IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND DESTINATION IMAGE ON TOURIST SATISFACTION THROUGH VISIT DECISION AS A MEDIATING VARIABLE

Deta Irama Kasih, Toni Herlambang, Abadi Sanosra
Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember, Indonesia
Corresponding Author Email : detairamakasih1@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the impact of Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Destination Image on Tourist Satisfaction, with Visiting Decision serving as a mediating variable. Utilizing a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach with Warp PLS 8.0 software, the research encompasses a population of both international and local tourists visiting Jember Regency. Data collection involved incidental sampling and a structured questionnaire, with a sample size of 150 respondents. The findings reveal that SMM and Destination Image significantly influence both Visiting Decision and Tourist Satisfaction. SMM directly enhances tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.24$, $P < 0.01$) and affects visiting decisions ($\beta = 0.42$, $P < 0.01$), while Destination Image also positively impacts tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.15$, $P = 0.03$) and visiting decisions ($\beta = 0.43$, $P < 0.01$). Moreover, Visiting Decision significantly mediates the relationship between SMM ($\beta = 0.20$, $P < 0.01$), Destination Image ($\beta = 0.21$, $P < 0.01$), and Tourist Satisfaction. These results underscore the need for optimized SMM strategies and a positive destination image to improve tourist satisfaction and visiting decisions in Jember Regency. The study provides valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders to enhance tourism strategies, ensuring a satisfying and memorable tourist experience.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing; Destination Image; Visiting Decision; Tourist Satisfaction; Jember Regency.

Introduction

The tourism industry in the digital era has rapidly evolved. Significantly influenced by social media's role in transforming destination marketing paradigms (Nuenen & Scarles, 2021). Social media is not just a communication tool but an effective marketing platform for tourist destinations. Tourism is a crucial economic development sector that brings substantial benefits to countries. The tourism industry is a major sector accelerating economic growth (Sumual, Lapian, & Tolosang, 2023). The tourism boom can increase visitor numbers, government revenue, and provide livelihood benefits to local communities. This heightens the competition between regions and destinations to attract tourists (Muktamar, Safitri, Nirwana,

& Nurdin, 2024). Key factors in developing the tourism sector, particularly tourist satisfaction and their decision to visit, require attention.

Tourist satisfaction is a crucial component of tourism success. Tourist satisfaction results from a positive evaluation of the travel experience, encompassing service quality and destination facilities (Prayogo, 2020). This satisfaction influences tourists' positive perception of the destination and encourages their decision to revisit or recommend it to others (Gnanapala, 2015). The decision to visit is central to tourism, involving destination selection influenced by factors such as destination image, recommendations, and information from various sources, including social media (Almeida-García, Domígunez-Azcue, Mercadé-Melé, & Pérez-Tapia, 2020).

Social Media Marketing (SMM) is essential in the current tourism landscape. Social Media Marketing (SMM), utilizing social platforms for marketing, is indispensable in enhancing destination visibility, engaging tourists, and creating appealing digital experiences (Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2021). Understanding SMM's impact on visit decisions and tourist satisfaction is crucial for optimizing destination marketing potential (Armutcu, Tan, Amponsah, Parida, & Ramkissoon, 2023). Equally important, destination image is a key factor in shaping tourist perceptions. This image can be influenced by personal experiences, media information, and social media interactions (Alcocer & Ruiz, 2020). Creating a positive destination image is fundamental to attracting tourists and enhancing their satisfaction (Reyes, 2023).

During 2019-2024, Jember Regency struggled to meet its tourism targets set by the Department of Tourism and Culture. Despite ambitious goals, the actual number of tourist visits consistently fell short, influenced significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which caused a sharp decline in both local and international tourists (Pambudi, Masteriarsa, Dwifebri, Amaliyah, & Ardana, 2020). Additionally, Jember's tourism marketing strategies may need reevaluation to align better with target markets (Prayogo, 2020). The pandemic, while a major factor, also highlighted potential decreases in tourist satisfaction. Preliminary surveys revealed mixed feedback, with concerns about cleanliness and transportation services affecting overall satisfaction. Further research is essential to understand the factors influencing tourist satisfaction, focusing on Social Media Marketing, destination image, and visitor decisions. Effective Social Media Marketing and a positive destination image are crucial in shaping tourist perceptions and enhancing satisfaction (Wang & Li, 2023).

Figure 1 illustrates that several previous studies have provided relevant insights into the variables examined in this research. It was found that tourist attractions and Social Media Marketing can drive local tourists' interest and decisions to visit in the West Java region (Sarifiyono & Lesmana, 2023). Another study highlighted the positive impact of Social Media Marketing on customer satisfaction, indicating that interactions through social media can play a crucial role in shaping positive perceptions and satisfying customer experiences (Jaya, Yuliana, & Arwin, 2022). Further research emphasized the importance of destination image in shaping tourist satisfaction and visit decisions, reinforcing the urgency of this study to explore

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how the destination image in Jember influences tourist satisfaction and decisions to visit (Caroline, 2021; Mareta, Farida, & Dewi, 2022). The decision to visit has also been identified as a well-considered decision involving thorough evaluation of tourist attractions, providing a basis for understanding the role of visit decisions as an intervening variable (Kristiutami, 2017). However, there remain knowledge gaps that need to be addressed. Research has shown that social media promotion does not significantly affect purchase intention (Rojikun, 2022), while destination image does not significantly influence the intention to visit (Isman, Patalo, & Pratama, 2020). Additionally, brand image does not have a significant impact on customer satisfaction (Prastiwi & Rivai, 2022). Therefore, this study will focus on filling these gaps and providing a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing tourism in Jember Regency.
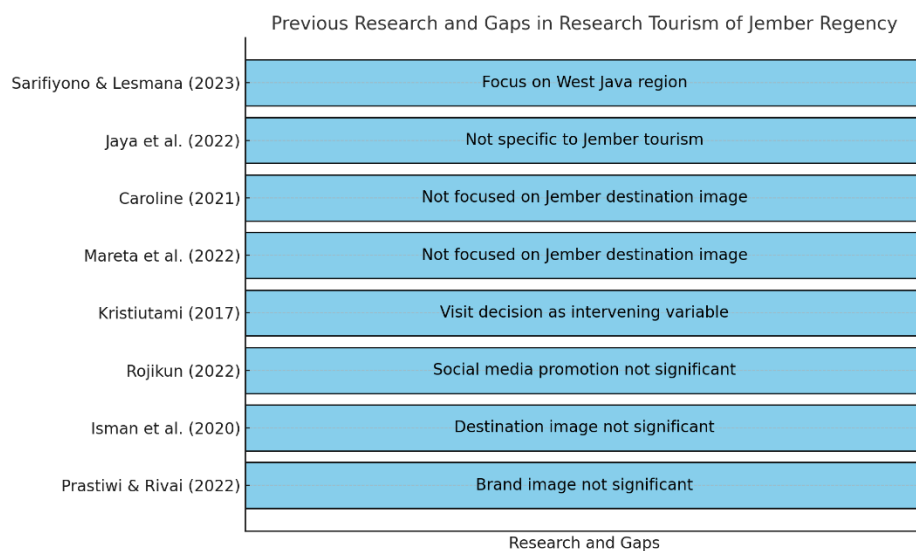

Figure 1. Novelty and Gaps in Research on Tourism of Jember Regency

Based on the identified phenomena and gaps in the existing research, it is evident that there is a critical need to investigate the impact of Social Media Marketing and destination image on tourist satisfaction, with a specific focus on Jember Regency. While previous studies have highlighted the importance of these factors in different contexts, the unique dynamics of Jember's tourism sector remain underexplored. This research aims to fill these gaps by examining how Social Media Marketing and destination image influence tourists' decisions to visit and their overall satisfaction. By addressing these gaps, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the key drivers of tourism satisfaction in Jember Regency, thereby offering valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders to enhance the region's tourism strategies and ultimately improve tourist experiences.

Method

This study using a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach with Warp PLS 8.0 software, chosen for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of complex relationships among variables influencing tourist satisfaction. The population includes all tourists visiting

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Jember, encompassing both international and local visitors. An incidental sampling method will be employed, with researchers randomly approaching tourists at various locations such as Rembangan Bathing Place, Kebun Agung Bathing Place, Watu Ulo Beach, and Patemon Bathing Place to invite them to participate. These sites were selected for their accessibility, cost efficiency, and representativeness of Jember's tourism. After explaining the study's purpose, willing participants will complete a questionnaire via Google Forms. The sample size, determined based on the formula of indicators multiplied by ten, requires 150 respondents given the 15 indicators used. The questionnaire will utilize a Likert scale to measure respondents' agreement or disagreement with statements related to their preferences, experiences, and decisions. All personal and sensitive information will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes.

In addition to primary data collection, secondary data will be utilized to complement the findings. This secondary data includes information previously collected by other parties, such as research findings, official statistics, government reports, and scientific journals. By integrating these sources, the study aims to draw a comprehensive picture of tourism trends, tourist preferences, and factors influencing tourist decisions in Jember. This approach ensures that the research captures both current and historical perspectives, providing a robust foundation for understanding the dynamics of tourism in the region. All personal and sensitive information will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes.

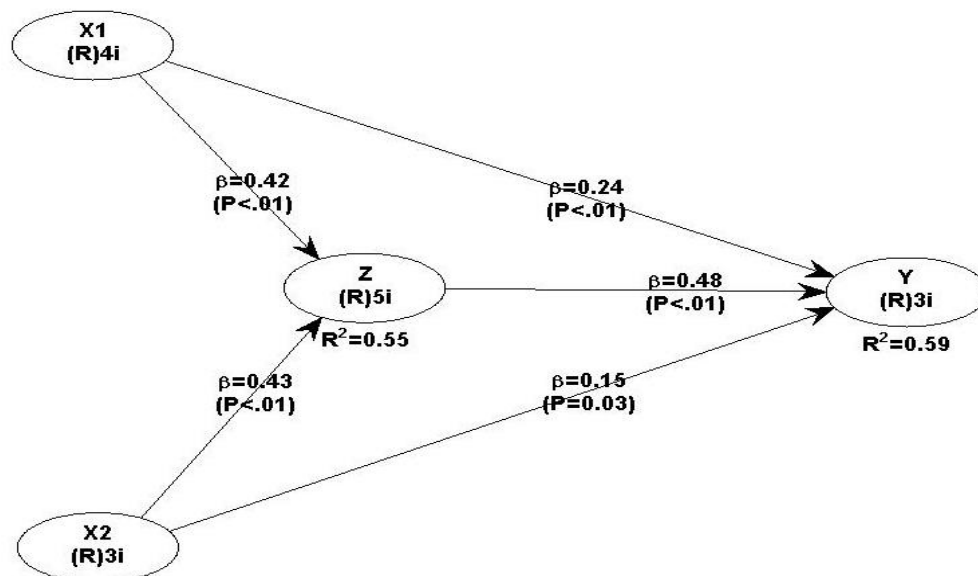## Result and Discussion
Result Findings

Figure 2. Path Analysis Results

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for Visiting Decision (Z) is 0.55, indicating that 55% of the variability in Visiting Decision can be explained by the independent variables in

the model. Similarly, the R² for Tourist Satisfaction (Y) is 0.59, suggesting that the model accounts for 59% of the variability in Tourist Satisfaction. These high R² values demonstrate that the model has substantial explanatory power, effectively capturing a significant portion of the variability in both Visiting Decision and Tourist Satisfaction. This implies that the independent variables included in the analysis play a crucial role in influencing these outcomes.

Table 1. Direct and Mediating Effects on Visiting Decision and Tourist Satisfaction

Effect Type	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	P-Value
Direct Effects	Social Media Marketing (X1) -> Visiting Decision (Z)	0.42	<0.01
	Destination Image (X2) -> Visiting Decision (Z)	0.43	<0.01
	Visiting Decision (Z) -> Tourist Satisfaction (Y)	0.48	<0.01
	Social Media Marketing (X1) -> Tourist Satisfaction (Y)	0.24	<0.01
	Destination Image (X2) -> Tourist Satisfaction (Y)	0.15	0.03
Mediating Effects	Social Media Marketing (X1) -> Visiting Decision (Z) -> Tourist Satisfaction (Y)	0.20	<0.01
	Destination Image (X2) -> Visiting Decision (Z) -> Tourist Satisfaction (Y)	0.21	<0.01

The analysis reveals that both social media marketing and destination image have significant direct effects on visiting decision and tourist satisfaction, with social media marketing showing slightly higher path coefficients for visiting decision. Additionally, the visiting decision strongly influences tourist satisfaction. Mediating effects indicate that the visiting decision partially mediates the relationship between both social media marketing and destination image on tourist satisfaction. The path coefficients for these mediating effects underscore the importance of the visiting decision as a crucial intermediary factor, highlighting its role in enhancing the overall tourist satisfaction through the influences of social media marketing and destination image.

Discussion

The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Tourist Satisfaction

PLS-SEM analysis shows that Social Media Marketing (SMM) positively and significantly affects Tourist Satisfaction (Y) with a path coefficient (β) of 0.24 and P < 0.01. This suggests that increasing SMM activities can directly enhance tourist satisfaction. Previous studies support this finding, indicating that engaging social media content can boost tourist interest and satisfaction (Isman et al., 2020; Jaya et al., 2022). This underscores the need for optimized SMM strategies in Jember Regency to improve tourist satisfaction through visually appealing, informative, and interactive content.

The Effect of Destination Image on Tourist Satisfaction

PLS-SEM analysis indicates that Destination Image (X2) positively and significantly affects Tourist Satisfaction (Y) with a path coefficient (β) of 0.15 and P = 0.03. This implies that a positive destination image enhances tourist satisfaction. Studies corroborate this result, highlighting the importance of maintaining a positive destination image to increase tourist

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satisfaction (Caroline, 2021; Reyes, 2023). Jember Regency should focus on marketing strategies that emphasize positive testimonials to strengthen its destination image.

The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Visiting Decision

PLS-SEM analysis reveals that SMM positively and significantly impacts Visiting Decision (Z) with a path coefficient (β) of 0.42 and P < 0.01. This indicates that effective SMM can directly influence tourists' decisions to visit a destination. Research supports this finding (Isman et al., 2020; Sarifiyono & Lesmana, 2023). Jember Regency should optimize SMM strategies to attract more visitors by creating engaging and informative content.

The Effect of Destination Image on Visiting Decision

PLS-SEM analysis shows that Destination Image (X2) significantly affects Visiting Decision (Z) with a path coefficient (β) of 0.43 and P < 0.01. This suggests that a positive destination image can enhance tourists' visiting decisions. Studies confirm this (Caroline, 2021; Sarifiyono & Lesmana, 2023). Jember Regency should focus on strengthening its destination image through positive reviews and testimonials.

The Effect of Visiting Decision on Tourist Satisfaction

PLS-SEM analysis indicates that Visiting Decision (Z) positively and significantly affects Tourist Satisfaction (Y) with a path coefficient (β) of 0.48 and P < 0.01. This implies that well-considered visiting decisions enhance tourist satisfaction. Research supports this finding (Jaya et al., 2022; Kristiutami, 2017). Jember Regency should ensure accurate and appealing information to potential tourists to improve satisfaction.

The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Tourist Satisfaction Through Visiting Decision

PLS-SEM analysis shows that SMM significantly affects Tourist Satisfaction (Y) through Visiting Decision (Z) with an indirect path coefficient of 0.20 and P < 0.01. This suggests that SMM not only influences visiting decisions but also indirectly boosts tourist satisfaction. Studies support this (Isman et al., 2020; Jaya et al., 2022). Jember Regency should enhance SMM strategies to improve both visiting decisions and tourist satisfaction.

The Effect of Destination Image on Tourist Satisfaction Through Visiting Decision

PLS-SEM analysis indicates that Destination Image (X2) significantly affects Tourist Satisfaction (Y) through Visiting Decision (Z) with an indirect path coefficient of 0.21 and P < 0.01. This suggests that a positive destination image indirectly enhances tourist satisfaction via visiting decisions. Studies confirm this (Caroline, 2021; Mareta et al., 2022). Jember Regency should focus on positive destination image strategies to boost both visiting decisions and tourist satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Destination Image significantly influence both Visiting Decision and Tourist Satisfaction in Jember Regency. The PLS-SEM analysis revealed that SMM and Destination Image have strong direct effects on Visiting Decision and Tourist Satisfaction, with Visiting Decision acting as a critical

mediating variable. Specifically, SMM and Destination Image positively impact Visiting Decision, which in turn significantly enhances Tourist Satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of leveraging effective social media strategies and maintaining a positive destination image to attract visitors and improve their satisfaction. Therefore, Jember Regency's tourism management should focus on optimizing SMM activities and reinforcing the destination's positive image to enhance tourists' decisions to visit and their overall satisfaction, ultimately boosting the region's tourism industry.

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