The impact of virtual tourism on improving the perception of the image of Algerian tourist destinations from the perspective of the Algerian tourist: a field study on a sample of Algerian tourists

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Ghozlane MAAZI[1] , Lazhar BAOUT[2] *

[1] *University of Djilali Bounaama-Khemis Miliana, Department of Commercial Sciences (Algeria), g.maazi@univ-dbkm.dz.*
[2] *University of 8 May 1945- Guelma ,Department of Commercial Sciences (Algeria), baout.lazhar@univ-guelma.dz*

Abstract

This research paper aims to highlight the impact of using virtual tourism on improving the perception of the image of Algerian tourist destinations from the perspective of Algerian tourists. The descriptive approach was used to define the nature of virtual tourism and the image of tourist destinations. The analytical approach was used based on a field study of a purposive sample of Algerian tourists. The study sample consisted of 124 valid individuals for analysis using the SPSS statistical package.

The study found that there is a statistically significant effect at a significance level of 5% for virtual tourism on improving the perception of the image of tourist destinations in Algeria from the perspective of the Algerian tourist.

Keywords

Virtual Tourism;
Tourist Destinations;
Image of tourist destinations.

تأثير السياحة الافتراضية على تحسين إدراك صورة الوجهات السياحية الجزائرية من وجهة نظر السائح الجزائري: دراسة ميدانية على عينة من السياح الجزائريين.

ملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى تسليط الضوء على تأثير استخدام السياحة الافتراضية على تحسين إدراك صورة الوجهات السياحية الجزائرية وذلك من وجهة نظر السياح الجزائريين، واستخدم المنهج الوصفي للتعريف بماهية السياحة الافتراضية وصورة الوجهات السياحية، أما المنهج التحليلي فتم استخدامه بالاعتماد على دراسة ميدانية لعينة عمدية من السياح الجزائريين، وتكونت عينة الدراسة من 124 مفردة صالحة للتحليل باستخدام الحزمة الإحصائية SPSS،

وتوصلت الدراسة إلى وجود تأثير ذو دلالة إحصائية عند مستوى معنوية 5% للسياحة الافتراضية على تحسين إدراك صورة الوجهات السياحية بالجزائر من وجهة نظر السائح الجزائري.

الكلمات المفتاحية

السياحة الافتراضية؛
الوجهات السياحية؛
صورة الوجهات السياحية.

* *Corresponding author.E-mail: baout.lazhar@univ-guelma.dz*
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I- Introduction :

The tourism industry has witnessed significant development in recent decades, with technology playing a crucial role in stimulating growth and developing the sector. Among these developments, virtual tourism is considered one of the most important, as it provides a realistic-like tourism experience for users without the need for actual travel. Virtual tourism is an attractive option for users who wish to enjoy tourist attractions, culture, history, and scenic views without the need to travel. Virtual tourism allows users to obtain a realistic-like tourism experience, where they can explore places, scenic views, museums, archaeological, historical, and cultural sites without the need for actual travel. Users can also enjoy a personalized and unique tourism experience, where they can choose the places they wish to visit and interact with them effectively.

Statistics indicate that virtual tourism is experiencing continuous growth globally and locally, with an increasing number of users using virtual reality and augmented reality applications to enjoy tourism. This reflects the importance of virtual tourism in the tourism industry and its positive impact on promoting tourist destinations by forming a mental image about them, encouraging the exploration of tourist destinations, and stimulating growth in the country's tourism industry.

Through the above, we can raise the following problem:

To what extent does the use of virtual tourism contribute to improving the perception of the image of tourist destinations in Algeria from the perspective of the Algerian tourist?

Importance of the research:

This study derives its importance from the fact that virtual tourism is one of the recent developments in the tourism industry, which aims to provide a realistic-like tourism experience for users without the need for travel. Virtual tourism represents an important tool in promoting tourist destinations and forming a mental image about them.

Research objectives:

Our goals through this research paper are:

- Elucidate the foundational constructs of virtual tourism and tourist destination image.
- Ascertain the prevailing conditions of domestic tourism in Algeria.
- Determine the extent to which virtual tourism impacts the enhancement of Algerian tourists' perception of tourist destinations.

Research hypotheses:

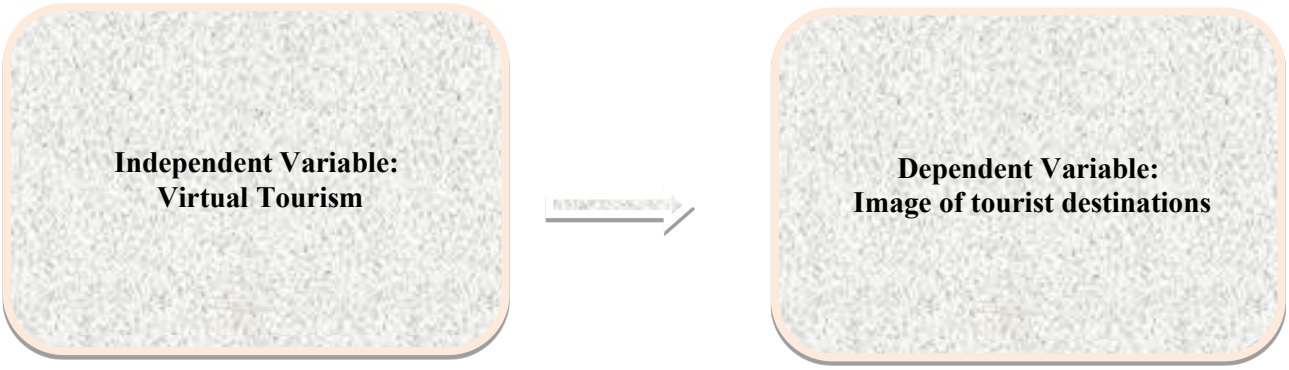
To achieve the research objectives, the following hypotheses were developed:

- Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant relationship at a significance level of 5% between the use of virtual tourism and the perception of the image of tourist destinations from the perspective of the Algerian tourist;

- Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant effect at a significance level of 5% for virtual tourism on improving the perception of the image of tourist destinations in Algeria from the perspective of the Algerian tourist.

Research Model:

Figure 01. Proposed Study Model



Source: Prepared by the Researchers.

Research Methodology:

This study utilized an analytical-descriptive approach. The descriptive method defined virtual tourism and tourist destination image, while the analytical method facilitated achieving research objectives and drawing conclusions.

The previous studies:

- **Study of L P Voronkova entitled: Virtual Tourism: on the Way To the Digital Economy (2018):** This research analyzes how computerization, specifically online booking, e-marketing, and virtual tourism, is transforming the tourism sector. It highlights VR's growing role in areas like advertising and education, emphasizing that its future relies on technological advancements. While acknowledging the digital economy's benefits, it also stresses the need to address VR's potential negative impacts and build a human-centered, communicative virtual tourism environment.
- **Study of Muhammad Shoaib Siddiqui entitled: Virtual Tourism and Digital Heritage: An Analysis of VR/AR Technologies and Applications (2022):** The pandemic's impact on tourism, with trillion-dollar losses, contrasted with the growth of remote connectivity. Virtual tourism, using VR/AR, and digital heritage preservation benefited. This paper reviews relevant technologies, analyzing user experience, awareness, and the pros and cons of virtual experiences, to inform research in this growing area of e-tourism.
- **Study of Xavier Font entitled: Managing the Tourist Destination's Image (2024):** Rather than passively accepting existing perceptions, this paper argues for a proactive approach to destination image. It presents a detailed methodology for image analysis and management, establishing it as a crucial strategic tool for positioning, differentiating, and promoting a tourist destination.

What is noted from previous studies is that they shared the concepts of virtual tourism and Image of tourist destinations as one of the variables, in addition to their use of the same research tool and methodology. Accordingly. these studies represent the basic building block of our current study in terms of our discussion of virtual tourism and its impact on improving the perception of the image of Algerian tourist destinations, but they differ from it in that In terms of time, place, purpose, size and type of sample through its study of the concept of virtual tourism and its impact on improving the perception of the image of Algerian tourist destinations from the point of view of Algerian tourists.

I.1. Virtual Tourism:

Virtual tourism was born from the intersection of technology and the love of exploration. It is a revolutionary concept that has transformed the way individuals experience and explore the world. In an era where global connectivity is at its peak, virtual tourism offers a unique and immersive alternative to traditional travel.

I.1.1 The Concept of Virtual Tourism:

The term 'virtual' refers to the unconventional form of communities that can be built on information and communication technology, without being bound by the spatial and temporal limitations that govern the real environment (Abbe, 2010, p. 267). In recent years, Virtual tourism, using 360-degree views, has gained popularity enabling users to explore cultural heritage sites, real estate, and other locations digitally. These experiences, built from 360-degree images or videos, allow interactive navigation and viewing, simulating physical presence. They offer remote access and can even depict historical representations of places. (Shikhri & Lanir, 2024, p. 1). It should be noted here that e-tourism should not be confused with virtual tourism. Although e-tourism can include virtual tourism, the former encompasses a wide range of tourism and travel technologies used in the tourism industry to help manage a range of complex logistical activities to meet customer expectations. E-tourism is closely related to the management of tourism operations using internet technologies to facilitate the provision of tourism services, while the latter provides a tourist experience in a metaverse environment within an electronic environment, allowing the tourist to interact with real tourist destinations without spatial or temporal barriers and at a lower cost. (Mohamed abu abaa, 2021, pp. 294,295)

I.1.2 Importance of Virtual Tourism:

The importance of virtual tourism can be summarized as follows: (Bazzazo, 2014, p. 93)

- Preservation of at-risk tourist sites by relying on virtual tourism as an alternative to physical visits, sites vulnerable to deterioration and destruction can be protected. This is due to the advanced capabilities of virtual reality in replicating and simulating tourist sites with high fidelity. increase the information and awareness of

the social media audience about the components of tourist destinations and to increase the number of visitors to its sites through influencer marketing.

- Marketing virtual tourism contributes to placing tourist sites on the global tourism map, thereby expanding their reach.
- Compared to traditional marketing methods, virtual tourism offers a cost-effective alternative.
- The interactive technologies of virtual reality play a significant role in promoting tourist sites and attracting potential visitors.
- It is a tool that protects historical sites, architectural works, and artistic creations of human and cultural heritage.

I.1.3 Virtual Tourism Technologies:

There are several technologies and applications used in virtual tourism, the most important of which is:

a. **Virtual Reality:** is a technology that constructs virtual environments within the human perceptual system, providing users with an immersive experience. Through the use of specialized equipment, such as Head-Mounted Displays (HMDs) and joysticks, individuals can interact with these virtual environments. VR technology generates these immersive virtual experiences by simulating senses like sight, sound, and touch. When a user wears a VR headset, they are completely enveloped by a computer-generated virtual environment, creating the sensation of being physically present. Using VR technology, users can experience and engage in various scenes and activities within the virtual environment, leading to a more immersive and interactive experience. (Zhenga & Fengb, 2023, p. 1)

b. **Augmented Reality:** It is a three-dimensional technology that integrates the real world with the virtual world, merging real and virtual objects to enable their real-time interaction as a user performs a task. It is a composite display combining the user's view of the real scene with a computer-generated virtual scene that enhances it with supplementary information. Users perceive that they are interacting with the real world, not a virtual one, with the goal of improving their sensory perception. This technology displays digital materials as if they were real-world objects. Thus, augmented reality enhances the real world with virtual elements, allowing users to see the real world augmented by virtual objects integrated through digital media and various technologies. (Alghamidi, 2020, p. 827)

I. 2. The Mental Image of Tourism:

The image of tourist destinations has gained significant attention in our current era from researchers due to the role it plays in the development of tourist destinations and attracting tourists. The image of a country's tourist destinations plays an important role in the process of tourists choosing their tourist destination and their willingness to engage in tourism activities. It is also important because it is closely related to the decision-making behavior of actual and potential tourists.

I. 2.1 The Concept of Tourist Destination Image:

Before addressing the concept of tourist destination attractiveness, it is necessary to define tourism, tourist, and tourist destination.

- **Tourism:** It refers to the experiences and actions of individuals while traveling and residing temporarily, for up to a year, in locations distinct from their everyday surroundings, whether for relaxation, professional engagements, or other motivations" (Mouhoub, 2007, p. 29).
- **Tourist:** is defined as any person travels to places other than the one in which is his habitual residence, outside of their everyday environment, for a period of at least one night but not more than one year and whose usual purpose is different from the exercise of any remunerated activity in the place to which he goes. (IGI Global, 2024)
- **Tourist Destination:** A real physical space where a visitor or tourist spends at least one night, containing tourism products such as support services, tourist attractions, and tourism resources, with physical and administrative geographical boundaries that determine its management mechanism (Organization World Tourism, 2017, p. 1).

The image of a tourist destination is viewed as "all the objective knowledge, impressions, preconceptions, imagination, and emotional ideas that an individual or group of individuals may have about a particular place" (Jenkins, 1999, p. 2) It is also seen as "The accumulation of beliefs and perceptions, derived from the analysis of diverse information sources over time, resulting in a mental image of a destination's sought-after features and advantages" (Jameel & al, 2019, p. 3). The tourist destination image is generally defined as 'the public and private organizations that participate in

developing and marketing products and services to meet the needs of tourists and achieve their well-being". (Kafi, 2014, p. 24)

I. 2.2 The importance of the image of the tourist destination:

The image of a tourist destination has emerged as a crucial marketing concept in the tourism industry because this image affects tourism-related attitudes and behaviors. It enhances, creates, or changes tourist behavior. The image of a tourist destination is closely related to tourist behavior, as it has an impact on travel behavior during its three stages: the pre-visit stage, the during-visit stage, and the post-visit stage. In the pre-visit stage, for example, the image of the tourist destination affects the intentions of potential tourists because the destination is an intangible product with limited knowledge. A positive and strong image of the tourist destination plays an important role in influencing the tourist's choice among different destinations. The impact of the destination image during the visit may be relatively low, as this stage is more influenced by the tourist's needs and desires. In the post-visit stage, the tourist has the opportunity to obtain an honest image of the destination they visited, and the duration of their visit may be related to their awareness and perception of the image of the tourist destination they visited.

The image of a tourist destination is of great importance because it directly affects the tourist's behavior and their travel and destination selection decisions. The most popular tourist destination is the one with a positive image in the tourist's mind. There are three elements that allow a tourist destination to persist in the long term: word-of-mouth transmitted by tourists who have previously visited the destination, the creation of the tourist destination image by the media, and government policies to support and promote the tourist destination. (Maazi & Allam, 2023, p. 9)

I. 2.3 Dimensions of the Tourist Destination Image:

The image of a tourist destination consists of a combination of three dimensions, represented as follows**:** (Maazi & Allam, 2023, pp. 10, 11)

a. Cognitive Dimension: A tourist destination's image is formed by a collection of ideas, information, and attitudes, resulting in an internal perception of its characteristics. This perception is influenced by external sources like advertising, word-of-mouth, and actual visits, as well as the perceived unique qualities, potentially based on prior experiences.

b. Affective Dimension: This refers to the feelings and emotions aroused in the tourist about tourist destinations or their evaluation of them. It results from the tourist's direct interactions with the components of the tourist destination and the various marketing and non-marketing stimuli to which the tourist is exposed in the destination and during the trip. This component is strongly influenced by tourists' motivations and the cognitive component of the image, and this affective component becomes active during the evaluation stage in the tourist destination selection process.

c. Behavioral Dimension: After the tourist is exposed to all the internal and external influences of the tourist destination, they will make a decision to travel to the tourist destination or not. Therefore, the behavioral component or intention expresses the tourist's intention and desire to visit the tourist destination at a specific time.

I. 2.4 Domestic Tourism in Algeria:

With its rich natural and historical heritage, Algeria holds a prominent position in the Mediterranean region. Its strategic location and remarkable cultural and geographical diversity, including an extensive coastline, varied terrain, mountainous regions, and the renowned Sahara Desert, make it a compelling tourist destination, Algerian tourism stakeholders are focused on maximizing tourist numbers, particularly from within the country.

Among the measures that Algeria has prepared to stimulate domestic tourism, the following can be mentioned: (Belainine & Ledjlet, 2024, pp. 17, 18)

- For its part, Air Algérie has taken a decision to reduce ticket prices to the south between September and April, in order to encourage citizens to engage in desert tourism and discover the richness of these regions of the country.
- The Algerian state organizes many festivals in the desert regions to attract tourists from within and outside the country, to introduce them to its desert areas and learn about the heritage of each region.
- Inviting investors to invest in the tourism sector, which opens up golden opportunities for the Algerian Sahara, which includes unique tourist areas and landmarks in the world, given its ancient history and diverse cultures.
- Tourism in tourist areas has received the attention of the Algerian authorities, which have mobilized enormous capabilities to upgrade and revitalize it.
- Allocating an amount of 58 billion dinars to rehabilitate public tourist facilities, of which 12 billion dinars were allocated to rehabilitate 8 centers with mineral baths.

II– Methods and Materials:

II–1– Study Population and Sample:.

The target population for this study comprised Algerian tourists who had cultivated a mental representation of Algerian tourist destinations through exposure to virtual tourism. A purposive sample of 124 respondents was selected for participation, with data acquisition spanning from January 2, 2025, to February 28, 2025

II–2– Study Tool:

To collect initial data from the sample, a specialized questionnaire was designed, reflecting the study's objectives, variables, and proposed model. The questionnaire comprised two sections: the first, with 7 statements, focused on virtual tourism, and the second, containing 9 statements, addressed the image of Algerian tourist destinations.

II–3–Validity and Reliability of the Study Tool:

Table 01. Internal Consistency Reliability Coefficients for the Study Variables Using Cronbach's Alpha

Study Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Virtual Tourism	0,807
Image of Algerian tourist destinations	0,853

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs

It is observed from Table No. (1) that all reliability coefficients for the study variables' dimensions are between (0.80) and (0.85), exceeding the 0.60 minimum. This confirms the questionnaire's validity and reliability, ensuring its suitability for data analysis and hypothesis testing.

II–4– Statistical methods:

- **Reliability:** Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the reliability of the study's instrument.
- **Descriptive Analysis:** Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to characterize the study sample's data.
- **Simple Linear Regression:** To test the second hypothesis, simple linear regression was performed to determine the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

III-Results and discussion:

III-2- Descriptive Analysis of the Study Sample Responses:

Table 02. Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations for the Study Variables

Study Variables	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Trend
Virtual Tourism	3,7131	0,71452	Agree
Image of Algerian tourist destinations	3,7912	0,70438	Agree

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on SPSS outputs

The results from Table No. (2) shows a high level of agreement among respondents regarding virtual tourism "independent variable", with a mean of (3.7131) and a low standard deviation of (0.71452), indicating consistent responses. Respondents also agreed that virtual tourism positively impacts the perception of Algerian tourist destinations "dependent variable", with a mean of (3.7912) and a standard deviation of (0.70438), again showing homogeneity in responses.

III-2-Testing the first hypothesis of the study:

Table 03. The correlation between the use of virtual tourism and the perception of the image of tourist destinations in Algeria

Virtual Tourism		
Image of Algerian tourist destinations	**R**	**T**
	0.873	12.508

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs

From table number (3) and the results of the one-sample t-test yielded a statistically significant t-value of 12.508 (sig < 0.05), establishing the model's significance and confirming a positive relationship between virtual tourism utilization and the enhancement of Algerian tourists' perception of Algerian tourist destinations. Furthermore, a strong positive correlation was observed between these variables, as evidenced by a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.873 (sig < 0.05)

Based on this, we accept the first hypothesis **"There is a statistically significant relationship at a significance level of 5% between the use of the use of Virtual tourism and the image of tourist destinations from the perspective of the Algerian tourist".**

III-3-Testing the second hypothesis of the study:

Table 04. Simple Linear Regression Analysis of the Impact of Virtual Tourism on improving the perception of the image of tourist destinations

Model	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Significance Level
Regression	46.522	1	46.522	391.274	0.000
Residual	14.505	122	0.119		
Total	61.027	123	/		
A= 0,861	B= 0,873	R = 0,873		R^2 = ,0762	

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs

To examine the relationship between the attractiveness of tourist destination image (Y) and virtual tourism (X), a linear regression model was developed, represented by the equation $Y = \alpha + bX$. The resulting regression equation was:
The image of tourist destinations = 0.873 + 0.861 (Virtual Tourism).

The analysis revealed a strong, statistically significant correlation between the variables, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.873. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.762$) indicates that 76.2% of the variance in tourist destination image is explained by virtual tourism.

Furthermore, a significant impact of virtual tourism on tourist destination image was confirmed. This is supported by a highly significant F-statistic (F = 391.274, sig = 0.000), demonstrating the overall significance of the regression model and its statistical acceptability.".

Based on this, we accept the second hypothesis stating that **"There is a statistically significant effect at a significance level of 5% for Virtual tourism on improving the perception of the image of tourist destinations in Algeria from the perspective of the Algerian tourist".**

IV-Conclusion:

This study identified the extent to which virtual tourism shapes the perception of Algeria's tourist destinations. Based on field research with Algerian tourists and data analysis using SPSS V23, the following results and suggestions were formulated:

IV-1- Results:

The study concluded the following results:

- Virtual tourism offers many attractions and major tourist destinations virtual tours or online experiences for visitors to enjoy, creating a compelling illusion of real presence;
- It helps increase cultural awareness among tourists, as they can explore and interact with the cultures and cultural heritage of different regions of the world in a vibrant and interactive way;
- The application of virtual tourism does not cause the abandonment of traditional tourism, but rather it is one of the modern means to revitalize tourist destinations;
- Virtual tourism encourages future tourists to explore Algerian tourist destinations, and contributes to forming a mental image for the Algerian tourist about these destinations. The credibility of the influencer and their presentation of their experiences in different tourist trips in Algeria makes the followers feel confident and increases their desire to get to know the different tourist areas in Algeria and choose it as a tourist destination.

IV-2- Suggestions:

The following suggestions can be derived:

- It is imperative to encourage all development opportunities that work to develop infrastructure and technology to facilitate the use of virtual tourism technologies;
- Mandatory support for entrepreneurial programs related to digital technology in all aspects of the tourism industry;
- Improve the outcomes of tourism education in the field of producing human resources capable of dealing with virtual tourism;
- Direct tourism institutions to complete marketing projects for tourist and archaeological sites and publish them online, on YouTube, and on social media sites;
- It is obligatory to push tourism agencies and hotel establishments to adopt virtual tourism as a strategic option to promote the tourism product;
- The necessity of effectively implementing the concept of e-government in Algeria, which makes tourism institutions promote and market tourist destinations through digital mechanisms and technologies that place the country on the global tourism map with great speed and wider spread.

- Appendices:

The questionnaire used in the study is available at the following link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/15MezU10cfFCrsMo16znSt8wwmKVu3FfPdLsV9oVUYDM/preview

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