

The Role of Tourist Satisfaction as a Mediator between Brand Gestalt and Destination Loyalty in the Berastagi Tourist Area

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Abstract–This study aims to determine the effect of tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty with brand gestalt as a mediating variable. The research method used in this study is quantitative with an explanatory research design. This approach was chosen because the study aims to test the causal relationship between the research variables, both direct and indirect effects through mediating variables. This study examines the effect of Brand Gestalt on Destination Loyalty, with Tourist Satisfaction as the mediating variable. The research design is cross-sectional, meaning that data collection was conducted at a specific time to capture tourists' perceptions of their travel experiences in the Berastagi Tourist Area. SmartPLS was used as a statistical tool. There were 200 respondents in the research sample. The results of this study are: Brand Gestalt has a significant positive effect on tourist satisfaction, tourist satisfaction has a significant positive effect on destination loyalty, Brand Gestalt has a significant positive effect on destination loyalty, and tourist satisfaction mediates the effect of Brand Gestalt on destination loyalty. These findings indicate that *Brand Gestalt* influences tourist loyalty both directly and indirectly through tourist satisfaction.

Keywords: Brand Gestalt; Tourist Satisfaction; Destination Loyalty; Tourism; Tourism Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector has long been recognized as one of the main drivers of global and national economic growth. In recent decades, the tourism industry has experienced rapid development, contributing significantly to the Gross Domestic Product and job creation in various countries. Its potential to increase regional income, encourage infrastructure development, and promote local culture has made tourism a priority in the economic development agenda (Haris & Ningsih, 2020; Kurniawan et al., 2024).

The development of the digital economy has also accelerated the growth of the tourism sector. Digitalization facilitates access to information, destination promotion, and tourism transactions, which in turn attracts domestic and foreign tourists. However, the full adoption of digital services in Indonesian tourism is still developing, creating opportunities and challenges for destination managers (Sudarmawan & Miranti, 2022). The tourism sector is also expected to reduce unemployment and increase foreign exchange earnings (Aliansyah & Hermawan, 2021).

The Indonesian government is actively pursuing the development of the tourism sector, with several regions designated as Priority Tourism Destinations. The focus on sustainable development and smart management is key, as seen in the development of a *smart tourism destination* model at Lake Toba, North Sumatra, which aims to prepare the destination for various external impacts, including those following the COVID-19 pandemic (Aprinawati & Prayogo, 2022). Priority policies have also been formulated to control the impact and restore nature tourism in North Sumatra after the pandemic (Nasution et al., 2025).

This global and national transformation positions tourism not only as an economic contributor, but also as an agent of social and cultural change. Therefore, the management and development of tourism destinations requires a holistic approach, considering economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects in an integrated manner, in order to achieve sustainable and competitive development (Mulia, 2021).

The Berastagi Tourism Area, located in the highlands of Karo Regency, North Sumatra, has a strategic position as one of the leading destinations in the region. With its beautiful mountainous scenery, cool climate, volcanic panoramas, and rich local culture of the Karo tribe, Berastagi has long been an attraction for tourists, both domestic and foreign (Bangun et al., 2025). This potential makes it a valuable asset in efforts to boost the regional economy and improve the welfare of the surrounding community (Febrian et al., 2021).

Despite its great potential, tourist destinations such as Berastagi face considerable challenges, especially in building and maintaining tourist loyalty amid increasingly fierce competition between destinations (Muis et al., 2020). Tourists now have more choices and easy access to information, so their decision to return or recommend a destination is greatly influenced by their experience. Without loyalty, destinations will continue to depend on new tourists, which requires higher promotion costs and less guaranteed sustainability (Setiawan et al., 2024).

Table 1. Trends in Tourist Arrivals and Tourism Development (2020–2024)

Year	Number of Tourists (People)	Development
2020	50,000	A drastic decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic
2021	262,250	The beginning of tourism recovery

Year	Number of Tourists (People)	Development
2022	500,000	Sustained recovery
2023	780,322	Significant improvement
2024	1,434,797	Surge in tourist visits

The tourism sector is one of the strategic sectors in driving regional economic growth, including in Karo Regency with the Berastagi Tourism Area as its leading destination. Berastagi is known for its natural attractions, cool climate, and rich culture, making it a favorite tourist destination for both domestic and regional tourists. The dynamics of tourist visits to this area reflect how destinations adapt to changes in the external environment and tourist preferences. One key to overcoming this challenge is through *destination branding*. Destination branding is not just a logo or slogan, but a comprehensive representation that creates a holistic travel experience. It encompasses all aspects, from visual imagery and atmosphere to cultural symbolism and memorable interactions with tourists, forming a unique identity that distinguishes one destination from another (Mandagi et al., 2021; Rather et al., 2020). *Destination branding* promises an unforgettable experience of a location, which is important for survival in a competitive global market (Arif et al., 2024).

The concept of Brand Gestalt is highly relevant in this context. Brand Gestalt refers to tourists' overall perception of a destination, which is formed from the integration of various elements such as visuals, atmosphere, symbolism, and personal experiences. This is a complete impression that goes far beyond mere physical attributes, but involves complex emotional and cognitive aspects, forming a rich mental image in the minds of tourists (Mandagi et al., 2021; Mohamed & Adiloğlu, 2023; Rantung et al., 2023; Walean et al., 2024). *Gestalt* theory explains that individuals perceive and understand the whole, where elements such as hotels, architectural structures, and lighting are seen as part of a whole that is evaluated holistically (Genc & Temizkan, 2023). Tourist satisfaction, as a result of cognitive and affective evaluation of the travel experience, is an important indicator of a destination's success. Satisfied tourists tend to have positive perceptions, which can then lead to loyalty and the intention to revisit or recommend the destination to others (Rantung et al., 2023; Tahir et al., 2024). Research consistently shows that brand image plays a vital role in customer satisfaction and loyalty (Sintya et al., 2025; Tahir et al., 2024). In fact, visitors' positive experiences at tourist destinations are predictors of visitor loyalty (Sukaris et al., 2020).

However, there is still a significant empirical gap. Although many studies have discussed *destination branding*, satisfaction, and loyalty separately, studies that simultaneously integrate the concepts of *Brand Gestalt*, Tourist Satisfaction, and Tourist Loyalty in regional tourist destinations such as Berastagi are still not optimal. Generally, research tends to focus on one or two aspects, without exploring the complex interconnections between the three in shaping the overall experience and behavior of tourists in the Indonesian regional context.

The urgency of research in the Berastagi Tourism Area is becoming increasingly prominent. By gaining a deep understanding of how the *Brand Gestalt* perceived by tourists influences Tourist Satisfaction and ultimately Tourist Loyalty, destination managers can formulate more focused and effective marketing and development strategies. This is crucial to ensure the sustainability, competitiveness, and continued growth of Berastagi as a leading destination in North Sumatra in the future (Sitorus, 2020).

Research on *destination branding*, satisfaction, and tourist loyalty has been conducted extensively, but a framework that deeply integrates these three concepts is still evolving. Several studies have highlighted the importance of each variable separately or in binary combinations, providing a theoretical basis for this research. Regarding the concept of *Brand Gestalt*, Mandagi et al. developed and validated a multidimensional measurement scale for *brand gestalt* in the context of tourism destinations, specifically in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. This study identified four interrelated dimensions, namely story, experience, environment, and stakeholders, which contribute to the *brand gestalt* scale (Mandagi et al., 2021). Their findings show that *brand gestalt's* " " provides a more holistic and integrated view of destination brands, influencing revisit intentions and word-of-mouth recommendations (Mandagi et al., 2021). Another study by Rantung et al. highlights the influence of *brand gestalt* on customer satisfaction and repurchase intention in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises, showing that *brand gestalt* is a key driver of satisfaction and repurchase intention (Rantung et al., 2023). Although the context is different, these findings reinforce the idea that comprehensive brand perception is crucial for consumer behavior outcomes. Additionally, Mohamed & Adiloğlu analyzed the role of *Gestalt* elements in logo design and *branding*, emphasizing how *Gestalt* principles influence overall brand perception and interpretation (Mohamed & Adiloğlu, 2023). Walean et al. also emphasize that a brand's total strength emerges when the combined value of its components exceeds the sum of its parts, integrating *Brand Gestalt* and customer loyalty with the mediating role of customer satisfaction (Walean et al., 2024).

In the context of *destination branding* and loyalty, Ruiz-Real et al. conducted a bibliometric analysis and network mapping of *destination branding* research. They identified research trends focusing on strategy, experience, customer-based brand equity, *place attachment*, destination loyalty, and the role of social media (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020). This study emphasizes that *destination branding* is a powerful instrument for establishing the position of a tourist destination. In line with this, Rather et al. developed a theoretical model of *destination branding* that integrates destination brand experience, identification, value alignment, attachment, and tourist behavioral intent. Their research found that brand experience and destination credibility significantly influence brand identification, which in turn shapes destination attachment and loyalty (Rather et al., 2020).

As for tourist satisfaction as a mediator or determinant of loyalty, Elalfy et al. emphasize the role of destination and local brand equity in shaping tourist loyalty, with customer satisfaction as one of the strategic objectives of DMOs. They conclude that the literature has focused on constructs such as destination loyalty, destination image, and tourist experience as determinants of overall satisfaction and loyalty (Elalfy et al., 2025). Tahir et al. also highlight that brand image is very important for customer satisfaction and loyalty, especially in the context of the foreign tourism industry (Tahir et al., 2024). Panjaitan, through his research on *city branding* strategies in Batu City, Indonesia, found that destination brand value is the main determinant of tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Panjaitan, 2020). Although previous studies have made significant contributions to the understanding of *destination branding*, *Brand Gestalt*, tourist satisfaction, and loyalty, there are several gaps that need to be filled. The main gap lies in the simultaneous and in-depth integration of these three key concepts, particularly in the context of regional tourist destinations in Indonesia, which have unique characteristics.

First, many studies on *Brand Gestalt* tend to focus on scale development or its application in the context of general products or services (e.g., SMEs) (Rantung et al., 2023), or on tourism destinations at a macro level (e.g., North Sulawesi) (Mandagi et al., 2021). However, exploration of *Brand Gestalt* as the overall perception of tourists formed from visual, atmospheric, symbolic, and specific experiential elements in more specific regional tourist destinations such as Berastagi remains limited. How these elements interact and form a unique *Brand Gestalt* in Berastagi and how this perception translates into satisfaction and loyalty has not been fully revealed (Sandriester & Pizzera, 2024). Second, although the relationship between tourist satisfaction and loyalty has been extensively studied (Elalfy et al., 2025; Panjaitan, 2020; Tahir et al., 2024), the role of *Brand Gestalt* as a comprehensive antecedent to satisfaction and loyalty has not been fully explored in an integrated causal model. Several studies have shown that destination brand experiences influence attachment and loyalty (Rather et al., 2020), but *Brand Gestalt* offers a broader lens for understanding holistic perceptions that may have a stronger and more fundamental influence. This gap includes a lack of research that explicitly positions *Brand Gestalt* as a factor that forms the basis of satisfaction, which then influences loyalty, in a coherent model.

Third, most previous studies have often been general in nature or focused on large, well-established destinations. The lack of research that simultaneously integrates *Brand Gestalt*, satisfaction, and tourist loyalty in regional tourist destinations, such as the Berastagi Tourist Area, represents a significant empirical gap. The local context, tourist demographic characteristics, and the cultural uniqueness and appeal of Berastagi may produce different dynamics in the relationships between variables compared to other destinations (Sappewali et al., 2022). Therefore, this study will fill this gap by providing empirical evidence from a relevant specific location.

This empirical gap indicates that comprehensive studies to understand how *Brand Gestalt* perceptions as a whole affect tourist satisfaction, and furthermore how that satisfaction plays a role in shaping their loyalty to regional tourist destinations, are not yet optimal. This research is necessary not only to confirm existing theories but also to develop a richer and more contextual understanding of this phenomenon.

The tourism sector continues to be a significant driver of economic growth at various levels, from global to regional, including in Indonesia. With its tangible contribution to GDP and job creation, tourism drives infrastructure development and the promotion of local culture (Haris & Ningsih, 2020; Kurniawan et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the tourism sector contributed US\$16.426 billion in 2018, and the government targeted 20 million foreign tourists in 2020 before the pandemic (Nasution et al., 2021; Wibowo, 2020). However, this sector is highly vulnerable to external shocks. For example, in 2020, the number of tourists plummeted, with some reports showing a 77% to 89% decline in tourist visits to various destinations in Indonesia due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Rini et al., 2022; Semara & Arianty, 2023; Suasapha, 2023). Recovery began to be seen in 2022, but the challenges of restoring tourist numbers to pre-pandemic levels and building loyalty remain significant (Semara & Arianty, 2023).

The Berastagi Tourism Area in North Sumatra, with all its natural beauty and cultural richness, has great potential as a leading destination. Before the pandemic, this area attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors. For example, by the end of 2017, the number of visitors to various tourist attractions in Karo Regency (including Berastagi) reached 550,223 people, an increase from 541,219 people in 2016, with 52,346 foreign tourists and 488,883 domestic tourists in 2016 (Rinaldi, 2019). However, amid increasingly fierce competition among destinations where North Sumatra ranks 10th in the National Tourism Competitiveness Index with a score of 6.97 (Wambrauw & Ilham, 2023) Berastagi faces crucial challenges in building and maintaining tourist loyalty. This loyalty is vital for the sustainability of the regional economy, given that the cost of acquiring new tourists is higher than retaining existing ones (Setiawan et al., 2024).

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Type and Data of Research

This study uses a quantitative approach with explanatory research. This approach was chosen because the study aims to examine the causal relationship between research variables, both direct and indirect effects through mediating variables. This study examines the effect of Brand Gestalt on Destination Loyalty, with Tourist Satisfaction as the mediating variable. The research design is cross-sectional, meaning that data collection is conducted at a specific time to capture tourists' perceptions of their travel experiences in the Berastagi Tourism Area.

2.2 Research Location and Time

The research was conducted in the Berastagi Tourist Area, Karo Regency, North Sumatra Province. The location was chosen based on Berastagi's strategic position as a leading tourist destination that has experienced a significant increase in tourist visits after the pandemic. The research period is planned to last for approximately four months (August 2025- January 2026), covering the stages of instrument preparation, data collection, data processing, analysis, and research report writing.

2.3 Population and Sample Population

The research population consists of all tourists who have visited the Berastagi Tourist Area. This population is *infinite*, given that the number of tourists is constantly changing and cannot be determined with certainty. The sampling technique used non-probability sampling with the purposive sampling method, with the following criteria:

- a. Tourists who have visited the Berastagi Tourist Area.
- b. At least 17 years of age.
- c. Have direct experience enjoying the facilities and tourist attractions in Berastagi.
- d. Willing to be a research respondent.

The sample size was determined based on SEM-PLS provisions, namely a minimum of 5–10 times the number of indicators. With approximately 30 indicators in this study, the minimum sample size was 150 respondents. This study set the sample size at 200 respondents to increase the reliability and accuracy of the model estimation.

2.4 Variable Operationalization

Table 2. Variable Operationalization

Variable	Dimension	Indicators	Questions	Scale
Brand Gestalt	Sensescape	1. Visual Appeal 2. Sensory Comfort	1. The scenery and visual layout of Berastagi are attractive. 2. The atmosphere (air, sound, aroma) of Berastagi is comfortable.	Likert
	Storyscape	1. Uniqueness of the story 2. Symbolic meaning	1. Berastagi has a distinctive story/identity 2. Berastagi has a special meaning for me	
	Servicescape	1. Quality of facilities 2. Ease of access	1. Berastagi's tourist facilities are adequate and well-maintained 2. Access to Berastagi is easy to reach	
	Stakeholders	1. Hospitality 2. Professionalism of managers	1. The Berastagi community/stakeholders are friendly. 2. Professional management of the Berastagi tourist area.	
Tourist satisfaction	Overall satisfaction	Level of satisfaction	Overall, I am satisfied with my trip to Berastagi.	Likert
	Expectation fulfillment	Expectation comparison	My travel experience in Berastagi was in line with my expectations	
	Tourism experience	Quality of experience	I had a satisfying travel experience in Berastagi	
Destination Loyalty	Decision to visit	Accuracy of choice	My decision to visit Berastagi was the right one.	Likert
	Intention to revisit	Repeat visit intention	I intend to visit Berastagi again in the future.	
	Recommendations	WOM	I am willing to recommend Berastagi to others	
	Destination Preference	Destination Preference	Berastagi is my top choice for a tourist destination to visit	
	Destination Commitment	Long-Term Loyalty	I am committed to continuing to choose Berastagi as my tourist destination	

2.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with the assistance of SmartPLS software

- a. Descriptive Data Analysis
- b. Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)
- c. Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)
- d. Hypothesis Testing
- e. Mediation Test

2.6 Conceptual Framework

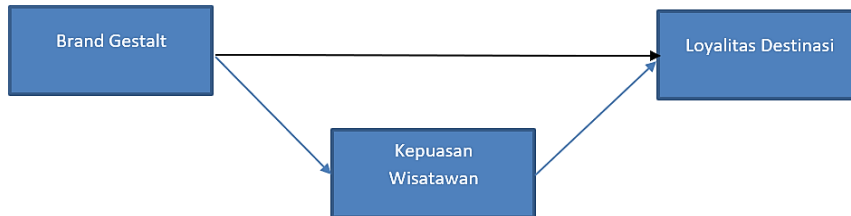


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

2.7 Research Hypotheses

- a. H1: Brand Gestalt has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction.
- b. H2: Tourist Satisfaction has a positive effect on Destination Loyalty. H3: Brand Gestalt has a positive effect on Destination Loyalty.
- c. H4: Tourist Satisfaction mediates the influence of Brand Gestalt on Destination Loyalty.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

In this study, data processing was conducted using the *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM) method with SmartPLS 4 software. In the data collection method, the research instruments must meet the validity and reliability requirements. Validity and reliability tests are the initial stages of research to determine the extent to which the research can be accounted for.

3.1.1 Outer Model Test Convergent Validity Test

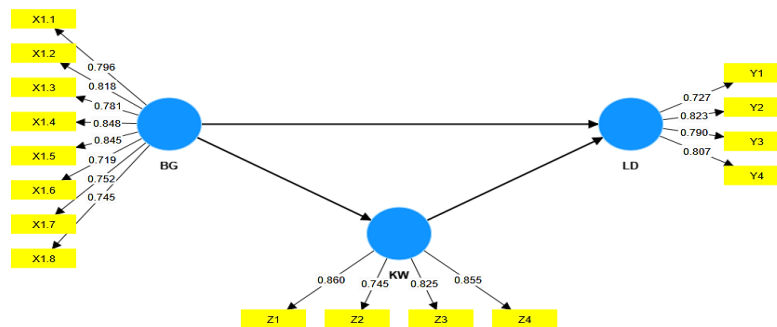


Figure 2. Outer Model Test Convergent Validity Test

Table 2. SmartPLS Outer Model Schema

Variables	Measurement Items	Factor Loadings	AVE	Description
Brand Gestalt (X1)	X.1	0.796	0.623	Valid
	X.2	0.818		
	X.3	0.781		
	X.4	0.848		
	X.5	0.845		
	X.6	0.719		
	X.7	0.752		
	X.8	0.745		
Tourist Satisfaction (Z)	Z.1	0.860	0.676	Valid
	Z.2	0.745		
	Z.3	0.825		
	Z.4	0.855		
Destination Loyalty (Y)	Y.1	0.727	0.621	Valid
	Y.2	0.823		

Variables	Measurement Items	Factor Loadings	AVE	Description
	Y.3	0.790		
	Y.4	0.807		

3.1.2 Factor Loading Results

As can be seen in the table above, the *loading factor* results for all items in each variable are > 0.70 and the AVE value is > 0.50, so it can be stated that the measurement items are valid. This shows that the latent variables measure the constructs that should be measured.

3.1.3 Validity Test

In this study, the discriminant validity test aims to ensure that each latent construct in the research model is empirically distinct from other latent constructs. The method used is the Fornell–Larcker criteria. The following table shows the Fornell–Larcker criteria.

Based on the results, it can be seen that Brand Gestalt, Tourist Satisfaction, and Destination Loyalty are conceptually and empirically different constructs because the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (\sqrt{AVE}) value for each construct is greater than the correlation value between other constructs.

3.1.4 Reliability Test

Table 3. Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Brand Gestalt (X)	0.91	Reliable
Tourist Satisfaction (Z)	0.840	Reliable
Destination Loyalty (Y)	0.796	Reliable

Cronbach's Alpha values for all variables > 0.70. This indicates that the instruments used to measure these variables have good internal reliability. This means that the items in these instruments consistently measure the same construct.

3.1.5 Hypothesis Testing

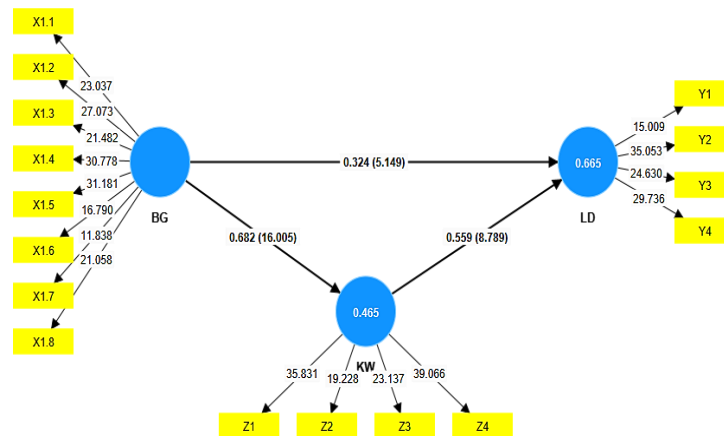


Figure 3. Hypothesis Testing

Based on the results of data processing, hypothesis testing was conducted using a significance level of 5% and a t-statistic value of 1.96. Thus, the criteria for accepting or rejecting the hypothesis are that H_a is accepted and H_0 is rejected when the t-statistic > 1.96. To reject or accept the hypothesis, probability is used with the condition that H_a is accepted if the p-value < 0.05. The following are the results of the hypothesis testing obtained using *SmartPLS 4 bootstrapping* with the *t-values* model. The following are the results of the direct effect hypothesis test conducted based on the variables studied. Direct effect of exogenous variables on endogenous variables.

Table 4. Direct Effect of Research Variables

	Original sample (O)	T statistics	P values	Description
Brand Gestalt -> Tourist Satisfaction	0.682	16.005	0.000	Accepted
Brand Gestalt -> Destination Loyalty	0.324	5,149	0	Accepted
Tourist Satisfaction -> Destination Loyalty	0.559	8,789	0.00	Accepted

Based on the table above, the direct effect of each exogenous variable on the endogenous variable can be explained as follows:

- a. The coefficient of influence of *Brand Gestalt* on Tourist Satisfaction is 0.682, and the t-value 16.005 > t-table

- 1.96 and the p-value $0.000 < 0.05$ (Hypothesis H_a is accepted). This means that *Brand Gestalt* has a positive and significant direct influence on Tourist Satisfaction.
- b. The coefficient of influence of *Brand Gestalt* on Destination Loyalty is 0.324, and the t-value is $5.149 > t\text{-table}$ 1.96 and the p-value is $0.000 < 0.05$ (H_a hypothesis accepted). This means that *Brand Gestalt* has a positive and significant direct effect on Destination Loyalty.
- c. The coefficient of influence of tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty is 0.559, and the t-value is $8.789 > t\text{-table}$ 1.96 and the p-value is $0.000 < 0.05$ (H_a hypothesis accepted). This means that Tourist Satisfaction has a positive and significant direct effect on Destination Loyalty.

3.1.6 Indirect Effect of Exogenous Variables on Endogenous Variables

Table 5. Indirect Effect of Research Variables

	Original sample (O)	T statistics	P values	Description
<i>Brand Gestalt</i> -> Tourist Satisfaction	0.382	7.852	0.000	Accepted
Destination Loyalty				

The indirect influence of each exogenous variable on the endogenous variable can be explained as follows: The coefficient of the influence of *Brand Gestalt* on Destination Loyalty through the immediate variable of Tourist Satisfaction of 0.382 explains that an increase in customer trust in the brand contributes positively to loyalty, although the effect is relatively moderate. The statistical test results show that $t_{\text{calculated}}$ is 7.852, which is greater than t_{table} 1.96, and the p-value is $0.000 < 0.05$ (), so the H_a hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that Tourist Satisfaction acts as a moderating variable between the influence of *Brand Gestalt* on Destination Loyalty.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 The Influence of Brand Gestalt on Tourist Satisfaction

Brand Gestalt has a positive and significant effect on tourist satisfaction. These findings indicate that tourists' perceptions of destinations that are comprehensively designed can create a satisfying travel experience. Tourists evaluate destinations not only based on physical attributes, but also based on the emotional meaning and convenience they experience during their visit.

The analysis results show that tourists' perceptions of the Berastagi Tourism Area *Brand Gestalt* are most strongly reflected in the *Servicescape* and *Stakeholder* dimensions. Tourists consider that ease of access to tourist areas is part of the *servicescape* that supports a comfortable and smooth travel experience. Good accessibility creates a conducive service environment, allowing tourists to enjoy the destination without significant obstacles. This finding is in line with the view that *servicescape* not only includes spatial layout and physical facilities, but also ease of mobility and affordability of the destination as part of the overall service experience.

In addition, the perception that the Berastagi Tourism Area has special meaning for tourists reflects the strong role of stakeholders in shaping the destination's *Brand Gestalt*. This meaning is formed through interactions between tourists and various stakeholders, such as the local community, tourism businesses, and destination managers, who together create an authentic and emotionally valuable tourist experience. Positive stakeholder involvement encourages the formation of emotional bonds between tourists and the destination, thereby increasing overall tourist satisfaction. Overall, the dominance of the *servicescape* and *stakeholder* dimensions in shaping the *Brand Gestalt* indicates that tourist satisfaction in the Berastagi Tourism Area is not only influenced by natural attractions, but also by the quality of the service environment and the active role of stakeholders in creating meaningful and accessible tourism experiences.

Theoretically, these findings are in line with the *Brand Gestalt* concept, which emphasizes that the image of a destination is formed from a holistic experience that encompasses emotional, symbolic, and functional aspects. When tourists interpret a destination personally and find it easy to access, their travel experience will be evaluated positively and increase tourist satisfaction. These findings support the studies by Mandagi et al. (2021) and Rantung et al. (2023), which explain that *Brand Gestalt* plays an important role in shaping tourist satisfaction.

In addition, this study also supports and expands on previous research by confirming that ease of access is an important part of *Brand Gestalt* in the context of regional tourist destinations. Research by Kladou et al. (2022) and Zenker et al. (2021) shows that good accessibility increases tourists' positive perceptions and contributes to satisfaction. These findings reinforce that *Brand Gestalt* is not only shaped by symbolic imagery, but also by the functional ease that tourists experience directly.

3.2.2 The Influence of Tourist Satisfaction on Destination Loyalty

Tourist satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on destination loyalty. These findings indicate that tourists' overall evaluation of their travel experience is the main basis for forming loyal behavior, such as the intention to return and the willingness to recommend the destination to others.

Descriptive analysis shows that the highest score on the tourist satisfaction variable indicates that tourists rate their travel experience in the Berastagi Tourism Area positively and that it meets their overall expectations. This

global satisfaction evaluation reflects the destination's success in managing various aspects of the travel experience in an integrated manner, thereby encouraging positive attitudes among tourists, which ultimately strengthens their loyalty to the destination.

Theoretically, overall satisfaction is the tourist's final evaluation of their entire travel experience and plays an important role in shaping tourist loyalty. Tourists who are satisfied overall tend to develop positive attitudes toward the destination, which is then reflected in their intention to return and their willingness to recommend the destination to others. Recent research by Elalfy et al. (2025) and Suprina et al. (2023) shows that tourist satisfaction has a significant effect on loyalty, both in terms of attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty.

In addition, research by Prayag et al. (2021) and Rather (2021) confirms that overall satisfaction strengthens tourists' emotional attachment to a destination. When tourists feel completely satisfied, they tend to develop trust and commitment to the destination, thereby increasing tourist loyalty.

In the context of the Berastagi Tourism Area, the high overall satisfaction level indicates that the tourism experience has been able to meet tourists' expectations. This condition encourages tourists to consider Berastagi as a destination worth revisiting and recommending to others. The implications of these findings indicate that destination managers need to maintain the consistency of the overall tourism experience quality. Focusing on the overall satisfaction of tourists will be key to building long-term tourist loyalty and increasing the competitiveness of the Berastagi Tourism Area.

3.2.3 The Influence of Brand Gestalt on Destination Loyalty

Brand Gestalt has a positive and significant effect on destination loyalty. Tourists' perception of a strong and consistent destination identity can encourage repeat visits and a willingness to recommend the destination to others. Improving the quality of *Brand Gestalt* will be followed by an increase in tourists' desire to revisit the Berastagi tourist area in the future. The results of the descriptive analysis show that tourists' perceptions of the Berastagi Tourism Area Brand Gestalt are most strongly reflected in the *Sensecape* dimension. Tourists greatly appreciate the beauty of the scenery and visual appearance of the tourist area, and feel a comfortable atmosphere, such as cool air, soothing natural sounds, and refreshing environmental aromas. The experiences directly perceived by tourists' senses are the main factors in forming positive impressions of the destination. These pleasant sensory experiences make tourists feel more comfortable and connected to the tourist area, thereby strengthening their bond and encouraging loyalty to the Berastagi Tourist Area.

These findings are relevant to the studies by Mandagi et al. (2021) and Rantung et al. (2023), which state that *Brand Gestalt* has a direct influence on destination loyalty. A strong *Brand Gestalt* creates a memorable image of the destination that is distinct from other destinations. Other studies, Ruiz-Real et al. (2020) and Rather et al. (2020), confirm that destination branding plays an important role in building tourist attachment. Research by Tasci et al. (2022) also reveals that the strength of a destination brand contributes to the formation of sustainable tourist loyalty.

Attachment theory suggests that individuals tend to form emotional bonds with places that are perceived as meaningful and consistent. In the context of tourism, a strong *Brand Gestalt* shapes the perception of a destination that is easily recognizable and valuable to tourists, thereby encouraging attachment to the destination. This attachment then leads to loyal behavior, such as the intention to revisit and recommend the destination to others. Prayag et al. (2021) explain that tourist attachment to a destination plays an important role in strengthening destination loyalty.

The dominance of the *Sensecape* dimension emphasizes that sensory experiences play an important role in shaping deep impressions of destinations and strengthening tourists' bonds with tourist areas. Therefore, destination managers need to maintain and develop the quality of the physical environment and atmosphere of tourist areas. Preservation of natural scenery, environmental cleanliness, and control of noise and air comfort are important strategies in maintaining tourist loyalty through strengthening the *Sensecape*-based Brand Gestalt.

3.2.4 The Role of Tourist Satisfaction as a Mediator in Influencing Brand Gestalt on Tourist Loyalty

Tourist satisfaction mediates the influence of *Brand Gestalt* on destination loyalty. These findings indicate that *Brand Gestalt* influences tourist loyalty both directly and indirectly through tourist satisfaction. A strong *Brand Gestalt* creates a positive destination experience, which is then evaluated by tourists as satisfaction. This satisfaction acts as a mechanism that bridges the destination experience with the formation of destination loyalty. This is in line with Sandriester and Pizzera (2024), who emphasize the role of satisfaction as a mediator in the destination branding model.

Tourist satisfaction also functions as a mediator because loyalty is not formed instantly from the destination experience, but rather through a comprehensive assessment of the quality of that experience. Studies by Rather and Sharma (2021) and Sandriester and Pizzera (2024) confirm that satisfaction strengthens the relationship between destination branding and loyalty by transforming experiences into tourist attachment and commitment. Without satisfaction, even a strong Brand Gestalt tends to generate only momentary interest.

According to the satisfaction-loyalty theory, satisfaction is the result of a comparison between tourists' expectations and their actual experiences, and forms the basis for positive attitudes toward a destination. In the context of this study, tourist satisfaction is formed through an evaluation of the suitability between the experiences felt and the initial expectations of tourists, and forms the basis for positive attitudes toward the destination. The research by

Prayag et al. (2021) confirms that tourist satisfaction plays an important role in strengthening destination loyalty.

In the context of the Berastagi tourist area, a strong *Brand Gestalt* needs to be realized in a real experience that can satisfy tourists. This satisfaction then encourages tourists to return and recommend the destination to others. To that end, destination managers must prioritize tourist satisfaction in their branding strategies. A good *Brand Gestalt* must be accompanied by a satisfying quality of experience in order to build sustainable tourist loyalty.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and conclusions above, several suggestions can be made, namely: Tourism area managers are advised to continue maintaining and improving the overall quality of the tourist experience, particularly in terms of ease of access, environmental comfort, and the services experienced by tourists. These efforts are important to maintain high levels of tourist satisfaction, as satisfaction has been proven to play a role in increasing tourist loyalty. Local governments, tourism businesses, and local communities need to strengthen collaboration in creating consistent and valuable tourism experiences for tourists. Active stakeholder involvement in destination management will strengthen positive perceptions of the Berastagi Tourism Area and encourage the formation of sustainable tourist loyalty. *The brand* development strategy for the Berastagi tourist area should not only focus on promotion, but also on providing real experiences that meet tourists' expectations. Strengthening the image of the destination must be accompanied by improvements in service quality and destination management so that positive perceptions can be internalized into tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Further research is recommended to develop a research model by adding other variables, such as destination image, tourist attachment, or quality of travel experience, as well as using different methodological approaches. This is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

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