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The role of destination image in domestic tourism development: Evidence from Mandalay City, Myanmar[1]

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of destination image in determining the satisfaction of domestic travelers in Mandalay City. Two objectives guided this study. The primary objective was to assess domestic travelers' perceptions of the destination image of Mandalay City. The second objective was to analyze the effect of destination image on the satisfaction of domestic travelers in Mandalay City. In this study, destination image was measured by four dimensions: namely, natural environment, cultural environment, social environment, and infrastructure. To attain these objectives, both primary and secondary data were utilized, and the data were gathered from travelers who have visited Mandalay City in the last two years. Convenience sampling was used to collect data for the application from a total of 385 travelers. The findings of this study showed that most domestic travelers' perception of Mandalay City is based on its cultural environment. In addition, two dimensions of destination image – namely, cultural environment and infrastructure – have significant positive effects on domestic travelers' satisfaction, highlighting their critical roles in shaping travelers' experiences. Specifically, the cultural richness and well-preserved heritage of Mandalay, along with its developing infrastructure, are key factors that enhance traveler satisfaction. This study contributes to the understanding of destination image dynamics in emerging tourism markets and provides practical insights for policymakers, tourism planners, and local businesses to improve destination attractiveness and traveler experiences in Mandalay.

KEYWORDS

Destination image, domestic travelers' satisfaction, natural environment, cultural environment, social environment, infrastructure.

1 This research has been approved by the Myanmar Research Synergy Association (MRSA) Ethical Committee Report on 7/02/2024.

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INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry, a dynamic and multifaceted sector, thrives on the allure of destinations and the experiences they promise. At its core, tourism is driven by the desire to escape the familiar, to explore new horizons, and to create lasting memories. However, the decision-making process for travelers is not solely based on tangible attributes like infrastructure or amenities. It is profoundly influenced by the intangible factors, such as destination image – the mental picture that potential tourists hold of a place. This image, a composite of beliefs, feelings, and impressions, acts as a critical determinant in shaping travel choices and experiences. In an era where destinations compete fiercely for tourist attention, understanding and managing this image is paramount. The significance of destination image extends beyond mere marketing; it is a fundamental element that dictates the success and sustainability of a tourism destination.

The concept of destination image was first introduced to the tourism sector by Hunt (1971), who defined it as the collective or individual perceptions of a location by those who do not reside there. This notion has since evolved, becoming a central theme in tourism research. Destination image is not a static entity. It is a dynamic construct that is shaped by a multitude of factors, including personal experiences, media portrayals, word-of-mouth, and marketing efforts. As noted by Huang et al. (2021), while the concept is widely recognized, its definition, measurement, and management remain complex and subjective. This complexity stems from the fact that destination image is both cognitive and affective, encompassing both information about a place and the emotional responses it evokes. The intangible nature of tourism services further amplifies the importance of destination image, often surpassing the reality of the destination itself (Dwyer, 2022).

The impact of destination image on tourist behavior is profound. As Dahiya and Batra (2011) suggest, it plays a crucial role in the initial decision-making process, influencing where travelers choose to visit. Moreover, a positive destination image can lead to increased visitor satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy (Aniqoh et al., 2022). In today's competitive tourism landscape, where travelers are inundated with choices, a strong and positive destination image can be a decisive factor in attracting and retaining tourists. This image not only affects the initial visit but also shapes the post-visit perceptions, influencing future travel decisions and recommendations. Understanding the dimensions of destination image, as outlined by San Martín and Del Bosque (2008) and Qu et al. (2011), is crucial for destinations to manage and enhance their appeal effectively.

The formation of a destination image is a multifaceted process, influenced by various sources and experiences. As Kanwel et al. (2019) point out, a person's perception can stem from both personal experiences and information from other sources. This image can develop before, during, or after a visit, highlighting its dynamic and evolving nature. Hsu et al. (2009) emphasize that travelers' perceptions are often based on their imaginations, or the information provided to them. This underscores the importance of effective destination branding and marketing. The means through which a destination image is conveyed, such as its name, logo, and visual media, play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of the destination. Furthermore, the complexity and subjectivity of destination image, as highlighted by Huang et al. (2021), necessitate a nuanced approach to its measurement and management. The variables that define destination image are numerous and interconnected, making it a challenging yet vital area of study.

Given the critical role of destination image in the tourism industry, this study aims to delve deeper into its various dimensions and explore how they influence tourist perceptions and behaviors. Specifically, this research will focus on the Mandalay region. After Yangon, Mandalay is the second-largest city in Myanmar. With 1,225,553 residents as of the 2014 census, the city is situated on the east bank of the Irrawaddy River, approximately 631 kilometers (392 miles) north of Yangon. It was established by King Mindon in 1857, replacing Amarapura as the new royal capital of the Konbaung dynasty. Prior to the kingdom's absorption by the British Empire in 1885, it served as Burma's last capital. Despite the development of Yangon as the new capital of British Burma, Mandalay maintained its cultural and commercial significance during the British colonial era. When the Japanese conquered Burma in World War II, the city was severely damaged. Mandalay joined the recently formed Union of Burma in 1948.

With a lifespan of 142 years, Mandalay is the ancient capital of Myanmar, the center of Buddhist Sasana and traditional arts and crafts, and a city rich in historical landmarks, cultural monuments, and Buddhist temples. Thus, it is the most valuable historical site and is rich in cultural heritage. Additionally, Mandalay Hill, located in the northeastern portion of the current city, inspired the city's name. The hill has long been revered as a holy mount, and it is said that Lord Buddha foretold that a large city, the Buddhist metropolis, would be built at its base. Nowadays, Mandalay is regarded as the Burmese cultural center of Myanmar and the commercial hub of Upper Myanmar. Despite the recent rise of Naypyidaw, Mandalay remains the primary economic, educational, and medical hub of Upper Myanmar. Therefore, Mandalay is more than just a city. It is a living testament to Myanmar's cultural heritage. In this place, the artistry of ancient traditions and the warmth of its people create an unforgettable destination image, inviting exploration and promising profound experiences.

However, the coronavirus pandemic and the nation's political unrest have dealt a severe blow to Myanmar's domestic tourism sector in recent years. The quantity of foreign arrivals has therefore sharply declined. Nonetheless, indications suggest that domestic travel is starting to rebound, as seen by an increase in domestic travelers over the Thingyan vacation period in April 2022 (Thuta, 2022). This means that domestic tourism currently supports the national economy and local communities. By examining the natural, cultural, and social environments, as well as the infrastructure of the Mandalay region, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape domestic travelers' perceptions and experiences. The primary objectives of this research are to determine domestic travelers' perceptions of the destination image of Mandalay and to analyze the effect of this image on their satisfaction with Mandalay. Thus, the findings of this research will contribute to a better understanding of how destinations can effectively attract and retain travelers. Besides, this research is particularly significant in the current context of Myanmar, where domestic tourism plays a crucial role in sustaining the industry and supporting local communities.

Figure 1. Map of Mandalay City (Source: Myanmar: District Map – Mandalay Region (Oct 23, 2017))

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Destination Image

A crucial consideration in the tourism industry is the perception that prospective travelers have of a particular location. Hunt (1971) was the first to apply the idea of image to the tourist industry in the early 1970s. According to Hunt (1971), a destination image is defined as the collective or individual perceptions of a location that one does not currently reside in. Ever since, there has been considerable discussion on destination image in the travel literature (Melo et al., 2016). According to Sonnleitner (2011), destination images play a crucial role in trip planning. With the intangible nature of tourism services, destination images are believed to become even more crucial than reality (Dwyer et al., 2020). Moreover, destination image plays a crucial role in determining how valuable, satisfying, and loyal visitors feel about it (Sangle-or & Kornpetpranee, 2015).

According to Cavlak and Cop (2019), a person's perception of a destination may be influenced by both personal experiences and information from other sources. This impression may develop prior to, during, or following a visit to a location (Ioradanova & Stylisdis, 2019). According to Hsu et al. (2008), travelers' perceptions of the appearance of tourist sites are based on their imaginations or the information they are given. The tourist attraction is working to distinguish itself from other places and increase awareness of its brand in the meantime. A destination image can be conveyed through various means, including its name, logo, and visual media such as pictures and animations.

Melo et al. (2016) note that, despite several academics having established ideas related to tourism destinations, there remains disagreement over how to define, quantify, and shape these concepts, rendering them complex and subjective. These conceptualizations rely on location and time. According to Ksouri and Abdellatif (2015), measuring the destination image is a complex phenomenon since it depends on several variables throughout its development and growth, due to the variety of features and conclusions that define the destination image. As stated by Birdir et al. (2018), combining both affective and cognitive representations creates the destination image. While the affective image focuses on people's sentiments and emotions towards the trip, the cognitive image deals with information about the destination. Table 1 presents the different dimensions of destination images as described by two authors.

Table 1.
Dimensions of Destination Image (Source: Cetinsoz, 2017)

Authors	Dimensions
Martin and del Bosque (2008)	• Infrastructure and socio-economic environment • Atmosphere • Natural environment • Cultural environment
Qu, Kim and Im (2011)	• Quality of experiences • Touristic attractions • Environment and infrastructure • Entertainment/external activities • Cultural traditions

Concept of Travelers' Satisfaction

Understanding the relationship between destination image and satisfaction is crucial for providing insights into how a destination's image can shape travelers' perceptions and experiences. This foundational aspect can help identify key factors that contribute to a positive or negative traveler experience, ultimately guiding tourism strategies and marketing efforts to enhance destination appeal.

Satisfaction is theoretically defined as the traveler's emotional state in the post-visitation phase, after they have arrived at their intended destination (Horávth, 2013). Moreover, satisfaction is a traveler's statement of total satisfaction after a vacation or visit (Thiumsak & Ruangkanjanases, 2016). A traveler destination's ability to successfully promote itself depends on how satisfied its travelers are (Devesa et al., 2010). According to Kozak and Rimmington (2007), satisfaction influences travelers' decisions about which places, goods, and services to purchase, which is a critical component of maintaining a competitive tourism industry.

Yoon and Uysal (2005) were among the first to suggest that destination executives should cultivate positive traveler behavior and a high degree of post-purchase satisfaction to maintain and grow a competitive destination. Thus, traveler satisfaction is a significant indicator of intent to visit a place (Bramwell, 1998). Moreover, a variety of factors contribute to travelers' satisfaction with their travel experiences, including the high caliber of service, infrastructure, safety, cleanliness of the surroundings, consumer protection, and ease of access.

Satisfaction has several distinct components, each with its unique character (Parasakul, 2012). As a result, traveler satisfaction with tourism-related activities varies. Thus, achieving satisfaction encompasses meeting the different aspects of the tourism experience, such as being content with the services or the natural surroundings (beautiful, pristine, clean, and scenic). Every dimension of satisfaction needs to be examined independently. In conclusion, travelers' satisfaction with their travel experience will influence how devoted they are to a specific location going forward. Therefore, travelers who are satisfied with their tourism experience are more likely to return and recommend the location to others.

Research Model and Hypothesis Development

Numerous studies have been conducted by scholars on the effect of destination image on tourist satisfaction, as examined in the related literature. However, while numerous studies have explored the impact of destination image on tourist satisfaction, the current study focuses specifically on domestic travelers within the context of Mandalay, particularly given the political instability in Myanmar, which has led to a decline in foreign tourist arrivals. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the influence of destination image on the satisfaction of domestic travelers, with a focus on four key independent variables: natural environment, cultural environment, social environment, and infrastructure. By investigating these variables in the context of Mandalay, this study provides a unique perspective that differentiates it from existing studies. The research will provide valuable insights into how domestic tourists perceive Mandalay's image and satisfaction, which can inform local tourism policies and strategies, particularly in light of the changing dynamics in Myanmar's tourism sector.

According to Tang et al. (2022), the destination image comprises four elements: natural environment, cultural environment, social environment, and infrastructure. The authors then conducted a study with 545 tourists visiting rural regions in China. The study conducted by the authors examined the effects of motivation, destination image, and satisfaction on willingness to revisit. The study concluded that all destination image attributes — namely, natural environment, cultural environment, social environment, and infrastructure — have a positive and significant impact on tourist satisfaction.

The destination image is composed of four elements: natural environment, infrastructure, social environment, and entertainment (Xue, 2019). The authors also conducted a study with 400 Chinese tourists to Bangkok. This study indicated that destination image has a significant positive effect on tourist satisfaction. Another study conducted by Coban (2012) investigated the effect of destination image on tourist satisfaction and loyalty with 170 tourists who visited Cappadocia. In this study, the destination image is divided into two categories: cognitive and emotional. The result indicated that cognitive image has a significant positive effect on tourist satisfaction in this study.

In addition, the study conducted by Cetinsoz (2017) stated that Arab visitors' intentions to return are significantly and favorably impacted by their perception of their cognitive image. Stated differently, the more positively Arab visitors perceive Istanbul's natural appeal,

infrastructure, overall atmosphere, social environment, and value for money, the more likely they are to return. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that there is no significant correlation between the intention to return and the affective image of Arab tourists. For the present study, the following hypotheses were empirically tested based on the above discussion.

- Hypothesis 1 (H1): The natural environment has a significant positive effect on domestic travelers' satisfaction.
- Hypothesis 2 (H2): The cultural environment has a significant positive effect on domestic travelers' satisfaction.
- Hypothesis 3 (H3): The social environment has a significant positive effect on domestic travelers' satisfaction.
- Hypothesis 4 (H4): The infrastructure has a significant positive effect on domestic travelers' satisfaction.

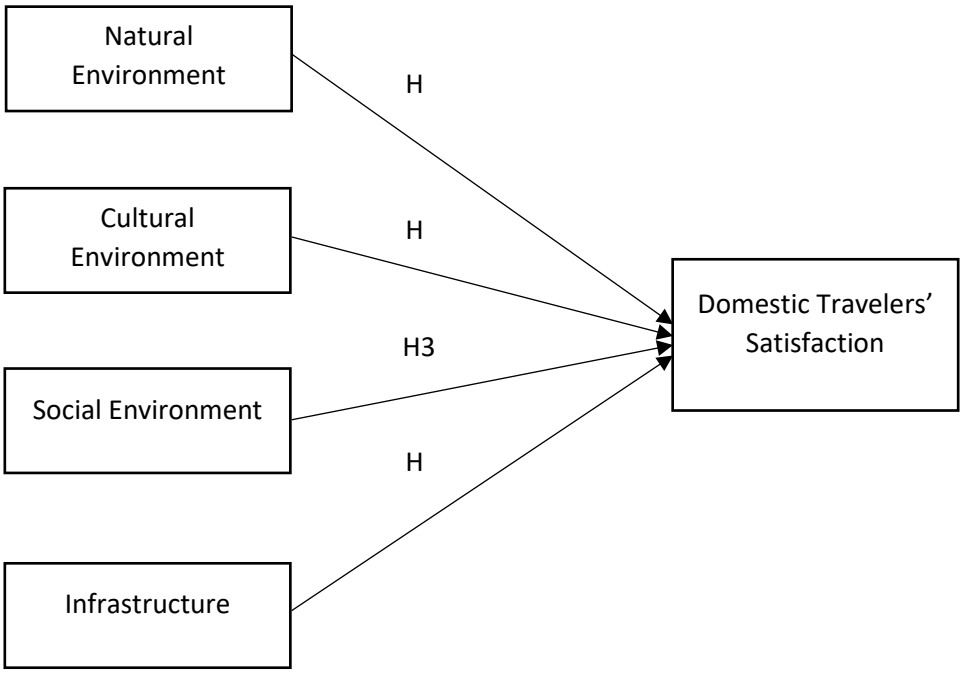

Figure 2. Hypothesized Framework of This Study (Source: Own research)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to determine domestic travelers' perceptions of destination images and to analyze the effect of destination images on domestic travelers' satisfaction with Mandalay City. To achieve these objectives, a quantitative research approach was employed in this study. The population in this study consists of travelers who have visited Mandalay City within the last two years. The sample selected to reflect the characteristics of the population under investigation was chosen using the convenience sampling approach. According to Myanmar Tourism Statistics (2022), the number of domestic travelers arriving in Mandalay City is about 1.201 million. Since the population (N) exceeds 10,000, it can be assumed to be a large population for this study. Thus, to determine the required sample size, Cochran's formula (1977) was used, and the minimum sample size for this study was calculated as 385 with the formula. A survey was employed as the data-gathering method in this study, and it was administered to over 415 individuals. Nevertheless, 385 questionnaires were analyzed overall, considering incomplete, inaccurate, and unreturned questionnaires. The survey was conducted online using Google Forms, allowing participants to complete the questionnaires at their convenience.

The survey consists of three sections, each designed to gather specific data. The first section discusses demographic profiles of travelers (gender, age, marital status, education, monthly income, and visit time to Mandalay City). The second section consists of a destination

image scale with 15 items, and the third section measures domestic travelers' satisfaction using a scale of 4 items. The aforementioned dimensions of destination image are used as independent variables in this study. The scales used by Mulia (2019) were utilized to measure the travelers' satisfaction. A Likert scale with ratings ranging from 1 to 5 is used to quantify each indication (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree).

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 2, providing insights into their gender, marital status, age, education level, monthly income, and visit frequency to Mandalay.

Table 2.
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 385) (Source: Survey data, 2024)

Variables	Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	105	27.27
	Female	280	72.73
Marital Status	Single	319	82.86
	Married	66	17.14
Age	Below 21	44	11.44
	21 – 30	199	51.68
	31 – 40	101	26.23
	41 – 50	41	10.65
	Above 50	0	0
Education	High School	31	8.05
	Bachelor's degree	229	59.48
	Master's degree	122	31.69
	Doctor Degree	3	0.78
Monthly Income	300,000 MMK – 500,000 MMK	218	56.63
	500,001 MMK – 700,000 MMK	46	11.95
	700,001 MMK – 900,000 MMK	27	7.01
	Above 900,000	94	24.41
Visit time to Mandalay	1 – 3 times	146	37.93
	4 – 6 times	74	19.22
	7 – 9 times	22	5.71
	Above 9 times	143	37.14

In Table 2, regarding gender distribution, the majority of respondents were female, accounting for 72.73% (n = 280), while males comprised 27.27% (n = 105) of the sample. In terms of marital status, a significant proportion of respondents were single (82.86%, n = 319), whereas 17.14% (n = 66) were married. The age distribution revealed that more than half of the respondents (51.68%, n = 199) were between 21 and 30 years old, followed by 26.23% (n = 101) in the 31–40 age group.

A smaller percentage of respondents (10.65%, n = 41) were aged 41–50 years, while 11.44% (n = 44) were below 21 years old. Notably, no respondents were above 50 years of age. Regarding educational qualifications, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (59.48%, n = 229), while 31.69% (n = 122) had a master's degree. A small proportion had completed high school (8.05%, n = 31), and only 0.78% (n = 3) had obtained a doctoral degree. The income distribution analysis revealed that the most significant portion of respondents (56.63%, n = 218) earned a monthly income between 300,000 MMK and 500,000 MMK, followed by 24.41% (n = 94) who earned above 900,000 MMK.

A smaller proportion of respondents (11.95%, n = 46) reported earnings between 500,001 MMK and 700,000 MMK, while 7.01% (n = 27) earned between 700,001 MMK and 900,000 MMK. Lastly, the frequency of visits to Mandalay varied among respondents. The most significant proportion of participants had visited 1–3 times (37.93%, n = 146), closely followed by those who had visited more than nine times (37.14%, n = 143). Meanwhile, 19.22% (n = 74) had visited 4–6 times, and 5.71% (n = 22) had visited 7–9 times.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the construct items, including the mean, standard deviation, and overall mean for each construct. The results provide insights into the respondents' perceptions and variability in responses across the measured constructs.

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics Value for Each Construct (Source: Survey data, 2024)

No.	Construct Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Overall Mean
1	NE1	3.90	1.00	3.46
2	NE2	3.96	0.97	
3	NE3	3.02	0.94	
4	NE4	2.97	0.89	
5	CE1	4.09	1.01	4.06
6	CE2	4.02	1.04	
7	CE3	3.98	0.99	
8	CE4	4.15	0.96	
9	SE1	3.69	1.00	3.62
10	SE2	3.66	0.95	
11	SE3	3.66	0.94	
12	SE4	3.47	0.90	
13	IF1	3.79	0.97	3.69
14	IF2	3.54	0.99	
15	IF3	3.95	0.94	
16	IF4	3.47	0.92	
17	TS1	3.78	0.97	3.89
18	TS2	3.84	1.04	
19	TS3	4.18	0.99	
20	TS4	3.74	0.90	

NE = natural environment, CE = cultural environment, SE = social environment, IF = infrastructure, TS = travelers' satisfaction

According to Table 3, the natural environment (NE) construct had an overall mean score of 3.46, indicating a moderate perception of the natural environmental aspects. Among the NE items, NE2 (M = 3.96, SD = 0.97) received the highest rating, while NE4 (M = 2.97, SD = 0.89) was rated the lowest, suggesting relatively lower satisfaction with this aspect of the natural environment. For the cultural environment (CE), respondents expressed a generally positive perception, with an overall mean of 4.06. The highest-rated item was CE4 (M = 4.15, SD = 0.96), while the lowest was CE3 (M = 3.98, SD = 0.99). The high scores across all CE items suggest a strong appreciation of the cultural environment.

The social environment (SE) construct yielded a moderate overall mean of 3.62. The ratings for SE items were relatively consistent, with SE1 (M = 3.69, SD = 1.00) receiving the highest score and SE4 (M = 3.47, SD = 0.90) receiving the lowest score. This suggests that, while respondents generally have positive views of the social environment, some aspects may require improvement. In the infrastructure (IF) category, the overall mean score was 3.69, reflecting a slightly favorable perception. IF3 (M = 3.95, SD = 0.94) had the highest rating, whereas IF4 (M =

3.47, SD = 0.92) received the lowest, indicating potential areas for enhancement in infrastructure development.

Finally, the travelers' satisfaction (TS) construct exhibited the highest overall mean of 3.89, suggesting a generally positive experience. The highest-rated item was TS3 (M = 4.18, SD = 0.99), while TS4 (M = 3.74, SD = 0.90) had the lowest rating. The high mean scores across TS items indicate that most respondents were satisfied with their travel experiences.

Assessment of the Measurement Model

This study conducted a two-step approach to conduct data analysis. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to assess the reliability and construct validity of the model. Second, multiple linear regression analysis is employed to empirically test the research hypothesis. Table 4 presents the results of the reliability and validity assessment for the five constructs: natural environment, cultural environment, social environment, infrastructure, and travelers' satisfaction. The analysis includes factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE), which are crucial indicators of measurement reliability and construct validity.

Table 4.
Construct on Reliability and Validity (Source: Survey data, 2024)

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Natural Environment	NE1	0.824	0.714	0.815	0.530
	NE2	0.818			
	NE3	0.681			
	NE4	0.554			
Cultural Environment	CE1	0.894	0.912	0.939	0.793
	CE2	0.865			
	CE3	0.916			
	CE4	0.886			
Social Environment	SE1	0.931	0.901	0.931	0.773
	SE2	0.931			
	SE3	0.789			
	SE4	0.858			
Infrastructure	IF1	0.903	0.871	0.912	0.722
	IF2	0.825			
	IF3	0.839			
	IF4	0.830			
Traveler Satisfaction	TS1	0.899	0.874	0.913	0.726
	TS2	0.906			
	TS3	0.838			
	TS4	0.757			

NE = natural environment, CE = cultural environment, SE = social environment, IF = infrastructure, TS = travelers' satisfaction

The value of alpha is used to determine whether an instrument is reliable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Table 4 indicates that the alpha value exceeds 0.7, which is greater than the threshold values suggested by Hair et al. (2013), indicating extreme internal accuracy and reliability for the scale in this sample. Factor loadings for all items are examined to assess the reliability of the indicators. Factor loading represents the variance shared between the item and the construct, and its standardized value should ideally be 0.5 or higher, which is also acceptable (Hair et al., 1998). As shown in Table 4, standardized factor loadings exceed 0.5, indicating that each item makes a significant contribution to its respective construct.

CR refers to internal consistency, indicating that all measures consistently represent the same latent construct. A reliability value of 0.7 or higher refers to good reliability (Cheung et al., 2024). In this study, CR values ranged from 0.815 to 0.939, reinforcing the robustness of the measurement model. AVE values, which measure the proportion of variance captured by each construct relative to measurement error, exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.05 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As shown in Table 4, the cultural environment (0.793), social environment (0.773), infrastructure (0.722), and traveler satisfaction (0.726) constructs demonstrated strong convergent validity. In contrast, the natural environment (0.530) had the lowest AVE but still met the acceptable threshold.

Discriminant Validity

Table 5 presents the discriminant validity assessment based on the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, where the square root of the AVE for each construct is compared against the inter-construct correlations. The diagonal values represent the square root of the AVE, while the off-diagonal values indicate the correlation coefficients between constructs.

Table 5.
Discriminant Validity (Source: Survey data, 2024)

	NE	CE	SE	IF	TS
Natural Environment (NE)	**0.728**				
Cultural Environment (CE)	.565**	**0.890**			
Social Environment (SE)	.470**	.680**	**0.879**		
Infrastructure (IF)	.553**	.702**	.732**	**0.849**	
Travelers' Satisfaction (TS)	.388**	.698**	.560**	.633**	**0.852**

** means ($p < 0.01$),
NE = natural environment, CE = cultural environment, SE = social environment, IF = infrastructure, TS = travelers' satisfaction

The results confirm adequate discriminant validity, as the square root of the AVE for each construct (bold diagonal values) is greater than the correlation coefficients with other constructs. This suggests that each construct is more strongly related to its own indicators than to those of other constructs.

The highest correlation is observed between cultural environment (CE) and infrastructure (IF) ($r = 0.702$, $p < 0.01$), followed by social environment (SE) and infrastructure (IF) ($r = 0.732$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a strong association between these variables. This finding suggests that infrastructure development is closely linked with cultural and social environmental factors, which may influence travelers' overall perceptions. Meanwhile, travelers' satisfaction (TS) is moderately correlated with all other constructs, with the highest correlation found with cultural environment (CE) ($r = 0.698$, $p < 0.01$), implying that cultural aspects significantly shape tourists' satisfaction levels.

Despite the strong inter-construct relationships, the square root of AVE values (NE = 0.728, CE = 0.890, SE = 0.879, IF = 0.849, TS = 0.852) consistently exceed the corresponding correlation coefficients. This confirms that each construct maintains sufficient distinctiveness, satisfying the discriminant validity requirement.

Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression was conducted to identify the causal relationship between independent and dependent variables. Moreover, regression analysis was used to estimate or predict the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The significance level of 0.05 with a 95% confidence interval was used.

Assumptions for Regression Model Test

According to Field (2018), the validity of multiple linear regression depends on key assumptions: multicollinearity, which ensures predictor variables are not highly correlated; homoscedasticity, indicating uniform error term variance; linearity, which assumes a linear relationship between the predictor and dependent variables, and normality, requiring a symmetric data distribution. Violating these assumptions can compromise the accuracy and predictive reliability of the model. Thus, these standard assumption tests are conducted for this study.

Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity occurs when predictor variables in a regression model are highly correlated, resulting in inflated variance in the estimated coefficients. It is assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), where values above 5 indicate severe multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2013). Tolerance, the reciprocal of VIF, represents the proportion of a variable's variance that is not shared with other predictors, with values below 0.1 indicating significant multicollinearity (Kutner et al., 2005). The following Table (6) is discussed to evaluate the VIF and tolerance of predictor variables.

Table 6.
Collinearity Assumption Test (Source: Survey Data, 2024)

	N	Mean	Tolerance	VIF
Natural Environment	385	3.46	.632	1.582
Cultural Environment	385	4.06	.413	2.421
Social Environment	385	3.62	.410	2.441
Infrastructure	385	3.69	.367	2.725

Dependent Variable = Travelers' Satisfaction

According to Table 6, the collinearity statistics for the predictor variables indicate no severe concerns regarding multicollinearity. All VIF values range from 1.582 to 2.725, well below the critical threshold of 5, and tolerance values range from 0.367 to 0.632, above the 0.1 threshold. Therefore, multicollinearity is not a significant issue in this model, suggesting that the predictor variables contribute independently to the regression analysis.

Homoscedasticity

To test the assumption of homoscedasticity in multiple regression analysis, a scatter plot of regression-standardized residuals against regression-standardized predicted values was examined.

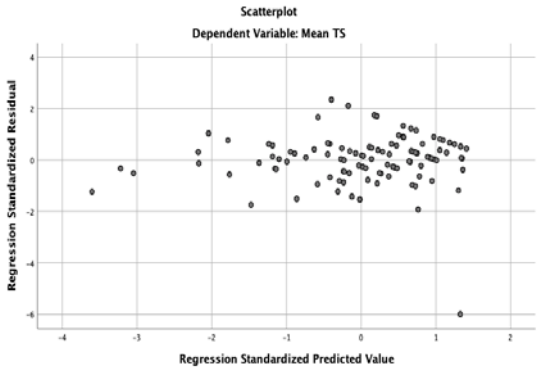

Figure 3. Scattered Plot for Homoscedasticity Test (Source: Own research)

As shown in Figure 3, the residuals are randomly scattered without a clear systematic pattern, indicating that the variance of residuals remains consistent across all levels of the

predicted values. This suggests that the assumption of homoscedasticity is met, supporting the reliability of the regression model. However, a few potential outliers were observed, which may slightly impact the overall model fit. Despite this, the overall pattern of residual distribution does not indicate a serious violation of homoscedasticity, affirming the validity of the regression estimates.

Linearity Test

Linearity refers to the degree to which the change in the dependent variable is related to the change in the independent variable. The best test for normally distributed error is the normal probability plot of the residuals. If the distribution is normal, the points on such a plot should fall close to the diagonal reference line.

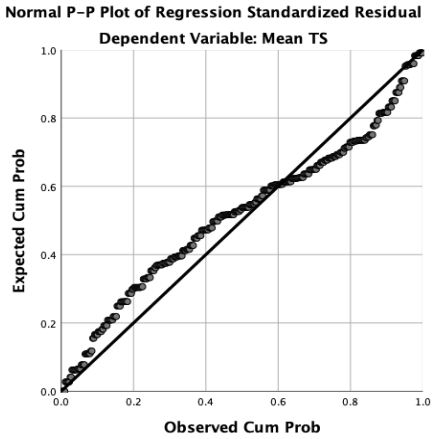

Figure 4. Linearity Test (Source: Own research)

As illustrated in Figure 4, the data points generally align with the diagonal reference line, indicating that the residuals are approximately normally distributed. Minor deviations are observed at the lower and upper ends of the distribution, but they do not suggest a severe violation of normality. Given this observation, the assumption of normality is considered reasonably met, supporting the robustness and reliability of the regression model.

Normality Test for Residuals

This study tests the normality assumption and presents the results graphically as follows:

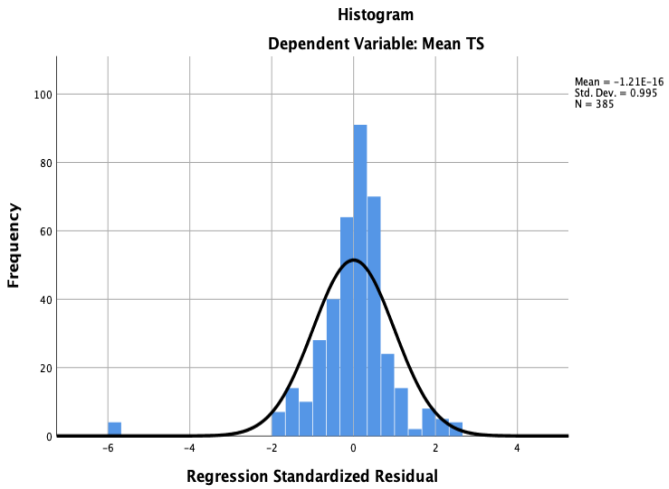

Figure 5. Normality Test (Source: Own research)

As demonstrated in Figure 5, the histogram of regression standardized residuals for 'Mean TS' exhibits a distribution that is close to normal. The residuals' mean (-1.21E-16) is nearly zero, indicating no systematic bias, while the standard deviation (0.995) reflects a reasonable spread. The histogram closely follows the normal curve, with most residuals clustering around zero and tapering off symmetrically. This pattern suggests that the errors are randomly distributed, supporting the assumption of normality in the regression model.

Regression Result and Discussion

The information gathered from the 385 respondents via the questionnaire was used to analyze how destination images affect the satisfaction of domestic travelers. To test the four hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was employed in this study.

Table 7.

Multiple Regression Results between Destination Image and Domestic Travelers' Satisfaction (Source: Survey Data, 2024)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.961	.165		5.833	.000
Natural Environment	-.030	.046	-.028	-.654	.514
Cultural Environment	.468***	.052	.501	9.023	.000
Social Environment	.031	.055	.031	.559	.576
Infrastructure	.279***	.059	.273	4.752	.000
R Square			.529		
Adjusted R Square			.524		
F Value			106.778 (P Value = 0.000)		

*** means 1% significance level

According to the regression analysis, the F value is 106.778 (sig. = 0.000), and the significance test of the regression equation indicates a linear correlation between the two independent variables (cultural environment and infrastructure) and domestic travelers' satisfaction. Except for the natural environment and social environment as destination image, the other two independent variables were significant in the model at a significance level of 0.000 (99%). The Adjusted R-squared value is 0.524, indicating that the closeness of the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable is 52.4%

The cultural environment and infrastructure have a significant positive effect at the 1% level on travelers' satisfaction. It shows that every one-unit increase in cultural environment helps increase satisfaction by 0.468, and every one-unit increase in infrastructure helps increase satisfaction by 0.279. The natural environment and social environment are not significant at any level.

Hypothesis Testing

According to the results and discussion of the multiple linear regression analysis, cultural environment and infrastructure are the primary factors influencing domestic travelers' satisfaction with the destination image. In contrast, neither the natural environment nor the social environment has a significant effect on satisfaction. Thus, the following results for hypothesis testing are conducted.

Table 8.
Results of Hypothesis Testing (Source: Survey data, 2024)

Hypothesis	Results
H1: Natural environment → domestic travelers' satisfaction	Not Supported
H2: Cultural environment → domestic travelers' satisfaction	Supported
H3: Social environment → domestic travelers' satisfaction	Not Supported
H4: Infrastructure → domestic travelers' satisfaction	Supported

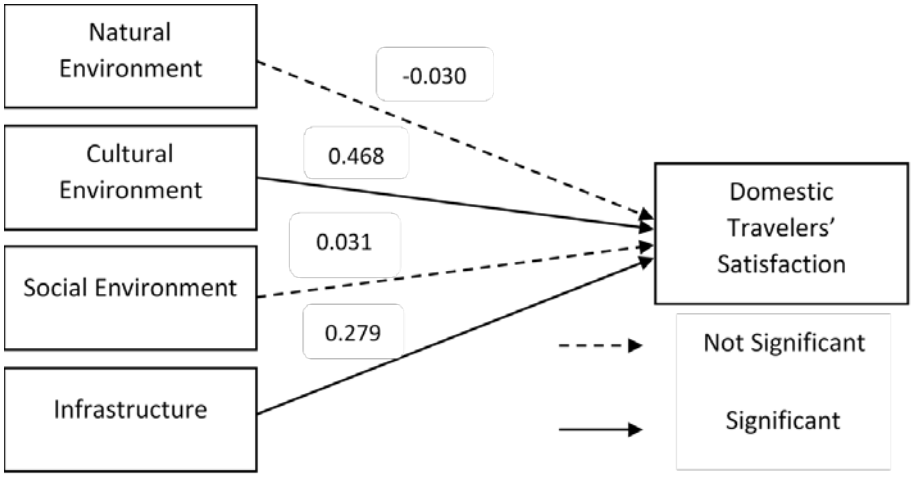

Figure 6. Results of Hypothesis Testing (Own research)

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Theoretical Contributions

This study aimed to achieve two objectives. The first objective was to describe domestic travelers' satisfaction with Mandalay City, and the second was to analyze the effect of destination image on domestic travelers' satisfaction with Mandalay City. To meet these objectives, a research framework that was relevant to the research area was developed and tested in a sample of 385 travelers who visited Mandalay. Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to prove the hypotheses of this study.

According to the results of multiple linear regression analysis, the study's findings highlight the significant role of Mandalay city's cultural environment in shaping its destination image and influencing travelers' satisfaction. This suggests that travelers perceive Mandalay as a culturally rich and historically significant destination, reinforcing previous research that emphasizes the appeal of cultural environments in tourism (Austin, 2002; Baxter, 2020; Tang et al., 2022). This also proposes that travelers appreciate the city's highly recognizable traditional architecture, which serves as a distinct visual representation of its cultural identity. Additionally, travelers find Mandalay to offer a unique cultural experience, which is likely driven by its well-preserved intangible cultural heritage, including traditional arts, performances, and local customs. The historic sites and heritage further contribute to its intense cultural atmosphere, allowing travelers to immerse themselves in an authentic and meaningful journey. In combination, these elements create a powerful cultural environment that enhances travelers' satisfaction by providing them with a deep sense of place and connection to Mandalay's historical and cultural legacy.

The study further reveals that the infrastructure of Mandalay city is the second most significant factor contributing to travelers' satisfaction. This finding aligns with previous research (Gretzel et al., 2015; Zekan et al., 2022; Avieli & Sermoneta, 2020), which underscores the importance of well-developed infrastructure in enhancing the overall travelers' experience. The assessment of Mandalay's infrastructure includes key elements such as the quality of its road layout, which facilitates ease of travel and accessibility within the city. In addition, the presence

of an effective travelers' information network ensures that travelers can easily navigate and access relevant information about attractions, accommodations, and services. The availability of high-quality hotels and accommodations further enhances the comfort and convenience of tourists, making their stay more enjoyable. Moreover, the city's commitment to maintaining hygiene and cleanliness plays a crucial role in shaping positive perceptions and reinforcing a sense of safety and well-being among travelers. Collectively, these infrastructural factors contribute to a seamless and satisfying travel experience, highlighting the critical role of urban planning and service quality in tourism development.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study reveal that the cultural environment and infrastructure are critical drivers of traveler satisfaction in Mandalay City, presenting clear practical implications for policymakers, tourism planners, infrastructure developers, and businesspersons.

Firstly, given the strong positive effect of the cultural environment, policymakers in the Mandalay region should prioritize cultural heritage conservation initiatives, including the restoration and maintenance of historic sites, traditional architecture, and intangible cultural heritage, such as local arts and performances. This requires strategic policies that integrate sustainable tourism development with cultural preservation efforts to ensure the long-term attractiveness of Mandalay as a travel destination. Additionally, policymakers should work towards enhancing public infrastructure, ensuring efficient transportation networks, clear signage, and a comprehensive traveler information system that supports seamless navigation within the city. These measures will not only enhance traveler satisfaction but also position Mandalay as a competitive destination for cultural tourism.

Secondly, urban planners and infrastructure developers should focus on improving transportation, expanding traveler amenities, and maintaining high hygiene standards in public spaces. The study highlights that good infrastructure plays a key role in traveler satisfaction, suggesting that modern developments that respect cultural heritage can enhance the tourism experience. This includes enhancing digital services, such as mobile apps for navigation, multilingual information platforms, and smart city initiatives tailored for tech-savvy tourists. By striking a balance between cultural preservation and urban development, Mandalay can create a sustainable and welcoming environment for visitors.

Finally, entrepreneurs and business owners in the tourism and hospitality sector can leverage the study's findings by aligning their services with travelers' expectations of an immersive cultural experience. Investments in culturally themed accommodations, guided heritage tours, and traditional entertainment can further enrich the destination image. Moreover, businesses should prioritize service quality by ensuring high standards of hospitality, cleanliness, and customer engagement to enhance visitor satisfaction. Collaborating with local artisans and performers to offer authentic cultural experiences can create unique value propositions that appeal to international and domestic tourists.

Limitations and Needs for Further Studies

This study on the satisfaction of domestic travelers in Mandalay offers significant insights, identifying several areas that require further exploration. The results highlight the significant impact of the cultural environment and infrastructure on traveler satisfaction. However, no significant effects were found from the natural and social environments, indicating that these factors require more detailed investigation. Future research could incorporate qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of travelers' personal experiences and perceptions. The reliance on a quantitative survey approach in this study limits the ability to explore the underlying reasons for satisfaction, suggesting that a mixed-methods approach could provide a deeper understanding. Additionally, the focus on domestic travelers within the context of political instability in Myanmar underscores the importance of longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of socio-political changes on destination image and traveler satisfaction. Lastly, further studies could explore how various dimensions of destination image interact with factors

such as digital media, personal values, and travel motivations to develop a more comprehensive and integrated model of traveler satisfaction.

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