



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38035/gijtm.v4i3>
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From Smart Experiences to Tourist Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Satisfaction in Kintamani Culinary Tourism

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Abstract: Kintamani is one of Bali's most visited culinary destinations, yet little is known about how smart tourism shapes the experience of visitors who come specifically for its food. This study examines the effect of smart tourism on tourist satisfaction and revisit intention at Kintamani's culinary tourism destination, with tourist satisfaction as a mediating variable. An explanatory quantitative approach was applied, with 150 tourists surveyed using purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4. Results confirm that smart tourism positively and significantly affects both tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.502$, $t = 7.524$, $p < 0.001$) and revisit intention ($\beta = 0.161$, $t = 2.374$, $p = 0.018$). Tourist satisfaction strongly predicts revisit intention ($\beta = 0.604$, $t = 11.489$, $p < 0.001$) and mediates the smart tourism and revisit intention relationship ($\beta = 0.303$, $t = 5.881$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating partial mediation. The effect size of satisfaction on revisit intention is large ($f^2 = 0.533$), while smart tourism exerts a medium-to-large effect on satisfaction ($f^2 = 0.337$). Model fit is acceptable (SRMR = 0.063, NFI = 0.875). Technology alone does not build loyalty; it does so through the satisfaction it generates. Destination managers at Kintamani should invest in smart tourism not merely as a digital amenity, but as a pathway to meaningful experiences and repeat visits.

Keywords: Culinary tourism, Kintamani, Revisit intention, Smart tourism, Tourist satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Something has been happening quietly at tourist destinations across Indonesia for the past several years. Visitors who arrive at Kintamani do not simply step off a bus and start eating. They check Google Maps to compare restaurants. They scan TripAdvisor reviews before deciding between the fish grilled over volcano-heated steam and the buffet with the unobstructed caldera view. They photograph their meals before tasting them, tag the location, and read comments from strangers who visited two weeks ago. None of this is extraordinary anymore. It is just how people travel. And it raises a question that is surprisingly hard to answer: does all this digital activity actually make tourists happier with where they end up, and does it make them want to come back?

Smart tourism, broadly defined as the application of information and communication technologies to enhance destination management and tourist experience, has attracted considerable academic interest over the past decade (Gomes et al., 2026). Most of that research has concentrated on formally designated smart cities and large urban destinations such as Macau, Singapore, and South Korean technology hubs. The picture for smaller, culturally specific culinary destinations in emerging tourism economies is thin. Kintamani sits precisely in that gap: a mountain destination in Bangli Regency, Bali, drawing visitors primarily through its panoramic restaurants overlooking Mount Batur and Lake Batur, where smart tourism is driven by tourists themselves rather than top-down infrastructure planning (Sekar, 2025). Smart tourism development increasingly emphasizes the integration of digital platforms, data-driven services, and interactive technologies to create more personalized and meaningful tourist experiences (Mishra et al., 2024).

The theoretical motivation comes from two directions. Smart tourism technologies reshape the tourist journey at every stage, from pre-visit planning through in-destination navigation to post-visit sharing, and these changes affect both expectations and actual experiences (Calza et al., 2022). At the same time, culinary tourism is a particularly experiential form of travel, where satisfaction depends on a combination of food quality, service, atmosphere, and sense of place; factors that digital information can calibrate, amplify, or distort (Soonsan et al., 2026).

This study's contribution is specific. Most smart tourism research either treats satisfaction as a mediator without adequately explaining the mechanism, or examines satisfaction separately from the smart tourism ecosystem (Yuksel et al., 2025). No published study, to our knowledge, tests the full smart tourism to satisfaction to revisit intention pathway in a culinary tourism context in Bali. Senachai et al. (2025) confirm through systematic review that satisfaction consistently mediates between destination attributes and revisit intention across multiple methodologies; the present study extends this by placing smart tourism as the upstream variable driving that satisfaction at Kintamani. Previous tourism studies have also demonstrated that tourist satisfaction represents a key determinant of behavioral intentions, including revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth, because satisfied visitors are more likely to develop stronger destination loyalty (Acharya et al., 2023).

Four research questions organize this study: What is the direct effect of smart tourism on tourist satisfaction at Kintamani? What is its direct effect on revisit intention? Does tourist satisfaction mediate the smart tourism and revisit intention relationship? And what is the relative magnitude of each effect? The answers have operational weight for the restaurants and destination managers who serve the roughly 1.5 million visitors Kintamani draws annually.

METHODS

Research Design and Setting

This study uses an explanatory quantitative design to test the hypothesized relationships. Kintamani, Bangli Regency, Bali, was selected as the setting because it is a high-traffic culinary destination where tourist use of digital technology is high and consistent, yet no formal smart destination infrastructure exists. This makes it a valid setting for examining smart tourism as a tourist-driven, bottom-up phenomenon rather than one produced by deliberate smart city investment.

Variables and Measurement

Three constructs were measured using five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Table 1 presents the construct definitions and their indicators.

Table 1. Research Construct Model

Variable	Role	Construct Definition	Indicators
Smart Tourism (X)	Exogenous	Use of digital technology to support the tourist experience	X1: Destination information access X2: Application ease of use X3: Online reviews X4: Interactivity X5: Trip planning support
Tourist Satisfaction (M)	Mediating	Tourist evaluation of the overall culinary tourism experience at Kintamani	M1: Overall satisfaction M2: Expectation confirmation M3: Service quality M4: Information access satisfaction M5: Culinary experience quality
Revisit Intention (Y)	Endogenous	Tourist intention to return to the Kintamani culinary destination	Y1: Desire to return Y2: Return preference Y3: Recommendation intention Y4: Future destination choice Y5: Intent to explore further

Sampling and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was applied with three inclusion criteria: tourists aged at least 17 years, currently visiting or having previously visited Kintamani's culinary attractions, and having used at least one digital technology tool (Google Maps, social media, or a travel application) to find information about the destination. Purposive sampling is appropriate when researchers need to select respondents who possess specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives, particularly in tourism studies involving visitor experiences and technology adoption (Tan et al., 2025). Sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for unknown populations at a 10 percent error margin, yielding a minimum of 100 respondents. The target was set at 150 to improve the reliability of PLS-SEM estimation, as partial least squares structural equation modeling can effectively analyze complex models with mediation relationships using moderate sample sizes (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to profile respondents and characterize their perceptions of the three constructs. Respondent demographics covered age, gender, tourist origin, visit frequency, and which digital technologies were used to search for destination information. Perceptions of smart tourism, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention were summarized using mean scores and standard deviations for each indicator. Mean scores were interpreted using Likert scale interval categories (low, medium, high), with standard deviations indicating the degree of variation in responses across the 150 respondents. Descriptive

analysis is an essential preliminary statistical approach used to summarize data characteristics, identify response patterns, and provide an overview of respondents' perceptions before conducting further inferential analysis (Adeniran et al., 2024).

Data Analysis Using PLS-SEM

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4. PLS-SEM is appropriate here because all three constructs use reflective indicators, the model includes a mediation pathway, and the sample size is moderate; conditions under which PLS-SEM performs well relative to covariance-based SEM (Subhaktiyasa, 2024). Darwisman (2025) applied the same approach in a recent study of service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty in Indonesian hospitality, demonstrating PLS-SEM's suitability for mediation analysis in similar tourism contexts. The analysis proceeded in two stages.

Stage one evaluated the measurement model through convergent validity (outer loading ≥ 0.70 , AVE ≥ 0.50 ; Fornell & Larcker, 1981), discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT < 0.85 ; Henseler et al., 2015), and reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.70$, CR ≥ 0.70 ; Hair et al., 2017). Indicators with outer loadings below 0.40 were to be removed. Stage two evaluated the structural model using R^2 , R^2 adjusted, effect size (f^2 ; Cohen, 1988), predictive relevance (Q^2 predict; Shmueli et al., 2019), and hypothesis testing through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples ($t > 1.96$, $p < 0.05$). Goodness of fit was assessed using SRMR (< 0.08) and NFI (> 0.85) (Jafarova et al., 2026).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model

All outer loadings fell between 0.732 and 0.856, all above the 0.70 threshold. No indicator was removed (Table 2).

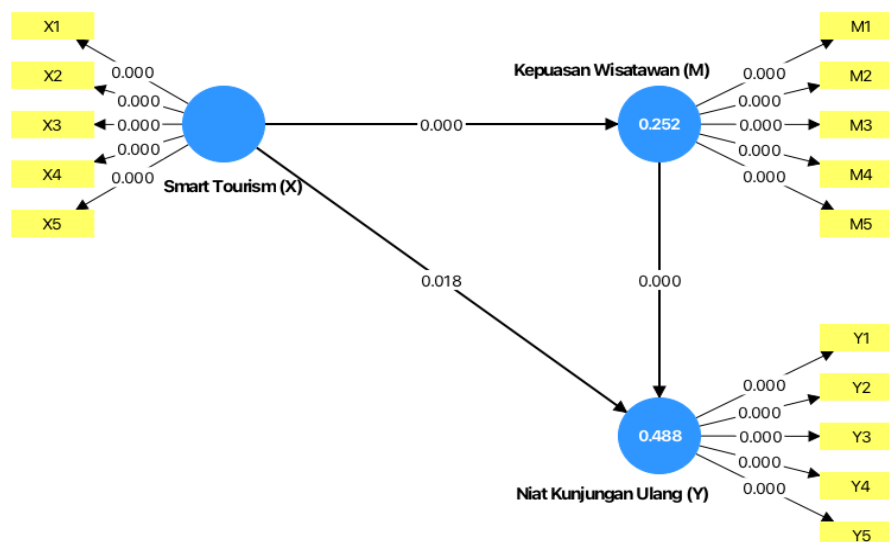


Figure 1. PLS Model — Outer Loadings and Path Coefficients
(Source: SmartPLS 4)

Table 2. Outer Loading Results

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	Conclusion
Smart Tourism (X)	X1	0.785	Valid
	X2	0.792	Valid
	X3	0.802	Valid
	X4	0.755	Valid
	X5	0.762	Valid

Revisit Intention (Y)	Y1	0.838	Valid
	Y2	0.813	Valid
	Y3	0.747	Valid
	Y4	0.828	Valid
	Y5	0.809	Valid
Tourist Satisfaction (M)	M1	0.829	Valid
	M2	0.732	Valid
	M3	0.832	Valid
	M4	0.831	Valid
	M5	0.856	Valid

AVE exceeded 0.50 for all constructs (Table 3), confirming convergent validity.

Table 3. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	AVE
Smart Tourism (X)	0.608
Revisit Intention (Y)	0.652
Tourist Satisfaction (M)	0.668

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table 4). The square root of each construct's AVE (diagonal values) exceeds its correlations with all other constructs.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Variable	Tourist Satisfaction (M)	Revisit Intention (Y)	Smart Tourism (X)
Tourist Satisfaction (M)	0.817		
Revisit Intention (Y)	0.685	0.808	
Smart Tourism (X)	0.502	0.464	0.780

HTMT ratios further confirmed discriminant validity (Table 5): all values fell below the conservative 0.85 threshold, with no indication of conceptual overlap between constructs.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity: HTMT Ratio

Variable	Tourist Satisfaction (M)	Revisit Intention (Y)
Revisit Intention (Y)	0.777	
Smart Tourism (X)	0.576	0.542

All constructs met reliability criteria well above the minimum thresholds (Table 6). Cronbach's α values ranged from 0.839 to 0.875, and Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.886 to 0.909. All values remain below 0.95, confirming internal consistency without indicator redundancy.

Table 6. Reliability Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Tourist Satisfaction (M)	0.875	0.909
Revisit Intention (Y)	0.867	0.904
Smart Tourism (X)	0.839	0.886

Structural Model

Table 7 reports R^2 and R^2 adjusted values, which measure how much variance in the endogenous variables the model explains.

Table 7. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Variable	R^2	R^2 Adjusted
Tourist Satisfaction (M)	0.252	0.247
Revisit Intention (Y)	0.488	0.481

Smart tourism explains 25.2% of variance in tourist satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.252$, adjusted = 0.247). Under Chin's (1998) criteria, this is categorized as weak, which is not surprising given that satisfaction in culinary tourism is influenced by many psychological and situational factors outside any model. Smart tourism and satisfaction together explain 48.8% of variance in revisit intention ($R^2 = 0.488$, adjusted = 0.481), approaching the moderate-strong boundary and indicating reasonable predictive power for this type of behavioral outcome.

Effect sizes (f^2) tell a more pointed story about the relative contribution of each predictor (Table 8). Cohen's (1988) benchmarks are: $f^2 \geq 0.35$ large, 0.15–0.35 medium, 0.02–0.15 small, and below 0.02 negligible.

Table 8. Effect Size (f^2) Results

Predictor	Outcome	f^2	Category
Tourist Satisfaction (M)	Revisit Intention (Y)	0.533	Large
Smart Tourism (X)	Tourist Satisfaction (M)	0.337	Medium-Large
Smart Tourism (X)	Revisit Intention (Y)	0.038	Small

Tourist satisfaction's effect on revisit intention is large ($f^2 = 0.533$). Smart tourism's effect on satisfaction is medium to large ($f^2 = 0.337$). Smart tourism's direct effect on revisit intention is small ($f^2 = 0.038$). These three numbers together already tell a story about the architecture of how smart tourism generates loyalty: the pathway runs through satisfaction, not around it.

Hypothesis Testing

All four hypotheses are accepted (Table 9). The indirect effect ($\beta = 0.303$) is nearly double the direct effect ($\beta = 0.161$), confirming partial mediation.

Table 9. Hypothesis Testing Results

Path	Path Coeff	T-Stat	p-Value	Conclusion	H
Smart Tourism (X) → Tourist Satisfaction (M)	0.502	7.524	0.000	Accepted	H1
Smart Tourism (X) → Revisit Intention (Y)	0.161	2.374	0.018	Accepted	H2
Tourist Satisfaction (M) → Revisit Intention (Y)	0.604	11.489	0.000	Accepted	H3
Smart Tourism (X) → Satisfaction (M) → Revisit Intention (Y)	0.303	5.881	0.000	Accepted	H4

H1 (Smart Tourism → Satisfaction, $\beta = 0.502$, $t = 7.524$, $p = 0.000$): Accepted. The stronger the smart tourism implementation at Kintamani, the higher the satisfaction tourists report. This is the most precisely estimated relationship in the model.

H2 (Smart Tourism → Revisit Intention, $\beta = 0.161$, $t = 2.374$, $p = 0.018$): Accepted. Smart tourism does directly influence revisit intention, but this effect is modest compared to the other paths. It exists; it just does not dominate.

H3 (Tourist Satisfaction → Revisit Intention, $\beta = 0.604$, $t = 11.489$, $p = 0.000$): Accepted. This is the strongest path in the entire model. Satisfied tourists at Kintamani are substantially more likely to intend to return. The path coefficient of 0.604 is the highest of any tested relationship.

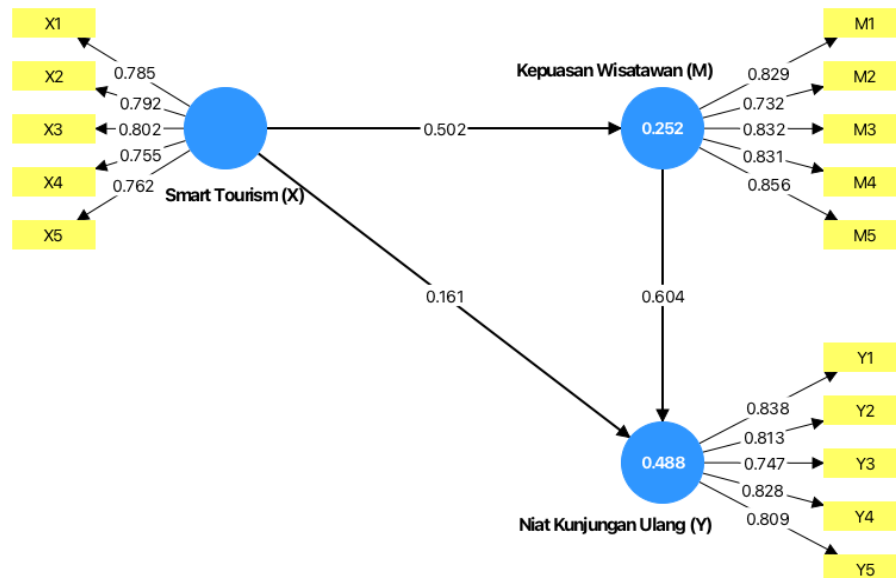


Figure 2. Bootstrapping Analysis — Path Coefficients, T-Statistics, and P-Values
Source: SmartPLS 4

H4 (Smart Tourism → Satisfaction → Revisit Intention, indirect effect $\beta = 0.303$, $t = 5.881$, $p = 0.000$): Accepted. Tourist satisfaction meaningfully mediates the smart tourism and revisit intention relationship. Since both the direct (H2) and indirect (H4) paths are significant, this is partial mediation. The indirect path is nearly twice the direct path in magnitude (0.303 versus 0.161), which means that most of smart tourism's influence on return visits is channeled through the satisfaction experience, not delivered directly.

Predictive Relevance

Table 10. Predictive Relevance (Q^2 predict)

Variable	Q^2 predict	RMSE	MAE
Tourist Satisfaction (M)	0.236	0.888	0.713
Revisit Intention (Y)	0.201	0.913	0.734

Both Q^2 predict values exceed zero, confirming that the model has out-of-sample predictive relevance for both endogenous variables. Under Shmueli et al.'s (2019) guidelines, Q^2 values of 0.236 (satisfaction) and 0.201 (revisit intention) fall in the small-to-medium range, meaning the model produces genuine predictions rather than fitting noise. The accompanying RMSE and MAE values indicate adequate prediction accuracy.

Goodness of Fit

Table 11. Goodness of Fit Results

Criterion	Saturated	Estimated	Threshold
SRMR	0.063	0.063	< 0.080
d_ULS	0.478	0.478	

d_G	0.171	0.171	
Chi-square	147.060	147.060	
NFI	0.875	0.875	> 0.850

The SRMR of 0.063 is below the 0.08 threshold, indicating acceptable fit between the hypothesized model and the empirical data. The NFI of 0.875 is above the 0.85 threshold and approaches the ideal of 1.0. The perfect consistency between saturated and estimated models on d_ULS and d_G confirms no structural discrepancy between the two model forms. The Chi-square value should be read with caution in PLS-SEM, since it is sensitive to sample size and is not the primary fit criterion; the SRMR and NFI are sufficient for fit assessment here (Usakli & Rasoolimanesh, 2023).

Discussion

The findings form a coherent picture that is worth reading carefully. Smart tourism works at Kintamani. But it works primarily through the satisfaction it generates, not through any direct loyalty effect of the technology itself. The indirect path ($\beta = 0.303$) is nearly double the direct path ($\beta = 0.161$), and the effect size difference is even more striking: satisfaction's contribution to revisit intention ($f^2 = 0.533$) is substantially greater than smart tourism's direct contribution ($f^2 = 0.038$) by a factor of fourteen. That is not a marginal finding. It is the structural logic of how digital technology generates loyalty in this setting.

This structure mirrors what other studies have found across very different destination contexts. Torabi et al. (2023) found the same mediated architecture in smart rural destinations in Iran. Ng et al. (2023) found it in their study linking smart tourism attributes to loyalty. Hitchcock (2023) confirmed it in Macau. The persistence of this pattern across Iranian mountains, Chinese gambling hubs, and Balinese caldera restaurants suggests it is not an artifact of any particular setting. It reflects something more fundamental: tourists do not return to destinations because they had a smooth digital experience. They return because they had a good time. The digital experience is how you increase the probability of the good time happening.

Shi et al. (2022), reviewing the revisit intention literature in this journal, draw the same conclusion: satisfaction is the consistent bridge variable, and the question for destination managers is not whether satisfaction matters (it always does) but what generates it. At Kintamani, smart tourism generates 25.2% of satisfaction variance, which is meaningful even if categorized as weak under Chin's criteria. Vukolić et al. (2025) found that food quality, restaurant ambience, and culinary authenticity are the dominant satisfaction drivers in gastronomy tourism, and smart tourism's role in that context is to ensure that the information tourists arrive with accurately reflects what they will find. When online reviews match the actual panorama and the actual gado-gado, satisfaction follows. When they do not, it does not.

The EDT framework is useful for making sense of the H1 mechanism. Smart tourism tools set pre-visit expectations through reviews, photos, and geolocation information. Those expectations then get tested against the actual food, service, and view at Kintamani. When the actual experience confirms or exceeds what the digital content promised, satisfaction results. This is why information accuracy matters so much in smart tourism contexts: it is not a secondary feature but the primary mechanism through which digital tools affect experience quality. Wen et al. (2024) found in a nighttime tourism satisfaction study that the expectation-experience gap was the single most reliable predictor of satisfaction under EDT. Hoang et al. (2026) adds that tourists' pre-trip emotional state modulates how receptively they evaluate what they find at a destination; this is largely beyond smart tourism's control, but calibrating expectations properly gives the experience the best possible chance of landing positively.

H3's path coefficient (0.604) is the highest in the model. This finding echoes Hui et al. (2007), whose work in Singapore established tourist satisfaction as the primary predictor of

both recommendation and return behavior. That finding has held across four decades and dozens of destination contexts. Murevazvivi & Chihwai (2026) demonstrated the same principle in non-metropolitan Indonesian hospitality, satisfaction fully mediated the service quality to loyalty relationship, and that mediation explained far more variance than any direct service quality to loyalty effect. The implication is the same here, improving smart tourism infrastructure earns returns in loyalty only insofar as it improves what tourists actually experience.

What does this mean for Kintamani's restaurant operators and destination managers? The practical implications follow directly from the numbers. Since smart tourism works through satisfaction, investment in smart tourism should target the specific mechanisms through which digital information affects satisfaction at this destination. That means ensuring online reviews and photos accurately represent the food and the caldera view (accuracy of expectations), optimizing navigation for the steep and sometimes confusing roads approaching the restaurants (friction reduction), and supporting photography-friendly dining environments that generate organic social media content (post-visit information generation for future tourists). Smart tourism investment aimed at adding digital features for their own sake, without a clear mechanism connecting those features to the quality of the actual dining experience, will show up in the f^2 statistics for exactly what it is: small.

This study has real limits worth acknowledging. The 150-respondent sample, while sufficient for PLS-SEM, constrains generalizability. The cross-sectional design captures a single moment in time and cannot establish causality in the strict sense. Smart tourism infrastructure and tourist demographics at Kintamani may shift. Future research should test this model longitudinally, expand the geographic scope to other Balinese culinary destinations, and explore potential moderating variables such as digital literacy, visit frequency, or tourist origin, factors that Pugra et al. (2026) suggest may condition how smart tourism attributes convert into satisfaction and loyalty in practice.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Kintamani draws tourists with something that cannot be digitized: a crater lake, volcanic slopes, and food served against a view that is difficult to replicate anywhere else. What this study adds is an account of how digital technology fits into that equation. Smart tourism positively and significantly affects both tourist satisfaction and revisit intention, with tourist satisfaction serving as a strong partial mediator. The mediated path is nearly twice the direct path in magnitude. Satisfaction exerts a large effect on revisit intention ($f^2 = 0.533$), making it the mechanism through which digital technology generates loyalty, not the technology itself.

The model is internally consistent, well-fitted, and predictively relevant. For destination managers, the operational conclusion is direct: smart tourism investment earns returns in repeat visitation only when it actually improves what tourists experience on the ground, specifically the accuracy of expectations set by digital content, the ease of reaching and navigating the destination, and the quality of information available before and during the visit. Infrastructure that reduces friction and calibrates expectations well serves as a genuine lever for repeat visitation. Infrastructure added for its own sake does not. This study provides an empirically grounded mediation model for the smart tourism, satisfaction, and revisit intention chain in a culinary destination context, and offers a concrete foundation for both practice and future research.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted only in Kintamani culinary tourism destination

with a specific sample of 150 tourists, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other tourism destinations, regions, or types of tourism experiences. Second, this study focused on three main constructs, namely smart tourism, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention, while other potential factors such as digital literacy, perceived value, destination image, service quality, and tourist characteristics may also influence tourist loyalty formation. Third, the cross-sectional research design captures tourist perceptions at a single point in time and cannot fully explain long-term changes in smart tourism adoption and visitor behavior. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the specific context of Kintamani culinary tourism and the variables examined in this study.

Recommendations

Future research is recommended to expand the investigation of the smart tourism–satisfaction–loyalty relationship across different tourism destinations and cultural contexts to improve the generalizability of findings. Larger sample sizes and longitudinal research designs are suggested to capture changes in tourist behavior and the development of smart tourism experiences over time. Future studies may also incorporate additional variables, such as digital literacy, destination image, perceived value, visit frequency, and tourist origin, to develop a more comprehensive research model. Furthermore, the application of advanced analytical approaches, including Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), Artificial Intelligence-based analysis, and longitudinal approaches, may provide deeper insights into how smart tourism experiences contribute to tourist satisfaction and loyalty formation.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed significantly to the development of this study, including research conceptualization, formulation of the theoretical framework, development of the research methodology, data collection, data analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), interpretation of findings, manuscript preparation, critical revision, and final approval of the submitted article. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and are fully responsible for the integrity and academic quality of the research.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Politeknik Negeri Bali for supporting this research and providing academic resources throughout the study process. The authors also sincerely thank all tourists who participated in the survey and contributed valuable information regarding their smart tourism experiences, satisfaction, and revisit intentions at Kintamani culinary destination. Their participation was essential in completing this research and developing a better understanding of how digital tourism experiences influence tourist loyalty.

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