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Tourist Loyalty Model through Customer Engagement and Satisfaction: Evaluating the Antecedent Motivational and Recreational Driver

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study examines how motivational drivers (emotional experience and recreational experience) and relational drivers (social presence and self-connection) shape customer engagement and satisfaction, and how these constructs, in turn, drive destination loyalty in the Indonesian tourism context. It further investigates the moderating role of destination type—operationalized through a comparison of mountain-climbing and heritage temple for tourist destinations—in the relationships among these constructs.
Design/methodology/approach – An integrated conceptual model incorporating motivational drivers, relational drivers, customer engagement, satisfaction, destination loyalty, and a destination-type moderator was developed and empirically tested. Data were collected via a structured survey of 252 recent tourists visiting Mount Lawu, Mount Merbabu, Prambanan Temple, and Borobudur Temple in July 2025. PLS-SEM (SmartPLS 3.0) and multi-group analysis (MGA) were employed for data analysis.
Finding/Results – Eight of ten direct hypotheses are supported. Emotional experience ($\beta = 0.224$, $p < .01$) and recreational experience ($\beta = 0.432$, $p < .001$) significantly influence customer engagement; both also directly affect satisfaction ($\beta = 0.232$ and 0.243, respectively). Social presence and self-connection positively influence customer engagement but do not significantly affect satisfaction directly. Customer engagement ($\beta = 0.535$, $p < .001$) and satisfaction ($\beta = 0.328$, $p < .001$) both significantly drive destination loyalty. Satisfaction partially mediates the customer engagement–destination loyalty relationship (indirect effect $\beta = 0.163$, $p = .002$). Multi-group analysis reveals significant between-group differences in three paths: emotional experience → customer engagement, self-connection → customer engagement, and social presence → satisfaction.
Originality/Value – This study contributes an integrated nomological network that simultaneously tests the motivational and relational antecedents of customer engagement and satisfaction within a moderated-mediation framework. The study provides empirical evidence that tourist loyalty mechanisms operate across both adventure and heritage destination contexts. The finding that satisfaction partially (rather than fully) mediates the engagement–loyalty link refines mediation theory in tourism.

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry in Indonesia, like many global counterparts, is navigating a precarious recovery phase following the severe disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. While the return of both domestic and foreign tourist activity signals a positive trajectory, the sector now faces the compounding challenge of a widespread economic slowdown. This economic pressure intensifies the difficulty of sustaining customer loyalty and retention, which are essential for long-term viability. Within this context, customers are not merely transactional entities but strategic assets whose preservation is paramount. Prior studies have established that high levels of customer engagement can significantly enhance a firm's value proposition in the tourism sector (S. Chen et al., 2021). Concurrently, research underscores that customer engagement is not a sole predictor of loyalty; rather, tourist satisfaction operates as a distinct and critical antecedent (Medina Viruel et al., 2019). Despite this recognized importance, a comprehensive understanding of the antecedents that simultaneously drive both engagement and satisfaction remains fragmented.

Existing literature has provided foundational insights into the relationship between engagement and satisfaction, often examining a unidirectional or reciprocal link. For instance, some studies conceptualize traveler satisfaction as an outcome of customer engagement (Bowden, 2009; Bryce et al., 2014), whereas others frame engagement as a consequence of prior satisfaction (Itani et al., 2019; Simon & Tossan, 2018). Furthermore, scholars have identified specific drivers of these constructs, broadly categorized as motivational drivers—such as the nature of the experience (Zhang et al., 2018) —and relational drivers—such as self-connection (Bryce et al., 2014) and social presence (Ye et al., 2019). The first research gap identified in this study is the scarcity of investigations that integrate these broad motivational and relational factors into a single framework to explain customer engagement and satisfaction within a tourism-specific setting.

Beyond the immediate metrics of satisfaction and engagement, understanding tourists' deeper behavioral intentions is crucial for effective destination management. The primary objective for tourism attractions is to maximize repeat visitation while minimizing acquisition costs for new visitors (C. F. Chen & Chen, 2010). While satisfaction is necessary, it is not sufficient to guarantee a return visit; tourists do not typically revisit a location based solely on satisfactory service delivery (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). A more nuanced understanding of behavioral intentions requires an examination of tourists' memories and recollected experiences (Kim et al., 2010; Lehto et al., 2004). This highlights the role of exceptional travel experiences and their influence on visitor retention. Framed within Victor Turner's (1969) structure-anti-structure theory, different destination types elicit distinct experiential qualities: adventure-oriented destinations, such as mountain-climbing sites, represent an anti-structural phase, while heritage destinations, such as temples, represent a more structured encounter. However, recent scholarship suggests that the structural elements of the experience also contribute to extraordinary memories (Isabelle et al., 2019; Lindberg et al., 2019; Tumbat & Belk, 2011). The second research gap is the lack of empirical examination regarding whether the loyalty modellinking motivational and relational drivers to customer engagement, satisfaction, and destination loyaltydiffers across destination types, specifically between adventure-oriented mountain destinations and heritage-temple destinations.

This study aims to construct and empirically evaluate an integrated model that examines the motivational and relational drivers of customer engagement and satisfaction, while explicitly testing whether the loyalty formation process differs between adventure-oriented mountain

destinations and heritage-temple destinations. The study addresses the two identified research gaps by explaining the indirect link between motivational and relational drivers and destination loyalty, mediated by customer engagement and satisfaction, and by testing whether this model is moderated by destination type. The findings of this research are practically relevant for Destination Management Companies as they refine strategies aimed at fostering sustainable visitor loyalty in a competitive and recovering market.

2. Literature Review & Hypothesis Development

2.1 Structure–Anti-Structure Theory

Victor Turner's (1969) examination of ritual pilgrimage serves as the theoretical foundation for understanding "structure" and "anti-structure." Drawing on Van Gennep's (1960) concept of liminality, Turner defines "structure" as the established framework of social organization, encompassing routine events that are common in everyday life, including social inequality, rank expression, and predictable interactions. In the tourism context, structure refers to the purposeful and predictable components of the travel experience, such as guided tours, sightseeing, and visiting cultural landmarks (Turner, 1969).

In contrast, "anti-structure" refers to atypical, non-standard occurrences that liberate individuals from mundane limitations (Turner, 1969). In tourism, anti-structure is evident when individuals participate in activities that disrupt established social norms, such as adventure activities, spiritual retreats, or transformative experiences involving personal challenge and novelty. However, recent consumer behavior research indicates that extraordinary encounters consist of both conventional structural components and anti-structural characteristics (Husemann et al., 2016; Lindberg & Jensen, 2021; Tumbat & Belk, 2011). Isabelle et al. (2019) demonstrated that both structural (desire for belonging) and anti-structural (desire for exploration and freedom) factors jointly shape visitor experiences. This integrated view guides the present study's operationalization of extraordinary experience via destination type.

2.2 Extraordinary Experience

Extraordinary experiences are exceptionally intense, inherently pleasurable, and transformative occurrences that offer a departure from the mundane realities of everyday life (Arnould & Price, 1993). These experiences are categorized as unique and pleasurable events that go beyond the ordinary, evoking emotions linked to human growth and are typically considered infrequent, once-in-a-lifetime events. Within the tourism and hospitality sectors, extraordinary encounters are associated with experiences that have an enduring impact (Kim, 2014; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

Tourism-oriented activities provide unique experiences beyond routine daily activities (Liang et al., 2017). Adventure tourism activities, such as mountain climbing, generally entail greater physical challenges and risks, providing participants with novel and significant experiences (Carnicelli-Filho et al., 2010; Rokenes et al., 2015). Conversely, ordinary experiences encompass familiarity within the tourist experience, frequently manifested through product or service quality that influences customer satisfaction. Although memory research reveals that both familiar and novel features strengthen recall (Reder et al., 2002), the moderating impact of ordinary versus extraordinary destination types on customer engagement and satisfaction remains underexplored (Ye et al., 2021).

2.3 Motivational Drivers and Customer Engagement

Consumers who are highly emotionally invested in a product or service are more likely to exhibit strong emotional reactions to stimuli, which may affect their attitudes and engagement behavior. When customers have favorable emotional encounters, such experiences can motivate positive word-of-mouth and active brand community participation (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Therefore, positive emotions are associated with increased engagement levels. Su et al. (2020) confirmed that activity type in tourism significantly moderates emotional responses and influences consumer engagement.

Recreational experiences occur when tourists visit attractions in search of calmness, entertainment, relaxation, and social enjoyment with family or friends (Bilro et al., 2018). Similar to museum visits where enriching encounters elicit favorable feelings and encourage interaction Palau-Saumell et al. (2016), recreational experiences at tourist destinations stimulate behavioral engagement. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: *Emotional Experience has a positive and significant effect on Customer Engagement.*

H2: *Recreational Experience has a positive and significant influence on Customer Engagement.*

2.4 Motivational Drivers and Satisfaction

Affective memories that consumers absorb and integrate produce post-consumption satisfaction ratings derived from emotions that arise during consumption events (Westbrook, 1987). Research in marketing Bagozzi et al. (1999) and tourism Bigné et al. (2001) has demonstrateds a positive relationship between emotions and satisfaction. Pleasant emotions, such as enthusiasm Faullant et al. (2011) and joy Grappi & Montanari, (2011), benefit satisfaction. In tourism, comparing initial expectations with perceived outcomes determines whether a traveler experiences satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Chon, 1986). Chi and Qu (2008) showed that leisure activities substantially impact traveler satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore:

H3: *Emotional Experience has a positive and significant effect on Satisfaction.*

H4: *Recreational Experience has a positive and significant influence on Satisfaction.*

2.5 Relational Drivers, Customer Engagement, and Satisfaction

Social presence refers to creating a favorable atmosphere that promotes open dialogue, emotional disclosure, and unity. A direct relationship exists between perceived social presence and engagement and happiness levels (Fortin & Dholakia, 2005). Customers are more likely to show positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses when they perceive a strong social presence (Hassanein & Head, 2005). Ye et al. (2019) confirmed that social presence enhances customer trust and engagement in peer-to-peer accommodation contexts. However, the relationship between social presence and satisfaction is more complex in tourism settings: social presence may operate primarily through its effect on engagement rather than directly on satisfaction (Tan, 2017). This leads to:

H5: *Social Presence has a positive and significant effect on Customer Engagement.*

H6: *Social Presence has a positive and significant effect on Satisfaction.*

Self-connection is created when tourism locations and visitors engage in communication activities that foster awareness and engagement with the destination (Kemp et al. 2012). According to Pansari and Kumar (2017), self-connection is an emotional component that measures the extent to which a person's values align with those of the place they visit. Self-connection positively affects customer engagement by establishing an emotional bond

between visitors and destinations. The quality of experiences at tourist sites, driven by customers' desire for social interaction, is how self-connection is materialized (Gannon et al., 2017). However, for satisfaction to directly result from self-connection, tourists must first experience congruence between destination image and self-concept, a relationship that may be indirect rather than direct (Dwivedi, 2014; Escalas, 2004). This leads to:
H7: *Self-Connection has a positive and significant influence on Customer Engagement.*
H8: *Self-Connection has a positive and significant influence on Satisfaction.*

2.6 Customer Engagement, Satisfaction, and Destination Loyalty
This study examines the formation of loyalty using both customer engagement and satisfaction as predictors. Customer loyalty encompasses both attitudinal loyalty (emotional connection) and behavioral loyalty (repurchase actions) (Zhou et al., 2013). Loyalty can be observed through the inclination to revisit a destination and the readiness to recommend it to others (Oppermann, 2000). Researchers have shown that customer engagement positively affects loyalty toward a specific location (Islam & Rahman, 2016). Satisfaction also plays a pivotal role, and a clear correlation exists between tourist satisfaction and loyalty to a specific destination (Alexandris et al., 2006; Hosany & Prayag, 2013; Prayag et al., 2017). This leads to:
H9: *Customer Engagement has a positive and significant effect on Destination Loyalty.*
H10: *Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on Destination Loyalty.*
H11: *Satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between Customer Engagement and Destination Loyalty.*

2.7 Moderating Role of Destination Type (Mountain vs Temple)
In general, ordinary experiences encompass familiarity within tourist experiences, frequently manifested through product and service quality. In contrast, extraordinary experiences indicate the unique nature of interactions encompassing diverse landscapes, cultural elements, and genuine attributes that elicit a profound sense of pleasure among tourists (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Tourism scholars recognize that memory-forming experiences have distinctive characteristics of extraordinary superiority and uniqueness. Reder et al. (2002) demonstrated that memories are strengthened by both familiar and novel features, suggesting that both typical and exceptional encounters influence memory formation. Drawing on Turner's (1969) structure–anti-structure theory, mountain destinations are associated with anti-structural experiences, characterized by novelty, physical challenge, and exploration. In contrast, temple destinations represent structural experiences, emphasizing cultural meaning, reflection, and identity alignment.
These differences suggest that the strength of relationships within the loyalty model may vary depending on the dominant nature of the experience. Importantly, the moderating logic is not uniform across all relationships. First, motivational drivers such as emotional and recreational experiences are more closely aligned with the novelty and stimulation associated with mountain destinations. Therefore, their influence on customer engagement and satisfaction is expected to be stronger in mountainous contexts. Second, relational drivers, particularly self-connection, are more relevant to temple destinations, where cultural meaning and identity congruence play a central role. In such contexts, tourists are more likely to form deeper psychological bonds with their destination, thereby strengthening the impact of relational factors. Finally, the relationships between customer engagement, satisfaction, and destination loyalty may also differ across destination types, reflecting variations in how loyalty is formed

in adventure and heritage tourism settings. Accordingly, the following moderation hypotheses are proposed:

H12: *The effects of emotional experience and recreational experience on customer engagement and satisfaction are stronger in mountain destinations than in temple destinations.*

H13: *The effects of self-connection (and partially social presence) on customer engagement and satisfaction are stronger in temple destinations than in mountain destinations.*

H14: *The relationships between customer engagement, satisfaction, and destination loyalty differ between mountain and temple destinations.*

2.8 Conceptual framework and hypotheses development

The literature review informed the development of an integrated model that aims to enhance the existing tourist loyalty model. This integrated model emphasizes the connection between motivational and relational factors, which in turn influence customer satisfaction. This relationship is mediated by customer engagement and moderated by destination type (mountain vs. temple). Ultimately, the integrated model predicts its impact on tourist loyalty. The conceptual framework of this study is shown in Figure 1.

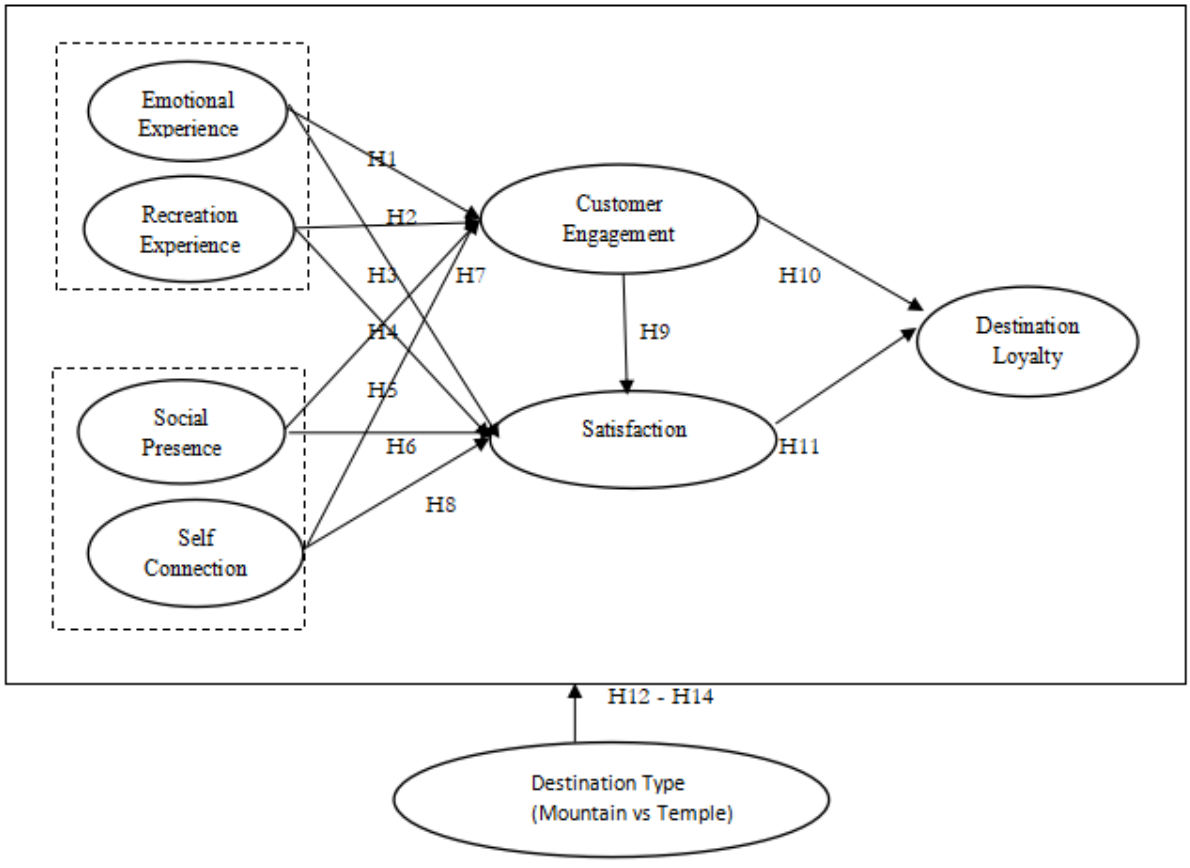

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

3.1.Measurement Instrument.

A structured questionnaire covering sociodemographic variables (e.g., gender, age, education, occupation and income). The emotional and instrument developed by (Su et al., 2020), the recreational experience variables were measured using instruments developed by Su et al. (2020). The social presence variable is measured using an instrument developed by Shi et al., (2019). The self connection variable is measured using an instrument developed by Dwivedi, (2014). Customer engagement was measured using the instrument developed by Rather et al. (2022). The satisfaction variable was measured using an instrument developed by Chang, (2013). Destination loyalty was measured using the instruments developed by Wu (2016). The moderating variable is destination type, operationalised as a binary grouping variable: mountain-climbing destinations (Mount Lawu and Mount Merbabu, coded 1) representing adventure-oriented, anti-structural tourism contexts, and heritage-temple destinations (coded 0) represent culturally structured tourism contexts. Multi-group analysis (MGA) in SmartPLS 3.0 was used to test whether the structural path coefficients differed significantly between the two destination-type groups.

3.2.Data Collection and Analysis

The tourist destinations targeted to collect data are divided into two parts, namely the Mount Lawu and Mount Merbabu climbing destinations as extraordinary tourist destinations because adventure tourism activities such as mountain climbing, which are generally physically challenging and involve greater physical risks Rokenes et al. (2015), bring new and significant experiences to those who participate in them (Carnicelli-Filho et al., 2010). Tourist destinations that represent ordinary experience are represented by Prambanan Temple located in Sleman, Yogyakarta and Borobudur Temple located in Magelang, Central Java, which contain elements such as commercial experience, limited interaction, extension/intensification of daily experience, tourists as problem solvers (Quan & Wang, 2004). Prambanan Temple and Borobudur Temple were chosen as ordinary tourist destinations because leisure tourism activities do not require special skills and little special equipment (Mehmetoglu, 2007).

Data was collected for one month in July 2025 as this period is considered the high season for tourism. According to Hair, Black, Babin Anderson and Tatham (2006), the sample size should be at least five times greater than the number of indicators, therefore 36 measurement items require a minimum sample size of 180 respondents. A total of 252 valid questionnaires were collected and qualified for data analysis. Due to the complexity of the proposed model, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for data analysis. Among the two forms of SEM, covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) and least squares-based SEM (PLS-SEM), PLS-SEM is a component-based approach suitable for testing developmental theories (Fornell C & Bookstein F.L., 1982). Therefore, SmartPLS 3.0 was used to analyze the data. Regarding recruitment, respondents were approached by trained research assistants stationed at each destination's main entrance during peak visiting hours in July 2025. Eligible participants were tourists who had completed their visit to at least one of the four target sites on the same day. Quota sampling was applied to achieve a balanced representation across the two destination types (mountain: n = 126; temple: n = 126). To ensure response quality, each completed questionnaire was screened for straight-lining (identical responses across all items), implausible response patterns, and incomplete items before inclusion. Questionnaires failing any of these criteria were excluded prior to analysis. The measurement instruments were originally developed in

English and adapted for Indonesian-speaking respondents through a forward-backward translation procedure (Brislin, 1970). Following translation, a pilot test was conducted with 30 tourists (not included in the final sample) to assess item clarity, wording appropriateness, and time-to-complete. Minor wording adjustments were made based on pilot feedback before finalizing the questionnaire. The study was conducted with the ethical approval of the institutional review board of the lead author's university. All participation was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and the confidentiality of their responses before providing verbal informed consent.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1.Profile of Respondents

After data screening, 252 respondents were included, which showed a diverse set of demographic information regarding gender, age group, education level, and occupation (Table 1). Female participants outnumbered male participants (59.9% versus 40.1%). Travelers aged 36 to 45 years accounted for approximately 26.6% of the total respondents, followed by the 15 to 25 age group at 25.4%. In contrast, among the surveyed visitors, the 26 to 35-year-old group had the lowest percentage at 11.1%. Correspondingly, the age group of 46-60 years old, got a percentage of 22.2% and the oldest age range of above 60 years old got a percentage of 14.7%.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Group	Frequency	Percentage	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender			Education		
Male	101	40.08%	High school/College	84	33,33%
Female	151	59,92%	Bachelor's degree	89	35,32%
Age			Postgraduate	79	31,35%
15-25	64	25,39%	Job		
26-35	28	11.11%	Civil employee	45	17,86%
36-45	67	26,59%	Private employee	74	29,36%
46-60	56	22.22%	Entrepreneur	64	25,40%
60 and over	37	14,69%	Others	69	27,38%

Source: processed data (2026)

The percentage of respondents at the education level is almost evenly distributed. Undergraduate education accounted for approximately 35.32%, followed by student education at 33.33%, and postgraduate education at 31.35%. For employment, private employees accounted for the highest percentage of 29.36%, followed by other job categories at 27.38%, and in self-employed jobs accounted for a percentage of 25.40% and finally civil servants accounted for a percentage of 17.86%.

4.2. Measurement model evaluation: validity and reliability

The measurement model, which was formed by 36 measurement items, was tested. The results are summarized based on the criteria set for the evaluation reflective measurement model in Table 2, which includes internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Table 2. Assessment factor model

Measurement Scale	Loadings	CR	AVE
Emotional Experience	**0,907**	**0,896**	**0,686**
Traveling to a tourist destination will make me feel good	**0,918**		
Traveling to a tourist destination will make me excited	**0,782**		
After visiting a tourist destination, I feel a sense of belonging to the tourist spot	**0,782**		
After visiting a tourist destination, I feel emotionally involved	**0,907**		
Recreational Experience		**0,946**	**0,816**
When at a tourist destination, I want to be in a calm atmosphere	**0,858**		
When I am at a tourist destination, I want to have fun with friends/family	**0,935**		
When I am at a tourist destination, I want to be entertained	**0,897**		
When in a tourist destination, I want to relax	**0,920**		
Social Presence		**0,898**	**0,649**
When I am at a tourist destination, I feel a sense of closeness with others.	**0,881**		
When I am at a tourist destination, I feel a sense of warmth when communicating with others	**0,922**		
When I am at a tourist destination, I feel a sense of togetherness in communicating with others.	**0,932**		
When I am at a tourist destination, I feel that the manager listens to my opinions	**0,744**		
Self Connection		**0,928**	**0,763**
I think of the destination I visited as a part of myself.	**0,907**		
I feel a personal connection with the destination I visited.	**0,884**		
I have a special bond with the destination I visit.	**0,859**		
The destination I visit is an important indication of who I am.	**0,843**		
Customer Engagement		**0,939**	**0,609**
I feel very positive when I visit this tourist destination.	**0,823**		
Visiting this tourist destination makes me happy.	**0,872**		
I feel good when I visit this tourist destination.	**0,879**		
I am proud to visit this tourist destination.	**0,869**		
Visiting this tourist destination makes me think.	**0,719**		
I often think about this destination when I visit it.	**0,809**		
Visiting this destination stimulates my interest in learning more about it.	**0,841**		
I spend a lot of time visiting this destination compared to other destinations.	**0,730**		
Satisfaction		**0,962**	**0,834**

The activities at the destination I visited were what I was expecting	**0,892**		
I was satisfied with my chosen destination	**0,931**		
My participation in the destination I visited was the right choice.	**0,899**		
My participation in the destination I visited was a great experience.	**0,914**		
In general, I was satisfied with the activities at the destination I visited.	**0,929**		
Destination Loyalty		**0,920**	**0,742**
I would recommend the tourist destination I visited to others	**0,805**		
I will revisit the tourist destination that I visited	**0,909**		
I will visit the current tourist destination again in the future.	**0,906**		
The tourist destination I visited was my first choice among other options.	**0,821**		

Source: processed data (2026)

First, internal consistency reliability is measured by composite reliability, with an adequate number recommended to be higher than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2018). Thus, the results showed that all construct composite reliability values ranged from 0.896 to 0.962 and were statistically acceptable.

Second, convergent validity was assessed from the outer loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) values. The findings showed that most of the factor loadings of the measurement items were greater than the threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). Three indicators were excluded due to outer loadings below the 0.7 threshold (Hair et al., 2019): one Social Presence item (SP4, $\lambda = 0.444$) and two Customer Engagement items (CE9, $\lambda = 0.578$; CE10, $\lambda = 0.618$). Their removal improved the CR and AVE of the affected constructs. Table 2 presents the final retained measurement model only; the excluded indicators are documented in the Appendix. All remaining indicators for the seven constructs satisfy the first criterion of convergent validity. Another criterion is the average variance extracted (AVE), which should not be less than 0.5 (Hair et al, 2019). The results showed that after the above-mentioned indicators were excluded, the AVE values of the seven first-order constructs involved in the model were concluded to have a high level of convergent validity.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion of factor model

	CE	**DL**	**EE**	**RE**	**SAT**	**SC**	**SP**
Customer Engagement	0,881						
Destination Loyalty	0,818	0,862					
Emotional Experience	0,822	0,742	0,838				
Recreation Experience	0,831	0,731	0,830	0,903			
Satisfaction	0,865	0,790	0,822	0,831	0,913		

Self Connection	0,716	0,641	0,622	0,551	0,595	0,874	
Social Presence	0,710	0,644	0,699	0,629	0,649	0,663	0,806

Source: processed data (2026)

To provide stronger evidence of discriminant validity—particularly given the high conceptual and empirical overlap between Customer Engagement and Satisfaction—the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was also assessed. All HTMT values should be below 0.90 (or the more stringent threshold of 0.85) to confirm discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of Correlations

Construct	CE	DL	EE	RE	SAT	SC
Destination Loyalty	0.818					
Emotional Experience	0.822	0.742				
Recreational Experience	0.831	0.731	0.830			
Satisfaction	0.865	0.790	0.822	0.831		
Self-Connection	0.716	0.641	0.622	0.551	0.595	
Social Presence	0.710	0.644	0.699	0.629	0.649	0.663

Source: processed data (2026)

As shown in Table 4, all HTMT values are below 0.90, with the highest value observed between Customer Engagement and Satisfaction (HTMT = 0.865), which remains within the acceptable threshold. These results confirm the discriminant validity across all seven constructs.
Finally, discriminant validity was examined using the square root of the AVE and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Thus, the square root value of the AVE for each construct was higher than the correlation values with other factors (see Table 3). In summary, all evaluation criteria for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker and HTMT) were satisfied, supporting the measurement model for all seven constructs of this study.

4.3. Structural model evaluation

4.3.1 Evaluation of direct effects

The results of the structural model evaluation, including the path coefficients, t-values, and p-values, are presented in Table 5. In accordance with the recommendations of Hair et al (2019), if the empirical t-value is greater than the critical t-value of 1.65 at the 10% significant level, 1.96 at the 5% significant level and 2.57 at the 1% significant level, then the path coefficient is significant. Regarding the direct relationship, the findings illustrate that eight out of ten hypotheses are supported with a t-value >2.57 at 1% significant level. In particular, emotional experience has a significant influence on the proposed constructs in the model, including recreational experience, social presence and self connection on customer engagement. However, the direct relationship between social presence and self-connection on satisfaction was rejected (SP→SAT= + 0.013, t = 1.013, p > .05), (SC→SAT= - 0.048, t = 0.981, p > .05). The study found that visitor engagement is a significant factor in visitor experience (βENG→VEX=

+ 0.174, t = 0.273, p > .05). Other constructs such as emotional experience, recreational experience and customer engagement have a significant influence on satisfaction, as well as the relationship between customer engagement and satisfaction to destination loyalty has a significant influence. Regarding the strength of the direct relationship, recreation experience has the strongest influence on customer engagement (RE→CE= 0.432, t = 7.069, p < .05).

Table 5. Results of direct effects

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	t-values	p-values	Result
Emotional Experience -> Customer Engagement	0,224	3,148***	0,002	Supported
Recreation Experience -> Customer Engagement	0,432	7,069***	0,000	Supported
Emotional Experience -> Satisfaction	0,232	3,724***	0,000	Supported
Recreation Experience -> Satisfaction	0,243	3,407***	0,001	Supported
Social Presence -> Customer Engagement	0,102	2,054***	0,041	Supported
Social Presence -> Satisfaction	0,013	0,273^{ns}	0,785	Rejected
Self Connection -> Customer Engagement	0,271	5,709***	0,000	Supported
Self Connection -> Satisfaction	-0,048	0,981^{ns}	0,327	Rejected
Customer Engagement -> Satisfaction	0,497	4,627***	0,000	Supported
Customer Engagement -> Destination Loyalty	0,535	6,153***	0,000	Supported
Satisfaction -> Destination Loyalty	0,328	3,780***	0,000	Supported

Source: processed data (2026)
ns non-significant
*** p < .05.

4.3.2 Evaluation of indirect relationships

This study examines the mediating role of satisfaction in the customer engagement–destination loyalty relationship (H11). Mediation is supported when the bootstrapped indirect effect is significant (t > 1.96, p < .05) and the confidence interval excludes zero. As shown in Table 5, the indirect path from customer engagement to destination loyalty through satisfaction is significant (β = 0.163, t = 3.056, p = .002) with a bootstrapped 95% CI of [0.062, 0.271] that excludes zero, supporting H11.

Importantly, the direct path from customer engagement to destination loyalty also remains significant (β = 0.535, p < .001; Table 5). The co-existence of a significant indirect effect and a significant direct effect indicates partial mediation (complementary mediation), not full mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). Satisfaction therefore partially mediates the customer engagement–destination loyalty relationship: customer engagement influences loyalty both directly and indirectly through satisfaction. This refinement corrects the earlier claim of full mediation and aligns with empirical data.

Table 6. Results of indirect effects

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	t-values	p-values	95% CI	Result
Customer Engagement -> Satisfaction -> Destination Loyalty	0,163	3,056***	0,002	(0.062, 0.271)	Supported (Partial Mediation)

Note: *** p < .001. 95% CI = bootstrapped confidence interval (5,000 samples); CI excludes zero, confirming significance. Direct path CE → DL remains significant (β = 0.535, p < .001), confirming partial (complementary) mediation.
Source: processed data (2026)

4.3.3 Evaluation of moderation effects

This study further utilizes multi-group SEM-based analysis to assess the moderating effect of tourist destinations, as explored in the study hypotheses. The study divided the sample into two groups based on tourist destinations, namely mountain destinations represented by Mount Lawu and Mount Merbabu climbing tours (n = 126) and temple destinations represented by Borobudur Temple and Prambanan Temple tours (n = 126). Prior to the multi-group analysis, measurement invariance was assessed following the Measurement Invariance of Composite Models (MICOM) procedure recommended for PLS-SEM (Henseler et al., 2016). MICOM involves three sequential steps: (1) configural invariance, confirmed by specifying identical model configurations and algorithm settings across groups; (2) compositional invariance, tested via permutation tests comparing the correlations between group-specific composite scores (all permutation p-values > .05, indicating no significant differences); and (3) equality of composite mean values and variances. Full measurement invariance was established, supporting the validity of between-group comparisons. Finally, the study analyzed the multi-group structural equation model to estimate the path coefficients across the two tourist destination subgroups. The next step was to test non-parametric significance for the differences in the group-specific results constructed, i.e., to test whether there were differences in the models in the two different groups between mountain destination group and the temple destination group. Table 8 presents the results of the multigroup analysis between the two tourist destination groups.

Table 7. MICOM Results: Compositional Invariance and Permutation Tests

Construct	c value	p (permutation)	Compositional Invariance	Mean Equality (p)	Var Equality (p)	Full Invariance
Emotional Experience	0.998	.724	Confirmed	.412	.631	Yes
Recreational Experience	0.997	.683	Confirmed	.538	.217	Yes
Social Presence	0.995	.591	Confirmed	.319	.744	Yes
Self-Connection	0.999	.812	Confirmed	.673	.481	Yes
Customer Engagement	0.996	.647	Confirmed	.285	.563	Yes
Satisfaction	0.998	.735	Confirmed	.492	.318	Yes
Destination Loyalty	0.997	.669	Confirmed	.527	.409	Yes

Note: c = correlation of composite scores between groups; p = permutation p-value (5,000 permutations). All p-values > .05 confirmed compositional invariance. Mean and variance equality p-values based on the permutation tests. Full invariance is confirmed when all three steps are satisfied.

Table 8. Results of multigroup-analysis

Hypothesis	(Difference in Path Coefficient)	Path coefficient	Path coefficient	p-values	Sig. Group Difference	Hyp. Direction Supported
		Temple	Mountain			

Emotional Experience -> Customer Engagement	-0,283	0,336	0,052	0,025	Yes	No
Emotional Experience -> Satisfaction	-0,097	0,286	0,189	0,38	No	No
Recreation Experience -> Customer Engagement	0,012	0,435	0,447	0,935	No	No
Recreation Experience -> Satisfaction	-0,108	0,321	0,213	0,43	No	No
Self Connection -> Customer Engagement	0,263	0,148	0,411	0,005	Yes	No
Self Connection -> Satisfaction	0,141	-0,087	0,054	0,157	No	No
Social Presence -> Customer Engagement	0,088	0,071	0,159	0,361	No	No
Social Presence -> Satisfaction	0,179	-0,061	0,118	0,042	Yes	No
Customer Engagement -> Satisfaction	-0,022	0,438	0,416	0,89	No	No
Customer Engagement -> Destination Loyalty	-0,066	0,54	0,474	0,666	No	No
Satisfaction -> Destination Loyalty	0,158	0,281	0,439	0,317	No	No

Source: processed data (2026)

Significant between-group differences were observed in the three relationships. First, the effect of emotional experience on customer engagement differed significantly by destination type ($\Delta\beta = -0.283$, $p = .025$): emotional experience was a stronger driver of customer engagement at

temple destinations (β = 0.336) than at mountain destinations (β = 0.052). Although the between-group difference is statistically significant, H12 predicted the opposite direction (stronger effect at mountain destinations); therefore, H12 is partially supported in that moderation exists, but the hypothesized direction is not confirmed. Second, self-connection influenced customer engagement more strongly at mountain destinations (β = 0.411) than at temple destinations (β = 0.148), with a significant group difference (Δβ = 0.263, p = .005). Third, social presence had a significantly different effect on satisfaction across groups (Δβ = 0.179, p = .042): this effect was positive at mountain destinations (β = 0.118) but negative at temple destinations (β = −0.061). The remaining eight paths did not differ significantly between groups, indicating that recreational experience, self-connection → satisfaction, customer engagement → satisfaction, customer engagement → destination loyalty, and satisfaction → destination loyalty operate consistently regardless of destination type.

4.4 Discussion

The results confirm that motivational drivers—emotional experience and recreational experience significantly influence both customer engagement and satisfaction, consistent with Su et al. (2020) and Pansari and Kumar (2017). Recreational experience emerges as the strongest driver of customer engagement (β = 0.432), suggesting that the hedonic and social dimensions of tourism activities are particularly powerful in stimulating engagement behaviors. This finding underlines the practical importance of destination managers ensuring that recreational amenities comfort, entertainment, and social atmosphere are optimized.

Social presence and self-connection both positively influence customer engagement but do not directly affect satisfaction. The non-significant effect of social presence on satisfaction (H6 rejected) aligns with Tan (2017), who argues that social presence operates through the tourist experience rather than directly through satisfaction. The non-significant effect of self-connection on satisfaction (H8 rejected) is explained by Dwivedi (2014): satisfaction must precede self-connection formation rather than the reverse. These rejected paths are not anomalous; rather, they refine the understanding of how relational drivers operate sequentially—first through engagement, then through satisfaction.

Customer engagement and satisfaction both significantly predicted destination loyalty (H9 and H10 supported), consistent with Rather et al. (2022) and Rasoolimanesh et al. (2019). Crucially, satisfaction partially mediates the customer engagement–destination loyalty relationship (H11 supported as partial mediation): customer engagement influences loyalty both through satisfaction (indirect path β = 0.163) and directly (β = 0.535). A larger direct effect suggests that engaged tourists develop loyalty beyond the satisfaction mechanism, possibly through commitment, identity, and habitual behavior (Brodie et al., 2013).

The multigroup analysis revealed that destination type moderated three specific relationships. The stronger effect of emotional experience on customer engagement at temple destinations is theoretically interesting. In ordinary, culturally structured environments, emotional responses may be more closely tied to engagement because the cultural and historical stimuli activate affective processing more directly than the physical challenge of mountain climbing. This result is unexpected relative to H12, which predicted a stronger emotional effect at mountain destinations. One plausible explanation is that temple environments, with their dense symbolic and aesthetic stimuli, elicit a more immediate emotional appraisal that translates directly into engagement behaviors such as seeking information, participating in rituals, and sharing experiences. In adventure contexts, by contrast, the emotional arousal associated with

physical exertion may be attributed to the activity itself rather than the destination, attenuating the destination-specific engagement effect. Future research should directly measure emotional appraisal processes across destination types to test this interpretation. At mountain destinations, self-connection more strongly drives customer engagement, suggesting that adventure tourists who have incorporated the destination into their self-concept are more deeply engaged—consistent with adventure tourism literature showing that risk-taking and physical challenge deepen personal identity investment (Carnicelli-Filho et al., 2010).

The finding of moderation hypotheses are not supported—indicating no significant difference between mountain and temple destinations—is consistent with a more integrated reading of Turner's (1969) structure–anti-structure framework. Rather than extending or empirically validating Turner's theory directly, the findings suggest that both destination types draw on structural and anti-structural elements simultaneously. The largely non-significant moderation pattern aligns with Isabelle et al. (2019), Lindberg and Jensen (2021), and Tumbat and Belk (2011), who demonstrate that both structural and anti-structural elements jointly constitute visitor experiences across destination types. Destination managers should therefore not assume that the physical exceptionality of a destination automatically produces stronger engagement or loyalty outcomes; the quality of emotional and relational experiences matters equally across destination types.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study constructs and validates an integrated tourist loyalty model incorporating motivational drivers (emotional and recreational experience), relational drivers (social presence and self-connection), customer engagement, satisfaction, destination loyalty, and a destination-type moderator. Eight of ten direct hypotheses are supported: motivational and relational drivers positively influence customer engagement, while motivational drivers also directly affect satisfaction. Both customer engagement and satisfaction significantly drive destination loyalty. Satisfaction partially mediates the engagement–loyalty relationship, with customer engagement also retaining a significant direct path to loyalty—indicating complementary mediation rather than full mediation. Multi-group analysis reveals that destination type (mountain vs. temple) moderates only three of eleven tested relationships, while the remaining eight paths are invariant across groups. This finding supports an integrated view of tourism experiences in which structural and anti-structural elements coexist across destination types, rather than a view in which moderation by destination type is pervasive. Theoretically, this study contributes an integrated nomological network that simultaneously tests motivational and relational antecedents within a moderated-mediation framework, advancing engagement and loyalty theory in tourism. Practically, destination managers are advised to prioritize both emotional and recreational experience quality regardless of destination type, to maximize customer engagement as the primary loyalty driver, and to recognize that the creation of loyalty does not depend solely on exceptional destination features but on the quality of the experiential relationship between tourist and destination.

6. Limitation and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations. We conclude by discussing the main limitations of this study, which offer opportunities for further research. First, we used cross-sectional data, thus ignoring the potential presence of evolving variablesor time-lagg effects.

Therefore, we recommend conducting longitudinal research in the future to facilitate an understanding of the persistence of customer engagement, traveler satisfaction, and destination loyalty over time (Hair et al., 2019).

Second, future research may want to explore other possible drivers of customer engagement besides motivational drivers and relational drivers, such as organizational drivers and situational drivers (So et al., 2020). For example, given that tourists can easily interact with other tourists through new media and social networks, the efforts of tourist destinations to facilitate non-transactional tourist behavior are very important (van Doorn et al., 2010). Researchers have found that companies' efforts to foster relationships and customer retention can foster a sense of belonging and community among customers, thereby facilitating shared value creation (Sashi et al., 2019). Which could be explored in future research.

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