



## The mediating role of memorable tourism experience on tourist behavior: A perspective on organized tours

### O papel mediador da experiência turística memorável no comportamento do turista: uma perspectiva sobre os *tours* organizados

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#### Abstract

This study aims to determine the effect of destination image on the intention to recommend memorable tourism experiences of tourists participating in organized tours. In this context, the relationships between the variables of destination image, memorable tourism experience, tourist satisfaction and intention to recommend were examined in the research process. Quantitative research methods were used in the study. A questionnaire was preferred as the data collection tool. The population of the research consists of individuals living in Türkiye and having previous experience in organized tours. Data were collected from 950 participants using the convenience sampling technique from this universe. It has been revealed that the destination image has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction, memorable tourism experience and intention to recommend. In this context, it can be said that phenomena such as image, satisfaction and experience affect tourists' perceptions of destination image, and this situation increases the probability of destinations being preferred repeatedly. As a result, it can be concluded that factors with high emotional intensity such as memorable tourism experience and tourist satisfaction affect the intention to recommend.

**Keywords:** Memorable tourism experience, destination image, intention to recommend, tourist satisfaction, organized tours.

#### Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo determinar o efeito da imagem de destino na intenção de recomendar experiências memoráveis por parte de turistas que participam em *tours* organizados. Neste contexto, foram examinadas as relações entre as variáveis de imagem de destino, experiência turística memorável, satisfação do turista e intenção de recomendar. Foram utilizados métodos de pesquisa quantitativa, sendo um questionário a ferramenta escolhida para a recolha dos dados. A população da pesquisa consiste em indivíduos que residem na Turquia e possuem experiência prévia em *tours* organizados. Os dados foram coletados de 950 participantes utilizando a técnica de amostragem por conveniência. Foi constatado que a imagem de destino tem um efeito positivo na satisfação do turista, na experiência turística memorável e na intenção de recomendar. Neste contexto, pode-se afirmar que fenômenos como imagem, satisfação e experiência afetam as percepções dos turistas em relação à imagem de destino, aumentando a probabilidade de os destinos serem escolhidos repetidamente. Como resultado, pode-se concluir que fatores com alta intensidade emocional, como a experiência turística memorável e a satisfação do turista, afetam a intenção de recomendar.

**Palavras-chave:** Experiência turística memorável, imagem do destino, intenção de recomendar, satisfação do turista, *tours* organizados.

#### 1. Introduction

Countries use the tourism industry, which is one of the biggest employment sources, as a force to compete at the international level. The tourism industry is a significant contributor to the destination image as well as providing economic benefits through employment to the countries. The image of a country greatly influences the positive or negative attitudes towards a nation's internal and external perception. Destination image, which underscores the attractiveness and qualities of the tourism industry, is a crucial aspect. In the tourism industry, the concepts of destination and destination image are important and constantly examined.

Destination image also influences tourists' intention to choose or recommend a region. A positive destination image can influence tourists' preferences and their willingness to recommend a destination. Chen et al. (2014) found that if tourists find satisfaction in their experiences resulting from their activities in the destination, they are likely to revisit the destination. At the same time, the satisfaction level of tourists

can be effective in shaping the destination image in a positive or negative way. If the tourists coming to a destination leave satisfied with the service quality and the attractiveness of the destination by having positive experiences, the image perception of that destination is shaped in a positive way. Tourists with a high level of satisfaction choose the destination again thanks to the positive experience, memories of the destination in their minds and positive image perception. In the literature, this preference is referred to as a memorable tourism experience. In addition, the satisfied tourist conveys his experiences about the destination to his entourage by word of mouth (WOM) or electronic word of mouth (EWOM) on online sites. In these interactions, the tourist shares about the positive, memorable experiences and recommends the destination to his/her entourage. This situation also affects the destination image positively. However, tourists who leave with a low level of satisfaction do not recommend that destination or business by transferring their negative experiences at the destination to their entourage. This situation negatively affects the image of the destination. Memorable tourism experiences



influence the intention to recommend either positively or negatively, and concurrently, it affects the destination image. Examining these issues is of critical importance in the tourism industry.

If a destination provides unique, memorable experiences, it is likely that the experiences of visiting tourists will influence their level of satisfaction. In his study, Kim (2014) posited that the touristic products that tourists purchase at the destination constitute to their satisfaction levels and excitement. According to the research results, it was revealed that the enjoyment derived from the tourism experience process, that is, hedonism, is correlated with the level of satisfaction. A tourist who leaves the destination or establishment satisfied tends to recommend it to his/her entourage, sharing his/her experiences.

The concepts of tourist satisfaction, destination image, memorable tourism experiences, and intention to recommend are interrelated. When considered together, they constitute a phenomenon that holds significance for many groups, including those interested in tourist loyalty, destination image, the tourism industry, and stakeholders. These concepts have been introduced to the literature numerous times by various researchers either individually or in combination. However, resources that examine all these factors collectively are scarce. Therefore, this research addresses the impact of memorable tourism experiences on satisfaction, destination image and intention to recommend. Additionally, it aims to contribute to the tourism industry and literature by elucidating the relationships among these concepts.

This research examines both the effect of destination image on tourist satisfaction and the contribution of tourist satisfaction to destination image. The study explores these processes, which arise due to the touristic experience, the satisfaction derived from positive experiences, and the emergence of memorable tourism experiences that result from these enduring experiences. Furthermore, the memorability of touristic experiences, and the communication of these experiences after leaving the destination, influence the intention to recommend. This, in turn, contributes to a cycle that enhances the destination's image. Based on these insights, the research aims to test the impact of the memorable tourism experience on tourists' intention to recommend using a model that incorporates other variables.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

### 2.1 Destination Image

The destination, an indispensable elements of the tourism industry, needs to be effectively promoted and its existence made known. In this direction, the image of the destination can also come into play. Especially with the widespread use of the internet and the increase in the use of social media, image has become even more important. It is predicted that the more positive a destination image is, the greater the satisfaction of the tourist and thus the more tourist attraction will increase.

Apart from tourist satisfaction, factors such as memorable tourism experience and intention to recommend should be considered together with the destination image. By considering all these factors, all stakeholders in the destination can potentially experience income growth (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

Tourists' experiences with a place are affected by the image of the destination. Research on the tourist experience has progressed to include a satisfying, unique, enduring, and extraordinary experience (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). Tourists, who experience the services of the destination in line with its projected image, gain lasting impressions with the perception that their expectations are met. These unique and lasting experiences obtained are called memorable tourism experiences. Zhang et al. (2018) investigated the effect of destination image on memorable tourism experience in their study conducted with Korean tourists in Huangshan City, China. In addition, some researchers have stated that a memorable tourism experience affects the image of a destination (Dagustani et al., 2017; Kim, 2018; Sharma & Nayak, 2019; Li et al., 2023). Moreover, many researchers such as Zhang et al. (2018) (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022; Johari & Mohd Anuar, 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021) examined the image and experience fiction in the form that the destination image affects the memorable tourism experience. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The destination image affects the memorable tourism experience.

Upon reviewing the literature, it is clear that the destination image has both indirect and direct effects on people's behavioral intentions (Chi & Qu, 2008; Prayag et al., 2017). Initially, the researchers have concluded that destination image directly affects tourists' willingness to recommend the destination to others (Hallmann et al., 2015). For example, Prayag et al. (2017) found a direct relationship between the destination image and the inclination to recommend a destination. Similarly, Kock et al. (2016) found in their study that destination image has significant effects on tourists' willingness to visit and word-of-mouth communication recommendations. Eid et al. (2019) arrived at similar results and concluded that the destination image has a strong effect on the intention to recommend. Upon examining this and other similar studies (Kim et al., 2017; Foroudi et al., 2018; Kim, 2018; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Wong & Lai, 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Joo et al., 2023), it is evident that the destination image affects the intention to recommend. In this context, the following hypothesis is proposed for the study:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Destination image affects the intention to recommend.

In the studies conducted related to tourism, it has been concluded that the image of the destination has a significant effect on tourist satisfaction. Lu et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between port aesthetics of Hong Kong, destination image and tourist satisfaction. Upon examining the results of



the research, it was concluded that the destination image is a direct antecedent for tourist satisfaction. Also, it has been revealed that it indirectly affects tourist loyalty through tourist satisfaction. Ramseook-Munhurrin et al. (2015) in their study on the island of Mauritius, they concluded that the image of the island directly affects tourist satisfaction. When this and other similar studies (Prayag, 2009; Kim, 2018; Foroudi et al., 2018; Jeong & Kim, 2020; Sharma & Nayak, 2019; Eid et al., 2019; Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022; Wong & Lai, 2021; Cham et al., 2021; Ihwanudin et al., 2023) are examined, it is concluded that the image of the destination affects tourist satisfaction. In order to examine this result differently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Destination image affects the level of tourist satisfaction.

## 2.2 Memorable Tourism Experience

Consumers use their memories to influence their search process and ultimately determine the probability of future purchases. Memories influence consumer choices, and information obtained from past experiences is considered quite reliable (Kim et al., 2010). Hoch and Deighton (1989) suggest that when a consumer has an experience with a product, their motivation and engagement increase. Johnson & Russo (1984) state that customers who have experienced a product in the past use their memories to limit their searches while shopping. In addition, previous experiences in a consumer's memory are a valuable source of information as they are considered reliable for the consumer (Kim, 2018).

When the literature is examined, in previous tourism studies; researchers have reported that the memorable tourism experience significantly affects tourists' recommendation intention (Kim et al., 2010). In this context, when the study of Marschall (2012) is examined, it is concluded that tourists want to revisit the destinations of which they have positive and lasting memories, and they intend to recommend these destinations to their entourage. Similarly, Kim (2018) concluded in his study conducted in Taiwan that a memorable tourism experience is effective in intention to recommend. The effect of memorable tourism experience on recommendation intention has been investigated by different researchers (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2023). In this context, the following hypothesis is proposed for the study:

**H<sub>4</sub>:** The level of tourist satisfaction affects the memorable tourism experience.

## 2.3 Tourist Satisfaction

How satisfied a tourist is with a destination can be measured by their level of satisfaction regarding their expectations for the destination and their level of happiness while at the destination. A higher level of satisfaction can make tourists more likely to revisit the destination and recommend it to their friends and family (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Chen & Tsai, 2007). In addition, there is an important relationship between the

satisfaction of tourists and their experience. Thanks to this relationship, tourists who are satisfied with the service they receive can have lasting experiences in their memories.

When the literature is examined, many researchers (Zhong et al., 2017; Kim, 2018; Sharma and Nayak, 2019; Chen et al., 2021) have concluded that the memorable tourism experience has an effect on tourist satisfaction. For example, Stavrianea & Kamenidou (2022) found in their study that the memorable tourism experience produces effective results on tourist satisfaction and that loyal customers emerge as a result of intense experiences of these emotions. Through these studies, it is suggested that tourist satisfaction can affect the memorable tourism experience from a different perspective. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed for the study:

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Memorable tourism experience affects intention to recommend.

It has been revealed by many studies (Eid et al., 2019; Cham et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2021) that tourist satisfaction has a significant impact on recommendation intention. The research conducted by Foroudi et al. (2018) in London produced parallel results in this direction and came to the conclusion that satisfied tourists are in the act of recommending. In this context, the following hypotheses are proposed for the study:

**H<sub>6</sub>:** The level of tourist satisfaction affects the intention to recommend.

**H<sub>7</sub>:** The level of tourist satisfaction has a mediating role in the effect of the destination image on the memorable tourism experience.

## 2.4 Intention to Recommend

Intention to recommend can occur in many ways. The most well-known of these are in the form of WOM and eWOM. It is important for people to convey their experiences to their entourage. Because while this behavioral intention is being realized, at the same time, the result may occur that the person wants to visit the recommended place again. Within the scope of the components of the memorable tourism experience and the complex structure of the experience, there is no theoretical consensus for the concept of experience from the point of view of researchers. For this reason, it is recommended to conduct more research to ensure that the memorable tourism experience is understood from different perspectives and thus to reveal qualified studies (Kim, 2018). In addition, previous studies argue that memorable tourism experience and tourist satisfaction have effects on behavioral intentions (Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Shin et al., 2023). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed within the study fiction and supported from the literature.

**H<sub>8</sub>:** Memorable tourism experience has a mediating role in the effect of destination image on intention to recommend.

**H<sub>9</sub>:** Memorable tourism experience has a mediating role in the effect of tourist satisfaction on intention to recommend.

**H<sub>10</sub>:** Tourist satisfaction and memorable tourism experience have a mediating role in the effect of destination image on intention to recommend.

**H<sub>11</sub>:** Tourist satisfaction has a mediating role in the effect of destination image on intention to recommend.

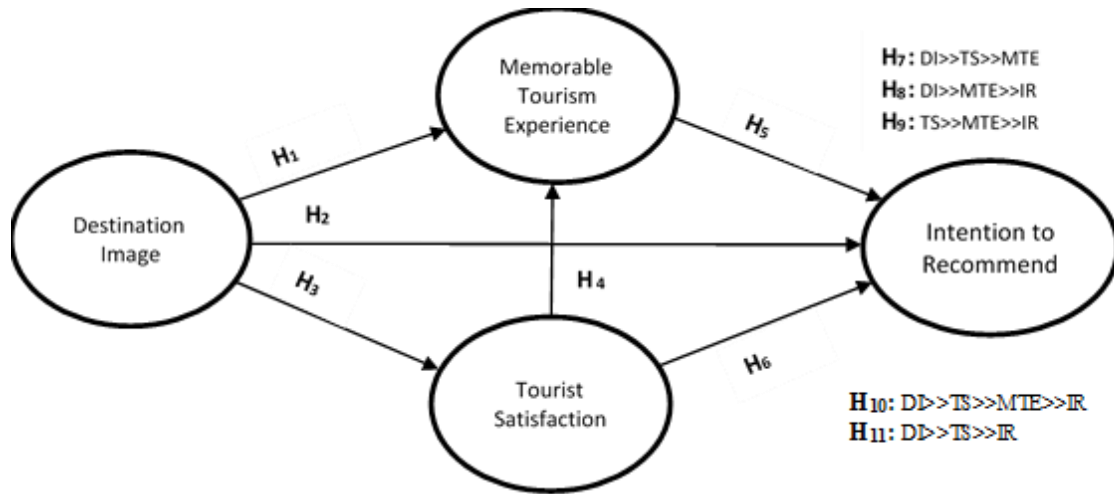
### 3. Research design, questionnaire and model

In the study, scales were used to measure the evaluations of tourists participating in organized tours within the scope of destination image, tourist satisfaction, memorable tourism experience and intention to recommend. In this context, a questionnaire form consisting of five parts was used as a data collection technique in the research. In the first part, to measure the satisfaction levels of tourists participating in guided tours, the “customer satisfaction scale” developed by Oliver (1980, 1997), used by Hellier et al. (2003), Jin et al. (2015) and adapted to Turkish by Silik (2018) was used. In the second part of the questionnaire, in order to measure the recommendation intentions of tourists participating in guided tours, the “recommendation intention scale” developed by Zeithaml et al. (1996), used by Hudson & Shephard (1998), Alexandris et al. (2002), Faullant et al. (2008) and adapted to

Turkish by Silik (2018) was used. In the third part, the “memorable tourism experience scale” developed by Oh et al. (2007) and used by Hosany & Witham (2010) and Ali et al. (2016) was adapted and used in order to measure the memorable tourism experiences of the tourists participating in the guided tours. In the fourth part, the “destination image scale” developed by Hankinson (2005) and used by Akroush et al. (2016) and Albaity & Melhem (2017) was adapted and used to measure the destination image of tourists participating in guided tours.

In order to measure the expressions in the first four parts, a five-point Likert-type rating scale (1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree) was used, and tourists were expected to answer the questions. In the fifth and last part, there are eight questions that measure the demographic information of the tourists. These consist of questions about gender, age, who they travel with, monthly income, marital status, how many times they came to the last visited destination, how long they stayed in the last visited destination and how many times they participated in the organized tour. The variables the relationships of which were tested with the help of the scales used, are depicted in figure 1.

Figure 1 - Research Model



#### 3.1 Sampling and data collection

The universe of the research consists of all people living in Türkiye and having previous guided tour experience. Although numerical operations were not performed on the sample to be obtained within the scope of the research universe, some criteria were used. While creating the sample, the aim was to reach 384 people who had consented to and participated in the survey, which is a primary criterion for an infinite sample number (Coşkun et al., 2015; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Although this criterion was not considered a target for research, the number 384 was accepted as a limit. In other words, after reaching the number 384, the data collection process was continued and the maximum number of data that could be obtained was tried to be reached. Secondly, it is necessary to reach ten times the total number of expressions, which is the working principle of the SmartPLS program used for

structural equation modeling (Doğan, 2019). In this context, the minimum number of samples to be reached was determined by considering a total of 15 expressions in the research scales (15x10=150).

Due to the criteria that exist in the sample, data were collected using the easy sampling technique, one of the sampling methods that is not based on probability. The data were obtained both face-to-face and online (Google forms-social media) method due to the pandemic and the need for social distancing. In addition, obtaining data using online methods prevents the problem of missing, incorrect or lost data. The questionnaires of the participant candidates who did not meet the prerequisites in the sample were terminated by the system before they started. In this context, a total of 1207 participants wanted to participate in the survey, but were asked “have you



participated in a guided tour before? The survey could not be continued by the 257 participants who answered “no” to the question. Data were collected between June 2021 and December 2021. When a total of 950 participants were reached the data collection process was terminated. Lost data is unlikely to be found in online data collection methods. The reason for this is that the system warns the participant when there is an incomplete question. Therefore, all the data obtained from the participants were analyzed. Tests were carried out with the data obtained from 950 participants in total, and evaluations were made in the light of the necessary parameters.

### 3.2 Analysis of Data

The SPSS software was used to determine the distributions of the demographic characteristics of the sample participating in the research. The SmartPLS program was used to test the measurement and structural models. The SPSS program was preferred because it systematically displays the frequencies of descriptive statistics. The SmartPLS program was used in the evaluation of the structural model because it is flexible in the analysis of formative prediction models, facilitates the identification of predictions, does not require the normality condition, and makes appropriate predictions within small

samples (Loureiro & Gonzalez, 2008; Henseler et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2012; Di- Clemente et al., 2019). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to test the measurement model. As a result of the factor analysis, a four-dimensional structure including 15 expressions was confirmed.

## 4. Results and findings

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

When examining the gender of the participants, it is observed that 536 of the 950 participants were female (56.4%) and 414 were male (43.6%). When examining the marital status, it is observed that 611 (64.3%) of the participants are married and 339 (35.7%) are single. Another variable that should be examined within the scope of demographic variables is age. When the age ranges of the participants are examined, it is seen that 118 (12.4%) are 30 years old and under, 541 people (56.9%) are between the ages of 31-45 and 291 people (30.6%) are at the age of 46 and above. When examining the income situation, it was observed that 47 (4.9%) of the participants had an income of 4000 TL or less, 294 people (30.9%) had an income between 4001 TL and 8000 TL, and 609 people (64.1%) had an income of 8001 TL or more (Table 1).

**Table 1 - Descriptive statistics of participants**

Variables	No	%	Variables	No	%
<b>Gender?</b>	--	--	<b>How many times do you participate in the organized tour?</b>	--	--
Woman	536	56,4	First time	223	23,5
Man	414	43,6	Twice	233	24,5
<b>Marital status?</b>	--	--	Third time and above	494	52,0
Married	611	64,3	<b>Age Groups?</b>	--	--
Single	339	35,7	30 years and under	118	12,4
<b>How many times have you visited the last destination you visited?</b>	--	--	31-45 years	541	56,9
First time	605	63,7	over 46 years old	291	30,6
Twice	198	20,8	<b>Income status?</b>	--	--
Third time and above	147	15,5	4000 TL* and below	47	4,9
<b>How long did you stay in the last destination you visited?</b>	--	--	4001-8000 TL	294	30,9
2 days and below	179	18,8	8001 TL and above	609	64,1
3-6 days	477	50,2	<b>Who Did You Travel With?</b>	--	--
7-10 days	242	25,5	By myself	86	9,1
11-14 days	35	3,7	With my family	502	52,8
15 days or more	17	1,8	With my friends	317	33,4
			Other	45	4,7

Note: \*Turkish Lira

### 4.2 Measurement model

The final results of the research are discussed in two separate sections. The first of these is the measurement model, and the other is the testing of the structural model. First, the analysis of the measurement model is discussed. Table 2 shows the CFA and measurement model values of the research scales. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the measurement model (Kim & Hall, 2020). The factor load is expected to be above 0.70, as per the basic conditions required by the social sciences field and the SmartPLS program. However, it is known

that the value of 0.50 is also accepted for factor loads within the scope of studies found in the literature (Chen & Tsai, 2007). The accepted t values for expressions should be greater than the reference value of 1.96 (Doğan, 2019). In this context, the t-values of the expressions in the research scale are observed to vary between 17,697 and 182,805. The VIF (variance inflation factor) value for each statement in the research scale is less than 10. Smart-PLS program accepts VIF values less than 5 or 10 as reference (Sevinç, 2013). Thus, it is important for the scope of the research that the VIF values for each expression are less than 10 or even 5.



**Table 2 - Confirmatory factor analysis and measurement model**

Dimension (structure)	Mean	Std. Dev	VIF	t-Value	Factor load
<b>Destination Image</b>					
The environment of my last visited destination is attractive.	4,244	0,677	1,459	39,111	0,751
It is easy to reach historical and touristic places in my last visited destination.	3,983	0,861	1,700	25,983	0,700
I liked the style of the buildings in the destination I visited recently.	4,206	0,756	1,561	31,881	0,737
I think the last destination I visited has a good transport network.	3,763	0,967	1,577	19,985	0,633
The residents of the last destination I visited are friendly.	3,759	0,828	2,946	17,796	0,648
Residents of the last destination I visited are hospitable to tourists.	3,784	0,802	2,939	17,697	0,639
<b>Memorable Tourism Experience</b>					
I have great memories of my last visit to the destination I visited.	4,146	0,765	2,530	92,580	0,902
I will remember many positive things about the last destination I visited.	4,214	0,697	2,664	71,660	0,908
I will not forget my last visit to the destination experience.	4,241	0,709	2,230	69,502	0,884
<b>Tourist Satisfaction</b>					
In general, I was very satisfied with the destination I visited last time.	4,214	0,688	2,321	55,589	0,878
Considering all the factors, I am happy with my decision to come to my last visited destination.	4,306	0,680	3,423	125,242	0,933
When I think about the touristic experience, it was wise to choose the destination I visited last time.	4,273	0,729	2,549	85,246	0,895
<b>Intention To Recommend</b>					
I will say positive things to people around me about the last destination I visited.	4,307	0,688	3,480	127,160	0,925
I will recommend the last destination I visited to people who ask my advice about tourism.	4,267	0,691	4,403	182,805	0,949
I will encourage my friends and relatives to visit my last visited destination.	4,106	0,791	2,550	84,569	0,888

In Table 2, arithmetic mean and standard deviation values are presented for each expression forming the four-dimensional structure of the study. When the arithmetic averages of the expressions in the CFA and measurement model are examined, it is seen that the expressions in the destination image dimension have different values between 3.759 and 4.244.

It is expected that the diagonal values in the Fornell-Larcker criterion, given in Table 3, are larger than all other values in both rows and columns (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). For all dimensions, these values were determined to be the largest value in the row and column. It is known that there are different criteria that are related to the measurement model and that meet the discriminant validity condition in the context of the Smart-PLS statistical program. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT), which is a correlation ratio value, stands out as one of these criteria. To test the model reliably, the desired Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratio is below 0.90 (Hair et al., 2017). It has been determined that all HTMT values detected in this study are below 0.90. One of the important criteria in PLS

measurements is the AVE (Average of Variance Extracted) coefficient. The scales used as a result of AVE value confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) provide predictions about their convergent validity. This validity represents the degree to which the items (statements) that make up the structure converge in order to explain the variance. Convergent validity describes the average reflection of all the substances that make up each structure. It can be stated that the AVE values in the study are above 0.50 in all four measurement models used and that the convergent validity requirement is fulfilled in this context. In the study, the validity and reliability values of the variables with different qualities are among the reference values used in the context of the measurement model. From this point of view, Reliability Coefficient (Rho\_A), Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values for all measurement tools in the study were examined. All three reliability values, consisting of Reliability Coefficient (Rho\_A), Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha, were found to be above 0.70 for all four measurement tools.

**Table 3 - Reliability, validity and correlation**

Variables	Fornell-Larcker Criterion				Heterotrait -Monotrait Ratio			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Destination Image (1)	<b>0,686</b>				-			
Memorable Tourism Experience (2)	0,649	<b>0,898</b>			0,739			
Intention to Recommend (3)	0,636	0,710	<b>0,921</b>		0,720	0,792		
Tourist Satisfaction (4)	0,598	0,665	0,706	<b>0,902</b>	0,688	0,753	0,784	-
Cronbach's alpha	0,781	0,880	0,910	0,886				
Reliability coefficient (Rho_A)	0,804	0,880	0,915	0,887				
Composite Reliability	0,842	0,926	0,944	0,929				
AVE	0,571	0,807	0,848	0,814				



### 4.3 Structural model

The suitability of the structural model and the acceptance status of the hypothesis tests are given in Table 4. When the model fit values are examined, it is seen that the SRMR value and the NFI fit index values are at an acceptable level. It is

expected that the SRMR value, which is important within the scope of SEM studies in the field of social sciences, is below 0.10 (Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2020). In addition, the accepted values for the NFI fit index, which is another criterion, are required to be above 0.80 (Karagöz, 2017).

**Table 4 - Path coefficients and impact dimensions**

Hypothesis	Path coefficients	t-stat	p-value	Supported/ Significant	SRMR	NFI
Direct effects					0,086	0,80
H <sub>1</sub> : DI -> MTE	0.391	10,747	0.000*	Yes		
H <sub>2</sub> : DI -> IR	0.200	5,597	0.000*	Yes		
H <sub>3</sub> : DI -> TS	0.598	18,293	0.000*	Yes		
H <sub>4</sub> : HTD -> IR	0.341	8,086	0.000*	Yes		
H <sub>5</sub> : TS -> MTE	0.432	10,890	0.000*	Yes		
H <sub>6</sub> : TS -> IR	0.360	8,175	0.000*	Yes		
Mediator effects						
H <sub>7</sub> : DI -> TS -> MTE	0.258	8,070	0.000*	Yes		
H <sub>8</sub> : DI -> MTE -> IR	0.133	5,702	0.000*	Yes		
H <sub>9</sub> : TS -> MTE -> IR	0.147	7,492	0.000*	Yes		
H <sub>10</sub> : DI -> TS -> MTE -> IR	0.088	6,881	0.000*	Yes		
H <sub>11</sub> : DI -> TS -> IR	0,215	6,503	0.000*	Yes		

**Note:** Significant at \*p < 0.01 level, t > 1.96,

DI: Destination Image, MTE: Memorable Tourism Experience, IR: Intention to Recommend, TS: Tourist Satisfaction

When Table 4 is examined, all six hypotheses in which direct effects were tested were supported. It has been determined that the destination image affects the memorable tourism experience ( $\beta$ : 0.391, t: 10,747, p: 0.000). In line with this result, the H<sub>1</sub> hypothesis is supported. The other variables whose direct relationship was tested in the research are the destination image and the intention to recommend. In this context, it has been determined that the destination image affects the intention to recommend ( $\beta$ : 0.200, t: 5.597, p: 0.000). It can be said that the H<sub>2</sub> hypothesis is supported.

As many studies in the literature point out, it is known that destination image is a factor that strongly affects tourist satisfaction (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022; Wong & Lai, 2021). The results of this study also confirm this information, and it was concluded that the destination image affects tourist satisfaction ( $\beta$ : 0.598, t: 18.293, p: 0.000). In line with this determination, the H<sub>3</sub> hypothesis was accepted.

According to the results of this study, it was revealed that the memorable tourism experience affects the intention to recommend ( $\beta$ : 0.341, t: 8.086, p: 0.000). Therefore, it can be said that the H<sub>4</sub> hypothesis is accepted. It can be said that there is a direct interaction between the intermediary variables, tourist satisfaction, and the memorable tourism experience variables. According to the results of this study, it was revealed that the memorable tourism experience affects the intention to recommend ( $\beta$ : 0.432, t: 10.890, p: 0.000). In line with this result, it can be said that the H<sub>5</sub> hypothesis is accepted.

The last relationship tested in the context of direct effect hypotheses is between tourist satisfaction and intention to recommend variables. In this context, it has been determined that tourist satisfaction has a significant effect on the intention to recommend ( $\beta$ : 0.360, t: 8.175, p: 0.000). In the light of this information, it can be said that the H<sub>6</sub> hypothesis is supported by taking the relationship determined as reference.

After the hypotheses related to direct effects were examined, the indirect effects included in the structural model were examined. The intermediary variables that constitute the indirect effects here are, as mentioned earlier, the variables of memorable tourism experience and tourist satisfaction. In this context, the hypotheses were established within the framework of these intermediary variables. The examination of the indirect effect hypotheses should start with the H<sub>7</sub> hypothesis. It was revealed that the destination image affects the memorable tourism experience with the mediator variable tourist satisfaction ( $\beta$ : 0.258, t: 8.070, p: 0.000). In this case, H<sub>7</sub> is accepted.

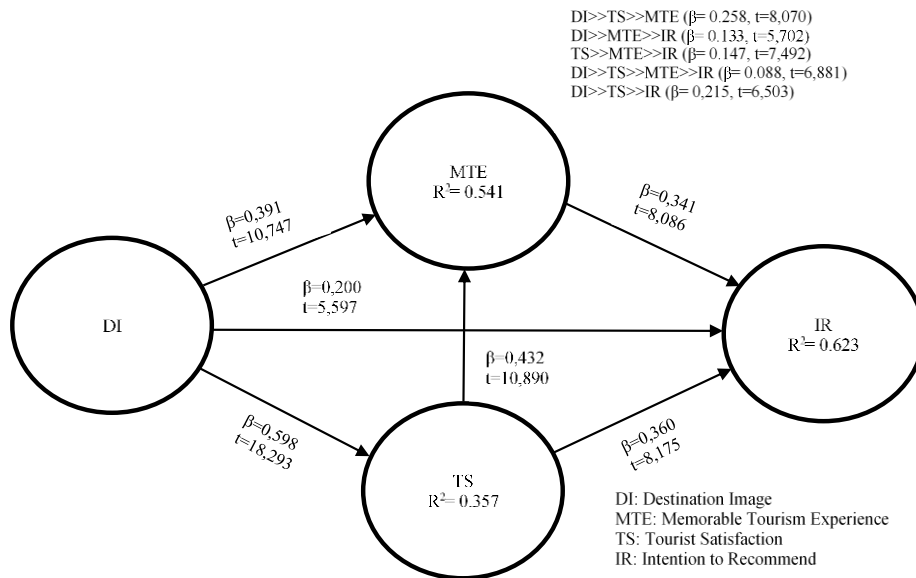
Destination image affects the intention to recommend with the mediator variable memorable tourism experience ( $\beta$ : 0.133, t: 5.072, p: 0.000). In line with this result, it can be said that the H<sub>8</sub> hypothesis is accepted. Considering another indirect effect hypothesis; tourist satisfaction affects the intention to recommend with the mediator variable memorable tourism experience ( $\beta$ : 0.147, t: 7.492, p: 0.000). In the light of this information, the H<sub>9</sub> hypothesis is supported.



When the results of the remaining two hypotheses in Table 4 are examined, according to the hypothesis that two mediator variables are used simultaneously among these hypotheses, the destination image affects the recommendation intention simultaneously through the tourist satisfaction level and the memorable tourism experience mediator variables ( $\beta$ : 0.088,  $t$ : 6.881,  $p$ : 0.000) was determined. In line with this result, it can be said that the  $H_{10}$  hypothesis is supported. Finally, when

looking at the  $H_{11}$  hypothesis from a statistical point of view; It has been determined that the destination image affects the intention to recommend with the mediator variable of the tourist satisfaction level ( $\beta$ : 0.215,  $t$ : 6.503,  $p$ : 0.000). In this case, the  $H_{11}$  hypothesis was also supported. Thus, it was concluded that all 11 hypotheses developed within the scope of the research were supported (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - PLS-SEM results of the structural model



$R^2$  values provide information about how independent variables explain dependent variables. When a comprehensive model is tested in the study, there are three different  $R^2$  values and dependent and independent variables differ according to these values. Considering the  $R^2$  values, the destination image variable in the model affects the tourist satisfaction at the level of 35.7%. This result shows that about 36% of tourist satisfaction is explained by the destination image. The  $R^2$  value of the memorable tourism experience variable in the model is 54.1%. In this context, it can be said that when the memorable tourism experience is the dependent variable, 54% is explained by the independent variables in the model, namely destination image and tourist satisfaction.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the  $R^2$  value related to the intention to recommend, which is the dependent variable in the main model, is 62.3% in the final model. In a model where the intention to recommend variable is dependent, approximately 62% of it is explained by the independent variables such as destination image, tourist satisfaction and memorable tourism experience. According to the  $R^2$  values in the model, the intention to recommend is above the medium level and close to strong, the memorable tourism experience is moderate, and the tourist satisfaction has an explanatory level slightly below the medium level (Chin, 1998; Nikbin & Hyun, 2017). As a result, it has been determined that different factors related to destinations can affect the repetitive behavior patterns of tourists.

## 5. Discussion

In this part of the study, it is planned to address the results of the subject covered in the research and to create a discussion within this framework. Within the scope of the theoretical background, the research findings are discussed with a critical perspective.

This study has produced results that can contribute to the theoretical background of MTE (Memorable Tourism Experience). The study by Oh et al. (2007) contributes to the tourism literature by testing the concept of MTE, which he has added to the literature. Creating and testing this scale, which is important for the tourist experience, in a different context contributes to a better and broader understanding of the relationships between MTE components and behavioral intentions. Although variables such as image, satisfaction, and intention to recommend are frequently used in most studies, it is acknowledged that these variables cannot completely explain certain behavioral intentions. Therefore, this study is expected to shed light on the unexplained behavioral intentions of MTE.

The results of the research reveal that tourists' thoughts about the destination are important. Similarly, they recommend the destination to their entourage according to the image of the tourists. In this context, Kim (2018) found that Chinese, Japanese, South Korean and American tourists visiting Taiwan's Kaohsiung city tend to recommend it to their entourage. Wong and Lai (2021), in their study in Macau, discovered that tourists





make recommendations to their entourage based on their perception of the destination's gambling-related image. In this context, it has emerged that the hypothesis that the destination image affects the intention to recommend, which is also found in the scope of many studies, is verifiable and supportable (Kim et al., 2017; Foroudi et al., 2018; Afshardoost et al., 2020). When the results of the study are examined, it is concluded that the image of the destination has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction. Wong & Lai (2021), in their study in Macau, reached the same conclusion and found that the destination image positively affects tourist satisfaction. Lu et al. (2020) in their study in Hong Kong, mentioned that the destination image is effective in the satisfaction of tourists and that tourists can become loyal customers in line with this result. Foroudi et al. (2018) investigated whether destination image has an effect on tourist satisfaction in their study in London. In line with the results of the study, it was concluded that the destination image has an effect on tourist satisfaction.

### 5.1 Theoretical Implications

In every industry, people seek to experience the products they buy, and this experience can lead them to make positive or negative recommendations to their entourage. The tourism industry is one of these industries. Compared to other industries, tourism can occupy a larger space in people's memories as the product is mostly intangible, and this experience often takes place when people's motivation is high. Thus, through the memorable tourism experience, tourists can recommend destinations to their entourage based on their experiences. These recommendations have a very important role in the tourism industry. Due to this role, the tourist demand of countries may increase, and there may also be a contraction in demand due to the opposite effect. In this context, it is important to support the hypothesis that the memorable tourism experience established in the study affects the intention to recommend. In the study conducted by Kim (2018) in Taiwan, it was determined that the same effect was accepted. Chen & Rahman (2018) touched on the same topic in their study on American tourists and emphasized that the higher the memorable tourism experience, the higher the intention to recommend the destination. Chen et al. (2021), in their study carried out in one of the most famous cafes in the city of Saigon, Vietnam, stated that the establishment tried to create a comfortable dining atmosphere, improve service quality, produce innovative recipes, and include unique decorations to impress customers. The aim of all these activities is to awaken the memorable tourism experience and thus enable customers to recommend it to their surroundings. Other studies have also emphasized that a memorable tourism experience has an effect on the intention to recommend (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

The study found that destination image influences the intention to recommend through the memorable tourism experience. This situation is also supported by the study conducted by Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) in Iran. As a result of the study, it

was determined that tourists who have fun and meaningful memories of their last trips are more likely to show intention to recommend. As a result of these experiences, it is seen that tourists share their opinions especially on social media platforms and thus tend to recommend the destination. Finally, it is necessary to consider the intention to recommend in the context of two mediating factors. In this context, it is seen that the destination image affects the memorable tourism experience and tourist satisfaction mediator effects and the intention to recommend. As a result, it can be concluded that factors with high emotional intensity such as memorable tourism experience and tourist satisfaction affect the intention to recommend. Therefore, it's suggested that destinations that have a good image and can offer different experiences to tourists, thereby increasing satisfaction, can get ahead of their competitors.

### 5.2 Practical Implications

Different types of planning can be implemented for stakeholders in the destination to generate more income (Kuokkanen and Bouchon, 2021). In this sense, more foreign tourists should be attracted. In this context, tour operators can be used. In addition, other stakeholders in the destination should be involved in this process. For this purpose, incentives should be given to the operators that bring tourists from abroad through different campaigns and support programs. It is seen that tourist guides also play a role in the destination image. First, the guides who come to the destination help the tourists there to have a good experience and to transfer this experience to their entourage. In addition, while providing this, guides should know the destination and its entourage well and be able to introduce them to the tourist. In this way, it can be ensured that the tourists leave the destinations satisfied.

The results provide a useful framework for destinations that want to create or develop MTE and highlight the role of MTE. There is an important point that destinations must consider in order to provide a sustainable competitive advantage in terms of management. It may be important for destination management (marketing) organizations to focus on the core functions and outputs of MTE (such as satisfaction, referral, and revisit) rather than focusing solely on product-oriented marketing. However, by doing so, it is possible to leave lasting impressions and influence behaviors in the tourist who has experience in any destination. As Pine and Gilmore (1998) noted, the richest experiences create a "unique memory" in consumers and influence their future decisions and behavior. Tourists with unique experiences are often the most reliable source of information for the intent to re-visit and eWOM communication.

Some studies reveal that unforgettable experiences are gained where tourists and locals interact (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). In this context, being able to bring together the tourists coming to the destination with the local people and culture can be important in terms of transferring both experience and culture.



By offering such cultural events, memorable experiences can be shared by tourists with others, potentially encouraging re-visit. During the destination experience, the tourists' participation in practices (handicraft workshop, local food making and tasting, etc.) with the local people will directly affect the memorization of the trip.

In order to ensure the image of the destination and be sustainable, it is necessary not only to tourism enterprises, but also to raise awareness of local people about tourism (Buhalis, 2000). In this context, it would be beneficial for local governments to organize tourism trainings and events for local people. In this way, people's interest in the service sector can increase more, they can be more hospitable to the tourists they encounter, and better service can be provided. This situation again allows the tourists to have a good experience, to create satisfaction because of this experience, to choose the destination or business again and to recommend it to their entourage. At the same time, the loyalty of tourists to the destination or business can also occur. For a destination or business, a loyal customer can make it easier and bigger profits than gaining a new customer.

### 5.3 Limitations and future studies

Due to the nature of scientific research, as in many studies, this study also has some limitations. One of the most significant limitations of this study is that the research universe is limited to domestic tourists, as the plan was to collect data from a homogeneous sample to suit the objectives of the research. It remains an intriguing question as to what kind of attitudes foreign tourists, who were not included in the data collection plan, would develop in the context of this research. Also, the criterion that the tourists from whom data will be collected must have participated in an organized tour previously can be considered another sample-based constraint in the study. The criterion requiring "tourists to participate in at least one organized tour previously", which was a prerequisite for the sample group determined within the scope of the study, complicated data collection. Due to this criterion, the researchers participated in the tours and managed the data collection process. This was because there were difficulties in finding tours that met the desired criteria. The high costs of the tours also introduced constraints such as time and financial expense. In this context, certain tours were determined and it was planned to obtain maximum data by participating in as few tours as possible. It can be said that the COVID-19 pandemic experienced during the field research process of the study is one of the important limitations of the research. In this context, a significant part of the research data was collected online.

It is a fact that research on repeat purchase behavior and recommendation intention, which is seen as a deficiency in the tourism industry, is not discussed in detail. In this context, it may be appropriate to conduct more research on these issues. Particularly, the experience, which holds a more important position in tourism, and the memorable experience should be

discussed, related to various issues, and examined further. Various studies can be proposed by linking memorable tourism experience with service quality and other variables or by incorporating additional variables. In order to measure MTE, mostly positive memorable tourism experiences were measured. On the other hand, looking at MTE only with its positive aspect is one of the limitations of the study. Studies involving negative memorable tourism experiences can also be done.

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