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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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The role of news articles, prior destination experience, and news involvement in destination image formation

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Abstract

Despite the relevance of news articles as autonomous image formation agents, we still have limited understanding of their influence on destination image and the conditions under which such influence occurs. This paper analyses the role of news articles and two moderating conditions—prior destination experience and news involvement—in destination image formation. It shows that the number of news articles individuals read is positively associated with their image of the destination, that news involvement enhances the influence of the news articles on destination image formation, and that this influence holds even after controlling for prior destination experience.

KEYWORDS

destination image formation, news articles, news involvement, prior destination experience

1 | INTRODUCTION

Over the last four decades, there has been a proliferation of studies on destination image (Tasci, 2007; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007), as scholars have linked perceptions of destinations with visit intentions (e.g., Assaker, Vinzi, & O'Connor, 2011; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Stylidis, Belhassen, & Shani, 2015; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014). Quite a lot of these studies have analysed the image formation process and identified the factors that affect it (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008). Early studies in the field have referred to these factors as image formation agents (Gartner, 1994; Gunn, 1972) and have identified three types of agents: organic agents, such as word-of-mouth and destination experience; induced agents, such as promotional material; and autonomous agents, such as news articles.

Later research has largely focused on organic and induced agents. As for organic agents, research has provided evidence of the impact of word-of-mouth (e.g., Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007; Simpson & Siguaw, 2008)—or more recently electronic word-of-mouth and blogs (e.g., Camprubí, Guia, & Comas, 2012; Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Manzari, 2012; Ketter, 2016; Kim, Lee, Shin, & Yang, 2017; Kladou & Mavragani, 2015; Költringer & Dickinger, 2015; Stechenkova et al., 2015; Sun, Ryan, & Pan, 2014; Tham, Croy, & Mair, 2013; Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen, 2015)—and destination experience (e.g., Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2005) on destination image. With reference to induced agents, research has looked at travel-related website (e.g., Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Tang-Taye & Standing, 2013) and travel agencies (e.g., Frías, Rodriguez, & Castaneda, 2008) and studied their influence on destination image.

Less attention has been paid, in comparison, to autonomous agents. Those studies that have looked at the impact of autonomous agents on destination image have generally documented the existence of a negative association between these agents and destination image (Lee & Bai, 2016). Such a negative association, however, is likely to be attributed to the fact that these studies have primarily looked at negative news media such as violence, terrorist activities, and natural disasters. Whether less extreme, negatively oriented news articles affect destination image in the same way remains an open question. In addition, a few studies have analysed the impact of autonomous agents on image-related concepts such as destination risk perception (Kapuściński & Richards, 2016), tourism demand (Stepchenkova & Eales, 2011), or the importance attached to different sources of information (Beerli & Martin, 2004) but have not directly analysed whether news media as autonomous agents affect destination image formation. More research is, therefore, needed to further investigate the role of news media on destination image formation.

In addition, we know little about the conditions under which news articles are likely to influence the image formation process. Although it has been broadly acknowledged that different agents interact in the image formation process (Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, & Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015), no studies have empirically investigated whether prior destination experience as an organic agent influences the relationship between autonomous agents and destination image formation. The lack of empirical research on this issue is troublesome, because prior destination experience is an important source of information (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Gartner, 1993; Gunn, 1972; Iordanova & Stylidis, 2017; Lehto, O'Leary, & Morrison, 2004; Rodríguez-Molina, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2012) that can affect how much we rely on other sources of information. In addition, no empirical studies have analysed whether news involvement—defined here as the "intensity of information search and processing" by individuals (Lehto et al., 2004)—moderates the relationship between news articles and destination image formation. Again, this seems to be a relevant gap in existing research, because the extent to which individuals are involved with the media is likely to affect how much news media influence their perceptions (Frías et al., 2008; Rodríguez-Molina, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2015).

To help fill these gaps in existing research, we examine the influence of news reports as autonomous agents on the image formation process, taking into account the role of prior destination experience and news involvement as potential moderators of the relationship between news reports and destination image formation. The specific research objectives of this study are to

1. Analyse whether news reports as autonomous agents influence the image formation process;
2. Examine whether prior destination experience as an organic agent influences the relationship between news reports and destination image;
3. Study whether news involvement influences the relationship between news reports and destination image.

2 | RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2.1 | The effects of news articles on destination image formation

Research on news articles as autonomous image formation agents has primarily focused on the strong negative influence of news such as violence, terrorist activities, and natural disasters on image formation (Lee & Bai, 2016). Alvarez and Campo (2014) analyse the effect of the Mavi Marmara conflict between Turkey and Israel on the image that Turks have of Israel, as well as their intention to visit the place, and provide evidence that this incident—extensively reported upon by Turkish media—severely shattered the image of Israel and reduced Turks' willingness to visit Israel. Similarly, Chew and Jahari (2014) focus on the relationships between destination image, perceived risks, and revisit intention after a natural disaster had been reported in the media and show that this event affected the country's perceived riskiness and image, as well as revisit intention. Avraham (2015) examines the media strategies used by Middle Eastern countries' marketers to restore a positive image after the Arab Spring uprisings, which had received intensive media coverage and had had a negative effect on tourism to the Middle East.

This research has undoubtedly shed new light on the influence of news articles on the image formation process but has analysed rather extreme cases of bad publicity. Thus, there is a need for additional research on the influence of more "ordinary" news articles on image formation, especially considering that many destinations around the world do not face such high levels of bad publicity.

Stepchenkova and Eales (2011) suggest two main ways in which news articles affect destinations and, more specifically in their case, tourism demand for a destination. The first is through the "volume of media materials in the source country about the destination" (p. 198), that is to say the number of times the destination is "talked about" in the media (on this point, see also Liu & Pennington-Gray, 2015). The second is through the favourability of media coverage, defined as the evaluation of a particular entity—in our case, the destination—with some degree of favour or disfavour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In this study, we build on these insights and argue that the volume of media materials about the destination (i.e., media coverage of the destination) and media favourability affect destinations also by affecting their image.

The volume of news articles about a destination is likely to affect destination image formation because the frequency with which a symbol, idea, reference, or topic occurs in a stream of messages is taken to indicate the importance of, attention to, or emphasis on that symbol, idea, reference, or topic in the message (Lasswell, Lerner, & Pool, 1952). Symbols, ideas, references, or topics that are more frequent enter into the experience of everyone, irrespective of their status (Lasswell et al., 1952), and become familiar. Familiar symbols, ideas, references, or topics tend to be associated with more favourable images than less familiar ones (Milman & Pizam, 1995). Following this line of reasoning, we theorize that media coverage should be positively associated with destination image, so that the higher the coverage by the media, the better the image of the destination. Stated it more formally, we propose that

> **Hypothesis 1.** *Media coverage is positively associated with destination image.*

The favourability of media coverage—that is to say, whether news articles provide "good" or "bad" news—is likely to affect destination image formation because individuals tend to form impressions that are more positive when they are exposed to signals that are more positive and more negative when they are exposed to signals that are more negative (e.g., Golan & Wanta, 2001; McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997). Mass communication research has provided evidence of these effects in the context of political elections (Golan & Wanta, 2001; McCombs et al., 1997). McCombs et al. (1997) document the influence of what they refer to as "media framing"—that is to say, the association with positive or negative attributes—on individuals' perceptions of the different candidates during the Spanish elections, and Golan and Wanta (2001) show that

those U.S. presidential candidates that had been portrayed in more favourable terms by the media outperformed the other candidates on a number of attributes. In a tourism setting, Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) provide evidence that positive reviews improve attitude towards hotels, especially in case of lesser known ones, and make consumers more likely to consider them. Building on this research, this study proposes that

> **Hypothesis 2.** *Media favourability is positively associated with destination image.*

2.2 | The moderating role of prior destination experience on the relationship between news articles and image formation

A closer examination of the relationship between news articles and image formation requires an analysis of the factors that may influence such a relationship. The first factor considered in this study is prior destination experience. Although it has long been acknowledged that prior destination experience as an organic image formation agent affects image formation (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Gartner, 1993; Gunn, 1972; Iordanova & Stylidis, 2017; Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2012), its relationship with news articles is less clear. In particular, no studies have empirically tested whether prior destination experience affects the relationship between news articles and image formation. This study argues that because those who have visited a destination can rely also on their prior destination experience of it, the influence of news articles on image formation should be weaker for them than for those who have not visited the destination. More formally, we propose that

> **Hypothesis 3a.** *Prior destination experience negatively moderates the association between media coverage and destination image.*

> **Hypothesis 3b.** *Prior destination experience negatively moderates the association between media favourability and destination image.*

2.3 | The moderating role of news involvement on the relationship between news articles and image formation

This study argues that the effect of news article on the image formation process may also be affected by individuals' involvement in the news. So far, tourism research has mainly looked at news involvement as a factor influencing motivation or image formation regarding destinations (Frías et al., 2008; Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2015). Frías et al. (2008) provide evidence that the degree of message involvement moderates the effect of previsit image formation, and Rodríguez-Molina et al. (2015) document the role of involvement in moderating the processing of information on the website.

Yet, no studies have analysed if and how news involvement affects the relationship between news articles and image formation. It could be argued, however, that highly involved individuals may see the information provided as more important and may, therefore, elaborate more on that information. On the contrary, individuals that are less involved may not have a particular interest in the information they are presented with and not engage in very sophisticated elaborations. This, in turn, may lead to a higher influence of news articles on destination image formation for highly involved individuals than for low-involvement individuals. This is why this study theorizes that

> **Hypothesis 4a.** *News involvement positively moderates the association between media coverage and destination image.*

> **Hypothesis 4b.** *News involvement positively moderates the association between media favourability and destination image.*

3 | RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 | Data sources

The above hypotheses were tested by collecting data on the image of Milan—the destination we focus on—held by our respondents and their prior destination experience with the destination and news involvement, as well as data on the coverage and favourability of the articles about the destination published in the media the same individuals were exposed to.

Data on the image of Milan, prior destination experience, and news involvement were collected through an online survey conducted in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Surveys have been employed extensively to measure destination image and to collect demographic and/or behavioural data on the respondents (Ryan & Garland, 1999). The choice of the countries was mainly dictated by practical motivations but also reflects the size of these countries in terms of inbound tourists to Italy. The three countries are in fact listed as "top markets" in the 2016 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Tourism Trend and Policies Guide (OECD, 2016), accounting for respectively 3,972; 11,260; and 10,675 inbound tourists to Italy in 2014.

The questionnaire included two sections. The first section provided demographic information on the respondents, such as gender, age, and country of residence, as prior research has shown that personal factors including socio-demographical factors can influence destination image formation (e.g., Baloglu, 1997; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Kapuściński & Richards, 2016; Kladou & Mavragani, 2015), as well as information about their news involvement and prior destination experience with the destination. The second section provided information on these individuals' image of the destination. The items used to capture destination image came from prior research on destination image (see Table 1). The three language versions of the questionnaire were uploaded to SurveyMonkey. Links to the three surveys were sent to the English, French, and German partners of Centro Turistico Studentesco e Giovanile (CTS), the largest Italian association of young travellers. Each partner posted the link to the appropriate version of the survey in the weekly newsletter sent to its associates. Two weeks later, the partners posted the survey link in the newsletter

TABLE 1 Items included in the questionnaire

Items included in the questionnaire	GGC	E&R	S&M
1. I have a good feeling about Milan	X (Fame/reputation)	X (Fame/reputation)	
2. I admire Milan	X (Fame/reputation)	X (Fame/reputation)	
3. I feel safe in Milan	X (Safety)	X (Personal safety)	X (Safety)
4. Milan offers innovative accommodation	X (Accommodation)	X (Accommodation facilities)	X (Accommodation)
5. Milan offers innovative events and entertainment	X (Fairs/festivals)	X (Nightlife and entertainment)	X (Nightlife and entertainment)
6. Milan offers high-quality accommodation	X (Accommodation)	X (Accommodation facilities)	X (Accommodation)
7. Milan offers high-quality events and entertainment	X (Fairs/festivals)	X (Nightlife and entertainment)	X (Nightlife and entertainment)
8. Milan offers accommodation that is good value for the money	X (Accommodation)	X (Accommodation facilities)	X (Accommodation)
9. Milan offers events and entertainment that are good value for the money	X (Fairs/festivals)	X (Nightlife and entertainment)	X (Nightlife and entertainment)
10. Milan has a clear vision for its future		X (Economic development/affluence)	X (Economics)
11. Milan recognizes and takes advantage of opportunities		X (Economic development/affluence)	X (Economics)
12. Milan is a liveable city		X (Family or adult oriented)	X (Family or adult oriented)
13. Milan is an open city	X (Resident's receptiveness)	X (Hospitality/friendliness/receptiveness)	X (Ease of communication)
14. Milan is a clean city		X (Cleanliness)	X (Cleanness)
15. Milan tends to outperform other urban destinations	X (Price, value, cost)	X (Costs/price levels)	
16. Milan seems like a city with strong prospects for future growth		X (Economic development/affluence)	X (Economics)

Note. GGC: Gallarza, Saura, & García, 2002; E&R: Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; S&M: Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008. "X" indicates that the item is included in the article. The name of the item is indicated between parentheses.

a second time. After 1 week, we closed the survey. We collected 2,095 questionnaires: 288 from Germany, 161 from France, and 1,648 from the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom accounted for a larger percentage of the questionnaires than the other two countries, because CTS has two partners in this country. The two U.K. partners have different memberships. One hundred sixty-six of the collected questionnaires (around 8%) were incomplete, which resulted in 1,929 usable questionnaires. We collected data on media coverage and favourability through an analysis of a sample of newspapers and magazines published in the same countries 1 year before the survey took place. The sample of newspapers and magazines to be analysed was identified through the questionnaires. In each country, we selected the three newspapers and the two magazines that the respondents declared to read the most (see Table 2) and analysed hard copies of all the articles on the destination that were published in these media 1 year before the survey took place.[1] We identified these articles by using "Milan" as a keyword and searching for its presence in either the title or the subtitle of the articles. No other criteria were applied so to maximize the number of articles we could rely on. Table 3 provides an overview of the analysed articles divided by country and by media.

A research assistant who was fluent in the three languages coded all the articles after receiving coding instructions from the authors. She counted the articles and rated them as positive, negative, or neutral. In line with prior research (e.g., Kladou & Mavragani, 2015), an article was rated as positive when the destination was praised or associated with elements that previous research had found to improve destination image, such as appreciation of the events and entertainment organized by the destination, the destination's historic and cultural heritage, or the destination's lifestyle. An article was rated as negative when the destination was criticized or associated with elements that previous research had found to worsen destination image, such as high crime rates and corruption, a hostile environment, and poor facilities. A neutral rating was given when the article did not involve any evaluation of the destination; examples of this type of article include event announcements, directions, and historic accounts. Although our measures of media coverage and favourability are only proxies for actual readership, they mark an improvement over existing measures of media influence. First, by asking respondents to indicate what newspapers and magazines they commonly read, it was possible to associate the image held by each respondent to the coverage and favourability of those media that he or she declared to read, rather than considering all the newspapers and magazines circulated in one country. Second, our operationalization of media influence does not require respondents to have read the articles entirely. Respondents could have noticed the presence of an article about the destination and developed an understanding of its favourability just by skimming the newspaper or the magazine. This should further mitigate concerns about actual readership.

[1]Die Süddeutsche Zeitung and L'Express had to be removed from our analyses, as we could not collect articles for the entire period under examination.

3.2 | Model specification

After collecting the data, we ran the following Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression:

TABLE 2 Media use among our respondents

Panel A: Newspapers			
	United Kingdom	**France**	**Germany**
Most read newspaper	The Guardian (634 references)	Le Monde (104 references)	Die Süddeutsche Zeitung (84 references)
Second most read newspaper	The Times (606 references)	Le Figaro (42 references)	Die Frankfurter Allgemeine (62 references)
Third most read newspaper	The Financial Times (132 references)	Liberation (27 references)	Die Welt (47 references)
Fourth most read newspaper	Daily Mail (106 references)	Metro (10 references)	Die Zeit (38 references)
Fifth most read newspaper	Metro (90 references)	Twenty Minutes (7 references)	Das Bild (12 references)
Sixth most read newspaper	The Sun (87 references)		Die Tageszeitung (11 references)
Panel B: Magazines			
	United Kingdom	**France**	**Germany**
Most read magazine	Sunday Time (500 references)	L'Express (49 references)	Der Spiegel (197 references)
Second most read magazine	The Observer (291 references)	Le Novelle Observateur (44 references)	Der Stern (75 references)
Third most read magazine			Neon (22 references)
Fourth most read magazine			Focus (8 references)

TABLE 3 Number of articles analysed by country and by media

	United Kingdom		**France**		**Germany**		**Total**
Newspapers	The Guardian	233	Le Monde	233	Die Frankfurter Allgemeine	23	1,393
	The Times	207	Le Figaro	228	Die Welt	152	
	The Financial Times	269	Liberation	48			
Magazines	Sunday Time	112	Le Novelle Observateur	6	Der Spiegel	27	217
	The Observer	48			Der Stern	24	
Total		869		515		226	1,610

$$image = \alpha + \beta_1 sex + \beta_2 age + \beta_3 coun + \beta_4 inv + \beta_5 vis + \beta_6 nam + \beta_7 cov + \beta_8 mf + \beta_9 inv^{*}cov + \beta_{10} inv^{*}mf + \beta_{11} vis^{*}cov + \beta_{12} vis^{*}mf + \varepsilon,$$

where *image* represents respondent *i*'s image of the destination, *sex* his/her gender, *age* his/her age, *cou* his/her country of residence, *inv* his/her involvement, *vis* whether he/she has previously visited the destination, *nam* whether he/she has read media not included in the analysis, *cov* media coverage (e.g., the number of articles on the destination in the media he/she read), *mf* the favourability of the articles on the destination in the media he/she read, *inv*cov* the interaction term between involvement and media coverage, *inv*mf* the interaction term between involvement and media favourability, *vis*cov* the interaction term between visiting the destination and media coverage, *vis*mf* the interaction term between visiting the destination and media favourability, and ε the error term. Appendix 1 provides a full description of the variables in our model.

4 | FINDINGS

4.1 | Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics and the correlation matrix for our sample. The correlations between the variables were generally low to moderate. The only exceptions were the correlations between the interaction terms and the relative factors (e.g., between *vis* and *vis*cov* or between *vis* and *vis*mf*). A subsequent VIF analysis ruled out the possibility of collinearity among these variables (all VIF were lower than 5).

4.2 | Multivariate analyses

Results of the multivariate analyses are presented in Table 5. Model 1 was the baseline model. Image was positively and significantly related to news involvement (β = 0.134, $p \leq 0.010$) but negatively and significantly related to prior destination experience (β = −0.083, $p \leq 0.010$). Individuals of different ages formed different images. Specifically, older individuals formed progressively worse images than younger individuals (e.g., from 20 to 25: β = −0.057, $p \leq 0.100$; from 26 to 30: β = −0.099, $p \leq 0.010$; from 31 to 35: β = −0.090, $p \leq 0.010$; <20 is the baseline variable). Individuals in Germany and France held less favourable images compared with individuals in the United Kingdom (Germany: β = −0.162, $p \leq 0.010$; France: β = −0.090, $p \leq 0.010$; United Kingdom is the baseline variable). The variable capturing whether respondents read also newspapers and magazines that were not included in our analyses was not statistically significant in any of the models (β = −0.017, 0.016, and 0.014, respectively, $p > 0.100$), indicating that media read by respondents but not included in our analyses did not influence image formation in a statistically significant way.

Model 2 included the effects of media coverage and media favourability on destination image. Media coverage exhibited a positive and significant impact on destination image (β = 0.080, $p \leq 0.010$), suggesting that the extent to which a destination is "talked about" in the media influences the image of the destination, providing support for hypothesis 1. On the contrary, the relationship between

TABLE 4 Descriptive statistics and correlations

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Image	1,918	0.000	1.000	1.000	0.013	0.032*	−0.079***	−0.064***	−0.016	−0.026	−0.144***	−0.063***
2. Sex	1,918	0.294	0.456		1.000	−0.055***	0.084***	0.057***	0.061***	0.007	−0.024	0.049**
3. From 20 to 25	1,918	0.600	0.490			1.000	−0.500***	−0.272***	−0.152***	−0.097***	−0.024	0.020
4. From 26 to 30	1,918	0.143	0.350				1.000	−0.091***	−0.051**	−0.032*	0.149***	−0.059***
5. From 31 to 35	1,918	0.047	0.212					1.000	−0.027	−0.018	−0.002	−0.028
6. From 36 to 40	1,918	0.015	0.122						1.000	−0.010	−0.012	−0.015
7. From 41 to 50	1,918	0.006	0.079							1.000	0.007	0.006
8. Germany	1,918	0.137	0.344								1.000	−0.105***
9. France	1,918	0.065	0.246									1.000
10. *inv*	1,918	0.354	0.478									
11. *vis*	1,918	0.109	0.312									
12. *nam*	1,918	0.674	0.469									
13. *cov*	1,918	201.661	182.540									
14. *mf*	1,918	0.083	0.848									
15. *vis*cov*	1,918	20.671	87.289									
16. *vis*mf*	1,918	0.260	0.467									
17. *inv*cov*	1,918	69.457	148.404									
18. *inv*mf*	1,918	0.052	0.660									

Note. Pearson's correlations (one-tailed).

***$p \leq 0.010$. **$p \leq 0.050$. *$p \leq 0.100$.

media favourability and destination image showed the expected sign, but was not statistically significant (β = 0.013, $p > 0.100$), thereby not providing support for hypothesis 2.

Model 3 tested the four interaction terms: *vis*cov*, *vis*mf*, *inv*cov*, and *inv*mf*. The coefficients of both *vis*cov* and *vis*mf* were not statistically significant (*vis*cov*: β = 0.050, $p > 0.100$; *vis*mf*: β = 0.011, $p > 0.100$), indicating that the media influenced the image of the destination held by visitors in the same way as that held by non-visitors. Therefore, the results of the analysis did not support Hypothesis 3a and Hypothesis 3b. In contrast, the coefficient of *inv*cov* was statistically significant (β = 0.144, $p \leq 0.010$) providing support for Hypothesis 4a, whereas the coefficient of *inv*mf* was not statistically significant (β = −0.038, $p > 0.100$) and did not support Hypothesis 4b.

4.3 | Supplementary analyses

The robustness of our results was tested by using different measures of the variables in the model. First, two additional measures of destination image were tested. The first measure was calculated as the average score for each item, weighted by the loading of the item on the resulting factor (i.e., the image of the destination). The second measure was the respondents' overall image of the destination, calculated as the average of the scores achieved on all items. The results obtained using these measures were qualitatively identical to the results of the main analyses.

Second, the Janis–Fadner coefficient was used as a measure of media favourability (Janis & Fadner, 1965). This coefficient was calculated as follows:

$$\begin{cases} (p^2 - pn) \div (total)^2 \text{ if } p > n, \\ 0 \text{ if } p = n, \\ (pn - n^2) \div (total)^2 \text{ if } n > p, \end{cases}$$

where p is the number of positive articles about the destination, n is the number of negative articles about the destination, and *total* is the total number of articles about the destination published in the media respondents declared to read. The coefficient ranges from −1 to 1, with 1 indicating that all articles were favourable, −1 indicating that all articles were unfavourable, and 0 indicating a balance between the two extremes. The results of the analyses, which used this measure, were similar to the results of the main analyses.

5 | IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 | Academic implications

This study contributes to the academic literature from a number of perspectives. First, it provides evidence of the influence of "ordinary" news articles on image formation. More precisely, it shows that the extent

TABLE 4 (continued)

	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. Image	0.088***	−0.125***	−0.034*	0.120***	−0.030*	−0.033*	−0.028	0.177***	−0.036*
2. Sex	0.002	−0.010	−0.037*	0.035*	−0.027	0.023	−0.036*	0.022	−0.037*
3. From 20 to 25	−0.040**	−0.081***	0.005	0.032*	−0.044**	−0.026	−0.049**	0.033*	−0.057***
4. From 26 to 30	0.025	0.081***	0.008	−0.052**	0.102***	0.009	0.059***	−0.068***	0.102***
5. From 31 to 35	−0.015	0.041**	−0.003	−0.023	0.004	0.001	0.032*	−0.038**	0.014
6. From 36 to 40	0.007	0.011	0.013	0.012	−0.012	−0.016	−0.008	0.010	−0.010
7. From 41 to 50	0.024	0.015	−0.043**	0.019	−0.007	0.014	−0.004	0.020	−0.006
8. Germany	0.250***	0.127***	0.126***	−0.344***	0.182***	−0.059***	0.114***	−0.111***	0.161***
9. France	0.071***	0.091***	−0.007	0.023	0.056***	0.098***	0.021	0.043**	0.029
10. *inv*	1.000	−0.005	0.025	−0.022	0.064***	−0.057***	0.055***	0.632***	0.107***
11. *vis*		1.000	−0.002	−0.025	0.070***	0.676***	0.159***	−0.057***	0.077***
12. *nam*			1.000	−0.458***	0.065***	−0.111***	0.038**	−0.195***	0.053***
13. *cov*				1.000	−0.103***	0.243***	−0.061***	0.474***	−0.085***
14. *mf*					1.000	−0.022	0.579***	−0.043**	0.820***
15. *vis*cov*						1.000	−0.011	0.029	−0.018
16. *vis*mf*							1.000	−0.026	0.584***
17. *inv*cov*								1.000	−0.034*
18. *inv*mf*									1.000

TABLE 5 Regression analysis

	Model I	Model II	Model III
Sex	0.025	0.024	0.022
From 20 to 25	−0.057*	−0.061**	−0.064**
From 26 to 30	−0.099***	−0.102***	−0.097***
From 31 to 35	−0.090***	−0.089***	−0.087***
From 36 to 40	−0.037	−0.039*	−0.037
From 41 to 50	−0.038*	−0.038*	−0.038*
Germany	−0.162***	−0.139***	−0.124***
France	−0.090***	−0.090***	−0.088***
vis	−0.083***	−0.084***	−0.116***
inv	0.134***	0.129***	0.055
nam	−0.017	0.016	0.014
cov		0.080***	0.017
mf		0.013	0.041
*vis*cov*			0.050
*vis*mf*			0.011
*inv*cov*			0.114***
*inv*mf*			−0.038
F test	11.256***	10.351***	8.759***
R squared	0.066	0.071	0.077
R squared change		0.005***	0.006***

Note. N = 1,918.

***$p \leq 0.010$. **$p \leq 0.050$. *$p \leq 0.100$.

to which news articles "talk about" a destination has a positive effect on destination image, whereas the favourability of the news articles about the destination does not affect image formation. By doing so, this study adds to those studies that found that news media affect image-related concepts, such as destination risk perception (Kapuściński & Richards, 2016), tourism demand (Stepchenkova & Eales, 2011), and the importance attached to different sources of information (Beerli & Martin, 2004), by showing that news media influence destination image formation as well. Yet, it also suggests that, in case of "ordinary" news – i.e., news that are not related to accidents, war episodes, or natural catastrophes – destination image is affected more by the extent to which the media "talk about" the destination than by the favourability of their reports.

Second, this study provides additional evidence of the role of news involvement as a moderating variable between destination formation agents and image formation. Whereas Rodríguez-Molina et al. (2015) have looked at the role of involvement in moderating the relationship between the information provided through websites and image formation, this study examined a context—namely, news articles—in which information overload is less likely to occur. Although news involvement may be expected to play a less relevant role in such a context, this study provided evidence that it still plays a significant role.

Finally, the study contributes to the long-standing debate on the role of prior destination experience in the image formation process (e.g., Beerli & Martin, 2004) by showing that news reports affect the image formation process of both visitors and non-visitors in the same way. This is important because, although quite a lot of studies have examined how prior destination experience as an organic agent influences image formation, no studies have empirically analysed if and how prior destination experience influences the relationship between news articles as autonomous agents and image formation.

5.2 | Practical implications

This study has several implications for destination marketing practice. First, we found that media coverage is positively associated with destination image. This means that destination marketers should provide the media with a constant flow of information on the destination, so to increase the chances that the destination gets covered by the media and to improve its image. Although other sources of information, such as electronic word-of-mouth and social media, have become increasingly important in the last few years and have been shown to provide relevant information to actual and potential tourists (e.g., Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Zhang et al., 2014), destination marketers should not overlook more "traditional" media and make sure that they are constantly provided with the latest available news about the destination.

Second, our results show that even those that have visited the destination rely on news media in forming their image of the destination. Destination marketers should bear this in mind when promoting their destination. Making sure that visitors find their visit as enjoyable as possible is important. Yet, destination marketers should also take care of their relationships with the media, so to provide them with a constant flow of information. Although prior experience no doubt affects tourists' behaviour (Lehto et al., 2004), our results show that news articles still play a role in the image formation process even for those who have visited the destination. It is, therefore, important to work on both the actual experience when visiting the destination and the extent to which the media report about it.

Finally, our study shows that news involvement affects destination image by increasing the impact of media coverage on destination image. This means that destination marketers should try to increase potential and actual visitors' involvement, so to increase the positive effect of media coverage on destination image. This could possibly be achieved through the use of social media and ITC, which offer the possibility to engage individuals and to create ad hoc contents. Destination marketers should skilfully use these media while, at the same time, starting to provide more news about the destination to "traditional" media.

5.3 | Limitations and directions for future research

The study exhibits several limitations that may also provide direction for future research. First, because it focused on individuals between the ages of 18 and 50, the sample is not representative of the entire population of actual and potential visitors to the destination. Although the sample included a broad age range, it is possible that the news articles influence the destination image of older individuals differently. The finding that news articles affect the destination image of individuals who typically are less attentive to printed media and more familiar with nontraditional media, such as social media and the web, however, may indicate that news articles also influence the destination image of elderly individuals, who tend to rely more heavily on traditional media. Nonetheless, future research should examine if and how news articles influence the destination image of individuals of different ages.

Second, although the scale items used to measure destination image came from prior research in the field, they may be criticized for not entirely capturing the construct they were meant to measure. This concern is common to most research on destination image, because of the relative vagueness of the term and the shifting meanings often associated with it (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Pearce, 1988; Zhang et al., 2014). The strong correlation between our measure of destination image and one of the questions in our questionnaire (i.e., the respondents' overall image of the destination, based on a 7-point Likert scale, with "1" representing an extremely negative image and "7" representing an extremely favourable image) seems to indicate that our measure of destination image may actually capture respondents' perception of the destination. Yet, future research may replicate this study using different items to measure destination image and see if the results achieved in this study are robust to different specifications of the same construct.

Third, our research design did not allow to study the influence of prior destination images on subsequent images despite evidence of the path dependency of social judgments (e.g., Arthur, 1988; David, 1985). Prior destination images are indeed likely to affect subsequent destination images—an occurrence that Chefiri et al. (2014, p. 195) called the "persistence of destination images"—as well as individuals' involvement with news articles. Future research should analyse more closely how prior destination images, subsequent destination images, and news involvement influence each other.

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APPENDIX A
VARIABLE DEFINITIONS

Variable	Definition
image	Respondent's image of the destination. The variable was created from the questionnaire items (α = 0.950) using a varimax factor analysis that extracted a single factor with an eigenvalue of 9.395 that accounted for 58.72% of the variance. Data source: questionnaire.
sex	Respondent's gender, coded as 1 when the respondent was male and 0 when the respondent was female. Data source: questionnaire.
age	Respondent's age, operationalized using six dummy variables (under 20 years, 20 to 25 years, 26 to 30 years, 31 to 35 years, 36 to 40 years, and 41 to 50 years. The category "under 20 years" was omitted. Data source: questionnaire.
count	Respondent's country of residence, operationalized using two dummy variables, one for France and one for Germany. The United Kingdom is the base case. Data source: Questionnaire.
inv	*News involvement* was operationalized by asking respondents whether they had deliberately searched for information on the destination. The variable is coded as 1 if the respondent states that he/she has deliberately obtained information on the destination and as 0 if the respondent states that he/she has not deliberately collected information. Data source: questionnaire.
vis	The variable captures whether the respondent has visited the destination. The variable is coded as 1 if the respondent has visited the destination at least once and 0 if he/she has never visited the destination. Data source: questionnaire.
nam	The variable controls for the possibility that the respondent reads newspapers and magazines that are not included in the analyses. The variable is coded as 1 if the respondent declares to read newspapers or magazines that are not analysed and 0 otherwise.
cov	Media coverage of the destination. Coverage is operationalized as the total number of media articles on the destination published the year before the survey was administered that the respondent declares to read. Data source: content analysis.
mf	Favourability in the media reporting on the destination. As in Deephouse and Carter (2005), media favourability is computed as the difference between the number of positive articles and the number of negative articles in the media that the respondent declares to read divided by the total number of articles in the media that the respondent declares to read. Data source: content analysis.