

# Effect of Perception of COVID-19 Crisis Management on Destination Image and Intention to Visit

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Tourism has been one of the most dynamically developing sectors of the world economy in recent years, yet the emergence of the COVID-19 virus crisis has led to a recession in the industry, making managing this crisis essential. Thus, the study was conducted to examine the effect of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management on destination brand image and, ultimately, the intention to select a tourist destination, and carried out by explaining the role of brand personality and tourists' attitudes towards the destination. This research used the descriptive approach and quantitative data collection with applied purpose. Tehran was the spatial domain of the study, with all those (domestic and foreign) visiting Tehran as tourists from July 2020 to April 2021 as the population of the study. The Available Sampling Method was used and the data collection tool was a questionnaire. Finally, 768 complete questionnaires were collected and the hypotheses were analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS and SPSS. The results revealed that although cities and tourist destinations are lifeless elements, tourists often consider them to have personality and human characteristics. The results showed that COVID-19 crisis management positively and significantly affected the destination image and ultimately the intention to visit the destination. Ultimately, some suggestions were made that could be used as a route for tourism destinations to tackle the crisis of tourist attraction in the post-COVID-19 period.

*Keywords:* perception of COVID-19 crisis management, destination image, destination brand personality, tourist attitude, intention to visit

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## Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, a subgroup of the coronavirus, beginning in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, spread around the world in less than two months, endangering the health and lives of millions of people.

Moreover, it has led to global changes with a significant effect on the daily lives of citizens as well as the global economy (UNWTO, n.d.). For instance, tourism in many countries has virtually ceased and travel has stopped.

At the same time, after presenting discussions about the COVID-19 crisis, countries should not overlook other critical elements for tourists. The construction of a tourism destination image is primarily important because 'it is impossible for tourists to experience the desired holiday prior to a visitation, leading the way for imagery to become an essential element to inspire and to influence them during the decision-making process,' stated Matos et al. (2015, p. 135). In fact, the destination image positively influences the intention to visit it (Marine-Roig, 2019). As 'potential tourists with limited knowledge of destinations depend on their perceived image of a destination when it comes to making choices' (Blazquez-Resino et al., 2016), the question that taxes the minds of destination marketers is to know why people travel to a particular destination and what comes to mind when a particular destination name is mentioned (in terms of attributes) (Tavares et al., 2020). Thus, creating a good image of the destination for tourists could enhance the destination in many other factors. One of these new topics is the destination's personality, which raises many questions and ambiguities and has not yet been definitively answered. The question that taxes researchers in this regard is 'What are the specific personality traits for the destination?' Although scholars argue that destination personality refers to human traits ascribed to a destination, researchers exhibit many differences in describing these traits. Additionally, it is tough to describe and measure the personality traits of the destination (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 391).

Intense competition between tourist destinations requires the necessary resources to create a competitive advantage. One of the key resources in this field is the destination brand. Branding is the process by which the adoption and use of a brand through different marketing activities is created for customers and businesses and by which the brand provides a competitive advantage for tourist destinations (Frías-Jamilena et al., 2018, p. 26; Aghaei et al., 2021a). In the COVID-19 crisis, one of the factors able to affect branding for these purposes is crisis management, and the perception of COVID-19 crisis management gives the customer a sense of security. It can affect many of psychological and behavioural indicators. Customer knowl-

edge of and positive attitude towards a brand lead to customer purchase behaviour. Positive brand perceptions make organizations stronger and have a consistent advantage over competitors. Hence, many organizations look to shape and maintain a strong brand name among their target audience (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019, p. 221). For instance, 70% of international tourists visit just 10 countries. In other words, the other countries compete for 30% of the total international tourists (Pike, 2009, p. 857; Clark, 2006, p. 15). Thus, the destination must be unique to attract tourists (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 8; Hosany et al., 2006, p. 640). Positive brand perceptions may make customers select a destination they have not experienced previously (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019, p. 218). Thus, the destinations have to make significant efforts to develop effective destination marketing strategies for their target markets (Mansouri Moayyed et al., 2020). Destination personality is a significant element in creating a destination brand. Destination personality is derived from the concept of brand name. In the marketing literature, personality is a set of human characteristics ascribed to a brand (Ghasemian Sahebi et al., 2018). An effective brand increases its brand equity by having a consistent set of traits that a specific consumer segment enjoys. This personality is a qualitative value-add that a brand gains in addition to its functional benefits. As such, a brand personality is something to which the consumer can relate (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 391).

As health is one of the main concerns of many public and private sectors and a key element in selecting a travel destination and the satisfaction of travellers and tourists, so the spread of COVID-19 has led to restrictions on travel and international trade. In other words, this employment-generating industry has stopped and many units and activities in the dependent chain are affected (including accommodation, transportation, food, entertainment complexes and other upstream and downstream intermediaries) and their staff may lose their jobs. This leads to a recession and regression of the developing industry and wider tourism in the market (Agarwal and Helfat, 2009). The strategic modernization of businesses operating in the industry, along with the developments and changes resulting from this disease, is vital in the development and

revival of the tourism industry considering its vulnerability to the COVID-19 crisis. Inattention to effective strategies to tackle this crisis in the tourism industry will end in huge issues for companies and lead to the destruction of active companies and severe damage to the economies of countries.

Some studies have been done in this regard; for instance, the study by Perić et al. (2021). This study is among the first to provide a timely discussion within tourism discourse about the impact of the perceived risk to travel intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic and it deepens the understanding of the relationship between the perceived risk and travel intentions during an epidemic outbreak. The PCA identified five categories of perceived risk that affect travel intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically: health risk, psychological risk, financial risk, destination risk, and travel risk. Also, the aim of research by Ahmad et al. (2020) was to analyse the factors influencing intention to visit and destination image in post-COVID-19 crisis recovery. The findings demonstrated that physical factors are the main factors that influence tourists' intention to visit. Additionally, destination image significantly affects intention to visit and significantly mediates the relationship between the factors and intention to visit.

Overall, previous studies in this regard have focused more on the destination brand image (Stylidis, 2020; Kislali et al., 2020; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Woosnam et al., 2020; Dubois et al., 2020; Lee & Xue, 2020; Sahebi et al., 2022) and the effects of COVID-19 prevalence in the tourism industry (Ahmad et al., 2020; Sigala, 2020; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2020; Kock et al., 2020; Bakar & Rosbi, 2020; Perić et al., 2021; Fotiadis et al., 2021). However, there is a lack of research on the effects of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management and a need for examining the destination image, the destination personality and the intention to visit in this process. Thus, the study was conducted to examine the effect of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management on the destination image and destination selection for the tourist, considering the important role of destination image components, destination personality and tourist attitudes toward the destination. The important point in the relation-

ship between variables and the conceptual model of research is that in this study, we are not talking about causality, but the different dimensions and criteria of the same concept (destination image). Identifying the factors affecting the tourist relationship with the destination and the results will help destination marketing management employees to differentiate the destination better and guide the destination branding process in a direction that establishes a strong emotional connection and stability between the destination and the tourist. The study findings could be used as a way for tourism officials to overcome the COVID-19 crisis and re-boost the industry.

The rest of the study will consist of the theoretical foundations of the study and the presentation of the study model. Then the results are analysed by explaining the method, and ultimately, conclusions and the discussion are presented, and practical suggestions are given.

## Theoretical Background

### Perception of COVID-19 Crisis Management

The COVID-19 crisis (declared as a pandemic by WHO, 12 March 2020) has significantly impacted the global economic, political, and socio-cultural systems (Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2020). The crisis management practices supporting the industry's needs are changing as the pandemic continues (Aghaei et al., 2021b). In the literature, several definitions of crisis have been proposed. For example, Beirman (2011) defined a crisis as an event or a set of circumstances that can damage the reputation and marketability of tourism businesses or the entire destination. The tourism industry is extremely sensitive to crisis situations, as even minor negative events can seriously affect tourism demand and deteriorate tourism firms' financial performance (Kukanja et al., 2020).

The pandemic has created a 'fertile' new context whereby tourism researchers can conduct research with valuable end-user benefits. What is still lacking is knowledge about how crisis can foster industry change, how companies can convert this crisis disruption into transformative innovation and how to conduct research that can enable, inform and shape the re-thinking and resetting of a new normal (Sigala, 2020).

Therefore, researchers should examine and understand the stakeholders' lived and perceived COVID-19 experiences as well as their consciousness, mindfulness, capabilities and willingness to understand and act (pro-actively and re-actively) to the pandemic, as all these can equally influence their image, attitudes, behaviours and potential (Sigala, 2020; Aghaei et al., 2021c). Therefore, due to the importance of perception of the destination, in this study, the effect of perception of crisis management on the intention to choose a destination has been investigated.

#### Destination Image

Since Kim et al.'s (2018) foundational research, the concept of destination image has drawn wide attention in the tourism marketing literature (Akgün et al., 2020). Destination image can be defined as all the cognitive frameworks, perceptions, prejudices, and emotional beliefs that an individual or group expresses regarding a place (Cossio-Silva et al., 2018, p. 3). However, the congruence between the induced image projected by the destination and the organic image held by prospective visitors may vary substantially depending on the destination, previous experiences and the sources that have influenced visitor and prospective visitor perceptions, particularly the Internet (Schofield et al., 2020).

Fazli (2012) argues that destination image is a critical element for the development of successful tourism and destination marketing. Establishing a strong destination image is a way to attract tourists (Fazli, 2012, p. 17). Indeed, destination image has a significant role in predicting the behaviour of tourists (Kim et al., 2018, p. 91). Positive image has a significant effect on tourists' visit to the destination and word of mouth recommendation (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019, p. 217).

Regarding this, Kim et al. (2018) have studied the personality of the destination, the destination image and the purpose of the trip. Their results indicate the essential role of destination personality in image formation. Also, Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020), in a study on destination image and tourist behavioural intentions, find that destination image plays a significant role in predicting tourists' intentional behaviour, in different magnitudes. Also, overall and affective im-

ages significantly impact behavioural intention, followed by the cognitive image. Of the different dimensions of behavioural intentions, destination image significantly impacts the intention to recommend (Séraphin & Butcher, 2018).

#### Destination (City) Personality

Today, as the key to end-product homogeneity, brand personality has been of wide concern, and its connotation and denotation have been constantly expanded. In this regard, the concept of brand personality has been introduced into destination brand marketing, excavating and refining the core genes that distinguish it from other destinations, as well as finding emotional and cultural elements that meet the needs of tourists. American scholar Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as 'a series of personality characteristics related to a certain brand' based on the theoretical model of 'Five Personalities' in psychology (Shi, 2020).

Tourists prefer to assign human personalities for tourism purposes and attribute human characteristics to cities (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 391). Tourist destinations use a combination of destination image and destination personality as a strategy to differentiate themselves from competitors (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006, p. 130). To Ekinici and Hosany, the destination personality has a key role in shaping the destination brand, identifying tourist perceptions about various destinations and creating a unique brand for the destination. The increase in competition between tourism markets and the destinations' efforts to stand out has led to increasing attention to the destination personality. Rajabi (2018) argues that Spain is known as a friendly and family destination, London as open-minded, lively, and creative, and Paris as a romantic city. Cities with cultural brand personalities are Budapest, Prague, Vienna, Ankara, Cairo, Bangkok, Washington, DC, Delhi, Bucharest, Sydney, and Madrid. Some cities have an artistic city brand; these heritage cities include Venice and Oxford.

#### Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

In this section, the relationship between variables in this study is explained, and finally the hypotheses are presented.

### *The Relationship between the Destination Image and the Destination Personality*

Hosany et al. (2006) argue that there is a lot of ambiguity in the relationship between brand image and brand personality. According to them, modification of brand image (destination) and brand personality (for destination) has been used extensively in the literature (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006, p. 129). Ekinici and Hosany also concluded that destination image is associated with the destination personality. Chen and Phou's (2013) results confirmed that destination image affects the destination personality, corroborated by Ekinici and Hosani (2006). Souiden et al. (2017) examined the effects of personality and destination image on people's attitudes and opinions. Their results indicate that destination image affects the destination personality. Nonetheless, Kim and Lee (2015) showed that the city personalities (excitement, intimacy and perfection) affect the three dimensions of the city image (dynamic image, special image and stable image). Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou (2015) argue that the destination personality (excitement and honesty) has a significant effect on destination image. Kim and Lee (2015) and Souiden et al. (2017) showed the effect of destination image on destination personality.

### *The Attitude and the Effect of the Destination Image and Destination Personality on the Tourists' Attitude*

In the tourism literature, the relationship between economic profitability and regular tourists, enhancement of positive tourist attitudes, and repeat visitation has been discussed in many studies (Marinkovic et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2013; Song et al., 2012). There are some studies in the tourism literature (Choo et al., 2016; Song et al., 2012) which have examined attitude as one of the predictors of tourist intention to visit (Hasan et al., 2019).

Tourists' attitudes describe the psychological tendencies expressed by their positive or negative assessments. Indeed, tourist attitude is a predictor variable of the tourist's decision to travel to a specific destination (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012, p. 593). International trade and marketing literature shows that people's overall perception of a destination image affects people's evaluation of and visits to a tourist destination. The find-

ings of Usakli and Baloglu (2011), Kim and Lee (2015), and Souiden et al. (2017) show the effect of tourism destination personality on tourist attitudes. In other words, destination image can have a significant role in the decision-making process of international tourists and their loyalty (Chaulagain et al., 2019, p. 2). Additionally, recent studies indicate a positive and significant relationship between a positive image of the destination and tourists' willingness to travel. Hence, a positive and valid understanding of the destination is essential to attract tourists to that destination (Chaulagain et al., 2019, p. 1). Regarding this, Souiden et al. (2017) studied the effects of personality and destination image on the attitudes and perspectives of individuals. Their findings indicate that destination image is a precursor to the destination personality and affects it, and has a direct effect on attitudes towards a destination and an indirect effect on behavioural intentions. Also, Sharifsamet et al. (2020), in a study on marketing destinations, researched the impact of destination personality on consumer attitude, finding that destination personality and destination attitude are partially related.

### *Intention to Visit and the Effect of the Image and Destination Personality on the Intention to Visit of Tourists*

Consumers perceive satisfaction according to their personal experiences of cognitive and effective assessments of services/products (An et al., 2021). The behavioural component is usually inherent and committed, as the customer makes a decision and this decision ends in behaviour. Intention to visit is a perception felt by tourists to visit certain destinations in a certain period (Ahn et al., 2013). Intention to visit is also considered a mental process and a transformation from travel motivation into behaviour (Atmaja & Lukito, 2021). Travel intention for tourists can be seen by developing insights into issues such as attitudes or perceptions of goals, with the primary key being to pay attention to constraints and the perceived level of personal control over the resources needed to the achieve targeted behaviour (Sparks & Pan, 2010).

From the consumption process perspective, tourists' behaviour is divided into three stages: before the

trip, during and after the trip. Tourist behaviour includes selecting a destination to visit, subsequent evaluations, and the intention to revisit. Overall, subsequent evaluations are perceived travel experience or value and visitor satisfaction, whereas future behavioural intentions go back to the visitor's judgment of the destination, and the tendency to revisit the same destination and recommend it to others (Shahin et al., 2014, p. 89). For success in the tourism industry, one has to examine tourists and their behaviours (Maleki et al., 2015, p. 12).

Tourism literature has acknowledged the model of the relationship between destination brand personality, self-congruity, and tourist behavioural loyalty (e.g. intention to visit) (Yang et al., 2020). To illustrate, several studies confirmed that destination brand personality had a direct influence on tourists' intention to visit (Yang et al., 2020; Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2015; Chen & Phou, 2013; Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

Several studies centred on the relationship between city image and preference or intention to visit (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Moon et al., 2011). The initial image formation stage before the trip is the most important phase in tourists' city selection processes (Yang et al., 2020).

Given the content expressed and significance of the elements and relations examined in this study, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1 *Perception of COVID-19 crisis management has a positive and significant effect on the destination image.*
- H2 *The destination image has a positive and significant effect on the personality of the destination.*
- H3 *The destination personality has a positive and significant effect on the attitude towards the destination.*
- H4 *Attitude towards the destination has a positive and significant effect on the intention to choose the destination.*
- H5 *Perception of COVID-19 crisis management has a positive and significant effect on destination selection.*

The important point in the relationship between

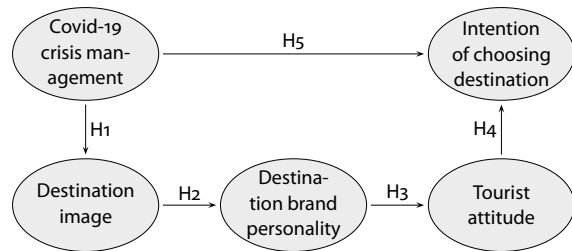


Figure 1 The Study Conceptual Model

variables and the conceptual model of research is that in this study we are not talking about causality, but only about the different dimensions and criteria of the same concept (destination image). In fact, we are talking here about the relationship between a whole and its components and discussing it to determine the factors associated with the destination image that have received less attention in previous research and to determine its impact on destination selection.

## Methodology

The study was conducted to examine the effect of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management on destination image and the intention to visit the tourist destination by explaining the role of destination personality and tourists' attitudes towards the destination. This research used the descriptive approach and quantitative data collection with applied purpose. Tehran was examined as the spatial territory of the study and all people (domestic and foreign) visiting Tehran as tourists from July 2020 to April 2021 were the population of the study. The Available Sampling Method was used and the sample size was obtained using Cochran's formula for an infinite population. In this formula, the most important parameter to be estimated is  $S^2$ , which is the variance of the prototype. To calculate  $S^2$ , 30 pilot questionnaires were distributed and then the variance of the pilot was calculated and the value was 0.0248.

The data collection tool was a questionnaire with closed questions using a Likert scale. The minimum sample size of 381 was determined in the study, assuming a 95% confidence level. Besides face-to-face distribution, the questionnaire was distributed in many sites of natural, historical and man-made tourist attractions in Tehran, such as Golestan Palace, Nature

Park, Botanical Museum Garden, Eram Park, Museum of Ancient Iran, and the National Jewelry Museum in Tehran. To collect the data, the research questionnaire was prepared both online and offline, and the link to the online questionnaire was placed on the tourist destinations sites for tourists to complete them. Also, the printed questionnaires were distributed in person at these destinations, and answers were collected. Ultimately, 768 complete questionnaires were collected to ensure the results, of which 632 were online and 136 samples were collected in person. The hypotheses were analysed using SEM in AMOS and SPSS.

The questionnaire in this research consisted of 6 variables and 25 questions. For questions related to the perception of COVID-19 crisis management, the research of Seyedin et al. (2016) was used with corrections. Also, the destination image variable from Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020), the destination brand personality from Rutelione et al. (2018), the tourist attitude from Liu et al. (2018), and the intention to select the destination from Hassan and Hemdi (2016) were used.

In this study, 30 questionnaires were distributed among the members of the population. First, the validity of the questionnaires was confirmed with the opinions of experts, and then it was distributed among the population to confirm the validity and initial reliability; they were also asked to express their opinions and suggestions in the field of items. After review, correction and the final approval of experts, a questionnaire was distributed among the sample members. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis was used for construct validity. The reliability of the study was calculated by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient and combined reliability.

## Results

In this section, Table 1 first summarizes the demographic information of the samples. Then the reliability and validity of the tool and the results of model fit analysis and testing of hypotheses are explained.

Based on Table 1, the highest percentage of sample members in each variable were males (62%), age 25 to 45 years (67%), with an undergraduate education (39%) and most people (55%) were domestic tourists

Table 1 Demographic Information of Sample Members

Demographic variable/options		(1)	(2)
Gender	Male	476	62
	Female	292	38
Age	Under 25 years	48	6
	25 to 45 years	516	67
	46 to 60 years	144	19
	Over 60 years	60	8
Education	Less than bachelor's	201	26
	Bachelor's degree	297	39
	Master's degree	174	23
	PhD and above	96	12
Continent	Asia (Iran)	421	55
	Asia (excluding Iran)	139	18
	Europe	92	12
	Africa	69	9
	America	47	6
The most important factor in choosing a tourist destination (after the corona outbreak)	Destination health and COVID-19 control	382	50
	Low cost	101	13
	Variety of tourist places	153	20
	Access and proximity to the destination	43	5
	Other factors	66	9

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) frequency, (2) percentage.

from Iran. The key element for selecting a tourist destination in the period after the outbreak of COVID-19 is the health of the destination and control of COVID-19 (50%).

First, the factor loadings associated with the measured indices in each latent variable (visible variables) is examined. As is seen, the factor loading of all items is greater than 0.7. Two indices are used to evaluate the model reliability: (a) Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and (b) Combined reliability (CR). As Tables 2 and 3 show, all the variables have Cronbach's alpha and CR greater than 0.7, implying the existence of reliability in the main variables of the study.

Two criteria have been used to evaluate the validity of the measurement model. The first criterion is

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha Results (Prototype Stage)

Research variables	(1)	(2)
COVID-19 crisis management	4	0.812
Destination image	8	0.808
Destination personality	9	0.941
Attitude to the destination	3	0.928
Intention to visit (destination selection)	6	0.896

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) number of questions, (2) Cronbach's alpha results.

convergent validity and the second is divergent validity. The results of estimating the average variance extracted (AVE) show that all values are higher than 0.5 and the convergence validity of the study is confirmed. The study of the relationship between the squared variance squared with the mean correlation has been used in the study to show the divergent validity, the results of which are shown in Table 3.

After ensuring the acceptability of the measurement model in the developed structural model, the process of path analysis with the latent variables is stated in this section to examine the structural relationships between the variables. As Table 4 shows, the fitting results of the model show that the model has the desired fit. Furthermore, the  $R^2$  value of the dependent variables 'destination image,' 'destination personality,' 'attitude' and 'intention to visit' discussed in this model, is more than 1.0 and desirable. In other words, for the dependent variable 'destination image,' the effect of the independent variable (Perception of COVID-19 Crisis Management) is 0.272 (27.2%) and the effect of other latent variables not visible in this model but affecting the results and 'destination image' is 0.728 (72.8%). Furthermore, the  $R^2$  of 'destination personality,' 'attitude' and 'intention to visit' are 11.6%, 10.2% and 29.6%, respectively. In other words, the power of the study in measuring the variables affecting the dependent variable and the outcomes is desirable.

The results of the path coefficient of 'Perception of COVID-19 crisis management on the destination image' show that the value of  $P$  is less than 0.01 and the value of the critical ratio (12.091) for this path is more than 1.96, by which one can state that the effect of per-

ception of COVID-19 crisis management on the destination image is significant at the 99% level. It has to be stated that the standardized factor loading value for this path is 0.509 and positive, showing the positive effect of the prevalence of COVID-19 on the destination image. Table 4 shows that the value of  $P$  for the path 'destination image to destination personality' is less than 0.01 and the value of the critical ratio (6.418) confirms the significance of this path. The standardized factor load value for this route is 0.343. Furthermore, the value of  $P$  for the path coefficient 'destination personality to the tourist attitude' is less than 0.01 and the value of the critical ratio (5.877) confirms the significance of this path coefficient; The amount of standardized factor load for this route is 0.322. Like the previous three paths, the significance of the attitude path to the destination intention to visit is confirmed by considering the value of  $P$  and the value of the critical ratio (9.117). The value of factor loading in this path is 0.496 and, considering the positive standardized factor loading, one can conclude that attitude has a positive effect on behavioural intention. Ultimately, the results of the path coefficient of 'Perception of COVID-19 crisis management on the intention to visit the destination' show that the value of  $P$  is less than 0.01 and the value of the critical ratio (14.825) for this path is more than 1.96. It can be said that the effect of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management on the intention to visit is 99% significant. Considering these values, one can state that the standardized factor loading value for this path is 0.532 and positive, showing the positive effect of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management on the intention to visit the destination. The test results of the hypotheses testing and the path coefficient are shown in Table 4 and Figure 2. The results of testing the hypotheses in SEM showed that all 5 hypotheses, as stated in this study, has been confirmed with a 99% confidence level.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Attention to the tourism industry as an important source of income has increased in many countries in recent years. Thus, as competition increases, the destination outperforming the others in branding will be more successful. Considering the changing tastes of



Table 3 Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Main variables	Items	Standard operating load	CR	AVE	$\alpha$			
Perception of COVID-19 crisis management	The COVID-19 crisis makes me feel insecure.	0.806	0.902	0.674	0.916			
	I feel safe in Tehran against the COVID-19 virus.	0.769						
	I feel that the COVID-19 virus has been tackled in Tehran.	0.715						
	After this crisis, I only visit cities that are healthy in terms of the virus.	0.825						
	COVID-19 crisis control and management is effective in my visit to Tehran.	0.793						
Destination personality	In Tehran, I feel like I belong to the upper social class.	0.873	0.963	0.749	0.963			
	I feel that Tehran is unique.	0.848						
	Tehran has a friendly and intimate feeling for me.	0.870						
	You can have a sense of warm relations with Tehran.	0.838						
	Tehran is up to date (modern).	0.874						
	Tehran is attractive to me.	0.882						
	Tehran is desirable and lovable.	0.887						
	Tehran is a leader in everything.	0.857						
Tehran is reliable.	0.855							
Destination image	Tehran is a beautiful place.	0.767	0.944	0.682	0.944			
	Tehran has good infrastructure (roads, service communications, etc.).	0.813						
	Tehran is a good place for business.	0.842						
	Tehran has a developed industry.	0.815						
	Tehran is a safe place to invest.	0.839						
	Tehran has a high standard of living.	0.810						
	Tehran offers enjoyable recreational activities.	0.874						
Tehran is socially and culturally diverse.	0.840							
Attitude	I love Tehran.	0.852	0.871	0.693	0.970			
	I have a positive opinion about Tehran.	0.832						
	Visiting Tehran is a good decision.	0.811						
Behavioural intention (intention to visit)	I was waiting to see Tehran.	0.890	0.932	0.699	0.931			
	I was actively looking for information about Tehran.	0.882						
	I had considered Tehran among my travel destinations.	0.789						
	After visiting Tehran, I will probably visit Tehran again.	0.820						
	I will definitely travel to Tehran.	0.780						
	I will suggest a trip to Tehran to others.	0.845						
Model	$\chi^2$	DF	P	TLI	IFI	CFI	RMSEA	$\chi^2/DF$
Measurement model	617.851	292	0.001	0.959	0.963	0.963	0.053	2.108
Acceptable values	-	-	-	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.08	1-5

tourists and the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, the revival of the tourism industry has become an impor-

tant and critical issue for countries, so that the management of this crisis has become a current topic in

Table 4 Results of the Main Structural Equation Model

Path	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Crisis management of COVID-19 in the destination image	0.568	0.509	0.070	12.091	0.000	0.272
Destination image on the destination personality	0.426	0.343	0.066	6.418	0.000	0.116
Destination personality on attitude towards the destination	0.301	0.322	0.050	5.877	0.001	0.102
Attitude to the destination on the intention to visit	0.539	0.496	0.058	9.117	0.001	0.296
Perception of COVID-19 crisis management on intention to visit	0.590	0.532	0.060	14.825	0.001	0.296

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) standardized factor load, (2) not standardized factor load, (3) standard error, (4) critical ratio, (5) *p*, (6) *R*<sup>2</sup>. Model fit values: RMSE = 0.047, CFI = 0.937, IFI = 0.937, TLI = 0.930, *P* = 0.001, DF = 295,  $\chi^2 = 856.8, \chi^2/DF = 2.894$ .

Table 5 Test Results of Hypotheses in Structural Equation Model

Path	Standardized factor loads results					Result
	(o)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
Crisis management of COVID-19 in the destination image	0.509**	-	0.466**	-	-	Conf.
Destination image on the destination personality	0.343**	-	-	0.336**	-	Conf.
Destination personality on attitude towards the destination	0.322**	-	0.093*	0.093*	0.093*	Conf.
Attitude to the destination on the intention to visit	0.496**	0.539**	0.542**	0.542**	0.542**	Conf.
Perception of COVID-19 crisis management on intention to visit	0.532**	0.583**	0.591**	0.591**	0.591**	Conf.

Notes Column headings are as follows: (o) the original model, (1) alternative model one, (2) alternative model two, (3) alternative model three, (4) alternative model four.

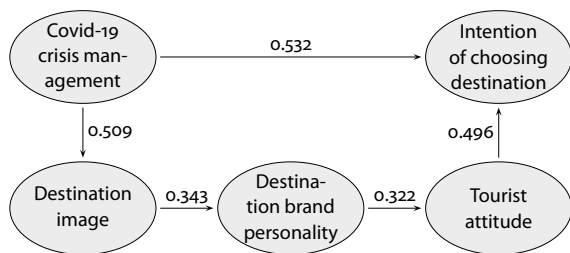


Figure 2 The Results of Hypothesis Testing

most countries. As a country with high tourism potential, Iran has faced this crisis, too. The previous studies in this regard have been carried out more on the brand image of the destination and the effect of the prevalence of COVID-19 in the tourism industry, and the lack of studies on the effects of perception of COVID-19 crisis management and destination image, destination personality and intention to visit in this process is felt. The study tried to fill the gaps expressed. Thus, the study examines the effect of COVID-19 crisis management on the destination image and the inten-

tion of the tourist to select a destination within the tourist destination of Iran (Tehran). The data was collected from tourists using a questionnaire and analysed using AMOS and SPSS. The results can enhance the awareness of tourism industry officials of the factors affecting the choice of destination, and the practical suggestions could be used as a way for travel destinations to exit the crisis of tourist attraction in the post-COVID-19 era.

Overall, no previous studies have been carried out that meticulously examine the effect of perception of COVID-19 crisis management on intention to visit by considering the effect of the factors in this study. However, the results of the hypotheses of this study are compared with the most relevant studies in the past.

The results revealed that although tourist destinations and cities are lifeless elements, tourists usually consider them to have personality and human characteristics. According to the first hypothesis, crisis management of COVID-19 has a positive and significant effect on the destination image. In fact, with the

prevalence of COVID-19 and the differences between countries regarding their success rate in combating the virus, the mental image of tourists has been negative towards the countries with more infections and more positive towards the ones with fewer infections; a country able to manage this crisis creates a better image of itself. The results of the first hypothesis are in line with those of Ahmad et al. (2020), Yu et al. (2020), and Abbaspour et al. (2020). The results regarding the second hypothesis showed that destination image has a positive and significant effect on the personality of the tourist destination. Tourism industry officials and decision makers must pay special attention to branding for all cities with tourism potential. The results of a study revealed that branding cost a city like Glasgow about 3 million pounds. It generated 42 million pounds in revenue. In other words, for every dollar spent on branding, the city generates \$ 12.72 in revenue in the city of Glasgow. This result is in line with those of Kim and Lee (2015), Doosti et al. (2016), Souiden et al. (2017), and Yang et al. (2020). Furthermore, the results on the third hypothesis of this study showed that the personality of the tourist destination has a positive and significant effect on attitudes towards the destination. These are in line with those of Kim and Lee (2015), Souiden et al. (2017), Doosti et al. (2016), Yang et al. (2020) and Sharifsamet et al. (2020). The fourth hypothesis indicates that the attitude of tourists towards the destination has a positive and significant effect on the intention to select and visit the tourist destination. In other words, when the attitudes of tourists towards a tourist destination improves, their intention to visit the destination is strengthened, too. Destination personality attributes human personality traits to a tourist destination. The results of this hypothesis are in line with those of Chung et al. (2015), Doosti et al. (2016), Yang et al. (2020), Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020), and Nechoud et al. (2021). Ultimately, the results of the fifth hypothesis showed that COVID-19 crisis management has a positive and significant effect on the intention to select and visit a tourist destination. Thus, in the era of COVID-19, the health of the destination can have a key role in creating destination image. A destination with less prevalence of COVID-19 and with crisis management of the virus will be more reli-

able than the destination with more prevalence of the virus. The results of this hypothesis are in line with those of Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2020), Ioannides and Gyimothy (2020), Han et al. (2020), Ahmad et al. (2020), and Perić et al. (2021).

Considering the results, city officials should control and manage the COVID-19 crisis and increase the health of their city as the most important factor in choosing tourist destinations in the COVID-19 era, in order to get out of the tourist decline crisis in this period. As a tourism city can be considered as a brand consisting of tangible and intangible characteristics, tourism marketers must use this feature and focus more on informing tourists about the health of the destination and creating a positive mindset about the health of the city and improving the image of the city, to brand and expand their desired tourism destinations. During the COVID-19 crisis, they can capture destination images by providing reliable statistics on the number of cases and government efforts to control and manage the crisis of the virus and vaccinate people, and by showing a healthy image of the city as well as the physical characteristics of the destination (beautiful scenery, beaches, parks, cultural events and festivals, shopping facilities, friendly locals). The destination personality can be characterized by characteristics such as: attractive, modern, reliable, exciting, up to date, friendly, cheerful. Marketers can use of these characteristics to shape the attitude of tourists and, by encouraging them, make their city a destination of choice for tourists. Thus, the organizations in charge of tourism (like Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, Tourism, and Municipality) can emphasize the historical, recreational, business environment, and safe investment of the city besides creating the city's image in terms of health as the key factor in this period.

The city personality has a significant role in the success of tourism destinations. The studies showed that a unique personality has been designed for all successful tourism cities in the world today. For instance, the city of Paris has a feminine brand, and the personality of this city is different from that of a city like Berlin, which has a masculine personality. The brand personality of cities like Tokyo, Beijing, Kuala Lumpur, and Dubai is unique to them. Hence, it is essential

for all cities in a country to design a unique brand personality. The brand personality of the city has to encompass the history, architecture, climate, geography and everything in the city. There is no doubt that creating a brand personality for tourist cities is not a choice but a necessity. The increase in the competition between tourism markets and destinations trying to stand out has led to more attention being paid to the destination personality. The results revealed that the concept of tourism city personality is used to describe the characteristics of the city and differentiate tourist destinations. Tourists are more likely to travel to cities where they can identify themselves. Awareness of the city brand is a key factor in visiting the destination and increases interest in it.

The study identifies the efforts to control and manage the COVID-19 crisis and show a safe and healthy image of the city as the key element in attracting tourists in this period, and encourages tourism marketers to treat the image and destination personality as a key predictor for tourists' attitudes. Managers and tourism marketing experts have to try to enhance the subjective image of tourism destinations for tourists by increasing advertising and promotional activities. As tourists' attitudes have a direct effect on travel intentions, it is recommended that tourism managers emphasize marketing activities and long-term strategies rather than cross-sectional ones in creating a positive tourist attitude. Additionally, it is suggested that the experts and managers of tourism destinations try hard to create a safe image of the city, and to show architecture and tourist attractions in order for tourism cities to improve and develop tourism. It also seems that marketers and managers of recreational and tourism destinations must focus on the key elements in attracting tourists according to the target market segmentations and classify tourists based on characteristics like novelty, diversity and other factors and, based on this, formulate strategies to create a city brand to attract tourists.

For future studies, it is suggested to study the economic dimensions of the effect of COVID-19 on the tourist incomes of countries and identify the key factors for tourists in selecting a tourist destination in the future and after control of the COVID-19 virus. It

is suggested that the model and strategy of creating a destination brand value be developed based on the changing tastes of tourists after the COVID-19 era. Additionally, it is recommended that future studies examine the effect of other variables such as satisfaction, loyalty, tourism brand resonance, perceived quality of tourism, tourism destination identity, tourism brand trust and sympathy and various other variables on tourists' attitudes and intention to visit.

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