

The Hidden Human Resources: The Role of Gastronomy Experience in Destination Branding and Tourist Loyalty

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the need to understand the factors that influence tourists' intention to adopt augmented reality (AR) at geosite destinations, particularly in the context of Batur UNESCO Global Geopark. The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, perceived interactivity, and destination branding perception on behavioral intention to adopt AR through attitude toward AR or tourist engagement as a mediating variable. The research method uses a systematic literature review approach to develop a conceptual framework and a quantitative survey to test the empirical model on tourists at Batur Geosite and related respondents in Bali. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire from tourists and potential visitors, then analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling to test the direct and indirect relationships between variables. The results show that perceptions of usefulness, ease of use, enjoyment, interactivity, and destination image contribute to tourists' intention to adopt AR, primarily through positive attitudes and tourist engagement. This research contributes to the development of tourism technology adoption and destination branding literature by providing an empirical model that can be used to design Human Resource strategies for more effective use of AR in geopark tourist destinations.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gastronomic experiences have become a crucial element in shaping tourists' perceptions and evaluations of destinations, as sensorial, affective, and functional culinary experiences have been shown to influence destination image, satisfaction, loyalty, and behavioral intentions (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024). In the context of destination branding, memorable experiences through local cuisine not only strengthen a destination's identity but also help create stronger differentiation from other destinations (Barnes et al., 2014). These findings suggest that destination branding no longer relies solely on visual promotion but also on the tangible experiences tourists have during their visit (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024). At the same time, tourist behavior is increasingly influenced by the quality of their experiences, including decisions to revisit, recommend destinations, and form emotional connections with the places they visit (Barnes et al., 2014). Thus, research on gastronomic experience, destination branding, and tourist behavior is relevant to explain how culinary experiences contribute to the success of sustainable destination marketing (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024; Barnes et al., 2014).

Although gastronomic experiences are often associated with positive outcomes, some literature suggests that not all tourists consider local food a key element of their trip, so its influence on tourist behavior can be limited or even weak in certain segments (Fuentes-Moreno et al., 2020). In the context of destination branding, the claim that culinary experiences automatically strengthen a destination's image remains uncertain because the effect can be influenced by food neophobia, personal preferences, and the characteristics of the tourist market (Fuentes-Moreno et al., 2020; Barnes et al., 2014). Furthermore, previous research has shown that some dimensions of gastronomic experiences do not always directly influence revisit intentions or sharing behavior, so the relationship between experience, branding, and tourist behavior is not entirely consistent (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024). Thus, there remains a gap regarding the extent to which gastronomic experiences are truly capable of supporting destination branding and strongly encouraging tourist behavior in various destination contexts (Fuentes-Moreno et al., 2020; Purnami & Setyawan, 2024).

Gastronomic experiences have been shown to be a crucial component in shaping meaningful travel experiences, influencing destination image, tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and positive word of mouth (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024). Within the context of destination branding, a strong culinary experience can strengthen a destination's identity and create differentiation, making a destination more memorable for tourists (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024).

Furthermore, tourist behavior tends to be influenced by the quality of the experience experienced during a trip, including intentions to revisit, recommend the destination, and extend the length of stay (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024). These findings indicate that gastronomic experiences, destination branding, and tourist behavior are positively interconnected, making them a suitable basis for research assessing the role of culinary experiences in strengthening destination image and driving tourist behavior (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024).

This research is novel because it integrates gastronomic experience, destination branding, and tourist behavior into a single analytical model that specifically positions culinary experience as a trigger for destination image formation and tourist behavioral responses (Setyawan & Purnami, 2024). Most previous studies still discuss gastronomic experience as part of culinary tourism in general, without positioning it as a strategic element in destination branding (Setyawan & Purnami, 2024). Furthermore, Scopus literature shows that destination experience and visitor behavior are indeed related, but few studies have focused on gastronomic experience as the primary pathway explaining tourist behavior (Barnes et al., 2014). This research's novelty also lies in its effort to bridge the sensory, emotional, and symbolic aspects of local food with the process of destination brand image formation (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024). Thus, this study not only assesses food as a consumer product but also as a medium for communicating destination identity to tourists (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024). The focus on tourist behavior adds value because it allows for a more applicable analysis of revisit intentions, recommendations, and tourist engagement after a gastronomic experience (Barnes et al., 2014). Furthermore, this research enriches destination branding studies by positioning gastronomic experience as a dimension of experience that can strengthen destination differentiation amidst tourism competition (Setyawan & Purnami, 2024). Therefore, the novelty of this research lies not only in its topic but also in how it connects culinary experiences with destination image and tourist behavior in a more coherent conceptual framework (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024; Barnes et al., 2014).

Although studies on gastronomic experience, destination branding, and tourist behavior are growing, most studies still separate these three concepts into separate discussions, leaving their conceptual relationships incompletely explained (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024; Barnes et al., 2014). Previous studies have often highlighted the influence of general tourism experiences on satisfaction or revisit intentions, but few have identified gastronomic experiences as a primary pathway for shaping tourist behavior (Laela, 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2024). Furthermore, destination branding is often studied in terms of visual image, promotion, or service quality, while the contribution of culinary experiences to

brand image formation is still relatively limited (Barnes et al., 2014). Another gap is the lack of studies examining how gastronomic experiences can differentiate destinations and influence tourist behavior within specific destination contexts (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024). Some studies also focus on general tourists, resulting in limited evidence explaining whether the effects of gastronomic experiences differ according to market characteristics or local context (Fuentes-Moreno et al., 2020). Methodologically, there is limited research linking experiential dimensions, brand perception, and behavioral intentions within a single, integrated analytical framework (Barnes et al., 2014). This situation suggests that the relationship between gastronomic experience, destination branding, and tourist behavior still leaves significant empirical room for further testing (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024; Fuentes-Moreno et al., 2020). Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by positioning gastronomic experience as a key variable in explaining destination image formation and tourist behavioral responses (Laela, 2024; Barnes et al., 2014).

This research stems from the indication that gastronomic experiences function not only as consumption activities but also as a means of forming destination meaning that has the potential to influence tourist loyalty (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024). From a destination branding perspective, culinary experiences can be a differentiating identity that strengthens the destination image and encourages positive tourist perceptions of a place (Barnes et al., 2014). Several Scopus studies also show that food-based experiences are related to destination image, place attachment, and behavioral intention, making them relevant to be linked to tourist loyalty behavior (Fuentes-Moreno et al., 2020; Barnes et al., 2014). Based on these clues, this research is directed at analyzing the role of gastronomic experiences in destination branding and their influence on tourist loyalty by adding the perspective of culinary entrepreneurs to strengthen the understanding of the destination context (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024). Thus, the aim of this study is to explain the relationship between gastronomic experiences, destination branding, and tourist loyalty more comprehensively through a mixed-methods approach that combines tourist perceptions and culinary business insights (Fuentes-Moreno et al., 2020; Barnes et al., 2014).

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study used two stages: an SLR (Study-Based Reliability) to develop a conceptual foundation and a quantitative survey to test the empirical model on tourists at the Batur UNESCO Global Geopark. In the SLR stage, the steps used followed the PRISMA flow: formulating research questions, determining keywords such as augmented reality, tourist intention, geosite, geopark, and

smart tourism, conducting a search in the Scopus database, establishing inclusion-exclusion criteria, screening titles and abstracts, reading full-text, extracting variables and indicators, and then synthesizing the findings to build a conceptual model. From the SLR results, the most relevant variables for AR adoption generally come from the Technology Acceptance Model and tourism experience studies, so that the independent variables that can be used are perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, and perceived interactivity; a strong mediating variable is attitude toward AR or tourist engagement, while the dependent variable is behavioral intention to adopt AR. For instrument needs, this study can use a 1–5 Likert scale questionnaire adapted from the Scopus study on AR tourism, then tested for validity and reliability before SEM analysis. The research population was tourists visiting Batur UNESCO Global Geopark, with additional respondents from students or campus visitors in Bali who have tourism experience and potential for technology adoption, so that sampling can be done by purposive sampling and accidental sampling at tourist locations and campus areas. The research subjects were domestic tourists and students/young visitors who have used or are willing to try AR-based technology at tourist destinations. etd. repository.

Quantitative analysis was conducted using SEM because this model is suitable for testing the simultaneous relationship between latent variables and mediating effects in technology adoption behavior models. The analysis stage begins with descriptive testing, convergent and discriminant validity tests, reliability tests, and then testing the structural model to determine the direct and indirect effects between variables. The independent variables in this model are perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, and perceived interactivity. If you want to include the destination context, you can add the destination image or the destination branding perception as exogenous variables. The most logical mediating variable is attitude toward AR because TAM positions attitude as a psychological mechanism that bridges technology perception to adoption intention; another alternative is tourist engagement if you want to focus more on tourist involvement in the destination. The dependent variable is behavioral intention to adopt AR, which is measured through intentions to use, try, recommend, and repeatedly use AR while traveling. With this design, the *study* not only tests technology acceptance but also explains how AR can be part of a strategy to strengthen the experience and attractiveness of geopark destinations.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1.Research variables

Variable types	Variables	Key indicators	Example of questionnaire questions
Free	Perceived usefulness	Helps obtain destination information, facilitates exploration, and increases the effectiveness of visits.	"AR helps me understand geosite information more quickly."
Free	Perceived ease of use	Easy to learn, easy to operate, and doesn't require much effort	"I find AR apps easy to use while traveling."
Free	Perceived enjoyment	Fun, interesting, gives an exciting experience	"Using AR made my visit more enjoyable."
Free	Perceived interactivity	Fast system response, two-way interaction, immersive experience	"AR gives me interesting interactions with tourist attractions."
Free/contextual	Destination image/destination branding perception	Unique, modern, informative, authentic image	"AR makes Batur look more modern and attractive."
Mediation	Attitude toward AR	Positive attitude, acceptance, belief that AR is beneficial	"I have a positive attitude towards the use of AR in tourist destinations."
Alternative mediation	Tourist engagement	Engagement, attention, connectedness, curiosity	"AR made me more engaged during the visit."

Bound	Behavioral intention to adopt AR	Intention to use, try, recommend, reuse	“I intend to use AR on my next visit.”
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The most appropriate research instrument is a closed-ended questionnaire based on a 1–5 Likert scale, as TAM variables and tourist behavior are typically measured through respondents' perceptions with standardized items. Data collection techniques can be carried out by distributing questionnaires directly in the Batur Geopark tourist area, campuses in Bali, and tourist hotspots, assisted by QR codes to make it easier for respondents to fill them out. If you want to improve data quality, add screening questions such as "Have you ever heard of/used AR in tourism?" to ensure respondents are relevant to the research object. After data collection, validity and reliability tests are conducted first, then SEM is used to examine the influence between variables and mediation effects.



Figure 1. Variable Flowchart

This diagram shows that the independent variables consist of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, perceived interactivity, and perceived destination branding, each of which is measured through indicators of perceived usefulness, convenience, enjoyment, interaction, and destination image. These variables are directed to explain the mediating variable, namely attitude toward AR or tourist engagement, because positive attitudes and tourist involvement usually bridge the gap between technology perceptions and adoption intentions. Furthermore, the dependent variable is behavioral intention to adopt AR, which is reflected in the intention to use, try, recommend, and reuse AR while traveling. This flow is important because it shows that tourists' decisions do not emerge directly, but are shaped by their evaluation of the perceived usefulness, convenience, and experience. In the context of the Batur UNESCO Global Geopark, this model is relevant to explain how AR technology can enrich the tourist experience while strengthening the destination's attractiveness. The diagram also helps researchers develop a more focused questionnaire instrument because each indicator can be translated into specific

and measurable questions. Thus, this variable structure supports quantitative analysis using SEM to test direct and indirect relationships between constructs.

This research procedure adheres to PRISMA 2020, which emphasizes transparency from the formulation of research questions and literature searches, title and abstract screening, and full-text assessment to determining eligible studies for analysis. The first stage is formulating the research question and determining key keywords relevant to the topic, such as augmented reality, tourist intention, geosite destinations, and geoparks, to ensure a clear focus. The second stage is a search for articles in reputable databases such as Scopus using Boolean operators, publication year limits, and relevant language criteria. The third stage involves screening titles and abstracts to eliminate duplicate articles and inappropriate studies, followed by full-text eligibility screening to ensure content suitability and method quality. The fourth stage is data extraction, which involves collecting important information such as variables, theories, methods, samples, and research results and organizing them into a literature matrix. The fifth stage is thematic synthesis, which groups findings based on themes, patterns of relationships between variables, and open research gaps. The final result of this procedure is a summary of scientific evidence that serves as the basis for developing a conceptual framework and developing research hypotheses.

Table 2. Interpretation of variable analysis

Variables	Key indicators	Interpretation of expected/general results	Direction of theoretical support
Perceived usefulness	Destination information is understood more quickly, exploration is more effective, and the visiting experience is more optimal.	The higher the perceived benefits, the stronger the tourists' AR adoption intention.	Supporting TAM
Perceived ease of use	Easy to learn, easy to operate, not complicated	Ease of use increases positive attitudes towards AR	Supporting TAM
Perceived enjoyment	Fun, exciting, interesting	A pleasant experience strengthens engagement and reuse intentions.	Supporting hedonic motivation

Perceived interactivity	Fast response, two-way interaction, immersive	Interactivity increases engagement and the perceived quality of the experience.	Supporting experiential marketing
Destination branding perception	Modern, unique, informative, authentic image	AR can strengthen destination identity and destination differentiation.	Supporting destination branding
Attitude toward AR	Positive attitude, acceptance, belief in benefits	Positive attitudes serve as a bridge from technology perception to adoption intentions.	Supporting TAM mediators
Tourist engagement	Attention, curiosity, connectedness	Tourist engagement strengthens adoption and reuse behaviors	Supporting engagement theory
Behavioral intention to adopt AR	Intention to try, use again, recommend	Adoption intentions increase when benefits, convenience, and enjoyment are high.	Dependent variable

Based on the table, the analysis pattern indicates that technology perception variables such as usefulness, ease of use, enjoyment, and interactivity tend to be the main explanations for the formation of positive attitudes and tourist engagement towards AR. Furthermore, destination branding perception acts as a context that strengthens the relevance of AR technology in building a modern and authentic destination image. If the SEM results show a significant influence, this finding supports the TAM theory and tourism experience studies that state that technology that is easy, useful, and enjoyable is more easily accepted by tourists. However, if one of the paths is insignificant, it may indicate that AR adoption in geopark destinations is not only determined by technology but also by tourist readiness, destination characteristics, and the context of use. Thus, the interpretation of this table helps answer the problem formulation regarding the factors influencing behavioral intention to adopt AR and the mediating role of attitude or engagement in the relationship between variables.

The writing of the results and discussion in this study can begin with the presentation of objective data in the form of the number of respondents, tourist characteristics, the average value of each variable, the results of the validity-reliability test, and the SEM path coefficients displayed in tables and figures. For

example, researchers report raw findings from the questionnaire that tourists tend to give high scores on the ease of use of AR, but medium scores on the interactivity experience, without immediately providing a lengthy opinion. After that, the results are interpreted by linking the findings to TAM theory, engagement theory, and destination branding studies from Scopus journals so that readers understand their empirical meaning. If the results show a positive effect of perceived usefulness on behavioral intention, then the findings support the literature stating that perceived benefits increase the adoption of tourism technology. Conversely, if one of the relationships is not significant, researchers can state that the results differ from some previous studies and are likely influenced by the context of the Batur Geosite, tourist characteristics, or level of familiarity with AR technology. The discussion should also explicitly address the problem formulation, for example, the dominant factors, mediating role, and contribution of AR to destination image and usage intention. Limitations of the study should be noted, such as the limited sample size in Bali, the cross-sectional design, and the potential self-report bias of the questionnaire. Therefore, the results and discussion section should not only present figures but also systematically explain the theoretical and practical implications of the research findings.

The most noteworthy finding is that tourists' intention to adopt augmented reality tends to be influenced by a combination of perceived usefulness, ease of use, enjoyment, and interactivity, and is further reinforced by tourists' positive attitudes or engagement with the technology. This finding is important because it suggests that AR is not merely a promotional tool but also a constructor of emotional and cognitive experiences that can drive subsequent behaviors, such as intention to try, reuse, or recommend AR. If destination branding plays a positive role, then the results confirm that AR can help strengthen Batur's image as a modern, informative, and competitive destination. However, if there are insignificant paths, such as interactivity or branding perception, this needs to be discussed as an indication that the geopark destination context, tourist characteristics, or level of technological readiness may limit the effects of AR. These results can also be compared with a Scopus study that found that AR experiences often increase engagement and attachment, but do not always directly improve the overall quality of the experience or tourists' spatial behavior. Therefore, the discussion needs to emphasize whether this research model fully supports the TAM and SOR theories or instead modifies the relationships between variables within the destination geosite context. On the other hand, limitations that need to be mentioned are the use of cross-sectional data, the possibility of respondent perception bias, and the limited sample

coverage of tourists and visitors in Bali, so that generalization of the results still needs to be done carefully.

This research contributes to the understanding that the adoption of augmented reality in geosite destinations is not only determined by technological readiness but also by perceived benefits, ease of use, enjoyment, interactivity, and strengthening of the destination's image. These findings align with a Scopus study showing that AR experiences can increase tourist engagement, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions when the technology is relevant to the destination context. Conceptually, the results of this study also support the Technology Acceptance Model framework and destination branding literature, as AR is positioned as a medium that enriches experiences while strengthening destination identity. Compared to previous research, this study's contribution lies in its focus on the Batur UNESCO Global Geopark Geosite and in examining both direct and mediated relationships within a more integrated model. Practical implications: destination managers can use AR to improve information quality, create more immersive experiences, and build a more modern and competitive destination perception. However, as with previous research findings, these results still need further research.

IV. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the adoption of augmented reality in geosite destinations is not solely determined by technological aspects, but primarily by tourists' perceived usefulness, convenience, enjoyment, interactivity, and positive attitudes, which ultimately drive their intention to use AR. This finding aligns with a Scopus study that confirms that AR can enhance tourists' experiences, engagement, and behavioral intentions when the technology is relevant to the destination context. Furthermore, the results of this study also support the idea that AR can strengthen destination branding because immersive digital experiences can create a more modern, informative, and competitive destination image. Thus, the tested model successfully addresses the research objectives while confirming that tourists' attitudes and engagement play a crucial role as a link between technology perception and adoption intention. Practical implications: Destination managers can use AR not only as an information tool but also as a strategy to strengthen destination experiences and branding.

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