Research Article

Mangrove Ecotourism in East Java, Indonesia: A Memorable Tourist Experience that Awakens Revisit Intention

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Abstract.

As outdoor tourism grows amidst competition in the tourism industry, ecotourism must offer tourists Memorable tourist experiences (MTEs). Memorable experiences shared on social media can be re-shared and have the potential to go viral. This study drew from previous empirical research and explored the mediating role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and MTEs on revisit intention in mangrove ecotourism in East Java, Indonesia. Samples were selected using a probabilistic technique among mangrove ecotourism tourists in Trenggalek District and Surabaya City, East Java, Indonesia. 250 questionnaires were distributed to respondents, out of which 160 were returned and deemed complete. The structural equation model (SEM) tested the hypothesis with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach. This research concludes that positive experiences left by tourists can directly influence revisit intention, but this influence is more significant if the experience is staged through eWOM. This research has implications for theory in understanding the role of MTEs and eWOM on revisit intention, while managerially it has implications for developing destination marketing strategies to create maximum MTEs and eWOM to generate revisit intention.

Keywords: ecotourism, eWOM, memorable tourist experiences, revisit intention

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1. Introduction

Indonesia's mangrove diversity is the largest and most comprehensive in the world, reaching 3.5 million hectares (18 - 23%) spread throughout the Indonesian archipelago with at least 202 types of mangroves with the primary function of protecting beaches from abrasion, tsunami waves, and improving coastal habitats and ecosystems. Mangrove forests are also exciting for education and ecotourism [1]. As a tourism product with a unique experience [2], ecotourism emphasizes environmental preservation. It encourages pro-environmental behavior [3] as a solution to environmental degradation and biodiversity [4]. Ecotourism is a type of tourism with outdoor activities that can lead to satisfaction, memorable experiences, and an intention to repeat trips to these destinations [5]. Memorable tourist experiences and satisfaction are the core of tourism

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[6], which can increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations [7] and influence tourist behaviour in the future.

Ritchie and Hudson [8], believe that tourism managers must strive to facilitate the realization of memorable tourist experiences so that they can form future behavioral intentions to return to the destination. Several previous studies related to the influence of MTEs on intention to revisit have been conducted, but the results are inconsistent. Research by Rasoolimanesh et al. [9], Melón et al. [10], Chen et al. [11], Tiwari et al. [12], Chen & Rahman [13], Keskin et al. [14], Lu et al. [15], Hu & Shen [16], Zhang et al. [6], state that MTEs influence visiting intentions. Furthermore, Brochado et al. [17], stated that MTEs did not affect tourists' revisit intentions. Meanwhile, Rasoolimanesh et al. [18], found that several MTE attributes affected revisit intentions, while several others had no effect.

Research by Kutlu & Ayyildiz [19] found that several attributes of memorable tourist experiences, namely hedonism, novelty, involvement, and knowledge, positively affected revisit intention, while local cultural attributes and meaningfulness had no effect. Tran [20], research results also show that the dimensions of hedonism, refreshment, novelty, involvement, meaningfulness, knowledge, local culture, and surprising experiences positively influence revisit intention. However, the dimension of unpleasant feelings has a negative.

Social media has now become an effective promotion and information tool Adam et al [21], to establish strong relationships with consumers Mangold & Faulds [22], as a provider and transmitter of information and opinion Chu & Kim [23], so that it can influence consumer decisions [24]. Memorable tourist experiences can be disseminated through electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) Semrad & Rivera [25] so that they become a source of information for tourists to plan their future travel trips [26]. Experiences shared via eWOM are easily reproduced Assaker & O'Connor [27], so they can create viral effects [28]. Rasolimanesh [9], shows that MTEs influence eWOM and revisit intention. Meanwhile, Adam et al. [21], Abubakar et al. [29], and Soliman [30], show that eWOM influences revisit intention.

Based on previous research regarding the inconsistent research results on the influence of MTEs on eWOM and revisit intention, this research tests a model built from previous research regarding the relationship between memorable experiences and revisit intention mediated by eWOM with Mangrove ecotourism objects in East Java, Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research context

This research takes objects in Trenggalek Regency and Surabaya City in East Java. Tourist visits to Mangrove ecotourism in Trenggalek Regency in 2021, 6,389 tourists; in 2022, there will be 18,048 visits (satudata.trenggalekkab.go.id) [31]. Meanwhile, visits to the Wonorejo Mangrove ecotourism in Surabaya recorded 14,869 tourists in 2022 (Opendata.surabaya.go.id) [32]. The increase in visits to Mangrove ecotourism after COVID-19 began to subside so that tourism activities resumed. Therefore, this study tested a model related to the relationship between MTEs and revisit intention, mediated by the role of eWOM, to find out whether MTEs and eWOM can influence tourists to intend to return to Mangrove ecotourism destinations in East Java, Indonesia.

2.2. Relationships memorable tourist experiences, eWOM, and revisit intentions

The tourist experience is at the core of the tourism industry. According to Zhang et al [6], destinations must be able to create and provide MTEs to increase their competitiveness during intense competition in the tourism industry. Rasoolimanesh et al. [18], argue that the primary experiences shared on social media are the most memorable. Therefore, according to Kim & Ritchie [33], regardless of the form of tourism, the destination must create a memorable experience so that revisit intention arises. RI is a factor of consumer behavior that causes consumers to repeat their tourist trips to the same destination, which is caused by a sense of satisfaction [34,35].

The factors influencing MTEs vary due to the heterogeneity of tourists [36]. According to Kim & Ritchie [33], factors that influence MTEs are psychological factors of tourists and destinations or service factors at destinations. Zhang et al. [6] stated that the experiences of tourists and MTEs are different but interrelated. Not all traveler experiences are MTEs. MTEs are selective experiences remembered after a tour and can influence future travelers' decision-making [37]. MTEs are the best behavioral predictors for future tourism[38, 39]. Oh et al. [26], say that MTEs are an influential and reliable source of information that can guide the formulation of future tourism MTEs influences future destination decisions and choices and is essential for the competitiveness and sustainability of destinations [33].

Several previous studies have partially shown that MTEs affect RI, as was done by Research Zhang et al. [6], Setyaningsih & Farida [40], Rasoolimanesh et al. [9], Melón et al. [10], Hu & Shen [16], Chen et al. [11], Brochado et al. [17], Tiwari et al. [41], and Tiwari et al. [11]. Zhang et al. [6] that if tourist destinations can offer MTEs to tourists, the potential for RI to these destinations will increase. Furthermore, Semrad and Rivera [25], in the context of music festival experiences, found that MTEs affect eWOM. Other research by Nanggong and Mohammad [42], and Rasoolimanesh et al. [9] states that MTEs positively affect eWOM.

Hypothesis 1: MTEs affect RI positively and significantly

Hypothesis 2: MTEs affect eWOM positively and significantly

2.3. Electronic word-of-mouth and revisit intention

Social media allows easy connection between consumers and providers [22]. The availability of the Internet and gadgets makes it easier for tourists to find and convey destination information. Hennig-Thurau et al. [43], define eWOM as positive or negative statements about products via the Internet. eWOM changes consumer behavior Chen & Law, [44], and eWOM's dynamic and interactive interactions allow one to take on multiple roles as provider, seeker, and conveyer of opinion [23]. According to Litvin et al. [24], eWOM is informal communication via the Internet network aimed at influencing purchasing decisions, and according to Adam et al. [21], eWOM is used in the marketing world to promote various product facilities to consumers.

eWOM as a communication model has three components: sources, messages, and recipients [44]. Assaker & O'Connor [27], said that consumer experiences and opinions shared on online platforms can be easily liked and re-shared, thus creating a viral effect depending on the influence of service experience that can satisfy consumers [28]. According to Agustina [45], tourists who intend to visit again expressed a desire to review the goodness and satisfaction of the destination and recommend it to others. Previous research has shown that eWOM positively supports repurchase activity [46] and RI [29].

The study's results by Farrukh et al. [47], stated that eWOM affected the intention of medical travel. According to González-Rodríguez et al. [48], a trusted source of eWOM will increase consumer confidence in visiting destinations. Research on eWOM as a mediator variable is relatively limited. Research by Fachrurazi et al. [49], in a different

context, states that eWOM can mediate brand influence and repurchase in the halal industry in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Adam et al. [21], Abubakar et al. [29], Soliman [30], and Mittal et al. [50], found evidence that e-WOM affects RI. Abubakar et al. [29], Soliman [30], and Mittal et al. [50], state that there is a relationship between eWOM and RI. Meanwhile, Nanggong and Mohammad [42], show the role of eWOM in mediating cultural tourism experiences in DI.

Hypothesis 3: eWOM affects RI positively and significantly

Hypothesis 4: eWOM mediates the relationship between MTEs and RI

3. Research Framework

First, investigate the direct effects of MTEs on RI, the relationship of MTEs to eWOM, and eWOM to RI. Second, examine the indirect relationship between MTEs and RI mediated by eWOM (4 hypotheses, Figure 1).
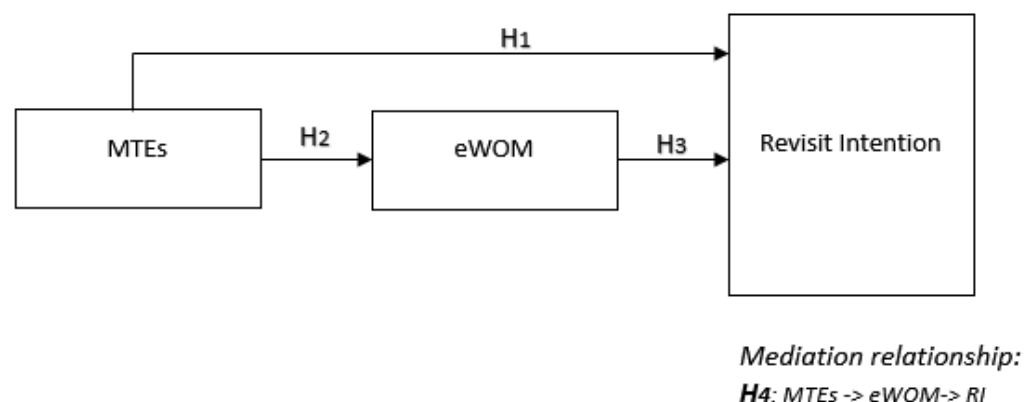

Figure 1: Conceptual design.

4. Methodology

4.1. Data collection technique

This research is explanatory, establishes and explains the relationship between variables Cooper & Schindler [51], tests hypotheses, and confirms existing empirical evidence by survey techniques using a questionnaire. The Trenggalek and Surabaya City, mangrove ecotourism areas, were chosen as research locations because they are familiar, unique, and identical to the concept of ecotourism. The purposive sampling technique was used with the respondent's criteria: tourists who visited or had been to the Cengkrong Trenggalek Mangrove ecotourism or Wonorejo Surabaya, East Java. Second, respondents who have shared their travel experiences or obtained information about mangrove ecotourism from online media.

The sampling period was from October to November 2022; of the 250 questionnaires distributed to respondents and selected using probabilistic sampling techniques, 172 questionnaires were completed and returned. Four were declared incomplete and excluded upon inspection, and 168 were declared complete for further analysis. The valid response rate was 67.2%, exceeding the target threshold of 50% (125 samples). This number is sufficient because, according to Hair et al., [52], the minimum sample size is ten times the number of latent variables. A total of 168 questionnaires were declared complete for further analysis, with the following profiles; gender (male = 46.43% = 78 people and female = 53.57% = 90 people), age (15-25 years = 42.26% = 71 people, 26-35 years = 30.95% = 52 people, 36-45 years = 16.07% = 27 people and $\geq$ 46 years = 10.72% = 18 people), and education (Elementary School = 13.10% = 22 people, Junior High School = 22.02 % = 37 people, High School/Vocational School = 37.50% = 63 people, Higher Education 19.05% = 32 people and Others 8.33% = 14 people.

4.2. Indicator measurement

The questionnaire adopts research by Sachse & Mangold [53], Hoang et al. [54], Carvache-Franco et al. [55], Obradović et al. [2], and Adam et al. [21]. Using a five-point Likert Scale, 1=strongly disagree while 5=strongly agree. The MTEs variable consists of five attributes (X.1 – X.5), adopted from Obradović et al. [2], for example, "I got a new travel experience," "This tour is different from the others," and "The natural atmosphere is interesting." The eWOM variable has three attributes (Y1.1 – Y1.3) adopted from Sachse

& Mangold [53] and Adam et al. [21], such as: "Reading online reviews to ensure the right choice of destination" and "Gathering information online before going on a tour." Measured RI variable by four attributes (Y2.1 – Y2 .4), adopted from Obradović et al. [2] and Adam et al. [21], such as; "I will revisit this place," "If there is a chance, I will visit again," and "I will speak of the goodness of this place to others."

4.3. Analysis technique

Hypothesis testing uses the Structural Equation Model (SEM), suitable for studies with small sample sizes from large populations [56]. This research used the SmartPLS application to test the research model. This study follows the extracted average variance threshold, which is $\geq$ 0.50 [57], to achieve convergent and discriminant validity and $\geq$ 0.70 for reliability [52]. The structural model is tested using the bootstrap method.

5. Research Result

5.1. Outer model evaluation

Based on the SmartPLS application estimation results, all indicators in this study were declared valid, with a loading factor > 0.50. If the loading factor value is above 0.50, the effectiveness of the indicator is said to be good.
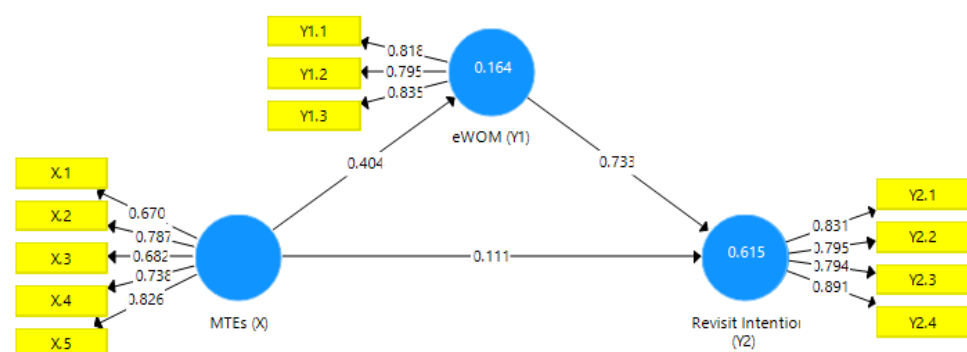

Figure 2: Outer model evaluation.

The Average Variance Extract (AVE) test results show that the AVE value is > 0.50. MTEs (X.1=0.670, X.2=0.787, X.3=0.682, X.4= 0.738 and X.5=0.826), eWOM (Y1.1=0.818, Y1.2=0.795, and Y1.3=0.835) and revisit intention (Y2.1=0.831, Y2.2=0.795, Y2.3= 0.794, and Y2.4=0.891). Therefore, all constructs are valid and supported by the lowest loading factor value of 0.670 (X1) and the highest of 0.891 (Y2.4).

The research model has good discriminant validity because all indicator constructs correlate more than the other constructs (Table 1).

TABLE 1: Results of the fonell-larcker criteria validity test.

	MTEs (X)	Revisit (Y2)	eWOM (Y1)
MTEs (X)	0,743		
Revisit Intention (Y2)	0,407	0,829	
eWOM (Y1)	0,404	0,778	0,816

From the results of the reliability test, all constructs have Cronbach's alpha (CA) and Composite reliability (CR) values > 0.70. MTEs (CA=0.802, CR=0.860, AVE=0.552), eWOM (CA=0.749, CR=0.857, AVE=0.666), and revisit intention (CA=0.848, CR=0.897, AVE=0.686), indicating that all constructs have good reliability.

TABLE 2: Validity and reliability test results.

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha (CA)	rho-A	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Result
	Criteria > 0,70	Criteria > 0,70	Criteria > 0,70	Criteria > 0,50	
MTEs (X)	0,802	0,816	0,860	0,552	Justified
eWOM (Y1)	0,749	0,749	0,857	0,666	Justified
Revisit Intention (Y2)	0,848	0,862	0,897	0,686	Justified

5.2. Structural model evaluation

The R square value in the model test, RI variable is 0.615, which shows that the MTEs variable has a 61.5% effect on RI in the strong category, while eWOM only has a 16.4% effect on RI in the weak category, as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Contribution Value of Influence between Variables (R-Square).

Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted	Relationship
Revisit Intention (Y2)	0,615	0,611	Strong
eWOM (Y1)	0,164	0,158	Weak

In the predictor effect of latent variables at the structural level (F Square), MTEs have a small effect on RI (0.027), while MTEs have a medium impact on eWOM (0.196), and eWOM has a large effect on RI (1.170) (Table 4).

TABLE 4: Effect value of variable predictor at the structural level (F-Square).

Variabel	Effect Size	Rating
MTEs (X) -> RI (Y2)	0,027	Small
MTEs (X) -> eWOM (Y1)	0,196	Medium
eWOM (Y1) -> RI (Y2)	1,170	Large

The observed values generated by the model and its parameters are measured using the q-square test. In the calculation results, the q-square predictive relevance value obtained is 0.678 > 0.00, which means the model has a sufficient predictive relevance value (Table 5).

TABLE 5: Q^2 Predictive relevance value.

Variable	R Square	1-R Square
eWOM (Y1)	0,164	0,836
RI (Y2)	0,615	0,385
Q^2 =	0,678	

6. Hypothesis Test

The bootstrap method is for hypothesis testing. The results show that all the hypotheses proposed are supported (Table 6).

TABLE 6: Results of path coefficient and T-count.

Hypothesis	Influence	Path Coefficient	t-Count	p-Value	Status of Hypothesis
H1	MTEs -> RI	0,111	2,334	0,020	Supported
H2	MTEs -> eWOM	0,404	6,731	0,000	Supported
H3	eWOM -> RI	0,733	17,076	0,000	Supported
H4	MTEs -> eWOM -> RI	0,297	6,375	0,000	Supported

MTEs are directly related to RI with a path coefficient value of 0.111, t-count = 2.334, and p-value = 0.020. Therefore, H1 is supported. The MTEs path coefficient value for eWOM is positive 0.404 and significant with t-count = 6.731, p-value = 0.000 > 0.05, so H2 also is supported. In addition, the effect of eWOM on tourists' revisit intention to Mangrove destinations is also positive at 0.733, t-count = 17.076, and p-value = 0.000, so H3 is supported. The indirect relationship between MTEs and RI through eWOM also has a unidirectional positive value, with a path coefficient value of positive with a

significant value on the 2-tailed test, t-table 0.297 with t-count = 6.375 > t-table 1, 96 and p-value 0.000 <0.05. Thus, H4 is also supported.

7. Discussion of Findings

The results of the outer model show that for the MTEs variable, tourists in carrying out their trips, the priority is to get memories of memorable travel experiences (X.5), an exciting atmosphere (X.2), and obtain meaningful values (X.4), compared to other MTEs factors, such as; break away from the routine of daily life/work (X.3), or to seek knowledge (X.1). MTEs have a direct impact on RI; if the MTE's obtained by tourists on their travels are memorable and enjoyable, then the potential desire to return to visit the same destination will increase, so that H1 is supported.

The relationship between MTEs and eWOM is positive. Suppose the tourist experience gained while carrying out their tourism activities causes pleasure and is memorable. In that case, these tourists have the potential to share stories about positive experiences and the advantages of these destinations to others through social media. Thus, MTEs can influence tourist eWOM behavior, so H2 is also supported. Stories related to memorable travel experiences from tourists shared via social media can be a reference for other potential tourists who will visit these destinations. As for tourists who share their positive experiences, it will be a stimulus to visit again. Therefore, H3 is supported.

The role of eWOM as a mediator in the relationship between MTEs and RI is proven, as eWOM partially mediates the relationship between MTEs and RI. The relationship between MTEs and RI improves when eWOM mediates the relationship. The intention to revisit will increase if the MTEs that tourists get during their tourism activities and are conveyed through eWOM also increase, and vice versa. So, the H4 hypothesis is supported. The relationship between MTEs and RI through eWOM is better than the direct relationship between MTEs and RI. Memorable experiences tourists get when traveling and sharing them widely and virally through social media have effectively influenced tourists' revisit intention. Memorable experiences shared on social media can serve as a reference for other tourists regarding destinations and travel plans.

8. Conclusion

This study highlights Mangrove ecotourism in East Java, proposing a model with four hypotheses to test based on previous empirical findings. The findings of this study suggest that MTEs affect RI (H1). The tourist experience gained during the trip, whether related to destinations, services, and infrastructure, which causes good, memorable, or pleasant feelings and perceptions, will shape the behavior of the desire to repeat the trip. These findings support previous research put forward by Zhang et al. [6], Setyaningsih & Farida [40], Melón et al. [10], Hu & Shen [16], Chen et al. [11], Rasoolimanesh et al. [9], Brochado et al. [17], Tiwari et al. [41], and Tiwari et al. [11]. Further findings, MTEs affect eWOM (H2); this shows that the beautiful, pleasant, and memorable experiences that tourists get in their tourism activities will be shared on social media so that they can become memories for these tourists and can be a potential source of information for prospective tourists. Other tourists in planning their travel trips. This finding is in line with Semrad & Rivera [25], Nanggong & Mohammad [42], Rasoolimanesh et al. [9], Kim [58], and Chen et al. [11].

e-WOM also makes a positive contribution to RI (H3). Positive reviews shared on social media become a source of information for other people and provide satisfaction that can shape the behavior of revisiting the intention to the destination. This finding is in line with Adam et al. [21], Abubakar et al. [29], Soliman [30], and Mittal et al. [50]. In addition, this study also proves that eWOM is proven to mediate the relationship between MTEs and RI (H4). This research model supports all the hypotheses proposed and strengthens some of the previous empirical findings. This research concludes that positive experiences left by tourists can directly influence intentions to visit again. However, this influence is more significant if the experience is staged through eWOM. This research has theoretical implications in understanding the role of MTEs and eWOM on intention to visit again, while managerially, it has implications in developing destination marketing strategies to create maximum MTEs and eWOM to generate revisit intention.

9. Theoretical Implications

This research has implications for adding to the richness of theory and strengthening previous findings, thus adding empirical evidence regarding the relationship model between the variables studied. That MTEs affect RI (H1) strengthens and supports the research of Zhang et al. [6], Melón et al. [10], Hu & Shen [16], Rasoolimanesh et al. [9],

Chen et al. [11], Brochado et al. [17], and Tiwari et al., [11, 41]. Furthermore, MTEs affect eWOM (H2), strengthening and supporting research by Semrad & Rivera [25], Nanggong & Mohammad [42], Rasoolimanesh et al. [9], Kim [58], and Chen et al. [11]. e-WOM has a positive effect on RI (H3), strengthening and supporting the research of Adam et al. [21], Abubakar et al. [29], Soliman [30], and Mittal et al. [50]. Finally, eWOM partially mediates the relationship between MTEs and RI (H4).

10. Practical Implications

This study examines the model based on previous research and highlights the factors influencing tourists' intention to return to destinations. Primary data obtained from respondents' opinions, which were then processed and analyzed, shows that MTEs and eWOM positively contribute to tourists repeating their visits to destinations they have visited. In addition, the MTEs created during the trip and shared through online media will become a reference for other tourists in determining tourist destinations and become the most beautiful memories for the tourists themselves to generate an intention to visit again. The potential for eWOM and the creation of MTEs in destinations must be designed and appropriately integrated and precisely by ecotourism authorities and business actors to increase tourist return visits to Mangrove ecotourism in East Java, Indonesia.

11. Limitations and Recommendations

This research has limitations. This study does not discuss the main motivations of tourists visiting Mangrove ecotourism; future research can consider this variable. The short research time and limited sample also failed to capture the full range of tourists' responses to memorable experiences and the use of eWOM. Follow-up research can be conducted longer with a more comprehensive sample (number and sociodemographics), different types of ecotourism, and diverse sociodemographic characteristics. Comparing tourism perspectives and identifying potential differences can add theoretical treasures and practical implications as a reference for managers and policymakers in making decisions for the development and sustainability of ecotourism.

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