



## **Brand Image of Mystical Spiritual Tours and Tourists’ Satisfaction and Quality of Life**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines how contemporary tourists visiting the mystical destinations perceive the different aspects of the mystical tours. In other words, this article attempts to investigate the role of mystical journeys and spiritual tours in improvement of tourists’ satisfaction and quality of life. The statistical population of this study includes the international tourists, who participated in the mystical tours and visited the attractions of the mystical elders in Iran. Therefore, 384 tourists were selected by convenience sampling method and a questionnaire survey was conducted since June 2019 to January 2020. Then, in order to determine relationships between research variables, the Structural Equation Modeling method was applied. Findings indicated that participating in the mystical tours has an impact on the increasing quality of life. This effect can be achieved through various variables. In addition, many factors and variables such as brand image, quality of services, perceived value, tourist satisfaction, reputation of destinations and tourist commitment to the destination have positive impacts on the tourists’ loyalty.

**Keywords:** mystical tourism, quality of life, perceived value, brand image, spiritual destinations

## **Introduction**

As a social and cultural reality, mystical tourism has positive duties and functions in the society (Imani Khoshkhoo, 2017). In Fact, mystical tourism is a branch of cultural tourism that is directly related to the epistemic one, in which the tourist begins a purposeful journey to gain wisdom or visit the sacred places of mysticism. It can be said that mysticism is not just something which is added to the spirituality part, but it is the heart of spirituality which makes it a part of transformation (Klein et al., 2016). Mental relaxation, enjoying the spiritual atmosphere, observing various customs, sustained peace, economic prosperity, earning money and wealth, creating employment opportunities, cultural character (Islamic - Iranian), emerging cultural exchanges, etc., are among the most important functions and positive effects of this field on the society (Norouzi et al., 2018). Today, tourism, as the world's largest and most significant industry, has become so important in the socio-economic development of countries so that the local, regional and national managers and planners are always planning and attempting to expand it (Imani Khoshkhoo et al., 2015). In a situation where the country is struggling to get rid of its dependence on oil, tourism industry can help the country's economic booming (Nadalipour & Chiti, 2018). It seems that the study of mystical tourism and capabilities in the country is very important, as Iran is one of the most prone areas to the mysticism and spirituality. Mystical tourism seeks to understand and experience mysticism as a spiritual message, religious thought and a disciplinary process whose pillar is the heart purification from materialism and the impurities of life and the essence of which is the human connection with the great Creator (Battour et al., 2011). Plante and Thoresen (2007) define spirituality as the search for meaning in life, transcendental relationship with self and God, comprehensive guidance, and creation of unity with nature and environment. Willson et al. (2013) believes that spirituality is the essence of human being and encourages him to find the meaning in life because of the nature of his searcher. In other words, spirituality can be considered as an awareness tool that mentally causes awareness in people's minds (Kavar, 2015). In addition, since travel drives tourists to seek meaning in life, tourism can be interpreted as a body of spirituality (Raj, 2012). Therefore, Mystical tourism is not a

specific type of tourism, but it is a sign of spirituality found by the tourist in order to achieve immaterial values while traveling (Burkhardt, 1989; Jesurajan & Prabhu, 2012). Various factors affect people's mystical tourism, the most important of which is to gain the spiritual experience (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). Therefore, the tourist makes a physical and emotional connection with the new environment and this interaction and the meaning given to it, is the key of understanding his experience and behavior (He et al., 2018). The main question of research is how can mystical tourism help improve people's lives? And can it be said that participating in mysticism tours improves life? In evaluating the impact of mystical tourism on life improvement, the variables affecting its brand equity have also been considering in the current model. However, the impact of mystical tourism is examined through several factors including the brand image, quality of service, perceived value, tourist satisfaction, reputation of the destinations, tourist loyalty and commitment. Obviously, individual and marketing factors also influence the mystical tours selection and they have been considered in the present investigation as well.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The conceptual model of the study is an adoption of a model on building customer loyalty developed by Lai (2019) in Macau. It has been localized to fit the present study. Compared to Lai's Model, the present study has added two factors including the individual and marketing factors at the beginning of the model which affect the selection of spiritual destinations and mystical tourism, respectively. At the end of the model, the interaction with others, interaction with environment as well as improve the quality of life were added as the dependent variables. The subject of this research is the mystical tourism and almost all the variables examined by Lai (2019) were taken into account. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model of the present research. This study examines the significant roles of individual factors affecting the selection of spiritual destinations and marketing ones affecting the mystical tourism, both of which have positive and significant impacts on mystical tourism image.

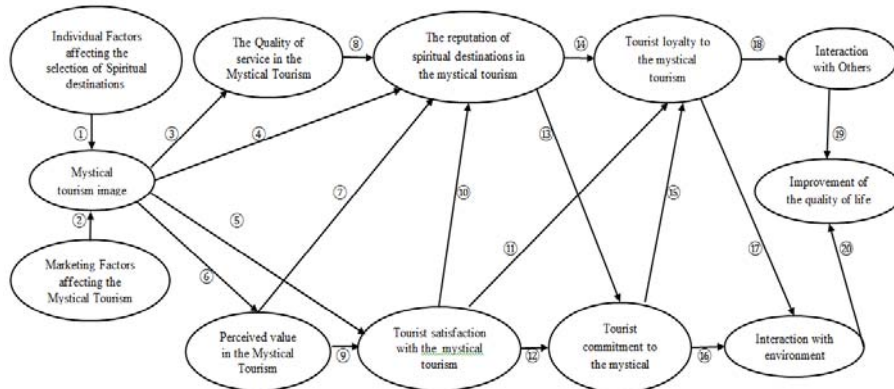


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

### Individual factors affecting the selection of spiritual destinations

Spiritual destinations, regardless of their sacred and mystical features, are exhibitions of art and symbols of civilization and culture which attract religious tourists (Karoubi et al., 2018; Piranashvili & Kadagidze, 2016). Mystical tourism has been formed as a religious mission, spiritual journey or a motivation to discover the religious sites such as the tombs of righteous people, clergy, great scientists and honest people (Saghaili et al., 2018). Factors which affect the selection of travel destination are identified as in 7 categories, including: economic, cultural and social, political, geographic and natural, individual, travel agency plans and other factors (infrastructure and advertising) (Azani & Lotfi, 2013). The more diverse and unique the tourist attractions are, the more interesting they will be to the tourists. Therefore, they will have a much wider sphere of influence (Antara & Prameswari, 2018). Spiritual tourism destinations are of special importance, so that their tourist attractions can be considered as one of the most important elements in the tourism industry.

### Marketing factors affecting the mystical tourism

Tourism marketing is a tool to identify and predict the tourists' needs, to provide facilities in order to meet their demands, as well as informing and motivating them to visit, which helps to satisfy tourists and achieve the organizational goals (Castro et al., 2017). Besides, marketing can provide potential tourists with the information about what the tourism area can offer and encourages them to visit (Sanavi et al., 2019). Numerous marketing

factors affect the behavior of tourists. However, in this study marketing mix elements as the contributory factors to the tourists' behavior has been regarded. These factors, namely product, price, place and promotion of sales have an undeniable impact on selection of tourism destinations as well as various tours offered by the agencies. Marketing mix affects both factors of the tourism brand equity and behavior of tourists in choosing the tourism destination.

### **Mystical tourism image**

Destination image contains the series of views and perceptions that tourists have in mind about the places. It is an important reflection of how tourists feel about a destination (Marine-Roig, 2019). Girard et al. (2017) stated that the mental image of a tourist destination refers to all beliefs and perceptions of a person about that site. Therefore, understanding how to form a mental image of a tourism destination and effective factors on this process, is one of the essential and significant elements in developing the tourism industry and marketing planning (Tolabi & Nasrolahi Vosta, 2017). Tourism image of the destination plays a key role in choosing the tourism destination, decision-making process and selecting the tourist's favorite activities there. On the other hand, it can be said that marketing the mental image of tourism is the starting point for a successful tourism marketing (Mansuri & Soleymani, 2012). Since the destination image provides a strong incentive to travel to the cities, success or failure of tourism development in most destinations around the world depends on the tourist's mental image of the destination and how local government and tourism planners manage the attitudes (Taghipourian et al., 2019). The destination image meets the expected values of the tourists in such a way that the more positive the destination image is, the more tourists' perceptions of the destination quality will be positive; thus destination image increases the perceived value (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). In this study, the image of the destinations visited in mystical tours is considered as one of the influential factors in choosing the mystical tourism destination.

### **The quality of service in the mystical tourism**

Regarding the new ideas in the field of management studies, quality is defined by the customer's demands (Hikmah et al., 2018). Due to the

specific characteristics of the mystical tourism industry and its important contribution to the economic and cultural development and improvement of the country, it is important to strive for improving the quality of tourism services provided in this industry (Narayan et al., 2008; Lin et al., 2017). Among all the service industries, tourism industry is one of the most sensitive ones in terms of quality due to its essential role in the national economy. Therefore, identifying the real quality level of the services received by the tourists will be the first step to increase their satisfaction leading to the sustainable economic development as a consequence (Croes et al., 2018). Customers or service recipients evaluate the quality of services by comparing their perceptions of service experiences with their expectations of what the service quality and performance should be (Park & Jeong, 2019; Masrurul, 2019). On the other hand, like other customers, tourists usually have a level of expectation of the services which they will receive at tourism centers before visiting a destination. These expectations are often raised by advertisements, media and also unofficial information from acquaintances. The vastness of these expectations will be the basis for the tourist's satisfaction (Ye et al., 2019). If the expectations of tourists could be met, they will certainly recommend visiting the corresponding area to others, which is the most effective method of marketing and advertising (Ka Wai Lai et al., 2018). In this study, the quality of service in the mystical tourism is considered as one of the influential factors in choosing the mystical tourism destination. The more desirable the quality of service in the mystical tourism is, the more it will attract the tourists.

### **Perceived value in the mystical tourism**

Perceived value is an essential element of competitive strategy. Researches have shown that there are significant relationships between the quality, value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions, including the customer loyalty, price, intention to revisit and positive verbal advertising (Asgarnezhad Nouri et al., 2019). Value is the key to gain competitive advantage and it is a reliable option in improving the destination's competitive position. (Gallarza & Saura, 2006; Saqib, 2019). It is argued that the values are one of the most important aspects of the social life (Kaffashpur et al., 2012). Better understanding of the tourist behavior will only occur while being examined

within the framework of the "perceived value" (Yavari Gohar et al., 2017). Recent researches have indicated that the perceived quality and material price are the two precursors which affect the perceived value in tourism services (Chen & Chen, 2010). Value perceived in terms of a visitor's overall assessment of the trip net value based on comparing what he has paid (costs) with what he has really received (benefits), can be considered as a precursor of behavioral reactions during their visiting (Zarei et al., 2011). In other words, the tourist's perceived value is a result of his/her personal assessment of the tourism product characteristics such as quality of service, price, emotions and social factors, which determine whether or not these products are worth the cost. These factors also affect the tourist satisfaction and participation after the trip (Prebensen & Xie, 2017). Zeithaml (1988) defines the customer's perceived value as the result of a personal comparison between the overall benefits and costs paid by him. In his viewpoint, perceived value is a combination of experience, quality comparison, subjective and objective factors. Accordingly, El-Adly (2019) believes that perceived value affects the customer satisfaction and loyalty. In this study, the perceived value of tourism services in mystical tours is considered as one of the factors influencing the selection of mystical tourism. The more desirable the perceived value of a tourist destination is, the more it will attract the tourists.

### **Tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism**

Similar to other service industries, business startup, its survival, development or failure in the travel and tourism sector, significantly depend on the tourist satisfaction (Imani Khoshkhoo & Javdaneh, 2012). Satisfaction certainly plays an important role in the quality of tourism services (Masrurul, 2019). According to importance and the growing contribution of the tourism sector to the modern economy, planning to enhance the tourism infrastructure and improve the quality of tourist services and facilities is of high necessity (Blazeska et al., 2018). It is believed that the tourists satisfaction causes the return and continuation of the trip to the destination and encourage friends and acquaintances to visit a certain destination. Thus, it leads to the sustainable tourism and economic booming in the region (Kişi, 2019). With respect to the overall development in the communities' standard

of living, the progress of the tourism industry process and changing demands and preferences of the tourists, have caused the satisfaction creation among the tourists and making them loyal to the destinations to be much more complex rather than what it was in the past (Ruiz et al., 2018). On the other hand, accurately measuring the tourists' satisfaction level is a prerequisite for developing an effective management strategy (Kisi, 2019). According to Lai and Vinh (2013), satisfaction (as an emotional component) plays as a mediator in the effect of services quality (as a cognitive component) on the behavioral intentions. In other words, tourist satisfaction is the result of a comparison between one's previous expectations of the destination and what he actually sees, feels and achieves there (Aksu et al., 2010; Aliman et al., 2014). Since tourists are increasingly demanding quality of service and value, therefore satisfying them is the main purpose of tourism-oriented activities (Bernini & Cagnone, 2014). So, the tourist satisfaction has a great impact on the orientation of the country's economic interests as there is a positive relationship between the tourist satisfaction and long-term economic success in a destination (Shohani et al., 2019). Moreover, meeting the needs of tourists will increase their satisfaction. In fact, addressing the needs of tourists in mystical tours will be one of the factors affecting the loyalty and tourism destination choosing by them (Haghparast et al., 2019). According to the literature review, five dimensions of service quality factors such as hospitality, food, logistics, security and price fairness, had the greatest impact on the tourist's satisfaction with the quality of service.

### **Interaction with Others**

It seems that the concept of spirituality must be known far broader and more comprehensive than the religion (Shafia & Sabaghpour Azarian, 2017), so that any non-religious tourist without religious intent can enjoy from the greatness of nature, making connection with different cultures or even interacting with different people to understand the concepts which cause the spiritual and mental enhancement (Sharpley, 2016). Even the unwanted presence of the tourist in religious ceremonies without religious intent can create a field of spirituality and spiritual transformation (Willson, 2017). This transformation will not inevitably lead to his religious orientation, but it will create another type of meaning by a deepening view towards the world



and understanding the philosophy of current values in people's communities (Mazaheri, 2018). Vahedian-azimi and Rahimi (2013) believe that spirituality is a special state with two vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension indicates the human relationship with God while the horizontal one is a reflection of the human being - environment communications. In both dimensions, human connection is completely internal and mystical, so that each individual's experience is completely different from the other's one. Zargham Boroujeny (2017) see the travel and tourism as a spiritual issue in itself, while Coles (1991) believes that spirituality in tourism only involves excursions that lead to the creation of sacred values and a sense of transcendence. Imani Khoshoo et al. (2015) in a study on relationship between travel and spirituality in Pre-Islamic religions found that for all Zoroastrian, Judaism, and Christianity religions, spiritual trips are very similar to each other in terms of the rituals.

#### **The reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism**

Destination reputation is a combination of different beliefs, perceptions, knowledge and attitudes of the different stakeholders that generally include the tourists and society (Darwish & Burns, 2019). The reputation of tourism destinations can have many benefits and advantages for them. In addition, the tourism destination reputation can reduce the risks perceived by the foreign tourists from traveling to the destination, as they feel less danger and risk while traveling to a well-known and popular destination (Liu et al., 2019). It should be mentioned that the tourism destination reputation might have a significant impact on the perceived quality and tourist satisfaction (Wang et al., 2017). The tourism destination reputation is identified as an influential factor on the tourism industry and loyalty to the destination. Therefore, tourism destination reputation can affect the tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Tabatabaei Nasab & Mahavarpour, 2017). Participation in mysticism tours can increase the peace of mind which finally results in better interaction with people around. This variable has been considered in this study.

#### **Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism**

Loyalty to the destination brand has been recognized as one of the most important influencing factors on the success of marketing activities and

particularly those of the spiritual tourism destination. Zhang et al. (2014) defined the intention to revisit the destination and recommend it to friends and relatives as loyalty to the tourism destination brand. Studies conducted on the tourism loyalty and its relation to the quality of provided service and perceived image of the destination by tourists, indicate that the perceived quality of the service and destination image play an important role in choosing a destination and evaluating the future travel of tourists (Dedeoğlu, 2019). Loyalty is the best predictor of future tourist behavior and the factor of creating competitive advantage and market success (Lv et al., 2020; Campón-Cerro et al., 2017). Tourist satisfaction is one of the most important factors of his loyalty to the urban tourism destination. However, it is not the only effective factor and many other ones are involved in determining the tourist loyalty (Chenini & Touaiti, 2018) such as the marketing innovation (Sigalat-Signes et al., 2019), destination image (Huet Alcocer & López Ruiz, 2019), features of the tourism destinations (Gu et al., 2016), perceived quality (Ghaffari, 2018) and perceived value (Lin et al., 2017; Dedeoğlu, 2019). In other words, there are three elements for indicating the tourist loyalty more extensively, including: tourist behavioral element which is the same as the journey repetition, the tourist attitude which means his commitment and assurance in choosing the destination. and availability element which is the same as many options to choose and revisit a tourism destination (Cossío-Silva et al., 2019; Mohammadi & Mirtaghian Rudsari, 2019). Another variable examined in the present model is the tourist loyalty to the tourism destinations. It is clear that the tourist's loyalty can increase their return to the destination and consequently increase their loyalty to the mystical tours.

### **Interaction with the environment**

The desire of the world's people to find the easiest and most effective way for the cultural dialogue has caused the role of tourism more vital in these interactions (Piranashvili & Kadagidze, 2016). This is mainly due to the fact that the mystical spaces and places make a close connection between the cultures of the nations. A spiritual journey is a discovery within yourself that leads to knowing God, arguing that you are the Creator when you know yourself. According to Skali (2011) this knowledge is itself associated with

divine science. In addition, he stated that "we arrive to our reality with greater awareness and understanding of ourselves". Mystical tourism provides better interaction with the whole world as well as better interaction with the environment.

### **Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism**

Commitment is defined as the desire to continue a relationship along with the desire for its continuation and expectation for its continuation (Lai, 2015). In the field of tourism, empirical evidence shows that obtaining the tourists commitment to the destination may lead to the decreasing marketing costs and increasing loyalty. Also, tourist loyalty is the "deep commitment created to travel again". Today, spiritual and mystical places account for an important sector of every country's tourism. Providing suitable conditions for the tourists in this area can bring about commitment and loyalty among them. Previous studies dealing with the tourist commitment, indicate that commitment has a positive and significant effect on reducing the customer loss, loyalty and positive oral advertising (Mahmoudi & Parsi, 2017). Therefore, in order to increase the tourist's loyalty, it is necessary to provide the perquisites for creating the satisfaction and desire to repeat the journey as a consequence (Song et al., 2012). One of the factors and variables affecting the selection of tourism destinations is the commitment to tourism destination which is considered in this study.

### **Improvement of the quality of life**

Quality of life is a concept which defines the state of human life. In general, it can be said that mystical tourism is a desire to change, to get rid of boring daily life and to move towards the divine nature for a human being (Nicolaidis & Grobler, 2017). Since this situation is reflected by several factors and characteristics, the quality of life is usually used with welfare, facilities, life satisfaction, prosperity, needs fulfillment, capabilities and living standards development in a synonymous manner (Pestana et al., 2019). In this study, the quality of life implies more in the mental state that people are satisfied with their life.

### **Hypotheses Research**

1. Individual factors affecting the selection of spiritual destinations, have a significant, positive effect on the mystical tourism image.
2. Marketing factors affecting the mystical tourism, have a significant, positive effect on the mystical tourism image.
3. Mystical tourism image has a significant, positive effect on the quality of service in the mystical tourism
4. Mystical tourism image has a significant, positive effect on the reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism
5. Mystical tourism image has a significant, positive effect on the tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism
6. Mystical tourism image has a significant, positive effect on the perceived value in the mystical tourism
7. Perceived value in the mystical tourism has a significant, positive effect on the reputation of spiritual destinations
8. The quality of service in the mystical tourism has a significant, positive effect on the reputation of spiritual destinations
9. Perceived value in the mystical tourism has a significant, positive effect on the tourist satisfaction
10. Tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism has a significant, positive effect on the reputation of the spiritual destinations
11. Tourist satisfaction has a significant, positive effect on his loyalty to the mystical tourism
12. Tourist satisfaction has a significant, positive effect on his commitment to the mystical tourism
13. The reputation of spiritual destinations has a significant, positive effect on the tourist commitment to the mystical tourism
14. The reputation of spiritual destinations has a significant, positive effect on the tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism
15. Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism has a significant, positive effect on his loyalty
16. Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism has a significant, positive effect on the interaction with environment
17. Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism has a significant, positive effect on the interaction with environment

18. Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism has a significant, positive effect on his commitment
19. Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism has a significant, positive effect on the improvement of the quality of life
20. The interaction with environment has a significant, positive effect on the improvement of the quality of life.

### **Method**

The statistical population of this study includes the international tourists, who participated in the mystical tours and visited the attractions of the mystical elders in Iran. Cochran formula was applied to determine the number of samples and 384 tourists were selected by convenience sampling method and a questionnaire survey was conducted since June 2019 to January 2020. These tourists mainly visited several attractions such as the tomb of Hafiz in Shiraz, Sheikh Jabrail Shrine and Sheikh Safi Eddin Ardabili located in Ardabil City, Tomb of Hamdollah Mostofi and Tomb of the Four Prophets located in Qazvin City, Pir-e Alamdar Tower located in Damghan City, Bayazid Bastami Tomb located in Semnan City, Attar Neyshabouri Tomb located in Neyshabour City, and Tomb of Abu al-Hassan Kharaqani located in Shahrood City.

The data inferential analysis has been performed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for measuring the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The KMO and Bartlett Tests were applied to determine the appropriateness of the sample size and separation of the factors, respectively. Also the Structural Equation Modeling method was implemented in order to determine the causal relationships between the variables. In order to perform the literature review, library studies have been conducted.

### **Findings**

According to the results of the first part of the questionnaire (demographic characteristics), Table 1 shows profile of respondents.

**Table 1. Profile of Respondents**

%	N.	Demographic characteristics
<b>Gender</b>		
55.2	212	Male
44.8	172	Female
100	384	<b>Total</b>
<b>Age</b>		
48.2	185	Less than 35 years old
19.0	73	Between 35 and 45 years old
32.8	126	More than 45 years old
100	384	<b>Total</b>
<b>Education</b>		
7.0	27	Diploma
16.7	64	Associate's degree
50.3	193	Bachelor's degree
21.1	81	Master's Degree
4.9	19	Doctorate
100	384	<b>Total</b>

Findings indicated that the effect of mystical tourism image on the quality of service is undeniable. Although the quality of service, tourist satisfaction and perceived value in the mystical tourism have positive and significant effects on the reputation of the spiritual tourism destinations, mystical tourism image does not significantly affect it. Due to the positive and significant effects of the mystical tourism image and perceived value in the mystical tourism on the tourist satisfaction, the corresponding image has a positive and significant effect on the perceived value as well. On the other hand, results showed that the tourist satisfaction, reputation of spiritual destinations and tourist commitment to the mystical tourism, has positive and significant impacts on the loyalty to the mystical tourism. In addition, tourist satisfaction, his loyalty and reputation of the spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism has positive and significant effects on the commitment to mystical tours. However, the present findings illustrated that the tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism destination has not a positive and significant effect on the interaction with environment. Further to these, the tourist commitment to the mystical tourism has a positive and significant effect on the interaction with environment while his loyalty has no effect on. In this

paper, it has been attempted to show how the interaction with environment has a positive and significant effect on the improvement of the quality of life while the tourist commitment to the mystical tourism does not significantly affect it. Considering the increasing tendency of tourists to different spiritual and mystical aspects of the journey, the present investigation seeks to recreate and clarify the concept of spirituality and mysticism in tourism. It is clear that although there are many common paradigms in tourism that emphasize the topic of business and economic benefits, the spiritual and mystical issues have been also included in various studies. Since the exact number of foreign tourists is unknown, the number of population was considered to be infinite. The number of research samples was determined 384 by using Cochran formula. The structural model was analyzed after establishing the reliability and validity of the proposed model. The structural model includes a series of dependency relationships that are associated with the assumptions made by the framework. The quality of the conceptual framework for indicators was measured using the structural model. The SEM results show that the conceptual framework considered in the present study fits the data well. The value of all fit indices (GFI (goodness-of-fit index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis index), CFI (comparative fit index), IFI (incremental fit index)) are higher than the proposed value of 0.9. The observed value of RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) was expressed as 0.070 which is in line with the proposed criterion of  $0.08 > 0$ . In this study, a questionnaire was used to collect the data. Having collected the data from the questionnaire, the minimum statistics, maximum score, skewness and kurtosis are given in Table 2 for each of the research variables.

According to the Table 2, all of the variables fall within an acceptable range for the two indexes of skewness and kurtosis. It should be noted that the acceptable range is between 2 and -2. To investigate the structural validity of the questionnaire and confirm the considered factors, factor analysis was employed using the orthogonal axis rotation (VARIMAX) method in order to obtain the pure factors. For this reason, the KMO and Bartlett tests were used. As can be seen in Table 3, since the value of KMO index is greater than 0.6, the number of samples (here, the same as the number of respondents) is sufficient for the factor analysis. Also, the

significant value (sig) of the Bartlett test is less than 5%, indicating that the factor analysis is an appropriate factor model for identifying the structure.

Cronbach's Alpha method has been used to determine the reliability of the indexes in the present research and the results obtained are given in Table 4. As can be seen, all of the variables meet acceptable reliability (more than 0.70).

**Table 2. Descriptive variables of the research**

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Individual factors affecting the selection of spiritual destinations	3.82	.781	-1.215	2.946
Mystical tourism image	3.62	.894	-.615	-.736
The quality of service in the mystical tourism	3.40	.824	-.721	1.019
The reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism	3.39	.860	-.583	.285
Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism	3.11	.956	-.640	.035
Interaction with others	3.28	1.007	-.623	.035
Marketing factors affecting the mystical tourism	3.23	1.050	-.298	-.181
Perceived value in the mystical tourism	3.49	1.057	1.032	.268
Tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism	3.32	.910	-.937	.452
Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism	3.30	.907	-1.019	.347
Interaction with environment	3.44	.994	-1.333	.692
Improvement of the quality of life	3.51	1.117	-1.071	.359

**Table 3. Results of KMO index and Bartlett test for the entire model dimensions**

Variables	KMO	Bartlett tests (Sig)
Individual factors affecting the selection of spiritual destinations	0/804	0/000
Mystical tourism image	0/723	0/000
The quality of service in the mystical tourism	0/698	0/000
The reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism	0/630	0/000
Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism	0/715	0/000
Interaction with others	0/718	0/000
Marketing factors affecting the mystical tourism	0/699	0/000
Perceived value in the mystical tourism	0/734	0/000
Tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism	0/775	0/000
Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism	0/770	0/000
Interaction with the environment	0/686	0/000
Improvement of the quality of life	0/646	0/000



**Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha for all research variables**

Variables	Number of questions	Cronbach's Alpha
Individual factors affecting the selection of spiritual destinations	4	0/869
Mystical tourism image	3	0/960
The quality of service in the mystical tourism	3	0/782
The reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism	3	0/761
Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism	3	0/836
Interaction with others	3	0/860
Marketing factors affecting the mystical tourism	3	0/938
Perceived value in the mystical tourism	3	0/857
Tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism	4	0/848
Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism	4	0/773
Interaction with the environment	3	0/794
Improvement of the quality of life	3	0/900

**Table 5. Pearson's correlation coefficient**

Pearson's correlation coefficient	IFASD	MTI	QS	RSD	TL	IWO	MF	PV	TS	TC	IWE	IQL
IFASD	1											
MTI	0/315	1										
QS	0/342	0/698	1									
RSD	0/316	0/479	0/537	1								
TL	0/230	0/334	0/433	0/726	1							
IWO	0/316	0/389	0/470	0/474	0/387	1						
MF	0/256	0/288	0/384	0/474	0/434	0/795	1					
PV	0/154	0/190	0/282	0/368	0/429	0/245	0/241	1				
TS	0/266	0/429	0/479	0/532	0/473	0/298	0/273	0/462	1			
TC	0/323	0/474	0/534	0/559	0/520	0/437	0/337	0/441	0/722	1		
IWE	0/215	0/354	0/486	0/410	0/344	0/319	0/278	0/299	0/407	0/593	1	
IQL	0/207	0/324	0/475	0/412	0/364	0/305	0/268	0/2238	0/383	0/549	0/767	1

IFASD = Individual factors affecting the selection of spiritual destinations

MTI = Mystical tourism image

QS = Quality of service in the mystical tourism

RSD = Reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism

TL = Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism

IWO = Interaction with others

MF = Marketing factors affecting the mystical tourism

PV = Perceived value in the mystical tourism

TS = Tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism

TC = Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism

IWE = Interaction with the environment

IQL = Improvement of the quality of life

### **Bivariate hypothesis test: Pearson's correlation coefficient test**

Correlation analysis is a tool to determine the type and degree of relationship between the two quantitative variables. Correlation coefficient is one of the criteria used to determine the correlation of two variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient is a parametric method used for data with normal distribution or great numbers of them. In this study, Pearson's correlation coefficient has been implemented to investigate the type and intensity of the relationship among the research variables. The results of this test are presented in Table 5. As can be seen, all relationships are positive and meaningful, and the resulting P value is less than the 5% error level.

In order to use Amos software, it should be noted that path analysis in this software produces a fitting index which can be validated within a certain interval and its results can be cited as well. The first index is normed chi-square which can be obtained via dividing  $X^2$  by the degree of freedom, values of less than 3 are considered to be highly desirable. The adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AFGI) should also be greater than 0.8. Also, values of above 0.9 for goodness-of-fit (GFI) and comparative fit index (CFI) indicate that the model meet a desirable fit. In addition, the value of Root Mean Square Error of approximation (RMSEA) index is less than 0.1. The degree of goodness of the indices for the extracted framework was obtained as described in the table 6.

Table 6. Model's fitting indices

Fitting indices	Index name	Allowance amount	obtained values
Absolute fit	$\chi^2/df$ (normed chi-square index)	3<	2/899
	RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation)	0/08<	0/070
	GFI (goodness-of-fit index)	0/90>	0/817
Incremental-fit index	AGFI (adjusted goodness-of-fit index)	0/80>	0/775
	CFI (comparative fit index)	0/90>	0/900
	NFI (normed fit index)	0/90>	0/856
	TLI (non-normed fit index)	0/90>	0/883

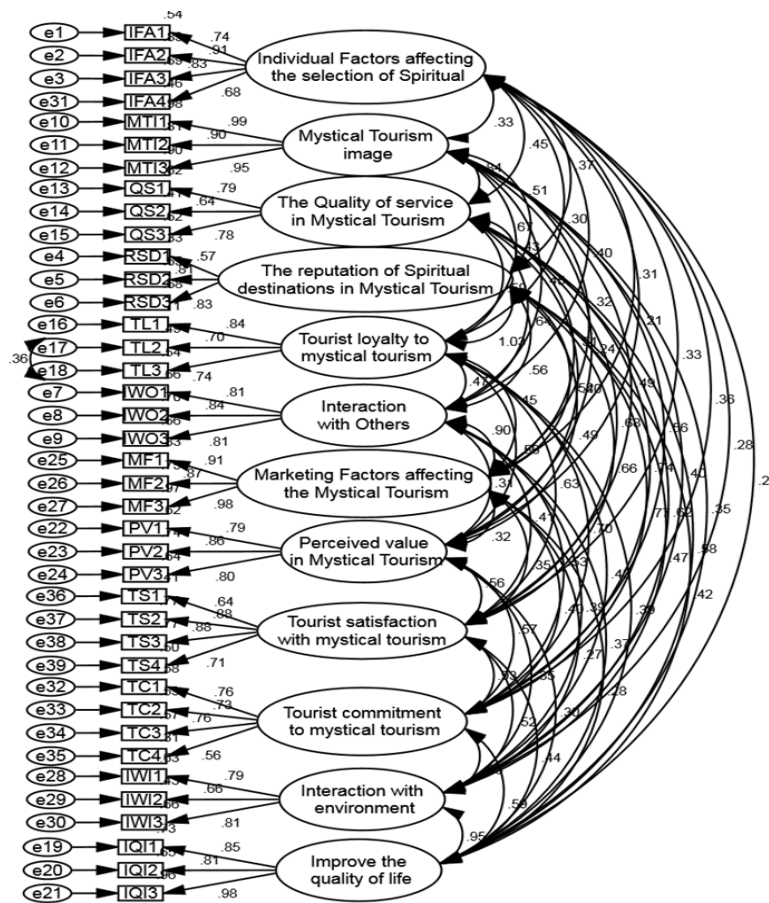


Figure 2. Fitting indices test of the conceptual model

### Path analysis

As mentioned before, this research is based on 20 hypotheses. To examine these hypotheses, the path analysis method has been used in AMOS software. The significance levels for testing these hypotheses are given in Table 7. The basis for confirming the hypotheses is that the significance level (p-value) for them is smaller than 0.05.

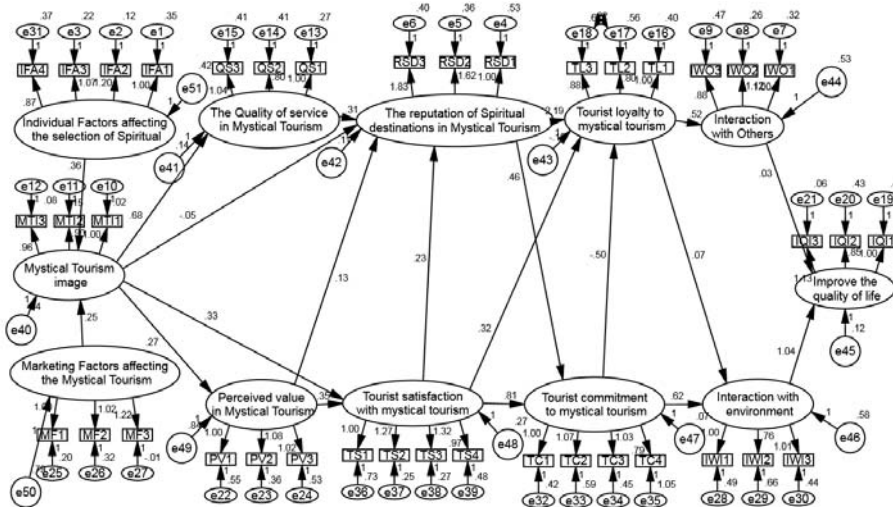


Figure 3. Research hypotheses test

Table 7. Significance levels for testing research hypothesis

Hypotheses	Path	Estimate	P	Results
1	Mystical tourism image ← Individual factors affecting the selection of spiritual destinations	.359	***	Confirmation
2	Mystical tourism image ← marketing factors affecting the mystical tourism	.247	***	Confirmation
3	The quality of service in the mystical tourism ← Mystical tourism image	.675	***	Confirmation
4	The reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism ← Mystical tourism image	-.054	.366	Rejection

Hypotheses	Path	Estimate	P	Results
5	Tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism ← Mystical tourism image	.330	***	Confirmation
6	Perceived value in the mystical tourism ← Mystical tourism image	.267	***	Confirmation
7	The reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism ← Perceived value in the mystical tourism	.128	***	Confirmation
8	The reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism ← The quality of service in the mystical tourism	.307	***	Confirmation
9	Tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism ← Perceived value in the mystical tourism	.346	***	Confirmation
10	The reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism ← Tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism	.231	***	Confirmation
11	Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism ← Tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism	.320	***	Confirmation
12	Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism ← Tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism	.815	***	Confirmation
13	Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism ← The reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism	.460	***	Confirmation
14	Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism ← The reputation of spiritual destinations in the mystical tourism	2.190	***	Confirmation
15	Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism ← Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism	-.500	***	Confirmation
16	Interaction with the environment ← Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism	.622	***	Confirmation
17	Interaction with the environment ← Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism	.065	.416	Rejection
18	Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism ← Tourist loyalty to the mystical tourism	.521	***	Confirmation
19	Improvement of the quality of life ← Tourist commitment to the mystical tourism	.028	.463	Rejection
20	Improvement of the quality of life ← Interaction with the environment	1.036	***	Confirmation

## **Results and discussion**

Research findings indicated that participating in the mystical tours has an impact on the increasing quality of life. This effect can be achieved through various variables. In addition, many factors and variables such as brand image, quality of service, perceived value, tourist satisfaction, reputation of destinations and tourist commitment to the destination have meaningful, positive impacts on tourist loyalty. Moreover, tourist, as Kamenidou & Vourou (2015) argues, is interested in mysticism and joining the spiritual and mystical journeys to understand the sense of transcendence. The results of this study show that the marketing factors affecting the mystical tourism has a meaningful, positive and significant effect on the mystical tourism image. The results further indicated that the different psychological factors of marketing mix affect the tourism brand image in the mystical tours. It should be noted that the brand image, is itself influenced by the quality of service and perceived value in the mystical tours. It was found that the perceived value of mystical tours can increase the reputation of mystical tourism destinations. The perceived value of tourism destinations can increase the tourist's satisfaction with the mystical tours and this satisfaction might also affect the increasing reputation of the mystical tourism destinations. The present achievements also showed that the tourists satisfaction with mystical tours leads to their loyalty. This finding is consistent with the results reported by Wang (2010). In this article, the quality of service, perceived value and tourist satisfaction with the mystical tourism have been found to have positive and significant impacts on the reputation of spiritual destinations. However, the mystical tourism image has not a positive and significant effect on such reputation. Finally, the results showed that better interaction with both environment and others and improved quality of life had a significant effect. The interaction with environment has a positive and significant effect on the improvement of the quality of life while tourist commitment to the mystical tourism has not any effect. These findings are in agreement with the results reported by Hag and Wong (2010). This study provided information for various stakeholders of tourism destination related to the tourism marketing, which in its turn produces favorable tourism satisfaction. The results of this study also showed that mystical tourism could help improve the people lives. However,

the impact of mystical tours on improving the lives of people is very complex. The present results confirmed that mystical tourism image has a positive impact on the quality of service which is consistent with the results of Bahari et al. (2017), Haghparast et al. (2019) and Narayan et al (2008). The results also indicate that the reputation of the mystical tourism destinations can affect the tourist's loyalty to revisit destinations. Further to these, the tourism commitment to the mystical tourism destinations can increase tourist's loyalty. The results presented by Tabatabaei Nasab and Mahavarpoor (2017) illustrated that the reputation has a positive and significant effect on the belief in the tourism destination and word-of-mouth advertising. In addition, the reputation of the destination, through its mental image, affects the loyalty to and awareness of destination brand, and perceived value, as well. Therefore, the mental image of the destination has a positive effect on the perceived value of the brand, which confirms the results reported by the researches of Ramseook-Munhurrun et al. (2015), Dedeoğlu (2019), Huang and Pearce, (2019). The study conducted by Artigas et al. (2015), indicated that the strong destination reputation positively affects the destination image, perceived value, destination loyalty and tourist satisfaction. In this article, the mystical tourism image and perceived value have a positive effect on the tourist satisfaction. Many previous studies have concluded that subjective image of tourism destination and perceived value are the most important prerequisites for tourist satisfaction, which have a great influence on the tourist behavior in choosing the tourist destination (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2016; Huang & Pearce, 2019). Ramseook -Munhurrun et al. (2015), also concluded that the destination image has a direct impact on the perceived value and tourist satisfaction; whereas only satisfaction directly affects the loyalty. The results of this research are also consistent with the study carried out by Gim (2018). The tourist satisfaction must be improved by investing principally on the improvement of the quality of tourism services and travel demand increasing, thus injecting more revenue into the tourism industry. The current study revealed that the mystical tourism image has a positive effect on the perceived value. In order to increase the perceived value, continuous training can be used to enhance the skills of local residents in communicating with tourists. This is due to the fact that creating a high

quality relationship has a significant impact on the tourists' satisfaction, which is consistent with the outcomes of Lin et al. (2017) and Lestari et al. (2019). This study also states that the tourist satisfaction, reputation of spiritual destinations and tourist commitment to the mystical tourism have positive effects on his tourist's loyalty to the mystical tours. Examining the impact of perceived value and sense of place on the tourist loyalty, Taheri and Ansari (2017) indicated the significant relationships among the perceived value, sense of place and tourist loyalty. on the other hands, current study found a positive relationship between the tourist satisfaction and loyalty, as well as reputation of the spiritual destinations. This finding of the research is consistent with the results of Musavengane et al. (2020), Yang et al. (2019), Costea et al. (2017) and Fahimi et al. (2018).

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