

Impact of Chilam Joshi Festival on Destination Image and Tourist Behavioral Intentions: A Study of Kalash Valley, Chitral

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the Chilam Joshi Festival on destination image and tourist behavioral intentions in Kalash Valley, Chitral. The study specifically investigated the relationships among festival experience, destination image, and tourist behavioral intentions, while also examining the mediating role of destination image. The research was grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model, where festival experience served as the stimulus, destination image as the organism, and tourist behavioral intentions as the response. A quantitative research approach was adopted, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 250 tourists attending the Chilam Joshi Festival. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents who had directly experienced the festival. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation analysis. The findings revealed that festival experience has a significant positive effect on destination image and tourist behavioral intentions. The results further indicated that destination image significantly influences tourist behavioral intentions and partially mediates the relationship between festival experience and behavioral intentions. All proposed hypotheses were supported. The study confirms that positive festival experiences enhance tourists' perceptions of Kalash Valley and encourage revisit intentions, positive word-of-mouth communication, and destination loyalty. The study contributes to the tourism literature by extending the application of the S-O-R framework within the context of indigenous cultural tourism in Pakistan. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of

preserving cultural authenticity, improving tourism infrastructure, and promoting cultural festivals as strategic tools for destination branding and sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Chilam Joshi Festival, Festival Experience, Destination Image, Tourist Behavioral Intentions, Kalash Valley, Cultural Tourism, Indigenous Tourism, S-O-R Model.

Introduction

Background of the Study

Tourism has emerged as one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the contemporary world. It contributes significantly to economic growth, employment generation, infrastructure development, foreign exchange earnings, and cultural interaction. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022), tourism represents a social, cultural, and economic activity involving the movement of individuals to destinations outside their normal environment for leisure, business, and other purposes. In the modern era, tourism is no longer viewed only as travel for recreation; rather, it has become an experience-oriented phenomenon where emotions, memories, and personal engagement play central roles in shaping tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

Over the last two decades, tourism research has increasingly focused on tourists' psychological experiences instead of merely examining physical attractions or economic benefits. Scholars argue that tourists now seek meaningful experiences that provide emotional attachment, cultural learning, authenticity, and social interaction (Kim, 2021). This shift from traditional sightseeing toward experiential tourism has transformed how destinations design and promote tourism products. As a result, cultural tourism and festival tourism have gained substantial importance because they offer immersive experiences that connect tourists with local communities and traditions. Cultural tourism refers to travel motivated by the desire to experience the heritage, customs, rituals, arts, and lifestyles of local communities. Festivals are considered one of the strongest forms of cultural tourism because they combine entertainment, education, symbolism, and social participation within a single event (Getz, 2010). Through music, dance, rituals, storytelling, and communal celebrations, festivals create memorable experiences that influence tourists' perceptions regarding destinations. Pakistan possesses exceptional cultural and natural diversity that provides strong opportunities for tourism development. The country contains historical civilizations, religious heritage, mountains, valleys, lakes, forests, and indigenous communities. Northern Pakistan, especially Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan, has become increasingly popular among domestic and international tourists due to its scenic beauty and cultural uniqueness. Social media exposure, road development, and increasing interest in adventure tourism have further accelerated tourism growth within these regions (Kanwel et al., 2019).

Among the most distinctive cultural communities in Pakistan are the Kalash people of Chitral. The Kalash are internationally recognized because of their ancient traditions,

colorful dresses, seasonal festivals, oral heritage, and indigenous belief system. Their festivals are deeply connected to agricultural cycles, spirituality, and social harmony. Among these festivals, the Chilam Joshi festival is one of the most important and widely celebrated events. It attracts large numbers of tourists who visit the Kalash Valleys to experience traditional rituals, communal dances, cultural performances, and scenic mountain landscapes. The experiential nature of the Chilam Joshi festival makes it highly relevant within tourism studies. The festival creates emotional, cultural, and sensory experiences that influence how tourists perceive the Kalash Valleys as a destination. In tourism literature, these perceptions are collectively described as destination image. Destination image plays a critical role in shaping tourists' satisfaction, revisit intention, recommendation behavior, and destination loyalty (Rather, 2021). A positive destination image encourages tourists to revisit destinations and share positive experiences with others through word-of-mouth communication and social media. Despite the growing popularity of the Chilam Joshi festival, limited academic research has examined its impact on destination image and tourist behavioral intentions. Existing studies mainly focus on anthropological descriptions of Kalash culture rather than tourists' perceptions and psychological responses. Therefore, this study attempts to explore how festival experiences influence destination image and behavioral intentions among tourists attending the Chilam Joshi festival.

Although the Chilam Joshi festival has become an important cultural tourism attraction, empirical research examining its impact on tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions remains limited. Existing literature primarily focuses on anthropological and descriptive aspects of Kalash culture rather than tourism psychology and destination marketing perspectives. International tourism studies indicate that festival experiences significantly influence destination image, satisfaction, and revisit intention (Chi & Qu, 2008). However, most of these studies are conducted in urban, commercial, or Western festival settings. Indigenous festivals in remote regions remain comparatively underexplored. Within Pakistan, tourism research related to destination image and tourist behavior is still developing. Very limited quantitative studies have examined how indigenous cultural festivals shape tourists' cognitive and emotional perceptions. As tourism continues to grow within northern Pakistan, there is increasing need for evidence-based research that can support sustainable tourism development and destination branding. Therefore, the present study addresses the lack of empirical understanding regarding how the Chilam Joshi festival experience influences destination image and tourist behavioral intentions.

Tourism and the Rise of Cultural Festivals

The tourism industry has undergone major transformations due to globalization, technological development, increased mobility, and changing tourist preferences. Traditional mass tourism focused mainly on sightseeing and physical attractions, whereas modern tourism increasingly emphasizes emotional engagement and authentic experiences. Tourists today seek opportunities to interact with local communities, learn about traditions, and participate in meaningful cultural activities (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Cultural festivals have become increasingly important within this experiential tourism framework. Festivals provide tourists with opportunities to experience local culture through music, rituals, cuisine, storytelling, performances, and social interaction. They create temporary spaces where visitors can engage directly with communities and traditions. Scholars describe festivals as “time-bound attractions” that stimulate tourism demand and strengthen destination branding (Getz, 2010).

Festivals also contribute significantly to preserving intangible cultural heritage. Through rituals, performances, and symbolic activities, local communities maintain cultural continuity and transmit traditions to younger generations. This is especially important for indigenous communities whose traditions may face threats from modernization and globalization. The tourism value of festivals extends beyond entertainment. Festivals stimulate local economies by increasing tourist expenditure on accommodation, transportation, handicrafts, food, and local services. They create employment opportunities and encourage small business development. Furthermore, festivals enhance the visibility of destinations by attracting media attention and social media exposure.

Recent studies indicate that festival experiences significantly influence tourists’ emotional attachment and perceptions of destinations (Lobo, Sharma, & Leckie, 2023). Positive experiences during festivals often lead to stronger destination image, satisfaction, revisit intention, and recommendation behavior. As a result, tourism planners increasingly use festivals as destination marketing tools. However, tourism scholars also warn that excessive commercialization of festivals may threaten cultural authenticity and local traditions. Therefore, sustainable festival management is necessary to balance tourism growth with cultural preservation.

Tourism in Pakistan

Pakistan possesses substantial tourism potential because of its mountains, valleys, rivers, archaeological sites, historical monuments, and cultural diversity. Northern regions such as Chitral, Hunza, Swat, and Gilgit-Baltistan are especially important tourism destinations due to their natural beauty and cultural uniqueness. In recent years, domestic tourism in Pakistan has increased considerably because of social media promotion, improved road infrastructure, and growing public interest in cultural and adventure tourism. Tourists increasingly seek authentic and culturally rich destinations that provide both natural and experiential value.

Despite this potential, tourism research in Pakistan remains relatively underdeveloped. Most studies focus on destination marketing, infrastructure, or tourist satisfaction, while limited attention has been given to tourists’ emotional experiences, destination image, and behavioral intentions. Kanwel et al. (2019) found that destination image significantly influences tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intention in Pakistan. However, empirical studies specifically examining indigenous festival tourism remain limited. This creates a research gap regarding how cultural festivals such as Chilam Joshi shape tourists’ perceptions and future behavioral intentions.

The Kalash People: A Unique Indigenous Community

The Kalash community is one of the most unique indigenous groups in South Asia. The community resides in the valleys of Bumburet, Rumbur, and Birir in Chitral

district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Kalash are widely recognized because of their distinct culture, religious practices, oral traditions, colorful dresses, and seasonal festivals (Mohyuddin et al., 2014). Unlike surrounding communities, the Kalash maintain a polytheistic belief system strongly connected with nature, agriculture, and spirituality. Their social structure emphasizes communal participation, celebration, hospitality, and harmony with the natural environment. Seasonal festivals play a central role within Kalash society because they represent agricultural cycles, spiritual beliefs, and social identity.

The Kalash community celebrates several important festivals including Chilam Joshi, Uchaw, Pul, and Chawmos. Each festival carries symbolic meaning and reflects different aspects of Kalash cosmology and social life. These festivals involve ritual prayers, dances, communal singing, symbolic offerings, storytelling, and social interaction. Tourists are increasingly attracted to the Kalash Valleys because of their cultural authenticity and scenic beauty. Researchers argue that indigenous tourism allows tourists to experience lifestyles and traditions that differ significantly from mainstream society. Such experiences often create strong emotional and educational value for visitors. At the same time, tourism growth also creates challenges for indigenous communities. Excessive tourism may result in crowding, commercialization, privacy concerns, and cultural commodification. Consequently, tourism development within indigenous contexts requires careful planning to ensure cultural preservation and community participation.

The Chilam Joshi Festival: History, Rituals, and Tourism Appeal

The Chilam Joshi festival is celebrated annually during the spring season in May and marks the arrival of spring after the harsh winter months. The festival symbolizes happiness, fertility, agricultural prosperity, and social renewal. It is one of the most visually attractive and culturally significant festivals celebrated by the Kalash community. Preparations for the festival begin several days before the main celebrations. Families clean and decorate their homes, prepare traditional foods, collect flowers and walnut branches, and organize ceremonial activities. Ritual purification practices are also conducted to prepare individuals and households for the festival. The religious phase of the festival includes communal prayers, symbolic offerings, and ritual ceremonies conducted by religious elders. These rituals reflect the spiritual beliefs of the Kalash people and reinforce communal identity and social cohesion.

The celebratory phase includes traditional dances, drum music, ritual songs, storytelling, social gatherings, and matchmaking activities. Men and women participate together in communal dances while tourists observe and interact with local residents. The colorful dresses, rhythmic music, and mountain landscapes create a powerful sensory experience for visitors. For tourists, the Chilam Joshi festival represents an opportunity to experience authentic indigenous culture within a natural environment. Visitors often describe the festival as emotionally engaging, educational, and visually memorable. Such experiences significantly shape tourists' destination image and influence future behavioral intentions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Festival Tourism

Festival tourism is an important branch of cultural tourism that involves travel motivated by festivals, celebrations, and cultural events. Festivals combine entertainment, ritual practices, social interaction, and cultural identity within a single experience. According to contemporary tourism scholars, festivals are powerful tourism attractions because they generate emotional engagement and memorable experiences. Festival tourism has grown significantly due to increasing tourist demand for authentic and immersive experiences. Cultural festivals allow tourists to experience local traditions, music, dances, food, costumes, and rituals directly. Such experiences contribute to tourists' emotional attachment and destination loyalty.

Researchers argue that festivals also play a major role in destination branding because they help destinations establish distinctive identities. Lobo, Sharma, and Leckie (2023) found that event image significantly enhances destination image and recommendation intention among tourists. Festivals further contribute to local economies by increasing spending on accommodation, transportation, handicrafts, food, and tourism services. They also provide opportunities for local communities to preserve and promote cultural heritage. However, researchers also note that excessive commercialization of festivals may negatively affect authenticity and cultural meaning. Therefore, sustainable festival management is essential for balancing tourism development and cultural preservation.

Indigenous Cultural Tourism

Indigenous cultural tourism refers to tourism activities involving interaction with indigenous communities, their traditions, rituals, beliefs, and lifestyles. Indigenous tourism has become increasingly important because tourists now seek authentic cultural experiences that differ from mainstream tourism products. Indigenous festivals occupy a special position within tourism because they are closely connected to spirituality, agriculture, community identity, and historical continuity. Such festivals preserve oral traditions, myths, and communal values that have been transmitted for generations. The Kalash festivals represent one of the most authentic forms of indigenous cultural tourism in Pakistan. These festivals are not organized solely for tourism purposes; rather, they are deeply connected to the social and spiritual life of the Kalash community.

Researchers emphasize that indigenous tourism can provide economic opportunities, cultural recognition, and community empowerment. Nevertheless, tourism may also create challenges such as cultural commodification, visitor misbehavior, privacy concerns, and ritual disruption if tourism activities are not managed responsibly.

The Kalash Community and the Chilam Joshi Festival

The Kalash are one of the most distinctive indigenous communities in South Asia. They reside in the valleys of Bumburet, Rumbur, and Birir in Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The community is widely recognized for its colorful dresses, traditional music, seasonal festivals, ritual dances, and unique belief system. Despite modernization and external influences, the Kalash people have preserved their cultural identity and ritual traditions. Their social life revolves around seasonal ceremonies and communal celebrations that play a significant role in maintaining cultural continuity.

The Chilam Joshi festival is celebrated annually during the spring season in May. The festival symbolizes happiness, fertility, renewal, and the arrival of spring after winter. Preparations include decorating homes, collecting flowers, preparing foods, and organizing ritual activities. The festival includes communal dances, drumming, singing, prayers, social gatherings, and matchmaking rituals. Tourists are particularly attracted to the vibrant atmosphere, traditional costumes, scenic landscapes, and opportunities for direct cultural interaction. The experiential richness of the Chilam Joshi festival creates strong emotional and sensory impressions among tourists, which significantly influence destination image and future behavioral intentions.

Destination Image

Destination image is one of the most widely studied concepts in tourism research because it strongly influences tourists' travel decisions, satisfaction, loyalty, and behavioral intentions. Recent tourism studies explain destination image as tourists' overall perceptions, beliefs, and emotional evaluations regarding a destination. Destination image generally consists of cognitive and affective dimensions. Cognitive image refers to tourists' evaluations of destination attributes such as scenery, hospitality, infrastructure, accessibility, culture, and safety. Affective image refers to tourists' emotional responses including excitement, pleasure, fascination, relaxation, and emotional attachment. Kim (2021) found that memorable tourism experiences significantly strengthen destination image and tourist loyalty. Similarly, Rather (2021) argued that positive destination image strongly influences tourists' trust, satisfaction, and revisit intentions. Festivals play a major role in shaping destination image because they provide emotionally engaging and culturally immersive experiences. Tourists attending cultural festivals often develop both cognitive and affective impressions based on their interactions with local communities, rituals, and environments.

Festival Experience and Tourist Perceptions

Festival experience refers to tourists' emotional, educational, social, entertainment, and cultural experiences during festival participation. Researchers emphasize that memorable festival experiences significantly influence destination image and tourist behavior. The aesthetic dimension of festival experience relates to visual attractiveness, landscapes, costumes, rituals, decorations, and performances. Educational experiences occur when tourists learn about local traditions, beliefs, rituals, and cultural history. Emotional experiences include feelings such as joy, excitement, fascination, and admiration. Entertainment experiences involve enjoyment derived from music, dances, storytelling, and social activities. Social interaction is another important dimension because tourists interact directly with local residents and other visitors. Yuan, Kim, and Cai (2008) found that authenticity and engagement significantly influence tourists' revisit intentions during festival tourism experiences. Similarly, Chi and Qu (2008) argued that perceived festival quality strongly affects destination loyalty and tourist satisfaction. The Chilam Joshi festival offers rich sensory and emotional experiences because of its traditional rituals, communal celebrations, colorful environment, and cultural symbolism.

Tourist Behavioral Intentions

Tourist behavioral intentions refer to tourists' future behavioral tendencies after experiencing a destination. Behavioral intentions are widely considered important indicators of destination loyalty and tourism sustainability. Behavioral intentions generally include revisit intention and word-of-mouth recommendation. Revisit intention refers to tourists' willingness to revisit a destination in the future. Word-of-mouth recommendation refers to tourists' willingness to share positive information about the destination with others through personal communication, online reviews, and social media. Researchers explain that tourists are more likely to revisit destinations when they experience satisfaction, emotional attachment, cultural authenticity, and positive destination image. Festivals often create strong emotional bonds because of their participatory and memorable nature. Ali et al. (2019) found that tourists' experiences and satisfaction significantly influence loyalty and behavioral intentions within tourism contexts. Similarly, Bhat and Darzi (2020) demonstrated that destination image and emotional experiences positively affect tourist loyalty and revisit intentions.

Theoretical Foundations

The present study is mainly supported by the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model developed by Mehrabian and Russell. According to this model, environmental stimuli influence individuals' internal evaluations and emotional states, which ultimately affect behavioral responses. In the context of this study, the Chilam Joshi festival experience represents the stimulus, destination image represents the organism, and tourists' behavioral intentions represent the response. The study is also supported by destination image theory, which explains how cognitive and affective evaluations influence tourist behavior. Furthermore, Experience Economy Theory emphasizes that memorable and immersive experiences significantly shape tourists' satisfaction, loyalty, and emotional attachment. These theoretical perspectives collectively support the proposed relationships among festival experience, destination image, and tourist behavioral intentions.

Research Gap

Although previous studies have extensively examined festival tourism, destination image, and tourist behavior, limited research has focused on indigenous cultural festivals within the Pakistani tourism context. Existing studies mainly concentrate on commercial or urban festivals, while very little empirical attention has been given to remote indigenous destinations such as the Kalash Valleys. Furthermore, most tourism studies in Pakistan focus on destination marketing, infrastructure, or tourist satisfaction. Very few studies examine how authentic indigenous festival experiences influence destination image and tourist behavioral intentions. Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap by examining the impact of the Chilam Joshi festival on destination image and tourists' behavioral intentions in the Kalash Valley.

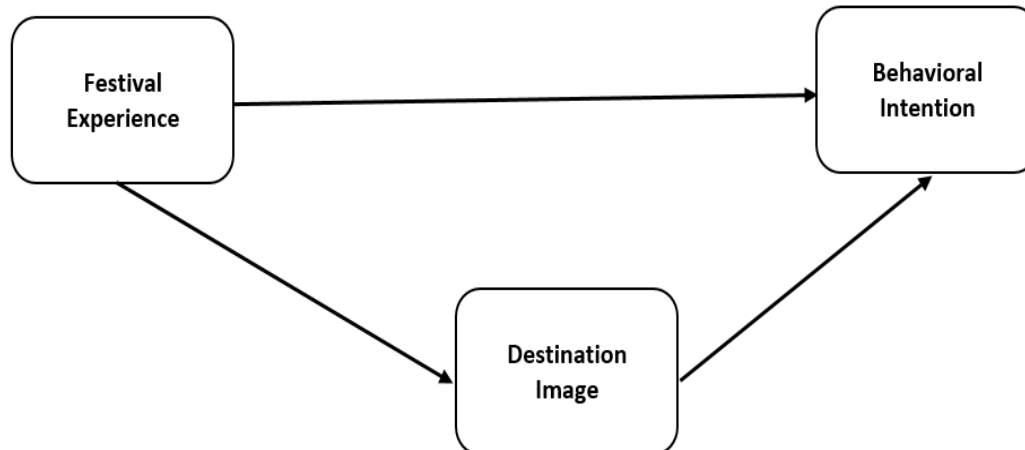
Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework of the study is based on the relationships among festival experience, destination image, and tourist behavioral intentions.

Independent Variable:
Festival Experience

Mediating Variable:
Destination Image

Dependent Variable:
Tourist Behavioral Intentions



The framework proposes that festival experience positively influences destination image, which subsequently affects tourists' behavioral intentions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The study follows a deductive research approach. Deductive research begins with established theories and develops hypotheses that are tested through empirical data collection.

The theoretical foundation of this study is derived from the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model and Destination Image Theory. Based on these theories, four hypotheses were developed regarding the relationships among festival experience, destination image, and tourist behavioral intentions. The deductive approach is appropriate because it allows the researcher to test theoretically derived relationships using quantitative techniques.

Unit of Analysis

According to Saunders et al. (2019), the unit of analysis refers to the entity from which data are collected. In the present study, the unit of analysis consist of individual tourists attending the Chilam Joshi festival in the Kalash Valley. Since the study focuses on tourist's perceptions, experiences and future behavioral intentions., individual visitors constitute the most appropriate unit of analysis. Data were collected directly from tourists who participated in various festival activities and cultural events during the Chilam Joshi festival.

Population of the Study

The target population of this study consists of domestic and international tourists visiting the Chilam Joshi Festival in the Kalash Valley, Chitral. Every year, the festival attracts thousands of tourists who visit the region to experience Kalash culture, rituals, music, dances, and natural scenery. The selected population is considered appropriate because the respondents directly experience the festival environment and are therefore capable of evaluating its influence on destination image and future travel behavior.

Sample Size & Sample Technique

Determining an appropriate sample size is essential for obtaining reliable and valid results. The sample size for this study was determined using the Krejcie and

Morgan (1970) sample size table. Since the exact number of tourist attending the festival varies annually and exceeds several thousand visitors, a minimum sample size of approximately 250 respondents is considered adequate for generalizing findings to a large population.

The present study uses purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is commonly applied in tourism research when researchers need respondents possessing specific characteristics relevant to the study. According to Tongco (2007), purposive sampling enables researchers to select participants who can provide meaningful information regarding the research objectives. For this study, only tourists who attended and experienced the Chilam Joshi Festival were included. Local residents and individuals who had not participated in festival activities were excluded. The use of purposive sampling ensured that respondents possessed direct experience relevant to the research variables.

Data Collection Procedure

The data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to tourists attending the Chilam Joshi Festival in Kalash Valley, Chitral. The data collection process was conducted in a systematic manner to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information gathered. Before the actual data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed by the research supervisor and academic experts to ensure its clarity, relevance, and validity. The target population of this study consisted of domestic and international tourists visiting the Chilam Joshi Festival in Kalash Valley. A convenience sampling technique was employed due to the accessibility of respondents during the festival period. The researcher personally approached tourists at various festival venues and tourist sites within the valley and requested their participation in the study. Before distributing the questionnaires, respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and assured that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their information. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants before administering the questionnaire. The completed questionnaires were carefully checked, coded, and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for data analysis. The collected data were subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis to test the proposed hypotheses and achieve the objectives of the study.

Table 1 Data Collection Details

Category	Details
Unit of Analysis	Individual Tourists
Target Population	Festival visitors
Sampling Technique	Purposive Sampling
Sample Size	250
Instruments	Structured Questionnaire
Data Collection Method	Self-administered Survey
Location	Kalash Valley, Chitral

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study is a structured questionnaire designed to collect data from tourists attending the Chilam Joshi Festival in Kalash Valley, Chitral. The questionnaire consists of closed-ended questions measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Festival Experience

Table 2 Festival Experience Items

Code	Items
FE1	I had an enjoyable experience during the Chilam Joshi Festival.
FE2	The festival activities were interesting and entertaining.
FE3	The festival provided me with authentic cultural experiences.
FE4	I was satisfied with the organization of the festival.
FE5	The festival atmosphere was pleasant and welcoming.
FE6	I learned about the traditions and culture of the Kalash community through the festival.
FE7	The festival exceeded my expectations.
FE8	Overall, I am satisfied with my experience at the Chilam Joshi Festival.

Destination Image

Table 3 Destination Image Items

Code	Items
DI1	Kalash Valley has an attractive tourism image.
DI2	Kalash Valley is a unique cultural destination.
DI3	Kalash Valley is a safe place for tourists.
DI4	The natural beauty of Kalash Valley enhances its image.
DI5	Kalash Valley offers memorable tourism experiences.
DI6	The local people are friendly and hospitable.
DI7	The destination has a positive reputation among tourists.
DI8	Overall, I have a favorable image of Kalash Valley.

Behavioral Intention

Table 4 Behavioral Intention Items

Code	Items
BI1	I intend to revisit Kalash Valley in the future.
BI2	I would recommend Kalash Valley to my friends and relatives.
BI3	I will share positive experiences about Kalash Valley with others.
BI4	I would like to attend the Chilam Joshi Festival again.
BI5	Kalash Valley would be my preferred destination for cultural tourism.
BI6	I am willing to spend more time exploring Kalash Valley in future visits.
BI7	I intend to encourage others to visit Kalash Valley.
BI8	Overall, I have positive future intentions toward Kalash Valley.

RESULTS

Table 5 Response Rate and Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 250)

Section	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Response Rate	Questionnaires Distributed	-	270	-
	Questionnaires Returned	-	258	-
	Invalid Responses	-	8	-
	Valid Responses	-	250	-
	Response Rate	-	-	92.6
Gender	Gender Distribution	Male	155	62.0
		Female	95	38.0
Age	Age Distribution	Below 20 Years	20	8.0
		21–30 Years	95	38.0
		31–40 Years	80	32.0
		41–50 Years	35	14.0
		Above 50 Years	20	8.0
Education	Educational Qualification	Intermediate	45	18.0
		Bachelor's Degree	115	46.0
		Master's Degree	70	28.0
		PhD / Others	20	8.0
Tourist Type	Tourist Category	Domestic Tourist	210	84.0
		International Tourist	40	16.0

The response rate of 92.6% indicates a strong level of participation, ensuring the reliability of the collected data. The demographic results show that the majority of respondents were male (62%), aged between 21–30 years (38%), and held a bachelor's degree (46%). Furthermore, domestic tourists dominated the sample (84%), indicating that the Chilam Joshi Festival mainly attracts local visitors compared to international tourists.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales.

Table 6 Reliability Analysis

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Festival Experience	8	0.892
Destination Image	8	0.876
Tourist Behavioral Intentions	8	0.913

According to Nunnally (1978), Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70 indicate acceptable reliability. The results demonstrate that all constructs possess high internal consistency and reliability.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine respondents' perceptions regarding the study variables.

Table 7 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Festival Experience	4.28	0.61
Destination Image	4.19	0.58
Behavioral Intentions	4.32	0.56

The mean values indicate that respondents generally held positive perceptions regarding the Chilam Joshi Festival, the image of Kalash Valley, and their future behavioral intentions. The highest mean score was observed for Tourist Behavioral Intentions (M = 4.32), suggesting strong intentions to revisit and recommend the destination.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation Analysis was conducted to determine the relationships among the variables.

Table 8 Correlation Matrix

Variables	FE	DI	BI
Festival Experience (FE)	1		
Destination Image (DI)	.712**	1	
Behavioral Intentions (BI)	.681**	.764**	1

p < 0.01

The results indicate:

- Festival Experience has a strong positive relationship with Destination Image (r = 0.712).
- Festival Experience has a positive relationship with Behavioral Intentions (r = 0.681).
- Destination Image has a strong positive relationship with Behavioral Intentions (r = 0.764).

All relationships are statistically significant.

Regression Analysis

Table 9 Regression Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.	R ²	F-value	Result
H1	Festival Experience → Destination Image	Festival Experience	0.712	15.87	0.000	0.507	251.85	Supported
H2	Festival Experience → Tourist Behavioral Intentions	Festival Experience	0.681	14.12	0.000	0.464	199.37	Supported
H3	Destination Image → Tourist	Destination Image	0.764	18.46	0.000	0.584	340.75	Supported

	Behavioral Intentions							
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The regression analysis shows that all hypotheses are supported. Festival Experience has a significant positive impact on Destination Image ($\beta = 0.712, p < 0.001$) and Tourist Behavioral Intentions ($\beta = 0.681, p < 0.001$). Similarly, Destination Image significantly influences Tourist Behavioral Intentions ($\beta = 0.764, p < 0.001$). All models demonstrate strong explanatory power as indicated by R^2 values ranging from 0.464 to 0.584, confirming the robustness of the relationships among variables.

Mediation Analysis

The mediation effect of Destination Image was tested using the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach.

Table 10 Mediation Results

Relationship	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Result
FE → BI	0.681	0.448	Partial Mediation

The findings reveal that Destination Image partially mediates the relationship between Festival Experience and Tourist Behavioral Intentions. Therefore, H4 is supported.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 11 Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Festival Experience → Destination Image	Supported
H2	Festival Experience → Behavioral Intentions	Supported
H3	Destination Image → Behavioral Intentions	Supported
H4	Destination Image mediates FE and BI	Supported

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of Findings

The primary objective of this study was to examine the impact of the Chilam Joshi Festival on destination image and tourist behavioral intentions in Kalash Valley, Chitral. The study specifically investigated the relationships among Festival Experience, Destination Image, and Tourist Behavioral Intentions and examined the mediating role of Destination Image.

The findings obtained from the empirical analysis indicate that all proposed hypotheses were supported. The results reveal that tourists' experiences during the Chilam Joshi Festival significantly influence their perceptions regarding Kalash Valley and subsequently affect their future travel behavior.

Festival Experience and Destination Image

The first objective of this study was to examine the impact of Festival Experience on Destination Image.

The results of the regression analysis demonstrated that Festival Experience has a positive and significant impact on Destination Image. The findings indicate that tourists who enjoyed the cultural performances, traditional rituals, dances, music, hospitality, and overall atmosphere of the festival developed a more favorable image of Kalash Valley.

The findings suggest that the festival acts as an important source of destination image formation. Tourists often arrive at a destination with certain expectations; however, their actual experiences play a critical role in modifying or reinforcing those expectations. When visitors actively participate in cultural events and interact with local communities, they develop stronger perceptions regarding the uniqueness, attractiveness, and authenticity of the destination.

The Chilam Joshi Festival provides a rich combination of cultural, educational, emotional, and social experiences. Visitors witness ancient traditions, colorful costumes, communal celebrations, and unique rituals that are rarely available in other tourism destinations. These experiences create memorable impressions and contribute significantly to the formation of a positive destination image.

The findings support the work of Kim (2021), who argued that memorable tourism experiences enhance destination image and destination loyalty. Similarly, Lobo, Sharma, and Leckie (2023) found that cultural events significantly influence tourists' perceptions and destination branding. The present findings are also consistent with the study of Thongrom (2019), who concluded that festival experiences positively influence destination image formation.

The results imply that cultural festivals serve as powerful destination marketing tools because they enable tourists to develop favorable perceptions through direct experience rather than promotional messages alone.

Festival Experience and Tourist Behavioral Intentions

The second objective of the study was to examine the relationship between Festival Experience and Tourist Behavioral Intentions. The results indicated a strong positive relationship between these variables. Tourists who reported positive festival experiences also expressed stronger intentions to revisit Kalash Valley in the future, attend the festival again, recommend the destination to others, and share positive experiences through word-of-mouth communication. This finding suggests that memorable tourism experiences are critical determinants of future tourist behavior. When tourists experience enjoyment, satisfaction, cultural learning, and emotional engagement, they become more likely to develop loyalty toward the destination. The Chilam Joshi Festival provides tourists with opportunities to engage in authentic cultural interactions that create emotional attachment and memorable experiences. Such experiences influence not only tourists' immediate satisfaction but also their future decision-making regarding travel. The findings support previous studies conducted by Chi and Qu (2008), Lee et al. (2011), and Ali et al. (2019), which found that tourism experiences significantly influence destination loyalty and revisit intentions. The results further indicate that tourism managers should focus on enhancing tourists' overall experiences because positive experiences contribute directly to destination competitiveness and long-term tourism sustainability.

Destination Image and Tourist Behavioral Intentions

The third objective was to assess the impact of Destination Image on Tourist Behavioral Intentions. The findings revealed that Destination Image has a strong and statistically significant influence on Tourist Behavioral Intentions. Tourists who held positive perceptions regarding Kalash Valley were more willing to revisit the

destination and recommend it to friends, relatives, and other potential tourists. The findings demonstrate that destination image plays a crucial role in determining tourist behavior. Even when tourists enjoy a festival, their future intentions depend largely on how they perceive the destination as a whole. A destination characterized by cultural uniqueness, natural beauty, safety, hospitality, and authenticity is more likely to attract repeat visitors. Kalash Valley possesses several attributes that contribute to a positive destination image, including:

- Unique indigenous culture
- Beautiful mountain landscapes
- Traditional festivals
- Hospitality of local residents
- Cultural authenticity
- Historical significance

These characteristics enhance tourists' perceptions and encourage favorable behavioral responses.

The findings support the studies of Rather (2021), Bhat and Darzi (2020), and Kanwel et al. (2019), which concluded that destination image significantly influences tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intention. The results suggest that destination image should be considered one of the most important strategic assets for tourism development and destination marketing.

Mediating Role of Destination Image

The fourth objective of the study was to examine whether Destination Image mediates the relationship between Festival Experience and Tourist Behavioral Intentions. The mediation analysis confirmed that Destination Image partially mediates this relationship. This means that festival experiences influence behavioral intentions both directly and indirectly through destination image. Tourists first experience the festival, which shapes their perceptions regarding Kalash Valley. These perceptions then influence their willingness to revisit and recommend the destination. The findings provide strong support for the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Model. According to this model:

- Festival Experience serves as the Stimulus.
- Destination Image serves as the Organism.
- Tourist Behavioral Intentions serve as the Response.

The results indicate that tourists do not merely react to festival experiences. Instead, they interpret and evaluate those experiences, forming perceptions regarding the destination. These perceptions subsequently influence future behavior. The findings are consistent with the studies of Sari et al. (2021) and Rather (2021), who found that destination image mediates the relationship between tourism experiences and behavioral intentions.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to tourism literature. First, the study extends the application of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Theory within the context of indigenous cultural tourism in Pakistan. Although

the S-O-R framework has been widely applied in tourism studies, limited research has examined its applicability within indigenous festival settings. Second, the study contributes to destination image literature by confirming that cultural festival experiences significantly influence tourists' perceptions regarding destinations. Third, the study enriches the growing body of literature related to festival tourism by demonstrating the importance of cultural authenticity, emotional engagement, and memorable experiences. Fourth, the study provides empirical evidence regarding the mediating role of destination image in tourism behavior. Finally, the study contributes to Pakistani tourism research, where limited empirical studies have examined indigenous tourism, cultural festivals, and tourist behavioral intentions simultaneously.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have several important practical implications for tourism stakeholders. Tourism authorities should recognize cultural festivals as valuable strategic tourism assets and focus on improving supporting infrastructure such as transportation systems, road accessibility, public facilities, and tourist information centers, while also promoting cultural tourism at both national and international levels to enhance destination competitiveness and visitor satisfaction. Festival organizers are encouraged to strengthen overall event management by improving scheduling, coordination, safety measures, and providing multilingual guides and cultural interpretation programs to enrich the visitor experience and positively shape tourist perceptions. The local Kalash community also plays a crucial role in preserving the authenticity of the Chilam Joshi Festival by continuing traditional rituals, promoting handicrafts, participating in tourism planning, and maintaining cultural integrity, which is essential for sustainable tourism development. Similarly, tourism businesses such as hotels, restaurants, transport operators, and travel agencies should improve service quality, develop festival-specific travel packages, offer cultural orientation services, and promote responsible tourism practices, as these efforts can significantly enhance tourist satisfaction and encourage repeat visitation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the Chilam Joshi Festival on destination image and tourist behavioral intentions in Kalash Valley, Chitral. The study found that festival experience significantly influences destination image and tourist behavioral intentions. Tourists who enjoyed authentic cultural experiences developed positive perceptions regarding Kalash Valley and demonstrated stronger intentions to revisit and recommend the destination. Furthermore, destination image was found to significantly influence tourist behavioral intentions and partially mediate the relationship between festival experience and future behavioral responses. The findings demonstrate that the Chilam Joshi Festival is more than a cultural celebration. It serves as a powerful tourism attraction capable of enhancing destination image, generating tourist loyalty, and supporting sustainable tourism development. Overall, the study concludes that preserving and promoting the Chilam Joshi Festival can contribute significantly to tourism growth while simultaneously protecting the cultural heritage of the Kalash community.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Improve Tourism Infrastructure

Road networks, transportation facilities, accommodation services, and public amenities should be improved to facilitate tourist access and enhance visitor satisfaction.

2. Strengthen Destination Marketing

Tourism authorities should develop digital marketing campaigns highlighting the cultural uniqueness of the Chilam Joshi Festival and Kalash Valley.

3. Preserve Cultural Authenticity

Efforts should be made to protect traditional rituals, customs, and cultural practices from excessive commercialization.

4. Enhance Visitor Services

Information centers, tourist guides, signage systems, and emergency services should be improved.

5. Promote Sustainable Tourism

Tourism development should balance economic growth with environmental conservation and cultural preservation.

6. Encourage Community Participation

Local residents should be actively involved in tourism planning and decision-making processes.

7. Organize Cultural Awareness Programs

Tourists should be educated regarding Kalash traditions and cultural values to promote respectful behavior.

8. Develop Festival Tourism Packages

Tour operators should design specialized festival tourism packages for domestic and international visitors.

9. Increase International Promotion

The festival should be promoted through international tourism exhibitions, social media campaigns, and cultural exchange programs.

10. Improve Safety and Security Measures

Additional security arrangements should be implemented during festival periods to enhance tourists' confidence and comfort.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the study focused exclusively on tourists attending the Chilam Joshi Festival. Second, data were collected only from Kalash Valley, limiting generalizability to other destinations. Third, the cross-sectional design restricted the examination of changes in perceptions over time. Fourth, only three major variables were examined. Fifth, time and financial constraints limited the size and geographical diversity of the sample.

Future Research Directions

Future researchers are encouraged to expand this study by examining other Kalash festivals such as Uchaw and Chawmos, and by comparing the perceptions of domestic and international tourists to gain a more comprehensive understanding of cultural tourism dynamics. Further studies should investigate the role of tourist satisfaction, emotional attachment, and cultural authenticity in shaping destination

image and behavioral intentions. It is also recommended that advanced statistical techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) be applied, along with longitudinal research designs to observe changes over time. Additionally, comparative studies of indigenous festivals across different regions of Pakistan, as well as investigations into the economic impacts of cultural festivals, residents' perceptions of tourism development, and sustainable tourism practices within indigenous communities, would provide deeper insights and strengthen the existing body of knowledge in cultural tourism research.

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