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## Article

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## Role of airline promotion activities in destination branding: Case of Dubai vis-à-vis Emirates Airline

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### ABSTRACT

Dubai, the globally known Emirate of the United Arab Emirates, has achieved an image of its own as a sun, sand and sea destination with the added X-factor of safety and shopping to enhance visitors' positive perceptions. Equally well perceived by consumers and envied by competitors, its national carrier, Emirates Airline, has made a substantial contribution to Dubai's branding as a tourist destination. This study investigates Emirates Airlines' promotional activities and their impact on Dubai's brand image. The study then creates a conceptual model of destination attributes, brand image and airline promotional activities, which provide the basis for empirical analysis. The results, conforming to the conceptual model, show that the national carrier's promotional activities and in-flight services have a significant and positive impact on Dubai's branding image. The study finds an interesting correlation between the promotional efforts of a national carrier and branding of destinations and provides recommendations for enhanced co-branding.

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### 1. Introduction

Branding is the process by which brands can strengthen, protect and distinguish themselves from competition (Baker, 2007; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). However, brand images are not created quickly and require sustained multipronged efforts over a long period of time. There is today, growing interest in the concept of brand management together with various requirements of international marketing strategies amongst organizations across sectors (Ökten, Okan, Arslan, & Güngör, 2019).

The image of a destination is particularly crucial as it inspires people to visit the destination at least once and possibly repeatedly (Hafeez, Foroudi, Dinnie, Nguyen, & Parahoo, 2016). It is a process that attempts to shape specific associations with a place in people's minds. Destination branding, a subcategory of place branding, implies a touristic perspective and is therefore more specific. Destination branding is about what makes a place unique – its identity (Parente, Hancke, Ryabicheva, & Baumhauer, 2019). The benefits of strategic branding of destinations include building a desirable image that can attract tourists enabling effective targeting to attract

potential consumers, communicating the objective of the destination to the target market, enabling immediate recognition, and educating visitors Séraphin, Zaman, Olver, Bourliataux-Lajoinie, and Dosquet (2019).

The brand can create a positive identity and image for a destination that ties tourists to it emotionally (Gnoth, 2007), one possible partner meeting these criteria is the regional or national airline that serves the destination. Airlines and airports have a great bearing on the overall economy of a nation in general and tourism in particular. Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott (2003) believe that key partners on the international stage for any destination management organization may be airlines since they have already invested millions of dollars of their own funds to establish strong brand identities that can benefit destinations through a co-branding effort. A customer's intention to consume an airline's services means that the traveler is interested in a particular destination, whether for business or pleasure. To sell seats, an airline must also sell the destination. Thus, by doing so, it contributes to the formation of the tourist destination image (Frossard, Castro, & Fraga, 2017).

The Middle East aviation sector has been steadily growing, and the GCC has played a major role in this growth. Since 2015, Dubai, Doha, and Abu Dhabi airports have attained an annual capacity of 190 million passengers, and it has been estimated that by 2020, Emirates, Qatar and Etihad Airways will have the capacity to carry nearly 200 million passengers – four times their current capacity –

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with Dubai's new five-runway airport able to handle 70 million passengers (<https://centreforaviation.com/2019>). In this, the national carrier, Emirates Airline, has a key role to play. Emirates Airlines already acts as brand ambassador for Dubai in the same way that Singapore Airlines has played a central role in spurring tourism to Singapore. Emirates are widely recognized as the strongest brand in the UAE.

This airline, then, is in a good position to help to spur the destination branding of Dubai, one of the key GCC hubs that it serves (Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). There is limited research available in the public domain on whether and how Emirates. The aims of this paper are to examine and evaluate the impact that airline promotional activities have upon the development of destination attributes and brand image, drawing on a case study of the Emirates of Dubai and Emirates Airlines.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Destination branding and brand equity

Destinations all over the world, amid competitive pressure, have realized the importance of developing brand equity and have been aggressively applying the branding theory in their destination development practices (George, 2017). The process of destination image formation is influenced by a number of stakeholders who play roles in it, including local residents and existing and future tourists, who are usually affected by their level of familiarity with the destination. The perceptions of these stakeholders cumulatively “morph the brand of a destination and instigate a number of branding initiatives” for destinations to respond to intense competition in the tourism industry (Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou, & Apostolopoulou, 2018).

Empirical research in destination branding, however, began to appear after Gnoth (1998) first introduced the theoretical concept in 1998. Following almost two decades of research on the topic, it is now generally acknowledged that ‘brand’ and ‘image concepts’ are related concepts. Tasci and Kozak (2006), for instance, understand a brand to be the “product marketing activities of the authorities,” while image is considered “more of a product of consumer perception,” as it plays the role of the concept from the point of sub-brand. A destination brand is used to market a destination by communicating the image, values and attributes of the destination to travelers, potential travelers and other stakeholders (Pechlaner, Raich, & Zehrer, 2007).

A successful branding strategy will thus include strong congruence between visitors’ perception of the destination and the brand identity intended by the destination marketing organization and is all the more important because it can lead to customer loyalty. Branding builds a desirable image that can attract tourists, offer differentiation, increase the economic contribution of tourism, appeal to target audiences’ emotional desires, and educate visitors (S raphin et al., 2019). In this context, destinations need to have a strong brand for identification and differentiation, as such branding is considered one of the most powerful tool for destination marketing (Malerba, Fernandes, & Veiga, 2020).

Brands represent how consumers perceive and feel about a product and its performance (George, 2017). Brand equity is defined by Kotler and Armstrong (2001) as the value of a brand based on the extent to which it has high brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, strong brand associations. The consumption pattern of destinations is simultaneous and varied; each consumer is purchasing a unique product from the services on offer (George, 2017). “Another differentiating factor of branding destinations is the complexity of the tourists’ decisional process. Tourists are buying a

bundle of goods and services that usually comes with an intrinsic uncertainty and a high price tag” (Cai, 2002).

### 2.2. Dubai a tourist destination

#### 2.2.1. Economic drivers

Dubai is the second-largest of the seven Emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates in terms of economic size and the main driver of economic diversity in the country. Dubai’s tourism, logistics, manufacturing and services sectors provide opportunities for growth beyond oil and gas, the industry upon which many economies in the region are dependent. The UAE has the second-largest economy in the Arab world (after Saudi Arabia). At the country level, hydrocarbons account for 30% of GDP and oil exports for less than 40% of revenues. Economic development programmers for the emirate of Dubai have been designed to leverage its strategic location between Europe and Asia, and Emirates Airlines has played a significant role in bringing foreigners to Dubai, accounting for two-thirds of tourist arrivals in the country (<https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/uae-dubai-2019>). Dubai’s economy grew 2.1 per cent year-on-year in the first half of 2019. Dubai’s GDP in 2018 was approximately US \$41 billion, and its GDP per capita was US \$43,000, an increase by 8% (<https://countryeconomy.com>, 2019). The hospitality and restaurant sector in Dubai, which contributed 5.1 per cent to GDP, grew by 2.7 per cent. Total visitors to Dubai increased by 0.8 per cent in 2018 to reach 15.92 million compared to 15.79 million in 2017, according to the data from the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (<https://gulfnews.com/2019>).

The UAE’s success can be attributed largely to the UAE government’s smart strategy in terms of massive investments in non-oil trade, world-class infrastructure, a strong and developed international financial market hub and a strong emerging travel and tourism sector. Among the seven Emirates in the UAE, only Dubai has transformed itself into a diversified emirate owing to the existence of increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, a sound international financial market and an expanding international travel and tourism sector (Shadab, 2018). Dubai has attracted significant FDI through incentives such as duty-free zones and revised property laws. The tax-free zone creates a competitive environment that attracts foreign companies (Balakrishnan, 2008).

#### 2.2.2. Tourism drivers

According to the Government of Dubai – Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing ([www.visitdubai.com/2019](http://www.visitdubai.com/2019)), in 2018, 15.92 million international tourists visited Dubai, staying an average of 3.5 nights per tourist, in 716 enlisted hotels, with an average occupancy of 76%. In the first nine months of 2019, new data from the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing show the total number of international overnight visitors grew 4.3 per cent year-on-year to 12.08 million, with numbers increasing from Saudi Arabia, Oman and China even as tourism numbers from the emirate’s largest source market, India, declined. Dubai Tourism strategy market-specific diversified aimed at driving consideration from a broad spectrum of countries and visitor segments continues to help us successfully navigate macroeconomic vagaries over a nine-month period, culminating in a record number of visitors between January–September” ([www.thenational.ae/2019](http://www.thenational.ae/2019)).

The growth of Dubai tourism has received a further boost with a new supply of hotel rooms in the run-up to Expo 2020, the global trade fair that is expected to bring 25 million visitors to the Emirate over a six-month period, with the number of rooms increasing by seven per cent year-on-year. New accommodation units that opened recently include the Five Star Hotel Jumeirah Village, Vida Creek Harbor Hotel and Millennium Al Barsha, which brought the number of hotels to 716 and total rooms to 119,779

([www.visitdubai.com/2019](http://www.visitdubai.com/2019)). The increasing emphasis on tourism as an engine of Dubai's economic growth is a logical consequence of the iconic brand into which Emirates Airlines has evolved since its inception in 1985. It began with two leased aircraft and scaled up rapidly to an all-wide-bodied fleet of 236 aircraft in service with over 250 on order as of June 2016 (Emirates, 2016). This transportation, some would say, is driving Dubai forward in attracting and delivering high numbers of visitors year after year (Nadkarni & Heyes, 2016). The Palm Island projects, started in 2002, were the first of their kind. Foreign money poured into Dubai as wealthy tourists came to stay at its fancy hotels or purchase some of its valuable waterfront properties. Dubai has succeeded in securing a leading position on the global tourism map and become a center for business visitors, tourists, and shopping lovers ([www.dsc.gov.ae](http://www.dsc.gov.ae) 2019).

### 2.2.3. Retail drivers

According to the Global Retailer Development Index 2019, the UAE ranks ninth in a league table of thirty top countries; of special interest is the factor of Market Attractiveness, on which the UAE scores 87%, and Country Risk, on which the UAE is the only country to score a perfect 100% ([www.atkearney.com/2019](http://www.atkearney.com/2019)).

Shopping is a major attraction for tourists visiting Dubai, which is regarded as the shopping capital of the Middle East. To meet the needs of these customers, Dubai has created more retail space than any other country and has the largest commercial development space. Dubai has come a long way from being a trading post in the 1960s to a modern tourist destination with the entire infrastructure in place to also become the most favored retail destination (Upadhya & Kumar, 2017). The city is one of the best-connected cities in the world with air transportation networks reaching out to all continents, mainly thanks to its local carrier Emirates Airlines" (Mehta, Jain, & Jawale, 2014). In fact, in 2015, Dubai had more global retail operations than any other city in the world through its mall, Dubai Mall, with a total retail floor area of 12.1 million square feet, has 1200 stores and is stated to be among the world's most visited malls for shopping. Similarly, the Mall of the Emirates measures 2.4 million square feet and has 520 stores. Burjuman, Deira City Center, Ibn Battuta, Mirdiff City Center, Festival Center, Dubai Marina, Mercato Mall, and Wafi Mall are some of the popular malls participating in the Shopping Festival. Each of these malls is architecturally unique with varied attractions for visitors (Peter & Anandkumar, 2016).

The free trade zones offered by the Dubai government contain offices of 500 major global companies (Microsoft, Nokia, CNN, Pepsi, etc.), banks (Credit Suisse, Merrill Lynch, Deutsche Bank, etc.) and hotels (Sheraton, Hyatt, Meridian, Raffles, etc.) (Upadhya & Kumar, 2017). A recent study suggests that clothing and fashion accessories are the most preferred shopping items for tourists, especially females, probably due to the long list of luxury brands and wide variety of retail choices. Approximately 45% prefer to buy clothing. On the other hand, 25% prefer to buy electronic devices, laptops, and smartphones because of the low customs and other duties compared to their countries. Thirty per cent prefer to buy jewelry, gold, and watches because of the variety of collections and shops (Upadhya & Kumar, 2017).

## 3. Conceptual model and research hypotheses

A conceptual model is visualized to empirically corroborate the premise that national airlines play a role in branding of tourist destinations as shown in Fig. 1.

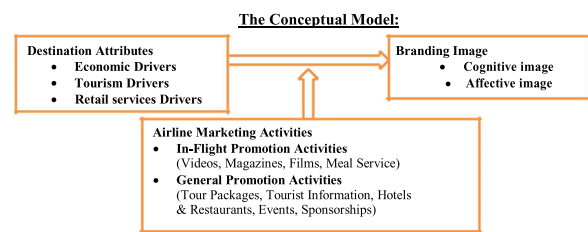


Fig. 1. The conceptual model.

### 3.1. Hypotheses of research

Based on the proposed model of study, the following null hypotheses are formulated, and testing them will achieve the goals of this research.

**H<sub>01</sub>.** There is no significant impact, at significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , of destination attributes (economic, tourism and retail drivers) on branding image (cognitive and affective). This hypothesis has two branch hypotheses, namely:

**H<sub>01a</sub>.** There is no significant impact, at significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , of destination attributes (economic, tourism and retail drivers) on cognitive branding image.

**H<sub>01b</sub>.** There is no significant impact, at significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , of destination attributes (economic, tourism and retail drivers) on affective branding image.

**H<sub>02</sub>.** Airlines' promotion activities, including in-flight and general promotions, do not impact the relationship between destination attributes and branding image.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Procedure and participants

An exploratory approach is adopted in this study, which is commensurate with the limited research that has been undertaken on this topic. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale with strongly agree and strongly disagree as the two extremes and agree, neutral and disagree in between. A total of 370 questionnaires were disseminated to a randomly selected sample of travelers and residents of the Emirate of Dubai and Sharjah during an extended three-month period from December through February in 2016–17. Fifteen questionnaires were found to be incomplete or erroneous; as a result, 355 responses were put to analysis. A pilot survey of 50 respondents was conducted earlier to test the effectiveness of the conceptual model; this survey helped in refining the questionnaire.

### 4.2. Reliability of the scale

Internal consistency of the scale was established through measuring Cronbach's alpha. The values of this measure showed that internal consistency reliability is established since the value of the scale as a whole is 0.891 and other values are more than 0.70, except for two values that exceed 0.66 (Gliem and Gliem, 2003). See Appendix A.

### 4.3. Profile of the respondents

It is evident from the demographic data presented above that the population contacted for this study is representative and diverse in the parameters of age, nationality, education and purpose of visit. The majority of the respondents were 35–45 years old (63.66%),

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics of variables and dimensions.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Economic drivers	355	2.00	5.00	4.0141	.68091
Tourism drivers	355	2.25	5.00	3.6268	.63568
Retail drivers	355	1	5	3.32	1.073
Cognitive image	355	2.33	5.00	3.7700	.58817
Affective image	355	1.50	5.00	3.7676	.88471
General promotion	355	2.57	5.00	3.7686	.55139
In-flight promotion	355	2	5	4.31	.744
Marketing activity	355	2.50	5.00	3.8363	.52548

had Bachelor's degrees (31.5%), were visiting for business purposes (25.63%) and were of Asian nationalities (45.63%). See [Appendix A](#).

#### 4.4. Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics, namely, the minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation of each of the variables and their dimensions, are given in [Table 1](#).

[Table 1](#) shows that the means of all the variables and dimensions exceed 3.6 except retail drivers, whose mean is 3.32 with a high standard deviation, which indicates large variability in the responses on the two items of retail drivers.

#### 4.5. Data analysis

Before testing the null hypotheses by multiple regressions, the assumption of normality of the dependent variable (branding image) and its dimensions (cognitive image and affective image) must be verified. Verification of this assumption was carried by computing the possibility of skew and kurtosis coefficients for these variables, and the results are shown in [Table 2](#).

As seen in [Table 2](#), the skewness and kurtosis coefficients are very small, with the absolute value of skewness for each construct <2 and the absolute value <7 ([Kim, 2013](#)), indicating that the assumption of normality is satisfied. Additionally, the P-P Plot for branding image verifies the normality assumption since the points lie almost on a straight line. See [Appendix A](#).

##### 4.5.1. Testing of first main hypothesis

To test the first main null hypothesis, multiple regression was carried out using SPSS version 18, and the results show that the  $p$  value = 0.000 <  $\alpha$  = 0.05 and the  $F$  value 74.037 > the tabulated value  $F_{0.05}(3354) = 2.60$ , indicating the adequacy of the model and rejecting the null hypothesis of no impact. Hence, it can be concluded that destination attributes have a significant impact on branding image. Coefficient of determination  $R^2 = 0.388$  indicates that 38.8% of the total variability in the dependent variable (branding image) is explained by the model, and the remaining 61.2% is explained by other variables not included in this study. To determine the dimensions with significant effects, the coefficients of regression were computed wherein the tolerance values for all the dimensions of the independent variable are more than 0.20 and the VIF values are all less than 5, indicating that no collinearity exists among the dimensions of the independent variable ([O'Brien, 2007](#)). This indicates that the three dimensions of the independent variable can all be included in the regression model since they are not highly correlated. See [Appendix A](#).

Additionally, it is found that economic drivers do not have a significant effect on branding image,  $B = 0.04$ ,  $t = 1.026 < 1.96$  and the  $p$  value = 0.306 >  $\alpha = 0.05$ , while tourism drivers have a significant effect on branding image since  $B = 0.184$ ,  $t = 3.575 > 1.96$  and the  $p$  value = 0.000 <  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Additionally, retail services drivers have a significant effect, since  $B = 0.249$ ,  $t = 8.875$  and Sig. = 0.000. From the values of  $\beta$ , it is clear that retail drivers have the largest effect, with

value = 0.464, followed by tourism drivers, with  $\beta = 0.203$ , and the least impact is from economic drivers, with  $\beta = 0.048$ . The zero order correlations show that economic drivers have the smallest value of 0.227, which is not significant, while those of tourism and retail drivers are significant, with values of 0.500 and 0.594, respectively.

Furthermore, analyzing the influence of tourism drivers, the questions included peaceful and politically stable destination, natural and man-made attractions and various amenities including quality of hotels. The items included in questions on tourism attributes were entertainment and nightlife; the 5 Ss' of sun, sand, sea safety and shopping; and sporting and entertainment events as special attractions. The  $p$  value of the tourism driver coefficient is found to be less than 0.05 (0.000), and the  $R$  square is (0.388); therefore, the relation between the tourism driver and the destination brand image is relatively good.

The influence of retail drivers on branding image has great significance since the destination has more retail space than any city around the globe. Dubai boasts of being a shopping paradise, and tourists have been attracted for this attribute. The questionnaire included questions on the Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF), the Dubai summer surprises (DSS) and other shopping-related activities. The  $p$  value of the retail driver coefficient in the model is found to be less than 0.05 (0.000), and the  $R$  square of the model is (0.594)<sup>2</sup>, indicating that the relation between the retail driver and the destination brand image is relatively good.

#### 4.6. Testing the first branch hypothesis

Testing the branch hypotheses of the first main hypothesis was carried out similarly, and the results show that destination drivers have significant impacts on cognitive image, with  $F = 83.426 > F$  tabulated 2.6, and the  $p$ -value of 0.000 < 0.05. The value of  $R$  square of 0.416 indicates that 41.6% of the variation in cognitive image is explained by the linear model. To decide which predictors have significant impacts on cognitive image, multiple regressions were carried out, and the results show that tourism and retail drivers are significant with  $p$  values of 0.003 and 0.000, respectively. Economic drivers have an impact of  $p$  value 0.054, which is very close to the significance level of 0.05. See [Appendix A](#).

#### 4.7. Testing the second branch hypothesis

The test of the second batch hypothesis was carried similarly and result shows that only 9.8% of the variance of affective image is explained by the dimension drivers since the value of  $R$  square is 0.098. The  $F$  value is 12.752 > tabulated value of 2.6, and the  $p$  value is 0.000, indicating that destination drivers have a significant impact on affective image. As such, both economic and tourism drivers have significant impacts on affective image with  $p$  values of 0.002 and 0.000, while retail driver does not have a significant impact on affective image since its  $p$  value 0.075 is >0.05.

#### 4.8. Structural model analysis

The second null hypothesis states that airline promotions and in-flight services do not moderate the relation between destination drivers and the brand image. Since the  $p$  value of the parameter economic driver in the model is above 0.05 ( $p = 0.306$ ), it can thus be concluded that airline promotions and in-flight services do not moderate the relation between economic drivers and the destination brand image. The survey in this category included pointed questions on various airline promotion and in-flight services activities, which included promotional fares during festivals and events, sponsorships of various sporting and musical events enhancing global visibility of Emirates Airlines, and excellent connectivity and coverage of large numbers of destinations. Safety and reliability of

**Table 2**  
Descriptive statistics dependent variable.

	N	Mean	St. deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	St. error	Statistic	St. error
Branding image	355	3.7696	.57628	-.266	.129	.048	.258
Cognitive image	355	3.7700	.58817	-.239	.129	-.169	.258
Affective image	355	3.7676	.88471	-.874	.129	.294	.258
Valid N	355						

**Table 3**  
Structural model (use D. A. for Dest. Attrib., B.I. for branding Image, A.A. for Airline Activities or services).

	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta β	Std dev.	t Value	p-Value	95% C.I.
<i>Model 1/D.A.</i>						
B.I.	0.408	0.638	0.069	9.304	0.000	(0.566, 0.794)
<i>Model 2D.A.</i>						
B.I.	0.505	0.416	0.108	3.837	0.000	(0.268, 0.674)
A.A.	B.I.	0.399	0.128	3.105	0.002	(0.112, 0.587)
<i>Model 3</i>						
D.A.	B.I.0.509	0.428	0.104	4.100	0.000	(0.274, 0.679)
A.A.	B.I.	0.373	0.122	3.068	0.000	(0.115, 0.575)
D.A.* A.A.	B.I.	-0.055	0.087	-0.638	0.526	(-0.204, 0.144)

the airline carrying the Dubai flag and the in-flight services of food, entertainment and courtesies are some of the airline activities.

Therefore, the possible moderation effect of airline promotions and in-flight services on the relation between destination drivers and brand image was investigated and SMART PLS-3.28 software was used to perform the analysis. Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, and Wang (2010) justifying the use of PLS-SEM opine that it is appropriate for theory building and examining complex cause-effect relationships, it is a non-parametric approach, and it poses fewer restrictions, especially on data distribution (it does not require the normality assumption) and sample size. Structural analysis shows that destination attributes have a direct impact on branding image with  $\beta = 0.638$ ; moreover, this impact is significant at the level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , with the  $p$ -value = 0.000. This fact is also verified by the value of  $t = 9.304$ , which is larger than  $t_{0.05} (354) = 1.96$ . As shown in Table 5, the coefficient of variation  $R^2 = 0.408$ , meaning that 40.8% of the total variation of branding image is explained by the variable destination attributes. Another interpretation of  $R^2$  is that it gives a measure of predictive accuracy to the exogenous variable (Rigdon, 2012). Hence, the predictive accuracy of destination attributes is 0.408.see Appendix A.

Table 3 shows that  $R^2$  has increased from Model 1 to Model 2 and then to Model 3, indicating that the increment of 0.097 in  $R^2$  is due to airline activities and the increment of 0.101 was due to both A.A. and A.A. interaction with D.A., showing an effect of both on B.I. The effect of A.A. is significant, with  $\beta = 0.428$ ,  $t = 4.100 > 1.96$ , and the  $p$ -value of  $0.002 < 0.05$ , but the effect of moderation (interaction of A.A. and D.A.) is negative and not significant, with  $\beta = -0.055$ ,  $t = -0.634$  and the  $p$ -value =  $0.526 > 0.05$ . The analysis gives the effect size  $f^2$ , which measures the impact of a specific predictor construct on an endogenous construct. Guidelines for assessing  $f^2$  values are 0.02 and  $< 0.15$  as weak, 0.15 and  $< 0.35$  as moderate and  $\geq 0.35$  as strong (Cohen, 1988, Chin, 2010). Our analysis gives  $f^2 = 0.265$  for the effect of destination drivers on branding image,  $f^2 = 0.185$  for airline activities, and  $f^2 = 0.08$  for moderating effect, which means that the effects of D.D. and A.A. are moderate, while the moderating effect of A.A. is weak according to the above criterion. Now, to test whether airline activities moderate the relationship between tourism drivers and branding image, three steps are performed: (1) Test the effect of tourism drivers on branding image. The analysis supports a significant effect since the  $p$  value is  $0.000 < 0.05$  and  $\beta = 0.675$ .  $R^2 = 0.457$ , (2) Model 2 tests the effect

of two constructs on branding image, namely, Tourism. B.I. and A.A. B.I., and both have significant effects, with  $p$  values of 0.000 and 0.002, respectively and finally (3) the effects of both constructs and moderation are tested. The results show that both tourism and airline activities have significant effects, but the moderation effect is negative and not significant, as inferred from Table 4.

### 5. Discussion and conclusion

As per the conceptual model developed for this study, airline promotion activities and in-flight services have a considerable impact on branding image but do not moderate either the relationship between tourism, inclusive of retail drivers and destination branding or that between airline destination drivers and branding image. This lack of moderation means that these activities and services have a direct influence in enhancing the image of the destination and play a major role. The economic driver, however, encompasses a wider variety of economic activities that may not necessarily be concerned with destination branding; hence, it has proven not to be statistically significant in this case.

The study findings that Emirates Airlines' in-flight promotion activities, such as magazines, videos and films and meal and beverage services, and general promotional activities, such as events, sponsorships, awareness campaigns, advertisements and public relations activities, have direct and positive impacts on the cognitive and to an extent affective image of the destination, thereby adding brand value. This seems consistent with the view of Park and Nunkoo (2013) that though it may not be possible to control all the elements contributing to shaping the affective image of a destination, it is possible to manipulate some by advertising and promoting tourist attractions, organizing cultural events that appeal to tourists, and administering quality services provided by tourism infrastructure such as restaurants, cafés, and tourist centers.

The study results, especially in the case of Dubai as a tourist destination and its association with Emirates Airlines as the national carrier and its designated brand ambassador, are significant and can provide practical tips for destination marketing and management. It is noteworthy that the economic drivers of destination attributes do not seem to have any statistically significant influence on destination branding; however, it is equally remarkable that tourism and retail drivers to a larger extent positively correlate with destination branding. However, the promotional activities of the airline do not necessarily moderate tourism attributes or branding. The premise of the study that promotional and service activities of airlines, especially national carriers, have a significant positive impact on brand building of a destination has been proven correct, although somewhat independently. There is evidently a conceptual difference between marketing and branding of destinations since marketing is more of a push technique, whereas branding is a pull strategy inasmuch as the perception created by branding occupies a long-term position in the buyer's mind compared to marketing, which is more transient. Second, destination brands are developed by experiences over a period, and the tourism and retail experiences at the destination add value to the branding efforts.

**Table 4**  
Structural model: moderation of airline activities on relation between tourism and branding image.

Model		R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	Std. dev.	T value	p Value	95% C.I.
<i>Model 1</i>							
Tourism	B.I.	0.457	0.676	0.049	13.7	0.000	(0.525,0.741)
<i>Model 2</i>							
Tourism	B.I.	0.535	0.468	0.093	5.051	0.000	(0.314,0.675)
A.A.	B.I.		0.364	0.115	3.165	0.002	(0.108,0.566)
<i>Model 3</i>							
Tourism	B.I.	0.540	0.448	0.092	4.848	0.000	(0.239,0.613)
A.A.	B.I.		0.348	0.112	3.101	0.002	(0.078,0.513)
Tourism* A.A.	B.I.		-0.072	0.192	0.377	0.706	(-0.345, 0.383)

Another noteworthy possibility that the study presents is that of co-branding. The idea of developing an overarching framework of brands that will include the “destination brand family tree” and the coordination of activities of the destination under the same brand concept that will include the logo, slogan, brand identity, mission, vision, values, etc. are crucial in the concept of brand extension and cooperative branding. As such, destination managers are advised to develop a co-branding strategy that is more comprehensive and benefits both Emirates Airlines and Destination Dubai. Since their promotional activities are complementary, a common logo, slogan and promotional campaign are worth exploring. There is already synergy between the promotional and branding efforts of the airlines and the destination, but unified efforts may generate greater results.

Finally, it must be noted that there are a few limitations to the study. These may include random sampling of the respondents and exclusion of a few factors under various drivers in the questionnaire. It is therefore suggested that sweeping generalization based on the results of this study may not be wise; however, this study certainly shows a path for undertaking a larger and more representative study to further corroborate the concept.

#### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found, in the online version, at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iemeen.2020.07.001>.

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