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**To cite this article:** Dimitrios Stylidis & Ana Maria Dominguez Quintero (2022) Understanding the Effect of Place Image and Knowledge of Tourism on Residents' Attitudes Towards Tourism and Their Word-of-Mouth Intentions: Evidence from Seville, Spain, *Tourism Planning & Development*, 19:5, 433-450, DOI: [10.1080/21568316.2022.2049859](https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2022.2049859)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2022.2049859>



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Published online: 11 Mar 2022.



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# Understanding the Effect of Place Image and Knowledge of Tourism on Residents' Attitudes Towards Tourism and Their Word-of-Mouth Intentions: Evidence from Seville, Spain

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## ABSTRACT


As places are greatly shaped and reshaped by tourism, the way residents perceive their place and their knowledge of tourism gradually transform and become more complex and influential. Drawing on the social exchange and social representations theory, this research aimed to explore the effect residents' place image and knowledge of tourism have on perceived tourism impacts, which were subsequently expected to predict residents' support for tourism development and their word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions. Data were collected from 484 residents in Seville, the third most visited destination in Spain. The findings suggest that place image shaped residents' perceptions of the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts, while knowledge of tourism affected only the economic ones. Additionally, place image and support for tourism determined residents' WOM intentions. The study extends current knowledge in mature destinations on the way residents' attitudes are shaped, whereby additional emphasis on place based and resident informed policies is needed.

## KEYWORDS

Residents' attitudes towards tourism; place image theory; social exchange theory; Spain

## 1. Introduction

Studies on residents' perceptions of tourism impacts and support for its development have rapidly developed over the last decades (Maruyama et al., 2019; Rasoolimanesh & Seyfi, 2021). Such academic popularity is grounded on the axiom that the sustainable planning, development and marketing of tourism rely on local communities' goodwill and support (Hadinejad et al., 2019; Stylidis et al., 2014). Previous research has focused on the various factors shaping local residents' perceptions and attitudes towards tourism, with an emphasis on intrinsic ones (related to locals), such as their image/perceptions of their place (Ganji et al., 2020; Stylidis et al., 2014; Tosun et al., 2020), or subjective knowledge of tourism (Andereck et al., 2005; Nunkoo & So, 2016; Rua, 2020). Despite its potential in explaining residents' responses to tourism, knowledge of tourism has produced contradictory results, due to the variety of approaches used (factual/objective

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knowledge vs. subjective knowledge). Somewhat similarly, while the prominence of residents' place image to serve as an antecedent of residents' attitudes has been well documented in the literature (Stylidis, 2021), studies have very rarely pointed to how locals' image dictates their WOM intentions; and whether the latter corresponds with their support for tourism. Last but not least, knowledge of tourism and place image have never been jointly used (to the best of our knowledge) to explain local perceptions of and support for tourism development.

As places are greatly shaped and reshaped by tourism (Heo, 2016), the way residents perceive their place and their knowledge of tourism (Latkova & Vogt, 2012) gradually transform and become more complex and influential. As stated earlier, studies on the role of locals' subjective knowledge of the industry in the tourism development context have been inconclusive, with some authors (see Andreck et al., 2005) reporting that the less knowledgeable residents are less supportive of tourism, while other studies (see Nunkoo & So, 2016; Rua, 2020) confirming the opposite. Following Nunkoo and So (2016), knowledge is defined here as residents' understanding of tourism development issues in their area.

At the same time, local residents have been progressively recognised—due to their familiarity with the destination—as key informants and destination marketers who often recommend (word-of-mouth or WOM) to their acquaintances local sites to visit and places to dine, thereby shaping visitors' destination image and experience (Tosun et al., 2020). WOM intentions are known in the tourist context to be related to the image visitors hold of the destination; the more positive the image, the greater the WOM intentions (Zhang et al., 2014). Little is known though, in the tourism development context, about the potential relationships between residents' place image and WOM intentions; and especially between residents' support for tourism and WOM. The willingness to share local views of the place with current and/or potential visitors serves as a powerful promotional tool for the destination, an act of direct support for the tourism industry, and a positive influence on visitors' experiences (Stylidis, 2021). Extensive reviews on this field (Hadinejad et al., 2019; Rasoolimanesh & Seyfi, 2021), further support the integration of models considering both antecedents (place image, knowledge of tourism) and consequences of residents' perceptions of tourism impacts (support for tourism, WOM intentions), for a better understanding of such phenomena.

The current study seeks thus to explore the effect of residents' place image and knowledge of tourism on their perceptions of tourism impacts, which in turn affect support for tourism development and WOM intentions. To address this aim, three objectives are formulated: (a) investigate the impact residents' knowledge of tourism has on perceived tourism impacts; (b) examine the effect residents' place image has on perceived tourism impacts, support for tourism, and WOM intentions; (c) explore the relationships between perceived tourism impacts and support; and between the latter and WOM intentions. Such examination sheds more light on the antecedents and consequences of residents' perceptions of tourism impacts (Rasoolimanesh & Seyfi, 2021) and of their WOM intentions (Stylidis, 2018). More specifically, understanding and incorporating in tourism planning residents' knowledge of tourism and image of their place is central to the sustainable development and marketing of the sector (Moscardo, 2011). Furthermore, such understanding will assist local authorities in Seville and elsewhere to assess residents' level of knowledge of tourism, which is often based on misinformation, as this might pose a threat to successful planning and development of tourism.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Theoretical framework: social exchange theory and place image

Social-Exchange Theory (SET) is the most commonly applied theoretical framework to explain community attitudes towards tourism (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Hadinejad et al., 2019; Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2011). SET postulates that residents support tourism development in cases where they foresee the potential benefits to exceed the expected costs (Ap, 1992). A vast volume of studies reported that the more positive the evaluations of tourism impacts, the greater the support for tourism development (Hadinejad et al., 2019). Some researchers though criticised SET for treating the decision-making process as too systematic and rational (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010), merely focusing on monetary transactions (Woosnam & Norman, 2010; Styliadis & Terzidou, 2021). For Sharpley (2014), SET is primarily relevant to the analysis of implicitly voluntary exchange processes between the parties. But even in cases of co-existence in a shared space without contact, the local residents might feel that the act of sharing “their” locality’s space is part of the exchange process in which they participate. Rasoolimanesh et al. (2015) further argued that while some impacts might not directly benefit individuals, they can still influence their perceptions of those impacts, as they recognise the benefits accrued by the community.

Despite the criticism, SET offers a solid theoretical foundation to explain the examination of the inter-relationships between the perceptions of positive and negative impacts and support for tourism; whereby at the community level, positive and negative, economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts have been validated as significant determinants of residents’ attitudes toward tourism development (Ward & Berno, 2011). Nunkoo and So (2015), for example, who compared four competing models of residents’ support for tourism, offered additional insights on the relationships among the various SET variables.

Another theory that can supplement well SET in explaining residents’ attitudes is the Social Representations Theory (SRT) (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Moscardo, 2011; Pearce et al., 1996). In line with Moscovici (1981), social representations are “systems of preconceptions, images and values which have their own cultural meaning and persist independently of individual experience” (p.122). As issues associated with tourism development are often context-specific, the need for place-related policies that consider the locality’s uniqueness has been highlighted (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). Within this context, a concept critical for planning, which also offers strong potentials to elucidate the locality’s characteristics is that of residents’ place image (Schoreder, 1996; Styliadis et al., 2014).

Drawing on the works of Boulding (1956, p. 6) who defined image as “what we believe to be true, our subjective knowledge”, and Scott (1965, p.72) who argued that image is “the totality of attributes that a person recognises when he contemplates that object,” place image is commonly defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions individuals have of a place (Crompton, 1979), or perceptions about the characteristics of a place (Gallarza et al., 2002). Boulding (1956), in his seminal work in the field of psychology was among the first to recognise that people’s subjective knowledge consists not only of images of “fact”, but also of images of “value”. Building on Boulding’s (1956) work, place image comprises a cognitive and an affective component (Chew & Jahari, 2014). The former encompasses peoples’ beliefs and knowledge about a destination (Pike & Ryan, 2004), while the latter corresponds to their feelings and emotions towards it

(Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997). Both are known to give shape to behavioural intentions such as WOM (Stylidis et al., 2017). Images are not necessarily accurate or representative of the reality, as the evaluations of the attributes of a place are based on personal views, and are, thus, highly subjective (Neal et al., 1999). A number of reasons explain why places should manage their image, including the need to attract tourists, investors and new residents (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

Despite the strong emphasis given in the past on tourists' destination image, there is a growing recognition in the literature that residents' place image is equally pivotal, especially in relation to tourism planning, development and marketing (Bigné et al., 2005; Ganji et al., 2020). Local residents' image of their place is more complex and comprehensive than visitors' image (Stylidis et al., 2014), and several studies have confirmed differences in the images of the two parties (Chan & Marafa, 2016; Ku & Mak, 2017; Stylidis et al., 2017). For instance, Ku and Mak (2017) reported that residents were attracted by recreational activities and relaxation, while tourists preferred the facilities and public space while visiting a scenic area in Taiwan.

Residents also act as destination marketers by recommending cultural sites, restaurants, experiences and activities to their friends and relatives (Gallarza et al., 2002; Hudson & Hawkins, 2006); their image is therefore a key determinant not only of their perceived tourism impacts but also of their WOM intentions. Further exploring place image from the resident perspective is critical in tourism planning and marketing, for understanding its impact on perceptions of tourism/support for its development along with residents' WOM intentions (Campelo et al., 2014; Hsu et al., 2004; Tosun et al., 2020). Empirical research, however, is limited in this regard; in response to this lack of research on this field, the study applies SET and place image to explore how residents' support for tourism development and WOM intentions are shaped, as discussed below.

## ***2.2 Perceived tourism impacts and support for tourism***

There is anonymous agreement in the literature that the impacts of tourism can be classified as economic, socio-cultural and environmental (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019; Vargas-Sanchez et al., 2011). In economic terms, tourism generates employment and increased investment opportunities (Almeida-García et al., 2016; Gursoy et al., 2002), leading to improved local economies and residents' quality of life (Ribeiro et al., 2017; Woo et al., 2015), while it also increases the cost of living (Bujosa & Roselló, 2007; Vargas-Sanchez et al., 2011). In the socio-cultural domain, tourism provides increased opportunities for leisure and cultural activities, assists in the maintenance and conservation of historical heritage, the preservation of customs, values and cultural identity, and boosts pride and cultural identity (Besculides et al., 2002; Sinclair-Maragh et al., 2015). On the other hand it is often linked to traffic and parking issues, increased crime and vandalism (Andereck et al., 2005; Bujosa & Roselló, 2007). As for the environmental impacts, tourism is considered a driver for the preservation of natural resources (Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017), whereas it is also a source of increased litter and pollution (Almeida-García et al., 2016), and generates congestion in public services and overcrowding in the destination (Bujosa & Roselló, 2007; Terzidou et al., 2008).

Based on SET, studies have established links between the evaluations of tourism impacts by residents and their level of support for tourism development (Almeida-

García et al., 2016; Prayag et al., 2013; Stylidis et al., 2014). For example, Almeida-García et al. (2016) reported that more favourable perceptions lead to more supportive behavioural intentions. Residents as such with positive attitudes towards tourism impacts are expected to show higher levels of support, while those with negative attitudes will oppose tourism development (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Ribeiro et al., 2017). Following this discussion, the next hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Perceived economic impacts affect support for tourism development.

H1b: Perceived socio-cultural impacts affect support for tourism development.

H1c: Perceived environmental impacts affect support for tourism development.

### **2.3 Knowledge of tourism and residents' perceptions of tourism impacts**

Knowledge sits well within the SET framework as an important resource for locals, which determines their position in a social exchange network (Cook et al., 2013). Nunkoo (2015), Nunkoo and So (2016) and Rua (2020) reported that knowledge of tourism does not explain perceptions of positive impacts, but is linked to perceptions of negative impacts. A tenable explanation offered by these researchers is that knowledge reinforces "critical citizens" who hold more critical attitudes towards further tourism development (Christensen & Laegreid, 2005). For Rua (2020), these more knowledgeable residents can act as gatekeepers of sustainable tourism development in the area, with such knowledge elevating their notion of empowerment (Joo et al., 2020). For example, Joo et al. (2020) reported that the more knowledgeable about tourism local residents were, the more psychologically, socially, and politically empowered they felt. In contrast, lack of knowledge is reported as a main obstacle in residents' participation in decision making related to tourism (Weng & Peng, 2014). Andereck et al. (2005), on the other hand, found knowledgeable residents to be more positively predisposed towards the positive impacts of tourism, perhaps a sign of appreciation to the industry. Davis et al. also noted that a group of residents classified by the researchers as "haters" were the ones with the lowest level of knowledge about tourism. Lastly, Latkova and Vogt (2012) did not report any relationship between knowledge and positive or negative impacts of tourism. Part of these variations can be attributed to the variety of measures of knowledge used, ranging from a single item (Latkova & Vogt, 2012) to a four-item scale (Nunkoo and So, 2016). Based on this discussion, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H2a: Residents' knowledge of tourism affects the perceived economics impacts of tourism.

H2b: Residents' knowledge of tourism affects the perceived socio-cultural impacts of tourism.

H2c: Residents' knowledge of tourism affects the perceived environmental impacts of tourism.

### **2.4 Place image, residents' perceptions of tourism impacts, and support for tourism**

The link between residents' place image, perceived tourism impacts and support for tourism has been progressively explored the past years (Ganji et al., 2020; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon,

2010; Stylidis et al., 2014; Tosun et al., 2020). Schroeder's (1996) work was the first to establish a positive relationship between place image and support for tourism. Ramkisoom and Nunkoo (2010) further confirmed that three out of four dimensions of place image these researchers explored exerted a positive effect on the perception of overall tourism impacts, ignoring through the tri-dimensional nature of tourism impacts. Stylidis et al. (2014) also established a positive effect of place image on the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts, and on support for tourism. Tournois and Djerić (2019), Ganji et al. (2020) and Tosun et al. (2020) further confirmed that residents' place image had both direct and indirect effects (via perceived impacts) on support for tourism. As most of the previous research was conducted on destinations at the first stages of tourism development, our understanding of such relationships in the context of well-established, mature destinations remains limited. Based on SRT and previous research, it is suggested that:

H3a: Residents' place image affects the perceived economics impacts of tourism.

H3b: Residents' place image affects the perceived socio-cultural impacts of tourism.

H3c: Residents' place image affects the perceived environmental impacts of tourism.

H4: Residents' place image affects support for tourism development.

## **2.5 Residents' place image and WOM intentions**

Positive recommendations serve as a credible source of information for potential tourists (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). This is especially relevant in tourism, which heavily relies on positive word-of-mouth for destination image building (Williams & Soutar, 2009). In recent times this also takes also the form of positively/negatively discussing about a destination through social media via chatting with friends or posting content on social networks (Kislali et al., 2019). Although the link between destination image and WOM has been well established in the tourism literature (e.g. Choi et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2014), there is limited evidence on the stability of this relationship when applied to local residents; locals' place image and its effect on their word-of-mouth intentions is thus far little understood. Among the few studies available, Schroeder (1996) first reported that residents who hold a more positive image of North Dakota are more likely to recommend it as a tourist destination to others. Stylidis (2018), who clustered residents of Eilat in Israel based on their place image, confirmed that those with more favourable images—termed nature aesthete and appreciators—were more likely to recommend Eilat to others as compared to the critical residents. Similarly, limited empirical evidence is available regarding the relationship between residents' support for tourism and their intentions to spread positive WOM about their place to others. For Hsu et al. (2004), such positive recommendations imply indirect support for tourism activity. Aiming to fill these two gaps, the following hypothesis are proposed:

H5: Residents' place image affects their WOM intentions.

H6: Residents' support for tourism affects their WOM intentions.

Figure 1 below presents the proposed model including the hypothesised relationships previously discussed.

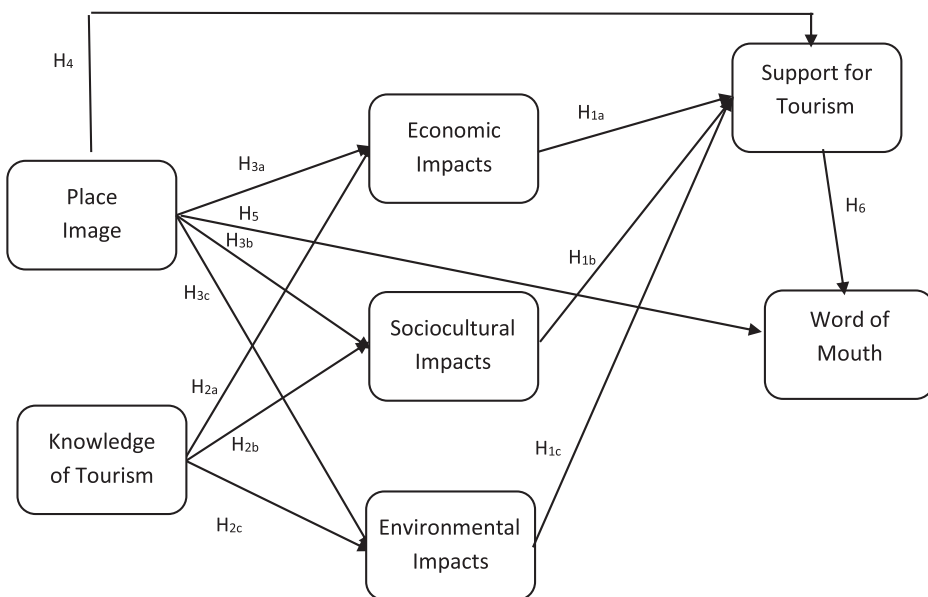
### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research setting

The research setting of this study is Seville (population 700,000), one of the most historical cities in Spain. Seville is on the banks of Guadalquivir and the capital of Andalusia region. The city boasts a number of cultural and heritage attractions, such as the Cathedral, the Alcázar, and the Archivo General de Indias, declared as World Heritage Sites. Seville is also known for hosting the Holy Week Processions and the April Fair. Massive developments such as new bridges, highways, and transport links (e.g. high-speed train to Madrid) were undertaken in 1992 as part of the Universal Exhibition. Seville, the third most visited destination in Spain (only after Madrid and Barcelona), welcomed 3,121,934 travellers in 2019, while the number of overnight stays the same year reached 6,706,744 (Ayuntamiento de Sevilla, 2020).

#### 3.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire contained four parts and all items were measured on seven-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The first part captured the perceived impacts of tourism via 14 items across the three impact domains. Economic was measured by five items (e.g. revenue generated in the local economy) adopted from Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) and Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2010). Socio-cultural were evaluated by six items (e.g. availability of recreational facilities) adopted by Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) and Styliadis et al. (2014). Four items (e.g. pollution) were used to measure environmental, borrowed from Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) and Gu and Ryan (2008). Support for tourism was assessed using four items drawn from McGehee and Andereck (2004) and Nepal (2008).



**Figure 1.** Proposed Model.



The second part was devoted to understanding residents' place image. The concept of image is elusive, known for its complexity and multiplicity (Di Vittorio, 2007; Gallarza et al., 2002). This is evident on the number of components (cognitive, affective) and attributes used to measure image in the past. Place attributes typically cover (a) commonly applied ones such as the natural environment, activities, and accessibility (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008) and (b) place-specific ones, given that image greatly hinges upon the place under investigation (Chen et al., 2013). Place image cognitive component was assessed in this study based on Stylidis et al. (2014) work, with items classified across four factors: community services, physical appearance, social environment and entertainment services. The affective component was evaluated via four items (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Stylidis et al., 2011). The third part captured residents' knowledge of tourism based on Nunkoo and So (2015) and Andereck et al. (2005). WOM intentions were captured via three items following Bosnjak et al. (2011) and Chen et al. (2018). The last part included questions about respondents' personal characteristics. A pilot version of the survey was distributed to 40 conveniently selected Sevillians, out of which, 38 agreed to participate. During this process, the researchers ensured that the respondents understood the wording of the items and that the time for completion was within a logical timeframe to avoid withdrawals. The responses and comments obtained during this process did not suggest any major changes to the initial wording of the items, assisting in establishing the face validity of the research instrument.

### ***3.3 Sampling and data collection***

Data were collected using self-administered pen and paper questionnaires, which were distributed by one of the researchers over the months of April-May, and October-December 2019. These months were selected as they are the peak and mid tourist season in Seville. Following a stratified random sampling approach based on gender, age and postal districts—using the 2018 Seville census data available—the sample was proportionally selected in accordance with the stratum's relative weight in relation to the population. In total, 484 questionnaires were returned by adult residents, who were approached in their neighbourhoods. This approach is commonly used in researching the attitudes of residents as it is known to produce results that are reflective of the local population (McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Woosnam, 2012).

### ***3.4 Data analysis***

Prior to data analysis, a data screening process was performed to identify incomplete or unengaged responses and to assess normality. Assessment of the kurtosis and skewness values confirmed that the responses in all variables did not violate normality, and were within the suggested threshold (Hair et al. 2018). Next, a two-stage CB-SEM was conducted using SPSS v.26 and AMOS v. 26. The appropriateness of the measurement model was assessed first using the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), followed by CB-SEM for testing the proposed hypothesised relationships between the constructs.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Respondents' profile

The sample was comprised of more female respondents (54%) than male (46%) (Table 1). Respondents were highly educated, with a preponderance holding tertiary education degrees. They were aged 45–54 years old (26%), 35–44 years old (22%), while only 8% were those over 65 years old. As for their annual income, most of them reported earning 20,000–29,999 or 10,000–19,999 Euro, followed by those earning more than 40,000 Euro.

### 4.2 Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

To eliminate the possibility of common method bias (variance in the data largely attributed to a single factor), Harman's single factor test was conducted using SPSS. The total variance explained by a single factor was 19%, far less than the suggested benchmark (< 50%) (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

The results of the CFA analysis indicated a satisfactory fit of the model: Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 759.5, CMIN/DF = 2.51, CFI = 0.92, GFI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.059 and TLI = 0.91. However, three items ("PI1" from the Place Image Scale; "opportunity to meet with people" from the Socio-cultural Impacts Scale; "Public funding for tourism development" from the Support for Tourism Scale) had factor loading lower than the recommended 0.50, and were removed from further analysis. The fit indices improved as a result, indicating a good model fit:  $\chi^2$  = 458.0, CMIN/DF = 1.98, CFI = 0.96, GFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.048, and TLI = 0.95.

All the factor loadings exceeded 0.50 and the respective *t-values* were higher than the critical value of 3.29 (see Table 2) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Composite reliability (CR) scores surpassed the 0.70 threshold and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were over the cut-off value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2018). The square roots of the AVE

**Table 1.** Respondents' profile.

<b>Gender</b>	
Female	54.4%
Male	45.6%
<b>Age</b>	
18–24	14.3%
25–34	13.3%
35–44	22.2%
45–54	26.3%
55–64	15.7%
65+	8.2%
<b>Education</b>	
Primary Education	6.5%
Secondary Education	33.4%
Tertiary Education	60.1%
<b>Income</b>	
0–9,999	16.4%
10,000–19,999	21.9%
20,000–29,999	22.9%
30,000–39,999	15.4%
40,000+	18.2%
Prefer not to say	5.2%

scores exceeded the inter-construct correlations in all cases, indicating clear evidence of discriminant validity (Table 3).

### 4.3 Structural path model

The results of SEM suggested a good overall model fit: ( $\chi^2$ ) = 526.2, CMIN/DF = 2.19, CFI = 0.94, GFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.05, TLI = 0.94 (Hair et al., 2018). Most (9 out of 12) of the hypothesised relationships were supported, as presented in Table 4 below; perceived economic, socio-cultural and environmental tourism impacts positively influence support for tourism ( $H_{1a}$ ,  $H_{1b}$ ,  $H_{1c}$ ). Knowledge of tourism negatively affects economic tourism impacts ( $H_{2a}$ ), but is not related to any of the other types of impacts ( $H_{2b}$ ,  $H_{2c}$ ). Place image has a positive effect on economic impacts ( $H_{3a}$ ), socio-cultural impacts ( $H_{3b}$ ), environmental impacts ( $H_{3c}$ ), and WOM intentions ( $H_5$ ) but not on support for tourism ( $H_4$ ). Support for tourism positively influence WOM intentions ( $H_6$ ). Overall, perceived tourism impacts, knowledge of tourism, and place image explained 46% of the variance in support for tourism and 45% of the variance in residents' WOM intentions. The next section discusses the contribution of these findings to tourism theory and practice.

**Table 2.** Measurement model CFA results.

Constructs/ indicators	Item loadings	t-values	Composite reliability	AVE
<i>Economic Impacts (ECI)</i>			.78	.55
Revenue generated in the economy	0.75	15.03		
Standard of living	0.76	16.16		
Number of jobs	0.71	16.08		
<i>Socio-cultural Impacts (SCI)</i>			.84	.56
Cultural activities	0.79	18.56		
Availability of recreational facilities	0.85	20.59		
Quality of public services	0.71	15.90		
Community spirit	0.63	13.53		
<i>Environmental Impacts (ENI)</i>			.86	.60
Noise levels	0.80	18.92		
Pollution	0.86	20.64		
Crowding	0.72	16.13		
Traffic congestion	0.71	15.87		
<i>Place Image (PLI)</i>			.82	.54
Physical appearance	0.71	15.99		
Social environment	0.60	12.68		
Entertainment opportunities	0.74	16.58		
Affective attributes	0.87	20.69		
<i>Knowledge of Tourism (KOT)</i>			.90	.70
I am fully aware of the issues related to tourism development in my community	0.71	16.32		
I keep up with the news regarding tourism development	0.86	21.64		
I know a lot about tourism in my community	0.89	23.29		
I know about the impacts of tourism in Seville	0.88	22.58		
<i>Word of Mouth (WOM)</i>			.87	.69
I will tell more people about tourism attractions in my city than in other cities.	0.83	20.32		
I only have good things to say about tourism attractions in my city.	0.90	22.56		
I write positive comments about tourism attractions in my city on social media	0.75	17.24		
<i>Support for Tourism (SFT)</i>			.73	.57
Further tourism development	0.81	16.79		
Increase in the volume of tourists	0.70	14.40		

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity.

Constructs	ECI	SCI	ENI	PLI	KOT	WOM	SFT
ECI	<b>.74</b>	.55	.16	.34	-.10	.35	.63
SCI	.55	<b>.75</b>	.27	.65	.00	.49	.52
ENI	.16	.27	<b>.78</b>	.22	-.04	.27	.32
PLI	.34	.65	.22	<b>.73</b>	.03	.50	.45
KOT	-.10	.00	-.04	.03	<b>.84</b>	.09	-.05
WOM	.35	.49	.27	.50	.09	<b>.83</b>	.63
SFT	.63	.52	.32	.45	-.05	.63	<b>.77</b>

**Table 4.** Structural equation model paths.

		Effect	t-value	p-value	
H <sub>1a</sub>	Economic impacts → Support for tourism	.45	6.74	<.001	Supported
H <sub>1b</sub>	Socio-Cultural impacts → Support for tourism	.18	2.26	<.05	Supported
H <sub>1c</sub>	Environmental impacts → Support for tourism	.19	3.59	<.001	Supported
H <sub>2a</sub>	Knowledge of tourism → Economic impacts	-.11	-1.97	<.05	Supported
H <sub>2b</sub>	Knowledge of tourism → Socio-cultural impacts	-.02	-.50	.73	Unsupported
H <sub>2c</sub>	Knowledge of tourism → Environmental impacts	-.05	-.90	.37	Unsupported
H <sub>3a</sub>	Place image → Economic impacts	.39	6.39	<.001	Supported
H <sub>3b</sub>	Place image → Socio-cultural impacts	.68	11.18	<.001	Supported
H <sub>3c</sub>	Place image → Environmental impacts	.25	4.33	<.001	Supported
H <sub>4</sub>	Place image → Support for tourism	.14	1.71	.08	Unsupported
H <sub>5</sub>	Place image → WOM	.30	5.06	<.001	Supported
H <sub>6</sub>	Support for tourism → WOM	.47	7.22	<.001	Supported

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the role residents' knowledge of tourism along with the place image they hold play in shaping their perceptions of the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism, which, in turn, were expected to explain their support for tourism and WOM intentions. The results of this research led credence to previous studies (e.g. Almeida-García et al., 2016; Prayag et al., 2013), which have established a relationship between the perceived impacts of tourism and their support for tourism development (H<sub>1a</sub>, H<sub>1b</sub>, H<sub>1c</sub>). Similar to other contexts that have suffered in the past from severe economic crisis (Garau-Vadell et al., 2018) and to destinations in which tourism is a core component of the local economy (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010), the economic impacts exercised the strongest effect on support for tourism, followed by the socio-cultural and environmental. All these reflect the central role tourism plays in Seville's economy and its over-dependence on this industry.

Results also suggest that knowledge of tourism did not have any effect on perceived tourism impacts (socio-cultural (H<sub>2b</sub>) and environmental (H<sub>2c</sub>)), apart from the economic ones (H<sub>2a</sub>). A negative relationship, in particular, was established between knowledge of tourism and the perceived economic impacts. These findings contradict the ones produced by Nunkoo (2015) and Nunkoo and So (2016), who noted that knowledge of tourism does not explain perceptions of positive impacts, but is linked to perceived negative impacts such as the environmental ones. They also contrast those provided by Ander- eck et al. (2005), who reported that knowledgeable residents are more positively predisposed towards the positive impacts of tourism. Here, the more knowledgeable the residents, the less positive they were towards the economic (positive) impacts of

tourism, probably considering the opportunity costs or balancing these together with the wider implications of tourism for the local society and environment. Knowledge as such cultivates critical members of the local community who serve as gatekeepers of sustainability in the region (Rua, 2020).

The image residents hold of their place was reported exercising a positive effect on economic ( $H_{3a}$ ), socio-cultural ( $H_{3b}$ ), and environmental impacts ( $H_{3c}$ ), and a positive but not-significant one on support for tourism ( $H_4$ ). These are partially in line with previous research which also established a direct positive association between place image, perceived impacts of tourism and support for tourism (Stylidis et al., 2014; Tosun et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the direct link between place image and support for tourism was not verified in the context of Seville. Furthermore, the magnitude of the link between place image and socio-cultural impacts was the strongest one noted here; while it has been equally related to economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts in the context of Urgup, Turkey (Tosun et al., 2020).

The present study further advances past research as it is among the first to confirm that place image is also positively related to residents' WOM intentions ( $H_5$ ) in the tourism development context. The moderate positive relationship between the two constructs suggests that the way residents perceive their place determines their intentions to promote it to their friends and relatives. This is in line with the few studies available in the field (Schroeder, 1996; Stylidis, 2018). Lastly, residents' support for tourism development was found to be positively associated to their WOM intentions ( $H_6$ ). Although such link between the two has been implied in the literature, empirical validation was much needed. The strong relationship substantiated here indicated that residents' intentions to act as ambassadors of the destination by promoting it to their friends and relatives is a clear outcome of their support in practice of further tourism development.

### **5.1 Theoretical and managerial implications**

The results of this study make a contribution to both tourism theory and practice. First, it is one of the few works to supplement SET with social representations and place image theories in the context of residents' attitudes towards tourism. The results confirm the suitability of both theories in explaining how residents' support for tourism is developed; place image (Stylidis et al., 2014) and social representations (Moscovici, 1981) seem to shape the perceived tourism impacts, which, in turn, determine support for tourism development, as the SET postulates. Second, although knowledge of tourism and place image have been independently used to predict residents' perceptions of tourism impacts, with some inconclusive results (see Nunkoo & So, 2016; Rua, 2020 on knowledge of tourism), their joint effect was so far little understood. In this study it is merely peoples' perceptions of their place rather than their level of local knowledge that seem to determine their attitudes towards tourism and their WOM intentions. Knowledge of tourism might act as a stepping stone for resident empowerment (Joo et al., 2020), but not considered so prominent in directly shaping residents' support. Third, the study contributes to a better understanding of how place image and support for tourism shape WOM intentions, as these relationships have received limited attention in the destination development context. The study as such extends past work that has established a relationship

between place image and WOM (Stylidis, 2018), but not between support for tourism and WOM.

Such findings have further implications for the planning and management of tourism destinations, especially the mature ones. From the empirical results it becomes evident that the way locals perceive their place, and to a lesser extent their knowledge of tourism, determine their perceptions of all types of tourism impacts, which, in turn, affect their support for tourism, offering valuable knowledge for the planning and marketing of tourism destinations. In their June 2020 published tourism plan (Plan8 Seville Tourism Impact, 2020) aiming to relaunch the Seville brand, however, limited weight was given to the images, knowledge or opinions of local residents in the tourism planning and marketing process. This raises concerns over the ability of such plans to adequately reflect the host population and its vision for the future of the city. Plans that cultivate tourism in ways that benefit the local community and enhance at the same time residents' images of their place are much needed, as they will secure support for tourism and lead to positive WOM recommendations.

Given that residents' subjective assessment of their knowledge of tourism had no relationship with the socio-cultural and environmental impacts, and a negative one with the economic impacts, questions are raised about the depth and accuracy of their knowledge of the industry. Local authorities in Seville and elsewhere should first of all conduct assessment exercises that would provide prudent understanding of residents' level of knowledge of tourism, which might be based on misinformation. Lack of knowledge might pose a threat in the successful and sustainable development of tourism, which largely depends on the local community for its viability. Correcting action should then be taken at the next stage via educational events that aim to inform residents about the benefits and costs of tourism. Lastly, as the findings suggest, local authorities and destination planners need to establish a mechanism to monitor locals' perceptions of tourism, of their locale, support and WOM intentions, so that can act proactively in maintaining enhanced images and high levels of support, a necessity for the sustainable development of the industry.

## ***5.2 Limitations and future research directions***

This research is subject to some limitations, which also offer directions for future studies. Given that the conclusions are drawn from data collected using only residents in Seville, future studies need to further validate the model in various settings, also reflecting destinations at the early stages of tourism development. Similarly, most of previous research on place image and support for tourism has been conducted on urban settings; it is therefore useful to extent such research on islands destinations or rural contexts. Next, although one place based factor—place image—and one people oriented factor—knowledge of tourism—were considered, others like emotional solidarity (Tasci et al., 2021; Woosnam, 2012) were not; future studies are needed to address this omission by considering additional antecedents in the model. Finally, it might be useful to explore the moderating effect of the level of tourist activity or locals' benefit from tourism in the relationships of the established model.

## **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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