

LOCAL TOURISM MARKETING STRATEGY THROUGH THE REVITALIZATION OF TOURIST PRODUCTS AND WORD OF MOUTH

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the effect of tourism product revitalization and word of mouth on tourists' visit decisions through the mediating role of destination image. The research was conducted in the Rembangan Tourism Area, Jember, using a quantitative explanatory approach. Data were collected from 100 respondents who had visited the destination at least once, through a purposive sampling technique. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method was employed for data analysis using SmartPLS 3.0 software. The results show that tourism product revitalization has a significant and positive effect on both destination image and visit decisions. Destination image also has a strong and positive impact on visit decisions. However, word of mouth does not show a significant influence on either destination image or visit decisions. Additionally, the moderating effect of destination image in the relationship between both independent variables and visit decision was not supported. These findings suggest that revitalizing tourism products is a more influential strategy for encouraging tourist visits, while destination image plays a critical role in enhancing the attractiveness of the tourism destination.

Keywords: Tourism Product Revitalization, Destination Image, Visit Decisions.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector plays a pivotal role in driving economic, social, and cultural development. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), global tourism has reached 90 percent of its pre-pandemic level by the end of 2023 (UNWTO, 2023). Indonesia, as one of the countries that prioritizes tourism as a key economic sector, demonstrates a significant recovery. Based on data from Databoks, Indonesia's tourism foreign exchange earnings dropped drastically from USD 16.91 billion in 2019 to USD 3.3 billion in 2020 and USD 520 million in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the tourism sector began to rebound, generating USD 4.26 billion in 2022 and increasing to USD 5.95 billion in 2023 (Databoks, 2023).

Tourism contributes not only to national income but also plays a critical role in fostering regional economic growth through local destination development. One strategic effort to enhance tourism competitiveness is tourism product revitalization, which involves the renewal and improvement of destination facilities, attractions, and visitor experiences to adapt to the needs of modern tourists (Gantini & Setiyorini, 2012; Setiyorini, 2016). At the same time, word of mouth (WoM) becomes a significant communication channel in influencing tourist behavior. WoM refers to informal communication by consumers sharing their experiences with products or services. In the tourism context, it often holds greater credibility due to its authenticity and perceived trustworthiness (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).



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Rembangan Tourism, located in Jember Regency, East Java, is a heritage tourism destination established in 1937. It offers various attractions such as hot spring pools, hotel accommodations, agro-tourism with coffee plantations and chrysanthemum gardens, and other natural features (Buku Data Pengunjung, 2020). Despite these assets, the destination has experienced limited growth in tourist numbers, with only a modest increase from 796 visitors in 2015 to 1,915 in 2020. This stagnant growth is attributed to outdated infrastructure and unsatisfactory service quality, highlighting the need for revitalization and strategic marketing efforts to stimulate visitor interest.

Destination image is a key component in reinforcing these efforts. It reflects tourists' perceptions of physical attributes, safety, hospitality, and overall emotional impressions of a place (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Research by Prawira and Putra (2022) indicates that destination image significantly influences tourists' decisions to visit. Conversely, some previous studies found mixed results regarding its influence on actual visiting behavior. Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride (2011) argue that a positive image enhances the competitive positioning of a destination. Therefore, revitalization and WoM can be more effective when mediated or reinforced by a strong and favorable destination image.

Previous studies have primarily examined the effects of product revitalization, word of mouth, or destination image on tourist behavior individually. However, integrative research exploring the combined influence of these factors, especially in Indonesian local tourism contexts, remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the combined influence of tourism product revitalization and word of mouth on tourists' visiting decisions, with destination image serving as a moderating variable.

This research offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches tourism marketing literature by developing an integrated framework linking destination revitalization, communication, and perception to behavioral outcomes. Practically, the findings provide insights for local tourism managers, particularly in Rembangan, to design effective marketing strategies aimed at increasing tourist engagement and enhancing destination appeal.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design, aiming to examine the causal relationships between the variables of Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR), Word of Mouth (WoM), Destination Image (DI), and Visit Decision (VD). The research was conducted at the Rembangan Tourist Destination in Jember, East Java. The population for this study consisted of visitors to Rembangan, although the exact population size was unknown. Therefore, nonprobability sampling was applied using a purposive sampling method. A sample of 100 respondents was selected based on the criteria that they had visited Rembangan at least once, were willing to participate as respondents, and were at least 17 years old (Ahmad & Nurjannah, 2024).

The variables measured in this study included Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR), which was assessed using the indicators of revitalizing attractions, amenities, and accessibility; Word of Mouth (WoM), measured by the indicators of sharing positive information, recommendations, and inviting others; Destination Image (DI), evaluated through two primary dimensions: cognitive image and affective image; and Visit Decision (VD), assessed through indicators such as problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, visit decision, and post-visit behavior. These variables were measured using a Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Ahmad & Nurjannah, 2024).



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Data collection was carried out through an online questionnaire, which was distributed by enumerators to respondents who met the established criteria. Additionally, direct observation and literature review from books, journals, and other academic sources were conducted to supplement the information required for the analysis (Ahmad & Nurjannah, 2024). Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the SmartPLS 3.0 software. The model testing was executed in two phases: the Outer Model test to evaluate the validity and reliability of the measurement instruments, and the Inner Model test to analyze the relationships between variables and test the hypotheses (Ahmad & Nurjannah, 2024).

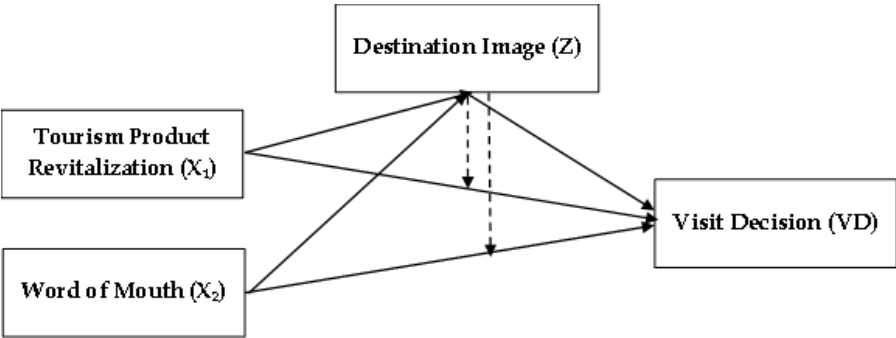


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study illustrates the relationships between the variables under investigation and was presented in the form of a conceptual diagram, outlining the variables and the hypotheses being tested (Ahmad & Nurjannah, 2024). Based on the conceptual framework, this study formulates the following hypotheses. The first hypothesis states that Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) influences Destination Image (DI). The second hypothesis suggests that Word of Mouth (WoM) affects Destination Image (DI). The third hypothesis proposes that Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) affects Visiting Decision (VD), while the fourth hypothesis asserts that Word of Mouth (WoM) influences Visiting Decision (VD). The fifth hypothesis indicates that Destination Image (DI) contributes to Visiting Decision (VD). Furthermore, the sixth hypothesis posits that Destination Image (DI) moderates the relationship between Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) and Visiting Decision (VD). Lastly, the seventh hypothesis suggests that Destination Image (DI) also moderates the relationship between Word of Mouth (WoM) and Visiting Decision (VD).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of research and testing should be displayed in the form of pictures or tables. The format of the table is as follows:

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

No	Gender	Age Group	Education Level	Profession	Visit Frequency
1	Male	20-29	High School	Public Servant	1-2 times
2	Female	30-39	College Degree	Student	3-4 times
3	Male	40-49	Diploma	Entrepreneur	5-6 times

Source: SPSS processed research data, 2025



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The demographic data of the respondents reveals a balanced representation between genders, with a slight female majority (52%). The majority of the respondents were within the age range of 20 to 29 years (30%), followed by those aged 30 to 39 (25%) and 40 to 49 (20%). In terms of education, most of the respondents had completed high school (35%), followed by those with a college degree (25%) and a diploma (20%). Additionally, the majority of respondents were employed as public servants (40%), with students (20%) and entrepreneurs (15%) making up the rest. The visit frequency showed that 59% of respondents visited the Rembangan Tourist Destination 1-2 times annually, with 34% visiting 3-4 times and 7% visiting 5-6 times.

Validity and Reliability Testing. The study employed a Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach using SmartPLS 3.0. Convergent validity was initially assessed through outer loadings. Items with loadings below 0.70 were removed from the model, including several indicators from the variables Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR), Destination Image (DI), and Visit Decision (VD). After elimination, all retained items demonstrated loading values exceeding 0.70, confirming satisfactory convergent validity.

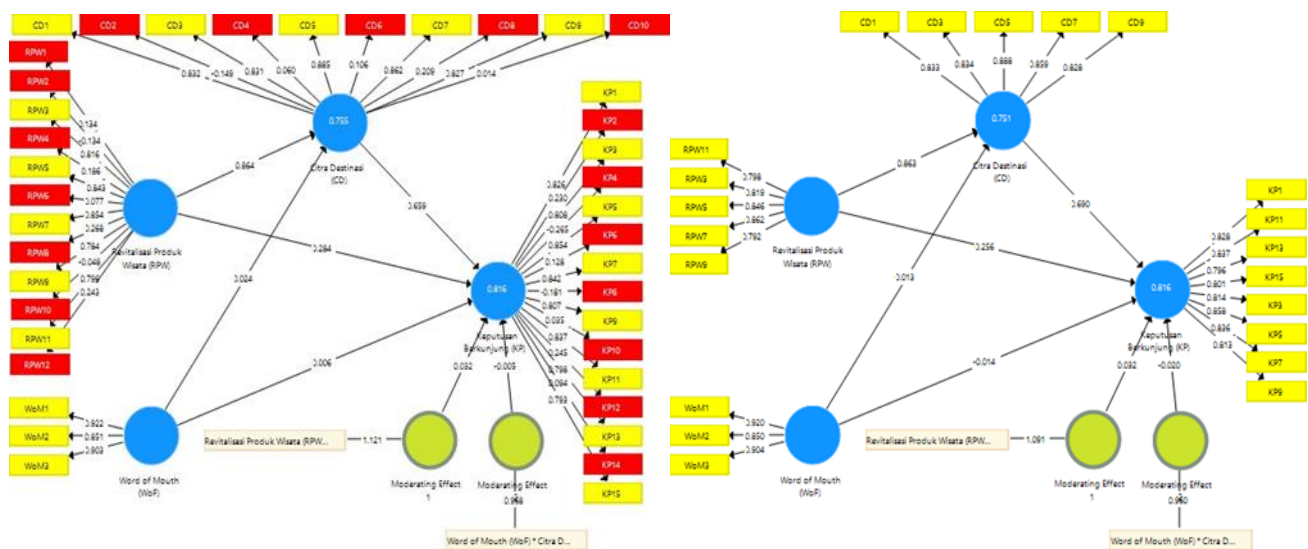


Figure 2. Outer Loading Results

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All constructs achieved AVE values above the 0.50 threshold (TPR = 0.679; WoM = 0.796; DI = 0.721; VD = 0.678), indicating that each construct shares more variance with its indicators than with other constructs.

Reliability was confirmed via Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha. All variables surpassed the minimum accepted value of 0.70, demonstrating internal consistency:

Table 2. Results of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	AVE
Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR)	0,679
Word of Mouth (WoM)	0,796
Destination Image (DI)	0,721

Source: SmartPLS processed research data, 2025



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These results provide strong empirical evidence that the measurement model demonstrates both construct validity and internal consistency reliability. The combination of high outer loadings, acceptable Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, and composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70 collectively confirms that the indicators accurately measure the underlying latent constructs and that the measurement instrument is both statistically valid and reliable for further structural analysis.

R-Square and Hypothesis Testing. The structural model (inner model) was evaluated through R-squared and hypothesis testing using the bootstrapping procedure. The R-squared values suggest strong predictive power:

Table 3. Results of R-Square

Variable	AVE
Destination Image (DI)	0,751
Visit Decision (VD)	0,816

Source: SmartPLS processed research data, 2025

These indicate that 75.1% of the variance in DI and 81.6% of the variance in VD are explained by the exogenous variables in the model. Hypothesis testing revealed mixed support for the proposed relationships:

Table 4. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Variable	Original Sample (O)	P Values	Explanation
H ₁	Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) → Destination Image (DI)	0,863	0,000	Supported
H ₂	Word of Mouth (WoM) → Destination Image (DI)	0,013	0,810	Not Supported
H ₃	Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) → Visit Decisions (VD)	0,256	0,009	Supported
H ₄	Word of Mouth (WoM) → Visit Decisions (VD)	-0,014	0,735	Not Supported
H ₅	Destination Image (DI) → Visit Decisions (VD)	0,690	0,000	Supported
H ₆	TPR*DI → Visit Decisions (VD)	0,032	0,462	Not Supported
H ₇	WoM*DI → Visit Decisions (VD)	-0,020	0,602	Not Supported

Source: SmartPLS processed research data, 2025

In summary, Tourism Product Revitalization and Destination Image significantly influence Visit Decisions, while Word of Mouth showed no significant direct or moderating effects. Furthermore, the moderating role of Destination Image in the relationship between TPR/WoM and VD was not supported.

The Effect of Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) on Destination Image (DI). The results showed that Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) had a significant positive effect on Destination Image (DI) ($O = 0.863$, $p < 0.05$), supporting hypothesis H₁. This indicates that improvements in tourism products, such as enhancing attractions and amenities, positively affected the perception of the destination. This finding is consistent with previous research by Gantini and Setiyorini (2012), who emphasized the importance of product revitalization in enhancing a destination's competitiveness and attractiveness. The significant effect suggests that when a destination improves



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its facilities and services, it contributes to a more favorable image, making the destination more appealing to tourists.

The Effect of Word of Mouth (WoM) on Destination Image (DI). Contrary to expectations, Word of Mouth (WoM) did not show a significant effect on Destination Image (DI) ($O = 0.013$, $p = 0.810$), rejecting hypothesis H_2 . This result suggests that WoM, while often regarded as a powerful marketing tool, did not significantly influence the destination's image in this case. It is likely that the WoM messages were inconsistent or did not reach a wide enough audience to have a noticeable impact on the destination image. This finding aligns with the work of Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), who found that WoM's effectiveness is contingent on the consistency and credibility of shared experiences. In the context of Rembangan, other factors, such as formal marketing efforts or changes in the destination's physical infrastructure, may be more influential in shaping its image.

The Effect of Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) on Visit Decision (VD). Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) was found to have a significant positive effect on Visit Decision (VD) ($O = 0.256$, $p < 0.05$), supporting hypothesis H_3 . This indicates that revitalizing the tourism products, such as upgrading services and attractions, positively influenced visitors' decisions to visit the destination. This is consistent with the findings of Ihsan and Siregar (2020), who concluded that improvements in tourism products can enhance the attractiveness of a destination, ultimately motivating tourists to visit. The results of this study suggest that the revitalization efforts at Rembangan have successfully encouraged tourists to choose it as their destination.

The Effect of Word of Mouth (WoM) on Visit Decision (VD). In contrast, Word of Mouth (WoM) did not have a significant effect on Visit Decision (VD) ($O = -0.014$, $p = 0.735$), rejecting hypothesis H_4 . This suggests that, although WoM can influence tourists' decisions in some cases, it was not a significant determinant in this study. The lack of impact could be attributed to the quality and trustworthiness of the information shared or the limited reach of WoM. This finding aligns with the research by Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008), who argued that WoM's influence on visit decisions is often moderated by the trustworthiness of the source and the alignment with the individual's preferences.

The Effect of Destination Image (DI) on Visit Decision (VD). Destination Image (DI) was found to have a significant positive effect on Visit Decision (VD) ($O = 0.690$, $p < 0.05$), supporting hypothesis H_5 . This means that a positive image of a destination strongly influences tourists' decisions to visit. This is in line with the work of Prawira and Putra (2022), who found that a favorable destination image plays a crucial role in attracting tourists. A positive destination image, shaped by factors such as natural beauty, amenities, and safety, can make the destination more appealing to potential visitors.

The Moderating Role of Destination Image (DI) in the Relationship Between Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) and Visit Decision (VD). Hypothesis H_6 , which proposed that Destination Image (DI) moderates the relationship between Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) and Visit Decision (VD), was not supported. The moderating effect was weak ($O = 0.032$, $p = 0.462$), indicating that although TPR influenced visit decisions, the destination image did not significantly amplify this effect. This suggests that improvements in the tourism products at Rembangan are sufficient to drive visitors to decide to visit, irrespective of the destination's image. This finding contrasts with previous studies that suggest an appealing image can enhance the effects of product revitalization (Dewi, Sukaatmadja, & Giantari, 2024).



The Moderating Role of Destination Image (DI) in the Relationship Between Word of Mouth (WoM) and Visit Decision (VD). Finally, hypothesis H₇, which proposed that Destination Image (DI) moderates the relationship between Word of Mouth (WoM) and Visit Decision (VD), was also rejected ($O = -0.020$, $p = 0.602$). This suggests that WoM alone did not have a significant effect on visit decisions, and the destination image did not strengthen its influence. This finding further supports the idea that WoM, while important, is not a sufficient factor by itself to influence tourists' decisions. The results imply that more structured marketing efforts, such as online reviews or targeted advertising, might be necessary to enhance the impact of WoM.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings indicate that Tourism Product Revitalization (TPR) has a significant positive effect on both Destination Image (DI) and Visit Decision (VD), highlighting the importance of improving tourism products to enhance a destination's appeal. However, Word of Mouth (WoM) was found to have no significant impact on Destination Image or Visit Decision, suggesting that other factors, such as physical revitalization and official marketing, may be more influential in this case. Additionally, the study found that Destination Image (CD) does not moderate the relationships between TPR and WoM with Visit Decision, indicating that the effects of revitalization efforts and WoM on visit decisions are independent of the destination image. These results provide valuable insights for destination marketers seeking to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of local tourist destinations.

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