

Information Source Influence Destination Image

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between information sources and destination image as well as the relationship between destination image and overall satisfaction among local visitors using structured questionnaires. Structural equation modeling using AMOS was conducted by fitting the data to the hypothesized model using the covariance matrix. Results indicate that induced information sources are important predictor in destination image in addition to influencing overall visitors satisfaction level. This study revealed and confirmed the existing of causal relationships between information sources and destination image which directly lead to positive visitors satisfaction.

Keywords: CCL Program; evaluation; reading abilities; language proficiency

1. Introduction

1.1 An overview on destination image

Image has generally been referred as a compilation of beliefs and impressions based on information processing from a variety of sources over time (Choi *et al.*, 2007). Individuals' views or images of a particular place or a specific product are unique, constructed from their own memories, associations and imagination of that places or product (Jenkins and McArthur, 1996). Most of the destination image studies focus on the functional characteristics that are directly observable, such as prices and climate (Azlizam and Zainol, 2010). In addition, other researchers (i.e. Hong *et al.*, 2006) discuss the psychological characteristics such as atmosphere or romance of the setting.

Destination image in general are assumed to consist of two main components- cognitive and affective (Gartner 1993; Balogly and McCleary 1999). Cognitive could be based on any functional, structural, element or physical characteristics of destination. Cognitive components of image are measured and identified to understand people decision making in choosing travel destination (e.g. Chen and Hsu, 2000; Ibrahim and Gill, 2005). These research show that cognitive component represented a knowledge representation of environmental features. For examples, cognitive dimension such as physical environment was found by Chen and Hsu (2000) as ideal destination images for northern region of Korea. Similar studies also took place in Turkey (Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002), Florida (Bonn *et al.*, 2005), and Spain (Castro *et al.*, 2007).

Affect represents an individual's feeling toward an object, which will be favourable, unfavourable, or neutral (Fishbein, 1967). Affect implies emotions such as love, hate, joy, boredom, anxiety, pride, ecstasy, greed, guilt, elation, shame and awe (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) reported that affective or emotion influenced the evaluation of destination image than cognitive/perceptual dimension.

1.2 Measurement of image

Various methodologies of measuring destination image have been developed over the past 30 years, most of which consist of either structured, quantitative approach or, less frequently, an unstructured, qualitative approach (Azlizam and Zainol, 2011; Grosspietsch, 2006). The majority of destination image studies have used either structured (scale format) or unstructured (open-ended, repertory grid, etc.) measurement techniques (Baloglu and Mangaloglu, 2001). The studies adopting a structured technique employed the semantic differential and/or Likert scale for measuring cognitive and affective components of destination image (e.g. Chen and Hsu, 2000). The rarely used alternatives to structured approaches are unstructured, qualitative methods of measurement such as focus groups or open-ended questions with content analysis and various sorting techniques, employing free form descriptions to capture the more holistic component image (e.g. Bennett and Koudelova, 2001; Choi *et al.*, 2007; Prebensen, 2007; Ryan and Cave, 2005).

1.3 The importance of destination image

The key objective in generating and commercializing a successful destination image is that tourist's perception of the destination should correspond to the one that the marketing managers have tried to project (Andreu *et al.*, 2000). Tourism destination image is important because it is presumed to have direct consequences for variables such as the satisfaction felt by the tourist or loyalty to the tourism destination (Lucio *et al.*, 2006). The image of a tourism destination is a complex construct. A tourism destination is formed by a variety of elements, which makes it more difficult to measure (Lucio *et al.*, 2006). Image is the key construct in destination positioning. Kotler *et al.* (1993) highlighted the way in which minds simplify the process of destination image formation: "images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with the place. They are the product of the mind trying to process and essentialist huge amounts of data about a place".

Successful destination marketing depends largely on the way consumers perceived products and the marketing stimuli designed to promote the products (Ahmed, 1991). A strong and clear destination tourist image can increase consumer confidence in its tourist attractions and consumer predisposition to visit them. A destination's touristy product image as perceived by its actual and potential visitors plays an important role in determining its competitiveness as a tourist destination. There are appreciable evidences that show a destination image influences a tourist's decision making process when he/she considers alternative destinations for touring experiences (Azlizam and Zainol, 2011).

Discovering existing perceptions about a destination may provide valuable insights to destination marketing strategists, particularly if perceptual differences exist. Recognition of existing images can help identify factors contributing to the success or failure of product positioning efforts (Ahmed, 1991). The image of a tourist destination must be thoroughly investigated before product positioning attempts are undertaken. As a consequence, destinations can reposition themselves to improve or change touristy products in their respective target markets in order to enhance their competitive edge.

In view of the above, this study was interested to extend the theoretical and empirical evidence by Baloglu (1999) on the relationship between information source, destination image and tourist satisfaction for the

state of Perak (Malaysia) since the year of 2012 was declared as the “Visit Perak Year” as a campaign to induce visit to the state’s many attractions for both local and foreign tourists. In this campaign, the tagline ‘Yours to Discover’ was coined to create awareness and stimulate travelers to the state. Accordingly, ten icons frequently deemed to be associated by the state were identified as the “pulling factors” to Perak to spur the state to become the preferred tourist destination in Malaysia. It is hoped that the results derived from an empirical evaluation of the proposed model will serve as the basis for the development of destination marketing strategies.

2. Literature review

2.1 Information sources

Understanding how visitors retrieve information about a destination is important for marketing and management decision making among private entrepreneurs and public authorities (Wöber, 2003). Andereck and Caldwell (1993) assert that information sources are the processes of consulting multiple sources by tourists in advance before making a purchase decision. Information search propositions are grouped into three sets namely ‘how’, ‘where’, and ‘when’, before the search processes takes place. The ‘how’ refers to internal and external sources such as the person’s knowledge and experience about the destination retrieved from tourist offices, travel guides, brochures, relatives, newspapers, radio, television and friends. The ‘where’ refers to the places where information can be obtained, which means that information can be retrieved from the media and before arriving at the destinations. However, if the information retrieved is related to ‘when’, tourists will start collecting the information early, long before the actual vacation takes place. Many studies have shown that information sources and image towards destinations influence tourists’ preferences and intentions (Baloglu, 1999).

The role of information sources in destination image formation has been explained by Tasci and Gartner (2007) when they claim that image is “...a construction of a mental representation of a destination on the basis of information cues delivered by the image formation agents and selected by a person” (Tasci and Gartner, 2007). Tourists acquire destination image which includes advertisements and promotion, news accounts, magazine stories, conversation with acquaintances, and past visits (Gartner and Hunt, 1987). Tasci and Gartner (2007) categorized sources of image formation agents as (1) supply-side or destination (through promotional efforts undertaken by the destination), (2) independent or autonomous (through non-promotional materials which are not related to those promoting the destination), (3) demand-side or image receivers (through materials originating from tourists’ of origins). The subjectivity of destination image becomes more complicated as the destination-projected image might not always be the same as the received image since the perceivers can also form images through personal experiences and information they hear from words-of-mouth. It is a matter of fact that information transmission between suppliers, intermediaries and receivers has become more complicated since the arrival of the Internet (Choi *et al.*, 2007).

Thus, much effort is needed to establish and improve strategic marketing and operating procedures by the tourism destination managers, with the aim of influencing visitors to vast the competing destinations. To develop strategic and tactical marketing plans, it is crucial for managers to deeply understand the stimulus factors and dimensions of tourist behavior. The understanding of this process is necessary to reposition unfavorable destinations as well as to improve or sustain demand (Tasci and Gartner, 2007) and eventually to make profit.

The formation of good image is not the end of the effort in sustaining demand to a destination. Tourists who visit a destination, either motivated or not motivated by the information they received about the destination, must be satisfied with the experience they receive from the destination or else they may not return to the destination or they may inform others not to visit that destination. Constant improvements are made to develop a unique destination in order to deliver satisfaction. To gain satisfaction, tourists have to be satisfied with all the services they receive. Satisfied visitors will surely repeat their visits to the same destinations (Prayag, 2009). However, visitors’ attitudes and behavior are difficult to predict and measure, hence making it difficult to create an effective travel motivations and emotional promotions image. Hence, there is a need to build strong and consistent images as a long term entity will eventually create a strong perception to all destinations (Gartner and Hunt, 1987). Since tourist pre-visit perceptions toward a destination are considered as image that they have toward that destination and since satisfaction is an

evaluation of experiences based on this image, this study hypothesizes that there is a link between the process of pre-visit perceptions, formed by sources of information, with satisfaction.

2.2 The formation of destination image

The literature reveals that the principal contents in determining the formation of destination image are innate, attainable, cultural resources, and thus security cannot be denied to strengthen the result. However, [Baloglu and McCleary \(1999\)](#), and [Prayag \(2008\)](#) claimed that there are two main elements of image; the cognitive image and affective image (emotions). Cognitive image is described as the beliefs and information that visitors have about a place, which is arrived at through evaluation of the community who live in that place and, the events happening in there. Affective image evaluates and describes what visitors feel about the place, and it is about the likes and dislikes of the destination. [Coban \(2012\)](#) argues that emotional image that people have about the destination, such as knowledge, beliefs and thoughts can be connected to the cognitive image. Hence, the differences among the destination image are the uniqueness and culture, which are the result of man-made or natural features. [Fredericks and Salter \(1995\)](#) contended that image is an ingredient of the customer -value package that comes together with price, product quality, service quality, innovations and that determines the extent of loyalty. [Eskildsen et al. \(2004\)](#) also conclude that image determines the influence of perceived value, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, and that a favorable image is viewed as a critical aspect of a company's ability to maintain its market position in a competitive industry.

Forming an image of place generally goes through a process of awareness, familiarity and complexity. People become aware of places through first-time or initial exposure, perhaps by watching a place from television, reading about a place from books or friends talking about it. Through additional exposure to this place, predominately through the general media, their familiarity with the place and its contents increase. As this exposure increases, and generally from a number of sources, the image becomes increasingly complex where icons and personality, and relationships between these become evident.

The process of image formation is a bit more complex, especially when considering how these images were supplied, what role these images have in our overall or holistic image of the place and the role in travel behavior. The image a place, often termed destination image in the tourism literature, is formed through three collective sources. These collective sources generally conform to personal organic; destination generated induced; and experienced real agents ([Gartner, 1993](#)).

Organic images are those that are formed through general life experiences and not specific to tourism. Sources of organic images include movies, newspaper reports, the internet, television, magazines, and personal sources, such as friends and family. Induced images are tourism specific and usually denoted by an active search for information regarding a possible destination. Sources of induced images include travel and tourism advertisements, brochures, internet, television, magazines, newspaper reports, and travel agents. Real images are those formed through experiences of the destination.

All image collective sources modify destination image to a certain degree, though they have differing levels of credibility in the modification process. Real images, the experience of the place, have the highest credibility. The organic images are the next most credible, followed as least credible induced images; those from the destination. This is further played out in finding the distinction between organic and induced images. As demonstrated through the sources of organic and induced images there is a growing overlap between them. What is organic and what is induced is increasingly difficult to determine. Tourism, travel, and tourists are becoming increasingly popular in the media. Travel programmes, are becoming prevalent on television. These not only provide audiences with a greater awareness of places, but also influences awareness of travel behavior and decision making to selected destination.

2.3 Visitors satisfaction

Visitors satisfaction is defined as the degree of positive feelings activated from the experience at the destination ([Lobato et al., 2006](#)). The main focus of evaluating satisfaction is the increase in itself when customers compare their sensations to their initial expectations with the 'disconfirmation theory' ([Prayag, 2009](#)). The theory reveals that visitors would compare between the 'performance' of the destination organization and their 'expectations' through information that they received from promotions and by word-of-mouth. A satisfied visitors will be happy when he perceives a higher service performance than the

service expectation. However, if the perceived service performance is lower than the service expectation, it is considered as discontentedness of the visitors experience (Coban, 2012).

3. Research methodology

3.1 Conceptual model

According to the formation theory (Figure 1) on the determinants of destination image on visitation intention Baloglu and McCleary (1999), the information sources are the antecedent of cognitive image and, the overall formation of destination image. The socio-psychological and the travel motivation factors are considered antecedents of the affective image and, the overall formation of the destination image. They found that the formation of visitation intention is dependent on the different roles played by the informational, motivational and image elements in the process, where image is the major factor predicting travel behavior. However, studies discussing the causal relationships among destination image, information sources, and visitors satisfaction are still lacking.

Based on the discussion above, there is a need for a comprehensive study to bridge the gap by integrating between information sources, destination image, and visitors' satisfaction. To address the aforementioned, by drawing on the literature and review on the promotional information sources materials, a theoretical model was developed to propose relationships among the variables briefly discussed. The relationships depicted in Figure 2 are reflected as hypotheses which propose associations among the variables.

These are stated as follows:

- H₁: Induce information sources influence on the overall information sources
- H₂: Organic information sources have an influence on the overall information sources
- H₃: Information sources have an influence on destination image.
- H₄: Tourists destination image has an influence on visitors' satisfaction.

3.2 Method

This study employs a causal research design using a cross-sectional sample survey. Questionnaires were distributed to PLUS highway users who visited Perak as their holiday destination by intercepting them at two rest areas in Tapah, Perak, namely northbound and southbound points. Stratified sampling was used. The questionnaires were distributed during the weekends and weekdays for a period of seven days during the last week of Jun of 2012. A total of 241(73%) questionnaires were usable out of the 330 questionnaires that were distributed.

Measurement instrument variables were developed on the basis of a review of related literature and were modified to apply to the research objectives and target population. Survey questionnaire consisted of the following major sections, information sources, destination image, and visitors' satisfaction. The survey questions were developed as seven point Likert scales statements with 0 representing 'not satisfied/fully disagreed' to '7' which implied 'very satisfied/fully agreed'.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to determine the underlying dimensions of all the investigated variables by analyzing the patterns of correlation among the items which comprised different variables. The principle component analysis method with varimax rotation was employed. All cutoff criteria were used to determine the number of factors derived such as eigenvalues, scree plot, percentage of variance, item communalities and factor loadings (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Kline, 2005). Items with factor loadings lower than 0.4 and with loadings higher than 0.4 or more than one factor were eliminated (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Structural equation modeling using AMOS (version 18) was conducted by fitting the data to the theoretical model. The hypothesized model was estimated using the covariance matrix derived from the data, thus, the estimation procedures satisfied the underlying statistical distribution and yielded estimates of the desirable properties.

4. Data results and interpretation

4.1 Measurement model

To do the aforementioned, convergent validity and discriminant validity were initially checked. The average variance extracted (AVE) was computed by the indicators corresponding to each of the study constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Malhotra, 2007; Byrne, 2010).

After the EFA process, all variables were measured for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to establish confidence in the measurement model, since it specified the expected relationships of the observed variables to the underlying construct. The purification of items was conducted through multiple iterations of CFA, using maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) method for the purpose of searching for model specifications (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Byrne, 2010).

Modifications to the hypothesized model were performed by observing the standardized regression weights on the highest modification index (MI) value, and unfitted items were omitted from the measurement model (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Byrne, 2010). The overall result of the CFA process indicated that eight items were dropped from travel motivation, six items from information sources, 11 items from destination image, and two items from visitors' satisfaction. The final results of the 'Goodness of Fit Measures' was recorded in Table 1.

4.2 Relationship among constructs

4.2.1 Sample profile

The sample profile indicated an almost majority of the respondents (63%) was younger than 35 years old. The number of male tourists was (62%) larger than the number of female tourists. With regard to the educational level, most of the respondents (57.2%) have at least a college degree. In terms of monthly income, among respondents were found to have the highest average monthly income was about RM 3000.00. Their main purpose of visits was either holiday (57%) or visit friends and relative (43%). Most of the visits during the weekdays were chosen due to the public holidays. While visitors that travel during the weekends choose that time because of the availability of time and less crowded.

4.2.2 Structural equation model test

After assessing the measurement model, the modified structural model was developed. The goodness of fit index on the final result showed chi-square value is $\chi^2 = 12.732$ with DF (degree of freedom)= 12, GFI (Goodness of Fit of Index)=0.985 and CFI (Comparative of Fix Index) =0.999, RMSEA=0.016, CMIN/DF= 1.061, TLI =0.998 (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Kline, 2005; Byrne, 2010). This showed an overall of 'good fit' of the revised model. Findings indicate a positive relationship between all constructs and confirm the following research hypothesis:

H₁: Induced information sources' influence on the overall information sources

Induced information sources consist of information received from travel brochures, travel advertisements and promotional campaign such as from the airlines, the tour operators, movies, articles, direct mail. Gunn (1972) stated that if visitors, who have a motive to travel, will actively use the information sources as source of guidance. Information sources are used to create a desired image and modified the induced image towards the favored or projected image of the destination. This study proved that there was a correlation of $r=0.85$ between induced information sources and the overall information sources. Squared multiple correlation of 0.72 indicating that 72% of the variances of induced information sources contributed to the overall information sources.

H₂: Organic information sources have an influence on the overall information sources

Organic information sources are non-tourism or non-commercial information such as the news, stories, word of mouth from local residents, recommendations from friends and local residents. The result showed that there was a correlation of $r= 0.62$ between organic information sources and on the overall information sources. While squared multiple correlation of .39 indicating that 39% of the variance comes from organic information sources that contributed to the overall information sources. Anderck & Caldwell (1993) view that information sources differ substantially in their characteristic. These sources are purposefully designed to express a uniform message about the quality of a place or an environment. Organic information consists of very expressive information with no cost involved. This is coincidentally more effective since it involves experience from the messenger which is more enthusiastic and excited for the visitors to take into consideration in their decision making process.

H₃: Overall information sources have an influence on destination image

There was a relationship between information sources as indicated by the standardized regression coefficient of $\beta=0.73^{**}$. The squared multiple correlations is 0.53 indicating that 53% of the variance destination image is predicted from the overall information sources. This result confirmed the destination image formation theory made by Baloglu & McCleary (1999) whereby information sources are a strong stimulus factor in building up image of destinations in a long term (Gartner, 1993).

H₄: Tourists destination image has an influence on visitors' satisfaction

There was a relationship between destination image and visitors satisfaction, as indicated by the standardized regression coefficient of $\beta=0.58^{**}$. The squared multiple correlations for tourist satisfaction was 0.34 indicating that 34% variance could be predicted from destination image. This showed that destination image in structural model was significant and a predictor of change in tourist satisfaction (Lobato *et al.*, 2006; Coban, 2012). This result was similar to the investigation made by Lee (2009) in his research at Cigu, Taiwan and found that destination image had an impact on satisfaction.

The empirical results of this study provided tenable evidence that the proposed structural equation model designed to consider simultaneously the variables of information sources, destination image, and tourist satisfaction was acceptable. This study makes it clear that induced information sources plays a more important role than organic information sources in achieving destination image, and must be handled proactively in order to develop a lasting positive image to create satisfaction at the destinations (Chi & Qu, 2008). It also enhances his or her intention to return and to recommend the destination in the future (Chi & Qu, 2008; Jamaludin *et al.*, 2012).

This study revealed and confirmed the existence of the critical relationships among induce and organic information sources, destination image, and tourist satisfaction. The findings suggested that it would be worthwhile for destination managers and local tourist authorities to make greater investments in their tourism induced information sources, in order to continue to enhance tourists' positive and lasting image of a destination.

Conclusion

This study revealed and confirmed the existing relationships of information sources as the crucial factor in contributing to the building up of the second order of causal relationship of the destination images. To also lead to a positive visitors satisfaction. Assessing this model contributes confirm the development of previously proposed model by Baloglu and McCleary, (1999) on the formation of destination image. The result of this study yields an important finding that can enhance the understanding of causal relationship in tourism destinations.

As showed by this study, the role of induced information sources in achieving the desired destination image is far greater than that of the organic information. One principle implication from this finding is in the need to properly manage the flow of organic information from the current visitors to the state. In order to do so, it is of paramount important for the state tourism agency to ensure highest quality of services are made available to visitors at all stage of touristic experience while in the state. Creating the 'wow factor' will leave visitors with everlasting favorable impression about the state and perhaps will induce friends and relatives to make that first visit to Perak. In this age of social media, outlets like Facebook, Twitter and travel blogs usually become the outlets for sharing personal travel experience, thus can easily help to disseminate organic information about Perak en masse.

Also, this study found the role of the overall information sources as a strong stimulus factor in building up image of destinations in a long term. As such, beside organic image as mentioned above, attention must also be given to create unique and sound induced information in promoting the state's tourism. Paid promotions must be carefully designed to ensure the advertisements messages will get across to the intended audience and bring in profits to the state. Since most present and future visitors are more likely to travel by land transportation and capitalizing on the major highway traversing the length of the state, billboards and directional signage may be erected along the highway and major roads to present information and lure visitors to the state's many attractions.

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Figure(s) & Table(s)

Figure 1: A destination image formation by Baloglu, S. and McCleary, K. W, 1999

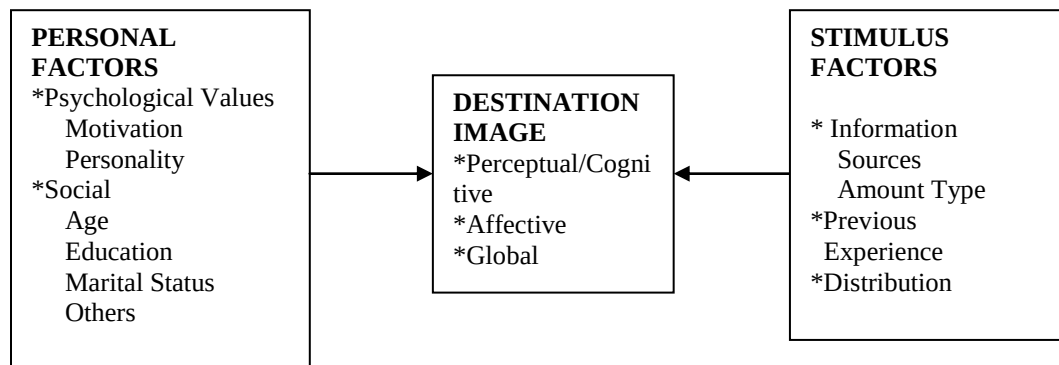


Figure 2: Structural model

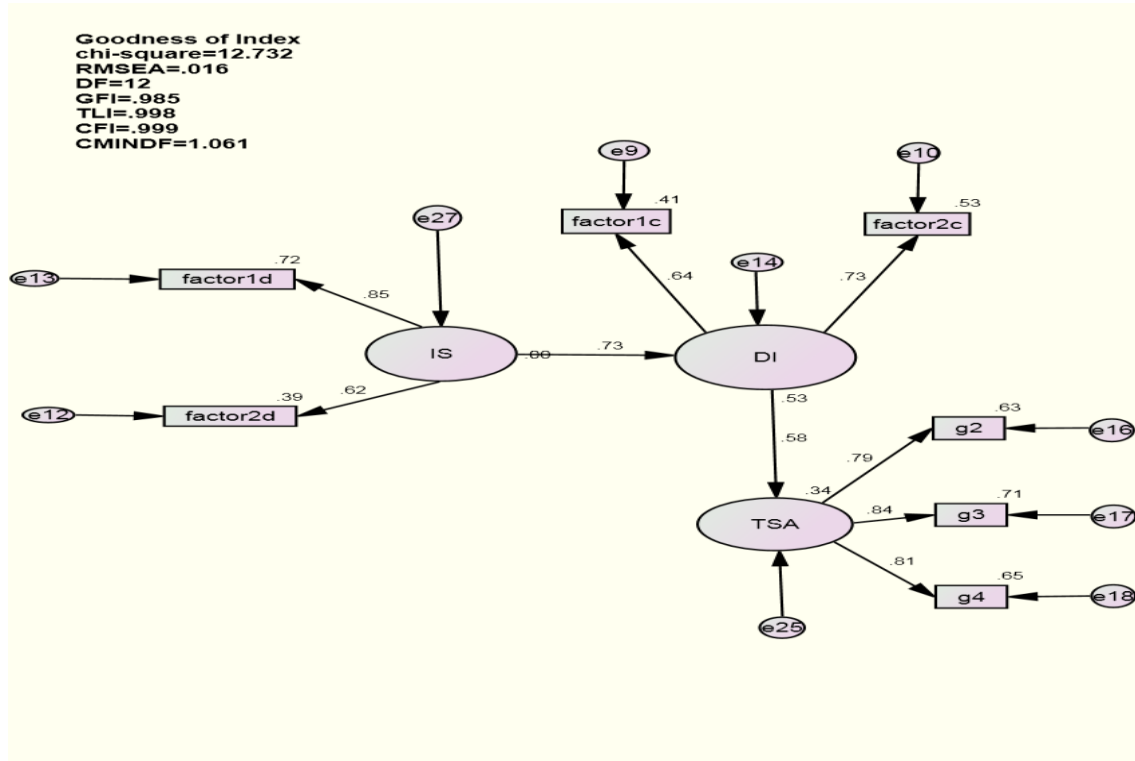


Table 1: Goodness of fit measures for the modified measurement model (N=241)

Parsimonious fit	Absolute fit			Incremental fit	
	Chi-square	GFI	RMSEA	AGFI	CFI
I. Sources	45.821	0.949	0.077	0.904	0.976
D. Image	140.990	0.920	0.073	0.859	0.951
T. Satisfaction	9.282	0.985	0.060	0.905	0.992

GFI, goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA, root-mean-square error of approximation, AGFI, adjusted goodness-of-fit, CFI, comparative fit index