



Experiential Marketing, Destination Image, Tourists Satisfaction, and Tourists' Destination Loyalty for Sustainable Tourism (*Evidence from Tourists' Cultural Destinations in Sri Lanka*)

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World tourism has significantly contributed to destinations generating more social, economic and environmental benefits. Therefore, all tourist destinations have identified sustainability as their main goal of tourism. There are plenty of research to discuss the effect of experiential marketing, tourists' satisfaction, destination image and destination loyalty than measuring these variables' effect on sustainable tourism. In the Sri Lankan context, though Sri Lanka has many world heritage destinations to facilitate sustainable tourism, it has only a few cultural attractions. Further, there was no research to address the experiential marketing effect on sustainable tourism through image, satisfaction and loyalty. This gap has been addressed through this research with three mediating variables referenced to cultural destinations in Sri Lanka. To collect data for the study 513 tourists representing all tourists who visited Sri Lanka in 2019 conveniently interviewed. The data were analyzed through the SPSS Amos software and was able to achieve all the research objectives and answer all the research questions. The findings of the study include adaptable strategies for the attention of all the destination-marketing authorities in Sri Lanka, which may help to facilitate experiential marketing for sustainable tourism through destination image, tourists' satisfaction, and destination loyalty for cultural destinations in Sri Lanka.

KEYWORDS: Experiential Marketing, Tourists Satisfaction, Destination Image, Destination Loyalty, Sustainable Tourism, Cultural Destination

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INTRODUCTION

Protecting the environment, enhancing social values and increasing profits are the main goals of any organization worldwide (WTTC, 2019). Dynamic competition has no space to survive in the long term if there is any process or project that has no alignment with a sustainable approach. Therefore, the tourism industry also must facilitate sustainable tourism. (WTTC, 2019)

In world tourism, cultural places that are more significant because of their historical recognition have a higher demand. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2019) highlighted that cultural destinations have more capacity to attract and retain more tourists. Having eight world heritage places Sri Lanka also attracted more than 2 million tourists in 2019 (SLTDA 2018). However, Udurawana et al (2020) have stated that almost all cultural places in Sri Lanka have the least tourist attraction.

Apart from that there is plenty of research to facilitate destination management organizations and researchers to develop tourism loyalty, satisfaction, and image (Kim et al (2013), Aliman et al (2016)). There are a few studies that discuss experiential marketing and its effect on tourists' satisfaction and loyalty (Nazari et al. (2014), Aliman et al (2016)). Further, discussing the Sri Lankan context many researchers have highlighted that though every cultural place has enough spiritual, peaceful, pleasant, historical value with ancient and indigenous knowledge, and other facilities for tourists, tourist attractions are not considerable. (Udurawana et al 2020)

Silva, (2002), Wanninayake, and Chovancova, (2012), Rathnayaka (2017) and Udurawana (2018), have explained tourists' satisfaction and/or destination image, tourists' destination loyalty behaviour, and destination marketing from different perspectives but none of these studies have examined the cultural places in an experiential marketing viewpoint. Hence, it was evident that existing literature does not have provision to explain the contribution of experiential marketing to sustainable tourism. Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of experiential marketing on sustainable tourism through the mediating effect of destination image, tourists satisfaction and' destination loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Sustainable Tourism

In 2019, the World Tourism Organization explained that sustainable tourism happens when tourism facilitates the fulfilment of destinations' economic, social, and aesthetic needs while enriching their cultural integrity important ecological processes, biological variety, and life support systems. Further, Jamie Lisse (2018) has stated that if tourists visit places with a positive mindset, it makes a progressive impact on the economy of the place, society and the environment. Therefore, the tourists' mindset is used to understand the concept of sustainable tourism, where tourist behaviour at the destinations add value for their people, places and profits. Therefore, Pulido-Fernández, Juan and López-Sánchez (2014) have analyzed the tourists' perceptions to measure sustainable tourism, where they used perceived sustainable tourism instead of sustainable tourism. Udurawana et al. (2021), on the other hand, have focused on perceived sustainable tourism to measure the effect of destination loyalty on sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism has three dimensions namely, economic, social, and environmental wellbeing (Jamie Lisse (2018)). Jamie Lisse (2018), Sun, Kim, and Kim, (2014), and Udurawana et al (2021) have measured perceived sustainable tourism with the three components mentioned above.

Experiential Marketing

Experiential marketing also known as live marketing, event marketing or engagement marketing is explained as the 'living' impression formed by people's involvement with products, services, and businesses (Haeckel et al 2003). Schmitt, (1999), Oliver (1999), Pine and Gilmore, (1999), have contributed to identification of experiential marketing where they argued that experiential marketing has the ability to produce an unforgettable memory in the consumer mind. Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate are the five factors of experiential marketing. Many scholars including Schmitt (1999), Schmitt (1999b), Brakus et al. (2009), Fournier et al. (2001), Gentile et al, (2007), and Schmitt (2010) have explained the experiential marketing with reference to these five factors. Udurawana and Wanninayake (2021), too used these five factors of experiential marketing as five dimensions with their studies.

Tourists Loyalty

Hawkins et al. (1995) have identified that consumer loyalty happens when consumers are continually involved with their particular products or services.

In tourism, a place or destination is called as a product, whereas Yoon and Uysal (2005) and Nazari et al. (2014) revealed that destination loyalty happens when tourists' have an intention to recommend the places or destinations to themselves and other visitors.

Hongmei et al. (2014), Nazari et al. (2014), Chenini (2017), Sangpikul (2018), and Udurawana (2018) have explored tourists loyalty behaviour in Sri Lanka, where the researchers have used recommending to others, intention to revisit, spending more at the destination, spending more time at the destination, and discussing positive movement of the places were the dimensions of tourists' destination loyalty.

Destination Image

Kim et al (2013) have defined destination image as a totality of impressions, beliefs, ideas, expectations and feelings accumulated toward a place over time. Tasci et al., (2007) have explained the destination image as an interactive system of tourists' feelings, sentiments, thoughts, and imaginings explaining a destination.

Most researchers have used the attributes of a destination to measure the visitors image (Brakus et al. (2009), but Aliman et al (2016) and Udurawana and Wanninayake (2021) have used attractions, amenities, accessibility, activities, ancillary services, and available packages as the dimensions of the destination image.

Tourists Satisfaction

Oliver (1997) has defined satisfaction as an assessment of, or a judgement about, a consumption event or its essential parts. Severt et al. (2007) have defined tourists' satisfaction as the extent of the tourists' fulfillment of pleasure, which depends on the experience about a product, or service feature that fulfills the tourists' desires, expectations and wants in association with the trip.

Researchers have also measured tourists' satisfaction by considering the visitors' feelings about the facilities and the experience they got at the destination. Many researchers including Udurawana and Wanninayake (2020), Aliman et al (2016), Song et al (2012), and Prayag and Ryan (2012) have considered destination fees, freedom from hazards, secure places, attraction, quality of services, hospitality and experience as the dimensions of tourists' satisfaction.

The Impact of Experiential Marketing

There are plenty of researchers that have tested the impact of experiential marketing and tourists' loyalty behavior. Stratigea and Hatzichristos (2011), Udurawana and Wanninayake (2021), R. Öztürk (2015), and Cohen et al (2014), have stated that experiential marketing has significantly affected tourists destination loyalty through the mediating effect of tourists satisfaction and destination image. Udurawana et al (2020) have stated that there are only a few studies to explain the loyalty effects has on sustainable tourism.

Further, Masarrat (2012) has explained how tourists' loyalty facilitates sustainability. They have explained that if a region has an attractive capacity, it means that the region has attracted more and more tourists who have contributed to the region's economic and social wellbeing through spending more time, money, and spreading positive discussions.

The researcher developed the research model for this study considering the model developed by Udurawana and Wanninayake (2021). They have used the following table to describe experiential marketing, tourists' satisfaction, destination image and destination loyalty.

Table 1: Dimensions of Variables

Variable/ Factors	Indicators	References	
Experiential marketing	SENSE	Sight, sound, touch, taste and smell.	Schmitt (1999), Oliver (1999), Pine and Gilmore. (1999). Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982). Brakus et al. (2009), Fournier et al. (2001), Gentile et al. (2007)
	FEEL	Moods, emotions, feel secure, feel comfortable, feel safe in your transaction	
	THINK	Problem Solving (find more information). creative thinking, arouse interactions, surprising, intrigue, curiosity (interested), willing to share, involve	
	ACT	Stay, behavior, social interaction, Adopt lifestyles, motivation, inspiration, emotions, recommendation	
	RELATE	Position, stimulates relationships, social attention, associations, memories, connection, engage cultural values, group feeling,	

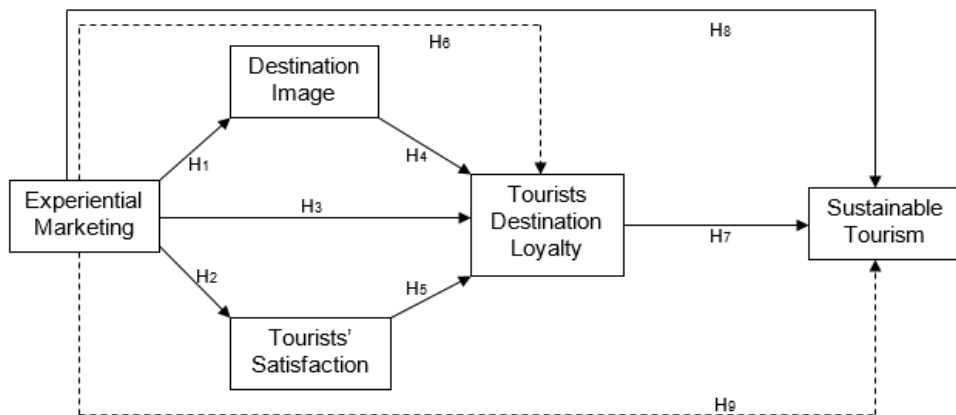
Designation Image	Infrastructure, Environmental attraction, Excited natural and cultural resources, Reasonable charging system, Appreciable social environment, Entertainment, Safety feelings, Peaceful perception	Wijaya (2013), Aaker (1996), Crompton, (1979). Brakus et al. (2009), Artuger et al. (2013), Ranjbarian et al. (2017)
Loyalty	Stay more times, Repurchase/revisit, extent positive word-of-mouth, recommend the place to others, long term relationship with, spent more, valued places	Yoon & Uysal (2005), Sangpikul, (2018), Zhang et al. (2014). Chenini (2017). Piotr (2004)
Satisfaction	Freedom, Fair Chargers, Enough Security, Exciting Attraction, Quality Service, Hospitality, And Thrilled Experience	Aliman et al. (2016), Song et al (2012), Prayag & Ryan (2011), and Jawaria et al. (2010)

Source: Udurawana and Wanninayake (2021)

Negruşa et al. (2015) and Campón-Cerro et al. (2017) also discussed the importance of loyalty towards sustainability, where they explored how tourists' loyalty to a destination has contributed to enriching the economy, society and environmental values of the destination. Udurawana et al (2020) have stated that tourists' destination loyalty has significantly contributed to enhancing sustainable tourism. Lee and Xue (2020) have identified the value of destination image and loyalty that have facilitated to the development of a sustainable destination.

These relationships among the variables have directed the following research model, where the researcher considers identifying the impact of experiential marketing on sustainable tourism through the mediating effect of destination image, tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. The dotted line of the figure represents the indirect effect of the variable.

Figure 1: Research Model with Hypotheses



Source: Developed by the Researcher

The following nine hypotheses have been developed based on the above research model.

- H1 Destination image has been significantly affected by experiential marketing
- H2 Tourists satisfaction has been significantly affected by experiential marketing
- H3 Tourists' destination loyalty is significantly affected by the experiential marketing
- H4 Tourists destination loyalty is significantly affected by the destination image
- H5 Tourists' destination loyalty is significantly affected by the tourists' satisfaction
- H6 Tourists' destination loyalty is significantly affected by experiential marketing through the mediating effect of destination image and or tourists satisfaction
- H7 Tourists destination loyalty significantly affected on sustainable tourism
- H8 Sustainable tourism has been significantly affected by tourists' destination loyalty

- H9 Experiential marketing has significantly affected on sustainable tourism through the mediating effect of destination image, tourists satisfaction and destination loyalty.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study's philosophy was positivism and aligned with the deductive approach. As an explanatory study, the researcher developed the study under a survey strategy with a cross-sectional time horizon under the mono method quantitative methodology. The researcher conveniently selected 513 international tourists as a representative sample from all tourists who visited Sri Lanka in 2019. Tourists' preferences and attitudes on cultural experiences were collected through a standard questionnaire and data were analyzed through the AMOS software.

The validity of the constructs was tested through Average Variance Extracted, (AVE) and Construct Reliability (CR). The reliability was tested through Cronbach's Alpha. All the variables were in the acceptable region.

Table 2: Construct Validity and Mean Values for the Variables

Variable	Dimension	Alpha	AVE	CR	No of Items	Mean
Experiential Marketing	Sense	0.736	0.65070	0.98225	5	2.456
	Feel	0.708	0.61040	0.96574	5	3.240
	Think	0.700	0.86468	0.96841	8	3.245
	Act	0.793	0.69193	0.96644	8	3.352
	Relate	0.729	0.60906	0.87964	8	2.857
Destination Image		0.803	0.60006	0.89792	8	2.881
Tourists Satisfaction		0.737	0.52291	0.96817	7	2.790
Destination Loyalty		0.759	0.53003	0.95787	7	2.470
Sustainable Tourism	Social Wellbeing	0.743	0.50236	0.96381	8	3.314
	Economic Wellbeing	0.735	0.52555	0.98215	7	2.742
	Environmental Wellbeing	0.838	0.57274	0.97990	8	2.807
Overall Model		0.814			79	

Source: Developed by the Researcher

All the mean values were located in 2 to 3 range, which means that tourists have moderately agreed to the experience of the cultural place.

To test the hypothesis, the researcher analysed the data through the following AMOS diagram, where the following effects were explored.

The below table has shown the direct effect of one variable has been on another through the R-value and its significance.

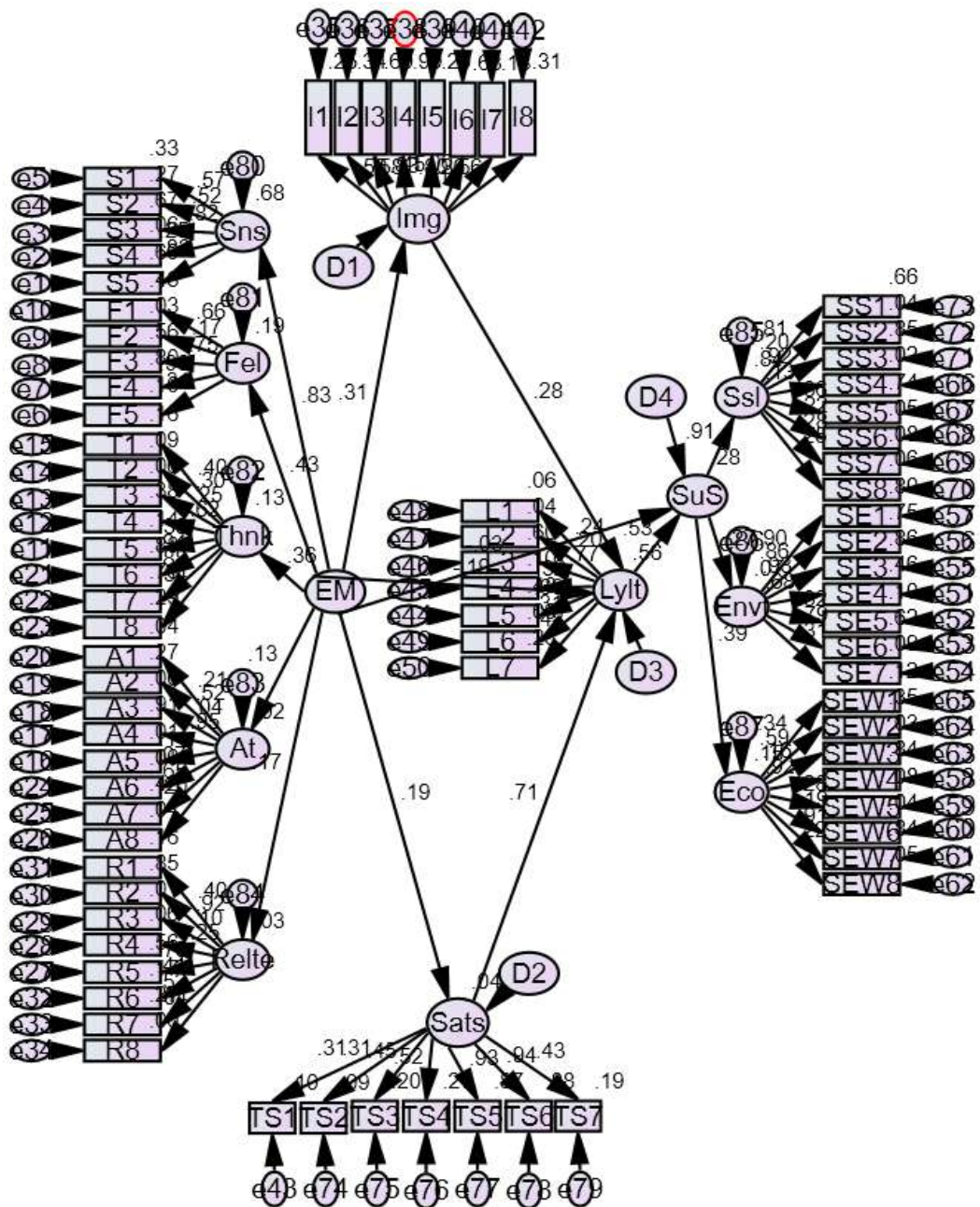
Table 3: Results Summary: Path diagram of the Structural Model

Predicted Variable	Effect	Predictor Variable	R ²	P
Destination Image	<---	Experiential Marketing	0.312	0.000
Tourists' Satisfaction	<---	Experiential Marketing	0.187	0.000
Destination Loyalty	<---	Destination Image	0.277	0.005
Destination Loyalty	<---	Tourists' Satisfaction	0.710	0.000
Destination Loyalty	<---	Experiential Marketing	-0.188	0.094
Sustainable Tourism	<---	Destination Loyalty	0.533	0.000
Sustainable Tourism	<---	Experiential Marketing	-0.031	0.588

Source: Developed by the Researcher

According to the results given in the table, experiential marketing significantly and positively affected destination image (H1 – Accepted) and tourists' satisfaction (H2 – Accepted). Tourists' destination loyalty has been significantly and positively affected by the destination image (H4 – Accepted) and tourists' satisfaction (H5 – Accepted). Experiential marketing did not contribute to changing destination loyalty (H3 – Rejected). However, if the destination expects destination loyalty from experiential marketing there should be a mediating contribution by tourists' satisfaction and image, it means there is a mediating effect from satisfaction and image to upgrade the destination loyalty (H6 – Accepted). Hypothesis 7 was accepted as tourists' destination loyalty has significantly affected on sustainable tourism. However, the main hypothesis developed to explain the main objective of the study was rejected (H8) as the direct effect of experiential marketing was not significant on sustainable tourism. Then researcher explored that there was an indirect effect among the variable. He found that experiential marketing has a weak positive but significant effect (27%) on sustainable tourism (H9 – Accepted) through the mediating effect of tourists satisfaction, destination image, and destination loyalty.

Figure 2: AMOS Diagram for the Research Model



Source: Developed by the Researcher

The following table explains the indirect effect among the variables.

Table 4: Standardized Indirect Effect

Predicted Variable	Indirect Effect	Predictor Variable	Coefficient
Destination Loyalty	<---	Experiential marketing	0.219
Sustainable Tourism	<---	Experiential marketing	0.270

Source: Developed by the Researcher

It is obvious that destination loyalty has significantly affected (53% - Table 3) sustainable tourism. However, sustainable tourism has also been slightly affected (27%) by experiential marketing through the mediating effect of tourists' satisfaction, destination image and loyalty.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has facilitated the achievement of all the objectives and testing of all hypotheses. Results proved that tourists' destination loyalty occurs when experiential marketing has the capacity to upgrade tourists' satisfaction and destination image. Further, experiential marketing has a positive impact on destination image and satisfaction. Moreover, destination loyalty has strongly effected on creating sustainable tourism in cultural places in Sri Lanka. Thus, the researcher achieved his main research objective, i.e., proving that “experiential marketing has positively affected sustainable marketing through the mediating effect of tourists satisfaction, destination image and destination loyalty. Therefore, Sri Lanka Tourists Development Authority (SLTDA) and Destination Management Officers (DMO) must initiate programmes to develop the cultural places with outstanding experiences that are able to appeal to all types of senses of the visitors. If they expect tourism sustainability only through developing of the areas under experiential marketing, it is not fruitful. As the results of the study have explained there is no direct impact of experiential marketing on sustainable tourism (H8 was rejected). Therefore, SLTDS and DMOs must discuss sustainable tourism through experiential marketing after clearly identifying the visitors' satisfaction, image and loyalty. One of the visitors from Singapore stated that after seeing the history of Ruwanwaliseya, “If this dagaba was protected as it was at finding around eighteen century without developing, I would be delighted. Not only that there are so many common dagabs without different images. Therefore seeing one dagab is enough rather than visiting other

dagabs". Therefore, we must develop the cultural places in Sri Lanka especially considering visitors' image and satisfaction.

Hence, it is best for DMOs to develop cultural areas giving considering the five senses of experiential marketing such as sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioural, and relational perceptions. Further, SLTDA and DMOs need to develop the existing programmes and introduce more exciting activities considering the destination image and satisfaction.

Also, considering visitors' loyalty DMOs should improve quality infrastructures, certify visitor security, and arrange quality food-lodging-financing facilities for visitors. If a destination introduces more entertaining and adventure opportunities using the environment around cultural areas, and improve nightlife for them to spend more time, generating loyalty and sustainability behaviour can be done effectively. Further, if there are jogging, fishing, boat riding, water- games, tree houses, hiking, and village tourism using paddy fields tourists will be encouraged to spend more time at these cultural locations. Apart from these, most of the places need to have Wi-Fi facilities, 24*7 operation, and good social well-being the destination image and satisfaction in the cultural areas can be increased.

Finally, the findings highlight that there should be unity among all the stakeholders of cultural places to promote and keep tourists at these destinations. There should be common policies, practices and procedures when dealing with tourists' within a cultural destination while maintaining its unique recognition and simultaneously offer to diversified services. It means that cultural places must maintain at least one solution for everyone, obeying the concept 'something for everyone under greater hospitality' (Udurawana et al 2020) to offer a memorable experience for its visitors.

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