

Developing a Destination Loyalty Model Based on Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation: The Mediating Roles of Destination Brand Gestalt and Tourist Satisfaction in Samosir Regency

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ABSTRACT:

The rapid growth of tourist arrivals does not necessarily translate into sustainable destination loyalty. This phenomenon, referred to as the growth–experience gap, indicates that increasing visitation alone is insufficient to foster long-term tourist commitment unless visitors experience meaningful and holistic destination encounters. Addressing this issue, the present study develops and empirically tests a comprehensive model of destination loyalty by integrating Destination Image, Social Capital, Tourism Innovation, Destination Brand Gestalt, and Tourist Satisfaction within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) theoretical framework. A quantitative explanatory research design was employed using survey data collected from 474 domestic and international tourists who had visited tourist attractions in Samosir Regency, Indonesia. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The findings reveal that Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation significantly influence Destination Brand Gestalt. Furthermore, Destination Brand Gestalt positively affects Tourist Satisfaction, while Tourist Satisfaction emerges as the strongest determinant of Destination Loyalty. Interestingly, Destination Brand Gestalt does not exert a significant direct effect on Destination Loyalty but contributes indirectly through Tourist Satisfaction, indicating a full mediation mechanism. The serial mediation analysis further demonstrates that tourists' loyalty is established through an integrated psychological process in which destination stimuli are transformed into holistic destination perceptions before generating satisfaction and subsequent loyalty. The study contributes to destination marketing literature by proposing the Destination Brand Gestalt Model (DBGM), an integrative framework that extends the application of SOR theory by positioning Destination Brand Gestalt as a key psychological mechanism linking destination stimuli and tourist loyalty. From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that destination managers should shift from an attraction-based development paradigm toward an experience-based destination management approach that integrates cultural narratives, multisensory experiences, service excellence, stakeholder collaboration, and continuous tourism innovation to enhance sustainable destination loyalty.

Keywords: Destination Brand Gestalt; Destination Image; Destination Loyalty; Social Capital; Tourism Innovation; Tourist Satisfaction; Stimulus–Organism–Response.

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Introduction

The tourism industry has become one of the fastest-growing sectors contributing to regional economic development, employment creation, and community welfare. In response to this strategic role, many countries have intensified investments in tourism infrastructure, destination branding, and innovative tourism products to strengthen their global competitiveness. Indonesia has likewise positioned tourism as a priority sector through the development of several Super Priority Tourism Destinations, including Samosir Regency, the core area of the Lake Toba UNESCO Global Geopark.

Although tourist arrivals to Samosir have increased substantially in recent years, the sustainability of this growth remains uncertain. An increasing number of visitors does not automatically lead to repeat visitation or positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Many tourists visit a destination only once despite expressing positive evaluations of its attractions. This phenomenon reflects a growth–experience gap, whereby quantitative growth in tourist arrivals is not accompanied by the development of memorable, integrated, and meaningful destination experiences capable of fostering long-term loyalty.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that destination loyalty represents one of the most important indicators of destination competitiveness because loyal tourists are more likely to revisit a destination, recommend it to others, and generate sustainable tourism demand. Existing literature has identified several determinants of destination loyalty, including Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction, Service Quality, Place Attachment, and Destination Trust. However, these studies have predominantly examined direct relationships among variables, providing limited explanation of the psychological processes through which destination attributes are transformed into loyal behavioral intentions.

From the perspective of Stimulus–Organism–

Response (SOR) theory, tourists' behavioral responses are not generated directly by external environmental stimuli. Instead, external stimuli are first processed through internal psychological mechanisms before influencing behavioral outcomes. Within the tourism context, destination attributes such as destination image, social relationships, and tourism innovation function as external stimuli that shape tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations. These internal evaluations subsequently determine tourists' satisfaction and loyalty toward the destination.

Recent advances in destination branding have introduced the concept of Destination Brand Gestalt, which conceptualizes destination experience as a holistic perception emerging from the integration of multiple experiential dimensions rather than isolated destination attributes. Unlike conventional destination branding approaches that primarily emphasize visual identity or promotional communication, Destination Brand Gestalt encompasses four interconnected dimensions—Storyscape, Sensescape, Servicescape, and Stakeholderscape—which collectively shape tourists' overall perception of a destination.

Despite its conceptual significance, empirical research examining Destination Brand Gestalt remains limited. Existing studies have primarily focused on its role in destination branding and destination identity, while its function as a psychological mediator linking destination stimuli and destination loyalty has received little scholarly attention. Consequently, the mechanisms through which tourists integrate cognitive, emotional, social, and experiential information into holistic destination perceptions remain insufficiently understood.

Furthermore, previous studies have generally investigated Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation independently, without considering their simultaneous interaction in shaping tourists' integrated destination experiences. Such fragmented approaches limit our understanding of how multiple destination resources collectively influence tourists'

psychological evaluations and subsequent loyalty.

To address these theoretical gaps, this study develops an integrative conceptual framework that combines Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) theory with the emerging concept of Destination Brand Gestalt. Specifically, Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation are conceptualized as external stimuli; Destination Brand Gestalt and Tourist Satisfaction are positioned as internal organism variables; and Destination Loyalty is treated as the behavioral response. This integrated framework is referred to as the Destination Brand Gestalt Model (DBGM). The study seeks to answer the following research question:

- How do Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation jointly influence Destination Loyalty through the mediating roles of Destination Brand Gestalt and Tourist Satisfaction?

The findings are expected to contribute to destination marketing literature by extending the application of SOR theory through the introduction of Destination Brand Gestalt as a central psychological mechanism underlying destination loyalty formation. In addition, the proposed model provides practical insights for destination managers seeking to transform tourist arrivals into sustainable destination loyalty by delivering authentic, integrated, and memorable tourism experiences.

1. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

1.1. Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) theory, originally proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for explaining how environmental stimuli influence individuals' psychological states and subsequent behavioral responses. According to this theory, external environmental factors do not directly generate behavioral outcomes. Instead, these stimuli are first processed through internal cognitive and

affective mechanisms before resulting in observable behavioral intentions.

Within the tourism context, destination attributes function as external stimuli that shape tourists' internal evaluations. These stimuli include destination image, interactions with local communities, service quality, tourism innovation, and various environmental cues encountered during the travel experience. Tourists subsequently process these external stimuli through psychological mechanisms, forming perceptions, emotions, and evaluative judgments that ultimately determine their behavioral responses, such as revisit intentions and destination recommendations.

Although SOR theory has been widely applied in tourism research, previous studies have primarily conceptualized the organism component as tourist satisfaction, emotional attachment, destination trust, or place attachment. Consequently, the psychological mechanism through which tourists integrate multiple destination experiences into a holistic perception remains insufficiently explored.

This study extends the application of SOR theory by introducing Destination Brand Gestalt as an additional organism construct that precedes tourist satisfaction. In this framework, tourists first synthesize diverse destination experiences into a holistic mental representation before evaluating those experiences and developing destination loyalty.

1.2. Destination Image and Destination Brand Gestalt

Destination image has long been recognized as one of the most influential determinants of tourist behavior. According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999), destination image comprises both cognitive evaluations, reflecting tourists' knowledge and beliefs regarding destination attributes, and affective evaluations, representing emotional responses toward the destination.

A favorable destination image shapes tourists' expectations before travel and influences how they interpret their experiences during their visit. When actual experiences confirm or exceed

these expectations, tourists tend to develop more favorable evaluations of the destination.

However, destination image alone cannot fully explain tourists' holistic perceptions. Contemporary destination branding literature argues that visitors do not evaluate destinations by assessing isolated attributes independently. Rather, they integrate multiple sensory, emotional, cultural, and social experiences into a unified perception of the destination.

This integrative perception is conceptualized as Destination Brand Gestalt, which consists of four interconnected experiential dimensions:

- **Storyscape**, referring to narratives, history, myths, and cultural storytelling embedded within the destination;
- **Sensescape**, encompassing multisensory experiences such as scenery, sounds, culinary experiences, and visual identity;
- **Servicescape**, representing the quality of physical environments, tourism facilities, and service delivery;
- **Stakeholderscape**, reflecting interactions among tourists, local communities, tourism businesses, and destination stakeholders.

A positive destination image is therefore expected to strengthen tourists' holistic perception of the destination.

H1: Destination Image positively influences Destination Brand Gestalt.

1.3. Social Capital and Destination Brand Gestalt

Social capital refers to social resources embedded within networks of trust, shared norms, and social relationships that facilitate collective action and cooperation. Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000) argue that social capital enhances coordination among community members while fostering reciprocal relationships and mutual trust.

Within tourism destinations, social capital is reflected through the hospitality of local

residents, collaborative stakeholder relationships, cultural authenticity, and supportive social environments. These interactions contribute substantially to tourists' experiential evaluations because meaningful encounters with local communities often become memorable aspects of travel experiences.

Unlike physical infrastructure, social interactions are difficult for competing destinations to imitate. Consequently, destinations characterized by strong social capital are more likely to generate authentic and emotionally meaningful tourism experiences.

Accordingly, higher levels of social capital are expected to enhance tourists' holistic perceptions of the destination.

H2: Social Capital positively influences Destination Brand Gestalt.

1.4. Tourism Innovation and Destination Brand Gestalt

Tourism innovation refers to the implementation of new or significantly improved products, services, marketing approaches, organizational practices, and tourism processes that enhance destination competitiveness (Hjalager, 2010).

Innovation enables destinations to respond effectively to evolving tourist expectations while creating differentiated and memorable experiences. Examples include smart tourism technologies, digital storytelling, immersive interpretation, augmented reality applications, innovative tourism products, and personalized visitor services.

Rather than merely improving operational efficiency, tourism innovation enriches tourists' overall experiences by increasing convenience, engagement, and experiential value throughout their travel journey.

Consequently, destinations characterized by continuous innovation are expected to strengthen tourists' integrated perceptions of the destination.

H3: *Tourism Innovation positively influences Destination Brand Gestalt.*

1.5. Destination Brand Gestalt and Tourist Satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction represents tourists' overall evaluation of whether their travel experiences meet or exceed their prior expectations. According to Expectation Confirmation Theory, satisfaction emerges when actual experiences correspond with anticipated outcomes.

This study argues that tourists do not evaluate isolated destination attributes independently. Instead, they assess their travel experiences holistically after integrating various cognitive, emotional, sensory, and social experiences.

Destination Brand Gestalt provides this integrated representation by synthesizing multiple experiential dimensions into a coherent perception of the destination. A stronger Brand Gestalt therefore enables tourists to evaluate their travel experiences more positively, leading to greater overall satisfaction.

H4: *Destination Brand Gestalt positively influences Tourist Satisfaction.*

1.6. Destination Brand Gestalt and Destination Loyalty

Destination loyalty reflects tourists' commitment to revisit a destination and recommend it to others. Previous studies generally explain destination loyalty through tourist satisfaction, destination image, or destination trust.

This study proposes that Destination Brand Gestalt also contributes to destination loyalty because tourists who develop a coherent and meaningful perception of a destination are more likely to establish stronger emotional bonds with that destination.

A holistic destination perception creates memorable experiences that may encourage repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth communication.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: *Destination Brand Gestalt positively influences Destination Loyalty.*

1.7. Tourist Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty

Tourist satisfaction has consistently been identified as one of the strongest predictors of destination loyalty. Satisfied tourists are more likely to revisit destinations, recommend them to others, and develop long-term relationships with tourism destinations.

According to Expectation Confirmation Theory, satisfaction functions as the final evaluative mechanism through which tourists determine whether their travel experiences have fulfilled their expectations. Consequently, higher levels of satisfaction substantially increase the likelihood of repeat visitation and favorable behavioral intentions.

Therefore:

H6: *Tourist Satisfaction positively influences Destination Loyalty.*

1.8. The Mediating Roles of Destination Brand Gestalt and Tourist Satisfaction

Unlike previous studies that primarily examined direct relationships among destination attributes, this study proposes a more comprehensive psychological mechanism underlying destination loyalty formation.

Based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework, Destination Brand Gestalt represents tourists' holistic cognitive perception resulting from multiple destination stimuli, whereas Tourist Satisfaction reflects tourists' affective evaluation of those integrated experiences.

Accordingly, Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation are expected to influence Destination Loyalty indirectly through Destination Brand Gestalt and Tourist Satisfaction. Furthermore, a serial mediation mechanism is proposed, whereby tourists first develop a holistic destination perception, subsequently evaluate this perception through satisfaction, and ultimately form destination loyalty.

This integrated perspective constitutes the foundation of the proposed Destination Brand

Gestalt Model (DBGM), which seeks to explain how multiple destination stimuli are transformed into sustainable tourist loyalty through sequential psychological processes.

1.9. Research Gap

The synthesis of previous studies demonstrates that destination loyalty has become one of the most extensively investigated topics in tourism marketing. Existing research consistently highlights the importance of Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation in shaping tourists' behavioral intentions. More recently, the emergence of Destination Brand Gestalt has enriched destination branding literature by emphasizing the significance of holistic destination experiences rather than isolated destination attributes.

Despite these advancements, several important theoretical gaps remain.

First, most previous studies have focused primarily on the direct effects of destination attributes on destination loyalty. Such an approach provides limited understanding of the psychological mechanisms through which external destination stimuli are transformed into loyal behavioral intentions. Consequently, the internal processes linking destination resources with tourist loyalty remain insufficiently explained.

Second, empirical investigations of Destination Brand Gestalt are still at an early stage of development. Existing studies have mainly examined Brand Gestalt as a destination branding or destination identity construct. Its potential role as a mediating psychological mechanism within destination loyalty models has received little empirical attention.

Third, previous studies generally examine Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation independently. Limited research has explored how these three strategic destination resources interact simultaneously to create holistic destination experiences capable of fostering sustainable tourist loyalty.

These gaps indicate the need for a more comprehensive conceptual framework capable of integrating multiple destination stimuli with tourists' internal psychological processes within a single explanatory model. Such an integrative perspective is particularly important for nature- and culture-based destinations, where tourists' overall experiences emerge from the interaction of physical attractions, cultural authenticity, social relationships, and innovative tourism offerings.

Accordingly, this study proposes the Destination Brand Gestalt Model (DBGM) by integrating Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory with the emerging concept of Destination Brand Gestalt. The proposed model conceptualizes Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation as destination stimuli; Destination Brand Gestalt and Tourist Satisfaction as organism variables; and Destination Loyalty as the final behavioral response.

1.10. Research Positioning

Compared with previous destination loyalty studies, the present research offers several distinctive contributions.

From a theoretical perspective, previous studies have generally applied Destination Image Theory, Expectation Confirmation Theory, or Relationship Marketing Theory independently. In contrast, this study integrates Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory with Destination Brand Gestalt, providing a more comprehensive explanation of destination loyalty formation.

Regarding stimulus variables, earlier studies frequently focused on only one or two destination attributes, such as destination image or service quality. The present study simultaneously incorporates Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation, thereby providing a more holistic representation of destination resources.

With respect to the organism component, prior studies predominantly employed satisfaction, emotions, or place attachment. This study

introduces Destination Brand Gestalt as an additional psychological construct that precedes satisfaction and explains how tourists integrate diverse destination experiences before evaluating them.

Unlike previous studies that typically regarded destination loyalty as a direct consequence of satisfaction or destination image, this study conceptualizes loyalty as the final outcome of a sequential psychological process in which holistic destination perceptions and tourist satisfaction jointly transform destination stimuli into loyal behavioral intentions.

Furthermore, the study is conducted in Samosir Regency, the core area of the Lake Toba UNESCO Global Geopark, representing an important nature- and culture-based tourism destination that has received limited attention in destination branding research.

1.11. Conceptual Framework

Based on the preceding theoretical discussion, this study proposes a conceptual framework grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) paradigm.

Within this framework: Stimulus

- Destination Image
- Social Capital
- Tourism Innovation

↓ Organism

- Destination Brand Gestalt
- Tourist Satisfaction

↓ Response

- Destination Loyalty

The framework assumes that tourists do not respond directly to destination stimuli. Instead, external destination attributes are first integrated into a holistic destination perception (Destination Brand Gestalt), subsequently evaluated through tourist satisfaction, and finally transformed into destination loyalty.

This sequential psychological process constitutes the foundation of the proposed Destination

Brand Gestalt Model (DBGM).

1.12. Research Novelty

The present study offers several novel contributions to destination marketing literature. Theory Novelty

This study extends Stimulus–Organism–Response Theory by incorporating Destination Brand Gestalt as a psychological mechanism explaining how destination stimuli are transformed into destination loyalty.

• Model Novelty

The study proposes the Destination Brand Gestalt Model (DBGM), a new structural model integrating Destination Image, Social Capital, Tourism Innovation, Destination Brand Gestalt, Tourist Satisfaction, and Destination Loyalty within a unified conceptual framework.

• Methodological Novelty

Unlike previous studies that mainly investigated simple mediation models, this research empirically tests a serial multiple mediation model using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

• Contextual Novelty

This study provides empirical evidence from Samosir Regency, the core area of the Lake Toba UNESCO Global Geopark, thereby extending destination marketing literature to a nature- and culture-based geopark destination that has received limited scholarly attention.

• Managerial Novelty

The study introduces an experience-based destination management perspective by emphasizing the integration of four experiential dimensions Storyscape, Sensescape, Servicescape, and Stakeholderscape to address the growth–experience gap and strengthen sustainable destination loyalty.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the causal

relationships among the constructs proposed in the conceptual framework. The explanatory approach was considered appropriate because the primary objective was to investigate both direct and indirect relationships among Destination Image, Social Capital, Tourism Innovation, Destination Brand Gestalt, Tourist Satisfaction, and Destination Loyalty.

The conceptual model was developed based on Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory, which conceptualizes destination loyalty as a behavioral response emerging from tourists' internal psychological processes after exposure to various destination stimuli.

The empirical study was conducted in Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia, which serves as the core area of the Lake Toba Super Priority Tourism Destination and is recognized internationally as part of the UNESCO Global Geopark. Although tourist arrivals have increased substantially in recent years, previous evidence indicates that this growth has not been accompanied by comparable improvements in destination experiences and tourist loyalty. Consequently, Samosir provides an appropriate context for examining the growth–experience gap addressed in this study.

2.2. Population and Sample

The study population comprised both domestic and international tourists who had visited tourism destinations in Samosir Regency.

Because the total population size could not be accurately identified, purposive sampling was employed based on three eligibility criteria:

1. respondents were at least 17 years old;
2. respondents had visited at least one major tourist attraction in Samosir Regency; and
3. respondents had completed most of their travel activities, enabling them to evaluate their destination experiences comprehensively.

Following recommendations for PLS-SEM, the required sample size was determined by considering the complexity of the proposed structural model and the number of indicators

employed.

A total of 474 valid responses were obtained, exceeding the minimum sample size recommended for estimating complex structural models and ensuring sufficient statistical power.

2.3. Measurement of Variables

The measurement instrument was developed by adapting well-established and validated scales from previous tourism and destination marketing studies. All measurement items were translated into the Samosir tourism context using a back-translation procedure to ensure semantic equivalence and contextual appropriateness. Minor modifications were introduced to improve clarity while preserving the original conceptual meanings.

All latent constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Destination Image was operationalized based on the cognitive and affective image dimensions proposed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999). Social Capital was measured using three fundamental dimensions adapted from Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000), namely:

- Trust
- Social Norms
- Social Networks

Tourism Innovation was measured using Hjalager's (2010) multidimensional innovation framework, encompassing:

- Product Innovation
- Service Innovation
- Marketing Innovation
- Process Innovation
- Organizational Innovation

Following Mandagi et al. (2021), Destination Brand Gestalt was conceptualized as a higher-order construct consisting of four experiential dimensions:

- Storyscape

- Sensescape
- Servicescape
- Stakeholderscape

Tourist Satisfaction was adapted from Yoon and Uysal (2005) and measured as tourists' overall evaluation of their travel experiences.

Finally, Destination Loyalty was operationalized using three behavioral intention indicators:

- Revisit intention
- Recommendation intention
- Destination preference for future travel

2.4. Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered directly to tourists visiting major tourist attractions throughout Samosir Regency.

Data collection was conducted in accordance with established research ethics. Prior to completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, assured that participation was entirely voluntary, and guaranteed the confidentiality of their personal information.

All collected data were used exclusively for academic research purposes.

2.5. Data Analysis

The proposed research model was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS Version 4.

PLS-SEM was selected because it is particularly suitable for analyzing complex structural models involving multiple latent constructs and simultaneous mediation effects. Furthermore, the method possesses strong predictive capabilities while requiring fewer assumptions regarding multivariate normality.

The analytical procedure consisted of two consecutive stages.

3.5.1. Measurement Model Assessment

The first stage evaluated the psychometric

properties of the measurement model through:

- Convergent validity
 - Discriminant validity
 - Internal consistency reliability
- Convergent validity was assessed using:
- Outer Loadings (> 0.70)
 - Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50)
- Construct reliability was evaluated using:
- Composite Reliability (CR > 0.70)
 - Cronbach's Alpha (> 0.70)

Discriminant validity was examined using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) with a recommended threshold below 0.90.

3.5.2. Structural Model Assessment

The second stage evaluated the structural relationships among the latent constructs. The assessment included:

- Coefficient of Determination (R^2)
- Effect Size (f^2)
- Predictive Relevance (Q^2)
- Hypothesis Testing

Statistical significance was assessed using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples, generating standardized path coefficients (β), t-values, p-values, and confidence intervals.

In addition to direct effects, indirect effects were examined to evaluate the mediating roles of Destination Brand Gestalt and Tourist Satisfaction within the proposed Destination Brand Gestalt Model (DBGM).

3. Results

3.1. Respondent Profile

The empirical analysis was based on 474 valid questionnaires collected from tourists who had visited various tourist destinations throughout Samosir Regency.

Respondents were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that every participant possessed direct travel experience relevant to the

research objectives.

Most respondents were domestic tourists within the productive working-age group. The majority also held undergraduate degrees and had visited Samosir on more than one occasion.

These demographic characteristics indicate that respondents possessed sufficient familiarity with the destination to evaluate its Destination Image, Social Capital, Tourism Innovation, Destination Brand Gestalt, Tourist Satisfaction, and Destination Loyalty accurately.

3.2. Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated to ensure that all latent constructs satisfied the recommended criteria for validity and reliability prior to testing the structural relationships.

4.2.1. Convergent Validity

The results indicate that all measurement items exhibited outer loading values exceeding 0.70, confirming satisfactory convergent validity.

Furthermore, every construct achieved an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value greater than 0.50, indicating that each latent construct explained more than half of the variance of its indicators

.Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Interpretation
Destination Image	0.870	0.945	0.606	Reliable and Valid
Social Capital	0.920	0.922	0.714	Reliable and Valid
Tourism Innovation	0.926	0.929	0.693	Reliable and Valid
Destination Brand Gestalt	0.900	0.905	0.668	Reliable and Valid
Tourist Satisfaction	0.938	0.940	0.731	Reliable and Valid
Destination Loyalty	0.943	0.945	0.715	Reliable and Valid

All constructs exceeded the recommended thresholds for both Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha, confirming strong internal consistency reliability.

4.2.2. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

All HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.90, demonstrating that each construct represented an empirically distinct concept.

Accordingly, the measurement model satisfied all validity and reliability requirements and was therefore considered appropriate for structural model evaluation.

4.3. Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was evaluated to determine the explanatory power of the proposed conceptual framework.

4.3.1. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The results indicate substantial explanatory power for all endogenous constructs.

Table 2. Coefficient of Determination

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Interpretation
Destination Brand Gestalt	0.754	Strong

Tourist Satisfaction	0.820	Strong
Destination Loyalty	0.780	Strong

The R^2 values suggest that the combined effects of Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation adequately explain the variance in Destination Brand Gestalt, Tourist Satisfaction, and Destination Loyalty.

Furthermore, the positive Q^2 values indicate that the proposed model possesses satisfactory predictive relevance.

3.3. Hypothesis Testing

The structural relationships were examined using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples.

A hypothesis was considered statistically supported when the t-value exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was below 0.05.

The proposed hypotheses were evaluated using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. A hypothesis was considered statistically supported when the t-value exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was below 0.05.

The empirical findings indicate that Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation each exert significant positive effects on Destination Brand Gestalt, thereby supporting H1, H2, and H3. These results suggest that tourists develop holistic destination perceptions through the combined influence of favorable destination images, strong social interactions, and continuous tourism innovation.

Furthermore, Destination Brand Gestalt significantly enhances Tourist Satisfaction, supporting H4. This finding indicates that tourists' overall evaluations are shaped not merely by isolated destination attributes but by integrated and meaningful destination experiences.

Interestingly, the direct relationship between Destination Brand Gestalt and Destination

Loyalty was not statistically significant (H5 rejected). This result implies that although tourists may perceive a destination holistically, such perceptions alone are insufficient to generate loyalty unless they subsequently lead to positive evaluative outcomes.

The analysis also demonstrates that Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation significantly influence Tourist Satisfaction, supporting H6, H7, and H8, respectively. These findings indicate that destination resources directly contribute to tourists' overall evaluations of their travel experiences.

Among all direct relationships examined, Tourist Satisfaction exhibited the strongest positive effect on Destination Loyalty, supporting H9. This result confirms that satisfaction remains the most influential determinant of tourists' intentions to revisit and recommend a destination.

Regarding the direct effects of destination stimuli on loyalty, Destination Image significantly influences Destination Loyalty (H10 supported), whereas the direct effects of Social Capital (H11) and Tourism Innovation (H12) were not statistically significant. These findings suggest that the influence of social interactions and tourism innovation on loyalty operates primarily through tourists' internal psychological evaluations rather than through direct behavioral responses.

3.4. Mediation Analysis

Beyond the examination of direct effects, this study investigated the indirect relationships among constructs through mediation analysis.

The bootstrapping results reveal that Destination Brand Gestalt and Tourist Satisfaction jointly function as significant mediating mechanisms linking destination

stimuli with Destination Loyalty.

Interestingly, the indirect effects of Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation on Destination Loyalty through Destination Brand Gestalt alone (H13–H15) were not statistically significant. This finding indicates that holistic destination perceptions do not independently translate into loyal behavioral intentions.

However, Destination Brand Gestalt significantly mediates the relationships between each destination stimulus and Tourist Satisfaction (H16–H18). These findings demonstrate that tourists first integrate destination experiences into coherent holistic perceptions before evaluating those experiences emotionally.

Moreover, Tourist Satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between Destination Brand Gestalt and Destination Loyalty (H19 supported). This result suggests that Destination Brand Gestalt influences loyalty indirectly by enhancing tourists' satisfaction rather than by directly stimulating loyal behavior.

Similarly, Tourist Satisfaction significantly mediates the relationships between Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation and Destination Loyalty (H20–H22 supported).

Most importantly, the serial mediation analysis (H23–H25) confirms that tourists' loyalty is established through a sequential psychological process. Specifically, tourists first construct a holistic perception of the destination (Destination Brand Gestalt), subsequently evaluate this perception through Tourist Satisfaction, and finally develop Destination Loyalty.

Overall, these findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed Destination Brand Gestalt Model (DBGM), demonstrating its ability to explain destination loyalty formation within nature- and culture-based tourism destinations.

4. Discussion

4.1. Destination Brand Gestalt as the Psychological Mechanism Transforming Destination Stimuli into Destination Loyalty

One of the principal contributions of this study lies in demonstrating that Destination Brand Gestalt represents a fundamental psychological mechanism through which destination stimuli are transformed into destination loyalty. These findings advance existing destination marketing literature, which has traditionally emphasized direct relationships between destination attributes and tourist satisfaction.

The present study suggests that destination loyalty does not emerge automatically from attractive tourism resources, high-quality services, or favorable destination images. Instead, loyalty develops through an internal psychological process during which tourists integrate diverse experiences into a coherent and holistic perception of the destination.

Within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, Destination Brand Gestalt functions as the organism, representing tourists' cognitive processing before behavioral responses occur. Rather than evaluating individual destination attributes separately, tourists synthesize visual impressions, emotional experiences, cultural encounters, social interactions, and service experiences into a unified mental representation of the destination.

These findings reinforce the conceptualization of Destination Brand Gestalt proposed by Mandagi et al. (2021), which argues that destination experiences emerge through the interaction of four experiential dimensions: Storyscape, Sensescape, Servicescape, and Stakeholderscape.

More importantly, this study extends previous conceptualizations by demonstrating that Destination Brand Gestalt serves not only as a branding construct but also as a psychological mechanism underlying destination loyalty formation. Consequently, Brand Gestalt should

be viewed not merely as an outcome of destination branding but as an essential component explaining how tourists transform destination experiences into future behavioral intentions.

These findings also provide an explanation for the growth–experience gap, which motivated the present research. Increasing tourist arrivals alone cannot guarantee sustainable destination loyalty if tourists experience destination attributes only as isolated encounters rather than as integrated experiences.

Destinations may possess attractive attractions, modern infrastructure, and extensive promotional activities; however, unless these elements are experienced as coherent and meaningful, tourists may fail to establish emotional connections with the destination.

Accordingly, destination competitiveness in the experience economy should no longer be evaluated solely through visitor numbers but also through the destination's ability to deliver authentic, memorable, and holistic experiences.

From a managerial perspective, these findings suggest that destination management organizations should shift from attraction-based development toward experience-based destination management, ensuring that cultural narratives, tourism services, community interactions, and innovative experiences are consistently integrated throughout tourists' journeys.

4.2. The Synergistic Effects of Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation on Destination Experience

The findings demonstrate that Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation collectively contribute to the development of Destination Brand Gestalt, indicating that tourists' holistic destination perceptions emerge from the interaction of cognitive, social, and innovative destination resources rather than from any single factor.

Destination Image provides the initial cognitive framework through which tourists establish expectations before their visit. Positive destination images influence how visitors interpret their subsequent travel experiences. When actual experiences confirm these expectations, tourists are more likely to develop favorable holistic perceptions of the destination.

Social Capital contributes by enriching tourists' interpersonal experiences through trust, hospitality, shared social norms, and collaborative relationships between tourists and local communities. These social interactions strengthen the Stakeholderscape dimension and create authentic experiences that are difficult for competing destinations to replicate.

Meanwhile, Tourism Innovation enhances tourists' experiences by introducing creative tourism products, innovative services, digital technologies, and adaptive tourism activities that respond to evolving visitor expectations. Innovation therefore functions not only as an operational improvement mechanism but also as a strategic tool for enriching tourists' experiential value.

Collectively, these three destination resources operate as complementary rather than substitutive mechanisms. A destination characterized by a favorable image but weak innovation or limited community engagement may struggle to generate memorable experiences. Conversely, integrating a positive destination image with strong social capital and continuous innovation creates richer destination experiences capable of strengthening tourists' holistic perceptions.

4.3. Tourist Satisfaction as the Primary Driver of Destination Loyalty

One of the most significant findings of this study is that Tourist Satisfaction exerts the strongest positive influence on Destination Loyalty among all constructs included in the proposed model. This result confirms that tourists' loyalty is fundamentally determined by

their overall evaluation of accumulated travel experiences rather than by individual destination attributes alone.

This finding is consistent with Expectation Confirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), which argues that satisfaction arises when actual experiences meet or exceed tourists' prior expectations. However, the present study extends this theoretical perspective by demonstrating that satisfaction is not merely the consequence of service quality or destination image. Instead, tourist satisfaction reflects the cumulative evaluation of an integrated destination experience represented by Destination Brand Gestalt.

Within the context of Samosir Regency, tourists' satisfaction is influenced not only by the scenic beauty of Lake Toba, but also by the richness of Batak cultural heritage, interactions with local communities, service quality, accessibility of tourism information, transportation convenience, and continuous tourism innovation.

When these experiential elements are perceived as coherent and mutually reinforcing, tourists are more likely to develop higher levels of satisfaction, which subsequently strengthens their intentions to revisit the destination and recommend it to others.

Interestingly, the empirical findings indicate that Destination Brand Gestalt does not directly influence Destination Loyalty, but instead exerts its influence indirectly through Tourist Satisfaction. This result suggests that although tourists may perceive a destination as attractive and meaningful, such perceptions alone are insufficient to generate loyal behavioral intentions unless they are translated into positive evaluative experiences.

Within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, Destination Brand Gestalt represents the cognitive organism, whereas Tourist Satisfaction represents the affective organism. The sequential mediation identified in

this study demonstrates that tourists first develop holistic destination perceptions, subsequently evaluate these perceptions emotionally, and finally generate behavioral responses in the form of destination loyalty.

Therefore, Tourist Satisfaction should be regarded as the immediate antecedent of destination loyalty, while Destination Brand Gestalt functions as the psychological foundation upon which satisfaction is established.

4.4. Theoretical Implications for the Development of Stimulus–Organism–Response Theory

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by extending the application of Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory within the context of destination marketing.

Previous tourism studies have commonly conceptualized the organism component as tourist satisfaction, emotions, destination trust, or place attachment. Although these constructs successfully explain tourists' evaluative responses, they provide limited insight into how multiple destination experiences are cognitively integrated before emotional evaluations occur.

The present study expands this theoretical perspective by introducing Destination Brand Gestalt as an additional organism construct that captures tourists' holistic cognitive processing of destination experiences.

The empirical findings demonstrate that destination loyalty is formed through a three-stage psychological mechanism.

The first stage consists of external stimuli, represented by Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation.

The second stage involves internal psychological processing, during which tourists construct Destination Brand Gestalt and subsequently evaluate their experiences through Tourist Satisfaction.

The third stage culminates in the behavioral

response, namely Destination Loyalty.

Accordingly, the proposed model broadens the explanatory scope of SOR theory by demonstrating that destination loyalty results from a sequential cognitive–affective process rather than from direct responses to destination attributes.

More importantly, this study proposes the Destination Brand Gestalt Model (DBGM) as a new conceptual framework for destination marketing research.

The DBGM emphasizes that successful destinations should not merely provide attractive tourism products but should instead create integrated experiences through the harmonious interaction of cultural narratives, multisensory experiences, service excellence, stakeholder collaboration, and tourism innovation.

Consequently, the proposed model enriches the literature on destination branding, tourist experience, and destination loyalty by providing a more comprehensive explanation of tourists' psychological decision-making processes.

5. Theoretical Contributions

The present study contributes to destination marketing literature in several important ways.

The first contribution lies in extending Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory through the incorporation of Destination Brand Gestalt as a novel cognitive mechanism linking destination stimuli and destination loyalty. Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on satisfaction or emotional attachment, this research demonstrates that tourists first construct holistic destination perceptions before forming evaluative judgments and behavioral intentions.

The second contribution is the development of the Destination Brand Gestalt Model (DBGM) as a new empirical framework explaining destination loyalty formation. The model illustrates that Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation operate synergistically

rather than independently in shaping tourists' holistic perceptions of destinations.

The third contribution concerns the contextual extension of Destination Brand Gestalt into a nature- and culture-based geopark destination. Previous empirical studies have primarily examined Brand Gestalt within urban tourism or destination branding contexts. By applying the construct to Samosir Regency, this study demonstrates that tourists' holistic destination perceptions emerge through the integration of natural landscapes, cultural authenticity, social interactions, and tourism innovation.

The fourth contribution relates to the identification of the growth–experience gap, demonstrating that increasing tourist arrivals alone is insufficient to establish sustainable destination loyalty. Instead, loyalty depends on destinations' ability to transform visitor experiences into meaningful, integrated, and memorable tourism encounters.

Collectively, these findings provide new theoretical insights into sustainable destination competitiveness and contribute to the growing literature on experience-based destination management.

6. Managerial Implications

The findings provide several practical implications for destination management organizations, local governments, tourism businesses, and community stakeholders.

First, destination development strategies should shift from attraction-based development toward experience-based destination management. Destination competitiveness should no longer be evaluated solely by visitor numbers or infrastructure investment but by the ability to deliver coherent, authentic, and memorable tourism experiences throughout the entire visitor journey.

Second, destination branding strategies should emphasize the four experiential dimensions of Destination Brand Gestalt.

Storyscape should be strengthened through compelling interpretations of Batak culture, Lake Toba's geological heritage, local legends, and cultural storytelling.

Sensescape should focus on creating multisensory experiences through local cuisine, traditional music, cultural performances, scenic landscapes, and distinctive visual identity.

Servicescape should prioritize service excellence, cleanliness, accessibility, visitor comfort, and integrated tourism information systems.

Stakeholderscape should encourage collaboration among local communities, tourism entrepreneurs, government agencies, cultural organizations, and visitors to co-create authentic tourism experiences.

Third, local governments should strengthen community social capital through capacity-building programs, institutional development of tourism villages, stakeholder collaboration, and community empowerment initiatives.

Fourth, tourism innovation should extend beyond product development by emphasizing experience innovation. Digital technologies, smart tourism applications, augmented reality, integrated reservation systems, and digital storytelling should be employed to enrich visitor engagement while differentiating the destination from competing tourism destinations.

Overall, sustainable destination loyalty can only be achieved through the systematic integration of tourism experiences managed collaboratively by all destination stakeholders.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Despite its theoretical and practical contributions, this study has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research.

First, the empirical investigation was conducted exclusively in Samosir Regency, limiting the generalizability of the findings to destinations with different geographical, cultural, and institutional characteristics. Future studies should validate the proposed model across

diverse tourism contexts, including urban tourism, coastal destinations, ecotourism, and heritage tourism.

Second, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, capturing tourists' perceptions at a single point in time. Given that destination loyalty evolves dynamically through repeated experiences, longitudinal studies are recommended to investigate changes in tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions over time.

Third, the proposed model focused on three principal destination stimuli. Future studies may extend the model by incorporating additional constructs such as Destination Authenticity, Tourist Engagement, Memorable Tourism Experience, Perceived Value, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Smart Tourism Experience, or Destination Resilience.

Finally, this study relied exclusively on a quantitative survey approach. Future research employing mixed-methods or qualitative approaches may provide deeper insights into how tourists construct holistic destination perceptions throughout their travel experiences.

8. Conclusion

This study developed and empirically validated a comprehensive model explaining Destination Loyalty through the integration of Destination Image, Social Capital, Tourism Innovation, Destination Brand Gestalt, and Tourist Satisfaction within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) theoretical framework.

The findings demonstrate that Destination Image, Social Capital, and Tourism Innovation function as external stimuli that significantly influence Destination Brand Gestalt. This holistic destination perception subsequently enhances Tourist Satisfaction, which ultimately serves as the strongest predictor of Destination Loyalty.

The study further reveals that destination loyalty does not emerge directly from destination attributes but through a sequential psychological

process in which tourists first construct holistic perceptions of the destination before evaluating these experiences and developing long-term behavioral intentions.

Accordingly, the proposed Destination Brand Gestalt Model (DBGM) represents a meaningful theoretical advancement in destination marketing literature by integrating SOR theory with the emerging concept of Destination Brand

Gestalt.

From a managerial perspective, the findings emphasize that sustainable destination competitiveness depends not merely on attracting more visitors but on delivering authentic, integrated, and memorable tourism experiences capable of fostering enduring tourist loyalty.

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