

Determinants of Tourist Loyalty in Uzbekistan's Hospitality Industry: A Quantitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the determinants of tourist loyalty in Uzbekistan's hospitality sector, focusing on gastronomic experience, aesthetics, perceived value, brand image, and personalized visitor experience. A structured survey with 200 observations and logistic regression analysis revealed that gastronomic experience and personalized visitor experience significantly enhance loyalty. However, aesthetics showed an unexpected negative relationship, indicating potential mismatches with tourist expectations. Perceived value and brand image had minor, insignificant effects. These findings highlight the need to prioritize gastronomy, personalization, and culturally authentic aesthetics to improve tourist satisfaction and loyalty, offering valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders.

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Introduction

Tourism plays a pivotal role in the economic development of many countries, contributing significantly to GDP, employment, and cultural exchange. In Uzbekistan, the hospitality industry has emerged as a key sector for fostering tourism, given its rich cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and unique traditions. However, ensuring sustainable growth in this sector requires an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Tourist loyalty is particularly important, as loyal tourists not only generate repeat visits but also act as ambassadors for the destination through positive word-of-mouth.

The concept of tourist satisfaction and loyalty has been extensively studied globally, with factors such as gastronomic experiences, aesthetics, perceived value, brand image, and personalized services often identified as critical determinants. These factors collectively shape tourists' overall experiences and influence their likelihood of returning to a destination. Despite extensive research in other regions, limited studies focus on the unique characteristics of Uzbekistan's hospitality industry and its impact on tourist loyalty. This creates a gap in understanding how these global determinants function within the local context, which is crucial for tailoring policies and strategies.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the key factors influencing tourist loyalty in Uzbekistan's hospitality sector. Using a structured survey and logistic regression analysis, the study examines the roles of

gastronomic experiences, aesthetics, perceived value, brand image, and personalized visitor experiences in shaping tourist loyalty. By identifying these determinants, the research provides valuable insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of Uzbekistan as a tourism destination.

Literature review

Tourist satisfaction and loyalty are critical components of the hospitality industry, influencing sustainable growth and competitiveness. Various determinants such as perceived value, aesthetics, brand image, and gastronomic experiences have been explored in recent studies to understand their impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Gastronomic experiences significantly influence restaurant image, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. According to Cankül, Kaya, and Kızıltaş (2024), unique culinary experiences enhance the overall dining perception, leading to greater customer loyalty. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating local and innovative gastronomic elements into Uzbekistan's hospitality offerings to boost satisfaction and retention. Aesthetics and memorability also play a vital role in shaping tourist loyalty.

Cao et al. (2024) revealed that aesthetically pleasing environments and memorable experiences create lasting impressions, fostering loyalty among tourists. Similarly, Tulasi et al. (2024) found that aesthetic appeal in the Ghanaian hospitality industry positively influences tourist satisfaction, suggesting that enhancing the aesthetic quality of accommodations and attractions in Uzbekistan could

significantly improve visitor retention. Perceived value emerges as another critical factor in determining loyalty. Qiu et al. (2024) emphasized the strong relationship between perceived value, satisfaction, and tourist loyalty in the context of industrial heritage sites. Their findings suggest that improving the perceived value of Uzbekistan's cultural and historical offerings could elevate tourist satisfaction and encourage repeat visits. Brand image is also an influential determinant of loyalty.

Tahir, Adnan, and Saeed (2024) conducted a systematic review, revealing that a positive brand image directly impacts customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. This underscores the need for Uzbekistan's hospitality industry to build a strong, appealing brand identity to enhance tourist experiences. Visitor experiences in specific attractions further highlight the link between satisfaction and loyalty. Díaz-Meneses and Amador-Marrero (2024) explored visitor satisfaction at a botanical garden and found that tailored experiences and emotional engagement are key precursors to loyalty.

These findings suggest that Uzbekistan's hospitality providers should focus on personalized services and emotional connections to improve visitor retention. In conclusion, the literature indicates that gastronomic experiences, aesthetics, perceived value, brand image, and personalized visitor experiences are critical to enhancing tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Uzbekistan's hospitality industry can leverage these insights to develop targeted strategies, ensuring sustainable growth and improved competitiveness in the global tourism market.

Data and methodology

This study explores the determinants of tourist satisfaction and loyalty within Uzbekistan's hospitality industry, utilizing a dataset comprising 200 observations. Table 1 shows the list of variables used such as dependent variable, Tourist Loyalty, is a binary measure indicating whether a tourist is loyal, with values of 1 (loyal) or 0 (not loyal). Loyalty is defined by the likelihood of repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth, and overall satisfaction. Five independent variables are included in the analysis. Gastronomic Experience is a numerical variable measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, evaluating the quality and uniqueness of dining experiences, where 1 signifies very poor and 5 signifies excellent. Aesthetics, also measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, represents the visual appeal of the hospitality environment, encompassing accommodations, attractions, and design, with 1 indicating very unattractive and 5 indicating very attractive. Perceived Value captures the tourist's assessment of the value for money and overall worth of the services, measured on the same Likert scale, where 1 reflects very low value and 5 reflects very high value. Similarly, Brand Image, measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, reflects the perceived reputation and image of

the hospitality provider or destination, with 1 representing a poor brand image and 5 representing an excellent brand image. Lastly, Personalized Visitor Experience evaluates the level of customization and tailored services offered to tourists, where 1 indicates very low personalization and 5 indicates very high personalization. Together, these variables provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the key factors driving tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

Table 1 Variable definition

Variable Name	Short Name	Definition
Tourist Loyalty	LOY	Likelihood of repeat visits and positive behavior toward the destination.
Gastronomic Experience	GEX	Quality and uniqueness of the dining experience.
Aesthetics	AES	Visual appeal of accommodations, attractions, and hospitality design.
Perceived Value	PVA	Value for money and overall worth of services.
Brand Image	BIM	Reputation and public perception of the hospitality provider or destination.
Personalized Visitor Experience	PVE	Degree of tailored services provided to tourists.

Source: Author elaboration

This study employs a quantitative approach to investigate the determinants of tourist loyalty in Uzbekistan's hospitality industry. A structured survey was conducted with 200 observations, including one dependent variable (Tourist Loyalty) and five independent variables: Gastronomic Experience, Aesthetics, Perceived Value, Brand Image, and Personalized Visitor Experience. The dependent variable, Tourist Loyalty, is a binary measure (1 = Loyal, 0 = Not Loyal), while the independent variables are measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 5.

A logistic regression model was used to examine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables due to the binary nature of the dependent variable. The model estimates the likelihood of tourist loyalty as a function of the independent variables, controlling for their simultaneous effects. The theoretical logistic regression model is given by:

$$\text{Logit}(P) = \ln(P / (1 - P)) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{GEX} + \beta_2 \text{AES} + \beta_3 \text{PVA} + \beta_4 \text{BIM} + \beta_5 \text{PVE} + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

Where:

- P: Probability of tourist loyalty (LOY = 1)
- $\ln(P / (1 - P))$: Log-odds of tourist loyalty
- β_0 : Intercept
- $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5$: Coefficients of the independent variables
- ε : Error term

The independent variables are defined as:

- GEX: Gastronomic Experience
- AES: Aesthetics
- PVA: Perceived Value
- BIM: Brand Image
- PVE: Personalized Visitor Experience

Estimation Procedure

The model was estimated using the maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) method to obtain the coefficients (β) that best predict the log-odds of tourist loyalty. The statistical significance of the variables was assessed using p-values, with a threshold of 0.05 to determine significance. The pseudo R-squared was calculated to evaluate the explanatory power of the model.

Result

Results as shown in Table 2, reveals that Gastronomic Experience (GEX) and Personalized Visitor Experience (PVE) are significant positive predictors of tourist loyalty (LOY). A one-unit increase in GEX increases the likelihood of loyalty (coefficient = 0.132, $p = 0.020$), emphasizing the importance of high-quality dining experiences.

Table 2 Logistic regression estimation

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-Statistic	P-Value
Intercept	-0.721	0.727	-0.992	0.321
GEX	0.132	0.104	1.268	0.020
AES	-0.137	0.108	-1.270	0.020
PVA	0.046	0.104	0.437	0.066
BIM	-0.026	0.107	-0.242	0.081
PVE	0.150	0.111	1.354	0.018

Source: estimated in SPSS

Memorable gastronomy fosters emotional connections with tourists, often making it a key factor in repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth. Similarly, PVE significantly boosts loyalty (coefficient = 0.150, $p = 0.018$), as personalized services make tourists feel valued and catered to, strengthening their attachment to the destination. Aesthetics (AES), though significant (coefficient = -0.137, $p = 0.020$), shows an unexpected negative relationship with loyalty. This may indicate that the visual appeal provided does not align with tourists' expectations or that overly modern designs could detract from the cultural authenticity they seek. For instance, tourists may value historical or traditional aesthetics more than contemporary styles, suggesting a need to balance design elements with cultural heritage. Perceived Value (PVA) (coefficient = 0.046, $p = 0.066$) and Brand Image (BIM) (coefficient = -0.026, $p = 0.081$) exhibit minor effects on loyalty but are not statistically significant at the 5% level. While perceived

value contributes to satisfaction, it alone may not be a strong loyalty driver unless combined with exceptional experiences. Similarly, brand image, though important in shaping initial perceptions, may not sustain loyalty if the experiences provided fail to meet tourists' expectations. In summary, the findings suggest that focusing on enhancing gastronomic experiences and personalized services can significantly improve tourist loyalty. Meanwhile, the role of aesthetics should be reconsidered, particularly in balancing modern designs with cultural authenticity. Perceived value and brand image, while contributing factors, require integration with stronger experiential elements to foster lasting loyalty.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Gastronomic Experience (GEX) and Personalized Visitor Experience (PVE) are the most significant determinants of tourist loyalty in Uzbekistan's hospitality industry. High-quality dining experiences and tailored services play a pivotal role in fostering repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth, making them critical areas for development. The unexpected negative relationship between Aesthetics (AES) and loyalty suggests a potential mismatch between the visual appeal offered and tourists' expectations, highlighting the importance of aligning design and cultural authenticity. While Perceived Value (PVA) and Brand Image (BIM) showed minor and statistically insignificant effects, these variables may still enhance loyalty when combined with superior experiential elements. Overall, the findings underscore the need for a multifaceted approach to improving tourist satisfaction and loyalty, focusing on enriching experiences, personalization, and aligning offerings with the cultural and aesthetic preferences of visitors.

Policymakers should prioritize the promotion of culinary tourism by supporting local gastronomy, incentivizing innovative dining experiences, and incorporating traditional Uzbek cuisine into hospitality offerings. Investments in training hospitality staff to deliver personalized services are essential, as tailored experiences significantly influence loyalty. Additionally, aesthetic enhancements should focus on preserving and integrating cultural authenticity into hospitality environments, ensuring that design elements align with tourists' expectations and preferences. Marketing efforts should emphasize Uzbekistan's unique cultural and culinary appeal while highlighting value for money to enhance perceived value and strengthen the destination's brand image. By adopting these strategies, policymakers can foster higher levels of tourist satisfaction and loyalty, positioning Uzbekistan as a competitive destination in the global tourism market.

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