

The Effectiveness of Marketing Initiatives toward the Growth of Rural Tourism in Indonesia

By

Bakhtiar Tijjang*

Andi Sapada Institute of Social Science and Business, Indonesia

Email: btijjang62@gmail.com

Nurfadhilah

State Islamic Institute of Parepare, Indonesia

Abstract

Tourism is one of the businesses most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, having ramifications on the economics, lives, public services, and opportunities of all continents. Every step of its enormous value chain has been touched. This study examines the marketing actions rural tourism locations must engage in to sustain their businesses in the post-COVID-19 era. Achieving economic, social, and environmental sustainability is a primary priority. Rural tourism contributes to the development and economic prosperity of the targeted regions. As a way of boosting comprehension of this research, supporting ideas based on Stakeholder Theory are applied. 143 participants freely participated in this study by completing a questionnaire. Theoretically, a framework is required to demonstrate the connection between tangible and intangible indicators. The data is then thoroughly reviewed with SPSS and SmartPLS. The data suggest that the image of the location is the most important factor in rural tourism marketing tactics in Indonesia. Rural tourist promotion relies heavily on destination marketing. All of the traits were considered to be beneficial for marketing rural tourism destinations, with destination image having the most important role in rural tourism development. The remaining components are also related to marketing techniques for rural tourist destinations. Therefore, this research will benefit tourism industry players and stakeholders in boosting previous rural tourism destination marketing efforts.

Keywords: COVID-19; destination marketing; rural tourism; tangible and intangible; tourism industry players

Introduction

Asian countries have become the greatest market for Indonesian tourism, owing to economic growth and increased traveler friendliness. The growth raises concerns about the Asian market's long-term viability. The tourist sector, both private and public, has increased its investments in response to the rapidly expanding market, but the question of long-term future prospects remains. Tourism is vulnerable to shocks (economic, political, social, or health) that can jeopardise the sector's stability (Mehta et al., 2020). The effects of such shocks are demonstrated by the 2008 financial crisis, terrorism attacks in 2002 and 2005, natural disasters, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Esquivias et al., 2021). A novel lethal strain of coronavirus, COVID-19, has recently emerged from human-to-human transmission, causing a global pandemic burden, affecting hundreds of thousands of people, and having life-threatening outcomes not only in medically compromised individuals but also in perfectly healthy young people with an immunocompetent system (Chan et al., 2020). Tourism is one of the industries most impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with repercussions on all continents' economies, lives, public services, and possibilities. According to the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the COVID-19 pandemics have a significant impact on the tourism industry and could cost the global economy more than \$4

trillion (UNCTAD, 2021). This is due to the tourism industry's losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemics, as well as the massive impact on related industries. Furthermore, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reports that the number of tourists arriving around the world decreased significantly between January and April 2020, particularly in Asia and the Pacific (Prompetchara et al., 2020). Tourist arrivals in these areas fell by 51% during that period (Hasmuk et al., 2020). Its extensive value chain has been touched on every level. This crisis has reduced the incomes of international travelers. There is no denying that Indonesia is a stunning country, and it is well known for its stunning and alluring tourist destinations, including its beaches, scenery, coastal areas, hill stations, mountains, world heritage sites, national parks, and nature reserves. This increased tourism helps the country's tourism and hospitality sectors (Guo et al., 2020). In the meantime, prices are altering in Indonesia and other nations, which is expected to affect the demand for tourism services. As governments aim for a speedy revival of the tourism industry by designating extensive support measures, the international tourism competition will intensify. In addition, the Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) has been declining against the currencies of the six highest-grossing countries, which may provide a competitive edge. A proactive and aggressive strategy for the development of competitive rural tourism is required, including strategies on the internal development of tourist destinations, aspects of tourism industry collaboration, and government integration, with reference to both internal and external environments (Soeswoyo et al., 2021). To ensure that tourists, businesspeople, and members of the community can engage in tourism-related activities in a reasonably secure manner, special efforts are required. Because of this, the Indonesian government, acting through the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, has developed a health protocol manual that is based on Cleanliness, Health, Safety, and Environmental Sustainability (CHSE) to be applied in tourism destinations, both in tourist attractions and also in various tourism supporting facilities such as restaurants, hotels, homestays, shopping centres, creative economy businesses, and tourism transportation. This was done in order to enhance visitor sense of trust in that particular destination and other tourism-related enterprises (MOTCE, 2020). Figure 1 shows the number of tourist arrivals in Indonesia from 2012 to 2021 has also decreased significantly in 2020 and 2021. Due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions, around 1.56 million international visitors arrived in Indonesia in 2021, a substantial fall from the previous year. The visitor arrivals were allocated among Indonesia's numerous ports of entry. Over the years, international travel to Indonesia has increased, and Indonesia has become a popular vacation destination. This illustrates that the COVID-19 pandemics had a detrimental effect on the tourism business, and that the repercussions are still being felt now.

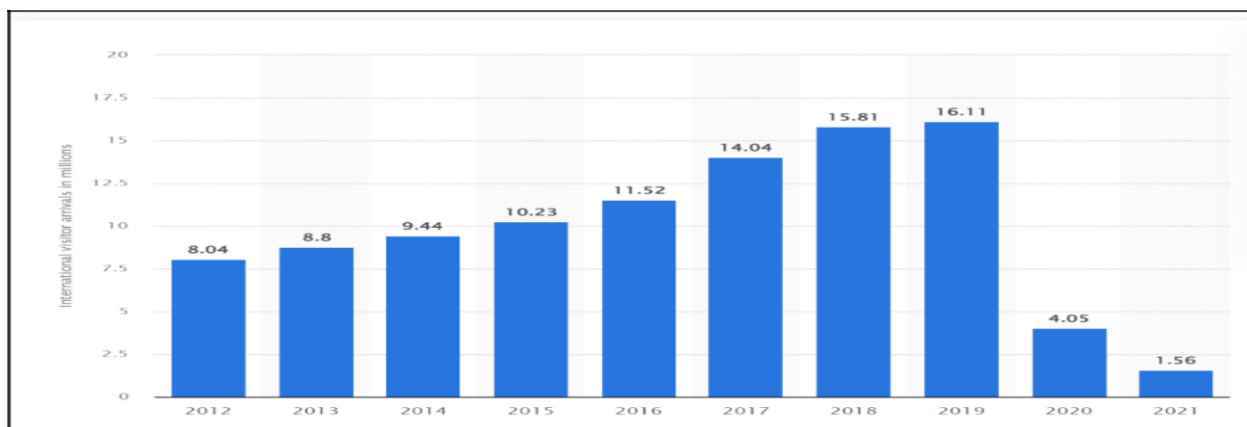


Figure 1: o. of Tourist Arrivals in Indonesia from 2012 to 2021 (Source: [Statista, 2022](#))

The purpose of rural tourism is to provide tourists the chance to get a taste of what it's like to live in a more remote location. Ecotourism is all about getting out into nature and enjoying it at its finest. According to Soeswoyo et al. (2021), rural tourism makes a contribution to the development and economic growth of the target regions. Therefore, the promotion of rural tourism should be a priority in order to meet the objectives of economic, sociocultural, and environmental sustainability. The vast majority of people who live in this area are welcoming, friendly, and even willing to provide lodging for visitors. Because of this trend, young people are being compelled to leave their rural communities in search of employment in the metropolitan areas of larger towns and cities. On the other hand, the possibility of leading a less complicated life is what draws some city dwellers to move to rural areas and take up country living. Aside from that, An and Alarcón (2020) mentioned that rural tourism is developing swiftly as an increasing number of individuals seek a new area to get away from the hustle and bustle of city life. This is one of the reasons why rural tourism is rising so quickly. Experts also mention the fact that vacationing in rural areas is getting more and more common. The phrase "rural tourism" refers to a variety of activities that, among other things, are mindful of their impact on the environment and respectful of rural culture and the way of life in the surrounding area. According to the definition provided by Li et al. (2021), the term "sustainable tourism" refers to any type of tourism that either directly contributes to long-term economic and environmental development or is well-suited for such development. As part of the strategy, which also entails cutting pollution, increasing the long-term viability of the environment and the resources it contains, fostering socioeconomic growth that is sustainable, and

putting into management practices that are sustainable and are based on an in-depth understanding of the requirements of customers are all included. Sustainable tourism in rural areas may help rural communities find solutions to a few problems, and those communities will profit greatly from the aid provided by sustainable tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to build a connection between destination marketing efforts and both measurable and intangible characteristics. Consequently, this study was done to evaluate the destination marketing strategies that may contribute to the growth of rural tourism. The researchers believe that the tourism industry actors, including the local community, local tourism players, and government tourism departments, would benefit substantially from this study if they incorporated tourist insights and perceptions into their post-Covid-19 marketing initiatives. In addition, it can aid all Indonesian tourism stakeholders in enhancing this rural tourism industry and providing better service to tourists at the state or national level. In addition, the researchers conducted this study to assist tourism stakeholders as well in efficiently managing and implementing a destination marketing plan and promoting rural tourism destinations.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Rural Tourism Industry

The precise definition of rural tourism has been a source of confusion for professionals working in the tourist sector due to the numerous types of tourism activities that can be carried out in rural settings. Previous definitions suggested that rural tourism only covered farm and non-farm tourist activities that took place in rural areas (Oppermann, 1996); however, Oppermann (1997) extended on this by including activities that take place in mountainous places. It has been noted in the past, and it was reiterated by OCDE (1994), that rural tourism is an activity that is both complex and diversified, and that it is not restricted to farm-based tourism. It includes holidays based on farms as well as those with a particular interest in ecotourism and nature, climbing, and horseback

riding vacations, adventure, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, ethnic tourism, and other types of tourism. On the other side, tourism in rural areas could potentially inflict damage to the ecosystem that is difficult to repair. As a consequence of this, promoting environmentally responsible rural tourism calls for striking a careful balance between various economic, social, and environmental concerns. Stainton (2020) also examined the consequences of the three steps of COVID-19 crisis management, namely response, recovery, and restart, on the three important stakeholders that are tour operators, destinations, and decision-makers. These stages are as follows: response; recovery; and restart. Rebuilding infrastructure, providing financial support and human resources to tourism companies, and engaging in activities related to promotion and marketing are the three main categories that can be used to summarize the general response policies that governments have taken in response to the crisis. As a direct consequence of COVID-19's travel restrictions, some tourist destinations have experienced historically low levels of both visitor traffic and revenue. The enormous public health risks that may be posed by the movement of large numbers of people in conjunction with mass tourism may place passengers in an especially precarious position (Li et al. (2021). Alternative tourism will emerge as a viable alternative to mass tourism as a result of COVID-19. This is a concern for the National Tourism Organization, along with investors, employees, and other industry stakeholders. During the post-COVID-19 restoration stage, alternative tourism can contribute to the optimization of our tourist resources and the protection of tourism stakeholders. Alternative tourism is a revolutionary concept within the

tourism sector. The idea has been circulating for over two decades. Those who are tired of lying on a beach, reading a book, and tanning are increasingly turning to experiential tourism. Alternative tourism provides guests with a unique experience tied to the country's nature, culture, and even religion. It forces individuals to leave their comfort zones and engage in new activities. Alternative tourism encompasses a wide range of activities, including "Health and Wellness Tourism," "Rural Tourism," "Agrotourism," "Ecotourism," "Backpacking Tourism," "Community-based Tourism," "Pro-Poor Tourism," and "Spiritual Tourism," to name a few. By catering to fewer, more privileged sectors, businesses and investors in the tourism sector stand to win greatly (Lin et al., 2022).

Stakeholder Theory

Freeman (1984), a professor at the University of Virginia, defines Stakeholder Theory as any individual or group (shareholders, employees, consumers, suppliers, and government) who can affect or be affected by the achievement of an organization's goals (Sharma, 2022; Dooms, 2019). This idea describes how a firm could not survive without its stakeholders, depicting it as an ecosystem of interdependent groups (Upwork, 2021). To ensure long-term success, businesses within this ecosystem must acknowledge the requirements of all stakeholders. Additionally, Simon (2022) argued that a company's genuine success resides in satisfying all of its stakeholders, not just those who stand to profit from its shares. Moreover, the Stakeholder Theory positions ethics, morals, and values at the centre of every enterprise (Keup, 2022; Linden, 2021). This notion may provide firms with long-term competitive benefits. By recognising the significance of stakeholders in their organisational structure and operational procedures, businesses could indeed foster positive connections with the parties upon whom they depend (Upwork, 2021). Previous study reveals that stakeholder theory has been utilised extensively in tourism research. From the standpoint of rural tourism in Albania, Stakeholder Theory was widely applied as the theoretical foundation of tourist development research (Domi et al., 2018). Their notion that customer orientation and human

resource practises are two of the most influential factors on the performance of SMEs is supported by Stakeholder Theory. Nogueira and Pinho (2015) explore the structure, nature, and composition of rural tourism stakeholder networks in a Portuguese National Park using Stakeholder Theory. In addition, Nicolaidis' (2015) research applies this theory since stakeholder attention and involvement are essential for organisational sustainability in the tourism industry. Using this idea, Martini and Buffa (2015) demonstrate in their paper the significance of stakeholders in assuring tourism's long-term development. Consequently, the Stakeholder Theory is applied to this study, which analyses tourists' perspectives on tangible (destination appeal and tourism infrastructure) and intangible (service quality and destination image) measures that enhance the development of rural tourism destination marketing initiatives. The suggested variables are applicable to the development of tourism destination marketing initiatives intended to enhance destination competitiveness.

2.3 Rural Tourism Destination Marketing Efforts

Destination marketing is a specialised promotional strategy used by the travel industry to promote a certain location and its advantages (Team, 2022). This is accomplished by emphasising the attributes of the destination or experience that make it a superior travel and tourism option to the product or service being marketed (Oliverio, 2021). During the recurring COVID-19 pandemic,

tourism destinations reestablish visitor intent in domestic tourism marketplaces through recovery marketing techniques (Volgger et al., 2021). The issue faced by travel marketers is well captured by the contradiction of dealing with today's tough reality and preparing for a slow future recovery (Omagari, 2020). According to Sotiriadis's (2020) research, destination marketing strategies facilitate the accomplishment of beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders. Moreover, Chin et al. (2018) highlights the importance of destination marketing in rural tourism destinations. Karim and Ahamed (2019) assert that destination marketing is an essential aspect of the tourism industry for the development of rural areas and the local population. Revfine (2022) noted that destination marketing initiatives are essential for boosting a destination's uniqueness relative to competitors by emphasising what makes it special or a highly desirable place to visit. Effective and efficient destination marketing will significantly influence the local tourism economy. On the other hand, a study conducted by Okumus et al. (2018) revealed that destination marketing efforts such as the use of regional cuisines are an integral part of travel experiences and may be one of the primary reasons why some tourists travel to a destination. In their 2018 study, Hahm and Severt reveal the significance of destination marketing initiatives in enhancing Alabama's image and recognition as a tourist destination. According to Bokuniewicz and Shulman (2017), destination marketing activities, including the utilisation of social media platforms, have huge promotional potential. Consequently, destination marketing is anticipated to be the major tool for tourism branding and promotion throughout the post-COVID-19 rebuilding phase of the tourism industry.

Tangible and Intangible Components of Rural Tourism

Products in the tourism industry can be categorised as both hard and soft measures. According to a recent study conducted by Lo et al. (2017), both tangible and intangible variables contribute significantly to the growth of the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations. The destination's allure and the tourism infrastructure are two components of tangible rural tourism. Intangible components of rural tourism include service quality and the image of the area. Academics and tourism professionals in the rural tourist business are fascinated by the concept of destination appeal (Adeyinka-Ojo & Nair, 2015). Frequently, the attraction or appeal of tourist

locations is decided by the range of things they offer (Stainton, 2020). Gajic et al. (2018) claim that a destination's attractiveness must be superior to that of alternative places available to potential tourists in order to enhance the country's uniqueness. In a separate study, Fras-Jamilena et al. (2018) confirmed that achieving destination attractiveness and competitiveness is a top priority for tourism destination managers. Tourism infrastructure is one of the primary factors that might attract and encourage tourists to visit a region (Chin et al., 2020). Goodwin (2018) describes tourism infrastructure as a set of structures and institutions that serve as the material and organisational basis for tourism's expansion. He stated that it typically includes essential services, a road network, transportation, lodging, gastronomy, cultural and recreational activities, a store network, etc. In contrast, Jovanovi and Ivana (2016) define tourism infrastructure as a vast array of services necessary to meet visitor demand and satisfy their requirements and wishes throughout their visit to the place. According to a study conducted by Mandić, Mrnjavac and Kordić (2018), tourism infrastructure and recreational amenities are crucial to the process of tourism growth. According to Victorovna and Ivanovich (2019), a developed tourism infrastructure is a significant indicator of a successful tourism business. In addition, a study by Mamirkulova et al. (2020) demonstrated that the tourism infrastructure project has a positive impact on the development of chances for sustainable tourism. Development and improvement of tourism infrastructure also help

to cities' competitiveness in the tourism services market (Victorovna & Ivanovich, 2019). Service quality is an assessment of how well a service is provided relative to the client's expectations (Ramya et al., 2019). In addition, they stated that service providers frequently review the quality of the service they provide to clients in order to improve service, precisely identify problems, and more precisely measure customer satisfaction levels. Ghotbabadi et al. (2015) concur, stating that service quality evaluation is one of the most essential tools for organisations to fully know their customers' needs and wants by analysing their experience and happiness with the services they receive. In addition, Chin et al. (2018) suggest that service quality is one of the most important measures of tourist satisfaction, leading to a desire to return. According to El Saghier (2015), it is essential for service providers to comprehend client expectations and the aspects that can influence their happiness with the supplied service. This motivates them to maintain client loyalty and a competitive advantage over their rivals. In accordance with Yarimoglu (2015), a national service quality index based on industry enables large firms to comprehend their distinctive industrial characteristics, which must be continuously upgraded to increase service quality and achieve a competitive advantage. Location image refers to the impression that a traveler has of a tourism destination. Lai and Li (2016) contend that this definition is too imprecise and propose an alternate definition that more accurately describes the destination image while minimizing its internal and external ambiguity. In addition, it is one of the factors that contributes to customer happiness and brand loyalty (Huete & López, 2019). Zhang and Niyomsilp (2020) and Pan et al. (2021) discovered that the image of a destination has a beneficial effect on the behavioral desire to visit a particular location. In another study by Kichin, Ayob and Kasuma (2021), the researchers examine the formation of cognitive and affective impressions of a rural tourism site from the perspective of locals. Moreover, the quality of a tourist site can also be determined by its destination image (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2022). In contrast, Lu and Atadil (2021) have demonstrated in their research on the negative impact of COVID-19 on China's reputation as a tourist destination.

Methodology

Researchers employed a large sample size and a strictly quantitative research approach to examine the causal link between the variables in the present study. All information is displayed

numerically and graphically. The purpose of an explanatory study is to illustrate the association between variables by testing and explaining hypotheses. In addition, an explanatory study utilises the survey method, which is a systematic study that collects actual data on hard measures, such as destination image and tourism infrastructure, and soft measures, such as service quality and destination image. Observations were made of the variables and their measures, and the study's hypotheses were tested. The following research hypotheses are developed, and the research framework is shown in Figure 2:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Destination appeal is closely associated with the marketing initiatives of a rural tourism destination.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Tourism infrastructure is closely associated with the marketing initiatives of a rural tourism destination.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Service quality is closely associated with the marketing initiatives of a rural tourism destination.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Destination image is closely associated with the marketing initiatives of a rural tourism destination.

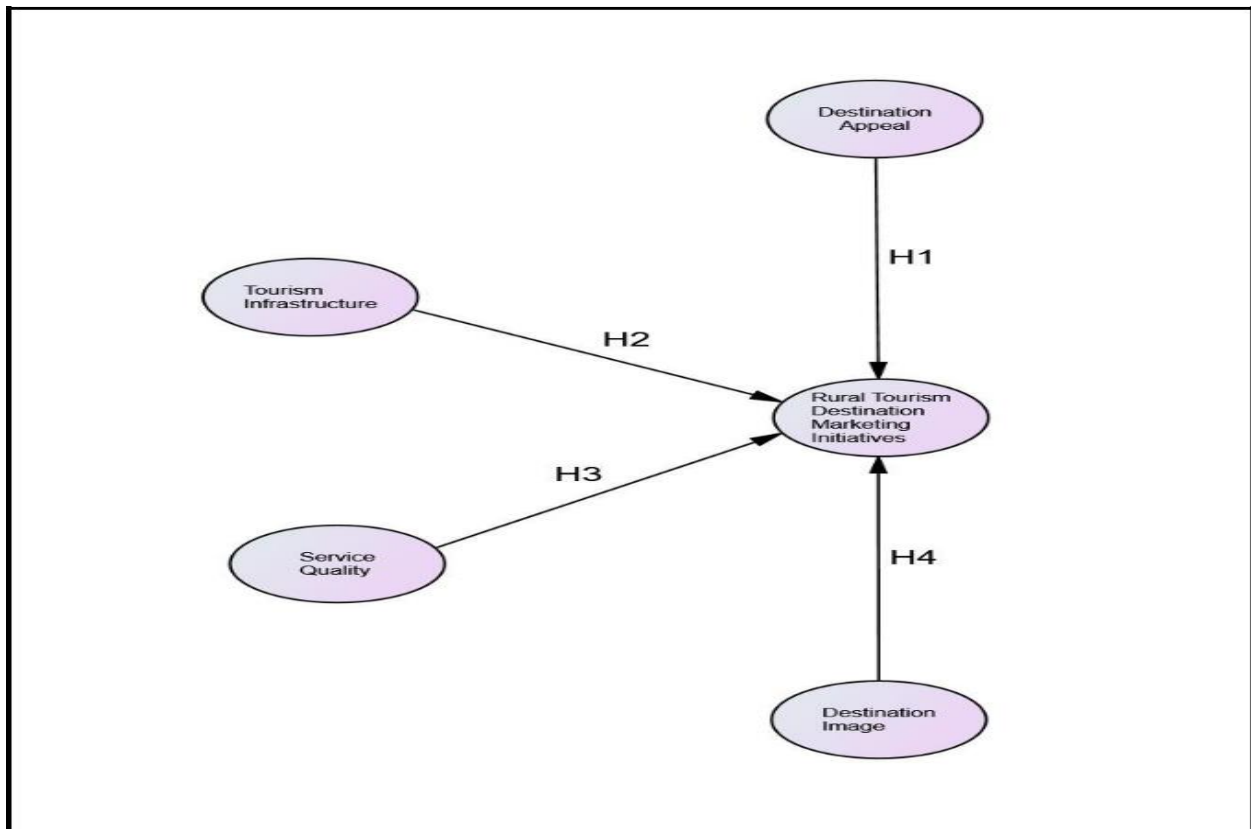


Figure 2. Research Framework

This study includes a total of four variables. The dependent variable in this study is rural tourism destination marketing initiatives. There are four independent variables in total: destination appeal, tourism infrastructure, service quality, and destination image. Each variable has between five and seven measurements. The variables and measurements that we adapted from previous research in Sarawak by Chin et al. (2020) are listed below:

Table 1. Variables and Measurements Items

Variable(s)	Code	Measurement Item(s)
Destination Appeal (DA)	DA_01	A travel destination should have beautiful flora and fauna.
	DA_02	A travel destination should have attractive natural scenery.
	DA_03	A travel destination should be rich in natural resources.
	DA_04	A travel destination should have a diverse range of cultural attractions.
	DA_05	A travel destination should have unique heritage attractions.
	DA_06	A travel destination should have high-quality craft products.
	DA_07A	A travel destination should have a variety of outdoor adventurous activities.
Tourism Infrastructure (TI)	TI_01	A travel destination's infrastructure should be adequate to meet the needs of visitors.
	TI_02	A travel destination should have access to local transportation systems to support tourism facilities.
	TI_03	A travel destination's accommodations should be of high quality.
	TI_04	A travel destination should have access to electricity.
	TI_05	A travel destination should have a functioning telecommunications system.
	TI_06	The tourist attractions are conveniently located.
Service Quality (SQ)	SQ_01	The service providers should be courteous and friendly.
	SQ_02	The service providers should provide prompt service.
	SQ_03	The service providers should be knowledgeable about the products and services offered.
	SQ_04	The service providers should be professional.
	SQ_05	The service providers should always be willing to assist.
Destination Image (DI)	DI_01	A travel destination should be safe and clean.
	DI_02A	A travel destination should be a relaxing and restful place to visit.
	DI_03	A travel destination should have a variety of interesting places for visitors to visit.
	DI_04	A travel destination should provide a pleasant environment.
	DI_05	A travel destination should provide an exciting experience.
	DI_06	A travel destination should provide a relaxing environment.
Destination Marketing Initiatives (DMI)	DMI_01	Tourism contributes to the development of a strong destination image.
	DMI_02	A travel destination should have a positive image in the global community.
	DMI_03	A travel destination should provide tourists with an enjoyable vacation experience.
	DMI_04	A travel destination should be committed to the continuous improvement and development of a high-quality destination.
	DMI_05A	A travel destination should be committed to providing a safe and secure environment.

In the study procedure, a high sample size is utilized. Participants were selected from a population of at least 17-year-old Indonesians who had previously visited rural tourist destinations. The proponent received 143 Indonesian responses. This population was selected as study respondents because of their accessibility. In addition, the study reveals that respondents

may access and finish the survey without difficulty. On the basis of the instrument's cost-effectiveness and the availability of pertinent resources, data will be collected. As the primary method for collecting data from sample of population, an online survey via Google form is utilized to collect data which instructed in the modified Likert scale. A survey questionnaire containing a URL is used to collect data because it enables us to counteract any resistances that may arise during data collecting activities from the target population. The researchers took 29 items from a prior study conducted by Chin et al. (2020) and modified it to meet the Indonesian setting for the questionnaire.

4.0 Data Analysis and Findings

Several preliminary analyses were conducted with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (25.0) (SPSS) to eliminate the potential of missing values and straight lining prior to measurement and structural analysis. In addition, the SmartPLS (version 3.3.0) was utilized to execute the Partial Least Square—Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) estimate technique in order to examine the produced research model. Utilizing descriptive statistics, the researchers examine the questionnaire results. The demographic factors have been presented by integrating all demographic findings into a single table, and SPSS will be used to conduct descriptive frequency analysis. The SmartPLS results on the proven and validated research framework will be displayed alongside the figures. This analysis will be followed by a discussion of the hypothesis model based on the generated figures. The results of the hypothesis test will then be displayed, and our findings will be compared to those of prior research to support and discuss them. The researcher will also compare and contrast our findings with those of earlier study. Last but not least, a set of tables will be created based on the SmartPLS data.

Demographic Variables

Table 2 outlined the demographic profile of the respondents in detail:

Table 2. *Demographic Statistics of the Sample Data*

Variable	Category	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	72	50.3	50.3	50.3
	Female	71	49.7	49.7	100.0
Age	11 - 20 years old	7	4.9	4.9	4.9
	21 - 30 years old	73	51.0	51.0	55.9
	31 - 40 years old	17	11.9	11.9	67.8
	41 - 50 years old	19	13.3	13.3	81.8
	51 - 60 years old	22	15.4	15.4	96.5
	61 - 70 years old	5	3.5	3.5	100.0
Education Level	High school or below	7	4.9	4.9	4.9
	Diploma	30	21.0	21.0	25.9
	Degree	78	54.5	54.5	80.4
	Postgraduate	28	19.6	19.6	100.0
Status of Employment	Student	64	44.8	44.8	44.8
	Employed	61	42.7	42.7	87.5
	Student and employed	1	0.7	0.7	88.2
	Retired	6	4.2	4.2	92.4
Travel Frequency (In a year)	Unemployed	11	7.7	7.7	100.0
	1 – 5 times	113	79.0	79.0	79.0
Travel Frequency (In a year)	10 times or more	14	9.8	9.8	88.8
	6 – 10 times	16	11.2	11.2	100.0

4.2 Results on the Tested and Validated Research Framework

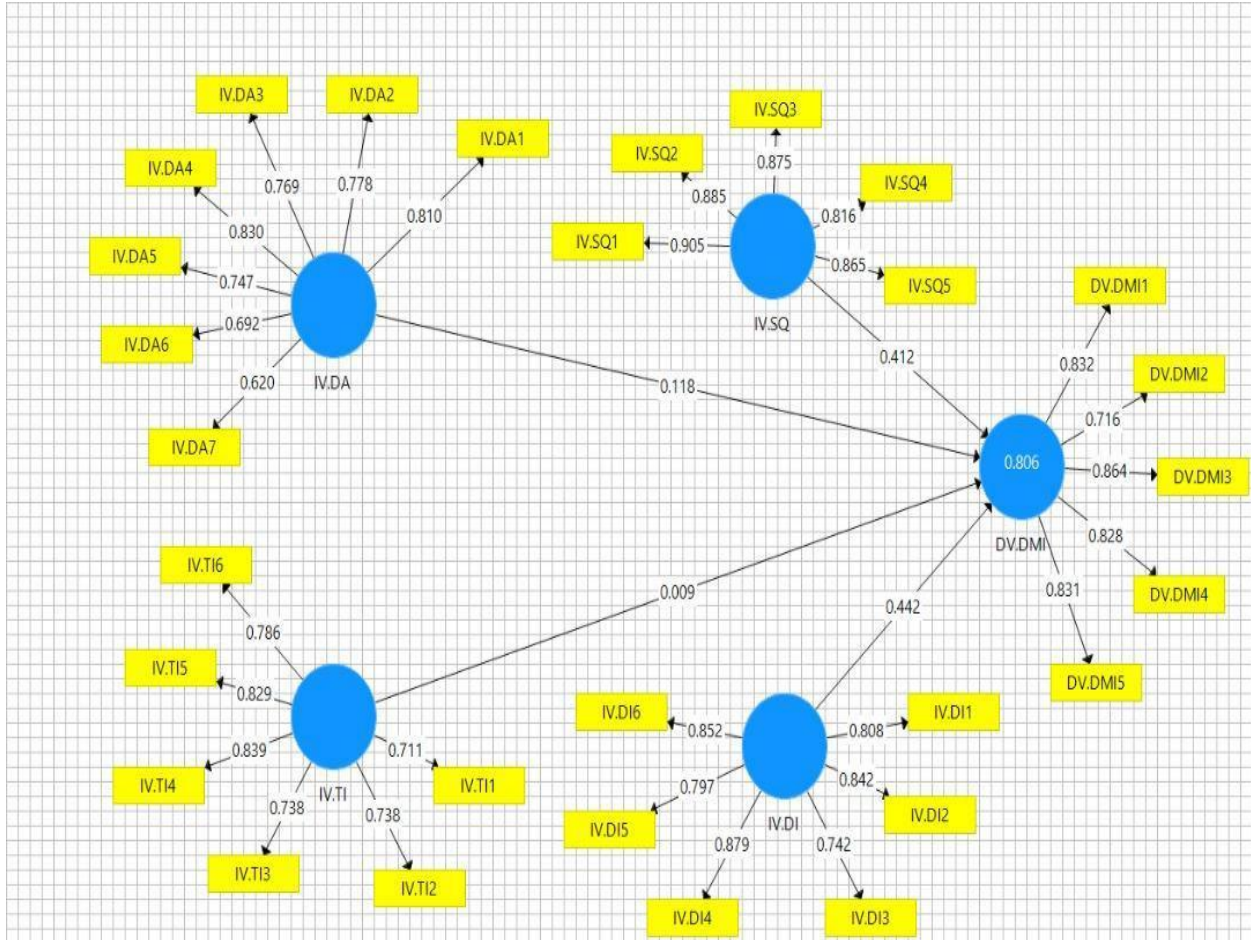


Figure 3: Hypothesized Model

Figure 3 depicts the findings from the tested and validated research framework. We can deduce from this diagram that there are four independent variables and one dependent variable. The four independent variables were divided into two categories: tangible and intangible components. Destination appeal (DA) and tourism infrastructure are the tangible components (TI). The intangible components, on the other hand, are service quality (SQ) and destination image (DI). Because the factor loading for each variable item is greater than 0.5, no elimination process will be performed. The first item with the highest factor loading was discovered to be the first item for service quality variable, with a factor loading of 0.905. This demonstrates that respondents believe service providers should be courteous and friendly to customers. Meanwhile, the last item for the destination appeal variable had the lowest factor loading of 0.620. This result indicates that respondents believe a variety of outdoor adventurous activities are not required at a travel destination. In the same figure, the path coefficient of each independent variable to the dependent variable is also shown. In comparison to the other variables, the path coefficient for destination image is the strongest, while the path coefficient for tourism infrastructure is the weakest. These findings show that respondents believe the destination image has the greatest impact on destination marketing initiatives, while tourism infrastructure has the least impact. The model's R-square is 80.6 percent, indicating that these four variables make a significant contribution to rural tourism destination marketing initiatives.

4.3 Results of Hypothesis Testing

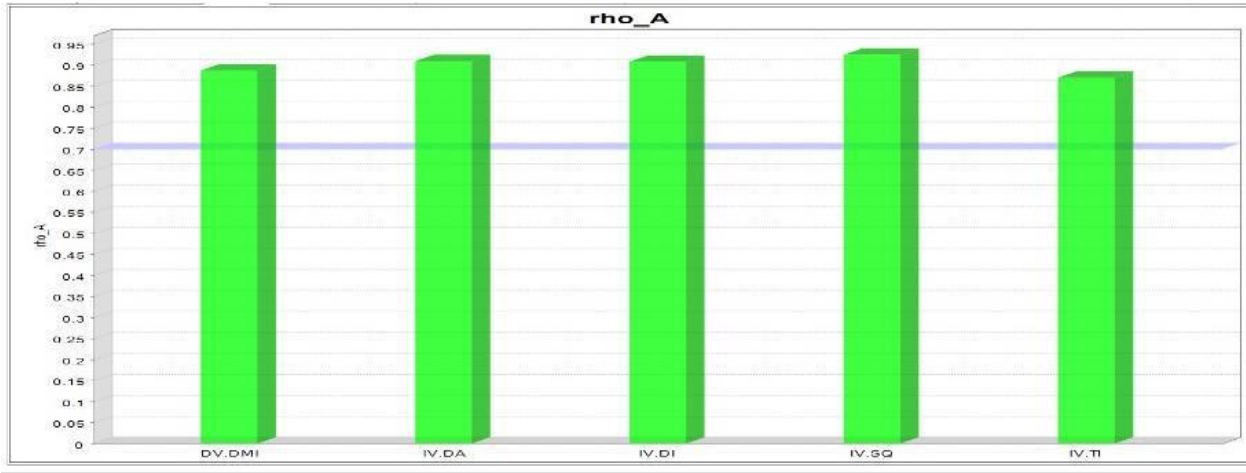


Figure 4: Rho_A

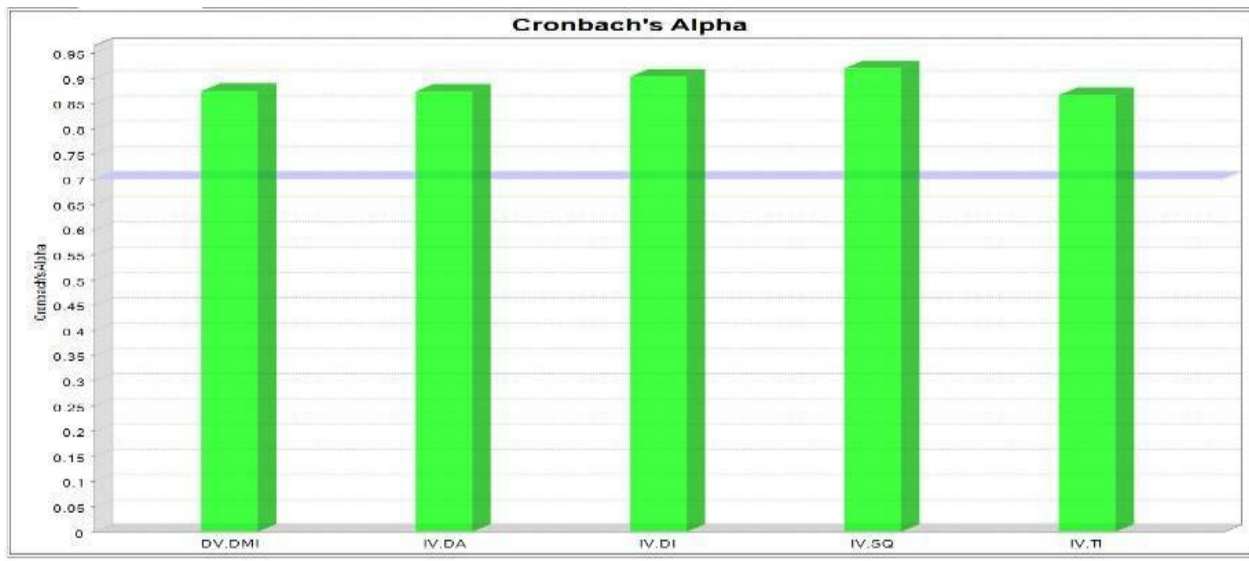


Figure 5: Cronbach's Alpha

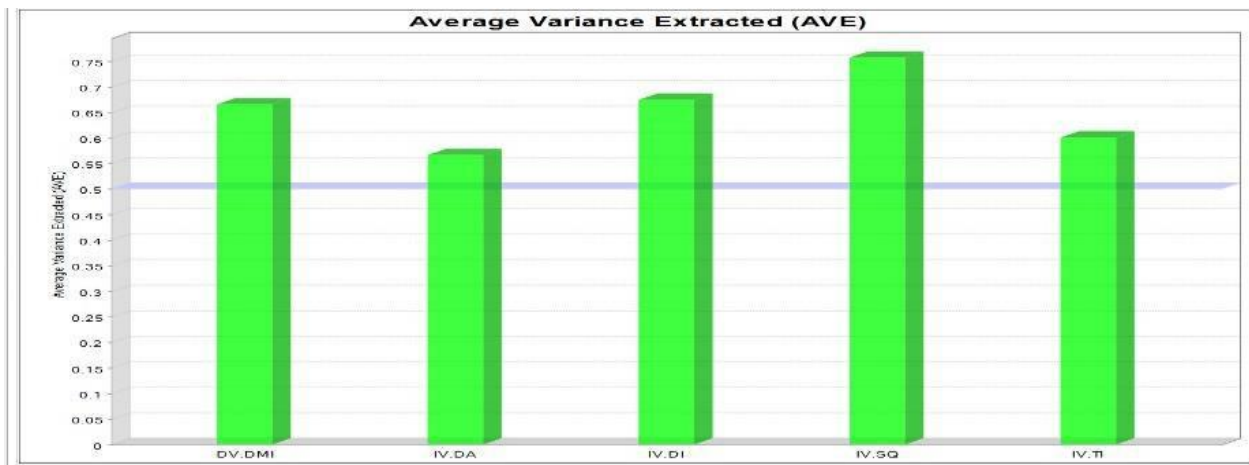


Figure 6: Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

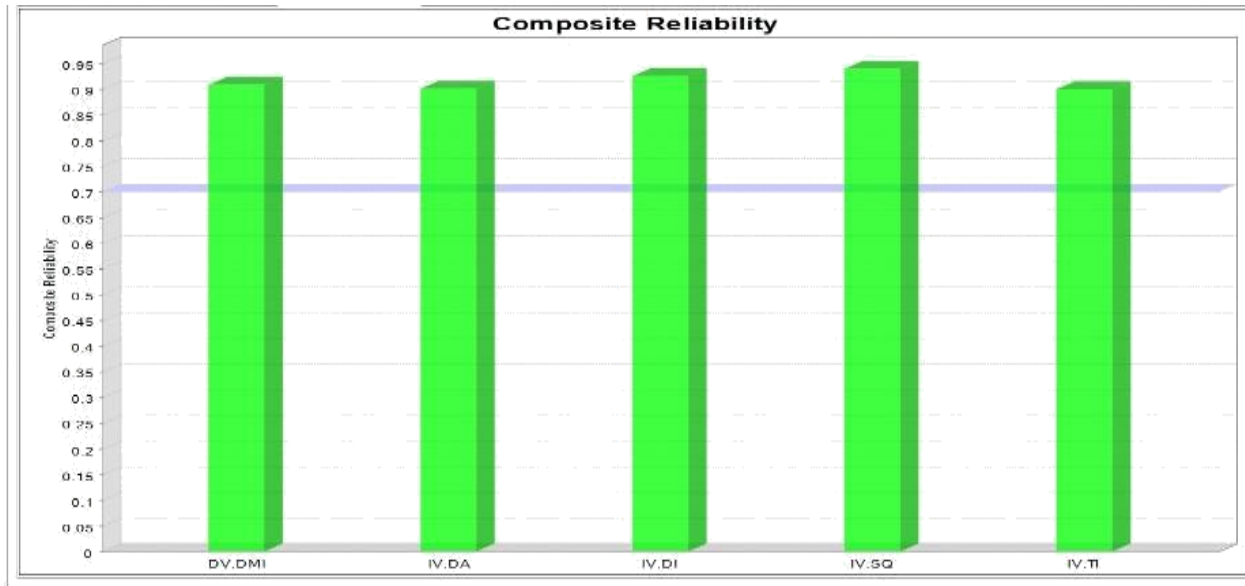


Figure 7: Composite Reliability

The results of hypothesis testing are depicted in Figures 4 through 7. The statistical results for the entire sample supported the tested direct relationship hypothesis. All the variables were positively associated with rural destination marketing initiatives. The first hypothesis (H1) proposes that a rural tourism destination's marketing initiatives are closely related to its destination appeal. The findings of this study support this hypothesis, as there is a positive relationship between these two variables. This is consistent with the findings of a previous study conducted by [Vinyals-Mirabent \(2019\)](#), which discovered that destination appeal is critical to the success of the destination. The study's findings support the idea that marketing initiatives can contribute to the success of a rural tourism destination. The second hypothesis (H2) seeks to determine whether tourism infrastructure is linked to marketing initiatives in rural tourism destinations. The results demonstrated that this hypothesis is viable, as tourism infrastructure is one of the factors that contribute to the development of rural tourism destinations. Meanwhile, hypothesis three (H3) proposes that the marketing initiatives of a rural tourism destination are closely related to service quality. This hypothesis yielded similar results to previous research by [Choi et al. \(2018\)](#), who concluded that service quality should be one of the key indicators of tourist satisfaction and desire to return. Customers should be satisfied with the services they receive because this will influence whether they return. These factors are undeniably important in promoting and marketing the rural tourism destination. Hypothesis three is thus supported. The final hypothesis (H4) contends that the image of a rural tourism destination is closely related to its marketing initiatives. Our findings support this hypothesis, as the variables have been demonstrated to be linked. [Zhang and Niyomsilp \(2020\)](#) and [Pan et al. \(2021\)](#) discovered that destination image influences tourists' behavioral intention to visit a specific location. Their concept is especially relevant to destination marketing initiatives, where a destination image helps retain tourists who have visited specific locations. They may not feel compelled to return to those locations if this component is missing. In conclusion, the study's findings revealed that there are significant links between these components and rural tourism destination marketing initiatives.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This sector's performance has been badly impacted by COVID-19, and prompt action is required to ensure the long-term viability of this tourism sector. According to [Karim and Ahamed \(2019\)](#), destination marketing is an essential aspect of rural tourism promotion. Consequently, it was

determined that all of the characteristics were advantageous for marketing rural tourism destinations, with destination image playing the most significant role in rural tourism development.

This is congruent with the findings of López-Sánchez et al. (2021), who observed that destination image is crucial for enhancing tourist loyalty and satisfaction, which benefits in the promotion of rural tourism to a wider audience. Other aspects, such as service quality, destination appeal, and tourism infrastructure, have been demonstrated to be crucial for encouraging rural tourism. Choi et al. (2018) highlight the significance of service quality as a competitive advantage for rural tourism, which has contributed to its growth. Aside from this, Yacob, Johannes, and Qomariyah (2019) feel that destination attractiveness is crucial to the intention to visit a rural tourism destination, hence contributing to the growth of the business. According to Chi et al. (2020), tourism infrastructure, as one of the perceived quality factors by tourists, is crucial to the viability of rural tourism and the marketing of the destination itself. The objectives of this research were met as a result of the findings, which were corroborated by a prior related study. Successfully identifying and demonstrating the important components of destination marketing will help the rural tourist business flourish in the future. Numerous options exist for achieving this objective; thus, all industry stakeholders must collaborate to promote rural tourism to as many individuals as possible. For the development of rural tourism in Indonesia, industry participants should design and implement strategic plans and initiatives. In addition, the government tourist agency must provide all essential help and government aid to individuals participating in reestablishing this industry. Local tourism stakeholders are accountable for implementing marketing efforts in their respective tourist location. It is essential that each partner participate in the implementation of these rural tourist destination marketing activities. Consequently, rural tourism locations would be able to flourish, tremendously helping their local populations; this is one of the study's contributions to all parties involved.

Identifiable limitations exist within our investigation. The first limitation is that this study presents just the viewpoints of tourists on rural tourism destination marketing initiatives without including the opinions of rural tourism stakeholders, therefore the results may be less accurate and efficient. As a participant in industry activities, their ideas may be more useful and constructive. The second concern is that the results of this study may appear unclear because they are not specific to a particular rural tourist area. There are currently numerous rural tourism destinations, and their marketing strategies may differ from those of other destinations. Accordingly, this study may boost some rural tourism sites while having little effect on others. The last is the application of quantitative research methods. Even though this technique is extensively utilized as a research tool, it produces less data. This is due to the difficulties of comprehending the thoughts and viewpoints of responders in such a brief inquiry. Due to the aforementioned constraints, future research may incorporate the perspectives of rural tourism stakeholders in order to better comprehend destination marketing strategies that would be of immense use to the business. Because they are intimately involved in this industry, they may have a greater understanding of how it runs and the necessary improvements. Second, future research should concentrate on a particular rural location in order to achieve better results. Because each place has its unique set of advantages and disadvantages, it would be far more sensible to focus on specific marketing campaigns for a particular destination than to employ the same strategy for all rural tourist destinations. Lastly, future research should employ a qualitative or mixed-methods approach. These methods will aid the researcher in acquiring a comprehensive grasp of the thoughts and perspectives of the respondents, enabling the development of more comprehensive data regarding the rural tourist destination. These are some research recommendations for the future.

References

- Adeyinka-Ojo, S. F., & Nair, V. (2015). Towards Developing a Framework for Rural Tourism Destination Appeals. *Developments of the New Tourism Paradigm in the Asia Pacific Region*, 300-316. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280628356_Towards_Developing_a_Framework_for_Rural_Tourism_Destination_Appeals
- An, W., & Alarcón, S. (2020). How Can Rural Tourism Be Sustainable? A Systematic Review. *Sustainability*, 12(18), 7758. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187758>
- Bokuniewicz, J. F., & Shulman, J. (2017). Influencer identification in Twitter networks of destination marketing organizations. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 8(2), 205–219. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jhtt-09-2016-0057>
- Cambra-Fierro, J. J., Fuentes-Blasco, M., Huerta-Álvarez, R., & Olavarría-Jaraba, A. (2022). Destination recovery during COVID-19 in an emerging economy: Insights from Perú. *European Research on Management and Business Economics*, 28(3), 100188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iedeen.2021.100188>
- Chan, J.-W., Yuan, S., Kok, K.-H., To, K.-W., Chu, H., Yang, J., ... Yuen, K.-Y. (2020). A familial cluster of pneumonia associated with the 2019 novel coronavirus indicating person-to-person transmission: A study of a family cluster. *The Lancet*, 395(10223), 514523. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7159286/>
- Chi, X., Lee, S. K., Ahn, Y. J., & Kiatkawsin, K. (2020). Tourist-Perceived Quality and Loyalty Intentions towards Rural Tourism in China. *Sustainability*, 12(9), 3614. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12093614>
- Chin, C. H., Law, F. Y., Lo, M. C., & Ramayah, T. (2018). The Impact of Accessibility Quality and Accommodation Quality on Tourists' Satisfaction and Revisit Intention to Rural Tourism Destination in Sarawak: The Moderating Role of Local Communities' Attitude. *Global Business and Management Research*, 10(2), 115-127. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328899252_The_Impact_of_Accessibility_Quality_and_Accommodation_Quality_on_Tourists%27_Satisfaction_and_Revisit_Intention_to_Rural_Tourism_Destination_in_Sarawak_The_Moderating_Role_of_Local_Communities%27_Attitude
- Chin, C. H., Lo, M. C., Razak, Z. B., Pasbakhsh, P., & Mohamad, A. A. (2020). Resources Confirmation for Tourism Destinations Marketing Efforts Using PLS-MGA: The Moderating Impact of Semirural and Rural Tourism Destination. *Sustainability*, 12(17), 6787. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12176787>
- Choi, H., Ann, S., Lee, K. W., & Park, D. B. (2018). Measuring Service Quality of Rural Accommodations. *Sustainability*, 10(2), 443. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10020443>
- Domi, S. H. P. R. E. S. I. M., Keco, R. E. M. Z. I., Musabelliu, B. A. R. I., & Kapaj, I. L. I. R. (2018). A review of factors affecting SMEs performance: an Albanian rural tourism perspective. *Albanian Journal of Agricultural Sciences. Special edition-Proceedings of ICOALS*, 713-718. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Shpresim-Domi/publication/329924171_A_review_of_factors_affecting_SMEs_performance_An_Albanian_rural_tourism_perspective/links/5c23f273458515a4c7fae137/A-review-of-factors-affecting-SMEs-performance-An-Albanian-rural-tourism-perspective.pdf
- Dooms, M. (2019). Stakeholder management for port sustainability: moving from ad-hoc to

- structural approaches. In Green ports (pp. 63-84). Elsevier.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780128140543000049>
- El Saghier, N. M. (2015). Managing Service Quality: Dimensions of service quality: a study in Egypt. *Managing ServiceQuality*, 9, 56-63.
<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.907.5049&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Esquivias, M.A., Sugiharti, L., Rohmawati, H., Setyorani, B., & Anindito, A. (2021). Tourism Demand in Indonesia: Implications in A Post-Pandemic Period. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 37(3), 951–958. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.37329-731>
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Boston: Pitman.
- Frías-Jamilena, D. M., Sabiote-Ortiz, C. M., Martín-Santana, J. D., & Beerli-Palacio, A. (2018). The effect of Cultural Intelligence on consumer-based destination brand equity. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 72, 22–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2018.05.009>
- Gajić, T., Penić, M., Vujko, A., & Petrović, M. D. (2018). Development Perspectives of Rural Tourism Policy—a Comparative Study of Rural Tourism Competitiveness Based on Perceptions of Tourism Workers in Slovenia and Serbia. *Eastern European Countryside*, 24(1), 143-154. <https://doi.org/10.2478/eec-2018-0007>
- Ghotbadi, A. R., Feiz, S., & Baharun, R. (2015). Service Quality Measurements: A Review. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v5-i2/1484>
- Goodwin, F. (2018). Tourism infrastructure: what is it and how is it made? *Life Persona*. <https://www.lifepersona.com/tourism-infrastructure-what-is-it-and-how-is-it-made>
- Guo, Y. R., Cao, Q. D., Hong, Z. S., Tan, Y. Y., Chen, S. D., Jin, H. J., Tan, K. S., Wang, D. Y., & Yan, Y. (2020). The origin, transmission, and clinical therapies on coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak – an update on the status. *Military Medical Research*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40779-020-00240-0>
- Hahm, J. J., & Severt, K. (2018). Importance of destination marketing on image and familiarity. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 1(1), 37–53. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jhti-10-2017-0002>
- Hasmuk, K., Sallehuddin, H., Pin Tan, M., Kooi Cheah, W., Ibrahim, R., & Tyng Chai, S. (2020, May 30). The COVID-19 Long-Term Care Situation in Malaysia | MALAYSIAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE ON AGEING (MyAgeingTM). Universiti Putra Malaysia. https://myageing.upm.edu.my/covid_19_older_persons/article/the_covid_19_long_term_care_situation_in_malaysia-56935?msclkid=cf10e2edc5b911ec84b4a8d319940fd8
- Huete A., N., & López, R. V. R. (2019). The role of destination image in tourist satisfaction: the case of a heritage site. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 33(1), 2444–2461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677x.2019.1654399>
- Jovanović, S., & Ivana, I. L. I. Ć. (2016). Infrastructure as important determinant of tourism development in the countries of Southeast Europe. *Ecoforum journal*, 5(1). <http://www.ecoforumjournal.ro/index.php/eco/article/viewFile/329/216>
- Karim, R. & Ahamed, M. (2019). Marketing Of Rural Destinations as a Tourism Product: A Case Study Of selected Areas in West Bengal, India. *Journal Of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR)*, 25-31. https://Www.Academia.Edu/38671305/Marketing_Of_Rural_Destinations_As_A_Tourism_Product_A_Case_Study_Of_Selected_Areas_In_West_Bengal_India
- Keup, M. (2022). What Is Stakeholder Theory? *ProjectManager*. <https://www.projectmanager.com/blog/what-is-stakeholder-theory>

- Kichin, S., Ayob, N., & Kasuma, J. (2021). The Initial Development of Rural Tourism Destination Image from Residents' Perceptions. *Journal Of Sustainability Science and Management*, 16(5), 288-306. <http://doi.org/10.46754/jssm.2021.07.018>
- Lai, K., & Li, X. R. (2016). Tourism Destination Image. *Journal of Travel Research*, 55(8), 1065–1080. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287515619693>
- Li, Z., Zhang, X., Yang, K., Singer, R., & Cui, R. (2021). Urban and rural tourism under COVID-19 in China: research on the recovery measures and tourism development. *Tourism Review*, 76(4), 718–736. <https://doi.org/10.1108/tr-08-2020-0357>
- Lin, Jao-Chuan, Lin, Hsiao-Hsien, Lu, Shih-Yun, Chien, Jung-Hul and Shen, Chih-Chien. "Research on the current situation of rural tourism in southern Fujian in China after the COVID-19 epidemic" *Open Geosciences*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2022, pp. 24-43. <https://doi.org/10.1515/geo-2020-0335>
- Linden, B. V. (2021). Stakeholder theory: What it is and how to use it. EDHEC Business School. <https://master.edhec.edu/news/stakeholder-theory-what-it-and-how-use-it>
- Lo, M. C., Chin, C. H., & Law, F. Y. (2017). Tourists' perspectives on hard and soft services toward rural tourism destination competitiveness: Community support as a moderator. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 19(2), 139–157. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1467358417715677>
- López-Sanz, J. M., Penelas-Leguía, A., Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, P., & Cuesta-Valiño, P. (2021). Sustainable Development and Consumer Behavior in Rural Tourism—The Importance of Image and Loyalty for Host Communities. *Sustainability*, 13(9), 4763. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13094763>
- Lu, Q., & Atadil, H. A. (2021). Do you dare to travel to China? An examination of China's destination image amid the COVID-19. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 40, 100881. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2021.100881>
- Mamirkulova, G., Mi, J., Abbas, J., Mahmood, S., Mubeen, R., & Ziapour, A. (2020). New Silk Road infrastructure opportunities in developing tourism environment for residents' better quality of life. *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 24, e01194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gecco.2020.e01194>
- Mandić, A., Mrnjavac, E., & Kordić, L. (2018). Tourism Infrastructure, Recreational Facilities and Tourism Development. *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 24(1), 41–62. <https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.24.1.12>
- Martini, U., & Buffa, F. (2015). Local networks, stakeholder dynamics and sustainability in tourism. Opportunities and limits in the light of stakeholder theory and SNA. *Sinergie Italian Journal of Management*, 33(Jan-Apr), 113-130. <https://doi.org/10.7433/s96.2015.07>
- Mehta, P., McAuley, D. F., Brown, M., Sanchez, E., Tattersall, R. S., & Manson, J. J. (2020). COVID-19: consider cytokine storm syndromes and immunosuppression. *The lancet*, 395(10229), 1033-1034. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7270045/>
- Ministry of Tourism & Creative Economics (MOCTE) (2020). Panduan Pelaksanaan Kebersihan, Kesehatan, Keselamatan dan Kelestarian Lingkungan. Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif Indonesia/ Badan Pariwisata dan ekonomi Kreatif Indonesia. Jakarta
- Nicolaidis, A. (2015). Tourism Stakeholder Theory in practice: instrumental business grounds, fundamental normative demands, or a descriptive application? *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* Vol. 4 (2) 1-26. [http://www.ajhtl.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article25vol4\(2\)july-nov2015.pdf](http://www.ajhtl.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article25vol4(2)july-nov2015.pdf)
- Nogueira, S., & Pinho, J. C. (2015). Stakeholder network integrated analysis: The specific case of rural tourism in the Portuguese Peneda-Gerês National Park. *International Journal of*

- Tourism Research, 17(4), 325-336.
<https://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/bitstream/1822/31179/1/DOC241114-24112014104622.pdf>
- Okumus, B., Xiang, Y., & Hutchinson, J. (2018). Local cuisines and destination marketing: cases of three cities in Shandong, China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 23(6), 584–599. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2018.1469521>
- Oliverio, C. J. (2021). What is Destination Marketing? Play Hard Florida. <https://playhardflorida.com/what-is-destination-marketing/>
- Omagari, L. (2020). 5 Ways to Successfully Pivot Travel Marketing During Covid-19. Skift. <https://skift.com/2020/05/21/covid-19-travel-marketing-strategies-pivot-messaging/>
- Oppermann, M. (1997). First-time and Repeat Visitors to New Zealand. *Tourism Management*, 18(3), 177 – 181
- Oppermann, M. (1996) Visitation of tourism attractions and tourist expenditure patterns - repeat versus first-time visitors, *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 1:1, 61-68, DOI: 10.1080/10941669708721964
- Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, General Distribution Tourism Strategies and Rural Development, Paris 1994 OCDE/GD (94)49, 013927
- Pan, S., Chang, C. W., & Zhu, Z. (2021). A Study of the Influence of Tourists' Destination Image and Perceived Service Quality on Their Behavioral Intention. *Open Journal of Applied Sciences*, 11(05), 585–595. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojapps.2021.115042>
- Promptchara, E., Ketloy, C., & Palaga, T. (2020). Immune responses in COVID-19 and potential vaccines: Lessons learned from SARS and MERS epidemic. *Asian Pacific Journal of Allergy and Immunology*, 38(1), 1– 9. http://apjai-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/1.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1kVlFnoc6mobqEy7FDz_93fX__AaY8ZgE4TUwtjzh8oVqgs82rgf3QoU
- Ramya, N., Kowsalya, A., & Dharanipriya, K. (2019). Service Quality and Its Dimensions. *EPRA International Journal of Research & Development (IJRD)*, 4(2), 38-41. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333058377_SERVICE_QUALITY_AND_ITS_DIMENSIONS
- Revfine (2022). 14 Destination Marketing Strategies to Attract More Visitors. Revfine. <https://www.revfine.com/destination-marketing/>
- Sharma, R. (2022). Stakeholder Theory. WallStreetMojo. <https://www.wallstreetmojo.com/stakeholder-theory/>
- Simon, B. (2022). What Is Stakeholder Theory and How Does It Impact an organization? Smartsheet. <https://www.smartsheet.com/what-stakeholder-theory-and-how-does-it-impact-organization>
- Soeswoyo, D. & Jeneetika, M. & Dewi, L. & Dewantara, M. & Asparini, P. (2021). Tourism Potential and Strategy to Develop Competitive Rural Tourism in Indonesia. *International Journal of Applied Sciences in Tourism and Events*. 5. 131-141. 10.31940/ijaste. v5i2.131-141.
- Sotiriadis, M. (2020). Tourism Destination Marketing: Academic Knowledge. *Encyclopedia*, 1(1), 42–56. <https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia1010007>

- Stainton, H. (2020, September 21). The appeal of tourist destinations | What attracts tourists. Tourism Teacher. <https://tourismteacher.com/the-appeal-of-tourist-destinations/>
- Statista Research Department, Apr 14, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/707633/number-of-international-visitor-arrivals-in-indonesia/>
- Team, W. (2022). What is Destination Marketing? WTM Global Hub. <https://hub.wtm.com/blog/travelindustry/what-is-destination-marketing/>
- United Nation Trade and Development (UNCTAD). (2021, July 3). COVID-19 impact on tourism could deal \$4 trillion blow to global. UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/06/1095052>
- United Nation World Trade Organisation (UNWTO) (2020). New Data Shows Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism as UNWTO Calls for Responsible Restart of the Sector. 22 June 2020. UNWTO. <https://www.unwto.org/news/new-data-shows-impact-of-covid-19-on-tourism>
- Upwork. (2021). Stakeholder Theory: What It Is and Why You Should Care. Upwork. <https://www.upwork.com/resources/stakeholder-theory>
- Victorovna, S., & Ivanovich, S. (2019). Way to assess the development of municipal tourism infrastructure. Journal of Applied Engineering Science, 17(1), 87–92. <https://doi.org/10.5937/jaes17-17073>
- Vinyals-Mirabent, S. (2019). European urban destinations' attractors at the frontier between competitiveness and a unique destination image. A benchmark study of communication practices. Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, 12, 37–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2019.02.006>
- Volgger, M., Taplin, R., & Aebli, A. (2021). Recovery of domestic tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic: An experimental comparison of interventions. Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, 48, 428–440. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2021.07.015>
- Yacob, S., Johannes, J., & Qomariyah, N. (2019). Does Destination Attractiveness and Destination Image Create Increase of Visiting Intention in Indonesia Rural Tourism? Sriwijaya International Journal of Dynamic Economics and Business, 3(2), 122. <https://doi.org/10.29259/sijdeb.v3i2.122-133>
- Yarimoglu, E. K. (2015). A Review of Service and E-Service Quality Measurements: Previous Literature and Extension. Journal of Economic and Social Studies, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.14706/jecoss115110169-200>.
- Zhang, B., & Niyomsilp, E. (2020). The relationship between tourism destination image, perceived value, and post-visiting behavioral intention of Chinese tourist to Thailand. International Business Research, 13(11), 1-96. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ibr.v13n11p96>