

# Seeing – Feeling – Doing: Locals' and Tourists' Responses to Instagram Images of the Bregenzerwald

## problem statement.

Tourism destinations increasingly rely on **Instagram**, where **user-generated images** form perceptions before travel. These visuals appear authentic and emotionally engaging but also challenge official marketing (Mak, 2017; Gallarza et al., 2002). While post-visit impressions are well researched, little is known about pre-travel perceptions, especially comparing **locals** and **pre-travel tourists** (Marchi & Raschi, 2022; Sun et al., 2021).

## aim of study & research questions.

This study aims to reveal how locals and pre-travel tourists differ in their perceptions and responses to Instagram photographs of the Bregenzerwald.

- RQ1** Which visual motifs are perceived as most salient by locals and pre-travel tourists?
- RQ2** How do participants respond **cognitively** to these images?
- RQ3** How do participants respond **affectively** to these images?
- RQ4** What **conative** responses (e.g. intentions to visit or recommend) are triggered?
- RQ5** What are the implications for alpine destination marketing strategies?

## theoretical background.

Photographs strongly influence **destination image**, conveying authenticity, credibility, and emotions (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Mak, 2017). Gartner's (1994) model describes destination image as a step-by-step process: people first build knowledge and beliefs (cognition), which shape their feelings (affect) and finally influence their behaviour and intentions (conation).

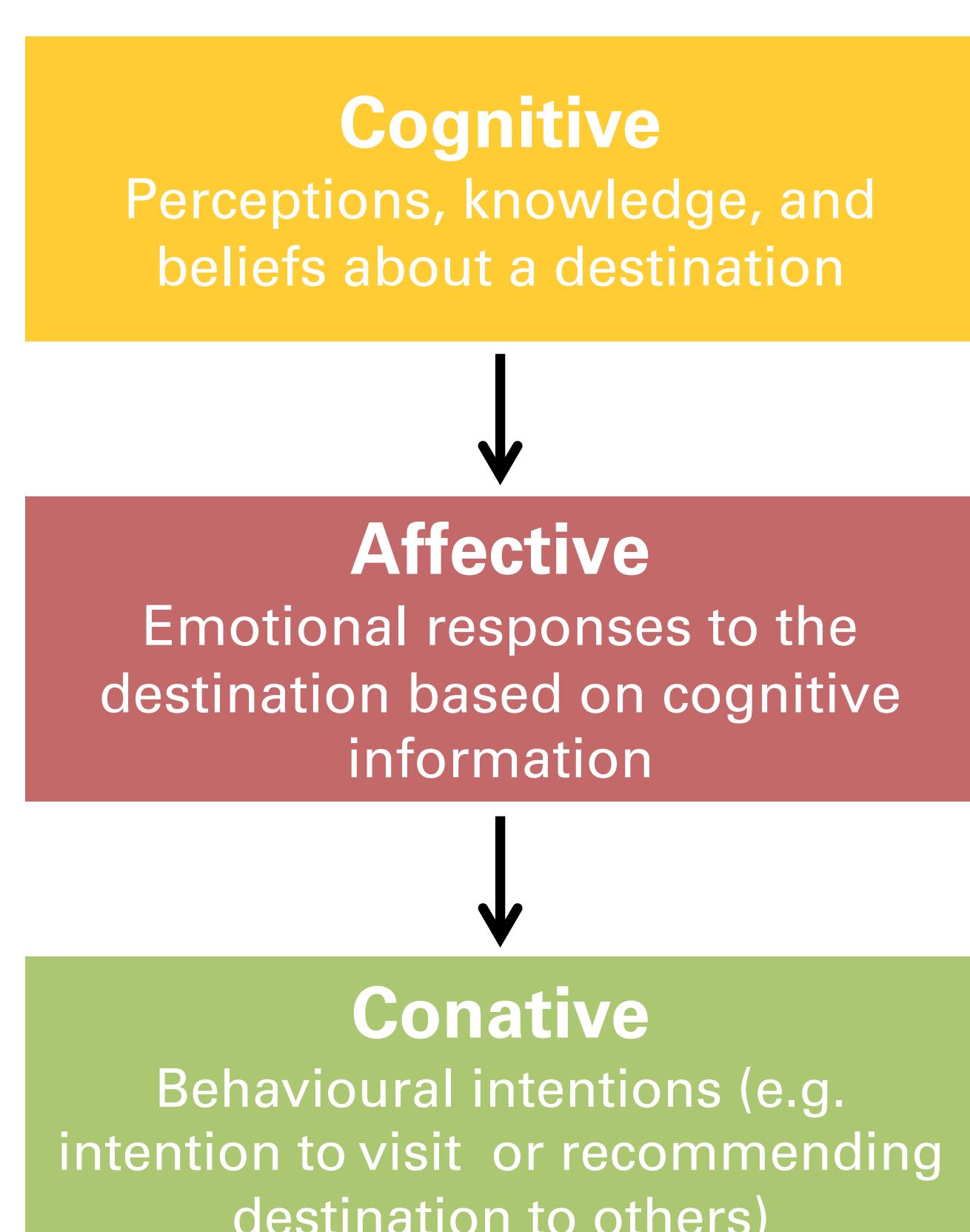


Figure 1: Hierarchical Structure of Destination Image Component  
(Own illustration, referring to Gartner (1994))

## methodology.

- **Design:** Qualitative, researcher-driven photo elicitation (Matteucci, 2013)
- **Visuals:** 24 Instagram photos showing themes typical of the Bregenzerwald
- **Sample:** 20 participants (10 locals, 10 pre-travel tourists)
- **Collection:** Semi-structured interviews on cognitive, affective, conative responses
- **Analysis:** Thematic coding in MAXQDA (Kuckartz, 2016)

## key findings.

- **Most salient motifs:** landscapes with people, traditional food, cultural traditions.
- **Locals:** mainly **affective** – emotions, pride, belonging.
- **Tourists:** mainly **cognitive** – aesthetics, novelty, authenticity.
- **Conative:** tourists show strong visit intentions, locals selective but willing to recommend.



Figure 2: Hiking & Mountain Panorama  
(©Theresa Schwärzler)

"The closeness to nature and being able to hike straight from home into the mountains is always something special – it feels like a true escape and very meditative." (Person H, Local)



Figure 3: Cattle Drive  
(© Bergkäserei Schoppernau)

"The landscape really caught my attention – the mountains are simply stunning, and the quality of the picture is great. I especially like the hiker in the image, who looks so small compared to the huge mountains." (Person E, Tourist)

"The cattle drive is very typical of the Bregenzerwald. It has always been something special to go and watch the event as a kid. When the cows return after summer and everyone comes together, it gives me a deep sense of belonging." (Person J, Local)

"To be honest I don't really know what this is. But I found it fascinating because I've never seen anything like that before – not in other destinations or back in my home region." (Person Q, Tourist)

## practical implications.

- Use **genuine visuals** to build trust and emotions.
- Show nature, culture, food, and **people** to make images relatable.
- **Tailor messages:** highlight heritage and pride for locals, spark curiosity for tourists.