

# Importance of destination image and customer satisfaction for new emerging destinations: An empirical research case from tourism development perspective

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**Abstract:** The current study purposed to focus on the importance of destination Image and customer satisfaction by conducting an empirical case study from Amasya Province, Turkey. Data for the present research work was obtained from a sample of domestic tourists in Amasya. Respondents self-administered the questionnaires. A total number of 100 usable questionnaires were obtained in the research location. For the statistical analyses, the current study has used SPSS Version 23 in conjunction with Partial Least Squares (PLS). Based on the analysis, the majority of tourists seemed satisfied and had positive destination image. However this study showed that there are some points that should be developed such as tourism infrastructure, night life and entertainment environment, public transport transportation system, services for tourists and etc. Examining the factors constitutes destination image on a continuous basis is a critical issue for the new emerging destinations, so, in this regard the current work procures important implications in general. At the same time it contributes to the new theoretical knowledge.

**Keywords:** Hotels; Destination image; Customer satisfaction; Tourist; Heritage tourism; Amasya.

## Importancia de la imagen del destino y la satisfacción del cliente para los nuevos destinos emergentes: un caso de investigación empírica desde la perspectiva del desarrollo turístico

**Resumen:** El estudio actual se propuso centrarse en la importancia de la imagen del destino y la satisfacción del cliente mediante la realización de un estudio de caso empírico de la provincia de Amasya, Turquía. Los datos para el presente trabajo de investigación se obtuvieron de una muestra de turistas nacionales en Amasya. Los encuestados se autoadministraron los cuestionarios. Se obtuvo un total de 100 cuestionarios utilizables en el lugar de la investigación. Para los análisis estadísticos, el estudio actual ha utilizado SPSS Versión 23 junto con Partial Least Squares (PLS). Según el análisis, la mayoría de los turistas parecían satisfechos y tenían una imagen positiva del destino. Sin embargo, este estudio mostró que hay algunos puntos que deben desarrollarse, como la infraestructura turística, la vida nocturna y el entorno de entretenimiento, el sistema de transporte público, los servicios para los turistas, etc. Examinar los factores que constituyen la imagen del destino de manera continua es un tema crítico para los nuevos destinos emergentes, por lo que, en este sentido, el presente trabajo adquiere importantes implicaciones en general. Al mismo tiempo contribuye al nuevo conocimiento teórico.

**Palabras Clave:** Hoteles; Imagen de destino; La satisfacción del cliente; Turista; Turismo patrimonial; Amasya.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism has been one of the fastest growing sectors globally since the middle of the 20th century. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) data, around 25 million international trips were made throughout the world in the 1950s, and this number has grown steadily over the years. In the 1990s, the number of international trips exceeding 500 million reached 1 billion in 2011. The growth

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rate of the tourism sector, which continued its stable development in the following years, was realized as 4 percent on average until 2019. According to UNWTO data, while world tourism grew by 3.8 percent in 2019, the number of international travels increased to 1 billion 461 million and the revenues from international tourism to 1.5 trillion dollars. According to the data announced by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the total contribution of the tourism sector to the world economy is 8.9 trillion dollars. From the current data stated above, it is understood how the tourism sector has a positive effect on the economy of the countries. It can be said that tourism is an important sector that provides a solution to the unemployment problem of that country, as well as providing foreign currency inflows to the countries. According to the WTTC evaluation, the tourism sector constitutes 10 percent of the world's employment and provides employment to 330 million people (Association of Turkish Travel Agencies, 2020). Tourism is defined as an invisible export in terms of balance of payments because it earns foreign exchange by selling goods and services to visitors. The fact that the country's natural, historical and cultural values can be marketed on-site by tourists makes tourism more advantageous than other export sectors (Costa, 2017; Khan, Sughra, Ardito, Jiaying, and Zaheer, 2020; Sana, 2021; Şen and Şit, 2015).

In the tourism sector, which has an important share in the world economy, destinations that want to increase their market share and be different from their competitors have to direct their resources in line with the strategies and objectives they have determined. One of the most important factors affecting the travel decision processes of current and potential tourists and directly affecting their destination preferences is the image studies carried out in the destination and the perceived image level (Yazıcıoğlu and Akbulut, 2015). Natural attractive factors, accessibility, tourism stakeholders, climate, other variables can be effective in the formation of the destination image, which expresses the sum of the impressions that the tourists have about a destination. (Roig and Clave, 2016; Vieira, Borges, Rodrigues, and Lopes, 2020). Since tourists' beliefs, ideas and perceptions about the destination are more important than other features of the destination, a strong image of a destination means that it is ahead of other destinations (Mcdowall and Choi, 2010). In addition, destination image is effective in the formation of behaviors such as travel satisfaction, re-visit and recommendation (Al-Ansi and Han, 2019; Zhang, Byon, Williams and Huang, 2019). Accordingly, the destination image can be considered as an antecedent variable at the point of explaining post-travel behaviors. In this context, the starting point of this study is to examine the destination image as an antecedent variable. Therefore, it can be said that destination image perceptions play an important role in tourist preferences (Prayag and Ryan, 2012).

Since the services offered in the tourism sector do not have a concrete feature that can be tried before purchasing, the tourist in a way buys the image of the destination. The image of a country or region constitutes the most important components of the touristic product (Tapia, Mele, and Garcia, 2018). The image of touristic places affects both the choice of the destination of the tourists and the satisfaction level of the destination. It can be said that a different and positive destination image can positively affect the decision to travel to that place. In addition, travel agencies and tour operators also take into account the image of the country and destination in the formation and marketing of holiday packages. For this reason, the image of the destination is decisive in the evaluation process of a tourism product (Ünal and Çakır, 2020). Since the increase in international tourism movements in recent years has brought about changes in the satisfaction and perception of tourists, it is of great importance to analyze the wishes and needs of tourists in a tourism region, to ensure customer satisfaction and thus to create a strong destination image. Knowing the factors affecting the perception of destination image and destination-based studies carried out to improve or develop the image in this direction will increase the satisfaction level of tourists from their destination experiences and will be reflected in their behaviors such as recommending or revisiting the destination (Sarıipek, Çevik and Saçılık, 2019).

In the current study, the destination image and customer satisfaction as an output of the created image; the subject of how the destination will affect the course of the tourism sector and what the possible gains will be in terms of sustainable tourism have been examined in Amasya province, Turkey. The fact that such a study has not been carried out in Amasya in this regard and that the destination image and customer satisfaction are of great importance in terms of sustainable tourism constitutes the motivation of this study. The city of Amasya, located in the Central Black Sea Region of Turkey, is a city where cultural tourism is intense with its historical urban texture, traditional Ottoman House examples, Yeşilirmak River and Valley, legends, natural and cultural values. The existence of the Yeşilirmak River passing through the city, the traditional housing texture and civil architectural examples that have been preserved from the past to the present, is almost an open-air museum with its deep-rooted cultural level. Thanks to the Harşena Mountain located in the north of the city and the Pontus King Rock Tombs, which are among the largest rock tombs in Anatolia, the city has been

on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List since 2015. In addition, the city is one of the 15 brand cities determined by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism within the scope of Turkey Tourism Strategy 2023, due to its natural beauties, rich cultural heritage, architecture and tourism attraction points.

However though these advantages and potentials, Amasya has not been successful to attract the desired number of domestic and foreign tourists to increase occupancy rate over yearly coming tourists to the country. Many reasons may lie under this fact that should be clarified by research. Therefore this study aimed to explore the destination image and customer satisfaction of domestic tourists visited Amasya. This study, by questioning the destination image of Amasya, provides a guide to the steps to be taken in order for Amasya to be in the position it deserves in the growing tourism sector with its historical and cultural values.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Destination Image

Although there is no generally accepted and clear definition of destination image in the literature, there is a consensus that it is the whole of the subjective ideas, beliefs, impressions and expectations of the people about the destination. To make a general definition about the destination image; It can be defined as “impressions about a place” or “perceptions about a place” (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou, and Andronikidis, 2016). Tourism, which has an effective power in local and regional development, is seen as an important driving force especially in the development of rural areas. Destinations that are aware of the driving force of tourism are looking for ways to be successful. One of the primary conditions of achieving success is stated as creating a positive destination image. Increasing the positive image of the destination perceived by the tourists is one of the important factors that will contribute to the development of the destination. Creating a positive destination image will contribute to the destination's competitive advantage compared to other destinations it is in competition with and its transformation into a more competitive destination (Chi and Qu, 2008; Jeong and Kim, 2020).

The touristic products offered to consumers by a destination contain environmental, economic, socio-cultural, political, geographical and historical characteristics unique to the destination. In fact, a destination differs from other destinations with these features, and all of these features form the personality of the destination. In order to be successful in the marketing of the destination, the image to be created should reflect the personality of the destination or be directly proportional. However, the image does not always reflect the real personality. In reality, destination managements only reflect the positive aspects of the destination in the image creation process. On the other hand, image is a subjective concept as it is the sum of the thoughts and beliefs in the minds of individuals and groups, and it is a subjective concept and can be used by media and affected by many factors such as friend recommendations, negative propaganda of competing destinations, and etc. For this reason, it is not possible to develop the positive image of a destination in a very short time and to erase its negative image in a short time. One of the most important factors affecting the purchasing preferences and satisfaction levels of tourists is the destination image. The image that potential and current tourists have about the destination can be considered as the main factor that determines the future of that destination in tourism. Since the tourism product is intangible and similar to each other, competition between destinations takes place through images. Tourist behavior is evaluated in three stages: before the trip, during the trip and after the trip. The destination image helps to make the purchasing decision before the travel, the experience in the destination and the evaluation of this experience, and to shape the behaviors and intentions after the travel (Özersin, 2019).

Destination image is formed by perceptual/cognitive and emotional evaluations. In this case, the destination image consists of two elements, perceptual/cognitive and emotional. Perceptual/Cognitive assessment refers to the knowledge and beliefs that people have about destination characteristics. Emotional evaluations refer to feelings about a place. While the emotional element emerges as a result of the emotional evaluation of the destination environment, the cognitive element generally emerges as a result of the evaluation of the physical characteristics of a place. As a result of cognitive and emotional evaluation of a place, the general image of that place is formed. In other words, the overall image is formed as a result of the interaction of different features in a destination (Baloğlu and McCleary, 1999; Aliedan, Sobaih, and Elshaer, 2021).

It is accepted that the image of a destination perceived by tourists plays an important role in tourists' decision making, destination selection, post-trip evaluations and future behavior (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003). Due to this importance, various models have been proposed by many researchers about the formation of the destination image; explanations have been given in different ways. The complexity and diversity of the destination image, which has a dynamic structure, is one of the important charac-

teristic features. The high number of components (cognitive, affective, operational) and features used to measure the destination image shows its complexity, while at the same time, there is no consensus on its measurement (Stylidis and Cherifi, 2018).

In addition, complexity means that the destination consists of various stakeholders, components and suppliers and conveys different meanings to different markets (Sonnleitner, 2011). Gallarza, Irene and Haydee (2002) conceptualized the destination image with four characteristics: complex, dynamic, multiple and relative. Complexity arises from the number of image components, multiplicity arises from the variety of objects used in measurements, and relativity arises from the subjective nature of the image. Finally, dynamism means that the image is not static, but changes over time. When the destination image is examined, it is seen that many studies focus on functional and psychological characteristics of the destination such as landscape, environment, nature, cultural venues, nightlife and entertainment, shopping opportunities, tolerance of local people and safety (Gallarza et al., 2002). Apart from these, it can be said that natural environmental dimensions such as landscape, wild nature and activities and artificial environmental dimensions such as nightclubs and shopping opportunities have a significant positive effect on destination evaluations (Nadeau et al., 2008). While the destination qualities used in many studies consist of general features such as natural environment and climate, attractions, activities, accessibility, culture, friendship with local people (Chen and Tsai, 2007), at the same time the features specific to that place are also used because the image depends on the quality of the touristic place (Beerli and Martin, 2004).

Researchers, in their studies, have found that the behavior patterns of tourists play an important role in the formation of images and that previous visit or recommendations from other people are effective in shaping these behaviors. Murphy (1999) emphasized in his research that tourist behaviors are grouped into three groups while forming the destination image: before the trip, while the trip is in progress and at the end of the trip. While the destination image is formed, the previous visits of the individuals, the behaviors that ensure satisfaction during the travel and the behavioral intentions after the visit play an important role.

## 2.2. Customer Satisfaction

The concept of customer satisfaction is a concept that covers meeting the wishes, needs and expectations of the customers and going beyond them. For physical goods, customer satisfaction emerges from the evaluation of the quality, performance, etc. of a product or service after purchase. On the other hand, customer satisfaction arises during the services delivery as an outcome of meeting the expectations from that service. So the comparison of customer expectations at the beginning with the end perceptions after product and service provision results in customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Satisfaction occurs when the benefits of the goods or services purchased by the customer and the expectations of the customer match the destination (Stylos et al., 2016; Türk, 2005).

Recently, the modern marketing understanding is based on the fact of satisfying customer requests and needs. This understanding calls for higher level of customer satisfaction which emerges from customer-orientation, being close to the customer, customer relationship management perspective and establishing a continual system of the customer relationship. Therefore the basic of these marketing functions are to boost satisfaction level and individual choices for future consumption (Goldman, 1997; cited in Midilli, 2011).

Tourism businesses should be in constant communication with customers, which are their target audiences. Thus, they will know their customer expectations and complaints and will take the necessary measures in advance. Otherwise, it will be difficult for the business to determine how they can satisfy customer expectations. A customer who is not satisfied because their expectations are not met will cause the business to lose sales and customers (Aktepe, Baş and Tolon, 2009). Zairi (2000) stated in his study that a satisfied tourist can recommend his experiences positively to five or six people, while a dissatisfied tourist can talk about his negative experiences to ten people (Cited by Shirazi and Som, 2013). Customers who were satisfied with the service they received in the past will be willing to receive the service of the same service provider in the following years (Loi, So, Lo, and Fong, 2017; Ueltschy, Laroche, Eggert and Bindl, 2007).

Today, customers' expectations are higher than in the past. The choice of goods and services offered by tourism businesses to customers is also greater than in the past. According to the contemporary marketing approach, the concept of satisfying the customer is to offer the quality expected by the customer with an extraordinary service understanding and to try to ensure that the customer is satisfied with these services. According to this understanding, businesses in tourism destinations combine customer service, quality and marketing in order to create customer satisfaction and long-term customer relations. Just as people cannot live without their physiological needs such as air, water and food, destinations cannot live without their customers. Since their source is their

customers, destinations need to ensure customer satisfaction with the services they offer. Satisfaction is a valuable concept in understanding the performance of destinations (Nasir, Mohamad and Ab Ghani, 2021). Although the quality of products and services is primarily under the control of the service producer or manager, it is tourists who evaluate their quality. Tourists' evaluation of service quality affects their behavior and satisfaction with visiting the destination again or recommending it to others (McDowall, 2010; Prayag, Hosany, Muskat, and Del Chiappa, 2017). In this regard, an empirical research conducted by Jeong and Kim (2020) reported a positive correlation between destination image and satisfaction and loyalty as well. Similarly, a study performed by Wang and Hsu (2020) approved the positive role of destination image on tourist satisfaction and behavioral intention in their integrated model.

### 2.3. Amasya Tourism Potentials

Amasya, located in the Yeşilirmak basin, has been chosen as a settlement for different civilizations throughout history due to its strategically important geographical location and fertile lands. The area, starting from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, has become important settlement center for Early Bronze Age, Hatti and Hittite Civilizations, Assyrian Trade Colonies Age, Phrygians, Scythians, Cimmerians, Medes, Persians, Mithridates, Roman Empire, Eastern Rome (Byzantine), Danishmends, Anatolian Seljuks, Ilkhanids, Ottomans and lastly the Republic of Turkey. The province, which has hosted many civilizations, is a museum in terms of historical and cultural heritage (Middle Blacksea Development Agency, 2015). With the increase in expectations for tourism in recent years, Amasya was one of the 15 brand cities selected for the development of cultural tourism by taking its cultural and historical past as the criterion in the Turkish Tourism Strategy Action Plan (2007-2013), which was prepared with the aim of meeting these expectations and ensuring the sustainability of its development in tourism (T.R. Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007).

Amasya is located between two hills with its historical, cultural heritage and topography. The city, which is divided into two by Yeşilirmak and connected by historical bridges, has important potentials for tourism. These reflections in Amasya, which date back to ancient times and carry their traces to the present as a cultural heritage, also form the basis of the city's cultural heritage. There are many historical mosques, historical houses, historical baths, madrasas, historical bridges and structures in the center and districts including the registered cultural and natural assets in the center, mainly 4 natural sites and 34 archaeological sites (see Photo 1).

**Photo 1: Amasya Historical and Touristic Sites.**



**Source:** Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism

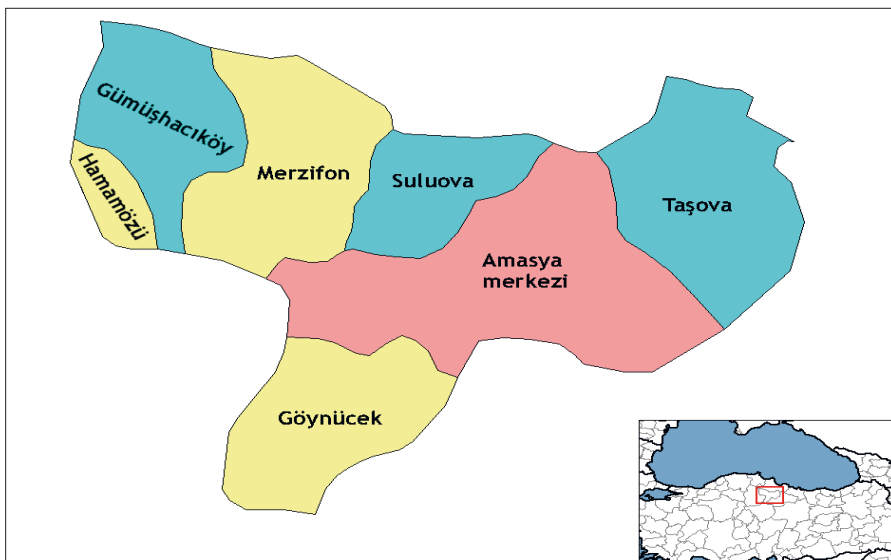
It is seen that the province of Amasya has a richer potential in terms of culture and faith tourism in general. It can be said that the province of Amasya has the potential to allow most of the alternative tourism types based on nature and culture to be realized in both summer and winter seasons. For example, nature tourism activities such as trekking, cycling, tent camping, nature sports, bird watching, hunting tourism, highland tourism, thermal tourism, sports tourism and photo safari are possible (see Photo 2 and Map 1). In addition, there are areas with scenic beauty and features suitable for photographing in all seasons. This increases the attractiveness and preference for the province of Amasya (Zengin, Öztürk and Salha, 2014).

**Photo 2: Amasya Natural Tourism Attractions.**



Source: Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism

**Map 1: Location of Amasya/Türkiye**



Source: tr.wikipedia.org

Amasya possesses various types of accommodations for its visitors. In the city center or just a few kilometers from the center, in addition to the hotels with high service quality, some of the historical mansions and houses lined up on the edge of Yeşilirmak serve as boutique hotels or hostels. According to the data of the Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism (2021), when the tourism infrastructure at the accommodation point of Amasya is examined, it is seen that the number of accommodation establishments is 90, there are 1652 rooms and the number of beds is 3,554 that is not meeting the future expectations.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Procedure

Quantitative research methods were used in this study. In quantitative studies, numerical methods and data are not very flexible. In this method, data are collected through “closed-ended” questions that are not open to interpretation or questionnaires with answers given as choices in order to avoid directing the participants (Mack et al., 2005). In this type of research, a determined number of data is collected from the participants. These collected data are analyzed using statistical methods. This type of quantitative research is result-oriented and is used to measure the correlation between the assumed relationships of data with each other. In this way, data is analyzed more efficiently. However, if care is not taken, the relations between the subjects may be missed. In other words, before the data collection period, every aspect of the research should be carefully related, considered and organized. On the other hand, a qualitative research has holistic, process-oriented and detail-oriented approach as much as possible (Hoskara, 2004). Qualitative studies are very suitable for small and medium-sized studies that serve the purpose. Based on this fact, the deductive approach was used in this work to investigate hypothetical relationship as well. This method is an ideal method for this type of research.

#### 3.2. Sampling and Data Collection

The current survey was aimed to examine the destination image and satisfaction levels of domestic tourists and visitors coming to Amasya destination/Türkiye. The universe of survey consists of domestic tourists and visitors coming to Amasya destination. Although the number of tourists and visitors coming to the city is not known exactly, simple random sampling method was chosen as the sampling method. In the simple random sampling method, everyone in the universe has an equal chance of entering the sample. However, sometimes, the randomly approached respondents among little numbers of tourists refused to be participant for the survey, so they were added in the survey based on convenience and volunteering. The attained data from the participants was processed in the low season 2021 due to the time constraints. Most of the time, the tourists visit Amasya in July and August.

The research team collected the data on a one-to-one and face-to-face basis in order to obtain a better return percentage. Consequently, the all of questionnaires were conducted with the voluntary participants from different touristic places. The research team aimed to collect 150 questionnaires over the coming tourists during the data collection period of a month. However, due to low season, total numbers of 100 usable questionnaires were completed within this period and the data was ready for advanced data analysis.

#### 3.3. Measures

The survey scales in the present research was adopted from Çakmak and Kök (2012). The questionnaire was categorized under two sections, such as, there are 5 questions in the first part regarding demographics; age, monthly income and education, gender, and marital status. The second part is devoted to measuring the destination image and customer satisfaction by 35 questions. There are 5 likert scale type responds to measure 30 destination image questions and 5 customer satisfaction questions. Accordingly, the statements in the questions were arranged to be evaluated as 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-undecided, 4-agree, and 5-strongly agree.

#### 3.4. Data Analysis

The current study has used SPSS Version 23 in conjunction with PLS (Partial Least Squares) regression method for data analyses. First the descriptive statistics was performed together with psychometric properties of the measures. Then the study scales were put to Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to

assure support for the concerns of dimensionality, convergent and discriminant validity (Chin 1998; Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson, 2010). PLS regression works well in analyzing a series of cause-and-effect relationships (Gustafsson and Johnson, 2004; Ringle, Sven, and Jan-Michael, 2015). Once the measure was validated, PLS regression was used to test the validity of the proposed model.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

As can be seen in the table 1 below, data on the demographic characteristics of the participants were obtained. As can be seen in Table 1, data on the 'gender' factor were obtained from demographic characteristics. In the light of these data, 42 of the 100 participants are female and 58 are male. Table 1 shows the 'age' factor distribution among the demographic characteristics. According to this, out of a total of 100 participants, 20% of the participants are 24 years old and younger, 31% are 25-35 years old, 41% are 36-49 years old, and 8% are 50 years old and over. Table 1 shows the distribution of 'education level' among demographic characteristics. The expression as a percentage refers to the participants with 22% primary school, 39% high school, 18% associate degree, 17% undergraduate, 3% master's and 3% doctorate education. Table 1 shows the 'marital status' factor distribution among the demographic characteristics. Accordingly, 40% of the 100 participants are married and 60% are single. Finally table 1 shows the 'income level' distribution from demographic characteristics. According to this, 18% of the participants have an income level of 1,300 TL and below, 50% of the participants with an income level of 1,301-2,999 TL, 20% of the participants with an income level of 3,000-4,999 TL, and 4% of them with 5,000 TL and above.

**Table 1: Demographic Profiles**

Demographic variable	Sample composition	Percentage
<i>Age</i>	24 years and less	20.0
	25-35 years	31.0
	36-49 years	41.0
	50 years and over	8.0
<i>Gender</i>	Female	42.0
	Male	58.0
<i>Education</i>	Secondary education and lower	61.0
	Vocational school	18.0
	Undergraduate	17.0
	Masters	3.0
	Doctorate	3.0
<i>Marital Status</i>	Married	40.0
	Single	60.0
<i>Monthly Income</i>	1300 TL and less	18.0
	1301-2999 TL	50.0
	3000-4999 TL	28.0
	5000 and over	4.0

The table 2 shows that the average mean score for customer satisfaction scale is 4.062 which means the respondents have positive perceptions in general. Along with this, the average mean score for destination image is 3.915 which means the respondents have positive image in general. However there are some items that the respondents are neutral and not much satisfied. Such that the mean score for DEIM6 (Tourism infrastructure is sufficient) is low that means the infrastructural tourism developments are needed for Amasya. Second, the mean score for DEIM31 (I think it has a fast night life and entertainment environment) seems low that means the tourists expect more entertainment and more night life facilities should be organized. Third, the mean score for DEIM33 (It has an advanced, public transport transportation system) is low that means the tourists are not much satisfied with the public transport transportation system and new developments needed on this. Finally the mean score for DEIM35 (There are services for tourists) seems low that means the tourists are not satisfied of touristic services and there are limitations on this.



**Table 2: Mean Values and Standard Deviations for the Scale Items**

Codes	Scale items	Mean	Std. Deviation
SAT1	I truly enjoyed this trip.	3.96	0.81
SAT2	I will recommend this trip to my relatives.	4.10	0.99
SAT3	This trip has been the way I wanted it to be.	4.05	0.83
SAT4	This destination has a positive image.	4.05	0.95
SAT5	I am glad to have come to this destination.	4.15	0.85
<b>DEIM6</b>	<b>Tourism infrastructure is sufficient.</b>	<b>3.41</b>	<b>1.27</b>
DEIM7	I think it's a nice place to take a vacation.	3.97	0.94
DEIM8	It is a nice place to get to know a new culture.	4.11	0.95
DEIM9	It is a suitable place to experience different excitements.	3.98	0.88
DEIM10	It is a place to relax, away from stress.	4.10	0.89
DEIM11	It has sufficient number of accommodation facilities.	4.00	0.86
DEIM12	Accommodation facilities are very convenient.	4.04	0.87
DEIM13	Accommodation is available for every budget.	3.98	0.87
DEIM14	There is a certain standard of cleanliness and hygiene in the facilities.	4.05	0.86
DEIM15	Access to accommodation facilities is easy.	4.01	0.89
DEIM16	People living in Amasya are friendly and warm-blooded.	4.15	0.88
DEIM17	Local shopkeepers are helpful.	4.10	0.87
DEIM18	Local employees are kind.	4.06	0.85
DEIM19	I think the weather conditions are favorable for the holiday.	3.99	0.98
DEIM20	It has pristine environmental conditions.	4.02	0.84
DEIM21	I think it has an untouched nature and a clean environment.	4.00	0.89
DEIM22	I think it has interesting historical sites.	4.12	0.92
DEIM23	I think it's a safe place to travel.	4.04	0.95
DEIM24	I think it has a unique view and different natural beauties.	3.99	0.98
DEIM25	I think it hosts interesting cultural events.	4.16	0.90
DEIM26	The standard of living is high	3.90	0.96
DEIM27	I think that the price of the products sold and the services offered is suitable for me.	4.02	0.97
DEIM28	I think the shopping opportunities are sufficient.	3.89	0.98
DEIM29	It has good quality restaurants.	4.06	0.90
DEIM30	Local dishes are delicious.	3.86	1.10
<b>DEIM31</b>	<b>I think it has a fast night life and entertainment environment.</b>	<b>3.47</b>	<b>1.31</b>
DEIM32	I feel safe walking on the street.	3.77	1.00
<b>DEIM33</b>	<b>It has an advanced, public transport transportation system.</b>	<b>3.49</b>	<b>1.21</b>
<b>DEIM34</b>	<b>There are many package tours available for this destination.</b>	<b>3.39</b>	<b>1.05</b>
<b>DEIM35</b>	<b>There are services for tourists.</b>	<b>3.32</b>	<b>1.21</b>

### 3.2. Psychometric Properties of the Measures

The details for the measurement items can be seen in Table 3. The Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and composite reliability (CR) measures were over the minimum value of .70, which depicts that items are representative of the latent constructs and internal consistency was adequate (Hair et al., 2010). As the second step, in order to check the adequacy of distribution of values for each construct, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was performed as recommended by Field (2000) and consequently each of them were found to be over the least value of 0.50 (Customer satisfaction = 0.874, Destination image = 0.940). Furthermore, based on the Bartlett's test of sphericity measure, the multivariate normality of the set of distributions was normal for the constructs that signals a significant value,  $p = 0.000 (< 0.05)$ . Thus, the data was ready for factor analysis (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black, 1998). Table 3 presents factor loads test results for each construct. Convergent validity was satisfied in that factor loadings were high (values ranged from .520 to .880). Additionally, all constructs average variances extracted (AVE) values of all constructs were over the

minimum value of .50, indicating convergent validity and all *t*-values over 1.96 are approved as significant values, (Chin, 1998; Hair Black, Babin and Anderson, 2014; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

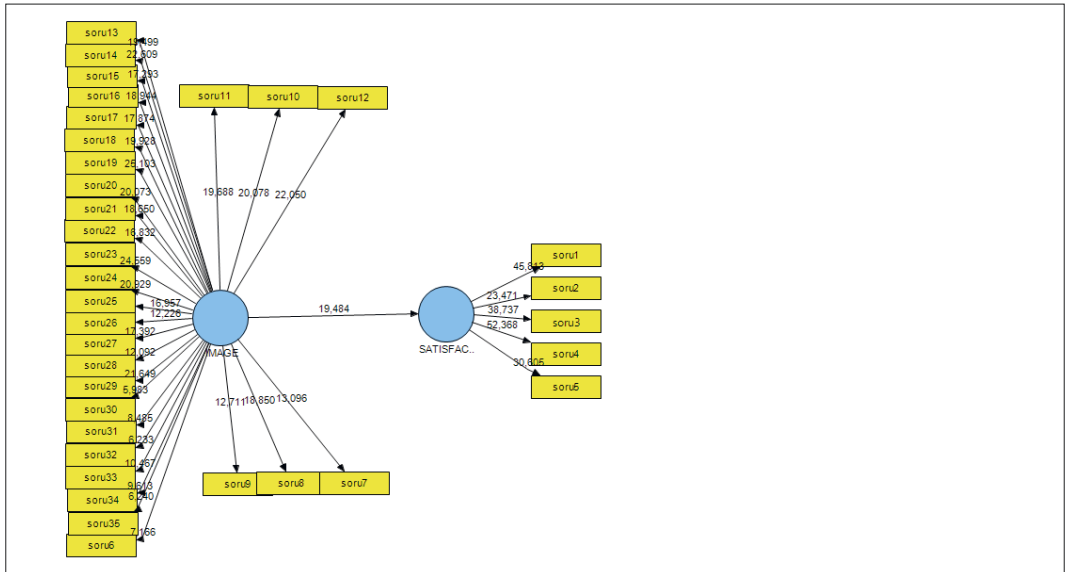
**Table 3: Factor Load, *t*-values, Reliabilities, and AVE Results**

Codes	Scale items	Factor loads	<i>t</i> -value	Alpha	AVE
SAT1	I truly enjoyed this trip.	,846	46,22	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.832</b>
SAT2	I will recommend this trip to my relatives.	,822	23,61		
SAT3	This trip has been the way I wanted it to be.	,815	38,40		
SAT4	This destination has a positive image.	,880	52,00		
SAT5	I am glad to have come to this destination.	,798	30,55		
DEIM6	Tourism infrastructure is sufficient.	,618	7,06	<b>0.97</b>	<b>0.601</b>
DEIM7	I think it's a nice place to take a vacation.	,632	12,96		
DEIM8	It is a nice place to get to know a new culture.	,755	18,78		
DEIM9	It is a suitable place to experience different excitements.	,597	12,39		
DEIM10	It is a place to relax, away from stress.	,749	19,81		
DEIM11	It has sufficient number of accommodation facilities.	,721	19,81		
DEIM12	Accommodation facilities are very convenient.	,714	21,97		
DEIM13	Accommodation is available for every budget.	,742	19,69		
DEIM14	There is a certain standard of cleanliness and hygiene in the facilities.	,750	22,42		
DEIM15	Access to accommodation facilities is easy.	,709	17,02		
DEIM16	People living in Amasya are friendly and warm-blooded.	,757	18,70		
DEIM17	Local shopkeepers are helpful.	,714	18,05		
DEIM18	Local employees are kind.	,752	19,75		
DEIM19	I think the weather conditions are favorable for the holiday.	,759	24,71		
DEIM20	It has pristine environmental conditions.	,741	19,84		
DEIM21	I think it has an untouched nature and a clean environment.	,707	18,65		
DEIM22	I think it has interesting historical sites.	,706	16,55		
DEIM23	I think it's a safe place to travel.	,757	23,80		
DEIM24	I think it has a unique view and different natural beauties.	,756	20,91		
DEIM25	I think it hosts interesting cultural events.	,663	16,82		
DEIM26	The standard of living is high	,618	12,08		
DEIM27	I think that the price of the products sold and the services offered is suitable for me.	,731	17,70		
DEIM28	I think the shopping opportunities are sufficient.	,681	12,06		
DEIM29	It has good quality restaurants.	,740	21,61		
DEIM30	Local dishes are delicious.	,520	6,027		
DEIM31	I think it has a fast night life and entertainment environment.	,664	8,47		
DEIM32	I feel safe walking on the street.	,529	6,13		
DEIM33	It has an advanced, public transport transportation system.	,706	10,50		
DEIM34	There are many package tours available for this destination.	,847	9,93		
DEIM35	There are services for tourists.	,684	6,28		

Although the relationship between destination image and customer satisfaction was not hypothesized in the current study. PLS regression analysis was performed by a bootstrapping technique to determine the *t*-statistics and to find out the path significance (Hair et al., 2014). The goal of PLS is maximizing the explained variance (i.e., the  $R^2$  value) of the endogenous latent variables in a PLS regression (Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2017). In this regard, based on the test results, the destination image explained 69% ( $R^2$ ) of the variance in customer satisfaction and also the Figure 1 shows the *t*-statistics

results that destination image makes a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction ( $= 0.828, t = 19.48, p < 0.01$ ).

**Figure 1: PLS Regression Test Results**



**4. Conclusion**

It is only possible to manage a destination that has a different cultural richness in each region, together with social organizations such as non-governmental organizations, voluntary organizations and local governments. Brand and image concepts have a very important place in this system called destination marketing. The attempt to create a destination brand should not only be a phenomenon related to tourism employees, but should be seen as a mass transformation project. The first step of this is to create a destination image. Choosing a tourism destination as a holiday destination is directly related to the image of that destination in the eyes of tourists. The creation of this image is possible by combining many elements. So, in the current work, the factors contributing to the formation of the destination image were discussed and measured.

The results obtained from this study, which was conducted to evaluate the destination image and satisfaction levels of domestic tourists and visitors coming to Amasya destination, helped us to learn how satisfied the tourists and visitors are from this destination and to examine the reasons for the results. On the other hand, by comparing the province of Amasya with various tourism destinations in Turkey in terms of tourism adequacy, it will allow us to have an idea about what the minuses and pluses are. In addition, it will inform the managers and academicians who will conduct research in the field of tourism about the issues that should be given importance in terms of tourism destination image. The first impressions of the tourists who temporarily leave their places of residence for different causes, for example, entertainment, sightseeing, relaxing, sports and health are formed by observing the historical and natural places, the adequacy of transportation opportunities, the perception of security and the culture of the destination region. Moreover, the first impression of tourists regarding the destination is formed through the quality and adequacy of the accommodation to stay as well. Thus, these components make sense in the eyes of travellers in terms of the perception of destination.

Generally, according to the results of the survey, the majority of the tourists coming to Amasya province responded that they had enjoyment from visit and thought that they would recommend it to their relatives. Likewise, based on the survey results, tourists who think that the tourism image of

Amasya province is positive think that the natural and historical attractions of this destination make a great contribution to Amasya province. The attitudes and behaviors of the local people towards tourist plays an important role in making a tourism center more attractive. These findings were consistent with the findings found in past research, such that, an empirical study conducted in Portugal by Vieira et al. (2020) contended that “the tangible (e.g., city heritage and natural beauties) and intangible (e.g., experiences during the trip; meet new people and try something different and being an environmentally friendly city) dimensions together turn the destination product into a multi-dimensional asset”. A very recent study conducted by Aliedan et al. (2021) found that destination image and tourist experience quality were found to fully mediate the influence of event quality on tourist satisfaction. Another very recent research performed in Langkawi/Malaysia by Nasir, Mohamad, and Ab Ghani (2021) contended that providing high-quality transportation service, attractive culture and adequate infrastructure could directly or indirectly increase tourist visits to Langkawi Island through satisfaction. Similarly, an empirical study conducted by Loi et al. (2017) shows that satisfaction with destination characteristics (e.g., historic and religious places, experiencing different lifestyle, tourist guide service and etc.) are realized to significantly influence the probability of revisit intention of budget travellers to Nepal.

When we look at the results of the survey, 84 out of 100 tourists coming to Amasya province stated that the tradesmen and employees in the region are kind and helpful. In terms of Amasya destination, these statistics show that the social carrying capacity of the local people is very high. On the other hand, 81 out of every 100 people who came to the city were satisfied with the quality of the restaurants, 72 out of 100 people had positive opinions about the local dishes in this region. In addition, most of the tourists who come to Amasya destination state that it has natural and historical attractions and think that it has an untouched clean environment.

On the other hand, importantly, 68 out of 100 participants of the survey study consider Amasya destination as a reliable tourism region. However the remaining 13% did not see it as reliable, while 19% stated that they did not have an opinion. Amasya province is a new emerging tourism destination and is not well known due limited marketing strategies, so the authorities should prepare a strategic plan to search the reasons of this perception. The province of Amasya has some other points that need to be developed in order to increase its touristic attractiveness and to provide better service to incoming tourists. Because the most of participants do not agree with the scale item that is “There are many package tours for this destination”. This means the province of Amasya has great deficiencies in terms of promotional marketing. With the minimization of these deficiencies, it is undoubtedly thought that the rate of tourists coming to the city will be increased. In addition, there will be great increases in package tour sales. Effective management of tourism destinations depends on factors such as examining the characteristics of the destination well, coordinating its resources and marketing it in a way that will create the desired level of demand. The products and target audience of the destination can also affect destination management. It is normal for the management program for each destination to differ. In this respect, Amasya province possesses many historical places cultural heritage from Ottoman Empire and other civilizations, ecotourism and farm tourism sources. Thus DMO and other related authorities should make a management program over these touristic products.

Moreover, most of the participants think that the tourism infrastructure of this destination is insufficient. Considering that the tourism season is the most intense in June, July and August, excluding our provinces that carry out winter tourism throughout our country, it is possible to state that Amasya may encounter a number of challenges at this point. Another scale item that the most of respondents do not agree is “It has an advanced public transportation system”. The population that Amasya destination will have together with the tourists coming in the summer months will exceed the limits of the public transport capacity of this province. For this reason, the problem of ‘transportation’ is seen as one of the most important elements to be solved. In solving the problems of the region with a team of professionals on paying attention to the environmental planning of the destination, determining the carrying capacity and accepting tourists accordingly, and conducting the Environmental Impact Assessment should be the first step.

This study like others may have some limitations. Such that, the current research was carried out on domestic tourists and visitors coming to Amasya, and foreign tourists who made a small number of visits during the year could not be included. Since it is expected that a positive destination image will positively affect customer satisfaction, this relationship was not hypothesized, but the relationship between them was tested and presented statistically. As a result, the main point here is to reveal which factors are perceived positively or negatively by the tourists, which the study has accomplished. For future research studies with a larger sample including foreign tourists in the region may be carried out

at certain time intervals. In this context, researches can be conducted to test the differences in image perception between countries. Although visitor views are affected by different factors, it is thought that such studies are important for the future of tourism and should be repeated.

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