

The role of service quality in shaping customer loyalty in an emerging golf market: Testing the moderating role of golf course image

DANG KHOA PHAM¹, NGUYEN THI THUY VAN²

^{1,2}Faculty of Sport Science, Ton Duc Thang University, Ho Chi Minh City, VIETNAM

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Abstract

Although the golf market in Vietnam is experiencing rapid growth, there is still a lack of comprehensive evidence regarding the impact of service quality on maintaining customer loyalty in emerging markets for golf. To address this issue, the present study explores how service quality influences loyalty through perceived value, price fairness, and customer satisfaction. Additionally, it examines whether the image of the golf course serves as a moderator in the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. Data were collected through on-site, face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire administered to 406 participants (golfers) across multiple golf courses in Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding provinces in Southern Vietnam (e.g., Dong Nai and Long An), and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to validate the research model and examine the proposed relationships. The findings reveal a sequential mechanism in which service quality significantly enhances perceived value ($\beta = 0.429$, $p < 0.001$), price reasonableness ($\beta = 0.410$, $p < 0.001$), and customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.301$, $p < 0.001$). Notably, customer satisfaction emerges as the strongest predictor of customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.001$). The proposed moderating effect of golf course image on the satisfaction–loyalty link is not supported ($\beta = 0.002$, $p = 0.922$). However, golf course image has a strong direct positive effect on loyalty ($\beta = 0.454$, $p < 0.001$). This study advances research on customer loyalty by integrating service quality, perceived value, price reasonableness, and customer satisfaction into an integrated mechanism tailored to Vietnam's emerging golf services context. Importantly, the results clarify that golf course image operates as a direct antecedent of loyalty, rather than moderating the satisfaction–loyalty relationship. To enhance customer loyalty from a managerial standpoint, it is essential to implement synchronized enhancements in foundational service delivery and the perceived fairness of pricing to boost customer satisfaction. In addition, it is crucial to invest in the golf course's image as an independent factor influencing customer loyalty.

Key words: Golf Services, Price Reasonableness, Perceived value, Customer Satisfaction, Perceived Value, PLS-SEM

Introduction

Despite economic volatility, the Golf industry continues to deliver surprising economic results and is constantly developing at a strong pace (Serrano-Gómez et al., 2020). Golf continues to expand as a global participation- and tourism-driven service industry. Beyond traditional on-course play, the sport has broadened through multiple formats and experiences, contributing to sustained demand across diverse consumer segments. Recent industry evidence indicates that golf participation across The R&A's affiliated markets (excluding the USA and Mexico) reached 108 million players in 2024, representing continued year-on-year growth (The R&A, 2025). Alongside rising participation, the golf tourism sector is expected to expand further, reflecting the growing appeal of golf as a leisure and travel experience (Future Market Insights, 2025). Recent trends are fueling an increased demand for high-quality golf courses and associated services, leading to heightened competition and greater pressure on operators to enhance customer retention through exceptional service delivery and relationship-building strategies. This environment also opens avenues for differentiation that go beyond the essential facilities. In the context of Vietnam's evolving golf services sector, competitive dynamics are influenced not just by the conditions of the courses, but also by the quality and consistency of service interactions, which significantly affect perceived value, price fairness, and overall customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, many operators struggle to turn service enhancements into long-term customer loyalty, underscoring the necessity of clarifying how service quality impacts loyalty outcomes within this landscape.

Customer loyalty is central to sustained performance in service-based industries, and this also applies to sports facility operations (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Loyalty is widely recognized as a strategic means of achieving competitive advantage (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2004). Prior research further indicates that service quality, perceived value, price and customer satisfaction are among the primary drivers of customer loyalty (Han & Hyun, 2015; Kasiri et al., 2017; Konuk, 2019; Nam & Lee, 2011; Tuncer et al., 2021). Golf, in particular, is largely viewed as a form of experiential consumption (Wu & Ai, 2016). Accordingly, the quality perceived by golfers often relates more to the golfing process itself than to discrete ancillary services provided by the golf course (Hutchinson et al., 2009). Evaluations of service quality and perceived value may also vary

across countries (Byon et al., 2013; Carrillat et al., 2007) and across golfer characteristics such as expertise, handicap and gender (Bruton et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2011). These insights indicate that loyalty in golf is likely influenced by a complex interplay of experience-based judgments rather than solely by individual service attributes. Existing research on service quality generally confirms a positive correlation with customer loyalty, often mediated by consumers' cognitive and emotional assessments like perceived value and satisfaction. However, findings remain ambiguous regarding the role of price fairness alongside perceived value as a separate evaluative criterion, especially within the context of golf services where pricing is prominent and service offerings are multifaceted. In such scenarios, customers may concurrently construct evaluations based on value (perceived value) and fairness (price reasonableness), leading to varied impacts on their satisfaction and loyalty levels. Furthermore, while the image of a golf course is recognized as a vital strategic element, previous studies have largely examined it as a direct predictor. This approach has limited empirical understanding of its potential to moderate the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty in emerging golf markets.

From a managerial standpoint, enhancing loyalty requires setting priorities that enable golf courses to deliver high-quality experiences and generate customer satisfaction from those experiences (Chen & Chen, 2010; Kao et al., 2008). Satisfied customers often become brand advocates who share positive experiences within their social networks, thereby helping to broaden the customer base (Byon et al., 2013). Price is also an important factor that can increase customer satisfaction (Voss et al., 1998) whereas prices perceived as unreasonably high may trigger switching behavior (Ranaweera & Neely, 2003) and undermine relationship intentions (Han et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2020; Liu & Lee, 2016). Beyond these functional evaluations, corporate image—formed through perceptions of product and service quality, customer care, social responsibility and ethical behavior (Abratt & Nsenki Mofokeng, 2001)—represents another strategic determinant of relationship outcomes. In the present study, this construct is conceptualized as golf course image. Existing evidence suggests that golf course image may reinforce the influence of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty by shaping how golfers translate their satisfaction into repeat patronage and advocacy (Kipkirong Tarus & Rabach, 2013). Therefore, improving service quality, maintaining reasonable pricing, and building a distinctive golf course image represent complementary strategies for strengthening loyalty in golf services.

In addition, prior studies have examined the determinants of customer satisfaction in the golf course context, with particular attention to service quality, perceived value, and experience-related characteristics; however, most of this evidence comes from developed markets where the golf industry is mature and service standards are highly institutionalized (Hutchinson et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2011). In contrast, Vietnam is situated within a developing market where the golf industry is experiencing rapid expansion and the expectations of golfers are becoming increasingly varied. This shift may influence how service evaluations lead to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Although the growth potential for Vietnam's golf sector is significant, there is a lack of comprehensive research on what drives customer loyalty. Current studies often investigate factors such as service quality, perceived value, price, and customer satisfaction in isolation, failing to fully examine the interactions between these variables. Furthermore, the role of golf course image—a unique and strategic aspect of golf services—has not been adequately studied in its capacity to elucidate the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. Additionally, much of the existing literature is based on international markets or different service sectors, potentially overlooking the specific developmental traits of Vietnam's golf industry.

This study offers a more integrated account of how service quality translates into customer loyalty through perceived value, price reasonableness, and customer satisfaction, while clarifying the role of golf course image in Vietnam's emerging golf market. Accordingly, this study aims to address these gaps by simultaneously examining the effects of service quality, perceived value, price reasonableness, and customer satisfaction on customer loyalty in the context of Vietnam's emerging golf market, and by testing the moderating role of golf course image in the satisfaction–loyalty relationship. The study aims to tackle its objectives by creating and empirically validating an integrated framework that outlines both direct and indirect routes from service quality to customer loyalty. This pathway involves perceived value, price reasonableness, and customer satisfaction, while also looking at golf course image as a potential moderator in the satisfaction-loyalty dynamic. Through this approach, the research sheds light on the ways service quality can influence customer loyalty, providing practical insights for golf course operators on how to enhance service delivery, manage pricing perceptions, and develop their brand image effectively.

Material & methods

Research Model

Service quality is commonly conceptualized as the extent to which perceived service performance meets or exceeds customers' expectations (Grönroos, 1993). Because service quality is ultimately judged by customers, these evaluations may differ from providers' own assessments and are shaped by multiple cues from the service encounter and service environment (Thwaites, 1999). A service quality gap arises when customers' expectations exceed the level of service actually received (Tazreen, 2012). Prior research consistently indicates that higher service quality is a key antecedent of customer satisfaction (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Bojanic, 1996). Evidence from hospitality and other service industries also suggests that service quality enhances perceived value (Chen & Hu, 2010; Hu et al., 2009; Ge et al., 2021; Tian et al., 2021). And in the study by (Le et al.,

2025), service quality was also found to have a significant impact on customers' perceived value in pickleball facilities. In the golf course context, service quality is reflected not only in core course conditions (e.g., course maintenance and pace of play) but also in complementary services such as staff responsiveness, caddie support, and clubhouse facilities. These service cues are likely to shape golfers' overall evaluations of the experience, including whether the benefits received are commensurate with the fees paid. Moreover, service quality may shape customers' perceptions of price reasonableness, as consumers tend to view prices as more acceptable and fair when the service delivered is of superior quality and associated with higher benefits and lower perceived risk (Kashyap and Bojanic, 2000; Cronin et al., 2000). Based on these arguments, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: *Service quality has a direct positive impact on perceived value at golf courses.*

H2: *Service quality has a direct positive impact on price reasonableness at golf courses.*

H3: *Service quality has a direct positive impact on customer satisfaction at golf courses.*

The concept of perceived value has received substantial attention in marketing and service research (Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). Perceived value refers to a consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a service based on perceptions of what is received relative to what is given (Zeithaml, 1988a). Because value judgments are context-dependent, perceived value may vary across industries and cultural settings (Brady and Robertson, 1999). In service exchanges, perceived value can be enhanced by increasing perceived benefits and/or reducing perceived sacrifices associated with acquiring and consuming the service (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011). Prior studies consistently suggest that perceived value is a key antecedent of customer satisfaction. For example, research in restaurant and retail settings reports that higher perceived value is positively associated with satisfaction and serves as a strong predictor of satisfaction (Tarn, 1999; McDougall and Levesque, 2000). Choi et al. (2018) likewise reported that perceived value exerts a significant direct effect on consumer satisfaction. Moreover, perceived value has also been linked to customer loyalty across various service industries, including banking, insurance, telecommunications, and sport services (Rasheed and Abadi, 2014; Min, 2022). Based on these empirical insights, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H4: *Perceived value has a direct positive impact on customer satisfaction at golf courses.*

H5: *Perceived value has a direct positive impact on customer loyalty at golf courses.*

Price reasonableness

Price reasonableness refers to customers' perceptions that the price paid is appropriate, acceptable, and fair relative to relevant reference prices and the benefits received from the service (Han & Hyun, 2015; Zeithaml, 1988b). Building on reference price theory, consumers evaluate whether the current price represents a perceived "gain" or "loss" by comparing it with an internal reference price formed through prior experiences and market information (Petrick, 2005). When golfers perceive the fees charged (e.g., green fees and related service charges) as reasonable, they are more likely to form favorable evaluations of the service encounter because the exchange is perceived as fair and justified relative to the experience delivered. Conversely, perceptions of unreasonable pricing may trigger feelings of unfairness and dissatisfaction, thereby weakening relationship intentions. Prior empirical evidence suggests that price perceptions influence customer satisfaction (Voss et al., 1998; Cao et al., 2003) and can also translate into loyalty-related outcomes, particularly in repeat-purchase services where customers continually compare what they pay with what they receive. Based on these arguments, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H6: *Price reasonableness positively influences customer satisfaction at golf courses.*

H7: *Price reasonableness positively influences customer loyalty at golf courses.*

Customer satisfaction is widely viewed as an overall evaluative judgment formed after consumption, typically arising from customers' comparisons between prior expectations and perceived performance (Fornell, 1992; Minarti & Segoro, 2014). It reflects the extent to which customers perceive that a service encounter meets or exceeds their needs and delivers desirable benefits (Singh et al., 2023). The extant literature consistently documents customer satisfaction as a key antecedent of customer loyalty. For example, Bolton (1998) and Bowen and Chen (2001) found that higher satisfaction strengthens loyalty intentions and is associated with improved organizational outcomes, while Shankar et al. (2003) reported a positive satisfaction–loyalty relationship across both online and offline purchasing contexts. Based on this empirical evidence, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H8: *Customer satisfaction positively influences customer loyalty at golf courses.*

According to Dowling (1986), corporate image has long been viewed as an elusive and multi-faceted concept. Corporate (or organizational) image is formed through a wide range of cues and is inherently subjective, as individuals' beliefs, experiences, and backgrounds shape their overall impressions. Keller (1993) defines corporate image as consumers' perceptions of an organization reflected in the associations stored in memory. In the loyalty literature, research has predominantly emphasized the direct effect of image on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (e.g., Gürlek et al., 2017; Wang, 2020). By contrast, the moderating role of image in strengthening the satisfaction–loyalty relationship has received comparatively limited attention. Nevertheless, Tarus and Rabach (2013) found that corporate image can reinforce the link between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, such that the positive effect of satisfaction on loyalty becomes stronger when image is favorable. In line with prior conceptualizations of image, the current study examines golf course image

(GI) as the context-specific manifestation of organizational image in golf services and proposes the following hypothesis:

H9: *Golf course image has a positive moderating effect on the impact of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty at golf courses.*

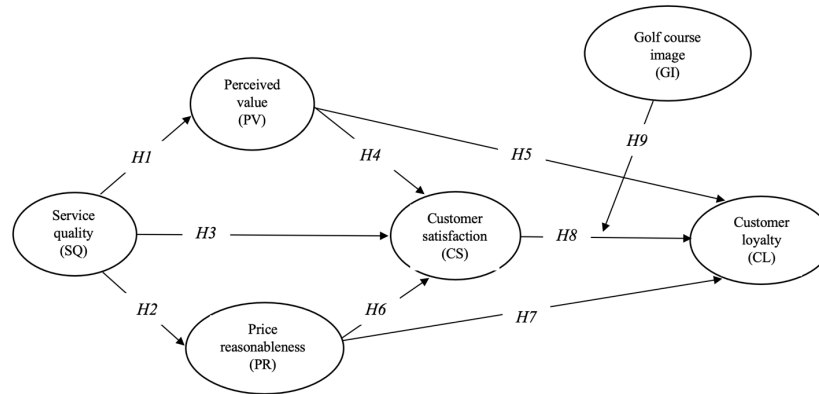


Fig 1. Hypothesized model.

Research Instruments

All constructs in the study were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). To guarantee content validity, measurement items were derived from established scales in previous studies and tailored to suit the golf service domain. Seven items measuring service quality were adapted from Wu and Ai (2016). Three items assessing price reasonableness were taken from Oh (2000). For perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, three, four, and three items were employed, respectively, with adaptations based on Hutchinson et al. (2009). Lastly, golf course image was evaluated using three items adapted from Nguyen and Leblanc (2001).

Data collection and sample

This study focuses on golf players across multiple golf courses in Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding provinces in Southern Vietnam (e.g., Dong Nai and Long An), where golf course density is high and golfer traffic is substantial. With the cooperation and permission of course management, five private golf courses were purposively selected as survey sites. Data were collected through on-site, face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire. Participants were informed of the study’s purpose and invited to participate voluntarily before completing the survey. In total, 459 questionnaires were distributed. After data screening, 53 responses were excluded due to substantial missing information, resulting in 406 valid questionnaires for analysis and hypothesis testing (usable response rate: 88.5%). Data collection was conducted from July 2025 to the end of September 2025. As shown in Table 1, the sample was predominantly male (70.7%), with females accounting for 29.3% of respondents. In terms of age, most participants were between 20 and 49 years old (78.3%), with the largest share in the 30–39 group (32.8%), followed by 40–49 (23.6%) and 20–29 (21.9%); participants under 20 and those aged 50 and above represented 10.1% and 11.6%, respectively. Regarding monthly income, the largest proportion reported earnings of 31–40 million VND (34.0%), followed by 21–30 million VND (26.4%) and 41–50 million VND (19.4%), while 10.1% fell into each of the lowest (<20 million VND) and highest (>50 million VND) income categories. Finally, more than half of the participants reported playing one to two times per month (54.4%), while 24.9% played three to four times per month; smaller proportions played five to six times (12.3%) or more than six times per month (8.4%).

Table 1. Respondent demographics (N = 406)

Category	Classification	Sample Amounts	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	287	70.7
	Female	119	29.3
Age	Under 20	41	10.1
	20–29	89	21.9
	30–39	133	32.8
	40–49	96	23.6
	50 and above	47	11.6
	Less than 20	41	10.1
Monthly Income (million VND)	From 21 to 30	107	26.4
	From 31 to 40	138	34.0
	From 41 to 50	79	19.4
	Over 50	41	10.1
	1–2	221	54.4
Frequency of playing golf (times per month)	3–4	101	24.9
	5–6	50	12.3
	More than 6	34	8.4

Results

Empirical Results and Discussions

Table 2 presents the outer model assessment results, including Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 2, CR values range from 0.919 for PV to 0.954 for GI, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. In addition, both Cronbach's alpha and rho_A are above the 0.60 cut-off. These results indicate satisfactory internal consistency reliability for all constructs.

Regarding convergent validity, the AVE values range from 0.676 (SQ) to 0.873 (GI), exceeding the acceptable level and confirming adequate convergent validity. Discriminant validity was further evaluated using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT), a widely used criterion in PLS-SEM. Following the recommended threshold of 0.85, all HTMT values in this study fall below 0.85, supporting discriminant validity. These results are reported in Table 3. The measurement model demonstrates satisfactory reliability and validity, and the constructs are empirically distinct from one another.

Table 2. Construct reliability and convergent validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
CL	0.888	0.889	0.931	0.817
CS	0.885	0.888	0.920	0.743
GI	0.928	0.928	0.954	0.873
PR	0.875	0.876	0.923	0.799
PV	0.868	0.875	0.919	0.790
SQ	0.920	0.921	0.936	0.676

Notes. CL = Customer loyalty; CS = Customer satisfaction; GI = Golf course image; PR = Price reasonableness; PV = Perceived value; SQ = Service quality.

Table 3. Results of discriminant validity using HTMT.

	CL	CS	GI	PR	PV	SQ
CL						
CS	0.748					
GI	0.791	0.619				
PR	0.635	0.637	0.584			
PV	0.583	0.666	0.579	0.471		
SQ	0.515	0.627	0.396	0.456	0.478	
GI x CS	0.400	0.477	0.391	0.457	0.339	

Notes. CL = Customer loyalty; CS = Customer satisfaction; GI = Golf course image; PR = Price reasonableness; PV = Perceived value; SQ = Service quality.

The subsequent phase involves assessing the inner model to confirm the proposed relationships following the evaluation of the outer model. Fig 2 displays the path coefficients for all variables alongside the R-squared (R^2) values. As depicted in Fig 2, the path coefficients indicate the magnitude of the relationships among constructs, whereas the R-squared values reflect the extent of variation in each construct within the model. Higher R^2 values indicate greater explanatory power of the PLS structural model and, consequently, stronger predictive ability for the endogenous constructs (Dawson, 2019).

Hair et al. (2019) suggest that R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 may be interpreted as substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively, while noting that appropriate benchmarks can vary across research contexts. As reported in Fig 2, the R^2 values are 0.184 for PV, 0.168 for PR, 0.536 for CS, and 0.627 for CL. Overall, these results indicate that the model's explanatory power ranges from weak (PV and PR) to moderate (CS) and relatively substantial (CL). In addition, a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was employed to assess the statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships (Henseler et al., 2016). As reported in Table 4, all proposed paths are statistically supported with p-values below 0.01, except for H5 and H9, which are not supported.

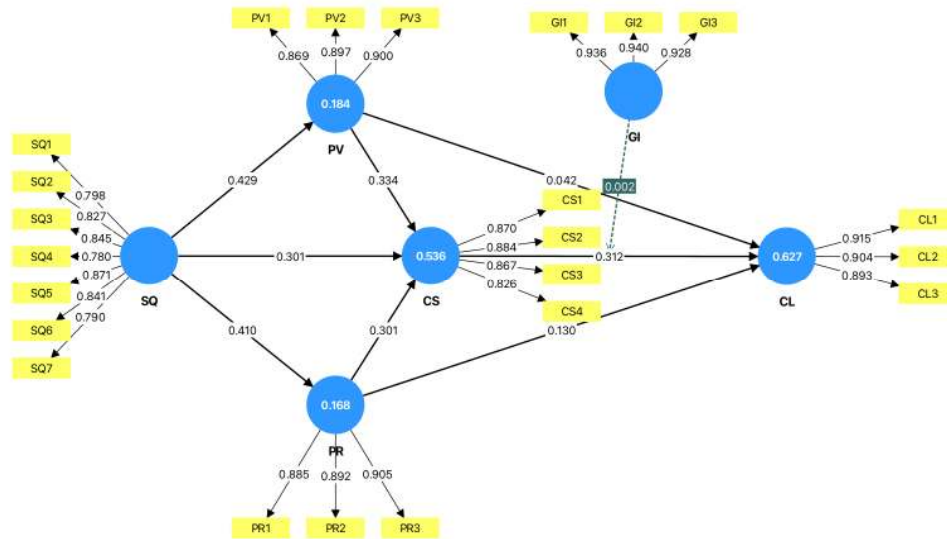


Fig 2. SmartPLS results.

Moderating effects

We hypothesized that the relationship between CS and CL is moderated by GI (H9). The results indicate that GI has a significant positive direct effect on CL ($\beta = 0.454$, $p < 0.001$). However, The interaction effect ($CS \times GI$) on CL was not significant ($\beta = 0.002$, $p = 0.922$), indicating that GI does not moderate the CS—CL relationship. Consistent with this result, the interaction plot shows that the simple slopes of CS predicting CL at low (-1 SD), mean, and high ($+1$ SD) levels of GI are nearly parallel, indicating negligible differences in the CS—CL association across levels of GI. Therefore, H9 is not supported, and there is no empirical evidence for the moderating role of GI in the CS—CL relationship.

Table 4. Bootstrapping results.

Hypotheses	Path coefficients	T -Statistics	Standard Deviation	P-values	Results
H1. SQ → PV	0.429	9.212	0.047	0.000	Supported
H2. SQ → PR	0.410	9.591	0.043	0.000	Supported
H3. SQ → CS	0.301	7.311	0.041	0.000	Supported
H4. PV → CS	0.334	7.212	0.046	0.000	Supported
H5. PV → CL	0.042	1.038	0.040	0.299	Not supported
H6. PR → CS	0.301	6.421	0.047	0.000	Supported
H7. PR → CL	0.130	2.278	0.047	0.005	Supported
H8. CS → CL	0.312	7.142	0.044	0.000	Supported
H9. $GI \times CS \rightarrow CL$	0.002	0.098	0.025	0.922	Not supported

Notes. CL = Customer loyalty; CS = Customer satisfaction; GI = Golf course image; PR = Price reasonableness; PV = Perceived value; SQ = Service quality.

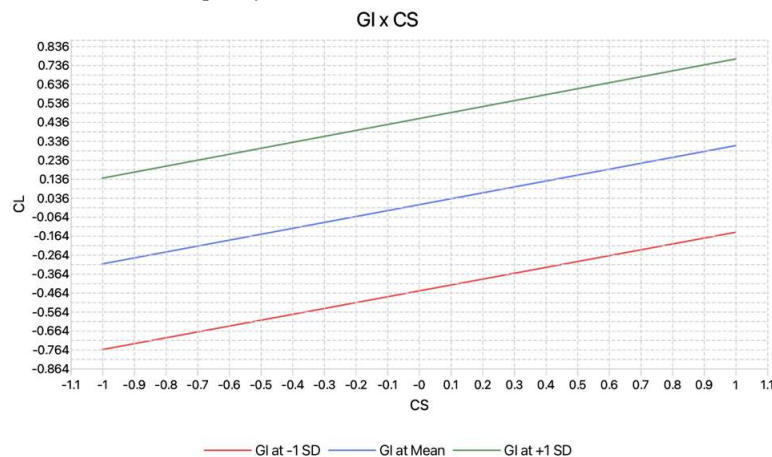


Fig 3. Moderating effect of GI on the CS—CL relationship.

The moderating role of GI

Although the hypothesized moderating effect of golf course image (GI) on the satisfaction–loyalty relationship was not supported, GI still showed a significant direct association with customer loyalty. One plausible explanation is that GI functions as an independent, experience-based cue that shapes attachment and preference beyond evaluative satisfaction. In golf, course image often reflects symbolic and experiential benefits (e.g., prestige, aesthetics, maintenance quality, and atmosphere) that can directly motivate revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth even when satisfaction is already accounted for. Second, the CS–CL link may be relatively robust in this context, leaving limited room for GI to meaningfully change its strength; satisfaction may operate as a dominant predictor that consistently translates into loyalty across different image levels.

Mediating effects

To assess the mediating mechanisms linking service quality (SQ) to customer loyalty (CL), we examined the specific indirect effects using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples (Table 5). The results show that the indirect effect of SQ on CL through perceived value alone (SQ → PV → CL) is not significant ($\beta = 0.018$, $p = 0.314$). In contrast, SQ exerts significant indirect effects on CL through price reasonableness (SQ → PR → CL; $\beta = 0.053$, $p < 0.001$) and through customer satisfaction (SQ → CS → CL; $\beta = 0.094$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, two serial indirect effects are significant: SQ → PR → CS → CL ($\beta = 0.039$, $p < 0.001$) and SQ → PV → CS → CL ($\beta = 0.045$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, these findings indicate that customer satisfaction represents the central mechanism through which service quality translates into loyalty, whereas perceived value and price reasonableness contribute to loyalty primarily by strengthening customer satisfaction.

Table 5. Indirect effects analysis.

Indirect effects	Specific Indirect Effects	T -Statistics	Standard Deviation	P-values	Results
SQ → PV → CL	0.018	1.008	0.018	0.314	Not significant
SQ → PR → CL	0.053	2.587	0.021	0.000	Significant
SQ → CS → CL	0.094	4.957	0.019	0.000	Significant
SQ → PR → CS → CL	0.039	3.998	0.010	0.000	Significant
SQ → PV → CS → CL	0.045	4.448	0.010	0.000	Significant

Notes. CL = Customer loyalty; CS = Customer satisfaction; GI = Golf course image; PR = Price reasonableness; PV = Perceived value; SQ = Service quality.

Conclusions

The results provide a coherent explanation of customer loyalty formation among golfers in the golf service context. Customer satisfaction emerges as the central mechanism through which customers (golfers) develop loyalty, supporting the view that satisfaction is the most proximal evaluation that translates service experiences into repeat patronage and advocacy. Perceived value contributes to customer loyalty primarily through customer satisfaction rather than through a strong direct effect, implying that golfers consider “value for money” most consequential when it is reflected in an overall satisfying golf experience. In addition, price reasonableness plays a complementary role in shaping customer satisfaction. When golfers perceive fees as fair and acceptable relative to the experience delivered, they are more likely to evaluate the service encounter favorably, which subsequently strengthens loyalty-related outcomes. However, contrary to the proposed moderating hypothesis, golf course image does not significantly moderate the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. A plausible explanation is that the customer satisfaction–customer loyalty relationship is relatively stable among golfers, leaving limited scope for course image to amplify or attenuate this association. Moreover, golf course image may function as a salient cue of experiential and symbolic benefits (e.g., prestige and reputation) that directly motivates customer loyalty regardless of satisfaction levels. This interpretation is consistent with the significant direct effect of golf course image on customer loyalty, suggesting that a favorable image strengthens loyalty in its own right rather than operating as a moderator.

While this study extends understanding of customer loyalty among golfers, several limitations should be noted. First, the sample was drawn from a specific setting and group of golfers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions and course types; future research should replicate the model across diverse contexts. Second, although the framework includes key determinants (service quality, perceived value, price reasonableness, customer satisfaction, and golf course image), other relevant factors such as customer engagement and social influence may further improve explanatory power. Third, the cross-sectional design constrains causal inference and does not capture changes in loyalty over time; longitudinal studies are therefore recommended. Finally, reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias; future work should combine survey measures with behavioral indicators (e.g., revisit frequency or membership renewal) to strengthen validity.

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