

Antecedents of Tourist Satisfaction, an Empirical Study on a Nature-Based Tourism Destination in Pakistan

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The tourism industry faces many challenges and competitive environments that impact tourists' behavior. Understanding these factors is crucial for Pakistan to maintain its standing as one of Asia's most attractive tourist destinations. Following the literature, destination image and perceived value can impact tourist satisfaction. Subsequently, it is urged to examine these constructs, which may significantly affect domestic tourist satisfaction. This study, therefore, investigated tourist satisfaction in relation to destination image and perceived value. Using a random sample, 380 domestic tourists were selected to test the proposed model. The study was conducted between July 2021 and September 2021. Based on the empirical results, tourist satisfaction is strongly influenced by the destination image and perceived value. The proposed model also met the reliability and validity requirements. According to the study, the proposed model demonstrated acceptable goodness of fit and met the reliability requirements. Through the study, a better understanding of behavioral factors was gained that could be used to increase customer retention. As part of the visitor's experience, individual providers should provide amenities and services according to the expectation of tourists. Study findings suggest that destination image and perceived value aspects can enhance a destination's competitive advantage through strategic management of tourism offerings.

Keywords: Destination Image, Perceived Value, Tourist Satisfaction, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry can serve as one of the most critical and robust pillars of an economy. Most economies consider tourism as one of the essential elements in creating jobs and income sources. The most unique and exciting phenomenon in the tourism industry is its spillover effect on other sectors. It helps in diversifying economic activities at large. In this era of hyper-competitiveness, economies for a sustainable development model in the tourism sector, and destinations offering a range of products and services for leisure and business purpose (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018). To harvest these opportunities, an amalgamation of resources needed to be utilized to make tourist destinations more attractive and profitable (Sheresheva & Kopiski, 2016). Understanding the behavior pattern of tourist, stakeholders like the Government and other agencies related to tourism needs

to deal with tourism services which are becoming an essential component of the tourism industry around the Globe (Bowen & Whalen, 2017).

The definition of tourists varies among tourism marketing authors, according to the United Nations World Travel Organization definition, which states that "a visitor is classified as a tourist if his/her trip includes an overnight stay" (UNWTO, 2014). This definition comprises two dimensions which are "visitors" and overnight stays. Understanding these two components is essential for the statistical evaluation of definition in research. The term "visitor" encompasses both tourists as well as "same-day visitors" (Suvantola, 2018). These simple-sounding definitions are much more complicated. The criteria mentioned in the definition to be a tourist includes; movement outside one's environment, duration of a trip, and the purpose of the

trip. Understanding the bifurcation of tourists and visitors is essential from an economic perspective. Tourism and tourists are considered critical elements of a soft economy in export by countries (Bowen & Clarke, 2009)

According to Lickorish & Jenkins (1997), tourism is an economic philosophy, as tourists spend their income at other destinations. The current research will define tourists as discussed above from an economic and technical perspective, as it will help weigh tourism from volume and value, which will ultimately help monitor the behavior pattern of tourists and the flow of tourists. In this contemporary era,

tourism as an industry is ever-expanding from mere economic benefits into sectors of non-economic benefits.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, the tourism industry is on the rise worldwide, and this trend is expected to continue in coming years. The following graph by UNWTO depicts the rapid growth and forecast of tourism in different regions of the World. Furthermore, the graph describes tourism growth from 1950 till now and future growth till 2030, which indicates numerous potential of this industry.

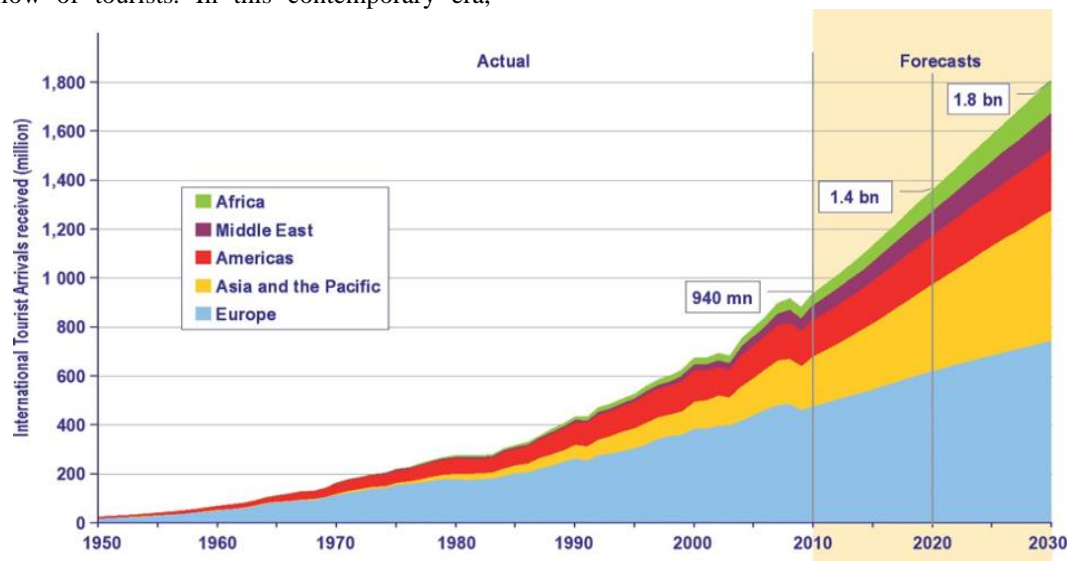


Figure 1.1: UNWTO Tourism Towards 2030: Actual trend and forecast 1950- 2030

Source: UNWTO 2017. Tourism Highlights

The concept of tourism in literature is mainly linked with international tourism, even though most world tourism flow, i.e., 72%, is due to domestic tourists. Several advantages associated with domestic tourism include tourism around the year without any seasonality, and language, time, and distance are not barriers to tourism for domestic tourists, which positively affects the economy (Canh & Thanh, 2020). Several studies identified the positive impact of domestic tourism on economies, even for emerging countries (Tsui, 2017; Yip & Pratt, 2018). According to Morupisi and Mokgalo (2017), domestic tourism helps local and national economies through the circulation and flow of wealth from wealthy to rural areas. Additionally, it overcomes the barrier of seasonality demand in tourism and dependence on International tourists visiting in a particular season (Alzboun, 2018). After the COVID-19 pandemic, countries are focusing more on the revival of tourism by boosting and facilitating domestic tourists. Hence, this study has focused on domestic tourists who visited tourist destinations for nature-based tourism. The reason for selecting this category are as follow:

a) Pakistan is a country that lies in South Asia that is famous for its diverse landmass, distinctive

cultures, beautiful lakes, high altitude mountains, rural tourists spots, very hospitable and social inhabitants, and many tourist activities in natural settings to attract and satisfy the need of tourists (Arshad *et al.*, 2018).

- b) The demand for nature-based tourism is growing, particularly in Asia, due to the increasing number of urban middle-class people. Less established destinations' natural and cultural heritage could contribute to a country's sustainable economic and social development. (Worldbank, 2019).
- c) Theoretically, the study is scarce on nature-based tourism, considered an underdeveloped type of tourism (Namazov, 2021).

Competing in a highly competitive market like the tourism industry, adopting strategies that attract tourists to a specific destination, and transforming first-time visitors into loyal visitors is vital. Loyal visitors can promote the destination and spend and consume more at the destination (Králiková *et al.*, 2020). In tourism, industry satisfaction and loyalty are understandably considered a strong basis of competitive advantage and a reliable source for predicting tourists' future behavior (Cossío-Silva *et al.*, 2019).

As tourism destinations compete fiercely for tourists, understanding the factors that constitute tourist satisfaction may become more crucial. The success of any tourism destination depends on tourist satisfaction, which leads to loyalty. The main aim of developing the marketing strategy for a destination is to acquire and retain satisfied and loyal customers (Pato & Kastenholz, 2017). Researchers have studied tourist behavior to develop strategies to increase tourist visits to a particular destination (Cong, 2016). A systematic analysis of tourist behavior, especially tourist satisfaction, is essential to develop strategies to achieve a competitive advantage over destinations. According to Mohamad *et al.*, (2019), Malaysia's declining tourist arrival rate harms tourist receipt; thus, understanding and analyzing the behavior benefits the destination. The fulfillment of visitors' needs and wants is crucial in destination management as it impacts the choice of destination, satisfaction, and loyalty (Sangpikul, 2018).

Tourism marketing literature suggests that satisfaction is a driving force when selecting the destination for a visit. There is a possibility that perception of value and destination image is the critical antecedents to satisfaction and destination loyalty (Sangpikul, 2018). Tourists' perception and belief about a destination is called the destination image (Crompton and MacKay 1991) and is strongly associated with tourist satisfaction (Kanwel *et al.*, 2019). Destination image is a vital persuading element for visiting a travel destination (Hasan *et al.*, 2019). Another recent research study conducted by Lestari *et al.*, (2019) concluded that destination image significantly and positively impacts satisfaction, leading to destination loyalty. The concept of perceived value is a trade-off between monetary and non-monetary offerings against costs associated with those offerings to meet stated needs (Kotler *et al.*, 2013). Customer perceived value in tourism destination research has been considered one of the antecedents of satisfaction; the greater the perceived value, the greater satisfaction and loyalty toward a destination (Lestari *et al.*, 2019). Thus perceived value is among the most critical elements in explaining customer satisfaction and loyalty (Adinegara *et al.*, 2017). Hence, a destination's competitive advantage depends on destination image and perceived value, as these elements are the predecessor of tourist satisfaction in tourism (Jeong & Kim, 2019). A deeper understanding of customer behavior in the tourism sector is essential to ensure the destination's long-term growth and survival. However, marketing researchers and academicians have an apparent inconsistency in conceptualizing the most significant predictors of customer satisfaction. Additionally, the tourism sector in Pakistan has been understudied in terms of some of the most critical determinants of post-trip behavior, such as satisfaction and loyalty (Kanwel *et al.*, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

TOURIST SATISFACTION

According to Asmelash and Kumar (2019), tourism marketing has recognized the role of tourist satisfaction in tourism development by promoting destination products and services. Tourist satisfaction is critical to understand a destination's long-term success and development (Gidey & Sharma, 2017). Additionally, Asmelash and Kumar (2019) suggested that tourism growth depends on long-term tourist satisfaction. The study by Razović (2013) discussed that tourist satisfaction has a significant economic impact on the destination, helps attract more investment for the destination, and helps gain a competitive advantage. The studies dealing with service satisfaction have defined the construct in several ways. A customer's satisfaction can be defined as an evaluation of a service-based both on the expectations of a customer and the actual performance of that service (Orel & Kara 2014). Pizam *et al.*, (1978) defined tourist satisfaction as "feelings and expectations about the destinations." The long-term effect of customer satisfaction on businesses is crucial because of repurchasing and due to informal communication through word of mouth (Walker, 1995). Therefore, in nature-based tourism, it is vital to evaluate tourists' satisfaction to ensure positive emotions with the experience and for the industry's long-term competitiveness (Nazwa-Al-Zannat, 2018).

DESTINATION IMAGE

There has been much research surrounding concepts of destination image (Pan & Li, 2011). Destination image has become an exciting field of study amongst tourism researchers since its understanding is essential for tourist choice, satisfaction, and post-purchase behavior (Beerli & Martín, 2004). According to Gartner (1993), the destination image is generally seen as the collection of ideas, beliefs, and impressions developed from a diverse source of information, which helps form a mental picture of different attributes and benefits associated with the destination. Furthermore, the destination image is an effective tool for management to strengthen the tourism industry in this competitive era (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Researchers have defined destination image in numerous ways (Marine-Roig, 2019). People's beliefs, ideas, and impressions of a destination are commonly referred to as the destination image (Chiu *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, Dichter (1985) articulated the definition of destination image as "image is not only the individual traits or qualities but also the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others." Beerli and Martín (2004) emphasized that many researchers focused on destination image based on its ability to develop satisfaction and loyalty among tourists in tourism marketing literature. Consequently, destination image studies are crucial marketing phenomena in the tourism industry, as they indicate a destination's competitive advantage via tourists' perceptions of the

image (Bhat & Darzi, 2018). Destination image has been considered a crucial element in tourism marketing for two main reasons. Destination image influence tourist in selecting a destination and help in evaluating (satisfaction) the performance of a destination (Kanwel *et al.*, 2019). Hence the following hypothesis has been proposed:

H1: There is a significant and direct effect of destination image on satisfaction.

PERCEIVED VALUE

In marketing literature, the construct of perceived value is used to analyze the product and service future usage and purchase decision of customers (Jamal & Sharifuddin, 2015). According to Gallarza and Saura (2006), it has been well-established in marketing literature that the behavior of consumers can be explained much better when examined with perceived value. Suggesting that perceived value is one of the instrumental factors in achieving outcomes like satisfaction, loyalty, and healthy financial performance of a company, services, or destination (Agrawal *et al.*, 2015). Zeithaml (1988) indicated that perceived customer value is a strategic tool to attract and retain customers and is essential to a company's success. The concept of perceived value is getting much impetus in organizations' strategic management domain (Spiteri and Dion, 2004) because the perceived value becomes imperative to gain competitive advantages. According to Holbrook (1999), in almost every marketing activity, the term 'consumer value' is essential to address since positive outcomes like profitability, satisfaction, and loyalty are strongly linked with value (Khalifa, 2004). Although much work has been carried out on perceived value, heterogeneity exists among the proposed definitions of the perceived value construct. Literature is yet to accept and follow one universal definition, so that several descriptions can be found for perceived value.

Additionally, Day and Crask (2000) stated that "there is no accepted definition of value since the existence of so many definitions makes a scientific discourse on value difficult because researchers may be discussing two completely different constructs, depending on how each defines value." According to Gallarza and Gil (2008), the importance of perceived value can be understood because researchers and consumers have constantly evaluated and focused on this concept in the last two decades. Novel theoretical concepts and diverse conclusions make this concept an endemic in marketing theory and consumer behavior analysis. Pandža Bajcs (2015) claimed that perceived value provides a solid theoretical foundation in assessing tourist behavior and practical implications for DMOs to attract and retain tourists (Kim & Park, 2017).

Furthermore, Agrawal *et al.*, (2015) also reaffirm that understanding perceived value is pivotal for success in the tourism industry. According to

tourism marketing literature, perceived value and tourist satisfaction are significantly related (Sato *et al.*, 2018). Empirical evidence from different research settings in tourism reveals that tourists with a positive perception of a destination can be instrumental in creating customer satisfaction (Mohamad *et al.*, 2019; Ramseook-Munhurrun *et al.*, 2015). Thus based on the above discussion following hypothesis is developed:

H2: There is a direct and significant impact of perceived value on satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

This study incorporated the quantitative methodology comprising hypothesis testing through covariance-based structural equation modeling. This study focused on domestic tourists who traveled within the country for a holiday, business trip, conference, or to visit friends or relatives for more than one day. (Mill & Morrison, 1987). According to Kabote *et al.*, (2019), domestic tourists can be a vital source of tourism development in a region through exposition, appreciation, and economic activities. Analyzing domestic tourists could be beneficial in the long run for tourism development. That is one of the criteria for selecting domestic tourists as a population and unit of analysis in this study. This study was conducted from July 2021 to September 2021 in the Gilgit-Baltistan province of Pakistan. This study needed to establish a particular sampling framework because precise information on this population's size was not accessible, as suggested by (Burns *et al.*, 2017). Awang (2015) urged using probability sampling techniques to perform SEM in AMOS. Therefore, the simple random sampling approach has been chosen to reduce the human bias potential in selecting the sample cases (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). As part of this study, 400 out of 831 respondents were selected as participants. Nevertheless, only 380 respondents were used to analyze the data after removing outliers and incomplete responses. This still fulfils Burn's *et al.*, (2017) suggested sample size.

This study used a close-ended questionnaire to gather primary data on destination image, customer perceived value, and satisfaction. Scholars developed instruments from their perspective and validated and used them in different studies. The instruments are modified according to the requirement of this study.

Destination image instruments were adapted from the work of Bhat and Darzi (2018), achieving high validity and reliability in a context similar to the current study. Measures of perceived value were adapted from Lee *et al.*, (2007). Furthermore, the author identified three dimensions, functional, emotional, and overall value, to measure perceived value. These dimensions are suitable and relevant to the context (Lee *et al.*, 2007). Nine items were adapted from Aliman *et al.*, (2014) to measure tourist satisfaction. The measurement approach and dimension used were overall satisfaction with multiple items. The respondents will choose from

a 10-point interval scale for each item in the questionnaire, starting with "1 as Strongly Disagree" to "10 as Strongly Agree".

This study used Version 24.0 of IBM SPSS (statistical package of social sciences) to analyze the data collected for the pilot, and for the field study, AMOS (Analysis of a Moment Structures version 24) was used. A pilot study was used to perform Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in SPSS. Confirmatory Factor analysis is a part of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) that comprises validation of the measurement model (Awang *et al.*, 2018). In this study, latent constructs, namely destination image, perceived value, and tourist satisfaction, have been validated through CFA before applying structural equation modeling in AMOS. In Confirmatory factor analysis, the validation of the measurement model started with assessing the importance of the items measuring the construct. After validation of the latent constructs, An analysis of the relationship between destination image, perceived value, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty was conducted with structural equation modeling (SEM).

RESULTS

Respondent's Profile

In this study, two hundred and four (53.7%) respondents were males, and one hundred and seventy-six (46.3%) were female domestic tourists visiting Gilgit-Baltistan have participated. One hundred and eleven domestic tourists are 35-44 years old, contributing (29.2%) to the field's sample. The second-

largest domestic tourist group is aged between 18 to 24 years old (25.8%). Eighty-three respondents were aged 45 to 54, contributing (21.8%) to the total sample. Only one (0.3%) respondent is from the sample aged more than fifty-six years. Eighty-four (21.1%) respondents were self-employed, and one-hundred and one (26.6%) were government servants. Among the rest of the respondents, one hundred and four were doing private jobs and contributed (27.4%) to the total sample. Four domestic tourists (1.1%) were retired individuals, while eighty-seven (22.9%) were marked as students.

Measurement Model Testing

The EFA method was used to identify items indicating destination image, perceived value, and tourist satisfaction based on data collected during a pilot study. It was also examined for underlying factors. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the instrument was assessed for its internal reliability, and a value greater than or equal to 0.7 indicated that the instruments were internally reliable. The pooled measurement model is applied in this study to assess the confirmatory factor analysis of the model. Confirmatory Factor analysis is a part of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) that comprises validation of the measurement model (Awang *et al.*, 2018). According to Afthanorhan *et al.*, (2019), the researcher widely uses confirmatory factor analysis in social sciences as it is a unique form of factor analysis.

Figure 2 depicts the model for measuring destination image perceived value and tourist satisfaction.

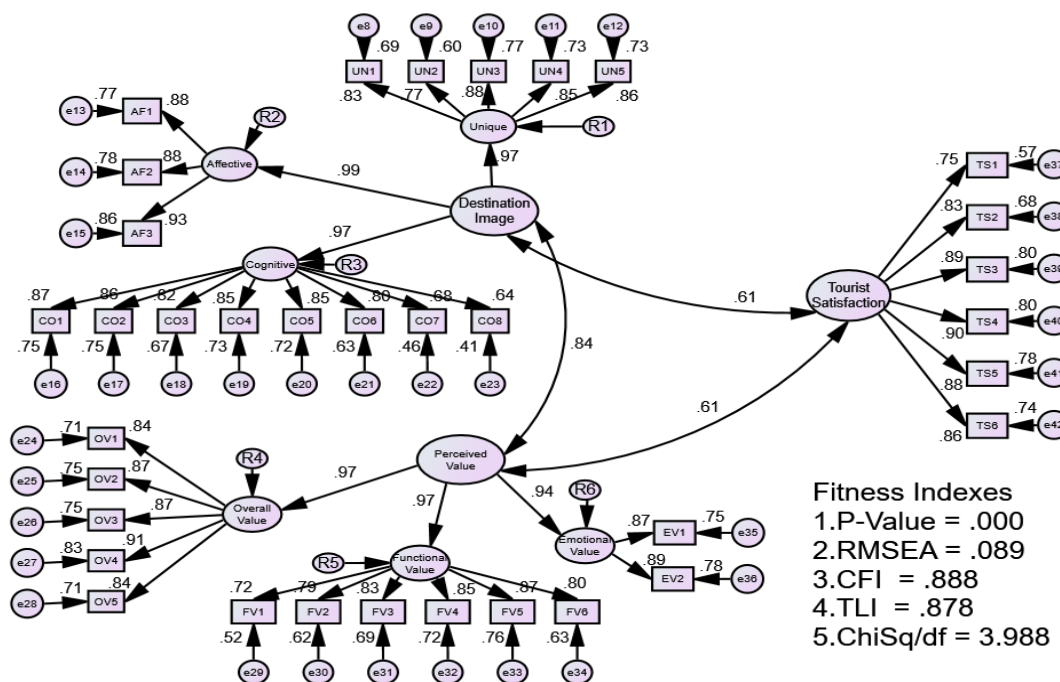


Figure 2: The Pooled Measurement Model

Assessment of Normality, Reliability, and Validity

According to Awang (2015), CFA evaluates latent constructs' unidimensionality, reliability, and validity before modeling them into structural models. The factor loadings, CRs, and AVEs of the constructs under study are shown in Table 1. We assessed the

reliability requirement using CR. Table 1 indicates that the reliability requirement is met when all constructs have CR values of at least 0.6. AVE and discriminant validity were used to assess the validity of the measurement model. Values of AVE (more than 0.5) indicated adequate convergence validity.

Table 1: The Validity and Reliability of the Measurement Model

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	CR (above 0.6)	AVE (above 0.5)
Tourist Satisfaction			0.941	0.728
	TS1	0.75		
	TS2	0.82		
	TS3	0.89		
	TS4	0.89		
	TS5	0.89		
	TS6	0.87		
Destination Image			0.984	0.954
	Cognitive Image	0.97		
	Affective Image	0.99		
	Unique Image	0.97		
Cognitive Image			0.934	0.641
	CO1	0.87		
	CO2	0.86		
	CO3	0.82		
	CO4	0.85		
	CO5	0.85		
	CO6	0.80		
	CO7	0.68		
	CO8	0.64		
Affective Image			0.925	0.805
	AF1	0.87		
	AF2	0.89		
	AF3	0.93		
Unique Image			0.922	0.704
	UN1	0.83		
	UN2	0.77		
	UN3	0.88		
	UN4	0.85		
	UN5	0.86		
Perceived Value			0.975	0.928
	Emotional	0.94		
	Functional	0.98		
	Overall	0.97		
Emotional				
	EV1	0.87		
	EV2	0.89		
Functional				
	FV1	0.72		
	FV2	0.79		
	FV3	0.83		
	FV4	0.85		
	FV5	0.87		
	FV6	0.80		
Overall Value				
	OV1	0.84		
	OV2	0.87		
	OV3	0.87		
	OV4	0.91		
	OV5	0.84		

Using discriminant validity, which measures how distinct or similar the constructs are, table 2 shows that all constructs in the study were discriminately valid (Hair *et al.*, 2010). This study found that the square root

of the average variance (diagonal values in bold) extracted from each construct exceeded their correlation.

Table 2: The Discriminant Validity Index Summary

Construct	Tourist Satisfaction	Destination Image	Perceived Value
Tourist Satisfaction	0.85		
Destination Image	0.61	0.97	
Perceived Value	0.61	0.84	0.95

Structural Model

After completing the CFA procedure and report and determining that the values are valid and reliable, the researcher can conclude that all latent construct measurement models have been validated (Awang, 2018). Afthanorhan *et al.*, (2019) suggested arranging constructs from left to right with exogenous constructs at the left and endogenous constructs at the right. (Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2019).

After the CFA report is completed and all values meet the thresholds for validity and reliability, it

is possible to conclude that all measurement models for latent constructs have been validated (Awang, 2018). Afterward, structural equation modeling was conducted using these constructs. Before proceeding to path analysis, the researcher needs to ensure that the model is fit. Based on the fit index of the structural model, it is concluded that it has adequate goodness-of-fit, with ChiSQ/df = 3.988, TLI = 0.878, CFI = 0.888, and RMSEA = 0.089, suggesting the study fits the sample data adequately.

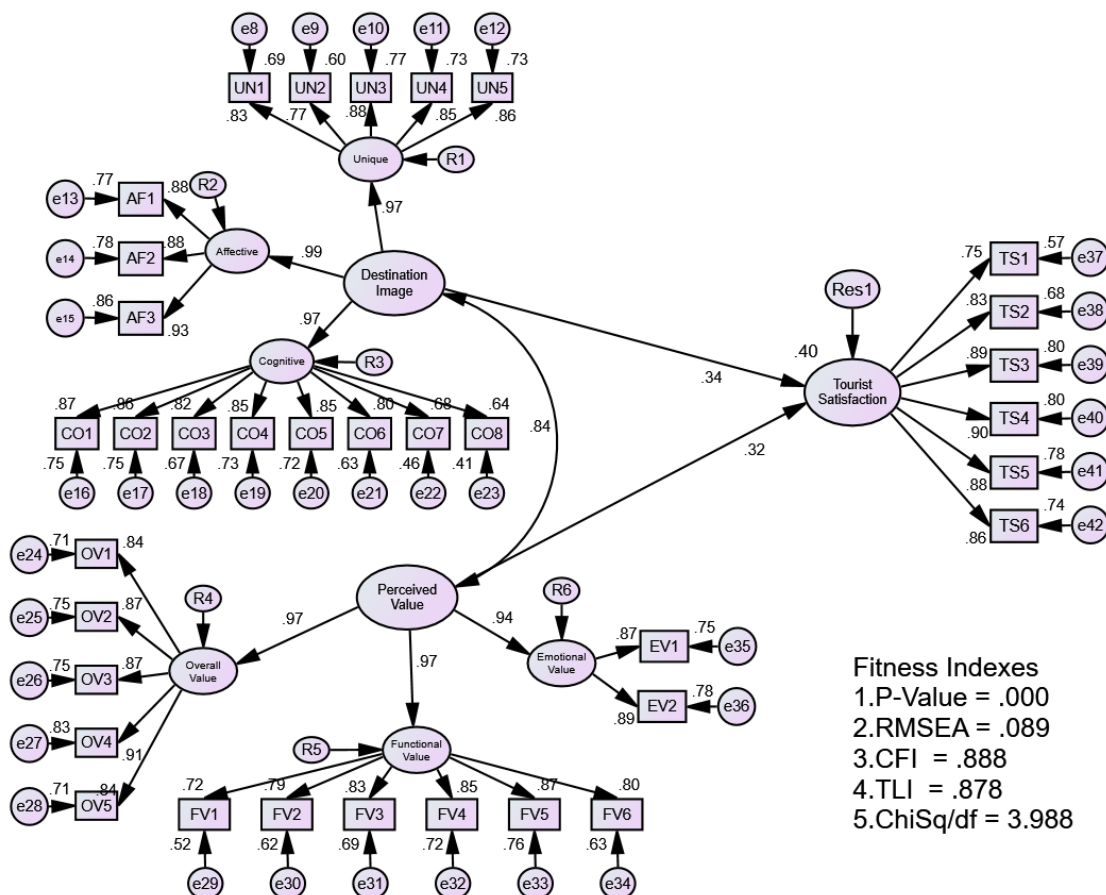


Figure 3: Structural Model of Destination Image, Perceived Value, and Tourist Satisfaction

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to analyze the hypotheses in the study. Two direct hypotheses were proposed (Path Analysis). Table 3 shows that the hypotheses were supported. A positive relationship was found between destination image and

tourist satisfaction according to the first hypothesis (H1); the result follows the findings of Weisheng *et al.*, (2016) that destination image significantly affects satisfaction. The second hypothesis (H2) proposes that perceived value directly affects tourist satisfaction.

According to Kim & Park (2017), the relationship between perceived value and tourist satisfaction has

been widely debated and considered an essential antecedent of tourist satisfaction.

Table 3: Regression Weights

Structural Relationship	Estimate	SE.	CR.	P	Hypothesis	Result
Ts <--- DI	.224	.065	3.457	***	H1	Significant
TS <--- PV	.264	.079	3.348	***	H3	Significant

*Note: Significant Level $p \leq 0.05$ (**); $p \leq 0.001$ (***), DI = Destination Image PV = Perceived Value and TS = Tourists Satisfaction

CONCLUSION

A key objective and goal of the Pakistan tourism development corporation were to rank Pakistan among the most attractive tourist destinations among South Asian countries in specific and worldwide in general. But till now, it did not achieve that goal. Pakistan lacks tourism in terms of its economic impact on its economy, so studying tourist behavior, especially those of domestic tourists, is critical to evaluate. It is thus essential to acquire tourists' satisfaction toward the destination Gilgit Baltistan (Pakistan) as nature bestowed it with immense natural beauty, and it may yield impressive benefits in the future for the nation through increasing its share in the soft economy. Thus, this study attempted to investigate and develop a theoretical relationship between destination image and perception regarding the value offered during the visit and empirically tested the constructs that influence tourist satisfaction.

Based on the results of empirical research, tourism satisfaction was significantly influenced by destination image. Also, the research showed that perceived value greatly affected satisfaction. Through the study, the stakeholders, especially the Pakistan tourism development corporation, can better understand customer retention and behavioral factors, which may serve as a sustainable source of increasing customer retention at the destination level. As part of the visitor's travel experience, the service providers should provide amenities and services according to the expectation of tourists and try to build a positive image of the destination by meeting the expectations. A strategic tool for managing tourism offerings could be based on elements of destination image and perceived value identified in the study.

Limitation and Recommendation

The study was not without limitations. The study was limited to domestic tourists visiting Gilgit-Baltistan from July 2021 to September 2021. It was a snapshot study, and the findings were only available to tourists who traveled during this period. Gilgit-Baltistan as a tourism destination can be viewed differently by tourists during different seasons. Future researchers may conduct similar surveys throughout the year to overcome this limitation. This study is not generalizable beyond this population because the data was collected at a nature-based destination (Lakes of Gilgit-Baltistan). Therefore, this study excluded tourists who did not visit

and see the lakes. To increase the generalizability of these findings, it would be imperative to replicate similar studies in other tourist destinations like historical places and Islamic architecture, famous spots, and tourist attractions. Finally, this study collected cross-sectional data and could not be used to analyze behavior over time. It would be beneficial for researchers in the future to collect longitudinal data to determine the causality of relationships and to measure change over time.

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