

## HOW VISITORS' PERCEIVED DESTINATION ETHICS IMPACTS THEIR BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The aim of this research was to investigate the relationship between destination loyalty and its determining factors. A central role was attributed to the perception of the destination ethics. **Design** – Three dimensions of the perceived destination ethics were identified with the potential to influence tourists' loyalty: the wellbeing of local people, subjective wellbeing and active participation and equality.

**Methodology** – The study is based on a questionnaire targeting international visitors to the city of Quito (Ecuador). A total of 419 returned questionnaires were analysed using the principal component factor analysis to identify the underlying dimensions of the perceived destination ethics and structural equation modelling to measure and test the research hypotheses.

**Approach** – The structural relationship analysis indicates that perceived destination ethics appear to be the principal influence on loyalty, namely the intention to revisit and willingness to recommend.

**Originality** – A pioneering aspect of the research is that it includes the perceived destination ethics as a loyalty predictor, as well as considering the relationship between predictors. The study proves that the perceived destination ethics contributes to tourist loyalty. In the light of the results managerial implications are discussed.

**Keywords** Perceived Destination Ethics, Loyalty, Overall Satisfaction, Trip Quality, SEM

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In a highly competitive scenario, loyalty has become a strategic goal for destinations, and a clear indicator of success (Ribeiro et al. 2017). Loyalty reduces advertising and promotion costs, provides an effective indicator of tourist satisfaction and is a key factor in determining destination feasibility (Kanwel et al. 2019). As a result, numerous studies have addressed the question of loyalty determinants. The principal determinants for loyalty include satisfaction, perceived quality, motivation or destination image (Khasawneh and Alfandi 2019; Suhartanto et al. 2019; Vo and Chovancová 2019; Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil 2018; Hapsari 2018; Antón, Camarero and Laguna-García 2017).

In recent research attention has focused on visitor perception of certain aspects of the destination in order to describe tourists' behaviour and loyalty, considering determinants such as the tourist-resident relationship, sustainability or fairness (Bršćić and Šugar 2020; Hwang, Baloglu and Tanford 2019; Moliner et al. 2019; Lai, Hitchcock and Liu 2018; Kim 2017; Iniesta-Bonillo, Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo 2016). These

studies concluded that in many cases visitor perception in these areas has the capacity to generate memorable tourism experiences, and also conditions satisfaction and loyalty levels.

Perceived ethics of destination appear implicitly in a number of studies that analyse destination image and tourists' behaviour (Fan, Zhong and Zhang 2012; McDonald 2015), but little research has assessed the importance ethical aspects play in loyalty from an integrated approach. On the other hand, the number of studies into tourists' behaviour in South America is limited and to date no research appears to have considered tourist loyalty in Ecuador from an integrated approach. To bridge these gaps, our study focuses on Quito and considers the notion that perceived ethics of destination may condition tourist loyalty.

For the purpose of our study, loyalty refers to the intention to return to the same destination and the positive impact of word-of-mouth (WOM) on friends and/or relatives. Our research proposes a model capable of testing the effects of perceived ethics of destination, perceived trip quality and satisfaction as predictors of loyalty, as well as examining the relationships between predictors. Although Quito, the capital of Ecuador was the city chosen for our analysis, the findings are potentially applicable to other heritage cities in other regions of the world. Our work makes two further contributions. On the one hand, it advances the current understanding of tourists' behaviour and provides a basis for further literature addressing the question of loyalty. Furthermore, considering the key role loyalty plays in destination competitiveness, the findings could be of use to tourist destination managers in boosting tourists' loyalty.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES**

### **2.1. Destination loyalty**

Loyalty can be considered from a behavioural or an attitudinal standpoint. In the former case, it refers to repeat visits and the frequency with which they occur (Yoon and Uysal 2005), whilst in the latter case, loyalty is understood as the intention to return and/or recommend the destination to others (Zhang et al. 2014). It is this vision of loyalty that is most commonly used in measuring tourist loyalty (Ribeiro et al. 2017) and will therefore form the focal point of our study.

Visitor loyalty is considered a key determinant for the overall success of a destination and in particular of any business operating therein (Akhoondnejad 2016). On the one hand, loyal repeat visitors to a destination provide a stable source of revenue. Furthermore, attracting these visitors who are already familiar with the destination is cheaper in terms of promotion and marketing strategies. In addition, these loyal visitors have a lower price elasticity and would therefore be prepared to pay higher prices. Finally, they are themselves providers or positive word-of-mouth publicity (Kanwel et al. 2019). Taking all these factors into account, it would seem clear that generating visitor loyalty is a key strategy for heritage cities acting within a highly competitive context.

The determinants of tourism loyalty have received a considerable amount of attention from scholars. A review of the major publications over the last decade reveals that the principal determinants addressed include *tourist satisfaction* (Antón, Camarero and Laguna-García 2017; Kim and Park 2017; Ozdemir, Çizel and Cizel 2012; Lee, Jeon and Kim 2011); *motivation* (Agyeiwaah et al. 2019; Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil 2018; Akgunduz and Cosar 2018; Antón, Camarero and Laguna-García 2017); *destination image* (Khasawneh and Alfandi 2019; Kim 2017; Chiu, Zeng and Cheng 2016; Zhang et al. 2014); *perceived value* (Kim, Holland and Han 2013; Sun, Geng-Qing and Xu 2013) and *quality of experience* (Suhartanto et al. 2019; Lee, Jeon and Kim 2011). Other antecedents of tourism loyalty have also been considered, albeit to a lesser extent. They include *safety*, *novelty seeking*, *expectations*, *travel characteristics*, *price fairness* or *travellers' characteristics* (Vo 2019; Albaity and Melhem 2017; Tasci 2017; Wong, Wu and Cheng 2014; Kim, Holland and Han 2013; Prayag and Ryan 2012; McDowall 2010).

More recently, attention has been centred on aspects of the tourist experience, such as visitor engagement, cultural contact, perceived sustainability or perceived fairness. In his study of ecotourism in Korea, Kim (2017) found that memorable tourism experiences were the most influential determinant of behavioural intentions, the intention to revisit and WOM publicity. In the context of cultural tourism, Chen and Rahman (2018) found that visitor engagement significantly and positively influenced cultural contact and memorable tourism experiences. Urban tourism research conducted by Lai, Hitchcock and Liu (2018) revealed that the tourist–resident relationship has significant effects on trip satisfaction. The analysis of two tourist destinations in Spain and Italy carried out by Iniesta-Bonillo, Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2016) showed that visitors' perceived sustainability of a tourist destination was a determining factor of perceived value and satisfaction. Similarly, Brščić and Šugar (2020) found that the perceptions of beach comfort, beautiful scenery and beach cleanliness condition tourists' satisfaction. Finally, Hwang, Baloglu and Tanford (2019) found that the perception of fairness significantly influences loyalty intention.

## 2.2. Perceived ethics of destination

Tourists' experiences at their destination prove crucial in explaining their behaviour both during and after travel. Essentially, they affect their behaviour in three ways: economically, socio-culturally and environmentally (Gao, Huang and Zhang 2016). Weeden (2005) pointed out that addressing ethical aspects provides competitive advantages for businesses and by extension for the destinations themselves. This author goes even further, claiming that it is their perception of ethical considerations that leads tourists to behave responsibly in the destination (Weeden 2014). In this sense, the perceived ethics of the destination is of vital importance in the quest for more sustainable tourism.

Modern-day tourists are generally far more demanding than before. However, a new type of tourist has emerged that is more respectful and responsible towards the host environment and society. In this case, perceived economic, social and environmental issues contribute to determining a destination's ethical image and reputation. For these tourists, self-fulfilment, knowledge and exploration are essential. There is also an ethical

component that is more directly related to aspects such as personal growth and the quest for happiness (Barbieri, Santos and Katsube 2012).

Tourists' perception of ethical aspects contributes to forging a destination's image. Essentially this perception consists of an emotional and reasoned representation of a destination that stems from both the affective appraisals relating to an individual's feelings towards the object and the perceptive/cognitive evaluations referring to the individual's own knowledge of that object (Kanwel et al. 2019). Destination image can influence tourists' behaviour to a considerable extent, both in terms of their choice of destination and behavioural intention (Khasawneh and Alfandi 2019; Zeugner-Roth and Žabkar 2015; Hosany and Prayag 2013). The perceived ethics of the destination will help to form cognitive evaluations and therefore determine tourists' behaviour. The perception of the destination's ethical component contributes to shaping expectations and therefore also the perceived quality. Ethical considerations will clearly affect the quality and added value of tourism products (Donyadide 2010).

The ethical aspects of travel are of increasing importance for tourists, and therefore will determine their perceptions. Ribeiro et al. (2017) claim that tourists' interaction with others at the destination will determine emotional solidarity and condition satisfaction levels and the likelihood of revisits. Hwang, Baloglu and Tanford (2019) indicate that *"the reviewed literature finds a direct link between perceptions of fairness and loyalty intentions in a variety of service settings"*.

Despite the apparent relevance of ethical considerations on tourists' behaviour, we are unable to find any studies that provide an integrated model for these aspects. Consequently, and in line with research into the determinants underlying tourists' behaviour, our study hypothesizes that tourists' satisfaction, perceived quality of the trip and destination loyalty depend on the level and nature of the perceived ethics of destination. Our first three hypotheses are given below:

*H1: The more favourable the perceived ethical issues of destination, the higher overall satisfaction will be.*

*H2: The more favourable the ethical issues of destination, the higher the perceived quality of the trip will be.*

*H3: The higher perceived ethics of destination, the higher destination loyalty will be.*

### **2.3. Perceived trip quality**

In line with other research (Chen and Tsai 2007), for the purpose of our study perceived trip quality is understood as the tourists' assessment of service quality in terms of food, accommodation, tourist attractions, transport and the local environment. Expectations play a key role in tourists' behaviour (Dodds, Graci and Holmes 2010). Chen and Tsai (2007) consider that perceived trip quality is based on a comparison of expectations and actual performance. They also believe that trip quality is a representation of the destination experience. Various authors claim that satisfaction is positively conditioned by expectations, perceived quality and perceived value (Padlee et al. 2019; Eusébio and Vieira 2013). Moon and Han (2019) pointed out that perceived value is a stronger mediator between involvement and satisfaction than perceived price reasonableness.

It seems clear that loyalty is the result of a positive experience in the destination. In this regard, perceived quality has been recognised as an antecedent to tourism satisfaction and future intended behaviour (Babić-Hodović et al. 2019; Chen and Tsai 2007). Quality not only affects perceptions of value and satisfaction, but also has a direct influence on behavioural intention. According to Petrick (2004), quality has a direct and moderating effect, and some authors even go so far as to claim that perceived quality has a greater influence on behavioural intentions than actual tourist satisfaction (Baker and Crompton 2000). Kladou and Kehagias (2014) assert that “loyalty, as expressed by items such as recommendation and re-visitation, is mostly influenced by quality”.

Considering this background, the following hypotheses may be made:

*H4: The higher perceived trip quality, the higher overall satisfaction will be.*

*H5: The higher perceived trip quality, the higher tourist loyalty will be.*

#### **2.4. Overall satisfaction**

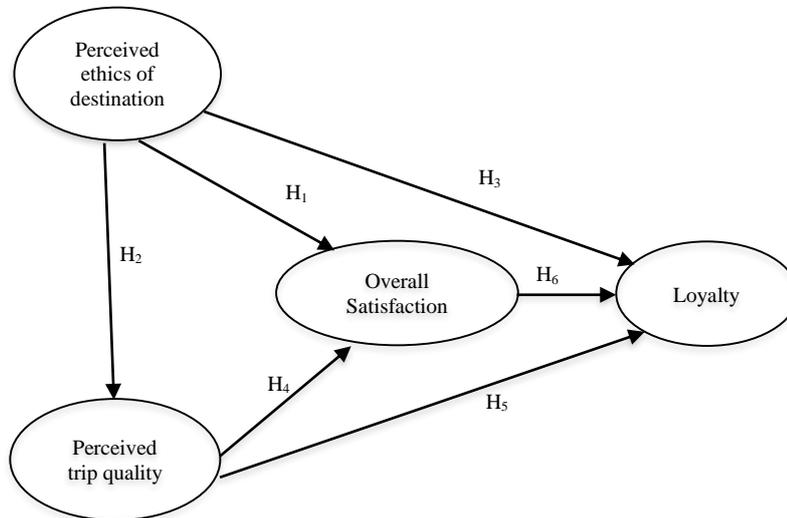
Consumer satisfaction is defined as a cognitive or emotional judgement based on an individual's experience with a product or service (Akhoondnejad 2016). However, analysing satisfaction with a tourist destination is a more complex process than with individual service providers. Indeed, in addition to service quality, a number of other destination attributes will influence overall satisfaction (Kim and Brown 2012). Satisfaction with the tourist experience can be measured by the sense of enjoyment with the destination's attributes or by overall judgements and feelings regarding the site experience. A number of authors define these two approaches to satisfaction as ‘attribute’ or ‘transaction- specific’ satisfaction and ‘overall’ satisfaction (Hall, O'Mahony and Gayler 2017; Prayag and Ryan 2012). Various studies have concluded that attribute satisfaction has a positive impact on overall satisfaction (Pérez Campdesuñer et al. 2017), whilst others consider that overall satisfaction is more than the mere sum of satisfaction with various separate attributes (Chi and Qu 2009). Furthermore, overall satisfaction would appear to be a more stable construct than transaction-specific satisfaction (Prayag and Ryan 2012). In line with other studies (Ramseook-Munhurrana, Seebalucka and Naidoo 2015), for the purpose of our research we consider overall satisfaction to be tourists' general satisfaction with the travel experience.

Tourist satisfaction is important to successful destination marketing because it influences tourists' behaviour. This is firstly due to the fact that satisfied tourists are more willing to pay more, and secondly because they will recommend the destination to others and probably return themselves (Deng and Pierskalla 2018). A large amount of research has been conducted into the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction (Sánchez-Rebull et al. 2018). Many authors conclude that overall tourist satisfaction is an antecedent to tourist loyalty (Padlee *et al.* 2019; Wu 2016; Chi and Qu 2008; Baker and Crompton 2000), mediates with image and is associated with attributes, expectations, consumer experience or perceived quality (Hu 2016; Wang et al. 2009; Chi and Qu 2008; Chen and Tsai 2007). This leads us to a final hypothesis:

*H6: The higher the overall satisfaction, the higher destination loyalty will be.*

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model.

Figure 1: **Conceptual model**



### 3. METHODOLOGY

We designed a questionnaire to verify the hypotheses of the proposed model. The survey instrument was revised and finalised, based on feedback from a pilot sample of 55 international tourists. The final questionnaire was conducted in English and Spanish and included two types of questions. On the one hand, a series of questions related to ethical aspects of the destination, image, perceived trip quality, satisfaction and loyalty. In this case, respondents were asked to indicate their agreement level for each item on a five-point Likert-type scale, from “strongly disagree (=1)” to “strongly agree (5)”. In addition, a series of questions related to the tourists’ profile were included, with the objective of ascertaining age, education level, occupation level, monthly income, travel party, length of stay and previous experience, among other aspects. In this case, a categorical scale was used.

Ethically-aware tourists demand reassurances that their travel experience does not impact negatively on the host society or environment. In this sense, ethical tourism must address its economic, social and environmental impact on the tourism industry, minimising the negative effects whilst at the same time acting as a vehicle for individual and collective fulfilment, as posited by the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (UNWTO 2017). An ethical destination should encourage personal development through participation and contact with local communities. Emotional aspects such as wellbeing allow for the construction of an ethical image of a destination (McDonald 2015). Perceived destination ethics, representing economic, socio-cultural, environmental and wellbeing aspects, were measured using 13 items taken from expert opinion<sup>1</sup>, a review of previous studies

<sup>1</sup> In order to determine the various dimensions of destination ethics, 60 surveys were sent by email to specialists with mid to long standing experience in the tourist sector and 7 in-depth interviews were held with tourist industry experts with more than 20 years’ experience.

and a five-point Likert-type scale (Uysal et al. 2016; Su et al. 2015; Jamal and Camargo 2014; Kim, Holland and Han 2013). Perceived trip quality was measured with 5 formative indicators, in line with literature related to this construct (Chen and Tsai 2007). Overall satisfaction was measured by means of a single item, while loyalty was measured using 2 items (Prayag and Ryan 2012; Chi and Qu 2008; Chen and Tsai 2007).

The target population comprised international visitors to the city of Quito (Ecuador). The sample was selected using a stratified random sampling method based on tourists' geographical origins. More than 80% came from North America, South America and Europe. The strata were made up of tourists over the age of 18 from these three regions. The number of tourists interviewed in each stratum was proportional to the number of tourist in the target population. Moreover, in order to ensure that the tourists had prior experience in the destination, they were required to have already completed at least 50% of their planned stay in the city. The empirical study was carried out during May and June 2016. The surveys were conducted in Quito's most popular tourist areas and at Antonio José de Sucre International Airport. After screening the responses and discarding unusable questionnaires, 419 valid questionnaires were obtained. The sample size was in line with the level recommended in literature for structural equation models with similar complexity (So et al. 2014; Bagozzi and Yi 2012).

The respondent profile is summarised in Table 1. The tourists were mainly from the United States, Venezuela, Colombia and Spain. The vast majority of respondents were aged between 31 and 54 (54.9%), with a slightly higher number of male visitors (53.7%). The respondent profile is a person with university studies, visiting the city for fewer than 5 days and accompanied by friends or relatives. Differences were observed according to the region of origin. South American tourists stayed in the city for an average of 7.6 days, North Americans for 4.5 days and Europeans for 4.4 days.

Quito was the main travel destination of just 37.5% of respondents. Additional destinations included the Galapagos (16%), Otavalo (14%), Guayaquil (14%) and Latacunga (10%). The majority were first-time visitors to the city that had used online resources to learn about its attractions and amenities.

Table 1: **Profile of respondents (N=419)**

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	225	53.7
Female	194	46.3
Age		
18-30	98	23.4
31-42	136	32.5
43-54	94	22.4
55-66	52	12.4
66 and over	39	9.3
Education level		
High school	23	5.5
Vocational training	22	5.3
University	252	60.1
Postgraduate	122	29.1

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Occupation		
Student	29	6.9
Housework	7	1.7
Retired	55	13.1
Salaried worker	140	33.4
Skilled worker	27	6.4
Civil servant	36	8.6
Self-employed	56	13.4
Entrepreneur	29	6.9
Executive staff	26	6.2
Other	14	3.3
Travel party		
Single	108	25.8
Couple	58	13.8
Family/relatives	131	31.3
Friends	122	29.1
Past experience		
First-time visit	327	78.0
Repeat visit	92	22.0
Information source		
Internet (Blog, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	151	36.0
Media (TV, Newspaper, etc.)	92	22.0
Friends (word-of-mouth)	94	22.4
Travel Agencies	65	15.5
Other	17	4.1
Length of stay		
< 5 days	225	53.7
[5-8] days	111	26.5
>8 days	83	19.8

The data were analysed in two stages. Firstly, exploratory factor analyses on ethical issues affecting the destination were conducted using a principal component method with varimax rotation in order to examine dimensionalities and psychometric properties. Secondly, the relationship between the perceived ethics of destination, perceived trip quality, overall satisfaction and loyalty were tested empirically using the structural equation modelling (SEM) technique with AMOS in a second phase.

#### 4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

As discussed above, the perception of ethical aspects of the destination was measured using a multi-attribute approach. The principal component factor analysis was applied to the final data in order to scrutinise the underlying dimensions of the perceived ethics of destination. Three factors with an eigenvalue greater than one explained 58% of the variance of the ethical perception on the destination scale. Two items with factor loadings of less than 0.5 were removed from the scale. The varimax-rotated factor pattern indicates that the first factor concerns the “wellbeing of the local people” (5 items,  $\alpha=0.76$ ). The second factor relates to “subjective wellbeing” (3 items,  $\alpha=0.74$ ) and the third factor consists of “active participation and equality” (3 items, 0.58). Next, the

arithmetic means of items included within the three factors was used to build the construct perceived ethics for subsequent analysis. Table 2 summarises the results of the factor analysis.

**Table 2: Factor analysis of Perceived Ethics of Destination**

Factor or items	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance explained (%)	Cumulative variance explained (%)	Cronbach $\alpha$
<b>ETH1: Wellbeing of the local people</b>		4.041	36.7	36.7	0.76
<i>The visit enabled me to see the existence of...</i>					
Equity	0.731				
Respect for culture and the environment	0.727				
Responsible consumption of and demand for local products	0.647				
Respectful behaviour	0.617				
Social commitment	0.555				
<b>ETH2: Subjective wellbeing</b>		1.329	12.1	48.8	0.74
<i>The visit made me feel...</i>					
Happy	0.802				
At peace with myself	0.788				
Self-fulfilled	0.707				
<b>ETH3: Active participation and equality</b>		1.011	9.2	58.0	0.58
<i>The visit highlighted the existence of ...</i>					
Active participation	0.800				
Respect for others	0.688				
Coexistence in equality among participants	0.522				

Note. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)=0.841; Bartlett's test of sphericity= 1233.50;  $p < 0.001$ .

Perceived trip quality, overall satisfaction and loyalty are presented in Table 3. The mean values for perceived quality ranged from 3.62 to 4.12, which also seems to indicate a high perceived quality of the trip. The existence of multicollinearity was tested (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer 2001). The highest value of the variance inflation factor (VIF) stood at a relatively low 1.606, (Henseler, Ringle and Sinkovics 2009). In addition, tolerance values were close to 1. The Condition Index (CI) was below 30. Therefore, multicollinearity was not considered a problem in this study. The means for overall satisfaction scale ranged from 4.40 to 4.51, indicating a high degree of satisfaction amongst tourists travelling to Ecuador in general, and Quito in particular. In turn, the means of loyalty scale ranged from 3.57 to 4.36, indicating that they were more

likely to recommend Quito to others than actually revisit the city. The constructs were considered reliable (alpha value= 0.851).

**Table 3: Construct of Perceived Trip Quality, Overall Satisfaction and Loyalty**

Indicators	Mean	Standard deviation	Reliability $\alpha$
<b>Perceived Trip Quality</b>			
Q1: Food	4.12	0.749	
Q2: Accommodation	4.06	0.758	
Q3: Attractions	3.73	0.973	
Q4: Accessibility and transport	3.62	0.921	
Q5: Local environment	4.02	0.717	
<b>Overall Satisfaction</b>			
Satisfaction with the overall quality of the stay in Quito	4.40	0.657	
<b>Loyalty</b>			0.851
L1: I intend to revisit this destination	3.57	1.156	
L2: I will recommend Quito to others	4.36	0.712	

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to test the proposed conceptual model in Figure 1. SPSS software was used to check missing values and outliers. The results showed that the data have no significant outliers. The listwise deletion method was used as the number of missing values was lower than 10%. Normality was checked with SPSS and AMOS. Skew was < 3 and kurtosis < 10, which suggests a normal distribution of the variables observed (Hair et al. 2010). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS software with maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) to test the convergent validity of the constructs used in the subsequent analysis. As Table 4 shows, the convergent validity of CFA results should be supported by item reliability, construct reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair et al. 1998). T-values for all the standardised factor loadings of the items were found to be significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Construct reliability estimates ranging from 0.75 to 0.87 exceeded the recommended critical value of 0.7, indicating that it was satisfactory (Hair et al. 1998). The AVE for all constructs exceeded the minimum value of 0.50, suggesting good convergent validity (Hair et al. 1998; Fornell and Larcker 1981). The Fornell-Larcker criterion shows that the square root of each AVE (0.71 for perceived ethics of destination and 0.87 for loyalty) is greater than the related inter-construct correlations (0.40), indicating adequate discriminant validity. Consequently, all these assessments support the soundness of the measurement model.

Table 4: **Convergent validity**

Constructs	Items	Item reliability				$\alpha$	CR	AVE
		FL	SE	SFL	t- value			
Perceived Ethics of Destination	ETH1	1	-	0.805	-	0.83	0.75	0.51
	ETH2	1.13	0.11	0.609	10.41***			
	ETH3	0.88	0.08	0.691	11.22***			
Loyalty	LOY1	1	-	0.918	-	0.85	0.87	0.76
	LOY2	0.72	0.06	0.826	11.74***			

FL: factor loadings; SE: standard error; SFL: standardized factor loading; CR: construct reliability; AVE: average variance extracted.

The proposed model was tested using the four constructs; namely, perceived ethics of destination, perceived trip quality, overall satisfaction and destination loyalty. The “wellbeing of the local people”, “subjective wellbeing” and “active participation and equity” were used as measurement variables for the perceived ethics of destination. Composite scores for perceived trip quality were obtained from the mean scores across items representing that construct. In addition, satisfaction and loyalty were measured with one and two items respectively, as stated above. SEM analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the five constructs.

The model proposed in Figure 1 was compared with a series of alternative competing models. More specifically, the model was compared with three alternative models. A model (A) that did not include the path between “perceived ethics of destination” and “destination loyalty”; a model (B) that did not include the path between “perceived trip quality” and “destination loyalty”; and finally, a model (C) that did not include the path between “perceived ethics of destination” and “destination loyalty” or the path between “perceived trip quality” and “destination loyalty”.

The fit of the structural models was examined using maximum likelihood estimation. The fit indices of the model comparison are summarised in Table 5. Following the recommendations of Jöreskog and Sorbom (1995), sequential Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests were performed to assess the differences in estimated construct co-variances explained by the four models. The results of the  $\chi^2$  difference tests favoured the proposed theoretical model. A series of goodness-of-fit measures was also compared, indicating that the proposed theoretical model achieved the best level of model fit. The results indicate  $\chi^2$  is 12.91 with 10 degrees of freedom (d.f.) and  $p=0.22$ , greater than 0.05 and therefore statistically insignificant. The  $\chi^2/d.f.$  ratio of the model is 1.29 (12.91/ 10), indicating an acceptable fit. Other indicators of goodness of fit are GFI= 0.99, AGFI= 0.97, NFI= 0.98, CFI= 0.99, RMSEA= 0.03 and RMR= 0.01. The results indicated that the data collected are consistent with the hypothesised model.

Due to the nature of the study, tests were conducted for common method bias, specifically because the five-point Likert scale is prone to capturing response sets. Two tests were also used to determine the degree of variance in the common method bias. The Harman one-factor test (Podsakoff and Organ 1986) revealed that no single general factor accounted for the majority variance in an exploratory factor analytic. In the model,

single factor variance stood at 32.6%, indicating no common method bias. On the other hand, based on Podsakoff et al. 2003, a new model with all the observed variables loaded onto one factor was re-estimated, producing unacceptable results (Chi-square=304.111; df=14; GFI=0.79; RMSEA=3.204). Overall, these results suggest that common method variance is not a pervasive issue in the data.

Table 5: Comparison of competing models

	Theoretical	Model A	Model B	Model C
X <sup>2</sup>	12.91	28.86	23.67	55.72
d.f	10	11	11	12
GFI	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.96
AGFI	0.97	0.95	0.96	0.92
NFI	0.98	0.97	0.97	0.94
CFI	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.95
RMSEA	0.03	0.06	0.05	0.09
RMR	0.01	0.04	0.03	0.08

Figure 2 presents the results of SEM analysis. The results of hypothesis testing indicated that all the paths had significant path coefficients. As Fig. 2 shows, H1 prediction was supported ( $t= 3.89$ ,  $p< 0.01$ ), confirming that perceived ethics of destination have a significantly positive effect on overall satisfaction. Our findings indicated that perceived ethics of destination have a positive influence on perceived trip quality ( $t= 7.49$ ,  $p< 0.01$ ), supporting H2. Perceived trip quality also has positive effects on overall satisfaction ( $t=5.42$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), supporting H4. Overall satisfaction, as hypothesised, has a significantly positive effect on loyalty ( $t= 3.45$ ,  $p< 0.01$ ), supporting H6. H3 and H5 were supported, showing that perceived ethics of destination and trip quality have a significantly positive effect on loyalty ( $t= 3.97$ ,  $p< 0.01$  and  $t= 3.32$ ,  $p< 0.01$  respectively).

Figure 2: Model results

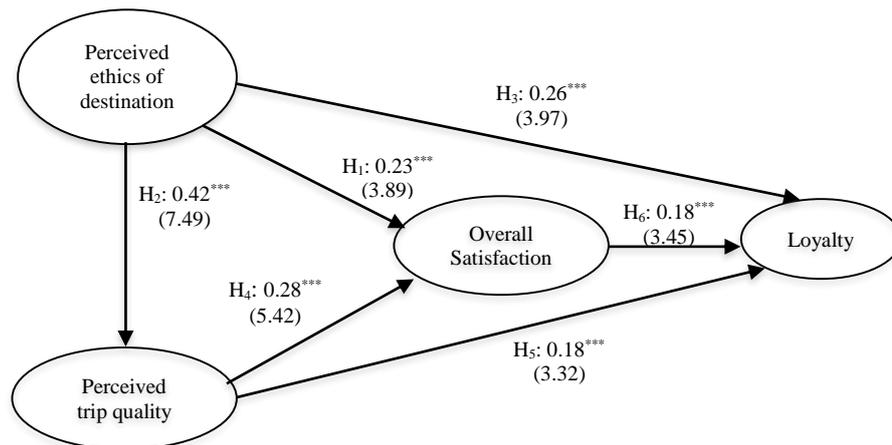


Table 6 summarises the results of the hypothesis testing. Perceived ethics of destination directly and indirectly influence overall satisfaction. Likewise, perceived ethics of destination also have a direct and indirect influence on loyalty. Finally, overall satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between perceived trip quality and destination loyalty.

Table 6: **Summary of hypothesis testing results**

<b>Hypothesis</b>		<b>Testing result</b>
H1	Perceived ethics of destination → Overall satisfaction	Supported
H2	Perceived ethics of destination → Perceived trip quality	Supported
H3	Perceived ethics of destination → Loyalty	Supported
H4	Perceived trip quality → Overall satisfaction	Supported
H5	Perceived trip quality → Loyalty	Supported
H6	Overall satisfaction → Loyalty	Supported

Table 7 illustrates the direct and indirect effects. The greatest total effect of the perceived ethics of destination occurs above perceived trip quality, which stood at 0.424. Similarly, the total effect of perceived ethics of destination on overall satisfaction was found to be 0.347: 0.230 directly and 0.117 indirectly. The total effect of perceived ethics of destination on loyalty was found to be 0.398. This indicates that perceived ethics of destination is the most important variable that influences tourist loyalty.

Table 7: **Direct, indirect and total effect**

	<b>Direct effect</b>	<b>Indirect effect</b>	<b>Total effect</b>
Perceived ethics of destination → Overall satisfaction	0.230	0.117	0.347
Perceived ethics of destination → Perceived trip quality	0.424	0.000	0.424
Perceived ethics of destination → Loyalty	0.257	0.141	0.398
Perceived trip quality → Overall satisfaction	0.276	0.000	0.276
Perceived trip quality → Loyalty	0.183	0.050	0.233
Overall satisfaction → Loyalty	0.182	0.000	0.182

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In an increasingly competitive scenario, loyalty has emerged as a strategic goal for cities. Considered for the purpose of our study as the intention to recommend and/or revisit a destination, is also a strong indicator of a destination's success, as it reflects tourists' degree of satisfaction. Understanding the determinants of tourist loyalty is therefore crucial for destination managers, as it enables them to prioritise those elements capable of boosting loyalty. Numerous studies have addressed the question of loyalty and its determinants, and the most frequently cited antecedents in this sense include satisfaction, destination image, perceived quality and motivation.

More recently, attention has been focused on tourists' perception of certain aspects of a destination, such as sustainability, tourist-resident relationships and perceived fairness (Chen and Rahman 2018). Although several studies appear to implicitly accept the importance of ethical considerations on tourists' behaviour, none address this question in an explicit manner. This study fills this research gap by conducting an empirical study and including the perceived ethics of destination in tourists' behaviour. More specifically, it has tested the effects of perceived ethics of destination, perceived trip quality and overall satisfaction on loyalty. It also tested the relationships among predictors. The structural relationships between all variables in the study were tested using data obtained from 419 international tourists visiting Quito in Ecuador and applying structural equation modelling (SEM).

The findings showed that perceived ethics of destination appear to be the principal influence on behavioural intentions, namely the intention to revisit and willingness to recommend. The perceived ethical issues of destination have both a direct and indirect influence on behavioural intentions. Moreover, perceived ethics of destination have an important effect on trip quality and overall satisfaction. It seems that tourists who perceived aspects of the destination as ethical were more likely to perceive the destination as being of high quality, which in turn would strengthen their degree of satisfaction and consequent loyalty. The results also showed that perceived quality influenced overall satisfaction and loyalty. These findings confirm the findings of previous research (Vo and Chovancová 2019; Hallak, Assaker and El-Haddad 2017; Wang, Tran and Tran 2017). It seems that international tourists who perceived high quality were more likely to be satisfied and therefore more loyal to the destination. Finally, in line with many other research projects, overall satisfaction influenced loyalty (Antón, Camarero and Laguna-García 2017; Kim and Park 2017). In other words, tourists' satisfaction with their visit to Quito would influence their loyalty to the city.

The study has major theoretical and managerial implications. In terms of the former, our research was conducted in South America, a region that has received little attention in terms of the analysis of tourists' behaviour based on integrated models. Our work also contributes to literature by including for the first time the perception of destination ethics as a predictor for loyalty. Finally, our research considered the relationships between predictors. Although the connection between the perceived quality and overall satisfaction with the travel experience has been addressed in tourism literature, the role of the perceived ethics of destination had not been considered.

The findings also have a series of managerial implications. On the one hand, they suggest that perceived ethics of destination is a significant predictor of tourist loyalty. Therefore, any decision to improve these aspects, such as providing more authentic tourist experiences, will contribute to destination loyalty. Loyal tourists will revisit the destination and/or recommend it to third parties by WOM, thereby providing an efficient and inexpensive means of promotion. In recent years, competition to attract tourists has become increasingly fierce. Although producers have to offer a specific product in a specific place, with the consequent spatial immobility, demand has become increasingly mobile, allowing for the global consumption of tourist services. In this context, a destination's success does not depend only on economic factors but is also conditioned by cultural changes that influence tourists' expectations. Tourists are demanding

experiences of increasingly higher standards, forcing the industry and destination managers to create differentiated products that satisfy their expectations and needs.

Destinations should increase trip quality in order to boost tourist's satisfaction and loyalty. In the specific case of Quito, improvements could be made particularly with regard to the attractions, accessibility and transport, which scored lowest among tourists. Increasing the supply of leisure and entertainment activities and more efficient means of transport would prove effective in improving quality. In turn, this would boost overall satisfaction with the travel experience, as the findings showed that perceived trip quality weighed most heavily in defining overall satisfaction.

Finally, as with all research, our work has a series of limitations that could be addressed in future research. Firstly, our study is limited to a single city and country. Secondly, it considers international tourists only. Research should therefore be conducted in other cities and countries, and also include domestic tourists. Thirdly, and as Weeden (2014) and Lee et al. (2017) explained, the perception of ethical considerations leads tourists to behave responsibly in the destination. Future studies could therefore analyse how this perception affects the degree of responsibility shown by tourists. Finally, in line with studies such as those by Moeller, Dolnicar and Leisch (2011) and Nickerson, Jorgenson and Boley (2016), who demonstrated that destination expenditure is higher among sustainable tourists, our study has shown a similar trend amongst tourists with more sensitive, ethical or responsible motivations, thereby increasing the positive economic impact, a consideration that will be addressed in-depth in future research.

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