

# Managing Conservation Value to Enhance Tourist Electronic Word of Mouth for Rural Tourism Destinations

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## ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, Indonesia has made various efforts to increase tourist visits. This study aims to examine the effect of experiential marketing on conservation value, the effect of experiential marketing on e-WoM (electronic Word of Mouth), and the mediating effect of customer value on the relationship between experiential marketing and e-WoM in rural conservation destinations. Hence, a survey was conducted to 125 visitors with structured questions and used PLS to reveal the relationship between experiential marketing on e-WoM, where customer conservation value has a mediation function. Thus, customers' conservation value will contribute to the marketing of rural tourism destinations. The results showed that experiential marketing positively and significantly affects conservation value, but it does not directly affect e-WoM unless mediated by customer conservation value. Therefore, this study suggests that destination managers and tourist guides maintain and continue improving the tourist experience and add conservation attributes to the destination. So, the tourist will comprehend the attributes through their online device. In doing so, they will be involved in marketing activities with e-WoM as the destination marketer's partner.

## ABSTRAK

Selama beberapa tahun terakhir, Indonesia melakukan berbagai upaya untuk meningkatkan kunjungan wisata. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji pengaruh experiential marketing terhadap nilai konservasi, pengaruh experiential marketing terhadap e-WoM (electronic Word of Mouth), dan pengaruh mediasi nilai pelanggan terhadap hubungan antara experiential marketing dan e-WoM di pedesaan konservasi. tujuan. Oleh karena itu, survei dilakukan pada 125 pengunjung dengan pertanyaan terstruktur dan menggunakan PLS untuk mengungkapkan hubungan antara experiential marketing pada e-WoM, di mana nilai konservasi pelanggan berfungsi sebagai mediasi. Dengan demikian, nilai konservasi pelanggan akan berkontribusi pada pemasaran destinasi wisata pedesaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa experiential marketing berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap nilai konservasi, tetapi tidak secara langsung mempengaruhi e-WoM kecuali dimediasi oleh nilai konservasi pelanggan. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menyarankan pengelola destinasi dan pemandu wisata untuk mempertahankan dan terus meningkatkan pengalaman wisatawan dan menambahkan atribut nilai konservasi ke destinasi. Sehingga wisatawan akan memahami atribut melalui perangkat online mereka. Dengan demikian, mereka akan terlibat dalam kegiatan pemasaran dengan e-WoM sebagai mitra pemasar destinasi konservasi.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The simple way to distinguish tourism is to classify massive and rural tourism activities. Rural tourism is an activity conducted by the community, bringing benefits to the local community and its surroundings. Rosalina (2021) emphasized the role of rural tourism as an effective source of income and employment, especially in rural areas where

traditional agriculture is practiced. Additionally, Matviyenko & Oklovyh (2018) emphasized that the rural tourism concept is related to the administration or location where the community or villagers take dominant service. Tourism is related to multidimensional and multi-disciplinary activities as a manifestation of each person and country and interactions between tourists and the

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community, tourists guide, local governments, and entrepreneurs (Republik Indonesia, 2009).

In line with it, one of the tourist destinations established in Jambi, Indonesia, is Rawa Bento. Rawa Bento is the brand identified as local grass growing in the highest swamp in Southeast Asia. The location belongs to the Kerinci Seblat National Park Forest (TNKS), the world conservation tropical forest, a strategic geographical condition that provides exotic natural attractions. The location advantage has been known as the best photography spot where the famous Kerinci Mountains are enriched by freshwater, supporting rare habitats. In addition, its local culture and social environment attract tourists to visit. Ginting et al. (2013) said that the attraction offered its uniqueness be the tourist reason to visit. Rawa Bento offers natural tourism with added value in a natural beauty atmosphere and a unique swamp forest atmosphere that impresses visitors.

Rawa Bento has a maintained view that can accommodate various tourist activities. It provides a good experience, such as adventure activities, vacations, nature vacations, outdoor sports, green tours, and health recovery as a unique experience. Matarazzo et al. (2021) said that customer experience is an internal and subjective response after direct or indirect consumption of a particular product or service. In addition, Rosita et al. (2021) said Rawa Bento could do many activities such as picnics, camping, fishing, bird watching, and flora or fauna with exited views.

Rawa Bento provides a beautiful and unique natural area that became a World Heritage Area by UNESCO in 2004. A nature reserve area with tropical rain forests that protect and preserve many endemic and endangered flora and fauna. The essential value is that nature is part of the world's lungs and has a unique and challenging geographic area. Hence TNKS requires the village to protect it. So village officials issued the village regulation that makes villagers conservation guardians.

Visitors prefer to spend their money on experiences in conservation areas that need sustainability in the tourism industry. Nature tourism turns out to be a unique attraction for the public. Half of the people are more interested in traveling to locations close to nature and getting references from the internet or social media. Currently, Rawa Bento visitors like to share travel activities and feel happy to provide exciting photos and videos of their trips. Nurhaipah (2019) said the desire to update news destinations as a self-existence search forms the passion for e-WoM. After

visiting tourist destinations, they deliver everything on the internet, and those activities are classified as e-WoM.

So, based on the above explanation, the research aim is: to examine the effect of experiential marketing on conservation value, the effect of experiential marketing on e-WoM, and the effect of experiential marketing on e-WoM that mediate by customer conservation values. This research is the first to examine the role of experiential marketing and e-WoM in increasing customer value in rural conservation destinations. Therefore, this is the novelty of this study.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

### Experiential Marketing

The experience encourages a satisfied customer to deliver what he feels. Le Dung (2018) noted that tourist behavior depends on the imagery process he perceives. Rather (2020) confirmed that the behavior will be behavioral intention toward a destination.

Experience is not only determined by rational thought but also driven by emotion. Marketing is a stimulus from stimulation after product or service consumption that involves the emotional and rational sides, such as feeling, enjoying, and thinking. Experiential marketing, an approach that combines the emotional side of consumers toward products or services, refers to the experience of consumers through sense, feeling, thinking, acting, and relating. It aims to provide a memorable experience stimulation. Furthermore, Zena & Hadisumarto (2013) said that experiential marketing is a framework for integrating experience and entertainment elements into products or services. So, experiential marketing targets the experience of the emotional and rational aspects of the tourist (Soehadi & Ardianto, 2019). Accordingly, the marketer offers a product or service feature and benefits to win customers' hearts and provide sensation and experience in experiential marketing. So it will allow customers to be sensory engaged and interact with brands, products, and services. Yu & Yuan (2019) mentioned that experience would direct customer perception to destination branding. Therefore, the marketer needs to manage it in a holistic approach and includes a variety of cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical from the customer to the company.

Strategy to manage experiential marketing consists of two concepts: SEMs (*Strategic Experiential Modules*) and Experience Providers (*ExPros*), as tactical tools for implementing experiential

marketing. SEMs are dimensions of compiling indicators of sense, feel, think, act, and relate questions. The researcher used it to explore different customer experiences. Sense focuses on the visitor's five senses: sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. Feel focuses on experiences related to inner mood and emotions. Think related with the awareness that can create a sense to rethink visitors such as surprise, captivating, provocation of creative thinking and problem-solving. The act is designed to be related to lifestyle, behavior, or interaction. Relate connecting individually with others or the surrounding environment from the social context. Regarding destination marketing, Minkiewicz et al. (2014) illuminate three things as co-creation between the host and tourist: co-creation, co-production, and personalization.

### **Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM)**

WoM is a consumer activity to deliver their experience to others. Marketers receive the benefits because the consumers self-finance in all their activities. It uses technological devices connected to a network called electronic communication or electronic word of mouth. Kotler & Keller (2021) identified WoM as a marketing tool that should be integrated with other marketing communication tools. WoM is consumers' way to communicate, send messages, and inform conservation about their experience consuming a particular product or service. As the internet's devices increase, customers instantly use it to support their activities. Their actions to convey everything on the internet are identified as e-WoM.

Therefore, e-WoM is a form of marketing communication in the form of positive or negative statements submitted by potential consumers or former consumers who review final products or services. As the internet and technology are massively used, people use many devices or platforms: blogs, emails, reviews, social networks, and virtual communities. In addition, e-WoM could occur in many ways, including opinion web platforms, web boycotts, group news, and discussion forums.

In terms of technology, Mai & Olsen (2013) said the role of a community member in marketing is to deliver conservation value caused by internet technology. This practice introduces co-production activities where the marketer and consumer create vast value that satisfies them more. It is a new marketing tool that the marketer should consider and integrate into destination marketing (Johannes et al., 2022).

### **Customer Value on Conservation**

Value is a broad concept that relates to the consumption practice and the expected result or condition. Rihova et al. (2014) emphasized the role of the customer in creating value, particularly in conservation programs. Customer value is the consumer preference after evaluating consumption action product or service attributes, performance attributes or services, and the consequences of using products or services to achieve customer goals in product or service usage situations. Overall satisfaction requires the customer's feelings to evaluate user experiences with many sacrifices incurred perception. Furthermore, experiences form value in service, post-purchase, pleasure, and evaluation. In tourism, customer value results from various quality activities related to consumer perceptions and experiences with tourist attractions at a specific period. The service substance is co-production, where the host and the tourist create satisfaction together (Fesenmaier, 2017; Minkiewicz et al., 2014). Saarinen (2015) confirmed that conservation has a global value, and Orr et al. (2021) enlarged the role of conservation in heritage, including social life.

Komppula (2005) elaborated it more operationally in tourism and consists of functional values: utility, performance, functional destination functions such as uniqueness, conservation, authenticity, social values, and emotional value: obtained from the capacity to evoke feelings and affective states. Furthermore, the epistemic value indicates the ability that causes cognitive stimulation, innovation, and behavior. Additionally, conditional values refer to the stimuli that increase functional or social value from certain situations.

Based on the discussion above, the hypotheses to be tested in the study are as follows.

- H<sub>1</sub>: Experiential marketing positively affects customer value.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Experiential marketing positively affects e-WoM.
- H<sub>3</sub>: Customer value positively mediates the impact of experiential marketing on e-WoM.

## **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Population and data collection**

This survey research collects data using structured questionnaires and observation techniques. The populations are tourists who have visited the Rawa Bento. In this case, Nunan et al. (2021) offered a sample size of 125 units based on conventional considerations. Questionnaires were distributed to

respondents in person to person and online. Hence, this research provides 40 statements on a 7-item Likert scale where the respondents can choose the answer to each variable concept. In addition, this study also did in-depth interviews with destination managers and village officials who manage the destinations.

**Smart PLS (Partial Least Squares) Analysis**

Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis provides path models with variance-based approaches. This approach implies a looser distribution of statistical requirements and can employ for small sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2019).

**4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

**General**

Rawa Bento is located in the village of Jernih Jaya, Gunung Tujuh sub-district, Kerinci district, Jambi province. It is at an altitude of 1,333 meters above sea level and 1,000 hectares. It is formed due to the lake’s silting process, which slowly becomes a swamp. Rawa Bento refers to local vegetation that is found surrounding. Wulan et al. (2019) identified the destination as typical scenery of a swamp area covered with *Leersia hexahedra* and *Eugenia spicate*

*grass*. Furthermore, he reported several immigrant birds, ten permanent birds from Rawa Bento, and 38 others.

In addition, groups of indigenous fish are found, such as Tilapia, Seluang, Pareh, Mujair, and Semah. Other animals in the swamp forest are also found there, such as ducks, buffalo, and others. She also reported the indigenous flora: *karet* wood, *gelam* wood, *medang*, *surian*, *sesaat*, bamboo, guava, *waru*, *pandan duri*, *jeringau*, and several types of grasses Rawa Bento has nature conservation that is still awake and natural such as lakes and rivers that are still clear. Meanwhile, local indigenous fauna is found, such as butterflies, dragonflies, and tailed monkeys.

**Sample Description**

The brief sample description is shown in Table 1. As it is shown in Table 1, the respondent age modus is 18-24 (88 percent). This age composition reflects that most respondents are Generation Z, the primary user of the internet. They use various social media platforms to share experiences, including tourist spots. Furthermore, respondents used several tools, such as email, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter, and they used them to deliver their experiences to others.

**Table 1.** The sex, classification, frequencies, and percentage of the sample (n=125)

Variable	Classification	Number	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	44	35.2
	Female	81	64.8
Age	18 - 24	110	88.0
	25 - 35	4	3.2
	35 - 45	7	5.6
	> 46	4	3.2
Last Education	Senior High School	68	54.4
	Diploma	12	9.6
	Bachelor	25	28.0
	Masters	7	5.6
	Doctoral	3	2.4

Source: PLS Software output, 2021

**Statistical Results**

The validity and reliability of the research instrument are first analyzed. The validity test is based on the indicator loading factor and the results, as presented in Table 2. The loading factor value is greater than 0.7. It means that each research question and the indicators are valid. Experiential marketing: sense dimensions ( $x_1$ ) that are reflected by beautiful views of protected areas ( $x_{1.1}$ ), natural sounds ( $x_{1.2}$ ), touches of protected areas ( $x_{1.3}$ ), and flavors ( $x_{1.4}$ ) of places visited. Feel dimension ( $x_2$ ) indicates by tourist mood ( $x_{2.1}$ ) and the

emotions ( $x_{2.2}$ ) that show happiness, relaxation, uniqueness, and tactile. Think ( $x_3$ ) causes more surprises that exceed tourism expectations ( $x_{3.1}$ ) and ( $x_{3.2}$ ) attract tourists to protected areas. The act dimension ( $x_4$ ) behavior ( $x_{4.1}$ ) can influence behaviors such as swimming, climbing, or exploring. It then provides lifestyle conservation areas ( $x_{4.2}$ ), the basis for some categories’ needs. Finally, the experiential indicated by related ( $x_5$ ) includes the relationship, interacting with others, and then social identity ( $x_{5.2}$ ) expressing the tourist identity.

**Table 2.** Loading factor

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	Description
Experiential Marketing (X)	X1.1	0.752	Valid
	X1.2	0.760	Valid
	X1.3	0.781	Valid
	X1.4	0.760	Valid
	X2.1	0.835	Valid
	X2.2	0.817	Valid
	X3.1	0.854	Valid
	X3.2	0.792	Valid
	X4.1	0.788	Valid
	X4.2	0.838	Valid
electronic Word of Mouth (Y)	X5.1	0.777	Valid
	X5.2	0.850	Valid
	Y1.1	0.759	Valid
	Y2.2	0.765	Valid
	Y2.1	0.876	Valid
	Y2.2	0.859	Valid
	Y4.1	0.826	Valid
	Y4.2	0.859	Valid
	Y5.1	0.838	Valid
	Y5.2	0.809	Valid
Customer Value on Conservation (Z)	Y7.2	0.771	Valid
	Z1.1	0.802	Valid
	Z1.2	0.815	Valid
	Z1.3	0.746	Valid
	Z2.1	0.715	Valid
	Z2.2	0.793	Valid
	Z2.3	0.857	Valid
	Z3.1	0.768	Valid
	Z3.2	0.840	Valid
	Z4.1	0.778	Valid
Z4.2	0.784	Valid	

Source: PLS Software output, 2021

The second concept is e-WoM which has many tourist behavioral dimensions. The platform assists dimension (Y1) consists of tourists' tendency to upload conservation tourism activities online (Y1.1) and then their tendency to write open opinion leaders' opinions online (Y1.2). The dimension of Concern for others (Y2) reflects in tourists who share positive experiences of traveling to protection areas (Y2.1) and then tourists who want to help other tourists make decisions about protection tourism (Y2.2). Tourists in the Helping destination dimensions (Y4) are satisfied with protection tourism and then pass it on to others (Y4.1) as a form of promotion and assistance to destination managers (Y4.2). Each tourist in a protected area also has a dimension of expressing positive emotions (Y5) in the form of confidence to travel in a conserved area and then expressing themselves (Y5.1) and then feeling like an intelligent traveler in choosing and viewing a protected area. (Y5.2) social benefits dimensions (Y7) a benefit for providing benefits to virtual communities, providing tourism information about

protection areas for virtual communities (Y7.2)

The third concept is customer value on conservation destination. It has several dimensions: functional value (Z1) refers to the destination provided, which indicate by the spectacular view (Z1.1), the sanctuary area has uniqueness (Z1.2), and the nature protection is still awake and original (Z1.3). The emotional value dimension (Z2) is the utility of a protective zone that tourists feel to evoke feelings and emotional states. Includes protected areas as challenging and stimulating areas; otherwise, adrenaline (Z2.1) refers to the tourists directly interacting with nature (Z2.2), which can affect the feelings of tourists (Z2.3). The social value dimension (Z3) is related to the associations with particular social groups and pleasant tourists in the protected areas with other people (Z3.1). Then the tourists can communicate with other people at the destination (Z3.2) and epistemic value (Z4) as a part value that further awakens the cognitive state, including new experiences that tourists gain in the protection area (Z4.1) and then influences tourists with a broader

curiosity towards conservation areas (Z4.2).

The following test is to look at the reliability of the instrument. It is examined based on the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and the result is presented

in Table 3. Based on Table 3, all variables show that AVE is greater than 0.5. Therefore, it could be concluded that the instrument is reliable.

**Table 3.** Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value

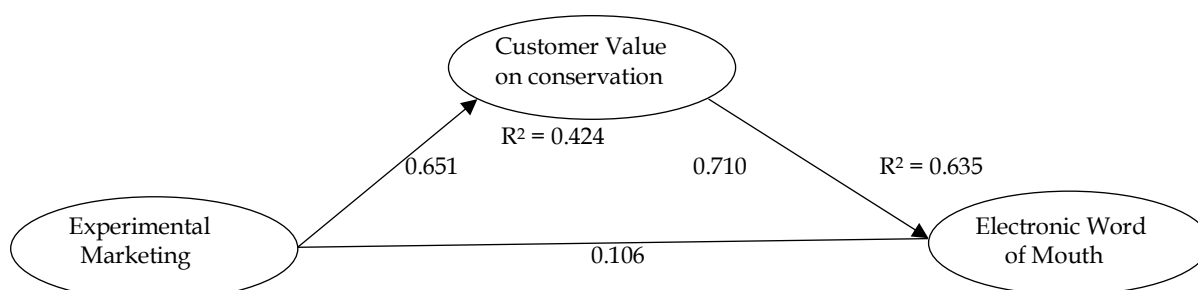
Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
electronic Word of Mouth (Y)	0.671
Experiential Marketing (X)	0.642
Customer Value on Conservation (Z)	0.625

Source: PLS Software output, 2021

**Structural Model**

The structural model testing (inner model) is carried out after the measurement model (outer model) test.

The R-square, path coefficient, and p-values show the structural model's testing process. Figure 1 presents the resulting model.



**Figure 1.** Experiential, e-WoM, and conservation customer value model  
Source: PLS Software output, 2021

The R-Square (R<sup>2</sup>) analysis or determination test aims to examine the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Based on Figure 1, experiential marketing explains the variant of e-WoM by 64%, and the rest (34 %) explain by the other variables not included in this research. Furthermore, the customer value on the conservation has a value of 0.42. So, the rest (58%) is explained by the other variables.

**Hypothesis Testing**

This study presents the results of the hypothesis in Table 4 with a significant value of 0.05. Table 4 shows that experiential marketing has a significantly positive effect on customer value on conservation and this customer value has a significantly positive effect on e-WoM. Meanwhile, experiential marketing does not significantly affect e-WoM. Furthermore, the result reveals that customer value (tourist value on conservation) could mediate the relationship between experiential marketing and e-WoM.

**Table 4.** Path coefficient value

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable			
	Customer Value		e-WoM	
	Coefficient	P-Value	Coefficient	P-Value
Experiential Marketing	0.651	0.000	0.106	0.194
Customer Value on Conservation			0.710	0.000
Experiential Marketing → Customer Value			0.462	0.000

Source: PLS Software output, 2021

**Discussion**

Experiential marketing is the tourist's perspective on their experience, requiring marketers to provide more attributes about particular destinations' value. Che et al. (2021) argued that the ecological attributes satisfy

the tourist. Kurniawan et al. (2019) further revealed the importance of a socio-ecological system to support destination sustainability. Accordingly, conservation value represents a modern marketing perspective on sustainable tourism principles. Hence

the marketer and tourist guides deliver meaningful conservation attributes. In line with it, Yacob et al. (2019) noted that conservation attribute is part of destination attraction that should be built. The more the tourist experience is established, the more information tourists deliver. So it will create destination sustainability. Regarding technology, Liu et al. (2020a) required marketers to enhance their capacity as massive marketing tools.

Accordingly, e-WoM is vital to integrate marketing tools with other devices. In the Internet of Things (IoT) era, e-WoM is realistic for customers to do what they want to do over the destination. Besides, Kotler & Keller (2021) noted the behavior of Generation Z in marketing practices. They take smartphones, tablets, connected to internet game consoles, wireless internet, and digital and social media for granted – they have always been around – making this group highly mobile, bonded, and social. They do e-WoM. Felix (2015) said that understanding changing customer expectations and preferences is critical to long-term performance. Schmitt (2011) noted that creating an engaging online experience is essential to gaining a competitive edge on the internet. Experiential marketing strengthens the relationship between brands and consumers, increases brand awareness, creates buzz, and encourages positive e-WoM (Urdea & Constantin, 2021).

Consequently, destination managers must improve facilities and other infrastructure to provide more experience and value for visitors, including adding to tourist attractions and the destination's uniqueness. Liu et al. (2020b) stated that companies should design a focus journey map to maximize customer touchpoints based on experience, ensuring customer value proposition engagement. The role of the government must also be to support the development and sustainability of destinations; for example, the government has more rights and parts in policies and intensive relationships related to destination asset development and management.

In terms of Generation Z, as the main respondents of this study, tourist guides need to make interactive communication with the tourist. A comfortable destination information system will direct tourists to get involved easier (Johannes et al., 2022). Hence, they will increase their e-WoM role and deliver conservation value attributes as the primary information. Customers' experiences and values will shape conveying e-WoM behavior. So, if visitors are satisfied, they direct e-WoM behavior themselves. Visitors who are satisfied with the destination share their experiences and feelings on the internet. Then

visitors also share their experiences with others through the virtual community.

## **5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS**

Rawa Bento belongs to global conservation destination tourism. This study aims to examine the factors influencing e-WoM for rural tourism destinations. The results show that experiential marketing has a significantly positive effect on customer value on conservation, while it has no significant impact on e-WoM. Furthermore, the result reveals that customer value on conservation could mediate the relationship between experiential marketing and e-WoM.

The finding implies a need for cooperation between the local park authority, village officials, and destination managers to make Rawa Bento a potential destination. e-WoM is vital in driving tourism to be a marketer that integrates Rawa Bento managers and village officials. Tourists can deliver the destination advantages or their feeling. The manager's guide recommended enlightening the tourist about the marketable conservation attributes as the value for tourists. In doing so, potential tourists will find it easier to deliver all the news to their connected people.

This research has technical limitations, especially in obtaining comprehensive information from relevant parties managing Rawa Bento tourist destinations. In this regard, future research focuses on the competence and capacity of destination managers, BUM Desa (village-owned enterprises), and the local public figure. They are expected to be able to formulate tourism attributes and their uniqueness through a story that pleases tourists. Qualitative research and case studies are the right choices for this growing destination.

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