Unveiling Destination Appeal: How Image Shapes Visitor Behaviour?

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Abstract

The study aims to develop and test a theoretical model that examines the relationship between destination branding, tourist satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. Specifically, the model explores the impact of various components of destination image (cognitive, affective, unique, and overall) on tourists' satisfaction, which in turn influences their behavioral intentions such as intention to revisit and intention to recommend. To gather empirical evidence, a survey was conducted with a sample of 212 international tourists who visited the Mirissa regional destination in Sri Lanka. The respondents were asked to rate Mirissa as a travel destination using a 5-point Likert scale, focusing on cognitive image, affective image, unique image, and overall image. The results of the study support the notion that tourists' behavioral intentions are positively influenced by their satisfaction with the destination. This satisfaction, in turn, is directly influenced by the unique and overall image of the destination. It was found that tourists' satisfaction plays a critical role as a mediator between the different components of destination image and their behavioral intentions. Furthermore, the study revealed that tourist satisfaction is more influenced by the intention to revisit rather than the intention to recommend the destination to others. Additionally, the unique image of the destination had the second-largest impact on the formation of tourist satisfaction, according to the overall evaluations. Overall, these findings shed light on the importance of destination branding and its influence on tourists' satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The study provides valuable insights for destination marketers and managers seeking to enhance their destination's appeal and cultivate positive visitor experiences.

Keywords: Cognitive image, Affective image, Unique image, overall image, Satisfaction, behavioral intentions

01. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the Study

Tourism plays a vital role in global trade as it serves as a highly effective and straightforward means to generate foreign currency, create local employment opportunities, and expand market capabilities (Alcocer et al., 2019). Consequently, understanding destination competitiveness is of paramount importance. According to (Saquib,2019), destinations are at the core of tourism and

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hold tremendous significance. Destinations across the world possess unique names, cultures, histories, images, and environments, among other factors. However, the focus should not solely be on the components of their identity, but rather on the deserved constructive image, reputation, inherent value, and perceived attractiveness of destination brands (Rakita & Sipragic, 2014). Hence, the process of destination brand building assumes great significance. (Fierre ,2016) highlights that the concept of destination branding differs from product and service branding. This implies that a satisfied customer can greatly contribute to destination branding through their positive experiences. As competition, product similarity, and substitutability in tourism markets continue to grow, destination branding has emerged as a standardized and dominant marketing tool (Usakali & Baloglu, 2011). The primary objectives of destination or place brand marketers revolve around promoting positive brand experiences (Marzano and Scott, 2009; Qu et al., 2011; Singh and Mehraj, 2018). However, the concept of destination branding is relatively new. Lam (Dioko, 2015) suggests that destination branding involves aligning the projected destination image with visitors' experiences. Thus, understanding visitors' perceptions of the destination becomes crucial in developing a stronger brand. The perceptions of tourists and marketers regarding the features or attractions offered by a destination are collectively referred to as destination image (Hallmann et al., 2013). The image of a destination plays a pivotal role in tourists' decision-making (Alcocer et al., 2019). It has been identified as a relevant factor in a customer's final evaluation of a service. However, 'image' is a complex concept that is challenging to define. In practice, the image comprises various elements that extend beyond the perception of any individual. It is characterized by a high level of subjectivity, encompassing both cognitive aspects (beliefs) and affective aspects (feelings) of such subjectivity (Castro et al., 2007). Therefore, it is imperative to further study destination brand image at the individual level. Overall, recognizing the significance of tourism, understanding destination competitiveness, and effectively managing destination branding is crucial for destinations seeking to attract visitors and differentiate themselves in the increasingly competitive tourism industry.

1.2. Research Gap

The research has identified two significant gaps that have not been thoroughly explored in empirical and academic research. These gaps pertain to the impact of tourists' overall image on their intention to revisit and recommend a destination, as well as the role of tourist satisfaction as a mediator in the tourism context. The present study aims to address these gaps by testing the inclusion of overall image as a component of destination image and examining the moderating role of tourist satisfaction between destination image and conative image (future behavior of tourists). Firstly, this study emphasizes the importance of affective image, which is in contrast to previous research that has predominantly focused on cognitive image. By highlighting the significance of the affective image, this study contributes to the existing literature. Secondly, this study explores the unique image dimension, which has been largely neglected in previous studies. The unique image of a destination will be analyzed, and its impact on future behaviors will be further examined, with the mediating role of tourist satisfaction. It is essential for academics to continue investigating this image component in relation to other tourist destinations to fill these gaps in knowledge. By conducting further research, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the overall image, unique image, and tourist satisfaction on tourists' behavioral intentions. This will contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of destination branding and the factors that influence tourists' decisions and behaviors.

02. Research Problem

The concept of destination branding is a relatively recent development, yet it has become widely adopted by countries aiming to maximize their appeal to tourists, particularly in underdeveloped destinations. An extensive review of the literature on tourism branding demonstrates its status as a leading marketing strategy for destination promotion. According to (Zhang,2015), while brand attributes and features influence consumers' decisions, it is ultimately the brand image that determines their choices. Although Zhang's study primarily focuses on goods and services, its findings can be applied to destination branding as well. Consequently, this research directs its attention to the concept of the destination image. Sri Lanka is experiencing significant growth in the tourism industry, boasting numerous highly attractive tourist destinations. However, many of these destinations remain underdeveloped, lacking a comprehensive branding strategy. Consequently, it becomes crucial to address this matter of concern when marketing these destinations effectively.

2.1. Research Questions

The study aims to investigate several key questions regarding the relationship between different dimensions of a tourist's image and their satisfaction, as well as the impact of tourist satisfaction on their intentions towards Mirissa:

1. How does a tourist's cognitive image influence their satisfaction?
2. How does a tourist's affective image affect their satisfaction?
3. How does a tourist's unique image impact their satisfaction?
4. How does a tourist's overall image shape their satisfaction?
5. What is the impact of tourist satisfaction on their intention to revisit Mirissa?
6. How does tourist satisfaction influence their intention to recommend Mirissa to others?
7. What role does tourist satisfaction play as a mediator in these relationships?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to shed light on the complex dynamics between a tourist's image, their satisfaction, and their behavioral intentions towards Mirissa. Understanding these relationships is crucial for destination managers and marketers to develop effective strategies that enhance tourist satisfaction and drive positive intentions towards the destination.

2.2 Objectives of the study

2.2.1 Primary objective

- To examine the relationship of tourist’s Cognitive, Affective, Unique and Overall images with tourist’s satisfaction.

2.2.2 Sub objectives

- To examine the relationship of tourist’s satisfaction in between tourist’s intention to revisit and tourist’s intention to recommend.
- To examine the mediating impact of tourist’s satisfaction.

2.3 Setting Hypothesis

H1: Tourists' cognitive image has a positive impact on tourist satisfaction.
H2: Tourists' affective image has a positive impact on tourist satisfaction.
H3: A tourist's unique image has a positive impact on tourist satisfaction.
H4: Tourists' overall image has a positive impact on tourist satisfaction.
H5: Tourists' overall image has a positive impact on tourists' revisit intention.
H6: Tourists' overall image has a positive impact on tourists' revisit intention.
H7: Tourists' overall image has an indirect effect on tourists' revisit intention mediated by tourist satisfaction.
H8: The tourist's overall image has an indirect effect on the tourist's recommendation intention mediated by the tourist's satisfaction.

03. Literature Review

3.1. Tourist's Destination Image

The concept of destination image encompasses a collection of impressions, ideas, expectations, and emotional thoughts that an individual holds about a particular place (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004). It serves as a comprehensive evaluative representation of both intangible and verifiable functional aspects associated with a destination (Lin & Kuo, 2017). (Cai,2002) discovered that the image is regarded as the most crucial element in destination branding, defined as the perception of a place reflected by the associations retained in the memories of tourists (p:723). Among the various existing models, Garner's 1993 "Image Formation Process" stands as the most comprehensive one to date in the literature. While it serves as an image-building framework, it also closely resembles a model of destination branding (Cai, 2002). Although not extensively explored by scholars, (Qu et al.,2011) assert that the destination image aligns with the pre-existing concept of destination branding. In essence, the foundation of destination branding lies in developing a positive destination image that effectively identifies and distinguishes the destination through the strategic selection of consistent brand elements.

3.2. Tourist's Cognitive Image

According to (Qu et al., 2011). the cognitive image can be defined as the beliefs and knowledge individuals possess about the attributes of a destination (p:473). Furthermore, (Qu et al.,2011) describe the cognitive image as encompassing the beliefs and knowledge pertaining to an object, while affective evaluations refer to the feelings associated with that object. However, it is worth noting that most studies predominantly focus on the cognitive evaluation of destination image (Qu et al., 2011). For instance, (Stylidis et al.,2017) reported that tourists tend to develop emotional responses toward a destination after they have cognitively evaluated it.

3.3. Tourist's Affective Image

As per (Stylidis et al.,2017), the affective image refers to the emotional responses and feelings an individual holds towards a destination (p:185). It is noteworthy that the affective image plays a significant role in shaping tourists' perception of the overall destination image (Moreno-Gil et al., 2012). This component serves as a reflection of their emotional connection and sentiments towards a particular destination (Chen et al., 2016). In alignment with a body of research, (Stylidis et al.,2017) suggest that people's affective evaluation of a place is greatly influenced by their knowledge about that specific location.

3.4. Tourist's Unique Image

In their study, (Lin and Kuo,2017) put forth a definition of the unique image as a composite construct in which each distinct element contributes to the overall holistic uniqueness of a destination, as opposed to a reflective construct where each element simply reflects the destination's overall uniqueness (pg. 15). Considering the tourism industry's high level of rivalry and relatively undifferentiated supply, (Lin and Kuo,2017) argue that the unique image of a tourism destination should be recognized as a crucial brand association that has a substantial impact on shaping the overall image of the destination brand. It is crucial to acknowledge that in today's dynamic market environment, constant changes and adaptations are necessary for sustainable success.

3.5. Tourist's Overall Image

(Gartner,1993) synthesized previous research studies and proposed that the destination image is composed of three distinct yet interconnected components: cognitive, affective, and conative (p. 193). Building upon this framework, (Baloglu and McCleary,1999a) describe the overall image of a place as being formed by two key components: cognitive and affective evaluations. Furthermore, (Ekinci and Hosany,2006) assert in their study that a tourism destination is perceived as a fusion of individual products and experiences that collectively shape the overall visitor experience of the area.

3.6. Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction is commonly defined as the extent to which an individual perceives a consumption experience as generating positive emotions (Phillips et al., 2013). It represents a comprehensive evaluation of the overall experience by consumers. Within the context of tourism, satisfaction refers to the general sense of contentment that a tourist experiences after visiting a destination, where their travel expectations and needs have been fulfilled (Phillips et al., 2013).

3.7. Tourist's Intention to Revisit

According to (Qu et al.,2011), the intentions to revisit a specific destination and engage in positive word-of-mouth communication are regarded as the most significant behavioral outcomes in studies related to destination image and post-consumption behavior. The intention to revisit has received extensive attention in tourism research due to its indication of customer loyalty and commitment to a destination.

3.8. Tourist's Intention to Recommend

(Bigne et al.,2001) highlight that individuals with a positive perception of a destination are more likely to recommend it to others. The findings of (Qu et al.,2011) support this notion, demonstrating that destination image directly influences the act of recommending a destination. In the context of tourism, where consumption is relatively infrequent, it becomes even more crucial to emphasize the positive impact of the overall destination image on recommendations.

04. Research Methodology

4.1. Conceptual Framework

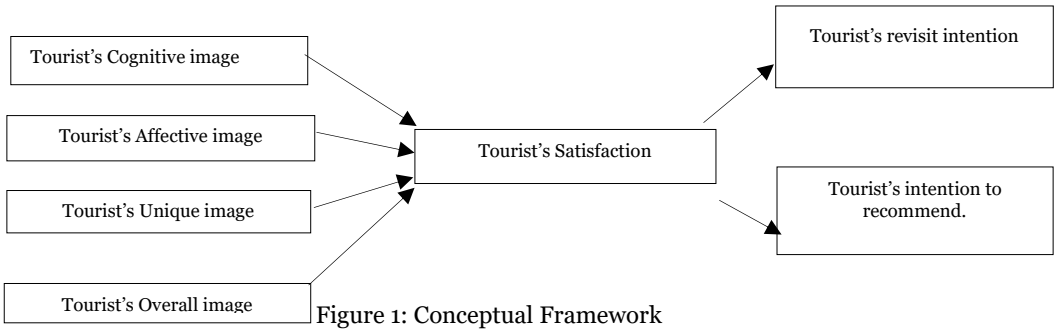

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

4.2. Sample

This study focuses on foreign tourists who visited Mirissa as the sampling unit. The sampling frame, as defined by the researcher, is "a representation of the elements of the target population that consists of a list or set of directions for identifying the target population" (Sekaran,2003). (p. 359). To identify the target population, the researcher utilized the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority's annual report of 2020. Additionally, the researcher gathered tourist information from guest details of hotels in Mirissa to further refine the target population. The sample size for this study is 212 (n=212). Convenience sampling and Snowball sampling methods were employed as the sampling techniques.

4.3. Instrument

The survey questionnaire utilized in this study comprised four major sections. The first section focused on capturing information about the individual travel behavior of the respondents. It included items such as the number of times they visited Mirissa, the timing of their last visit, the number of overnights spent in Mirissa, and the size of their travel group.

The second section was designed to assess the respondents' cognitive, affective, unique, and overall image perceptions of Mirissa as a travel destination. To generate a comprehensive list of cognitive image perceptions, the method employed by Qu et al. (2011) was adopted. Respondents were asked to rate Mirissa as a travel destination on 28 attributes using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The measurement of the affective image of the destination utilized affective image scales developed by Russell et al. (1981) and adapted from Qu et al. (2011). The scale included four bipolar scales: Arousing-Sleepy, Pleasant-Unpleasant, Exciting-Gloomy, and Relaxing-Distressing. A 7-point semantic differential scale was employed, with the positive poles assigned to smaller values (e.g., 1 = arousing, 7 = sleepy).

The third section aimed to identify the attributes that differentiate Mirissa from neighboring destinations (Hikkaduwa, Weligama, Tangalle, and Galle) as a travel destination. A total of 12 items were derived from Qu et al.'s (2011) image study, and respondents rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Additionally, the scale for measuring the overall image was adapted from Qu et al. (2011), with respondents asked to

rate their perception of the overall image of Mirissa on a 7-point scale ranging from very negative (1) to very positive (7).

The fourth section aimed to identify the attributes that contribute to tourist satisfaction, as well as their intention to revisit and recommend Mirissa as a destination. Satisfaction was measured using a single item adapted from Barnes et al.'s (2014) study, with respondents rating their satisfaction levels on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Two additional questions assessed the respondents' intention to revisit Mirissa and their intention to recommend it to others, both on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = most unlikely, 5 = most likely). Demographic questions were included in the final section of the questionnaire.

4.4. Data Analysis

After the collection of primary and secondary data via questionnaires and relevant publications, all the data was meticulously tabulated and computed to analyze the relationships between the selected variables. Special attention was given to exploring the connections between the dependent variable and the independent variables, as well as examining the mediating effect of the moderating variable. To ensure reliability, factor loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were utilized as measures. Convergent and discriminant validity were assessed to ensure the validity of the data. The structural model was employed to evaluate the inter-relationships between the variables and to uncover significant associations and patterns. For data analysis, SMART PLS, a widely recognized and robust software tool, was employed. SMART PLS is a powerful statistical analysis tool that allows for the examination of complex relationships and the assessment of structural models. It provides reliable results and facilitates the analysis of both reflective and formative measurement models. By utilizing SMART PLS, the study was able to effectively analyze the collected data and derive meaningful insights regarding the relationships and interactions among the variables under investigation.

05. Data Analysis

5.1. Data Analysis and Results

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was chosen as the preferred approach for analyzing the complex interactions among multiple variables in this study's model. The SEM framework enabled a comprehensive examination of the relationships proposed in the model. The analysis proceeded in two stages. Firstly, the measurement model was estimated to evaluate the reliability and validity of the various variables included in the study. This step ensured that the measurement instruments used accurately captured the intended constructs. Secondly, the structural model was estimated to test the hypothesized relationships between the different variables, providing insights into the causal pathways and direct effects within the model. By employing SEM, this study was able to rigorously assess the relationships and interactions among the variables, contributing to a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon.

06. Results and Discussion

Table 1 6.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Constructs – Final Model

Constructs & Indicators	Standardized factor loadings (t-value)	Composite Reliability /AVE
Tourist's Cognitive image		0.956/0.521
Quality of experiences		
• Easy access to the area	0.662(12.719)	

• Reasonable cost of hotels/restaurants	0.728(17.804)	
• Lots of open space	0.599(10.596)	
Touristic attractions		
• Local cuisine	0.666(19.712)	
• State/theme parks	0.662(19.957)	
• Good place for children/family	0.642(14.677)	
• Welcome centers	0.796(36.926)	
• Good weather	0.722(19.882)	
Environment and infrastructure		
• Clean/unspoiled environment	0.728(17.990)	
• Infrastructure	0.768(32.067)	
• Availability of travel information	0.631(18.972)	
• Easy access to the area	0.765(27.829)	
• Safe & Secure environment	0.770(28.124)	
Entertainment/outdoor activities		
• Entertainment	0.795(30.805)	
• Nightlife	0.806(34.832)	
• Water sports	0.752(33.885)	
• A wide variety of outdoor activities	0.775(36.466)	
Cultural Traditions		
• Native Sinhala culture	0.729(20.647)	
• A taste of beach boys life and culture	0.690(18.637)	
• Cultural Attractions	0.707(21.217)	
Tourist's Affective Image		0.855/0.596
• Arousing - sleepy	0.794(20.830)	
• Pleasant - Unpleasant	0.683(4.880)	
• Exciting - Gloomy	0.788(19.536)	
• Relaxing - Distressing	0.816(11.721)	
Tourist's Unique Image		0.943/0.582
Native Sri Lankan/Natural environment		
• Native Sri Lankan/western cultures	0.817(31.772)	
• Friendly and helpful local people	0.654(19.357)	
• Scenery and natural wonders	0.807(31.336)	
• Restful and relaxing atmosphere	0.801(36.993)	
• Clean environment	0.721(18.634)	
Tourist's Appealing destination		
• Appealing as a travel destination.	0.816(30.881)	
• Entertainment/nightlife	0.770(25.904)	
• A wide choice of outdoor activities	0.754(21.510)	
• Shopping	0.729(20.7)	
• Safe and secure environment	0.760(26.824)	
Local attractions		
• Lots of tourist attractions	0.843(39.021)	
• Cultural/historical attractions	0.617(10.357)	
Tourist's Overall Image		0.935/0.745
• Mirissa has quality infrastructure (roads, airport and/or utilities).	0.695(10.529)	
• Mirissa has attractive artificial & natural attractions. (Shopping facilities, natural attractions, scenery, climate, cultural events)	0.838(27.765)	
• Mirissa offers good value for your travel money.	0.933(94.216)	
• My perception about the overall image of the destination is?	0.932(78.365)	
• How do you rate your overall image about the destination?	0.896(84.889)	
Tourist's Satisfaction		0.932/0.774
• My stay on Mirissa has been quality.	0.831(30.557)	
• My satisfactions about the destination experience encourage me to revisit.	0.914(65.710)	
• Overall, staying in this tourist destination has been very valuable to me.	0.871(31.601)	
• My stay on Mirissa has been satisfactory.	0.901(58.273)	
Tourist's Intention to revisit		0.942/0.804

• You have recommended this destination to your friends/family/colleagues.	0.894(50.521)	
• The Satisfaction about the destination experience encourages me to revisit.	0.924(75.679)	
• Perceived attractiveness motivate me to revisit.	0.936(94.439)	
• I am likely to visit the city in the near future.	0.829(32.680)	
Tourist's Intention to recommend		0.950/0.863
• I would say positive things about Mirissa to others.	0.885(36.698)	
• I am likely to recommend the Mirissa to those who want advice on travel.	0.955(83.771)	
• I will recommend others to visit Mirissa.	0.945(74.741)	

With the acceptance of the overall model, it becomes crucial to evaluate each construct individually. This involves examining the indicator loadings for statistical significance and assessing the reliability and variance extracted for each construct. Firstly, for each variable, the t-values associated with their loadings were found to exceed the critical value at the 0.05 significance level (Hair et al., 1998). These results indicate that all variables were significantly related to their designated constructs, confirming the hypothesized relationships between indicators and constructs.

Next, the reliability and variance extracted measures for each construct were assessed to determine the adequacy of the chosen indicators in representing the constructs. The results, including the t-values and computations for each measurement, are presented in Table 1. Regarding reliability, four exogenous constructs, namely cognitive image (0.95), affective image (0.85), unique image (0.94), and overall image (0.93), surpass the suggested threshold of 0.70, thereby demonstrating acceptable levels of reliability. Furthermore, the reliability estimates for three constructs, supported by all significant t-values, provide evidence for the convergent validity of the items within each scale.

In terms of variance extracted, all three constructs, cognitive image, affective image, unique image, and overall image, either exceed or meet the threshold value of 0.50. These results indicate that a satisfactory portion of the variances in the observed variables is explained by their respective constructs.

Based on the findings presented in Table 2, the R^2 values provide insights into the explanatory power and in-sample predictive ability of the model (Shmueli & Koppius, 2011; Rigdon, 2012). R^2 represents the amount of variance explained in the endogenous constructs, indicating how much of the variation in the dependent variable can be accounted for by one or more independent variables. In this study, tourist satisfaction is influenced by two key factors: their unique image and overall image.

Table 2: Coefficient of Determination

Variable	R Square	R Square adjustment
Satisfaction	0.543	0.523
Intention to Revisit	0.689	0.686
Intention to Recommend	0.487	0.481

The R2 value for this relationship is 0.543, signifying that 54.3% of the variation in tourist satisfaction can be explained by their unique image and overall image. This suggests a substantial impact of these variables on shaping tourists' satisfaction levels. Furthermore,

tourists' intention to revisit the destination is influenced by their satisfaction, as indicated by an R^2 value of 0.689. This implies that 68.6% of the variation in tourists' intention to revisit can be explained by their level of satisfaction. This highlights the importance of satisfaction in determining tourists' willingness to return to Mirissa. Additionally, tourists' intention to recommend Mirissa to others is influenced by their satisfaction, resulting in an R^2 value of 0.487. This means that 48.7% of the variation in tourists' intention to recommend Mirissa can be explained by their level of satisfaction. These findings emphasize the significant role of satisfaction in shaping tourists' intention to promote Mirissa to others. Overall, the R^2 values provide valuable insights into the extent to which the independent variables explain the variations in the dependent variables, underscoring their significance in understanding tourist satisfaction, intention to revisit, and intention to recommend Mirissa.

5.2. Structural Model

The structural model in this research examines the relationships between various factors, including the tourist's cognitive image, affective image, unique image, overall image, satisfaction, intention to revisit, and intention to recommend. The $\beta = -0.253$, $t = 1.912$, and $p < 0.057$ indicate a relationship between the tourist's cognitive image and their satisfaction. The values between the tourist's affective image and satisfaction, based on three items, are $\beta = 0.001$, $t = 0.017$, and $p < 0.987$. Regarding the tourist's unique image and satisfaction, the values (based on three items) are $\beta = 0.477$, $t = 3.930$, and $p < 0.001$. Similarly, for the tourist's overall image and satisfaction (based on four items), the values are $\beta = 0.505$, $t = 4.168$, and $p < 0.001$.The relationship between tourist satisfaction and their intention to revisit (based on four items) is $\beta = 0.830$, $t = 20.828$, and $p < 0.001$. The relationship between tourist satisfaction and their intention to recommend (based on four items) is $\beta = 0.698$, $t = 9.685$, and $p < 0.001$. Additionally, the relationship between the tourist's overall image and their intention to revisit, mediated by satisfaction (based on four items), is $\beta = 0.419$, $t = 3.929$, and $p < 0.001$. Similarly, the relationship between the tourist's overall image and their intention to recommend, mediated by satisfaction (based on four items), is $\beta = 0.698$, $t = 9.685$, and $p < 0.001$.

Except for the cognitive image and affective image paths, all other paths proposed in the structural model were statistically significant and aligned with the expected positive direction. These findings provide evidence for the relationships between the variables in the model, highlighting the significant role of cognitive image, affective image, unique image, overall image, satisfaction, intention to revisit, and intention to recommend in the context of tourist behavior.Hypothesis 1, which proposed a positive impact of tourists' cognitive image on tourist satisfaction, was rejected (standardized coefficient = 0.253, t-value = 1.912, sig < 0.05). This finding suggests that cognitive image does not significantly influence tourist satisfaction, as measured in this study. Hypothesis 2, which explored the relationship between affective image and tourist satisfaction, was also rejected (standardized coefficient = 0.001, t-value = 0.017, sig < 0.987). This indicates that affective image does not have a significant effect on tourist satisfaction, as observed in the study. However, Hypothesis 3, testing the positive relationship between unique image and tourist satisfaction, failed to be rejected (standardized coefficient = 0.477, t-value = 3.930, sig > 0.001). This implies that the unique image of a destination positively influences the overall image, which in turn impacts tourist satisfaction. In line with expectations, Hypothesis 4 confirmed a positive relationship between overall image and tourist satisfaction (standardized coefficient = 0.555, t-value = 4.168, sig > 0.001). The results indicate that tourists' overall perception of a destination has a significant positive influence on their satisfaction. Among the variables studied, the overall image was found to have the strongest effect on tourist satisfaction, followed by the unique image.Hypothesis 5 tested the positive

relationship between tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit (standardized coefficient = 0.830, t-value = 20.828, sig > 0.001). The results confirmed that tourist satisfaction has a positive influence on their intention to revisit the destination. Similarly, Hypothesis 6 examined the positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and intention to recommend (standardized coefficient = 0.698, t-value = 9.685, sig > 0.001). The results supported the notion that tourist satisfaction positively influences their intention to recommend the destination to others. These recent findings provide valuable insights into the relationships among cognitive image, affective image, unique image, overall image, tourist satisfaction, and intentions to revisit and recommend. The results highlight the importance of overall image and unique image in shaping tourist satisfaction, as well as the significant role of satisfaction in influencing intentions for revisiting and recommending the destination.

This study aimed to test an integrated model exploring the relationships between various components of destination image (cognitive image, affective image, unique image, and overall image), tourist satisfaction, and behavioral intentions (intention to revisit and intention to recommend) among foreign tourists in the Mirissa tourism destination. The findings of the study can be summarized as follows: The proposed image model demonstrated applicability to foreign tourists in Mirissa, with the exception of cognitive and affective image components, which did not significantly influence tourist satisfaction. Tourist unique image and overall image evaluations were found to be important predictors of tourist satisfaction. Tourist satisfaction was identified as a mediator between the components of destination image (overall image) and behavioral intentions (intention to revisit and intention to recommend). The unique image and overall image components positively influenced tourist satisfaction, with the overall image having the strongest effect.

There was no significant relationship found between cognitive image or affective image evaluations and tourist satisfaction. The R2 value indicated that 54.3% of the variation in tourist satisfaction could be explained by the unique image and overall image, while 68.6% of the variation in intention to revisit and 48.7% of the variation in intention to recommend could be explained by tourist satisfaction. Tourist satisfaction positively influenced both intention to revisit and the intention to recommend. There was a positive indirect effect from the overall image component to both intention to recommend and intention to revisit, mediated by tourist satisfaction. The study highlights that the proposed model, which includes unique and overall image components, can be applied to foreign tourists in Mirissa. It challenges the focus on cognitive and affective components in previous destination branding models, providing insights into the image formation process. The study also emphasizes the importance of considering the unique and overall image evaluations of stakeholders when planning and promoting tourist destinations.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the understanding of destination image and consumer behavior by revealing the significance of tourist satisfaction as a mediator. It establishes that unique and overall images are antecedents to tourist satisfaction, shedding light on the multidimensional nature of destination images and the need to consider these evaluations. The findings also highlight the influential role of tourist satisfaction in destination selection and behavioral intentions. The study adds to the existing knowledge by uncovering the varying degrees of the effect of different image components on tourist satisfaction, with an overall image having the strongest influence. It also reveals the mediating role of tourist satisfaction in the relationship between destination image components and behavioral intentions. The findings are consistent with previous research regarding the indirect relationship between destination image, tourist satisfaction, and behavioral intentions, as well as the positive

relationship between satisfaction and loyalty intention. These results align with studies that emphasize the importance of measuring customer satisfaction and its role in relationship marketing**.** This study contributes to the tourism theory and consumer behavior field by validating the proposed image model and shedding light on image formation, the role of satisfaction as a mediator, and the significance of unique and overall image evaluations. The study emphasizes the importance of considering the images of stakeholders in destination planning and provides insights for developing marketing strategies targeting foreign tourists.

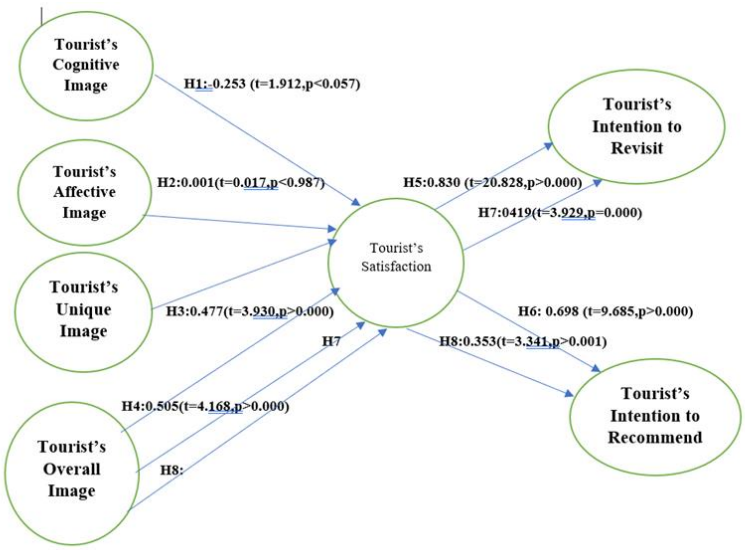

Figure 2: Results of destination branding model

5.3. Theoretical & Managerial Implications

The findings of this study have significant theoretical implications. The study highlights the critical role of tourists' satisfaction in shaping their perception of a destination's image. This is an important contribution since previous studies on destination image formation have largely overlooked the influence of tourists' satisfaction. By incorporating the mediating effect of tourists' satisfaction on the relationships between destination image components and behavioral intentions, this study fills a gap in the destination image literature. Furthermore, this study contributes to the field of destination branding by developing an integrative model that considers destination image components, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. It emphasizes the key role of these components in tourism destination branding, providing insights into effective branding strategies. The study also underscores the importance of destination uniqueness in building destination identities and marketing differentiation strategies. These findings align with previous studies and offer valuable guidance to Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) in their efforts to promote destinations effectively.

The managerial implications of this study are diverse. The findings suggest that rural tourism service providers and decision-makers should effectively manage image attributes to enhance destination quality and promote sustainable industry development. Understanding tourists' satisfaction and its impact on behavioral intentions can help DMOs develop feasible destination branding strategies. Additionally, destination marketers should focus on differentiating their destinations and matching tourists' satisfaction and behavioral intentions through tailored marketing strategies and tourism activities. It is crucial for destination marketers to consider the characteristics and satisfaction components of distinct tourist groups. This understanding will enable them to design targeted marketing strategies and develop tourism products that align with tourists' preferences. Building a friendly and hospitable destination image, promoting local features and landscapes, and creating service experiences that align with tourists' self-concept can contribute to destination brand loyalty.

Destination marketers should also capitalize on opportunities for networking, organizing social events, and promoting local festivals to strengthen brand identification and enhance tourists' social identity. Innovative communication strategies, such as storytelling through movies or celebrity advertising, can further foster tourists' identification with the destination brand. It is important to address negative aspects and low satisfaction levels, as they can deter tourists from recommending the destination. On the other hand, delighted tourists with high satisfaction levels can serve as opinion leaders and should be targeted for future visitations. Destination marketers and travel intermediaries should actively promote the destination's image through advertising campaigns. Creating travel forums and communities can foster a sense of pride among members and encourage positive images and identity formation. Overall, this study provides practical insights for destination marketers to effectively manage destination image, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions to enhance branding efforts and attract loyal tourists.

07. Conclusion

The concept of destination image plays a vital role in understanding tourists' choices and behaviors. In the context of destination branding, this study explores the various dimensions of destination image, including cognitive, affective, unique, and overall aspects. A significant finding is that tourists' satisfaction acts as a mediator between the unique and overall image components and their behavioral intentions. Developing a strong and distinctive destination image is crucial for effective branding, and harnessing tourist satisfaction directly influences consumer behaviors. The study confirms that both the overall and unique images of a destination have direct effects on tourists' satisfaction, with the overall image exerting a greater impact. In infrequent tourism consumption, recommendations become particularly important as they shape tourists' satisfaction expectations. Therefore, destinations should focus on providing positive experiences, fostering satisfaction, and encouraging positive word-of-mouth recommendations to influence potential tourists' decision-making.

Interestingly, tourists' satisfaction is influenced by specific image components rather than the overall impression. Contrary to previous research, the cognitive and affective images do not have a direct impact on satisfaction in the case of the Mirissa tourism destination. However, tourists' behaviors are influenced by their level of satisfaction with the destination. The study highlights that the overall image of a destination holds the strongest positive influence on tourists' satisfaction, while the cognitive image does not significantly impact satisfaction. This suggests that beliefs and knowledge about destination attributes do not directly contribute to satisfaction in the context of the Mirissa tourism destination. On the other hand, the

uniqueness of a destination emerges as the second most influential factor affecting tourists' satisfaction. Emphasizing the unique image becomes crucial for effective destination branding, as it helps position the destination and differentiate it from competitors. Therefore, more attention should be given to understanding and promoting the unique image in destination image research and branding efforts.

Furthermore, the study reveals that overall satisfaction is a better predictor of loyalty than satisfaction with specific attributes. The sustained nature of overall satisfaction implies that destination image acts as a precursor to overall satisfaction, while attribute-specific satisfaction pertains to particular product or service experiences. However, satisfaction with individual components contributes to the overall satisfaction tourists derive from the destination. In summary, this study contributes valuable insights into destination image research and branding strategies. It underscores the importance of understanding and managing specific image components, particularly the unique and overall images, to enhance tourist satisfaction and influence their behavioral intentions. The findings also highlight the significance of overall satisfaction as a key predictor of loyalty. Destinations should strive to create positive experiences, leverage their unique image, and foster overall satisfaction to attract and retain tourists.

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