Destination love in Asia:
Understanding the role of experiences
and perceived value in building tourist loyalty

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Abstract

This study proposes an integrated model to investigate how destination experience, destination love, and perceived value drive tourist loyalty, underpinned by attachment theory and expectancy-value theory. Addressing gaps in previous loyalty research, it combines emotional and cognitive constructs that have often been examined in isolation. Based on survey data from 642 respondents and analyzed using PLS-SEM with SEMinR, the findings reveal that destination experience significantly enhances destination love, perceived value, and loyalty. Moreover, destination love and perceived value act as mediators, strengthening the formation of loyalty. The model shows moderate explanatory power, validating the theoretical integration. This study contributes novel insights by unifying emotional attachment and value perceptions within a single framework, offering a more comprehensive understanding of loyalty-building mechanisms. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of delivering emotionally engaging and value-rich experiences to foster tourist loyalty and enhance destination competitiveness. The results extend existing theories and provide a strong foundation for future research in cross-cultural and emerging market contexts.

Introduction

Destination love, which describes the emotional bond between tourists and destinations, has become a critical focus in destination marketing because of its influence on tourist behavior, such as revisiting intentions and positive word-of-mouth dissemination (Yuan & Vui, 2023). However, diverse geographical and cultural contexts may constrain the applicability of these findings to global markets (Amaro et al., 2020).

Conceptually, there is a need for more comprehensive models that integrate emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions to holistically explain the phenomenon of destination love (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022; Haase et al., 2018). Additionally, the role of technology, such as social media, has been shown to influence emotional bonding and value perception (Hosany & Gilbert, 2009; Kim & Johnson, 2016; Tsai, 2016). Destination love is positioned as the key emotional construct in the model, reflecting the affective attachment and emotional closeness tourists feel toward a destination. The inclusion of this variable directly responds to calls for greater integration of emotional mechanisms into contexts. These additions have been further clarified in the revised manuscript, with stronger empirical grounding to support their interconnected roles.

Research on destination love continues to face various gaps and limitations that warrant attention in future development. Thematically, there is a lack of integration of emotional concepts, such as destination love, into broader tourism models, despite some studies exploring emotional

factors, such as nostalgia (Chen et al., 2020a) and historical connections (Verma & Rajendran, 2017). Cultural contexts remain underrepresented, necessitating cross-cultural comparative studies to understand how cultural differences influence destination loyalty (Ghorbanzadeh, 2024; Suhartanto et al., 2020)

Existing research frequently focuses on specific regions, such as India (Verma & Rajendran, 2017) or Bangladesh (Masud et al., 2024), with limited geographical representation from other areas, particularly Africa and Latin America. Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea are growing in competition in the global destination market, providing new insights to support more effective and contextually relevant destination marketing strategies.

Research on destination love has garnered attention because its significant role in driving tourist behaviors, such as loyalty, revisiting intentions, and the spread of positive word-of-mouth. However, most prior studies have focused on specific geographical contexts, such as Europe, of destination love, particularly in Asia, which boasts unique cultural diversity (Amaro et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022a).

As an emerging icon in Central Java's tourism landscape, Solo seamlessly blends local cultural narratives, environmental awareness, and technology-based visitor services, including e-ticketing and mobile interactions. These elements are consistent with visitors' evaluations of the perceived benefits and emotional satisfaction of the experience (Bagozzi, 1986; Chen & Chen, 2010). Despite this relevance, zoo destinations, such as Solo Safari, have received limited academic attention in tourism loyalty studies, particularly in the fields of emotional and experiential tourism. This study addresses this gap by providing context-specific empirical insights from Indonesia, an ethnically and culturally diverse tourism setting, while also contributing to theoretical development through the integration of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral constructs.

While the concept of destination love has garnered increasing attention in tourism and marketing literature, most existing models remain fragmented, often isolating emotional, cognitive, or behavioral dimensions (Câmara et al., 2023; Won et al., 2024). Additionally, these studies are frequently frameworks that operate within underexplored cultural landscapes, where tourist–destination relationships may evolve differently due to unique cultural, social, and geographic factors.

To address these theoretical and contextual gaps, this study proposes an expanded conceptualization of destination love by situating it within the Indonesian tourism context—a setting rich in heritage, symbolism, and sociocultural values that are underrepresented in global tourism research. This study aims to contribute to both theory development and strategic destination marketing by integrating emotional, cognitive, and behavioral perspectives into a unified model. Accordingly, this research is guided by the following central question: How can a multidimensional and culturally grounded framework explain the formation of destination love among tourists in Indonesia through the integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of tourist identification within an underexplored Asian cultural context?

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Destination Love

Destination love is a concept that has been variously defined across tourism literature, reflecting the depth and complexity of tourists' emotional connections to places. According to Swanson (2017), destination love refers to a passionate, emotional attachment that tourists develop for a place, often manifested through loyalty, nostalgia, separation distress, and advocacy behavior such as positive word of mouth. This attachment is deeply rooted in relational and experiential dimensions such as shared memories, identity alignment, and sensory engagement.

While the concept of brand love has traditionally captured the profound emotional attachment between consumers and brands, its application has expanded into the tourism domain. Recent studies, notably Aro et al. (2018), have introduced the term destination brand love to denote a similar emotional bond with destinations, although the conceptual foundation remains rooted in the original brand love framework. Their framework emphasizes that love for a destination extends beyond mere satisfaction; it encompasses symbolic identification, hedonistic pleasure, and love,

which persist over time and influence revisiting intentions, recommendation behaviors, and emotional intensity in both online and offline contexts.

Destination Experience

Destination experience refers to a comprehensive and multifaceted set of cognitive, emotional, sensory, and behavioral responses that tourists develop during their interactions with a destination's physical environment, cultural attractions, services, and social encounters (Bajs, 2013; Ghorbani et al., 2023). It plays a pivotal role in framing overall satisfaction and subsequent behavioral intentions (Jeong & Kim, 2019; Lai et al., 2021).

Recurring themes and concepts in tourism experience research have been widely explored in previous studies. Among these, the idea of a memorable tourism experience (MTE) is a key focus. MTE refers to a positively remembered travel experience that significantly involves local cultures and unique activities, evoking emotional engagement and creating positive memories (Ur Rahman et al., 2020). Research indicates that the quality of destination services often shapes memorable tourism experiences, tourists' involvement in the experience-creation process, and the design of tourism products (Y.-S. Chen et al., 2020b).

Destination Experience and Destination Love

The connection between destination experience and destination love has been widely examined in diverse contexts and countries, establishing its importance in fostering emotional bonds between tourists and their destinations. Early studies provided a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how experiences influence urban tourism in Iran (Baniya et al., 2024). This study confirmed that creating unique and memorable experiences significantly fosters emotional attachment to urban destinations.

Drawing from both theoretical and empirical contributions, it is evident that destination experience is a critical determinant in cultivating destination love. These findings underscore the significance of providing meaningful and high-quality experiences to foster emotional connections with destinations (Jiang & Garrod, 2025; Putu et al., 2023). Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis is proposed.
H_1: Destination experience has a significant influence on destination love.

Destination Experiences and Perceived Value

Perceived value tourism is a multifaceted concept that refers to tourists' subjective evaluation of their travel experience through a tradeoff between the benefits derived and costs incurred during the trip. In essence, it represents a customer's overall assessment of and evaluation of the utilitarian aspects of their experiences, thereby influencing subsequent behaviors, such as destination loyalty and positive word-of-mouth promotion (Oliver, 1980). Meanwhile, expectancy-value theory (Bagozzi, 1986) underpins the inclusion of perceived value as a cognitive construct that reflects tourists' evaluation of a destination's overall benefits relative to their expectations. This theory supports the rationale that tourists who perceive a high value in their experience are more likely to express loyalty. In the model, destination experience has a positive effect on perceived value, which subsequently contributes to loyalty formation.

The influence of destination experiences on perceived value has been widely investigated in tourism research, revealing its crucial role in shaping how tourists evaluate their travel experiences. Early research by Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2021) focused on the context of co-creating experiences, which contributes positively to perceived value. This study highlights the importance of engagement in enriching destination experience.

More recently, Zhou and Chen (2023) explored eudaimonic experiences of agritourism in China. Their findings revealed that profound emotional experiences such as feelings of happiness and life meaning play a pivotal role in shaping perceived experiential value. Additionally, Amado Mateus et al. (2024) created meaningful and high-quality experiences to enhance perceived value for individuals. Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₂: Destination experience has a significant influence on perceived value.

Destination Experience and Loyalty

Loyalty to a tourism destination is a multidimensional concept that encapsulates the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of tourists' commitment to a destination (Jiao et al., 2022). Specifically, destination loyalty refers to a tourist's recurring intention to revisit a destination, generated by the destination itself, and behavioral aspects are reflected in the actual repeated visits and advocacy behaviors exhibited by tourists.

Further expanding on this theme, Pramanik (2024) shifted the focus to cultural heritage tourism in Bangladesh, providing evidence that destination experiences have a significant impact on destination loyalty in a developing-country context. Meanwhile, Rini et al. (2024) investigated tourism at Lake Toba in Indonesia and concluded that destination brand experience strongly influences destination loyalty, reinforcing the importance of experiential factors in strengthening tourists' commitment to specific destinations.

The cognitive and emotional dimensions embedded in destination experience have been shown to enhance loyalty outcomes. Nenotek et al. (2025) provided evidence that engagement with virtual reality experiences can evoke intense emotional connections, promoting destinations, and memorable moments that encourage tourists to re-engage with the destination. Based on this foundation, the following hypothesis is proposed.
H₃: Destination experience has a significant influence on loyalty.

Perceived Value and Loyalty

The relationship between perceived value and loyalty has been a prominent focus of academic research, consistently highlighting the critical role of perceived value in shaping customer and tourist loyalty across various industries and contexts. Verma and Rajendran (2017) explored this relationship in the context of cultural heritage tourism in India. Their research demonstrated that perceived value significantly influences destination loyalty intentions, particularly in motivating tourists to remain loyal to specific destinations. Similarly, Jeong and Kim (2019) investigated perceived value in the context of sports tourism in South Korea, revealing a significant impact on destination loyalty, particularly in international sports events.

Further studies should examine this relationship in other sectors. Chen et al. (2020a) explored perceived value and loyalty in China's traditional restaurant industry, underscoring the importance of delivering valuable experiences to retain customer loyalty in the culinary sector. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2022b) expanded the discourse on urban destination management in China and concluded that perceived value significantly enhances tourist loyalty, particularly in urban tourism settings. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2022) examined the importance of creating valuable experiences in rural summer health tourism in China to enhance customer loyalty. Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis is proposed.
H₄: Perceived value has a significant influence on loyalty.

Destination Love and Loyalty

Attachment theory (Hicks & Korbel, 2013) explains the formation of destination love as an affective bond between tourists and destinations. This theory provides the basis for understanding how emotionally engaging experiences lead to feelings of closeness, affection, and attachment, which, in turn, influence behavioral outcomes such as loyalty.

Khan et al. (2021) explored brand love in Malaysia, focusing on its passion dimension within the context of halal fast food branding. The study revealed that emotional connections rooted in brand love not only foster brand loyalty but also stimulate electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) behavior, emphasizing its dual impact on consumer engagement and retention. More recently, Yadav et al. (2023) investigated nation-brand love and its influence on loyalty within the context of national tourism in India. This research highlighted the critical role of emotional connections in fostering loyalty toward national tourism, as strong emotional connections with

destinations or brands are essential for achieving sustained loyalty. Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H5: Destination love has a significant influence on loyalty.

The conceptual relationships and hypotheses derived from the literature review and theoretical framework are represented in Figure 1, which illustrates the proposed research model. This model outlines the interconnections between key constructs and highlights the central role of destination experience in influencing destination love, providing a comprehensive framework for empirical testing and analysis.
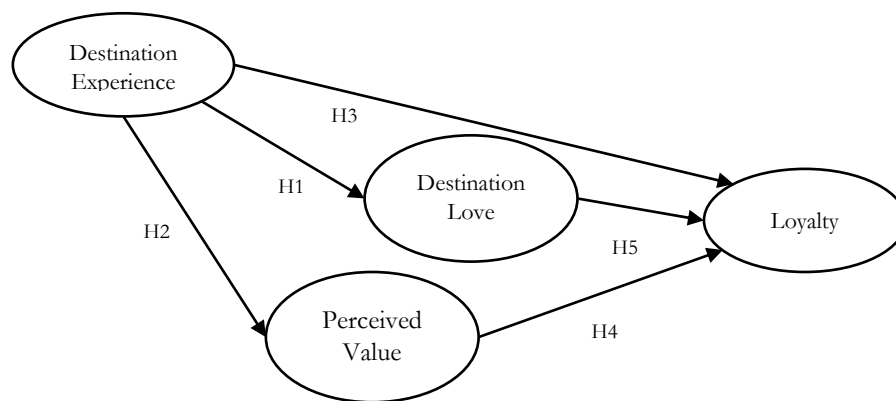

Figure 1. Research Model

Research Methods

This study explored the relationships between related variables using a survey design. Conducted online via a digital platform, the survey ensured broad reach and flexibility for respondents. Using Solo Safari as an example, this study provides this study provides Indonesia-specific contributions that enrich the broader discourse on tourism in emerging markets.

In this study, purposive sampling was applied with a specific criterion: participants had to have visited Solo Safari at least once. This criterion was clearly stated in the introduction section of the questionnaire to ensure that all responses were loyal, which conceptualizes loyalty as both attitudinal and behavioral intention (e.g., revisit intention and word-of-mouth advocacy) (Han et al., 2011). First-time visitors were eligible to complete the questionnaire if they had completed at least one visit to Solo Safari at the time of participation. Their responses enabled the measurement of anticipated loyalty (i.e., future behavioral intentions), a valid and commonly used approach in tourism loyalty research, particularly when real-time behavioral tracking is not feasible (Prayag & Ryan, 2011). Solo Safari was also contextually significant. As an emerging icon in Central Java's tourism landscape, it blends local cultural narratives, environmental awareness, and technology-based visitor services, as evidenced by visitors' evaluations of the perceived benefits and emotional satisfaction of the experience (Bagozzi, 1999; C. Chen & Chen, 2010).

The research instrument consisted of a two-part questionnaire: sociodemographic data and research variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The established scales were adapted, including Shen et al. (2021) for destination love, Hsiao et al. (2021) for destination experience, Chiu et al. (2014) for perceived value, and Li and Zhang (2023) for loyalty. A pilot test ensured clarity and validity, and the four-week data collection was carefully monitored to avoid invalid responses (Tehseen et al., 2017).

Data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with the SEMinR package in R, chosen for its flexibility, transparency, and efficiency in modeling complex structural relationships (Hair et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2021; Zhou, 2022). Reliability and validity assessments based on Cronbach's alpha, factor loadings, AVE, and the Fornell-Larcker criterion confirmed the robustness of the constructs (Hair et al., 2022). Subsequently, hypothesis testing was conducted using a structural model analysis with a bootstrapping procedure of 1.000 iterations to estimate the strength of the relationships among variables.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis of the Respondents

The research was conducted using an online survey distributed to target respondents. Data screening was conducted to identify the problematic responses. According to Hair et al. (2019), screening the respondent data is essential to avoid response bias. Several strategies were implemented to further mitigate potential response bias. First, respondents were assured of anonymity and voluntary participation, which is known to reduce the social desirability bias (Jarvis et al., 2003). Second, attention check questions were embedded within the survey. Finally, descriptive and statistical diagnostics were applied to detect univariate outliers and identify any abnormal response patterns.

These comprehensive procedures ensured that the dataset used for hypothesis testing was both reliable and free of significant bias, thereby enhancing the validity of the study's findings. From the distributed questionnaires, 642 respondents completed the survey fully and met the criteria, yielding a usable response rate of 98.17%based on the collected responses. Table 1 presents the respondents' profile data.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Categories	Characteristics of respondent	Frequencies (N=642)	Percentage
Gender	Male	270	42.06%
	Female	372	57.94%
Education	High school	272	42.37%
	Diploma/Bachelor	316	49.22%
	Master and Doctoral	54	8.41%
Occupation	Student	297	46.26%
	Civil servant	72	11.21%
	Military/police force	1	0.16%
	Private sector employee	132	20.56%
	Entrepreneur	55	8.57%
	Others	85	13.24%

The majority of respondents were female (57.94%), held a diploma or bachelor's degree (49.22%), and were predominantly students (46.26%). The predominance of female visitors suggests a stronger tendency toward emotional attachment. The relatively high education level reflects greater cognitive capacity in evaluating destination experiences. Furthermore, the large proportion of young visitors indicates a preference for experience-based tourism, reinforcing the potential for fostering emotional loyalty toward Solo Safari.

Measurement Model Testing

Internal consistency reliability testing

The measurement model testing process involves three stages: internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Table 2 presents the results of these analyses.

Table 2. Internal Consistency Reliability Testing

Variables	Cronbach' Alpha	Statement
Destination Experience	0.8267	Very good
Destination Love	0.9287	Very good
Loyalty	0.8418	Very good
Perceived Value	0.7936	Very good

The internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha method through data analysis conducted using SEMinR software. As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha values for

each variable demonstrated excellent reliability. These findings confirm that the model achieves excellent internal consistency and reliability across all tested variables.

Convergent validity testing

Convergent validity was assessed based on the indicator reliability (outer loading) and average variance extracted (AVE) values. According to the standards outlined by (Hair et al., 2022), an outer loading score above 0.7 is considered excellent, while an AVE value exceeding 0.5 is regarded as very good.

      The results of the analysis, presented in Table 3, indicate that each indicator within the variables of destination experience, destination love, perceived value, and loyalty achieved outer loading values above 0.7. standards, as recommended by Hair et al. (2022, 2019). This indicates that the indicators reliably and validly represent their respective constructs.

Table 3. Convergent Validity Testing

Variables	Indicator	Loading Factor	Composite Reliability	AVE
Destination Experience	I am content with the experience in Solo Safari.	0.7902	0.8852	0.6589
	I am satisfied with the experience in Solo Safari.	0.8502		
	It was a wise choice to visit in Solo Safari.	0.8466		
	I am pleased with the experience in Solo Safari.	0.7560		
Destination Love	Solo Safari is a fantastic destination.	0.8614	0.9465	0.7800
	Solo Safari makes me feel good.	0.8755		
	Solo Safari is genuinely extraordinary.	0.8698		
	I like this Solo Safari destination.	0.8387		
	I am very passionate about this Solo Safari destination.	0.9650		
Perceived Value	The quality of the experience at Solo Safari is acceptable.	0.7650	0.8661	0.6187
	The experience at Solo Safari is worth the money.	0.8252		
	The experience at Solo Safari makes me feel good.	0.8294		
	Participating in a tour at Solo Safari creates a good impression on others.	0.7216		
Loyalty	Solo Safari would be my preferred choice for tourism.	0.8278	0.8939	0.6782
	I would recommend Solo Safari to others.	0.8331		
	I intend to visit Solo Safari in the future.	0.8392		
	Compared with other destinations, I prefer to choose Solo Safari.	0.7932		

Discriminant validity testing

Discriminant validity testing was conducted using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Hair et al., 2022). According to the results presented in Table 4, the highest correlation values for each construct appear on the diagonal, representing the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE). The values for destination experience, destination love, perceived value, and loyalty were 0.8117, 0.8832, 0.7866, and 0.8235, respectively (Table 4). These values indicate that each construct has a higher correlation with itself than with any other.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Testing

Variables	Destination Experience	Destination Love	Perceived Value	Loyalty
Destination Experience	0.8117	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Destination Love	0.5313	0.8832	0.0000	0.0000
Perceived Value	0.6270	0.5299	0.7866	0.0000
Loyalty	0.5388	0.6707	0.5327	0.8235

      However, Fornell and Larcker (1981) have been criticized for their limitations in comprehensively assessing discriminant validity because of their weak performance in detecting

validity issues, as noted by Henseler et al. (2014) and Radomir and Moisescu (2019). Despite these limitations, our results provided an initial indication of the model's discriminant validity.

Structural Model Evaluation

A bootstrapping procedure with 1,000 iterations was conducted to examine the relationships between constructs. The results of PLS-SEM analysis are shown in Figure 2.
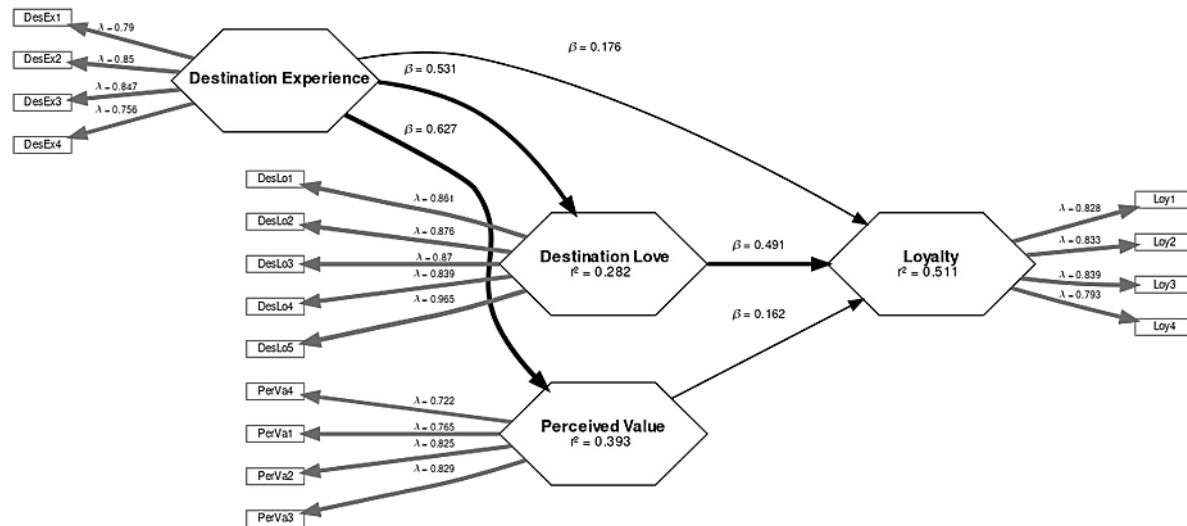

Figure 2. Structural Model Testing

Structural model testing was performed to evaluate the explanatory power of the proposed model. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. R Square Testing

Dependent	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted	FCVIF	Status*
Destination Love	0.2823	0.2812	1.393	Weak
Loyalty	0.5106	0.5083	2.043	Moderate
Perceived Value	0.3932	0.3922	1.648	Moderate

Structural model testing was conducted to evaluate the explanatory power of the proposed model based on the R-square (R^2) values. According to the results, the construct destination love had an R-squared value of 0.2823 (Adjusted R^2 = 0.2812), which is 0.3922), also categorized as moderate. These results indicate that the predictor variables have varying explanatory power for the respective constructs.

Additionally, a full collinearity variance inflation factor (FCVIF) test was conducted to detect potential common method bias (CMB). The results indicated that all the FCVIF values were below the threshold of 3.3, with the following values for each construct: destination love. These findings support the validity of the model in explaining the relationships among the variables.

The next step involved testing the strength of the hypothesized relationships. This was done by examining the t-test scores and p-values from the hypothesis-testing results. The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 6.

The results confirm that destination experience has a positive and significant influence on destination love (H1, β = 0.5313, t = 17.8167) and perceived value (H2, β = 0.3741, t = 9.1532). This supports attachment theory (Hicks & Korbel, 2013), which posits that individuals form positive emotional bonds through engaging and meaningful experiences. Destination experience also has a direct influence on loyalty (H3, β = 0.1764, t = 4.1902), reinforcing the behavioral outcomes predicted by expectancy-value theory (Bagozzi, 1986). Moreover, destination love strongly predicts loyalty (H4, β = 0.4912, t = 13.7651), while perceived value also contributes

positively (H5, β = 0.1618, t = 4.5487). These results validate the integrated model that connects emotional, evaluative, and behavioral dimensions in tourist loyalty formation.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Result

Hypothesis	Original Sample	Standard Deviation	t-test	Status
Destination Experience → Destination Love	0.5313	0.0298	17.8167	Significant
Destination Experience → Loyalty	0.1764	0.0421	4.1902	Significant
Destination Experience → Perceived Value	0.6270	0.0274	22.8981	Significant
Destination Love → Loyalty	0.4912	0.0357	13.7651	Significant
Perceived Value → Loyalty	0.1618	0.0455	3.5566	Significant

These findings align with previous research that underscores the importance of emotional connections in tourism experiences (Orgaz-Agüera & Moral-Cuadra, 2022; Mariani & Baggio, 2022; Pramanik, 2024; Haase et al., 2018). Destination experience, when meaningful and immersive, has been shown to foster destination love, which then enhances behavioral loyalty. The significant effect of perceived value on loyalty further affirms that tourists are not only driven by affective bonds but also by their assessment of service quality, uniqueness, and personal relevance (Stangl et al., 2020; Long, 2023). Emotional safety and post-visit engagement through digital platforms also support the durability of loyalty in a post-pandemic context (Hudson et al., 2016; Sigala, 2016).

This study contributes directly to the Indonesian tourism context, particularly through the case of Solo Safari in Central Java—a culturally rich but underexplored destination. Indonesian domestic tourists, who formed the majority of the sample, showed high digital literacy and strong responsiveness to conservation-oriented narratives. The significance of destination experience on destination love (β = 0.5313) can be interpreted through the lens of Indonesian visitor preferences for immersive, ethical, and identity-relevant experiences. In Solo Safari, thematic zones such as the African savannah and Indonesian rainforest, combined with interactive animal encounters, reflect an experiential design that resonates with emotional expectations of domestic visitors.

Solo Safari also reflects broader patterns within the Taman Safari Indonesia network, which includes facilities in Bogor and Prigen. The success of digital outreach strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bogor—through virtual storytelling and online conservation campaigns—demonstrates the value of digital engagement in maintaining emotional continuity and visitor loyalty. Solo Safari has the opportunity to emulate these approaches, ensuring continuity in relationships through post-visit content and educational interactions. Furthermore, positive perceptions among local communities and conservation-oriented programming help reinforce value perceptions and contribute to sustainable tourism, in line with Indonesia's national tourism development goals (Mahrinasari et al., 2024; Suci et al., 2023).

This localized focus also reinforces the broader argument that emotional and evaluative drivers of loyalty may vary across regions (Omo-Obas et al., 2022). While much of the existing literature comes from Western contexts, this study provides empirical support for the relevance of destination love and perceived value in Southeast Asian markets, especially Indonesia. By integrating theoretical rigor with cultural specificity, this study bridges a significant gap in tourism loyalty research and enhances understanding of how culturally grounded experiences can shape long-term tourist behavior in emerging markets.

Although technological or cultural constructs were not directly measured, contextual insights can be inferred from visitor demographics. A substantial portion of respondents demonstrated high digital literacy, which amplifies their engagement with storytelling, service interaction, and educational content. This supports the role of digitally mediated experiences in strengthening value perception and emotional bonds, particularly in culturally themed destinations (Busby et al., 2013; Park et al., 2022).

Solo Safari's emphasis on cultural storytelling and wildlife conservation differentiates it from urban amusement parks. This aligns with domestic tourists' preference for identity-affirming

experiences and reflects a broader shift in Indonesian tourism behavior toward sustainability and ethical encounters. The immersive design, which includes interpretive exhibits and regionally inspired theming, offers emotional resonance and authenticity that foster destination love.

Moreover, the geographic location of Solo Safari in Central Java—an area renowned for its cultural richness—provides a natural advantage for cultivating deep emotional connections. Tourists who seek meaningful and reflective travel are more likely to evaluate destinations based on cultural immersion and authenticity. This supports previous studies asserting that geographical and narrative authenticity can have a stronger influence on affective and evaluative judgments than superficial entertainment elements (Pradhan et al., 2023).

The application of the model to the broader Taman Safari Indonesia network further validates the study's practical relevance. For example, the pandemic-period strategies adopted by Taman Safari Bogor—such as live streaming, online campaigns, and virtual educational content—were effective in sustaining visitor engagement during periods of physical closure (Chiu et al., 2022; Gupta et al., 2022). These approaches demonstrate how emotional continuity and digital interaction can extend loyalty beyond on-site experiences.

Additionally, tourism activities within the Taman Safari ecosystem have promoted community engagement and sustainability education. At Taman Safari Prigen, for instance, conservation programs are integrated with tourism delivery, reinforcing visitor value while empowering local communities. These initiatives are aligned with national efforts to balance tourism growth with environmental responsibility (Mahrinasari et al., 2024; Suci et al., 2023).

Although macro factors such as the pandemic and social media were not explicitly modeled in this study, their indirect effects are acknowledged. Digital platforms not only enabled destination resilience during crisis but also served as emotional bridges that sustained post-visit engagement. As previous literature suggests, loyalty can be reinforced through affective continuity and community-building via digital storytelling (Erfgen et al., 2015; Sigala, 2016; Hudson et al., 2016).

This study offers empirical confirmation of the hypothesized relationships between destination experience, destination love, perceived value, and tourist loyalty. Through a culturally embedded and statistically validated model, this research advances the theoretical understanding of emotional and evaluative processes in tourism loyalty formation, particularly within the context of emerging Southeast Asian destinations such as Indonesia.

Conclusion and Implication

This study provides both theoretical and practical implications for understanding the relationships between destination experience, destination love, perceived value, and loyalty. From a practical perspective, destination managers should focus on designing high-quality culturally rich experiences that evoke strong emotional connections. Media platforms and virtual tours present further opportunities to strengthen emotional bonds and expand engagement in today's technology-driven tourism landscapes.

The findings highlight the critical role of destination experience, destination love, and perceived value in fostering loyalty, both directly and indirectly. This highlights the importance of delivering high-quality tourism experiences, cultivating strong emotional attachment, and enhancing perceived value to ensure sustained tourist loyalty. From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the understanding of how experiences, emotions, and value perceptions interact with shape loyalty, offering an integrated framework for future studies.

This study offers several avenues for future research in this area. First, cross-cultural comparative studies are encouraged to examine how cultural values influence the relationships between destination experience, destination love, perceived value, and loyalty, given that this study's cultural orientation, such as individualism versus collectivism, is based on emotional and behavioral outcomes. Such studies would enhance the generalizability and cultural sensitivity of the frameworks for emotional tourism (Beer et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2024).

Second, future research should investigate the impact of macro-environmental factors, including pandemics, economic disruptions, and climate change, on tourist perceptions and loyalty behavior. These external factors may not only affect destination accessibility and safety perceptions,

but also alter the emotional connection that mobile guides may offer, providing new avenues to stimulate destination love and perceived value, especially among younger and digitally savvy tourists.

From a practical perspective, destination managers should focus on designing high-quality culturally rich experiences that evoke strong emotional connections and deliver tangible value. This includes leveraging digital platforms and tools to enhance their experiences. For instance, social media can be more than just a recreational site; it can be a culturally relevant, conservation-oriented destination that builds lasting relationships with visitors. The integration of virtual experiences, such as 360-degree tours, VR-based exploration, and interactive mobile applications, can simulate emotional and sensory experiences, making them especially useful for pre-travel engagement and for those unable to travel physically. These technologies not only complement physical tourism, but also extend the emotional connection beyond the actual visit, reinforcing loyalty and long-term relationships.

In today's technology-driven landscape, tourism marketing strategies should embrace a hybrid model of physical and digital engagement to maximize their impact. Emotional strategies such as evoking nostalgia, promoting meaningful stories, and fostering identity-based experiences can be amplified through these digital channels. Destination marketers should invest in digital storytelling, gamified experiences, and platforms that enable two-way interactions with tourists to sustain and deepen their love for the destination over time.

Acknowledgment

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