EXPLORING THE PARADOXES OF TOURISM: HOW MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES, CITY BRANDING, AND DESTINATION IMAGE INFLUENCE REVISIT INTENTIONS?

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Abstract

This study addresses a critical gap in tourism literature by examining how memorable tourism experiences, city branding, and destination image collectively influence revisit intention through tourist satisfaction in Batu City Tourism Village. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) on data from 155 visitors surveyed within six months of their visit, the results show that while memorable experiences and city branding enhance satisfaction, they do not directly impact revisit intention. In contrast, destination image significantly influences revisit intention, highlighting its critical role in shaping tourist behavior. The findings challenge the assumption that positive experiences and strong branding alone ensure return visits, emphasizing the complexity of tourist decision-making. Additionally, tourist satisfaction mediates these relationships but proves insufficient on its own to guarantee revisit intention. These insights underscore the need for dynamic tourism strategies that prioritize enhancing destination image while offering compelling reasons for tourists to return, ensuring alignment with evolving preferences and expectations.

Keywords: memorable tourism experiences; city branding; destination image; tourist satisfaction; revisit intention

Article Info

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's tourism sector is expanding rapidly across various regions, emerging as a key driver of national economic growth. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (2024), the sector made a strong recovery last year, growing by 29.5% to nearly IDR 1,008 trillion, contributing 4.8% to the country's total economic output. By 2034, this contribution is expected to rise to approximately IDR 1,828 trillion annually, making up 5.3% of Indonesia's GDP. Employment in the tourism industry is also predicted to surpass 17 million jobs, meaning one in every nine Indonesians will work in this sector. Tourism development in Indonesia is carried out sustainably, aligning with broader national development goals. What sets Indonesia

apart is its unique comparative advantage, rooted in the strong presence of religious norms and cultural values that influence daily life (Ikasari, 2021)

Indonesia's natural beauty holds immense potential for development through effective and comprehensive collaboration at the national level, involving all relevant stakeholders. As outlined in Law Number 10 of 2009 on Tourism, tourism development is essential to create equal business opportunities, generate economic benefits, and address the challenges of local, national, and global changes. When managed optimally, tourism can significantly increase tourist arrivals, which in turn drives economic growth. One region in Indonesia with exceptional tourism potential is Batu City. Batu City, with its hilly and mountainous terrain at an altitude of around 800 meters above sea level, is surrounded by Mount Panderman (2,010 m) and Mount Welirang (3,156 m). creating a cool climate with temperatures ranging from 17–25°C. Batu City also serves as a gateway to the Kawasan Strategis Pariwisata Nasional (KSPN), or the National Tourism Strategic Area (Sentanu et al., 2021). The city is characterized by diverse landscapes; many villages, such as Oro-Oro Ombo, Songgokerto, Tlekung, Torongrejo, and most areas in Bumiaji Sub-district, feature hilly terrains, while others are relatively flat.

Batu City holds immense economic potential, primarily driven by its agricultural and tourism sectors (Anggaini & Juviano, 2023). The city's fertile natural resources support diverse agricultural activities, including vegetables, rice, fruits, ornamental plants, medicinal plants, dairy farming, rabbit farming, and aquaculture. Notably, horticulture has positioned Batu City as an Agropolitan City, a hub for high-quality crops and sustainable agricultural practices. In addition to agriculture, Batu City has developed a thriving tourism industry, which serves as another key driver of economic growth. Its tourism potential spans agro-tourism, natural tourism, and man-made attractions, supported by well-developed infrastructure such as hotels and accommodations. Recognized regionally and nationally, the Batu City Government continues to enhance its tourism offerings, leveraging its unique natural beauty and agricultural heritage. As of 2014, Batu City featured 14 prominent tourist attractions, including Selecta Baths, Kusuma Agro Tourism, East Java Park, Cangar Hot Springs, Songgoriti Baths, Batu Night Spectacular (BNS), and apple-picking tours. Other attractions include the Dammadhipa Arama Monastery, the Animal Museum, Beji Outbound, Kaliwatu Rafting, Kampoeng Kidz, Banyu Brantas Rafting, and Tourism Villages. These attractions showcase the city's rich natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities, making it a complete destination for tourists. With strong government support, continued development, and a commitment to delivering high-quality visitor experiences, Batu City has the potential to emerge as a leading destination in Indonesia. Its ability to provide memorable tourism experiences not only strengthens the local economy but also showcases Indonesia's natural beauty and cultural charm to the world.

Tourists' experiences in a destination have consistently been shown to shape their memories of the visit (Wang et al., 2020). The overall tourist experience is considered the most important factor for tourists after completing a trip. Additionally, the most influential source of information for individuals deciding whether to revisit a destination is their own memories of previous travel experiences (H. Kim & Chen, 2019). As a result, offering tourists positive and memorable experiences is crucial in the competitive tourism market (Ratnamiasih et al., 2024). A Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) is defined as "a tourism experience that is positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred" (J.-H. Kim et al., 2012). MTEs play a crucial role in influencing tourists' future travel decisions (Sojasi Qeidari et al., 2024; Stone et al., 2018) and are essential for enhancing both tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. As highlighted by Xiang & Fesenmaier (2022), an MTE is a highly positive and significant experience that tourists encounter during their trip, making it a key factor in shaping their overall perception and loyalty toward a destination. According to Kim et al. (2012) and Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022), the indicators of MTEs include hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge. Lee et al. (2020) suggests that MTEs significantly impact revisit intention through tourist satisfaction. However, several studies indicate that MTEs do not significantly influence revisit intention through tourist satisfaction (Che et al., 2021; Morshed et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2024). This inconsistency in findings highlights a gap in the literature, suggesting that the relationship between MTEs, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention may be influenced by other contextual factors. Therefore, further exploration is needed to better understand the conditions under which MTEs contribute to revisit intention, making this topic highly relevant for continued research.

In addition to offering memorable tourism experiences, city branding and destination image are essential in increasing tourist satisfaction and their intention to revisit. City branding focuses on creating a strong and lasting impression through elements like slogans, logos, and promotional campaigns, which help shape tourists' perceptions and encourage return visits (Hussein, 2020). Several studies support the positive relationship between city branding, satisfaction, and revisit intention (Mandagi et al., 2024; Mutia et al., 2020; Ubjaan et al., 2018). On the other hand, destination image—formed by tourists' beliefs, impressions, and feelings about a place—also plays a crucial role in driving repeat visits. According to Chi & Qu (2008), factors that contribute to a strong destination image include the travel environment, natural attractions, entertainment options, historical sites, infrastructure, accessibility, opportunities for relaxation, outdoor activities, and value for money. Studies by Asiku et al. (2020), Quynh et al. (2021), Chan et al. (2022), and Kusumawati & Rahayu (2022), highlight that a positive destination image enhances satisfaction, which in turn boosts tourists' intention to revisit.

Moreover, previous studies have shown that tourist satisfaction mediates the effects of destination image (Tsai et al., 2022), perceived value (Hossain et al., 2024), memorable tourism experiences (Torabi et al., 2022), and novelty-seeking (Thipsingh et al., 2022) behavior on revisit intention. This indicates that the impact of these factors on tourists' intention to revisit is significantly strengthened when they are satisfied with their experiences. Expectation and perceived value had a more substantial influence on revisit intention compared to satisfaction (Damanik & Yusuf, 2022).

Finally, the mediating role of tourist satisfaction in the relationship between memorable tourism experiences, city branding, and destination image on revisit intention is critical. Scientifically, when tourists have positive and memorable experiences, it leads to higher satisfaction levels, which in turn fosters a desire to revisit (Torabi et al., 2022; Tsai et al., 2022). A well-executed city branding strategy enhances the overall perception and attractiveness of the destination, leading to increased tourist satisfaction. Similarly, a favorable destination image positively influences tourists' expectations and experiences, further boosting satisfaction. Satisfied tourists are more likely to develop emotional connections and positive memories associated with the destination, which significantly increases their intention to return. Thus, tourist satisfaction acts as a crucial intermediary that transforms positive tourism experiences, effective city branding, and a strong destination image into a higher likelihood of revisits.

Given this background, the study aims to address a critical gap in the existing literature. While prior research has explored the role of tourist satisfaction in mediating the effects of various factors on revisit intention, few studies have simultaneously examined how memorable tourism experiences, city branding, and destination image collectively impact revisit intention through tourist satisfaction in the specific context of Batu City Tourism Village. Additionally, this study seeks to confirm the findings of Damanik and Yusuf (2022), who reported that expectation and perceived value have a greater influence on revisit intention compared to satisfaction, and the inconsistency of the relationship between MTEs, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention (Che et al., 2021; Morshed et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2024). By addressing these gaps, this research provides a deeper understanding of the interplay among these variables and offers new insights into enhancing tourism experiences and developing strategies to encourage repeat visits to Batu City Tourism Village.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative explanatory research approach, collecting data using questionnaires that included structured questions and statements. A total of 155 respondents, consisting of individuals who had visited the Batu City Tourism Village within the six months preceding the study, were recruited to participate in a closed-ended survey. The sample size of 155 is considered appropriate based on the principles of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), which recommends a minimum of 5-10 respondents per observed variable to ensure robust and reliable analysis (Engelbrecht et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2022). This number aligns

with previous studies that successfully employed SEM with similar sample sizes for comparable research contexts (Chaniago, 2022; Han et al., 2019; Laksamana, 2018).

This study focuses on understanding the relationships among three key variables: memorable tourism experience (X1), city branding (X2), and destination image (X3), which act as exogenous variables. Revisit intention (Y2) is analyzed as the endogenous variable, with tourist satisfaction (Y1) serving as a mediating factor. By exploring these nuance relationships, the study provides a detailed view of how these elements collectively influence tourist behavior, offering insights into strategies for improving visitor satisfaction and fostering repeat visits to Batu City Tourism Village.

In this study, a memorable tourism experience is defined as the positive and impactful moments tourists enjoy during their visit. Based on the indicators identified by Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022), such experiences include aspects like hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge. City branding, on the other hand, involves crafting the perceptions, impressions, and unique images that tourists associate with a city. As highlighted by Mutia et al. (2020) and Sevin (2014), effective city branding incorporates elements such as presence, place, pre-requisites, people, pulse, and potential. Similarly, the destination image is shaped by tourists' beliefs and impressions about a location, with key indicators including the travel environment, natural attractions, entertainment options, historical sites, infrastructure, accessibility, relaxation opportunities, outdoor activities, and value for money (Chi & Qu, 2008).

On the other hand, tourist satisfaction is defined as the fulfillment experienced by visitors after their travel, encompassing aspects like satisfaction with city attractions, recreational facilities, local hospitality, safety, public services, and the city's tagline (Asiku et al., 2020; Ubjaan et al., 2018). Tourist satisfaction plays a critical role in shaping revisit intention, which reflects tourists' willingness or readiness to return to the same destination. Revisit intention is measured through indicators such as planning future visits, forming emotional connections with the destination, and prioritizing the location for future trips (Asiku et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2022). Enhancing these factors is essential for increasing tourist satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits.

Data was collected through questionnaires, which involved providing respondents with a set of written statements or questions to answer (Sugiyono, 2012). The study generally utilized a Likert scale for quantitative measurement. Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and processed with the AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) software.

The study focuses on three exogenous variables: memorable tourism experience (X1), city branding (X2), and destination image (X3). The endogenous variable in this research is revisit intention (Y2), with tourist satisfaction (Y1) acting as a mediating variable. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of how memorable tourism experiences, city branding, and destination image influence tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. By understanding these relationships, the study aims to provide valuable insights for enhancing tourist experiences and promoting repeat visits to Batu City Tourism Village.

In this study, a memorable tourism experience refers to the positive and impressive moments that tourists enjoy during their travels. Indicators of such experiences, as identified by Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022), include aspects like hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge. City branding involves shaping the perceptions, impressions, and unique images that tourists have about a city. According to Mutia et al. (2020) and Sevin (2014), effective city branding includes elements such as presence, place, pre-requisites, people, pulse, and potential. Meanwhile, the destination image is formed by tourists' beliefs and impressions about a particular place, with indicators including the travel environment, natural attractions, entertainment, historical sites, infrastructure, accessibility, relaxation opportunities, outdoor activities, and value for money (Chi & Qu, 2008).

Tourist satisfaction is the fulfillment felt by individuals after their travel experiences, encompassing satisfaction with city attractions, recreational facilities, local hospitality, safety, public services, and the city's tagline (Asiku et al., 2020; Ubjaan et al., 2018). This satisfaction significantly influences revisit intention, which is the willingness or readiness of tourists to return to the same destination. According to Asiku et al. (2020) and Chan et al. (2022), indicators of revisit intention include planning future visits, having emotional connections with the place, and prioritizing the destination for future trips. Understanding and enhancing these factors are crucial for boosting tourist satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits.

RESULTS

Table 1. Goodness of Fit Result

Goodness of fit index	Result	Cut off value	Decision
X^2 Chi-Square (df = 245, α = 0,05)	257,391	Chi-Square (df = 245, α = 0,05) = 282,51	Good
Probability (p)	0,281	≥ 0,05	Good
CMIN/DF	1,051	≤ 2,00	Good
RMSEA	0,018	≤ 0,08	Good
GFI	0,889	≥ 0,90	Marginal
TLI	0,990	≥ 0,95	Good
CFI	0,992	≥ 0,95	Good

Based on the provided Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) diagram (Figure 1) and Table 1, the analysis presents a comprehensive evaluation of the relationships between memorable tourism experience (X1), city branding (X2), destination image (X3), tourist satisfaction (Y1), and revisit intention (Y2). The model fit indices suggest an excellent fit, with a chi-square value of 257.391 and a probability value of 0.281, indicating that the model fits the data well, as the chi-square value is less than the cut-off value of 282.51 and the probability value exceeds the 0.05 threshold. The RMSEA value of 0.018 is well below the threshold of 0.08, suggesting a close fit and further reinforcing the model's accuracy. The GFI value of 0.889 is near the acceptable threshold of 0.90, which indicates a marginal fit, while the CMIN/DF value of 1.051 is within an acceptable range, significantly lower than the cut-off value of 2.00, thus indicating a good model fit. Additionally, the TLI and CFI values of 0.990 and 0.992, respectively, are both well above the 0.95 threshold, indicating that the model has met the criteria for goodness of fit by performing correlations and removing insignificant indicators. The indicators excluded from the model to improve fit include X11 (hedonism) from the memorable tourism experience variable, X21 (presence), X22 (place), X25 (pulse), and X26 (potential) from the city branding variable, and X36 (accessibility) from the destination image variable. These adjustments have ensured that the remaining indicators provide a robust evaluation of the relationships between the variables, thereby enhancing the overall reliability and validity of the model.
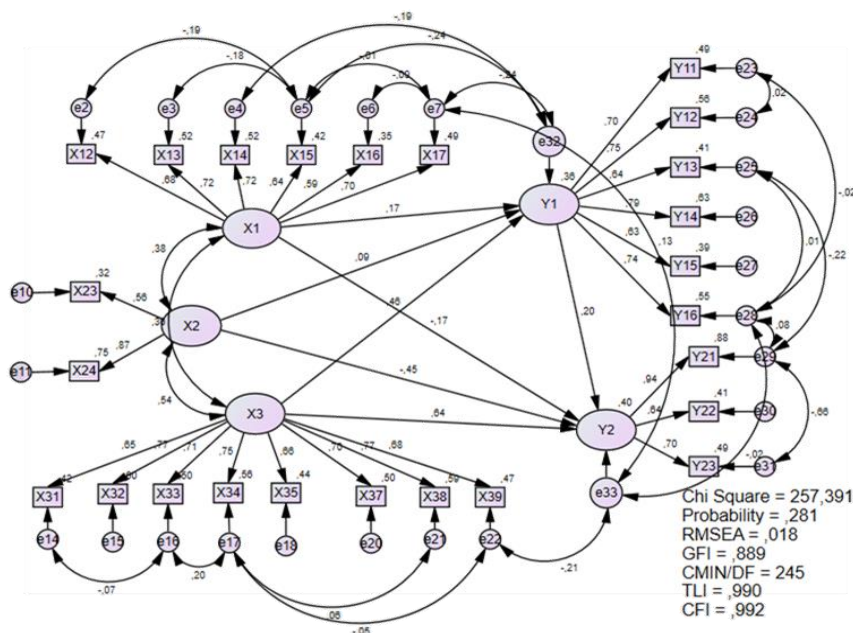

Figure 1. SEM Result

Based on the provided statistical results (Table 2), the analysis reveals several key relationships between memorable tourism experience (X1), city branding (X2), destination image (X3), tourist satisfaction (Y1), and revisit intention (Y2). The memorable tourism experience has a positive and significant effect on tourist satisfaction, with a standardized coefficient of 0.170 and a p-value of 0.006, indicating that as the quality of memorable experiences increases, so does tourist satisfaction. City branding also positively influences tourist satisfaction, demonstrated by a standardized coefficient of 0.090 and a p-value of 0.040, suggesting that effective city branding efforts enhance tourist satisfaction. Similarly, the destination image has a strong positive effect on tourist satisfaction, with a standardized coefficient of 0.460 and a p-value of 0.044, highlighting that a favorable destination image significantly boosts tourist satisfaction.

However, the direct effects on revisit intention show some unexpected results. The memorable tourism experience has a negative direct effect on revisit intention, with a standardized coefficient of -0.170, suggesting that while these experiences increase satisfaction, they might also fulfill tourists' desires so thoroughly that they feel no need to return. This relationship is implied to be significant. City branding also shows a negative direct effect on revisit intention, with a standardized coefficient of -0.450 and a p-value of 0.023, indicating that while branding efforts enhance satisfaction, they might not always translate into a desire to revisit. In contrast, the destination image positively and significantly affects revisit intention, with a strong standardized coefficient of 0.640 and a p-value of 0.021, meaning that a favorable image of the destination greatly increases the likelihood of tourists intending to return. Lastly, tourist satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on revisit intention, with a standardized coefficient of 0.202 and a p-value of 0.020, suggesting that higher levels of satisfaction lead to a greater likelihood of tourists planning to revisit.

Table 2. Direct Effect Result

Direct Effect	Standardized Coeff.	Prob.	Decision
Hypothesis 1			
X_1 -> Y_1	0,170	0,006	Supported
X_2 -> Y_1	0,090	0,040	Supported
X_3 -> Y_1	0,460	0,044	Supported
Hypothesis 2			
X_1 -> Y_2	-0,170	***	Supported
X_2 -> Y_2	-0,450	0,023	Supported
X_3 -> Y_2	0,640	0,021	Supported
Hypothesis 3			
Y_1 -> Y_2	0,2020	0,020	Supported

Additionally, the indirect effects highlight the mediating role of tourist satisfaction in the relationship between the exogenous variables and revisit intention. The standardized indirect effect of X1 on Y2 through Y1 is 0.057, leading to a total effect of -0.175, indicating a slight positive mediating effect despite the negative direct effect. For X2, the standardized indirect effect on Y2 through Y1 is 0.069, resulting in a total effect of -0.256, also showing a minor positive mediation amidst a negative direct impact. In contrast, X3 exhibits a significant positive indirect effect on Y2 through Y1 with a standardized coefficient of 0.084, contributing to a substantial total effect of 0.650.

Table 3. Indirect and Total Effect Result

Indirect Effect	Standardized Direct Effect	Standardized Indirect Effect	Standardized Total Effect
Hypothesis 4			
X_1 -> Y_1 -> Y_2	-0,232	0,057	-0,175
X_2 -> Y_1 -> Y_2	-0,325	0,069	-0,256
X_3 -> Y_1 -> Y_2	0,566	0,084	0,650

DISSCUSSION

The statistical analysis of the relationships between memorable tourism experience, city branding, destination image, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention reveals several intriguing and unique findings. One of the most surprising results is the negative coefficients observed for the direct effects of memorable tourism experience and city branding on revisit intention. This suggests that while these factors positively influence tourist satisfaction, they do not necessarily translate into a higher likelihood of tourists returning to the destination. From a logical and scientific standpoint, the negative coefficient for memorable tourism experience on revisit intention might indicate that highly memorable experiences create a sense of fulfillment and completion for tourists. These tourists may feel they have fully experienced what the destination has to offer, reducing their desire to revisit (Soonsan & Somkai, 2022; Whitehead & Wicker, 2018). This phenomenon aligns with the concept of the "once-in-a-lifetime" experience, where the uniqueness and intensity of the experience fulfill the tourist's needs and desires, making repeat visits less appealing (deMatos et al., 2024). Additionally, this result challenges the conventional assumption that all positive experiences will always lead to revisit intention.

Similarly, the negative impact of city branding on revisit intention, despite its positive effect on satisfaction, suggests a complex relationship between marketing efforts and actual tourist behavior. Effective city branding can set high expectations and create a strong initial attraction. However, if these expectations are fully met or even exceeded, tourists might feel no need to revisit, believing they have already experienced the best the destination can offer. This higlight the importance of dynamic and evolving branding strategies that continuously offer new attractions and experiences to encourage repeat visits. Destination managers need to adopt a flexible branding approach that evolves with changing tourist preferences and trends. This could involve regularly updating marketing campaigns, introducing new events and attractions, and highlighting different aspects of the destination over time. Such strategies can keep the destination fresh in the minds of potential return visitors, ensuring that the brand remains appealing and relevant. Additionally, this insight can guide the development of loyalty programs that reward repeat visits with unique experiences unavailable during a first visit.

In contrast, the positive relationship between destination image and revisit intention highlights the enduring importance of a favorable perception of the destination. Unlike the more transient effects of specific experiences or branding campaigns, a strong, positive image can create lasting appeal, encouraging tourists to return. This suggests that investments in maintaining and enhancing the overall image of the destination, through consistent quality and positive word-of-mouth, can be more effective in promoting repeat visits. A strong destination image encompasses various factors such as the natural environment, cultural attractions, and the overall ambiance of the place. Efforts to preserve and enhance these elements can significantly contribute to sustaining the positive image. Additionally, leveraging social media and online reviews to build and maintain a positive destination image can be a powerful tool in attracting repeat visitors. Destination managers should focus on fostering a sense of community and belonging among visitors, which can further enhance the destination's image and encourage repeat visits. This could involve engaging with tourists through digital platforms and encouraging user-generated content that showcases the positive aspects of the destination.

The mediating role of tourist satisfaction further complicates these dynamics. While memorable experiences and effective branding enhance satisfaction, their indirect effects on revisit intention through satisfaction are relatively modest. This indicates that satisfaction alone, while necessary, is not sufficient to drive repeat visits. Tourists require new and compelling reasons to return, beyond just being satisfied with their previous visit. These findings underscore the need for a nuanced and multifaceted approach in tourism management and marketing. Destination managers should not only focus on creating memorable experiences and strong branding but also consider strategies that continually refresh and renew the tourist experience. Other factors such as the role of cultural engagement (Yi & La, 2023), sustainability practices (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023; Thipsingh et al., 2022), personalized services (Anand et al., 2023; Jeong & Shin, 2020), and technological innovations (Azis et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2024) should also be considered in enhancing the tourist experience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study reveals that memorable tourism experiences and strong city branding enhance tourist satisfaction but do not always directly motivate revisit intention. This challenges the conventional assumption that positive experiences and branding automatically lead to repeat visits. Instead, the findings show that a positive destination image is a more significant predictor of revisit intention, highlighting the need to maintain and strengthen the destination's favorable perception. Tourist satisfaction, while critical for encouraging repeat visits, proves to be insufficient on its own. Tourists often seek new, compelling reasons to return to a destination, making it essential for tourism management to develop strategies that continually refresh and adapt the tourist experience. These strategies should not only focus on creating memorable experiences and effective branding but also respond dynamically to evolving tourist preferences and expectations to sustain interest and competitiveness in the long term.

Despite its valuable contributions, this study has several limitations. The reliance on cross-sectional data restricts the ability to track changes in tourist satisfaction and revisit intention over time. Future research could benefit from a longitudinal approach to better understand how these factors evolve and interact over time. Additionally, this study focuses solely on Batu City Tourism Village, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other destinations with different characteristics. Including diverse destinations and tourist segments, particularly international visitors, could provide broader insights into various preferences and behaviors. Combining self-reported data with objective measures, such as actual revisit rates and spending patterns, could also strengthen the findings. Furthermore, future research should explore how cultural engagement, sustainability practices, personalized services, and technological innovations influence tourist decision-making. These factors, along with psychological and cultural aspects, can offer deeper insights into developing more effective and sustainable tourism strategies. By addressing these limitations and exploring these additional areas, future studies can build a more comprehensive understanding of tourist behavior, ultimately supporting improved destination management and marketing practices.

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