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Time for Tea: Factors of Service Quality, Memorable Tourism Experience and Loyalty in Sustainable Tea Tourism Destination

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Abstract: Underpinned by Script Theory and the S-O-R model, this research enhances the green tourism consumption literature to identify how destination service quality contributes to visitors' memorable experiences and loyalty towards a place-based food tourism attraction. A total of 202 tourists who visited the Best of Highlands tea plantation in Malaysia were surveyed using an online questionnaire. Using PLS-SEM, this study has several notable findings: (i) destination service quality factors: activities, cleanliness, language, and security emerged as predictors of memorable tourism experiences; (ii) memorable tourism experiences strongly predicted destination loyalty; and (iii) memorable tourism experiences mediate the path between destination service quality and destination loyalty. This study therefore provides new insights into both sustainable tea tourism and script theory with respect to how memories guide future decision making. These results also provide insights for tea tourism providers in designing an unforgettable destination that stimulates the tourist's intention to revisit the destination and to communicate it to others.

Keywords: tea tourism; destination service quality; memorable tourism experience; destination loyalty; sustainable tourism

1. Introduction

In recent years, sustainability has become "perhaps the most prominent feature of contemporary tourism discourse" [1]. Truly sustainable tourism should make the destinations better for people to live in as well as visit. In general, the focus of sustainable tourism is to protect the environment and natural resources, provide socio-economic benefits to local communities, preserve cultural heritage, and generate authentic tourism experiences [2]. An increasingly important role of sustainable tourism practices is the promotion of local food produce which stimulates destination networks and supply chains and contributes to the association of food products with destination identity [3]. Such place-based food attractions may therefore be significant locations for and promoters of green tourism consumption as well as sustainable tourism development [4]. Memorable experiences are important for such food tourism encounters as they not only may encourage destination loyalty and positive word-of-mouth, but they may also encourage continued purchase of produce from the destination thereby contributing to businesses and the regional economy [4].

Similar to wine tourism and the wine industry, tea tourism is an important contributor to the development of a sustainable tea industry [5], given that tea-producing regions can

gain a competitive advantage by linking tea production with tourist services [6]. Apart from contributing to both the social and economic development of tea-producing regions, it is also necessary for the tea industry to revisit its business model to remain competitive [7,8]. Jolliffe [9] claimed that tea tourism is seen as a multi-dimensional system resulting from the interaction of tourism and tea culture subsystem, as by experiencing tea, it helps to promote national and regional identities, while discovering the religions and rituals practiced by locals. Generally, tea tourism includes a wide range of tea-related destination elements including factories, agricultural production (plantations), performance, museums and other heritage attractions, plantation-based accommodations, and tea houses [10,11]. Although tea tourism is regarded as an increasingly important form of tourism in many countries that integrates cultural and culinary tourism, research in this area remains surprisingly limited and is concentrated in three countries: China, India, and Sri Lanka [11], furthering the need to examine tea tourism in a wider context.

Partly with an aim of expanding the range of destinations that are included in studies of tea tourism, the primary purpose of this study is to better understand the factors influencing tourist perceptions towards sustainable tea tourism in Malaysia, especially with respect to destination loyalty, experience, and service quality. The Best of Highlands (BOH) tea plantation (https://bohtea.com/) (accessed on 28 August 2022) located in the Cameron Highlands, Malaysia, is the location of this research. It is Southeast Asia's largest tea plantation [12] and the world's 23rd largest tea producer (over 10,800 tonnes per year) [13]. Founded in 1929, the BOH tea plantation has earned many international awards (e.g., World Branding Award 2021–2022) for the quality of its products [14]. With its panoramic landscapes, the BOH tea plantation is ranked as the top 'must visit' destination in Cameron Highlands for both local and international tourists [15,16] and is therefore an appropriate site in which to conduct sustainable tea tourism research.

Destination loyalty (revisit or recommend intention) is an important competitive factor in tourism [17]. From the perspective of tourism providers, loyalty is often used as an indicator to measure the positive attitudes and perceptions of tourists towards a destination that, in turn, suggest future visitation and positive word-of-mouth [18]. Destination service quality (DSQ) is increasingly recognized as a competitive advantage to foster loyalty among tourists. As He et al. [19] argued, tourists who experience high quality service perceive greater value on a destination, which will be positively linked to post-behavior such as revisiting a destination or recommending it to others. As a result, there are calls to better understand the attributes of DSQ across different elements of tourist destination experience [20]. Focusing on these issues, the first part of this study explores the DSQ factors in a sustainable tourism context, i.e., tea tourism, that incorporates the various cultural, economic, environmental, historical, and social dimensions of place [3,4,8,9,21]. A wide range of activities are particular to tea tourists, including tasting, tea factory and museum visits, tea leaf picking, as well as participating in the tea making process and cultural events. The combination of all these activities means that tea tourism can generate multiple income streams and opportunities. This, in turn, can help expand and promote the industry, rejuvenate local culture and heritage, and reinforce local identity in tea producing areas [9].

The emotional arousal provided by truly memorable experiences may lead to greater loyalty. For example, Chen and Rahman [22] showed that tourists are increasingly likely to suggest a destination to families and friends if the destination gave them vivid memories. Remembered experiences greatly influence future travel decision making [23], with Oh et al. [24] suggesting that memorable experiences are the most influential and reliable information sources guiding the formulation of future trips. Although MTEs have been identified as significant in other forms of tourism [25], its influence in the setting of tea tourism has not been investigated extensively.

Script Theory, which describes the bonding between memory and the way an individual processes information, is a potential means to better understand how MTEs can be positioned as a mechanism to connect between DSQ and destination loyalty. Manthiou

et al. [26] referred to "script" as a knowledge construction gained through emotional experience that is kept in the memory system to guide future behaviors. Despite tourists' inability to recall specific trip details, the pleasant feelings gained from the journey, such as being happy, satisfied, and relaxed, can still be used as key catalysts to influence revisit intention [27]. In other words, travel memory is the "script" written within the tourist's mind that is used for future journey planning. Therefore, regardless of which form of tourism, it is imperative that the destination imprints a "memorable" experience so that tourists can recall those experiences [28]. Responding to the call of Coudounaris and Sthapit [29] to enrich the impacts of MTEs in "real world" tourism, the second part of this study aims to understand specific attributes of sustainable tea plantation visits that can store the vivid memories of tea tourists, and how these memorable experiences impact destination loyalty (i.e., revisit and recommend intentions).

A stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model is recognized to be a useful framework to address the gap in the literature by examining the mediating factor that would enhance long-term behavior. Emerging from the environmental psychology literature, the S-O-R model offers valuable insights in explaining how human affect and behaviors are influenced by the physical and social environment [30]. Many studies have also confirmed the mediation pattern of the S-O-R theory, in which the organism plays a powerful mediating role between stimuli and response [31]. As argued by Kim, Lee, and Jung [32], an integrative S-O-R model was found to be suitable to elucidate tourist behavior combining both cognitive and affective systems that incorporate all previous engaged experiences and involve long-term memory.

Taking the BOH tea plantation as the study site, quantitative research was conducted among domestic tourists in Malaysia to address the proposed research questions, which are as follows. Which aspects of DSQ factors influence MTEs? Do MTEs influence destination loyalty? Do MTEs mediate the path between the aspect of DSQ factors and destination loyalty? Given that little emphasis has been placed on sustainability in the area of tea tourism in emerging economies, this line of research could be useful in developing tea regions by providing direction to destination providers on how to develop, implement, and improve sustainable tea tourism practices. Theoretically, the results of this study extend the sustainable tea tourism literature by adding new knowledge and extending the applicability of Script Theory and the S-O-R model in understanding the interrelationships between DSQ factors, MTEs, and destination loyalty. Several significant managerial issues that may have implications for tea tourism providers in improving the quality of service, tourist memorable experiences, and competitive advantages of tea-oriented attractions are also discussed.

2. Literature

2.1. Tea Tourism

Scholarly literature on tea tourism is mainly concentrated on the supply side (tea plantations), with limited attention given to demand perspectives (tourists) [33]. Supply-side research mostly uses qualitative and stakeholder approaches [8], with attention given to tea tourism development [34,35], community livelihood and well-being [36], labor division [37], integration of tea plantation and tea tourism [38], and ecological systems [39]. Demand-oriented research is primarily quantitative. Research themes include the types of tea preferred by foreign tourists [40], tea drinking attitude and willingness to purchase tea-related souvenirs [8], sense of place and environmentally responsible behavior [41], intention to visit [42], and satisfaction [43].

Significantly for the development of a better understanding of tea tourism consumers, theoretically informed research on tea tourist behavior is limited [41,44]. The theory of planned behavior has been used to explain intention to visit tea plantations in Malaysia [42] and Thailand [43]. However, despite Script Theory's application in related tourism contexts, including coffee [45] and wine tourism [46] to capture the effects of memorable experiences

on future travel intention, no study has employed this theory in the field of sustainable tea tourism.

2.2. Underpinning Theory—Script Theory

According to Tomkins [47], the future decisions of individuals are guided by remembered experiences stored in memory as scripts. Following the information processing logic, past knowledge or experiences that are kept in long-term memory are known as schemata. They are retrieved to compare with current experiences, and are used to guide decisions, e.g., purchasing decisions [26]. These schemata are mental constructs that allow individuals to classify experiences and functions as a lens to filter selected stimuli that are familiar when making decisions [48]. When one is highly stimulated by a new event, a schema is recalled from long-term memory to the working memory and serves as a frame of reference for interpreting, accepting, and understanding the event [49]. Theoretically, script is therefore a function of the event context.

Script Theory proposes that memorable experiences are created when the destination introduces distinctive attributes. Experiences outside of regular scripts, such as unique landscapes, interaction with the guest house host, and traditional food tasting, were reported as unusual rituals that make eco-cultural tourism memorable [50]. This logic is integral to the idea that tourist experience should be at the core of destination promotion. Therefore, from this perspective, in order to gain competitive advantages, it is crucial that the destination provides unique goods/services or memories that add to the tourists' scripts [51]. The strategy of highlighting authentic and unique experiences to assist tourists in gaining different perspectives on how the world functions may be an effective approach in marketing a sustainable destination [4,50]. With respect to sustainable tea tourism, those unexpected experiences and pleasure received from the tea plantation visit may also add to the script of travelling. These scripts could, in some circumstances, encourage tourists to recommend destinations to their families, friends, or relatives and/or revisit the destination [26].

Using the context of tea tourism, this study adopts Script Theory to explain how the behavior of tourists is formed on the basis of the knowledge and experience stored in the long-term memory. That is, we predict that the external stimuli (i.e., quality of the service perceived in destination) and emotional experience (memorable or forgettable) are the key aspects that generated the "script" during a sustainable tea visit. Those scripts are stored in the tourist's memory, and the memory subsequently will be retrieved and, in turn, impact the process of making travel decisions.

2.3. Supporting Theory—Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model

The S-O-R model was introduced by Mehrabian and Russell [30]. The central idea of this model highlighted that a stimulus (S) received by an individual will facilitate the development of internal states (O) and, in turn, elicit consequent responses of approach or avoidance (R). This model provides a parsimonious and robust foundation for predicting tourists' responses through a series of processes [51]. In most cases, the "organism" in the S-O-R model is regarded as the mediating components or internal structures that intervene between external stimuli and the subsequent actions or responses [30]. For example, empirical research on hospitality and tourism has shown that the emotions [52] and memories [53] of tourists act as significant mediators linking perceived destination attributes and tourist behavior. Recent research by Su, Hsu, and Boostrom [54] also asserted that the emotional states (positive and negative emotions) elicited from eco-friendly destinations play an important role in explaining the environmentally responsible behavior of tourists. In association with the literature, the present study adopted the S-O-R model to predict MTEs as a potential organism that mediates the relationship between the service quality of tea destinations and tourists' loyalty behavior.

3. Hypotheses Development

3.1. Destination Service Quality (DSQ) and Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs)

DSQ measures "perceptions of the quality of services experienced during a stay which remains in the minds of tourists" [55]. This term is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct which varies according to the context of tourism. For example, Lari et al. [56] reported consumables and physical environment, availability of halal food, cost of food and drinks, and employee attitude as the main dimensions of DSQ in theme park tourism. Zhang et al. [23] captured DSQ on ten dimensions: accessibility, activity variety, environment management, hospitality, infrastructure, local culture, physiography, place attachment, quality of service, and superstructure, when examining tourist intention to visit China. In another example, Kozak [57] conceptualized DSQ into eight concrete dimensions, including accommodation, hygiene and cleanliness, hospitality, facilities and activities, prices, language, local transport services, and airport services.

Empirically, DSQ factors are often reported as significant predictors of tourists' memorable tourism experience (MTE). For instance, exclusive experiences including interacting with the local community and discovering their culture are the main themes in the formation of MTEs among Australian tourists [58]. In urban tourism, the hosted events are evidenced as the most enticing aspect for tourists [59]. Ekanayake and Gnanapala's study [60] documented that the service quality and infrastructure of a destination were key factors that heighten tourists' loyalty and experiences. Another island tourism study from Moon and Han [61] reported that the features of service quality and local culture positively stimulate unforgettable experience. As such, destination qualities have a key role in building positive and unforgettable experiences to tourists. Building on the above, we propose that favorable DSQ will lead to MTEs in sustainable tea tourism. By utilizing the scale of Kozak [51], the present study uses multiple attributes, i.e., activities, amenities, cleanliness, hospitality, language, security, and café service quality, to capture tourists' perceptions of trips at a tea plantation. The justifications for each of the factors follows.

A variety of activities at tea-related destinations may provide tourists with memorable experiences. This includes touring the tea factory, which offers an opportunity to learn about the quality of tea and how it is produced [62]. The visual landscape in tea plantations offers a different dimension for those who want a relaxing experience [63]. Additionally, activities like visiting tea gardens, watching tea cultural performances, and picking tea leaves are found as the main aspects that enhance tourist experience [8]. For example, in Sri Lanka, the Ceylon Tea Trails provide tourists with heritage tea experiences as well as also promoting a sense of calmness [64]. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H1a. *Activities in tea destination positively influence MTEs.*

Amenities play essential roles in distinguishing one destination from another, so efforts to promote unique amenities are therefore common [65]. Kozak [57] added amenities as one of the factors in measuring service quality in a destination. These aspects include numbers of toilets, children-oriented facilities, and Internet connections at tourist spots. To validate the importance of this factor, Vengesayi et al. [66] demonstrated a positive connection between amenities in enhancing destination development, destination image, and attractiveness. Similarly, Song and Hsu [67] documented that destination amenities are the most important attribute in influencing tourists' overall travel experiences. Thus, we predict that adequate amenities at tea destinations will provide tourists with unforgettable experiences. The hypothesis is formulated as:

H1b. *Amenities in tea destination positively influence MTEs.*

Cleanliness is a major concern among tourists, especially in the post-COVID-19 context [68]. According to Kozak [57], the overall cleanliness of a destination is determined by the level of hygiene in all tourist areas, spaces, and facilities. The empirical work conducted by Rajaratnam et al. [69] showed that cleanliness was the most influential factor on destination quality in rural tourism. Food hygiene and cleanliness was also found by

Choe and Kim [70] as a major influence on positive tourist perceptions. Likewise, Kala [71] also emphasized the importance to tourism operators to constantly monitor the cleanliness of the destination site. Therefore, cleanliness is likely a critical element of the perceived quality of sustainable tea tourism destinations. The hypothesis suggested is:

H1c. *Cleanliness in tea destination positively influence MTEs.*

Tasci et al. [72] claimed that hospitality is a crucial dimension in the creation of MTEs. The scale developed by Kozak [57] conceptualized hospitality as the extent to which the local people and staff at the destination site are helpful, sincere, and attentive when interacting with tourists. With respect to the service quality of theme parks, staff attitudes and behavior were identified as the main factors influencing the travel experiences of Muslim visitors [56]. Similarly, Zhang et al. [23] conclude hospitable staff influences the intensity of tourists' memorable experiences. Thus, it is predicted that:

H1d. *Hospitality in tea destination positively influence MTEs.*

The English language is not only the leading language in communication, negotiation, and trade, but also has an increasingly important role when interacting with tourists from different origins [73]. As such, Kozak [57] incorporated language as one of the factors when measuring DSQ. Tourists tend to be dissatisfied when service providers are unable to communicate effectively [74]. Tourist satisfaction and travel experiences can be enhanced by improving the language skills of service staff at destinations [20]. We therefore suggest that the English proficiency of staff and the use of English language in signboards will help create a memorable experience for tea tourists. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1e. *Language in tea destination positively influence MTEs.*

As Kozak [57] indicated, components affecting tourists' perceived security and safety at a destination include the level of safety in the place of stay, at tourist areas, and while using the local transport. The consequences of security issues on tourists' perceptions have been widely reported. For example, Zou and Meng [75] note that criminal activities, natural disasters, and political unrest negatively affect tourist arrivals because people naturally react to events that may jeopardize their vacations. Yen et al. [76] report the positive relationship between destination-perceived security on destination image, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention. Hence, it is hypothesized:

H1f. *Security in tea destination positively influence MTEs.*

Service quality plays a crucial foundation in developing distinctive competence and is viewed as a key source of competitive advantage in tourism and hospitality [77]. In the café/restaurant setting, service quality that includes quality of food, attitude of staff, and level of services is deemed important [51]. Staff who provide excellent and professional services can effectively convey the image and core values of an organization, as well as enhance customers' affective response such as memorability and excitement [24]. Ryu and Han [78] found that social cues (e.g., attitude and service provided) are a positive influence on memorable dining experiences. Stone et al. [79] further stated that food quality is a fundamental element affecting a *customer's* affective and cognitive responses to a restaurant. Consequently, we propose that:

H1g. *Café service quality in tea destination positively influence MTEs.*

3.2. Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs) and Destination Loyalty

MTEs are favorably recalled tourism experiences after an event [80]. MTEs are often used as an operational definition to quantitatively capture the essence of Script Theory in explaining tourists' experiences. Destination loyalty denotes a sense of commitment towards a destination, which is often reflected in tourist intention to recommend to their friends and relatives and to revisit the destination despite the existence of alternatives [22].

Research into destination loyalty is conceptualized into three main approaches: attitudinal, behavioral, and composite loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty can be explained as future loyalty that comprises willingness to recommend or sharing a good review of a place to others [81]. Behavioral loyalty refers to the actual revisitation caused by previous destination experiences [72], while composite loyalty comprises both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty [22]. Similar to the conceptualization used by Jeong and Kim [17], this study measures destination loyalty in a composite fashion, which is captured by two dimensions: recommendation and revisit intentions.

A positive relationship between MTEs and destination loyalty is reported in many types of tourism. For instance, tourists were inclined to revisit a yoga destination providing positive and unique memories in terms of stress management and relief. Similarly, Zhong et al. [82] found that theme park visitors who experienced exceptional stimuli (film scenes, intense visual, and audio effect) indicated high MTEs and loyalty. MTEs were also found to exhibit positive effects on loyalty in cultural tourism [22], where tourists and hosts interactions were perceived as a positive and memorable cultural exchange that drives loyalty. Although MTEs' applicability in sustainable tea tourism has not been empirically researched, evidence seems to suggest that memorable experiences from a tea plantation visit will motivate tourists to revisit or recommend to others. For example, Chinese tourists who enjoyed tea plantation activities such as watching tea cultural performances, picking tea leaves, and learning about tea knowledge were found to be more likely to return [8]. Likewise, visits to tea plantations in India, which allow tourists to be immersed completely in peace and inner exploration, were found to provide lasting memories that promoted positive word-of-mouth [8].

The abovementioned findings are consistent with Script Theory, i.e., lasting memories drive future decisions, as they may add to the permanent memories as renewed scripts [44]. Based on these studies, the memorable experiences gained from tea plantation visits will be stored permanently in the minds of tea tourists, where those memorable scripts will be activated and used to guide future trips. Therefore, this study hypothesized:

H2. *MTEs positively influence destination loyalty.*

3.3. Mediating Role of Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs)

Research that investigates the mediating roles of MTEs remains relatively limited. For example, Zhang et al. [23] reported MTEs mediated the relationship between destination image and revisit intention, where tourists who were impressed with the destination were more likely to gain MTEs, which leads to revisit intention. Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró [83] found that participation, hedonism, nostalgia, novelty, and local culture formed memorable experiences which resulted in higher satisfaction in wine tourism, while MTEs also play a mediating role between involvement and loyalty in gastronomic tourism [84].

The role of MTEs as being a potential link between DSQ and destination loyalty is clearly outlined in Script Theory and the S-O-R model. The central idea of these theories suggests that exceptional or unique experiences (e.g., exceeded expectation services) different from regular scripts may create memorable experiences that drive future behavior. The reason for MTEs to act as a mediator can also be explained by tourists generally being more widely travelled, so only those experiences that are unique, authentic, and memorable would impress them to revisit or recommend to others [84]. The study of Manthiou et al. [26] asserts that theme park visitors' satisfaction and loyalty appeared in sequential process, with memorable experience being the significant mediator. This finding supported the notion that the "memorable scripts" will be automatically retrieved and used for future decision making. Based on such research and underpinned by Script Theory and the S-O-R model, this study proposes that MTEs would be the mediator between DSQ factors and destination loyalty in a sustainable tea tourism context. The hypotheses are proposed as

H3a–g. *MTEs mediate the relationship between: (H3a) activities, (H3b) amenities, (H3c) cleanliness, (H3d) hospitality, (H3e) language, (H3f) security, and (H3g) cafe service quality on destination loyalty.*

As depicted in Figure 1, using BOH tea plantation as the study context and under-pinned by Script Theory and supported by the S-O-R model, a total of eight direct and seven indirect hypotheses are developed. Destination loyalty is a higher-order construct with two dimensions, namely, revisit intention and recommend intention.
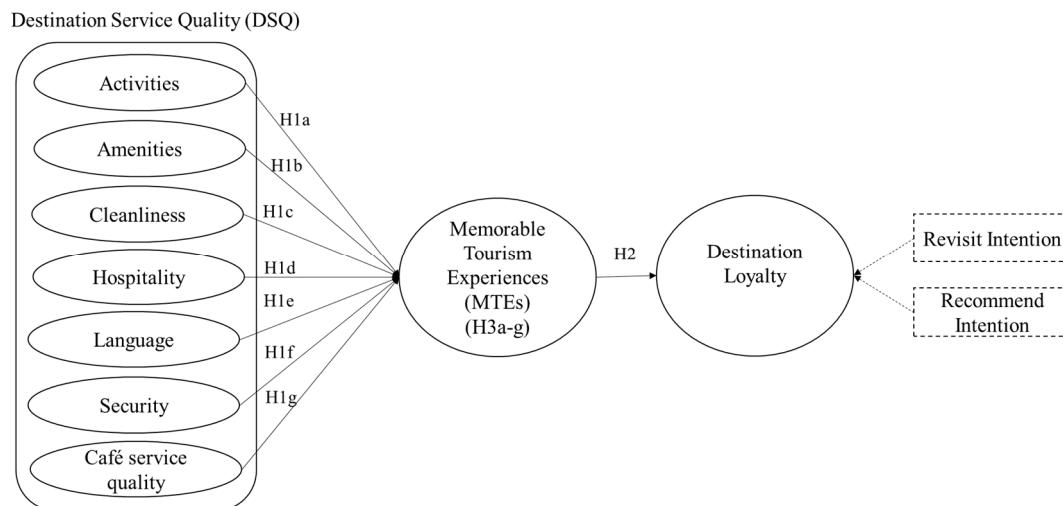

Figure 1. Research Model.

4. Methods

4.1. Data Collection

To address the objectives of this study, the target respondents were recruited using purposive sampling technique as it is almost impossible to obtain a complete list of the tourist population at a destination [85]. As highlighted in several related studies [86,87], tourists visiting the destination site are the most appropriate sample for providing a reliable and valid response to questions related to their travel experience towards a destination. This study's target population are domestic tourists visiting the BOH tea plantation in Malaysia. When filling out the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to respond based on their most recent tourism experience in the BOH tea plantation.

Since the data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic from September to November 2020, an online questionnaire was developed through Google Forms. Digital Influence Lab [88] reports that about 88% of the population in Malaysia uses the Internet and 81% of them are active social media users. Therefore, this study used social media as the option to collect data. The questionnaire (Google Form) link was distributed through various social media platforms that are used widely in Malaysia, e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Disseminating a survey via social media has been the most effective tool to reach samples during national lockdown, where outdoor activities were reduced, and social distancing was maintained to prevent the spread of the virus [89]. Apart from this, the advantage of using this approach includes: (i) facilitating communication and effective involvement with respondents; (ii) making it useful for tourism studies involving respondents in remote areas with different demographic contexts; and (iii) collecting data from individuals who may be difficult to reach using physical modes especially during a crisis [90,91].

Of the 235 returned questionnaires, 33 responses were eliminated because of straight-lining responses (non-differentiation in rating) and a large number of missing values. The usable sample size of 202 was considered satisfactory based on post hoc power analysis [92] with the effect size of 0.15 and the power level at 80 percent. A sample size exceeding 160 is considered sufficient to produce informed results [93]. As indicated in Table 1, most respondents are female (63.40%), aged between 26 to 30 years old (32.20%), and visited the BOH tea plantation only once (47%).

Table 1. Demographic Profile.

Demographic Attribute		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	74	36.6
	Female	128	63.4
Age	21–25 years old	60	29.7
	26–30 years old	65	32.2
	31–35 years old	29	14.4
	36–40 years old	16	7.9
	41 years old and above	16	8
Number of Time visited BOH tea plantation	Only once	95	47
	2–3 times	61	30.2
	4–5 times	27	13.4
	6–7 times	11	5.4
	More than 8 times	8	4
Total		202	100

4.2. Instrumentation

All items in this study were modified from validated instruments and measured using a seven point-Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). DSQ was measured using seven factors: activities (two items), amenities (three items), cleanliness (three items), hospitality (five items), language (two items), security (four items), and café service quality (three items), proposed by Kozak [57]. MTEs were measured using a scale modified from Kim et al. [80]. Destination loyalty was conceptualized based on two dimensions: revisit intention (three items) and recommend intention (three items) introduced by Zeithaml et al. [94]. An open question, i.e., list the negative experience you had, was included to better understand respondents' perceptions of travel in the BOH tea plantation and to further explain the aspects that closed questions could not capture. Before data collection was undertaken, a pre-test with a panel of ten members was conducted to examine questionnaire clarity and validity. The amended questionnaire was then piloted with 30 local tourists. The results indicated that all variables have shown adequate reliability, with a Cronbach alpha value of above 0.7.

5. Results

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the interrelationships among the proposed constructs. Compared with covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM), PLS-SEM is deemed particularly appropriate for this study since it is concerned with examining a model for the purpose of theory testing and prediction [95]. The use of PLS-SEM permits maximization of the explained variance in terms of providing managerial insights [96,97] as opposed to CB-SEM that aims to minimize the difference between theoretical and empirical covariance matrix [98]. PLS-SEM is well-performed when the model requires the use of latent variables scores for follow-up analysis, i.e., the evaluation of higher-order constructs and for the model that requires the use of bootstrapping technique for the analysis of mediating variables [95].

5.1. Common Method Bias

The common method variance was analyzed following Harman's single-factor procedure. The exploratory factor analysis results of the unrotated factor solution showed that 41.87 percent (<50%) of variance was recorded for the first factor. Thus, we conclude that common method variance is not an issue [99].

5.2. Measurement Model

When evaluating measurement model, three criteria were emphasized: internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. As demonstrated in Table 2, the

values of CR surpassed the cut-off point of 0.70 [95]. The convergent validity estimation indicates outer loading for all items are higher than the threshold values (>0.7), except for C1 and S4; meanwhile, AVE scores ranged from 0.552 to 0.816, which supported the required standards [95]. Next, for discriminant validity, the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion was used. As exhibited in Table 3, all constructs achieved scores lower than the threshold of 0.9 suggested by Henseler et al. [100], indicating discriminant validity of constructs. In addition, mean and standard deviations were also evaluated, with respondents seeming to have a positive perception of their experience in the BOH tea plantation (see Table 2).

Table 2. Results of measurement model.

	Mean	SD	Outer Loading	CR	AVE
Amenities				0.870	0.691
A1: The number of toilets in BOH tea plantation is sufficient	4.678	1.480	0.814		
A2: Children-oriented facilities in BOH tea plantation are good	4.743	1.443	0.86		
A3: Internet connection at tourist spots in BOH tea plantation is good	4.881	1.416	0.819		
Activities				0.850	0.739
ACT1: Shopping facilities in BOH tea plantation are good	5.094	1.311	0.864		
ACT2: Daily tour services in BOH tea plantation are good	5.005	1.355	0.856		
Cleanliness				0.899	0.816
C1: Cleanliness of tourist areas in BOH tea plantation is good		D			
C2: Cleanliness at the cafe of BOH tea plantation is good	5.243	1.370	0.898		
C3: Cleanliness of tea garden in BOH tea plantation is good	5.292	1.273	0.908		
Hospitality				0.859	0.552
H1: Staff at BOH tea plantation are sincere	5.099	1.297	0.687		
H2: Local people in BOH tea plantation are sincere	5.025	1.232	0.659		
H3: Staff in BOH tea plantation is attentive in a general sense	5.099	1.250	0.795		
H4: Staff in BOH tea plantation is helpful in a general sense	5.020	1.289	0.817		
H5: Staff in BOH tea plantation is humorous in a general sense	4.936	1.320	0.745		
Language				0.833	0.713
L1: English level of staff in BOH tea plantation is quite good in a general sense	4.822	1.378	0.805		
L2: Adequacy of written information in English on signboards is good	4.951	1.307	0.882		
Security				0.892	0.734
S1: Security in place of stay in BOH tea plantation is good	4.955	1.450	0.827		
S2: Security at tourist areas in BOH tea plantation is good	5.055	1.429	0.884		
S3: Security of local transport in BOH tea plantation is good	4.960	1.349	0.858		
S4: Regardless of time, I feel safe while wandering in BOH tea plantation		D			
Café Service Quality				0.907	0.765
SQ1: Quality of food at BOH tea cafe is good	4.886	1.600	0.876		
SQ2: Attitude of staff at BOH tea cafe is good	5.188	1.329	0.88		
SQ3: Level of services at BOH tea plantation is good	5.134	1.333	0.867		
Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs)				0.881	0.597
MTES1: I experienced something new during this visit	5.119	1.303	0.71		
MTES2: I had a chance to closely experience the local culture of a destination area	5.099	1.393	0.745		
MTES3: I learned something about myself from this tourism experience	5.238	1.376	0.819		
MTES4: I revitalized through this tourism experience	5.168	1.418	0.781		
MTES5: I really enjoyed this tourism experience	5.396	1.372	0.805		

Table 2. *Cont.*

	Mean	SD	Outer Loading	CR	AVE
Recommend Intention				0.893	0.806
RE1: I will tell my positive impressions to my family and friends	5.134	1.441	0.904		
RE2: I will recommend BOH tea plantation to all those who search for a trip advice			D		
RE3: I will launch a campaign form my family and close friends to make a visit to BOH tea plantation	5.302	1.443	0.891		
Revisit Intention				0.882	0.713
RI1: I will revisit BOH tea plantation soon within coming years	5.391	1.335	0.809		
RI2: BOH tea plantation would be my first choice if I think to make a relaxing trip in the future	5.203	1.460	0.862		
RI3: I think I would come to BOH tea plantation once again despite of an additional travel cost in my budget	5.030	1.431	0.862		

D—Item deleted due to low loading (<0.40); SD—Standard Deviation; CR—Composite Reliability; AVE—Average Variance Extracted.

Table 3. Results of HTMT.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Activities										
2. Amenities	0.795									
3. Cleanliness	0.799	0.551								
4. Hospitality	0.877	0.673	0.781							
5. Language	0.681	0.890	0.737	0.732						
6. MTE	0.838	0.674	0.734	0.746	0.862					
7. Recommend Intention	0.657	0.548	0.682	0.692	0.699	0.815				
8. Revisit Intention	0.742	0.597	0.654	0.724	0.738	0.867	0.860			
9. Security	0.720	0.711	0.569	0.709	0.873	0.845	0.658	0.715		
10. Café Service Quality	0.764	0.594	0.831	0.747	0.680	0.701	0.626	0.669	0.621	

HTMT < 0.9.

5.3. Higher-Order Construct

A two-stage approach was applied to assess destination loyalty which was manifested as a high-order construct (HOC), with recommend intention and revisit intention as the lower-order constructs (LOCs). In the first stage, the assessment of LOCs was performed using a standard reflective measurement. In the second stage, the LOC scores are utilized as the indicator for the HOC. Following Sarstedt et al. [97], we first examined the weight and significance of LOCs. The findings demonstrated that both recommend intention ($\beta = 0.422$, $p < 0.001$) and revisit intention ($\beta = 0.665$, $p < 0.001$) had a pronounced and significant effect when regressed towards loyalty (see Table 4). Further, the VIF values for both LOCs are below 3, signifying that collinearity issues do not exist [101]. Therefore, it can be concluded that destination loyalty was formatively constructed by two LOCs: recommend intention and revisit intention.

Table 4. Results of higher-order construct.

LOC	Outer Weight	Std Error	Outer VIF	t-Value	*p*-Value
Recommend Intention	0.422	0.105	1.843	4.032	<0.001
Revisit Intention	0.665	0.097	1.843	6.867	<0.001

LOC = Lower-order construct.

5.4. Structural Model

The hypothesized relationships were assessed in the structural model based on a five-step approach. The findings showed that collinearity between the constructs is not a concern, as the VIF values ranged from 2.065 to 2.326 (<3) [101]. Using the bootstrapping technique, 5000 sub-samples were used to explore relationship significance. As shown in Table 5, activities (H1a: β = 0.193, t = 2.784), cleanliness (H1c: β = 0.142 t = 2.002), language (H1e: β = 0.171, t = 2.673), and security (H1f: β = 0.352, t = 4.624) are the DSQ factors that positively predicted MTEs, providing support to H1a, H1c, H1e, and H1f. However, there were no relationships between amenities, hospitality, and café service quality on MTEs; hence, H1b, H1d, and H1g were not supported. As predicted, destination loyalty was positively influenced by MTEs (H2: β = 0.744, t = 20.149); thus, H2 was supported.

Table 5. Results of Structural Model.

Path Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	t-Value	*p*-Value	VIF	F^2
Direct Relationship						
(H1a) Activities → MTEs	0.193	0.069	2.784 *	0.003	2.129	0.048 (S)
(H1b) Amenities → MTEs	−0.014	0.059	0.239	0.406	2.060	0.001 (T)
(H1c) Cleanliness → MTEs	0.142	0.071	2.002 *	0.023	2.227	0.025 (S)
(H1d) Hospitality → MTEs	0.070	0.085	0.822	0.206	2.326	0.006 (T)
(H1e) Language → MTEs	0.171	0.064	2.673 *	0.004	2.147	0.038 (S)
(H1f) Security → MTEs	0.352	0.076	4.624 ***	<0.001	2.065	0.166 (M)
(H1g) CSQ → MTEs	0.084	0.071	1.183	0.119	2.240	0.009 (T)
(H2) MTEs → Destination Loyalty	0.744	0.037	20.149 ***	<0.001	N/A	N/A
	R^2		Q^2			
MTEs	0.639		0.365			
Destination Loyalty	0.554		0.457			
Indirect Relationship						
(H3a) Activities → MTEs → DL	0.144	0.049	2.923 *	0.004		
(H3b) Amenities → MTEs → DL	−0.011	0.047	0.225	0.822		
(H3c) Cleanliness → MTEs → DL	0.105	0.051	2.057 *	0.040		
(H3d) Hospitality → MTEs → DL	0.052	0.058	0.891	0.373		
(H3b) Amenities → MTEs → DL	−0.011	0.047	0.225	0.822		
(H3e) Language → MTEs → DL	0.128	0.051	2.496 *	0.013		
(H3f) Security → MTEs → DL	0.262	0.058	4.498 ***	<0.001		
(H3g) CSQ → MTEs → DL	0.062	0.055	1.126	0.261		

CSQ: Café service quality; MTEs: Memorable Tourism Experiences; DL: Destination loyalty; *** *p* < 0.001; * *p* < 0.05; the range for F^2: T—Trivial, S—Small, M—Medium

As indicated in Table 5, MTEs significantly mediate the path between activities (H3a: β = 0.144, t = 2.923), cleanliness (H3c: β = 0.105, t = 2.057), language (H3e: β = 0.128, t = 2.496), and security (H3f: β = 0.262, t = 4.498) on destination loyalty. Therefore, H3a, H3c, H3e, and H3f were supported. Overall, the proposed model explained 63.9% and 55.4% of the variance in MTEs and destination loyalty, respectively. With regards to the effect size, the results were explained following Cohen's [102] guideline. It showed that security (f^2 = 0.166) had a medium effect size on MTEs. Activities (f^2 = 0.048), cleanliness (f^2 = 0.025), and language (f^2 = 0.038) indicated a small effect size, while amenities (f^2 = 0.001), hospitality (f^2 = 0.006), and café service quality (f^2 = 0.009) resulted in trivial effect size in explaining MTEs. Lastly, the predictive relevance of the model was evaluated using Q^2 [103]. The outcome indicated presence of the model's predictive relevance as all the Q^2 values > 0 (i.e., MTEs =0.365; destination loyalty = 0.457) [104,105].

6. Discussion

6.1. Theoretical Implications

This study has three main contributions. Firstly, it explores tea tourism in a new context (i.e., Southeast Asia—Malaysia), responding to the call for research outside of China, India, and Sri Lanka [11]. In addressing the first research question, this study uncovered the relevance of DSQ factors in affecting MTEs among tea tourists, underpinned by Script Theory. Specifically, the results revealed that activities, cleanliness, language, and

security were significant DSQ factors predicting MTEs, while amenities, hospitality, and cafe service quality did not. Different from previous studies that have mostly examined DSQ at an abstract level (above order level), this study contributes to the body of knowledge by measuring the effect of each DSQ factor on TEMs. The detailed results follow.

It seems that activities offered in the BOH tea plantation provide a pleasant surprise which exceeded tourists' expectation and, thus, created memorable experiences (H1a). The result is consistent with previous findings which reported that unexpected experiences increased pleasurable feelings and made the trip more memorable [50]. The findings are also similar to those of Wang et al. [45] who found that tea tourists perceived the tea plantation factory tour as the most significant activity that can enhance their knowledge and make the trip more memorable. Cleanliness around the cafe, tea garden, and tourist areas of the tea plantation are other aspects that offer a renewed script that store vivid memories in the tourist's mind [7] (H1c).

It is not surprising that English language (H1e) significantly predict MTEs, as Kladou et al. [73] noted, "English is the language of hospitality" since it is used to communicate, negotiate, and execute transactions with domestic and international tourists. In this study, visitors gain memorable experience when the staff's English proficiency is good, and English is used as the primary language for all the signboards. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the "security" attribute, which measured tourists feeling safe when walking around the tea plantation, relates to memorable moments as well (H1f). The presence of security guards taking care of the car park area, walking trail, factory entrance, and cafe also help provide a sense of safety to tourists.

In contrast, amenities (H1b), hospitality (H1d), and cafe service quality (H1g) did not predict MTEs. The insignificant findings are found to contradict those reported in earlier studies [24,65]. This could be since amenities (toilets and children-oriented facilities), hospitality (sincerity of local people and staff's attentiveness and helpfulness), and cafe service quality (food quality and staff attitude) were similar to the scripts found at other attractions, leaving no surprise or unexpected elements that were memorable. Bhuiyan and Darda [106], who measured five factors of DSQ at a Dhaka heritage tourism site in Bangladesh also found that facilities insignificantly predict tourists' satisfaction.

Secondly, in addressing the second research question, our study provides empirical support on the association between MTEs and destination loyalty (H2). This again provides support for Script Theory in that pleasant experiences add new scripts in long-term memories that influence future decisions. Similar results were reported in other type of tourism including, yoga, cultural, and theme park tourism [22,80]. In the case of the BOH tea plantation, unique, pleasant, and unexpected experiences (free of charge tea garden admission, no charge factory tour, English signage, English-speaking staff, above average cleanliness, excellent security, a shuttle bus transporting tourists from carpark to tea garden) helped store authentic scripts in tourists' memory, encouraging revisits and recommendations to families and friends. These are considered memorable because they were different from tourists' remembered scripts when visiting other tea gardens or orchards in Cameron Highland, Malaysia, where admission, factory tour, and shuttle services are usually charged for. From the responses to the open-ended question, an overwhelming concern was overcrowding at the BOH tea plantation during weekends and festive seasons. This could be a very serious drawback to memorable experiences and reflects a particularly important dimension of destinations that should be reflected in future MTE research given its implications for future revisit decision making and word-of-mouth [107].

Thirdly, in addressing the third research question, the empirical results of the mediation analysis showed that MTEs acted as a significant mediation between four factors of DSQ (i.e., H3a: security, H3c: cleanliness, H3e: activities, and H3f: language) and destination loyalty. As noted in the S-O-R model [30], the external stimuli perceived in a destination facilitate the formation of tourists' desirable behavior through the mechanism (i.e., internal/emotional states). In this study, we articulate the role of the MTEs as an internal evaluation to strengthen the effects of service quality in one destination and

tourists' long-term behaviors (intentions to revisit and recommend) with greater insights. Although the findings are largely in line with previous studies, the renewed understanding of the role of MTEs in sustainable tea tourism and its relationship with DSQ factors and destination loyalty behavior is pivotal to an improved understanding of tourism marketing in destination scholarship.

In conclusion, the essential theoretical contribution of this study is to propose an integrated framework to explain the bridge that forms the destination loyalty through integrating the Script Theory and an S-O-R model, with MTEs as the mechanism. From the new integrated research model, it is clearly shown that the formation process of destination loyalty behavior is based on the result of script generation through the process described in the S-O-R model. As discussed, it can be seen that the middle stages—MTEs—act as key processes which help to form the tourists' responses through an intention toward loyalty in sustainable tea tourism destination.

6.2. Managerial Implications

This study's findings also offer practical recommendations for tea plantation destination managers in adjusting the services and providing MTEs. As the findings showed, MTEs exerts direct and indirect effects in promoting destination loyalty. Exceptional memories can be created by providing tea tourists with the opportunities to learn new things that can stimulate them, such as hands-on experience in tea picking, tea leaf rolling, and the process of brewing their own tea. Such experiences are also embraced in Pu'er City, South China, where tea lovers get hands-on experience to participate in the process of making tea. As a result, the tea tourism revenue in this destination increased by 707.59 percent [33]. In addition, memorable experiences can be reinforced by encouraging tourists to record and share experiences of their tea plantation journey on social media. With encouragement from the plantation, posted photographs not only assist tourists to recall happy memories but are also significant marketing communication material to promote the destination. Significantly, for sustainable food tourism developments, visits that promote memorable experiences appear important not just for destination loyalty and positive word-of-mouth, but may also help encourage continued purchasing from the location thereby stimulating the local economic networks [4].

In addition, tea destination's sustainability could be enhanced by creating unique, unconventional, and memorable experiences, such as through the integration of tea tourism and avitourism. As noted by Kumar, Govindarajo, and Khen [108], bird watching is gaining popularity among local and foreign tourists; if tea destinations could attract rare birds to the tea plantation, they will be able to attract growing numbers of birders to the plantation. At the same time, tea tourists will be surprised by the unexpected opportunity of seeing birds, adding more dimensions and deepening their memorable tourism experience.

Four DSQ factors, i.e., activity, cleanliness, language, and security are important aspects that may need to be improved to enhance memorable experiences in sustainable tea tourism. Tea destination providers could diversify activities; for instance, by focusing more on those who wish to enjoy the landscape or who wish to engage with "silent tourism", and providing activities like meditation, yoga, and silence retreats, which have been offered at several other sustainable tea tourism destination [8]. However, this will also require dealing with issues of crowding. Given that language is a factor to increase memorable experience, tea destination providers should ensure clear English signage is used around tea plantations. Security is also important to tourists. Therefore, ensuring that tourists feel that their safety is a priority embraced by the plantation is important for visitor satisfaction and destination choice [109], e.g., preserving a high level of hygiene during the pandemic is significant for tourist intention to recommend and revisit. Social marketing measures may also be adopted to encourage appropriate visitor behavior to, for example, better manage crowding (based on the findings of the open questions) and to ensure social distancing and other health measures are observed [110]. Lastly, maintaining "cleanliness" should be

a high priority for sustainable tea destinations in attempting to satisfy the aesthetic and hygienic needs of tourists.

7. Conclusions

This study sets out to investigate the interrelationships among DSQ factors, MTEs, and destination loyalty in the context of sustainable tea tourism in Malaysia. The findings presented four salient DSQ factors (activities, cleanliness, language, and security) in stimulating the memorability of the BOH tea plantation visit experiences and MTEs triggering destination loyalty. Furthermore, this study also predicted a DSQ-MTEs-destination loyalty sequential process in the sustainable tea tourism context, confirming Script Theory and the S-O-R model.

Several limitations of this study can also be identified. First, data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic using social media, which makes it impossible to fully predict changes in behavior in the post-pandemic era when travel is resumed. Future studies should also use other methods to collect data, such as face-to-face interviews. It would also be ideal to collect longitudinal data to track recommendation and revisitation over time. Secondly, respondents in this study were skewed towards younger tourists, thus, potentially underestimating the number of older tourists. Given the aging population of many countries, it would be interesting to explore the perceptions of older tourists in relation to sustainable tea destinations. Furthermore, research should also be conducted on international tourists as borders reopen. Since this study examined only the mediating effect of MTEs on the relationship between DSQ and loyalty, it may neglect other potential mechanisms, such as destination image. As stated in earlier studies, the image of a destination held by tourists has an indirect impact on the behavior of tourists [111,112]; hence, this effect deserves to be explored further in a context of sustainable tea tourism.

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