

## MARKETING COMMUNICATION, E-WOM, AND TOURISM EVENTS IN SHAPING VISIT INTENTION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF DESTINATION IMAGE

Futri Rezki Indah <sup>1)</sup>, Syahmardi Yacob <sup>2)</sup>, Musnaini <sup>3)</sup>

<sup>1,2,3)</sup> Faculty Economics and Business, Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia

Corresponding author: tetehtutri@gmail.com

### Abstract

*This study examines the role of destination image as a mediating variable in the relationship between marketing communication, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), tourism events, and visiting intention in Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency, Indonesia. Tourism development in the region has shown fluctuating growth, indicating the need for more effective strategic marketing efforts. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this research proposes that destination image functions as a psychological mechanism linking marketing stimuli to behavioral intention. A quantitative explanatory approach was employed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to respondents aged 17 years and above who had accessed tourism-related information about Tanjung Jabung Timur. The findings reveal that marketing communication, e-WOM, and tourism events significantly influence visiting intention. Tourism events demonstrate the strongest direct effect on visiting intention, while e-WOM has the strongest influence on destination image. Furthermore, destination image significantly affects visiting intention and mediates the relationship between marketing communication and visiting intention, as well as between e-WOM and visiting intention. However, destination image does not mediate the relationship between tourism events and visiting intention. The model shows strong explanatory power, highlighting the importance of integrated digital marketing strategies and online engagement in strengthening destination image and enhancing tourism competitiveness in Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency.*

**Keywords:** Marketing Communication, Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), Tourism Events, Destination Image, Visiting Intention

### Introduction

Tourism is a strategic sector contributing to regional economic growth, employment creation, and local identity development (UNWTO, 2023). Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency possesses considerable coastal, natural, and cultural tourism potential; however, its tourism performance has not yet been optimal. Tourist arrivals increased significantly from 25,687 in 2020 to 59,517 in 2022, declined in 2023, and slightly recovered in 2024, indicating fluctuative growth patterns (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). These conditions demonstrate that tourism development in the region remains unstable and requires stronger strategic intervention (Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Tanjung Jabung Timur, 2025).

Despite the increasing number of visitors, tourism contribution to the regional Gross Domestic Product remains relatively low at approximately 3.2% in 2023 (Bappeda, 2024). The number of tourism destinations and community-based management groups has shown only marginal growth over the past five years (Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Tanjung Jabung Timur, 2025). In the digital era, destination competitiveness is not only determined by physical attractions but also by how destinations are communicated, perceived, and discussed in online environments (Tjiptono, 2019).

Marketing communication, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and tourism events are considered strategic instruments in strengthening destination competitiveness (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Marketing communication enhances awareness and brand positioning (Tjiptono, 2019). E-WOM builds credibility through peer-generated content and online reviews (Filiari & Mariani, 2021). Tourism events create experiential attraction that stimulates emotional engagement (Getz & Page, 2020). However, their effectiveness may depend on how they shape destination image, which subsequently influences visiting intention (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework, destination image functions as a mediating variable linking marketing stimuli to behavioral responses in the form of visiting intention (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Additionally, the Theory of Planned Behavior explains that intention is directly influenced by individual attitudes and perceptions toward the destination (Ajzen, 1991).

### Literature Review

#### Marketing Communication

Marketing communication refers to strategic efforts to inform, persuade, and remind target markets about a destination's attributes and advantages. Integrated marketing communication includes advertising, digital promotion, public relations, and social media campaigns. Effective communication enhances awareness and forms positive perceptions, contributing to destination image development.

### Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM)

E-WOM refers to online information exchange among consumers regarding their experiences, opinions, and evaluations. In tourism, online reviews, social media posts, and travel blogs significantly influence decision-making processes. Because E-WOM is perceived as more credible than official promotion, it strongly shapes destination perceptions.

### Tourism Events

Tourism events include festivals, cultural celebrations, and regional attractions organized to promote destination identity. Events create emotional experiences and strengthen destination branding. When properly managed and digitally promoted, events generate publicity and stimulate travel motivation.

### Destination Image

Destination image represents tourists' overall perceptions, beliefs, and impressions about a location. It consists of cognitive (knowledge-based) and affective (emotion-based) components. A positive image enhances confidence and reduces perceived risk, thereby increasing visit intention.

### Visit Intention

Visit intention refers to the likelihood or willingness of tourists to visit a destination in the future. According to TPB, intention is the strongest predictor of actual behavior. Positive attitudes and perceptions significantly contribute to intention formation.

### Methods

This study employed a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the causal relationships among marketing communication, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), tourism events, destination image, and visiting intention in Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency. Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to respondents who had accessed information about tourism destinations in the region. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with criteria including individuals aged 17 years or older who were familiar with tourism information related to Tanjung Jabung Timur. All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is appropriate for predictive analysis and complex mediation models. The evaluation process consisted of two main stages: the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model). The measurement model assessment included testing convergent validity through outer loading values ( $\geq 0.70$ ), Average Variance Extracted ( $AVE \geq 0.50$ ), and composite reliability ( $\geq 0.70$ ) to ensure construct validity and reliability. Meanwhile, the structural model evaluation involved examining the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), path coefficients, and hypothesis testing using bootstrapping procedures with a significance threshold of  $t\text{-value} > 1.96$  and  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ . Mediation analysis was conducted to determine the indirect effects of marketing communication, e-WOM, and tourism events on visiting intention through destination image.

### Results and Discussion

#### Profile of Respondents

The majority of respondents were female (60%), aged between 20-25 years (25%), held a bachelor's degree (45%), and 70% had previously visited tourism destinations in Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency. The dominance of young respondents indicates that the primary tourism market segment in this region consists of digitally active and socially connected individuals. This demographic characteristic is highly relevant to the role of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and digital marketing communication in shaping destination perception. Furthermore, the high proportion of respondents who had prior visiting experience strengthens the reliability of the data, as their responses are grounded in either direct experience or informed exposure to the destination.

#### Measurement Model Evaluation

Before analyzing the structural relationships among variables, it is essential to ensure that the measurement model meets validity and reliability requirements. The evaluation of the outer model was conducted by examining internal consistency reliability and convergent validity using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

**Table 1.** Reliability and Validity Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Destination Image	0.979	0.982	0.874
Tourism Events	0.976	0.980	0.858
E-WOM	0.975	0.979	0.851
Marketing Communication	0.977	0.980	0.862
Visiting Intention	0.978	0.981	0.865

As presented in Table 1, all constructs demonstrate Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. Notably, all reliability values exceed 0.95, suggesting a very high level of measurement stability. The Average Variance Extracted

(AVE) values range from 0.851 to 0.874, significantly exceeding the minimum requirement of 0.50. This indicates that more than 85% of the variance in the indicators is explained by their respective latent constructs. Methodologically, these findings confirm that the measurement model satisfies convergent validity and reliability criteria, ensuring the robustness of subsequent structural model analysis.

**Structural Model Evaluation**

After confirming the adequacy of the measurement model, the next step is to evaluate the structural model. The structural model assessment focuses on examining the explanatory power of the model through the R-square (R<sup>2</sup>) value and testing the hypothesized relationships.

**Table 2. R-Square**

Variable	R <sup>2</sup>
Destination Image	0.773
Visiting Intention	0.801

Table 2 shows that the R<sup>2</sup> value for Destination Image is 0.773, meaning that 77.3% of its variance is explained by marketing communication, e-WOM, and tourism events. This indicates strong predictive capability in explaining how tourists’ perceptions are formed. The R<sup>2</sup> value for Visiting Intention is 0.801, indicating that 80.1% of the variance in visiting intention is explained by the model. In behavioral research, R<sup>2</sup> values above 0.75 are categorized as substantial, suggesting that this model has strong explanatory power. These results confirm that the integrated model effectively captures the determinants of tourists’ behavioral intentions in the context of Tanjung Jabung Timur.

**Hypothesis Testing**

Following the evaluation of model fit and explanatory power, hypothesis testing was conducted to assess the direct relationships among variables. The significance of each path was examined using bootstrapping procedures.

**Table 3. Direct Effects**

Path	Coefficient	T-Value	P-Value	Result
Marketing Communication → Visiting Intention	0.279	5.486	0.000	Supported
E-WOM → Visiting Intention	0.305	5.269	0.000	Supported
Tourism Events → Visiting Intention	0.577	15.494	0.000	Supported
Marketing Communication → Destination Image	0.488	12.746	0.000	Supported
E-WOM → Destination Image	0.607	15.584	0.000	Supported
Tourism Events → Destination Image	0.036	0.987	0.324	Not Supported
Destination Image → Visiting Intention	0.236	3.194	0.001	Supported

As shown in Table 3, marketing communication, e-WOM, and tourism events significantly influence visiting intention. Among them, tourism events exhibit the strongest direct effect ( $\beta = 0.577$ ), indicating that experiential activities directly stimulate tourists’ intention to visit. In contrast, e-WOM has the strongest influence on Destination Image ( $\beta = 0.607$ ), followed by marketing communication ( $\beta = 0.488$ ). This suggests that tourists’ perceptions of the destination are primarily shaped by digital information and peer-generated content rather than experiential events alone. Interestingly, tourism events do not significantly influence destination image ( $p > 0.05$ ). This finding implies that although events may attract immediate interest, they have not yet been strategically managed to strengthen long-term destination branding. Destination Image significantly affects Visiting Intention ( $\beta = 0.236$ ), confirming that tourists’ perceptions and evaluations play an important role in shaping behavioral intentions.

To further understand the mechanism of influence, mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether Destination Image mediates the relationships between the independent variables and Visiting Intention.

**Table 4. Indirect Effects**

Path	Coefficient	T-Value	P-Value	Result
Marketing Communication → Destination Image → Visiting Intention	0.115	3.048	0.002	Supported
E-WOM → Destination Image → Visiting Intention	0.143	3.047	0.002	Supported
Tourism Events → Destination Image → Visiting Intention	0.008	0.930	0.353	Not Supported

Table 4 indicates that Destination Image significantly mediates the relationship between marketing communication and visiting intention, as well as between e-WOM and visiting intention. The indirect effect of e-WOM ( $\beta = 0.143$ ) is stronger than that of marketing communication ( $\beta = 0.115$ ), demonstrating that peer-generated digital content has a stronger psychological impact in shaping intention through perception. However, Destination Image does not mediate the relationship between tourism events and visiting intention.

This reinforces the earlier finding that tourism events operate more as direct behavioral triggers rather than perception-building mechanisms.

## **Discussions**

The findings of this study provide important theoretical and managerial implications regarding the role of destination image as a mediating variable in shaping visiting intention in Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency. The results confirm that marketing communication, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and tourism events significantly influence visiting intention, both directly and indirectly through destination image.

First, the significant effect of marketing communication on both destination image and visiting intention indicates that integrated promotional strategies play a crucial role in strengthening regional tourism competitiveness. This finding aligns with the perspective of Kotler and Keller (2016) that effective communication enhances awareness and shapes positive brand perceptions. In the context of Tanjung Jabung Timur, consistent digital campaigns, social media engagement, and public relations activities contribute to building favorable cognitive and affective evaluations of the destination. The mediation result further demonstrates that destination image partially transmits the effect of marketing communication to visiting intention, meaning that communication efforts become more effective when they successfully shape positive perceptions.

Second, e-WOM emerges as the strongest determinant of destination image and shows a significant indirect effect on visiting intention through destination image. This finding supports previous research by Filieri and Mariani (2021), which emphasizes that online reviews and peer-generated content are perceived as more credible than formal promotional messages. Considering that the majority of respondents belong to a digitally active young demographic group, the dominance of e-WOM influence becomes highly relevant. The result confirms the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, where digital information (stimulus) shapes internal perception (organism) and ultimately influences behavioral intention (response). Thus, tourism stakeholders must encourage positive online engagement and actively manage digital reputation to strengthen destination image.

Third, tourism events show the strongest direct effect on visiting intention but do not significantly influence destination image. This finding indicates that events function more as short-term attraction drivers rather than long-term perception builders. While festivals and cultural activities successfully stimulate immediate travel interest, they may not yet be strategically integrated into destination branding efforts. This suggests that event management in Tanjung Jabung Timur still focuses more on operational implementation rather than strategic image positioning. From a managerial standpoint, events should be packaged with consistent thematic branding and amplified through digital channels to maximize their image-building potential.

Furthermore, the significant influence of destination image on visiting intention reinforces the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which states that intention is largely determined by attitudes and perceptions. The high  $R^2$  value (0.801) indicates that the proposed model has strong explanatory power in predicting tourists' behavioral intentions. This suggests that strengthening psychological perception is as important as improving physical infrastructure in tourism development.

Overall, this study confirms that destination image plays a strategic mediating role, particularly in translating marketing communication and e-WOM into behavioral intention. However, tourism events operate primarily as direct motivators. These findings highlight the importance of integrating digital marketing strategies, online engagement management, and experiential event design within a cohesive destination branding framework to achieve sustainable tourism growth in Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency.

In practical terms, local government and tourism stakeholders should prioritize digital-based communication strategies, encourage user-generated content, collaborate with travel influencers, and design events that reflect a strong and consistent destination identity. By doing so, destination image can be strengthened, leading to higher visiting intention and improved regional tourism performance.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to examine the role of destination image as a mediating variable in the relationship between marketing communication, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), tourism events, and visiting intention in Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency. Based on the results of PLS-SEM analysis, it can be concluded that marketing communication, e-WOM, and tourism events significantly influence visiting intention. Among these variables, tourism events demonstrate the strongest direct effect on visiting intention, indicating that experiential attractions play a crucial role in stimulating tourists' immediate travel interest.

Furthermore, marketing communication and e-WOM significantly influence destination image, with e-WOM showing the strongest effect. This finding highlights the importance of digital interaction and peer-generated content in shaping tourists' perceptions. Destination image itself significantly affects visiting intention, confirming that positive cognitive and affective evaluations of a destination enhance tourists' behavioral intentions.

Mediation analysis reveals that destination image significantly mediates the relationship between marketing communication and visiting intention, as well as between e-WOM and visiting intention. However, destination image does not mediate the relationship between tourism events and visiting intention,

suggesting that tourism events function more as direct motivational drivers rather than long-term perception-building mechanisms.

Overall, the proposed model demonstrates strong explanatory power in predicting visiting intention. The findings emphasize that strengthening digital marketing strategies, managing online reputation, and developing consistent destination branding are essential to enhancing tourism competitiveness in Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency. Future research is recommended to incorporate additional variables such as perceived value, tourist satisfaction, or destination loyalty to further enrich the understanding of sustainable tourism development.

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### **Authors' Bibliography**

#### **Futri Rezki Indah**

Futri Rezki Indah was born in Jambi on October 2, 2001. She earned her Bachelor of Economics (S.E.) degree in Management from Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia. She is currently pursuing a Master of Management (M.M.) degree at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia. Her academic interests include marketing management, regional tourism, and entrepreneurship.