

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i6.2454>

## From Experience to Traveler Loyalty: Examining the Moderating Role of Epistemic Motivation

Nam Danh Nguyen<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

*The study aims to determine the effect of experience on traveler loyalty through the moderation of epistemic motivation. It analyzes 256 usable responses using quantitative methods such as reliability testing, exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis, and linear regression, following the hierarchical method and bootstrapping technique in Macro Process analysis on SPSS 26 software. The results indicate that peace of mind, outcome focus, service experience, and moments of truth positively impact traveler loyalty through the moderating role of cognitive engines. These findings highlight the strategic importance of linking experiences to enhance traveler loyalty in the context of an emerging economy. Based on the study's results, some implications are provided to assist tourism enterprises in designing services that align with the cognitive characteristics of each customer, improve experience management efficiency, and foster more sustainable customer relationships.*

**Keywords:** *Traveler's Experience, Loyalty, Epistemic Motivation, Vietnam.*

### **Introduction**

Tourism is an important source of revenue; therefore, destination marketing managers are highly interested in discovering, testing, and identifying factors that affect traveler satisfaction and loyalty (Yu et al., 2019). In fact, what remains for travelers are the memories of that experience (Kim, 2018). Although the on-site travel experience is temporary and can evoke a sense of transience (Kim, 2009), the memories preserved from the experience hold significant importance because travelers frequently reflect on their travels (Bagheri et al., 2024). The experiences of travelers influence their satisfaction and loyalty (da Costa Mendes et al., 2010; Bagheri et al., 2024).

Vietnam is a developing country in Southeast Asia, boasting a favorable location characterized by its geography, climate, and natural conditions. They include a coastline of over 3,000 km, flanked by lush forests and stunning landscapes. With more than 125 beaches, Vietnam ranks among the top 12 countries globally for its beautiful bays and features over 3,000 landscapes and historical sites. Consequently, Vietnam holds significant potential for tourism development. According to data from the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (2024), the number of international travelers visiting Vietnam reached 17.5 million, alongside 110 million domestic travelers. Total revenue from tourism is estimated to be around 840 trillion VND, which has a positive impact on the service sector and the overall economy. However, survey data from Agoda (2024) indicates that around 30% to 40% of international visitors who have traveled to Vietnam express a desire to return, a figure notably lower than that of neighboring countries

---

<sup>1</sup> Thanh Dong University, Vietnam, Email: [namnd@thanhdong.edu.vn](mailto:namnd@thanhdong.edu.vn), ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0744-4793>.



3340 *From Experience to Traveler Loyalty: Examining the Moderating*  
such as Thailand (46%) or Japan (70%). This statistic highlights the necessity for tourism enterprises to enhance the traveler experience to bolster loyalty.

Previous studies have examined various factors affecting traveler loyalty, such as demographic characteristics, memorable experiences, destination images, and service quality (Assaker et al., 2011; McDowall, 2010), as well as tourist satisfaction (Campo-Martínez et al., 2010). Surprisingly, few studies have investigated how loyalty is significantly influenced by travelers' experiences in the moderate relationship of epistemic motivation.

This study contributes to the enrichment of customer experience theory and examines the moderating role of epistemic motivation in the relationship between experience and traveler loyalty. Furthermore, the study provides recommendations for managers to cultivate a positive travel experience and enhance traveler loyalty in emerging economies such as Vietnam.

## **Literature Review**

### **Analytical Framework**

The foundational theories employed in constructing the analytical framework encompass customer experience theory, self-determination theory, the theory of consumer behavior, and the theory of the moment of truth. Customer experience theory was initially introduced by Schmitt (1999) and has since been further refined by Meyer and Schwager (2007) and Verhoef et al. (2009). Key research concepts associated with this theory include service experience factors, moments of truth, peace of mind, and outcome focus.

Complementary to customer experience theory, the self-determination theory developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) describes the epistemic motivation that drives human voluntariness based on the need for understanding, control, and autonomy.

The theory of consumer behavior proposed by Solomon (1994) explains the consumer decision-making process based on psychological, cognitive, and experiential factors. According to this theory, loyal behavior is the end result of a series of customer evaluations – feelings – and actions.

The moment of truth theory was developed by Carlzon (1987). It shows that a tough moment is a pivotal point when a customer makes a decision based on a specific situation in the consumption process and has a direct impact on awareness and loyalty.

Based on a comprehensive review, the proposed analysis framework is illustrated in Figure 1:

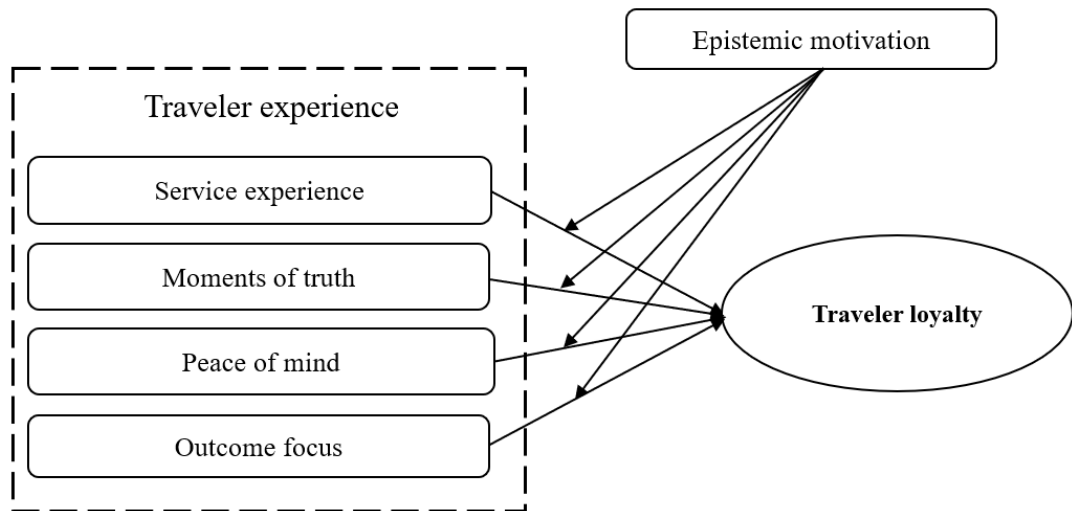


Figure 1. Analytical Framework

Source: Recommended author

### The Relationship Between Experience And Loyalty

According to Schmitt (1999), customer experience is multidimensional, encompassing emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social interactions. These elements significantly impact service quality and serve as a crucial foundation for encouraging customers to return in the future. In the tourism industry, services are often highly personalized and invisible, making the customer experience even more critical. It encompasses everything travelers encounter at their destination, including behavior, cognition, and emotions (Ho et al., 2025). Positive experiences can lead to deep satisfaction, a sense of engagement, and emotional value, which, in turn, fosters traveler loyalty, as evidenced by behaviors such as returning, recommending services to others, and a willingness to overlook competitive factors like price (da Costa Mendes et al., 2010).

Loyalty is the commitment of customers to consistently choose and use the products and services of a specific brand over time (Oliver, 1999). Dick and Basu (1994) define loyalty as the outcome of a combination of positive attitudes and repeat purchasing behaviors, where loyal customers not only provide a steady source of revenue but also act as effective promotional channels through positive word-of-mouth (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). According to Ho et al. (2025), loyalty refers to a traveler's intention to return to a previous destination and to recommend it to friends or family. Traveler loyalty is viewed as a commitment characterized by the frequency with which travelers revisit, stemming from their positive feelings toward a specific tourist destination. When a traveler's experience exceeds expectations, they will feel satisfied and develop trust and emotional attachment to the destination, fostering enduring loyalty (Bagheri et al., 2024).

### Hypothesis Development

This study examines the traveler experience in a multidimensional way to understand travelers'

behaviors, emotions, and expectations holistically. Additionally, the multidimensional traveler experience study helps managers categorize the factors that are important for enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty to destinations and tourism enterprises. In this study, the traveler's experience consists of four dimensions: service experience, moments of truth, peace of mind, and outcome focus.

Service experience is the synthesis of customer feelings, impressions, and reactions throughout the interaction with the business at touchpoints before, during, and after using the service (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). It is one of the key factors influencing customer behavior and their level of engagement with the brand, particularly in the service sector such as tourism, where the product possesses invisible characteristics and relies heavily on the customer's subjective perception (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). According to Maklan and Klaus (2011), service experience encompasses more than just technical or operational quality; it includes emotional engagement, personalization, and the ability to create perceived values that exceed expectations. If customers have a fulfilling and memorable experience, they will be inclined to return to the service and actively recommend it to others (Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2011). Based on these points, the proposed research hypothesis is as follows:

*H1: Service experiences have a positive impact on traveler loyalty.*

Moments of truth are critical instances in the service journey, where customers encounter unexpected situations and must assess the true capabilities of the service provider. According to Tax et al. (1998), these moments occur during crises, breakdowns, malfunctions, or when clients have special requirements. The supplier's ability to respond effectively in these instances through service recovery, flexibility in handling, and professional communication leaves a lasting impression on the customer's mind (Trinh et al., 2023). Liljander and Strandvik (1997) highlight that adaptability in unpredictable situations is vital for maintaining or even enhancing customer satisfaction, even when mistakes are made. Numerous studies indicate that positive experiences during "truth" times have a more significant impact on strengthening loyalty than typical smooth experiences, as they showcase a supplier's true commitment to the customer (Mbulu et al., 2023; Vu et al., 2020). Based on the above arguments, the proposed research hypothesis is as follows:

*H2: Moments of truth has a positive impact on traveler loyalty.*

Peace of mind during the service experience reflects the trust, comfort, and reassurance that customers feel while using the service. According to Bendapudi and Berry (1997), peace of mind arises from the service provider's expertise, proficiency, and capacity to offer clear guidance, enabling customers to understand and navigate the process smoothly. When customers perceive that they are being served by a professional, experienced, and reliable team, their stress and anxiety levels significantly decrease, thus enhancing the overall quality of the experience. In the tourism sector, travelers often encounter uncertainties related to location, schedules, culture, or unexpected situations, making a sense of security essential for fostering their loyalty (Shankar, 2024). When they feel safe and untroubled, they are more likely to maintain relationships and recommend the destination to others (Ittamalla & Kumar, 2024). Based on these arguments, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

*H3: Peace of mind has a positive impact on traveler loyalty.*

Focusing on outcomes emphasizes customers' specific expectations regarding tangible benefits or actual results after using a service (Vu et al., 2020). According to Maklan and Klaus (2011),

this focus reflects clients' tendencies to minimize transaction costs, such as the time and effort required to find, evaluate, and select a new service provider, by relying on trust in positive outcomes from previous experiences. If customers see that a service consistently and effectively meets their individual goals, they are more likely to remain loyal rather than switch to another provider. Vu et al. (2020) note that concentrating on outcomes often involves consulting individuals with real-world experience, particularly those in informal advisory roles, such as relatives or friends. Advice from others' successful experiences further bolsters the clients' trust in the provider's competence while also reducing perceived risk in the selection decision. In the tourism sector, when travelers experience precise results, such as a smooth, scheduled, and cost-effective trip, it serves as a crucial foundation for building loyalty (Trinh et al., 2023). Based on these arguments, we propose the following research hypothesis:

*H4: Outcome focus has a positive impact on traveler loyalty.*

According to Kruglanski and Webster (1996), epistemic motivation is the psychological tendency that drives individuals to seek, process, and deeply understand information related to specific situations. Individuals with high epistemic motivation tend to approach information proactively, prudently, and comprehensively before making judgments or decisions (DeBacker et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2017). Previous studies have demonstrated that epistemic motivation can regulate how people respond to social situations by minimizing the influence of transient emotions and enhancing the role of rational judgment (Greifeneder et al., 2011; Van Kleef et al., 2009). In the context of tourism services, experiences are often subjective and difficult to quantify; thus, epistemic motivation plays a particularly important role. Travelers with high epistemic motivation often actively observe and decode non-verbal signals during interactions, forming a more comprehensive assessment of service quality. In contrast, travelers with low epistemic motivation tend to respond based on emotions or immediate impressions, which can compromise the accuracy of their judgments and the stability of their behavior post-experience. When epistemic motivation is high, the positive impact of a traveler's experience on loyalty tends to be stronger and more sustainable because customers evaluate the service based on deep awareness rather than fleeting situational emotions. Based on the above arguments, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

*H5: Epistemic motivation plays a role in moderating the relationship between experience and traveler loyalty.*

## **Methodology**

### **Measurement Scales**

The preliminary scale is derived from prior studies by Maklan and Klaus (2011), Wang et al. (2017), Bagheri et al. (2024) and is adapted to the research context of an emerging economy like Vietnam through group discussions with travelers who have used the service, industry staff, and consultations with experts in the fields of marketing, services, and tourism (Thakur, 2016).

The traveler's experience is measured through four dimensions: service experience, moments of truth, peace of mind, and outcome focus. They are inherited with 17 observation variables adjusted according to the customer experience framework of Maklan and Klaus (2011). In which, the service experience is measured by four observation variables, symbols from SE1 to SE4, moments of truth measured by five observation variables, symbols from MT1 to MT5, peace of mind is measured by four observation variables, symbols from PM1 to PM4 and outcome focus measured by four observation variables, symbols from OF1 to OF4.

Epistemic motivation is derived from the study of Wang et al. (2017), which consists of three observation variables, labeled EM1 to EM3.

Traveler loyalty is assessed through four observational variables, denoted as TL1 to TL4, and informed by adjustments from the study of Bagheri et al. (2024).

The scales used in this study employed a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

### **Data Collection**

The study employed an optimal sample ratio of 10:1, as recommended by Hair et al. (2010) for exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Therefore, with 24 observed variables, the study requires 240 samples. However, to prevent unsatisfactory responses from impacting the results, the formal sample size is set at 280. The study utilizes a convenient non-probability sampling method; the survey is distributed online to customers who have used tourism services in two major tourist cities in Vietnam, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, via travel review sites such as Tripadvisor and Benthantourist.com. The survey period is from January 2025 to March 2025. The results yielded 256 usable questionnaires. Of the total 256 travelers participating in the survey, 148 were female, accounting for 57.8%, while 108 were male, accounting for 42.2%. Among the travelers, there were 112 international travelers (43.7%) and 144 domestic travelers (56.3%). Regarding age, the group from 25 to under 35 years old represented the largest proportion with 112 respondents (43.8%), followed by the group under 25 years old with 76 respondents (29.7%), the group from 35 to under 45 years old with 48 respondents (18.8%), and the group aged 45 years and older with 20 respondents (7.8%). In terms of educational level, the majority of survey participants held a university degree with 170 respondents (66.4%), followed by postgraduate qualifications with 62 respondents (24.2%), and intermediate/college education with 24 respondents (9.4%). Regarding occupation, 106 respondents were office workers (41.4%), 58 respondents were students (22.7%), 52 respondents were self-employed (20.3%), and 40 respondents belonged to other occupational groups (15.6%). Additionally, the survey revealed that 104 respondents (40.6%) traveled within the last 6 months, 96 respondents (37.5%) traveled between 6 months and 1 year, and 56 respondents (21.9%) had their last trip more than 1 year ago. Regarding the purpose of the most recent trip, 144 respondents (56.3%) traveled for leisure/relaxation, 52 respondents (20.3%) traveled for work or business, and 60 respondents (23.4%) traveled for personal purposes such as visiting relatives or other personal reasons.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative research methods are employed to test research hypotheses. The screening and processing of irrelevant information within the collected dataset occurs. SPSS 26 software is utilized to assess the reliability of the scale, perform exploratory factor analysis (EFA), conduct correlation analysis, and apply MMR hierarchical regression analysis (Saunders, 1956) to evaluate how the traveler's experiential dimensions influence their loyalty. Additionally, to examine the role of cognitive drivers in the relationship between experience and loyalty, the study implements a combination of Bootstrap techniques using Hayes' Process Macro tool (version 4.0) to analyze the extent and direction of the moderate influence more precisely. This illuminates the hypothesis that varying cognitive motives can modify the relationship between experience and traveler loyalty. The research model comprises three regression equations as follows:

- (1) The regression equations illustrate the impact of independent variables on the dependent

variable:

$$TL = \beta_0 + \beta_1*cSE + \beta_2*cMT + \beta_3*cPM + \beta_4*cOF$$

(2) The regression equation expresses the impact of the independent variable and the moderating variable (independent variable) on the dependent variable:

$$TL = \beta_0 + \beta_1*cSE + \beta_2*cMT + \beta_3*cPM + \beta_4*cOF + \beta_5*cEM$$

(3) The regression equations illustrate the impact of independent variables, moderating variable, and interacting variables on the dependent variable:

$$TL = \beta_0 + \beta_1*cSE + \beta_2*cMT + \beta_3*cPM + \beta_4*cOF + \beta_5*cEM + \beta_6*cEM.SE + \beta_7*cEM.MT + \beta_8*cEM.PM + \beta_9*cEM.OF$$

In which:

TL (Dependent variable): Tourist loyalty

EM (Moderating variable): Epistemic motivation

Independent factors (X<sub>i</sub>): Service experience (SE), Moments of truth (MT), Peace of mind (PM), Outcome focus (OF).

Interacting variables: Epistemic motivation and service experience (EM.SE), Epistemic motivation and moments of truth (EM.MT), Epistemic motivation and peace of mind (EM.PM), Epistemic motivation and outcome focus (EM.OF).

β<sub>k</sub>: Regression coefficient.

## Results

A descriptive analysis of traveler loyalty (see Table 1) indicates that most of them, according to my survey, are generally willing to return to the service (3.83). Epistemic motivation received the highest ranking at 3.96, demonstrating that travelers tend to be interested and learn thoroughly when experiencing tourism services. Following this, service experience ranked second at 3.89, reflecting positive customer reviews about the interaction process with the travel service provider. Next are outcome focus and moments of truth with mean scores of 3.87 and 3.84, respectively. This suggests that travelers are well aware of the importance of being assured of service outcomes and the ability of service providers to handle situations that arise. Lastly, peace of mind, with the lowest mean score of 3.75, indicates that some travelers do not really feel safe and lack absolute confidence in the services provided.

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	S.D
Service experience	1.00	5.00	3.89	0.66
Moments of truth	1.00	5.00	3.84	0.73
Peace of mind	1.00	5.00	3.75	0.70
Outcome focus	1.00	5.00	3.87	0.68
Epistemic motivation	1.00	5.00	3.96	0.72
Tourist loyalty	1.00	5.00	3.83	0.80

**Table 1: Descriptive Analysis**

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

The results of the reliability analysis indicate that the scales have Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.788 to 0.827, exceeding the acceptance threshold of 0.5 and reflecting a high degree of internal consistency (Hair et al., 2010). Simultaneously, the Corrected Item-Total Correlation was greater than 0.5, and Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted was smaller than Cronbach's Alpha, indicating that the observed variables were consistent and contributed positively to the scale structure. Therefore, the scales are reliable and validity (see Table 2).

For convergent and discriminant validity, exploratory factor analysis must confirm that factor loadings and the KMO coefficient are above 0.5, with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 (Hair et al., 2010). Table 1 shows that the factor loadings, KMO, and eigenvalues of all constructs meet the requirements to ensure discriminant validity (see Table 2).

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	% of Variance
Service experience	SE1	0.827	0.517	0.818	5.597	49.202
	SE2		0.509	0.803		
	SE3		0.532	0.790		
	SE4		0.561	0.775		
Moments of truth	MT1	0.803	0.604	0.811	4.826	57.381
	MT2		0.587	0.805		
	MT3		0.562	0.782		
	MT4		0.540	0.769		
	MT5		0.528	0.757		
Peace of mind	PM1	0.795	0.631	0.788	2.013	68.295
	PM2		0.602	0.769		
	PM3		0.575	0.752		
	PM4		0.543	0.746		
Outcome focus	OF1	0.819	0.626	0.801	1.425	77.326
	OF2		0.618	0.783		
	OF3		0.544	0.771		
	OF4		0.532	0.754		
KMO = 0.782, Sig. = 0.000						
Epistemic motivation	EM1	0.788	0.619	0.809	1.979	78.103
	EM2		0.603	0.794		
	EM3		0.572	0.778		
KMO = 0.806, Sig. = 0.000						
Tourist loyalty	TL1	0.814	0.580	0.819	1.862	77.695
	TL2		0.562	0.802		
	TL3		0.534	0.785		
	TL4		0.511	0.774		
KMO = 0.817, Sig. = 0.000						

Table 2: Results of Reliability, Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

Before conducting regression testing, factors are standardized (using the centering technique) to

limit multicollinearity and ensure accuracy in analyzing interactions between scales. This approach helps clarify the role of epistemic motivation in the relationship between the traveler's experience and their loyalty.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	1	0.782**	0.699**	0.681**	0.725**	0.747**
2	0.782**	1	0.213**	0.184*	0.269**	0.251**
3	0.699**	0.213**	1	0.247**	0.192**	0.250*
4	0.681**	0.184*	0.247**	1	0.176**	0.213*
5	0.725**	0.269**	0.192**	0.176**	1	0.194**
6	0.747**	0.251**	0.250*	0.213*	0.194**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.  
 \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.  
 Notes: 1 = Tourist loyalty, 2 = Service experience, 3 = Moments of truth, 4 = Peace of-mind, 5 = Outcome focus, 6 = Epistemic motivation

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

All variables have been checked for correlation analysis. As shown in Table 3, a correlation exists between the independent variables and the selected dependent variable. Among independent constructs, service experience have the highest correlation with the tourist loyalty ( $r = 0.782$ ), while peace of-mind has the lowest correlation with the tourist loyalty ( $r = 0.681$ ). Notably, the tourist loyalty is significantly correlated with other variables, with correlation significant less than 0.05.

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.694 <sup>a</sup>	0.675	0.662	0.314	1,724
2	0.783 <sup>a</sup>	0.760	0.738	0.326	1,762
3	0.826 <sup>a</sup>	0.804	0.789	0.355	1,808

Table 4: Coefficient of Detemination

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis show that the model has significantly improved at each testing step, namely:

In Model 1, the correlation coefficient R reaches 0.694, the determination coefficient  $R^2$  equals 0.675, and the adjusted  $R^2$  is 0.662, indicating that independent factors explain 66.2% of the variability in traveler loyalty. The standard error of the estimate is 0.314, which is low and reasonable, demonstrating that the model has good predictive ability. The Durbin-Watson index of 1.724 falls within the range of 1.5 to 2.5, suggesting that there are no signs of autocorrelation in the residuals, which fulfills the necessary condition for linear regression.

For Model 2, the R value increases to 0.783, and the  $R^2$  value rises to 0.760, indicating that this model provides a better interpretation compared to Model 1. The adjusted  $R^2$  also grows to 0.738, highlighting the significant influence of epistemic motivation on the overall model.

In model 3, the R coefficient continues to increase to 0.826,  $R^2$  reaches 0.804, and adjusted  $R^2$  is 0.789. This indicates that 78.9% of the variability in loyalty is explained by the regression model, which includes independent, moderate, and interacting variables. The estimated standard error is low at 0.355, with a Durbin-Watson index of 1.808, indicating no significant autocorrelation in the model. Therefore, model 3 is the best and most reflective model, and it will be selected to explain the results of the analysis in the following section.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	Constant	1.075	0.028		5.462	0.000		
	SE	0.361	0.026	0.387	6.977	0.003	0.782	1.833
	MT	0.319	0.037	0.332	4.351	0.002	0.621	1.792
	PM	0.344	0.011	0.365	5.405	0.000	0.695	1.841
	OF	0.297	0.019	0.304	7.736	0.005	0.796	1.854
2	Constant	2.151	0.035		5.423	0.004		
	SE	0.382	0.029	0.391	6.902	0.000	0.624	1.705
	MT	0.334	0.030	0.365	4.367	0.001	0.659	1.826
	PM	0.356	0.021	0.373	5.219	0.002	0.737	1.832
	OF	0.310	0.018	0.329	7.785	0.000	0.783	1.756
	EM	0.278	0.015	0.315	5.468	0.062	0.608	1.679
3	Constant	1.364	0.022		6.929	0.000		
	SE	0.343	0.031	0.357	4.323	0.001	0.677	1.693
	MT	0.303	0.028	0.326	5.408	0.002	0.695	1.803
	PM	0.374	0.016	0.391	7.711	0.003	0.733	1.752
	OF	0.351	0.011	0.368	5.434	0.000	0.782	1.611
	EM	0.290	0.024	0.312	6.927	0.075	0.694	1.701
	EM.SE	0.265	0.027	0.287	5.413	0.002	0.693	1.824
	EM.MT	0.197	0.010	0.206	6.945	0.000	0.751	1.736
	EM.PM	0.225	0.022	0.239	4.388	0.003	0.789	1.672
EM.OF	0.242	0.035	0.253	5.434	0.000	0.607	1.707	

Table 5: Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

The results of the regression model test indicated that the factors constituting the traveler experience had a positive and statistically significant effect on loyalty, with a Sig. value of less than 0.01. Furthermore, a VIF coefficient greater than 1 and less than 2 suggests that no multicollinearity occurs. Therefore, based on the regression weighted result presented in Table 5, the final regression equation according to the normalized Beta coefficient is expressed as follows:

$$TL = 0.391 * cPM + 0.368 * cOF + 0.357 * cSE + 0.326 * cMT + 0.287 * cEM.SE + 0.253 * cEM.OF + 0.239 * cEM.PM + 0.206 * cEM.MT$$

The results of the study indicate that traveler loyalty is directly influenced by factors such as

peace of mind, outcome focus, service experience, and moments of truth. Therefore, hypotheses H1 to H4 are accepted. These findings demonstrate that positive emotional experiences and the appreciation of post-service outcomes play an important role in shaping travelers' loyalty. In addition, the study's results indicate a significant moderating role of epistemic motivation in traveler loyalty; thus, Hypothesis 5 is confirmed.

Int 1		coeff	se	t	p
Model	EM.SE	0.1630	0.0853	5.4311	0.0001
	EM.MT	0.1851	0.0622	4.6109	0.0000
	EM.PM	0.1496	0.0741	3.8452	0.0004
	EM.OF	0.1725	0.0754	4.2766	0.0003

Table 6: Results of Moderate Impact Testing on the Macro Process

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

Additionally, the study conducted a bootstrap analysis on the Macro Process to examine further the moderating impact of epistemic motivation on the relationship between the dimensions of traveler experience and loyalty. The results of the analysis in Table 6 for the interaction factors showed positive regression coefficients and strong statistical significance, notably, the EM.MT interaction factor has the highest impact coefficient ( $\beta = 0.1851$ ), followed by EM.OF ( $\beta = 0.1725$ ), EM.SE ( $\beta = 0.1630$ ), and EM.PM ( $\beta = 0.1496$ ). As traveler epistemic motivation increases, the influence of positive experiences on loyalty behavior also grows stronger, and travelers tend to be more loyal when they not only engage with the experience emotionally, but also actively analyze, evaluate, and reflect on the value of the service.

Tests of Normality			
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Unstandardized Residual	0.049	287	0.082

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 7: Standardized Residuals

Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26

The study employs the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to assess the normal distribution of residuals. The analysis results in Table 7 indicate that the significance coefficient of 0.082 supports the normal distribution of the residuals, confirming that the assumption of normality for the linear regression model is satisfied.

White Test for Heteroskedasticity <sup>acb</sup>		
Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
51.072	20	0.064

a. Dependent variable:  
 b. Tests the null hypothesis that the variance of the errors does not depend on the values of the independent variable.  
 c. Design: Intercept + SE + MT + PM + OF + EM + SE.SE + SE.MT + SE.PM + SE.OF +

**White Test for Heteroskedasticity<sup>acb</sup>**

SE.EM + MT.MT + MT.PM + MT.OF + MT.EM + PM.PM + PM.OF + PM.EM + OF.OF + OF.EM + EM.EM

Table 8: Heteroscedasticity

*Source: Analysis results from SPSS 26*

The study uses the White test to evaluate heteroscedasticity. The results in Table 8 indicate that the significance level. The coefficient of 0.064 exceeds 0.05, suggesting no evidence of heteroskedasticity. Therefore, the error variance is stable, fulfilling the requirements of the OLS model. Additionally, the scatterplot illustrates the random distribution of residual values around the zero axis.

## Discussion and Implications

### Discussion

This study explores the relationship between travelers' experiences and their loyalty within Vietnam's tourism industry. The results indicate that dimensions of the traveler's experience positively influence their loyalty, aligning with several prior studies, including those by Maklan and Klaus (2011), Mbulu et al. (2023), Shankar (2024), and Trinh et al. (2023). Furthermore, the findings reveal that epistemic motivation significantly moderates the relationship between service experience, moments of truth, peace of mind, outcome focus, and traveler loyalty, consistent with the previous research conducted by Wang et al. (2017). The more epistemically motivated a traveler is, the more experiences they will have, thereby enhancing their loyalty. However, the results of this study contradict those of Vu et al. (2020), which demonstrate that epistemic motivation does not affect the relationship between outcome focus and customer loyalty.

This study also contributes a research methodology to effectively assess the value and reliability of the scale within a research model applied to the tourism industry in an emerging economy like Vietnam. As a result, this research can provide a theoretical and documentary foundation for further studies conducted in other developing countries.

Additionally, research enhances the theory of customer experience. Moreover, the study also broadens the moderate role of epistemic motivation, indicating that the higher the cognitive motivation of travelers, the greater their loyalty increases. This study offers valuable insights for various stakeholders, such as policymakers and business managers, in boosting tourist loyalty to Vietnamese destinations.

First of all, tourism business managers need to create peace of mind for travelers throughout their journey by focusing on clear and transparent information, providing quick support in case of incidents, and committing to service safety. Enterprises should offer complete and accurate details about the program, schedule, travel conditions, cancellation policy, and the processes for addressing issues that arise. Additionally, investing in a multi-channel customer care system that operates 24/7, ensures quick responses, and offers flexible travel insurance packages tailored to different itinerary types and customer segments is essential. Particularly, training employees in crisis management and communication skills in high-pressure situations is crucial to ensure customers always feel supported and protected in all circumstances.

Next, tourism enterprises need to focus on the end results that customers aim to achieve after

experiencing the service. As travelers increasingly emphasize the true value of their travel journeys, enterprises should not only implement effective programs but also clearly define the “achievements” each service aspires to provide, such as a sense of relaxation, inspiration to explore, family bonding, or opportunities to experience new cultures. Tourism enterprises must understand the personalized goals of each customer group to create suitable product packages, thereby ensuring that customers perceive the “value” they receive as greater than expected. Additionally, it is essential to shift the mindset of measuring effectiveness from evaluating processes to assessing perceived results through after-service experience surveys, satisfaction indicators, or online evaluation systems to effectively capture customer psychology and engagement.

Moreover, tourism enterprises need to comprehensively invest in the quality of service experience throughout the entire customer journey, from the stage of learning about information and booking services to actual use and beyond. The service experience is not merely a moment of direct contact but a continuous journey in which every touchpoint shapes the customer's perception of the brand. To enhance the experience, enterprises must design the customer journey in a scientific, synchronized, and seamless manner. The application of technology, such as chatbots, artificial intelligence, and personalized tour booking apps, will increase convenience and speed; however, the human factor still needs to be maintained and emphasized at crucial touchpoints to create authentic and cohesive emotions. Additionally, after the experience, enterprises must implement an after-sales care policy that encourages customers to respond and reconnect through offers, thank you letters, or loyalty programs.

Furthermore, tourism enterprises must focus on effectively managing challenging moments, which occur when incidents or unexpected situations arise, such as delays, changes in plans, complaints, or media crises. These are particularly emotionally sensitive times that can break customer trust if handled ineptly. However, they also present a “golden opportunity” to foster attachments when enterprises respond promptly and appropriately. Therefore, enterprises need to establish a flexible and transparent response process, implement an early warning system, and utilize a tool to capture customer feedback in real time. Additionally, managers should empower frontline workers to address on-site situations, streamline approval processes, and ensure that responses are quicker and more empathetic. Timely apologies, reasonable compensation, and a respectful attitude will help customers feel valued, thereby preventing them from leaving the business and increasing loyalty through restored trust and positive emotions.

Finally, tourism enterprises need to understand the epistemic motivations of different types of travelers and classify them according to their level of epistemic motivation - high or low - to provide an appropriate experience process.

## **Conclusions and Limitations**

The study has achieved two objectives: the first is to measure the influence of experience on traveler loyalty, and the second is to explore the role of epistemic motivation in moderating the relationship between experience and traveler loyalty in Vietnamese tourism enterprises. However, this study also has some limitations, namely:

Firstly, the sample size is concentrated in only two major cities, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, which are the two largest cities in Vietnam. The high level affects the ability to generalize the results. Further research could expand the survey sample's scope to improve representativeness.

Secondly, the study examines the moderate impact of overall epistemic motivation, without

exploring other dimensions or factors such as gender, age, type of traveler, and so on. Therefore, future studies may consider a wider range of factors that moderate this relationship.

Ultimately, the study focused on investigating at a time. Therefore, future studies utilizing longitudinal and time-based research methods could provide more comprehensive results.

## References

- Assaker, G., Vinzi, V. E., & O'Connor, P. (2011). Examining the effect of novelty seeking, satisfaction, and destination image on travelers' return pattern: A two factor, non-linear latent growth model. *Tourism Management, 32*(4), 890-901. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.08.004>
- Bagheri, F., Guerreiro, M., Pinto, P., & Ghaderi, Z. (2024). From Tourist Experience to Satisfaction and Loyalty: Exploring the Role of a Sense of Well-Being. *Journal of Travel Research, 63*(8), 1989-2004. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875231201509>
- Bendapudi, N., & Berry, L. L. (1997). Customers' motivations for maintaining relationships with service providers. *Journal of Retailing, 73*(1), 15-25. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4359\(97\)90013-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4359(97)90013-0)
- Campo-Martínez, S., Garau-Vadell, J. B., & Martínez-Ruiz, M. P. (2010). Factors influencing repeat visits to a destination: The influence of group composition. *Tourism Management, 31*(6), 862-870. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2009.08.013>
- Carlzon, J. (1987). *Moments of Truth 1987*. Cambridge MA: Ballinger.
- da Costa Mendes, J., do Valle, D. O., Guerreiro, M. M., & Silva, J. A. (2010). The tourist experience: Exploring the relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal, 58*(2), 111-126.
- DeBacker, T. K., Crowson, H. M., Beesley, A. D., Thoma, S. J., & Hestevold, N. L. (2008). The challenge of measuring epistemic beliefs: An analysis of three self-report instruments. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 76*(3), 281-312. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/JEXE.76.3.281-314>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Dick, A. S., & Basu, K. (1994). Customer loyalty: Toward an integrated conceptual framework. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 22*, 99-113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070394222001>
- Greifeneder, R., Bless, H., & Pham, M. T. (2011). When do people rely on affective and cognitive feelings in judgment? A review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 15*(2), 107-141. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1088868310367640>
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2010). *Multivariate Data Analysis (7th Edition)*. Pearson, New York.
- Ho, T. T., Bui, T. T., & Nong, T. N. M. (2025). Theoretical overview of the impact of memorable travel experiences on destination loyalty: The mediating role of destination satisfaction. *Ho Chi Minh City Open University Journal of Science: Economics and Business Administration, 20*(3), 3-20. <https://doi.org/10.46223/HMCOUJS.econ.vi.20.2.3491.2025>
- Kim, J. H. (2009). *Development of a scale to measure memorable tourism experiences* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Indiana University.
- Kim, J. H. (2018). The impact of memorable tourism experiences on loyalty behaviors: The mediating effects of destination image and satisfaction. *Journal of Travel Research, 57*(7), 856-870. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287517721369>
- Kruglanski, A. W., & Webster, D. M. (1996). Motivated closing of the mind: "Seizing" and "freezing." *Psychological Review, 103*(2), 263-283. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.103.2.263>
- Liljander, V., & Strandvik, T. (1997). Emotions in service satisfaction. *International Journal of Service Industry Management, 8*(2), 148-169. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09564239710166272>

- Maklan, S., & Klaus, P. (2011). Customer experience: Are we measuring the right things? *International Journal of Market Research*, 53(6), 771-792. <https://doi.org/10.2501/IJMR-53-6-771-792>
- McDowall, S. (2010). International tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty: Bangkok, Thailand. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 15(1), 21-42. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10941660903510040>
- Meyer, C., & Schwager, A. (2007). Understanding customer experience. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(2), 116-126.
- Oliver, R. L. (1999). Whence consumer loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 63(4), 33-34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429990634s105>
- Pine, B. J., II, & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The experience economy*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Reichheld, F. F., & Sasser, E. (1990). Zero defections: Quality comes to services. *Harvard Business Review*, 68, 105-111.
- Schmitt, B. H. (1999). Experiential marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 15(1-3), 53-67. <https://doi.org/10.1362/026725799784870496>
- Slåtten, T., & Mehmetoglu, M. (2011). What are the drivers for innovative behavior in frontline jobs? A study of the hospitality industry in Norway. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 10(3), 254-272. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15332845.2011.555732>
- Solomon, M.R. (1994). *Consumer behavior: Buying, having, being*. Allyn and Bacon, Boston.
- Tax, S. S., Brown, S. W., & Chandrashekar, M. (1998). Customer evaluations of service complaint experiences: Implications for relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 62(2), 60-76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299806200205>
- Thakur, R. (2016). Understanding Customer Engagement and Loyalty: A Case of Mobile Devices for Shopping. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 32, 151-163. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.06.004>
- Trinh, T. T. T., Vo, N. N. Y., & Nguyen, N. P. (2023). Tourist experiences on digital customer services provided by homestays in Vietnam and augmenting behaviors. *Proceedings of the 5th Young Science Conference: Young Knowledge in the Digital Era*, 433-452, Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House.
- Van Kleef, G. A., Homan, A. C., Beersma, B., Van Knippenberg, D., Van Knippenberg, B., & Damen, F. (2009). Searing sentiment or cold calculation? The effects of leader emotional displays on team performance depend on follower epistemic motivation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(3), 562-580. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2009.41331253>
- Verhoef, P. C., Lemon, K. N., Parasuraman, A. P., Roggeveen, A. L., Tsirsos, M., & Schlesinger, L. A. (2009). Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies. *Journal of Retailing*, 85(1), 31-41. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2008.11.001>
- Vu, T. M. C., Bui, T. K., & Tran, H. M. Q. (2020). The relationship between customer experience and customer loyalty - The moderating role of customers' epistemic motivation: An examination across Beauty Service Industry. *Journal of Economics and Development*, 276, 103-112.
- Wang, Z., Singh, S. N., Li, Y. J., Mishra, S., Ambrose, M., & Biernat, M. (2017). Effects of employees' positive affective displays on customer loyalty intentions: An emotions-as-social-information perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(1), 109-129.
- Yu, C. P., Chang, W. C., & Ramanpong, J. (2019). Assessing visitors' Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs) in forest recreation destination: A case study in Xitou nature education area. *Forests*, 10(8), 636, <https://doi.org/10.3390/f10080636>.