

The Influence of Lembur Pakuan and KDM Branding on Tourists' Visit Decisions to Subang Regency in 2025

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of Lembur Pakuan branding and Kang Dedi Mulyadi (KDM) branding on tourists' decisions to visit Subang Regency in 2025. A quantitative approach was applied through a survey of 100 purposively selected respondents. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), including evaluation of construct validity and reliability, testing of relationships between variables, and assessing the model's predictive ability. The analysis results show that all constructs meet the criteria of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability. Lembur Pakuan branding has a positive and significant effect on visiting decisions with a path coefficient of 0.502, t-statistic of 7.789, and $p < 0.001$. KDM branding also has a positive and significant effect with a path coefficient of 0.329, t-statistic of 5.021, and $p < 0.001$. The two variables together explained 50.4% of the variation in visit decisions ($R^2 = 0.504$). In the PLS Predict test, the RMSE and MAE PLS-SEM values for all indicators were lower than those of the linear model, indicating good predictive performance. This finding confirms that a strong destination identity, when supported by the popularity, credibility, and communication activities of the KDM, can drive tourists' decisions to visit Subang Regency.

Keyword: Destination branding, Lembur Pakuan, KDM, visit decisions, Subang tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Regional tourism competitiveness no longer relies solely on natural resources, infrastructure, and complete facilities. A region's ability to build a clear and memorable image also determines whether the destination is able to attract tourists (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2023). In tourism marketing, destination branding serves as a means to emphasize a region's distinctiveness while shaping perceptions of the uniqueness, value, and experiences it offers (Qu et al., 2020). Subang Regency boasts diverse tourism potential, ranging from mountainous areas, hot springs, tea plantations, culinary delights, and rural tourism (Open Data Subang Regency, 2026). One destination that has garnered public attention in recent years is Lembur Pakuan in Dawuan District. This area is known for its Sundanese village atmosphere, rice paddy landscapes, thematic parks, environmental management, and local community involvement. The Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Indonesia (2025) also ranks Lembur Pakuan as a developing rural destination, primarily due to its cultural attractions, well-

maintained environment, and consistently maintained cleanliness system. Tourist visit data for Subang Regency shows significant year-to-year fluctuations. After recording over 8.3 million visits in 2023, the number declined to 2,659,093 in 2024 and approximately 2.22 million in 2025. This change demonstrates that tourist flows are dynamic and can be influenced by many factors, including the strength of a destination's image and the effectiveness of marketing communications. Lembur Pakuan also has a strong symbolic connection with Kang Dedi Mulyadi (KDM). Several news reports link the area to KDM's personal background as a West Java public figure (Pikiran Rakyat Subang, 2025). In the public sphere, KDM is known for his close communication style, use of Sundanese cultural symbols, social activities, and intensive social media activity. This connection creates a distinctive form of branding because the image of a public figure can contribute to the meaning of the destination associated with him (Gorbatov et al., 2018).

This phenomenon is worth examining because formal government promotion is not the only factor shaping tourist decisions. In the digital environment, public attention can grow through social media content, virality, online recommendations, personal branding, and perceptions of a destination's uniqueness (Hasan & Soliman, 2021). Lembur Pakuan demonstrates how a rural area can gain visibility when cultural narratives, environmental quality, public figures, and visual experiences are present in mutually reinforcing communication. However, high public attention does not necessarily explain the extent to which Lembur Pakuan and KDM branding influence tourist decisions. This study therefore aims to analyze the influence of these two forms of branding on the decision to visit Subang Regency in 2025, including intention to visit, actual visits, willingness to recommend, intention to revisit, and interest in other destinations in Subang.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination Branding

Destination branding is the process of building a destination's identity and image to make it easily recognized, trusted, and chosen by tourists (Qu et al., 2020). This process goes beyond a logo or slogan. Travel experiences, local stories, symbols, atmosphere, cultural values, and the destination's reputation all contribute to shaping the brand's perceived meaning (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2023). When these elements are consistently communicated, tourists gain a clearer understanding of the destination's character and the reasons for visiting.

In the context of Lembur Pakuan, destination branding is reflected in the uniqueness of Sundanese culture, the cleanliness and tidiness of the environment, the visual beauty, the attractiveness of the rural atmosphere, the destination's reputation, and its easily recognizable identity. These attributes can strengthen a positive image and reduce tourists' uncertainty when comparing travel destination options. Therefore, Lembur Pakuan branding is expected to positively influence tourists' decision to visit.

Personal Branding

Personal branding describes the effort to shape and maintain an individual's image through character, values, competencies, and communication patterns that are recognized by the public (Khedher, 2014). In tourism, the image of a public figure can extend to associations with the place they are associated with. Figures with large followings, high credibility, and consistent digital activity can accelerate the spread of information and drive attention to a destination (Xiang & Gretzel, 2020).

KDM's branding in this study encompasses popularity, credibility as a public figure, association with Sundanese culture, social media activity, ability to arouse curiosity, and the appeal of his image in promoting Lembur Pakuan. The alignment between KDM's image and the cultural identity of the destination is expected to make promotional messages feel more relevant and convincing. Therefore, KDM's branding is expected to positively influence tourists' decision to visit.

Tourist Visiting Decisions

The decision to visit is the result of a process where tourists identify needs, seek information, evaluate options, and then determine the most suitable destination (Kotler & Keller, 2019). This decision can be influenced by the attraction of the destination, accessibility, facilities, price, destination image, recommendations, social media exposure, and the experiences of other tourists (Qu et al., 2020). In this study, the decision to visit was reflected in intention to visit, actual decision, willingness to recommend, desire to revisit, interest in other destinations in Subang, and consideration of making Lembur Pakuan a primary choice.

METHOD

This research used a quantitative approach with an explanatory survey design. Data collection was conducted in Lembur Pakuan, Dawuan District, as well as several tourist spots and tourism support areas in Subang Regency. The study population included tourists who had visited Lembur Pakuan or other tourist destinations in Subang Regency in 2025. Respondents

were selected through purposive sampling, and 100 responses were used in the analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019).

The research instrument measured three constructs, each with six indicators. Lembur Pakuan branding was measured through Sundanese cultural uniqueness, environmental cleanliness, visual beauty, rural tourism appeal, destination reputation, and identity clarity. KDM branding was measured through popularity, credibility, familiarity with Sundanese culture, social media activity, influence on curiosity, and KDM image appeal. Visit decisions were measured through interest, actual decisions, recommendations, return visits, interest in other destinations, and Lembur Pakuan's position as a top choice.

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The measurement model evaluation included outer loading, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, confidence intervals, variance inflation factors (VIF), effect sizes (f^2), and coefficients of determination (R^2). The model's predictive ability was assessed using PLS Predict by comparing the RMSE and MAE of PLS-SEM to the linear model (Hair et al., 2022; Shmueli et al., 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Demographics

Table 1. Respondent Demographics.

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Persentase
Gender	Male	19	19%
	Female	81	81%
Age	17-25 years	28	28%
	26-35 years	34	34%
	36-45 years	23	23%
	>45 years	15	15%
Last education	High School/Vocational School	38	38%
	Diploma	12	12%
	Bachelor's Degree	42	42%

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Persentase
	Master's Degree/Doctoral Degree	8	8%
Work	Student/College Student	32	32%
	Private Employee	6	6%
	Entrepreneur	8	8%
	Housewife	54	54%
Domicile	Bogor City	24	24%
	Bogor Regency	31	31%
	Bandung City/Regency	14	14%
	Purwakarta	16	16%
	Other areas in West Java	15	15%
Knowledge about Pakuan Overtime	Heard of	72	72%
	Never heard of	28	28%
Knowledge about KDM	Unfamiliar with KDM	100	100%
	Familiar with KDM	0	0%

Source: 2026 Data Processing Results

Of the 100 respondents, 81% were female, and 62% were aged 17-35. The most common educational backgrounds were undergraduate (42%) and high school/vocational high school (38%). Based on occupation, respondents were predominantly housewives (54%) and students (32%). In terms of domicile, 55% of respondents came from Bogor City and Regency. This composition indicates that the research results primarily represent the views of women, young adults, and the Bogor area.

72% of respondents had heard of Lembur Pakuan, while all respondents were familiar with KDM. This difference in level of familiarity indicates that KDM's visibility is much broader than that of the destination. This situation opens up opportunities to utilize KDM communication as a gateway to promote Lembur Pakuan and Subang Regency tourism, although its influence still needs to be demonstrated through a structural model.

Measurement Model

Table 2. Measurement Model Results

Variabel	Measurement Items	Indicator	Outher Loading	Cronbach`s Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Lembur Pakuan Branding	X1.1	The uniqueness of Sundanese culture.	0,837	0,876	0,906	0,617
	X1.2	Cleanliness and tidiness of the environment.	0,832			
	X1.3	Visual beauty and photo spots.	0,767			
	X1.4	Rural tourist attractions.	0,773			
	X1.5	Destination reputation or virality.	0,718			
	X1.6	Lembur Pakuan has a destination identity that is easily recognized by tourists.	0,777			
KDM Branding	X2.1	The popularity of KDM.	0,730	0,875	0,886	0,565
	X2.2	KDM's credibility as a public figure.	0,790			
	X2.3	KDM's connection to Sundanese culture.	0,693			
	X2.4	KDM's activity on social media.	0,799			
	X2.5	KDM's influence on tourist curiosity.	0,737			
	X2.6	KDM's image makes tourists more interested in Lembur Pakuan.	0,753			
Tourist Visiting Decisions	Y.1	Interest in visiting.	0,774	0,845	0,906	0,616
	Y.2	Actual decision to visit.	0,787			
	Y.3	Willingness to recommend to others.	0,753			
	Y.4	Desire to revisit.	0,811			
	Y.5	Interest in visiting other destinations in Subang.	0,804			
	Y.6	Tourists consider Lembur Pakuan as their top choice when traveling to Subang.	0,784			

Source: 2026 Data Processing Results

The outer loading values for all indicators range from 0.693 to 0.837. Almost all indicators have exceeded the 0.70 limit. Indicator X2.3 has a value of 0.693, but it can still be maintained because it is close to the recommended value and does not reduce the overall quality of the construct. Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.845 to 0.876, while composite reliability ranges from 0.886 to 0.906. These values indicate good internal consistency. All AVE values also exceed 0.50, so the three constructs meet convergent validity and are suitable for use in the structural testing stage.

Table 3. Validity of Discriminant

Variables	Overtime Pakuan Branding	KDM Branding	Tourist Visiting Decisions
Overtime Pakuan Branding	0,786		
KDM Branding	0,645	0,785	
Tourist Visiting Decisions	0,547	0,433	0,751

The diagonal values in the Fornell-Larcker matrix are higher than the correlations between constructs. The Lembur Pakuan branding value of 0.786 exceeds its correlation with KDM branding (0.645) and visiting decision (0.547). The KDM branding value of 0.785 is also higher than its correlation with visiting decision (0.433), while the visiting decision value of 0.751 remains greater than its correlation with the other constructs. Thus, each construct has adequate discriminating power and measures empirically distinct concepts.

Structural Model Testing

Figure 1. Research Model

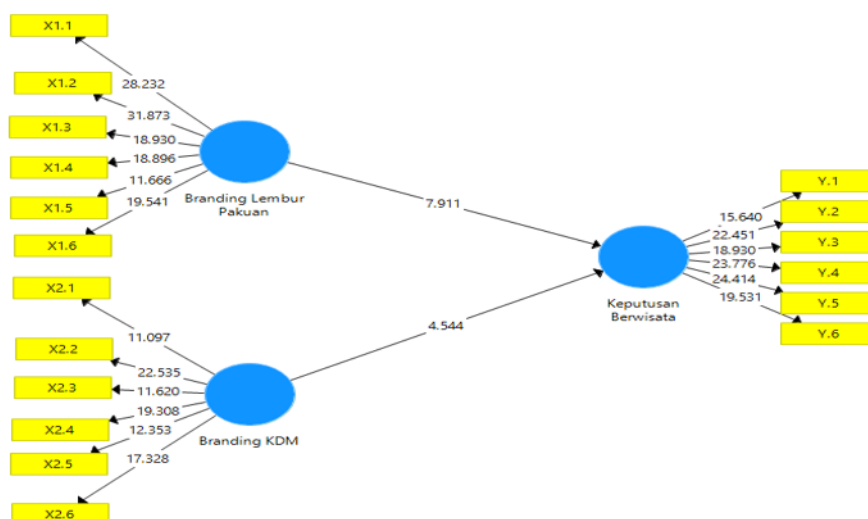


Figure 1. Research Model

Table 4. Structural Model

Hipotesis	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Value	95% Interval Kepercayaan		Test Results	VIF	F Square / Upsilon V	R Square
Direct Influence					Lower Limit	Upper Limit				
KDM Branding -> Tourist Visiting Decisions	0,329	0,066	5,021	0,000	0,205	0,462	Accepted	1,231	0,413	0,504
Lembur Pakuan Branding -> Tourist Visiting Decisions	0,502	0,065	7,789	0,000	0,359	0,620	Accepted	1,231	0,177	

Both paths in the model show a positive and significant influence. Lembur Pakuan branding has a path coefficient of 0.502 with a t-statistic of 7.789 and $p < 0.001$. The 95% confidence interval ranges from 0.359 to 0.620. KDM branding has a path coefficient of 0.329 with a t-statistic of 5.021 and $p < 0.001$, and a confidence interval of 0.205 to 0.462. Because both intervals do not include zero, H1 and H2 are accepted.

The VIF value of 1.231 for both paths indicates that the model does not face multicollinearity. Based on the f^2 , Lembur Pakuan branding has a medium effect size (0.177), while KDM branding has a large effect size (0.413). The R^2 value of 0.504 indicates that Lembur Pakuan branding and KDM branding together explain 50.4% of the variation in visit decisions. The remaining 49.6% is related to other factors not included in the model.

Model Prediction Ability

Table 5. PLS Predict

	PLS Predict		LM Predict	
	RMSE	MAE	RMSE	MAE
Y.1	0,629	0,497	0,685	0,554
Y.2	0,681	0,541	0,745	0,610
Y.3	0,603	0,493	0,656	0,554
Y.4	0,715	0,578	0,776	0,623
Y.5	0,627	0,513	0,701	0,577
Y.6	0,692	0,568	0,763	0,624

For all indicators Y.1-Y.6, the RMSE and MAE values of PLS-SEM are lower than those of the linear comparison model. The PLS-SEM RMSE ranges from 0.603 to 0.715, while the linear RMSE ranges from 0.656 to 0.776. The same pattern is seen for MAE: the PLS-SEM model produces a range of 0.493 to 0.578, lower than the linear model, which ranges from

0.554 to 0.624. These results indicate that the PLS-SEM model provides smaller prediction errors and has good out-of-sample prediction performance for all visit decision indicators.

Discussion

The Influence of Lembur Pakuan Branding on Tourists' Visiting Decisions

Lembur Pakuan branding proved to be the strongest predictor in the model. A path coefficient of 0.502, a t-statistic of 7.789, and $p < 0.001$ indicate that the more favorably tourists perceived Lembur Pakuan's identity, the stronger their likelihood of visiting. These results not only demonstrate a directional relationship but also confirm that destination attributes play a direct role in the destination choice process.

The two indicators with the highest contributions were the uniqueness of Sundanese culture (0.837) and environmental cleanliness and tidiness (0.832). These findings suggest that Lembur Pakuan's brand strength stems primarily from the combination of cultural authenticity and environmental quality perceived by tourists. The visual beauty, rural atmosphere, destination reputation, and recognizable identity further enhance this experience. When a destination's character is distinctive and consistent, tourists have a clearer reason to choose it over others.

These results align with the view that destination branding operates through identity and imagery that distinguish a destination from its competitors (Qu et al., 2011; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). The F^2 value of 0.177 indicates a moderate influence, indicating that Lembur Pakuan branding has a significant contribution, although it is not the sole determinant of decision-making. Practically, managers need to maintain consistency in Sundanese culture, cleanliness, spatial planning, and the quality of the tourist experience. Promotional content should also authentically depict the destination's condition so that the image formed in the media matches the experience experienced by tourists upon arrival.

The Influence of KDM Branding on Tourists' Visiting Decisions

KDM branding also had a positive and significant influence on visit decisions, with a path coefficient of 0.329, a t-statistic of 5.021, and $p < 0.001$. This means that KDM's popularity and image extend beyond familiarity with the figure, but also contribute to increasing tourist interest in Lembur Pakuan and other destinations in Subang Regency. Descriptive findings reinforce this context: all respondents were familiar with KDM, while 72% had heard of Lembur Pakuan. This disparity suggests that familiarity with public figures can be an initial pathway to expanding destination visibility.

KDM's social media activity had the highest outer loading (0.799), followed by credibility as a public figure (0.790). These two indicators demonstrate that the strength of KDM's branding lies in the combination of communication reach and audience trust. Content featuring Sundanese culture, community life, and activities at Lembur Pakuan can spark curiosity and make destination information feel more accessible. The connection between KDM's image and local culture also helps strengthen the congruence between the person delivering the message and the place being promoted.

These findings align with source credibility theory, which places the credibility and attractiveness of the source as important factors in message acceptance (Ohanian, 1990). In social media communications, message value and figure credibility have also been shown to influence audience trust and response to branded content (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The f^2 value of 0.413 indicates a large effect size. However, the path coefficient for KDM branding is still lower than for Lembur Pakuan branding. These results confirm that public figures are most effective when they serve as reinforcements, not substitutes, for destination quality. Promotion through KDM needs to be accompanied by services, cleanliness, access, and tourism experiences that align with the communicated image.

CONCLUSION

This study found that Lembur Pakuan branding and KDM branding both had a positive and significant influence on tourists' visit decisions to Subang Regency. Lembur Pakuan branding demonstrated a stronger influence, with a path coefficient of 0.502, a t-statistic of 7.789, and $p < 0.001$. KDM branding also had a significant influence, with a path coefficient of 0.329, a t-statistic of 5.021, and $p < 0.001$. Thus, both research hypotheses were accepted.

Substantively, tourists' decisions were largely shaped by the destination's identity and attractiveness, particularly its unique Sundanese culture, environmental cleanliness, visual beauty, rural atmosphere, and Lembur Pakuan's easily recognizable identity. At the same time, KDM's popularity, credibility, cultural proximity, and social media activity broadened public awareness and fostered curiosity about the destination. Both variables together explained 50.4% of the variation in visit decisions, and PLS Predict results demonstrated better predictive performance than linear models across all indicators.

The implication is that Subang Regency's tourism promotion strategy needs to combine strengthening the quality and identity of Lembur Pakuan with consistent and relevant communication of the KDM figure. However, these results reflect visiting decisions and

tendencies based on respondents' answers, not direct changes in aggregate visit numbers. Future research should combine surveys with actual visit data, expand the respondents' regions of origin, and consider other factors such as accessibility, facilities, travel costs, service quality, and electronic word of mouth.

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