

# Tourist Satisfaction Research in Tourism: A Focused Bibliometric Mapping of Service Quality, Experience, Destination Image, Sustainability and Well-Being

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## Abstract

Tourist satisfaction has remained one of the most persistent constructs in tourism research, but its conceptualisation has changed considerably from service-quality evaluation toward experience, destination image, authenticity, sustainability, well-being and technology-mediated tourism. This paper presents a focused bibliometric mapping of a curated corpus of 16 unique studies published between 2001 and 2024. All studies published in proceedings were excluded, and duplicate files representing the same publication were removed. The analysis examines the temporal development of the research domain, recurring thematic concentrations, theoretical perspectives, methodological tendencies and emerging areas of research. The findings indicate that tourist satisfaction functions as a stable central construct across the literature, while the factors surrounding it have progressively diversified. Four broad thematic concentrations emerge: service quality and destination evaluation; tourist experience and behavioural responses; destination image, authenticity and cultural meaning; and sustainability, well-being and smart tourism. The literature also demonstrates increasing use of mediation and moderation models, particularly in explaining revisit intention, loyalty, trust, happiness and word-of-mouth. Despite this diversification, the research remains fragmented, with technology, sustainability, cultural identity and psychological well-being frequently examined in separate streams. The study concludes by identifying an integrative research agenda for future tourism scholarship.

**Keywords:** tourist satisfaction; bibliometric mapping; tourist experience; destination image; authenticity; sustainability; tourist well-being; smart tourism

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## 1. Introduction

Tourist satisfaction has long been regarded as a fundamental construct for understanding tourists' evaluations of destinations, tourism services and travel experiences. Early tourism research primarily examined satisfaction through destination comparison, service performance and the extent to which destinations met tourists' expectations. Kozak (2001), for example, examined tourist satisfaction comparatively across British and German travellers, illustrating the relevance of destination evaluation and nationality in satisfaction research. Literature subsequently moved toward more comprehensive destination-level conceptualisations. Dmitrović et al. (2009) argued that tourist satisfaction should be examined alongside perceived quality, destination image, value, costs and other destination-level factors, while also emphasising the managerial value of systematic satisfaction measurement. Chan et al. (2015) further demonstrated that tourist satisfaction cannot necessarily be reduced to a single service-quality evaluation because tourists distinguish between satisfaction with specific tour services and satisfaction with the overall tour experience.

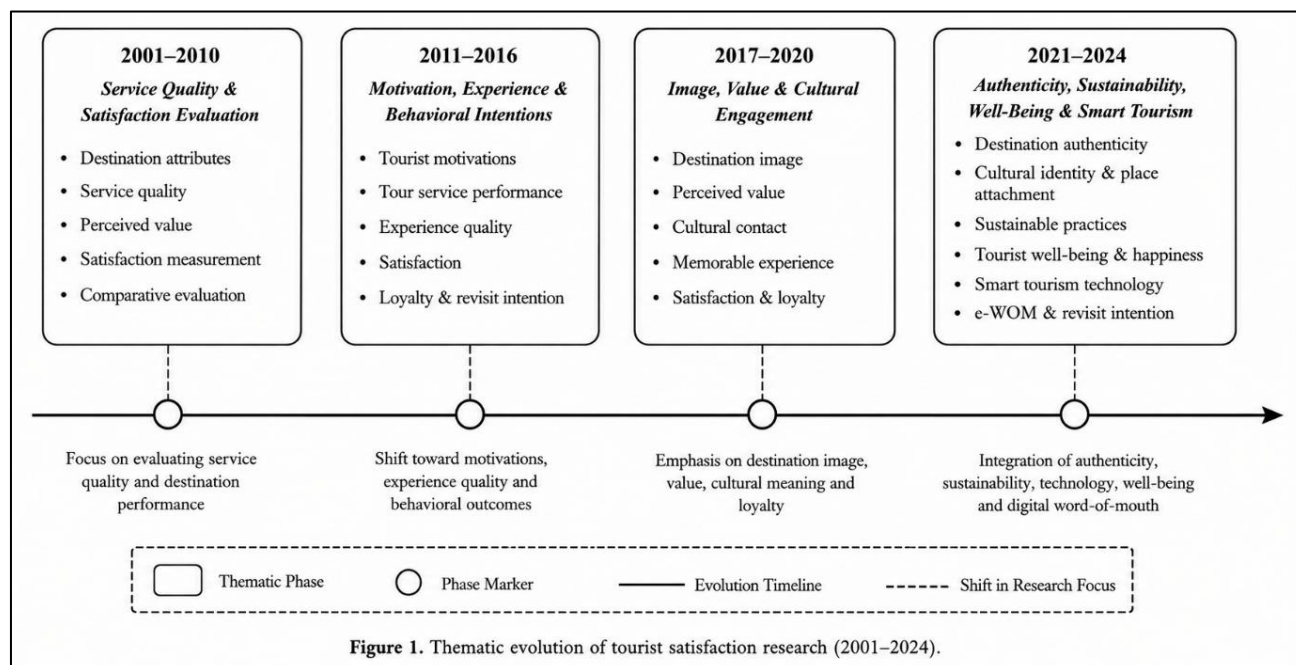
As the field developed, researchers increasingly incorporated motivations, experience quality, perceived value and behavioural intention. Correia et al. (2013) examined satisfaction in relation to tourist motivations, while Chen and Chen (2010) connected experience quality and perceived value with satisfaction and behavioural intentions in heritage tourism. The literature consequently began treating satisfaction as part of a broader tourism experience rather than merely an outcome of service performance. More recent research has further expanded this field by introducing destination image, authenticity, cultural identity, sustainability, well-being and smart tourism. Shi et al. (2022) examined destination brand equity and brand authenticity in relation to revisit intention, with tourist satisfaction functioning as an important explanatory mechanism. Jebbouri et al. (2022) connected destination image formation, authenticity and community participation with tourist satisfaction and trust. Fu and Luo (2023) extended the literature into cultural identity and place attachment, while Bagheri et al. (2024) placed tourist well-being between tourism experience and satisfaction and loyalty.

The most recent studies retained in the present corpus also show the emergence of smart tourism and digitally mediated experience. Yuksel et al. (2024) examined smart tourism technology experience in Bordeaux and found that accessibility, informativeness and personalization contributed to satisfaction, while satisfaction was positively associated with tourist happiness. Seow et al. (2024) examined tourist satisfaction, experience, e-WOM and revisit intention in wellness tourism and demonstrated that different aspects of experience and satisfaction contribute differently to recommendation and revisit outcomes. These developments suggest that tourist satisfaction research has become increasingly interdisciplinary. However, the literature has not developed in a single direction. Service-quality studies, cultural-tourism studies, destination-branding studies, sustainability research, well-being research and smart-tourism studies continue to operate as partially separated streams. This creates a need to map the intellectual development of the field and identify the themes that now define tourist satisfaction research. Accordingly, this study conducts a focused bibliometric mapping of the supplied literature with the objective of identifying its temporal development, dominant themes, theoretical

foundations, methodological tendencies and future research opportunities.

## 2. Methodological Approach

The study adopts a focused bibliometric mapping approach using the research papers supplied for analysis. The resulting corpus contains 16 unique studies published between 2001 and 2024. The corpus includes empirical studies, conceptual work and research using quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches. The papers cover tourist satisfaction across general tourism, heritage tourism, wellness tourism, sustainable tourism, destination branding and smart tourism contexts. The analysis was undertaken along five dimensions: temporal development, thematic concentration, theoretical orientation, methodological evolution and research gaps. The thematic analysis focused on recurring constructs appearing in the titles, abstracts, research models, findings and reference discussions of the supplied studies. Because the corpus is a researcher-curated set rather than a complete Scopus or Web of Science export, the analysis does not claim database-wide citation counts, author centrality, country productivity, h-index or software-generated co-citation statistics.



**Figure 1. Thematic evolution of tourist satisfaction research (2001–2024)**

## 3. Temporal Evolution of Tourist Satisfaction Research

The temporal distribution of the corpus indicates a clear broadening of the research domain.

### 3.1 2001–2010: Satisfaction as Destination and Service Evaluation

The earliest phase is dominated by satisfaction measurement and destination evaluation. Kozak (2001) examined differences in tourist satisfaction

across nationalities and destinations, while Dmitrović et al. (2009) proposed a destination-level framework incorporating quality, image, value, costs and other destination attributes. This period therefore conceptualises satisfaction largely as an evaluative construct. The research question is essentially what destination, and service characteristics make tourists satisfied and how satisfaction can be measured systematically.

### **3.2 2011–2016: Motivation, Experience and Behavioural Consequences**

The next phase expands the field beyond destination attributes. Correia et al. (2013) connects tourists' motivations with satisfaction, indicating that satisfaction is shaped not only by what a destination provides but also by what tourists seek from travel. Chan et al. (2015) similarly distinguish between tour-service performance, satisfaction with tour services, satisfaction with the tour experience and behavioural intentions. This period therefore introduces a stronger experience orientation, while behavioural consequences such as loyalty and revisiting intention become increasingly important.

### **3.3 2017–2020: Destination Image, Value and Cultural Engagement**

The literature then becomes more concerned with destination meaning and the experiential context in which satisfaction is formed. Research included in the corpus discusses destination image, perceived value, cultural contact, memorable experience and loyalty. The Can Tho study's reference base, for example, reflects the continuing development of this stream through work on experience quality, cultural contact, perceived value and destination loyalty. The destination-image literature also became increasingly sophisticated. Research no longer viewed image merely as descriptive knowledge of a destination, but as an important evaluative factor associated with satisfaction, trust and behavioural intention.

### **3.4 2021–2024: Psychological, Cultural, Sustainable and Technological Expansion**

The final period is substantially more heterogeneous. Literature incorporates destination authenticity, brand equity, cultural identity, place attachment, sustainability, well-being, happiness, e-WOM and smart tourism technology. Shi et al. (2022) examine destination brand equity and brand authenticity and explicitly position tourist satisfaction as a mediator while considering destination familiarity as a moderator. Thipsingh et al. (2022) extend satisfaction research into sustainable practices, destination image, perceived value and novelty seeking. Fu and Luo (2023) introduce cultural identity and place attachment into heritage tourism, finding that cultural identity is related to travel experience and place attachment, while satisfaction and place attachment are associated with revisit intention. The 2024 studies further broaden the field into wellness tourism, smart tourism and e-WOM. Seow et al. (2024) identify differentiated effects of satisfaction and experience on revisit and recommendation behaviours, while Yuksel et al. (2024) connect smart tourism technology experience with satisfaction and happiness.

## **4. Major Thematic Concentrations**

### **4.1 Service Quality, Perceived Value and Satisfaction**

Service quality remains the foundational theme of the literature. Earlier studies largely conceptualised satisfaction as a response to service performance and perceived quality. Chan et al. (2015) identify multiple service dimensions and demonstrate the need to distinguish service-specific satisfaction from overall tour experience. Perceived value is also persistent. Literature repeatedly treats value as a significant evaluative component associated with tourist satisfaction. Thipsingh et al. (2022), for example, reports significant effects of perceived value on satisfaction, while Seow et al. (2024) examine perceived-value dimensions as antecedents of satisfaction and experience. Thus, despite subsequent conceptual expansion, quality and value remain core foundations of satisfaction research.

### **4.2 Destination Image, Authenticity and Brand Evaluation**

Destination image has emerged as one of the most persistent themes beyond service quality. Thipsingh et al. (2022) report a positive relationship between destination image and satisfaction, while Jebbouri et al. (2022) place destination image formation alongside authenticity, community participation and access to local products. Authenticity introduces a further symbolic dimension. Shi et al. (2022) argue that destination brand authenticity contributes to destination brand equity and affects revisit intention, with satisfaction providing an important mechanism. This thematic concentration demonstrates that contemporary satisfaction research increasingly recognises tourists as evaluators of meaning, credibility and symbolic value, rather than only service performance.

### **4.3 Tourist Experience, Cultural Identity and Place Attachment**

Experience represents another major concentration. Rehman et al. (2023) investigate tourist experience quality alongside destination image, regenerative tourism involvement and price reasonableness, finding that enjoyment and destination image contribute positively to satisfaction even though several other experiential dimensions do not show direct effects. Fu and Luo (2023) extend the experiential literature through cultural identity and place attachment. Their evidence indicates that cultural identity is positively associated with travel experience and place attachment, while place attachment and satisfaction are positively related to revisit intention. This research stream is important because it shifts attention from the evaluation of services to the personal and cultural meaning of tourism experiences.

#### ***4.4 Sustainability and Responsible Tourism***

Sustainability appears as an increasingly important dimension of tourist satisfaction. Thipsingh et al. (2022) explicitly examine sustainable practices alongside destination image, perceived value and novelty seeking. Their structural results indicate significant effects of sustainable practices, destination image, perceived value and novelty seeking on satisfaction. Rehman et al. (2023) introduce regenerative tourism involvement, providing evidence that sustainability-oriented participation is increasingly being incorporated into satisfaction models, although its direct effect may vary according to destination context. Zulvianti et al. (2023) further extend this discussion through perceived environmental value, destination image, satisfaction, loyalty and religiosity in halal tourism. Sustainability is therefore shifting from being treated solely as a destination-management concern to becoming part of tourist evaluation and behavioural research.

#### ***4.5 Well-Being, Happiness and Psychological Outcomes***

A notable development in the recent literature is the distinction between satisfaction and broader psychological outcomes. Bagheri et al. (2024) identify tourist well-being as a multidimensional construct involving positive emotion, engagement and meaning and argue that tourism experience can generate well-being, which subsequently affects satisfaction and loyalty. The wellness tourism research similarly connects tourist experience, satisfaction and well-being. Liu et al. (2023) place tourist satisfaction within a broader model of wellness-tourism experience and tourist well-being. Yuksel et al. (2024) further demonstrate that smart tourism experiences can influence tourist satisfaction and that satisfaction can subsequently contribute to tourist happiness. They explicitly distinguish satisfaction as a relatively immediate evaluation from happiness as a broader psychological outcome. The research agenda has therefore expanded from “Are tourists satisfied?” toward “What psychological value does tourism create?”

#### ***4.6 Smart Tourism and Digitally Mediated Experience***

Smart tourism is the newest thematic concentration within the pre-2025 corpus. Yuksel et al. (2024) examine smart tourism technology experience through informativeness, accessibility, interactivity and personalization and find that accessibility, informativeness and personalization contribute positively to satisfaction. The importance of this stream lies less in technology itself than in the recognition that technology increasingly forms part of the tourist experience. Smart tourism technologies

provide personalised information, support decision-making and contribute to the design of destination experiences. Compared with the other themes in the corpus, however, smart tourism remains relatively underrepresented. This suggests that technology-mediated satisfaction represents an emerging rather than mature research cluster within the present literature set.

### **5. Theoretical Perspectives**

The reviewed studies demonstrate considerable theoretical pluralism. Expectation-disconfirmation theory appears prominently in satisfaction research, particularly in studies examining the comparison between tourists’ expectations and experienced outcomes. Seow et al. (2024) explicitly ground their wellness-tourism research in expectancy-disconfirmation theory. Stimulus-Organism-Response theory is used in destination-brand research, particularly by Shi et al. (2022), where destination brand equity and authenticity are conceptualised within a framework explaining tourist responses.

The authentic happiness perspective is important in the well-being literature. Bagheri et al. (2024) draw upon the distinction between positive emotion, engagement and meaningful experience in explaining tourist well-being. Other theoretical influences include tourism experience theory, perceived-value perspectives, novelty-seeking theory and smart tourism technology frameworks. Thipsingh et al. (2022), for example, explicitly draw on novelty-seeking theory when explaining tourists’ desire for unfamiliar and stimulating experiences. The diversity of theories demonstrates that tourist satisfaction has become a cross-theoretical construct rather than one belonging exclusively to service-quality research.

### **6. Dominant Outcomes in the Corpus**

The reviewed studies reveal three broad categories of outcomes. The strong recurrence of revisit intention and loyalty confirms that satisfaction continues to be studied primarily because of its relevance to long-term destination performance. At the same time, the growing appearance of happiness, well-being, trust and place attachment indicates that tourism research is increasingly concerned with psychological and relational outcomes, not solely behavioural responses.

### **8. Research Gaps**

#### ***8.1 Fragmentation of research streams***

Service quality, sustainability, cultural identity, destination branding, well-being and smart tourism are strongly represented but remain largely separated in individual studies. Few studies within the reviewed corpus examine these domains simultaneously.

**Table 1. Dominant outcomes identified across the reviewed literature.**

| Outcome category | Recurring variables                                    | Examples from corpus                                           |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Behavioural      | Revisit intention, loyalty, recommendation, e-WOM      | Shi et al. (2022); Nguyen et al. (2024); Seow et al. (2024)    |
| Relational       | Trust, destination attachment, brand-related responses | Jebbouri et al. (2022); Fu & Luo (2023)                        |
| Psychological    | Well-being, happiness, positive emotions               | Bagheri et al. (2024); Liu et al. (2023); Yuksel et al. (2024) |

### **8.2 Overreliance on satisfaction as an endpoint**

Although satisfaction is frequently used as a mediator, many studies still treat it as the principal dependent variable. The more recent well-being literature suggests that satisfaction may instead be one component of a broader experiential and psychological evaluation process.

### **8.3 Limited integration of cultural and technological dimensions**

The cultural-identity literature focuses on heritage, attachment and experience, whereas smart-tourism literature focuses largely on accessibility, informativeness and personalisation. Fu and Luo (2023) and Yuksel et al. (2024) therefore represent two important but largely separate directions in the corpus.

### **8.4 Need for greater contextual diversity**

A considerable portion of the studies is destination specific, including Guilin, Yogyakarta, Bordeaux, Can Tho, Ha'il, West Sumatra, Liangzhu and wellness tourism locations. Such contextual richness is valuable, but it also makes it difficult to determine whether relationships are universal or strongly context dependent.

## **9. Future Research Agenda**

The reviewed literature suggests that future research should move toward greater integration across four dimensions: destination evaluation, experiential meaning, psychological response and technological mediation. Research on tourist satisfaction should increasingly examine how tourists interpret destination experiences rather than focusing exclusively on attribute-level evaluations. Cultural identity and place attachment provide promising extensions because they capture the symbolic relationship between tourists and destinations. Sustainability should also be treated more consistently as part of tourist experience and value creation rather than only as a destination-management objective. The Yogyakarta findings indicate that sustainable practices can form part of the satisfaction experience and influence subsequent revisiting behaviour. Technology represents another important frontier. The Bordeaux study demonstrates that smart tourism technology can influence satisfaction and happiness, but the current corpus contains relatively little

integration of technology with cultural identity, authenticity or destination attachment. Finally, future research should distinguish carefully between satisfaction, loyalty, happiness, well-being, trust and revisit intention. The Bordeaux evidence demonstrates that satisfaction and happiness are related but conceptually distinct, while the wellness and heritage studies show that experience and attachment can produce behavioural outcomes beyond satisfaction alone.

## **10. Conclusion**

This focused bibliometric mapping of 16 unique studies published between 2001 and 2024 demonstrates that tourist satisfaction remains a stable and influential construct within tourism research, but its intellectual boundaries have expanded substantially. The field began with service quality, destination attributes and evaluative satisfaction, moved toward motivation, experience and behavioural intention, expanded into destination image, authenticity, cultural identity and place attachment, and has more recently incorporated sustainability, well-being, happiness, e-WOM and smart tourism technology. The most important observation is therefore not that satisfaction has declined in importance, but that the meaning of satisfaction research has changed. Satisfaction is increasingly embedded within broader experiential, psychological, cultural and technological contexts. The strongest opportunity for future scholarship lies in reducing the fragmentation between these streams. Research that brings together destination evaluation, cultural meaning, experiential quality, sustainability, psychological well-being and smart tourism can provide a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary tourist behaviour while retaining tourist satisfaction as a central analytical construct.

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