

# The Influence of Cultural Events and Social Media Marketing on Tourist Visit Interest: The Mediating Role of Destination Image (Wonosobo Balloon Culture Festival)

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of cultural events and social media marketing on tourist visit interest, with the destination image as a mediator at the Wonosobo Balloon Festival. The quantitative method used with the PLS-SEM technique through SmartPLS 4.0 and involved 96 respondents selected purposively. The results show that cultural events ( $p = 0.000$ ) and social media marketing ( $p = 0.040$ ) have a significant effect on visit interest. Both also affect destination image, which is proven to mediate the relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ). This study strengthens the importance of synergy between digital promotion and local culture in tourism strategies. These findings are expected to be a practical reference for destination managers in designing effective tourism promotions

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## 1. Introduction

Indonesia's tourism sector is one of the main contributors to the country's economy and foreign exchange. In 2024, the number of foreign tourist visits reached 13.90 million, an increase of 19.05% from the previous year's 11.68 million visits on a monthly basis, in December 2024 it was recorded at 1.244 million visits, the highest figure since January 2024. This positive trend shows that the tourism sector is the backbone of post-pandemic economic recovery. In addition to being the second largest contributor of foreign exchange, the tourism industry also creates jobs for more than 12 million people (BPS, 2024). The diversity of cultures and natural resources spread across various regions is a great potential in the development of locally-based tourism. (WTTC, 2023).

Social media users grow, all forms of tourism promotion are now increasingly digital. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok are used to spread visual content of destinations widely and quickly. Governments and tourism players are increasingly utilizing digital campaigns (e.g. #WonderfulIndonesia) to reach global tourists. Although there is no recent official data on the number of impressions or engagement, global trends confirm the vital role of social media in shaping destination perceptions and influencing travel decisions. (Kavoura & Stavrianea, 2014) stated that social media is a strategic tool in innovative destination marketing.

Cultural events such as traditional festivals are now an important strategy in the process of destination marketing. Cultural events not only serve as a means of preserving traditions, but also become an effective tourist attraction. Regional festivals packaged with creative concepts are able to invite the interest of tourists while introducing local cultural identities. Research conducted by revealed that the implementation of cultural festivals has a significant impact on increasing the number of tourists and providing a positive economic effect for UMKM in the surrounding area (L. Lestari et al., 2025)

One of the real practices of involving local culture in tourism promotion is the holding of the Hot Air Balloon Festival in Wonosobo Regency. This activity has transformed from a community tradition into a regional-scale tourism event. Through optimal digital promotion management, the committee succeeded in increasing visitor enthusiasm. The strategy of distributing content through social media such as Instagram and YouTube is considered the key to success in attracting tourist interest. (Setiawati & Pritalia, 2023)

The increasing number of tourist visits to Wonosobo Regency during the Wonosobo Balloon Culture Festival is concrete evidence that local culture-based tourism has its own appeal. Based on data from the Wonosobo Tourism and Culture Office, during the festival period, more than 437,529 domestic tourists and 259 foreign tourists were recorded as attending the event location. This spike was also supported by a massive promotional strategy through social media, involving various digital platforms and support for user-generated content from visitors. (Compas.com, 2025)

Results of a pre-survey conducted in the Balloon Festival area showed that there was a gap between the potential of cultural events and their promotional reach. 61% of local respondents knew the exact date of the festival and were enthusiastic about the event, while only 39% of out-of-town tourists really knew the festival schedule, and even fewer had seen the festival promotion through digital platforms. This indicates that promotional communication has not yet reached the target audience optimally, especially tourists from out of town.

Literature review shows that there are quite a lot of studies related to the effectiveness of social media in tourism promotion, but most of them only focus on tourist destinations in general. Studies that specifically examine the relationship between cultural events, social media promotion, and destination image in one quantitative research model are still very limited. Therefore, this study presents a new contribution by combining the three variables through the PLS-SEM approach, using the Wonosobo Balloon Festival as a case study that reflects local dynamics in the context of digital tourism promotion.

(Prakoso & Marlana, 2020) as well as between destination image and tourist behavior (Novitaningtyas et al., 2022), there are still limited studies that comprehensively integrate the influence culture event, social media marketing, and destination image on tourist visit interest in one quantitative research model.

Based on the background, the formulation of the problem in this study is: (1) Do cultural events and social media marketing influence the image of the destination? (2) Do cultural events and social media marketing influence the interest of tourists to visit? (3) Does the image of the destination mediate the relationship between the two and the interest of tourists to visit.

## 2. Literature Review

### Theory of planned Behavior

This study adopts the Theory of Planned Behavior developed by (Ajzen, 2019) States that an individual's intention to visit a tourist attraction is influenced by three main factors:

1. Attitude: Refers to an individual's positive or negative evaluation of a behavior. In the context of tourism, attitudes are formed from perceptions and destination images received through digital promotions, social media, or testimonials from other tourists. A positive image can increase interest in visiting.

2. Subjective Norms: Relating to social influence or pressure from the social environment, including social media, friends, and family, which can encourage someone to decide to visit a tourist attraction.
3. Perceived Behavioral Control: Describes an individual's belief in the ease or difficulty of carrying out an action, for example access to transportation, digital information, and the organization of cultural events that support visits.

### **Interest in tourist visits**

Intention to visit refers to a person's intention to travel to a destination, built from perceptions, experiences, and information obtained (Sayangbatti & Baiquni, 2013) Indicators of repeat visit interest according to (Novitaningtyas et al., 2022) are:

1. Actively seeking information about destinations or events
2. Determination or confidence to visit
3. Final decision to visit the place

### **Culture Event**

Cultural events an attraction that highlights the local identity and history of an area. Cultural tourism is a form of cultural industry, because it uses cultural aspects in its management. Culture is aligned with other resources such as natural resources and economy (finance) (Anggoro et al., 2023) Indicator culture Event in (A. A. Lestari et al., 2017) namely:

1. Spectacularization: the level of excitement or visual appeal of the event.
2. Theme: clarity and uniqueness of the cultural theme being promoted
3. Immersion and Participation: the level of tourist participation in the event directly.

### **Social media marketing**

(Hidayati et al., 2024) defines social media marketing is a form of marketing mix used to increase consumer knowledge about a brand/object, by using tools from social media platforms that can be accessed from anywhere. The indicators of social media marketing are:

1. Content creation: The process of creating interesting content (text, images, videos) to promote destinations through social media.
2. Content sharing: The activity of sharing content with other users so that promotional messages are spread more widely.
3. Building connections: Establishing direct interactions with users to build closeness and engagement.
4. Community building: Building a community of active and loyal social media users towards a destination or event

### **Destination Image**

Destination image is the result of a perceptual and cognitive process influenced by information sources, age, education level, motivation and culture. (Budi, 2018) Indicators of destination image are:

1. Cognitive image: objective perception of the facilities, infrastructure, and uniqueness of the destination
2. Affective image: emotional reaction or feelings towards the destination

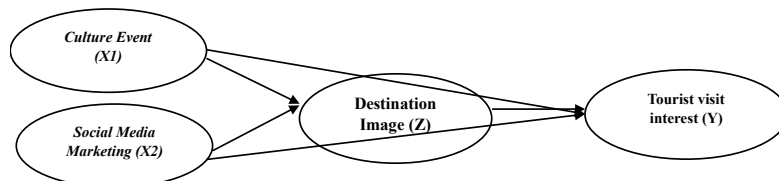
## **3. Method, Data, and Analysis**

The research method uses a quantitative approach carried out by the survey method. The survey is equipped with the distribution of forms to visitors to the Wonosobo Balloon Culture Festival. Sampling was obtained by the purposive sampling method where samples were taken based on predetermined criteria. Based on the (Hair et al., 2019) formula. The number of respondents is the number of indicators multiplied by 5-10. In this study, the indicators consist of: 4 Culture Event

indicators, 4 Social Media Marketing indicators, 3 Destination Image indicators, and 3 Visit Interest indicators. So that 12 indicators x 8 = 96 respondents are counted.

Data collection techniques using closed questionnaires/surveys using a Likert scale instrument of 1-5 to measure: Culture Event, Social Media Marketing, Tourist Visit Interest, Destination Image. The scoring is given to each respondent's answer with the assumption of answers (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree. Which will then be processed using path analysis techniques with SmartPLS 4.0.

**Figure 1.** Framework



Cultural events, such as festivals, traditional performances and exhibitions significantly enhance a destination's attractiveness. These events offer authentic local experiences that increase tourists interested in visiting. Previous research conducted by (Parastiwi & Farida, 2018). The influence of culture events significantly influence tourist visit intention

**H1: Culture event has a positive effect on tourist visit interest.**

Social media marketing is a powerful tool for engaging with potential tourist. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok shape destination awareness and influence visit intention through visual content and peer interaction. Previous research conducted by (Andiaresmi & Pramono, 2023) and (Sulistio & Talumantak, 2024). The influence of social media marketing significantly influence visit interest

**H2: Social media marketing has a positive influence on tourist visit interest.**

Culture event contribute not only to visit interest but also enhance the perceived image of the destination by highlighting its uniqueness and authenticity. Previous research conducted by (Romadhan, 2019). The influence of culture events significantly affects the destination image.

**H3: Culture events has a positive impact on destination image.**

Social media activities strongly shape destination image by facilitating the sharing of attractive visuals, testimonials, and experiences. Which form mental associations with the destination. Previous research conducted by (Alghamdi & Abdulwahid, 2025). The influence of social media marketing significantly influence destination image

**H4: Social media marketing has a positive effect on destination image.**

A strong destination image directly enhances tourist visit interest. Positive perceptions of safety, uniqueness, and quality influence travel decision making. Previous research conducted by (Mehetabel et al., 2023) and (Sulistio & Talumantak, 2024). The influence of destination image significantly influence visit interest

**H5: Destination image has a positive effect on tourist visit interest.**

Although cultural event attract attention, the tourist visit interest is largely shaped by their perception of the destination image, making it a key mediating variable. Empirical findings suggest that destination image mediates the relationship between cultural events and visitor intention to revisit (Maharani & Setyowardhani, 2018)

**H6: Destination image mediates the influence culture event on tourist visit interest.**

Social media allows in depth information processing that result in positive perceptions of the destination. This formed image is when tourists decisions to visit the destination. Empirical findings

suggest that destination image mediates the relationship between social media marketing and intention to visit (Omeish et al., 2024)

**H7: Destination image mediates the influence of social media marketing towards tourist visit interest.**

#### 4. Result and Discussion

##### Respondent Characteristics

##### Respondent Characteristics Based on Gender

**Table 1.** Respondent gender data

Demographics	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Females	43	44.8
	Males	53	55.2
Total		96	100.0
Age	17-25	48	50.0
	26-34	33	34.3
	35-44	9	9.4
	> 45	6	6.3
Total		96	100.0

Source: Processed data, 2025

Based on the table, it shows that the respondents are male as many as 53 or 55.2% and the female gender is 43 or 44.8%. It can be concluded from the data that the majority of respondents are male. The data also shows that the age group with the most visitors is 17-25 years old. This age is a productive and active period, where many people have a high interest in outdoor activities and unique events like balloon festivals. This age range also tends to be easier to reach the festival location and have free time to participate. Based on the table, it can be seen that the majority of respondents are in the age range of 17-25 years as many as 48 tourists, respondents aged 26-34 years as many as 33 tourist, respondents aged 35-44 years as many as 9 tourist. And the lowest are respondents over 45 years old. The combination of the majority of male visitors and the age range of 17-25 years can be explained by the tendency of young men's interest in adventure activities and hobbies related to technology or extreme sports. Balloon festivals that offer unique experiences and spectacular visuals can be a major attraction for this group.

##### Outer model

##### Convergent Validity

Results Convergent Validity is the Loading Factor value on the latent variable with each construct indicator based on a measurement scale of 0.50 to 0.60. (Haryono, 2016)

##### AVE

Value obtaine AVE above 0.5, no variables need to be discarded because they meet the criteria convergent validity. (Haryono, 2016)

##### Composite Reliability

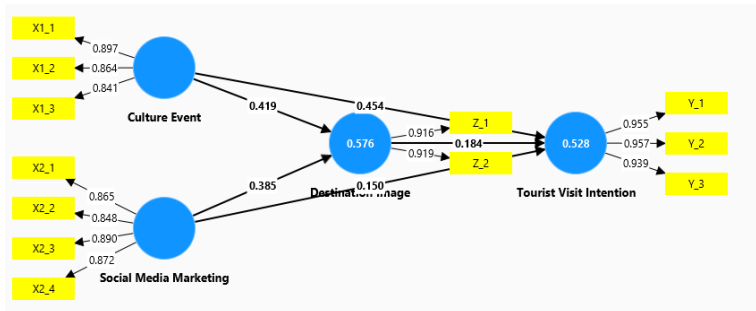
The instrument used in the variable is said to be reliable if it has Cronbach Alpha more than 0.60. (Haryono, 2016)

##### Inner Model

##### R-Square

Based on the output of the test results, the data shows the influence of all independent and mediating variables on Tourist Visit Interest of 0.513 or 51.3%. While the influence of all independent variables on Destination Image is 0.567 or 56.7%

**Figure 2.** SmartPLS Diagrams



**Table 2.** Factor Loading Matrices

Construct and Indicator	Factor loading	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	R-Square
Tourist Visit Intention		0.903	0.946	0.513
I follow social media accounts that share information about the Wonosobo Balloon Festival	0.955			
I have a strong desire to visit the Wonosobo Balloon Festival in the future	0.957			
I have discussed plans to visit the Wonosobo Balloon Festival with others.	0.939			
Destination images		0.842	0.812	0.567
Wonosobo looks like a fun place to visit.	0.916			
The information I received made me judge Wonosobo as a place worth visiting.	0.919			
Culture Event		0.752	0.835	
The performances at the festival were able to attract the attention of tourists.	0.897			
The theme raised reflects the uniqueness of Wonosobo's local culture.	0.864			
This festival provides an immersive cultural experience for visitors.	0.841			
Social media marketing		0.755	0.892	
Information about the Wonosobo Balloon Festival is presented in the form of interesting content on social media.	0.865			
I often see people sharing content about the Wonosobo Balloon Festival on social media.	0.848			
Social media helps me stay connected with the developments of the Hot Air Balloon Festival.	0.890			
I see social media as a platform to exchange information with fellow festival goers.	0.872			

Source: Processing data, 2025.

**Table 3.** Hypothesis test results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values
X1 -> Z -> Y	0.077	0.070	0.035	2.208	0.027
X2 -> Z -> Y	0.071	0.068	0.039	2.811	0.007

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values
X1 -> Y	0.531	0.534	0.108	4.902	0.000
X1 -> Z	0.419	0.419	0.126	3.327	0.001
X2 -> Y	0.221	0.209	0.107	2.054	0.040
X2 -> Z	0.385	0.383	0.127	3.023	0.003
Z -> Y	0.184	0.174	0.074	2.493	0.013

Source: Processing data, 2025.

**Table 4.** Bootstrapping Test Result

Source: Processing data, 2025.

**Culture Event Has Positive Influence on Tourist Visit Interest**

From the test results, p value of 0.000 and a t statistic value of 4.902 were obtained, indicating a significant influence. Culture Event in the interest of tourist visiting Wonosobo Balloon Culture Festival. This shows that the more interesting and authentic a cultural event is, the higher the interest of tourists to visit. In the context Wonosobo Balloon Culture Festival, visitors are treated not only to a hot air balloon parade, but also to traditional Wonosobo art performances such as the Tari Lengger, to a local culinary bazaar. The visual aesthetic elements of the balloons depicting the creativity of local artists, as well as the lively cultural atmosphere, create an emotional appeal that is hard to forget. This finding is in line with research (P. R. J. Sari & Kale, 2024) which states that cultural events play a role in creating the uniqueness and attractiveness of tourist destinations which ultimately increases the intention to visit. (Angriani & Mekarini, 2013) also stated that cultural events are able to attract tourists to visit.

**Social Media Marketing Has Positive Influence on Tourist Visit Interest**

From the test results, p value of 0.040 and a t statistic value of 2.054 were obtained, indicating a significant influence. Social Media Marketing in the interest of tourist visiting Wonosobo Balloon Culture Festival. Social media is able to create wide exposure and increase the curiosity of potential tourists through visual content and digital narratives. The festival was promoted massively through Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok accounts, managed by the Wonosobo city media team with content such as videos of festival preparations, behind the scenes, to live reports during the event. The success of this strategy can be seen from the high engagement rate and many out-of-town visitors mentioned social media as their main source of information. Visual content such as the release of balloons in the morning with Mount Sindoro in the background is very effective in creating anticipated experience which triggers the desire to visit. This finding is reinforced by research (F. F. Sari & Aguilika, 2024) which reveals that social media promotion has an important role in shaping tourists' decisions to visit destinations.

**Culture Event Has Positive Impact on Destination Image**

From the test results, p value of 0.001 and t statistic value of 3.327 were obtained, indicating a significant influence. Culture Event on Destination Image Wonosobo Balloon Culture Festival. Cultural events reflect local identity and strengthen the perception of the uniqueness of a destination. The

festival is not only held as an annual event, but also as a symbol of the modernization of tradition. Balloons created with a local touch strengthen Wonosobo's identity as a region that values culture and is open to innovation. Visitors see Wonosobo as not just a cool place in the highlands, but a creative city that has cultural competitiveness (A. A. Lestari et al., 2017) explained that events that combine tradition and creativity can strengthen the positive image of a place. Research (Berutu & Dhanka, 2024) also confirms that cultural events enrich the perception of a destination visually and emotionally.

#### **Social Media Marketing Has Positive Impact on Destination Image**

From the test results, p value of 0.003 and a t statistic value of 3.023 were obtained, indicating a significant influence social Media Marketing on Destination Image Wonosobo Balloon Culture Festival. This digital promotion is packed with a visual narrative that depicts the beauty of Wonosobo as an exotic and culturally rich place. Through social media, tourists get an idea of the friendliness of the people, the natural panorama, and the excitement of the festival, even before they come directly. This shows that marketing strategies through social media significantly influence destination image. Information spread on social media forms a collective perception of the attractiveness of a destination. Research (Hania, 2016) which in his research, he stated that advertising indicators have the greatest influence on destination image.

#### **Destination Image Has Positive Influence on Tourist Visit Interest**

From the test results, p value of 0.013 and a t statistic value of 2.493 were obtained, indicating a significant influence of destination image on tourist interest in visiting Wonosobo Balloon Culture Festival. A good image encourages tourists' trust and interest in visiting. Destination image has been proven to be a strong determinant of tourist visitation interest. When tourists form a positive perception of Wonosobo both from personal impressions during the festival, and from visual expectations through social media, they tend to have a desire to return or recommend it to others. (Charli & Putri, 2020) prove that a positive destination image is a major factor in influencing tourists' decisions to make repeat visits.

#### **Destination Image Mediates Influence Culture Event to Tourist Visit Interest**

From the test results, p value of 0.027 and a t statistic value of 2.208 were obtained. This indicates a significant influence of Destination Image in mediating Culture Event on the interest of tourist visiting Wonosobo Balloon Culture Festival. This indicates that perceptions of destinations are formed through event experiences, which then influence the decision to visit. Although cultural events have immediate appeal, their influence will be much stronger if visitors first form a positive perception of the area where the event is held.

In this case, the strength of the festival lies in its ability to authentically represent local identity, which is then translated into destination meaning. When visitors feel that the festival reflects the uniqueness and warmth of Wonosobo, then interest in visiting increases because of the building of trust in the destination. Research conducted by (Berutu & Dhanka, 2024) states that cultural events held are able to create a destination image, thus having an impact on increasing visits by tourists.

#### **Destination Image Mediates Influence Social Media Marketing on Tourist Visit Interest**

From the test results, a p value of 0.007 and a t statistic value of 2.811 were obtained. This indicates a significant influence of Destination Image in mediating Social Media Marketing on the interest of tourist visiting Wonosobo Balloon Culture Festival. These results prove that destination image significantly mediate the influence of social media marketing to tourist visit interest. This means that digital exposure through social media increases positive perceptions, which in turn drives visitation intentions. destination image significantly mediates the influence of social media marketing to tourist visit interest. Although digital promotion can attract attention directly, the decision to visit

still depends on the image formed in the minds of potential tourists. If social media only displays beautiful visuals without deep meaning, then the interest in visiting will not last long. Balloon Culture Festival, the promotions carried out show the involvement of local communities, cultural narratives, and a collaborative spirit all of which have a positive meaning for Wonosobo image. This finding is consistent with research from (Syarifuddin, 2016) which states that destination image is an important connecting variable in explaining how digital promotion leads to visiting intentions. Supported by research conducted by (Utama & Giantari, 2020) which resulted in electronic information provided by tourism managers being able to influence tourists in visiting, through destination image.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the results of data analysis using PLS-SEM, it can be concluded that cultural events and social media marketing have a direct positive and significant effect on tourist interest in visiting the Wonosobo Balloon Festival. Both variables also contribute to forming a positive destination image, which then mediates the relationship between promotion and visiting intention. This finding confirms that local culture based and digital promotion strategies need to be combined synergistically to increase the attractiveness of tourist destinations. The theoretical contribution of this study is the development of an integrative model that explains the mediating role of destination image in the context of regional event promotion. Practically, these results can be the basis for decision making in regional tourism promotion planning to be more effective and sustainable.

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