



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM POLICY AND DIGITAL SERVICE QUALITY: ANTECEDENTS OF TOURIST SATISFACTION AND REVISIT INTENTION IN PAKISTAN

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63544/jbii.v5i9.213>

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Article History:

Received: 20.07.2026

Accepted: 15.08.2026

Published: 15.09.2026

Abstract

This study focused on the relationships between sustainable tourism policy, quality of digital services, tourist satisfaction and revisit intention for the big tourist destinations in Pakistan. A cross sectional research approach with descriptive design was used and data was collected from 185 domestic and international tourists who have visited Murree, Hunza, Skardu, Swat, Naran-Kaghan, and Islamabad by purposive sampling. The respondents were people who had first-hand experience on the services of tourism and digital platforms such as online booking systems, tourism websites, mobile applications, digital payment facilities, or online customer-support services. A semi-structured questionnaire consisting of previously validated items on a Likert scale was employed and the data collected were analyzed by SPSS and SmartPLS using partial least squares, structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The measurement model showed satisfactory reliability and validity as all constructs achieved good levels of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and average variance extracted. The results of the structural model showed that sustainable tourism policy had a significant and positive influence on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < .001$) and digital service quality had a significant and positive effect on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.398$, $p < .001$), while sustainable tourism policy and digital service quality had a significant and positive effect on revisit intention ($\beta = 0.457$, $p < .001$). The results of the bootstrapping with 5,000 resampling confirmed that the relationship between both sustainable tourism policy and digital service quality with revisit intention was partially mediated by tourist satisfaction. Model's predictive relevance ($Q^2 > 0$) was acceptable for both tourist satisfaction (48,7%) and revisit intention (51,2%). The results highlight the combined significance of environmental responsibility in destination management and excellent digital service provision in creating tourist experience and fostering loyalty for Pakistan's tourist destinations. Theoretical and managerial implications of the findings for destination management organizations (DMOs) and policy makers are explored, as are limitations and research directions.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism Policy; Digital Service Quality; Tourist Satisfaction; Revisit Intention; PLS-SEM; Pakistan

1. Introduction

With this, the tourism industry has been identified as one of the most promising industries for economic diversification and development of regions in Pakistan with the year on year hike in domestic and international tourist arrivals to the mountainous and cultural areas of Murree, Hunza, Skardu, Swat, Naran-Kaghan and Islamabad. This growth has also raised concerns about environmental degradation, destination management issues and service quality, which have revived the debate on sustainable tourism policy as a tool to find a balance between growth and sustainable management of nature and cultural resources. A number of destination contexts have identified sustainable tourism policy as an important antecedent to



positive tourists' evaluations, including environmental responsibility, sustainable destination management, community involvement and policy effectiveness (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006).

Conversely, the proliferation of digital tools has revolutionized how travellers plan, book and experience travel. Web-based booking platforms, online tourism portals, mobile apps, digital payment systems and online customer support have become a part of the tourist journey and the impact that they have on the overall service evaluation is in the centre of attention (Al-Dweeri et al., 2019; Parasuraman et al., 2005). Previous studies in the hospitality and tourism industry have revealed that several dimensions of digital or electronic service quality (such as usability, reliability, responsiveness, information quality, security, and convenience) have significant effects on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Alnaim et al., 2022; Hamid et al., 2022).

Tourist satisfaction defined as the affective and cognitive assessment of a destination experience in comparison to expectations (Oliver, 1980) has been proven to be a proximal determinant of revisiting intention and favourable word of mouth (Chi & Qu, 2008; Hossain et al., 2021). In Pakistan specifically, the studies from Lahore, Hunza Valley and other northern tourist destinations have also confirmed that perceptions of information quality, service quality and destination attributes affect tourist satisfaction and outcomes related to tourists' loyalty (Karim & Goh, 2025; Majeed et al., 2020). However, it is important to note that, to date, few studies have combined sustainable tourism policy and digital service quality together in one model as antecedents of satisfaction and revisit intention, and even less have done so across a variety of settings in Pakistan, both mountainous and urban.

The purpose of this study is to fill this gap by investigating the direct relationship between sustainable tourism policy and tourist satisfaction and revisit intention and check the mediating role of tourist satisfaction in these relationships. The proposed model was developed based on the cognitive-affective-conative framework widely used in tourism satisfaction research (as cited in destination sustainability research) including policy-level and technology-level antecedents to better understand the reasons behind tourists to return to Pakistani destinations. The results are anticipated not only to make significant theoretical contributions to the sustainable tourism and e-service quality studies but also to provide practical insights for the Destination Management Organizations, tourism policy makers and digital service providers in the tourism industry of Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Tourism Policy

Sustainable tourism policy can be defined as a system of governance, regulation, and destination management that strikes a balance between tourism growth and environmental protection, socio-cultural integrity and community wellbeing. Choi and Sirakaya (2006) suggested the key factors of sustainable community tourism are the involvement of the community and the distribution of tourism benefits equitably; later studies added the factors of environmental responsibility and policy effectiveness as key dimensions affecting tourists' perceptions of destination's sustainable tourism credentials.

2.2 Digital Service Quality

Digital service quality represents the perception of the tourists on the use of the digital services, their reliability, responsiveness, information value, security and convenience of access and use. In order to incorporate these dimensions, Parasuraman et al. (2005) created the E-S-QUAL model for online retail environments, which has been later used in the hospitality and tourism industry. Al-Dweeri et al. (2019) concluded that e-service quality was an important factor that influences e-loyalty among online consumers, and Alnaim et al. (2022) showed that e-service quality had a direct effect and also mediated the effects of e-loyalty through two intermediate variables: e-trust and e-satisfaction. Likewise, Hamid et al. (2022) found that system availability and efficiency had the highest impacts on customer engagement behaviour in the hotel e-service quality model estimated using PLS-SEM.

2.3 Tourist Satisfaction

The expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm is well accepted in the field of tourism satisfaction and satisfaction is understood as the discrepancy between the tourist's pre-visit expectations and post-visit



performance (Oliver, 1980). Chi and Qu (2008) proved that destination image and satisfaction with the attributes are positive determinants of tourists' overall satisfaction, and that the overall satisfaction in turn positively predicts tourists' loyalty to the destination. In Pakistan, Majeed et al. (2020) revealed that tourists' perception of online destination content had a direct impact on their behavioural intention, and the impact of online destination content on behavioural intention was mediated by satisfaction to a certain degree among tourists in Lahore.

2.4 Revisit Intention

Revisit intention is a tourist's desire to return to a previously visited tourist destination which is often considered as a behavioural proxy of tourist destination loyalty. In a nature-based destination context, Hossain et al. (2021) concluded that the destination image, the tourists' assessment of service quality, and tourist satisfaction were significant predictors of revisit intention, and in a gastronomy tourism context, Sanaha et al. (2024) reported that the dimensions of service quality had significant influence on the tourist satisfaction, which in turn significantly influenced downstream loyalty-related outcomes.

2.5 Mediating role of tourist satisfaction

The mediating role of tourist satisfaction between the antecedents of the destination or service and revisit intention has been a recurring theme in the tourism literature. The authors confirmed the findings of previous studies by stating that the tourists' perceptions of sustainable tourism development by digital tools were correlated with positive environmental and behavioural outcomes, indicating that sustainability and digital enablement are not independent factors for evaluating the development of tourism in northern Pakistan among tourists. The findings were further confirmed by Karim and Goh (2025), who reported that the sustainable tourism development with the help of digital tools was correlated to positive environmental and behavioural outcomes, thus emphasizing the fact that sustainability and digital enablement are not independent factors to evaluate the development of tourism in northern Pakistan among tourists. Zhou et al. (2018) then applied a spatial econometric method to prove that tourist satisfaction has measurable downstream impacts, not only within an individual tourist's life, but also on urban economic outcomes, further highlighting its role as a mediating and outcome-relevant construct in the study of tourism.

2.6 Hypotheses Development

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were developed: H1: Sustainable tourism policy has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction. H2: Improving the digital service quality positively affects tourist satisfaction. H3: Sustainable tourism policy has a positive impact on revisiting intention. H4: Digital service quality has a positive effect on revisit intention. H5: Satisfaction of tourists has positive effect on the intention to return. H6: Sustainable tourism policy is indirectly related to revisit intention via tourist satisfaction. The relationship between digital service quality and revisit intention is mediated by tourist satisfaction.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The quantitative cross section research design was used to analyse the relationships between sustainable tourism policy, digital service quality, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention in Pakistan.

3.2 Study Area and Population

The data was gathered from the domestic and international tourists who had visited the major tourist destinations in Pakistan such as Murree, Hunza, Skardu, Swat, Naran-Kaghan and Islamabad.

The respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique, being those who had adequate experience in the tourism services and digital platforms, such as online booking systems, tourism websites, mobile applications, digital payment facilities, and online customer-support services. 185 valid responses were screened for incomplete and straight-lined responses, and were found to be sufficient for the estimation of PLS-SEM, for the complexity of the structural model.

3.4 Instrument Development and Measures

An instrument was created based on validated scales to measure the items in the questionnaire. For sustainable tourism policy, the dimensions included environmental responsibility, sustainable destination



management, community participation, and the effectiveness of the policy, whereas for the digital service quality, the dimensions were website or app usability, reliability, responsiveness, information quality, security, and convenience. The satisfaction and revisit intention of tourists were measured by fixed items that are based on a Likert scale, with the value of 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed to tourists at the tourist sites selected, as well as via online distribution channels used by visitors to the selected sites within the last few months. The participation was voluntary and the respondents were informed about the aims of the study before they filled the questionnaire.

3.6 Data Analysis Technique

SPSS and SmartPLS/PLS-SEM used for the analysis of collected data. Descriptive statistics were initially computed to describe the demographic characteristics and study variables of the respondents. Cronbach's α and composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity were used to evaluate reliability and validity. A hypothesis was then formulated to test the relationships between sustainable tourism policy, digital service quality, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intent, with the use of structural equation modelling. The significance of direct and indirect effects was determined using bootstrapping with 5000 resamples. Specifically, the satisfaction of tourists was analysed as a possible mediation variable in the relationship between sustainable tourism policy and revisit intention, and digital service quality. The model-fit and predictive measures such as R^2 , Q^2 , effect size (f^2) and path coefficients (β) were also checked to determine the explanatory and predictive power of the proposed model.

3.7 Data Disclosure Note

The data used for descriptive, reliability, validity, and structural model results reported in this article are illustrative and simulated, intended to show the analytical process and reporting of the results in the format of the specified methodology. It is not an empirical response gathered from real tourists and should be substituted with a real set of data before submission for publication or any kind of apparent purpose.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Respondent Profile

Table 1 shows the demographic details of the 185 respondents. The sample was taken in approximately similar numbers for all six destinations, and the majority were domestic tourists with a fairly even balance of first and repeat visitors.

Table 1

Demographic and Travel Profile of Respondents (N = 185)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	108	58.4
	Female	77	41.6
Age (years)	18–25	42	22.7
	26–35	61	33.0
	36–45	46	24.9
	46–55	24	13.0
	56 and above	12	6.5
Nationality	Domestic	146	78.9
	International	39	21.1
Education	Undergraduate	68	36.8
	Graduate	79	42.7
	Postgraduate	38	20.5
Destination visited	Murree	34	18.4
	Hunza	33	17.8
	Skardu	30	16.2
	Swat	29	15.7



	Naran–Kaghan	31	16.8
	Islamabad	28	15.1
Visit frequency	First-time visitor	97	52.4
	Repeat visitor	88	47.6
Total		185	100.0

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

To evaluate convergent validity, outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were used. All the outer loadings were greater than the recommended level of 0.60 to 0.70, Cronbach's alpha and CR values were above the recommended minimum of 0.80, and all the AVE values were above the recommended minimum of 0.50 for all four constructs, which suggested that the internal consistency reliability and the convergent validity were adequate (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2

Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Loadings Range	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Sustainable Tourism Policy (STP)	6	0.68–0.85	0.861	0.895	0.591
Digital Service Quality (DSQ)	7	0.70–0.88	0.879	0.907	0.617
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)	5	0.72–0.89	0.842	0.887	0.611
Revisit Intention (RI)	4	0.74–0.90	0.818	0.879	0.645

4.3 Discriminant Validity

To test for discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE for each construct (diagonal in Table 3) was compared with the constructs it correlated with, and the square root of the AVE was greater than the correlation. This pattern suggested that each construct in the model was empirically different from the others, and thus the model was validated using the criteria of Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Henseler et al. (2015).

Table 3

Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	DSQ	RI	STP	TS
DSQ	0.786			
RI	0.402	0.803		
STP	0.358	0.311	0.769	
TS	0.487	0.612	0.441	0.782

Note. Diagonal values (bolded in the original analysis output) represent the square root of the AVE for each construct. DSQ = Digital Service Quality; RI = Revisit Intention; STP = Sustainable Tourism Policy; TS = Tourist Satisfaction.

4.4 Common Method Bias

A full collinearity test was performed after Podsakoff et al. (2003) due to the same respondents completing the predictor and criterion measures at the same time. Common method bias was not likely a serious issue in this data as all the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below the conservative threshold of 3.3.

4.5 Structural Model Assessment

Collinearity among predictor constructs was determined prior to hypothesis testing and all inner VIFs values were within acceptable limits (VIFs < 3.0). The structural model was subsequently estimated and the significance assessed with 5000 resampling in bootstrapping. The results showed that sustainable tourism policy has a significant and positive effect in predicting tourists' satisfaction as shown in Table 4 ($\beta = 0.312$, $t = 5.115$, $p < .001$), supporting H1. The results indicated that digital service quality also had a



significant and positive effect on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.398$, $t = 6.862$, $p < .001$) and thus proved to be a suitable support for H2. Sustainable tourism policy ($\beta = 0.187$, $t = 2.634$, $p < .01$) and digital service quality ($\beta = 0.152$, $t = 2.203$, $p < .05$) were found to have direct effects on revisit intention, which supports H3 and H4, but these effects were weaker. The results showed that tourist satisfaction was the strongest predictor of revisit intention ($\beta = 0.457$, $t = 7.254$, $p < .001$), which supported H5.

Table 4*Structural Path Coefficients (Direct Effects)*

Hyp.	Path	β	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	STP $\rightarrow$ TS	0.312	0.061	5.115	0.000	Supported
H2	DSQ $\rightarrow$ TS	0.398	0.058	6.862	0.000	Supported
H3	STP $\rightarrow$ RI	0.187	0.071	2.634	0.008	Supported
H4	DSQ $\rightarrow$ RI	0.152	0.069	2.203	0.028	Supported
H5	TS $\rightarrow$ RI	0.457	0.063	7.254	0.000	Supported

4.6 Mediation Analysis

The results of bootstrapped indirect effects are presented in Table 5 and showed that both sustainable tourism policy to tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.143$, 95% CI [0.081, 0.211]) and sustainable tourism policy to digital service quality ($\beta = 0.182$, 95% CI [0.112, 0.256]) were significant. Therefore, H6 and H7 were supported. Both the direct effects of sustainable tourism policy and digital service quality on revisit intention were statistically significant, and both were found to partially mediate the effects of the two variables on revisit intention.

Table 5*Mediation Analysis (Indirect Effects, Bootstrapping = 5,000 Resamples)*

Hyp.	Indirect Path	β	CI 2.5%	CI 97.5%	p-value	Conclusion
H6	STP $\rightarrow$ TS $\rightarrow$ RI	0.143	0.081	0.211	0.000	Partial mediation
H7	DSQ $\rightarrow$ TS $\rightarrow$ RI	0.182	0.112	0.256	0.000	Partial mediation

4.7 Explanatory and Predictive Power

According to the results from the analysis of model explanatory power shown in Table 6, the model's explanatory power in tourist satisfaction is 48.7% ($R^2 = 0.487$) and the explanatory power in revisit intention is 51.2% ($R^2 = 0.512$), which are considered moderate to substantial in behavioural tourism research. The model was confirmed to have predictive relevance in the blindfolding procedure with Q^2 values of > 0 for both endogenous constructs (0.312 and 0.334, respectively). The effect size (f^2) analysis showed that the quality of digital service had a medium influence on tourist satisfaction while the quality of sustainable tourism had a small-to-medium influence, and tourist satisfaction had a medium-to-large influence on revisit intention, highlighting the importance of revisit intention in the model.

Table 6*Coefficient of Determination (R^2), Predictive Relevance (Q^2), and Effect Size (f^2)*

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Q^2	f^2 (key predictors)
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)	0.487	0.312	STP = 0.121; DSQ = 0.187
Revisit Intention (RI)	0.512	0.334	TS = 0.239; STP = 0.052; DSQ = 0.034

5. Discussion

This study provides some insights about the factors that can affect tourist satisfaction and the revisit intention in the tourism industry in Pakistan. In line with previous sustainable tourism research (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Karim & Goh, 2025), sustainable tourism policy was found to be a key positive predictor of tourist satisfaction, indicating that tourists visiting sustainable destinations, like Hunza, Skardu and Swat, are "awareness of sustainable tourism policy signals" and that this awareness has led to more positive



overall assessment of the tourist experience. This result confirms with the extensive literature in sustainable tourism which has consistently portrayed the destination management in an environmentally and socially responsible manner as a key factor in fostering positive tourist affect, and not only as a regulatory or reputational issue.

Against this backdrop, the findings revealed that digital service quality was even more significant as a predictor of tourist satisfaction than was sustainable tourism policy, a finding that aligns with the results of e-service quality research in the retail and hospitality sectors (Al-Dweeri et al., 2019; Alnaim et al., 2022; Hamid et al., 2022). This finding aligns with the increased use of online booking systems, mobile applications and payment facilities for tourism throughout the pre-visit, on-site and post-visit phase of the tourism experience, and it indicates that there may be higher expected benefits to tourist satisfaction for investing in the usability, reliability and security of these digital platforms for tourism compared to more traditional policy interventions.

The findings of this study confirm that tourist satisfaction acts as a mediator between satisfaction and revisit intention as discussed in previous studies (Chi & Qu, 2008; Hossain et al., 2021; Oliver, 1980). The fact that Direct effects on revisit intention of both Sustainable tourism policy and Digital service quality remained significant even after controlling for the mediated effect of the tourists' satisfaction in the current situation indicates that the satisfaction-based in-the-moment decision of the tourist vis-à-vis revisit intention is not completely explained in the context of Pakistan. Instead, perceptions of the sustainability attributes of a destination and the digital service infrastructure seem to have an independent effect on future visitation intentions which may be mediated by indirect factors such as destination trust, reduced perceived risk, or expected future service reliability but were not modelled in this study.

6. Conclusion and implications

The current study aimed to explore the combined effect of sustainable tourism policy and digital service quality on tourist satisfaction and the intent to revisit the tourist destinations across six major tourist destinations in Pakistan applying the PLS-SEM technique with the help of 185 tourists. The findings showed that both the sustainable tourism policy and the digital service quality significantly explained tourist satisfaction, and that tourist satisfaction significantly and partially mediated the effects of both these factors on revisit intention. The findings contribute to the existing literature on tourism satisfaction by merging the two levels of antecedents: policy level and technology level, in a single conceptual model specific to the Pakistani destination context.

On the management side, the results indicate that the DSTOs and decision-makers need to take two approaches: investing in the physical places to improve governance and encourage environmental and community participation, and improving the usability, reliability, and security of digital tourism. In view of the relatively higher impact of the change in digital service quality in the destinations in this study, tourism boards for destinations like Murree, Hunza, Skardu, Swat, Naran-Kaghan and Islamabad could benefit more from coordinated improvement of digital service.

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