The Combined Effect of Brand Gestalt, Brand Awareness, and Brand Image on Ecotourism WOM Intention

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to critically examine the interplay of brand gestalt, brand awareness, and brand image in the rapidly evolving context of ecotourism destinations, addressing the immediate need for insights that can enhance sustainable tourism marketing strategies.

Methodology: A quantitative research design was utilized in this study using survey-based data on 241 respondents who were visitors to ecotourism destinations in North Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Results: This study found that service quality, platform type, shopping convenience, and product quality have a positive influence on consumer satisfaction when shopping online.

Limitations: One potential limitation of the study is that the respondents were limited to customers of online shoppers and college students in North Sulawesi, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader consumer populations.

Contribution: Tourism operators can use the insights gained from this study to enhance their brand strategy. By focusing on building a strong brand gestalt, increasing brand awareness, and fostering a positive brand image, they can effectively stimulate WOM, which is a powerful marketing tool in ecotourism.

Keywords: *Brand gestalt, brand awareness, brand image, WOM intention, ecotourism*

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1. Introduction

Ecotourism has emerged as a prominent sector within the tourism industry, driven by growing consumer awareness and demand for sustainable travel options. It stands out as the fastest-growing segment, with projected annual revenue expected to rise significantly by 2025 (Daneva & Nadda, 2023). This form of tourism focuses on conserving natural and cultural resources while benefiting local communities (Tešin, Kovačić, Jovanović, Vujičić, & Obradović, 2020). Emphasizing environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and local well-being appeals to travelers conscious of their ecological footprint and social responsibilities. Ecotourism not only provides economic benefits to local communities but also ensures the sustainable use of natural resources, drives local economic growth, and preserves sociocultural values for future generations (Baydeniz, Çılgınoğlu, & Sandıkcı, 2024; Merce, Elena, Ioan, Tiberiu, & Milin, 2017).

With increasing competition among ecotourism providers, understanding the drivers of consumer advocacy, particularly word-of-mouth (WOM), becomes crucial. WOM, involving personal recommendations and reviews, holds substantial influence over potential tourists due to its perceived trustworthiness compared to traditional advertising. Positive WOM can significantly amplify marketing efforts, enhance brand awareness, and positively impact purchase intentions (Al-Dwairi, Harb, & Shehabat, 2020; Cheng, Cham, Cai, Chalke, & Dent, 2022; Firman, Ilyas, Reza, Lestari, & Putra, 2021; Yurinonica & Yusrin, 2024). Therefore, identifying factors that stimulate WOM is vital for ecotourism providers aiming to effectively leverage this potent marketing tool.

This study explores three essential brand-related variables—brand gestalt, brand awareness, and brand image—as antecedents of WOM in ecotourism. Brand gestalt refers to the overall perception and emotional connection consumers have with a brand, encompassing every interaction and experience (Centeno & Mandagi, 2022; Diamond et al., 2009). It underscores how consistent positive experiences foster emotional bonds with consumers, particularly significant in ecotourism where experiences are deeply personal and linked to sustainability and cultural preservation.

Brand awareness, another critical factor, measures consumers' ability to recall or recognize a brand (Khurram, Qadeer, & Sheeraz, 2018). High brand awareness ensures the brand is top-of-mind for consumers considering ecotourism options, influencing their purchase decisions, commitment, and loyalty (Alkhawaldeh, Al-Salaymeh, Alshare, & Eneizan, 2017; Azzari & Pelissari, 2021; Foroudi, 2019; Marhareita, Kila, & Mandagi, 2022; Molinillo, Japutra, Nguyen, & Chen, 2017). As familiarity with an ecotourism brand grows, customers are more inclined to share their experiences, thereby amplifying WOM. Building and maintaining strong brand awareness in ecotourism is essential for establishing a robust market presence and attracting conscientious travelers seeking authentic, sustainable experiences (Cini, Leone, & Passafaro, 2012; Saidmamatov et al., 2020). By continually reinforcing positive associations and fostering customer loyalty through consistent delivery of high-quality experiences aligned with environmental and cultural preservation, ecotourism brands can not only thrive but also lead in shaping the future of responsible tourism practices globally

Brand image, defined as consumers' perceptions and associations with a brand. Plays a pivotal role in driving WOM within the context of ecotourism. Research underscores that a positive brand image enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty, prompting travelers to share their positive experiences with others (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Ezeuduji & Mhlongo, 2019; Liang & Lai, 2023). In ecotourism specifically, a brand image aligned with sustainable values resonates deeply with environmentally conscious travelers, influencing their intention to engage in ecotourism activities and passionately share their experiences (Khan et al., 2022; Li, Liu, & Soutar, 2021; Pham & Khanh, 2021; Thi Khanh & Phong, 2020). This alignment not only fosters customer trust and emotional connection but also serves as a powerful driver of organic marketing through WOM endorsements, where satisfied customers become advocates, amplifying the brand's reputation and attracting like-minded travelers seeking authentic and sustainable tourism experiences.

By examining these constructs—brand gestalt, brand awareness, and brand image—this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their impact on WOM in ecotourism. This knowledge empowers ecotourism providers to develop effective branding strategies that enhance consumer advocacy, boost market presence, increase customer satisfaction, and foster sustainable growth in a competitive market (Centeno & Mandagi, 2022; Li et al., 2021; Rondonuwu & Mandagi, 2023; Wantah & Mandagi, 2024).

This study contributes significantly to both theoretical understanding and practical applications by integrating brand gestalt, brand awareness, and brand image specifically within the context of ecotourism. It fills a critical gap in sustainable tourism marketing literature, offering a novel framework for examining these relationships empirically and providing actionable insights for ecotourism operators and marketers. By emphasizing strategies that enhance brand perception and stimulate positive WOM, this research equips practitioners to effectively navigate and thrive in the competitive ecotourism landscape.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Brand Gestalt
Gestalt is a concept originating from psychology, which refers to the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, emphasizing how elements are perceived as organized wholes rather than isolated parts (Diamond et al., 2009). In ecotourism, understanding brand gestalt becomes particularly crucial as it defines how consumers perceive and connect with brands that emphasize sustainability and cultural authenticity. The comprehensive perception of a brand as a cohesive entity, integrating narratives,

sensory experiences, physical environments, and stakeholder engagements, influences consumer attitudes and behaviors profoundly (Centeno & Mandagi, 2022). This holistic impression not only enhances brand attachment and loyalty but also shapes consumer satisfaction and purchase intentions within competitive markets (Centeno & Mandagi, 2022; Walewangko, Mandagi, & Indrajit, 2024). Moreover, brand gestalt acts as a critical mediator in the intersection of social media marketing and festival branding, amplifying brand visibility and engagement through cohesive brand narratives and sensory experiences.

The collective findings underscore the pivotal role of brand gestalt in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes towards ecotourism brands. Each dimension—storyscape, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholderscape—plays a vital role in creating meaningful and memorable experiences that resonate with environmentally conscious travelers. By effectively managing these dimensions, ecotourism brands can establish strong emotional connections, foster loyalty, and influence positive consumer behaviors (Rantung, Mandagi, Wuryaningrat, & Lelengboto, 2023), ultimately driving sustainable growth in the competitive ecotourism market. Essentially, sensory experiences, service environment, and stakeholder engagement collectively enhance brand awareness, thereby positioning ecotourism destinations more favorably in the minds of potential tourists. Consequently, the following hypotheses was introduced:

H1: The 4S dimension of brand gestalt (storyscape, sensescape, servicescape and stakeholderscape) have a positive and significant effect on ecotourism destination brand image.
H2: The 4S dimension of brand gestalt (storyscape, sensescape, servicescape and stakeholderscape) have a positive and significant effect on ecotourism destination brand awareness.

2.2 Brand awareness
Understanding the factors that influence tourists' WOM intentions is crucial for the growth and sustainability of ecotourism destinations. Brand awareness is a critical component of marketing strategy, significantly impacting consumer behavior, brand equity, and overall market success. It refers to the likelihood of a person retrieving a brand identifier and a product category from memory in various brand-relevant situations (Bergkvist & Taylor, 2022). This concept encompasses the recognition and recall of the brand by the consumer and their ability to associate it with a specific product category.

By measuring and enhancing brand awareness, companies can achieve better consumer engagement, stronger brand loyalty, and a competitive edge in the marketplace (Achmad, Pangestu, Fitriansyah, Surapati, & Mahsyar, 2020; Cuong & Khoi, 2022; Ledikwe, 2020; Marhareita et al., 2022). The concept has been extensively studied, with numerous methodologies developed to operationalize and measure its impact effectively. Different measures of brand awareness are required depending on a brand's market share and the desired level of sensitivity or stability (Romaniuk, Wight, & Faulkner, 2017).

In the context of ecotourism, brand awareness is particularly crucial. It significantly influences consumer choice, as tourists are more likely to select a destination they recognize and trust (Achmad et al., 2020; Azzari & Pelissari, 2021). High brand awareness can differentiate a destination from its competitors, establishing a strong market position. It fosters trust and loyalty among tourists, leading to repeat visits and long-term engagement (Cuong & Khoi, 2022). For new ecotourism offerings, established brand awareness can ease their introduction, as tourists are more willing to explore new destinations associated with a familiar brand. Additionally, it contributes to overall brand performance, enhancing the perceived value of the destination and allowing for premium pricing. Moreover, tourists who are aware of a destination are more likely to engage in WOM marketing and recommend the destination to others. Therefore, the following hypothesis was introduced:

H3: Ecotourism destination brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on tourists' WOM intention

2.3 Brand Image

Brand image is a multifaceted concept that encapsulates the perceptions, beliefs, and impressions that consumers hold about a brand (Syed Alwi, Nguyen, Melewar, Loh, & Liu, 2016). It represents the overall essence and identity of a brand in the minds of consumers, shaped by various interactions, experiences, and communications with the brand over time. Factors such as the brand's reliability, credibility, and consistency in delivering on promises influence this perception. Brand image goes beyond tangible product attributes to include intangible aspects such as brand personality, reputation, and emotional connections with consumers. Establishing a strong brand image involves shaping how consumers think and feel about the brand, thereby influencing their purchasing decisions and fostering loyalty. This process adds intangible value to products by aligning them with desirable qualities and meanings in consumers' minds (Wijaya, 2013).

The importance of brand image cannot be overstated in the competitive landscape of modern business. It influences consumer behavior at every stage of the purchasing process and serves as a significant predictor of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Ezeuduji & Mhlongo, 2019; Liang & Lai, 2023). A strong and positive brand image fosters trust among consumers and increases the likelihood of repeat purchases (Marhareita et al., 2022). Moreover, it plays a crucial role in attracting new customers by shaping their perceptions and influencing their attitudes (Khan et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021; Pham & Khanh, 2021; Thi Khanh & Phong, 2020).

Previous studies have extensively explored the impact of brand image across various industries, highlighting its significance in driving consumer preferences and behaviors. For instance, Abin, Mandagi, and Pasuhuk (2022) examined the role of brand image in the context of start-up brands, emphasizing how brand image contributes to shaping attitudes and satisfaction towards ecotourism brands. Demonstrated that a positive brand image can lead to increased customer loyalty and positive WOM recommendations in the hospitality sector. Additionally, Liang and Lai (2023) investigated the relationship between brand image and consumer behavior in the context of sustainable tourism, revealing that a favorable brand image enhances tourists' intention to support environmentally responsible practices and revisit intentions. Based on this theoretical and empirical conceptualization, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Ecotourism destination brand image has a positive and significant effect on tourists' WOM intention.

The conceptual framework of this study is summarized in Figure 1. The independent variable is brand gestalt, operationalized into four dimensions: storyscape, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholderscape. The dependent variables in this study are brand awareness, brand image, and WOM intention.
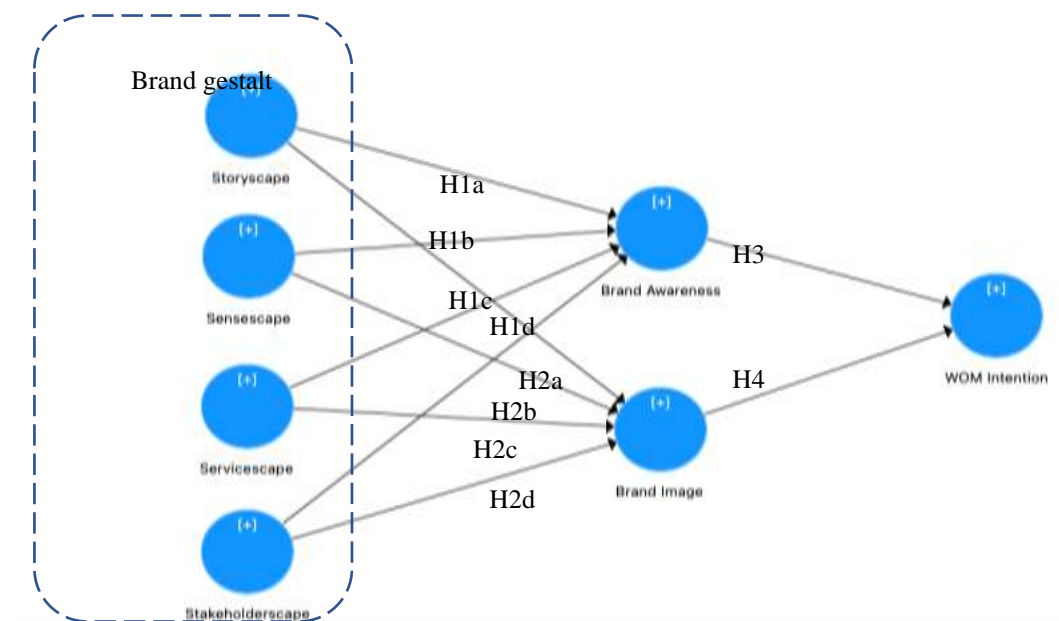
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Source: Authors' elaboration (2024)

3. Methodology

Considering the research objectives and problem formulation, a descriptive quantitative research design was adopted for this study. This research design is appropriate for this study because it aligns with the objective of systematically examining the relationships between brand gestalt, brand awareness, brand image, and WOM intention in ecotourism. The target population comprises visitors to the five most popular ecotourism destinations in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. Table 1 displays the selected ecotourism destinations chosen as data collection sites. By focusing on visitors to the top ecotourism destinations in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, the study aims to capture insights from a relevant and engaged audience that plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and behaviors related to sustainable tourism.

To ensure accessibility and feasibility, subjects who are easily reachable were selected using the convenience sampling method. This method allows researchers to select samples based on practical considerations and availability. Convenience sampling is justified in this study because ecotourism destinations, particularly those in remote or less accessible areas like North Sulawesi, may have limited visitor accessibility. This method allows researchers to reach respondents who are readily available and willing to participate, thereby facilitating data collection without extensive logistical challenges.

Table 1. Ecotourism Destination Used as Data Collection Site

No	Ecotourism Destination	Location
1	Ecotourism Village Bunaken	Manado
2	Pall Beach Likupang	North Minahasa
3	Desa Wisata Budo	North Minahasa
4	Linow Lake	Tomohon
5	Tangkoko National Park	Bitung

The variables for this study were operationalized using indicators from prior research, as detailed in Table 2. Data collection involved conducting surveys at ecotourism destinations, where the research team intercepted target respondents and invited them to participate. Upon finishing the questionnaire, the researchers collected the responses and verified the completeness of each questionnaire according to specified guidelines. Only fully completed questionnaires were included in the tabulated data

presentation. The final stage of the data collection process entailed tabulating the gathered responses in preparation for analysis.

Table 2. Ecotourism Destination Used as Data Collection Site

No	Variable	# of Indicators	Source
1	Brand Gestalt	19	Mandagi et al., 2021; Dedeoğlu et al., 2020; Achmad et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2018.
2	Brand Awareness	5	
3	Brand Image	5	Qu et al., 2011; Marhareita et al., 2022; Liang & Lai, 2023
4	WOM Intention	5	Cheng et al., 2022; Firman et al., 2021; Setiawan et al., 2021

After ensuring the completeness of the dataset, the entire dataset was exported to SPSS for descriptive and demographic analysis, which involved extracting information such as age, gender, city of residence, and occupation. Subsequently, the data analysis proceeded with the application of structural equation modeling (SEM). SEM, as described by Matthews, Hair, and Matthews (2018), is a robust analytical framework that integrates multiple constructs, making it particularly suitable for examining complex relationships among variables such as brand gestalt, brand image, brand awareness, and WOM intention.

The utilization of SEM involves two main components: the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model focuses on ensuring the validity and reliability of the constructs, while the structural model tests the hypotheses derived from the research objectives (Matthews et al., 2018). The measurement model was executed using the PLS algorithm, and the structural model was analyzed using PLS bootstrapping techniques. This comprehensive approach allowed for a thorough examination of the interrelationships between the variables under study.

4. Result dan discussion

4.1 Respondent Demographic

The demographics of the respondents in this study are shown in Table 3 below. This table distinguishes the demographic characteristics of respondents based on gender, age, domicile and occupation. The table indicates that 29% of the sample are male, with the majority being female (71%). In terms of age distribution, a significant portion falls within the 11-20 age range (52.5%), followed by 21-30 years (44.8%), while a smaller percentage are aged 31-40 years (2.7%). Geographically, the majority reside in Manado (49.7%), followed by Minut (20.2%), Bitung (4.3%), Tomohon (4.9%), and other cities (20.9%). Occupation-wise, a large majority are students (75.9%), with a smaller percentage being employed (8.7%), and the rest having other occupations (15.4%). Overall, the data highlights the diversity within the sample population across gender, age, location, and occupation.

Table 3. Demographic Data of Respondents

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	53	29
	Female	130	71
Age	11-20	96	52,5
	21-30	82	44,8
	31-40	5	2,7
City of domicile	Manado	91	49,7
	Minut	38	20,2
	Bitung	8	4,3
	Tomohon	9	4,9
	Minahasa	37	20,9

	Others	37	20,9	
Occupation	Students	139	75,9	
	Employee	16	8,7	
	Government employee			
	Others	28	15,4	

Source: Data processed using SPSS (2024)

4.2 Descriptive statistic

Table 4 presents a descriptive analysis of the variables in this study, providing details on sample size, maximum and minimum values, standard deviation, and average values. The table summarizes the statistical characteristics of five variables—Story, Sensescape, Servicescape, Stakeholder, and Purchase Intention—across 183 observations. It reveals generally positive perceptions, with the highest mean rating found in Servicescape (5.74), indicating favorable views of the service environment, closely followed by Stakeholder (5.44), suggesting positive perceptions of stakeholder engagement. Story (5.1) and Purchase Intention (5.4) also demonstrate moderately positive sentiments, while Sensescape (4.81) shows slightly lower but still generally favorable perceptions.

Table 4. Variable descriptive analysis result

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev
Story	241	1	5	4.39	0.867
Sensescape	241	1	5	4.19	0.880
Servicescape	241	1	5	4.45	0.933
Stakeholder	241	1	5	4.44	0.913
Brand image	241	1	5	3.96	0.864
Brand awareness	241	1	5	4.19	0.853
WOM	241	1	5	4.22	0.887

Source: Data processed using SPSS (2024)

4.3 Measurement Model

The measurement model analysis in this study utilized the PLS algorithm menu in the SmartPLS software. The results of the measurement model, including the factor loading of each indicator, are depicted in Figure 2 below. The results of the measurement model test, as depicted in Figure 2, indicate that all indicators possess a Loading Factor above 0.7. In other words, convergent validity has been established for all variables included in this study.
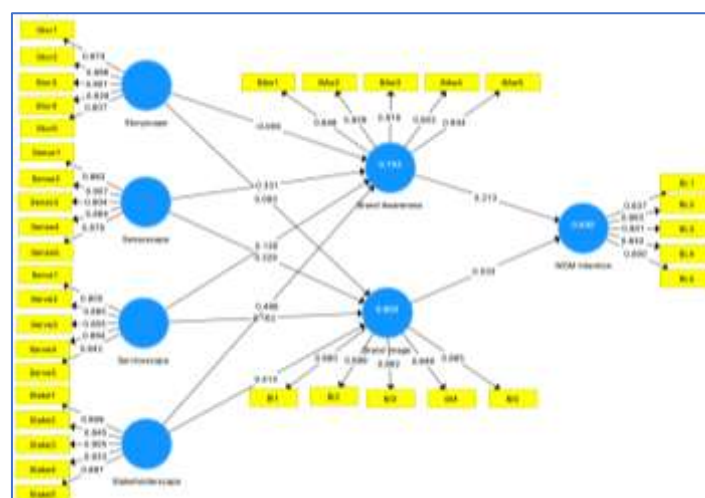

Figure 2. Result of the Measurement Model Evaluation
Source: Data processed using SmartPLS (2024)

4.4 Discriminant validity

Testing discriminant validity in this study involves several criteria, including the Fornell-Larcker criterion, cross loading, and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio. The results of the validity test based on the Fornell-Larcker criteria are presented in Table 5 below. The results in the table indicate that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) on the diagonal of the table is greater than the correlation between variables in the same column. Therefore, it can be concluded that the indicators and variables used in this study satisfactorily meet the criteria for discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity based on Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Purchase Intention	Sensescape	Servicescape	Stakeholder	Story
Purchase Intention	0,792				
Sensescape	0,651	0,844			
Servicescape	0,729	0,704	0,824		
Stakeholder	0,638	0,487	0,678	0,841	
Story	0,665	0,576	0,669	0,563	0,853

Source: Data processed using SmartPLS (2024)

Additionally, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio method is additionally employed to evaluate discriminant validity, with the results presented in Table 5. Based on the findings showcased in Table 6, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio values for all variables are less than 0.9. Thus, it can be inferred from the analysis of the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio that all variables exhibit satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 6. Discriminant Validity based on Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Brand Awareness (1)						
Brand Image (2)	0.94					
Sensescape (3)	0.84	0.89				
Servicescape (4)	0.75	0.80	0.81			
Stakeholderscape (5)	0.87	0.89	0.80	0.70		
Storyscape (6)	0.72	0.79	0.78	0.70	0.78	
WOM Intention (7)	0.71	0.76	0.79	0.81	0.66	0.72

Source: Data processed using SmartPLS (2024)

4.5 Reliability

The reliability test in this study involved analyzing Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values. These results are detailed in Table 7 below. The analysis indicates that each variable possesses a Cronbach's alpha (CA) value exceeding 0.70, composite reliability (CR) surpassing 0.70, and AVE exceeding 0.50. Thus, it can be concluded that all variables in this study exhibit a high level of reliability.

Table 7. Reliability test result

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand Awareness	0.946	0.949	0.959	0.823
Brand Image	0.925	0.926	0.943	0.769
Sensescape	0.93	0.931	0.947	0.78

Servicescape	0.901	0.912	0.927	0.717
Stakeholderscape	0.94	0.941	0.954	0.807
Storyscape	0.915	0.925	0.936	0.747
WOM Intention	0.918	0.94	0.938	0.752

Source: Data processed using SmartPLS (2024)

4.6 Goodness-of-fit Model

Table 8 presents the results of the goodness-of-fit model test. The findings listed in Table 7.10 demonstrate that all goodness-of-fit indicators, including SRMR, d_ULS, d_G, chi-square, and NFI, fall within the recommended limits. Consequently, these results indicate a strong alignment between the data and the proposed research model, affirming a good fit.

Table 8. Goodness-of-fit Model

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.066	0.079
d_ULS	2.741	3.902
d_G	1.389	1.521
Chi-Square	1841.259	1946.074
NFI	0.81	0.799

Source: Data processed using SmartPLS (2024)

4.7. Structural model

After ensuring that all aspects of validity and reliability have been addressed, the subsequent stage involves structural model testing, primarily aimed at evaluating the research hypotheses. Structural model testing is conducted using the PLS Bootstrapping Menu in SmartPLS statistical software, aiming to ascertain the significance level of the path coefficients. The outcomes of model testing are illustrated in Figure 3 and presented in Table 8 below.
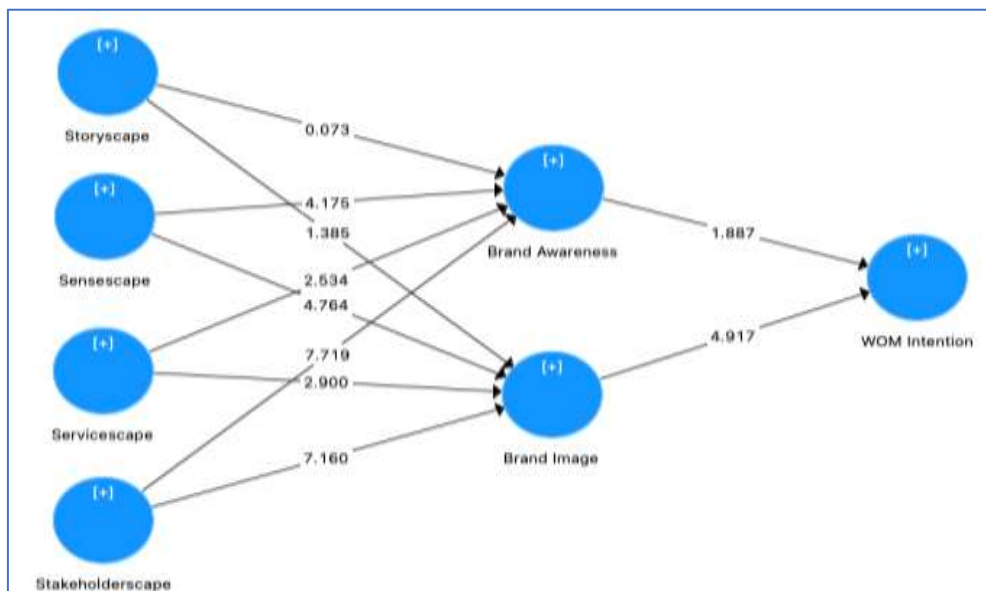

Figure 3. Result of the Structural Model Evaluation
Source: Data processed using SmartPLS (2024)

To determine whether or not the research hypothesis is accepted, it is carried out by testing the significance of the path coefficient that connects the variables. The hypothesis will be accepted or rejected based on the value of the p-value that does not exceed the estimated value (alpha). Table 9 summarizes the result of the hypothesis testing.

Table 9. hypothesis testing results

	Sample Mean	Std. Dev.	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values	H	Significant?
Storyscape -> BA	0.005	0.069	0.073	0.942	H1a	No
Storyscape -> BI	0.102	0.067	1.385	0.167	H1b	No
Sensescape -> BA	0.325	0.079	4.175	0.000	H2a	Yes
Sensescape -> BI	0.322	0.069	4.764	0.000	H2b	Yes
Servicescape -> BA	0.132	0.054	2.534	0.012	H3a	Yes
Servicescape -> BI	0.161	0.056	2.9	0.004	H3b	Yes
Stakeholderscape -> BA	0.484	0.063	7.719	0.000	H4a	Yes
Stakeholderscape -> BI	0.41	0.058	7.16	0.000	H4b	Yes
BA -> WOM Intention	0.208	0.113	1.887	0.06	H5	No
BI -> WOM Intention	0.536	0.108	4.917	0.000	H6	Yes

BA= Brand Awarness; BI=Brand Image
Source: Data processed using SmartPLS (2024)

The results from the table 9 provide insights into the relationships examined in this study, focusing on the impact of different dimensions of brand gestalt on brand awareness (BA), brand image (BI), and WOM intention in the context of ecotourism destinations. Firstly, the analysis revealed that storyscape, which explores narrative elements of a brand such as its history and messaging, did not show a statistically significant influence on either brand awareness (H1a) or brand image (H1b).

In contrast, sensescape showed robust and statistically significant relationships with both brand awareness (H2a) and brand image (H2b). This finding underscores the pivotal role that sensory elements play in influencing consumer perceptions within the context of ecotourism brands. Research has consistently indicated that sensory stimuli such as natural landscapes can evoke powerful emotional responses and contribute significantly to how consumers perceive and remember ecotourism destinations. By immersing visitors in sensory-rich environments, ecotourism destinations can effectively differentiate themselves and create lasting impressions that enhance brand awareness. The sensory experiences not only captivate the senses but also evoke emotions and associations that align with the brand's values and narratives. For instance, the serene sounds of a forest or the refreshing scent of a pristine waterfall can evoke feelings of tranquility and environmental stewardship, reinforcing consumers' perceptions of the brand's commitment to sustainability.

Moreover, these sensory impressions contribute significantly to shaping brand image by fostering positive associations and strengthening consumers' emotional connections with the brand. Studies have shown that memorable sensory experiences lead to more favorable brand evaluations and increased likelihood of repeat visits and positive WOM recommendations. Therefore, investing in enhancing the sensescape of ecotourism destinations not only enriches visitor experiences but also plays a crucial role in building a strong and distinctive brand identity that resonates deeply with environmentally conscious consumers.

Similarly, servicescape, encompassing the physical environment and service delivery within ecotourism destinations, exhibited notable impacts on both brand awareness (H3a) and brand image (H3b). The physical setting of ecotourism sites, including facilities, cleanliness, and overall ambiance, plays a crucial role in shaping visitors' perceptions. For instance, a well-maintained and eco-friendly lodge or visitor center can enhance visitors' initial impression of the destination as committed to sustainability. Moreover, the quality of service delivery, such as friendly and knowledgeable staff members who provide informative tours or activities, contributes significantly to visitor satisfaction and loyalty.

The findings underscore the critical importance of the servicescape in influencing consumer perceptions of ecotourism brands. A positive servicescape not only enhances brand visibility by creating memorable experiences but also reinforces the brand's image as trustworthy and committed to providing high-quality, sustainable tourism experiences. These aspects collectively contribute to building a strong

brand identity that resonates positively with environmentally conscious travelers, thereby influencing their decision-making process and enhancing their overall satisfaction with the ecotourism destination. Thus, investing in and maintaining a favorable servicescape is essential for ecotourism destinations aiming to differentiate themselves in a competitive market while promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Stakeholderscape, which involves the interactions and relationships with diverse stakeholders linked to ecotourism destinations, emerged as a pivotal factor influencing both brand awareness (H4a) and brand image (H4b) in a highly significant manner. This aspect of brand gestalt highlights the importance of fostering positive relationships with stakeholders, including local communities, environmental organizations, and conservation groups. Positive engagements with these stakeholders not only enhance the visibility and reputation of ecotourism brands but also contribute to building trust and credibility among consumers.The significant impact observed suggests that when ecotourism destinations actively involve and collaborate with stakeholders in their operations and conservation efforts, they effectively communicate their commitment to sustainability and responsible tourism practices. Consumers increasingly value brands that demonstrate social responsibility and environmental stewardship through meaningful interactions with stakeholders. These interactions create a ripple effect, where positive perceptions and endorsements from stakeholders can amplify brand awareness within their communities and networks.

Moreover, stakeholderscape influences brand image by aligning the brand with values and principles that resonate with environmentally conscious consumers. By engaging stakeholders in transparent and mutually beneficial ways, ecotourism brands can differentiate themselves in a competitive market, positioning themselves as authentic and trustworthy choices for travelers seeking sustainable experiences. This reinforces the idea that beyond marketing strategies, genuine partnerships with stakeholders can organically enhance brand perception and attractiveness, fostering long-term loyalty and advocacy among consumers.

Regarding the relationship between brand awareness (BA) and WOM intention (H5), the analysis revealed that there was no statistically significant association between these two variables. This finding suggests that while brand awareness plays a role in shaping consumer perceptions of ecotourism destinations, it may not directly prompt consumers to engage in WOM activities such as recommending the destination to others. This could be due to several factors, including the complexity of consumer decision-making in ecotourism, where other factors such as personal experiences, emotional connections, or perceived environmental impact may weigh more heavily in influencing WOM intentions.

Conversely, the analysis showed that brand image (BI) had a strong and statistically significant influence on WOM intention (H6). This result aligns with established research indicating that a positive brand image enhances consumers' propensity to share their experiences and recommend the destination to others (Alexander & Widjaja, 2024; Kurniasih & Elizabeth, 2021; Lumeno & Yusrin, 2024). A positive brand image can evoke trust, admiration, and loyalty among consumers, motivating them to advocate for the brand through positive WOM. In the context of ecotourism, where environmental responsibility and authenticity are paramount, a strong brand image that conveys these values effectively can resonate deeply with environmentally conscious travelers, prompting them to spread positive WOM and potentially attract more like-minded tourists.

Moreover, previous studies have consistently demonstrated that brand image not only influences consumer behavior but also serves as a key driver of brand advocacy and loyalty. Consumers are more inclined to share their experiences with brands that they perceive positively and align with their values. Therefore, for ecotourism destinations aiming to enhance their reputation and attract more visitors, cultivating a strong and positive brand image through effective communication of their sustainability efforts, community engagement, and unique experiences is crucial. This not only enhances consumer perceptions but also encourages them to actively promote the destination, thereby contributing to its sustainable growth and success in the competitive ecotourism market.

5. Conclusion
5.1. Conclusion
The findings of this study shed light on the intricate relationships between various dimensions of brand gestalt—specifically storyscape, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholderscape—and their impacts on brand awareness, brand image, and WOM intention within the ecotourism sector. Storyscape, which encompasses the narrative elements of a brand, was found to have no statistically significant influence on either brand awareness or brand image. This underscores the complexity of how storytelling alone may not strongly sway consumer perceptions in ecotourism contexts, where sensory and experiential factors may hold greater sway. Storytelling (storyscape) might not have influenced brand awareness or image due to several factors. The stories may not have resonated with the target audience or were poorly executed, leading to weak engagement. If the narrative did not clearly communicate the brand's message or was lost in a saturated market, its impact would be minimal. Additionally, the effects of storytelling can take time to manifest and may require more integrated marketing efforts to be effective. Lastly, a short evaluation period might not capture the full impact, highlighting the need for more sophisticated measurement techniques.

In contrast, sensescape emerged as a powerful determinant, significantly influencing both brand awareness and brand image. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing the profound impact of sensory experiences, such as natural landscapes and wildlife encounters, in shaping consumer perceptions and fostering emotional connections with ecotourism destinations. These sensory impressions not only captivate visitors but also reinforce the brand's commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship, crucial factors for attracting and retaining environmentally conscious travelers.

Similarly, servicescape—the physical environment and service quality within ecotourism sites—was identified as pivotal in enhancing both brand awareness and brand image. A well-maintained and eco-friendly servicescape, coupled with high-quality visitor experiences and informative interactions, enhances perceptions of the destination's authenticity and commitment to sustainable tourism practices. These findings highlight the strategic importance of investing in the physical infrastructure and service delivery to enhance brand visibility and appeal in the competitive ecotourism market.

Stakeholderscape, involving interactions with diverse stakeholders such as local communities and conservation groups, also emerged as a significant driver of brand awareness and brand image. Positive engagements with stakeholders foster trust, credibility, and community support, crucial for positioning ecotourism brands as responsible and trustworthy choices among consumers. By involving stakeholders in meaningful ways, ecotourism destinations can amplify their brand's environmental credentials and community impact, thereby enhancing brand perceptions and fostering long-term sustainability

5.2. Limitation
Despite the insightful findings, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, the research was conducted in specific ecotourism destinations within North Sulawesi, Indonesia, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other geographic regions or types of ecotourism contexts. Secondly, the study's reliance on cross-sectional data collection methods and convenience sampling may introduce biases and limit the ability to establish causal relationships among variables. Future research could benefit from longitudinal studies and more diverse sampling methods to strengthen the robustness and applicability of the findings across different ecotourism settings.

Furthermore, the study focused primarily on perceptual measures of brand awareness, brand image, and WOM intention, which may not fully capture the complex decision-making processes and behavioral outcomes of ecotourism consumers. Future research could explore additional variables such as visitor satisfaction, loyalty behaviors, and actual visitation patterns to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior within ecotourism contexts.

5.3. Implication

These findings have several practical implications for ecotourism destination managers and marketers. Firstly, understanding the differential impacts of various brand gestalt dimensions can inform targeted marketing strategies that leverage sensory experiences, service quality, and stakeholder relationships to enhance brand perceptions. Investing in sensory-rich environments, sustainable services, and community partnerships can differentiate ecotourism brands and attract discerning travelers seeking authentic and environmentally responsible experiences.

Moreover, the emphasis on brand image as a strong predictor of WOM intention underscores the importance of cultivating a positive and distinct brand identity. Communicating sustainability efforts, engaging with stakeholders transparently, and delivering exceptional visitor experiences are critical for building brand loyalty and encouraging visitors to advocate for the destination through positive WOM. Strategic branding initiatives should focus on aligning the brand with consumer values and aspirations, thereby fostering stronger emotional connections and enhancing overall brand attractiveness.

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