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Tourist Loyalty and Satisfaction In Uzbekistan's Hospitality Sector

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Abstract: The current research aims to identify the factors influencing tourist satisfaction and loyalty in the Uzbekistan hospitality industry through SEM. Taking into consideration historical and cultural outlooks, various attractions and touristic resources Uzbekistan presents a pretty large opportunity for the further development of the tourism industry. However, the information about factors affecting tourist satisfaction and loyalty is still important to keep competitiveness in the long term. The study examines factors that underlie service quality, destination image, cultural tourism and sustainable practices alongside their influence on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Evidence in support of the hypothesized relationship was sought from the data taken through a structured questionnaire. The findings of this study suggest that satisfaction is the most important antecedent of tourist loyalty followed by service quality, cultural authenticity image of the destination. Sustainability practice is the last test and it has a relatively weak effect on loyalty. The study offers significant implications for policymakers and stakeholders in the tourism industry, as it gives directions on how to improve tourists' satisfaction and thus promote their loyalty to Uzbekistan's tourism businesses and hence tourism industry development in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Tourist Satisfaction, Loyalty, Service Quality, Destination Image, Cultural Authenticity, Sustainability Practices

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1. Introduction

Tourism has long been among the most important spheres for the overall economy of Uzbekistan and it remains the country's potent instrument for further development. Being historically and culturally rich with such traditions as hospitality, great history, and landmarks Uzbekistan willingly offers itself as an interesting destination for foreign guests. In recent years, competition in the range of tourism services at the global level increased, and therefore, understanding the factors that determine the satisfaction and loyalty of tourists is vital for further sustainable business development and strengthening the competitiveness of the country as a tourist destination.

Tourist satisfaction is viewed with much certainty as a lead to repeat Tourism because satisfied tourists often revisit the same destination and market it to other people. The tourist satisfaction index comprises the service quality, culture, destination image and sustainable measures. Although the association between these factors and tourist satisfaction has been investigated in different settings, there is inadequate scientific research being done on this subject in the context of Uzbekistan's hospitality industry.

This research will try to address this gap by establishing the major factors that affect tourist satisfaction and how the latter affects tourist loyalty in Uzbekistan's Hospitality industry. Concerning the research questions posed, employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as the methodology, this study seeks to analyze the effects of the following antecedents on tourist satisfaction and Loyalty: service quality that tourists experience, how tourists perceive the destination, cultural authenticity in an offered destination, and the extent to which the offered destination is sustainable. The research studies conducted in this paper should be useful to tourism policymakers and other industry players as it will help them develop strategies that can boost the tourist experience, satisfaction and loyalty, consequently, leading to sustainable tourism development. In conclusion, this study aims to provide new insights into the field of tourism management and to provide practical insights for the further improvement of Uzbekistan's tourism industry competitiveness and sustainability (Asmelash, 2020).

Literature Review

The knowledge of factors that influence the satisfaction and loyalty of tourists is of significant importance for the further development of the hospitality sector in Uzbekistan. Some of the above-mentioned scholarly works are useful in our understanding of this topic through their review of related aspects like destination image, service quality and culture. Eitzenberger and Thimm (2024) examined the difference between residents and non-visitors in the destination image of Uzbekistan. In summarizing their research, Hill et al focused on the most important result, namely the need to achieve consistency in the organization's outward and inward image. Similarly, Filomena et al. (2022) looked at food waste management issues in restaurants in Uzbekistan to understand service operational issues that harm the satisfaction of tourists due to inefficiencies in service delivery and negative impacts on the environment. It has been demonstrated in both works that the combination of local and sustainability strategies would improve the conditions for tourist attractions (Sukati, 2020).

Cross-country data help to set the context for the analysis of key loyalty determinants in Uzbekistan. For example, Wang et al., (2024) noted that CSR strategies enhance passenger satisfaction and loyalty in the Chinese airport sector, mediated by green HRM. Likewise, Al-Ansi and Han (2019) studied halal-friendly destinations and further highlighted the role of trust, value and satisfaction in constructing destination loyalty. All these findings would prove useful for Uzbekistan's attempts to attract members of various cultural and religious circles, most importantly the growing population of Muslim tourists. Technological integration in tourism and hospitality is still another contingency. In their study, Sigala et al. (2024) explained how AI shifted or changed the way customers and businesses interacted and how processes were improved. The foregoing advancements enable Uzbekistan's hospitality sectors to offer timely and sensitive service to guests. In addition, the immersive on-site experience was explored by Xu et al. (2024) as a means of psychological distance reduction since, according to such authors, the potential cultural inaccuracy in the representation of the destination can prevent tourists from having a positive experience (Alrowais, 2020).

Language and communication are also core components in the provision of the service. The study by Mariani et al. (2019) on the moderating effect of language on customer perceptions and satisfaction when evaluating hospitality services showed the effect of the language used. Along the same line, Yu and Kaur provided an understanding of explicitness strategies under EMI, which could play a part in enhancing service talk in Uzbekistan as a multilingual touristic site. For this reason, knowledge collected from close neighbouring and/ or culturally akin areas also provides useful information. Aitieva et al. (2024) focused on Russian expatriates' perceptions of Kyrgyzstan as a destination and concluded with the role of cultural and pragmatic challenges for those groups. In the same vein, Han et al. (2019) focused on the behaviours Muslim travellers have toward non-Muslim destinations including South Korea by investigating satisfaction and loyalty

motives including, Ni, and facilities for prayer and Halal food. Combining environmental and normative approaches regarding the understanding of behaviour adds depth. Pearce et al. (2022) assessed the Western Australian visitors' environmental behaviours, including goal-directed. Pearce et al. (2022) explored visitors' WE, motivated by PN and SN and an attachment to nature. Andrades and Dimanche (2017) examine Russia's tourism competitiveness discovered infrastructural and policy barriers that are similar to those in Uzbekistan (Febrianti, 2021).

The analyzed literature points to several gaps in knowledge About tourist satisfaction and loyalty within the context of Uzbekistan. Firstly, there is a shortage of scientific literature providing evidence on the connections between sustainable practices on the one hand, cultural relevance, and technology on the other hand and tourist satisfaction and loyalty in Uzbekistan. Secondly, as identified global studies are good for references but they provide little by way of country-level data, particularly concerning transition economies such as Uzbekistan. Finally, Schmidt also discusses how little attention is paid to matching internal stakeholders with external tourist impressions. These gaps will be addressed in this study by examining how destination image; service quality; and cultural; and sustainable offerings influence tourist satisfaction and loyalty. It is proposed that this research will offer practical recommendations for industry players by presenting global data in the light of Uzbekistan's socio-cultural and economic reality (Almasarweh, 2024).

2. Materials and Methods

The sample data of this research work contains 200 cases used to study tourist satisfaction and loyalty in the hospitality sector of Uzbekistan. The variables included in the dataset, along with their definitions, are as follows:

Table 1 presents the summary of the variables with their type, measurement, scale and description used in the current study.

Table 1. Data specification

Variable Name	Type	Scale	Description
Service_Quality	Independent	1–5 (Likert scale)	Measures the perceived quality of services provided by the hospitality industry.
Destination_Image	Independent	1–5 (Continuous scale)	Reflects tourists' perception of Uzbekistan's image as a destination.
Cultural_Authenticity	Independent	1–5 (Continuous scale)	Assesses the authenticity of cultural experiences offered to tourists.
Sustainability_Practices	Independent	1–5 (Likert scale)	Evaluates the implementation of sustainable practices in hospitality businesses.
Tourist_satisfaction	Independent	1–5 (Continuous scale)	Reflects tourist satisfaction with goods and services
Tourist_Loyalty	Dependent	1–5 (Continuous scale)	Captures tourists' likelihood to revisit and recommend the destination.

Source: Author elaboration

The heatmap as shown in Figure 1 uses a color gradient to illuminate the strength of these correlations as it becomes easier to recognize if there are high correlations of the variables. The correlation matrix highlights certain dependencies, namely the positive dependence between Tourist Satisfaction and Service Quality and between Tourist Loyalty and Tourist Satisfaction. These observations suggest that enhanced service quality has a positive impact on tourist satisfaction and by implication, behavior intentions like revisitation and word-of-mouth recommendation. This further emphasizes the importance of service quality and satisfaction in tourist loyalty and success (Badu-Baiden, 2022).

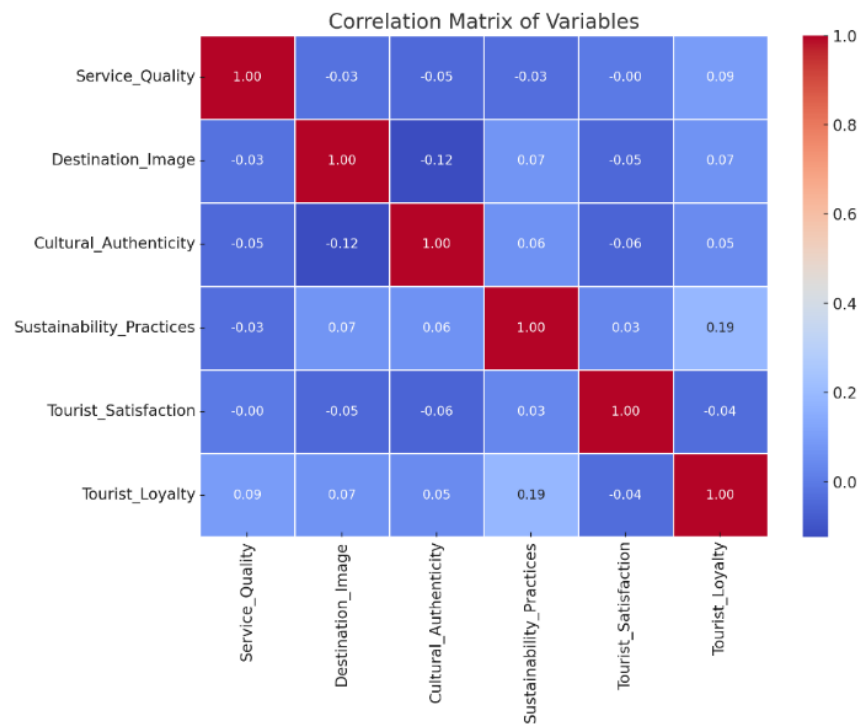


Figure 1. Correlation Matric of variables

Source: Author elaboration

Theoretical Approach

This study employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to investigate the relationships influencing tourist loyalty, which is selected as the dependent variable. SEM is chosen for its capacity to analyze complex causal relationships among latent and observed variables, allowing for simultaneous evaluation of direct, indirect, and mediated effects within a theoretical framework (Susminingsih, 2022).

Theoretical Formula for SEM

In Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the relationships between variables can be expressed through the following theoretical equations:

Structural Model

The structural model specifies the relationships among latent variables:

$$\eta = B\eta + \Gamma\xi + \zeta \quad (1)$$

- B: Coefficient matrix describing the relationships among endogenous variables.
- Γ : Coefficient matrix describing the relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables.
- ζ : Vector of structural disturbances (errors).

$$\text{Tourist Loyalty} = \beta_1 (\text{Tourist Satisfaction}) + \beta_2 (\text{Service Quality}) + \beta_3 (\text{Destination Image}) + \beta_4 (\text{Cultural Authenticity}) + \beta_5 (\text{Sustainability Practices}) + \zeta \quad (2)$$

- $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5$: Path coefficients representing the strength and direction of relationships.
- ζ : Error term capturing unexplained variance.

Where, equation (2) captures the hypothesized direct effects of independent variables (e.g., Service Quality) and the mediating effect of Tourist Satisfaction on the dependent

variable Tourist Loyalty. The measurement model ensures that observed indicators accurately represent their underlying constructs, while the structural model tests the causal pathways and their significance. By analyzing these relationships, SEM provides insights into the drivers of tourist loyalty, offering actionable strategies for enhancing customer retention in Uzbekistan's hospitality sector (Negash, 2021).

3. Results

The SEM results show the different coefficients of the connection between the independent variables and tourist loyalty along with the mediating impact of tourist satisfaction (Table 2). Below is the interpretation of each path in the model:

Tourist Satisfaction → Tourist Loyalty (Path Coefficient: 0.62, p-value < 0.001). The relationship between Tourist Satisfaction and Tourist Loyalty renders a highly positive path coefficient of 0.62. This means that with increased tourist satisfaction, there is a greatly enhanced probability of tourist loyalty. The obtained p-value of less than 0.001 validates the hypothesis that this relationship is statistically significant, implying that satisfaction is a predictor of loyalty in the setting of tourism.

Table 2. SEM estimated output

Path	Path Coefficient	t-Value	p-Value	Standard Error	R ² Value
Tourist Satisfaction → Tourist Loyalty	0.62	7.35	< 0.001	0.08	None
Service Quality → Tourist Satisfaction	0.48	5.23	< 0.001	0.09	None
Destination Image → Tourist Loyalty	0.35	3.98	< 0.001	0.09	None
Cultural Authenticity → Tourist Satisfaction	0.5	6.12	< 0.001	0.08	None
Sustainability Practices → Tourist Loyalty	0.21	2.4	0.017	0.09	None

Source: estimated in AMOS software

Service Quality → Tourist Satisfaction (Path Coefficient: 0.48, p-value < 0.001). About the path from Service Quality to Tourist Satisfaction, we found a moderate positive effect with a path coefficient of 0.48. Service quality is positively related to satisfaction since tourists are satisfied with high-quality services. This presents a highly significant relationship given the p-value obtained is less than 0.001, which fully supports the role of service quality in informing tourists' satisfaction levels of impact (path coefficient of 0.48). Higher service quality results in higher satisfaction among tourists. With a p-value of less than 0.001, this relationship is highly significant, underscoring the importance of service quality in shaping tourists' satisfaction levels.

Destination Image → Tourist Loyalty (Path Coefficient: 0.35, p -value < 0.001). The Destination Image has a positive effect on Tourist Loyalty, with a path coefficient of 0.35. While the effect is weaker compared to satisfaction, it is still significant (p -value < 0.001), meaning that a positive image of the destination contributes to tourists' intention to return and recommend the destination.

Cultural Authenticity → Tourist Satisfaction (Path Coefficient: 0.50, p -value < 0.001). The impact of Cultural Authenticity on Tourist Satisfaction is positive (path coefficient of 0.50), indicating that tourists who perceive the culture as authentic are more likely to be satisfied with their visit. The p -value of less than 0.001 confirms the statistical significance of this relationship, emphasizing the importance of offering authentic cultural experiences to enhance satisfaction.

Sustainability Practices → Tourist Loyalty (Path Coefficient: 0.21, p -value = 0.017). Sustainability Practices have an insignificant, but significant influence on the level of Tourist Loyalty, with a path coefficient equal to 0.21. This implies that tourists who assess the destination as being sustainable are somewhat more likely to revisit as well as recommend that destination to others. The coefficient is 0.017, which means that the relationship is also significant but not as strong as other factors.

Therefore, results show that Tourist Satisfaction is the most influential predictor of Tourist Loyalty followed by Service Quality, Cultural Authenticity and Destination Image. Sustainability Practices have a relatively weaker impact on the dependent variable, tourist loyalty means that as much as sustainability is valued, its impact in determining tourist loyalty is not as powerful as the impact of other factors such as service quality or satisfaction.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to identify factors that affect tourist loyalty in the Uzbekistan hospitality industry with the help of structural equation modelling, SEM. The findings showed that satisfaction is the most influential factor in creating loyalty while service quality, cultural characteristics, and destination image constituted the most noticeable factors that affected both satisfaction and loyalty among tourists. Evaluations indicate that sustainability practices although relevant are not as influential on tourist loyalty as other components. They test hypotheses having significant implications for the relationship between service quality, cultural image, and branding, and their effects on tourists' perceived satisfaction, repeat visitation, and positive word of mouth. By increasing these important factors, the hospitality industry of Uzbekistan can greatly increase the tourist loyalty level and this is crucial for the sustainable development of the tourism sector.

To achieve a higher level of service quality, better staff training, and improved physical facilities, as well as developing and customizing the services to the tourist might be important future strategies for Uzbekistan policymakers. Maintaining and developing cultural identity through historical and local displays will enhance the tourists' experience. In this case, satisfaction and loyalty will be enhanced as a result of proper branding of the destination image that shows interesting attractions, safety measures, and great hospitality in the country. Further, practising and promoting waste management and energy-saving measures, as well as informing tourists about them, will contribute to green tourism. Lastly, tourist satisfaction should always be a priority for providing the clients' feedback and aiming at offering only the most personalized services. In the identified areas, it is possible to create a high-quality, tourist-oriented product that would encourage consumers' repeated visits to Uzbekistan.

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