



Ecotourism Experience and Integrated Marketing Communication as an Antecedent of Ecotourism Satisfaction and Ecotourism Intention

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is one of the tourism activities that are environmentally friendly by prioritizing aspects of nature conservation and aspects of socio-cultural-economic empowerment of local communities. The more varied ecotourism destinations in Yogyakarta make researchers interested in researching how marketing, experience, and satisfaction affect the intention to visit in the future. This study aims to examine the effect of tourist experience and integrated marketing communication on ecotourism satisfaction. Furthermore, this research also to investigate the effect of ecotourism satisfaction on ecotourism intention. Respondents in this study were 100 tourists who had visited ecotourism destinations in Yogyakarta. Sampling technique using purposive random sampling. Reliability, validity, and hypothesis testing using the Smart-PLS software tool. All hypotheses put forward in this study are accepted.

Keywords: *ecotourism experience, integrated marketing communication, ecotourism satisfaction, ecotourism intention*

1. INTRODUCTION

The attention and awareness of many people about environmental issues in recent years have grown and made ecotourism increasingly known. Ecotourism has now become the focus of attention from various developed and developing countries [1]. Ecotourism is currently a trend in the tourism sector in Indonesia. This is supported by the fast growth of the ecotourism business in the tourism sector [2]. Ecotourism also positively influences the environment, economy, and culture in local communities [3]. In other words, ecotourism has an important role in protecting nature, recreation, education, and creating jobs [4].

There are several important issues in tourism research that are of concern to practitioners and marketers. These issues include the tourist experience in traveling; integrated marketing communication for conveying messages to tourists; pursuit of tourist satisfaction; and tourist intention to

visit the destination. In general, these issues have received a lot of attention in tourism research. However, research on the ecotourism context is still scarce [5][6][7], especially in a country like Indonesia. In addition, previous research has discussed tourist satisfaction in the

context of the tourism industry which is associated with tourist experience and integrated marketing communication [8][9][5][6], but there is

limited discussion about the role of tourist satisfaction as a mediating variable and its relationship with intentions [10][11][7], especially in the context of ecotourism.

Experience is the main product offered by tourism companies [12][13]. Creating a better tourist experience than competitors is important for companies to win in today's market competition. Tourist experience has been extensively discussed in the tourism literature [14][10][11][13]. Tourist experience is a key factor in creating tourist satisfaction and has been proven conceptually to be an antecedent of behavioral intention [15][16].

Several literature reviews found mixed results for the relationship between these constructs. For example, Prayag et al. [17] mentions that the mediating effect of satisfaction was not found in the relationship between emotional experience and behavioral intention. The results of research from Baptista et al. [18] show that tourist satisfaction is not significantly mediating the relationship between push factors and tourist behavioral

intention. Other research results from Zaitul et al. [19] explain that the role of mediating satisfaction is not found in the relationship between the natural environment and the intention to revisit and the relationship between appealing activity and the intention to revisit.

On the contrary, some research results find that satisfaction acts as a mediation. For example, Atmari and Putri [16] states that satisfaction strongly mediates the relationship between tourism experience and revisit intention. Haji et al. [20] found that tourist satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between experience quality and behavioral intention. Libre et al. [21] explains that tourist satisfaction can fully mediate the relationship between tourist experience and visit intention. Therefore, this research will re-examine the role of tourist satisfaction as mediating the relationship between tourist experience and behavioral intention in the ecotourism context.

Communication is very important for tourism industry activities which can be done through destination marketing. Destination marketing can be interpreted as a communication process that aims to invite potential visitors to visit their chosen destination [22]. Communication is also a tool for companies that can influence consumer behavior based on marketing processes such as providing information, convincing, and increasing consumer awareness of the company's brands and products directly or indirectly [9]. This can be done well if the company can implement an integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategy in the business it runs. IMC aims to create relationships with customers based on brand messages sent by companies [23].

IMC also aims to create brand awareness that minimizes costs, focuses on winning new customers and maintaining relationships with existing customers, and can save time [24]. Research conducted by Ramanust [25] has found that satisfaction can mediate the relationship between IMC and repurchase. Other research from Fitriana et al. [26] and Adnan et al. [27] states that satisfaction can mediate the effect of IMC on loyalty. Meanwhile, research conducted by Bob et al. [28] shows that marketing strategies from IMC such as advertising, sales promotion, and direct marketing do not affect the intention to visit sports facilities. Therefore, this study will examine the relationship between IMC and intention in the ecotourism context which is mediated by satisfaction.

Tourist satisfaction is one of the variables often found in tourism literature. Satisfaction is an important factor for companies in maintaining relationships with customers in the long term [29]. In the tourism industry, when tourists are satisfied with the activities and services provided by tour owners it will generate a desire to return to visit destinations in the future [16]. This will also happen to tourists visiting ecotourism destinations.

Research in the tourism sector has increased in examining the relationship between emotional experience and outcome variables including intention [30]. Studies on tourism have made the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory one of the most widely used theories today in predicting tourist behavior based on a

2. LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Stimuli-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory

Lee and Yun [32] explains that the S-O-R theory has three basic elements including stimuli, organism, and response. Stimuli are based on individual stimuli conditions originating from the external environment. Organism are generally based on internal states that arise as a result of the influence of external environmental stimuli. Response is the last result that can be characterized as approach or avoidance behavior.

Among tourism researchers, Chang et al. [33] claim that the S-O-R model is one of the most widely used frameworks in explaining tourist behavior. For example, Kim et al. [31] stated that S-O-R theory can test various factors such as authentic experience, cognitive and affective responses, attachments, and visit intentions which influence consumer decisions to visit destinations through VR. Meanwhile, Zhou et al. [34] uses the S-O-R theoretical framework in examining the relationship between amusement park tourist experience, brand identity, brand satisfaction, and brand loyalty in China, and assigns an important role to brand satisfaction as a mediating variable. Based on these findings this study will use the S-O-R theoretical framework to examine tourism research related to ecotourism. Ecotourism experience and IMC as stimuli that come from individual external factors. Furthermore, these stimuli factors will affect organisms which are individual internal factors, namely ecotourism satisfaction, and play a mediating role. Finally, stimuli and organism will influence individual decisions to behave like ecotourism intention as response constructs.

2.2. Relationship between Ecotourism Experience and Ecotourism Satisfaction

Customer experience can be determined based on the time, place, and context in which the customer is located [35]. In the tourism, destination attributes or features are the determining factors for creating experience when tourists travel to a destination [36]. Experience is the main determinant of tourist satisfaction [37][36]. Satisfaction can describe the psychological results of people based on experience (Baptista et al., 2020). This is based on the positive experience felt by tourist when visiting destination that will make them feel satisfied [38]. Satisfaction will be obtained by tourists when the comparison between expected product and service features matches the reality of tourist visiting destination [18]. Several studies found that the tourist experience has a significant positive effect on satisfaction [36][16][6][21]. In the case of ecotourism, when tourists have positive feelings on their trip in enjoying the beauty

of nature, culture, and taking part in protecting the environment, a feeling of satisfaction will appear after traveling to that destination. Based on such explanations, the following hypothesis can be established:

H₁: Ecotourism experience has a positive and significant effect on ecotourism satisfaction

2.3. Relationship between IMC and Ecotourism Satisfaction

IMC is an approach that is now in demand by many businesses and is considered a strategy competent of reaching the potential customer and conveying a positive image to customers [25]. The IMC theory has explained that between IMC and the quality of customer relationships there is close intercourse [39]. For companies using IMC is the best approach to pursuing the level of customer satisfaction [40]. Several empirical studies have proven that IMC has a positive impact on customer satisfaction [26][39]. In tourism research, Hadi [5] found that IMC has a positive and significant influence on visitor satisfaction. Based on such explanations, the following hypothesis can be established:

H₂: IMC has a positive and significant effect on ecotourism satisfaction

2.4. Relationship between Ecotourism Satisfaction and Ecotourism Intention

Based on the S-O-R theory, satisfaction is included in the drug component and influences behavioral intentions [41]. For tourism, the existence of a strong relationship between satisfaction and future customer behavior is very important [42]. This can be illustrated through the satisfaction felt by visitors after carrying out all the activities presented by the tourism manager so that in the future visitors are willing to visit again [16]. Several empirical studies show that tourist satisfaction is a prominent predictor that can influence behavioral intentions, such as the revisit intention [16][41][42]. The results of research conducted by Carvache-Franco et al. [42] found that three factors can influence tourists to make return visits to ecotourism destinations, namely natural, cultural, and infrastructure satisfaction factors. In other words, when tourists are satisfied with the visits made to ecotourism destinations, in the future tourists will visit again. Based on such explanations, the following hypothesis can be established:

H₃: Ecotourism satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on ecotourism intention

2.5. Ecotourism Experience influencing Ecotourism Intention through Ecotourism Satisfaction

Experience is the result of an interaction or in the form of an assessment by the customer of the destination visited through the customer's senses, how the feelings, thoughts, and actions are chosen after visiting the destination [21]. Experience is an important factor for tourist satisfaction [15]. Satisfaction has a positive effect

on tourist behavior that has been tested in the tourism literature [20]. Satisfaction in the tourism context illustrates a comparison between tourist expectations before traveling and experiences after the trip which is expected to produce feelings of satisfaction when tourists are happy with the trip that has been made [20]. Several empirical tourism studies reveal that satisfaction plays an important role in mediating the relationship between experience and revisit intention [43][20][21]. In ecotourism studies, visitors to destinations that get memorable experiences will feel satisfied and ultimately encourage them to revisit these destinations on other occasions in the future. Based on such explanations, the following hypothesis can be established:

H₄: Ecotourism experience has a positive and significant effect on ecotourism intention mediated by ecotourism satisfaction.

2.6. IMC influencing Ecotourism Intention through Ecotourism Satisfaction

Marketing communication is a process of building dialogue between brands and markets to meet market needs and wants [44]. Customer satisfaction can be achieved by obtaining positive evaluation results for products and services [39]. Through the use of this communication strategy, customers will find themselves in a position to satisfy their needs through the use of these brands [45]. Ramanust [25] research results show that customer satisfaction has an important role in mediating the relationship between IMC and the repurchase intention of 5-star hotels. Based on such explanations, the following hypothesis can be established:

H₅: IMC has a positive and significant effect on ecotourism intention mediated by ecotourism satisfaction

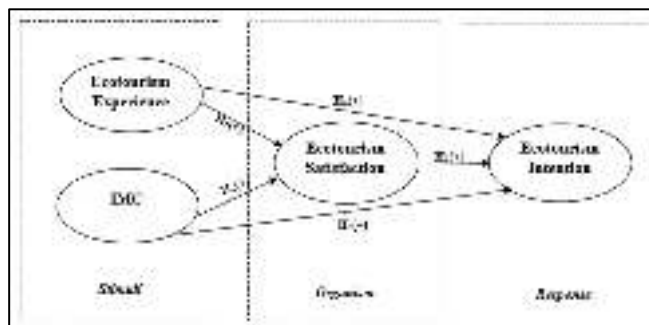


Fig. 1. Research Framework

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The theoretical framework of this research consists of four variables. Each construction of the frame measurements is measured through various items. Several previous studies were used to adapt and adjust variable items. Each item is measured using a 5-Likert scale that has a range from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Ecotourism experience consists of five items adapted from Hoang et al. [6]. Integrated marketing communication consists of five items adapted from Porcu

et al. [46]. Ecotourism satisfaction consists of four items adapted from Aliyah and Sulastri [47] and Hoang et al. [6]. Ecotourism intention consists of four items adapted from Pai et al. [48].

This study has a population of tourists throughout Indonesia, with the unit of analysis being individuals. This study uses a purposive sample concerning the selection of respondents who must fulfill one of the conditions, namely having visited ecotourism destinations in Yogyakarta. This study uses a sample size based on the number of constructs of 5 or less with a sample size of 100 can be stated as already usable in SEM [49].

Furthermore, the instrument was validated through validity test, reliability test, and the structural model was estimated through partial least squares, using the SmartPLS 3 software. Items declared to have good validity if they have a standardized factor loading value ≥ 0.50 and the t-value > 1.96 , while the statement item is declared to have good reliability if the composite

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In terms of age, the majority of respondents 20-25 years old with a percentage of 33.3 percent. As for the occupation of the majority of respondents as students with a percentage of 44.1 percent, followed by private employees with a percentage of 32.4 percent. The majority of respondents' monthly income is in the range of 1 million – 3 million per month with a percentage of 39.2 percent. Then the most visited ecotourism destination is marine/sea ecotourism with a percentage of 84.3 percent. Next, the results of the validity and reliability test can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 2.

TABLE 1. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY TEST OF THE MEASUREMENT MODEL

Measurement Indicator	Composite Reliability	Standardized Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha
ECE1	0.877	0.743	0.826
ECE2		0.774	
ECE3		0.792	
ECE4		0.739	
ECE5		0.787	
IMC1	0.853	0.749	0.783
IMC2		0.823	
IMC3		0.815	
IMC4		0.526	
IMC5		0.733	
ECS1	0.773	0.815	0.626
ECS2		0.537	
ECS3		0.639	
ECS4		0.706	
ECI1	0.885	0.675	0.826
ECI2		0.852	
ECI3		0.858	
ECI4		0.851	

Total standardized loadings for the other components were examined to determine convergent validity. As presented in Table 1 and Figure 2, all loadings were greater than 0.5 and statistically significant [51].

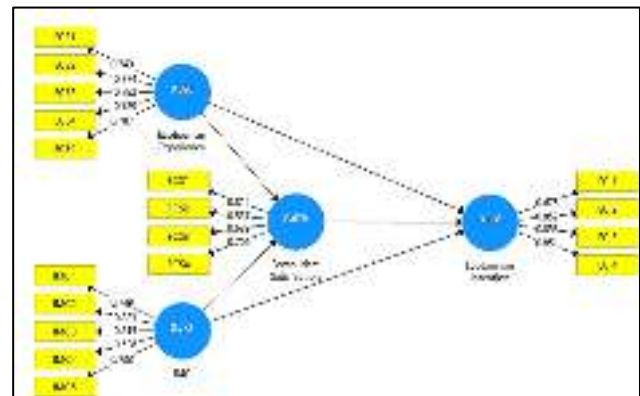


Fig. 2. Outer Loading and Cronbach's Alpha from SmartPLS 3

Furthermore, both the composite reliability values and the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient are higher than 0.6 [50] for all constructs, which, in turn, confirms the reliability of all scales. As a result, the scales' reliability and the

convergent validity of the suggested constructs were validated. As shown in Table 2 the discriminant validity is supported by squared correlation values smaller than 0.9 [52].

TABLE 2. DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

Factor	1	2	3	4
1. Ecotourism Experience	0.767	-	-	-
2. Integrated Marketing Communication	0.746	0.813	-	-
3. Ecotourism Satisfaction	0.600	0.672	0.682	-
4. Ecotourism Intention	0.702	0.573	0.643	0.737

Note: Below the diagonal: correlations between the factors. On the diagonal: values of the squared correlations

Next, path analysis is estimated through partial least squares (PLS), and the significance of the structural relationships is analyzed through the bootstrapping algorithm. To verify the explanatory power and confirm

the predictive relevance of the structural model, the values of the coefficient of determination R2 that exceed the value of 0.10 [53] as presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. HYPOTHESES TEST RESULTS

Hypothesis	Path/Relationship	P-value	t-value	Result
H ₁	Ecotourism Experience → Ecotourism Satisfaction	0.002	3.124	Accepted
H ₂	IMC → Ecotourism Satisfaction	0.000	4.213	Accepted
H ₃	Ecotourism Satisfaction → Ecotourism Intention	0.001	3.286	Accepted

Note: Ecotourism Satisfaction: R²=0.456; Ecotourism Intention: R²=0.638

The calculation findings reveal that the first hypothesis are accepted, since positive and significant connections are established between ecotourism experience and ecotourism satisfaction (H1) with respective t-value 3.124. This means that there is a positive and significant influence of ecotourism experience on ecotourism satisfaction. In other words, the higher the role of ecotourism experience the more influence it will have on ecotourism satisfaction [6][21]. Based on Table 3, the second hypothesis are accepted, since positive and significant connections are established between IMC and ecotourism satisfaction (H2) with respective t-value of 4.213. This means that there is a positive and significant influence of IMC on ecotourism satisfaction. The higher the role of IMC, the more influence it will have on ecotourism satisfaction [5][39]. Furthermore, the data shows that ecotourism satisfaction has a significant influence on intention (H3) with a t-value

of 3.286, leading to the acceptance of hypothesis three. In other words, the higher the role of ecotourism satisfaction, the intention will increase [42][41].

As stated in the objective of this research, it is necessary to advance along the lines of identifying the mediating role of ecotourism satisfaction. The analysis is in the Table 4. Thus, the results provide empirical support H4 & H5 for the mediation of the relationship between ecotourism experience, IMC and ecotourism intention. The results of the mediation effect calculation can be seen in Table 4 which explains the relationship between ecotourism experience and IMC on ecotourism intention mediated by ecotourism satisfaction. These results indicate that there is a positive and significant influence between ecotourism experience and IMC on ecotourism intention mediated by ecotourism satisfaction [43][20][25], therefore H4 and H5 are accepted.

TABLE 4. THE EFFECT OF MEDIATION

Hypothesis	Path/Relationship	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
H ₄	Ecotourism Experience → Ecotourism Satisfaction → Ecotourism Intention	0.052	2.084	0.038
H ₅	IMC → Ecotourism Satisfaction → Ecotourism Intention	0.056	2.912	0.004

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study seeks to prove the argument empirically, namely by examining the effect of ecotourism experience and integrated marketing communication on ecotourism satisfaction, the effect of ecotourism satisfaction on ecotourism intention. Furthermore, this study investigated the effect of ecotourism experience and integrated marketing communication on ecotourism intention mediated by ecotourism satisfaction.

The first hypothesis proves that ecotourism experience significantly and positively related to ecotourism satisfaction. This suggests that the more a person have experience about ecotourism, the greater satisfaction toward ecotourism. Conversely, if a person less has experience about ecotourism, the satisfaction toward ecotourism is likewise low. The second hypothesis proves that integrated marketing communication significantly and positively related to ecotourism satisfaction. This suggests that the more a person heard about ecotourism through integrated marketing communication, the greater satisfaction toward ecotourism. Conversely, if a person less aware about ecotourism, the satisfaction toward ecotourism is likewise low.

The third hypothesis proves that ecotourism satisfaction significantly and positively related to ecotourism intention. This suggests that the more a person satisfied to ecotourism, the greater intention toward ecotourism in the future. Conversely, if a person not satisfied about ecotourism, the intention toward ecotourism in the future is likewise low. The fourth hypothesis proves that ecotourism experience significantly and positively related to ecotourism intention mediated by ecotourism satisfaction. This suggests that the more a person have experience about ecotourism mediated by ecotourism satisfaction, the greater intention toward ecotourism in the future. The fifth hypothesis proves that integrated marketing communication significantly and positively related to ecotourism intention mediated by ecotourism satisfaction. This suggests that the more a person heard about ecotourism through integrated marketing communication mediated by ecotourism satisfaction, the greater intention toward ecotourism in the future. Therefore, this study supports previous researches [25]. The empirical

contribution of this study provides that the intention to ecotourism in the future is influenced by satisfaction, either as a mediation or as an independent variable. On the other hand, satisfaction is significantly influenced by experience and integrated marketing communication.

The limitation in this study is this research does not use interview techniques due to limited time and resources. Another limitation in this study is that there are only four variables in this study. Further research is recommended to increase the research sample by expanding the research area, so that the research results obtained can describe a more real situation. Future research is also suggested to add other variables, either independent, moderator, mediator, or dependent variable and in different region.

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