



**Assessing the impact of brand awareness on destination choice
among tourists from Gauteng**



Mini-Dissertation
submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Commerce in strategic brand leadership at The
Independent Institute of Education, Vega School.

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16/ 01 / 2026

Abstract

This study examines the impact of brand awareness on destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists in South Africa. With tourism growth concentrated in a few key regions like Cape Town and Durban, this research explores how brand awareness can influence travel decisions to lesser-known destinations. The study employed Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity model and other relevant frameworks to test the influence of brand recall, brand image, and perceived risk on destination selection. A survey with 271 respondents was conducted, revealing that brand awareness significantly affects destination choice, with 54% of variance in destination affordability attributed to brand-related factors. Brand image emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.386$), followed by brand awareness ($\beta = 0.243$) and brand recall ($\beta = 0.231$) in decisions related to cost considerations. Additionally, 60% of the variance in the accessibility of destinations was explained by brand awareness dimensions. The results also indicate that perceived risk, though important, was a weaker predictor ($B = -0.074$) of destination choice, suggesting tourists prioritise brand recognition over safety concerns. This research provides valuable insights for tourism marketers, recommending strategies to enhance brand visibility for under-visited destinations and foster a more balanced distribution of tourism across South Africa, ultimately contributing to regional economic growth. The study recommends that tourism stakeholders strengthen destination branding through targeted marketing campaigns, improved digital presence, and strategic communication that highlights unique destination attributes. Enhancing brand visibility through social media platforms, partnerships with travel influencers, and integrated marketing strategies may increase awareness and encourage domestic tourists to explore less-promoted destinations.

These findings further support Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model by demonstrating how brand awareness dimensions influence tourists' destination choice behaviour. the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on destination branding and domestic tourism. Strengthening brand equity for emerging destinations may therefore assist in redistributing tourism demand more evenly across South Africa and contribute to sustainable tourism development and regional economic growth.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who supported me throughout this research journey. First, I extend my deepest thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Corne Engelbrecht, for her invaluable guidance, expertise, and unwavering support. Her encouragement and insightful feedback have been instrumental in shaping this dissertation. I also appreciate the assistance and encouragement from my family and friends, whose love and understanding kept me motivated during challenging times. My sincere thanks go to all the participants who took the time to complete the surveys, making this research possible. Lastly, I am grateful to The Independent Institute of Education and Vega School for providing the resources and environment conducive to my academic growth.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation as my own original work. It has not been submitted previously for any other degree or qualification at any other institution. All sources used and referenced in the research have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that the work is a product of my independent research, and I take full responsibility for its content. This research was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Corne Engelbrecht, whose guidance and support were essential throughout the process.

Signed: L Seshoka

Lebogang Seshoka

Date: 16 January 2026

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1. Chapter 1

Introduction

For this study, tourism refers to travel undertaken by individuals outside their usual environment for leisure or business purposes, without permanent relocation. This study focuses specifically on domestic tourists residing in Gauteng who travel to destinations within South Africa (Page & Connell, 2020). This study focuses primarily on leisure and domestic holiday tourism, as these travel types are most directly influenced by destination branding and brand awareness (Stats SA, 2022). It is well-known that the domestic tourism (Gauteng residents who travelled within South Africa for leisure purposes in the past or upcoming 12 months) industry of South Africa can create inclusive growth, yet the gains of this growth were uneven (Hoogandoorn & Rogerson, 2016). According to national travel surveys, the metro centres, especially Cape Town and Durban, receive a disproportionate number of leisure trips and the countryside and new destinations cannot attract tourists (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). This imbalance of distribution of tourism resulted in unbalanced distribution of resources in popular destinations such as jobs, infrastructures, and economic gains (Rogerson, 2017). This is because Gauteng was the driver for a quarter of all the leisure trips in South Africa (Stats SA, 2022) and as such, had a negative impact on the overall tourism demand in the country.

This study was set out to address this gap by determining the effect of brand awareness on destination choice among Gauteng based tourists. Customer-based brand equity and planned behaviour frameworks and hypotheses tested in the study predicted that brand awareness, brand recall, brand image, and perceived risk would significantly affect destination choice, with demographic factors and past travel frequency controlled (Pike, 2017).

1.1. Background to study

Branding has now become a strategic component in competitive markets and so is the case with tourism (Ezeuduji et al, 2016). While Gauteng is recognised as the economic hub of South Africa, the focus of this study is not tourism within Gauteng itself, but rather the travel behaviour of Gauteng residents who travel to other domestic destinations within South Africa. Gauteng residents represent one of the largest domestic tourism markets in the country and frequently travel to other provinces for leisure and business purposes (Statistics South Africa, 2023). With destinations becoming increasingly competitive in the sense of creating visibility and winning loyalty, brand strength has become a major determinant to success (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021). For a destination to be seriously considered by potential tourists, it must first be part of their awareness set (Hoogandoorn

& Rogerson, 2016). that is, the group of destinations that come to mind when making destination choice (Pike, 2017). This underscores the significance of brand awareness within destination branding strategies, as tourists are unlikely to select a destination they do not recall.

An already branded business can contribute greatly towards the competitiveness of a destination, perceived stakes that might lead to risks of tourism, and a strong desire to visit (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021). The idea is especially pertinent in South Africa and some of the provinces, like the Western Cape and the KwaZulu-Natal provinces, have a solid brand recognition and stable traffic (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021). Nevertheless, there are other areas which have not been explored but have a vast potential in terms of tourism overlooked (Ezeuduji, November, & Haupt, 2016, pp. 156-168). The first step to be taken to address these imbalances should be an intensive work on making lesser-known destinations more visible and engaging with the help of the right branding strategies.

The theoretical foundation of this study was grounded in Keller's (1993) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, which positions brand awareness as the critical first stage in building strong destination brands. According to this framework, tourists must first recognise or recall a destination before forming associations, building positive brand images, and ultimately developing loyalty (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021).

In South Africa, brand awareness plays an important role in forming choices related to tourism, since there are a variety of destinations that promise different experiences (Kladou, Kavaratzis, Rigopoulou, & Salonika, 2017). It accounts to reminding and perceiving destinations thus determining the decision of a tourist and creating more exposure (Dias & Cardoso, 2017). Successful branding, such as those in Iceland and New York City, has been instrumental in attracting more visitors (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021, p. 8). Destinations that are well recognized in South Africa have been more appealing which supports the need to strengthen brand awareness in the less known destinations. Brand awareness has been identified as the major impact in consumer behavior by forming familiarity, identity, perceived risk being reduced, and including consideration set in the tourist (Kladou et al., 2017).

Though a high brand name recognition is evident to play a major role in consumer choice in a conventional product background, the results of the tourism sector were more complicated, and results revealed that destination loyalty and choice was influenced by not only recognition, but also included elements like brand recall, image and perceived risk (Rather, 2021; Tasci, 2021). To illustrate, the studies on the relationship between brand image elements linked to the physical environment and people features including Cape Town show that such factors are the most critical determinants of loyalty (Ezeuduji

et al., 2016), whereas the literature on place brand introduces to South Africa suggests socio-cultural strengths and competitive advantage as the mediators of travel motivation (Matiza & Slabbert, 2020). Likewise, Chuchu, Chiliya, and Chinomona (2019) indicate that image has a significant and important influence on the decision to revisit not only through cognitive, affective, and conative aspects but also through perceived risk, which can reduce destination choice because it creates uncertainty (Satar, Amir, Jamal, Aziz, & Asyraff, 2023). These implications indicate that the level of awareness may not be sufficient in advancing travel decisions because recall, image, and risk together intersect to influence the travel decisions, and that there is a necessity of hypothesis-driven testing in domestic tourism. Table 1.1 as shown below shows that Gauteng based tourists constitute the largest group of domestic travellers (25%), the other most prevalent category of domestic traveller is constituted of tourists that reside in Kwa-Zulu Natal province (18%), Eastern Cape (12%) and Western Cape (10) respectively. It has 35 percent (35%) percent of its travellers in other provinces in South Africa

Table 1.1: Travel Trends by Province of residence

The data presented in Table 1.1 is based on (Statistics South Africa, 2024), more recent domestic tourism reports from Statistics South Africa indicate that Gauteng continues to account for the largest proportion of domestic travellers in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2024).

Provinces	% of total travellers	Trend/Observation
Gauteng	25%	Highest proportion of domestic travellers
Kwa-Zulu Natal	18%	Second-highest traveller population
Eastern cape	12%	Third-highest significant contributor to domestic travel
Western cape	10%	Among the top four provinces with most travellers
Other provinces	35%	35% combined

Sources: (Statistics South Africa, 2024).

Table 1.2 shows Gauteng and the Western Cape leading in domestic tourism, despite challenges like overcrowding and high competition. Mid-tier provinces such as Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal show steady growth but face issues like limited branding and seasonal fluctuations. Lower-performing provinces like the Free State and Northern Cape need improved infrastructure and marketing to boost tourism

Table 1.2: Travel Trends of South African Domestic Tourists by Province

Province	Number of Day Trips ('000)	Number of Overnight Trips ('000)	Growth Rate (%)	Challenges
Gauteng	1,923	4,026	6%	High competition from other provinces
Western Cape	1,779	2,379	5%	Overcrowding in major areas
Mpumalanga	1,223	1,364	4%	Seasonal fluctuations
KwaZulu-Natal	1,147	1,357	4%	Seasonal fluctuations
Northern Cape	727	644	4%	Low marketing visibility
Eastern Cape	1,194	1,399	3%	Limited brand awareness
North West	1,096	1,262	3%	Inconsistent tourism numbers
Limpopo	1,497	909	3%	Insufficient tourism branding
Free State	546	564	2%	Underdeveloped infrastructure

Sources: (Statistics South Africa, 2024).

Even with the attempts to popularise domestic tourism, there were still destinations that were also getting very little traffic and were still under explored compared to other more well-known destinations (Videira, 2019). The Shot left campaign by South African Tourism was premised upon the idea of ensuring that South Africans get encouraged to explore the country and enjoy the range of attractions available in the country (Videira, 2019). Despite specific social media promotion, influencer relations, and the other immersive tourism activities, the distribution of tourism is not even (Kladou, Kavaratzis, Rigopoulou, and Salonika, 2017). This was attributed to various factors which were usually surrounding the lack of brand awareness and a difficulty in promoting not so popular destinations.

When making travel choices, brand awareness forms the basis of the brand of any destination since it would mean whether a prospective tourist would identify or remember a destination (Dias & Cardoso, 2017). The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model proposed by Keller (1993) suggests the first step to developing high-quality brands, namely, awareness, which allows associating with it in the future and developing the brand identity. Brand identity, in its turn, is the distinctive number of associations and traits that render a destination appealing and memorable, creating an impression and influencing the experiences of tourists (Dias & Cardoso, 2017). Good brand identity increases brand equity that gets an expression of the value and competitiveness of a destination in the tourism industry. It is especially relevant to less well-known South Africa destinations whose perception of risk and trust building would become more valuable in destination selection and in the process creating awareness and a strong brand identity

(Elgin & Elveren, 2024). In turn, all these theoretical insights explain why the hypotheses of the study are brand awareness (H_1), brand recall (H_2), brand image (H_3), and perceived risk (H_4), are all important in choosing a destination by Gauteng-based domestic tourists.

Gauteng-based tourists dominate South Africa's domestic travel, leading other provinces in terms of day or overnight trips (Nengovhela, 2020). Their elements of destination choice can give an insight to other provinces regarding destination branding strategy. The research involved the tourists in Gauteng to raise the visibility of the destination or correct the visibility issue of such areas in the local tourism market.

Tourism competitiveness has turned into a major element of branding, where conscious or subconsciousness, brand image, and risk in customers influence their selection of a destination (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021). Although such provinces as the Western Cape or KwaZulu-Natal have good brand presence, most of the potentially promising ones are neglected (Ezeudji, November, & Haupt, 2016). The more tourism attraction sites could be known and could be easily remembered, the more tourists preferred to go to them, particularly when the tourism site could cast out a positive picture and reduce the risk factors (Dias and Cardoso, 2017). Gauteng residents constitute most people who travel within the country for leisure and business (Nengovhela, 2020). According to domestic tourism statistics, Gauteng contributes approximately one quarter of the country's domestic trips, making it the leading source market for domestic tourism in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2023). so, it is important to investigate how these elements will affect their travel behaviour in a bid to empower underutilised provinces such as Limpopo and the Free State and create a more balanced spread of tourism benefits across the South African population

1.2 Rationale

South Africa's tourism sector is crucial for economic development, job creation, and regional upliftment, but its benefits were not evenly distributed across the country. Provinces like the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal attract a disproportionate share of visitors, while other regions with significant tourism potential remain under-explored (Howes, 2024). Branding plays the key point in influencing the decision of travellers, especially in the highly diverse domestic tourism destination in South Africa. This study attempted to find out whether there exists any relationship between brand awareness and destination choice as far as the Gauteng based tourist South Africa (largest and most active segment in domestic travel) is concerned. The share of domestic travelling done by Gauteng tourists was high and knowledge of their preferences concerning the destinations they visit offered relevant advice to the tourism marketers particularly in

provinces that experience lower tourist visitation (Stats SA, 2022). Through alignment of branding approaches with the preferences of the Gauteng tourists the research will increase the visibility and attractiveness of underserved provinces and thus distribute tourism within a region, and support more inclusive economic growth.

1.3 Problem statement.

Despite the growing recognition of branding's role in tourism marketing, many South African provinces continue to struggle with low domestic visitor numbers due to weak brand awareness and limited promotional efforts (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021).

South Africa's domestic tourism landscape reveals a significant imbalance in visitor distribution (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). Urban hubs like Cape Town and Durban attract most travellers, while rural regions and lesser-known provinces remain underexplored and economically stagnant (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021, p. 1730). This uneven distribution hinders the potential of underutilised areas to leverage tourism as a catalyst for regional growth (Nengovhela, 2020, p. 112). The largest segment of domestic travellers comes from Gauteng, and understanding their travel patterns is crucial for uncovering how brand awareness influences destination choice (Hassan, 2024, p. 5). Many lesser-known destinations suffer from weak brand recognition and ineffective marketing, which limit their appeal and prevent them from attracting more visitors (Ezeudji, November & Haupt, 2016, p. 160).

While brand awareness is widely acknowledged as a critical factor influencing consumer decisions (Egayuni, 2026; Chughtai, 2024), there is a significant lack of evidence on how it specifically affects destination choice among South African tourists, particularly those from Gauteng, who were a key source market (Anholt, 2010). Without a clear understanding of this relationship, tourism marketers face challenges in designing effective branding strategies that attract domestic travellers and address regional tourism imbalances. This study sought to fill this gap by investigating the impact of brand awareness on destination choice among Gauteng-based tourists. By doing so, it aimed to provide insights that helped tourism marketers develop more targeted and effective branding strategies to encourage a more equitable distribution of tourism across South Africa.

Thus, the problem statement for this study is that despite the recognised importance of branding in tourism, many South African destinations particularly lesser-known provinces continue to experience low domestic visitation due to weak brand awareness, limited brand recall, unclear brand image, and high perceived risk, and there is insufficient

evidence on how these factors influence destination choice among Gauteng-based tourists, who represent the largest segment of domestic travellers.

1.4 Research Aim

This study aims to assess the impact of brand awareness on destination choice among tourists based in Gauteng.

1.5 Research Objectives

- To critically review and synthesise scholarly literature on brand awareness dimensions and their effects on domestic tourists' destination choice within the South African context.
- To identify and define the key dimensions of brand awareness (recall, image, and perceived risk) relevant to domestic tourism in South Africa.
- To empirically test the formulated hypotheses (H_1 – H_4) to determine the statistical relationship between brand awareness dimensions (recall, image, and perceived risk) and destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists.
- To develop evidence-based recommendations for destination marketers and tourism agencies on branding strategies that enhance the visibility and appeal of under-visited provinces, using insights from Gauteng tourists to inform broader national tourism strategies.

1.6 Research Hypotheses

- Based on the research objectives and existing literature, the following hypotheses have been formulated to assess the relationship between destination brand awareness and destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists:
- **H₁**: Overall brand awareness positively influences destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists.
- **H₂**: Brand recall positively influences destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists.
- **H₃**: Positive brand image positively influences destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists.
- **H₄**: Lower perceived risk positively influences destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists.

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1.7 Preliminary Literature Review

This preliminary literature review assesses the role of destination branding in shaping domestic tourism in South Africa, with particular focus on four key constructs: brand

awareness, brand recall, brand image, and perceived risk. For the purposes of this study, tourism is defined as any voluntary travel undertaken by Gauteng-based residents to a destination outside their usual environment for leisure or recreational purposes, for a period not exceeding twelve consecutive months (UNWTO, 2014). The review is grounded in three established theoretical frameworks that together explain how these constructs influence tourists' destination choices.

1.7.1 Brand Awareness and Brand Recall

The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, developed by Keller (2003), positions brand awareness as the foundational stage in building strong destination brands. According to this framework, tourists must first recognise or recall a destination before forming associations, developing positive brand images, and ultimately demonstrating loyalty. Brand awareness comprises two interrelated dimensions: brand recognition, which is the ability to identify a destination when presented with a visual or auditory stimulus, and brand recall, which is the capacity to retrieve a destination from memory without external prompting (Keller, 2003; Rosaria et al., 2012). In the South African domestic tourism context, where Gauteng residents account for approximately 25% of all domestic leisure trips (Stats SA, 2022), high brand recall and recognition are critical for ensuring that lesser-known provinces enter tourists' consideration sets. Destinations that are easily recalled are more frequently selected, as familiarity reduces the cognitive effort required in decision-making and lowers the perceived risk associated with visiting unfamiliar places (Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021; Dias and Cardoso, 2017). This theoretical relationship supports Hypothesis 1 (H_1 : overall brand awareness positively influences destination choice) and Hypothesis 2 (H_2 : brand recall positively influences destination choice).

1.7.2 Brand Image and Brand Resonance

Brand Resonance Theory (Keller, 2001) extends the CBBE model by emphasising the emotional and psychological bonds that form between tourists and destinations. A destination with strong brand resonance elicits feelings of trust, perceived quality, and loyalty, which together increase the likelihood of both initial visitation and repeat travel (Dias and Cardoso, 2017; Kuseni, van Aardt and Boshoff, 2021). Brand image defined as the set of perceptions, associations, and emotional impressions that tourists hold about a destination is central to this process (Keller, 2003). Research consistently identifies brand image as a primary determinant of destination competitiveness, with positive imagery improving perceived value and reducing risk perceptions (Kladou, Kavaratzis, Rigopoulou and Salonika, 2017; Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021). In South Africa, provinces such as the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal benefit from strong brand images associated with iconic natural landscapes, which drive sustained domestic and international visitor volumes (Ezeuduji, November and Haupt, 2016). By contrast, many

Limpopo, Free State, and Northern Cape destinations suffer from weak or undefined brand images, limiting their appeal despite their substantial tourism potential (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021). This underpins Hypothesis 4 (H_4 : positive brand image positively influences destination choice).

1.7.3 Perceived Risk and Place Branding

Place Branding Theory (Anholt, 2010) offers a complementary perspective by framing destinations as brands that compete for tourists, investors, and cultural relevance within a crowded marketplace. The theory highlights that a destination's brand identity is shaped not only by its physical attributes but also by stakeholder engagement, community narratives, and perceived safety (Videira, 2019; Stoica et al., 2021). Perceived risk encompassing concerns about safety, health, financial loss, and accessibility is a significant barrier to destination choice, particularly for under-visited provinces that lack established reputations (Quintal and Polczynski, 2010; Satar et al., 2023). When a destination is perceived as risky, tourists are less likely to include it in their consideration set, even if they are broadly aware of it (Kankhuni, 2020). Effective destination branding can mitigate risk perceptions by building trust through consistent, credible communication (Kladou et al., 2017). This supports Hypothesis 3 (H_3 : lower perceived risk positively influences destination choice).

1.7.4 Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing body of research on destination branding globally, significant gaps remain in the South African domestic tourism literature. Most existing studies focus on international tourist perceptions of high-profile destinations such as Cape Town and Durban, leaving the brand perceptions and destination-choice behaviour of Gauteng-based domestic tourists the country's largest source market largely unexamined (Nengovhela, 2020; Ezeuduji et al., 2016). Furthermore, limited empirical work has simultaneously tested the relative predictive strength of brand awareness, brand recall, brand image, and perceived risk within a single regression framework, making it difficult to determine which branding dimension most powerfully drives destination selection. This study addresses both gaps by testing Hypotheses 1 through 4 using a quantitative survey administered to 271 Gauteng-based domestic tourists. A full and critical review of the relevant literature is presented in Chapter 2.

1.8 Research Methodology

This section provides an overview of the research methodology adopted in this study. A comprehensive methodological account, including full detail on sampling procedures, instrument design, data collection, and analytical methods, is presented in Chapter 3. The overview here is intended to orient the reader to the epistemological and design choices that informed the study.

1.8.1 Research Paradigm, Ontology, and Epistemology

This study was grounded in a positivist research paradigm, which assumes that reality exists independently of human consciousness and can be objectively observed, measured, and analysed through quantitative methods (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Ontologically, positivism holds that the phenomena under investigation in this case, the relationship between brand awareness dimensions and destination choice exist as objective, measurable constructs that are independent of the researcher's interpretation (Scotland, 2012). Epistemologically, the study adopted a deductive approach, meaning that theoretically derived hypotheses were tested against empirically collected data (Bryman, 2016). This approach is consistent with previous quantitative studies in destination branding, where established theoretical frameworks such as Keller's (2003) CBBE model and the Destination Image Model are used to generate and test hypotheses about tourist behaviour (Bakhshayesh, Shafiee and Kazemi, 2021; Dias and Cardoso, 2017).

1.8.2 Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed. Cross-sectional designs collect data from all respondents at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the associations between variables as they exist now of measurement (Leedy and Ormrod, 2020). This design was appropriate for the current study because it enabled the efficient collection of data from a large sample of Gauteng-based tourists and allowed for the statistical testing of the four hypotheses. Whilst cross-sectional designs do not permit causal inferences, they are well-suited to identifying the strength and direction of relationships between independent variables brand awareness, brand recall, brand image, and perceived risk and the dependent variable, destination choice (Hair, Wolfenbarger, Money, Samouel and Page, 2015).

1.8.3 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised adult domestic tourists residing in Gauteng Province who had undertaken at least one leisure trip within South Africa in the preceding 12 months, or who planned to do so in the next 12 months. All participants were required to be 18 years of age or older, in accordance with the IIE's ethics requirements for informed consent. Gauteng was selected as the source population because it is South Africa's most populous province, home to approximately 15.1 million residents representing 25.4% of the national population (Stats SA, 2022) and consistently generates the largest share of domestic tourist trips in the country (Kankhuni, 2020).

A purposive sampling method was used to recruit participants who met the eligibility criteria. The survey was distributed via three publicly accessible social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp targeting domestic travel communities on each.

Gatekeeper permission was obtained from the administrators of all relevant groups prior to distribution. The target sample was approximately 90 responses per platform to ensure balanced representation. A total of 312 responses were received, of which 271 were valid following the removal of incomplete submissions, ineligible respondents, and duplicate entries. The final sample of 271 was determined by a power analysis (Cohen, 1992) for multiple regression with four predictors, at a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, and statistical power of 0.80, confirming the sample was sufficient to detect meaningful relationships among the study variables.

1.8.4 Research Instrument and Data Analysis

Data were collected using a structured self-administered online questionnaire comprising closed-ended items rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). Measurement items for each construct were adapted from previously validated scales: brand awareness and brand recall items were drawn from Keller (2003) and Bornmark, Goransson and Svensson (2016); brand image items were adapted from Prayag (2009) and Konecnik and Gartner (2007); and perceived risk items were sourced from Quintal and Polczynski (2010). Each construct comprised four to six items. Minor wording adjustments were made to contextualise items for a South African domestic tourism setting. The instrument was reviewed by a subject matter expert using the Delphi technique to confirm content validity and was pilot-tested with 15 Gauteng-based domestic tourists prior to main data collection. All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 29.0. Multiple regression analysis was used to test each of the four hypotheses, assessing the strength, direction, and statistical significance of each brand awareness dimension as a predictor of destination choice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter examined the literature studies done on brand awareness and its effect on consumer behaviour and in the context of tourism. It also described how the process of destination choice depends on several psychological and marketing factors, and the role of the brand awareness is focused. This review discussed the basic issues like brand awareness and branding in tourism, consumer destination choice behavior and strategic models like brand co-creation.

Brand awareness and its role in destination choice

A brand refers to a set of unique names, pictures, design and associations that makes a product, service or place to be identified with a distinctive identity (Hanna, 2022). It is the creator of consumer perceptions and emotional responses, which acts as an indicator of value and experience, and distinguishes it amongst competitors in the marketplace (Hanna, 2022). Brand awareness is the level at which people are aware of a brand or might recall a brand in different circumstances (Rosaria et al., 2012). It incorporates brand recall, where one can recall a brand stored in memory without reminders, and brand recognition that involves recognizing a brand when a visual or audible response is given, in affecting consumer preference (Rosaria et al., 2012).

Brand awareness comprises of brand recall which is the capability to mention brand of a destination in memory, and brand recognition, the capacity to recognize the brand when presented with visual and auditory stimuli (Rosaria et al., 2012). A good destination branding establishes brand resonance in the minds of tourists creating familiarity and trust in positioning the destination from which the tourist originates (Howes, 2024), whereas high brand awareness minimizes perceived risks of destination quality and value, which impact destination choice (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021). In addition to the physical features of a destination, reputation and image of a destination affect its competitiveness where high brand identities are remembered and preferred and promote tourist loyalty (Howes, 2024). In South Africa they are particularly pertinent where brand recall impacts upon the positioning of a destination in a competitive tourist market Hanna, 2022).

Brand awareness plays a key role in helping people decide what to buy in fields such as tourism by building up their familiarity and confidence in brands. Keller (2021) points out in marketing theory that strong awareness of a brand leads to customers preferring and becoming loyal to it because they feel confident choosing a known and trusted brand

(Keller ,2021). It works broadly, but is especially important in tourism, where reputation and image matter a lot next to the things people go to see. Dias and Cardoso (2017) as well as Irani and Rahimzhan (2021) note that when people become more aware of a brand, they develop stronger emotions and go to the place more often. In addition, according to Nengovhela (2020), post-pandemic, guaranteeing safety and quality has become especially important in destination branding and it affects the destination choice of people everywhere.

According to Nengovhela, (2020), in tourism, a destination is a geographic location attracting visitors for its natural, cultural, or recreational features, and destination brand awareness reflects how familiar travellers are with that place's brand and how easily they can recognize or recall it. Destination choice is the process by which travellers decide which place to visit among various options, with brand awareness playing a key role by shaping how destinations are perceived and evaluated (Nengovhela, 2020).

Brand awareness helps tourists in the tourism process by helping them consider and evaluate different locations and lower the risks of choosing somewhere new. As Mangali and Ortaleza (2021) note, it is the destinations that people can easily recognise and remember which often win people's trust and are chosen more regularly. overall brand awareness positively influences destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists. Building on Keller's (2003) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, which emphasizes that brand awareness is a key determinant of consumer choice, this hypothesis explores whether higher levels of brand awareness (including both brand recall and recognition) lead to a stronger intention to visit certain destinations. Work done in first-class countries for example, United states, UK etc has proven that emotional and cultural brand associations improve how appealing a destination is and boost loyalty to it (Dias & Cardoso, 2017; Irani & Rahimzhan, 2021). Rogerson and Rogerson (2021) say that household tourism in South Africa is mostly drawn to places like Cape Town and Durban because of their strong brand reputation. Although Steyn (2015) points out that it's difficult for small and unknown destinations to attract attention, so tourists are not always spread equally. According to Mkwizu (2018), advertisements and media highlight lesser-known areas which increase demand, but Rogerson and Rogerson (2021) say that having one recognisable brand is still rare in those areas. According to Elgin and Elveren (2024), making brands popular in different destinations helps achieve balanced economic growth and sustainable tourism.

In domestic tourism (Domestic tourism refers to the activities of residents travelling within their own country to destinations outside their usual environment for leisure, business, or other purposes, without crossing international borders (UNWTO, 2019; Statistics South Africa, 2023)) Gauteng province plays a vital role by being both the economic centre of

South Africa and a primary spot for tourists. According to Kankhuni (2020), how Gauteng residents travel has a major impact on South African tourism, so they are very important for branding campaigns. It is shown in Lui (2023) that being familiar with a destination encourages more Gauteng tourists to travel since the risk involved seems lower. According to Mangali and Ortaleza (2021) such groups tend to identify with emotional and cultural features of a brand which makes them prefer and remain loyal to a certain tourist destination. As explained by Nengovhela (2020), Gauteng tourists now pay more attention to travel brands that promise safety and quality. Since they have such big economic impact (most populated province in the country. Gauteng is home to 25-26% of the country's population, so naturally, the province would have the most tourists) and travel often, Gauteng tourists help set new trends for other parts of the country.

Brand Co-Creation and Stakeholder Engagement in Destination Branding

Brand co-creation means tourists, residents and many other stakeholders help form the identity of a destination in this joint process. As explained by Giannopoulos, Piha and Skourtis, involving locals and tourists in brand creation causes the brand to be more authentic, since it reflects actual life experiences instead of directed advertising (2021). Stoica et al. (2021) focus on how the involvement of people in storytelling builds a strong and appealing image of the place.

This approach helps to form a recognisable brand and helps fuel tourist loyalty and draw more tourists to the destination. As stated by Giannopoulos, Piha and Skourtis (2021), when brands are created by the public, they create a sense of friendship and personal links that encourage people to visit the business many times and spread good reviews. According to Mandagi and Centeno (2024), brands developed in this way also include social and cultural meanings, helping them compete better in the market. It enables the tourists to have a stronger attachment with the destination, and this contributes to local businesses and sustainable tourism development.

Brand co-creation is best applied in destinations that are rich in culture, and multiple languages are used. This means that working with many stakeholders helps to reduce the rejection of minority groups and boost brand trust (as described in case by Stoica et al. 2021). Shoukat et al. (2023) argue that the brands created by both locals and tourists contribute to the creation of local pride and presentation of visitors to the significance of the local culture. Mariapina and Della Lucia (2019) supplement the fact with the idea that engagement in community results in more significant feelings of connection which are significant to people who are interested in authentic experiences. Merrilees, Miller and Yakimova (2021) emphasise that when all people collaborate the quality and consistency of the service offered will increase and will satisfy the visitors better. To achieve honesty

in every activity of the company, Vandy (2018) observed that messages used by a company should always align with the values of the company and its stakeholders

Broader perspectives on brand awareness and destination choice

Globally, brand awareness plays a critical role in shaping tourists' destination preferences by reducing uncertainty and fostering trust before travel decisions are made (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021). Studies from Europe, Asia, and North America emphasise this effect. As an example, Dias and Cardoso (2017) emphasize that destination brand equity plays a crucial role in the choice of European tourists, and the power of brands stimulates appeals to emotions and loyalty. A study by Irani and Rahimizhian (2021) in Asia also showed that destination familiarity and positive word-of-mouth resulted in a decision on the part of international students, especially when these countries were well established like in Turkey and Cyprus. On the same note, studies conducted in the United States indicate that popular tourism brands appeal to repeat customers since they increase customer trust and reduce the perceived risk of travel (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021). Brand recognition and recall are some features of brand awareness, which is essential in making tourists make the right judgment in the selection of options (Rosaria et al., 2012). These global insights reveal how destination branding as a measure of competitiveness may distinguish a place within the global competition, focusing on distinctive culture and experience (Asseraf et al., 2020).

Nationally, South African tourism trends are distinctly brand dependent with the most advertised destinations of Cape Town and Durban getting most of the domestic travelling. Building on Keller's (2003) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, which emphasizes that brand awareness is a key determinant of consumer choice, this study examined whether higher levels of brand awareness (including both brand recall and recognition) lead to a stronger intention to visit certain destinations. Accordingly, the following hypothesis (H_1) was made based on the literature:

H₁: Overall brand awareness positively influences destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists.

Rogerson and Rogerson (2021) point out that such dominance is linked directly to the visibility and given identity of these cities that tend to overpower less famous or rural tourist destinations. This is backed by Steyn (2015) who laments that branding has failed to adequately promote smaller provinces thus leading to the unequal distribution of tourists. Mkwizu (2018) also discovered that with enhanced brand exposure by properly targeted television advertising, demand of under-promoted sites can be boosted considerably, but still, there is no consistent strategic branding. Elgin and Elveren (2024)

advocate the necessity of increasing the level of brand awareness to stimulate a sustainable economic growth in all regions. The absence of consolidated branding methods of new travel destinations makes them less attractive despite the country-wide incentives such as Shot Left (Videira, 2019). Such national-level experiences show that it is necessary to increase the presence of the brand throughout South Africa to provide the tourism industry with a new balance and diversity.

The emphasis upon Gauteng tourists is relevant because, the province is the largest (with approximately 15.83 million people) source of domestic tourism in South Africa (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021). Gauteng residents as per Kankhuni (2020) have been moving more than residents in any other province and what they select as destinations has a significant impact on the national tourism trend. The ability to choose familiar destinations at favourable prices is also a premium feature of the Gauteng tourism product and, in many ways, it is tied to brand recognition (Nengovhela, 2020). Place Branding Theory suggests that brand recall is a powerful tool in tourism marketing, as it triggers recognition of a place's brand without external prompts. This study therefore proposes:

H₂: Brand recall positively influences destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists.

According to Lui (2023), the familiarity with destination and emotional attachment to it raise the possibility of tourist visits within this segment, since they lower the uncertainty associated with traveling. Mangali and Ortaleza (2021) proceed by stating that culturally relevant, emotionally relatable branding increases the destination appeal to Gauteng tourists. It is necessary to understand the relative impact of brand awareness with regards to their travel behavior to advise ways of ensuring that it flows to areas that are not being known for e.g. use of tourism to prevent tourism. The study aims at filling the gaps in the effectiveness of branding and assists in the development of tourism that is more balanced between the regions through the examination of a section of the country, Gauteng, as a case group of tourists.

Destination image is the general perception and the mental picture, which tourists have about a place, influenced by the cognitive, affective and the experience features. It has been accused of affecting destination choice significantly by creating expectations regarding the quality and the nature of the experience one is likely to get in a particular destination (Van Dyk, 2018). Positive destination image improves perceived value, which is the analysis assessment in the benefits retrieved by the tourist concerning the expenditure and effort to go (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021). The conceptualization of perceived value relies not only on the real elements such as attractions and safety but

also on the emotional and cultural integrity of the setting (Dias & Cardoso, 2017; Ferguson, 2018). Destination image is dominated by digital media and social influences in Gauteng tourists leading to increased destination visibility and destination trust (Hoeanet, 2018; Shoukat et al., 2023). Together, a strong, favourable image and high perceived value reduce travel-related risks and increase the likelihood of destination choice, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021; Merrilees et al., 2021). Building on Brand Resonance Theory, it is suggested that a destination's brand image shaped by logos, campaigns, and other branding elements creates familiarity and trust, lowering perceived risks and influencing tourists' decisions. Hence:

H₃: Brand image positively influences destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists.

Furthermore, Place Branding Theory emphasises perceived risk as a crucial determinant in destination choice, proposing that destinations perceived as safer, more reliable, and well-branded are more likely to be selected. Accordingly:

H₄: Lower perceived risk positively influences destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists.

Gauteng-Based Domestic Tourists: Characteristics and Influence

Gauteng province is South Africa's economic hub, home to a large, urbanised population (aged 25 to 55 years) with a high propensity for domestic travel, making its residents a critical segment in the country's tourism sector as Parrock (2015) states. Travel behaviour of tourists residing in Gauteng are diverse and encompass those who frequently embark on day and weekend tours as well as annual vacations within the country of South Africa that are prompted by attitudes such as available income, accessibility, and the pursuit of leisure and cultural experiences (Mkansi, 2023). Videira (2019) noted that younger tourists particularly of Generation Y have been increasingly interested in cultural heritage and experiential tourism, illustrating changed tastes which link recreation with identity formation. However, older generations, who generally possess higher disposable income, also constitute an important segment of domestic tourists and often participate in more frequent and higher-value travel activities. Specific niche tourism, like military heritage tourism, has also highlighted an emerging interest among Gauteng residents indicating heterogeneous tourist motives and relation to history and culture (Venter, 2017). The relatively diverse travel behavior and interests described in this Section draw attention to the importance of Gauteng tourists for domestic tourism flows. Knowledge of these characteristics informs destination marketers how to design products and branding

strategies that cater to the unique preferences and travelling patterns of the Gauteng tourist, and it can make traditional and non-traditional South African places more appealing.

As Gauteng based day trip travellers have high purchasing power and frequent travel behaviour, influences on national tourism patterns such as the economic and seasonal viability of destinations in other parts of South Africa (SA) also depend on their tastes and preferences and personal travel considerations (Mkansi, 2023). Their choices determine not just the popularity of well-known urban nodes, but now increasingly of places that are less well known and have new cultural and recreational experiences (Jack, 2011). This influences the distribution of tourism income and flows of visitors to the provinces, hence also influencing regional development strategies (Videira, 2019). Gauteng-based tourist expenditure and travel mode preferences can be used as the basis for the development of tourism marketing strategies and infrastructure investments for regional growth strategies (Parrock 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic affected travel activities and behaviours, and it also illustrated the strength and flexibility of Gauteng travellers who opted for closer and safer travel destinations, after travel habits were interrupted (Nyika, David-Soobramoney & Nzimande, 2021).

Brand familiarity, image and perceived value significantly influence the destination choices of tourists from Gauteng Province, as it gives tourists a sense of comfort, it reduces perceived risks and it creates emotional connection to certain destinations (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). Social media as a channel media used by Gauteng tourists, also plays a significant role in the quick transmission of information about travels that affect the image of the destination and the quality of experience (Hoeanet, 2018). According to Ferguson (2018), the travel destination brand that conveys an authentic story that connects in meaningful and compelling ways, are welcome to the interest of this generation that prefers meaningful and culturally significant experience. Van Deventer and Shezi (2021) additionally point out that a key market for Gauteng visitors - namely the Generation Y consumer - is attracted to brands with distinct, relatable personalities consistent with their value systems and way of life. Moreover, Dias and Cardoso (2017) note that with strong standing-destination brand equity, tourists will most likely select a destination, implying the importance of branding in shaping Gauteng tourists' preference. These results support the assertion that successful brand awareness campaigns are needed to attract Gauteng tourists, more so when destination such as the lesser-known ones, whose visibility needs to be boosted to increase its competitive spirit.

In summary, Gauteng domestic tourists are an active group of travellers that can be identified as dynamic visitors with a high propensity to travel, wide range of interests, and

great economic relevance for the SA tourism industry (Mkansi, 2023; Videira, 2019). Their tastes and travel behaviours are significant contributors to domestic tourism patterns and consequent regional development outcomes (Jack, 2011). The recognition of destination Brand emerges as a basic feature norm in the determination of destinations from social media and targeted branding work, has made destination more appealing, as well as developing passion (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020; Hoeanet, 2018). The significance between variable relationship emanating from the Gauteng tourists and destination brand perception also indicates the need for marketing strategies which are customised to the brand equity to encourage the spread of tourism growth across the country. This perception is also in line with the purpose of the current study – which seeks to establish the influence that brand awareness has on the domestic destination choice of Gauteng tourists and should provide direction on how tourism can become more effective and inclusive when it comes to development strategies.

Destination Branding Strategies

Destinations use several practical marketing approaches to build brand awareness and stand out in a competitive tourism market. Developing a distinctive logo and catchy slogan helps create a memorable visual and verbal identity that tourists can easily recognise and recall (Kuseni, van Aardt, & Boshoff, 2021). Positioning strategies focus on highlighting unique cultural, natural, or experiential aspects of the destination to differentiate it from competitors and appeal to specific tourist segments (Dias & Cardoso, 2017). In the age of the internet, it is essential to use the power of regions and visible social media presence to be able to reach those who are interested in visiting that place; the tools which help the most are Instagram and Facebook as they allow destinations to communicate with potential visitors personally, deliver the genuine accounts, and utilise user-generated content to increase exposure and emotional appeal (Hoeanet, 2018; Mandagi & Centeno, 2024). Otherwise, cooperating through co-branding with other local companies or popular events enables effective utilisation of respective audiences and increases credibility, extending the reach beyond what could be done through single-power campaigns (Giannopoulos, Piha, & Skourtis, 2021). All these strategies aid destinations in the development of competitive, relatable and dynamic brands.

Table 2.1: Destination Branding Models

Model Name	Description	Key Features
Destination Branding Model	This model is concerned with generating a destination brand (calling it distinct and consistent) through incorporation of domestic cultural, physical and social features. It emphasises the cooperation of the stakeholders	- Collaborative stakeholder involvement - Consistent messaging

	to realise authenticity and consistent communication that enhances the competitiveness of the destination (Kuseni, van Aardt, & Boshoff, 2021).	- Focus on local identity integration
Place Branding Theory	The Place Branding Theory views places as cultural, economic, political and physical entities competing not only in attracting tourists but also investments and cultural establishment. It emphasises the need of multi-dimensional branding that consists of economic, social, and cultural elements, and governance, and community connectedness to true place identities (Videira, 2019).	- Multi-dimensional branding (economic, social, cultural) - Participatory governance - Managing competing narratives
Experience Economy Theory	The theory stresses that destinations ought to provide unique experiences that are memorable and immersive in such a way that the tourist must undergo emotions and sensor perception. It proposes the co-creating of these experiences via events, regional culture and interactive interaction and needs innovation and the investment of infrastructure (Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2015)	- Focus on emotional and sensory experiences - Co-creation with tourists - Requires innovation and infrastructure
Brand Resonance Model	Brand Resonance Model centres on building strong emotional and psychological connections between tourists and destinations. High brand resonance fosters loyalty, advocacy, and repeat visits through identity congruence and trust (Rojas-Méndez, Parasuraman, & Papadopoulos, 2019).	- Emotional engagement and loyalty - Identity congruence - Long-term relationship building
Service-Dominant Logic (SDL)	SDL takes the perspective of branding tour in a free-flowing manner with the tourists, local populations, and businesses as co-creators of the service ecosystem. It emphasises the consideration of stakeholders and value co-production to give rise to real, customised destination brands (Sharma, Altinay, & Neapolitan, 2021).	- Co-creation of value - Dynamic stakeholder networks - Emphasis on governance for brand coherence

Relevant theories

Place Branding Theory

Place Branding Theory holds that places are involved in competition for tourists, investors, residents and cultural status. It adds economic, social and cultural approaches to marketing, highlighting that a place's identity is formed through joint efforts by government, local communities and businesses (Videira, 2019). Using this process preserves the local community's identity and tells all its storeys which is most important where many cultures or backgrounds meet (Manhas, Manrai, & Manrai, 2016). When managers treat the brand as a combination of reputation, shape of the area and community relations, the theory promotes community development and a strong sense of belonging among people. By following a holistic approach, the area develops a well-known image that attracts a wide variety of travellers, not just those who see advertising.

Through Place Branding Theory, organisations can cultivate how tourists view and feel about a location which affects where they choose to go. Such a brand with genuine cultural and social aspects, as well as with diversity and governance, usually helps to form positive feelings and confidence among travellers, making travel decisions seem safer (Stoica et al., 2021). When stake holders are involved in brand development the destination will appear more organised and believable by the tourists and therefore more attractive and easier to remember. In cities or regions where there are numerous stories, inclusivity in branding would enable them to get a natural and authentic sense that will appeal to the travellers seeking authenticity. Places that comply with the Place Branding Theory, in turn, are more likely to contribute to the decision of people who will experience the place as both logical and emotional (Videira, 2019).

Experience Economy Theory

Experience Economy Theory is the belief that although people are not as interested in purchasing products and services, they focus more on those experiences that can give them a lasting ideal (Pine, Gilmore, 1999). The discussion of this theory in tourism implies the focus on emotional and sensual experiences, making visits extraordinary and contributing to why every tourist will visit a particular place. The primary cause of such a theory is to consider marketing as a way of attaining good experiences to the visitors, whether in form of organising festivals, guided tours or ensuring that tourists can communicate to locals (Bakhshayesh, Shafiee, & Kazemi, 2021). In this strategy, it is understood that tourists want genuine and personal experiences, and thus destinations should remain inventive and modernise their facilities to achieve the above experiences

(Videira, 2019). Using this method places are identified to have special and enjoyable alternatives that make travellers not run away

Experience Economy Theory impacts which destinations tourists prefer by changing how they view the place's value and uniqueness. If a place lets people take part in personalised activities that affect them both inside and out, they tend to value it higher and think more positively about it than plain sites (Ferguson, 2018). When people feel involved emotionally, they believe they had better and more personal experiences which helps them overcome the usual worries and doubts about travel (Giannopoulos, Piha, & Skourtis, 2021). For places hoping to draw younger or culturally interested industries, the theory is especially helpful as these tourists choose to participate actively rather than watch from the side. Emphasising experiences helps destinations influence visitors by providing moments that attract both mind and heart (Bakhshayesh et al., 2021).

Brand Resonance Model

The Brand Resonance Model, as explained by Keller in 2001, outlined the process that leads brands to gain the trust and loyalty of customers. The model stresses strengthening the emotional and mental bond between tourists and destinations, aiming for involvement, closeness and support for promotion. This model guides places in choosing brand strategies that support return visits, make guests loyal and lead to good publicity for the company. This model works best when destinations try to turn their visitors into firm supporters by making them relate closely to what a place stands for (Dias & Cardoso, 2017). Emphasising emotion in their image lets destinations stand out in crowded markets and stay important as what travellers look for shifts.

The Brand Resonance Model increases the role of emotion and experience when tourists decide where to visit. A strong brand resonance with tourists often leads to them trusting the place, perceiving it as more valuable and being loyal which influences them to plan further holiday trips there (Kuseni, van Aardt, & Boshoff, 2021). It also strengthens tourists' desire to suggest the place to others which increases the popularity of the brand. This method is highly successful with people coming back and with visitors searching for experiences that confirm their identity. Through brand resonance, destinations attract tourists and develop lasting relationships that help visitors want to come back and get involved in tourism (Dias & Cardoso, 2017). For this reason, this type of approach displays the effect of both rational and emotional motivation for choosing a place to visit, keeping the brand's power over travellers strong.

Service-Dominant Logic

Service-Dominant Logic or SDL, developed by Vargo and Lusch in 2004, changes

marketing to include services and highlights the co-creation of value by tourists, the community, businesses and government working together (Giannopoulos, Piha, & Skourtis, 2021). This theory reveals that a place's brand is formed over time through connexions and activities between the key stakeholders. SDL is meant to help destinations become more authentic, customised and responsive by involving various actors and making improvements through ongoing dialogue (Mandagi & Centeno, 2024). Thanks to SDL, destinations can create tough brands that change with tourist expectations and market trends, thanks to teamwork (Merrilees, Miller, & Yakimova, 2021). SDL achieves this by including people from the community and business owners which produces an authentic brand image that helps stand out in a competitive experience-driven tourism industry (Shoukat et al., 2023).

SDL makes tourists feel part of shaping their travels which leads to a better connexion with the place they are visiting (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Being involved in this way increases the worth visitors see in a company, as it helps them bond through unique experiences and sharing online, forming trust and respect (Merrilees et al., 2021). For places interested in these types of tourists, the theory is key, as such travellers look for genuine interactions and honest experiences (Mandagi & Centeno, 2024). Moreover, engaging with stakeholders through an SDL programme leads to tourists and residents working together, so travellers become more loyal, provide positive feedback and wish to return to the destination (Shoukat et al., 2023). Therefore, SDL offers a strong method for destinations to influence people's choices by including community, personalisation and joint destination choice in their marketing activities.

Application and critique of these theories in Gauteng tourism

Kuseni et al. (2021) observe that while Gauteng's diverse tourism assets reflect elements of the Destination Branding Model, fragmented stakeholder involvement limits a unified brand identity. Videira (2019) further states that the multicultural nature of Gauteng demonstrates that Place Branding Theory and its notion of inclusivity are especially pertinent - given that competing narratives from communities' counter brand coherences. According to Ferguson (2018), Experience Economy Theory is aligned with the urban and cultural tourism aspirations of Gauteng, although there are still challenges of variable quality of experience and infrastructure deficiencies. Dias and Cardoso (2017) argue that brand resonance objectives are thwarted by fragmentation of messaging and by feeble combination of the stakeholders, restricting emotional bonds with the tourists. Giannopoulos, Piha, and Skourtis (2021) underscore the promise of the mechanisms of co-creation proposed by service-dominant logic in Gauteng but show the necessity of

stronger governance to manage the competitive and cooperative interests of diverse stakeholders.

Van Dyk (2018) critically highlights that there are inconsistencies between traditional and contemporary media branding strategies in Gauteng which reduces the overall impact of the branding strategies. Stoica et al. (2021) identify untapped storytelling and participatory branding opportunities that diminish genuine engagement. The authors argue that the socio-economic dynamics of Gauteng require destination branding strategies that are flexible and adaptive (Mandagi & Centeno, 2024). Tourism experiences and participatory governance can contribute to building resilient destination brands in such environments (Mandagi & Centeno, 2024). Shoukat et al. (2023) highlight the need for targeted tourism development in Gauteng through coordinated stakeholder collaboration, investment in innovative visitor experiences, and consistent branding communication to strengthen the province's competitiveness in sustainable tourism.

Consumer Perceptions, Motivations, and Decision-Making of Gauteng Tourists

Tourism behaviour in Gauteng is shaped by a combination of socio-economic conditions, travel motivations, and destination perceptions. Scholars argue that tourism branding strategies in Gauteng need to be flexible and responsive to changing socio-economic conditions in order to remain competitive (Mandagi & Centeno, 2024). In this context, Shoukat et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of coordinated stakeholder collaboration, investment in innovative tourism experiences, and consistent branding communication to strengthen Gauteng's competitiveness in sustainable tourism. Research further shows that tourist motivations in Gauteng are often driven by affective needs such as novelty, relaxation, and connection with nature. Muzeza, Khunou and Hermann (2018) found that visitors to Gauteng's provincial nature reserves are particularly motivated by experiences that allow them to reconnect with natural environments. Similarly, Gounden (2021) explains that such motivational factors influence destination choice behaviour within the broader context of domestic tourism in South Africa. These motivations are especially relevant given the diversity of tourist demographics and travel preferences among Gauteng residents. Understanding these motivations therefore helps explain how internal travel motives and destination attributes shape tourists' decision-making processes.

The Destination image model fundamentally helps to make sense of how Gauteng tourists develop perceptions that strongly determine their choice to travel. Van Dyk (2018) established that the key sources influencing the tourism image among the younger generation of Gauteng residents are the contemporary digital media platforms such as social media and travel blogs. Younger travellers are important because they

represent a large, active segment of domestic tourists in Gauteng, frequently using social media and digital platforms that strongly influence destination awareness, perceptions, and travel decision-making. His study revealed that dynamic and interactive Webpages increase favourable destination perceptions which in turn increase a tourist's choice to travel. Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa (2018) depicted how mega sports events contribute to the positive positioning of South Africa and its provinces in the minds of local and international tourists through increased exposure and emotional connection, increasing the demand for tourism. Moreover, Shoukat et al. (2023) states that the stakeholder participation helps to act as mediator between the destination image and the tourist behavior and the active involvement of the community in business would generate mutual trust and credibility. As a result, Gauteng's tourists' travel decisions are heavily influenced by the way in which the destination manages its image and handles the media, as well as its stakeholders. This study is therefore in line with the research interest in determining the processes that underline the way in which brand image influences destination preference among Gauteng's domestic tourists.

Cognitive-Affective Models contribute towards an understanding of the complex balance of reason and emotion in Gauteng tourists' destination choice. Merrilees, Miller, and Yakimovaousand (2021) posit that cognitive elements, such as safety, ease, and cost, are the important constructs in judging the desirability of a destination, but affective experiences, emotional bonds and unique experiences are of the same importance in determining loyalty and intention to visit (Merrilees et al., 2021; Stoica et al., 2021). Merrilees et al. (2021) and Stoica et al. (2021) suggested that when the internal stakeholders such as local businesses and communities' engagement levels in destination branding are higher, both the cognitive evaluation and emotional appeal towards the destination tend to be stronger. Stoica et al. (2021) also argue the need for co-created place brands that resonate with tourists at both an intellectual and an emotional level, resulting in a more sustainable brand loyalty. Mariapina and Della Lucia (2019) also emphasise that stakeholder collaboration is important in achieving a balance between these cognitive-affective facets which can help to generate authentic destination identities. Like the logic of the two dimensions approach, from a practical convenience vs emotional satisfaction perspective of Gauteng visitors, this model theoretically draws attention to the importance of brand strategy that appeals simultaneously to holistic travel motivators and is in line with the purpose of the present study, which involved examining the impact of brand awareness on perceptions and destination choice.

Social Influence Theory is used to explain how social networks (e.g. friends, family, and online communities) influence the travel decisions of tourists. According to Giannopoulos, Piha, and Skourtis (2021), social sharing and co-creation augment destination brand awareness by tapping tourists' social capital, which implies that peer-

to-peer recommendations will be extremely effective. Van Dyk (2018) discovered that Gauteng tourists depend heavily on social media reviews and word of mouth when it comes to deciding where to travel as an important role is played by trusted sources in choosing a destination. Kruger and Saayman (2019) state that shared experiences of festivals and other events provide a sense of community, promoting loyalty and Word-of-Mouth Promotion (WOMP), which in turn contribute to strengthening destination brands. Mandagi and Centeno (2024) emphasise that having efficient stakeholder engagement plans that leverage on social influence can improve brand authenticity and advocacy. These findings illustrate that for Gauteng tourists, social influence plays a role in travel motivation and thus it is crucial in destination branding strategies, which is the focus of this work.

Consumer perceptions and emotional attachment towards destinations are cultivated experiences that occur as part of the media and stakeholder engagement experience for Gauteng tourists (Stoica et al., 2021). Van Dyk (2018) points out the way that contemporary digital storytelling and social media contribute to the creation of vivid, relatable destination images that resonate emotionally with Gauteng residents. Hemmonsbeey and Tichaawa (2018) stress that megaevents such as sporting events do elicit emotional connection between destination and visitor and thus contribute to memory about the destination as well as visitor loyalty. According to Stoica et al. (2021) argue, co-creation in place branding contributes to creating greater authenticity and stronger emotional relations by also including tourists and local communities in the process of creating destination narratives. Shoukat et al. (2023) also note that engaged stakeholders become brand advocates actively reinforcing the good image after the life of brands through enduring interaction (Van Dyk, 2018; Hemmonsbeey & Tichaawa, 2018). These findings demonstrate that branding efforts aimed at Gauteng tourists should develop cognitive trust and emotional appeal as co-components of successful persuasive travel decisions.

The findings from Merrilees et al., (2021) suggest that branding is an important factor that influences the perceptions and travel decisions of Gauteng tourists through the influence of both rational appraisals and emotional bonds. Merrilees, Miller and Yakimova (2021) show that active involvement of the stakeholders and a unified brand message contribute to trust and credibility, two important factors that promote destination visitation and repeat visitation. Giannopoulos, Piha, and Skourtis (2021) emphasise the co-creation of branding strategies involving tourists at a social as well as digital level which will help in increasing the brand reachability and emotional appeal. They also claim that recognisable brand stories, established because of stakeholder engagement, increase loyalty and can play a key role in the destination selection process. For visitors to Gauteng, working in a dynamic and competitive tourism industry, these branding

dimensions are important in terms of their awareness, attitudes and consumption intentions (Merrilees et al., 2021; Giannopoulos et al., 2021). This also brings us to the significance of strategic branding interventions, a central element in this research, as a study of the effect of brand awareness on destination choice among Gauteng residents.

Branding for competitive advantage and destination visibility

Globally, brand equity is recognised as a crucial competitive asset that significantly influences the success of tourism destinations in increasingly crowded markets (Merrilees et al., 2021). Strong destination brands help differentiate locations from competitors and shape tourists' perceptions of quality, value, and experience. According to Kuseni et al. (2021), building brand equity requires the development of a positive brand image, consistent communication, and emotional connections that guide tourists' preferences. When destinations establish strong brand equity, they are able to attract more visitors, command higher prices, and generate greater economic benefits (Merrilees et al., 2021). In addition, strong destination brands encourage repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth promotion, which further strengthens long-term competitiveness (Merrilees, Miller & Yakimova, 2021). However, maintaining brand equity requires continuous collaboration among stakeholders and ongoing adaptation to changing consumer preferences and market trends.

At a national level, destination branding has become increasingly important in promoting balanced tourism development. Many countries are now using branding strategies to promote lesser-known destinations and reduce pressure on overcrowded tourism hubs (Mandagi & Centeno, 2024). Through strategic branding, emerging or underdeveloped destinations can reposition themselves by emphasising unique cultural, natural, or experiential attributes that distinguish them from well-established locations (Videira, 2019). Targeted branding initiatives can also increase destination awareness among tourists seeking alternative experiences away from traditional mass tourism attractions (Giannopoulos, Piha & Skourtis, 2021). Furthermore, involving local communities in destination storytelling helps strengthen authenticity and competitiveness in both domestic and international tourism markets (Stoica et al., 2021). As a result, branding strategies can support a more balanced distribution of tourism flows while contributing to sustainable regional development (Mandagi & Centeno, 2024).

In the South African context, branding remains essential for increasing the visibility and competitiveness of destinations. However, many regions face challenges in developing strong destination brands due to limited resources, fragmented marketing strategies, and insufficient coordination among stakeholders (Mandagi & Centeno, 2024). When tourism organisations fail to collaborate effectively, branding efforts may become inconsistent,

creating confusion among potential tourists and weakening the overall destination image. Van Dyk (2018) notes that the lack of integration between traditional marketing approaches and modern digital platforms further complicates the development of coherent destination brands. In addition, structural challenges such as financial constraints, political factors, and infrastructure limitations can hinder investment in destination branding beyond major tourism centres (Hemmonsbeey & Tichaawa, 2018). Differences in stakeholder priorities may also lead to fragmented branding strategies that weaken the authenticity and credibility of a destination's identity (Shoukat et al., 2023).

Within Gauteng specifically, effective branding strategies are essential to strengthen destination visibility and competitiveness within the broader South African tourism landscape. As one of the country's main economic and travel hubs, Gauteng destinations compete both locally and internationally for tourist attention. To remain competitive, destinations in the province must adopt inclusive, adaptable, and innovative branding strategies that reflect the region's diverse cultural and tourism offerings. Engaging stakeholders in collaborative branding initiatives helps ensure that destination narratives remain authentic and credible while maintaining consistent messaging across marketing platforms (Merrilees, Miller & Yakimova, 2021). In addition, digital media and social sharing have become increasingly important tools for reaching domestic tourist markets, particularly younger travellers who rely heavily on online information when selecting destinations (Mandagi & Centeno, 2024). When effectively implemented, coordinated branding strategies can help lesser-known destinations in Gauteng gain visibility, compete with established tourism hubs, and contribute to more balanced and sustainable tourism development across the region.

Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite growing research on destination branding, significant gaps remain in understanding how brand awareness specifically influences the destination choice of Gauteng-based tourists (Tasci, 2021; Rather, 2021). Details on how carefully chosen brands influence this key group's travel decisions are lacking, since this group's likes and dislikes set the trends in travel (Videira, 2019). In addition, little research looks at the connection between a brand and other factors impacting Gauteng tourists' decisions, leading to a gap in our understanding of their travel motivations (Van Dyk, 2018; Kuseni et al., 2021). No specific evidence exists about Gauteng tourists and how they choose destinations which is why this study is examining how their awareness of brands indirectly influences their decisions to visit certain places in South Africa.

One more challenge is that brands do not give adequate attention to promoting South African destinations that are rarely visited. Populated areas like Cape Town and Durban

are easily visible because they are supported by known brands and much marketing, but many less known and up and coming destinations have difficulty being seen (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). Branding strategies to help develop such regions have not been discussed in detail. Furthermore, studies usually miss the difficulties these places experience, like being short on resources, having around-competing stakeholders and underuse of infrastructure (Kuseni et al., 2021). For this reason, we need research that creates useful branding frameworks for improved tourism across all parts of South Africa.

In addition, South Africa's domestic tourism sector has not explored how working together with locals can benefit destination branding. Many global experts now see co-creation as key to making brands trustworthy and meaningful, but its benefits have not reached Gauteng tourists yet (Giannopoulos et al., 2021; Stoica et al., 2021). Most studies so far concentrate on stakeholder participation in theory instead of observing how tourists and communities build destination brands in actual practice. Because of this gap, it is hard to understand the ways co-creation shapes loyalty to tourism and a destination's appeal within a certain location (Merrilees et al., 2021). Most studies have not addressed the nature of branding co-creation or its results within South Africa and its numerous cultures, which is important in ensuring equitable and sustainable branding (Shoukat et al., 2023). As a means of addressing this gap, the paper has investigated the role that co-creation plays in shaping the perceptions of the Gauteng-based tourists about travel that assists in enhancing the success of any branding strategy.

Destination branding is an essential part of competitiveness because it determines the impression, credibility and loyalty of tourists (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021). Most of the South African regions are not being promoted as provinces such as the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal are well-known (Ezeuduji et al., 2016). It is established in literature that brand awareness and recall have a role in destination consideration, as perceived risk is likely to discourage travelling to unexplored locations, and presence of positive brand image breeds confidence and loyalty (Dias and Cardoso, 2017; Kladou et al., 2017). Nevertheless, there is limited literature on how these factors are impacting domestic travellers on the Gauteng, the highest source of tourism to South Africa (Nengovhela, 2020), hence the gap that this study aims to fill.

Chapter Summary

With a literature review, the multi-dimensional application of the brand awareness in determining the destination preference of the domestic tourist in Gauteng has been critically revealing. It also noted that reputation was one of the strongest factors that determined whether visitors would come back and the competence of any vacation facility. The reviewings noted that the turn to the branding strategies can be applied to

make tourism development more equitable and sustainable by promoting tourism destinations outside the main cities (Videira, 2019; Giannopoulos, Piha, & Skourtis, 2021). Moreover, it identified that the assembling of stakeholders is crucial towards the creation of brands that will affect people emotionally and make a destination more desirable to visit. The utilisation of the Push and Pull Theory and the Destination Image Model helped the study understand the factors that guided the tourists and the process of their destination choice on a deeper level. These insights show the importance of using focused approaches to deal with destination branding considering different regions in Gauteng, each of which had varying tourist requirements. According to what the insights reveal, the literature review places a clear way forward of the research by indicating gaps that are still there in the approach of understanding what Gauteng tourists do and see and how less accessed regions of South Africa have with setting their brands (Van Dyk, 2018; Kuseni et al., 2021).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlined the research methodology used to investigate the impact of brand awareness on destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists. It began by explaining the research paradigm, specifically the positivist approach, which supported the quantitative nature of the study. The chapter also described the research design, including the cross-sectional survey and the purposive quota sampling technique used to obtain a representative sample. It further explained how the research instrument was developed, namely a structured questionnaire designed to measure the key dimensions of brand awareness, including brand recall, perceived risk, and brand image. In addition, the chapter described the data collection procedure, where online surveys were distributed to Gauteng residents through widely used social media platforms. Finally, it outlined the data analysis methods used to test the study's hypotheses, including descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. Overall, the chapter provided the methodological foundation for analysing the relationship between brand awareness and destination choice, thereby supporting the overall objectives of the study.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study adopted a positivist approach, which is grounded in the belief that reality is objective and can be measured through quantifiable data (Bakhshayesh et al., 2021). Positivism sought to identify descriptive responses among variables that can be arrived

at through statistical analysis, and it is quite appropriate in this case of brand awareness and destination choice (Bakhshayesh et al., 2021). The positivism paradigm poses the existence of the phenomena of research (here, it is the effect of brand awareness on the destination choice) outside of human perception and determines it by measurable constructs (Dias & Cardoso, 2017). Such a strategy allowed collecting empirical data that undergoes a thorough statistical analysis to draw evidential trends that are generalisable to a broader spectrum of participants (Ezeuduji, November & Haupt, 2016).

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology refers to the study of the nature of reality and what exists (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). In research, it concerns what researchers believe about the nature of reality and whether it can be objectively observed or is shaped by human perceptions and experiences (Bakhshayesh et al., 2021). The ontological premise of the study is that tourist activity (especially destination choice) is an objective phenomenon, which can be viewed within the context of brand knowledge and travel motivations. This presupposition corresponds to positivism, according to which the truth is independent of human consciousness and can be empirically studied (Bornmark, Goransson & Svensson, 2016). Within the context, therefore, the study works on the assumption that the choices of tourists concerning their desire to visit certain destination places are influenced by some identifiable and quantifiable variables such as brand recall, recognition, and image (Asseraf et al., 2020). By emphasising objective-based brand awareness and destination choice, the research hypothesises that tourist destination choice is not a random process but rather existing patterns which can be learned and quantified.

3.2.2 Epistemology

In an epistemological sense, knowledge of this study is valid when it is based on empirical evidence which can be observed, tested, and proven by measuring and testing it statistically (Neuman, 2014). Positivist epistemology holds that knowledge is found directly through observation and measurable events, and denies subjective interpretation (Bakhshayesh et al., 2021). Information of 271 tourists based in Gauteng was collected using a structured questionnaire and responses was quantitative in nature as they express their perceptions regarding their feeling about their brand awareness and the preferences they make regarding their destinations. This is then followed by analysing the data, using the tool of statistics, which entails regression models to address the research question to provide the answers to the research hypothesis and identify the connection between the key variables. Statistical methods ensured that the created knowledge becomes objective, replicable, and generalisable to another population of tourists based in Gauteng (Desfiandi & Singagerda, 2019). The above statistical tools

used effectively helped the study surpass subjective value judgment and focus on physical data which is observable and can be harnessed to draw conclusions with regards to the importance of brand awareness in destination choice.

The testing of any given existent theory about destination branding such as Brand Equity Model advanced by Keller and Destination Image Model was possible in the posited positivist epistemology in which the intended undertaking of the study was taken. The surveys that were prepared based on these frameworks contain measurable constructs in terms of the brand recall, perceived risk, and brand image (Dias & Cardoso, 2017). Through these defined frameworks, the study is compatible with the positivism tradition of empirical testing theories to produce verified outcomes. Additionally, the research leverages established scales and approaches to gathering and synthesising data, which guarantees its reliability and validity, meaning that the findings could be used in the context of Gauteng tourists, as well as in other regions of South Africa (Elgin & Elveren, 2024).

This study examines brand awareness as a determinant of destination choice using systematic measurement and analysis within a positivist epistemological approach (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The research questions assumed that it is measurable and predictable how brand awareness can affect the decisions of tourists and create hypotheses which can be tested statistically (Giannopoulos, Piha & Skourtis, 2021). The study itself can thus be expected to have a contribution to the overall body of knowledge on tourism destination branding by offering empirical data on the place of brand awareness in the context of the destination choices made by travellers, especially focusing on the domestic tourism of South African context (Kuseni, van Aardt & Boshoff, 2021).

3.3 Research Design

Research design is an important element of any study because it provides a blueprint of how the study is conducted, the kind of data that it is to capture and the way the data is to be analysed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research used a quantitative research design to establish the correlation between destination choice and brand awareness in Gauteng based domestic tourists (Bryman, 2016). Quantitative methods can be used because numerical data can be collected and analysed systematically; thus, it is possible to formulate and test hypothesis regarding the relationship between brand awareness and tourists' destination choice (Hair et al., 2015). Besides, the research operated on deductive reasoning and cross-sectional research design to determine the pertinent variables affecting travel decisions (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

3.3.1 Quantitative Research

The research was conducted in accordance with quantitative research design that is often applied in social sciences to analyse the relations between variables, gathering the data that can be measured and undergo statistic tests (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative research can be addressed to investigate patterns, behavior, and relations within large populations using data of a numerical nature which is analysed mathematically (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Brand awareness and destination choice were the main variables in focus in this study. The quantitative research enables the objective and definite measurement of the effects of brand awareness (such as brand recall, recognition, and image) of the intention of the tourists to visit certain destinations (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Destination choice is greatly influenced by brand awareness because it determines how tourists view a destination mentally and how they feel about it emotionally (Bakhshayesh et al., 2021). High brand awareness may also help to diminish the perceived risk related to destinations that tourists do not visit to boost the subsequent tourist visitation to a particular destination (Dias & Cardoso, 2017). The correlation between the variables was explored by using structured questionnaires that aimed at capturing the perception of the respondents of various destination brands and their visibility to the attitudes of respondents towards various destinations depending on the image of the brand of the destination.

A quantitative design meant that the study would be able to give sounder results that would apply in more situations in finding the relationship between brand awareness and destination choice (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). It theorised that by gauging the respondents in Likert-scale questions, it is possible to quantify those aspects that are rather abstractive in nature like brand recollection and image that cannot be easily measured with the support of qualitative methodology (Desfiandi & Singagerda, 2019). Since the research was carried out on a sample of 271 respondents, the quantitative research method allowed carrying out statistical analysis that may reveal patterns, trends, and correlations in the data, which may be difficult to acquire using a purely qualitative approach.

3.3.2 Deductive Reasoning

One crucial feature in the research design is the deductive reasoning whereby they use a set, or proven theories and hypotheses are tested based on facts (Bryman, 2016). Deductive reasoning works as the opposite of Inductive one; it starts with an abstract idea or theory and shifts to observations (Dias & Cardoso, 2017). Destination branding

and brand awareness is another concept that can be discovered as the theoretical source of hypotheses of the research. Specifically, the study is founded on the branding equity model developed by Keller and Destination Image Model created by him, according to which brand recall, recognition, and image can shape the choice of the tourist to a great extent (Bakhshayesh et al., 2021; Dias & Cardoso, 2017).

The point of deductive research is that out of the given theoretical understanding one creates the hypotheses, which can subsequently be tested empirically. As an illustration, in this paper some of the hypotheses could be the following: “overall brand awareness positively influences destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists.” This hypothesis is informed by the fact that earlier studies have revealed brand awareness as being one of the determinants of destination choice (Ezeuduji, November & Haupt, 2016). The data obtained during the conducted structured surveys is used to test the hypothesis by assessing brand awareness rates of different destinations and related destination choice of tourists. Through conducting these hypotheses, in case they become true, the study confirmed the existing relationship between brand awareness and destination choice and was added to the available knowledge on the subject.

There is a good fit between this form of study and deductive reasoning since it would be possible to have predetermined theories and frameworks that was used as the guiding principles in this form of study (Ali, Zakuan, & Basri, 2020). It is with the established concepts that the study may test their applicability on Gauteng-based tourists and domestic tourism in South Africa. Additionally, deductive reasoning aids in finding out variables that can be numerically quantificational, including brand recall, brand recognition, and destination choice, which was analysed utilising statistics (Giannopoulos, Piha & Skourtis, 2021). This model made the research based on previously done work as well as challenging new concepts or using already developed theories to a novel situation.

3.3.3 Cross-Sectional Design

This study used a cross-sectional design, which implied that data was gathered at a given moment to give an overview of the parameters that affect destination choice among the tourist of Gauteng (Dias & Cardoso, 2017). Cross-sectional design is very convenient when it is necessary to study the relationships between variables and identify how these variables are interconnected in a particular period (Bornmark, Gorransson & Svensson, 2016). This design was enabling the research to collect information effectively on a wide base of tourists and analyse how the awareness of the brand used affects their decision on destinations in a relatively short time.

Cross-sectional designs are non-experimental research designs where the data is taken once at a particular time, and no follow-ups are conducted to observe the relationship between variables (Desfiandi & Singagerda, 2019). In the undertaking, the data collection was done by way of administering structured surveys on subjects with a population of 271 people who carried all the qualifications of the study as residents of the Gauteng and having just travelled or indulgent plans to travel domestically within twelve months. This survey evaluated brand awareness using different dimensions, including brand recall and image, and the general brand of the different South African tourist destinations (Hair et al., 2015). An analysis of these responses was done to give the degree to which these elements of brand awareness have a bearing on the probability of a destination choice.

The strengths of using a cross-sectional study are that it gives a complete picture of the association between brand awareness and destination choice, and it does not require longitudinal collection of data, a process which can also be costly and demanding of resources (Desfiandi & Singagerda, 2019). Capturing the data at one time enables the study to rapidly determine how tourists perceive various destinations and how likely they are to visit them based on their familiarity with brands related to those destinations (Bakhshayesh et al., 2021). The given approach is especially applicable in research on tourism where the process of destination choice can be affected by short-term conditions, like the recent marketing campaign or the presence of information on the digital platform (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021).

Although cross-sectional designs are better suited to the purpose of measuring the prevalence of attitudes or behaviours at a given point in time, it should be noted that they do not allow us to understand causality (Desfiandi & Singagerda, 2019). The research can conclude that brand awareness and destination choice are correlated, but it cannot conclusively say that the former contributes causally to the latter (Kuseni, van Aardt & Boshoff, 2021).

3.4 Population and Sampling

Population and sampling are the primary aspects of any research design that determine the extent to which the results of the research may be generalised and whether the research was long-lived. This part elaborates the target population, sampling technique and sample size to be used in this project evaluating the correlation between awareness of brand identity and destination choice of the domestic tourists within Gauteng.

3.4.1 Target Population

The study population is the domestic tourists based within Gauteng and have the intention of traveling within South Africa or have travelled within the country during the

past 12 months. Being the economic centre of South Africa, Gauteng is a large portion of the domestic tourism market of the country, with a heterogeneous population that actively participates in leisure and business-related travel (Ezeuduji, November & Haupt, 2016). The study of the behavior and preferences of Gauteng tourists is important because the traveling choices of this group have a significant impact on the national tourism trends especially in less visited destinations (Desfiandi & Singagerda, 2019).

This population was chosen as people in such group have prior or intended domestic travel experience, which means that they are more likely to offer the relevant information on the factors how they make their destination choice (Desfiandi & Singagerda, 2019). The hypothesis reflects those previous travellers, and potential future travellers have distinct favourites and are likely to base their preferences on brand recognition, which matches the research purpose of studying the factors that determine the destination choice brand familiarity (Dias & Cardoso, 2017).

The inclusion criteria for participants are as follows:

1. Age requirement: Participants had to be 18 years or older to ensure they were able to provide informed consent.
2. Gauteng residency: Participants had to be current residents of Gauteng Province, South Africa, meaning individuals who live and are primarily based in the province at the time of completing the survey.
3. Domestic travel experience: Participants had to have travelled within South Africa for leisure or business purposes in the past 12 months or have plans to undertake such travel within the next 12 months. This ensured that respondents were familiar with domestic tourism dynamics and able to provide relevant insights into destination choice.

3.4.2 Sampling Method

A purposive/snowball sample was used in order to come up with a relevant and targeted sample. Purposive and snowball sampling were used in this study, as these sampling techniques are commonly applied in tourism and social science research when the target population is specific and participants can assist in identifying other potential respondents within the same population group (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). The sample was carefully chosen among social media networks that are publicly available, such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp profiles devoted to domestic travels. The participants were invited to participate only after traveling within the last 12 months or intended to travel in the last 12 months which ensured that the sample was directly relevant in relation to the objectives of the study.

Demographic data including age, gender, and income were gathered using the survey to know more about the participants. This enabled the researcher to keep track of the sample composition in real time and have proportionality among the various segments of the population. As an illustration, younger and older tourists may have a difference in terms of their reaction to brand awareness and that income levels may play a role as a destination selection. The purposive selection with the help of these features allowed the study to represent the diversity of domestic tourists in South Africa and increase the validity and meaningfulness of the results.

In this research, the researcher used purposive sampling, whereby the respondents were sampled intentionally depending on their suitability as domestic tourists to Gauteng. Even though one survey link was sent to more than one platform, proportional distribution could not be strictly provided. Nonetheless, Google Forms gave the researcher access to the demographic information that could be monitored by the researcher as the responses were being sent, which allowed the researcher to monitor the sample make up in real-time. In case of disproportions (an overweighting with younger respondents), action measures were implemented (e.g., an increased recruitment in the groups with older tourists being more active). This non-probability method of purposive quota aided in enhancing balance and was also in line with the non-probability nature of the study

3.4.3 Sample Size

The study had a total sample size of 271. The sample size was determined by the power analysis of a multiple regression analysis with four predictors by Cohen (1992) with standard effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), alpha (0.05) and the required statistical power (0.80). It added the target to 10 percent more than 250 to cover the possible cases of non-response and missing data which are frequent in web surveys (Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson, 2019). This guarantees sufficient statistical power to identify meaningful relationships existing between the independent variables (brand awareness, brand recall, brand image, perceived risk) and the dependent variable (destination choice).

It was proposed that the study would enrol about 90 respondents on each platform to have a balance of WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. Even though these targets informed the disbursing of the survey link, the number of responses given by each platform was slightly different owing to respondent participation conditions, whereby 79 respondents responded through WhatsApp, 89 respondents responded through Facebook, and 83 respondents responded through Instagram.

The questionnaire had a platform identification question to make sure that the respondents have nearly 90 responses per platform, i.e., to ask the participants to

indicate if they report through Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp. The researcher was tracking the reports in real time by using the number of surveys completed per platform. In case a certain platform has not met the target, further recruitment was made to that platform only (e.g., posting reminders in appropriate Facebook groups, sending follow-up messages in WhatsApp groups, or re-posting the link on Instagram). This focus strategy worked to guarantee that optimal number of responses per platform had been met and this ensured rightful representation and validity and generalisability of the findings

3.5 Research Instrument

The data collection instrument used in the current study was a structured questionnaire based on the aim of the study, which aimed at gathering information concerning brand awareness, brand recall, brand image, perceived risk and destination choice among the domestic tourists in Gauteng. The advantage of a structured questionnaire is that the same questions were given to diverse participants, and a consistent response is obtained because it may be easier to contrast and dissimilate answers of different participants (Asseraf, Bramwell, and Cai, 2020). Using the questionnaire enabled the study to identify the quantitative information of the influence of brand awareness, brand recall, brand image, and perceived risk on the willingness to visit various locations within South Africa. Specifically, items measuring brand awareness and brand recall were adapted from Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) framework and related destination branding studies (Keller, 2013; Boo, Busser & Baloglu, 2009). Items measuring destination image and perceived risk were adapted from established tourism research examining destination choice behaviour (Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Chew & Jahari, 2014).

The questionnaire consisted of multiple items for each construct to ensure reliable measurement of the variables under investigation. Brand awareness and brand recall were measured using four items, brand image using five items, perceived risk using four items, and destination choice using three items. Some items were slightly reworded to suit the South African tourism context and the focus on Gauteng-based domestic tourists, while maintaining the original meaning of the validated scales.

3.5.1 Questionnaire Design

Closed-ended questions were mostly used during the survey with a cover page requiring the demographics of the participants. The questions were chosen due to their ability to provide numerical data, which can be subjected to statistical analysis, and in which the answers of the participants could be given with clarity and consistency. Questions

contained in the questionnaire were multiple choices and Likert scales that are generally considered to be adequate when conducting a quantitative study since they facilitate the generation of orderly and similar data (Dias and Cardoso, 2017).

A consistent five points Likert scale measured all the items that measured brand awareness, brand recall, brand image and risk perceived in visiting domestic destinations; a five-point Likert scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. This standardisation reduced the response bias and facilitated the data collected reliability and validity (Bakhshayesh, Shafiee, and Kazemi, 2021). Every variable that was incorporated in the questionnaire was fully aligned with the hypotheses of the study and the language in which the items were written was in tandem with the theoretical constructs under consideration. The respondents were able to express their differences in perceptions and intentions in a standardised fashion through the Likert-scale format and thus the intentions of the respondents towards certain destinations could be quantified (Bakhshayesh, Shafiee, & Kazemi, 2021).

Another component that was included in the questionnaire was destination choice, where the question segment was concerned with the chances of the respondents visiting the choice destinations in South Africa in future. The items were created on the premise of the already existing research, which proved that brand awareness has a direct impact on destination choice, and that the perceived risk is minimised, accompanied by increased trust (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). The presence of such items made possible data collection on the effectiveness of destination branding in determining travel decision making and method of establishing connections between the dimensions of brand awareness and the likelihood of destination choice.

In addition, the general layout of the questionnaire was consistent with the four study hypotheses (H₁ brand awareness, H₂ brand recall, H₃ brand image, H₄ perceived risk). Every section was well designed to cover the corresponding measures of the constructs of brand awareness, brand recall, brand image and perceived risk items: brand awareness, brand recall, and brand image items covered H₁, H₂, and H₃, perceived risk items covered H₄. As this alignment allowed the testability of every hypothesis by the quantitative data obtained during the use of the designed questionnaire, it made the study more valid and helped to test the theoretical relationships developed in the process of the literature review (Keller, 2003; Quintal and Polczynski, 2010; Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021)

3.5.2 Testing of the Research Instrument

The questionnaire underwent a two-stage testing process to ensure accuracy, clarity, and suitability before the main data collection.

Delphi technique

In the first stage, the Delphi technique was applied. Regarding the Delphi technique, a limited face validity check applied rather than a full multi-round Delphi process. Since the questionnaire is developed based on current theories, the purpose was to ensure clarity, relevance, and contextual appropriateness of all items within the South African domestic tourism setting.

There were three experts, the researcher's supervisor, the reviewer, and a tourism specialist from Durban Tourism examined the instrument based on their expertise in the fields of tourism and marketing. Their feedback was used to refine item wording, ensure construct alignment, and confirm that all relevant theoretical variables are represented. During the review process, the supervisor recommended the inclusion of destination choice items in the questionnaire, as this construct forms a key dependent variable of the study. Based on the expert feedback, minor wording adjustments were made to improve clarity and contextual relevance,

No additional rounds of Delphi feedback were required, as the instrument relies on established scales and this expert review ensured content validity (Bakhshayesh, Shafiee, & Kazemi, 2021). The questionnaire items were derived from established destination branding and brand equity scales, including the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) framework and destination brand equity research (Keller, 2013; Boo, Busser & Baloglu, 2009; Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

Pilot testing

Pilot testing in the second phase was done to assess the practicality, flow, and clarity of the questionnaire. In Week 1, the questionnaire was brought to WhatsApp and shared with the participants. The initial 15 responses would be monitored seriously to ensure that the questions are being interpreted in the right way, and the answers are in line with the purpose of the research. In case the pilot was able to ascertain the instrument to be reliable, then the questionnaire was disseminated further. Pilot participants were Gauteng-based domestic tourists recruited through WhatsApp travel groups. They were excluded from the main study by using a separate pilot survey link and recruiting new respondents for the final survey.

The primary data gathering was performed within the next two weeks, and this time, the questionnaire was distributed in the rest two chosen social media avenues (Instagram

and Facebook). The data was collected on the WhatsApp platform and at the same time extended to the other platforms until the desired number of valid responses, which is 271, was reached.

Such a strategy helped to guarantee that the questionnaire is verified not only by the expert method (Delphi technique) but also by the experiment with real individuals (pilot testing) combined with increasing the instrument reliability and validity.

The pilot is interested in testing the clarity of the questionnaire item and determining whether the wording of the question has any minor ambiguity. Modifications that were necessary to enhance understanding were carried out without changing the meaning of the constructs.

3.5.3 Data Collection Techniques

The respondents were recruited by use of social media platforms that were publicly available, such as Facebook (**Tour guides and tour operators in south Africa**), Instagram (**Residents of the sky**) and WhatsApp group (**Explore Mzansi**) that were targeted by subjects covering domestic travels such as. Before administration of the survey, gatekeepers (relevant group administrators) were formally contacted by signing gatekeeper letters. The survey link was directly sent by the researcher in events where permission to post was not necessary. In the areas where there was a limitation on direct posting, the survey link was distributed by the gatekeepers on behalf of the researcher.

Social media platforms were used to distribute the questionnaire because they provide access to large and diverse populations and are widely used in online survey research to reach respondents efficiently (Evans & Mathur, 2018). Where the gatekeeper permission was not possible to get through a particular online community or an organisational representative, different strategies to recruit the same were followed in line with ethics. Such strategies included the use of the publicly accessible internet sites, tourism dedicated forums, and social media pages in which survey links could be distributed without any administrative control. The final report was comprehensive and outlined all the platforms that were used during the recruitment process. There was no data gathered among limited groups or communities in which permission was not received or denied.

Participants were contacted to participate in the study by the use of a standardised invitation link (see appendix B), and this link informed the participants of the voluntary aspect of participation, anonymity and confidentiality as well as taking about 15 minutes to finish questionnaire. The respondents who filled in the survey link expressed that they were ready to take part in the study.

The entire IIE informed consent form (Annexure G[c]) was presented in the first page of the questionnaire as per the requirement of the institution. The purpose of the study, voluntary participation, study procedures, possible risks and benefits, the presence of confidentiality and information about the contact between the researcher were described in this form. Prior to the survey questions, the respondents had to obtain an agreement by marking in an I consent choice. Participants who participated with the questionnaire could only proceed through the consenting procedure thus ensuring that the ethical ethics of participation were adhered to in a clear and verifiable way.

Each question in the questionnaire was set as an obligatory option to pass the request. This action notwithstanding, there were some unresolved responses as some participants left the survey prematurely or had technical problems. Such incomplete submissions were automatically banned out of the final dataset. The sample size of 271 respondents was observed for 2 weeks to ensure that the invalid or duplicate respondents were captured without necessarily affecting the validity of the research.

This was done during the data cleaning process whereby responses with patterned responding, responses with inconsistency or ones that contained contradictory demographic data were filtered. The contribution of duplicate entries was discovered and discarded by using IP addresses, timestamp, and other demographical parameters to make sure that only one respondent made one valid input. The inclusion of screening questions was incorporated at the first pages of the questionnaire so that only people who passed the inclusion criteria would continue to the survey. The participants that failed to qualify can also send-off the questionnaire and were given a thank you.

3.7. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were an important component of this study. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire. Participants were also assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential, and that the data collected would only be used for academic research purposes. No personal identifying information was collected from respondents. Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the survey at any stage without any negative consequences. In addition, the data collected were stored securely and were only accessible to the researcher and the research supervisor.

3.8 Data Analysis

The study was analysed using SPSS. Data analysis was a very vital part of the present

research, since it allowed one to make meaningful conclusions about the gathered data. This was analysed in three consecutive steps with the help of some statistical tests that are suitable to the quantitative nature of the study.

Phase 1: Data Screening and Preparation

The data on the survey completed by the domestic tourist were filtered out into completeness and accuracy. The questionnaires which were not filled completely were eliminated and those who's entries were made twice were identified and eliminated. Checking of responses was also done to make sure that these responded to the study inclusion criteria. Data had been screened, coded, and cleaned and ready to be analysed statistically

Phase 2: Descriptive statistics

The demographic characteristics, travel behaviour, brand awareness, brand recall, perceived risk, brand image and preferred domestic destinations per question of the respondents were summarised using descriptive statistics. The frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were computed in order to present a picture of the sample and the major constructs of the research

Phase 3: Inferential Statistical Analysis

Multiple regression was the appropriate technique to use when a number of independent variables are used to predict a single continuous dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between the independent variables and destination choice. Regression analysis is commonly applied in quantitative research to determine the extent to which one or more independent variables influence a dependent variable (Hair et al., 2019). Regression analysis was used to test all four hypotheses of the study (H₁: overall brand awareness, H₂: brand recall, H₃: brand image, and H₄: perceived risk as a driver of destination choice). Regressions were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent variables and the choice of destinations and to determine the amount of predictive power that any one of the variables has.

In the case of H₁, H₂, H₃ and H₄, which indicated directional, predictive relationships, regression analysis was used to estimate the strength and statistical significance of each independent variable to the personal aspects of destination choice.

Regression analysis was used throughout in the series of hypotheses, which guaranteed a consistent and methodologically acceptable approach to the analysis. Such plan represented the quantitative design of the research and permitted to conduct a profound study of both associative and predictive relations of the research variables

3.9 Validity and Reliability

Reliability is a term used to denote consistency of the measurement tool (Giannopoulos, Piha & Skourtis, 2021). In this research, Cronbach alpha coefficient was checked as an indicator of internal consistency reliability with an approximate of 0.7 as an acceptable value (Andersson et al., 2024). this validated the fact that the items that gauge each construct (brand awareness, brand image, brand recall, perceived risk) are sufficiently correlated and yielding constant results.

Validity on the other hand is the degree to which the instrument is able to measure what it is aimed to measure (Hair et al., 2021). The content validity was the one requiring the development of items based on the existing literature and reviewing by experts through Delphi methodology (Andersson et al., 2024). The measure of convergent validity was measured through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) by providing a value of 0.5 or above; this revealed the ability of the items to measure the intended construct (Hair et al., 2021). The Fornell Larcker criterion was used to determine the discriminant validity such that when the square root of each measures AVE exceeds the correlations of the measures with other measures, and when the items are highly loaded on the respective construct compared to other measures (Giannopoulos, Piha & Skourtis, 2021). These measures along with others enhanced the research rigour. Credibility where credibility is translated as the confidence in the truthfulness or correctness of the findings was improved by survey design, pilot testing and matching survey items based on the literature available (Andersson et al., 2024). The credibility of the research process was demonstrated by trust which indicates the general reliability and honesty of the study, as the process of data gathering and analysis as well as the process of data reporting were properly documented, and the absence or invalidity of responses were systematically managed. All these steps are put in place to make sure that the findings of the study were reliable, replicable, and meaningful to the researchers and practitioners (Hair et al., 2021).

3.10 Limitations and Delimitations

3.10.1 Limitations

Purposive quota sampling, which was used in this study, is a non-probability sampling technique and this was one of the major weaknesses of this paper. Although purposive quota sampling represented all the various categories within the population; it does not imply that an individual in the population has equal opportunities of being picked. This drawback presents the possibility of sampling bias, where the sample was not quite representative of the overall tourist population in Gauteng. Besides, the research is based on self-reported data that may bring response bias. The participants can reprocess or fabricate their responses since they might be influenced by social desirability resulting in

incorrect data about their brand awareness and their intentions to choose the destination (Giannopoulos, Piha & Skourtis, 2021). And finally, the cross-sectional research design does not allow making any causal connections between destination choice and brand awareness. Data is gathered on a snapshot, and as such, it is not possible to determine whether brand awareness causes changes in destination choice or there are other external factors affecting both variables (Bakhshayesh, Shafiee & Kazemi, 2021). One limitation of this study relates to the gender distribution of the sample, as a higher proportion of female respondents participated in the survey. This imbalance may influence the generalisability of the findings, as travel motivations and decision-making behaviour may differ between male and female tourists. Future research should aim to obtain a more balanced gender representation in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of domestic tourism behaviour.

3.10.2 Delimitations

The delimitations of this study are those boundaries that the researcher has been compelled to deliberately place in the study both in focus and scope. The research is only limited to tourists who are based in Gauteng, and other tourists in other provinces do not participate purposely. The sample has been reduced to include only one demographic group by this choice and that is the biggest source of domestic tourism in South Africa. On one hand, this is a tremendous contribution to the relevance of the study to the comprehension of the behaviours of the Gauteng tourists, but, on the other hand, it is not that easy to apply the findings to the tourists in other provinces or international visitors (Ezeuduji, November & Haupt, 2016). Moreover, the research aims specifically at brand awareness and its role in the selection of the destination, excluding other possible factors, which may affect the choice of tourists, e.g., price or accessibility.

3.10 Assumptions

The first step in regression is to test the assumptions of the method. The various assumptions are discussed below and were tested in the statistical analysis.

Absence of multivariate outliers

Numerical guidelines can be used to identify multivariate outliers. Standardised residuals are most used. The rule of thumb is that standardised residuals should not be more than +3.29 or less than -3.29 (Hair et al., 2021). Cases that fall outside of this range should be excluded from the analysis (Hair et al., 2021). SPSS identifies the case numbers of respondents who are multivariate outliers. Multivariate outliers can also be identified on the histogram of residuals. Both these methods were used. The number of outliers removed (if any) will be indicated in each analysis. The final analysis in each case will be

performed excluding the outliers.

Normality of residuals

The next assumption is the normality of residuals. Regression assumes that the residual values ("errors" in prediction) are more or less normally distributed. This assumption is addressed by the inspection of the histogram of residuals.

Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity is a situation where two or more predictors are highly linearly related. In general, an absolute correlation coefficient of >0.7 or 0.8 among two or more predictors indicates the presence of multicollinearity. This is only a rule of thumb (Ezeuduji, November & Haupt, 2016). There are also official diagnostics as part of the output, namely the VIF value (which should be < 5 , preferably with a mean around 1) and the Tolerance value which should be >0.2 .

Homoscedasticity

The assumption of Homoscedasticity is assessed by plot of the standardised residuals against the standardised predicted value. It should show no clear pattern, such as funnelling, and the dots should be randomly distributed (Ezeuduji, November & Haupt, 2016). On this graph, outliers should also clearly be visible, should there be any.

Independence of residuals

The Durbin-Watson statistic can be requested to test the independence of residuals as assumption. This statistic can vary from 1 to 4. Values below 1 and above 3 are of concern and may suggest some dependency amongst the residuals (Ezeuduji, November & Haupt, 2016). The extent to which these assumptions were met were reported with each regression analysis.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research design used in the study as quantitative, deductive and cross-sectional design used to test the relationship among the aspects of brand awareness and destination selection in domestic tourists of Gauteng origin. It has described the purposive sampling technique, structured questionnaire that was employed to collect data online and data analysis method of multiple regression. Ethical considerations and measures to ensure validity and reliability have also been discussed. The methodology described here provides a robust framework for addressing the research objectives and hypotheses of the study, and the next chapter presented the analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

Chapter 4: Data analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter showed the findings of the given research that assessed the impact of the brand awareness among the Gauteng-based domestic tourists on the destination choice. The aim of the study was to establish the importance of brand awareness, brand image, brand recall and perceived risk in influencing destination judgment and destination choice of the Gauteng traveller in South Africa. In answering this, the survey conducted was quantitative whereby 271 respondents were surveyed to offer quantifiable information on the influence of these branding factors in decision making.

The chapter contained the reports of the descriptive statistics, reliability tests, and regression analyses which are the foundation of the findings. Each group of findings related to the formulated hypothesis in the previous chapters and discussed within the frames of the literature review. This organisation of the data presented in the chapter

demonstrated the level to which branding factors can affect the destination choice and preconditions the following conclusions and recommendations.

4.2 Sample Description (Demographic Profile)

Gender

According to Figure 1, the dataset shows that 223 respondents were female, representing 82.3 percent of the sample, while 48 respondents were male, representing 17.7 percent. This pattern is common in survey-based tourism studies, where women tend to participate in higher numbers in online questionnaires and are generally more responsive to research recruitment circulated through digital platforms (Mkwizu, 2018).

Gender		
	N	%
Female	223	82.3%
Male	48	17.7%

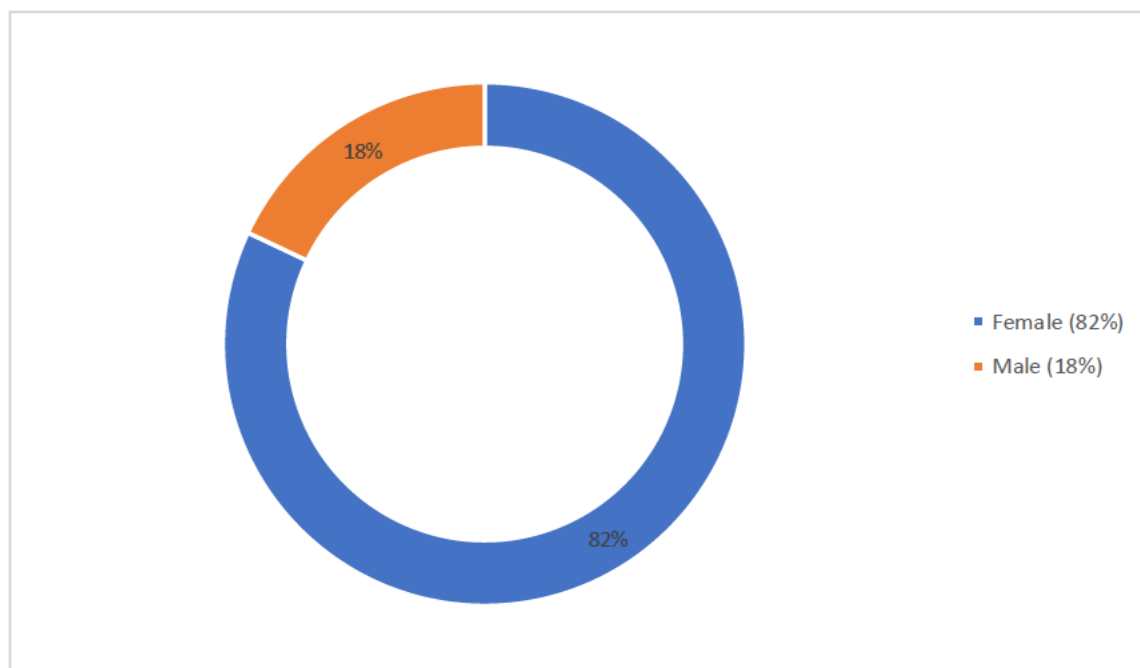


Figure 1: Gender

Income

As indicated in Figure 2, income frequencies recorded in the dataset show that 89 respondents earned less than R5 000, representing 32.8 percent of the sample. A total of 51 respondents earned between R5 000 and R9 999, accounting for 18.8 percent. Sixty-one respondents fell within the R10 000 to R19 999 category, representing 22.5 percent. Forty-two respondents reported monthly income between R20 000 and R34 999, representing 15.5 percent. Twelve respondents earned between R35 000 and R49 999,

representing 4.4 percent. Sixteen respondents earned R50 000 or more, representing 5.9 percent. Similarly, a report by *Business Tech* (Hair et al., 2021) indicates that more than 55 % of the working population in South Africa earns less than R10 000 per month. These figures suggest that a large proportion of the national population earns relatively low monthly incomes, with only a small share earning higher incomes. This pattern is broadly consistent with the findings of the current study, where approximately half of respondents earn below R10 000 per month and fewer than 10% earn above R35 000.

Income		
	N	%
Less than R5000	89	32.8%
R5000-R9,999	51	18.8%
R10,000-R19,999	61	22.5%
R20,000-R34,999	42	15.5%
R35,000-R49,999	12	4.5%
R50,000 and above	16	5.9%

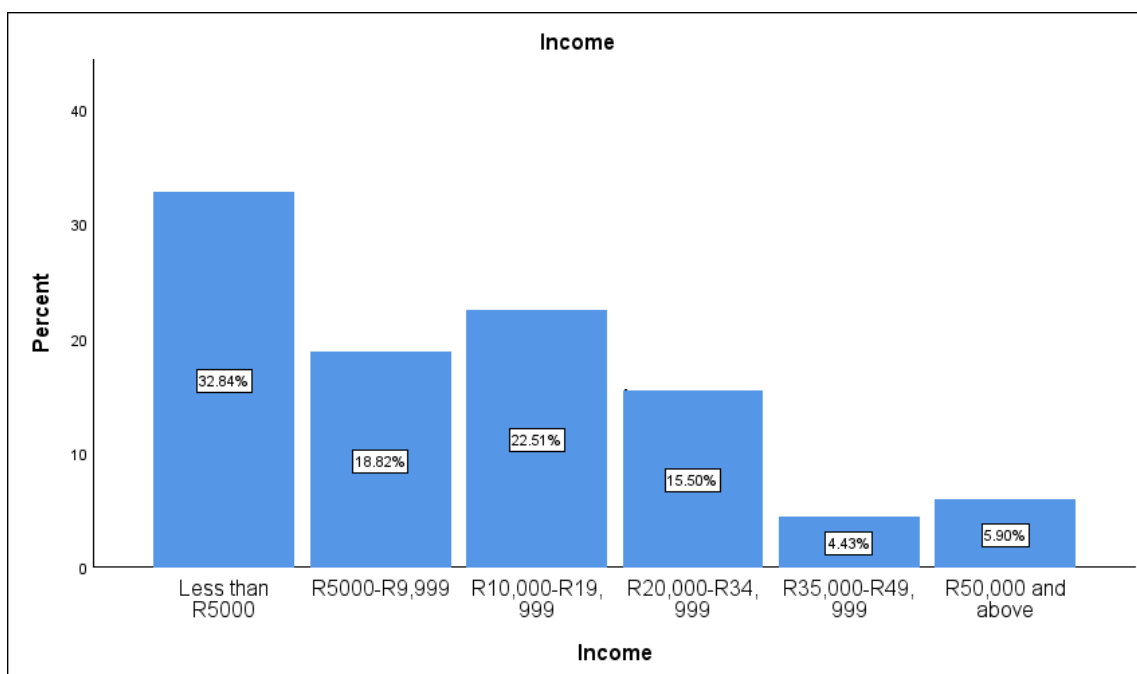


Figure 2: Income distribution

Past travel

Past travel frequencies show that 118 respondents reported taking one to two domestic trips in the past 12 months, representing 43.5 percent. Eighty respondents reported taking three to five trips, representing 29.5 percent. Seventy-three respondents reported taking more than five trips, representing 26.9 percent. Overall, intended travel levels are

noticeably higher than past travel frequencies, suggesting an increase in planned domestic travel activity over the next 12 months and indicating stronger future travel intentions among respondents. See Figure 3.

Past travel		
	N	%
□ 1–2 trips	118	43.5%
□ 3–5 trips	80	29.6%
□ More than 5 trips	73	26.9%

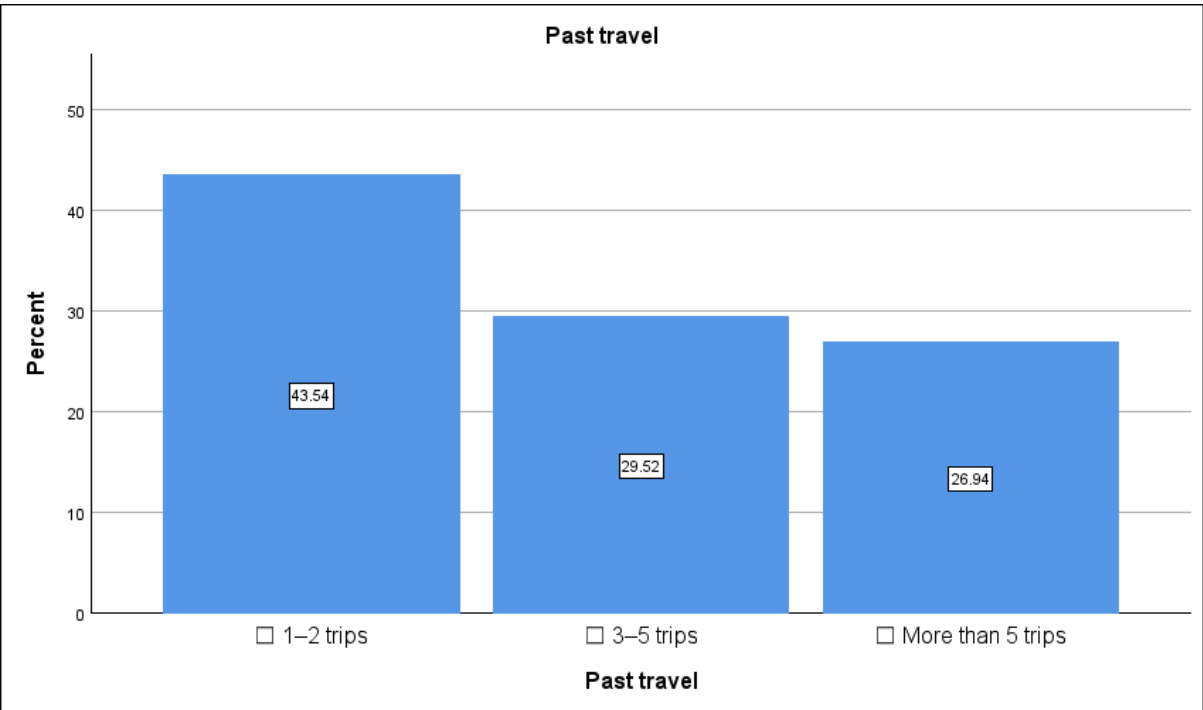


Figure 3: Past Travel Distribution

Intended travel

Intended travel frequencies in figure 3 above show that 80 respondents planned to take one to two domestic trips in the next 12 months, representing 29.5 percent. Seventy-eight respondents planned to take three to five trips, representing 28.8 percent. A total of 113 respondents planned to take more than five trips, representing 41.7 percent. Intended travel levels were noticeably higher than past travel, with a larger proportion of respondents planning to take more than five domestic trips in the next 12 months, indicating increased future travel intentions compared to their recent travel behaviour.

Intended travel		
	N	%

□ 1–2 trips	80	29.5%
□ 3–5 trips	78	28.8%
□ More than 5 trip	113	41.7%

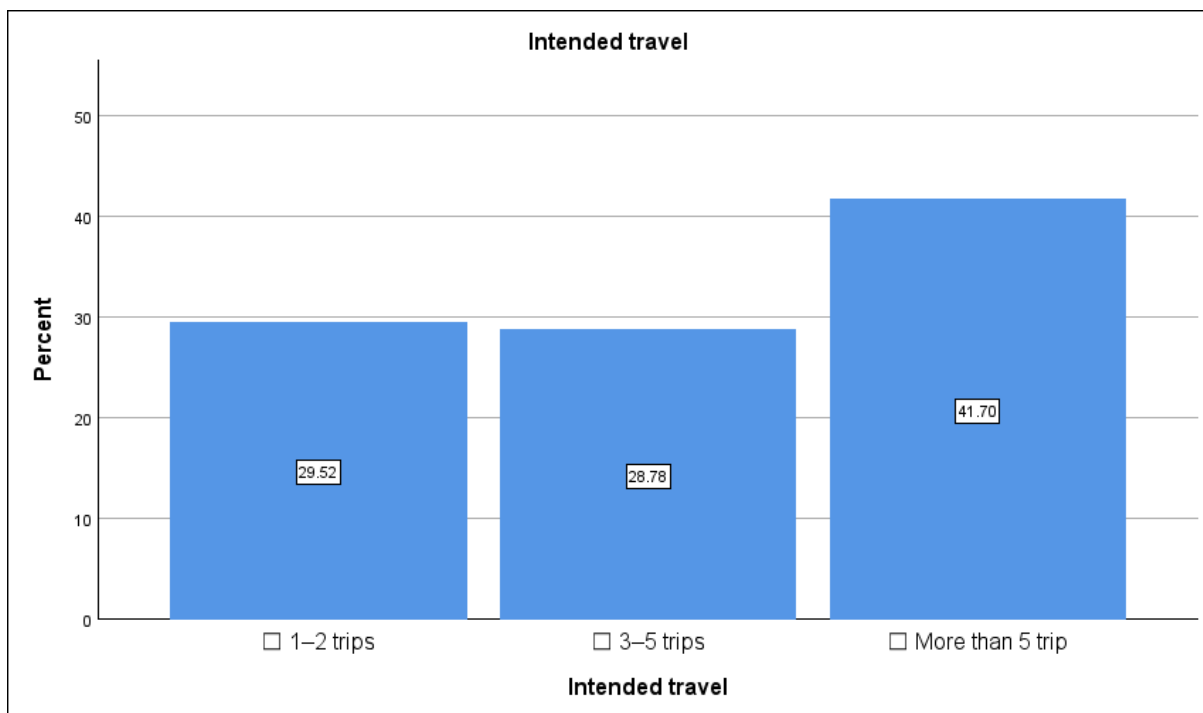


Figure 4: Intended Travel Distribution

Purpose of Travel

Because multiple selections were allowed, the percentage of both the responses (number of affirmative answers) and the percentage of cases (respondents) are reported below as illustrated in figure 4 above, the latter adds up to more than 100% as individuals could be in more than one category. The graph represents the percentage of respondents. The dataset recorded 141 selections for leisure travel, representing 44.1 percent of all responses and 53.6 percent of cases. Family visits were selected 135 times, accounting for 42.2 percent of responses and 55.1 percent of cases. Business travel received 44 selections, representing 13.8 percent of responses and 16.7 percent of cases. The data show that leisure and family purposes were selected at similar frequencies, while business travel appeared considerably less often.

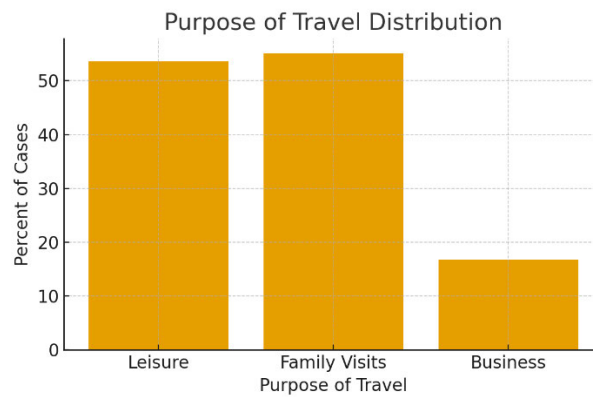


Figure 5: Purpose of Travel

Social Media Platform Used

Although the study aimed to achieve approximately 90 respondents per platform, the final frequencies vary slightly, reflecting actual participation and response behaviour. Respondents could indicate which social platform they used to complete the questionnaire. Results for this question is presented below. It shows an even spread between the three main platforms. A total of 79 respondents (29.2%) completed the instrument on WhatsApp, 89 (32.8%) chose Facebook, and 83 (30.6%) on Instagram. Four respondents (1.5%) completed it on another platform while 5.9% (N=16) did not complete the question.

Social media		
	N	%
Whatsapp	79	29.2%
Facebook	89	32.8%
Instagram	83	30.6%
Other	4	1.5%
Missing System	16	5.9%

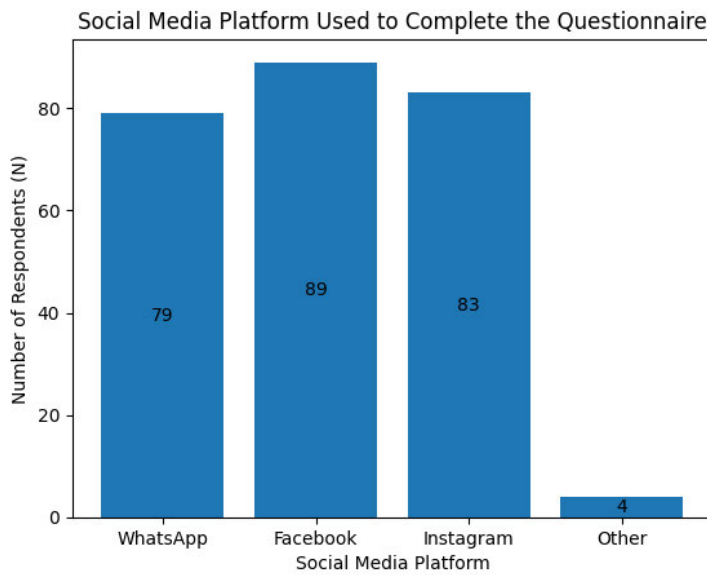


Figure 6: Social Media Platform Used to Complete the Questionnaire

4.3 Descriptive Statistics for Core Constructs

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were calculated for each item within each scale to shed light on how respondents reacted to the various questions. Results are reported below.

Descriptive statistics per scale

The descriptive statistics per scale, though mentioned in the discussion below, is summarised below

Descriptive Statistics				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Brand awareness	4.265	0.763	-1.096	1.338
Brand image	4.287	0.795	-1.096	0.931
Brand recall	4.208	0.786	-1.024	1.442
Perceived risk	4.166	0.873	-0.764	-0.217
Destination choice	4.365	0.756	-1.207	1.423

4.3.1 Familiarity

The familiarity of respondents with various tourist destinations in South Africa, The

descriptive statistics per item is presented in table 4.3.1. This aligns with evidence that domestic tourists in South Africa often possess broad exposure to national destinations due to regular interprovincial mobility (Ezeuduji et al., 2016) and the country's strong internal tourism flows (Elgin & Elveren, 2024). The narrow range may reduce differentiation between destinations. Mean scores ranged from 3.11 to 3.99 on the scale which suggests a high level of familiarity with all destinations mentioned, with the Kruger national park being most familiar and Clarens the least.

Table 4.3.1: Mean Familiarity Scores of Selected South African Destinations

Descriptive Statistics		
Province	Mean	Std. Deviation
Familiar with Sun City (Northwest)	3.97	1.32
Familiar with Kruger National Park (Limpopo/Mpumalanga)	3.99	1.25
Familiar with uShaka Marine World (KwaZulu-Natal)	3.90	1.39
Familiar with Table Mountain (Western Cape)	3.93	1.35
Familiar with Big Hole, Kimberley (Northern Cape)	3.25	1.64
Familiar with Clarens (Free State)	3.11	1.70
Familiar with Addo Elephant Park (Eastern Cape)	3.13	1.71
Familiar with God's Window (Mpumalanga)	3.75	1.43
Familiar with Maropeng/Cradle of Humankind (Gauteng)	3.78	1.43

4.3.2 Brand awareness

Brand awareness as a scale recorded a high overall mean of 4.27 on the five-point scale, indicating generally strong awareness levels among respondents. All items scored above 4, except for the item relating to the likelihood of visiting lesser-known destinations, which recorded a slightly lower mean of 3.96. The descriptive statistics per item is presented in table 4.3.2. These differences are marginal and suggests that responses across the brand awareness items were largely consistent, reflecting broadly high levels of destination awareness within the sample.

Table 4.3.2: Mean per statement Scores for Brand Awareness Statements

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation
I recognise well-known tourist destinations when I see their advertisements or promotions.	4.28	0.97
I tend to consider destinations I know well.	4.28	0.91
I am more likely to visit lesser-known destinations if I am familiar with their brand.	3.96	1.16
High brand awareness makes me more likely to choose a destination for my next vacation.	4.31	0.95
I consider brand awareness as a sign of reliability when choosing a travel destination.	4.30	0.91
I prefer traveling to places I have heard about frequently.	4.32	0.90
I associate specific destinations with unique qualities (e.g., culture, scenery, activities).	4.30	0.97
I have heard of local travel campaigns like "Sho't Left."	4.25	1.09
I feel more confident choosing a destination I have seen promoted multiple times.	4.37	0.91

4.3.3 Brand image

Brand image as a scale recorded a high mean of 4.29, with item scores ranging from 4.19 to 4.38, indicating consistently positive perceptions of the destinations evaluated. The descriptive statistics per item is presented in table 4.3.3. A strong brand image is a key driver of trust and expectations in tourism, shaping how travellers evaluate the quality and attractiveness of a destination (Keller, 2003). Positive imagery can also enhance perceived value and emotional connection, which influence repeat visitation and preference formation (Kladou et al., 2017). The consistently high ratings across all items suggest that respondents held broadly favourable impressions of domestic destinations, supporting the prominent role that image played in the predictive models. This finding is consistent with literature identifying brand image as a central component of destination decision-making.

Table 4.3.3: Descriptive statistics per item for Brand Image Statements

Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
I consider destinations with a strong brand image to be more trustworthy.	4.38	0.86

A destination's brand image affects my willingness to consider it for future trips.	4.27	0.85
The image I have of a destination plays a significant role in my travel decisions.	4.31	0.88
The destination's brand image reflects my personal values and interests.	4.19	0.99

4.3.4 Brand recall

Brand recall as a scale obtained a mean of 4.21, with item values ranging from 4.15 to 4.37, reflecting high ease of remembering destinations previously encountered or promoted. The descriptive statistics per item is presented in table 4.3.4. Strong recall typically develops through repeated exposure to marketing communication, social media content, and shared travel experiences (Giannopoulos, Piha & Skourtis, 2021). Recall also tends to be higher for long-established or frequently visited destinations, which aligns with patterns observed among South African travellers who demonstrate consistent awareness of major provincial attractions (Ezeuduji, November & Haupt, 2016). The narrow score range indicates uniformly high recall across items, supporting its significance in several regression models. These results suggest that destination recall remains an influential component of brand knowledge for domestic tourists.

Table 4.3.4: Mean Scores for Brand Recall Statements

Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
I can recall the names of several domestic tourism destinations without needing a prompt.	4.15	1.00
I am familiar with local destinations even if I have never visited them.	4.11	1.03
I can easily list popular places to visit in different provinces.	4.15	0.93
I often remember hearing about certain destinations through media or word of mouth.	4.26	0.88
Some destinations stand out in my memory more than others.	4.37	0.83

4.3.5 Perceived risk

Perceived risk as a scale produced a mean of 4.17, with item scores ranging from 3.95 to 4.41, showing generally elevated awareness of potential risks. Crime concerns received the lowest rating but remained high on the scale. The descriptive statistics per item is presented in table 4.3.5. In tourism contexts, perceived risk often shapes

travellers' comfort levels and behavioural intentions, particularly in regions where safety perceptions vary (Gounden, 2020). The results indicate consistent risk sensitivity but limited effect on destination-choice variable.

Table 4.3.5: Mean Scores for Perceived Risk Statements

Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
It is safe to travel there.	4.41	0.86
I do not expect health-related issues during the trip.	4.19	1.01
I am not worried about crime at the destination.	3.95	1.24
I feel confident about my ability to handle anything unexpected during my visit to the destination.	4.11	0.98

4.3.6 Destination choice

The mean score on destination choice was 4.37, which means that all destination-choice considerations scored between 4.19 and 4.45, demonstrating uniformly high importance across cost, accessibility, distance, and activities. This suggests that respondents evaluated destinations using several practical criteria equally. The descriptive statistics per item is presented in table 4.3.6. Research on domestic tourism in South Africa similarly highlights cost, accessibility, and activity offerings as central components shaping destination preferences (Ezeuduji, November & Haupt, 2016). Attributes closely aligned with traveller motivations also influence comparative evaluations between competing destinations (Mangali & Ortaleza, 2021). The consistently high ratings indicate that participants prioritised a broad mix of functional factors rather than a single dominant criterion.

Table 4.3.6: Mean Scores for Destination Choice Decision Factors

Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
The cost or affordability of a destination influences my decision to visit it.	4.45	0.82
I am likely to choose destinations that are easily accessible by my preferred mode of transport.	4.42	0.79

I tend to choose destinations that offer activities or experiences aligned with my reason for travel (e.g., leisure, family, or cultural experiences).	4.40	0.82
The distance from my home affects my likelihood of choosing a particular destination.	4.19	1.07

These considerations subsequently served as dependent variables in the regression models, where brand-related predictors varied in significance.

4.4 Reliability of Scales

Cronbach's alpha is a measure of the internal consistency of a questionnaire, that is, how closely related a set of items are as a group. According to Bryman and Bell (2007: 164) Cronbach alpha values of 0.70 and above are typically employed as a rule of thumb to denote a good level of internal reliability. If it is too high (>0.90) it suggests that there is some item redundancy and one could have used fewer items. The reliability of the subscales in the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach Alpha, with the exception of destination choice as these refer to different considerations when choosing a destination and one does not necessarily expect that all of these will be important for respondents. The same could be said to some extent about the familiarity scale, as familiarity with one destination does not necessarily correspond to familiarity with another, but for the sake of the study, this was handled as a scale of general familiarity with key destinations in South Africa.

Reliability statistics are reported below.

Scale	Cronbach Alpha
destination choice	0.880
Brand awareness	0.92
Brand image	0.909
Brand recall	0.893
Perceived risk	0.866

As can be seen, all are above 0.7 which means reliability is acceptable. However, since the respondents answered very similarly on the questions, the intercorrelations between

the items are very strong which leads to a very high level of reliability.

4.5 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression was used to investigate to which extent familiarity, brand awareness, brand image, brand recall and perceived risk influence the considerations of destination choice. The considerations were cost / affordability, easy access, activities / experiences, and distance from home.

Pearson correlations

Before proceeding with the regression analysis, a Pearson correlation was performed between the main variables to investigate the relationship between them. Results are reported below and shows strong and significant positive correlations between all the variables. As stated in the assumptions of regression (3.10. Assumptions in chapter 3), the correlation of 0.776 between brand awareness and brand awareness could be of some concern for multicollinearity. The formal multicollinearity diagnostics will confirm whether this is an issue.

	Brand awareness	Brand image	Brand recall	Perceived risk	Destination choice
Brand awareness	--				
Brand image	0.776** 0.000	--			
Brand recall	0.677** 0.000	0.724** 0.000	--		
Perceived risk	0.669** 0.000	0.663** 0.000	0.684** 0.000	--	
Destination choice	0.659** 0.000	0.743** 0.000	0.642** 0.000	0.582** 0.000	--

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.5.1 Regression results

The influence of familiarity, brand awareness, brand image, brand recall and perceived risk on destination choice was investigated by means of a multiple regression analysis. Results are reported below.

With 5 outliers removed, all assumptions were tested and found to hold. The histogram

of residuals did not outliers since these have been removed and the scatterplot of the standardized residuals against the predicted residuals shows no clear pattern which would suggest violation of the homoscedasticity assumption. Multicollinearity diagnostics showed

. VIF values below 5 although the average is somewhat above the recommended value of 1, and Tolerance values were above 0.2. The Durbin- Watson value is 1.755.

The results are summarised below. The model summary shows that the combination of independent variables explains 65.6 % of the variance in the dependent variable and the model is significant $F(4,262)=135.12, p<.001$.

Regression results

	B	S.E	β	T	p
(Constant)	0.905	0.162		5.570	<0.001
Brand awareness	0.119	0.119	0.124	1.973	<0.050
Brand image	0.494	0.061	0.533	8.131	<0.001
Brand recall	0.185	0.054	0.199	3.397	<.001
Perceived risk	0.017	0.046	-0.021	0.379	<0.705
F(4,262)=125.12, $p<.001$					
$R^2 = 0.656$					

The coefficient in the table above gives an indication of which of the predictors are significant.

($b=0.255, p<.001$) as was It shows that Brand image ($B=0.494, p<.001$), as well as Brand recall ($(B=0.185, p<.001)$) were significant positive predictors of destination choice. Brand awareness was a marginally significant predictor of Destination choice ($B=0.119, p=0.050$). Perceived risk was, however, not a significant predictor ($B=0.017, p=0.705$). The Beta coefficients show that brand image is the strongest positive predictor of destination choice ($\beta=0.533$) followed by brand recall ($\beta=.199$). This is followed by Brand awareness which is only a marginal predictor ($\beta=0.124$). Perceived risk was not significant as indicated above.

4.6 Discussion of Findings

Brand Awareness and Destination Choice

The findings indicate that brand awareness was an important predictor of various destination-choice considerations, which justifies H_1 . Brand awareness was positively and uniformly significant in all models, especially in cost and accessibility and activity-related decision-making. This is consistent with studies that indicate that awareness is the baseline of brand knowledge as it assists consumers in recognising and distinguishing destinations when making an evaluation (Keller, 2003). Through high awareness, the possibility of a destination being added to the consideration set of a traveller is higher, thus influencing early decision-making (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Among the Gauteng travellers, the presence of high awareness levels has demonstrated the dominance of key South African destinations on the digital and traditional marketing platforms that uphold the role of visibility in tourism decisions (Ian, 2023). Moreover, research on domestic tourism observes that keeping awareness enhances perceived relevance, especially based on economic and practical aspects, which justifies why cost and accessibility were deeply connected with awareness (Ezeuduji et al., 2016). All these findings confirm that brand awareness plays a significant role in traveller ratings in this study.

The defence of the H_1 also shows that the role of awareness as catalyst to further brand perceptions. Good awareness tends to boost recall and deepen the cognitive foundation on which travellers make comparisons about destinations (Keller, 2001). This compound effect can be seen throughout the outcome of the regression, as awareness repeatedly emerged as an important predictor alongside image and recall instead of an isolated action (Kladou et al., 2017). In Gauteng respondents, awareness was particularly of interest since the respondents indicated high levels of general exposure to well-known destinations, and similar results were found that domestic travellers often resorted to familiar and highly marketed destinations (Elgin and Elveren, 2024). Literature also shows that awareness fosters attributed legitimacy of a destination and the evaluations (both rational and emotional) (Howes, 2024). The high level of consideration among various destinations in the diverse tourism sector in South Africa is associated with intense promotional visibility of the destination, which the current research affirms. Therefore H_1 , is not just statistically supported but it is also conceptually sound because patterns make sense to the known roles of awareness in the destination-branding theory.

Brand Recall and Destination Choice

Brand recall was found to be a significant predictor of destination choice in three models, indicating H₂. The high recall scores realised in the dataset shows that the respondents could easily recall the destination names when choosing the destinations. This is in line with the perception that retrieval through memory is important in consumer decision-making, especially when the tourists have numerous offers that they could make (Keller, 2003). Recall affects the salience of a destination, increasing its likelihood of being chosen in the process of evaluation and comparison (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Among Gauteng travellers the high recall values indicate their exposure to domestic travel messages and destination content exposure is high which ensures brand associations are made (Ezeuduji et al., 2016). Literature also indicates that recall contributes to perceived reliability of brand information, increasing the probability of travellers selecting destinations that they can recollect with high ease (Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021). Such trends show that recall is a significant cognitive dimension that affects domestic travel behaviour.

The regression models demonstrate that brand recall also positively affected cost, accessibility, and activity related choices, which proves its worth as predictor of destination choice. Recall has been defined as a connection between image and awareness and a stronger brand association that travellers use in the destination comparison (Keller, 2001). High-recall services in tourism are labelled as being associated with culturally relevant destinations or that have been exchanged through social media dialogue regularly (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). It aligns with the Gauteng respondents that said they were highly engaged with Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, which are platforms that are known to strengthen memory due to repeatedly shown visual stimuli (Hoeanat, 2018). Recall also leads to confidence in the choice, given that travellers are likely to visit the destinations that they are familiar with without any challenges (Dias and Cardoso, 2017). The results thus confirm H₂ for three dependent variables and are consistent with the existing destination-branding models that take recall as a required cognitive factor in tourist decisions and choice.

Perceived Risk and Destination Choice

The perceived risk did not have a significant predictive ability on all the destination-choice variables, and, thus, H₃ was partially supported. Despite its high mean score, which highlights general awareness of safety-related factors, the lack of predictive power implies that respondents were not distinguishing so much between destinations in terms of risk. It has been observed in literature that risk may affect tourism utility when destination differences are large but weakly when travellers believe crossing alternative

destinations have equal risk levels (Kankhuni, 2020). This trend aligns with the domestic travel in South Africa where the traveller tends to view risk as an overall situation but not a destination-based point of difference (Gounden, 2020). Moreover, positive elements of the brand like a high image and high recall may help in determining the position of risk in the decision-making (Kladou et al., 2017). These findings indicate that risk was not an important determinant of choice behaviour in this study despite the respondents recognising it.

It is also noteworthy that the perceived risk through models did not demonstrate significant variation as the research focusing on the importance of brand-related attributes indisputably assumes that in well-established domestic tourism markets, the perceived risk no longer matters (Ezeuduji et al., 2016). South African destinations are quite similar in their risk rates, so it might be the reason why the respondents considered risk specifications constantly but did not rely on it to differentiate between options (Kankhuni, 2020). Another aspect of destination branding that is also noted in literatures is that good image and familiarity may override safety concerns due to enhanced trust and confidence (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). This was exhibited in the present study as brand image was always the most important predictor, which minimised the impact of risk. Also, perceived risk might be more dominant in international travel situations, and domestic travellers tend to use previous experience to mediate risk perceptions (Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021). Taken together, these facts explain why H₃ was not validated.

Brand Image and Destination Choice

The strongest predictor of all regression models was brand image which gives a very strong support to H₄. The stable image scores indicate positive attitudes toward South African destinations, which shaped the cost, accessibility, and activities and distance ratings. This is quite similar to the branding theory which identified brand image as the most powerful dimension in consumer responses and preferences formation (Keller, 2003). Through a powerful image, emotional appeal, perceived value, and expectations improve, which raises the chances of destination selection (Kladou et al., 2017). The intensive predictive impact of picture among Gauteng travellers implies that meaningful relationships, including perceived quality, attractiveness, or cultural value, take center stage in decision-making (Ezeuduji et al., 2016). The role of image as a contributor to destination competitiveness is also corroborated by literature, especially in the emerging tourism settings (Kankhuni, 2020). These trends justify the primacy of image in this research.

The superiority of brand image in all the models supports literature on the multidimensional nature of brand image in destination branding. Good image is a

contributor to traveller confidence and better perceptions on safety, and it eases decision-making through provision of a clear evaluative structure (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). This aligns with the findings that image is a holistic portrayal of the destination attributes that incorporates emotional, functional and experiential elements (Keller, 2001). To respondents of Gauteng, the impact of image as a predictor is high indicating that travellers use the associations to a high degree in destination choice. South African studies also provide evidence that image affects both loyalty and initial choice and thus its strategic alignment to destination managers (Ezeuduji et al., 2016). Due to its recurrent importance in all dependent variables, brand image is the most effective determinant in the given dataset, thus confirming H₄ and affirming existing theories on destination-branding research.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter recapped the major findings of the quantitative analysis, as follows: the demographic findings and descriptive statistics of the core branding constructs. The level of familiarity, awareness, image, recall, and perceived risk were high through meaning that the respondents were well exposed to domestic destinations. The results show that familiarity had a negative influence in some models, suggesting that higher overall familiarity with destinations was associated with a reduced emphasis on factors such as accessibility and activities when making destination choices. Those trends present tendencies typical of the domestic tourism of the South African region where tourists often tend to explore popular tourist destinations (Ezeuduji et al., 2016). The reliability coefficients displayed were high which validated the internal consistency of the measurement scales giving confidence in the statistical results. These descriptive results reproduce larger concepts of branding as a cognitive basis that forms initial destination impressions (Keller, 2003). Thus, the chapter depicts an objective quantitative summary of how Gauteng travellers react to branding signals and how such reaction reflects the national tourism behaviour (Elgin and Elveren, 2024).

Regression analysis indicated that destination-choice consideration was not equally contributed to by the branding constructs. In all four models, brand image was identified as the most predictive factor, further confirming its primary role in influencing traveller assessments (Kladou et al., 2017). Cognitive recognition and memory-based associations also had crucial impacts on decision-making; brand awareness and brand recall registered considerable effects in a number of models (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). By contrast, perceived risk had no significant effect on any destination-choice metric, indicating that risk perceptions might not be a differentiating factor among domestic travellers, particularly when brand-related constructs have a greater effect (Kankhuni, 2020). Comprehensively, the regression findings indicate destination branding is an

overlay structure where image, awareness and recall aspects are predominant in influencing tourist choices.

The results in this chapter form a basis on which the implications of branding are interpreted in the case of domestic tourism in South Africa. Brand image prominence and the unchanging importance of awareness and recall reinforce the relevance of strategic branding on destination competitiveness (Howes, 2024). These findings are also in line with literature where branding is regarded as an important factor in influencing traveller choice that defines both functional and affective reactions to destinations (Keller, 2001). The chapter ends by indicating that destination choice among Gauteng travellers is multidimensional, revealing that consistently high brand-related perceptions impact cost, accessibility, activities, and distance evaluation (Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021). These lessons underlie Chapter 5, where the implications of the broader implications, recommendations, and contributions of the study to tourism stakeholders are discussed.

4.8 CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of brand awareness on destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists in South Africa. The findings indicate that destination branding plays an important role in shaping tourists' travel decisions, particularly through constructs such as brand awareness, brand recall, brand image and perceived risk. The results contribute to the understanding of domestic tourism behaviour in South Africa and highlight the importance of effective destination branding strategies. The study also provides practical insights for tourism marketers seeking to promote under-visited destinations and improve the distribution of domestic tourism across provinces. Overall, the findings support the relevance of the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model in explaining destination choice within the South African tourism context.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations arising from this study, which sought to assess the impact of brand awareness on destination choice among domestic tourists based in Gauteng. Drawing on the empirical findings reported in Chapter 4, this chapter synthesises the results of the regression analysis across the four brand-related dimensions, namely brand awareness, brand recall, brand image, and perceived risk, and situates these findings within the broader theoretical and practical context of South African domestic tourism. The chapter also reflects on the degree to which the study objectives and hypotheses were addressed, and the extent to which this research contributes to destination branding theory and practice. The chapter further acknowledges the limitations of the study and identifies avenues for future research.

The empirical evidence gathered from 271 Gauteng-based domestic tourists demonstrated that brand awareness dimensions are significant and consequential determinants of how tourists evaluate and select domestic travel destinations. The regression models collectively explained 65.6% of the variance in destination choice ($R^2 = 0.656$, $F(4, 262) = 135.12$, $p < .001$), confirming the theoretical premise that branding exerts substantial influence on travel decision-making among this population (Keller,

2003; Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021). These findings carry meaningful implications for tourism marketers and destination management organisations seeking to promote equitable tourism distribution across South Africa, particularly in under-visited provinces such as Limpopo, the Free State, and the Northern Cape.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings and Objectives

This section integrates the study's empirical findings with each of the four research objectives and four hypotheses, providing a structured account of how the research aim was achieved.

Objective 1: Synthesis of Literature on Brand Awareness and Destination Choice

The first objective required a critical review and synthesis of scholarly literature on brand awareness dimensions and their effects on domestic tourists' destination choice within the South African context. This objective was comprehensively addressed in Chapter 2, which reviewed established theoretical frameworks including Keller's (2003) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, Brand Resonance Theory, Place Branding Theory, Experience Economy Theory, and Service-Dominant Logic. The literature consistently identified brand awareness, brand recall, brand image, and perceived risk as the principal branding constructs influencing domestic destination choice (Kladou et al., 2017; Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021).

Specific gaps in the South African literature were identified, most notably the absence of empirical studies examining these branding dimensions simultaneously among Gauteng-based tourists, who constitute the country's largest domestic tourist source market (Nengovhela, 2020; Ezeuduji et al., 2016). The chapter also highlighted that while Cape Town and Durban dominate domestic visitation patterns due to their strong brand recognition, lesser-known destinations in provinces such as Limpopo, the Free State, and the Northern Cape remain underexplored, in part because of weak brand visibility and ineffective marketing (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021; Ezeuduji et al., 2016). This synthesis provided the theoretical and contextual grounding for the four hypotheses

tested in the study.

Objective 2: Identification and Definition of Key Brand Awareness Dimensions

The second objective was to identify and define the key dimensions of brand awareness relevant to domestic tourism in South Africa. Brand awareness was operationalised as a composite construct consisting of brand recall, brand image, and perceived risk, all of which were measured through validated Likert-scale items adapted from established destination branding and brand equity scales (Keller, 2003; Boo, Busser and Baloglu, 2009; Tasci and Gartner, 2007).

Brand recall was defined as the capacity of tourists to retrieve destination names and associations from memory without external prompting. Brand image was conceptualised as the holistic set of perceptions, emotional associations, and experiential attributes that tourists attach to a destination. Perceived risk was defined as tourists' subjective assessment of safety, health, financial, and functional risks associated with visiting a destination. All three dimensions demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.86$ for each scale) and recorded high mean scores on the five-point Likert scale, confirming their salience as constructs within this research context.

Objective 3: Empirical Testing of Hypotheses H_1 – H_4

The third objective required empirical testing of the four formulated hypotheses using multiple regression analysis, conducted in SPSS 29.0. The regression model met all statistical assumptions, including the absence of multivariate outliers (with five cases removed), normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, absence of multicollinearity (VIF < 5, Tolerance > 0.2), and independence of residuals (Durbin-Watson = 1.755). The findings from the regression analysis for each hypothesis are discussed below.

H_1 : Overall Brand Awareness Positively Influences Destination Choice

The first hypothesis proposed that overall brand awareness positively influences destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists. The descriptive statistics

revealed consistently high brand awareness scores across all items ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.763$), indicating that respondents were broadly aware of domestic destinations and regularly exposed to tourism branding efforts. Regression analysis confirmed that brand awareness was a marginally significant positive predictor of destination choice ($\beta = 0.124$, $B = 0.119$, $p = .050$), providing empirical support for H_1 .

These results are theoretically consistent with Keller's (2003) CBBE model, which positions brand awareness as the foundational prerequisite for higher-order brand associations and destination consideration. Destinations with higher awareness are more likely to enter tourists' consideration sets, reducing cognitive effort and facilitating decision-making (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). The finding that awareness is a significant, if marginal, predictor is also consistent with literature suggesting that in domestic tourism contexts where tourists are broadly aware of most destinations, awareness alone may not suffice to drive destination selection; rather, it functions as a necessary but insufficient condition that enables deeper brand evaluations (Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021; Elgin and Elveren, 2024). H_1 was therefore accepted.

H₂: Brand Recall Positively Influences Destination Choice

The second hypothesis proposed that brand recall positively influences destination choice. High mean recall scores ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.786$) indicated that respondents could readily retrieve domestic destination names and attributes from memory without prompting. Regression analysis confirmed that brand recall was a significant positive predictor of destination choice ($\beta = 0.199$, $B = 0.185$, $p < .001$), offering strong empirical support for H_2 .

This finding is consistent with Keller's (2003) framework, which identifies brand recall as a critical cognitive dimension that increases the salience and accessibility of destination information in tourists' memory. Strong recall reduces the mental effort required to evaluate competing destinations and increases the probability that a destination will be selected (Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021). Among Gauteng respondents,

the high prevalence of social media use (Facebook: 32.8%; Instagram: 30.6%; WhatsApp: 29.2%) is likely to have reinforced recall through repeated visual exposure to destination content (Hoeanet, 2018; Giannopoulos et al., 2021). H₂ was therefore accepted.

H₃: Positive Brand Image Positively Influences Destination Choice

The third hypothesis proposed that a positive brand image positively influences destination choice. Brand image recorded the highest mean among all constructs (M = 4.29, SD = 0.795) and emerged as the strongest predictor of destination choice in the regression model ($\beta = 0.533$, B = 0.494, $p < .001$), providing compelling empirical support for H₃.

The primacy of brand image is well documented in destination branding literature. Keller (2003) identifies a favourable brand image as the most influential driver of consumer preference, as it encapsulates the emotional, functional, and experiential associations that tourists attach to destinations. Strong brand images increase perceived value, reduce uncertainty, and foster loyalty (Kladou et al., 2017; Dias and Cardoso, 2017). For Gauteng tourists, a destination's image reflecting trustworthiness, cultural richness, and alignment with personal values emerged as the most decisive factor in their destination evaluations. This finding confirms that destination marketers must prioritise image development and management as the cornerstone of their branding strategies. H₃ was therefore accepted.

H₄: Lower Perceived Risk Positively Influences Destination Choice

The fourth hypothesis proposed that lower perceived risk positively influences destination choice. Despite high mean perceived risk scores (M = 4.17, SD = 0.873), which indicate that respondents were broadly safety-conscious, the regression analysis revealed that perceived risk was not a statistically significant predictor of destination choice ($\beta = -0.021$, B = 0.017, $p = .705$). H₄ was therefore not supported.

This outcome, while counterintuitive, is explicable within the South African domestic tourism context. Research indicates that perceived risk functions as a differentiating factor primarily when travellers perceive substantial variation in risk levels across destinations (Kankhuni, 2020). In the domestic context, where all destinations are subject to broadly similar safety conditions and travellers draw on prior experience to manage risk perceptions, safety considerations may not meaningfully distinguish one destination from another (Gounden, 2020). Additionally, the strength of brand image as a predictor may have suppressed the independent predictive effect of perceived risk, given that a strong destination image can effectively substitute for safety reassurances by building cognitive trust and emotional confidence (Kladou et al., 2017; Giannopoulos et al., 2021). These findings suggest that while safety remains a contextual concern, it is not the primary lever through which domestic tourists differentiate destinations in South Africa.

Objective 4: Evidence-Based Recommendations for Tourism Marketers

The fourth objective required the development of practical, evidence-based recommendations for destination marketers and tourism agencies, derived from the empirical findings. These recommendations are presented fully in Section 5.3 below, drawing on the regression outcomes to prioritise the branding interventions most likely to influence destination choice among Gauteng tourists.

5.3 Practical Recommendations for Tourism Marketers and Destination Management Organisations

The empirical findings of this study provide clear, evidence-based guidance for tourism marketers, destination management organisations (DMOs), and provincial tourism agencies seeking to redistribute domestic tourism demand more equitably across South Africa. The recommendations are structured according to the four hypotheses tested in the study, prioritised by each branding dimension's predictive strength.

5.3.1 Enhancing Brand Image through Emotionally Resonant Storytelling

Given that brand image was the strongest predictor of destination choice ($\beta = 0.533$, $p < .001$), the most impactful strategic priority for tourism marketers is the development and management of compelling, emotionally resonant destination images. Under-visited provinces such as the Free State, Limpopo, and the Northern Cape possess distinctive cultural, heritage, and natural attributes that can form the basis of powerful brand narratives; however, these attributes remain largely unexploited in national and provincial marketing communications (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021).

Tourism marketers should invest in storytelling campaigns that foreground authentic local experiences, cultural heritage, and unique environmental features specific to each province. Such campaigns should prioritise emotional engagement over functional information, seeking to build affective connections between Gauteng tourists and the destination (Keller, 2003; Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Co-developing destination narratives with local communities, indigenous cultural custodians, and small tourism enterprises ensures authenticity and credibility, which are critical to sustaining long-term brand resonance (Mandagi and Centeno, 2024). Co-created stories also align with Service-Dominant Logic by positioning tourists as co-creators of destination meaning rather than passive recipients of promotional messages (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Visual consistency across marketing channels, including digital platforms, print media, and out-of-home advertising, should be maintained to reinforce brand identity and deepen emotional associations.

5.3.2 Strengthening Brand Recall through Repeated and Targeted Digital Exposure

Brand recall was the second most significant predictor of destination choice ($\beta = 0.199$, $p < .001$), confirming that memory-based accessibility powerfully shapes destination selection. Tourism marketers should develop sustained, multi-platform digital campaigns designed to increase the frequency with which destination names, landmarks, and signature experiences are encountered by Gauteng tourists across their daily media

consumption.

Given that the majority of respondents accessed the survey through Facebook (32.8%), Instagram (30.6%), and WhatsApp (29.2%), social media platforms represent the most cost-effective channels for achieving repeated destination exposure. Micro-campaigns employing consistent visual identifiers such as destination logos, signature landscapes, and cultural imagery can build strong memory traces without requiring large advertising budgets (Kladou et al., 2017; Hoeanet, 2018). Partnerships with domestic travel influencers who authentically represent specific provinces can amplify reach and accelerate recall among younger Gauteng tourists, who are particularly responsive to peer-generated content (Van Dyk, 2018). Destination-specific hashtags, “place challenges”, and user-generated content initiatives can further reinforce recall through social sharing and community engagement (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). Under-visited provinces should be specifically featured in the South African Tourism “Sho’t Left” campaign and similar national initiatives to ensure they achieve adequate recall among Gauteng source market travellers.

5.3.3 Sustaining and Amplifying General Brand Awareness Visibility

While brand awareness was a marginally significant predictor ($\beta = 0.124$, $p = .050$), it remains an important baseline condition for destination consideration. Marketers should ensure that under-visited destinations achieve sufficient brand salience to enter the awareness sets of Gauteng tourists before deploying recall- and image-building campaigns. Consistent brand visibility across traditional media, digital platforms, and tourism trade channels is therefore essential (Keller, 2003; Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021).

Tourism agencies should work collaboratively with national bodies such as South African Tourism to include lesser-known provincial destinations in mainstream campaigns, travel magazines, and digital tourism portals. Destination-specific awareness campaigns should clearly communicate what a destination offers, to whom it is most suited, and why it merits consideration alongside better-known alternatives. Investment

in search engine optimisation (SEO) and paid digital advertising targeting Gauteng residents can increase destination discoverability among tourists actively planning domestic travel (Ian, 2023).

5.3.4 Addressing Perceived Risk without Overemphasising Safety

Although perceived risk was not a statistically significant predictor of destination choice in this study, the high mean safety ratings ($M = 4.17$) indicate that tourists do consider safety as a background contextual factor. Marketers should therefore integrate safety information within broader brand communications rather than positioning safety as a primary selling point, to avoid inadvertently signalling risk concerns and diminishing emotional appeal (Kankhuni, 2020; Gounden, 2020).

Practical approaches include embedding travel safety information within destination websites as supplementary content, highlighting tourism-specific safety records in provincial annual tourism reports, and featuring tourism police and visitor support services in destination guides. Adventure and eco-tourism products should proactively communicate safety protocols and quality assurance standards as part of their experience narrative, reassuring risk-sensitive tourists without making safety concerns the primary marketing message. For destinations associated with higher perceived risk profiles, targeted reassurance campaigns featuring verified traveller testimonials and certified safety ratings may help reduce friction for first-time visitors (Satar et al., 2023).

5.3.5 Leveraging Gauteng Tourists as Brand Advocates for Under-Visited Provinces

A critical strategic opportunity identified by the study is the potential to convert Gauteng tourists who have visited under-promoted provinces into active brand advocates. Given that 43.5% of respondents had taken one to two domestic trips in the preceding 12 months and 41.7% planned more than five trips in the next 12 months, Gauteng tourists represent a high-frequency, economically active domestic tourism

segment with significant word-of-mouth influence (Mangali and Ortaleza, 2021).

Tourism agencies should design post-visit engagement strategies that incentivise Gauteng tourists to share their experiences on social media, provide reviews on travel platforms, and recommend under-visited destinations to their social networks. Loyalty reward programmes, referral incentives, and community travel challenges can stimulate user-generated content that functions as credible, peer-driven brand advertising. Social influence theory confirms that peer recommendations are among the most effective drivers of destination awareness and consideration, particularly for unfamiliar or emerging destinations (Giannopoulos et al., 2021; Van Dyk, 2018).

5.4 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several contributions to destination branding theory and domestic tourism scholarship. First, it extends the application of Keller's (2003) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model to a sub-Saharan domestic tourism context, empirically demonstrating that the model's core propositions regarding the sequencing and hierarchy of brand awareness dimensions remain valid in an emerging market setting. The finding that brand image is the strongest predictor of destination choice, followed by brand recall and brand awareness, confirms the model's theoretical architecture, which positions image and associations as higher-order determinants of preference, built upon an awareness foundation.

Second, the study contributes to Place Branding Theory by demonstrating that, in a domestic tourism context characterised by broadly comparable risk profiles across destinations, perceived risk does not function as a meaningful differentiating variable in destination choice. This nuances Anholt's (2010) theoretical position on the centrality of perceived safety in place brand evaluations, suggesting that risk's predictive power may be context-dependent and is potentially suppressed when overall risk levels are uniformly perceived as manageable. Marketers should therefore not assume that risk reduction is a universal priority in domestic tourism branding strategies.

Third, the study enriches Service-Dominant Logic by confirming that value co-creation in tourism branding extends beyond formal stakeholder engagement to encompass the organic social media-driven co-production of destination imagery and recall by tourists themselves. The strong influence of social media platforms in shaping recall and image perceptions among Gauteng tourists highlights the role of digital communities as de facto co-creators of destination brand meaning, consistent with SDL's emphasis on value co-production through dynamic stakeholder interactions (Mandagi and Centeno, 2024; Giannopoulos et al., 2021).

Finally, the study provides one of the first empirical datasets to simultaneously test brand awareness, brand recall, brand image, and perceived risk as predictors of destination choice within a single regression framework in South Africa, filling a significant gap identified in the literature review. The confirmed R^2 of 0.656 demonstrates that these four branding dimensions collectively explain the majority of variance in destination choice, providing strong empirical justification for branding-centred tourism development strategies in the South African context.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be noted when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the use of purposive quota sampling, a non-probability technique, limits the generalisability of the findings beyond the specific sample and study context. While the sampling strategy was appropriate for achieving the study's purposive aims, the findings cannot be extrapolated with confidence to all Gauteng-based domestic tourists or to domestic tourists in other South African provinces (Ezeuduji et al., 2016).

Second, the sample composition was significantly skewed toward female respondents (82.3%), which is consistent with patterns of online survey participation in tourism research (Mkwizu, 2018) but nonetheless introduces a gender imbalance that may limit the representativeness of the findings. Future research should employ stratified

sampling to ensure proportional gender representation.

Third, the uniformly high mean scores across all branding constructs (ranging from 4.17 to 4.37 on a five-point scale) indicate a ceiling effect, suggesting that respondents may have rated most constructs similarly, which may have constrained the ability of the regression models to detect finer-grained predictive differences between constructs. This high-rating pattern may be attributable to social desirability bias or to the fact that the sample, recruited from domestic travel social media groups, is likely to represent tourism-engaged individuals with pre-existing positive attitudes toward travel (Kankhuni, 2020).

Fourth, the cross-sectional research design precludes causal inference. While the regression results confirm statistically significant associations between branding dimensions and destination choice, it cannot be definitively concluded that changes in brand awareness, recall, or image cause changes in destination selection. Longitudinal or experimental designs would be required to establish causal directionality (Desfiandi and Singagerda, 2019).

Finally, the study's focus on brand awareness dimensions, while theoretically motivated, does not account for other potentially important determinants of destination choice, such as travel cost, physical accessibility, social influence, and prior destination experience. Future studies should incorporate a broader range of predictor variables to develop a more comprehensive model of domestic destination choice in South Africa.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Research

The findings and limitations of this study suggest several directions for future inquiry that would advance understanding of destination branding and domestic tourism decision-making in South Africa.

- Mixed-methods studies: Future research should employ mixed-methods

approaches that combine quantitative measurement of branding constructs with qualitative exploration of the emotional, cultural, and narrative mechanisms through which tourists form destination brand perceptions. Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and social media discourse analysis would provide richer insight into the processes by which brand image and recall are constructed and maintained among Gauteng tourists.

- Comparative provincial studies: A comparative analysis examining destination brand perceptions and choice behaviour across multiple South African provinces, or between Gauteng tourists and tourists from other source markets, would illuminate regional and demographic variations in branding effectiveness. Such a study could identify which branding strategies are universally effective and which require adaptation for specific provincial or demographic contexts.
- Longitudinal research: A longitudinal study design, tracking changes in brand perceptions and travel intentions over time, would enable causal inferences to be drawn about the effects of specific marketing campaigns on destination awareness, recall, and image. Such a design would also allow assessment of whether branding investments translate into sustained changes in visitation patterns to under-visited provinces.
- Focused studies on under-visited destinations: Dedicated qualitative and quantitative studies exploring the specific branding barriers and opportunities facing provinces such as the Free State, Northern Cape, and Limpopo would generate actionable insights for DMOs and provincial tourism agencies seeking to develop competitive destination brands. Such studies should engage local communities, tourism operators, and visitors as co-researchers to ensure that branding strategies are contextually grounded and authentically representative.
- Perceived risk in international tourism contexts: Given that perceived risk was not a significant predictor in the domestic context, future research should investigate whether and how risk perceptions operate differently when South African tourists consider international destinations, or when international tourists evaluate South

Africa as a travel destination. Cross-national comparative studies would help clarify the boundary conditions within which perceived risk functions as a meaningful determinant of destination choice.

5.7 Conclusion

This study has provided robust empirical evidence confirming that brand awareness dimensions are significant determinants of destination choice among Gauteng-based domestic tourists. Grounded in Keller's (2003) CBBE model, Brand Resonance Theory, Place Branding Theory, and Service-Dominant Logic, the study tested four hypotheses using multiple regression analysis with data from 271 respondents. The findings demonstrate that brand image is the most powerful predictor of destination choice ($\beta = 0.533$), followed by brand recall ($\beta = 0.199$) and overall brand awareness ($\beta = 0.124$), collectively explaining 65.6% of the variance in destination selection. Perceived risk was not a significant predictor in the domestic context, suggesting that safety considerations are effectively managed through strong brand image and trust-building communications.

These findings carry meaningful implications for South Africa's domestic tourism sector. The continued concentration of domestic tourist flows in a small number of highly branded provinces, most notably the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, represents both an economic inequity and a missed development opportunity for under-visited regions. The study demonstrates that strategic, evidence-based branding interventions, prioritising brand image development, recall enhancement, and sustained awareness campaigns, can meaningfully influence Gauteng tourists' destination evaluations and increase the likelihood that lesser-known provinces enter their consideration sets.

For national and provincial tourism agencies, the study's message is clear: investment in destination branding, anchored in authentic storytelling, consistent visual identity, and collaborative stakeholder engagement, represents the most effective mechanism for redistributing domestic tourism demand more equitably across South

Africa. When implemented strategically, destination branding has the potential not only to increase visitor numbers to under-visited provinces but to generate sustainable regional economic development, job creation, and cultural exchange, contributing to the broader goals of inclusive and equitable national growth.

In conclusion, this study advances the scholarly understanding of how brand awareness influences domestic destination choice in an emerging economy context and provides tourism practitioners with actionable, evidence-based guidance for strengthening destination competitiveness and broadening the geographic distribution of South Africa's domestic tourism benefits.

Appendices

APPENDIX A :



Annexure H – PARTICIPANT OR RESPONDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Lebogang Seshoka, and I am a student at The IIE's Vega school of brand leadership. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr Corne Engelbrecht about assessing the impact of brand awareness on destination choice among tourists from Gauteng. This study tests specific hypotheses regarding the influence of brand awareness on travel decisions. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the role brand awareness plays in tourist behaviour. By focusing on Gauteng travellers, who travel more frequently, the study aims to generate insights that can help lesser-known or under-visited destinations develop effective branding strategies. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer

so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

What will I be doing if I participate in your study?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you are a Gauteng-based resident who has recently travelled or plans to travel within South Africa in the next 12 months, making your experiences and perspectives valuable for understanding domestic tourism patterns. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like you to complete a structured online questionnaire about your awareness of South African destinations, your travel preferences, and how brand awareness influences your destination choices. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your travel preferences, brand awareness, and decision-making related to South African domestic tourism. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Detail the potential risks and how it will be managed by the researcher. Indicate how the ethical considerations will be applied in the context of the study. Potential risks are minimal and may include slight discomfort in reflecting on personal travel choices or financial considerations related to travel. Should any discomfort arise, you may pause or withdraw from participation immediately.

Management of risks:

- Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.
- No personal or identifying information will be linked to your responses.
- Data will be stored securely on a password-protected device, accessible only to the researcher and supervisor.
- Anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly maintained throughout the study.

Ethical considerations:

- The study will adhere to the guidelines set by The IIE's Vega School Research Ethics Committee.
- Informed consent will be obtained before participation.
- Participants' rights to privacy, confidentiality, and voluntary participation will be fully respected.
- Data will only be used for academic research purposes related to this study.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;

- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at IIE's Vega school, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my **Master of Commerce in strategic brand leadership**. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Dr Corne Engelbrecht

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Participant or respondent Informed Consent – Audio and Visual Recordings.

I agree to participate in the research conducted by Lebogang Seshoka about assessing the impact of brand awareness on destination choice among tourists from Gauteng.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to participate in this research and be recorded for the purpose of data collection.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private and confidential.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.

• I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
Signature	Date

APPENDIX B : QUESTIONNAIRE

Title: Assessing the impact of brand awareness on destination choice among tourists from Gauteng

Description:

Thank you for participating! This short survey explores how branding influences your travel choices within South Africa. Your responses are anonymous and will only be used for academic research. It takes 15 minutes to complete.

SECTION 1: Consent and Screening (PLEASE SELECT THE RELEVANT OPTION)

1.1 Informed Consent

By continuing with this survey, you confirm you are over 18, understand the purpose of the study and participate voluntarily. Your responses will be kept anonymous and confidential.

☐ I agree to participate

☐ I do not agree

2. Travel Behaviour and Intentions

Screening Question (Eligibility Check):

2.1. In which province do you currently reside?

☐ Gauteng → Continue with the questionnaire

☐ Other → Thank you, you do not qualify to participate in this study

2.2. Have you travelled within South Africa in the past 12 months OR do you plan to travel within South Africa in the next 12 months?

☐ Yes → Continue with the questionnaire

☐ No → Thank you, you do not qualify to participate in this study

Section 2: Demographic Information

2. Age:

3. Gender:

3.1. ☐ Male

3.2. ☐ Female

3.3. ☐ Other

4. Home language:

☐ Afrikaans

☐ English

☐ Other (Specify): _____

5. Province of residence:

- ☐ Gauteng
- ☐ Western Cape
- ☐ KwaZulu-Natal
- ☐ Eastern Cape
- ☐ Free State
- ☐ Limpopo
- ☐ Mpumalanga
- ☐ North West
- ☐ Northern Cape
- ☐ Outside of South Africa (Specify): _____

6. Employment status:

- 6.1. ☐ Employed full-time
- 6.2. ☐ Employed part-time
- 6.3. ☐ Self employed
- 6.4. ☐ Unemployed
- 6.5. ☐ Student
- 6.6. ☐ Retired
- 6.7. ☐ Other (Specify): _____

7. Monthly Income bracket

- 7.1. ☐ Less than R5000
- 7.2. ☐ R5000-R9,999
- 7.3. ☐ R10,000-R19,999
- 7.4. ☐ R20,000-R34,999
- 7.5. ☐ R35,000-R49,999
- 7.6. ☐ R50,000 and above

8. Which social media platform are you using to complete this questionnaire?

- 8.1. ☐ Facebook

8.2. Instagram

8.3. WhatsApp

8.4. ☐ Other (Specify): _____

Past Travel Behaviour:

8.5. How many domestic trips have you taken within South Africa in the past 12 months?

☐ 1-2 trips☐ 3–5 trips☐ More than 5 trips

9. Intended Travel (Next 12 Months):

10.1 How many trips do you anticipate making in the next 12 months?

☐ 1-2 trips

☐ 3–5 trips☐ More than 5 trips

10.2 What is the primary purpose of your planned travel in the next 12 months?

☐ Leisure☐ Business☐ Family visits☐ Other: _____

10. Name three South African holiday destinations that come to mind immediately

--

11. Please indicate how familiar you are with the following destinations (1 = Not at all familiar, 5 = Extremely familiar):

No.	Tourism Destination (by Province)	1 Not at all familiar	2 Slightly familiar	3 Moderately familiar	4 Very familiar	5 Extremely familiar
1	Sun City (Northwest)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Kruger National Park (Limpopo/Mpumalanga)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	uShaka Marine World (KwaZulu-Natal)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Table Mountain (Western Cape)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Big Hole, Kimberley (Northern Cape)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Clarens (Free State)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Addo Elephant Park (Eastern Cape)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	God's Window (Mpumalanga)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	Maropeng/Cradle of Humankind (Gauteng)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 3: Brand awareness

Please tick (☐) the response that best matches your opinion for each statement below:

No.	Statement	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
14	I recognise well-known tourist	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	destinations when I see their advertisements or promotions.					
15	I tend to consider destinations I know well.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16	I am more likely to visit lesser-known destinations if I am familiar with their brand.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17	High brand awareness makes me more likely to choose a destination for my next vacation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18	I consider brand awareness as a sign of reliability when choosing a travel destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19	I prefer traveling to places I have heard about frequently.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20	I associate specific destinations with unique qualities (e.g., culture, scenery, activities).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21	I have heard of local travel campaigns like "Sho't Left."	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
22	I feel more confident choosing a destination I have seen promoted multiple times.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 4: Brand Image

Please tick (☐) the response that best matches your opinion for each statement below:

No.	Statement	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree

23	I consider destinations with a strong brand image to be more trustworthy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24	A destination's brand image affects my willingness to consider it for future trips.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
25	The image I have of a destination plays a significant role in my travel decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26	The destination's brand image reflects my personal values and interests.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 5: Brand recall

Please tick (☐) the response that best matches your opinion for each statement below:

No.	Statement	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
27	I can recall the names of several domestic tourism destinations without needing a prompt.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
28	I am familiar with local destinations even if I have never visited them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
29	I can easily list popular places to visit in different provinces.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
30	I often remember hearing about certain destinations through media or word of mouth.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
31	Some destinations stand out in my	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	memory more than others.					
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SECTION 6: PERCEIVED RISK

Please tick (☐) the response that best matches your opinion for each statement below:

When thinking about visiting a destination, I believe that: (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

No.	Statement	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
37	It is safe to travel there.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
38	I do not expect health-related issues during the trip.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
39	I am not worried about crime at the destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
40	I feel confident about my ability to handle anything unexpected during my visit to the destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION 7: DESTINATION CHOICE

Please tick (☐) the response that best matches your opinion for each statement below:

When thinking about visiting a destination, I believe that: (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

No.	Statement	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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41	The cost or affordability of a destination influences my decision to visit it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
42	I am likely to choose destinations that are easily accessible by my preferred mode of transport.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
43	I tend to choose destinations that offer activities or experiences aligned with my reason for travel (e.g., leisure, family, or cultural experiences).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
44	The distance from my home affects my likelihood of choosing a particular destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Consent form to conduct research at company/organisation/association

I, Mtha Majavu, in my capacity as account administrator of Tour guides and tour operators in south Africa, grant permission Lebogang Seshoka to conduct research at the official Facebook page of tour guides and tour operators in south Africa pending the outcome of the ethics committee of the IIE on the envisaged research. The student may only engage with members of the organisation/ company/ association if they can produce the Ethics Letter from the IIE.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve for the people I represent. I also reserve the right to remind the people I represent that their participation in this study is completely voluntary and that this permission does not imply their participation. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time.

I also understand that research reports are made available in IIE Libraries as well as on the IIE Repository. The below conditions must be applied whilst writing up the research report:

Conditions concerning the anonymity of the company/organisation/association:

The company/organisation/association must be kept <u>anonymous</u> in the research report.		☒
The company/organisation/association may be <u>identified</u> in the research report.		☐
Conditions concerning the publication of the research report:		
The research report will be made available on the IIE Repository...		
<u>Immediately</u> after completion.		☐
<u>After</u> a specified number of months has elapsed.		☒
Number of months, if selected:		
M.MAJAVU		16 / 01/ 26
Signature		Date

APPENDIX C : GATEKEEPERS LETTERS

Consent form to conduct research at company/organisation/association
I, [REDACTED], in my capacity as account administrator of residence of the sky on Instagram, grant permission to Lebogang Seshoka to conduct research at the official Instagram page of residence of the sky pending the outcome of the ethics committee of the IIE on the envisaged research. The student may only engage with members of the organisation/ company/ association if they can produce the Ethics Letter from the IIE. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve for the people I represent. I also reserve the right to remind the people I represent that their participation in this study is completely voluntary and that this permission does not imply their participation. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time. I also understand that research reports are made available in IIE Libraries as well as on the IIE Repository. The below conditions must be applied whilst writing up the research report:
Conditions concerning the anonymity of the company/organisation/association:

The company/organisation/association must be kept <u>anonymous</u> in the research report.		☐
The company/organisation/association may be <u>identified</u> in the research report.		☐
Conditions concerning the publication of the research report:		
The research report will be made available on the IIE Repository...		
<u>Immediately</u> after completion.		☐
<u>After</u> a specified number of months has elapsed.		☐
Number of months, if selected:		
		15 JAN 2026
Signature		Date

Consent form to conduct research at company/organisation/association	
I, , in my capacity as group administrator of Explore mzanzi, grant permission to Lebogang Seshoka to conduct research at the official whatsapp group of explore Mzanzi pending the outcome of the ethics committee of the IIE on the envisaged research. The student may only engage with members of the organisation/ company/ association if they can produce the Ethics Letter from the IIE. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve for the people I represent. I also reserve the right to remind the people I represent that their participation in this study is completely voluntary and that this permission does not imply their participation. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time. I also understand that research reports are made available in IIE Libraries as well as on the IIE Repository. The below conditions must be applied whilst writing up the research report:	
Conditions concerning the anonymity of the company/organisation/association:	

The company/organisation/association must be kept <u>anonymous</u> in the research report.		☐
The company/organisation/association may be <u>identified</u> in the research report.		☐
Conditions concerning the publication of the research report:		
The research report will be made available on the IIE Repository...		
<u>Immediately</u> after completion.		☐
<u>After</u> a specified number of months has elapsed.		☐
Number of months, if selected:		
		15 January 2026
Signature		Date

Our Ref: M1460925
Enquiries research@iie.ac.za

26 September 2025

Outcome of Ethical Clearance for Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand Leadership

Student name Lebogang Geshoka

Brand and campus Emeris

Dear Lebogang

Thank you for submitting ethics clearance for the study: *Assessing the impact of brand awareness on destination choice among tourists from Gauteng*

We are pleased to inform you that the IIE's Higher Degrees Committee considered your study and granted ethics clearance, with major revision to satisfaction of the Supervisor and Head of Programme. This means you may proceed with data collection once the required changes have been addressed and approved by both your supervisor and Head of Programme. You are reminded to inform the IIE's Higher Degrees Committee of any changes made to the research methodology or title of the research prior to examination. Kindly ensure that all ethical considerations are duly applied whilst collecting, analysing and interpreting the data for the completion of your research.

All the best with your research studies



Dr Reza Hosseini

Chair: Higher Degrees Committee

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