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AN INTEGRATED S-O-R FRAMEWORK FOR CROSS-BORDER GOLF TOURISM: LINKING DESTINATION IMAGE, GOLF COURSE QUALITY, GOLFER INTENTION, AND DESTINATION LOYALTY

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Abstract:

Golf tourism serves as a lucrative niche segment driving regional economic resilience. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, this study examines an integrated model evaluating the impact of Destination Image and Golf Course Quality on Golfer Intention and Destination Loyalty within an emerging Southeast Asian cross-border hub, Batam City, Indonesia. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire targeting 200 domestic and international golf tourists with direct golfing experience in Batam. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was utilized for empirical testing. Findings reveal that both Destination Image ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.001$) and Golf Course Quality ($\beta = 0.398$, $p < 0.001$) significantly drive Golfer Intention. Furthermore, Golfer Intention strongly predicts Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.862$, $p < 0.001$) while serving as a crucial mediating mechanism across both structural paths. This study advances the S-O-R theory by validating product-specific and destination-level stimuli in predicting cross-border loyalty. Practical implications highlight that destination managers and golf operators must prioritize core facility maintenance alongside regional branding to capture golfer intentions and secure long-term tourist retention.

DOI:10.35631/JTHER.1145059 **Keyword:**Destination Image, Destination Loyalty, Golf Course Quality,
Golfer Intention, Golf Tourism, S-O-R Framework.

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Introduction

Tourism is a fundamental driver of regional economic development, contributing significantly to job creation, foreign exchange earnings, destination competitiveness, and sustainable economic growth. Within the broader tourism industry, sport tourism has emerged as an exceptionally dynamic segment that generates substantial local business growth and commercial revitalization (Ordinana-Bellver et al., 2026).

Among the various forms of sport tourism, golf tourism represents one of the most lucrative niche markets due to its premium nature and highly resilient demand. Golf tourists are generally characterized by high purchasing power, longer average stays, and a greater willingness to spend on accommodation, transportation, dining, and auxiliary leisure activities compared to average recreational travelers (Hinch & Higham, 2019). Consequently, developing a competitive golf tourism sector yields far-reaching economic benefits for host destinations.

Recognizing its substantial economic potential, scholars have extensively investigated the determinants of golf tourism development across various mature markets, including Malaysia (Cham et al., 2021), China (Zhang et al., 2022), South Korea (Jeong, 2024; Jeong & Kim, 2019), and the United States (Lee & Kim, 2024). These foundational studies consistently demonstrate that destination image, service quality, and overall tourist satisfaction play pivotal roles in driving visitor behavioral intentions and long-term destination loyalty. However, while these studies offer valuable insights into established destinations, their empirical findings cannot be blindly generalized to emerging cross-border destinations, where spatial proximity, price sensitivity, and distinct competitive dynamics fundamentally reshape how tourists evaluate their travel experiences.

This empirical and contextual gap is particularly pronounced in Batam City, Indonesia, an emerging cross-border golf tourism hub in Southeast Asia. Strategically located in the Riau Islands adjacent to Singapore and Malaysia, Batam is aggressively transforming its tourism landscape by positioning golf tourism as a core flagship product, backed by international-standard golf courses and seamless cross-border transport connectivity (Fahlevi et al., 2025).

Aspiring to become a premier choice for both domestic and international golfers, Batam's golf tourism sector faces intense regional competition. Batam competes not only with domestic golf destinations like Bali and Jakarta, but also directly confronts established cross-border golf tourism markets in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand (Ali et al., 2024). Within this highly

competitive cross-border golf corridor, sustaining Batam's market share requires moving beyond mere spatial proximity; it demands a deep understanding of the behavioral mechanisms governing golfers' decision-making and destination loyalty.

While recent research has begun to give academic attention to golf tourism in Batam (Fahlevi et al., 2025), two theoretical and conceptual limitations remain that warrant deeper investigation. First, existing literature within this context tends to treat service quality as a broad, generic construct, leaving golf course quality (a vital attribute specifically sought by golf tourists) insufficiently isolated and examined (Lee & Lee, 2023). Second, most prior studies evaluate tourist behavior through fragmented models, such that the integrated relationships among Destination Image, Golf Course Quality, Golfer Intention, and Destination Loyalty have not been fully conceptualized as a cohesive structural framework.

To address these limitations, this study proposes and empirically tests an integrated framework linking Destination Image and Golf Course Quality as key antecedents shaping Golfer Intention and Destination Loyalty within the cross-border context of Batam City, Indonesia. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory, this framework conceptualizes destination-level perceptions (Destination Image) and facility-level attributes (Golf Course Quality) as external environmental stimuli (S), which jointly trigger golfers' internal evaluations and behavioral intentions (O), ultimately culminating in long-term destination loyalty (R).

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model

This study adopts the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, rooted in environmental psychology, as its overarching theoretical foundation to explain the behavioral mechanisms of golf tourists. The S-O-R model posits that external environmental cues (Stimulus) influence individuals' internal cognitive and affective states (Organism), which subsequently drive their final behavioral outcomes (Response) (Zhou et al., 2025). Within tourism research, this framework has been widely validated as a robust mechanism for understanding how destination attributes and service environments trigger internal psychological evaluations, ultimately shaping tourist behavioral decisions and loyalty (Yang et al., 2025).

In the proposed structural model, the Stimulus (S) component is represented by two primary external attributes: Destination Image (destination-level perception) and Golf Course Quality (facility-level product attribute). The Organism (O) component captures the internal cognitive evaluation and decision-making state of the golfer, manifested as Golfer Intention. Finally, the Response (R) component is reflected through Destination Loyalty, representing the long-term behavioral commitment to revisit and recommend the destination. Grounding the research model in the S-O-R paradigm provides a cohesive theoretical mechanism to systematically analyze the path from environmental cues to final visitor loyalty.

The Effect of Destination Image on Golfer Intention

Within the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, destination image operates as a vital environmental stimulus (S) that triggers internal cognitive and affective evaluations (O)

within individuals. Destination image serves as a foundational concept for understanding how potential travelers process environmental information and make individual destination choice decisions (Cham et al., 2022). In the specific context of golf tourism, destination image encompasses a bundle of golf-related core attributes—such as strategic location, supporting facilities, hospitality, uniqueness, and overall attractiveness—which collectively determine the destination's market standing and appeal (Song et al., 2017). When golfers perceive these external attributes favorably, this environmental stimulus fosters a cohesive psychological perception regarding the destination's overall offering.

Conceptually, this positive cognitive evaluation translates into internal psychological readiness, manifested as golfer intention. Literature in general tourism and sport tourism consistently demonstrates that destination image plays a pivotal role in shaping behavioral intentions, where a favorable destination evaluation directly heightens a tourist's intention to visit (Jeong & Kim, 2019). In cross-border golf tourism, a strong destination image mitigates perceived risks and elevates expectations of a premium experience, thereby solidifying the golfer's internal motivation to choose the destination. Consequently, a more positive destination image will lead to a higher behavioral intention among golfers.

The Effect of Golf Course Quality on Golfer Intention

In the S-O-R paradigm, physical and operational attributes serve as direct environmental stimuli (S) evaluating a sport destination's core product. Golf courses constitute the primary attraction driving destination relevance in sport tourism (López-Bonilla et al., 2020). This quality dimension is operationalized through course cleanliness, aesthetic design, and continuous course and equipment maintenance (Cavas-García et al., 2021). Tangible evaluations of these core facility attributes provide critical experiential cues that stimulate the golfer's cognitive processing.

Psychologically, superior facility conditions influence internal decision-making states (O), specifically driving behavioral intentions. In outbound or cross-border golf travel, golfers prioritize course quality as the definitive selection criterion when evaluating destination options (Lee & Lee, 2023). High perceived course quality directly elevates the golfer's internal motivation and intention to visit the destination. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

The Influence of Golfer Intentions on Destination Loyalty

In the S-O-R model, the internal decision-making state (O) serves as a direct antecedent that drives the actual behavioral response (R). Understanding golfer perceptions and intentions is crucial to ensuring the long-term sustainability of golf tourism (Bonilla et al., 2020). For golf clubs and destination managers, cultivating golfer loyalty (manifested through repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations to peers) is a critical determinant of business sustainability and competitiveness (Cavas-García et al., 2021; Lee & Kim, 2024).

Theoretically, strong psychological intention acts as the driving force that translates internal readiness into actual loyal behavior. Golf destinations aim beyond one-off visits, striving to secure continuous visitor retention through repeat visitation patterns (Chung & Peachey, 2021). Consequently, a heightened behavioral intention directly strengthens the commitment to revisit and advocate for the destination.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H1: Destination Image has a positive effect on Golfer Intention.
- H2: Golf Course Quality has a positive effect on Golfer Intention.
- H3: Golfer Intention has a positive effect on Destination Loyalty.
- H4 & H5 : The Mediating Role of Golfer Intention.

Methodology

This quantitative study employs a correlational design to evaluate the structural relationships among the hypothesized constructs. The target population encompasses all domestic and international golf tourists with experience golfing in Batam City, Indonesia. A total sample of 200 respondents was established, which satisfies the requisite statistical power thresholds for execution via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) (Hair & Alamer 2022).

Sampling was executed using a non-probability purposive sampling technique to ensure data collection from highly relevant informants. Qualified respondents met three specific inclusion criteria: (1) aged 17 years or older, (2) having played at least one golf course in Batam City, and (3) having completed their golf tourism trip prior to taking the survey (Cham et al., 2022). Primary data were collected via a structured questionnaire utilizing a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). Measurement items assessing destination image, golf course quality, golfer intention, and destination loyalty were adapted from validated scales in previous literature (Cavas-García et al., 2021; Cham et al., 2022; Song et al., 2017).

Data were processed through PLS-SEM starting with measurement model (outer model) evaluation. Internal consistency reliability was confirmed via Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding the threshold of 0.70, while convergent validity was established with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50, before proceeding to structural model hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2019).

Findings & Discussion

Findings

The demographic profile of the 200 respondents highlights that Batam's golf tourism market is predominantly characterized by mature, male, highly frequent, and cross-border golfers. A substantial majority of respondents are aged over 40 years (76%) and male (88%), mirroring the established profile of the premium golf niche market which requires stable discretionary income and purchasing power. In terms of visitation behavior, respondents exhibited strong destination familiarity and repeat visitation patterns, with 34% having played on Batam's courses more than 40 times. Geographically, international golfers from neighboring Singapore (42%) and Malaysia (29%) represent the largest market shares, empirically confirming Batam's strategic positioning as a premier ASEAN cross-border golf hub driven by spatial proximity and accessibility.

Table 1. The Demographic Profile

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	(%)
Age	>40 years	151	76%
	30–40 years	27	14%
	26–30 years	11	6%
	17–25 years	11	6%
Gender	Male	176	88%
	Female	24	12%
Golf Visits	>40 visits	68	34%
	30–40 visits	43	22%
	21–30 visits	28	14%
	11–20 visits	29	15%
	5–10 visits	23	12%
	<5 visits	9	5%
Country	Singapore	84	42%
	Malaysia	58	29%
	Indonesia	47	24%
	Australia	11	6%

The evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) was conducted to establish the convergent validity and internal consistency reliability of all latent constructs prior to structural model testing. The statistical results indicate that all constructs successfully satisfied the required psychometric criteria. Convergent validity was confirmed as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.50, ranging from 0.612 (Golf Course Quality) to 0.673 (Loyalty). Furthermore, internal consistency reliability was robustly established, with Cronbach's Alpha values ranging between 0.905 and 0.931 and Composite Reliability values ranging between 0.924 and 0.944, all comfortably exceeding the recommended benchmark of 0.70. Consequently, all latent constructs in the proposed model were demonstrated to be empirically valid and reliable for subsequent hypothesis testing.

Table 2. The Evaluation Of The Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Construct	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Result
Destination Image	0.635	0.905	0.924	Valid & Reliable
Golf Course Quality	0.612	0.929	0.940	Valid & Reliable
Golfer Intention	0.621	0.913	0.929	Valid & Reliable
Loyalty	0.673	0.931	0.944	Valid & Reliable

Hypothesis testing was conducted by evaluating the structural model (inner model) to determine the significance and direction of the hypothesized relationships among the latent constructs. A path relationship is considered statistically significant and positive if the t-statistic exceeds the critical threshold of 1.96 (at a 5% significance level) with a corresponding p-value of less than 0.05. Furthermore, a positive original sample coefficient (β) indicates a direct positive relationship between the constructs.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing

Path	Original Sample	t- statistic	p- value	Decision
Destination Image → Golfer Intention	0.412	6.327	0.000	Supported
Golf Course Quality → Golfer Intention	0.398	6.102	0.000	Supported
Golfer Intention → Loyalty	0.862	49.621	0.000	Supported
Destination Image → Golfer Intention → Loyalty	0.355	6.359	0.000	Supported
Golf Course Quality → Golfer Intention → Loyalty	0.343	5.940	0.000	Supported

As shown in the statistical results, all direct structural paths (H1, H2, and H3) were empirically supported. Testing of the first hypothesis (H1) revealed that Destination Image exerts a significant positive effect on Golfer Intention ($\beta = 0.412$, $t = 6.327$, $p = 0.000$). Similarly, the second hypothesis (H2) confirmed that Golf Course Quality positively and significantly influences Golfer Intention ($\beta = 0.398$, $t = 6.102$, $p = 0.000$). The third hypothesis (H3) demonstrated an exceptionally strong positive effect, with Golfer Intention heavily predicting Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.862$, $t = 49.621$, $p = 0.000$).

In addition to direct effects, the SmartPLS bootstrapping procedure enabled the evaluation of specific indirect paths to examine the mediating mechanisms of Golfer Intention. The empirical findings indicate that Golfer Intention significantly mediates the relationship between Destination Image and Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.355$, $t = 6.359$, $p = 0.000$). Likewise, Golfer Intention also positively and significantly mediates the path between Golf Course Quality and Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.343$, $t = 5.940$, $p = 0.000$), reinforcing its vital role as an internal psychological mechanism bridging environmental stimuli to final tourist loyalty.

Discussion

H1: The Effect of Destination Image on Golfer Intention.

The empirical findings confirm that Destination Image has a positive and significant effect on Golfer Intention ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.001$). This result aligns with and reinforces previous studies (Song et al., 2017; Cham et al., 2022), which established destination image as a pivotal determinant driving golf tourists' behavioral intention. Favorable destination perceptions consistently stimulate golfers' internal drive to select a specific location for their travel. In the contextual setting of Batam City, golfers evaluate Batam as possessing a robust brand image as a premier golf destination. This favorable image is anchored by seamless cross-border accessibility and strong supporting infrastructure (such as star-rated hotels, diverse culinary offerings, convenient local transport, and auxiliary entertainment options) which collectively reinforce Batam's regional competitiveness as a golf hub.

Philosophically and theoretically, this significant relationship is best elucidated through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory. Within this paradigm, Destination Image serves as an external Stimulus (S) comprising holistic cognitive and affective environmental cues. When these external cues (accessibility, hospitality, and destination infrastructure) are favorably perceived, they trigger internal psychological processing within the golfer's cognitive

state (Organism - O). A positive destination image mitigates perceived travel risks while elevating expected experiential value, thereby driving internal psychological readiness manifested as behavioral intention. Consequently, a superior destination image directly heightens the internal motivation of golfers to formulate affirmative travel intentions toward the destination.

H2: The Effect of Golf Course Quality on Golfer Intention.

Empirical results confirm that Golf Course Quality exerts a positive and significant effect on Golfer Intention ($\beta = 0.398$, $p < 0.001$). This finding aligns with and reinforces previous literature (Cavas-García et al., 2021; Lee & Lee, 2023), which established that core facility quality serves as a primary selection criterion driving golf tourists' destination choices. In the contextual setting of Batam City, golfers' favorable evaluations regarding course cleanliness, aesthetic design uniqueness, and continuous maintenance of playing surfaces and supporting equipment directly catalyze their intention to visit. This highlights that within a premium niche market focused on the playing experience, the technical and physical excellence of Batam's golf courses represents a critical operational pillar driving cross-border tourist demand.

Philosophically and theoretically, this significant path exemplifies the operational mechanism of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model at the core product level. Golf Course Quality operates as a tangible physical and operational Stimulus (S), delivering direct sensory and technical cues to players. When course attributes meet or exceed expectations, these environmental stimuli undergo cognitive evaluation within the golfer's internal psychological state (Organism - O). This internal processing fosters perceived high experiential value and technical satisfaction, which ultimately translates into heightened psychological readiness manifested as behavioral intention. Consequently, superior course quality directly strengthens golfers' internal motivation to form affirmative travel intentions.

H3: The Effect of Golfer Intention on Destination Loyalty

Empirical testing of the third hypothesis confirms that Golfer Intention exerts a highly significant positive effect on Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.862$, $p < 0.001$). This finding aligns with and strongly reinforces prior literature (Bonilla et al., 2020; Chung & Peachey, 2021; Cavas-García et al., 2021; Lee & Kim, 2024), which establishes behavioral intention as the single most powerful predictor of tourist loyalty. In the contextual setting of Batam City's golf tourism, the exceptionally high path coefficient ($\beta = 0.862$) demonstrates that once golfers formulate a positive behavioral intention to play in Batam, this psychological drive powerfully translates into concrete loyal behaviors, such as repeat visitations and word-of-mouth recommendations to peers. This underscores that fostering strong visitor intention is the ultimate key to securing long-term tourist retention and business sustainability in cross-border destinations.

Philosophically and theoretically, this intense relationship illustrates the direct transition from the Organism (O) state to the Response (R) outcome within the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. Golfer Intention operates as the internal cognitive and affective state (O) that consolidates all prior evaluations of environmental stimuli. Once this internal psychological readiness reaches an optimal threshold, it propels behavioral execution at the Response (R) stage. This response manifests not merely as a short-term visitation choice but crystallizes into enduring destination loyalty characterized by revisit commitment and active

advocacy. Consequently, golfer intention serves as the essential psychological engine converting internal cognitive readiness into tangible destination loyalty.

H4 & H5 : The Mediating Role of Golfer Intention.

Empirical results confirm that Golfer Intention significantly mediates the relationship between Destination Image and Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.355$, $p < 0.001$), as well as between Golf Course Quality and Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.343$, $p < 0.001$). These findings demonstrate that neither destination-level nor facility-level stimuli automatically translate into tourist loyalty; rather, they operate through an internal psychological activation process. This reinforces existing literature highlighting cognitive-affective states as crucial explanatory mechanisms bridging environmental destination evaluations to tangible loyalty behaviors such as repeat visits and peer recommendations.

Within the overarching Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm, these mediation results validate the complete structural path (S - O - R) in Batam's cross-border golf tourism context. Destination Image (macro-environmental stimulus) and Golf Course Quality (micro-product stimulus) collectively act as external Stimuli (S). These dual stimuli undergo simultaneous cognitive processing within the golfer's internal state (Organism - O), driving Golfer Intention. Heightened behavioral intention serves as the indispensable catalyst that activates the final Response (R) of Destination Loyalty. Without stimulating internal intention (O), superior destination image or course attributes (S) cannot fully materialize into long-term destination loyalty (R).

Managerially, this mediating role offers key strategic insights for Batam's golf tourism stakeholders. It indicates that destination branding and course quality enhancements must be synergistically aligned to directly stimulate cross-border golfers' travel intentions. By ensuring that favorable external perceptions effectively crystallize into strong behavioral intentions, destination management organizations and golf operators can secure sustainable visitor retention and elevate Batam's competitive advantage within the regional market.

Conclusion

Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, this study empirically confirms an integrated model explaining the formation of cross-border golfer loyalty in Batam City, Indonesia. Statistical findings consistently demonstrate that external environmental stimuli at both the macro-destination level (Destination Image) and the core product level (Golf Course Quality) exert positive and significant effects on golfers' internal cognitive states (Golfer Intention). Furthermore, golfer intention proved to be the most dominant antecedent driving tangible behavioral responses, heavily predicting Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.862$) as manifested through repeat visitation commitment and positive word-of-mouth advocacy.

Theoretically, this research advances the literature by validating the significant mediating role of Golfer Intention, which successfully bridges both Destination Image and Golf Course Quality to Destination Loyalty. This establishes the complete structural mechanism of S-O-R, proving that external destination attributes or physical course quality cannot automatically generate tourist loyalty without first activating the golfer's internal behavioral intention. Practically, these insights signify to destination management organizations (DMOs) and golf operators in Batam that sustaining regional competitiveness requires a dual strategy: preserving

superior course technical standards and optimizing cross-border marketing to decisively capture golfer intentions, thereby securing long-term visitor retention in the ASEAN market.

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