Experiential Marketing, Destination Image, and Tourists' Destination Loyalty (Reference to Tourists' Cultural Destinations in Sri Lanka)

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Abstract

Today, tourism has become a growing industry to develop the world economy. Among varied destinations, cultural destinations are more popular in the world. Among the South Asian countries, Sri Lanka (SL) is a popular tourists' destination as it has promoted its 2000 year aged history and eight world heritage sites to attract more tourists. As a reason, the 'number of tourists visited Sri Lanka' has increased by year by year. However, the recent statistics released by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, have proved that tourists' growth rate was gradually decreased to 3.5% from 43% since 2010. Meanwhile, All the cultural places in Sri Lanka have visited around 0.2 million tourists except Pollonnaruwa and Sigiriya, these two places have visited by 0.8 million tourists. Another thing is all the museums have visited by very few tourists (around 14000) except the national museum. Therefore, based on this least attraction, this research addresses the effect of experiential marketing to upgrade tourists' destination's loyalty through the mediating effect of the destination image. Independent variable of the study was 'experiential marketing' and the dependent variable was 'destination loyalty'. The population of the study has represented by all tourists who have visited cultural areas in the year 2019. 600 tourists have selected as the sample through the convenient sampling technique. Valid and reliable research questionnaire has used to collect data. Data analyzed through the AMOS software, where all the research questions and objectives have achieved. Findings proved that experiential marketing has significantly and positively affected destination loyalty and destination image without the mediating effect of the destination image.

Therefore, researchers have suggested suitable strategies to develop cultural areas with more exciting events and activities with greater hospitality to attract and keep more tourists, being obeying to five factors of experiential marketing such as tourists' sense, feel, think, act and relate.

Keywords: Experiential Marketing, Destination Loyalty, Destination Image, Cultural Destination, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

As a major growing industry tourism has generated trillion dollars, million jobs, and billion tourists to the world in the year 2019 (WTTC 2019). Meanwhile, tourism has contributed to Sri Lanka generating more than 2.3 million tourists, more than 4.9% for the GDP, and thousand jobs in the year 2019. To earn this tourists attraction, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Beuro (SLTPB) and SLTDA have kept more weight on cultural heritage with the 2000 year aged history of Sri Lanka. As a reason, cultural places was the major contributor (40%) to the total revenue of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka (SLTDA 2018).

Sri Lanka was an attractive destination for 2,333,796 tourists in the year 2018. They contributed for US$ 4,380.6 million foreign exchange, staying at least 10.8 night with Sri Lanka, representing 4.9% of Sri Lankan GDP (SLTDA 2018). At setting the strategic plan for tourism development in 2010, SLTDA has planned to attract 2.5 million international tourists at the year-end of 2016. However, still today even, that target was not achieved. Meanwhile, the growth rate of tourists' attraction to Sri Lanka, has shown gradually decreasing trends, which was 46.1% in 2010, and reduced to 3.2%, up to the year 2017.

Figure 1: Tourist Arrivals Growth Rate (Change) 2001 – 2018
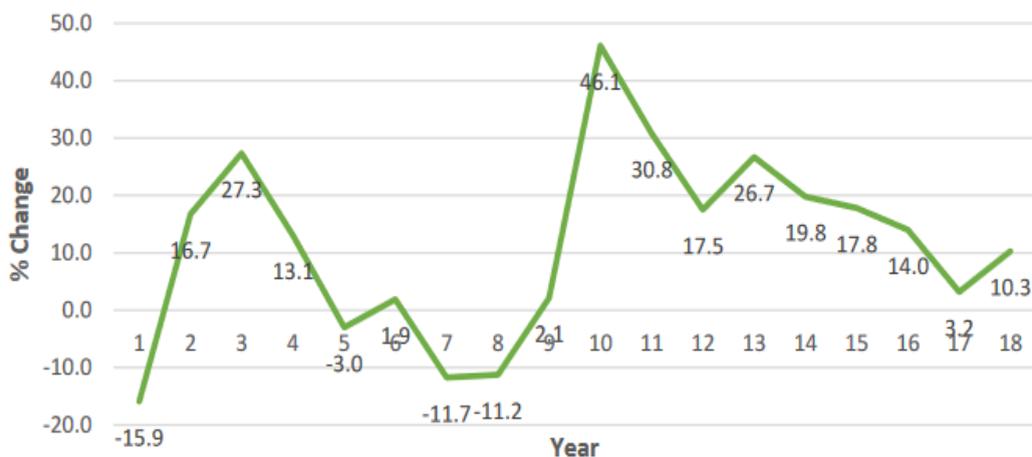
Source: Udurawana Y and Wanninayake W (2020)

Another big issue is, there were around 0.98 million tourists have visited all the cultural places in 2018. Among them, Sigiriya and Polonnaruwa were popular to attract around 0.8 million tourists as it has varied activities with exciting experiences. Therefore, other cultural places have failed to attract more tourists, because there were 0.18 million tourists to all other places, including Anuradhapura, Dambulla, Monaragala, and Matale (SLTDA 2018). Meanwhile, there is another example to prove as cultural places have the least tourists attraction is, more than 99.04% of tourists have rejected to visit museums in Sri Lanka. These visible shreds of evidence have proved that cultural areas in Sri Lanka are suffering from some considerable obstacles to attract more tourists.

In the literature, there are enough contributions to explain destination image, loyalty behaviour, and experiential marketing related to a physical product or an organization (Abedi, H., & Ghelich Khani, M. H. (2016), Chao, D.R. (2015), Chao and Kuo (2013), Yeh, S. S et al. (2012), Hsu, (2010), Chen, H. J et al. (2008), Baloglu, S (2001), Alba and Hutchinson (2000), Dobni and Zinkhan (1990). In Sri Lankan context, Udurawana YMWGPK (2015), Silva, D.A.C, (2002), and Rathnayaka, R (2017) have discussed tourists' image, satisfaction, destination marketing, and loyalty behaviour in different perspectives. However, most of the researchers in the respective field have neglected the experiential marketing attached to cultural areas in Si Lanka on creating destination loyalty. Accordingly, this study reports the experience marketing practices associated with the cultural destinations in Sri Lanka and how does experience marketing facilitates to destination image and tourists' destination loyalty attached to cultural places in Sri Lanka. Therefore the major objective of the study is, to identify the contribution of experiential marketing to upgrade tourists' destination loyalty in the cultural places in Sri Lanka.

Therefore, this study will draw attention to experiential marketing as an important phenomenon for researching different contexts. This study will contribute to developing a comprehensive understanding and application of experiential marketing in the tourism industry. In the practical aspect, this study provides directions to SLTDA, DMOs, and other policy decision-makers to develop effective marketing strategies to attract tourists towards the cultural destinations in the developing countries like Sri Lanka. In this article, the researchers have discussed the present trends of tourists' behaviour relating to cultural destination and have presented the literature to justify the conceptual framework and hypotheses along with the adopted methodology. Finally, the researchers have discussed the results of the study and presented the conclusion in the final section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential marketing or living marketing has defined by Oliver (1999), Schmitt, (1999), Pine and Gilmore, (1999), and Khaled, Kwek, and Anas (2013) as the capacity to generate an unforgettable impression on the consumer mind. Further, they have identified five components of experiential marketing such as sense, feel, think, act, and relate. Destination image has defined by Zhang et al. (2014) and Kim et al. (2013) as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination. Artuger et al. (2013) have studied many researchers contribution and discussed the destination image and its dimensions. Ranjbarian et al. (2017) have studied many researchers contribution were on destination image dimensions. Quality infrastructure, environmental attraction, exciting natural and cultural resources, reasonable charging system, appreciable social environment, entertainment, safety feelings, and peaceful perception are the most suitable dimensions to address destination image. These dimensions have also addressed by Wijaya B.S (2013), Artuger et al. (2013), Jeong, Chul & Holland, Stephen (2012), Brakus et al. (2009), and Steven Pike (2008).

Tourists' loyalty has discussed by Udurawana Y (2018), Nazari et al. (2014), and Yoon & Uysal (2005) have defined tourists' loyalty as 'visitor preparedness to recommend the destination to himself and others in a confident manner. There were researchers such as Yoon & Uysal (2005), Udurawana Y (2019), Sangpikul, A. (2018), Zhang, Hongmei et al. (2014), Chenini (2017), and Piotr (2004) have addressed several dimensions of destination loyalty. These dimensions are, stay more times, repurchase /revisit, extent positive word-of-mouth, recommend the place to others, long term relationship with, spent more, and use places valued places.

Yoon & Uysal (2005), Sangpikul A. (2018), Chenini (2017), Piotr (2004), Abedi, H, & Ghelich Khani, M. H. (2016), Chao, D.R. (2015), Chao and Kuo (2013), Chao, Wu and Yen, (2015), Zhang, H et al. (2014), and Hu, Ho, and Hsieh (2014), Udurawana Y, and Wanninayaka W (2020), have discussed the positive relationships between experiential marketing, destination image and customer loyalty behaviour. Among them, Johnson et al. (2001) Wu, Yeh and Hsiao, (2011), Juntunen, Juntunen, and Juga, (2011) Hu, Ho, and Hsieh (2014) have facilitated to Chao, D.R. (2015), and he proved that brand image has a mediating effect between experiential marketing and tourists' loyalty behaviour.

Table 1: Major Dimensions of the Research Variable

Variable/ Factors	Indicators	References

Experiential marketing	SENSE	Sight, sound, touch, taste and smell.	Oliver (1999), Pine and Gilmore, (1999), Khaled, Kwek, and Anas (2013), Alkilani et al. (2012), Brakus et al (2009), Schmitt (2011), O'Shaughnessy (2003), Gentile et al (2007), Brakus et al. (2009)
	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, recommend	
	RELATE	Position, Stimulates relationships, social attention, associations, memories, connection, engage cultural values, group feeling,	
Destination Image		Quality infrastructure, Environmental attraction, Excited natural & cultural resources, reasonable Charging, Appreciable social environment, entertainment, safety feelings, peaceful perception	Wijaya B.S (2013), Artuger et al. (2013), Jeong, Chul & Holland, Stephen. (2012), Brakus et al. (2009), Steven Pike (2008),
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, A. (2018), Zhang, Hongmei et al. (2014), Chenini (2017), Piotr (2004), Udurawana Y, and Wanninayaka W (2020),

Source: Developed by Researchers

Being on these relationships among the variables, the researchers developed the bellow basic research model with four hypotheses, where independent variable was experiential marketing, the dependent variable was destination loyalty, and destination image was mediating variable.

Figure 2: Experiential Marketing, Destination Image and Destination Loyalty
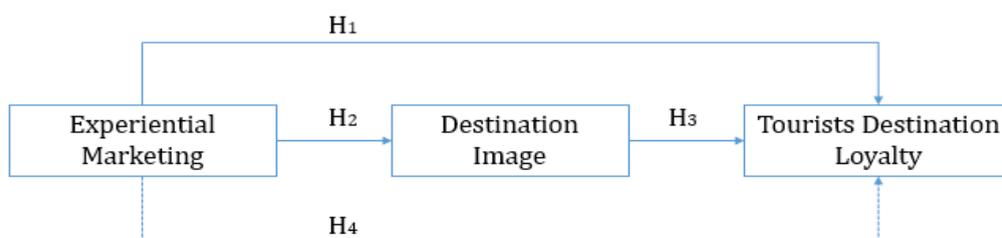
H1   Tourists' destination loyalty has significantly affected by the experiential marketing

H2   Destination image has been significantly affected by experiential marketing

H3   Tourists destination loyalty has significantly affected by the destination loyalty

H4   Tourists' destination loyalty has significantly affected by experiential marketing through the mediating effect of destination image

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Based on the research nature, this research philosophy is positivism, and the research approach is deductive. The research methodological choice is mono method quantitative, the survey was the research strategy, and this research time horizon is cross-sectional (Saunders et al., 2009).

Research Methodology

All international tourists who already visited Sri Lanka in the year 2019, have considered as the population of the study. Selected 600 tourists as the sample through the convenient sampling technique, and sample represented by 100 tourists from each district such as Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Mathale, Kandy, Monaragala, Galle, and Mathara. After removing the uncompleted questionnaires total respondents were 513. Data were collected through the well-developed questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire represented 14 questions to measure tourists' demographic factors. The second part of the questionnaire has 49 questions, where experiential marketing (independent variable) has developed as a second-order construct, therefore it measured through 34 questions. 08 questions to destination image (mediate variable), and destination loyalty (dependent variable) measured through 07 questions. The five-point Likert scale such as 5 for strongly agree (SA), 4 for agree (A), 3 for moderately agree (MA), 2 for disagree (DA), and 1 for strongly disagree (SDA) have used to measure the tourists' attitudes.

As the study has more sample size, quantitative method, and explanatory type, the researcher used AMOS software to analyze the data. Face validity and content validity of the research instrument have tested through the ten scholars representing the academic and tourism industry in Sri Lanka, where 60 questions had in part two of the questionnaire has reduced to 49 questions keeping one question to one indicator. Average Variance Extracted, (AVE) and Construct Reliability (CR) values have tested to identify the construct validity, where all the constructs have proved more than 0.5 AVEs and around 0.9 CR values. Finally, researchers tested the construct reliability, all five factors

of experiential marketing, destination image, and destination loyalty have presented more than 0.7 alpha value, indicating good reliability. (Collis and Hussey (2014).

Table 2: Construct Validity and Mean Values for the Variables

Variable	Dimension	Alpha	AVE	CR	Number 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
Destination Loyalty		0.759	0.53003	0.95787	7	2.470
Overall Model		0.814			49	

Source: Developed by the Researcher

All the mean values have generated for all variables have located between 2 and 3 (mordantly agreed level) values of the Likert scales. It meant that tourists' have weak attitudes on cultural experiences in Sri Lanka.

The demographic profile of the sample has shown that more males (276 Males - 53.8%), have visited cultural areas than females (46.2%), most visited age group was 30 -39, there were 148 (28.8%) tourists, further 158 tourists, (30.8%) who owned to aged tourists (more than 50 age) have visited cultural areas. Most tourists (221 tourists, 43.1%) were Christianity, and 208 tourists (40.5%) mentioned that they have no religion. 453 tourists (88.3%) have visited cultural areas mentioning that their purpose of the visit is 'pleasure', and most tourists (253, 49.3%) owned to professional category. Among the visited tourists, 290 tourists (56.5%), have mentioned their states as in a relationship, then 423 (81.7%) tourists have visited Sri Lanka with friends. Another thing is 445 tourists (86.7%) have visited cultural areas under their second or third visit to Sri Lanka, and 299 tourists have mentioned that they have stayed 8 – 14 days (58.3%) with Sri Lanka.

Researchers used the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to test the research model fit. All the incremental indices such as Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and all the absolute fit indices such as Chi-square ($\chi2$),

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), and Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) have shown acceptable fit indices (Barrett, 2008) as presented by the bellow table.

Table 3: CFA Indices for Variables

Variable	χ^2	CMIN/df	P	GFI	RMSEA	RMR	NFI	CFI	IFI	TLI
EM	2588	4.94	0.00	0.910	0.068	0.019	0.901	0.913	0.900	0.906
DI	30.63	20	1.53	0.00	0.985	0.032	0.002	0.984	0.994	0.994
DL	54.63	3.902	0.00	0.921	0.040	0.021	0.925	0.918	0.906	0.933

Note: EM- Experiential Marketing, DI- Destination Image, DL- Destination Loyalty

Source: Developed by the Researcher

Further, relationships among the variables have measured through the correlation analysis through the SPSS's. Results proved that all the variables have a significant and positive relationship as follows.

*Table 4: Correlation Analysis for Variables*

Variable and Values		Destination Image	Destination Loyalty	Experiential Marketing
Destination Image	Pearson Correlation	1	.380**	.246**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	513	513	513
Destination Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.380**	1	.167**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	513	513	513
Experiential Marketing	Pearson Correlation	.246**	.167**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	513	513	513

Source: Developed by the Researcher

The AMOS diagram has drawn bellow, has shown the regression weight (coefficient of determination - R2) for its main three variables.

Figure 2: AMOS Diagram for Research Model
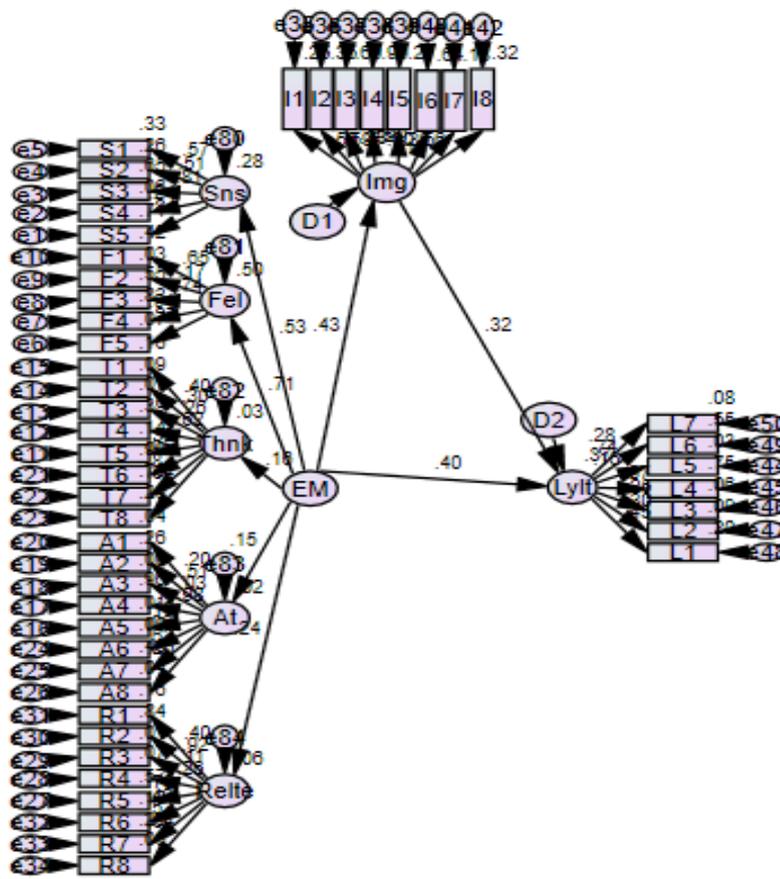
Source: Developed by the Researcher

Table 5: Results Summary: Path diagram of the Structural Model

Predicted Variable	Effect	Predictor Variable	R^2	P
Destination Loyalty	<---	Experiential Marketing	0.403	0.004
Destination Image	<---	Experiential Marketing	0.427	0.000
Destination Loyalty	<---	Destination Image	0.317	0.008

Source: Developed by the Researcher

According to the above table, all the variable effects have positive and significant. Experiential marketing has positively affected to destination loyalty. It meant H1 has accepted, when experiential marketing goes up by 1 destination loyalty has gone up by 0.403 standard deviations. Experiential marketing has affected positively on destination image, then H2 has accepted, it meant experiential marketing goes up by 1 destination image has gone up by 0.427 standard deviations. Further, H3 has accepted, it meant that when the destination image goes up by 1, destination loyalty has gone up by 0.317. Finally, H4 has rejected, as the indirect effect of experiential marketing on destination loyalty was 0.159 coefficient. It meant, the indirect effect (0.159) has shown a low coefficient value than the

direct effect (0.403). Therefore results have proved that there was no mediating effect with destination image between experiential marketing and destination loyalty. But Chao, D.R. (2015) has strongly proved that brand image has a mediating effect between experiential marketing and tourists' loyalty behaviour, after studying many researchers contribution.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the sample has represented by the different nations owned to different value systems, visitors' expectations should identify by the hospitality marketers in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), Destination Management Organization (DMOs), and other stakeholders of the cultural areas, better to consider tourists geo-demographic factors such as age groups (especially the 30 -39, aged tourists, more than 50 ages), tourists purpose of visit as the 'pleasure', tourists' income, profession, and tourists' marital states (more were in a 'relationship'). Further, authorities better to consider tourists friends (they mostly have visited with friends), repeat visitors (they have visited cultural areas than new visitors), and concern on the tourists who have more days to stay in Sri Lanka, when loyally preparing cultural destinations. The most interesting thing is, destination loyalty has happened directly with experiential marketing in this study. Meanwhile, experiential marketing creates the destination image, and destination image has affected destination loyalty. Therefore, SLTDA and DMOs must take action to implement experiential marketing activities considering the tourists' geo-demographic nature and destination image factors. All event and activities better to be aligned with the visitors 'sense, feel, think, act, and relate' factors.

This research has achieved its all research objectives, answered all the research questions, and accepted up to hypotheses three (H4 as rejected). Then the results have proved that experiential marketing has contributed to destination loyalty with the destination image and without the destination image. Therefore it is obvious that there should be programs to upgrade experiential marketing (sense, feel, think, act, and relate) at the destinations to contribute for image and destination loyalty.

As more tourists have expected a comfortable and memorable experience on their journey. Therefore, researchers have purposed to tourism authorities to maintain quality infrastructures, visitor security, and quality food-lodging-financing facilities with entertaining facilities surrounding cultural areas in Sri Lanka. Another thing is, better to implement a nightlife at cultural areas, developing jogging areas near rivers, water tanks, with street programs opening locations 24*7 concepts at least with basic facilities. Further, researchers invite stakeholders to implement new solutions such as water- games,

tree houses, bird watching, boat riding, and fishing demonstration through many rivers, canals, and big water tanks surrounded to places. Bullock cart riding, horse riding and or catamaran riding, and walk to poor village house through paddy fields or states to enjoy its traditional cultivation, and cookery demonstration of Sri Lankan Authentic foods are most suitable programs to upgrade destinations image on visitors mind. Meanwhile, as a strategy, exciting entertainment and greater hospitality can be contributed to removing the price sensitivity of tourists. Another thing is, there should be a unity among the cultural places stakeholders to promote cultural places, and cater to its tourists. There should be a common policy, practices and procedures deal with tourists' all types of needs within a cultural destination maintaining a unique recognition to themselves to offer to diversify services for tourists. Finally, all tourists' facilitators better to manage greater hospitality within the region to offer a memorable experience for its visitors.

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