

***Analysis of Tourist Perceptions and the Word of Mouth Phenomenon in
Shaping the Image of the Situbondo Beach Forest Marine Tourism Destination***

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze tourists' perceptions in shaping destination image (cognitive and affective) and to examine the role of Word of Mouth (WOM) at Situbondo Beach Forest. The research approach used is descriptive quantitative. Data collection was conducted by distributing questionnaires to 100 respondents selected using accidental sampling. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics based on the mean. The results indicate that tourists' perceptions form a highly positive image of the Situbondo Beach Forest as a tourist destination. Regarding the cognitive image, the highest ratings were found in the beauty indicator with a mean of 4.70 and ease of accessibility with a mean of 4.69. However, there are still several aspects that require attention, particularly regarding the cleanliness indicator with a mean of 4.08 and the adequacy of facilities with a mean of 4.03. Meanwhile, the affective image is well-formed through a sense of comfort with a mean of 4.54 and uniqueness with a mean of 4.58. Furthermore, this study indicates that the phenomenon of Word of Mouth plays a significant role in shaping the destination image for prospective tourists with highly positive scores. This is evident from tourists sharing positive aspects about the destination with a mean score of 4.42. Additionally, tourists' willingness to invite others to visit has a mean score of 4.49, and tourists provide positive recommendations with a mean score of 4.46. Based on the findings of this study, tourism destination managers are advised to preserve the natural environment and improve the management of cleanliness and public facilities so that the positive image of Situbondo Beach Forest can be sustained over the long term.

Keywords: Destination Image, Tourist Perceptions, Word of Mouth, Situbondo Beach Forest