

LOCAL CULTURE AS A MEDIATING VARIABLE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESTINATION IMAGE AND TOURISTS' VISIT INTENTION IN MADURA RAYA



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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of culture in mediating the relationship between destination image and tourists' intention to visit tourism destinations in Madura Raya. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey method involving tourists who have knowledge of or interest in tourism destinations in Madura Raya. The data were analyzed using regression analysis and mediation testing. The findings reveal that destination image has a positive and significant effect on tourists' visiting intention as well as on culture. Culture also has a positive and significant effect on visiting intention. Furthermore, culture partially mediates the relationship between destination image and visiting intention. These results highlight the strategic role of culture in strengthening the influence of destination image on tourists' intention to visit. Therefore, tourism development in Madura Raya should integrate destination branding strategies with the preservation and promotion of local culture to achieve sustainable and competitive tourism development.

Keywords: Destination Image, Culture, Visiting Intention, Cultural Tourism, Madura Raya

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian tourism possesses substantial potential due to its rich natural resources, cultural diversity, and local traditions, which attract both domestic and international tourists. This sector contributes significantly to the national economy through job creation, increased community income, and foreign exchange earnings generated by tourist expenditures (Hanggidae, 2006; Henderson, 2002; Hsin Hui Hu, 2007; Lim & McAleer, 2001; Liping A.Cai, 2001; Martaleni, 2011). The government has strengthened its support for tourism development through Law No. 10 of 2009 on Tourism, encouraging regions to explore and utilize local potential to stimulate economic growth. The optimization of tourism resources, including the development of tourism villages, is regarded as a strategic approach to accelerating regional development (Martaleni, 2011).

As part of the creative economy, the tourism industry exerts wide-ranging impacts on both national and regional economies. Beyond its economic contribution, modern tourism also provides recreational spaces, preserves cultural values, and promotes sustainable natural resource management (Li, H., & Su, 2022; Susanto, B & Astutik, 2020). The development of this sector is considered a crucial phenomenon due to its high sensitivity to internal and external changes, while still generating significant economic, social, and cultural impacts (Isfillah, 2023). Through a sustainable development approach, tourism is viewed as a means of strengthening cultural identity, creating economic opportunities, and improving the welfare of local communities (Panjaitan, 2025).

At the provincial level, East Java continues to demonstrate dynamic tourism growth. Following the recovery of global mobility in the post-pandemic period, international tourist arrivals have shown a notable increase. Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS, 2023) indicate that the 2023–2025 period has been marked by a relatively stable rise in foreign tourist visits, particularly during peak months such as July and August. In August 2024, the number of international tourist arrivals approached 39,000, reflecting the growing attractiveness of East Java as a tourism destination.

This increase is closely linked to shifts in global tourism trends, where experience-based tourism has become increasingly favored by international travelers. Tourists now seek authentic experiences involving direct interaction with local culture, traditional cuisine, and emotionally meaningful activities. This trend aligns well with the characteristics of East Java tourism, which offers rich cultural, natural, and adventure-based experiences. East Java is not merely visited as a physical destination but is also experienced as a cultural space that provides emotional value to tourists.

In addition to changing tourist preferences, social media has played a significant role in increasing travel interest. Destination visualizations through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube generate viral exposure that strengthens tourists' perceptions of East Java. Tourist testimonials and influencer content serve as powerful forms of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), reinforcing the push–pull theory developed by (Baker, D. A., & Crompton, 2000; Dann, 1977). Push factors, such as tourists' desire for new experiences, interact with pull factors offered by East Java, including Mount Bromo, Ijen Crater, local traditions, and cultural festivals.

However, the growth in tourist arrivals has not been evenly distributed across all regions of East Java. Areas on Madura Island exhibit significantly lower visitation rates

compared to destinations such as Surabaya, Malang, Banyuwangi, or Batu City (Dinas Pariwisata Provinsi Jawa Timur, 2025). Although Bangkalan records more than 12 million visits, other regions such as Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep report relatively low tourist numbers. This disparity highlights gaps in destination attractiveness and underscores the need for policy intervention, promotion, and innovation in tourism destination management in Madura.

In fact, Madura Island holds substantial potential in cultural, natural, and religious tourism and is widely recognized as the “Hidden Paradise” of East Java (Arifin, 2017). Unique traditions such as Karapan Sapi (bull racing), Saronen music, and religious sites like Asta Tinggi and the tombs of prominent Islamic scholars represent distinctive attractions (Maulidiyah & AS, 2024; Pratama et al., 2022). Unfortunately, these potentials have not been optimally managed and therefore have not generated a significant multiplier effect for the regional economy. Collaboration among government institutions, local communities, and tourism industry stakeholders is essential to ensure the sustainable development of tourism in Madura.

In the context of increasingly intense destination competition, tourists’ intention to visit is not determined solely by physical attractions but also by destination image, social media influence, and local cultural elements. Destination image is widely recognized as a key predictor of tourists’ interest and decision-making in selecting travel destinations (Echtner, C. & Ritchie, 1991; Tasci, A. D. A., Gartner, W. C., & Cavusgil, 2007). A positive image enhances perceived value, builds emotional attachment, and encourages both visit intention and repeat visitation.

Madura possesses a unique and complex image shaped by a combination of cultural, geographical, social, and societal stereotypes. On one hand, Madura’s strong cultural and natural assets contribute to the formation of a unique image (Marleen, A., & Iskandar, 2022). On the other hand, social stigma, limited accessibility, and uneven tourism facilities remain challenges in shaping tourists’ cognitive image. This is consistent with the findings of (Tjahjono et al., 2025) who argue that Madura’s affective image remains positive due to authentic cultural experiences and the hospitality of its people.

Based on the stimulus–organism–response (SOR) framework proposed by (Mehrabian, A., & Russell, 1974), destination image can be positioned as an internal process (organism) influenced by external stimuli such as tourist attractions, social media exposure, and cultural interactions. Accordingly, Madura’s destination image is not merely an objective attribute but also a reflection of tourists’ perceptions of modernization, cultural authenticity, and local uniqueness. (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021) emphasize that cultural experiences and the authenticity of traditions are critical factors in strengthening destination image and tourists’ visit intentions.

Previous studies indicate that destination image significantly influences visit intention, either directly or indirectly through mediating variables such as tourist satisfaction and travel experience (Anggraeni et al., 2024; Syafrida & Sari, 2023). However, other studies, including (Barus, 2025) and (Firmansyah et al., 2025) suggest that the direct effect of destination image is not always significant, thereby necessitating mediating variables—such as culture—to better explain this relationship.

In addition to destination image, social media represents a crucial factor influencing visit intention. Based on the Technology Acceptance Model, tourists are more likely to use

social media platforms when they perceive them as easy to use and useful. Content shared by tourists, digital reviews, and influencer testimonials ultimately form electronic word-of-mouth (Hennig-Thurau, 2004), which plays a major role in shaping destination perceptions.

In the context of Madura, the substantial potential of tourism destinations has not yet been fully optimized through digital communication strategies. Social media representations of Madura remain limited and inconsistent, reducing the effectiveness of digital branding efforts. As a result, tourists tend to prefer destinations with stronger media exposure, such as Banyuwangi or Batu City. This condition highlights the importance of strategic social media utilization in enhancing the visibility and attractiveness of Madura's tourism destinations.

Culture, as the core element of regional identity, plays a vital role as a mediating variable that bridges the influence of destination image and social media on tourists' visit intention. Culture strengthens emotional bonds, creates authentic experiences, and fosters psychological closeness between tourists and destinations (Hadrian & Ratnasari, 2025; Nanggong & Mohammad, 2024; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). In destinations rich in local values such as Madura, culture serves as a key force in shaping tourists' perceptions.

Based on the above discussion, this study posits that culture plays a strategic mediating role in the relationship between destination image and tourists' intention to visit Madura Raya. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social processes that influence tourists' decisions to choose Madura as a travel destination. The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the sustainable and competitive development of tourism in Madura, culture serves as a key force in shaping tourists' perceptions.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Destination image represents a collective perceptual construct formed by tourists regarding a particular place, shaped through both direct experiences and indirect information sources such as mass media, social media, tourist reviews, and promotional activities. (Echtner, C. M., & Ritchie, 1993) explain that destination image consists of cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions that simultaneously shape tourists' overall evaluation of a destination. The cognitive dimension relates to tourists' knowledge and beliefs, the affective dimension reflects emotions and feelings, while the conative dimension refers to behavioral tendencies. A positive destination image plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' expectations and enhancing destination attractiveness (Tasci, A. D. A., Gartner, W. C., & Cavusgil, 2007), making it a strategic element in tourism marketing.

Destination image significantly influences tourist behavior, particularly in shaping perceptions of quality, value, and travel risk. Research by (Agapito, D., Valle, P. O., & Mendes, 2013) demonstrates that destination image directly contributes to visitation

decisions and tourist loyalty. When the perceived image aligns with tourists' expectations, levels of trust and intention to visit increase (Stylidis, 2020). Therefore, effective destination image management is essential, especially for regions with distinctive characteristics such as Madura Raya, where cultural richness serves as the primary attraction.

Visit intention refers to an individual's psychological tendency to visit a destination in the future. (Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, 2010) argue that intention is a key predictor of actual behavior, thus playing a critical role in explaining travel decisions. In the tourism context, visit intention is influenced by various factors, including destination image, prior experiences, promotional activities, and social and cultural factors (Chen, C. F., & Tsai, 2007). Visit intention also serves as an important indicator in predicting repeat visitation and destination sustainability (Prayag, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design aimed at examining the causal relationships among destination image, culture, and tourists' visit intention to Madura Raya. The explanatory design was selected because it enables the testing of both direct and indirect effects among variables, including the mediating role of culture (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, 2018). The study population consists of domestic tourists who have never visited or have an interest in visiting tourism destinations in Madura Raya. A purposive sampling technique was applied, with criteria including tourists who utilize digital media, are familiar with Madura's destination image, and have been exposed to local cultural elements. The sample size in this study comprised 32 respondents.

Data were collected using an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to reach respondents from various regions across Indonesia. The use of online questionnaires is considered effective in tourism research as it allows access to tourists with digital exposure and destination-related information (Evans, J. R., & Mathur, 2018). A five-point Likert scale was employed to measure respondents' perceptions of destination image, culture, and visit intention indicators. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach through SmartPLS software. This method was chosen due to its ability to analyze complex causal relationships, including mediating variables, and its suitability for relatively small sample sizes and non-normally distributed data (Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, 2015). Mediation analysis was performed using a bootstrapping technique to assess the significance of indirect effects (Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, 2008), Research ethics were upheld by ensuring voluntary participation and the confidentiality of respondents' identities, thereby enhancing the external validity of the study (Bryman, 2016).

Research Hypothesis

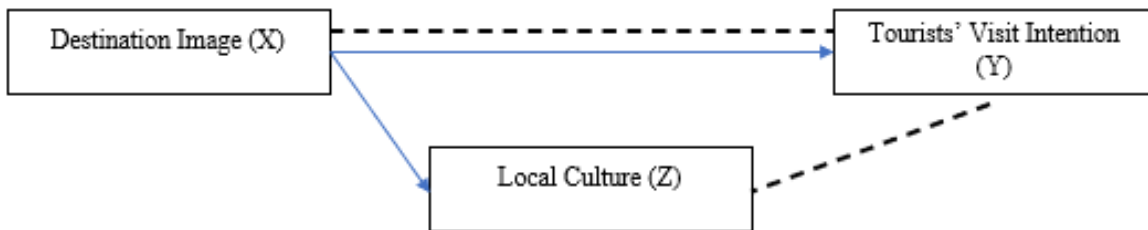
This study aims to analyze the effect of destination image on tourists' visit intention, with local culture as a mediating variable in the context of Madura Raya tourism. Based on the review of the literature and previous empirical studies, the hypotheses proposed in this study are as follows:

- H1: Destination image has significant effect on tourists' visit intention to Madura Raya.
- H2: Destination image has significant effect on Local culture to Madura Raya.

- H3: Local culture has significant effect on tourists' visit intention to Madura Raya.
- H4: Local culture mediates the relationship between destination image and tourists' visit intention.

Research Model

This research model describes the relationship between the independent variable (destination image), the mediating variable (local culture), and the dependent variable (tourists' visit intention). Destination image is assumed to influence tourists' visit intention both directly and indirectly through local culture. This model can be illustrated as follows:



The conceptual model of this study illustrates that destination image has both a direct and an indirect relationship with tourists' visit intention, with local culture acting as a mediating variable. These relationships are tested using a quantitative research approach.

This study employs a survey method, in which data are collected through a structured questionnaire using a Likert scale. The data analysis technique used is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS), which allows for the simultaneous testing of direct and indirect effects among destination image, local culture, and tourists' visit intention.

The results of this study are expected to provide deeper insights for tourism stakeholders and destination managers in Madura Raya by highlighting the importance of strengthening destination image and preserving local culture to enhance tourists' visit intention, particularly in the context of culture-based tourism development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Research Object

This study was conducted in the Madura Raya region, which encompasses the regencies of Bangkalan, Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep. Madura Raya is recognized for its distinctive local cultural heritage, including karapan sapi (bull racing), Madurese batik, Islamic boarding school (pesantren) traditions, and the local wisdom of coastal communities. Tourism destinations in this region are not only nature-based (beaches and islands) but also culture- and religion-based, making it relevant to examine the role of culture in mediating the relationship between destination image and tourists' visit intention.

Respondent Description

The respondents in this study were tourists who have knowledge of or interest in tourism destinations in Madura Raya. Their characteristics included gender, age, education level, and exposure to information about Madura Raya through social media, recommendations, or other indirect experiences.

Based on age distribution, the largest group of respondents was 26–35 years old, comprising 15 individuals. This indicates that the majority of respondents were in the productive age range, generally active in tourism-related activities. The >45 years age

group was the next largest with 7 respondents, followed by the 17–25 and 36–45 years age groups, each with 5 respondents. This composition suggests that interest and engagement in Madura Raya tourism are not only dominated by younger generations but also include adult and older age groups, reflecting diverse tourist characteristics as the object of this study.

Regarding educational background, most respondents held undergraduate (S1/D4) to postgraduate (S2/S3) degrees, totaling 24 individuals, indicating that the majority of respondents have a high level of education. Respondents with senior high school (SMA/SMK) education totaled 5, while diploma (D3) holders represented the smallest group with 3 respondents. This composition suggests that the study respondents were predominantly highly educated individuals, likely possessing strong information literacy and critical abilities in evaluating destination image and cultural attractiveness when determining their visit intention to Madura Raya.

Based on the respondents' regions of origin, most were from Kendari (12 respondents), indicating a dominance of tourists from eastern Indonesia in this study. Other respondents included 4 from Bandung, 3 each from Jombang and Bogor, 2 from East Jakarta, and 1 each from Makassar, Palabuhanratu, Pontianak, Karawang, Sukabumi, Yogyakarta, Central Java, and Medan. This distribution shows that respondents came from various regions across Indonesia, both within and outside Java, indicating that Madura Raya tourism destinations attract visitors from diverse geographical backgrounds.

Descriptive Analysis, Validity, Reliability, and Classical Assumption Testing

The descriptive analysis revealed that respondents generally provided positive evaluations for destination image (X), culture (Z), and visit intention (Y). For destination image, all indicators (X1.1–X1.6) scored means ranging from 3.66 to 4.09, categorized as “Agree,” indicating favorable perceptions of Madura Raya’s tourism image in terms of attractiveness, uniqueness, and positive impressions. The highest mean was observed in X1.6 (4.09), while X1.2 recorded the lowest (3.66), yet still within the “Agree” category.

Regarding culture, most indicators (Z1.1–Z1.10) had relatively high mean scores between 3.8 and 4.5. Z1.1 received the highest score (4.5, “Strongly Agree”), reflecting that respondents considered Madura Raya’s cultural elements highly strong and appealing. Other indicators fell within the “Agree” category, confirming the significance of local culture in shaping tourists’ attraction to Madura Raya destinations.

For visit intention, all indicators (Y1.1–Y1.7) scored means between 3.25 and 4.00, categorized as “Agree.” The highest mean was Y1.1 (4.00), indicating strong intentions among respondents to visit Madura Raya, while Y1.5 recorded the lowest mean (3.25), still reflecting a positive intention. Overall, these findings suggest that both destination image and culture positively influence tourists’ visit intention.

Validity testing using Pearson correlation indicated that all research indicators had r-values ranging from 0.612 to 0.842, exceeding the 5% significance level threshold of 0.361, confirming the validity of the instruments. Reliability analysis via Cronbach’s Alpha showed coefficients above 0.70 for all variables: destination image (0.874), culture (0.889), and visit intention (0.901), demonstrating high internal consistency.

Classical assumption tests confirmed that the data met the requirements for regression analysis. Normality testing (Kolmogorov–Smirnov) yielded a significance of 0.086 (>0.05), indicating normal distribution. Multicollinearity tests showed tolerance values of 0.612 (destination image) and 0.589 (culture) with VIFs of 1.632 and 1.698,

respectively, below the threshold of 10. Heteroscedasticity testing using the Glejser method yielded significance values of 0.274 and 0.318 for destination image and culture, respectively, confirming homoscedasticity. These results indicate that the regression model meets classical assumptions and is suitable for hypothesis testing.

The following are the research results obtained from the analysis using SEM PLS, namely:

Effect of Destination Image (X) on Visit Intention (Y)

Table 1.
Destination Image Regression Results on Visiting Interest

		Koefisien (β)	Sig.
1	X \rightarrow Y	0,931	,000

Source: Data processed (2025)

Table 1 presents the regression results for the effect of destination image (X) on visit intention (Y). The analysis indicates that destination image has a positive and significant influence on visit intention, with a regression coefficient of 0.931 and a significance value of 0.000. These findings confirm that a positive perception of Madura Raya enhances tourists' intention to visit the destination.

Effect of Culture (Z) on Visit Intention (Y)

Table 2.
Cultural Regression Results on Visiting Interest

		Coefficient (β)	Sig.
1	M \rightarrow Y	0,446	,000

Source: Data processed (2025)

Table 2 shows the regression results examining the influence of destination image on culture (M). The results demonstrate a positive and significant effect, with a regression coefficient of 1.003 and a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05). This suggests that a favorable destination image strengthens tourists' perception of the local culture embedded within Madura Raya.

Effect of Destination Image (X) on Culture (Z)

Table 3.
Destination Image Regression Results on Culture

		Coefficient (β)	Sig.
1	M \rightarrow Y	0,446	,000

Source: Data processed (2025)

As presented in Table 6, destination image positively and significantly influences culture, confirming that tourists' favorable perception of Madura Raya enhances recognition and appreciation of the local cultural elements.

Mediation Effect of Culture

Table 4.
Mediation Test Summary

		Coefficient (β)	Sig.
1	X \rightarrow Y (c)	0,931	,000

$X \rightarrow Y (c')$	0,483	,002
$X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y (a \times b)$	0,447	Sig

Source: Data processed (2025)

To examine the mediating role of culture, the variable was included in the model. The effect of destination image on visit intention decreased from 0.931 to 0.483, while remaining significant (Sig = 0.002), indicating a partial mediation effect. Table 7 summarizes the mediation test results.

When destination image and culture were simultaneously tested against visit intention, culture was found to have a positive and significant effect on visit intention, with a coefficient of 0.446 and a significance of 0.000. These findings confirm that culture partially mediates the relationship between destination image and tourists' visit intention.

Effect of Destination Image on Visit Intention

The study further revealed a positive and significant effect of destination image on tourists' visit intention to Madura Raya. According to destination image theory, a strong, consistent, and positive image encourages tourists to choose a destination over alternatives. When tourists perceive Madura as unique, attractive, safe, and culturally rich, their intention to visit increases. This result corroborates findings by (Saadah et al., 2024; Stylidis, 2020) who found a direct effect of destination image on visit intention across diverse destinations. The significant relationship between destination image and culture also indicates that Madura Raya's image not only influences the perception of its attractions but also strengthens the interpretation of embedded cultural values. This supports (Tan, G. W.-H., Lee, V.-H., Hew, J.-J., Ooi, K.-B., & Wong, 2018), who highlighted that destination image and cultural representation complement each other in creating culturally meaningful tourism. experiences.

Effect of Destination Image on Culture

The results of this study indicate that destination image plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions of Madura Raya's local culture. A destination image that highlights unique local traditions, such as *karapan sapi*, pesantren culture, and Madurese batik, strengthens the cultural identity of the destination. This finding aligns with (Echtner, C. M., & Ritchie, 1993), who emphasized that destination image encompasses both psychological and symbolic dimensions closely related to culture. Recent studies support this finding, such as (Nguyen, T. H. H., & Cheung, 2016), who demonstrated that a strong and authentic destination image enhances cultural perception among tourists. Conversely, (Barus, 2025) reported that in some destinations, destination image alone was insufficient to fully enhance tourists' cultural perception, suggesting that other factors such as local participation and community involvement may also be critical.

Effect of Culture on Visit Intention

Regression analysis shows that culture significantly influences tourists' visit intention. Local culture functions as a perceived cultural value, deepening curiosity and attraction toward the destination. In the context of Madura, strong cultural elements serve as emotional appeal and distinctive identity that encourage tourists to explore local traditions and community life. This is consistent with (Suhartanto, D., Brien, A., Primiana, I., Wibisono, N., & Burgess, 2022), who emphasized culture as a key motivator for tourists visiting culturally rich destinations. Authentic cultural experiences in Madura Raya also

add value to tourists seeking meaningful experiences, supporting (Larasati & Kurrahman, 2019) concept of the experience economy and (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), who underscored the role of cultural experiences in tourism.

Mediating Role of Culture

The inclusion of culture as a mediator demonstrates that the relationship between destination image and visit intention is not merely direct but strengthened by the local cultural values present at the destination. The Sobel Test indicated significant partial mediation, meaning culture acts as a bridge explaining how and why destination image stimulates visit intention. While destination image still directly affects visit intention, the presence of culture amplifies this effect. In Madura Raya, destination image constructed through visual content, digital promotion, previous tourist experiences, and narratives about local culture will be suboptimal without contextual cultural interpretation.

The model shows an R^2 value of 62.3%, indicating that destination image and culture explain over half of the variance in tourists' visit intention. This relatively high value in social research suggests that these factors are key determinants in attracting tourists to Madura Raya. Emotional aspects, visual perception, cultural narratives, and local values play a significant role in shaping modern tourists' intentions, particularly for culture-based destinations.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributes to the discourse on cultural-based tourism development in Indonesia, particularly in regions with strong cultural identities such as Madura. Many cultural destinations fail to attract tourists due to inadequate communication of the relationship between destination image and embedded cultural values. The findings demonstrate that Madura possesses cultural strengths that are not only unique but also relevant in shaping positive tourist perceptions. Therefore, culture is not merely a tourism object but a strategic instrument in forming destination image and promotion.

Practically, the results suggest that tourism managers in Madura Raya should strengthen the destination image through authentic and narrative-based cultural promotion rather than solely visual representation. Cultural packaging should involve local communities to maintain authenticity and align with Madurese values. Systematic development of digital content, cultural festivals, local storytelling, and integration of culture into tourism packages can enhance destination image and increase visit intention. Hence, culture serves not only as Madura's identity but also as a strategic asset for long-term tourism development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, several important conclusions can be drawn. The results indicate that destination image has a significant influence on tourists' perceptions of local culture in Madura Raya. A positive and distinctive destination image that highlights unique cultural elements, such as *karapan sapi*, Madurese batik, and *pesantren* culture, contributes to strengthening the cultural identity of the destination. Furthermore, destination image is found to have a positive and significant effect on tourists' visit intention, suggesting that tourists are more likely to visit Madura Raya when they perceive the destination as unique, culturally rich, safe, and attractive.

In addition, local culture plays a crucial role in enhancing tourists' visit intention by offering authentic experiences and emotional connections that increase tourists' interest in exploring local traditions and community life. The findings also reveal that local culture partially mediates the relationship between destination image and visit intention, indicating that while a positive destination image directly encourages tourists to visit, the presence of strong cultural values further reinforces and contextualizes this effect. Overall, the research model explains 62.3% of the variance in tourists' visit intention, demonstrating that destination image and local culture are key determinants in attracting tourists to Madura Raya, particularly within the framework of culture-based tourism development.

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