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# The Effect of Destination Image and e-WOM on Decision to Visit Agrotourism

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## Abstract

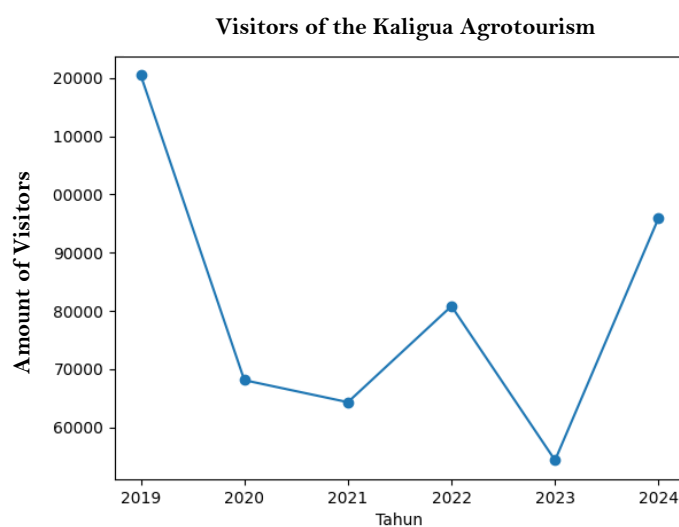
Tourism plays a crucial role in supporting economic growth and regional development, particularly in optimizing local potential and increasing community income. However, understanding the factors that influence tourists' visiting decisions remains essential to ensure the sustainability and competitiveness of tourism destinations. This research aims to analyze the influence of destination image and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on tourists' decisions to visit Kaligua Nature Tourism in Brebes Regency. The study applied a quantitative survey method involving 271 respondents, and the data were processed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS software. The findings reveal that destination image exerts a positive and statistically significant impact on visiting decisions. Similarly, e-WOM demonstrates a positive and significant effect on tourists' decisions to visit. The R-square result indicates that 73.4% of the variation in visiting decisions can be explained by the independent variables included in the model. These results highlight the importance of maintaining a favorable destination image and leveraging digital information channels to stimulate tourists' visiting intentions. Accordingly, destination managers are encouraged to enhance the destination's image and maximize digital marketing strategies.

## Keywords

Destination Image, e-WoM, Tourism, Visiting Decision.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism plays a vital role in Indonesia's economic development by contributing to GDP, creating employment, increasing income, and supporting regional growth, making it a priority sector for post-pandemic economic recovery (Esquivias et al., 2021; Syafitri et al., 2023). At the regional level, tourism development serves as a strategic approach to optimize local potential. Brebes Regency in Central Java, for instance, offers diverse natural attractions, including Kaligua Tea Agrotourism. It integrates agricultural and tourism activities through tea plantation experiences, nature-based tourism, and educational value, while also contributing to the local economy.



**Figure 1.** Graph of Visitors to Kaligua Agrotourism 2019-2024

According to Figure 1, the number of tourist visits to Kaligua Tea Agrotourism remains unstable over time. Data from the Central Statistics Agency of Brebes Regency in 2025, visits declined from 120,450 in 2019 to 68,110 in 2020 and 64,325 in 2021, then increased to 80,813 in 2022, dropped again to 54,359 in 2023, and rose to 95,955 in 2024. These fluctuations indicate a gap between the destination's tourism potential and actual visitor numbers. Despite the general recovery of the tourism sector after the pandemic, this trend is not consistently reflected in Kaligua, suggesting the presence of underlying factors influencing tourists' visiting decisions.

The decision to visit can be understood as the process of determining tourists' choices of a tourist destination that is considered most capable of meeting their needs, desires, and expectations, which is manifested through their willingness to travel and allocate costs to obtain travel experiences and satisfaction (Wulandari et al., 2025). In addition, the decision to visit is also interpreted as the result of a tourist's evaluation of several alternative tourist destinations, where tourists choose the destination that is considered most suitable for their preferences and travel goals, both before and after the visiting experience (Sarmigi & Parasmala, 2021). An increase in visitation decisions must be achieved at Kaligua Agro Tourism in order to increase and stabilize the number of visitors and revenue.

Destination image refers to the perceptions and evaluations formed in tourists' minds regarding a destination, which influence their attitudes and visiting decisions (Yuan & Vui, 2023). It reflects tourists' views, impressions, and expectations shaped by information and prior experiences, and plays a key role in assessing the attractiveness and quality of a destination (Andiaresmi & Pramono, 2023). A positive destination image can enhance tourists' interest and confidence, whereas a negative

image may reduce their intention to visit (Sumatri & Pribowo, 2023). In addition, e-WOM serves as an important source of information through digital media, providing reviews, opinions, and travel experiences that influence tourists' perceptions and decisions (Kuo, 2024). Strong and positive e-WOM can increase destination attractiveness and trust, while limited or negative e-WOM may weaken tourists' interest, highlighting its importance in shaping visiting decisions.

The decision to visit is the dependent variable in this study. The researchers chose the decision to visit as the dependent variable because of the gap in previous research. Research conducted by Ath'af and Sukaris (2024) shows that destination image and e-WOM have a significant effect on the decision to visit. Meanwhile, in a study conducted by Andriani and Ma'rifatullaili (2022) showed that e-WOM did not affect the decision to visit, but destination image had a significant effect on the decision to visit. Thus, there are still differences in the results of previous studies, so it is necessary to conduct further research by considering the phenomena supported by previous studies.

Based on the identified phenomena and inconsistencies in previous studies, a research gap emerges regarding the influence of destination image and e-WOM on visiting decisions. While some studies find that both variables significantly affect visiting decisions, others report that e-WOM does not have a significant influence, indicating inconsistent empirical results. In addition, the fluctuation in visitor numbers at Kaligua Tea Agrotourism highlights the need to better understand the factors driving tourists' decisions. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effects of destination image and e-WOM on visiting decisions in the context of Kaligua Tea Agrotourism, in order to provide empirical evidence and contribute to resolving inconsistencies in prior research.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development**

### **2.1. The Effect of Destination Image on Visiting Decisions**

Destination image can be understood as the assessment and impression formed in the minds of tourists about a tourist destination, which arises from their visiting experience, level of satisfaction, and perceptions of various aspects of the destination, such as infrastructure, environmental conditions, climate, and historical and cultural elements (Malikhah et al., 2023). In addition, the image of a destination is also formed through various sources of information, whether from the personal experiences of tourists, stories and recommendations from others, or information conveyed through the media and promotional activities by the management or related agencies. This information plays a role in shaping the public's perception of a tourist destination (Huang et al., 2023; Faisal et al., 2025). In the context of tourism, destination image plays an important role because the image attached to a destination can encourage or hinder tourists' motivation in determining their travel destination. The collection of impressions, insights, and ideas formed about the quality of the destination's products and communication are factors that influence tourists' decisions in choosing a tourist destination to visit.

Previous studies consistently demonstrate a significant relationship between destination image and visiting decisions. A quantitative study conducted by Arevin (2024) found that destination image has a significant influence on visiting decisions. This finding is supported by Pan et al. (2021), who also concluded, using a quantitative approach, that destination image significantly affects tourists' decisions to visit a destination. Conceptually, a strong destination image, encompassing cognitive, unique, and affective dimensions, can shape positive tourist perceptions, which in turn increase the likelihood of choosing a particular destination (Yuan & Vui, 2023). Therefore, the more positive tourists' perceptions of a destination, the greater their propensity to make visiting decisions.

H1: Destination image has a significant effect on visiting decision.

## 2.2. The Effect of e-WOM on Visiting Decisions

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), is a form of digital-based marketing communication that allows consumers to convey their experiences, assessments, and opinions regarding products or services they have used. Through e-WOM, consumers can share information in the form of reviews or opinions that can be accessed by a wide audience, including individuals who have no direct relationship with the information provider (Yan et al., 2016). In addition, e-WOM can also be understood as the exchange of information through the internet, which allows individuals who have never interacted face-to-face to share their experiences regarding certain services or products. The information conveyed through e-WOM becomes an important reference source for potential consumers in evaluating a product or service.

Electronic word of mouth represents the evolution of traditional word of mouth, where information exchange is no longer conducted through direct interpersonal communication but mediated by electronic platforms, enabling faster dissemination and broader reach (Rahjasa et al., 2022). As a digital marketing concept, e-WOM facilitates the sharing of information, opinions, and consumer reviews, which play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing decision-making. Empirical evidence consistently supports its impact on visiting decisions. Pasaribu and Yuliawati (2019), using a quantitative approach, found that e-WOM has a significant effect on visiting decisions, a finding that is reinforced by Rivero and Facrureza (2024), who also reported a significant influence of e-WOM on tourists' decisions. This relationship is further explained by the nature of online reviews, where positive information can enhance trust and attract potential tourists, while negative reviews may reduce their intention to visit (Afren, 2024; Sihombing et al., 2024). Moreover, information conveyed through e-WOM is often perceived as more objective and credible than traditional promotional messages, thereby strengthening its role in influencing visiting decisions.

H2: E-WOM has a significant effect on visiting decision.

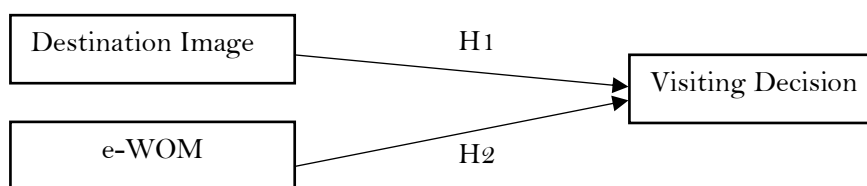


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

According to Figure 2, this study proposes a research framework that examines the influence of destination image and Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on visiting decisions. Destination image is conceptualized as a key factor shaping tourists' perceptions of a destination, which in turn influences their decision-making process. A more positive destination image is expected to increase the likelihood of tourists choosing a particular destination. In addition, e-WOM serves as an important external information source, where online reviews, opinions, and shared experiences contribute to shaping tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. Positive e-WOM is assumed to strengthen trust and interest, thereby encouraging visiting decisions. Therefore, this framework posits that both destination image and e-WOM have significant effects on visiting decisions.

### **3. Methods**

This study employed a quantitative research design based on the positivist paradigm to test the proposed hypotheses. Quantitative research methods are grounded in positivist philosophy and are used to examine specific populations or samples using primary and secondary data. The research was conducted in Bumiayu District and surrounding areas, with visitors to Kaligua Tourism in Brebes Regency serving as the research object. This approach was selected to analyze the relationships among variables in a structured and measurable manner. By using quantitative methods, the study aimed to produce objective findings that could explain the causal relationships proposed in the hypotheses.

The population of this research comprised visitors to Kaligua Tourism in Brebes Regency. Primary data were gathered through questionnaires distributed directly to respondents. The questionnaire, as a data collection instrument, consisted of a series of written questions and statements designed to be answered by the participants. The measurement instrument employed a 1–5 Likert scale to assess respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions regarding the research variables. This scale captures social phenomena through varying levels of agreement, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Furthermore, a literature review was undertaken to obtain secondary data and to provide theoretical foundations relevant to the study.

The data analysis technique followed systematic procedures, including grouping data based on variables and respondent characteristics, tabulating responses, presenting findings for each variable, and performing statistical calculations to answer research questions and test hypotheses. This study utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) approach, processed using the SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was chosen because of its advantages in handling complex models, addressing multicollinearity, remaining robust with missing data, and exploring relationships among latent variables more comprehensively (Sihombing et al., 2022). The evaluation process included measurement model testing (validity and reliability) and structural model assessment through the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect size (F-square), predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), and PLS-Predict analysis (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Hypothesis testing was conducted using a non-parametric bootstrapping procedure, with significance assessed through p-values and 95% confidence intervals of the path coefficients.

### **4. Results**

To evaluate the validity and reliability of the constructs employed in this study, an assessment of the measurement model (outer model) was conducted. This evaluation aims to ensure that the indicators used appropriately represent their respective latent variables. The validity test was performed to determine whether each construct met the required criteria, thereby confirming that the measurement instrument was suitable for further structural model analysis. Only constructs that satisfied the established validity and reliability thresholds were advanced to the subsequent stage of analysis.

**Table 1.** Validity and Reliability Result

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's alpha	CA (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	AVE
Destination Image	DI1	0.863	0.803	0.903	0.930	0.727
	DI2	0.853				
	DI3	0.827				
	DI4	0.851				
	DI5	0.852				
E-WOM	EW1	0.727	0.702	0.705	0.820	0.530
	EW2	0.727				
	EW3	0.714				
	EW4	0.735				
Visiting Decision	VD1	0.868	0.925	0.919	0.945	0.759
	VD2	0.873				
	VD3	0.882				
	VD4	0.856				
	VD5	0.875				

Based on the validity test results using factor loading, all outer model values or correlations between constructs and variables indicate that all indicators are valid and can be used for further analysis. The results in Table 1 show that all research variables satisfy the established criteria for reliability and construct validity. The destination image construct demonstrates a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.803, a Composite Reliability (rho\_c) of 0.930, and an AVE of 0.727. The e-WOM construct records a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.702, a Composite Reliability of 0.820, and an AVE of 0.530. Meanwhile, the visiting decision construct shows a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.925, a Composite Reliability of 0.945, and an AVE of 0.759. Since all Cronbach's Alpha, rho\_A, and Composite Reliability values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 and the AVE values are above 0.50, it can be concluded that each construct exhibits satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity. Accordingly, the measurement model is considered both reliable and valid, allowing the analysis to proceed to the structural model evaluation stage.

**Table 2.** HTMT Test

Variable	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)
E-WOM <-> Destination Image	0.899
Visiting Decision <-> Destination Image	0.719
Visiting Decision <-> E-WOM	0.764

Discriminant validity testing was conducted using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) approach as presented in Table 2. The test results show that the HTMT values between constructs e-WOM-destination image are 0.899, destination image-visiting decision are 0.719, and e-WOM-visiting decision are 0.764. All HTMT values were below the maximum limit of 0.90, so it can be concluded that each construct in this study had good discriminant validity. This shows that each construct was able to measure different concepts, and there was no overlap between constructs.

**Table 3.** Collinearity Statistic (Inner VIF)

Variable	VIF
Destination Image -> Visiting Decision	2.477
e-WOM -> Visiting Decision	2.444

The VIF value in Table 3 indicates the presence of collinearity in the research model. The table above shows that there are variables in this study with VIF values < 5, which means that this study found a correlation, namely the relationship

between destination image and visit decision, with a VIF value of 2.477, and e-WOM and visit decision, with a VIF value of 2.444.

Based on Table 4, the results of the coefficient of determination (R-square) test show that the visiting decision variable has an R-square value of 0.734 and an adjusted R-square value of 0.72. This indicates that 73.4% of the variation in visiting choices can be attributed to the independent variables in the model, whereas the leftover 26.6% is due to other factors not considered in this research. The minor discrepancy between the R-square and adjusted R-square values suggests that the model exhibits sufficient stability and is not prone to overfitting. Consequently, the structural model is regarded as having a moderate ability to explain visiting decisions.

**Table 4.** Q- Square, F Square, and R Square

Variable	SSO	SSE	Q <sup>2</sup>	F-Square	R Square	Adjusted R Square
Destination Image	1355.00	1355.00	0.381	0.760		
e-WOM	1084.00	1084.00	0.355	0.822		
Visiting Decision	1355.00	822.755	0.393		0.734	0.72

Based on the results of the F-square (f<sup>2</sup>) analysis, the variable destination image on visiting decision shows an f<sup>2</sup> value of 0.760, which falls into the large effect size category. This indicates that destination image makes a substantial contribution to Y within the proposed structural model. Additionally, variable e-WOM on visiting decision yields an f<sup>2</sup> value of 0.822, which is also categorized as a large effect size. This finding suggests that e-WOM exerts a strong influence in explaining the dependent variable visiting decision. Based on the Q<sup>2</sup> table, the test results show that destination image has a value of 0.381, e-WOM 0.355, and visiting decision has a value of 0.393. These values indicate that the five variables have predictive relevance in this model. This means that the research model has a good ability to predict visit decisions based on the exogenous variables used.

**Table 5.** PLS Predict Test

Item	Q <sup>2</sup> predict	PLS-SEM RMSE	PLS-SEM MAE	LM RMSE	LM MAE
VD1	0.383	0.533	0.416	0.546	0.426
VD2	0.331	0.561	0.439	0.567	0.456
VD3	0.402	0.529	0.422	0.540	0.436
VD4	0.351	0.559	0.434	0.573	0.429
VD5	0.417	0.514	0.410	0.530	0.408

Note: VD = Visiting Decision, RMSE = Root Mean Square Error, MAE=Mean Absolute Error, LM = Linear Regression Model.

Based on Table 5, the analysis findings suggest that the suggested Partial Least Squares (PLS) model shows better predictive performance than the Linear Regression (LM) model according to RMSE criteria. This is evident in the reduced Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) and Mean Absolute Error (MAE) figures yielded by the PLS-SEM model for the majority of measurement items associated with destination image, e-WOM, service quality, digital marketing, and facilities, in contrast to those produced by the linear regression method.

To assess whether the hypotheses were accepted or rejected, significance testing was conducted using t-statistics and p-values. The bootstrapping procedure was employed to minimize reliance on distributional assumptions in estimating parameters and standard errors, ensuring that the results were derived from empirical resampling and thus more robust for inference.

**Table 6.** Hypothesis Test

Variable	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	t-statistics	p-values
Destination Image -> Visiting Decision	0.289	0.283	0.096	3.290	0.004
e-WOM -> Visiting Decision	0.165	0.177	0.080	2.413	0.002

According to Table 6, the destination image variable has a positive and statistically significant effect on visiting decision, with a sample coefficient of 0.289, a t-statistic of 3.290 (exceeding 1.96), and a p-value of 0.004 (below 0.05). These results suggest that an enhanced destination image boosts the chances of tourists deciding to visit. In a similar manner, the e-WOM variable shows a positive and notable impact on the visiting decision, indicated by an original sample value of 0.165, a t-statistic of 2.413, and a p-value of 0.002. This indicates that electronic word of mouth significantly impacts tourists' choices to visit.

**Table 7.** Confidence Interval 95%

Variable	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Bias	5.0%	95.0%
Destination Image -> Visiting Decision	0.289	0.283	-0.004	0.331	0.553
e-WOM -> Visiting Decision	0.165	0.177	0.005	0.186	0.418

Based on the path analysis results obtained in Table 7 through the bootstrapping procedure, the variable destination image shows a significant effect on visiting decision, with a path coefficient of 0.289 and a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.331 to 0.553, which does not include zero. Similarly, variable e-WOM also demonstrates a significant influence on visiting decision, with a coefficient of 0.306 and a confidence interval between 0.186 and 0.418. Since the confidence intervals for both variables do not cross zero, it can be concluded that only destination image and e-WOM have a statistically significant effect on visiting decision within the proposed model.

## 5. Discussion

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that destination image positively and significantly influences visiting decisions. This is supported by a path coefficient of 0.289, a t-statistic of 3.290 ( $>1.96$ ), and a p-value of 0.004 ( $<0.05$ ). Consequently, the proposition asserting that destination image influences visiting decisions is acknowledged. These findings indicate that a good destination image, such as natural beauty, tourist attractions, comfort, and positive impressions felt by tourists, can increase the tendency of tourists to visit (Ilyas et al., 2023; Hamdy et al., 2024). The more positive the tourists' perception of a destination, the more likely they are to choose that destination as their destination.

These results are in line with the research conducted by Widayati et al. (2020) and Riyadi and Nurmahdi (2022) which shows that destination image has a positive and significant effect on visitation decisions. This study reinforces that destination image not only shapes expectations but also influences the actual behavior of tourists in choosing tourist locations. A good image, including aspects of cognitive image, unique image, and affective image, can shape positive perceptions that encourage tourists to choose that destination (Yuan & Vui, 2023).

According to the analysis results, the e-WOM factor significantly and positively influences visiting choices. This is shown by a path coefficient of 0.165, a t-statistic

of 2.413 ( $>1.96$ ), and a p-value of 0.002 ( $<0.05$ ). Consequently, the theory that e-wom affects the choice to visit is acknowledged. These results indicate that information, reviews, and recommendations conveyed by tourists through digital media, such as social media and online review platforms, play an important role in influencing potential tourists' decisions to visit (Gulati, 2024; Swadhi et al., 2025). Positive reviews circulating in digital media can increase the trust and interest of potential tourists, while negative reviews can reduce their intention to visit (Afren, 2024; Sihombing et al. 2024).

The e-WOM is a form of informal communication between consumers that has a high level of credibility because it comes from the real experiences of tourists. Information conveyed through e-WOM is considered more objective and trustworthy than commercial promotions. The findings of this study are in line with previous studies by Rivai et al. (2022) and Habibie et al. (2025) that state that e-WOM has a significant effect on tourist visitation decisions. Therefore, the management needs to actively manage its digital reputation, such as encouraging tourists to provide positive reviews, responding to comments or complaints, and utilizing social media as a means of two-way communication with tourists.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that destination image and electronic word of mouth exert a positive and significant influence on tourists' decisions to visit Kaligua Tourism. The destination image, reflected in its natural scenery, tourist attractions, comfort, and distinctive atmosphere, has been shown to enhance visiting decisions. Furthermore, reviews and recommendations disseminated through digital media play an important role in shaping positive perceptions and stimulating tourists' interest in visiting. The research model exhibits strong explanatory and predictive capabilities, as indicated by an R-square value of 0.734 and a Q-square value of 0.393. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening destination image and optimizing digital promotional strategies. Accordingly, destination managers should maintain environmental quality, improve visitor comfort and safety, and encourage tourists to share positive experiences through digital platforms. Support from local government through infrastructure development, improved accessibility, and integrated tourism promotion is also essential.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to certain limitations, as it focuses on a single tourist destination and includes only two independent variables, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to incorporate additional variables, such as service quality, facilities, digital marketing, or tourist satisfaction, and to expand the scope of investigation to different destinations in order to obtain more comprehensive insights. Moreover, employing larger and more diverse samples, as well as integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, would provide a deeper understanding of tourist behavior and enhance the robustness of future research findings.

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Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

### ***Data Disclosure Statement***

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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