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Ecotourism Visit Intentions: Linking Environment Identity, Nature Enjoyment and Social Media

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Abstract: This study examines how environmental identity and social media consumption influence individuals' visit intention to ecotourism sites in West Java, with enjoyment of nature serving as a mediator. Data from 468 respondents were analyzed using structural equation modeling, and results indicate that both environmental identity and social media consumption have significant direct and indirect effects on visit intention via enjoyment of nature. The model demonstrates strong explanatory power, as evidenced by favorable fit indices. The study's novelty lies in integrating environmental identity, social media consumption, and enjoyment of nature into a single framework—whereas most prior research treated these constructs in isolation—thereby revealing the synergistic interplay of cognitive, digital, and emotional experiences in shaping ecotourism motivations. These findings offer destination managers practical guidance for crafting marketing strategies that resonate both emotionally and ethically with young, digitally savvy travelers.

Keywords: environmental identity, enjoyment of nature, ecotourism, and social media consumption

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, global tourism has shifted markedly toward sustainability, as evidenced by the rising popularity of ecotourism. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people, and involves interpretation and education" (Azam et al., 2021; TIES, 2015). That definition underscores how ecotourism extends beyond mere nature exploration by emphasizing environmental education, conservation, and social contributions to host communities. Likewise, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) describes ecotourism as "all forms of nature-based tourism that have an educational and interpretive component and are generally conducted in a manner that is ecologically and culturally sensitive" (UNWTO, 2020). Ecotourism is thus viewed not simply as a travel activity but as a holistic approach integrating environmental preservation, education, and community empowerment.

Growing environmental awareness has fueled ecotourism's rapid expansion both worldwide and within Indonesia. West Java Province—renowned for its ecological diversity and natural attractions—illustrates this trend. According to the West Java Central Bureau of Statistics (Badan Pusat Statistik/BPS), total tourist visits in the province rose from 28.5 million in 2021 to over 59.3 million in 2023 (BPS Jawa Barat, 2023). Over the same period, visitor numbers in Pangandaran Regency—a leading ecotourism destination—rose from 3.6 million to 3.9 million, representing an 8.3 percent increase. By comparison, overall ecotourism visits across the province grew by 108 percent (BPS Jawa Barat, 2023).

Enthusiasm for visiting ecotourism destinations is no longer driven solely by traditional considerations such as price or facilities; rather, it is increasingly shaped by complex psychological, social, and emotional dimensions. One prominent internal driver is environmental identity, defined as an individual's social sense of self derived from their interactions with nature (Teeroovengadum, 2018). Balundė et al. (2019) found that people who feel a strong emotional bond with nature are more inclined to adopt pro-environmental behaviors, including choosing ecotourism sites. Complementing these findings, Bellotti et al. (2025) demonstrated that connectedness to nature plays a central role in forming environmental attitudes and behaviors, anchoring them within one's self-identity.

On the external side, social media consumption has become a key factor influencing tourists' intention to visit. Platforms now shape destination perceptions through user-generated content, testimonials, and experience-based promotions. Chrismardani et al. (2025) showed that although content quality alone may not directly boost visit intentions, user engagement on social media significantly mediates this effect. Majeed & Ramkissoon (2022) further observed that post-pandemic social media interactions—especially shared experiences and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)—enhance travelers' confidence and strengthen their intention to visit.

Furthermore, enjoyment of nature—the emotional response elicited by engaging with natural environments—serves as a key mediating variable. Keith et al. (2022) and Kement et al. (2021) showed that positive emotional experiences in nature strengthen environmental identity, which in turn fosters pro-environmental behaviors such as travel choices. In digital marketing contexts, Chen et al. (2024) demonstrated that enjoyment of nature also mediates the influence of destination information exposure on tourists' visit intentions.

Consequently, increasing tourists' intention to visit ecotourism destinations in West Java hinges not only on destination quality but equally on three strategic factors: the depth of tourists' environmental identity, their engagement with social media, and their emotional connection to nature. Collectively, these factors are essential for designing sustainable, impactful ecotourism promotions and management practices.

Building on these insights, the present study fills gaps in the literature by examining how environmental identity and social media consumption jointly influence visit intention in an ecotourism setting, while further clarifying the mediating role of enjoyment of nature. Whereas previous research has typically addressed these factors in isolation, few studies have integrated them into a unified model. This research, therefore, advances theoretical understanding of tourist behavior in ecotourism and offers destination managers practical guidance for developing emotionally resonant, more effective marketing strategies.

Drawing on earlier literature, seven hypotheses are proposed, each illustrating the interrelationships among the key constructs.

First, environmental identity consistently correlates with the enjoyment of nature. Emotional connectedness to nature—especially through pleasurable outdoor experiences—has been shown to strengthen both self-identity and environmental identity (Balundė et al., 2019; Keith et al., 2022). Enjoyment of nature also directly and

indirectly shapes pro-environmental behavior (Atik et al., 2023) and mediates the effects of nature connectedness on sustainable actions (Sierra-Barón et al., 2023). Collectively, these studies indicate that enjoyment of nature provides the emotional basis for developing environmental identity.

H1: Environmental identity positively influences the enjoyment of nature

Second, social media consumption exerts a multifaceted influence on the enjoyment of nature. Using social media during outdoor activities can distract users and trigger self-presentation motives, thereby reducing immersion in the natural environment (Tamir et al., 2018). Conversely, sharing narratives and visual content enhances emotional connection and sense of place (Olafsson et al., 2021; Wilkins et al., 2020). Platforms such as YouTube further amplify affective responses by delivering immersive wildlife experiences (Dylewski et al., 2017). Thus, the impact of social media consumption on the enjoyment of nature depends on the specific modes and motivations for its use.

H2: Social media consumption positively influences the enjoyment of nature

Third, enjoyment of nature—characterized by feelings of comfort, stress relief, peace, and emotional satisfaction in natural settings—plays a pivotal role in shaping pro-environmental attitudes and visit intention for sustainable destinations (Gunawan et al., 2023). Emotional satisfaction and relaxation also drive social media sharing, which in turn reinforces the desire to visit these sites (Pratminingsih et al., 2024). Moreover, enjoyment of nature strengthens the link between tourist engagement and behavioral intentions, including visits to ecotourism sites (Yulianto et al., 2025). Experiencing nature thus fosters both immediate pleasure and sustained commitment to revisitation and conservation.

H3: Enjoyment of nature positively influences visit intention

Fourth, environmental identity exhibits a moderate to strong correlation with pro-environmental attitudes. Bellotti et al. (2025) found that individuals with a stronger sense of connection to nature are more likely to adopt positive environmental attitudes, which in turn foster sustainable behaviors, including intentions to visit eco-friendly destinations. Teeroovengadum (2018) showed that although environmental identity does not directly influence ecotourism visit intention, it significantly shapes attitudes and interest in ecotourism, which then mediate visit intention. Wismantoro et al. (2023) further emphasized the role of an environmentally friendly destination image and heightened environmental awareness in shaping tourists' behavioral intentions. Collectively, these studies indicate that environmental identity indirectly but substantially drives visit intention by promoting favorable attitudes and interest toward sustainable destinations.

H4: Environmental identity positively influences visit intention

Fifth, social media consumption plays a critical role in shaping ecotourism visit intention. Chrismardani et al. (2025) demonstrated that user interaction with destination content on social platforms directly enhances visit intention. Nurhandini et al. (2023) confirmed that social media exerts a positive effect on ecotourism behavior, mediated by destination image. Similarly, Sadu et al. (2024) found that perceptions of social media marketing strengthen attitudes, subjective norms, and destination image, thereby increasing visit intention. Yusra et al. (2023) highlighted that exposure to social media influencers enhances enjoyment and indirectly promotes visit intention via emotional engagement. Collectively, these findings suggest that social media consumption influences ecotourism visit intention both emotionally—by heightening enjoyment—and cognitively—by shaping destination image.

H5: Social media consumption positively influences visit intention

Sixth, enjoyment of nature mediates the relationship between environmental identity and visit intention for ecotourism destinations. Teeroovengadum (2018) and Balundė et al. (2019) showed that individuals with a strong environmental identity derive greater enjoyment from nature, which increases their intention to visit. Pham & Chi (2020) demonstrated that both environmental identity and enjoyment of nature significantly affect attitudes and intentions toward ecotourism. Chi & Pham (2022) further underscored the role of ecotourism destination image and environmental trust in shaping visit intention, suggesting that positive perceptions reinforced by environmental identity and enjoyment of nature strengthen interest in sustainable tourism. Collectively, these studies reveal a consistent pathway in which environmental identity fosters emotional connections to nature that drive ecotourism intentions.

H6: Enjoyment of nature mediates the impact of environmental identity on visit intention

Seventh, enjoyment of nature elicited by social media consumption mediates the link between media exposure and ecotourism visit intention. Chen et al. (2024), Mustafa et al. (2024), and Nurbaiti (2024) found that exposure to destination content on TikTok and YouTube Shorts increases emotional engagement with natural settings, strengthens destination image, and evokes enjoyment of nature by enabling imagined interactions with wildlife. Chrismardani et al. (2025) and Sadu et al. (2024) further demonstrated that user interaction, content trust, and social engagement reinforce enjoyment of nature, which in turn promotes visit intention. These findings suggest that enjoyment of nature—stimulated by social media—serves as a key mediator linking media exposure to ecotourism intention. Consequently, promotional strategies should emphasize emotional comfort, tranquility, and natural beauty to boost visit intention effectively.

H7: Enjoyment of nature mediates the impact of social media consumption on visit intention

METHODS

Data were collected from October 2024 to March 2025 among West Java residents who met all inclusion criteria—understanding of ecotourism concepts, demonstrated environmental awareness, and prior exposure to ecotourism destinations via social media. The study employed a descriptive–associative design with a quantitative methodology to examine the effects of environmental identity (X1) and social media consumption (X2) on visit intention to ecotourism destinations (Z), mediated by enjoyment of nature (Y). Purposive sampling was employed to recruit respondents based on these predetermined criteria. To justify the sample size, the resource-constraints approach was applied, which entails collecting the maximum feasible amount of data within specified time and labor limitations while safeguarding data quality (Lakens, 2022). Primary data were gathered through a structured questionnaire, and secondary data were obtained via a targeted literature review. All survey items employed a five-point Likert scale, a widely accepted format for capturing levels of agreement or perception in quantitative research (Joshi et al., 2015).

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. First, descriptive statistics summarized respondents' demographic and baseline characteristics. Second, inferential analysis was conducted using SmartPLS. SmartPLS was chosen for its ability to handle mixed data scales, its minimal normality requirements, and its simultaneous estimation of construct–indicator and inter-construct relationships (Hair et al., 2019). Prior to hypothesis testing, the measurement (outer) model was evaluated to assess each construct's validity and reliability, followed by examination of the structural (inner) model to test the hypothesized paths among latent variables (Table 1).

Table 1 Research Instruments

Variables	Instrument	Source
Environmental Identity	1. I feel that I am a part of nature, not separate from it. (X1.1) 2. I believe it is my personal duty to help protect the Earth. (X1.2) 3. I try to live in a way that reduces harm to the environment. (X1.3) 4. I would rather live in a small house with a natural view than a large house without one. (X1.4) 5. I enjoy spending time in natural outdoor environments. (X1.5) 6. As a child, I often played or spent time in natural open spaces. (X1.6) 7. I am involved in a group or community that supports environmental protection. (X1.7) 8. I feel proud when I act in ways that support the natural environment. (X1.8)	Atik et al. (2023); Balundė et al. (2019); Freed (2015)
Social Media Consumption	1. Before visiting ecotourism destinations in West Java, I read reviews on social media from other tourists. (X2.1) 2. Before visiting, I search for information about West Java ecotourism destinations on social media. (X2.2) 3. Before visiting, I find out what activities can be done at the destination through social media. (X2.3) 4. Before visiting, I look for interesting attractions at the destination on social media. (X2.4) 5. Before visiting, I find out about interesting experiences at the destination through social media. (X2.5) 6. Before visiting, I look for helpful tips from other tourists on social media. (X2.6)	Olafsson et al. (2021); Wilkins et al. (2020)
Enjoyment of Nature	1. I feel emotionally comforted by being in open natural spaces when I feel sad. (Y1.1) 2. I believe that spending time in nature helps reduce my stress. (Y1.2) 3. I enjoy being in open, natural environments. (Y1.3) 4. I feel a sense of peace and calmness when I am in natural surroundings. (Y1.4) 5. I feel happy and content when I spend time in nature. (Y1.5)	Tarigan et al. (2022); Teeroovengadum (2018)
Visit Intention	1. I would choose an ecotourism destination as part of my travel activities. (Z1.1) 2. I intend to visit an ecotourism destination in the future. (Z1.2) 3. I am confident in choosing ecotourism as a vacation destination. (Z1.3) 4. I believe ecotourism is beneficial for the destination, local residents, and tourists. (Z1.4) 5. I am willing to spend time and resources to experience ecotourism destinations (Z1.5) 6. I feel responsible for supporting ecotourism as part of preserving nature (Z1.6)	Chen et al. (2024); Tarigan et al. (2022)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Between October 2024 and March 2025, 665 respondents completed the survey; 468 met all inclusion criteria. Most participants were aged 17–25 years (76.28%), followed by those aged 26–40 years (16.24%). Females accounted for 66.88% of the sample, and 50.21% resided in West Java Province. In terms of education, 50.43% held a senior high school or vocational diploma, while 47.01% possessed a diploma or bachelor's degree. Students comprised 59.83% of respondents, with private-sector employees making up 23.29%. Monthly income was below IDR 1,000,000 for 45.94% and between IDR 1,000,000–3,000,000 for 29.70%.

Table 2 Validity and Reliability Test

Variable	Item	Loading Factor	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Description
EI	X1.1	0.717				
	X1.2	0.745	0.603	0.782	0.858	Valid & Reliable
	X1.6	0.846				
	X1.7	0.793				
SMC	X2.1	0.820				
	X2.2	0.822				
	X2.3	0.839	0.697	0.913	0.932	Valid & Reliable
	X2.4	0.834				
	X2.5	0.851				
	X2.6	0.844				
EON	Y1.1	0.834				
	Y1.2	0.862				
	Y1.3	0.859	0.736	0.910	0.933	Valid & Reliable
	Y1.4	0.892				
	Y1.5	0.843				
VI	Z1.1	0.803				
	Z1.2	0.846				
	Z1.3	0.841	0.708	0.918	0.936	Valid & Reliable
	Z1.4	0.871				
	Z1.5	0.836				
	Z1.6	0.851				

The predominance of 17–25-year-olds—primarily low-income students—mirrors the digitally engaged youth segment most responsive to online tourism promotions and local nature-based experiences (Pratminingsih et al., 2024). A higher proportion of women aligns with evidence that females often exhibit stronger emotional connections to natural environments and higher levels of environmental identity, which in turn drive ecotourism participation and pro-environmental behavior (Sierra-Barón et al., 2023). The large share of West Java residents likely reflects easy access to nearby natural attractions and frequent exposure to ecotourism content online, factors that enhance emotional ties to nature and support sustainable travel intentions (Pratminingsih et al., 2024). Even within lower-income brackets, values emphasizing conservation and community benefit can sustain robust visit intentions among student populations (Sadu et al., 2024).

For the measurement model assessment (Table 2), indicators X1.3, X1.4, X1.5, and X1.8 exhibited standardized loadings below the 0.70 threshold and were therefore removed to satisfy validity criteria (standardized loading > 0.70; AVE > 0.50) as recommended by Hair et al. (2019). The model was re-estimated following these revisions (Figure 2).

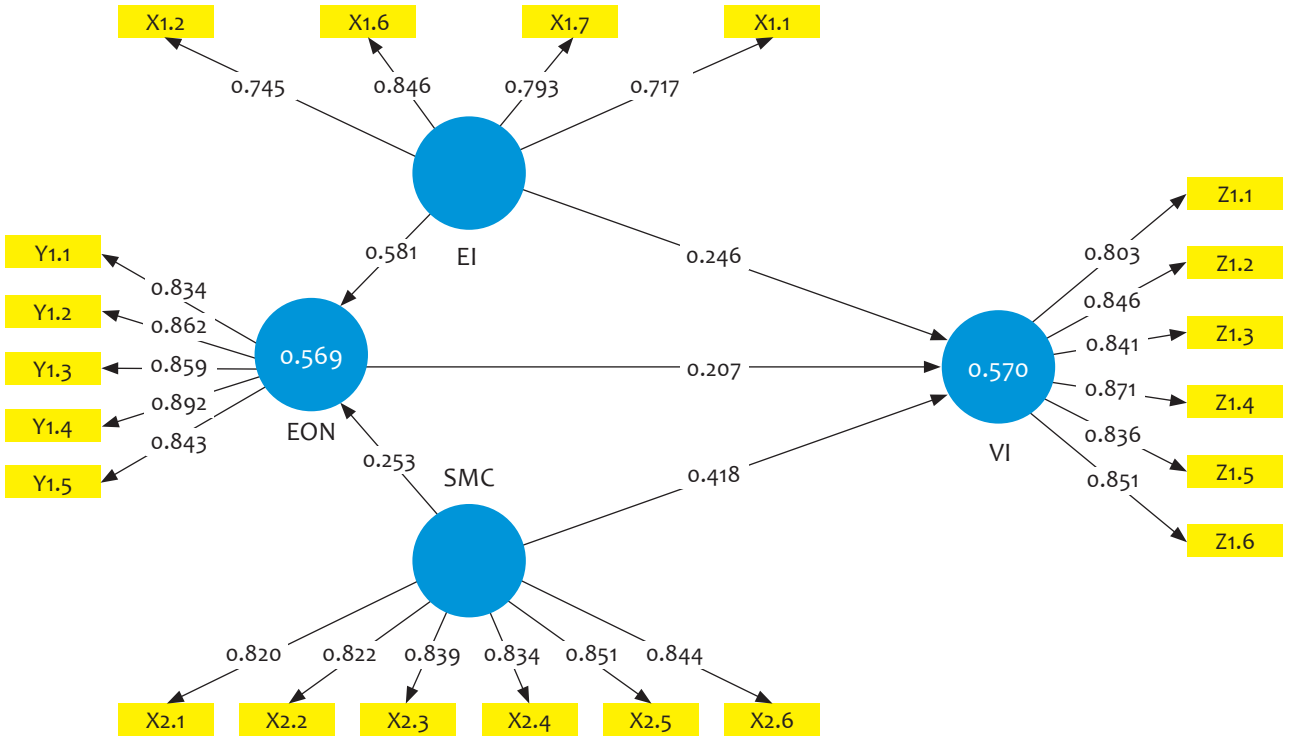

Figure 2 Outer Model Final

The measurement model assessment confirmed that all indicators met established validity and reliability criteria. Standardized factor loadings for every item exceeded 0.70, and each construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) surpassed 0.50, as recommended by Hair et al. (2019). Moreover, all AVE values were higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlations, demonstrating both convergent and discriminant validity. Reliability analysis showed that Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.60 and composite reliability (CR) surpassed 0.70 for every construct, further confirming internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019).

Hair et al. (2019) emphasize that evaluating factor loadings, AVE, Cronbach's α, and CR is critical for establishing the psychometric soundness of a measurement model in structural equation modeling (SEM). Factor loadings quantify how strongly each observed indicator reflects its underlying latent construct; values above 0.50 indicate that items make a substantive contribution to construct measurement. AVE assesses the proportion of variance a latent construct explains in its indicators relative to measurement error, with values above 0.50 signifying adequate convergent validity. Cronbach's α evaluates internal consistency reliability, with values above 0.60 deemed acceptable in exploratory research and above 0.70 preferred in confirmatory studies.

Given that Cronbach's α assumes equal contributions from all indicators, CR provides a more precise reliability estimate by weighting each indicator's loading; a CR above 0.70 confirms construct reliability. Collectively, these metrics demonstrate that the measurement model is both valid and reliable, ensuring confidence before structural model analysis. Without first verifying these measurement properties, any conclusions drawn from the structural model risk methodological flaws or misinterpretation. In this study, relationships among variables were examined using SEM in SmartPLS 4.0.

Collinearity among predictor constructs was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) following Hair et al. (2019) and related methodological guidelines. VIF values in the structural model ranged from 1.487 to 2.321 (Table 3)—well below the conservative threshold of 3.3 and the general upper limit of 5.0—indicating no multicollinearity and confirming that each predictor uniquely explains variance in the dependent constructs. Such low VIF values align with criteria outlined by Keith et al. (2022) and applied by Goeltom & Hurriyati (2024), who emphasize that maintaining VIFs below critical cutoffs enhances model stability and the precision of path-coefficient estimates in variance-based SEM. Consequently, the structural relationships can be interpreted confidently, without concerns about redundancy or inflation among predictors.

Table 3 Collinearity Results

	VIF
EI → EON	1.487
SMC → EON	1.487
EON → VI	2.321
EI → VI	2.270
SMC → VI	1.636

The R^2 value for enjoyment of nature (EON) is 0.569, and for visit intention (VI) it is 0.570 (Table 4), indicating that the model explains 56.9% and 57.0% of the variance in these endogenous constructs, respectively. According to Hair et al. (2019), R^2 thresholds of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 correspond to weak, moderate, and substantial explanatory power. Both values therefore fall into the moderate category, demonstrating acceptable model strength. Adjusted R^2 values of 0.567 (EON) and 0.568 (VI) account for the number of predictors and confirm that explained variance remains stable without evidence of overfitting (Goeltom & Hurriyati, 2024); Nurhandini et al., 2023). Overall, these metrics attest to the model's solid predictive accuracy and internal validity.

Effect size (f^2) was assessed to determine each exogenous construct's incremental contribution to the variance of its endogenous counterpart. The path from environmental identity (EI) to enjoyment of nature (EON) yielded an f^2 of 0.526, classifying as a large effect and underscoring EI's dominant role in emotional engagement with nature (Atik et al., 2023; Sierra-Barón et al., 2023). Social media consumption (SMC) exhibited a medium effect on visit intention (VI) (f^2 = 0.249), highlighting the significant impact of digital exposure on behavioral intentions (Majeed & Ramkissoon, 2022). Smaller yet meaningful effect sizes emerged for the EI → VI (f^2 = 0.062) and EON → VI (f^2 = 0.043) paths (see Table 5), suggesting these influences may operate more strongly via mediated relationships. The SMC → EON link produced an f^2 of 0.100, approaching the medium threshold and indicating that social media not only conveys information but also enhances affective experiences with natural environments. Collectively, these f^2 values confirm that both identity-based and digital engagement constructs make distinct and substantive contributions to the model.

Table 4 R-Square Results

	R-square	R-square adjusted
EON	0.569	0.567
VI	0.570	0.568

Table 5 F-Square Results

	F-square
EI → EON	0.526
EI → VI	0.062
EON → VI	0.043
SMC → EON	0.100
SMC → VI	0.249

Q^2 values were calculated using the blindfolding procedure recommended by Hair et al. (2019). A Q^2 value above zero indicates predictive relevance, with approximate benchmarks of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 denoting small, medium, and large relevance, respectively.

The Q^2 values were 0.345 for environmental identity (EI), 0.594 for enjoyment of nature (EON), 0.568 for social media consumption (SMC), and 0.584 for visit intention (VI) (see Table 6). EI's Q^2 approaches the large threshold, while EON, SMC, and VI all exceed 0.35, reflecting exceptionally strong predictive relevance. These figures demonstrate that the model not only explains a substantial portion of variance in each construct but also reliably predicts omitted data, confirming its robustness and external validity. These results echo findings by Goeltom & Hurriyati (2024) and Pratminingsih et al. (2024), who highlight Q^2 as a critical indicator of generalizability and predictive accuracy in tourism and behavioral research contexts.

Model fit was evaluated using multiple Goodness of Fit (GoF) indices in line with Hair et al. (2019) and more recent methodological studies (Table 7). The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) of 0.054 falls below the 0.08 cutoff, indicating that the model's predicted covariance matrix closely matches the observed data. Henseler et al. (2016) classify SRMR values under 0.05 as excellent and values up to 0.08 as acceptable. Both d_ULS (0.663) and d_G (0.308) lie within recommended limits, implying minimal residual variance and reinforcing overall model validity. Although the chi-square statistic ($\chi^2 = 856.343$) is reported, its applicability in PLS-SEM is limited due to sensitivity to sample size and model complexity. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) of 0.879 approaches the conventional 0.90 benchmark, signifying strong comparative fit. Collectively, these indices demonstrate that the structural model exhibits sound integrity and fits the data well, consistent with recent PLS-SEM applications (Goeltom & Hurriyati, 2024).

Within the PLS-SEM framework (Hair et al., 2019), assessing the inner model involves estimating both direct and indirect effects to test the study hypotheses. Direct effects quantify the immediate influence of an exogenous construct on an endogenous construct, whereas indirect effects capture mediation through an intervening variable. Bootstrapping (e.g., 5,000 subsamples) produces path coefficients, t-values, and p-values for each effect. Evaluating indirect effects is essential for mediation hypotheses, and calculating total effects reveals the combined direct and indirect impact of one construct on another.

The structural model results show that all five direct hypotheses are statistically significant ($p < .05$; $t > 1.96$), indicating strong associations among the latent constructs (Table 8). Mediation analysis further identified two significant indirect pathways (Table 9): both H6 and H7 reveal that Enjoyment of Nature (EON) positively mediates the relationships of Environmental Identity (EI) and Social Media Consumption (SMC) with Visit Intention (VI).

Table 6 Q-Square Results

	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
EI	1872.000	1226.036	0.345
EON	2340.000	950.566	0.594
SMC	2808.000	1212.327	0.568
VI	2808.000	1169.177	0.584

Table 7 Goodness of Fit

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.054	0.054
d_ULS	0.663	0.663
d_G	0.308	0.308
Chi-square	856.343	856.343
NFI	0.879	0.879

Table 8 Hypothesis Test (a)

	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Result
H1: EI → EON	8.974	0.000	Positive & Significant
H2: SMC → EON	4.486	0.000	
H3: EON → VI	2.780	0.005	
H4: EI → VI	4.364	0.000	
H5: SMC → VI	6.976	0.000	

Table 9 Hypothesis Test (b)

	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
H6: EI → EON → VI	2.810	0.005
H7: SMC → EON → VI	2.151	0.031

For environmental identity, the item "As a child, I often played or spent time in natural open spaces" exhibited the highest factor loading (LF = 0.846), demonstrating that early-life interactions with nature play a pivotal role in shaping an individual's ecological self-concept. These results support Atik et al. (2023), who argued that formative outdoor experiences establish environmental identity and foster environmentally responsible behavior and nature connectedness.

Within the social media consumption construct, the statement "Before visiting, I find out about interesting experiences at the destination through social media" proved most salient. That outcome aligns with Majeed & Ramkissoon (2022), who showed that digital narratives create both emotional and informational bonds with destinations prior to actual visits. Social platforms thus function as critical channels through which prospective tourists reduce uncertainty and form intentions based on peer reviews and destination imagery.

Regarding enjoyment of nature, the item "I feel a sense of peace and calmness when I am in natural surroundings" achieved the highest loading, highlighting the emotional benefits derived from nature immersion. That result corresponds with Keith et al. (2022); Naini & Reddy (2023), who found that affective experiences—such as tranquility and joy—strengthen nature connectedness and drive repeat ecotourism behavior. The emotional dimension of enjoyment of nature therefore appears central to travel decisions among those seeking restoration.

For visit intention, the top-loading indicator was "I believe ecotourism is beneficial for the destination, local residents, and tourists," reflecting a belief in the social and environmental value of ecotourism. These findings confirm Chi & Pham (2022), who demonstrated that positive impact perceptions enhance destination appeal and revisit intentions, and echo Goeltom & Hurriyati (2024), who noted that perceived mutual benefits underpin destination loyalty.

In summary, the strongest indicators reveal that visit intention hinges not only on hedonic and informational factors but also on personal identity formation, emotional experience, and perceived collective benefits. Theoretically, these insights bridge environmental identity theory, affective nature engagement, and digital consumer behavior. Practically, destination marketers should craft narrative-driven, emotionally resonant, and ethically informed digital campaigns to heighten engagement with ecotourism offerings.

H1 (Environmental Identity → Enjoyment of Nature) was strongly supported, with a t-statistic of 8.974 exceeding the critical value of 1.96 ($p < .001$). These results indicate that individuals with a stronger environmental identity—often rooted in early-life nature experiences—are more likely to derive emotional satisfaction and tranquility from natural environments. These findings align with Atik et al. (2023) and Sierra-Barón et al. (2023), who reported that a well-established environmental identity intensifies affective responses to nature and fosters sustainable behavior.

H2 (Social Media Consumption → Enjoyment of Nature) also showed a significant positive effect ($t = 4.486$; $p < .001$). The outcome suggests that exposure to curated digital narratives and user-generated content enhances both emotional anticipation and cognitive awareness of nature experiences. These results correspond with Majeed & Ramkissoon (2022); Goeltom & Hurriyati (2024), who found that social media engagement triggers emotional resonance and perceived familiarity with ecotourism destinations before actual visits.

H3 (Enjoyment of Nature → Visit Intention) achieved statistical significance ($t = 2.780$; $p = .005$), confirming that the restorative and emotional qualities of nature significantly motivate ecotourism decisions. These statistics are consistent Keith et al. (2022) and Pratminingsih et al. (2024), who demonstrated that benefits such as peace and stress relief serve as strong predictors of travel behavior in natural settings.

H4 (Environmental Identity → Visit Intention) was supported ($t = 4.364$; $p < .001$), indicating a direct alignment between an individual's ecological self-concept and their intention to engage in pro-environmental tourism. These outcomes corroborate Sadu et al. (2024); Chi & Pham (2022), both of which highlighted that identity-driven travelers are more committed to responsible tourism and long-term eco-friendly behavior.

H5 (Social Media Consumption → Visit Intention) produced the largest direct effect ($t = 6.976$; $p < .001$), suggesting that social media serves not only as an informational platform but also as a powerful motivator of action. These findings support Goeltom & Hurriyati (2024); Mustafa et al. (2024), who observed that visually rich storytelling, peer reviews, and destination branding on social platforms strongly influence digitally engaged youth.

The results reveal a synergistic mechanism whereby environmental identity and social media consumption strengthen emotional connectedness to nature, which in turn mediates and amplifies individuals' visit intention to ecotourism destinations. The combined effect of ecological self-concept and digital engagement

highlights the value of integrated marketing strategies that are both emotionally engaging and ethically grounded.

H6 (EI → EON → VI). The indirect effect of environmental identity on visit intention via enjoyment of nature was significant (t = 2.810; p = 0.005), indicating partial mediation. These findings imply that a well-developed ecological self-concept enhances emotional satisfaction in natural settings, thereby fostering intentions to participate in ecotourism. This pattern aligns with the environmental self–identity framework of Atik et al. (2023), where early and sustained nature interactions shape both values and emotional attachments that drive eco-behavior. Sierra-Barón et al. (2023) further demonstrated that affective states—such as peace and calmness—serve as motivational mediators linking identity to pro-environmental actions. Keith et al. (2022) also found that emotional engagement with nature amplifies the influence of environmental beliefs on behavioral outcomes, underscoring the mediator role of enjoyment of nature.

H7 (SMC → EON → VI). The indirect effect of social media consumption on visit intention through enjoyment of nature reached significance (t = 2.151; p = 0.031), albeit with a smaller effect size. These results indicate that digital content not only conveys information but also evokes emotional anticipation—particularly through vivid depictions of natural landscapes and immersive user stories. Majeed & Ramkissoon (2022) emphasized that curated digital narratives can establish emotional bonds before an actual visit, and Goeltom & Hurriyati (2024) showed that online travel content fosters both emotional attachment and cognitive trust in destinations. Such evidence supports the notion of experiential priming, where social media acts as a pre-visit stimulus that enhances nature appreciation and ultimately promotes ecotourism engagement (Pham & Chi, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Overall, the study shows that environmental identity and social media consumption each exert significant direct effects on visit intention to ecotourism destinations in West Java, with enjoyment of nature acting as a pivotal mediator. Both antecedents independently boost enjoyment of nature, which in turn elevates visit intention. The PLS-SEM model demonstrated robust explanatory and predictive performance, affirming the integrated role of cognitive, emotional, and digital dimensions in shaping sustainable tourism behavior. Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, our sample comprised predominantly young residents of West Java, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other age cohorts or geographic regions. Second, the cross-sectional design captures intentions at a single time point; longitudinal research is needed to assess behavioral consistency over time. To enhance explanatory scope, future studies should incorporate additional psychological or behavioral constructs—such as environmental trust, perceived behavioral control, or destination image—and test the model across diverse cultural contexts. From a practical standpoint, ecotourism marketers and operators should craft emotionally resonant, value-driven campaigns that highlight not only the aesthetic appeal of natural settings but also their restorative and communal benefits. Storytelling emphasizing tranquility and solidarity can be disseminated via social platforms to stimulate enjoyment of nature and strengthen visit intention, particularly among digitally active youth. Partnerships with environmental influencers and content creators can bolster message authenticity and align branding with environmental identity. Finally, involving local communities in narrative development will underscore ecotourism's social benefits and foster a shared sense of environmental stewardship.

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