OVERTOURISM AND DESTINATION BRANDING: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF FUNCTIONAL AND EMOTIONAL VALUES AMONG TOURISTS

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Abstract

Purpose – This research note offers an integrative model of destination branding in the context of overtourism in an ecotourism destination. This study examines the impact of overtourism on the functional and emotional values and destination branding.
Design – A quantitative research design was used. The research findings were collected through purposive sampling and a cross-sectional approach.
Methodology/Approach – Three hundred and thirty-three (333) valid responses were utilised for hypothesis testing. Measurement of the study model and their interrelationship were examined based on Partial-least square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM).
Findings – The empirical results revealed that overtourism impacts tourists' functional and emotional value and positively influences destination branding. In contrast, overtourism impacts both tourists' functional and emotional values adversely. As predicted, tourists' functional and emotional values mediate the relationship between the effects of overtourism and the destination branding.
Originality of the research – This study makes a unique theoretical contribution to the destination branding literature by integrating and empirically testing the interrelationships between overtourism impacts, functional values, emotional values, and destination branding from the tourists' perceptions. The results of the study are also valuable for destination managers and policy makers to develop sustainable destination branding for their respective tourism destinations.
Keywords Overtourism impacts, functional values, emotional values, destination branding

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INTRODUCTION

Since Langkawi Island was acknowledged as Malaysia's first global geopark by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2007, the ecotourism destination has attracted an influx of mass tourists and developments (Shariff & Zainol Abidin, 2020). This led to overtourism issues which subsequently caused the island to be environmentally, economically, and socio-culturally less competitive and sustainable (Cruz, 2019; Muler Gonzalez et al., 2018). As such, the overtourism issues cause overutilisation of natural resources, infrastructure, facilities, and other destination-specific components (Berselli et al., 2022; Koens et al., 2018; Mihalic, 2020).

The overexploitation of such resources, especially within a fragile and sensitive ecological setting in an ecotourism destination can lead to serious threats and rapid depletion of nature and host communities (see Andria et al., 2020; Beall et al., 2021). This is in contrast with the ethos of a sustainable ecotourism model, which emphasizes the balance between economic development, environmental conservation, tourist experiences, and community well-being (Khan et al., 2022; Khanra et al., 2021). Therefore, increased tourist activity in any ecotourism destination heightens the need to better understand visitor perceptions and satisfaction, given the undesirable and negative consequences of overtourism on tourist experience and behavioural intention.

Researchers claimed that perceptions of overtourism can negatively affect the tourist experience, although it does not necessarily diminish visitors' satisfaction (Li et al., 2017). As such, strong destination branding (DB) is important as it plays a significant role in leveraging the effect of overtourism and encouraging repeat visitation (Bianchi & Pike, 2011; Séraphin et al., 2019). For this reason, the implementation of DB strategies by destination management organizations (DMOs) should be centered on the essence of the destination where the practice of sustainability is integral (Dioko, 2015; Seraphin et al., 2018). Accordingly, the equity of DB emphasises functional values while considering abstract attributes, such as emotional attachment between the visitors and a destination (Quintal et al., 2014; Wong & Teoh, 2015). In other words, both values are considered essential in developing the core value of a destination (Ashton, 2015).

Based on this premise, it is posited that the negative dynamics between overtourism impacts (OVT) and DB are conditioned by functional values (FV) and emotional values (EV). However, past literature has highlighted the lack of assessment of the unique interrelationships between OVT, FV, EV, and DB, especially within an ecotourism setting. Besides, most available studies only investigate the impacts of overtourism, such as tourismphobia and pollution, and its potential solutions like educating

the tourists, campaigns, and tourist experiences (see Séraphin et al., 2019). Henceforth, underpinned by the Social Exchange Theory (SET), this study aims to analyse the interrelationship between OVT, FV, EV, and DB among the tourists of Langkawi Island in Malaysia. As such, the following hypotheses are proposed:

$H_{1,2,3}$: OVT negatively influences DB, FV, and EV
$H_{4,5}$: FV and EV have a significant positive influence on DB
$H_{6,7}$: FV and EV mediate the relationship between OVT and DB

1. METHOD

A cross-sectional survey was utilised to collect information from Langkawi Island's tourists through purposive sampling. The target subjects were 18 years old travellers who recently visited Langkawi Island for leisure. The survey instruments were adapted from past research: OVT (Tsai et al., 2016; Moyle et al., 2012), FV (Lee et al., 2010), EV (Lee et al., 2010; Kim & Thapa, 2018) and DB (Ghafari et al., 2017; Shahabi et al., 2019) (see Appendix 1). The draft questionnaire was pre- and pilot-tested (N=30) to ensure its validity and reliability.

The finalised survey was distributed face-to-face to Langkawi Island's tourists from October 2021 to November 2021, yielding 333 valid responses. The study respondents include 203 female respondents (61 percent) and 130 (39 percent) male respondents. Most of them were between 21 and 30 years old (50.8 percent) and declared Langkawi the main destination of their leisure trips (94 percent).

The collected data were coded and analysed using SPSS version 26 software. Before proceeding to inferential analysis, the common-method bias issues were assessed via Harman's single-factor approach, as suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Next, the Partial-Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) via the SmartPLS version 3.3.7 software was applied to analyse the study's framework and hypotheses.

2. RESULTS

2.1. Assessment of Measurement Model

The framework for this study entails OVT as a reflective construct that includes economic, environmental, and sociocultural items. The framework also incorporates three other reflective constructs: FV, EV, and DB. For the measurement model, the threshold of convergent validity, construct reliability, and discriminant validity are loaded significantly (Hanafiah et al., 2021; Hanafiah, 2020). While the required threshold of statistical significance, the size of the indicator weights, and the indicator's collinearity are achieved when the economic construct is removed (see Hair et al., 2017). This decision is taken due to low and non-significant loading that affects the measurement model's reliability. The results then demonstrated acceptable measurement models for the first and second stages.

2.2. Assessment of Structural Model

The assessment of the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and effect size (f^2) (see Table 1) are within the acceptable thresholds (Hanafiah, 2020). This study confirms that OVT can explain 3.2 percent (R^2=0.032) and 19.4 percent (R^2=0.194) of the variance in the functional and emotional values constructs, respectively. Meanwhile, OVT, FV, and EV can explain 37.7 percent (R^2=0.377) of the DB variances. In terms of predictive relevance (Q^2), the model estimation indicates considerable predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2019). This is reflected in the high effect size of FV on DB (f^2 =.478), while the effect size of OVT on EV (f^2 =.240) is moderate, as per Cohen (1988). However, this is not the case for OVT on FV (f^2 =.033) and DB (f^2 =.018), as well as EV on DB (f^2 =.075), which their effect size is considered trivial.

The bootstrapping technique was used to determine the significance level of the path coefficient (Table 1). The path analysis results confirm the significant direct effects of OVT on DB, FV, and EV. The path analysis illustrated that OVT (β=.120**) significantly influences the DB. A similar result can be seen between FV (β=0.557***) and EV (β=0.242***) values on DB. The findings are comparable to Wang et al. (2019) and Carvache-Franco et al. (2019), confirming that FV and EV positively influence traveller satisfaction.

Table 1: **Structural Estimates of Path Analysis**

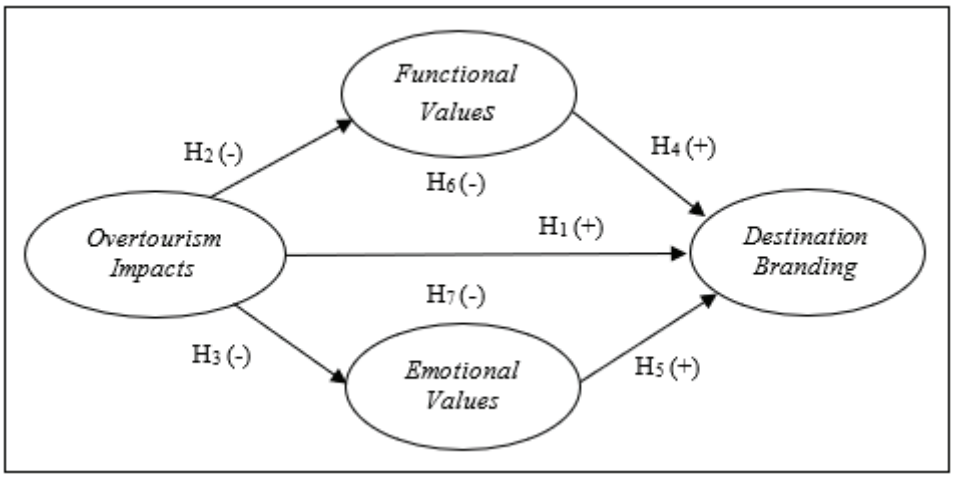
Relationship	Beta (β)	T- Statistics	P-values	f^2	R^2	Q^2
Direct Effect						

OVT -> DB	0.120**	2.062	0.040	0.018		
FV -> DB	0.557***	13.020	0.000	0.478	0.377	0.364
EV -> DB	0.242***	4.482	0.000	0.075		
OVT -> FV	-0.178**	2.414	0.016	0.033	0.032	0.025
OVT -> EV	-0.440***	6.204	0.000	0.240	0.194	0.175
Mediating Effect						
OVT -> FV -> DB	-0.099**	2.364	0.018			
OVT -> EV -> DB	-0.106***	3.796	0.000			

Note: ***(p<0.001) **(p<0.05)

The study confirms that OVT negatively influences FV (β=-0.178**) and EV (β=-0.440***). These results align with Jordan et al. (2019), proving that perceptions of positive and negative tourism impacts lead to the perception of positive and negative emotions from tourism, respectively. Next, based on the indirect effect assessment, FV (β=-0.099**) and EV (β=-0.106***) were found to significantly mediate the relationship between OVT and DB. These results highlighted the importance of both direct and indirect effects between OVT, FV, and EV on DB. To conclude, all the studied hypotheses were supported except for the first hypothesis (H_1), where the relationship's nature is positive. All of the results are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: **Hypotheses Testing Results**



4. CONCLUSION

This paper conceptualised an integrated framework for DB from the perspective of overtourism in ecotourism destinations. It fills the knowledge gap and enhances the understanding of DB by bridging the tourist's FV and EV from the branding literature to the context of OVT, thus representing a theoretical contribution to the tourism discipline. It can be inferred that the positive influence of OVT on the DB of Langkawi Island may illustrate the role of the former as an important indicator for the popularity of an ecotourism destination. The result is the opposite of what has been hypothesised and reflects that the overall negativity associated with overtourism destinations to tourists cannot be taken for granted.

Indeed, overtourism might shape tourists' decision-making where the impacts of crowding in a destination on their perception and behaviour are complex and dynamic (see Jacobsen et al., 2019). For certain types of tourists, past literature has indicated that overcrowded destinations can be considered tolerable as they have a range of norms and preferences. In the same vein, the branding strategy implemented by DMOs is argued to induce visitations and potentially the degree of destination loyalty amongst the visitors. However, this does not necessarily reflect the role of DB as a sole predictor of overtourism. Rather, it signals the role of the phenomenon in yielding positive branding through their level of tolerance and preferences. Although indirect, the nature of this result provides a new perspective on the relations between both factors and is considered another central contribution to the body of knowledge.

It is crucial to understand the dimensions contributing to tourists' evaluations to meet the demands of increasingly value-conscious tourists. This study also concurred that the dynamic of the hypothesised relationship changes when the tourists' perceived values are integrated. As expected, the negative impacts of overtourism would impede the destination's ability to provide positive emotional connections amongst the respondents and the right balance between pricing and consumption of tourist products and services. This, in turn, would negatively influence the level of congruence between the destination's perception by the tourists and branding identity.

With Langkawi Island's popularity among mass tourists, evaluating tourist experiences is extremely important as these will influence tourist behavioural intention. The study results argue that the tourism marketers' roles are to create a brand image to boost tourism and improve tourism sustainability. Thus, understanding OVT is very important to practitioners, enabling them to manage tourism destinations effectively. The DMOs should take a more balanced approach within the destination's carrying capacity to limit the adverse effects of overtourism, especially in fragile ecological areas. Planning destination management based on tourism segmentation would make more sense to achieve a more effective tourism flow and movement.

On the other hand, the results of this study need to be treated cautiously, given its limitation. Since purposive sampling is used to collect the data, the result cannot be generalised beyond the tourists in the study despite the large number of respondents. Nonetheless, the study still managed to generate a good data model with a significant confidence level that can still be used for interpretation (see Field, 2009). However, given the nature of the results, it is proposed that vital demographic factors such as age and gender should be incorporated into the model of future studies. Their inclusion will provide richer insights into varying tolerance or preference across different segments of tourist's profiles. Furthermore, integrating other factors such as responsible tourism, sustainable intelligence, destination loyalty, and destination attractiveness could provide comprehensive and alternative lenses on the interrelationship between OVT, EV, FV, and DV. These additional variables are suggested due to their potential in forming responsible and sustainable behaviours within the parameter of high value added of an ecotourism destination performance.

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APPENDIX 1
Survey Instruments

Code	Items
Overtourism	
EC1	Local tourist products are expensive
EC2	The price of accommodation is high
EC3	Local services are costly
EC4	Restaurants are always overcrowded in Langkawi
EC5	Overtourism leads to poor quality of goods/services
SC1	The increased tourists flow makes me feel uncomfortable
SC2	Overtourism leads to increasing crimes rates
SC3	Overtourism reduces the security of tourists
SC4	Overtourism increases the conflict between residents and tourists
SC5	Overtourism makes me feel unsafe
SC6	Overtourism changes the local cultures
ENV1	Overtourism increases the damage of natural environment of Langkawi
ENV2	Overtourism leads to excessive land reclamation of coastal areas in Langkawi
ENV3	Overtourism causes air pollution
ENV4	Overtourism contributes to seawater pollution
ENV5	Overtourism contributes to noise pollution
ENV6	Overtourism causes overcrowded beaches in Langkawi
Functional Values	
FV1	Visiting Langkawi is economical
FV2	Destination in Langkawi offers me a better value for money than other destination
FV3	Services in Langkawi are reasonably priced
FV4	Langkawi offers better quality of visit
FV5	Langkawi has consistent quality as a tourism destination
FV6	The visit to tourist attractions in Langkawi is worth the money paid
Emotional Values	
EV1	Visiting Langkawi is pleasurable
EV2	I am impressed with Langkawi after my visit
EV3	Langkawi is considered my best tourist destination
EV4	The travel experiences make me feel happy
EV5	I enjoy the wonderful tourist attractions of Langkawi
Destination Branding	
DB1	Langkawi is branded as a safe destination
DB2	Langkawi is known to be a shopping haven
DB3	Langkawi is an exciting island destination
DB4	Langkawi performs better than other competing tourism destinations in the region
DB5	Langkawi is blessed with high-level cleanliness of tourist environment
DB6	I would strongly recommend Langkawi to relatives/friends
DB7	Langkawi is a preferred destination for the next island trip

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