Evaluating Dimensions of Destination Image for Selection of Eco-tourism Destination in Bangladesh

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Abstract
The rising image issues for destinations have become an escalating concern for ecotourism expansion in Bangladesh. The initial research about the destination image offered specific unknown gaps concerned with several advantages. However, this study aims to investigate the effect of destination image on ecotourism destination selection in Bangladesh. The data were collected by a self-administered questionnaire survey of 352 tourists and refined using structural equation analysis. SPSS-AMOS analyses revealed the existence of significant relationships between the variables. The findings demonstrate that a proper image would entice tourists to travel to Bangladesh’s ecotourism destinations. In addition, it may benefit Bangladesh tourism organizations by implementing plans to deal with sustainable development. Nevertheless, this study evaluates the destination image with a three-way interaction between ecotourism destination selection, which might serve as a precedent for future research.

Keywords: Destination Image, Ecotourism, Sustainable Development, Destination Selection

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Introduction

Destination managers have intense rivalry to provide enticing amenities in destinations. Attracting new tourists and maintaining them need a complete, indispensable approach for the growth of the tourism business (Quynh et al., 2021). Tourist satisfaction is frequently seen as the essential indicator of future travel, adding to a tourist destination’s success (Chiu et al., 2016). However, the destination image is crucial in determining specific travel behaviour. It significantly impacts tourists’ decision-making when travelling and evaluating the level of happiness and expectations (Pratminingsih et al., 2014).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020) describes destination image as a critical component of developing and delivering tourism services. Thus, it is one of the distinguishing features of the destinations and a central component of this study. An early study identified destination image as a critical influencing factor affecting human behaviour (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). In phases of tourism, it includes beliefs and feelings about a place that encourage personal visits (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). It also inspires tourists to plan a tour. Similarly, Kim (2017) suggested that an appealing destination image drives the travelling decision-making of the tourist and raises the level of satisfaction with the remembrance experience. Although destination image has been researched extensively in the tourism literature (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Whang et al., 2015; Sharma & Nayak, 2018; López-Sanz et al., 2021b), little is known about its effect on ecotourism perspectives in Bangladesh.

As time advanced, the literature on ecotourism has identified many factors that may fulfil ecotourism demands (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2008; Hultman et al., 2015). Aside from that, it has been regarded as having less effect on the industry than traditional tourism owing to its reliance on distant locations (Chand et al., 2015). It also signifies a mutually beneficial relationship between the ecotourist and tour provider, in which tourists obtain a unique and educational travel experience (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018). The definitions of ecotourism share commonalities in concepts. The most widely accepted definition is “responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and sustain the well-being of local people” (TIES, 2015, p-9). Moreover, there have been several studies on the benefits of ecotourism in conserving natural resources, biodiversity, and tourism businesses (Drumm & Moore, 2005).

This study predicts that the image of a destination is a vital facet in deciding ecotourism destination selection. Indeed, there is a dearth of empirical research on the link between destination image and ecotourism destination selection. An earlier study by Chiu et al. (2014) is among the few that demonstrate the importance of destination image in influencing ecotourism conduct. In light of the above, this study offers an improved understanding of the destination image components and the knowledge that influences ecotourism behaviours in Bangladesh.

Literature Review

Ecotourism Destination Selection

Ecotourism concepts emphasize the need for sustainable development and environmentally responsible behaviour as a means of nature conservation (López-Sanz et al., 2021a). It reflects economic, socio-cultural, and infrastructure development (Khondkar & Anis, 2016). Fennel (2020) argued that ecotourism involves deliberate travel to natural regions that understand the environment’s social and cultural history. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 2017) mentioned that many countries like Ecuador, Nepal, Kenya, Costa Rica, and Madagascar’s main economic contributory factors depend on tourism income. Additionally, 83% of developing nations’ economies depend on ecotourism returns.
However, in Bangladesh, ecotourism has grown in popularity due to the country’s natural structure and the likelihood of tourists’ relationship with nature (Zacarias & Loyola, 2017). Thus, the potential for ecotourism in Bangladesh appears promising because of numerous natural features and a heritage legacy (Afroza & Mahmud, 2017; Roy & Chowdhury, 2021). Researchers have stated that a destination is heavily influenced by the desire to meet specific wants rather than a general appeal (Ghaderi et al., 2018). An early study revealed that destination image dimensions are significant factors that tourists rely on and induce repeat visitation (Plog, 2001; Molinillo et al., 2018). Bao and McKercher (2008) have argued that destination selection explores the relationship between a place’s image and quality perceptions of such inclinations.

Nevertheless, numerous scholars have previously addressed the critical drivers of the destination selection process, their stability, and expansion (Kim et al., 2012; Pechlaner et al., 2012). To become a thriving destination, marketers must do a detailed investigation of tourists’ desires, loyalties, and motives (McKercher & Prideaux, 2011). On this note, Bangladesh has a striking, unique destination to attract tourists. The government must deliberately take initiatives to develop ecotourism destination infrastructure balancing with the environment (Islam et al., 2012). Therefore, destination marketers should create and implement an effective destination management system to influence tourists and foster ecotourism. In such an instance, Alexandris et al. (2008) argued that destination image includes the primary element of customer loyalty, satisfaction and motivation. As a fundamental concept of tourism research, destination image is frequently addressed in tourism-related studies. Therefore, understanding the characteristics of the destination image in ecotourism destination selection is equally essential.

**Dimensions of Destination Image**

Towards the progress of any tourism destination, the essence of the destination image in selecting ecotourism destinations is obligatory. A study revealed that understanding the characteristics of destination image may also help improve destination effectiveness (Zahra, 2012). It can be constructive or adverse prejudice experienced by tourists while visiting a destination. Pike and Ryan (2004) focused on a destination’s “cognitive”, “affective”, and “conative” aspects. The “cognitive” image refers to an individual’s awareness and appraisal of the destination attributes (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Pike & Ryan, 2004). The feelings that come after visiting a destination are the “affective” image component (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004). Lastly, the “conative” image embodies the behaviour of an individual tourist (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008).

Under the same approach, Stylidis and Cherifi’s (2018) study indicated that the characteristics of the destination image depend on three criteria. The first criteria differentiate between the visitors and non-visitors expression and their attraction. In line with this, Tsaci (2006) discovered that tourists need more distinct, alluring images than non-visitors. The second criteria refer to the degree of uncertainty as the destination image is separated and oversimplified. The last criteria illustrated the dynamic of the destination image that consistently advances and directly involves the destination (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Baloglu, 2001). Subsequently, these destination image attributes are clarified and developed into a specific measure (Kim, 2012; Todd, Leask & Fyall, 2015; Terzidou et al., 2017).

Nonetheless, literature revealed that the destination image is a complex term. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) clarified the critical division of the destination image into two separate components, “attributes” and “holistic”. Besides, researchers have shown these components to be “functional” or “psychological” characteristics representing a destination’s “common” or “unique” traits (Rezende-Parker et al., 2003). Adding to this, Echtner and Ritchie’s (1991) destination image consists of three primary components: “attributes-holistic”, “functional-
psychological”, and “common-unique”. The researchers added that the “attributes-holistic” and “functional-psychological” traits are equally critical to the image of a tourism destination. In contrast, Jenkins (1999) argued that the destination image’s “common” and “unique” characteristics are frequently overlooked. However, the following sections elucidate these elaborations further.

Motivation is the start of all instances of tourism. Crompton (1979) proposed that “push and pull” factors measure tourists’ motivation for heading out to a destination. In such circumstances, the destination image represents a motivational factor influencing tourists to select a destination. Based on the preceding debate, destination image components are characterized as “push and pull” factors, essential for understanding travel behaviors and motivation (Jang et al., 2009). Thus, this current study directs the necessity to incorporate the push-pull model proposed by Crompton (1979) within the conceptual framework.

Hypothesis Development

Attributes-Holistic

The “Attributes-Holistic” dimension of destination image alludes to people’s capacity to process data on a psychological and consumer behaviour basis (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). It also suggested that destination images were composed of individual attribute experiences such as environmental issues, lodging services, and more holistic location observations (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Similarly, the “attributes-holistic” subset reflects an understanding of the image, including the historical features and the demands of tourists (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). A destination’s “cognitive” component often implies the appraisal of the environment’s physical features (Baloglu & McCleary, 1991; Tessitore et al., 2014). This discussion is predicated on the central premise that “cognitive” positioning is a process that benefits both the marketer and the customer. Previous studies have tested and identified the influences of an ecotourism destination’s “cognitive” image and destination selection (Qiu, 2014; Jiang et al., 2017; Stylos et al., 2017). In the context of ecotourism in Bangladesh, no such step has focused on the direct association between destination image of attributes-holistic and destination selection. The accumulation of these utter remains of evidence culminated in creating the initial hypothesis:

\[ H_1: \] “Attributes-Holistic” Image of Destination Significantly Impact the Selection of Ecotourism Destinations.

Functional-Psychological

The “Functional-Psychological” continuum is formed between functional aspects of the image, referring to intangible and less tangible elements that are not difficult to observe. It is repeatedly called the “affective” component of the destination image (Alcaniz et al., 2009). It focuses on the facets of the “affective” dimension and reflects on the “functional” and “psychological” character. However, these “functional or psychological” attributes are grouped according to their traits. It directs at intangible and observable experiences, such as scenery and entertainment. “Psychological” components, on the other hand, give more abstract and subjective characteristics, including atmosphere or pleasantness (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Numerous scholars have concluded that both components contribute to defining the tourist’s overall destination image, which was a composite interpretation higher than the total of the pieces (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991, Alcañiz et al., 2009). As a result, the following hypothesis is formed:

\[ H_2: \] “Functional-Psychological” Image of Destination Significantly Impact the Selection of Ecotourism Destinations.
**Common-Unique**

The “Common-Unique” continuum suggests that a destination’s impressions might differ based on “common” characteristics. For example, level of costs, framework and atmosphere. “Unique” elements refer to hospitality, fame and nature of service of the destination. The “common-unique” spectrum describes the variety of features that a tourist evaluates a destination, ranging from those generally seen at all locations, for instance, customer service or accommodation (Ahmadova, 2018). On this note, Echtner and Ritchie (1991) attempted to represent both the “affective” and “cognitive” factors by integrating the “common-unique” attribute domain with the “functional-psychological” sphere. Nevertheless, Ahmadova’s (2018) study over again indicated that this continuum includes characteristics of a destination on the side and the unique or differentiated features of the other. Similarly, Alrawadieh et al. (2018) divulged that the destination image is formed from common to unique characteristics since it is the intent or action component. Although many studies combined “cognitive” and “affective” dimensions, the majority of current destination image research has focused on “conative” components utilizing a list of destination characteristics. (Hahm & Wang, 2011; Zhang et al., 2014; Da Silva et al., 2018; Hahm et al., 2018). Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**H₃**: “Common-Unique” Image of Destination Significantly Impact the Selection of Ecotourism Destinations.

![Conceptual Framework of the Study](image)

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study**

**Methodology**

Participants in this study include people who travel to different ecotourism destinations in Bangladesh. In particular, this study utilized a non-probability purposive sampling technique to generate its sample, as it is feasible to contact tourists at ecotourism destinations (Hair et al., 2019). As recommended by multivariable analysis literature, the primary sample size was set to at least 400 observations. (Byrne, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013; Hair et al., 2015). It was decided in this study to use a structured questionnaire that included socio-demographic data (age, gender, nationality, occupation, monthly income) as well as 19 items measuring the multi-dimensional destination image (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) and six items measuring the selection of ecotourism destinations. Measurement scale items were scored on a “5-point Likert” scale from “1” (strongly disagree) to “5” (strongly agree) to show their agreement level. As a side note, the researchers stated that the “5-point Likert Scale” has more significant variation than (Allen & Seaman, 2007; Louangrath & Sutanapong, 2018).
The substantial survey was conducted between June and November 2021 in several distinct ecotourism destinations. The researchers of this study approached tourists face-to-face in different ecotourism destinations and randomly offered to participate. 482 people were contacted, and 391 responded, yielding an 81.12% response rate. However, 39 replies were omitted from the analysis due to a lack of required information. The total sample included 352 valid observations. Kline (2011) stated that a sample size of around 200 instances is standard when using SEM Table 1 outlines the demographics of the respondents. The collected data, conceptual model and hypotheses were statistically analyzed using SPSS-AMOS (version 25) since it is the best tool for determining a large-scale model’s interactions (Hair et al., 2019).

Common method bias is most pronounced in analyses where data are collected from the same respondents using the exact measurements and items over the same period for criteria and predictors (Podsakoff et al., 2012). The likelihood of a common method bias (CMB) was identified while collecting data from a single questionnaire for this study. The result showed that four distinct factors having an eigenvalue of 1.00 accounted for 38.43% of variance rather than a single factor, which confirmed no issue with such an assessment.

Data Analysis and Results

Profile of the Respondents

There was a total of 352 valid replies obtained for this study. Most respondents were male (70.45%), then female (29.55%). The maximum number of respondents was between 26 to 35 years of age (36.07%). About 90% of the responders were local, and the smallest number were foreigners. A large margin of the respondents (40.06%) were service holders, and a minor proportion comprised housewives (5.68%). The lead group of participants had a monthly salary of over BDT 100,000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>70.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>29.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>25.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>36.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>27.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56 and above</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>89.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreigner</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>40.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>29.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Income</td>
<td>Less than BDT 25000</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BDT 25001-50000</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>21.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BDT 50001-100000</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>20.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Above BDT 100000</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>15.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>24.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents of the Study
Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Model

The study evaluated the reliability and validity of the constructs and examined the convergent and discriminant validity of 26 indicators. EFA was conducted initially to identify the underlying factors and found more than 0.5, and no construct items shared substantial amounts of residual variance with other constructs (Table 2). However, one item was deleted (STD 5) during the process. The instruments were further evaluated to verify the structure’s reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Tables 2 and 3). All constructs were deemed reliable provided their Cronbach’s alphas and composite reliability values exceeded 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), constructs were found acceptable as their average variance extracted (AVE) was more than 0.50 and concluded to have a high level of convergent validity. The cross-loadings and the HTMT ratio of correlations are checked to validate for discriminant validity. The results show that all HTMT values of the latent variables were below the critical and conservative value of 0.85 (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Loadings</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha (α)</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attributes-Holistic (DAH)</td>
<td>The destination has a pleasant climate that represents its “attributes-holistic” features.</td>
<td>Echtner and Ritchie (1993)</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The destination offers high-quality accommodation that represents its “attributes-holistic” features.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.653</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The destination has friendly and hospitable people who represent its “attributes-holistic” features.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.652</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The destination has many adventure activities that represent its “attributes-holistic” features.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.701</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>0.537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The destination has a minimum strikes and social unrest record, representing its “attributes-holistic” features.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.682</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The destination has a sound transportation system representing its “attributes-holistic” features.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.708</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It gives me excellent value for money.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.733</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
representing its “attributes-holistic” features.

| Functional-Psychological (DFP) | The destination has a natural attraction that indicates its “functional-psychological” attributes. | .551 |
| | The destination has many indoor sports facilities, which indicate its “functional-psychological” attributes. | .685 |
| | The destination has high-quality restaurants in the area, which indicates its “functional-psychological” attributes. | .597 |
| | The destination offers lots of open-air activities, indicating its “functional-psychological” attributes. | .564 |
| | The destination has many shopping facilities, indicating its “functional-psychological” attributes. | .630 |
| | The destination offers nightlife entertainment that indicates its “functional-psychological” attributes. | .797 |

| Common-Unique (DCU) | As a “common-unique” characteristic, the destination has a reasonable price for accommodation. | .664 |
| | As a “common-unique” characteristic, the destination has opportunities for new experiences. | .695 |
| | As “common-unique” characteristics, the destination has | .695 |

|  | Echtner and Ritchie (1993) | 0.795 | 0.806 | 0.635 |
|  | Baloglu and McCleary (1999) | 0.855 | 0.849 | 0.578 |
significant historical attractions.
As “common-unique” characteristics, the destination has significant religious attractions.
As “common-unique” characteristics, the destination has different and unique cultural activities.
As “common-unique” characteristics, destination helps me to discover new places.

| Selection of Ecotourism Destination (STD) | Affordable travel cost encourages me to select a destination. | .554 |
|                                          | The availability of facilities that meet up the needs of female travellers inspires me to select a destination. | .685 |
|                                          | Reasonable travel time inspires me to select a destination. | .632 |
|                                          | Convenient trip connectivity encourages me to select a destination. | Chen and Tsai (2007) |
|                                          | A strong reputation for environmental sustainability inspires me to select a destination. | .721 |
|                                          | Suitable for family and group tours inspired me to select a destination. | .623 |

Table 2. Reliability and Validity of the Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Constructs</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>DAH</th>
<th>DFP</th>
<th>DCU</th>
<th>STD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DAH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFP</td>
<td>.382</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCU</td>
<td>.219</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD</td>
<td>.523</td>
<td>.594</td>
<td>.426</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio
The study employed the SEM approach with AMOS 25 to analyze the hypotheses. Confirmatory factor analysis further evaluated the structural model as a combination of the measurements and models. The modification indices with error terms produced by the AMOS output served as the basis for the correlations between the three constructs: DAH, DFP, and DCU. The modification reduced the chi-square value and enhanced model fit indices, which could be well justified theoretically. There should ideally be a correlation between the variables. For evaluating the hypothetical relations, the structural model is calculated. The results show that the goodness-of-fit indices are all within their acceptable levels and showed a good fit for the data (Chi-Square = 560.739; cmin/df= 269; RMSEA = 0.055; CFI = 0.924). According to the goodness-of-fit statistics, the structural model fits the data well. Among three, two hypotheses were supported (Table 4). Table 4 summarizes the findings of the path analysis, which were then utilized to evaluate the hypotheses.

Figure 2 displays the structural relations’ standardized coefficients and the related t-values. The significant relations include attributes-holistic, functional-psychological, and the
common-unique towards ecotourism destination selections in the model. Based on the t-values, two of the three hypothetical paths were significant ($H_1$, $H_3$), and the other hypothesis ($H_2$) was found insignificant.

The $R^2$ value is the primary criterion for evaluating structural models in SPSS-SEM. This value is obtained from the outcome and is known as the coefficient of determination; however, the acceptable level of the $R^2$ value depends on the research context (Hair et al., 2019). Chin’s study (1998) suggested that $R^2$ values of 0.67, 0.33 and 0.19 can be considered substantial, moderate and weak, respectively. In this study, the $R^2$ coefficients for “attributes-holistic” (DAH) (0.41), “functional-psychological” (DFP) (0.39), “common-unique” (DCU) (0.47) and selection of ecotourism destination (SED) (0.65), suggesting the model’s constructs were well predicted (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2019).

### Hypotheses Results and Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H(x)</th>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$H_1$</td>
<td>STD $\leftarrow$ DAH</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>3.091</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_2$</td>
<td>STD $\leftarrow$ DFP</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>1.043</td>
<td>.297</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_3$</td>
<td>STD $\leftarrow$ DCU</td>
<td>.435</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>6.873</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5. Hypotheses Results**

**Relationship between “Attributes-Holistic” Image of Destination and Selection of Ecotourism Destination**

To examine the strength of the correlation between attributes-holistic image of destination and selection of ecotourism destination, the first hypothesis ($H_1$) was tested and found accepted ($S.E. = 0.134, t = 3.091, p<0.002$). It indicated that the components of the “attributes-holistic” elements formed an overall image of a particular ecotourism destination. It is in line with the arguments and findings of the previous literature that the attributes-holistic continuum of “cognitive image” is significantly related to ecotourism destination selection (Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Jiang et al., 2015). Overall, this result demonstrates that destination marketers adhere to the elements of “attributes-holistic” features to build destinations’ optimistic images for favorable tourists’ presence at different ecotourism sites in Bangladesh. Specifically, the tourists believed that “attributes-holistic” images with unique and natural resources provide great natural treasures and adventures that allow them to enjoy various ecotourism destinations.

**Relationship between “Functional-Psychological” Image of Destination and Selection of Ecotourism Destination**

An insignificant relationship was founded between “functional-psychological” traits of destination image between ecotourism destination selection ($S.E. =0.048, t=1.43, p>0.050$). Despite the insignificant relationship between affective components of “functional-psychological” features and ecotourism destination selection, many previous studies (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991, Alcañiz, García & Blas, 2009), no significant relationship was found that provided support for $H_2$. These findings can also help tourism industry practitioners modify their services based on the “functional-psychological” scale of the destination image to satisfy tourists’ needs. Therefore, it can be concluded that the “functional-psychological” continuum
did not impact the tourists from the ecotourism destination selection in Bangladesh’s perspective.

**Relationship between “Common-Unique” Image of Destination and Selection of Ecotourism Destination**

Regarding the “common-unique” continuum of destination image dimension, a significant relationship was found between the construct ($S.E. = 0.435$, $t = 6.873$, $p < 0.000$), demonstrating that the elements of “common-unique” characteristics significantly impact ecotourism destinations among tourists. In sum, this $H_3$ hypothesis is supported. The finding also empirically corroborates the previous tourism and destination image literature (Hahm & Wang, 2011; Zhang et al., 2014; Hahm et al., 2018). It helps deploy the brand image in Bangladesh’s ecotourism destination and long-term sustainability. It also elaborates on the understanding of tourism development in Bangladesh, considering its product attributes and country image. The finding also confirmed that combining the “cognitive” and “conative” components of the destination image sheds new light on the relationship.

**Implications**

This study aims to determine the relative strength of the destination image and selection of ecotourism in Bangladesh by analyzing data from local and foreign tourists visiting ecotourism destinations in Bangladesh. It contributes to the partial knowledge of destination image from a tourism viewpoint. The contribution adds to the empirical investigation of Bangladesh’s ecotourism destination image and added continuum. This study might result in a more accurate representation of the destination image in the tourists’ minds and more significant operational concerns for tourism marketing. The study’s findings indicate that destination image is essential in achieving destination loyalty towards sustainable development.

This current study contributes to the existing body of tourism knowledge. The destinations are common in long according to the same set of attributes. It places them in direct competition, emphasizing the need to establish a distinct image. Concerning the relationships between the “cognitive” image in the “attributes-holistic” continuum and the “conative” image in the “functional-psychological” continuum, both were the former concept in representing the destination image. However, an additional image continuum named “common-unique” played a significant role in the current study analysis.

Additionally, these findings can assist tourism-related operators in adapting their services depending on the image to meet their demands and achieve the anticipated benefits. The relevant authorities may also explore the emotional components of the destination image when necessary. Another significant conclusion from the study is that destination marketers may effectively impact tourists’ existential experiences through a well-managed destination image. To summarize, defining key attributes and resolving pertinent issues will enable more efficiently allocating of resources at the destinations, reinforcing the promotion of authentic visitors in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Limitations and Future Research**

As important as this study, it has a few flaws that need to be considered. The data were gathered and examined following the global devastation caused by COVID-19. As the virus began in the east and travelled westward, unfavorable opinions and attitudes about certain areas and individuals with specific ethnic and cultural origins were created. Therefore, the ratio of local and foreign tourists has significant differences. Another limitation implies the insignificant relationship between “functional-psychological” attributes and ecotourism destination
selection. However, a substantial number of comprehensive and reliable questions were used to assess this relationship.

The study findings will extend deep insight into the ecotourism destination exploration in Bangladesh and contribute to further research into the area. It will also introduce new research questions and be a starting point for it to be followed. Future research must explore the influence of each destination characteristic on destination selection by considering the mediating effect of different variables on the link between destination image and destination selection.

Conclusion
This study has focused on the implications of different destination images and ecotourism destination selection. With the knowledge of destination image, this study examined the perceptions of Bangladesh’s destination image held by local and foreign tourists, concentrating on the country’s many ecotourism destinations. The objectives laid the foundation for an academic approach that has empirically examined the constructs of destination image and ecotourism destination selection that renowned researchers have previously tested in different domains and applied a conceptual framework (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Zhang et al., 2014). Future studies also on Bangladesh’s country and destination image are recommended to employ a random approach to generate a more representative study to attract overseas interest and inflow of income. These recommendations and implications assist destination management organizations, tourist agencies, and policymakers in developing competitive marketing and branding strategies to position Bangladesh as an ecotourism destination leader.

References


