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EXAMINING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF TOURIST SATISFACTION IN THE TRAVEL MOTIVATION AND DESTINATION LOYALTY RELATIONSHIP: A PARTIAL LEAST SQUARES STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING ANALYSIS

Omar JAWABREH [1]*, Vineet KUMAR [2]

[1] The University of Jordan, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality, Department of Hotel Management, Aqaba, Jordan; o.jawabreh@ju.edu.jo (O.J.)
[2] Rayat Bahra Professional University, University School of Hospitality and Tourism, Hoshiarpur, Punjab, India; vinitsharma 678@gmail.com (V.K.)

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Abstract: This study aims to empirically examine the relationships among travel motivation (push and pull factors), tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty within the context of the Indian Himalayan region. Grounded in motivation theory, the study proposes that internal (push) and external (pull) motivational dimensions significantly influence tourist behavior, which in turn enhances overall satisfaction and fosters destination loyalty. Primary data were collected from 403 domestic tourists using a structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 24) for preliminary analysis and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships. The findings reveal a significant and positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, indicating that satisfied tourists are more likely to revisit and recommend the destination. Furthermore, both push and pull motivation factors were found to have a substantial impact on tourist satisfaction, confirming their critical role in shaping travel experiences. The results also validate the proposed model by demonstrating statistically significant linkages among the key constructs, thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge on tourism behavior. From a practical perspective, the study highlights the importance of designing destination attributes that align with tourists' intrinsic motivations and expectations. Destination planners and tourism managers are encouraged to enhance the uniqueness, attractiveness, and experiential value of destinations to strengthen tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The study offers valuable insights for sustainable tourism development and strategic destination management in mountain regions.

Keywords: domestic tourists, travel motivation, satisfaction, destination loyalty

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the intense competition among destination promoters and the crowded market, it is significant to understand the tourists' satisfaction and destination loyalty variables. It is essential to comprehend how variables affect tourist satisfaction, tourism motivation, and destination loyalty (Kumar & Bhinder, 2024). Destination promoters need to comprehend whether tourist motivation and pleasure are the factors underlying recurring travel to destinations. Determining whether this relationship applies to all segments or just some segments. Himachal Pradesh is a traveler's paradise since it has some of the most magnificent scenery on earth. It has mountains, steep gorges, furious rivers, scenic lakes, and flower-covered meadows. High passes and twisting roads connect its high mountains and lowlands. Himachal Pradesh rises to the formidable Pir-panjal, Choor Chandni, and Kinner Kailas from the Shivalik Range. Himachal Pradesh is one of the famous tourist destinations for National and International tourists. Some major tourist destinations of Himachal Pradesh are Shimla, Dharmshala, Kullu, Manali, Rohtang Pass, Chamba, Kinnaur, Kangra, and Lahaul Spiti.

A lot of work has been done worldwide on destination loyalty and tourist satisfaction. Very limited empirical studies have been done on these variables in the context of the Himalayan states of India, particularly Himachal Pradesh. Mostly destination loyalty and tourist satisfaction studies have been conducted on beach destinations, urban destinations, and in the international context. In the context of the Indian Himalayan region, domestic mountain tourism is different because of different travel motives, risk perceptions, accessibility challenges, and infrastructural problems.

This study has its own geographical scope; this study was conducted in districts that receive the maximum domestic tourist flow, i.e., Shimla, Kangra, Kullu, Kinnaur, and Lahaul-Spiti. These districts also have infrastructural and accessibility constraints and represent high, low, and mid-altitude tourism zones. State Government promotes economically driven tourism development. This study has its own significance for the Himalayan state of India to ensure sustainable

* Corresponding author

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tourism development and to promote domestic tourism in the state. Domestic tourism has a variety of advantages over international tourism from the point of view of its contribution to economic development. Compared to other tourist categories, domestic tourists are more likely to buy domestically produced goods and services. These home visitors are more likely to support local enterprises and participate in community improvement initiatives. Domestic travel, which includes visiting friends and family and participating in other social activities, disperses tourists to regions that are not as popular with foreign tourists and encourages more balanced regional growth. Additionally, domestic tourism is related to stronger pro-poor, backward economic links than inbound tourism. Domestic tourism aids in addressing regional seasonality.

The benefits of domestic tourism for the state are a strong research-based reason for conducting a study on domestic tourists. This shows that domestic tourism is not a substitute for international tourism but also provides community upliftment and economic benefits to the state, which further enhances the importance of this study.

Himachal Pradesh's economy heavily depends on the tourism sector. The Himachal administration has placed a strong emphasis on getting the tourism sector to generate 12% of all jobs in the state. The state's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) proportion of tourism is also expected to rise to 8.5%, according to the government (Kumar & Sharma, 2022). There are numerous possibilities for domestic tourism in Himachal Pradesh. Due to infrastructure challenges, poor accessibility, and perceived risks, domestic mountain tourism varies significantly. Till now, very few empirical studies have been conducted to study these factors together in Himachal Pradesh. Moreover, very little existing research has tested how push and pull motivations, along with different altitude zones and accessibility challenges, impact tourist satisfaction, and loyalty.

This study aims to empirically examine the association between travel motivation factors (push and pull), overall satisfaction, and tourists' loyalty towards a destination. With the assumption that push and pull factors can influence tourist behavior, thereby leading to overall tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. This study provides guidance that is supported by empirical evidence to policymakers, local businesses, and the domestic tourism market to grow.

Literature Review

Tourist Satisfaction and Tourism Motivation: How well a tourist destination meets its requirements and motivations. The push and pull factors are tourists' expectations, while the satisfaction level expresses whether such expectations have been met. Satisfaction is a strong determinant of tourist loyalty and intention to return.

Which is exactly what the destination promoter wants to foster in a fiercely competitive field. Hence, by investigating how motivation influences satisfaction and explaining the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty, this research is directly connected to destinations such as Himachal Pradesh in its applied goal of providing design recommendations that are more appealing to the domestic tourists and evoke feelings for their return.

Tourists' satisfaction is strongly associated with the extent to which their travel-related needs are fulfilled. Consequently, understanding motivation and knowing its response to various levels of satisfaction is extremely important. Indeed, satisfaction plays a big role in marketing research. To successfully promote destinations, tourist satisfaction is essential (Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz, 2020; Zeng & Li, 2021). Although domestic travel has become a significant industry since the COVID-19 pandemic, research into domestic travel motivations has not received as much attention as it deserves, in comparison to research into international travel motivations in developing countries (Esubalew & Singh, 2020; Melese, 2022).

The tourism and destination marketing literature commonly interprets travel motivations and destination choice through the lens of push and pull factors. Most authors agree that people choose their travel and destinations based on various push and pull motivating factors (Su et al., 2020; Nikou et al., 2025). According to the theory, people are initially drawn to travel by internal desires before being pulled by physical or external ones (Destination attributes). Moreover, push and pull motivating factors consider the possibility of both independence and dependence between these two sets of forces.

The intrinsic motivations that compel people to travel to a place are known as push factors. These are essentially socio-psychological motivations that arise from within an individual and drive the desire to travel. Motivational factors commonly include the need to escape routine or monotonous environments, the desire to strengthen family or personal relationships, and the desire for self-exploration and self-assessment. They also include the wish for relaxation, the desire to relive past experiences, or engage in activities that refresh old memories and motivations, such as the opportunity for social interaction and forming new connections. These internal motivations collectively shape the fundamental reasons why people seek travel experiences (Lin & Liu, 2022). After choosing where to travel, pull factors are what cause people to choose one destination over another. Ngoc et al. (2023), classify pull motives are classified as budget, cosmopolitan interests, culture, heritage, wildness, effortless travel, resources, and hunting.

Research Gaps on Tourist Satisfaction and Tourism Motivation in the Literature

It is noted that very little empirical research focuses exclusively on domestic tourists' travel motivations. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand that no research has been done to investigate the travel-related reasons given by domestic tourists from various Indian states. Push and pull motivations are critical to understand for several reasons. First, it would help tourism planners develop culture-based or target-based products that meet the expectations and needs of various domestic tourists. Secondly, the present study will assist industry practitioners, local inhabitants, and policymakers in expanding the domestic tourism business in the Indian mountain state, and is a core part of the sustainable growth of tourism. Lastly, the research will contribute to tourism literature by filling in missing knowledge with empirical findings.

However, very few studies have examined the connection between travel motivations and total visitor satisfaction using empirical methods (Zhang et al., 2021). This study will not only investigate the motivations of domestic tourists but also the association between these motivational factors and overall tourist satisfaction. Prior studies have examined the impact

of travel motivations on overall tourist satisfaction (Jang & Liping, 2002; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Meng et al., 2008; Žabkar et al., 2010; Su et al., 2020). Every variable, push factors (PUSF) and pull factors (PULF), has estimated effects on overall tourist satisfaction (OTS). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are developed to examine the relationship between travel motivations (push and pull factors) and overall tourist satisfaction.

H1: Push factors (PUSF) have a positive effect on overall tourist satisfaction (OTS).

H2: Pull factors (PULF) have a positive effect on overall tourist satisfaction (OTS).

Tourists' Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty

Willingness to buy more and Word-of-mouth are two sides of the same coin among Kenyan consumers. Besides that, both willingness to buy more and word-of-mouth by their buying behavior are well-known in the literature as indicators of customer loyalty (Ryu & Park, 2020). Customers' propensity to repurchase goods is what's meant by "willingness to repurchase" (Sullivan & Kim, 2018). While word-of-mouth advertising is characterized by a client's desire to continue doing business with a vendor (Ismagilova et al., 2020). It is well established in the literature that customer satisfaction has a significant impact on client retention and repeat business (Chi & Gursoy, 2009; Bhatnagar & Nim, 2019). Customers are more likely to refer a business and buy from it again if they are happy with the quality of its products and services (Lina, 2022).

The probability of recommending is positively affected by satisfaction and the possibility of return (Quynh et al., 2021). Hence, when there is high satisfaction and quality performance, then loyalty and repeat purchases will increase (Kuo et al., 2015). Lewis et al. (2022) noted that places can be seen as products, as it is a form of product, the tourist would tell another tourist (family members or friends) or visit again if they feel good about the place. The likelihood of visitors recommending the destination and returning is therefore a strong indication of their ability to contribute value (Suban, 2025). Fang et al. (2024), suggest that while attempting to understand destination loyalty, motivation, and satisfaction, structures should be considered. Satisfied tourists are more inclined to return to the same location and are more eager to recommend the destination to their friends and family (Azis et al., 2025). Recent empirical investigations confirmed that satisfaction has been recognized as one of the key factors to explain destination loyalty, the recommendation of the destination to others, and the intention to return. Cossío-Silva et al. (2019) confirmed that the relationship between satisfaction and destination loyalty makes it a practical strategy for boosting client retention. Kau & Lim (2005) also proved that satisfied tourists will return to the destination. Akhavan et al. (2023); Saha & Nath (2023) conducted structural equation modeling (SEM) to study the relationship between experience quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. The study offered actual proof that satisfaction influences behavioral intentions.

Lee et al. (2011) used path analysis to explore the connections between Chinese tourists' expectations, the quality of their tours, their motivations, their complaints, their contentment, and their loyalty. According to the study, perceived tour quality has an impact on tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. Satisfaction and loyalty are positively correlated.

Lee et al. (2004) revealed a substantial difference in the levels of satisfaction and repeat visitors have a higher satisfaction rating compared to first-time visitors. Kayar & Kozak (2010) strengthened the notion that overall visitor happiness with their vacations had an impact on their inclination to return to the same place.

Destination Loyalty Literature Review Gap

A large portion of tourism research recognizes that tourist satisfaction plays a significant role in shaping post-visit behavioral intentions, including repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth. There is still little research on how visitor happiness affects future purchasing intentions (Yüksel, 2007; Chen et al., 2014). Li & Zhang (2024), suggest that a more recent trend in tourism is the study of loyalty. Consequently, additional research on loyalty is needed to better understand this concept in the tourism industry. Yet, there is no research exploring the correlation between a tourist's satisfaction and loyalty to the Himachal Pradesh region regarding domestic tourism. Figure 1 illustrates the potential causal links that examine the association to address this gap between tourists' overall satisfaction and destination loyalty. Inclusive tourist satisfaction impacts destination loyalty. The following hypothesis was developed to investigate the connection between destination loyalty (DEL) and overall tourist satisfaction (OTS).

H3: Overall tourist satisfaction (OTS) has a positive effect on destination loyalty (DEL)

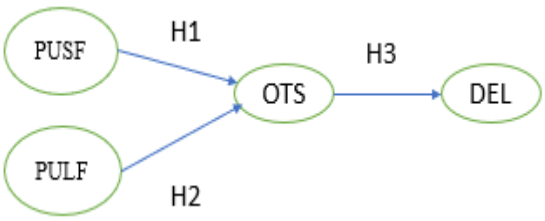


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework (PUSF = push factors; PULF = pull factors; OTS = overall tourist satisfaction; DEL = destination loyalty)

The proposed conceptual framework illustrates the hypothesized relationships among travel motivation (push and pull factors), overall tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty. Specifically, push and pull motivations are posited to influence overall tourist satisfaction, which in turn acts as a mediating variable affecting destination loyalty. This model provides a structured basis for empirically examining both the direct and indirect effects among the study constructs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sampling Design

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which is recognized as being highly sensitive to sample size and can be unreliable when applied to data coming from small samples, is one of the data analysis methods (Li, 2016) have been proposed for this study. According to the literature, there are no universally recognized standards for choosing an exact sample size when employing CFA, a component of SEM (Hair et al., 2010). But still, there have been suggested general guidelines for sample size. The majority of experts agree that 100 is the appropriate sample size for SEM (Hair et al., 2010). Cliff (1987) suggests that for a 40-variable scale (item statements), the sample size should be 150. Several heuristics can be used to calculate a priori statistical power analysis. Structural equation modeling with AMOS requires a minimum sample size that is five times the number of variables or indicators used to ensure adequate data for accurate results, according to a long-standing guideline (Pallant, 2020). Due to the five variables in the proposed model, this research considers two exogenous variables with a combined total of 56 indicators (30 for PUSF and 26 for PULF), as well as two endogenous variables composed of 8 indicators (4 for OTS and 4 for DEL) and 1 moderating variable with 16 indicators. As there are 80 indicators ($80 \times 5 = 400$), the necessary sample size is 400. An alternate approach claims that when the model is reflective and the use of partial least squares (PLS), as adopted in the current study, allows for greater flexibility in sample size, as it is not directly dependent on the number of indicators. The study will use a sample size of 400, which the power calculations indicate is sufficient.

Questionnaire Design

The metrics developed by (Battour et al., 2012; Battour & Ismail, 2014; Mustelier-Puig et al., 2018) have been applied to assess overall tourist satisfaction (OTS). There are four items in the OTS construct, 26 items in the pull motivation (PULF) construct, and 27 in the push motivation (PUSF) construct that were taken (Shawn & Wu, 2006; Arowosafe et al., 2022; Ngoc et al., 2023). The four items for destination loyalty were adapted based on earlier studies (Lee et al., 2007; Kim & Brown, 2012). The 5-point Likert scale, which has statements about each characteristic ranging from 1 to 5, was employed to empirically measure tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. By using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represents "not at all important," and 5 represents "very important." A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed between September 2025 and November 2025 in hotels, homestay units, and tourism destinations in four districts of Himachal Pradesh: Kullu, Lahaul Spiti, Shimla, and Mandi. These sites were selected because lakhs of domestic tourists visit these locations due to the abundance of tourist attractions. Hotels and homestay units were chosen as lodging options. After receiving authorization from the hotels and homestay units, tourists were given a questionnaire with instructions to return the completed questionnaire to hotel reception desks and homestay hotel owners. The tourist destinations were chosen based on the well-known locations in each district. After the tourist completed the questionnaire on the tourism site, it was immediately collected.

Measurement Models

Before evaluating the measurement model, data on tourism motivations were reduced using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Factor analysis is generally used to identify a small number of components from many observed variables. It identifies the main factors that explain most of the variance among all these variables (Hair et al., 2010). For this investigation, the principal components analysis (PCA) method was used. Measurement items exhibiting factor loadings greater than the threshold value of 0.50 are kept for additional analysis (Hair et al., 2010). Using SPSS version 24, all these processes were carried out. CFA is a special case of SEM. Multiple cycles for CFA are applied to the item purification process using a method of maximum likelihood estimation (MLE). Those terms that violate the measurement model are excluded, as suggested by (Hair et al., 2010). It is common to test construct validity using measurement models. The extent to which a measure properly measures what it is supposed to is called construct validity (Hair et al., 2010; Malhotra et al., 2017). The four essential elements of construct validity are convergence validity, discriminant validity, face validity, and nomological validity. Convergence validity can be determined using one of three methods. Convergent validity is assessed using factor loadings, average extracted variance (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). For current measurements, the factor loadings for each item should be at least 0.6 (Awang, 2014). For the construct to be valid and convergent, the AVE must be greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The third criterion that establishes convergent validity is Composite reliability (CR), which indicates the degree of internal consistency between the construct's components. The composite reliability (CR)scores for the constructs should be more than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010).

A construct is unique in measuring a construct in a way that no other construct can estimate or measure, which is known as having divergent validity. According to Fornell & Larcker, (1981), both the squared inter-construct correlation with other constructs and the variance extracted by the construct can be used to assess discriminant validity (AVE). Hence, the value of AVE should be greater than the squared inter-construct correlations to achieve discriminant validity.

Structural Model

In the present research, a structural model is tested employing partial least squares (PLS) method. The second generation of data analysis is PLS and SEM (Gefen et al., 2000). The PLS and SEM software are similar with some minor differences. By Anderson & Gerbing, (1988) SEM is seen as a confirmatory technique that provides a robust approach to assessing and modifying theory. On the other hand, PLS is like Ordinary least squares linear multiple regression in that it explains variance, while SEM covariance-based estimates both observed and latent variables. PLS estimates model parameters to reduce the residual variance associated with each dependent variable (Gefen et al., 2000). Partial least squares (PLS) can serve to both validate theoretical constructs and explore potential associations, offering insights for subsequent testing (Chin, 1998).

RESULTS

In Himachal Pradesh's four districts of Kullu, Lahaul Spiti, Shimla, and Mandi, the surveys were distributed in hotels, homestays, and tourist destinations. 434 questionnaires out of 800 were completed and returned, with a 54.2% effective response rate. After data cleaning, the sample size was 403. Table 1 presents the respondents' state of origin, while Table 2 provides a summary of their demographic characteristics.

Table 1. Respondent's state of origin

State/Union Territories	Respondents	State/Union Territories	Respondents
Delhi	61	Bihar	09
Punjab	46	Kerala	14
Uttar Pradesh	27	Karnataka	15
Rajasthan	17	Telangana	12
West Bengal	14	Andhra Pradesh	21
Madhya Pradesh	16	Jharkhand	19
Uttarakhand	17	Chhattisgarh	17
Haryana	41	Chandigarh	36
Maharashtra	19	Goa	07
Gujarat	21	Jammu & Kashmir	05
Total Respondents 434			

Table 2. Respondent's Demographic Profile **(**Note: ₹ Symbolizes Indian Rupee)

	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender (N=403)	Male	246	61
	Female	157	39
Age (Years)	Below 25	33	8.2
	From 26 to 35	233	57.7
	From 36 to 45	96	23.7
	From 46 to 55	37	9.3
	Above 55	4	1.1
Education	Secondary education or less	20	5.0
	Under Graduation	78	19.4
	Post-graduation	229	56.7
	M.Phil./Ph.D.	63	15.7
	Other	13	3.2
Occupation	Student	50	12.4
	Employee	206	51.2
	Businessperson	138	34.3
	Unemployed	9	2.1
Monthly Income	Up to ₹20,000	9	2.3
	₹ 20,001 to ₹ 40,000	114	28.2
	₹40,001 to ₹ 60,000	55	13.6
	₹ 60,001 to ₹ 80,000	108	26.8
	Above ₹ 80,000	117	29.0

Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

800 questionnaires were distributed; 434 were completed and returned. This indicated a 54.2% effective response rate. The final sample size after data cleaning was 403. Data cleaning was conducted to ensure reliability, accuracy, and consistency, and to find out missing data and straight-lining response patterns. The EFA findings identified several strongly associated variables, including five push and five pull travel motivations. After EFA, confirmatory factor analysis was done on the measures using AMOS version 21. The confirmatory factor analysis results for the adapted push and pull factor models are presented in Table 6.

Measurement Model

The validity of the scale was established using the measurement models. AMOS version 21 was used to run the measurement models. The outcomes also supported the convergent and discriminant validity of the scales. Discriminant validity is confirmed when the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than its correlations with all other constructs in the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). KMO and Bartlett's Test: Having a KMO value of 0.910 and a significant p-value of .001 for Bartlett's test, Table 3 demonstrates that the research sample size was adequate and that the construct's constituent aspects are considered acceptable. Consequently, both the KMO and Bartlett's test conditions were satisfied.

Table 3. Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) & Bartlett test of Sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.910
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	10044.413
	df	10611
	Sig.	.000

Tables 4 and 5 present the exploratory factor analysis results, which yielded five push and five pull motivation factors explaining 61.52% and 61.36% of the total variance, respectively. All item loadings exceeded the 0.50 threshold, and Cronbach's α values (.610-.939) indicated acceptable to excellent internal consistency.

Table 4. Push Factors

Push factors	Factor Loading	Explained Variance	Internal Consistency (Cronbach's α)
Factor 1: Explore		34.69	.939
Meeting new people	.818		
Visiting destinations that friends have not been to	.842		
To claim an authentic experience	.838		
Exploring natural beauty	.852		
Factor 2 Exciting and adventure		7.40	.819
Discovering excitement and thrills	.721		
Having fun and being amused	.813		
Being courageous and adventurous	.638		
Being able to behave as I feel	.779		
Factor 3: Knowledge/Education		5.59	.932
Gaining new information or learning new experiences	.712		
Learning something new or different	.632		
Seeing and going to a faraway location	.732		
Visiting religious places	.765		
Factor 4: Escape		4.823	.854
Escaping the pressures at home	.835		
Changing up from busy work	.826		
Feeling at home when traveling	.659		
Living a more straightforward lifestyle	.789		
Factor 5: Family togetherness		3.426	.610
Visiting ancestral or familial heritage sites	.809		
Visiting family and friends	.610		
Engaging in shared family experiences	.815		
Exploring a wide range of attractions	.748		
Total variance explained	61.52		

Table 5. Pull Factors

Pull Factors	Factor Loading	Explained Variance	Internal Consistency (Cronbach's α)
Factor 1: Natural scenery		33.62	.864
Magnificent scenery	.628		
Tranquil mountainous areas	.832		
Untouched natural areas	.858		
Unspoiled wilderness and nature	.842		
Factor 2: Large area and activities		8.41	.865
Large areas to escape crowded areas	.839		
A variety of things to do	.630		
Water activities	.816		
Individual security	.833		
Factor 3 Accessibility & Cleanliness		7.37	.935
Good connectivity	.744		
The condition of the roads is good	.856		
Standards of hygiene and cleanliness	.742		
Sanitary food standards	.776		
Factor 4: Modern atmosphere		5.43	.764
Metropolitan settings	.765		
Exotic environment	.809		
Luxury hotels	.748		
Pleasant weather	.671		
Factor 5: Distinctive culture		5.09	.728
Friendly and engaging residents	.658		
Engaging with culturally diverse communities	.653		
Ancient old cities	.730		
Fascinating town or village	.748		
Total variance explained	61.36		

Fit indices for the CFA Models: Table 6 shows that all fit indices (CMIN/DF, GFI, RMSEA, TLI, PNFI) satisfy recommended thresholds for both push and pull models, indicating an acceptable fit of the measurement models.

Table 7 demonstrates that the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE), which is bolded in the table's diagonal, is always bigger than the correlation values.

These findings imply that the discriminant validity of the study's measurements is satisfactory.

Table 6. Model fitness (Note: PUSF = push factors; PULF = pull factors)

Indices	Suggested Threshold	Goodness-of-Fit Measures		Interpretation
Absolute Fit Indices				
Chi-Square ($\chi 2$)	Anticipated to be minimal	PUSF	PULF	Accepted
		209.542 (p=.000)	98.772 (p=.000)	
CMIN/DF	< 3	2.635	1.995	Accepted
GFI	>.9	.917	.949	Accepted
RMSEA	< .08	.048	.044	Accepted
Incremental Fit Measure - TLI	>.9	.960	.981	Accepted
Parsimonious Fit Measure - PNFI	>.6	.794	.728	Accepted

Table 7. Correlation Between Constructs
(Note: PUSF = push factors; PULF = pull factors; OTS = overall tourist satisfaction; DEL = destination loyalty)

	PUSF	PULF	OTS	DEL		PUSF	PULF	OTS	DEL		PUSF	PULF	OTS	DEL		PUSF	PULF	OTS	DEL
PUSF	**.729**				OTS	.402	.638	**.842**		PULF	.315	**.748**			DEL	.291	.399	.568	**.789**

Analysis of Hypotheses and Structural Model Analysis

Examining the causal association between travel reasons, total visitor happiness, and destination loyalty is the aim of the structural model's validation. The total level of visitor pleasure is therefore put to the test as a mediating factor between travel incentives (push and pull) and destination fidelity. As indicated in Figure 2, this issue was examined by contrasting two alternative modeling frameworks against the baseline model (Model 1). After being discussed, the outcomes of Model 1 will be contrasted with those of Models 2 and 3.

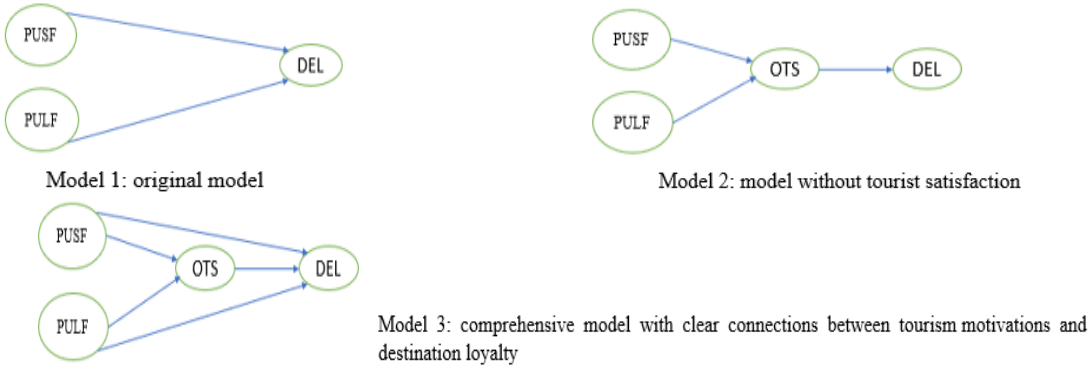


Figure 2. Conceptual Models for Assessing the Mediating Role of Overall Tourist Satisfaction
(PUSF= Push Factors; PULF= Pull Factors, OTS= Overall Tourist Satisfaction; DEL= Destination Loyalty).

Standardized estimates of Model 1 parameters obtained through bootstrap simulation are shown in Table 8. Because the t-statistics are greater than 1, they support the links between the three components. The path coefficients are, respectively, .22, .51, and .56. The explained variance (R^2) is displayed in Table 9 as being .42 for overall tourists' satisfaction and .36 for destination loyalty. Table 9's findings show that Model 1's goodness-of-fit (GoF) is.48, indicating that the model demonstrates an acceptable fit (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 8. Bootstrap Technique for PLS Model Parameter Estimates (PUSF = push factors;
PULF = pull factors; OTS = overall tourist satisfaction; DEL = destination loyalty. ∗ For a 1-tailed test, significant if above 1.64)

Model ⟶	1		2		3	
	Standardized Path Coefficient (β)	t-Statistic	Path coefficient	t-Statistic	Path coefficient	t-Statistic
PUSF ⟶ OTS	.22	6.18*	-	-	.22	6.83*
PULF ⟶ OTS	.51	14.5*	-	-	.52	14.5*
OTS ⟶ DEL	.56	15.7*	-	-	.54	10*
PUSF ⟶ DEL	-	-	.17	4.4	.04	1.40
PULF ⟶ DEL	-	-	.36	7.6	.03	.87

As shown in Table 8, for Model 2 in the comparison of Models 1 and 2, the direct effect of push factors (PUSF) on destination loyalty (DEL) also exhibits a statistically significant result, with a t-value of 4.4, exceeding the critical threshold of 1.64 for statistical significance. Similarly, the direct effect of pull factors (PULF) on destination loyalty (DEL) is also statistically significant, as indicated by a t-value of 7.6, which surpasses the same threshold. Table 9, Model 2, shows that when overall tourist satisfaction (OTS) is removed from Model 1, the R^2 for destination loyalty (DEL) decreases to 0.18, and the goodness-of-fit (GoF) also decreases to 0.32. In Table 10, the average CV-similarity for both models is comparable (H2 = 0.56), indicating an adequate quality of the measurement model is satisfactory in both cases. However, Model 1 shows higher CV-redundancy (F^2 = 0.26) than Model 2 (F^2 = 0.12), indicating stronger predictive capability. These findings provide Model 1 with an overall higher quality for predicting destination loyalty.

Table 9. Assessment of Model Fit: Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) Indices for Models 1–3
(PUSF = push factors; PULF = pull factors; OTS = overall tourist satisfaction; DEL = destination loyalty; GoF = goodness-of-fit; C: Correlations that are squared between the manifest variables and the corresponding latent variables represent communality coefficients; r: redundancy coefficients, show how well the linkages between the inner and outer models can predict events together)

Model ⟶	1			2			3		
	R^2	C	r	R^2	C	r	R^2	C	r
PUSF		.52			.52			.52	
PULF		.60			.58			.60	
OTS	.42	.71	.23			.26	.43	.71	.27
DEL	.36	.64	.27	.18	.65	.09	.34	.64	.28
Average	.39	.61	.25	.18	.58	.17	.38	.61	.27
GoF	.48			.32			.50		

Table 10. Blindfolding Results (PUSF = push factors; PULF = pull factors; OTS = overall tourist satisfaction; DEL = destination loyalty; H^2 = CV-communality; F^2 = CV-redundancy)

Model ⟶	1		2		3	
	H^2	F^2	H^2	F^2	H^2	F^2
PUSF	.50		.50		.50	
PULF	.55		.55		.55	
OTS	.57	.30			.72	.31
DEL	.63	.22	.63	.12	.63	.24
Average	.56	.26	.56	.12	.60	.28

In the comparison of Models 3 and 1, the direct path from push factors (PUSF) to destination loyalty (DEL) does not exhibit statistical significance, as the t-statistic (1.40) is below the critical threshold of 1.64. However, Table 8 indicates that in Model 3, the direct paths from PUSF to overall tourist satisfaction (OTS), pull factors (PULF) to OTS, and the path from OTS to DEL is statistically significant. Likewise, the direct relationship between PULF and DEL is not significant, with a t-statistic of 0.87, which is below the 1.64 threshold. As presented in Table 9, Model 3 demonstrates an improved goodness-of-fit index (GoF = 0.50) and a substantial increase is observed in the explained variance of destination loyalty (R^2 = 0.34). Moreover, Table 10, Model 3, demonstrates that Model 3's average communality (H^2 =.60) is higher than Model 1's (H^2 =.56), indicating a superior measurement model and supporting the measurement model's prior findings. Also, the Model 3 (F^2 = .28) average redundancy exceeds that of Model 1 (F^2 =.26), indicating that the Model 3 structural model is superior to Model 1. In conclusion, the preceding findings indicate that Model 3 is superior to Models 1 and 2 and show that the connection between tourist motivation and destination loyalty was mediated by overall tourist satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The results of the final PLS structural model indicated that there was statistical support for both the association between push factors and overall tourist satisfaction, as well as the relationship between pull factors and overall tourist satisfaction. Overall explanatory variance (R^2) for overall tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty was 0.43 and 0.34, respectively. The resulting GoF value was satisfactory (.50). While the F^2 value (.28) indicated a stronger structural model, the H^2 value (.60) showed a strong measurement model. According to the findings, domestic tourists value natural scenic beauty, large space and activities, accessibility, and cleanliness, and contemporary and metropolitan settings as pull factors for travel motivation.

The PLS findings show a strong and favorable relationship between pull motivation and overall tourist satisfaction: t value (14.5) > 1.64 with β =.51. This outcome supports the strong findings that indicate a direct and positive correlation between favorable location characteristics and overall tourist satisfaction. Regarding the association between destination attributes and overall tourist satisfaction, the results are consistent with those of other research conducted by (Meng et al., 2008; Ghose & Johann, 2018; Tešin et al., 2025). The findings indicate that the key push factors driving domestic tourists' travel motivations include exploration, excitement and adventure, knowledge and learning, escape, and family togetherness.

The association between push factor and overall tourist satisfaction is also present: t value (6.83) > 1.64, with β=.22. While the path coefficient is only .22, this relationship is, however, regarded as being quite weak. There are several possible explanations for this weak relationship. Most of these factors are chosen before travel and are subject to modification while staying, and so may be slightly related to satisfaction. Although it is uncertain if these characteristics affect overall tourist satisfaction, travelers who are motivated by an intrinsic desire to travel may contribute to tourist satisfaction. As per Vojtko et al., (2020), there are extraneous factors that affect tourist motivation. Results from the PLS structural model show a positive correlation between destination fidelity and overall visitor satisfaction t value (10) > 1.64) with β = .54. This finding demonstrates how important tourist satisfaction is in retaining repeat business and word-of-mouth referrals. These findings are supported by previous research conducted by (Cossío-Silva et al., 2018; Stumpf et al., 2020; Dandis et al., 2026).

To investigate the association between overall satisfaction and tourists' loyalty towards a destination, their expectations about the destination, the timing and effort of the visit, overall satisfaction with the destination, and comparisons with vacations to previously visited destinations in other countries. The overall mean score of tourists' satisfaction was observed to be (3.86). Destination loyalty is defined as the intention to visit the destination again. Overall destination loyalty was measured in terms of general trip satisfaction, willingness to recommend the destination to others, and encouraging friends and relatives to visit. The average loyalty score was high (M = 4.63). Findings from the PLS structural model reveal a positive relationship

between overall tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty (β = 0.54, t = 10 > 1.64), confirming a statistically significant relationship. This finding demonstrates that the satisfaction of tourists is crucial to being visited again and recommending the destination to others. These results are consistent with prior empirical studies that report high levels of satisfaction lead to increased intention to revisit and recommend (Mancı, 2022; Suban, 2025). To meet the needs and desires of travellers, DMOs must tailor their marketing strategies to gain an understanding of the motivations that account for why tourists choose destinations and how they can be led to return or refer others (Ningsih & Muslichah, 2025). This study identified the push and pull factors that impact domestic tourists to travel. Similar research is restricted to Himachal Pradesh in this context, but this study, which looked at the association between overall satisfaction and tourists' loyalty towards a destination, provides additional empirical evidence that overall satisfaction positively influences tourists' loyalty to the destination.

This study has practical implications for destination marketers and policymakers. As pull factors have a strong influence on tourist satisfaction, destination marketers should focus on scenic landscape, natural scenery, diverse recreational activities, adventure activities, and product development. Tourism product push should be aligned with the motivation, which includes information and education tourism, relaxation, adventure tourism, and family-oriented tourism. Work should focus on enhancing tourist satisfaction, with improvements in service quality, infrastructure development, community involvement, and regular monitoring of tourist feedback, along with local business development, to increase repeat visits and loyalty. Tourism development approach should be quality-driven, not volume-driven. There should be work on high, mid, and low altitude tourism management and development zoning strategy (Shi & Xiao, 2025). There is a need to link tourism with employment. The study has numerous theoretical implications, specifically for the tourism motivation, loyalty, and satisfaction literature, particularly in the under-researched context of domestic mountain tourism. First, it empirically validates the push and pull motivation theory in the context of a Himalayan Mountain state and shows that both push and pull motivations significantly influence overall tourist satisfaction. This study extends the theory's applicability beyond its dominant areas, i.e., urban coastal and international destinations, to high-altitude, accessibility-challenging mountain destinations. Second, these findings strengthen the theory of satisfaction in tourism by confirming that overall tourist satisfaction plays a full mediating role between travel motivations and destination loyalty.

While previous studies have often examined direct relationships, this study advances the theory by demonstrating that motivation alone does not guarantee loyalty unless it is transformed into satisfaction. It provides solid empirical evidence for establishing satisfaction as a central explanatory mechanism in the development of destination loyalty. Third, the division of motivational factors into exploration, adventure, knowledge, escape, and family bonding, as well as the division of motivational factors in natural scenery, activities, accessibility and cleanliness, modern environment, and culture, provides a context-specific motivational framework for mountain destinations. Ultimately, the use of PLS-SEM and mediation testing contributes methodologically to tourism motivation research by demonstrating the robustness of variance-based structural modeling, especially where both theory development and prediction are central.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined how travel motivation, through push and pull factors, relates to destination loyalty, and whether overall tourist satisfaction mediates that relationship. It used PLS-SEM on data from 403 domestic tourists visiting Himachal Pradesh. The results support all three hypotheses. Push and pull factors both have a positive, significant effect on overall tourist satisfaction, and satisfaction in turn strongly predicts destination loyalty.

Pull factors proved the stronger driver of satisfaction (β = .52) compared with push factors (β = .22). Tourists' satisfaction therefore depends more on what the destination offers than on their internal reasons for travelling. These attributes include natural scenery, activities, accessibility, cleanliness, and cultural character. Satisfaction had a substantial effect on loyalty (β = .54). Once satisfaction was in the model, the direct paths from push and pull factors to loyalty became non-significant. This indicates that satisfaction fully mediates the motivation–loyalty link. Motivation alone does not secure loyalty unless the visit actually satisfies the tourist. The mediated model also explained loyalty better (R^2 = .34) than the direct-effects model (R^2 = .18). The findings extend push–pull theory to domestic mountain tourism in the Indian Himalayas and show that satisfaction is a central mechanism for building loyalty. Practically, destination managers should invest in scenic and recreational products, infrastructure, hygiene, and service quality. They should also monitor visitor feedback and favour quality-driven rather than volume-driven development.

Limitations and Future Scope

The study's context is the first limitation (Himachal Pradesh), which restricts the applicability of the findings to other states and countries, and should be taken into consideration for purposes of future research. It is necessary to do more research using relevant measures (items) of other tourism motivations. To determine the mediating effect of satisfaction, it could be interesting to replicate the study using a questionnaire tailored to overseas tourists in a subsequent line of research. The second drawback has to do with the decision to use the PLS to anticipate the connections in the suggested theoretical model. It is advised to carry out this investigation employing fresh data collection alongside structural equation modeling (SEM) to empirically assess these associations.

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