The Effect of Experiential Marketing, Destination Image, Tourists' Satisfaction on Destination Loyalty: Evidence from Tourists' Cultural Destinations in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study aims at examining the influence of experiential marketing (EM) on destination loyalty (DL) through the mediating effect of tourists' satisfaction and destination image in the tourists' cultural destinations in Sri Lanka. Review of literature headed the study to develop the conceptual model with six hypotheses. The study facilitated the survey strategy with a structured questionnaire, which was directed to a representative sample of 600 international tourists who have visited cultural areas in Sri Lanka. Both the measurement model and the structural equation model were assessed through the AMOS software, where all the constructs were valid, reliable and fit with the model. The findings revealed that the experiential marketing has a significant positive effect on destination loyalty only with the mediating effect of destination image and satisfaction. Therefore, the researchers suggest strategies for destination marketing authorities in Sri Lanka, which may help to upgrade destination image, tourists' satisfaction, and experiential marketing practices to attract and keep more tourists with cultural destinations in Sri Lanka.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourists' loyalty behavior has generated a lot of benefits to destination stakeholders (Udurawana, 2018). Tourists' movements from one location to another has contributed trillion dollars to the world with million jobs, and billion tourists in the year 2019 (WTTC, 2019). Tourism is a major service industry in Sri Lanka, it brings 1.9 million tourists upgrading from around 4% of the GDP of the country in 2019 (SLTDA, 2018). World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2019) highlighted that the world's cultural destinations have more values to attract more tourists. Among the world's destinations, cultural destinations have become more loyal destinations to tourists, where France was the most valued tourists' destination in the world having promoted 41 world heritage sites and has attracted 89.4 million tourists in 2018. China promotes 55 world heritage sites and become as the most valued destination to Asia and the Pacific (Udurawana et al., 2020). As more than 2000 aged historical country, having eight world heritage sites, Sri Lanka has kept more weight on cultural values when promoting Sri Lanka to the world (SLTDA, 2018). As cultural places have reported more revenue than the other tourism services to the tourism industry in Sri Lanka which was a 40% contribution to the total revenue of tourism (SLTDA, 2018).

Table 1. Tourist Traffic in Cultural Areas in 2018

City	Location	Number of Foreign Visitors	Revenue (In Rs.)
Anuradhapura	Abhayagiriya/ Jethawana	100,548	391,892,701
Pollonanruwa	Galviharaya, Museum	200,224	1,023,140,249
Sigiriya	Museum, Sigiriya Rock	594,917	2,746,939,936
Katharagama	Museum	88	69,735
Galle	Museum	20,461	14,300,531
Dambulla	Museum	789	251,741
Kandy	Museum	353	56,941
Ape Gama	Ape Gama	2,132	1,223,581
Monaragala	Buduruwagala	40,839	12,830,236
Yapahuwa	Yapahuwa kingdom	7,511	4,808,169
Ramba	Ramba viharaya	13	4,230
Ritigala	Ritigala forest monastery	10,140	3,707,745
Ibbankatuwa	Ancient Burial Ground	1,156	344,126
Namaluayana	Namal Uayana	938	577,953
Total		**980,109**	**4,200,147,873**

Source: Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority - Statistical Report 2018

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The growing issue is that after the year 2010, the tourists' growth rate has continuously reduced from 46.1% to 3.2% up to now, further SLTDA needed to achieve 2.5 million tourists target in the year 2016, but it is still failing to achieve (Udurawana et al., 2020). Further, tourists' statistics shows that the cultural destinations have attracted only 980,109 tourists in the year 2018, which was a very low attraction compared to the other destinations such as Colombo, and South Coast.

Another thing is, except Sigiriya and Polonnaruwa, all the other cultural places have attracted around 0.18 million tourists in the whole year 2018 (Udurawana, 2019). This worst situation has significantly affected all the other types of stakeholders in cultural areas. The historical value owned to cultural places has explained by its own museums. From the total tourists who visited cultural destinations, 99.04% of tourists have rejected to visit museums. (Visited rate is 0.06%).

Table 2. Tourist Traffic at Museums in Cultural Areas in 2017

Museum	Foreign Tickets	
	Number of Foreign Tourists	**Revenue (in Rs.)**
Colombo National Museum	55,259	43,229,000
Natural History Museum	5,447	3,982,700
Kandy National Museum	1,955	1,105,300
Rathnapura National Museum	60	17,900
Anuradhapura Folk Museum	149	44,400
Dutch Museum	1,605	796,700
Galle Maritime Museum	2,942	834,300
Independence Memorial Museum	648	179,100
Hambantota National Museum	42	21,000
Total	**68,107**	**50,210,400**

Source: Tourism Development Authority 2017

Though every cultural place is rich with enough spiritual, peaceful, pleasant, historical values with ancient and indigenous knowledge, have a capacity to keep tourists with an exciting experience having thousands of hotels around the ancient cities in Sri Lanka, only 4360 rooms were hired by the tourists in 2018. Those empirical explanations of tourists' behavior in Sri Lankan destinations have proved that the tourists' attraction and loyalty are not at a satisfactory level.

In the literature, there were many contributions to explain the destination image (Wijaya, 2013; Artuger et al., 2013) tourists satisfaction (Aliman and Mohomad, 2016), destination loyalty (Yoon and Uysal; 2005, Sangpikul; 2018), and experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999; Oliver, 1999; Pine and Gilmore, 1999) related to a physical product or an organization, further Udurawana and Wanninayake (2020), Silva (2002), and Wanninayake and Chovancova (2012) discussed tourists' image, satisfaction, destination marketing, and loyalty behavior in different perspectives, but not related to cultural places with experiential marketing.

Accordingly, this study reports the experience marketing practices associated with the cultural destinations in Sri Lanka and how does experience marketing facilitates the destination image, tourists satisfaction and' destination loyalty attached to the cultural places in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study will draw attention to destination loyalty through experiential marketing as an important phenomenon for researching different contexts. Further, this study will contribute to the applying of experiential marketing in the tourism industry.

The outcome of this research will guide Tourism development authorities, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), and other policy decision-makers to develop effective marketing strategies to attract loyal tourists towards the cultural destinations in Sri Lanka. Finally, this research presents the existing tourists behavior in cultural areas, the literature to justify the conceptual framework, due hypotheses along with the adopted methodology, and the results of the study and conclusion in the final section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential Marketing

Haeckel et al. (2003) have defined experience as "the 'take-away' impression formed by people's encounters with products, services, and businesses' and Experiential marketing or called as engagement marketing, live marketing, or event marketing defined by Schmitt (1999), Oliver (1999), Pine and Gilmore (1999), as the capacity to generate an unforgettable impression on the consumer mind, and Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) have explained experiential marketing as consumption of fantasies, feelings and fun. There are plenty of researchers such as Schmitt (1999), Brakus et al. (2009), Fournier et al. (2001), and Gentile et al. (2007) discussed experiential marketing with five sub-factors such as Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate. All these researchers

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used these five factors as dimensions of experiential marketing but Indrawati et al. (2016) used these factors as five variables.

Destination Image

Aaker (1996) has defined the brand image as "how the consumers perceive the brand". Destination image has been explained by the researchers pertinent to the cognitive image components, where Crompton (1979) mentioned that cognitive image is related to the impressions, perceptions, beliefs, ideas and knowledge that people hold on objects. Tasci et al. (2007) defined the destination image as a one to one connected interactive system of visitor's thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions toward a destination. Brakus et al. (2009), Artuger et al. (2013), Chovancova et al. (2012) Ranjbarian et al. (2017), and Udurawana et al. (2020) considered on destination image and its dimensions, and they have summarized worth infrastructure, green attraction, exciting natural and cultural resources, rational charging system, significant social environment, entertainment, safety feelings, and peaceful perception as the most suitable dimensions to address the destination image.

Tourists' Destination Loyalty

Hawkins et al. (1995) defined consumer loyalty as "consumers' purposes or authentic behavior to repeatedly purchase certain products or services". Nazari et al. (2014) and Yoon and Uysal (2005) have defined destination loyalty as the 'visitor preparedness to recommend the destination to himself and others in a confident manner. Sangpikul (2018) has studied many research contributions that were on brand loyalty, and he proposed that the brand loyalty dimensions are very much suitable to address the destination loyalty. Further, in Sri Lankan context, tourists' loyalty has been discussed by Udurawana (2018) and Silva (2002). There are researchers such as Yoon and Uysal (2005), Sangpikul (2018), Zhang et al. (2014), Chenini (2017), Udurawana et al. (2020) and Piotr (2004) who have explained dimensions of tourists' destination loyalty such as revisit to places, positive word-of-mouth, stay more times, recommend the place to the others, keep long term relationship, spent more, and use places valued places.

Tourists Satisfaction

Truong and Foster (2006) defined tourists satisfaction as the difference between tourists expectations and his perceived performance, or the ''fit'' between expectations of the tourist and host destination attributes. Cadotte, et al. (1982) well-defined tourist satisfaction as the holistic assessment of tourist expectations with earned experiences in terms of destination performance. Most studies have highlighted that the personal satisfaction is determined by the service quality. Parasuraman et al. (1994) and Dissanayake and Wanninayake (2007) explained that customers' overall satisfaction may influence not only by the service quality but also from the product features and the price. Further, based on the situational behavior, Arnould and Price (1993) proposed that the most satisfactory experiences of a person may receive from the non-expected situations than the expected. There are seven dimensions as freedom, fair chargers, enough security, exciting attraction, quality service, hospitality, and thrilling experience that have been identified by the researchers through the contribution given by scholars such as Aliman et al. (2016), Song et al. (2012), Udurawana (2015), Prayag and Ryan (2012), and Jawaria et al. (2010).

The Effects of Experiential Marketing

Wang and Lin (2010) and Stratigea and Hatzichristos (2011) explained that experiential marketing has positively affected on tourists satisfaction. Öztürk (2015) and has discussed the relationships between experiential marketing, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty as an empirical examination in Kenya, where he discovered that experiential marketing has been a major predictor of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, having a positive effect on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Cohen et al. (2014) have analyzed many studies, where they have identified that tourists' satisfaction plays a mediating role in determining the tourist loyalty behavior. Baloglu (2001) investigated a positive effect of experiential dimensions on image variations, and Chen et al. (2008) explored that image was affected by foreign visitors' night market experience. Further, Hsu, (2010) and Chao and Kuo (2013) have identified that experimental marketing has a positive effect on company brand image. Johnson et al. (2001) explained that the brand image has significantly influenced the custom loyalty. Oliver (1997) and Reicheld (1996) have discussed the relationship of experimental marketing, brand image, and customer loyalty with positive and significant contribution of experiential marketing, further, Chao (2015) explored that brand image plays the mediating

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role between experimental marketing and customer loyalty behavior. Being on these explanations, the researchers have developed the table below summarizing the relevant literature on respective variables.

Table 3. Major Dimensions of the Research Variable

Variable/ Factors		Indicators	References
Experiential marketing	SENSE	Sight, sound, touch, taste and smell.	Schmitt (1999), Oliver (1999), Pine and Gilmore, (1999), Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982), Brakus et al. (2009), Fournier et al. (2001), Gentile et al. (2007)
	FEEL	Moods, emotions, feel secure, feel comfortable, feel safe in your transaction	
	THINK	Problem solving (find more information), creative thinking, arouse interactions, surprising, intrigue, curiosity (interested), willing to share, involve	
	ACT	Stay, Behavior, social interaction, Adopt lifestyles, motivation, inspiration, emotions, recommendation	
	RELATE	Position, Stimulates relationships, social attention, associations, memories, connection, engage cultural values, group feeling,	
Destination Image		Infrastructure, Environmental attraction, Excited natural and cultural resources, Reasonable charging system, Appreciable social environment, Entertainment, Safety feelings, Peaceful perception	Wijaya (2013), Aaker (1996), Crompton, (1979), Brakus et al. (2009), Artuger et al. (2013), Ranjbarian et al. (2017)
Loyalty		Stay more times, Repurchase/revisit, extent positive word-of-mouth, recommend the place to others,, long term relationship with, spent more, valued places	Yoon & Uysal (2005), Sangpikul, (2018), Zhang et al. (2014), Chenini (2017), Piotr (2004)
Satisfaction		Freedom, Fair Chargers, Enough Security, Exciting Attraction, Quality Service, Hospitality, And Thrilled Experience	Aliman et al. (2016), Song et al (2012), Prayag & Ryan (2011), and Jawaria et al. (2010)

Source: Developed based on Literature Survey

Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual model (figure 2), has been developed on the basis of the above literature survey which illustrates the relationship between the independent, dependent and two mediating variables. Experiential marketing is the independent variable and Tourists destination Loyalty is identified as the dependent variable. Further, the tourists satisfaction and destinations image are the mediating variables.
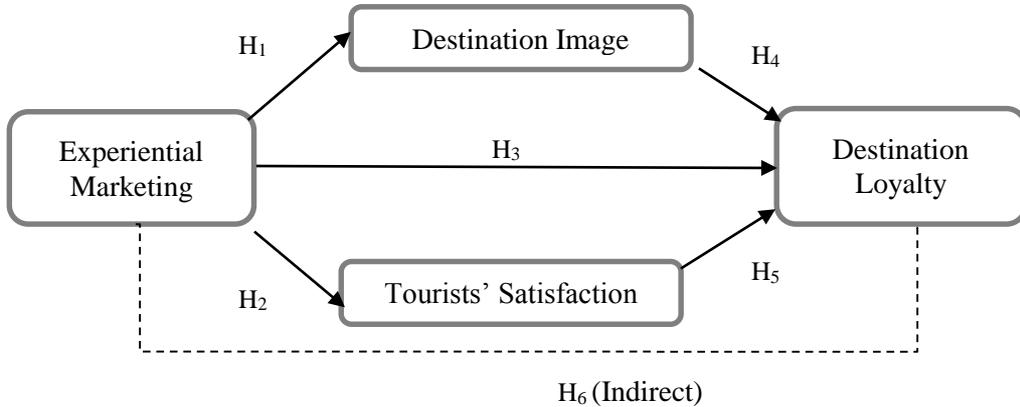

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Study

According to the given literature in the above paragraph and operationalization table, the researchers have developed six hypotheses as follows.

H_1: Experiential marketing has a significant effect on the destination image

H_2: Experiential marketing has a significant effect on tourists' satisfaction

H_3: Experiential marketing has a significant effect on destination loyalty

H_4: Destination image has a significant effect on tourists' destination loyalty

H_5: Tourists' satisfaction has a significant effect on tourists' destination loyalty

H_6: Tourists' destination loyalty is significantly affected by experiential marketing through the mediating effect of destination image and/or tourists' satisfaction

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

According to the research nature, this research philosophy was positivism, the research approach was deductive, and therefore this is an explanatory type of research. Further, the research methodological choice was mono method quantitative, the researchers used the survey strategy as the research strategy, and the study time horizon was cross-sectional. The population of the study was represented by all international tourists who had visited Sri Lanka in 2019. The sample consisted of 600 tourists, they have been selected through the convenient sampling technique. 513 questionnaires were filled properly by the respondents and data were analyzed through the AMOS software. Face validity and content validity of the constructs were tested through the ten scholars. Construct validity was tested through the Average Variance Extracted, (AVE) and Construct Reliability (CR), and AVE values were more than 0.5, and CR values were around 0.9. Finally, all four variables indicated good reliability as there were more than 0.7 alpha value (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

Table 4. Construct Validity and Mean Values for the Variables

Variable	Dimension	Alpha	AVE	CR	Number of Items	Mean
	Sense	0.736	0.65070	0.98225	5	2.456
	Feel	0.708	0.61040	0.96574	5	3.240
Experiential	Think	0.700	0.86468	0.96841	8	3.245
Marketing	Act	0.793	0.69193	0.96644	8	3.352
	Relate	0.729	0.60906	0.87964	8	2.857
Destination Image		0.803	0.60006	0.89792	8	2.881
Tourists Satisfaction		0.737	0.52291	0.96817	7	2.790
Destination Loyalty		0.759	0.53003	0.95787	7	2.470
Overall Model		0.814			56	

Source: Developed by the Researcher

Table 4 shows the mean values for variables, which were located around 2 to 3 range, it means tourists' have moderately agreed with the cultural places experience.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

At the analyses of tourists' sample profile, more males (276 Males - 53.8%), have visited the cultural areas than females, and 158 (30.8%) aged tourists (more than 50 age) have selected cultural areas than other age groups. There were 148 (28.8%) tourists with 30 -39 age group. From the sample, 221 tourists (43.1%) have mentioned their religion as Christianity and 208 tourists (40.5%) mentioned that they have no religion. Meanwhile, 453 tourists (88.3%) mentioned that their purpose of visiting the cultural areas is for 'pleasure. From the visited tourists, 423 (81.7%) have visited Sri Lanka with friends, and 290 tourists' (56.5%), stated as 'in a relationship'. Cultural areas attracted by re-visitors to Sri Lanka than the new visitors, where 445 tourists (86.7%) have visited cultural areas under their second or third visit to Sri Lanka, and 299 have visited cultural areas as they have stayed for more days (8 – 14) in Sri Lanka.

The researchers tested Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), including incremental and absolute indices, where Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI), used as incremental indices. Chi-square ($\chi2$), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), and Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) have used as absolute indices (Barrett, 2008) as presented by Table 5.

Table 5. 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	0.900	0.985	0.032	0.002	0.984	0.994	0.994
TS	59.21	14	4.23	0.900	0.900	0.055	0.017	0.911	0.928	0.902
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, TS- Tourists satisfaction DL- Destination loyalty
Source: Developed by the Researcher

All the CFA values have shown that the model has a perfect fit with its data. Further, relationships among the variables measured through the correlation analysis, then SPSS's results proved that all the variables have a significant and positive relationship as follows.

Table 6. Correlation Analysis for Variables

Variable and Values		DI	DL	TS	EM
Destination Image (DI)	Pearson Correlation	1	.380**		.246**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000		.000
	N	513	513		513
Tourists Satisfaction (TS)	Pearson Correlation	-.030	.449**	1	.217**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.496	.000		.000
	N	513	513	513	513
Destination Loyalty (DL)	Pearson Correlation	.380**	1		.167**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			.000
	N	513	513		513
Experiential Marketing (EM)	Pearson Correlation	.246**	.167**		1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	513	513		513

Source: Developed by the Researcher

     The AMOS diagram drawn bellow has shown the regression weight (coefficient of determination - R^2) for its main four variables.
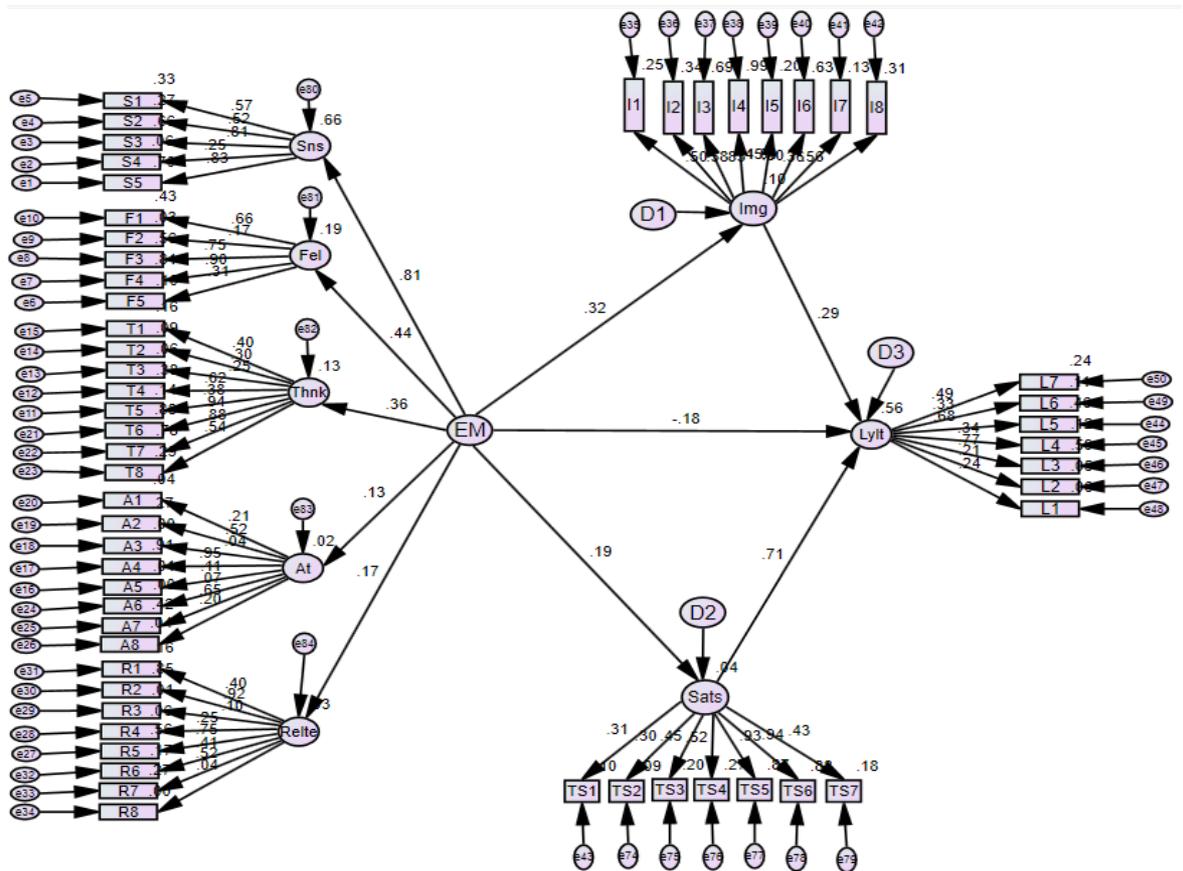

Figure 2. AMOS Diagram for Research Model

The table has shown that all the variables effects were significant and positive except the effect of experiential marketing has given on destination loyalty which was significant but negative.

Table 7. Results Summary: Path diagram of the Structural Model

Predicted Variable	Effect	Predictor Variable	R^2	P
Destination Image	Direct <---	Experiential Marketing	0.312	0.000
Tourists' Satisfaction	Direct <---	Experiential Marketing	0.187	0.000
Destination Loyalty	Direct <---	Destination Image	0.277	0.005
Destination Loyalty	Direct <---	Tourists' Satisfaction	0.710	0.000
Destination Loyalty	Direct <---	Experiential Marketing	-0.188	0.004
Destination Loyalty	Indirect <---	Experiential Marketing	0.219	

Source: Developed by the Researcher

The results proved that experiential marketing has significantly affected on destination image. It means H1 has accepted, when experiential marketing goes up by 1, destination image goes up by 0.312 standard deviations. Experiential marketing has significantly and positively affected on tourists' satisfaction, it means H2 was accepted. When the Experiential marketing goes up by 1, tourists' satisfaction goes up by 0.187 standard deviations. H3 has accepted, as experiential marketing has significantly affected on tourists' destination loyalty, it means, experiential marketing goes up by 1 destination loyalty goes down by 0.188 standard deviations. However, as this effect was negative, the researchers tested the indirect effect between experiential marketing and destination loyalty, where experiential marketing has significantly affected on tourists' destination loyalty through the mediating effect of destination image and or tourists' satisfaction. It means, H6 has been accepted. The indirect effect was 0.216, it means experiential marketing goes up by 1 tourists' destination loyalty goes up by 0.216 standard deviations through the mediating effect of destination image and or tourists satisfaction. Further, H4 has accepted, destination image has significantly affected the tourists' destination loyalty. It means destination image goes up by 1, tourists' destination loyalty goes up by 0.216 standard deviations. Finally, H5 has accepted as tourists' satisfaction has significantly affected on the tourists' destination loyalty, it means that tourists' satisfaction goes up by 1, tourists' destination loyalty goes up by 0.710 standard deviations. Therefore, this research model has aligned with Chao (2015) as he has strongly proved loyalty is upgraded by the indirect effect than the effect given by the direct effect of experiential marketing.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Udurawana (2016) has mentioned that tourists' demographic factors are more valuable when managing loyal destinations in Sri Lanka. Therefore, SLTDA, DMOs and other decision-makers including stakeholders of the cultural areas had better to consider tourists geo-demographic factors such as age groups; especially the 30 -39 age tourists, and more than 50 age tourists, tourists needs as the 'pleasure', tourists' marital status as in a 'relationship', tourists' income, and professions. DMOs had better to arrange tourists' solutions considering tourists friends, because more tourists have visited cultural areas with their friends. Further, it is better to pay attention on repeat visitors than the new visitors to Sri Lanka, because the cultural areas have been visited mostly by the repeat visitors than the new visitors. Another thing is that the DMOs must focus on tourists who have long time vacations in Sri Lanka than short-time visitors. The most interesting thing found is that the experiential marketing has no direct effect on destination loyalty, but it has happened indirectly with the mediating effect of destination image and tourists satisfaction. Therefore, if any DMOs have expected to upgrade tourists' loyalty behavior, they must consider tourists image factors and satisfaction factors to use with experiential marketing practices. It means that there is no tourists' loyalty in cultural areas in Sri Lanka without considering tourist satisfaction and destination image factors.

In this research, the researchers have achieved all research objectives, answered to all the research questions, and accepted all the research hypotheses. Therefore, it was obvious that all the cultural areas should have sound programs to upgrade experiential marketing through the adoption of tourists sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioral, and relational perceptions. Meanwhile, all the authorities must consider destination image dimensions and tourists' satisfactory dimensions to attract more tourists while offering a comfortable and memorable experience to the visitors. The researchers advised the DMOs to maintain quality infrastructure, ensure visitor security, arrange quality food-lodging-financing facilities, implement entertaining facilities in surrounding cultural areas with nightlife for tourists, develop jogging areas near rivers, water tanks, with street-programs opening locations 24*7 concepts, to upgrade the destination image and satisfaction in the cultural areas.

Further, the researchers have identified that the cultural places should have additional activities to keep tourists with destinations. Therefore, it is better to use the natural resources to add many activities such as water- games, tree houses, bird watching, boat riding, and fishing activities facilitating rivers, canals, and big water tanks in the surrounding areas of the attractions. Further, the stakeholders must invest in new tourists' activities through Bullock cart riding, horse riding, catamaran riding, and walk to poor village houses through paddy fields or states to enjoy its traditional cultivation. Meanwhile, involve tourists with preparing Sri Lankan Authentic foods may help to keep the tourists for more time with destinations. Therefore, to attract loyal tourists, DMOs should develop exciting entertainment programs and greater hospitality removing the price sensitivity of tourists. Finally, there should be a unity among the stakeholders of all the cultural places to promote and keep tourists with destinations. There should be a common policy, practices and procedures when dealing with tourists' within a cultural destination while maintaining a unique recognition to themselves by offering diversified services. It means cultural places must maintain have at least one solution for everyone, being obeying the concept called 'something for everyone' with greater hospitality to offer a memorable experience for its visitors.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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