

Colombia as a Future Tourism Destination from u.s. Travelers' Perspective

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Destination image, Colombia, u.s. travelers, cognitive image, affective image, perceived value, behavior intention

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Abstract: This research identified the perceptions of u.s. travelers regarding Colombia as a potential tourism destination, including their perception of risk. The framework of destination image and travelers' behavior, including perceived risk, cognitive and affective images, and perceived value for the trip, was adopted. Data for these behaviors were collected using a self-administered online survey with u.s. citizens who had not visited Colombia. Hypotheses were tested employing Confirmatory Factor Analysis and the Partial Least Squares method to analyze the measurement and structural models. The results indicated that u.s. citizens had a positive affective and cognitive perception of Colombia, which led to a higher perceived value in visiting the country and a strong intention to do so in the near future. This research provides information for tourism organizations in Colombia to develop tourism strategies aimed at attracting international inbound travelers, particularly u.s. residents. The research aims to understand travelers' perceptions of Colombia as their future tourist destination. This research is significant since Colombia is becoming an attractive tourism destination for international travelers. Therefore, it is important to understand their perceptions and travel behavior towards the country. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first attempt to examine Colombia as a potential tourism destination from the perspective of its primary target market.

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COLOMBIA COMO FUTURO DESTINO TURÍSTICO DESDE LA PERSPECTIVA DE VIAJEROS ESTADOUNIDENSES

Resumen: el presente estudio identificó las percepciones de turistas estadounidenses con respecto a Colombia como eventual destino turístico. Para ello, se adoptó el marco teórico de la imagen del destino y el comportamiento del viajero, que incluye el riesgo percibido, las imágenes cognitivas y afectivas y el valor percibido del viaje. Los datos para el análisis de estos comportamientos se recopilieron mediante una encuesta autoadministrada en línea a personas residentes en Estados Unidos que no han visitado a Colombia en el pasado. Las hipótesis de la investigación fueron evaluadas por medio de análisis factorial confirmatorio y el método de mínimos cuadrados parciales. Los resultados indicaron que las personas consultadas tenían una percepción afectiva y cognitiva positiva sobre Colombia, lo que llevó a un mayor

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valor percibido frente a una posible visita al país y una fuerte intención de concretarla en un futuro cercano. Esta investigación proporciona información clave para las organizaciones turísticas en Colombia con respecto al desarrollo de estrategias encaminadas a atraer viajeros internacionales —particularmente aquellos provenientes de Estados Unidos— con base en la comprensión de sus percepciones sobre el país como un futuro destino turístico. Esta investigación es relevante debido a que Colombia se está convirtiendo en un destino atractivo para viajeros internacionales, por lo cual es necesario comprender sus percepciones sobre el país y sus comportamientos de viaje. Hasta donde conocemos, este trabajo es el primero que analiza a Colombia como un destino turístico potencial desde la perspectiva de su principal mercado objetivo.

Palabras clave: imagen de destino, Colombia, turistas estadounidenses, imagen cognitiva, imagen afectiva, valor percibido, intención de comportamiento.

A COLÔMBIA COMO FUTURO DESTINO TURÍSTICO SOB A PERSPECTIVA DOS VIAJANTES ESTADUNIDENSES

Resumo: neste estudo, foram identificadas as percepções dos turistas estadunidenses com relação à Colômbia como um destino turístico em potencial. Para isso, foi adotada a estrutura teórica da imagem do destino e do comportamento do viajante, que inclui risco percebido, imagens cognitivas e afetivas e valor percebido da viagem. Os dados para a análise desses comportamentos foram coletados por meio de uma pesquisa on-line autoadministrada com residentes dos Estados Unidos que ainda não visitaram a Colômbia. As hipóteses da pesquisa foram testadas usando a análise fatorial confirmatória e o método dos mínimos quadrados parciais. Os resultados indicaram que os entrevistados tinham uma percepção afetiva e cognitiva positiva da Colômbia, o que levou a um valor percebido mais alto de uma possível visita ao país e a uma forte intenção de visitá-lo em breve. Esta pesquisa fornece informações-chave para as organizações de turismo da Colômbia no que diz respeito ao desenvolvimento de estratégias destinadas a atrair viajantes internacionais — especialmente os dos Estados Unidos — com base no entendimento de suas percepções do país como um futuro destino turístico. Esta pesquisa é relevante porque a Colômbia está se tornando um destino atraente para viajantes internacionais; portanto, é necessário compreender suas percepções sobre o país e seu comportamento de viagem. Até onde sabemos, este artigo é o primeiro a analisar a Colômbia como um destino turístico em potencial sob a perspectiva de seu principal mercado-alvo.

Palavras-chave: imagem de destino, Colômbia, turistas estadunidenses, imagem cognitiva, imagem afetiva, valor percebido, intenção comportamental.

INTRODUCTION

With the government's strong commitment and dedication to tourism development, Colombia has become one regional tourism hotspot in South America (Oxford Business Group, 2020). According to Oxford Business Group, Colombia was listed as one of the ten "coolest places" to visit in 2019. This organization highlights the unique characteristic of various Colombian cities, such as the "breezy appeal of Cartagena" and "[the] celebration of life in Bogota." Both global organizations' direct investment and the government's substantial funding in Colombia's tourism infrastructure have contributed to the country's position as the third-highest recipient of tourism in South America. This has resulted in a 21% growth in arrivals, from 3.3 million in 2016 to 4 million in 2017 (UNWTO, 2019). Now, Colombia has become an appealing tourist destination due to its various tourism resources, including rich biodiversity, stunning landscapes, scenic areas, and a wide range of ecotourism activities (Maldonado *et al.*, 2018).

Since tourism is recognized as a key driver of the country's economy (Hall & Williams, 2019), Colombia has made significant efforts to enhance its tourism promotion and marketing through social media, websites, and advanced digital technologies, resulting in 3.8% of the gross domestic product (USD 19 billion) deriving from the travel and tourism sector in 2019 (Rauls, 2020). According to the Ministry

of Commerce, Industry and Tourism (The City Paper, 2020), among various international inbound travelers to Colombia in 2019, u.s. travelers accounted for 22% of the market share in Colombian tourism, followed by Mexico, Argentina, Peru, and Brazil. In particular, after Colombia signed the peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerilla in 2016, the number of international travelers to Colombia grew by an average of 8.5% in 2018 (Rauls, 2020). Despite Colombia's skyrocketing popularity among international travelers as a tourism destination, scarce research has been conducted on how international travelers perceive Colombia as a potential travel destination, what images and risks they associate with the country, and how these factors influence their intention to visit the country in the near future.



To fill the gap in current tourism research on Colombia, this study attempted to identify the perceptions of u.s. travelers towards Colombia as a potential tourism destination. The perception of a destination's image can be assessed by examining the images associated with the impressions, expectations, ideas, and emotional thoughts that travelers have about a it (Assaker, 2014). Focusing on u.s. travelers as a key international inbound market for Colombia, this study aimed to achieve the following specific objectives: first, to identify the perceived risks of u.s. travelers towards Colombia as a potential tourism spot; second, to examine the destination image constructs (e.g., cognitive and affective image) (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Stylos *et al.*, 2016), and their relationship with the behavioral intentions by this travelers to visit Colombia; and third, to develop feasible tourism marketing strategies for

Colombia that cater not only the needs of u.s. travelers but also of other upcoming inbound international visitors.

This paper presents the theoretical background and the conceptual framework of the study, as well as its hypothesis. The next section focuses on the research methods: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Partial Least Squares (PLS). The findings of the data analysis are then presented in the results section. Finally, the discussions and conclusions and limitations are addressed.

CONTEXT DESCRIPTION

Colombia is a country located in the American continent, specifically in the northern region of South America (figure1). The country offers a diverse range of landscapes, including tropical forests, Caribbean beaches, the Andes mountains, and numerous coffee plantations. Colombia is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Caribbean Sea to the north, and the Amazon Rainforest to the south, and shares borders with Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador.



Figure 1. Geographical location of Colombia in South America. **Source:** authors, based on image available in mapede: <https://www.mapade.org/colombia.html>

Due to its various geographical regions and climates, Colombia has a wide variety of tourist offerings, such as adventure tourism, beaches, natural attractions, cultural heritage sites, gastronomic destinations, and Indigenous artifact’s locations. In addition, this country has developed luxury and healthcare tourism to attract diverse groups of international travelers. Table 1 summarizes the main tourist attractions identified in Colombia by the authors of this work.

Table 1

Inventory of the main tourist attractions in Colombia.

Items	Place/city	Touristic attractions
Cosmopolitan cities	Bogotá	Monserate, Candelaria, Zona Rosa, Parque de la 93
	Medellín	El Poblado, Comuna Trece, Plaza Botero, Parque Arvi, Pueblito Paisa

Items	Place/city	Touristic attractions
	Santa Marta	El Rodadero, Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino, Playa Cristal
	Cali	Cali Zoo, Cristo Rey
Colonial cities	Cartagena	Walled city, San Felipe Castle, Clock Tower, India Catalina
	Villa De Leyva	Main Square, Historical center
	Mompox	Historical center of Santa Cruz, Eastern celebration
	Barichara	Historical Center
Outdoor activities	Santander, Cundinamarca, Antioquia	Rafting, trekking, hiking, sunbathing, bird watching, paragliding, rafting, bungee jumping, canyoning, rappelling and cave exploration.
Zona Cafetera	Pereira, Armenia, Salento	Parque Nacional del Café, Recuca, Mariposario, Parque Panaca, Parque los Arrieros, Parque Ukumary, Coffee farms
Archeological ruins	Santa Marta	Ciudad Perdida
	San Agustín	Parque Arqueológico de San Agustín
	Cauca	Parque Arqueológico Nacional de Tierradentro
Festivals	Cali	Feria de Cali
	Medellin	Feria de las Flores, Colombia Moda
	Cartagena	Festival Internacional de Cine y Televisión, International Music Festival
	Barranquilla	Carnaval de Barranquilla
	Pasto	Carnaval de Negros y Blancos
Beaches & Islands	San Andrés y Providencia, Chocó, Antioquia, Bolívar, Magdalena, Córdoba y Sucre, Guajira	Johnny Cay, Playas de Choco, Capurganá, Rincón del Mar, Islas del Rosario, Playa Cristal, Playa Blanca, Golfo de Morrosquillo, Cabo de la Vela
Rivers	Meta	Caño Cristales
Forest	Amazonas	Amazonian rainforest

Source: authors.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Perceived risk

Travelers’ perception of risks associated with destinations significantly affects destination image and their behavior (Lehto *et al.*, 2008) since perceived risks play an important role in tourists’ decision-making process when choosing their future vacation destinations. Various researchers (Dowling & Staelin, 1994; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005) have identified perceived risk as tourists’ perceptions of uncertainty and adverse situations and consequences they may face when purchasing a product or service or engaging in an activity (Sohn *et al.*, 2016). Thus, the potential or perceived risks are key inhibiting factors for travelers when considering visiting certain destinations. In particular, when travelers plan to visit a new international destination, they tend to check its potential risks or gather more information about the destination from reliable sources, such as social media, social networks, family and friends, the Internet, or tourist specialized organizations in order to mitigate their perceived risks (Lepp *et al.*, 2011). Travelers’ perceived risks of a destination can vary based on their geographic location, culture, and previous travel experiences, which may affect their behavioral intention (Hasan *et al.*, 2017).

A traveler's perceived risk towards a destination is of paramount importance in their decision-making process as it can influence their choice of destination (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). Perceived risks of the destination can be one of the critical factors in destination choice and seem to reflect a distinction between risk and destination image. Chew and Jahari (2014) explored the effect of perceived travel risks on the formation of destination image, while other researchers (e.g., Emami & Ranjbarian, 2019; Lehto *et al.*, 2008; Lepp *et al.*, 2011; Viet *et al.*, 2020) have empirically confirmed the direct impact of perceived risks on destination image. Many international travelers still have stereotyped perceptions of Colombia as an unsafe location, associated with drug trafficking, vulnerable to natural disasters, politically unstable, and unsanitary (Barley & Dimanche, 2016). Since 2016, the Colombian government has made significant marketing efforts to change its image and attract international travelers to the country. However, there is limited research documenting the effectiveness of these efforts in reducing perceived risks. As indicated by Chew and Jahari (2014), travelers' downgrading the country's perceived risks could improve their perceived image towards that destination.

Destination image

Destination image is a crucial topic in tourism marketing as it generates traveler demand and has been one of the key predictors that can explain potential travelers' attitudinal and behavioral intentions to visit a place for their future travel (Fjelldal *et al.*, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2019). Destination image is generally defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person holds about a particular destination (Assaker, 2014; Prayag & Ryan, 2011; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Travelers' perceptions of destination image are subjective and are influenced by several factors, such as the characteristics of a destination and their quality (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Pike, 2017). Grounded on this, researchers (Gartner, 1993; Woosnam *et al.*, 2020) have identified three key components of destination image: cognitive, affective, and conative.

In this study, however, two components of destination image—cognitive and affective—will be included and reviewed, considering that our research will only focus on the characteristics of tourist destinations and travelers' emotional feelings towards the destination, where conative destination image is considered synonymous with intention (King *et al.*, 2015; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Prayag, 2009; Stylidis *et al.*, 2017). The cognitive destination image refers to the knowledge and beliefs about a destination that are explained through tangible attributes (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008; Papadimitriou *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, the affective destination image is related to the emotions and feelings associated with the destination (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Kock *et al.*, 2016; Yüksel & Akgül, 2007). Some studies (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Boo & Busser, 2005; Russell & Pratt, 1980) indicate that people's affective evaluation of a place is largely dependent on their knowledge of that place, and that the relationship between the cognitive and affective components has been documented in previous destination image models (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Li *et al.*, 2010; Lin *et al.*, 2007).

Based on the studies mentioned above, the following hypotheses have been formulated.

H₁: The cognitive destination image built by travelers is inversely affected by their perceived risks towards a destination.

H₂: The affective destination image built by travelers is inversely affected by their perceived risks towards a destination.

Perceived value

According to the study conducted by Lai *et al.* (2009), customers' perception of value was influenced by their image of the company. In the tourism setting, Ryu *et al.* (2008) indicated that there is a positive relationship between travelers' destination image and their perceived value. Perceived value is a customer's overall assessment of the utility of a product or service based on their perceptions of what is they receive and what is given (Zeithaml, 1988). In our study, perceived value refers to the expected value that travelers believe they can obtain through their pre-assessment of a potential destination prior to their visit. Sharma and Nayak (2019a, 2019b) studied the tourists' perceived value focusing on functional value, value for money, emotional value, and novelty value. In satisfaction-related studies (Cronin *et al.*, 2000; Ghorbanzadeh *et al.*, 2021; Hallak *et al.*, 2018; McDougall & Levesque, 2000), perceived value is considered a key predictor of satisfaction and behavioral intention. However, in this study, satisfaction is not included in the study's conceptual framework in a sense that this study focuses on travelers' perceptions of Colombia as their future destination, which they could not assess the level of their satisfaction with the destination yet prior to their trip to the destination. Satisfaction is defined as a positive reaction that results from favorable evaluations of consumption experiences (Babin & Griffin, 1998; Oliver, 1997) and as a post-consumption appraisal of the accomplishment (Eusébio & Vieira, 2013). As Jin *et al.* (2015) emphasize in their study, perceived value exerts a significant influence on travelers' behavioral intentions and high-level perceived value led to both future purchase intentions and behaviors (Baker *et al.*, 2002; Grewal *et al.*, 1998). Therefore, and based on the previous studies, the following hypotheses have been proposed:

H₃: The cognitive destination image built by travelers positively affects their perceived value towards a destination.

H₄: The affective destination image built by travelers positively affects their perceived value of the destination.

Behavior intention

Behavior intention is a barometer to measure people's actual behavior or to predict the probability they will perform a specific behavior. Oliver (1997) states in his study that intention is defined as "a stated likelihood to engage in a behavior." As one of the most well-known theories that measures people's anticipated behavior, the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Venkatesh & Brown, 2001) asserts that an individual's behavior is determined by their behavioral intention. The TRA has been adopted in different contexts such as marketing and advertising, and the hospitality industry (Mo Kwon *et al.*, 2013; Shrum *et al.*, 2012) to predict and explain customer behavior.

The TRA has been widely adopted in the tourism and hospitality context to understand an individual's travel behavior. Tourist behavior intention to visit a destination can be interpreted as a person's "anticipated future travel behavior" (Chang *et al.*, 2014) and is based on their personal judgment or perceived value towards the destination. Chen and Tsai (2007) purport that intention is considered as a tourist's judgement about their willingness to visit or revisit a destination. Bayih and Singh (2020) defined behavioral intention as the intention to revisit a tourist destination and the willingness to recommend it. Researchers also argue that perceived value affects positively customers' intended future behavior (Cronin *et al.*, 2000; McDougall & Levesque 2000; Parasuraman & Grewal 2000), indicating that perceived value is an essential element to determine their future behavioral intention (Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2022; Zhang *et al.*, 2020).

The positive impact of customers’ perceived value on their behavioral intention has been confirmed in the study of Parasuraman and Grewal (2000), who have found that perceived value is one of the most important factors of purchase intentions. Other researchers (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Kuo *et al.*, 2009; Um *et al.*, 2006) confirm the findings of the study by Parasuraman and Grewal (2000), addressing that customers’ perceived value is a key predictor for their purchase intentions and future behavioral intentions and the visit intention is determined more from what tourists perceive from destination than from what the destination satisfies them. Based on the findings of the studies mentioned above, the following hypothesis has been derived:

H₅: Travelers’ perceived value positively affects their intention to visit a destination.

Based on the previous studies mentioned above, this study has developed its conceptual framework to test the hypotheses shown in figure 2.

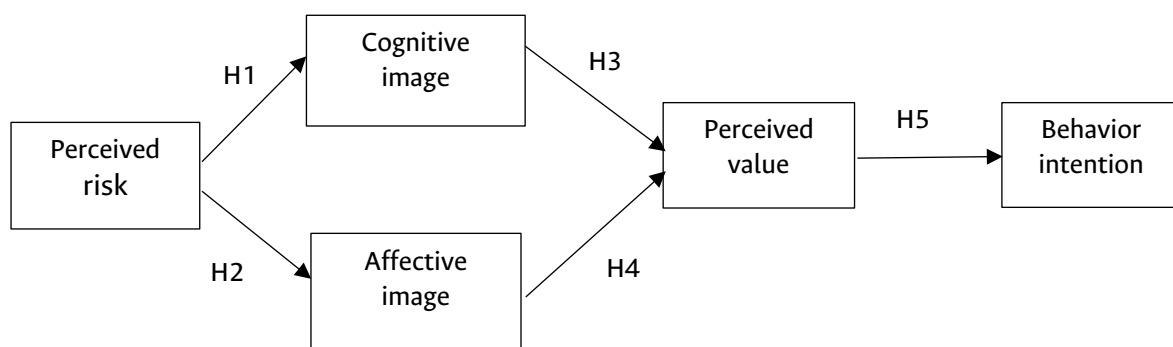


Figure 2. Study’s conceptual framework. Source: authors.

RESEARCH METHODS

As an exploratory study, this research decided to focus on potential travelers from the United States (U.S.), as they are considered the largest group of international inbound travelers to Colombia. Moreover, in recent years, the number of U.S. travelers to Colombia has been increasing (Mincit, 2019, 2023). An online self-administered survey on Qualtrics was used to examine U.S. nationals’ perceived image of Colombia as a potential travel destination and test the proposed hypotheses. Those who had not visited Colombia before and were at least 18 years old were selected as the sample for this study. In order to recruit potential respondents for the pilot test and main study, researchers contacted Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a database marketing company, which supported the recruitment of U.S. travelers who were interested in visiting Colombia in the near future. The pilot test was conducted to ensure the clarity of wording and the content validity of the questions. After revising and modifying the survey instrument, the main study was conducted. According to Casler *et al.* (2013), Amazon MTurk panels are more diverse in terms of socio-demographics and ethnicity compared to a traditional convenience sample survey. Furthermore, the results across the different samples (i.e., face-to-face, MTurk, and social media) were almost equivalent, indicating that the data quality using MTurk is valid.

All the measurement items were adopted from previous studies to ensure the validity, reliability, and readability of the measurements. The survey questionnaire had three sections. The first section consisted of items asking respondents about their willingness to visit Colombia for their leisure trip for the first time and their sources of travel information search. The second section asked questions related

to the risks they might perceive when traveling to Colombia, the destination image of Colombia, perceived value, and behavioral intentions. Finally, the last section asked questions related to respondents’ socio-demographic information. All measurement constructs were operationalized using multiple items on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), except for the affective destination image construct, which was measured using a 5-point semantic differential scale.

Previous studies conducted by Shin *et al.* (2021) used similar data analysis, employing the Two-Step Approach proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). In line with these studies, we have employed CFA and PLS, following the approach described by Izquierdo-Alfaro *et al.* (2014), Hair *et al.* (2012), and Ahuja & Thatcher (2005). Furthermore, it was found that the data followed a normal distribution. Additionally, an analysis of Cronbach’s Alpha and composite reliability indicated that the data exhibited satisfactory reliability. In addition, the validity of the research model and the structural model was tested using the methods described in previous research studies by Lee *et al.* (2020) and Shin *et al.* (2021).

RESULTS

A total of 315 questionnaires were collected, but 25 responses were eliminated due to incompleteness and incorrect responses to one of the five attention check items. Therefore, this study had a total of 290 responses for data analysis. More than half (58.6%) of the respondents were female, and the majority of them (68.3%) were from Generation Y, followed by Generation X (19%). About three-quarters of the respondents (74.2%) hold associate degrees or higher. Regarding the source of travel information search, travel blogs were the favorite among respondents (63.6%), followed by the official tourism website of the country of interest (58.4%), recommendations from friends and family (51.1%), and online portal sites (48.1%) (table 2).

Table 2.

Demographic profile of respondents (n = 290).

Variables		n	%
Gender	Male	120	41.4
	Female	170	58.6
Age	Generation Z (18-21)	18	6.2
	Generation Y (22-37)	198	68.3
	Generation X (38-53)	55	19.0
	Baby Boomers (54-72)	19	6.6
Education Level	High school	61	21.0
	Associate degree	40	13.8
	Bachelor’s degree	120	41.4
	Master’s degree	48	16.6
	Doctoral degree	7	2.4
Marital Status	Others	14	4.8
	Single	101	34.8
	Married with children	42	14.5
	Not married but living with partner	27	9.3
	Married with no children	109	37.6
Household Income	Divorced	11	3.8
	< USD 35,000	64	22.1
	USD 35,000-59,999	87	30.0

Variables		n	%
	USD 60,000-84,999	55	19.0
	USD 85,000-99,999	38	13.1
	USD 100,000-125,000	30	10.3
	> USD 125,000	16	5.5
Ethnicity	White	228	78.6
	African American	20	6.9
	Asian	18	6.2
	Spanish	4	1.4
	American Indian or Alaska Native	20	6.9
Information source ^a	Travel blogs	147	63.6
	Official tourism website of country	135	58.4
	Friends and family	118	51.1
	Online portals	111	48.1
	Social media	100	43.3
	Travel agents	81	35.1

^aMultiple selection allowed. **Source:** authors.

Measurement model test

Following Anderson and Gerbing’s (1988) two-step approach for the measurement model and testing, this study initially examined the measurement model by eliminating measured variables or latent factors that did not fit well, based on the initial CFA. To ensure an appropriate fit for the factors, a non-parametric assessment was conducted, following the recommendation of Hair *et al.* (2017), using bootstrapping and blindfolding. Once the factors had an appropriate fit, the results of the measurement model for the constructs were determined by evaluating the reliability of the individual measurements and validating their convergence, as outlined by Hulland (1999).

The results (table 3) indicate that the measurements for each construct demonstrated a convergent validity and composite reliability greater than 0.70. This result is consistent with the recommendation by Hair *et al.* (2016). Furthermore, as the values for all factor loadings in this exploratory research were higher than 0.6, there is evidence to suggest that there were more variances associated with the construct being measured than with error variances. This is aligned with the findings reported in the work conducted by Gefen *et al.* (2000), and further supported by the values of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which are all higher than 0.50 (see Fornell & Larcker 1981). To verify the discriminant validity of the constructs, we used the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), as recommended in recent PLS-SEM studies (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Henseler *et al.*, 2015). As shown in table 4, HTMT values for all constructs are lower than the conservative threshold value of 0.85 (Hair *et al.*, 2019; Henseler *et al.*, 2015). This provides strong evidence for the discriminant validity of the constructs examined.

Table 3.

Results of the measurement model.

Construct/items	Mean (Std.) [*]	Loading	CR ^{**}	AVE
Perceived risk				
Perceived risk – 1		0.75	0.91	0.73
Terrorism	2.95 (1.41)	0.89		
Guerrilla	2.97 (1.36)	0.91		
Political instability	3.13 (1.30)	0.78		
Drug trafficking	3.36 (1.47)	0.81		
Perceived risk – 2		0.80	0.84	0.63

Construct/items	Mean (Std.)*	Loading	CR**	AVE
Rip off prices	3.83 (1.150)	0.82		
Pollution	3.76 (1.42)	0.78		
Unsafe drinking water	2.83 (1.14)	0.80		
Cognitive image				
<i>Cognitive image - 1</i>		0.79	0.89	0.66
Inexpensive airfare to the destination	4.07 (0.93)	0.79		
Inexpensive packages to the destination	4.31 (0.76)	0.83		
Good prices for accommodations	4.41 (0.61)	0.84		
Good value for my travel money	4.50 (0.62)	0.77		
<i>Cognitive image - 2</i>		0.77	0.85	0.66
Large number of nature reserves and wilderness areas	3.94 (0.99)	0.82		
Great variety of plants and animals	3.87 (0.98)	0.86		
Wealth and beauty of landscapes	4.30 (0.76)	0.70		
<i>Cognitive image - 3</i>		0.82	0.86	0.76
Restful and relaxing place	4.45 (0.71)	0.86		
Cleanliness and sanitation	4.38 (0.77)	0.89		
<i>Cognitive image - 4</i>		0.75	0.85	0.73
Places of historical, cultural, or archeological interest	4.13 (0.89)	0.87		
Traditional arts and crafts	3.34 (1.04)	0.83		
<i>Cognitive image - 5</i>		0.82		
Availability of authentic restaurants	4.12 (0.83)	0.87	0.86	0.76
Varied gastronomy	3.44 (0.93)	0.86		
Affective image			0.85	0.64
Unreliable (1) ... Reliable (5)	3.86 (0.86)	0.91		
Bad (1) ... Good (5)	4.53 (0.70)	0.65		
Unsafe (1) ... Safe (5)	3.92 (0.84)	0.81		
Perceived value			0.89	0.72
Overall, my trip to the country will be valuable	4.39 (0.59)	0.79		
What I get from my trip, it will be greater than what I expected	4.14 (0.76)	0.88		
My experience with the country will satisfy my needs and desires	4.32 (0.68)	0.87		
Intention			0.85	0.66
I have a strong intention to travel to the country in the near future	3.67 (0.96)	0.76		
I will visit the country	3.91 (0.79)	0.82		
I will enjoy visiting the country	4.25 (0.60)	0.84		

* 5-point scale. ** Composite reliability. **Source:** authors.

Table 4.

Discriminant validity by HTMT.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Perceived risk - 1	-								
2. Perceived risk - 2	0.649	-							
3. Cognitive image - 1	0.210	0.329	-						
4. Cognitive image - 2	0.165	0.201	0.126	-					
5. Cognitive image - 3	0.482	0.645	0.434	0.252	-				
6. Cognitive image - 4	0.198	0.322	0.307	0.417	0.268	-			
7. Cognitive image - 5	0.172	0.240	0.228	0.276	0.383	0.358	-		
8. Affective image	0.139	0.364	0.174	0.267	0.278	0.326	0.154	-	
9. Perceived value	0.139	0.200	0.142	0.223	0.224	0.357	0.220	0.373	-

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. Behavior intention	0.159	0.145	0.147	0.163	0.132	0.292	0.132	0.339	0.615

Source: authors.

Prior to conducting the measurement model test, we assessed the normality of the data and checked for multicollinearity issues. As the skewness and kurtosis values fell within the range of ± 1.5, and the VIF statistics were less than 3.0, there were no issues related to the normality of the data and multicollinearity (Ringle *et al.*, 2015). The measurement model was assessed through a series of factor analyses and reliability tests. As the perceived risk and cognitive image were second-order constructs, the first-order constructs were estimated first.

According to the results of factor analysis, the perceived risk was found to have two first-order constructs, while the cognitive destination image consisted of five first-order constructs. Standardized factor loadings for all items were greater than 0.70, except for one item (affective image). However, the item was not eliminated because other items under the same construct exhibit high factor loadings, which are sufficient to yield an AVE greater than 0.50. The AVE value for each construct was greater than 0.50, indicating that the error variance was less than the shared variance of the manifested constructs in the study (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, composite reliability values were greater than 0.75, thus indicating sufficient reliability.

To validate the conceptual framework of this study, five hypotheses were proposed and assessed using the criteria suggested by Hair *et al.* (2016): (i) relationships based on the explained variance (i.e., R²) of the dependent variables; (ii) path coefficients (i.e., β); and (iii) the levels of significance obtained from a bootstrapping re-sampling method with 5,000 re-samples (Chin, 1998). Experimental results show that all hypotheses were accepted with p < 0.01 (table 5). Both hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported (β = -0.477, t = -10.112, p < 0.001; β = -0.258, t = -4.137, p < 0.001), indicating that perceived risks negatively affected travelers’ cognitive and affective image towards the destination. Consequently, hypothesis 3 was confirmed (β = 0.200, t = 3.092, p < 0.01).

Table 5.

Results of hypothesis testing.

Structural path (Hypothesis)	β	S.E.	t-ratio	p	Supported
Perceived risk → Cognitive image (H1)	-0.477	0.046	-10.112	p < 0.001	Yes
Perceived risk → Affective image (H2)	-0.258	0.061	-4.137	p < 0.001	Yes
Cognitive image → Perceived value (H3)	0.200	0.062	3.092	p < 0.01	Yes
Affective image → Perceived value (H4)	0.231	0.067	3.429	p < 0.001	Yes
Perceived value → Intention (H5)	0.506	0.047	10.627	p < 0.001	Yes

Source: authors.

DISCUSSION

This study attempted to identify how Colombia is perceived by international travelers, specifically the U.S. travelers, as a potential tourism destination. The goal was to provide Colombian tourism organizations with constructive tourism marketing strategies to attract and expand their inbound international tourism markets. According to our results, U.S. travelers’ overall cognitive image towards Colombia is positive, as indicated by higher mean scores ranging from 3.34 (traditional arts and crafts) to 4.50 (good value for travel money) on a 5-point Likert scale.

In general, Colombia has been perceived as a good (4.53), safe (3.92), and reliable (3.86) destination by u.s. travelers. Given the positively perceived image of Colombia among u.s. travelers, they believed that their trip to the country would be valuable (4.39), satisfy their needs and desires (4.32), and exceed their expectations (4.14). Finally, their overall intention to visit Colombia was high, resulting in an overall mean score of 3.94. Despite their positive image and high intention to visit Colombia, Americans still have stereotypical perceptions of risks associated to Colombia, including issues such as rip off prices (3.83), pollution (3.76), drug trafficking (3.36), political instability (3.13), guerrilla groups (2.97), terrorism (2.95), and the safety of drinking water (2.83).

By adopting the conceptual frameworks presented in the works of Chew and Jahari (2014) and Stylos *et al.* (2016), this study expanded its framework by including perceived risk, perceived value, and visit intention to examine travelers' perceived image towards a destination prior to their visit and its impact on perceived value and visit intention. The findings of this study indicated that all five proposed hypotheses were accepted at a significance level of $p < 0.01$ (table 5). As proven in hypotheses 1 and 2, Americans' perceived risks towards Colombia negatively affected both cognitive and affective images at a significance level of 0.001. Between the two images, the cognitive image of u.s. travelers towards Colombia was more negatively affected by perceived risk than their affective image. As they perceived Colombia as a risky country to visit, their cognitive image of the country diminished. This study confirmed the findings by Ryu *et al.* (2008) that destination image was positively correlated to travelers' perceived value. As a result, both hypotheses 3 and 4 were accepted. Travelers' perceived value towards the destination was influenced by both cognitive and affective images. Therefore, destination tourism organizations should focus on developing diverse tourism activities while also maintaining the unique tourism attractions at a given destination in order appeal to the emotional fulfillment of travelers, whose perception of the destination, as influenced by diverse images, plays a crucial role in determining their behavioral intentions and ultimately increases their likelihood of visiting the destination.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study developed a theoretical framework that examined the visit intention of prospective travelers by evaluating their perceived risks towards a destination, their perceived destination images, both cognitive and affective, and their perceived value. Using second-order analysis, this study identified key dimensions of perceived risk and cognitive image in relation to travelers' perceptions. As stated by Lepp *et al.* (2011), travelers' perceived risks can be placed in their thoughts when planning to visit a new international destination. These risks are formed differently depending on the social and political status of a destination.

In this study, Colombia was the chosen destination for u.s. travelers who were visiting for leisure purposes for the first time. From the perspective of these travelers, the perceived risks were identified by two dimensions: the first associated with social and political aspects, and the second with economic and environmental ones. This study identified five dimensions of the cognitive image that Americans perceive about Colombia, and that are associated with Colombia's economy, biodiversity, environment, culture, and authentic cuisine, in order of relevance. Moreover, this study provides a framework for explaining how travelers' perception of risk and destination image influence their perceived value of Colombia, ultimately influencing their intention to visit the country.

This framework will also assist tourism organizations in Colombia in developing their tourism strategies to attract international inbound travelers, specifically Americans, to the country and understanding their perceptions towards Colombia as a future tourist destination. As indicated by the study's findings, people hold deep-rooted perceptions of Colombia due to its stereotyped image. These perceptions include potential risks that individuals associate with traveling to the country. Therefore, Colombian travel and tourism organizations should make a concerted effort to alter the perceptions of potential travelers towards Colombia. This is because the perceived risks associated with trips to Colombia are believed to impact their perception of the country, leading to a diminished desire to visit and a lack of value associated with visiting the country. As Americans recognize Colombia as a reliable, good, and safe destination with economic benefits, natural beauty, and authentic cultural features, it is crucial for the Colombian government and tourism organizations to highlight these unique features and effectively communicate them to potential inbound travelers in order to attract their attention to Colombia.

During the last two decades, the Colombian government, in association with Procolombia, has been developing strategies to promote and position Colombia as a tourist destination and attract international travelers. As indicated by the results of this study, Colombia should focus on reducing the perceived risks for international travelers and enhancing the benefits of traveling in Colombia. This aligns with the vision pursued by Procolombia. Thus, this study recommends that the government and tourism organizations continue working together to promote the country and its tourist attractions. This can be achieved by developing policies that enhance the quality and service provided throughout the value chain.

To minimize the risks associated with social and political aspects, this study recommends that Colombia should guarantee the safety of travelers by implementing campaigns to promote citizen culture. These campaigns would aim to raise awareness among local people about the importance of welcoming, taking care of, helping, and protecting travelers who visit the destinations. Additionally, Colombia should establish a tourist awareness program to encourage responsible and conscientious use of tourism resources. To address the economic and environmental risks, this study suggests that the government create price regulations with penalties and sanctions for businesses that take advantage of travelers. The government should regularly supervise and monitor businesses for any violations. Also, when tourists find themselves in difficult situations, the local government should establish a quick response team or an electronic assistance system, such as a mobile app, to provide aid when necessary.

As Colombia has been recognized as a tourism hub for international travelers, the national government and tourism organizations should focus on promoting the key tourism elements available in various destinations. Focusing on biodiversity and environmental dimensions, Colombia should create natural and rural routes that encompass the country's main natural reserves, forests, and natural beaches. Regarding the cultural dimension, this study proposes the establishment of cultural pathways that include historical and archaeological landmarks. The final dimension is authentic cuisine, where Colombia needs to create a culinary route that showcases local specialties and dishes. It is also advisable to establish and promote country of origin designations for products, which should include geographical names or traditional names that ensure a certain standard of quality and specific characteristics. Therefore, tourism management agencies and local governments should regularly organize and upgrade natural, cultural, and gastronomic activities. They should also promote authentic cultural attractions and well-being programs to international travelers in order to enhance their satisfaction and encourage them to revisit. Researchers highlight the importance of Colombia's tourism and service diversification for various tourism segments, including natural, cultural, and culinary tourism. Furthermore, travel agencies

should offer tailor-made packages to meet the expectations, preferences, and desires of international travelers.

Technology should be used to promote tourist attractions. Colombia has tremendous opportunities to develop apps that use technology and map tourism offerings such as restaurants, points of interest, museums, and transportation. These features will not only facilitate and enhance traveler's experience but will also be useful for businesses to promote. Another way to use technology in promoting destinations is by employing virtual reality to create immersive experiences that inspire travelers to visit.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, a convenience sampling method was adopted, utilizing a consumer panel from a research firm. Therefore, caution is required in the generalization and interpretation of findings. Second, this study mainly focused on Americans' perceptions of Colombia as a potential future tourism destination, considering the country's position as the top inbound market. Third, in order to understand Americans' overall perceptions of Colombia as a travel destination, it would be ideal to conduct a comparative study between those who have not visited Colombia and those who have. Finally, future research should examine more diverse groups of people from different regions, such as European countries or China, to compare their perceptions of Colombia and their behavioral intentions.

DISCLOSURES

The authors declare no institutional or personal conflicts of interest.

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