

## Article

# Stereotypes and Prejudices as (Non) Attractors for Willingness to Revisit Tourist-Spatial Hotspots in Serbia

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**Abstract:** Despite the fact that the topic of the influence of stereotypes and prejudices on the loyalty and willingness of tourists to visit a destination again is increasingly common in world publications, researchers have yet to examine this relationship. The aim of this research is precisely to assess the influence of stereotypes and prejudices (S&P) in the system of other attractors of tourist visits, on the loyalty and willingness of foreign visitors to revisit Serbia as a tourist destination. It is known that Serbia possesses large natural and anthropogenic resources as a basis for tourism development, but it is also known for numerous prejudices and stereotypes, which can potentially dictate loyalty to the destination and the behavior of tourists. The results obtained by the Path analysis show that stereotypes and prejudices, among 892 randomly selected foreign tourists, have a more significant direct influence on the dimensions of loyalty and revisiting Serbia compared to other factors. Further analysis showed that foreign tourists consider the Serbian people to be arrogant, with expressed nationalism and a preserved traditional social approach, as well as that middle-aged tourists show the highest loyalty and willingness to visit again after evaluating all the aforementioned factors. Limitations of the research were related to a lack of understanding of the language and non-cooperation on the part of the respondents. The results of the research have theoretical and applied importance as information for future research in Serbia and beyond, but also for improving the management strategy of tourism development.

**Keywords:** prejudice and stereotypes; attractors; loyalty; revisit; Serbia



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## 1. Introduction

The influence of certain factors on tourists' intention to choose a destination, on their loyalty to the destination, and therefore on the decision to visit those destinations again in the future, is a very frequent topic of research. Some of the tourist destinations have expressed natural and social values, then quality tourist service, expressed acceptability by the local population, and developed stable economy and political relations, all of which make up the spectrum of attractors for tourists [1]. On the contrary, the image of the destination can be built from a series of bad factors in the position of a non-attractor, which will dictate negative implications on the consciousness of tourists. One good example is the COVID-19 pandemic, which for more than two and a half years caused a collapse in the tourism sector and other branches of the economy, certainly affecting the perception of tourists about certain destinations and trips [2,3]. The destinations most affected by the pandemic were unfairly classified as “at risk”, even though the pandemic has completely stopped in some of those countries [4].

Studying the influence of stereotypes and prejudices on the behavior of tourists is an important aspect of the successful development of tourism and destination marketing [5] because man as a conscious human being tends to create prejudices and stereotypes in everyday life [6,7]. The creation of a certain image of the destination in the minds of tourists is caused by experience (personal or others) [8], or even media influence [9,10]. Stereotypes and prejudices are a type of critical analysis, which includes a wider cultural and social context in which specific information functions and which tourists perceive in their own way and under the influence of factors of different strengths [11]. There are destinations that are marked by stereotypes and prejudices related to war conflicts and pandemics, and where national consciousness, racism, etc. are expressed. In some cases, stereotypes and prejudices influence the creation of hostile attitudes toward a destination or people [12], but tourism is certainly one of the ways to break down disagreements and remove all doubts [13].

Serbia has been a country with a negative image for many years, both for tourists who had visited it and for those who had not but had received information about Serbia as a destination through some sources. Looking at the recent history of Serbia, some of the factors that influence stereotyping and prejudice can be singled out: war conflicts in the region during the 90s of the last century, economic and political instability in the country, national conflicts in Kosovo and Metohija, the emergence of a pandemic, the development of dark tourism in the south-eastern part of the country, heightened awareness of nationalism and racism, as well as the poor position of women in society, etc. [4]. There are also many short internet videos related to knowing the geographical location of Serbia, where foreign tourists recognize Serbia as a Russian republic. The totality of negative attitudes about Serbia and its people can also have a positive effect, in the sense that they attract certain groups of tourists for whom prejudices and stereotypes are attractors for a tourist visit [1]. The goal of the research was to determine to what extent stereotypes and prejudices, in relation to other attractors, influence the awareness of foreign tourists and their desire to revisit the destination and their loyalty to that destination. During this research, we tried to answer the key research questions:

R.Q.1. *Do prejudices and stereotypes determine the attitude of tourists about revisiting Serbia?*

R.Q.2. *What are the most pronounced prejudices when talking about Serbia as a destination?*

The results show that there is a significant direct influence of stereotypes and prejudices in the system of other factors, on the loyalty and creation of will among foreign tourists to visit Serbia again. It was also established that of the demographic characteristics, only age determines the attitude of tourists about loyalty and revisiting the destination. Other factors showed the existence of a weaker influence on the dimensions of loyalty and revisiting the destination.

However, to the best of the author's knowledge, no empirical study has dealt with stereotypes and prejudices related to visiting Serbia as a tourist destination, and for this reason, the research has a great deal of innovation. Certainly, the results will supplement the existing literature and be the starting point for similar research in the region and the world. Serbia is a small country, but it has a rich cultural and national diversity and is still a country in transition with major economic and political changes that do not fit into the Western system and context that tourists are used to in the world [10]. Serbia is a country characterized by its wealth of natural and anthropogenic resources, and it is possible that the results will serve as a more practical overview of the current situation and the design of a strategy in order to place the destination with a positive and specific image on a higher position in the world tourist market [10]. The structure of this manuscript is organized into the following units: an introductory part with the construction of research questions, a detailed review of the literature with the development of the hypothesis model, a section that includes the methodology, a section of results and discussions, as well as concluding considerations with limiting circumstances and future implications.

## 2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

### 2.1. Factors Influencing Loyalty and Possible Revisiting Destinations

Loyalty and the intention to revisit a destination are considered important topics of study because the intentions of travelers change over time, but so do the factors that imply the intentions of visits [14]. During travel, a social interaction between the consumer and the destination brand is created, and based on the type and strength of the interaction, loyalty and the intention to revisit the given destination are formed [15]. If the outcome of the tourist visit is positive in the mind of the tourist, a high degree of possible loyalty is obtained, leaving the tourist satisfied and willing to repeat the visit [16]. In tourism research, the approach adopted is that a satisfied tourist creates an intention to revisit and creates a degree of loyalty toward the destination, and in this way, is ready to recommend it to friends and relatives [17–20]. Loyalty is certainly a step toward creating the intention to revisit a destination because loyalty manifests tourists' emotions and the perceived value of the destination, which results in a recommendation to visit again [21,22].

Among the many attractors that are responsible for tourists' visits, one of the essential elements of a positive perception of a destination is the cultural background [23]. However, in some profiles of tourists, who had a pronounced trait of individualism, a reduced degree of loyalty was expressed, and a high desire to visit new and different places, without the intention of returning to a destination they had already seen, and regardless of the impression they got [24]. One of the key psychological traits that dictate return is the trait of uncertainty avoidance [25–27]. Some of the factors that create a positive or negative image of a destination are: the quality of the complete tourist service and infrastructure, the quality of the gastronomic offer, the price, additional facilities for tourists such as shopping centers, a diverse resource base, a unique experience, traffic infrastructure, celebrities and the representation of current trends [28]. A specific brand of a tourist destination influences the creation of better relations and exchanges between tourists and the destination, their loyalty, or their intention to revisit the destination [29–31]. The image of the destination is important in observation and research because it affects the decisions of tourists to visit or revisit the destination [32–37]. The way the brand is created, its nature, and its origin influence consumer attitudes in terms of the existence of a compensatory relationship between the globality of the brand and the warmth of the country, and on the other hand, the locality of the brand and the competence of the country [38]. Khoo [39] claims that image does not have a significant effect on revisit intention, but has a significant positive effect on word of mouth. Moreover, his claims indicate that customer satisfaction has a significant positive effect on revisit intention and word of mouth.

According to some authors, it is definite that the factor of accommodation quality largely dictates loyalty to the destination and the creation of a positive image of it [40–42], especially since the achieved quality affects word-of-mouth marketing [43,44]. Service quality has a significant positive impact on destination image and customer satisfaction [45, 46], and the achieved level of visitor satisfaction can contribute to the creation of tourist loyalty to rural destinations [47], which further certainly strengthens tourists' intention to revisit the destination [48]. Some results also indicate that previous experience moderates the relationship between perceived service quality and satisfaction, and influences the creation of loyalty and return to the destination [49]. Chin et al. [50] came to similar results in their research, claiming that the quality of accessibility and the quality of accommodation leave a positive impression of the destination on visitors, while the satisfaction of tourists was found to have a positive relationship with the intention to visit again.

The creation of a positive or negative image of a destination is influenced by the set of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudices, imagination, and emotional thoughts that an individual or group may have about a tourist place [51,52]. The experience in the destination, whether negative or positive, has both a direct and indirect influence on the behavioral intentions of visitors, which certainly affects their intention to revisit destinations [53]. In that process of revisiting a destination and being loyal to it, tourist satisfaction plays a direct and very significant role [54,55]. Lopez-Sanz and Penelas-Leguia [56] claim

that the research results demonstrate the importance of motivation in the formation of the destination image, as well as satisfaction with the trip. The relaxation dimension is the most important and most influential predictor in return, recommendation, and saying positive things about the demand for adventure tourism [57]. The concern is heightened in the case of destinations that are under constant threat and affected by geopolitical unrest and acts of terrorism [58–61]. Some research focuses on satisfaction with specific gastronomy, which can create a recognizable brand among tourists and be a factor for loyalty and revisiting the destination [62]. In addition, the reflection of the price of services the tourist is offered, the economic situation in the country, and the environmental and sociocultural domains has been identified as significant influences on attitudes toward tourists to revisit the tourist area [63].

One of the goals of this research is to determine to what extent certain factors, which are the subject of research by the above-mentioned authors, are (non) attractors that would potentially affect the process of returning and creating loyalty by visitors. In accordance with the available literature on similar research, the following hypotheses were set:

H1a. *Structural factors (satisfaction with the quality of the complete tourist service) have a significant direct influence on the dimension of tourists' loyalty to the destination.*

H1b. *Structural factors (satisfaction with the quality of the complete tourist service) have a significant direct influence on the revisit dimension.*

H1c. *Image factors have a significant direct influence on the dimension of tourists' loyalty to the destination.*

H1d. *Image factors have a significant direct influence on the revisit dimension.*

H1e. *Identity factors have a significant direct influence on the dimension of tourists' loyalty to the destination.*

H1f. *Identity factors have a significant direct influence on the revisit dimension.*

H2. *The loyalty dimension is mediating the relationship between all factors and the revisit dimension.*

Overall findings from previous studies confirmed that sociodemographic factors play a role in influencing tourists' travel intention [64–66], emphasizing that these variables can have a significant impact on creating loyalty and decisions to revisit the destination [67]. The age category plays a role in the formation of decisions and intentions during tourist trips [68,69], while some other research claims that the gender structure is strongly expressed in the influence on behavioral intentions [70]. Merchinde et al. [71] claim that men are more loyal and willing to return to a destination that left a good impression and with whose offer they are satisfied, while tourists who had children living with them showed less loyalty. The education structure is one of the factors that determine tourists' decisions, where some authors pointed out that the more educated remain less loyal to the destination [72]. Given that demography is an indispensable segment of most research, the authors set additional hypotheses in this research:

H3a. *There are statistically significant direct influences of the gender structure on the dimension of tourists' loyalty to the destination.*

H3b. *There are statistically significant direct influences of the gender structure on the revisit dimension.*

H3c. *There are statistically significant direct influences of educational structure on the dimension of tourists' loyalty to the destination.*

H3d. *There are statistically significant direct influences of the educational structure on the revisit dimension.*

H3e. *There are statistically significant direct effects of the age structure on the dimension of tourists' loyalty to the destination.*

H3f. *There are statistically significant direct influences of the age structure on the revisit dimension.*

H3g. *There are statistically significant direct effects of earnings on the dimension of tourists' loyalty to the destination.*

H3h. *There are statistically significant direct effects of earnings on the revisit dimension.*

## 2.2. Stereotypes and Prejudices in the Role of (Non) Attractors for Revisit Destinations

Very often, the wrong generalization of the term stereotype is pointed out, which is that stereotypes are beliefs explained on the basis of minimal knowledge of a certain group and the unjustified assumption that all members of that group have unique characteristics that separate them from others [73,74]. Any group stereotype that contains a strong emotional negative evaluation (feelings of revulsion, hostility, hatred, contempt) of some ethnic, racial, religious, or social group and is often interpreted as prejudice [75]. For this reason, the elements of prejudice and stereotypes will be connected in this manuscript. According to the author's knowledge, there are studies that indicate a strong influence of prejudices and stereotypes on the consciousness of tourists, and the very concept of stereotypes refers to the perception of tourists or their expectations of individuals from an external group [76], and studying them is a strategy for simplifying decision-making [77]. Stereotypes and prejudices are subjective attitudes about a destination that contribute to the evaluation of its value and specificity in the decision to revisit the same place [78], and tourists very often adjust their behavior and travel decisions based on prejudices, creating simplified beliefs about the characteristics of societies or communities where they travel [4].

Prejudices and stereotypes can certainly shape residents' attitudes toward sustainable tourism development and harmonious host-guest relations [79]. Using the SCM model (stereotype content model) Diamantopoulos et al. [80] found that consumer preferences about country competence are better predictors of deliberate consumer choices, while judgments about country warmth dominate spontaneous choice. They developed a stereotype content model (SCM) and investigated the influence of explicit and implicit stereotypes on consumer behavior. Their results showed that stereotypes and prejudices influence the creation of a brand and that they are good predictors of future behavioral intentions. Very often, unpleasant events and sudden crisis situations can contribute to creating a negative image or prejudices about a place [4]. The pandemic that suddenly created chaos in the world, damaged health, economy, and social life, also leaves consequences in the minds of people in the form of stereotypes and creates insecurity in the intention to go to those destinations [4]. The countries that were most threatened by the pandemic are still marked as risky. Furthermore, there are prejudices about countries where there is an increased level of nationalism, racism, or war conflicts, and this certainly affects the negative perception of tourists. Tourism historian and professor at the University of Neuchâtel, Laurent Tissot, listed some of the stereotypes: Germans travel in sandals, French people smell bad, Italians are seductive, British drink too much, Americans are uneducated, Chinese have no manners, and Japanese are too disciplined [81].

Serbia is a specific country due to its unexplored nature and large resource base for the development of several types of tourism [1]. Certainly, the creation of prejudices and stereotypes about Serbia was influenced by the war in the region during the 90s. Then, the ongoing conflicts in Kosovo, the consequences of the pandemic, the development of dark tourism due to various cultural resources and established legends that are represented by nationalities and peoples in underdeveloped parts of southern and eastern Serbia, the traditional attitude toward women that is considered humiliating or second-rate, etc. all played a role [4]. One of the authors who significantly contributed to the research on the dimensions of national cultures and the development of psychological theory on cultural differences and the influence of stereotypes and prejudices on people's needs and intentions is Gert Hofstede. He studied many nations, including Serbian culture and national characteristics, where he highlighted some of the essential characteristics of the Serbian people that can potentially dictate the intentions of tourists interested in getting

to know the Serbian people and space in the future [82]. Hofstede broke the original data on Yugoslavia, after its disintegration, into data on the national culture of Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. He stated that the Serbian national culture expressed high power distance, high avoidance of uncertainty, high collectivism, i.e., low degree of individualism, and femininity (Serbia belongs to the group of countries with feminine characteristics—commitment to consensus, solidarity, quality, conflict resolution by compromise), does not exist expressed pragmatism and leniency shows pronounced features of restraint of Serbian culture, and characteristic features are pessimism and cynicism. Based on these terrorist claims of Hofstede, the authors set out to investigate the impact of stereotypes related to the Serbian people in the recent era of tourism.

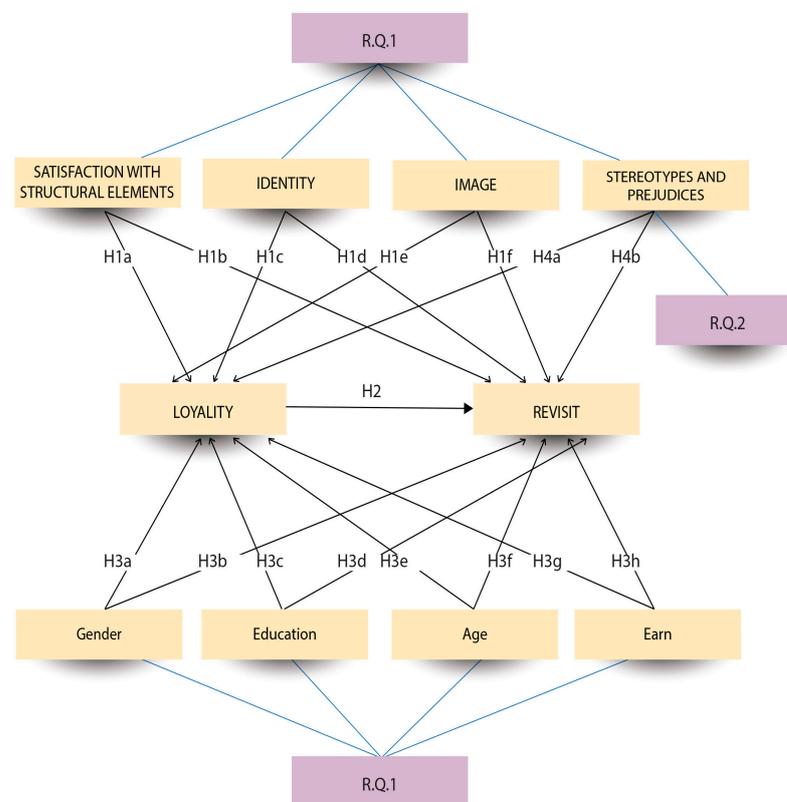
The importance of positive and negative stereotyping was studied by Chen et al. [75] where they point out that both forms of stereotyping and prejudice are important for destination management organizations. Many studies have investigated the relationship between tourists and the local population, focusing on the emotional solidarity and ethics of care between them, as well as the creation of tourists' perceptions of the destination based on stereotypical information about the local population [83–85]. In his research, Tung [86] provides findings according to which the local population is ready to help lost tourists who are under the influence of strong negative meta-stereotypes. It is interesting to point out the findings where the authors relate to the research on the role of tradition [87], the media, the experience of tourists, the local population of their thinking, and also certain resources that create prejudices [88]. Accordingly, certain results show that the media is capable of not only changing the methods of sending messages but also shaping the language used by the destination and the way it creates awareness among tourists to revisit the destination in the near future [9]. Many authors have also investigated the creation of a destination perception based on personality traits. Kahle et al. [89] claim that members of the extroverted profile of tourists are receptive to overcoming prejudices and are very interested in adventurous and unknown locations, and are attracted to any form of prejudice. In contrast, tourists with neuroticism characteristics avoid unstable terrain and situations, so they are less likely to accept a visit to a destination if they are influenced by prejudices about it. Moreover, those curious, interested, and intrigued by dark experiences with paranormal activities have greater preferences toward destinations that are marked by some types of prejudice [90].

A large number of visitors are ready to create their own subjective conclusions about the destination based on prejudices and pass them on, thus influencing the formation of the destination in our minds [6,91,92]. Prejudices are very often transmitted intuitively [80], while positive stereotypes almost always give a positive attitude about the destination [93], where the factor of warmth and competence acquired by staying in the destination creates admiration among tourists, but it stands in a negative relationship with contempt [94]. Research related to prejudices about destinations where a higher degree of discrimination in society is observed indicates that people have more negative perceptions about such a hostile destination [75], and the influence of stereotypes is strengthened and the situation changes in the intention to revisit that place [95].

At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, a high degree of prejudice among Thais toward Chinese tourists was investigated, and the findings also indicate a strong impact on Thai tourism [96]. The most common prejudices in the hospitality industry are related to stereotypes of aging in hospitality work environments [97], then sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, lookism, and ego-altruism appear as the main sources of discrimination in hospitality and tourism services [98]. The impacts of prejudices about disability in the service sector were investigated, where it was found that users with disabilities fail to free themselves from the prejudices created by users without disabilities, where they are generalized as a group toward which they are negative and hostile [99]. Prejudices at the level of racism have also been investigated and are still expressed by some tourists with the intention to visit the destination again [100]. Satisfactory intercultural contact, lower threat perception, more positive stereotypes, and less intergroup anxiety predict tourists' intention to revisit destinations [101]. Some types of stereotypes or prejudices

(socio-psychological risk, time risk, physical risks, financial risks, and performance risk) perceived by tourists during their vacation in Marmaris had an impact on their intentions to visit again [102]. Zeng and Rita [103] established that the elements of experience (functional value, contextual value, emotional value, cognitive value, economic value), together with the elements of satisfaction after the trip create the need to return to the destination and its recommendation [103].

However, some research works give different results, where it is claimed that stereotypes have no power on tourists and creating awareness about the destination, but that it is emotions that override stereotypes and predict behavioral tendencies [104]. In some earlier works on this topic, the authors point out that prejudices lose their importance over time and that they are not a key obstacle in the early decision-making phase of the destination selection process [105]. The assumption of the model is given in Figure 1.



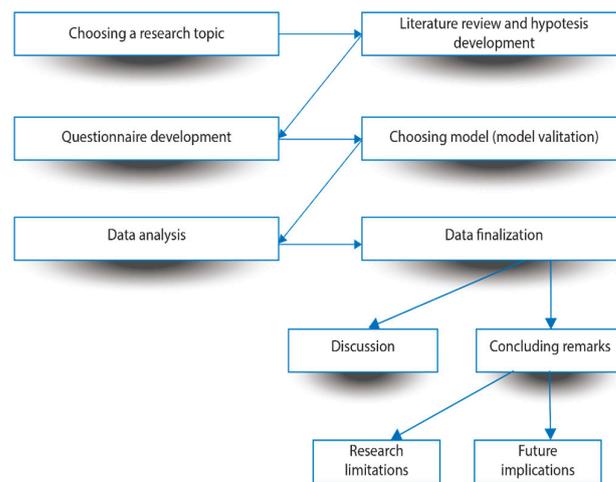
**Figure 1.** A graphical scheme of hypothesis.

H4a. Factors of stereotypes and prejudice have a direct impact on the dimension of tourists' loyalty to the destination.

H4b. The factor stereotypes and prejudices have a direct influence on the revisit dimensions.

### 3. Methodology

Based on the reviewed literature for the purpose of achieving the goal, proving the initial hypotheses, and obtaining valid answers to the questions, the following research model is proposed (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** A graphical scheme of research flow.

### 3.1. Procedure and Participants

The research was carried out in the period from January to September 2022, on a total sample of 892 foreign tourists in the following cities of Serbia: Belgrade (270), Novi Sad (254), Niš (74), Subotica (63), Sombor (76), Kragujevac (47), Pirot (26), Vranje (18), and in the localities Đavolja varoš (located near Kuršumlija on map—33 samples) and Đerdapska klisura (located near Kladovo on map—31 samples) (area of Southern and Eastern Serbia). The geographical position of the administrative areas where the research was carried out is given in Figure 3, and where the number of foreign tourists for the period of January 2022 is highlighted. However, considering that the research is of a volunteer nature, the time period of the survey was not determined in advance, it was stopped at the moment when the authors considered that the sample for analysis was sufficient. The two mentioned cities Pirot and Vranje are located near the border with Romania and Bulgaria—which is known for legends, stories about fairies, black magic, dark tourism, the existence of vampires, and similar prejudices and stereotypes. The smallest number of respondents is in this part because it is not affirmed touristically except for domestic visitors and children on excursions. On the map, you can see the positions of cities or research areas.

The research was carried out by the authors of the manuscript together with students in the third year of doctoral studies at the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, who had previously been trained in surveying. The researchers reminded all participants that the survey is anonymous and voluntary in nature, and as such will be used for the purposes of scientific work, and will be completely safe, regardless of the answer they give, and that they can get a copy of the questionnaire whenever they want. It was extremely important that all researchers make sure that the participants were over 18 years old, and that they gave answers on a voluntary basis for the purpose of cooperation and helping the research. The survey was conducted on a total sample of 892 foreign tourists who came from 11 foreign countries and regions. A random sampling technique was used because the probability of being included in the sample is the same for each individual. The required sample size was calculated using the G\*power test. Taking into account that there was a total of 8 predictors 2 criterion, the required effect size was set to  $\eta^2 = 0.15$ , with a statistical power of 0.95, and it was calculated that a sample size of 160 respondents may be appropriate for this research.

Table 1 provides an insight into the demographic characteristics of the respondents. It can be seen that there is a slight difference in the gender structure of the respondents and that most of them are in the middle age range from 31 to 55 years. The highest percentage of research participants have a university degree and an average monthly salary, as well as tourists who travel several times during the year. The dominant number of annexation tourists is from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia, and Croatia.



**Figure 3.** Geographical position of the investigated administrative areas with the number of foreign tourists for 2022. <https://www.mapsland.com/> (accessed on 15 July 2022); <https://www.stat.gov.rs/> (accessed on 15 July 2022).

### 3.2. Questionnaire Design and Measurement

The data were obtained by self-completion of the questionnaire. The respondents were presented with a questionnaire, with the researchers explaining the essence of the terms to which they had to answer. The questionnaire was translated into English, German, and Serbian due to the different domicile areas from which the tourists come. The authors relied on the psychological theories of Diamantopoulos et al. [80] and of Gert Hofstede [82] and Tung et al. [86]. The questions that were modified were taken from the research used by Pizam et al. [106], then Çelik [107] for determining the influence of prejudice on the attitude of tourists, as well as Anastasopoulos [108] in an earlier period. Questions related to structural elements were adopted and modified according to the research model of Jose et al. [109]. A five-point Likert rating scale was used (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire consisted of a total of 30 questions, whose Cronbach alpha values are above the recommended 0.7. This means that the instruments used in the study are reliable and can measure the given constructs. All items had the following Cronbach alpha values: Structural elements SSE (quality elements): SSE1—quality of food ( $\alpha = 0.901$ ), SSE2—quality of accommodation ( $\alpha = 0.896$ ), SSE3—ratio of price and quality ( $\alpha = 0.888$ ), SSE4—quality of existing infrastructure ( $\alpha = 0.881$ ), SSE5—natural and anthropogenic values ( $\alpha = 0.868$ ), SSE6—recreational and sports activities, excursions and additional activities ( $\alpha = 0.899$ ), SSE7—attitude of employees toward guests and work

( $\alpha = 0.807$ ). Identity ID: ID1—unique name ( $\alpha = 0.897$ ), ID2—recognizable logo ( $\alpha = 0.898$ ), ID3—attractive content ( $\alpha = 0.916$ ), ID4—pleasant atmosphere in the destination ( $\alpha = 0.790$ ). Image IM1—various attractions at the destination ( $\alpha = 0.886$ ), IM2—hospitality of the local population ( $\alpha = 0.892$ ), IM3—rich tradition and culture ( $\alpha = 0.889$ ), IM4—traditional and specific gastronomy ( $\alpha = 0.896$ ). Revisit R: R1—I enjoyed my stay and have the intention to revisit Serbia ( $\alpha = 0.866$ ), R2—satisfied with the overall visit to the destination and have the intention to revisit Serbia ( $\alpha = 0.711$ ), R3—I did not make a mistake in choosing the destination and have the intention to revisit Serbia ( $\alpha = 0.739$ ). Loyalty L: L1—I have a good perception of Serbia after the visit ( $\alpha = 0.893$ ), L2—I intend to advertise Serbia orally ( $\alpha = 0.896$ ), L3—I intend to recommend it to close friends and relatives ( $\alpha = 0.809$ ). Stereotypes and prejudices SP: SP1—Serbs are arrogant and cruel ( $\alpha = 0.892$ ), SP2—Serbs are a hostile people ( $\alpha = 0.897$ ), SP3—pronounced nationalism and racism ( $\alpha = 0.894$ ), SP4—present outdated traditional culture ( $\alpha = 0.898$ ), SP5—illiterate nation ( $\alpha = 0.797$ ), SP6—represented dark tourism ( $\alpha = 0.892$ ), SP7—unstable war zone ( $\alpha = 0.831$ ), SP8—Serbs are helpless and lazy people ( $\alpha = 0.839$ ), SP9—pronounced gender inequalities ( $\alpha = 0.784$ ), SP10—Serbia is a cheap and uninteresting destination ( $\alpha = 0.809$ ).

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents.

Gender		Frequency of Traveling			
Male	52.6%	I have traveled abroad several times		15.8%	
Female	47.4%	I travel abroad once a year		38.4%	
		I travel abroad several times a year		45.8%	
Education		Earning			
High school	39%	Low ( $\leq 300$ *)		0.3%	
Faculty	40.8%	Average (300–600 *)		54.5%	
MSc, PhD	19.3%	High ( $>600$ *)		5.2%	
Age		Country of Residence			
18–30	22%	Austria	7.2%	United Kingdom	2.6%
31–55	22%	Bosnia	21.4%	Australia	2.1%
>56	31.7%	Croatia	15.9%	Italy	5.3%
		Slovenia	8.3%	Germany	2.2%
		Hungary	7.4%	Montenegro	11%
		Russia	16.6%		

\* euro.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

The obtained data were processed in the program software IBM SPSS version 23.00 and SPSS AMOS version 23.00 [4]. Cronbach's alpha was estimated for each factor, as a way of assessing the reliability of the questionnaire. Composite reliability and average variance extracted for each factor were also assessed. None of the variables presented Sk (Skewness) or Ku (Kurtosis) values that could indicate violations of the normal distribution. Exploratory factor analysis determined the percentage of saturation for each factor, as well as the extraction of all items in six factors whose characteristic values exceeded the acceptable value of 1. The number of factors was confirmed by the parallel model. Using the maximum variance rotation procedure, all options that had values below 0.3 were eliminated from the measurement process, while the results showed that the requirements of loading and internal consistency as reliability requirements were met. Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Test showed the adequacy of sampling for each variable in the model and for the complete model:  $\chi^2 = 9701.024$ ,  $df = 352$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Path analysis was used to describe forward-directed dependencies between a set of variables, with model

fit parameters:  $RMSEA \leq 0.05$ ; CFI, TLI, NFI, IFI  $> 0.90$ . With multivariate analysis of variance, the authors determined differences in responses in relation to belonging to the correct age category.

#### 4. Results

According to the path analysis model, various influential factors were assumed, and the hypothetical model was constructed in the context of achieving the research goal, obtaining answers to the initial questions constructed on the basis of a review of the literature that indicates the existence of the influence of the mentioned factors on loyalty to the destination and the intention to revisit Serbia as a tourist destination.

Before implementing the path model, convergent acceptable value (AVE—average variance extracted—acceptable limit above 0.50) and divergent construct validity (CR—composite reliability—acceptable value above 0.60) were calculated (Table 2). The results in the table show that all conditions are met and the values are above the limits. The results of the factor analysis with Promax rotation indicated the existence of six factors, which was confirmed by the criterion of the parallel analysis model. The first factor (SSE) gathers indicators of the quality of the complete tourist service and explains the smallest percentage of the variance of the questionnaire (28%), while the highest percentage explains the last factor Stereotypes and prejudices (SP), with a total of 10 indicators and 56% of the variance explained. The respective and cumulative explanation of the variance of rates after rotation was 56.11%.

**Table 2.** Percentage of explanation, measures of the size of the variance, and descriptive values of the factors.

Factors	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings						
	Total % of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	M	SD	$\alpha$	AVE	CR	
Satisfaction with Structural elements (SSE1–SSE7)	7.789	28.849	28.849	6.886	2.386	0.939	0.776	0.770	0.960
Identity (ID1–ID4)	2.327	8.619	37.468	5.552	2.958	0.903	0.853	0.650	0.916
Image (IM1–IM4)	1.374	5.089	42.557	3.383	3.547	1.795	0.680	0.793	0.939
Loyalty (L1–L3)	1.338	4.955	47.512	3.010	2.177	0.636	0.777	0.751	0.602
Stereotypes and prejudices (SP1–SP10)	1.219	4.514	52.026	1.618	3.547	1.414	0.859	0.730	0.964
Revisit Serbia (R1–R3)	1.103	4.085	56.111	1.474	3.383	2.018	0.892	0.639	0.703

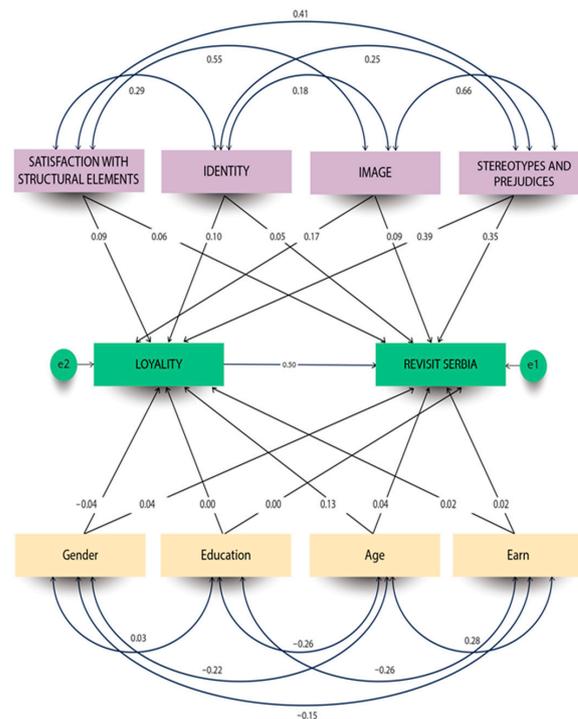
M—arithmetic mean, SD—standard deviation,  $\alpha$ —Cronbach alpha, AVE—average variance extracted, CR—composite reliability.

Path analysis served as a method for decomposing correlations in order to better interpret the effects. The model can be considered to fit well because all basic conditions (Relative  $X^2 = 2.664$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), as well as all fit indices, were in accordance with the prescribed standards of the general model. In the path analysis model verification, the model fit values with a confidence interval of 95% CI were as follows: CMIN/ $df = 3.401$ , TLI = 0.906, CFI = 0.967, NFI = 0.962, IFI = 0.901, RMSEA = 0.058, AIC = 205,330 and BIC = 206,555.

The diagram of the estimated model is shown in Figure 4, where the relationship between the variables in the path and the two dimensions is investigated. Arrows from one observed variable to another indicate the functional relationships between the variables, which were specified by the author before the analysis. Path analysis showed a statistically significant positive direct effect of the first group of factors (SSE, ID, IM, L, SP) on two dimensions: loyalty and revisit, while the influence of sociodemographic factors on the same two dimensions is statistically insignificant, except at the age factor. This would mean that if the performance of one factor from the first group decreases or increases, the performance of the revisit and loyalty dimensions decreases and increases. The statistical

significance of the indirect influence of all the mentioned factors on the revisit dimension is shown, but through the mediator loyalty (positive and low indirect influence,  $\beta = 0.50$ ), which speaks of the functional connection between the dimensions loyalty and revisit.

Regarding the partial influence of the factors, it is observed that the most pronounced direct effect on the loyalty dimension has the factor of stereotypes and prejudices ( $\beta = 0.39$ ), while the other factors have a much weaker and positive direct effect. The same is the case with the influence of factors on the revisit dimension, where the correlation achieved in the relationship between stereotypes and the revisit dimension is more pronounced in the positive direction ( $\beta = 0.35$ ).



**Figure 4.** Path model—analysis of direct and indirect effects.

Indirect effects are observed through the inter-factor correlation of the first group, where the most pronounced is the relationship between the factors of Satisfaction with structural elements and Stereotypes and prejudices (0.41), as well as Satisfaction with structural elements and image (0.55). It is observed that the correlations between all factors range from low to very high values.

With regard to sociodemographic factors, the existence of a statistically significant direct and indirect influence on two dimensions is observed only in the age category. The direct influence of the age factor on loyalty is positive and very low, while according to the Revisit Serbia dimension, it is positive and of medium strength  $\beta = 0.4$ .

An overview of standardized regression weights and total, direct, and indirect standardized effects for all variables for confirmatory structural analysis is given in Table 3.

Table 4 presents correlation estimates ( $\beta$ ), standard errors (sd) and critical ratios (C.R) for confirmatory structural analysis. Most of the estimated parameters are statistically significant and have good standardized regression weights (estimates ( $\beta$ ), P, C.R). An exception is the relationship between gender, educational structure, and salary according to the dimensions of loyalty and revisit ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Table 4 also contains data on the confirmation of the hypotheses from which the research began. All the above-mentioned hypotheses were confirmed after the data analysis, with the fact that, according to the results, the hypotheses related to socio-demographic factors: gender, education, and salary were rejected (H3, H3b, H3c, H3d, H3g, H3h).

Multivariate analysis of variance verified the existence of differences in answers in relation to sociodemographic characteristics, and confirmed, as in the previous analysis, that only age has statistical significance in the perception of loyalty and revisit ( $\lambda = 0.984$ ,  $F(2) = 3.613$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ). When looking at individually dependent variables, it is observed that there are statistically significant differences in loyalty in relation to age ( $F(2) = 6.198$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $\eta = 0.01$ ) and at the revisit dimension ( $F(2) = 7.783$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $\eta = 0.01$ ). Statistical differences and values are given in Table 5 and Figure 5.

**Table 3.** Effects of Standardized Regression Weights.

Standardized Regression Weights																
L-SSE	L-ID	L-IM	L-SP	L-G	L-Ed	L-A	L-E	R-L	R-SSE	R-ID	R-IM	RSP	R-G	R-Ed	R-A	R-E
0.093	0.096	0.167	0.394	-0.40	-0.42	-0.132	0.020	0.504	0.057	-0.053	0.089	0.353	-0.001	-0.01	0.043	0.018
Standardized Total Effects																
	E	A	Ed	G	SP	IM	ID	SSE	L							
LOYALTY	0.054	-0.370	-0.071	-0.112	0.862	0.129	0.148	0.137	0.000							
REVISIT	0.073	0.173	-0.003	-0.002	10.118	0.099	-0.118	0.123	0.728							
Standardized Direct Effects																
	E	A	Ed	G	SP	IM	ID	SSE	L							
LOYALTY	0.020	-0.132	-0.042	-0.040	0.394	0.167	0.096	0.093	0.000							
REVISIT	0.018	0.043	-0.001	-0.001	0.353	0.089	-0.053	0.057	0.504							
Standardized Indirect Effects																
	E	A	Ed	G	SP	IM	ID	SSE	L							
LOYALTY	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000							
REVISIT	0.010	-0.066	-0.021	-0.020	0.198	0.084	0.048	0.047	0.000							

SP—stereotypes and prejudices, IM—image, ID—identity, SSE—satisfaction with structural elements, L—loyalty, R—revisit, G—Gender, A—age, Ed—education, E—earn.

**Table 4.** Results of path model and hypothesis confirmation.

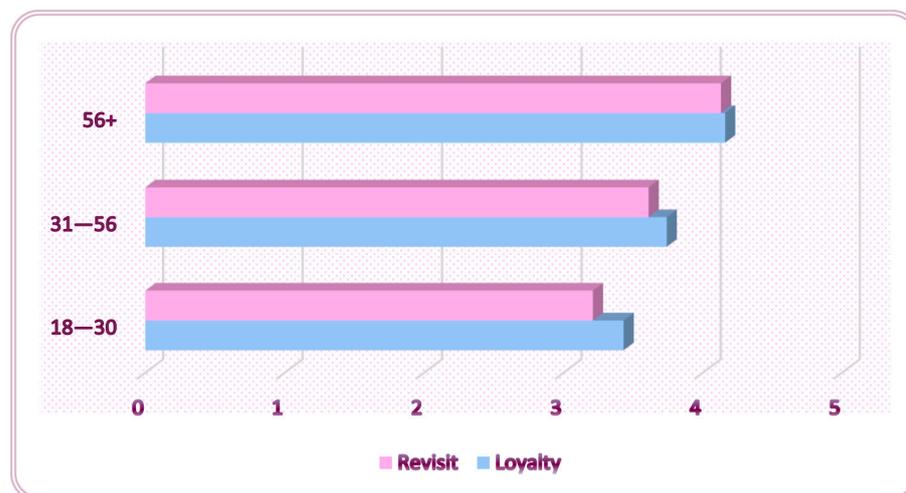
Confirmation of Hypothetical Relations				$\beta$	S.E.	C.R.	p-Value	
H1a	✓	Loyalty	⇐⇒	Satisfaction with structural elements	0.137	0.048	20.837	0.005
H1c	✓	Loyalty	⇐⇒	Identity	0.148	0.043	30.425	***
H1e	✓	Loyalty	⇐⇒	Image	0.129	0.030	40.314	***
H4a	✓	Loyalty	⇐⇒	Stereotypes and prejudices	0.862	0.078	110.017	***
H3a	✗	Loyalty	⇐⇒	Gender	-0.112	0.076	-10.479	0.139
H3c	✗	Loyalty	⇐⇒	Education	-0.0071	0.047	-10.502	0.133
H3e	✓	Loyalty	⇐⇒	Age	0.370	0.080	-40.606	***
H3g	✗	Loyalty	⇐⇒	Earn	0.054	0.078	0.697	0.486
H2	✓	Revisit	⇐⇒	Loyalty	0.728	0.034	210.452	***
H1b	✓	Revisit	⇐⇒	Satisfaction with structural elements	0.123	0.049	20.495	0.013
H1d	✓	Revisit	⇐⇒	Identity	-0.118	0.044	-20.687	0.007
H1f	✓	Revisit	⇐⇒	Image	0.099	0.031	30.244	0.001
H4b	✓	Revisit	⇐⇒	Stereotypes and prejudices	10.118	0.084	130.236	***
H3b	✗	Revisit	⇐⇒	Gender	-0.002	0.077	-0.027	0.978
H3d	✗	Revisit	⇐⇒	Education	-0.003	0.048	-0.065	0.948
H3f	✓	Revisit	⇐⇒	Age	0.173	0.082	20.105	0.035
H3h	✗	Revisit	⇐⇒	Earn	0.073	0.079	0.923	0.356

\*\*\*  $p = 0.00$ .

**Table 5.** Confirmation of differences in answers in relation to the age structure of the sample.

Dimension	m1	m2	m3	F(df)-Values	p-Value	Compare
Loyalty	3.43	3.74	4.16	F(2, 892) = 6.198	0.02	m3 > m2 > m1
Revisit	3.21	3.61	4.13	F(2, 892) = 7.783	0.00	m3 > m2 > m1

m1—18–30; m2—31–55; m3—56 and more;  $p < 0.01$ .

**Figure 5.** Differences in the perception of revisit destinations and loyalty in relation to the age of foreign tourists.

The results of the differences in relation to the age category are also given in the figures for better visibility.

It is observed that the category of respondents over the age of 56 is the most loyal and most determined to visit Serbia again as a destination, taking into account all the values and factors that were on offer.

## 5. Discussion

The first part of the research was determining the influence of stereotypes and prejudices (S&P) on creating loyalty among tourists and the intention to visit Serbia again. After the hypothetical setting of the research and survey of foreign tourists, data analysis was performed to extract all items by exploratory factor analysis. A total of six factors were obtained, which make up a good percentage of the explained variance. The results obtained by path analysis consistently indicate that stereotypes and prejudices related to Serbia as a tourist destination have a statistically significant and direct impact on the loyalty of foreign tourists and their intention to visit Serbia again. This importance is somewhat greater in relation to other supply factors examined in this study. The research started with the motivation of the model and theory developed by Hofstede about the characteristics of the Serbian people, in the former state of Yugoslavia, of which Serbia was an integral part. He claimed, according to his six-dimensional model, that Serbs accept and expect hierarchical order in organizations and institutions, that Serbs are dedicated and loyal, have feminist characteristics and motivate individuals in society, have a high tendency to avoid uncertainty, and are more inclined to refrain from satisfying desires or impulses, that they are nationalists, that they were raised in a patriarchal manner with a pronounced tradition in behavior toward the weaker sex, prone to conflicts, etc. The results obtained from the research confirm the theory developed by Hofstede about the characteristics of the Serbian people, in the former state of Yugoslavia, of which Serbia was an integral part [82]. Little has changed when it comes to oral traditions about the Serbian people and the stereotypes that prevail about them. Bourdin et al. [38], with their results, claim that stereotypical assessments of countries can replace or supplement brand perception. Moreover, I point

out that there is an interaction between the globality of the brand and the warmth of the country, and the locality of the brand and the competence of the country, which leads to new implications regarding brand positioning strategies in different conditions. Research on the influence of various factors on repeat visitation and loyalty is a frequent topic, the results confirm the results obtained in this research [23]. Chattalas and Takada [6] carried out an experimental study of the influence of stereotypes on the behavior of tourists and came to the conclusion that there is a downstream influence of stereotypes related to nationalism on the expectations and behavior of tourists. A similar study was conducted by Tung et al. [86], who proposed a model to assess the positive and negative tourist stereotypes that Hong Kong residents have toward Chinese outbound tourists. Their results also indicate a significant influence of stereotypes on tourists' intentions, but also indicate a wide range of practical implications of stereotype research.

Tourists' satisfaction with the complete tourist offer is a significant factor in tourists' decision to visit tourist sites again [110–112]. The achieved degree of satisfaction with the quality of the tourist service plays a role as the primary precursor of behavioral intentions after the purchase because it positively develops the tourist's insight toward the service, brand, or product and creates loyalty and repeat desire for the purchase [113,114]. Similar to our research, previous studies have shown that increasing the level of passenger satisfaction with the quality of a specific tourist offer is an excellent aspect of loyalty and necessary to improve the intentions of repeat visits and recommendations [115,116]. The relationship between loyalty and repeat visits was statistically confirmed as significant in our research. Olivier [117] showed the importance of loyalty to the survival of the destination because, according to his understanding, the retention of loyal visitors has multiple benefits, one of which is the reduction of marketing costs. The loyalty of tourists is also considered a vital characteristic because it is associated with a great desire for the safety of capacity filling and cost reduction, which is certainly better than attracting new visitors [118–121]. Ozdemir et al. [122] in their research point out that there are significant relationships between the tourist profile, satisfaction, and loyalty, which further results in a repeat visit to the same destination.

The data obtained in this study answered the initial research questions (R.Q.1 and R.Q.2), that all factors of quality and offer influence the creation of loyalty and repeat visits, and that stereotypes to a large extent have a direct impact on the given dimensions. Among the prejudices that are most prevalent in the minds of tourists when it comes to Serbia are the following: arrogant people with pronounced nationalism and a high degree of traditionalism.

The second part of the research was devoted to examining the influence of socio-demographic factors on the given two dimensions: loyalty and revisit. Further analysis revealed that variables such as gender, material structure, and education have no significance in predicting repeat intention to visit and loyalty to the destination. The exception is the age variable, which showed that older tourists to the greatest extent create loyalty and the intention to visit again. Previous research on the topic of the influence of demographic factors on decisions in tourist trips and the intentions of tourists has shown that age is important, and that younger categories from 18 to 31 years of age are more motivated to travel regardless of limiting circumstances, which would include stereotypes, prejudices and similar negative influences on decision-making [123]. Jonsson and Deonish [124] claim that older people or older travelers are motivated by the desire for novelty, while contrary to their research, the study of Luo and Deng [125] showed that age has a negative effect on travel motivation and that younger tourists prefer to seek novelty compared to the elderly. As a result, older tourists become more loyal to the destination. A study by Mohsin et al. [126] examined the influence of demographic factors on the intention to travel, they found that there is a significant relationship between travel motivation and demographic factors such as age and level of education, where the higher level of education certainly reduces loyalty. A study by Irimias et al. [127] talks about the fact that older travelers see educational purposes when visiting a destination, and have a high degree of national

identity. The same authors claim that younger categories of tourists are not aware of the stated value of travel, and for them, education has less value during the trip.

## 6. Conclusions

The challenge of every tourist destination is to create loyal consumers who will be sure to return again, which is achieved in different ways [128,129]. The research presented in this study shows the influence of specific elements of the offer, stereotypes, and prejudices, on the loyalty and formation of tourists' intention to visit again. It was established that this factor (S&P) plays a significant role in predicting future return visits to Serbia as a tourist destination that has not yet experienced an expansion in tourism development. Most studies focus on researching the quality of standard offer factors and their impact on loyalty, but the innovation of this study is reflected in the research of a specific element, namely, stereotypes and prejudice.

### 6.1. Theoretical Contribution

This conceptual research highlights the emphasis on creating a theoretical framework in the context of monitoring the behavior of tourists and the influence of various factors on their decisions. The proposed influencing factors have been extensively researched, but there is a lack of literature on the issue of the impact of stereotyping and prejudice on the behavior of tourists. Certainly, the results obtained in this research can contribute to the expansion of the existing literature and knowledge about predicting the intention to visit the destination again. There is especially little literature and research on the territory of Serbia and the region. The current conceptual work bridges the gap in previous research and provides a supplement to the theoretical framework of knowledge in the field of tourism. The theoretical implications refer to the possibility of acquiring new knowledge, because the research is corroborated by a large number of previous similar research on this topic, and such abundant, relevant, and deep information from the territory of Serbia will certainly contribute to the spread of information.

The informative basis of the theoretical significance of the results of this research is that, perhaps for some tourists, Serbia will become an interesting tourist area and create a recognizable brand, but on the other hand, it can have the opposite effect, which is to create a completely negative image of Serbian people. In the last decades, from the 90s until today, the media conveys a bad image of the Serbian people and the area, for this reason, the promotion of some values can improve the image and use stereotypes as a good trend for tourists who seek adventure. The fact is that the psychological segmentation of tourists would contribute to a better understanding of the influence of stereotypes on consumer behavior, and the theoretical implications should certainly be reflected in the context of future research.

### 6.2. Practical Contribution

With the theoretical framework proposed in this study and the results obtained, it is possible to create a system of information that would serve marketers to develop a strategy in order to place Serbia in a higher place on the highly competitive tourist market, proposing a special type of tourism and attracting a special profile of tourists for whom stereotyping is an attractor for visiting. This would show Serbia as a destination with a specific tourist product. By promoting stereotypes and prejudices, it is possible to create interaction with tourists and influence their loyalty and return.

In recent decades, thanks to the development of cultural studies of all nationalities living in the territory of Serbia, both prejudices and stereotypes related to the cultural and sociological aspects of this area have been created. Such stereotypes are mainly the domain of negative rhetoric and a poor representation of the social characteristics of Serbia. The basis of these stereotypical assumptions is made up of either truths or distorted truths, which should be reexamined, and a great enigma for the consumer to investigate. In fact, the practical implications of the results, as well as the overall research on the given issue

can be turned into a challenging task, in the sense of presenting it to tourists and becoming a leading attractor for visits to Serbia.

The Republic of Serbia does not record a large number of visits by foreign tourists, because it cannot be said that it is a country with developed tourism but it can certainly be said that such results will become a factor in designing new forms of motives that would increase tourist visits of certain profiles of tourists. Designing a recognizable brand is one of the key activities needed for a more prosperous development of tourism in Serbia, and this can certainly be achieved with motives that are presented through stereotyping or prejudice. Tourists will be given the opportunity to review or recognize some of the aforementioned stereotypes through their visit to Serbia, thus establishing whether they are rhetorical categories or whether they have a place in real life.

Therefore, managers could use the results to market key attractive stereotypes and give tourists a chance to get to know them or analyze them. This increases the probability that after considering the substance of the given attractors, loyal customers will be created. The implications of research on the influence of stereotypes certainly contribute to a more prosperous touristic positioning of Serbia on the European as well as the world tourist market. It is known that Đavolja Varoš, placed as a candidate on the list of natural wonders of the world, is a natural monument with two rare natural phenomena: earthen figures, as specific forms of relief that have a very attractive effect in the space, and two sources of highly acidic water with high mineralization. Precisely because of the large number of legends, stereotypes, and prejudices related to this space, it will be possible to place all those narratives in the future as attractors for greater attendance, which is significant for now. Furthermore, the areas of Eastern Serbia are known for their legends about fairies and witches, as well as black and white magic, therefore the promotion of such stories will enable this area to become a stronger tourist spatial focal point of Serbia, and influence the return of tourists to explore these odd destinations or tourist hotspots.

### *6.3. Limitations and Future Research*

The limiting circumstances of the research were shown primarily in contact with foreign tourists and communication. It was one of the more challenging tasks because some tourists did not understand the language of the questionnaire, so the researchers had the task of explaining and facilitating their participation in the survey. A number of tourists avoided answers due to the fear of the pandemic, which is still present in the minds of tourists. Of course, as is the practice, a large number of tourists refused to participate in the survey for no specific reason. The limiting factor was the number of respondents and the space. It is possible to expand the research to the region and perform a comparative analysis of countries that are also marked by similar prejudices. The study creates potential avenues for future research. This study can be expanded in its research basis, with the same goal, but to add specific psychological profiles of tourists. In this way, we would find out which group of tourists prefers stereotypes, and which group considers them a negative part of the brand of Serbia. The expansion of the study will also contribute to the theoretical knowledge of which profile of tourists prefers loyalty and repeat return in relation to the perception of stereotyping, by which we would study the emotional connection of tourists with the destination. The research of stereotypes and the construction of questions related to prejudices and stereotypes of a nation and country are very sensitive topics. Very often, such connotations and images of a nation are part of the political scene and the presentation of the state to the public, and very often the answers to such questions are omitted and rejected. However, when stereotypes are used as a political insinuation in a certain situation, they still show an enviable carrying capacity of a desirable meaning that can be intensified at any time. That is why stereotypes and prejudices should not be used in the jargon of collective representation, they cannot be understood exclusively as an image of a nation or state because the implications of such stereotypes can represent a broad ideology of extratextual dimensions.

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