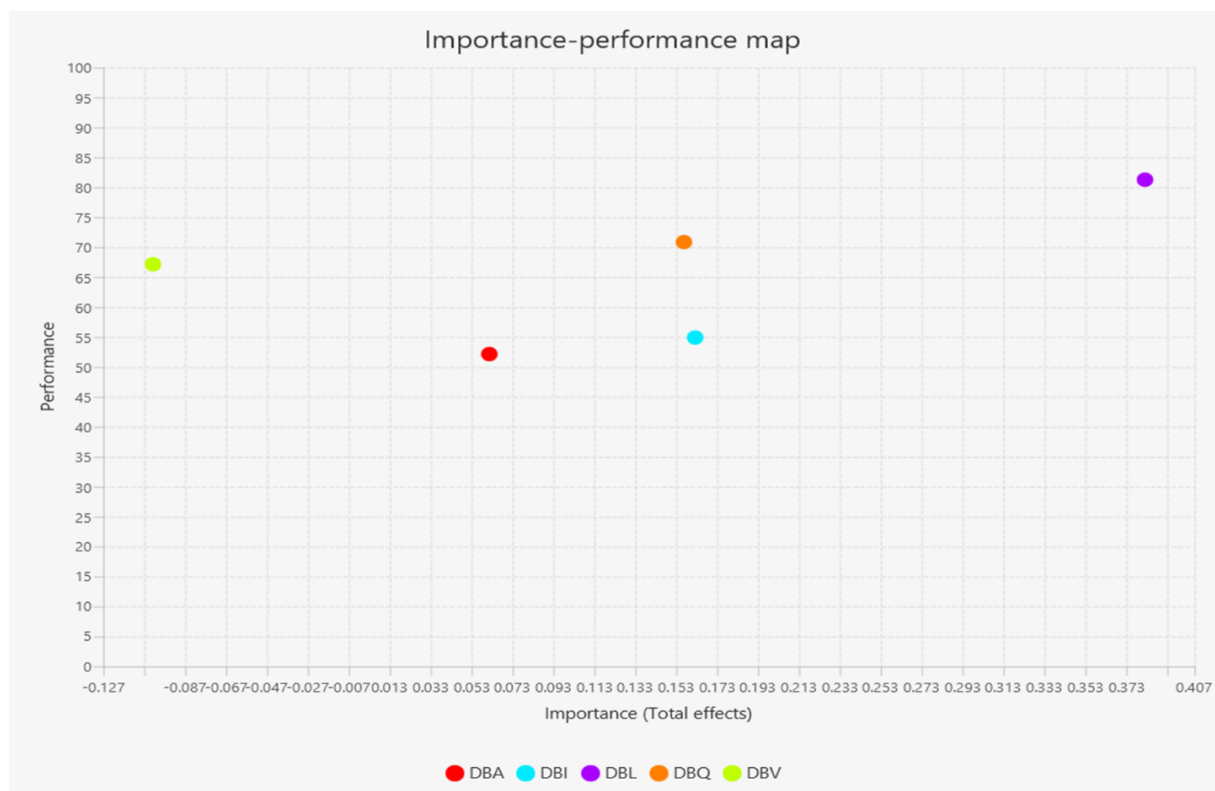


Figure 4.2 Results of the IMPA on travel intentions

	Destination brand value (DBV)		Travel intentions (TI)	
	Total effect	Performance	Total effect	Performance
DBA	0,148	52,151	0,062	52,151
DBI	0,047	54,913	0,162	54,913
DBL	0,047	81,263	0,382	81,263
DBQ	0,382	70,852	0,157	70,852
DBV			-0,103	67,149

Table 4.5. The IPMA results for travel intentions and destination brand value

Based on the results, it is evident that destination brand loyalty is the best performing variable, with a total performance of 81,263 in the case of both travel intentions and destination brand value. Destination brand awareness and destination brand image show the worst performance in both cases, with results of 52,151 and 54,913, respectively.

In addition, total effect results show that destination brand loyalty also has the biggest effect on travel intentions, with a value of 0,382. It is followed by destination brand image and destination brand quality with total effect results of 0,162 and 0,157, respectively. Destination brand awareness shows quite a low total effect on travel intentions (0,062), and destination brand value shows the only negative total effect (-0,103), confirming that it has no influence on travel intentions.

The IPMA result for destination brand value demonstrates that destination brand quality has the biggest total effect on this construct with the result of 0,382, closely followed by destination brand loyalty with the effect of 0,316. Destination brand awareness shows the third result with a 0,148 total effect score. Moreover, on the contract with the IPMA results of travel intentions, destination brand image shows the smallest total effect (0,047).

Overall, the IPMA results demonstrate that all four dimensions of destination brand equity appear to have an effect on both travel intentions and destination brand value. The IPMA also shows that while destination brand loyalty has both relatively good performance and effect on the target constructs, the performance of destination brand quality, destination brand image, and destination brand awareness can be improved. Therefore, management activities should specifically consider improving these three variables in order to enhance UNESCO World Heritage brand value and tourists' aspiration to visit WHS.

5. Discussion

This study sought to investigate the influence of various dimensions of brand equity—specifically brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand quality—on travel intentions and perceived brand value of the UNESCO World Heritage brand, as well as in what ways the destination brand value affects tourists' travel intentions.

Firstly, the findings reveal that destination brand quality positively impacts both destination brand value and travel intentions. The positive influence of destination brand quality on both destination brand value and travel intentions aligns with existing theories in the field of tourism and brand management (Low & Lamb, 2000; Dedeoğlu et al., 2019). High-quality brands are often perceived as more reliable and desirable, which enhances their overall value and attracts potential visitors (Aaker, 1991; Dedeoğlu et al., 2019). The positive influence of brand quality on brand value and travel intentions underscores the importance of maintaining high standards for the amenities, experiences, and services offered at UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Secondly, destination brand loyalty was found to positively influence both destination brand value and travel intentions. This finding expands the work of Yoon and Uysal (2005) and Bianchi et al. (2014), who emphasized the importance of loyalty in destination marketing by demonstrating that brand loyalty not only enhances brand value but also translates into travel intentions. These findings seem to indicate that positive attitudes can lead tourists to visit other WHS and potentially advocate for their protection. However, because brand loyalty and visit intentions are sometimes closely associated (Baloglu, 2001), the links between the two concepts need to be examined further across different contexts.

Thirdly, the study found no significant influence of destination brand awareness and destination brand image on brand value and travel intentions. This finding indicates that while awareness and a positive image are necessary for initial recognition, they do not necessarily translate into tangible outcomes such as increased travel intentions without the reinforcement of high quality and loyalty. These findings contradict Chen and Tsai's (2007) and Im's et al. (2012) statements about the key role of brand image in tourists' travel intentions. However, in the case of brand awareness, both in the context of UNESCO World Heritage brand and general destination brand equity studies (Milman & Pizam, 1995), this result aligns with Poria et al. (2011), Marcotte and Bourdeau (2006), and Dewar et al. (2012) finding that argue that there is little evidence that the awareness of designation has had a major impact on the motivation to

visit WHS. Research findings also support Boo et al.'s (2009) claim that there is no statistically significant correlation between destination brand awareness and destination brand value.

Lastly, destination brand value shows no influence on travel intentions, which contradicts the findings of Williams and Soutar (2009) and Kaushal et al. (2019). It can possibly be explained by a one-dimensional approach to brand value, which was measured primarily in monetary terms, and other value dimensions like functional and emotional value can have a different relationship with travel intentions; thus, further research to test this relationship is needed.

Overall, findings of this research advance existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence to the relationship between various dimensions of brand equity, specifically brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand quality and travel intentions, and brand value in the specific context of UNESCO World Heritage sites. Furthermore, in light of conflicting findings or a lack of the literature examining the relationships between the variables used, this research offers a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which these dimensions interact, thereby contributing to the development of destination brand equity knowledge.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

The present research makes several notable contributions to the theoretical understanding of destination brand equity, particularly within the context of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. By addressing the specified research questions, this study contributes to the literature in several ways.

Firstly, this research contributes to the literature by applying the destination brand equity model to examine the UNESCO World Heritage brand. Although previous studies have primarily examined destination brand equity in a wider tourism context, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of UNESCO World Heritage brand by examining factors like brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand quality, and brand value specifically for UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Additionally, it provides a more complex picture of how these elements interact within this particular destination, emphasizing the significance of destination brand quality and brand loyalty for this brand.

Secondly, the study advances the theoretical framework by linking destination brand equity to travel intentions. Particularly, by examining how different dimensions of brand equity—namely brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand quality, and brand value—influence travelers' intentions to visit WHS, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of brand equity in shaping travel behavior and decision-making.

Thirdly, the study provides evidence of the influence of brand equity dimensions on the brand value. The findings also help to fill a gap in the literature by identifying which brand equity aspects contribute to a perceived value of the UNESCO World Heritage brand.

6.2 Practical Implications

This research has a number of practical implications. First, the stakeholders and managers should not expect a significant influx of tourists to the World Heritage site just because it was added to the List. As the findings suggest, factors such as brand quality and loyalty play a more crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions of the site's value and their willingness to visit. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize improving the quality of the visitor experience and fostering loyalty to attract visitors.

Second, considering the importance of brand quality for both brand value and travel intentions, it is necessary to ensure that the sites are well preserved, accessible, and provide

high-quality educational and cultural experiences. To safeguard these sites for future generations, developing high-quality educational programs is especially important in order to raise awareness about heritage preservation and promote sustainable tourism. To improve visitors' overall experience, attention must also be given in regard to the quality of the facilities, their cleanliness, and the availability of straightforward guidance and information. Improving the sites' accessibility for all types of visitors will also further enhance the quality of the experience.

Third, developing programs that will positively influence visitor loyalty, such as personalized experiences and targeted communications, can strengthen the emotional connection between visitors and the UNESCO brand. This can include storytelling that highlights the historical and cultural significance of the sites, thereby, in addition to helping create a connection, also enhancing perceived brand value.

Finally, establishing a solid brand image and increasing brand awareness are still extremely important. Dedeoğlu et al. (2019) highlight the positive relationship between destination brand awareness and destination brand quality perceptions. This relationship is explained by the fact that increased awareness provides consumers with more information, leading to higher expectations about the brand's quality. Given the significant impact of brand quality on both brand value and travel intentions, site managers should focus their marketing efforts not only on promoting UNESCO World Heritage status but also on highlighting the high-quality services and experiences available at these sites. This approach can help establish strong associations between the World Heritage brand and a quality tourist experience. The issue of low brand awareness must also be addressed. Since many experts believe that the inconsistent way that brand information is presented at different sites significantly contributes to this problem (Poria et al., 2011; King & Halpenny, 2014), the World Heritage Committee needs to create unified rules for the placement of the World Heritage sign and information about the Convention.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, it is crucial to acknowledge its limitations and consider opportunities for future research to address these gaps and expand on the findings.

One such limitation is related to the study sample being primarily European; therefore, it's possible that the results may be biased toward European ideas and values. This may result in the findings omitting important aspects influencing destination brand equity in other regions.

Future research could test the theoretical model from this study across more culturally and ethnically diverse groups to enhance the universality and applicability of the findings.

Not differentiating between domestic and foreign tourists could be another potential limitation in this study. Since all tourists are treated as one cohesive entity in this research, major differences in the perceptions of World Heritage brand equity between these two groups might go undetected. When visiting WHS, domestic and international visitors frequently have different motivations, experiences, and expectations. Domestic tourists might have a deeper emotional connection and greater familiarity with the site, which could influence their perception of brand equity in unique ways compared to international tourists. Future research could address this gap by analyzing the attitudes of each visitor group to better understand how each group perceives the UNESCO World Heritage brand in one specific country.

Although brand awareness and image have been found to positively correlate with travel intentions and brand value in the context of other destinations, this study did not investigate why these factors do not have the same effect on travel intentions and brand value in the context of World Heritage Sites. Future studies can examine the reasons behind these dimensions' lack of significant relevance in the case of the World Heritage brand and identify potential elements that might strengthen their influence. Moreover, future research could extend the model and investigate the potential mediating effects of factors like personal interest in heritage or prior travel experience on brand equity and travel intentions.

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Annexes

Annex A – Survey in English

Part 1.

1. Please indicate your sex:
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
2. Please indicate your age:
 - ☐ 18 - 27 years
 - ☐ 28 - 44 years
 - ☐ 45 - 64 years
 - ☐ 64 years and more
3. Please indicate your nationality:
 - ☐ Europe
 - ☐ Asia
 - ☐ North/South America
 - ☐ Australia and Oceania
 - ☐ Africa
4. Please indicate your educational level:
 - ☐ Complete school education (High school)
 - ☐ Undergraduate degree
 - ☐ Postgraduate degree
5. Please indicate your occupation:
 - ☐ Employed
 - ☐ Unemployed/retired
 - ☐ Student
6. Did you visit any UNESCO World Heritage site in the past year?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
7. How many UNESCO World Heritage sites have you visited?
 - ☐ None
 - ☐ 1-2
 - ☐ 3-5
 - ☐ 6-10
 - ☐ More than 10

Part 2. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

Nº		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
1.	I wish to visit any UNESCO World Heritage site	1	2	3	4	5
2.	When I am thinking about cultural and natural heritage, UNESCO World Heritage sites come to my mind immediately	1	2	3	4	5

3.	UNESCO World Heritage sites provide tourism offerings and facilities of consistent quality	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites worth the price	1	2	3	4	5
5.	UNESCO World Heritage sites are very famous	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I enjoy visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites	1	2	3	4	5
7.	When visiting UNESCO World Heritage site, I expect superior quality services	1	2	3	4	5
8.	UNESCO World Heritage sites have reasonable prices	1	2	3	4	5
9.	My friends would think highly of me if I visited any UNESCO World Heritage site	1	2	3	4	5
10.	UNESCO World Heritage sites have good name and reputation	1	2	3	4	5
11.	UNESCO World Heritage sites provide high-quality experiences	1	2	3	4	5
12.	In the following year, I may visit any UNESCO World Heritage site	1	2	3	4	5
13.	When I hear about a UNESCO World Heritage site, I immediately think of unique and authentic place	1	2	3	4	5
14.	The image of UNESCO World Heritage sites is consistent with my own selfimage	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Considering what I would pay for the trip, I will get much more than my money's worth by visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites	1	2	3	4	5
16.	The unique characteristics of UNESCO World Heritage sites come to my mind quickly	1	2	3	4	5
17.	UNESCO World Heritage sites would be my preferred choice for a vacation	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites corresponds to my interests	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites is a good deal	1	2	3	4	5
20.	From UNESCO World Heritage sites' offerings, I can expect superior performance	1	2	3	4	5
21.	The costs of visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites are a bargain relative to the benefits I receive	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I would advise other people to visit UNESCO World Heritage sites	1	2	3	4	5
23.	UNESCO World Heritage sites perform better than other similar places	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites reflects who I am	1	2	3	4	5

25.	In the following year, I plan to visit any UNESCO World Heritage site	1	2	3	4	5
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Annex B – The variance inflation factor (VIF) values

	VIF
DBA -> DBV	1,558
DBA -> TI	1,604
DBI -> DBV	1,836
DBI -> TI	1,841
DBL -> DBV	1,499
DBL -> TI	1,707
DBQ -> DBV	1,737
DBQ -> TI	2,040
DBV -> TI	2,080

Annex C - The heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT)

	DBA	DBI	DBL	DBQ	DBV	TI
DBA						
DBI	0,817					
DBL	0,391	0,670				
DBQ	0,655	0,804	0,686			
DBV	0,566	0,652	0,762	0,812		
TI	0,416	0,618	0,701	0,568	0,439	