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UNDERSTANDING TOURIST VISITING DECISIONS THROUGH VIRAL MARKETING, E-WOM, AND DESTINATION IMAGE PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract:
This study aims to analyze the influence of viral marketing and electronic word of mouth on visiting decisions with destination image as an intervening variable at Goa Lawa Purbalingga tourism destination. The background of this study is based on the fluctuation in the number of tourist visits to Goa Lawa Purbalingga, which indicates the dynamics of tourists' visiting decisions. This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey method by distributing questionnaires to 190 respondents. The data analysis technique used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. The results showed that viral marketing (X1) had no effect on visiting decisions (Y). Meanwhile, electronic word of mouth (X2) and destination image (M) had a positive and significant effect on visiting decisions (Y). Viral marketing (X1) and electronic word of mouth (X2) also had a positive and significant effect on destination image (M). In addition, destination image (M) was able to mediate the influence of viral marketing (X1) and electronic word of mouth (X2) on visiting decisions (Y). These findings indicate that tourism managers need to focus more on strengthening destination image and improving tourist experiences in order to encourage visiting decisions.
Keywords: Viral Marketing; Electronic Word of Mouth; Destination Image; Visiting Decision.

Abstrak
Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh viral marketing dan electronic word of mouth terhadap keputusan berkunjung dengan citra destinasi sebagai variabel intervening pada wisata Goa Lawa Purbalingga. Latar belakang penelitian ini didasari oleh fluktuasi jumlah kunjungan wisatawan Goa Lawa Purbalingga yang menunjukkan adanya dinamika keputusan berkunjung wisatawan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode survei melalui penyebaran kuesioner kepada 190 responden. Teknik analisis data menggunakan *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)* dengan *software SmartPLS*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *viral marketing* (X1) tidak berpengaruh terhadap keputusan berkunjung (Y). Sementara itu, *electronic word of mouth* (X2) dan citra destinasi (M) berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap keputusan berkunjung (Y). *Viral marketing* (X1) dan *electronic word of mouth* (X2) juga berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap citra destinasi (M). Selain itu, citra destinasi (M) mampu memediasi pengaruh viral marketing (X1) dan *electronic word of mouth* (X2) terhadap keputusan berkunjung (Y). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pengelola wisata perlu lebih memfokuskan strategi pada penguatan citra destinasi dan peningkatan pengalaman wisatawan guna mendorong keputusan berkunjung.

Kata Kunci: *Viral Marketing; Electronic Word of Mouth;* Citra Destinasi; Keputusan Berkunjung.

1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the countries known for its abundant natural resources, including mountains, beaches, tropical forests, and high biodiversity, all of which serve as major attractions in the development of the tourism sector. Various leading destinations such as mountain tourism, beaches, temples, and cultural tourism have made Central Java one of the preferred tourist destinations for both domestic and international tourists. Central Java Province is also one of the regions experiencing relatively rapid tourism growth, marked by an increase in the number of tourists and the development of tourism-supporting facilities and infrastructure (Rosyadi, 2022). This indicates that the tourism sector has become one of the main drivers of the regional economy, particularly in increasing regional income and expanding employment opportunities for the community. One of the regions contributing to tourism

development in Central Java is Purbalingga Regency. Purbalingga Regency utilizes the tourism sector as a means to improve community welfare and local economic development. The region is known for its diverse natural attractions, ranging from mountain tourism and waterfalls to educational and family tourism.

The local government actively develops the tourism sector as a source of regional revenue and as a way to improve community welfare. One of the leading tourist destinations and tourism icons in Purbalingga is Goa Lawa Purbalingga (Golaga), located in Siwarak Village, Karangreja District. This tourist attraction was inaugurated in 1979 by the Purbalingga Tourism Office and has been managed by Perumda Owabong since 2018. The tourism area is located on the southern slope of Mount Slamet and offers a unique geological attraction in the form of a natural lava cave formed by volcanic activity.Goa Lawa Purbalingga is not only known for its natural beauty but has also been developed as an educational geotourism destination equipped with various facilities such as thematic parks, outbound areas, and thematic photo spots. These potentials make Golaga an important destination in attracting tourists and supporting regional economic growth.

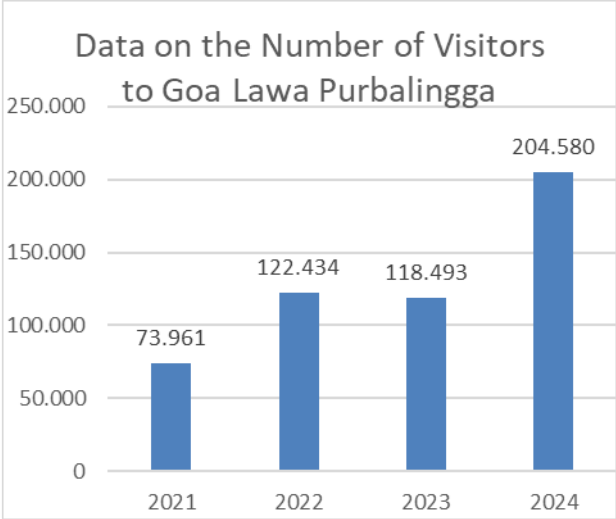

Figure 1. Number of Visitors to Goa Lawa Purbalingga
Source: Data processed by the researcher (2026)

The graph above is based on interviews and field observations conducted with the management of Perumda Owabong regarding the Goa Lawa Purbalingga tourism destination. Based on these data, the number of visitors in 2021 was recorded at 73,961 visitors, which then increased to 122,434 visitors in 2022. However, Goa Lawa Purbalingga experienced a decline in the number of visitors to 118,493 in 2023. Furthermore, in 2024, Goa Lawa Purbalingga showed a significant increase again, reaching 204,580 visitors. The changes in the number of visitors from year to year indicate that tourists' visiting decisions toward Goa Lawa Purbalingga are dynamic and not always stable. The fluctuation in visitor numbers reflects the dynamics occurring in the visiting decision variable. In the tourism context, the number of visits can be related to how tourists make decisions to visit a tourism destination. Visiting decisions themselves are a process in which tourists consider various types of information, perceptions, and evaluations of a destination before finally deciding to visit (Andjarwati et al., 2023). Surya Wijaya et al. (2021) explained that visiting decisions are the result of a decision-making process influenced by various factors, both internal factors such as tourists' motivation and perceptions, and external factors such as destination image and the effectiveness of promotional strategies. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence visiting decisions is crucial for the management of Goa Lawa Purbalingga tourism destination in an effort to improve destination competitiveness.

Destination image refers to tourists' beliefs and impressions of a destination, which are formed through direct experiences as well as exposure to information received (Andjarwati et al., 2023). In tourism marketing, destination image is considered an important factor because it influences how tourists perceive and evaluate a tourism destination. The more positive the destination image, the greater the possibility that tourists will choose the destination. Amalia et al. (2023) also highlighted the essential mediating role of destination image in connecting promotional elements with tourist behavior. Research conducted by Prawira & Putra (2022) indicated that destination image has a positive relationship with visiting decisions. Therefore, destination image functions as a link between digital promotion, positive

tourist experiences, and tourists' visiting decisions. One of the promotional strategies that continues to develop is viral marketing, which is a marketing approach that optimizes social media platforms to disseminate promotional messages quickly and widely through active user engagement (Handayani et al., 2022). In addition to building destination image, viral marketing also plays a role in influencing tourists' visiting decisions. Kaplan & Haenlein (2011) stated that viral marketing is effective when the message delivered is emotionally relevant and encourages audience participation, thereby influencing consumer behavior and decision-making.

Electronic word of mouth refers to a form of indirect communication among consumers that occurs digitally, where individuals exchange experiences, opinions, and recommendations regarding a product or destination (Ismagilova , E ., Slade , E ., Rana , N . P ., 2021). This information plays a role in shaping destination image through the experiences and evaluations shared by other users. Positive reviews and experiences spread through digital media can strengthen impressions and perceptions of a destination, thereby creating a positive destination image. This is supported by the study conducted by Rakhmawati et al. (2019), which showed that EWOM plays a role in shaping brand image, where information conveyed online is able to build consumer perceptions of a product or service. Besides shaping destination image, electronic word of mouth also plays a role in influencing visiting decisions. Information obtained from reviews and experiences of other users can increase tourists' trust and confidence in determining their destination choices.

Previous studies regarding the influence of viral marketing on visiting decisions have shown inconsistent results. Research conducted by Sholeh Dwi et al. (2023) and Fauzia & Adlina (2024) found that viral marketing has a positive and significant effect on visiting decisions. However, Ferdiansyah (2021) and Misli et al. (2025) reported that viral marketing does not significantly affect visiting decisions. Differences in research findings were also found in the electronic word of mouth (EWOM) variable. Studies by Sari et al. (2021) and Wulansari (2023) revealed that electronic word of mouth has a positive and significant effect on visiting decisions. In contrast, research conducted by Nurita Andriani & Nuri Ma'rifatullaili (2022) and Ajid et al. (2023) showed that electronic word of mouth does not significantly affect visiting decisions.

These inconsistent findings indicate the existence of a research gap. Therefore, further research is needed to examine the influence of viral marketing and electronic word of mouth on visiting decisions with destination image as an intervening variable at Goa Lawa Purbalingga tourism destination.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Visiting Decision

According to Aqmal & Setiawan (2022), a visiting decision is the actual action taken by tourists after considering attractions, facilities, travel costs, and the information obtained about a destination. Hawa (2025) also stated that a visiting decision refers to tourist behavior in determining the choice of a tourism destination in order to fulfill their needs and gain satisfaction during their travel experience. This decision not only reflects the intention to travel, but also includes decisions regarding the type of tourism destination visited, the time of visit, the tourism location, the costs incurred, and the information media used in selecting a destination. Therefore, it can be concluded that visiting decisions are the result of tourists' rational and emotional consideration processes toward a destination, involving aspects such as the selection of time, place, type of tourism, costs, as well as social influences and digital information.

2.2 Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is a marketing strategy that optimizes the widespread dissemination of messages through digital media channels and social media platforms by encouraging user participation in sharing content with others (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Viral marketing is often manifested through videos, images, or creative content that stimulates curiosity and the desire to visit certain destinations (Cakirkaya & Aytac Afsar, 2024). Therefore, it can be concluded that viral marketing is a digital marketing strategy that utilizes the power of social networks to rapidly and widely distribute promotional messages through engaging and easily shareable content to users.

2.3 Electronic Word of Mouth

Electronic word of mouth is the process of exchanging information among individuals through electronic media that can influence consumer perceptions and decisions. The information shared may include comments, reviews, or recommendations distributed through social media, blogs, or other online platforms (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Meanwhile, Meenakshy et al. (2024) explained that electronic word of mouth behavior not only includes providing reviews but also involves the level of user engagement, such as "likes," comments, or sharing personal experiences on social networks. Therefore, it can be concluded that electronic word of mouth (EWOM) is a form of consumer communication based on digital media that involves the dissemination of information, opinions, and experiences regarding tourism destinations.

2.4 Destination Image

Stylidis et al.(2017) define destination image as the overall perception formed in an individual's mind regarding a particular place, which includes cognitive and affective elements. The cognitive component includes knowledge and beliefs about the physical attributes of a destination, such as tourist attractions, facilities, accessibility, and safety. Destination image is not only formed through direct experience, but also through various sources such as social media, friends' recommendations, and destination promotional campaigns (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Therefore, it can be concluded that destination image is essentially a comprehensive perception created from tourists' knowledge, emotions, and behavioral tendencies toward a tourism destination.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Object, time and Place

This research was conducted at Goa Lawa Purbalingga (Golaga) tourism destination, located in Siwarak Village, Karangreja District, Purbalingga Regency, Central Java. The object of this study was tourists who had visited Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This study used a quantitative research method because it aimed to test hypotheses regarding the influence of viral marketing and electronic word of mouth on visiting decisions with destination image as an intervening variable. According to Sugiyono (2019), quantitative research is a research method based on the philosophy of positivism and is used to examine certain populations or samples using primary and secondary data. This research was conducted from April to May 2026.

3.2. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique in this study used questionnaires based on the Likert Scale distributed to 190 respondents selected using purposive sampling. The criteria of respondents were tourists who had visited Goa Lawa Purbalingga. In addition, observations and literature studies were conducted to support the research data. The data used in this study consisted of primary and secondary data.

3.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The data obtained were analyzed using SmartPLS software with the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique. This method was used because it is capable of analyzing complex relationships among latent variables and testing mediating variables in the research model.

1) Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)
   This study used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) as the data analysis technique. PLS-SEM was chosen because it can analyze relationships among latent variables simultaneously and is suitable for predictive research models with multiple variables.
2) Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)
   The outer model evaluation was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the constructs. Validity testing was carried out through convergent validity and discriminant validity, while reliability testing used composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha.
3) Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)
   The inner model evaluation was conducted using the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (F^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), PLS-Predict, and path coefficient analysis. Hypothesis testing was performed using the bootstrapping procedure by examining the p-values and t-statistics to determine the significance of the relationships among variables in the research model.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Characteristics of Respondents

This study was conducted on tourists who had visited Goa Lawa Purbalingga Tourism Destination. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of viral marketing and electronic word of mouth on visiting decisions with destination image as an intervening variable at Goa Lawa Purbalingga. Data collection was carried out through the distribution of questionnaires both offline and online to 190 respondents who had visited Goa Lawa Purbalingga. The classification of respondents in this study aimed to provide a clear description of the respondents as the objects of the research. Based on the distribution of questionnaires, the characteristics of respondents in this study were classified according to gender, age, and educational background. The results of the respondent characteristics are presented as follows:

Table 1. Respondents Based on Gender

No	Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Male	45	23,7%
2.	Famale	145	76,3%
Total		**190**	**100%**

Sources: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the table presented above, it can be seen that out of 190 respondents at Goa Lawa Purbalingga tourism destination, the majority of respondents in this study were female, totaling 145 respondents or 76.3%. Meanwhile, male respondents amounted to 45 respondents or 23.7%.

Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents Based on Age

No	Age	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	17 – 30 Years	188	98,9%
2.	31 – 45 Years	2	1,1%
3.	46 – 55 Years	-	-
4.	>55 Years	-	-
Total		**190**	**100%**

Sources: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the output above, it can be seen that the majority of respondents in this study were in the age range of 17–30 years, totaling 188 respondents or 98.9% of the total respondents. Meanwhile, respondents in the age range of 31–45 years amounted to 2 respondents or 1.1%. There were no respondents in the age groups of 46–55 years and above 55 years in this study.

Table 3. Respondents Based on Educational Background

No	Last Education	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Elementary School	-	-
2.	Junior High School/MTs	5	2,6%
3.	Senior High School/Vocational High School	144	75,8%
4.	Diploma	3	1,6%
5.	Bachelor's Degree	36	18,9%
6.	Postgraduate Degree	2	1,1%
Total		**190**	**100%**

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the table above, the majority of respondents in this study had an educational background equivalent to Senior High School/Vocational High School, totaling 144 respondents or 75.8% of all respondents. This indicates that most visitors to Goa Lawa Purbalingga came from students and individuals with secondary-level education. Furthermore, respondents with a Bachelor's degree amounted to 36 respondents or 18.9%. Meanwhile, respondents with Junior High School/MTs education totaled 5 respondents or 2.6%, Diploma education totaled 3 respondents or 1.6%, and Postgraduate education totaled 2 respondents or 1.1%. There were no respondents with an Elementary School educational background in this study.

Table 4. Characteristics of Respondents Based on Domicile

No.	Domicile	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Purbalingga	69	36,3%
2.	Brebes	44	23,3%
3.	Bumiayu	26	13,7%
4.	Pemalang	11	5,8%
5.	Tegal	10	5,3%
6.	Bobotsari	6	3,2%
7.	Banjarnegara	5	2,6%
8.	Purwokerto	4	2,1%
9.	Cirebon	2	1,1%
10.	Banyumas	3	1,6%
11.	Kendal	2	1,1%
12.	Yogyakarta	2	1,1%
13.	Jakarta Barat	1	0,5%
14.	Pekalongan	1	0,5%
15.	Purworejo	1	0,5%
16.	Cikarang	1	0,5%
17.	Karawang	1	0,5%
18.	Semarang	1	0,5%
Total		**190**	**100%**

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on Table 4, a total of 190 respondents came from various regions, with the majority originating from Purbalingga, totaling 69 respondents or 36.3%, followed by Brebes with 44 respondents or 23.3%, Bumiayu with 26 respondents or 13.7%, and Pemalang with 11 respondents or 5.8%. Furthermore, respondents from Tegal amounted to 10 respondents or 5.3%, Bobotsari 6 respondents or 3.2%, Banjarnegara 5 respondents or 2.6%, and Purwokerto 4 respondents or 2.1%. Other regions such as Banyumas contributed 3 respondents or 1.6%, while Cirebon, Kendal, and Yogyakarta each contributed 2 respondents or 1.1%. Several other areas, including West Jakarta, Pekalongan, Purworejo, Cikarang, Karawang, and Semarang, each contributed 1 respondent or 0.5%. Therefore, Goa Lawa Purbalingga tourism destination is not only dominated by local tourists but also attracts visitors from various other regions, although in smaller proportions, reflecting the destination's appeal at both regional and national levels.

4.2. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The measurement model evaluation (outer model) in this study was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the constructs used in the research model.

a. Convergent Validity

The measurement model in this study describes the relationship between observed variables and the latent constructs being measured. Convergent validity was used to determine the extent to which the indicators were able to represent the corresponding latent constructs. An indicator is considered to meet the criteria of convergent validity if it has a high loading factor value greater than 0.60 (Hair et al., 2019). Based on the results of data processing using SmartPLS software (v.4.1.1.8), the outer loading values for each indicator were obtained as follows:

Table 5. Loading Factor

Variable	M	X1	X2	Y
M.1	0,697			
M.2	0,741			
M.3	0,748			
M.4	0,691			
M.5	0,699			
M.6	0,729			
M.7	0,659			
M.8	0,767			
M.9	0,657			
M.10	0,672			
M.11	0,768			
M.12	0,748			
X1.1		0,698		
X1.2		0,702		
X1.3		0,832		
X1.4		0,783		
X1.5		0,835		
X1.6		0,839		
X1.7		0,722		
X1.8		0,730		
X1.9		0,772		
X1.10		0,813		
X2.1			0,842	
X2.2			0,751	
X2.3			0,793	
X2.4			0,799	
X2.5			0,795	
X2.6			0,669	
X2.7			0,795	
X2.8			0,768	
Y.1				0,789
Y.2				0,769
Y.3				0,773
Y.4				0,807
Y.5				0,736
Y.6				0,734

Y.7	0,757
Y.8	0,707
Y.9	0,770
Y.10	0,802
Y.11	0,772
Y.12	0,737

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the results of the validity test using loading factors, all outer model values or correlations between constructs and variables showed values above the required criteria. This indicates that all indicators were declared valid and could be used for further analysis.

b. Construct Reliability dan Validity

The reliability test was conducted to determine the extent to which a construct could be measured consistently and reliably. In the PLS-SEM approach using SmartPLS, construct reliability can be assessed through several measurements, namely Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability. These indicators were used to evaluate the internal consistency of each construct examined in this study. The results of the reliability test, including Cronbach's Alpha, AVE, and Composite Reliability values, are presented in the following table.

Table 6. Construct Reliability dan Validity

Variable	*Cronbach's alpha*	*Composite reliability (rho_a)*	*Composite reliability (rho_c)*	*AVErage variance extracted (AVE)*
M	0,913	0,915	0,926	0,512
X1	0,925	0,931	0,937	0,600
X2	0,906	0,911	0,924	0,605
Y	0,935	0,936	0,944	0,583

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Table 6 presents the results of the construct reliability and validity tests for all variables in this study. The results indicate that all variables met the required standards of reliability and validity. This is evidenced by the values of Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (rho_a), and Composite Reliability (rho_c) for each variable, all of which exceeded 0.70. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all variables were above 0.50, indicating that the constructs effectively captured the variance of their indicators. Therefore, it can be concluded that all variables in this study demonstrated adequate reliability and convergent validity, making them suitable for further structural model testing.

c. Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was used to test the ability of the indicators to distinguish one construct from another. In PLS analysis, this test can be conducted through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross loading values. An indicator is considered to meet the discriminant validity criteria if the loading value on the measured construct is higher than the cross loading value on other constructs, with a minimum value generally above 0.50. The following table presents the evaluation results of cross loading values as part of the discriminant validity test.

Table 7. Evaluation of Fornell-Larcker Criterion Discriminant Validity

Variable	M	X1	X2	Y
M	0,716			
X1	0,701	0,775		
X2	0,791	0,688	0,778	
Y	0,880	0,693	0,753	0,763

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the square root of the AVE value for each construct was above 0.50. This indicates that each construct had a good ability to distinguish itself from other constructs. Therefore, all variables in this study met the discriminant validity criteria and were suitable for further analysis.

4.3. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

The structural model evaluation aimed to assess the ability of the model to explain the relationships among variables. The testing was conducted through several approaches, including the R-square value, which was used to determine the extent to which the variance of the dependent constructs

could be explained by the model. In addition, Stone-Geisser Q-square (Q^2) was used to evaluate the predictive capability of the model in estimating observed values based on parameter estimations. Furthermore, the significance test of the path coefficient was conducted to determine whether the relationships among latent variables in the model were statistically significant.

a. Collinearity Statistics (Inner VIF)

Table 8. Collinearity Statistics (Inner VIF)

Variable	*VIF*
M -> Y	3,054
X1 -> M	1,898
X1 -> Y	2,167
X2 -> M	1,898
X2 -> Y	2,953

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the table presented above, it can be seen that all VIF values for the relationships among variables were below 5.00. This indicates that there were no collinearity problems in the structural model. Therefore, it can be concluded that the relationships among variables in this study were free from collinearity issues and suitable for further analysis.

b. Coefficient of Determination (R-square)

The structural model evaluation (inner model) was conducted to analyze the relationships among latent variables and the ability of the model to explain the variance of endogenous constructs. The R-square value was used as an indicator to show the proportion of variance explained by the model. The results of the R-square values are presented in the following table.

Table 9. Coefficient of Determination Evaluation (R-square)

Construct	*R-square*	*R-square adjusted*
Citra Destinasi (M)	0,673	0,669
Keputusan Berkunjung (Y)	0,790	0,787

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the output above, the R-square value for the destination image variable (M) was 0.673, indicating that the variable could be explained by the independent variables by 67.3%, while the remaining percentage was influenced by other factors outside the model. Meanwhile, the R-square value for the visiting decision variable (Y) was 0.790 or 79.0%, meaning that the variance of visiting decisions could be explained by the variables in the model by 79.0%, while the remaining percentage was influenced by other variables not examined in this study. Therefore, it can be concluded that the model in this study had a good ability to explain the endogenous variables.

c. Effect Size (F^2)

Table 10. Effect Size Evaluation (F^2)

Variable	*F-square*	Information
M -> Y	0,785	Big
X1 -> M	0,141	Currently
X1 -> Y	0,033	Small
X2 -> M	0,555	Big
X2 -> Y	0,019	Small

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

The results of the F-square analysis showed that the variable M on Y obtained an F-square value of 0.785, which falls into the large category. This finding indicates a strong contribution of variable M toward variable Y in the developed structural model. In addition, the variable X1 on M had an F-square value of 0.141, categorized as moderate, indicating a moderate influence of X1 in explaining variable M. On the other hand, the variable X1 on Y recorded an F-square value of 0.033, which falls into the small category, indicating a low contribution to variable Y in the model. The variable X2 on M obtained an F-square value of 0.555, which belongs to the large category, implying a significant contribution of X2 in explaining the variation of variable M. Lastly, the variable X2 on Y had an F-square value of 0.019, which is categorized as small, indicating only a weak contribution to the variation of variable Y.

d. Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

The predictive relevance (Q^2) evaluation in the structural model was conducted to assess the ability of the model to predict values based on parameter estimations. A model is considered to have predictive relevance if the Q^2 value is greater than 0, whereas a Q^2 value below 0 indicates low predictive

capability. In general, Q^2 values of 0, 0.25, and 0.50 indicate weak, moderate, and strong predictive relevance, respectively (Hair et al., 2019). The results of the predictive relevance test in this study are presented in the following tables.

Table 11. Q^2 Test Results

Variable	Q^2
M.1	0,208
M.2	0,381
M.3	0,360
M.4	0,346
M.5	0,360
M.6	0,315
M.7	0,264
M.8	0,280
M.9	0,268
M.10	0,308
M.11	0,398
M.12	0,314
Y.1	0,374
Y.2	0,290
Y.3	0,371
Y.4	0,311
Y.5	0,260
Y.6	0,268
Y.7	0,316
Y.8	0,274
Y.9	0,304
Y.10	0,446
Y.11	0,382
Y.12	0,376

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the output of the Q^2 test results, the indicators of variable M (M.1 to M.12) showed Q^2 values ranging from 0.208 to 0.398, while the indicators of variable Y (Y.1 to Y.12) showed Q^2 values ranging from 0.260 to 0.446. Overall, these ranges indicate positive predictive relevance for both endogenous variables in the model. Therefore, most Q^2 values of variables M and Y fall into the moderate predictive relevance category, indicating that the model provides a good contribution in explaining and predicting the variation of the endogenous variables.Overall, the model demonstrates adequate predictive capability, with the indicators of variables M and Y consistently showing significant predictive relevance. Therefore, this structural model can be considered reliable for explaining the relationships among variables.

e. PLS-Predict

Table 12. Evaluation of PLS-Predict Test Results

Variable	*Q²predict*	*PLS SEM_RMSE*	*PLS SEM_MAE*	*LM_RMSE*	*LM_MAE*
M.1	0,208	0,693	0,526	0,758	0,574
M.2	0,381	0,567	0,431	0,557	0,408
M.3	0,360	0,563	0,429	0,598	0,448
M.4	0,346	0,552	0,425	0,593	0,444
M.5	0,360	0,603	0,443	0,616	0,458
M.6	0,315	0,659	0,510	0,719	0,550
M.7	0,264	0,651	0,500	0,723	0,558
M.8	0,280	0,634	0,479	0,674	0,506
M.9	0,268	0,658	0,502	0,694	0,532
M.10	0,308	0,642	0,477	0,669	0,492
M.11	0,398	0,593	0,461	0,627	0,473

M.12	0,314	0,547	0,398	0,595	0,452
Y.1	0,374	0,599	0,438	0,590	0,448
Y.2	0,290	0,665	0,513	0,708	0,534
Y.3	0,371	0,677	0,485	0,717	0,496
Y.4	0,311	0,590	0,432	0,589	0,429
Y.5	0,260	0,597	0,438	0,619	0,453
Y.6	0,268	0,640	0,475	0,682	0,519
Y.7	0,316	0,612	0,474	0,662	0,506
Y.8	0,274	0,683	0,494	0,675	0,523
Y.9	0,304	0,615	0,470	0,634	0,474
Y.10	0,446	0,523	0,401	0,570	0,434
Y.11	0,382	0,558	0,423	0,605	0,443
Y.12	0,376	0,586	0,441	0,590	0,424

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on Table, which presents the results of the PLS-Predict test, the proposed Partial Least Squares (PLS) model demonstrated better predictive performance than the linear regression model (LM) for most indicators. This superiority is reflected in the lower Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) and Mean Absolute Error (MAE) values of the PLS-SEM model compared to the LM model for most indicators of variables M (M.1 to M.12) and Y (Y.1 to Y.12). Therefore, it can be concluded that the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) model applied in this study has better predictive capability and adequate out-of-sample predictive relevance.

f. Significance and Relevance of Path Coefficients

Table 13. Significance and Relevance of Path Coefficients

Construct	*Original sample (O)*	*Sample mean (M)*	*Standard deviation (STDEV)*	*T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)*	*P values*
M -> Y	0,709	0,696	0,077	9,237	0,000
X1 -> M	0,296	0,306	0,113	2,634	0,004
X1 -> Y	0,122	0,137	0,085	1,439	0,075
X2 -> M	0,588	0,580	0,100	5,857	0,000
X2 -> Y	0,108	0,106	0,065	1,656	0,049

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the analysis results presented in the table above, this study examined five relationships between exogenous and endogenous constructs. Most of the tested hypotheses produced significant results, indicating that the alternative hypotheses (Ha) were accepted, except for one insignificant relationship. The interpretation of the results is as follows:

1) The hypothesis regarding the influence of destination image on visiting decisions showed a t-statistic value of 9.237 > 1.65 and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05. Therefore, Ha was accepted and Ho was rejected, meaning that destination image had a significant effect on visiting decisions.
2) The hypothesis regarding the influence of viral marketing on destination image showed a t-statistic value of 2.634 > 1.65 and a p-value of 0.004 < 0.05. Thus, Ha was accepted and Ho was rejected, indicating that viral marketing had a significant effect on destination image.
3) The hypothesis regarding the influence of viral marketing on visiting decisions showed a t-statistic value of 1.439 < 1.65 and a p-value of 0.075 > 0.05. Consequently, Ha was rejected and Ho was accepted, indicating that viral marketing did not have a significant effect on visiting decisions.
4) The hypothesis regarding the influence of electronic word of mouth on destination image showed a t-statistic value of 5.857 > 1.65 and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05. Therefore, Ha was accepted and Ho was rejected, indicating that electronic word of mouth had a significant effect on destination image.
5) The hypothesis regarding the influence of electronic word of mouth on visiting decisions showed a t-statistic value of 1.656 > 1.65 and a p-value of 0.049 < 0.05. Thus, Ha was accepted and Ho was rejected, meaning that electronic word of mouth had a significant effect on visiting decisions.

g. 95% Confidence Interval

Table 14. 95% Confidence Interval

construct	*Original sample (O)*	*Sample mean (M)*	5%	95%
M -> Y	0,709	0,696	0,559	0,813
X1 -> M	0,296	0,306	0,128	0,498
X1 -> Y	0,122	0,137	0,006	0,284
X2 -> M	0,588	0,580	0,411	0,739
X2 -> Y	0,108	0,106	0,003	0,216

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the table above, the confidence interval values indicate the lower and upper limits of the relationships among variables in the model. Specifically, the influence of destination image (M) on visiting decisions (Y) showed a confidence interval ranging from 0.559 to 0.813. Furthermore, the influence of viral marketing (X1) on destination image (M) had a confidence interval ranging from 0.128 to 0.498, while the influence of viral marketing (X1) on visiting decisions (Y) showed a confidence interval ranging from 0.006 to 0.284. In addition, the influence of electronic word of mouth (X2) on destination image (M) had a confidence interval ranging from 0.411 to 0.739, whereas its influence on visiting decisions (Y) ranged from 0.003 to 0.216.

h. Hypothesis Testing

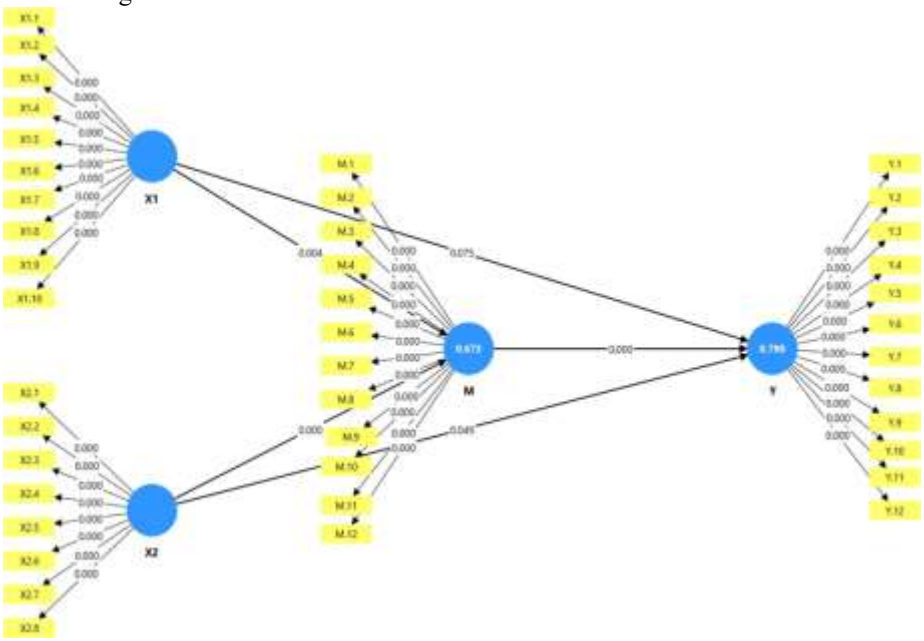

Figure 2. Hypothesis Testing Results
Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

To examine the structural relationships among latent variables, hypothesis testing was conducted on the path coefficients connecting these variables. The testing was carried out by comparing the p-value with the significance level (α = 0.05) or by comparing the t-statistic value with the critical value (1.65). The t-statistic and p-value values were obtained from SEM analysis using SmartPLS version 4 through the bootstrapping method. The hypotheses tested in this study were as follows:

H1: Viral marketing has a positive effect on visiting decisions.
H2: Electronic word of mouth has a positive effect on visiting decisions.
H3: Viral marketing has a positive effect on destination image.
H4: Electronic word of mouth has a positive effect on destination image.
H5: Destination image has a positive effect on visiting decisions.
H6: Destination image mediates the relationship between viral marketing and visiting decisions.
H7: Destination image mediates the relationship between electronic word of mouth and visiting decisions.

Table 15. Total Direct Effect

Construct	*Original sample (O)*	*Sample mean (M)*	*Standard deviation (STDEV)*	*T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)*	*P values*
M -> Y	0,709	0,696	0,077	9,237	0,000
X1 -> M	0,296	0,306	0,113	2,634	0,004
X1 -> Y	0,122	0,137	0,085	1,439	0,075
X2 -> M	0,588	0,580	0,100	5,857	0,000
X2 -> Y	0,108	0,106	0,065	1,656	0,049

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Hypothesis 1
H01: Viral marketing does not affect visiting decisions.
Ha1: Viral marketing has a positive effect on visiting decisions.
The p-value was 0.075 > 0.05 and the t-statistic was 1.439 < 1.65; therefore, H01 was accepted and Ha1 was rejected. This indicates that viral marketing did not have a significant effect on visiting decisions.

Hypothesis 2
H02: Electronic word of mouth does not positively affect visiting decisions.
Ha2: Electronic word of mouth has a positive effect on visiting decisions.
The p-value was 0.049 < 0.05 and the t-statistic was 1.656 > 1.65; therefore, H02 was rejected and Ha2 was accepted. This indicates that electronic word of mouth had a positive effect on visiting decisions.

Hypothesis 3
H03: Viral marketing does not positively affect destination image.
Ha3: Viral marketing has a positive effect on destination image.
The p-value was 0.004 < 0.05 and the t-statistic was 2.634 > 1.65; therefore, H03 was rejected and Ha3 was accepted. This indicates that viral marketing had a positive effect on destination image.

Hypothesis 4
H04: Electronic word of mouth does not positively affect destination image.
Ha4: Electronic word of mouth has a positive effect on destination image.
The p-value was 0.000 < 0.05 and the t-statistic was 5.857 > 1.65; therefore, H04 was rejected and Ha4 was accepted. This indicates that electronic word of mouth had a positive effect on destination image.

Hypothesis 5
H05: Destination image does not positively affect visiting decisions.
Ha5: Destination image has a positive effect on visiting decisions.
The p-value was 0.000 < 0.05 and the t-statistic was 9.237 > 1.65; therefore, H05 was rejected and Ha5 was accepted. This indicates that destination image had a positive effect on visiting decisions.

Hypothesis 6
H06: Destination image does not mediate the relationship between viral marketing and visiting decisions.
Ha6: Destination image mediates the relationship between viral marketing and visiting decisions.
The p-value was 0.002 < 0.05 and the t-statistic was 2.870 > 1.65; therefore, H06 was rejected and Ha6 was accepted. This indicates that destination image was able to mediate the relationship between viral marketing and visiting decisions.

Hypothesis 7
H07: Destination image does not mediate the relationship between electronic word of mouth and visiting decisions.
Ha7: Destination image mediates the relationship between electronic word of mouth and visiting decisions.
The p-value was 0.000 < 0.05 and the t-statistic was 4.492 > 1.65; therefore, H07 was rejected and Ha7 was accepted. This indicates that destination image was able to mediate the relationship between electronic word of mouth and visiting decisions.

i. Mediation Testing (Indirect Effect)

Table 16. Indirect Effect

Variabel	*Original sample (O)*	*Sample mean (M)*	*Standard deviation (STDEV)*	*T statistics (|O/STDEV|)*	*P values*
X1 -> M -> Y	0,210	0,210	0,073	2,870	0,002
X2 -> M -> Y	0,417	0,406	0,093	4,492	0,000

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the output above, it can be seen that destination image was able to mediate the relationship between viral marketing and electronic word of mouth on visiting decisions. This is indicated by the p-values below 0.05 and t-statistics above 1.65.

j. Model Fit (SRMR)

Table 17. Model Fit (SRMR)

	Saturated model	*Estimated model*
SRMR	0,063	0,063
d_ULS	3,554	3,554
d_G	2,036	2,036
Chi-square	1878,673	1878,673
NFI	0,713	0,713

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the model fit test results, the SRMR value obtained was 0.063, which is below 0.08. According to Hair et al. (2019), an SRMR value below 0.08 indicates that the model has a good fit. Therefore, the model can be considered appropriate and has met the goodness of fit criteria.

4.4 Discussion

1) The Effect of Viral Marketing on Visiting Decisions
   The results showed that viral marketing did not have a significant effect on visiting decisions at Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This was evidenced by a p-value of 0.075 > 0.05 and a t-statistic of 1.439 < 1.65. These findings indicate that viral content on social media was only able to attract tourists' attention and interest but was not strong enough to directly encourage visiting decisions. Tourists tended to consider other factors such as ticket prices, facilities, accessibility, and direct travel experiences before deciding to visit. This finding is consistent with the studies of Ferdiansyah (2021) and Misli et al. (2025), which stated that viral marketing does not always directly influence consumer decisions. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2011), viral marketing is a digital marketing strategy that utilizes social media to disseminate information quickly and widely to consumers.
2) The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Visiting Decisions
   The results indicated that electronic word of mouth had a positive and significant effect on visiting decisions, with a p-value of 0.049 < 0.05 and a t-statistic of 1.656 > 1.65. Information in the form of reviews, comments, photos, and videos shared through social media increased tourists' confidence in visiting Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This finding is in line with the study by Eklesia & Mahliza (2024), which stated that electronic word of mouth positively influences visiting decisions. According to Romadhoni et al. (2021), electronic word of mouth refers to the dissemination of information regarding products or services through digital media that can influence consumer decisions.
3) The Effect of Viral Marketing on Destination Image
   This study found that viral marketing had a positive and significant effect on destination image, with a t-statistic of 2.634 > 1.65 and a p-value of 0.004 < 0.05. Promotional content and information about Goa Lawa Purbalingga shared through social media successfully created positive perceptions among tourists toward the destination. This finding is consistent with the studies of Hatta (2020) and Iqbal & Susanti (2022), which stated that viral marketing significantly influences brand image. The more attractive and widespread the information shared on social media, the more positive the destination image formed in tourists' minds.
4) The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Destination Image
   Electronic word of mouth was proven to have a positive and significant effect on destination image, with a t-statistic of 5.857 > 1.65 and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05. Reviews, comments, and travel experiences shared through social media were able to create positive impressions of Goa Lawa Purbalingga in tourists' minds. This finding is in line with the studies of Muis et al. (2020) and Ummah (2019), which stated that information disseminated through social media can shape

tourists' perceptions of a tourism destination. According to Yonita & Budiono (2020), positive digital communication can strengthen destination image in consumers' minds.

5) The Effect of Destination Image on Visiting Decisions
The results showed that destination image had a positive and significant effect on visiting decisions, with a t-statistic of 9.237 > 1.65 and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05. Positive perceptions regarding tourist attractions, facilities, and the tourism environment increased tourists' confidence and interest in visiting Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This finding is consistent with the study by Abhimayu & Putra (2025), which stated that destination image positively affects visiting decisions. According to Stylidis et al. (2017), destination image is the overall perception tourists form about a place based on their experiences, information, and evaluations of the destination.
6) The Effect of Viral Marketing on Visiting Decisions Mediated by Destination Image
Destination image was proven to mediate the relationship between viral marketing and visiting decisions, with a t-statistic of 2.870 and a p-value of 0.002 < 0.05. Viral marketing through social media can create a positive destination image, which then encourages tourists to visit. This finding is consistent with the studies of Nasla et al. (2025) and Yogiana et al. (2025), which stated that brand image can mediate the relationship between viral marketing and purchasing decisions.
7) The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Visiting Decisions Mediated by Destination Image
Destination image was also proven to mediate the relationship between electronic word of mouth and visiting decisions, with a t-statistic of 4.492 and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05. Positive reviews and information shared through social media formed a favorable destination image, thereby strengthening tourists' decisions to visit Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This finding is consistent with the studies of Satifa Putri & Widyastut (2023) and Rofiah (2020), which stated that destination image can mediate the relationship between electronic word of mouth and tourists' visiting decisions.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study regarding the influence of viral marketing and electronic word of mouth on visiting decisions with destination image as an intervening variable at Goa Lawa Purbalingga tourism destination, several conclusions can be drawn:

1) Viral marketing did not have a positive effect on tourists' visiting decisions at Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This finding indicates that promotional content distributed through social media platforms has not been fully effective in encouraging tourists to immediately decide to visit.
2) Electronic word of mouth had a positive effect on tourists' visiting decisions at Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This indicates that reviews, comments, and tourist experiences shared through digital platforms can increase tourists' confidence in making visiting decisions.
3) Viral marketing had a positive effect on the destination image of Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This finding shows that attractive and viral promotional content on social media can create positive perceptions of the destination among tourists.
4) Electronic word of mouth had a positive effect on the destination image of Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This indicates that positive information and reviews from tourists can strengthen the destination image in the minds of potential visitors.
5) Destination image had a positive effect on tourists' visiting decisions at Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This finding implies that the more positive the destination image, the greater the likelihood that tourists will decide to visit.
6) Destination image was able to mediate the relationship between viral marketing and tourists' visiting decisions at Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This indicates that viral marketing can influence visiting decisions through the formation of a favorable destination image.
7) Destination image was able to mediate the relationship between electronic word of mouth and tourists' visiting decisions at Goa Lawa Purbalingga. This finding indicates that information and reviews shared by tourists through digital media can create a positive destination image, thereby increasing tourists' visiting decisions.

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