

ANALYSIS OF TOURISM IMAGE AND TOURISM TRUST ON VISITING DECISIONS THROUGH CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AT TANGKAHAN TOURIST OBJECT

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine directly and indirectly the relationship between tourism image and tourism trust on visiting decisions through customer experience. The population in this study is all local and foreign tourists who visit. The sample withdrawal used is accidental sampling. Due to time, cost and other limitations, the researcher directly determined the sample in the study was 120 respondents to be studied further. Data analysis was carried out using structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques with Smart-PLS analysis tools to test the direct and indirect relationships between these variables. The results explain that tourism image directly has a significant effect on customer experience, tourism image directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions, tourism trust directly has a significant effect on customer experience, tourism trust directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions, customer experience directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions, tourism image directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions through customer experience and then tourism trust directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions through customer experience.

Keywords: *Tourism Image, Tourism Trust, Customer Experience, Visiting Decisions*

1. Introduction

Indonesia is known as one of the countries with enormous tourism potential. Natural beauty, cultural diversity, and historical heritage make Indonesia a leading tourist destination. From Sabang to Merauke, there are various interesting destinations, ranging from natural tourism such as beaches, mountains, and tropical forests, to cultural tourism such as temples, traditional dances, and regional culinary specialties. The Indonesian government continues to encourage the tourism sector as a source of foreign exchange through various policies, such as developing leading destinations, promoting tourism, and improving infrastructure. Medan City is one of the tourism centers on Sumatra Island. As the capital city of North Sumatra Province, Medan offers a variety of tourist destinations, ranging from historical, religious, to culinary tourism. Some popular destinations in Medan include Maimun Palace, Al-Mashun Grand Mosque, and the Kesawan area which is known for its colonial buildings. In addition, culinary tourism such as Medan durian, Medan soto, and Bika Ambon are a special attraction for domestic and foreign tourists.

Tangkahan is one of the ecotourism destinations located in Langkat Regency, North Sumatra. Known as "The Hidden Paradise of Sumatra," Tangkahan offers a unique natural tourism experience with the beauty of tropical forests and the presence of Sumatran elephants. Tourists can enjoy various activities such as trekking in the tropical rainforest, interacting with elephants, bathing in the clear river, and enjoying the beauty of the waterfall. Tangkahan is an option for tourists looking for a quiet tourism experience away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Although Tangkahan has great potential as an ecotourism destination, the number of tourist visits is still relatively fluctuating. Several factors that influence tourists' decisions to visit are tourism image, the level of tourist trust in the destination (tourism trust), and the tourist experience while at the location (customer

experience). Therefore, analysis of these factors is important in understanding tourists' decisions to visit Tangkahan.

Visiting decision is a process that involves individual consideration before deciding to visit a destination (Belanger et al., 2017; Alvares & Campo, 2020). Factors that influence this decision include destination attractiveness, accessibility, price, promotion, and previous experience. Visiting decision is a person's decision to visit a place, be it a tourist destination, restaurant, or shopping center. This decision is influenced by various factors, such as reviews from others, recommendations from friends, the attractiveness of the location, price, and the comfort offered. In addition, emotional factors, such as nostalgia or the desire to seek new experiences, also play an important role. In the digital era, social media and review platforms are increasingly influential in shaping this decision. A person tends to be more confident in visiting a place if they see many positive testimonials. Ultimately, visiting decisions are subjective and depend on individual preferences and needs. In the context of Tangkahan, understanding the factors that influence tourist decisions is essential to increase destination attractiveness. Although Tangkahan has extraordinary natural beauty, there are still obstacles in attracting more tourists. Some of the obstacles faced include quite difficult accessibility, lack of massive promotion, and minimal supporting facilities such as adequate accommodation and transportation.

Customer experience is the overall impression a customer feels when interacting with a brand, from when they first learn about the product to after making a purchase (Buhalis et al., 2022; Kaushal & Yadaf, 2021). This experience includes various aspects, such as service quality, ease of transaction, and responsiveness in handling complaints. A good customer experience can build loyalty, increase satisfaction, and encourage customers to recommend products or services to others. Therefore, companies need to understand customer needs and continue to innovate so that their experiences remain positive and memorable. Customer experience is one of the key factors in determining tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Customer experience encompasses all interactions between tourists and the destination, from the planning stage to after the visit. Aspects such as the friendliness of the local people, the cleanliness of the environment, and the services provided at the destination greatly influence the tourist experience. Several tourists expressed that although Tangkahan offers extraordinary natural beauty, there are several obstacles that can reduce the quality of their experience, such as limited public facilities, lack of clear tourist information, and services that still need to be improved.

Tourism image is an impression or image formed in the minds of tourists about a destination (Xioau et al., 2022; Ganji et al., 2021). This image can be influenced by various factors, such as personal experience, tourism promotion, recommendations from others, and media coverage. A destination with a positive image tends to be more attractive to tourists, while a negative image can reduce interest in visiting. Tourism image includes aspects of natural beauty, culture, infrastructure, security, and the friendliness of the local people. Therefore, the government and tourism industry players strive to build and maintain a positive image to attract more tourists. Tourism image is a tourist's perception of a destination based on information received before the visit. This image can be formed through social media, tourist reviews, and other people's experiences. A positive image of a destination can increase its appeal and encourage more tourists to visit. Tangkahan is still less well-known compared to other destinations in North Sumatra such as Lake Toba or Bukit Lawang. This is due to the lack of effective promotion and the lack of tourism documentation that displays the main attractions of this destination.

Tourism Trust is a concept related to trust in the tourism industry, covering aspects of reliability, safety, and tourist satisfaction (Artigas et al., 2017; Razak & Mansor, 2021). This trust is formed through various factors, such as transparency in information, quality services, and positive experiences provided by destinations, service providers, and local communities. In the digital era, reviews from other travelers and interactions on social media also play an important role in building or destroying this trust. With strong Tourism Trust, tourists are more confident in choosing destinations, thus encouraging the growth of sustainable tourism. Factors such as security, credibility of information, and quality of service are the main considerations in building tourist trust in a destination. Some tourists still doubt the facilities and security in Tangkahan. The lack of accurate information about road conditions to the destination, accommodation facilities, and service standards makes some prospective tourists hesitate to visit this place.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that Tangkahan has great potential as a unique ecotourism destination in North Sumatra. However, there are several challenges that need to be overcome, such as limited accessibility, minimal promotion, and lack of supporting facilities. Factors such as tourism image, tourism trust, and customer experience greatly influence tourists' decisions to visit. Therefore, a more effective strategy is needed in building a positive image, increasing tourist trust, and improving the tourist experience in Tangkahan in order to attract more visitors in the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Visiting Decisions

Visiting Decisions is a decision-making process that someone does before visiting a place. This decision is influenced by various factors, such as the purpose of the visit, comfort, cost, and personal preferences (Ghifari & Siregar, 2022; Bélanger et al., 2017; Alvarez & Campo, 2020). Visiting Decisions relate to the decision to visit business partners, clients, or trade shows. These decisions take into account urgency, business benefits, and travel budget. Visiting Decisions involve emotional and cognitive factors, such as curiosity, social needs, or past experiences that influence a person in determining whether to visit. (Tajeddini et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021) Visiting Decisions are closely related to factors such as the attractiveness of the destination, comfort, accessibility, and the experience to be gained. Travelers often consider aspects such as recommendations from friends, online reviews, and promotions before finally choosing a place to visit (Dai et al., 2022; Poon & Koay, 2021).

Customer Experience

Customer experience is a customer's perception and feelings about a brand, product, or service based on their interactions with the company across multiple touchpoints (Ghesh et al., 2024; Buhalis et al., 2022). Customer experience encompasses the entire customer journey, from awareness, purchase, product or service usage, to after-sales service (Kaushal & Yadav, 2021; El Bakkouri et al., 2022). This experience is not just about product quality, but also includes ease of access, responsiveness of customer service, personalization, and the emotions customers feel while interacting with the company. Customer Experience is one of the main factors that determine customer loyalty (Tom Dieck & Han, 2022; Rather et al., 2022). A positive experience can create a strong emotional connection between customers and a brand, encouraging customers to return and even recommend products or services to others. Conversely, a negative experience can make customers switch to competitors and leave bad reviews that can damage a business's reputation. Therefore, many companies invest in customer experience strategies that focus on customer satisfaction to increase retention and business growth (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2021; Amoako et al., 2023; Chittiprolu et al., 2021).

Tourism Image

Tourism Image is a perception, impression, or picture that someone has of a tourist destination (Wang et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2022). This image is formed through direct experience, tourism promotion, social media, stories from other people, and information available on various platforms. Tourism image plays an important role in attracting tourists, because a positive impression can increase someone's interest in visiting a place, while a negative impression can reduce the attractiveness of the destination (Kutlu & Ayyıldız, 2021; Sio et al., 2023). Tourism image is not just a visual image or natural beauty, but also includes various other aspects, such as culture, friendliness of the people, infrastructure, security, cleanliness, and supporting tourism facilities (Lalicic et al., 2021; Tosun et al., 2021). For example, a city known for its friendly people and convenient transportation system will have a positive image in the eyes of tourists. Conversely, if a destination is often associated with traffic jams, less secure security, or lack of supporting facilities, then the tourism image formed will tend to be negative. In today's digital era, tourism image is increasingly easy to form through various media. Social media, travel blogs, online reviews, and visual content such as photos and videos have a big influence in shaping the perception of potential tourists. Destinations that often appear in positive content on social media tend to get more attention and visits. Therefore, tourism marketing strategies must be able to build an attractive and authentic image in order to compete in the global tourism industry (Ndubisi & Nair, 2023; Ganji et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024).

Tourism Trust

Tourism Trust is an important element in building relationships between tourists, service providers, and tourist destinations (Williams & Baláž, 2021; Shin et al., 2022). This trust includes a sense of security, confidence in the quality of service, and a positive perception of the destination visited. In the tourism industry, trust is a major factor in determining tourist decisions, both in choosing a place, transportation, and accommodation (Poon & Koay, 2021; Jebbouri et al., 2022). Without trust, tourists will feel hesitant and tend to look for more convincing alternatives. Tourism Trust plays a role in shaping a pleasant and memorable travel experience. When tourists feel confident in a destination, they will enjoy their trip more without worry. For example, tourists who feel confident in the cleanliness and safety of a hotel will be calmer during their stay. Trust in tourism not only impacts short-term visits, but also forms tourist loyalty to a destination. Tourists who have a positive experience are more likely to return or recommend the place to others (Artigas et al., 2017; Su et al., 2017; Razak & Mansor, 2021). Thus, building and maintaining Tourism Trust is not only a marketing strategy, but also a long-term investment for the tourism industry.

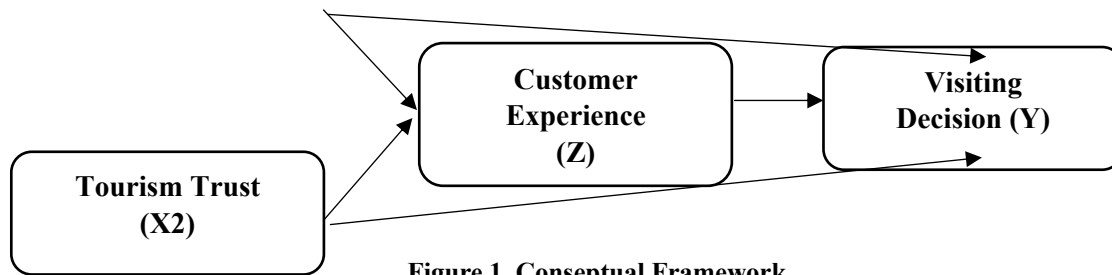


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Sources: By Researcher (2025)

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This type of research is causal associative research. Causal associative research aims to determine the relationship or association between two or more variables. This type of research is usually used to see if there is a relationship, correlation, or influence between the variables studied, and how strong the relationship is (Sugiyono, 2021). The types of data used are primary data and secondary data obtained from questionnaires. The population in this study is all local and foreign tourists who visit. The sample withdrawal used is accidental sampling. Due to time, cost and other limitations, the researcher directly determined the sample in the study was 120 respondents to be studied further. Data analysis was carried out using structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques with Smart-PLS analysis tools to test the direct and indirect relationships between these variables.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Outer Model

Convergent Validity

Convergent Validity is an indicator that is assessed based on the correlation between the item score / component score and the construct score, which can be seen from the standardized loading factor which describes the magnitude of the correlation between each measurement item (indicator) and its construct. Individual reflexive measures are said to be high if they correlate > 0.7 with the construct to be measured but the outer loading value between 0.5 - 0.6 is considered sufficient (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 1. Test Results Loading Factor

Variable	Statement Item	Outer Loading	Description
Visiting Decisions (Y)	VD1	0.831	Valid
	VD2	0.814	Valid
	VD3	0.839	Valid
	VD4	0.877	Valid
Customer Experience (Z)	CE1	0.844	Valid
	CE2	0.816	Valid
	CE3	0.891	Valid
	CE4	0.800	Valid
Tourism Image (X1)	TI1	0.809	Valid
	TI2	0.822	Valid
	TI3	0.803	Valid
	TI4	0.832	Valid
Tourism Trust (X2)	TT1	0.856	Valid
	TT2	0.865	Valid
	TT3	0.804	Valid
	TT4	0.872	Valid

Sources: Smart-PLS (2025)

Based on Table 1. above, it is known that there are several statement items that are eliminated because they do not meet the requirements, so that after re-processing the data, all of the statement items above have an outer loading value > 0.7.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant Validity is a measurement model with reflexive indicators assessed based on crossloading measurements with constructs. If the correlation between the construct and the measurement item is greater than the size of the other constructs, it shows that their block size is better than the other blocks. Meanwhile, according to another method for assessing discriminant validity, namely by comparing the square root value of average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2. Test Results Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Visting Decisions	0.848
Customer Experience	0.877
Tourism Image	0.891
Tourism Trust	0.823

Sources: Smart-PLS (2025)

Based on Table 2. above, it is known that the AVE (Average Variant Extracted) value of each variable is greater than 0.7. So it can be concluded that the variables or constructs used are valid.

Composite Reliability and Cronbach’s Alpha

Composite reliability is an indicator for measuring a construct which can be seen in the latent variable coefficients view. To evaluate composite reliability, there are two measuring tools, namely internal consistency and Cronbach's alpha. In this measurement, if the value achieved is > 0.70, it can be said that the construct has high reliability. Cronbach's Alpha is a reliability test that is carried out to strengthen the results of composite reliability. A variable can be declared reliable if it has a Cronbach's alpha value > 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3. Test Results Cronbach’s Alpha & Composite Reliability

Variabel	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability
Visting Decisions	0.811	0.916
Customer Experience	0.875	0.820
Tourism Image	0.868	0.818
Tourism Trust	0.853	0.874

Sources: Smart-PLS (2025)

Based on Table 3. above, it is known that each research variable has a Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability value > 0.70. Based on the results obtained, it can be stated that the variables used in the study are declared reliable.

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Table 4. Test Results Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Visitng Decisioons	Customer Experience	Tourism Image	Tourism Trust
Visting Decisions	0.879			
Customer Experience	0.792	0.832		
Tourism Image	0.778	0.762	0.876	
Tourism Trust	0.848	0.740	0.787	0.859

Sources: Smart-PLS (2025)

Table 4. above shows that the correlation value of the association construct is higher than the other constructs so that it can be said that the model has good discriminant validity. In this case, the FL Criterion value which has the lowest value is tourism trust 0.859 which is greater than other correlations.

b. Inner Model

Inner model analysis is usually also called inner relation or structural model and substantive theory which describes the relationship between latent variables based on substantive theory. Changes in the value of R-square

can be used to assess the effect of certain independent latent variables on the dependent latent variable whether it has a substantive effect (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 5. Test Results R-Square (R²)

Variabel	R Square (R ²)
Customer Experience	0.781
Visiting Decisions	0.677

Sources: Smart-PLS (2025)

Based on Table 5. above, the R Square value for the customer experience variable is 0.781, this means that the percentage of the influence of tourism image and tourism trust on customer experience is 78.1%, while the remaining 21.9% is explained by other variables not examined in this study. Furthermore, the R Square value for the visiting decisions variable is 0.677, this means that the percentage of the influence of tourism image, tourism trust and customer experience on visiting decisions is 67.7%, while the remaining 32.3% can be explained by other variables not examined in this study.

c. Hypotesis Test

Direct Effect

Table 6. Test Results Direct Effect

	<i>Original Sample (O)</i>	<i>Sample Mean (M)</i>	<i>Deviation Standard (STDEV)</i>	<i>T Statistic (O/STDEV)</i>	<i>P Values</i>
Tourism Image -> Customer Experience	0.277	0.237	0.227	2.199	0.005
Tourism Image -> Visiting Decisions	0.172	0.193	0.213	3.233	0.000
Tourism Trust -> Customer Experience	0.327	0.436	0.189	2.147	0.007
Tourism Trust-> Visiting Decisions	0.279	0.318	0.274	2.077	0.004
Customer Experience -> Visiting Decisions	0.501	0.515	0.225	3.710	0.000

Sources: Smart-PLS (2024)

Based on Table 6. above, the test results can be used to answer the hypothesis in this study. Hypothesis testing in this study by looking at the coefficient path (original sample), t-statistic value or p-value. With a significance of 5%, the hypothesis can be accepted if the t-statistic > t-table 1.65 (n-k = 120-4 = 116 at 0.5 / 5%) or the p-value < 0.05. Direct effect can be explained as follows:

- a. X1 to Z: T-Statistic value (|O/STDEV|) = 2.199 and P-Values = 0.005 < 0.05, meaning that tourism image directly has a significant effect on customer experience.
- b. X1 to Y: T-Statistic value (|O/STDEV|) = 3.233 and P-Values = 0.000 < 0.05, meaning that tourism image directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions.
- c. X2 to Z: T-Statistic value (|O/STDEV|) = 2.147 and P-Values = 0.007 < 0.05, meaning that tourism trust directly has a significant effect on customer experience.
- d. X2 to Y: T-Statistic value (|O/STDEV|) = 2.077 and P-Values = 0.004 < 0.05, meaning that tourism trust directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions.
- e. Z to Y: T-Statistic value (|O/STDEV|) = 3.710 and P-Values = 0.000 < 0.05, meaning that customer experience directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions.

Indirect Effect

Table 7. Test Results Indirect Effect

	<i>Original Sample (O)</i>	<i>Sample Mean (M)</i>	<i>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</i>	<i>T Statistics (O/STDEV)</i>	<i>P Values</i>
Tourism Image -> Customer Experience -> Visiting Decisions	0.417	0.345	0.093	3.672	0.000
Tourism Trust -> Customer Experience -> Visiting Decisions	0.316	0.256	0.092	2.748	0.001

Sources: Smart-PLS (2024)

Based on Table 7. above, it is known that tourism image indirectly has a significant effect on visiting decisions through customer experience with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. Furthermore, it is known that tourism trust indirectly has a significant effect on visiting decisions through customer experience with a p-value of $0.001 < 0.05$.

Total Effect

Table 8. Test Results Total Effect

	<i>Original Sample (O)</i>	<i>Sample Mean (M)</i>	<i>Deviation Standard (STDEV)</i>	<i>T Statistic (O/STDEV)</i>	<i>P Values</i>
Tourism Image -> Customer Experience -> Visiting Decisions	0.471	0.535	0.274	3.281	0.000
Tourism Trust -> Customer Experience -> Visiting Decisions	0.328	0.327	0.229	2.727	0.015

Sources: Smart-PLS (2025)

Based on Table 8. above, it can be synthesized that the total effect value is as follows:

- a. The total effect of the relationship between tourism image directly and indirectly has a significant effect on visiting decisions through customer experience with a T-statistics value (O/STDEV) of 4.173 with p-values of $0.000 < 0.05$.
- b. The total effect of the relationship between tourism trust directly and indirectly has a significant effect on visiting decisions through customer experience with a T-statistics value (O/STDEV) of 1.838 with p-values of $0.015 < 0.05$.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the results of the research discussion above, it can be concluded that:

- a. Tourism image directly has a significant effect on customer experience.
- b. Tourism image directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions.
- c. Tourism trust directly has a significant effect on customer experience.
- d. Tourism trust directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions.
- e. Customer experience directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions.
- f. Tourism image directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions through customer experience.
- g. Tourism trust directly has a significant effect on visiting decisions through customer experience.

Based on the above conclusions, the following suggestions can be made:

- a. Tangkahan, known as the "Hidden Paradise" in North Sumatra, has extraordinary natural tourist attractions. To improve the tourism image of Tangkahan, it is important to strengthen visual branding by authentically displaying its natural beauty through high-quality photos and videos. Images that highlight the clarity of the river, the green of the rainforest, and the interaction of tourists with elephants can attract more visitors. In addition, promotions through social media and digital platforms must highlight the unique and sustainable ecotourism experience. By consistently displaying the natural charm of Tangkahan, this destination can be increasingly recognized as an exotic eco-friendly tourist destination.

- b. To increase tourism trust in Tangkahan tourist attractions, synergy is needed between tourism managers, local communities, and tourists. Transparency in management, friendly service, and environmental sustainability are the main keys. Improved facilities, security, and authentic experience-based promotions can also strengthen tourist trust. In addition, education about conservation and active community involvement in maintaining the ecosystem will create a sense of security and comfort for visitors. With a commitment to sustainability and quality service, Tangkahan can become a trusted and sought-after destination for tourists, both local and international.
- c. To improve customer experience at Tangkahan tourist attractions, it is important to prioritize visitor comfort and satisfaction. This can be done by providing clean and well-maintained facilities, such as toilets, rest areas, and safe trekking paths. In addition, friendly and informative service from tour guides can improve the tourist experience. Providing attractive tour packages, such as interactions with elephants and ecotourism activities, can also increase the attraction. Managers should maintain the sustainability of nature so that the beauty of Tangkahan is maintained. With these improvements, tourists will have a memorable experience and want to return.
- d. The decision to visit Tangkahan tourist attraction should consider several main factors, such as accessibility, weather conditions, and available facilities. As an ecotourism destination, Tangkahan offers authentic nature experiences, including elephant interactions and jungle trekking. However, tourists need to ensure physical readiness, as some activities require good stamina. In addition, preserving the environment by complying with local regulations is very important to maintain the ecosystem. The best time to visit is during the dry season, when tourist routes are more accessible. With thorough preparation, a trip to Tangkahan can be a memorable and sustainable experience.

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