

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).

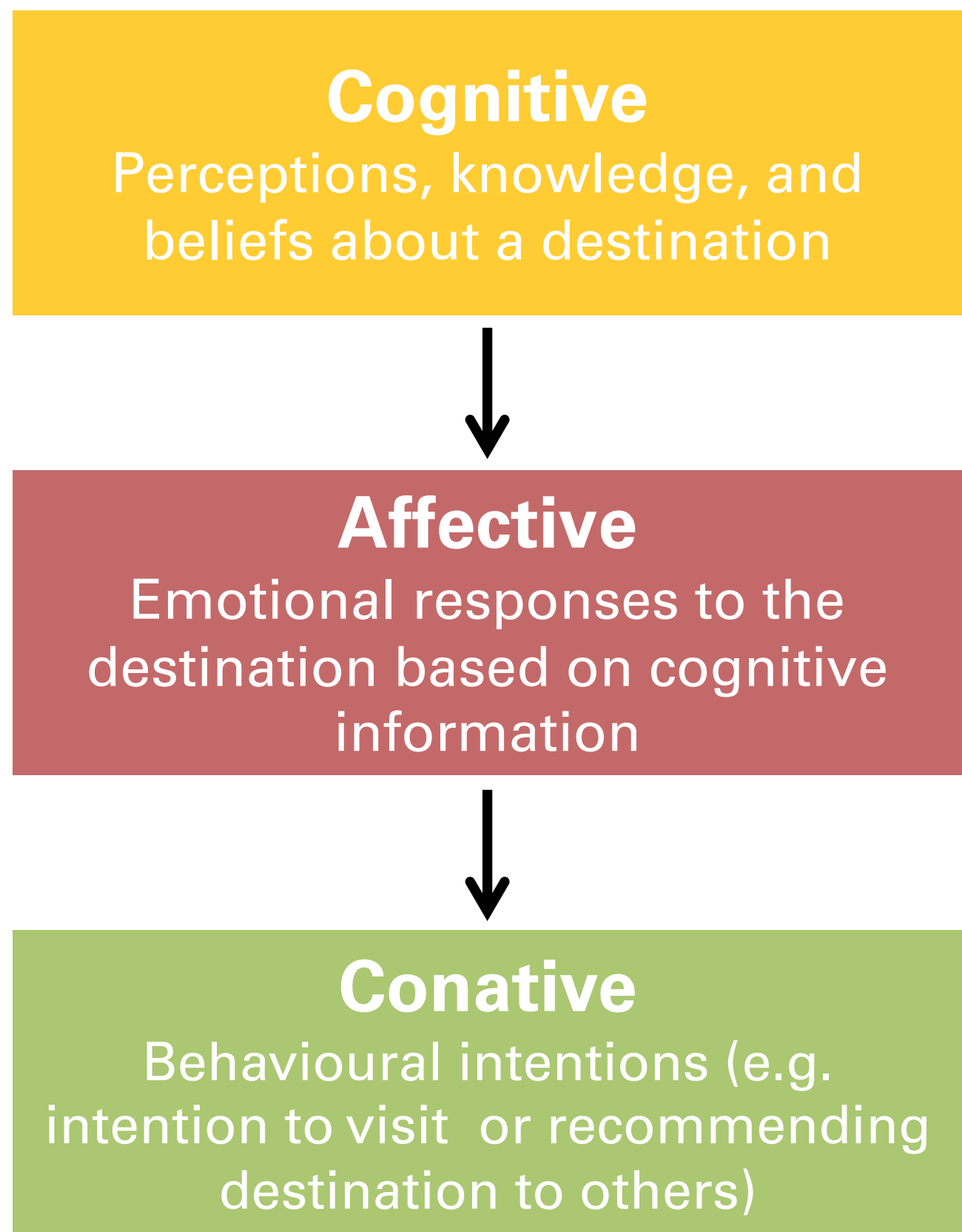


Figure 1: Hierarchical Structure of Destination Image Component (Own illustration, referring to Gartner (1994))

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)

“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)

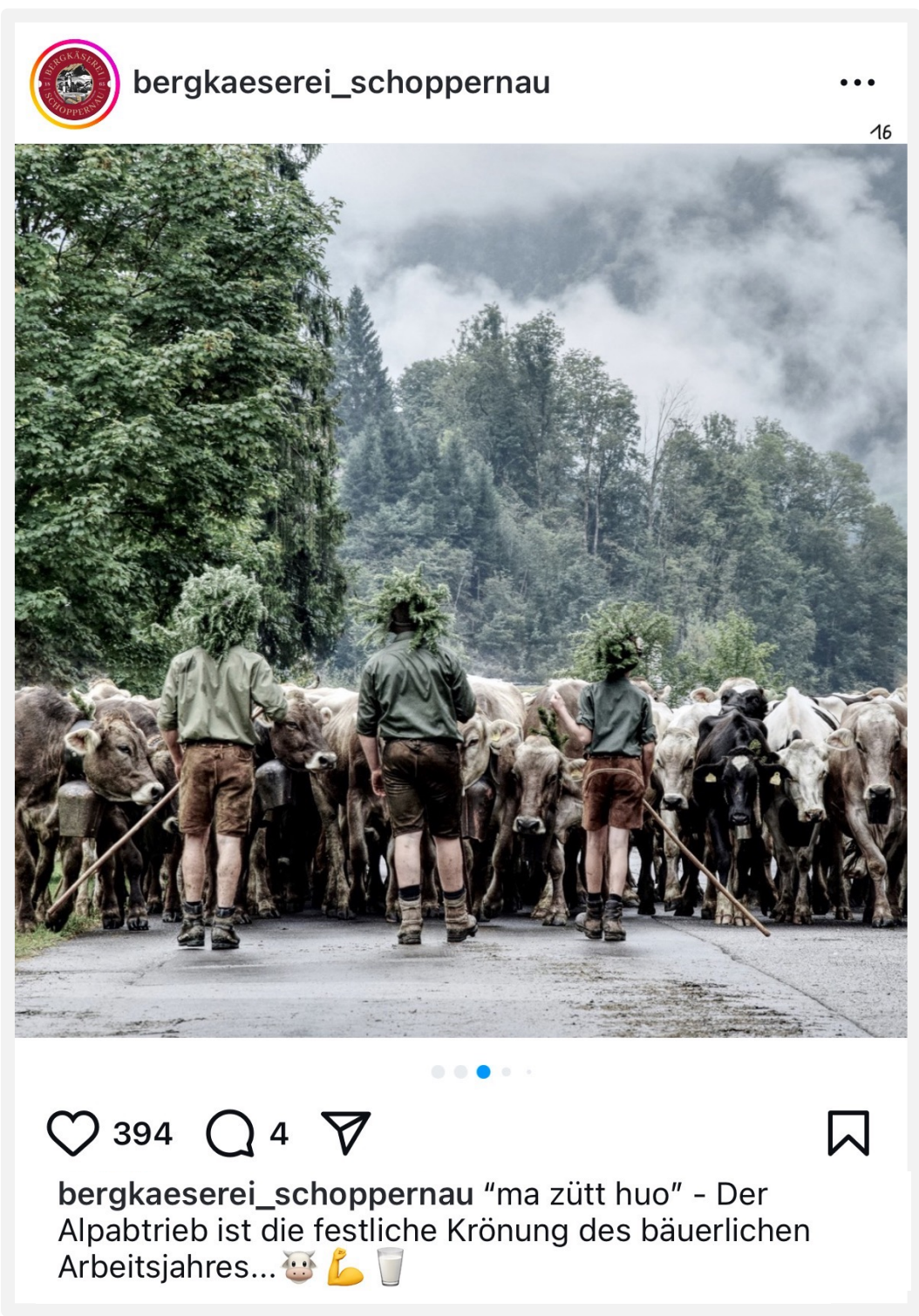


Figure 3: Cattle Drive (© Bergkäseerei Schoppennau)

“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 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.