

EXPLAINING TOURIST SATISFACTION WITH COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN THE MEKONG DELTA REGION, VIETNAM

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Abstract: In the Mekong Delta region (Vietnam), community-based tourism is developing and achieving impressive results. To maintain this success, community tourism sites should pay special attention to improving tourist satisfaction. Therefore, this study aims to demonstrate the factors influencing tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region (Vietnam). A mixed research method was used, combining qualitative and quantitative research to test the research hypotheses. The research data were collected using a convenient sampling with a sample size of 350 tourists who had experienced community-based tourism services in the Mekong Delta region. The research results have pointed out 08 factors that positively affect tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region, including trust, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangible facilities, perceived price, cultural interaction, and local cuisine. Among these, the trust factor has the most powerful impact on tourist satisfaction. Several management implications have been proposed for community tourism sites to enhance service quality and tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region, Vietnam.

Keywords: satisfaction, service quality, community-based tourism, tourists, Mekong Delta.

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INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, the Mekong Delta region boasts rich tourism resources with an intricate network of canals and diverse ecosystems from freshwater to saltwater, particularly a rich cultural heritage (Mai et al., 2023). In the Mekong Delta region, community-based tourism models are increasingly developing in quantity and quality. Some well-known community tourism sites that are popular with both domestic and international tourists include the Con Son community tourism area (Can Tho City) and the Con Chim community tourism area (Tra Vinh Province). To meet the growing demands of tourists, community tourism sites improve service quality and diversify activities, focusing on exploiting local specialities. However, these community tourism sites still face challenges regarding capital, human resources, and operation procedures. These issues certainly impact tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region.

Tourist satisfaction is a measure of the success of a tourist destination (Kozak and Rimmington, 2000; Hui et al., 2007; Nowacki, 2009). Ensuring tourist satisfaction is the basis for creating differentiation and competitive advantage for a tourist destination (McQuilken et al., 2000). Previous studies in tourism have often focused on demonstrating tourist satisfaction with various types of tourism such as coastal tourism (Regalado-Pezúa et al., 2023; Castillo-Canalejo et al., 2023), river tourism (Nguyen and Mai, 2021; Masitenyane and Mokoena, 2023), ecotourism (Cheraghzadeh et al., 2023; Phung et al., 2024; Talukder et al., 2024), agricultural tourism (Son et al., 2023; Wang and Hao, 2023), and culinary tourism (Kim et al., 2022; Rehman et al., 2022). However, few studies demonstrate the factors affecting tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism. Additionally, most studies focus on showing that tourist satisfaction is influenced by service quality and destination image. Meanwhile, for community-based tourism, cultural interaction, an essential factor, is rarely mentioned in research. Therefore, to address the limitations of previous studies, this study approaches by synthesizing factors related to service quality and destination image and adding the factor of cultural interaction to demonstrate tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region, Vietnam.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1. Theoretical framework

Community-based tourism is a form of tourism where local people participate in providing services, creating products/services, managing, and directing development (Nghi et al., 2012). Community-based tourism is characterized by the

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involvement of the local community in tourism development activities (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009; Tasci, 2013), particularly as co-creators of tourism products (Mai et al., 2023). It is a tourism development approach where the community plays a leading role (Nga et al., 2022). Community-based tourism is a type of tourism that is established, managed, and provided by the local community within a specific territory (Terencia, 2017). According to Ellis (2011), community-based tourism is a suitable approach for sustainable tourism development because it is based on the community's existing assets.

Customer satisfaction is the customer's response to meeting their desires (Oliver, 1997). In a study in 2006, Kotler and Keller suggested that satisfaction is the perceived level of fulfilment based on the comparison between the perceived and expected quality of a product/service. Tourist satisfaction is the positive perception or feeling tourists have when participating in leisure activities, expressed by their enjoyment level from those experiences (Chen and Tsai, 2007). Tourist satisfaction is the evaluation of service quality and the fulfillment of their needs and expectations (Fu et al., 2019). According to Tian-Cole and Crompton (2003), there are two approaches to measuring tourism satisfaction: appraisal-based and need-based. In this study, the need-based approach is used to demonstrate tourist satisfaction.

2. Research hypotheses

The relationship between trust and tourist satisfaction

Trust refers to the ability to consistently and dependably perform the promised service (Chaudhary and Aggarwal, 2012), including commitments and the ability to fulfil those commitments by the provider (Shafiq et al., 2019). Reliability is an important factor that positively affects tourist satisfaction with a destination (Phung et al., 2024). The positive relationship between trust and tourist satisfaction has been demonstrated by many researchers (Al-Ababneh, 2013; Attallah, 2015; Ibrahim et al., 2015; Cilliers et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2018; Long, 2019; Masrurul, 2019; Thuy, 2020; Thanh and Ha, 2021; Hong et al., 2022; Phuong et al., 2022; Hien et al., 2023; Talukder et al., 2024). Therefore, the study proposes hypothesis H1: Trust positively affects tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region.

The relationship between responsiveness and tourist satisfaction

In tourism, responsiveness is the ability to provide tourists with service experiences that meet their expectations (Thuy, 2020). A lack of understanding in resolving customer inquiries can lead to customer dissatisfaction with service quality (Attallah, 2015; Shafiq et al., 2019). Besides, customers always expect service providers to meet their needs patiently and enthusiastically (Canny, 2013; Markovic and Raspor, 2010). Responsiveness is a crucial factor in service quality that positively affects tourist satisfaction (Ibrahim et al., 2015; Phu, 2016; Cilliers et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2018; Masrurul, 2019; Hong et al., 2022; Hien et al., 2023; Phung et al., 2024; Talukder et al., 2024). Therefore, the study proposes hypothesis H2: Responsiveness positively impacts tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region.

The relationship between assurance and tourist satisfaction

Safety and security at tourist destinations have become an increasing concern of tourists (Poon and Adams, 2000). Assurance is a very important criterion for tourism service quality, influencing tourism development at a destination (Cavlek, 2002; Garg, 2015). Tourists want to feel relaxed and safe at their destinations, so they highly value this criterion (Tuyet et al., 2014). Several researchers have demonstrated that assurance positively affects tourist satisfaction (Attallah, 2015; Shah et al., 2018; Carvalho and Medeiros, 2021; Giao et al., 2021; Thuy, 2020; Hong et al., 2022; Dung and Canh, 2023; Cheraghzadeh et al., 2023; Sapkota et al., 2023; Son et al., 2023; Phung et al., 2024; Talukder et al., 2024). Therefore, the study proposes hypothesis H3: Assurance positively influences tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region.

The relationship between empathy and tourist satisfaction

Empathy is a multi-faceted concept that includes both cognitive and emotional elements (Kerem et al., 2001; Smith, 2006). According to Wieseke et al. (2012), empathy is the ability of an individual to understand others' thoughts (Davis, 1996) and share in others' emotional experiences (Duan and Hill, 1996; Moore, 1990). The ability and willingness to understand customer perspectives play an important role in delivering quality services (Parker and Axtell, 2001). Additionally, empathy encourages employees to understand customer needs, resulting in increased customer satisfaction (Homburg et al., 2009). Empathy positively correlates with tourist satisfaction (Shah et al., 2018; Long, 2019; Masrurul, 2019; Thuy, 2020; Dai and Quynh, 2019; Thanh and Ha, 2021; Hien et al., 2023; Phung et al., 2024; Talukder et al., 2024). Therefore, the study proposes hypothesis H4: Empathy positively affects tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region.

The relationship between tangible facilities and tourist satisfaction

According to Akbaba (2006), tangible facilities are the most important factor in service quality. Al-Ababneh (2013) suggests that tangible facilities significantly impact tourist satisfaction. The more investment in the tangible facilities of a tourist destination, the higher the tourist satisfaction with that destination (Phung et al., 2024). The impact of tangible facilities on tourist satisfaction has been demonstrated by many researchers (Attallah, 2015; Ibrahim et al., 2015; Phu, 2016; Shah et al., 2018; Long, 2019; Masrurul, 2019; Thuy, 2020; Phuong et al., 2022; Cheraghzadeh et al., 2023; Hai et al., 2023; Sapkota et al., 2023; Sugiyama et al., 2024; Talukder et al., 2024). Therefore, the study proposes hypothesis H5: Tangible facilities positively influence tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region.

The relationship between perceived price and tourist satisfaction

Price is the amount of money charged for a product/service or the total value exchanged by customers for the benefit of using the product/service (Kotler et al., 2008). Lower service prices and costs positively influence the demand and decision

to choose a destination (Nicolau and Mas, 2006; Chi and Qu, 2008). Perceived price is a very important factor that positively contributes to tourists' satisfaction with a destination (Son et al., 2023). Several researchers have shown a positive relationship between perceived price and tourist satisfaction (Long and Khai, 2021; Giao et al., 2021; Phuong et al., 2022; Cheraghzadeh et al., 2023; Hien et al., 2023; Huong et al., 2023; Sapkota et al., 2023). Therefore, the study proposes hypothesis H6: Perceived price positively affects tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region.

The relationship between cultural interaction and tourist satisfaction

Culture includes values, ethics, symbols, physical expressions, and behaviors governed by a distinct world (Gnoth and Zins, 2013). In the field of tourism, cultural contact is considered a new concept to measure the purposes and experiences of tourists interacting with a different culture (Gnoth and Zins, 2013). According to Vengesayi (2003), indigenous culture is one of the resource factors of a destination that creates its attractiveness. The influence of cultural interaction on tourist satisfaction has been demonstrated by many scientists (Jayasinghe et al., 2015; Romão et al., 2015; Zeng, 2017; Carvache-Franco et al., 2018; Si and Bang, 2018; Chia et al., 2021; Son et al., 2023). Therefore, the study proposes hypothesis H7: Cultural interaction positively affects tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region.

The relationship between local cuisine and tourist satisfaction

Local cuisine is defined as food and drinks produced locally or labelled with a local brand (Kim et al., 2009; Nummedal and Hall, 2006). Local cuisine reflects the cultural and social identity of a place and plays an essential role in tourists' destination choices (Sengel et al., 2015). Culinary experiences are among the most enjoyable activities for tourists throughout their journey (Frochot, 2003). Several researchers have demonstrated a positive relationship between local cuisine and tourist satisfaction (Chen and Rahman, 2018; Si and Bang, 2018; Suhartanto, 2018; Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2019; Cheraghzadeh et al., 2023). Therefore, the study proposes hypothesis H8: Local cuisine positively impacts tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region.

Based on the literature review and the proposed research hypotheses, the research model identifying factors affecting tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region is established below (Figure 1).

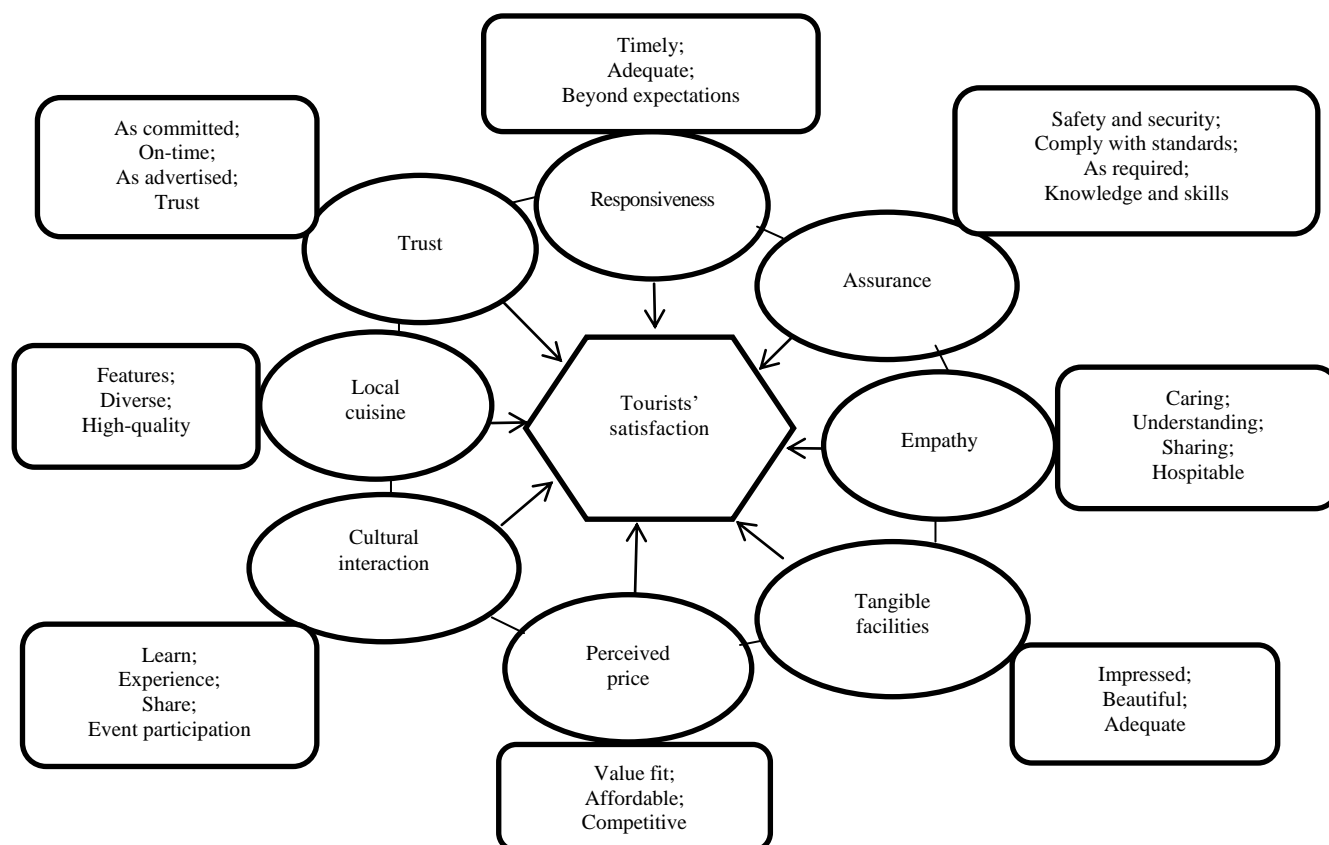


Figure 1. Proposed research model

Based on the research model (Figure 1), the independent research scales include trust, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangible facilities, perceived price, cultural interaction, and local cuisine. The only dependent research scale in the model is tourists' satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region, Vietnam.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was used to identify the factors affecting tourists' satisfaction with community-based tourism. The research was conducted in two phases: preliminary research and formal research. In the preliminary phase, the

research team conducted a literature review to identify the research problem and theoretical basis for the study. This phase also involved identifying preliminary scales and consulting experts to refine these scales. The experts included five community-based tourism researchers and four community-based tourism managers. The research scales were adapted from relevant studies. The service quality scales (trust, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangible facilities) were inherited from the research of Phung et al. (2024) and Talukder et al. (2024); the perceived price scale was inherited from Hai et al. (2023) and Son et al. (2023); the cultural interaction scale was inherited from Chen and Rahman (2018) and Si and Bang (2018); and the local cuisine scale was inherited from Kim et al. (2022) and Hai et al. (2023). After consulting experts, the research team conducted pilot interviews with 30 tourists to identify any errors and make adjustments before the official survey.

In the formal research, the survey was designed with two main parts: the first part measured the factors affecting tourists' satisfaction with community-based tourism, and the second part collected tourists' demographic information. In the first part, questions were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The survey focused on tourists who had experienced community-based tourism services at the Con Son Community-based Tourism Site (Can Tho City) and Con Chim Community-based Tourism Site (Tra Vinh Province). These two sites were selected because they are among the most famous community-based tourism sites in the Mekong Delta region, attracting many domestic and international tourists (Figure 2). The survey was conducted from March to April 2024. A convenient sampling method with direct surveys was used. According to Hoelter (1983), the minimum sample size required for structural equation modeling (SEM) is 200 observations to ensure reliability. The total number of collected surveys was 358, and after removing invalid responses (lack of reliability), a total of 350 valid surveys were used to test the research hypotheses.

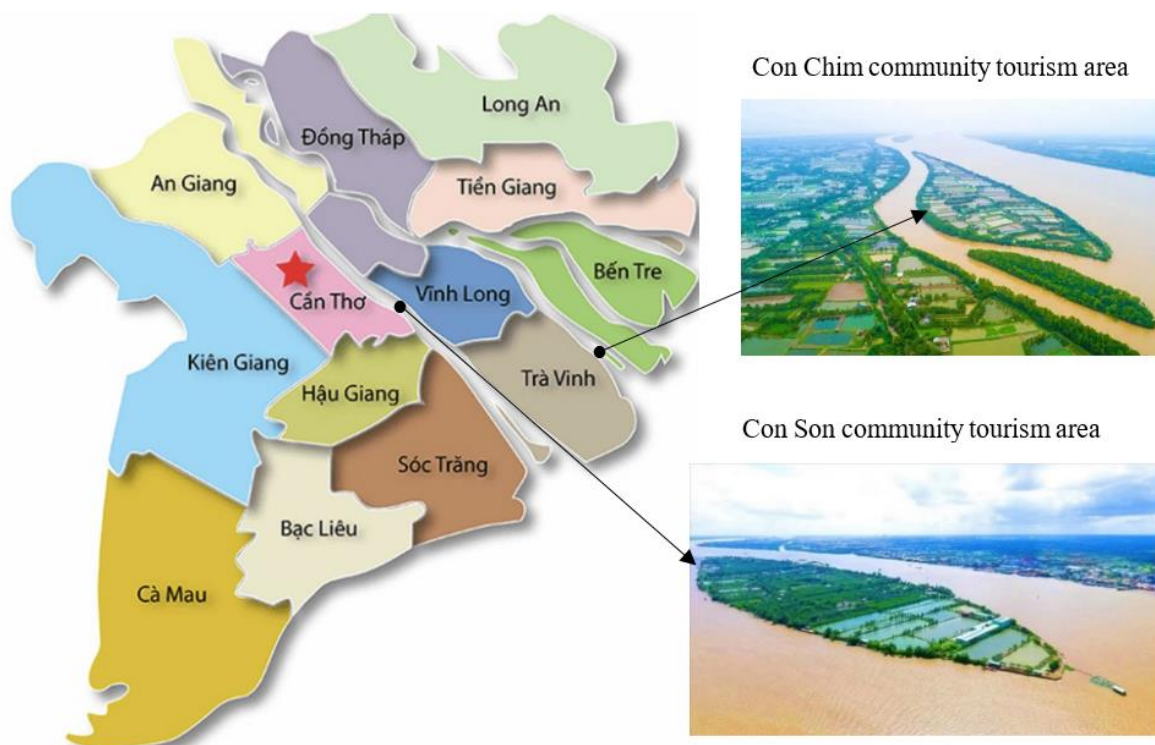


Figure 2. Location of Con Son community tourism area and Con Chim community tourism area (Source: private document authors, 2024)

Data analysis method: Quantitative analysis tools were used in the following sequential steps. Step 1: Internal consistency reliability testing was employed to assess the linkage of observed variables within the scale. Step 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to evaluate the convergent validity and discriminant validity of the scale. Step 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to test the suitability of the research data. Step 4: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses.

Table 1. Sample's characteristics (n = 350)

| Tourist type | Frequency | % | Education level | Frequency | % |
|---------------|------------------|----------|------------------------|------------------|----------|
| Domestic | 248 | 70.86 | Postgraduate | 22 | 6.29 |
| International | 102 | 29.14 | University | 140 | 40.00 |
| Gender | Frequency | % | College | 44 | 12.57 |
| Female | 181 | 51.71 | High school | 112 | 32.00 |
| Male | 169 | 48.29 | Junior high school | 32 | 9.14 |
| Age | Frequency | % | Occupation | Frequency | % |
| 16-30 | 98 | 28.00 | Officer | 104 | 29.71 |
| 31-45 | 135 | 38.57 | Public sector employee | 88 | 25.14 |
| 46-60 | 85 | 24.29 | Manager | 82 | 23.44 |
| Above 60 | 32 | 9.14 | Freelancer | 76 | 21.71 |

RESEARCH RESULTS

Description of survey respondents

Based on the statistical results of the survey respondents' characteristics shown in Table 1, the sample size ensures representation based on the main characteristics of the tourist market in the Mekong Delta region. The proportion of domestic tourists is 70.86%, while international tourists account for 29.14%. Regarding the gender of the respondents, male tourists make up 48.29%, and female tourists account for 51.71%. The majority of respondents are aged between 31 and 45 (38.57%). In terms of educational attainment, most respondents are university graduates (40%). The respondents' occupations are diverse, with office workers making up the highest proportion at 29.71%.

Evaluation of scale reliability

Based on the test results in Table 2, all research scales have Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.8. The lowest Cronbach's alpha value (0.855) belongs to the tangible facilities scale. This indicates that all scales meet the requirements for internal consistency reliability (Nunnally, 1978; Peterson, 1994; Slater, 1995). Therefore, all research scales were used in the next Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The EFA result for the independent scales yielded the following values: (1) model suitability test ($0.5 < KMO = 0.902 < 1.0$). (2) Bartlett's test of variable correlation (Sig. = $0.00 < 0.05$). (3) Reliability of the observed variables (Factor loading > 0.5). (4) Total variance explained = $77.64\% > 50\%$. Similarly, the EFA result for the dependent scale (satisfaction) showed the following indices: (1) model suitability test ($0.5 < KMO = 0.840 < 1.0$). (2) Bartlett's test of variable correlation (Sig. = $0.00 < 0.05$). (3) Reliability of the observed variables (Factor loading > 0.5). (4) Total variance explained = $74.55\% > 50\%$. These results indicate that the observed variables in the research scales achieve discriminant validity and convergent validity (Hair et al., 1998).

Table 2. Scale reliability test result

| Scale | Number of observed variables | Cronbach's alpha | Factor loading |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Trust (TR) | 4 | 0.875 | 0.715 – 0.826 |
| Responsiveness (RE) | 3 | 0.866 | 0.734 – 0.871 |
| Assurance (AS) | 4 | 0.889 | 0.794 – 0.838 |
| Empathy (EM) | 4 | 0.903 | 0.779 – 0.863 |
| Tangible facilities (TF) | 3 | 0.855 | 0.805 – 0.866 |
| Perceived price (PP) | 3 | 0.867 | 0.701 – 0.871 |
| Cultural interaction (CI) | 4 | 0.869 | 0.745 – 0.819 |
| Local cuisine (LC) | 3 | 0.864 | 0.736 – 0.879 |
| Satisfaction (SA) | 4 | 0.886 | 0.779 – 0.848 |

According to Hu and Bentler (1999), the key indices considered to assess model fit include CMIN/df, CFI, TLI, GFI, and RMSEA. The data analysis results of the study show the following indices: CMIN/df = 1.965, CFI = 0.945, TLI = 0.936, GFI = 0.873, and RMSEA = 0.053. These indices are all at good and very good levels (Bentler and Bonett, 1980; Carmines, 1981; Anderson and Gerbing, 1988), indicating that the model fits well with the market data. Table 3 indicates that the research scales ensure convergent validity with the average variance extracted (AVE) values for all factors being greater than 0.6. The composite reliability (CR) values for all factors are greater than 0.8, achieving very good levels (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The study also ensures discriminant validity, with all maximum shared variance (MSV) values smaller than the AVE, and the square root of the AVE values greater than the correlations between that variable and other variables in the model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Summarizing the scale validation results, the research data fits well with the market data, achieving convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability.

Table 3. Correlation matrix between conceptual constructs

| | CR | AVE | MSV | TF | EM | RE | AS | CI | PP | LC | TR | SA |
|----|-------|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| TF | 0.886 | 0.721 | 0.381 | 0.849 | | | | | | | | |
| EM | 0.904 | 0.701 | 0.458 | 0.501 | 0.837 | | | | | | | |
| RE | 0.869 | 0.689 | 0.356 | 0.372 | 0.457 | 0.830 | | | | | | |
| AS | 0.889 | 0.668 | 0.273 | 0.227 | 0.397 | 0.394 | 0.817 | | | | | |
| CI | 0.870 | 0.626 | 0.395 | 0.446 | 0.486 | 0.373 | 0.396 | 0.791 | | | | |
| PP | 0.867 | 0.685 | 0.455 | 0.403 | 0.474 | 0.492 | 0.452 | 0.461 | 0.828 | | | |
| LC | 0.864 | 0.680 | 0.424 | 0.374 | 0.477 | 0.474 | 0.486 | 0.463 | 0.622 | 0.825 | | |
| TR | 0.876 | 0.638 | 0.520 | 0.596 | 0.549 | 0.479 | 0.337 | 0.441 | 0.634 | 0.546 | 0.799 | |
| SA | 0.886 | 0.661 | 0.520 | 0.618 | 0.676 | 0.597 | 0.523 | 0.628 | 0.674 | 0.651 | 0.721 | 0.813 |

Testing research hypotheses

In social science research, all proposed causal relationships with a 95% confidence level (or a significance level of 5%, corresponding to $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$) are considered good (Cohen, 1988). According to the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis results shown in Table 4, all research hypotheses are accepted with 95% confidence.

Additionally, all standardized coefficients of the factors are positive. This indicates that the satisfaction of tourists with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta region is positively influenced by eight factors: trust, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangible assets, perceived price, cultural interaction, and local cuisine.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on Table 4, the factors related to the quality of community-based tourism services (trust, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangible assets) positively impact tourists’ satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta. The research results confirm that the components of service quality are important factors contributing to enhancing tourists’ satisfaction with the destination (Hai, 2014). These results align with several studies in the field of tourism proposed by Chen et al. (2011), Lee et al. (2011), Canny and Hidayat (2012), Rajaratnam et al. (2014), and Si and Bang (2018). In the field of tourism, the study further demonstrates the close relationship between the service quality of a tourist destination and tourists’ satisfaction (Huong et al., 2023; Cheraghzadeh et al., 2023; Phung et al., 2024).

Table 4. Results of estimating relationships in the SEM model

| Hypotheses | Relationship | Estimate | P-value | Result |
|------------|--------------|----------|---------|----------|
| H1 | TR → SA | 0.208 | 0.000 | accepted |
| H2 | RE → SA | 0.129 | 0.005 | accepted |
| H3 | AS → SA | 0.111 | 0.012 | accepted |
| H4 | EM → SA | 0.179 | 0.000 | accepted |
| H5 | TF → SA | 0.158 | 0.001 | accepted |
| H6 | PP → SA | 0.126 | 0.029 | accepted |
| H7 | CI → SA | 0.174 | 0.000 | accepted |
| H8 | LC → SA | 0.120 | 0.025 | accepted |

The study results also demonstrated a positive correlation between perceived price and tourists’ satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta. These results align with several studies in the field of tourism proposed by Long and Khai (2021), Giao et al. (2021), Phuong et al. (2022), Cheraghzadeh et al. (2023), Hien et al. (2023), Huong et al. (2023), and Sapkota et al. (2023). Tourists are concerned with a tourist destination that offers reasonable prices and services that match the quality provided (Thong and Phung, 2021). Perceived price is also an important criterion that enhances the attractiveness of a tourist destination (Swarbrooke and Page, 2012; Hai et al., 2023). This shows that setting reasonable service prices aligned with tourists’ willingness to pay will help improve tourists’ satisfaction with community-based tourism services in the Mekong Delta.

Table 4 shows that cultural interaction positively affects tourists’ satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta. These results align with studies in the field of tourism proposed by Jayasinghe et al. (2015), Romão et al. (2015), Zeng (2017), Carvache-Franco et al. (2018), Si and Bang (2018), Chia et al. (2021), and Son et al. (2023). The development of community-based tourism is always linked with the preservation of community cultural values (Brunt and Courtney, 1999). Cultural exchange and interaction between residents and tourists help enhance tourists’ experiences with community-based tourism (Mai et al., 2023). The research results affirm that cultural interaction is a crucial factor that improves tourists’ satisfaction with community-based tourism. This suggests that community-based tourist destinations should pay special attention to cultural exchange, information sharing, and creating interactions about the customs, rituals, and lifestyle of the local community.

The analytical results also show a positive correlation between local cuisine and tourists’ satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta. In the field of tourism, these research results align with several studies on tourist satisfaction proposed by Chen and Rahman (2018), Si and Bang (2018), Suhartanto (2018), Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2019), and Cheraghzadeh et al. (2023). Indeed, a positive culinary experience at a tourist destination increases tourists’ satisfaction and fosters positive behavioral intentions (Antón, 2019; Lai et al., 2021). At a tourist destination, local specialty dishes are an important part of the culinary culture (Thuy, 2023), enhancing the destination’s attractiveness (Hai et al., 2023). The research results suggest that community-based tourist destinations in the Mekong Delta should further promote the value of local cuisine and regional specialties, which will enhance the destination’s attractiveness and improve tourists’ satisfaction with community-based tourism services.

Theoretical implications

The research findings have expanded the explanatory capacity for tourist satisfaction with destinations, particularly community-based tourism destinations. Besides the service quality and destination image factors that have been substantiated by many researchers, this study has added the factor of cultural interaction to explain tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism destinations. This is an essential factor in measuring tourist experience when participating in community-based tourism. This suggests that different types of tourism at different destinations should be supplemented with additional characteristic factors to enhance the explanatory power of tourist satisfaction. Furthermore, the study has demonstrated that trust has the strongest influence on tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism destinations. Due to the intangible nature of tourism services, tourists are concerned about the commitment, sincerity, and honesty of the tourism destination. Thus, this study has emphasized the crucial role of trust in tourist satisfaction with community-based tourism destinations.

Managerial implications

Based on the research results, several management implications for community-based tourist destinations in the Mekong Delta are proposed as follows: First, improve the quality of community-based tourism services, with special attention to the trust factor. Second, develop service pricing strategies that align with tourists’ willingness to pay and

are competitive in the tourism market. Third, enhance local cultural experiences through activities that promote cultural exchange and information sharing about the customs, rituals, and lifestyle of the local community.

Fourth, promote the value of local cuisine and regional specialties to enhance the destination's attractiveness and tourists' satisfaction with community-based tourism services.

CONCLUSION AND NEW RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study aims to explain tourists' satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta by identifying the factors that influence tourists' satisfaction. Overall, the research results have demonstrated that eight factors influencing tourists' satisfaction with community-based tourism in the Mekong Delta include trust, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangible assets, perceived price, cultural interaction, and local cuisine. All these factors positively affect tourists' satisfaction, with trust having the most powerful impact. As this is a type of community-based tourism, the most important discovery of the study is that cultural interaction positively affects tourists' satisfaction. The research results provide useful references for managers of tourism destinations and researchers in community-based tourism.

Although the study has made important findings, it still has certain limitations, including: First, it is a cross-sectional study and thus has limited generalizability; Second, the scope of the research was only conducted at two typical community tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta, limiting the ability to generalize to other destinations; Third, the study has not tested the differences in satisfaction levels between international and domestic tourists. Therefore, future research should examine these differences, especially by testing satisfaction levels based on tourists' demographic criteria to enhance the explanatory power regarding tourists' satisfaction with community-based tourism.

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