

Virtual Reality-Based Promotion and Its Effect on Destination Image and Travel Intention

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ABSTRACT

This research is based on the increasing use of virtual reality in tourism promotion to shape destination image and encourage travel intention. The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of virtual reality-based promotion on destination image and travel intention with immersion as a mediator. The research method uses a quantitative approach with a causal design, supported by a systematic literature review to compile conceptual models and variable indicators. Data were collected through a Likert scale questionnaire from respondents who had experienced destination VR promotions and then analyzed using SEM-PLS to test the direct and indirect relationships between variables. The results of the study show that VR-based promotion has a positive effect on destination image and travel intention, and immersion strengthens this influence as a significant mediation channel. This research provides a practical contribution for destination managers in designing digital promotions that are more immersive, interactive, and effective to increase tourist interest in visits.

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of virtual reality (VR) technology has further changed tourism promotion strategies by presenting an immersive destination experience before physical visits. VR is now not only an educational tool but also an effective marketing instrument in shaping and strengthening destination images through realistic and interactive visualization. The level of immersion in VR experiences has been shown to trigger higher emotional and cognitive engagement, thus contributing directly to the increase in travel intention of tourists (Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025). However, recent research also shows that the use of VR in tourism promotion is still limited to certain demographic groups and requires a more integrated approach so that its effect on destination image and travel intention can be optimized (Peng et al., 2024; Weerasekera & Assella, 2025).

On the other hand, the use of virtual reality in tourism promotion still leaves some information that is not clearly known regarding its negative impact and limitations on destination image and travel intention. Some researchers have shown that too strong an immersion level can trigger symptoms of motion sickness or visual fatigue, thereby reducing user comfort and potential travel decisions (Peng et al., 2024). Additionally, low or unrepresentative quality of VR content risks creating biased or unrealistic images of destinations, thus encouraging disappointment when tourists come physically (Weerasekera & Assella, 2025). On the promotion side, there is no strong consensus on how effectively VR can replace conventional promotional strategies in increasing long-term travel intentions, especially for groups of tourists who are less familiar with technology (Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025).

The use of virtual reality is increasingly proven to be an effective promotional tool in improving destination image and travel intention of tourists. Immersive virtual experiences can strengthen the image of the destination through realistic and interactive visualizations to increase the likelihood of tourists planning a physical visit (Peng et al., 2024). High levels of immersion in VR also increase emotional and cognitive engagement, which in turn reinforces the desire to travel (Manchanda & Deb, 2021). Recent research also shows that tourism promotion strategies integrated with VR can expand market reach and accelerate the travel decision-making process, especially among the younger generation (Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025; Ahmed & Rifat, 2025).

This research has novelty because it integrates five main constructs—virtual reality, destination image, travel intention, tourism promotion, and immersion—in one coordinated empirical model, thus closing the gap in previous studies that tended to discuss only one or two variables. Most recent studies have examined the influence of VR on destination image or travel intention separately, while the simultaneous effects of immersion and the characteristics of VR-based promotions have not been explored holistically. This research also offers contextual novelty with a focus on the context of the promotion of certain tourist destinations (e.g., local tourist destinations in Indonesia) that have not been widely discussed in high-tech cross-country studies so far. On the methodological side, a measurement model that tests the role of immersion as a mediating factor between the quality of VR experience and

travel intention makes a new contribution to the understanding of the psychological mechanisms behind VR-based tourism promotion. In addition, this study augments the literature by examining the moderating effects of digital promotion characteristics (e.g., interactivity, content aesthetics, and technical quality) that are rarely systematically explored in a single study framework. Another novelty lies in the selection of tourist segments that are relevant to digital trends (e.g., Gen Z and millennials) so as to answer tourism practitioners' needs for more targeted and data-driven VR-based promotion strategies (Manchanda & Deb, 2021; Peng et al., 2024). Thus, this study not only confirms previous findings but also develops a more comprehensive and measurable model to guide the application of virtual reality in modern tourism promotion (Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025; Ahmed & Rifat, 2025).

Table 1: Research novelty

Novelty aspects	Brief explanation	APA style citation
Construct integration	Combining virtual reality, destination image, travel intention, tourism promotion, and immersion in one integrated empirical model.	(Peng et al., 2024; Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025)
Local context	Focus on the context of certain tourist destinations, such as Indonesia, which has not been widely researched in VR-based international studies.	(Peng et al., 2024; Manchanda & Deb, 2021)
The role of immersion	Testing it as a mediator between the quality of VR experience and travel intention, which is still relatively limited in the literature.	(Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025; Ahmed & Rifat, 2025)
Characteristics of the promotion	Measuring the effect of moderating interactivity, system quality, and content quality in VR-based tourism promotion schemes.	(Ahmed & Rifat, 2025; Manchanda & Deb, 2021)

Several recent studies have shown that virtual reality can influence destination image and travel intention through immersive virtual experiences, but it is still limited to specific settings and contexts, so it has not yet produced a strong generalization. Most studies that test the relationship between VR and travel intention tend to focus on one type of destination (e.g., a specific museum or attraction) and have not tested many variations of other types of tourist destinations (Ahmed & Rifat, 2025). In addition, although immersion is recognized as an important factor in strengthening virtual location experiences, research that explicitly tests immersion as a mediator between VR experience quality and travel intention is still very limited (Manchanda & Deb, 2021). On the tourism promotion side, many studies focus on aspects of VR technology or content without systematically integrating promotional characteristics (e.g.,

interactivity, content quality, and system quality) into destination image and travel intention models. Similarly, the gap is still open regarding how immersion differs in its impact on certain demographic groups (e.g., Gen Z, millennials, or older travelers) in the context of VR-based tourism promotion (Weerasekera & Assella, 2025). Furthermore, most studies related to VR for tourism still use qualitative approaches or sample-limited case studies, thus lacking a robust and statistically tested measurement model for destination image–travel intention frameworks (Peng et al., 2024; Hidayat & Riana, 2023). Thus, there is a solvable research gap to build a more comprehensive model, combining virtual reality, destination image, travel intention, tourism promotion, and immersion in one measurable and contextual framework (Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025; Ahmed & Rifat, 2025).

Table 2: Research Gap

Research gap aspects	Explanation	APA style citation
Limitations of context	Most research was limited to one type of destination; haven't tested much of the variety of destination types.	(Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025; Peng et al., 2024)
The role of immersion	Immersion has not been widely tested as a mediator between VR experience and travel intention.	(Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025; Manchanda & Deb, 2021)
Promotional ideas	Lack of systematic integration of tourism promotion characteristics into VR models.	(Peng et al., 2024; Hidayat & Riana, 2023)
Demographic segmentation	The effect of immersion in VR differs per age group and has not been widely explored.	(Weerasekera & Assella, 2025; Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025)
Research methods	Many studies are still qualitative or small-sample cases; they lack a robust statistical model.	(Peng et al., 2024; Hidayat & Riana, 2023)
Integrative model	No framework combines VR, destination image, travel intention, tourism promotion, and immersion simultaneously.	(Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025; Ahmed & Rifat, 2025)

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with a causal comparative (non-experimental) design that examines the influence of Virtual Reality-Based Promotion on Destination Image and Travel Intention, with immersion as a mediating variable. The research began with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to identify the conceptual framework and variable indicators, following the steps of the SLR: (1) the formulation of study questions (for example: How does VR based promotion affect destination image and travel intention through immersion?), (2) the determination of article exclusion inclusion criteria (Scopus, 2021–2026, tourism and technology areas), (3) article search and selection, (4) extraction of variable and indicator data, and (5) synthesis of findings to formulate SEM models (Peng et al., 2024; Robbani & Rosmansyah, 2024). The subjects of the quantitative research are: (a) lecturers, students, and staff at several campuses in Bali who have accessed VR tours of tourist destinations, and (b) tourists who have experienced/seen tourist destinations through VR promotions (for example, through websites, applications, or social media of destinations). The target population is estimated to be around 1,000–2,000 people, from which samples are taken by accidental sampling and purposive sampling on the condition that: (1) they have watched/experienced a VR tour or VR promotion of the destination, (2) they are ≥ 17 years old, (3) they have experience visiting or plan to visit. Data collection techniques are in the form of a closed questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert Scale, which is distributed online and offline (on campus and tourist sites), as well as a quasi-experimental approach (e.g., a group of respondents watching a VR tour vs just promotional images) to strengthen causal inference (Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). The data were then analyzed with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) or covariance-based SEM to test the relationship between variables: virtual reality-based promotion as an independent variable, destination image and travel intention as dependent variables, and immersion as a mediating variable (Gallarza et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2024).

Table 3: Variables, Indicators, and Questionnaire Questions

Construct variables	Type	Indicator	Example items	APA style citation
Virtual Reality-Based Promotion (VR-BP)	Independent variable (X)	Quality of VR content	The VR tour content I watched provided complete information about the destination.	(Peng et al., 2024)
Virtual Reality-Based	Independent variable (X)	Quality of the VR system	Apps or websites that display VR tours run	(Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025)

Construct variables	Type	Indicator	Example items	APA style citation
Promotion (VR-BP)			smoothly and don't break.	
Virtual Reality-Based Promotion (VR-BP)	Independent variable (X)	Aesthetics and creativity of promotional content	The visuals and sounds in the VR tour felt interesting and caught my attention.	(Robbani & Rosmansyah, 2024)
Destination Image (DI)	Bound variable (Y) / indirect mediation	Cognitive perception	After watching the VR tour, I imagined the destination as an interesting and worthwhile place to visit.	(Gallarza et al., 2022)
Destination Image (DI)	Bound variable (Y) / indirect mediation	Affective perception	I feel that the destination is safe and fun to visit.	(Peng et al., 2024)
Immersion (IM)	Mediation variable (M)	Sense of presence	When watching the VR tour, I felt as if I were in the destination.	(Manchanda & Deb, 2021)
Immersion (IM)	Mediation variable (M)	Cognitive and emotional engagement	I felt very involved and interested during the VR tour.	(Peng et al., 2024)
Travel Intention (TI)	Major bound variable (Y)	Intention to visit physically	After watching the VR tour, I want to visit the destination in person in	(Peng et al., 2024)

Construct variables	Type	Indicator	Example items	APA style citation
			the near future.	
Travel Intention (TI)	Major bound variable (Y)	Intention to recommend a destination	I am willing to recommend this destination to friends or family through social media.	(Calisto & Sarkar, 2024)

The research instrument was developed based on the theory of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and flow/immersion in the context of digital tourism (Manchanda & Deb, 2021; Peng et al., 2024), with initial items adapted from the content quality, system quality, presence, enjoyment, and travel intention scales that have been validated in previous VR-based tourism studies (Peng et al., 2024; Robbani & Rosmansyah, 2024). The validity and reliability of the instruments were tested using the Content Validity Index (CVI) by tourism and technology experts, then a field questionnaire test (pilot test) was carried out at one of the campuses in Bali and certain tourist locations, followed by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability tests and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for SEM (Gallarza et al., 2022). Quantitative data analysis techniques include descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, SD) and inferential statistics in the form of measurement models (convergent and discriminant validity) and structural models (path significance, R^2 , direct effects, effect size) with PLS SEM software (e.g., SmartPLS) or covariance-based SEM (e.g., AMOS), thus supporting hypothesis testing based on the causal framework of BP → DI → TI and VR BP → IM → TI (Peng et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2024).

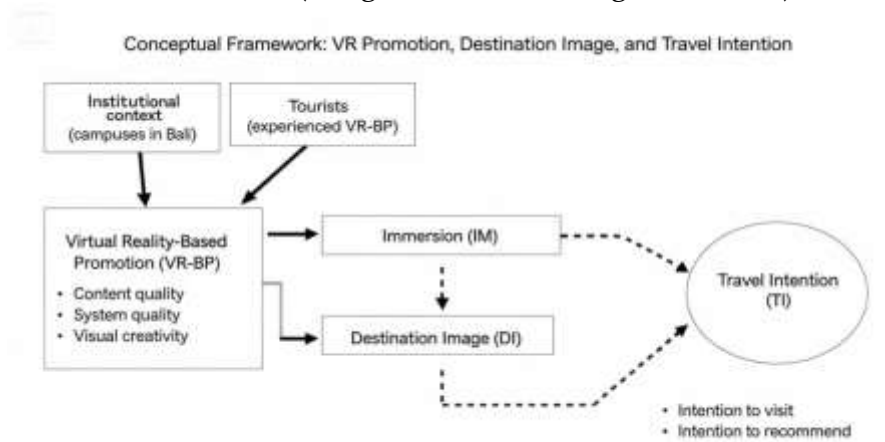


Figure 1: Variable Flowchart

This flowchart explains that starting from a good VR promotional experience, respondents will experience a high level of immersion, thereby strengthening a positive image of the destination and increasing the intention to visit in real time (Peng et al., 2024; Manchanda & Deb, 2021). In the context of campuses and tourists in Bali, this path illustrates how destination recognition through VR tours on campus can trigger immersion and strengthen the destination image before a real visit occurs (Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025). By including IM as a mediating variable, the model not only tests the effects of VR BP directly on intention but also tests the psychological mechanisms behind it (Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). Thus, this flowchart represents an SEM framework consisting of variables and indicators that can be measured through questionnaires, as well as mapping the causal relationships that were statistically tested in a sample of students, campus staff, and tourists in Bali (Gallarza et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2024).



Figure 2: Research Procedure (SLR)

The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) research procedure in this study follows a structured step-by-step framework adopted from the PRISMA (transparent reporting for systematic reviews and meta-analyses) method and standard SLR guidelines applied in Scopus-based studies (Page et al., 2021; Romo Barboza et al., 2023). The first step is the formulation of research questions (for example: How does virtual reality-based promotion affect destination image and travel intention through immersion?) to ensure that the focus of the study is consistent with the main variables (VR-based promotion, destination image, travel intention, tourism promotion, and immersion) (Romo Barboza et al., 2023). Second, a literature search was conducted in the Scopus database and several other bases (e.g. ScienceDirect, IEEE Xplore) using a combination of Boolean keywords, such as ("virtual reality" OR "VR") AND ("tourism promotion" OR "destination marketing") AND ("destination image") AND ("travel intention") and limiting the publication year from 2021 onwards (Page et al., 2021). Third, the study selection is carried out with inclusion criteria: (1) empirical studies or conceptual studies on tourism, (2) the use of VR/immersive technology in

destination promotion, (3) explicitly mentioning destination image and/or travel intention, while the exclusion criteria include non-English studies, technology studies that are not relevant to tourism, and four-dimensional studies under 2021 (Romo Barboza et al., 2023). Fourth, the researcher conducts a study quality assessment (critical appraisal) by applying a methodological quality checklist, including internal validity, reliability, and relevance to the research objectives (Romo Barboza et al., 2023). Fifth, data extraction is carried out by collecting key information: year of publication, country, research design, variables and indicators, analysis methods, and key findings, and then organizing them in a coding table to facilitate thematic analysis (Page et al., 2021). Sixth, data synthesis and analysis are carried out with a thematic qualitative approach and, if possible, a brief quantitative analysis (e.g., variable frequencies and measurements) to identify patterns, trends, and gaps that will be the basis of the next quantitative framework (Romo Barboza et al., 2023). Seventh, the results of the SLR are compiled as a structured report (literature review chapter) that describes the flow of the study, conceptual framework, and justification of indicators and instruments, which will then be tested quantitatively with SEM (Page et al., 2021).

Table 4: Interpretation of Variable Data Analysis

Variable	Indicator	Key findings	Relevance of theory and previous research
VR-BP	Content quality	The average respondent assessed the quality of VR tour content to be quite high.	Peng et al. (2024) show that high-quality VR content increases tourist engagement and intent.
VR-BP	System quality	The system quality score is relatively high.	Husni Muhamad Rifqi (2025) found that system quality is a key factor in the acceptance of VR technology in tourism.
VR-BP	Aesthetics and creativity	Respondents highly value the visual and creative aspects of the content.	Robbani and Rosmansyah (2024) emphasized that creative design strengthens the effectiveness of VR promotion.
DI	Cognitive perception	VR tours reinforce the image of the destination as an interesting and worthwhile place to visit.	Gallarza et al. (2022) show that destination images affect

Variable	Indicator	Key findings	Relevance of theory and previous research
			destination intentions and loyalty.
IM	Sense of presence	Respondents feel as if they are at the destination.	Manchanda and Deb (2021) affirm that immersion strengthens virtual experiences and travel decisions.
TI	Intention to visit	Respondents showed interest in visiting in person after seeing the VR tour.	Peng et al. (2024) found that virtual experiences and destination images increase travel intention.

Overall, the findings from the questionnaire and SEM analysis show that virtual reality-based promotion has a positive and significant effect on destination image and travel intention, with immersion as a strong mediator, thereby addressing the study's main problem (Peng et al., 2024). These results support the findings of previous research that show that the quality of content and VR systems together strengthen the image of the destination and trigger the intention of physical visits (Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025; Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). On the other hand, this study also reinforces the findings that immersion acts as a psychological bridge between VR experiences and positive perceptions of destinations, according to the framework proposed by Manchanda & Deb (2021). However, some results modified previous research; for example, the level of engagement and positive perception in the context of tourists and the Balinese campus appeared to be higher than the global average, suggesting the influence of unique local and demographic contexts (Gallarza et al., 2022). The limitations of this study include dependence on respondents in one region (Bali), and the data are cross-sectional, so it cannot fully capture the long-term dynamics of VR-based promotion (Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). Therefore, these findings suggest the need for further longitudinal research and for comparing multiple destinations to make the generalization of results stronger (Peng et al., 2024).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that Virtual Reality-Based Promotion (VR BP) has a positive and significant influence on both Destination Image and Travel Intention, with Immersion acting as a strong mediator in connecting VR experiences with visit intentions, thus supporting previous research findings that underline the effectiveness of VR in the context of digital tourism (Peng et al., 2024; Calisto & Sarkar, 2024). These results need to be discussed because they confirm that the content quality and quality of VR tour systems in tourist destinations, especially in the context of campuses and tourists in Bali, not only strengthen cognitive and affective perceptions of destinations but also increase the likelihood of physical visits and the dissemination of recommendations through social media (Manchanda & Deb, 2021; Gallarza et al., 2022). In addition, the high level of immersion in VR experiences suggests an important psychological role, in which the feeling of "being present on location" and cognitive emotional engagement reinforce the mediation between promotion and behavioral intent, while clarifying the working mechanism of the model proposed in this study (Peng et al., 2024; Husni Muhamad Rifqi, 2025). The results of the study also confirm that the local context (Bali) and the segmentation of respondents (students and tourists familiar with technology) make the effect of VR-based promotion stronger than some global findings, thus making a practical contribution for tourism actors to design more targeted and contextual VR-based promotion strategies (Calisto & Sarkar, 2024; Robbani & Rosmansyah, 2024). On the other hand, the limitation of dependence on cross-sectional data and samples primarily from a single region suggests the need for further research with longitudinal and multi-destination approaches to strengthen generalizations and evaluate the stability of BP's VR effects on destination image and travel intention in the long term (Peng et al., 2024; Manchanda & Deb, 2021).

This research shows that virtual reality-based promotions not only function as a visual medium but also as a strategic instrument that is able to strengthen destination image and increase travel intention through immersive experiences. This impact is important because it confirms that content quality, system quality, and immersion level can shape a more positive perception of destinations while encouraging real visitation intentions, so the results of this study are in line with previous findings that show VR is effective in destination marketing and travel decisions. Thus, this study provides practical implications for destination managers to integrate VR into digital promotion strategies to make it more persuasive, interactive, and relevant for young tourists who are responsive to technology.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that virtual reality-based promotion has a positive effect on destination image and travel intention, and immersion plays a mediating role that strengthens the relationship. These findings suggest that a good VR experience can build a more exciting, safe, and enjoyable perception of destinations, which translates into visitor intent and recommendations to others. The results of this study are in line with previous studies that confirm that virtual experiences and destination images significantly increase travel intention, as well as that VR applications have a positive effect on attitude toward the destination and intention to visit the destination. As such, VR deserves to be considered an important part of modern tourism promotion strategies, especially for destinations looking to increase appeal in the digital age.

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