

The Impact of Destination Image on Tourist Re-visit Intention Mediating the Role of Tourist Satisfaction in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Tourism has identified as a major contributor to the economy of the majority of the countries in the world as it creates many employment opportunities, accelerate foreign exchange earnings, cultural exchange and the development of the infrastructure facilities. In Sri Lanka tourism has identified as the major contributor to the development of the economy in the country as it creates many employment opportunities and the regional development. After the civil conflicts, COVID 19 pandemic and the economic crisis, the country has now focused on diverse strategies to enhance the tourism industry in the country and to position Sri Lanka as a major tourist destination in the world.

One of the major challenges that has identified in the tourism industry not only to attract new tourists but also to accelerate the repeat tourists to the country as the repeat tourists are more beneficial as they reduce the marketing expenses and creates profitability to the country. It is critically identified that the repeat tourists are more important as they are more cost effective and sustainable than the first visitors as repeat tourists spend more and increases the profits to the country. Hence within this context, the image that the tourists possess regarding a particular destination which is identified as the Destination Image has identified as the major contributor to the tourist revisit intention of the country. This study identifies the impact of Destination Image on Tourist Re-visit Intention mediating the role of Tourist Satisfaction in Sri Lanka.

Key words: Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction, Tourist Re-visit Intention

1.0 Introduction

It is undeniable that the tourism industry plays a major role in the economic growth of the country mainly after the conflict that has ended in the year 2009 which has identified as the turning point in the tourism industry of Sri Lanka (Samaranayake et al., 2013). The end of the 30-year civil war, the country was able to adopt novel tourism development strategies in order to accelerate the tourist arrivals mainly in its coastal and cultural regions (Kumudhini, 2024; Samaranayake et al., 2013). The launch of the “Sri Lanka Tourism Strategic Plan 2017-2020” can be identified as a prime example of how the Sri Lanka has strategically prioritized the tourism industry as a major development factor after the conflict (Bandara, 2019). However, a balanced strategy is important to ensure the long-term sustainability and the competitiveness in the global market when establishing a strategic priority on the development of the tourism industry (Biyagamage and Jayawardena, 2013). According to the Waas et al., (2020) critically argued that the way that the tourists’ view about a particular destination has a greater impact on whether or not they decide to return, consequently destination management organizations and other tourism stakeholders need to pay a special attention to this area. Moreover, in order to improve the overall tourism experience and to create effective promotional tactics, it is crucial to understand the relationship between destination image, tourist satisfaction and the tourist re-visit intention (Atmari & Putri, 2021; Setiawan et al., 2020). Furthermore, it has critically identified that the relationship between the destination image and the tourist re-visit intention is significantly mediated by the tourist satisfaction, emphasizing the significance in offering the experiences that not only meet but exceed the tourist expectations. Hence, repeat business is critical for retaining tourists, emphasizing the importance of encouraging the trust and return trips to particular destinations (Le & Le, 2020).

1.1 Background of the Study

The significance of the destination image in influencing the tourist behaviour has been extensively studied in the area of tourism studies. Tourists’ attitudes and perceptions of a specific destination is mainly determined by the cognitive, affective and conative components that compose the destination image. Their perceptions consequently impact their decision-making procedures, encompassing the decision of the destination, the degree of satisfaction and the aims for future behaviours (Sanjaya and Aruan, 2021). The interdependence of these components emphasizes how comprehensive the destination image is and how it affects the tourists’ overall experiences. The overall emotional and cognitive evaluations of tourists’ experiences are mainly included in the complex concept of the tourist satisfaction (Marasinhe et al., 2020). Moreover, the tourist satisfaction is a major factor in determining the customer loyalty and positive recommendations from others, which support the sustainability and long-term profitability of a particular destination. According to the

literature, it has critically argued that the favourable perception of a particular destination assist tourists to feel more satisfied, which accelerates the possibility that they will return to the same destination (Christina and Qu, 2007). Hence, the revisit intention is the possibility that the tourists will return to a particular destination in the future and it is identified as a crucial behavioural outcome. The intention to return has substantial consequences for the destination marketing and management since returning tourists tend to spend more money, explore the destination thoroughly and generate positive word of mouth recommendations to others (Zhang and Niyomslip, 2020).

1.2 Research Gap and Significance

There still remain gaps in the literature, particularly when it comes to Sri Lanka, despite the recognized links between the destination image, tourist satisfaction and tourist re-visit intention. Since the two concepts are multifaceted, the existing literature is imprecise on the relationship between the destination image and tourist loyalty (Zhang et al., 2013). Although a lot of research has examined at the direct effects of destination image and tourist satisfaction on the tourist intention to return, additional study needs to be done in order to understand on how the tourist satisfaction functions as a mediator in the relationship between the destination image and tourist revisit intention in the particular context of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, creating effective strategies is vital to enhance the sustainability and the competitiveness of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka. Moreover, in the context of Sri Lanka, the current study bridges these gaps by investigating the mediating function of tourist satisfaction in the relationship between the destination image and the tourist revisit intention, revealing theoretical and practical insights for those involved in the tourism industry. Resolving these gaps will provide Sri Lankan tourism companies and destination management groups with more useful information that they can utilize to create concentrated plans that will strengthen the country's image, increases the tourist satisfaction and encourages the repeat visits to the country.

1.3 Problem Statement

Sri Lanka has become a well-liked travel destination due to its rich cultural legacy, varied scenery and friendly people. However, there are many problems facing the tourism sector of the country as it is vital to develop the perception of the country as it enhances the tourist satisfaction which leads to develop the tourist return visits to the country. Hence, as it affects the tourist views, expectations and the overall experiences, managing the destination image effectively is more important in attracting as well as retaining tourists (Peral and Gil, 2017). Moreover, satisfied tourists are more likely to return and recommend others to a particular

destination as the customer satisfaction is a major factor in determining the tourist's intention to return. In order to enhance the competitiveness and the sustainability of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka it is important to understand the relationship between the destination image, tourist satisfaction and the tourist re visit intention (Stylidis and Cherifi, 2018; Umasuthan & Park, 2021). Though these relationships have been studied in diverse contexts in the past, but less study has been conducted exclusively on Sri Lanka (Huang, et al., 2021).

Moreover, in the literature on tourism, destination image is becoming more and more important, but its development trajectory and application fields, and strategic implications have not been thoroughly examined (Huang, et al., 2021). Furthermore, numerous social, cultural, historical and technical elements mainly influence the perception of a destination, which is more important as it can mainly influence on how tourists behave and what they expect (Kislali et al., 2016). Hence, majority of researches have explained on the history and importance of the perception of a tourist destination, but there is no comprehensive factors that influences the tourist satisfaction have been developed yet and both the direct and indirect effects of these factors on tourist satisfaction have not yet been thoroughly examined (Kanwel et al., 2019).

Moreover, traveller's opinions about a specific destination have a huge impact on how satisfied they are and whether that they plan to revisit the same destination (Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000). Hence, the Sri Lanka's eastern province has to deal with the problems such as poor infrastructure, safety issues, and a shortage of a competent labour (Kumar, 2018). Hence, political instability can have a short-term negative impact of tourist revenue, but the positive perception of a destination can helps to mitigate these consequences (Ingram et al., 2013).

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine on how the perception of a destination affects the tourists' intention to return, with a particular emphasis on the mediating function of tourist satisfaction in the Sri Lankan context.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the research is to examine on how the destination image affects tourists' intention to return with an emphasis on how tourist satisfaction functions as a mediator. With their satisfaction levels acting as mediating factor, the research is mainly aiming to assess how tourists' opinions on Sri Lanka's destination image affect their decision to return the same destination in the future. By fulfilling these objectives, the study mainly aims to offer insightful information to Sri Lankan tourism companies and destination management organizations to create more specific plans to enhance the destination image of the country and to develop the tourist repeat visits to create more revenue to the country. This study adds to the

body of knowledge by presenting empirical data on the relationships between destination image, tourist satisfaction and tourist revisit intention in the context of Sri Lanka. The findings will lead to develop the competitiveness and the sustainability of the tourism industry of Sri Lanka.

1.5 Research Questions

What is the impact of destination image on tourist revisit intention in Sri Lanka?

Does tourist satisfaction mediate the relationship between the destination image and tourist revisit intention in Sri Lanka?

These questions direct the empirical research of the study and offers a structure to gather, analyse and interpret the data.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The study is mainly focusing on the international tourists who are visiting in the country and the questionnaire will be used to gather data. The scope of the study is restricted to the components of the tourist satisfaction, destination image and tourist intention to return. The sample size and the specific locations where data are gathered may have an impact on the result of the study. The research will only be carried out for a limited period of time, which might not account for the dynamic shifts in tourist preferences and destination perception over time. In spite of these limitations the study intends to add to the body of knowledge already in existence and inform useful tactics for tourism stakeholders by offering insightful information about the relationships among destination image, tourist satisfaction and tourist revisit intention in Sri Lanka.

1.0 Literature Review

The competitiveness of the tourism industry requires a thorough comprehension of the elements affecting the tourists' decision and their actions (Peral and Gil 2017). According to Soleimani and Einolahzaeh, (2018), critically argued that there are variety of elements that affect the tourists' decision to return such as the destination perception, tourist satisfaction and the tourist return intent. Furthermore, tourist experiences and subsequent actions are significantly influenced by the destination image, which captures the general impressions and opinions that tourists possess regarding a particular destination (Abbasi et al., 2021; Styliadis and Cherifi, 2018). The tourist satisfaction which is identified as a direct outcome of expectations and experiences and it is identified as a mediator in the relationship between the destination image and the tourist revisit intention. Hence, revisit intention which is identified as a measure of the traveller's propensity to return to a particular destination and it is an important predictor of destination loyalty and it is an essential driver in

the expansion of sustainable tourism.

This literature review attempts to summarize the body of knowledge that comprised with the complex relationships among the destination image, tourist satisfaction and tourist revisit intention in Sri Lanka. Moreover, Sri Lanka is a country with its rich bio diversity, picturesque landscapes and varied cultural legacy. Furthermore, in order to effectively design effective strategies to attract and to retain tourists the Sri Lankan tourism stakeholders which includes the policymakers, destination managers and the tourism operators need to understand on how the destination image has affected the tourist satisfaction which leads to tourist re-visit intention. Through an analysis of the current literature, this review aims to determine the important themes, anticipated research needs and possible directions for further study.

2.1 Destination Image

Destination image has been identified as a complex concept that includes cognitive, affective and conative elements. It mainly reflects the attitudes, feelings and the behavioural intentions of tourists towards a specific destination (Tahir et al., 2024). The cognitive component is identified as the tourists' perception and understanding of a particular destination's features such as its environment, infrastructure and attractions (Huang et al., 2021). Hence, the emotional reactions and the feelings are mainly captured by the affective component and it influences the total satisfaction of the tourists (Sanjaya and Aruan, 2021). Moreover, the conative component is identified as the behavioural intentions, such as the desire to visit or to return to the same location and to suggest the destination to others. Moreover, Mano and Costa (2015) have critically argued that the travel agents' and tour operators' global cognitive and affective perceptions of a particular destination are mainly influenced by socio-psychological motivations, socio-demographic characteristics, prior experience there and the type and the range of information sources that they use. Hence, the formation of the destination image is dependent on the accumulation of impressions and the mental representations of a particular destination (Placio and Martin, 2003). In order to attract more tourists and to increase the tourist satisfaction and to promote the repeat visits, the destination must have a positive image (Tasci and Gartner, 2007; Zhang et al., 2013). Hence, to improve tourists' impressions of a particular destination and to develop a positive destination image, it is important to have effective marketing strategies. Moreover, the cognitive and affective evaluation on a particular destination creates the perception of that destination (Martin and Bosque, 2007).

According to the studies, the perception of a destination has a significant impact on tourist behavior which affects the tourist loyalty, satisfaction and the choice of the destination (Christina and Qu, 2007). Hence, a destination may differentiate itself out from the competition, attract new tourists and promote repeat visits

with a strong positive destination image (Peral and Gil, 2017). However, the perception of a particular destination can be unpredictable and may be impacted by a number of things such as the individual experiences, media representations and word-of-mouth advertising. Furthermore, the advancement of the destination image is significantly influenced by stimulation variables and the tourist characteristics (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Furthermore, Prebensen (2006) has critically argued that it is crucial for the destination managers to concentrate on appropriate marketing techniques in order to develop the positive destination image. Moreover, Unnikrishnan and Sibi (2023), critically evaluated that the destination image is the “sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a tourist destination”. According to Han et al., (2022), destination image reflects the tourists’ opinions, views and impressions about a particular destination. In tourism research destination image has identified as a most crucial component (Hamdy et al., 2023).

2.2 Tourist Satisfaction

The degree to which the tourists believe their experiences, meet or surpass their expectations is identified as the tourist satisfaction and it is a crucial component in the tourism research (Rajesh, 2013). It is a multifaceted and complex idea that it is impacted by a number of variables such as personal values, service quality and destination characteristics. A major factor in determining destination loyalty and the favourable word-of-mouth recommendations is identified as the tourist satisfaction. The ability of a destination to meet the expectations of the tourists determines the level of their satisfaction. A tourist’s psychological condition is a result of assessing their travel experience and it is mainly represented by their level of satisfaction. The happiness that the tourists experience as a result of their trip can be known as the tourist satisfaction. Numerous researches have examined the causes and effects of tourist satisfaction emphasizing on how crucial it is in influencing the traveller behaviour and the destination performance.

Numerous elements such as the perceived worth of the experience, the emotional attachment to the destination and the quality of the services affect the satisfaction levels of tourists. Superior service quality increases the tourist satisfaction and it leads to make more enjoyable travel experiences. Hence, tourist satisfaction is greatly influenced by the emotional experiences as the happy feelings increases the satisfaction as it leads to create long lasting memories (Atmari and Putri, 2021). Hence, Sanjaya and Aruan (2021) critically argued that the tourist satisfaction is a major contributor to the performance of the tourism industry as it affects the tourists plans to return and recommend the destination to others. Hence, Atmari and Putri (2021) critically argued that the tourists are more satisfied when their expectations are meet or surpassed.

According to Tenean (2017), one of the main elements that contributes to a positive business climate is the tourist satisfaction. Satisfied tourists are more likely to express others about the particular destination, which

accelerates the reputation of the destination and it creates positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Mohammad and Som, 2010). Hence, positive tourist experiences assist in increasing the likelihood that they will return, which promotes the development of the sustainable tourism. Moreover, the tourist satisfaction has been measured by the aesthetic attributes of the destination (Tulasi et al., 2024). Furthermore, the tourism companies and the destination managers need to identify the elements that influence the tourist satisfaction in order to enhance the total traveller experience and to attain the sustainable growth (Bulatovic and Stranjancevic, 2019). Therefore, in order to have the success of any tourism product or service it is important to determine the elements that affect the tourist satisfaction as it affects the success of any tourism product or service. In the tourism industry it is significant to study the tourist satisfaction as it is a result of the growing rivalry between different tourism attractions or destinations. Therefore, it is crucial in determining the elements that affect tourist satisfaction as it has a tremendous interest to the tourism sector.

2.3 Tourist Revisit Intention

The tourist revisit intention has been identified as the desire of tourists to return to a same destination that they have already visited which can be identified as their satisfaction, and favourable experiences. Tourist revisit intention is identified as an essential indicator of destination loyalty and it is a major force that contributes to the sustainable tourism (Le and Le, 2020). Furthermore, Um et al (2006) critically argued that the tourist's intention to return is a critical factor of the long-term success of the destination as it assists in developing the local economy and improve the destination image. Moreover, Jimenez-Garcia et al (2025) critically argued that the tourist revisit intention is the most important measure of the success of the destination in the tourism industry. There are many factors that affect the tourist revisit intention such as the perception of the destination, tourist satisfaction and perceived value. The repeat tourists are more crucial rather than staying longer they spread the positive word of mouth and recommend the destination to others as it is identified as the better promotional technique to accelerate the repeat visits to the country.

The tourist revisit intention is mainly influenced by the destination image as the travellers are more inclined to travel to destinations that they have a favourable and appealing image (Le and Le, 2020). Revisit intention is mainly influenced by the tourist satisfaction as the satisfied tourists are more inclined to back to the destinations that they prefer. Tourists inclination to return to a particular destination in the future is greatly influenced emotions which includes the comfort, joy and pain (Lei et al., 2025). The factors that influence the tourist revisit intention can be mainly classified as the destination specific variables and the tourist specific factors. The destination specific factors can be identified as the tangible elements such as the infrastructure, facilities and the attractions and also the intangible elements as the environment, culture and the atmosphere.

Hence, the tourist specific factors can be identified as the personal values, travel objectives and the demographic traits (Hasan et al., 2023). The tourists experience of a particular destination is the major determinant of them to return to a particular destination in the future. Tourists that who have a good experience of a particular destination are more likely plan to return to the same destination. Therefore, the destinations need to enhance their appeal in order to have more repeat visits. Furthermore, in the context of the tourism industry, the tourist's experiences during a particular visit have a significant impact in the decision of them whether or not they decide to return.

2.4 The relationship between Destination Image and Tourist Re-visit Intention and the mediating role of Tourist Satisfaction

According to Sari et al (2021), the relationship between the destination image and the tourist revisit intention is mainly based on the basic idea that the favourable impressions of a particular destination greatly influence the tourist's decision to return. Hence, tourists are more likely to return to destinations that they meet their expectations and if they provide them unforgettable experience that is the crucial factor for them to have revisit intention (Wei et al., 2024). The desire of tourists to return portray on how devoted and committed them to a particular destination by identifying the significance of promoting a positive destination image (Le and Le, 2020). Hence, Setiawan et al (2020), critically argued that the positive perception about a destination contributes to the overall reputation and the appeal by increasing the possibility of the repeat visits.

The theories such as the cognitive consistency theory and the expectancy valence theory provide frameworks to critically identify the psychological processes that explain the relationship between the destination image and the tourist revisit intention. Hence, according to the expectancy valence theory identifies that the tourists assess the destinations according to their expectations and the perceived value of a particular visit. Moreover, according to the cognitive consistency theory critically analyses that the tourists who have a favourable opinion of a particular destination are more likely to return as they try to keep their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours consistent (Jebbouri et al, 2022).

Moreover, the theories such as the stimulus-organism-response model and the satisfaction loyalty framework critically explains the mediating role of tourist satisfaction. Moreover, the stimulus-organism-response model critically analyses that the destination image serves as a stimulus affecting the thoughts and feelings of tourists which in turn influences the tourist's intention to return. According to the satisfaction loyalty theory critically analyses that the tourist satisfaction is a major factor that develops the loyalty which in turn enhances the repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Yuksel, et al, 2009)

2.5 Development of the Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework that supports the study mainly aims to clarify the complex relationships among the destination image, tourist satisfaction and the tourist revisit intention. Furthermore, it critically identifies that the tourist satisfaction mediates the impact of destination image on tourist revisit intention. The conceptual framework for the research is developed as follows.



Figure 1 Conceptual Model

2.6 Conclusion

This study explores the complex relationship between the destination image and the tourist revisit intention with the mediating role of tourist satisfaction as it mainly influences the tourist's decision to return to a particular destination. The conceptual model of the research suggests a comprehensive framework as it critically understands the relationship between the important concepts and this can provide valuable information to the tourism companies and destination managers in order to develop the tourism sector of the country. Moreover, the tourist satisfaction is mainly impacted by the perception of their earlier visit of the particular destination. Hence, satisfaction increases with the quality of the destination image and it is critically identified that the satisfied tourists tend to spend more, stay long longer and spread the positive word of mouth as it is the better promotional tactic to accelerate the tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

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