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From advocacy to intention: How does online destination brand advocacy shape brand equity and visit intention?

Maria Inês Senra Rocha

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Teresa Maria Rocha Fernandes Silva

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Abstract

In the contemporary digital era, social media platforms are becoming an increasingly prevalent search engine and source of information. In the tourism industry, this tendency is especially evident, as travelers have access to a wide range of past experiences, opinions and recommendations in the decision-making process. In this context, online destination brand advocacy (ODBA) emerges as a potentially influential mechanism through which tourists shape perceptions of destinations and behavioral intentions. Although research has primarily focused on studying its antecedents, little attention has been devoted to its consequences. The present research constitutes one of the first attempts to understand if and how online destination advocacy (OBA) contributes to positive perceptions and responses towards a destination brand. For that, this study employs a quantitative methodology, in which data was obtained through the administration of an online questionnaire to social media users who had been positively influenced by travel-related content shared by either tourists or influencers, resulting in a total of 321 valid responses. The proposed relationships were then analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The results indicated that ODBA exerts a positive influence on visit intention (VI) when assessed independently. However, once destination brand equity (DBE) is incorporated into the model, this effect becomes indirect, as ODBA contributes positively to DBE, with destination brand awareness (DBA) and destination brand loyalty (DBL) as the only dimensions mediating the relationship between ODBA and VI. Furthermore, a multigroup analysis evidenced that the influence of ODBA varies according to consumer characteristics, such as nationality and the use of social media for travel planning purposes. The present study thus extends prior research by shifting the focus from the advocates to the receivers, providing valuable theoretical contributions as well as practical implications for destination management organizations (DMOs).

Keywords: destination branding, online destination brand advocacy, destination brand equity, visit intention, user-generated content

JEL-codes: M30, M31, M37

Resumo

Na era digital contemporânea, as redes sociais estão-se a tornar um motor de busca e uma fonte de informação cada vez mais predominante. No setor do turismo, esta tendência é particularmente evidente, uma vez que os viajantes têm acesso a uma vasta gama de experiências passadas, opiniões e recomendações na tomada de decisão. Neste contexto, a online destination brand advocacy (ODBA) surge como um mecanismo potencialmente influente através do qual os turistas moldam as suas perceções sobre os destinos e as suas intenções comportamentais. Embora a literatura se tenha centrado principalmente no estudo dos seus antecedentes, pouca atenção tem sido dedicada às suas consequências. A presente investigação é um dos primeiros a compreender se e como a online brand advocacy (OBA) contribui para perceções e respostas positivas em relação a uma marca destino. Para tal, este estudo adotou uma metodologia quantitativa, na qual os dados foram obtidos através de um questionário online a utilizadores de redes sociais que tivessem sido positivamente influenciados por conteúdos relacionados com viagens partilhadas por outros turistas ou influenciadores, resultando num total de 321 respostas válidas. As relações foram analisadas através da Modelação de Equações Estruturais por Mínimos Quadrados Parciais (PLS-SEM). Os resultados indicaram que a ODBA exerce uma influência positiva na intenção de visita (VI) quando avaliada isoladamente. No entanto, assim que o destination brand equity (DBE) é incorporado no modelo, este efeito torna-se indireto, pelo que a ODBA contribui positivamente para a DBE, sendo o destination brand awareness (DBA) e destination brand loyalty (DBL) as dimensões que medeiam a relação entre ODBA e VI. Adicionalmente, a análise multigrupo evidenciou que a influência da ODBA varia de acordo com as características do consumidor, como a nacionalidade e a utilização de redes sociais para fins de planeamento de viagens. O presente estudo amplia, assim, investigações anteriores, deslocando o foco dos advocates para os receivers, proporcionando contribuições teóricas valiosas, bem como implicações práticas para as organizações de gestão de destinos (DMOs).

Palavras-chave: branding de destinos, online destination brand advocacy, valor da marca destino, intenção de visita, conteúdo gerado pelos utilizadores

Códigos JEL: M30, M31, M37

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1. Introduction

In the same way that companies seek to enhance their competitiveness in the market (Kasapi & Cela, 2017), countries, regions and cities also compete to attract visitors (Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013). In this context, destination branding arises as a tool for strengthening the positioning of tourist destinations (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020) and gain competitive advantage (Berrozpe et al., 2019; Tsaur et al., 2016).

Social media stands as one of the most pervasive branding and marketing strategies in this context. For example, the recent case of Albania demonstrates how sharing pleasant experiences online has improved the destination's reputation and visitor numbers (Albanian Times, 2025). Similarly, social media has contributed to an increase in overseas tourists visiting Japan (The Japan Times, 2025). These examples align with the global trend, as of 2024 there were over 5 billion social media users worldwide (Slotta, 2025), and as of 2023, 75% of visitors used these platforms as sources of inspiration for their trips (Hinton, 2023). The pervasive use of social media alongside the onset of the pandemic, further triggered changes in consumer behavior (Alsetoohy et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, scant emphasis has been placed on the role of social media in destination branding. Although certain dimensions have received attention – such as, destination brand image (Veasna et al., 2013), destination brand equity (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Tasci, 2018), destination brand experience (Barnes et al., 2014), destination brand personality (Hultman et al., 2017) and destination brand identity (Saraniemi & Komppula, 2019) – the online perspective is still understudied in the destination branding literature (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020).

Yet, handling social media in destination branding is crucial (Lund et al., 2018), especially user-generated content (UGC), since people use these platforms to look for information, experiences and reviews (Zhou et al., 2020), referring to the way in which social media users interact with each other, express themselves and share their experiences (Llodra-Riera et al., 2015; Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018). Therefore, it plays a pivotal part in the co-creation of destination brands (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). Still, the relationship between social media and destination branding persists debatable (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). Research gaps encompass the influence of UGC on traveler's behavior and attitudes (Nguyen & Tong, 2022), with Swain et al.

(2024) further underscoring the need to explore the effect of social media influencers in shaping travel decisions.

Just as influencer-generated content is a type of UGC, so is online brand advocacy (OBA) (Wilk et al., 2018). The foundation of OBA is the proactive defense and promotion of a positive reputation for the brand (Wilk et al., 2019), which is highly valued because the information shared by these users is regarded as more genuine and therefore trustworthy than that shared by service providers (Alves et al., 2016; Filieri, 2016).

However, to the author's best knowledge, in the context of destination branding, only one study has focused on OBA, employing a qualitative methodology. As a result, the authors (Wilk et al., 2024) suggest that conducting an equivalent study with a quantitative methodology would be interesting. Further research undertaken indicated that studies on brand advocacy investigated antecedents, thereby allowing future research to explore their consequences, extending the study from givers (advocates) to include the receivers (potential visitors) (Sweeney et al., 2020; Wilk et al., 2020).

Against this background, this study aims to understand if and how OBA contributes to positive perceptions and responses towards a destination brand. This study thus addresses the following research questions: "What is the impact of online destination brand advocacy on the intention to visit a given destination?" and "What is the role of destination brand equity in this relationship?". Moreover, a post-hoc multigroup analysis was conducted to ascertain whether these relationships vary according to consumers' nationality and their utilization of social media for travel planning purposes.

For this purpose, this study will employ a quantitative methodology, specifically a questionnaire-based survey with consumers of travel-related content on social media as the target population.

The field of destination branding benefits greatly from this study. It first expands the body of literature by analyzing online destination brand advocacy (ODBA) from a quantitative approach, facilitating the utilization of a predefined scale to gauge impacts. Furthermore, it advances the discussion from the tourist's perspectives, taking a step further by demonstrating how it influences tourists' perceptions of the destination and their decisions to visit, thereby showing that ODBA is a bidirectional construct, while also demonstrating how destination brand equity (DBE) acts as a partial mediator through which ODBA translates into visit

intention. From a managerial perspective, tourists should not solely be viewed as consumers of these experiences, but also as active contributors to the destination branding development process. Therefore, destination managers should develop strategies that proactively encourage visitors to share positive experiences on social media, while nurturing long-term relationships.

The report is organized as follows. Firstly, a comprehensive literature review will be conducted, alongside the positioning of the study. The following section outlines the empirical study and proposed methodology. Subsequently, the presentation of the results and a discussion of the findings take place. The dissertation concludes with final considerations, including theoretical and practical contributions, as well as potential avenues for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Destination branding

Destination branding is a subset of place branding, where the term "destination" refers to a place's tourism-oriented view (Hanna et al., 2021). Specifically, destination branding has been defined as "*a collection of marketing activities aimed at cultivating positive perceptions of the destination. These perceptions encompass: 1) a name, symbol, brand, or graphical representation that encapsulates the essence of the destination, setting it apart from others; 2) the anticipation of experiences linked to the destination; and 3) an emotional connection forged between visitors and the destination.*" (Blain et al., 2005, p. 337, cited in Pike, 2015).

Thus, destination branding is rooted around the establishment of a strategy to empower a destination, through a unique brand identity ensuring that it is recognized and perceived as superior to competitors (Qu et al., 2011). This enables destinations to further strengthen their position (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020), setting them apart from others (Kim & Malek, 2017; Kumar & Kaushik, 2017), attract tourists and attain competitive advantage (Berrozpe et al., 2019; Tsaur et al., 2016). Thus, destination branding plays a pivotal role in fostering tourism growth (Thompson et al., 2016) and according to Mora-Rivera & García-Mora (2021), the greater a region's reliance on tourism, the more crucial destination branding becomes.

The creation of a strong destination brand is not merely a matter of image; it also exerts real economic impacts. A distinctive and unique destination brand enhances the perception of the destination among tourists, thereby prompting greater value. This value translates into more tourists, higher revenues, increased sales in the sector, and greater competitiveness (Kumar & Kaushik, 2017; Miličević et al., 2017). Beyond these financial benefits, destination branding offers benefits for the growth of a destination brand identity (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018, 2017), destination brand personality (Kumar & Nayak, 2014), and destination brand equity (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019). Destination brand advocacy results from good destination branding (Kumar & Kaushik, 2017), hence it's important to consider how users demonstrate this advocacy through their online behavior.

2.2. Destination branding and brand advocacy

2.2.1 User-generated content (UGC)

UGC encompasses social media users' communication, self-expression, and sharing of experiences (Aljarah et al., 2024; Llodra-Riera et al., 2015; Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018).

Regarding tourism destinations, this type of information includes a wide variety of social media users, such as locals, visitors, local businesses, destination management organizations (DMOs), and tour operators (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). Tourists' content is seen by social media users as more genuine and trustworthy than that produced by DMOs and other service providers (Alves et al., 2016; Filieri, 2016), increasing the influence of this kind of UGC (Narangajavana et al., 2017). Notably, UGC not only supplements traditional media, but is also considered as a credible means of image representation (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). This is particularly true for services, such as tourism and hospitality, which cannot be evaluated before being experienced. Therefore, the opinions shared by individuals who had that experience are considered more reliable and less influenced by other interests, such as those of brands. Consequently, prospective travelers often rely on UGC to inform and base their decisions (Arsal et al., 2010).

In an increasingly digital world, where social media consumption is on the rise, individuals feel more compelled to share content online whether as a form of self-expression or as part of peer-to-peer communication. This is also true in the context of tourism, not only because they love to share their experiences online, but also because, in doing so, they are helping other users better understand what the destination is like (Filieri, 2016; Zhou et al., 2020). So, UGC can include voluntary behaviors of brand support, if in addition to spreading positive electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) (i.e., any type of favorable online communication about a brand or product), consumers proactively advocate the destination brand on social media platforms (Wilk et al., 2018).

DMOs looking to draw tourists to their destinations cannot only rely on conventional marketing promotion techniques (Wilk et al., 2024), as UGC helps co-create a destination brand (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). Since many travelers search for this type of content while making travel plans, they should be conscious about the influence and forms of UGC (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018), particularly ODBA, which has considerable influence.

2.2.2 Online destination brand advocacy (ODBA)

Brands are gradually shifting their attention toward consumer-to-consumer interactions in the modern consumer landscape (VML, 2024), where traditional advertising has lost influence (Forbes, 2025) and consumers are given a multitude of options when making decisions (Aljarah et al., 2024). As a result, brand advocacy has become increasingly popular, especially OBA, which is thought to be more impactful compared to offline brand advocacy due to its increased visibility and worldwide reach (Wilk et al., 2020).

OBA is defined as a *"strong, influential, purposeful and non-incentivised, online representation of a brand and that brand's best interest by a brand-experienced customer (either past or current), which includes "standing up for" and speaking on behalf of the brand"* (Wilk et al., 2020, p. 416). OBA is essentially the result of a brand-experienced and voluntary consumer that goes beyond simply sharing positive e-WOM to include the promotion, defense, and support of a brand in an online setting (Aljarah et al., 2024; Wilk et al., 2018).

Literature frequently employed the terms "e-WOM" and "destination advocacy" as equivalents (Kumar & Kaushik, 2020). However, these two concepts are distinct and should be distinguished (Wilk et al., 2018). e-WOM is "*any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet*" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). Thus, e-WOM is considered as a broader concept, being based on hearsay or information reported by the brand itself, with no requirement for prior experience (Wilk et al., 2020). In contrast, OBA is "*an elaborate, positive statement about a brand, with strong and unique cognitive and affective characteristics supported by virtual visual cues*" (Wilk et al., 2018, p.110). Accordingly, this encompasses solely the positive nature and is based on personal experience (Wilk et al., 2020), treating the brand as a partner (Fournier, 1998). In comparison to e-WOM, OBA is more "*purposeful*" and has a greater impact (Wilk et al., 2018, 2020), with e-WOM falling short in achieving certain elements in terms of brand defense and active support (Keller, 2007). So, OBA is contingent upon the existence of consumers who advocate for a brand that are truly invested and have a strong and genuine connection to it (Bilro et al., 2018), being regarded as an advanced form of e-WOM (Chu & Kim, 2011).

These customers are usually referred to as "brand evangelists" (Patel, 2015), or simply brand advocates, as they not only purchase the product or service, but also actively endorse the brand

by responding to negative feedback and criticism and encouraging consumers to explore what the brand has to offer (Malik & Pradhan, 2025). Accordingly, the highest-performing marketers are brand advocates (Aljarah et al., 2024), as they are perceived as more authentic and less biased (Kumar et al., 2022) than the company itself.

OBA comprises four dimensions: brand defense (consistent defense and safeguarding the brand and the brand's interests); brand information sharing (exchange of personal experiences with the brand); brand positivity (favorable brand-related communication); and virtual positive expression (use of visual symbols such as emojis) (Wilk et al., 2020).

From a business perspective, OBA offers valuable opportunities for companies to further enhance their credibility and profitability. Brand advocates, in contrast with traditional advertising methods, serve as a cost-effective and organic form of marketing (Keller, 2007), thus attracting new customers, engendering brand loyalty, and consequently driving sales and market share growth (Coelho et al., 2019; Wong & Hung, 2023). Simultaneously, consumer relationship is enhanced, ultimately contributing to brand equity (Shailesh & Reddy, 2016). Overall, OBA is advantageous for both companies and consumers (Bhati & Verma, 2020; Wilk et al., 2021), being a critical element in the brand-customer relationship (Keller, 2007) and the success of the brand (Bhati & Verma, 2020).

In the context of tourism, OBA directly translates into ODBA, representing an intensified manifestation of UGC, consisting of actions carried out by social media users with prior experience on the destination and thus aspire to promote and advocate it through ongoing defense and positive communication (Wilk et al., 2024).

Just as OBA has positive consequences for companies in general, it is also expected that ODBA will have a similar effect. Thus, it is relevant to understand how these advocacy behaviors and actions impact the formation and perception of value of a destination brand, i.e. destination brand equity (DBE).

2.3. OBA and destination brand equity (DBE)

Aaker (1991, p. 15) conceptualized brand equity as "*a set of brand assets attached to or subtracted from the value provided by a manufacturer, a product or a service associated with a brand, brand's name and symbol*". In the context of tourism destinations, brand equity should be considered from the consumer's perspective (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016), since they are regarded as the producers of

brand equity (Jamilena et al., 2017), as its value is primarily contingent upon the consumer's perception of a brand (Guervos et al., 2020). DBE thus quantifies the value that consumers attribute to a destination brand (Guervos et al., 2020), reflecting tourist's perceptions and affective responses towards a destination (Xie et al., 2025).

In this study, the perspective adopted will be that of the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) framework, emphasizing that brand equity should be looked at from the consumer's point of view. The extensively used dimensions in the field of place branding literature (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014) and their noteworthy acceptability in the travel industry (Guervos et al., 2020; Castañeda-García et al., 2020) provide additional support for this strategy.

Four variables make up this framework: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association/image, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991; Ergün et al., 2022; Phung et al., 2019). According to Chekalina et al. (2018), brand awareness is the degree to which customers are familiar with a brand, which serves as the basis for people's attitudes and impressions of a place (Kotsi et al., 2018). Customers' view of a brand's overall quality or superiority over competitors is known as perceived quality (Jamilena et al., 2017). Brand image is mirrored in the perceptions and associations with the destination brand (Tasci, 2018), and brand loyalty describes a consumer's commitment and attachment to a certain brand (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014).

A favorable brand equity can improve the value perception of a destination among tourists, thereby encouraging a positive attitude towards it, which in turn is expected to positively impact visit intention (Chi et al., 2020; Lim & Weaver, 2014) and destination brand loyalty (Wong, 2018).

Furthermore, a strong brand equity shapes consumer preferences and purchasing intentions (Shailesh & Reddy, 2016), fosters customer loyalty, opens new opportunities, ensures a competitive advantage, and profitability (He & Calder, 2020). Therefore, brand equity is a significant element in the decision-making process of tourists' selection of a destination (Phung et al., 2019).

Given its importance (González-Mansilla et al., 2019), authorities invest on the establishment of a place as a brand, seeking to generate and bring brand equity and identity, whilst conveying a strong image of the place (Plaza et al., 2013).

2.4. Critical reflection on the literature review and study's positioning

To comprehend the existing body of literature on OBA and how this study aspires to contribute to that body of knowledge and drawing on the table devised by Shimul et al. (2025), Table 1 was developed.

Table 1 indicates that, in the field of destination branding, brand advocacy has been studied, although to a very limited extent in the online context, with only three of the eight articles focusing on OBA, with all three published from 2022 onwards.

Another observation is that all papers under consideration have one thing in common: the fact that brand advocacy always appears as a dependent variable. In other words, these studies have only examined the antecedents of brand advocacy and not the consequences, demonstrating how the literature focuses on what makes people want to advocate, rather than on the impact that this advocacy has. Among the key antecedents of brand advocacy that the literature has investigated are destination management, destination brand experience, destination love, destination personality congruence, destination trust and destination brand credibility.

The transition from studying antecedents to studying consequences has been identified as a future research direction by Wilk et al. (2020), who, alongside Sweeney et al. (2020), suggest that studies should be extended from the givers (advocates) to the receivers (potential visitors) perspective. Hence, this study will focus on understanding the effects of OBA on receivers, showing how ODBA contributes to positive perceptions and behavioral responses for a destination, while analyzing its effect on brand equity and subsequent visit intentions.

Table 1 - Summary of empirical studies on OBA in the context of destination brands

Author	Study objective	Methodology	Variables			
Aksoy & Yazici (2025)	How OBA is impacted by drivers for destination information dissemination	Quantitative (online survey + PLS-SEM)	Independent: Destination management and brand experience	Mediator: Destination satisfaction	Dependent: OBA	
Aljarah et al. (2024)	Comprehend the impacts of UGC and firm generated content (FGC) on OBA	Scenario-based experimental	Independent: UGC and FGC	Mediator: Customer engagement	Moderator: Brand familiarity	Dependent: OBA
Atsız et al. (2024)	Assess how stimuli can generate perceived value, ultimately resulting in economic support and endorsement of the destination	Quantitative (survey + SEM)	Independent: Tourist inspiration	Mediator: Masstige and destination love	Dependent: Destination brand advocacy and willingness to pay	
Kumar & Kaushik (2017)	Study the influence of identification in establishing enduring relationships	Quantitative (survey)	Independent: Destination personality congruence and destination trust	Mediator: Destination brand identification	Dependent: Destination advocacy and destination loyalty	
Kumar & Kaushik (2020)	Analyze destination brand engagement as a mechanism between experience and intention to revisit.	Quantitative (survey + PLS-SEM)	Independent: Destination experience	Mediator: Destination brand engagement	Dependent: Brand advocacy and revisit intention	
Rather et al. (2020)	Explain the method via which tourists form a connection with a destination brand	Quantitative (survey + SEM)	Independent: Destination brand experience, destination brand credibility and destination value congruence	Mediator: Destination brand identification	Dependent: Destination attachment, destination advocacy and destination loyalty	
Wang et al. (2021)	Explores how the locals' welcoming attitude can lead to behaviors that promote the destination brand	Quantitative (survey + SEM)	Independent: Welcoming nature	Mediator: Interaction quality	Dependent: Brand advocacy and brand-consistent behavior	
Wilk et al. (2024)	Examines how residents and foreign visitors view Australia as a destination on social media	Qualitative	N/A			

3. Empirical study

3.1. Research model and hypotheses

The present study is grounded on the theoretical framework of social influence theory (SIT), which explains how a person's behaviors and attitudes can be influenced by others, whether on purpose or not, via compliance, identification and internalization (Kelman, 1958). Identification takes place when individuals behave in a manner that fosters connections and fulfilling relationships. Acceptance of influence "- i.e., entailing that the behavior is both rewarding and consistent with one's value" - is known as internalization. Conversely, when an individual has a certain behavior to satisfy another person, compliance has occurred (Kelman, 1958).

SIT has been applied to understand behaviors within social media. In the context of tourism, this theory seeks to investigate the reasons why people share their experiences online (Oliveira et al., 2020). These reasons may encompass identification (belonging in a community), internalization (for its own sake and intrinsic pleasure), or compliance (as a result of coercion or pressure to act in that way) (Kang & Schuett, 2013).

Since OBA pertains to individuals who have established a strong relationship with the brand, proactively advocating and defending it as a result of identification and internalization mechanisms, both OBA and ODBA can be approached through SIT (Wilk et al., 2024).

Research on destination branding shows that social media platforms (Llodra-Riera et al., 2015) and social media influencers (Talukdar & Shekhar, 2022) have a significant influence on visit intention. In this context, Setiawan et al. (2021) further confirmed that e-WOM has a positive effect on visit intention.

Despite the existence of more general studies on online communication, a study by Wilk et al. (2021) tested the direct relationship between OBA and purchase intention, concluding that OBA positively affects purchasing intention.

Given the distinctions between OBA and e-WOM, covered in section 2.2.2, as well as the fact that OBA is a "*purposeful*" (Wilk et al., 2020) and experience-based type of digital communication, it makes sense to anticipate that its impact will outweigh that of e-WOM.

In a similar vein, the study posits that, in the context of destination branding, ODBA will increase a destination's visit intention:

H1: ODBA has a direct positive effect on visit intention.

Regarding social media communication, Khan et al. (2024) asserted that e-WOM has a considerable influence on brand equity. Nevertheless, the relationship between brand advocacy and brand equity remains tenuous, with research in this area yielding mixed relationships. While Khan and Fatma (2023), posit that brand equity is a predictor of advocacy, Shailesh and Reddy (2016) argue that advocacy leads to greater brand equity, as such behavior increases market share and strengthens consumer relationships.

To verify the hypotheses pertaining to DBE, it is necessary to break it down into its four components. Earlier research looking at the reciprocal relationship between brand loyalty and OBA, concluded that brand loyalty is both an antecedent and consequence of OBA (Wilk et al., 2021). In the context of destination branding, Qu et al. (2011) asserted that destination image is a key antecedent of destination advocacy; nonetheless, the question remains as to whether this relationship is also bidirectional. Still, literature pertaining to the other components of destination brand equity - namely, brand awareness and perceived quality - remains to be developed.

Hence, this study intends to investigate if ODBA, consistent with OBA standards but for a destination, has a positive effect on all four dimensions and, consequently, enhances overall DBE:

H2: ODBA has a direct positive effect on DBE.

Research has shown that DBE has a substantial impact on visit intention. Supporting this conclusion, Chi et al. (2020) claims that all brand equity dimensions exert a positive influence on visit intention, with destination image being identified as the most decisive component.

Regarding studies conducted on each of the dimensions individually, Ferns and Walls (2012) and Ergün et al. (2022) stated that brand awareness and brand loyalty strongly and positively shaped an individual's travel intentions. Similarly, destination image has a significant influence

on visit intention (Benslimane & Semaoune, 2021). Moreover, Kim et al. (2016) established that travelers exhibited greater propensity for behavior intention when they perceived a brand with positive awareness and image or of higher quality.

Considering the findings, it can be concluded that high levels of brand equity will result in a higher level of travel intention (Zhang et al., 2021). Thus, it is anticipated that:

H3: DBE has a direct positive effect on visit intention.

Similar to OBA, which is considered a credible source, Chakraborty (2019) explored the mediating role of brand equity components in the relationship between credible online reviews and purchase intention. Despite the study's utilization of just two dimensions aligning with the CBBE framework, it was found that brand awareness exhibited a significant impact as a partial mediator. In a similar vein, a study on clothing brands examined both the direct effect of e-WOM on purchase intention and the indirect effect, with brand equity mediating this relationship. The authors (Khan et al, 2024) concluded that the indirect effect was significant, while also supporting the direct effect, so a partial mediation effect was observed, meaning that neither effect cancelled each other out.

Hence, within the scope of destination branding, in addition to anticipating ODBA to exert a direct positive influence on visit intention, as previously referenced, an indirect approach will also be employed, with DBE serving as a mediator in this relationship, comparing how the model performs in each case. Accordingly, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H4: DBE mediates the relationship between ODBA and visit intention.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the conceptual research model.

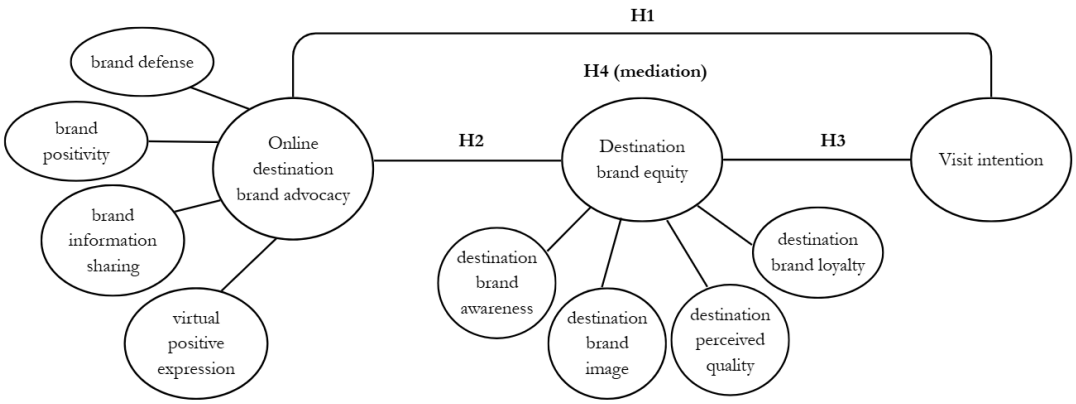


Figure 1 - Conceptual research model

3.2. Methodological approach

The study will employ a quantitative methodology, using primary data as the data source. This study will be conducted through a self-administered online survey to analyze the relationships between variables.

This methodological approach is aligned with the objective of this explanatory study, as it allows perceptions and behaviors to be measured within a sample. Most studies in this field (Table 1) use the same methodology, namely survey-based questionnaire, further supporting this option as being the most appropriate when studying such phenomena.

The validity of the hypotheses will be determined by means of partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) statistical analysis, since this approach suits predictive models and assessing correlation between latent variables (Hair et al., 2011). Consequently, the SmartPLS platform will be used to assess these impacts.

3.3. Survey design

To ensure the relevance of the sample, respondents will be asked two screening questions: 1) whether they are social media users, and 2) whether they have been positively impacted by social media content related to destinations produced by other tourists or

influencers who have already visited them. Eligible participants will then be invited to select a destination they were more significantly impacted on and haven't visited yet, and then to complete the remainder of the questionnaire with this destination in mind.

The questionnaire will be structured as follows. The initial section pertains to the visit intention and will comprise 3 items, the second section will address DBE, considering each component, totalizing 12-items. The subsequent phase involves the ODBA section with a 12-item scale and finally, the questionnaire concludes with the collection of respondents' demographic information, such as age, gender, nationality and educational level, as well as some contextual information, including travel frequency and social media use.

The survey was developed in two languages - English and Portuguese - with the Portuguese version being designed to be more convenient, accessible and appealing for national participants, while the English version aimed to expand the study to include international participants within and outside the academic setting.

Prior to its dissemination, a preliminary test was conducted with a small sample of participants from diverse backgrounds. These participants were invited to provide feedback on the coherence and clarity of the questionnaire. Subsequent to the test administration, the survey was revised, thus yielding its final version.

3.4. Measures

Model constructs will be measured with existing scales adopted in the literature, whereas some will be adapted to better capture the context of the study. A 7-point Likert scale, spanning from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) will be used, thus enabling responses to express varying levels of agreement, thereby reflecting more truthful and precise opinions (Nguyen et al., 2025).

Table 2 details the measurement of the nine variables.

Table 2 - Summary of measurement scales

Dimensions	Measurement items	Sources
	VI1: If I have the opportunity to travel, I plan to visit this destination.	

Visit intention (VI)	VI2: I plan to travel to that destination in the near future. VI3: When I make a trip, the probability that I visit this destination is high.	Nguyen et al. (2025)
Destination brand awareness (DBA)	DBA1: I am aware of the place as a travel destination. DBA2: I can recognize the destination among other similar travel destinations. DBA3: When I am thinking about travelling, this destination comes to my mind.	Chi et al. (2020)
Destination brand image (DBI)	DBI1: This destination is well established. DBI2: This destination has a clean image. DBI3: This destination has differentiated image in comparison with other destinations.	Sasmita & Suki (2015)
Destination perceived quality (DPQ)	DPQ1: This destination seems to provide quality experiences. DPQ2: From this destination's offerings, I can expect superior performance. DPQ3: I expect this destination to perform better than other similar destinations.	Chi et al. (2020)
Destination brand loyalty (DBL)	DBL1: The destination would be my first choice of a travel destination. DBL2: I am willing to recommend this destination as a favorable destination to others DBL3: I would advise other people to visit this destination.	Chi et al. (2020) and Shizhen et al. (2025)
Brand defense (BD)	BD1: They stand up for the destination when others talk negatively about it. BD2: They defend the destination if someone speaks poorly about it. BD3: They try to persuade others to travel there.	Wilk et al. (2020)
Brand positivity (BP)	BP1: They say positive things about the destination. BP2: They talk about the destination favorably. BP3: They say the destination is great.	
Brand information sharing (BIS)	BIS1: They provide extra details about the destination (e.g., prices, accommodation options, availability of discounts, or links to websites). BIS2: They share information about present or upcoming promotions (discounts) for the destination. BIS3: They give thorough justifications as to why the destination is better than others.	
	VPE1: They use emoticons or emojis, such as smilies or winks.	

Virtual positive expression (VPE)	VPE2: They use smilies. VPE3: They use visual symbols (e.g., emoticon, emoji, exclamation or capital lettering).	

Note: To minimize potential bias and ensure accuracy of the data, items in sections comprising multiple dimensions – namely section 2 (DBE) and 3 (ODBA) - will be mixed.

3.5. Data collection

A convenience sample of social media users who have been impacted by destination content will be used to gather data. Such collection will be voluntary and anonymous, where participants will be required to consent to the use of their data for purely scientific purposes, and will have the option to withdraw at any time. This convenience sample will be collected through colleagues, friends and acquaintances via social networks and through the Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto (FEP).

The data collection process was conducted over a period of 31 days and was facilitated by a collaborative data collection platform, resulting in a total of 392 responses. Following the exclusion of two responses due to respondent's failure to consent to continue with the survey, and another 46 responses due to non-eligibility, the sample size is 344. In addition, instances where respondents provided information that did not align with the question's intent were excluded from further analysis. To ensure greater accuracy and data quality, an attention-filter question was included in the survey. Anyone who failed to answer it correctly was removed from the sample as well. Therefore, the final sample size is set at 321.

4. Results

4.1 Sample description

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are displayed in Table 3. A significant majority of respondents were female (76.64%), aged between 18 and 25 (71.34%), indicative of a relatively youthful sample, with 47.66% of respondents having completed at least an undergraduate degree. In terms of nationality, although a high cultural diversity was observed, the largest proportion was still represented by Portuguese (34.27%), representing one third of the sample, followed by American (9.66%), British (8.10%) and Indians (6.85%). Regarding travel habits, the most prevalent pattern observed was that participants undertake one to two annual trips. Furthermore, social media is frequently used for travel planning, with Instagram and TikTok being perceived as the primary influential platforms at 49.53% and 34.27%, respectively.

Table 3 - Demographic characteristics of the sample (n=321)

Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Female	246	76.64%
Male	70	21.81%
Prefer not to say	5	1.56%
Age		
18-25	229	71.34%
26-35	58	18.07%
36-45	18	5.61%
46 and above	16	4.98%
Nationality		
Portuguese	110	34.27%
American	31	9.66%
British	26	8.10%
Indian	22	6.85%
Brazilian	11	3.43%
Dutch	9	2.80%
German	7	2.18%

Polish	7	2.18%
French	6	1.87%
Czech	5	1.56%
Australian	5	1.56%
Others	77	23,99%
N/A	5	1.56%
Highest education level completed		
Undergraduate	153	47.66%
Graduate	100	31.15%
Post-graduate	68	21.18%
Annual travel frequency (number of times)		
0	15	4.67%
1 or 2	187	58.26%
3 to 4	93	28.97%
5 or more	26	8.10%
Social media usage (per week)		
1-3h	59	18.38%
4-7h	137	42.68%
8h or more	125	38.94%
Social media usage when planning trips		
Never	8	2.49%
Rarely	44	13.71%
Sometimes	86	26.79%
Often	137	42.68%
Always	46	14.33%
Most impactful social media platform		
Instagram	159	49.53%
TikTok	110	34.27%
YouTube	39	12.15%
Facebook	10	3.12%
Other	3	0.93%

4.2 Descriptive analysis

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the data, a descriptive analysis of each construct was initially conducted. This information can be found in Tables 4, 5 and 6.

Table 4 - Descriptive statistics (ODBA)

Item number	Scale items	Mean	Standard deviation
	Online destination brand advocacy (ODBA)		
	Brand defense (BD)		
BD1	They stand up for the destination when others talk negatively about it.	4.61	1.46
BD2	They defend the destination if someone speaks poorly about it.	4.84	1.36
BD3	They try to persuade others to travel to the destination.	5.19	1.43
	Brand positivity (BP)		
BP1	They say positive things about the destination	6.21	0.84
BP2	They talk about the destination favorably.	6.09	0.86
BP3	They say the destination is great.	6.13	0.87
	Brand information sharing (BIS)		
BIS1	They provide extra details about the destination (e.g.. prices. accommodation options. availability of discounts. or links to websites).	5.43	1.44
BIS2	They share information about present or upcoming promotions or discounts for the destination.	4.53	1.66
BIS3	They give thorough justifications as to why the destination is better than others.	5.04	1.37
	Virtual positive expression (VPE)		
VPE1	They use emoticons or emojis. such as smilies or winks. when talking about the destination.	4.44	1.75
VPE2	They use smilies.	4.48	1.77
VPE3	They use visual symbols (e.g.. emoticon. emoji. exclamation or capital lettering).	4.59	1.74

Analysis of the ODBA reveals a mean score that remains consistently above 4, indicating moderate agreement and, in some cases, even high agreement. This is especially evident in the BP components, where the mean exceeds 6 where a favorable attitude towards the destination is clear. This is accompanied by low standard deviation (values below 1), reflecting a higher degree of consensus in the participant's responses, thus suggesting that the expression of positive opinions about the destination is pervasive and consistent.

The VPE dimension demonstrates the lowest mean values, although these are still deemed good (above 4), indicating moderate agreement. However, when the standard deviation is considered, it reaches values of 1.7, suggesting greater variability and a more diverse range of responses. So, respondents' perceptions regarding the usage of emojis or visual symbols by social media users appear to be inconsistent, with some participants perceiving such behaviors as frequent while others do not.

The remaining dimensions - BD and BIS - demonstrate moderate to high agreement, as individuals are willing to defend the destination, particularly when it comes to persuading others to visit (BD3 = 5.19) and are of greater propensity to disseminate information about it (BIS1 = 5.43). Their standard deviation ranges between 1.3 and 1.6, exhibiting moderate to high level of variability, as the likelihood for such behaviors is not uniform across respondents.

Table 5 - Descriptive statistics (DBE)

Item number	Scale items	Mean	Standard deviation
	Destination brand equity (DBE)		
	Destination brand awareness (DBA)		
DBA1	I am aware of this place as a travel destination.	6.24	1.04
DBA2	I can recognize this destination among similar destinations.	5.47	1.27
DBA3	When I think about travelling, this destination comes to my mind.	5.74	1.28
	Destination brand image (DBI)		

DBI1	This destination holds a strong position among travel destinations.	5.74	1.23
DBI2	This destination has a clean image.	5.72	1.13
DBI3	This destination has a differentiated image compared to other destinations.	5.54	1.23
	Destination perceived quality (DPQ)		
DPQ1	This destination seems to provide quality experiences.	5.97	0.95
DPQ2	Considering this destination's offerings, my expectations are high.	6.03	0.95
DPQ3	I expect this destination to perform better than similar destinations.	5.53	1.18
	Destination brand loyalty (DBL)		
DBL1	This destination would be one of my first choices as a travel destination.	5.36	1.45
DBL2	I am willing to recommend this destination as a favorable destination to others	5.70	1.24
DBL3	I would advise other people to visit this destination.	5.62	1.24

Regarding DBE, the mean score has been found to be consistently above 5, thus indicating a high level of agreement. Considering each dimension individually, the DBA mean scores range from 5.47 to 6.24, denoting a relatively strong level of awareness among respondents. The standard deviation ranges between 1.04 and 1.28, indicating moderate variability, since participants show different levels of recognition.

The DBI values are above 5.5, reflecting positive perceptions regarding the destination's image. As with the DBA, it also demonstrates moderate variability in its perception.

DPQ demonstrates a high degree of agreement, particularly regarding expectations of what the destination offers (DPQ2 = 6.03). The standard deviation is below 1, except for DPQ3, thus supporting consensus on the first two items.

Furthermore, DBL also displays a high degree of agreement in terms of loyalty and willingness to recommend (values above 5). In comparison to the other dimensions, this one

was found to exhibit greater variability, resulting in a wider disparity in the responses provided. Therefore, even though perceptions of a destination are, as general rule, positive, this does not necessarily result in strong loyalty intentions.

Table 6 - Descriptive statistics (VI)

Item number	Scale items	Mean	Standard deviation
	Visit intention (VI)		
VI1	If I have the opportunity to travel. I plan to visit this destination.	6.31	0.90
VI2	I plan to travel to this destination in the near future.	5.18	1.69
VI3	When I make a trip. the probability that I visit this destination is high.	5.54	1.44

With respect to the final construct - VI - the results suggest favorable intentions. The first item possesses the highest mean among the three (VI1 = 6.31), thereby signifying a pronounced inclination to visit the destination if they had the chance to travel. This assertion is further substantiated by the observed low standard deviation, indicative of a substantial degree of consensus among participants.

While the mean of VI2 is good, the standard deviation is elevated, suggesting considerable variability. This finding indicates a divergence of opinions concerning short term and concrete travel plans, likely attributable to variations in personal circumstances, constraints or even readiness to act.

The latter also generates high levels of agreement and moderate variability, indicating that participants consider the destination an option but have some level of uncertainty.

4.3 Measurement model validation

4.3.1 Reliability and convergent validity

Subsequently, the measurement model was assessed to evaluate the reliability and convergent validity of the constructs. Table 7, 8, and 9 display the factor loadings, Cronbach's alphas, average variance extracted (AVE) values, and composite reliability (CR) scores.

Factor loadings should be significant ($p<0.05$) and, ideally, exceed 0.70; nevertheless, values under 0,7 may be retained if CR and AVE values fall within the acceptable limits, which is the case of DBL1 (0.69) and BD3 (0.60).

A few indicators reveal weaker values, namely BIS2 (0.71), DBA1 (0.69) and DBI3 (0.61), which can potentially compromise convergent validity. However, given that no measurement improvements were registered upon the removal of such items, these were retained.

Table 7 - Factor loadings, validity, and reliability (ODBA)

Constructs	Item number	Item	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Online destination brand advocacy (ODBA)						
Brand defense	*BD*			0.72	0.84	0.65
	BD1	They stand up for the destination when others talk negatively about it.	0.92			
	BD2	They defend the destination if someone speaks poorly about it.	0.86			
	BD3	They try to persuade others to travel to the destination.	0.60			
Brand positivity	*BP*			0.79	0.88	0.70
	BP1	They say positive things about the destination	0.84			
	BP2	They talk about the destination favorably.	0.82			
	BP3	They say the destination is great.	0.86			

Brand information sharing	*BIS*			0.62	0.80	0.57
	BIS1	They provide extra details about the destination (e.g. prices. accommodation options. availability of discounts. or links to websites).	0.78			
	BIS2	They share information about present or upcoming promotions or discounts for the destination.	0.71			
	BIS3	They give thorough justifications as to why the destination is better than others.	0.76			
Virtual positive expression	*VPE*			0.88	0.93	0.81
	VPE1	They use emoticons or emojis. such as smilies or winks. when talking about the destination.	0.91			
	VPE2	They use smilies.	0.85			
	VPE3	They use visual symbols (e.g. emoticon. emoji. exclamation or capital lettering).	0.94			

Table 8 - Factor loadings, validity, and reliability (DBE)

Constructs	Item number	Item	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Destination brand equity (DBE)						
Destination brand awareness	*DBA*			0.57	0.78	0.54
	DBA1	I am aware of this place as a travel destination.	0.69			
	DBA2	I can recognize this destination among similar destinations.	0.74			
	DBA3	When I think about travelling, this destination comes to my mind.	0.77			
Destination brand image	*DBI*			0.58	0.77	0.53
	DBI1	This destination holds a strong position among travel destinations.	0.79			
	DBI2	This destination has a clean image.	0.78			
	DBI3	This destination has a differentiated image compared to other destinations.	0.61			

Destination perceived quality	*DPQ*			0.71	0.84	0.63
	DPQ1	This destination seems to provide quality experiences.	0.80			
	DPQ2	Considering this destination's offerings, my expectations are high.	0.80			
	DPQ3	I expect this destination to perform better than similar destinations.	0.80			
Destination brand loyalty	*DBL*			0.74	0.85	0.66
	DBL1	This destination would be one of my first choices as a travel destination.	0.69			
	DBL2	I am willing to recommend this destination as a favorable destination to others	0.89			
	DBL3	I would advise other people to visit this destination.	0.85			

Table 9 - Factor loadings, validity, and reliability (VI)

Constructs	Item number	Item	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Visit Intention (VI)	VI			0.74	0.85	0.65

VI1	If I have the opportunity to travel. I plan to visit this destination.	0.80
VI2	I plan to travel to this destination in the near future.	0.80
VI3	When I make a trip, the probability that I visit this destination is high.	0.83

Apart from BIS, all dimensions of ODBA proved to be reliable, as evidenced by their Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which ranged from 0.72 to 0.88 and their CR, which ranged from 0.84 to 0.93, both of which exceeded the suggested minimum level of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2014). The factors also demonstrated convergent validity, as their AVE scores ranged from 0.57 to 0.81, which were also well above the minimum suggested 0.50 level as proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Regarding DBE, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.57 to 0.74, and the CR remained within the range of 0.77 to 0.85, thus meeting both criteria as values closer to 0.6 (in the case of Cronbach's alpha) falls within the acceptable range to ensure convergent validity (Hair et al., 2006). The convergent validity of these factors was demonstrated by the range of their AVEs, which were found to be between 0.53 and 0.66 - values that exceed the recommended threshold.

Concerning the final construct - VI - Cronbach's alpha and the CR both surpass 0.7, at 0.74 and 0.85, respectively. Moreover, the AVE of 0.65 is also above the suggested minimum level.

To facilitate comprehension and enable more straightforward comparison, Table 10 provides an overview of construct reliability and validity.

Table 10 - Construct reliability and validity overview

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
BD	0.72	0.77	0.84	0.65
BIS	0.62	0.62	0.80	0.57

BP	0.79	0.79	0.88	0.70
VPE	0.88	0.58	0.93	0.81
DBA	0.57	0.60	0.78	0.54
DBI	0.58	0.74	0.77	0.53
DBL	0.74	0.71	0.85	0.66
DPQ	0.71	0.90	0.84	0.63
VI	0.74	0.75	0.85	0.65

4.3.2 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Following the Fornell-Larcker's principle, Table 11 shows that correlations between variables are lower or equal than the square root of AVE (i.e., the values on the diagonal), thereby supporting discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 11 - Discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion

Constructs	BD	BIS	BP	DBA	DBI	DBL	DPQ	VPE	VI
BD	0.81								
BIS	0.56	0.75							
BP	0.41	0.35	0.84						
DBA	0.23	0.25	0.38	0.74					
DBI	0.24	0.24	0.44	0.68	0.73				
DBL	0.26	0.24	0.39	0.66	0.67	0.81			
DPQ	0.34	0.26	0.50	0.60	0.73	0.66	0.80		
VPE	0.38	0.40	0.24	0.18	0.12	0.11	0.12	0.90	
VI	0.12	0.14	0.26	0.50	0.42	0.50	0.42	0.07	0.81

Notes: BD = brand defense; BIS = brand information sharing; BP = brand positivity; DBA = destination brand awareness; DBI = destination brand image; DBL = destination brand loyalty; DPQ = destination perceived quality; VPE = virtual positive expression; VI= visit intention.

Numbers on the diagonals indicate the square root of AVE.

4.4 Structural model validation

ODBA was operationalized as second-order constructs using a reflective-reflective measurement model, consistent with the original scale proposed by (Wilk et al., 2020). The premise of this model is that the higher-order construct is reflected in its underlying dimensions. In the DBE, the decision was taken to separate the dimensions as opposed to considering it a higher-order construct.

Among the four dimensions of ODBA, BP has the highest weight in the construct (β = 0.80), suggesting that the expression of positive opinions online regarding a destination brand constitutes the primary manifestation of advocacy behavior. This is followed by BD (β = 0.77) and BIS (β = 0.74), underscoring the importance of defending a destination against unfavorable criticism and the dissemination of relevant information online. VPE exhibits the lowest weight (β = 0.55), implying that the use of emojis plays a lesser role in the construction of ODBA compared to the other three dimensions.

Overall, the model explains 30% of the variance in VI, which is a positive outcome, given that these two constructs represent only a subset of the broader set of factors that influence the intention to visit a destination. Thus, the residual 70% is attributed to other factors not considered in the model. Furthermore, ODBA demonstrates explanatory power over the four different dimensions of DBE. Specifically, ODBA explains 15% of the variance in DBA, 17% in DBI, 24% in DPQ, and 16% in DBL.

Figure 2 depicts the measurement model.

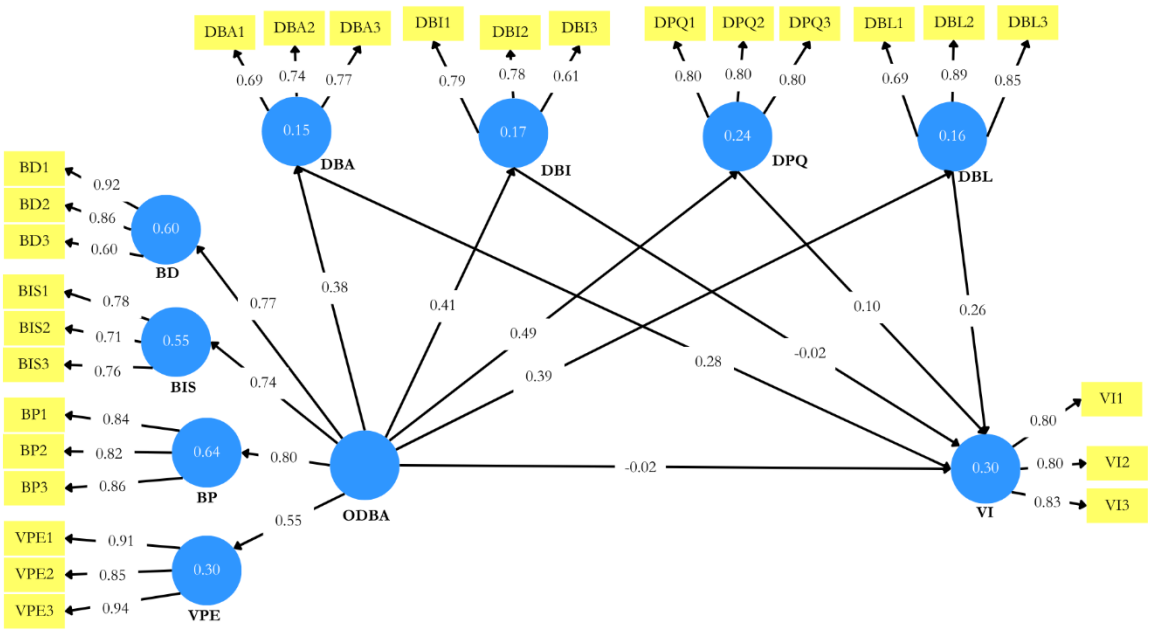


Figure 2 - Measurement model

The structural model was examined to test the hypotheses proposed in section 3.1. Table 12 presents all the estimated values of path estimates, which, at a significance level of 0.05, statistically confirm the hypothesized direct effects of the proposed conceptual model.

Table 12 - Path coefficients results

Hypotheses	Path coefficients	Standard error	p-value	Results
H1				
ODBA -» VI	-0.02	0.06	0.81*	Not supported
H2				
ODBA -» DBA	0.38	0.06	0.00	Supported
ODBA -» DBI	0.41	0.05	0.00	Supported
ODBA -» DBL	0.39	0.06	0.00	Supported
ODBA -» DPQ	0.49	0.05	0.00	Supported
H3				
DBA -» VI	0.28	0.07	0.00	Supported

DBI - » VI	-0.02	0.08	0.86*	Not supported
DBL -» VI	0.26	0.07	0.00	Supported
DPQ -» VI	0.10	0.08	0.20*	Not supported

**Indicates not statistically significant at the 5% significance level.*

Hypothesis 1 (H1), which sought to ascertain whether ODBA had a direct positive effect on VI, was initially supported when the relationship excluded DBE, revealing a positive and statistically significant effect ($\beta = 0.20$; $p = 0.00$). However, after introducing the DBE dimensions into the structural model, the direct effect between ODBA and VI is no longer significant ($\beta = -0.02$; $p = 0.81 > 0.05$).

Hypothesis 2 (H2) postulated that ODBA exerted a direct positive influence on DBE. The impact of ODBA on each of DBE's four dimensions - DBA ($\beta = 0.38$; $p = 0.00$), DBI ($\beta = 0.41$; $p = 0.00$), DBL ($\beta = 0.39$; $p = 0.00$) and DPQ ($\beta = 0.49$; $p = 0.00$) - was significant, validating H2.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) posited that DBE had a direct positive effect on VI. The impact of two DBE dimensions, namely DBA ($\beta = 0.28$; $p = 0.00$) and DBL ($\beta = 0.26$; $p = 0.00$) was significant, but the impact of DBI ($\beta = -0.02$; $p = 0.86$) and DPQ ($\beta = 0.10$; $p = 0.20$) was not, and thereby H3 was only partially supported.

Table 13 - Specific indirect effects

Hypotheses	β	p-value	Result
H4			
ODBA -» DBA -» VI	0.11	0.00	Supported
ODBA -» DBI -» VI	-0.01	0.87*	Not supported
ODBA -» DPQ -» VI	0.05	0.22*	Not supported
ODBA -» DBL -» VI	0.10	0.00	Supported

**Indicates not statistically significant at the 5% significance level.*

In view of the findings of H1, which demonstrated an absence of a direct relationship between the two variables, hypothesis 4 (H4) aims to assess whether there may be an indirect effect, namely mediated by DBE. To test H4, Table 13 presents the specific indirect effects of

ODBA on VI across each dimension of the DBE. The findings indicate significant indirect effects on DBA (β = 0.11; p = 0.00) and DBL (β = 0.10; p = 0.00). However, the effects on DPQ (β = 0.05; p = 0.22) and DBI (β = - 0.01; p = 0.87) are not statistically significant, thus providing only partial support for H4.

4.4.1 Post hoc analysis

A complementary post-hoc analysis was conducted using Multigroup Analysis (MGA). The objective was to ascertain the interrelationships between the variables, whilst incorporating consumer characteristics into the analysis. Consequently, the moderating effect of all control variables, i.e. those related to individual characteristics, was examined; however, only those where significant differences were identified will be reported, specifically nationality and social media usage for travel planning.

In accordance, the variables were categorized into two groups through the process of dichotomization (Hair et al., 2019) as this ensures statistical robustness while capturing meaningful behavioral differences.

4.4.1.1 Nationality

Nationality was divided into Portuguese (n=110) and non-Portuguese citizens (n=211).

Some interesting differences between groups were identified. An analysis of both direct and indirect effects of ODBA on VI reveals that, although the direct effect remains non-significant for both groups (Table 14), indirect effects (Table 15) are only significant for the non-Portuguese group (p = 0.00), but not for the Portuguese group (p = 0.14).

Table 14 - Direct effect: Portuguese vs non-Portuguese respondents

	Portuguese Group (n=110) p value	Non-Portuguese Group (n=211) p value
ODBA-» VI	0.22*	0.36*

**Indicates not statistically significant at the 5% significance level.*

Table 15 - Total indirect effects: Portuguese vs non-Portuguese respondents

	Portuguese Group (n=110) p value	Non-Portuguese Group (n=211) p value
ODBA-» VI	0.14*	0.00

**Indicates not statistically significant at the 5% significance level.*

In the latter group, further examination of the specific indirect effects (Table 16) reveals that no component of DBE acts as a mediator, while the non-Portuguese group follows the overall sample trend with DBL and DBA mediating such relationship ($p = 0.04$ and $p = 0.01$, respectively). Hence, for Portuguese respondents, neither the direct nor the indirect effect of ODBA on VI are statistically significant, indicating that overall ODBA does not affect VI.

Table 16 - Specific indirect effects: Portuguese vs non-Portuguese respondents

	Portuguese Group (n=110) p value	Non-Portuguese Group (n=211) p value
ODBA -» DPQ -» VI	0.99*	0.09*
ODBA -» DBL -» VI	0.06*	0.04
ODBA -» DBI -» VI	0.29*	0.49*
ODBA -» DBA -» VI	0.34*	0.01

**Indicates not statistically significant at the 5% significance level.*

4.4.1.2 Social media usage for travel-planning purposes

A second MGA was conducted, this time incorporating the use of social media for planning purposes. Users were categorized into frequent users (n=183) - encompassing those who responded "often" and "always" and are therefore expected to feel comfortable with social media - and infrequent users (n=138) - comprising those who responded "never", "rarely", and "sometimes" - thus those less reliant on it.

Some interesting differences between groups were identified. An analysis of the relationship between ODBA and VI reveals that direct effects (Table 17) remain non-significant,

and indirect effects (Table 18) remain significant for both groups. However, these latter effects manifest themselves differently (Table 19).

Table 17 - Direct effect: Frequent vs infrequent users

	Low social media usage for planning purposes (n=138) p value	High social media usage for planning purposes (n=183) p value
ODBA-» VI	0.10*	0.05*

**Indicates not statistically significant at the 5% significance level.*

Table 18 - Total indirect effects: Frequent vs infrequent users

	Low social media usage for planning purposes (n=138) p value	High social media usage for planning purposes (n=183) p value
ODBA-» VI	0.01	0.00

As shown in Table 19, in the frequent user's group, the underlying mechanism occurs through DBA and DPQ (effects that are not significant in the low group), whereas in the low group it occurs only through DBL ($\boldsymbol{p} = 0.01$).

Table 19 - Specific indirect effects: Frequent vs infrequent users

	Low social media usage for planning purposes (n=138) p value	High social media usage for planning purposes (n=183) p value
ODBA -» DPQ -» VI	0.29*	0.01
ODBA -» DBL -» VI	0.01	0.05*
ODBA -» DBI -» VI	0.47*	0.50*
ODBA -» DBA -» VI	0.11*	0.02

**Indicates not statistically significant at the 5% significance level.*

5. Discussion

The current study aimed to examine if and how OBA contributes to positive perceptions and responses towards a destination brand. This study thus addresses the following research questions:

(1) What is the impact of ODBA on the intention to visit a given destination?

(2) What is the role of DBE in this relationship?

By means of PLS-SEM, four main hypotheses were tested, and Table 20 summarizes the main results.

Table 20 - Overall results from the hypotheses' test

Hypotheses	Description	Result
H1	ODBA has a direct positive effect on VI.	Not confirmed
H2	ODBA has a direct positive effect on DBE.	Confirmed
H3	DBE has a direct positive effect on VI.	Partially confirmed
H4	DBE mediates the relationship between ODBA and VI.	Partially confirmed

As shown in Table 20, H1 is not supported in the final structural model, since the relationship between ODBA and VI becomes non-significant when the DBE dimensions are incorporated into the model. However, prior to its inclusion, the relationship between ODBA and VI was statistically significant, suggesting that initially ODBA positively influenced VI, which is consistent with Setiawan et al. (2021) and Wilk et al. (2021). This observed loss of significance thus indicates that this effect is not direct but rather indirectly transmitted through specific dimensions of DBE. When considering the impact of mediation, the results provide partial support for H4. Given the non-significant direct effect of ODBA on VI (H1) when the DBE's dimensions are included in the model and the consequent mediation of two of the four components of DBE, it can be concluded that ODBA operates through indirect mechanisms, given its impact on VI occurs solely through DBA and commitment/attachment (DBL), rather

than DPQ and DBI. Despite the presence of notable parallels in the conceptual underpinnings, this study findings demonstrate congruence with Khan et al. (2024), concerning the indirect partial effect of DBE between e-WOM and purchase intention.

Second, and consistent with the predictions, H2 was supported, meaning that ODBA exerts a direct positive influence on all four dimensions of DBE. In accordance with the findings of Khan et al. (2024), which demonstrated that e-WOM exercises a favorable influence on DBE, the present results are in alignment with those of Shailesh and Reddy (2016), who posited that advocacy fosters enhanced DBE. Furthermore, the study corroborates the conclusions of Wilk et al. (2021) concerning the role of ODBA in fostering DBL, while further reinforcing the relationship between ODBA and brand image which so far to Qu et al. (2011), was only considered to be a predictor and not a consequence. In consideration of the variables DBA and DPQ, the present study reinforces the positive impact of UGC on brand awareness and perceived quality, as previously established by Wei et al. (2023). Thus, the findings indicate that DBE is an outcome of ODBA, as the expression of positive opinions online, use of visual symbols, the defense for the destination, and dissemination of content related to it leads to increased familiarity.

H3 was only partially supported. While DBA and DBL showed a favorable influence on VI, this phenomenon is not observed in DBI and DPQ, thus the present finding yields equivocal results, corroborating some and contradicting others. Previous studies (Chi et al., 2020; Ergün et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021) suggested that DBE (and therefore all four dimensions) had a direct positive influence on VI, with Benslimane and Semaoune (2021) and Şengel et al. (2023) emphasizing an indisputable link between DBI and VI. Nevertheless, in the study the latter is not verified. Still, it is fully aligned with Ferns and Walls (2012) and Ergün et al. (2022), who found the same conclusion regarding the positive impact of DBA and DBL on VI. Thus, the destination acknowledgement, emotional attachment and willingness to recommend are strong predictors of behavioral outcomes.

Finally, the findings of the post-hoc MGA provide insightful information into the moderating role of consumer characteristics in the relationships proposed in the model.

Nationality has long been acknowledged as a potential explanation for the divergent behaviors observed across different populations, namely in the tourism sector (e.g., Kang & Moscardo, 2006; Tsaur et al., 2005; Whang et al., 2016). In the current study, an analysis of the direct and indirect effects discloses differing patterns between the group of Portuguese respondents and that of non-Portugues respondents. The influence of ODBA on VI is exclusively observed within the non-Portuguese group, manifesting through indirect effects emanating from DBA and DBL. Conversely, the indirect effect of ODBA on VI did not attained statistical significance in the Portuguese group. This finding suggests that the VI of non-Portuguese respondents is more likely to be impacted by ODBA into VI, while in the Portuguese group, such impact does not exist.

This heterogeneity in results may be attributed to uncertainty avoidance (UA), one of Hofstede's five cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980), which refers to the degree an individual perceives a sense of threat or discomfort in scenarios that are unfamiliar or uncertain (Karl, 2018).

It is an inherent characteristic of consumers that they face uncertainty when making decisions. Given that the tourism sector involves services that are difficult to evaluate before use (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008), uncertainty and ambiguity are particularly pronounced in this context. As a result, tourists' behavior is significantly influenced by their propensity to avoid risk and eschew uncertainty (Yang et al., 2025). Still, UA has been shown to influence differences between cultures in external search behavior (Dawar et al., 1996). Confronted with the unknown, high UA cultures place a premium on structure as they experience a heightened sense of threat. Conversely, medium UA cultures exhibit a propensity to assume greater risk (Money & Crotts, 2003).

In terms of UA, Portugal scores very highly (99) in comparison to other nationalities represented in the non-Portuguese group (e.g., United States - 46; United Kingdom - 35; India - 40) (The Culture Factor Group, 2026). Individuals from high UA cultures are likely to adopt more conservative strategies to reduce uncertainty and risk and may thus tend to conduct more extensive research prior to travel. Prior research presents contradictory findings on this matter.

A comparative study undertaken by Amaro and Duarte (2017) between Portugal and the United Kingdom (low UA culture) demonstrated that, in the context of travel planning, Portuguese individuals exhibited a greater reliance on social media than their British counterparts, which is consistent with previous studies that individuals in high UA countries engage more extensively with online travel information (Quintal et al., 2010; Jordan et al., 2013). However, a study conducted on Japanese tourists (high UA culture) and German tourists (medium UA culture) found that individuals with high UA exhibited a propensity for engaging in less information-seeking behavior. Our study contributes to this debate by showing that, for Portuguese consumers (high UA culture), ODBA alone is insufficient to influence VI; therefore, further sources (e.g., travel agencies) might be needed to establish behavioral intentions among these travelers. Conversely, for the non-Portuguese respondents' group, ODBA functions as an external source of validation.

The study reports a moderating effect of social media usage for planning purposes on the relationship between ODBA and VI. An analysis of indirect effects discloses differing patterns between the group of frequent and infrequent users of social media for travel planning: among infrequent users this influence is mediated solely by DBL, whereas among frequent users' mediation operates through DPQ and DBA.

Basco et al. (2021) indicates that greater utilization of social media by tourists is associated with heightened exposure to, and access to, travel content. Conversely, limited use may result in diminished exposure to travel-related social media content. As social media usage levels vary, so too does the way it influences tourists' perceptions.

Accordingly, the indirect effects via DBA and DPQ among frequent users can be explained by the exposure of online travel content on a continuous basis. Regular interaction with destination related content in the form of photos, videos and recommendations enables individuals to gather information and accumulate knowledge. Thus, intense exposure to content generated through social media may furnish destinations with the capacity to boost their visibility and foster awareness (Chandrasekaran & Annamalai, 2023; Moro & Rita, 2018; Sigala, 2018). Moreover, previous research (Abbasi et al., 2024; Wei et al., 2023) has shown that social media and UGC engenders an enhanced perception of quality. This conclusion is further supported by

Uzir et al. (2020), who demonstrated that this effect is particularly evident among more active individuals. Complementing this, Hossain et al. (2025) identified perceived quality as a key mediator in the relationship between social media influence and purchase intention. Taken together, these findings lend support to explain the mediating role of DBA and DPQ among frequent users.

Conversely, infrequent users, having limited exposure to online travel content, encounter fewer opportunities for evaluating destinations based on information obtained through social media platforms, which may shed light on why DBA and DPQ are not significant mediators in this group. Instead, these individuals may rely on pre-existing emotional ties to a destination, developed through prior travel experience or personal recommendations. Indeed, social media has been shown to foster consumer brand loyalty (Ho & Chung, 2020; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Still, the finding that DBL constitutes the sole mediating mechanism through which ODBA translates into VI among infrequent users of social media for travel planning presents a novel insight that warrants further investigation.

6. Final considerations

The final chapter of this study presents its concluding remarks and main contributions to academia and management. Furthermore, the study goes on to mention the limitations that were encountered, as well as possible suggestions for future research.

6.1 Conclusion

The tourism sector represents one of the most important economic activities, contributing to both economic growth and job creation (World Travel & Tourism Council, n.d.). However, this sector is characterized by an inherent element of uncertainty, which in turn engenders a risk perception among consumers (Pop et al., 2022). Consequently, tourists turn to external sources of information to gather and evaluate the information received to minimize such risk (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002). In this context, social media platforms and UGC have become crucial, empowering tourists to participate in the creation and dissemination of destination-related information through shared experiences, opinions and recommendations. In fact, social media was considered a superior resource for acquiring information about a destination compared to other sources (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Consequently, social media users - encompassing tourists and influencers - assume a significant role in mitigating risk, influencing consumers' decision-making process (Chen et al., 2014).

Within the domain of destination branding, only one qualitative study has focused on ODBA. Accordingly, a quantitative analysis of this phenomenon was deemed essential (Wilk et al., 2024). Moreover, research on OBA has only viewed it as an outcome rather than an agent in its own right. Consequently, research into its consequences – exploring the shift from advocates to tourists - remains a gap in the literature (Sweeney et al., 2020; Wilk et al., 2020). This is where the present study comes in. Aimed to understand if and how OBA contributes to positive perceptions and responses towards a destination brand, a quantitative approach was taken, and a questionnaire was distributed online among social media users, in particular consumers of travel-related content on these platforms.

The study sought to provide answers to two research questions. The first question aimed to ascertain the impact of ODBA on the intention to visit a destination. The study's results

demonstrate that ODBA exerts a direct impact on VI when assessed independently. Nevertheless, upon incorporating DBE into the model, the direct effect becomes negligible, indicating that ODBA exerts its influence on VI solely through indirect mechanisms. The second question was designed to understand the role of DBE in this relationship. The findings reveal that ODBA exerts a positive influence on DBE, though not all dimensions contribute in a uniform manner to the translation of advocacy into behavioral intentions. To be precise, out of the four dimensions of DBE, only DBA - through augmented destination visibility - and DBL - by fostering emotional attachment to the destination - were found to mediate the relationship between ODBA and VI.

The multigroup analysis further evidence that the influence of ODBA is not uniform across individuals, as significant differences based on nationality/culture and usage of social media for travel planning purposes were established. In particular, the indirect effect of ODBA on VI was found to be stronger among non-Portuguese respondents. Regarding the use of social media for such purposes, the indirect effect was proved to be significant for both groups, albeit through differing dimensions of DBE. Thus, consumer characteristics have been identified as significant factors in shaping the way advocacy is processed and influences behavioral intention.

To conclude, the efficacy of destination branding efforts is contingent not solely on the way destinations promote themselves, but also on the way tourists communicate and share via social networks.

6.2 Theoretical implications

From a theoretical perspective, the present study contributes to the field of tourism and destination branding literature by advancing ODBA and its role in shaping tourists' behavioral intentions. In light of the growing significance of UGC and social media interactions in the tourism sector, the investigation of the influence of advocacy on potential visitors has assumed considerable scholarly relevance.

The concept of OBA is a relatively recent construct (Wilk et al., 2019; Wilk et al., 2018). In accordance with observations made by Wilk et al. (2024), this phenomenon has only been investigated through means of a qualitative approach. Consequently, the present study

contributes to the body of knowledge by conducting one of the first quantitative investigations into ODBA, employing the scale developed by Wilk et al. (2020) to measure impacts.

Previous research has approached brand advocacy as a dependent variable (as shown in Table 1), focusing on the factors that motivate individuals to advocate for a brand or destination (advocates/givers). Still, literature pertaining to the outcomes of OBA is scant. In light of the dearth of studies that have examined the consequences of this phenomenon - a lacuna noted by Wilk et al. (2020) and Sweeney et al. (2020) - this study makes a substantial contribution to the existing literature, by being one of the firsts to address this shift of focus from the advocates themselves to the receivers of such advocacy, by comprehending the impact that this advocacy can have on potential visitors. Thus, from a theoretical standpoint, this study makes a valuable contribution to the tourism literature by expanding the understanding of OBA as a bidirectional construct in destination branding, moving from the outcome of consumer-brand relationships to being a driver.

A third contribution pertains to how ODBA influences VI. Wilk et al. (2021) explored the direct relationship between OBA and purchase intention. This study extended this line of inquiry by incorporating DBE as a potential mediator of such relationship, showing how the effect occurs through indirect mechanisms -DBA and DBL – therefore ODBA not only fosters behavioral intention, but also strengthens the destination brand itself. Thus, this study broadens the scope of research by fostering a more profound comprehension of the fundamental mechanisms underpinning the intertwined dynamics between advocacy and behavioral responses, supporting the notion that information generated by external users constitutes an important source of brand equity creation, strengthening the link between UGC and destination branding outcomes.

Finally, the findings provide preliminary evidence that the effect of ODBA may not be uniform amongst consumers, suggesting that individual characteristics, such as nationality and the utilization of social media for travel planning purposes, may influence the mechanisms through which ODBA is translated into VI.

6.3 Managerial implications

The significance of academic research extends beyond its theoretical contributions, as the managerial implications are also of equal importance. The aforementioned results have practical implications for the tourism industry, particularly for DMOs, marketing professionals, and local government authorities.

The identification of strategies to safeguard and grow a brand is of paramount importance to its long-term success (Benthaus et al., 2016). In this regard, ODBA represents a valuable mechanism, as it facilitates the collaborative creation of destination brand content between DMOs, residents, tourists among others, which can resonate with prospective tourists, contributing to the long-term competitiveness and success of a destination. The findings demonstrate that ODBA not only promotes VI but does so by strengthening the destination brand. Consequently, DMOs should view ODBA not solely as an indicator of effective social media engagement, but as a strategic branding metric.

As a low cost and high impact resource, ODBA enables organizations to extend their reach by leveraging content generated by satisfied tourists, minimizing dependence on paid advertising. Therefore, it is incumbent that destination managers should invest in the development of strategies that proactively encourage visitors to disseminate positive experiences on social media platforms, through images, videos, reviews, or recommendations, as high levels of trust are placed in this type of communication. Although ODBA's antecedent is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that mechanisms such as hashtag-driven social media campaigns promote ODBA (Wilk et al., 2021). So, monitoring ODBA can yield invaluable insights into the effectiveness with which the destination brand is reinforced amongst potential visitors and complement traditional DBE metrics.

Furthermore, visitors continue to generate value long after their visit. Thus, destination managers should view loyal visitors as valuable brand ambassadors and should invest in maintaining relationships with them through the establishment of post-visit engagement strategies, such as the creation of online communities and forums.

Moreover, local government authorities can use social media platforms as a powerful tool to observe ODBA, thus facilitating a more profound comprehension of how individuals perceive their destination.

Finally, the results indicate that tourists should not be regarded exclusively as consumers of these experiences; rather, they should be considered active contributors to the destination branding building process. In the same vein, the destination brand should be viewed as an asset with its own distinct value - one that conveys its unique attributes and identity, thereby enhancing visitors' perception of exclusivity and perceived value. Consequently, branding initiatives that accentuate the destination's distinctive features, coupled with the development of a compelling narrative and engagement with local communities, are crucial to strengthen perceptions and ultimately lead to the positive impact of ODBA on VI.

6.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Notwithstanding the importance of the results obtained, it is imperative to acknowledge that this study is not without certain limitations.

First, the non-probabilistic and convenience-based nature of the sample limits the extent to which the results can be generalized to the broader population. The online dissemination of the questionnaire may have introduced sampling bias, as it predominantly reached the researcher's immediate network, which comprised university students.

Second, despite the questionnaire having been developed in two languages to broaden the sample to include individuals from different cultures and countries, the international sample was not very representative and proved to be quite diverse, with the Portuguese sociocultural context prevailing. Therefore, it may not be possible to extrapolate the findings to other sociocultural contexts, as it does not fully represent the diversity of profiles in terms of educational background, social, economic, or cultural context.

Furthermore, the construct of online brand advocacy is a relatively recent addition to the literature (Wilk et al., 2019; Wilk et al., 2018). Given the emerging nature of the concept, participants may hold different interpretations, despite the careful and thoroughly refined design.

While this investigation has contributed to a more profound understanding of the impact of ODBA on DBE and VI, there are several opportunities for future research that would allow for a more in-depth exploration of this topic.

One potential avenue for exploration would be the conduct of longitudinal studies, designed to evaluate the evolution of ODBA and its effect on perceptions and intentions over

time. Complementary qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups, could also be employed to gain deeper insights into how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to destination advocacy content.

Further research could also examine this model across a variety of populations, utilizing more representative sampling methodologies, as this would facilitate the validation of results within different organizational and geographic contexts, enabling subsequent comparative analysis.

Additionally, it was the respondents themselves who selected their own destinations, thus rendering the study more realistic but resulting in choices that were less controlled by the researcher. Consequently, subsequent studies could concentrate on one or more destinations defined a priori or even compare different destination types.

Moreover, to further enrich the conceptual model, subsequent research could investigate alternative outcomes, such as destination perceived authenticity or incorporate additional potential mediators, such as trust and even moderating variables. For instance, the utilization of social media for travel planning as a moderator could be further examined, as the literature has solely examined the intensity of social media usage in general terms, lacking a more specific focus.

Appendixes

Appendix 1 - Escolhi este destino porque vi no Instagram: Influência das redes sociais nas decisões

Este questionário foi desenvolvido por Maria Inês Senra Rocha, no âmbito da dissertação de Mestrado em Gestão da Faculdade de Economia da Universidade do Porto (FEP).

O objetivo deste estudo é compreender se e como o **online destination brand advocacy** - entendido como a promoção favorável, defesa e apoio a um destino em ambiente online - contribui para a formação de perceções e respostas positivas relativamente a esse destino. Em particular, pretende-se analisar de que forma este fenómeno influencia o valor da marca do destino (destination brand equity) e a intenção de visita.

O preenchimento do questionário tem uma duração aproximada de **5 minutos**. A participação é totalmente voluntária, podendo o/a participante desistir a qualquer momento, sem qualquer consequência, bastando para o efeito fechar o navegador.

Os dados recolhidos destinam-se exclusivamente a tratamento coletivo e estatístico, no âmbito deste projeto académico, não sendo recolhidos dados de identificação direta dos participantes. Os dados serão utilizados apenas para fins científicos e conservados até à defesa da dissertação de mestrado, prevista para julho de 2026, sendo posteriormente eliminados.

Os dados serão tratados pela investigadora e, se necessário, pela orientadora científica, não sendo partilhados com terceiros.

Para qualquer esclarecimento adicional, poderá contactar-me através do seguinte endereço de correio eletrónico: up202402430@edu.fep.up.pt

Agradeço, desde já, pela sua colaboração.

1. Consente em participar neste estudo? *

- Sim
- Não

Elegibilidade dos Participantes

3. Utiliza redes sociais (por exemplo, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, …)?
   - Sim
   - Não

4. Alguma vez foi positivamente influenciado(a) por conteúdos nas redes sociais sobre um destino turístico, publicados por turistas ou influenciadores que já o tenham visitado? *
   - Sim
   - Não

Seleção do Destino

4. Por favor indique o destino que mais o(a) influenciou positivamente nas redes sociais, através de conteúdos publicados por turistas ou influenciadores, mas que ainda não tenha visitado. *

As perguntas que se seguem deverão ser respondidas tendo esse destino em mente.

Intenção de Visita

Responda às seguintes questões tendo em consideração o **destino selecionado.** Indique o seu nível de concordância com cada afirmação, utilizando uma escala de 1 a 7, em que 1 corresponde a "discordo totalmente" e 7 a "concordo totalmente".

5. Se tiver oportunidade de viajar, pretendo visitar este destino. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. Planeio viajar para este destino num futuro próximo. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. Quando fizer uma viagem, a probabilidade de visitar este destino é alta. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Quais são as suas perceções sobre o destino?

Responda às seguintes questões tendo em consideração o **destino selecionado.**
Indique o seu nível de concordância com cada afirmação, utilizando uma escala de 1 a 7, em que 1 corresponde a "discordo totalmente" e 7 a "concordo totalmente".

8. Tenho conhecimento deste lugar como destino de viagem. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

9. Tendo em conta o que este destino oferece, as minhas expectativas são elevadas. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. Este destino tem uma imagem diferenciada em relação a outros destinos. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11. Este destino seria uma das minhas primeiras escolhas como destino de viagem. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

12. Quando penso em viajar, lembro-me deste destino. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

13. Este destino tem uma posição sólida. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

14. Este é um filtro de atenção, selecione o número 3 para esta afirmação. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

15. Este destino parece proporcionar experiências de qualidade. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

16. Incentivaria outras pessoas a visitarem este destino. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

17. Consigo reconhecer este destino entre destinos semelhantes. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

18. Este destino tem uma imagem clara. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

19. Espero que este destino tenha um desempenho superior ao de destinos semelhantes. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

20. Estou disposto a recomendar este destino a outras pessoas. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Conteúdo nas redes sociais sobre o destino

Tenha agora em mente os **turistas ou influenciadores** que viu a publicar conteúdo nas redes sociais sobre o **destino selecionado**. As seguintes afirmações referem-se ao **comportamento típico** desses criadores de conteúdo sobre esse destino.
Indique o seu nível de concordância com cada afirmação, utilizando uma escala de 1 a 7, em que 1 corresponde a "discordo totalmente" e 7 a "concordo totalmente".

21. Eles expressam opiniões positivas sobre o destino. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

22. Eles defendem o destino se alguém o criticar. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

23. Eles fornecem detalhes adicionais sobre o destino (por exemplo, preços, opções de alojamento, disponibilidade de descontos ou links para sites). *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

24. Eles usam emoticons ou emojis, como smilies ou winks, quando falam sobre o destino. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

25. Eles dizem que o destino é ótimo. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

26. Eles defendem o destino quando outros falam negativamente sobre ele. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

27. Eles dão justificações detalhadas sobre porque é que o destino é melhor do que outros. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

28. Eles utilizam símbolos visuais (por exemplo, emoticons, emojis, pontos de exclamação ou letras maiúsculas). *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

29. Eles falam favoravelmente sobre o destino. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

30. Eles partilham informações sobre promoções ou descontos atuais ou futuros relacionados com o destino. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

31. Eles tentam persuadir outras pessoas a viajar para esse destino. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

32. Eles usam smilies. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Informação sociodemográfica

33. Idade*

- 18-25

- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46 e acima

34. Género*

- Masculino
- Feminino
- Prefiro não dizer

35. Nacionalidade*

36. Indique o grau académico mais elevado concluído*

- Ensino Secundário
- Licenciatura
- Mestrado/Doutoramento

37. Frequência anual de viagens (número de vezes) *

- 0
- 1 ou 2
- 3 a 4
- 5 ou mais

38. Uso de redes sociais (por semana) *

- 1-3h
- 4-7h
- 8h ou mais

39. Com que frequência utiliza redes sociais para planear viagens? *

- Nunca
- Raramente
- Às vezes
- Frequentemente
- Sempre

40. Em que rede social foi mais impactado(a) por conteúdo sobre o destino? *

- Instagram
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Facebook
- Outro

Questionário Completo

Muito obrigada pela sua participação!

Appendix 2 - Instagram inspired me: How does social media impact travel decisions

This questionnaire was developed by Maria Inês Senra Rocha within the scope of the Master's Dissertation in Management at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto (FEP).

The aim of this study is to understand whether and how **online destination brand advocacy** - understood as the favorable promotion, defense, and support of a destination in an online environment - contributes to the formation of positive perceptions and responses towards that destination. More specifically, this research analyses how this phenomenon shapes destination brand equity and, ultimately, influences visit intention.

Completing this questionnaire takes approximately **5 minutes**. Participation is entirely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time, without any consequences, by simply closing the browser.

The data collected are intended exclusively for collective and statistical analysis within the scope of this academic project. No data allowing the direct identification of participants are collected. The data will be used solely for scientific purposes and will be stored until the defense of the Master's dissertation, expected in July 2026, after which they will be deleted.

The data will be processed by the researcher and, if necessary, by the academic supervisor, and will not be shared with third parties.

For any additional information or clarification, you may contact me at the following email address: up202402430@edu.fep.up.pt

Thank you very much for your collaboration.

1.Do you consent to participate in this study? *

- Yes
- No

Eligibility Screening

2.Do you use social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, ...)? *

- Yes
- No

3.Have you ever been positively influenced by social media content about a travel destination created by tourists or influencers who had already visited it? *

- Yes
- No

Destination Selection

4. Please indicate a destination you were most positively influenced by on social media through content that tourists or influencers published, but that you have not visited yet. *

All subsequent questions should be answered with this destination in mind.

Visit Intention

All of the following questions should be answered with the **destination selected** in mind.
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding the selected destination, where 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree" and 7 corresponds to "strongly agree".

5. If I have the opportunity to travel, I plan to visit this destination. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. I plan to travel to this destination in the near future. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. When I make a trip, the probability that I visit this destination is high. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

What are your perceptions regarding the destination?

All of the following questions should be answered with the **destination selected** in mind. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding the selected destination, where 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree" and 7 corresponds to "strongly agree".

8. I am aware of this place as a travel destination. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

9. Considering this destination's offerings, my expectations are high. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. This destination has a differentiated image compared to other destinations. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11. This destination would be one of my first choices as a travel destination. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

12. When I think about traveling, this destination comes to my mind. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

13. This destination holds a strong position among travel destinations. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

14. This is an attention filter, please select number 3 for this statement. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

15. This destination seems to provide quality experiences. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

16. I would advise other people to visit this destination. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

17. I can recognize this destination among similar destinations. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

18. This destination has a clean image. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

19. I expect this destination to perform better than similar destinations. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

20. I am willing to recommend this destination as a favorable destination to others. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Social media content about the destination

Now bear in mind those **tourists or influencers** you have seen posting content on social media about the **selected destination**. The following statements refer to the **typical behavior** of these content creators regarding that destination.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding the selected destination, where 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree" and 7 corresponds to "strongly agree".

21. They say positive things about the destination. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

22. They defend the destination if someone speaks poorly about it. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

23. They provide extra details about the destination (e.g., prices, accommodation options, availability of discounts, or links to websites). *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

24. They use emoticons or emojis, such as smilies or winks, when talking about the destination. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

25. They stand up for the destination when others talk negatively about it. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

26. They say the destination is great. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

27. They give thorough justifications as to why the destination is better than others. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

28. They use visual symbols (e.g., emoticon, emoji, exclamation or capital lettering). *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

29. They talk about the destination favorably. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

30. They share information about present or upcoming promotions or discounts for the destination. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

31. They try to persuade others to travel to the destination. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

32. They use smilies. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Background Information

33. Age*

- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46 and above

34. Gender*

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

35. Nationality*

36. Indicate the highest level of education you have completed*

- Undergraduate
- Graduate
- Post-graduate

37. Annual travel frequency (number of times) *

- 0
- 1 or 2
- 3 to 4
- 5 or more

38. Social media usage (per week) *

- 1-3h
- 4-7h
- 8h or more

39. How often do you use social media when planning trips? *

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

40. On which social media platform were you most impacted by content about the destination?*

- Instagram
- TikTok

- YouTube
- Facebook
- Other

Survey Completed

Thank you very much for your participation.

Appendix 3 - Structural model bootstrapping results

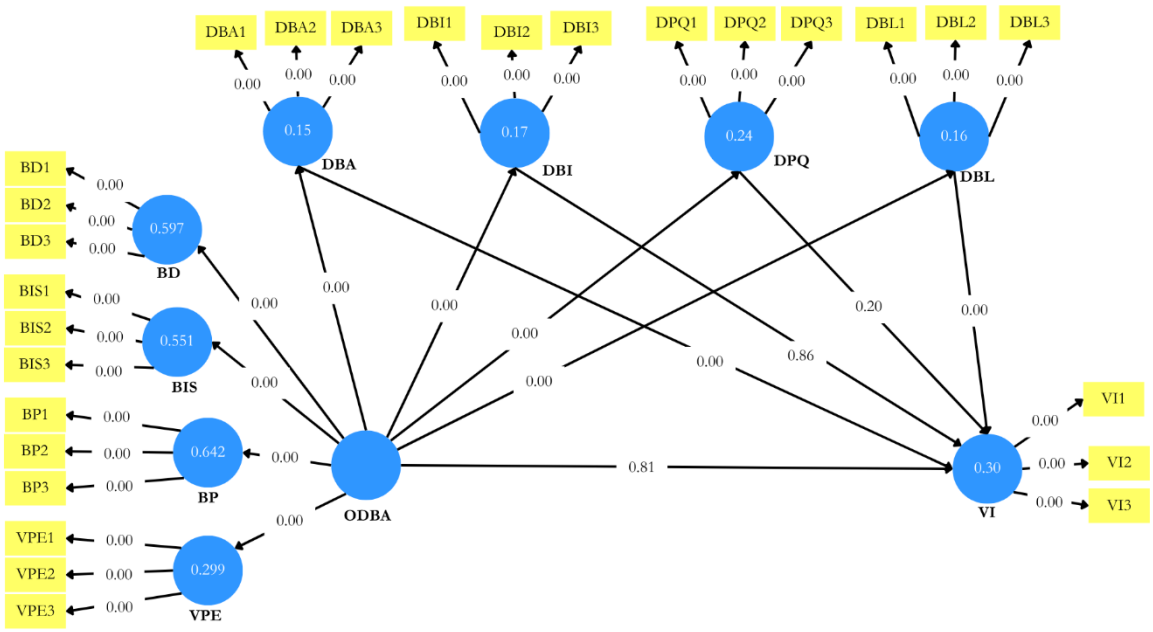


Figure 3 - Structural model bootstrapping results

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