Article

The Influence of Tourists' Experience on Destination Loyalty: A Case Study of Hue City, Vietnam

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Abstract: This research focuses on the impact of the tourist experience on the relationship among destination image, tourist motivation, and tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty by examining the theoretical and empirical evidence on the causal relationship between constructs. A research model was proposed, in which nine hypotheses were developed, and the empirical data were collected from Hue city, which is a major tourist destination in Vietnam. A total of 204 questionnaires were returned, and the data were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The moderating effect of the tourist experience on the impact of the destination image, tourist motivation, and tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty is analyzed in this article. The proposed conceptual model was tested, and the results reveal a significant relationship between the two constructs to destination loyalty (destination image and tourist satisfaction). Furthermore, the findings support the proposed destination loyalty model: destination image, tourist satisfaction directly influenced destination loyalty, and tourist experience play an important role as a moderator in the relationship between tourist motivation and tourist loyalty.

Keywords: tourist satisfaction; tourist loyalty; tourist experience; destination image; tourist motivation; hue city

1. Introduction

Tourism has grown further and has become a dominant industry globally, which significantly affects a country's economy. It is also affiliated with many other fields, such as advertising, endorsements, product placements, sponsorships, and business organizations [1].

Knowing what tourists' loyalty depends on and how it is shaped has become a maxim to managers of tourist companies and destinations. Loyalty is the best indicator of potential actions, competitive advantage, and business performance [2–5]. Tourist loyalty has closely correlated with tourist satisfaction, tourist motivation, and tourist experience as a basic principle of marketing [6–8].

The impact of destination image, motivation, and satisfaction on tourist loyalty has been a trendy research topic in tourism research. Previous researchers have focused on various relationships between destination images, tourist experience, and tourist loyalty, which has been inconclusive in several previous studies. Researchers have found that tourist loyalty is directly influenced by destination image [9,10], and some pointed out an indirect relationship [11–14]. Although researchers have offered hypotheses regarding the role of the tourist experience in some related aspects, scholars have yet to address the impact of tourist experience as a moderator in an overall relationship; such empirical investigation is still incomplete. Loyalty is regarded as the significant predictor of future

behavior as well as a source of competitive advantage and commercial success [15]. The application and usefulness of destination loyalty are investigated in this study. A number of loyalty measurements are provided based on the literature on customer loyalty [16,17].

In recent years, destinations related to heritage have been having significant and rapid growth. Heritage tourism has grown in popularity in recent years, particularly in cities that have been recognized as World Heritage Sites [17]. This study focusses on tourism in Hue city, which is well-known for its historical monuments and one of the few UNESCO designated sites in Vietnam [18]. This paper explores the existing correlations between the perception of the historical and monumental heritage site visited and tourist behavior. It adds to the current academic literature on tourist experiences at World Heritage (WH) places [19,20]. In this paper, we investigate the degree of tourist experience with the visit to the heritage site to the motivation that leads to the trip being made, and the valuation of the site's attributes. For this reason, this area has become a prime destination for tourists.

Objectives of the study:

(a). This study measures the impact of tourist motivation, tourist satisfaction, and destination image on tourist loyalty.
(b). To examine the moderating role of tourist experience on destination image, tourist motivation, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty.

The paper's outline is as follows: The first section introduces the conceptual background constructs and their interrelationships with the proposed model. The research design and study findings are discussed in the second section. The final sections include results, discussions, contributions and limitations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Destination Image

The destination image can be defined as the consequences of a tourist's impression or perception of a destination. It is an important principle that plays a role in a tourist's choices. The destination image is considered to be a key aspect of tourist decision-making [9–11,21–23]. The impact of tourism on countries and local destination economic growth has been widely confirmed [24–26] and boost the competition between countries in the tourism industry [27,28].

Destination image impacts tourists in choosing a destination and re-visiting in the future [29,30]. Furthermore, destination image can positively influence the tourist experience, satisfaction, motivation, and visit intention [8,26]. Some perceptions of cultural tourism destination attractiveness might lead tourists to develop an attachment to the place [31–33].

Destination image can be considered a critical component of people's destination choice [10,31,34]. In addition, destination image also impacts the intention to visit [35,36].

The destination image definitions relate to developmental constructions and representations of individuals or groups [37–39]. Destination image is an integrated system of feelings, thoughts, opinions, visualizations, and destination intention [12,32,33]. Tourism destination image is one of the critical challenges in tourism research; it is widely recognized that destination image influences tourists' behavior, from their mental constructions about destination attributes to the decision-making process [40–43]. Several studies have indicated that the destination image is an essential subject in tourism research, and researchers have tried to use different methods to develop a conceptual framework. Destination image plays an essential role in tourist behavior; previous studies have presented the relationship between destination image and tourist experience, tourist loyalty, and satisfaction by direct pathway. However, there exists a lack of studies that investigates the influence from destination image to tourist loyalty. Based on this previous literature, three hypotheses were developed.

Hypothesis 1. *Destination image has a positive impact on Tourist motivation.*

Hypothesis 2. *Destination image has a positive impact on Tourist satisfaction.*

Hypothesis 3. *Destination image has a positive impact on Tourist loyalty.*

2.2. Tourist Motivation

As a significant determinant of tourist behavior, motivation has been widely researched by academics since the 1940s. At the same time, some researchers have tried to examine their relationships with other constructs, such as destination image [44,45], destination loyalty [8,10,11,13,14]. Since the beginning of these areas of study, motivation has been an important subject in leisure and tourism literature review [46,47]. Refs. [41,48,49] argued that in tourism studies, the entire field of tourist motivation is fundamental and indispensable to tourism growth itself. [50] stated that the "who, when, where", and "how" of tourism could be defined, but it is more difficult to answer the "why".

For specialists in the area, motivation as a variable poses several questions. It has been considered the only one that intervenes between stimulation and reaction to tourist behavior for a long time [7,9,46].

Motivation is widely seen as the driving force behind all tourist behaviors [8,51–53]. Therefore, it is a starting point for researching visitors' behavior and, beyond that, for understanding tourism systems [54,55], while there is some consensus on the fundamental meaning of motivation [56].

In particular, the relationship between tourist motivation and tourist satisfaction, tourist loyalty has been a common research interest for many researchers as satisfaction and loyalty have shown a positive effect on the post-purchase behavior of tourists, such as recommendations and intention to re-visit [7–9,57,58]. Following the literature review, the below research hypotheses are given.

Hypothesis 4. *Tourist motivation has a positive impact on Tourist satisfaction.*

Hypothesis 5. *Tourist motivation has a positive impact on Tourist loyalty.*

2.3. Tourist Satisfaction

Reference [59] defines satisfaction as a judgment that a pleasurable consumption level is provided by a product or service features. Many tourism researchers deal with various aspects of consumer satisfaction in the hospitality and tourism industry, such as satisfaction with specific destinations [60,61]. A researcher shows that satisfaction is closely linked to the choice of destination and decision-making regarding where to visit [62,63]. Tourist satisfaction has always been considered an important business objective because pleasing tourists will be re-visiting. In tourism management, tourist satisfaction is also significant because it impacts destination choice [64]. Satisfaction is also a reliable measure of the quality of on-site leisure experiences and future behaviors [65–67].

As a result, the concept of tourist loyalty has recently replaced satisfaction measurement because of the predictor of actual behavior. Two of three indicators that make up most of the Tourist Loyalty Indices (TLI) are conduct-based, such as "likelihood of repurchasing the product or service" and "like hood recommending a product or service to others." The third dimension of TLI is typically "overall satisfaction" itself [68].

Several studies indicate an important positive correlation between tourist satisfaction and tourist loyalty [69,70]. Some empirical research in the tourism industry indicates that tourists' satisfaction is a good predictor of visiting and recommending the destination to other individuals [71]. High levels of consumer satisfaction, coupled with a favorable image of the destination, are likely to influence the behavioral intentions of tourists and travelers (Liu et al., 2017). The satisfaction levels influence tourists' decision to revisit and put a positive word of mouth to others about the destination [72].

One of the crucial factors for tourist attractions' success is tourist satisfaction because of customer behavior [73]. Scholars define satisfaction differently but almost agree that this concept is complex, encompassing cognitive and affective aspects and physiological and psychological dynamic elements [74]. References [75–77] stated that satisfied tourists

are inclined to have desirable attraction behaviors. [78] agree that tourist satisfaction is calculated primarily by the attractiveness of tourist experience and recognizing satisfaction as an essential factor in establishing tourist loyalty. With literature studies in this field to demonstrate the relationship between tourist satisfaction and loyalty, the hypothesis is the following:

Hypothesis 6. *Tourist satisfaction has a positive impact on Tourist loyalty*.

2.4. Tourist Experience

A complicated psychological mechanism is the tourist experience. It is challenging to provide a concise description since it may include a complex variety of elements. Tourist experiences are distinct from daily experiences. The act of tourism provides complicated place-related interactions, memories, and emotions, and it is argued that place or self-in-place experience is what people are seeking.

Focusing on on-site encounters, [79,80] describe the tourist experience as an interaction between tourists and destinations, with destinations being the site of the experience and the actors of the experience being tourists. The overview of claims on the tourist experience by [81] pointed out that encounters require more than visitors. By manipulating location and presentation of culture, tourism industries are also part of the production, staging, and experience consumption.

Reference [82] explores the various meanings of tourist experience that include a built and produced consumption act, a reaction to "ordinary" life problems, a quest for authenticity, and multifaceted leisure activity. For all meanings, Li's only requirement to be universal is that the tourist experience is important for the participant. The tourist experience is described by [83] as a combination of novelty/familiarity involving the individual pursuit of identity and self-realization. Nonetheless, people encounter similar behaviors and environments in various ways.

Since the tourist experience is extremely subjective, it can only be interpreted by focusing on the actual people involved and the particular conditions in which experiences occur [84]. Most of these meanings apply to the experience at the destination. Still, the experience of a tourism event starts before the trip in the planning and preparation phases. It continues after the tourist returns through the events' memory and communication [24,85,86]. This study considers three hypotheses in order to assess the relationship between tourist loyalty and the three variables:

Hypothesis 7A. *Tourist experience moderates the relationship between Destination image and Tourist loyalty*.

Hypothesis 7B. *Tourist experience moderates the relationship between Tourist satisfaction and Tourist loyalty*.

Hypothesis 7C. *Tourist experience moderates the relationship between Tourist motivation and Tourist loyalty*.

2.5. Tourist Loyalty

According to [87], tourist loyalty is "a deeply held commitment to consistently repurchase or re-patronize a preferred product/service in the future." This triggers purchases of the same repeat-brand or the same brand package, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that can activate switching behavior. For several tourism destinations, travelers with a high degree of loyalty constitute a major market segment. As tourists are more likely than first-time visitors to stay longer at a destination, they tend to spread positive knowledge by word of mouth (WOM) and engage more intensively in consumer activities [88–90]. Moreover, relative to attracting first-time tourists, these frequent visitors will reduce marketing costs [10,91].

Many researches have also investigated the precedents of tourist loyalty. As described above, tourist loyalty is a powerful indicator of several tourist activity outcomes [92,93]. Researchers have proposed that tourists' loyalty-related behaviors (i.e., desire to re-visit and willingness to recommend) may be affected by the picture they perceive of the destination [91,94].

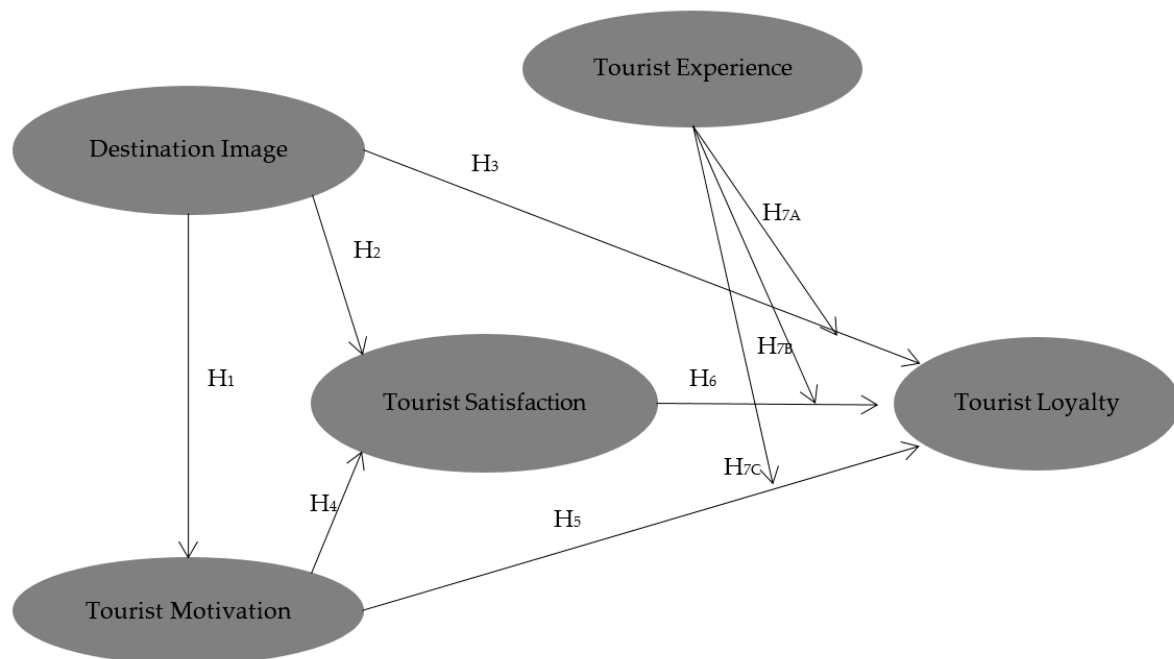The conceptual model is given below through Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework (Source: Author's own).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Data Collection and Sample

Data were collected from the tourists who visited Hue city, Vietnam, as the research targets. The convenience sampling approach is used in this study; surveys were conducted over two months from June to August 2020. Data were collected through an online questionnaire survey method.

Table 1 shows the various demographic profiles of the participants. There were a total of 250 responses, 46 of which were incomplete, and these or duplicate responses were eliminated. As a result, the number of valid questionnaire copies returned is 204, and the rate of reaction for this questionnaire is 82%.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants.

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	98	48%
Female	106	52%
Age (Year)		
18–29	15	7%
30–39	24	12%
40–49	34	17%
50–59	41	20%
60 and above	90	44%

Table 1. *Cont.*

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Education		
Under high school	21	10%
High school	42	21%
College	63	31%
Graduate or postgraduate	78	38%
Marital Status		
Single	79	39%
Married	95	47%
Separated	14	7%
Widower	9	4%
Decline to answer	7	3%
Monthly Income (USD)		
Under 5000	18	9%
5000–10,000	23	11%
10,000–20,000	31	15%
20,000–30,000	33	16%
30,000–40,000	23	11%
40,000–50,000	17	9%
Over 50,000	12	6%
Decline to answer	47	23%
Occupation		
Student	48	24%
Employed/self-employed	18	9%
Retired	15	7%
Other	123	60%

Source: Author's own.

3.2. Measurement

The questionnaire was developed to collect data and fulfill the prospective research objectives. The five variables include the second section described in the path model, which consists of five sections: 1—destination image; 2—tourist motivation; 3—tourist satisfaction; 4—tourist experience; and 5—tourist loyalty. Tourists are required to mark their agreement level of each item on a section by Likert scale with five-point from: strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=5).

Table 2 shows the constructs with multiple items that followed previous studies closely. The data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire administered to tourists and were analyzed using Smart PLS-SEM methodology.

Table 2. Key references of construct based on prior studies.

Code	Construct	Reference
Destination Image		
DI 1	My visit to this destination is worth my time and effort	
DI 2	Compared to other destinations, this destination is a much better one	[95]
DI 3	My experiences with this destination are excellent	
DI 4	Overall, I am satisfied with the travel experience in this destination	
Tourist Motivation		
TM 1	To relax in foreign land	
TM 2	To get experience in foreign land	
TM 3	To learn new culture	[96]
TM 4	To see how the people of difference cultures live	

Table 2. *Cont.*

Code	Construct	Reference
	Tourist Experience	
TE 1	This trip helped me to improve my self-confidence	
TE 2	This trip helped me to develop my personal identify	[97]
TE 3	This trip helped me to learn more about myself	
TE 4	This trip helped me to acquire new skills	
	Tourist Satisfaction	
TSA1	Hue is one of the best destinations for cultural heritage tourism	
TSA2	My choice to visit Hue was a wise one	[98]
TSA3	I think I made the right decision to visit the destination	
TSA4	I am satisfied with my overall experience during my visit	
	Tourist Loyalty	
LOY 1	Will say positive things about Hue to other people	
LOY 2	Suggest Hue to friend and relatives as a vacation destination to visit	[99]
LOY 3	Consider Hue as your choice to visit in the future	

Source: Author's own.

3.3. Measurement Model Assessment

Reference [100] stipulate critical pre-requisite in conducting a comprehensive PLS-SEM analysis, such as examining the constructs' reliability and validity. Table 3 reports the reliability of constructs as gauged through their respective Cronbach's alpha values, which exceeds the suggested critical value of 0.5 [101,102] composite reliability of greater than 0.7 [103] and Dijkstra–Henseler's rho (ρA) above the 0.8 thresholds [104]. The AVE reported surpassing the standard point of 0.5 by (Henseler et al., 2014), signifying all constructs' successful convergence.

Table 3. Construct reliability and validity.

Variables	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	CR	rho_A
TE	TE1	0.997	0.995	0.990	1	0.998
	TE2	0.998				
	TE3	0.991				
DI	DI1	0.882	0.842	0.680	0.890	0.853
	DI2	0.789				
	DI3	0.842				
	DI4	0.774				
TM	TM1	0.940	0.946	0.860	0.960	0.954
	TM2	0.940				
	TM3	0.919				
	TM4	0.913				
TSA	TSA1	0.880	0.861	0.710	0.910	0.862
	TSA2	0.893				
	TSA3	0.841				
	TSA4	0.744				
LOY	LOY1	0.788	0.702	0.620	0.830	0.707
	LOY2	0.798				
	LOY3	0.784				

α—Cronbach alpha, CR—composite reliability, AVE—average variance extracted, Rho_A—Dijkstra-Henseler's rho. (Source: Author processing from smart PLS version 3.2.9).

Similarly, all indicators have been reported to have loaded precisely with their corresponding variables displaying a loading range between 0.7 and 0.9, confirming the recommended convergent validity rules [101]. On testing the latent variables' discriminant validity on the Fornell and Larcker criterion provisions, it is evident (refer to Table 4) that

the diagonal-wise values (in bold) are the square root of the Average Variance Extracted coefficients and the remaining are correlational coefficients of the latent variables. According to the values registered herewith, the assumption of the criterion has been met. Thus, it can be concluded that latent constructs contain discriminant validity, and the investigation can proceed further.

Table 4. Correlation matrix and discriminant assessment.

	TE	**DI**	**LOY**	**TSA**	**TM**
TE	0.995				
DI	0.032	**0.823**			
LOY	0.341	0.259	**0.790**		
TSA	0.395	0.064	0.474	**0.840**	
TM	0.332	0.194	0.274	0.360	**0.930**

Squared correlations; AVE in the diagonal (Source: author processing from smart PLS version 3.2.9).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Results

The theoretical model was analyzed through partial least square methodology drawn from structural equation modeling via the SMART-PLS software. The author's decision to deploy PLS-SEM over other co-variance-based data modeling techniques was attributed to the small sample size and the non-normality of data [100,105]. PLS-SEM explains the causal relationships among multiple variables without strict assumptions and pre-conditions [100], which makes PLS-SEM the inferential tool of choice.

Structural model assessment and hypotheses testing: This phase of research is important as it determines and defines an association between the variables under inquiry. Findings show the existence of both direct and indirect effects on the variables in question in this analysis.

Direct effect: It may be deciphered from Table 5, based on accepted regression coefficients and t-statistics, that there exists a positive relationship among the primary independent variables Destination Image ($\beta = 2.813$, $t = 2.798$) and Satisfaction ($\beta = 3.817$, $t = 3.849$) with the dependent variable Destination Loyalty which supports the provisions of H_3 and H_6. On the other hand, Tourist Motivation with $\beta = 0.807$ and $t = 0.736$ has an insignificant association with Destination Loyalty, which disagrees with H_5.

Table 5. Path coefficient: direct and indirect effects.

Effects	β	Mean Value	Std. Dev	*t*-Value	*p*-Value	Hypothesis Supported
			Direct Effect			
DI -> LOY	2.813	0.214	0.074	2.798	0.005	**Yes**
DI -> TSA	0.072	−0.006	0.086	0.072	0.943	**No**
DI -> TM	3.058	0.204	0.068	2.855	0.004	**Yes**
TSA -> LOY	3.817	0.34	0.091	3.849	0.000	**Yes**
TM -> LOY	0.807	0.064	0.081	0.736	0.462	**No**
TM -> TSA	5.065	0.362	0.072	5.047	0.000	**Yes**
			Indirect Effect (Moderation)			
TE -> DI -> LOY	2.027	−0.142	0.075	1.883	0.060	**No**
TE -> TSA -> LOY	1.669	0.131	0.08	1.707	0.088	**No**
TE -> TM -> LOY	1.769	0.148	0.065	2.134	0.033	**Yes**
	Dependent Variable		**Coefficient of determination (R²)**		**Empirical Remark**	
	Tourist Loyalty		0.527		Robust	

Note: β = regression coefficient and t = significant value ($t > 1.96$) or ($p < 0.05$).

The results also portray an insignificant association between Destination Image and Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.072$, $t = 0.072$) in disagreement with H_2 but in complete agreement with the provisions of H_4 (the positive relationship between Tourist Motivation and Satisfaction) as the authors observed a robust $\beta = 0.807$ and a corresponding $t = 0.736$. Lastly, the bootstrapping method also revealed a significant relationship between Destination Image and Tourist Motivation ($\beta = 3.058$, $t = 2.855$), thereby corroborating with the premises of H_1.

Indirect effect: The conceptual model tested three moderating interactions. It is revealed from the non-parametric bootstrap method that Tourist Experience as a moderating vehicle fails to predict Destination Loyalty when interacting with Destination Image ($\beta = 2.027$, $t = 1.883$) and satisfaction ($\beta = 1.669$, $t = 1.707$), respectively, thereby rejecting the postulation provided through H_{7A} and H_{7B}. It is important to note that the moderating variable interacts with Tourist Motivation more significantly to predict Destination Loyalty, although the relationship's strength is weak ($\beta = 1.769$, $t = 2.134$).

According to the study's structural predictive analysis, the interaction's exogenous and endogenous variables represent a robust 52.7% explanatory power (Table 5). According to [106], R-squared (R^2) is a statistical measure that represents the proportion of the variance for a dependent variable. R^2 is explained by an independent variable or variables in a regression model. Table 6 provides the path coefficients for the endogenous variables in the theoretical model.

Table 6. Path Coefficients of the endogenous variables.

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Std. Dev.	*t*-Value	*p*-Value
LOY	0.361	0.394	0.053	6.789	0.000
TSA	0.130	0.142	0.047	2.769	0.006
TM	0.037	0.046	0.027	1.376	0.169

4.2. Discussion

The study postulates five direct and three indirect assumptions towards capturing tourists' behavior towards destination loyalty. The first hypothesis concerns the positive association between DI and TM, which has been accepted due to the PLS algorithm run report's significant empirical observations. Previous literature by [45], who was one of the first to experiment with both of the above variables to capture tourists' future behavior, reported robust association among the same. In the visit intention domain, authors such as [107] have corroborated a significant relationship between latent motivation among tourists and destination image. Parallel, in a study conducted by [108] to predict re-visit intention, the positive correlation between motivation and destination image has been further strengthened. [109] investigated the effect of mini-movies on tourism image development through proportion and variance testing mechanisms like ANOVA, they observed a positive correlation with traveler and destination image motivation. Furthermore, the empirical observations of this study strengthen the findings of extant literature [8,26], thereby extending the discourse on the topic.

The second hypothetical assumption of the study entails the positive relationship between Destination Image and Tourist Satisfaction. In their study to examine Chinese tourists' behavior in Korea [12] reported that cognitive image directly influenced the affective image and confirmed its formation process. Both cognitive and affective images had positive influences on satisfaction. [12] examined the structural relationships among tourist satisfaction and destination image. Their study reports a significant combination among DI and TSA in extant studies, [106] outlined the composite relationship among DI and TSA variables in their study regarding visitations by foreigners to heritage sites. According to the findings of our study, there exists a negative co-relationship between DI and TSA, which is a departure from parallel studies in the field, especially in South-East Asia; a plausible explanation for this trend may be since the sample consisted of a large number of Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2005) who are less likely to be brand-conscious. The result of this study is a departure from established literature [26],

which has determined a positive interaction between the image of a destination and tourist satisfaction.

The third dimension of the study deals with analyzing the relationship between DI and Destination Loyalty. In their meta-analysis of literature in tourism, authors [10] have reported several studies that have identified synergy between DI and Destination Loyalty from studies dating back to the early 2000s. A case study conducted in the town of Alanya by Turkish investigators [110] reveal among other factors affecting tourism demand, Destination Image is instrumental in predicting Destination Loyalty. [111], in their study set in Orlando, attempted to estimate destination loyalty through a structural schema; their findings corroborate with our findings that Destination Image has a positive relationship with Destination Loyalty. A parallel study concerning the effects of self-congruity and destination loyalty [25] observed that destination image proved to be a predicting variable of destination loyalty which reflected with the findings of investigations like [35,36]. Additionally, a construct like destination loyalty which is dynamic in nature is considered to be a challenge in psychometric evaluation due to the changing propensities of tourists.

The fourth hypothesis of the study assumes that Tourist Motivation is a predictor of Tourist Satisfaction, which has been proved through this study. Our claims for the above correlation are backed by authors [112], who studied the push and pull attributes of tourism products and services. They have outlined the interrelation between Tourism Motivations and Tourist Satisfaction. A study of international tourists visiting and camping at a major national park in Zimbabwe by [113] concluded that Travel Motivation and Tourist Satisfaction are interrelated to a substantial extent. A study investigating Muslim tourists' intention towards visiting a particular destination was impacted by the extent of motivation the tourist contains, which is in tandem with our findings. Concluding the discourse is a study by [114], who observed that Tourist Motivation is not a fit measure to predict Tourist Satisfaction according to the classical model they deployed in their study, which implies our study is in harmony with [115] who have utilized Principal Component Analysis techniques in combination with partial least square systems to predict satisfaction among tourists.

The fifth hypothesis states that Tourist Motivation and Destination Loyalty are significantly associated with each other; our study has not found statistical significance among the variables discussed hereto. This is contrary to the extant literature by [6], who have structurally analyzed the variables' positive relationship with loyalty. On the other hand, this study's findings support the investigation conducted by [116], who proposed that Tourist Motivation does not need to lead to Destination Loyalty. The insignificant relationship among the variables in question is deflective from studies like [57] and [58]. A plausible cause into the insignificance maybe due to the fact that different destination typologies trigger different push and pull factors.

The sixth hypothesis revolves around Tourist Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty having a positive relationship with each other. Our study determines that the above hypothesis and its premises must be agreed upon according to robust parameters as indicated by the SMART-PLS application. A study by [117] further ratifies our findings by observing that both the variables exhibit associative behavior. Furthermore, in their study, [118] performed a structural evaluation of the variables in question and detected empirical indications to signal positive correlation, providing us a premise to enhance this study's claims. In extant studies by [119], who examined aesthetic experiential qualities for tourist satisfaction, tourist satisfaction was observed to explain a substantial amount of all the variances in their structural design, further strengthening our claim of a significant and positive association between the variables. Concluding the discussion, a landmark study by [120], who investigated the efficacy of Tourist Satisfaction to measure Destination Loyalty, indicated a robust and positive commonality among them. This study reflects the results of [69,70,78], wherein satisfaction has been found to be a subjective construct; therefore, further contextual research is warranted in the future.

Our study postulates three moderator-led interaction terms to predict Destination Loyalty through Tourist Experience. It was found that only one particular interaction effect had a significant positive capacity to explain the desired dependent variable. The only pathway in the theoretical framework, H_{7C} (Destination Image > tourist Experience > Destination Loyalty), confirmed our assumption. It is to be noted that the moderating interaction term used in the study has been sparsely used in literature; to this extent, only two scientific papers exist which have demonstrated a significant and positive effect of Tourist Experience. In determining stay quality in rural homestays in Spain [121] and the other one, tourists' behavioral intentions for re-visitation to a particular destination [122]. It is noteworthy to observe that, while there exists no significant direct effect between motivation and loyalty, the presence of a moderator (tourist experience) produces commonality between the former and the latter constructs. This may be due to the fact that both the predictor variable (Tourist motivation) and the output variable (Tourist loyalty) are multi-level categorical variables and such that the difference between the group means for the predictor variable differs according to the group membership on the moderator variable [123].

5. Contributions and Limitations

5.1. Contributions

The contribution of the study is two-fold. Firstly, for academicians, the study is the first to discern the predictors of tourist loyalty towards a particular destination, which enriches and supplements existing literature in the field. Furthermore, the moderating effect of tourism experience (subjective construct) serves as a unique feature of this study. Traditionally, subjective constructs have been used as direct effect variables, according to our understanding of extant literature, this is study attempts to set a precedent into future researches involving subjective constructs as moderating or control variable [9,57,58]. This gives the study essence of context in understanding tourist dynamics.

Secondly, for marketers, the study reveals consumer propensities towards re-visit, which hopes to assist decision-makers in tourism and travel companies and DMOs to strategize their offerings post the COVID-19 pandemic as tourism resumes in Vietnam. According to the research objective of the study, it aimed to quantify in empirical terms the predicting power of tourist experience on destination loyalty, the study established the moderating presence of tourist experience between destination image and loyalty. This observation implies that tourism managers, destination management companies consider destination image as a vital component of their product designs. For example, itineraries to Hue City can involve a diversity of experiences like tourist participation in traditional sports (Đẩy gậy) promotion of local culinary delights like Bún bò Huế by organizing food walks, training and engaging students of the Hue Tourism College in provision of tourist guide services, foreign language courses like English, French, Russian, and Japanese can be offered to taxi/tourist coach drivers, hotel, spa and restaurant staff, facilitating small and medium sized companies based in Hue to become more tourist friendly by organizing sensitization camps. Government and non-government stakeholders of tourism in Hue City must deliberate in leveraging the experiential quality of the destination to sustain destination loyalty and ensure re-visitation.

This is a ramification to the observation pertaining to the first hypothesis concerning Destination Image and Tourist Motivation. Because of the practical importance of destination loyalty, significant efforts have been made to investigate the various factors that may influence tourist loyalty. Significance of this study: the study's findings would contribute significantly to tourism services' theoretical and managerial aspects and cultural heritage tourism, specifically.

This study also intended to distinctively contribute to the body of knowledge on tourism experience by bringing together the literature on heritage tourism and cultural tourism.

5.2. Limitations

As with every study, this research has got some limitations that need to be acknowledged by the researchers. The current study was implemented in the summertime from June to August 2020, the initial time of tourism season in Hue city, Vietnam, which means it overlooks the tourists who come to Hue city during wintertime. Tourists travel to the destination in different seasons and might have different opinions, perceptions, or images. Future scholars should utilize the sample that needs to be taken throughout the year from all the tourist seasons to get comprehensive pictures and draw a comparative analysis in the results to better understand the destination image and their loyalty.

After a systematic review of extant literature in leading scientific indexes (Web of Science and Scopus), we have concluded that this study is the first of its kind to take in cognizance Tourist Experience as a moderating variable. Therefore, it is safe to consider this novel finding to contribute to the existing literature on tourist behavior. The study's explanatory power can be further augmented by deploying other behavioral variables to increment the explanatory power in the future; it would be interesting to add constructs like mindfulness to gauge intrinsic propensities or engage variables Service-Dominant (SD) logic.

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