

Enhancing Tourist Visits to Villages through Branding, Experience, and Digital Promotion: The Role of Value Creation

*Enhancing Rural
Tourism Through
Branding*

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Submitted:
JUNE 2025

Accepted:
AUGUST 2025

ABSTRACT

Indonesia's tourism sector holds significant potential to drive economic growth, yet tourist visits remain concentrated in urban destinations, leaving rural areas like the Eastern Priangan region of West Java underexplored. This study aims to examine how destination branding, tourism experience, and digital promotion media influence tourists' decisions to visit five emerging tourist villages in Eastern Priangan, with tourism value creation as a mediating factor. A quantitative approach was employed, surveying 200 domestic tourists who visited Bayongbong, Taraju, Gunung Sari, Batulawang, or Selasari, supplemented by interviews with ten village tourism managers. The findings reveal that digital promotion media has the strongest influence on visiting decisions, followed by destination branding and tourism experience, with tourism value creation partially mediating these relationships. Villages with active digital campaigns, such as Taraju and Batulawang, showed higher visitor interest. The study concludes that integrated strategies combining consistent branding, authentic experiences, and robust digital promotion are essential for enhancing the competitiveness of rural tourist villages. These findings offer practical insights for village managers and policymakers to strengthen tourism development through improved infrastructure and targeted marketing, fostering sustainable growth in Indonesia's rural tourism sector.

Keywords: *Destination Branding, Digital Promotion, Tourism Experience, Tourism Value Creation, Tourist Village, Visiting Decision.*

ABSTRAK

Sektor pariwisata Indonesia memiliki potensi yang signifikan untuk mendorong pertumbuhan ekonomi, namun kunjungan wisatawan masih terkonsentrasi di destinasi perkotaan, sehingga daerah pedesaan seperti wilayah Priangan Timur di Jawa Barat belum tereksplorasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana pencitraan destinasi, pengalaman wisata, dan media promosi digital memengaruhi keputusan wisatawan untuk mengunjungi lima desa wisata yang sedang berkembang di Priangan Timur, dengan penciptaan nilai wisata sebagai faktor mediasi. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan, dengan mensurvei 200 wisatawan domestik yang mengunjungi Bayongbong, Taraju, Gunung Sari, Batulawang, atau Selasari, dilengkapi dengan wawancara

JIMKES

Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen
Kesatuan
Vol. 13 No. 5, 2025
pp. 3375-3388
IBI Kesatuan
ISSN 2337 – 7860
E-ISSN 2721 – 169X
DOI: 10.37641/jimkes.v13i5.3604

dengan sepuluh pengelola desa wisata. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa media promosi digital memiliki pengaruh paling kuat terhadap keputusan berkunjung, diikuti oleh pencitraan destinasi dan pengalaman wisata, dengan penciptaan nilai wisata sebagian memediasi hubungan ini. Desa-desa dengan kampanye digital yang aktif, seperti Taraju dan Batulawang, menunjukkan minat pengunjung yang lebih tinggi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa strategi terpadu yang menggabungkan pencitraan yang konsisten, pengalaman autentik, dan promosi digital yang kuat sangat penting untuk meningkatkan daya saing desa wisata pedesaan. Temuan ini menawarkan wawasan praktis bagi para pengelola desa dan pembuat kebijakan untuk memperkuat pengembangan pariwisata melalui peningkatan infrastruktur dan pemasaran yang tepat sasaran, sehingga mendorong pertumbuhan berkelanjutan di sektor pariwisata pedesaan Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Branding Destinasi, Promosi Digital, Pengalaman Pariwisata, Penciptaan Nilai Pariwisata, Desa Wisata, Keputusan Berkunjung

INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector significantly contributes to Indonesia's economic growth by generating employment, increasing regional income, and fostering the development of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) (Halim & Setiawan, 2022; Hendi et al., 2023). With its rich natural landscapes, diverse cultural heritage, and historical assets, Indonesia possesses substantial potential to develop competitive and sustainable tourism destinations (Darmawan & Yasa, 2022). However, tourist visits remain concentrated in well-known areas such as Bali, Yogyakarta, and Labuan Bajo, while other regions, including the Eastern Priangan area of West Java, have not fully realized their tourism potential. This uneven distribution highlights the need for strategic interventions to enhance the competitiveness of emerging tourism destinations, particularly in rural areas with unique cultural and natural attractions.

The Eastern Priangan region, comprising Garut, Tasikmalaya, Ciamis, Banjar, and Pangandaran, offers considerable potential for community-based village tourism due to its diverse natural resources, rich traditional culture, and strong local community engagement. The region is characterized by its scenic landscapes, including mountains, beaches, and agricultural areas, as well as its rich Sundanese cultural heritage, which includes traditional arts, cuisine, and festivals. Despite this potential, data indicate that the region's contribution to tourist visits in West Java remains low compared to major urban centers like Greater Bandung and Greater Bogor (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). This gap suggests deficiencies in destination branding, the quality of tourism experiences, and the effective use of digital promotion strategies, which are critical for attracting visitors to rural tourism destinations.

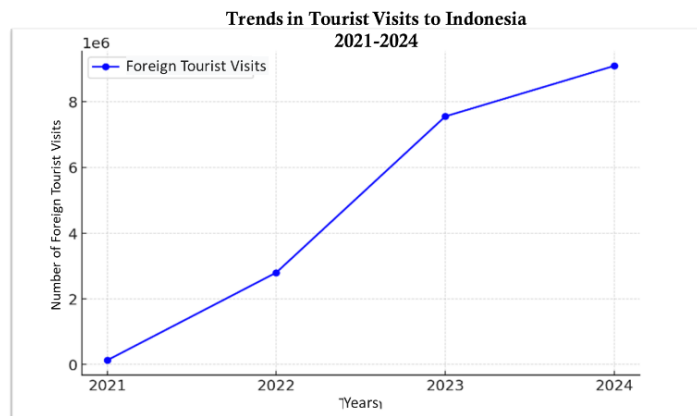


Figure 1. Trends in Tourist Visits to Indonesia 2021-2024

Post-pandemic tourism recovery in Indonesia has shown a positive trend in domestic tourist visits from 2021 to 2024, as illustrated in Figure 1 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). However, the distribution of these visits remains uneven, with emerging destinations like the Eastern Priangan region lagging behind. Figure 2 highlights that tourist visits to the Eastern Priangan region between 2021 and 2023 are significantly lower than those to major urban destinations in West Java. The underperformance of this region highlights the need for a comprehensive strategy to capitalise on its unique assets and overcome barriers to tourism development, including limited visibility and inconsistent promotional efforts.

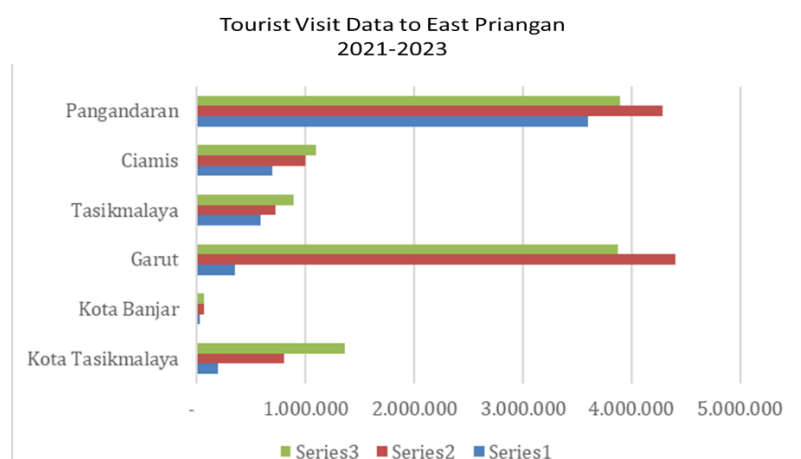


Figure 2. Number of Tourist Visits to East Priangan (2021-2023)

Research gaps in the existing literature further justify the need for this study. According to Lidya et al. (2017), destination branding in regions like Ciamis remains underdeveloped, lacking a consistent narrative that highlights local identity and cultural uniqueness. Similarly, Vidyastuti (2021) notes that the integration of branding and digital promotion in rural tourism destinations is often fragmented, limiting their ability to compete with established destinations. Halim and Setiawan (2022) emphasize that tourism experiences in rural areas are not sufficiently managed to create memorable and emotionally engaging interactions, which are essential for visitor satisfaction. Additionally, Susanti and Wibowo (2023) argue that digital promotion strategies in Indonesian tourist villages are inconsistent and fail to fully utilize social media platforms to engage younger audiences. According to Carvalho and Alves (2023), few studies have explored an integrated model that combines destination branding, tourism experience, and digital promotion with tourism value creation as a mediator in the context of rural tourism. This lack of integration leaves a significant gap in understanding how these factors collectively influence tourists' visiting decisions in emerging destinations, such as the Eastern Priangan region.

This study aims to address these gaps by developing and testing a conceptual model that increases tourist visits to emerging tourist villages in the Eastern Priangan region through destination branding, tourism experiences, and digital promotion, mediated by tourism value creation. The research focuses on five selected tourist villages Bayongbong (Garut), Taraju (Tasikmalaya), Gunung Sari (Ciamis), Batulawang (Banjar), and Selasari (Pangandaran) chosen for their developing status, community involvement, and varying levels of digital visibility. By examining these villages, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence for a value-based tourism management framework that integrates branding, experiential, and digital strategies. The study contributes to both theory and practice by validating a model for rural tourism development, advancing the understanding of tourism value creation as a mediator, and offering practical recommendations for local

governments and tourism managers to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of tourist villages in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Destination Branding and Tourist Decision-Making

Destination branding plays a pivotal role in shaping tourists' perceptions and decisions to visit a destination. According to Pike and Page (2020), effective destination branding creates a unique identity that differentiates a location from competitors, fostering emotional attachment and trust among potential visitors. A strong brand enhances destination awareness and conveys a consistent image that aligns with tourists' expectations, influencing their decision-making process. In the context of rural tourism, branding that emphasizes cultural heritage and local authenticity significantly impacts tourists' perceptions (Camilleri, 2018). For instance, rural destinations leveraging unique cultural narratives, such as traditional festivals or local crafts, can attract visitors seeking authentic experiences. According to Styliadis and Cherifi (2022), a well-crafted destination brand enhances perceived value, which directly affects tourists' intentions to visit and recommend the destination.

The influence of destination branding extends beyond direct decision-making to the creation of tourism value. According to Li and Petrick (2022), a strong brand fosters emotional and cognitive connections, contributing to tourists' perceived value of a destination. This value is co-created through interactions between tourists and destination attributes, such as cultural landmarks or community engagement. In rural settings, branding strategies that highlight local identity can enhance tourists' sense of connection, thereby increasing the perceived value of their visit (Gartner, 2021). However, branding efforts in emerging destinations, such as tourist villages, often lack consistency, which limits their ability to compete with established urban destinations (Lidya et al., 2017). These findings suggest that destination branding not only drives visit intentions but also shapes the value tourists derive from their experiences. Based on this evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Destination branding has a significant effect on tourism visiting decisions.

H2: Destination branding has a significant effect on tourism value creation.

Tourism Experience and Its Impact

Tourism experience is a critical determinant of visitors' decisions and perceived value in tourism destinations. According to Kim and Lee (2020), memorable tourism experiences encompass cognitive, affective, and relational dimensions, local communities. These dimensions create lasting impressions that encourage repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. In rural tourism, participatory activities, such as cultural workshops or nature-based adventures, enhance tourists' engagement and satisfaction (Halim & Setiawan, 2022). According to Díaz et al. (2023), authentic and emotionally engaging experiences strengthen tourists' connections with destinations, influencing their decision to visit and their overall satisfaction.

The role of tourism experience in value creation is equally significant. According to Ranjan and Read (2016), tourism experiences contribute to value co-creation by enabling tourists to actively participate in shaping their interactions with a destination. For example, engaging in local traditions or environmental activities allows tourists to derive functional, emotional, and social benefits, enhancing their perceived value (Susanti & Wibowo, 2023). In the context of tourist villages, the quality of experiences is often constrained by limited infrastructure and inconsistent service delivery, which can diminish perceived value. Addressing these challenges requires designing experiences that align with tourists' expectations for authenticity and engagement. The influence of tourism experience on both decision-making and value creation underscores its importance in rural tourism development. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Tourism experience has a significant effect on tourism visiting decisions.

H4: Tourism experience has a significant effect on tourism value creation.

Digital Promotion Media and Tourist Behavior

Digital promotion media has emerged as a dominant tool in influencing tourists' perceptions and decisions. According to Mariani et al. (2019a), social media platforms, review sites, and user-generated content significantly shape tourists' destination choices due to their accessibility and credibility. Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) recommendations, particularly on platforms like Instagram and TripAdvisor, build trust and interest, especially among younger audiences who rely heavily on digital information (Hua et al., 2017). In rural tourism, digital promotion is critical for increasing visibility, as many tourist villages lack the resources for traditional marketing campaigns (Hendi et al., 2023). According to Leung et al. (2020), digital content that showcases authentic experiences, such as videos of local festivals or testimonials from visitors, enhances destination appeal and influences visit intentions.

Digital promotion also contributes to tourism value creation by facilitating interactions between tourists and destinations. According to Tussyadiah and Zach (2014), digital platforms enable tourists to co-create value by accessing real-time information and engaging with destination content before, during, and after their visits. For instance, social media campaigns the unique aspects of tourist villages, such as agrotourism or cultural heritage, can enhance tourists' perceptions of value (Gumilang et al., 2024). However, many rural destinations in Indonesia, including those in the Eastern Priangan region, struggle with fragmented digital marketing strategies, which limits their reach. Effective digital promotion requires consistent and interactive content to engage potential visitors. Based on these insights, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Digital promotion media has a significant effect on tourism visiting decisions.

H6: Digital promotion media has a significant effect on tourism value creation.

H7: Destination branding, tourism experience, and digital promotion has a significant effect on tourism visiting decisions.

Value Creation Mediation in Visit Decisions

Value creation is a crucial concept in mediating the influence of various factors on tourists' visit decisions, particularly in the context of branding, experience, and digital promotions. First, in the relationship between branding and visit decisions, value creation acts as a mediator, linking positive brand perceptions with tourists' active engagement through the value co-creation process. Research by Pham et al. (2021) and Shulga and Busser (2021) indicates that when a destination brand successfully creates value for consumers, it strengthens brand equity and increases the likelihood of a visit. Second, experiential value, as a manifestation of value creation, mediates the influence of tourists' experiences on their decisions to revisit a destination. Studies by Darmawan and Yasa (2022) and Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022) reveal that meaningful experiences, encompassing emotional, sensory, and social aspects, foster the formation of perceived value, thus strengthening revisit intentions. Third, digital promotions play a crucial role in shaping value creation, which in turn influences visit decisions. Research by Septiandari et al. (2024) suggests that effective digital promotion enhances tourists' perceived value through easy access to information and digital interactivity, thereby increasing its influence on visit decisions. Overall, the literature over the past five years consistently emphasizes that value creation is not only a supporting variable but also a key mediator that transforms the effects of branding, experience, and digital promotion into visit decisions, making this approach more holistic and relevant in modern tourism destination management.

H8: Destination branding has a significant effect on visit decisions through value creation.

H9: Tourism experience has a significant effect on visit decisions through value creation.

H10: Digital promotions media has a significant effect on visit decisions through value creation.

The conceptual framework of this study integrates destination branding, tourism experience, and digital promotion media, with tourism value creation as a mediating variable influencing tourists' visiting decisions. According to Vargo and Lusch (2016), the Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) framework emphasizes value co-creation, where tourists actively participate in shaping their experiences and perceptions through interactions with destination attributes and promotional content. Tourism value creation encompasses functional, emotional, social, cognitive, and personalization benefits, which collectively influence tourists' decisions (Carvalho & Alves, 2023). According to Grönroos and Voima (2013), value is co-created through tourists' engagement with branding, experiences, and digital information, making it a critical mediator in tourism models.

This framework posits that destination branding, tourism experience, and digital promotion media collectively shape tourists' visiting decisions both directly and indirectly through tourism value creation. According to Prebensen and Xie (2023), integrating these variables provides a holistic approach to understanding tourist behavior in rural contexts. Figure 3, the Conceptual Framework, illustrates these relationships, showing direct paths from the three exogenous variables to visiting decisions and indirect paths through tourism value creation. The framework is grounded in empirical findings from prior studies, such as those by Ribeiro et al. (2023), which highlight the need for integrated models in rural tourism research. Additional factors, such as destination loyalty or perceived risk, may also influence visiting decisions but are excluded to focus on the core variables of this study (Prayogi, 2020).

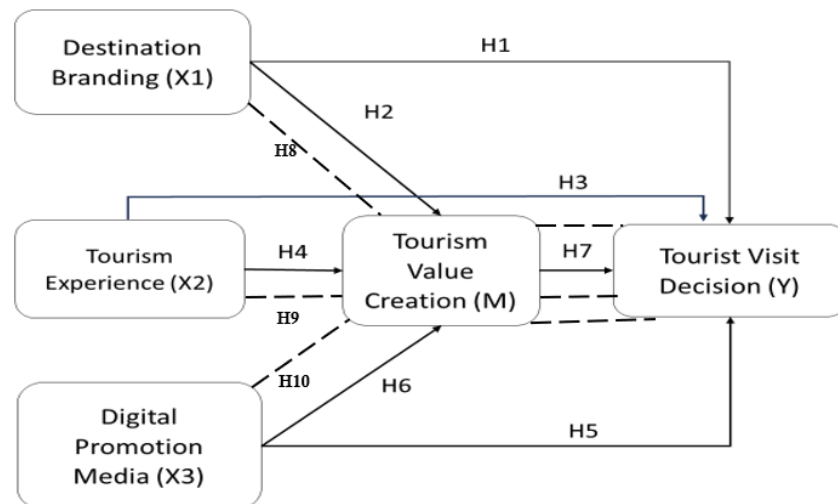


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a survey design to examine the influence of destination branding, tourism experience, and digital promotion media on tourists' visiting decisions, with tourism value creation as a mediating variable. The research was conducted in five emerging tourist villages in the Eastern Priangan region of West Java, namely Bayongbong (Garut), Taraju (Tasikmalaya), Gunung Sari (Ciamis), Batulawang (Banjar), and Selasari (Pangandaran). These villages were purposively selected based on their developing tourism status, active community involvement, and varying levels of digital visibility, as evidenced by their social media presence and online promotional activities. The selection criteria ensured that the villages represented diverse tourism potentials, such as agrotourism, ecotourism, and cultural tourism, providing a robust context for testing the proposed model.

The population consisted of domestic tourists who had visited one of the five selected villages within the past three months, ensuring recent and relevant experiences. A sample of 200 respondents was selected using purposive sampling, with inclusion criteria including actual visit experience, willingness to participate, and availability during data collection. The sample size was determined based on the guideline of ten times the number of indicators in the structural model, which included 31 indicators across five constructs, justifying a minimum sample of 150 respondents. The choice of 200 respondents provided additional statistical power for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis. Data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with ten local tourism managers to gain contextual insights into village tourism management practices.

The questionnaire was designed to measure five constructs: destination branding, tourism experience, digital promotion media, tourism value creation, and tourists' visiting decisions. Each construct included 5–8 indicators adapted from validated measurement models in prior studies, such as Pike and Page (2020) for destination branding and Kim and Lee (2020) for tourism experience. The instrument was pre-tested with 30 respondents to ensure validity and reliability, achieving Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70 for all constructs. Interviews with tourism managers explored challenges in branding and digital promotion, and responses were analysed thematically to complement quantitative findings, enhancing the contextual interpretation of the results.

Data analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS software, suitable for exploratory studies with complex models. The analysis process involved evaluating the measurement model to assess indicator validity, construct reliability (as measured by Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability), and convergent and discriminant validity (as indicated by the AVE and HTMT ratio). The structural model was tested using the bootstrapping method with 5,000 subsamples to evaluate path coefficients and hypotheses at a 5% significance level. Model fit was assessed using Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Chi-square, and Normed Fit Index (NFI), ensuring alignment with empirical data. The research was conducted over a six-month period, from December 2024 to June 2025, allowing sufficient time for data collection and analysis.

RESULTS

This study was conducted in five developing tourist villages in the Eastern Priangan region of West Java, namely Bayongbong (Garut), Taraju (Tasikmalaya), Gunung Sari (Ciamis), Batulawang (Banjar), and Selasari (Pangandaran). Each village offers unique tourism potentials, including agrotourism in Bayongbong, cultural tourism in Taraju, ecotourism in Gunung Sari, geotourism in Batulawang, and coastal tourism in Selasari. Data indicate that these villages contribute marginally to West Java's tourism visits compared to urban centers like Bandung. Only Taraju and Batulawang actively utilize social media platforms, such as Instagram and websites, for promotion, while the other villages rely on traditional methods like brochures. This variation in digital adoption provided a diverse context for examining the influence of digital promotion media alongside destination branding and tourism experience on tourists' visiting decisions.

A total of 200 respondents participated in the survey, with demographic characteristics revealing a predominantly female sample (60%), primarily aged 30–39 years (40%), with a senior high school education (41%), and mostly students (75%). Approximately 57% of respondents were first-time visitors, indicating a mix of new and returning tourists. The primary sources of information about the villages were social media (49%), brochures (27%), and recommendations from friends or family (18%). Semi-structured interviews with ten tourism managers from the five villages provided qualitative insights, revealing challenges such as limited digital marketing skills in Bayongbong, Gunung Sari, and Selasari, and inconsistent branding narratives across all villages. These findings, analysed thematically, complement the quantitative data by highlighting practical barriers to tourism development.

Descriptive statistics of the research variables are presented in Table 1. The table shows that tourism experience received the highest mean score (4.547, SD = 0.583), indicating that visitors found their interactions with the villages, such as cultural activities or nature exploration, highly satisfying. In contrast, tourism value creation had the lowest mean score (3.421, SD = 0.958), suggesting that tourists perceived limited added value from their visits, possibly due to inadequate facilities or engagement opportunities. Destination branding (3.532, SD = 0.961) and digital promotion media (3.458, SD = 0.906) scored moderately, reflecting partial success in establishing a distinct identity and leveraging digital channels. Visiting decision scored 3.563 (SD = 0.922), indicating a moderate intention to visit or recommend the villages. A comparative analysis across villages showed that Taraju and Batulawang, with active digital promotion, had slightly higher scores for digital promotion media (3.62 and 3.59, respectively) compared to Bayongbong (3.31), Gunung Sari (3.28), and Selasari (3.25).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Research Variable	Number of Indicators	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Destination Branding	8	3.532	0.961
Tourism Experience	6	4.547	0.583
Digital Promotion Media	6	3.458	0.906
Tourism Value Creation	6	3.421	0.958
Visiting Decision	5	3.563	0.922

Table 2. Summary of Construct Validity and Reliability Results

Variable	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Description
Destination Branding	0.574	0.852	0.890	Valid and Reliable
Tourism Experience	0.587	0.860	0.895	Valid and Reliable
Digital Promotion Media	0.650	0.893	0.918	Valid and Reliable
Tourism Value Creation	0.573	0.851	0.889	Valid and Reliable
Visiting Decision	0.548	0.794	0.858	Valid and Reliable

The measurement model was evaluated to ensure construct validity and reliability, with results summarized in Table 2. All constructs met the criteria for convergent validity, with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 and outer loadings exceeding 0.70 for all indicators. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values, ranging from 0.794 to 0.893 and 0.858 to 0.918, respectively, confirmed high internal consistency across constructs. Discriminant validity was established using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, with all values below 0.85, indicating that constructs were distinct. These results align with guidelines for robust measurement models in PLS-SEM studies (Hair et al., 2019). Interviews with tourism managers further supported these findings, as they noted that branding efforts in Taraju and Batulawang were more consistent, contributing to higher reliability scores for destination branding in these villages.

The structural model's fit was assessed using multiple criteria, demonstrating alignment with empirical data. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.062 was below the threshold of 0.10, indicating a good fit. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) of 0.806 approached the ideal benchmark, and the Chi-square value of 530.429 exceeded the table value of 40.113, confirming model appropriateness. These metrics suggest that the model accurately represents the relationships among variables. Qualitative insights from interviews suggested that the limited digital infrastructure in Bayongbong and Gunung Sari hindered effective promotion, potentially affecting the model fit in these contexts. The robust fit metrics, however, support the reliability of the quantitative findings across the five villages.

Table 3. Results of Structural Model Testing

Endogenous Variable	R-square	Adjusted R-square
Visiting Decision	0.245	0.233
Tourism Value Creation	0.301	0.291

The structural model results, presented in Table 3, demonstrate the model's explanatory power. The R-square value for tourism value creation was 0.301 (adjusted R-square: 0.291), indicating that destination branding, tourism experience, and digital promotion media collectively explain 30.1% of the variance in tourism value creation. The R-square for visiting decision was 0.245 (adjusted R-square: 0.233), suggesting that the model explains 24.5% of the variance in tourists' visiting decisions. The relatively low R-square for visiting decision aligns with findings by Prayogi (2020), who noted that additional factors, such as destination loyalty or perceived risk, may influence tourist decisions. Interviews with managers highlighted that external factor, like transportation access in Selasari, also affect visit intentions, explaining some of the unexplained variance.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results (Direct Effects)

Pathway	Coefficient	t-Statistic	p-Value	Description
Destination Branding → Visiting Decision	0.290	4.517	0.000	Significant
Destination Branding → Tourism Value Creation	0.333	5.200	0.000	Significant
Tourism Experience → Visiting Decision	0.254	4.177	0.000	Significant
Tourism Experience → Tourism Value Creation	0.251	4.603	0.000	Significant
Digital Promotion Media → Visiting Decision	0.342	5.488	0.000	Significant
Digital Promotion Media → Tourism Value Creation	0.396	7.394	0.000	Significant
Tourism Value Creation → Visiting Decision	0.212	3.926	0.000	Significant

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping method with 5,000 subsamples, with results shown in Table 4. All paths were statistically significant at the 5% level (t-statistic > 1.96, p-value < 0.05). Destination branding significantly influenced visiting decisions ($\beta = 0.290$, $t = 4.517$, $p = 0.000$) and tourism value creation ($\beta = 0.333$, $t = 5.200$, $p = 0.000$). Tourism experience had a significant effect on visiting decisions ($\beta = 0.254$, $t = 4.177$, $p = 0.000$) and tourism value creation ($\beta = 0.251$, $t = 4.603$, $p = 0.000$). Digital promotion media showed the strongest influence on both visiting decisions ($\beta = 0.342$, $t = 5.488$, $p = 0.000$) and tourism value creation ($\beta = 0.396$, $t = 7.394$, $p = 0.000$). Tourism value creation significantly affected visiting decisions ($\beta = 0.212$, $t = 3.926$, $p = 0.000$). These results confirm the direct effects of all exogenous variables and the mediating role of tourism value creation.

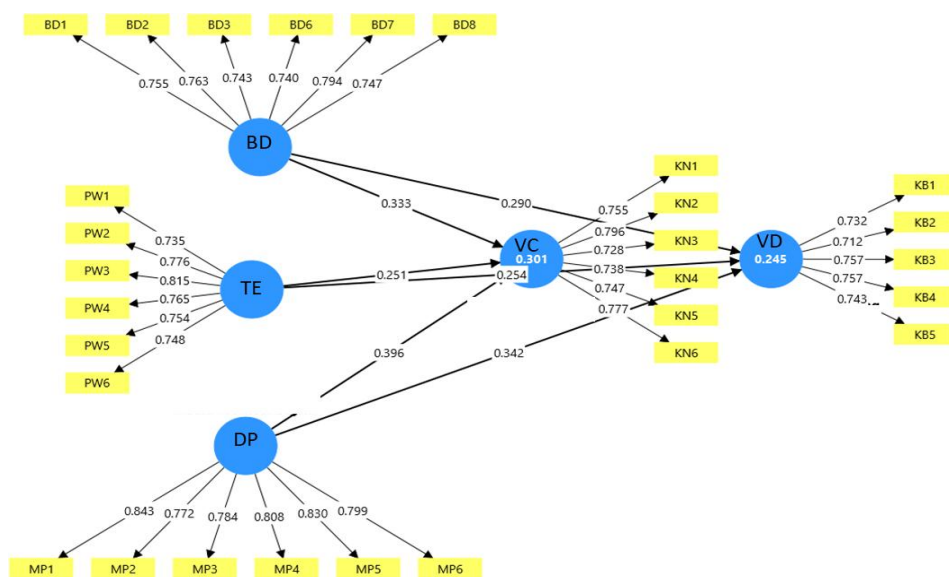


Figure 4. Structural Model of the Study

The structural model is visualized in Figure 4, illustrating the relationships among variables. The figure shows path coefficients for direct effects from destination branding, tourism experience, and digital promotion media to visiting decisions, as well as indirect effects through tourism value creation. All path coefficients were positive and significant, with factor loadings above 0.70, confirming convergent validity. The R-square values of 0.301 for tourism value creation and 0.245 for visiting decision indicate moderate explanatory power, consistent with the complex nature of tourist behavior (Hair et al., 2019). Qualitative data from interviews reinforced these findings, as managers in Taraju and Batulawang noted that their active social media campaigns enhanced visitor interest, aligning with the strong effect of digital promotion media.

Table 5. Bootstrapping Results of Indirect Effects

Mediation Path	Indirect Effect	Sample Mean	STDEV	t-Statistic	p-Value	Description
Branding → Value Creation → Visiting Decision	0.118	0.118	0.031	3.808	0.000	Significant
Experience → Value Creation → Visiting Decision	0.092	0.096	0.029	3.209	0.001	Significant
Digital Promotion → Value Creation → Visiting Decision	0.143	0.144	0.035	4.070	0.000	Significant

Mediation testing, presented in Table 5, confirmed the significant mediating role of tourism value creation. The indirect effect of destination branding on visitation decisions through tourism value creation was 0.118 ($t = 3.808$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of tourism experience was 0.092 ($t = 3.209$, $p = 0.001$), and digital promotion media had the strongest indirect effect at 0.143 ($t = 4.070$, $p = 0.000$). These results indicate partial mediation, as all exogenous variables also had significant direct effects on visiting decisions. Interviews highlighted that value creation was limited in villages like Bayongbong due to inadequate facilities, supporting the quantitative findings. The mediation effects underscore the importance of creating meaningful value to enhance visit intentions, particularly through effective digital promotion strategies.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that destination branding, tourism experience, and digital promotion media significantly influence tourists' visiting decisions, both directly and indirectly through tourism value creation, in the context of five tourist villages in the Eastern Priangan region of West Java. According to Pike and Page (2020), destination branding enhances a location's appeal by creating a distinct identity that resonates with tourists' preferences. In this study, destination branding's significant effect on visiting decisions ($\beta = 0.290$, $p < 0.05$) and tourism value creation ($\beta = 0.333$, $p < 0.05$) aligns with their findings, particularly in Taraju and Batulawang, where consistent branding narratives, such as cultural heritage promotion, strengthened visitor interest.

Tourism experience emerged as a critical driver of visiting decisions ($\beta = 0.254$, $p < 0.05$) and tourism value creation ($\beta = 0.251$, $p < 0.05$), supporting the Experience Economy framework proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999). According to Kim et al. (2012), memorable experiences, such as cultural workshops or nature-based activities, foster emotional engagement, which in turn enhances visitor satisfaction and increases revisit intentions. In this study, Taraju's cultural festivals and Batulawang's geotourism activities scored higher on experience quality, as reflected in the high mean score of 4.547 while Bayongbong and Gunung Sari faced challenges with limited facilities, reducing experiential value. The predominance of student respondents (75%) may have influenced these results, as younger tourists often prioritize interactive and authentic experiences (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015; Morrison, 2022).

Digital promotion media exhibited the strongest influence on both visiting decisions ($\beta = 0.342$, $p < 0.05$) and tourism value creation ($\beta = 0.396$, $p < 0.05$), consistent with findings by Mariani et al. (2019b). According to Leung et al. (2020), digital platforms like

Instagram and TripAdvisor amplify destination visibility through user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth. Taraju and Batulawang's active social media campaigns, as noted in interviews, correlated with higher digital promotion scores (3.62 and 3.59, respectively), compared to Bayongbong (3.31) and Selasari (3.25). This disparity highlights the need for enhanced digital marketing training for village managers, as supported by recent studies on rural tourism marketing (Sutanto & Setiawan, 2024). According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022), integrating short-form video content on platforms like TikTok can further boost engagement, a strategy yet to be fully adopted in these villages.

The mediating role of tourism value creation ($\beta = 0.212$, $p < 0.05$) aligns with the Service-Dominant Logic framework by Vargo and Lusch (2016). According to Carvalho and Alves (2023), value co-creation occurs when tourists actively engage with destination attributes, enhancing their perceived benefits. The low R-square for visiting decisions (0.245) suggests that additional factors, such as destination loyalty or transportation access, may influence tourist behavior, as noted by Prayogi (2020). Interviews revealed that Selasari's limited transportation infrastructure reduced perceived value, supporting this observation. According to Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2018), incorporating real-time digital feedback can strengthen value co-creation in rural tourism, a strategy that could address these gaps.

The relatively low explanatory power of the model (R-square = 0.245 for visiting decisions) indicates the complexity of tourist decision-making in rural contexts. According to Kotler et al. (2021) and Kladou et al. (2021), external factors such as economic conditions or travel restrictions can significantly impact visit intentions, particularly in emerging destinations. Qualitative insights from managers highlighted that inconsistent promotional budget and limited digital infrastructure in Bayongbong and Gunung Sari constrained their competitiveness. According to Buhalis et al. (2023), adopting smart tourism technologies, such as virtual tours, can enhance the appeal of rural destinations. These findings suggest that while the proposed model is robust, incorporating additional variables, such as perceived risk or digital accessibility, could improve its explanatory power in future research.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that destination branding, tourism experience, and digital promotion media significantly influence tourists' decisions to visit five emerging tourist villages in the Eastern Priangan region of West Java, with tourism value creation serving as a critical mediator. The findings underscore the importance of establishing a distinct destination identity, delivering memorable and authentic experiences, and utilising digital platforms to enhance visibility and engagement. Among the variables, digital promotion media emerged as the most influential factor, particularly in villages like Taraju and Batulawang, where active social media campaigns effectively attracted visitors. The integration of these factors fosters meaningful value co-creation, encouraging tourists to choose rural destinations over more established urban centers. These results validate a comprehensive model for rural tourism development, emphasizing the need for cohesive strategies that align branding, experiential offerings, and digital marketing efforts to boost competitiveness in emerging tourist villages.

The implications of this study are substantial for tourism stakeholders and policymakers. Village managers should prioritize consistent branding that highlights unique cultural and natural assets, alongside investing in digital marketing training to enhance online visibility. Local governments are encouraged to support infrastructure improvements, such as transportation access in Selasari and digital connectivity in Bayongbong, to facilitate value co-creation and attract more visitors. These efforts can be integrated into national tourism strategies to promote sustainable rural tourism across Indonesia. However, the study's limitations include a relatively low explanatory power for visiting decisions, suggesting that additional factors, such as destination loyalty or external constraints, may also play a role. The sample, predominantly composed of

younger respondents, may also limit generalizability. Future research should adopt mixed-methods approaches to capture qualitative nuances and longitudinal designs to examine evolving trends in tourist behaviour, ensuring more robust strategies for sustainable tourism development in rural areas.

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