

Resolving the Willingness-to-Pay Paradox: A Pricing Justice Perspective on Destination Loyalty in Emerging Tourism Contexts

Eko Susanto^{1*}, Olubunmi Modupe Ajayi²

Tourism Destination Program, Politeknik Negeri Bandung, Indonesia¹
Department of Tourism Studies, National Open University of Nigeria, Nigeria²

Email: eko.susanto@polban.ac.id

Abstract

Traditional tourism pricing models often fail to explain the "Willingness-to-Pay (WTP) Paradox," where high environmental commitment among tourists does not translate into financial readiness. This study moves beyond generic satisfaction-loyalty frameworks by empirically adjudicating the structural mechanisms linking justice-based pricing antecedents to destination loyalty in volatile emerging markets. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA) with a sample of 350 tourists, the research examines how price transparency, integrity, and social comparison influence behavioral intentions. The findings reveal a critical theoretical shift: price integrity significantly outperforms mere informational transparency in establishing perceived price fairness. Furthermore, the analysis validates a sequential dual-mediation framework, demonstrating that the path from pricing justice to loyalty is strictly contingent upon the formation of both perceived destination value and destination trust. IPMA results identify a structural asymmetry: these relational mediators—value and trust—have the highest predictive importance but exhibit suboptimal performance, placing them in the high-priority quadrant for intervention. This research extends Equity Theory by demonstrating that loyalty in nascent regulatory environments is anchored in institutional reliability rather than transient price advantages. Ultimately, it offers Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) a data-driven roadmap to harmonize pricing strategies and secure competitive resilience.

Keywords: Destination Loyalty; Price Integrity; Willingness-to-Pay Paradox; Pricing Justice; Destination Trust; Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis.

A. INTRODUCTION

Pricing strategies in the contemporary tourism landscape have transcended their traditional role as mere economic instruments, evolving into pivotal psychological determinants of destination competitiveness (Hai et al., 2023; Kapera, 2024). In emerging destinations—characterized by nascent regulatory standardization and high price dispersion—the calibration of price structures is inextricably linked to regional economic revitalization and the mitigation of socio-economic vulnerabilities among local stakeholders (Pan et al., 2025; Qi et al., 2025). While these destinations often leverage pristine natural ecosystems as primary attractions, their long-term viability remains contingent upon the perceived justice of the pricing ecosystem (A Senese et al., 2025; Antonella Senese et al., 2025). Recent scholarship emphasizes that tourism promotion alone cannot sustain destination loyalty if the underlying pricing mechanisms are perceived as opaque or exploitative (Hai et al., 2023).

Despite the strategic importance of pricing, a profound disconnect persists between infrastructure development and tourists' auxiliary costs. Investigations reveal that even during global crises, tourists' dissatisfaction frequently stems not from core entrance fees but from the perceived unreasonableness of supplemental service prices, such as food, beverages, and souvenirs (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022). This dissonance is exacerbated by "pricing asymmetries" in the digital era, where informational transparency often fails to align with the ground-level reality of volatile markets (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022). This study examines the structural friction between these disparate price points, arguing that such asymmetries are the primary catalyst for the erosion of destination trust.

* Corresponding author

The behavioral complexity of modern tourists, particularly Generation Z, presents a significant Willingness-to-Pay (WTP) Paradox for destination management organizations (DMOs). Empirical evidence suggests that while this cohort exhibits high levels of environmental commitment (Pulido-Fernández et al., 2024), their WTP for a premium for sustainable destinations remains alarmingly low, stagnating at approximately 10% (Bolaños-Martinez et al., 2025; Pulido-Fernández et al., 2024). This gap suggests that pro-sustainable attitudes do not translate into financial commitment unless anchored by a robust perception of price integrity—defined here as the ethical consistency of costs across various touchpoints. Consequently, traditional linear satisfaction models have become insufficient to capture the predictive nuances of loyalty in destinations where institutional reliability is still under development (Hai et al., 2023; Le et al., 2023).

To address these gaps, this research moves beyond conventional symmetry-based analyses by proposing a sequential dual-mediation framework grounded in Justice Theory (Le Roy et al., 2012) and Equity Logic (Adams, 1965). The theoretical novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that the transition from pricing justice to destination loyalty is not direct but strictly contingent upon the serial formation of perceived destination value and destination trust. By integrating Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) with Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA), we provide a granular diagnosis of "performance-gap" areas—identifying attributes that tourists deem highly important but perceive as underperforming (Hair et al., 2021). Ultimately, this research provides a data-driven roadmap for DMOs to harmonize pricing policies with the evolving psychological expectations of the global traveler, fostering a more resilient and sustainable tourism ecosystem.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Theoretical Anchor: Justice Theory and Equity Logic

Pricing conceptualization in tourism services has transitioned from a purely economic transaction into a multifaceted psychological evaluation centered on fairness heuristics. Justice Theory provides a robust analytical framework for understanding how tourists assess pricing legitimacy through distributive, procedural, and informational dimensions (Bies & Moag, 1986). Within the context of emerging markets—often characterized by nascent regulatory frameworks—distributive justice concerns the perceived appropriateness of the exchange outcome, in which the value received is weighed against the financial sacrifice incurred (Adams, 1965). Simultaneously, informational justice emerges as a pivotal determinant, emphasizing transparency, truthfulness, and timeliness in explanations of pricing structures (Al-Moustafa et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2023). In destinations where standardized pricing is absent, aligning transparent communication with fair pricing outcomes serves as a fundamental mechanism for mitigating tourist risk perceptions and navigating potential informational gaps.

Equity logic further refines these evaluations by introducing social comparison mechanisms through referent cognitions. According to Equity Theory, tourists do not perceive prices in an absolute vacuum but rather through the lens of input-output ratios relative to market standards or others' experiences (Adams, 1965; Rasouli et al., 2023). In destination environments characterized by low institutional standardization and high price dispersion, the propensity to seek external price references intensifies to ensure that the treatment received is proportional. Perceived imbalances in these equity ratios—particularly common in volatile tourism ecosystems—frequently trigger deleterious behavioral responses, including the erosion of trust and a significant decline in revisit intentions (Japutra et al., 2023). Consequently, equity perception serves as a cognitive filter, determining whether a price is categorized as a justified investment or exploitation.

The integration of Justice Theory and Equity Logic facilitates a comprehensive adjudication of the psychological mechanisms underlying price appraisals in non-traditional markets. Informational justice serves as a strategic bridge to reduce information asymmetry, while distributive justice ensures that on-the-ground pricing aligns with advertised initial-value expectations (Prete & Samoggia, 2023). Empirical research indicates that informational and procedural justice often have greater predictive power than nominal price figures, particularly in dynamic, often unregulated pricing scenarios found in emerging hospitality sectors (Aguilar-Rojas et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2023). Thus, the collective fulfillment of these justice principles forms the bedrock of perceived value, which ultimately determines a destination's competitive positioning in the global market.

Structurally, this integrated theoretical framework can uncover the performance asymmetries prevalent in emerging tourist destinations. Failure to maintain informational integrity regarding localized surcharges or arbitrary price fluctuations can undermine overall fairness perceptions, irrespective of the destination's physical or natural attributes (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022). By analyzing how tourists balance justice and equity cognitions, the research model positions price perception as a strategic relational variable rather than a mere revenue instrument (Japutra et al., 2023). This perspective is imperative for identifying how asymmetries in pricing importance and performance can be managed to fortify long-term tourist loyalty through evidence-based, context-specific interventions.

Price Transparency and Informational Justice

Price transparency, representing the extent to which essential cost information is accessible, intelligible, and comprehensive, serves as the cornerstone of informational justice (Hai et al., 2023). Within the framework of informational justice, transparency is the primary mechanism by which destination management organizations (DMOs) validate the legitimacy of their pricing architectures, especially in emerging markets where institutional oversight is often in flux (Bies & Moag, 1986; Jones et al., 2023). Providing forthright, accurate, and timely explanations of price structures—particularly during dynamic pricing shifts or service-recovery scenarios—directly bolsters perceptions of informational fairness (Al-Moustafa et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2023). Consequently, transparency functions not merely as a communication strategy but as a structural prerequisite for mitigating the psychological friction inherent in financial sacrifice.

In digitalized tourism environments, price transparency acts as a critical filter against informational asymmetry. As tourists increasingly rely on real-time reviews and digital comparison platforms, expectations for the accuracy of ground-level information have intensified (Dumitrașcu et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2023). Structural friction often emerges when the ground-level pricing for auxiliary services—such as localized logistics, food, or beverages—diverges from the advertised informational baseline (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022). This informational gap leads to a sense of perceived injustice, as tourists interpret the omission of cost details as a breach of the "informational contract." Therefore, the strategic disclosure of pricing rationale is essential to ensure that tourist evaluations are anchored in cognitive equity rather than a perception of exploitation.

The operationalization of price transparency in emerging destinations is particularly influential due to the frequent absence of regulatory standardization. In these nascent environments, the lack of clear justification for supplemental or "hidden" costs significantly increases perceived risk and institutional distrust (Kapera, 2024; Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022). Proactive informational justice helps tourists calibrate their reference prices, thereby aligning distributive outcomes with psychological expectations (Aguilar-Rojas et al., 2024; Rasouli et al., 2023). By fostering an environment in which pricing decisions are justified by truthful, complete data, destinations can neutralize the negative impacts of price volatility on fairness perceptions. Based on this theoretical adjudication, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Price transparency has a significant positive influence on perceived price fairness.

Price Integrity and Distributive Justice

Price integrity signifies the ethical consistency and reliability of pricing mechanisms across diverse service touchpoints and distribution channels (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022). Grounded in the principles of distributive justice, integrity ensures that the economic outcomes of a transaction remain congruent with the initial value propositions presented to the tourist (Adams, 1965; Huang et al., 2023). In emerging destinations—where regulatory frameworks are often nascent, and market oversight is fragmented—the strict adherence to established price points serves as a fundamental pillar of institutional trust (Kapera, 2024; Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022). Unlike mere informational transparency, which focuses on data availability, price integrity addresses the behavioral reliability of the destination, serving as a critical safeguard against the "pricing transgressions" often encountered in unregulated environments (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022).

The erosion of price integrity frequently manifests as arbitrary surcharges for auxiliary services—such as local food, beverages, or logistics—that often diverge significantly from the advertised informational baseline (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022; Rasouli et al., 2023). These transgressions exacerbate structural pricing asymmetries, where the financial sacrifice incurred by the tourist deviates from the anticipated referent price or established market norms (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022). Such imbalances trigger cognitive dissonance, as the volatility of ground-level costs compromises the perceived equity of the exchange and undermines the destination's relational legitimacy (Japutra et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2023). By institutionalizing rigid price integrity, destinations can neutralize these asymmetries, ensuring that the distributive justice contract is fulfilled and the risk of tourist exploitation is systematically mitigated.

Empirical evidence confirms that perceived justice in pricing outcomes is a prerequisite for sustained consumer engagement and the formation of long-term relational bonds (Aguilar-Rojas et al., 2024; Japutra et al., 2023). Price integrity serves as a high-fidelity predictive signal of destination quality, allowing tourists to calibrate their value expectations with a significant degree of certainty (Prete & Samoggia, 2023). When a destination demonstrates high adherence to its pricing promises, the likelihood of favorable fairness judgments increases, regardless of the nominal price level (Huang et al., 2023). Thus, integrity serves as a critical moderating factor, stabilizing the relationship between price-related inputs and perceived fairness. Based on this theoretical adjudication, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Price integrity has a significant positive influence on perceived price fairness.

Social Comparison and Equity Logic

Social comparison involves the sophisticated cognitive process through which tourists evaluate their individual transaction outcomes against those of referent others or established market benchmarks (Adams, 1965; Rasouli et al., 2023). Grounded in Equity Theory, this mechanism posits that perceived fairness is not an absolute judgment but a relative heuristic, contingent on the perceived proportionality of the input-output ratio relative to social referents (Adams, 1965; Huang et al., 2023). In the modern tourism sector, travelers actively seek price-related cues from peers or digital platforms to adjudicate whether their financial sacrifice is equitable or exploitative. Consequently, social comparison functions as a vital diagnostic tool for assessing pricing legitimacy, particularly in environments where standard price signals remain ambiguous or inconsistent.

In the specific context of emerging destinations, the role of social comparison is significantly intensified by inherent market fragmentation and a pervasive lack of regulatory pricing standardization. Structural asymmetries in these nascent markets often manifest as high price dispersion, prompting tourists to rely heavily on "referent cognitions" to mitigate the perceived risk of financial exploitation (Aguilar-Rojas et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2023). Empirical evidence suggests that social comparison acts as a catalytic mechanism

in these service settings; when a tourist perceives their pricing outcome as superior or equal to others', the sense of distributive justice is reinforced (Japutra et al., 2023; Rasouli et al., 2023). Conversely, unfavorable comparisons—where other tourists are perceived to have secured better value for a lower price—trigger immediate perceptions of inequity and a subsequent erosion of institutional trust.

Furthermore, the transparency of pricing communications moderates the influence of social comparison on fairness appraisals. Favorable comparisons serve as external validation of the destination's pricing integrity, signaling that the exchange occurs within the boundaries of acceptable social and market norms (Aguilar-Rojas et al., 2024; Prete & Samoggia, 2023). By aligning individual pricing experiences with broader social expectations, destinations can foster an environment of perceived equity that transcends nominal price levels and addresses the "Willingness-to-Pay Paradox" by justifying the financial investment. Therefore, the strategic management of referent price perceptions is essential for maintaining a positive fairness appraisal across diverse tourist segments in volatile markets. Based on this theoretical adjudication of equity logic, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Favorable social comparison has a significant positive influence on perceived price fairness.

Price Fairness as a Structural Anchor for Perceived Destination Value and Trust

Perceived price fairness serves as a pivotal cognitive anchor, shaping a tourism destination's overall valuation and institutional credibility. Grounded in Justice Theory, the appraisal of value transcends simple cost-benefit calculations, as tourists evaluate whether their financial sacrifice is justified by the ethical fairness of both the pricing process and the outcome (Huang et al., 2023; Prete & Samoggia, 2023). In the tourism value chain—particularly in emerging markets, where economic volatility can obscure traditional price signals—perceived fairness is a primary antecedent of perceived value (Adams, 1965). This signals that the exchange is conducted within the boundaries of equity. Consequently, a pricing model perceived as equitable—regardless of its nominal level—elevates the perceived utility and value of the tourism experience (Al-Moustafa et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2023).

Beyond value appraisal, perceived pricing justice is a fundamental prerequisite for the formation of destination trust. Trust is conceptualized as the tourist's reliance on the destination's integrity to deliver promised experiences without exploitation (Japutra et al., 2023). In emerging destinations, where standardized pricing is often inconsistent and regulatory oversight is nascent, fulfilling informational and distributive justice serves as a critical signal of institutional reliability (Hai et al., 2023; Kapera, 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that pricing transgressions, such as arbitrary surcharges or "hidden costs," act as immediate inhibitors to trust, even when the destination's primary attractions are of high quality (Aguilar-Rojas et al., 2024; Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022). By maintaining a fair pricing ecosystem, destinations can effectively bridge the structural gap between initial attraction and relational security.

The structural intersection of value and trust underscores the necessity of a justice-based approach to destination management. Perceived fairness does not operate in isolation but serves as a relational node that justifies the financial investment while simultaneously reducing perceived risk (Japutra et al., 2023; Rasouli et al., 2023). When tourists perceive that the pricing mechanism is truthful and the outcomes are proportionate to the inputs, the resulting cognitive state fosters a deeper psychological bond with the destination (Jones et al., 2023; Prete & Samoggia, 2023). This integrated mechanism ensures that the destination's competitive position is anchored in sustained relational legitimacy rather than transient price advantages. These considerations lead to the adjudication of fairness as a central predictive force in the proposed research model. Thus, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H4: Perceived price fairness significantly predicts perceived destination value.

H5: Perceived price fairness serves as a foundational driver for destination trust.

The Value-Trust Nexus: Mediating the Path to Destination Loyalty

The perceived value-loyalty nexus governs the transition from transactional appraisal to long-term relational commitment. Perceived value serves as a critical psychological filter, synthesizing the cognitive justice of pricing with the experiential quality of the destination (Huang et al., 2023; Japutra et al., 2023). High perceived value is a significant predictor of destination loyalty, manifesting in intensified revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth advocacy (Hai et al., 2023). When the pricing-value nexus is optimized, the resultant competitive resilience allows emerging destinations—often struggling with fragmented market signals—to secure a stable position against established regional alternatives.

Within this relational framework, destination trust emerges as a critical mediator that solidifies the impact of perceived value on loyalty. Trust is established when tourists perceive the destination's pricing and service delivery as consistently reliable and free from exploitative transgressions, which are common in nascent regulatory environments (Japutra et al., 2023; Kapera, 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that perceived value serves as a foundational antecedent to trust; specifically, as tourists acknowledge the fairness and utility of their investment, institutional credibility is reinforced (Aguilar-Rojas et al., 2024; Hai et al., 2023). This value-trust link is instrumental in converting transient satisfaction into enduring loyalty, particularly in emerging destinations where perceived risk is inherently higher.

However, the predictive efficacy of the value-trust nexus is often constrained by the "WTP Paradox," where strong ethical or environmental alignment fails to translate into a higher willingness to pay (WTP). Findings elucidate a significant dissonance, where only approximately 10% of tourists demonstrate a functional readiness to pay a premium for sustainable destination attributes (Pulido-Fernández et al., 2024). This behavioral gap suggests that loyalty is bounded not only by intention but also by the distributive justice of the pricing structure and the perceived proportionality of the exchange (Adams, 1965; Rasouli et al., 2023). By resolving these performance asymmetries through bolstered trust and value, destinations can mitigate the loyalty erosion typically triggered by pricing inconsistencies (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022).

Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Synthesis

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 represents a logical synthesis of Justice and Equity theories, specifically designed to address the multifaceted nature of pricing in emerging destinations. Unlike traditional linear models that treat price as a standalone economic variable, this framework adjudicates the psychological friction between informational antecedents and relational outcomes. The inclusion of price transparency, integrity, and social comparison as exogenous constructs represents the three pillars of cognitive appraisal: informational justice (truthfulness), distributive justice (consistency), and equity logic (proportionality).

The dialectic within this model centers on the transition from a "transactional" experience to a "relational" bond. Existing literature frequently identifies a "satisfaction-loyalty" gap, in which high functional satisfaction does not consistently translate into repeat visits or higher WTP. This study argues that the missing link in this dialectic is the dual-mediation of perceived value and destination trust. By positioning price fairness as the structural anchor for both cognitive utility (value) and relational security (trust), the model accounts for the WTP Paradox observed in recent scholarship (Pulido-Fernández et al., 2024). Furthermore, by integrating social comparison as a dynamic antecedent, the framework moves beyond the static "attribute-satisfaction" trope, demonstrating how internal fairness judgments are continuously calibrated against external social signals in volatile markets.

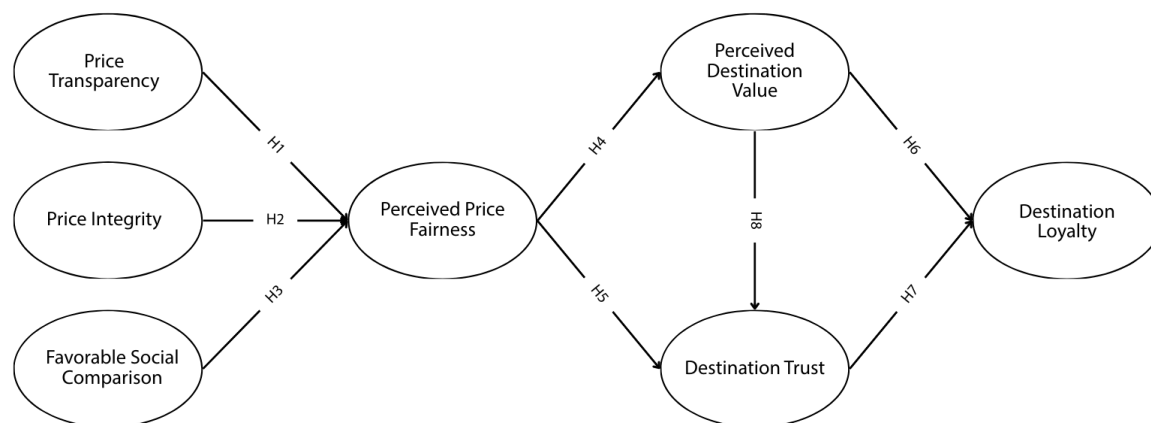


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model and Path Dialectics

Source: Research data, 2025

C. METHODS

Research Design and Contextual Boundary Conditions

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to validate the proposed structural model of destination loyalty empirically. The research is situated within the specific context of emerging tourism destinations in Bandung Regency, Indonesia, an area characterized by a transition from rural to commercialized tourism, where pricing structures exhibit high volatility and regulatory standardization is nascent. These destinations are defined by their reliance on natural ecosystems and by a lack of institutionalized oversight of pricing, which directly influences visitors' perceptions of distributive and informational justice. The target population comprises domestic and international tourists who have recently visited these destinations, ensuring that their psychological appraisals of price and value remain salient during data collection.

Sampling Framework and Data Collection

To ensure a representative and contextually relevant sample, a purposive sampling technique was employed. The specific inclusion criteria for participants were: 1) individuals aged 18 or older; 2) those who had completed a visit to the target destinations within the last three months; and 3) those who had engaged in multiple transactional experiences across diverse service touchpoints, including food, beverage, and local logistics. Data collection was executed over four months (May–July 2025) through a structured self-administered survey disseminated via digital platforms and on-site distribution at major transit hubs to mitigate coverage bias. The sample size of 350 respondents was deemed robust. A post-hoc power analysis conducted via G*Power (version 3.1.9.7) utilized a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), a significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), and a power of 0.95 for the eight-path model, confirming that the sample exceeds the minimum requirement for high predictive power in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS).

Instrumentation and Construct Operationalization

The survey instrument was developed through a rigorous process of scale adaptation from validated scholarly sources to ensure content and face validity. All constructs were operationalized using multi-item scales measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree). 1) Price Transparency & Destination Loyalty: Measured using items adapted from (Hai et al., 2023; Kapera, 2024), focusing on informational clarity and revisit intentions; 2) Price Integrity & Auxiliary Services: Derived from the scales of (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022); 3) Social Comparison: Operationalized based on equity-

logic items from (Adams, 1965; Rasouli et al., 2023); 4) Perceived Price Fairness: Measured via a multidimensional scale from (Al-Moustafa et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2023), encompassing outcome and informational justice; and 5) Perceived Value & Destination Trust: Adapted from (Hai et al., 2023; Japutra et al., 2023; Prete & Samoggia, 2023), emphasizing the ratio of benefits to sacrifice and institutional reliability. To ensure linguistic equivalence and conceptual clarity, the instrument underwent a double-back translation process and was refined through a pilot study involving 30 tourists and academic experts in tourism management.

Data Analysis and Statistical Rigor

Data analysis followed a two-stage approach using SEM-PLS, which is well-suited to complex models with non-normal data distributions. The first stage assessed the measurement model through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio to establish reliability and discriminant validity. The second stage evaluated the structural model by examining path coefficients (β), coefficients of determination (R^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2) using the PLSpredict procedure. To identify structural asymmetries, the study concluded with an Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA), enabling a granular assessment of justice antecedents relative to destination performance.

D. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Profile of Respondents and Preliminary Data Screening

The demographic composition of the 350 respondents reflects a balanced, heterogeneous cohort of travelers across the targeted tourism destinations. Analysis of the gender distribution reveals a relatively equal representation, with females accounting for 52.86% of the sample and males representing 47.14%. Regarding age distribution, the study captured a significant portion of younger demographics, particularly those aged 26–35 (34.00%) and 18–25 (26.86%). The remaining participants were distributed across the 36–45 (17.43%), 46–55 (15.14%), and 56+ (6.57%) age categories.

The respondents' occupational profile was notably diverse, with an almost equitable distribution among students (20.57%), freelancers (20.29%), government employees (20.00%), entrepreneurs (19.71%), and private-sector employees (19.43%). Furthermore, income levels were spread across five distinct brackets, with the lower-middle-income group (22.00%) and high-income earners (21.71%) accounting for the largest segments. Regarding travel behavior, 35.43% of respondents reported traveling 1–2 times per year, 35.43% reported traveling 3–5 times, and 29.14% were categorized as frequent travelers with more than 5 visits per year.

To ensure the methodological integrity of the structural model, a rigorous preliminary screening was conducted to identify potential Common Method Bias (CMB). This study utilized the Full Collinearity VIF approach, which offers a more stringent assessment of bias than traditional statistical methods (Kock, 2015). An examination of the inner VIF values confirmed that all latent constructs remained well within the acceptable threshold of 3.3. Collinearity scores ranged from a minimum of 1.002 for Price Transparency to a maximum of 1.372 for Destination Loyalty and Perceived Destination Value. These results empirically validate that the dataset is free of substantial common-method bias, ensuring that the structural relationships examined in subsequent stages are not distorted by measurement method.

Additionally, collinearity among the measurement items was assessed by calculating the VIFs for each indicator. All 35 indicators across the seven latent constructs exhibited VIF scores significantly below the critical threshold of 5.0, ranging from 1.402 (DT4) to 2.768 (SC1). This confirms that the measurement model is not compromised by excessive multicollinearity at the item level. Initial positive associations

observed in the correlation matrix between justice-based antecedents and fairness perceptions provide a substantive empirical basis for the subsequent testing of hypothesized structural paths.

Assessment of the Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated to establish the reliability and validity of the latent constructs prior to the structural analysis. As detailed in the operationalization table in Appendix A, the measurement items were developed through a rigorous adaptation of validated scales from established literature, ensuring high content and face validity. The assessment commenced with an examination of indicator reliability through outer loadings. All 35 indicators across the seven latent constructs exhibited factor loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.711 (DT4) to 0.876 (SC1). Internal consistency was further validated by Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) scores, which all significantly exceeded the 0.70 benchmark. Furthermore, convergent validity was established as all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded the critical threshold of 0.50, confirming that the latent variables account for more than half of the variance in their respective indicators.

Table 1. Results of the Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Item	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Price Transparency	TR1–TR5	0.775–0.835	0.859	0.899	0.639
Price Integrity	IN1–IN5	0.828–0.866	0.909	0.932	0.733
Favorable Social Comparison	SC1–SC5	0.856–0.876	0.916	0.937	0.748
Perceived Price Fairness	PF1–PF5	0.723–0.785	0.816	0.871	0.576
Perceived Destination Value	PV1–PV5	0.742–0.758	0.803	0.864	0.559
Destination Trust	DT1–DT5	0.711–0.768	0.791	0.856	0.544
Destination Loyalty	DL1–DL5	0.749–0.788	0.825	0.877	0.588

Source: Research data, 2025

Discriminant validity was adjudicated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, which is widely recognized as a more stringent criterion than the traditional Fornell-Larcker method. The results detailed in Table 2 demonstrate that all HTMT values remain significantly below the conservative threshold of 0.85. The highest correlation was observed between Perceived Price Fairness and Destination Trust ($r = 0.666$). These findings provide empirical evidence that each construct represents a distinct theoretical phenomenon, free from excessive overlap. This distinctiveness is essential for ensuring that the subsequent path analysis accurately reflects the unique influence of each justice-based antecedent.

Table 2. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio Results

Construct	DL	DT	SC	PV	PF	IN
Destination Trust (DT)	0.650	-				
Favorable Soc. Comp (SC)	0.222	0.281	-			
Perceived Value (PV)	0.639	0.648	0.298	-		
Price Fairness (PF)	0.504	0.666	0.398	0.616	-	
Price Integrity (IN)	0.290	0.345	0.056	0.364	0.548	-
Price Transparency (TR)	0.239	0.234	0.053	0.263	0.328	0.055

Source: Research data, 2025

Finally, the overall fit of the measurement model was assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and the Normed Fit Index (NFI). As indicated in Table 3, the SRMR value of 0.047 for the saturated model and 0.055 for the estimated model are both comfortably below the conventional 0.08 limit. The NFI value of 0.862 further corroborates the model's suitability, providing a robust foundation for the structural evaluation of the hypothesized relationships.

Table 3. Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.047	0.055
d_ULS	1.415	1.905
d_G	0.417	0.426
Chi-Square	841.374	854.521
NFI	0.862	0.859

Source: Research data, 2025

Assessment of the Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated through a rigorous bootstrapping procedure utilizing 5,000 sub-samples to determine the statistical significance and magnitude of the hypothesized pathways. As detailed in Table 4 and Figure 2, the empirical results provide robust support for all eight hypotheses ($p < 0.001$). An analysis of the justice-based antecedents reveals that Price Integrity exerts the most substantial influence on Perceived Price Fairness ($\beta = 0.457$, $t = 11.974$), followed by Favorable Social Comparison ($\beta = 0.338$, $t = 9.547$) and Price Transparency ($\beta = 0.253$, $t = 6.088$). These findings confirm that while informational clarity and social equity are critical, the consistency of pricing outcomes remains the primary determinant of fairness appraisals in volatile markets.

Furthermore, the pathway from Perceived Price Fairness to Perceived Destination Value exhibited the highest coefficient in the entire model ($\beta = 0.501$, $t = 13.105$), underscoring the role of justice as a structural anchor for cognitive utility. The relational dimensions were also validated, with Perceived Price Fairness ($\beta = 0.367$, $t = 7.572$) and Perceived Destination Value ($\beta = 0.337$, $t = 6.582$) as significant predictors of Destination Trust. Ultimately, the drivers of Destination Loyalty were found to be approximately equal in weight, with Destination Trust ($\beta = 0.349$, $t = 6.784$) and Perceived Destination Value ($\beta = 0.341$, $t = 6.506$) serving as critical precursors to long-term relational commitment. These results, visualized in Figure 2, confirm the efficacy of the dual-mediation mechanism in bridging the gap between pricing antecedents and behavioral outcomes.

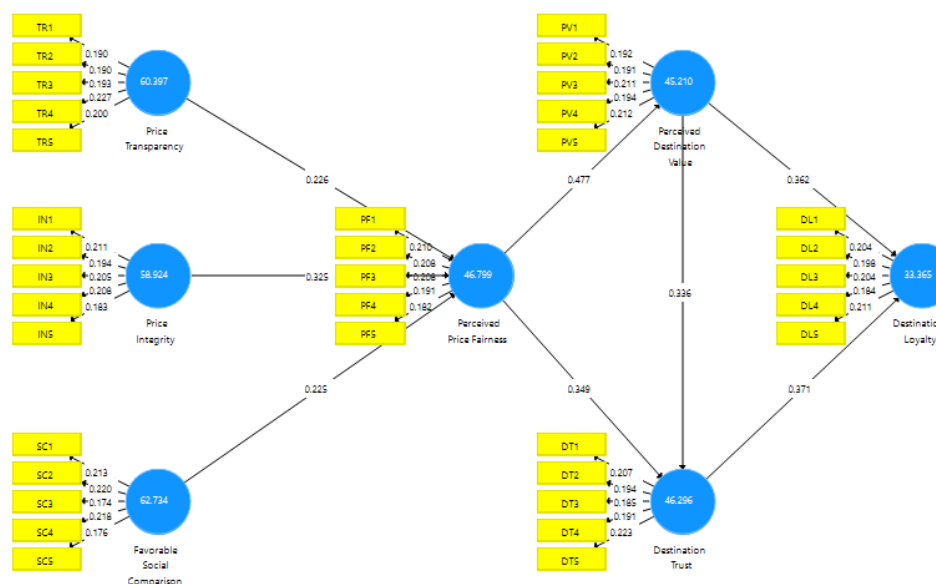


Figure 2. Structural Model Results and Path Coefficients

Source: Research data, 2025

Table 4. Hypotheses Testing and Path Coefficients

H	Path	β	T	P Values	Result
Statistics					
H1	Price Transparency $\rightarrow$ Price Fairness	0.253	6.088	0.000	Supported

H	Path	β	T Statistics	P Values	Result
H2	Price Integrity $\rightarrow$ Price Fairness	0.457	11.974	0.000	Supported
H3	Social Comparison $\rightarrow$ Price Fairness	0.338	9.547	0.000	Supported
H4	Price Fairness $\rightarrow$ Perceived Value	0.501	13.105	0.000	Supported
H5	Price Fairness $\rightarrow$ Destination Trust	0.367	7.572	0.000	Supported
H6	Perceived Value $\rightarrow$ Destination Loyalty	0.341	6.506	0.000	Supported
H7	Destination Trust $\rightarrow$ Destination Loyalty	0.349	6.784	0.000	Supported
H8	Perceived Value $\rightarrow$ Destination Trust	0.337	6.582	0.000	Supported

Source: Research data, 2025

Beyond path significance, the model's quality was assessed through the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). As shown in Table 5, the model explains 36.2% of the variance in Destination Loyalty and 37.2% in Destination Trust, representing moderate predictive power in the context of behavioral tourism research. The f^2 effect sizes indicate that Price Integrity (0.350) and Perceived Price Fairness (0.335) have substantial impacts on their respective endogenous targets. Finally, the Q^2 values, calculated via the blindfolding procedure, are all greater than zero, ranging from 0.138 to 0.224. These results confirm the model's predictive relevance, indicating that the observed justice and value constructs provide meaningful insights into loyalty formation in emerging destinations.

Table 5. Predictive Power, Effect Sizes, and Relevance

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Q^2	Key Predictor (f^2)
Destination Loyalty	0.362	0.207	Destination Trust (0.139)
Destination Trust	0.372	0.199	Perceived Price Fairness (0.161)
Perceived Price Fairness	0.404	0.224	Price Integrity (0.350)
Perceived Value	0.251	0.138	Perceived Price Fairness (0.335)

Source: Research data, 2025

Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA)

The Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA) extends the structural evaluation by contrasting the unstandardized total effects of the predecessor constructs with their respective performance index values. This dual-dimensional analysis provides an empirical basis for adjudicating the structural asymmetries between variable influence and ground-level performance within the destination. Based on the total effect calculations, Perceived Destination Value emerges as the most critical determinant of Destination Loyalty, exhibiting a high importance score of 0.486 but a sub-optimal performance index of 45.210. Similarly, Destination Trust (Importance = 0.371; Performance = 46.296) and Perceived Price Fairness (Importance = 0.362; Performance = 46.799) serve as the primary relational pillars of loyalty but exhibit performance scores significantly lower than those of their justice-based antecedents.

Table 6. IPMA Results for Destination Loyalty

Predecessor Construct	Importance (Total Effect)	Performance (Index Value)
Perceived Destination Value	0.486	45.210
Destination Trust	0.371	46.296
Perceived Price Fairness	0.362	46.799
Price Integrity	0.118	58.924
Price Transparency	0.082	60.397
Favorable Social Comparison	0.081	62.734

Source: Research data, 2025

The visualization of the importance-performance matrix maps (Figure 3) the predecessor constructs into strategic quadrants to guide resource allocation. The constructs identified within the "Concentrate Here" quadrant—namely, Perceived Destination Value, Destination Trust, and Perceived Price Fairness—are

highly important but currently underperform. This classification indicates that any marginal improvement in these specific relational nodes will yield the highest return in enhancing long-term tourist loyalty.

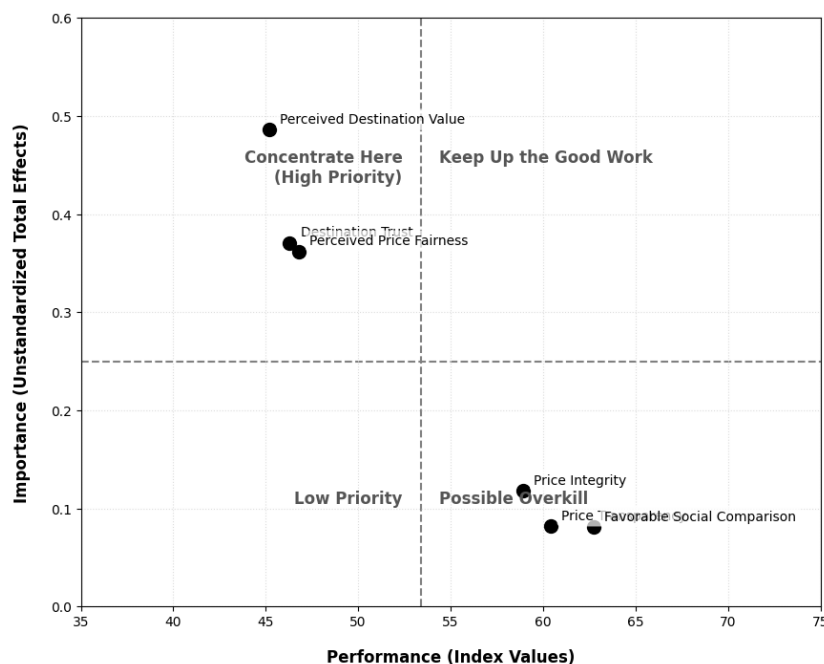


Figure 3. Importance-Performance Matrix Plot for Destination Loyalty

Conversely, the justice-based antecedents, including Price Transparency (Performance = 60.397) and Favorable Social Comparison (Performance = 62.734), exhibit high performance scores but possess the lowest total importance (0.082 and 0.081, respectively). This indicates that efforts within these informational areas have reached a point of diminishing marginal returns; they should be maintained to prevent erosion but not prioritized for intensive new investment. The identified structural asymmetry provides a data-driven roadmap for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). The findings imply that the "WTP Paradox"—where tourists express pro-sustainable attitudes but remain highly price-sensitive—can be mitigated by shifting strategic focus from basic transparency to the stabilization of Destination Trust and Price Fairness. By prioritizing nodes with the largest performance gaps and the highest structural importance, destinations can optimize resource allocation and strengthen their competitive resilience in volatile tourism markets.

Discussion

The empirical evaluation of the structural model validates the proposed theoretical framework, confirming that the pathway to destination loyalty is a complex, multi-stage cognitive and relational process. By confirming all eight hypotheses, this study provides a nuanced dialectic with established equity and justice theories, particularly regarding how pricing mechanics are appraised by tourists and subsequently translated into behavioral commitment. A critical point of theoretical departure in this study lies in the structural weighting of the justice-based antecedents driving Perceived Price Fairness. While contemporary tourism literature often positions Price Transparency as the paramount driver of fairness, the current findings challenge this singular focus. The results demonstrate that Price Integrity exerts a substantially stronger influence on fairness appraisals ($\beta = 0.457$) than both Favorable Social Comparison ($\beta = 0.338$) and Price Transparency ($\beta = 0.253$).

Grounding this in the specific psychological and contextual realities of the 350 tourists sampled in emerging destinations like Bandung Regency, this hierarchy reveals that transparency is often perceived as a "passive" informational signal. In nascent regulatory environments where "hidden costs" and arbitrary surcharges for auxiliary services are a constant threat, the mere disclosure of pricing information (transparency) is insufficient to establish equity. Instead, tourists place a premium on Price Integrity as an "active" ethical commitment and a signal of institutional reliability. As suggested by (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2022), in volatile markets, the behavioral consistency of prices across touchpoints is more critical than the availability of informational baselines for establishing perceived fairness.

The significant role of Favorable Social Comparison (H3) extends (Adams, 1965) foundational Equity Theory by refining its boundary conditions within the modern travel context. In destination environments characterized by low institutional standardization and high price dispersion, social comparison shifts from a mere psychological benchmark to a critical risk-mitigation tool. Tourists continuously benchmark their financial sacrifices against peers' experiences, not just for satisfaction, but also as a heuristic for determining whether they are being exploited. These findings align with (Rasouli et al., 2023), confirming that in volatile markets, "referent cognitions" serve as a structural prerequisite for the formation of fairness perceptions.

The analysis further elucidates the mediating mechanisms bridging pricing justice and loyalty. The substantial path from Perceived Price Fairness to Perceived Destination Value ($\beta = 0.501$) supports conceptual models suggesting that cognitive utility cannot be formed in the absence of perceived equity. When tourists perceive a pricing structure as fundamentally fair, their appraisal of "value for money" is significantly amplified. Concurrently, the results validate the relational path, demonstrating that Price Fairness and Value are critical precursors to Destination Trust. This triangulates with findings by (Hai et al., 2023; Japutra et al., 2023), affirming that trust is a synthesized outcome of equitable financial treatment and the delivery of utilitarian value.

Ultimately, the model establishes that Destination Loyalty is driven almost equally by Destination Trust ($\beta = 0.349$) and Perceived Destination Value ($\beta = 0.341$). This dual-conduit mechanism offers a critical dialectic with recent studies by (Kapera, 2024) and provides a pathway to resolve the Willingness-to-Pay (WTP) Paradox. It suggests that loyalty in emerging destinations is not a direct result of low prices, but rather a reflection of tourists' belief that the destination has provided both cognitive utility and relational security.

Theoretical Implications

The empirical validation of the justice-value-trust-loyalty framework offers significant theoretical advancements to the existing body of tourism literature. Primarily, this study extends the application of Equity Theory by demonstrating that price justice in tourism is a multidimensional construct where pricing consistency structurally outweighs mere information availability. By establishing Price Integrity as the dominant antecedent to Perceived Price Fairness, the research challenges the prevailing academic consensus that often equates transparency with equity. This structural hierarchy suggests that in emerging destinations—where formal market oversight is often fragmented—tourists prioritize behavioral reliability over mere data disclosure as a proxy for institutional legitimacy.

Furthermore, the structural model successfully resolves the Willingness-to-Pay (WTP) Paradox, which is frequently observed in volatile tourism markets. The findings confirm that destination loyalty is not an unconditional affective state but is strictly contingent upon a complex, sequential dual-mediation process. Theoretical models must, therefore, transcend linear satisfaction-loyalty tropes to account for both the cognitive appraisal of financial sacrifice—captured through Perceived Destination Value—and the relational security provided by Destination Trust. This dual-conduit mechanism enriches the theoretical boundaries of relationship marketing by providing empirical evidence that sustained behavioral

commitment in volatile tourism ecosystems requires the simultaneous activation of utilitarian value and institutional reliability.

Managerial Implications

The Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA) yields a granular, data-driven diagnostic for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and regional policymakers. The structural asymmetries identified in the matrix reveal that while current efforts to provide Price Transparency and facilitate Favorable Social Comparison are performing well, they have reached a point of diminishing marginal returns. Consequently, further intensive investment in these informational areas will yield negligible gains in tourist loyalty. Strategic resources must be aggressively redirected toward the high-priority constructs identified in the "Concentrate Here" quadrant: Perceived Destination Value, Destination Trust, and Perceived Price Fairness.

To elevate institutional trust and mitigate the "WTP Paradox," destination managers must transition from passive communication to robust structural interventions. First, Regulatory Harmonization: Policymakers should lead the active alignment of overarching national tourism laws with specific local and regional regulations to eliminate regulatory gaps that allow arbitrary surcharges. Second, Standardized Operational Guidelines: DMOs must establish enforceable frameworks to prevent unregulated market fluctuations and "hidden" costs—specifically targeting inconsistent fees for auxiliary services such as food, beverages, and local logistics—to guarantee Price Integrity across the destination ecosystem. Third, Verification and Enforcement: Implementing localized "fair-price" certification or auditing for service providers can diminish the perceived risk of financial exploitation, thereby directly stabilizing institutional reliability and trust.

To address the significant performance gaps in Perceived Destination Value, stakeholders must pivot from traditional service delivery to active experiential facilitation. First, Immersive Product Development: Rather than relying on passive sightseeing, DMOs should integrate structured, experiential learning elements—such as cultural workshops or community-led guided tours—into the core tourism product to ensure the psychological utility outweighs the financial cost. Second, Value-Oriented Itineraries: By transforming standard itineraries into deeply engaging, participatory experiences, destinations can effectively recalibrate the value proposition without necessarily lowering nominal prices. Third, Relational Security: Destinations must secure competitive resilience by ensuring that every touchpoint validates the tourist's belief in the destination's ethical consistency, moving beyond transient price advantages to secure long-term behavioral commitment.

By prioritizing these specific relational nodes with the largest performance gaps, destinations can resolve the dissonance between tourist intentions and actual financial commitment, fostering a more resilient and loyal visitor base.

E. CONCLUSION

This study successfully operationalizes and validates a comprehensive structural model that delineates the sophisticated pathway from justice-based pricing antecedents to destination loyalty. The empirical findings fundamentally confirm that the formation of tourist loyalty in contemporary, volatile markets is not an immediate affective response, but rather a sophisticated, dual-mediated process anchored in cognitive value appraisal and relational security. By systematically evaluating the structural weights of pricing dimensions, the research establishes that price integrity—the ethical consistency of pricing across various destination touchpoints—significantly outweighs mere price transparency and favorable social comparisons in driving perceived price fairness.

Furthermore, the Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA) provides a critical strategic directive by revealing a structural asymmetry: destination trust, perceived price fairness, and perceived destination value possess the strongest influence on loyalty but currently exhibit sub-optimal performance. Consequently, to secure long-term behavioral commitment and mitigate the Willingness-to-Pay (WTP) Paradox, destination management must pivot away from over-investing in basic informational transparency and concentrate resources on actively elevating experiential utility and institutional reliability.

Limitations and Future Research Trajectories

While the empirical evidence robustly supports the proposed framework, the study is subject to specific methodological and contextual limitations that define the boundaries of its findings. The primary limitation lies in the use of a cross-sectional research design, which captures tourist perceptions at a single point in time. Because cognitive appraisals of value and affective trust are dynamic constructs subject to post-visit reflection, this snapshot approach restricts the ability to observe the longitudinal evolution of destination loyalty. Additionally, reliance on self-reported survey instruments introduces inherent vulnerabilities to common method bias, although rigorous statistical testing via the Full Collinearity VIF approach confirmed that this bias was not a pervasive threat in the current dataset. Finally, the structural model was validated within the specific geographical context of emerging destinations in Bandung Regency, which may limit its generalizability across vastly different cultural or economic settings.

These limitations concurrently establish highly relevant trajectories for future academic inquiry: First, Longitudinal Designs: Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to track how pricing justice appraisals fluctuate throughout the entire tourist journey—from pre-trip planning to post-trip evaluations. Second, Diverse Paradigms: It is recommended to investigate how this pricing justice framework operates within non-traditional travel paradigms, such as nomadic tourism, and evaluate its operational implications for intermediary travel agencies. Third, Typological Comparisons: Comparative studies contrasting integrated urban transit tours with rural, community-based tourism villages would provide critical insights into how different infrastructural environments moderate the impact of price integrity on destination trust. Fourth, Multigroup Analysis: Incorporating socio-demographic variables, such as varying income brackets or prior visitation frequencies, will yield a more granular understanding of how diverse tourist segments process financial sacrifice and experiential value.

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