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Museum Experience Quality and Word of Mouth Intention: The Critical Role of Emotional Engagement as a Mediator

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between museum experience quality, emotional engagement, and word of mouth intention in the context of cultural tourism. A quantitative approach was employed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with data collected from 160 visitors of Museum Wayang in Jakarta through purposive sampling. The results indicate that museum experience quality has a strong and significant effect on emotional engagement. Furthermore, emotional engagement significantly influences word of mouth intention. However, museum experience quality does not have a direct significant effect on word of mouth intention. The indirect effect test reveals that emotional engagement fully mediates the relationship between museum experience quality and word of mouth intention. These findings suggest that high-quality experiences alone are insufficient to stimulate recommendation behavior unless they evoke emotional responses. The study contributes to the tourism literature by highlighting the critical role of emotional engagement as a key mechanism linking experience and behavioral intention, particularly in the context of cultural museums in developing countries. Practically, the findings emphasize the importance of designing immersive and emotionally engaging museum experiences to enhance visitor advocacy.

Keywords: museum experience quality, emotional engagement, word of mouth intention

A. Introduction

The development of experience-based tourism has encouraged museums to transform from mere educational spaces into tourist destinations capable of creating emotional and interactive experiences for visitors. The Wayang Museum, as a cultural museum located in the Kota Tua area and focused on preserving puppet art and cultural collections, represents an important example of an educational tourism destination in Jakarta. Experience quality has become a crucial factor influencing tourist behavior, particularly in spreading recommendations to others.

A study by Lin et al. (2025) shows that memorable museum experiences have a significant effect on word of mouth, particularly through psychological mechanisms such as attachment and cultural identity. Meanwhile, Vesci et al. (2020) found that museum experience quality does not directly influence word of mouth, but rather operates through visitor satisfaction as a mediating variable. These findings indicate that museum experiences play a strategic role in shaping tourists' communication behavior; however, the underlying psychological processes remain diverse and not yet fully explained, especially in modern museums in large cities that increasingly emphasize interactivity and storytelling.

Most previous studies still focus on cognitive variables such as satisfaction as the primary mediator, while affective aspects such as emotional engagement have not been extensively explored, particularly in the museum context (Lin et al., 2025; Vesi et al., 2020; Juliana et al., 2025; Cetinkaya, 2025; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Mody & Hanks (2020); Chen & Chen (2010; Tsaur et al. (2007); Thyne et al. (2020); Kieanwatana & Vongvit (2024). Furthermore, the relationship between experience quality and word of mouth is often viewed as linear or mediated by traditional variables, thus failing to capture the complexity of visitors' emotional responses to their experiences. On the other hand, research on museums as tourist destinations provides strong empirical evidence on how museum experiences can trigger emotional engagement and encourage recommendation behavior among visitors.

Various prior studies reveal a significant gap in the literature. Lin et al. (2025) examined the influence of tourism experience on word of mouth using mediating variables such as nostalgia and cultural identity, but did not directly consider emotional engagement. Vesci et al. (2020) positioned satisfaction as the main mediator, thus not fully capturing the affective dimension. Juliana et al. (2025) found that emotions mediate the relationship between experience and electronic word of mouth; however, the study was not conducted in a museum context. Çetinkaya (2025) highlighted the role of emotional engagement in augmented reality-based museum experiences, but the focus was limited to technology rather than overall experience quality.

Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) demonstrated that emotional attachment influences loyalty in heritage tourism, but did not specifically examine word of mouth. Mody & Hanks (2020) investigated consumption emotions in tourism,

yet placed greater emphasis on loyalty rather than communication behavior. Chen & Chen (2010) and Tsaur et al. (2007) linked experience quality to behavioral intentions, but did not include emotional variables as primary mediators. Thyne et al. (2020) explored emotional experiences in tourism, but did not specifically relate them to museum experience quality. Kieanwatana & Vongvit (2024) examined technology-based tourism experiences, yet did not focus on the physical museum context. In addition, most studies have not integrated museum experience quality, emotional engagement, and word of mouth into a single comprehensive model.

This study offers novelty by integrating the relationship between museum experience quality, emotional engagement, and word of mouth intention within a unified conceptual framework. Unlike previous studies that primarily used satisfaction or nostalgia as mediating variables, this research positions emotional engagement as the main mechanism bridging experience and tourists' communication behavior. Furthermore, this study focuses on the Wayang Museum as an urban tourism destination that is evolving toward an immersive experience concept, thereby providing relevant empirical contributions to tourism literature in developing countries. The integration of the experience economy and emotional tourism perspectives also adds value in enriching academic discourse in tourism marketing.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the effect of museum experience quality on emotional engagement, examine the influence of emotional engagement on word of mouth intention, and test the role of emotional engagement as an intervening variable in the relationship between museum experience quality and visitors' intention to recommend the museum to others.

B. Literature Review

Museum Experience Quality

The variable of museum experience quality is rooted in the experience economy theory developed by Pine & Gilmore (1999), which explains that modern economic value has shifted from goods and services toward the creation of memorable and emotional experiences. This theory identifies four main dimensions: education, entertainment, escapism, and esthetics. In the museum context, this framework is used to assess the extent to which museums are able to create immersive, educational, and meaningful experiences for visitors. In addition, the measurement of museum experience quality is supported by the contextual model of learning proposed by Falk & Dierking (1992), which explains that museum experiences are formed through the interaction of personal context, social context, and physical context. Thus, visitor experiences are influenced not only by exhibitions but also by individual and environmental factors.

Several previous studies reinforce this theoretical foundation. Radder & Han (2015) and Anggoroningrum et al. (2026) found that the dimensions of

edutainment, escapism, and esthetics have a significant influence on visitor satisfaction and behavioral intention in museums. Mehmetoglu & Engen (2011) and Rianto et al. (2026) demonstrated that the education dimension is the most dominant factor in shaping visitors' museum experiences. Meanwhile, Badurina et al. (2021) revealed that the quality of visitor experience has a significant effect on satisfaction and revisit intention, confirming that museum experience quality is an important determinant of tourist behavior.

Emotional Engagement

The variable of emotional engagement in the context of tourism and museums is grounded in the stimulus–organism–response (SOR) theory developed by Mehrabian & Russell (1974). This theory explains that a stimulus, in the form of experiences or environmental factors, triggers the organism, which refers to internal responses such as emotions and levels of engagement. These internal states subsequently lead to a response, manifested in behaviors such as loyalty and word of mouth. Within this framework, emotional engagement is positioned in the organism component, representing the emotional state that emerges from visitors' interactions with tourism experiences.

Improving the quality of the tourist experience through educational, cultural, and creative activities has the potential to enhance visitors' emotional engagement, thereby encouraging them to recommend the tourist destination to others and ultimately strengthen the local creative economy (Fatlurrahman & Maghfira, 2026). Several previous studies support the importance of emotional engagement in shaping tourist behavior. Folgado-Fernández et al. (2021) demonstrated that emotional engagement is a key factor influencing tourists' memory and commitment to a destination. Setiawan et al. (2022) found that nostalgic emotions can enhance tourist engagement, leading to more memorable tourism experiences and influencing behavioral outcomes. Meanwhile, Darda et al. (2026), through a neuroscience approach, revealed that interpretive media in museums can increase emotional engagement, particularly in terms of arousal and immersion, thereby strengthening the overall quality of the visitor experience.

Word of Mouth Intention (WOM Intention)

The variable of word of mouth intention (WOM intention) is rooted in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991), which explains that behavioral intention, including WOM, is influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In addition, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model is also applied to explain that tourism experiences as stimuli affect internal conditions such as emotions and engagement (organism), which in turn generate responses in the form of WOM intention. Individuals are more likely to engage in WOM when they perceive

value or benefits from their experiences, motivating them to share those experiences with others.

Several previous studies reinforce this relationship. Kanje et al. (2020) found that customer engagement has a significant effect on electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) behavior in the tourism context. Tiong et al. (2025) demonstrated that tourist experience influences e-WOM, which subsequently affects revisit intention. Meanwhile, Hapsari et al. (2026) confirmed that tourists with higher levels of engagement are more likely to engage in positive WOM and demonstrate loyalty toward a destination, thereby emphasizing that WOM intention is an important consequence of tourists' experiences and engagement.

The E-Wom Intention in Heritage Tourism

Word of Mouth (WoM Intention) dalam penelitian pariwisata warisan budaya, variabel ini didefinisikan sebagai keinginan wisatawan untuk merekomendasikan destinasi warisan budaya kepada orang lain setelah mereka mengalami pengalaman kunjungan, yang dapat diukur melalui indikator seperti rekomendasi lisan, pembagian ulasan positif secara daring, atau dorongan bagi orang lain untuk berkunjung ke situs tersebut. Deb & Lomo-David (2021) menemukan kaitan antara keterikatan emosional, autentisitas, dan niat WoM pengunjung di situs warisan budaya (Sun Temple, India). Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman berkesan berpengaruh positif terhadap e-WOM intention di wisata heritage ; riset tentang Fu (2025) yang menekankan peran emosi dan estetika dalam membentuk WOM di situs heritage. Maulina et al. (2023) yang memasukkan eWOM sebagai salah satu indikator perilaku pascavisit. Yi et al. (2025) yang menginvestigasi dampak persepsi autentisitas dan estetika terhadap WOM di situs heritage di Tiongkok yang menunjukkan hubungan signifikan antara persepsi tersebut dan perilaku WOM wisatawan

Hypothesis Development

Museum experience quality plays an important role in shaping visitors' emotional engagement. Experiences that are educational, esthetic, entertaining, and immersive act as stimuli that trigger internal responses in the form of positive emotions and psychological involvement (Economou et al., 2026). When visitors perceive a high-quality experience, they tend to develop a stronger emotional connection with the museum environment (Li et al., 2025).

H1: Museum experience quality has a significant effect on emotional engagement

Museum experience quality also directly influences visitors' intention to engage in word of mouth. Satisfying and memorable experiences foster positive attitudes that encourage individuals to recommend the experience to others (Chen & Rahman, 2010). The higher the perceived quality of the experience, the greater the likelihood that visitors will share their experiences, both directly and through digital media (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

H2: Museum experience quality has a significant effect on word of mouth intention

Emotional engagement has a significant influence on word of mouth intention. Positive emotions arising from the experience stimulate behavioral responses in the form of a desire to share those experiences (Deb & Lomo-David, 2021). Visitors who feel emotionally engaged tend to develop stronger attachments to their experiences, making them more likely to recommend them to others as an expression of satisfaction and connection (Lin et al., 2025).

H3: Emotional engagement has a significant effect on word of mouth intention

To date, limited empirical studies have directly examined the mediating role of emotional engagement in the relationship between museum experience quality and word of mouth intention. However, this relationship is conceptually supported by the literature, such as The Experience Economy by Pine & Gilmore (1999), which emphasizes that high-quality experiences generate emotional engagement that drives recommendation behavior, and An Approach to Environmental Psychology by Mehrabian & Russell (1974), through the SOR framework, which explains that experiences as stimuli influence emotions as internal responses that subsequently lead to word of mouth intention.

H4: Emotional engagement mediates the effect of museum experience quality on word of mouth intention

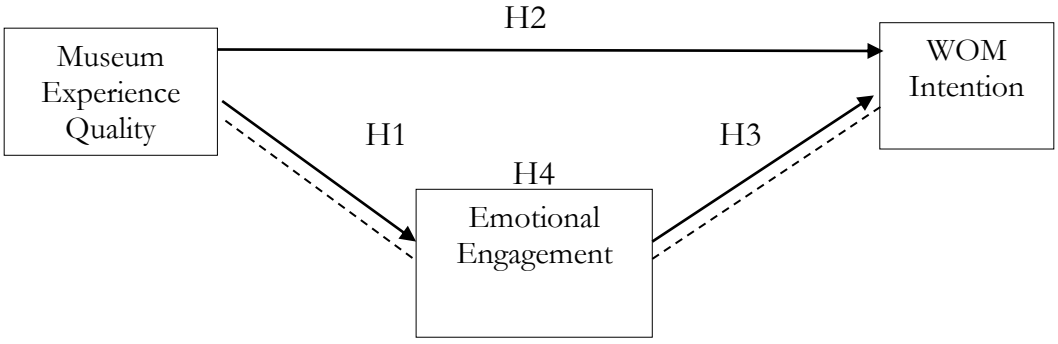


Figure 1. Research Framework

C. Research Methods

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach using path analysis to examine the relationships among museum experience quality, emotional engagement, and word of mouth (WOM) intention. Path analysis is selected because it allows for the assessment of both direct and indirect effects among variables, including the mediating role of emotional engagement in the relationship between museum experience quality and visitors' intention to engage in WOM.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of all visitors to the Wayang Museum in Jakarta who are at least 17 years old and have visited a museum within the last six months. Based on the guideline proposed by Hair et al. (2019), the appropriate sample size for path analysis with multiple indicators is

at least 10 times the number of questionnaire items. With a total of 16 indicators, the sample size for this study is set at 160 respondents.

Participants

Data were collected using a survey-based questionnaire distributed both offline at the museum location and online through social media platforms commonly used by museum visitors. The questionnaire was designed using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to measure respondents' perceptions of each research variable. This study employs purposive sampling, where respondents are selected based on specific criteria: (1) having visited a museum in Jakarta within the past six months, (2) being at least 17 years old, and (3) being willing to complete the questionnaire fully and honestly. This technique ensures that the data collected are relevant to the research objectives and focused on visitors with recent museum experience.

Instruments

The variable of museum experience quality is measured based on the experience economy theory by Pine & Gilmore (1999), which includes four main dimensions: education, entertainment, escapism, and esthetics. The emotional engagement variable is measured using the stimulus–organism–response (SOR) theory by Mehrabian & Russell (1974), encompassing the dimensions of pleasure, arousal, dominance, emotional attachment, enthusiasm, and immersion. Meanwhile, the WOM intention variable is measured based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), which explains that behavioral intention, including WOM, is influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

Table 1. Measurement of Variables

Variable	Dimension	Questionnaire Item
Museum experience quality Source: Pine & Gilmore (1999)	Education	I feel that my experience at the museum enhances my knowledge
	Entertainment	I feel that my experience at the museum is enjoyable and entertaining
	Escapism	I feel that I can "escape" from my daily routine while at the museum
	Esthetics	I appreciate the visual and artistic beauty of the museum
Emotional Engagement Source: Mehrabian & Russell (1974)	Pleasure	I feel happy and satisfied while being at the museum
	Arousal	I feel stimulated and excited while participating in activities at the museum
	Dominance	I feel in control and comfortable during my visit to the museum
	Emotional Attachment	I feel emotionally attached to this museum
	Enthusiasm	I feel enthusiastic and interested while at the

Variable	Dimension	Questionnaire Item
		museum
	Immersion	I feel fully engaged in the museum experience
Word Of Mouth Intention Source: Ajzen (1991)	Attitude	I have a positive attitude toward recommending this museum to others
		I feel that recommending this museum is a good and enjoyable thing to do
	Subjective Norms	I feel that people who are important to me (friends, family) approve of me recommending this museum
		I feel that social pressure from my environment supports me in talking about this museum to others
	Perceived Behavioral Control	I feel that it is easy for me to recommend this museum to others
		I am confident that I have the ability to share positive information about this museum

Data Analysis

Data analysis is conducted using path analysis with SmartPLS 4. The analysis includes validity and reliability testing to ensure indicator consistency through convergent validity and composite reliability, as well as the coefficient of determination (R^2) to evaluate the extent to which independent variables explain the variance of dependent variables. Direct effect testing is performed to examine the influence of museum experience quality on emotional engagement and WOM intention, as well as the effect of emotional engagement on WOM intention. Additionally, indirect effect testing is conducted to assess the mediating role of emotional engagement in the relationship between museum experience quality and WOM intention, using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS.

D. Result and Discussion

Result

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	68	42.5%
	Female	92	57.5%
Age	17–20 years old	88	55.0%
	21–30 years old	46	28.8%
	31–40 years old	18	11.2%
	>40 years old	8	5.0%
Education	Primary/Junior/Senior High School	86	53.8%
	Diploma/Bachelor's Degree	54	33.8%
	Postgraduate	20	12.4%
Visit	1 time	72	45.0%

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Frequency	2–3 times	58	36.3%
	>3 times	30	18.7%

Source: Processed data by the researcher (2026)

Based on Table 2, the majority of respondents are female (57.5%). This higher proportion suggests a tendency for women to be more active in cultural tourism activities and to exhibit greater sensitivity toward emotional experiences. The age group of 17–20 years (55.0%) dominates the sample, which can be attributed to the growing trend of experience-based and educational tourism among Generation Z. This group tends to be more interested in interactive, esthetic, and socially shareable activities, particularly through digital and social media platforms.

In terms of education level, most respondents are primary, junior high, and senior high school students (53.8%), indicating that museum visitors are largely drawn from school-age groups with a strong interest in educational tourism. Meanwhile, respondents with a bachelor's degree account for 33.8%, and those with postgraduate education (master's and doctoral levels) represent 12.4%, reflecting a smaller proportion. This may be due to time constraints; however, some individuals in these groups still visit museums for academic purposes, such as completing undergraduate theses, master's theses, or doctoral dissertations.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents reported visiting a museum once in the past six months (45.0%). This relatively low visitation frequency indicates that museums are still primarily perceived as occasional destinations rather than regular leisure choices. This pattern may be influenced by limited innovation in visitor experiences or a lack of programs designed to encourage repeat visits.

Table 3. Validity Test

Variable	Code	Loading Factor	Average Variance Extracted	Description
Museum Experience Quality	Ed	0.846	0.814	Valid
	En	0.913		Valid
	Esc	0.922		Valid
	Est	0.926		Valid
Emotional Engagement	Ple	0.889	0.812	Valid
	Aro	0.931		Valid
	Dom	0.924		Valid
	EA	0.931		Valid
	Enth	0.924		Valid
	Imme	0.800		Valid
Word of Mouth Intention	Att1	0.787	0.791	Valid
	Att2	0.783		Valid
	SN1	0.820		Valid
	SN2	0.737		Valid

Variable	Code	Loading Factor	Average Variance Extracted	Description
	PBC1	0.786		Valid
	PBC2	0.799		Valid

Source: Processed data by the researcher (2026)

Based on Table 3, all indicators of the variables museum experience quality, emotional engagement, and word of mouth intention have loading factor values above 0.7 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.5, thereby meeting the criteria for convergent validity. This indicates that all indicators are valid and are able to adequately represent the constructs being measured.

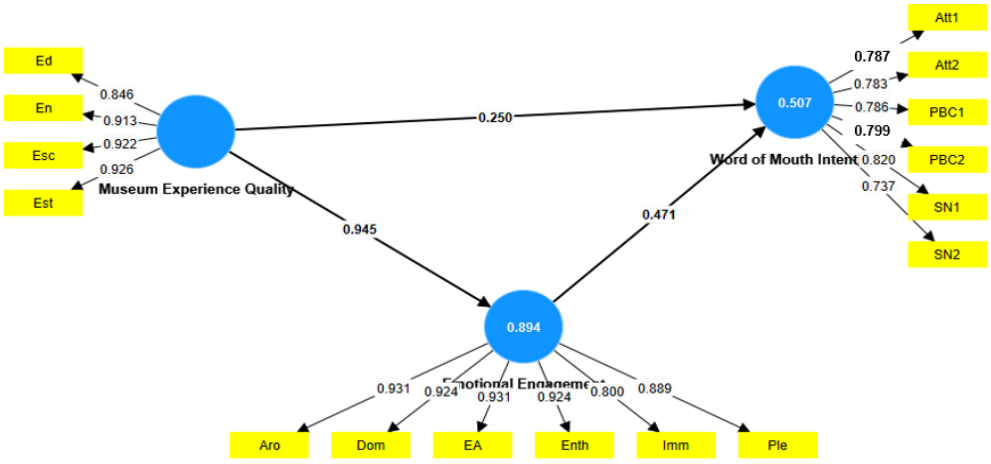


Figure 1. Outer Model
Source: Processed data by the researcher (2026)

Based on Figure 1, all indicators for each variable demonstrate high loading factor values above 0.7, indicating that each indicator has a strong contribution in reflecting the measured constructs. The museum experience quality variable is supported by four main dimensions with very good loading values, while emotional engagement shows consistent and dominant indicator contributions, particularly in dimensions such as emotional attachment and enthusiasm.

For the word of mouth intention variable, all indicators also meet the validity criteria, although with more moderate variation in their loading values. Overall, the measurement model can be considered robust and acceptable, as all indicators satisfy the requirements of convergent validity and are able to accurately represent the latent variables.

Table 4. Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Description
Museum Experience Quality	0.924	0.946	Reliable
Emotional Engagement	0.953	0.963	Reliable
Word of Mouth Intention	0.794	0.834	Reliable

Source: Processed data by the researcher (2026)

Based on Table 4, all variables have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.7, thereby meeting the reliability criteria. This indicates that the variables of museum experience quality, emotional engagement, and word of mouth intention demonstrate good internal consistency and can be considered reliable for this study.

Table 5. R-Square (R^2)

Variable	R^2
Emotional Engagement	0.894
Word of Mouth Intention	0.507

Source: Processed data by the researcher (2026)

Based on Table 5, the R^2 value for the emotional engagement variable is 0.894, indicating that museum experience quality explains 89.4% of the variance in emotional engagement, which falls into a very strong category. Meanwhile, the R^2 value for the word of mouth intention variable is 0.507, showing that the independent variables in this study explain 50.7% of the variance in word of mouth intention, which is considered a moderate category. These results indicate that the research model has good explanatory power.

Table 6. Direct Effect Test

Relationship	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T-Statustic	P Values	Description
Museum Experience Quality → Emotional Engagement	0.945	0.946	0.014	67.804	0.000	Significant
Museum Experience Quality → Word of Mouth Intention	0.250	0.233	0.251	0.996	0.319	No Significant
Emotional Engagement → Word of Mouth Intention	0.471	0.498	0.235	2.003	0.0405	Significant

Source: Processed data by the researcher (2026)

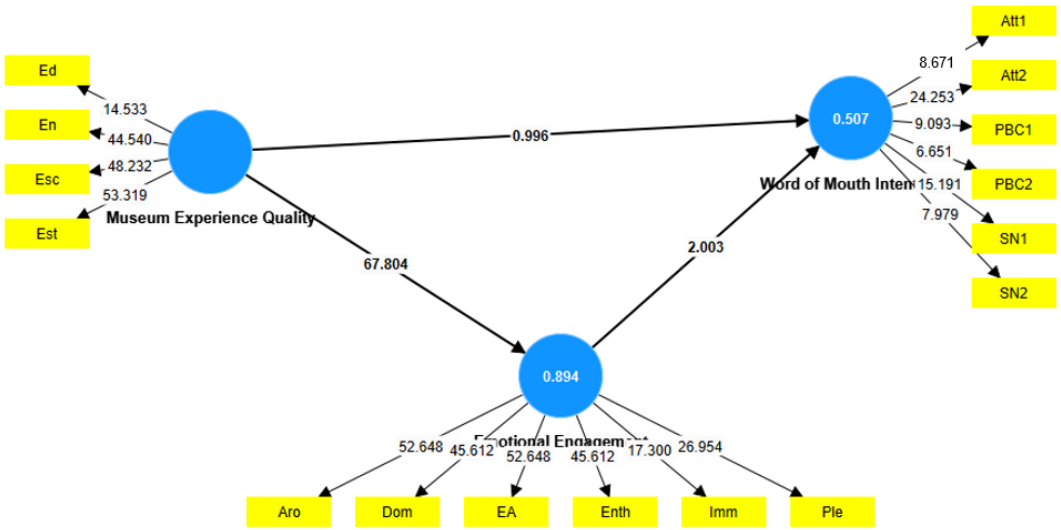


Figure 2. Inner Model
Source: Processed data by the researcher (2026)

Based on Figure 2, the results indicate that museum experience quality has a positive and significant effect on emotional engagement, with a T-statistic value of 67.804. Furthermore, emotional engagement also has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth intention, with a T-statistic value of 2.003. However, the direct relationship between museum experience quality and word of mouth intention is not significant, as indicated by a T-statistic value of 0.996.

Based on Table 6, the direct effect test results show that museum experience quality has a positive and significant effect on emotional engagement (T-statistic = 67.804; p-value = 0.000), and emotional engagement also has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth intention (T-statistic = 2.003; p-value = 0.0405). However, museum experience quality does not have a significant direct effect on word of mouth intention (T-statistic = 0.996; p-value = 0.319). This indicates that the influence of museum experience quality on word of mouth intention is more effectively transmitted through emotional engagement rather than directly.

Table 7. Indirect Effect Test

Relationship	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistic	P Values	Description
Museum Experience Quality → Emotional Engagement → Word of Mouth Intention	0.445	0.471	0.224	1.985	0.047	Significant

Source: Processed data by the researcher (2026)

Based on Table 7, the results of the indirect effect test show that museum experience quality has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth intention through emotional engagement (T-statistic = 1.985; p-value = 0.047). This indicates that emotional engagement serves as a mediating variable in this relationship, meaning that museum experience quality can enhance word of mouth intention indirectly through visitors' emotional engagement.

Discussion

The Effect of Museum Experience Quality on Emotional Engagement

The findings of this study indicate that museum experience quality has a very strong and significant effect on emotional engagement. This suggests that the quality of the experience is a primary determinant in shaping visitors' emotional engagement at the Wayang Museum in Jakarta. It confirms that comprehensively designed experiences encompassing education, entertainment, esthetics, and escapism can generate profound affective responses.

Empirically, these results align with the study by Economou et al. (2026), which found that tourism experiences significantly influence tourists' emotions. Additionally, Li et al. (2025) emphasized that memorable experiences are closely associated with the formation of emotional responses. Therefore, the present study not only confirms previous findings but also strengthens their relevance in the context of culture-based tourism in Indonesia.

The Effect of Museum Experience Quality on Word of Mouth Intention

In contrast, the results indicate that museum experience quality does not have a significant effect on word of mouth intention. This suggests a gap between the perceived experience and visitors' communication behavior. Generally, tourism literature indicates that experience quality directly contributes to behavioral intentions, including word of mouth. For example, Chen & Rahman (2010) found that perceived destination quality significantly affects tourists' recommendation intentions, and Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) reported similar findings regarding the influence of tourism experiences on behavioral intentions.

However, the present study shows that this relationship is not universal. In the context of the Wayang Museum, a high-quality experience does not automatically motivate visitors to engage in word of mouth. This may be explained by the museum's nature as a reflective and educational destination, rather than a mass entertainment site. Experiences are often personal and do not necessarily carry high social signaling value, so they do not automatically prompt sharing with others. These findings are consistent with Prayag & Ryan (2012), who showed that tourism experiences do not always directly affect loyalty, but do so through psychological variables such as emotions. Consequently, the relationship between experience and word of mouth appears to be indirect and requires a mediating mechanism.

The Effect of Emotional Engagement on Word of Mouth Intention

The study also finds that emotional engagement has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth intention, highlighting the critical role of emotional dimensions in shaping post-visit behavior. From a theoretical perspective, this can be explained through the affective response approach, which posits that emotions are primary determinants in shaping attitudes and consumer behavior. When individuals experience strong emotional engagement, they are more likely to develop an urge to express their experiences through interpersonal communication, including recommendations.

These results are consistent with Deb & Lomo-David (2021), who found that emotional experiences significantly influence loyalty and word of mouth. Similarly, Lin et al. (2025) demonstrated that emotions have a direct impact on tourists' behavioral intentions. At the Wayang Museum, visitors' emotional engagement can emerge from aesthetic experiences, historical value, and cultural narratives embedded in the wayang collection. These emotions then serve as the main driver for visitors to recommend the museum to others.

The Mediating Role of Emotional Engagement in the Relationship between Museum Experience Quality and Word of Mouth Intention

A key finding of this study is that emotional engagement serves as a significant mediator in the relationship between museum experience quality and word of mouth intention. The significant indirect effect, coupled with a non-significant direct effect, indicates full mediation, in which emotional engagement functions as the primary mechanism bridging experiences and communication behavior.

Conceptually, this finding confirms that experiences do not directly drive behavior, but rather operate through an internal psychological process in which emotions transform experiences into behavioral intentions. While the relationship among experience, emotion, and behavior has been widely studied, research that specifically positions emotional engagement as a mediator within the context of cultural museums remains limited. Therefore, this study provides an empirical contribution by filling this gap.

Theoretically, these results are supported by Pine & Gilmore's (1999) experience economy framework and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model by Mehrabian & Russell (1974), which explain that experiences as stimuli affect individual emotions, which in turn drive behavioral responses such as word of mouth intention.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that museum experience quality has a very strong effect on emotional engagement, while emotional engagement has a significant effect on word of mouth intention. In contrast, museum experience quality does not directly influence word of mouth intention. These findings confirm that the relationship between experience quality and communication behavior is

indirect, with emotional engagement acting as a full mediator. Therefore, a museum experience will only encourage recommendation intentions if it can generate deep emotional engagement among visitors.

From a practical perspective, these results suggest that museum managers should prioritize creating experiences that stimulate emotional engagement, rather than focusing solely on improving facilities or providing educational information. Strategies such as culture-based storytelling, the use of interactive media, and immersive exhibition design can serve as effective approaches to enhance emotional engagement. By strengthening the emotional dimension of visitor experiences, museums can foster positive word of mouth, both directly and through digital platforms.

The study also makes a theoretical contribution by integrating experience economy theory and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model into a comprehensive conceptual framework. The findings regarding the full mediating role of emotional engagement extend understanding that the relationship between experience and behavioral intention is not direct but operates through affective mechanisms. Moreover, this research enriches tourism literature by providing empirical evidence in the context of cultural museums, which has been relatively limited, particularly in developing countries.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted at a single site, the Wayang Museum, so generalizing the results to other museum contexts should be done cautiously. Second, the use of a quantitative, cross-sectional approach limits the ability to capture the dynamic changes in visitor behavior over time. Third, the study variables are limited to museum experience quality, emotional engagement, and word of mouth intention, and do not include other potentially influential factors such as satisfaction, loyalty, or visitation motivation, which may also affect tourist behavior.

E. Conflict of Interest

The authors confirm that this research was conducted independently and without any personal, professional, or financial interests that could have influenced the research process, the interpretation of the results, or the preparation of this manuscript.

F. Declaration of AI Use

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors utilized ChatGPT (OpenAI) as an AI-assisted tool to support the brainstorming of research ideas and to facilitate the presentation of research data. The tool was used to explore initial ideas and assist in organizing data for clearer and more comprehensible presentation. All research decisions, data verification, statistical analysis, interpretation of results, and academic conclusions were carried out and

reviewed by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the entire manuscript.

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