

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

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## 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

27 2018, domestic travel reached 86.8 million, with around 21.6 million engaging in various  
28 forms of rural tourism, accounting for a significant quarter of domestic tourism [1].

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

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

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

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

## 54 **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS**

### 55 **2.1. DESTINATION IMAGE AND SATISFACTION**

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

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

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

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

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

## 87 **2.2. TOURISTS' EXPECTATIONS AND SATISFACTION**

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

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

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

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

### 113 **2.3. PERCEIVED QUALITY OF SERVICE AND SATISFACTION**

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

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

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

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

#### 149 **2.4. PERCEIVED VALUE AND SATISFACTION**

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

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

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

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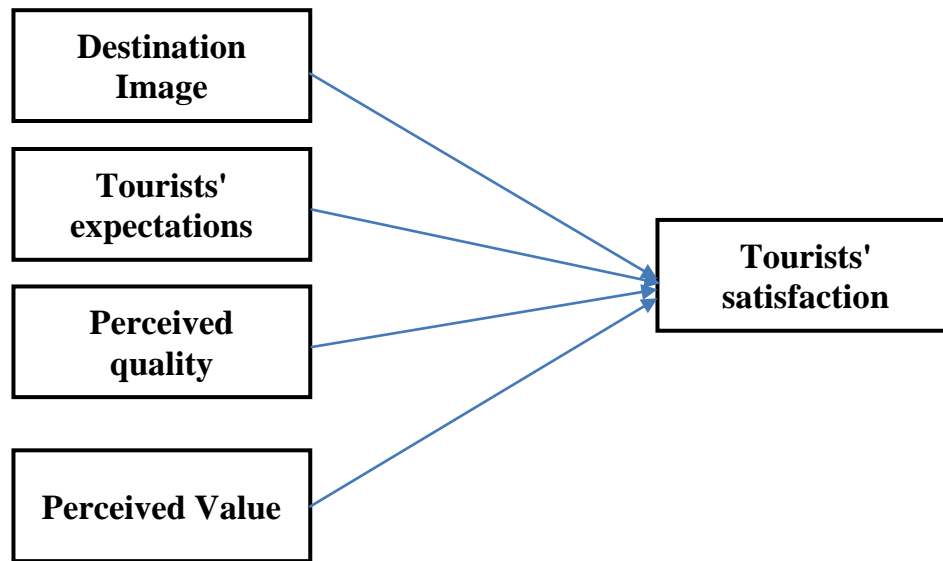


Figure 1 Research model

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### 204 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 205 3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN:

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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.

## 220 **3.2. MEASURES**

### 221 **3.2.1. Tourists' expectations**

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

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

231 Additionally, the Self-efficacy scale underwent CFA and exhibited a strong fit to the  
232 data ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.001$ , IFI = 1.000, GFI = 0.991, AGFI = 0.982, NFI = 0.992, TLI = 1.000, CFI =  
233 1.000, RMSEA = 0.002, and RMR = 0.007). This analysis confirmed the scale's  
234 unidimensionality, high validity, and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .895). These results affirm  
235 the Tourists' expectations scale's strong internal consistency and reliability, exceeding the  
236 recommended alpha threshold of .70.

### 237 **3.2.2. Destination Image**

238 In this study, we employed a scale comprising seven items adapted from Byon et al.  
239 (2010) to evaluate Tourists' expectations [57]. Following Confirmatory Factor Analysis  
240 (CFA), all seven items exhibited robust factor loadings well above the acceptable threshold  
241 of 0.50. These items were rated on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = "Not at all" to 5 =  
242 "Very much." As an example, one of the items read, "The destination provides experiences  
243 that justify the cost of the trip."

244 The internal consistency and reliability of the Tourists' expectations scale were  
245 evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a highly satisfactory result of  
246 .914.

247 Additionally, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the Self-  
248 efficacy scale, which demonstrated a strong fit to the data ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.838$ , IFI = 0.987, GFI =  
249 0.978, AGFI = 0.963, NFI = 0.972, TLI = 0.983, CFI = 0.987, RMSEA = 0.043, and RMR =  
250 0.015). This analysis confirmed that the Self-efficacy scale is unidimensional and possesses  
251 strong validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .914). These results underscore the

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

### 254 **3.2.3. Perceived quality of service**

255 In this study, we employed a scale consisting of four items adapted from Lopes et al.  
256 (2019) to assess Perceived quality of service[58]. Following Confirmatory Factor Analysis  
257 (CFA), all four items exhibited strong factor loadings well above the acceptable threshold of  
258 0.50. Respondents rated these items on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = "Not at all" to 5  
259 = "Very much." For example, one of the items read, "The service team effectively  
260 communicates with customers."

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

263 Additionally, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the Self-  
264 efficacy scale, which demonstrated a strong fit to the data ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.914$ , IFI = 0.997, GFI =  
265 0.996, AGFI = 0.980, NFI = 0.994, TLI = 0.992, CFI = 0.997, RMSEA = 0.045, and RMR =  
266 0.009). This analysis confirmed that the Self-efficacy scale is unidimensional and possesses  
267 strong validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .826). These results affirm the Perceived  
268 quality of service scale's robust internal consistency and reliability, exceeding the  
269 recommended alpha threshold of .70.

### 270 **3.2.4. Perceived Value**

271 In this study, a scale comprising four items adapted from Lopes et al. (2019) was  
272 utilized to assess Perceived quality of service[58]. Following Confirmatory Factor Analysis  
273 (CFA), all four items displayed robust factor loadings well above the acceptable threshold of  
274 0.50. Respondents rated these items on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 = "Not at all" to 5  
275 = "Very much." For instance, one of the items stated, "I perceive that I am making a cost-  
276 effective choice by using this product/service."

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

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

284 robust internal consistency and reliability, surpassing the recommended alpha threshold of  
285 .70.

### 286 **3.2.5. Satisfaction**

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

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

295 Additionally, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the Self-  
296 efficacy scale, demonstrating a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2(2) = 5.375$ , IFI = 0.990, GFI = 0.989,  
297 AGFI = 0.944, NFI = 0.987, TLI = 0.969, CFI = 0.990, RMSEA = 0.098, and RMR = 0.014).  
298 This analysis confirmed the scale's unidimensionality and demonstrated strong validity and  
299 reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .867). These findings affirm the Perceived Value scale's  
300 robust internal consistency and reliability, surpassing the recommended alpha threshold of  
301 .70.

## 302 **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### 303 **4.1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

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

### 311 **4.2. Convergent and Discriminant Validity**

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

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

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

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

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

335 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

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

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

347 Table 2: Item loading of the latent constructs

	Factor				Cronbach's Alpha
	Tourists' expectations	Destination Image	Perceived Value	Perceived quality satisfaction	
TE1	.743				<b>.895</b>
TE2	.685				
TE3	.719				
TE4	.750				
TE5	.703				
TE6	.652				
TE7	.655				
TE8	.690				
TE9	.698				
DI1		.790			<b>.914</b>
DI2		.799			
DI3		.810			
DI4		.734			
DI5		.745			
DI6		.794			
DI7		.777			
PV1			.913		<b>.946</b>
PV2			.896		
PV3			.917		
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.*

### 348 **4.3. Hypothesis testing**

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

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

353 Chi-squared statistic ( $\chi^2$ ): It was statistically significant ( $\chi^2(350) = 1907.708$ ,  $p =$   
354  $.000$ ), suggesting some differences between predicted and observed data, which can be  
355 common in SEM with large sample sizes.

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

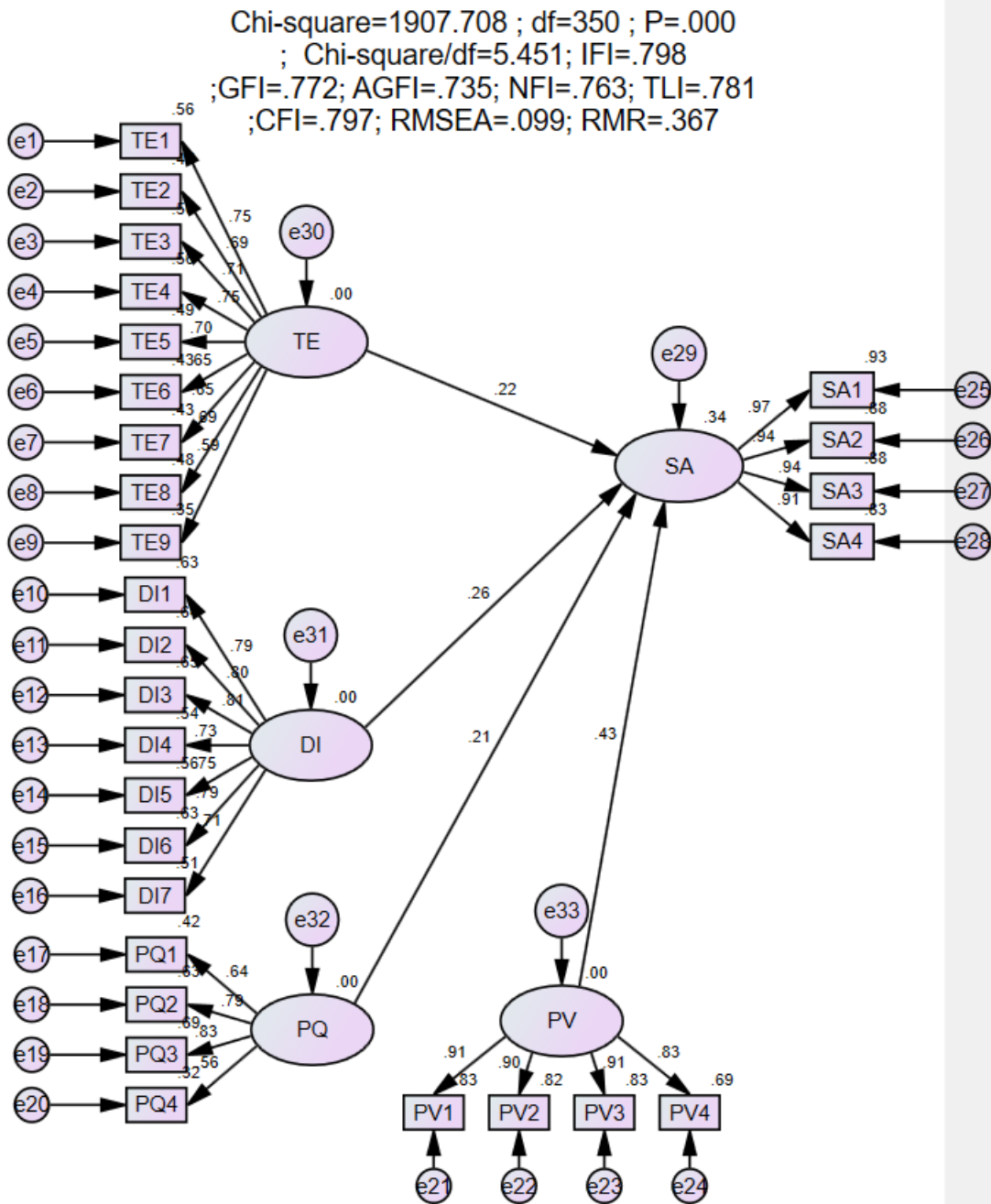
357 Goodness of Fit Index (GFI): GFI was 0.772, representing reasonable fit.

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

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

360 Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA): RMSEA was 0.099, below the  
361 0.1 threshold, signifying reasonable model fit.

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



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Figure 2: Results of structural equation model

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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

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

372 The findings presented in Table 3 affirm that Satisfaction is closely associated with  
 373 and influenced by Image ( $\gamma = 0.256$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Expectations ( $\gamma = 0.216$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ),  
 374 Perceived Value ( $\gamma = 0.425$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and Perceived Quality of Product ( $\gamma = 0.211$ ,  $p <$   
 375  $0.001$ ), aligning with the predictions made in hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively.  
 376 Notably, the effect of Perceived Value on Satisfaction ( $\gamma = 0.425$ ) is the most substantial  
 377 among these relationships.

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

383 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			

## 384 Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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

421

## 422 **Conclusion**

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

428

## 429 **6. Future Research and Limitations**

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

435 It's important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The data were collected at  
436 a specific point in time, and tourist perceptions may evolve over time. Additionally, this study  
437 focused on domestic Vietnamese tourists; future research could include international tourists  
438 to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

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

444

445

#### 446 **Ethical Approval:**

447

448 As per international standards or university standards written ethical approval has been  
449 collected and preserved by the author(s).

#### 450 **Consent**

451 As per international standards or university standards, Participants' written consent has  
452 been collected and preserved by the author(s).

453

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