

(Research/Review) Article

# Effect of Environmental Quality and Sustainability on Visiting Interest Mediated by Tourist Recommendations in Wonorejo

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the influence of environmental quality and sustainability on visit intention at the Mangrove Wonorejo tourism site in Surabaya, with tourist recommendation as a mediating variable. The background of this research is based on the high tourism potential of mangrove areas in coastal Surabaya, which still faces challenges in maintaining environmental quality and consistently applying sustainability principles. This research employs a quantitative approach using a survey method. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 100 respondents who had visited Mangrove Wonorejo, and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that both environmental quality and sustainability have a significant influence on visit intention. Additionally, these two variables also significantly affect tourist recommendations. Tourist recommendation is proven to significantly mediate the relationship between environmental quality and sustainability toward visit intention. These findings indicate that positive visitor experiences encourage tourists to recommend the destination to others, which in turn strengthens the intention to revisit. This research offers theoretical contributions to sustainable tourism marketing and practical recommendations for ecotourism managers to integrate conservation strategies with experience-based promotion.

**Keywords:** Environmental Quality, Sustainability, Tourist Recommendation, Visit Intention, Mangrove Tourism.

## 1. Introduction

Sustainable tourism has become a major focus in the development of the tourism sector in various countries, including Indonesia. As a country with a wealth of extensive mangrove ecosystems, Indonesia has a great opportunity to develop mangrove-based ecotourism. This ecosystem plays an important role not only in environmental aspects, such as preventing coastal abrasion and maintaining biodiversity, but also in social and economic aspects, especially through the development of ecotourism. The development of mangrove ecotourism is one of the strategic approaches in supporting sustainable tourism that can provide ecological, educational, and economic benefits simultaneously.

Surabaya as one of the big cities that also has a mangrove tourism area, offers great potential in this sector which is known as a center of trade while offering various interesting tourist destinations. The leading mangrove destination area is located in East Java. Along with the increasing interest of tourists in nature-based tourism and environmental education, the development of tourism in mangroves becomes relevant. Mangrove tourism offers a unique experience that combines recreation, education, and empowerment of the surrounding community.

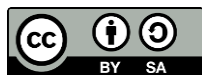
However, the growth of the tourism sector also faces complex environmental challenges. Increasing visitor numbers have the potential to put pressure on mangrove ecosystems, and declining environmental quality can have a direct impact on tourist satisfaction and reduce future interest in visiting. Damage to mangrove ecosystems, declining

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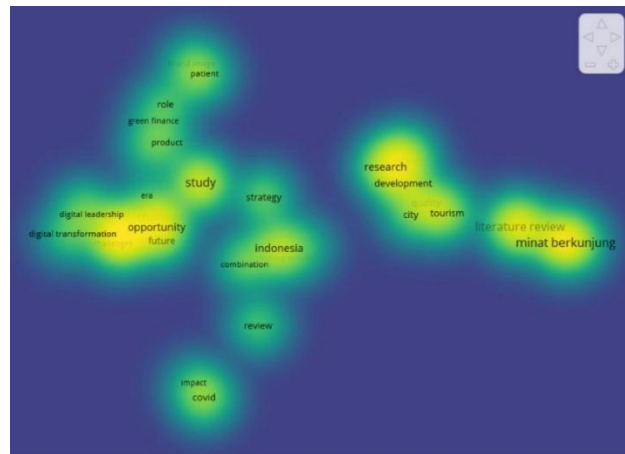
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water quality, and lack of innovation in management and promotion are often issues found in the field. This affects tourist perceptions and interests, as well as the sustainability of the destination itself.

Visiting interest refers to an individual's desire to visit or revisit a tourist destination. In the context of mangrove tourism, this interest is influenced by factors such as perceptions of environmental quality, tourist attractions, and previous experiences. Environmental quality, including physical aspects such as water cleanliness, mangrove vegetation conditions, and cleanliness of public facilities, is a crucial factor in attracting tourists, especially in ecotourism. Positive perceptions of a clean and natural environment will create a pleasant experience and increase visiting interest.

Sustainability in tourism focuses on efforts to maintain a balance between economic, social, and environmental aspects. Sustainable management includes the preservation of mangrove ecosystems, local community participation, and environmental education for visitors. Tourists who are aware of sustainability initiatives tend to respond positively, which can increase satisfaction and return visits.

Traveler recommendations, whether through direct testimonials or digital media, play a significant role in influencing travel interest. In the digital era, recommendations through social media and online reviews have become very effective promotional tools in increasing travel interest. Research shows that environmental quality and sustainability not only have a direct impact on travel interest, but also indirectly strengthen that interest through traveler perceptions and experiences that drive positive recommendations.



**Figure 1.** Literature Keyword Density Map

*Source: Processed Data, 2025*

Based on the keyword density map and empirical findings above, it can be seen that research on the influence of environmental quality and sustainability on visiting interest, with tourist recommendations as a mediating variable, is still very relevant and important to be studied further. Although visiting interest has become a widely discussed topic, exploration space remains open, especially in understanding how environmental quality and sustainability of tourist areas can trigger a domino effect in the form of positive recommendations that strengthen the attractiveness of mangrove destinations in Surabaya. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of sustainable mangrove tourism management strategies, as well as enrich scientific literature in the fields of tourism and the environment.

This phenomenon is in line with the conditions in the field, where mangrove tourism in East Java such as in Surabaya, has become one of the leading destinations that offers educational, recreational, and conservation values. However, the development of mangrove ecotourism areas also presents its own challenges, especially related to the decline in environmental quality due to tourist activities, development, and less than optimal environmental management. Damage to mangrove ecosystems, declining water quality, and lack of innovation in management and promotion are issues that are still frequently encountered. This has an impact on tourists' perceptions and interest in visiting, which ultimately affects the sustainability of the tourist destination.

## 2. Literature Review

### Sustainable Tourism Development

The theory of Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) is based on the principle of sustainable development as stated in the Brundtland Report (1987), namely development that meets current needs without sacrificing future generations. In the context of mangrove tourism, STD emphasizes the balance between environmental conservation, local community empowerment, and economic sustainability. According to UNWTO (2005), sustainable tourism considers economic, social, and environmental impacts as a whole, and ensures the welfare of local communities and the sustainability of natural resources.

Sustainable tourism development becomes the main framework because it is able to explain the relationship between environmental quality and sustainability towards visiting interest mediated by tourist recommendations. This theory is also flexible and can be applied in various types of tourist destinations including mangrove ecotourism which is the focus of this study. In the Wonorejo mangrove tourism area in Surabaya is a real example of a natural destination (ecotourism) that requires sustainable management.

### Environmental Perception Theory

According to Lindal et al. (2021), environmental perception is the result of the interaction between the physical characteristics of the environment and the psychological perception of individuals, which ultimately forms attitudes, aesthetic judgments, and behavior towards a place. In the context of tourism, how tourists perceive cleanliness, beauty, comfort, and environmental sustainability greatly influences their decision to visit or recommend a destination. Environmental perception is an important foundation for understanding how the quality and sustainability of the environment of tourist destinations such as mangrove ecotourism areas can influence tourists' interest in visiting through the dimensions of their subjective perceptions of environmental conditions experienced directly.

Environmental perception is a complex psychological process, involving the interaction between physical environmental stimuli and individual internal factors such as knowledge, experience, emotions, values, and expectations. In the context of tourism, environmental perception greatly determines how tourists assess, feel, and respond to a tourist destination. The environment in question includes everything that can be captured by the senses, both visual, auditory, and atmospheric elements of a place.

### Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior is used as a theoretical framework to explain how tourists' interest in visiting the Wonorejo Mangrove ecotourism area in Surabaya is formed. Environmental quality and destination sustainability act as external factors that shape tourists' attitudes towards visiting, while encouragement from the social environment forms their subjective norms. In addition, perceptions of the ease or obstacles in visiting the mangrove area form the dimension of perceived behavioral control. These three components together form the intention to visit, which in many studies has been shown to be a strong predictor of actual behavior. Thus, the application of TPB in this study is expected to provide a strong theoretical and empirical understanding of the psychological factors that drive tourists to choose, visit, and recommend environmentally and sustainability-based destinations.

### Place Attachment Theory

Place attachment is an affective bond between a person and their physical environment that is formed through experience, meaning, and social interaction. This bond is not only based on physical location, but is also influenced by personal values, past experiences, and symbols attached to the place.

Lewicka (2011) stated that place attachment can be formed through repeated interactions with a place, personal memories, and social participation in that place. This confirms that attachment is not instantaneous, but rather the result of consistent and meaningful experiences.

In the context of mangrove ecotourism, such as in Wonorejo Surabaya, place attachment can be created through:

- Positive experiences with environmental quality (cleanliness, authenticity, coolness).
- Conservation efforts that were successful and witnessed directly by visitors.
- Interaction with local communities or education about the importance of protecting the area.

Place attachment acts as a middle theory that bridges the influence of environmental quality and sustainability on visiting intentions. When tourists feel emotionally attached to a tourist destination because of the memorable experiences it offers, they tend to have a higher intention to return or recommend the place.

### **Triple Bottom Line (TBL)**

The TBL model emphasizes the balance between three main aspects of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. In mangrove tourism, this approach is used to evaluate the impact of sustainability practices on environmental quality and the welfare of local communities. The triple bottom line introduced by Elkington (1997) emphasizes that success is not only assessed from the economic aspect but also from its impact on humans. This model emphasizes that the success of an entity is not only measured by financial profit, but must also consider its contribution to community welfare and environmental sustainability.

Sustainable tourism, especially in mangrove ecotourism areas, the Triple Bottom Line approach is used to assess whether the tourism practices implemented actually provide positive impacts not only economically, but also socially and ecologically. This model requires a balance between these three aspects as a basis for planning, managing, and developing responsible and sustainable tourist destinations. According to Gunawan, Ramanditya, and Setiawan (2021) communities in managing mangrove ecosystem-based tourism, by adopting the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach as a framework for evaluating sustainable development. This study was conducted in coastal areas of Indonesia that develop mangrove tourism as a form of local ecotourism.

### **3. Research Method**

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method to test the causal relationship between environmental quality variables, sustainability, tourist recommendations, and visiting intentions. The study aims to test the hypotheses that have been formulated based on a theoretical framework built from the theory of Sustainable Tourism Development, Theory of Planned Behavior, and Place Attachment Theory.

The population in this study were tourists visiting mangrove tourist destinations in East Java, including areas in Surabaya, Lamongan, Gresik, and Pasuruan. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling with the respondent criteria being tourists who had visited mangrove tourist locations at least once. The number of samples used in this study was 100 respondents. Data were collected through a closed questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire instrument was tested for validity and reliability before being used in the main study.

Environmental Quality Variable (X1) is measured through five indicators: environmental cleanliness, ecosystem sustainability, air and water quality, visual comfort, and waste management. Sustainability (X2) is measured through five indicators: ecological sustainability, social sustainability, economic sustainability, community involvement, and environmental education. Tourist Recommendation (Z) as a mediating variable, includes indicators of satisfaction, service quality, tourism experience, positive emotions, and online reviews. Visiting Intention (Y) as a dependent variable, is measured through preferences, predictions of repeat visits, and future needs.

Data analysis was conducted using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach with SmartPLS software. The analysis stages consist of Descriptive Analysis to describe the respondent profile and distribution of answers. Measurement Model Testing (Outer Model) includes convergent validity test, indicator reliability, and AVE. Structural Model Testing (Inner Model) includes R-square test and influence test between variables. Hypothesis testing is conducted using bootstrapping technique to see the significance of direct and indirect relationships between variables. This method was chosen to obtain a deep empirical and quantitative understanding of the influence of environmental quality and sustainability on visiting interest, as well as the mediating role of tourist recommendations.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

The results of the outer model analysis show that all indicators in each variable have a loading value  $> 0.7$  and AVE  $> 0.5$ , so that the research instrument is declared valid and reliable. The inner model analysis shows that environmental quality has a positive and

significant effect on visiting interest ( $O = 0.246$ ;  $T\text{-stat} = 2.774$ ). Sustainability also has a significant effect on visiting interest ( $O = 0.212$ ;  $T\text{-stat} = 2.742$ ).

In addition, environmental quality and sustainability each have a significant effect on tourist recommendations ( $O = 0.273$  and  $0.243$ ). Tourist recommendations are proven to mediate the relationship between environmental quality and sustainability on visiting intentions, with a significant indirect effect ( $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ). These results are consistent with the TPB and Place Attachment theories, where pleasant experiences shape the intention to return or recommend to others.

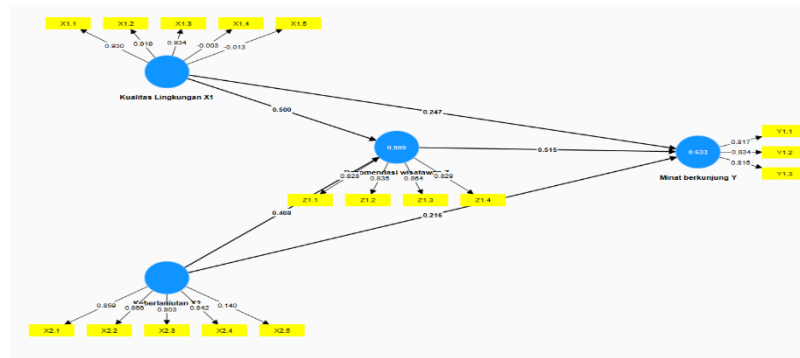


Figure 2. Outer Model

The following are the results of the outer model in this study:

Based on the image above, it is known that before further algorithm data processing, there are still factor loading values (outer loading) whose values are less than 0.5. This indicates that several indicators have not met the recommended convergent validity criteria, namely having a loading value of more than 0.5.

Table 1. Outer Model Algorithm Results Outer Loading Testing:

Variables	Dimensions	Loading factor	Information
X1_Environmental quality	X1.1	0.930	Valid
	X1.2	0.919	Valid
	X1.3	0.934	Valid
	X1.4	-0.003	Invalid
	X1.5	-0.013	Invalid
X2_Sustainability	X2.1	0.859	Valid
	X2.2	0.866	Valid
	X2.3	0.803	Valid
	X2.4	0.842	Valid
	X2.5	0.140	Invalid
Y_Interested in Visiting	Y1.1	0.817	Valid
	Y1.2	0.834	Valid
	Y1.3	0.815	Valid
Z_Traveler Recommendations	Z1.1	0.828	Valid
	Z1.2	0.835	Valid
	Z1.3	0.864	Valid
	Z1.4	0.829	Valid

The following are the results of the outer model after being modified in this study:

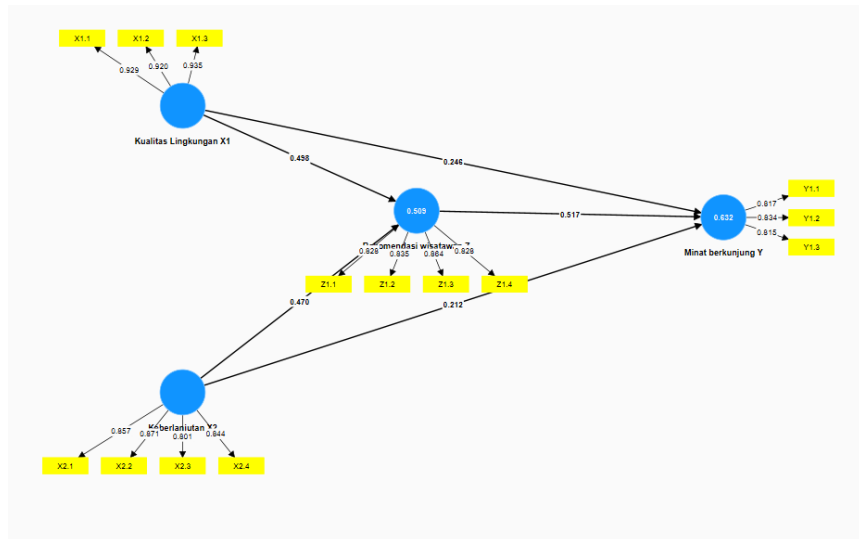


Figure 3. Outer Model Modification

Based on the image after elimination, it can be seen that all indicators in each latent variable have a factor loading value above 0.5. This indicates that the retained indicators are valid and reliable in measuring the intended construct.

5. Hypothesis Analysis

Table 2. Direct Effect

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Tstatistics ( O/STDEV )	P Value (P values)	Significance
Sustainability (X2) -> Interest in Visiting (Y)	0.212	0.077	0.006	ACCEPTED
Sustainability(X2) -> Traveler Recommendation(Z)	0.470	0.075	0.000	ACCEPTED
Environmental Quality(X1) -> Interest in Visiting(Y)	0.246	0.100	0.014	ACCEPTED
Environmental Quality(X1) -> Tourist Recommendation(Z)	0.498	0.069	0.000	ACCEPTED
Tourist Recommendation(Z) -> Interest in Visiting(Y)	0.517	0.108	0.000	ACCEPTED

H1. Sustainability X2 -> Visiting Interest Y

Original Sample (O): 0.212. This indicates that every one unit increase in Sustainability (X2) will increase Visiting Intention (Y) by 0.212 units, assuming other variables are constant. The direction of the relationship is positive. T statistic: 2.742. This value is greater than 1.96, indicating an initial indication of significance. P values: 0.006. The p value of 0.006 is smaller than 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Since the p value (0.006) is smaller than 0.05, it can be concluded that Sustainability (X2) has a positive and significant direct effect on Visiting Intention (Y). The better the Sustainability, the higher the Visiting Intention.

H2. Sustainability X2 -> Traveler Recommendation Z

Original Sample (O): 0.470. This indicates that every one unit increase in Sustainability (X2) will increase Tourist Recommendation (Z) by 0.470 units, assuming other variables remain constant. The direction of the relationship is positive. T statistic: 6.236. This

value is much greater than 1.96, indicating a strong indication of significance. P values: 0.000. The p value of 0.000 (close to zero) is clearly smaller than 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Since the p value (0.000) is smaller than 0.05, it can be concluded that Sustainability (X2) has a positive and significant direct effect on Tourist Recommendation (Z). Good sustainability plays a major role in encouraging tourists to recommend a destination.

### H3. Environmental Quality X1 -> Visiting Interest Y

Original Sample (O): 0.246. This shows that every one unit increase in Environmental Quality (X1) will increase Visiting Interest (Y) by 0.246 units, assuming other variables are constant. The direction of the relationship is positive. T statistic: 2.459. This value is greater than 1.96, indicating an indication of significance. P values: 0.014. The p value of 0.014 is smaller than 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Because the p value (0.014) is smaller than 0.05, it can be concluded that Environmental Quality (X1) has a positive and significant direct effect on Visiting Interest (Y). The higher the Environmental Quality, the greater the Tourist Visiting Interest.

### H4. Environmental Quality X1 -> Tourist Recommendation Z

Original Sample (O): 0.498. This indicates that every one unit increase in Environmental Quality (X1) will increase Tourist Recommendation (Z) by 0.498 units, assuming other variables remain constant. The direction of the relationship is positive. T statistic: 7.199. This value is much greater than 1.96, indicating a very strong indication of significance. P values: 0.000. The p value of 0.000 is clearly smaller than 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Since the p value (0.000) is smaller than 0.05, it can be concluded that Environmental Quality (X1) has a positive and significant direct effect on Tourist Recommendation (Z). Good environmental quality is a crucial factor that encourages tourists to recommend a place.

### H5. Tourist Recommendation Z -> Visiting Interest Y

Original Sample (O): 0.517. This indicates that every one unit increase in Tourist Recommendation (Z) will increase Visiting Intention (Y) by 0.517 units, assuming other variables are constant. The direction of the relationship is positive. T-statistic: 4.794. This value is much greater than 1.96, indicating a very strong indication of significance. P values: 0.000. The p value of 0.000 is clearly smaller than 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Since the p value (0.000) is smaller than 0.05, it can be concluded that Tourist Recommendation (Z) has a positive and significant direct effect on Visiting Intention (Y). The more positive recommendations from other tourists, the higher the Visiting Intention of potential tourists.

**Table 3.** Indirect Effect

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	T statistic ( O/STDEV )	P values	SIGNIFICANCE
Environmental Sustainability(X2) -> Tourist Recommendation(Z) -> Interest in Visiting(Y)	0.243	0.064	0.000	Accepted
Environmental Quality(X1) -> Tourist Recommendations(Z) -> Interest in Visiting(Y)	0.258	0.073	0.000	Accepted

From the hypothesis test using the bootstrap technique on SmartPLS, the following were found:

### H6. Environmental Quality X1 -> Tourist Recommendation Z -> Visiting Interest Y

Original Sample (O): 0.258. This value indicates the magnitude of the indirect effect of Environmental Quality (X1) on Visiting Intention (Y) mediated by Tourist Recommendations

(Z). A positive number of 0.258 indicates that an increase in Environmental Quality (X1) will indirectly increase Visiting Intention (Y) through its role in increasing Tourist Recommendations (Z). T statistic: 3.525. The T statistic value of 3.525 is also much greater than the critical limit of 1.96, indicating a strong indication of statistical significance. P value (P values): 0.000. The p value of 0.000 (approaching zero) is significantly smaller than 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Based on the very small p value (0.000), it can be concluded that Environmental Quality (X1) indirectly has a positive and significant effect on Visiting Intention (Y) through the mediation of Tourist Recommendations (Z). This implies that superior environmental quality not only attracts visitors directly, but also substantially increases that interest by encouraging tourists to provide positive recommendations. Thus, Tourist Recommendation (Z) acts as a crucial mediator in the relationship between Environmental Quality (X1) and Visiting Intention (Y). A well-maintained and attractive environmental quality will encourage tourists to recommend the place, which in turn will attract more visitors.

#### **H7. Sustainability X2 -> Tourist Recommendation Z -> Visiting Interest Y**

Original Sample (O): 0.243. This value represents the magnitude of the indirect effect of Sustainability (X2) on Visiting Intention (Y) mediated by Tourist Recommendations (Z). The positive number 0.243 indicates that an increase in Sustainability (X2) will indirectly increase Visiting Intention (Y) through its role in increasing Tourist Recommendations (Z). T statistic: 3.799. The T statistic value of 3.799 is much greater than the critical limit of 1.96, indicating strong statistical significance. P values: 0.000. The p value of 0.000 (approaching zero) is significantly smaller than 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Based on the very small p value (0.000), it can be concluded that Sustainability (X2) indirectly has a positive and significant effect on Visiting Intention (Y) through the mediation of Tourist Recommendations (Z). This means that Sustainability enhancement efforts not only have a direct effect on visitor interest, but also substantially promote that interest by encouraging tourists to provide positive recommendations. In other words, Tourist Recommendation (Z) serves as an effective mediator in the relationship between Sustainability (X2) and Visiting Intention (Y). The better the sustainability aspect of a destination, the more likely tourists are to recommend it, which in turn will increase the visiting interest of other potential tourists.

### **5. Conclusions**

Based on the research results and discussions that have been explained previously, the conclusions from the results of this research can be described as follows:

- Environmental quality has a significant effect on interest in visiting the mangrove tourism area in Wonorejo Surabaya mangrove tourism in Surabaya. This finding shows that a clean, natural, and well-maintained environment can increase tourist interest in coming, because it provides a meaningful, healthy, and educational tourism experience.
- Environmental quality has a significant effect on tourist recommendations in the mangrove tourism area in Wonorejo Surabaya. This indicates that tourists tend to give positive recommendations to tourist destinations that have good environmental quality, such as cleanliness, comfort, and authenticity of the ecosystem.
- Sustainability has a significant effect on interest in visiting the mangrove tourism area in Wonorejo Surabaya mangrove tourism. This shows that tourists increasingly appreciate the environmental and social sustainability aspects in choosing a destination, especially when they see efforts to preserve and empower local communities.
- Sustainability has a positive and significant effect on tourist recommendations in the mangrove tourism area in Wonorejo Surabaya. Tourists are more likely to recommend destinations that are committed to sustainability because they feel that the tourism experience they get contributes to moral values and social responsibility.
- Tourist recommendations have a significant influence on interest in visiting the mangrove tourism area in Wonorejo Surabaya. Positive recommendations or testimonials from previous tourists are important factors in attracting potential tourists, both verbally and through digital media.
- Environmental quality has a significant effect on visiting interest through tourist recommendations as a mediating variable in the mangrove tourism area in Wonorejo Surabaya. This shows that environmental quality not only has a direct impact, but also

indirectly strengthens visiting interest through tourist perceptions and experiences that drive recommendations.

- Sustainability has a significant effect on visiting interest through tourist recommendations as a mediating variable in the mangrove tourism area in Wonorejo Surabaya. This implies that sustainable practices implemented in tourist destinations encourage tourists to provide recommendations, which then increase the interest of other visitors to visit.

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