

Tourists' Loyalty to Rural Tourism Destination based on Perceptions

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Abstract *This study examined the impacts of tourists' perceptions of quality, image, value, and experience on their loyalty with the mediating role of overall satisfaction and trust in one of the rural tourism destinations. A survey of 540 respondents was conducted across Javaherdeh, one of the main rural destinations in Ramsar, Iran. The structural, convergent, divergent, and diagnostic validity was performed to confirm the validity of the questionnaire, and the reliability was confirmed by composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha test. Analyzing data using SPSS22 and SmartPLS3, supported the conceptual model and indicated that perceived quality can positively affect the perceived image, which has a significant and positive impact on perceived value and overall satisfaction. Additionally, it was revealed that perceived value positively influences the perceived experience and perceived quality and overall satisfaction have a significant and positive impact on trust. Finally, the perceived experience and overall satisfaction were found to positively affect loyalty. Based on all the results, "Creating an integrated network of rural tourism services to facilitate marketing communication and informing tourists" was presented as the main aspect of the study. The paper includes discussions of the theoretical and managerial implications of the findings.*

Keywords: *Loyalty, Tourists' Perceptions, Rural Destination, Rural Tourism, Javaherdeh Village, Ramsar.*

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism, as a development and revitalization strategy for rural areas (Deka, 2020; Ho & Lee, 2020) is considered to grow the agricultural economy and preserve the existing traditional structure in many developed and developing countries (Ayhan et al., 2020). Choosing the theme of "Tourism and Rural Development" for World Tourism Day 2020 (UNWTO, 2020) highlights the significance of this area for various communities. Rural tourism refers to a type of tourism that displays rural life, art, culture and heritage in rural areas and brings social and economic benefits to the local community, as well as leading to the interaction between tourists and local people (Mohan et al., 2020) as a complex and multifaceted concept (Lwoga & Maturo, 2020). This diversity and experience can bring countless benefits and capacities for the success of these rural areas

(Kastenholz et al., 2020) leading to increasing competition between them (Lo et al., 2019).

Therefore, in order to overcome their rivals, rural tourism destinations must facilitate themselves with factors of success (Mataveli & Gil, 2019; Alves et al., 2019; Ryglóvá et al., 2018; Campón-Cerro et al., 2017; Pujiastutia et al., 2017). One of the most essential factors is tourist's loyalty, which is the main source of marketing strategies (Cossío-Silva et al., 2018) and is vital for the success of rural destinations (Mataveli & Gil, 2019).

One of the well-known rural destinations in Iran is Javaherdeh rural complex which is located in Ramsar city and Mazandaran province. This rural area benefits from its rich nature and culture, climatic and geographical conditions (Table 1), as well as easy access to Ramsar city as one of most touristic cities in the north of Iran. Javaherdeh village with

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historical antiquity is located in the southwest of Sakhtsar village of the central part of Ramsar city in Mazandaran province (latitude 25 ° 50 east and latitude 52 ° 36 north). Even in summer, it has an average and mountainous climate with an average temperature between 10 and 12 degrees Celsius. It is 25 km away from Ramsar city and 2000 m above

sea level. There are accommodation and facilities (formal and informal), catering services (restaurants, cafes and pavilions), information, health, law enforcement and municipality in this destination. This village was connected with Qazvin and was once a trade center, although its road was built by German engineers in 1350 (Mohammadi & Mirtaghian Rudsari, 2017).

Table 1: Tourism Resources of Javaherdeh Village

Resource		Type of Activity	Connection to other Resources	Demand Volume	Performance Scale
Type	Title				
Natural	Forest access route	Road Tourism	Adjacent to natural resources, mountains, numerous springs, traditional livelihood and rural originality of Javaherdeh, food tourism and shopping	Very Much	International
	Saffarood Forest Park	Recreation, Ecotourism Film Location, Landscape Photography, Event Management and Health Tourism	Being close to natural resources, mountains, food tourism and shopping	Very Much	Regional
	Neydasht mineral water spring	Recreation, Health, Ecotourism, Movie Location, Landscape Photography, Events and Tourism	Adjoining to Saffarood Forest Park and access route	Very Much	Regional
	Javaherdeh Waterfall	Landscape photography, shopping tourism, relaxation	Adjacent to the forest and being accessible	Very Much	Regional
	Springs inside the village	Health and relaxation tourism next to Suleiman, Barshi and Koohkin springs	Traditional livelihood and Rural authenticity of the Javaherdeh	Little	Local
	Mountains and peaks	Mountaineering, Red Traps Peaks (Samamos and vajak Peak), ecotourism and adventure, medicinal plants collection, landscape photography, yoga tourism	Adjacent to natural resources and mountains	Very Much	Regional
	Swan lake	Recreation, Ecotourism, Movie Location, Landscape Photography, Event Management, Fishing, Boating	Closeness to natural resources, mountains, numerous springs, traditional livelihood and rural originality of Javaherdeh, food tourism and shopping	Very Much	National
Cultural	The Adineh Mosque	Spiritual heritage tourism, sports tourism, food tourism and archaeology	Adjacent to natural resources, mountains, numerous springs, traditional livelihood and rural originality of Javaherdeh, food tourism and shopping	Average	Local
	Art workshop and profession of felt weaving	Cultural heritage tourism, quality tourism, scientific-educational visits, landscape photography and documentation, holding events, shopping tourism and food tourism	Connected to natural resources, mountains, numerous springs, traditional livelihood and Rural authenticity of Javaherdeh, proximity to Adineh Mosque	Average	International
	Event of Tirma-Sizdah-Sho	Spiritual heritage tourism, event tourism, food tourism, shopping tourism	Adjoining to the venue with natural resources, mountains, numerous springs, traditional livelihood and rural authenticity of Javaherdeh, proximity to Adineh Mosque	Very Much	National (National Heritage Registration No. 236 in 2011)
	Local Wrestling (Gileh-mardi Wrestling) competitions	Heroic Heritage Tourism, Event Tourism, Sports Tourism, Food Tourism, Shopping Tourism	Adjoining to the venue with natural resources, mountains, numerous springs, traditional livelihood and rural authenticity of Javaherdeh	Very Much	National (National Spiritual Heritage Registration No. 414 in 2011)
	Horse riding competitions	Event Tourism, Sports Tourism, Food Tourism, Shopping Tourism	Adjoining to the venue with natural resources, traditional livelihood and rural authenticity of Javaherdeh	Very Much	Local

In order to develop the tourism in Javaherdeh, this region needs to increase the loyalty of the tourists as this type of tourists is considered as a stable source of income. Furthermore, their maintenance is less costly than the costs required to attract new tourists. Therefore, it is necessary for the managers and planners of Javaherdeh to explore the influential factors, especially the perception of tourists in creating loyalty, in order to draw appropriate marketing strategies to maintain and create loyal tourists. Accordingly, the main issue of the present study is to explore the impacts of tourists' perceptions on their loyalty to a rural destination.

A review of the research in the field of loyalty to the rural destinations shows that perceived experience (Ryglová et al., 2018; Pujiastutia et al., 2017), perceived quality (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017), perceived image (Ryglová et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2017), perceived value, overall satisfaction (Chi et al., 2019) and trust (Alves et al., 2019) have been considered as determinants of loyalty. Nevertheless, the comprehensive steps and process of tourist loyalty has been considered in none of the previous studies, and only the effects of several variables have been studied.

Tourist loyalty is a four-step sequential process including cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, conative loyalty and pragmatic loyalty (Yi et al., 2017). Each of these steps requires the development of different factors, forming from the weakest to the strongest level (Oliver, 1999). This is the gap in the literature that we seek to fill in the present study. Hence the variables for steps of loyalty formation includes as follows; "the perceived quality", "perceived image", "perceived value" and "perceived experience" for cognitive loyalty, "the overall satisfaction" for the affective loyalty, "the trust" for the Conative loyalty, and "the loyalty" for the pragmatic loyalty.

Another important issue of this research is choosing the concept of perception than the concept of attitude. The perception represents the process of assigning meaning to an object, event, or person that we encounter in the environment, while attitude indicates a tendency to think and act toward an object, event, or person. So, unlike attitudes which are formed based on the experience of learning and acquiring knowledge, tourists' perceptions of a destination are formed before they visit that destination, Second, tourists and hosts may be interested in understanding each other without prior experience and knowledge. As a result, they develop perceptions of each other before attitudes. Finally, the decision to travel is primarily due to the perception, and attitudes develop later and after the trip (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). So, this study helps formation of "loyalty" and the role of "tourist perceptions" have responded to the gap in the context of a rural destination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourists' Loyalty and Rural Tourism

Research on tourist' loyalty has been initiated by studies of (Oppermann, 2000). Although loyalty has been widely studied in tourism context, it is extremely challenging to transform it from theory to practice (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017). The most common definition of loyalty (Cossío-Silva et al., 2018), defines it as: "The highest level of commitment that implies a transition from" desire to consume a product/service "to a" commitment to repurchase that product/service " (Oliver, 1999: 37). Rural destinations are easily capable to make tourists loyal (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017). Loyalty to a rural destination can be in the form of general loyalty; That is, in general, the tourist considers himself loyal to that village (Alves et al., 2019; Campón-Cerro et al., 2017), revisits the rural area in the future (Alves et al., 2019; Chi et al., 2019; Mataveli & Gil, 2019; Ryglová et al., 2018; Campón-Cerro et al., 2017; Pujiastutia et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2017) or recommend it to the family and friends (Alves et al., 2019; Chi et al., 2019; Mataveli & Gil, 2019; Campón-Cerro et al., 2017; Pujiastutia et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2017). Another form of loyalty is specific in which the tourist is not looking for a substitute destination (Pujiastutia et al., 2017), he/she actively encourages family and friends to visit that village (Pujiastutia et al., 2017), praises that (Alves et al., 2019; Chi et al., 2019; Ryglová et al., 2018; Campón-Cerro et al., 2017; Pujiastutia et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2017) and even becomes interested in temporary or even permanently living in that rural area (Pujiastutia et al., 2017). This is where the loyalty of a tourist to a rural destination is determined.

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality comprises the overall customer's evaluation of the quality of the product/service provided in their last experience of consumption (Chin & Lo, 2017). Parasuraman, Zeitamel, and Barry (1988) defined service quality as the provider's ability to meet or exceed customer expectations (Wu et al., 2017). In tourism industry, providing expected consistent quality of the service to the visitors, has become one of the major challenges in destination management. Previous research in this area have found that perceived quality has a positive impact on tourists' perceived image (Wu et al., 2017), trust (Su & Fan, 2011), their overall satisfaction and loyalty to a rural destination (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017). Therefore, the following hypotheses can be supposed:

H1: Tourists' Perceived quality has a positive and direct effect on their perceived image of the Javaherdeh.

H2: Tourists' Perceived quality has a positive and direct effect on their overall satisfaction of the Javaherdeh.

H3: Tourists' Perceived quality has a positive and direct effect on their trust in the Javaherdeh.

H4: Tourists' Perceived quality has a positive and direct effect on their loyalty to the Javaherdeh.

Perceived Image

The image of the destination is formed through a complex process of interaction with people and places (Moon & Han, 2018). This factor is defined based on a tourist's overall perception of a destination, and destinations have to improve their image in order to increase the number of tourists, employment, and revenues (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015). Studies in the field of tourism emphasize on two dimensions of the destination image (cognitive and affective) as the existence of these two dimensions describes the destination image more accurately; Cognitive component refers to an individual's beliefs or knowledge about the characteristics of a tourist destination and the affective dimension refers to an individual's feelings about a tourist destination (Chiu et al., 2016). Today, the image of the destination is regarded very significant in tourism context as it is likely to have a direct impact on variables such as tourist satisfaction and loyalty to the destination (Lobato et al., 2006). Tourists' perception of a rural destination is based on their image of the destination (Wu et al., 2017). The finding of the studies in the field of rural tourism destinations show that the perceived image of tourists positively affects their perceived value (Phillips et al., 2011), satisfaction and loyalty to a rural destination (Ryglová, et al., 2018; Campón-Cerro et al., 2017). Hence, the following hypotheses are assumed:

H5: Tourists' Perceived image has a positive and direct effect on their perceived value of the Javaherdeh.

H6: Tourists' Perceived image has a positive and direct effect on their overall satisfaction of the Javaherdeh

H7: Tourists' Perceived image has a positive and direct effect on their loyalty to the Javaherdeh.

Perceived Value

Perceived value is one of the most important forms of visitor evaluation (Phillips et al., 2011). Zitamel (1998) defines perceived value as follows: "The customer's overall assessment of the usefulness of a product, based on their perception of what they have received and paid for" (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015). This factor consists of two dimensions of the emotional-functional; this dimension

refers to the rational and economic evaluations made by individuals, while the emotional dimension emphasizes on emotions resulting from the received product/service (Peña et al., 2017). The previous studies have found that perceived value is regarded as one of the determining factors of perceived experience (Kim & Thapa, 2018), and the satisfaction and loyalty of rural tourists (Chi et al., 2019). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are presumed:

H8: Tourists' Perceived value has a positive and direct effect on their experience of the Javaherdeh.

H9: Tourists' Perceived value has a positive and direct effect on their overall satisfaction of the Javaherdeh.

H10: Tourists' Perceived value has a positive and direct effect on their loyalty to the Javaherdeh.

Perceived Experience

Experiences are inherently personal which emotionally, physically, mentally, or even spiritually involves an individual (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Therefore, no two people can have the same experience (Allan, 2016). Distinctive experiences from everyday life are one of the reasons for tourists to travel (Moon & Han, 2018). Thus, it can be stated that the structure of tourism experience is based on the interaction between the tourist and the destination or its components (Vada et al., 2019). Scholars have found that the tourist's perceived experience of a rural destination has a significant effect on satisfaction (Ryglová et al., 2018) and on their trust and intentions (Pujiastuti, 2017). A unique experience of the rural environment may become a prerequisite for visitor's loyalty (Ryglová, et al, 2018). Perceived experience can be an effective factor in tourists' satisfaction and loyalty to the rural destinations (Moon & Han, 2018). Accordingly, tourists' previous experiences of the destination are more important and preferred than other sources of information and can be effective in re-visiting the destination (Liu et al., 2015). Hence, the following hypotheses arise:

H11: Tourists' Perceived experience has a direct and positive effect on their satisfaction of the Javaherdeh.

H12: Tourists' Perceived experience has a direct and positive effect on their trust in the Javaherdeh.

H13: Tourists' perceived experience has a direct and positive effect on their loyalty to the Javaherdeh.

Overall Satisfaction and Their Loyalty to a Rural Destination

Satisfaction is one of the most crucial concepts in the marketing literature (Phillips et al., 2011) and is defined

as customer evaluation of a product/service in relation to customer expectations (Suhartanto et al., 2019). In addition, satisfaction is one of the common concepts in the tourism literature which is usually considered as an evaluation after the purchase (or after visiting) a tourist destination (Liu et al., 2015). Tourists' satisfaction with a rural destination influences their post-trip behaviors (Araslı & Baradarani, 2014). The overall satisfaction leads to re-visiting the rural destination and recommending to others, which are important criteria of loyalty (Chiu et al., 2016). The results of research in the field of rural tourism have shown that the overall satisfaction of tourists positively affects their trust (Osman & Sentosa, 2013; Su & Fan, 2011) and loyalty to rural destinations (Ryglová et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2017; Campón-Cerro et al., 2017). So, the following hypotheses are supposed:

H14: Tourists' overall satisfaction has a direct and positive effect on their trust in the Javaherdeh.

H15: Tourists' overall satisfaction has a direct and positive effect on their loyalty to the Javaherdeh.

Trust and Tourists' Loyalty to a Rural Destination

Customers often have to make purchasing decisions before experiencing services, so trust plays a critical role in communication between customers and service providers (Kim et al., 2009). Customer's trust consists of two emotional and cognitive dimensions (Pujiastuti et al., 2017) and trust refers to the reliability of important elements of a destination (Marinao et al., 2012). This variable has rarely been considered in loyalty modeling (Alves et al., 2019). But, research on tourism and rural destinations shows that tourists' trust has a significant impact on their loyalty (Alves et al., 2019; Pujiastuti et al., 2017). Therefore, the following hypothesis assumed:

H16: Tourists' trust has a direct and positive effect on their loyalty to the Javaherdeh.

By reviewing the literature and previous studies, based on the research problem and developing hypotheses, a conceptual model is presented in Fig. 1.

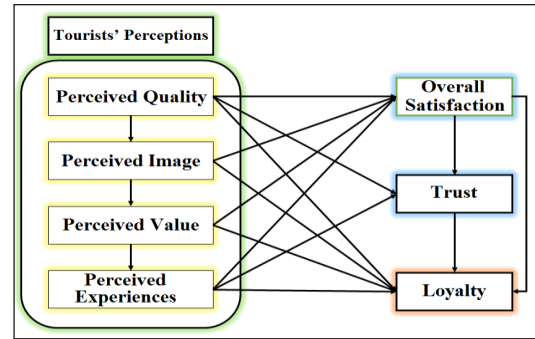


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

The statistical population of this study was all the tourists who visited to Javaherdeh village, one of the most touristic destinations in Ramsar, Iran, at least three times a year with tourism-related goals. Estimating the number of these tourists was practically impossible, so we were dealing with an unlimited statistical community. Due to the infinity/uncertainty of the statistical population, the modeling and the number of items of the questionnaire was assigned based on previous studies¹ (Mirtaghian Rudsari & Khorasani, 2019). Since the number of items in the questionnaire was assigned to be 27 and according to the instructions, 20 samples were required for each item, the sufficient number of samples (27*20) was estimated at 540 people (Table 2). After distributing and collecting a questionnaire to ensure the estimated value of the sample, the sample adequacy test (KMO) and Bartlett were performed. Considering the test value (0.861) which was close to 1 and the significance level was less than 0.05 i.e. 0.000, the estimated value of the sample was desirable. The non-random sampling method was available electronically. An electronic questionnaire² was used to collect data (Table 3). The link of online questionnaire was placed in various media channels and social networks and the data was collected during the November 2020 to March 2021.

¹ - "The ratio of respondents to the number of observed variables (questionnaire items) should be 20 to 1"

² - https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSciUEZzD1X7IRkG9NsuO5_Ljaw81dmERxnXuKxz1LsQrQHNAg/viewform?usp=sf_link

Table 2: Description of Demographic Variables

Variable	characteristic	Frequency (Percent)	Variable	Characteristic	Frequency (Percent)
Gender	Female	227 (42%)	Age Group	15-25	59 (11%)
	Male	313 (58%)		26-35	335 (62%)
Marital Status	Single	286 (53%)		36-45	130 (24%)
	Married	254 (47%)		46-55	11 (2%)
Education Level	Undergraduate	48 (9%)		Above 55	5 (1%)
	Bachelor	216 (40%)	Job	Governmental	97 (18%)
	Master's	238 (44%)		Private sectors	130 (24%)
	PhD	38 (7%)		Business Owner	172 (32%)
Tourism-Related Job	Related	167 (31%)		Retired	11 (2%)
	Not related	373 (69%)		Jobless	130 (24%)

Table 3: Questionnaire Items

Variable	Scale	Reference
Perceived quality (PQ)	PQ1: Javaherdeh Village is where I'm looking for. PQ2: Going to Javaherdeh, makes me feel good. PQ3: Going to Javaherdeh was a pure experience for me.	Campón-Cerro et al. (2017)
Perceived image (PI)	PI1: Javaherdeh village has special features. PI2: Javaherdeh village has a high reputation due to its environmental capacities. PI3: The performance of Javaherdeh village managers is appropriate in terms of environmental management and innovation.	Wu et al. (2017)
Perceived Value (PV)	PV1: Generally, Javaherdeh was worth a visit. PV2: I think there is a balance between the effort I put into having this experience of Javaherdeh trip and the benefits I get. PV3: The experience of traveling to Javaherdeh, compared to what I spent (time and money), adequately met my needs.	Peña et al. (2012)
Perceived experience (PE)	PE1: I enjoyed being in Javaherdeh. PE2: Being in Javaherdeh increased my enthusiasm. PE3: Being in Javaherdeh was full of surprises for me. PE4: It was a pleasure to be in Javaherdeh. PE5: Being in Javaherdeh created dreamy moments for me.	Pujiastutia et al. (2017)
Overall satisfaction (SA)	SA1: The trip to Javaherdeh was a wise choice. SA2: I am satisfied with my decision to visit Javaherdeh. SA3: The village of Javaherdeh has met all my expectations. SA4: I feel that Javaherdeh is an ideal place.	Campón-Cerro et al. (2017)
Trust (TU)	TU1: The people of Javaherdeh village welcome tourists. TU2: Javaherdeh village offers good tourism services. TU3: Javaherdeh village has high quality tourist attractions. TU4: Javaherdeh village is a recreational tourist destination.	Pujiastutia et al. (2017)
Loyalty (LO)	LO1: Generally, I consider myself loyal to the village of Javaherdeh. LO2: On my next trip, I will visit Javaherdeh. LO3: I will introduce Javaherdeh to my family and friends.	Alves et al. (2019)
	LO4: I am not looking for another rural destination after my trip to Javaherdeh. LO5: I'm interested in living [owning a house] in Javaherdeh.	Pujiastutia et al. (2017)

Data Analysis

The present study is explanatory and quantitative and data analysis was performed by PLS- SEM. The data were analyzed using SPSS22 and Smart-PLS3 software.

Measurement Model

The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed using convergent, divergent and discriminant validity, and its reliability was approved by composite reliability and pre-test of 30 primary samples, based on Cronbach’s alpha test. These are reported in Table 4. convergent validity was checked through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which includes standardized factor loading (SLF) and significance coefficient (t-Value). The SLF value should be more than (0.5) and the significance coefficient value should be more than the absolute value (1.96); Therefore, variables had convergent validity. In the field of divergent validity (Table 4), the average variance extracted (AVE) was measured for latent variables whose standard value should be greater than (0.5), since this value was greater than (0.5) for variables, it can be concluded that the divergent validity is established. To check the discriminant validity (Table 5), if the values of the square root AVE associated with a variable is greater than the value of the correlation coefficient of that variable with other variables, it can be concluded that the discriminant validity is established. On the other hand, in the reliability study, composite reliability (CR < 0.7 and rho_A < 0.50), which are calculated using standardized and non-standardized factor loads, respectively, and Cronbach’s alpha test ($\alpha < 0.7$) were used. According to the report in Table 4, the values obtained were more than the standard value. Therefore, the reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed.

Table 4: Measurement Model

Var.	Item	α	CFA (Variance based)					α
			SLF	t-Value	AVE	CR	rho-A	
PQ	PQ1	0.894	0.819	15.837	0.647	0.735	0.735	0.726
	PQ2	0.894	0.849	18.818				
	PQ3	0.895	0.742	7.327				
PI	PI1	0.892	0.867	32.256	0.621	0.830	0.751	0.702
	PI2	0.893	0.785	14.056				
	PI3	0.897	0.704	7.841				
PV	PV1	0.891	0.844	24.488	0.739	0.894	0.852	0.824
	PV2	0.892	0.915	50.991				
	PV3	0.893	0.816	16.873				

Var.	Item	α	CFA (Variance based)					α
			SLF	t-Value	AVE	CR	rho-A	
PE	PE1	0.893	0.760	13.666	0.625	0.892	0.876	0.848
	PE2	0.891	0.893	52.712				
	PE3	0.891	0.839	23.473				
	PE4	0.893	0.756	12.466				
	PE5	0.895	0.689	8.521				
SA	SA1	0.895	0.779	10.586	0.686	0.897	0.849	0.846
	SA2	0.893	0.873	28.799				
	SA3	0.894	0.769	13.114				
	SA4	0.893	0.886	41.093				
TU	TU1	0.895	0.750	9.236	0.632	0.872	0.819	0.806
	TU2	0.893	0.841	26.686				
	TU3	0.893	0.769	16.457				
	TU4	0.893	0.815	16.721				
LO	LO1	0.893	0.740	15.358	0.574	0.871	0.821	0.815
	LO2	0.891	0.779	18.038				
	LO3	0.893	0.735	9.252				
	LO4	0.893	0.788	15.297				
	LO5	0.891	0.745	8.542				

Table 5: Discriminant Validity

Var.	PQ	PI	PV	PE	SA	TU	LO
PQ	0.804	-	-	-	-	-	-
PI	0.434	0.788	-	-	-	-	-
PV	0.491	0.625	0.859	-	-	-	-
PE	0.387	0.401	0.535	0.790	-	-	-
SA	0.365	0.445	0.233	0.214	0.828	-	-
TU	0.479	0.289	0.350	0.352	0.427	0.794	-
LO	0.309	0.470	0.492	0.558	0.523	0.385	0.758

FINDINGS

Test of Hypotheses

In order to test the research hypotheses, SEM-PLS was performed. According to the general model fit criterion (i.e. GOF), the GOF value was equal to 0.608. A value of 0.608 for GOF indicates that experimental data as large as 0.608 have been able to fit the model optimally and have a basic predictive power compared to the standard values. Therefore, we can rely on the test results (Fig. 3 & 4).

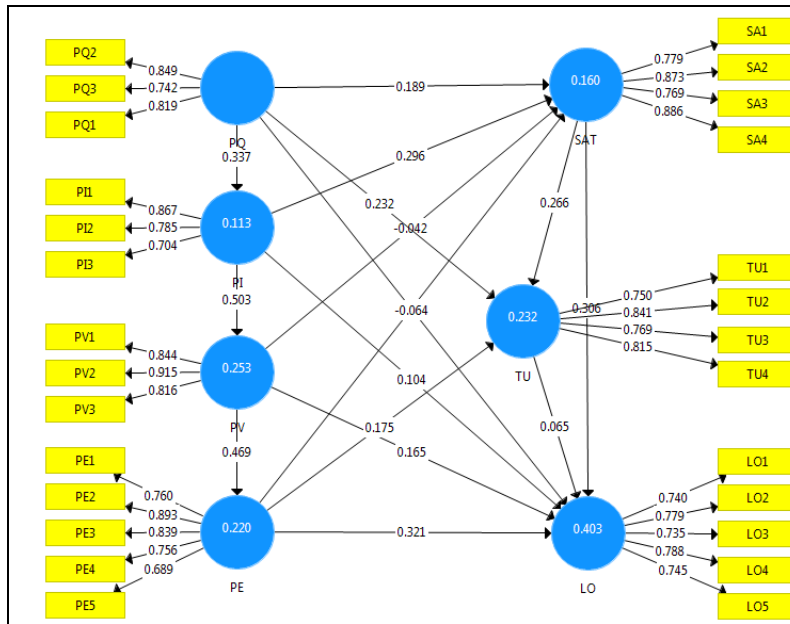


Fig. 2: Final Approved Structural Model (Path Coefficients)

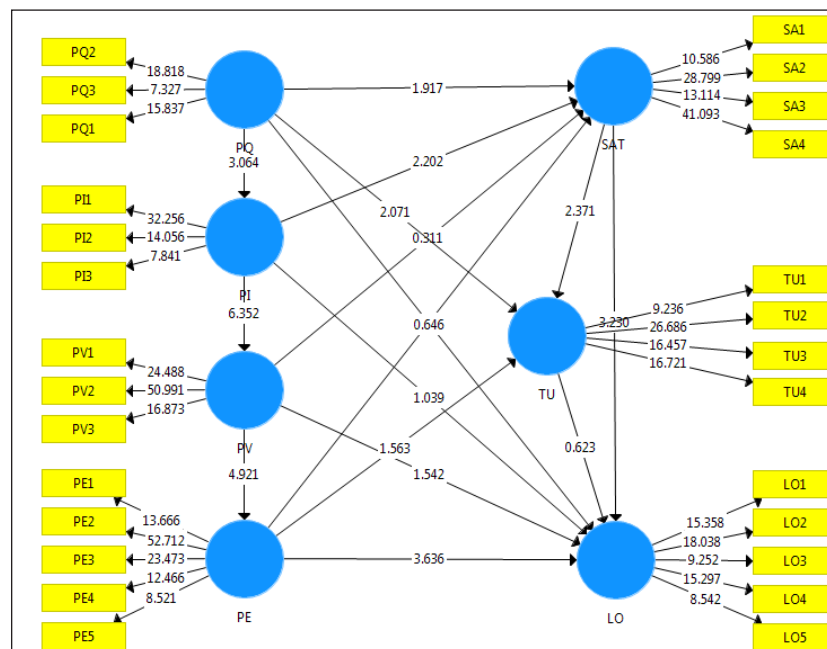


Fig. 3: Final Approved Structural Model (T-Value)

As the results are reported in Table 6, perceived quality had a positive and direct effect on their perceived image of the village of Javaherdeh ($t\text{-Value} = 3.064$ and $\beta = 0.337$), of which Hypothesis H1 is confirmed at the level of $\alpha = 0.01$ and the critical value $z = 1.96$. In fact, perceived quality can explain 11% of the changes in tourists' perceptions. That is, if the perceived quality increases of 1 unit, the perceived image

of tourists will increase by 0.11 units. The perceived image also had a positive and direct effect on their perceived value of the village of Javaherdeh ($t\text{-Value} = 6.325$ and $\beta = 0.503$), hence the H5 hypothesis at the level of $\alpha = 0.01$ and the critical value of $z = 1.96$ is confirmed. In fact, the perceived image of the village of Javaherdeh can explain 25% of the changes in the perceived value of tourists. So, if the perceived

image increases by 1 unit, the perceived value of tourists will increase by 0.25 units. Furthermore, perceived value has a positive and direct effect on their perceived experience of Javaherdeh village (t -Value = 4.219 and $\beta = 0.469$), hence H8 hypothesis at the level of $\alpha = 0.01$ and the critical value of $z = 1.96$ were confirmed. So, the perceived value of the village of Javaherdeh can explain 22% of the changes in the perceived experience of tourists. That is, if the perceived value of 1 unit increases, the perceptual experience of tourists will increase by 0.22 units. Also, among the factors of perceived quality, perceived image, perceived value and perceived experience, only perceived value had a positive and direct effect on their overall satisfaction with the village of Javaherdeh (t -Value = 2.202 and $\beta = 0.296$). Therefore, at the level of $\alpha = 0.01$ and the critical value $z = 1.96$, Hypotheses H2, H6 and H11 are rejected and H9 hypothesis was confirmed. In addition, according to the output of the analysis, the set of these perceptions (quality, image, value and experience) can explain 16% of the changes in overall tourist satisfaction. That is, if the perceptions of tourists increase by 1 unit, their overall satisfaction will definitely increase by 0.16 units. Moreover, except for the variable of perceived experience, the two variables of perceived quality and overall satisfaction had a positive and direct effect on their trust in Javaherdeh village, which include (t -Value = 2.071 and $\beta = 0.232$, respectively) and (T -Value = 2.371 and $\beta = 0.266$). Therefore, at the level of $\alpha = 0.01$ and the critical value $z = 1.96$, Hypotheses H3, H14 and Hypothesis H12 were confirmed. In addition, according to the output of the analysis, the set of these variables (quality, experience and overall satisfaction) can explain 23% of the changes in tourist trust. That is, if the quality and perceived experience, as well as the overall satisfaction of tourists, increase by a total of 1 unit, their trust will increase by approximately 0.23 units. Additionally, among the factors of perceived quality, perceived image, perceived value, perceived experience, overall satisfaction and trust, only two variables of perceived experience and overall satisfaction had a positive and direct effect on their loyalty to Javaherdeh village based on T -Value = 3.636 and $\beta = 0.321$ and (t -Value = 230.3 and $\beta = 0.306$). Therefore, at the level of $\alpha = 0.01$ and the critical value $z = 1.96$, the hypotheses H13 and H15 were confirmed and the hypotheses H4, H7, H10 and H16 were rejected. In addition, according to the output of the analysis, the set of these variables can explain 42% of the changes in tourist loyalty. That is, if the perceptions (quality, image, value and experience) of tourists, their overall satisfaction and trust, increase by a total of 1 unit, their loyalty will definitely increase by 0.4 units.

Table 6: Results of Structural Equation Model to test Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Path Coefficients	t-Value	Hypothesis	R ²
H1: PQ on PI	0.337	3.064	approved	0.113
H5: PI on PV	0.503	6.325	approved	0.253
H8: PV on PE	0.469	4.921	approved	0.220
H2: PQ on SAT	0.189	1.917	rejected	0.160
H6: PI on SAT	0.296	2.202	approved	
H9: PV on SAT	- 0.042	0.311	rejected	
H11: PE on SAT	0.052	0.646	rejected	
H3: PQ on PT	0.232	2.071	approved	0.232
H12: PE on PT	0.175	1.563	rejected	
H14: SAT on PT	0.266	2.371	approved	
H4: PQ on LO	- 0.064	0.646	rejected	0.403
H7: PI on LO	0.104	1.039	rejected	
H10: PV on LO	0.165	1.542	rejected	
H13: PE on LO	0.321	3.636	approved	
H15: SAT on LO	0.306	3.230	approved	
H16: PT on LO	0.065	0.623	rejected	

CONCLUSION

The increasing growth of rural tourism destinations has required the managers of these destinations to evaluate the loyalty of tourists as one of the influential factors in the field of marketing in order to succeed and compete in this market. The present study, considering the importance of this issue in rural tourism, investigated the effect of tourists' perceptions on their loyalty with the mediating role of overall satisfaction and trust to Javaherdeh as one of the well-known rural destinations in the Iran.

From the perspective of tourists, their perceived quality has a positive and direct effect on the perceived image of the village of Javaherdeh, which is consistent with the results of studies (Wu et al., 2017). Providing quality services beyond expectations and standards can be promising, make positive attitude and create a good image of this village in the minds of tourists. Due to the innumerable capacities of this destination in providing tourism services to the visitors, this can be achieved by upgrading and diversifying them.

From the point of view of tourists, their perceived image has a positive and direct effect on the perceived value of the village of Javaherdeh, which is consistent with the results

of research (Phillips et al., 2011). The set of tourists' beliefs and feelings towards the destination leads to the creation of a special image of it, which has a great impact on the behavior and decision-making of tourists and increases their perceived value. Therefore, in order to create and improve the image of the destination, it is vital for the managers of rural destinations to have the necessary knowledge and understanding about the perceptions and expectations of tourists towards the destination.

Furthermore, it was found that perceived value has a positive and direct effect on tourist's perceived experience, which is consistent with the results of studies (Kim & Thapa, 2018). perceived value is considered as a key factor for better understanding the emotional reactions of tourists to achieve a competitive advantage. Tourists' reactions are based on their emotional and intellectual evaluation of the services. In particular, the emotional value of a service becomes a symbolic concept of its experience. Accordingly, the value of quality, price and time, shapes tourists' experience and the variety in price, quality and the availability of services positively affect the experience for rural tourists.

It was also explored that the perceived image has a positive and direct effect on their overall satisfaction with the village of Javaherdeh, which is consistent with the result of previous studies (Ryglóvá et al., 2018; Campón-Cerro et al., 2017). Tourist satisfaction is a combination of tourists' expectations before the trip and their experiences after the trip. So, if the previous expectations are matched with their experience and perceptions of the destination, satisfaction is achieved. Satisfaction is a significant factor in determining the success of the destination. Therefore, in order to enhance satisfaction, rural destination management and tourism service providers should seek to produce and deliver products, services and experiences that meet the needs and requirements of the visitors.

As found in this study, perceived quality and overall satisfaction have a positive and direct effect on their trust in Javaherdeh village, which is in line with the results of studies (Osman & Sentosa, 2013; Su & Fan, 2011). From the perspective of tourism destinations, reliability refers to the significant elements of a destination. Due to the service nature of tourism activities, tourists have to decide to buy before visiting a destination, so trust is a necessity to maintain communication between tourists and service providers in tourism destinations. Therefore, in order to build trust, managers and planners must provide a platform for tourists to believe that, suppliers have the ability to deliver on their promises and are reliable, in addition to seeking to maximize their profits.

Moreover, perceived experience and overall satisfaction was found to have a positive and direct effect on their loyalty to the village of Javaherdeh, which matches the results of

(Alves et al., 2019; Chi et al., 2019; Moon & Han, 2018; Campón-Cerro et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2017; Pujiastuti et al., 2017). Loyalty to the destination is an influential factor in the development and long-term success of the destination due to the role it plays in achieving profitability. The set of elements that determine loyalty (perceived quality, perceived image, perceived value, perceived experience, overall satisfaction and trust) together are considered as the keys to developing long-term relationships between tourists and the destination and are of great importance in creating tourists' loyalty. When the tourist's expectations meet their unique experiences at the destination and the quality of services are consistent with their perceptions of the destination, their perceived value will be higher. Moreover, there would be a greater sense of satisfaction and trust will be created. Ultimately this can lead to their loyalty and increase the likelihood of returning to a rural tourism destination. Managers of rural destinations should pay attention to this point, in order to maintain this competitive advantage. A tourist's shopping behavior (such as re-visiting a destination) may not really be a tourist's loyalty, but repetition and number of visits, willingness to recommend it to others, and paying more at the destination can also have a significant impact on building a degree of loyalty.

IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

As stated earlier, none of the previous studies have addressed the stages and process of tourist loyalty (cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, conative loyalty and pragmatic loyalty) which is one of the significant implications of this research. In this study, we used separate variables for each stage and in addition to examining the effects of a variable related to a loyalty levels, the effects of variables before and after the formation of loyalty were also examined. Therefore, in addition to measuring the effect of each of these factors on each other (the effect of cognitive loyalty on emotional loyalty, the effect of emotional loyalty on desire loyalty, and the effect of desire loyalty on practical loyalty), the interaction of internal variables in each step was examined. This was a lack of attention of previous studies to the "process of loyalty formation" and the role of "tourist perceptions" that we tried to fill in this study. According to the findings, suggestions to the managers and tourism marketers are presented as follows; The two main features of the rural area for tourists are the unique climate characteristics and the level of hospitality among the local community. So, we suggest that there should be performed workshops such as "Empowerment of residents in hospitality etiquette", "the awareness of the local community to increase the importance of communication and dealing with tourists in tourism activities and services". Given that the fact that experience can build a powerful economy and tourism is an industry full of experience, they are suggested to try to include experience

along with all the services provided to tourists. Experiences like keeping cattle and doing their affairs, participating in horticultural affairs and traditional handicrafts, performing the activities of the rural women (baking bread and cooking food), etc. This study suggests that an integrated network of tourism services such as transportation, accommodation, catering, attractions, tours, souvenir shops and public services in the form of multilingual app or interactive website should be developed. This will facilitate marketing and tourist communication communications.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

As no research is performed without limitations, this study has some limitations. First, this study only assessed the loyalty process in a rural area in Iran. Future studies can test the proposed model in other tourism contexts and locations. In this study, we tried to explore the impacts of perceptions in forming tourist' loyalty steps and process as the first research. Then, future studies can look at this subject considering other factors and qualitative research.

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