

How Destination Value and Tourist Engagement in Destination Image Affect Tourist Loyalty?

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Abstract

Research Originality: There is only a limited amount of empirical research that examines how the post-visit destination image is shaped by tourist experiences with perceived high destination value and its impact on tourist loyalty within the context of ecotourism.

Research Objectives: The aim is to understand the role of perceived value and tourist engagement in the post-visit destination image concerning tourist loyalty within the context of ecotourism.

Research Methods: A cross-sectional research design was used and a sample of 326 travelers was drawn from an unknown pool of customers. The analysis method used in this study utilizes SEM.

Empirical Results: Destination value directly influences both tourist engagement and loyalty. Additionally, tourist engagement directly affects tourist loyalty; however, it does not mediate between destination image and tourist loyalty.

Implications: The results suggest several practical implications for destination managers, who should focus more on the ecotourism context when designing visitor experiences as a source of sustainable information, as well as for governments and nonprofit organizations aiming to promote ecotourism.

Keywords:

destination image; destination value; tourist engagement; tourist loyalty

How to Cite:

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INTRODUCTION

Today's tourists are fortunate to have a wide range of destinations. Given the economic potential of tourism, many places that were once indifferent to tourism are now positioning themselves as appealing destinations for diverse groups of travelers (Jeong & Kim, 2020; Kim et al., 2018). Regrettably, this has intensified competition among destinations that emphasize their beauty and uniqueness (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). This situation can be particularly disadvantageous for domestic destinations that may lack a clear destination image, as tourists are more likely to choose similar competitors (Gómez et al., 2018). Consequently, destinations are undertaking active marketing efforts to ensure their viability, often focusing on brand development. As a result, numerous destination brands are now operating at the national, provincial, county, or city levels, making destination branding an area of significant interest for researchers and practitioners in tourism (Chen et al., 2020). Nevertheless, research on destination branding has advanced slowly within tourism studies, primarily addressing how tourists respond to product or service brands, leaving destination branding relatively underexplored (Chen et al., 2021). Although there has been some investigation into how destination brands are formed or measured, there has been limited focus on tourists' perceived value, tourist quality, and destination image (Dedeoğlu, 2019).

While many destinations offer similar tourism products, tourists are inclined to choose destinations with distinctive brand value (Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2019). The value derived from tourists' experiences with a destination brand tends to be ingrained in their hearts and minds, which suggests that a stronger destination brand can encourage tourists to return and recommend the destination to others with positive brand associations. Therefore, destination marketers must provide personalized information to project a stronger destination image, influencing the perceptions of potential tourists (Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019). Destination value is defined as a set of human traits associated with a place (Matzler et al., 2016). It has been identified as an important tool for highlighting the distinctive characteristics of a destination (Martín-Santana et al., 2017). Several studies focus on destination personality, which reflects the perceived value of a destination's image. A destination's unique value can distinguish its brand from competitors (Sheng et al., 2022), thereby enhancing tourists' perceptions of the destination's image (Sheng et al., 2022; Yilmaz & Yilmaz, 2020; H. Zhang et al., 2014). The perception of a strong destination value can also influence tourists' destination choices and significantly increase their intention to visit (Chi et al., 2018; Qian et al., 2022).

In other words, a stronger destination image increases the likelihood of returning to the same destination. Some researchers even suggest that the measurement of perceived value should be linked to measures of satisfaction (Acharya et al., 2023) and that perceived value plays a mediating role between service quality, satisfaction, and customer loyalty (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019). Furthermore, perceived value associates the benefits received with the price paid. Other research has also found that perceived value significantly influences future behavior by generating intentions to revisit (Jeong & Kim, 2020).

In tourism, there are critical determinants of tourist loyalty essential at the overall management level, functioning as a phenomenon that strengthens the brand image (Han & Hyun, 2015). Given the consequences of tourist loyalty, it is no surprise that several studies outline the key factors leading to customer retention (Li et al., 2021). However, most do not focus on the perceived value of the destination as it relates to tourists' personal experiences. Therefore, numerous studies have focused explicitly on investigating the antecedents of repeat purchase behavior, including satisfaction, quality constructs, perceived value, and destination image (Humagain & Singleton, 2021). Other studies indicate that destination image influences tourists when selecting a destination based on various sources of information, their past experiences, and their future intentions (Li et al., 2021). Moreover, destination image significantly impacts perceived quality, satisfaction, and the intention to return to a destination and customer engagement in promoting and recommending favored destinations (Schofield et al., 2020).

Customer engagement is a crucial factor supporting the existence of a destination, as engaged customers serve as advocates by recommending and promoting it to other travelers, thereby enhancing the tourism business (Harmeling et al., 2017). Therefore, destination managers continually strive to build harmonious and strong relationships with their customers through various products and services (Wang et al., 2017). One of these efforts is to foster customer engagement, which in this study is defined and interpreted as tourist engagement. Tourist engagement occurs when the relationship between the product (tourist destination) or the brand created to foster positive relationships reaches its highest level (So et al., 2016), characterized by a strong emotional bond between tourists and the company or destination they visit (Amoah & Amoah, 2019; Huang et al., 2017; Tseng et al., 2015). At this level, tourists typically have sufficient rational considerations when visiting, so economic sacrifices are not the primary factor in their decision-making. Thus, if a company (organization) can foster tourist engagement (So et al., 2016), it will be highly beneficial for establishing sustainable tourism businesses in the long term and strengthening the destination brand to maintain tourist loyalty.

When linked to existing research, the emphasis on the role of consistency in destination brand marketing (Šerić et al., 2024), indicates that high consistency ensures that every brand touchpoint reinforces commitment to the brand, which in turn can enhance consumer attitudes and trust (Schallehn et al., 2014), and loyalty (Šerić & Vernuccio, 2020). Conversely, 'inconsistency' is seen as a factor that can disrupt brand meaning, leading to a decline in brand evaluations and a loss of tourist loyalty (Michel & Donthu, 2014). A genuinely novel strategy for customers involves creatively managing the perception of the perceived value of the destination, which manifests a brand personality that may conflict with the findings of the research (Frías Jamilena et al., 2017). Unlike the general perspective, experimental research indicates that brand image influences tourist loyalty through tourist satisfaction. However, inconsistencies arise in other studies regarding the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty (Jeong & Kim, 2020).

In the tourism industry, research on destinations often yields differing or contradictory findings; thus, inconsistencies are not surprising (Pan et al., 2017). This condition is particularly evident given the differences in research subjects, such as Dubai (modern shopping center vs. historical attractions), Macau (gambling vs. cultural heritage), and Thailand (sex tourism vs. religious tourism) (Yang et al., 2022). Although research on consistency in the destination branding literature primarily focuses on tourists and destinations (Huaman-Ramirez, 2021), there remains a scarcity of academics examining the influence between destination image, perceived value, and tourist engagement (Souiden et al., 2017; Yilmaz & Yilmaz, 2020). Understanding the science behind the contradictory effects of tourist engagement on destination image is still limited, presenting a research gap in tourism. To the author's knowledge, the perception of tourists regarding destination value has been underexplored in the context of ecotourism, raising the question of whether there are tourists who prefer the value of destinations in ecotourism, which merits further investigation (Chen et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). Tourists who visit a destination are not always motivated by a favorable image of the destination as a factor in building loyalty. Several studies have revealed that fostering tourist loyalty is often tied to the perceived value of the destination, which provides a satisfying experience, such as the memorable impressions of the destination's ambiance and the revival of nostalgia (Prayag et al., 2015). Previous research on tourism has often overlooked the concept of long-term loyalty, focusing instead on general loyalty behaviors such as returning visits, recommending the destination to others, and inviting others (Tseng et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2016). Ideally, when tourists perceive more excellent value from a destination, they are more likely to engage further and develop sustainable loyalty.

However, recent trends in tourism research indicate that tourists are increasingly concerned about the overall travel experience, which has also become a crucial focus for service providers (Lee & Jan, 2019; Lu et al., 2015). The tourist experience involves engagement through positive or negative interactions from the perspectives of both tourists and tourism service providers (Paul & Roy, 2023). Previous research on tourist engagement in nature-based ecotourism has demonstrated the influence of psychological engagement, brand loyalty, destination brand image, social media engagement, and visitor engagement on satisfaction and loyalty (Cabiddu et al., 2014; H. Chen & Rahman, 2018; Morshed et al., 2022; Quoquab et al., 2021). However, more information is needed to understand what motivates them to engage from various perspectives, such as cultural, community, personal, and environmental values. In addition, previous literature has examined how different types of tourists, such as adventure travelers, budget travelers, backpackers, and long-term tourists, utilize online marketplaces and traveler reviews to make travel decisions and select accommodations (Luo et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). However, little attention has been given to understanding how their travel decisions to nature-based destinations are influenced by factors such as environmentally friendly consumption in hotel selection, eco-friendly transportation, and brand community engagement. Consequently, empirical research on destination brand engagement remains limited, and previous studies on tourist engagement have primarily focused on outcomes (Harrigan et al., 2017; So et al., 2016).

Much of the debate in previous research on destination image and tourist engagement in nature-based areas has been limited to exploring attitude and behavioral aspects from the dominant service perspective (Stone et al., 2022). Although tourist engagement is not a new concept in the context of ecotourism, most research has been conducted using a quantitative approach through case study analysis to understand tourist behavior (Morshed et al., 2022; Qian et al., 2022; van Asperen et al., 2018). Unfortunately, the same shortcomings are reflected in the research by Xiong et al. (2015) regarding tourists visiting ancient cities in Tiongkok. Their qualitative descriptive approach focused on the multi-sensory image of the destination for visitors, yet without further development and verification of scales, their findings remain more contextual and less generalizable (Buzova et al., 2021; Lai & Li, 2015).

Managing a positive post-journey destination image is even more challenging for marketers in specialized tourism areas, such as ecotourism. Therefore, the destination image must be profitable and 'green' (nature-based and environmentally friendly), as this is the core of ecotourism (Li et al., 2021). Furthermore, ecotourism experiences emphasize the 'green' aspect and require qualities similar to other forms of tourism, such as being entertaining, comfortable, and appealing (Paul & Roy, 2023). However, it is practically challenging to incorporate the factors of perceived experience during visits as perceived value at ecotourism destinations, and it may be challenging to balance the 'environmentally friendly' aspects with other aspects (L. Su, Gong, et al., 2020).

Specifically, this research adopts a framework of perceived image-value-tourist engagement-loyalty, which encompasses both the construct of destination loyalty and ecotourism loyalty, operationalized as loyalty toward ecotourism as a unique form of travel. This study aims to expand upon previous research by examining the differential effects of destination image aspects on destination value aspects. Besides that, this research links these constructs to perceived destination value and visitor engagement. After that, this research evaluated the proposed framework within the context of ecotourism, leading to the decision to incorporate ecotourism loyalty into the model. As mentioned, the relationships between these important constructs remain underexplored, particularly in ecotourism, an industry that significantly requires understanding these interconnections. A better understanding of these relationships will also assist destination managers in designing tourism experiences that enhance image, perceived value, and destination loyalty. Additionally, understanding ecotourism loyalty will aid governments and nonprofit organizations, such as The International Ecotourism Society, in promoting ecotourism.

Destination image has been extensively studied, with previous research primarily focusing on pre-trip image and its influence on travel decisions (Chung et al., 2015). However, post-trip destination image and how tourism experiences shape it remain under-researched (Kim, 2018) and have not been explored in the context of ecotourism, despite its importance to the industry. Therefore, this study contributes to the discussion on the importance of post-trip destination images and fills the gap in the lack of research focused on the context of ecotourism (Li et al., 2021). It emphasizes the differences between tourists' pre-trip expectations and the actual experiences during the trip, where the perceived value

between these expectations and realities influences the post-trip image. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the role of perceived value during the trip in shaping the post-trip destination image, particularly within the context of ecotourism. Thus, the gap between tourists' expectations and actual experiences in the post-trip destination image and how emotions, memories, and tourist activities shape the destination image in the long term can provide a compelling new contribution to the literature as the novelty of this research. Additionally, limited previous research combines destination value and tourist engagement within a single conceptual model. This condition is important because the perception of destination value can shape engagement with relevant stimuli, which is crucial for the development of a tourist destination, as it can significantly impact the image perceived by travelers and their emotional connection that fosters loyalty (D. N. Su et al., 2020; L. Su, Gong, et al., 2020; L. Su, Lian, et al., 2020).

METHODS

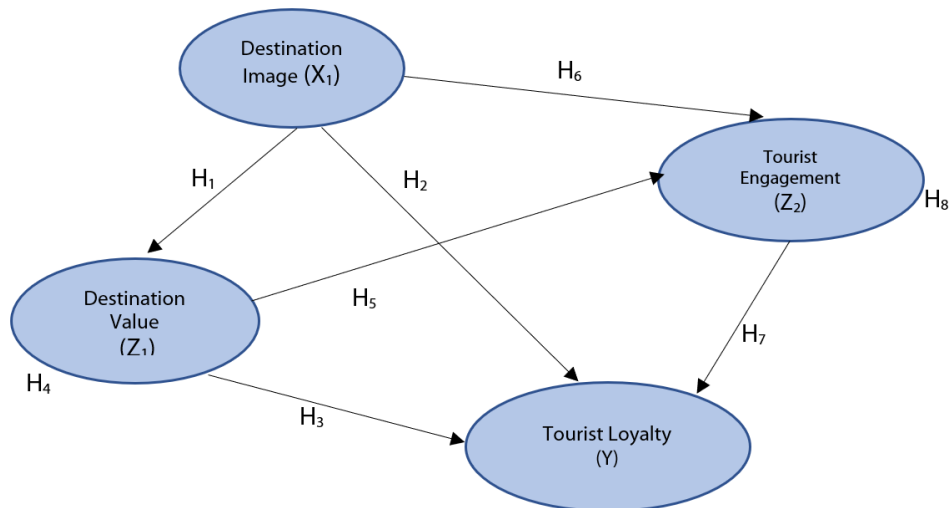
This study employs an explanatory research approach. Based on the identified problems, research objectives, and hypothesis testing, the research design utilizes a survey research pattern, sampling a population using a questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The data collection method employed is a survey approach, utilizing a structured questionnaire to obtain data for analysis. Additionally, in-depth interviews with selected respondents are conducted to clarify information, ensuring the data collected is accurate. The analysis method used in this study is Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). SEM is a multivariate technique that combines multiple regression and factor analysis to estimate a series of simultaneous dependency relationships (Hair Jr et al., 2014). It also analyzes causal relationships within the proposed structural model between exogenous and endogenous variables while examining the validity and reliability of the overall research instruments.

The target population in this study comprises all domestic tourists visiting destinations in Tojo Una-Una Regency, which numbered approximately 1,953 in 2023, according to information from the Togean management in Una-Una Island. However, the exact number of the population remains uncertain, as observational results indicate that the tourist sites do not maintain a comprehensive list of visitors. Additionally, the number of domestic tourists visiting these attractions cannot be precisely determined.

The sampling method used in this study is non-probability sampling, specifically employing purposive sampling techniques. Purposive sampling involves selecting samples based on specific considerations or criteria that are believed to be closely related to the population. Therefore, the sampling technique was determined using the Slovin formula, resulting in a sample size of 326 respondents for this study. Therefore, the sample for this study consists of all domestic tourists who have previously visited the Togean tourist destination and all individuals or domestic tourists currently visiting the tourist destinations in Tojo Una Una Regency, totaling 326 tourists. However, to account for the possibility of errors in questionnaire responses during distribution, a total of 326 questionnaires will be distributed to tourists in Togean, located on the beautiful Una Una Island, known for its natural attractions and marine tourism that are comparable to

Bunaken Island and Wakatobi Beach. The respondent criteria in this study are as follows: (a) Respondents who are visiting the destination for the first time; (b) Respondents who are on their second visit to the destination; (c) Respondents must be at least 18 years old at the time of completing the questionnaire.

Figure 1. Research Conceptual Model



This study will investigate various variables constructed within a comprehensive conceptual model to address significant gaps in the literature, as illustrated in Figure 1. The research model in Figure 1 consists of a comprehensive construct encompassing several variables examined within a single study. This model includes destination image as the exogenous variable, destination value, tourist engagement as mediating variables, and tourist loyalty as the endogenous variable. When referring to Cronbach's alpha (α), a measure is considered reliable if it has an alpha value above 0.6 (Hair, Jr. et al., 2014). In this context, examining the Cronbach Alpha for each variable shows that the destination image, which consists of nine items adapted from Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020), has an initial Cronbach Alpha of 0.891.

The destination value variable also consists of four items adapted from (Zauner et al., 2015), with an initial Cronbach Alpha of 0.817. The tourist engagement variable related to destination value comprises five items adapted from (So et al., 2014) and has an initial Cronbach Alpha of 0.882. Meanwhile, the loyalty of tourists concerning destination value consists of three items adapted from Bryce et al. (2015), Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021), and Stylidis et al. (2022), with an initial Cronbach Alpha of 0.823.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents in this study are domestic and international tourists who have made more than one visit to the Togean beach tourist destination on Una Una Island, Central Sulawesi Province—the respondent profile is shown in Table 1. Table 1 shows that the most frequent visitors to Togean Beach are in the age range of 31 to 50 years,

with 196 tourists enjoying the beauty of the ocean, which can lift their spirits and leave them in awe of the natural surroundings. It also shows that most visitors are male, with 227 individuals, and the highest level of education among them is undergraduate.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

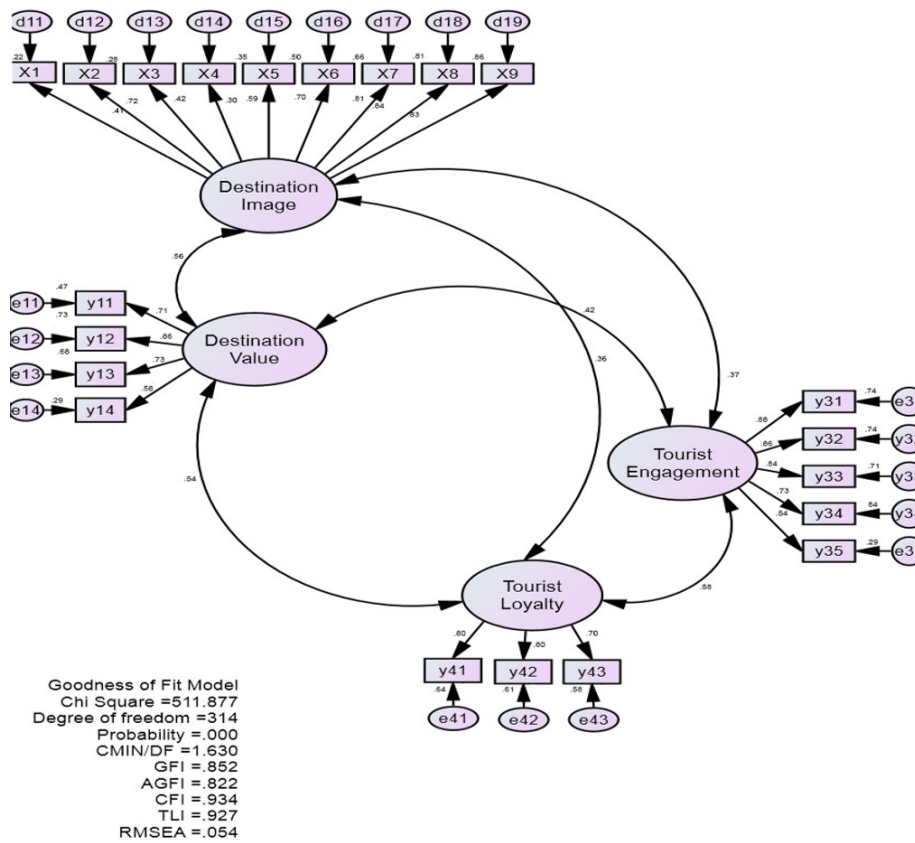
| Number | Respondent Characteristics | Frequency | Percentage | |
|--------|--|--|------------|-----|
| 1 | Age | 18 - 30 Years | 93 | 29 |
| | | 31 - 50 Years | 196 | 60 |
| | | > 50 Years | 37 | 11 |
| 2 | Gender | Male | 227 | 68 |
| | | Female | 109 | 32 |
| 3 | Number of Visits | One-time visit | 0 | 0 |
| | | More than one visit | 326 | 100 |
| 4 | Level of Education | SD | 0 | 0 |
| | | SLTP | 0 | 0 |
| | | SLTA | 17 | 5 |
| | | Diploma | 3 | 1 |
| | | S1 | 226 | 67 |
| | | S2 | 83 | 25 |
| 5 | Sources of Information about Beach Tourism Destinations in Central Sulawesi Province | S3 | 7 | 2 |
| | | From friends or family | 167 | 51 |
| | | Company Promotions | 82 | 25 |
| | | From family | 77 | 24 |
| 6 | the uniqueness of Togeian Beach Tourism Destinations in Tojo Una Una Regency, Central Sulawesi | Others | 0 | 0 |
| | | The natural beauty, the exotic sea and beaches, and the stunning coral reefs | 179 | 55 |
| | | The diversity of culture and customs | 47 | 14 |
| | | Culinary delights | 73 | 22 |
| | | the friendliness and welcoming nature of the local residents. | 27 | 8 |

Additionally, 179 tourists are specifically drawn to the beauty of the sea. Several factors that may influence this preference include physical activities and water sports available at the beach, which often offer a variety of physical activities such as surfing, snorkeling, diving, and other water sports. Many men are attracted to adventure activities and sports that are often available at beach destinations, making it an ideal place for exploring remote islands or beach caves. Many men may be more inclined to seek out these exploratory experiences than other tourist destinations, engaging in adventures amidst the beauty of nature and the sea. They may be drawn to the relaxing and enjoyable atmosphere that offers a great place to unwind, enjoy nature, or socialize with friends. Tourists' interest in returning is not solely due to the allure of the underwater scenery but also the exciting challenges they face during their adventures, such as participating in water sports like fishing. The challenge of catching various types of fish, huge ones,

adds a significant element of excitement and appeal to their overall experience. However, what enhances the enjoyment of these tourists is that Togean Beach, located in Tojo Una-Una Regency, also boasts the unique charm of coral reefs, which appear incredibly beautiful when viewed directly underwater.

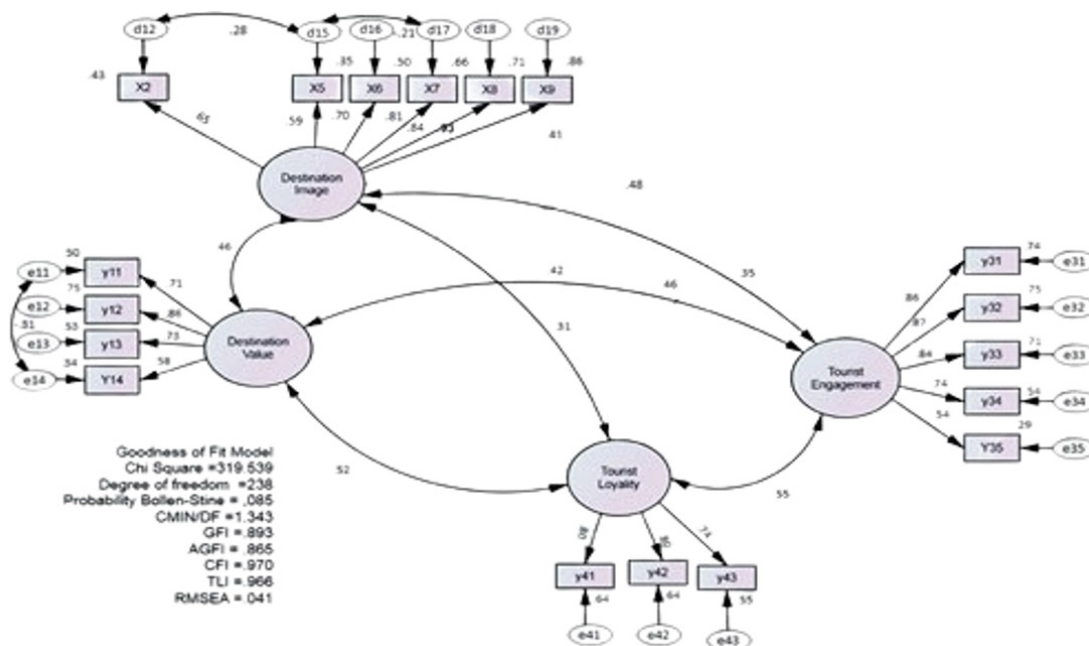
The steps to be taken include conducting a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) model. The initial step before testing the full model in Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is to analyze the CFA model. This step is commonly referred to as the two-step approach. The goal of CFA model analysis is to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs. If the CFA results reveal indicators with a loading factor below 0.50, those indicators will be removed from the model.

Figure 2. Initial Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model



The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) model can be used to examine the unidimensionality of variables. Unidimensionality is a necessary condition for the analysis of construct reliability and validity. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis model demonstrates that the estimated model's variance-covariance matrix differs from the sample's variance-covariance matrix when the probability value exceeds 0.05. Another criterion used to assess the model's adequacy is the goodness of fit index (GFI). The minimum expected value for GFI is 0.90 (Hair et al., 2021). Therefore, if the calculated GFI is more significant than 0.90, it indicates that the indicators possess acceptable reliability. Thus, the first CFA evaluation model is shown in Figure 2.

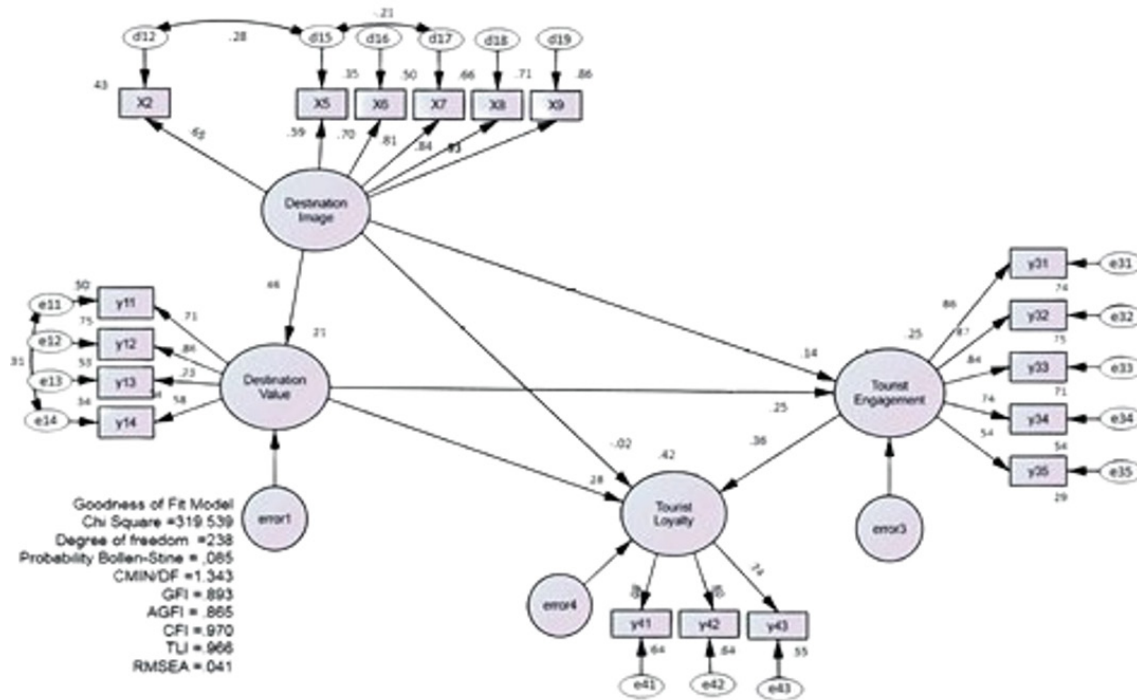
Figure 3. Second CFA Evaluation Model



The researcher tested whether the twenty-one items were unidimensional, meaning they accurately measured a single factor or not. The initial results of the CFA analysis conducted with a one-factor model indicated that the model was not a perfect fit, with Chi-Square = 378.28, P-value = 0.05, GFI = 0.877, AGFI = 0.848, CFI = 0.950, TLI = 0.943, and RMSEA = 0.052. The model demonstrated marginal fit for GFI and AGFI (0.80-0.90) and TLI (0.90-0.95), with no poor fit indicators. The modification indices (MI) results will be considered for further adjustments. This section provides a number of calculation results aimed at adding error correlation indicators, which help reduce the chi-square value. However, with the model not fitting, modifications are necessary to allow measurement errors for specific items to correlate. This adjustment allows the process to move forward to the second CFA evaluation model, which presents the analysis results by adding several correlated error indicators. The analysis results for the second CFA evaluation model are shown in Figure 3.

The fit model results for the second CFA evaluation show Chi-Square = 319.539 ($p > 0.05$), GFI = 0.893, AGFI = 0.865, CFI = 0.970, TLI = 0.966, and RMSEA = 0.041. The model competes with RMSEA (less than 0.08), CFI, and TLI (greater than 0.95). Marginal fit is observed in GFI and AGFI (0.80-0.90), with no poor fit indicators. The CFA model results will be used to proceed with the hypothesis model. In the hypothesis model, destination value and tourist engagement mediate the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty. Therefore, the results will include calculating the indirect effect test to demonstrate the mediating roles of destination value and tourist engagement.

Figure 4. Results of Hypothesis Model Testing



The fit model results for the hypothesis model in the direct effect analysis show Chi-Square = 319.539, GFI = 0.893, AGFI = 0.865, CFI = 0.970, TLI = 0.965, and RMSEA = 0.041. The model demonstrates a good fit based on RMSEA (less than 0.08) and CFI and TLI (greater than 0.95). Marginal fit is observed in GFI and AGFI (0.80-0.90), with no poor fit indicators. Next, the results of all path coefficients within the model will be presented. The hypothesis model contains three endogenous variables. Two coefficients are calculated in this analysis: regression weight and standardized regression weight. Regression weight is the estimated parameter that explains the magnitude of the influence one variable has on another. Regression weight has a standard error and a critical ratio, which is the result of dividing the regression weight by the standard error. Thus, the significance of the coefficient test results is based on this calculation; if the C.R. value is greater than two or if p is less than 0.05, then the estimated regression weight is considered significant. Standardized regression weight is the normalized regression weight, also referred to as path coefficients, which can be compared with one another.

The path coefficient results will be explained sequentially based on the position of the endogenous variables within the hypothesis model. The path coefficient of 0.461 from the destination image to the destination value is significant. The contribution of destination image in explaining the variation in destination value data is 21%, while other variables account for the remaining percentage. Both destination image and destination value explain tourist engagement. The path coefficient of 0.143 from destination image to tourist engagement is insignificant.

In contrast, the path coefficient of 0.253 from destination value to tourist engagement is significant. The combined contribution of destination image and destination value in explaining the variation in tourist engagement data is 25%, while other variables account for the remaining percentage. Tourist loyalty is explained by destination image, destination value, and tourist engagement. The path coefficient of -0.021 from destination image to tourist loyalty is insignificant. However, the path coefficient of 0.283 from destination value to tourist loyalty is significant. Additionally, the path coefficient of 0.190 from tourist engagement to tourist loyalty is also not significant. In contrast, the path coefficient of 0.359 from tourist engagement to tourist loyalty is significant. The combined contribution of destination image, destination value, and tourist engagement in explaining the variation in tourist loyalty data is 42%, while other variables account for the remaining percentage.

The calculations performed in SEM do not provide Sobel test results; therefore, the validation will be conducted separately using Microsoft Excel. The Sobel test utilizes the regression weight coefficients and standard errors (S.E.) as values for a, b, ab, Sa, and Sb. The C.R. value for testing the significance of the indirect effect is calculated by dividing ab by Sab (C.R. = ab/Sab).

Table 3. Results of Sobel Test for Mediation Testing

| Relationship | | | Regression Weight (Estimate) | S.E. | P |
|---|-------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------|--------|
| Mediation of Destination Value in the Relationship Between Destination Image and Tourist Loyalty | | | | | |
| Image | ----▶ | Value ^a | 0,401 | 0,076 | <0,001 |
| Value | ----▶ | Loyalty ^b | 0,204 | 0,066 | 0,002 |
| Image | ----▶ | Value ----▶ Loyalty ^{ab} | 0,082 | 0,030 | 0,007 |
| Mediation of Tourist Engagement in the Relationship Between Destination Image and Tourist Loyalty | | | | | |
| Image | ----▶ | Engagement ^a | 0,153 | 0,087 | 0,078 |
| Engagement | ----▶ | Loyalty ^b | 0,212 | 0,048 | <0,001 |
| Image Engagement | ----▶ | Loyalty ^{ab} | 0,032 | 0,019 | 0,095 |

Description : Indirect Effect (ab) = a*b; Deviasi Standar (a*b)+ SE(ab) = (a²Sb² + b²Sa² - Sa²Sb²) t=(ab)/SE(ab); p Calculated using Excel with the function = (1-norm.s.dist(abs(t);true))*2*

Source: Primary data, processed (2024).

The indirect effect of destination image on tourist loyalty, mediated by destination value, is examined. The regression weight coefficient from destination image to destination value is 0.401, while the path coefficient from destination value to tourist loyalty is 0.204. The magnitude of the indirect effect is calculated as 0.401 × 0.204 = 0.082, with a standard error (S.E.) of 0.030, resulting in a C.R. value of 2.703. This result indicates that the indirect effect is significant. Therefore, the analysis concludes that destination value mediates the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty.

The indirect effect of destination image on tourist loyalty, mediated by tourist engagement, is analyzed. The regression weight coefficient from destination image to tourist

engagement is 0.153, while the path coefficient from tourist engagement to tourist loyalty is 0.212. The magnitude of the indirect effect is calculated as $0.153 \times 0.212 = 0.032$, with a standard error (S.E.) of 0.019, resulting in a C.R. value of 1.671. This result indicates that the indirect effect is not significant. Therefore, the analysis concludes that tourist engagement does not mediate the relationship between destination image and loyalty.

The mediation demonstrated in several relationships will be assessed using the Variance Accounted For (VAF) approach, as presented in Table 4. The VAF (Variance Accounted For) value is the ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect (the sum of direct and indirect effects). The criteria for determining the type of mediation are as follows: a VAF of less than 20% indicates insufficient evidence for a mediation role. A VAF between 20% and 80% suggests partial mediation. A VAF greater than 80% indicates complete mediation. The VAF results in Table 4 indicate that the research findings closely interconnected destination image, destination value, and tourist loyalty. Furthermore, direct interviews with visiting tourists revealed that the beauty, stunning underwater scenery, and pristine and picturesque islands left a significant impression on the tourists. This remarkable experience has given a unique value in the eyes and hearts of tourists regarding Togeian Beach on Una Una Island.

Table 4. Results of Variance Accounted For (VAF) for Determining Mediation Type

| Relationship | Direct Effect | Indirect Effect | Total Effect | VAF | Type of Mediation |
|--|---------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Mediation of Destination Value in the Relationship Between Destination Image and Tourist Loyalty | | | | | |
| Image ----> Loyalty | 0,201 | | | | |
| Value ----> Value | 0,461 | | | | |
| Value ----> Loyalty | 0,370 | | | | |
| Image ----> Value ----> Loyalty | | 0,130 | 0,151 | 86,1% | Full Mediation |

Source: Primary data, processed (2024).

This research focuses on Togeian Beach in Tojo Una Una, a site recognized as a UNESCO biosphere reserve characterized by its scientifically unique ecosystem of flora and fauna that attracts visitors to the Togeian destination. The study highlights the relationships among destination image, value, visitor engagement, and tourist loyalty within ecotourism. The destination image impacts the destination value and visitor loyalty during the post-visit phase. Initially, visitors may have perceptions centered on the beauty of the underwater environment. However, upon arrival, they are captivated by the actual beauty of not only the marine life but also the islands, surrounding nature, culture, and the warm hospitality of the local community towards tourists. The research findings indicate a positive and significant relationship between destination image and destination value, distinguishing this study from others that reported insignificant results. This finding aligns with previous studies that examined the relationship between destination image and perceived destination value, which found a strong and positive impact on tourist

expectations (Chen et al., 2021; Özdemir & Şimşek, 2014; Ramseook-Munhurrin et al., 2015; Rasheed & Abadi, 2014).

The destination brand theory closely relates to customer value theory, both of which suggest that the destination image is based on the comparison between tourists' expectations before their visit and the experiences they have after the visit. If the experience exceeds expectations, the destination value is deemed favorable. Conversely, this study disagrees with previous research that found a different outcome, indicating that the relationship between destination image and destination value is insignificant (Kanwel et al., 2019; Lee & Hyun, 2016; Souiden et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2022). This discrepancy may arise because the destination image does not always serve as a strong predictor, particularly in studies focused on modern shopping tourism and hospitality, where tourist expectations are significantly high. Thus, it can be concluded that the post-visit destination image, driven by high expectations from visitors, will directly influence the perceived destination value.

The relationship mediated by destination image, destination value, and tourist loyalty demonstrates a positive and significant finding. This condition indicates that the better tourists perceive the destination image, the higher the destination value, which fosters tourist loyalty. Therefore, destination value mediates the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty. The influence of destination image on tourist loyalty can also occur through destination value. These findings align with previous research indicating that destination image positively impacts destination value, which in turn can create tourist loyalty (Özdemir & Şimşek, 2014; Manyiwa et al., 2018; Mat-Som & Bader-Badarneh, 2017; Ramseook-Munhurrin et al., 2015; Rasheed & Abadi, 2014; Rimadias et al., 2021). These findings demonstrate a very strong relationship between destination image, destination value, and tourist loyalty. The destination image formed in the minds of tourists, influenced by online media information and recommendations from friends, creates high expectations for visits. The positive experiences tourists perceive contribute to a strong perception of the tourism destination's value. Consequently, this satisfaction fosters tourist loyalty, encouraging them to plan return visits or recommend the destination to others. Thus, a destination characterized by beautiful marine biodiversity, stunning beaches, adequate infrastructure, and quality tourism services can create a positive value for the destination image, ultimately impacting tourist loyalty. This study does not align with previous research that reported different findings, indicating no significant relationship (Chiu et al., 2016; Stylidis et al., 2022). Other studies have also found similar results, where the influence of destination image on perceived value and visitor loyalty did not consistently show significant outcomes (Milovanović et al., 2019).

The relationship between tourist engagement and tourist loyalty showed significant results. The findings of this study align with previous research that revealed that customer engagement influences customer loyalty (Bryce et al., 2015; Raditha et al., 2017; So et al., 2014). This research suggests that customers' emotional experiences with an organization during customer engagement can foster loyalty, as the interactions create lasting positive impressions that enhance emotional responses. Such a strong relationship can reinforce tourist loyalty over time, enabling tourists to share their positive experiences with others. This word-of-mouth recommendation can become a potential source of new tourists,

stemming from the perceived value of the destination and ultimately enhancing overall loyalty to the destination (van Asperen et al., 2018). Customer Engagement Theory asserts that strong tourist engagement can lay a solid foundation for fostering sustainable loyalty. Destinations that enhance engagement and create memorable experiences for visitors have a greater opportunity to build a loyal and sustainable visitor base (Zyminkowska, 2019). However, this study differs from previous research that found contrasting results regarding the relationship between tourist engagement and tourist loyalty, indicating it was insignificant (Bergel et al., 2019). This discrepancy may stem from cognitive aspects related to the weak emotional attachment between the destination and tourists, potentially due to a lack of genuine commitment from visitors to promote the destination.

This study also found no significant results in the relationship between destination image and tourist engagement. Tourists may have high initial expectations regarding the influence of the destination image, but the actual visiting experience might not align with those expectations. For instance, inadequate speedboat services to Togean Island and a lack of clean water can affect this perception. Consequently, the level of tourist engagement is likely to be more influenced by the real experiences they encounter. While destination image remains crucial in the tourism industry as a factor influencing tourists' initial perceptions of a place, its impact on tourist engagement levels may not be as significant (Šerić et al., 2024; Styliadis et al., 2022). This is because the destination experience may not meet visitors' desires or expectations. These findings are somewhat at odds with prior research suggesting that destination image positively correlates with customer engagement. In those studies, it is argued that when customers have a favorable perception of a brand, they are more inclined to visit and engage with a recommended destination (Prayag et al., 2015; So et al., 2014).

Subsequently, the mediation analysis revealed insignificant findings regarding the relationship between destination image, tourist engagement, and tourist loyalty. Destination image is often based on expectations built through promotions and information before tourists arrive at the tourist site. If the actual experiences of tourists do not meet their expectations, the destination image fails to impact engagement and loyalty significantly. Similarly, tourist loyalty is greatly influenced by the satisfaction derived from actual experiences at the destination rather than merely the image perceived prior to the visit (Prayag et al., 2015). The destination image of Togean Beach in Tojo Una-Una Regency has not effectively enhanced tourist engagement. This indicates that while the destination image may influence initial decisions to visit, the actual experiences during the visit significantly impact the level of tourist engagement. These findings align with previous research that found the relationships between destination image, tourist engagement, and tourist loyalty to be non-significant in mediation (Abbasi et al., 2021; Jeong & Kim, 2020).

In contrast, several previous studies have reported different findings, indicating significant results (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019, 2021; Sönmez & Sirakaya, 2002). The Customer Experience Theory suggests that tourists' overall experiences, which include interactions with destination images and engagement, can influence tourist loyalty in ecotourism. Conversely, if experiences do not meet expectations, the anticipated relationships may not be significant (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Understanding how tourists' experiences influence destination image can help destination managers design more tailored experiences. Although destination image has been widely studied, there is limited empirical research on how post-trip actual travel experiences shape destination image. Furthermore, although previous studies have explored the relationships between experience, image, satisfaction, and tourist behavior, they have not been fully understood, particularly in pre-visit and post-visit experiences. They have not focused on the specific context of ecotourism loyalty. When considering a model focused on post-trip destination value, it becomes evident that tourists' views or perceptions of a destination can change after they visit and experience the destination firsthand. Therefore, this research brings novelty by emphasizing the importance of post-trip destination value, as it significantly impacts the destination's image after the visit. Tourist perceptions before and after their journey often differ, and these changes can influence their decision to return and their likelihood of recommending the destination to others. Both expectations and the actual experiences shape the post-trip image during the visit, where tourists gain firsthand experiences that can either reinforce, weaken, or alter their initial expectations.

This study's novelty lies in the perceived ecological value experienced by visitors in the context of ecotourism. These changes often reveal a gap between the projected image of the destination and the one experienced by tourists, shaping the perceived value. Tourists frequently develop a new image based on their direct experiences, such as the quality of services, interactions with locals, environmental conditions, the beauty or uniqueness of natural or marine attractions, and the infrastructure present. These experiences can create a more authentic and richer image than anticipated before arrival. Consequently, fostering a deeper and more emotional connection between tourists and the destination becomes essential. Tourists, as visitors to the destination, feel that by visiting and supporting the location, they contribute to the sustainability of that destination, which is rooted in ecotourism loyalty.

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