

Modeling the Determinants of Tourist Satisfaction and Loyalty: A Structural Equation Approach

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Abstract: *This study aims to provide an integrated approach to understand how tourists perceive destination quality, destination image, and destination trust. It introduces a model for identifying factors that are affecting tourist's satisfaction and loyalty. The proposed model has been drawn out and a questionnaire was designed based on the factors chosen. Seven hypotheses were developed to find out factors that are affecting perceived destination quality and destination image, and ultimately tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. To test the relationship between the constructs, a SEM was applied. The results reinforced the proposed model: (1) Destination brand image and trust are directly influenced by destination marketing and destination brand quality. (2) Tourist satisfaction is directly influenced by both destination brand image and destination brand trust. (3) Tourist satisfaction in turn has a direct and positive impact on tourist loyalty. Theoretical and practical implications were drawn, and recommendations for future researchers were also made.*

Keywords: Destination Marketing, Brand Image, Brand Quality, Brand Trust, Tourist Satisfaction, Destination Loyalty

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Introduction

More than before, brand could be considered as one of the main assets of any business. Everything could be branded such as people, ideas, cities, and destinations (Anholt & Hildreth, 2004). Thus, it may give advantage for a city or country over others. It is the way people perceive and identify unique characteristics of product, service, and destination. Tourism destinations compete each other on the how to create their brand through forming and nurturing image in the minds of consumers (Anggana and Abadi, 2020). A destination quality can attract tourists and its value can affect destination image and tourism loyalty. According to Konecnik & Gartner, (2007), destination brand equity is strongly influenced by its destination quality and attributes. The ultimate purpose of improving destination quality is satisfying customers' needs and expectations. According to (Chen & Chen, 2010), perceived past experience is a determining factor of tourists' satisfaction and their intention to re-visit a destination. Thus, it is very important for decision makers and policy makers to be able to assess tourist's satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, investigating how tourist loyalty can be enhanced can provide marketing tactics for destination marketers and government authorities.

Research significance

The success of any destination hinges on promoting high tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. While previous research has explored the effect of destination marketing on these outcomes, a broad understanding within a specific cultural context remains abstract. This study addresses this gap by examining the combined impact of destination marketing, destination brand quality, destination brand image, and destination brand trust on tourist satisfaction and loyalty in Aqaba, Jordan. This research seeks to contribute theoretically by examining how destination marketing interacts with brand quality, image, and trust to create a holistic influence on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. This analysis will reveal how effective marketing can amplify a positive brand image and trust, ultimately leading to higher satisfaction and repeat visits. This research aims to refine present theories on destination branding. This could include identifying how destination marketing strategies influence brand quality and image to nurture trust among tourists within a specific cultural setting. This nuanced understanding can advise authorities in Aqaba to develop culturally-sensitive marketing and branding strategies that nurture a strong brand image, trust, and ultimately, high tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Destination marketing

Destination marketing plays a vital role in determining tourist perceptions and influencing their experience. Destination marketing campaigns can foster a positive image of a destination in the minds of possible tourists. By emphasizing unique attractions, cultural experiences, and desirable aspects, marketing materials can generate a sense of excitement, leading to higher satisfaction upon arrival if the destination delivers on its promises (Assaker & Zaidan, 2017). Marketing efforts can successfully manage tourist expectations by providing precise information about the destination's offerings, infrastructure, and overall experience.

Realistic descriptions can prevent disappointment and contribute to a sufficient visit (Kim & Morrison, 2006). Targeting the exact audience with relevant messages can attract tourists who are likely to find the destination attractive, leading to a higher level of satisfaction (Buhalis, 2000). Trustworthy brands conveys a sense of security and reliability, leading to a more positive travel experience and increased loyalty (Morgan & Pritchard, 2006).

Destination brand image

Destination image is the perceived attributes of the tourism destination (Wang and Hsu, 2010). The total image is formulated in tourists' minds about a particular destination through their knowledge, beliefs, and feelings (Chen & Tsai, 2007), thus image is mentally constructed and does not reflect reality because it largely represents the intangible features of the destination. Whenever tourists select a destination, they recall its image in their minds which is constructed in the form of feelings, and past knowledge or experience (Kanwel et al., 2019; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001), thus destination image differs from an individual to another according to their own subjective evaluation. According to Donaire & Gali, (2015), destination image precedes the tourist's behavior which involves comparing destinations and choosing the worthiest.

Destination brand quality

According to Karkehabadi & Foadian, (2020), is the consumer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service over other options". The destination quality is tourists' perception of a destination's characteristics that fulfill their needs and expectations. Tourists perceive destination quality differently because of the complexity of assessing its quality. It is assessed through observing tangible quality attributes and perceiving its intangible service elements. Furthermore, quality assessment varies between people due to their diverse past experience and social/cultural backgrounds. Perceived destination quality could be considered as a competitive advantage that differentiate a destination form another. In a study of Matzler et al., (2008), it is argued that destination quality is determined by a variety of attributes such as ease of access, level of prices and value. In contrast, Liu & Jang, (2009), services, convenience and location, facilities and atmosphere were found to have impact on tourist satisfaction.

Destination brand trust

Brand identification is reinforced when consumers trust it because they perceive that its features are relevant and socially needed (Ahearne et al., 2005). In regard to leisure industry, it is argued that when a destination trust diffused among tourists, they become more attached, satisfied, and loyal (Chang, 2014). According to Laroche et al., (2012), trust is formed after consumers have perceived the benefits obtained from experiencing product and service. In this regard, the perceived destination trust would enhance tourist's satisfaction.

Tourists' satisfaction

Satisfaction is the feeling of pleasure tourists may experience in their visit (Agyeiwaah et al., 2016). According to Chen et al., (2016), it is argued that tourists are satisfied when perceived performance after experience overcome prior expectation. This indicates that satisfaction is determined by prior expectation and perceived performance after experiences. Visitors build their own image and share it with potential visitors, so the good image visitors formulate the higher satisfaction they feel. The results of Chiu et al., (2016) showed that brand image had a direct positive influences on tourist satisfaction, and in turn, satisfaction anticipated tourists loyalty. Similarly, Chi & Qu, (2008) found that the destination brand image had a direct impact on tourists' satisfaction, and that overall tourists' satisfaction had a direct and positive impact on their loyalty.

Destination loyalty

Tourists' loyalty is considered when they are willing to pay on a destination more than others. They are loyal when they intend to revisit the destination and more likely to recommend it (Chen & Tsai, 2007). It indicates that previous experience influences future tourist decision in choosing a certain destination (Imani et al., 2010). It is greatly argued that tourist behavior before, during, and after destination visit is significantly affected by destination image (Han et al., 2015; Chiu et al., 2016). When a tourist shows an intention to revisit the same destination then he is satisfied, thus visitor satisfaction is a good predictor of intention to revisit (Ramesh & Jaunky, 2021; Nilplub et al., 2016;). On the other hand, dissatisfied tourists may evoke negative impressions about a destination which may destroy its image (Reisinger & Turner, 2012).

Accordingly, seven hypotheses will be tested using data collected upon local tourists in Aqaba (Figure 1):

- H1: Destination marketing is positively related to destination brand image;
- H2: Destination marketing is positively related to destination brand trust;
- H3: Destination brand quality is positively related to destination brand image;
- H4: Destination brand quality is positively related to destination brand trust;
- H5: Destination brand image is positively related to tourist satisfaction;
- H6: Destination brand trust is positively related to tourist satisfaction;
- H7: Tourist satisfaction is positively related to tourist loyalty.

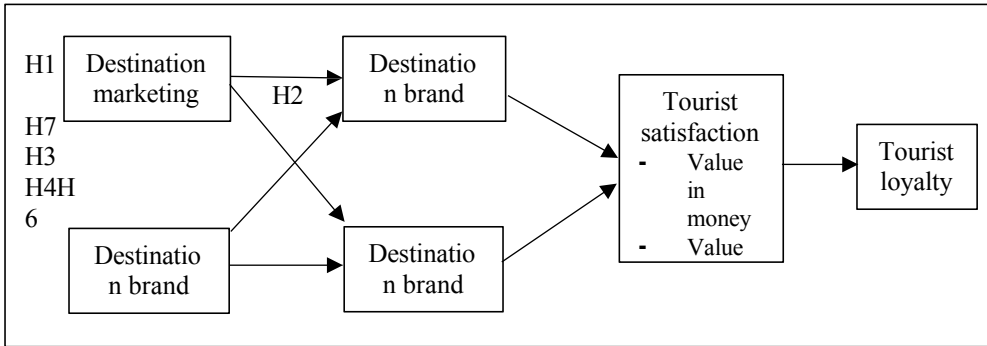


Figure 1: The proposed model. Source: authors

Method

This study focuses on local visitors from the different origins of Jordan. To avoid potential bias due to the way of selecting respondents, they will be interviewed in different locations (hotels, markets, souvenirs, beaches, etc.) within Aqaba city and at different times during day and night. Only the targeted respondents are those who made the decision to choose Aqaba.

Data collection

To test our research model, we conducted an online survey with 481 local tourists. After removing invalid responses, we analyzed data from 463 participants. The survey mostly used well-established questions from previous research to ensure reliability and validity. Participants rated each statement on a 5-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." All questionnaire items are shown in Appendix A.

Respondent profile

Among those surveyed, there were 239 males (51.6%) and 224 females (48.4%). Of these, 122 (26.3%) worked in the private sector, 193 (41.7%) in the public sector, and 148 (32%) were self-employed, unemployed, retired, students, or housewives. The majority of respondents (41.3%) reported an individual income of 500 JD or less. A significant portion (75.6%) visited Aqaba with their families, and the primary purpose for the majority (90.1%) of them was tourism. More detailed demographic distribution of respondents can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency distributions for respondents’ demographics

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	239	51.6
	Female	224	48.4
	Total	463	100.0
Occupation	Self-employed	6	1.3

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	Private sector	122	26.3
	Public sector	193	41.7
	Unemployed	17	3.7
	Retired	46	9.9
	Student	48	10.4
	Housewife	31	6.7
	Total	463	100.0
Individual income/month (JD)	Up to 500	191	41.3
	501–1000	158	34.1
	1001–1500	58	12.5
	1501–2000	25	5.4
	2001 and more	31	6.7
	Total	463	100.0
Number of visits	First time	128	27.6
	Two to three times	136	29.4
	Four to five times	73	15.8
	Six times or more	126	27.2
	Total	463	100.0
Purpose of visiting Aqaba	Tourism	417	90.1
	Shopping	11	2.4
	Beauty and medication	11	2.4
	Business trip	56	12.1
	Total	463	100.0
Accompany	Alone	24	5.2
	With families	350	75.6
	With friends/colleagues	89	19.2
	Total	463	100.0

Data analysis and results

The authors detail the methodological framework employed in this research to model the factors influencing tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The paper outlines the procedures undertaken to analyze the data and test the proposed hypotheses. This encompasses data collection, measurement of variables within the research model, and the application of specific analysis methods, including software tools like SPSS v25 and AMOS v24, culminating in the utilization of structural equation modeling. To assess whether the study data and variables conform to a normal distribution, the skewness and kurtosis coefficients were examined for each aspect of the study tool. Table 3 demonstrates that all skewness and kurtosis coefficients fall within acceptable ranges indicative of a normal distribution: skewness values range from -2 to 2, and kurtosis coefficients from -7 to 7. This suggests that the study data adhere to a normal distribution, making them suitable for further statistical analysis.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of research variables

Variables	Number of items	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Destination Marketing	7	3.09	0.78	-0.050	0.225
Destination Brand Quality	7	3.92	0.62	-0.769	1.270
Destination Brand Image	11	3.79	0.68	-0.317	-0.179
Destination Brand Trust	5	3.73	0.80	-0.525	0.336
Tourist Satisfaction	7	3.35	0.89	-0.244	-0.354
Tourist Loyalty	6	3.45	0.99	-0.462	-0.254

Reliability coefficients

The fit indices for the path model indicate satisfactory results (GFI = 0.901; RMSEA = 0.060; SRMR = 0.083; CFI = 0.936; AGFI = 0.845). Additionally, all expected relationships among the model constructs are statistically significant as shown in Table 3. The hierarchical organization of the model has been validated, underscoring the reliability and empirical strength of the proposed modeling strategy (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

Table 3: Measurement model: Goodness of fit indices

Indicator	Threshold Value	Statistic Value
Goodness-of-fit index (GFI)	> 0.90	0.901
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	< 0.08	0.060
Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)	> 0.08	0.083
Comparative fit index (CFI)	> 0.90	0.936
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI)	> 0.80	0.845

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to ensure the construct validity of each item measuring the variable's level and its association. Additionally, the convergent validity of the three measures was assessed through measuring the saturation values of each item. These variables were evaluated using Composite Reliability, Average Variance Explained, Discriminant Validity, and Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Key indicators were examined to assess the adequacy of each measure and the overall measure of the study Sarstedt et al., (2020). Table 11 presents the most significant of these indicators.

The measurement model exhibits satisfactory results (see Table 4). Initially, the composite reliabilities (CRs) validate the model, surpassing the suggested threshold of 0.7. The estimated regression weights, or factor loadings, are notably high and statistically significant. Specifically, all t-values exceed 1.96, ranging from 10.538 to 26.865. Moreover, all standardized loadings exceed 0.50, ranging between 0.582 and 0.815, with most surpassing 0.7. Substantial amounts of variance are explained by the squared multiple correlations (SMCs). The average variance extracted (AVE) significantly exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.5.

Table 4: Measurement model: Test statistics

Constructs	Scale	Composite	Standardized	t	SMC	AVE
Destination Marketing	DM1	0.874	0.604		0.546	0.579
	DM2		0.707	17.011	0.582	
	DM3		0.696	16.969	0.576	
	DM4		0.622	15.698	0.563	
	DM5		0.664	16.354	0.551	
	DM6		0.647	16.106	0.595	
	DM7		0.673	16.832	0.642	
Destination Brand Quality	DBQ1	0.801	0.509		0.567	0.539
	DBQ2		0.717	15.066	0.528	
	DBQ3		0.725	14.523	0.477	
	DBQ4		0.634	12.883	0.404	
	DBQ5		0.705	15.083	0.577	
	DBQ6		0.664	10.538	0.634	
	DBQ7		0.590	10.699	0.589	
Destination Brand Image	DBI1	0.901	0.592		0.672	0.670
	DBI2		0.582	15.620	0.687	
	DBI3		0.576	15.224	0.664	
	DBI4		0.699	16.616	0.714	
	DBI5		0.641	16.217	0.714	
	DBI6		0.616	11.352	0.517	
	DBI7		0.579	12.788	0.556	
	DBI8		0.773	17.417	0.731	
	DBI9		0.672	17.359	0.746	
	DBI10		0.688	17.553	0.752	
	DBI11		0.635	13.331	0.619	
Destination Brand Trust	DBT1	0.887	0.611		0.732	0.793
	DBT2		0.724	20.865	0.829	
	DBT3		0.656	19.720	0.800	
	DBT4		0.731	20.833	0.836	
	DBT5		0.606	17.739	0.769	
Tourist Satisfaction	TS1	0.860	0.681		0.753	0.762
	TS2		0.545	16.021	0.674	
	TS3		0.592	16.058	0.677	
	TS4		0.692	20.143	0.798	
	TS5		0.678	20.698	0.803	
	TS6		0.717	21.199	0.817	
	TS7		0.761	20.869	0.813	
Tourist Loyalty	TL1	0.951	0.749		0.786	0.781
	TL2		0.774	24.675	0.755	
	TL3		0.791	26.865	0.782	
	TL4		0.784	26.131	0.787	
	TL5		0.815	26.870	0.794	
	TL6		0.742	23.226	0.781	

Note:

SMC = squared multiple correlation; AVE = average variance extracted.

*Paths fixed to one to estimate parameters.

Table 5 presents the findings from the assessment of discriminant validity, which fully supports all constructs proposed in the model. Consequently, the confirmatory factor analysis

results are deemed satisfactory, as they affirm both convergent and discriminant validity (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

Table 5: Discriminant validity of the model measurement scale

	DM	DBQ	DBI	DBT	TS	TL
DM	0.381					
DBQ	0.248	0.607				
DBI	0.248	0.238	0.364			
DBT	0.262	0.303	0.299	0.482		
TS	0.208	0.258	0.281	0.314	0.381	
TL	0.169	0.187	0.24	0.238	0.284	0.324

Note: The bold diagonal elements show average variance extracted values; off-diagonal elements show squared correlations between model constructs.

Discussion and conclusion

This research contributes to the development of knowledge on transferring the concepts of brand quality, brand image, and brand trust to a tourism destination context (Boo et al., 2009; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pike et al., 2019). The proposed model was applied and tested for the destination of Aqaba-Jordan with data from domestic tourists visiting Aqaba. Results confirmed the hierarchical structure and demonstrated reliability and empirical robustness of the proposed model.

Table 6: Regression weights

Structural Relationships	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	CR	P
H1: DM → DBI	0.27	0.27	0.00	7.82	**
H2: DM → DBT	0.38	0.38	0.00	9.87	**
H3: DBQ → DBI	0.53	0.53	0.00	12.32	**
H4: DBQ → DBT	0.61	0.61	0.00	12.58	**
H5: DBI → TS	0.45	0.45	0.00	9.21	**
H6: DBT → TS	0.62	0.62	0.00	14.67	**
H7: TS → TL	0.94	0.94	0.00	33.81	**

As shown in Figure 2, Results showed that the explanation power of the proposed model is high and exceed the value of 0.50. Similarly, the chain of causal relationships between the models’ constructs is strong and significant (Table 6). Findings are in line with previous research(Liu & Jang, 2009) and confirm the multidimensional nature of the destination marketing, destination brand quality, destination brand image, destination brand trust, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty.

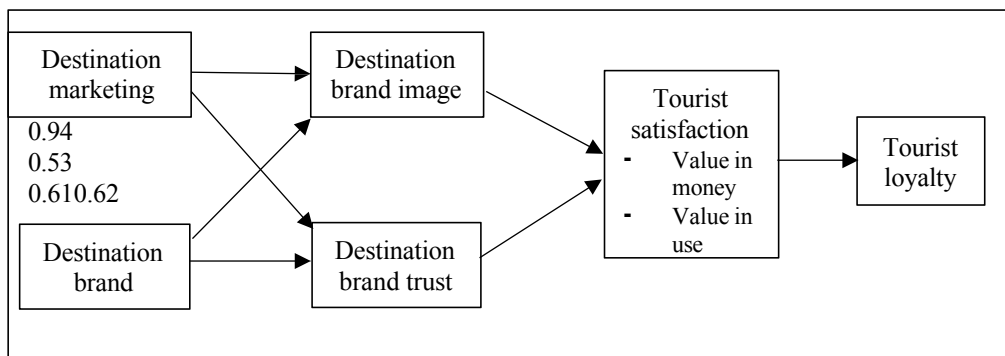


Figure 2: Study Model. Source: authors

The findings support our hypotheses, revealing significant positive relationships between all the constructs studied. Examination of the hypothesized relational structure within the proposed model confirmed previous findings regarding relationships between destination marketing, destination brand quality and tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Liu & Jang, 2009; Reisinger & Turner, 2003). The positive impact of destination marketing on brand image and trust resonates with Liu & Jang, (2009) who highlight the role of effective marketing in shaping tourist perceptions and building trust. Our research extends these findings by demonstrating that high-quality destination branding, characterized by distinctiveness, and a strong value proposition, further strengthens brand image and trust. This aligns with Assaker & Zaidan, (2017) who suggest that tourists are drawn to destinations with genuine brands, leading to higher revisit intentions.

The positive influence of brand image and trust on tourist satisfaction and loyalty is well-supported by existing literature. Tourists with a favorable brand image are more likely to be satisfied with their destination experience, as demonstrated by (Chang, 2014). Furthermore, trust in a destination brand fosters a sense of security and reliability, leading to increased loyalty as suggested by Nilplub et al., (2016). Our research reinforces these notions by demonstrating that a positive brand image and strong trust act as key drivers of tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The confirmation of the hypothesis that tourist satisfaction is a direct antecedent of tourist loyalty is, indeed an important finding that has been limitedly discussed in the literature. Nevertheless, the result is in line with studies demonstrating that overall judgments of destination brand image and the destination brand trust are positively influence tourist satisfaction and ultimately tourist loyalty (Chang, 2014; Han et al., 2015).

These findings hold significant implications for destination management organizations. Investing in strategic destination marketing that emphasizes unique selling points and delivers a consistent brand message is crucial for building a strong brand image. Furthermore, ensuring a high-quality destination experience that lives up to the brand promise is essential for fostering trust among tourists.

Limitations and future research

This research acknowledges certain limitations. The study dedicated on a particular tourist destination, and findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. Future research

could discover these relationships across various destinations and tourist classifications. Future research might incorporate more objective measures of tourist satisfaction and loyalty. In a nutshell, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on destination branding by demonstrating the positive impact of destination marketing and brand quality on brand image, trust, and ultimately, tourist satisfaction and loyalty. By prioritizing effective marketing and brand management approaches, a competitive advantage and foster a loyal tourist base can be generated.

Declarations

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