

## Destination Brand Visibility and Tourist Intention to Visit: The Mediating Role of Destination Image in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the relationship between destination brand visibility and tourist intention to visit Nigeria, with a particular focus on the mediating role of destination image. Against the backdrop of increasing global competition among tourism destinations, the study seeks to provide empirical insights into how visibility-driven branding efforts influence tourists' perceptions and behavioural intentions within an emerging tourism context. Drawing on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, Destination Image Formation Theory, Brand Equity Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the study develops and tests a conceptual model linking destination brand visibility, destination image, and tourist intention to visit. A quantitative research approach was adopted using a cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected from 398 valid respondents who were aware of Nigeria as a tourism destination, and the analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The results reveal that destination brand visibility has a significant positive effect on both destination image and tourist intention to visit. Destination image was also found to significantly influence tourist intention, confirming its central role in tourism decision-making. Furthermore, mediation analysis indicates that destination image partially mediates the relationship between destination brand visibility and tourist intention, suggesting that the impact of visibility is largely transmitted through tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations. The findings contribute to tourism literature by extending the destination branding framework to include visibility as a key antecedent and by validating the mediating role of destination image in an African context. Practically, the study highlights the importance of enhancing digital visibility while simultaneously managing destination image to improve tourists' perceptions and increase visitation intentions. The study concludes that for Nigeria to strengthen its position in the global tourism market, a strategic alignment of visibility and perception management is essential.*

**Keywords:** destination brand visibility, destination image, tourist intention to visit, tourism marketing, Nigeria, structural equation modelling.

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism continues to play a strategic role in global economic development, catalyzing employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, and cultural exchange. However, the sector has become increasingly competitive, requiring destinations to adopt more sophisticated branding and communication strategies to remain relevant in the global tourism marketplace. In this context, destination brand visibility referring to the extent to which a destination is exposed, recognized, and recalled across various communication channels has emerged as a critical factor influencing tourists' awareness and decision-making processes (Escobar-Farfán, Cervera-Taulet, & Schlesinger, 2024). Recent developments in tourism marketing highlight that visibility is no longer limited to traditional advertising but extends to digital ecosystems, including social media, online travel platforms, and user-generated content. These platforms significantly shape how destinations are perceived even before actual visitation. Tran and Rudolf (2022) argue that digital communication channels have transformed destination branding by enabling continuous interaction and exposure, thereby enhancing brand visibility and influencing tourists' perceptions and preferences. Similarly, Lin, Xu, Liu, and Zhang (2024) demonstrate that experiential and sensory aspects of destination branding—often communicated through visible media have a significant positive effect on tourists' intention to visit, reinforcing the importance of how destinations are presented and experienced virtually.

Closely associated with destination brand visibility is the construct of destination image, which remains central to understanding tourist behaviour. Destination image refers to the overall set of perceptions, beliefs, and emotional impressions that individuals hold about a destination. Contemporary studies conceptualize destination image as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive and affective components shaped by both internal motivations and external information sources (Akgün et al., 2020; Marques et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2022). Importantly, destination image plays a decisive role in influencing tourists' behavioural outcomes, including intention to visit, revisit, and recommend a destination. Empirical evidence from recent studies further confirms the strong predictive power of destination image in shaping tourist behaviour. A meta-analysis by Molinillo, Liébana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sánchez, and Buhalis (2020) reveals that destination image significantly influences various dimensions of behavioural intention, with affective image exerting the strongest effect on tourists' decision-making processes. In a similar vein, Wei, Zhou, and Li (2024) found that destination image has a significant impact on tourists' revisit intentions, emphasizing its role as a key determinant of sustainable tourism development. These findings underscore the importance of cultivating a favourable image as part of destination marketing strategies.

More importantly, emerging literature suggests that destination image functions as a mediating mechanism between marketing stimuli and behavioural intentions. For example, recent research on destination advertising indicates that promotional efforts influence tourist intention indirectly

through psychological constructs such as self-congruence and perceived destination reputation (Liu et al., 2024). Similarly, studies on destination branding demonstrate that visibility-driven factors such as brand experience and digital exposure shape tourists' perceptions, which subsequently translate into visit intentions (Lin et al., 2024). This mediation perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of how marketing efforts lead to behavioural outcomes, highlighting destination image as a critical intervening variable.

Despite the growing body of contemporary research, there remains limited empirical evidence that integrates destination brand visibility, destination image, and tourist intention to visit within a single analytical framework, particularly in the developing economies like Nigeria. Most existing studies have focused on established tourism destinations, with insufficient attention given to emerging markets such as Nigeria. This gap is significant, considering that perception-related factors often play a more pronounced role in destinations where tourism infrastructure and global visibility are still evolving. Therefore, Nigeria represents a compelling context for this investigation due to its vast tourism potential, encompassing diverse cultural heritage, natural attractions, and vibrant festivals. Nevertheless, the country continues to face challenges related to weak destination branding, limited international visibility, and inconsistent marketing strategies. These challenges contribute to unfavourable or unclear destination images, which in turn affect tourists' willingness to visit. Understanding how brand visibility influences destination image and subsequently shapes tourist intention is therefore essential for repositioning Nigeria within the global tourism landscape. Against this background, this study examines the relationship between destination brand visibility and tourist intention to visit Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of destination image.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored on an integration of established and contemporary theories in tourism marketing and consumer behaviour. Specifically, the study draws on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Theory, Destination Image Formation Theory, and Brand Equity Theory, which collectively explain how destination brand visibility influences tourist intention through the mediating role of destination image.

#### **Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Theory**

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) theory, originally proposed by Mehrabian and Russell and widely applied in marketing and tourism research, provides a robust framework for understanding tourist behaviour. The theory posits that external environmental stimuli (S) influence an individual's internal cognitive and emotional states (O), which subsequently lead to behavioural responses (R). In the context of this study, destination brand visibility through advertising, digital media presence, and user-generated content constitutes the *stimulus*. These

external cues shape tourists' internal evaluations, perceptions, and emotions, conceptualized here as destination image (the organism). The resulting behavioural outcome is the tourist's intention to visit (response). Recent empirical studies have validated the applicability of the S–O–R framework in tourism. For instance, destination-related stimuli such as advertising and digital exposure significantly influence tourists' psychological states, which in turn affect their visit intentions (Liu et al., 2024). Similarly, research shows that marketing-induced experiences and perceptions act as internal evaluative mechanisms through which external visibility influences behavioural outcomes (Lin et al., 2024). This theoretical lens, therefore, justifies the mediating role of destination image in the relationship between destination brand visibility and tourist intention.

### **Destination Image Formation Theory**

Destination Image Formation Theory provides a foundational explanation of how tourists develop perceptions about destinations. The theory posits that destination image is formed through a combination of information sources, including organic sources (e.g., word-of-mouth), induced sources (e.g., marketing communications), and autonomous sources (e.g., media exposure). Contemporary literature conceptualizes destination image as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive (beliefs and knowledge), affective (feelings and emotions), and conative (behavioural intentions) components (Akgün et al., 2020; Marques et al., 2021). Both internal motivations and external information stimuli, such as advertising, social media, and online reviews, shape these dimensions. Importantly, recent studies emphasize that destination image is not static but evolves through continuous exposure to information. Digital platforms and social media have become dominant channels that influence image formation by enhancing destination visibility and facilitating interactive engagement (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). Furthermore, empirical findings indicate that destination image significantly affects tourists' perceptions of value, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions, including intention to visit and recommend (Molinillo et al., 2020). Within this study, Destination Image Formation Theory explains how destination brand visibility (information exposure) translates into destination image (perception formation), thereby providing a theoretical basis for the mediating mechanism.

### **Brand Equity Theory**

Brand Equity Theory, particularly as applied to tourism destinations, provides insight into how branding elements influence consumer perceptions and behaviour. In tourism, destination brand equity refers to the value derived from tourists' awareness, associations, and perceived quality of a destination. Destination brand visibility is a critical antecedent of brand equity, as it enhances brand awareness and strengthens brand associations. According to recent studies, visible and well-positioned destination brands significantly influence tourists' perceptions and emotional connections, which in turn shape their travel intentions (Chiang & Chen, 2023). Moreover, destination brand experiences communicated through visible marketing channels have been shown

to positively affect tourists' intention to visit by reinforcing favourable perceptions (Lin et al., 2024). From this perspective, destination image represents a core component of destination brand equity, acting as the mental representation through which tourists evaluate a destination. The theory, therefore, supports the argument that visibility-driven branding efforts influence behavioural intentions indirectly through perceived image.

### **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)**

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), developed by Ajzen, further strengthens the theoretical underpinning of this study by explaining the determinants of behavioural intention. TPB posits that intention is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In tourism research, destination image is often linked to attitude formation, which directly influences intention to visit. Recent empirical studies confirm that a favourable destination image enhances tourists' attitudes and increases their likelihood of visiting a destination (Keni et al., 2024). Additionally, psychological constructs such as perception, belief, and emotional evaluation, central to destination image, align closely with the attitudinal component of TPB. Thus, TPB provides a complementary explanation for how destination image (attitudinal factor) translates into tourist intention, reinforcing its mediating role in the proposed model.

### **Hypotheses Development**

#### **Destination Brand Visibility and Tourist Intention to Visit**

Destination brand visibility plays a critical role in shaping tourists' awareness and decision-making processes. In an increasingly digitalized tourism environment, destinations that maintain strong visibility across multiple platforms such as social media, travel websites, and digital advertising are more likely to attract attention and influence travel intentions. Visibility enhances familiarity, reduces perceived risk, and strengthens cognitive accessibility, all of which are important drivers of behavioural intention. Recent studies provide empirical support for this relationship. For instance, Escobar-Farfán et al. (2024) found that increased exposure to destination branding significantly enhances tourists' intention to visit by improving awareness and perceived attractiveness. Similarly, Tran and Rudolf (2022) argue that continuous digital visibility fosters engagement and trust, which ultimately influence tourists' decision-making processes. Lin et al. (2024) further demonstrate that visible brand experiences communicated through online platforms significantly increase tourists' willingness to visit a destination. From a theoretical perspective, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework suggests that external stimuli such as marketing visibility can directly trigger behavioural responses, particularly when such stimuli are strong enough to create immediate cognitive impressions. In the context of Nigeria, where international awareness remains relatively low, enhancing visibility is likely to have a direct and

significant effect on tourists' intention to visit. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1:** *Destination brand visibility has a significant positive effect on tourist intention to visit Nigeria.*

### **Destination Brand Visibility and Destination Image**

Destination brand visibility is a fundamental antecedent of destination image formation. According to Destination Image Formation Theory, exposure to information whether through advertising, social media, or other communication channels shapes tourists' perceptions, beliefs, and emotional responses toward a destination. Increased visibility provides more opportunities for tourists to acquire knowledge and form impressions, thereby influencing both cognitive and affective components of destination image. Empirical studies support this relationship. Akgün et al. (2020) emphasize that information sources significantly influence the formation of destination image, particularly when they are consistent and engaging. More recently, Hernández-Mogollón et al. (2020) found that digital visibility and online content significantly enhance tourists' perceptions of destinations by shaping both emotional and evaluative responses. Tran and Rudolf (2022) further highlight that interactive digital platforms amplify visibility and contribute to more favourable and dynamic destination images. Additionally, visibility-driven brand communication enhances symbolic associations and experiential expectations, which are key elements of image formation. Lin et al. (2024) demonstrate that sensory and experiential branding communicated through visible channels significantly strengthens destination image, particularly in pre-visit stages. In the Nigerian context, where perceptions may be influenced by limited or inconsistent information, increasing destination visibility is likely to play a crucial role in shaping a more positive and coherent image. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H2:** *Destination brand visibility has a significant positive effect on destination image.*

### **Destination Image and Tourist Intention to Visit**

Destination image is widely recognized as one of the most influential determinants of tourist behaviour. A favourable image enhances tourists' perceptions of attractiveness, safety, and overall value, thereby increasing their likelihood of visiting a destination. Conversely, a negative or unclear image can discourage travel intentions, regardless of the destination's actual attributes. Recent empirical evidence strongly supports this relationship. Molinillo et al. (2020) found that both cognitive and affective components of destination image significantly influence tourists' behavioural intentions, with affective image playing a particularly strong role. Similarly, Marques et al. (2021) reported that a positive destination image enhances tourists' emotional attachment and increases their intention to visit and recommend the destination. Wei et al. (2024) further confirm that destination image significantly predicts revisit and initial visit intentions, emphasizing

its central role in tourism decision-making. From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), destination image contributes to the formation of favourable attitudes, which directly influence behavioural intention. When tourists perceive a destination positively, they are more likely to develop strong intentions to visit. In Nigeria's case, improving destination image is particularly important due to existing perception challenges related to safety, infrastructure, and service delivery. A positive image can help counteract these concerns and enhance the country's attractiveness as a tourism destination. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H3: Destination image has a significant positive effect on tourist intention to visit Nigeria.*

### **Mediating Role of Destination Image**

While destination brand visibility may directly influence tourist intention, its effect is often indirect and operates through psychological mechanisms such as perception and evaluation. Destination image serves as a critical mediating variable that explains how visibility translates into behavioural outcomes. The mediating role of destination image is well supported in contemporary literature. Liu et al. (2024) found that marketing stimuli influence tourist intention indirectly through perceived destination image and related psychological constructs. Similarly, Jalilvand et al. (2020) demonstrate that electronic word-of-mouth affects travel intention through its impact on destination image. More recent studies by Lin et al. (2024) show that brand experiences and visibility-driven interactions shape tourists' perceptions, which in turn determine their intention to visit. From the S-O-R perspective, destination brand visibility (stimulus) influences destination image (organism), which subsequently affects tourist intention (response). This sequential process highlights the importance of understanding not only the direct effects of visibility but also the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive behaviour. In the context of Nigeria, where visibility alone may not be sufficient to influence travel decisions, the role of destination image becomes even more critical. Tourists are likely to interpret visible information through their perceptions and emotions, which ultimately determine whether they form an intention to visit. Based on this theoretical and empirical justification, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H4: Destination image mediates the relationship between destination brand visibility and tourist intention to visit Nigeria.*

### **Concept of Destination Brand Visibility**

Destination brand visibility has emerged as a central concept in contemporary tourism marketing, particularly within the context of digital transformation and the attention economy. It refers to the degree to which a destination is seen, recognized, and recalled across multiple communication platforms, including traditional media, social networks, and digital travel ecosystems. In recent discourse, visibility is no longer viewed as a passive outcome of marketing efforts but as an actively constructed and continuously negotiated process involving multiple stakeholders. A

recent study by Jin et al. (2026) conceptualizes destination visibility as a dynamic and multi-layered phenomenon shaped by interactions among tourists, digital platforms, and destination managers. The study emphasizes that visibility is co-produced through processes such as platformization, institutionalization, and user engagement, which collectively determine how destinations gain prominence in the global tourism space. Similarly, Escobar-Farfán, Cervera-Taulet, and Schlesinger (2024) argue that destination branding has evolved into a strategic tool for enhancing visibility and positioning destinations in competitive markets. They highlight that effective brand identity and communication strategies are essential for ensuring that destinations remain salient in the minds of potential tourists. The increasing importance of digital platforms further reinforces the role of visibility in tourism marketing. Tran and Rudolf (2022), in their systematic review, note that social media has become a dominant channel for destination branding, enabling destinations to enhance recognition and engagement through user-generated content and interactive communication. From a conceptual standpoint, destination brand visibility encompasses several dimensions, including frequency of exposure, consistency of messaging, digital presence, and audience engagement. These dimensions collectively influence tourists' awareness and initial perceptions of a destination, thereby serving as a precursor to image formation and behavioural intention.

### **Concept of Destination Image**

Destination image remains one of the most extensively studied constructs in tourism research due to its significant influence on tourist behaviour. It refers to the overall perception, beliefs, impressions, and emotional responses that individuals hold about a destination. Contemporary literature conceptualizes destination image as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive and affective components. Recent studies emphasize that destination image is largely shaped by information sources, including marketing communications, social media content, and personal experiences. According to Tran and Rudolf (2022), digital platforms play a critical role in shaping both the cognitive (knowledge-based) and affective (emotion-based) dimensions of destination image by facilitating the dissemination of rich and interactive content. Furthermore, the role of branding in image formation has been widely acknowledged. Escobar-Farfán et al. (2024) highlight that destination brand identity and communication strategies directly influence how destinations are perceived, thereby reinforcing the link between branding and image development. Recent empirical research also underscores the integration of destination image within broader branding frameworks. Chiwaridzo and Chiwaridzo (2024) identify destination image as a core component of destination brand equity, alongside elements such as brand awareness, associations, and loyalty. Their findings suggest that a strong and positive image contributes significantly to shaping tourist behaviour and enhancing destination competitiveness. Importantly, destination image is not static but evolves as tourists are exposed to new information and experiences. In the

digital era, this process is accelerated by continuous exposure to online content, making image formation more dynamic and susceptible to rapid changes.

### **Concept of Tourist Intention to Visit**

Tourist intention to visit refers to the likelihood or willingness of individuals to travel to a particular destination within a specified period. It is widely regarded as a key predictor of actual travel behavior and a central outcome variable in tourism research. Recent studies highlight that tourist intention is influenced by a combination of cognitive, affective, and situational factors. For example, Liu et al. (2024) demonstrate that destination-related marketing stimuli, such as advertising, significantly influence tourists' visit intention, particularly when aligned with individuals' self-concept and expectations. In addition, the role of perception and evaluation in shaping intention has been consistently emphasized. Destination image, perceived value, and emotional attachment are identified as critical determinants of tourists' willingness to visit a destination. This aligns with broader consumer behavior theories, which suggest that intention is formed through a process of evaluation and decision-making based on available information and perceived benefits. Moreover, contemporary research indicates that digital engagement and online interactions play an increasingly important role in influencing tourist intention. Exposure to user-generated content, online reviews, and social media narratives can significantly shape travel decisions by providing authentic and relatable information about destinations.

### **Interrelationship among Destination Brand Visibility, Destination Image, and Tourist Intention**

The relationship among destination brand visibility, destination image, and tourist intention to visit has gained considerable attention in recent tourism literature. These constructs are interconnected within a sequential process in which visibility influences perception, and perception, in turn, drives behaviour. Destination brand visibility serves as the initial point of contact between the destination and potential tourists. Through repeated exposure and engagement, visibility enhances awareness and provides the informational basis for image formation. As highlighted by Jin et al. (2026), visibility is closely linked to perception, as digital platforms not only increase exposure but also shape how destinations are interpreted and evaluated by tourists. Subsequently, destination image acts as a cognitive and emotional filter through which tourists interpret visible information. A positive image enhances perceived attractiveness, reduces uncertainty, and strengthens emotional appeal, thereby increasing the likelihood of visit intention. Empirical evidence suggests that image is a key mechanism through which marketing efforts translate into behavioural outcomes. Furthermore, recent studies emphasize the mediating role of psychological constructs in tourism behaviour. Liu et al. (2024) demonstrate that marketing stimuli influence tourist intention indirectly through mediating variables such as self-congruence and perception, reinforcing the importance of intermediate cognitive processes. In this study, destination image is conceptualized

as the central mediating variable that explains how destination brand visibility influences tourist intention to visit. This perspective aligns with contemporary tourism research, which increasingly adopts integrated models to capture the complexity of tourist decision-making processes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopts a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design. This design is appropriate because it enables the collection of data from a large number of respondents at a single point in time and facilitates the testing of relationships among variables. Quantitative methods are widely used in tourism research to examine behavioural intentions and perception-based constructs (Hair et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2022). Furthermore, the study employs a causal research design to assess the direct and indirect relationships among destination brand visibility, destination image, and tourist intention. This approach is consistent with recent tourism studies that utilize structural modelling techniques to examine mediation effects and complex variable interactions (Ringle et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2021). The target population comprises potential and actual tourists (both domestic and international) who are aware of Nigeria as a tourism destination. This includes individuals who have either visited Nigeria previously or have been exposed to information about Nigeria through digital platforms, media, or interpersonal sources. The choice of this population is justified by the nature of the study variables, particularly destination image and visit intention, which are perception-based and do not necessarily require prior visitation experience (Stylos et al., 2021). Including both potential and actual tourists allows for a broader understanding of how visibility influences perception and behavioural intention. A sample size of at least 400 respondents is considered adequate for this study, based on recommendations for structural equation modelling (SEM), which suggest a minimum sample size of 200–400 for reliable parameter estimation (Hair et al., 2021). The study adopts a multi-stage sampling approach, using purposive sampling to first identify respondents who are familiar with Nigeria as a destination, and convenience sampling to distribute the questionnaire through online platforms such as social media, travel forums, and email networks. Data for the study are collected using a structured questionnaire administered electronically via platforms such as Google Forms. Online data collection is particularly suitable for this study due to its ability to reach a diverse and international audience and its alignment with the digital nature of destination visibility. The study employs Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using software such as SmartPLS to test the hypothesized relationships. SEM is particularly suitable for this study due to its ability to simultaneously assess measurement and structural models and test mediation effects.

**Table 1: Measurement Items for Study Variables**

Construct	Dimension	Code	Measurement Item
<b>Destination Brand Visibility (DBV)</b>	Unidimensional	DBV1	I frequently encounter information about Nigeria as a tourism destination on digital platforms.
		DBV2	Nigeria is highly visible on social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) as a tourism destination.
		DBV3	I often see advertisements or promotional content about Nigeria as a travel destination.
		DBV4	Nigeria appears prominently on travel websites and online tourism platforms.
		DBV5	Information about Nigeria as a tourism destination is easily accessible online.
		DBV6	Nigeria is widely recognized as a tourism destination.
		DBV7	Nigeria's tourism brand is consistently communicated across different media channels.
<b>Destination Image (DI)</b>	Cognitive Image	DI1	Nigeria offers a wide variety of cultural and tourism attractions.
		DI2	Nigeria has appealing natural and heritage tourism resources.
		DI3	Nigeria has adequate tourism infrastructure (e.g., accommodation and transportation).
	Affective Image	DI4	Nigeria is perceived as a safe destination for tourists.
		DI5	Nigeria offers good value for money as a travel destination.
		DI6	I perceive Nigeria as an exciting place to visit.
		DI7	Nigeria appears to be an enjoyable travel destination.

Construct	Dimension	Code	Measurement Item
		DI8	I have a positive overall feeling about Nigeria as a tourism destination.
		DI9	Nigeria seems to be a pleasant and attractive place to visit.
<b>Tourist Intention to Visit (TIV)</b>	Unidimensional	TIV1	I intend to visit Nigeria in the future.
		TIV2	I will consider Nigeria as a potential travel destination.
		TIV3	I am willing to travel to Nigeria if the opportunity arises.
		TIV4	I am likely to choose Nigeria over other competing destinations.
		TIV5	I would recommend Nigeria as a travel destination to others.

## DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This section presents the empirical findings of the study using structured tables to enhance clarity and academic rigour. The analysis covers data screening, demographic profile, descriptive statistics, measurement model results, structural model results, and hypothesis testing using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

### Data Screening and Response Rate

A total of 412 questionnaires were retrieved from respondents. After screening for completeness and consistency, 398 valid responses were retained for analysis.

**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents****Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	215	54.0
	Female	183	46.0
Age	18–24	82	20.6
	25–34	168	42.2
	35–44	98	24.6
	45 and above	50	12.6
Education	Secondary	45	11.3
	Bachelor's Degree	283	71.1
	Postgraduate	70	17.6
Travel Experience	Yes	259	65.1
	No	139	34.9

From Table 2, the demographic distribution shows that the majority of respondents are young, educated, and travel-experienced, making them suitable for evaluating tourism-related perceptions.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Destination Brand Visibility	3.87	0.71	Moderate–High
Destination Image	3.65	0.76	Moderate
Tourist Intention to Visit	3.58	0.80	Moderate

The results from Table 3 indicate that respondents moderately agree that Nigeria has visibility and a relatively positive image, with a fair intention to visit.

### Measurement Model Results

#### Reliability and Validity

**Table 4: Reliability and Convergent Validity**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Composite Reliability (CR)</b>	<b>AVE</b>
Destination Brand Visibility	0.89	0.92	0.65
Destination Image	0.91	0.93	0.68
Tourist Intention to Visit	0.88	0.90	0.66

Table 4 shows that all constructs exceed the recommended thresholds, confirming strong reliability and convergent validity.

**Discriminant Validity****Table 5: HTMT Ratio**

<b>Constructs Pair</b>	<b>HTMT Value</b>
DBV – DI	0.72
DBV – TIV	0.68
DI – TIV	0.75

Table 5 shows that all values are below 0.85, confirming adequate discriminant validity.

**Hypothesis Testing Results****Table 6: Structural Path Coefficients**

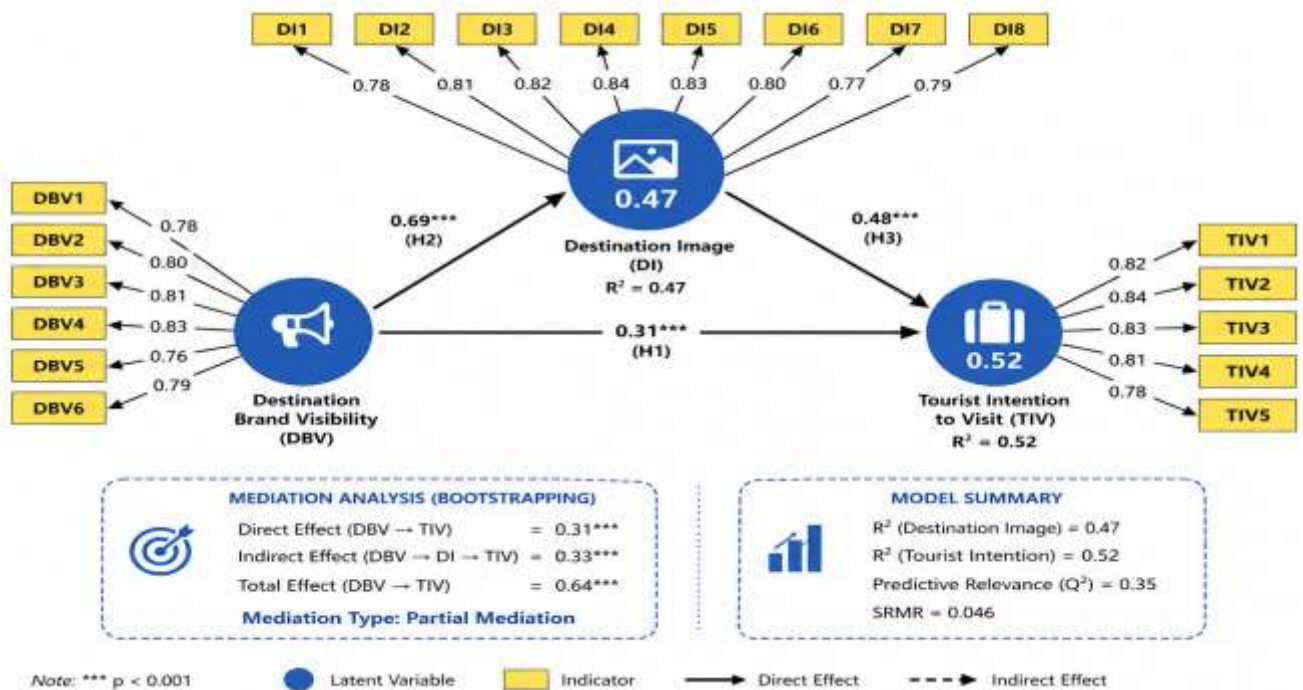
<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Relationship</b>	<b><math>\beta</math> (Beta)</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Decision</b>
H1	DBV $\rightarrow$ TIV	0.31	5.84	<0.001	Supported
H2	DBV $\rightarrow$ DI	0.69	14.27	<0.001	Supported
H3	DI $\rightarrow$ TIV	0.48	8.92	<0.001	Supported

**Mediation Analysis**

**Table 7: Mediation Effect of Destination Image**

Effect Type	$\beta$ (Beta)	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Direct Effect (DBV → TIV)	0.31	5.84	<0.001	Significant
Indirect Effect (DBV → DI → TIV)	0.33	7.45	<0.001	Significant
Total Effect	0.64	—	—	Strong Effect

Table 7 shows that destination image exhibits a partial mediation effect, as both direct and indirect effects are significant.



**Figure 1: SmartPLS**

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Destination Brand Visibility and Tourist Intention to Visit**

The findings reveal that destination brand visibility has a significant positive effect on tourist intention to visit Nigeria ( $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This result indicates that increased exposure to Nigeria as a tourism destination—through digital media, advertising, and online platforms—enhances tourists' willingness to visit. This finding aligns with recent studies emphasizing the importance of visibility in influencing tourist behaviour. For instance, Escobar-Farfán et al. (2024) found that destination branding efforts that enhance visibility significantly improve tourists' intention to visit by increasing awareness and perceived attractiveness. Similarly, Tran and Rudolf (2022) reported that digital visibility fosters engagement and trust, which are critical drivers of travel decision-making. Lin et al. (2024) further demonstrated that visible destination brand experiences communicated through digital platforms positively influence tourists' behavioural intentions. The result is also consistent with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) theory, which posits that external stimuli such as marketing exposure can directly influence behavioural responses. In this study, destination brand visibility functions as a stimulus that directly affects tourist intention, even before deeper cognitive evaluation occurs. However, the relatively moderate strength of the direct effect suggests that visibility alone may not be sufficient to strongly influence travel decisions. This finding supports the argument by Liu et al. (2024) that marketing stimuli often require psychological processing mechanisms such as perception and evaluation before translating into behavioural outcomes.

### **Destination Brand Visibility and Destination Image**

The study found that destination brand visibility has a strong and significant positive effect on destination image ( $\beta = 0.69$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that increased exposure to Nigeria as a tourism destination significantly shapes how it is perceived by potential tourists. This finding strongly supports existing literature. Akgün et al. (2020) emphasized that information sources play a critical role in shaping both cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image. Tran and Rudolf (2022) similarly found that digital platforms enhance image formation by providing rich, interactive content that influences tourists' perceptions. More recently, Hernández-Mogollón et al. (2020) demonstrated that online visibility significantly improves tourists' emotional and evaluative responses toward destinations. The strong path coefficient observed in this study suggests that visibility is a dominant factor in shaping destination image, particularly in emerging tourism contexts. This is consistent with the argument by Jin et al. (2026) that destination visibility, especially within digital ecosystems, plays a central role in how destinations are constructed and interpreted by global audiences. In the Nigerian context, this finding is particularly important. Given the country's relatively low global tourism visibility and mixed international perceptions, increased exposure through strategic branding and digital communication can significantly reshape

its image. This underscores the importance of consistent and positive messaging in destination marketing.

### **Destination Image and Tourist Intention to Visit**

The results indicate that destination image has a significant positive effect on tourist intention to visit Nigeria ( $\beta = 0.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding confirms that tourists' perceptions and emotional evaluations of Nigeria play a critical role in determining their willingness to visit. This result is strongly supported by recent empirical studies. Molinillo et al. (2020) found that destination image significantly influences behavioural intention, with affective image exerting a particularly strong effect. Marques et al. (2021) also reported that a positive destination image enhances tourists' emotional attachment and increases their intention to visit. Similarly, Wei et al. (2024) confirmed that destination image is a key predictor of both initial and repeat visit intentions. From a theoretical standpoint, this finding aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which suggests that attitudes shaped by perceptions and beliefs are primary determinants of behavioural intention. In this study, destination image reflects these attitudes, thereby influencing tourists' decisions. The relatively strong effect size observed in this study highlights the central role of perception in tourism decision-making. For Nigeria, this implies that improving destination image, particularly in terms of safety, infrastructure, and attractiveness, is essential for enhancing tourist inflow.

### **Mediating Role of Destination Image**

One of the most important findings of this study is that destination image partially mediates the relationship between destination brand visibility and tourist intention to visit (indirect  $\beta = 0.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that while visibility has a direct effect on intention, a substantial portion of its influence operates through destination image. This finding is consistent with recent literature emphasizing the mediating role of psychological constructs in tourism behaviour. Liu et al. (2024) found that marketing stimuli influence tourist intention indirectly through perception-based mechanisms such as destination image and self-congruence. Similarly, Jalilvand et al. (2020) demonstrated that electronic word-of-mouth affects travel intention through its impact on destination image. Lin et al. (2024) also confirmed that brand experiences and visibility-driven interactions shape tourists' perceptions, which subsequently determine their behavioural intentions. The presence of partial mediation suggests that destination image is a key explanatory mechanism, but not the only pathway through which visibility influences intention. This aligns with the S–O–R framework, where the organism (destination image) partially transmits the effect of the stimulus (visibility) to the response (intention). In practical terms, this finding implies that increasing visibility alone is insufficient unless it translates into a positive and compelling destination image. For Nigeria, this highlights the need for strategic communication that not only increases exposure but also actively shapes favourable perceptions.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between destination brand visibility and tourist intention to visit Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of destination image. Drawing on contemporary theoretical perspectives and empirical analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how visibility-driven marketing efforts translate into tourists' behavioural intentions within an emerging tourism context. The findings demonstrate that destination brand visibility is a significant driver of both destination image and tourist intention to visit. However, its influence is more pronounced when mediated through destination image, confirming that tourists do not respond to visibility alone but rather to how such visibility shapes their perceptions, beliefs, and emotional evaluations of a destination. Destination image emerged as a central determinant of tourist intention, reinforcing its critical role in tourism decision-making processes. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in several important ways. First, it extends the tourism branding literature by integrating destination brand visibility into the destination image-behavioral intention framework, an area that has received limited attention in recent research, particularly within developing economies. Second, it empirically validates the mediating role of destination image, providing a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which marketing stimuli influence tourist behaviour. Third, by focusing on Nigeria, the study offers context-specific insights that address the gap in African tourism research, where issues of perception, visibility, and branding remain underexplored.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings support and integrate key frameworks, including the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory, Destination Image Formation Theory, Brand Equity Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The results confirm that destination brand visibility (stimulus) influences internal evaluations (destination image), which subsequently drive behavioural responses (tourist intention). This integrated perspective enhances the explanatory power of tourism behaviour models and provides a solid foundation for future research.

Practically, the study underscores the need for tourism stakeholders in Nigeria to adopt a more strategic and coordinated approach to destination branding. Enhancing visibility through digital platforms, social media engagement, and consistent marketing communication is essential for increasing awareness. However, such efforts must be carefully managed to project a positive, authentic, and compelling destination image. This includes addressing negative perceptions, showcasing unique cultural and natural attractions, and improving the overall narrative associated with Nigeria as a tourism destination. In addition, policymakers and destination management organizations should invest in integrated marketing communication strategies that align visibility with perception management. Leveraging user-generated content, influencer marketing, and

immersive digital storytelling can significantly enhance both visibility and image, thereby increasing tourists' willingness to visit.

Finally, this study establishes that while destination brand visibility is a necessary condition for attracting tourists, it is not sufficient on its own. The effectiveness of visibility ultimately depends on its ability to shape a favourable destination image, which serves as the primary driver of tourist intention. For Nigeria to position itself competitively in the global tourism market, a deliberate focus on both visibility and image management is essential. Future research may build on this study by exploring additional mediating and moderating variables, as well as conducting comparative analyses across different tourism destinations.

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