“Drivers of self-reported destination loyalty intentions in an emerging tourism destination: A PLS-SEM study of tourists in Da Nang, Vietnam”

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DRIVERS OF SELF-REPORTED DESTINATION LOYALTY INTENTIONS IN AN EMERGING TOURISM DESTINATION: A PLS-SEM STUDY OF TOURISTS IN DA NANG, VIETNAM

Abstract

Growing competition among global tourism destinations has made it essential to understand what drives tourists to intend to return and recommend a place. This study aims to examine the direct and indirect relationships among destination image, tourist motivation, perceived value, destination experience, destination satisfaction, and destination loyalty intentions in Da Nang, Vietnam, in order to identify the key drivers of self-reported tourist loyalty in an emerging tourism destination. Data were collected from 428 international and domestic tourists who visited Da Nang between September and December 2024 through a structured questionnaire distributed both on-site and online. Respondents were recruited through non-probability convenience and intercept sampling among tourists aged 18 or older who were present at the destination during the study period. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling was used to test thirteen hypotheses. The results show that destination image significantly influences perceived value ($\beta = 0.330$, $p < 0.001$) and destination experience ($\beta = 0.201$, $p = 0.003$), but has no direct effect on satisfaction or loyalty intentions. Tourist motivation directly shapes perceived value ($\beta = 0.173$, $p = 0.003$), destination experience ($\beta = 0.330$, $p < 0.001$), and loyalty intentions ($\beta = 0.113$, $p = 0.024$). Perceived value is the strongest direct predictor of loyalty intentions ($\beta = 0.367$, $p < 0.001$), and destination experience is the primary driver of satisfaction ($\beta = 0.394$, $p < 0.001$). Because the loyalty outcome captures self-reported behavioral intentions rather than observed repeat behavior, the findings suggest that destination managers should prioritize enhancing perceived value and experiential quality over image-based marketing alone to build long-term tourist loyalty in emerging markets.

Keywords loyalty, satisfaction, experience, motivation, image, value, Vietnam

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INTRODUCTION

International tourism has recovered impressively since the COVID-19 pandemic. According to UN Tourism (2025), international tourist arrivals in 2024 reached 1.4 billion, representing 99% of pre-pandemic levels. This rebound is sustained by pent-up demand, expanded air connectivity, and visa simplification across many countries. Yet recovery is not uniform: competition among destinations has intensified, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, where both mature and emerging markets compete for the same global traveler (UN Tourism, 2025). For destinations in developing economies, the ability to convert one-time visitors into repeat visitors and advocates, that is, to build destination loyalty, is now a strategic priority rather than a secondary concern (Chi & Qu, 2008; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Despite the growing body of research on tourist behavior, a gap persists in understanding how multiple antecedents of loyalty interact within the specific cultural and developmental context of Southeast Asian emerging destinations. Existing models often test relationships in isolation or within well-established tourism markets where conditions differ substantially from rapidly developing destinations (Hoang et al., 2023; Hung et al., 2021). In contexts such as Vietnam, where tourism infrastructure, service standards, and tourist profiles are still evolving, the mechanisms through which image, motivation, value, experience, and satisfaction combine to generate loyalty remain empirically underexplored (Hoang et al., 2023). Da Nang, one of Vietnam's fastest-growing coastal tourism cities, provides an ideal context for examining these dynamics precisely because it represents an emerging destination that is actively competing for regional and international visitors. Understanding the scientific problem of which factors most powerfully generate loyalty in such a setting is not only a theoretical concern but also a practical necessity for destination competitiveness.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Tourism research has long recognized that destination loyalty, operationalized in this study as the tourist's self-reported behavioral intentions to revisit, recommend, say positive things about, and promote a place rather than as observed repeat behavior, is the result of a complex chain of evaluations rather than a single decisive factor. Building on foundational frameworks such as expectancy-disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980) and social exchange theory (Blau, 2017), scholars have progressively mapped the cognitive and affective pathways through which tourists form lasting behavioral intentions. The constructs most consistently linked to loyalty in the literature are destination image, tourist motivation, perceived value, destination experience, and destination satisfaction (Oliver, 1980; Blau, 2017).

Destination image refers to the sum of perceptions, beliefs, and emotional associations a tourist forms about a place, encompassing both cognitive and affective components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). A positive image serves as an antecedent to tourist decision-making by shaping initial expectations and attracting visitors (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Research consistently shows that a favorable destination image enhances tourists' perception of the value they receive (that is, their sense that the benefits of a visit justify the costs), because image frames what the destination promises relative to what the tourist invests (Petrick, 2004; Stylidis et al., 2017; Zeithaml, 1988). Image is also closely linked to destination experience: when a destination's projected attributes align with what tourists encounter on arrival, the experiential quality of the visit is reinforced (Kutlu & Ayyıldız, 2021; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). Studies additionally report that image positively predicts satisfaction, as expectations created by image serve as the benchmark against which actual experiences are evaluated (Jebbouri et al., 2021; Marine-Roig, 2021; Stylidis et al., 2020). Based on these relationships, this study proposes that destination image shapes perceived value, destination experience, destination satisfaction, and destination loyalty as downstream outcomes.

Tourist motivation, defined as the internal drive that prompts a person to travel to a specific destination, is equally foundational to tourist evaluation (Chon, 1990). Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1962) suggests that strongly motivated tourists actively seek experiences that validate their pre-travel expectations, thereby heightening their perceived value. Empirical work confirms this relationship: Agyeiwaah et al. (2019) found that motivation significantly affects satisfaction and loyalty through perceived value, while Gan et al. (2023) demonstrated that perceived value mediates the relationship between motivation and behavioral intentions. Tourist motivation also directly shapes the quality of destination experience, as tourists who are more motivated engage more deeply with local activities and environments (Bernaki & Marso, 2023; Din et al., 2022; Feng et al., 2020; Hung et al., 2021). Several studies further show that motivation positively predicts satisfaction, as motivated tourists approach the destination with clearer expectations, making favorable disconfirmation more likely (Hwang et al., 2020; Suhartanto et al., 2021), and that it ultimately con-

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tributes to loyalty through the satisfaction pathway (Hasan et al., 2019). Based on this evidence, the study proposes that tourist motivation influences perceived value, destination experience, destination satisfaction, and destination loyalty.

Perceived value, classically defined as the consumer's overall assessment of what is received relative to what is given (Zeithaml, 1988), occupies a central mediating position in destination loyalty models. High perceived value has been shown to enrich destination experience by generating more positive evaluations of what tourists encounter on-site (Din et al., 2022; Feng et al., 2020). It also directly predicts satisfaction: when tourists feel they have received more than they paid for in terms of time, money, and effort, overall satisfaction rises (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2021; Suhartanto et al., 2020). Moreover, perceived value predicts loyalty independently of satisfaction, suggesting that tourists may return to destinations they consider good value even when satisfaction is moderate (Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006; Marine-Roig, 2021). Based on these findings, perceived value is hypothesized to positively influence destination experience, destination satisfaction, and destination loyalty.

Destination experience encompasses the totality of a tourist's interactions, perceptions, and emotions during a visit, including service quality, the natural and cultural environment, and the overall atmosphere (Bernaki & Marso, 2023). Research consistently identifies experience quality as the most proximate driver of satisfaction: Feng et al. (2020), Stavrianea and Kamenidou (2022), and Suhartanto et al. (2021) all confirm that richer, more memorable on-site experiences translate directly into higher tourist satisfaction. Din et al. (2022) and Hasan et al. (2019) further document that positive experiences shape loyalty behaviors, often through satisfaction as an intermediary. Destination experience is therefore hypothesized to positively predict destination satisfaction.

Destination satisfaction, defined as the tourist's overall evaluation of a visit relative to prior expectations, is among the most robust predictors of loyalty in the tourism literature (Chi & Qu, 2008; Oliver, 1980; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). When experiences meet or surpass expectations, tourists develop emotional attachment that translates into revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth, the core components of destination loyalty (Feng et al., 2020; Hoang et al., 2023; Jebbouri et al., 2021; Marine-Roig, 2021). Despite the strength of this relationship, researchers note that satisfaction must be complemented by perceived value and emotional connection to generate robust loyalty in highly competitive environments (Laškarin Ažić et al., 2020). Destination satisfaction is therefore hypothesized to positively predict destination loyalty.

Taken together, the existing literature highlights destination image and tourist motivation as upstream antecedents, perceived value and destination experience as central mediating mechanisms, and destination satisfaction as the most direct precursor of loyalty. However, few studies have examined all six constructs simultaneously within a single structural model applied to an emerging Southeast Asian destination. Most empirical work originates in mature markets or tests subsets of these constructs, leaving the full causal chain underexplored in contexts like Vietnam where tourism conditions differ substantially (Hoang et al., 2023; Hung et al., 2021). This study addresses that gap by testing a comprehensive model in Da Nang, an emerging coastal city in central Vietnam, using data collected from tourists in 2024.

This study aims to examine the direct and indirect relationships among destination image, tourist motivation, perceived value, destination experience, destination satisfaction, and destination loyalty intentions in Da Nang, Vietnam, in order to identify the key drivers of self-reported tourist loyalty in an emerging tourism destination.

Based on the literature reviewed, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Destination image positively influences perceived value.

H2: Destination image positively influences destination experience.

H3: Destination image positively influences destination satisfaction.

H4: Destination image positively influences destination loyalty.

H5: Tourist motivation positively influences perceived value.

H6: Tourist motivation positively influences destination experience.

H7: Tourist motivation positively influences destination satisfaction.

H8: Tourist motivation positively influences destination loyalty.

H9: Perceived value positively influences destination experience.

H10: Perceived value positively influences destination satisfaction.

H11: Perceived value positively influences destination loyalty.

H12: Destination experience positively influences destination satisfaction.

H13: Destination satisfaction positively influences destination loyalty.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual model.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional design to test the proposed structural model. The survey instrument was developed using validated scales drawn from prior destination loyalty research. Established scales were chosen because they carry demonstrated construct validity and reliability across multiple tourism contexts, which strengthens comparability with existing studies and reduces the risk of measurement error inherent in newly developed items. The specific scales for each construct were selected because they represent the most theoretically grounded and empirically tested instruments in the destination loyalty literature: destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), tourist motivation (Chon, 1990), perceived value (Petrick, 2004; Zeithaml, 1988), destination experience (Bernaki & Marso, 2023), destina-

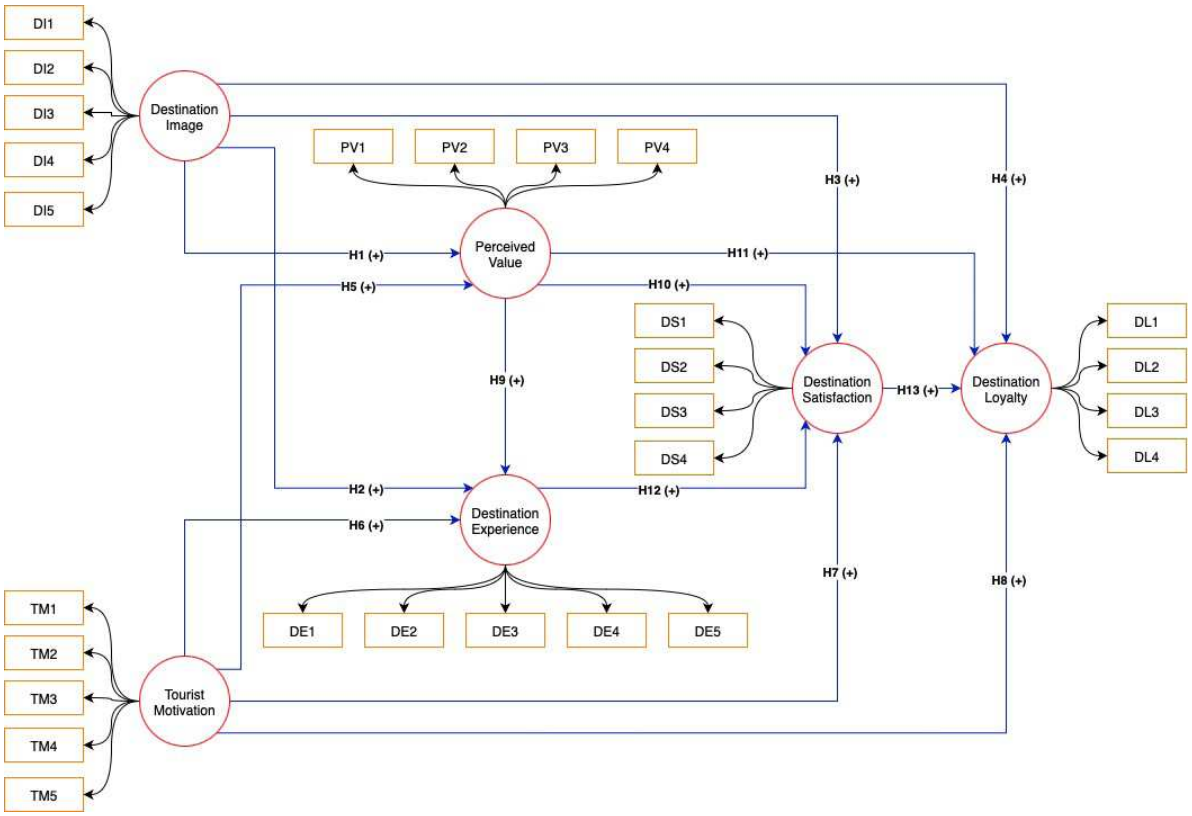

Figure 1. The conceptual model

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tion satisfaction (Oliver, 1980; Chi & Qu, 2008), and destination loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). The number of items per construct was kept to a minimum sufficient for reliable measurement, avoiding survey fatigue while retaining construct coverage. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to capture respondents' perceptions with a common metric. The constructs, items, and their source studies are presented in the Appendix. The questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese using a forward-translation and back-checking procedure to ensure linguistic accuracy and cross-cultural equivalence.

Because no sampling frame of tourists present in Da Nang exists, probability sampling was not feasible. Respondents were therefore recruited through non-probability convenience and intercept sampling: trained field assistants approached tourists in person at the research sites, and a parallel online Google Forms link was distributed through tourism-related channels to reach visitors who had recently completed or were completing a trip. This combination is consistent with standard practice in destination loyalty research, where on-site or recent experience at the destination is a prerequisite for meaningful evaluation (Hung et al., 2021; Suhartanto et al., 2020). The only eligibility criterion was being aged 18 or older, ensuring participants had the maturity to evaluate their travel experience. Data were collected during September to December 2024, a period spanning the tail of Da Nang's peak summer season and the early shoulder season, capturing a diverse mix of holiday and leisure travelers across both higher- and lower-season conditions rather than a single seasonal cohort. Data collection took place at major tourist sites, hotels, and departure areas in Da Nang, as well as through the online link. Da Nang was selected as the research site because of its status as one of Southeast Asia's fastest-growing coastal tourism destinations, its recent infrastructure development, and the availability of both domestic and international visitors, all of which make it an ideal emerging market context for testing destination loyalty models. The non-probability nature of the sample is acknowledged as a limitation in the Conclusions. Participation was entirely voluntary, respondents provided informed consent after being told the study's academic purpose, and anonymity was assured throughout; no personally identifying information was collected, and respondents could withdraw at any point. At the time of data collection, the authors' institution did not operate a formal institutional review board with jurisdiction over anonymous, non-interventional survey research of this kind; the study nonetheless adhered to the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and to standard academic research-integrity guidelines governing voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and data protection. The survey data reported in this study are original and were collected solely for this research; they have not been used as the basis for any other publication (Hung et al., 2021; Suhartanto et al., 2020).

Of 458 responses received, 30 were excluded for having more than three unanswered questions. This threshold was set because three missing items represent approximately 11% of the total questionnaire, beyond which data quality cannot be adequately maintained. Responses with three or fewer missing items were retained after imputing missing values with the median, a method robust to outliers and skewed distributions. In total, 12 cells were imputed (DI3: 1, TM4: 2, DS2: 1, DS4: 1, DE1: 2, DE5: 3, PV1: 1, DL4: 1), representing approximately 0.10% of all data points. The final sample of 428 valid responses exceeds the minimum of 155 required by Hair et al. (2022) for the model's complexity.

The sample was well-balanced in terms of gender: 49.77% identified as female and 49.30% as male, with 0.93% not responding. The largest age group was 31-45 years (45.56%), followed by 18-30 years (33.88%), 46-60 years (18.46%), and over 60 years (2.10%). Geographically, 59.81% of respondents were from Asia, while the remainder came from Europe (20.09%), the Americas (12.15%), Oceania (4.91%), and other regions (3.04%). In terms of education, 76.64% held a university degree, 14.02% held postgraduate qualifications, 8.15% had a high school diploma or lower, and 1.17% did not respond. Full demographic details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic profile of participants

Demographics	Category	Frequency (percentage)
Gender	Female	213 (49.77%)
	Male	211 (49.30%)
	No answer	4 (0.93%)
Age	18-30	145 (33.88%)
	31-45	195 (45.56%)
	46-60	79 (18.46%)
	>60	9 (2.1%)
Living area	Asia	256 (59.81%)
	Europe	86 (20.09%)
	Americas	52 (12.15%)
	Oceania	21 (4.91%)
	Others	13 (3.04%)
Education level	High school or lower	35 (8.15%)
	College/university	328 (76.64%)
	Postgraduate	60 (14.02%)
	No answer	5 (1.17%)

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) implemented in SmartPLS 3.2.9 (Ringle et al., 2015). This method was chosen for its suitability for predictive modeling, its capacity to handle complex mediation structures, and its robustness with non-normally distributed data, conditions common in tourism research (Hair et al., 2022). Bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples was used to generate stable confidence intervals for all path coefficients and indirect effects.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Measurement model assessment

Before testing the structural relationships, the measurement model was assessed for reliability, validity, and indicator quality. Outer loadings for most items ranged between 0.617 and 0.897. Some indicators (DI3, DI4, DI5, TM1) fell slightly below 0.7 but were retained due to their theoretical relevance and because composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted remained within acceptable thresholds (Hair et al., 2022). Full outer loading and collinearity statistics are provided in the Appendix.

Construct reliability and convergent validity were evaluated using four measures (Table 2). Cronbach's Alpha exceeded 0.6 for all constructs, confirming acceptable internal consistency. Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (rho_A) values were at or above 0.7 for all constructs, reinforcing reliability. Composite reliability exceeded 0.7 for all constructs, confirming strong overall reliability. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeded the 0.50 threshold for perceived value, destination satisfaction, and destination loyalty, confirming convergent validity for those three constructs. For destination image, destination experience, and tourist motivation, however, AVE fell below 0.50. Following Fornell and Larcker (1981), who note that convergent validity may still be considered adequate when AVE is below 0.50 provided composite reliability exceeds 0.60, these three constructs were retained because their composite reliability remained above 0.70. We nonetheless treat the convergent validity of destination image, destination experience, and tourist motivation as only partially established, and we acknowledge the sub-threshold AVE values as a measurement limitation of the study (see Conclusions). Results involving these three constructs should therefore be interpreted with appropriate caution (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Model fit was assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.069), which is below the 0.08 threshold, indicating good fit between the observed data and the proposed model. The variance explained by the model (R^2) was as fol-

Table 2. Construct reliability and validity from PLS-SEM estimation

Latent variables	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	AVE
Destination Experience	0.711	0.719	0.811	0.463
Destination Image	0.674	0.682	0.792	0.434
Destination Loyalty	0.848	0.855	0.898	0.688
Destination Satisfaction	0.670	0.675	0.802	0.504
Perceived Value	0.735	0.752	0.834	0.558
Tourist Motivation	0.713	0.719	0.813	0.466

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lows: perceived value $R^2 = 0.188$, destination experience $R^2 = 0.324$, destination satisfaction $R^2 = 0.355$, and destination loyalty $R^2 = 0.349$, indicating moderate to strong explanatory power (Table 3).

Table 3. R^2 values of the model

Latent variables	R^2	R^2 adjusted
Destination Experience	0.324	0.320
Destination Loyalty	0.349	0.343
Destination Satisfaction	0.355	0.349
Perceived Value	0.188	0.184

Effect sizes (f^2) showed that most relationships were small in magnitude, consistent with the complexity of the model. The strongest effects were destination experience on destination satisfaction ($f^2 = 0.163$) and tourist motivation on destination experience ($f^2 = 0.128$), both approaching a medium threshold. Perceived value on destination loyalty also approached medium magnitude ($f^2 = 0.159$). All other paths fell below 0.12 (Table 4).

Variance Inflation Factor values for all predictors were below 5, confirming the absence of multicollinearity. Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). Under the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of the average variance extracted for each construct exceeded its correlations with all other constructs (Table 5). The HTMT bias-corrected confidence interval upper bounds were below the conservative 0.90 threshold for all construct pairs except destination satisfaction-destination experience, whose upper bound reached 0.923 and thus exceeded 0.90 (Table 6). This single exception indicates that discriminant validity between destination satisfaction and destination experience is not fully established and likely reflects the well-documented conceptual overlap between experiential quality and satisfaction (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019). Because the point estimate remained below the more lenient 0.85 criterion and the two constructs are theoretically distinct, both were retained, but the borderline result is explicitly acknowledged as a limitation (see Conclusions), and findings linking these two constructs should be read with that caveat in mind (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019).

Table 4. Effect size of the model

Path	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	t-statistics	p-values
DE → DS	0.163	0.174	0.081	2.004	0.045
DI → DE	0.044	0.049	0.033	1.338	0.181
DI → DL	0.008	0.011	0.012	0.662	0.508
DI → DS	0.006	0.012	0.014	0.399	0.690
DI → PV	0.110	0.122	0.059	1.861	0.063
DS → DL	0.051	0.055	0.028	1.808	0.071
PV → DE	0.051	0.057	0.033	1.520	0.129
PV → DL	0.159	0.166	0.052	3.076	0.002
PV → DS	0.027	0.032	0.025	1.064	0.287
TM → DE	0.128	0.137	0.064	2.011	0.044
TM → DL	0.014	0.016	0.013	1.094	0.274
TM → DS	0.021	0.028	0.028	0.767	0.443
TM → PV	0.030	0.035	0.023	1.307	0.191

Table 5. Fornell-Larcker criterion from PLS-SEM estimation

Latent variables	DE	DI	DL	DS	PV	TM
DE	0.681					
DI	0.426	0.659				
DL	0.338	0.357	0.830			
DS	0.550	0.360	0.425	0.710		
PV	0.390	0.405	0.516	0.376	0.747	
TM	0.481	0.430	0.350	0.407	0.315	0.682

Table 6. Confidence intervals bias corrected of HTMT values from PLS-SEM estimation (bootstrapping)

Path	Original sample	Sample mean	2.5%	97.5%
DI → DE	0.596	0.601	0.416	0.760
DL → DE	0.430	0.434	0.304	0.550
DL → DI	0.463	0.468	0.310	0.604
DS → DE	0.785	0.791	0.611	0.923
DS → DI	0.523	0.538	0.321	0.729
DS → DL	0.557	0.559	0.434	0.665
PV → DE	0.520	0.530	0.327	0.704
PV → DI	0.565	0.574	0.345	0.788
PV → DL	0.646	0.650	0.543	0.755
PV → DS	0.523	0.531	0.331	0.718
TM → DE	0.675	0.677	0.502	0.819
TM → DI	0.621	0.630	0.438	0.788
TM → DL	0.454	0.454	0.332	0.557
TM → DS	0.582	0.588	0.396	0.747
TM → PV	0.431	0.439	0.256	0.600

3.2. Structural model and hypotheses testing

The direct effects results are presented in Table 7. Destination image significantly influenced perceived value (β = 0.330, p < 0.001) and destination experience (β = 0.201, p = 0.003), supporting *H1* and *H2*. Destination image did not have a direct effect on destination satisfaction (β = 0.073, p = 0.288) or destination loyalty (β = 0.084, p = 0.121), leading to the rejection of *H3* and *H4*. Tourist motivation significantly influenced perceived value (β = 0.173, p = 0.003) and destination experience (β = 0.330, p < 0.001), supporting *H5* and *H6*. Tourist motivation did not directly affect destination satisfaction (β = 0.139, p = 0.071), leading to the rejection of *H7*, but it significantly predicted destination loyalty (β = 0.113, p = 0.024), supporting *H8*. Perceived value significantly influenced destination experience (β = 0.205, p = 0.001), destination satisfaction (β = 0.149, p = 0.024), and destination loyalty (β = 0.367, p < 0.001), supporting *H9*, *H10*, and *H11*. Destination experience strongly predicted destination satisfaction (β = 0.394, p < 0.001), supporting *H12*. Destination satisfaction significantly influenced destination loyalty (β = 0.211, p < 0.001), supporting *H13*.

The indirect effects analysis confirmed several important mediation pathways (Table 8). Destination image indirectly influenced destination loyalty intentions through perceived value (β = 0.121,

Table 7. Path coefficients from PLS-SEM estimation (bootstrapping)

Hypothesis	Path	Original sample (β)	Sample mean (β)	Std	t-stat	p-values	Hypothesis is supported
Direct effects							
H1	DI → PV	0.330	0.335	0.073	4.553	<0.001	Yes
H2	DI → DE	0.201	0.200	0.069	2.926	0.003	Yes
H3	DI → DS	0.073	0.080	0.068	1.064	0.288	No
H4	DI → DL	0.084	0.086	0.054	1.549	0.121	No
H5	TM → PV	0.173	0.173	0.059	2.921	0.003	Yes
H6	TM → DE	0.330	0.329	0.071	4.660	<0.001	Yes
H7	TM → DS	0.139	0.138	0.077	1.805	0.071	No
H8	TM → DL	0.113	0.109	0.050	2.257	0.024	Yes
H9	PV → DE	0.205	0.207	0.062	3.300	0.001	Yes
H10	PV → DS	0.149	0.150	0.066	2.265	0.024	Yes
H11	PV → DL	0.367	0.370	0.049	7.559	<0.001	Yes
H12	DE → DS	0.394	0.391	0.076	5.192	<0.001	Yes
H13	DS → DL	0.211	0.211	0.056	3.800	<0.001	Yes
Indirect effects							
	DI → PV → DE	0.068	0.069	0.027	2.516	0.012	
	TM→ PV → DE	0.035	0.037	0.020	1.789	0.074	
	DI → DE → DS → DL	0.017	0.016	0.008	2.168	0.030	
	DI → PV → DE → DS → DL	0.006	0.006	0.003	2.094	0.036	
	PV → DE → DS → DL	0.017	0.017	0.007	2.514	0.012	
	TM → PV → DE → DS → DL	0.003	0.003	0.002	1.658	0.097	
	DE → DS → DL	0.083	0.082	0.025	3.335	0.001	
	TM → DE → DS → DL	0.028	0.027	0.010	2.732	0.006	

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Table 7 (cont.). Path coefficients from PLS-SEM estimation (bootstrapping)

Hypothesis	Path	Original sample (β)	Sample mean (β)	Std	t-stat	p-values	Hypothesis is supported
	DI → DS → DL	0.015	0.016	0.015	1.029	0.304	
	DI → PV → DS → DL	0.010	0.011	0.006	1.667	0.095	
	PV → DS → DL	0.031	0.031	0.016	1.975	0.048	
	TM → PV → DS → DL	0.005	0.006	0.004	1.459	0.145	
	TM → DS → DL	0.029	0.030	0.020	1.446	0.148	
	DI → PV → DL	0.121	0.124	0.032	3.840	<0.001	
	TM → PV → DL	0.063	0.064	0.023	2.740	0.006	
	DI → DE → DS	0.079	0.078	0.030	2.621	0.009	
	DI → PV → DE → DS	0.027	0.027	0.011	2.396	0.017	
	PV → DE → DS	0.081	0.080	0.027	2.948	0.003	
	TM → PV → DE → DS	0.014	0.015	0.008	1.728	0.084	
	TM → DE → DS	0.130	0.128	0.035	3.727	<0.001	
	DI → PV → DS	0.049	0.051	0.026	1.902	0.057	
	TM → PV → DS	0.026	0.027	0.017	1.515	0.130	

$p < 0.001$), supporting the mediating role of perceived value. The indirect path from destination image through destination experience and destination satisfaction to loyalty intentions was also significant ($\beta = 0.017$, $p = 0.030$). Tourist motivation indirectly influenced destination loyalty intentions via perceived value ($\beta = 0.063$, $p = 0.006$). Destination satisfaction mediated the relationship between destination experience and loyalty intentions ($\beta = 0.083$, $p = 0.001$). Each distinct mediation path is reported only once. Out of 13 direct hypotheses tested, 10 were supported. The confirmed model is illustrated in Figure 2.

4. DISCUSSION

This study tested a comprehensive structural model linking destination image, tourist motivation, perceived value, destination experience, destination satisfaction, and destination loyalty among tourists in Da Nang, Vietnam, using data collect-

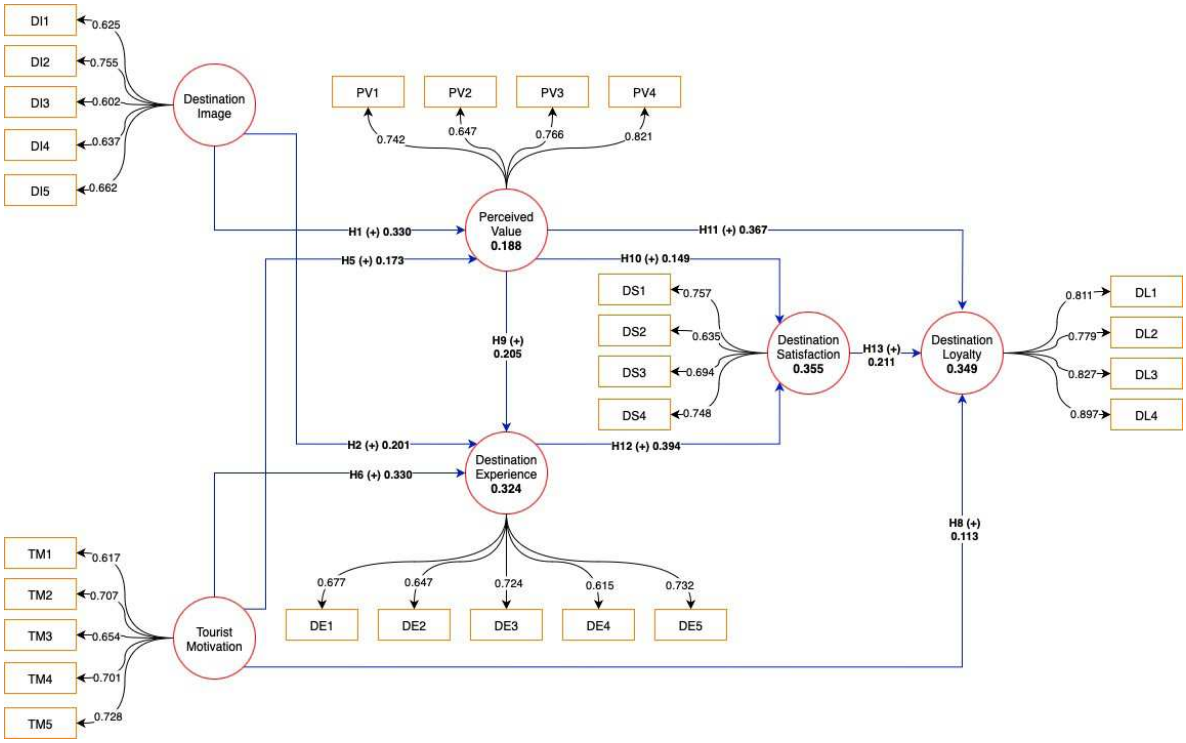

Figure 2. The confirmed model

ed in 2024. The findings offer several theoretical and practical contributions when compared with prior research.

The most notable finding is that destination image did not directly predict satisfaction or loyalty, but exercised its influence exclusively through perceived value and destination experience. This result contrasts with earlier studies that reported strong direct image-loyalty paths (Chi & Qu, 2008; Stylidis et al., 2017), but aligns with more recent work showing that image effects weaken in destinations with high cultural familiarity or repeat visitation (Marine-Roig, 2021; Stylidis et al., 2020). The significant indirect path from destination image through perceived value to loyalty ($\beta = 0.121$, $p < 0.001$) is consistent with findings from Huwae et al. (2020) and Zulvianti et al. (2023), who demonstrated that image primarily functions by shaping value perceptions, which then drive behavioral intentions. This suggests that Da Nang's image has matured to the point where it sets the stage for value formation rather than independently generating loyalty, an important distinction from earlier developmental phases of the destination.

The finding that tourist motivation significantly predicted perceived value, destination experience, and destination loyalty, but not destination satisfaction directly, mirrors the results of Suhartanto et al. (2020), who argued that motivation alone is insufficient to produce satisfaction without high-quality on-site experiences. This is consistent with Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1962): while motivated tourists arrive with clear expectations, their satisfaction is ultimately determined by whether those expectations are fulfilled through actual experience. The direct path from tourist motivation to loyalty ($\beta = 0.113$, $p = 0.024$) is consistent with Hasan et al. (2019), who found that motivation drives loyalty even without full mediation by satisfaction, and differs from studies where motivation influenced loyalty only indirectly (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019). This direct effect suggests that intrinsically motivated tourists in Da Nang develop positive behavioral intentions that partially bypass the satisfaction evaluation step.

Perceived value emerged as the strongest direct predictor of loyalty ($\beta = 0.367$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the foundational argument of Zeithaml (1988) that consumers' judgments of received benefits relative to costs are central to loyalty formation. This result aligns with Gallarza and Gil Saura (2006) and with recent work by Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2021) and Suhartanto et al. (2020), who identified perceived value as a key determinant across diverse tourism segments. Notably, perceived value predicted loyalty even more strongly than satisfaction did, echoing Marine-Roig (2021) finding that tourists may return to destinations they consider good value even when satisfaction is only moderate. The mediation of perceived value between destination image and loyalty, and between tourist motivation and loyalty, further supports contemporary destination models emphasizing value-driven behavioral responses (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2021).

Destination experience was the strongest predictor of destination satisfaction ($\beta = 0.394$, $p < 0.001$), consistent with Bernaki and Marso (2023), Li et al. (2021), and Suhartanto et al. (2020), all of whom confirmed that on-site experience quality is the primary driver of tourist satisfaction. The absence of a significant direct effect from destination experience to loyalty, with its effect running instead through satisfaction, replicates findings by Din et al. (2022) and Stavrianea and Kamenidou (2022), and reinforces the role of satisfaction as a bridge between experiential quality and behavioral intention. This pattern suggests that tourists in Da Nang cognitively process their experiences through satisfaction before translating them into loyalty behaviors, rather than forming loyalty directly from experiential impressions.

Destination satisfaction significantly predicted loyalty ($\beta = 0.211$, $p < 0.001$), consistent with the foundational work of Chi and Qu (2008) and Yoon and Uysal (2005) and with Vietnam-specific evidence from Hoang et al. (2023). The relatively modest effect size aligns with Laškarin Ažić et al. (2020), who observed that in competitive tourism environments, satisfaction must be reinforced by perceived value and emotional attachment to produce strong loyalty. The fact that perceived value exerted a larger direct effect on loyalty than satisfaction did suggests that Da Nang's tourists are value-sensitive visitors who weigh economic and experiential returns carefully, a characteristic consistent with the predominantly Asian and young-adult demographic composition of the sample.

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CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study aimed to examine the direct and indirect relationships among destination image, tourist motivation, perceived value, destination experience, destination satisfaction, and destination loyalty intentions in Da Nang, Vietnam, in order to identify the key drivers of self-reported tourist loyalty in an emerging tourism destination. To this end, a structural model was tested using survey data from 428 tourists collected in September-December 2024. The results show that destination image and tourist motivation shape tourist responses primarily through perceived value and destination experience rather than through direct paths to satisfaction or loyalty intentions. Perceived value proved to be the strongest driver of loyalty intentions, while destination experience was the most powerful predictor of satisfaction, which in turn translated into loyalty intentions. Ten of thirteen hypotheses were supported.

These findings carry three practical priorities for destination managers in Da Nang and similar emerging markets. Enhancing perceived value through transparent pricing, bundled offerings, and consistent service quality is the most direct lever for building loyalty. Improving experiential design through cultural events, interactive attractions, and hospitality training will strengthen satisfaction, which sustains long-term loyalty. Aligning marketing messages with actual on-site conditions will prevent expectation-experience gaps that erode both satisfaction and the image-to-value pathway.

This study has several limitations. Respondents were recruited through non-probability convenience and intercept sampling rather than random sampling, which limits generalizability and may introduce self-selection bias. Loyalty and the other constructs were measured as self-reported intentions at a single point in time rather than observed behavior, so the findings reflect stated loyalty intentions rather than realized loyalty. Three constructs (destination image, destination experience, and tourist motivation) had Average Variance Extracted below 0.50, and the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio for destination satisfaction and destination experience reached 0.923, so their convergent and discriminant validity are only partially established. Finally, the cross-sectional, single-destination design limits causal inference and transferability beyond comparable emerging coastal destinations.

Future research should employ longitudinal and probability-based designs to capture how loyalty evolves across multiple visits and to improve generalizability, and should compare different tourist segments to identify whether the model holds equally across cultural backgrounds and travel motivations. Refining the destination image, destination experience, and tourist motivation scales to raise convergent validity, and incorporating constructs such as place attachment, cultural familiarity, or emotional connection, may further strengthen the structural model. The use of behavioral data, including mobility traces, booking records, and online review analytics, would complement the self-reported intention measures used here and help close the gap between stated loyalty intentions and observed loyalty behavior.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

There are no financial or personal relationships with other people or organizations that could inappropriately influence (bias) our work.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Pham Quang Tin, Minh-Chau Pham, Yen-Ngoc Vo-Thi.
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Software: Pham Quang Tin.
Supervision: Pham Quang Tin.
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Writing – original draft: Pham Quang Tin, Minh-Chau Pham, Yen-Ngoc Vo-Thi.
Writing – review & editing: Pham Quang Tin, Minh-Chau Pham, Yen-Ngoc Vo-Thi.

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APPENDIX A

The constructs and associated items, derived from prior research, were evaluated for outer loadings and collinearity through PLS-SEM estimation. Items with outer loadings between 0.617 and 0.897 were retained. Indicators DI3, DI4, DI5, and TM1 fell slightly below the 0.7 benchmark but were retained for their theoretical relevance and because composite reliability and average variance extracted remained within acceptable thresholds. All Variance Inflation Factor values were below 5, confirming the absence of multicollinearity.

Table A1. Constructs

No	Code	Contents	References	Outer loadings	VIF values
I	**DI**	**Destination Image**			
1.1	DI1	Da Nang has a great cultural atmosphere.	Kanwel et al. (2019)	0.625	1.268
1.2	DI2	Da Nang is a safe place to visit.	Stylidis et al. (2017)	0.755	1.400
1.3	DI3	Da Nang offers a variety of activities for tourists.	Stylidis et al. (2017)	0.602	1.160
1.4	DI4	Da Nang has friendly people.	Stylidis et al. (2017)	0.637	1.292
1.5	DI5	Da Nang is a clean destination.	Kutlu and Ayyıldız (2021)	0.662	1.223
II	**DE**	**Destination Experience**			
2.1	DE1	I felt connected with Da Nang history.	Din et al. (2022)	0.677	1.325
2.2	DE2	While in Da Nang, I reenacted with the cultural traditions of the destination.	Din et al. (2022)	0.647	1.313
2.3	DE3	The experience in Da Nang has made me more knowledgeable.	Din et al. (2022)	0.724	1.376
2.4	DE4	There are no restrictions to access different areas of Da Nang.	Din et al. (2022)	0.615	1.202
2.5	DE5	I had an unique experience in Da Nang.	Suhartanto et al. (2021)	0.732	1.339
III	**DS**	**Destination Satisfaction**			
3.1	DS1	I was satisfied with accommodation in Da Nang.	Chi and Qu (2008)	0.757	1.388
3.2	DS2	I was satisfied with shopping in Da Nang.	Chi and Qu (2008)	0.635	1.154
3.3	DS3	I was satisfied with environment in Da Nang.	Chi and Qu (2008)	0.694	1.268
3.4	DS4	I was satisfied with tourist attractions in Da Nang.	Chi and Qu (2008)	0.748	1.326
IV	PV	Perceived Value			
4.1	PV1	The trip to Da Nang was worth the time spent.	Gan et al. (2023)	0.742	1.375
4.2	PV2	The quality of services in Da Nang was worth the price.	Gan et al. (2023)	0.647	1.279
4.3	PV3	The quality of goods in Da Nang was worth the price.	Gan et al. (2023)	0.766	1.433
4.4	PV4	The value of visiting Da Nang is more than what I expected.	Hasan et al. (2019)	0.821	1.588
V	**TM**	**Tourist Motivation**			
5.1	TM1	I was motivated to visit Da Nang because of word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and/or family.	Gan et al. (2023)	0.617	1.229
5.2	TM2	I was motivated to visit Da Nang because of the sharing of other people's tour experiences on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, etc.	Gan et al. (2023)	0.707	1.328
5.3	TM3	I am attracted by the promotion of online travel platforms, advertisements, etc.	Gan et al. (2023)	0.654	1.294
5.4	TM4	I was motivated to visit Da Nang for a new cultural exploration.	Hung et al. (2021)	0.701	1.314
5.5	TM5	I was motivated to visit Da Nang to escape the worries of real life for a while.	Gan et al. (2023)	0.728	1.354
VI	**DL**	**Destination Loyalty**			
6.1	DL1	I will say positive things about Da Nang.	Din et al. (2022)	0.811	1.793
6.2	DL2	I will recommend Da Nang to others.	Gan et al. (2023)	0.779	1.729
6.3	DL3	I will revisit Da Nang in the future.	Gan et al. (2023)	0.827	1.935
6.4	DL4	I will actively promote Da Nang to my other people.	Gan et al. (2023)	0.897	2.659

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