

Destination Brand Image, Tourist Satisfaction and Loyalty: A Cross-Country Study of India and Thailand

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I. PURPOSE

The financial viability and sustainability of the global tourism sector are increasingly dependent on a destination's capacity to convert first-time visitors into repeat brand loyalists and active promoters. This empirical study explores the intricate nomological network between Destination Brand Image (DBI), Tourist Satisfaction (TS), and Tourist Loyalty (TL). By conducting a rigorous cross-country comparative analysis between India (a complex, rapidly developing destination) and Thailand (a mature, internationally branded market), this research aims to confirm the causal relationships between these variables, identify the mediating role of satisfaction, and reveal how differing cultural contexts and destination maturity alter these structural models.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW & RESEARCH GAPS

While the sequential pathway from positive brand image to high tourist satisfaction and long-term loyalty is well-documented in general tourism literature, significant research gaps remain. First, there is a distinct contextual and geographic gap, as no existing multi-group Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) comparison exists between a fully developed Southeast Asian market (Thailand) and a cognitively challenging South Asian destination (India). Second, there is a methodological invariance gap, as previous cross-cultural research often fails to determine configural, metric, and scalar invariance before comparing structural paths. Lastly, existing literature heavily relies on the simple "intent to revisit" as a proxy for holistic loyalty, failing to explain the "satisfaction paradox" where moderate satisfaction does not linearly translate into loyalty in mature markets.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a Quantitative, Causal-Comparative Research Design, grounded in the Cognitive-Affective-Conative (CAC) model, Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory, and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory.

Primary data was collected via a structured 7-point Likert scale questionnaire administered to international and domestic tourists who recently visited India or Thailand, utilizing snowball and purposive sampling. The collected data was rigorously analyzed using IBM AMOS and SPSS software, employing Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Maximum Likelihood Estimation, Bootstrapping mediation (5,000 resamples), and Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) including stringent configural, metric, and structural invariance tests.

IV. ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Descriptive results indicated high respondent agreement across constructs, with strong mean scores for DBI ($M = 5.28$), TS ($M = 5.61$), and TL ($M = 5.68$). The SEM model achieved excellent goodness-of-fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.45$, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.058). All primary hypotheses were fully supported: DBI positively predicts TS ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$), TS strongly drives TL ($\beta = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$), and DBI directly influences TL ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$). Bootstrapping analysis confirmed that Tourist Satisfaction serves as a strong, significant partial mediator (indirect effect = 0.40). Crucially, Multi-group SEM revealed significant structural variations across countries: the direct effect of DBI on TL is stronger in India ($\beta = 0.35$), while the TS $\rightarrow$ TL effect is significantly stronger in Thailand ($\beta = 0.72$).

V. CONCLUSION

Destination brand image and tourist satisfaction co-determine tourist loyalty through both direct and indirect mechanisms.



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Destination loyalty is a complex, multi-determined outcome resulting from a combination of pre-consumption brand perception and post-consumption experiential evaluation. The partial mediation structure proves that a strong destination brand functions as an autonomous loyalty driver parallel to the satisfaction mechanism.

Strategically, the cross-national comparison dictates that mature markets like Thailand must constantly innovate their experiential service quality to capitalize on the TS → TL conversion pathway, whereas emerging destinations like India must heavily invest in improving cognitive infrastructure and unified brand storytelling to strengthen the direct DBI → TL route.