# BUILDING THE BRAND IMAGE OF DEMAK AS A CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS TOURISM DESTINATIONS THROUGH BRAND DEVELOPMENT AND E-WOM

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#### Abstract

This article aims to determine the factors that influence the brand image of a destination. This study examines the impact of destination brand awareness, destination brand quality, and e-WOM on destination brand image. The sample data used in this study were 112 respondents from 7 provinces in Indonesia. Multiple linear regression is used to test the significance of the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable. This research proves that the brand image of a destination can be formed due to visitor awareness of the brand and brand quality, while e-WOM is not a strong enough predictor to form the brand image of a destination. Tourism service providers can predict tourist behavior through this paper. Meanwhile for academics, this paper can be used for further research by integrating branding strategy as a predictor of destination image. Empirically this research helps increase understanding of how to communicate brands in a destination.

Keywords: Destination Brand Image, Brand Awareness, Brand Quality, e-WOM.

#### Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi citra merek suatu destinasi. Penelitian ini mengkaji dampak dari destination brand awareness, destination brand quality, dan e-WOM terhadap destination brand image. Sampel data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini sebanyak 112 responden dari 7 provinsi di Indonesia. Regresi linier berganda digunakan untuk menguji signifikansi pengaruh variabel independen terhadap variabel dependen. Penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa brand image suatu destinasi dapat terbentuk akibat kesadaran pengunjung terhadap merek dan kualitas merek, sedangkan e-WOM bukanlah prediktor yang cukup kuat untuk membentuk brand image suatu destinasi. Penyedia jasa wisata dapat memprediksi perilaku wisatawan melalui tulisan ini. Sedangkan bagi akademisi, tulisan ini dapat digunakan untuk penelitian selanjutnya dengan mengintegrasikan strategi branding sebagai prediktor citra destinasi. Secara empiris penelitian ini membantu meningkatkan pemahaman tentang bagaimana mengkomunikasikan merek di suatu destinasi.

Kata kunci: Citra Merek, Kesadaran Merek, Kualitas Merek, e-WOM.

#### A. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive market, tourism destinations must use the destination brand image to measure their performance (Carballo et al., 2015). The brand image of a tourist destination is a crucial concept (Saifudin, 2018) because it influences the decision of potential tourists to visit a destination (Kasdi & Saifudin, 2019) and their behaviour and subsequent spending at that destination.

Along with the growth and development of tourism and the challenges of the era of disruption around the world (Saifudin, 2022a), destinations are evolving. Still, all seem to offer consumers similar features in terms of quality accommodation, beautiful views and friendly people (Qu et al., 2011). Therefore, creating a distinct destination image has become the basis for surviving in a globally competitive market where various destinations compete fiercely (Beishami et al., 2016).

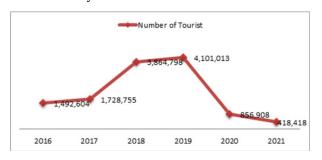
Indonesia is one of the countries in the world that is seriously working on tourism (Kemenparekraf RI, 2021). Halal tourism is a new thing developed in the tourism

industry in Indonesia (Saifudin & Puspita, 2020); however, religious tourism also has enormous potential (DPR RI, 2022). The city of Demak is one of the mainstays religious tourism destinations in Central Java. One of the destinations is the Masjid Agung Demak and the Makam Kadilangu so that Demak has a brand image as the Kota Wali (Saifudin, 2021). The image of religious tourism destinations cannot be ruled out in increasing tourist visits to an area (Kusumawati & Saifudin, 2020).

The success of its destination has not followed the brand image as a Wali City built over the years to attract tourists to Demak. A surprising fact occurred at the end of 2019, BPS Demak in 2022 released data which is depicted in graph one.

From graph 1 below, it can be analyzed that there has been a very significant decrease in the number of tourists to Demak from year to year. From 2016 until mid-2019, there has been an increase in visitors, but if looking after that, there has been a drastic decline; this is allegedly due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has become a problem everywhere, including in the economic and social sectors (Kasdi

& Saifudin, 2020). Issues like this must be addressed immediately, one of which is by increasing the brand image of the Demak destination as the centre of a religious tourism city.



Graph 1. Number of Tourist Visits to Demak Source: BPS (2022)

Previous research stated that to build a destination brand image is to increase destination brand awareness (Tran et al., 2019), destination brand quality (Quoquab et al., 2021), and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) from tourists (Quoquab et al., 2021). In previous studies, the object of research taken was ecotourism and historical tourism. In contrast to previous research, this research focuses more on the extent to which brand awareness, quality, and eWOM affect the image of Demak destinations as a religious tourism city.

The local government can use the study in this research as the basis for making policies for tourism development in Demak. The government can also carry out a branding strategy for cities to increase foreign exchange through tourism. This research has a novelty because it raises the theme of destination brands that are still rarely studied by previous researchers; moreover, the brand that is appointed is religious tourism.

#### B. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Destination Brand Image**

Tourists view a destination as an overall impression that includes various products and services (Carballo et al., 2015). During their visit, tourists enjoy the destination as a global and integral experience consisting of many individual experiences. As a result, the image formation process can be seen as a combination of independent factors or in conjunction with other elements.

Destination brand image can be influenced by many factors, such as tourist awareness of destination brands (Tran et al., 2019), quality perceived by tourists of destination brands (Quoquab et al., 2021), and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). It was circulating on tourists' social media (Quoquab et al., 2021).

Destination image is information, beliefs, impressions, attitudes, and emotional thoughts that individuals have concerning a place (Crouch, 1994). The image of a destination in tourism research is an overall representation of the beliefs, ideas, and impressions of a tourist destination (Lee & Lockshin, 2011).

#### **Destination Brand Awareness**

Awareness is the ability to understand, feel, and become aware of events and objects (Afnan & Saifudin, 2021). Brand awareness is the ability of consumers to recognize and remember a brand by seeing something unique from the brand identity (Nath Sanyal & Datta, 2011). A person can have brand awareness by placing brand identities, such as colours, logos, writing or

other visualizations. That identity gives the brand an essential position in the minds of consumers (Bojei & Hoo, 2012).

Destination brand awareness is related to the likelihood of tourists remembering and being aware of a brand (Chi et al., 2020). One of the goals of destination marketing is to increase awareness of tourist destinations by advertising and creating distinctive brands (Chi et al., 2020). The indicators of destination brand awareness are that the goal has a good name and reputation, the destination is very well known, and the characteristics of the destination appear in the minds of tourists (Tran et al., 2019).

Previous research conducted by Subagyo et al. (2019) proves that destination brand awareness positively affects a destination's brand image. Other research findings show that increasing destination brand awareness will increase the affective and cognitive image of a destination (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2022).

Based on the literature above, a hypothesis can be formulated: H1: The brand image of the destination positively affects the brand image of the destination

#### **Destination Brand Quality**

Destination brand quality indicators consist of destinations offering consistent travelquality, providing aquality experience, superior performance, and performing better than other destinations (Quoquab et al., 2021). Jraisat et al. (2015) stated that the quality of a destination brand is a tourist's perception of the quality of facilities and non-physical aspects of the destination. Quoquab et al. (2021) define destination

brand quality as tourists' perceptions of a destination's overall quality or excellence in relation to relevant alternatives.

Previous research conducted by Miličević et al. (2017)show that increasing a destination's brand value creates a sustainable competitive advantage for the destination. On the other hand, a lousy tourist visit experience associated with poor quality of tourist destination products and services can create a lousy destination brand image (Musavengane & Makiti, 2015).

Based on the literature above, a hypothesis can be formulated: H2: The quality of the destination brand positively affects the brand image of the destination

#### E-WOM

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) refers to the perception of customers' positive and negative statements about a product or company made by people and institutions through online media or the internet (Reza Jalilvand et al., 2012). E-WOM is the most emphasized source of information for consumers and the most inspiring to be doubled compared to traditional advertising (Casaló et al., 2015). Furthermore, Casaló et al. stated that e-WOM significantly impacts the tourism industry, mainly due to the intangible nature of tourism services. Thus, potential tourists rely on referrals from friends, family members and social networks (Casaló et al., 2015). Referring to Quoquab et al. (2021), e-WOM has the following indicators: reading online reviews of other travellers, consulting online with other travellers, collecting information from online reviews of other travellers, and online reviews of

tourists making sure to visit a destination.

Previous studies revealed that e-WOM communication is essential information for consumers, so marketers believe a site should produce good content to build brand image (Chan & Ngai, 2011). Then the research of Putra et al. (2020)also revealed that e-WOM significantly affects brand image.

Based on the literature above, a hypothesis can be formulated: H3: e-WOM positively affects the brand image of the destination

#### **Conceptual Framework**

The proposed relationship between the research variables is presented in Figure 1.

#### C. METHOD

This study uses quantitative methods, using primary data sources, namely data sources obtained directly from the research site (Sugiyono, 2016). The respondents collected data by filling out a Likert-scale questionnaire (range 1-5). The research was conducted in August-September 2022 in the religious tourism destination of Demak.

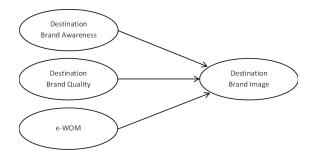


Figure 1. Research conceptual framework

The population of the research object is an average of 34,870 tourists per month in the current year (BPS, 2022). The sampling technique used is a purposive sample with the criteria of respondents being tourists

visiting Demak destinations and at least 18 years old. The sample that was successfully obtained and processed was 112 respondent data. The demographics of the respondents are presented in table 1 below:

Most people who visit Demak are domestic tourists; in this research data, as many as 101 respondents came from the province of Central Java, and the rest came from 6 other provinces. Table 1 shows that the characteristics of respondents in this research are dominated by female respondents, which are 90 people. Tourists are also dominated by productive age respondents in the range of 21-25 years, as many as 59 people. When viewed from their income structure, most respondents earn less than two million per month.

Table 1. Demographics of respondents

Demographic	Percentage
Gender	
Male	19.6
female	80.4
age	
17-20	33.9
21-25	52.7
26-30	3.6
31-35	3.6
36-40	0.9
41-45	1.8
46-50	3.6
Province	
Banten	1.8
DI Yogyakarta	1.8
Jambi	0.9
West Java	2.7
Central Java	90.2
East Nusa Tenggara	0.9
Southeast Sulawesi	1.8
Income per month	
Less than 2 million	77.7
2-5 million	15.2
6-10 million	2.7
More than 10 million	4.5
anner Data anageral 2022	1

Source: Data processed 2022

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequency		0.748
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	104,063
	df	6
	Sig.	0.000

Source: Data processed 2022

Then from table 2 above, it can be seen that the KMO value is 0.748, which means the value is good. While the significance value of Bartlett of Spherecity is 0.000,

which means the test results are significant. So it can be concluded that the samples taken in this study were declared sufficient (Ghozali, 2018).

Table 3. Convergent Validity and Reliability Test

Items	r-count	r-table	Cronbach's Alpha	Conclusion	
DBA1	0.602	0.361		valid and reliable	
DBA2	0.626	0.361	0.792		
DBA3	0.684	0.361			
DBQ1	0.736	0.361			
DBQ2	0.780	0.361	0.814	valid and reliable	
DBQ3	0.437	0.361	0.814		
DBQ4	0.610	0.361			
EWOM1	0.845	0.361			
EWOM2	0855	0.361			
EWOM3	0.669	0.361	0.026	valid and	
EWOM4	0.903	0.361	0.936	reliable	
EWOM5	0.776	0.361			
EWOM6	0.828	0.361			
DBI1	0.802	0.361		1:1 1	
DBI2	0.816	0.361	0.881	valid and reliable	
DBI3	0.744	0.361			

Source: Data processed 2022

Furthermore, from table 3 above, it can be seen that the results of testing the validity and reliability of the research instrument have met the requirements. The test results show that the value of the validity of each instrument is more than the r-table. Cronbach alpha for destination brand

awareness variable is 0.792, destination brand quality variable is 0.814, the e-WOM variable is 0.936, and destination brand image variable is 0.881. If you look at Cronbach's alpha which exceeds 0.60, it can be said that this research instrument is reliable (Ghozali, 2018).

Table 4. Determinant Coefficient and Adjusted R Square and Result of t-test and F-test

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	DBA to DBI	DBQ to DBI	e-WOM to
			DBI
Determinant Coefficient and Adjusted R			
R		$0.601^{a}$	
R		0.361	
Adjusted R Square		0.344	
Standardized Coefficient Beta			
T	4.138	3.435	0.370
Sig.	0.000	0.001	0.712
Result of F test			
F	20,360		
Sig.	$0.000^{\rm b}$		

Source: Data processed 2022

Hypothesis testing shows an R-value of 0.601, an R Square value of 0.361, and an Adjusted R Square value of 0.344. From the R Square value, it can be interpreted that the proposed model has an effect of 36% on the destination brand image. In other words, 64% of destination brand image is influenced by variables other than destination brand awareness, quality, and e-WOM. Furthermore, the results of the F test are 20,360 with a significance value of 0.000. These results indicate that destination brand awareness, brand quality, and e-WOM simultaneously affect the destination brand image. A significance value smaller than 0.05 means that if the destination brand awareness, quality, and e-WOM can be improved, the destination brand image will also increase.

#### D. DISCUSSION

## Relationship between destination brand awareness and destination brand image

The SPSS test results show that the t-count value is 4.138 with a significance

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of 0.000, meaning that the first hypothesis is accepted. So it can be stated that destination brand awareness positively and significantly affects the destination brand image of religious tourism in Demak. The greater the destination brand awareness of tourists to Demak, the brand image can be improved. The local government of Demak district can strengthen the brand identity of the City of Wali so that domestic and foreign tourists increasingly recognize it. The results of this study support previous research conducted by Subagyo et al. (2019) and by Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2022), which states that destination brand awareness positively affects destination brand image.

# Relationship between destination brand quality and destination brand image

The SPSS test results show that the t-count value is 3,435 with a significance of 0.000, meaning that the second hypothesis is also accepted. So it can be stated that destination brand quality has a positive and significant effect on the destination brand image of religious tourism in Demak.

The better the destination brand quality in Demak, the brand image can continue to increase. The local government of Demak district can improve the service quality of the Wali City destination to provide more satisfaction for domestic and foreign tourists. The results of this study support the previous research conducted by Miličević et al. (2017) and Musavengane & Makiti (2015), which states that destination brand quality directly or indirectly forms a destination brand image.

# Relationship of e-WOM with destination brand image

The SPSS test results show that the t-count value is 0.370 with a significance of 0.712, meaning that the third hypothesis is rejected. So it can be stated that e-WOM cannot affect the destination brand image of religious tourism in Demak. Based on researchers' observations, e-WOM about Demak is still very rarely found on social media. The local government of the Demak district should work with social media influencers to make reviews on websites and social media (Puspita & Saifudin, 2020; Saifudin, 2022b) so that domestic and foreign tourists increasingly recognize destinations. The placement of the brand image in the minds of tourists must be done continuously so that the brand image of the destination created remains strong and can be received positively. A good brand image about the destination will benefit the local government because consumers will unknowingly recommend the destination to others through websites or online forums; this is called electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). The results of this study reject the previous research conducted by Chan & Ngai (2011) and the research of Putra et al. (2020), which states that e-WOM positively affects destination brand image. This is because the average tourist who comes to Demak does not fully review their experiences via the internet, but more tell them directly by word of mouth.

#### E. CONCLUSION

Based on the research and discussion results above, it can be concluded that destination brand awareness, destination brand quality, and e-WOM simultaneously affect the destination brand image. However, only destination brand awareness and quality can partially affect the destination brand image; on the contrary, e-WOM cannot affect the destination brand image. The Demak district government is expected to be able to build its tourism destinations based on smart tourism so that more reviews about destinations are found by tourists who want to visit.

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