

Effect of the Quality of Tourism Objects and Brand Image of Tourism Aspects on the Tourism City's Image the Case of Tawangmangu, Indonesia

Diani Mustika Prianti

Universitas Indonesia

Email: diani.mustika15@ui.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines the effects of the quality of the tourism model and the aspects of the brand image of tourism on the image of Tawangmangu as a tourism city. The study was conducted in the Tawangmangu Sub-District of the Karanganyar Regency in Central Java, Indonesia, at the beginning of 2024. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 100 domestic travelers, all of whom responded to a standardized questionnaire. Software called SMARTPLS was used to analyze the data. The results showed that the quality of the tourism model and the brand image of its tourism components had a favorable and considerable impact on Tawangmangu's reputation as a tourist destination, both individually and collectively. Furthermore, the study discovered that the quality of the tourist model positively and significantly impacted the brand image of tourism-related features. Based on the findings, Tawangmangu should develop a strong tourism image by first creating a quality tourism model, which includes herbal tourism attractions, natural and cultural tourism objects, supporting facilities, and tourism services. A compelling brand image should be developed, encompassing destination naming, city environment, tourism logos, and identity. Additionally, the study shows that Tawangmangu's tourist model quality is a significant factor in determining how the tourism industry is portrayed.

Keywords: *Quality of Tourism Model; Brand Image of Tourism Aspect; City Image; Structural Equation Modeling; Tawangmangu.*

Corresponding: Diani Mustika Prianti

E-mail: Email author



INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelagic country with abundant resources for maritime tourism and biology (Atmadja, 2022; Pulungan, 2024; Supriyanto, 2022). It is also one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world because of its potential for a wealth of natural and cultural treasures (Mihardja et al., 2023; Panzera et al., 2021). Every Indonesian region has distinct cultures, arts, and traditions (Fauzan, 2025; Kusumaningtyas et al., 2023). Tourism is one of the key industries to Indonesia's development (Widiastuti et al., 2021; Yamin et al., 2021). Not only may tourism generate foreign cash for the country, but it can also generate new employment opportunities for locals (Matthew et al., 2021).

In 2023, Indonesia's tourism sector started to recover (Aryawiguna, 2021). Central Bureau of Statistics (2024) states that domestic travel is still rising. In 2023, there will be 825.80 million domestic visitor journeys, a 12.37% increase over 2022. Domestic travel is the primary driver of Indonesia's tourism industry's expansion (Fauzi & Sumirat, 2023; Zalukhu & Agustina, 2023). A rise in the average amount domestic visitors spend on each trip coincided with an increase in domestic visitor journeys (Falk et al., 2022). In 2023, domestic tourists will spend an average of 2.57 million rupiah on each trip, which is 5.36 percent more than in 2022.

Additionally, the overall number of foreign visitors arriving by the end of 2023 has begun to approach the pre-pandemic figures, which accounted for 16.10 million journeys in 2019. In

2023, there were 11.67 million foreign tourist visitors, a 98.30 percent increase compared to the previous year.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics of Karanganyar Regency (2024), Tawangmangu Sub-District is the easternmost district of Karanganyar Regency. It borders Magetan Regency to the east and East Java Province directly (Hartutik, 2021). Due to its location on the slopes of Mount Lawu, Tawangmangu is regarded as the most fertile region in Karanganyar (Nugraha et al., 2024; Wirawan et al., 2022). The majority of people are, therefore, employed as farmers and farmworkers (Soto et al., 2022). Rice, corn, cassava, and sweet potatoes are Tawangmangu's main commodities. As a result, Tawangmangu exports food items to neighboring regions.

Tourist attraction encompasses several elements contributing to a destination's appeal to travelers (Florido-Benítez, 2023). Natural beauty, such as gorgeous waterfalls, breathtaking mountains, and white-sand beaches, can be one of these elements. In addition, historic landmarks, historic structures, and distinctive cultural festivals are attractions that might originate from cultural heritage (Pratminingsih et al., 2022). Amusement parks, rides, and thrilling music events or performances are examples of tourist attractions that offer fun and enjoyment; these are crucial elements affecting travelers' decisions when selecting a destination (Wiharjokusumo et al., 2021).

Along with Bali and Yogyakarta, Tawangmangu has become a popular location for travelers interested in herbal and wellness tourism (Susanti & Wilyadewi, 2021). There is a rationale for Tawangmangu's selection as an herbal tourist site (Faskahariyanto et al., 2023). The Ministry of Health already operates a herbal health clinic in Tawangmangu, which could promote the growth of herbal tourism in Indonesia (Faskahariyanto et al., 2023; Sulaiman et al., 2021). Additionally, Tawangmangu's traditional medicine has undergone scientific testing utilizing natural substances (Tahoangako et al., 2024). Before a plant is fit for human consumption, it is evaluated for quality, safety, and effectiveness.

Tawangmangu also fosters the possibility of aromatherapy, meditation, nutritious eating, hiking, and herbal treatment. Plumbon Village is home to the tourist destination Rumah Atsiri Indonesia, which also has a restaurant (Suwarni et al., 2021). Rumah Atsiri boasts floral gardens reminiscent of those in the Netherlands and the charm of 1960s Bulgarian architecture. Rumah Atsiri Indonesia also features a workshop, a collection garden of necessary plants, and a museum (Suwarni et al., 2021).

Other attractions in Tawangmangu include Halloween Village, Sakura Hills, Sekipan Hill, New Balekambang Park, and Lawu Park (Lawu Parks 1 and 2) (Setiawan et al., 2022). Sakura Hills and Lawu Park are tourist destinations connected to lodging facilities and dining establishments. Their tourism landscape design mixes popular, traditional, and hybrid cultures to create attractions with a postmodernist culture (Setiawan et al., 2022).

Grojogan Sewu Waterfall is a well-known trekking destination (Syarofa et al., 2025). It is the highest waterfall in Central Java, 80 meters tall, situated on the west slope of Mount Lawu. The verdant surroundings and refreshing mountain air will enchant visitors as they make their way to the waterfall. In addition, tourists must descend 1,000 steps, but the journey will

be enjoyable because the herd of untamed monkeys represents the forest's natural habitat at the destination.

Two words make up brand image: brand and image (Siddiqui et al., 2021). The American Marketing Association (AMA) states that a brand is a combination of a name, phrase, sign, symbol, or design that is used to identify the products or services of a single manufacturer or group of manufacturers and to set the business apart from competitors. For instance, in the case of the city's image, Loureiro (2022) divided the tourism image of tourism products into two categories: effective image and cognitive image. Based on the findings of his research, Chan (2021) concluded that the city's image is comprised of six primary elements of the responses to the questions: (1) what the city is unquestionable; (2) what the city atmosphere is; (3) what the city expression is; (4) what the city is known for; (5) to whom the city seeks to provide services; and (6) what can be promised to potential visitors and what visitors expect from the city.

Increased sales and user recommendations on social media attest to its value as a tool for analyzing tourists' attitudes (Garner & Kim, 2022; Popy & Bappy, 2022). Creating a successful service-based brand in the tourism industry requires that every offer have a distinct value proposition focused on the client experience (Chi et al., 2024; Nuseir, 2021).

Tourists should minimize ambiguity and establish some expectations about what they would encounter at a place by using trustworthy sources to learn about their experience (Spring, 2023). Because tourist services are unpredictable, travelers should gather the knowledge they need to make the best travel decision. Travelers today are more likely to believe other travelers' opinions on social media than they are to believe official marketing recommendations.

Two previous studies serve as key references for this research. First, Hafasnuddin (2017) found that tourism object quality and brand image have a significant positive effect on a city's tourism image in Banda Aceh. Second, Yumna (2022) revealed that destination image and awareness positively influence perceived quality and visiting intention among TikTok users visiting Yogyakarta. However, both studies have limitations: (1) they do not examine how brand image and tourism quality interact in destinations undergoing transformation or rebranding, and (2) they overlook destinations combining natural, cultural, and wellness tourism elements such as Tawangmangu Sub-District.

This study aims to close the current gap by examining the effects of the brand image of tourism aspects and the quality of tourism objects on the perception of Tawangmangu as a tourist destination. The study's conclusions may help clarify some tourism-related concerns so that the appropriate authorities and policymakers can use them as a guide to help Tawangmangu establish itself as the area's most popular tourist destination. In addition, more tourists visiting Tawangmangu would undoubtedly lead to tremendous sustainable economic growth, good jobs, and fair labor for all, all of which align with the eighth Sustainable Development Goal.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted in the Karanganyar Regency's Tawangmangu Sub-District in Central Java, Indonesia. There were 395.139 visitors to Karanganyar Regency in 2023 (Central Bureau of Statistics of Central Java Province, 2024)

One hundred surveys were made available for additional examination. It is well acknowledged that a sample size of 100 to 150 is necessary to guarantee proper estimation use (Hair). The estimate method's sensitivity to identify data discrepancies grows as the sample size is increased beyond this threshold. Although there is no ideal sample size, a size between 100 and 200 is advised. Therefore, the 100 samples examined in this study meet the requirements for a sufficient sample size to yield a reliable result.

The questionnaires contained a set of measures for independent, dependent, and mediating variables. First, the qualities of tourism objects are measured via six-item, and such items are interesting tourism objects (Al-Ababneh), price of tourism objects (Komppula & Konu, 2017), value of tourism objects (Komppula & Konu, 2017), uniqueness of tourism objects (Pestek-Nikolic), condition of tourism objects (Al-Ababneh), and friendliness of employees who serve at the tourism objects (Al-Ababneh).

Second, the city's brand name (Suardi et al., 2023), city logo (Evans), city atmosphere (Evans), tourism aspects name (Camilleri, 2018), and brand name of tourism objects (Hafasnuddin et al., 2022) are the five items that make up the brand image of tourism aspects. Subsequently, the perception of Tawangmangu as a tourist destination can be reached through five other means, including qualified hotels (Al-Ababneh), qualified local transportation (Al-Ababneh), a variety of souvenirs (Berno & Bricker), different types of food (Pestek-Nikolic), and a welcoming local population (Komppula & Konu, 2017). A Likert scale, with a range of 1 to 5, was used to gauge the samples' or respondents' level of agreement with the statements. Questionnaires were distributed to all samples to collect the data, and path analysis was used for analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model

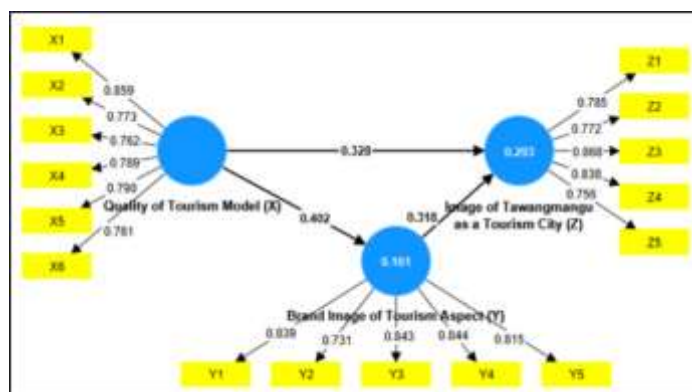


Figure 1. Measurement Model

Source: Processed by the researcher

Direct Effect

Table 1. Findings of the Direct

| | O | M | SDV | T | P |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| X-Y | 0.402 | 0.425 | 0.113 | 3.552 | 0.001 |
| Y-Z | 0.318 | 0.323 | 0,103 | 3.095 | 0.003 |
| X-Z | 0.328 | 0.338 | 0.115 | 2.850 | 0.005 |

(Source: Processed by the researcher)

Where:

O is original sample;

M is sample mean;

SDV is standard deviation;

T is T statistics;

P is P values;

X is the quality of tourism object;

Y is the brand image of tourism aspects;

Z is the image of Tawangmangu as a tourism city.

1. Hypothesis testing for structural equations is demonstrated as follows, according to the output results in the table:

The impact of the tourism model's quality (X) on the tourism aspect's brand image (Y). For the Quality of Tourism Model (X) influence on the Brand Image of Tourism Aspect (Y), the t-statistic value is $3.552 > t\text{-table} (1.983)$, the p-value is $0.001 < 0.05$, and the initial sample value is positive 0.404. Consequently, the study's hypothesis is approved. This indicates that the Quality of the Tourism Model (X) significantly and favorably influences the Brand Image of the Tourism Aspect (Y).

2. Tourism Aspect's Brand Image (Y) on Tawangmangu's Tourism City Image (Z)

The original sample value is positive 0.318, and the t-statistic value for the impact of Brand Image of Tourism Aspect (Y) on the Image of Tawangmangu as a Tourism City (Z) is $3.095 > t\text{-table} (1.983)$ with a p-value of $0.003 < 0.05$. Therefore, the study's hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that the perception of Tawangmangu as a tourist destination (Z) is positively and significantly impacted by the brand image of the tourism aspect (Y).

3. The impact of the tourism model (X) on Tawangmangu's image as a tourism city (Z)

Tawangmangu as a Tourism City (Z) was found to be influenced by the Quality of Tourism Model (X) with a t-statistic value of $2.850 > t\text{-table} (1.983)$, a p-value of $0.005 < 0.05$, and an initial sample value of positive 0.328. Consequently, the study's hypothesis is approved. The image of Tawangmangu as a tourism city (Z) is thus positively and significantly impacted by the Quality of Tourism Model (X).

Indirect Effect

Table 2. Findings of the Indirect Effects

| | O | M | SDV | T | P |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| X-Z | 0.128 | 0.136 | 0.058 | 2.214 | 0.029 |

(Source: Processed by the researcher)

Where:

O is original sample;

M is sample mean;

SDV is standard deviation;

T is T statistics;

P is P values;

X is the quality of tourism object;

Z is the image of Tawangmangu as a tourism city.

According to the chart, the Brand Image of the Tourism Aspect (Y) acts as a mediator between the Quality of the Tourism Model (X) and the Image of Tawangmangu as a Tourism City (Z). With a t-count of $2.214 > t\text{-table} (1.983)$, a p-value of $0.029 < 0.05$, and an initial sample value of positive 0.128, the t-statistic value for the impact of the Quality of Tourism Model (X) on the Image of Tawangmangu as a Tourism City (Z) can be explained through the mediation of Brand Image of Tourism Aspect (Y). Therefore, the study's hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that the Brand Image of Tourism Aspect (Y) can act as a positive and substantial mediator between the Quality of Tourism Model (X) and the Image of Tawangmangu as a Tourism City (Z).

Managerial Implications

The results of this study demonstrate how important the quality of the tourist model and the brand image of tourism elements are in determining Tawangmangu's perception as a city. These findings concur with earlier research (Komppula & Konu, 2017), highlighting the significance of distinctiveness, service quality, and a place's mental and emotional impressions.

From a practical standpoint, a positive brand image is constructed based on the quality of the tourist model, which includes physical infrastructure, pricing, distinctiveness, service friendliness, and perceived value. A strong brand image encourages stronger emotional ties, return visits, and positive word-of-mouth, which amplifies visitors' impressions of the city.

Moreover, the study's discovery of the mediation effect emphasizes how crucial it is to approach destination branding as a comprehensive process that begins with observable enhancements in the caliber of travel rather than as a stand-alone marketing initiative. This result is in line with Zeithaml and Živković, who contend that firsthand encounters and perceived reputations created through branding and social validation significantly impact visitor expectations and satisfaction.

This study emphasizes the importance of integrated destination management from a policy standpoint. Local governments, tourism companies, and community stakeholders must cooperate to match infrastructure development with brand positioning plans. In regional and national tourism branding campaigns, Tawangmangu's special offers, like herbal tourism, should be emphasized as both an attraction and a component of a unique identity.

Furthermore, the study's findings give impetus to the development of experience-based tourism in the future. This type of tourism combines narrative-driven tourism (e.g., storytelling, cultural interpretation, and immersive environments) with emotional connections to enhance visitors' engagement with the destination.

Ultimately, these results contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8), which promote sustainable tourism development by encouraging inclusive economic growth, productive employment, and decent labor in the travel and tourism industry.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that Tawangmangu City's image as a tourist destination is significantly enhanced by both the quality of its tourist attractions and the perception of its tourism brand, with the brand image mediating the relationship between attraction quality and destination image. Improving the quality of diverse attractions—such as nature tourism, herbal tourism, culture, and supporting services—is essential for building the city's reputation. To sustain and elevate Tawangmangu's appeal to local and international visitors, a strategic and long-term branding plan should be developed and implemented. Future research could explore the specific branding strategies that most effectively influence different tourist segments or examine the role of digital marketing in strengthening Tawangmangu's tourism brand.

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