The Role of Customer Delight, Engagement, Experience and Place Identity on Revisit Intention in the Tourism Sector in the Western Province, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of factors such as Customer satisfaction, Customer delight, Engagement, Memorable experiences and Place identity on visitors' Revisit intention in tourism sector of the Western Province, Sri Lanka, which is a key component of sustainable tourism. Tourists are more inclined to plan further visits when they are thrilled by interesting activities, meaningful encounters that are consistent with Place Identity. This study emphasizes the importance of these elements in encouraging repeat visits, ethical tourism, and supporting the longterm sustainability of the location and provides a comprehensive understanding of how these elements impact the overall growth of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka. The objectives of the study are to investigate the levels of Customer Delight (CD), Customer Engagement (CE), Customer Experience (CX), Place Identity (PI) & Revisit

Intention (RI) in tourism Sector in the Western Province, to identify the relationships between CD, CE, CX, PI & RI, evaluate the impact of CD, CE, CX, PI on RI & the fourth objective is to evaluate how CX & Pl mediate the relationship between CE & RI. Based on the literature review, this research establishes a conceptual framework for investigating the relationships among Customer delight, Engagement, Experience, Place identity, Revisit intention, and impacts on each other. Primary data were collected through a well-structured questionnaire from 400 local and foreign tourists in Western Province by using the convenience sampling method. This study has used univariate (descriptive), bivariate (correlation), multivariate (regression), and mediation analysis to achieve the objectives. The findings of the study reveal that there are significant relationships among the variables and a significant impact of Customer delight, Engagement, `Experience and Place identity on Revisit intention. Moreover, Customer experience and Place identity partially mediate the relationship between Customer

engagement and Revisit intention in the tourism sector. Overall, this research contributes to the existing knowledge by examining the critical role that Customer delight plays in the tourism industry, facilitating successful interactions.

1. INTRODUCTION

This Research note discusses the importance of several factors like Customer Delight (CD), Customer Engagement (CE), Customer Experiences (CX) & Place Identity (PI) in encouraging tourists' Revisit Intention (RI), thereby contributing to sustainable tourism. When considering the problem of research, it highlights the need to understand the interplay between Customer Delight & other constructs within a single framework. The research explores how these factors influence Sri Lanka's tourism sector's expansion, particularly in the Western Province, Sri Lanka & how they influence tourists' intention to revisit. The findings expect to guide tourism authorities, policymakers, & industry stakeholders in developing effective marketing strategies to attract more tourists, boost the economy & increase revenue. Overall, the research contributes academically by expanding the understanding of CD, CE, CX, PI & RI by offering insights for businesses to differentiate themselves & gain competitive advantages in the tourism sector. This study has been done in the context of famous tourist public places in the Western Province, it would be of value, future research to be done in the context of hotels as well as extension to other provinces.

1.1 Aims & Objectives

There are four main objectives of this research study. The first one is to investigate the levels of CD, CE, CX, PI & RI in the tourism Sector in the Western Province. The identification of the relationships between CD, CE, CX, PI & RI is the second objective. The third objective is to evaluate the impact of CD, CE, CX, PI on RI & the fourth objective is to evaluate how CX & Pl mediate the relationship between CE & RI.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

With respect to the research objectives & research questions, there are five variables in the research. The term "customer delight" describes a feeling that consists of happiness, excitement, pleasure, or exuberance. Customer Engagement refers to psychological condition that results from a client's collaborative, interactive experiences with a focus agent or item during a service interaction. Customer Experience refers to a multifaceted concept that focuses on how a client reacts to a company's services on a cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensory, and social level. Place Identity is known as a collection of meanings, information, attachment, dedication, and fulfillment that a person or group connects with a certain location. The intention to visit again is known as the Revisit Intention.

CD is examined in the context of CE by Ma et al. (2013); their results show that customers are more engaged and have more positive experiences when they are delighted with the destination. According to Arnold et al. (2005), there was a significant association between CE and CD. According to Taheri et al. (2019), Customers are more engaged, when they receive better product or a service than expected. According to several academics, CE is clearly a significant predictor of CX (Rather et al., 2021). It is unclear the extent to which Engagement can contribute to the relationship between Customer Delight and CX.

The links between tourism CE, CX, and RI were investigated by Rather et al. in 2021. Although previous studies on tourism have primarily examined these constructs separately, there is a dearth of research that integrates these ideas into a coherent nomological network. Rather and Hollebeek (2021) found that the results support the crucial strategic function of intra-interaction cognitive/emotional CE for tourist providers, considering their noteworthy impact on customers' trans-interaction experience. According to Harrigan et al. (2018), CX in turn, has a considerable impact on tourists' propensity to revisit their destination, demonstrating their strategic significance.

By including customer involvement as a moderating component in the relationship between CX and RI, respectively, Rather et al. (2021) improve on the current tourism CE-based insight. Therefore, while involvement is generally conceived of as a CE antecedent (Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014), Rather et al. (2021) have gained more precise understanding by demonstrating that a customer's level of involvement influences the strength of association of

CX with RI. Rather et al. (2021) added to the CE and tourism literature by observing the greater impact of CX on Revisit Intention for highly involved customers. Specifically, marketers may choose to focus on their more involved consumers or provide opportunities for their less involved clients to become more involved (via education, for example, Zaichkowsky 1985).

Rather et al. further found that the emotional destination Engagement of repeat customers was higher, indicating that customers' capacity to invest more affective resources in their site-related interactions (e.g., on subsequent visits) rises after they develop destination-related trust (Hollebeek, Srivastava, and Chen 2019). Put another way, because clients have limited resources, initially, they tend to cognitively assess the destination. During later visits, their limited assets gradually become available for use in more impactful destination evaluations. It suggests that experiential/hedonic marketing strategies such as site-based events like light shows and fairs can be used to better serve and attract repeat business (Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003). Moreover, repeat customers, on average, indicated increased behavioral engagement, suggesting that they invest more time, effort, and energy in their destination visits. This conclusion makes sense because returning guests who have already experienced the site's primary attraction(s) are probably going to look for extra or different on-site events (like markets or concerts) on their next trips.

2.1   Supporting theories for study

2.1.1   Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT)

According to CAT, assessments of the experience could cause emotions, which could then influence how a person would behave (Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer 1999; Lazarus 1991; Watson and Spence 2007). For the reasons listed below, CAT lays the foundation for the primary effects suggested in the present study. First, as a leading theory for researching the causes and effects of consuming emotions, this theory offers a comprehensive approach for comprehending the psychological process of emotions in the broader marketing domain (Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer 1999; Watson and Spence 2007). Second, even though CAT has been used in a few studies looking into the behavior of tourists and their Experiences (Cai, Lu, and Gursoy 2018; Choi and Choi 2019), researchers are calling for more studies to fully understand how CAT works in the tourism industry. Third, CAT states that a visitor who has a favorable assessment of their trip may Experience joyful emotions (like Delight) and act in ways to foster this feeling (Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer 1999). Consequently, it might be

argued that CAT provides a fortunate route for charting the Customer Delight process by connecting it to visitor appraisals and behavioral intents (e.g., Revisit Intentions).

2.1.2   Attachment Theory (AT)

AT specifies a psychological attachment or link between individuals (Bowlby, 1982; Ainsworth et al., 2015). According to other studies (Ainsworth et al., 2015; Hinson et al., 2019), people's attachment experiences shape their attitudes, behaviors, and inactions toward others. They identified three diverse kinds of attachments that occur between mothers and their babies: avoidance, resistant, and secure. Previous research looked at attachment from three aspects: bonding-based attachment, social structure-based attachment, and identity-based attachment (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981). Long-term interpersonal ties are referred to as bonding-based attachment, whereas physical structures that bind a person to a place are referred to as social structural attachment. In a similar vein, identity-based attachment is associated with incorporating an object into individual thoughts. According to our study's definition of attachment, attachment has three components namely Place Identity, bonding, and identitybased attachment. Consequently, a tourist's attachment to a place can be described as an ongoing emotional bonding process with the place as well as by recognizing and connecting the physical location/ place with their thoughts (Bowlby, 1982).

2.1.3   Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Behavioral intentions that precede overall conduct are referred to as TPB. "Revisit intentions" describe tourists' desire to go back and recommend a specific location in this study.

To determine the operational definitions of the concepts, the variables & concepts listed below are conceptualized based on the study problems. According to Figure 1, this study's independent, mediating & dependent factors have been conceptualized.

This model includes two independent variables. These are Customer Delight & Customer Engagement. The dependent variable is Revisit Intention & Mediating variables are Customer Experience & Place Identity.

Below is the Conceptual Framework of this study.

Figure 1 – Conceptual Framework
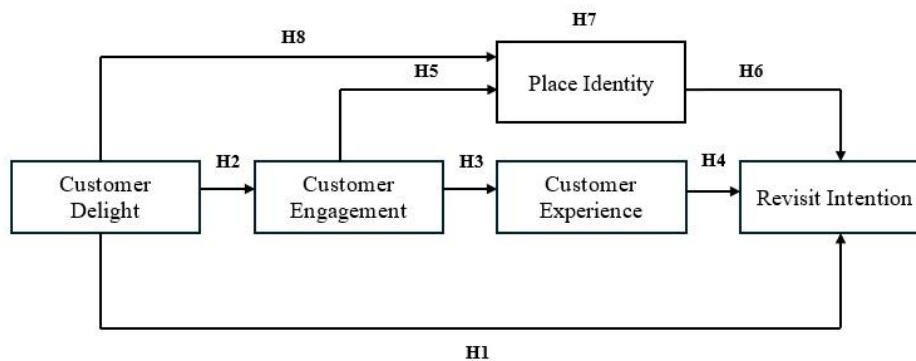
Source - (Shoukat & Ramkissoon, 2022)

Hypothesis proposed and evaluated based on the literature were as follows,

H1: *Customer Delight has a positive relationship with Revisit Intention* **H2***:*

Customer Delight has a positive relationship with Customer Engagement.

H3: *Customer Engagement has a positive relationship with Customer Experience.*

H4: *Customer Experience has a positive relationship with Revisit Intention.*

H5: *Customer Engagement has a positive relationship with Place Identity.*

H6: *Place Identity has a positive relationship with Revisit Intention.*

H7: *Place Identity mediates the relationship between Customer Engagement & Revisit*

Intention.

H8: *Customer Delight has a positive relationship with Place Identity.*

3.   METHODOLOGY

Research strategies & design are the guidelines or methodologies used to conduct the research. Here research guidelines (methodologies) include organizing, planning, designing, & conducting. Research Survey has been used as the appropriate research strategy.

This research concentrates on the role of CD, CE, CX & PI on RI in Tourism Sector in the Western Province & The objectives of the study are to investigate the levels of CD, CE, CX, PI & RI in tourism Sector in the Western Province, to identify the relationships between CD,

CE, CX, PI & RI, evaluate the impact of CD, CE, CX, PI on RI & the fourth objective is to evaluate how CX & Pl mediate the relationship between CE & RI.

Basically, two major research philosophies have been identified in the Western tradition of science, namely positivist [sometimes called scientific] and interpretivist [also known as anti-positivist] (Galliers, 1991). According to this research Philosophy, it is based on positivism. Because under positivism, theories provide the basis of explanation, permit the anticipation of phenomena, predict their occurrence, and therefore allow them to be controlled.

The researcher conducted this research using a deductive approach, as this is the development of a base of assumptions based on existing theories and the creation of a research plan to evaluate these assumptions. Here the deductive approach can be explained using assumptions derived from theory.

In this research context, surveys are an appropriate research strategy, one of the most common types of quantitative research in the social sciences. So that, in a survey study, the researcher selects a sample of participants from the population and applies standard questionnaire to them.

In the current study, the researcher chooses the local and foreign tourists of Sri Lanka's Western Province as the study population, to collect and analyze the study variables by selecting a convenience sample out of them & this study is conducted in a cross-sectional time horizon, as it collects data in a specific period.

The study considered Western Province as the research area due to the convenience of the researcher to collect the relevant research information from the local and foreign tourists who visit this province due to numerous reasons. Here, the researcher collects data from local and foreign tourists, which is the study setting of this research. The study population is identified as local & foreign tourists who visit Western Province for numerous reasons. It is exceedingly difficult to get accurate information regarding the tourists who visits specifically Western Province. Hence, the population of the research is unknown.

The researcher used convenience sampling as one of the important sampling methods of nonprobability sampling technique because it is exceedingly difficult to determine specific population. Questionnaires were distributed among the local & foreign tourists (under convenience sampling) who visit Western Province for numerous reasons to select the related respondents of the research. The researcher has selected four hundred local & foreign tourists in Western Province to distribute the questionnaires.

The first study objective achieved using the univariate analysis method, where each variable was evaluated using a descriptive statistical method, regarding the Second objective, the study has used the bivariate analysis method, where the correlation analysis method has used under it. To attain the third objective, the research has used the simple regression analysis & multiple regression analysis method. To attain fourth objective, the researcher has used the mediation analysis method through SPSS.

4.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Discussion of personal information

Personal information of local and foreign tourists who visit Western Province in Sri Lanka is determined using a nominal scale that included eight questions designed to assess different facets of the respondents' personal data.

Table 1 – Summary of Personal Information

Indicator		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	172	43%
	Female	228	57%
Age	20-30 Years	61	15.3%
	31-40 Years	212	53.0%
	41-50 Years	105	26.3%
	Above 50 Years	22	5.5%
Marital Status	Single	63	15.8%
	Married	328	82%
	Divorced	9	2.3%
Education Qualification	Primary/Secondary	210	52.5%
	Diploma	108	27%
	Bachelor's Degree	63	15.8%
	Postgraduate	19	4.8%

Reason for travelling	Leisure	270	67.5%
	Adventure	64	16%
	Religious	25	6.3%
	Other	41	10.3%
Origin	Sri Lankan	242	60.5%
	Non -Sri Lankan	158	39.5%
Employment Status	Fulltime employment	264	66%
	Parttime employment	87	21.8%
	Unemployed	20	5%
	Retired	5	1.3%
	Business	24	6%
Travelling Frequency	Once in 2-5 Years	76	19%
	Once a year	194	48.5%
	2-3 times a year	89	22.3%
	4-5 times a year	41	10.3%

(Source: Survey Data)

4.2 Discussion of Research information

Table 2 - Summary of Univariate Analysis

Variable/ Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Customer Delight	5.1395	0.77027
Customer Engagement	4.8415	0.58166
Customer Experience	4.8827	0.62773
Place Identity	4.9290	0.62773

Revisit Intention	5.3475	0.94455

(Source: Survey Data)

Apart from CE, CX & PI, Other variables had a prominent level in the tourism sector in the Western Province.

Table 3 - Summary of Bivariate Analysis

Variables	Relationship	r
Customer Delight and Customer Engagement	Strong positive relationship	0.631
Customer Delight and Place Identity	Strong positive relationship	0.667
Customer Engagement and Customer Experience	Strong positive relationship	0.608
Customer Engagement and Place Identity	Strong positive relationship	0.549
Customer Experience and Revisit Intention	Strong positive relationship	0.572
Place Identity and Revisit Intention	Strong positive relationship	0.506
Customer Delight and Revisit Intention.	Strong positive relationship	0.641

(Source: Survey Data)

Summary of Regression Analysis and Mediation Analysis

According to simple regression analysis results, it indicates that CD ($p<0.01$; $\beta=0.786$) significantly impacts on RI, CD ($p<0.01$; $\beta=0.476$) significantly impacts on CE, CE ($p<0.01$; $\beta=0.657$) significantly impacts on CX, CE ($p<0.01$; $\beta=0.699$) significantly impacts on PI, CX ($p<0.01$; $\beta=0.861$) significantly impacts on RI, PI ($p<0.01$; $\beta=0.645$) significantly impacts on RI, CD ($p<0.01$; $\beta=0.641$) significantly impacts on PI, CE ($p<0.01$; $\beta=0.657$) & CX ($p<0.01$; $\beta=0.513$) significantly impacts on RI, CE ($p<0.01$; $\beta=0.699$) & PI ($p<0.01$; $\beta=0.626$) significantly impacts on RI.

The application of Baron and Kenny's (1986) standard causal step approach analysis evaluated the mediating impact. To generate a mediation effect, the following four requirements must satisfied: a direct relationship between the independent and dependent variables; the independent variable needs to be connected to mediating variables; the mediating variable needs to have a significant relationship with the dependent variable when both the independent and mediating variables predict the dependent variable; the link between the independent and dependent variables must be substantially diminished when the mediator is included (Prayag et al., 2013). The study evaluated the mediating effect of CX & PI between CE and RI. As a result, the mediation analysis's conclusions corroborate the idea that CX and PI partially mediate the relationship between CE and RI.

5. CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

Four hundred respondents in the survey were both local and foreign tourists who visit Western Province for numerous reasons.

Researchers used descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis & Mediation Analysis to fulfill the study's objectives. The researcher's main goal is to ascertain, the role of CD, CE, CX, PI on RI in tourism sector in the Western Province. Thus, it can be concluded that CD, CE, CX, PI have a positive & significant impact on Revisit Intention as well as there are strong positive relationships among them & apart from Customer Engagement, Customer Experience & Place Identity, all other variables had a high level in the tourism sector of Western Province.

Particularly in the areas of management of the tourists' experience, interaction with the destination, and value co-creation, this research has practical significance for the marketing communication sector. Destination managers can delight customers using Customer Engagement. Destination management may therefore need to prioritize CE at popular tourist destinations & planning for tourism should involve the local community as well as other stakeholders, such small travel agencies, (Ramkissoon, 2020a).

The importance of this research rests in its contribution to Sri Lankan best tourism practices. The study supports strategies for boosting the industry's competitiveness and long-term sustainability by examining the link between CD, CE, CX and PI on RI. This provides insightful information that helps companies promote responsible travel, which will boost the economy, protect cultural assets, and motivate similar initiatives throughout the world.

Though creative work displays advances in theory and practical research, it has some shortcomings that can be resolved in further additional research. This research study has been done in the context of famous tourist's public places in the Western Province, & the Research study is limited to that province. It would be valuable for future research to be done in the context of hotels as well as extension to other provinces to understand any patterns of similarities & specificities. The study's data collection was done only in a short period. Thus, if someone can dedicate a considerable amount of time to gathering the data, it might prove to be useful.

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