Destination Brand Authenticity: What an Experiential Simulacrum! A Multigroup Analysis of Its Antecedents and Outcomes through Official Online Platforms

Keywords: online authenticity; destination brand authenticity; destination brand; destination website; destination social media; destination brand experience.

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• A measurement scale of the destination brand authenticity is validated using samples from three different countries.

• The online destination brand experience is an antecedent of the destination brand authenticity.

• The destination brand authenticity mediates between the destination brand experience and behavioral intentions.

• Different effects in the model were identified depending on the destination's official online platforms previously used.

• All platforms tested enable destinations to foster positive brand experiences and perceptions of authenticity.

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ABSTRACT

Tourists' intensive use of information and communication technologies when planning travel has forced destination marketing organizations to design online simulacra of destinations in multiple formats. We focus our study on official online destination platforms to analyze preliminary experiences with destination brands and the online perception of authenticity. Previous consumption studies have theorized that consumers' encounters with products/services are antecedents of their perceptions of authenticity. In the tourism literature, however, the link between online destination experiences and online destination authenticity constitutes a research gap. To fill that gap, we used a multimethod approach to develop a causal-predictive model by which we observed that the online destination brand experience directly affects destination brand authenticity. The findings also show that both of these constructs directly and indirectly influence users' behavioral intentions toward the destination. We examine the moderating role of various official online destination platforms to enrich the theoretical and managerial implications discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

> We seem to have transformed an attraction for authenticity with one for fidelity. We are more interested in whether things *look* real than whether they *are* real.
> –Colin Ellard, *Places of the Heart: The Psychogeography of Everyday Life*

Information and communication technologies have completely transformed how tourist destinations are promoted online. In the phases of gathering information and making decisions about where to travel, the relationships between tourists and destinations are now characterized by online and bi-directional communication (Choi, Hickerson, & Kerstetter, 2018). Given this situation, destination marketing organizations are increasingly directing marketing efforts and resources toward official online platforms (e.g., the web and social media) (Zhang, Gordon, Buhalis, & Ding, 2018). From the destination marketing standpoint, official online platforms are of particular importance because they constitute an *experiential* setting where tourists communicate and interact with destination content in the form of multi-sensory stimuli and, secondly, because tourists have the possibility of creating and sharing their travel stories through these official platforms, especially on social media (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013). Both elements—online experience and interactive communication—make official online platforms a pre-visit tool by which the destination's

cultural and promotional aspects are simulated, critiqued, shared, and consumed in a manner similar to tourists' consumption of other types of tourist products/experiences (e.g., festivals, rituals, souvenirs, textiles, gastronomy, and historical heritage).

Recent studies on virtual tourism suggest that pre-visit destination experiences through online platforms can be sufficiently relevant to shape tourists' perceptions of the destination's authenticity (Mura, Tavakoli, & Sharif, 2017). Although the shaping of tourists' perceptions of destination authenticity has been a hotly debated topic in tourism (e.g., Chhabra, 2008; Cohen, 1988; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2011; MacCannell, 1976; Wang, 1999), the study of authenticity perceptions as a result of online experiences with the destination currently represents a void in the literature (Mura et al., 2017; Tavakoli & Mura, 2015). In the context of promoting destination brands, it seems paradoxical that, even as the marketing literature demonstrates the importance and influence of concepts such as brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009) and perceived brand authenticity (Napoli, Dickinson–Delaporte, & Beverland, 2014), models that jointly analyze these two constructs and their repercussions on tourists' behavioral intentions toward the destination are practically non-existent.

In the interest of bridging this gap detected in the literature, the two main objectives of this study are (a) to identify the influence of the online destination brand experience (formed on official online platforms) on perceived destination brand authenticity and (b) to analyze the effects of these two constructs (online destination brand experience and destination brand authenticity) on tourists' behavioral intentions toward the destination. Regarding the formation of destination brand authenticity, we discuss studies of brand authenticity (e.g., Fritz, Schoenmueller, & Bruhn, 2017; Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2016) and theories of tourist destination authenticity (e.g., Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Wang, 1999). In the case of online destination brand experience, this study debates concepts such as brand experience (Brakus et al., 2009) and destination brand experience (e.g., Barnes, Mattison, & Soresen, 2014; Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio, & Campo-Martínez, 2019; Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, Rubio, & Campo, 2019). The final theoretical model is evaluated empirically through a multimethod analysis for which four studies were carried out—the development of a destination brand authenticity measurement scale (studies 1, 2, and 3A); a model of causal relationships through an online experiment (study 3A); and a multigroup analysis (study 3B)—to determine the moderating effect in the proposed theoretical model of the previous use of four distinct online destination platforms (the official website, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube).

This study's theoretical contributions are based on its pioneering development of a measurement scale for destination brand authenticity as well as on an analysis of its antecedents and consequences. Furthermore, this study's contributions will give destination brand managers a tool for evaluating the online destination brand experience and the perceived destination brand authenticity that tourists gather through contact with official online platforms.

2. DESTINATION BRAND AUTHENTICITY AND EXPERIENCE
2.1. Destination brand authenticity

Achieving consensus on a global definition of authenticity in tourism is a complex task due to the fact that this phenomenon has been linked to multiple factors that intervene in the shaping of the tourist's perceptions, motivations, and expectations regarding the destination (Costa & Bamossy, 2001). These factors range from interaction with and consumption of tourist offerings (e.g., souvenirs, textiles, and gastronomic products) to cultural representations of destinations beyond their borders (e.g., tourist events, travel and tourism fairs, dances, concerts, and tourist performances) (Cohen, 1988). In the latter case, simulating and staging a tourist destination's cultural and promotional aspects appear fundamentally as political and marketing tools to encourage the motivation to travel (Silver, 1993). As a result, authenticity in tourism has been defined as a motivational force (MacCannell, 1976), a perception (Cohen, 1988), a value (Olsen, 2002), a claim (Peterson, 2005), and a choice that tourists make about a destination (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006).

The conversation around how the perception of authenticity in tourism is formed has traditionally been presented from three theoretical perspectives: *objectivist, constructivist,* and *existentialist*. From the objectivist standpoint, authenticity is interpreted according to objective, measurable, and identifiable properties resulting from interaction with tourist objects (e.g., souvenirs, textiles, or other tourist arts) (Wang 1999). As a result, two elements are simultaneously generated in the process of shaping the perception of authenticity: a tourist object (or cultural consumption) and a system of standardization by which those tourist objects can be authenticated. For example, tourists may describe tourist products for sale as authentic or inauthentic depending on whether they were made by local individuals following a set of established and identifiable traditional practices (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006).

By contrast, the constructivist perspective on authenticity in tourism takes the objectivist view further by arguing that authenticity judgments refer to *non-object* elements, especially representations and practices that are of a cultural, social, or religious nature (or for tourist entertainment) and are associated with a certain place or group of individuals (Wang 1999). Following this description, which MacCannell (1973) and Crick (1989) call *staged authenticity*, the perception of authenticity arises in response to a tourist experience that is constructed and initially designed to be a cultural and commercial exchange in which there exists a shared understanding of what is and is not accepted as authentic, according to the symbolic elements that constitute that experience (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). An example is the re-creation, as a tourist lure, of tribal dances outside the presumed original territory where they were traditionally performed, a re-creation that relies on the use of local artists together with the portrayed tribe's characteristic musical instruments and textiles.

Finally, authenticity has also been analyzed through an existentialist approach, in which it results from an individual's internal and subjective responses while experiencing the

destination's physical or symbolic elements during any stage of the tourist experience (pre-visit, in situ, post-visit) (Wang, 1999). This approach supposes that authenticity is a psychological factor by which individuals give meaning to their own self-conception (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and self-awareness (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) (e.g., of being authentic and/or experiencing something authentic) on the basis of internal and subjective interpretations derived from their experiences (Illouz, 2017).

Currently, because information and communication technologies are heavily used in finding information and making decisions about where to travel, studies on authenticity are beginning to question how destination authenticity is formed based on contact with online platforms and technological devices that simulate and promote visiting the destination in person (Mura et al., 2017; Tavakoli & Mura, 2015). In this context, the existentialist perspective on authenticity is especially relevant in explaining the phenomenon. Specifically, studies on the online authenticity of virtual attractions and/or destinations point out that individuals do not require an objectifiable demonstration, whether figurative or socially constructed, to experience authenticity. By contrast, a product, cultural phenomenon, or social practice can come to be *false* or be mediated by technological devices and yet be able to transmit enough meaning that individuals are able to internally and subjectively perceive that it is authentic (Hall, 2007). This approach implies a conversation about two aspects of tourism: first, the lessening of the importance of corporality (the body) as a direct path through which one experiences the authenticity of a destination (Tavakoli & Mura, 2015) and, second, the rise of the mediating influence of online platforms (such as websites, destinations' social media, and virtual-reality applications) on interacting with and discovering a destination (Mura et al., 2017). The duality implicit in these two aspects of tourism—the destination's physical reality vis-à-vis its virtual reality—reinforces Baudrillard's (1970, 1994) idea of *simulacra*, in which the perception of authenticity and what is deemed to be real can be found in simulations of the physical world, for example, through pre-designed online environments. Recent studies have found that the simulation and digital reproduction of a destination through technological intermediation complements the physical tourist experience and constitutes determining factors in the creation of an intention to visit the destination in person (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2019a; Mura et al., 2017).

2.1.1. Toward a model of destination brand authenticity

The most critical positions on the perception of authenticity consider that any exercise in commodifying a tourist experience triggers a loss of naturality and, therefore, of the authenticity of that phenomenon (e.g., Comaroff & Comaroff, 2011; Halewood & Hannan, 2001). However, authors such as Kolar and Zabkar (2010) have developed a model of perceived authenticity from the consumer's point of view that challenges the most critical positions on cultural commodification as a tourist offering. These authors define authenticity as "an evaluative judgment that pertains to tourist experiences with a certain

site, culture, object or destination" (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010, p. 655). In this way, the commodification of the tourist experience is analyzed as a way by which cultural practices and a destination's heritage generate a particular value to visitors (Goulding, 2000). Other authors add that the perception of a tourist destination/attraction's authenticity can take diverse forms, including the form of an experience mediated by technological devices (Peterson, 2005). Thus, several tourism studies have begun to shed light on the relationship between the various forms of representation, simulation, and consumption provided by online destinations and the perception of authenticity derived from the same (Guttentag, 2010; Mura et al., 2017).

Along the same lines, and taking an existentialist approach, this study considers that if the destination utilizes its brand as a (semiotic) source of stimuli and experiences through its official online platforms, tourists can shape their perceptions of the destination's authenticity even without having physically visited the site. The destination brand is designed in an effort to frame the marketing discourse around objects, symbols, and experiences that are in some way beneficial to tourists (Watson & Kopachesvky, 1994). Therefore, when tourists come into contact with the destination brand and the accompanying ensemble of stimuli in virtual environments that offer experiences (i.e., images, videos, and texts on the official webpage or social media; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2019a), they can be provided with enough components to form an internal and subjective perception of whether the destination is authentic.

2.1.2. The authenticity of a brand

The marketing literature has developed several proposals to measure perceived brand authenticity. Fritz et al. (2017) distinguish between indexical authenticity and iconic authenticity. Indexical authenticity corresponds to the consumer's perception of the degree to which a product/service associated with a brand faithfully reflects a series of attributes that are objective, measurable, and evident regarding its originality/authenticity and that correspond to a process, also recognizable, by which one is able to authenticate the said commodities (e.g., by labels denoting originality or designation of origin).

On the other hand, iconic authenticity identifies emotional perceptions—imagined and experienced internally and subjectively by the consumer—in which there is no need of a measurable parameter of what would be accepted as authentic in a given context. Rather, the experiential perception allows an individual to experience something as authentic. Coming from this approach, in which objective and subjective aspects are seen as complementary to the creation of brand authenticity (Fritz et al., 2017), several authors propose measurement models with similar dimensions by which they identify three principle categories: brand temporal consistency (continuity through time and the brand's capacity to maintain its heritage appeal), brand credibility (the level of honesty and reliability transmitted to consumers by the brand), and brand originality (the degree to which the brand communicates naturalness, sincerity, and integrity to consumers) (Bruhn,

Schoenmüller, Schäfer, & Heinrich, 2012; Fritz et al., 2017; Morhat et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014).

Even though, from a marketing perspective, the perception of brand authenticity has been considered an element of value and differentiation (Gilmore & Pine, 2007), there is a surprising lack of qualitative and quantitative studies on destination brand authenticity. Due to this gap, it is important, both from an academic point of view and for destination marketing managers, to evaluate a possible measurement of destination brand authenticity. In this sense, as part of the effect of the commodification of destinations (Cole, 2007; Goulding, 2000), destinations' brands are created by a signaling process regarding a particular place for which there is a promotional discourse about objects, symbols, and ideas linked to diverse benefits for tourists (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998; Watson & Kopachevsky, 1994). Hence, an ontological parallelism is considered plausible between both: (a) how brand authenticity has been measured in the marketing literature as a consequence of consumer experiences with products and services (Bruhn et al., 2012; Fritz et al., 2017; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Morhat et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014); and (b) how destination brand authenticity can be formed during tourists' encounters with destinations' brands on official platforms. In this research, it is argued that the discourses of existential authenticity (Wang, 1999) and brand iconic authenticity (Davis, Sheriff, & Owen, 2019; Grayson & Martinec, 2004) converge in an assembly to explicate how tourists internally and subjectively perceive destination brand authenticity from the experience of browsing destinations' official platforms. To that end, this study proposes an adaptation of the brand authenticity model to the context of the destination brand, keeping in line with the three principle dimensions thus far identified in the marketing literature (Bruhn et al., 2012; Fritz et al., 2017; Morhat et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014): the brand's temporal consistency, the degree of perceived credibility, and the degree of perceived originality.

a) First, the temporal consistency of the destination brand may be defined based on the destination's capacity to transcend current travel trends and maintain its appeal to visitors independently of the passage of time (see Bruhn et al., 2012; Morhart et al., 2014). The importance of this concept as a creator of perceptions of authenticity lies in the capacity of the destination brand to transmit a sense of history and nostalgia to the territory it represents, which is, as a result, easily associated with certain cultural traditions, beliefs, and heritages and a specific local identity (Chhabra et al., 2003).

b) Second, destination brand credibility corresponds to the level of transparency and honesty that tourists perceive in relation to the destination's capacity to meet the expectations created (see the original proposal in Morhart et al., 2014). Consequently, destination brand credibility should consider the degree to which the promotion of the destination and its brand are in line with a realistic and coherent

perception of what a tourist can experience upon visiting the destination in person (Beverland & Luxton, 2005).

c) Finally, the destination brand's degree of originality constitutes the extent to which the brand is able to effectively transmit all its symbolic aspects though various stimuli (e.g., images, texts, videos, audios, and the design of online user interfaces) that allow the brand to be perceived as unique, natural, genuine, and not artificial (Brunh et al., 2012; Morhart et al., 2014).

2.2. The online destination brand experience

The brand, in the context of promoting a destination, constitutes the set of meanings and experiences that express a promise of value about a particular place as an element of differentiation (Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2003). Accordingly, destination brands should transmit the promise of a memorable travel experience that is clearly associated with that particular destination in order to be successful and to differentiate the brand from the competition (Hudson & Ritchie, 2009). Recently, studies such as those of Barnes et al. (2014) and Kumar and Kaushik (2018) have looked at tourists' destination brand experiences after their in-person visits through their sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective responses. For example, tourists may enjoy the sights, sounds, and tastes of a local market, enjoy a stroll along the coast, strike up a conversation with locals, and engage in a tourist activity such as a camel ride as well as perceive an enjoyable welcome in a hotel, restaurant, or tourist attraction during a trip to the destination.

The concept of destination brand experience arises from an adaptation by Barnes et al. (2014) of Brakus et al.'s (2009) pioneering concept of brand experience. In the marketing literature, brand experience is defined as the consumer's internal and subjective response when coming into contact with a brand, upon making a purchase, upon entering a store, through publicity, or at a brand event. Brand experience, in tourism as well as in marketing, has been measured through a multidimensional approach in which four dimensions are considered (Barnes et al., 2014; Brakus et al., 2009): (a) sensory (brand-related stimuli that can be perceived by consumers through their senses), (b) intellectual (thoughts, creativity, and imagination evoked while in contact with the brand), (c) behavioral (physical experiences and motor actions derived from contact with the brand), and (d) affective (the consumer's emotions and feelings in relation to the brand). Furthermore, brand experience can be positive or negative as well as fleeting or enduring (Reicheld, 1996). Applied to consumer contexts, brand experience has demonstrated a positive influence on consumer satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009), on attitude toward the brand (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010), on loyalty (Carù & Cova, 2003), and on brand associations (Brakus et al., 2009). In analyzing brand experience after a tourist's visit to the destination in person, Barnes et al. (2014), Beckman, Kumar, and Kim (2013), and Kumar and Kaushik (2018) have found a positive effect of the destination brand experience (sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and

affective) on satisfaction with the destination, intention to revisit, loyalty, and intention to recommend.

Traditionally, studies that have developed the multidimensional frame of brand experience (e.g., Barnes et al., 2014; Brakus et al., 2009) have focused on offline contexts. However, as individuals are more frequently making use of online platforms in their personal and professional relationships, brands need to further examine how to design online experiences that are relevant and appealing to online consumers. Following this approach, several authors have adapted the brand experience model from Brakus et al. (2009) to evaluate consumer contact with brands' websites and social media (e.g., Bleier, Harmeling, & Palmatier, 2019; Chen et al., 2014; Smith, 2013). These studies conclude, in the first place, that, in the case of a brand's website, a positive online brand experience will positively affect user confidence in and satisfaction with the brand (Rajaobelina, 2018) in addition to increasing intentions to make an online purchase (Bleier et al., 2019). Furthermore, in the context of the brand experience on social media, Chen et al. (2014) and Smith (2013) show that online brand experience is capable of influencing customer brand attachment as well as loyalty and intention to recommend the brand (Chen et al., 2014). In the marketing literature, however, studies of the online brand experience in social media are still very scarce, and the studies that have been done explore a limited set of aspects linked to diverse dimensions of the brand experience that consumers encounter when navigating a brand's social media (Smith, 2013) or offer instruments of measurement that do not contemplate the multidimensionality of the concept (Chen et al., 2014).

In the online context of tourist destinations, up to the present time, only Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2019a) have, taking a quantitative approach, adopted two of the four brand experience dimensions (sensory and intellectual/cognitive) developed by Brakus et al. (2009). Specifically, these authors consider the online destination brand experience of the official website in an effort to determine its potential to encourage user intentions to visit and recommend the destination. Following a qualitative approach, Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2019b) add that various dimensions of the online destination brand experience can be observed when tourists are in contact with a destination's official website (sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective) and social media stimuli (sensory, intellectual, behavioral, affective, social, and interactive). Similarly, prior studies based on a different research perspective (e.g., Lee & Gretzel, 2012; Lee, Gretzel, & Law, 2010; Zhang et al., 2018) have considered the paradigm of brand experience in the study of the online destination experience on official platforms. First, in relation to the dimension of sensory and intellectual brand experience, Lee et al. (2010) and Lee and Gretzel (2012) find evidence that the visual and textual stimuli found on the destination's official website stimulate cognitive processes in users, leading to a positive attitude toward the website and the destination. Second, reflecting Brakus et al.'s (2009) definition of the affective dimension of brand experience, Zhang et al. (2018) propose a measurement of users' emotional experiences with the destination upon browsing its website and social media. In

this case, the emotional experience with the destination is defined according to the user's pleasure and stimulation when in contact with the destination online.

In summary, the studies carried out up to now reveal a scarcity of research in the literature addressing the destination brand experience on official online platforms and, at the same time, reveal a lack of knowledge about which dimensions of the online destination brand experience can be measured in a comparative study of both situations: in encounters with the destinations' website and on official social media platforms. In the interest of filling the detected gap, in this paper we take Brakus et al.'s (2009) brand experience approach, using its four dimensions (sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective) as the best starting points for examining users' internal and subjective responses when in contact with destination brand content on official online platforms.

3. HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTION
3.1. Online brand experience and destination authenticity

Academic studies in tourism that adopt an experiential perspective in analyzing users' navigation of official online platforms have determined that, both for websites (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2019a; Lee & Gretzel, 2012; Lee et al., 2010) and for social media (Boley, Jordan, Kline, & Knollenber, 2018), a positive online user experience is an important antecedent to the intention to visit and recommend a destination (Zhang et al., 2018). Taking the destination website as the unit of analysis, authors Lee et al. (2010), Lee and Gretzel (2012), and Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2019a) find evidence suggesting that sensory stimuli on websites have a positive effect on the user's intellectual/cognitive experience. These authors add that the intellectual/cognitive experience positively influences the user's attitude toward the destination and the intention to visit and recommend it. Apart from the website, other studies show that user interaction with destination content shared by other tourists on social media, in addition to being in contact with the destination online, is a relevant predictor of intention to visit and recommend (Boley et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). In this study, both the intention to visit and the intention to recommend are defined according to the tourist's behavioral intentions toward the destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Therefore, we propose hypothesis H1:

H1. The online destination brand experience positively affects tourists' behavioral intentions toward the destination.

In the academic literature on tourist experiences, proposals have emerged for the systematic analysis of the effects of so-called *virtual tourism* on a destination's perceived authenticity. Virtual tourism has been defined from various perspectives; it is a phenomenon by which it is possible for tourists to be mentally transported (via technological mediation) to destinations where they can consequently receive and interpret simulated sensory stimuli that attempt to portray the tourist experience exactly as it would

be during a visit in situ (Mura et al., 2017). Current technological capacity enables the construction of virtual environments that, depending on the type of device used, can offer a fairly wide range of simulated destination stimuli. Among these devices are those that are identified as three-dimensional (virtual reality glasses, augmented reality in combination with odor or flavor simulators) or as two-dimensional devices (predominantly visual-auditory devices, such as Web 2.0 or mobile applications). Using these technological devices, tourists can have relevant and unique tourist experiences with a destination's multimedia brand content (i.e., images, texts, videos, audios, and combinations thereof; Hyun, Lee, & Hu, 2009) that enhance users' perceptions of that destination's authenticity. Qualitatively, studies such as those by Mura et al. (2017) and Huertas (2018) point in this direction, although it is still necessary to align those studies with quantitative models that reinforce theoretical discussions of the online experience of a destination and the perception of authenticity. Consequently, we propose the following research hypothesis:

H2. Online destination brand experience positively affects destination brand authenticity.

Authenticity in tourism has been considered a direct antecedent to tourist behavior in terms of motivation and interest to visit/consume tourist offerings/attractions (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011) in addition to being a direct antecedent to satisfaction with the tourist experience at the destination (Cohen, 1979; MacCannell, 1973). In this study, we consider that the online destination brand experience implies a virtual simulation whereby managers try to maintain a set of meanings and symbols that differentiate the destination. Thus, and reflecting the concept of *simulacra* posed by Baudrillard (1970, 1994), the perceptions of the authenticity of the online destination and their repercussions on the user's intentions toward the destination should be similar to those that arise in physical travel to the destination. Consequently, we propose as hypothesis H3 that the perception of the authenticity of a destination brand, through its theoretical dimensions (temporal consistency, credibility, and brand originality), will have a positive influence on the behavioral intentions of the destination's online platform users as a result of a virtual experience with the destination brand (Huertas, 2018; Mura et al., 2017).

H3. Destination brand authenticity has a positive effect on the behavioral intentions of the users of the destination's official online platforms.

3.2. The mediating effect of authenticity between the online destination brand experience and the tourist's behavioral intentions

In this study, destination brand authenticity is necessarily contingent upon an existentialist approach to the concept of authenticity (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). This implies that authenticity is formed as a result of the internal and subjective experiences and processes of individuals in response to stimuli presented by particular environments,

objects, or combinations thereof (Illouz, 2017). In this approach, the sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective experiences on a destination's website and social media could be sufficient stimuli to shape an individual's authenticity judgments of the online destination brand. According to theories in cognitive psychology, such as the sensations-perceptions theory (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2013; Goldstein, 2010; Krishna, 2012), perceived authenticity, understood as a cognitive evaluation, could represent the outcome of an initially sensory (sensations) and later cognitive-emotional (perceptions) process inspired by the subjective experience of coming into contact with a destination's online multimedia content. As a result of this, individuals would show a response to the destination in the form of attitudes, insights, memory, and behavioral intentions (Agapito et al., 2013). Based on the aforementioned sequence, it may be posited that destination brand authenticity is a mediator between the online destination brand experience and behavioral intentions toward the destination, and thus we propose the following:

H4. Destination brand authenticity plays a mediating role between the online destination brand experience and the behavioral intentions of users of the destination's official online platforms.

3.3. Moderating effects of the use of a destination's various online platforms

The degree to which the use of each of a destination's official online platforms moderates the relationships among online destination brand experience, destination brand authenticity, and behavioral intentions is yet to be determined. Prior studies that offer a comparison of brands' online platforms (e.g., social media) point out that each platform has its own architecture, cultural use, and rules and that each offers something different in terms of how online brand content is produced and consumed (Roma & Aloini, 2019; Smith, Fichner, & Yongjian, 2012).

In relation to the destination brand, the official website allows tourists to obtain relevant information for a visit, supported by a wide range of stimuli stemming from videos, images, and texts. Furthermore, a destination's social media offer a larger framework of interactive options among destination content, opinions, and user comments about the same. Likewise, differences arise in how users consume or create content on diverse social media. For example, on a destination's Facebook page, tourists can comment, ask questions, and even share content (videos, texts, images, live streaming) about the destination with their friends and acquaintances. A destination's Instagram account, by contrast, is based on a pleasing visual layout that captivates visitors with high-quality photos as well as short video clips, with the possibility for users to comment on them. Finally, social media such as YouTube are based on audiovisual communication through the opportunity of displaying official destination videos along with user comments and opinions of the same.

From the standpoint of the formation of destination brand authenticity, the fact that user-generated content (UGC) about a destination, in its various formats (photos, videos, and

textual narratives), is hypothetically more credible than the destination's official content and information (Huertas, 2018; Jacobsen & Munar, 2012) might lead us to consider that perceived destination brand authenticity, in its dimension of credibility, would be greater for a destination's social media users than for its website users. From the same perspective, users of the destination's social media could form their perception of brand originality to a greater extent than website users, considering that social media provide a high level of interactivity and communication between consumers and brands, leading to *authentic* engagement between them (Solis, 2010). By contrast, the official nature of the destination's website (Li, Robinson, & Oriade, 2017), derived from the high level of control over the content by destination brand managers, could strengthen the perception of the destination's temporal consistency, as managers can provide verified and moderated evidence of the destination's heritage value and cultural appeal without including the noise generated by other users' opinions and comments.

From the perspective of the online destination brand experience and the importance of its dimensions (sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective), one of the plausible differences between a destination's official website and its social media could be understood in terms of the functional characteristics offered by the two types of platform. Some authors argue that social media have the capacity to provide richer and more diverse information (Költringer & Dickenger, 2015) that would generate the need for more intense sensory and cognitive processing (Molinillo, Liébana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sánchez, & Buhalis, 2018). On the destination website, however, a manager can freely and dynamically use various types of interfaces and multimedia entertainment elements (e.g., interactive games, high-quality videos, and 360°-view applications) as well as collect testimonials and multimedia content from tourists who have visited the destination, making it possible to offer an online brand experience equally relevant at the sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective levels. In the comparable case of social media, differences in the importance of the online destination brand experience on each platform could be traced back to the type and diversity of multimedia content on display to users. For example, a destination's Facebook page allows high-quality, long-duration videos to be presented as well as a wide range of images, permitting the creation of highly sensory experiences that are affective (due to the video content) and intellectual/cognitive (due to the user effort needed to process the available multimedia stimuli). Conversely, social media such as Instagram facilitate the display of images while videos are supported in only limited formats, such as, for example, short videos or the sharing of stories based on a compilation of short videos. Therefore, it is to be expected that a destination's Instagram account fundamentally stands out in its ability to produce a sensory experience with the destination brand, over and above the other types of experience.

As the academic tourism literature still does not know the possible moderating effects of the type of online platform used for finding destination information on the relationships among online destination brand experience, destination brand authenticity, and users' behavioral intentions, we propose the following research question:

RQ1. What effect do distinct online destination platforms have on the relationships among online destination brand experience, destination brand authenticity, and the user's behavioral intentions?

Figure 1 presents all the hypotheses put forward as well as the research question.

–[Figure 1]. About here–

4. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Figure 2 represents a general overview of the set of empirical studies carried out on destination brand authenticity, online destination brand experience, and tourists' behavioral intentions when using official online platforms. This paper incorporates a total of four studies using a multimethod approach. Owing to the scarcity of research on destination brand authenticity, we first carried out three studies following the standard criteria for developing psychometric scales (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally & Berstein, 1994) to verify the destination brand authenticity construct and its underlying dimensions: item generation (study 1); item reduction and construct validation (study 2); and analysis of the discriminant validity, antecedents, and consequences of the construct (study 3A). Study 3A includes a model of causal-predictive relationships among online destination brand experience, destination brand authenticity, and behavioral intentions. Finally, study 3B analyzes the moderating effects of each official destination platform that tourists had previously used.

– [Figure 2]. About here–

4.1. Study 1. Generation of items on the destination brand authenticity scale—online projective techniques with North American tourists

The objective of study 1 was to evaluate North American tourists' perceptions of a tourist destination's authenticity after they were exposed to stimuli from the destination's promotional video (phase 1) and static images of its official online platforms (phase 2). The purpose of this study was to obtain an initial reduction of the theoretical items discussed previously in the literature, which constitute the dimensions of the destination brand authenticity construct (temporal consistency, credibility, and originality). Accordingly, we began with a total of 48 items pertaining to publications on brand authenticity by Bruhn et al. (2012) and Fritz et al. (2017) (15 items), Morhart et al. (2015) (15 items), and Napoli et al. (2014) (18 items).

For this study, a group of 53 North Americans was recruited from the crowdsourcing platform Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) (price per participant $1.05; 55% female; 19–67 years old, with an average age of 32 years and an average annual income of $25,000–$40,000). The MTurk participants were redirected through a link to online scenarios previously designed in Qualtrics. The destination we chose for the presentation of stimuli was Barcelona as it is one of the more visited European destinations of North American tourists (Barcelona City Council, 2017; Statista, 2018a). Furthermore, North American tourists make up Barcelona's most important visitor population with origins outside the European Union (Barcelona City Council, 2017).

Study 1 was carried out in two phases based on qualitative online projective techniques using the Qualtrics platform. In phase 1, a promotional video for Barcelona was presented, which served to contextualize the subject matter of the questions that would be presented after the video. After the video was presented to the participants, they were guided to define in writing their understanding of the authenticity of a tourist destination according to their own criteria. In addition to writing their responses on that concept, the participants were expected to add an example of a destination that met that definition.

Subsequently, in phase 2, the participants were shown four images through which they could view Barcelona on each of its official online platforms (website, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube) (Appendix A). These social media platforms were used in the study because they are among the top social media in terms of penetration rate and number of users in the United States (Statista, 2018b). In this case, after viewing images of Barcelona's various platforms, the participants were to select one or more platforms on which the destination seemed especially authentic to them and then to explain their selection in writing. The main advantage of using projective techniques, rather than any other type of qualitative technique, lies in the fact that the information that emerges as a result of presenting images and videos as well as capturing ideas through a free-writing exercise evokes the participants' memory in a deep way, which allows us to gather narratives with a high level of individualization (Harper, 2002).

The analysis of the narratives obtained in phases 1 and 2 was carried out using direct content analysis, a recommended technique for analyzing components or theoretical dimensions associated with a construct/concept (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). To process the data, three types of manual coding were carried out: open, axial, and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the open coding, we used line-by-line analysis to select quotes from the participants' narratives that demonstrated parallelism with the theoretical dimensions of brand authenticity. Through the axial coding, the theoretical dimensions referenced in the previously coded terms were distinguished one by one (sub-themes). Finally, in the selective coding, we specifically extracted the set of theoretical dimensions that emerged from the participants' narratives (main themes).

4.1.1. Qualitative analysis result, study 1

The results of study 1 are presented according to the phases in which the narratives were obtained from the participants. In phase 1, using the previously devised codes, three theoretical dimensions named in the academic marketing literature on brand authenticity were concisely detected (temporal consistency, credibility, and originality). Regarding the terms that allowed us to extract the dimension of temporal consistency, we find quotes from participants such as the following: "A tourist destination would be considered authentic if the place keeps traditional"; "A tourist destination that could be defined as authentic is Corfu, Greece. It has a very rich history." Another participant added: "The architecture of an authentic destination needs to show some history and the culture must be a big part of the life surrounding the destination." These comments clearly show the conceptualization of the brand's dimension of temporal consistency as a component of authenticity as seen in the ability of the destination brand to maintain its appeal by presenting a historical narrative through time as has been previously detected in the marketing literature (Morhart et al., 2015).

Next, the dimension of destination credibility was extracted from quotes such as the following: "An authentic tourist destination is when there are actual inhabitants in the area not actors"; "To make a destination authentic, is just enough when enjoying the [location's] true current self." In this case, the participants emphasized that a destination is credible when it is able to offer a high level of consistency between what one experience during a physical visit and what is marketed as a representative tourist experience while also maintaining its customs and cultural practices as part of its situational presentation to tourists (Goffman, 1956). In view of this consideration, aspects such as the development of a marketing narrative that is sincere, not artificial, that is far from being an imitation of other places and customs (a *pastiche*), and that clearly references local cultural values and practices will be crucial for a destination to be perceived as credible.

Finally, the following quotes reflect the fact that a destination's authenticity is also supported by the degree to which it can offer the tourist a unique and genuine element that is clearly distinguishable from other destinations (e.g., heritage, cultural practices, or tourist art): "To be authentic it has to offer a unique and distinctive experience"; another participant added, "Places to shop for local crafts and souvenirs—visitors usually want to bring back something memorable and unique as well as gifts."

Throughout phase 1, the coding that was done made it possible to distinguish the degree to which each of the dimensions was present in the participants' written notes. In this way, according to what the participants understood to be an authentic tourist destination, the dimension of destination brand authenticity that was most frequently named was originality (33 participants; 62%), followed by temporal consistency (23 participants; 43%) and finally credibility (seven participants; 13%). Here, there were cases in which the participants named more than one of the analyzed dimensions of destination brand authenticity in their texts.

In phase 2, the study participants freely expressed their understanding of destination authenticity in relation to the experience of viewing images from Barcelona's official

online platforms and choosing that (or those) image(s) in which they perceived Barcelona as being the most authentic. The dimensions obtained in phase 1 re-emerge in the participants' narratives in phase 2. Among the quotes that indicate the presence of the dimensions of destination brand authenticity, the following may be cited in reference to temporal consistency: "I liked that both [the official website and Instagram] were highlighting simple pictures of the architecture/landmarks and local tradition"; "The photos on the Barcelona's Instagram appeared to be of historical sites." Furthermore, in reference to the destination's credibility, participants commented, "I think an official Facebook page makes it feel more authentic. With Facebook you can have ratings or people can make comments to ensure the page is accurate and authentic, if it was fake it could be taken down"; "If you're looking for authenticity, the official website best highlights everything available for visitors, and on most social media sites, the images are heavily photoshopped to be more appealing." Finally, regarding the dimension of destination originality through its official platforms, we obtained quotes such as: "YouTube showed at least a little of what makes Barcelona unique"; "Instagram has a better visual layout in order to express the beauty and uniqueness of Barcelona."

From the results of phase 2, the official online platform on which authenticity was most highly perceived in the tourist destination was Instagram (25 participants; 47%), followed by the official website (15 participants; 28%), YouTube (eight participants; 15%), and Facebook (six participants; 11%). Finally, we determined the prevalence of each of the dimensions in the participants' written notes. Specifically, throughout phase 2, the most frequently named dimension of destination brand authenticity was credibility (22 participants; 40%), followed by originality (17 participants; 31%) and temporal consistency (three participants; 5%). In this case, 14 of the participants' narratives did not offer evidence of the destination authenticity dimensions (26.4%), and three participants described more than one dimension in their narratives (5.65%). Therefore, when the participants identified destination brand authenticity as the product of the destination's communication through official online platforms, the factor of credibility assumed a prevailing role in the narratives at the expense of the dimensions of originality and temporal consistency, which were observed with greater frequency in phase 1. These results show that the degree of destination authenticity, as such, in comparison to how the destination is marketed as authentic (through orchestrated brand discourse on official online platforms), is perceived by tourists in different ways. From the standpoint of destination promotion, credibility would assume a more relevant role in shaping destination brand authenticity as a result of visiting official online platforms.

Finally, thanks to the analysis of the participants' narratives, in study 1 we observed the expected theoretical dimensions of destination brand authenticity (temporal consistency, credibility, and originality). Accordingly, we were able to refine the items that would correspond to the destination brand authenticity measurement scale. Out of a total of 48 items that the academic marketing literature has developed as elements of brand authenticity, 12 items constituting destination brand authenticity were retained and divided

among the three theoretical dimensions, with four items per dimension (temporal consistency = four items, credibility = four items, and originality = four items).

4.2. Study 2. Refinement of the online destination brand authenticity scale with Spanish tourists

The main objectives of study 2 were: (a) to refine the destination brand authenticity scale obtained in study 1 and (b) to comparatively examine the ratings that tourists assign to the perceived authenticity of the destination brand and to their behavioral intentions toward it when they are exposed to the destination's promotional stimuli.

With that in mind, this study proposed an online experiment for students (N=99; female 46%; M_{age}=26) at one of the foremost universities in a European country (Spain). The study considered three conditions in which promotional stimuli about a destination were randomly presented. The design of the conditions was based on the type of stimuli that a tourist can find most frequently on online destination platforms: the destination's website (texts, images, and video) and the destination's social media (texts, images, video, and comments) (Appendix B). A condition including only the destination's promotional marketing text was designated as the control. In an effort to avoid bias due to a high degree of participant familiarity with the destination, we decided to use promotional material from Puerto Rico, one of the destinations that Spanish tourists visit least often (UNWTO, 2017). The lack of participant familiarity with the destination was confirmed by a control question in response to which only five participants, who were subsequently eliminated from the study, stated that they had previously visited the destination.

After the stimuli were presented, destination brand authenticity was measured in line with the three dimensions observed in study 1 (temporal consistency, credibility, and originality), with four items for each dimension. Finally, behavioral intentions were measured using an adaptation of Chen and Tsai's (2007) measurement (six items). All the items were evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree). At the end of the survey, an instructional manipulation check was presented to assess the participants' attentiveness to the information/stimuli presented (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). In this case, the participants were asked to select two specific options, which had been indicated at the statement of the question and which referred to online travel information platforms (i.e., Travelocity and Booking.com), from a battery of six platforms. All the participants included in this study responded correctly with the two platforms indicated in the question's statement.

4.2.1. Results of study 2

In the first part of the study, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation confirmed that there were three factors (eigenvalues >1) by which the theoretical dimensions of destination brand authenticity were

differentiated. However, we proceeded to eliminate three items with a load value of less than 0.70. After those items had been eliminated (one per dimension), 77% of the variance was explained, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.71, and the value of Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (X_{36}^2=467.20; p <0.001). The internal validity of each dimension exceeded the minimum value of 0.70 established by Cronbach's alpha (temporal consistency = 0.88; credibility = 0.84; originality = 0.82) (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The first reduction of items retained a total of nine items, of which three pertained to the dimension of temporal consistency, three to credibility, and three to the originality of the destination (Table 1).

–[Table 1.] About here–

In the confirmatory factor analysis phase, a maximum-likelihood estimation was conducted using AMOS 24. The fit values of the final tested model (with three first-order dimensions of destination brand authenticity) gave satisfactory results without the need to make improvements using modification indices or to eliminate items (X^2=29.61, df=24, X^2/df=1.23, p=0.198; CFI=0.98, GFI=0.93, AGFI=0.88, SRMR=0.06, RMSEA=0.04) (Figure 3).

–[Figure 3]. About here –

Finally, for each experimental condition tested, the means ratings comparison did not show significant differences among the destination brand authenticity dimensions: temporal consistency ($M_{Website}$=4.83 *vs.* $M_{Social\ media}$=4.68 *vs.* $M_{Control}$=4.40, p >0.05), credibility ($M_{Website}$=5.25 *vs.* $M_{Social\ media}$=5.37 *vs.* $M_{Control}$=5.53, p >0.05), and originality ($M_{Website}$=5.11 *vs.* $M_{Social\ media}$=5.31 *vs.* $M_{Control}$=5.46, p >0.05). These results indicate that the evaluation of destination brand authenticity through its dimensions can be shaped by diverse types of stimuli, with a better or worse authenticity rating not being subject to a greater or lesser quantity of destination stimuli. In addition, no significant differences were found in behavioral intentions toward the destination among the experimental conditions ($M_{Website}$=4.87 *vs.* $M_{Social\ media}$=5.19 *vs.* $M_{Control}$=5.26, p >0.05).

4.3. Study 3A. Discriminant validity, antecedents, and consequences of destination brand authenticity with US and UK tourists

The objectives set out for study 3A are divided into two sections: first, to analyze the discriminant validity and reliability of the online destination brand authenticity scale resulting from the refinement of studies 1 and 2 and, second, to evaluate the theoretical model under discussion in terms of the causal-predictive relationships among online

destination brand experience, destination brand authenticity, and tourists' behavioral intentions after visiting the destination's official online platforms. In study 3A, we use a sample of US and UK tourists obtained through one of the foremost American market research companies, Qualtrics (*N*=508; from UK=52.55%; female, 58%; age range, 18–66; average age, 52 years; participants with university studies, 38%; monthly salary range with highest frequency, UK=less than £2,500, 71.61%; monthly salary range with highest frequency, US=less than $3,000, 47.73%).

Online experiment and post-experiment surveys were conducted through the Qualtrics platform. The experimental design was based on the presentation of four online navigation scenarios associated with the online platforms of a destination proposed by the researchers, again utilizing the online platforms of the prior studies (the destination's official website, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube accounts). The selected destination was Rome, one of the more frequently visited European destinations both by British and North American tourists (Statista, 2019). The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four online navigation scenarios (Appendix C). After navigation, the participants answered a series of questions about the online destination brand experience, the destination brand's authenticity, and their behavioral intentions toward Rome.

The measurement scale for online destination brand experience is an adaptation of the items corresponding to Brakus et al.'s (2009) four dimensions of brand experience: sensory (three items), intellectual (three items), behavioral (three items), and affective (three items). The destination brand authenticity scale was measured using the refined scale from study 2 with three dimensions: temporal consistency (three items), credibility (three items), and brand originality (three items). Finally, the tourists' behavioral intentions toward the destination were measured using an adaptation of the measurement proposed by Chen and Tsai (2007) (six items) (Appendix D).

The study instructions directed participants to spend a minimum of 2 minutes navigating the assigned destination platform. Those participants who were reported to have a navigation time inferior to 2 minutes (via the timer included in the experimental design) were eliminated from the study. In addition to the navigation timer, the number of clicks the participants made during navigation was also detected. If no clicks were registered, that participant's responses were correspondingly eliminated as it was necessary to click at least once to access the presented platform.

4.3.1. Data-analysis procedure

The analysis of the data obtained in study 3A was divided into three stages. In the first stage, the destination brand authenticity scale was analyzed for validity and reliability. To that end, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted with the overall ratings of destination brand authenticity. In this case, the total sample was randomly divided into two groups, of which the resulting first group was used for the exploratory factor analysis (*N*=254) while the second group was added for the confirmatory factor

analysis. In the second stage, using the whole sample (*N*=508), we did a comparative analysis of the means of each of the variables evaluated in the study for each platform analyzed. In the third stage, using the whole sample, we analyzed the proposed theoretical model of the relationships among the online destination brand experience, destination brand authenticity, and behavioral intentions.

4.3.2. Analysis of the validity and reliability of the destination brand authenticity scale

In the exploratory factor analysis phase with the first half of the sample (*N*=254), the three factors by which the theoretical dimensions of destination brand authenticity were differentiated were again observed (eigenvalues >1) (Table 2). In this case, 78% of the variance was explained, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.91, and the value of Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (X^2_{36}=1401.86; *p* <0.001). The internal validity of each dimension exceeded the minimum value of 0.70 established by Cronbach's alpha (temporal consistency = 0.86; credibility = 0.85; originality = 0.84).

–[Table 2]. About here–

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the total sample using a maximum-likelihood estimation in AMOS 24. The final model fit values were satisfactory. The three theoretically expected factors of destination brand authenticity were obtained (X^2=31.09, df=24, X^2/df=1.29, *p*=0.15; CFI=0.99, GFI=0.98, AGFI=0.97, SRMR=0.01, RMSEA=0.02) (Figure 4). To more optimally estimate the model of destination brand authenticity, we compared unidimensional models, multidimensional models, and a second-order multidimensional construct. The comparison of model adequacy was conducted with AMOS 24 using the maximum-likelihood method (Table 3).

–[Table 3]. About here–

The comparative results of the tested destination brand authenticity models confirm the best fit in two cases: (a) for the multidimensional first-order formulation with the three intercorrelated emergent factors and (b) for the formation of destination brand authenticity with three second-order dimensions. The decision that will allow differentiation between one and another model of destination brand authenticity is proposed as a result of the fit yielded by the measurement model in relation to the other variables under study (online destination brand experience and behavioral intentions).

–[Figure 4]. About here–

4.3.3. Descriptive analysis

Prior to the development of the proposed relationship model, we conducted a means

analysis per variable. In line with the comparative analysis of the means ratings by variable and user type (website, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) (Figure 5 and Appendix E), significant differences were found in the following cases. First, for the behavioral online destination brand experience and for the destination brand authenticity variables of credibility and originality, Instagram users showed significantly higher means ratings than users of the official website (range of levels of significance: $p=0.040–0.020$). On the other hand, the ratings of Rome's YouTube users expressed significantly higher means for the sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective online destination brand experience than those of official website users (range of levels of significance: $p=0.040–0.001$). Finally, YouTube users also showed a significantly higher means of behavioral online destination brand experience than did Facebook users ($p=0.044$).

–[Figure 5]. About here–

4.3.4. Analysis of the causal-predictive relationship model of online destination brand experience and online destination brand authenticity

For the theoretical model evaluation, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used with SmartPLS 3. This method is recommended by Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2017) for the analysis of exploratory causal models when there does not yet exist a consolidated theoretical framework, as is the case for online destination brand experience and destination brand authenticity. Furthermore, the PLS-SEM method allows for multigroup analysis (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). To determine the minimum recommended sample size in the PLS-SEM method by analysis group (users of the destination website, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube), the cut-off value was set at 10 times the maximum number of structural paths directed at a construct in the model (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Accordingly, as the maximum number of structural paths directed at each construct in the model was four and the sample total was 508, the size of this study's database was considered acceptable. Likewise, the subsample size for each destination platform ($N_{website}=137$; $N_{Instagram}=119$; $N_{Facebook}=130$; $N_{YouTube}=122$) used in the multigroup analysis exceeded the required sample size for the PLS-SEM analysis.

In the relationship model, following the procedure carried out in Brakus et al.'s (2009) previous modeling of brand experience, online destination brand experience was established as a type I (reflective-reflective) second-order construct with four dimensions (sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective). Destination brand authenticity was first proposed as a first-order construct with three dimensions (temporal consistency, credibility, and originality). However, the PLS-SEM measurement model fit within the set of variables showed a better standardized root mean square residual (SRMS) value (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015) with destination brand authenticity as a type I (reflective-reflective) second-order construct (relationship model fit with destination brand authenticity with three dimensions in first order, SRMS=0.087 *vs.* relationship model fit with destination brand

authenticity in second order, SRMS=0.064). The latter, second-order configuration for destination brand authenticity was therefore used throughout the rest of the analysis.

The PLS analysis of the research model was carried out in two stages: (a) The reliability and validity of the measurement model was assessed, and then (b) the structural model was assessed. The first stage of analysis confirmed the constructs' reliability and validity as the values exceeded the established thresholds of 0.7 for Cronbach's alpha and 0.5 for average variance extracted (AVE) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) (Table 4). Furthermore, as the SmartPLS program also does factor analyses using the PLS algorithm for the measurement model being tested, we confirmed the suitability of the factors with the *factor* test (Appendix D), using the items' load values in each theoretical construct, which in all cases exceeded the minimum value of 0.70. Discriminant validity was also established for all the constructs according to the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio criterion (HTMT <0.90) (Henseler et al., 2015) and the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion (Table 4).

–[Table 4]. About here–

To ensure that the sample did not have a response bias, we conducted a common-method variance test using the marker variable method (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), which is not expected to be highly correlated with the model's latent variables. The marker variable corresponds to the participants' evaluation regarding their degree of agreement (1–7) as to whether, at the time of the study, they had sufficient funds to be able to afford a trip to Europe (*M*=4.21; *SD*=2.04). The correlations between the dimensions of the various model constructs and the marker variable returned a very weak range of correlation (0.15–0.31). It was established that there were no critical bias problems due to common-method variance in the study's data. In addition, a subjective manipulation check was presented to the participants (per their conditions) in which they had to evaluate the level of effort required in the navigation of the assigned platform (1 = minimal effort; 7 = considerable effort). The means scores per platforms obtained in a t-test comparison demonstrated a significantly greater effort in navigation for official website users in comparison with users of the rest of the destinations' platforms ($M_{website}$=3.02; $M_{Instagram}$=2.51; $M_{Facebook}$=2.40; $M_{YouTube}$=2.13; the range of *p*-values was 0.015–0.001). As the participants had declared at least one use per week of the social media platforms, the manipulation check is considered valid because the participants exerted significantly more effort in navigating Rome's official website than in navigating social media as a consequence of the official website representing a different and unfamiliar online scenario compared to the pre-designed and generalized layout of the social media platforms.

In the second stage of analysis, the standardized loading coefficients, statistical t-values, and their respective standard errors were calculated by implementing a bootstrapping procedure with a re-sample size of 5,000 (Figure 6). To assess the explicative and predictive capacity of the model across the whole sample, the R^2 and Q^2 values (Stone-Geisser's chi-square criterion) were calculated. According to the R^2 parameter, online

destination brand experience and destination brand authenticity explain 64% of the variance in behavioral intentions. Positive Q^2 values greater than 0.20 in the dependent variables (range of values obtained: 0.31–0.70) demonstrate that the model also has predictive relevance. Furthermore, the f^2 effect size of each predictive construct included and excluded from the model was calculated over the endogenous variables' R^2 values (destination brand authenticity and behavioral intentions). The f^2 effects obtained from the model were: 0.119 (medium effect, online destination brand experience → behavioral intentions); 0.896 (large effect, online destination brand experience → destination brand authenticity); and 0.510 (large effect, destination brand authenticity → behavioral intentions).

The results of the model analysis including the total sample (Figure 6) show that the online destination brand experience has a significant, positive, and direct influence on behavioral intentions (β=0.282, p <0.001) as well as on destination brand authenticity (β=0.688, p <0.001). We also note a significant, direct, and positive effect of destination brand authenticity on behavioral intentions (β=0.584, p <0.001). Finally, through the specific indirect effects, we confirmed the complementary partial mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986) of destination brand authenticity between online destination brand experience and behavioral intentions (β=0.402, p <0.001).

–[Figure 6]. About here–

4.4. Study 3B. Moderating role of official destination platforms

The estimated structural models for the four subsamples analyzed (users of Rome's official website and its Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube accounts) showed, in each case, a high explanatory power over behavioral intentions toward the destination (website: R^2=64%; Facebook: R^2=68%; Instagram: R^2=56%; YouTube: R^2=71%). To analyze the moderating effect of the online destination platform that was used on the variables evaluated in the model, a multigroup analysis PLS-MGA (a non-parametric multigroup test) was conducted using the percentile bootstrapping method (Henseler et al., 2009). In the PLS-MGA, we compared the loading coefficients obtained from bootstrapping between each of the analyzed groups in each of the relationships in the model (Figure 7). Likewise, the validity of the differences in p-values was reviewed (Table 5). Based on Henseler et al. (2009), percentiles lower than 0.05 or greater than 0.95 indicate significant differences between the groups analyzed (5% error).

–[Table 5]. About here–

Before we conducted the analyses by PLS-MGA, a metric invariance test was done in PLS-SEM (measurement invariance of composite models; MICOM) for each of the possible comparisons between subsamples following the three-step procedure

recommended by Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2016): (a) configural invariance, (b) compositional invariance, and (c) equal composite mean values and variances (Appendix F). Among the six comparisons between the groups (derived from the type of online platform visited), full invariance was achieved in the comparison between the website and Facebook, Instagram and Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, and Facebook and YouTube. In the other cases (website and Instagram; website and YouTube), partial invariance was achieved. The result of the metric invariance test indicated the suitability of proceeding with the PLS-MGA analyses.

–[Figure 7]. About here–

The PLS-SEM analysis indicates the existence of significant differences in the paths between the model's variables, specifically involving the users of the destination's Facebook and YouTube accounts. First, the paths of those who used Rome's Facebook page showed a significantly weaker relationship between online destination brand experience and destination brand authenticity in comparison to those who used Instagram, the official website, or YouTube. Second, in terms of the path between online destination brand experience and behavioral intentions, those who accessed the destination's YouTube page showed greater significant differences than those who used the official website.

4.5. Results for hypotheses of the causal-predictive models developed in studies 3A and 3B

The results of all the analyzed models (total sample and subsamples) indicate that online destination brand experience has a positive and significant influence on the behavioral intentions of tourists toward the destination after they have visited the destination's official platforms (H1 supported). Likewise, it is confirmed that online destination brand experience is an antecedent to destination brand authenticity (H2 supported). Second, in all the proposed models, destination brand authenticity shows a direct, positive, and significant influence on behavioral intentions toward the destination (H3 supported). Finally, all the models applied indicate complete confirmation of the hypothesis related to the mediating role of destination brand authenticity between online destination brand experience and behavioral intentions (H4 supported).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The discussions of authenticity that have centered academic debates on tourism have traditionally focused on explaining how and why tourists transform their social and cultural realities in searching for objects and experiences that allow them to have better self-awareness, to experience new emotions and sensations, to remember past times, and to be able to project an aesthetic identity on the search for what is genuine, different, and real (Cohen, 1979; MacCannell, 1973; Wang, 1999). Those discussions theoretically

subordinate the perception of authenticity to the experiences of individuals in physical environments and spaces where cultural practices and/or objects are produced, reproduced, and consumed (see Chhabra et al., 2003; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Mody & Hanks, 2019). In line with that perspective, this study proposes that a destination's authenticity can also be analyzed as the result of an online experience with the destination brand that is derived from tourist contact with the promotional content on official online platforms. Throughout the four studies conducted, we observed that destination brand experience at the time of searching for promotional material about the destination on its official online platforms (websites or official social media) produces in the users a sufficient sense of authenticity about the destination (studies 1, 2, and 3A) in addition to influencing their behavioral intentions toward the same (studies 3A and 3B).

This paper's contributions can be summarized in several points. First, we developed a psychometric scale for destination brand authenticity. The validity and reliability of the destination brand authenticity scale was acceptable for Spanish, British, and North American tourists. In this regard, destination brand authenticity is the result of a reflective, second-order construct with three dimensions (temporal consistency, credibility, and originality). Second, through a causal-predictive model, the destination brand authenticity construct was evaluated as the consequence of tourists' online experiences with the destination brand when they visited four official online platforms pertaining to a proposed destination (Rome). Both constructs (online destination brand experience and destination brand authenticity) demonstrated a direct, positive, and significant influence on the users' behavioral intentions toward the destination regarding their intentions to visit and recommend. Likewise, in all the relationship models analyzed, we observed that destination brand authenticity exercises complementary partial mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986) between the online destination brand experience and behavioral intentions. Finally, regarding the proposed theoretical model, the moderating role of the type of platform used for collecting information about the destination in the pre-visit stage was confirmed through a multigroup analysis.

5.1. Theoretical implications

Destination brand authenticity emerges as a result of the internal and subjective responses of tourists to the destination's temporal consistency, credibility, and originality. Tourists (study 1) refer to the destination's temporal consistency as the degree to which the destination maintains and effectively communicates its historical appeal and heritage as a differentiating promotional element. This evidence builds on previous perspectives found in the academic literature on marketing regarding the capacity of a product or service to maintain a sense of historical appeal to consumers (Morhart et al., 2014). Therefore, tourist destinations are evaluated, as are products/services, on their historical markings and on their capacity to maintain, through time, a sense of appeal based on their historical value to tourists. Destination brand credibility is defined as the degree to which the promise of

entertainment and enjoyment associated with visiting the destination is consistent with the perception tourists have of what an in-situ visit would actually be like. Finally, the originality of the destination refers to a basic component of authenticity: the degree to which the destination, through brand communication, is genuine, distinctive, and unique.

The model of causal-predictive relationships (study 3A and 3B) reveals that destination brand authenticity is a result of the brand experience that individuals have with the destination's promotional stimuli. In this case, the promotional stimuli came from Rome's official website and Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube accounts. The evidence obtained confirms previous theoretical perspectives from which it is argued that pre-designed environments (e.g., the destination's virtual environments) are experienced as elements that enhance the perception of authenticity (Mura et al., 2017). Thus, the perception of destination brand authenticity responds to an existentialist approach to the concept of authenticity in which not corporally experiencing the destination is no obstacle. On the contrary, through technological mediation and the creation of what Walter Benjamin called dream-worlds of consumption (1983)—in this case, online simulacra of the destination (its website or official social media)—can offer sufficient meaning to experience something as authentic, albeit in response to a simulation of the physical world (Baudrillard, 1994).

Online destination brand experience on the destination's official platforms is defined in this study as tourists' sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective responses when in contact with the destination brand's stimuli. In this regard, this study confirms the appropriateness of the brand experience scale developed in the academic literature on marketing (Brakus et al., 2009) in its application to the phenomenon of the destination brand. The relationship models developed (studies 3A and 3B) validate the conceptualization of online destination brand experience as a reflective, second-order construct with four dimensions (sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective).

The multigroup analysis allows us to distinguish significant differences in the model relationships between online destination brand experience and destination brand authenticity as well as between online destination brand experience and users' behavioral intentions. In the first case, the influence of online destination brand experience on Facebook users, even though it was positive and significant in the formation of destination brand authenticity, was lower than that of users of the other platforms. This evidence opens distinct lines of discussion about the lower relevance of a destination's official Facebook online brand experience as a driver of destination brand authenticity. First, Facebook, as a brand-promotional platform, has been involved in continual problems in terms of violations of users' privacy from 2015 to the current year (e.g., the case of Cambridge Analytica and the case of users' conversations being recorded on Facebook Messenger). In the same vein, Facebook, compared to other platforms, has come to be more associated by users with the spread of fraudulent content, tolerance of fake profiles (Li & Suh, 2015), and inappropriate use of users' private information (Ayaburi & Treku, 2020). As a result, users' trust and engagement with this platform have globally diminished (Kahn & Ingram, 2018). Thus, it is not unreasonable to expect that online encounters with brands on Facebook can provoke a

certain level of skepticism in users' perceptions of the stimuli and information displayed. Linked to the online destination brand experience's influence on destination brand authenticity, this plausible user skepticism toward Facebook as a platform may itself constrain the online destination brand experience's ability to affects users' perceptions of destination brand authenticity in comparison to the other platforms analyzed in this study (i.e., the official destination website, Instagram, and YouTube).

On the other hand, a prior qualitative study on the online destination brand experience suggests that destinations' official Facebook accounts are less valuable, at the experiential level, than other, younger social media platforms, such as Instagram (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2019b). In this regard, Facebook's lack of experiential attraction for destination brand promotion may represent a signal of its maturity as a communication channel. Facebook has been defined as the first mainstream social media platform in brand promotion (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016) and, at the same time, as a platform that tends to overload its interface with calls to action to users in terms of features, information, and communication (Lee, Son, & Kim, 2016). As a consequence, Facebook's users may be less impressed or overwhelmed by the features, information, and communication offered in the consumer/brand relationships on this platform. This, in the end, will affect the ability of a Facebook online destination brand experience to drive users' perceptions of destination brand authenticity.

Next, the destination's YouTube users showed a greater influence of the effect of online destination brand experience on behavioral intentions than the users of the destination's official website. In this regard, the experiential aspects of platforms such as YouTube, emphasized in this study by high ratings in the sensory, affective, and behavioral dimensions, show, on the whole, this platform's greater capacity to influence users' behavioral intentions toward the destination in comparison to the official website. This evidence reinforces the arguments of previous studies (e.g., Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2015; Huertas, 2018), which suggest that the use of a destination account on YouTube may be one of the best ways to facilitate the creation of expectation in tourists in terms of what they can find when visiting in person. Hence, this research confirms that video-based multimedia platforms allow a better presentation of how tourists can enjoy the destination (e.g., actual weather, people enjoying the main tourist attraction in real time, a video guided tour through the destination, and other displays of factual information), which is more engaging for reflection than, for example, image-based platforms (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2015, Roma & Aloini, 2019; Smith et al., 2012).

Finally, in contrast to the other platforms tested, it is observed of the destination's website users that the indirect effect of the online destination brand experience on behavioral intentions through the destination's brand authenticity (0.719*0.660=0.474) is significantly higher than its direct effect (0.183, $p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that, for the official website, destination brand authenticity strengthens the online destination brand experience's capability to influence users' behavioral intentions toward the destination.

5.2. Management implications

The present study has found that if the online destination brand experience is sufficiently relevant and impactful on a sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective level, the destination brand will be able to influence, in addition to tourists' intentions to visit and recommend the site, the perceptual shaping of the destination's authenticity. The results provide destination brand managers two measurement tools by which to monitor, examine, and control the destination's online brand experience and the brand authenticity perceived by tourists who come into contact with the destination's online platforms. These measurements are easily applicable in that they require only 12 items for online destination brand experience and nine items for destination brand authenticity.

Destination brand managers must keep in mind that users may process the online destination brand experience and the perception of brand authenticity differently depending on the type of platform. The official platforms that offer predominantly visual stimuli rather than textual stimuli (e.g., Instagram and YouTube) were valued by the participants of this study as the most appealing platforms on the sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective levels. Therefore, a destination's official Instagram and YouTube accounts offer the most holistic online experience of the destination brand as all its dimensions are highlighted. The experiential repercussions of these platforms translate into a higher rating of destination authenticity in the three proposed dimensions (temporal consistency, credibility, and originality). Therefore, for a destination's official Instagram and YouTube accounts, the destination brand strategy must be based on an online destination brand experience focused mainly on an impactful visual presentation of the destination's virtues while, at the same time, incorporating a combination of official content and UGC about the destination. The presentation of both narratives about the destination (i.e., official content and UGC) will complement the predominantly visual attraction of the online experience and enhance the perceived authenticity that makes the destination consistent, credible, and different from others to tourists from their very first impression (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2019a, 2019b; Lindgaard, Fernandes, Dudek, & Brown, 2006). In this case, the quality of the stimuli presented on the destinations' Instagram and YouTube profiles, such as its visual appeal, the ease of finding information about the destination, and a high level of permitted interactivity between the user and the content, will promote a better online experience with the destination (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2019b; Zhang et al., 2018) and, at the same time, foster destination brand authenticity and intention to physically visit and recommend the destination.

On the other hand, a destination's website stands out for being valued especially for its combination of sensory and intellectual experiences with the destination brand. The results of this research are in line with the prior study of Jiménez-Barreto (2019a) that argued that visual stimuli are important on the destination website (i.e., the presence of video and image galleries), but the users in our study indicated that the capacity of the content to generate curiosity through texts and official descriptions of the destination's characteristic

tourist offerings determines its final effect on the users' behavioral intentions. At the level of creating destination brand authenticity, the website stands out for facilitating the communication of information and stimuli primarily related to its historical-cultural aspects through sources that are perceived as official and easily verifiable. This factor translates into the greater importance of the dimension of temporal consistency over that of the credibility and originality of the destination brand, which, although high, are less important for official website users.

Finally, the destination's official Facebook account offers managers a way to generate balanced online destination brand experiences. As with users of the official website, Facebook users give importance to the capacity of the content to stimulate sensory responses and awaken interest and curiosity about the destination (i.e., the sensory and intellectual online destination brand experience). However, even though Facebook's online destination brand experience displayed a satisfactory capacity to predict users' perceptions of destination brand authenticity, its influence between said constructs is lower than that of other destination platforms. In this case, destination managers must consider that, as a social media platform, Facebook has recently been identified by its users as being susceptible to the dissemination of fake content, as violating users' privacy (Ayaburi & Treku, 2020; Li & Suh, 2015), and as tending to overwhelm highly active users with feature overload, information overload, and communication overload (Lee et al., 2016). This indicates that destination managers need to strictly control two aspects of Facebook accounts by: (a) ensuring that what users communicate about the destination on the official Facebook profile is highly consistent with the physical reality that tourists can find and experience at the destination; and (b) managing the destinations' stimuli and content processing to avoid overwhelming users with excessive calls to action, such as asking users to simultaneously engage with destination branding, comment on official content, indicate their liking of the content, and upload and link their content about the destination.

Conversely, a progressive disclosure approach in the destination's stimuli and calls to action to users on Facebook (i.e., an interaction design pattern that sequences information and actions across several screens; Nielsen Norman Group, 2006) can diminish users' experiential stress. For example, such an approach could first show mainly visual stimuli (e.g., image or video presentations), then introduce hyperlinks that allow access to more detailed information on places and the destination's attractions, and finally, after users have accessed the detailed information, invite them to leave feedback about their online experience with the destination or directly interact with the destination's content on Facebook (e.g., like or share a particular content).

5.3. Limitations and future research

Despite the contributions of the study, several limitations must be taken into consideration. First, while this paper is framed in a pre-visit situation, the qualitative and quantitative evaluation of online destination brand experience and destination brand

authenticity should also be conducted in each of the other phases of the tourist experience (while visiting the destination and post-visit). Second, in an effort to generalize the results, future analyses should include different destinations with distinct characteristics in their representative tourist offerings to determine whether there are differences in the proposed relational model according to the type of destination (e.g., sun-and-beach destinations *vs.* cultural destinations). Third, the destination brand authenticity construct has been evaluated under a second-order structure. However, its use as a multidimensional first-order construct should also be analyzed given that sufficient results were obtained to support the use of such a configuration. Fourth, in light of the differences in cultural values (e.g., individualism *vs.* collectivism) that can emerge when visiting brand platforms (see Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011), future studies should determine whether cross-cultural differences emerge at the time of experiencing a destination brand through its online platforms and whether the destination is perceived as more or less authentic as a result. Fifth, concerning the differences obtained in the path between the online destination brand experience and destination brand authenticity for Facebook's users as compared to those of the other platforms analyzed, future study must empirically isolate the multiple factors that have been discussed, such as users' skepticism about Facebook due to its recent privacy violations, and must determine whether Facebook's interface design is more prone to generating online experiential stress/overload than those of other official destination platforms. Sixth, as various technological simulacra of destinations are currently available to tourists, such as applications using virtual reality (VR) devices, further research could use VR devices in its experimental design to provide a virtual visit to destinations when analyzing the influence of online destination brand experience and destination brand authenticity on tourists' behavioral intentions toward the destination. Finally, the relationship model presented compares online brand experiences in an isolated way, platform by platform, but future studies should incorporate evaluations of cases in which the user visits two or more official platforms.

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Table 1. Exploratory factor analysis: Revealed the destination brand authenticity dimensions. Spanish sample.

	Factor analysis uses Varimax rotation		
Items	Temporal Consistency	Credibility	Originality
Puerto Rico stands out as a tourist destination because of its history	**0.91**	0.08	0.05
Puerto Rico's history makes the city attractive as a tourist destination	**0.94**	-0.00	0.04
Puerto Rico has a historical heritage that is always interesting to visit	**0.79**	0.23	0.10
I believe Puerto Rico meets the expectations as a tourist destination	0.00	**0.77**	0.13
Puerto Rico is realistic in terms of the tourist experience that it promises to tourists	0.11	**0.90**	0.13
Puerto Rico is an honest destination in terms of the tourist experiences advertised	0.19	**0.88**	0.19
Puerto Rico is an original tourist destination to visit	0.07	-0.00	**0.88**
Puerto Rico can be defined as an authentic tourist destination	0.09	0.24	**0.82**
Puerto Rico clearly distinguishes itself from other tourist destinations	0.04	0.18	**0.83**

**Notes*: N*= 99

Bold values indicate the factor on which each item predominantly loads.

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis: Confirmed destination brand authenticity dimensions. Study 3A.

Items	Factor analysis uses Varimax rotation		
	Temporal Consistency	Credibility	Originality
Rome stands out as a tourist destination because of its history	**0.77**	0.21	0.32
Rome's history makes the city attractive as a tourist destination	**0.81**	0.26	0.29
Rome has a historical heritage that is always interesting to visit	**0.76**	0.32	0.28
I believe Rome meets the expectations as a tourist destination	0.26	**0.81**	0.20
Rome is realistic in terms of the tourist experience that it promises to tourists	0.24	**0.83**	0.27
Rome is an honest destination in terms of the tourist experiences advertised	0.23	**0.80**	0.28
Rome is an original tourist destination to visit	0.38	0.23	**0.74**
Rome can be defined as an authentic tourist destination	0.40	0.25	**0.73**
Rome clearly distinguishes itself from other tourist destinations	0.21	0.33	**0.79**

Notes: *N*=254

Bold values indicate the factor on which each item predominantly loads.

Table 3. Confirmatory factor analysis model fit comparisons.

Models	Chi-square	df	Chi-Square Difference
Null	4415.46	36	-
One factor	698.04	27	3717.42; $p < 0.001$
Three factors (not correlated)	956.40	27	258.36; $p < 0.001$
Three factors (correlated)	31.09	24	925.31; $p < 0.001$
Second order model (Three factors)	31.09	24	-

Note: Chi-square differences represent comparisons of subsequent models.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity: Fornell and Larckert criterion (below the main diagonal) and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) (above the diagonal).

Constructs	AVE	Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Sensory ODBE	0.915	0.953	**0.956**	0.776	0.748	0.761	0.517	0.529	0.543	0.536
2. Intellectual ODBE	0.887	0.936	0.820	**0.942**	0.779	0.832	0.577	0.589	0.577	0.678
3. Behavioral ODBE	0.753	0.925	0.795	0.836	**0.933**	0.824	0.527	0.605	0.553	0.607
4. Affective ODBE	0.875	0.928	0.806	0.890	0.888	**0.935**	0.611	0.634	0.613	0.682
5. Temporal Consistency	0.893	0.940	0.546	0.614	0.563	0.651	**0.945**	0.692	0.800	0.712
6. Credibility	0.855	0.915	0.566	0.636	0.656	0.686	0.746	**0.925**	0.721	0.708
7. Originality	0.843	0.907	0.584	0.626	0.602	0.666	0.867	0.791	**0.918**	0.702
8. Behavioral intentions	0.753	0.934	0.567	0.727	0.653	0.731	0.759	0.763	0.761	**0.868**

Notes: Main diagonal in bold represents the square root of the AVEs (average variance extracted).
ODBE: Online Destination Brand experience

Table 5. Results of the PLS-MGA.

Relationships	Comparative with significant values	First group coefficients	Second group coefficients	Difference |coefficients|	*p-value*
ODBE → DBA	F vs. W	0.577	0.719	0.142	**0.969***
ODBE → DBA	F vs. I	0.577	0.710	0.133	**0.960***
ODBE → DBA	F vs. Y	0.577	0.757	0.180	**0.995***
ODBE → BI	W vs. Y	0.183	0.393	0.210	**0.040***

Notes: W= Website; I= Instagram; F=Facebook; Y= YouTube.
ODBE: Online Destination Brand Experience; DBA: Destination Brand Authenticity; BI= Behavioral Intentions.
*Significant differences when values are p≤ 0.05 (greater in the first group), or p ≥ 0.95 (greater in the second group) (Henseler et al., 2009).

Figure 1. Conceptual model

Figure 1. Conceptual model
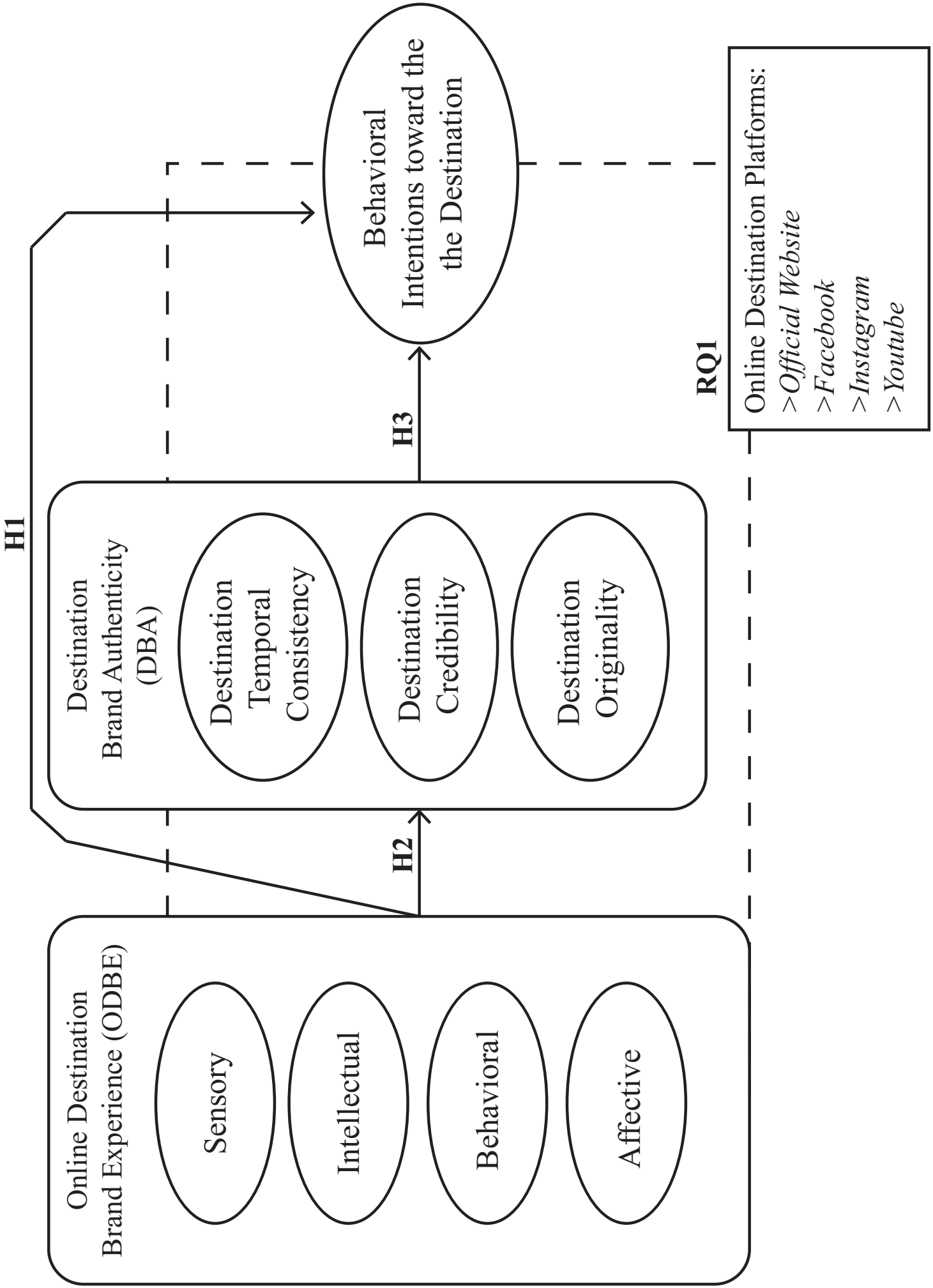
Note.
H4 represents the mediating role of the DBA between ODBE and the behavioral intentions toward the destination.
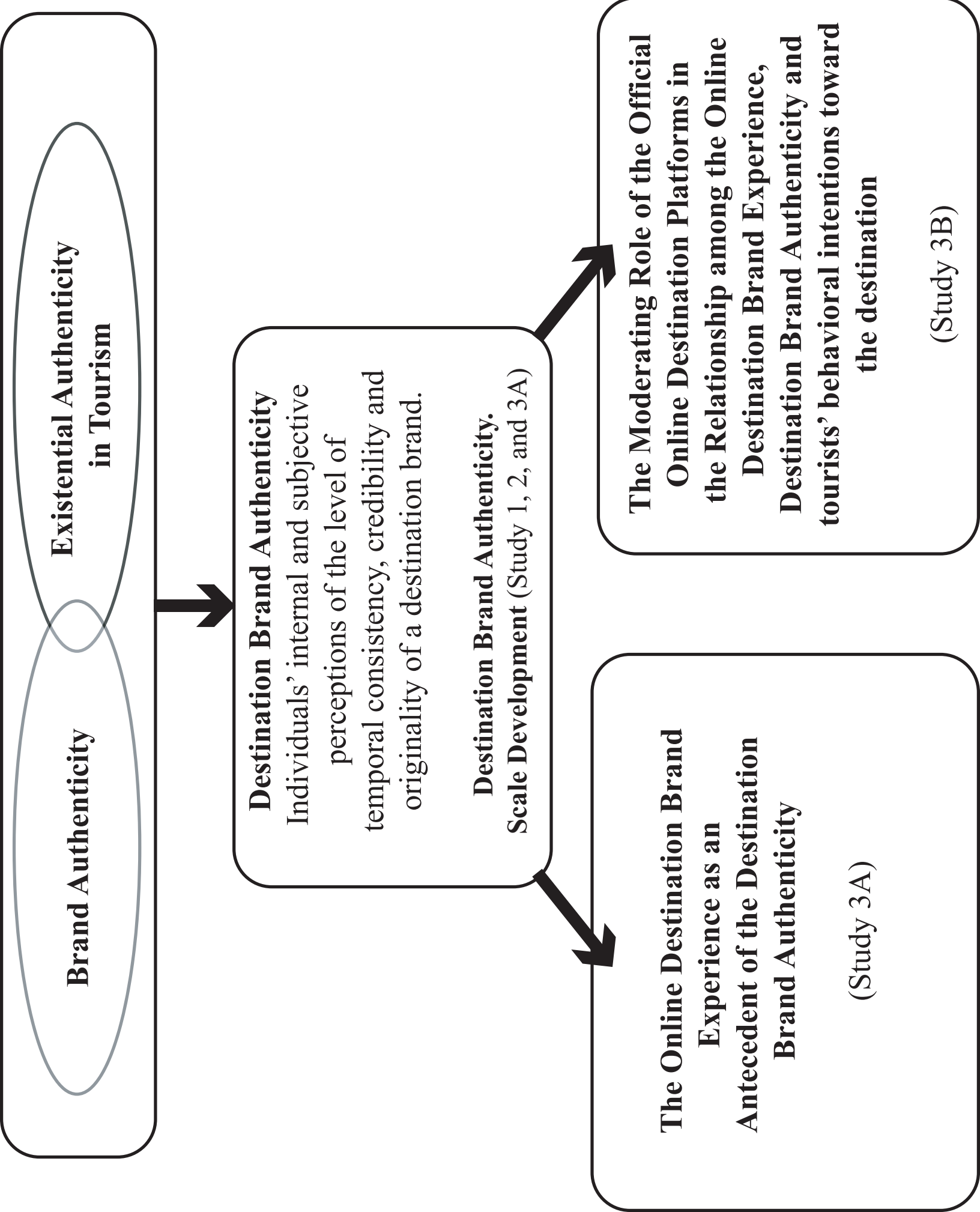
Figure 2. Research program overview

Existential Authenticity in Tourism

Brand Authenticity

Destination Brand Authenticity
Individuals' internal and subjective perceptions of the level of temporal consistency, credibility and originality of a destination brand.

Destination Brand Authenticity. Scale Development (Study 1, 2, and 3A)

The Moderating Role of the Official Online Destination Platforms in the Relationship among the Online Destination Brand Experience, Destination Brand Authenticity and tourists' behavioral intentions toward the destination

(Study 3B)

The Online Destination Brand Experience as an Antecedent of the Destination Brand Authenticity

(Study 3A)

Figure 3. Confirmatory factor analysis study 2

Puerto Rico stands out as a tourist destination because of its history

Puerto Rico's history makes the location attractive as a tourist destination

Puerto Rico has a historical heritage that is always interesting to visit

Temporal Consistency

0.90

0.94

0.69

0.21

I believe that Puerto Rico meets the expectations as a tourist destination

Puerto Rico is realistic in terms of the tourist experience that it promises to tourists

Puerto Rico is an honest destination in terms of the tourist experiences advertised

Credibility

0.60

0.92

0.91

0.34

0.16

Puerto Rico is an original tourist destination to visit

Puerto Rico can be defined as an authentic tourist destination

Puerto Rico clearly distinguishes itself from other tourist destinations

Originality

0.78

0.79

0.77

Figure 4. Confirmatory factor analysis study 3
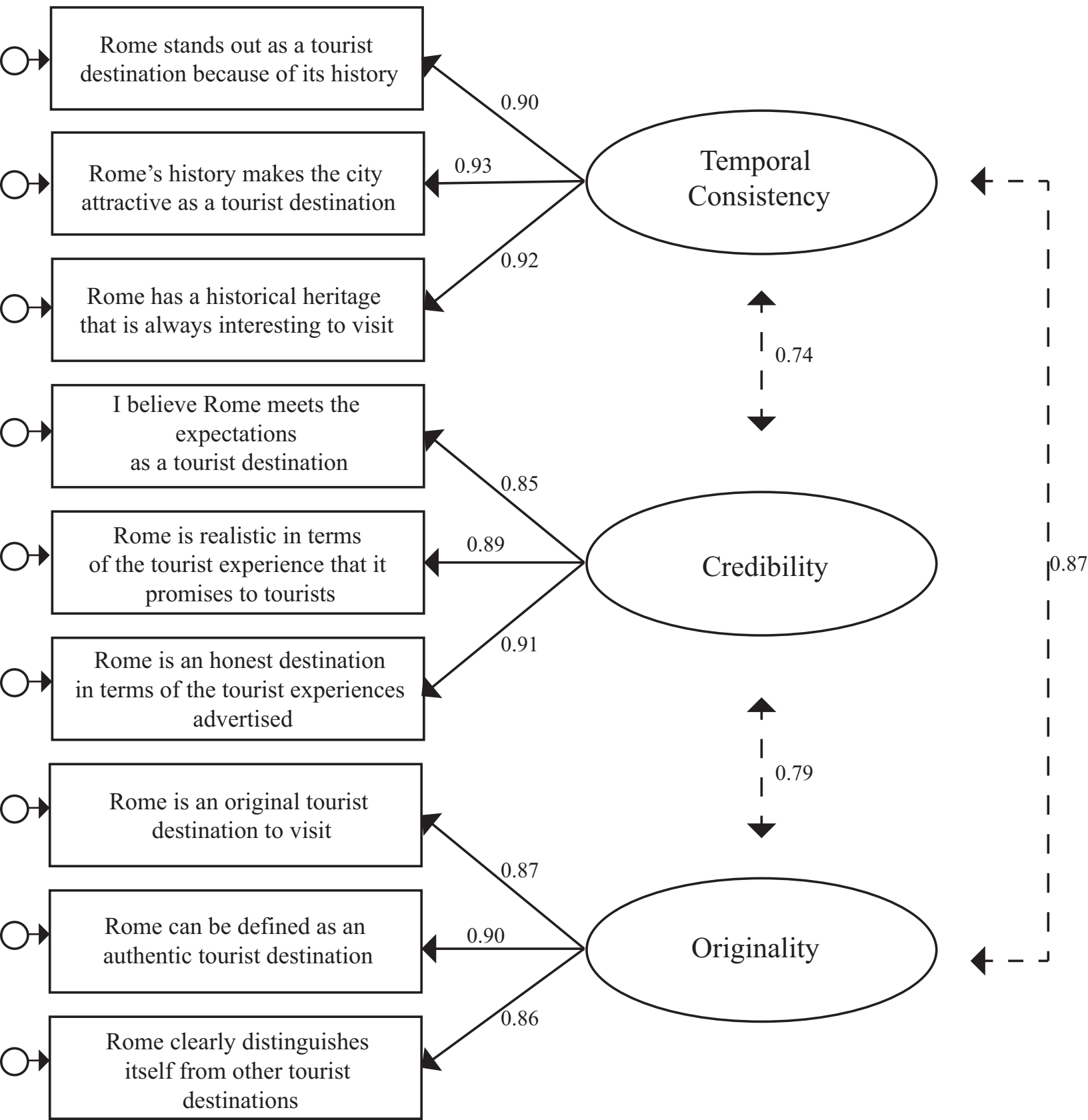
Figure 5. Analysis of means
Click here to download high resolution image
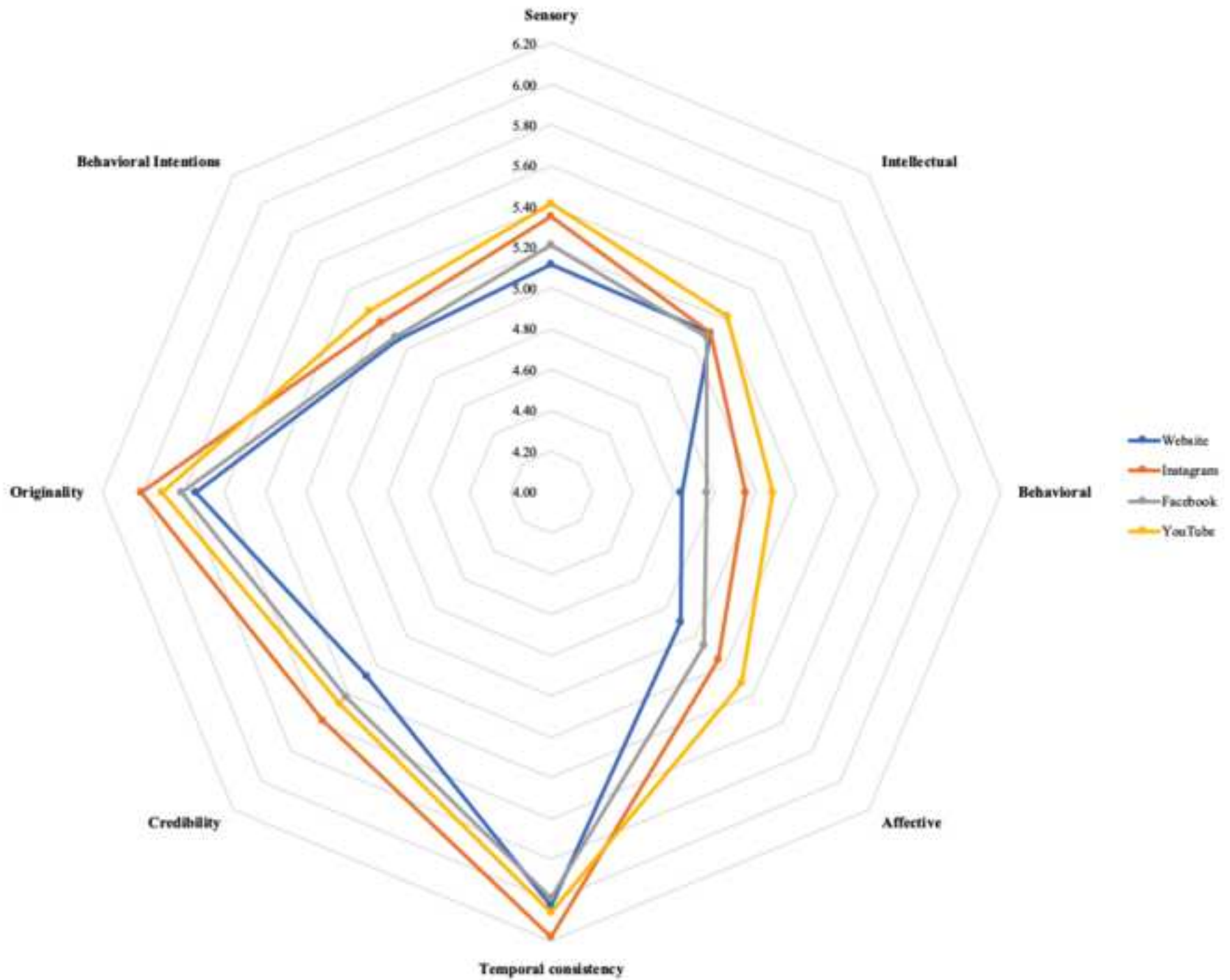
Figure 6. Causal-predictive model
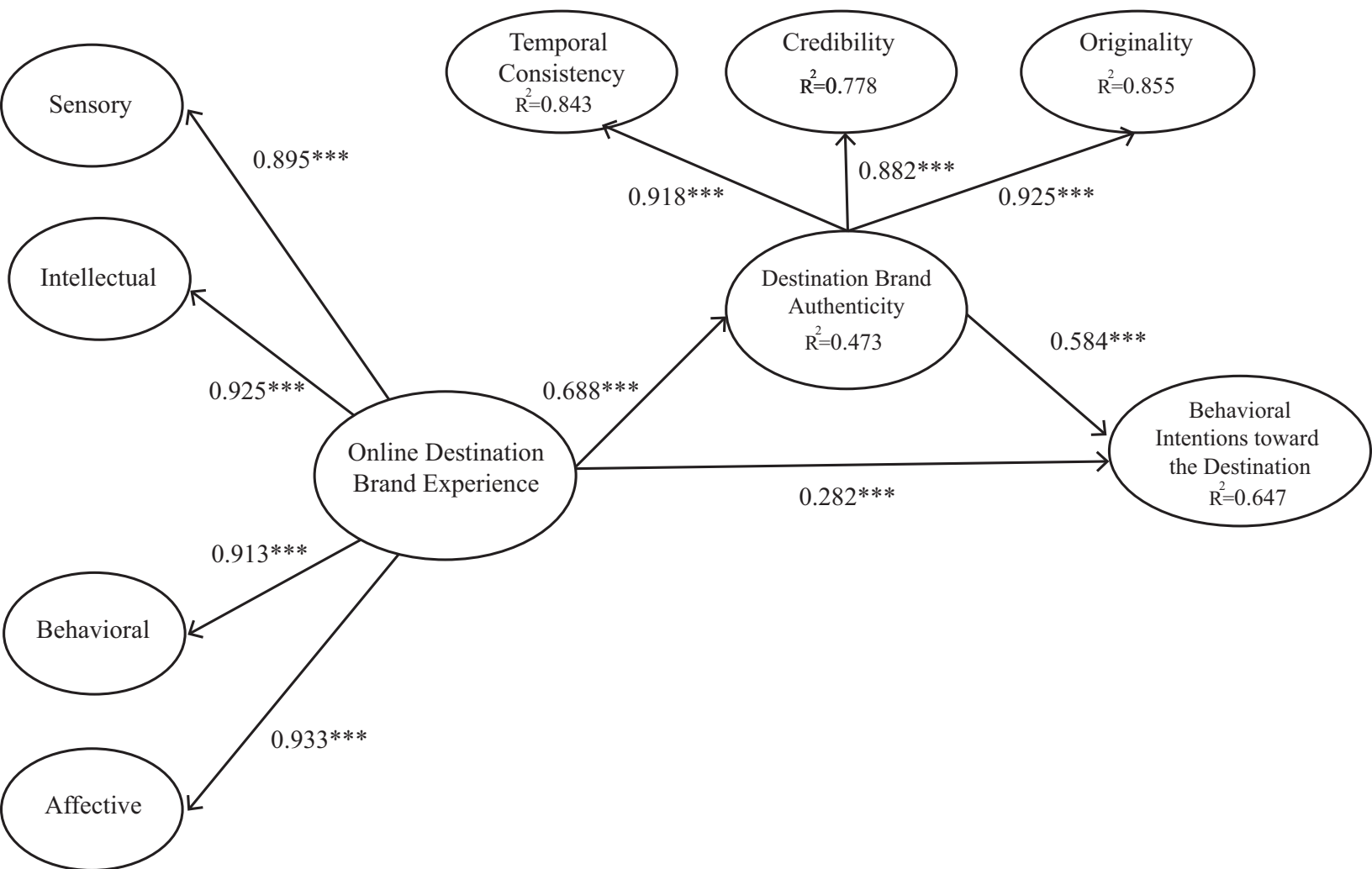
Figure 7. Multigroup models

W= 0.719***
I= 0.710***
F= 0.577***
Y= 0.757***

Destination Brand
Authenticity

W= 0.660***
I= 0.532***
F= 0.627***
Y= 0.505***

Online Destination
Brand Experience

Behavioral
Intentions toward
the Destination

W= 0.183**
I= 0.272**
F= 0.286***
Y= 0.393***
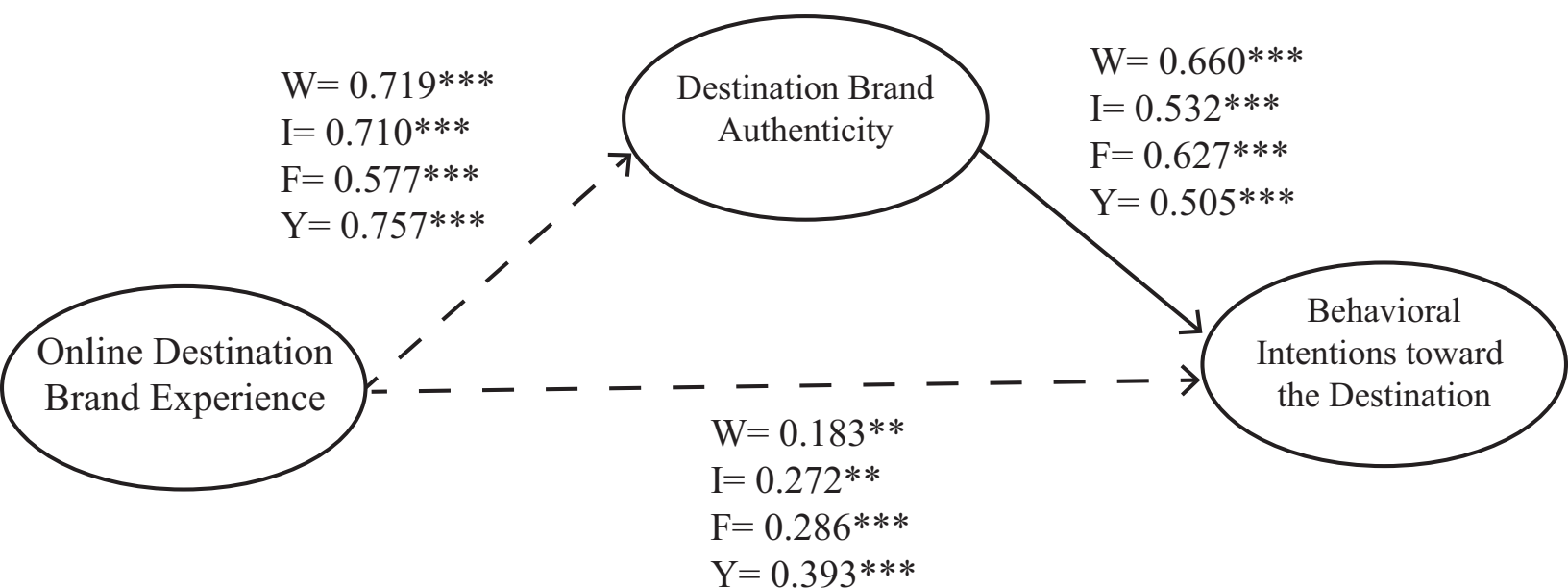
Note.
***p < 0.001.
**p < 0.05.
W= Website; I= Instagram; F= Facebook; Y= YouTube.

⟶ Relationships without significant differences between platforms.
– – ⟩ Relationships with significant differences between platforms.

Models' fit.
W=Acceptable model fit (SRMR= 0.07).
I= Acceptable model fit (SRMR= 0.08).
F= Acceptable model fit (SRMR= 0.08).
Y= Acceptable model fit (SRMR=0.06).

Projective Online Destination Platform MTURK USA

Thank you for participating in this study! The following information is provided to inform you about this research project and your participation in the study. Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate.

<u>Purpose:</u> The purpose of this study is to survey people's attitudes toward tourist destinations.
<u>Procedures:</u> During the study, you will be asked to answer questions. Note that this survey requires a desktop/laptop browser. If you are using a mobile device, please come back later when you can access the survey using a desktop browser. Please note that we will be very strict in analyzing the validity and quality of your responses. Do not participate if you are unwilling to provide high-quality answers. We cannot pay for incorrectly or falsely completed surveys.

<u>Compensation:</u> If you complete the study, you will receive monetary compensation as advertised.

<u>Confidentiality:</u> The researchers will make every effort to protect your privacy. The individual results in the study will be kept anonymous.

The instructions start on the next screen. Please press "Next" at the lower-right corner to continue.

A tourist group is interested in getting your feedback on a promotional video about a tourist destination. Please, wait for the video to download before playing it. After the video, press the **"next"** bottom.

*

Authentic_1 In your opinion, what makes a **tourist destination authentic**?

(Minimum 200 characters)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

*

Authentic_2 Please, write down **a tourist destination that in your opinion could be defined as authentic** and explain why
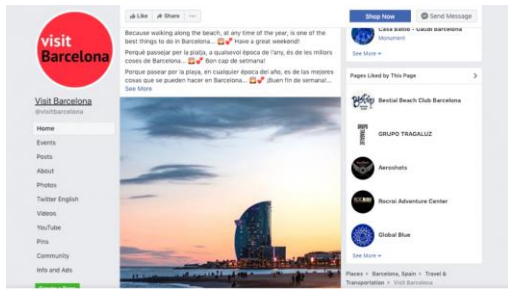
(Minimum 200 characters)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Online platforms
Please, take at least 2 minutes to read and visualize the information about the online platforms of Barcelona. Then, please respond to the question presented.

Destination Official Website

Facebook Destination Official Facebook

Instagram Destination Official Instagram
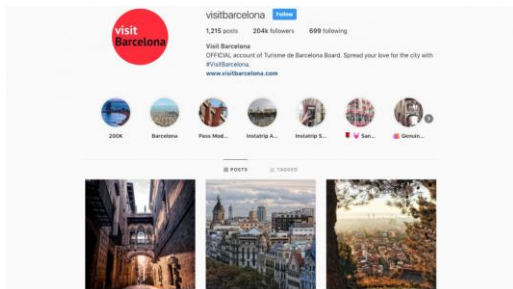
Twitter Destination Official Twitter

YouTube Destination Official YouTube
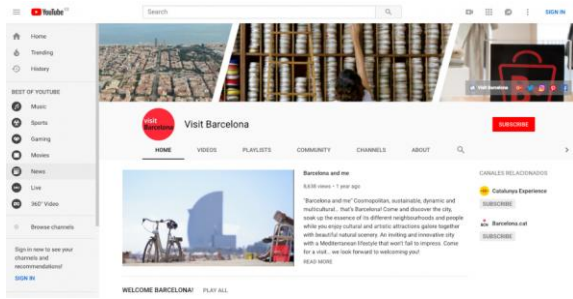
Authentic_3 In your opinion, **through which online platform Barcelona appears more authentic?**

☐ Official Website (4)

☐ Official Facebook (5)

☐ Official Instagram (6)

☐ Official Twitter (7)

☐ Official YouTube (8)

*

Authentic_4 Please, **explain your choice of the online platforms where you considered that Barcelona appears more authentic.**
  (Minimum 200 characters)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please, indicate the level of knowledge that you have about Barcelona as a tourist destination:

○ Very High (1)

○ High (2)

○ Medium (3)

○ Low (4)

○ None (5)

Have you ever been to Barcelona before?

○ Yes (1)

○ Not yet (2)

Please, indicate your age

_____

What is your gender?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Other (3)

- -

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

○ Less than high school degree (1)

○ High school graduate (2)

○ Professional degree (3)

○ Some other college degree (4)

○ Bachelor´s degree (5)

○ Master´s degree (6)

○ Doctoral degree (7)

Income What was your total household income before taxes in 2017?

○ Less than $10,000 (1)

○ $10,000 to $25,000 (2)

○ $25,001 to $40,000 (4)

○ $40,001 to $55,000 (6)

○ $55,001 to $70,000 (7)

○ More than $70,000 (8)

Author Biography

1

Jano Jiménez-Barreto is a Doctoral Candidate in Marketing Research at the Department of Finance and Marketing, Autonomous University of Madrid (Spain). His principal research interests include consumption experiences, tourism marketing, destination branding, sociology of consumption, multimethod research, and scale development with a focus on multichannel brand experience. He has published articles in journals as Current Issues in Tourism, International Journal of Tourism Research, Tourism Management Perspectives, among others. He was a visiting research scholar at the marketing department of the School of Business University of Connecticut (United States).

Natalia Rubio is an Associate Professor in the Marketing Research at the Department of Finance and Marketing, Autonomous University of Madrid (Spain). Her research interests include brand experiences, customer experiences, co-creation through online platforms, multichannel management, and retail marketing. She has published articles in several well-known international journals such as European Journal of Marketing, Journal of Service Management, Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, International Journal of Tourism Research, among others.

Sara Campo is an Associate Professor in the Marketing Research at the Department of Finance and Marketing, Autonomous University of Madrid (Spain). She has published books and articles in several well-known international journals such as Tourism Management, Journal of Travel Research, Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, International Journal of Tourism Research, among others.

Data in Brief

Data in Brief

Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C

Click here to download Supplementary material for online publication: Appendix C.jpg

Appendix D

Appendix E

Appendix F

Supplementary Table 1. Study 1

Supplementary Table 2. Study 1

*Author Contribution

J. Jiménez-Barreto contributed to the conceptual development, the methodological design, gathering the qualitative and quantitative data, analyzing the data, discussing the findings and implications, as well as writing the manuscript. N. Rubio contributed to perform the conceptual development, the data analysis approach, interpreting the results, and improving the writing of the manuscript. S. Campo-Martínez contributed to the conceptual development of the paper as well as discussing the methodology approach, the literature review, and improving the writing of the manuscript. All the co-authors contributed to the final version of the paper and approved it to be published.