

THE EFFECT OF DESTINATION BRAND IMAGE ON TOURIST SATISFACTION: A MODERATED MEDIATION MODEL OF DESTINATION BRAND LOYALTY AND PERCEIVED BRAND QUALITY

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Abstract

The study explores the moderated mediation between destination brand image (DBI) and tourist satisfaction (TS) in Lumbini, world heritage site of Nepal. The moderating effect of destination perceived quality (DPQ) on DBI and TS via destination brand loyalty (DBL). The research uses quantitative approach and deductive strategy to test the hypotheses set. Primary data has been used using a well-structured questionnaire, which ranges from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. A convenience sampling technique was deployed to collect data from 403 respondents. The findings depict that DBL mediates the relationship between DBI and TS. The results also reveal that DBI has its significant effect on TS, and DBL. Additionally, DPQ moderates the relationship between DBI and TS through DBL. This research contributes for the policy making in terms of Nepalese tourism in Lumbini. It also fosters rich and thick academic knowledge to the academia, particularly, investigating the moderated mediation of destination brand image on tourist satisfaction through destination brand loyalty and destination perceived quality.

Keywords: Destination brand image, destination brand loyalty, destination perceived quality, Tourism, and tourist satisfaction

1. Introduction

Tourism is today a major feature of the developing countries since it greatly benefited their economies and bookings. Aimed at capturing the attention of travelers when competing for a significant share in the global tourism market, destination branding appears to complement the evolving tourism environment efficiently to deliver pertinent outcomes (Pécot et al., 2024; García & Ricart, 2024; Altink, 2024; Lasisi et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023). In view of the growing competitiveness of destinations on the global market, the need to attract tourists' attention and secure the share of the market has made destination brand image important. This concept is the affective and cognitive one which means the feelings and attitudes which tourists connect with the place (Hardt & Glückstad, 2024; Almeida & Almeida, 2023; Tang et al., 2023).

Destination brand image is a strategic tool not only brings beauty to the appeal of a destination, but also facilitates the management of tourists' behaviors specifically the satisfaction and loyalty dimensions (Yuan & Marzuki, 2024; Almeida & Almeida, 2023; Jebbouri et al., 2022). Tourist satisfaction of destination marketing which is critical in a destination is determined by the kind of experiences that are offered to the tourists (Wang et al., 2022). In this regard, perceived quality refers to a holistic judgment of a destination's goods and services including its nature and cultural tourism resources and hospitality

and support services (Nguyen & Huynh, 2024; Vongvisitsin et al., 2024). This research revealed that a positive link between perceived quality and tourist satisfaction usually results in more positive word-of-mouth communication, revisits and improved brand association (Vongvisitsin et al., 2024; Spr et al., 2023).

But these three concepts are not always directly connected where destination brand image is equal to tourist satisfaction which is equal to perceived quality. These components are often tightly connected with each other; the interactions among them in many cases are mutual, and its result contributing to the further development and stabilization of the destination marketing (Vásquez-Parraga et al., 2024). For instance, while a positive destination brand image fosters an aura of quality, which in a way boosts array of tourist satisfaction (Yuan & Marzuki, 2024; Wang et al., 2023). On the other hand, high tourists' satisfaction assists in sustaining and further enhancing the positive brand image of the destination which inculcates positive feedback cycle for a destination (Hardt & Glückstad, 2024).

Out of all these dynamic relationships, destination brand loyalty can be considered as mediator. Concerning the loyalty perspective, it determines the extent of tourists' loyalty towards a destination since it measures their likelihood to recommence the destination and to revisit it (Cruz-Milán, 2023). Loyalty as a consumer and behavioral attitude, is an accumulative result that compliments the actualizer of favorable brand image and higher perceived quality. In decision-making, the moderating impact of destination brand loyalty is something that a destination marketer needs to grasp while managing the destination. Such awareness empowers them to propose solutions that can help develop and improve sustainable competitive advantages for the greater portend of achieving business successes in the long run (Vásquez-Parraga et al., 2024; Altink: 2024).

However, research on perceived destination quality as a moderator of the relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination brand image has been scarce through destination brand loyalty. This research therefore seeks to address this gap by assessing the various linkages between destination brand image, destination brand loyalty, and tourist satisfaction, with emphasis on the moderating effect of perceived destination quality. The conclusion drawn from this research will be useful to destination marketing and management professionals since it will avail a better understanding of how brand can be boosted, customer experiences improved, and faithful tourists developed. Finally, this research advances the knowledge about the concept of destination branding, and its relevancy in terms of positive change effects on the tourism business. Based on the above information, the research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the effect of brand destination image on tourist satisfaction in Lumbini?
2. How does destination brand loyalty mediate the relationship between destination brand image and tourist satisfaction?
3. When does destination perceived quality moderate the indirect relationship between destination brand image and tourist satisfaction through destination brand loyalty?

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Destination brand image, tourist satisfaction, destination brand loyalty and destination perceived quality

2.1.1 Destination Brand Image

Marketing of tourism destinations cannot be complete without considering the brand image of the destination in questions. It relates to the marketing of a destination which is defined as the combined impression that a destination creates in the mind of the tourists who are potential visitors (Hardt & Glückstad, 2024; Yuan & Marzuki, 2024; Wang et al., 2023). This image is a realization of consumers'

perception by past experience (Yuan & Marzuki, 2024) and word-of-mouth (Hardt & Glückstad, 2024) and marketing communication (Almeida & Almeida, 2023; Guan et al., 2023). Destination image perceived by consumers in a positive and strong manner can lead to the increase of the number of visitors, an improvement of their experience and their loyalty (Chigora et al., 2024). According to Jebbouri et al., (2022), and Jiang, et al. (2023), brand image is an important factor as it provides the tourists with satisfaction and leads them towards the selection of the certain destination.

2.1.2 Destination Loyalty

Destination loyalty means tourists' commitment to visiting a destination again and or advising fellow travelers to visit that particular destination (Wang & Li 2023; Le & Le 2020). As it has an impact on the tourism destinations and therefore it results in a rise in the revenue improvement (Wang & Li, 2023), word-of-mouth communication (Chigora et al., 2024), and improve sustainable tourism services (Malm Destination Loyalty is affected by the factors such as, Tourist Satisfaction, Perceived Value (Wang et al., 2022), Destination Image. It is of particular importance for tourism marketers and DMOs to realize what influences the destination loyalty for they need to design marketing strategies to attract and maintain tourists (Hung et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

2.1.3 Tourist Satisfaction

In a continuously changing market environment tourist satisfaction which is one of the core success factors (Abdullah et al., 2022) can be viewed from different perspectives, highlighting various aspects. These are; customer satisfaction (Djunaid, 2023; Sao et al., 2022), positive emotional response (Sao et al., 2022; Abdullah et al., 2022), and post-purchase response (Abdullah et al., 2022). Besides, it includes post-purchase assessments (Sao et al., 2022; Tan & Le, 2023), which can act as the metric of organizational performance (Tan & Le, 2023). Lastly, customer satisfaction has been defined more generally as the feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that a customer has when comparing a product or service with his or her expectations (Bindroo et al., 2020; Sabir, 2020).

2.1.4 Destination Perceived Quality

The quality experience is the significant part of the tourism experience that defines visitors' perceptions and their satisfaction with a destination (Akarsu et al., 2022; Huseynov et al., 2020). The importance of tourist resources has been expressed by scholars in terms of the quality of services offered to augment the value of a trip from the visitor's perception (Sukaris et al., 2020). The perception would always influence the quality being offered, accepted or rejected by the clients thus the destination managers and marketers need to have these attributes evaluated by the visitors (Bayraktaroğlu & Kozak, 2022).

2.2 Research Hypothesis Development

2.2.1 Destination Brand Image and Tourist Satisfaction and Destination Brand Loyalty (Direct effect)

Destination branding has emerged as a crucial element in tourism management, significantly influencing traveler perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty (Hamzah & Pontes, 2022; Vongvisitsin et al., 2024). It is widely recognized that the image of a destination forms a key aspect of its brand and is essential for competitiveness in the tourism sector (Ali et al., 2021). Research has shown that tourists often base their travel decisions more on emotional responses and perceptions than on factual knowledge about a destination (Jebbouri et al., 2022; Zulfiqar et al., 2022).

Prior research also suggests that satisfied tourists are more likely to rebook for the same destination and bring other people with them, therefore the destination image is an essential determinant of satisfaction

(Jebbouri et al., 2022; Chan et al., 2021). Destination image plays a significant role in affecting the expectations, perception and evaluation with regard to the satisfaction of the tourist (Nguyen-Viet et al., 2020). According to Alahi (2019), the destination brand image can be described as the evaluation of the destination, the cultural attractions and services that are on offer and the level of satisfaction which the tourists attain.

This has become so critical in tourism development because destination brand image has a significant influence on tourist behaviour particularly with regards to choosing tourism destinations. The link between the destination brand image and loyalty is well explored as an understanding of the factors that surround the repeated visitation and sustained tourist loyalty to the destination (Xu et al., 2020; Chi et al., 2020).

H1: DBI has significant impact on TS.

H2: DBI has a direct positive impact on DBL.

2.2.2 Destination Brand Loyalty on Tourism Satisfaction (Direct effect)

The destination brand loyalty is a key determinant of the satisfaction level of tourists that visit a specific site (Asmelash and Kumar (2020). Regarding loyalty, the study revealed that loyal tourists experience positive touch and feel that makes them show higher level of satisfaction (Wang & Li, 2023). Because of that, the guests are likely to understand more of the services and facilities available in the destination and thus their experience is more likely to be enhanced (Asmelash & Kumar, 2020).

Moreover, destination loyalty help gives tourism destinations competitive edge to magnets and retain tourists. Revisiting visitors are likely to encourage friends and family to visit the place making word-of-mouth publicity an advantage in enhancing the visibility of the destination (Hung et al., 2021; Chigora et al., 2024). Repeat visitors are also cheap to manage bearing in mind that the cost of managing customers is cheaper than the cost of procuring Customers are therefore an attractive commodity for tourism providers, especially because destination loyalty provides a relatively cheap means of gaining customers than the use of other marketing strategies (Cruz-Milán, 2023). Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H3: DLB has a significant influence on TS.

2.2.3 Destination Brand Loyalty, Destination Brand Image and Tourist Satisfaction (Mediating effect)

Destination branding has emerged as an important tool in the marketing of tourism destinations since it has the ability to enrich the perceived impression of the destination and ultimately improve the level of satisfaction and loyalty of the tourists (Chigora et al. 2024; Chi et al., 2020). Though prior literature has compared destination brand image with tourist satisfaction, the moderating function of destination brand loyalty has not been investigated much (Chigora et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2023).

The existing literature highlights the importance of destination brand image in shaping customer satisfaction (Chigora et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2023). A destination's image, which includes cognitive elements such as infrastructure and natural attractions (Martín et al., 2018), affective factors like emotional appeal (Saini & Arasanmi, 2020), and distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from others (Jiang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2020), significantly impacts tourist loyalty (Ali et al., 2021; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Styliadis et al., 2020). Thus, following hypothesis was proposed:

H4: DBL mediates the relationship between DBI and TS.

2.2.4 Destination Perceived Quality, Destination Brand Image and Destination Brand Loyalty (Moderating Effects)

A very important aspect that has a direct impact on the tourism destinations is the destination brand loyalty because this increases the frequency of visits and positive word-of-mouth (von Wangenheim et al., 2021; Ellen et al., 2020). Previous studies have analyzed different factors related to destination

loyalty which include the destination image and perceived quality (Hung et al., 2021). Nevertheless, prior research has not devoted sufficient effort into exploring the role that perceived quality may play in mediating the impact of destination image on loyalty. The purpose of this research is to build a theoretical framework to examine the proposed moderating role of perceived service quality in-between destination brand image and brand loyalty. With respect to the cognitive and affective image, it has been postulated and confirmed that they have a strong influence on tourists' loyalty (Jiang et al., 2023). Also, sustainable destination quality has been revealed to have an effect on loyalty; in addition, it moderates the relationship between image and loyalty (Martín et al., 2018). Thus, following hypothesis was proposed:

H5: DPQ moderates the relationship between DBI and DBL.

2.2.5 Destination perceived quality moderates the indirect effects of destination brand image on tourist satisfaction via destination brand loyalty

This paper seeks to establish that competition in the tourism industry is increasing due to efforts made by destinations in order to attract and maintain tourists. One of the critical factors within this competition is the perceived quality of the destination as this has an important balancing on the satisfaction and loyalty of the tourists. Past studies have also confirmed that destination brand image, perceived quality and brand loyalty have a significant impact on tourist satisfaction (Martín et al., 2018; Gürsoy et al., 2014). This paper found out that destination brand image of a favorable destination can help in increasing the perceived destination quality that will lead to an increase in tourists' satisfaction and hence loyalty. The hypothesis of interest in this study is as follows: Perceived quality of a destination moderate the indirect effects of destination brand image on tourist satisfaction through the mediation of destination brand loyalty. Thus, following hypothesis was developed:

H6: Destination perceived quality moderates the indirect effects of destination brand image on tourist satisfaction via destination brand loyalty.

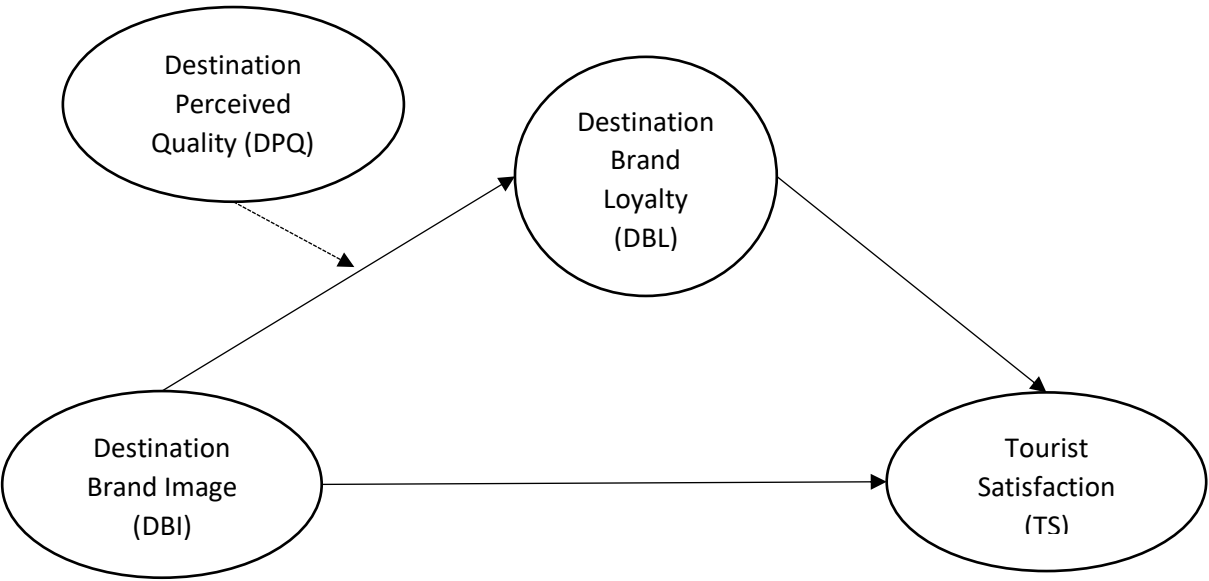
3. Methodology

3.1 Survey design

To enhance the reliability of our research model, in this study, we borrowed empirical variables from the existing research theories in tourism. Particularly, we updated five variables of destination perceived quality according to Boo et al. (2009) and six variables to destination brand image based on Boo et al. (2009). Moreover, we borrowed five measurements from Zhu et al. (2016) for measuring the tourist satisfaction and four measurements for destination brand loyalty from Wang and Hsu (2010) and Kashif et al. (2015). In ensuring the criteria for the validity of data, its content validity and reliability were measured based on well-defined theoretical framework. To ensure that the content validity was achieved, the author ensured that every indicator on the set paradigms met the criterion of dependability/ internal consistency as suggested Nunnally (1978). Self-administered questionnaires with 20 closed-ended questions were completed by four experts from the tourism departments and academic intuitions of Nepal to get the impression about the relevance and measurability of the observed variables. The scales were assessed by the experts on the Likert-type scale ranging from, 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree,' and the mean scores were above 3. It also made it possible for the participants to concur about the suitability of the scales at the end of the study, at hand 5. After this the factors were again checked for their reliability through a pilot study involving 30 people including both domestic and international tourists in Lumbini. Reliability analysis revealed Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.888 for destination brand image (DBI), 0.826 for destination perceived quality (DPQ), 0.858 for tourist satisfaction (TS), and 0.854 for destination brand loyalty (DBL), all exceeding the 0.7

threshold, thus confirming the reliability of these constructs. The final survey consisted of 20 items across four dimensions, rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To ensure inclusivity, the questionnaire was provided in English. The survey was divided into two sections: the first section gathered demographic data from respondents, while the second assessed the constructs of the research model.

Figure 1 Conceptual model



3.2. Data collection

Data was gathered from March 2024 to May 2024 through a paper-based survey. We employed convenient sampling techniques focusing on a specific group of both domestic and international tourists visiting Lumbini, Nepal. The questionnaires were strategically distributed at prime locations, including tourist attractions and hotels, where participants could feel comfortable and had ample time to respond thoughtfully. A total of 403 valid questionnaires were collected for data analysis, and the demographics of the respondents are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents personal information

Gender	Male	67.10%
	Female	32.90%
Age	18-39	68.40%
	40-59	17.90%
	60 and above	13.70%
Income	\$250-\$1000	54.80%
	\$1000-\$2500	23.90%
	\$2500 and above	21.30%
Country of Origin	Nepal	60.30%
	India	21.80%
	China	12%
	Vietnam	2%
	Thailand	2.40%

Others

1.50%

N=403**3.3 Data analysis**

This research employed SMART PLS to assess the alignment of established theories with real-world conditions (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). We conducted a comprehensive analysis of respondents' demographic data, performed exploratory factor analysis (EFA), evaluated the measurement model, and tested hypotheses using structural equation modeling (SEM). Additionally, we executed intermediate and multi-group analyses.

4. Results and Findings**4.1 The Measurement Model**

All constructs were rigorously validated and verified using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, which are well-established metrics for evaluating measurement reliability (Sarstedt, Ringle, & Hair, 2021; Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). Initially, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to test the unidimensionality of the measurements, confirming that the data fit the measurement model well. The CFA results, detailed in Table 2, demonstrated excellent goodness-of-fit, with values for CMIN/DF = 537.537, CFI = 0.973, and SRMR = 0.057, aligning with recommendations from existing literature (Agostini, Nosella, & Filippini, 2016; Marsh & Hocevar, 1985; Davis-Becker, Peterson, & Fischer, 2014).

Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.839 to 0.916, indicating high reliability. Composite reliability scores ranged from 0.840 to 0.909, surpassing the recommended cutoff of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978; Iacobucci, 2010). For further details, see Table 2.

Discriminant and convergent validity were meticulously assessed, including the average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE values, which should be at least 0.5 to confirm both discriminant and convergent validity (Iacobucci, 2010), ranged from 0.569 to 0.720, exceeding the threshold. Thus, the measurement model demonstrates strong convergent validity.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics**

Items	Mean	Standard deviation	Excess kurtosis	Skewness
DBI1	3.583	1.061	-0.502	-0.556
DBI2	3.474	1.092	-0.543	-0.484
DBI3	3.333	1.023	-0.673	-0.171
DBI4	3.432	1.081	-0.415	-0.557
DBI5	3.325	1.076	-0.655	-0.291
DBI6	3.201	1.128	-0.916	-0.089
TS1	3.799	0.969	-0.012	-0.654
TS2	3.774	0.933	0.239	-0.697
TS3	3.772	1.034	-0.353	-0.653
TS4	3.63	1.004	-0.531	-0.464
TS5	3.821	1.051	-0.551	-0.577
TS6	3.61	1.059	-0.413	-0.531

DPQ1	3.591	0.998	-0.142	-0.582
DPQ2	3.64	1.005	-0.281	-0.587
DPQ3	3.643	1.022	-0.363	-0.488
DPQ4	3.658	0.997	-0.07	-0.628
DPQ5	3.484	1.177	-1.192	-0.222
DPQ6	3.665	0.981	-0.164	-0.523
DPQ7	3.645	0.9	0.466	-0.737
DPQ8	3.685	1.002	-0.208	-0.597
DPQ9	2.829	1.246	-1.109	0.065
DBL1	3.457	0.935	-0.167	-0.423
DBL2	3.38	1.048	-0.448	-0.444
DBL3	3.417	1.057	-0.493	-0.401
DBL4	3.481	1.13	-0.608	-0.466

Source: Researcher's Computed

Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics for each variable, indicating that the values for standard deviation, mean, kurtosis, correlation, and skewness fall within the ideal range. Each variable exhibited normality, with skewness and kurtosis values remaining within the acceptable limits of $< \pm 2$ (Kline, 2018). Additionally, there were no issues with multiple linear relationships in the dataset, as the correlation coefficients were below the threshold of 0.85 (Kline, 2016; Jahmani, Fadiya, Abubakar, & Elrehail, 2018).

Table 5 presents the correlation coefficients between independent and dependent variables. Specifically, destination brand image ($r = 0.538$, $p < 0.01$), destination brand loyalty ($r = 0.438$, $p < 0.01$), and destination perceived quality ($r = 0.527$, $p < 0.01$) are all positively associated with tourist satisfaction.

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results of overall Model

Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho	AVE	CR	VIF
DBI1	0.828	0.888	0.891	0.642	0.915	2.263
DBI2	0.814					2.175
DBI3	0.787					1.975
DBI4	0.808					2.059
DBI5	0.82					2.222
DBI6	0.748	0.826	0.828	0.657	0.885	1.805
DBL1	0.788					1.665
DBL2	0.83					1.835
DBL3	0.837					1.906
DBL4	0.788					1.663
DPQ1	0.848	0.858	0.866	0.639	0.898	2.164
DPQ2	0.816					2.192
DPQ3	0.838					2.301

DPQ4	0.765					1.764
DPQ7	0.724					1.466
TS1	0.785					1.873
TS2	0.838					2.277
TS3	0.839	0.854	0.856	0.633	0.896	2.294
TS4	0.727					1.627
TS5	0.783					1.7

Source: Researcher's Computed

Table 3 presents the findings from the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the model. It was determined that the Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978), confirming the model's reliability. The results indicated a relatively acceptable fit: $\chi^2 = 537.537$, $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2 / df = 2.83$; SRMR = 0.054, NFI = 0.873. While the NFI fell slightly below the 0.90 threshold, researchers (e.g., Davis-Becker, Peterson, and Fischer, 2014; Iacobucci, 2010) have pointed out that even non-parsimonious models can adequately represent the data when the NFI is marginally under 0.90, provided that other indices are satisfactory, as evidenced by recent studies (e.g., Zhang, & Xu, 2019). Table 3 highlights that the AVEs for DBI, DBL, DPQ, and TS were 0.891, 0.828, 0.866, and 0.856 respectively. Previous research has shown that an AVE below 0.50 can still be deemed sufficient if the composite reliability is commendable (Fornell, & Larcker, 1981; Bufquin, DiPietro, Orlowski, & Partlow, 2017), as demonstrated by earlier empirical evidence in service research (Karatepe, Ozturk, & Kim, 2019; Bufquin, DiPietro, Orlowski, & Partlow, 2017). The composite reliability scores were recorded at 0.915, 0.933, 0.88, and 0.93, exceeding the standard cut-off of 0.70 (Fornell, & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1978). The standardized loadings for each construct were all above 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010), ranging from 0.724 to 0.848 and were statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ (Table 2). Therefore, these results provide compelling evidence for both convergent validity and reliability.

Table 4: HTM Ratio

Constructs	DBI	DBL	DPQ	TS
DBI				
DBL	0.568			
DPQ	0.589	0.641		
TS	0.613	0.518	0.613	

Source: Researcher's Computed

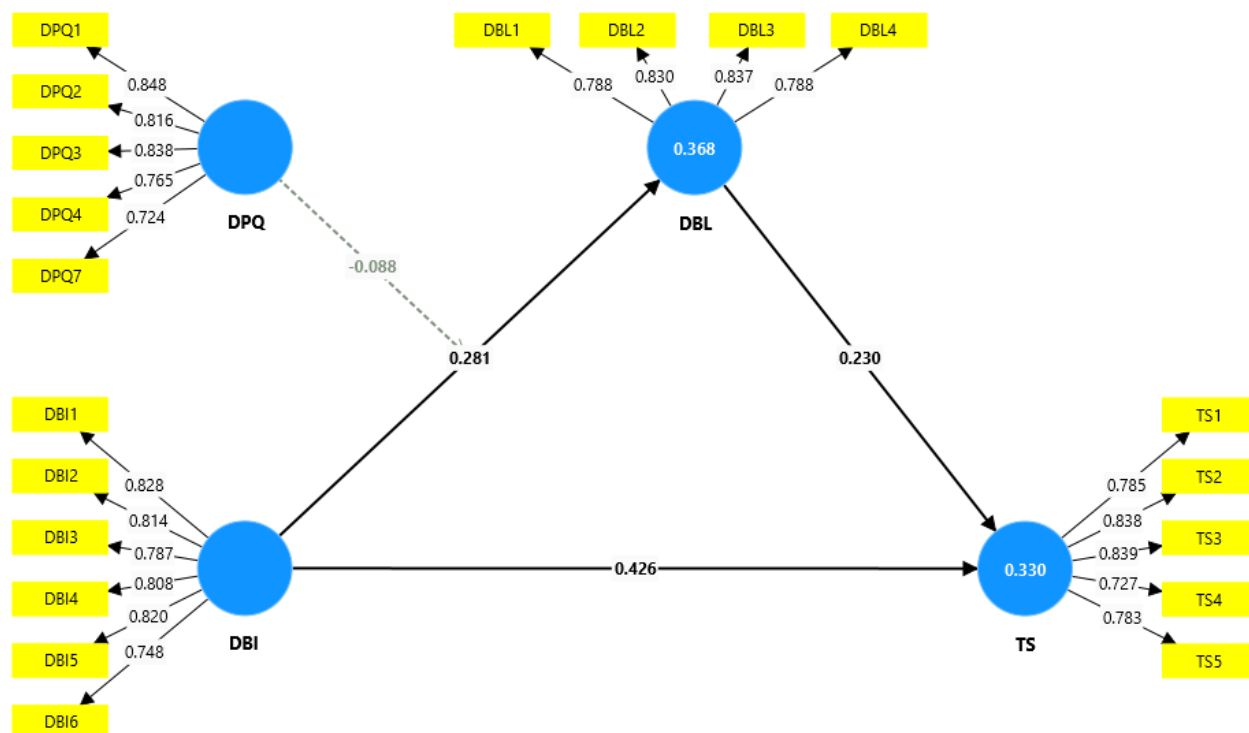
Table 5: Discriminant Validity

Constructs	DBI	DBL	DPQ	TS
DBI	0.801			
DBL	0.488	0.811		
DPQ	0.519	0.548	0.799	
TS	0.538	0.438	0.527	0.795

Source: Researcher's Computed

Table 5 demonstrates the validity of the constructs. The results indicate that validity is maintained, as the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeds the inter-correlation values, consistent with the criteria established by Fornell and Larcker (1981). This confirms the discriminant validity of the constructs. Additionally, Table 3 presents the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, which ranges from 0.518 to 0.641, all of which are below the cut-off criterion of 0.85 (Kline, 2018). This further supports the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Figure 2: Path Analysis



4.3 Hypothesis Testing

Table 3 provides evidence that destination brand loyalty (DBL) mediates the relationship between destination brand image (DBI) and tourist satisfaction (TS). Using SMART PLS, mediation effects were assessed with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (BC CI) based on 5,000 bootstrapped samples. The mediated model demonstrated overall significance ($F(2320) = 19.83$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.11$), confirming that DBI significantly predicted DBL ($b = 0.281$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn predicted TS ($b = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the direct relationship between DBI and TS remained significant ($b = 0.491$, $p < 0.001$) when controlling for DBL. The indirect effect was also statistically significant ($ab = 0.065$, $t = 3.726$, $p < 0.001$, $CI = 0.033-0.102$), supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3).

Additionally, Hypotheses 2 (H2), 3 (H3), and 4 (H4) were tested using SMART PLS with a 95% BC CI from 5,000 bootstrapped samples. Table 5 shows the moderated mediation analysis results, where Hypothesis 5 (H5) was supported. Specifically, destination perceived quality (DPQ) significantly moderated the direct relationship between DBI and DBL ($b = -0.088$, $p < 0.001$), and the moderated mediation index was statistically significant ($b = -0.02$, $p < 0.001$, $LLCI = -0.039$, $ULCI = -0.006$).

A closer examination of the conditional effects revealed that the direct effect of DBI on DBL was

significant at all levels of DPQ: low (blow = 0.37, $p < 0.001$, CI = 0.252–0.487), medium (bmed = 0.28, $p < 0.01$, CI = 0.184–0.379), and high (bhigh = 0.19, $p < 0.01$, CI = 0.078–0.302), further confirming H5.

Moreover, the conditional indirect effects, as detailed in Table 6, indicated that the confidence intervals for all levels of DBL were significantly different from zero, supporting Hypothesis 6 (H6). Multicollinearity was not an issue, as the variance inflation factors (VIFs) for all predictor variables were below 3. Harman's single factor test revealed that the first factor accounted for only 36.95%, well below the 50% threshold, suggesting that common method bias was not a significant concern in this study.

Table 6: Path Analysis Using Direct and Indirect Effect

Path		Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	LLCI	ULCI
DBI	->	0.281	0.279	0.051	5.482	0.000	0.197	0.367
DBL								
DBI	-> TS	0.491	0.491	0.043	11.437	0.000	0.416	0.556
DBL	->	0.23	0.232	0.052	4.446	0.000	0.14	0.31
TS								
DPQ	->	0.382	0.386	0.047	8.038	0.000	0.299	0.456
DBL								
DPQ	->	0.088	0.09	0.025	3.497	0.000	0.049	0.13
TS								
DPQ	x							
DBI	->	-0.088	-0.088	0.031	2.857	0.004	-0.14	-0.038
DBL								
DPQ	x							
DBI	-> TS	-0.02	-0.02	0.008	2.398	0.017	-0.037	-0.009
DBI	->							
DBL	->	0.065	0.064	0.017	3.726	0.000	0.033	0.102
TS								
DPQ	->							
DBL	->	0.088	0.09	0.025	3.497	0.000	0.045	0.142
TS								
DPQ	x							
DBI	->	-0.02	-0.02	0.008	2.398	0.017	-0.039	-0.006
DBL	->							
TS								

Source: Researcher's Computed

Table 7: Conditional Direct Effect at DPQ

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	2.50%	97.50%
DBI -> DBL conditional on DPQ at - 1 SD	0.37	0.368	0.06	6.147	0	0.252	0.487
DBI -> DBL conditional on DPQ at +1 SD	0.19	0.189	0.057	3.314	0.001	0.078	0.302
DBI -> DBL conditional on DPQ at Mean	0.28	0.278	0.05	5.566	0	0.184	0.379
Conditional Indirect effect at DPQ							
DBI -> DBL -> TS conditional on DPQ at +1 SD	0.041	0.041	0.015	2.776	0.006	0.017	0.078
DBI -> DBL -> TS conditional on DPQ at - 1 SD	0.08	0.08	0.021	3.817	0	0.045	0.127
DBI -> DBL -> TS conditional on DPQ at Mean	0.061	0.06	0.016	3.714	0	0.033	0.1

Source: Researcher's Computed

5. Discussion

Destination brand image, tourist satisfaction, destination brand loyalty, and perceived quality are four constructs that are significantly related in the context of tourism management whereby marketing and management of tourism destinations largely depend on the understanding of these four constructs. This discussion aims at explaining the relationship between these elements and therefore the strategies that a destination can use in order to have increased appeal and result in long term relationships with visitors. The findings of this research will enhance the understanding of the Tourism Destination on the Destination Brand Image and Tourist Satisfaction moderated by Destination Perceived Quality and

mediated by Destination Brand Loyalty.

When destination brand image is important in enhancing the tourist satisfaction, then tourists' perception before visiting a certain destination highly determines their experience (Zhang et al., 2014; Jebbouri et al., 2022). High expectations are created by a good destination brand image which makes visitors to expect the best from the place they are visiting. When these expectations relate with the experience, the tourists are likely to feel satisfied with the visit. On the other hand, if the destination brand image is negative or unresponsive to consumer perceptions, then tourists' expectation misgivings lead to dissatisfaction (Wang et al., 2021).

Tourists also develop a loyalty towards the destinations that are in accordance with their beliefs, perception and past experiences that images portrayed have influenced their decision. Brand image may help the destination to stand out among other similar destinations; this would enhance tourists' repeat visitation and recommendation intentions (Martín et al., 2018; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2010). Brand image can further be discussed under the lens of brand equity theory where a positive brand image can increase the perceived value of the destination. When tourists have positive attitude toward the image of the destination, they will have positive attitude and commitment towards the destination (Martín et al., 2018). The positive brand attitude consequently leads to both the affective or emotional commitment to the destination among tourist and the behavioral commitment characterized by revisit intention and the ability of the tourist to encourage others to visit the destination (Yüksel et al., 2010; Chen & Sambath, 2013).

Destination brand loyalty is positively related to tourist satisfaction, it has revealed the two-way flow between the two variables namely destination brand loyalty and tourist satisfaction (Christina & Qu, 2008; Martín et al., 2018). According to one's level of destination attachment, tourists who are attached to a certain destination develop positive expectations, trust, and an emotional connection which will make them have high levels of satisfaction while visiting the area. Loyalty acts as a means through which the tourist perceives his or her experiences; this results in positive perceptions plus overall satisfaction resulting from the perceived experiences whenever the actual destination matches the expected one even after placing an emotional stake. The following are the ways through which the destination brand loyalty increases the tourist satisfaction. First, loyal tourists will not be easily dissatisfied since they always have a better understanding of what they are supposed to find in that specific destination. By means of previous experience or previous perception of the destination brand, the consumer is able to expect what he/she is going to find, thus enhancing the match between expected and perceived value (Rufin et al., 2012; Michalkó et al., 2015; Bosque & Martín, 2008). In addition, it has been found that loyal tourists tend to repeat in their travel habits and this normally leads to higher levels of satisfaction. Experience in the destination provides confidence when making decision on where to stay, what to eat and where to visit, factors that increase the stress burden of planning among tourists who have no prior knowledge of the destination (Meleddu et al., 2015; Kozak et al., 2002). It also helps the repeated tourist have easier, and more pleasant experiences as to get acquainted with the destination increases satisfaction.

Destination brand image forms the premise for the tourist's expectation since it embodies the perceptions that prospective consumers have towards a given destination regarding the attractiveness, reputation and uniqueness (Qu et al., 2011). Nevertheless, brand image may not encompass the totality of tourists' satisfaction as there is usually a mediator between brand image and satisfaction, which is tourist brand loyalty. This kind of loyalty acts as a screen through which through past experiences or even perceived image tourists judge their experiences and therefore their level of satisfaction. When the brand loyalty is high among the tourists, they assume positive bent towards their experience, especially

if there are some minor, either objective or perceived as such, inconveniences or challenges in the given destination. This is so because are likely to have an attachment or perceived affiliation with the destination hence are likely to give more lenient evaluations of their trip experience and are more inclined to attend to positive dimensions of the journey than neutral ones as posited by Wang et al., 2017; Bajcs, 2013. In this regard, destination brand loyalty act in synergy with the brand image by strengthening the emotional link between the tourist and the destination increasing the chances of satisfaction (Veasna et al., 2013; Christina & Qu, 2008).

Destination brand image on the other hand is the overall impression that a tourist has towards a particular destination in regard to its cultural, environmental and service dimensions. The favorable brand image may have the potential of attracting more tourists and influence consumers' evaluation of the places of interest. However, when the perceived quality is not high enough so it reflects the tourists' perceived assessment of the overall excellence or superiority of the service providing in the destinations, a positive brand image may not necessarily guarantee the tourists' loyalty (Martín et al., 2018; Công, 2016). It may be added that the actual quality of the delivered experience has to be equal to or surpass brand image in order to develop lasting customer loyalty. The results depicted that when perceived quality is high then this enhances a positive relationship between destination brand image and brand loyalty. In other words, satisfaction results from a favorable comparison of the quality of visitors' experiences with their expectations that stemmed from the brand image (Xu et al., 2020; Jebbouri et al., 2022). When the quality perceived by the customers is actually high it speaks volume about the essence and appropriateness of the brand image which in turn bolsters the sense of trust and satisfaction thereby paving the way for the emotional consumer loyalty. For instance, if a destination has a reputation for good host hospitality, tidiness and well-maintained tourist attractions then this will uphold the improved brand image and encourage the tourists to visit the same destination repeatedly (Zhang et al., 2014; Christina & Qu, 2008). In contrast, when the extent of perceived quality is low, it has the negative effect of reducing the impact of brand image on consumers' loyalty. Originally, the brand image may be attractive and positively affecting the recognition and image of the brand; however, tourists cannot receive a desirable experience and, therefore, disappointment is probable which decreases the brand loyalty. This incongruity predisposes negative word-of-mouth communications which in turn decreases the probability of revisits and therefore the brand loyalty in the long run (Michalkó et al., 2015).

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that destination brand image has a significant positive effect on tourist satisfaction. The findings highlight the mediating role of destination brand loyalty, suggesting that a strong destination brand image leads to higher tourist satisfaction by fostering loyalty. Tourists who form a loyal attachment to a destination, driven by positive brand perceptions, are more likely to experience greater satisfaction during their visits.

Moreover, destination perceived quality moderates the indirect effect of destination brand image on tourist satisfaction. This indicates that the perceived quality of a destination weakens the relationship between brand image and satisfaction. Lower perceived quality may diminish this effect. It includes that tourism infrastructure concerns, road conditions, good hotels, and foods.

Building a strong destination brand image is crucial for achieving tourist satisfaction, and ensuring high perceived quality and fostering loyalty are essential in amplifying this relationship. These factors contribute to long-term success in the tourism industry.

7. Research implications

7.1 Theoretical implications

This study investigates the interplay between destination brand image, customer satisfaction, and destination perceived quality, with a specific focus on the mediating role of destination brand loyalty. The findings offer several theoretical implications that contribute to the understanding of destination marketing and tourism management.

The study confirms that destination brand loyalty mediates the relationship between destination brand image and customer satisfaction. This aligns with prior research emphasizing the pivotal role of brand loyalty in influencing customer satisfaction (Boo et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2014). By demonstrating that brand loyalty not only influences but also mediates the effects of brand image on satisfaction, this research extends the theoretical understanding of how loyalty functions within the tourism context. This finding highlights the necessity for destination marketers to foster strong brand loyalty as a strategy to enhance overall tourist satisfaction.

The study reveals that destination perceived quality significantly moderates the direct relationship between destination brand image and brand loyalty. This finding is consistent with the concept that perceived quality acts as a crucial determinant in shaping the effectiveness of a destination's brand image (Gürsoy et al., 2014; Alcañiz et al., 2001). By establishing that perceived quality enhances the impact of brand image on loyalty, the research emphasizes the importance of maintaining high-quality experiences to leverage brand image effectively. This extends the theoretical framework on how perceived quality interacts with brand image to influence loyalty and, consequently, satisfaction.

The investigation into conditional effects of destination perceived quality on the relationship between brand image and loyalty offers new insights into the contextual factors influencing tourism outcomes. The study's findings suggest that the strength of the relationship between brand image and loyalty varies with different levels of perceived quality. This contributes to the literature by introducing a nuanced understanding of how contextual factors, such as perceived quality, modulate the effectiveness of brand image in fostering loyalty. This has implications for theoretical models of brand management in tourism, emphasizing the need for context-specific strategies.

The study's rigorous validation of constructs, including brand image, perceived quality, loyalty, and satisfaction, through techniques such as CFA and HTMT, reinforces the robustness of measurement models in tourism research. This aligns with the recommendations of (Qu et al., 2011; Žabkar et al., 2010), providing a solid foundation for future studies to build upon. The confirmation of discriminant and convergent validity supports the reliability of these constructs, contributing to the theoretical clarity and precision in measuring complex tourism phenomena.

7.2 Managerial implications

The interplay between destination brand image, customer satisfaction, and destination perceived quality, with destination brand loyalty serving as a mediator, offers valuable insights for tourism managers and destination marketers. Understanding these dynamics can inform strategies to enhance destination competitiveness and visitor experiences.

A strong destination brand image is crucial for attracting tourists and fostering loyalty. Tourism managers should invest in branding strategies that create a positive and distinctive image of their destination. This involves not only promoting the unique attributes of the destination but also ensuring that these attributes align with tourist expectations and desires. Effective branding can lead to increased perceived quality and, consequently, higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Perceived quality plays a significant role in shaping tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Managers should focus on enhancing the overall quality of the destination's offerings, including accommodations,

services, and attractions. Regular assessments and improvements based on tourist feedback can help ensure that the destination meets or exceeds visitor expectations (Jiang et al., 2023). High perceived quality not only boosts satisfaction but also strengthens brand loyalty, which is critical for repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth.

The mediating role of destination brand loyalty highlights the importance of fostering long-term relationships with visitors. Managers should implement loyalty programs and personalized marketing efforts to encourage repeat visitation. By nurturing brand loyalty, destinations can benefit from sustained patronage and enhanced reputation, as loyal customers are more likely to recommend the destination to others (Công, 2021).

Given that customer satisfaction is both a direct and indirect outcome of the brand image and perceived quality, it is essential for managers to regularly evaluate and improve the factors influencing satisfaction. This includes addressing any areas of dissatisfaction promptly and ensuring that improvements are communicated effectively to visitors (Martín et al., 2018). Satisfaction surveys and feedback mechanisms can provide valuable insights into areas for enhancement.

Understanding the moderating effect of perceived quality on the relationship between brand image and loyalty allows for more targeted marketing strategies. Managers should tailor their marketing messages to emphasize the high quality of the destination's offerings and how they contribute to a positive brand image. This alignment between image, quality, and satisfaction can enhance the overall effectiveness of marketing campaigns (Gürsoy et al., 2014).

8. Limitations and future research

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted in Lumbini, Nepal, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. To enhance the applicability of the results, future research should consider investigating various destinations and comparing findings across different locations. Second, the data collection period was relatively brief, spanning only two months. This limited timeframe may not capture the full spectrum of the tourism season at the destination. To address this, future studies could adopt a longitudinal approach, collecting data over an extended period, preferably throughout the year and across multiple years. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved and yield broader, more generalized results.

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