Exploring the determinants of destination satisfaction: a multidimensional approach

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Abstract

Tourism, as one of the major contributors to the world GDP, offers a wide range of economic and non-economic benefits to global society. The exchange of culture and values through travel and tourism improves harmony among people, which is essential for global peace. Consequently, governments have started giving policy significance to the tourism sector and making budget allocations for its promotion in their respective countries. This increased attention on tourism promotion through policy initiatives has fostered research attempts on various aspects of tourism, making it relevant and contemporary. However, few research attempts have been made to study the precursors of destination satisfaction. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by studying the determinants of destination satisfaction through a multidimensional approach. The current study aimed to examine the dimensions of destination satisfaction and its role in deciding the destination loyalty. The study reveals interesting findings that helps the administrative apparatus in the tourism industry to come up with tailor-made policies to sustain and further enhance economic growth. The study findings reveal that factors such as satisfaction with destination characteristics, destination environment, and price significantly influence destination satisfaction among tourists visiting the Maldives. These findings underscore the importance of price as a determining factor in tourists' decision to visit the Maldives, suggesting the promotion of guesthouse tourism to provide a range of price options to attract a diverse tourist base. Additionally, the study emphasizes the necessity to enhance the quality of destination characteristics and prioritize environmental conservation efforts to ensure a positive tourist experience. The results highlight the important dimensions that determine the destination satisfaction of tourists visiting Maldives.

Keywords Destination characteristics, Environment, Tourism, Destination satisfaction, Destination loyalty, Maldives

JEL Classification L83, M31, M37

Introduction

The world is more open than ever, the standard of living is higher, and people are now traveling for tourism. Much research has been done to support the importance of repeat tourism, which is the most critical factor in tourism sustainability [32, 81]. Scholars have suggested that

consumers accumulate some degree of satisfaction by assessing various experiences in the process of purchase and consumption [4]. This customer experience rating leads to two approaches: item-specific satisfaction and cumulative satisfaction/overall satisfaction [22, 63]. In contrast to this approach to destination satisfaction, the present study uses a multidimensional structure and four sub-dimensions to explain tourist destination satisfaction. The cumulative approach seems to be more practical for assessing destination satisfaction, as it can better assess tourist behavior [31, 56]. Additionally, this study uses attributes that contribute most to the formation of tourist satisfaction from prior studies [7, 34].

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The Destination Satisfaction Index (DSI), jointly developed by Norstat and dp2research, declared Maldives as the top destination among mainstream tourist destinations during the second quarter of 2017. Moreover, Maldives scored the highest in terms of safety and beach satisfaction in the index, which is exceptional compared to other global destinations. This has attracted the attention of many scholars, and there are few studies conducted in the Maldives on the antecedents of destination satisfaction [23, 44, 99]. According to Weaver et al. [98], there is a significant association between loyalty and older married and high-income visitors who recognized the Maldives as an Islamic State and included the capital Male' in their itinerary. Furthermore, Jaleel et al. [45] reported that customer satisfaction is not mediating between perceived value and behavioral intent in the context of Maldives. A study conducted by Hameed [35] highlighted that policymakers should focus more on novelty, adventure, socializing, escape, relaxation, and social media marketing to improve the revisit intention. According to Popp et al. [75], customer feedback is an essential source of information for the hospitality industry and a powerful tool to help analyze and understand customer satisfaction as drivers to improve the quality of service.

Being one of the most sought-after destinations globally, the case of Maldives requires special attention. Moreover, the uniqueness of the supply-side factors also makes the case of Maldives unique and interesting. Unfortunately, no proper research has been conducted focusing on the destination satisfaction of the Maldives.

Even though the concept of customer satisfaction, loyalty and the connection between these two are widely discussed in the literature, there are only meager studies attempted to examine these in the tourism context. Moreover, the significance of this study also lies in the unique characteristics and high demand for the Maldives as a global tourist destination. While the tourism industry in the Maldives is thriving, there is a lack of focused research conducted in the Maldives to understand tourist preferences and satisfaction. By filling this gap, the study provides valuable insights that can have practical implications for the tourism industry in the Maldives. The findings of this study will contribute to identifying specific areas that require attention and improvement, based on the feedback from tourists. This knowledge can guide policymakers, tourism authorities, and industry stakeholders in enhancing the facilities and services offered in the Maldives. By understanding the key determinants of destination satisfaction, strategies can be developed to address any shortcomings and further enhance the overall tourist experience. Another significant aspect of this study is its approach to categorizing respondents'

nationalities and their corresponding satisfaction levels. This unique perspective allows for a comprehensive analysis of how different nationalities perceive and evaluate their experiences in the Maldives. Such insights can help tailor marketing efforts and services to cater to the specific expectations and preferences of diverse tourist groups.

Any failure to identify the missing elements that lead to goal satisfaction is claimed to lead to industry failure [60]. Therefore, this study helps the tourism sector focus on the significant dimensions of destination satisfaction. Some of the beneficiaries involved in this survey include the Maldives Travel Agency and Tour Operators Association (MATATO), Ministry of Tourism, Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC), Travel Agency Association (ATA), Destination Management Companies, and so on.

Aims and objectives

The study focused to evaluate the level of Destination Satisfaction among the tourists and its impact on generating Destination Loyalty. The specific objectives of the study are:

(a) To Study the Impact of Various Dimensions of Destination Satisfaction on Destination Loyalty.
(b) To Study the Moderation and Mediation Role of Tourists' Demographics on their Destination Satisfaction to Destination Loyalty.

Theoretical contribution

Destination satisfaction and the revisit intention by the travelers can be explored with the theory of destination selection by [27]. According to the destination selection theory, travelers choose the destination based on the attributes of the spot which satisfy their desires. Adding on, the revisit intention is determined by the level of satisfaction of the traveler with regard to the ability of the spot in catering to their demands [6, 16, 17, 20, 58, 61, 73, 78, 89, 103]. The return intention of tourists related to the recognition of the possibility of returning to the same destination is a specific element of favorable behavior after consumption and an important element of tourism loyalty [25, 61]. Destination satisfaction, on the other hand, is specifically defined as "the overall emotions that result from visiting a tourist attraction" [25].

Although the positive impact of destination satisfaction on the intent of tourists revisiting the destination seems undeniable, the destination experience has been shown to be complex and involved in many ways [74]. Previous studies have focused on various factors of goal

satisfaction, including unforgettable experience [103], and public transport [94].

When deciding on a vacation spot, travelers don't forget vacation spot attributes that could increase their memorable experiences [52], and buying travelers isn't any exception. Although they allocate greater time and price range to buying than entertainment travelers [24]. Shopping travelers revel in traveling landmarks and well-known attractions, attempting the neighborhood cuisine, and admiring landscapes and road scenes [40]. Thus, a vacation spot must be located as attractive, affordable, safe, and reachable to travelers to meet their supposed journey purpose.

Literature review
The precursors of tourism have been extensively studied in different cultural and geographical contexts [1, 5, 8, 13, 33, 44, 48, 57, 72, 77, 96, 100]. However, there is still a lacuna for a better comprehension of the terms and attributes which affect the destination satisfaction. Furthermore, the impact of destination satisfaction on loyalty has not been explored properly in the existing literature.

Destination satisfaction in tourism
Customer satisfaction and its implications by service providers play a major role in customer loyalty and travel destination approval [19, 36, 88]. According to Valle [95] tourists with more positive experiences at travel destinations are more likely to endorse and revisit. In a recent study, Chen and Liu [18] confirm that customer satisfaction comes from retaining that particular customer. Many studies look at why customers are dissatisfied with their travel destination and what influences their intention to return home. If tourists are dissatisfied with the experience, it is most likely due to their expectations not being met. However, in some studies, destination satisfaction diverges from an individual [97], and each experience accumulates overall satisfaction [3]. Clubs and others reportedly support discussions of predictability in different dimensions in generating destination satisfaction [43, 82]. Previous studies have shown that tourists are more satisfied and attracted to destinations when their expectations are communicated during destination planning [17, 71]. A dissatisfied tourist spreads negative reviews to his peers [86]. Satisfaction is a fundamental element of the travel and tourism market [84] and is the only way operators can generate revenue [36] and improve their strategies to increase the number of tourists to their destinations [54, 79, 84, 101]. A conceptual framework by [13] was used in this study to determine the level of satisfaction and loyalty to a destination.

Therefore, a set of variables that consumers reported to have influenced their satisfaction was selected.

Destination loyalty in tourism
Tourist satisfaction and loyalty are complementary, without satisfaction no loyalty cannot be created [79] (Hamza 2016), and tourists revisit intention is based on the experience of their previous visits [91, 103]. In the context of tourism, loyalty means optimistic recommendations and willingness to return to a destination [70]. The personal experience of the traveler determines the satisfaction and loyalty of the destination [2, 37, 55], as the marketers are aggressive in market conditions, they should consider loyal customers as an asset to gain a competitive advantage [36]. Destination loyalty is measured using return intent and word of mouth as a measure of the individual items of each predictor.

Revisit intention
Tourist retention depends on the success of liberation [60]. Tourist behavior, willingness to revisit, and willingness to recommend are important factors that can be used to calculate destination loyalty [47]. Much research has been done in terms of willingness to revisit the destination [46, 64], and the willingness to return to the destination may be a temporary rather than a permanent commitment. Mckerecher and Guillet [65] stated that there is sufficient data leading to a deadlock in repeated visits by tourists. These studies emphasize the inclusion of environmentally friendly destinations to continuously monitor destination loyalty and pay more attention to tourists [52]. Destination needs must be aware to understand their selling points to position themselves for loyal tourists [83]. Tourists' intention to return home can be measured as a cumulative assessment using a single-item scale [38].

Destination word of mouth
Another aspect of this survey is how overall satisfaction with the destination has contributed to the visitor's good recommendations in the past. Word of mouth is an important aspect of loyalty [30, 39] found that positive reviews create social intent to recommend a product or service to others. First-time travelers who are reluctant to arrange travel due to risk will gain trust through word of mouth [93]. Kandampully et al. [49] argued that a travel customized trip increases customer satisfaction and spread positive reviews and then becomes loyal customers. So, travel and tourism are encouraging tourists to spread positive word of mouth. Satisfied customers are ready to provide positive insights to at least 5 people, and satisfied customers are excellent for travel and tourism

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who want to help others decide on their vacation destination [85, 102].

Destination loyalty formation and demographic characteristics

Previous studies in the hospitality and tourism sector show that there is increasing academic interest in studying the demographic characteristics of various tourist destinations [51, 70]. However, contradictory results can be seen in surveys based on demographics in tourism literature. Age and education are reported as the most important determinants of destination satisfaction, but income, occupation, marriage history, etc., are not related to tourist demographics and their image perception [9, 11]. Adding on, previous studies have shown different results regarding the relationship between demographics and satisfaction [28, 41, 87].

Research gap

While the literature review highlights the importance of destination satisfaction and its impact on destination loyalty, there is a need for further research specifically focusing on the determinants of destination satisfaction in the context of the Maldives. While previous studies have explored factors such as customer satisfaction, revisit intention, word of mouth, and demographic characteristics in the tourism industry, there is a lack of research that specifically investigates the determinants of destination satisfaction in the Maldives. By conducting a study that examines the determinants of destination satisfaction in the Maldives, researchers can fill this research gap and contribute to the existing literature. Such a study would provide valuable insights into the factors that influence tourists' satisfaction levels and help identify areas that require attention and improvement to enhance the overall tourist experience in the Maldives. Furthermore, considering the unique characteristics and high demand for the Maldives as a tourist destination, understanding the specific determinants of destination satisfaction in this context would be highly relevant and practical for policymakers, tourism authorities, and industry stakeholders.

Therefore, it is important to examine the moderating role of demographics in the current study. In line with the above discussions the following hypotheses have been proposed.

H1 Satisfaction with Destination Characteristics Influences Destination Satisfaction.

H2 Satisfaction with Environment Influences Destination Satisfaction.

H3 Satisfaction with Price Influences Destination Satisfaction.

H4 Satisfaction with Hospitality Influences Destination Satisfaction.

H5 Destination Satisfaction Influences Destination Loyalty

H6 Age Moderates the Destination Satisfaction to Destination Loyalty.

H7 Booking References moderates the Destination Satisfaction to Destination Loyalty.

H8 Gender Moderates the Destination Satisfaction to Destination Loyalty.

H9 Number of Visits (Previous Visit to the Destination) moderates the Destination Satisfaction to Destination Loyalty.

H10 Age Mediates the relationship between Destination Satisfaction to Destination Loyalty.

H11 Booking References mediates the relationship between Destination Satisfaction to Destination Loyalty.

H12 Gender mediates the relationship between Destination Satisfaction to Destination Loyalty.

H13 Number of Visits (Previous Visit to the Destination) mediates the relationship between Destination Satisfaction to Destination Loyalty.

Research methodology

Considering the nature of the research objectives, the study used a quantitative descriptive approach with survey design to study the research problem. The study has structured a questionnaire by adopting elements from previous literature. Random sampling method has applied to identify the respondents for the study. The study successfully collected 319 questionnaires from random international tourists who visited Velena international airport, Male', Maldives during 2022.

Instrument development

In order to develop the instrument, similar studies in tourism sector in which tourist experiences and satisfaction were mapped have been reviewed. After thorough discussion on various instruments, the one developed for measuring destination satisfaction and loyalty by [13]

has been considered. As per the validated scale, there are item-specific questions for measuring Satisfaction with the Destination Characteristics, Environmental satisfaction, Satisfaction with Prices and Satisfaction with Hospitality that constitute Destination Satisfaction for the current study. In order to check the Destination Loyalty, two sub-dimensions such as word of mouth and revisit intention has been used [39]. Besides, the demographic variables such as age, gender, number of visits and booking references have been identified to check the mediation and moderation role of Destination Satisfaction to Destination Loyalty. The final instrument undergone for face and content validity with 5 academicians and 5 tourist operators in Maldives and their suggestions on rewording few questions has been incorporated prior to the final data collection.

Data collection and analysis

The number of foreign tourists vising the Maldives constitutes the population of the study, since it is highly fluctuating each year the study assumes it as undetermined. Accordingly, the study determined the sample size of 385 by using the standard sample size formula. The study chose a confidence level of 95%, population size and proportion as undefined. The survey was conducted at the Velana International Airport in the Maldives with international inbound tourists through random sampling. The random tourists who returned to Velena international Airport after their visit to islands and resorts were requested to fill out the questionnaire after explaining the purpose of the study to them. Collection of responses after the experiences of tourist destinations helps the tourists to evaluate and share their agreeableness on various destination experiences and satisfaction levels. All the responses are collected under free will, and the respondents were given a chance to withdraw

their responses before a reasonable time through email. Self-administered approach has been used in which each respondent read the questionnaire and marked the responses themselves. Out of the 385 questionnaires circulated, a total of 350 questionnaires were received back. At the end of the data collection, 319 completed questionnaires were received. The study used structural equation modeling to fit the model and test the hypotheses. The study adopted composite-based partial least squares structural equation modeling since it is more suitable for non-normal data. Adding on, both IBM SPSS and Smart PLS 3.0 software were used to analyze the data. The sample characteristics were generated through descriptive analysis in SPSS.

Results

Description of the sample

The sample profile is summarized in Table 1. The 319 respondents consist of 185 Female and 134 Male. Sufficient representation from various age groups were also gathered that includes 23 respondents belonging to 18–24 (7%), 100 respondents belonging to 25–34 with maximum tourists (31%), 74 respondents belonging to 35–44 (23%), another 74 respondents belonging to 45–54 (23%) and 48 respondents belonging to 55 and above (15%). Out of the total respondents, 199 visited Maldives before (62%) and 120 tourists are first-time visitors (38%). Tour agents plays a vital role in referring the destinations to tourists and influenced 149 tourists (47%), followed by online travel agency with 85 tourists (27%), resort/hotel website 34 (11%) and other categories such as own decision, family members, etc. accounts 51 (16%) tourists in persuading them to decide Maldives as a destination. Sufficient representation from each sub categories of demographic profiles has been ensured as the research

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the demographic variables

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender			Frequency of visit		
Female	185	58.0	No	120	37.6
Male	134	42.0	Yes	199	62.4
Total	319	100.0	Total	319	100.0
Age group			Booking reference		
18–24	23	7.2	Online travel Agency	85	26.6
25–34	100	31.3	Tour agent	149	46.7
35–44	74	23.2	Resort/hotel Website	34	10.7
45–54	74	23.2	Others	51	16.0
55 and above	48	15.0			
Total	319	100.0	Total	319	100.0

hypothesized to study the moderating roles between antecedents and consequences of destination satisfaction.

Descriptive and general PLS analysis

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for all the manifest variables. The results show that the respondents were pleased with most of the attributes of tourists' destination satisfaction. The mean score of various determinants of destination satisfaction shows above average that supports to conclude that most of the tourists are happy with the attributes. The mean score of 4.56 is reported for overall satisfaction with destination, indicating that the tourists' expectations were met and that they were willing to revisit Maldives in future and recommend to their friends.

The study has used PLS-SEM to analyze the data. The result depicts the relationships between the proposed latent variables in a path model. The estimation procedures focus on estimating the structural path coefficients represented by the inner model. The outer model represents the measurement model and specifies the relationship between the latent variables and their indicators. PLS-SEM does not rely on distributional assumptions [29], and *t*-values is considered to check the significance of each path [36].

Table 3 provides the composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) scores as measures for internal consistency and convergent validity. All measurement items had significant extractions from the manifest items as the AVEs are greater than the threshold value of 0.5 so that the latent variables explain more than half of the variance of its indicators. The Fornel-Larker criterion has been used to assess the discriminant validity that states that the AVE of each latent construct should be greater than the highest squared correlations between any other constructs and the loadings of each indicator should be greater than all its cross loadings [21, 29]. The square root of AVEs (Shows on the diagonal of the correlation matrix in bold) for each construct is higher than the correlation between that construct and any other construct, so the researchers concluded the data for the research shows internal consistency and convergent validity.

Table 4 shows the hypothesized path coefficients with *t*-statistic and *P* value. The original factor structure was retained to provide as much information as possible for the predictive analysis stage. Before testing the moderation of age, gender, number of visits and booking references on destination satisfaction to destination loyalty, the entire sample was submitted for analysis of the structural model. The results showed that all of the structural path estimates are significant except satisfaction with hospitality to destination satisfaction (β 0.069, $t = 0.602$). But theoretically, this path becomes very relevant as

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and the model specification

	Mean	SD	FL	*t*-Statistics (|O/STDEV|)
Satisfaction with destination characteristics (Mean: 4.62)				
Scenery	4.66	0.827	0.948	70.923
Beaches	4.64	0.828	0.941	64.397
Climate	4.55	0.881	0.928	53.431
Satisfaction with environment (Mean: 4.46)				
Urban surroundings	4.59	0.853	0.921	37.944
Environment and its quality	4.59	0.842	0.944	110.255
Cleanliness of public areas	4.21	0.926	0.67	9.86
Satisfaction with price (Mean: 3.97)				
Value for money	4.19	1.041	0.858	42.081
Price of food and beverages	3.90	1.049	0.909	64.501
Leisure activities	3.81	1.029	0.846	38.356
Satisfaction with hospitality (Mean: 4.64)				
Treatment as a customer	4.62	0.771	0.958	99.914
Hospitality	4.66	0.765	0.949	60.859
Overall sat. with destination	4.56	0.912	1	1 Item
Destination loyalty (Mean: 3.86)				
Revisit intention	3.90	1.049	0.941	116.009
Word of mouth	3.81	1.029	0.921	70.022

SD Standard deviation, *FL* Factor loading

Table 3 Reliability and discriminant validity

	CA	CR	AVE	Dest.Loyal	Dest.Sat	Sat.Dest Char._	Sat.Env	Sat.Hosp.	Sat.Price
Dest.Loyal	00.847	0.929	0.867	*0.931*					
Dest.Sat	1	1	1	0.538	*1*				
Sat.Dest.Char._	0.933	0.957	0.882	0.498	0.648	*− 0.939*			
Sat.Env	00.909	0.957	0.917	0.568	0.659	0.886	*0.854*		
Sat.Hosp.	0.899	0.952	0.908	0.544	0.618	0.83	0.823	*0.953*	
Sat.Price	0.842	0.904	0.759	0.944	0.616	0.634	0.683	0.667	*0.871*

CA Chronbach's Alpha, *CR* Composite reliability, *AVE* Average variance extracted

Table 4 Path coefficients

	Original sample (O)	t-Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Dest.Sat.-> Des.Loyl	0.538	8.788	0
Sat.Dest.Char.-> Dest.Sat	0.228	2.236	0.026
Sat.Env.-> Dest.Sat	0.205	1.99	0.047
Sat.Hosp.-> Dest.Sat	0.069	0.602	0.547
Sat.Price-> Dest.Sat	0.286	4.02	0

$n = 319$

Table 5 Path coefficients (moderation analysis)

	Original sample (O)	t-Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Age*Dest.Sat.-> Des.Loyl	0.057	0.77	0.441
BookRef*Dest.Sat.-> Des.Loyl	0.006	0.081	0.935
Gender*Dest.Sat.-> Des.Loyl	0.114	1.741	0.082
Num.Visit*Dest.Sat.-> Des.Loyl	− 0.056	0.766	0.444

satisfaction with the hospitality does have impacts on determining overall destination satisfaction of tourists and retained these dimensions for analyzing moderation role of destination satisfaction with loyalty. Satisfaction with the price is the strongest predictor of destination satisfaction (β 0.286, $t = 4.02$) followed by satisfaction with destination characteristics (β 0.228, $t = 2.236$) and satisfaction with environments (β 0.205, $t = 1.99$). It shows that satisfaction with the price is the major influencer of destination satisfaction followed by destination characteristics and environments. It seems most of the tourists are price sensitive, and the tourist operators should bother about this aspect. The table shows destination satisfaction is an important predictor of destination loyalty (β 0.538, $t = 8.788$). Accordingly, first six hypotheses have been tested and found significant except hypothesis 4 as the *t*-statistic and *P* value are lesser than the threshold limit.

Table 5 shows the results of moderation analysis. It is hypothesized that the age, gender, booking references and number of visits moderate the influence of Destination Satisfaction on Destination Loyalty. Better understanding of these predictors could be achieved if we can explore the circumstances under which these relationships vary depending upon various categories of tourists and destination managers can realign their marketing strategies to segment and focus the most relevant customer groups. The researchers classified tourists based on their age, gender, frequency of visits (first time or more than once) and booking references/influencers such as tourist agent, online travel agencies, etc., and run the

PLS-SEM to know the moderation of these attributes in predicting destination loyalty. Barron and Kenny [10] said that moderating effects would be evoked by variables whose variation influences the strength or the direction of relationship between an exogenous variable and the endogenous variable. In our study, it is hypothesized the destination satisfaction in predicting destination loyalty is moderated by age, gender, number of visits and booking references.

The moderation test results (Fig. 1) shows the results of each hypothesized paths. Satisfaction with destination characteristics ($\beta = 0.228$, $t = 2.245$), satisfaction with environment ($\beta = 0.205$, $t = 1.981$) and satisfaction with price ($\beta = 0.286$, $t = 4.133$) significantly influence destination satisfaction. The hypothesized influences of satisfaction with hospitality did not predict destination satisfaction ($\beta = 0.069$, $t = 0.600$). The destination satisfaction explains 50.2% variances on its determinants and can be confirmed as significant outcome of its predictors. The hypothesized influences of destination satisfaction to destination loyalty have been proven ($\beta = 0.518$, $t = 7.887$). Accordingly, it is established that the tourists' destination satisfaction significantly impacts on generation destination loyalty. Besides, destination loyalty accounts 31.7% variances in destination satisfaction, which can be considered as significant outcome. The moderation effect of age, booking reference, gender and number of visits has been tested with SmartPls, and the results of the analysis show age, booking references and number of visits to the destination did not moderate the destination satisfaction to destination loyalty. The moderating role of gender among the destination satisfaction and destination loyalty shows a p value of 0.082, which is more than the threshold limit of 0.05. But the researchers concluded that this path is not a significant one at 10% level of significance.

Mediation effects

To investigate the mediation effect of age, gender, number of visits and booking references on the relationship between destination satisfaction (exogenous) and destination loyalty (endogenous), bootstrapping analysis was applied using 95% of confidence interval and 5000 subsamples in order to find out PLS-SEM means and standard deviations. The results of mediating effect of any of the variables over the relationship between destination satisfaction and destination loyalty can have three options such as no mediation, full mediation and partial mediation depending on *P* values and *t*-statistics [42]. If there is no direct relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables but shows significant relation between mediator and endogenous variable, we can conclude as full mediation effect. If the direct relationship

Moderation Test Results
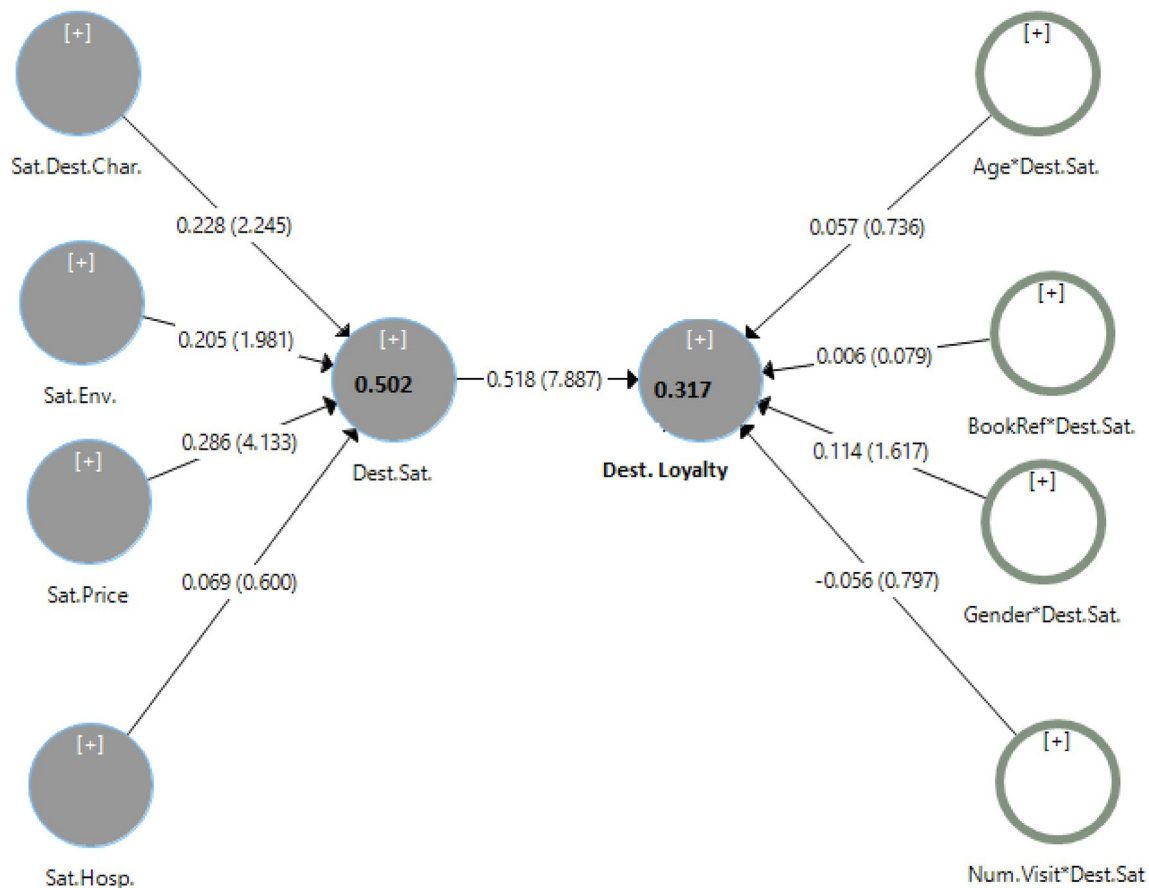
Fig. 1 Model fit results

between exogenous and endogenous variables is significant and the mediator to endogenous is not significant, we can conclude as no mediation effect. While both exogenous and mediator variables show significant path toward the endogenous variable, it is to be concluded as partial mediation.

Table 6 shows the results of mediation analysis. The results of the tables indicate the direct and indirect effects of exogenous, mediator and endogenous variables with the t-statistics and *P* value. The test results verify that age, gender and booking references did not mediate the relationship between destination satisfaction and loyalty. However, the test reveals number of visits has standardized indirect effect between destination satisfaction and destination loyalty. Accordingly, hypotheses 10, 11 and 12 have been rejected and hypothesis 13 has been confirmed with partial mediation.

Multicollinearity test for SEM

The multicollinearity test is used to check whether there are high inter-correlations among the independent constructs within the model. The multicollinearity test aims to approve the absence of problematic inter-collinearity among independent constructs that inflates the standard deviations for the exogenous variables and affects the significance test (t-statistic) for those variables unreliable. This test has the ability to show any problem that may occurs if there is a noteworthy correlation among the constructs, that is exogenous to endogenous. Theoretically, variance inflation factor (VIF) shouldn't exceed 10. Moreover, the values between 5 and 10 are considered high collinearity and unfavorable data. The table shows that all of variance inflation factor (VIF) values for every constructs is less than 5 and the data used for PLS-SEM are free from any multicollinearity issues (Table 7).

Table 6 Mediation analysis

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	t-Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Direct effect					
Age-> Des.Loyl	0.075	0.075	0.059	1.257	0.209
Age-> Dest.Sat	0.027	0.026	0.062	0.428	0.669
Book.Ref. > Des.Loyl	− 0.056	− 0.057	0.052	1.073	0.283
Book.Ref.-> Dest.Sat	− 0.005	− 0.005	0.05	0.094	0.925
Dest.Sat.-> Des.Loyl	0.53	0.529	0.065	8.164	0
Gender-> Des.Loyl	− 0.048	− 0.047	0.057	0.849	0.396
Gender-> Dest.Sat	− 0.069	− 0.068	0.057	1.21	0.226
Numb.Visits-> Des.Loyl	0.115	0.115	0.058	1.963	0.05
Numb.Visits-> Dest.Sat	0.15	0.152	0.059	2.567	0.01
Indirect effect					
Age-> Des.Loyl	0.014	0.013	0.033	0.432	0.666
Book.Ref.-> Des.Loyl	− 0.002	− 0.003	0.026	0.094	0.925
Gender-> Des.Loyl	− 0.036	− 0.037	0.032	1.14	0.254
Numb.Visits-> Des.Loyl	0.08	0.081	0.034	2.329	0.02

Table 7 Test of multicollinearity

	Des.Loyl	Dest.Sat
Age	1.063	1.062
Book.Ref	1.053	1.053
Dest.Sat	1.03	–
Gender	1.052	1.047
Numb.Visits	1.083	1.059

Hypotheses testing

Table 8 shows the test results for all hypothesis. Hypothesis 1 investigates the level of influence on satisfaction with the destination's characteristics on the overall destination. The hypothesis is significant, and the study shows that there is a positive influence of the destination's characteristics on the overall destination satisfaction. This relationship was confirmed with previous studies [3, 26]. Hypothesis 2 of the research investigates whether environmental satisfaction has an influence on the overall destination satisfaction. This hypothesis is significant and confirmed the path with previous literatures [62, 68] and contradict with the findings of Khuong and Nguyen [50]. Hypothesis 3 of the study was confirmed as the satisfaction with price significantly influences destination satisfaction. The results were also confirmed by previous

Table 8 Hypotheses results

Hypothesis	Decision
H1: Satisfaction with destination characteristics influences destination satisfaction	Significant
H2: Satisfaction with environment influences destination satisfaction	Significant
H3: Satisfaction with price influences destination satisfaction	Significant
H4: Satisfaction with hospitality influences destination satisfaction	Not significant
H5: Destination satisfaction influences destination loyalty	Significant
H6: Age moderates the destination satisfaction to destination loyalty	Not significant
H7: Booking references moderates the destination satisfaction to destination loyalty	Not significant
H8: Gender moderates the destination satisfaction to destination loyalty	Not significant
H9: Number of visits (previous visit to the destination) moderates the destination satisfaction to destination loyalty	Not significant
H10: Age mediates the relationship between destination satisfaction to destination loyalty	Not significant
H11: Booking references mediates the relationship between destination satisfaction to destination loyalty	Not significant
H12: Gender mediates the relationship between destination satisfaction to destination loyalty	Not significant
H13: Number of visits (Previous visit to the destination) mediates the relationship between destination satisfaction to destination loyalty	Partial mediation

studies by Hamza and Zakkariya, [38]. Besides, price is the most influencing dimension in predicting destination satisfaction with highest *t*-statistic and path coefficient among the dimensions of destination satisfaction. Hypothesis 4 of the study is disproved as the *t*-statistic and *P* value are less than the threshold limit. But the researcher continued with this path as theoretically this influence is significant in predicting destination satisfaction [80, 90].

Altogether, the destination satisfaction accounts 50.2% variances in its dimensions and statistically significant. Hypothesis 5 investigates the impact of destination satisfaction to destination loyalty and proved a significant influence in predicting tourists' destination loyalty that holds 31.7% variances of its hypothesized determinants. The moderating role of age, gender, number of visits and booking references were disproved as the respective hypotheses were insignificant (H6, H7, H8 and H9). Therefore, it is concluded that selected demographics does not have any moderating role in predicting destination satisfaction to destination loyalty with respect to Maldives as a tourist destination. There are studies in another context where demographics moderate the impacts and vice versa [59, 66, 76, 92].

The study has conducted a mediation analysis with selected constructs. The results shows that age, booking references and gender do not mediate the influences of destination satisfaction to destination loyalty as the respective hypotheses (H10, H11 and H12) do not show significance as per the validation criteria of their respective paths. However, hypothesis 13 shows partial mediation as both destination satisfaction and number of visits significantly predict destination loyalty. This finding can be attributed only to the scope of the study and Maldives as an identical destination as demographics may mediate destination satisfaction to destination loyalty in other contexts and destinations.

Discussion and practical implication

The study has adopted a four-dimensional approach to examine the destination satisfaction of international tourists, namely satisfaction with destination characteristics, destination environment, price and hospitality. The study has accepted the first three dimensions as significant predictors of destination satisfaction and rejected the fourth dimension, hospitality. However, this finding is contradicting with the findings of the study conducted by Bam and Nirajan [69] on the antecedents of tourist satisfaction in Nepal. According to a study conducted by Campo-Martínez and Garau-Vadell, [14], hospitality has been reported as a significant contributor of destination satisfaction. However, the current study rejects this hypothesis and this could

be because of the uniformity in the hospitality received across the multinational resorts in different countries. Adding on, the study has found satisfaction with price as the most significant predictor of destination satisfaction. This finding is corroborating with the main stream literature that found a negative influence of price on destination satisfaction. According to Campo and Yague [15], the negative impact of price and tourism satisfaction could be due to considering price as a sacrifice. Another study by [67] has found price as an important reason for tourist's revisit intention. However, there is another popular view that price is the indicator of quality. Hence, tourists perceive lower quality for less priced services and vice versa. However, the study results show that the tourists in Maldives are satisfied with the price charged for the services and that leads to the overall destination satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to note that the price of the service can influence the international tourist's arrival in the Maldives. Moreover, the Ministry of tourism Maldives can focus on fostering guesthouse tourism in islands to make different price options available for the international tourists. Moreover, Maldives Travel Agency and Tour Operators Association (MATATO), Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC) and Travel Agency Association (ATA) should try to keep the price competitive and reasonable measures should be taken to avoid any sort of price discrimination to foreign tourists.

The study has also reported destination characteristics as significant precursor of destination satisfaction. Hence, the tourism promotion apparatus in the country, which includes Ministry of Tourism and Destination Management Companies, should focus on building the necessary infrastructure to improve the quality of the destination characteristics. In addition, satisfaction with the environment is also found as significant in predicting the destination satisfaction. Therefore, the beneficiaries and the Government should take necessary action to protect the environment from different types of exploitations. Interestingly, age and gender are not moderating the path between destination satisfaction and brand loyalty. This finding is surprising and contradicting with the mainstream literature [12, 53], which confirms the moderating role of age and gender. Moreover, number of visits is also not moderating the path between the destination satisfaction and loyalty. Adding on, number of visits partially mediates the relationship between destination satisfaction and destination loyalty. However, booking reference, age and gender are not mediating the path between destination satisfaction and destination loyalty.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has adopted a multidimensional approach to examine the destination satisfaction and loyalty of international tourists in the Maldives. While there is extensive literature on destination satisfaction and loyalty, there is a lack of evidence to support the role of predecessors of destination satisfaction on predicting the destination loyalty.

The findings provide empirical evidence that satisfaction with destination characteristics, destination environment, and price are significant predictors of destination satisfaction, while hospitality is not. The study highlights the importance of price in influencing tourists' arrival in the Maldives and suggests the promotion of guesthouse tourism to offer different price options. The study also emphasizes the need to improve the quality of destination characteristics and protect the environment. Surprisingly, age and gender do not moderate the path between destination satisfaction and brand loyalty, and the number of visits partially mediates the relationship between destination satisfaction and destination loyalty. It is therefore recommended that the Maldives tourism industry should focus more on building and maintaining better infrastructure and keeping the price competitive. Maldives has a good organic environment which attracts the tourists; however, the built-in environment and infrastructure in islands still requires improvements.

Limitations of the study and scope for future research

The current study used a cross-sectional research design with a survey method of data collection. While this approach has some advantages, it also has limitations. For example, the study was not able to explore microfactors that may be unique to the islands of Maldives, which could have influenced destination satisfaction and loyalty. To address this limitation, future research could adopt a qualitative inquiry to explore more themes and factors that determine destination satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, future studies could compare the level of satisfaction in the northern and southern regions of the islands to identify areas that require government intervention. This comparison could provide insights into regional differences in satisfaction and help policymakers allocate resources more effectively. Finally, future research could focus on some of the peculiar features of the Maldives, such as the fact that the majority of the people speak English, and the availability of Halal restaurants. Understanding the impact of these unique features of the Maldives on destination satisfaction could not only enhance the literature but also help to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in the tourism industry, and could inform strategies for promoting sustainable tourism development in the country.

Declarations

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