The indirect experiences of young adult tourists with hypothetical cultural festivals/events via Twitter and an official homepage amid COVID-19: Focusing on destination image

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how hypothetical cultural festivals/events affect destination image before and after indirect experiences of them, particularly with detailed affective destination images in pandemic situations. The study examines the perceptions young adult tourists obtain from Twitter and an official homepage, the two backgrounds used for context priming. The sample comprised 248 potential tourists aged 20–39 years, 124 of whom were in the Twitter experiment group and 124 were in the official homepage group. The findings reveal significant differences in destination image before and after exposure to the hypothetical cultural festivals/events and different degrees of improved destination image between the Twitter and official homepage subjects. The importance of cultural festivals/events for destination image and the younger generation's heuristic reactions as context priming effects are discussed.

1. Introduction

Cultural festivals/events have been found to be one of the most attractive resources for experiencing packaged activities that represent a destination's culture. Interesting, well-scheduled programs delivered within a relatively short period of time seem to have a strong effect on international tourists' perceptions (Çelik & Gacnik, 2015). Such festivals/events have been considered an effective tool by which to create, improve, and reinforce destination image (Piva et al., 2017; Quinn 2006). Therefore, many destinations have attempted to develop cultural festivals/events to highlight their uniqueness and differentiate themselves from other destinations over the past few decades (Getz 2008; Frisby & Getz, 1989). However, most destinations have found it difficult to hold cultural festivals/events amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Some businesses have merely waited for the pandemic to end, while others have invested in renovations or promotions to increase the number of potential visitors. The main intention of promotions and marketing amid the pandemic is to increase awareness and enhance positive images, thereby leading to visits once the end of the pandemic makes them possible (Ketter &Avraham, 2021).

Despite the international popularity of such promotional work, few studies have examined whether promotional approaches relying on indirect experiences help foster a positive destination image or intention to visit among individuals who have never visited the destination, despite whatever strong experiential features might be inherent in the festivals/event. The research suggests that tourists consider their experiences at intangible cultural festivals/events to be more important than those at tangible infrastructure-based businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, resorts, and theme parks (Chang, Gibson & Sisson, 2014). Thus, do indirect experiences with cultural festivals/events influence positive destination image and visit preferences? Most pre-COVID-19 studies on this question focused on how destination images changed before and after direct experiences, and tended to consider detailed cognitive images rather than affective images (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; 1999b). The cognitive component of an image comprises the sum of all the knowledge about a destination a traveler has obtained via systematic judgment, while the affective component comprises the traveler's emotions about the destination, experienced through an abstract, heuristic process (Chaiken 1980; Dillard & Pfau, 2002). Indirect experiences with cultural festivals/events may produce more affective images than cognitive images. This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how cultural festivals/events affect destination image before and after indirect experiences, focusing on detailed affective images (which may be strongly associated with indirect experiences in

the current pandemic situation, wherein leisure travelers are prevented from having direct experiences overseas). The study considers hypothetical cultural festivals/events to explore the effects of indirect experiences on the destination image of potential international tourists. With the rapid growth of the Internet, cultural festivals/events have been strongly promoted via e-marketing tools, but research results differ about which promotions are most effective. Some studies have reported that official homepages are more effective than social networking services (SNS; Marbry & Porter, 2010), while other studies have indicated that SNS are perceived more positively (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012; Molinillo, Liébana, & Anaya, 2017). To address these conflicting results, this study compares improvements in destination image between Twitter, as a representative SNS tool, and official homepages. The study considers pictures of hypothetical cultural festivals/events appearing on Twitter and official homepages to understand young adults' heuristic reactions to the context priming effects of those backgrounds.

In sum, previous studies have failed to examine how indirect cultural festival/event experiences affect destination images, such as the detailed affective components that have become important during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, little research has been conducted on how young adults aged 20–39 years, whose touristic behaviors differ from those of middle-aged and older adults (Gibson & Chang, 2012; Gibson & Yiannakis, 2002), engage in indirect experiences on Twitter (as a representative SNS tool) and official homepages. Therefore, this study examines whether young adults' cognitive and affective destination images of South Korea differ before and after exposure to information on hypothetical cultural festivals/events, and whether young adults' improved destination images after exposure differ between experiences on Twitter and on official homepages. This study is expected to contribute to an in-depth understanding of affective components that may be more impulsively and heuristically induced by hypothetical cultural festival experiences in a pandemic, as well as the heuristic reaction of young adults to promotional tools.

2. Literature review

2.1. Cultural festivals/events and destination image

Cultural festivals/events are celebrations that commemorate the values, ideology, and identity of a community and facilitate social and cultural exchange (Bennett, Taylor, & Woodward, 2016; Frisby & Getz, 1989; Getz, 2008). Cultural festivals/events provide an opportunity for international tourists to experience authentic local cultures, allowing them to become active participants in the celebrations (Bennett et al., 2016; McKercher, Mei, & Tse, 2006). Cultural festivals/events have been considered effective and attractive tools for building or improving the image of a tourist destination (Çelik & Gacnik 2015; Crespi-Vallbona & Richards 2007; Quinn 2006; Smith 2004). Buch, Milne, and Dickson (2011) cited Auckland's Pasifik Festival as a successful example of improving a city's image through its unique identity. A visitor who builds a positive image of a cultural festival/event also makes a positive evaluation of the destination where they are held, and is more likely to have future visit intentions (Hernández-Mogollón, Duarte, & Folgado-Fernández, 2018).

Destination image has been conceptualized as a construct formed through the mental representation of beliefs, emotions, and the overall impression of a tourist destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a, 1999b; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Melo et al., 2017). Baloglu and McCleary (1999a, 1999b) suggested that an image is composed of cognitive and affective evaluations. The cognitive image component relates to beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge regarding the qualities of a destination, while the affective image component relates to emotions such as excitement, pleasant feelings, arousal, and relaxation. Many other researchers have approached the components of destination images by identifying cognitive (beliefs, knowledge) and affective (emotions) elements within a broader conceptual category, as suggested by Baloglu and McCleary

(1999a, 1999b) (e.g. Gartner, 1994; Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2018; Carvalhinho, Rosa & Soares, 2018). Hosany and colleagues have developed more detailed affective components for their measurement scales (Hosany, 2012; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Hosany & Prayag, 2013; Hosany et al., 2015; Prayag et al., 2017). Images can be created through direct experiences such as actual visits or indirect experiences such as promotion and marketing (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002; Gartner, 1994; Molinillo et al., 2017; San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008; Wang & Hsu, 2010). Most researchers have found significant differences in destination image before and after trips/visits (e.g., Park & Nicolau, 2019; Smith et al., 2015; Vogt & Andereck, 2003; Yilmaz et al., 2009) and before and after participation in festivals/events (e.g. Boo & Busser, 2005; Kim & Morrison, 2005). In an examination of indirect experiences, Jeong et al. (2012) found changes in both cognitive and overall images with and without exposure to travel website information. Hudson, Wang, and Gil (2011) found significant changes in destination image and a desire to visit countries before and after seeing films about them. However, few studies have explored changes in destination image before and after indirect experiences with cultural festivals/events, the exceptions being a couple of studies that investigated mega-event contexts such as the Olympics (e.g. Ritchie & Smith 1991; Zeng, Go, & Kolmer, 2011). Several studies show that detailed emotional responses are more likely to be induced by indirect experiences (Chaiken, 1980; Rodríguez-Molina, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2015). Russel and his colleagues (i.e., Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Russel, 1980; Russel, Lewicka, & Niit, 1989) were the first to explore the affective components associated with environments in the psychology field. Many tourism researchers later applied and adapted their findings (e.g. Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Richins, 1998; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a, 1999b). However, as Kim and Yoon (2003) pointed out, the affective images potential travelers form about destinations have not been explored as thoroughly as have cognitive destination images, even though affective images may influence the formation of destination images more strongly than cognitive images do. For example, several destination image researchers have found that emotions induced by indirect experiences gained through visual images such as travel brochures, postcards, and slogans (e.g. Jenkins, 2003; Lehto, Lee, & Ismail, 2014; Yüksel & Akgül, 2007) are important for triggering interest among potential tourists.

Several destination personality studies have investigated affective images in more detail, focusing on the diverse affective components within each positive and negative dimension, which express the personality associated with a destination beyond the four affective image dimensions (i.e., unpleasant–pleasant, distressing–relaxing, arousing–sleepy, gloomy–exciting) identified by Baloglu and McCleary (1999a, 1999b). For example, Hosany, Ekinci, and Uysal (2006) added specific excitement-, sincerity-, and conviviality-related emotional items (e.g. friendly–cold, interesting–boring, sincere, spirited, charming) along with several items (e.g., pretty–ugly) that were modified forms of Baloglu and McCleary's items. A series of studies conducted by Hosany and colleagues (Hosany, 2012; Hosany et al., 2015; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Hosany & Prayag, 2013; Prayag et al., 2017) have considered more specific emotions (e.g., joyful, cheerful, inspiring, enthusiastic, delightful, enjoyable, happy, comfortable, affectionate, passionate, amazing) and have produced slightly different items and factors depending on the destinations and samples considered. Their procedure is supported by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen's (1988) finding that emotions differ in personality from one context to the next. Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou and Kaplanidou (2015) also modified Hosany and colleagues' emotional items to fit the destination they studied, and found a significant effect of the destination's affective components on behavioral intentions for both past visitors and non-visitors.

Kim and Lehto (2013) explored destination emotions uniquely connected to the Korean context through the official Korean tourism organization (KTO) website and identified 33 emotional characteristics—including glamorous, safe, healthy, friendly, modern, and young—reflecting the country's rich culture and vitality. They

found gaps between the officially projected destination emotions and potential UK travelers' perceived emotions regarding South Korea. Similarly, Kim et al. (2017) developed new cognitive and affective factors (e.g. K-culture, trendy) to examine how potential UK tourists perceived South Korea as a tourist destination. Measuring the affective component with four items (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; 1999b), reflecting evaluations of the destination at an emotional level, has been deemed insufficient for exploring visitors' emotional decision-making in unique contexts (Hosany, 2012; Kim & Lehto, 2013). Therefore, this study pursues a deeper understanding of destination images formed through indirect experiences with hypothetical cultural festivals/events, focusing on detailed affective components along with cognitive components associated specifically with South Korea.

2.2. E-marketing and context effects

E-marketing (also called "digital marketing" or "Internet marketing") is the use of digital data and applications to plan, execute, distribute, price, market, and promote ideas, goods, and services in order to create tangible and intangible exchanges (Strauss & Frost, 2001). E-marketing communications have expanded their field from their traditional media of websites and electronic mail to the new social media and mobile environments, which allow integral e-marketing communications (Labanauskaitė, Fiore, & Stašys, 2020). With the rapid growth of digital technologies, travelers are using the Internet as their main source of information, particularly websites, blogs, review channels (e.g. TripAdvisor), and SNS sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram; Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2017; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007). However, these platforms differ in their effectiveness. Marine-Roig and Clavé (2016) found differences in destination image between official tourism websites and user-generated SNS content. Fotis et al. (2012, pp. 13–24) found that SNS had a more positive effect than official tourism websites on tourists preparing for their vacation. Molinillo et al. (2017) explored the moderating effect of official websites and SNS on destination image formation and found that the overall destination image was evaluated more consistently by those using SNS. However, Marbry and Porter (2010) found that official homepages were more effective than SNS in the movie promotion context. They also found that official websites for movies with more interactive functions had a positive influence on intentions to watch it. Given the importance of interactivity (Jee & Lee, 2002), SNS marketing has become popular among organizations and businesses, as it builds a more immediate and interactive relationship with users (Ye et al., 2020; Yang Ho & Lee, 2021). Younger generations are more familiar with SNS tools than older people are, and they spend much of their time online socially and emotionally engaging with them (Gentina, Chen, & Yang, 2021; Lee et al., 2015; Mulvey, Lever, & Elliot, 2020; Smith, 2011; Styvén & Foster, 2018).

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are the most representative SNS tools (Yang & Lee, 2020). Facebook is a platform that allows users to share elements such as text, photos, polls, and fundraising links, and generates a semi-public space that is more bounded that of other social networks, such as Twitter and Instagram (Waterloo et al., 2017). On the other hand, Twitter allows a more natural interaction with strangers online (Yang & Lee, 2020). It has been found that users who prefer this social network are more likely to have a public profile, a higher level of disclosure, and broader social capital (Shane-Simpson et al., 2018). Twitter, one of the largest and most multidimensional among the available virtual platforms, facilitates a rapid visualization of and access to information (Vicari & Murru, 2020). Information in tweets can be read by all of a user's followers, who in turn can retweet that content to share it, creating a massive chain of data exchange (Vicari & Murru, 2020). Instagram users can post text only along with images; they cannot post text alone (Yang & Lee, 2020). Among the aforementioned media, Twitter has been the most frequently and widely used, allowing the immediate expression of hundreds of emotional words and the sharing of useful information in the current pandemic situation (Rosenberg,

Syed, & Rezaie, 2020; Vicari & Murru, 2020).

Foroudi et al. (2018) pointed out that the development of the Internet and the increasing diversity in the types of tourist websites have driven changes in travelers' destination images and preferences. Chung et al. (2015) found a significant influence of South Korea's official DMO website on the decision making of potential international tourists. Similarly, Rodríguez-Molina et al. (2015) examined how the design of a tourist destination's website affected the creation of tourists' destination images, finding that potential tourists had a more positive destination image when emotional components (e.g., emotional messages) were included on the website. A series of studies conducted by Foroudi and colleagues (Foroudi et al., 2016, 2018; Foroudi, Melewar, & Gupta, 2014) also found that images of a company or destination were conditioned by how individuals perceived the company or destination website. In the tourism context, Foroudi et al. (2016, 2018) found that the favorability of a destination image was significantly influenced by how positively visitors perceived the website on which the image appeared, presumably due to the influence of the feelings, social identity, and self-esteem associated with the website. Vinyals-Mirabent, Kavaratzis, and Fernández-Cavia (2019) found that official urban destination websites played a key role in potential tourists' destination personality and images, particularly when the cultural attractions and activities (e.g., cultural festivals/events) featured on the websites induced more of an "excitement" emotional personality type in potential tourists than other attractions and destinations did.

The studies on how websites affect destination image and decision making discussed above examined the effects of website design. Peco-Torres, Polo-Peña, and Frías-Jamilena (2021) considered the relationship between SNS and the brand personality of cultural tourism resources, finding that SNS use significantly influenced brand personality related to emotional perceptions (e.g., sincerity, excitement) of such resources. Likewise, Tolica et al. (2017) and Williams et al. (2015) emphasized the promotional role of social media, particularly in the cultural festivals/event context. Liu (2018) suggested that an effective marketing mix consisting of homepages and SNS tools should be used to promote cultural festivals/events; however, no study has yet compared effectiveness between homepages and SNS tools in this regard.

The literature indicates that homepages and SNS differ in their effects. It thus seems to be very important to understand how context priming affects younger people's heuristic and affective factors, as specific context effects may be triggered by specific backgrounds, such as official homepages and SNS about cultural festivals/events, even when their core content and designs are similar. Heuristic–systematic theories posit that people tend to engage in more systematic thinking in the cognitive area and are more heuristic in the affective area (Chaiken, 1980; Dillard & Pfau, 2002). Assuming that consumers unconsciously and heuristically experience induced emotions within the promotional environment/context, Yi (1990) examined whether advertising placed in a context that generated positive affect reinforced more positive brand evaluations, finding that the effectiveness of advertisements was indeed significantly affected by their context. More recently, Bigne et al. (2021) investigated the effectiveness of online advertising on TripAdvisor and found that potential tourists exposed to it were more heuristic, and thus engaged in context-based processing. Integrating the literature reviewed above, this study proceeded based on tourist role theory's proposal that tourist and leisure behaviors differ across different age groups (Gibson & Chang, 2012; Gibson & Yiannakis, 2002), as younger people tend to be more socially, emotionally, and structurally engaged in using SNS tools than older people (Gentina et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2015; Mulvey et al., 2020). This study thus proposed the following hypotheses regarding young adults aged 20 to 39:

Hypothesis 1. Young potential international visitors' cognitive and affective destination images of South Korea and preference to visit the country will differ significantly before and after exposure to information on cultural festivals/events.

Hypothesis 1-1. Young potential international visitors' cognitive destination image of South Korea will differ significantly before and after exposure to information on cultural festivals/events.

Hypothesis 1-2. Young potential international visitors' affective destination image of South Korea will differ significantly before and after exposure to information on cultural festivals/events.

Hypothesis 1-3. Young potential international visitors' preference to visit South Korea will differ significantly before and after exposure to information on cultural festivals/events.

Hypothesis 2. Young potential international visitors' improved destination image of South Korea and improved preference to visit South Korea after exposure to information on cultural festivals/events will differ significantly between Twitter and an official homepage.

Hypothesis 2-1. Young potential international visitors' improved cognitive destination image of South Korea after exposure to information on cultural festivals/events will differ significantly between Twitter and an official homepage.

Hypothesis 2-2. Young potential international visitors' improved affective destination image of South Korea after exposure to information on cultural festivals/events will differ significantly between Twitter and an official homepage.

Hypothesis 2-3. Young potential international visitors' improved preference to visit South Korea after exposure to information on cultural festivals/events will differ significantly between Twitter and an official homepage.

3. Method

3.1. Experimental context

The "Korean Wave," also called "Hallyu," refers to the growing popularity of contemporary South Korean culture around the world, which began with music (K-pop) and TV programs (K-dramas) in the mid-1990s and has expanded to include Korean food, traditions, clothes, language, and literature (Lee, 2011; Roll, 2018). The Korean Wave has played an important role in encouraging potential international visitors to become interested in Korea and have the intention to visit (Roll, 2018). Since the South Korean government first became aware of the importance of the Korean Wave, they have devoted a specific budget towards a 'K-culture' strategy in destination management and marketing efforts (National Assembly Budget Office, 2012). In 2019, the South Korean government started using more comprehensive destination management and marketing, with an emphasis on K-culture, including K-contents, K-beauty, and K-food (Newdaily, 2019). Therefore, this study's experiment examined hypothetical images of a "K-Culture Festival" on Twitter and an official homepage. Promotional images of the hypothetical 2022 K-Culture Festival were provided in two versions: 1) images on Twitter, one of the most internationally popular social media tools; and 2) images on an official homepage. The hypotheses were tested using two groups of potential international tourists: One group was exposed to an image of the 2022 K-Culture Festival promoted on Twitter, whereas the other group was exposed to an image of the 2022 K-Culture Festival promoted on the official homepage. The experiment examined how the festival affected the formation of destination images by having the participants evaluate their destination images of South Korea before and after exposure to the media.

3.2. Study participants, design, and procedure

A total of 248 young individuals from various countries who had never been to Korea were recruited using convenience sampling from among MTurk participants via an online survey in November 2020; 124 of them participated in the Twitter version of the experiment, and the other 124 participated in the official homepage version. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the two hypothetical scenarios and responded to a questionnaire before and after being exposed to the promotional information. Each group consisted of 62 male and 62 female participants aged 20–39 years. People in this age range were categorized as "young adults" following the suggestion of Gibson and colleagues, who divided the population into "young" (20–39 years), "middle" (40–59 years), and "late adulthood" (60 years and over) groups to classify tourist roles and leisure behaviors (Gibson & Chang, 2012; Gibson & Yiannakis, 2002) on Levinson's model of the adult life cycle (Levinson, 1996; Levinson et al., 1978). The equality of the gender and age percentages between the two groups allowed a more accurate comparison by reducing bias. The participants had diverse nationalities, as the Korean Wave is popular—particularly among the young—all across the world (Roll, 2018). The study investigated the effect of cultural festivals on the formation of destination image among young potential travelers by asking the participants to answer a survey concerning their perceptions of South Korea as a tourist destination and their overall image of the country, focusing on the cognitive and affective dimensions. The questionnaire also asked about their preference for visiting South Korea in the future. Then, the participants were given several minutes' exposure to images promoting the cultural festival posted on the official website or Twitter depending on their group (see Figs. 1 and 2). The respondents then completed the same questionnaire they had filled out prior to their exposure to the promotional images. The questionnaire also collected demographic information.

3.3. Instrument and data analysis

This study adapted the cognitive and affective items of the scale developed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999a, 1999b) using data collected from Turkey, Greece, Italy, and Egypt, as well as other scales used in the literature (Hosany, 2012; Hosany et al., 2006, 2015; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Hosany & Prayag, 2013; Kim et al., 2017; Kim & Lehto, 2013; Prayag et al., 2017) to fit the context of this study's examination of how emotional images of South Korea as a potential destination affect people who have never visited the country amid the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 20 cognitive and 16 affective items were generated with robust validity and reliability levels through the pilot study. The study included Baloglu and McCleary's (1999a, 1999b) original 14 cognitive items: standard hygiene and cleanliness, quality of infrastructure, personal safety, appealing local foods and gourmet meals, friendly people, good night life and entertainment, suitable accommodations, great beaches, interesting cultural attractions, interesting historical attractions, beautiful scenery/natural attractions, good value for money, an unpolluted environment, and good climate (which produce three factors—quality of experience, attractions, and value/entertainment). The study also included Baloglu and McCleary's (1999a, 1999b) four bipolar semantic affective items: arousing–sleepy, pleasant–unpleasant, exciting–gloomy, and relaxing–distressing. To these, the study added new cognitive items (elegant cultures, interesting modern cultures, rich cultural heritage, great shopping opportunities, great places to enjoy K-culture, and diverse leisure activities) and affective items (friendly–unfriendly, valuable–worthless, positive–negative, appealing–unappealing, healthy–unhealthy, inspiring-uninspiring, beautiful-ugly, joyful-sad, safe-unsafe, supportive-unsupportive, favorable–unfavorable, attractive–unattractive) fitted to the study's context. The cognitive and affective items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree") and a five-bipolar semantic scale, respectively. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), exploratory factor analysis (EFA), a paired *t*-test, and an independent *t*-test using SPSS 25 and AMOS 25.
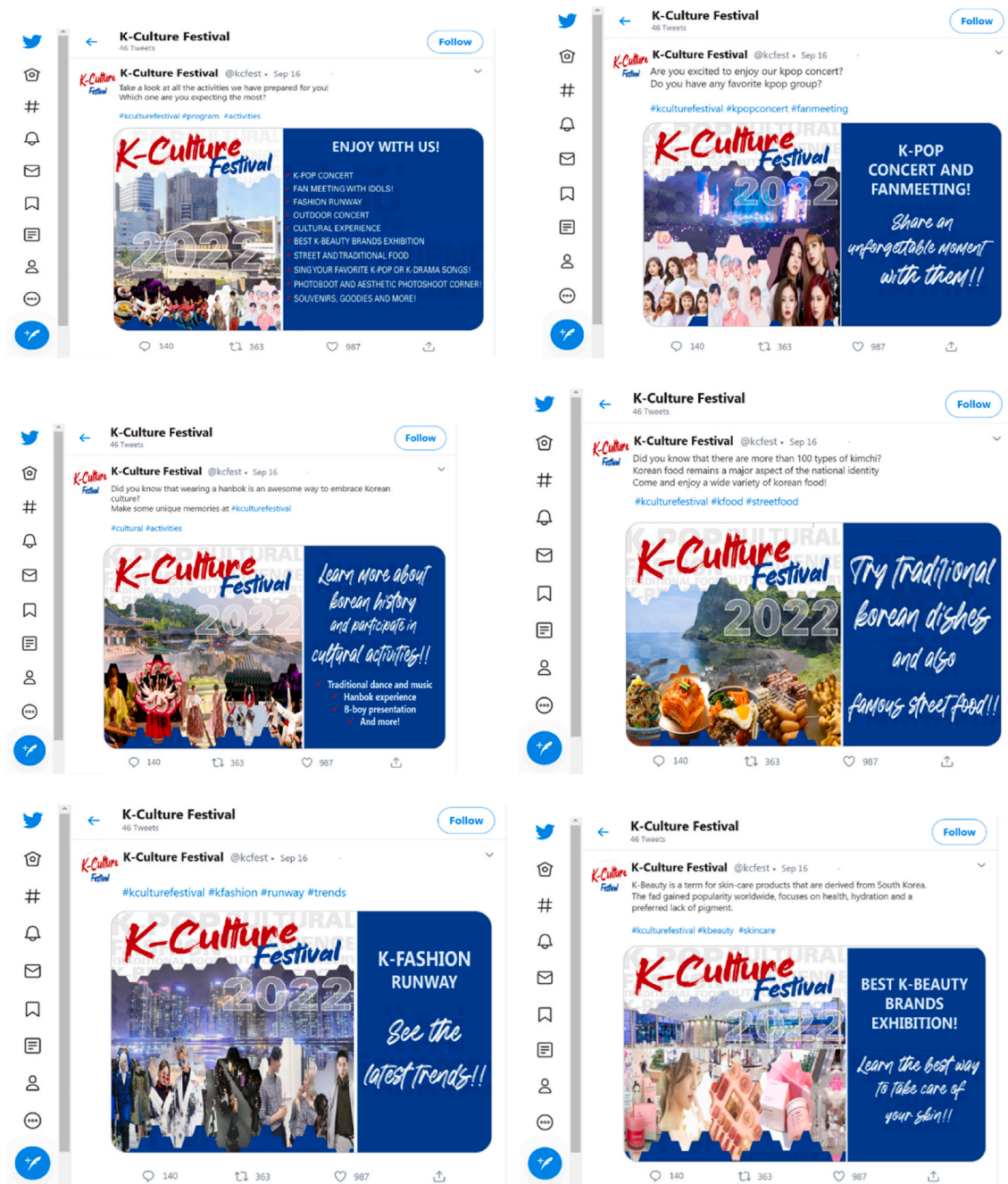
Fig. 1. Promotional images of K-Culture Festival on Twitter background.

4. Results

4.1. Participants

Of the 248 potential tourists, 50% (n = 124) were female; 48.79% (n = 121) belonged to the 30–39 year-old group, while 51.21% were in the 20–29 group. More than one third of the respondents (37.9%, n = 94) said they were moderately familiar with Korean culture, followed by 25.4% (n = 63) who said they had a low to moderate familiarity, 22.6% (n = 56) who said they had a moderate to high familiarity, 12.5% (n = 31) who said they had a low familiarity, and 1.6% (n = 4) who said they had a high familiarity with the culture. More detailed information is provided in Table 1.

4.2. Factor analysis

The study conducted an EFA to interpret the results in its unique context due to the unsatisfactory fit of the CFA initially conducted with Baloglu and McCleary's (1999a, 1999b) three factors, along with the newly adapted 20 cognitive destination image items that indicated the normality of the sample under 2 in their skewness' and kurtosis' absolute values, ranging between 0.004 and 0.820 and between 0.042 and 0.575, respectively. The following four factors yielded satisfactory results (see Table 2 for details): 1) cultural richness, 2) pleasant environment, 3) quality infrastructure, and 4) trendy K-culture. The mean KMO sampling adequacy was 0.89, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity (p < .01) evaluated the applicability of the factor analysis of the variables. The Pearson's correlation coefficients among the cognitive factors were between 0.458 and 0.590, significant at the 0.01 level, which indicated
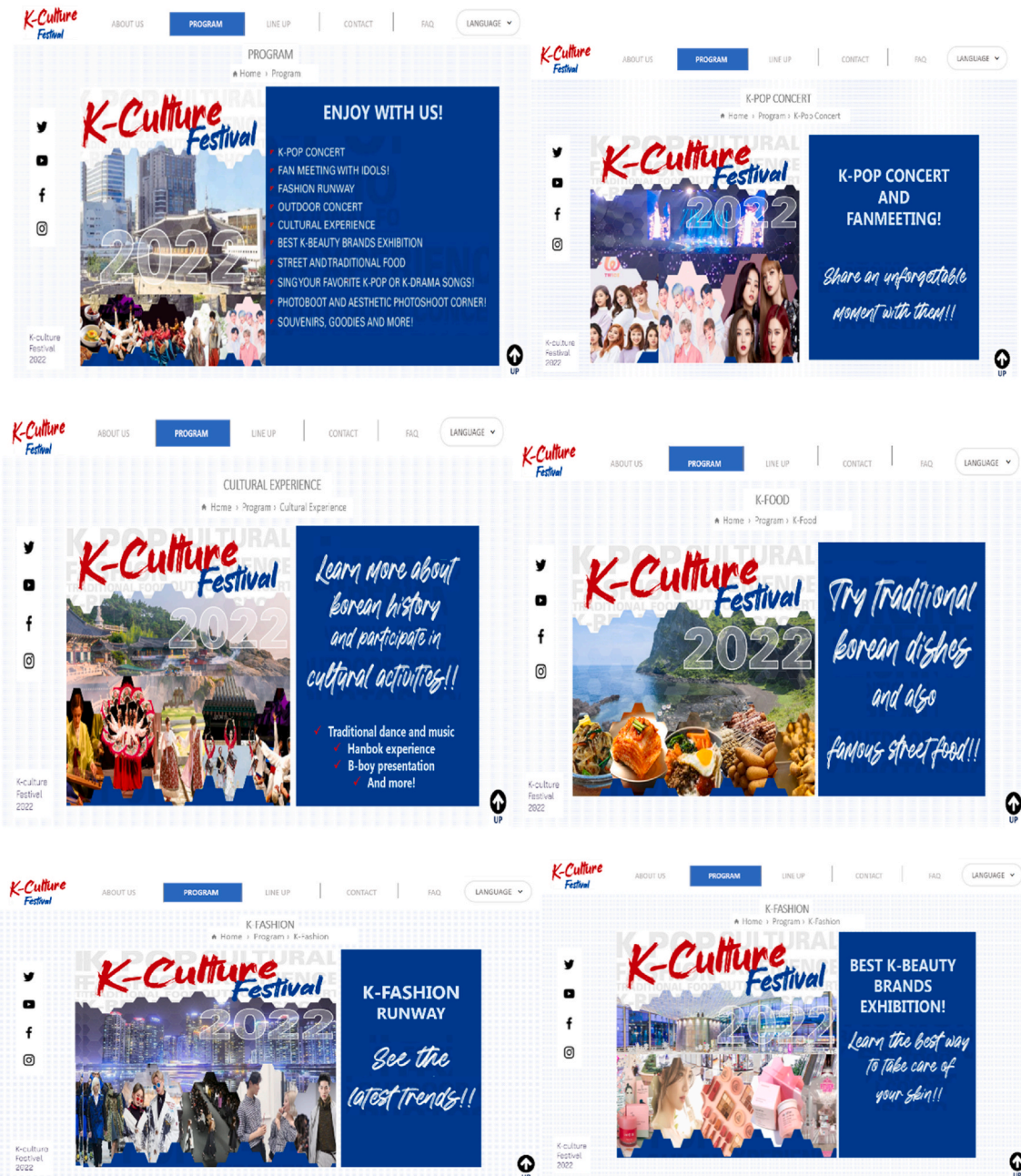
Fig. 2. Promotional images of K-Culture Festival on official website background.

their discriminant validity and common method bias (i.e., the values were under 0.8). The EFA for the newly adjusted affective destination image scale was conducted with more affective items in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the affective side. A total of 16 indicators indicated the normality of the sample, ranging from 0.053 to 0.530 and from 0.000 to 0.608 in their skewness' and kurtosis' absolute values, respectively. Three affective factors were satisfactorily generated (see Table 3): 1) felicity, 2) soundness, and 3) vitality. The mean KMO sampling adequacy was 0.93, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity (p < .01) evaluated the applicability of the factor analysis of the variables. The correlations were between 0.639 and 0.716, significant at the 0.01 level, which also indicated their discriminant validity and common method bias.

4.3. Hypothesis tests

To test Hypothesis 1-1, a paired-sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the cognitive destination image factors before and after exposure to promotional material in the e-marketing condition. All results were statistically significant (see Table 4).

Likewise, to test Hypothesis 1-2, a paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the affective destination image factors before and after exposure to promotional material, with satisfactory outcomes (see Table 5).

To test Hypothesis 1-3, the study conducted a paired-samples *t*-test to compare the preference for visiting South Korea while on vacation before and after exposure to promotional material; the results were also statistically significant (see Table 6).

In the test for Hypothesis 2-1, the cognitive results all showed statistically significant differences between exposure to information on

Table 1

Background information.

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	124	50.0
	Female	124	50.0
	Total	248	100.0
Age	20–29	127	51.2
	30–39	121	48.8
	Total	248	100.0
Nationality	American	120	48.4
	Canadian	84	33.9
	Spanish	14	5.6
	Belgian	14	5.6
	Indian	8	3.2
	Peruvian	2	0.8
	Italian	1	0.4
	South African	3	1.2
	Portuguese	1	0.4
	Mexican	1	0.4
	Total	248	100.0
Familiarity with Korean culture	Low	31	12.5
	Low-moderate	63	25.4
	Moderate	94	37.9
	Moderate-high	56	22.6
	High	4	1.6
	Total	248	100.0

Twitter and exposure to information on the official homepage (t = 3.257, df = 246, p = .03). The images based on Twitter exposure improved to a greater extent than those based on exposure to the official homepage (see Table 7).

In the test for Hypothesis 2-2, the Twitter group showed an improvement in affective image, felicity, and soundness that was greater than that of the official homepage group; however, the vitality levels were similar between the two groups (see Table 8).

In the test for Hypothesis 2-3, no difference was observed between the Twitter and official homepage groups in their preference for visiting

South Korea while on vacation (see Table 9).

These results are presented in diagram form in Figs. 3 and 4.

Additionally, no significant differences were found after exposure to cognitive and affective images between men and women or between those in their 20s and those in their 30s. This result supports Baloglu's (1997) finding that the results did not differ significantly based on demographic characteristics.

5. Discussion

This study furthers our understanding of affective images by considering detailed subsectors that previous studies have not discussed and provides crucial insight on how to develop a representative destination brand that embraces the K-Culture Festival at a governmental level to attract young potential international visitors. Moreover, this study's focus on potential visitors' indirect experiences (i.e., exposure to hypothetical images) of cultural festivals/events differs from most previous studies' concentration on direct experiences (i.e., participation in actual events). This approach has generated novel insights that are applicable to pandemic situations. Furthermore, beyond revealing the importance of using SNS tools for the younger generation, the study also found that cultural festivals/events promoted through hypothetical SNS images (i.e., where no actual interaction occurred because of the lack of actual SNS tools) were perceived as more attractive, even though the images were used only for background/context. This finding suggests the importance of using context images that incorporate emotional and social needs, even in rigid promotional forms.

5.1. Academic implications

The results support the findings of other authors who have emphasized the importance of destination images based on cultural festivals/events on the destination images, as well as the promotional role of social media (Getz, 2008; Tolica et al., 2017; Williamset al., 2015). The

Table 2

Components of EFA for cognitive destination image items (based on pre-images).

Factors and items	Factor Loadings	M	SD	Eigen values	Variance Explained (%)	Reliability (α)
Factor 1: Cultural richness						
Rich cultural heritage	0.731	3.47	0.527	6.896	34.479	0.831
Beautiful scenery/natural attractions	0.704	3.43	0.580			
Interesting historical attractions	0.696	3.44	0.629			
Interesting modern cultures	0.643	3.35	0.465			
Interesting cultural attractions	0.555	3.49	0.671			
Appealing local foods and gourmet meals	0.469	3.20	1.127			
Diverse leisure activities	0.444	3.35	0.249			
Factor 1 Means and SD		3.39	0.568			
Factor 2: Pleasant environment						
Unpolluted environment	0.700	3.03	0.415	1.412	7.058	0.735
Good value for money	0.627	3.19	0.443			
Good climate	0.577	3.10	0.383			
Great beaches	0.575	2.92	0.755			
Good night life and entertainment	0.553	3.20	0.929			
Friendly people	0.544	3.27	0.966			
Factor 2 Means and SD		3.12	0.536			
Factor 3: Quality of infrastructure						
Personal safety	0.750	3.32	1.320	1.320	6.598	0.794
Standard hygiene and cleanliness	0.729	3.33	6.896			
Quality of infrastructure	0.727	3.40	1.412			
Suitable accommodations	0.614	3.30	0.841			
Factor 3 Means and SD		3.34	0.642			
Factor 4: Trendy K-culture						
Great places to enjoy K-culture such as K-pop/shows/fan meetings with celebrities	0.723	3.68	0.692	1.127	5.633	0.607
Elegant culture: Fashion and trends	0.584	3.35	0.755			
Great shopping opportunities	0.440	3.31	0.778			
Factor 4 Means and SD		3.45	0.556			
Total Variance Explained					53.48%	

Table 3

Components of EFA for affective destination image items (based on pre-images).

Factors and items	Factor Loadings	M	SD	Eigen values	Variance Explained (%)	Reliability (α)
Factor 1: Felicity						
Pleasant	0.767	3.44	0.740	6.558	40.985	0.766
Relaxing	0.727	3.29	0.807			
Joyful	0.593	3.36	0.739			
Beautiful	0.549	3.43	0.797			
Factor 1 Means and SD		3.38	0.591			
Factor 2: Soundness						
Supportive	0.827	3.21	0.713	1.066	6.665	0.785
Safe	0.543	3.48	0.753			
Favorable	0.542	3.31	0.733			
Healthy	0.489	3.31	0.807			
Positive	0.460	3.49	0.661			
Valuable	0.414	3.42	0.800			
Factor 2 Means and SD		3.37	0.518			
Factor 3: Vitality						
Exciting	0.734	3.56	0.782	1.028	6.425	0.793
Attractive	0.694	3.48	0.714			
Appealing	0.606	3.39	0.797			
Inspiring	0.558	3.38	0.780			
Cheerful	0.531	3.44	0.700			
Friendly	0.456	3.26	0.800			
Factor 3 Means and SD		3.42	0.535			
Total Variance Explained					54.0%	

Table 4

Descriptive statistics and *t*-test results for cultural richness, pleasant environment, quality of infrastructure, and trendy k-culture.

Outcome	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Difference			
	M	SD	M	SD		r	t	df
Cultural richness	3.39	0.57	4.26	0.41	0.87	.242	−22.25***	247
Pleasant environment	3.12	0.54	4.05	0.39	0.93	.19	−24.45***	247
Quality infrastructure	3.34	0.64	4.15	0.43	0.81	.31	−19.40***	247
Trendy K-culture	3.45	0.56	4.37	0.43	0.92	.16	−22.48***	247
Total	3.31	0.47	4.20	0.33	0.89			

***p = .000.

Table 5

Differences between pretest and posttest for affective items.

Outcome	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Difference			
	M	SD	M	SD		r	t	df
Felicity	3.38	0.59	4.30	0.42	0.92	.19	−22.03***	247
Soundness	3.37	0.52	4.25	0.42	0.88	.22	−23.30***	247
Vitality	3.42	0.54	4.35	0.38	0.93	.29	−26.11***	247
Total	3.39	0.48	4.30	0.36	0.91			

***p = .000.

Table 6

Differences between pretest and posttest for preference for visiting South Korea while on vacation.

Outcome	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Difference		
	M	SD	M	SD		t	df
Preference for visiting South Korea while on vacation	3.03	0.70	4.11	0.57	1.08	−23.260***	247

***p = .000.

more interesting point is that even though the potential visitors who had never been to South Korea and who neither participated in nor had any direct experience of the K-Culture Festival experienced significantly improved cognitive and affective images merely after exposure to related pictures on two promotional tools. This result supports the previous finding that cultural events help people to form a positive image of a destination (Buch et al., 2011; Piva et al., 2017). However, most previous studies investigated the participants' direct experiences with cultural events, while this study focused on indirect exposure to images of a hypothetical festival. Generally, people who imagine cultural festivals/events while on vacation tend to automatically associate them with happy emotions, such as about hanging out with other people and engaging in fun, exciting, and novel experiences (Chang, 2017; Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019). Such attitudes, which have a happiness bias associated with engaging in cultural festivals/events while on vacation (Chang, 2017), may trigger and amplify inherent happiness

Table 7
Independent *t*-test for differences in cognitive destination image between Twitter and official homepage.

Outcome	Twitter		Official homepage				
	M[a]	SD[a]	M[a]	SD[a]	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Cultural richness	0.99	0.68	0.74	0.51	3.257	228.047 [b]	0.01*
Pleasant environment	1.06	0.64	0.80	0.53	3.500	246	0.01*
Quality infrastructure	0.97	0.73	0.65	0.52	3.975	223.257 [b]	0.000***
Trendy K-culture	1.01	0.66	0.84	0.62	2.143	246	0.03*

*p < .05; ***p = .000.
[a] Mean difference between post-image mean and pre-image mean (improved image scores).
[b] df to be used when the results of Levene's test to assess equality of variances are not satisfactory.

Table 8
Independent *t*-test for differences in affective destination image between Twitter and official homepage.

Outcome	Twitter		Official homepage				
	M[a]	SD[a]	M[a]	SD[a]	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Felicity	1.01	0.67	0.83	0.63	2.169	246	0.03*
Soundness	0.99	0.59	0.77	0.58	3.026	246	0.000***
Vitality	-.02	0.51	−0.6	0.59	.640	246	0.52

*p < .05; ***p = .000.
[a] Mean difference between post-image mean and pre-image mean (improved image scores).

Table 9
Independent *t*-test for differences in affective destination image between social media and official homepage.

| Outcome	Twitter		Official homepage				
	M[a]	SD[a]	M[a]	SD[a]	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Preference for visiting South Korea while on vacation	1.15	0.72	1.02	0.74	1.473	246	0.142

[a] Mean difference between post-image mean and pre-image mean (improved image scores).

among individuals who are exposed to related visual images as a stimulus. In particular, people tend to perceive cultural issues quite differently from political, social, and economic issues, which are mostly perceived as very serious and unpleasant. People tend to be more open-minded about cultural issues characterized by diversity despite being unfamiliar with them, which translates into positive feelings about unfamiliar cultural phenomena (Crompton & McKay, 1977; Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019). Those who have not thought much about or been interested in a particular culture might start being interested in experiencing it after exposure to attractive photos of or information on a related destination. This may be one of the most significant ways in which cultural aspects can be used to appeal to potential visitors. Moreover, the underlying features of cultural events combined with their benefits tend to reinforce happy feelings and foster social bonding among international visitors with different backgrounds (Bennet et al., 2016; Frisby & Getz, 1989). This phenomenon has often been described in terms of the ritualistic or religious dimension of events such as festivals (MacCannell, 2018; Laing, 1973). Overall, the findings of this study empirically reveal that cultural events can be very compelling tools for attracting potential visitors, consistent with earlier findings.

Specifically, the study observed the formation of positive cognitive and affective images of South Korea as a destination; interestingly, the affective images improved to a greater degree than the cognitive images did after exposure to a cultural festival. This result seems to reflect a unique outcome associated with this study's method, as the respondents relied exclusively on indirect visual images and had no direct experience of South Korea. Lacking direct experience, most of the respondents may have experienced emotional aspects via the abstract images rather than cognitive aspects requiring concrete images. Theories positing that affective or emotional aspects are more likely to be easily and impulsively induced by indirect experiences (Chaiken, 1980; Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2015) support this conjecture. Indeed, many studies on destination images have focused on more complex cognitive images than affective images before and after direct experiences (e.g. Boo & Busser, 2005; San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008). More importantly, this finding on affective images shows the need for more research on the affective images used for destinations, particularly in situations where having direct experiences is difficult (e.g., a pandemic situation).

Regarding improvements in cognitive images, the study found that cultural richness (including both traditional/historical and contemporary cultures) and trendy K-culture (including K-pop and fashions) improved to a greater extent. This pattern occurred in response to the traditional/contemporary Korean cultures and trendy K-culture-related
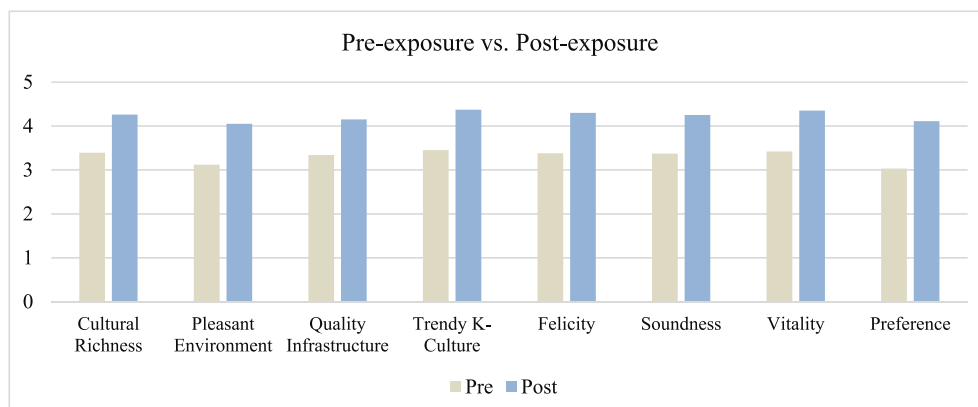
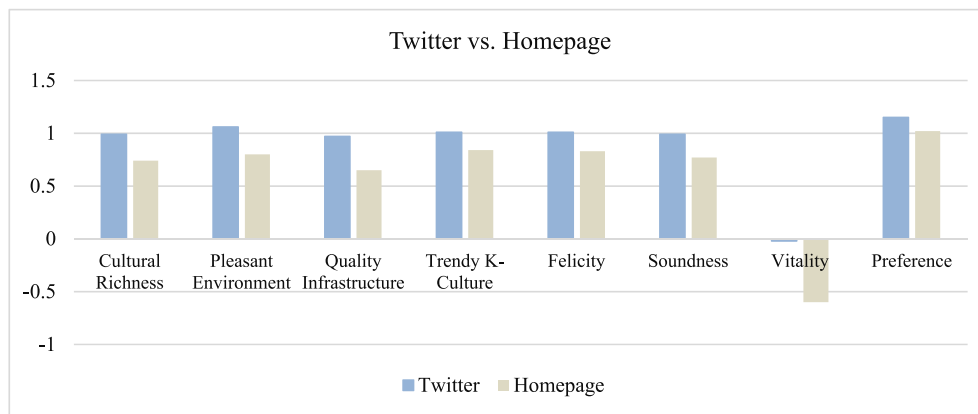**Fig. 3.** The diagramed results of Hypothesis 1.

Fig. 4. The diagramed results of Hypothesis 2.

contents designed in the promotional images. The fact that the cognitive judgments of potential visitors improved in response to the more strongly emphasized cognitive images provided in the promotional images is significant because this may suggest that cognitive images are concretely formed or improved on the basis of, or in proportion to, what the promotional images actually contain, as is proposed by systematic–heuristic theories (Chaiken, 1980; Dillard & Pfau, 2002). Nevertheless, beyond the core contents of the K-Culture Festival, the promotional background used (i.e., Twitter vs. the official homepage) also seemed to implicitly influence the subjects' positive images of pleasant environments as a context priming effect (Smith, 1992; Yi, 1990).

Regarding improvements in affective images, the finding that the vitality image was evaluated highest in both the pre- and post-exposure images provides an important clue as to how South Korea's national brand image should be highlighted and designed in the macroscopic context and embedded in a variety of attractions, such as the K-Culture Festival. Each country could have a representative affective image with which to appeal to potential international visitors and help them better remember the destination (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Kim & Lehto, 2013; Papadimitriou et al., 2015). Vitality, including several emotional aspects, is an abstract concept that has the strong advantage of being embedded into different sub-sectors and symbolically themed in the microscopic context. The fact that the preference for visiting South Korea improved to a greater extent than did the cognitive and affective images after exposure to the promotional images is critical because it indicates an increased possibility of visiting South Korea as a manifested behavioral form.

In the study, the Twitter and official homepage had the exact same images and contents except for some minor differences intended to signal which background was being shown. Nevertheless, almost all the reactive outcomes were much better in the Twitter subjects than in the official homepage subjects, even though the tools were only hypothetical. The young respondents' mere assumption that the images were posted on Twitter worked subtly to help generate positive destination images and preferences for visiting the destination. These findings have important implications. First, the importance of the context priming effect was confirmed. When organizations post promotional pictures on a variety of media, they focus on the contents and content-related designs, but the context priming effect (e.g., from the hypothetical SNS tool) is also effective, especially for young targets, regardless of the core messages or themes about the attractions. Young adults tend to spend more time on and become more familiar with SNS and are more comfortable doing so than middle-aged and older adults (Gentina et al., 2021; Gibson & Yiannakis, 2002; Mulvey et al., 2020; Styvén & Foster, 2018), which generates the heuristic reactions found in the study. Therefore, SNS context/background image effects should be used more widely and in creative ways to attract young adults to destinations

because they interact with them easily despite their imaginary features. In addition, this study focused on Twitter rather than other SNS tools because Twitter allows quick and immediate communication with others, even when on the move, and the exchange of short texts and images in real time (Vicari & Murru, 2020; Yang & Lee, 2020; Ye et al., 2021). Such advantages tend to maximize the underlying positive psychological mechanism by which young people network globally, beyond two-way interactive communication. Moreover, SNS satisfies young peoples' social need to express themselves to their social group conspicuously or ostentatiously in real time (Lee et al., 2015), which may have been reflected in the findings of this study.

Unexpectedly, the improvements between Twitter and the official homepage tended to be larger for the cognitive images than for the affective images. Twitter is characterized by more emotional, instant, and immediate user involvement, which studies have found is not accompanied by thoughtful cognitive engagement. However, this study shows that even cognitive images, requiring more thoughtful cognitive evaluations, were better on Twitter than on the official homepage, pointing toward a new insight. Tools with which the younger generation feels comfortable may allow them greater access to and deeper engagement with the contents they offer. Engaging in and focusing on content may lead to more cognitive involvement. Accordingly, a tool may influence the user's level of cognitive engagement and the change they experience. Furthermore, vitality was perceived as the highest-level affective factor on both Twitter and the official homepage. Again, this highlights vitality's status as the representative emotional image of South Korea, the practical implications of which should be considered. The fact that the preference for visiting South Korea improved to a greater extent on Twitter than on the official homepage also seems to be consistent with the features of Twitter discussed above.

5.2. Practical implications

Overall, the findings suggest that cultural festivals/events can play an important role in promoting a destination to potential international visitors who have not yet visited. Using cultural events to represent a destination to potential travelers is an effective strategy for governments. Such a strategy will significantly enhance inherent positive images and latent preferences for visiting a destination among people who lack direct experience of it, perhaps because a pandemic situation prevents them from traveling or because they cannot afford or have no time to take a vacation. Potential international visitors who have been exposed to cultural festivals/events will automatically associate their positive images of them with the destination and will travel there when they have the opportunity due to the suppressed desire accumulated because of external or personal reasons, as is explained by availability heuristic theory (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). This strategy will be effective in attracting potential international travelers, particularly in a

pandemic situation.

In the study, young potential international visitors' cognitive judgements were formed based on both traditional/contemporary cultures and trendy K-cultures that were deliberately highlighted in the K-Culture Festival, promoted at a governmental level. Improving the cognitive images of a destination requires a careful selection of the core contents of the promotional features and messages. This requires effective destination impression management because people judge cognitive images by thoroughly assessing the contents given to them. Nevertheless, the affective images improved to a greater extent than did the cognitive images among people who did not directly experience the cultural event. This result shows the need to develop more strategies for maximizing affective factors. Affective images are more abstract than cognitive images, which may allow potential visitors more room to imagine a destination in a positive way. The study also found that vitality was stronger among the affective images of South Korea. Therefore, vitality should be emphasized as the core emotion embedded across attractions such as cultural festivals in South Korea. More refined programs reflecting the various meanings of "vitality" featuring different cultural backgrounds should be developed to allow young international visitors to experience "vitality" when they visit South Korea. To stimulate the affective association effect, such vitality-related components should be implicitly and explicitly embedded in Twitter and official homepages, thereby working together to create a branded theme for South Korea. Satisfying younger people's emotional and social needs to express themselves conspicuously and to instantly interact with others online requires not only adding complementary options (e.g., creative chat bots, AI) to official homepages in a more creative and diverse way (as with SNS functions) but also incorporating the underlying affective and social components of background/context designs, even in the rigid form of pictures (e.g., posters) featuring hypothetical images.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This study focused on Twitter; thus, the findings may not be generalizable across all SNS tools. In addition, the survey sample, conveniently collected via mTurk, comprised 10 nationalities, which do not represent all potential international targets. Moreover, the promotional images used for the K-Culture Festival were hypothetical and designed specifically for this study. Some of their design elements may have implicitly influenced the subjects' answers. Therefore, future research should evaluate the effects of several actual SNS tools used to promote real cultural events, which would provide real-world outcomes that could be compared to those found in this study.

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