

"Sustainable Tourism Development: A Model Examining The Relationship Between Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction, And Tourism Loyalty"

Dr. Feba Kurian*

*Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Mar Athanasius College(Autonomous), Kothamangalam

Abstract:

As the global tourism industry continues to thrive, the imperative for sustainable tourism practices becomes increasingly apparent. This research paper proposes a model aimed at fostering sustainable tourism through the examination of the interconnected dynamics between destination image, tourist satisfaction, and tourism loyalty. The research explores the concept of destination image, delving into the factors influencing the perception of a destination by potential visitors. By synthesizing existing literature and conducting empirical investigations, the study identifies the key elements that contribute to shaping destination image. The paper investigates the crucial role of tourist satisfaction in the sustainable tourism paradigm and explores the relationship between tourist satisfaction and tourism loyalty. Utilizing advanced statistical analyses, the research assesses the extent to which satisfied tourists are more likely to engage in repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth, and a commitment to supporting sustainable practices. Loyalty is examined not only as a measure of economic impact but also as a potential driver for advocating sustainable tourism principles. Ultimately, the model presented in this research provides valuable insights for destination management organizations, policymakers, and tourism stakeholders seeking to promote sustainable tourism development. The findings contribute to the understanding of how building a positive destination image, ensuring tourist satisfaction, and fostering tourism loyalty collectively create a framework for sustainable tourism that benefits both the destination and its stakeholders. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for implementing sustainable tourism strategies that prioritize environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community well-being, ensuring a harmonious balance between economic growth and responsible tourism practices.

Keywords: Tourism destination Image. Tourist satisfaction, Destination Loyalty, Sustainable tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION:

In an era marked by unprecedented global mobility and a growing awareness of environmental and cultural preservation, the tourism industry finds itself at the forefront of a transformative journey towards sustainability. Sustainable tourism initiatives have emerged as a crucial response to the challenges posed by unchecked growth, environmental degradation, and the imperative to strike a harmonious balance between economic prosperity and the well-being of destinations and their communities.

As the world's population increasingly seeks meaningful and authentic travel experiences, the demand for sustainable tourism has gained momentum. Travelers are no longer content merely to be spectators; instead, they seek immersive experiences that contribute positively to the destinations they visit. Sustainable tourism initiatives, therefore, represent a collective effort to redefine the industry's narrative, placing emphasis on environmental stewardship, community engagement, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

The global tourism industry stands at a critical crossroads, where the imperative for sustainable practices has become paramount in the face of environmental challenges, cultural preservation concerns, and the increasing demand for responsible tourism. Sustainable tourism, characterized by a harmonious balance between economic development and the conservation of natural and cultural resources, has emerged as a guiding principle for the future of the industry. In this context, this research endeavours to contribute by presenting an integrated model that explores the intricate relationships between destination image, tourist satisfaction, and tourism loyalty. Insights from academic research highlight the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and economic factors in the pursuit of sustainability within the tourism sector. Studies such as those by Gössling et al. (2012) and Weaver (2006) emphasize the environmental impact of tourism activities, emphasizing the role of sustainable practices in reducing carbon footprints, conserving natural resources, and preserving biodiversity.

Destinations worldwide are grappling with the need to establish and enhance their image, not only as attractive tourist hotspots but also as stewards of environmental and cultural integrity. Jamal and Robinson (2009) and Mclachlan & Binns (2014) Mowforth and Munt (2015) discuss the complexities of balancing economic benefits with the protection of local cultures, as well as the potential for tourism to empower communities and foster inclusive growth. The concept of destination image, encompassing perceptions and expectations, plays a pivotal role in influencing the choices of potential visitors. Therefore, understanding the factors that shape a destination's image and their impact on sustainable tourism practices is of paramount importance. Hawkins (2017) and Dredge and Jenkins (2007) highlights the importance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders, including governments, businesses, and local communities, in the

successful implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives.

Tourist satisfaction is another critical facet of sustainable tourism. As visitors increasingly seek meaningful and enriching experiences, their satisfaction becomes intertwined with a destination's commitment to sustainability. This research seeks to investigate how well-managed destinations, with a focus on sustainable practices, influence tourists' overall satisfaction, including their perceptions of authenticity, environmental responsibility, and cultural immersion. By examining the relationship between tourist satisfaction and loyalty, this paper aims to unravel the potential for sustainable tourism principles to not only enhance visitor experiences but also to foster long-term commitment and support for destinations.

Although numerous studies have delved into the connection between tourism satisfaction and loyalty, there exists a notable gap in the literature concerning the examination of how tourism destination image influences tourist satisfaction and, in turn, shapes destination loyalty. The study directly tackles the imperative of sustainability within the tourism sector. As environmental concerns escalate globally, there is an urgent need for tourism practices that balance economic benefits with ecological responsibility. This research is poised to provide insights into how sustainable tourism development can be achieved.

The integrated model proposed in the study has the potential to contribute significantly to the academic understanding of sustainable tourism. By examining the interplay between destination image, satisfaction, and loyalty, the research may fill gaps in the existing literature and pave the way for further scholarly inquiries. The study can offer guidance to businesses operating in the tourism sector. Understanding the relationship between sustainable practices and tourist satisfaction can motivate businesses to adopt responsible approaches, contributing to the overall sustainability of the industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tourism Destination Image and Satisfaction

Brand Image may be referred as the totality of perceptions that a consumer has as regards to a brand in his memory (Keller, 2013). Destination image encompasses the entirety of an individual's perspectives, ideas, and impressions related to a particular place or destination (Crompton, 1979). A tourism Destination Image here refers to the perceptions that a tourist has as regards to a travel destination. The significance of perceptions outweighs reality, as these perceptions directly influence the genuine behaviours of consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The influence of destination image extends to shaping tourist behaviour and significantly impacting the ultimate success or failure of a destination (Tasci & Gartner, 2007)

Studies conducted by Beerli and Martín (2004), Tasci and Gartner (2007), and Zhang et al. (2014) have explored destination image in detail. This multifaceted concept is assessable across various dimensions. Numerous scholarly inquiries scrutinize destination image (Chi, 2008) (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011) (Wu, 2016) considering tangible aspects such as natural attractions and environment, historical and cultural landmarks, the destination's reputation and overall atmosphere. However, none have specifically evaluated destination image with a focus on the fundamental pillars of sustainability.

(Chen & Phou, 2013), (Chi, 2008), (Prayag & Ryan, 2011) (Wang & Hsu, 2010) have conducted research studies to test the relationship between destination image and the tourist satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction refers to a customer's response following the assessment of the variance between their prior expectations and the actual performance of a product (Tse & Wilton, 1988). Satisfaction is achieved when a product or service's performance aligns with or surpasses the customer's expectations, and conversely, dissatisfaction arises when expectations are not met (Fornell et al., 1996; Kotler & Keller, 2012). In the context of this research, tourist satisfaction pertains to an individual's assessment of a destination relative to their expectations.

The extent to which an individual's self-perception harmonizes with the image of a specific tourist destination can influence the level of engagement that the tourist has with that particular destination and the more will be his satisfaction (Rao, Qiu, Morrison, & Wei, 2022) (Segota, Chen, & Golja, 2022) (Saxena & Dhar, 2021) This is due to their perception that the destination mirrors their values, beliefs, and interests, creating a more profound resonance with them (Gupta, Pansari, & Kumar, 2018) (Wang & Lee, 2020).

The proposed hypothesis:

H1: Tourism destination image influences tourist satisfaction

In the framework of this research, tourist satisfaction refers to an individual's assessment of a destination concerning their expectations related to the cultural, environmental and socioeconomic aspects of that destination.

2.1.1. Cultural Image

Cultural attributes of a destination can impact the contentment of tourists (Wu, 2016) (Beerli & Martin, Factors Influencing Destination Image, 2004) (Lee, 2020). Cultural brand assets, encompassing elements like historical landmarks, interesting local arts and crafts, quality

cultural experiences, festivals, artistic expressions, unique cultural identity and traditions, Good preservation of cultural heritage and abundance of cultural learning opportunities significantly contribute to shaping the brand image of a destination (lee, 2020). Although tourism activities have the potential to yield positive effects on a destination's culture, such as the conservation of cultural and historical sites, they can also generate adverse impacts, such as the erosion of community character (Choi & Murray, 2010) (Fong, Lo, Songan, & Nair, 2017).

2.1.2. Environmental Image

Tourist satisfaction is also influenced by the environmental or ecological dimension of a destination. (Chen & Phou, 2013; Chi, 2008; Wu, 2016). The environmental factors commonly examined in the context of destination image typically encompass the overall travel environment, ambiance, and natural attractions (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Chen & Phou, 2013; Chi & Qu, 2008; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011; Qu et al., 2011; lee, 2020). Issues such as pollution and congestion exemplify environmental challenges within a destination (Akis et al., 1996; Puczkó & Rátz, 2000; Lee, 2020). A meticulously conserved natural environment can confer a competitive edge upon a destination, given its authenticity and potential to offer distinctive leisure experiences to tourists (Cánoves et al., 2004; Fong et al., 2017)

2.1.3. Socioeconomic Image

The objectives of sustainable tourism development within the economic and social dimensions frequently exhibit interconnectedness. This linkage is evident in endeavours such as the augmentation of business and employment opportunities, the enhancement of local facilities and infrastructure, the elevation of the standard of living of community, and the promotion of local products. Socioeconomic elements within a city, including public infrastructures, easy accessibility, tourism facilities, as well as the pricing of goods and services, have been identified as influential factors affecting tourist satisfaction (Chen & Phou, 2013; Qu et al., 2011; Wu, 2016).

Despite the fact that the tourism sector plays a role in the socioeconomic advancement of a destination (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Fong et al., 2017; Hall, 2011), it is not without drawbacks. Negative repercussions attributable to tourism include, for instance, the escalation of prices for goods and services (Akis et al., 1996; Cottrell et al., 2004). As tourism continues to expand, there is the potential for intricate challenges in sustainable tourism management among stakeholders (Hall, 2011; Lee, 2020).

2.2. Tourist Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty

Existing studies consistently affirm the positive correlation between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty (Prayag & Ryan, 2011; Chen & Phou, 2013 ; Wang & Hsu, 2010 ; Chi, 2008). Even though many research studies have tried to find the destination loyalty, there are very few studies examining the destination image in the perspective of cultural image, environmental image and socio-economic image.

Tourist satisfaction and loyalty are essentially playing a vital role in sustainable tourism (Zakiah, Winarno, & Hermana, 2023). A loyal tourist are more likely to support the sustainable tourism efforts and make more conscious travel decisions. Travelers who exhibit high levels of engagement with a company or brand typically demonstrate heightened loyalty. This heightened loyalty is marked by a profound emotional attachment to the company or brand, making them more inclined to sustain their association with it (Sharma & Singh, 2021). A favourable perception of a destination significantly impacts tourist loyalty, resulting in recurrent visits and positive word-of-mouth endorsements (Chen et al., Citation2020). The practice of ecotourism cultivates brand loyalty by fostering psychological engagement (Zakiah, Winarno, & Hermana, 2023), Hence the hypothesis

H2: Tourist satisfaction positively influences destination loyalty

3. PROPOSED MODEL

Figure 1



4. METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature. The population, development of the survey instrument, determination of sample size and its collection, the data employed in the study and the tools for data analysis are stated below.

4.1 Population

The population of the study comprises tourists availing travel services in the various travel destinations in the state of Kerala, India.

4.2 Development of Survey Instrument

An extensive review of literature was conducted. The questionnaire was developed in accordance with Churchill’s (1979). 12 destination image items were incorporated with the proposed sustainability dimensions from previous literature (Calantone, Di, Hakam, & Bojanic, 1989; Choi & Sirakaya, Sustainability indicators for managing community tourism, 2006 ; Milman & Pizam, 1995 ; Lee, 2020)

Five Tourist satisfaction items and five destination loyalty variables were adapted from (Kotler & Keller, Marketing Management, 2012) (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). The questionnaire was addressed using a 5- point Likert scale, ranging from 1 for “strongly disagree” to 5 for “strongly agree”. A draft questionnaire was presented to few experts to ensure face validity and their feedback was collected to make some minor adjustments. Later, a pilot study was conducted among 50 tourists to determine the reliability. The results of the pilot survey indicated that the questions and the tools used in the collection of data are good enough as all the constructs were having reliability of > 0.70.

4.3 Determination of sample size and its collection

A convenient sampling technique was employed to distribute the questions among the top 12 tourist destinations across the state of Kerala, as 83% of the tourists visiting the state of Kerala also visited these tourist destinations. The sample size of 384 is sufficient to draw a meaningful conclusion according to the Krejcie- Morgan Formula (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). A total of 435 samples were collected from October 15th 2023 to November 30th 2023 but later 25 samples were rejected after data cleaning and finally the sample size was fixed at 410.

4.3. Data Analysis

The factor structure of Tourism Destination Image, Tourist satisfaction and Destination Loyalty were identified using EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis). The assumptions of EFA (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998) were considered for the study. The variables with Eigen Value of minimum 1, Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of >0.5, The variables with a factor loading of minimum 0.4 and varimax rotation were followed. All the variables under the study were retained as they loaded to only one construct (Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010) and all the assumptions of EFA were met. A CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) was performed on the constructs to confirm the factor structure. The hypothesis was proved using SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) with AMOS program.

5. Results

Table 1 shows that 53.9 % tourists were male while 46.1% were females. Majority of the respondents were of the age group of 26-40 years (61.7%). 53.7% of the tourists were graduates and most of the tourists (58.3%) visting the destinations in Kerala were having a private job.

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	221	53.9
Female	189	46.1
Age in years		
Below 25	91	22.2
26-40	253	61.7
41-55	49	12.0
56 and above	17	4
Highest Education		
Pre-degree	19	4.6

Bachelors	220	53.7
Post graduate	134	32.7
Ph.D	15	3.7
Diploma	22	5.4
Occupation		
Business	48	11.7
Government Employee	44	10.7
Private Employee	239	58.3
Professional	42	10.2
Retired	16	3.9
Student	17	4.1
House wife	4	1.0

Source: primary data

5.1 Measurement Model

The factor structure of Tourism Destination Image, Tourist satisfaction and Destination Loyalty were identified using EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis). The assumptions of EFA (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998) were considered for the study. The variables with Eigen Value of minimum 1, Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of >0.5, The variables with a factor loading of minimum 0.4 and varimax rotation were followed. All the variables under the study were retained as they loaded to only one construct (Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010) and all the assumptions of EFA were met.

After the factor analysis 13 variables were considered for the study, which loaded to three factors. According to the inherent qualities of the variables loaded, the factors were identified as cultural image with five variables, environmental image with four variables and socio- economic image with four variables were identified. The results are shown in Table 2

Table 2 Tourism Destination Image constructs identified.

Sub constructs of Tourism Image	Item Label	Variables included	Item label Destination
Cultural Image	cultural_image	Interesting cultural attractions	TDI_C1
		Interesting historical attractions	TDI_C2
		Interesting local arts and crafts	TDI_C3
		Unique cultural identity and tradition	TDI_C4
		Good preservation of cultural heritage	TDI_C5
Environmental Image	Envn_image	Clean and tidy environment	TDI_Env1
		Good preservation of natural areas	TDI_Env2
		Restful and relaxing atmosphere	TDI_Env3
		Pollution free environment	TDI_Env4
Socio-Economic Image	SE_image	Good Public infrastructure	TDI_SE1
		Easiness to access places	TDI_SE2
		Good shopping facilities	TDI_SE3
		Good night life and entertainment	TDI_SE4

Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure: 0.870 , Sig: 0.000

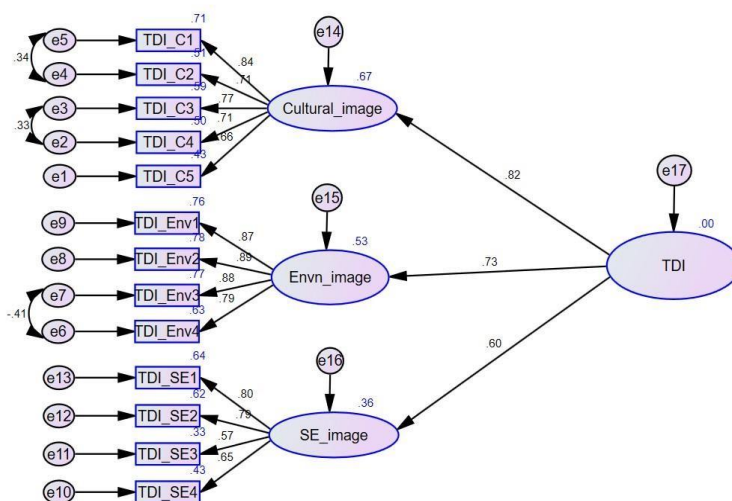
A reliability test was performed on the constructs and the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient values of all the constructs were greater than 0.7 which is considered as good and shows the stability and consistency of the variables. The results of EFA are presented in Table 3

Table 3 Tourism destination image constructs identified.

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Cronbach Alpha
Cultural Image	Interesting cultural attractions	0.849	5.784	0.851
	Interesting historical attractions	0.774		
	Interesting local arts and crafts	0.763		
	Unique cultural identity and tradition	0.695		
	Good preservation of cultural heritage	0.723		
Environmental Image	Clean and tidy environment	0.869	1.685	0.904
	Good preservation of natural areas	0.847		
	Restful and relaxing atmosphere	0.838		
	Pollution free environment	0.781		
Socio-Economic Image	Good Public infrastructure	0.816	1.500	0.789
	Easiness to access places	0.835		
	Good shopping facilities	0.627		
	Good night life and entertainment	0.734		

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to confirm the factor structure of Tourism destination image and found that all the paths are significant (Figure 2). The three dimensions of Tourism Destination Image are Cultural image with five variables Environmental image with four variables and Socio-economic image with four variables.

Figure 2: Measurement model of Tourism Destination Image (TDI)



Source: primary data

Cultural_image – Cultural Image; *Env_image*- Environmental Image; *SE_image*- Socio-economic Image; *TDI*- Tourism Destination Image

Based on the standardised coefficient, it is clear that Cultural Image (Cultural_image) is the most important factor influencing the Tourism Destination Image (0.82), followed by Environmental Image (0.73), Socio-cultural image 1805 <https://jrtd.com>

(0.60). All the paths are found to be significant at 5% level.

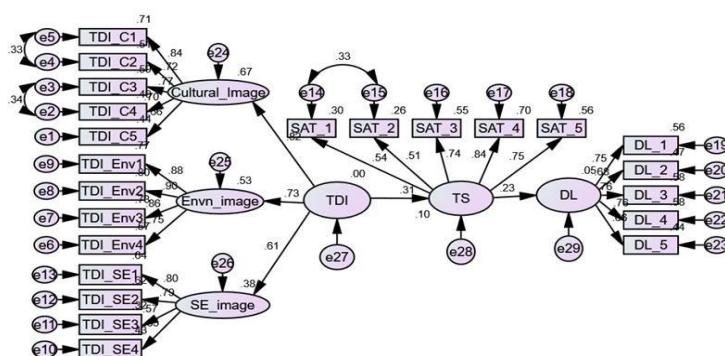
Table 4 Tests of model fit on Tourism Destination Image

Fit Indices	Recommended Value	Model Value
Measures of Absolute Fit		
χ^2 (Chi-square)		186.831
df (Degrees of Freedom)		59
Chi-square/df (χ^2 /df)	<5	3.167
RMSEA	<0.08	0.067
Measures of Incremental Fit		
NFI(Normed Fit Index)	>0.90	0.939
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	>0.90	0.957
IFI(Incremental Fit Index)	>0.90	0.958
RFI(Relative Fit Index)	>0.90	0.920
Measures of Parsimony Fit		
PNFI(Parsimony Normed Fit Index)	>0.50	0.711
PCFI (Parsimony Comparative of Fit Index)	>0.50	0.724

Source: primary data

All the fit indices values for the Tourism Destination Image fall within the acceptable range and hence we can accept the Tourism Destination Image model and progress with the development of the structural model.

5.2 Structural Model



The structural Model shows that the observed data and model, fitted well (χ^2 /df = 3.167, GFI = 0.957, CFI = 0.957, RMSEA = 0.073, NFI= 0.939, IFI=0.958).

Table 5 Standardised regression weights between proposed paths

Relationship among the exogenous and endogenous variables			Std Estimates(β)	S.E	C.R	p -value
TS	←	TDI	0.213	0.049	4.361	<0.001
DL	←	TS	0.609	0.161	3.795	<0.001

Source: primary data

Note: Significant at 5% level.

TDI- Tourism Destination Image, TS- Tourist Satisfaction, DL- Destination loyalty

Table 6 Tests of model fit on Structural Model

Fit Indices	Recommended Value	Model Value
Measures of Absolute Fit		
χ^2 (Chi-square)		504.130
df (Degrees of Freedom)		222
Chi-square/df (χ^2/df)	<5	2.271
RMSEA	<0.08	0.056
Measures of Incremental Fit		
NFI(Normed Fit Index)	>0.90	0.897
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	>0.90	0.939
IFI(Incremental Fit Index)	>0.90	0.939
RFI(Relative Fit Index)	>0.90	0.882
Measures of Parsimony Fit		
PNFI(Parsimony Normed Fit Index)	>0.50	0.787
PCFI (Parsimony Comparative of Fit Index)	>0.50	0.824

Source: primary data

All the model fit values except for NFI and RFI values fall within the acceptable range. Since the NFI and the RFI values are above 0.85 these values may be acceptable (Hair et al., 2014). Hence, hypothesis H1 and H2 are accepted.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The research findings underscore the significance of destination image in shaping tourists' perceptions of Kerala. The cultural image emerges as the most positively perceived aspect, contributing significantly to the overall favourable impression of the state. Conversely, the socio-economic image lags behind, representing an area for potential improvement in enhancing the destination's allure.

A noteworthy trend emerges as tourists' repeated visits to the state of Kerala correspond with an increasingly favourable appraisal of the city's developmental status and heightened loyalty. This positive correlation suggests that a deeper engagement with the destination fosters a stronger sense of place attachment among visitors (Chen & Phou, 2013; Prayag & Ryan, 2011).

Furthermore, the research aligns with the assertion that positive past experiences play a pivotal role in cultivating loyalty towards a destination (Wu, 2016). Tourists with favourable previous encounters in the state of Kerala exhibit a greater degree of loyalty, emphasizing the enduring impact of positive experiences on sustaining tourists' allegiance.

In conclusion, the intricate interplay between destination image, place attachment, and past experiences elucidates the mechanisms behind tourist loyalty in the context of Kerala. These insights not only contribute to our understanding of tourist behaviour but also offer valuable implications for destination management and marketing strategies aimed at fostering sustainable tourism development in Kerala and beyond.

The findings also demonstrated that tourists who had greater exposure to travel- or destination- related content on the Internet exhibited enhanced perceptions of the various tourism destinations and demonstrated increased loyalty towards

them. Online platforms, particularly within the realm of social media, serve as potent instruments for the implementation of marketing and communication strategies by tourism organizations. This is especially crucial as contemporary travellers predominantly seek travel-related information online as a precursor to their travel decision-making process (Mallick, 2023)

Interesting cultural and historical attractions and interesting local arts and crafts which are a part of the cultural image strongly influenced tourist satisfaction. Preservation of natural areas and clean and tidy environment were the most valued factors from environmental image which influenced the tourist satisfaction while the socio-economic factors like good public infrastructure and easiness to access the places have an impact on the tourist satisfaction.

Proposed avenues for advancement encompass bolstering employment and entrepreneurial prospects for the local populace within the tourism sector, advocating for the visibility and patronage of indigenous products and services among tourists, and augmenting public infrastructure and amenities to cater to the collective welfare of both tourists and the local community. Despite the absence of a discernible impact of the commercial factor on satisfaction, prioritizing a destination's economic viability becomes paramount to underpin the ethos of sustainable tourism.

Preserving structures, notably those of historical significance, holds paramount importance in upholding the distinctive identity and reputation of a locale (Hankinson, 2004). Likewise, the well-maintained condition of a destination's natural features, encompassing parks, lakes, and rivers, plays a pivotal role in shaping tourists' perceptions and, consequently, influencing their satisfaction (Chen & Phou, 2013; Chi & Qu, 2008; Beerli & Martín, 2004). Hence, these natural assets warrant meticulous care and maintenance.

To cater to the holistic well-being of both tourists and residents, ongoing investments by the government in urban development initiatives are crucial. This sustained commitment ensures the enhancement of the overall urban landscape, contributing positively to the experiences of both visitors and the local community.

In alignment with the outcomes elucidated in prior tourism studies, it is established that tourist satisfaction exerts a positive influence on destination loyalty. Contented tourists not only express an inclination to return to Kerala but also tend to propagate positive word-of-mouth, potentially influencing the intentions of other prospective visitors. Given that tourist satisfaction significantly hinges on key elements such as "culture," "upkeeping," "infrastructure," and "tourism offerings," and it helps in shaping destination loyalty.

Interestingly, it was observed that tourists exhibited a higher inclination to recommend Kerala than to revisit it. This phenomenon aligns with a pattern identified by Hui et al. (2007) among tourists in Singapore, where even satisfied travellers were less inclined to revisit a destination, especially if their travel objectives could be fulfilled within a short timeframe.

For prospective research endeavours, delving into the nuanced relationships between the intention to revisit and satisfaction with each specific destination attribute independently could offer deeper insights into the intricacies of tourist behaviour and decision-making processes.

7. Contributions and Implications

Theoretically, this research makes a noteworthy contribution to the tourism literature by introducing a novel approach for gauging destination image, one rooted in the sustainability paradigm. By demonstrating that tangible attributes of a destination, such as its tourist attractions, environmental conditions, and infrastructures, can be analytically examined through the lens of sustainability dimensions, this study paves the way for a more nuanced understanding of destination assessment. The outcomes of this inquiry extend our comprehension of tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, emphasizing the pivotal role of sustainable tourism perceptions.

In the context of sustainable tourism research, where a predominant focus is often on residents' viewpoints, this study takes a distinctive perspective by exploring tourists' perceptions of destination image. This fresh approach adds a valuable layer to the existing body of sustainable tourism research, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics influencing tourists' attitudes and behaviours.

From a practical standpoint, this study introduces a method for the ongoing assessment and monitoring of tourism sustainability in tourism destinations. It is advisable for authorities to periodically survey tourists, gauging their perspectives on destination sustainability to implement targeted measures that uphold and enhance sustainable tourism practices. The applicability of these insights extends to government entities, destination organizations, and tourism stakeholders in Kerala. The research underscores Kerala's positive socioeconomic image and commendable cultural image, yet it emphasizes the need for concerted efforts in addressing environmental aspects.

In light of escalating competition within the tourism industry, it is incumbent upon the government and tourism stakeholders in Kerala to concentrate on crafting distinctive and high-quality tourism offerings. Such efforts are pivotal in cultivating tourist satisfaction and fostering loyalty. Aligning with the principles of strategic destination positioning (Kotler & Keller, 2012), it is essential for Kerala to communicate its unique strengths in meeting tourists' expectations exceptionally well. Destination marketers should strategically highlight Kerala's competitive advantages, particularly its robust socioeconomic attributes, to imprint compelling and enduring images of the state in the minds of the tourists.

8. Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

Prospective research endeavours might explore the potential impact of residents' quality of life on tourist satisfaction and loyalty towards a destination. In refining the focus, future studies could narrow down the sample to tourists from a specific country, offering a more nuanced and contextually relevant understanding of their perspectives. Additionally, there is scope for investigating tourists' motivations for participating in sustainable tourism activities and discerning the intricate connections between these motivations, satisfaction levels, and destination loyalty.

This study delved into the satisfaction levels and loyalty intentions of tourists towards Kerala. However, given the multitude of competitors in the global tourism market, it is reasonable to expect that tourists may not sustain long-term loyalty to a specific destination. As highlighted by Haumann et al. (2014), the positive influence of satisfaction on loyalty tends to diminish over time, and customers who are not highly satisfied are prone to readily switch when presented with more appealing alternatives (Kotler & Keller, 2012). To gain deeper insights into the dynamics of tourists' recommendations and return intentions, future research could adopt a longitudinal approach. This method would track the evolving patterns of tourist behavior over time, shedding light on whether initial satisfaction translates into actual recommendations or revisits to the destination in question.

Beyond examining tourists, a prospective research avenue involves investigating whether residents' perceptions of the impacts of tourism on their community or the destination they inhabit influence their intentions to recommend the locale. This dual perspective would contribute to a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing both tourists and residents in shaping recommendations for a destination.

9. Conclusion

Kerala demonstrates the ability to meet the satisfaction and retention needs of tourists hailing from diverse countries globally. Within the framework of sustainable tourism, this research has illuminated the interconnections among tourist profiles, destination image, satisfaction, and destination loyalty. The implications of these findings extend to the governmental bodies, destination marketers, and tourism providers in Kerala, offering valuable insights for the city's tourism development and marketing endeavours.

Given the integral role of the tourism sector in fostering the sustainable advancement of destinations, it is crucial to fervently advocate for sustained initiatives by all stakeholders, including researchers. This encouragement holds true not only for Kerala but also for various tourist destinations globally.

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