

## BEYOND SERVICE EXCELLENCE: EXPLORING BRAND IMAGE AS THE BRIDGE BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN NATURE TOURIST CAMPS

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**Citation:** Almasarweh, M.S., Harb, A., Alnawaiseh, M.B., & Almajali, T.A. (2024). BEYOND SERVICE EXCELLENCE: EXPLORING BRAND IMAGE AS THE BRIDGE BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN NATURE TOURIST CAMPS. *Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 53(2), 725–735. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.53236-1248>

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**Abstract:** The previous research emphasized the importance of service quality, brand image, and customer loyalty in the context of the hospitality industry. However, there seems to be a need for more in-depth investigation into the specific mechanisms and strategies of service quality within the nature tourist camps that contribute to building a positive brand image and fostering customer loyalty. To cover this gap in knowledge, this study examined customer loyalty and brand image perception about nature tourist camps service quality in Jordan. This research is crucial due to the rapid growth of the outdoor accommodation industry and the importance of service quality. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the data collected from tourists who stayed at Wadi Rum. The results demonstrate that brand image significantly mediates the relationship between SERVQUAL model dimensions and customer loyalty. Theoretical and practical implications were discussed.

**Keywords:** Nature tourist camps, Outdoor accommodations, Service quality, Brand image, Customer loyalty

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### INTRODUCTION

Companies compete hardly in today's global market, always looking for new methods to anticipate service quality, comprehend clients' perceived value, and improve their brand image to win over loyal customers (Srivastava and Sharma, 2013). Since a strong brand image can significantly impact consumer behavior and corporate choices, many businesses aim to increase customer loyalty by cultivating a positive brand image among consumers (Zhang et al., 2016).

According to research by Shi et al. (2014), better profitability and improved service quality are positively correlated. Similarly, Blery et al. (2009) discovered a favorable correlation between repurchase intention and service quality. In any firm, particularly in the service industry, customer loyalty and satisfaction are critical to attracting new clients and retaining existing ones (Priyo et al., 2019). Hospitality managers think happier patrons can translate into more sales (Ali et al., 2021; Rahimi and Kozak, 2017). However, numerous studies have demonstrated that only having happy clients does not ensure their continued patronage or loyalty (Kiseleva et al., 2016; Poku et al., 2013; Mittal and Lassar, 1998).

In this context, the success of a business is thought to depend more on customer loyalty than on customer happiness. Furthermore, a business's reputation can have a big influence on marketing initiatives and can be good or bad (A Izboun et al., 2023; Alhamad et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2018; Godey et al., 2016; Lin and Lu, 2010). According to Zeithaml et al. (1996), brand image is defined as the capacity to influence how customers view the goods or services provided. According to Jiang and Zhang (2016), the hotel industry's brand image is considered a critical factor in influencing customer loyalty and independent of the travel market. While the literature explores the relationship between service quality, brand image, and customer loyalty in the context of the hospitality industry, there is a research gap that could be addressed. The existing literature primarily focuses on the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, as well as the role of brand image in influencing customer perceptions. However, there seems to be a need for more in-depth investigation into the specific mechanisms and strategies within the hospitality industry's nature tourist camps that contribute to building a positive brand image and fostering customer loyalty.

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The research could delve into understanding the unique aspects of nature tourist camps within the hospitality sector and how these factors influence brand image formation. For instance, the study explores whether specific service quality dimensions are more critical in the context of nature tourist camps compared to conventional hotels. Therefore, this study examines customer loyalty and brand image perception about Jordan's natural tourist camps' service quality. The research is crucial due to the rapid growth of the outdoor accommodation industry and the importance of service quality. Practitioners can use the findings to enhance profitability and academics to validate findings and guide future studies. Additionally, exploring nature tourist camps is particularly relevant given the increasing trend of tourists seeking immersive experiences in natural settings. As eco-tourism and nature-based travel gain popularity, understanding the dynamics of customer loyalty and brand image in nature tourist camps becomes crucial for businesses aiming to thrive in this niche market. This study aims to contribute valuable insights to industry professionals and researchers in this evolving landscape.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Service Quality and Customer loyalty

According to management and marketing literature, the quality of a service is determined by how healthy customers perceive it, either meeting or exceeding their expectations (Selnes, 1993; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Service quality has garnered significant attention from service marketing and management researchers in recent decades (Oh and Kim, 2017; Tamwatin et al., 2015; Jiang and Zhang, 2016). Furthermore, much effort has gone into comprehending the idea of service quality and creating measurement scales for it (Kitapci et al., 2014; Orel and Kara, 2014; Shi et al., 2014). In particular, many businesses, including mobile banking, health management, telecommunications, education, hospitality, and tourism, have thoroughly evaluated their many components of service quality. The concept of service quality is complex and includes several elements, each of which affects patients' happiness and the overall level of service quality in a unique way Paul and others (2016). In today's world, word-of-mouth referrals and customer satisfaction are heavily influenced by service quality. Customer happiness is commonly acknowledged as a valuable indicator of a product or service's worth to customers, as opposed to concentrating on cognitive outcomes Yang et al. (2018), Khan and Fasih, 2014. Additionally, because it fosters repeat business, customer loyalty, and recommendations, consumer happiness can be used to gauge companies' present and future performance (Boadi et al., 2019; Meesala and Paul, 2018). In another recent study, Annabella (2019) found a positive association between customer happiness, loyalty, and intentions to make repeat purchases.

Customer satisfaction is, therefore, essential to the hospital industry's ability to run a profitable business and cultivate enduring client relationships (Anabila, 2019; Chotivanich, 2014; Aftab and Razzaq, 2016). Customer loyalty is described by researchers as a customer's propensity to suggest or uphold a favorable attitude toward a service provider and to make repeat purchases from that supplier whenever feasible. A customer's propensity for a particular brand, likelihood of doing business with a given retailer again, and word-of-mouth recommendations are all indicators of loyalty (Molinillo et al., 2022). Further research is necessary in this vital field because customer loyalty is one of the most significant criteria for businesses to increase their market share (Jenneboer et al., 2022; Julander et al., 1997) There are two components to customer loyalty: behavioral and attitudinal. A customer's intention to consistently buy a brand or service from a service provider is known as behavioral loyalty. Conversely, a customer's optimistic views and feelings about a brand or service provider are called attitudinal loyalty. Julander and Mägi (1996), Conversely, attitudinal loyalty is a powerful indicator of customer loyalty since it describes the consumer's intention to repurchase the product or service and promote it to others (Bowen and McCain, 2015). According to several empirical investigations, there is a significant relationship between client loyalty and customer satisfaction (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Additionally, Brodie et al. (2009) studies on service quality indicate that favorable consumer repurchasing behavior is more likely when there is an improvement in service quality.

### The Relationship between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty:

According to Rahim (2012) definition, the four A's (Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy, and Responsiveness) and total service quality strongly correlate with every facet of service quality, including student happiness and reliability. Customer satisfaction, which promotes consumer repurchase, strengthens the bond between the caliber of the services provided and the clients, claim Malik et al. (2012). Chinomona et al. (2013) state that the model's foundation is brand service qualification, directly affecting customer happiness. Ultimately, brand satisfaction and trust are expected to impact brand selection, according to Tabaku and Kushi (2013). Kumowal et al. (2016) and Vasumathi and Subashini 9 (2015) both contend that satisfied customers are necessary for brand loyalty. Shala and Balaj (2016) assert that the general caliber of the user experience on an e-commerce platform is crucial.

When the customer's expectations and perceptions of the quality of service align, the supplied quality of services is deemed adequate; when they don't, it is considered unacceptable. The quality of products and services affects consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and perceived value, according to Naeimavi and Gaskari (2016). Better service will increase customer satisfaction, which promotes creative customer commitment. Dimiyati and Subagio (2016) claim that the business uses product differentiation to build value and a brand. Returning customers demonstrate their loyalty to a firm by making more purchases from it, according to Alnaser et al. (2017). Offering top-notch service is an efficient way to keep customers loyal to the bank. The review suggests a correlation between brand loyalty and service excellence, with some studies claiming a direct correlation and others suggesting an indirect one.

### Service Quality model

The Service Quality model, a widely used framework for measuring service quality, has been the subject of extensive literature. Researchers have explored its application, strengths, and limitations over the years. The model, developed by

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, employs four dimensions (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) to assess service quality. Despite documented limitations, such as its applicability in diverse industries, the Service Quality model remains a valuable tool for evaluating service quality, as evidenced in studies on hospitality services, medical services, and IT service measurement (Hartwig and Billert, 2018; Jonkisz et al., 2021). Thus, the researchers built the research model based on SERVQUAL model as shown in Figure 1.

### Dimensions of Service Quality

**Assurance**, in the context of service quality, refers to the skills and competencies employed by service providers in delivering services to customers (Alamgir and Shamsuddoha, 2004). It encompasses the elements that instill confidence and trust in customers regarding the reliability and professionalism of the service (Bilika et al., 2016). Assurance includes factors such as the expertise of service personnel, their ability to convey trust, and the overall competence displayed during service delivery (Pakurár et al., 2019). Customers must feel assured that the service provider has the qualifications and capabilities to meet their expectations and provide a satisfactory experience (Ali et al., 2021). Research indicates a positive relationship between service quality, assurance, and customer loyalty in the hotel industry (Anabila et al., 2022). Based on the notion above, the following hypothesis was proposed:

**H1:** Brand Image mediates the relationship between assurance and Customer loyalty.

**Empathy** refers to the organization's ability to understand and prioritize the needs and requests of its customers. It involves demonstrating understanding, care, and responsiveness to customers' emotions, concerns, and desires (Haming et al., 2019; Jenitta and Elangkumaran, 2014). Empathy is one of the dimensions commonly identified in service quality models, such as Service Quality; empathy underscores the importance of fostering a customer-centric approach and creating a service environment that reflects genuine concern for the well-being and satisfaction of the customers (Puri and Singh, 2018; Choi and Hong, 2024). Empathy plays a significant role in influencing customer loyalty, especially when mediated by hotel brand image. Bahadur et al. (2018) highlight that the empathic behavior of hotel employees positively impacts customer satisfaction and loyalty. The total impact of image congruence and customer satisfaction on brand loyalty is substantial, emphasizing the importance of a positive hotel brand image (Back, 2001). Service quality, influenced by empathetic interactions directly and indirectly, affects customer loyalty by identifying with the hotel brand (Gontur et al., 2022). Thus, empathy fosters positive emotional experiences, customer satisfaction, and a strong identification with the hotel brand, ultimately leading to increased customer loyalty. Based on the notion above, the following hypothesis was proposed:

**H2:** Brand Image mediates the relationship between empathy and Customer loyalty.

**Reliability** refers to the extent and consistency with which a product, system, or service performs its intended functions over time under specified conditions (Omar et al., 2015; Zygiaris et al., 2022) In the context of service quality, reliability emphasizes the ability of an organization to deliver services consistently, accurately, and dependably (Ramayah et al., 2011). It involves meeting customer expectations by providing services reliably and without unexpected interruptions or errors. In essence, reliability is a measure of the trustworthiness and predictability of a product or service, ensuring that it performs as expected and fulfills its intended purpose. Hence, reliability, a critical service quality dimension, plays a pivotal role in shaping customer loyalty within the hotel industry, with hotel brand image mediating this relationship (Rashid, 2013). The reliability of services, encompassing consistency and dependability, directly influences customer perceptions and loyalty. Based on the notion above, the following hypothesis was proposed:

**H3:** Brand Image mediates the relationship between reliability and Customer loyalty.

**Responsiveness**, in the context of service quality, refers to an organization's ability to promptly and effectively address customer needs, requests, and inquiries (Ghobadian et al., 1994). It involves the timely and efficient delivery of services and the willingness to assist customers with their questions or concerns (Zygiaris et al., 2022). A responsive service provider demonstrates a commitment to meeting customer expectations and ensuring a positive customer experience by minimizing waiting times and delivering assistance in a timely manner (Munusamy et al., 2010; Siregar et al., 2024; Sulistyadi et al., 2019). Responsive customer service is a critical factor in influencing customer loyalty in the hotel industry, with hotel brand image mediating this relationship (Kandampully et al., 2011) . The literature highlights the significance of this dimension in shaping positive customer perceptions and fostering loyalty within the competitive hospitality sector (Alzoubi et al., 2021). Based on the notion above, the following hypothesis was proposed:

**H4:** Brand Image mediates the relationship between responsiveness and Customer loyalty.

### Brand Image and Customer loyalty

The brand of the company is among its most important assets. Keller (1993) asserts that "brand is reflected by the brand links kept by consumers in consumer memory." A brand's image is essentially what a customer considers the first time he encounters the brand. Customers make these associations in their brains due to their firsthand interactions with service. Customers make decisions based on these encounters by contrasting the results with their previous dealings with the business and the established correlations. Many empirical studies have found Brand image to be positively connected (Selnes, 1993; Zins, 2001). Nonetheless, some research indicates that brand image is positively impacted by customer satisfaction and service excellence. Based on the previously mentioned idea, the following theory was put forth:

**H5:** Brand image significantly influences customer loyalty.

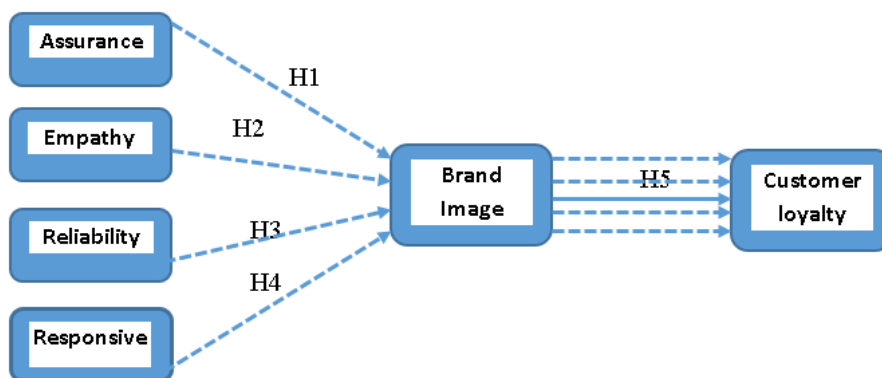


Figure 1. Conceptual model (Source: The model is developed based on previous studies: independent variables Aaker, 1991; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Akbaba, 2006. Mediating Variables: Oliver, 1997; Dependent variable)

**Study method**

A questionnaire was developed and evaluated by a group of experts in the same field to ensure the validity of the measurement elements used, which were used by previous studies that studied the same field but in a different environment.

**Sampling and procedure**

The study focused on tourists who had lodged at nature tourist camps within the "Wadi Rum reserve." This extraordinary location, known for its mesmerizing desert landscapes and cultural significance, provided a distinctive setting for our research. The convenience sample method was applied, comprising tourists who had experienced stays in these camps. A questionnaire was distributed to gather information related to the study's variables. Notably, a majority of respondents were foreign tourists from Europe and America, alongside some Arab tourists. A total of 275 questionnaires were distributed, and 225 were deemed valid for analysis. The inclusion of Wadi Rum as our study backdrop not only amplifies the relevance of our findings to a unique and culturally diverse tourism environment but also adds an enriching dimension to the broader discourse on nature tourism and its impact on customer loyalty and brand image perception.

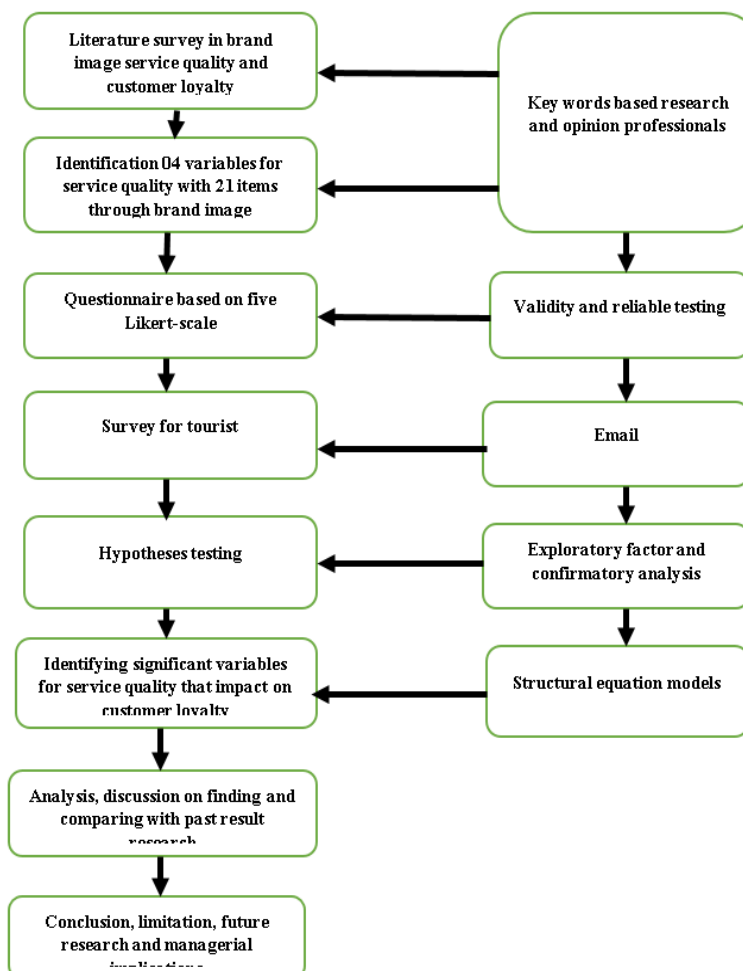


Figure 2. Research methodology

The structural equations model of partial least squares (PLS-SEM) was used to test hypotheses using Smart PLS.4.8.9 because it allows us to verify the validity of the measurement and structural models. PLS-SEM was widespread utilized in the fields of management and social sciences due to its capacity for providing reliable and consistent results (Avkiran and Ringle, 2018; Harb et al., 2021; Sarhan et al., 2020; Harb et al., 2023). After deleting responses with missing data, 225 questionnaires were retained to validate the form. The rule of thumb is that the minimum sample size should exceed ten times the most significant number of reflective indicators used to measure a given structure or ten times greater than the paths directed to the construction in the model (Hair et al., 2021). Whereas the paths in this model are five paths.

According to Hair (2016), the determination of an adequate sample size is pivotal for discerning specific R2 values within the structural model's endogenous constructs. To this end, we consider R2 values of 0.10, 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75, adopting significance levels of 1%, 5%, and 10% for precision. Furthermore, we factor in a statistical power of 80% and specify the level of complexity in the Partial Least Squares (PLS) path model. This complexity is defined as the maximum number of arrows directed at a construct in the PLS path model.

For example, assuming a maximum of five independent variables in both the measurement and structural models, we ascertain that a sample size of 45 observations is requisite to achieve a statistical power of 80%. This calculation is specifically tailored for detecting R2 values of at least 0.25, maintaining a 5% probability of error. The meticulous consideration of these parameters ensures the robustness and reliability of our statistical analysis.

**Research instrument**

The initial survey included 25 measurement indicators that needed to be evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey was given to six experts in the field, all of whom were university professors, as well as four experienced managers from the hospitality industry where the study took place. Following their feedback, the survey was modified to eliminate certain management terminology and rephrase two questions. This process helped ensure that the content and criteria of the survey were valid by engaging in thorough discussions with the experts, ensuring that the survey was grounded in theoretical models and accurately measured what it was intended to measure. Utilizing confirmatory factor analysis, the survey with a total of 25 indicators for the underlying variables was condensed to 21 items, resulting in a more concise and efficient questionnaire. Measurements according to Anabila et al., 2022; Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed the SERVQUAL (SQ) questionnaire to assess service quality based on five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness. Customer loyalty measurement according to (Anabila et al. (2022), while measurement of brand image from scale developed by (Chen and Tseng, 2010).

**Results**

Table 1 shows the demographic data related to the respondents. Survey participants represent a diverse group of visitors from different countries.

Table 2. Profile respondent

		Total	%
Age	20-30	22	10 %
	31-40	64	28.5 %
	41-50	66	29 %
	More than 50	73	32.5 %
Gender	Male	120	53.4 %
	Female	105	46.6 %
Country	Europe	36	16 %
	American	39	17.4 %
	Russian	85	38 %
	Arab	41	18.2 %
	Other	24	10.7 %

**Structural model results**

To experimentally validate our model, we followed a two-stage approach. First, we examined measurement models. In the second stage, we evaluated the structural model by testing the reliability and validity to determine the relationships between constructs in the path model (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2016; Ringle and Sinkovics, 2009).

To evaluate the measurement, we must assess the internal consistency reliability using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha. According to Table 2, all reflective internal consistency reliability constructs have values larger than 0.785 and 0.861 for CA and CR, respectively. These scores exceed the recommended 0.7 required levels (Chin, 1998). To determine the reliability of an indicator, it is necessary to ensure that a construct explains at least 50% of the variation in each of its related indicators (Chin, 1998). With reflective constructs, the indicator loadings are generally higher than the required threshold of 0.7 and statistically significant (Chin, 1998; Gefen et al., 2000; Henseler et al., 2015) This provides evidence of the indicators' reliability and confirms that they meet the criteria for internal consistency reliability. Another way to assess internal consistency reliability is by determining that the convergent validity (AVE) value should be higher than 0.50 (Chin, 1998; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Another way to evaluate the measurement is to use convergent validity to assess reflective constructs to ensure they are distinctive. The Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) were used to achieve this, as shown in Table 3. According to the literature, if two constructs are conceptually similar, their accurate correlation should be less than 0.9, and if they are conceptually different, their exact correlation should be less

than 0.85. A correlation of 1 or close to 1 indicates insufficient discriminant validity between the two constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). The findings of this study showed that each construct was unique, as it shared more similarity with its corresponding indicators than with other constructs in the path model. The cross-loadings test confirmed that none of the indicators had higher loadings on any build different than the one it was supposed to load on in the path model. The HTMT correlations between the two constructs were all less than 0.782, which confirmed their distinctiveness.

Table 2. Convergent validity

	Indicator	Outer loading	CA	CR	AVE
Brand image	BI1	0.877	0.912	0.934	0.739
	BI2	0.819			
	BI3	0.882			
	BI4	0.880			
	BI5	0.839			
Customer loyalty	CL1	0.830	0.902	0.927	0.718
	CL2	0.846			
	CL3	0.850			
	CL4	0.872			
	CL5	0.840			
Empathy	EMPA1	0.864	0.755	0.858	0.668
	EMPA2	0.779			
	IMPA3	0.808			
Insurance	ISUR1	0.911	0.773	0.898	0.815
	ISUR2	0.894			
Responsiveness	RES1	0.842	0.858	0.914	0.779
	RES2	0.906			
	RES3	0.898			
Reliability	RIA1	0.864	0.857	0.913	0.778
	RIA2	0.894			
	RIA3	0.887			

Table 3. Discriminant validity Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	Brand Image	Customer Loyalty	Assurance	Empathy	Reliability	Responsiveness
Brand Image						
Customer Loyalty	0.733					
Assurance	0.916	0.688				
Empathy	0.900	0.769	0.918			
Reliability	0.674	0.653	0.628	0.688		
Responsiveness	0.732	0.725	0.607	0.775	0.549	
<b>Fornell-Larcker criterion</b>						
Brand Image	0.860					
Customer Loyalty	0.668	0.848				
Assurance	0.771	0.575	0.903			
Empathy	0.765	0.636	0.731	0.818		
Reliability	0.599	0.575	0.511	0.567	0.882	
Responsiveness	0.651	0.640	0.493	0.624	0.472	0.883

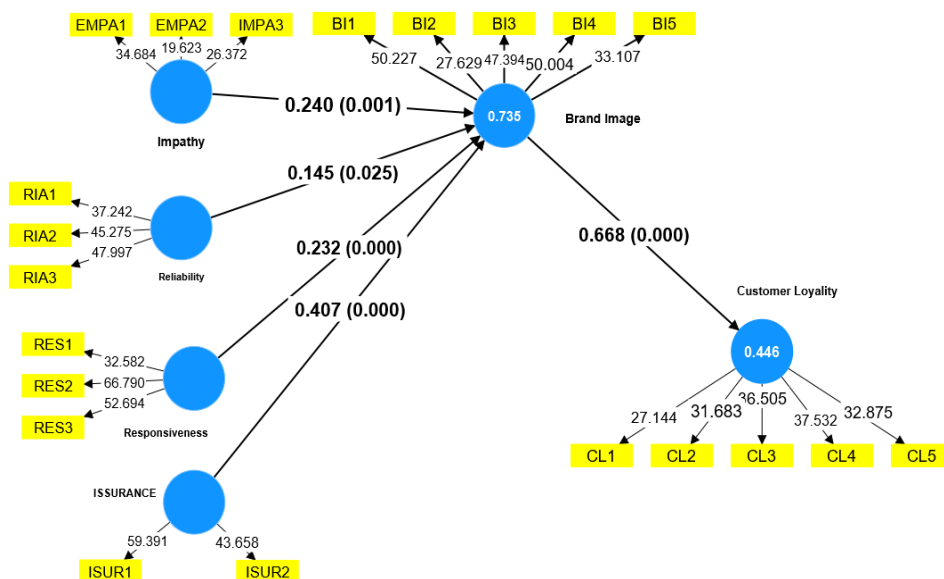


Figure 3. Structural model

### Testing hypothesis for structural model

The summary of the hypothesis test is presented in Figure 3. The figure illustrates the estimates of paths and causal relationships between the components of service quality, such as (responsiveness, assurance, empathy, reliability, and customer loyalty), in the presence of brand image as a mediator variable. The relationships between external and internal structures were evaluated using path coefficient values ( $\beta$ ), calculated t-values, and p-values. To determine the validity of the hypothesis, the computed t-value must be greater than 1.96, and the p-value must be less than 0.05. If the results are contrary, the null hypothesis is accepted. Table 4 presents the outcomes of the study's indirect and moderate hypothesis tests. All hypotheses were accepted and significantly with a p-value of  $< 0.00$ ; the first hypothesis is that brand image positively mediates the relationship between assurance and customer loyalty. The results show that the T-statistics are 5.190 and the P-value 0.000. After analyzing the results, it can be concluded that the first hypothesis is significant and therefore accepted.

Table 4. Testing hypothesis

	Beta	S m	Std	T.v	P-v
Assurance -> Brand Image -> Customer Loyalty	0.271	0.273	0.052	5.190	0.000
Empathy -> Brand Image -> Customer Loyalty	0.160	0.163	0.051	3.114	0.002
Reliability -> Brand Image -> Customer Loyalty	0.097	0.099	0.046	2.131	0.033
Responsiveness -> Brand Image -> Customer Loyalty	0.155	0.155	0.042	3.729	0.000
Brand Image -> Customer Loyalty	0.668	0.673	0.068	9.876	0.000

The second hypothesis examines whether that brand image positively mediates the relationship between empathy and customer loyalty. The test results disclose a T-Statistics value of 3.114 and a P-value of 0.000. After analyzing the results, it can be concluded that the second hypothesis is significant and therefore accepted. The Third hypothesis examines whether that brand image positively mediates the relationship between reliability and customer loyalty. The test results disclose a T-Statistics value of 2.131 and a P-value of 0.033. After analyzing the results, it can be concluded that the third hypothesis is significant and therefore accepted. The Fourth hypothesis examines whether brand image positively mediates the relationship between responsiveness and customer loyalty. The test results disclose a T-Statistics value of 3.729 and a P-value of 0.000. After analyzing the results, it can be concluded that the fourth hypothesis is significant and therefore accepted. The five hypotheses examine whether Reliability has a positive impact on Brand Image. The test results disclose a T-Statistics value of 9.876 and a P-value of 0.000. After analyzing the results, it can be concluded that the five hypotheses are significant and, therefore, accepted. This suggests that brand image has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

### CONCLUSION

This research aims to investigate the impact of service quality dimensions' customer on loyalty and brand image perception about nature tourist camps service quality in Jordan. Service quality dimensions represent the various facets and attributes that contribute to the overall assessment of the quality of services provided by an organization. These dimensions are crucial for understanding customer perceptions and expectations, ultimately influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty. The widely recognized and extensively studied dimensions of service quality are often captured by the SERVQUAL model developed by (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Assurance has been found to have a positive relationship with customer loyalty, and this relationship is mediated by the brand image. This finding aligns with previous studies (Mahatama and Wardana, 2021; Dam and Dam, 2021). The study suggests that when customers perceive a high level of assurance, such as the competence and professionalism of service personnel, it contributes positively to customer loyalty. The mediation role of brand image implies that the impact of assurance on loyalty is influenced by how the brand is perceived.

Additionally, Empathy has been found to have a positive relationship with customer loyalty, and this relationship is mediated by the brand image. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Bahadur et al., 2018; Mahatama and Wardana, 2021; Dam and Dam, 2021). The empathic behavior of employees during customer interactions contributes to increased satisfaction and loyalty to the service brand, often resulting in positive word-of-mouth. The study emphasizes that when customers perceive a genuine understanding and responsiveness from the service provider, it enhances their loyalty. The mediating role of brand image implies that the impact of empathy on loyalty is influenced by how the brand is perceived, highlighting the importance of cultivating a positive brand image through empathetic interactions.

The findings of this work indicate that reliability has a positive association with customer loyalty, and this relationship is mediated by brand image. The reliability of a product or service is a crucial factor influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty. The mediating role of brand image indicates that a reliable brand enhances the overall perception customers have, fostering loyalty. In essence, the positive impact of reliability on customer loyalty is partially channeled through the intermediary influence of a favorable brand image. This finding supports the research results of Bahadur et al. (2018), Wilson (2018), Mahatama and Wardana (2021), and Dam and Dam (2021) that indicate reliability positively associated with customer loyalty through brand image mediation. Moreover, the findings of this research indicate that brand image serves as a crucial mediator in the relationship between responsiveness and customer loyalty.

This finding is consistent with previous studies (Bahadur et al., 2018; Wilson, 2018; Mahatama and Wardana, 2021; Dam and Dam, 2021). This implies that the responsiveness of a business, including its ability to promptly address customer needs and concerns, influences not only customer satisfaction but also contributes to the formation of a positive brand image. This positive brand image, in turn, plays a significant role in fostering customer loyalty.

Furthermore, brand image has been found to influence customer loyalty. This finding aligns with prior research (Sangwan and Bhakar, 2018; Mehta and Tariq, 2020; Durmaz et al., 2018). This implies that a positive brand image

contributes to building trust and credibility among customers. When customers perceive a brand positively, they are more likely to trust the products or services it offers, fostering loyalty.

In conclusion, the findings of this research align with the broader understanding of service quality dimensions and their influence on customer loyalty. The concept of brand image acting as a mediator highlights the importance of not only delivering quality services but also effectively communicating and building a positive perception of the brand.

### Research implications

The study provides valuable insights into the relationships between service quality, brand image, and customer loyalty. Each dimension of service quality—assurance, empathy, reliability, and responsiveness—demonstrates a positive and significant influence on customer loyalty, mediated by brand image. These findings carry theoretical and practical implications for businesses, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sector, emphasizing the importance of not only delivering high-quality services but also cultivating a positive brand image to enhance customer loyalty. Firstly, the study reinforces the Service Quality model's relevance in measuring and understanding service quality in diverse industries, specifically in the context of nature tourist camps. Despite documented limitations, the model remains a valuable tool, and this study's findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on its application and effectiveness. Secondly, the positive mediation effect of brand image on the relationship between assurance and customer loyalty highlights the role of trust, competence, and professionalism in shaping customer perceptions. Consequently, industry practitioners are advised to invest in continuous training programs to improve the competence and professionalism of service personnel in nature tourist camps. Customer perception of a high level of assurance positively impacts loyalty. Strengthening these aspects contributes to a favorable brand image, influencing how customers perceive the brand's competence and professionalism. Thirdly, the study's confirmation of brand image as a mediator in the relationship between empathy and customer loyalty emphasize the impact of empathetic interactions on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Industry practitioners are urged to implement customer service practices that foster empathetic behavior during interactions. Genuine understanding and responsiveness positively influence customer satisfaction and loyalty, creating a ripple effect of positive word-of-mouth. Cultivating a positive brand image through empathetic interactions is essential for long-term loyalty. Fourthly, the positive mediation effect of brand image in the relationship between reliability and customer loyalty suggests that consistent and dependable service delivery fosters loyalty, particularly when coupled with a positive brand image. Therefore, industry practitioners should prioritize the reliability of products and services offered in nature tourist camps. Consistent and dependable service enhances overall customer perception and fosters loyalty. Investing in brand image mediation further solidifies the positive impact of reliability on customer loyalty. Lastly, the study's results highlight that responsive customer service and a positive brand image play a pivotal role in influencing customer perceptions and fostering loyalty. Hence, Develop and implement strategies to enhance the responsiveness of the business, addressing customer needs promptly. This influences customer satisfaction and significantly contributes to forming a positive brand image. The positive brand image, in turn, plays a crucial role in fostering customer loyalty.

### Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

While the results of this research are promising, it's essential to acknowledge certain limitations. The study focused mainly on SERVQUAL model dimensions and how they are related to customer loyalty through the mediation of brand image. Future research can expand by focusing on more dimensions of service quality, such as competence, courtesy, credibility, security, etc. Future research can also expand on the factors that affect customer loyalty by investigating other antecedents. This study used brand images as moderators. Future research can use more variables as mediators, such as reputation.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, M.S.A. and A.H.; methodology, M.S.A. and A.H.; software, M.B.A.; validation, M.S.A. and A.H.; formal analysis, M.B.A. and A.H.; investigation M.S.A. and A.H.; data curation, M.B.A.; writing - original draft preparation, M.S.A. and A.H., and M.B.A.; writing - review and editing, T.A.A.; visualization, M.B.A. T.A.A. and A.H.; supervision, M.S.A. and A.H.; project administration, M.S.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** Not applicable.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study may be obtained on request from the corresponding author.

**Acknowledgments:** The research undertaken was made possible by the equal scientific involvement of all the authors concerned.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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