

Case study

Factors Affecting Customer Satisfaction with rural Tourism Services in Vietnam: A Comprehensive Study

ABSTRACT

This comprehensive study explores the factors influencing customer satisfaction in rural tourism services in Vietnam. It delves into key determinants such as destination image, tourist expectations, perceived product and service quality, perceived value, and overall satisfaction. Combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the research highlights the interplay of these factors and their cumulative impact on tourist satisfaction. The findings underscore the importance of crafting positive destination images, managing expectations, and delivering high-quality products and services to enhance customer satisfaction in Vietnam's rural tourism sector.

Keywords: Image, Expectations, Perceived quality Product, Perceived quality- service, perceived value, satisfaction, Viet Nam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam has witnessed a rapid economic transformation and urbanization in recent years, with both positive outcomes, such as economic growth and improved infrastructure, and negative consequences, including environmental pollution and increased stress [1, 2]. Surprisingly, despite these challenges, the life satisfaction of the Vietnamese population ranks among the highest globally, challenging the conventional wisdom that material wealth equates to increased well-being [1].

In response to the pressures of urban living, there has been a growing interest in slower-paced, rural environments among urban residents [3]. This trend is not limited to rural tourism but extends to various forms of entertainment media. Although urban areas continue to attract Vietnamese families due to their superior healthcare, education, and economic opportunities [4, 5], rural villages in Vietnam have found a new role as weekend getaways and tourist destinations for urban families [2, 6]. From an economic perspective, rural tourism has emerged as a viable strategy for sustainable social and economic development [7]. It allows rural communities to harness and commercialize their local resources, contributing to revitalization efforts [8]. Since 1998, the Vietnamese government has actively promoted rural tourism through marketing campaigns like the 2006 Viet Nam Urban and Rural Year and the 2011 Viet Nam Rural Tourism Year [1]. (Center, 2023). In

2018, domestic travel reached 86.8 million, with around 21.6 million engaging in various forms of rural tourism, accounting for a significant quarter of domestic tourism [1].

Vietnam boasts abundant tourism resources that support rural tourism's growth, including diverse natural landscapes, unique cultural heritage, and agricultural traditions [9]. Previous research in Vietnam has primarily focused on destination marketing strategies and tourism policies [1].

However, there is a limited understanding of Vietnamese rural tourists and their loyalty intentions [1]. Prior studies used qualitative methods to explore tourists' perceptions. Beyond Vietnam, research in rural tourism often employed qualitative methods or focused on residents' perspectives [1]. Despite the validation of key variables in other countries, there is a lack of empirical evidence about the rural tourist experience in Vietnam [1]. This study draws on the framework established by research in other countries and focuses on domestic Vietnamese rural tourists and their intentions within rural Vietnam.

In the competitive landscape of tourism, understanding tourists' experiences and their evaluation is crucial [10, 11]. Empirical studies have shown that perceived quality significantly influences tourist loyalty [2, 12]. Destination quality is multidimensional, emphasizing the importance of measuring it using comprehensive scales [13-16]. Additionally, perceived value plays a critical role in overall satisfaction [17]. This study explores these dynamics, providing insights for businesses and operators in rural areas

In summary, this study investigates the perceived quality and loyalty intentions of Vietnamese rural tourists. Three specific objectives guide this research. [18-20]. First, the study identifies relevant dimensions of rural tourism quality and validates the scale for Vietnamese rural tourists. Second, it empirically tests a conceptual model that includes variables such as tourist-perceived quality, tourist-perceived value, tourist satisfaction, revisitation intention, positive word-of-mouth intention, and willingness to pay for special rural products. Lastly, a multi-group invariance analysis assesses potential moderating effects between urban and rural residents using the study model.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS

2.1. DESTINATION IMAGE AND SATISFACTION

Indeed, there is a strong relationship between the destination image and tourist satisfaction in the field of tourism research. A positive and favorable destination image often leads to higher levels of tourist satisfaction[21]. Here's a more detailed explanation: The destination image refers to the mental picture or perception that potential tourists or visitors have about a particular destination. It includes various aspects such as the destination's

natural beauty, cultural attractions, infrastructure, safety, cleanliness, and the overall reputation of the place[22].

A positive destination image can influence tourist satisfaction in the following ways when tourists have a favorable image of a destination, they often have higher expectations[23, 24]. If the actual experience matches or exceeds these expectations, it leads to higher satisfaction. A positive destination image can create a perception of high quality in the minds of tourists. When they visit the destination and find that the services, attractions, and overall experience are of good quality, it enhances their satisfaction. A positive destination image can create an emotional connection with the place before even arriving[25]. Tourists who feel positively about a destination are more likely to enjoy their visit and, consequently, feel satisfied[26]. Willingness to Overlook Minor Issues: When tourists have a favorable image of a destination, they are often more forgiving of minor inconveniences or issues they may encounter during their trip. This tolerance can contribute to overall satisfaction[27]. Positive Word-of-Mouth: Satisfied tourists who had a positive perception of the destination are more likely to share their positive experiences with others, contributing to positive word-of-mouth and potentially attracting more visitors[28]. However, it's important to note that a favorable destination image is not the only factor influencing tourist satisfaction. Actual experiences during the trip, including the quality of services, the friendliness of locals, and the fulfillment of specific expectations, also play a significant role[29].

In conclusion, a positive destination image can have a profound impact on tourist satisfaction[30]. It sets the stage for higher expectations and a more positive emotional connection with the destination, both of which contribute to tourists' overall satisfaction with their travel experiences[31, 32]. Destination marketing and management efforts often focus on shaping and maintaining a positive destination image to attract and satisfy tourists.

H1: The more favourable the destination image, the higher the tourist satisfaction.

2.2. TOURISTS' EXPECTATIONS AND SATISFACTION

When tourists' expectations are met or exceeded during their trip, it generally leads to higher levels of satisfaction. For example, if a traveler expects a clean and comfortable hotel room and finds that their accommodation meets or exceeds these expectations, they are likely to be satisfied[33]. Tourists' satisfaction can be influenced by the size of the gap between their expectations and the actual experience[34]. If the experience falls significantly short of their expectations, it can result in dissatisfaction. Conversely, if the experience exceeds their expectations, it can lead to a high level of satisfaction[35]. The post-trip

satisfaction assessment often involves a comparison between pre-trip expectations and the actual experience. If the experience confirms their expectations, it may lead to satisfaction. If it contradicts or disconfirms their expectations, it can lead to either satisfaction if the experience is better than expected or dissatisfaction if it is worse. Tourism marketers and service providers often play a crucial role in managing and influencing tourists' expectations[36]. Accurate and honest marketing that aligns with the actual experience can help set appropriate expectations and contribute to overall satisfaction[37]. According to Kastenzholz, E., et al Tourist satisfaction, driven by the alignment of expectations and experiences, can influence word-of-mouth recommendations. Satisfied tourists are more likely to share positive experiences, contributing to destination marketing and attracting more visitors[38].

In summary, expectations play a pivotal role in shaping tourist satisfaction. When tourists' expectations are met or exceeded, it generally leads to higher levels of satisfaction, while significant gaps between expectations and experiences can result in dissatisfaction[38]. Effective destination marketing and service delivery that align with tourists' expectations are essential for enhancing satisfaction and encouraging positive word-of-mouth promotion[39].

H2: The more favourable the tourists' expectations, the higher the tourist satisfaction.

2.3. PERCEIVED QUALITY OF SERVICE AND SATISFACTION

Perceived quality of service refers to the subjective evaluation by tourists of the overall excellence, reliability, and desirability of the services they receive while traveling[40]. It encompasses various aspects of the service, including responsiveness, courtesy, efficiency, cleanliness, comfort, and overall service delivery. When tourists perceive the quality of service as high, they are more likely to be satisfied with their travel experience[41]. High-quality service meets or exceeds their expectations, leading to a positive assessment of their trip. The quality of service is often regarded as one of the primary determinants of overall tourist satisfaction[42]. Even if other aspects of the trip, such as the destination itself or accommodations, are excellent, poor service quality can lead to dissatisfaction[32]. Repeat Visits and Positive Word-of-Mouth: High levels of perceived service quality can lead to repeat visits to the destination and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Satisfied tourists are more likely to return and share their positive experiences with others, contributing to destination loyalty and promotion[43]. The behavior and professionalism of staff members, including hotel employees, tour guides, restaurant staff, and transportation personnel, significantly impact tourists' perceptions of service quality[44]. Tourists value

efficient and effective service delivery. Quick responses to requests, minimal waiting times, and the ability to resolve issues promptly contribute to higher perceived quality. Clean and well-maintained facilities, accommodations, and transportation options are essential for positive perceptions of service quality[45]. Tailored and personalized services that cater to tourists' individual preferences and needs enhance the perceived quality of service. Consistency in service quality across various touchpoints throughout the travel experience is crucial. Tourists expect a consistently high level of service throughout their trip. Effective communication, including clear information about services, amenities, and expectations, can positively influence perceived service quality[46]. High levels of perceived quality of service contribute to the competitiveness of a destination in the global tourism market. Destinations that consistently offer excellent service are more likely to attract and retain tourists.

In conclusion, the perceived quality of service is a critical driver of tourist satisfaction. Tourists' subjective evaluations of service excellence, including factors like staff interactions, efficiency, cleanliness, and personalization, strongly influence their overall perception of the travel experience. High levels of perceived service quality lead to greater tourist satisfaction, repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth promotion, and enhanced destination competitiveness[28]. As a result, tourism stakeholders, including service providers and destination management organizations, prioritize delivering high-quality services to meet the expectations and needs of tourists.

H3: The more favourable the Perceived quality of service, the higher the tourist satisfaction.

2.4. PERCEIVED VALUE AND SATISFACTION

Perceived value in the context of tourism refers to tourists' subjective evaluation of the overall benefits and advantages they gain from their travel experience compared to the monetary and non-monetary costs associated with that experience[47]. It involves a trade-off between what tourists receive and what they give in terms of time, money, and effort. When tourists perceive that they have received significant benefits and experiences in exchange for their expenditures, they are more likely to be satisfied with their trip[48]. Tourists often evaluate their satisfaction in terms of whether they received value for the money they spent on accommodations, activities, dining, and other services[49]. If they believe that the experience was worth the cost, their satisfaction increases. Tourists engage in a mental cost-benefit assessment, comparing the perceived benefits (enjoyment, relaxation, cultural experiences) with the perceived costs (expenses, time, inconveniences). When the benefits outweigh the costs, it contributes to overall satisfaction[49]. High perceived value can lead to tourist loyalty and repeat visits. Satisfied tourists who feel they received excellent value for

their money are more likely to return to the destination in the future[50]. The quality of the travel experience, including the quality of accommodations, attractions, transportation, and services, directly affects tourists' perception of value[51]. The actual price and costs incurred during the trip play a crucial role in shaping perceived value[52]. Tourists compare these costs to the quality of the experience to assess value. Tourists' expectations significantly impact perceived value. If the actual experience meets or exceeds their expectations, it enhances value perception[53]. Personalized and tailored experiences that cater to individual preferences and needs can enhance perceived value. Destination Attributes: Unique destination attributes, such as natural beauty, cultural richness, and historical significance, contribute to perceived value. Lower perceived risk related to safety, health, and security can positively influence perceived value. A safe and secure environment enhances the overall value of the travel experience. High perceived value contributes to the competitiveness of a destination[23]. Destinations that consistently offer excellent value for tourists' money are more likely to attract and retain visitors, leading to economic benefits and positive word-of-mouth promotion[54].

In summary, perceived value is a critical determinant of tourist satisfaction. Tourists' subjective assessment of the benefits received compared to the costs incurred strongly influences their overall satisfaction with the travel experience[55]. High perceived value leads to greater tourist satisfaction, loyalty, repeat visits, and positive destination competitiveness[23]. Consequently, tourism stakeholders, including service providers and destination management organizations, strive to create and communicate value to meet the expectations and needs of tourists.

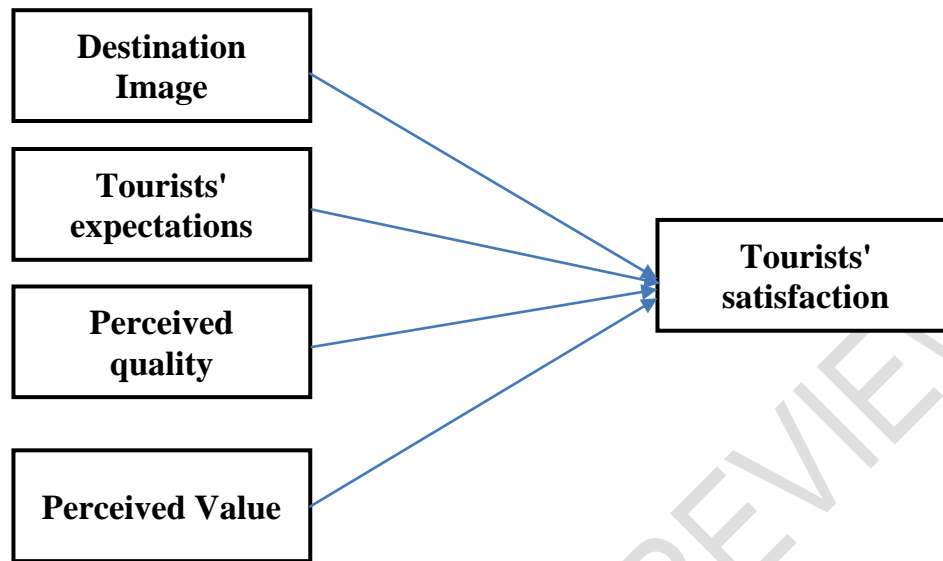


Figure 1 Research model

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN:

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between Destination Image, Tourists' expectations, Perceived quality of service, Perceived Value, and satisfaction in the context of Vietnam tourism. Structural equation modeling (SEM) will be used for data analysis to examine the proposed theoretical model.

Sampling Method: The research study utilized a systematic random sampling approach to collect data from tourists visiting various tourist destinations across Vietnam. This method was chosen to ensure a representative sample of the tourist population.

Sample Size: A total of 487 survey questionnaires were distributed to tourists, and responses were collected from 455 participants. The initial sample size was determined to capture a diverse range of tourist experiences.

Participant Characteristics: The study encompassed a wide range of participants, including individuals of varying ages, genders, nationalities, and travel preferences. This diversity was essential to obtain a comprehensive understanding of tourist experiences in Vietnam.

3.2. MEASURES

3.2.1. Tourists' expectations

In this study, we utilized a nine-item scale adapted from Jenkins (1982) to assess Tourists' expectations[56]. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) revealed strong factor loadings exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.50 for all nine items. Respondents rated these items on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = "Not at all" to 5 = "Very much." For instance, one item was "I expect the destination or service to provide value for the money spent."

The Tourists' expectations scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency and reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .895, surpassing the recommended threshold of .70.

Additionally, the Self-efficacy scale underwent CFA and exhibited a strong fit to the data ($\chi^2(2) = 1.001$, IFI = 1.000, GFI = 0.991, AGFI = 0.982, NFI = 0.992, TLI = 1.000, CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = 0.002, and RMR = 0.007). This analysis confirmed the scale's unidimensionality, high validity, and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .895). These results affirm the Tourists' expectations scale's strong internal consistency and reliability, exceeding the recommended alpha threshold of .70.

3.2.2. Destination Image

In this study, we employed a scale comprising seven items adapted from Byon et al. (2010) to evaluate Tourists' expectations [57]. Following Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), all seven items exhibited robust factor loadings well above the acceptable threshold of 0.50. These items were rated on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = "Not at all" to 5 = "Very much." As an example, one of the items read, "The destination provides experiences that justify the cost of the trip."

The internal consistency and reliability of the Tourists' expectations scale were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a highly satisfactory result of .914.

Additionally, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the Self-efficacy scale, which demonstrated a strong fit to the data ($\chi^2(2) = 1.838$, IFI = 0.987, GFI = 0.978, AGFI = 0.963, NFI = 0.972, TLI = 0.983, CFI = 0.987, RMSEA = 0.043, and RMR = 0.015). This analysis confirmed that the Self-efficacy scale is unidimensional and possesses strong validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .914). These results underscore the

Tourists' expectations scale's robust internal consistency and reliability, surpassing the recommended alpha threshold of .70.

3.2.3. Perceived quality of service

In this study, we employed a scale consisting of four items adapted from Lopes et al. (2019) to assess Perceived quality of service[58]. Following Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), all four items exhibited strong factor loadings well above the acceptable threshold of 0.50. Respondents rated these items on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = "Not at all" to 5 = "Very much." For example, one of the items read, "The service team effectively communicates with customers."

The internal consistency and reliability of the Perceived quality of service scale were assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a satisfactory result of .826.

Additionally, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the Self-efficacy scale, which demonstrated a strong fit to the data ($\chi^2(2) = 1.914$, IFI = 0.997, GFI = 0.996, AGFI = 0.980, NFI = 0.994, TLI = 0.992, CFI = 0.997, RMSEA = 0.045, and RMR = 0.009). This analysis confirmed that the Self-efficacy scale is unidimensional and possesses strong validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .826). These results affirm the Perceived quality of service scale's robust internal consistency and reliability, exceeding the recommended alpha threshold of .70.

3.2.4. Perceived Value

In this study, a scale comprising four items adapted from Lopes et al. (2019) was utilized to assess Perceived quality of service[58]. Following Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), all four items displayed robust factor loadings well above the acceptable threshold of 0.50. Respondents rated these items on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = "Not at all" to 5 = "Very much." For instance, one of the items stated, "I perceive that I am making a cost-effective choice by using this product/service."

The internal consistency and reliability of the Perceived Value scale were assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded an excellent result of .946.

Additionally, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the Self-efficacy scale, demonstrating a strong fit to the data ($\chi^2(2) = 1.144$, IFI = 0.996, GFI = 0.992, AGFI = 0.985, NFI = 0.993, TLI = 0.991, CFI = 0.987, RMSEA = 0.000, and RMR = 0.002). This analysis confirmed the scale's unidimensionality and demonstrated strong validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .946). These findings affirm the Perceived Value scale's

robust internal consistency and reliability, surpassing the recommended alpha threshold of .70.

3.2.5. Satisfaction

In this study, we employed a scale consisting of four items adapted from Araña and León (2013) to assess Perceived Value[59]. Following Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), all four items exhibited robust factor loadings well above the acceptable threshold of 0.50. Respondents rated these items on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = "Not at all" to 5 = "Very much." For example, one of the items stated, "How satisfied are you with the natural beauty and scenery of the destination?"

The internal consistency and reliability of the Perceived Value scale were assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a solid result of .867.

Additionally, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the Self-efficacy scale, demonstrating a good fit to the data ($\chi^2(2) = 5.375$, IFI = 0.990, GFI = 0.989, AGFI = 0.944, NFI = 0.987, TLI = 0.969, CFI = 0.990, RMSEA = 0.098, and RMR = 0.014). This analysis confirmed the scale's unidimensionality and demonstrated strong validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .867). These findings affirm the Perceived Value scale's robust internal consistency and reliability, surpassing the recommended alpha threshold of .70.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The means, standard deviations and zero-order Pearson correlations of all the key variables are presented in Table 1. Fig. 1 showed the research model of gender, age, education, tenure, Image, Expectations, Perceived quality Product, Perceived quality-service, perceived value, Satisfaction. As shown in Table 1, gender was negative related to tenure ($r = -.011$), education ($-.038$) and satisfaction ($-.027$). Age education, tenure was positive related to Image, Expectations, Perceived quality Product, Perceived quality-service, perceived value, Satisfaction.

4.2. Convergent and Discriminant Validity

In this study, we conducted an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principal Axis Factoring with promax rotation and Kaiser Normalization to assess the

interrelationships among observed variables. The primary objective was to evaluate the reliability and validity of the chosen variables.

The results demonstrated that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sampling adequacy yielded significant values for each variable, indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis (KMO = 0.877). Furthermore, as presented in Table 2, all factor loadings were highly significant at the 0.000 level, with values exceeding 0.652. This suggests that the chosen variables exhibited good discriminant validity and were appropriate for inclusion in the factor analysis. Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the variables are provided in Table 2, all of which exceeded 0.826, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the measures.

To address the potential issue of common method bias, we conducted Harman's single-factor test. In this test, we subjected the nine items related to Image, the seven items associated with Expectations, the four items related to Perceived Quality of Product, and the four items related to Perceived Quality of Service to a principal component factor analysis. The results revealed that the first factor in the model explained only 34.223% of the total variance. This finding suggests that common method bias did not significantly distort the study results.

Overall, these analytical procedures were undertaken to ensure the reliability and validity of the data and to mitigate any potential issues associated with common method bias. The results affirm the robustness of the data and support the validity of the subsequent analyses.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, correlations and scale reliabilities

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	TE	DI	PQ	PV	SA	age	Gender	Tenure	Education
TE	3.97	.58	1								
DI	3.74	.60	.365**	1							
PQ	3.76	.68	.327**	.395**	1						
PV	3.52	1.03	.377**	.199**	.190**	1					
SA	3.59	.74	.174**	.092*	.073	-.027	1				
age	2.41	.88	.280**	.339**	.664**	.175**	.090	1			
Gender	1.49	.50	.007	.190**	.176**	-.011	-.038	.145**	1		
Tenure	2.42	.88	.244**	.306**	.630**	.168**	.071	.812**	.131**	1	
Education	2.42	.88	.375**	.330**	.647**	.143**	.087	.546**	.102*	.503**	1

Note

(1). Cronbach alpha reliabilities for observed variables are in parenthesis in the diagonal

(2)* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). N =4

(3) The square root of AVE for discriminant validity are in parentheses along the diagonal

Discriminant validity is essential in structural equation modeling, ensuring that different constructs are distinct. The square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) is used to assess this. In Table 1, the authors presented the AVE for each construct, and all of them exceeded the correlations between that construct and others. This confirms that the constructs are effectively differentiated, strengthening the model's validity.

Conversely, notable and positive correlations were observed among Image, Expectations, Perceived Quality of Product, Perceived Quality of Service, Perceived Value, and Satisfaction. To further investigate the direct effects examined in this study, a sequence of regression analyses was conducted. Additionally, various tests, including tolerance and variance inflation factor, were employed to assess the absence of multicollinearity, following the approach outlined by [60].

Table 2: Item loading of the latent constructs

	Tourists' expectations	Destination Image	Factor			Cronbach's Alpha
			Perceived Value	Perceived quality	satisfaction	
TE1	.743					
TE2	.685					
TE3	.719					
TE4	.750					
TE5	.703					.895
TE6	.652					
TE7	.655					
TE8	.690					
TE9	.698					
D11		.790				
D12		.799				
D13		.810				
D14		.734				.914
D15		.745				
D16		.794				
D17		.777				
PV1			.913			
PV2			.896			
PV3			.917			.946
PV4			.885			

PQ1	.657	
PQ2	.780	.826
PQ3	.824	
PQ4	.690	
SA1		.824
SA2		.789
SA3		.799
SA4		.736

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.

4.3. Hypothesis testing

The authors used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS software (version 22) to test direct and indirect effects, as shown in Figure 2. The standardized structural coefficients indicated the relationships among variables.

The model's fit to the data was assessed using various fit measures:

Chi-squared statistic (χ^2): It was statistically significant ($\chi^2(350) = 1907.708$, $p = .000$), suggesting some differences between predicted and observed data, which can be common in SEM with large sample sizes.

Incremental Fit Index (IFI): IFI was 0.798, indicating good model fit.

Goodness of Fit Index (GFI): GFI was 0.772, representing reasonable fit.

Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI): TLI was 0.781, indicating satisfactory fit.

Comparative Fit Index (CFI): CFI was 0.797, supporting model adequacy.

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA): RMSEA was 0.099, below the 0.1 threshold, signifying reasonable model fit.

In summary, despite a significant chi-squared statistic, the overall combination of fit indices, squared correlation coefficients, and significance levels of path coefficients suggests that the model reasonably fits the data, bolstering the validity of the structural equations model and its findings.

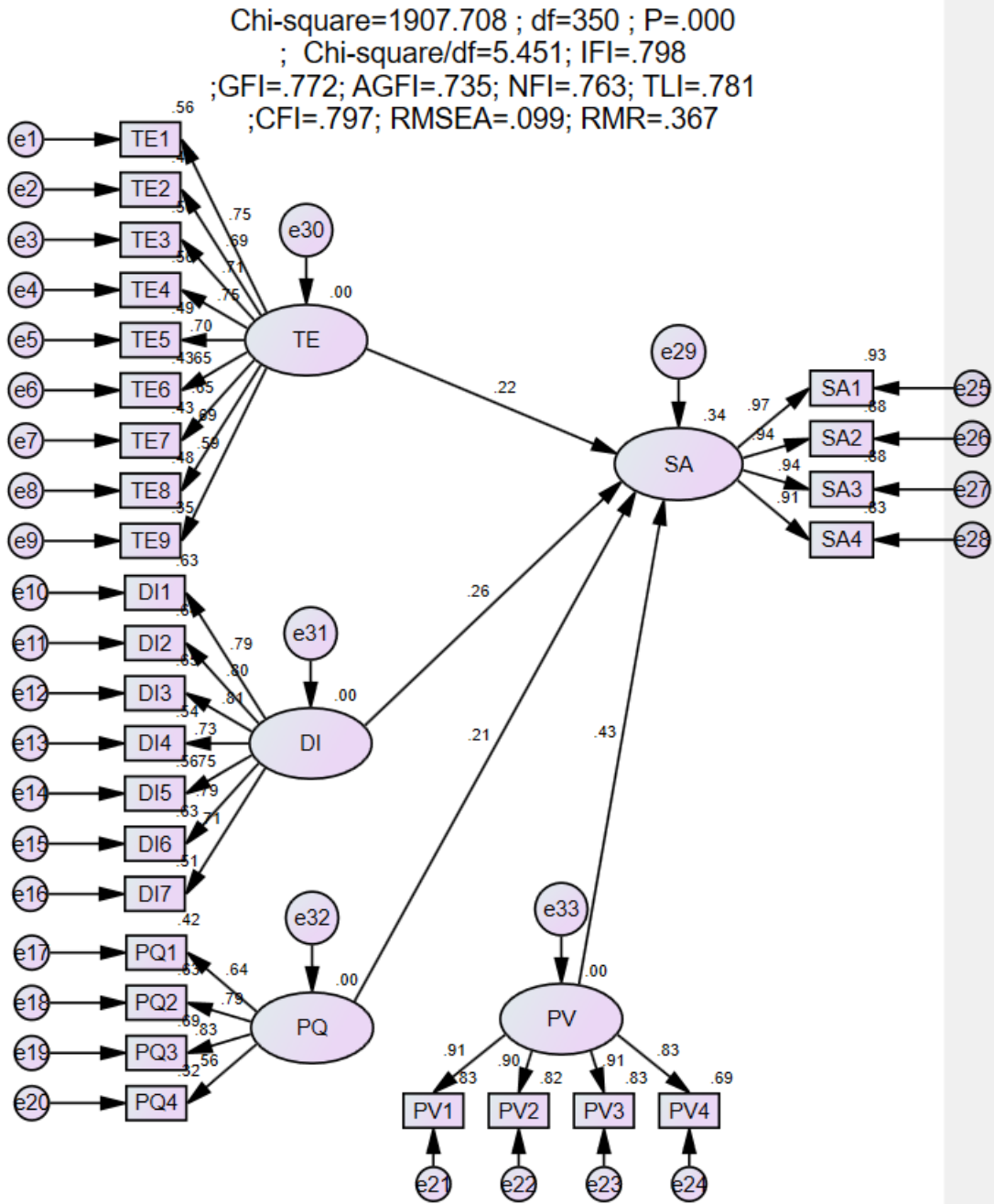


Figure 2: Results of structural equation model

Table 3 displays the results of the structural model as illustrated in Figure 2. The primary aim of the structural equation modeling analysis was to assess the direct impacts of

the independent variables, which include Image, Expectations, Perceived Quality of Product, Perceived Quality of Service, and Perceived Value, on the dependent variable, Satisfaction.

The findings presented in Table 3 affirm that Satisfaction is closely associated with and influenced by Image ($\gamma = 0.256$, $p < 0.001$), Expectations ($\gamma = 0.216$, $p < 0.001$), Perceived Value ($\gamma = 0.425$, $p < 0.001$), and Perceived Quality of Product ($\gamma = 0.211$, $p < 0.001$), aligning with the predictions made in hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. Notably, the effect of Perceived Value on Satisfaction ($\gamma = 0.425$) is the most substantial among these relationships.

These results emphasize that various factors, such as tourists' perceptions of destination image, their expectations, the perceived quality of products and services, and the perceived value of their experiences, significantly contribute to their overall satisfaction. The magnitude of these effects underscores the pivotal role of perceived value in shaping tourist satisfaction.

Table 3: Structural model result (direct, indirect and total effects).

Effect from	To	Direct	Indirect	Total
Image	Satisfaction	.216**	..	.291***
Expectations	Satisfaction	.256**		.109***
Perceived quality Product	Satisfaction	.211**		.559***
Perceived quality- service	Satisfaction	.425**		.202***
perceived value Engagement	Satisfaction	.216**		.538***
Goodness of fit statistics	Chi-square = 1907.708; chi-square/df = 5.451; df = 350; P=0.000; IFI=.798, GFI=.772, TLI=.781, CFI=.797RMSEA=.033			

Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the factors influencing tourist satisfaction in the context of rural tourism services in Vietnam. The discussion below highlights the key findings, their implications, and the broader significance of this research.

1. Destination Image Matters: The results of the structural model indicate that the perceived destination image significantly influences tourist satisfaction. This finding underscores the importance of creating a positive and appealing image of rural tourism destinations. Destination management organizations and service providers should focus on marketing strategies that enhance the overall image of rural areas, emphasizing their unique cultural and natural attractions. A positive destination image not only attracts tourists but also contributes to their overall satisfaction.

2. Expectations and Their Impact: Tourists' expectations play a pivotal role in shaping their satisfaction levels. It was evident from the analysis that when tourists' expectations were met or exceeded, their satisfaction levels were higher. Managing and aligning tourists' expectations with the actual experiences they encounter is crucial for enhancing satisfaction. Service providers should communicate clearly about what tourists can expect, manage those expectations effectively, and strive to overdeliver on promises when possible.

3. Quality Matters Across the Board: The study found that perceived quality, both of products and services, significantly influences tourist satisfaction. This emphasizes the need for maintaining high standards of quality in all aspects of the rural tourism experience. Service providers should continuously assess and improve the quality of their offerings, ensuring that tourists receive value for their money. This includes not only the quality of accommodations and attractions but also the quality of services provided by staff.

4. The Role of Perceived Value: Perceived value emerged as a crucial determinant of tourist satisfaction. Tourists assess whether their expenditures align with the perceived benefits and experiences they receive. Service providers should focus on offering competitive pricing and demonstrating the value of their services. Emphasizing the unique and enriching experiences that rural tourism can offer may justify higher prices and enhance perceived value.

5. Implications for Stakeholders: These findings have important implications for stakeholders in the rural tourism sector in Vietnam. Destination management organizations should invest in destination branding and marketing to create favorable destination images that attract tourists. Service providers, including accommodations, tour operators, and restaurants, should prioritize quality and continuously seek ways to improve customer experiences. Clear communication and managing tourists' expectations can lead to more satisfied customers.

6. Future Research and Limitations

While this study sheds light on the factors influencing tourist satisfaction, there is room for further research. Future studies could explore the moderating effects of demographic variables such as age, gender, and travel experience. Additionally, investigating the role of destination loyalty and repeat visitation in the context of rural tourism would provide deeper insights.

It's important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The data were collected at a specific point in time, and tourist perceptions may evolve over time. Additionally, this study

focused on domestic Vietnamese tourists; future research could include international tourists to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

Conclusion

This research contributes to our understanding of the factors that affect tourist satisfaction in the context of rural tourism services in Vietnam. By addressing the implications of these findings, stakeholders can work towards enhancing the quality of rural tourism experiences and ensuring that tourists leave with high levels of satisfaction, ultimately contributing to the sustainable growth of this vital sector.

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