

THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM SUPPLY CHAINS ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN HAINAN

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty within the sustainable tourism supply chain in Hainan Province, and to construct a structural equation model to analyze the relevant factors. With the promotion of sustainable development strategies in Hainan Free Trade Port, the local tourism industry faces both opportunities and challenges, particularly in resource integration and enterprise collaboration, which urgently need improvement. This research defines key constructs including sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, and analyzes their interrelations.

The research questions focus on customer satisfaction and its impact between sustainable tourism supply chains and customer loyalty. Specific objectives include: determining the relationships among the aforementioned constructs, explaining the pathways by which they influence customer loyalty, and investigating the mediating role of customer satisfaction. The research hypotheses posit that sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, and perceived value positively influence customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction serving as a mediator among these factors.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, encompassing over 2,433 tourism supply chain member enterprises across cities and counties in Hainan, with a sample selection of approximately 300 upstream and downstream tourism supply chain enterprises. The aim is to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for improving customer satisfaction and loyalty in Hainan's tourism industry, thus promoting sustainable economic development.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism Supply Chain, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Hainan Province

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the dissertation's background, rationale, and specific objectives. It introduces and defines key constructs such as tourism supply chain, sustainable tourism supply chains (STSC), service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, which will serve as the theoretical foundations for the subsequent empirical analysis.

1.1 Background of the Study

Hainan Free Trade Port is committed to establishing a tourism-centered sustainable economy through sustainable development concepts (Wang, 2024). The province aims to create a China-ASEAN tourism cooperation circle, integrating sustainable tourism with countries like Malaysia and Singapore, thereby enhancing eco-friendly development. Despite its abundant tourism resources, Hainan lags in development due to inadequate resource integration and management (Huang, 2024). This paper analyzes customer satisfaction and loyalty regarding service quality within Hainan's sustainable tourism supply chain and proposes the establishment of a customer evaluation system to optimize tourism operations.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The government has implemented the "Opinions on Accelerating the Comprehensive Green Transformation of Economic and Social Development," clarifying the development direction for tourism

(Huang, 2023). The tourism industry in Hainan relies on sustainable tourism supply chains that are crucial for enhancing customer loyalty. However, there is limited systematic research on the relationships between sustainable tourism supply chains and customer loyalty. This study aims to construct a structural equation model to explore the influence of these factors on customer loyalty.

1.3 Research Question

The impact of customer satisfaction and the structural framework between sustainable tourism supply chains and customer loyalty has not been fully considered. This study constructs a structural equation model to explore the relationships among sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. The research questions are:

What are the relationships among sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty?

How does the sustainable tourism supply chain influence customer loyalty through customer satisfaction?

How does service quality influence customer loyalty through customer satisfaction?

How does perceived value influence customer loyalty through customer satisfaction?

1.4 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the current status and challenges of customer development management for tourism supply chain in Hainan. Starting from sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, and perceived value, the aim is to identify sustainable pathways consistent with customer development management for tourism supply chain in the region, enhancing customer loyalty and achieving sustainable development for these enterprises. Therefore, the specific research objectives are as follows:

(1) To determine the relationships among sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty.

(2) To explain the influence pathways of sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, and perceived value on customer loyalty.

(3) To investigate the mediating mechanisms by which sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, and perceived value influence customer loyalty through customer satisfaction.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

H1: The sustainable tourism supply chain has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

H2: Service quality has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

H3: Perceived value has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

H4: Customer satisfaction has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

H5: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between sustainable tourism supply chain and customer loyalty.

H6: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty.

H7: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived value and customer loyalty.

1.6 Scope of Research

(1) Scope of Content

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses to determine the relationships among sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, and to explore the pathways through which these factors affect customer loyalty.

(2) Scope of Population

The sampling framework includes over 2,433 tourism supply chain member enterprises and customers from 20 cities and counties in Hainan Province.

(3) Scope of Location

The study focuses on tourism supply chain enterprise customers across 20 cities and counties in Hainan Province.

(4) Scope of Variable

Independent Variables: Sustainable Tourism Supply Chains, Service Quality, Perceived Value;
Dependent Variable: Customer Loyalty; Mediating Variable: Customer Satisfaction.

(5) Scope of Time

The study is conducted from January to June 2024, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative analyses.

1.7 Terminology

(1) Sustainable Tourism Supply Chain

Refers to the application of sustainable development principles within the tourism industry, aiming to minimize negative impacts on the environment and society through integrated management of resources, production, distribution, and consumption (Seuring et al., 2005).

(2) Service Quality

Service quality refers to how well a delivered service meets customer expectations, encompassing dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. High service quality is crucial in the tourism industry, as it significantly impacts customer satisfaction, loyalty, and sustainable business practices (Tsang et al., 2015).

(3) Perceived Value

Perceived value is the customer's overall assessment of a product or service's utility, based on perceived benefits relative to costs. It is influenced by factors such as product quality, price, brand reputation, and customer experience. Understanding perceived value is vital, as it directly affects customer satisfaction, loyalty, and business performance (Oliver et al., 1999).

(4) Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction measures how well a company's products or services meet customer expectations and is an indicator of purchasing intentions and loyalty. Satisfied customers are likely to repurchase and share positive feedback. Conversely, unsatisfied customers can lead to market share loss as they switch to competitors with higher quality (Fomell et al., 2001).

(5) Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty reflects customers' intention to repurchase based on the value received. It has been defined from various perspectives, emphasizing emotional attachment and consistent purchasing behavior. Factors influencing customer loyalty include perceived value and non-random purchasing habits across brands (Aaker, 1991; Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Oliver, 1999).

1.8 The Significance of the Research

A sustainable tourism supply chain is vital for the sustainable development and ecological improvement of tourism. It addresses waste management and pollution by promoting biodegradable products and developing technologies to treat wastewater, thus enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Despite limited research on the integration of sustainable tourism supply chains with satisfaction and loyalty, this study focuses on these critical aspects.

1.8.1 Theoretical Significance

(1) Integrating the constructs of sustainable tourism supply chain, service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty creates a unified analytical framework to explore their positive impacts in the context of Hainan Free Trade Port's international competition.

(2) The study analyzes customer satisfaction's mediating role and offers insights into enhancing customer satisfaction through better management of the sustainable tourism supply chain, service quality, and perceived value.

1.8.2 Practical Significance

(1) While China has made strides in green supply chain management primarily in manufacturing, research on sustainable tourism supply chains is still emerging. This paper examines service quality management and satisfaction within sustainable tourism supply chains, enhancing the theoretical framework in this area.

(2) The research provides a theoretical basis for developing sustainable tourism supply chains, assessing service satisfaction, and addressing environmental issues like resource shortages and pollution. It proposes strategies to balance customer loyalty with sustainable development, thus optimizing the tourism supply chain's performance and addressing competitive pressures in the industry.

This study aims to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty in Hainan's tourism supply chain, addressing future competitive challenges and contributing to sustainable development in this sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of relevant theories, definitions, and previous studies, clarifying key concepts and the relationships among independent, dependent, and mediating variables in the research.

2.1 Background Information of the Research Area

2.1.1 Literature Search

A systematic literature review on sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty was conducted. Despite numerous studies on sustainable tourism development, fewer than 20 specifically addressed the combination of "sustainable tourism supply chain" and "customer loyalty." Approximately 1,237 academic papers were retrieved using English and Chinese keywords, with a focus on high-impact journals.

2.1.2 Overview of Hainan Tourism Supply Chain Development

The tourism sector in Hainan is pivotal for economic growth, relying on resource elements like tourism supply chains (Atushiwei, 2024; Xu, 2021). Hainan aims to advance industries such as tourism and high-tech sectors while improving its appeal to international tourists (Wang, S., 2024).

2.1.3 Current Status of the Tourism Supply Chain Structure in Hainan

Challenges remain, including product homogeneity and a lack of diversity (Bi, 2021). Hainan's tourism landscape includes 2,433 supply chain enterprises and has implemented policies to enhance its attractiveness and integration in the tourism sector (Hainan Government Work Report, 2024).

2.2 Underpinning Theory

2.2.1 Sustainable Development Theory

Sustainable development integrates environmental concerns with economic growth (Pesqueux, 2009; Allemand, 2006). The 1972 United Nations Conference highlighted the significance of sustainability in global agendas.

2.2.2 Tourism Supply Chain Theory

This theory emphasizes the unique service dynamics within tourism, where various stakeholders deliver combined value to consumers (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009; Kwortnik & Thompson, 2009).

2.2.3 Natural Resource-Based View

The Natural Resource-Based View highlights the importance of natural resources in sustainable development strategies (Hart & Dowell, 2011; Wernerfelt, 1995).

2.2.4 Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty Theory

Customer satisfaction measures how adequately a product meets expectations and significantly influences customer loyalty (Fomell, 2001).

2.3 Sustainable Tourism Supply Chain (STSC)

2.3.1 Definition of Sustainable Tourism Supply Chain

Sustainable Supply Chain Management integrates sustainability principles into tourism (Seuring et al., 2005; Tapper & Font, 2004).

2.3.2 Dimensions of Sustainable Tourism Supply Chain

Key dimensions include environmental design, eco-friendly products, and sustainable marketing practices (He et al., 2023; Zhang, 2024).

2.4 Service Quality

2.4.1 Definition of Service Quality

Service quality reflects how well services meet customer expectations, impacting satisfaction and loyalty (Olu-lawal et al., 2024; Setiono & Hidayat, 2022).

2.4.2 Dimensions of Service Quality

Service quality includes dimensions such as accuracy, reliability, responsiveness, and overall service experience—these are vital for customer satisfaction and loyalty (Tsang et al., 2015; Abd-El-Salam et al., 2013).

2.5 Perceived Value

2.5.1 Definition of Perceived Value

Perceived value is categorized into trade-off, multi-factor, and comprehensive evaluation perspectives (Yue et al., 2021; Sanchez et al., 2019).

2.5.2 Dimensions of Perceived Value

The key dimensions identified include perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and perceived social norms, which influence consumer behavior and satisfaction (Wang et al., 2023; Asif et al., 2023).

2.6 Customer Satisfaction

2.6.1 Definition of Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction evaluates how well a company's offerings meet customer expectations and is crucial for loyalty (Fomell, 2001; Kotler & Armstrong, 2016).

2.6.2 Dimensions of Customer Satisfaction

Key dimensions include overall satisfaction, perceived service quality, and experiences that exceed expectations, contributing actively to loyalty (Gomez et al., 2004; Rust et al., 1995).

2.7 Customer Loyalty

2.7.1 Definition of Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is reflected in the commitment customers exhibit towards a brand, influenced by satisfaction and trust (Oliver, 1999; Dick & Basu, 1994).

2.7.2 Types of Customer Loyalty

Loyalty can be categorized into three types: active, passive, and true loyalty, with each necessitating different management strategies. Active loyalty involves customers who promote the brand and show clear intent to repurchase (Litvin et al., 2008). Passive loyalty refers to customers who are less enthusiastic and may shift if better options arise (Akhtar et al., 2011). True loyalty describes customers committed to a brand despite issues, emphasizing a deeper emotional connection (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2004).

2.7.3 Research Related to Customer Loyalty

Research indicates that customer loyalty is driven by strong relationships, satisfaction, and external influences on purchasing behavior (Bowen & Chen, 2001; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Factors influencing customer loyalty include perceived value, quality of service, and the company's social image (Lewis & Soureli, 2006).

2.7.4 Dimensions of Customer Loyalty

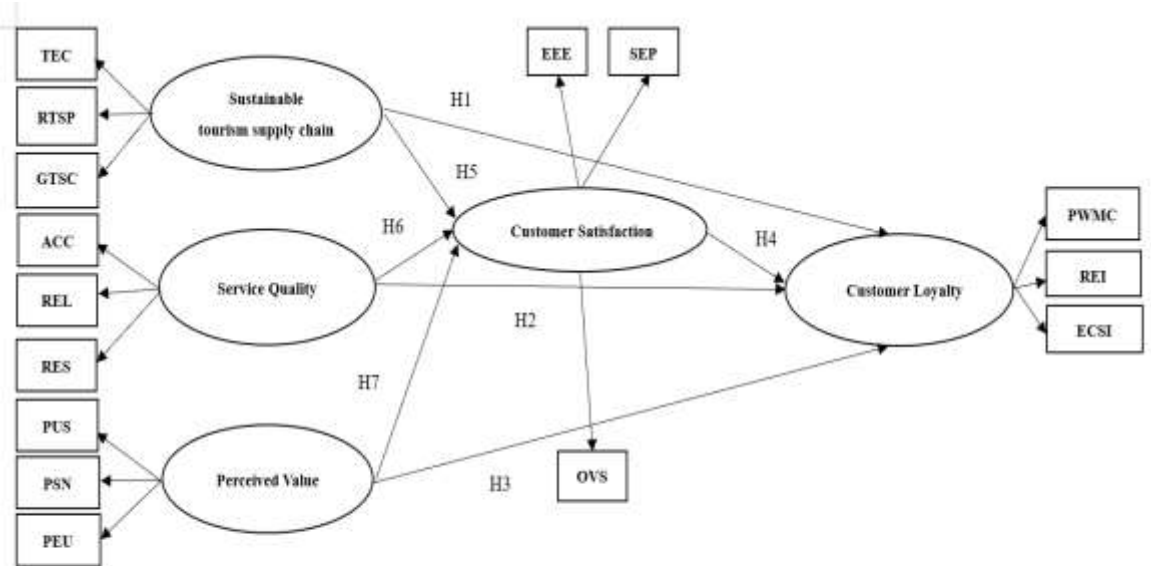
Customer loyalty comprises cognitive, emotional, intentional, and behavioral dimensions, each providing insights into customer engagement and retention strategies. Cognitive loyalty is based on rational evaluations of the brand (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006). Emotional loyalty reflects the customers' attachment to the brand (Beverland & Minahan, 2007). Intentional loyalty indicates a customer's commitment to repurchase, while behavioral loyalty is evidenced by actual repeat purchases (Rundle-Thiele, 2005; Yanamandram & White, 2010).

2.8 Relationships between Variables

This section outlines the proposed research hypotheses relating to the interconnectedness of sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and loyalty.

Conceptual Framework

Through the viewing of the literature, the researcher built up a research framework as shown in the Figure.



Note: TEC: Tourism Enterprise Customers; RTSP: Responsible Tourism Service Provider; GTSC: Green Tourism Supply Chain; ACC: Accuracy; REL: Reliability; RES: Responsiveness; PEU: Perceived Usefulness; PSN: Perceived Social Norms; PEU: Perceived Ease of Use; EEE: Experience exceeds expectations; SEP: Service perception; OVS: Overall Satisfaction; PWC: Positive word-of-mouth communication; REI: Repurchase Intention; ECSI: Enhancing Corporate Social Image.

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

This study will adopt a mixed-methods approach to investigate how customer loyalty in the sustainable tourism supply chain is mediated by customer satisfaction through this mediator variable. Utilizing structural equation modeling, surveys, and in-depth interviews, we will quantify the impact pathways and regulatory mechanisms of sustainable supply chains, service quality, perceived value, and customer satisfaction on customer loyalty. Moreover, we will explore the mediating role of customer satisfaction in enhancing customer loyalty. Additionally, through long-term follow-up interviews with customers of the sustainable tourism supply chain in Hainan Province, this research will delve deeper into the roles of sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, and perceived value in boosting customer loyalty, revealing the mechanisms by which customer loyalty is improved within sustainable tourism supply chains.

Variables and Dimensions of the Conceptual Framework

Variable type	Variable name	Dimensions		Number of items	Scale source
Independent variables	1. Sustainable Tourism Supply Chain (STSC)	Tourism Enterprise Customers		5	Deng et al.(2013) Saeed et al. (2019) Pizam et al. (2016)
		Responsible Tourism Service Provider		5	
		Green Tourism Supply Chain		5	
	2. Service Quality (SEQU)	Accuracy		4	Cheng (2023) Cui(2020)
		Reliability		3	
		Responsiveness		4	
	3.Perceived Value(PEVA)	Perceived usefulness		4	
		Perceived social norms		4	
		Perceived ease of use		4	
Dependent variable	Customer Loyalty (CULO)	Positive word-of-mouth Communication		5	Paulraj (2011) and Cankaya & Sezen (2019)
		Repurchase Intention		5	
		Enhancing Corporate Social Image		5	
Mediating variable	Customer Satisfaction (CUSA)	Experience exceeds expectations			Sigalas et al. (2013)
		Service perception		4	
		Overall Satisfaction		4	
Total number of items				65	

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates how sustainable tourism supply chain, service quality, and perceived value affect customer loyalty in Hainan's tourism sector, with customer satisfaction acting as a mediator. The research aims to:

- Identify relationships among key variables.
- Explore pathways to customer loyalty.
- Examine the mediating role of customer satisfaction.

3.1 Research Paradigm

A mixed methods design combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide comprehensive insights. The research includes:

- Step 1: Quantitative data collection and analysis through surveys.
- Step 2: Qualitative interviews to gain deeper understanding.

3.2 Research Design

- Using a sequential explanatory design, this study involves:
- Quantitative surveys to establish a baseline.
- Deep-dive analysis followed by qualitative data collection for richer context.

3.3 Quantitative Research

3.3.1 Population and Sample

Population: 2,433 tourism supply chain entities in Hainan.

Sample Size: Based on Raosoft calculations, 472 participants.

3.3.2 Data Collection Instruments

Surveys cover sustainable tourism, service quality, perceived value, and loyalty.

A 5-point Likert scale is used, validated through expert reviews and reliability checks.

3.3.3 Data Management

Electronic surveys will ensure wide reach.

Unreliable data will be discarded or corrected.

3.3.4 Statistical Techniques

Using SEM and SmartPLS 4, relationships and hypotheses are examined with an $\alpha = 0.1$ for significance.

3.4 Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research encompasses participant observation and interviews with industry experts to enrich quantitative findings.

Sampling: Purposive sampling of 20 participants.

Instruments: Interviews and discussions recorded for accurate data capture.

3.5 Action Plan

The structured timeline ensures efficient research process completion, covering activities from proposal presentation to result dissemination.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Adhering to ethical guidelines includes informed consent, confidentiality, risk minimization, and cultural sensitivity during research.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

4.1 Conclusion

This study explored the impact of sustainable tourism supply chains, service quality, and perceived value on customer loyalty in Hainan's tourism industry, with customer satisfaction serving as a mediator. By employing a mixed methods approach, we gained comprehensive insights into the complex relationships among these variables. The quantitative analysis, supported by SEM modeling, highlighted significant pathways through which these factors influence customer loyalty. The qualitative findings provided deeper context and validation for the quantitative results, emphasizing the critical role of customer satisfaction in mediating these relationships.

4.2 Future Work

4.2.1 Enhancement of Sustainable Tourism Supply Chains: Tourism enterprises should continuously optimize their supply chains to improve user experience, integrating sustainable sourcing and eco-friendly practices to further enhance customer satisfaction.

4.2.2 Focus on Sustainable Practices: Future initiatives must prioritize partnerships with local suppliers and responsible tourism service providers, fostering a sustainable supply chain that benefits both the environment and the community.

4.2.3 Training and Development: It is essential to provide training for staff to understand the significance of service quality, including multilingual support, responsiveness, and sustainable tourism concepts to meet the needs of international tourists.

4.2.4 Continuous Feedback Mechanisms: Implement systems to regularly collect feedback from customers and employees to allow for ongoing improvements in service delivery and technology utilization.

4.2.5 Addressing Research Gaps: Future research should explore specific implementation strategies of sustainable tourism supply chains and their impact on customer loyalty. This includes examining the interplay between local cultural factors, consumer demographics, and sustainable practices, thereby enriching the understanding of how sustainability can enhance customer experiences and competitiveness.

In summary, this study emphasizes the interconnectedness of sustainable tourism supply chains, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, illustrating the pivotal role of sustainable practices in

shaping the future of tourism in Hainan. This research makes a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge in this field.

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