

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Constructing a Destination Gestalt Model: Brand Gestalt, Brand Attitude, and Revisit Intention

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Abstract: This study proposes and tests a structural model that integrates brand gestalt, brand attitude, and revisit intention in the context of tourism destinations. Specifically, the study investigated the influences of 4S brand gestalt dimensions (i.e., story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder) on tourists' attitudes and intention to revisit a destination. Survey-based data were collected from visitors of North Sulawesi, Indonesia ($n = 357$). Findings from the structural equations modeling analysis indicate that the two underlying dimensions of brand gestalt (i.e., story and sensescape) significantly influence brand attitude and revisit intention. Additionally, the brand attitude has a significant effect on revisit intention. Finally, while the brand story is the most salient predictor of brand attitude, sensescape has a greater impact on revisit intention. The theoretical and managerial implications of these findings are proposed.

Keywords: brand gestalt, brand story, brand sensescape, brand attitude, revisit intention

Introduction

In today's competitive tourism market, establishing a strong brand that will stay top of mind with the tourist is pivotal. Branding provides a competitive advantage to a tourism destination by crafting unique characteristics and identity (Jarratt et al., 2018; Saraniemi, 2010; Saraniemi & Komppula, 2017; Tsaour et al., 2016), creating a strong and positive image (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Allameh et al., 2015; Chaulagain et al., 2019; Chen & Phou, 2013; Moon & Han, 2018; Ryu et al., 2019; Souiden et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2018), increasing perceived quality (Allameh et al., 2015; Berezina et al., 2012; Moon & Han, 2018), and maintaining strategic

positioning in the industry (Kotsi & Pike, 2020; Kumar & Kaushik, 2017; Pike et al., 2016; Ruiz-Real et al., 2020). Destination branding is also vital in influencing various tourists' behavior, such as satisfaction (Allameh et al., 2015; Martín et al., 2018; Olsen, 2007), visiting intention (Ahmad et al., 2020; Chen & Tung, 2014; Wang, et al., 2018), revisiting intention (Allameh et al., 2015; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Foroudi et al., 2021; Hasan et al., 2019; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Soliman, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018), and destination loyalty (Chen & Phou, 2013; Kumar & Kaushik, 2017; Moon & Han, 2018; Ong et al., 2018). On a broader scale, a successful destination brand triggers a multiplier effect to the country's economic and political value through the consumption

of tourism-related products and services (Berrozpe et al., 2019; Pike, 2005; Tsaour et al., 2016).

Over the past decade, the destination branding paradigm has shifted from an idiosyncratic and piecemeal approach to a more holistic and integrated system (e.g., Mandagi et al., 2021; Saraniemi, 2010; Seraphin, Sheeran, et al., 2018; Seraphin, Zaman, et al., 2018). On a theoretical note, the need for a more holistic branding approach is threefold. First, the destination is a complex social entity that consists of multifaceted elements (Pike, 2005; Seraphin, Sheeran, et al., 2018; Seraphin, Zaman, et al., 2018; Zenker et al., 2017) and their interaction with the environmental factors. Further, a destination brand comprises a broad range of heterogeneous products and services, which are often difficult to be aggregated and represented by a single brand. Third and last, the destination is a cocreative brand, which is a product of a dynamic partnership, collaboration, and interconnection between various stakeholders with different interests and objectives (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015; Morgan et al., 2016; Nyangwe & Buhalis, 2018; Perkins et al., 2020; Saraniemi & Komppula, 2017).

In explaining the complexity and multidimensionality of a destination, brand gestalt is a significant concept. The notion of brand gestalt postulates that brand is represented in the consumers' perception as a totality more than just the combination of its elements (Diamond et al., 2009). In a more formal definition, it is "the embodiment of combinative and elemental influences enabling consumers to perceive a sense of wholeness from the brand" (Mandagi et al., 2021, p.1). This holistic brand concept fully encompasses how customers perceive a brand as a complex sociocultural entity in four important ways. First, looking at the brand from the gestalt lens helps customers understand the vital role of story in conveying the destination's unique essence and distinctive characteristic (Berry & Seltman, 2007; Bitner, 1992; Moin et al., 2020; Pachucki et al., 2021; Saraniemi & Komppula, 2017; Su et al., 2020). Second, brand gestalt takes into consideration the interplay of consumers' sensory experience as a critical determinant of a destination's symbol, characteristics, and identity (Barnes et al., 2014; Ding & Tseng, 2015; Kim et al., 2010; Moon & Han, 2018; Ong et al., 2018; Rather et al., 2020). Third, brand gestalt brings together the role of the external environment (i.e., servicescape and stakeholder) in cocreating the destination brand identity.

The present study explores brand gestalt in the context of destination branding. Despite its critical role in explaining brand multidimensionality and complexity, the brand gestalt concept is relatively underexplored in both the marketing and tourism destination fields. The concept was first introduced by Diamond et al. (2009) signifying the shifting paradigm in branding perspective towards a more holistic and integrated approach. However, there has been a dearth of empirical and theoretical work that expands the concept, except for the seminal paper of Diamond et al. (2009) and related empirical studies (Mandagi & Aseng, 2021; Mandagi et al., 2021; Mandagi et al., 2022). Thus, the present study addresses this theoretical gap by further expanding brand gestalt's nomological network by integrating it with brand attitude and revisit intention. Particularly, the present study answered five main research questions:

- (1) What are the effects of brand gestalt's underlying dimensions on brand attitude?
- (2) What are the effects of brand gestalt's underlying dimensions on revisit intention?
- (3) Which among the brand gestalt underlying dimension has the most influence on brand attitude?
- (4) Which among the brand gestalt dimension has the most influence on revisit intention?
- (5) What is the effect of brand attitude on revisit intention?

In answering these research questions, a survey was conducted in the province of North Sulawesi, Indonesia. As one of the fastest growing tourism destinations in Indonesia in terms of the number of foreign visitors, North Sulawesi has received recognition from the national government as "the rising star" tourism destination, the next Bali, and one of the country's super-priority tourism destinations. A more comprehensive and strategic branding approach is pivotal for this province in sustaining its tourism growth and competitive position over other destinations.

The contribution of this study to the existing body of literature was threefold. First, by examining the interplay of destination brand gestalt, it expands the holistic brand concept into the destination brand context. Second, it enriches the limited empirical work on brand gestalt by providing the first empirical

evidence on the influence of brand gestalt dimensions (i.e., story, sensescape, and servicescape) on brand attitude on revisit intention. Third and last, it further validates the brand gestalt scale by integrating the construct with the two significant consumer behavior variables: brand attitude and revisit intention.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Destination Brand and Branding

Branding is a strategic tool that sets a destination apart from its competitor. Destination branding can be defined as “a name, symbol, logo, word, mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the place; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the place; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce pleasurable memories of the place experience” (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998, p. 17). Hanna and Rowley (2015) expand the concept further by explaining that branding initiatives should go beyond serving visitors’ interests but also its residents. Similarly, Zenker et al. (2017) explain that a place (or destination) brand is “a network of associations in the place consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place and its stakeholders. These associations differ in their influence within the network and the importance of the place consumers’ attitude and behavior” (p. 2). By definition, destination branding goes beyond a place’s symbolic elements, such as name, logo designs, or motto. Rather, it is a way to differentiate a destination from a competitor that offers an identical tourism package and to establish the destination’s competitive advantage with the ultimate goal to attract and retain visitors (Jarratt et al., 2018; Kumar & Kaushik, 2017; Morgan et al., 2011; Pike et al., 2016; Tsaour et al., 2016).

Destination branding has received outsized attention from practitioners and researchers in the marketing and tourism fields over the last decades as it has been acknowledged as a vital tool in developing and sustaining destination strategic positioning (Kotsi & Pike, 2020; Kumar & Kaushik, 2017; Pike et al., 2016; Ruiz-Real et al., 2020), identity (Blain et al., 2005; Jarratt et al., 2018; Pike, 2005; Saraniemi, 2010; Saraniemi & Komppula, 2017; Tsaour et al., 2016), personality (Chen & Phou, 2013; Kumar & Nayak, 2014; Souiden et al., 2017; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011),

and image (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Chaulagain et al., 2019; Chen & Phou, 2013; Lai et al., 2017, 2018; Moon & Han, 2018; Souiden et al., 2017). Developing an effective branding strategy is also pivotal for a destination in differentiating itself from its competitors, attracting potential visitors, conveying a specific message to the target customers, and educating existing visitors (e.g., Chen & Phou, 2013; Kumar & Kaushik, 2017; Martín et al., 2018; Moon & Han, 2018; Ong et al., 2018; Rather et al., 2020).

Despite remarkable progress in destination branding research, there has been limited empirical work devoted to a more holistic and comprehensive destination branding approach (Morgan et al., 2011; Pike, 2005). Previous literature and scientific studies on destination branding have primarily focused on symbolic elements, such as the destination’s name, logo, tagline, or slogan (Galí et al., 2017; Kladou et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2021; Qu et al., 2021). While these symbolic elements are a critical part of branding strategy, particularly in conveying the message and affecting tourists’ attachment (Galí et al., 2017), their effectiveness in influencing tourism behavior is very limited (Kladou et al., 2017). There appears a need for a more comprehensive and strategic approach that captures the essence of a destination and its multidimensional elements (Pike, 2005). Morgan et al. (2011) argued that a more holistic destination branding approach is necessary to aid destination management organizations (DMOs) in decision-making, strategic planning, and execution. Additionally, having a more integrated and comprehensive branding framework is essential for destinations to compete more effectively and maintain their strategic positioning in the market.

Brand Gestalt

The present study explores brand gestalt in the context of destination branding. It sheds light on understanding the holistic brand perception that customers hold about any given brand. The concept of gestalt, in general, explains how the human mind perceives an object consisting of various elements, not as separate parts but as a whole system that functions more than just a combination of its elements (Koffka, 1922). This concept is pivotal in explaining how the human mind perceived a complex or multifaceted object as an interconnected system.

Although the general concept of gestalt has been well established, especially in the area of psychology,

brand gestalt has not received much attention in the marketing field. Diamond et al. (2009), who first introduced the gestalt concept into branding, propose that a brand as a complex sociocultural entity is perceived as a totality in consumers' minds. This holistic mental model of a brand brings together the combinative role of the core components of a brand and its external environment. Mandagi et al. (2021) identified the 4S brand gestalt dimensions, namely, story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder (see Figure 1). The concept was further expanded by establishing the nomological network of brand gestalt and revealed that brand gestalt is the determinant of brand loyalty (Mandagi & Aseng, 2021; Mandagi et al., 2022).



Figure 1. 4S dimensions of brand gestalt (Mandagi et al., 2021).

The brand gestalt concept postulates four principles relevant to this study. First, it considers the crucial role of brand story in developing a positive brand image and association (Lundqvist et al., 2012; Mandagi & Sondakh, 2022; Ryu et al., 2019). Second, it identifies the critical interplay of consumers' sensory experiences. These brand experiential aspects are pivotal in the formulation of destinations' symbols, characteristics, and identities (Barnes et al., 2014; Ding & Tseng, 2015; Kim et al., 2010; Lundqvist et al., 2012; Moon & Han, 2018; Ong et al., 2018). Furthermore, the concept of brand gestalt recognizes the crucial role of the physical environment surrounding a brand in developing a destination brand (Berry & Seltman, 2007; Bitner, 1992). Lastly, it takes into account the role of stakeholders in cocreating the brand. Zenker et al. (2017) documented that a destination brand is the consumer's mental representation of the association between a destination and its stakeholder. Similarly,

Vanolo (2015) stated that stakeholders are actively involved in brand cocreation by creating a destination identity.

Brand Gestalt and Brand Attitude

Over the past two decades, brand attitude has attracted much attention from researchers and practitioners, especially in the marketing field because of its critical role in predicting various consumer behavior (e.g., Alden et al., 2013; Augusto & Torres, 2018; Foroudi, 2019; Foroudi et al., 2021; Hwang et al., 2021; Park et al., 2010; Salehzadeh & Pool, 2016; Wang et al., 2019; Yim et al., 2014). By definition, brand attitude explains consumers' overall evaluation and willingness to consistently respond favorably or unfavorably towards a brand (Park et al., 2010; Yim et al., 2014). It is formed through a consumer-brand experience, interaction, association, and belief (Foroudi, 2019; Park et al., 2010; Yim et al., 2014), as well as brand-related information obtained from multiple sources. Understanding brand attitude is pivotal for a marketer because it represents the value that consumers hold about a brand, which explains what customers think about a brand, whether the brand satisfies their needs, and just how much they wanted the brand.

The current body of literature in the marketing field documented the critical roles played by the brand attitude in today's competitive market. Brand attitude is found to be a critical determinant of a brand's perceived value (Salehzadeh & Pool, 2016), which enhances marketing strategy by minimizing cost and risk in introducing new products and increasing promotional benefits (Alden et al., 2013). Positive brand attitudes also contribute to a company's performance expectation and reputation (Foroudi, 2019; Salehzadeh & Pool, 2016). Furthermore, brand attitude is an important predictor of various consumer behaviors, such as purchase intention (Salehzadeh & Pool, 2016; Wang et al., 2019), attachment (Hwang et al., 2021), and word-of-mouth, revisit, and loyalty intention (Augusto & Torres, 2018; Foroudi et al., 2021).

This study aims to explain the brand gestalt effect on brand attitude and revisit intention. To answer the research questions and achieve the research objective, hypotheses were developed from the lens of the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985), which is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977). TPB postulates

that an individual's willingness to perform a specific behavior is determined by three core components: attitude, subjective norms, and perception (Ajzen, 2011). TPB is well recognized among researchers in tourism marketing to explain tourists' attitudes and behavioral intention (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2020; Chen & Tung, 2014; Olsen, 2007; Soliman, 2019; Wang, et al., 2018; Wang, Wong, et al., 2018). Olsen (2007) suggests that TPB can be used to explain consumers' attitudes and purchasing behavior. Furthermore, consumers' perception of a particular brand tends to influence their attitude towards the brand and their intention to purchase. In the context of this study, when tourists have a favorable perception of a particular brand (i.e., brand gestalt), they tend to develop a positive attitude towards a destination. Following Mandagi et al. (2021), the present study looks into the influence of brand gestalt at the dimensional level; hence, the following hypotheses are introduced:

- H1_a: Story has a positive effect on brand attitude, such that compelling brand story leads to a tourist's positive brand attitude.
- H1_b: Sensescape has a positive effect on brand attitude, such that favorable brand sensescape leads to a tourist's positive brand attitude.
- H1_c: Servicescape has a positive effect on brand attitude, such that compelling brand servicescape leads to a tourist's positive brand attitude.
- H1_d: Stakeholder has a positive effect on brand attitude, such that a higher degree of stakeholder participation leads to a tourist's positive brand attitude.

Brand Gestalt and Intention to Revisit

According to TPB, an individual's perception, attitude, and subjective norms are the antecedents of behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1985, 2011). In the context of this study, tourists build their perception of a destination (i.e., brand gestalt) based on their subjective evaluation of overall destination-related information, which shapes their attitude towards a destination and intention to revisit, such that the more favorable destination brand gestalt is, the stronger their revisit intention is. Moreover, Garbarino and Johnson (2018) argue that consumers' perception of brand-related information and experience shape their behavioral intention. Existing literature in the tourism

field has also documented the role of tourists' perceived destination image on revisit intention (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Ahn et al., 2016; Allameh et al., 2015; Berezina et al., 2012; Chaulagain et al., 2019; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Zhang et al., 2018).

The present study focuses on destination brand gestalt to represent tourists' holistic perception of destination essence, image, and characteristics (Mandagi et al., 2021). In particular, it looks into the influence of the 4S dimensions of brand gestalt (i.e., story, sensescape, servicescape, stakeholder) on tourists' revisit intention. Based on the prediction of TPB and some empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are introduced:

- H2_a: Story has a positive effect on revisit intention, such that compelling brand story leads to tourists' stronger intention to revisit.
- H2_b: Sensescape has a positive effect on brand attitude, such that favorable brand sensescape leads to tourists' stronger intention to revisit.
- H2_c: Servicescape has a positive effect on brand attitude, such that compelling brand servicescape leads to tourists' stronger intention to revisit.
- H2_d: Stakeholder has a positive effect on brand attitude, such that a higher degree of stakeholder participation leads to tourists' stronger intention to revisit.

Brand Attitude and Intention to Revisit

TPB predicts that a consumer's behavioral intention is a function of their attitude toward the behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 2011), which implies that one of the best predictors of customers' intention is their attitude towards the brand. In practical terms, the more favorable customers' brand attitude is, the stronger is their intention to purchase or repurchase the brand. Therefore, building and maintaining positive brand attitudes would be of interest to every business entity.

The existing body of literature in the marketing field has established a relationship between brand attitude and the customers' behavioral intention (e.g., Alden et al., 2013; Augusto & Torres, 2018; Foroudi, 2019; Foroudi et al., 2021; Hwang et al., 2021; Park et al., 2010; Salehzadeh & Pool, 2016; Wang et al., 2019; Yim et al., 2014). For instance, customers' positive attitudes towards brands are positively associated with their intention to purchase those items (Salehzadeh

& Pool, 2016). In the service sector, there is also a positive association between destination brand attitude and tourists' intention to visit and revisit. For instance, tourists' attitude towards a destination was found to be the significant antecedent of revisit intention (Han et al., 2019; Hasan et al., 2019; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Soliman, 2019), as well as a critical mediator between travel motivation and revisit intention (Huang & Hsu, 2009; Soliman, 2019). Consequently, the following hypothesis is presented:

H3: Brand attitude has a positive effect on revisit intention, such that the stronger tourists' attitude towards a destination is, the stronger their intention to revisit is.

Mediating Effect of Brand Attitude

Brand attitude has been regarded as an essential variable in marketing as it is deemed to be a significant determinant of consumer behavior (e.g., Alden et al., 2013; Augusto & Torres, 2018; Foroudi, 2019; Foroudi et al., 2021; Hwang et al., 2021; Park et al., 2010; Salehzadeh & Pool, 2016; Wang et al., 2019; Yim et al., 2014). Further, it represents customers' overall evaluation and willingness to consistently respond favorably or unfavorably towards a brand (Park et al., 2010; Yim et al., 2014). It is no surprise, then, that a marketer is interested in how to establish customers' positive attitudes towards the brand.

Previous research has documented that brand attitude is a significant predictor of customers' behavioral intention to repurchase and revisit (Han

et al., 2019; Hasan et al., 2019; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Salehzadeh & Pool, 2016; Soliman, 2019). Furthermore, brand attitude plays a mediating role in the relationship between brand reputation (i.e., brand gestalt) and revisit intention (Ahn & Back, 2018). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H4_a: Brand attitudes mediate the relationship between story and revisit intention.
- H4_b: Brand attitudes mediate the relationship between sensescape and revisit intention.
- H4_c: Brand attitudes mediate the relationship between servicescape and revisit intention.
- H4_d: Brand attitudes mediate the relationship between servicescape and revisit intention.

Figure 2 presents the proposed model in this study, which summarizes the relationships among variables in this study.

Method

Research Design

This study is primarily descriptive and aims to investigate the respondent's perception of destination brand gestalt and its influence on brand attitude and revisit intention. To test the hypotheses and answer the research questions, a quantitative survey was employed to collect the data from the respondents. A survey is a data collection procedure in quantitative research that enables the researcher to explore respondents'

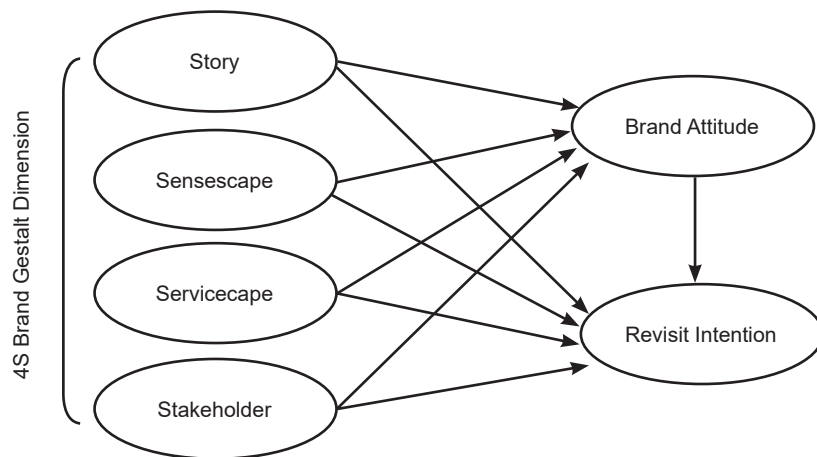


Figure 2. Conceptual model.

characteristics, perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, the quantitative survey approach best suits the purpose of this research.

Sampling and Data Collection

The sample in this study comprises visitors of North Sulawesi, Indonesia. To obtain a more comprehensive perception and robust result, the multigroup sample was included in this study comprised both first-time and repetitive as well as domestic and international visitors. There are two inclusion criteria for the sample selection. First, respondents are visiting tourist destinations in North Sulawesi for leisure purposes. Second, they are over 16 years old and give their consent to participate in the survey.

A most robust form of convenience sampling method was utilized, where the surveyor intercepted the tourists at the tourism destination randomly and requested them to fill out the questionnaire. The N10 (number of indicator times 10) formula was used to determine the minimum sample size in this study (Comrey & Lee, 2013; Hair et al., 2017; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Following this rule, given the 27-item questionnaire involved in this study, the minimum sample size should be $27(10) = 270$. Thus, the questionnaires were distributed to 380 visitors. Upon collection, 357 returned questionnaires were completed and used for further analysis.

A survey was conducted from July to December 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, in the province of North Sulawesi, Indonesia. This destination was selected due to its richness and diversity in tourism attractions. It offers a complete tourism package from well-known underwater parks listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites, breathtaking natural tourist spots, and exotic cultural and culinary activities. A strategic and integrated branding strategy is necessary for North Sulawesi to strengthen its positioning as a “super-priority” and “rising star” world-class tourist destination.

Three representative and most popular tourist spots in North Sulawesi (i.e., Bunaken National Park, Linow Lake, and Tangkoko National Park) were selected as the data collection sites (see Mandagi et al., 2021). This multisite data collection provided diverse samples with sufficient statistical power to explain the relationship among the variables in this study.

Measurement Instrument

The self-administered questionnaire was utilized

as the measurement instrument of all the variables in this study. The questionnaires were presented in both English and Bahasa Indonesia to accommodate both local and foreign visitors. A back-translation procedure was performed by a professional translator to ascertain accuracy (see Brislin, 2016). Furthermore, each item was further cross-checked by the researcher to ensure accuracy and clarity.

Respondents were asked to rate measurement items expressed in a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first section dealt with the demographic characteristics of respondents and some instructions, and the second section covered the measurement items for the seven variables.

All variables were measured using well-established and psychometrically sound instrument scales modified to suit the context of this study. The measurement for brand gestalt, which consisted of 19 items, was adapted from Mandagi et al. (2021). The brand attitude was measured using four items derived from previous studies (Augusto & Torres, 2018; Foroudi, 2019; Foroudi et al., 2021; Hwang et al., 2021; Park et al., 2010; X. W. Wang et al., 2019). Measurement for revisit intention consisted of a four-item scale adapted from previous studies (Allameh et al., 2015; Berezina et al., 2012; Cardona et al., 2017; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Foroudi et al., 2021; Hasan et al., 2019; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Soliman, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). The questionnaire was piloted to 50 respondents, independent of the main study, to ensure the clarity of each question. Revision regarding the wordings was then made after obtaining the feedback from the respondents.

Data Analysis

A two-stage structural equations modeling (SEM) procedure was employed to test the measurement and structural model (Hair et al., 2017). First, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to evaluate the reliability and validity of the variables and their indicators. The structural model was then evaluated to test the hypothesis. Data analysis was performed using statistical package SPSS version 25.0 and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 24.0. SPSS was used to extract the demographic information and reliability indicator (i.e., Cronbach's alpha [CA]) of each variable. AMOS was utilized to

perform the two-stage SEM procedure.

Result

Demographic

From the 357 responses that were collected from the survey, 198 respondents were male (55.5%). Most were in the age between 20 and 29, and 53% of the respondents were domestic tourists. Table 1 shows the demographic for the entire sample.

Respondents in this study involved various groups of visitors with potential differences in their perception of the variables of interest in this study (i.e., domestic vs international, first-time vs repetitive). Before performing the SEM, analysis of variance was done to check the possible differences in perceptions between groups. The result in Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference in the perception between these groups across all variables. It can be argued that the nonsignificant difference in the perception between groups of samples (i.e., domestic vs international and first time vs repetitive visitors) is due to the age of the respondents, who are mostly (70%) young tourists. Regardless of their country of origin and other sociodemographic backgrounds, this young

segment shares similar motivation and travel interests. Young tourists are motivated and keen to explore new and unique travel experiences, avoid mass tourism, embrace authentic goods and services, and participate in casual, recreational, and nature-oriented activities (Hampton, 1998; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Ooi & Laing, 2010).

These results provide the basis for treating the sample as a single data set in the subsequent analysis.

Measurement Model

CFA was performed by first evaluating the discriminant and convergent validity of the measurement model. The measurement model in this study involves three constructs. The brand gestalt construct as an independent variable is represented by the 4S dimensions (i.e., story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder). Brand attitude and revisit intentions serve as the dependent variables. In this confirmatory stage, five items with factor loading below the recommended threshold were removed (see Appendix). Table 3 summarizes the result of the CFA with the validity and reliability indicators.

With respect to discriminant validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was compared to the

Table 1
Demographic of the Respondents

| Characteristic | Category | Sample | |
|----------------|---------------|--------|------------|
| | | N | Percentage |
| Gender | Male | 198 | 55 |
| | Female | 159 | 45 |
| Age | Under 20 | 115 | 32 |
| | 20–29 | 136 | 38 |
| | 30–39 | 24 | 7 |
| | 40–49 | 45 | 13 |
| | 50 and above | 37 | 10 |
| Origin | Domestic | 190 | 53 |
| | International | 167 | 47 |
| Frequency | First time | 306 | 86 |
| | Repetitive | 51 | 14 |

Table 2*One-Factor ANOVA Test Result*

| Constructs | Group | Descriptive Statistics | | ANOVA Test | |
|-------------------|---------------|------------------------|------|------------|-------|
| | | Mean | SD | F Stat | p |
| Brand gestalt | Domestic | 4.30 | 0.55 | 3.418 | 0.065 |
| | International | 4.19 | 0.54 | | |
| | First time | 4.30 | 0.55 | | |
| | Repetitive | 4.19 | 0.54 | | |
| Brand attitude | Domestic | 4.21 | 0.75 | 0.033 | 0.857 |
| | International | 4.20 | 0.75 | | |
| | First time | 4.21 | 0.75 | | |
| | Repetitive | 4.20 | 0.75 | | |
| Revisit intention | Domestic | 4.06 | 0.85 | 0.804 | 0.37 |
| | International | 3.98 | 0.84 | | |
| | First time | 4.06 | 0.85 | | |
| | Repetitive | 3.98 | 0.84 | | |

Note. ANOVA = analysis of variance.

square of the correlation coefficient between the corresponding variables. Fornell and Larcker (2018) suggest that for the discriminant validity to be satisfied, the AVE values should be greater than the square of the correlation coefficient between the two variables. Subsequently, to evaluate the convergent validity, three indicators were examined: the significance of the factor loading, AVE, and construct reliability (CR). The recommended cutoff value of factor loading should be ≥ 0.5 , $AVE \geq 0.5$, and $CR \geq 0.7$ (Fornell & Larcker, 2018; Hair et al., 2017).

After a series of CFA and the deletion of factor loading below the recommended threshold, the results showed that the three convergent validity indicators (i.e., factor loading, AVE, and CR) were beyond

the recommended cutoff value across all variables. Additionally, the square root of AVE in the diagonal matrix was greater than the corresponding correlation coefficient between the two variables (see Table 4). These results imply that each variable has a convergent validity. Table 3 summarizes the CFA results.

Concerning the reliability, the CA and CR of each variable were examined. The decision criteria for the reliability to be satisfied are that both CA and CR should be higher than 0.70 (Cronbach, 1951; Cronbach & Furby, 1970). The result of the reliability test indicated that CR and CA values of each variable were higher than the cutoff value (see Table 3).

Furthermore, the goodness of fit of the measurement model was assessed based on the commonly used set of

Table 3*Validity and Reliability Results*

| Scale Items | Factor Loading | Cronbach Alpha | CR | AVE |
|---|----------------|----------------|------|------|
| Story | | 0.93 | 0.93 | 0.76 |
| The story of North Sulawesi is an essential part of its brand. | 0.82 | | | |
| The story of North Sulawesi makes it more attractive. | 0.88 | | | |
| North Sulawesi has authentic stories. | 0.88 | | | |
| The story of North Sulawesi affects me emotionally. | 0.93 | | | |
| The story of North Sulawesi makes me feel connected with it. | 0.90 | | | |
| Sensescape | | 0.93 | 0.93 | 0.76 |
| North Sulawesi offers novel experiences. | 0.90 | | | |
| North Sulawesi puts me in a good mood. | 0.82 | | | |
| North Sulawesi gives me pleasure. | 0.90 | | | |
| North Sulawesi satisfies my adventure needs. | 0.88 | | | |
| Servicescape | | 0.93 | 0.93 | 0.76 |
| North Sulawesi is clean. | 0.86 | | | |
| There is a comfortable overall temperature in North Sulawesi. | 0.76 | | | |
| Tourist spots in North Sulawesi are accessible. | 0.95 | | | |
| I feel safe and secure in North Sulawesi. | 0.91 | | | |
| Stakeholder | | 0.91 | 0.91 | 0.80 |
| The local resident of North Sulawesi is an integral part of its brand | 0.94 | | | |
| The recommendation of other tourists is an integral part of the North Sulawesi brand. | 0.88 | | | |
| The involvement of the local government is an essential part of the North Sulawesi brand. | 0.85 | | | |
| Brand attitude | | 0.94 | 0.94 | 0.84 |
| I enjoy visiting North Sulawesi. | 0.96 | | | |
| I am proud to visit North Sulawesi. | 0.92 | | | |
| I like the way North Sulawesi looks. | 0.87 | | | |
| Revisit intention | | 0.93 | 0.93 | 0.82 |
| I tend to visit North Sulawesi again. | 0.95 | | | |
| I'd love to come to North Sulawesi again. | 0.85 | | | |
| I think I will come back to North Sulawesi in the near future. | 0.91 | | | |

Note. AVE = average variance extracted, CR = construct reliability.

Table 4*Correlation Matrix With Square Root of AVE in the Diagonal*

| | Servicescape | Story | Sensescape | Stakeholder | Brand Attitude | Revisit Intention |
|-------------------|--------------|-------|------------|-------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Servicescape | 0.872 | | | | | |
| Story | 0.289 | 0.869 | | | | |
| Sensescape | 0.045 | 0.189 | 0.872 | | | |
| Stakeholder | 0.132 | 0.207 | 0.043 | 0.889 | | |
| Brand attitude | 0.274 | 0.701 | 0.380 | 0.171 | 0.917 | |
| Revisit intention | 0.000 | 0.127 | 0.830 | 0.020 | 0.345 | 0.902 |

Note. AVE = average variance extracted.

indicators: chi-square (χ^2); goodness-of-fit index (GFI); comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and root mean square residual (RMR); and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI). The recommended cutoff value of these indicators should be GFI > .90, CFI > .95, RMSEA < .06, RMR < .08, and TLI > .90 (Barrett, 2007; Fornell & Larcker, 2018; Hair et al., 2017; Hu & Bentler, 2009). The value of χ^2 is

significant (355.38, $p < .001$), which can be justified by our large sample size ($n > 200$). Moreover, the values of all goodness of fit in Table 5 are all beyond the recommended cutoff value, implying that the goodness of fit of the model is achieved.

Table 5*Goodness-of-Fit Measurement and Structural Model*

| Indicator | Cutoff Value | Calculated Value | | Conclusion |
|-----------|--------------|-------------------|------------------|------------|
| | | Measurement Model | Structural Model | |
| GFI | >0.90 | 0.92 | 0.92 | Good fit |
| CFI | >0.95 | 0.98 | 0.98 | Good fit |
| RMSEA | <0.06 | 0.05 | 0.05 | Good fit |
| RMR | <0.08 | 0.03 | 0.03 | Good fit |
| TLI | >0.90 | 0.97 | 0.97 | Good fit |

Note. GFI = goodness-of-fit index, CFI = comparative fit index, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, RMR = root mean square residual, TLI = Tucker Lewis Index.

Structural Model

The structural model's goodness of fit was also evaluated using the commonly used indicator (Barrett, 2007; Hu & Bentler, 2009). Table 5 reports that all indicators are beyond the recommended cutoff value, implying the

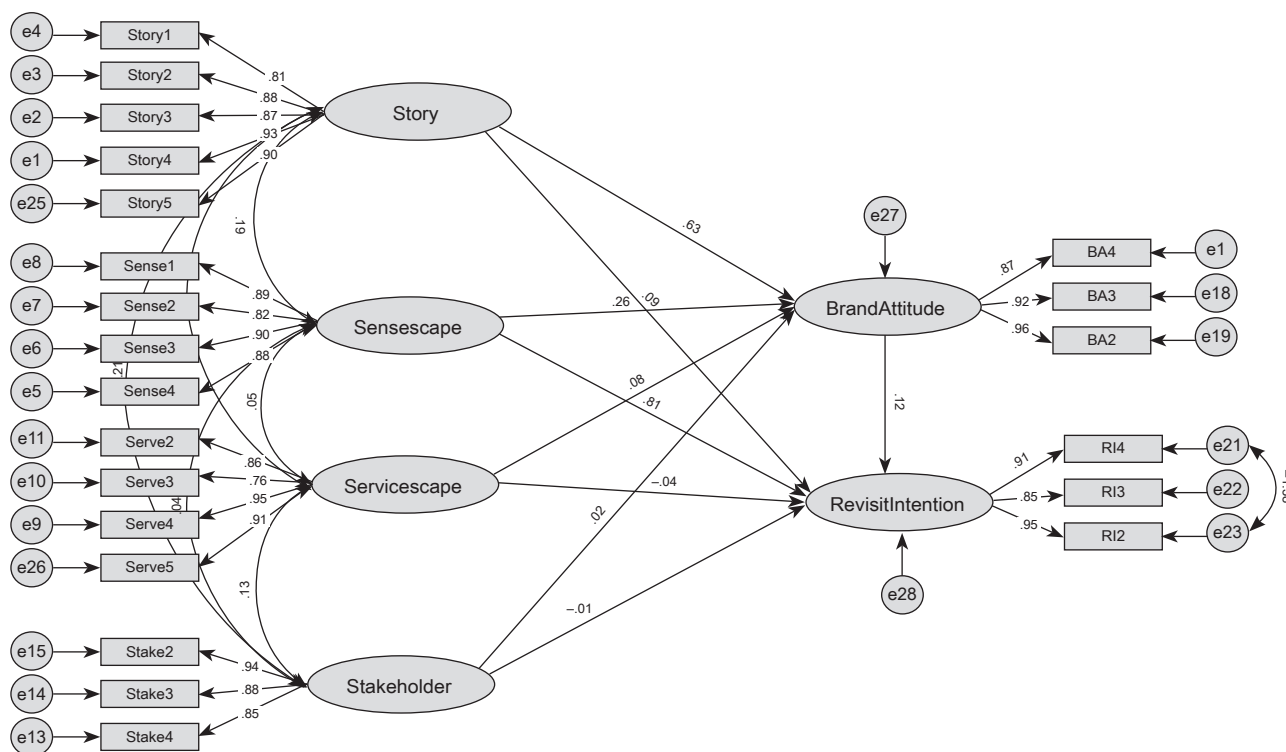


Figure 3. Structural model with path coefficient.

structural model’s goodness of fit was satisfied.

Figure 3 and Table 6 report the result for the hypothesis test. Regarding the effect of brand gestalt underlying dimension on brand attitude (H1a–H1d), only brand story and sensescape were found to be significant determinants of brand attitude. The path coefficient on brand attitude is significant and positive for both brand story ($\beta = 0.625, p < 0.001$) and brand sensescape ($\beta = 0.257, p < 0.001$), which confirms H1a and H1b. However, the effect of brand servicescape and stakeholder is nonsignificant. Therefore, H1c and H2b are not supported.

Hypothesis 2 (H2a–H2d) predicts a positive effect of the 4S brand gestalt dimension on revisit intention. The result shows the same pattern as in the first hypothesis. Brand story ($\beta = 0.94, p < 0.01$) and brand sensescape ($\beta = 0.805, p < 0.001$) have a significant and positive effect on revisit intention, which confirms H2a and H2b. Conversely, the effect of servicescape and stakeholder is nonsignificant. Hence, H2c and H2d are not supported.

A significant and positive effect was also detected in

the path coefficient between brand attitude and revisit intention ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.01$), which confirms H3.

Indirect Effect Analysis

To further test whether brand gestalt dimensions indirectly affect revisit intention via brand attitude, a mediating effect analysis was performed using bootstrapping method with 1,000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (see Hayes & Preacher, 2010). Based on the result shown in Table 7, the indirect effect of brand gestalt dimensions on revisit intention is not significant implying that brand attitude doesn’t mediate the relationship between brand gestalt dimensions and intention to revisit.

Discussion

The findings in the present study provide valuable insights into the link between brand gestalt, brand attachment, and intention to revisit in the tourism

Table 6*Structural Equation Model Result*

| Path Relationship | | | Estimate | Conclusion |
|-------------------|---|-------------------|----------|------------|
| Story | → | Revisit intention | 0.625*** | 0.049 |
| Sensescape | → | Brand attitude | 0.257*** | 0.033 |
| Servicescape | → | Brand attitude | 0.079 | 0.035 |
| Stakeholder | → | Brand attitude | 0.02 | 0.031 |
| Story | → | Revisit intention | 0.094* | 0.061 |
| Sensescape | → | Revisit intention | 0.805*** | 0.048 |
| Servicescape | → | Revisit intention | 0.04 | 0.036 |
| Stakeholder | → | Revisit intention | 0.011 | 0.031 |
| Brand attitude | → | Revisit intention | 0.118** | 0.062 |

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 7*Specific Indirect Effect Analysis*

| | Original Sample | Sample Mean | Standard Deviation | T Statistics | p Values |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|----------|
| Sensescape → Revisit intention | 0.006 | 0.005 | 0.005 | 1.305 | 0.192 |
| Servicescape → Revisit intention | 0.005 | 0.005 | 0.004 | 1.213 | 0.225 |
| Story → Revisit intention | 0.073 | 0.069 | 0.051 | 1.417 | 0.157 |
| Stakeholder → Revisit intention | 0.004 | 0.004 | 0.004 | 1.056 | 0.291 |

destination context. With respect to the effects of brand story, this study revealed that story dimensions of brand gestalt have significant effects on brand attitude and revisit intention. Furthermore, this study reveals that among the 4S brand gestalt dimensions, the brand story is the most salient predictor of brand attitude. It can be argued that a compelling story of a certain destination is positively linked to the tourist attitude towards the destination. This resonates with Moin et al. (2020), who stated that a brand story is particularly effective in the travel decision-making stage when tourists are planning their trip. Moreover, the brand story is effective because this narrative-based information is easier, more real, attractive, personal, and relevant to tourists, facilitating tourist-destination

emotional relationship (Lee & Jeong, 2017; Lundqvist et al., 2012; Moin et al., 2020; Pachucki et al., 2021; Su et al., 2020). It also serves as a powerful tool in communicating destination brand (Pachucki et al., 2021), conveying a positive destination image, and enhancing brand experience (Lundqvist et al., 2012).

With regard to the effect of sensescape dimensions of brand gestalt, the findings suggest that sensescape is the significant predictor of brand attitude and revisit intention. Furthermore, brand sensescape is found to be the most salient brand gestalt dimension in predicting revisit intention. This result is aligned with the prediction of TPB (Ajzen, 1985, 2011; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977) that people's perception or evaluation of a particular behavior determines their intention to

perform related activities. In the context of this study, when tourists evaluate their previous travel experience favorably, they are more likely to revisit the destination.

This study also uncovered strong evidence that tourists' attitude towards a destination positively affects their revisit intention. Clearly, when tourists develop a positive attitude towards a destination, they tend to engage in behavioral intention, such as a visit or revisit intention. This result is in line with the existing body of literature in the marketing field that documents a positive relationship between brand attitude and the customers' behavioral intention (Alden et al., 2013; Augusto & Torres, 2018; Foroudi, 2019; Hwang et al., 2021; Park et al., 2010; Salehzadeh & Pool, 2016; Wang et al., 2019; Yim et al., 2014). To a specific extent, this result provides empirical evidence in the tourism field regarding the link between tourists' attitude and intention to revisit.

It has been hypothesized that the servicescape dimension of brand gestalt would also positively affect brand attitude and revisit intention. However, this is not the case according to this study's findings. This was nevertheless surprising. There is a possibility that aggregating the three tourist sites confounded the results and led to a nonsignificant effect of stakeholders on brand attitude and intention to visit (Mandagi et al., 2022). The impact of each stakeholder differs across destinations depending on the tourism destination. Furthermore, the nonsignificant result may imply that the stakeholders' measurement scale needs additional refinement.

Finally, the present study also provided little evidence on the effect of servicescape on brand attitude and revisit intention. This may be related to the characteristic of the sample, which is predominantly younger tourists (70%). The sensescape attraction and stakeholders' participation in the selected local destination in North Sulawesi are not enough to facilitate their positive attitude and revisit intention. As documented in the previous studies, young tourists are motivated and keen to explore new and unique travel experiences, avoid mass tourism, embrace authentic goods and services, and participate in casual, recreational, and nature-oriented activities (Hampton, 1998; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Ooi & Laing, 2010). Furthermore, aggregating the multigroup sample may also confound the result. Tourists' perception and behavior toward the destination and its servicescape are varied across different ages (e.g., Assaker & Hallak,

2013; Lepp & Gibson, 2008), country of origin (Lepp & Gibson, 2008 Quintal et al., 2014), and gender group (e.g., Deng et al., 2010; Homburg & Giering, 2001; Lepp & Gibson, 2008).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

From the theoretical perspective, the contribution of this study is threefold. First, it advances knowledges on destination branding by providing more insights into the evolving concept of a holistic destination brand. The complexity of a destination demands a more holistic and integrated approach. Despite remarkable progress in destination branding research, there has been limited empirical work devoted to a more holistic and comprehensive destination branding approach (Morgan et al., 2011; Pike, 2005). The present study addressed this theoretical gap by providing valuable insights into the interplay of brand gestalt. Brand gestalt is a holistic and integrative brand concept that is valuable in explaining destination brand complexity and multidimensionality (Mandagi et al., 2021). A more holistic destination branding approach is necessary to aid DMOs in decision making, strategic planning, and execution (Morgan et al., 2011). Conversely, having a more integrated and comprehensive branding framework is essential for destinations to compete more effectively and maintain their strategic positioning in the market (Pike, 2005).

Second, the present inquiries contribute to the scarce empirical work on brand gestalt by proposing the first theoretical model examining the effect of the 4S brand gestalt dimension on brand attitude and intention to revisit. Despite brand gestalt's crucial role in explaining destination complexity (Mandagi et al., 2021), limited empirical work has been devoted to explore the concept and its influence. Furthermore, there is a dearth of empirical work integrating brand gestalt and the two important marketing variables: brand attitude and intention. The present study fills this gap by providing empirical evidence on the significant and positive effect of the two brand gestalt dimensions (i.e., story and sensescape) on brand attitude and revisit intention. Another interesting conclusion of this study is that brand story is the most salient brand gestalt dimension affecting a tourist's attitude towards a destination, while sensescape is the strongest predictor of their revisit intention.

Third and last, the present study provides additional insights on the link between brand attitude and revisit intention, which corroborated the previous inquiries on these two significant variables (e.g., Alden et al., 2013; Augusto & Torres, 2018; Foroudi, 2019; Foroudi et al., 2021; Hwang et al., 2021; Park et al., 2010; Salehzadeh & Pool, 2016; Wang et al., 2019; Yim et al., 2014). These findings enhanced our understanding of the relationship between brand attitude and revisit intentions in the tourism sector, as it demonstrated that brand attitude is a critical determinant in strengthening revisit intention.

On a practical note, this study provides valuable insights for the DMOs, destination marketers, and policy makers in designing and executing effective branding strategies in several important ways. First, the present inquiries indicate the positive influences of the brand story on brand attitude and intention to revisit. This implies that destination branding practitioners should acknowledge the power of story in fostering a strong destination brand. DMOs may enhance tourists' favorable attitude towards a destination by creating and disseminating compelling destination-related stories and triggering their intention to revisit. Various marketing methods, programs, and initiatives should be utilized to promote the brand story of a destination by, for instance, crafting compelling stories or narrative framework into the advertising, making sure that the advertising campaign goes beyond conveying tangible characteristics of a destination and inspires tourist or potential tourist to take action.

Another implication from the results of this study is that the optimal destination branding strategy, for both creating a positive brand attitude and reinforcing revisit intention, is based on providing a favorable brand sensescape. DMOs should consider improving destination sensescape by creating a memorable and meaningful travel experience that will last in the consumers' minds, strengthen destination brand perception, develop a positive brand attitude, and lead to their revisit intention. In a more practical sense, DMO needs to ensure that every destination's element, appearance, and touchpoint create memorable and meaningful impressions, provide the highest quality, and match the promised value. Further, it is necessary to plan and implement every interaction and touchpoint consistently and systematically to provide the same experience.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

Despite its significant contribution to current literature, the present study is subject to several limitations. First, the proposed model focuses only on three constructs: brand gestalt, brand attitude, and revisit intention. The model can be expanded further by considering the link with other destination branding variables, such as destination image, trust, attachment, loyalty, and equity, which have strong theoretical support. Likewise, future studies may consider the possible mediating and moderating variables on the link between brand gestalt and tourist behavior, such as satisfaction or word-of-mouth intention.

Second, this study focuses on tourism destination, which is a very broad and highly experiential area. Further research could explore more specific experiential goods or services (e.g., hotel, restaurant, and entertainment), high-end consumer goods (e.g., luxury brands), and search goods (e.g., smartphone and computer).

Furthermore, the present study analyzes the data collected from the same sources (i.e., visitors of North Sulawesi) in a single period. Considering cross-country or longitudinal data will also be beneficial in further investigating the brand gestalt's comparison across destinations and its evolution over time. Additionally, it would be worthwhile to increase the sample size involved in this study, which will allow comparisons of the causal relationships among variables across destinations.

Finally, the present inquiry aggregated the perception of multigroup of the sample. It is useful to examine the multigroup analysis to evaluate the moderating effect of age, gender, country of origin, and frequency of visit. For instance, comparing tourists' origin (international vs local) and frequency (first time vs repetitive) would provide deeper insights into whether the structural model effects differed across the subsample groups.

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Appendix

Items Scale Removed in the CFA

| Code | Item Description |
|--------|--|
| Sense5 | North Sulawesi makes a strong impression. |
| Serve1 | There are a warm ambiance and atmosphere. |
| Stake1 | The collaboration among destinations is an essential part of North Sulawesi brand. |
| BA1 | I can easily imagine the brand of North Sulawesi in my mind. |
| RI1 | I consider North Sulawesi as my first choice compared to another place. |