

Triggers For Destination Brand Loyalty Of Millennial Visitors To Natural Tourism Destinations

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Abstract: This research investigates triggers for destination brand loyalty of millennial visitors to natural tourism destinations. This research focuses on millennial visitors who have come to several natural tourist destinations in Southern Sumatra, with a sample of 110 visitors selected through purposive sampling. The survey output shows that eWoM has no notable effect on the image of a destination brand. However, the quality of the destination brand has a prominent clout on the image of a destination brand. Furthermore, the image of a destination brand significantly affects visitor engagement and loyalty. In addition, visitor engagement has a valuable clout on loyalty. Visitor engagement mediates between the image of a destination brand and a loyalty brand for nature tourism destinations. These findings provide precious insights for marketers of nature tourism destinations, offering alternative strategies to increase and maintain visitor loyalty.

Keywords: Brand Image; Brand Quality; eWoM; Loyalty; Tourist Engagement.

Abstrak: Riset ini menyelidiki pemicu loyalitas merek destinasi pengunjung milenial destinasi wisata alam. Penelitian ini berfokus pada pengunjung milenial yang telah datang ke beberapa destinasi wisata alam di Sumatera Bagian Selatan, dengan sampel 110 pengunjung yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling. Luaran dari survei menunjukkan bahwa eWoM tidak memiliki efek penting pada citra merek tujuan. Namun, kualitas merek destinasi memiliki pengaruh yang menonjol pada citra merek destinasi. Selain itu, citra merek destinasi secara signifikan mempengaruhi keterlibatan dan loyalitas pengunjung. Selain itu, keterlibatan pengunjung memiliki pengaruh penting pada loyalitas. Keterlibatan pengunjung berfungsi sebagai perantara antara citra merek destinasi dengan loyalitas merek destinasi wisata alam. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan berharga bagi pemasar destinasi wisata alam, menawarkan strategi alternatif untuk meningkatkan dan mempertahankan loyalitas pengunjung.

Kata Kunci: Citra Merek; Kualitas Merek; eWoM; Loyalitas; Keterlibatan Wisatawan.

INTRODUCTION

Long-term customer relationships can be built by creating a company's competitive advantage supported by brand loyalty (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019). Destination brand loyalty in the tourism context relates to tourists who wish to come back and are willing to provide recommendations of tourist destinations to other parties (Wang et al., 2017). In tourism activities, destination brand loyalty is increasingly recognized (Cossío-Silva et al., 2019). This activity allows tourism business actors to comprehend if tourists have attained their intended goals, such as return visits and recommendations to others (San Martín et al., 2019). Return visits and recommendations to others directly impact increasing income,



which supports the economic sustainability of nature tourism destinations (Quoquab et al., 2021). Although there has been a lot of research on nature tourism in recent decades, there is no comprehensive conception of the elements that keep tourists' loyalty to nature tourism destinations. The results of previous studies have revealed that in different contexts, several factors are foremost predictors of destination brand loyalty. These factors include the quality of the trip, perceived value, perceived quality, transfer costs, destination image, and motivation (Zhang et al., 2020). This output suits (Espinoza et al., 2018) and (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019) experiments.

Electronic word-of-mouth and destination images are inextricably linked in the evolving digital age (Setiawan et al., 2021). In the context of tourism and destination promotion, word-of-mouth messages are one of the most effective ways to influence tourists' perception and interest in a place (Wang et al., 2017). Word-of-mouth has dramatically transformed in this increasingly connected digital era (Siang et al., 2020). In the past, information about tourist destinations was spread through face-to-face chat or telephone, but now, these messages are often spread electronically (Hussain et al., 2017). Social media, travel platforms, and communication apps have allowed travellers to quickly share their experiences with thousands of people worldwide (Rosario et al., 2019). In the context of destination promotion, electronic word-of-mouth messages are compelling in shaping the destination's Image (Prayogo, 2021). When someone visit a place and feel the beauty, cultural diversity, or uniqueness of the destination, they are likelier to share the experience on social media or via text message with their friends and family (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). When many people speak positively about a destination, that positive image can attract potential travellers (Simon & Tossan, 2018). They can encourage visitors to share their positive experiences through social media campaigns, valuable content, or even incentives for positive reviews (Saini & Arasanmi, 2021). In this way, destinations can contribute to forming their positive image and benefit from the power of electronic communication, which has become integral to sharing experiences and recommending places to visit (Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017).

The quality of the destination is a significant factor that shapes and influences the destination's Image (Stylidis, 2022). When a destination is high quality, visitors will feel a positive experience, feel the beauty of nature, enjoy good service, and feel safe and comfortable. These positive experiences will create a good impression on visitors, and they are more likely to share their positive experiences with others (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019). Visitors who are satisfied with the quality of a destination are also more likely to leave positive reviews on various platforms, such as travel websites and social media (Rosario et al., 2019). This will positively affect the image of the destination because others will see the destination as an exciting place worth visiting (Leckie et al., 2018).

Conversely, if the quality of the destination is low, visitors may have a negative experience. They may be dissatisfied with the services or facilities available, and this can result in negative reviews that adversely affect the image of the destination (Wang et al., 2017). Imagery can have a negative impact on potential tourists and impact the local tourism industry. Therefore, tourist destinations need to maintain and improve their quality. By doing this, they can positively influence the image of their destination and attract more tourists to visit the place (Stylidis et al., 2022). High-quality destinations and a positive image of destinations are the keys to attracting tourists and encouraging regional economic growth (Azinuddin et al., 2022).



Destination image refers to tourists' perceptions and impressions of a place (Lu et al., 2023). Destination image is often the main factor influencing tourists' decisions to choose and visit a place (Muhoho-Minni & Lubbe, 2017). When tourists positively perceive a destination, they tend to be more interested in exploring it (Stylidis et al., 2017). A strong image of natural beauty, cultural heritage, security, and tourism facilities can attract tourists (García-Milon et al., 2020). Tourist engagement reflects the interaction and emotional or cognitive investment tourists have in the destination (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019). Tourist engagement often arises when they search for information about the destination they want to visit. They may read online reviews, look at photos, and follow other people's travel stories on social media (Kang, 2018). This engagement is closely related to how the destination image is formed and maintained through various information sources (Ji et al., 2017). When tourists arrive at a destination, their level of engagement can vary depending on their experiences. Activities such as interacting with residents, exploring tourist attractions, trying local food, or participating in local culture can increase their engagement. Destination marketing also plays a vital role in influencing destination image and tourist engagement (Ibrahim et al., 2017). An effective marketing campaign can create a desired image and attract tourists who match that Image (Kumar & Kaushik, 2017). Good marketing can also promote experiences and activities that can increase tourist engagement during their visit (Muhoho-Minni & Lubbe, 2017). A strong destination image can attract tourist interest, shaping tourist engagement during their trip.

Brand engagement involves consumers voluntarily sacrificing sources, such as money, time, and strength, to preserve a brand image, join the brand society, and support divergent matters connected to the brand (Kumar & Nayak, 2019). Brand engagement describes a psychological state highly dependent on context, in which customers sacrifice emotional, behavioural, and cognitive activities in interactions with certain brands (Hollebeek et al., 2019). Individual engagement in a brand can be motivated and triggered by the image of the brand (Espinosa et al., 2018). (Parihar & Dawra, 2020) declare that a loyal customer base can be built by companies through brand management by increasing customer engagement in the brand emotionally. (Junaid et al., 2019) revealed increased brand loyalty driven by rational and emotional ties between customers and brands, translating into brand engagement. (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019) state that until now, only some empirical studies have focused on specific contexts related to the interaction between brand engagement and loyalty.

In previous research, it has been studied that women and the quality of destination brands have a clout on the image of destination brands and will affect tourist engagement and destination brand loyalty. Quality of destination and eWoM are prominent factors influencing tourist intentions to come to a destination and loyalty to destination brands (Setiawan et al., 2021). However, the connection between destination quality, eWoM, and the image of the destination brand needs to be examined further. The information from various sources received by potential visitors can build the image of a destination even though they have never visited it. (Wang et al., 2017) describe that tourists will utilize the Internet and social media to get detailed information about the tourist destinations they will visit. In this context, eWoM is essential because it significantly influences perceptions of tourist accommodation quality and destination quality.

Theoretical models regarding brand engagement as mediation still need to be fully defined in the literature related to nature tourism management. Several previous



investigations have found a notable connection between the brand's image and engagement and between the brand's engagement and loyalty to the brand. Nevertheless, until now, research exploring the role of tourist engagement as a mediation between the image of destination brand and destination brand loyalty still needs to be completed. In this context, the research aims to verify the clout of women and the quality of the destination brand in terms of the image of the destination brand. The second objective is to examine the interaction between brand image and brand engagement and the interrelation between brand engagement and brand loyalty in nature tourism. Furthermore, the study will examine the effect of tourist engagement as mediation in intercourse between the image of the destination brand and destination brand loyalty.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Electronic Word of Mouth. Originally in face-to-face conversations between individuals, word-of-mouth messaging has now moved into the electronic realm (Hussain et al., 2017). As communications technology advances, messages previously shared via face-to-face or telephone conversations are now more frequently shared via text messages, emails, social media, and other digital communications platforms (Donthu et al., 2021). Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) is an essential phenomenon in the digital era that has changed the way we communicate, share information, and make purchasing decisions (Wang et al., 2017). It reflects how individuals communicate experiences, opinions, or reviews about a product, service, brand, or experience electronically, primarily through social media, online review platforms, or online communities (Siang et al., 2020). Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn are the leading platforms for e-WOM, and users can easily express their views about the product, brand or service (Kumar & Kaushik, 2017). Posting, commenting, liking and sharing content allows these messages to spread quickly and reach a broad audience (Rosario et al., 2019). Consumers look for reviews and recommendations online before purchasing (Zhang et al., 2017). Reviews from fellow consumers they meet online can provide valuable insight and influence their purchasing decisions (Mishra et al., 2018). Positive reviews can enhance a brand's image, while negative reviews can damage a reputation. Brands that monitor e-WOM well can respond quickly to consumer feedback and improve their brand image (Prayogo, 2021). The main advantage of e-WOM is access to more information and diverse views from fellow consumers, and it helps consumers make more informed and more intelligent decisions (Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017). However, the benefits include directly interacting with customers, obtaining real-time feedback, and building stronger relationships with the audience (Fu et al., 2017). Individual positive messages addressed to relatives or colleagues related to positive experiences in tourist destinations will spur individual intentions to revisit these destinations in the future (Wang et al., 2017).

Destination Brand Quality. Destination brand quality is a crucial aspect of the tourism industry related to how a destination positions itself in the eyes of tourists and influences their perceptions (Kim et al., 2018). Destination brand quality reflects a tourist destination's identity, character, and values (Ampountolas, 2018). A destination brand encompasses the destination's entire experience; it includes elements such as cultural heritage, nature, attractions, culinary delights, services, infrastructure, and even interactions with residents. A destination with strong brand quality has a unique and



alluring appeal (Mukherjee et al., 2018). Destinations with a good reputation for hospitality and quality service will be more attractive to tourists (Miličević et al., 2017). Quality destination brands also have high credibility and create a satisfying experience for visitors (Moon & Han, 2019). This positive experience encourages visitors to leave positive reviews and recommend the destination to others (Wang et al., 2017). Visitors will take home positive memories and stories about their experiences at the destination (Dedeoğlu, 2019). Destination brand quality also includes support from residents who are friendly and proud of their destination and can contribute positively to the destination's brand image (Gan & Wang, 2017). The quality of a destination brand is essential not only to attract tourists but also to support local economic growth, cultural preservation, and sustainability. Destinations that succeed in building strong brands will become destinations of choice for tourists, help create jobs, and provide significant economic benefits to local communities (Jeong & Kim, 2020). In the era of social media and digital connectivity, a destination brand's reputation can quickly change. Therefore, effective marketing planning and brand management is crucial in maintaining and improving the quality of a destination brand (Wang et al., 2017).

Destination Brand Image. Destination brand image reflects how a place is identified and known by tourists and the general public (Akgün et al., 2020). This includes perceptions, reputation, and values associated with the destination (Stylos et al., 2017). Each tourism destination has its unique identity, and the destination brand image is essential in communicating that identity to the world (Espinosa et al., 2018). A destination's brand image is strongly influenced by tourist perceptions (Muhoho-Minni & Lubbe, 2017). It includes what tourists expect from a destination and how their experience matches those expectations. A destination's image can be positive if visitors are satisfied with what they encounter or negative if their expectations are unmet (Chaulagain et al., 2019). A destination's reputation is an integral part of its brand image. Destinations with a good reputation for natural beauty, rich culture, quality service, and unforgettable experiences tend to have a positive brand image (Dedeoglu et al., 2019). This reputation is built through traveller reviews, media coverage, and personal experiences. A destination's brand image also reflects the values held by that destination (Lee & Xue, 2020). These values can be environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, friendliness, or other values that the destination considers necessary (Zheng et al., 2019). Travellers are often attracted to destinations with values that align with their own (Woosnam et al., 2020). How visitors feel during their visit directly impacts a destination's brand image (Cham et al., 2021). Destinations that provide satisfying and unforgettable experiences will improve their brand image in visitors' eyes (Sharma & Nayak, 2018). A destination's brand image also includes how the destination is different from others. In global competition in the tourism industry, differentiation is the key to standing out, and destinations must be able to show what makes them unique (Yachin, 2018).

Tourist engagement. Engagement has become a significant research focus in various subjects, such as customer behaviour, service marketing, psychology, and organizational behaviour (Kumar & Nayak, 2019). Consumer engagement is one of the central concepts in marketing that has become a significant focus for researchers and business practitioners (Ahn & Back, 2018). Consumer engagement refers to the level of participation, attention, and emotional or cognitive investment a consumer has in a product, brand, or purchasing experience (So & Li, 2020). This spans a wide range of



levels, from low engagement, where consumers don't care much about a product, to high engagement, where consumers actively seek out information, interact with the brand, and emotionally commit to it (Zhang et al., 2021). The amount and type of information influence consumer engagement they obtain about a product or service (Song et al., 2020). The more complex the product, the higher the level of engagement required. The level of consumer engagement can influence the purchasing decision-making process (Fehrer et al., 2018). High engagement tends to result in more rational and informed decisions. High engagement can create strong brand loyalty (Fang et al., (2017). Consumers who feel involved with a brand tend to be more loyal and repeatedly buy products or services from that brand (Ingram et al., 2017). Engaged consumers are likelier to leave positive reviews and recommend products or services to others (Hinson et al., 2019). This can help brands expand their customer base. In the digital era, consumer engagement on social media, forums, and other online platforms has also become very important (Chen et al., 2021). Actively engaged consumers can influence public opinion about a brand. Many companies are adopting marketing strategies focusing on interaction, customer experience, and community engagement to increase consumer engagement (Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2019). This can include story-based marketing campaigns, customer loyalty programs, active social media interactions, and providing unique customer experiences (Shee et al., 2020).

Destination brand loyalty. Destination brand loyalty is an interesting phenomenon in the tourism industry and refers to the level of trust, commitment, and loyalty that tourists have towards a particular destination (Cossío-Silva et al., 2019). Like product brands, destinations also have brands that reflect their identity. Destination brand loyalty usually comes from the destination's unique image and identity (Akgün et al., 2020). The destination's unique image includes natural beauty, culture, historical heritage, culinary delights, and unique experiences (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018). Positive experiences during tourists' visits can strengthen their loyalty to the destination, including exemplary service, friendliness of local people, and safety (Lv et al., 2020). The emotional connection between tourists and the destination often drives destination brand loyalty. It can relate to happy memories or meaningful moments that tourists experience during their visit (Kim et al., 2018). Destinations with loyal customers attract more repeat tourist visits (Ribeiro et al., 2018). Destination brand loyalty can create a positive cycle where tourists return and even recommend the destination to others (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019). Tourists visiting a destination regularly will spend more money in the area, including accommodation, food, and shopping. Destinations with loyal customers tend to invest more in preserving their culture and environment (Su et al., 2017). Destination brand loyalty can motivate efforts to maintain cultural authenticity and natural ecosystems. It is important for destinations to manage their brand image well through appropriate marketing and positive experiences for visitors (Dedeoğlu, 2019). High-quality service can increase tourists' positive impressions and strengthen loyalty (Woosnam et al., 2020).

eWoM, Destination Brand Quality, and Destination Brand Image. e-WoM influences and strengthens tourists' perceptions and image of a destination (Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017). Electronic word of mouth, primarily through social media, online review platforms and travel blogs, has become one of the main influences on travel decisions (Siang et al., 2020). (Setiawan et al., 2021) revealed that the decision of visitors to come and visit destinations is triggered by eWoM, the quality of the destination brand, and the image of the destination brand. Users sharing positive photos, stories, or recommendations



about a destination can strengthen the destination's positive brand image (Williams et al., 2020). Modern travellers tend to seek out and trust reviews, recommendations and personal experiences shared by fellow travellers online (Rosario et al., 2019). Positive reviews and recommendations from tourists who have visited a destination can help form a positive image of that destination (Zhang et al., 2017). Social media allows users to share photos, videos, and travel stories featuring destinations, and it helps potential tourists feel and visualise their experiences, which influences the destination's Image (Chaulagain et al., 2019). Tourism destinations and marketers must actively manage and respond to e-WOM, including maintaining and improving their online reputation, responding well to reviews, and interacting positively with the online traveller community (Song et al., 2020). Electronic word of mouth is central to shaping a destination's brand image in the digital era (Cham et al., 2021). A positive destination image formed through e-WOM can powerfully attract tourists and build loyalty (Prayogo, 2021). Therefore, tourism destinations and marketers must understand the impact of e-WOM, design effective marketing strategies, and interact with tourists online to ensure that the messages conveyed align with the desired Image (Kumar & Kaushik, 2017). Referred to the theoretical espouse and scientific proof, the hypothesis is proposed:

H1: eWoM clout on the image of natural tourism destination brand.

Destination brand quality reflects the destination's unique attributes and characteristics, including natural beauty, cultural heritage, services, infrastructure, and experiences (Kladou et al., 2017). Destination brand quality is essential in forming a destination brand image (Kumar et al., 2020). Destination brand image is the perception or impression tourists have about the destination, including views about the destination, whether seen as attractive, safe, tourist-friendly, or unique (Stylidis et al., 2017). A destination's brand image results from various factors, including travellers' experiences, reviews, recommendations, and the information they receive (Lee & Xue, 2020). The quality of the destination's physical and non-physical facilities will shape tourist perceptions regarding the quality of the destination brand (Dedeoglu et al., 2019). (Wang et al., 2017) explain that destination brand quality is a tourist's sight of the whole quality of a tourist destination in intercourse with appropriate preference. Miličević et al. (2017) show that increasing the competitiveness of sustainable tourist destinations will increase the brand value of these destinations.

Conversely, a poor tourist visit experience appurtenant with shoddy products and services of a destination, such as disreputable accommodation, roads, and transportation amenities, can invent a nasty destination brand image (Quoquab et al., 2021). The brand's image comes through the utilization of the tourist experience, while the perceived quality of the destination results from this consumption experience. Therefore, tourists' perceptions of the quality of the destination brand affect the image of the destination brand (Jeong & Kim, 2020). Based on the theoretical espouse and scientific proof, the hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Quality of destination brand clout toward the image of natural tourism destination brand.



Destination brand image, tourist engagement, and destination brand loyalty. (Lu et al., 2023) advocated that brand image involves the feelings and thoughts of consumers. The destination brand aims to create memorable experiences for visitors associated with the destination itself (Chaulagain et al., 2019). It also aims to gather and amplify pleasurable and remarkable visitor experiences (Mukherjee et al., 2018). Therefore, it's presumed the positive image of the destination brand will affect the psychological engagement of tourists toward the destination (Lv et al., 2020). Many attempts have been made to address the link between destination image and loyalty (Li et al., 2018). Studies related to consumer engagement show differing opinions regarding the factors that can predict the engagement of customers (Fang et al., 2017). Tourist engagement is the interaction, participation, and emotional or cognitive investment tourists have in destinations (Chen & Rahman, 2018). This includes exploring places, interacting with residents, trying typical foods, and participating in the destination's culture and tourism activities (Song et al., 2020). Strong engagement often results in a more positive experience for travellers. Tourists who feel actively involved in a destination tend to have more immersive and memorable experiences (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019). Engagement also creates an emotional bond between tourists and destinations. These could be fond memories, connections with local people, or valuable cultural experiences. When tourists feel emotionally connected to a destination, they tend to be more loyal (Dedeoğlu, 2019). Destination brand loyalty refers to the level of image of the destination, trust, commitment and loyalty that tourists have towards that destination (Jeong & Kim, 2020). This includes tourists' repeated desire to return to the same destination and positive recommendations to others (Quoquab et al., 2021). Previous research has linked chiefly destination brand image and value, evaluation after the trip, visitor behaviour coming times, and brand loyalty (Cossío-Silva et al., 2019). Based on the theoretical espouse and scientific proof, the hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Destination brand image affects tourist engagement.

H4: Image of destination brand clout on brand loyalty of natural tourism destinations.

(Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019) Revealed that the more intimate the engagement of tourists in nature tourism activities, the more psychologically tourists feel better about these natural destinations. Tourist engagement is essential in the behaviour model because it influences the environment in charge of actions (Kumar & Kaushik, 2017). (Rather et al., 2019) claimed that cognitive aspects can boost brand loyalty and that the desire of tourists to visit again becomes part of tourist engagement from a psychological perspective. The positive attitude of tourists to be involved in a destination will encourage tourists to visit again in the future and tend to have high loyalty to the destination (Setiawan et al., 2021). Strong tourist engagement is often critical to creating destination brand loyalty (Kumar et al., 2020). Strong engagement is often a key driver of destination brand loyalty (Huang & Choi, 2019). The psychological engagement of tourists in this process can contribute to destination brand loyalty (Rather et al., 2019). Therefore, destinations must strive to create engaging, immersive and positive experiences for tourists to feel emotionally connected to the destination and become loyal customers who return to visit and recommend the destination to others (Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2018). Destinations



can also increase visitor engagement through social media, story-based marketing campaigns, and participation in local events or festivals (Chen et al., 2020). Based on the theoretical espouse and scientific proof, the hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Tourist engagement affects brand loyalty to natural tourism destinations.

Return of visits, recommendations, and loyalty are indispensable for tourism businesses and services to ensure business continuity by involving tourists psychologically (Parihar & Dawra, 2020). In addition, tourist attitudes are also a determining factor that impacts destination image (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2020). Therefore, the mediation mechanism of tourist engagement is expected to reveal the relationship between the variables that make up tourist loyalty (Setiawan et al., 2021). The loyalty model's cognitive, affective, and conative components theoretically support this mediating effect (Cham et al., 2021). The brand image of natural tourism destinations is supposed to have a definite clout on tourist engagement and be able to trigger destination brand loyalty (Lv et al., 2020). However, this interaction has yet to be thoroughly studied in tourism marketing studies (Huwae et al., 2020). Based on the theoretical espouse and scientific proof, the hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Tourist engagement mediates the relationship between destination brand image and brand loyalty to natural tourism destinations.

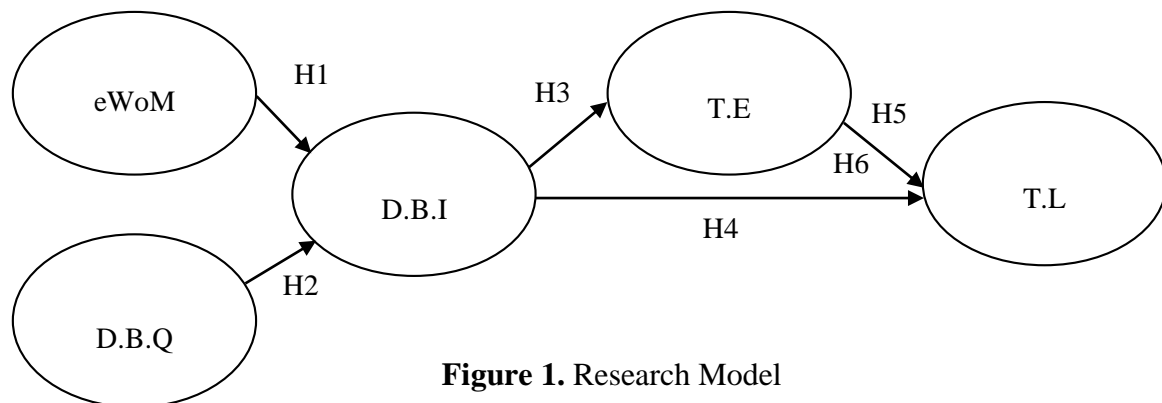


Figure 1. Research Model

METHODS

Measures. An online survey was based on a list of questions prepared using Google Forms and shared via WhatsApp. eWoM variable employed by (Quoquab et al., 2021) and assessed utilizes six items. Destination brand quality was employed by (Quoquab et al., 2020); (Wang et al., 2017) and measured using four items. (Quoquab et al., 2021) and (Jeong & Kim, 2020) employed the Destination brand image and measured using four items. Tourist engagement was employed by (Fang et al., 2017) and measured using four items. Meanwhile, destination brand loyalty was employed by (Quoquab et al., 2021) and



(Jeong & Kim, 2020) and assessed with four items. A Likert scale with 5 points was used with a span of 1 up to 5 to rate each item.

Table 1. Variable, item, and indicators

Variable	Item	Indicators
eWofM	6	Read other tourists' online reviews to determine which natural destinations make an excellent impression. Read other tourists' online reviews and ensure you'll visit the right natural attractions destination. Review other tourist online posts to help choose the right natural destination. Gather information from other tourists' online reviews before visiting a natural destination. I read traveller reviews online before I visit a natural destination to worry about visiting decisions. Online reviews of other travellers make you confident about booking a destination.
Destination brand quality	4	This natural tourist destination provides consistent tourist offerings. This natural tourist destination provides a quality experience You can expect superior performance from this natural tourist destination This natural tourist destination has a better performance than other destinations
Destination brand image	4	Natural tourist destinations in South Sumatra match my personality Friends will appreciate it if I visit natural tourist destinations in South Sumatra The image of natural tourist destinations in South Sumatra is in line with my image Visiting natural tourist destinations in South Sumatra reflects who I am
Visitor engagement	4	I feel energetic and energetic when visiting natural tourist destinations in South Sumatra I am enthusiastic about natural tourist destinations in South Sumatra Visiting natural tourist destinations in South Sumatra is exciting
Visitor Loyalty	4	I will share online content with other visitors on social media about nature tourism in South Sumatra I intend to visit natural tourism destinations in South Sumatra in the future Natural tourist destinations will be my primary choice for a vacation in South Sumatra Even if visiting other destinations is cheaper, I prefer to visit natural tourist destinations I would recommend others to visit natural tourist destinations in South Sumatra

Source: processed data (2023)

Sample and Procedure. The study population consisted of millennial travellers who had visited natural tourist destinations in South Sumatra at least twice. (Hair et al., 2019) recommend using a 5:1 ratio in calculating sample size, where each indicator variable must



have five responses. This survey has 22 items, and the sample size required is $22 \times 5 = 110$ respondents. Therefore, a sample size of 110 respondents is sufficient to analyse the data. The purposive sampling method was used to determine the research sample. Structural equation analysis with the SEM approach was applied to appraise the validity and reliability of the questionnaire (Hair et al., 2019). Construct reliability is declared fulfilled if Cronbach's α value is above 0.600, and every construct's C.R (comp. reliability) value must comply with the standard, indicating good reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Convergent validity is declared fulfilled if each indicator value is above 0.700 and each construct is above 0.500 for the AVE value, indicating that every construct has convergent validity that meets the requirements (Hair et al., 2019).

RESULTS

The overall description of the respondents can be seen in **Table 2**. Based on gender, 19.100 per cent of the respondents are male and 80.900 per cent of the respondents are female, and it can be revealed that most of the respondents are women, followed by male respondents. This shows that female visitors prefer natural attractions with a pleasant and refreshing atmosphere. As many as 5.500 per cent of respondents are over 21 years old, while 94.500 per cent are between 17 and 21 years old. Based on the age of respondents, it can be revealed that most of the natural tourism visitors in this study were aged 17 to 21 years. Respondents over the age of 21 followed this. This shows that most natural tourism visitors are the younger generation who still have the spirit and physical strength to explore nature.

Regarding the intensity of visits to natural tourism destinations, 15.5 per cent of respondents visited these destinations two times, 29.100 per cent of respondents visited these destinations 3 to 4 times, and 55.500 per cent of respondents visited these destinations more than four times. Based on the intensity of visits to natural tourism, respondents who have visited more than four times are the largest in this study, followed by the number of visitor visits as much as 3-4 times. This explains that most visitors are interested in the atmosphere and diversity of exciting and unique natural features in natural tourist destinations.

Table 2. Respondents' Characteristics (n of 110)

Respondent profile	Quantity	Percentage
Gender		
Male	21	19.100
Female	89	80.900
Age		
Under 17 year	0	0
17 to 21 year	104	94.500
Above 21 year	6	5.500
Visiting intensity		
Two time	17	15.500
3 to 4 time	32	29.100
more than four time	61	55.500
Natural tourist destinations		
Destinations in Palembang	56	50.900
Destinations in Pagar Alam	33	30



Destinations in OKU and South of OKU	9	8.200
Destinations in Lahat	7	6.400
Destinations in Muara Enim	3	2.700
destinations in Musi Rawas and Lubuk Linggau	2	1.800

Source: processed data (2023)

The distribution of respondents' visits to natural tourist destinations is as follows: 50.900 per cent of respondents visited natural tourist destinations in Palembang, 30 per cent of respondents visited natural tourist destinations in Pagar Alam, 8.200 per cent of respondents visited natural tourist destinations in OKU and South of OKU, 6.400 per cent of respondents visited natural tourist destinations in Lahat, 2.700 per cent of respondents visited natural tourist destinations in Muara Enim, and 1.800 per cent of respondents visited natural tourist destinations in Musi Rawas and Lubuk Linggau. Based on the most visited natural tourism destinations, it can be explained that most respondents have visited destinations in Palembang, followed by natural tourism destinations in Pagaralam. This is because Palembang and Pagaralam have more natural attractions that visitors can easily explore.

Table 3. Test Of Reliability And Validity Of Constructs

Constructs	Item	Loading	α	CR	AVE
eWofM			0.779	0.952	0.598
	eWofM1	0.740			
	eWofM2	0.740			
	eWofM3	0.786			
	eWofM4	0.740			
	eWofM5	0.793			
Destination brand quality	eWofM6	0.748	0.797	0.834	0.557
	D.B.Q1	0.771			
	D.B.Q2	0.773			
	D.B.Q3	0.773			
Destination brand image	D.B.Q4	0.787	0.815	0.861	0.610
	D.B.I1	0.815			
Visitor engagement	D.B.I2	0.793	0.828	0.873	0.636
	D.B.I3	0.861			
	D.B.I4	0.835			
	V.E.1	0.839			
Visitor Loyalty	V.E.2	0.850	0.702	0.846	0.580
	V.E.3	0.856			
	V.E.4	0.716			
	V.L1	0.733			
	V.L2	0.859			
	V.L3	0.750			
	V.L4	0.765			

Source: processed data (2023)

Table 3 revealed that the measurement model analysis was conducted to evaluate if the theoretical construct could be measured precisely through observable variables.



Classifying the nature of the concept as formative or reflective will determine the type of analysis required (Hair et al., 2019). The reliability assessment using Cronbach's alpha values shows that these values exceed the minimum threshold set at 0.700, and the C.R. of every construct also exceeds 0.700 (Hair et al., 2019). This indicates that the model validates consistency internally. The calculation outcome of AVE bolsters the convergent validity of constructs because every construct value transcends the minimum verge of 0.50. In testing the reliability and consistency of constructs and items, the loading factor of research items for eWoM the α value is 0.779, CR is 0.952, and AVE is 0.598, with a five-item loading factor value ranging from 0.740 to 0.793. Destination brand quality, α value is 0.797, CR is 0.834, and AVE is 0.557, with a four-item loading factor value ranging from 0.771 to 0.787. For destination brand image, the value of α is 0.815, CR is 0.861, and AVE is 0.610, with a four-item loading factor value ranging from 0.793 to 0.861. Visitor engagement, the value of α is 0.828, CR is 0.873, and AVE is 0.636, with a four-item loading factor value ranging from 0.716 to 0.856. For visitor loyalty, the α value is 0.702, CR is 0.846, and AVE is 0.580, with a four-item loading factor value ranging from 0.733 to 0.859.

The CFA model was utilized to examine the interrelation between all the variables studied in this study. The outcome of the model test shows that the tested pattern is consistent with the collected data. This is indicated by the values χ^2/df of 1.074, GFI of 0.879, RFI of 0.926, IFI of 0.989, TLI of 0.984, CFI of 0.988, and RMSEA of 0.026. Every fit index for this research model meets the guidelines from Hair et al. (2019).

Table 4. Result of Path Analysis

Analysis of Path	Path Coeff	Clarification
word of Mouth → Destination Brand Image	0.615	Positive
Destination Brand Quality → Destination Brand Image	0.683	Positive
Destination Brand Image → Visitor Engagement	0.784	Positive
Destination Brand Image → Visitor Loyalty	0.666	Positive
Visitor Engagement → Visitor Loyalty	0.603	Positive

Source: processed data (2023)

Table 4 reveals that eWoM and destination brand quality positively impact destination brand image with path coefficient values of 0.615 and 0.683. Referring to the analysis results, the quality of the destination brand has the highest impact on the brand image of the destination, with a value of 0.683. The destination's brand image positively impacts visitor engagement, with a path coefficient of 0.784. The destination's brand image positively impacts visitor loyalty, with a path coefficient of 0.666. Then, visitor engagement has a positive impact on visitor loyalty with a path coefficient value of 0.603.

Then, a statistical t-value with a 95 per cent confidence level standard is used as a measurement guideline for the hypothesis test. (Hair et al., 2019) revealed that the study hypothesis will be accepted if the statistical t-value is less than 1.96, the p-value is less than 0.050, and vice versa if the statistical t-value is smaller than 1.960, and the p-value is greater than 0.050. The description related to the hypothesis test results will be clarified in **Table 5**.



Table 5. t-statistics and p-value results

Analysis of Path	t-statistic	p-value	Clarification
word of Mouth → Destination Brand Image	1,895	0,058	Not significance
Destination Brand Quality → Destination Brand Image	4,448	0,000	Significance
Destination Brand Image → Visitor Engagement	6,083	0,000	Significance
Destination Brand Image → Visitor Loyalty	4,564	0,031	Significance
Visitor Engagement → Visitor Loyalty	4,222	0,000	Significance

Source: processed data (2023)

Furthermore, the structural model estimation results show several findings. First, eWoM has no significant clout on destination brand image (H_1 : β is 0.615; t statistic is 1.895; p-value is 0.058). eWoM does not directly affect the image of the destination brand. Second, destination brand quality significantly impacts destination brand image (H_2 : β is 0.683; t statistic 4.448; p of 0.000). This indicates that the destination brand's quality positively impacts visitor perceptions of the destination brand image. Third, destination brand image has a notable effect on visitor engagement (H_3 : β is 0.784; t statistic is 6.083; p-value is 0.000). A good destination brand image will increase visitor engagement. Fourth, destination brand image has a prominent clout on brand loyalty to natural tourism destinations (H_4 : β is 0.666; t statistic is 0.064; p-value is 0.031). A positive destination brand image will increase visitor loyalty to these natural tourist destinations. Fifth, visitor engagement has a noteworthy effect on brand loyalty of natural tourism destinations (H_5 : β is 0.603; t statistic is 4.222; p-value is 0.000). The higher the level of visitor engagement, the higher their loyalty to the nature tourism destination brand. Overall, this survey offers a knowledge of the factors that affect destination brand image and visitor loyalty. The proceeds show the importance of the quality of the destination brand, the image of the destination brand, and visitor engagement in building visitor loyalty to natural tourism destinations.

Table 6. Hypothesis assessment results

Hypothesis	Clarification
H ₁ . eWoM clout on the image of natural tourism destination brand	Not supported
H ₂ . Quality of destination brand clout toward the image of natural tourism destinations brand	Supported
H ₃ . Destination brand image affects tourist engagement	Supported
H ₄ . Image of destination brand clout on brand loyalty of natural tourism destinations	Supported
H ₅ . Tourist engagement mediates the relationship between destination brand image and brand loyalty to natural tourism destinations	Supported

Source: processed data (2023)

Based on the results of the hypothesis in **Table 6**, it can be explained that hypothesis testing 1, which reveals that eWoM clout on the image of natural tourism destination brand, is not proven and does not support it. Hypothesis 2 states that the Quality of destination brand clout toward the image of natural tourism destinations brand is proven and supportive. Hypothesis 3, which describes how destination brand image affects tourist



engagement, is proven and supportive. Hypothesis 4 explains that the image of destination brand clout on brand loyalty of natural tourism destinations is proven and supportive. Hypothesis 5, which reveals that tourist engagement mediates the relationship between destination brand image and brand loyalty to natural tourism destinations, is proven and supportive.

The test of the Sobel result in **Table 7** reveals that visitor engagement can significantly mediate the destination brand image and visitor loyalty (H_6). The outcome can be seen from the probability value below 0.050, both in one-way probability (0.002) and two-way probability (0.005), as well as Sobel's statistical value of 2.749.

Table 7. Results of the Sobel mediation test

Hypothesis	Sobel Test Statistics	p-value prob (one-tailed)	p-value prob (two-tailed)	Clarification
H_6 . D.B.I \rightarrow V.E \rightarrow V.L	2.749	0.0029	0.0059	Significance

Source: processed data (2023)

DISCUSSION

This study concluded that eWoM does not strongly predict destination brand image (H_1). This finding is disparate from the previous study arranged by (Setiawan et al., 2021), (Quoquab et al., 2021), (Choirisa et al., 2021), (Prayogo, 2021); (Martini et al., 2022): (Siang et al., 2020) which shows a positive interaction between eWoM and destination image. eWoM refers to electronic communications between individuals via online platforms, such as user reviews, recommendations, and comments about a destination. eWoM can influence visitors' perceptions of a tourist attraction's reputation, quality, and attractiveness through the reviews and recommendations they receive from other users. Although eWoM is generally regarded as an essential factor in shaping destination brand image, the study's results indicate that eWoM weakly predicts destination brand image. However, the output of this study advocates that eWoM needs more clout in the image of the destination brand. Online reviews shared by other visitors about natural tourist destinations have yet to maximally give an excellent impression to visitors. In addition, visitors still need to be confident and able to take advantage of online reviews that other visitors have shared to be a reference when choosing and deciding on natural attractions. Other factors, such as the direct experience of visitors and the marketing efforts made by the destination manager, may have a dominant task in shaping the image of the destination brand. The output stipulates that eWoM cannot be considered a powerful portend image of the destination brand.

Destination brand quality was a vigorous predictor of destination brand image (H_2). The results of this survey support the research of (Jeong & Kim, 2020), (Quoquab et al., 2021), and (Kumar et al., 2020), which found the quality of the destination brand interacts strongly with the destination brand image. Suppose that tourists can observe positive aspects of the quality of amenities and other support at the destination. In that case, they are more likely to form favourable views and expand positive feelings about the destination. They tend to be eager to visit these destinations. Tourists' perceptions about the quality of amenities and other support of a destination have a prominent effect on their attitude and desire to visit the destination. When tourists see that the provided facilities



meet or exceed their expectations, they are satisfied. Good facilities such as comfortable accommodation, reliable transportation, and other supporting facilities can offer a pleasant experience for tourists. In addition, the non-physical aspects of destinations also play an essential role in shaping tourist perceptions. These aspects include cleanliness, friendliness of the local population, safety, natural beauty, culture, and the general atmosphere at the destination. Tourists who feel the warmth and friendliness of the local community, the enchanting natural beauty, and the pleasant atmosphere at the destination tend to have positive thoughts and feelings towards the destination. Natural tourist destinations visited by visitors consistently provide quality tourist offerings, providing the best tourist experience with various attractions available. In addition, the natural destinations visited can show better performance with various adequate supporting facilities, which improves the image of natural tourism.

This survey found that destination brand image strongly relates to visitor engagement in choosing natural tourism destinations (H₃). This finding is in line with the research of (Quoquab et al., 2021), (Setiawan et al., 2021), (Kim & Barber, 2022), (Dedeoglu et al., 2019), (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2020) show a notable connection between image of destination brand and visitor engagement. Destination brand image relates to visitors' perceptions of specific natural tourism destinations' reputation, identity, and image. Visitors with a positive view of the image destination brand tend to be engaged and interested in visiting the destination. These findings demonstrate the preeminence of building and preserving a positive destination brand image in the scene of nature tourism. Destinations that have successfully acquired a strong brand image will appeal more to potential visitors. The image of natural tourism destinations brand in the minds of millennial visitors can encourage millennial visitors to be actively involved in sharing experiences and stories about beach tourism destinations with other parties. This is possible because the image of natural tourism destinations brand matches the characteristics of the millennial generation, so millennial visitors are encouraged to share content and stories about natural tourism destinations. Based on visitor assessments, natural tourist destinations have been based on the personality of visitors who can provide freedom, pleasure, and comfort. In addition, the image of natural tourist destinations is based on the self-image of visitors who highlight the beauty, uniqueness, and ease of enjoying nature and will be able to encourage visitors to actively participate in maintaining the preservation of nature.

The findings from this survey explicate that destination brand image has a notable function in predicting visitor loyalty to natural tourism destinations (H₄). This finding is to the results of a previous study by (Stylidis & Cherifi, 2018), (Huwae et al., 2020), (Setiawan et al., 2021), (Stylidis et al., 2022), which has empirically proven the association between destination image and the intentions and behaviour of loyal visitors. In this study, the image of a destination brand is related to visitors' perceptions of reputation, identity, and image associated with specific natural tourism destinations. The positive image of the destination brand in the minds of visitors will trigger visitor loyalty to the destination. A positive destination brand image will impact visitors' intentions to remain loyal and return to that destination. The survey results provide additional verifiable substantiation about the importance of the image of the destination brand in influencing the loyalty of nature tourism visitors. The image of natural tourism destinations brand in the minds and minds of millennial visitors can encourage millennial visitors to come again and suggest beach



tourism destinations to other parties. This is made possible by the image of natural tourism destination brands based on the characteristics of the millennial generation. Based on visitor assessments, natural tourist destinations have been based on the personality of visitors who can provide freedom, pleasure, and comfort. In addition, the image of natural tourist destinations is based on the self-image of visitors who highlight the beauty, uniqueness, and ease of enjoying nature and will be able to encourage the willingness of visitors to come back to natural tourist destinations in the future.

This study found that visitor engagement is vital in predicting loyalty to natural tourism destinations (H_5). This finding reveals that visitor engagement has a notable clout on their loyalty. Results of the survey support previous findings by (Islam et al., 2018), (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019), (Chen et al., 2020), (Setiawan et al., 2021); (Kim & Barber, 2022) show that visitor engagement has a significant clout on loyalty. Visitors' Engagement pertains to the level of attention, participation, and active interaction of visitors in the activities and experiences the destination offers. Visitors who feel involved in the travel experience gravitate to be faithful, tend to recommend the destination to others and spend a lot of money and time at the destination. Millennial visitors are actively involved on social media to share content and visiting experiences, encouraging them to return to natural tourism destinations and recommend them to friends or other parties. The outcome of this survey presents ancillary evidence about the importance of visitor engagement in influencing visitor loyalty in nature tourism destinations. Visitors are energetically and energetically willing to visit natural destinations. Visitors enthusiastically explore the diversity of fascinating natural tourism features. In addition, visitors will voluntarily share online content related to nature tourism on social media with other visitors, which will encourage higher visitor loyalty.

In the Sobel method test, it can be revealed that visitor engagement can significantly mediate the image of the destination brand and visitor loyalty (H_6). The outcome can be seen from the probability value below 0.050, both in one-way probability (0.002) and two-way probability (0.005), as well as Sobel's statistical value of 2.749. These results explain that visitor engagement plays a notable role in mediating images of the destination brand and visitor loyalty. The outcome of this survey supports the research of (Setiawan et al., 2021) that state visitor engagement can mediate between the image of the destination brand and visitor loyalty. However, this outcome contradicts (Huwae et al., 2020), who concluded that visitor engagement could not mediate the connection between Image of the destination brand and visitor loyalty.

CONCLUSION

This survey has findings that provide new contributions to the literature on women, tourist engagement, the image of the brand, and brand loyalty in several aspects. This research has developed an understanding of the association between destination brand image and tourist engagement, which is still slightly new in the existing manuscript. This survey also reveals that tourist engagement mediates between the image of the destination brand and destination brand loyalty. Results of this survey indicate that the image of a destination brand is related to the level of tourist engagement, which is connected to the degree of visitor loyalty. These findings confirm the function of tourist engagement as a mediation between the Image of destination brand and destination brand loyalty.



This output provides a new vision of customer engagement in the literature by providing evidence that the tourist engagement construct mediates the interrelation between the image of a destination brand and loyalty to the destination brand, particularly in the nature tourism industry. This outcome also strengthens the function of tourist engagement as a prominent element in driving destination brand loyalty. This finding is also a new contribution to the literature on destinations because the role of tourist engagement as the primary activator of brand loyalty is still relatively new. In addition, the connection between eWOM, destination brand quality, and destination brand image is still relatively new in the nature tourism reference. The output of this research provides a guide for managers to understand the desire of visitors to come again and give references to other parties about destinations.

Although this research provides significant insights regarding the image of destination brands, tourist engagement, and destination loyalty in nature tourism, the research is limited. However, this impediment also allows new opportunities for forthcoming researchers to conduct more in-depth research. In addition, it's important to assess gender differences to understand loyalty patterns to nature tourism destinations. Further research on destination brand loyalty is required to support ratifying the survey cross-research outcome. This investigation's output is the basis of further research conducted in the disparate domain. Subjects and research contexts can be expanded to address the various limitations of this research. Thus, additional research can offer a spacious and in-depth understanding of the interrelation between the image of destination brands, tourist engagement, and destination loyalty in nature tourism.

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