

Social Media Marketing and Cultural Experience Driving Revisit Intention: An SOR Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Seasonal cultural tourism often attracts large numbers of visitors during events but faces challenges in fostering long-term tourist loyalty. This study investigates the effect of Social Media Marketing (SMM) on Revisit Intention through the mediating role of Cultural Experience based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework. A survey was conducted among 156 domestic tourists who had attended the Wonosobo Hot Air Balloon Festival using purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that SMM significantly influences Cultural Experience ($\beta = 0.684, p < 0.001$), while Cultural Experience positively affects Revisit Intention ($\beta = 0.489, p < 0.001$). Furthermore, Cultural Experience significantly mediates the relationship between SMM and Revisit Intention ($\beta = 0.334, p < 0.001$), whereas the direct effect of SMM on Revisit Intention is insignificant. These findings extend SOR theory by identifying Cultural Experience as the primary mechanism through which digital marketing promotes sustainable revisit intention in seasonal cultural tourism.

Keywords: social media marketing; cultural experience; intention to revisit; cultural festival; SOR.

Pemasaran Media Sosial dan Pengalaman Budaya terhadap Niat Kunjungan Kembali: Perspektif SOR

ABSTRAK

Pariwisata budaya musiman mampu menarik banyak wisatawan selama penyelenggaraan acara, tetapi masih menghadapi tantangan dalam membangun loyalitas wisatawan jangka panjang. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pengaruh *Social Media Marketing* (SMM) terhadap *Revisit Intention* melalui peran mediasi *Cultural Experience* berdasarkan kerangka *Stimulus–Organism–Response* (SOR). Survei dilakukan terhadap 156 wisatawan domestik yang pernah mengunjungi Wonosobo Hot Air Balloon Festival dengan teknik *purposive sampling*. Data dianalisis menggunakan *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa SMM berpengaruh signifikan terhadap *Cultural Experience* ($\beta = 0,684; p < 0,001$), sedangkan *Cultural Experience* berpengaruh positif terhadap *Revisit Intention* ($\beta = 0,489; p < 0,001$). *Cultural Experience* juga terbukti memediasi secara signifikan hubungan antara SMM dan *Revisit Intention* ($\beta = 0,334; p < 0,001$), sementara pengaruh langsung SMM terhadap *Revisit Intention* tidak signifikan. Temuan ini memperluas teori SOR dengan menegaskan *Cultural Experience* sebagai mekanisme utama yang menghubungkan pemasaran digital dengan niat kunjungan ulang pada pariwisata budaya musiman.

Kata Kunci: pemasaran media sosial; pengalaman budaya; niat untuk kembali; festival budaya; SOR.

INTRODUCTION

Global tourism has shifted significantly from a primary focus on destinations to an emphasis on meaningful travel experiences. Rather than being motivated solely by scenic landscapes or leisure activities, modern travelers increasingly value authentic experiences that foster emotional connections, deepen cultural appreciation, and create lasting memories (Yang et al., 2023; Zhang & Deng, 2022). This transformation has encouraged tourism destinations to redesign their marketing strategies by integrating digital communication with experiential value creation.

Social media has consequently become one of the most influential communication channels in destination marketing. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube enable destination managers to distribute visual narratives rapidly, shape destination image, stimulate tourist curiosity, and influence travel decision-making. Previous studies consistently demonstrate that social media marketing enhances destination awareness, destination image, and visit intention through attractive visual content and user engagement (Armutcu et al., 2023; Baber & Baber, 2023; Hussain et al., 2024). Nevertheless, attracting first-time visitors does not necessarily translate into sustainable tourist loyalty.

This issue is particularly evident in seasonal cultural festivals. Such festivals generally generate substantial visitor numbers during event periods but frequently experience difficulty encouraging tourists to revisit in subsequent years. Since revisit intention contributes directly to destination sustainability, local economic resilience, and cultural preservation, understanding the determinants of tourist loyalty has become increasingly important within cultural tourism research.

The Wonosobo Hot Air Balloon Festival represents a notable example of this phenomenon. The festival successfully combines the traditional hot-air balloon culture of Wonosobo with contemporary tourism packaging. During the 2025 Eid holiday, the festival attracted more than 270,992 visitors, accounting for approximately 61.9% of the total 437,788 tourist arrivals recorded in Wonosobo Regency within the same period (Pemerintah Kabupaten Wonosobo, 2025; Setiaji, 2025). These figures illustrate the effectiveness of digital promotion in attracting visitors. However, the remarkable increase in visitor numbers has not necessarily been accompanied by stronger revisit intention. Current promotional activities remain heavily focused on spectacular visual attractions, whereas the philosophical meaning, historical narratives, and cultural values embedded within the festival receive considerably less attention. Consequently, tourists may enjoy the event but fail to develop a sufficiently meaningful cultural experience that encourages future visits.

The relationship between social media marketing and revisit intention has received growing scholarly attention. Previous studies have demonstrated positive associations between digital marketing activities and tourists' behavioral intentions (Chin

& Wong, 2022; Wilopo & Nuralam, 2025). Other studies have employed mediating variables such as destination image, tourist satisfaction, electronic word-of-mouth, or destination attachment (Baber & Baber, 2023; Maulina et al., 2023). Although these studies substantially advance tourism marketing literature, they provide limited explanation regarding the internal psychological mechanism through which digital promotion transforms into revisit intention within seasonal cultural festivals.

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework offers an appropriate theoretical lens to explain this mechanism. Originally proposed by Mehrabian & Russell (1974), the SOR framework argues that external environmental stimuli influence individuals through internal cognitive and emotional processes before generating behavioral responses. Within tourism marketing, social media marketing functions as the external stimulus, cultural experience represents the organism reflecting tourists' internal evaluation and emotional engagement, whereas revisit intention constitutes the behavioral response. Consequently, the effectiveness of digital promotion should not be evaluated solely based on its ability to attract visitors but also on its capacity to generate meaningful cultural experiences capable of fostering long-term loyalty.

Cultural experience constitutes a multidimensional construct encompassing perceived uniqueness, cultural learning, and emotional engagement during tourism activities (Kheiri, 2023; Song et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023). Previous studies indicate that tourists experiencing authentic cultural interactions develop stronger destination attachment, memorable experiences, and revisit intention (Chen et al., 2022; Fernández-López et al., 2025; Pamungkas & Pramesti, 2021). Therefore, cultural experience is theoretically positioned as the primary psychological mechanism through which digital promotional activities influence post-visit behavioral intention.

Beyond the SOR perspective, recent digital transformation literature has increasingly emphasized the importance of human actors in creating meaningful digital experiences. Participatory experiential learning research demonstrates that improving facilitator competence strengthens interaction quality, trust, and user experience within technology-enabled service environments (Sumarno et al., 2026). This perspective complements the SOR framework by suggesting that successful digital marketing depends not only on technological exposure but also on the quality of experiential mediation that transforms digital interaction into emotional engagement.

Despite increasing research on tourism marketing, several research gaps remain. First, previous studies predominantly examine direct relationships between social media marketing and revisit intention or emphasize mediators such as destination image and satisfaction. Second, empirical evidence investigating cultural experience as the principal mediating mechanism remains relatively limited, particularly within seasonal cultural festivals in developing tourism destinations. Third, Indonesian cultural festivals have received considerably less empirical attention despite their growing economic and

cultural significance. Addressing these gaps is essential because seasonal festivals rely heavily on repeat visitation to ensure long-term sustainability rather than short-lived popularity.

Based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, this study proposes a research model in which Social Media Marketing represents the stimulus, Cultural Experience serves as the organism, and Revisit Intention constitutes the resulting behavioral response. The proposed model seeks to explain how digital promotion influences tourist loyalty through meaningful cultural experiences within the context of the Wonosobo Hot Air Balloon Festival.

Based on the theoretical arguments and previous empirical findings, four hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Social Media Marketing positively influences Cultural Experience.

H2: Social Media Marketing positively influences Revisit Intention.

H3: Cultural Experience positively influences Revisit Intention.

H4: Cultural Experience mediates the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Revisit Intention.

The conceptual framework illustrating the proposed relationships among the research variables is presented in [Figure 1](#). This study aims to examine the direct and indirect effects of Social Media Marketing on Revisit Intention through Cultural Experience using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings are expected to extend the application of the SOR framework within seasonal cultural tourism while providing practical implications for designing digital marketing strategies that create meaningful cultural experiences and sustainable tourist loyalty.

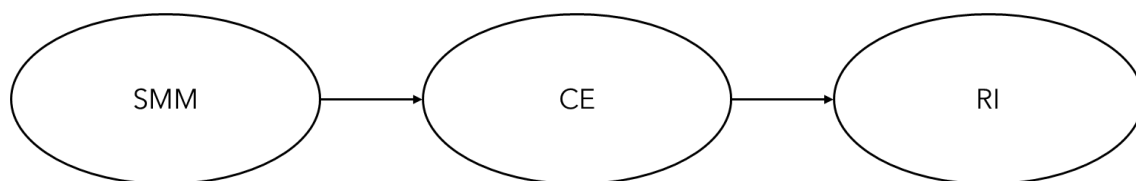


Figure 1. Research Framework

METHOD

Research Design

A quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey was adopted to investigate the relationships among Social Media Marketing (SMM), Cultural Experience (CE), and Revisit Intention (RI). The proposed relationships were examined within the theoretical perspective of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because the proposed model aimed to test theoretically derived hypotheses and estimate the structural relationships among latent

constructs. The cross-sectional design enabled data collection at a single point in time, capturing tourists' perceptions based on their most recent experiences of attending the Wonosobo Hot Air Balloon Festival.

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of domestic tourists who had attended the Wonosobo Hot Air Balloon Festival (Festival Mudik Wonosobo) at least once between 2024 and 2026. Since the exact number of festival visitors could not be accurately identified due to the seasonal nature of the event and the continuously changing visitor population, probability sampling was considered impractical. Accordingly, a purposive sampling technique was applied to select participants who met the study criteria and had experience relevant to the objectives of the research.

Respondents were required to satisfy two inclusion criteria. First, they must have participated in the Wonosobo Hot Air Balloon Festival at least once during the previous three years. Second, they had to actively use social media to obtain or share tourism-related information. These criteria ensured that respondents had adequate exposure to both the digital marketing activities and the cultural experiences examined in this study.

A total of 156 completed questionnaires met the eligibility criteria and were retained for the final analysis. This number surpassed the minimum sample size recommended for analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is considered appropriate for predictive models with mediation effects and medium sample sizes (Sarstedt et al., 2021).

Measurement of Variables

The study relied on primary data obtained through a structured questionnaire. All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The questionnaire items were adapted from established and previously validated instruments to ensure adequate content validity and construct reliability.

Social Media Marketing (SMM) was measured using four indicators representing content quality, interaction, trendiness, and entertainment value adapted from Fitri et al. (2023) and Tran & Rudolf (2022). Cultural Experience (CE) was operationalized using three indicators reflecting local uniqueness, cultural knowledge, and emotional engagement based on Chen et al. (2022), Kheiri (2023) and Song et al. (2022). Revisit Intention (RI) was measured using three indicators representing intention to revisit, recommendation intention, and destination loyalty adapted from Lu et al. (2022), Maulina et al. (2023), Wei et al. (2024).

Prior to the main survey, the questionnaire was reviewed to ensure clarity of wording and ease of understanding, thereby minimizing potential measurement bias during data collection.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted using a hybrid approach combining online and offline survey administration. The online questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms using social media platforms and direct messaging to respondents meeting the predefined criteria. Offline data collection was conducted by trained enumerators who distributed QR-code questionnaires to eligible visitors around the festival area. This combined approach increased respondent accessibility while improving the response rate and sample diversity.

Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and be used solely for academic research purposes.

Data Analysis

The obtained data were processed using SmartPLS through the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique. This analytical approach was employed because it is well suited for predictive research, the examination of mediation effects, and the analysis of latent constructs, while eliminating the need to satisfy multivariate normality assumptions (Sarstedt et al., 2021).

The data analysis proceeded through two consecutive stages. The initial stage focused on assessing the measurement (outer) model by examining indicator reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The second phase focused on assessing the structural (inner) model by analyzing the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), path coefficients, and the predictive associations among the latent constructs.

Hypothesis testing was conducted using a bootstrapping technique with 5,000 bootstrap samples to determine the statistical significance of both direct and indirect relationships. The mediating effect of Cultural Experience was assessed by testing the significance of the indirect pathway linking Social Media Marketing to Revisit Intention. All proposed relationships were regarded as statistically significant when the corresponding p-value was less than 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 156 valid questionnaires were collected and included in the final analysis. All respondents fulfilled the predefined inclusion criteria, namely having attended the Wonosobo Hot Air Balloon Festival at least once during the 2024–2026 period and actively using social media to obtain or share tourism-related information. The

number of valid responses exceeded the minimum sample size recommended for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), supporting the robustness of the subsequent statistical analysis (Sarstedt et al., 2021).

Respondent Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Female respondents accounted for 56.4% of the sample, while males represented 43.6%. The largest proportion of respondents belonged to the 20–29-year age group (59.0%), while participants under the age of 20 represented the second-largest group, accounting for 28.8% of the sample. Only 12.2% were aged 30 years or above. This distribution indicates that the festival predominantly attracts younger visitors, who also constitute the most active users of digital platforms for tourism information.

Regarding place of residence, respondents were primarily from Central Java outside Wonosobo (43.6%), followed by residents of Wonosobo (30.8%) and visitors from other provinces (25.6%). In terms of social media usage, Instagram emerged as the most frequently used platform (52.6%), followed by TikTok (39.7%), whereas Facebook and YouTube collectively accounted for less than 8% of respondents. These findings indicate that visual-based social media platforms represent the dominant communication channels among festival visitors.

Table 1. Respondent Demographic Profile

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	68	43.6
Female	88	56.4
Age		
<20 years	45	28.8
20–29 years	92	59.0
30–39 years	14	9.0
≥40 years	5	3.2
Residence		
Wonosobo	48	30.8
Central Java (outside Wonosobo)	68	43.6
Outside Central Java	40	25.6
Most Frequently Used Social Media		
Instagram	82	52.6
TikTok	62	39.7
Facebook	8	5.1
YouTube/Others	4	2.6

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability assessment following the recommendations of (Sarstedt et al., 2021). The evaluation results demonstrate that the proposed measurement model fulfills all established assessment criteria.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed using outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). As presented in Table 2, all indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.754 to 0.846. These results indicate that each indicator adequately represents its corresponding latent construct.

Table 2. Outer Loadings

Indicator	CE	RI	SMM
CE1	0.831	-	-
CE2	0.846	-	-
CE3	0.754	-	-
RI1	-	0.841	-
RI2	-	0.802	-
RI3	-	0.823	-
SMM1	-	-	0.757
SMM2	-	-	0.754
SMM3	-	-	0.791
SMM4	-	-	0.774

The AVE values further support convergent validity, with all constructs exceeding the recommended minimum value of 0.50. Specifically, Cultural Experience achieved an AVE of 0.658, Revisit Intention 0.676, and Social Media Marketing 0.591, indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated using cross-loadings and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. Table 3 demonstrates that every indicator loads highest on its intended construct compared with the remaining constructs, confirming satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 3. Cross Loadings

Indicator	CE	RI	SMM
CE1	0.831	0.543	0.481
CE2	0.846	0.547	0.645
CE3	0.754	0.442	0.527
RI1	0.492	0.841	0.466
RI2	0.540	0.802	0.394
RI3	0.525	0.823	0.480
SMM1	0.524	0.366	0.757
SMM2	0.464	0.365	0.754
SMM3	0.588	0.418	0.791
SMM4	0.520	0.509	0.774

The Fornell–Larcker (Table 4) criterion also confirms discriminant validity, as the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs.

Table 4. Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	CE	RI	SMM
CE	0.811	-	-
RI	0.632	0.822	-
SMM	0.684	0.543	0.769

These findings indicate that each construct is empirically distinct while maintaining adequate correlations consistent with the proposed conceptual model.

Reliability Assessment

Construct reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (ρ_A and ρ_C), and AVE. As shown in Table 5, Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.740 to 0.770, while Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.852 to 0.862. All values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Table 5. Reliability Assessment

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	ρ_A	ρ_C	AVE
CE	0.740	0.751	0.852	0.658
RI	0.760	0.760	0.862	0.676
SMM	0.770	0.774	0.853	0.591

Overall, the results confirm that the measurement model demonstrates acceptable reliability and validity, allowing further evaluation of the structural relationships among the proposed constructs.

Structural Model Assessment

After confirming that the measurement model met the required validity and reliability criteria, the structural model was evaluated by analyzing the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and the proposed hypotheses using the bootstrapping procedure.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the predictive performance of the structural model. As reported in Table 6, Social Media Marketing accounts for 46.8% of the variance in Cultural Experience ($R^2 = 0.468$). In addition, Social Media Marketing and Cultural Experience collectively explain 42.2% of the variance in Revisit Intention ($R^2 = 0.422$). These findings suggest that the structural model demonstrates a moderate level of explanatory power for both endogenous constructs.

Table 6. Coefficient of Determination

Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Cultural Experience	0.468	0.465
Revisit Intention	0.422	0.415

Effect Size (f^2)

The effect size analysis indicates the contribution of each exogenous construct to the endogenous variables. As presented in Table 7, Social Media Marketing exerts a

strong effect on Cultural Experience ($f^2 = 0.881$), while its direct influence on Revisit Intention is comparatively weak ($f^2 = 0.040$). Cultural Experience demonstrates a moderate effect on Revisit Intention ($f^2 = 0.220$).

Table 7. Effect Size (f^2)

Relationship	f^2
SMM $\rightarrow$ CE	0.881
SMM $\rightarrow$ RI	0.040
CE $\rightarrow$ RI	0.220

Hypothesis Testing

The proposed hypotheses were tested using a bootstrapping procedure based on 5,000 resamples. The results of the direct effect analysis are presented in Table 8.

Social Media Marketing exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on Cultural Experience ($\beta = 0.684$, $t = 14.087$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Cultural Experience exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on Revisit Intention ($\beta = 0.489$, $t = 3.946$, $p < 0.001$), thereby providing support for H3. However, the direct effect of Social Media Marketing on Revisit Intention is positive but statistically insignificant at the 5% significance level ($\beta = 0.209$, $t = 1.792$, $p = 0.073$). Therefore, H2 is not supported.

Table 8. Direct Effects

Relationship	β	STDEV	t-value	p-value	Decision
SMM $\rightarrow$ CE	0.684	0.049	14.087	0.000	Supported
CE $\rightarrow$ RI	0.489	0.124	3.946	0.000	Supported
SMM $\rightarrow$ RI	0.209	0.117	1.792	0.073	Not Supported

Mediation Analysis

The mediating effect of Cultural Experience was assessed by analyzing the indirect relationship between Social Media Marketing and Revisit Intention. As shown in Table 9, the indirect effect is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.334$, $t = 3.526$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that Cultural Experience serves as a significant mediator in the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Revisit Intention. Therefore, H4 is supported.

Table 9. Indirect Effect

Relationship	β	STDEV	t-value	p-value	Decision
SMM $\rightarrow$ CE $\rightarrow$ RI	0.334	0.095	3.526	0.000	Supported

Overall, the structural model indicates that Social Media Marketing plays a substantial role in shaping Cultural Experience, whereas Cultural Experience emerges as a significant determinant of Revisit Intention. The mediation analysis further indicates that the influence of Social Media Marketing on tourists' intention to revisit primarily occurs through the enhancement of meaningful cultural experiences.

Discussion

This study primarily sought to investigate whether Cultural Experience acts as a mediator in the relationship between Social Media Marketing (SMM) and tourists' Revisit Intention in the setting of a seasonal cultural festival. Based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, the results indicate that tourists' behavioral intentions are not influenced directly by digital marketing efforts. Instead, these responses are primarily formed through internal psychological mechanisms, with Cultural Experience functioning as the key mediating process. This result provides empirical support for the proposition that external digital stimuli become effective only when they can create meaningful cognitive and emotional experiences during the tourism encounter.

The first hypothesis proposed that Social Media Marketing positively influences Cultural Experience. The empirical findings strongly support this relationship, indicating that digital promotional activities significantly contribute to the formation of tourists' perceptions and emotional engagement with the cultural festival. Rather than functioning merely as an information dissemination channel, social media serves as a medium through which visitors construct expectations regarding authenticity, uniqueness, and symbolic meanings before participating in the event. This finding is consistent with the SOR framework, where marketing communication represents the external stimulus that initiates tourists' internal psychological evaluation (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). High-quality visual content, interactive communication, entertainment value, and trend-oriented messages collectively enhance visitors' readiness to appreciate cultural elements during the festival experience.

These results align with prior studies emphasizing the influence of social media on the development of tourism experiences. Baber & Baber (2023) argued that social media marketing positively influences tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations through destination image and emotional responses. Similarly, Tran & Rudolf (2022) emphasized that digital platforms have evolved beyond promotional tools into strategic channels capable of communicating destination identity and cultural narratives. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that, within seasonal cultural festivals, social media does not merely increase destination awareness but actively facilitates the development of Cultural Experience. This contribution broadens previous tourism marketing literature by identifying Cultural Experience as a direct psychological consequence of digital promotional activities rather than merely an outcome of on-site visitation.

The second hypothesis predicted a positive direct effect of Social Media Marketing on Revisit Intention. However, the empirical findings did not provide statistical support for this assumption. Although the path coefficient was positive, its lack of statistical significance suggests that social media promotional exposure, by itself, does not directly motivate tourists to return to a seasonal cultural festival. This finding suggests

that attractive digital content successfully motivates first-time visitation but does not necessarily establish long-term destination loyalty.

The absence of a significant direct effect is noteworthy because it is inconsistent with previous research reporting that social media marketing directly influences tourists' revisit intention (Chen et al., 2022; Wilopo & Nuralam, 2025). A plausible explanation lies in the distinctive characteristics of seasonal cultural festivals. Unlike permanent tourism destinations, seasonal festivals are limited in duration and frequently depend on novelty, exclusivity, and annual anticipation. Consequently, visitors may initially attend because of viral promotional content, yet their decision to return depends less on promotional exposure and more on whether the actual experience provides lasting cultural and emotional value. Therefore, promotional intensity alone cannot guarantee destination loyalty when experiential quality remains unchanged.

These results should not be taken to imply that Social Media Marketing lacks effectiveness. Rather, they indicate that digital marketing mainly acts as an initial stimulus in tourists' decision-making process, instead of serving as the primary factor that directly drives repeat visitation. Within the SOR perspective, the stimulus does not directly generate behavioral responses; instead, its influence operates through the organism, representing tourists' internal cognitive and emotional states. Consequently, the insignificant direct relationship observed in this study reinforces one of the central assumptions of SOR theory by illustrating that psychological processing cannot be omitted when explaining tourist behavioral intentions.

The third hypothesis predicted that Cultural Experience positively influences Revisit Intention. The empirical evidence strongly supports this proposition. Tourists who perceived stronger cultural uniqueness, acquired new cultural knowledge, and experienced deeper emotional engagement demonstrated significantly higher intentions to revisit the festival. This finding indicates that memorable cultural experiences constitute one of the principal determinants of destination loyalty within seasonal tourism contexts.

The result aligns with previous tourism literature emphasizing experiential value as a critical predictor of revisit behavior. Chen et al. (2022) reported that emotional experiences significantly influence tourists' behavioral intentions in cultural tourism settings. Similarly, Yang et al. (2023) demonstrated that emotional and cultural experiences strengthen visitors' cultural identity, ultimately encouraging future behavioral commitment toward heritage destinations. Fernández-López et al. (2025) likewise found that engagement and satisfaction generated during cultural events substantially increase revisit intention. The current study confirms these conclusions while extending their applicability to Indonesian seasonal cultural festivals, where empirical evidence remains relatively limited.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding reinforces the organism component of the SOR framework. Internal psychological experiences—including emotional attachment, cultural appreciation, and perceived authenticity—serve as the primary mechanisms translating external marketing stimuli into behavioral outcomes. Consequently, tourists revisit cultural festivals not because promotional messages remain persuasive over time but because meaningful cultural experiences generate enduring memories capable of sustaining future travel intentions.

The most important finding of this study concerns the mediating role of Cultural Experience. The significant indirect effect demonstrates that Social Media Marketing Influences Revisit Intention primarily through Cultural Experience rather than through a direct behavioral pathway. This finding represents the central contribution of the present research because it empirically validates the complete psychological mechanism proposed by the SOR model within the context of seasonal cultural festivals.

The mediation finding provides a more comprehensive explanation for inconsistencies reported in previous tourism marketing studies. Earlier investigations often examined the direct relationship between social media marketing and revisit intention or employed mediators such as destination image, satisfaction, or perceived value (Baber & Baber, 2023; Chin & Wong, 2022). While these mediators explain portions of tourists' behavioral responses, they insufficiently capture the distinctive experiential characteristics of cultural festivals, where symbolic meanings, local traditions, and emotional immersion constitute the core tourism products. By positioning Cultural Experience as the principal mediating construct, this study offers a more contextually appropriate explanation of loyalty formation within heritage-based tourism events.

The findings also suggest that digital promotion should be understood as a mechanism for constructing expectations rather than simply attracting attention. Tourists increasingly consume visual narratives through platforms such as Instagram and TikTok before making travel decisions. However, repeat visitation depends on whether the cultural meanings presented online are genuinely reflected in the actual tourism experience. When promotional narratives accurately represent authentic local traditions, visitors experience greater congruence between expectation and reality, strengthening emotional attachment and encouraging future visitation. Conversely, discrepancies between online representation and on-site experience may weaken destination loyalty despite successful promotional campaigns.

Theoretical Contributions

An additional theoretical implication emerges from integrating recent perspectives on human-centered digital transformation. Contemporary literature argues that the effectiveness of digital ecosystems depends not only on technological

sophistication but also on the competencies of human actors facilitating service encounters. Sumarno et al. (2026) demonstrated that participatory experiential learning enhances relational competence, trust, and user engagement within digitally supported service environments. The present findings complement this perspective by indicating that successful tourism marketing likewise requires meaningful interaction between digital communication and human-mediated cultural interpretation. In other words, technology attracts visitors, whereas authentic cultural interaction sustains loyalty.

The findings collectively enrich the application of the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework in tourism research in several important ways. First, they demonstrate that the organism component should not be treated as a simple emotional response but rather as a multidimensional cultural experience encompassing cognitive, affective, and experiential dimensions. Second, they show that the influence of digital marketing on loyalty is largely indirect, emphasizing the necessity of incorporating psychological mediators into behavioral models. Third, they extend the SOR framework from conventional destination marketing contexts to seasonal cultural festivals, where authenticity, temporality, and emotional immersion become fundamental determinants of tourists’ post-visit behavior.

Accordingly, the primary contribution of this study extends beyond the application of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework. It provides empirical evidence that Cultural Experience represents the central psychological pathway through which Social Media Marketing influences Revisit Intention in the context of Indonesian seasonal cultural festivals. While previous studies have predominantly emphasized destination image or tourist satisfaction as mediating variables, the present research establishes Cultural Experience as a theoretically and empirically stronger explanatory construct in heritage-based festival tourism. This contribution expands contemporary tourism marketing literature by providing a more nuanced understanding of how digital promotion generates sustainable destination loyalty through culturally meaningful visitor experiences rather than through promotional exposure alone.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several practical implications for destination management organizations (DMOs), festival organizers, local governments, and tourism marketers seeking to improve visitor loyalty through digital marketing strategies. The empirical evidence demonstrates that Social Media Marketing alone is insufficient to stimulate revisit intention unless it successfully generates meaningful Cultural Experience. Consequently, digital marketing strategies should move beyond increasing online visibility toward facilitating authentic cultural engagement throughout the tourist journey. Rather than emphasizing visually appealing promotional materials alone, destination managers should prioritize storytelling content that communicates the

historical background, philosophical values, and local traditions underlying the Wonosobo Hot Air Balloon Festival. Such an approach is expected to strengthen visitors' emotional connections with the destination and increase the likelihood of repeat visitation.

For festival organizers, the findings suggest the importance of integrating cultural interpretation into both online communication and on-site experiences. Promotional campaigns should not merely showcase spectacular balloon performances but also introduce the cultural significance of the festival, community participation, local rituals, and traditional knowledge associated with the event. During the festival, visitors should be provided with opportunities to interact directly with local communities through cultural workshops, storytelling sessions, traditional performances, and educational activities. These initiatives may enhance tourists' cognitive understanding and emotional appreciation of local culture, thereby reinforcing the Cultural Experience identified in this study as the principal driver of revisit intention.

The results also highlight important implications for social media content strategy. Considering that Instagram and TikTok represent the dominant information sources among respondents, destination marketers should prioritize short-form visual storytelling that combines entertainment with educational and cultural narratives. User-generated content, visitor testimonials, behind-the-scenes documentation, and narratives featuring local artisans and community members may increase the perceived authenticity of promotional messages. Furthermore, collaboration with local content creators and cultural influencers may improve message credibility while preserving the cultural integrity of the festival. This strategy enables digital promotion to function not only as a communication tool but also as a medium for transferring cultural values before tourists arrive at the destination.

From a broader policy perspective, local governments should recognize that sustainable tourism development depends not only on promotional investment but also on preserving and communicating cultural authenticity. Tourism policies should therefore encourage closer collaboration among government agencies, local communities, creative industries, and digital media practitioners in developing integrated destination branding strategies. Investments in digital infrastructure should be accompanied by programs that strengthen community capacity in digital storytelling, cultural interpretation, and experiential tourism management. Such collaborative initiatives may improve both destination competitiveness and long-term visitor loyalty while ensuring that cultural festivals continue to generate economic benefits without compromising their cultural identity.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, the analysis was confined to the Wonosobo Hot Air Balloon Festival, a seasonal cultural tourism event distinguished by its distinctive local traditions and time-specific characteristics. While this setting offers meaningful insights into heritage-oriented festival tourism, the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other tourism destinations, cultural festivals, or international settings remains limited and should therefore be interpreted with caution. Future studies are therefore encouraged to replicate the proposed model across different types of tourism destinations, including heritage sites, community-based tourism, music festivals, and recurring cultural events, to examine the robustness of the identified relationships under varying contextual conditions.

Second, the study adopted a cross-sectional research design, meaning that tourists' perceptions were measured at only one point in time. While this approach is appropriate for examining structural relationships among latent constructs, it does not allow causal inferences regarding changes in tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions over time. Since revisit intention may evolve following repeated travel experiences or subsequent promotional exposure, future research should adopt longitudinal or panel research designs to investigate how Social Media Marketing, Cultural Experience, and Revisit Intention develop throughout different stages of the tourist journey.

Third, the proposed model focuses on Cultural Experience as the primary psychological mechanism linking Social Media Marketing to Revisit Intention within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework. Although the significant mediating effect confirms the theoretical relevance of Cultural Experience, other psychological and behavioral constructs may further explain tourists' post-visit decisions. Future research could expand the current framework by incorporating additional mediating or moderating variables, including destination image, perceived authenticity, tourist satisfaction, memorable tourism experience, place attachment, electronic word-of-mouth, and perceived value. Integrating these factors into a single analytical model may offer a more comprehensive explanation of tourists' behavioral responses in digitally mediated tourism contexts.

Finally, the present study relied on self-reported questionnaire data collected from domestic visitors who actively use social media. Although this sampling strategy aligns with the research objectives, future investigations should include more diverse respondent groups, particularly international tourists and visitors with varying levels of digital engagement, to improve the external validity of the findings. Comparative studies across countries, cultures, or demographic segments may also reveal whether the mediating role of Cultural Experience remains consistent under different social, cultural, and

technological conditions. Such extensions would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how digital marketing strategies influence sustainable tourist loyalty across diverse tourism settings.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships among Social Media Marketing, Cultural Experience, and Revisit Intention within the context of the Wonosobo Hot Air Balloon Festival by applying the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework. The findings demonstrate that Social Media Marketing significantly enhances tourists' Cultural Experience, while Cultural Experience positively influences their intention to revisit the festival. In contrast, the direct effect of Social Media Marketing on Revisit Intention was not statistically significant, indicating that digital promotional activities alone are insufficient to generate sustainable visitor loyalty. Instead, the influence of Social Media Marketing operates primarily through the creation of meaningful cultural experiences, as confirmed by the significant mediating role of Cultural Experience.

These findings reinforce the central proposition of the SOR framework that external marketing stimuli do not directly determine behavioral responses but instead operate through tourists' internal psychological processes. Within the context of seasonal cultural festivals, Cultural Experience represents the critical mechanism through which digital communication is transformed into long-term behavioral intentions. The study therefore extends contemporary tourism marketing literature by demonstrating that experiential and cultural dimensions provide a stronger explanation of revisit intention than promotional exposure alone.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that destination managers, festival organizers, and tourism policymakers should reposition social media from a promotional instrument toward a platform for communicating authentic cultural narratives and facilitating meaningful visitor engagement. Integrating digital storytelling with on-site cultural interpretation, community participation, and authentic local experiences may strengthen tourists' emotional attachment to destinations and encourage sustainable revisit behavior. Such an approach contributes not only to destination competitiveness but also to the preservation and promotion of local cultural heritage.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of tourism marketing research by providing empirical evidence that Cultural Experience functions as the principal psychological pathway linking Social Media Marketing to Revisit Intention in seasonal cultural festivals. As digital technologies continue to reshape tourism consumption, future destination marketing strategies should increasingly emphasize culturally meaningful experiences that transform online engagement into enduring visitor loyalty and sustainable destination development.

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