

Information Systems and Digital Content Analysis in Nation Branding: Evaluating Online Tourism Databases and Their Impact on Destination Familiarity, Perception, and Visit Intention

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Abstract

Tourism and tourist activities act as a fundamental element in the GDP of any country therefore, tourists' perceptions and intentions are proficiently managed using advanced technology and online information to sustain the healthy circle of the economy. This paper analyzes the tourist's perceptions, visit intentions, and familiarity with the destinations by framing the digitalization, and online tourism information quality as predictors. This study utilized a mediated-moderation approach where brand image had a moderating role in the mediation of information quality. This study was conducted within the context of China and the tourists who visited China were accessed using different online databases and other sources to gather their perceptions on a scaled response sheet i.e., a questionnaire. The study used the advanced statistical software Smart-PLS 4.0 for data analysis. In the structural model assessment, the study encountered significant associations for the indirect and moderating relationships and digitalization gained only one significant direct relationship with destination familiarity. In the summary of the findings, the study quoted that tourists have been facilitated with a diverse source of information and they have become highly technology-oriented. Therefore, the managers, policymakers and planners have to use a holistic strategy covering the digitalization element with accurate information to develop a good brand image so that the tourists' perceptions and intentions can be positively flourished.

Keywords

Tourists, China, Visit Intentions, Digitalization, Information Quality, Online, Destination Familiarity, Perceptions, PLS-SEM.

1. Introduction

Information systems and digital content analysis in online tourism databases significantly enhance destination familiarity, perceptions, and visit intentions (Shariffuddin *et al.*, 2023). These digital platforms ensure potential tourists have the necessary information concerning the norms, origin, tourist attractions, and other experiences that might affect travel decisions (Iakovaki *et al.*, 2023). Since nation branding is a part of the digital process, it has become a country's primary driver that aims to change its perception and increase the flow of tourists (Murti *et al.*, 2023). Another contributing factor includes source content accessibility and credibility to enhance positive perceptions leading to vacationing (Armutcu *et al.*, 2023).



There is no dearth of research on information systems and digital contents (Li *et al.*, 2023), and literature exploring the roles and effects of online tourism, and the use of general situational digital marketing strategies. However, databases highlighting familiarity, perception, and visit intention remains scarce. There is also a lack of understanding about how individual digital tools influence tourists' decisions (Lacarcel; Huete, 2023). There is also a dearth of discussion on how these online sources are instrumental in shaping this perception, and this is a blow when nurturing the country's tourism market. There is also little known about how these digital tools can be harnessed optimally to support the concept of nation branding and how databases can be used to highlight indicators like familiarity, perception, and tourists' visit intention (Cluett; Alves, 2023).

A few have, however, nurtured the phenomenon of the efficacy of online media in nation branding, but pointed out the research gap in operating other online tourism databases that may shape the perception of the destination. For instance, Confetto *et al.* (2023) supported the assertion of the efficacy of online media in nation branding; Murti *et al.* (2023) urged a more critical examination of the effects of online content on nation brands. These studies argue that, as online resources serve such crucial roles in the tourists' decision-making process, it becomes equally imperative to learn and understand the effects to augment the nation's branding and marketing initiatives.

Thus, the current study aimed to define the potential opportunities of online tourism databases in the framework of nation branding and evaluate shifts in the specified tourists' perceptions concerning their previous experience with the targeted place. This research is relevant since it intends to assess the contribution of information system and digital content in building the nation brand within online tourism databases. Thus, by drawing attention to the impact of these databases on the specified attitude toward familiarity and the probability of visiting some destinations, the current research contributes valuable knowledge to understanding the role of digital content provision in the field of tourism. Consequently, by examining how different parts of the online information system influence the attitudes as well as intentions of tourists, destinations will be well prepared to address a common and compelling branding strategy. The study presents practical suggestions for official authorities and tourism departments that want to improve their online position, produce higher-quality content, and encourage travelers to visit particular tourist areas. Besides, beyond contributing to enhancing the understanding of nation branding, this work assists in improving the formulation of digital marketing communication strategies to increase tourism interest and arrivals.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Nation Branding and Tourism

Nation branding is defined by Avraham (2020), as the measurement, development, and management tool of a nation's image in the hope of making it more desirable on the global market. It entails the conscious control of a country brand image, values, beliefs and symbols to appeal to the target audience of tourists, investors and potential talents.

A major reason why tourism is an effective tool in nation branding is due to the fact that it offers a channel through which nations can market themselves to the rest of the world. Castellani *et al.* (2020) indicate that tourism can be used to market a country and its unique character, culture, and beliefs, and at the same time can give tourist memorable experience which will help them build strong bonds and long-lasting memories. Moreover, according to Khan *et al.* (2020), tourism also plays the role of boosting the economic employment opportunities and infrastructural development which in turn boost the image and appeal of a country. They also found that tourism can be used as a tool that fosters cross-cultural interaction, dialogue and diplomacy. Thus, tourism in effect can be used as a tool for nation branding, enabling nations to create a niche market and compete in this contemporary world economy.

2.2. Digitalization and Online Tourism Databases

Digital revolution has not left the tourism industry. According to Pencarelli (2020), it has been seen as people's way of finding information on tourism, planning for tourism and booking service have been influenced. Various studies indicated that through mobile devices, social media, and online platforms, it has become easy and convenient for tourists to connect to vast information and services (Pencarelli, 2020; Halkiopoulos; Giotopoulos, 2022). In addition, digitalization has enabled new distribution channels for tourism services through innovative business models like online travel agents, meta-search engines, and sharing economy platforms as described in the study of Reinhold *et al.* (2020). Thus, digitalization has helped tourism businesses, marketing their products, addressing the customers directly and accessing global markets.

Hamid *et al.* (2021) describe online tourism databases are defined as being online base sources of information to tourists, on destination, places to stay, activities and services that are available in the intended tourist destination. Such databases usually have simpler interfaces, internet search tools, and the filtering systems that allow for the finding of the necessary information. Most website databases covering tourism also have integrated facilities for booking and reservations to enable tourists book their trip online. Moreover, such databases also introduce users' reviews and ratings to help individuals make the right choice during a trip. Types of online tourism databases are Destination Management Organization (DMO) websites, Online Travel Agents (OTAs), and Meta-search Engines (Vila *et al.*, 2021; Goecke, 2020).

Many authors have pointed out how digitalization has changed the behaviour of tourists during their information search process when selecting their destination. Today, due to the access to the internet, the tourists have more information available and more options to consider, so they have better conditions to make the informed decision. It can also be seen that through digital enabled information search, consumers do not need to physically visit travel agencies or pick up brochures at any point of time (**García-Milon et al.**, 2021; **Tavitiyaman et al.**, 2021). Thus, digitalization has made it easy for the travel organizations as well as their customers.

2.3. Digitalization and Destination Familiarity, Perception, and Visit Intention

According to **Chi et al.** (2020), destination familiarity is the level of awareness a tourist has on the destination of their choice in terms of its attractions, culture and physical surroundings. It is an important determinant of travel since familiar places can always be perceived as safe and therefore preferred. While destination perception involves beliefs, impressions and attitudes towards a destination formed through various channels which include past experiences, communication from other people and the media (**Ashfaq et al.**, 2022). This is because travel guides, brochures, websites, social media affiliated to a destination and even first-hand encounters with people create initial and sometimes lasting impressions about a destination.

Moreover, **Seabra et al.** (2020) indicates that cultural and social factors, personal preferences and values may also influence perceptions further and create an individual and subjective mental picture of the destination. Familiarity and perception also affect visit intention which means that the number of tourists who intend to visit the particular destination (**Chi et al.**, 2020). This study has also highlighted that visit intention is an important since tourists will only plan to visit a destination that they are familiar with and which has a favorable perception in their eyes. Thus, it is suggested that the higher level of familiarity with a destination increases the comfort level and the confidence of the tourists to visit the place, thereby increasing the intention to visit.

Shariffuddin et al. (2023) describe that through technology and particularly through the social media platforms, digitalization proved to have affected the level of familiarity that tourists have with certain destinations. Virtual tours, travel blogs, and social media can contribute to greater awareness and even repeated visits to places, though the individual may have never been there physically.

Having contrasting views, **Dharmasena and Jayathilaka** (2021) indicate that as much information is available online, merely accessing the website might bring too much information overwhelming the consumer which may reduce familiarity. If exposed to a large amount of content, such as reviews, opposite opinions, and information overload or numerous choices, tourists may experience stress, anxiety, and uncertainty. The large quantity of data of this sort may cause fatigue so that despite having spent considerable time exploring the destinations, tourists may feel less acquainted with them. Thereby, the tourism businesses have to present the correct, adequate and interesting information to the intended customers.

In addition, **Wang et al.** (2021) indicate that the growth of the internet representation of the destination has greatly influenced the perception to the tourist destinations as most beliefs are formed from the content available online. They describe that through site-specific social media, travel portals, and rating sites, travel organizations can reform brand image. According to **Mueller and Rajaram** (2022), emotions, desire and anticipation can be created through the use of high quality images and videos while narratives and storytelling can add meaning, depth and context to the picture. Besides, through a process of digitalization, the destinations are also able to get audience reach, communicate with the audience differently and show the distinctive features they possess which sets them apart from the rest of the competing destinations (**Garbani-Nerini et al.**, 2022). Thus, with the help of the right utilization of online platforms, the identity of the destination is managed and refined, creating a powerful motivational appeal to the target tourist market.

To some extent, the emergence of digital technology has contributed to transforming the traditional approach of planning and visiting intention. Professionals argue that information and experiences that are found online are crucial motivators that entice tourists to go on a trip (**Cuomo et al.**, 2021; **Kamariotou et al.**, 2021; **Yu; Gao**, 2023). Websites, social media, and online travel agencies are easy for planning and organizing the tourist's trip which allow the tourists to search and to book the flights. Therefore, positive online evaluations have been found to positively influence the visit intention since more and more tourists use social cues to guide them.

2.4. Online Tourism Information Quality

Quality of tourism information has been found to play a significant role in online tourism. As a concept, it involves the reliability, relevance, and availability of information on destinations shared through digital platforms (**Tavitiyaman et al.**, 2021). **Tavitiyaman et al.** (2021) also describe that the components of online tourism information are such aspects as the information's accuracy, comprehensiveness, topicality, and convenience. As **An et al.** (2021) noted, existence of high-quality online information can also increase destination familiarity because good information found in cyberspace will enable the tourist to gain a better understanding about the destination.

Another study reveals that online tourism information quality does affect destination perception significantly (**Ali; Xiaoying**, 2021). This study revealed that any kind of information is crucial in shaping perception, particularly when such

information is positive and accurate; the perceptions formed are positive. However, if the information is inaccurate or incomplete, the perceptions are negative. Accurate information can bring to focus the strengths, heritage and experiences to be sampled in a destination and therefore influence tourists' perceptions and beliefs (Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2021). Thus, this study brought out evidence that the quality of online tourism information influences visit intention. This is because tourists are likely to plan for a trip to the particular destination with appropriate information regarding the destination. Tourism requires high quality information because the higher quality information can increase confidence and motivation while lower quality information can deter tourists from traveling (Lemy *et al.*, 2021). Thus, travel organizations must continuously ensure they deliver good quality information through the online platform to gain tourist traffic, and, in the process, stimulate the economy and development.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

In this case, the theoretical framework holds that digitalization which is the independent variable impacts on other variables namely, destination familiarity, perception as well as visit intention which are dependent variables. Thus, it is possible to suggest that online tourism information quality plays the role of a mediator, through which the impact of the digitalization is realized in relation to the dependent variables. The framework also incorporates brand image as a moderator on the effects of the quality of online tourism information on independent variables. Altogether, this developed framework offers considerably broad and clear concepts about the multifaceted interactions between digitalization, online tourism information quality and tourist behaviours. Figure 1 presents the research model of the study.

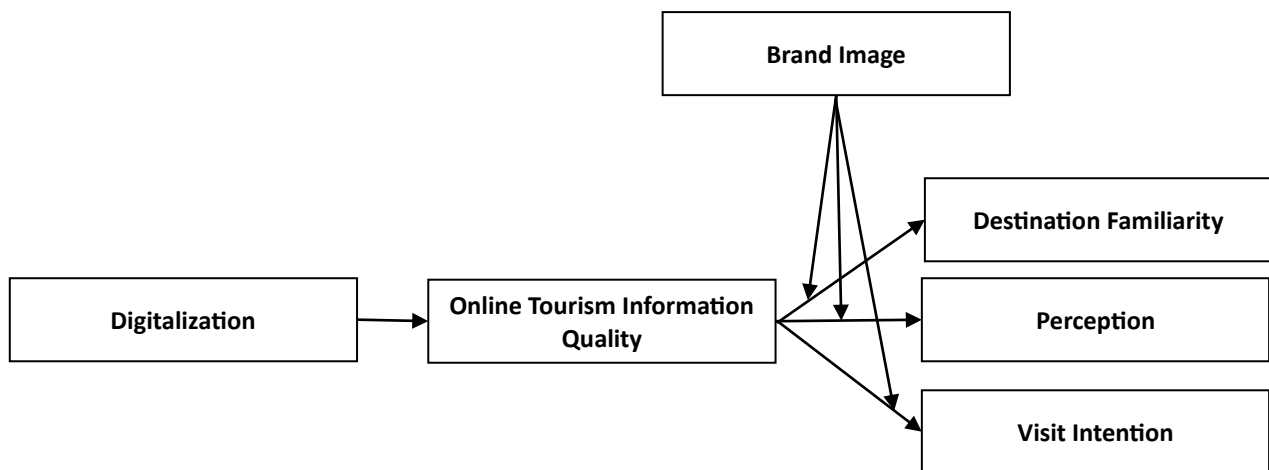


Figure 1: Research Model.
Source: Author Generated

3. Research Methodology

This research followed a quantitative research design, starting with establishment of hypotheses, followed by their testing to fulfil the final objective of their confirmation and non-confirmation. The chosen research instrument was the questionnaire which was distributed using the online survey method. To fulfil the designed research goals, the study conducted the data collection procedure among the tourists of China. Questionnaires were distributed online as Google Forms to a sample identified from online tourism databases and tourist agencies using the convenient sampling technique. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents, 254 of which were returned and found valid.

To evaluate the proposed conceptual framework and carry out the analysis, SEM techniques were utilized adopting the Smart-PLS software. PLS-SEM is the most widely used multi-variate data analysis method among empirical scholars and social science researchers due to its ease of use, and visual interface, offering great flexibility in the assessment of the formative measurement model and convergence (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, the PLS-SEM has the proficiency to assess the complex models and associations within a single model using different statistical indicators (Araújo *et al.*, 2023). In the PLS-SEM, the reflective measurement model of the study is evaluated with vigorous statistical parameters followed by the structural model assessment with the threshold of significance at 0.05 and 0.01.

The questionnaire comprised multiple scale items used to develop the measurements of the constructs developed through the previous empirical studies. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. The scales regarding digitalization, online tourism information quality and brand image resulted from the research of Etienne Fabian *et al.* (2024), Wang and Yan (2022) and Shah *et al.* (2020) in which the highlighted were measured with six, four and four items respectively which were borrowed from. Next, three items from Xue *et al.* (2022) were used to measure destination familiarity. The tourists' visit intentions was measured with three items borrowed from Liang and Lai (2023). In the last, the tourists' perceptions were measured as the value perceptions using four items adapted from He *et al.* (2018).

4. Results

Data analysis started with the factor loadings assessment. Using the PLS algorithms, the factor loadings of each latent measure of all constructs were identified. The analysis output reports that all latent measures have a strong relationship with their constructs since all factor loadings encompassed the recommended level i.e., >0.7, and showed a well-structured model (Hair *et al.*, 2011). Following the PLS algorithm, the internal consistency of the latent constructs was measured to ensure reliability. Starting with the Cronbach alpha in Table 1, it was concluded that all constructs have good reliability since all values are greater than 0.7 (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, “Composite Reliability” is also considered an important statistical predictor of construct reliability. (Lai, 2021) if it has values >0.7. As seen in Table 1, the goodness of the reliability has been presented. According to Hair Jr. *et al.* (2021), if the AVE values are greater than 0.5, then the factors show a high variance power of the original data. In this study, the AVE values of all constructs were above the recommended minimum threshold. Thus, the AVE values exhibited higher values than 0.5 and indicated that all variables have satisfactory level of convergent validity.

To assess the discriminant validity (Table 2), the F&L Criteria (Fornell; Larcker, 1981) was used which was complemented by the HTMT analysis as shown in Table 3 (Henseler *et al.*, 2015) where both analyses showed that the square root of AVE of all constructs is higher than the correlation between them (presented in the diagonal values in Table 2 and Table 3). Thus, by taking into account, it was been concluded that the constructs measure different concepts and they do not overlap with each other.

Table 1: Measurement Scales, Reliability, and Dimensionality.

	Loadings	α	CR	(AVE)
Brand Image (BI)				
BI1	0.977	0.970	0.970	0.917
BI2	0.976			
BI3	0.962			
BI4	0.913			
Destination Familiarity (DF)				
DF1	0.889	0.917	0.927	0.857
DF2	0.956			
DF3	0.931			
Digitalization (DG)				
DG1	0.922	0.951	0.953	0.805
DG2	0.867			
DG3	0.901			
DG4	0.917			
DG5	0.913			
DG6	0.860			
Online Tourism Information Quality (INQ)				
INQ1	0.871	0.891	0.892	0.755
INQ2	0.899			
INA3	0.878			
INQ4	0.825			
Tourist Visit Intentions (TIN)				
TIN1	0.940	0.946	0.947	0.903
TIN2	0.956			
TIN3	0.955			
Tourist Perception (TP)				
TP1	0.950	0.954	0.975	0.878
TP2	0.963			
TP3	0.955			
TP4	0.878			

Table 2: Discriminant Validity Analysis.

	BI	DF	DG	INQ	TIN	TP
BI	0.958					
DF	0.368	0.926				
DG	0.345	0.177	0.897			
INQ	0.384	0.484	0.475	0.869		
TIN	0.474	0.308	0.325	0.338	0.950	
TP	0.249	0.178	0.060	0.290	0.263	0.937

Note: The square roots of the AVE are represented on the diagonal in italics and highlighted in black. The remaining values correspond to the correlations between the constructs.

Table 3: Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT).

	BI	DF	DG	INQ	TIN	TP
BI						
DF	0.386					
DG	0.359	0.187				
INQ	0.413	0.534	0.516			
TIN	0.495	0.332	0.341	0.367		
TP	0.255	0.184	0.066	0.308	0.276	

After the reliability and validity assessment, the consistency of the structural model was assessed. In this domain, the hypotheses were tested and all hypotheses except the direct association between digitalization and visit intentions and tourists; destination perceptions due to the higher significance values than the minimum recommendation of 0.05. The variable digitalization showed an insignificant impact on tourist visit intentions ($B=0.027$, $p=0.757>0.05$) and tourists' perceptions ($B=0.022$, $p=0.746>0.05$). Other than these association, all direct, mediating and moderating associations were significant. The outputs of the structural model assessment have been reported in Figure 2 and Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 4: Measurement Analysis of Direct Effects.

	Direct effect	T-values	P values
DG -> DF	-0.209	3.073	0.002
DG -> INQ	0.475	10.046	0.000
DG -> TIN	0.027	0.309	0.757
DG -> TP	0.022	0.324	0.746

Table 5: Specific Indirect Effects.

	Specific Indirect Effects	T-value	P values
DG -> INQ -> TIN	0.094	2.379	0.018
DG -> INQ -> TP	0.086	2.951	0.003
DG -> INQ -> DF	0.242	5.734	0.000

Table 6: Moderation Effects.

	Moderation Effect	T-values	P values
BI x INQ -> DF	0.182	2.709	0.007
BI x INQ -> TIN	0.211	3.473	0.001
BI x INQ -> TP	-0.326	4.596	0.000

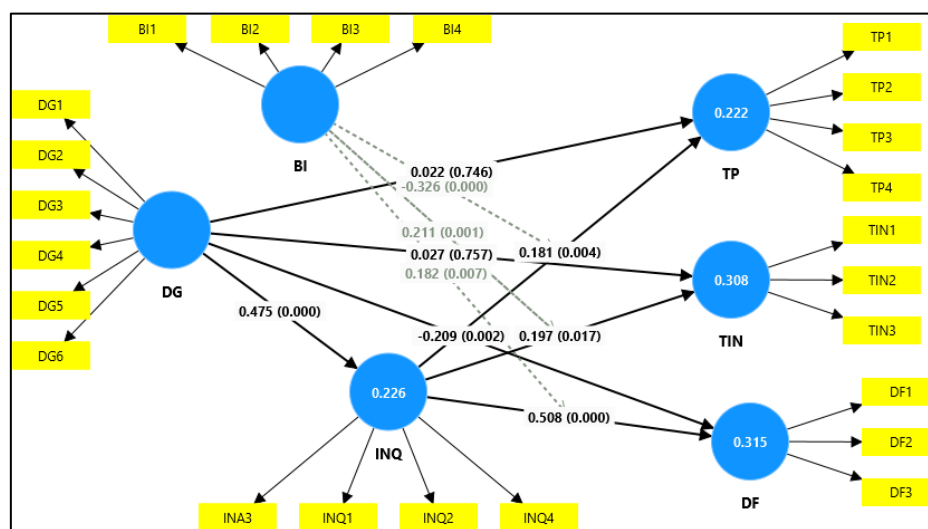


Figure 2: Structural Model.

5. Discussion

This paper aims at assessing the influence of digitalization in nation branding, focusing on the assessment of online tourism databases, and their impact on the degree of familiarity, perceived image, and visit intention of tourists. The direct impact of digitalization found in the research is quite significant on the destination familiarity, but its impact on the visit intention and tourism perception was found insignificant. Moreover, the findings of the study assert that mediated by online tourism information quality that digitalization impacts destination familiarity, visit intention and tourism perception. In addition, the moderation effect of brand image reveals that the information quality has a large impact on destination familiarity, visit intentions, and perception towards tourism (Cao; Zhang, 2022).

Prior studies also reveal that digitalization and the overall quality of the online tourism information significantly influence destination familiarity, visit intention, and tourism perception while brand image moderates these effects. The study by Alyahya and McLean (2022) implies that online tourism database or the digital contents are capable of raising the level of awareness among the tourists thus improving their familiarity with the destination. Given that people are more likely to travel to destinations they are familiar with, hence, digitalization can play a significant role of reducing uncertainty hence improving destination familiarity (Goo et al., 2022).

In addition, Tavitiyaman et al. (2021) indicated that accuracy of the information found on the internet enables tourists to develop positive intentions to visit a destination. When the information consumed is accurate, reliable, and relevant the

tourists build a positive image about the destination and have the intention to visit. This, therefore, underlines the need to see to it that information in the internet concerning tourism is well packaged, informative and appealing to the likely tourists. In addition, according to **Wang and Yan (2022)**, online information quality have impact on tourists' perception towards a destination and their attitude and belief. It is, thus, very important that specific high-quality information is presented online, as this can boost the perception of a destination. This puts focus on the fact that tourism information quality should be a strategic element that is promoted by the tourism boards as well as marketers of the tourist destinations. However, the present study has found quite contrasting results to these studies mentioned above (**Schneider, 2022**).

Similar to the findings of previous studies, the current research also supports the moderating function of brand image for the relation between the variables. **Chi et al. (2020)** established that positive brand image helps in the use of online tourism information by increasing the level of familiarity with the tourism destination, intention to visit the place and the perceived attitude towards tourism. This shows that there is need to enhance brand image so as to optimize on the gains that comes with digitalization and quality tourism information on the internet (**Hadjielias et al., 2022**).

Based on the studies cited above, the findings of this study provide insights for the tourism boards and destination marketers as they steadily emphasize on engaging more resources to introduce the digitalization and the online tourism information quality with a view to increasing the familiarization of the destination and visiting intention.

5.2. Implications

The results of this study have major practical implications for tourism boards, destination marketers, and policymakers. The research points out the importance of digitalization and quality of the online tourism information on familiarity with the destination, intention to visit, and perception of tourism. Thus, the support of the digital infrastructure and the provision of high-quality information on the internet can improve the competitiveness of a destination (**Chan et al., 2022**). Moreover, the results of the study indicate that destination marketers need to focus on building and maintaining online tourism database to enhance customers' decision making. Last, the results of the study will be useful to conceive policies, especially to encourage the digital environment development and offer more means to destination marketing organizations. Thus, it provides knowledge about the interactions between digitalization and the different aspects of quality of tourism information on the internet, as well as on the outcomes of tourism to support the actions of stakeholders to promote their destinations and attract tourists.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Although this study has made valuable contributions, there are some limitations that hint at directions for future research work. Some of these include the ability to replicate the study and its findings in other regions and with different samples, thus demonstrating the generalizability of the findings of the study. In addition, the study did not consider offline factors in relation to the accessibility of the tourism information database and the consumption of the related content in their actualization of tourism results (**Hamid et al., 2021**). In addition, research on the impact of various forms of internet media and the link between digitalization and sustainable tourism could be beneficial (**Loureiro; Nascimento, 2021**). Moreover, enhancing new approaches for determining the quality of the online tourism information, using machine learning algorithms and sentiment analysis can also improve the knowledge of the impact of digitalization on the field of tourism (**Madzik et al., 2023**). By addressing these limitations, more new and relevant research avenues can be discovered regarding to digitalization, online tourism information quality, brand image and the overall tourism experiences.

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