

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE TOURISTS' DECISION TO VISIT ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS IN BANGLADESH?

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Abstract: Ecotourism has been recommended for multiple outcomes that foster environmental protection in developing nations. Tourism studies have revealed that ecotourism has several setbacks in Bangladesh, resulting in environmental difficulties, security issues and tourists' unwillingness to visit destinations. Therefore, this paper examines the factors of destination image, perceived risk, and travel motivation to foresee tourists' selection of ecotourism destinations in Bangladesh. The framework of this study is built upon the "Stimulus-Response Model of Buyer Behaviour" to address the knowledge gap. A total of 364 usable responses were collected from the tourists. The data were examined using SPSS for primary analysis and SEM-AMOS for hypothesis testing. The findings suggest that a proper image and motivation would encourage tourists to visit ecotourism destinations.

Key words: Destination Image, Perceived Risk, Travel Motivation, Environmental Protection, Sustainable Development

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INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism originated in the 1980s as a constituent of alternative tourism owing to the belief that traditional mass tourism was detrimental in some aspects to the destinations (Mondino and Beery, 2018). Tourism researchers have described ecotourism differently, resulting in multiple definitions in the literature. As a pioneering work in ecotourism, Ceballos-Lascurain's (1987, p-7) definition is widely known as the earliest as "ecotourism implies travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery". Early research by Jacobson and Robles (1992) accentuated that ecotourism involves prime natural resources such as landscapes, rivers, forests, and wildlife to gratify clients. Sustainable development and biodiversity preservation are also eminent applications of ecotourism (Hassan and Burns, 2014). As Buckley (2016) identified ecotourism definitions as ambiguous, the current research employs essential components of ecotourism destination selection relevant to this investigation.

Researchers have asserted that Bangladesh is renowned for its natural attractions, culture, hospitality, and archaeological destinations (Afroz and Mahmud, 2017; Alauddin et al., 2021). Ahsan (2008) alluded to Bangladesh as a "land of opportunity" for her unparalleled bio-diversified natural habitats and ancient. Therefore, tourists who visit Bangladesh's ecotourism destinations may experience a sense of nature coexisting with heritage. Nevertheless, it is essential to have demanding policymaking, appropriate planning, monitoring, and assessment of the implemented strategies. As the arguments continue to be the deciding elements for tourists to choose and engage in Bangladesh's ecotourism progress, therefore, these discussions confirm that ecotourism has the potential to become a significant sort of tourism business to make a robust economy in Bangladesh (Jaafar and Maideen, 2012; Khondkar and Anis, 2016; Roy and Chowdhury, 2021).

In some instances, tourists have little understanding of a new tourist location they have not visited before (Morrison, 2019). Researchers argued that the destination largely depends on the choice of tourists and embodies a desire to fulfil specific needs and wishes (Ghaderi et al., 2018). As time advanced, the destination image and its dimensions became essential in the selection process. Morrison (2019) further insisted that a destination's appealing elements and cultural and natural perspectives persuade a tourist to visit and stay, which could be a city, state, or scenic area. On a separate note, destination image may sometimes lead to the apprehension and non-realisation of expectations. Likewise, risk domains distract tourists from selecting destinations despite their experiences and emotions (Caber et al., 2020).

However, much effort has been invested as selecting a destination relies on the destination's brand, image, and tourists' tolerance of risk elements and is considered the crucial components for destination marketers to look at (Stylidis et al.,

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2017; Lenggogeni et al., 2019). The researchers contend that the current modus of assessing risk involving travel activities is inadequate and should be modified to contemplate the corpus of currently available knowledge (Samdin et al., 2021). As discussed, travel is an essential desire among tourists worldwide; it also requires psychological needs that provoke, direct and integrate tourists' motivation (Pearce, 2013). Yolal et al. (2015) study uncovered that travel motivation is a factor that equally influences the decision-making process of tourists. Alauddin et al. (2021) stated that Bangladesh has many alluring ecotourism destinations that must fulfil tourists' demands. It appears to be a significant opportunity for the ecotourism business in Bangladesh, especially its connection with the said modules and its influence on the environment. In light of the preceding, the current research responds to this demand by examining factors that may impact tourists' decision to visit an ecotourism destination in Bangladesh. This study is organised in the following manner; The literature review briefly discusses ecotourism and hypotheses related to ecotourism destination selection. The methodology section describes the approach and procedures. The data analysis segment defines the outputs of the collected data, hypotheses, and general discussion. The consequences, limits, and future research are discussed in the conclusion section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecotourism Destination Selection

Ecotourism development is primarily concerned with mitigating adverse environmental impacts and safeguarding natural resources from deterioration (Bhuiyan et al., 2015). The researchers asserted that selecting an ecotourism destination required extensive information to decide and involved activities that tourists fascinatingly perform during the visit, pre-visit or post-visit (Croy and Wheeler, 2007; Djeri and Plavsa, 2007). However, the success of tourism organisations is heavily dependent on tourists' preferences that are presently luring academics' attention.

This view indicates that efficient destination management and a clearly defined tourism policy are essential for performing competently (Neger, 2021). Similarly, the natural environment, tourists' desires and modern tourists are the main facets of a supportive and environment-friendly tourism system (Ghimire and Dhakal, 2021). An early Belk and Costa (1995) study added that external and internal influences and judgement also direct tourists to a destination, such as motivation, personality, attitude, expense, accessibility, and destination image. Nonetheless, much effort has been expended, as destination selection is significantly impacted by brand, image, risk considerations, and other essential elements (Stylidis et al., 2017). The consequence of tourists' preferences in destination selection is critical for tourism marketing since they generate demand and assist visitors in making decisions (Alegre and Cladera, 2009; Ahmed and Azam, 2010). Since Bangladesh has a striking uniqueness in attracting visitors, there is a need for adequate knowledge and insight about the components influencing tourists to choose ecotourism destinations. Under this viewpoint, destination image, perceived risk and travel motivation are comprehensively explored in this current study.

The Stimulus-Response Model of Buyer Behaviour

Consumers' purchasing decisions are strongly influenced by economic, cultural and social preferences (Panwar et al., 2019). From a theoretical perspective, the researcher stated that the "Stimulus-Response Model of Buyer Behaviour" is a process that systematically understands how a consumer acts when travelling (Middleton and Clarke, 2001).

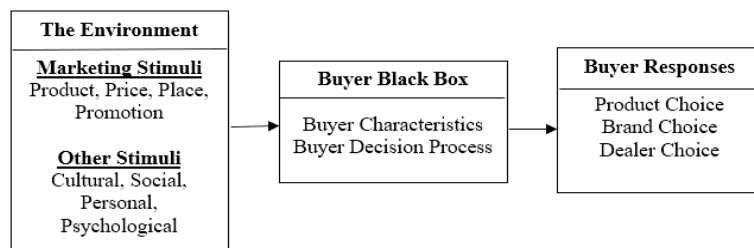


Figure 1. The Stimulus-Response Model of Buyer Behaviour

This concept is analogous to the black box theory of behaviourism, which focuses on the underlying relationship between inputs and subsequent outcomes (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Therefore, this theory has been adapted for this research. In line with such theoretical consensus, the components of the destination image are portrayed as marketing stimuli, as they pertain to brand image within the 4p. Other stimuli reflect perceived risk in the ecotourism segment, whereas travel motivation is the tourist's black box, and to the end, destination selection represents the consumer's response. Under this approach, Blackwell et al. (2003) argued that purchasing a product containing risk might obtain psychological discomfort. With the amelioration, the consumer sometimes paid more for security and risk avoidance. Likewise, Lepp and Gibson (2003) mentioned that risks repeatedly influence consumers to perceive over time. However, an early study suggested that perceived risk impacts every stage of consumer decision-making and compelled marketers to use this knowledge to gain a competitive advantage (Mitchell, 1992). Since it is relevant to the model, perceived risk is classified with other stimuli in psychological factors. To a greater extent, the researchers have asserted that the adapted model emphasises the importance of communication between the tourism business and the consumer.

Destination Image and Selection of Ecotourism Destination

Most scholars believe a destination image combines views, concepts, aspirations and emotional thoughts (Kim and Richardson, 2003; Beerli and Martin, 2004; Assaker, 2014; Molinillo et al., 2018). It also relies on its climate, landscape, and culture as internal resources (Chiutsi et al., 2011; Coria and Calfucura, 2012). Kaur et al. (2016) study indicated that destination image had been a primary focus of theoretical and empirical tourism studies over the past three decades. However, it is recognised all around since it focuses on the tourist's observation, behaviour, and choice (Gallarza et al., 2002; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003). Scholars have mentioned that the destination image has been divided into two key categories: internal and exterior (Lai and Li, 2015). Numerous findings demonstrated that the destination

image is the crucial component influencing the destination selection activity (Hallmann et al., 2015; Karl et al., 2015; Ojo and Yusof, 2019). The travel decision-making, travel-related activities and potential travel plans, and destination image as an intangible component unquestionably influence tourists' expectations on selecting a destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Byon and Zhang, 2010; Xiong et al., 2015; Molinillo et al., 2018). It has been identified that the least number of studies based on destination image attributes were undertaken in Bangladesh's ecotourism context. Based on the above-discussed relationship, the below hypothesis has suggested:

H₁: Destination image significantly impacts the selection of ecotourism destinations.

Perceived Risk and Selection of Ecotourism Destination

People have been disquieted about travel safety and paying attention to related risks. Tourism risk awareness is a quantifiable indicator that directly affects tourists' decisions. Cui et al. (2016) discovered that tourists' risk is typically between five and seven dimensions. Therefore, this study has used six dimensions of perceived risk to support this notion. Williams and Balaz's (2012) study further added that destination-related risks had gained much attention to increasing the safety and security of a destination. Thus, destination-specific risks need to be resolved for tourism advancement.

On a separate note, destination selections are affected by risk elements and are sometimes not judged by specific information sources. It may include terrorist attacks, criminal activity, national disasters, and the spread of disease (Chen et al., 2009; Fuchs and Reichel, 2011). There have been a few attempts to determine tourists' travel risks beyond health and safety concerns. It, therefore, needs to explore the link on the overhead view. On this note, Kani et al. (2018) argued that perceived risk analysis is essential given the significant destination calamities afflict a country's image. The recent pandemic of COVID -19 has created alarm among tourists worldwide. As a result, safety has emerged as a critical factor affecting the travel plans for tourists who visit Bangladeshi ecotourism destinations. People will not travel if they feel uncomfortable and visit safer locations they consider. Consequently, ensuring safety in diverse ecotourism destinations is essential to sustain tourism interest and acceptability. Thus, the above discussion has concluded the below hypothesis:

H₂: Perceived risk significantly affects the selection of ecotourism destinations.

Travel Motivation and Selection of Tour Destination

In conjunction with need-based tourist incentives, a long-discussed theoretical background impacted travel behaviour and destination selection (Yoo et al., 2018). In tourism trends, psychology and inspiration are intertwined (Skavronskaya et al., 2017). Therefore, in several tourism-related research, Maslow's (1954) five-stage need theory has been addressed, providing a comprehensive guide to tourist motivation. Nonetheless, the "need theory" proposed by Maslow (1954) is in progressive order of expanding motivational significance (Kenrick et al., 2010). As indicated by the researcher, the variables of physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualisation motivate the individuals to make two distinct choices on two unique occasions, for example, "regardless of whether to go" and "where to go" (Baniya and Paudel, 2016).

Motivation and destination selection are inextricably linked in the selection process, which could be complex and influenced by several instances (Jeong et al., 2018). Lee et al. (2014) found a correlation between travel motivation and tourist behaviour, which may be influenced directly and indirectly to meet visitors' demands. Tourism researchers similarly acknowledged travel motivation as essential for destination success (Prebensen et al., 2012). As previously said, motivation is defined as the driving force; it also encompasses tourist attitudes in significant aspects of action, such as commitment, interpretation, and satisfaction (Gnoth, 1997). Furthermore, travellers' motivation represents their intention, which deems them competent to make any decision (Jang et al., 2009). However, the tourists' motivation and destination choices are relatively unknown to many growing tourists because limited studies are available in this setting (Mehtaj, 2017; Nafi and Ahmed, 2018). Consequently, based on the preceding reasoning and discussion, the researchers postulate that travel motivation compels visitors to choose destinations and engage in ecotourism activities. The following hypothesis is meant to reflect this assumption:

H₃: Travel motivation has a significant positive impact on selecting ecotourism destinations.

Destination Image and Travel Motivation

More than two decades of tourism studies have demonstrated that destination image is essential in selecting tourism destinations (Chetthamrongchai, 2017). In such a journey, motivation is a factor in determining the prediction process of destination choice, and a positive image motivates travellers to call on and revisit (Pratminingsih et al., 2014). Previous studies explored destination image and travel motivation, depicting destination image as an influential element (Stabler, 1995; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Shi et al., 2012; Kim and Chen, 2016; Khan et al., 2017). Literature found that motivation is a socio-psychological component influencing a visitor to participate in leisure activities. Therefore, travel motivation is believed to be associated with successful destination image construction (Dann, 1996; Baloglu, 2001).

San Martin and Del Bosque (2008) highlighted from several viewpoints how cultural values and travel motives influence a tourist's decision to visit a specific location. Li et al. (2010) study also discussed the dimension of motivation (cognitive and affective) that has considerably moulded them. In line with this view, travel motivation as one of the antecedents is featured in many destination image design models (Josiassen et al., 2016; Kim and Chen, 2016; Jani, 2018). However, in Bangladesh, tourists have a sophisticated understanding of destination image and travel motivation in ecotourism destinations choice. Thus, it is necessary to examine how tourist travel motivation shapes destination image to attract inbound and foreign tourists. Moreover, these interrelationships have not previously been considered in a single study. Thus, the hypothesis below is intended:

H₄: Destination image has a significant positive impact on travel motivation.

Perceived Risk and Travel Motivation

Research has indicated that risk elements influence travel behaviour in the tourism segment and considers a critical construct for explaining tourists' behaviour (Rid et al., 2014; Khan et al., 2019). Thus, the risk factors are critical in identifying the travel motivation of a tourist (Beh and Bruyere, 2007; Li et al., 2010). In previous research, risk perception has significantly impacted tourists' motivation in decision-making and destination choice (Lin and Chen, 2009; Prayag and Jankee, 2013; Da Silva Lopes et al., 2021). Scholars have assumed that the decline in holiday plans involves past incidents around the world, and visitors are concerned about security issues while visiting a destination (Chiu and Lin, 2011; Chen and Noriega, 2004; Floyd et al., 2004; Kingsbury and Brunn, 2004; Fuchs and Reichel, 2011; Yazid et al., 2018). In addition, the perceived risk is associated with various psychological characteristics, including beliefs, attitudes and other behaviour (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005; Seabra et al., 2014; Adeloje and Brown, 2017). Subsequently, risk elements, including crime, political unrest, disease, and natural disaster, are exposed negatively and radically affect destination selection and leisure activities (Fuchs and Reichel, 2011). Therefore, the present study aims to assess travel motivation and risk perception when choosing ecotourism destinations in Bangladesh. As a result of the above discussion, the following assumption was postulated:

H₅: Perceived risk has a significant negative impact on travel motivation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study is initiated with a wide-ranging literature review of ecotourism destination selection associated with relevant theory and empirical data. A quantitative method is an organised method with precise empirical interpretations. This method is consistent with the positivism paradigm since numerical results are often accepted as unbiased and independent of the researcher's values and opinions (Oswald, 2015). Therefore, the current study endorsed quantitative analysis with a deductive approach to the suggested study framework and related hypotheses.

Study Population and Sampling Method

A study population is a distinct group of individuals or entities with similar characteristics (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014). This study's data were obtained from several ecotourism destinations by approaching tourists. The target population comprised visitors who visited several ecotourism locations in Bangladesh. It has set a total of 400 individual tourists to determine the sample size considering earlier studies, and the unit of analysis was an individual tourist (Fick and Ritchie, 1991; Tasci and Gartner, 2007; Hultsman et al., 2015). According to Hair et al. (2015), a sample size between 200 to 400 is adequate, associated with different parameters. In many cases, the 5:1 ratio has been used in multivariate analysis. The sampling method usually depends on the nature of the pertained study.

However, this study followed the non-probability purposive sampling technique, which explains specific assumptions, expectations and experiences to determine sample size (Hair et al., 2015). Since the approach was much more flexible, Jaafar and Maideen's (2012) study also used this sampling method to define the sample size for engaging tourists. In supporting the above statement, Muhamad et al. (2012) similarly utilised purposive sampling to collect data to determine the destination image, describing it as a more practical and cost-effective method.

Measurement Scale Development

The "questionnaire" is generally used to gather data from several respondents. Also, a valid questionnaire allows valuable and reliable information or data to be transmitted from the respondent to the researcher (Krosnick, 2018). The "Likert Scale" is the most popular of several measurement tools (Leung, 2011; Newman, 2014). The current study used a "5-point" Likert scale, which the researchers stated is the most used scale for statistical analysis (Hair et al., 2019). A total no. of 74 questions were included in the questionnaire (except demographic), and items were adapted from previous studies (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Stone and Grønhaug, 1993; Ryan, 1995; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Laroche et al., 2004; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Fuchs and Reichel, 2011).

Data Analysis

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a frequently used technique for measuring dynamic connections (Hair et al., 2019). However, the sample size is also an essential factor to consider. In this study, hypotheses were evaluated using SPSS-AMOS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of the Respondents

71.7 % of the total sample size of 364 were male, while 28.3 % were female. Regarding age, most participants were between 26 and 35 (36.5%), followed by the youngest age ranging from 18 to 25 (25%). The lowest responses came from the 56 and above age segment (3.3%). The local/foreigner ratio of the total population was a sizable variation, as 335 (92.0%) responses came from the local people. This finding of lower response from foreign tourists was due to the global pandemic (COVID-19). Concerning the respondents' qualifications, 42.3% had a master's degree. 37.1% of them engaged in bachelor's degrees. This result suggested that most respondents have a high level of educational background.

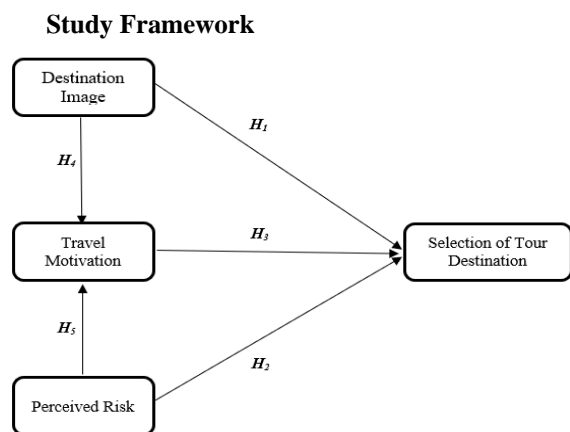


Figure 2. The Framework of the Study

Most participants reported being married (57.1%), and 41.5% identified themselves as single. While respondents were questioned about their occupations, five distinct categories were included in the range. 40.4 % were employed, while 28.3 % were students, and the class of these respondents comprised different education levels.

As an ordinal variable, 19.8% of respondents had a total income ranging from BDT50001-100000 and were deemed mid-level income in Bangladesh. In response to the frequency of travel towards ecotourism destinations, more than half of the respondents (52.5%) answered that they generally travel annually. However, 26.6% of the respondents travelled to ecotourism destinations every quarter. As represented in Table 1 relating to visiting type, the category “Family Trip” comprised the most significant percentage (49.70%) of answers. 63.2% of 364 respondents declared themselves as self-sponsored tourists. Other than that, 17.6% of respondents reported being sponsored by their parents.

Table 1. Respondents’ Demographics Profile

Items	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	261	71.7
	Female	103	28.3
Age	18-25	91	25.0
	26-35	133	36.5
	36-45	103	28.3
	46-55	25	6.9
	56 and above	12	3.3
Nationality	Local	335	92.0
	Foreigner	29	8.0
Education	HSC	35	9.6
	Diploma	20	5.5
	Bachelor	135	37.1
	Masters	154	42.3
	Others	20	5.5
Marital Status	Married	208	57.1
	Unmarried	151	41.5
	Others	5	1.4
Occupation	Service	147	40.4
	Business	63	17.3
	Student	103	28.3
	Housewife	20	5.5
	Others	31	8.5
Monthly Income	Less than BDT 25000	69	19.0
	BDT 25001-50000	77	21.2
	BDT 50001-100000	72	19.8
	Above BDT 100000	54	14.8
	Others	92	25.2
Frequency of Travel	Monthly	24	6.6
	Quarterly	97	26.6
	Yearly	191	52.5
	Others	52	14.3
Type of Visit	Individual Trip	71	19.5
	Family Trip	181	49.7
	Individual Trip	71	19.5
	Business Trip	15	4.1
	Others	97	26.6
Financial Sources	Self-Sponsored	230	63.2
	Parents	64	17.6
	Company Sponsored	6	1.6
	Loan	4	1.1
	Others	60	16.5

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis is essential because it describes the basic features of the data in a study. The result revealed that one of the dimensions of the perceived risk indicator coded as “PHY6” has the highest mean average of 4.26, where a standard deviation of .756. The highest mean average of all indicators, “DAH4”, achieved 4.36. However, a lower average mean value in the perceived risk items was “PHY3” (3.72).

Measurement Model

All items were initially analysed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Factors loadings with 0.50> were included for further interpretation of the data. The common method bias was also checked and found not present in this study. It ensured that the instrument’s index remained constant and within that range. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is computed for the scale’s internal accuracy. However, according to Hair et al. (2015), a reliability level of 0.70 or more is acceptable.

Cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker criteria, and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio have all been advocated as tools for measuring discriminant validity where cross-loadings observe the discriminant validity at the indicator level, while Fornell-Larcker criteria evaluate it at the construct level (Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2015). HTMT values are often interpreted as measures of inter-construct correlations, and the matrix is computed using the absolute values of the correlations (Henseler et al., 2015). Discriminant validity between the two reflective constructs has been shown when the HTMT value is less than 0.90.

All values in the HTMT matrix are significantly below 0.90, indicating good discriminant validity for this research (Table 4). However, all items load substantially on their respective factor ($p < 0.001$), ranging from 0.551 to 0.943.

These factors have composite reliability greater than the threshold of 0.70 (ranging from 0.738 to 0.919) (Hair et al., 2019).

Convergent validity is also apparent since the standardised loading for each item and the average variance extracted (AVE) surpass the specified criterion of 0.5. Table 2 also demonstrates discriminant validity where the AVE square root was more significant than the square root of any other construct.

Structural Model

This study analysed the data and tested the research hypotheses using SPSS (AMOS) software. The structural model was evaluated to determine the R^2 coefficients for endogenous factors and the relevance of path coefficients.

Meanwhile, Chin’s (1998) study suggested that R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33 and 0.19 can be considered substantial, moderate and weak, respectively. In this research, the R^2 coefficients for Destination Image (DI) (0.43), Perceived Risk (PR) (0.39), Travel Motivation (TVM) (0.59), and Selection of Tour Destination (STD) (0.63) suggest the model’s constructs were well predicted (Chin et al., 2008; Hair et al., 2019). However, the structural model analysis measures the significance of the coefficients of the estimated paths, which are the basis for accepting or rejecting the intended relationships between latent variables in the hypothesised model.

For the assessment of the structural model, model fit criteria using multiple fit indices (absolute fit (RMSEA), ChiSq/df; incremental fit (CFI, GFI); and parsimonious fit (NFI) is measured (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2019). The estimation of the re-specified model yielded a substantial value of absolute fit (RMSEA)=0.053, ChiSq/df= 3196.690;

incremental fit (CFI) = 0.918 and accepted the hypothesised model as valid and reliable for this research. The test of hypotheses resulting from the internal relationship among constructs is reported in the next section.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity Assessment

Construct	Dimension	Code	Mean	SD	Loadings	(α)	CR	AVE
Destination Image	Attribute-Holistics	DAH1	4.27	0.727	.654	0.855	0.860	0.537
		DAH2	4.06	0.833	.653			
		DAH3	4.18	0.765	.652			
		DAH4	4.36	0.707	.701			
		DAH5	4.21	0.729	.682			
		DAH6	4.27	0.741	.708			
		DAH7	4.13	0.778	.733			
	Functional-Psychological	DFP1	4.09	0.741	.551	0.795	0.806	0.635
		DFP2	4.20	0.754	.685			
		DFP3	4.13	0.778	.597			
		DFP4	4.07	0.744	.564			
		DFP5	4.23	0.704	.630			
		DFP6	4.08	0.738	.797			
	Common-Unique	DCU1	4.18	0.759	.664	0.855	0.849	0.578
		DCU2	4.16	0.761	.695			
DCU3		4.17	0.726	.695				
DCU4		4.05	0.744	.672				
DCU5		4.08	0.686	.686				
DCU6		4.11	0.675	.760				
Perceived Risk	Financial Risk	FNR1	3.94	0.874	.653	0.766	0.849	0.561
		FNR2	4.03	0.934	.753			
		FNR3	3.95	0.968	.788			
		FNR4	4.01	0.872	.692			
		FNR5	4.15	0.718	.749			
	Time Risk	TMR1	4.16	0.731	.685	0.877	0.913	0.701
		TMR2	3.99	0.861	.768			
		TMR3	3.79	1.002	.748			
		TMR4	3.82	0.991	.749			
		TMR5	3.90	0.813	.804			
		TMR6	3.96	0.797	.823			
		TMR7	4.00	0.786	.837			
	Performance Risk	PER4	4.40	0.619	.687	0.806	0.890	0.626
		PER5	4.30	0.676	.752			
		PER6	4.42	0.595	.791			
	Social Risk	SOR1	4.49	0.591	.799	0.738	0.925	0.889
		SOR2	4.43	0.624	.669			
		SOR3	4.35	0.601	.811			
		SOR4	4.30	0.563	.811			
		SOR5	4.51	0.582	.721			
		SOR6	4.40	0.584	.816			
SOR7		4.48	0.558	.943				
Psychological Risk	PSY1	4.46	0.546	.831	0.919	0.759	0.581	
	PSY2	4.50	0.577	.537				
	PSY3	3.85	0.804	.762				
Physical Risk	PHY5	4.23	0.762	.800	0.785	0.861	0.630	
	PHY6	4.26	0.756	.868				
	PHY7	4.10	0.805	.794				
Travel Motivation	nill	TVM1	3.75	0.900	.655	0.809	0.813	0.540
		TVM2	3.42	1.032	.634			
		TVM3	3.66	0.973	.612			
		TVM4	3.43	1.025	.560			
		TVM5	3.38	1.057	.569			
		TVM6	3.30	1.077	.562			
		TVM7	3.49	1.030	.735			
Selection of Tour Destination	nill	STD1	3.22	1.030	.554	0.807	0.827	0.594
		STD2	3.41	1.068	.685			
		STD3	3.50	0.937	.632			
		STD4	3.30	1.074	.721			
		STD6	3.36	1.023	.623			
		STD7	3.84	0.820	.774			

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio

Constructs	Destination Image	Travel Motivation	Perceived Risk	Selection TD.
Destination Image				
Travel Motivation	0.803			
Perceived Risk	0.583	0.814		
Selection TD	0.617	0.594	0.710	

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criteria

Constructs	Destination Image	Travel Motivation	Perceived Risk	Selection TD.
Destination Image	0.821			
Travel Motivation	0.634	0.817		
Perceived Risk	0.407	0.527	0.611	
Selection TD	0.511	0.234	0.513	0.711

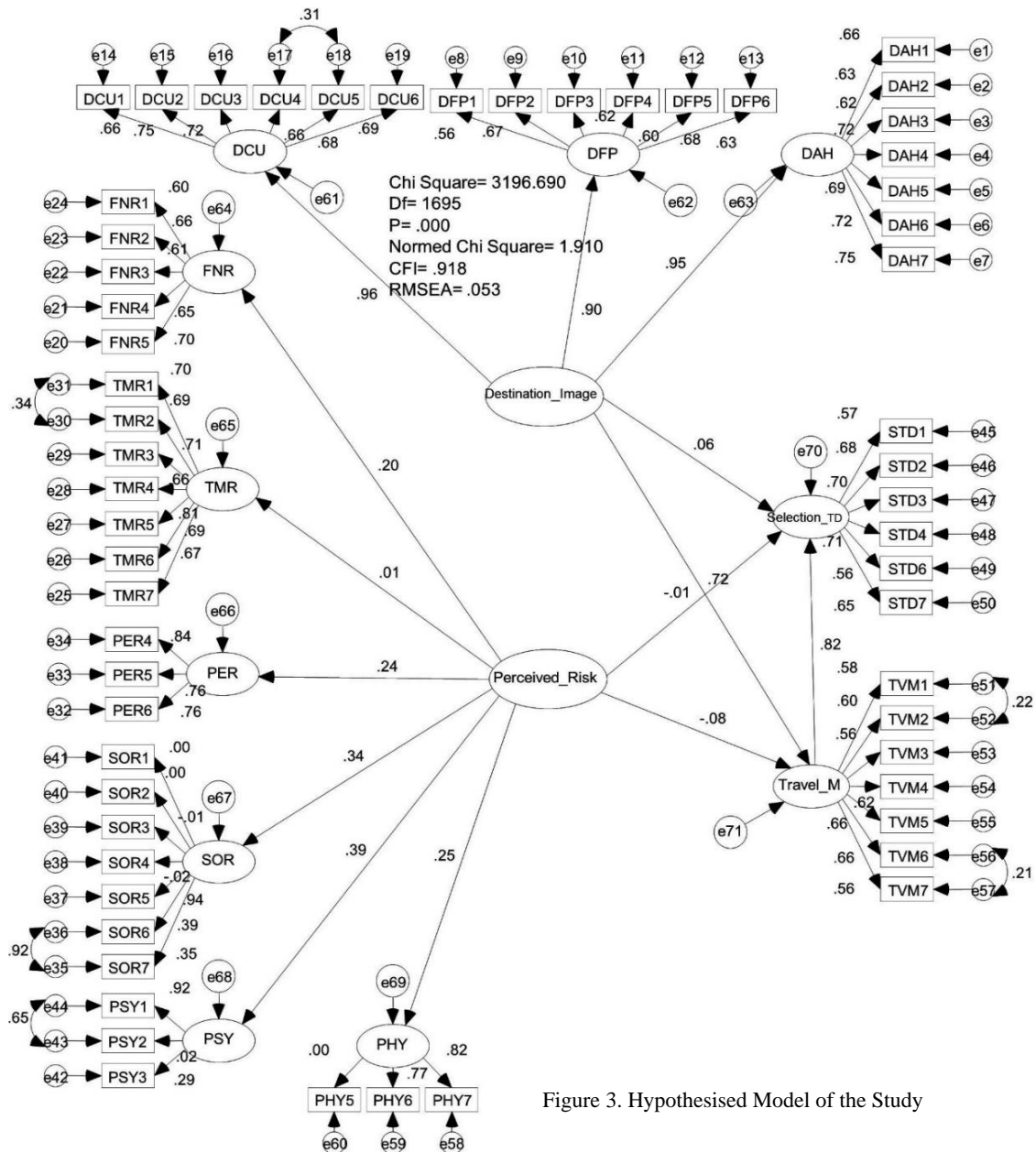


Figure 3. Hypothesised Model of the Study

Hypothesis Testing

SPSS(AMOS) was utilised to evaluate the interrelationships between all the variables: destination image, travel motivation, perceived risk and ecotourism destination selection (Figure 2). Table 5 exhibits the findings of the hypotheses analysis, which consists of the coefficient, *t*-values, and conclusion about the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses. Moreover, these hypotheses were evaluated using the *t*-values associated with the standardised path coefficients. Suppose an estimated *t*-value is more significant than a specific critical value ± 1.96 ($p < 0.05$) is considered significant (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2019). However, these hypotheses were evaluated using statistical significance at the 0.05 level and the nature of the suggested relationship (+ or -).

The testing of Hypothesis H_1 involved two variables: (i) image of the ecotourism destination; and (ii) tourists' destination selection. The developed hypothesis was supported and aligned with previous studies (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Assaker, 2014; Molinillo et al., 2018). As shown in Table 5, the p -value was less than 0.05 (0.000) with a standard error of 0.018, where the t -value was 6.693. As such, when the destination image predicts the selection of ecotourism, the regression weight was significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, based on the discussion, it concludes that from the Bangladesh perspective, the relationship between destination image and tour destination selection is substantial and psychologically impacts the tourists. Since the relationship is statistically significant, thus, this study accepted hypothesis H_1 .

The perceived risk involves the destination-related risk influencing tourists' visitation to the ecotourism destination. As Fuchs and Reichel (2011) highlighted regarding the role of perceived risk in destination selection, it was required to test this hypothesis further as there were a few other difficulties, such as terrorist attacks, criminal activity, natural catastrophes, and the spread of disease. Table 5 shows no evidence supporting the hypothesis that these two factors are related. The p -value is greater than 0.05 (0.862) with a standard error of 0.015, where the t -value is 0.174. This finding suggested that perceived risk does not affect the selection of ecotourism destinations. Even though past discoveries (Fuchs and Reichel, 2011; Cui et al., 2016; Kani et al., 2018) reported a significant relationship between the. One of the concerns about choosing ecotourism destinations was security, which was not a worry when the data was collected. Most people were confined since they dared not venture out during the COVID-19 outbreak. When given a chance, tourists did not let concerns about potential danger from experiencing the tourist destination. Therefore, the researchers recommended gathering data around the year with standard settings in future studies and thus H_2 , which was rejected. Nonetheless, the fact remains that several earlier investigations indicated the same clarification for the SEM analysis result (Fuchs and Reichel, 2011; Williams and Balaz, 2012; Cui et al., 2016).

The hypothesis (H_3) examined if travel motivation congruence positively with the selection of tour destination. Motivation is a psychological element with many aspects for tourists in the destination selection process. It was first introduced by Plog (1974) in tourism research. Since then, many studies have been conducted on the different types of tourists and perspectives on choosing their travel destinations (Plog, 1974; Crompton, 1992; Leung and Law, 2010). These studies also revealed how 'travel motivation' influences tourists' final choice of destination. Earlier, it has mentioned that Maslow's five-stage needs theory and push and pull components distinguished by Dann (1997) provide a comprehensive guide to tourist motivation. Thus, the hypothesis was tested in the context of Bangladeshi ecotourism destinations as the element of the destination selection mechanism. The results revealed that the estimated parameters (p -value less than 0.05 (0.000) with a standard error of 0.147 and a t -value of 6.365) supported this hypothesis. Similar to the previous evidence (Yousefi and Marzuki, 2015; Qiu et al., 2018; Wijaya et al., 2018; Jeong et al., 2018), the findings of this research revealed the existence of a stronger significant relationship between travel motivation and selection of tour destination and accepted the hypothesis H_3 .

Tourists' travel motivation has been an important field of study since the 1960s and a focal point for understanding tourism behaviour (Otoo and Kim, 2018). There is a lack of consensus among researchers concerning travel motivations for different destinations and tourists' characteristics (Pereira et al., 2019). As shown in Table 5, a significant correlation was found between the variables of destination image and travel motivation. The p -value is less than 0.05 (0.000) with a standard error of 0.087, and the t -value is 8.105. Therefore, hypothesis H_4 was confirmed. The results supported the empirical evidence of the above relationship (Khan et al., 2017; Jani, 2018; Pereira et al., 2019).

Researchers indicated that risk factors and motivations correlate with travel-related decisions and behavioural intentions (Caber et al., 2020). Tourist decision-making may vary regarding risk-taking acceptability on a socio-psychological continuum (Tarlow, 2014). Based on its importance, the hypothesis has been investigated. This study used travel motivation as a unidimensional construct to test its capability to undermine the relationship of perceived risk in ecotourism settings. However, earlier research concentrated on different countries' (i.e., India and Malaysia) views; consequently, this study evaluated Bangladesh's ecotourism destinations (Khan et al., 2018; Caber et al., 2020). The hypothesis (H_5) reflected the relationship between perceived risk and travel motivation in selecting an ecotourism destination. The findings suggested a significant relationship between perceived risk and travel motivation in choosing the tour destination with a p -value of less than 0.05 (0.023), a standard error was 0.015 and a t -value of -2.274. The results also support previous empirical evidence of the relationship between perceived risk and travel motivation (Khan et al., 2019; Caber et al., 2020).

Table 5. Estimates of the Hypothesised Model

H_0	Path	(β)	$\frac{3}{4}^2$	t - value	p - value	Results
H_1	Selection_TD<---Destination_Image	.122	.018	6.693	***	Supported
H_2	Selection_TD<---Percieved_Risk	.003	.015	0.174	.862	Not Supported
H_3	Selection_TD <--- Travel_Motivation	.933	.147	6.365	***	Supported
H_4	Travel_Motivation<---Destination_Image	.709	.087	8.105	***	Supported
H_5	Travel_Motivation<---Percieved_Risk	-.034	.015	-2.274	.023	Supported

IMPLICATIONS

This study has numerous significant consequences. Based on the Stimulus-Response Model of Buyer Behavior theory, this study provides a novel paradigm for future research. In addition, it contributes to the tourism marketing literature as the first empirical study to incorporate destination image, travel motivation, and perceived risk in determining tourist preferences for ecotourism activities. It enables developing countries such as Bangladesh to grasp how the image may be used to foster tourism business and contribute to developing ecotourism destinations. While the association between perceived risk and tour destination selection was insignificant, the other relationship indicates that perceived risk

substantially affects travel motivation. The findings might be applied to various ecotourism locations in other developing countries in Southeast Asia to boost the growth and sustainability of ecotourism destinations.

Finally, the findings from this study would significantly impact destination management organisations to understand risk management. Destination managers can motivate more tourists to visit the Bangladesh ecotourism destination by sharing useful information about the destinations and offering them special incentives for new and returning tourists.

Specifically, the most crucial finding was that destination image is the strongest predictor of tourists' engagement in a recommended risk-lesening behaviour to ensure tourist safety while visiting ecotourism destinations. The results suggested appropriate marketing strategies for destination management organisations and a reliable reference for government and policymakers for ecotourism development and forming a favourable image.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

There are several limitations when interpreting the results of this research. While this study revealed a clear delineation of destination image, a non-significant result concerning the selection of tour destination has occurred. No research has been devoted to studying the destination image and perceived risk of Bangladesh's ecotourism. As a result, it was limited by the availability of earlier research in the same setting.

Another limitation is that this research could not include all of Bangladesh's ecotourism destinations. The survey data were collected from most ecotourism destinations but did not cover all. There were some restricted locations where the survey could not be done due to the global pandemic and travelling restrictions. Moreover, due to the pandemic, convenient travel services and facilities cause a limited number of foreign tourists. So, it was possible to include a limited number of foreign visitors in the overall sample size. To an extent, future research may further define the perceived risk construct to overcome this limitation. Potential researchers who broaden this study's findings may employ different perceived risk dimensions to achieve significant results. However, all visitors to nature-based sites are not inherently right ecotourists because their reasons and behaviours differ and may not be consistent with ecotourism values. Future studies can consider using a different approach to distinguish visitors by observing their behaviour.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to evaluate destination image, travel motivation, and the perceived risk concerning ecotourism destination selection in Bangladesh. The "Stimulus-Response Model of Buyer Behavior" was demonstrated as a viable approach. The framework established by this theory aided in comprehending tourists' aims for destination selections. Upon empirical analysis of 364 valid tourist responses, the researchers found that destination image and travel motivation statistically impact ecotourism destination selection. This exploration supports the current trend in the tourism literature, emphasising destination selection criteria as a critical determinant of sustainable tourism. The findings also advocate the view of Bertella's (2019) study on the development of sustainable wildlife tourism. Overall, it is envisaged that this study would encourage further research on environmental protection and sustainable tourism in Bangladesh.

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