

Research article

Determinants of customer loyalty among domestic tourist shoppers: An analysis of price and service quality in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to determine how price and service quality influence customer loyalty among domestic tourist shoppers in East London, providing empirical insight to guide retail strategies in tourism-dependent urban economies. A quantitative approach was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to domestic tourists engaged in retail activities. Reliability and validity were confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to test the relationships between price, service quality, and loyalty. Both determinants showed a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty. Service quality was the strongest predictor, with respondents expressing high satisfaction with responsiveness, professionalism, reliability, and empathy. Price perceptions were similarly favourable, with tourists viewing retail prices as competitive and offering fair value. The study concludes that consistent service delivery and value-aligned pricing enhance trust and repeat patronage. Retailers and destination managers should prioritise service excellence and fair pricing to strengthen tourist loyalty and improve competitiveness in urban tourism markets. The study provides unique empirical evidence on retail loyalty drivers within a South African tourism context, offering a focused urban perspective and highlighting service quality as a critical factor shaping domestic tourist shopping behaviour.

KEYWORDS

Price; service quality;
customer loyalty;
domestic tourism;
tourist shopping

Introduction

Shopping has remained a vital leisure activity in tourism, although its role has evolved in recent years to reflect shifting social, cultural, and economic trends. Modern tourism experts highlight that shopping is no longer just a practical act; tourists now engage in shopping for experiences, meaning, and emotional connection (Liang et al., 2025). Today, shopping for tourists often involves hedonistic and experiential elements: they buy souvenirs, clothing, handicrafts, and artwork not only out of necessity but also for enjoyment, discovery, and memory-making (Liang et al., 2025). In this way, shopping serves as both a key part of the tourist experience and a motivation for travel (Sthapit et al., 2022). Furthermore, shopping opportunities are now widely regarded as a vital component of a destination's tourism offering, significantly contributing to its success. For many travellers, a trip feels incomplete without shopping opportunities, especially in places where shopping is deeply ingrained in the local identity (Yudhistira et al., 2024). Tourists rarely shop solely for themselves. For example, research on Chinese tourists in Korea reveals that social norms, perceived quality, and group conformity significantly influence their shopping intentions, suggesting that purchasing gifts for friends and family remains a common practice (Dong et al., 2024). Economically, shopping remains a significant driver of tourism expenditure. Beyond direct retail sales, tourist shopping also helps shape a destination's image. When tourists bring back souvenirs or share their shopping experiences on social media, this can boost the destination's perceived attractiveness (Aboalghanam et al.,

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2025). From a destination management view, well-curated shopping environments and experiences can serve as political and marketing tools, helping to cultivate a positive global image. In fact, emotional and experiential aspects of shopping tourism contribute to a destination's brand value, tourist loyalty, and repeat visits (Liang et al., 2025). Understanding tourist motivation is thus crucial. For example, research in Bali has demonstrated that place attachment and shopping motivation directly influence shopping satisfaction, with the shopping experience serving as a mediator of the relationship between place attachment and satisfaction (Yudhistira et al., 2024). From a comprehensive perspective, integrating every aspect of tourism, including shopping, in a coordinated way helps create unique experiences in a competitive international market. Insights from contemporary consumer behaviour research suggest that destinations that intentionally design their shopping options can positively influence both customer satisfaction and loyalty (Sthapit et al., 2022; Liang et al., 2025).

Ulusoy (2011) states that tourist income is a crucial driver of economic development and that tourism services must support it. Later, Al-Ababneh (2013) stated that the quality of tourism services is related to the availability of appealing amenities, which can positively or negatively influence tourist satisfaction and, in turn, affect their loyalty levels (Rohman, 2020). Liang et al. (2025) asserted that a competitive advantage arises from effectively meeting the quality of tourism products and services, which enhances customer satisfaction and boosts the likelihood of repeat visits. This parallels Canny's (2013) study, which highlighted the necessity of providing excellent services to tourists by offering exceptional travel agencies, knowledgeable tour guides with comprehensive information about destinations, efficient transportation options, and access to dining. Additionally, the quality of the tour guide influences tourist satisfaction (Chan et al., 2015). When tourism amenities offer sufficient satisfaction to visitors, it promotes future return visits. It allows them to share positive experiences with others, thus fostering loyalty and establishing a solid foundation. A method to generate foreign exchange involves developing tourist loyalty (Jalil et al., 2021), since it fosters repeat visits, ongoing transactions, and favourable word-of-mouth referrals. Loyalty is shown through the provision of quality services, competitive pricing, value for money, and prompt, satisfactory service (Wang et al., 2024). The South African National Government acknowledged tourism as one of the six key sectors for economic development, and the dedication outlined in the National Tourism Sector Strategy advocated for the establishment of a Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy for South Africa. This reflects the acknowledgment that local tourism plays a vital role in the development of the tourism sector (Dlomo & Ezeuduji, 2020). These authors claim that domestic tourism is a crucial basis for economic development in South Africa and further argue that local tourism is fundamental to South Africa's economic growth. Domestic tourism is important for job creation, poverty reduction, and infrastructure improvement, but note that elevated costs and an ineffective transportation network hinder this progress (Dlomo & Ezeuduji, 2020). Domestic tourism demand fuels international tourism demand, and it is essential to maintain a substantial share of South Africans' tourism spending in South Africa for local economic development. Tourists might travel locally, provincially, or nationally to explore tourist sites or visit friends and family (Makhaola & Proches, 2017). Domestic tourism is vital for the success of any tourism destination and is thus considered the foundation of the tourism industry. Given the above, this research aims to evaluate the impact of price and service quality on tourist loyalty in the context of domestic tourism in South Africa.

Literature review

Shopping has remained a vital leisure activity in tourism, although its role has evolved in recent years to reflect shifting social, cultural, and economic trends. Modern tourism experts highlight that shopping is no longer just a practical act; tourists now engage in shopping for experiences, meaning, and emotional connection (Liang et al., 2025). Today, shopping for tourists often involves hedonistic and experiential elements: they buy souvenirs, clothing, handicrafts, and artwork not only out of necessity but also for enjoyment, discovery, and memory-making (Liang et al., 2025). In this way, shopping serves as both a key part of the tourist experience and a motivation for travel (Sthapit et al., 2022). Furthermore, shopping opportunities are now widely regarded as a vital component of a destination's tourism offering, significantly contributing to its success. For many travellers, a trip feels incomplete without shopping opportunities, especially in places where shopping is deeply ingrained in the local identity (Yudhistira et al., 2024). Tourists rarely shop solely for themselves. For example, research on Chinese tourists in Korea reveals that social norms, perceived quality, and group conformity significantly influence their shopping intentions, suggesting that purchasing gifts for friends and family remains a common practice (Dong et al., 2024). Economically, shopping remains a significant driver of tourism expenditure. Beyond direct retail sales, tourist shopping also helps shape a destination's image. When tourists bring back souvenirs or share their shopping experiences on social media, this can boost the destination's perceived attractiveness (Aboalghanam et al., 2025). From a destination management view, well-curated shopping environments and experiences can serve

as political and marketing tools, helping to cultivate a positive global image. In fact, emotional and experiential aspects of shopping tourism contribute to a destination's brand value, tourist loyalty, and repeat visits (Liang et al., 2025). Understanding tourist motivation is thus crucial. For example, research in Bali has demonstrated that place attachment and shopping motivation directly influence shopping satisfaction, with the shopping experience serving as a mediator of the relationship between place attachment and satisfaction (Yudhistira et al., 2024). From a comprehensive perspective, integrating every aspect of tourism, including shopping, in a coordinated way helps create unique experiences in a competitive international market. Insights from contemporary consumer behaviour research suggest that destinations that intentionally design their shopping options can positively influence both customer satisfaction and loyalty (Sthapit et al., 2022; Liang et al., 2025).

Tourist loyalty, satisfaction, service quality, and price perceptions

Tourist loyalty indicates a strong dedication to repeatedly buy products or services from the same brand in the future, leading to ongoing purchases (Andreas & Tunjungsari, 2019). Matolo et al. (2021) argued that loyalty towards a product or service is reflected in customer behaviours, such as repeat purchases and a readiness to recommend it to friends or family. When tourists are pleased with the services, they are more likely to return, make further purchases, and share their favourable experiences about a specific tourism location. This behaviour increases the likelihood of revisiting, boosts the country's revenue, naturally provides free marketing for the tourism spot, and plays a vital role in the business strategies of various companies (Khuong & Ha, 2014; Gnanapala, 2015; Chiu et al., 2016). A strategy employed to encourage loyalty involves delivering exceptional service that addresses customers' requirements, offering a price considered reasonable, and providing value for money to travellers (Haarhoff, 2018; Sulistyowati, 2015). Tourist satisfaction is of paramount importance in the tourism sector, which relies heavily on individuals' capacity to repurchase and evaluate their favourable experiences (Medabesh & Khan, 2019). This aspect is a crucial element in achieving higher revisit frequencies, boosting national revenue, and refining corporate strategies across numerous enterprises (Khuong & Ha, 2014; Gnanapala, 2015; Chiu et al., 2016; Ying et al., 2016). The concept of intention to revisit is derived from behavioural intention, which denotes the deliberate intention to engage in a particular behaviour, such as repurchasing tourism services or returning to a specific destination (Wani et al., 2023). To facilitate convenience and meet tourists' needs during their visits, it is essential to deliver high-quality service and ensure product availability that caters to their diverse preferences. Kotler and Keller (2014) stated that facilities are all items intentionally delivered by service providers to customers for use and appreciation, aimed at achieving the highest level of satisfaction. Factors influencing tourist satisfaction include basic amenities, cultural attractions, tourist infrastructure, transportation, and the economy (Coban, 2012; Monoarfa et al., 2022). Tourism service quality and product availability are measures of tourist satisfaction (Vu et al., 2020). Tefera and Govender (2017) stated that service quality is the gap between customers' expectations of a service and their perceptions of its delivery. Substandard service quality results in customer discontent, which may lead to a reluctance to return to the establishment in the future or even an immediate shift of their patronage to alternative providers (Tefera & Govender, 2017). As noted by Tefera and Govender (2016), it is essential to evaluate both perceptions and expectations to effectively assess service quality. Service quality is a complex, multidimensional construct evaluated and interpreted by consumers, comprising a set of crucial components organised into five distinct dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Singh & Mehraj, 2018).

Tourists return to a destination based on the high value, distinctiveness, and quality of tourist attraction services (Singh & Mehraj, 2018). The convenience and appeal of tourist sites significantly impact visitors' overall happiness. As a result, high-quality service can be delivered by providing outstanding service through skilled human resources, supported by sufficient infrastructure and facilities that foster positive values (Kankhuni, 2020). Tourists who have visited a location repeatedly are often pleased because these offerings meet their expectations and leave a positive impression based on their experiences with tourism products, such as the variety of options and information available both online and offline, which encourages them to return (Gallarza et al., 2019). The perceived quality of service is seen as a customer's assessment, contrasting their preferences with the actual performance of the service provider (Ngcwangu et al., 2020). Quality in tourism is defined as providing exceptional hospitality, courtesy, efficient lodging, food, and recreational amenities (Gallarza et al., 2019). Furthermore, Gallarza et al. (2023) state that to ensure delighted and loyal tourists in transportation and lodging during tourism activities, efficiency, ease, and accessibility are crucial. Efficiency can be viewed cognitively, for example, through the provision of information, as competence is necessary for tourism (Phromlert et al., 2019). According to Meshack & Prusty (2021), service quality significantly impacts customer satisfaction. In line with this, other research has also shown a strong correlation between the calibre of services offered and consumer pleasure. Nevertheless, although the dimensions of assurance, responsiveness, and empathy are positively correlated with customer

satisfaction, these correlations were not statistically significant (Suvattanadilok, 2020). Many studies on the quality of tourism services, such as Bratha et al. (2025), examine lodging, hospitality, entertainment, transportation, and car services in relation to overall satisfaction, the desire to return, and the willingness to recommend to loved ones. Speed and accuracy of information are crucial during the pre-delivery phase of the travel experience, as noted by Liang (2008). Similarly, Ruslan (2014) noted that all tourists have the right to access accurate information about tourist attractions. Discussions on how to efficiently provide adequate information about tourist attractions, including lodging, transportation, and infrastructure, are a result of tourism information management activities (Ruslan, 2014). According to Vignati and Laumans (2010), the quality of services, including tour guides, lodging, food, attractions, and transportation, is interconnected. Qualified individuals providing exceptional, skilled service, backed by sufficient infrastructure and amenities, offer positive value, which is key to meeting the standards of tourism services (Jeong et al., 2019). The service quality indicators used in this study focus on personnel (approachable, friendly, respectful, competent, empathetic, and courteous). As Bratha et al. (2025) also stated, tourist satisfaction has a significant impact on loyalty.

From the customer's perspective, price is the perceived sacrifice required to obtain a service (Zhang & Cheng, 2024; Jeong et al., 2019). Many traditional theories, such as the Adaptation Level Theory, the Assimilation–Contrast Theory, and Prospect Theory, focus on pricing as a primary factor in understanding how consumers evaluate price fairness and make purchasing decisions. These theories suggest that explaining price fairness to customers could boost revenue and brand loyalty (Dang et al., 2024). However, most of these theories were developed for tangible products rather than services. Pricing in the tourism industry is more complex due to factors such as customers using unreliable reference prices, prices acting as quality indicators, and a service's value being influenced by both non-monetary and monetary variables (Yang, 2023). Additionally, traditional pricing ideas do not adequately explain the bundling and segmentation of tourist goods and services (Wang et al., 2023).

Tourism shopping experience and perceived value

Building on the preceding discussion of tourist loyalty, satisfaction, service quality, and price perceptions, it is essential to situate these constructs within the broader context of the tourism shopping experience. While service quality and price fairness have been widely recognised as direct antecedents of loyalty, they operate within a more holistic experiential framework. In tourism settings, particularly retail environments embedded within destinations, tourists do not evaluate service and price in isolation. Rather, these evaluations are formed through their cumulative shopping experiences, which shape perceived value and ultimately influence loyalty intentions. In tourism, shopping is a multifaceted activity that extends beyond the transactional act of purchasing goods; it encompasses a range of intangible experiential elements encountered throughout the shopping journey (Haarhoff, 2018; Koivisto & Hamari, 2019; Shi et al., 2022). This study defines the tourist shopping experience as a combination of factors that influence tourists' emotions, cognitive evaluations, and behavioural responses toward the destination, its products and services, and their interactions with local people (Jin et al., 2017; Tosun et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2024). These experiences directly shape perceived value, which reflects the overall assessment of benefits received relative to sacrifices made, including monetary and non-monetary costs. Numerous attributes characterise shopping tourism experiences, including cleanliness, accessibility, store location, operating hours, pricing transparency, honesty, tidiness, reliability, and the general ambience inside and outside retail spaces (Albayrak et al., 2016; Hwang et al., 2025). In addition to these functional elements, experiential and affective components such as emotions, sensory stimulation, perceptions, thoughts, actions, and social interactions also play a significant role in shaping evaluations (Chen & Lin, 2015). These dimensions collectively influence how tourists interpret both service quality and price fairness, reinforcing the argument that perceived value is constructed through integrated experiential encounters rather than single service episodes. The literature commonly groups shopping experience attributes into three primary dimensions: the product, the shopping environment (servicescape), and staff service quality (Lee & Choi, 2020; Tosun et al., 2007). These dimensions align closely with the constructs examined in this study, particularly service quality and price perception, thereby providing a conceptual bridge between experiential theory and loyalty outcomes.

First, the product itself is central to the tourist shopping experience and often serves as a primary attraction within shopping destinations (Albayrak et al., 2016). Tourists frequently seek distinctive, symbolic, or high-quality items that represent the destination and create lasting memories (Meng et al., 2019). Attributes such as uniqueness, design, cost, durability, availability, reputation, and overall value significantly influence satisfaction and repeat purchase intentions (Sharma et al., 2018). Importantly, perceptions of price fairness are often evaluated in relation to product uniqueness and quality, reinforcing the interdependence between product evaluation and pricing perceptions. Second, the shopping environment

or servicescape substantially shapes perceived value. Lloyd et al. (2011) argue that tourists expect local retail environments to differ from those encountered at home, contributing to destination distinctiveness. Elements such as store layout, lighting, window displays, décor, ambient conditions, music, scent, temperature, colour schemes, and cleanliness collectively influence emotional responses and satisfaction (Han et al., 2018). A well-designed servicescape enhances perceptions of professionalism and reliability, thereby strengthening evaluations of service quality. Third, staff service quality remains a critical determinant of the overall shopping experience (Lee & Choi, 2020; Tosun et al., 2007). When sales personnel demonstrate professionalism, empathy, courtesy, and competence, they positively shape tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations (Chang et al., 2006; Han et al., 2018). Staff attributes such as product knowledge, communication skills, professional appearance, welcoming behaviour, and multilingual ability enhance perceived service quality and reduce perceived risk (Albayrak et al., 2016; Sharma et al., 2018). These interpersonal interactions directly influence satisfaction and indirectly contribute to loyalty formation.

Collectively, these experiential dimensions converge to form perceived value, which functions as a mediating cognitive appraisal between service delivery, price evaluation, and loyalty behaviour. When tourists perceive that the quality of service, the uniqueness of products, and the fairness of prices align with or exceed their expectations, they are more likely to develop favourable attitudes toward the destination and exhibit repeat patronage behaviours. Conversely, negative experiential cues may weaken loyalty even when individual service encounters are satisfactory. Therefore, understanding the tourism shopping experience provides a holistic lens through which service quality and price perceptions can be examined as integrated value drivers rather than isolated predictors. This experiential perspective strengthens the conceptual foundation for examining how perceived price fairness and service quality influence tourist loyalty among domestic shoppers in South Africa.

Hypothesis statement

Drawing from the preceding discussion, the tourism shopping experience provides a comprehensive framework within which service quality and price perceptions shape perceived value and, ultimately, tourist loyalty. As demonstrated in the literature, tourists evaluate their shopping encounters holistically, integrating product attributes, servicescape elements, interpersonal service interactions, and pricing fairness into an overall value assessment. Within this integrated experiential process, perceived price fairness reflects the monetary sacrifice component of value, while service quality represents the functional and relational benefits received. When tourists perceive that the benefits of their shopping experience outweigh the associated costs, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward the destination and demonstrate loyalty behaviours, including repeat patronage and positive word-of-mouth. Grounded in this value-based and experiential perspective, this study posits that perceived price fairness and service quality serve as significant antecedents of tourist loyalty among domestic shoppers in South Africa. Specifically, it is expected that:

H1: Perceived price fairness has a significant positive influence on tourist loyalty.

H2: Perceived service quality has a significant positive influence on tourist loyalty.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to explore tourists' perceptions of service quality, price perception, and customer loyalty in retail stores. A structured, self-administered questionnaire served as the primary research tool. This approach facilitated the collection of standardized data suitable for statistical analysis, enabling examination of the relationships among the study's key variables. The target population comprised tourists visiting retail shopping areas in East London, South Africa. Since the study aimed to gather data from visitors who were easily accessible at shopping locations, a convenience sampling method was used. This method was appropriate given the high foot traffic and diverse shopper profile within the selected shopping areas. A total of 150 participants completed the questionnaire. Participants were approached in public shopping spaces when they were not actively shopping. Participation was voluntary, and respondents' anonymity was guaranteed. The final sample was demographically and geographically diverse, representing all nine provinces of South Africa, and included a range of ages, educational levels, occupations, and visit frequencies. Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire divided into three main sections relevant to this study: Demographic Information, which gathered data on age, gender, occupation, qualification, home province, and type of visit. The key variables examined were service quality (SQ), price perception (PP), and customer loyalty (CL). The SQ section assessed tourists' perceptions of service quality using seven items (SQ1–SQ7) rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These items evaluated reliability, responsiveness, courtesy, empathy, professionalism, physical facilities, and overall satisfaction with service responsiveness. The PP section measured four items

(P1–P4) related to perceptions of pricing fairness, competitiveness, reasonableness, and willingness to repurchase at current prices, also rated on a five-point Likert scale. The CL section included three items (CL1–CL3) that assessed the likelihood of continued patronage, recommendations, and overall satisfaction with the products, all rated on the same scale. The questionnaire was designed to be straightforward, clear, and easy to complete, ensuring reliable responses from participants with diverse educational backgrounds. Data collection spanned four months. Trained research assistants approached visitors in major retail and shopping zones in East London. After explaining the study's purpose, participants were invited to complete the questionnaire on-site. Completed forms were reviewed for completeness before being included in the analysis. Data from the questionnaires were coded and analysed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) summarized respondent demographics and provided an overview of perceptions across the measured constructs. Reliability and validity were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to examine the relationships among price, service quality, and customer loyalty. Ethical principles guided the data collection process. Participation was voluntary, responses remained anonymous, data were used solely for academic purposes, and no personally identifiable information was collected.

Results

Demographic profile of participants

A total of 150 participants took part in the study. The sample was predominantly female (71.3%), while males accounted for 28.7% of respondents. This gender distribution shows a significantly higher participation rate among women. In terms of age, the largest group of respondents (44%) was in the 35–44 age range, followed by those aged 45–54 (21.3%) and 25–34 (18%). Smaller proportions were in the 55–64 (12%) and 18–24 (4%) groups, with only 0.7% in the 65+ group. This indicates the sample mainly consisted of middle-aged individuals. Regarding occupation, most respondents were employed (64%), with an additional 12% reporting employment in another category (possibly a duplicate label). Self-employed individuals made up 16%, and students accounted for 8%. Overall, this distribution reflects a sample primarily involved in formal work. Participants came from all nine provinces of South Africa. The Western Cape had the highest representation at 24%, followed by Gauteng with 20%, and the Free State at 18.7%. KwaZulu-Natal contributed 14.7%, while Mpumalanga (6.7%), Limpopo (6%), Northern Cape (6%), and North West (4%) had smaller shares. This provincial spread shows wide geographic diversity among participants. Regarding education, 30% of respondents had completed Grade 12, 16% had a diploma, and 22% held an advanced diploma or degree. Postgraduate qualifications were also prevalent, with 10.7% holding an honours degree, 15.3% a master's degree, and 6% a PhD. This distribution suggests a relatively well-educated group. Lastly, regarding visit frequency, 40.7% had visited the destination two to four times, while 40% had visited five times or more. First-time visitors accounted for 19.3%, indicating that most respondents were repeat visitors with prior experience at the destination.

Measurement model

The Construct Reliability and Validity approach was employed to establish the constructs' reliability and validity. The results indicate that all three constructs, customer loyalty, perceived price, and service quality, meet the recommended thresholds for reliability and convergent validity (see Table 1).

Table 1: Construct reliability and validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Customer Loyalty	0.814	0.818	0.890	0.729
Perceived Price	0.748	0.768	0.840	0.569
Service Quality	0.898	0.919	0.922	0.666

Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs exceed the commonly accepted minimum of 0.70, demonstrating strong internal consistency among the measurement items. Composite reliability values (rho_a and rho_c) are also above the recommended 0.70 level across all constructs, confirming that the indicators consistently measure their respective latent variables. In terms of convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceed the threshold of 0.50. This suggests that more than half of the variance in each construct is explained by its indicators. Specifically, Customer loyalty shows robust convergent validity (AVE = 0.729), followed by Service Quality (AVE = 0.666) and Perceived Price (AVE = 0.569). Overall, the measurement model demonstrates adequate reliability and convergent validity, indicating that the constructs are measured with acceptable precision and accuracy.

Structural model

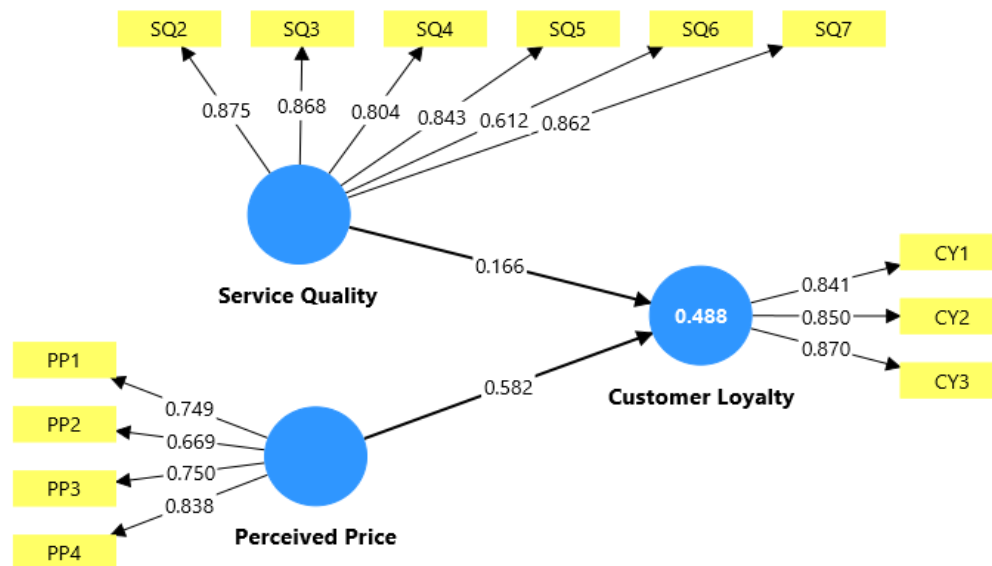


Figure 1: Tested structural model

The structural model demonstrates the relationships among service quality, perceived price, and customer loyalty, with each construct measured by strong and reliable indicators. Service quality is represented by seven items (SQ2–SQ7) with loadings ranging from 0.612 to 0.875, while perceived price is measured by four indicators (PP1–PP4) with loadings from 0.669 to 0.838. Customer loyalty is captured by three items (CL1–CL3), all of which exhibit high loadings (0.84 or higher). These results confirm that the measurement model has good convergent validity and that the indicators collectively provide robust representations of their respective constructs. In the structural model, 48.8% of the variance in customer loyalty is explained ($R^2 = 0.488$), indicating moderate predictive power. Perceived price has the most potent effect on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.582$), suggesting that perceptions of price fairness play a crucial role in shaping loyalty behaviours. Meanwhile, service quality shows a weaker positive effect on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.166$), indicating that although service quality contributes to loyalty, its influence is considerably smaller than that of perceived price. Overall, the model highlights the dominant role of pricing perceptions in predicting customer loyalty within this context.

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the evolving discourse on shopping-related tourism behaviour, particularly within the context of domestic tourism in South Africa. Consistent with contemporary literature that positions shopping as a central component of the tourist experience (Badu-Baiden et al., 2024; Liang et al., 2025; Pang & Sanders, 2025), the results confirm that shopping plays a meaningful role in shaping tourist loyalty. The demographic profile, dominated by middle-aged, educated, repeat-visiting respondents, aligns with earlier evidence that shopping-motivated tourists are typically experienced travellers who integrate consumption experiences into their broader travel behaviour (Vega-Vázquez et al., 2013). This reinforces the view that tourist shopping is not incidental but forms part of a holistic experiential journey in which value perceptions are continuously formed and reassessed. Importantly, the findings must be interpreted through the lens of the tourism shopping experience framework. As discussed earlier, tourists evaluate retail encounters not merely as isolated transactions but as integrated experiential episodes involving product attributes, the shopping environment (servicescape), staff interactions, and price fairness. These dimensions collectively shape perceived value, which in turn influences loyalty intentions. In this study, both perceived price and service quality significantly influenced customer loyalty, confirming that tourists' behavioural intentions are embedded within broader experiential evaluations rather than being driven by single service encounters.

The measurement model results demonstrate strong reliability and convergent validity, reinforcing the robustness of the constructs used to examine experiential value formation. The structural model further revealed that perceived price emerged as the most significant predictor of customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.582$). This finding aligns with value-based theories suggesting that tourists weigh the benefits of their shopping experience against the monetary sacrifice incurred. Within the tourism shopping experience framework, price fairness functions as a critical evaluative cue that signals overall value. Tourists are more likely to

develop loyalty when they perceive that product uniqueness, service delivery, and the shopping environment justify the price paid. In a domestic tourism context such as South Africa, where affordability remains a structural concern (Dlomo & Ezeuduji, 2020), perceptions of reasonable and competitive pricing appear to play a dominant role in reinforcing revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth behaviour. The prominence of perceived price also reflects the interrelationship between product evaluation and pricing fairness. Tourists often seek distinctive, symbolic, or high-quality items that represent the destination experience (Meng et al., 2019). When such products are perceived as offering fair value relative to their cost, the overall shopping experience is strengthened. Conversely, even well-designed retail environments and satisfactory service interactions may not compensate for perceptions of unfair pricing. This supports emerging scholarship suggesting that, in experiential retail tourism contexts, value-for-money considerations can outweigh incremental improvements in service delivery (Dlomo & Ezeuduji, 2020). Although service quality demonstrated a weaker positive effect on loyalty ($\beta = 0.166$), its significance remains theoretically meaningful. Within the tourism shopping experience model, staff professionalism, empathy, responsiveness, and reliability contribute to emotional and relational benefits that enhance perceived value. The relatively smaller effect size may indicate that among repeat domestic tourists, who comprised most of the sample, baseline service expectations are already established. In such contexts, service quality may function as a hygiene factor: necessary to avoid dissatisfaction but insufficient on its own to generate strong loyalty unless accompanied by favourable pricing and compelling product offerings. This interpretation aligns with research suggesting that the impact of service quality on loyalty is context-dependent and moderated by prior experience and expectation stability (Ngcwangu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the broader experiential dimensions of the servicescape likely contributed indirectly to loyalty formation. Elements such as store ambience, accessibility, cleanliness, layout, and local distinctiveness influence tourists' affective responses and reinforce perceptions of professionalism and reliability. While not measured as separate constructs in this study, these environmental cues form part of the overall service quality evaluation and shape perceived value assessments. The findings, therefore, support the argument that loyalty emerges from a cumulative experiential process rather than from isolated performance indicators (Suvattanadilok, 2020). The model explains 48.8% of the variance in tourist loyalty, indicating moderate predictive power and reinforcing the multidimensional nature of loyalty formation. Tourist loyalty in shopping contexts is influenced not only by economic considerations but also by experiential, cognitive, and emotional evaluations. However, the dominance of perceived price in this study highlights the centrality of value-for-money considerations in domestic tourism markets, particularly in developing economies. This finding contributes to refining traditional value–satisfaction–loyalty frameworks by demonstrating that, in tourism retail environments, price fairness may serve as the primary anchor of perceived value, with service quality playing a supportive yet essential role. Overall, integrating the tourism shopping experience perspective with the empirical findings underscores that domestic tourist loyalty in South Africa is shaped by a holistic evaluation of experiential benefits relative to perceived sacrifices. Retailers and destination managers should therefore adopt an integrated value strategy that combines fair and transparent pricing, distinctive product offerings, appealing shopping environments, and professional service delivery. Focusing on any single dimension in isolation may be insufficient to cultivate sustained loyalty. Instead, competitiveness in domestic tourism retail markets depends on delivering coherent, value-aligned shopping experiences that resonate with tourists' economic realities and experiential expectations.

Study implications and conclusion

The demographic characteristics of the sample offer several important implications for interpreting the study's findings. The dominance of female respondents (71.3%) suggests that women may be more engaged in the tourism or consumer behaviours under investigation, which could shape perceptions, evaluations, and loyalty-related responses. Similarly, the concentration of participants in the 35–44 and 45–54 age categories (a combined 65.3%) suggests that the sample is primarily composed of mature adults, who may have more stable incomes, greater purchasing power, and more experience with tourism services than younger groups. This concentration may therefore influence attitudes toward price, service quality, and loyalty constructs. The occupational distribution further strengthens this interpretation, as most respondents are employed (64%), with an additional 16% self-employed. These groups typically have consistent disposable income, which can influence their perception of price and service quality. The broad provincial representation also suggests that the sample captures diverse geographic perspectives, particularly from the Western Cape, Gauteng, and the Free State, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the findings within a South African context. Finally, the relatively high educational levels of respondents, with more than half holding at least a degree or diploma, suggest that participants may have higher expectations for service quality and value. The

high frequency of repeat visitation (80% visiting two or more times) also suggests a sample with substantial prior experience of the destination, which is directly relevant to studies on loyalty and behavioural intentions. Overall, the demographic profile represents a well-diversified sample, supporting the meaningful interpretation of the study's constructs. The predominance of middle-aged, educated, and economically active participants indicates that the findings represent consumers with established purchasing patterns and experience in tourism environments. These characteristics are important because they likely shape respondents' evaluations of service quality and perceived price fairness, and their resulting loyalty behaviours.

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