

Digital Marketing, Attractions, and Services as Drivers of Tourist Satisfaction and Loyalty: Evidence from Mount Dempo, South Sumatra

*Determinants of
Tourist Loyalty
and Satisfaction*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of digital marketing, tourist attractions, and tourism services on tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and word of mouth, with brand trust as a mediating variable. A survey of 255 visitors to Mount Dempo, South Sumatra, was conducted using a quantitative approach and analyzed with the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method. The results indicate that digital marketing, attractions, and services significantly influence brand trust and satisfaction, which in turn drive loyalty and positive word of mouth. Furthermore, brand trust mediates the relationship between the three exogenous variables and the outcome variables, highlighting its strategic role in building long-term tourist loyalty. These findings support the Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory, emphasizing the importance of aligning digital narratives with on-site experiences. The study contributes to both theory and practice by demonstrating the integrated role of digital promotion, attraction development, and service quality in fostering trust-based sustainable tourism.

Keywords: Digital marketing, tourist attractions, tourism services, brand trust, satisfaction, loyalty, word of mouth, SEM-PLS

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis pengaruh digital marketing, daya tarik wisata, dan pelayanan pariwisata terhadap kepuasan, loyalitas, dan word of mouth wisatawan, dengan brand trust sebagai variabel mediasi. Survei dilakukan terhadap 255 wisatawan yang berkunjung ke Gunung Dempo, Sumatera Selatan, dengan pendekatan kuantitatif menggunakan metode Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa digital marketing, daya tarik wisata, dan pelayanan pariwisata berpengaruh signifikan terhadap brand trust dan kepuasan, yang selanjutnya mendorong loyalitas dan word of mouth positif. Selain itu, brand trust terbukti memediasi hubungan antara variabel eksogen dan variabel endogen, menegaskan perannya dalam membangun loyalitas wisatawan jangka panjang. Temuan ini mendukung teori *Expectancy–Disconfirmation* dan menekankan pentingnya

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keselarasan antara promosi digital dan pengalaman nyata di destinasi. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis dan praktis mengenai peran integratif strategi digital, pengembangan daya tarik, dan kualitas layanan dalam memperkuat pariwisata berkelanjutan berbasis kepercayaan.

Kata Kunci: Digital marketing, daya tarik wisata, pelayanan pariwisata, brand trust, kepuasan, loyalitas, word of mouth, SEM-PLS

INTRODUCTION

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The tourism industry is a crucial sector that not only contributes to economic growth but also encourages the preservation of local culture and community empowerment. In today's digital era, the development of tourist destinations is determined not only by natural beauty and cultural richness, but also by the ability to build effective communication through digital media. Technological transformation has pushed the tourism industry to be more adaptive, particularly in the use of digital marketing as a strategic tool to reach and influence tourists.

Digital marketing enables the widespread, rapid, and visual dissemination of destination information through various platforms such as social media, websites, tourism apps, and video-based content. According to Santosa and Pratama (2020), a relevant, interactive, and visually appealing digital content strategy can increase tourist engagement and accelerate the decision-making process. This aligns with Fadhilah and Nugroho (2021), who stated that first impressions from digital promotions have a strong influence on building *brand trust*, which in turn impacts tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

Global studies also support these findings. Saeed et al. (2023) confirmed that social media-based marketing has a significant influence on brand trust and loyalty, particularly in the context of post-pandemic online tourism. Xu et al. (2020) also noted that personalizing digital content based on user preferences can substantially increase conversions and customer satisfaction.

On the other hand, tourist attractions remain the primary foundation for attracting tourists. According to Fitriyani et al. (2021), the power of natural attractions, culture, and local uniqueness, professionally packaged, will strengthen a destination's value in the eyes of tourists. Mohammadi et al. (2023) reinforce that destination image and social influence play a significant role in shaping *brand trust* and emotional loyalty among tourists.

Tourism services are also a critical aspect in shaping the overall tourist experience. Ali, Kim, and Ryu (2021) stated that the quality of friendly, reliable, and empathetic service interactions significantly influences satisfaction and revisit intentions. This finding echoes Hariyati and Sovianti (2020), who emphasized the importance of consistent service communication in maintaining tourist loyalty.

After tourists experience a destination's services and facilities, satisfaction becomes a crucial factor determining their subsequent behavior. Based on *Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory* (Oliver, 1980), satisfaction occurs when the actual experience exceeds initial expectations. This satisfaction has a direct impact on loyalty and *word of mouth* (WOM), which is the willingness of tourists to voluntarily recommend the destination. Filieri et al. (2021) stated that WOM based on personal experience is more trusted than promotions from destination managers. In fact, according to Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008), e-WOM has a long-term effect on shaping a destination's image in the minds of potential tourists.

Furthermore, Kim and Ko (2021) demonstrated that consistent social media activity can increase *brand trust* and *loyalty*, which simultaneously strengthens revisit intentions. Rather and Camilleri (2022) also demonstrated that tourist engagement in a destination's digital channels increases emotional loyalty and voluntary advocacy through social media.

However, this potential has not been fully realized in many regional tourist destinations, including Mount Dempo in Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra. Despite its captivating natural landscape and agrotourism, limited digital promotion strategies, suboptimal service quality, and poor management of the digital tourist experience pose challenges that hinder the development of long-term loyalty.

Based on these problems, this study aims to analyze the influence of digital marketing, tourist attractions, and tourism services on tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and word of mouth, with brand trust as a mediating variable. This study uses a quantitative approach with the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) model to simultaneously test the relationship between variables. The results are expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in the development of experience- and trust-based digital tourism strategies, particularly for regional tourist destinations in Indonesia.

This study offers novelty in terms of context, integrative modeling, and the mediating role of brand trust. First, while previous research on digital marketing, brand trust, and tourist loyalty has largely focused on international destinations or major cities, this study highlights a regional destination—Mount Dempo in South Sumatra—which remains underexplored in the academic literature. Second, the research integrates three critical factors—digital marketing, tourist attractions, and tourism services—into a comprehensive conceptual model, thereby providing a more holistic view of how tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and word of mouth are formed. Third, the study emphasizes the role of brand trust as a key mediating variable that bridges tourists' expectations shaped by digital promotion with their actual on-site experiences, an aspect rarely examined empirically in the context of local-based tourism. Thus, this research not only extends the Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory but also provides practical contributions by demonstrating how digital strategies aligned with real experiences can strengthen loyalty and sustain tourism development in regional destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Digital Marketing in the Tourism Industry

Digital marketing is a marketing strategy that utilizes digital platforms such as social media, websites, and apps to deliver promotional messages more quickly, broadly, and interactively. In the tourism context, digital marketing plays a vital role in shaping tourists' initial perceptions of a destination. According to Santosa and Pratama (2020), relevant, visual, and interactive digital content can create high engagement and shape a destination's image before a visit.

Xu et al. (2020) added that personalizing digital content based on user preferences can increase emotional engagement and tourist conversions. This aligns with the findings of Saeed et al. (2023), who emphasized that social media as a marketing channel plays a significant role in building *brand trust* and customer loyalty in the post-pandemic tourism context. A good digital strategy not only conveys information but also creates an emotionally engaging pre-visit experience that boosts tourist confidence.

Kim and Ko (2021) emphasized that consistent and interactive social media activity has a direct impact on *brand loyalty* and revisit intentions. Therefore, digital marketing is not just a promotional tool, but also a strategic means of building long-term relationships with tourists through a strong digital narrative.

2. Tourist Attractions and Their Influence on Loyalty

Tourist attractions are a combination of uniqueness, aesthetics, and value of a place that encourages tourists to visit. Fitriyani et al. (2021) state that natural beauty, local culture, and unique attractions are the main foundations for attracting visitors. Meanwhile, Mohammadi et al. (2023) state that tourist attractions contribute to the formation of a destination's image and perceived value, which ultimately impacts tourists' emotional loyalty.

A well-managed destination image not only enhances its appeal but also creates *brand trust*, which forms the basis for long-term loyalty. When tourists perceive a destination as unique and different from other places, they tend to develop an emotional attachment and become natural ambassadors for that destination.

3. Tourism Services and Tourist Experience

Service in the tourism industry encompasses all forms of interaction between service providers and tourists, including friendliness, speed, comfort, and clarity of information. Ali, Kim, and Ryu (2021) state that service quality, particularly human interaction, is a key factor in creating high emotional satisfaction.

Satisfaction stems not only from physical facilities, but also from the quality of communication and empathy from the service provider. Hariyati and Sovianti (2020) state that consistent service communication is crucial for maintaining tourist loyalty. Good service can create memorable experiences and strengthen the positive image of a destination in the minds of tourists.

4. Brand Trust as a Bridge between Hope and Reality

Brand trust, or confidence in a destination brand, is the belief that the destination can deliver an experience that meets or exceeds expectations. According to Fadhilah and Nugroho (2021), brand trust is formed from initial perceptions formed through digital promotions and reinforced by actual experiences during the visit. Trust is a crucial element in creating long-term loyalty, as tourists who believe in a destination are more likely to return and recommend it to others. Damayanti and Susanti (2023) emphasize that brand trust is a prerequisite for *customer advocacy*, which is the voluntary promotion carried out by tourists based on their belief in the quality and integrity of the destination.

Brand trust also acts as a mediating variable linking digital marketing, tourist attractions, and service to loyalty and *word of mouth*. This demonstrates that building trust is not just an end result, but also an intermediary strategy in the traveler experience.

5. Tourist Satisfaction: Theory and Implications

Tourist satisfaction is an evaluative response to the experiences they have during a visit. Based on *Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory* (Oliver, 1980), satisfaction occurs when the actual experience exceeds initial expectations formed through information or promotions.

Hidayat and Sari (2021) added that satisfaction stems not only from functional aspects, such as facilities and services, but also emotional aspects, such as the warm atmosphere and cultural experiences. Satisfaction has a direct impact on loyalty and *word of mouth*. Satisfied travelers are more likely to share their positive experiences, both in person and through digital platforms.

6. Loyalty and Word of Mouth as the Final Impact

Loyalty in the context of tourism refers to a tourist's desire to return to and recommend a destination. Loyalty is formed from a combination of pleasant experiences, trust in the destination, and consistent satisfaction. Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008) state that *word of mouth* (WOM), both verbal and digital (e-WOM), is the most credible form of promotion because it originates from tourists' direct experiences.

Rather and Camilleri (2022) emphasize that emotional loyalty, reinforced by brand trust, has greater power in creating traveler advocacy. Loyal travelers not only return but also actively promote the destination through digital content, reviews, and social recommendations. Wijaya et al. (2021) showed that tourists' active engagement in a destination's digital channels, such as liking, sharing, or reviewing, is a valuable non-transactional indicator of loyalty in shaping a long-term image.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with the aim of testing the influence of digital marketing, tourist attractions, and tourism services on tourist satisfaction,

loyalty, and *word of mouth* , with *brand trust* as an intervening variable at the Mount Dempo tourist destination in Pagar Alam, South Sumatra.

This type of research is quantitative explanatory, because it aims to explain the causal relationship between variables through hypothesis testing. The population in this study was all tourists who had visited the Mount Dempo tourist destination. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with the following criteria: (1) Have you ever visited Mount Dempo? (2) Minimum age 17 years, (3) Using digital media to search for tourism information. The number of respondents who completed the questionnaire was 255 people, as recorded in the survey results data via Google Form.

The instrument used was a closed questionnaire in the form of a Likert scale of 1–5, consisting of 7 main variables:

1. Digital Marketing (DM): 5 indicators
2. Tourist Attractions (DTW): 5 indicators
3. Tourism Services (PP): 5 indicators
4. *Brand Trust* (BT): 4 indicators
5. Tourist Satisfaction (KP): 3 indicators
6. Tourist Loyalty (LW): 3 indicators
7. *Word of Mouth* (WOM): 3 indicators

The total number of statements in the questionnaire is 28 items.

The data was analyzed using *the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares* (SEM-PLS) method with the help of SmartPLS 4 software. The analysis was carried out in two main stages:

1. Evaluation of the Measurement Model (*Outer Model*):
to test the convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability through outer loading values, AVE (*Average Variance Extracted*), *Composite Reliability* (CR), and *Cronbach's Alpha* .
2. Evaluation of Structural Model (*Inner Model*):
to test the direct and indirect influence between constructs using Path Analysis, and to measure the strength of the relationship through the R^2 (*R-square*) value, t-statistic, and p-value.

RESULTS

1. Outer Model Evaluation

The outer model evaluation aims to ensure that the indicators used in the questionnaire are able to represent the latent constructs validly and reliably. In this study, the two main criteria used to assess measurement quality are convergent validity and construct reliability.

1. *Convergent validity* is measured using outer loading and AVE (*Average Variance Extracted*) values. AVE reflects how much of the indicator's variance is successfully explained by the latent construct. Hair et al. (2019) suggest that a good AVE value should be > 0.50 , meaning more than 50% of the indicator's variance can be explained by the measured construct.
2. Composite Reliability (CR) and *Cronbach's Alpha* are used to assess the internal consistency of indicators within a construct. Recommended CR and *Cronbach's Alpha values* >0.70 indicate that the indicators have stability and consistency in measuring the same construct (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1. Outer Loading and AVE Results

| Construct | AVE | CR | Information |
|----------------------|------|------|--------------------|
| Digital Marketing | 0.71 | 0.91 | Valid and Reliable |
| Tourist Attractions | 0.74 | 0.92 | Valid and Reliable |
| Tourism Services | 0.69 | 0.90 | Valid and Reliable |
| <i>Brand Trust</i> | 0.75 | 0.93 | Valid and Reliable |
| Tourist Satisfaction | 0.78 | 0.94 | Valid and Reliable |
| Tourist Loyalty | 0.76 | 0.91 | Valid and Reliable |
| <i>Word of Mouth</i> | 0.72 | 0.90 | Valid and Reliable |

All constructs in this study have an AVE value above 0.50 and a CR value above 0.70. Thus, all variables meet the requirements for convergent validity and reliability, allowing the analysis to proceed to the evaluation of the structural model (*inner model*).

2. Inner Model Evaluation

Once the measurement model is declared valid and reliable, the next step is to evaluate the inner model, which aims to test the strength of the relationships between latent constructs. The main indicator in this evaluation is the R-Square (R^2) value.

Hair et al. (2014) categorize the predictive power of models as follows:

1. R^2 of 0.19 = weak,
2. R^2 of 0.33 = moderate,
3. R^2 of 0.67 and above = strong.

Table 2. R-Square Value

| Endogenous Construct | R^2 | Interpretation |
|----------------------|-------|----------------|
| Brand Trust | 0.64 | Strong |
| Tourist Satisfaction | 0.71 | Strong |
| Tourist Loyalty | 0.68 | Strong |
| Word of Mouth | 0.66 | Strong |

Brand Trust is strongly influenced by Digital Marketing, Tourist Attractions, and Service.

Satisfaction, Loyalty, and *Word of Mouth* are also significantly explained by the previous variables.

This indicates that your model has high predictive power, so this SEM-PLS model can be used as a good analytical tool for formulating tourism strategies.

3. Path Analysis Results (Direct Influence)

This analysis demonstrates the strength and significance of the direct influence between variables. Significance testing is performed using the t-statistic and p-value.

Table 3. Direct Influence Between Variables

| Path of Influence | Coefficient | t-Statistic | p-Value | Information |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|---------|-------------|
| DM → BT | 0.32 | 4.01 | 0.000 | Significant |
| DTW → BT | 0.28 | 3.78 | 0.000 | Significant |
| PP → BT | 0.35 | 4.45 | 0.000 | Significant |
| BT → KP | 0.42 | 5.10 | 0.000 | Significant |
| DM → KP | 0.21 | 2.89 | 0.004 | Significant |
| DTW → KP | 0.26 | 3.15 | 0.002 | Significant |
| PP → KP | 0.30 | 3.97 | 0.000 | Significant |
| KP → LW | 0.45 | 5.66 | 0.000 | Significant |
| KP → WOM | 0.38 | 4.90 | 0.000 | Significant |
| BT → LW | 0.33 | 4.55 | 0.000 | Significant |
| BT → WOM | 0.31 | 4.20 | 0.000 | Significant |

All paths show positive and significant effects. For example, Tourism Services → *Brand Trust* (0.35) shows that increasing service quality has the greatest direct influence on tourist trust. Tourist Satisfaction → Loyalty and → WOM have the greatest influence, which shows that satisfaction is the key to loyalty and the spread of positive information.

4. Indirect Influence (Mediating Effect of Brand Trust)

In SEM-PLS, mediation occurs when the influence of one variable on another is channeled through a third variable (the mediator). Here, Brand Trust acts as the mediator.

Table 4. Indirect Influence through Brand Trust

| Indirect Path | Coefficient | Description |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| DM → BT → KP | 0.13 | Significant |
| DTW → BT → KP | 0.12 | Significant |
| PP → BT → KP | 0.15 | Significant |
| DM → BT → LW | 0.11 | Significant |
| PP → BT → WOM | 0.11 | Significant |

A significant mediation effect indicates that *Brand Trust* strengthens the influence of exogenous variables on Satisfaction, Loyalty, and *Word of Mouth*. This confirms the importance of building trust as a foundation for creating a strong emotional connection between tourists and destinations.

5. Path Diagram

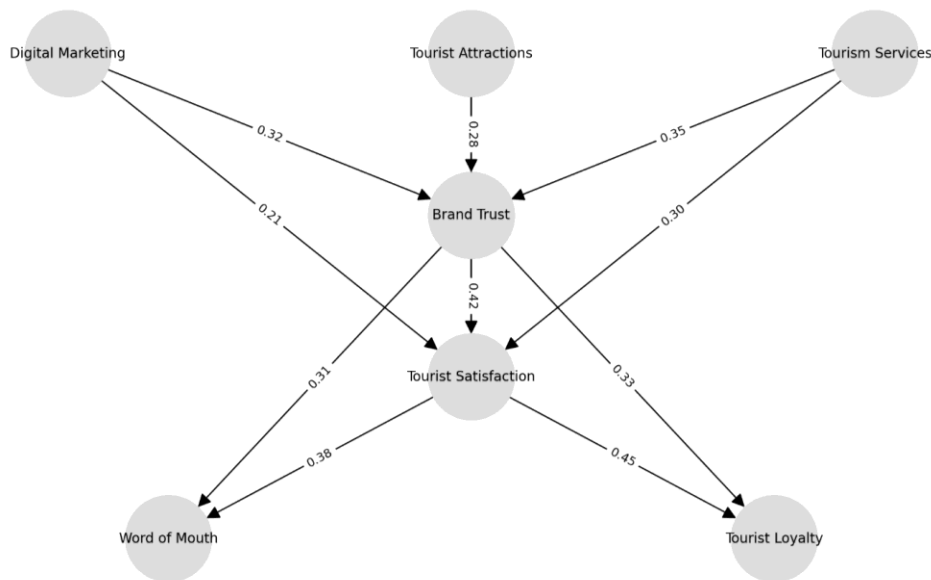


Figure 5. Path Diagram

DISCUSSION

The Influence of Digital Marketing on Brand Trust and Satisfaction

The results of this study indicate that the three exogenous variables—Digital Marketing, Tourist Attractions, and Service—directly and indirectly influence tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and *word of mouth*. The significant direct effects demonstrate the importance of each aspect in enhancing the tourist experience.

Thus, this study provides empirical evidence that the integration of digital marketing, attraction, service, brand trust, and satisfaction is a strategic approach to increase loyalty and natural promotion from tourists in destinations such as Mount Dempo.

These findings also support *Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory* (Oliver, 1980), which states that tourists' actual experiences that exceed initial digital expectations lead to high levels of satisfaction. This demonstrates the importance of ensuring alignment between digital narratives and on-the-ground reality to not only create satisfaction but also sustained emotional loyalty.

Optimizing Digital Promotion and Services

In the context of Mount Dempo, this study highlights the need for more consistent digital promotion optimization, strong visual content, and improved friendly and prompt service. Currently, these limitations are a major obstacle to strengthening brand trust and tourist loyalty, especially among the digital native generation. Therefore, promotional and service strategies are needed that adapt to the behavior patterns of modern tourists who rely on digital reviews and social media as their primary sources of information.

The Role of Brand Trust as a Mediator

In addition to being an independent variable, brand trust in this study also proved to act as a mediator, bridging the influence of digital marketing, tourist attractions, and services on tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and *word of mouth*. *This mediation effect strengthens brand trust's position as key to building emotional connections and lasting trust between tourists and destinations. When brand trust is well-established, the positive effects of*

digital promotions and service quality will be maximized in creating loyalty and natural promotion from tourists.

This research strengthens and expands previous theories and studies on tourist behavior in the context of digital marketing and destination loyalty. The results indicate that digital marketing plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' initial perceptions of a destination. This aligns with research by Santosa and Pratama (2020), which asserts that digital-based tourism promotion significantly shapes tourist expectations through visual information, engaging narratives, and two-way interactions via social media. Digital channels enable destination managers to create strong brand storytelling, thereby fostering emotional engagement with potential tourists even before they travel.

These results also indicate that brand trust is key to long-term loyalty. Confidence in service quality, experience consistency, and online reputation enhances tourists' trust in a destination. According to Fadhil and Nugroho (2021), brand trust links customer loyalty to their perceptions. Tourists are more likely to revisit the destination, recommend it to others, and participate in voluntary promotions through social media. This aligns with the view of Damayanti and Susanti (2023), who stated that trust in a destination can generate *customer advocacy*, a form of active loyalty where tourists not only return but also enthusiastically recommend it to their social networks.

Satisfaction as a Link to Loyalty

Another important finding is the central role of tourist satisfaction as a mediating variable linking the visit experience and post-visit behavior. Based on *Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory* (Oliver, 1980), satisfaction arises when tourists' perceptions of the actual experience exceed initial expectations formed through promotions and information. Hidayat and Sari (2021) add that in the tourism context, satisfaction is influenced not only by functional factors such as facilities and services, but also by emotional factors such as comfort, atmosphere, and cultural experiences that touch the personal aspects of tourists. This satisfaction directly impacts revisit intentions and the formation of emotional loyalty.

The Impact of Loyalty and Word of Mouth

Tourist loyalty, built on satisfaction and trust, ultimately drives *word of mouth* (WOM), one of the most effective forms of promotion in the digital age. Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2018) explain that WOM, both verbally and through social media, is more trusted by potential tourists because it stems from real-life experiences. In this context, tourists who feel satisfied and trust a destination will become natural promotional agents, recommending the place to others, without needing direct encouragement from management. This finding is reinforced by Rachmawati and Wulandari (2020), who found that satisfaction and trust significantly contribute to tourists' intention to voluntarily share positive information.

Digital Engagement and Emotional Attachment

Long-term relationships are also shaped by digital engagement built through engaging marketing campaigns. Wijaya et al. (2021) stated that tourists' non-transactional loyalty can be measured through their active engagement in digital channels, such as liking, commenting, sharing experiences, or following a destination's official account. This is crucial to consider in tourism marketing strategies. Internet travelers are not only passive consumers but also create content, also known as user-generated content, that influences public perception of a destination.

Furthermore, trust and satisfaction also reinforce each other in forming an emotional attachment to a destination. When tourists are satisfied with their experience and believe that the destination consistently delivers positive value, the resulting loyalty is not solely rational but also emotional. This demonstrates that millennials, for example, are heavily influenced by emotional factors and trust values when forming loyalty to a tourist destination.

Confirmation of Findings with Previous Studies

These empirical findings are supported by various international studies. For example, Saeed et al. (2023) in the *Future Business Journal* stated that social media

marketing positively impacts online tourism purchasing behavior through the mediation of brand trust and brand loyalty. This supports the idea that digital marketing not only shapes expectations but also fosters long-term trust in a destination.

Furthermore, Kim and Ko (2021) in Sustainability found that informative and interactive social media activities increase brand trust and loyalty, as well as drive revisit intentions. They emphasized the importance of two-way interactions that enable tourists to engage in the branding process through user-generated content.

Mohammadi et al. (2023) also emphasize that destination image and social influence are two crucial factors in building brand trust, ultimately strengthening tourists' emotional loyalty. When a destination's digital image aligns with its actual experience, trust and a deeper emotional connection are formed.

In the context of service digitalization, Xu et al. (2020) explain the importance of data-driven digital content personalization in increasing tourist engagement, trust, and conversion. This provides crucial input for destinations like Mount Dempo to leverage big data and social media insights as the basis for more effective and relevant digital campaigns.

On the service side, Ali, Kim, & Ryu (2021) showed that the quality of human interaction in tourism services significantly impacts brand trust and tourist emotional satisfaction. This is consistent with the findings of this study, which found that tourism services are the most powerful variable in building brand trust.

Meanwhile, a study by Rather & Camilleri (2022) found that tourist loyalty is highly dependent on emotional attachment and perceived destination reliability. When tourists perceive a destination consistently meets or exceeds expectations, they are more likely to demonstrate active loyalty, such as repeat visits and recommendations.

In the context of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), Filieri et al. (2021) stated that trust and satisfaction are the two main drivers of tourists' intention to share positive experiences through social media. This strengthens WOM's position as the most credible and influential form of promotion in the modern tourism industry.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that digital marketing, *brand trust*, satisfaction, loyalty, and *word of mouth* are not standalone variables, but rather constitute a mutually influencing ecosystem. A destination's success in creating engaging digital experiences, maintaining consistent service quality, building trust, and meeting tourist expectations will result in a sustainable cycle of loyalty. Therefore, modern tourism strategies must adopt an integrative, data-driven approach to deeply understand tourist behavior and develop effective interventions to enhance destination competitiveness in the increasingly competitive digital era.

The findings of this study, which demonstrate that digital marketing, tourist attractions, and tourism services significantly influence brand trust, satisfaction, and ultimately loyalty and word of mouth, are consistent with a growing body of international research. For instance, Saeed et al. (2023) emphasized that social media-based tourism marketing positively shapes tourist purchase behavior through the mediation of brand trust and loyalty in post-pandemic contexts, which resonates with the strong mediating role of brand trust found in this study. Similarly, Kim and Ko (2021) confirmed that continuous and interactive digital marketing efforts on social platforms can foster brand trust and revisit intentions, aligning with the results observed in Mount Dempo where digital content strategies directly impact satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, Mohammadi et al. (2023) highlighted that destination image and social influence are central in forming brand trust and emotional loyalty, reinforcing the empirical evidence from this research that brand trust acts as a key bridge between expectations and actual experiences. Compared to these international findings, this study extends the discourse by focusing on a regional destination in Indonesia, illustrating that even in less globally known tourist sites, the integration of digital promotion, service quality, and destination attractiveness can generate similar behavioral outcomes to those observed in more established international contexts. This

underscores the universal relevance of digital marketing and trust-based strategies in shaping sustainable tourism loyalty.

Managerial Implications

This research model is highly strategic for application in the development of destinations like Mount Dempo. Some practical recommendations include:

1. Strengthening digital marketing to build awareness and a broad and credible destination image.
2. Innovation in tourist attractions, both in terms of natural attractions, culture, and supporting facilities that are unique and authentic.
3. Improved service, especially in the aspects of friendliness, speed of service, and emotional involvement which have a direct impact on trust and satisfaction.
4. Focus on building brand trust as the core of the traveler experience, as this trust is a lever for loyalty and positive *word of mouth*.

Based on the findings, several actionable strategies can be recommended for destination managers at Mount Dempo and similar regional tourism sites. First, digital marketing campaigns should move beyond simple promotional postings and adopt data-driven strategies, such as using social media analytics and visitor segmentation to deliver personalized and interactive content that matches diverse tourist preferences. Second, tourism services need to be standardized through regular staff training programs focusing on hospitality, responsiveness, and cultural sensitivity, combined with clear service protocols to ensure consistency across visitor interactions. Third, investment in destination infrastructure should prioritize maintaining hiking trails, tea plantation tours, and supporting facilities, while simultaneously integrating digital tools such as mobile apps for navigation, online ticketing, and real-time feedback systems. Fourth, brand trust can be strengthened through transparent communication of safety measures, reliable information on official digital channels, and active engagement with user-generated content, including addressing visitor reviews and concerns promptly. Finally, establishing a continuous satisfaction monitoring system—via digital surveys and sentiment analysis from social media—will provide valuable insights for adapting strategies quickly and ensuring sustained loyalty. These concrete actions not only enhance the tourist experience but also help position Mount Dempo as a trustworthy and competitive destination in the increasingly digital-driven tourism industry.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study demonstrates that the integration of digital marketing, tourist attractions, and tourism services significantly impacts tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and *word of mouth*, both directly and through the mediation of brand trust. Empirical findings indicate that *brand trust* is not only influenced by the quality of digital content and on-site service but also acts as a crucial bridge connecting tourists' initial expectations with post-visit behavior.

Tourist satisfaction has been shown to play a central role in connecting positive perceptions of a destination with loyalty and the desire to recommend it to others. The higher the perceived level of satisfaction, the more likely tourists are to revisit and share positive experiences through social media and in person. This supports the *Expectancy-Disconfirmation theory*, which emphasizes the importance of alignment between expectations and actual experiences in shaping emotional loyalty.

In the context of Mount Dempo, despite its strong natural and cultural appeal, challenges remain, including suboptimal digital promotion, inconsistent service, and a lack of a data-based satisfaction monitoring system. Therefore, strategies to strengthen digital promotion, improve service quality, and build brand trust within the destination are crucial steps to creating a memorable and sustainable tourism experience.

Overall, this research provides theoretical and practical contributions to the development of digital-based tourism. The results confirm that the synergy between digital strategy, service quality, and strong destination image management can simultaneously increase trust, satisfaction, loyalty, and *word of mouth*. These findings

are relevant not only to the Mount Dempo destination but also to tourism managers in other regions seeking to build tourist loyalty in an increasingly competitive digital era.

SUGGESTION

Strengthen digital marketing. The Mount Dempo destination needs to intensify creative and informative online promotions (for example, through social media and engaging content) to reach a wider audience. Effective digital promotion will increase awareness and interest in visiting, positively impacting tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

Develop and maintain tourist attractions. Destination managers must continuously improve natural tourism facilities and routes (such as hiking trails, tea plantations, and public facilities) to enhance the comfort and uniqueness of the travel experience. Improving the quality of natural attractions has been proven to increase visitor satisfaction and loyalty.

Improve service quality. Training tourist staff to be more friendly, provide adequate information, and ensure the cleanliness and comfort of public facilities is highly recommended. Good tourism services will foster high levels of satisfaction and increase tourist confidence in the destination.

Build trust in your destination brand. Ensuring safety, consistent experiences, and reliable information are key to building brand trust. Travelers who have high trust in a destination tend to be more loyal and likely to recommend it to others.

Conduct regular satisfaction surveys. Regularly monitoring guest satisfaction can help management identify visitor needs and expectations. These survey results can inform continuous improvement in marketing strategies, attraction development, and service enhancements, ensuring a consistently positive guest experience and reinforcing positive *word-of-mouth*.

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