MARKETING STRATEGY OF ECOTOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN AND INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to compare a marketing strategy for ecotourism in Uzbekistan and Indonesia. A marketing strategy study for ecotourism in Uzbekistan used a literature review. However, ecotourism in Indonesia used a model to examine how the ecotourism experience influences tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The authors used structural equation modeling with 400 tourists who have visited the Kawah Putih Ecotourism in West Java, Indonesia. According to study findings, Uzbekistan's ecotourism industry has a more significant positive impact on the nation's economy and society. The results show that a positive ecotourism experience in Indonesia increases tourist satisfaction and loyalty, which is essential in marketing strategy. The impact of this research is that all stakeholders in the ecotourism sector should improve marketing strategies that can increase tourist satisfaction. As a result, the tourists will repeat visits to other ecotourism destinations.

Keywords: tourism experience; satisfaction; destination loyalty; ecotourism; marketing

INTRODUCTION

The study of ecotourism existed in the late 20th century as a solution to losses of mass tourism, especially for natural and cultural environments. Ecotourism is intended as a more sustainable form of tourism that

supports conservation efforts, benefits local communities, and educates travelers about the importance of protecting the environment (Mckercher, 2010). Hermawan et al. (2019) explained that most ecotourism destinations in Indonesia set high entry fees to limit the number of guests. Only loyal and qualified visitors are prospective to visit. Visitors who fit these criteria are visitors who come to enjoy nature indeed and not only to spend their holiday time. They are prepared to pay a higher price to get a unique experience. Aniqoh et al. (2022) stated that ecotourism destinations in Indonesia are still not an attraction for domestic and international tourists, and tourist loyalty to ecotourism is still low. This is caused by the common perception of tourists towards ecotourism destinations because the experience and perceived value are not comparable to what tourists spend.

The results of research by Pestana et al. (2020), Maroofi and Dehghan (2012), and Roseta et al. (2020) show that a positive ecotourism experience for tourists can determine repeat visits to ecotourism destinations. Ecotourism experience can influence tourists to revisit (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019; Sthapit et al., 2022). However, Huang and Liu (2017) have investigated the moderating impact of experience and intention to revisit ecotourism destinations. The study did not produce significant results by integrating the literature on ecotourism experience and tourist satisfaction for ecotourism loyalty. This research relates to past tourism research. The literature identifying the tourist decision process to be loyal to ecotourism and influences tourists' intention to be loyal to ecotourism through tourist satisfaction has been based on a relatively narrow conceptual lens that has not been deeply examined. Thus, there is a growing need to explore the extent to which ecotourism experiences and tourist satisfaction are related to the development of tourists' potential intentions to revisit other ecotourism destinations.

Uzbekistan and Indonesia have a wealth of natural and cultural diversity that attracts tourists looking for authentic and sustainable experiences. This diversity includes unique ecosystems, wildlife, cultural heritage sites,

and traditional communities. Both countries have developed ecotourism infrastructure that supports sustainable tourism, including nature reserves, national parks, eco-lodges, and cultural centers (Gulomkhasanov et al., 2021; Ismail et al., 2019). Therefore, a comparative study on ecotourism in the two countries is expected to impact the body of knowledge significantly.

This research wants to create a marketing strategy approach that can be applied in other Indonesian ecotourism destinations to encourage customer loyalty. Tourists' loyalty to ecotourism is studied at the Kawah Putih research object in Ciwidey, West Java Province, Indonesia. The variables influencing ecotourism loyalty are tourist experience and satisfaction, which are also discussed and studied in depth on ecotourism objects in detail. The research model with a combination of variables on ecotourism research objects is the latest in this study. The structural equation modeling approach with 400 tourists who have visited Kawah Putih Ecotourism in West Java, Indonesia, was applied in this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Ecotourism in Uzbekistan

Ecotourism can positively impact the economy of Uzbekistan by providing a source of income for local communities and promoting sustainable development (Saidmamatov et al., 2020). Uzbekistan's rich cultural and natural heritage makes it an attractive ecotourism destination. Ecotourism in Uzbekistan primarily focuses on the country's national parks, nature reserves, and cultural sites. One popular ecotourism destination in Uzbekistan is the Chatkal Biosphere Reserve, located in the western Tien Shan Mountains (Anvarova & Mirzoyeva, 2021). The reserve is home to various plant and animal species, including snow leopards, brown bears, and lynx. Another popular ecotourism destination is the Nuratau Mountains, located in the country's central part. The area is known for its natural beauty, including waterfalls, canyons, and forests. Visitors can go hiking, horseback riding, and bird watching, and they can also visit local villages to learn about the traditional Uzbek culture (Gulomkhasanov et al., 2021). Another ecotourism is the Aral Sea, one of the world's largest lakes, which has suffered significant

ecological damage due to irrigation projects. Still, efforts are underway to restore the region and develop sustainable tourism (Micklin, 2010).

Ecotourism in Indonesia

Kawah Putih in Ciwidey, West Java, Indonesia, is a popular ecotourism destination. It is a volcano crater lake in the Patuha Mountains and is known for its stunning turquoise-green water and scenic views. The crater lake is located within a protected area, which allows for conserving the natural environment and managing tourism activities. The local government has established regulations and guidelines to ensure the sustainability of the ecotourism at the site. Visitors to Kawah Putih can engage in various activities such as hiking, bird watching, and camping. In addition, visitors can also learn about the geology, geography, and history of the site. The destination provides education and awareness about preserving natural and cultural heritage. The local community also benefits from ecotourism through employment opportunities, such as guides, homestay providers, souvenir makers, and food vendors (Ismail et al.,2019; Trisoko & Putra, 2015).

Ecotourism Experience

Lian and Baum (2007) and Wang et al. (2012) noticed that experiential ecotourism has interactive, hedonic, stimulating, safety, comfort, novelty, and negative aspects. The emotional aspect is another important factor in encouraging customers to return and suggest a site in various scenarios (Yüksel and Yüksel 2007) such as attending festivals (Grappi & Montanari, 2011) and restaurants (Han & Jeong, 2013; Yuliarni et al., 2022; Nugraha & Yuliarni, 2022), festivals and museums (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011) but studies in ecotourism areas are still rare.

Huang and Liu (2017) found that tourist experience is positively related to their return visits. Furthermore, Chen and Chen (2010), Busijic et al. (2015), and Jung et al. (2016) observed that educational and entertainment experiences have an impact on tourist satisfaction. In addition, Sotiriadis (2017) states that the experience of escapism

increases tourist satisfaction in the context of nature-based tourism. Dick et al. (2018) report that experience has the potential to influence customer satisfaction and retention, influencing future intentions. Educational and aesthetic experiences in amusement parks influence visitor satisfaction, whereas escape is the only significant experience that causes intention to return (Lee et al., 2020). Tourist experience is a substantial determinant of loyalty to creative cultural appeal (Lu et al., 2021). Rasoolimanesh (2022) states that the better the tourism-related travel experience perceived by customers, the higher their intention to re-engage in certain behaviors, including revisiting tourist destination sites. However, Li et al. (2021), in their research on ecotourism, found that ecotourism experiences indirectly influence destination loyalty through a satisfaction mediating effect. These findings imply that experience can play a unique role in terms of happiness in different situations. As a result, the following hypothesis is made:

H_1: Ecotourism experience positively influences tourist satisfaction.

H_2: Ecotourism experience positively influences ecotourism destination loyalty.

Ecotourism Destination Loyalty

In tourism, destination loyalty is the most researched type of loyalty because tourists perceive destinations as products or brands and may revisit these destinations in the future (Baker & Crompton, 2000). Consumer enthusiasm increases when conscious recall of previous experiences is perceived as having the highest credibility (Hoch and Deighton, 1989). Tourists may intend to visit destinations with great experiences (Marschall, 2012; Warlina et al., 2022). The behavioral intention has been examined using either an independent structure (Sthapit et al., 2022) or a synthesis of multiple components, such as the intention to revisit and recommend a destination (Kim, 2018). The better the perception of travel related to tourism felt by customers, the higher their intention to visit tourist destinations (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). Although loyalty can be calculated in various ways, repeat visits or return intentions are often used to

determine destination loyalty (Campón et al., 2013).

However, increasing destination loyalty is challenging (Kim & Brown, 2012), and destination loyalty is still questionable (Assaker et al., 2011; Rivera & Croes, 2010). Tourists travel to escape the daily routine and discover unexpected experiences. However, satisfied tourists only visit destinations no more than once (Dolnicar et al., 2015). This is the same situation in ecotourism (Rivera & Croes, 2010). As a result, this research also looks at a certain loyalty construct (ecotourism destination loyalty), which is determined as a tourist's intention to visit other ecotourism destinations. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed is as follows:

H₃: Tourist satisfaction positively influence ecotourism destination loyalty

Tourist Satisfaction

Over the previous four decades, customer satisfaction was extensively examined and identified in various ways due to the importance of content descriptors in the marketing literature (Lee et al., 2020). Most marketing and tourism studies focus on the positive correlation between expectations and satisfaction (Wang et al., 2009; Suprayogi et al., 2022). Previous studies have shown that tourist satisfaction influences destination loyalty, which mediates the correlation between destination image and destination loyalty (Jamaludin et al., 2012). Previous studies have shown a correlation between perceived value and destination loyalty and the mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on the correlation between perceived value and destination loyalty (Eid, 2015; Gumussoy & Koseoglu, 2016). As a result of previous research, we conclude that (see Figure 1):

H₄: Tourist satisfaction mediates the relationship between ecotourism experience and ecotourism destination loyalty.
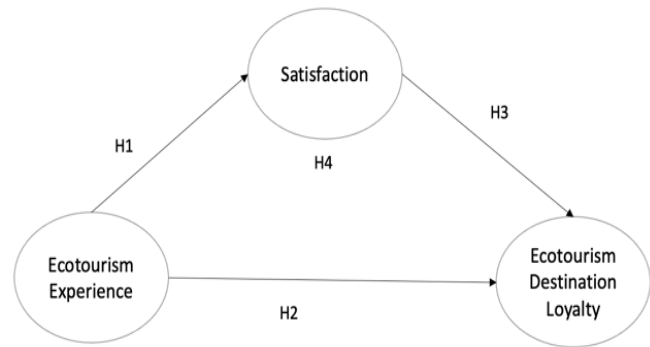

Figure 1: Theoretical Model

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the quantitative methodology was adopted. Using Partially Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the obtained survey was analyzed. Information was collected by sending questionnaires to respondents who had visited the Kawah Putih ecotourism area in West Java. We used a provider of online survey services to collect data from October 2022 to December 2022. The non-probability sampling technique was used in this research and obtained 400 respondents. PLS analysis was suitable for this study because one research segment was measured using one item (Hair et al., 2019). Following the technique proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the validity of the measurement model is anticipated before assessing the structural relationships reflected by the structural model. Ecotourism experience research is measured using several items adapted from Li et al. (2021) research and reused to measure real ecotourism experiences. Regarding tourist satisfaction, the objects were modified from the previous scale on tourist satisfaction used by Oviedo-García et al. (2017). Meanwhile, items to measure tourist loyalty to ecotourism destinations were obtained from research conducted by Hoang et al. (2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents from this study were tourists who had visited the Kawah Putih ecotourism destination at least once in the last three years. This study used a convenience sampling method through a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was designed in the form of a Google Doc. A total of 438 questionnaires

were obtained from the results of this online questionnaire distribution, and there were 38 that could not be used because they had never visited an ecotourism Kawah Putih in the last three years, so the number of questionnaires used in this study was 400 questionnaires. Referring to table 2, the total questionnaires distributed comprised 29.5% male respondents and 70.5% female respondents. The dominant age was between 36 and 50 years, 59.25%. Most respondents were dominated by bachelor's degrees as much as 66.25% and most visited ecotourism destinations once a year, 60.75%. Most respondents have an income of more than IDR 5,000,000, which is 43.5.

Partial Least Squares (PLS) are utilized to assess the research hypothesis and evaluate the measurement and structural models simultaneously. The PLS analysis shows two primary outcomes: the inner and outer models. The inner model represents the relationship between latent variables as a structural model or path matrix, whereas the outer model consists of configuration validity and reliability values. The results of the validity and reliability are demonstrated in Table 1. Based on the theory of Hair et al. (2019), the result can be classified as a valid and reliable model because the external factor

of value is higher than 0.500. The composite from reliability and AVE values are higher than 0.500 and 0.700.

Moreover, the Cronbach Alpha test score is above 0.700, and the score from discriminant validity for each configuration in this result is higher than the correlation with other configurations in the model. Table 1 reveals that all R-Square values are greater than 0.02. It indicates that the predictor is beneficial for elucidating variables in the significant or moderate predictability categories (Hair et al., 2019). As a result, 15 relevant articles were obtained. As for the most cited article, it was published in 2017 and had 4064 citations. Aside from that, there is the article with the fewest citations, which was published in 2016 and had 945 citations.

Table 1. Latent Variable Coefficients

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	ρ_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Acting experience	0.771	0.771	0.802	0.503	0.548	0.547
Ecotourism Destination loyalty	0.711	0.714	0.822	0.537	0.557	0.555
Ecotourism experience	0.902	0.906	0.915	0.621		
Fun learning experience	0.787	0.793	0.843	0.503	0.695	0.695
Immersion experience	0.755	0.762	0.831	0.554	0.828	0.827
Relating experience	0.809	0.819	0.867	0.568	0.640	0.639
Tourist satisfaction	0.813	0.826	0.860	0.639	0.427	0.426

Source: Author's finding

The outer loading shows how the value of the correlation between indicators and latent variables. In this study, the outer loading of each indicator above 0.6 is great (Hair et al., 2019). Referring to Hair et al. (2019) that P Values will be accepted if it is less than 0.05, then H_1, H_2, and H_4 can be accepted because the P Values are smaller than 0.05. In comparison, H_2 is rejected because the P Values are greater than 0.05.

According to Table 2 and Figure 2, every increase in ecotourism experience increases tourist satisfaction by 0.654, which means the experience is found as a significant factor that leads to tourist satisfaction, which is also promoted by previous studies (Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011); Chen and Chen (2010); Bujisic et al. (2015); Sotiriadis (2017)). The findings of Lee et al. (2020) indicate that visitors' absorbing experiences and their activity in tourism destinations are identified as educational spaces to study current knowledge. The educational experience increases their total satisfaction with their visit (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). A pleasant experience is another critical factor influencing visitor satisfaction (Hosany & Witham, 2010). Tourists who have a pleasant experience through ecotourism activities during their visit are more likely to be satisfied.

The increase in tourist satisfaction will increase ecotourism destination loyalty by 0.706. These results indicate that this study is the same as the study conducted by (Jamaludin et al., 2012; Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017). A study by Jamaludin et al. (2012) aligns with our findings that tourist satisfaction and ecotourism destination loyalty show associative behavior. Furthermore, Fernández et al. (2017) statistically evaluated tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty in their research. They found empirical evidence indicating a positive correlation, giving us a premise to bolster the claims of this study. Hung et al. (2021) examined the quality of the aesthetic experience for tourist satisfaction, which was found to explain a large number of all structural design variants, further bolstering our claim that there is a significant and positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and ecotourism destination loyalty. Concluding the discussion, a landmark study by Quynh et al. (2021) explored the effectiveness of tourist satisfaction in measuring destination loyalty and showed substantial and positive similarities between them. This study replicates the findings of Alnawas et al. (2019); Lu et al. (2021).

Ecotourism experience cannot directly impact ecotourism destination loyalty, but it must be through tourist satisfaction. This study is not in line with the results obtained by Dieck et al. (2018), suggesting that the experience economy's four areas influence satisfaction and retention, which leads to influence future intentions. Lu et al. (2021) stated that the tourist experience is crucial to cultural creative appeal loyalty. This research is also not in line with Rather and Rasoolimanesh (2022), saying that the better the tourism-related travel experience customers feel, the higher their intention to revisit tourist destination sites. However, this study's findings are consistent with those of Lee et al. (2020), who found that tourist experience, including education, entertainment, and aesthetics, had no impact on tourists' revisit. The revisiting intention is one dimension of destination loyalty (Hoang et al., 2022). Therefore, to form ecotourism destination loyalty, it is necessary to have mediation from tourist satisfaction which mediates the role of the ecotourism experience. It means that if tourists are satisfied with the ecotourism experience offered, it will shape tourist behavior to be loyal to the ecotourism destination. The results of this observation support previous research, namely, according to Eid (2015) and Gumussoy and Koseoglu (2016), the relationship between tourist experience and destination loyalty is mediated by tourist satisfaction.

The results of research in Indonesia align with research in Uzbekistan, although the study does not focus on ecotourism. Tourist satisfaction with Silk Road tourism in Uzbekistan appears to be influenced by cultural attractions, the locals, and the superstructure. Tourists' loyalty is boosted by satisfaction, and the experience of reliving mediates between loyalty and satisfaction on the Silk Road and shows their behavioral intentions. The destination is appealing and makes an experience memorable for tourists in Uzbekistan traveling along the Silk Road (Raimkulov, et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the research result on ecotourism in Uzbekistan was in the Samarkand Area. Ancient bazaars and goods that preserve national traditions and customs must be considered while deciding on practical aspects of ecotourism marketing in rural areas of Uzbekistan. Because promoting national values is one of ecotourism's objectives, including these

locations in the list of places to visit for   different tours is wise (Elbek et al., 2016).

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results

	Path coefficient	P Values	Decision
Ecotourism experience -> Tourist satisfaction	0.654	0.000	Supported
Ecotourism experience -> Ecotourism Destination loyalty	0.060	0.255	Not supported
Tourist satisfaction -> Ecotourism Destination loyalty	0.706	0.000	Supported
Ecotourism experience -> Tourist satisfaction ->Ecotourism Destination loyalty	0.462	0.000	supported

Source: Author's finding

Figure 2. Results of the research model
Source: Author's finding

CONCLUSION

Based on research conducted in Indonesia, it can be concluded that making tourists satisfied will result in their repeat visits. Travelers will visit other ecotourism destinations in the future if they have positive experiences with ecotourism that leave them highly satisfied. A study reveals that the ecotourism industry in Uzbekistan has a more significant positive influence on the nation's economy and society. The structural equation modeling approach with 400 tourists who have visited Kawah Putih

Ecotourism in West Java, Indonesia, was applied in the study. The results of this observation indicate that ecotourism experience is the variable that most influences tourist satisfaction, and tourist satisfaction is a mediating variable that influences ecotourism destination loyalty. This research can potentially support businesses in the tourism sector by increasing interest in repeat visits or destination loyalty as a marketing strategy.

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