

## ASSESSING THE ROLE OF SRI LANKA'S COUNTRY IMAGE AND DESTINATION IMAGE IN SHAPING MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES AND REVISIT INTENTIONS

**Senevirathne, K.S.B<sup>a\*</sup>**

<sup>a</sup>Department of Tourism Management, Faculty of Management Studies  
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka  
[buddhinis555@gmail.com](mailto:buddhinis555@gmail.com)\*

*\*Corresponding Author*

### ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka's tourism industry, a key economic pillar, has been severely impacted by a series of crises, including the 2019 - Easter attacks, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the recent economic crisis. These events have significantly damaged Sri Lanka's perceived image. While country image refers to the perceptions, beliefs, and impressions one holds about a nation, destination image encompasses an individual's thoughts, feelings, and overall impressions of a place. This study investigates how country image and destination image impact the memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) and tourists' revisit intentions in this post-crisis context. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire from 128 international tourists who had visited Sri Lanka. The statistical software package i.e. Smart PLS, was used to analyse the data. The findings reveal that destination image has a significant positive impact on revisit intention, mediated by memorable tourism experiences. Conversely, while country image positively influences destination image, it does not exert a significant mediated influence on revisit intention through memorable tourism experiences. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that, in a crisis-affected destination like Sri Lanka, the immediate destination image serves as a more powerful predictor of memorable tourism experiences and repeat visitation than the broader country image. The research underscores the critical role of destination image as a marketing tool, suggesting that stakeholders should prioritize cultivating a positive destination image to enhance memorable tourism experiences and encourage revisitation.

**Keywords:** *Country Image, Destination image, Memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), Revisit intention*

### 1. Introduction

Sri Lanka emerged as one of the world's premier tourist destinations following the end of its civil war in 2009, leveraging its geographic diversity, natural beauty, and rich cultural heritage (Fernando et al., 2017). The tourism industry is one of the key pillars of Sri Lanka's major economic sectors. It is identified as the third-largest foreign exchange earner in the country, after private remittance and garment exports, in 2018 (Saratha et al., 2020). The Easter Sunday attack impacted the tourism industry by reducing the tourism arrivals by 71% (Central Bank of Sri Lanka,

2020). The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak adversely impacted Sri Lanka's tourism industry by causing a sharp decline in international travel, resulting in a huge reduction in tourism revenue (Sachithanantham, 2022). Furthermore, the economic crisis in Sri Lanka was able to make an impact on the tourism industry, hence 40% of cancelled bookings (Outlook India, 2022). On the other hand, Sri Lanka is currently facing economic difficulties with some economic ups and downs. Therefore, a country should maintain a good image to increase tourist arrivals. Hence, the image of a country as a tourism destination always impacts the tourist decision to visit (Chaulagain et al., 2019). In this study, the main objective is to identify the influence of Sri Lanka's country image and destination image on memorable tourism experiences and revisit intention.

Sri Lanka incurred reputational damage due to the country's unstable economy and the internal crisis (i.e., picketing, strikes, and lack of fuel). According to Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009), a country image is typically described in the context of international commerce and marketing as the overall perception, belief, and impression that customers have of a certain nation. A country's image is a complex depiction of its characteristics, including its history, culture, geography, hospitality, infrastructure, security, and attractiveness. And it also involves the attitudes of different aspects, i.e., Policies, economy, diplomacy, and culture (Xiang, 2013; Peng, 2004). According to Chaulagain et al. (2019), tourists are more likely to visit a country if they have a positive perception of it, as this builds interest in what the place has to offer. On the other hand, a poor or inaccurate image of a country may discourage tourists from coming and decrease the growth of the tourist industry. However, after the Easter Sunday Attack, Sri Lanka suffered significant reputational damage. Also, after the economic crisis, there was destruction to Sri Lanka's image. Laroche et al. (2005) stated that the country's image plays an important role in marketing. And the authors have emphasized that the country image is based on the price and brand name, as well as consumers tend to regard the country with consistently positive and negative attitudes. Therefore, countries should develop their image positively to increase their country's well-being.

A destination is an important place that consists of multiple attractions (Jamaludi et al., 2012). According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999), the destination image means the person's beliefs, emotions, and overall perceptions of a location. Numerous factors, such as advertising materials, social media, first impression, and contact with locals, have an impact on a destination's image (Garay, 2019). The perception a tourist has towards a country can impact the decision of selecting that country as a destination to travel (Chaulagain et al., 2019). Memorable tourism experiences are the ability to remember the experiences a tourist had in a destination (Kim et al., 2010). The image of a country and a destination is inextricably linked by memorable tourism experiences since they influence and reinforces these perceptions. Therefore, when there is a positive country image and destination image, it can influence the memorable tourism experiences (Zhang et al., 2017). Hence, this research study focuses on examining the structural modelling of the relationship between country image, destination image and memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) as well as the relationship between memorable tourism experiences and the revisit intention of the tourists using the model developed by Zhang et al. (2017).

Zhang et al. (2017) noted that tourists are more likely to perceive themselves as having memorable tourism experiences if they have a positive image of the destination country, which in turn increases their likelihood of returning. This study, therefore, aims to fill the gap by examining the structural relationships between Sri Lanka's country image, destination image, memorable tourism experiences and revisit intention. Adopting the model by Zhang et al. (2017), the research investigates whether the country's recent challenges have altered the traditional pathways through which images influence tourist behaviour. The findings offer critical insights for destination marketers, policymakers, and tourism enterprises in Sri Lanka and similar crisis-affected destinations, providing a roadmap for strategic image management and experience design to foster recovery and sustainable growth.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Country Image and Destination Image*

In recent decades, there has been continuous interest in the concepts of country image and destination image within two main areas of study: international marketing and tourism. Chaulagain et al. (2019) reveal that the perception of a country positively influences the perception of a destination, and both country and destination perceptions have a positive impact on the intention to visit. According to the halo effect theory, consumer product evaluation is influenced by a country's perception with a favourable perception promoting a positive impact of its products (Costa et al., 2016). Country image has a big impact on destination image, and beliefs and assessments about the built environment are influenced by people's attitudes and ability (Nadeau et al., 2008). The overall perceptions of both the country and the destination can act as intermediaries in influencing post-visit behavioural intentions based on tourism satisfaction. Furthermore, a satisfying tourism experience of high quality not only impacts on the intention to revisit and the willingness to endorse the country as a tourist destination but also fosters more favourable intentions toward products originating from the visited country (De Nisco et al., 2015). Ayoub & Mohamed (2024) suggest that enhancing a country's image can play a role in shaping intention to visit and return to a domestic location. According to Zhang et al. (2017), it reveals a positive relationship between country image and destination image. When a more favourable country image is perceived, the destination image is also viewed more positively. Based on the above literature, this study posits the following hypothesis.

H1. Sri Lanka's country image positively influences the destination image

## *2.2 Destination Image and Memorable Tourism Experiences*

Destination image is the person's belief, emotions, and overall perceptions of a location (Baloğlu & McCleary, 1999). Culture, activities, attractions, lodging, cuisine, services, prices, and safety all affect how tourists perceive a location. Destination image is influenced by national image, which includes cordial, reliable interactions and economical consumption (Zhang et al., 2015). According to Wang et al. (2017), perceived quality influences satisfaction and behavioural intention, whereas destination image has a substantial impact on visitor satisfaction and the desire to return. Both travel motivation and the overall tourism experience have a substantial impact on the perception of tourism destinations. However, aspects of destination image have a partial influence on novelty, involvement, meaningfulness, and knowledge. In relation to the second aim, the outcomes demonstrated that dimensions of memorable tourism experiences account for the variability in revisit intentions. Given the significance of novelty as a precursor to both memorable tourism experiences and revisit intentions, constant monitoring of novelty and initiatives within the tourism sector is essential. Earlier research has shown that destination image plays a substantial role in shaping tourists' satisfaction and their likelihood to revisit. To illustrate, a study carried out by Wang et al. (2017) discovered that destination image has an impact on perceived quality, which subsequently affects satisfaction and behavioural intention. Inbound tourism cognitive images can be divided into categories such as food, culture, people, architecture, recreation, natural landscapes, urban life, animals, and infrastructure. Among these, the categories of architecture, culture, and natural landscapes exhibit superior visual appeal and evoke stronger positive emotions (Wang et al., 2024). Kim (2014) developed a model for evaluating the characteristics of destinations linked to memorable tourism experiences. This innovative assessment aims to investigate the distinctive attributes of destinations that might be offered at a specific location. The findings indicated that ten factors, including aspects such as local culture, the range of activities available, hospitality, infrastructure, environmental management, accessibility, service quality, physiography, place attachment, and superstructure, are significant destination attributes that have the potential to enhance a person's memorable tourism experiences. Based on the above literature, this study posits the following hypothesis.

H2. Sri Lanka's destination image positively influences the memorable tourism experiences

## *2.3 Country Image and Memorable Tourism Experiences*

According to Kim et al. (2010), Memorable tourism experiences refer to the ability to recall the experience a tourist had at a destination. Country image significantly impacts customer product assessment, perceived value, satisfaction, and purchase intention, despite its limited study on tourist experiences (Buhmann, 2016; Heslop et al., 2004; Costa et al., 2016). The country image and destination image influence on revisit intention is explained through the mediating role of memorable tourism experiences. The study of Kladou et al. (2021) explores both the direct and indirect influence of memorable tourism experiences on the formation of a country's image. It underscores the significance of memorable tourism experiences in shaping positive image

attributes and behaviours related to a country's image within the context of tourism, highlighting the pivotal role experiential satisfaction plays in this process. Interplay between various cognitive and emotional aspects of the country image and their collective impact on shaping behavioural intentions. There are potential avenues for further research in the field of country image analysis (Buhmann, 2016). Carneiro and Faria (2016) indicate that they place significant emphasis on the careful definition of the country image construct, recognizing that the lack of clarity in its conceptualization has contributed to conflicting findings in the literature. Providing an example of how to develop a tailored measure for country image in a specific context and empirically validate this new measurement approach. González-Reverté et al. (2025) indicate that visitors connect their sense of hospitality with emotional ties to the location, which serve as factors in developing memorable tourism experiences, ultimately encouraging a revisit to the destination. Based on the above literature, this study posits the following hypothesis.

H3. Sri Lanka's country image positively influences the memorable tourism experiences

#### *2.4 Memorable Tourism Experiences and Tourism Revisit Intention*

The relationship between satisfaction and memorable experiences is crucial. Early research showed that positive travel experiences often lead to unforgettable ones. Academics believed memorable experiences depended on visitor pleasure and a sympathetic attitude towards the tourism product. Unsatisfactory experiences occur when the gap between expectations and experience is not met, while satisfied experiences align with needs and performance (Cho, 2022). The dimensions that determine the Memorable Tourism Experience are hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty (Tsai, 2016; Kim et al., 2010). According to Zhang et al. (2017), they demonstrated that perceived image elements from the destination and country influence the revisit intention. Zhang et al. (2017) address a critical gap in the literature by constructing a causal relationship model that links country image, destination image, memorable tourism experiences, and revisit intention. Country image and destination image exert influence on revisit intention, mediated through the effects of memorable tourism experiences. Additionally, perceived risk negatively moderates the relationship between flow and intention to recommend (Chen et al., 2020). Based on the above literature, this study posits the following hypothesis.

H4. Memorable Tourism Experiences positively influence the revisit intention to Sri Lanka

#### *2.5 Theoretical Framework*

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework combining the halo effect and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB). The Halo Effect explained how the overall country image positively biases the evaluation of the specific destination image, supporting H1 (Costa et al., 2016). Yu et al. (2025) suggest that shaping intangible cultural heritage generates a halo effect, greatly impacting the overall perception of the destination. The TPB provides the mechanism for

how beliefs and attitudes translate into intentions. Here, the destination image and the Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs) shape the intention to revisit. The mediating role of MTEs between cognitive evaluations and behavioural intention is centred on this model, aligning with the TPB's emphasis on the attitude intention link (Zhang et al., 2017). Furthermore, the expected positive behaviour positively influences the intention to return to the place (Zheng et al., 2024). This framework justifies the proposed causal relationships and the mediating role of MTEs.

### **3. Methodology**

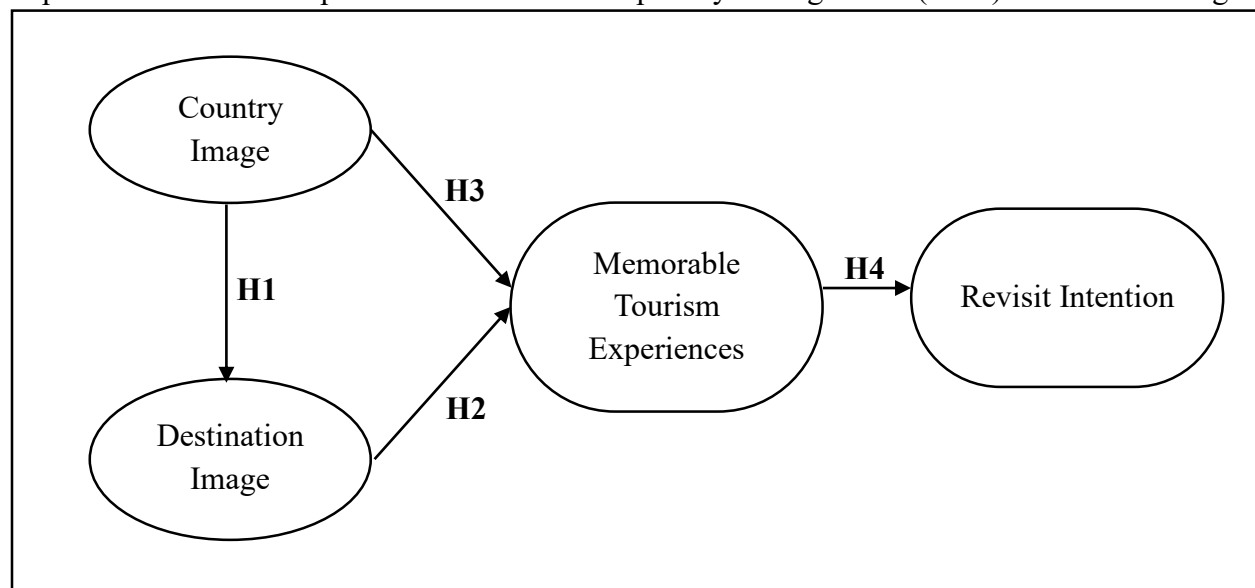
#### *3.1 Research Design*

This research employs a descriptive research design, enabling the testing of the hypotheses in the study. Additionally, a correlational design is employed, one of the three types of non-experimental designs, to analyze the relationships between independent and dependent variables and derive the study's outcomes (Fowler, 2008). Consequently, a survey research design was selected to collect data, as the researcher evaluates the data without further manipulation. This research employs a quantitative research method since the objective was to investigate how country image and destination image impact tourists' intention to return to Sri Lanka by assessing the relationships between the variables using measurable data, specifically statistical evidence (Mohajan, 2020). The target population was defined as the annual tourist arrivals in 2025 (2,053,465 based on SLTDA data from January to December 2024). Due to accessibility constraints, data were collected from 128 respondents, which is deemed adequate for PLS-SEM analysis (Kock & Hadaya, 2016).

Colombo and Negombo were identified as optimal locations for this purpose, as they are the typical final destinations for tourists before departure. This is due to their proximity to the Bandaranayake International Airport, with Colombo located approximately one hour away and Negombo within a 30-minute travel distance. Sampling from this population thus increased the likelihood of engaging respondents with the board, destination-wide exposure necessary for a meaningful evaluation of the measured attributes. Data collection was conducted over a specified period (2 months). Participants were approached at major hotels and tourist areas, screened for being adult international tourists who are at the end of their trip. Only one tourist was selected from one group to reduce bias. They were briefed on the research purpose, assured of anonymity, and provided informed consent before completing the paper-based questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured in sections: demographic profile, measures of country image (11 items), destination image (9 items), MTEs (24 items), and revisit intention (3 items), adapted from Zhang et al. (2017) and Kim et al. (2010). The questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert scale. 1 being strongly disagree, 2 being disagree, 3 being neither disagree nor agree, 4 being agree, and 5 being strongly agree.

### 3.2 Conceptual Framework

Zhang et al. (2017) have proposed a research model to examine the country image and destination image and their influence on revisit intention mediated by the memorable tourism experiences (MTEs). Country image attributes are country characteristics, country competence, people characteristics, people competence, environmental management and the relationship between two countries. Destination image attributes are natural attractions, cultural attractions, and tourism facilities. Memorable tourism experience attributes are hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge, which are the first seven order dimensions explained by Kim et al. (2010). According to the model, country image and destination image are considered as tourists' perceptions of microenvironment attributes, micro tourism attributes and facilities of the destination country. The perception of these attributes impacts the memorable tourism experiences and then influences the revisit intention of tourists to the destination. Furthermore, the study explains that the country image attributes contribute to the tourist perception of destination image, destination image attributes influence the memorable tourism experiences and having memorable tourism experiences will influence the revisit intention to the destination. Also, the study explains that country and destination image attributes influence the tourist revisit intention to the destination by the mediating effect of having memorable tourism experiences. The conceptual framework developed by Zhang et al. (2017) is shown in Fig.1.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two stages using SPSS and SmartPLS 4. In the first stage, SPSS was employed to perform demographic analysis and preliminary checks. In the second stage, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was applied to evaluate both the measurement model, focusing on reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity and the structural model for hypothesis testing. PLS-SEM was selected due to its appropriateness for

predictive research models with relatively small sample sizes and its capacity to accommodate complex mediating relationships (Hair et al., 2022).

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### *4.1 Demographic Statistics*

In the realm of demographic statistics, this research focuses on four key aspects related to the study's respondents. Firstly, it examines the respondents' gender, providing insights into the gender distribution within the group of individuals being studied. Secondly, the research delves into the respondents' age. Analysing the age of the participants helps identify age-related trends or distinctions that might be relevant to the study's objectives. The third aspect of focus is the origin continent of the respondents. This data reveals the geographical diversity among the participants and can offer valuable insights into the backgrounds and experiences of individuals from different parts of the world. Lastly, the study considers the duration of stay in Sri Lanka for the respondents.

Out of the total respondents, 67 were male (52.3%) and 61 were female (47.7%), indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution, with a slightly higher proportion of male participants. In terms of age distribution, a substantial proportion of respondents were between 31 and 40 years old, followed by a considerable number aged above 41. Regarding geographical distribution, 29.7% of participants were from Asia, while no respondents represented Africa. North America accounted for 21 respondents (16.4%), whereas Europe contributed the largest share, with 50% of the sample. South America represented only 0.8% and 4 respondents were from Australia, comprising 3.1% of the total. With respect to tourism engagement, 23.4% of participants reported staying in Sri Lanka for less than a week, while the majority (68.8%) stayed for less than two weeks. A smaller fraction, 7.0%, specified a time frame of less than a month, and only 0.8% reported staying for more than a month. This data highlights the variation in the duration of engagement in the specific activity, with the majority participating for a relatively short period, less than two weeks, and a notable proportion completing it in less than a week.

### *4.2 Measurement Model*

Factor loading, which indicates how effectively an item represents the latent construct, is typically recommended to be above 0.70 (Vinzi et al., 2010). It is common in social science research to encounter weaker factor loadings of less than 0.70. However, it is important to note that simply having a factor loading under 0.70 does not automatically warrant item removal. Removing such an item would lead to a substantial improvement in measures like Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). To achieve the accepted reliability, the study deletes 26 indicators which are below the accepted threshold level of 0.70. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of factor loadings for various items contributing to the Country Image, Destination Image, Memorable Tourism Experience and Revisit Intention constructs. In this analysis, all factor loadings fall above 0.70. To achieve the accepted reliability level, indicators that reflect low loading values less than the 0.70 threshold level were deleted.



According to Table 1, Country Image demonstrates a high Cronbach's Alpha of 0.961, indicating an extremely robust level of internal consistency. This suggests that the indicators related to Country Image are consistent and reliable. Destination Image also displays a strong level of internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.892, although slightly lower than Country Image. It still provides a dependable reliability of the Destination Image variable. Memorable Tourism Experiences stands out with a high Cronbach's Alpha of 0.944, indicating a high level of internal consistency, signifying the reliability of the measurements for this variable. Revisit Intention exhibits a commendable Cronbach's Alpha of 0.917, which suggests a good level of internal consistency. Country Image demonstrates a high CR of 0.960, indicating a strong level of reliability among the items related to this construct. This suggests that the items consistently and dependably measure the essence of Country Image. Destination Image exhibits a solid CR of 0.897, indicating a reliable measurement of the Destination Image variable, although slightly lower than Country Image. Memorable Tourism Experiences stands out with an exceptional CR of 0.946, signifying a highly reliable measurement of this construct. Revisit Intention displays a commendable CR of 0.916, indicating good internal consistency. The items within this construct consistently measure the underlying concept of Revisit Intention. In this study, Destination Image, Country Image, Memorable Tourism Experience, and Revisit Intention have an AVE score of more than 0.5. Therefore, findings collectively indicate that the variables are valid tools for assessing their respective constructs in the study, instilling confidence in the research's measurement instruments.

**Table 1: Assessment of Measurement Model**

	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
<b>Country Image</b>		0.961	0.960	0.738
<b>People Characteristics</b>				
Sri Lankans are friendly	0.811			
Sri Lankans are polite	0.850			
Sri Lankans are trustworthy	0.886			
Sri Lankans are honest	0.934			
Sri Lankans have a work ethic	0.934			
<b>People Competence</b>				
Sri Lankans are diligent	0.908			
Sri Lankans are smart	0.897			
Sri Lankans have a high level of education	0.785			
<b>Environmental Management</b>				
Sri Lankans prioritize environmental concerns	0.712			
<b>Destination Image</b>		0.892	0.897	0.740
<b>Cultural Attractions</b>				
Sri Lanka has a unique lifestyle and customs	0.762			
Sri Lanka's historical culture is unique	0.929			

<b>Tourism Facilities</b>				
Sri Lanka has suitable accommodation	0.882			
<b>Memorable Tourism Experiences</b>		0.944	0.946	0.658
<b>Hedonism</b>				
I'm thrilled about having a new experience	0.900			
I really enjoyed this tourism experience	0.885			
The experience is exciting	0.944			
<b>Novelty</b>				
This experience is different from previous experiences	0.925			
I experienced something new	0.823			
<b>Local Culture</b>				
I have good impressions of the local people	0.722			
<b>Meaningfulness</b>				
I did something meaningful	0.729			
I did something important	0.752			
<b>Involvement</b>				
I was interested in the main activities of this tourism experience	0.743			
<b>Revisit Intention</b>		0.917	0.916	0.848
I tend to visit Sri Lanka again	0.888			
I'd love to come to Sri Lanka again	0.953			

Source: Survey data

Table 2 presents the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values and Fornell-Larcker criterion, which are used to assess the discriminant validity of different constructs in the study. HTMT measures the degree to which constructs are more related to items measuring the same construct (monotrait) than to items measuring different constructs (heterotrait). In this analysis, the diagonal cells show perfect monotrait correlations, as expected. The off-diagonal cells indicate heterotrait correlations between different constructs. These values should ideally be lower than 1 to demonstrate good discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). In this table, all the heterotrait correlations are notably below 1, confirming that the constructs, namely Country Image, Destination Image, Memorable Tourism Experiences, and Revisit Intention, have strong discriminant validity. AVE is a measure of the amount of variance captured by the construct's indicators. These values are noticeably higher than the correlations between the respective constructs and other constructs in the off-diagonal cells (Hamid et al., 2017). The off-diagonal cells indicate the correlations between different constructs. To demonstrate discriminant validity, the AVE for each construct should be greater than the correlations involving that construct. In Table 2, the AVE values are consistently higher than the inter-construct correlations, confirming the discriminant validity of the variables, including Country Image, Destination Image, Memorable Tourism Experiences, and Revisit Intention.

**Table 2: Discriminant Validity**

<b>Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)</b>	Country Image	Destination Image	Memorable Tourism Experience	Revisit Intention
Country Image				
Destination Image	0.312			
Memorable Tourism Experiences	0.319	0.510		
Revisit Intention	0.325	0.426	0.699	
<b>Fornell-Larcker criterion</b>				
Country Image	<b>0.859</b>			
Destination Image	0.304	<b>0.860</b>		
Memorable Tourism Experiences	0.292	0.453	<b>0.811</b>	
Revisit Intention	0.335	0.423	0.652	<b>0.921</b>

Source: Survey data

#### 4.3 Structural Model

Table 3 provides a summary of path coefficients, t-values, and p-values for the tested hypotheses in the study. These hypotheses examine the relationships between various variables in the study. The results of hypothesis testing, whether using P-values or confidence intervals, show the same outcomes. The common criterion for accepting a hypothesis or accepting the significance is often set as  $P < 0.05$ , although occasionally  $P \leq 0.05$  is used. Using either criterion typically has an equivalent impact because P-values seldom reach precisely 0.05 (Kock, 2016). According to Table 3, Hypothesis 1 (H1) shows that country image positively influences destination image in Sri Lanka; for this hypothesis, the path coefficient is 0.301. This relationship is statistically having a weaker level with a t-value of 2.631 and a p-value of 0.009, confirming that there is a positive relationship between country image and destination image. Hypothesis 2 (H2) suggests that destination image positively influences memorable tourism Experiences (MTEs) in Sri Lanka. The path coefficient is 0.417, with a t-value of 4.184, and a statistically significant level in the relationship (p-value of 0.000) supports this hypothesis. Hypothesis 3 (H3) examines the impact of country image on MTEs in Sri Lanka and reveals a substantial path coefficient of 0.185. The relationship is statistically weakly significant, as indicated by a low t-value of 1.810 and a p-value of 0.070 and thus the hypothesis was not supported. Hypothesis 4 (H4) asserts that MTEs positively influence revisit intention in Sri Lanka, with a path coefficient of 0.655. This relationship is highly significant, supported by a substantial t-value of 9.807 and a p-value of 0.000.

**Table 3: Summary results of the hypothesis testing**

	Path coefficients	t value	p value	Result
H1. Sri Lanka's Country Image Positively Influences the Destination Image	0.301	2.631	0.009	Supported
H2. Sri Lanka's Destination Image Positively Influences the Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs)	0.417	4.184	0.000	Supported
H3. Sri Lanka's Country Image Positively Influences the Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs)	0.185	1.810	0.070	Not Supported
H4. Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs) Positively Influence the Revisit Intention to Sri Lanka	0.655	9.807	0.000	Supported

Source: Survey data

Table 4 gives the specific indirect effects in the structural model in this study. It examines the mediator relationship between independent and dependent variables in the study. The results show that country image does not influence revisit intention through the mediator effect of the memorable tourism experience. It shows a path coefficient of 0.121 with a low t-value of 1.724 and a higher p-value of 0.085. For the relationship to be significant, the p-value should be less than 0.05 (Huber et al., 2007). And here it has a weaker relationship. While this path shows a positive trend, it does not achieve statistical significance at the significance level of 0.05. The relationship between destination image and revisit intention through the mediator effect of memorable tourism experiences are statistically significant, having a path coefficient of a significantly good value of 0.273, a t-value of 3.347, and a statistically significant p-value of 0.001. This finding shows that memorable tourism experiences significantly mediate the relationship between the destination image and revisit intention. The study indicates that country image does not influence revisit intention through the tourist perception of having memorable tourism experiences. And destination image influences the revisit intention through the mediation effect of memorable tourism experiences.

**Table 4: Specific Indirect Effect**

	Path coefficient	t value	p value
Country Image -> Memorable Tourism Experience -> Revisit intention	0.121	1.724	0.085
Destination Image -> Memorable Tourism Experience -> Revisit intention	0.273	3.347	0.001

Source: Data collected by the researcher

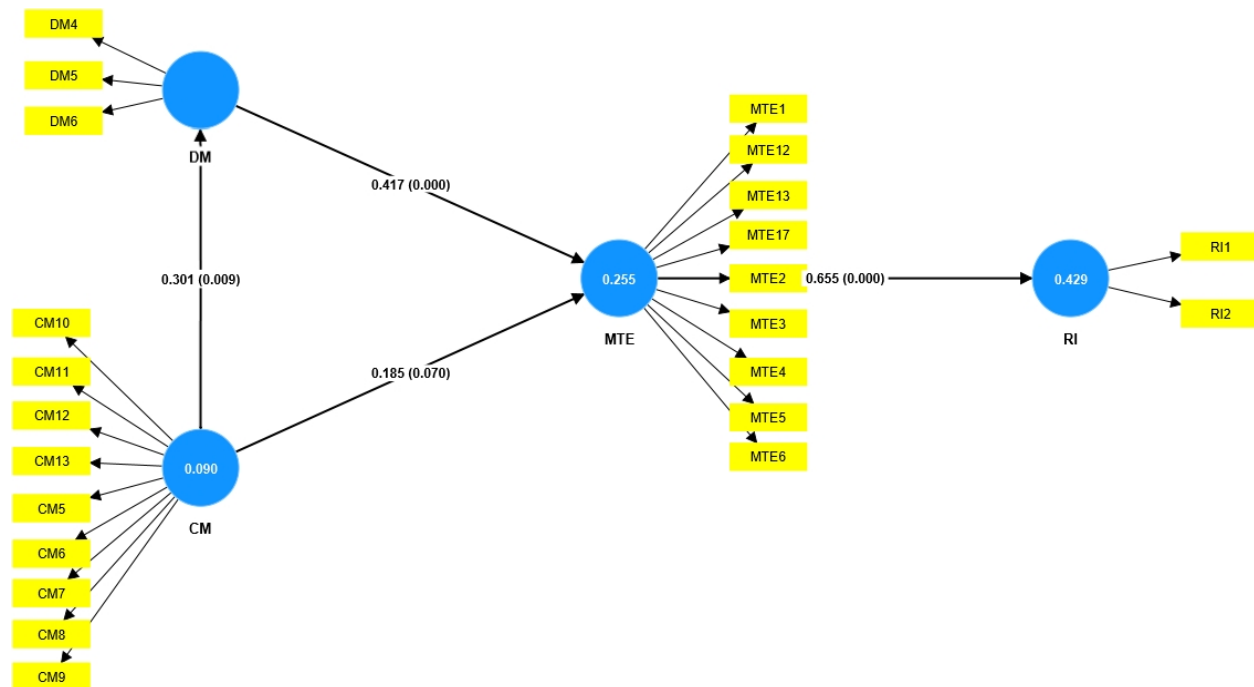
Furthermore, it explains that if the country has positive people characteristics, people's competence and environmental management, respectively, the destination image also will be positive. Which means that tourists' perception of the country positively influences their perception of the destination. It further explains that a positive country image will help to enhance the place, Sri Lanka has as a tourism destination. This is an important fact to consider for governmental bodies,

DMCs, hotels, travel agencies and other tourism-related businesses. Hence, it is important to focus on country image characteristics such as people characteristics, people's competence and environmental management to attract tourists. The second hypothesis measures the destination image having positive influence on memorable tourism experiences. Which means whether the destination image positively influences memorable tourism experience in Sri Lanka. The p-value for the second hypothesis falls under the required level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Which means that destination image strongly supports having memorable tourism experiences. In other words, a positive destination image contributes to a memorable tourism experience. This finding emphasises the significance of destination marketing and management in shaping tourists' experiences. Furthermore, it is important to focus on destination image characteristics such as cultural attractions and tourism facilities to maintain a better destination image. The third hypothesis explores whether country image positively influences memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) of tourists visiting Sri Lanka. However, this relationship was not found to be statistically significant. The null hypothesis is accepted. This result suggests that the country image may not significantly influence the creation of memorable tourism experiences for tourists. Researchers and practitioners need to explore other factors that might play a more prominent role in shaping memorable tourism experiences in the country, such as destination image attributes. Hence, the Country image is less important than the destination image to create memorable tourism experiences in Sri Lanka.

The fourth hypothesis is about whether MTEs positively influence revisit intention in Sri Lanka. The results strongly support the fourth hypothesis. And null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that the creation of memorable tourism experiences significantly influences tourists' intentions to revisit Sri Lanka. Hence, tourists' excitement, new culture, and meaningfulness factors affect them to have a memorable tourism experience (Kim, 2014). When tourists have memorable tourism experiences in the destination, they are more likely to revisit the destination. In practical terms, this finding emphasises the importance of delivering exceptional and memorable experiences to tourists, as this can positively impact their decision to return to the destination. It will help to reduce the marketing cost for tourism in the country. Hence, when tourists have a memorable tourism experience, the destination does not have to spend its budget on marketing. Tourists will act as advocates and promote Sri Lanka in their networks.

The study further examines the relationship between country image, memorable tourism experiences, and revisit intention. Findings say that country image does not influence revisit intention through the mediator effect of memorable tourism experience. However, the relationship between destination image and revisit intention through the mediator effect of memorable tourism experiences is statistically significant. This indicates that memorable tourism experiences significantly mediate the relationship between destination image and revisit intention. The destination marketers need to identify the direct and indirect relationships between variables. Therefore, they can focus on destination image and memorable tourism experience to improve revisit intentions. Furthermore, Figure 02 shows that the  $R^2$  value represents the variance of each variable. Therefore, the study explains 9% variance in country image, 25.5% variance in

memorable tourism experiences, and 49.9% variance in revisit intention. Other than the country image, all  $R^2$  values are greater than the accepted value of 10%. And the country image is close to 10%.



**Figure 2: SEM Model**

Source: Survey Data

## 5. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence on the relationships between country image, destination image, MTEs, and revisit intention within the context of post-crisis Sri Lanka. The findings offer insights that clarify the distinct roles of these constructions. The analysis confirms a statistically significant positive relationship between country image and destination image, supporting the theoretical proposition of a halo effect where general perceptions of a national influence assessment of its specific tourism attributes. Furthermore, a strong and significant relationship was established between destination image and MTEs, underscoring the critical role of destination-specific attributes in shaping tourists' ground experiences. A pivotal finding of this research is the non-significant direct relationship between country image and MTEs. This indicates that, in this context, the broader macro-level perception of the country does not directly translate into the creation of MTEs. Furthermore, the study strongly confirms that MTEs are a powerful and direct antecedent of tourists' revisit intentions. MTEs significantly mediate the relationship between destination image and revisit intention. However, no significant mediation was found for the path from country image to revisit intentions through MTEs. These results yield image-critical practical implications. For destination marketers and policymakers in Sri Lanka, the findings suggest that strategic resources should be prioritized towards cultivating and promoting a positive

destination image. This involves focused investments in enhancing cultural attractions, tourism facilities, and service quality to directly create the MTEs that fuel revisit intentions and positive word of mouth. While managing the country's overall image remains a long-term objective, the more immediate and impactful level for tourist retention is the curated destination experience. Therefore, stakeholders should concentrate on improving the tangible and experiential elements of the destination to foster loyalty and drive recovery in the tourism sector.

### *5.1 Theoretical and practical Implications*

This study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it validates the model by Zhang et al. (2017) in a unique, crisis-affected context, enhancing its generalizability. Second, it provides empirical evidence that the influence of country image on behavioural intentions can be fully mediated by destination-specific factors such as MTEs, suggesting a more nuanced relationship than previously assumed. The non-significant direct path from country image to MTEs highlights a critical boundary condition: in environments where a country's overall image is tarnished, the immediate destination attributes become the primary drivers of MTEs and future visits. The findings call for a refinement of existing image behaviour models to account for contextual volatility.

The findings offer clear strategic directions for Sri Lanka's tourism industry. Marketing campaigns should pivot towards highlighting concentrated destination attributes such as unique cultural heritage, natural attractions, and quality facilities, rather than attempting to repair the broader country image in the short term. Promoting unforgettable experiences and delivering that experience as promised is the key. Investment should focus on curating high-quality, engaging, and meaningful tourist activities that enhance hedonism, novelty, and cultural interaction. Training staff to deliver exceptional service is crucial for creating positive MTEs. While long-term country image repair is necessary, policies should support the tourism sector by ensuring stability in essential services (transport, energy) and maintaining safety at tourist sites to protect the destination image.

### *5.2 Limitations and Future Research*

This study has limitations that present avenues for future research. First, the sample size, while adequate for PLE-SEM, was relatively small and collected via simple random sampling, which may affect generalizability. Future studies should aim for larger samples. Second, the data were cross-sectional; longitudinal research could track how images and intentions evolve as Sri Lanka's situation stabilizes. Third, the study focused on tourists at departure, including potential tourists' perceptions could offer a comprehensive perspective. Future research could also incorporate moderating variables, such as tourists' prior knowledge or risk perception, to better understand the conditions under which these relationships hold. Finally, applying this mode to other crisis-affected destinations would help validate its broader applicability.

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