



الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا  
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA  
يُونُسُ رَسِيْتِيْ اِسْلَامًا اَنْتَارَا اِبْخَسًا مِّلِيْسِيَا

(Company No.: 198301005000)

Garden of Knowledge and Virtue

JoCTH

JOURNAL OF  
CONTEMPORARY  
TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY  
KSTCL IIUM

VOL. 2 NO. 2 SEPTEMBER 2026

eISSN: 3122-6744



JoCTH website



Publish in

March  
&  
September

Submission in

English  
Bahasa Malaysia  
Arabic



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Journal of Contemporary Tourism and Hospitality Research (JoCTH)

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## Published by:



Published biannually in March and September

International Islamic University Malaysia

Jalan Gombak, 53100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Phone (+603) 64215014

eISSN 3122-6744



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## PREFACE

Volume 2, Issue 2 brings together a curated collection of 13 scholarly contributions reflecting diverse academic disciplines, professional expertise, and international perspectives. The issue demonstrates a strong regional and international reach, with contributions from six countries; Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Singapore, and South Korea, representing six universities and three industry and non-academic organizations, namely BH Travel Sdn. Bhd., Crescentrating, and Flywind Holidays.

The participation of industry stakeholders further strengthens the practical relevance of this issue. Of particular note is an industry-led contribution providing a dedicated perspective on PondokStay, examining its challenges and potential within the broader Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality landscape. The inclusion of industry perspectives complements the academic contributions and reinforces the journal's commitment to scholarship that is relevant to contemporary industry realities.

From an editorial perspective, the significance of Volume 2, Issue 2 lies in the coherence that emerges across this apparent diversity of topics. The papers do not need to address the same destination, technology, market segment, or hospitality setting to contribute to the field of contemporary tourism and hospitality. Rather, their relevance is established through their engagement with current transformations, emerging practices, evolving consumer expectations, and contemporary management challenges within the sector.

The issue therefore reflects a broad conception of contemporary tourism and hospitality as one that encompasses digital transformation, social media influence, artificial intelligence, Muslim-friendly and halal tourism, sustainability, smart tourism, cultural experiences, destination management, and human resource considerations. These dimensions are increasingly interconnected in both tourism research and industry practice.

The geographical diversity of the contributions further strengthens this perspective. Perspectives from Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Singapore, and South Korea provide evidence of how contemporary tourism and hospitality issues are experienced across different cultural, institutional, and market contexts. The involvement of both academic institutions and industry organizations also contributes to a productive dialogue between theory, empirical research, and professional practice.

Taken as a whole, Volume 2, Issue 2 demonstrates the breadth and dynamism of contemporary tourism and hospitality scholarship. The issue brings together studies that, although diverse in their specific research questions and contexts, collectively respond to significant developments shaping the sector today. In doing so, the issue is aligned with the intellectual and practical orientation of Journal of Contemporary Tourism and Hospitality Research as a platform for advancing knowledge on contemporary tourism and hospitality.

We are particularly encouraged by the diversity of perspectives represented in this issue and by the meaningful engagement between academia and industry. It is our hope that these contributions will stimulate further scholarly discussion, encourage cross-sector collaboration, and provide useful insights for researchers, educators, practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders seeking to understand and respond to the rapidly evolving tourism and hospitality landscape. Hence, on behalf of the editorial team, I extend our sincere appreciation to all authors, reviewers, academic institutions, and industry partners whose contributions and support have made this issue possible.

Associate Professor Dr. Hajjah Mazni Haji Saad  
Chief-in-Editor  
Journal of Contemporary Tourism and Hospitality Research

September 2026.



## INDUSTRIAL OUTLOOK

# What is Holding Back the Establishment of PondokStay?

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### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 23/7/2026

Accepted : 27/7/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

### KEYWORDS

Islamic Tourism Center (ITC); Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality (MFTH); Muslim-Friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR); Muslim-Friendly Tourist Guide (MFTG); *Pondok*; *PondokStay*

**Abstract** - Malaysia's Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality (MFTH) ecosystem thrives through structured initiatives such as the Muslim-Friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR) and the Muslim-Friendly Tourist Guide (MFTG). However, PondokStay, a spiritually focused retreat centered on traditional Islamic institutions and classical texts, has struggled to gain commercial traction. This viewpoint article consolidates insights from focal institutional and academic stakeholders to examine production constraints, institutional limits, and readiness challenges in establishing PondokStay. It proposes a multi-layered strategic roadmap to bridge spiritual preservation with commercial viability. By reconciling the sacred values of pondok with contemporary tourism frameworks, this article translates theoretical concepts into a practical, scalable operational model for Islamic heritage tourism, expected to enrich the existing niche sector.

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### ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Viewpoint

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Tourism Center (ITC), an agency under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC), plays a central role in strengthening the Islamic tourism segment and positioning Malaysia as a Muslim-friendly destination, both domestically and internationally. ITC supports tourism enterprises and operators by facilitating strategic guidance, operational frameworks, and capacity-building programs to enhance industry readiness within the Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality (MFTH) ecosystem. Significant outcomes include the rollout of Muslim-friendly standards, certification, and recognition programs such as the Muslim-Friendly

Accommodation Recognition (MFAR) and the Muslim-Friendly Tourist Guide (MFTG).

The MFAR program is designed to help Muslim travelers identify accommodation options that meet Muslim-friendly requirements across Malaysia (Islamic Tourism Center, 2022). The MFAR framework establishes clear standards for focal operational segments, including lodging operators, healthcare facilities, and tourism products (Islamic Tourism Center, 2022). In the meantime, the MFTG program is designed to equip tourist guides with practical competencies and service awareness needed to cater to faith-based travel requirements, thereby enhancing service quality and building visitor confidence (Islamic Tourism Center, 2022). Both programs aim to regulate Muslim-friendly tourism practices and enhance the industry's preparedness to accommodate Muslim tourists, which resulted in building tourists' confidence and helping tourism operators support consistent operational standards (Islamic Tourism Center, 2022).

To illustrate the transition from a pondok to PondokStay, Yayasan Al-Jenderami in Selangor offers a pertinent model (Islamic Tourism Center, 2024, p. 13). Established in 2003, the foundation Yayasan Al-Jenderami manages the pondok, with an initial focus on safeguarding its pedagogical traditions and heritage of religious learning. In due course, its role has transitioned beyond this original function. To maintain traditional teaching practices, the pondok has introduced more comfortable, guest-centric facilities, enabling guests and learners to experience a setting that supports spiritual reflection and reconnection with faith (Islamic Tourism Center, 2024, p. 13).

This transition reflects a broader reorientation of the pondok's role, in which experiential elements are incorporated to support guests' educational and spiritual functions.

According to the chairman of Yayasan Al-Jenderami, the foundation remains committed to safeguarding the wisdom and traditions of the pondok, especially its values of continuous learning and spiritual heritage (Islamic Tourism Center, 2024, p. 13). This commitment is expressed through adaptive practices that broaden its relevance to contemporary needs of Muslim spiritual tourists (Islamic Tourism Center, 2024, p. 13).

Furthermore, Yusof and Simpong (2021) note that the tranquil rural ambiance of the pondok, combined with the grounding presence of the Tok Guru, fosters a unique cultural and educational experience, positioning these institutions as vital hubs for Islamic learning and social connectedness. Prolonged challenges such as limited facilities, a shortage of qualified religious teachers, and a need for more effective management hinder their full potential, indicating a strategic gap that must be addressed to enact it (Yusof & Simpong, 2021). Both arguments of reasoning indicate that the internal religious resources of the pondok are pertinent to its transition; however, the challenges must be addressed prior to establishment.

## 2. BACKGROUND OF PONDOK

The term pondok derives from the Arabic “al-funduq” (الفندق), referring to a place to study and reside (Azizan et al., 2021; Musa et al., 2023). Pondok represents one of the earliest forms of Islamic education in the Malay world, predating colonial rule and playing an instrumental role in shaping Malay religious identity, particularly in states such as Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, and Perak (Nasir et al., 2019; Azizan et al., 2021; Musa et al., 2023). Rooted in the scholarly traditions of the Malay Archipelago and the Middle East, pondok functioned not only as centers of religious learning but also as social and spiritual anchors across local communities (Nasir et al.,

2019; Azizan et al., 2021).

*Pondok* employs the *Talaqqi* method, which entails the direct transmission of religious insights through reading, explanation, and dialogue between the *Tok Guru* and students (Azizan et al., 2021; Musa et al., 2023). This approach focuses on experiential learning, repetition, memorization, and deep engagement with classical Islamic texts (Azizan et al., 2021). Students' progress is at their own pace and driven by intrinsic motivation rather than predetermined curricula or examination schedules, and the assessments are informal (Azizan et al., 2021). Furthermore, Azizan et al. (2021) stated that personal and dispositional aspects of learning, such as proper conduct (*adab*), discipline, and students' spiritual attachment to their teacher, are posited to facilitate the attainment of blessing (*barakah*). Aligned with this holistic view of *pondok* education, Nasir et al. (2019) had previously proposed that the *pondok's* role should extend beyond formal instruction to encompass broader communal functions.

### 3. CORE INSIGHTS AND ARGUMENT DEVELOPMENT

To facilitate a more robust understanding of these dynamics, insights from Haji Juhaidi bin Ahmad of Malaysia Pondok Development Foundation (Yayasan Pembangunan Pondok Malaysia), Puan Nur Alyssa Caroline Hussin of the Islamic Tourism Center, and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Azizan Che Embi of the International Islamic University Malaysia has consolidated into four thematic pillars. The following analysis is systematically segmented into the shared governance framework, spiritually integrated programs, infrastructural readiness, and financing mechanisms as depicted in Figure 1.

#### 3.1 Duality in Action: A Shared Governance Framework Adapted from Giddens' Structuration

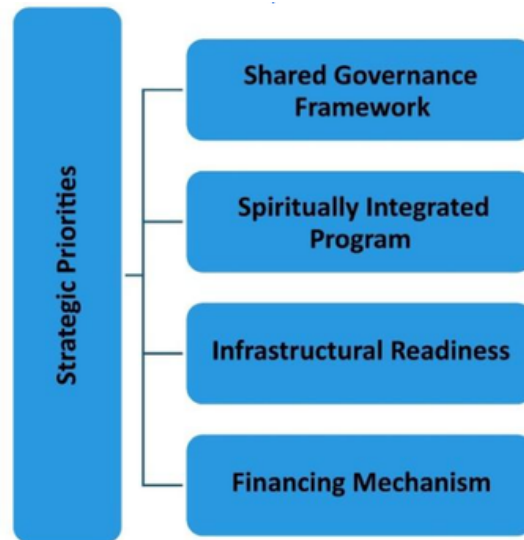


Figure 1. Strategic Priorities

#### Theory

Grounded in Giddens' structuration theory, as articulated by Gunawan et al. (2026), the framework models the continuous, dynamic interplay between structural conditions and institutional agency. Adapted to the PondokStay context, the proposed shared governance framework illustrates how "policy support agencies" and "the structure" co-participate in decision-making, resource management, and standard formulation, as depicted in Figure 2.

The policy support agencies, including Yayasan Pembangunan Pondok Malaysia, PINTA Kebangsaan, International Islamic University Malaysia, Jabatan Standard Malaysia, and ASEAN Member States, operate accordingly. These entities inject industrial insight, institutional data, and custodial protection of traditional values into the system. These inputs drive the "Structuration Processes" mediated by the Islamic Tourism Center (ITC), which functions as a dynamic facilitator rather than a rigid, top-down commander by setting

specific goals, tailoring standards, and disseminating information.

PINTA Kebangsaan and YPPM function as focal institutional voices, representing administrative interests and traditional values within madrasah and pondok in Malaysia. PINTA Kebangsaan plays a crucial role in national advocacy and administrative representation for pondok and madrasah (Gabungan Persatuan Institusi Tahfiz Al Quran Kebangsaan (PINTA), 2026). Meanwhile, YPPM is dedicated to protecting the pondok (Yayasan Pembangunan Pondok Malaysia, 2026). Their involvement could significantly help streamline the data repository, as the existing data is currently dispersed, according to Dato' Dr. Mashitah Ibrahim, executive chairman of YPPM (Yayasan Pembangunan Pondok Malaysia, 2026). By concentrating data collection efforts on these focal entities, we could establish a clearer baseline and avoid the unnecessary complexity of gathering information from auxiliary sources. At this stage, focusing on data quality is more critical than increasing the number of institutions represented.

In translating standard protocols into practice, which offers clear, immediate benefits that could heighten institutional readiness, strategic clarity, and tangible socioeconomic gains for host communities, the real test lies beyond policy or standard design. These initial wins naturally feed into broader empowerment outcomes, driving policy adjustments, inter-agency collaboration, and sustained local involvement. In theory, this continuous feedback loop enables policy support agencies to refine overarching tourism strategies while safeguarding the structural legitimacy and grassroots integrity of PondokStay.

However, drafting standards is the easy part; enforceability is where the framework threatens to stall. For instance, the governance of short-term

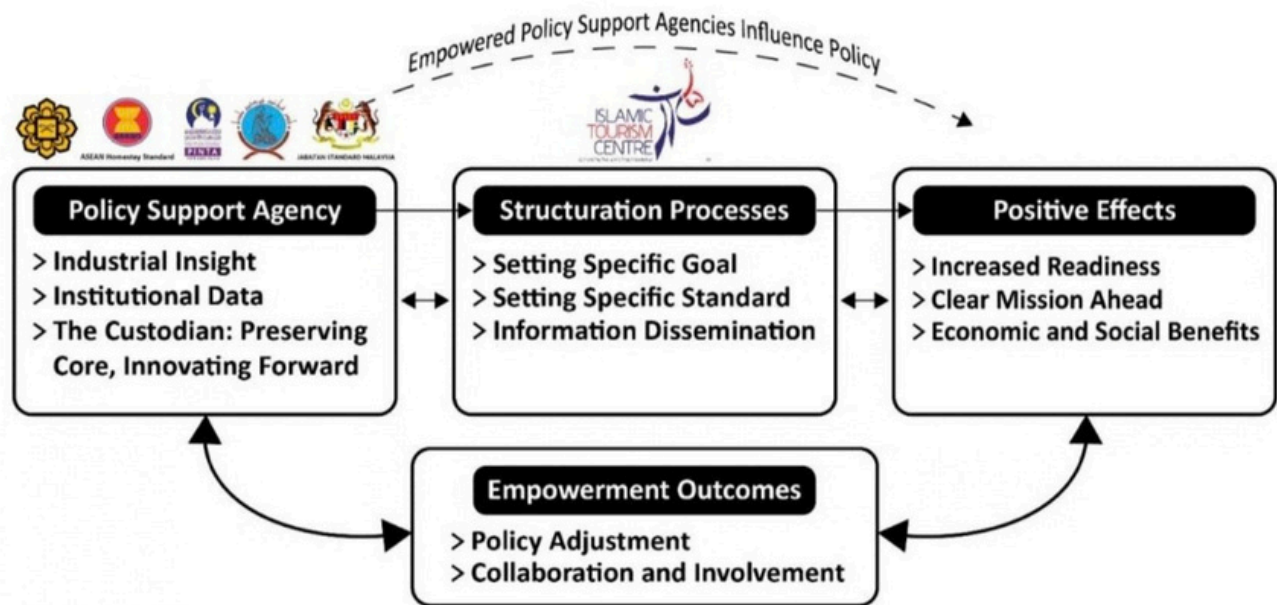
rental accommodation (STRA) remains notoriously fraught, particularly regarding licensing (Ariff, 2025). From my perspective, a similar situation could emerge for the *PondokStay*. Consider a situation where the Islamic Tourism Center (ITC) can aggregate input from policy support agencies and establish baseline standards, but collecting responses differs from enforcing compliance. The absence of a statutory licensing authority, even with the most well-designed framework, threatens to undermine it as an advisory document rather than an operational reality.

### *3.2 Spiritually Integrated Programs: The Rules of Partnership*

Although government and institutional actors continuously promote the value creation of pondok, a critical gap remains in understanding the readiness of institutional founders. It remains unclear whether they (the founders of those pondok's) genuinely accept the transformation of their sacred spaces into commercial tourism products. This shift can introduce severe friction regarding institutional intent, personal privacy, and value preservation. If founders reject these proposals, a fundamental disconnect will emerge between national strategies to enrich Muslim-friendly tourism and the reality on the ground, fueling clashes of intent, disrupting the traditional educational system, eroding trust, and fostering alienation among operators who feel forced into an uncomfortable compromise.

Against this backdrop, *PondokStay* offers a compelling alternative. It maintains the core religious mission of the traditional pondok while shifting the target demographic. Dissimilar to the traditional approach, which demands a rigorous, full-time commitment that many modern professionals cannot accommodate, PondokStay offers a flexible, short-term opportunity. In doing so, it functions as an accessible gateway for a





**Figure 2.** Conceptual Framework Illustrating the Interactions between Policy Support Agencies, the Structuration Process, Positive Effects, and Empowerment Outcomes of PondokStay (Adapted from: Gunawan et al., 2026)

broader audience to deepen their religious insights without disrupting their existing external obligations. As an analogy for *PondokStay* operators, the strategies of *umrah* operators could serve as a starting point.

Umrah operators are demonstrating that modern spiritual journeys can seamlessly transcend ordinary boundaries. If thoughtfully designed, these outdoor programs do not detract from the core spiritual experience; rather, they facilitate the experiential extension of faith. Mirroring this umrah blueprint, the PondokStay context cannot focus explicitly on indoor academic programs. Instead, PondokStay operators must host outdoor and community-based activities and leverage nearby attractions, which is a mandatory requirement for official homestay program registration (MOTAC, 2021). Just as the Taif excursions rely on the pedagogical proficiency of the Mutawwif to maintain spiritual sanctity, PondokStay operators must ensure that their cross-sector partners and local guides are trained to

interpret local assets through a reflective, faith-based lens.

Delivering these diversified offerings requires creativity, and this transition cannot be executed blindly. Structured capacity building and tailored training are essential to equip *PondokStay* operators to navigate predictable operational demands, such as regulatory compliance, and to buffer against unforeseen liabilities that could harm an early-stage venture. The joint force of academia and industry practitioners must be responsible for designing targeted training modules that translate abstract concepts into actionable frameworks. By shifting the paradigm from problem-solving to guided execution, these programs facilitate operators with concrete, uniform steps tailored to their immediate operational challenges.

Despite the promise of building bridges beyond initial institutional boundaries, successful execution depends on strict foundational rules for cross-sector partnerships, especially regarding non-



Muslim guests. *PondokStay* operators must ensure potential partners do not conflict with their core values or daily rhythms, such as aligning operational hours with prayer schedules and dress codes. Clear boundaries must be drawn to prevent role encroachment, ensuring that the services of the *pondok* and the external partner remain distinct yet complementary. Finally, they must rigorously vet the reputations of potential partners. In this context, vetting is not an opportunistic exercise to leverage an external partner's brand, but rather a defensive strategy to safeguard the sanctity of the *pondok*. To achieve this, *PondokStay* operators must identify and align with reliable partners across the operational spectrum: upstream (*regulators*) and downstream (*tourism service extenders*).

### 3.3 Infrastructure Readiness: Meeting the adaptive ASEAN Homestay Standard and Muslim-friendly Hospitality Services (MS 2610:2015).

Currently, growth is constrained by physical infrastructure designed for communal education rather than commercial hospitality. Overcoming this limitation requires proactive institutional leadership and targeted strategic funding. To establish a viable baseline, facilities must comply with core structural and operational standards across primary spaces, specifically residential units, sleeping quarters, and sanitation facilities. Ensuring these physical environments remain safe, hygienic, and structurally sound provides an adaptable foundation for *PondokStay*.

Expecting operators to maintain bedroom tidiness, for instance, does not require significant expense; it is the basic standard for a *PondokStay*. Differing from modern commercial hotels, this simple tidiness is the foundation of the experience. At this point, referring to both standards is practical because, without formal regulatory frameworks and compliance standards, the ecosystem could discourage motivated operators, thereby stalling

production. It can be argued that the battlefield is psychological alignment rather than physical assets alone, and it needs to be understood in advance.

A comparative analysis reveals that the primary divergence between the two standards centers on physical premises, capacity limits, and dedicated religious amenities. Beyond structural requirements, operational execution during periods such as offering *Sahur* (*pre-dawn meal*) and *Iftar* (*breaking the fast*) during Ramadhan, enforcing strict prohibitions on *Haram* (prohibited) activities, and restricting entertainment to Shariah-permissible activities remains critical. Rather than adopting a single standard, the most viable path forward lies at the intersection of both standards. Establishing this baseline consensus must be the prerequisite before drafting actionable guidelines.

Future research needs to empirically examine it through the lens of entrepreneurial motivations and the entrepreneurial ecosystem, which is centered around intrinsic, extrinsic, and the interconnected network of actors, institutions, and processes, such as founders, investors, universities, and government policies that foster, support, and sustain new business ventures within a specific geographic region or industry. Since it is an emerging concept, future studies should evaluate entrepreneurial performance using non-financial metrics rather than revenue performance; instead, the research should focus on multi-faceted outcomes.

### 3.4 Financing Mechanism

Successful deployment of alternative accommodation frameworks, such as the *PondokStay* model, requires addressing critical institutional and financial constraints. Currently, funding remains stalled due to a paucity of collateral, a lack of uniform operational frameworks, and a non-traditional tourism structure

that blends accommodations, transportation, and local attractions. Because commercial financial institutions classify these irregular, operator-dependent projects as high-risk ventures, standard commercial lending routes often prove to be a dead end.

In response to this gap, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) intervened in 2021 by approving the extension of the Tourism Fund loan incentive under enhanced procedures. Effective April 1, 2021, the Tourism Fund Convergence Committee (Jawatankuasa Pinjaman Tabung Pelancongan) mandates a dual-stage screening process: applications must first pass a commercial financial institution's initial risk assessment before advancing to the ministry for formal endorsement. While this ensures strict due diligence in public loan disbursement, it also highlights the ongoing reliance on conventional banking metrics, leaving many micro-operators stranded.

Besides, complementary funding models must be explored outside mainstream commercial banking, notably donation-based crowdfunding. As discussed by Dinh et al. (2024), this mechanism relies on non-reciprocal donor contributions driven by a blend of egoistic desires, such as social recognition, and altruistic motivations. For niche tourism ventures such as PondokStay, leveraging the "Warm-Glow Effect," the intrinsic psychological satisfaction donors experience when giving is vital (Dinh et al., 2024). However, capturing these funds depends on the campaign's "Framing Effect"; operators cannot rely on standard commercial pitches (Dinh et al., 2024). Instead, marketing narratives must be framed around community preservation and cultural altruism to align directly with the core values of prospective donors (Dinh et al., 2024). Because micro-operators often lack the baseline institutional backing to validate these public narratives,

alternative structures rooted in community trust must be examined.

Beyond public incentives and crowdfunding, field insights from academic informants underscore Islamic social finance or *waqf* as a resonant mechanism for the production of *PondokStay*. *Waqf* involves the perpetual dedication of assets, including immovable properties such as agricultural land and movable assets such as cash *waqf*, to generate continuous income for socio-economic development (Azganin et al., 2021). Despite its structural promise, integrating *waqf* into a scalable national tourism strategy remains complex. The primary operational hurdle at present is macro-governmental: the regulatory and legislative frameworks governing *waqf* are non-uniform across Malaysia's states. This fragmentation creates a restrictive compliance landscape for prospective tourism entrepreneurs, as state regulators lack a shared baseline for codifying *PondokStay*, thereby preventing the allocation of cash *waqf* funds to them.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, charting a sustainable pathway for PondokStay requires moving past isolated fixes and embracing a holistic, multi-layered approach. By anchoring the mechanism of a shared governance framework that balances structure and policy-support agencies, ITC and the policy-support agencies could draft and prepare specific standards for PondokStay. Secondly, to ensure that the programs offered do not focus on specific age groups, the existing or potential PondokStay operators should include religiously infused programs that require cross-sectoral partnerships. However, please ensure that the rules are adhered to curb friction.

Social and religious values are the soul of PondokStay, but lifeblood is the infrastructure.

Adapting local infrastructure to meet the adapted ASEAN Homestay Standards and the Muslim-friendly hospitality services (MS 2610:2015), ensuring that guests enjoy a reliable, enriching experience without stripping communities of their local charm, could serve as a starting point. As time goes by, these standards can be dynamically tailored to reflect practical, on-site realities.

From a strategic perspective, operators could opt for donation-based financing (*either crowdfunding or waqf*), which is preferred over commercial debt financing because the latter introduces financial uncertainties that could trap operators in debt. Lastly, the concept must be applicable in the first place to reduce confusion, as one might consider our approach more closely related to *PondokStay* than to other approaches. In conclusion, the establishment is expected to revitalize *pondok*, and its ongoing responsibilities are examined before the discussion of tourism receipts. The context must be confronted in chronological order.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express sincere gratitude to Tuan Haji Juhaidi bin Ahmad, Puan Nur Alyssa Caroline Hussin, and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Azizan Binti Che Embi from the International Islamic University Malaysia for their valuable insights and perspectives, which significantly enriched this viewpoint article. Appreciation is also extended to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mazni Saad, Chief Editor of the Journal of Contemporary Tourism and Hospitality, for the opportunity to contribute this work. Special thanks are due to Dr. Samshul Amry Abdul Latiff, Dr. Anis Najihah Ahmad, and Dato' Dr. Mohd Razip bin Hasan for their continuous encouragement and constructive reviews throughout the writing process. Finally, the author expresses heartfelt appreciation to Puan Nik Nor Laili Nik A Rasid, Principal of Maktab Adabi Maharani, for her

unwavering support in this scholarly endeavor, a vital encouragement given this article's aim to enrich the modern management of *pondok* and *madrasah* institutions beyond their existing core functions, reflecting the institution to mainstream the ex-*madrasah* students in the southern region of Malaysia.

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# TikTok Influences on Female Solo Travellers

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 19/5/2026

Accepted : 17/6/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Behavioural Intention;  
Female Solo Travellers;  
Social Media Influence;  
TikTok Tourism; Travel  
Motivation; User  
Generated Content

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Research paper

**Abstract** - This study investigates how TikTok influences female solo travellers by examining the platform's content characteristics, engagement features, and motivational messages that shape women travellers' perceptions and behavioural intentions. A qualitative content analysis was conducted using 70 TikTok short videos related to female solo travel. Data were collected from captions, hashtags, comments, likes, shares, and favourites, and analysed thematically through the Stimulus Organism Response Theory to explain how digital stimuli trigger psychological reactions and behavioural responses. The results indicate that TikTok significantly encourages female solo travel through empowering narratives, destination inspiration, and interactive community engagement. "Empowerment and motivation" was the most dominant theme, appearing in 48 posts and generating the highest average engagement of 4,196,794 likes, followed by self-identity and growth (25 posts) and destination highlights (13 posts). Caption tone analysis found empowering captions as the most frequent (22.42%), followed by excited (13.94%) and inspirational (11.52%). Hashtag analysis showed #solotravel as the leading tag (45%), while comment themes were dominated by empowerment (17.25%), desire to start (14.98%), and inspiration (11.75%), reflecting behavioural readiness among viewers. Tourism marketers and destination managers can leverage authentic female travel stories, empowering captions, and strategic hashtags to attract women travellers. This study contributes to emerging tourism literature by analysing real TikTok content rather than self-reported surveys, offering fresh insight into how short-form social media shapes contemporary female travel behaviour.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

TikTok has transformed contemporary tourism communication by reshaping how travellers search for information, evaluate destinations, and form travel intentions. Unlike earlier platforms that relied heavily on static images or long form narratives, TikTok combines short video storytelling, algorithmic visibility, music, captions, and interactive feedback that rapidly influence audience perceptions. Recent studies indicate that social media content increasingly functions as a major source of destination inspiration, particularly among younger travellers who prefer visually immersive and peer generated content (Dramićanin et al., 2023; Wu, 2024). Within this environment, travel decisions are no longer driven solely by official marketing campaigns, but by user generated experiences that appear authentic, relatable, and emotionally engaging.

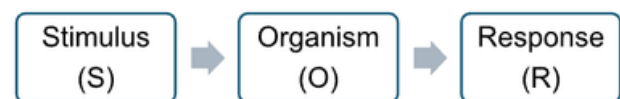
Female solo travel has simultaneously emerged as a growing global tourism segment associated with independence, self discovery, flexibility, and empowerment. Prior studies show that women travellers increasingly pursue solo journeys for confidence building, personal growth, and meaningful experiences, while also navigating barriers such as safety concerns, social judgement, and travel constraints (Chen et al., 2023; Shukor & Kattiyapornpong, 2024). Although the broader solo travel literature has expanded, limited scholarly attention has examined how TikTok specifically shapes female solo travel aspirations and behavioural responses. Existing research often focuses on Instagram, travel blogs, or general influencer marketing, leaving TikTok's distinctive short video ecosystem underexplored. This gap is significant because TikTok's emotionally persuasive format may influence not only destination awareness, but also courage, readiness, and perceived feasibility of travelling alone.

Therefore, this study investigates how TikTok content influences female solo travellers through captions, hashtags, comments, and engagement cues, contributing fresh insight into digital tourism behaviour and gendered mobility in the platform economy.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Foundation

This study is guided by the -Organism-Response Theory, which explains how external environmental cues influence internal psychological states, which subsequently shape behavioural responses. In tourism and digital marketing research, the model has been widely used to explain how media content stimulates emotions, cognition, and decision making. Sohaib et al. (2022) applied the framework to social media marketing and found that online stimuli such as content quality, interactivity, and entertainment significantly affect users' emotional reactions and behavioural intentions. Within the present context, TikTok videos, captions, hashtags, comments, and engagement metrics act as stimuli. Female viewers then interpret these cues cognitively and emotionally through inspiration, confidence, trust, curiosity, or reassurance, which may lead to responses such as liking content, sharing videos, saving destinations, or deciding to travel alone. The framework is particularly suitable because solo female travel decisions are not based solely on rational information search, but also on emotional readiness, self-efficacy, and perceived safety.



**Figure 1.** Theory of Stimulus Organism Response (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974)

## 2.2 Female Solo Travel Motivation and Constraints

Rather than being merely an emerging tourism segment, female solo travel represents a form of self development, independence, and identity construction. Previous studies consistently demonstrate that women increasingly choose solo travel to experience autonomy, personal growth, flexibility, and freedom from social obligations (Yang et al., 2019; Terziyska, 2021; Ejupi & Medarić, 2022). Similarly, Hamid et al. (2021) and Nguyen and Hsu (2023) argue that solo travel facilitates self reflection, confidence building, and psychological transformation, suggesting that the benefits extend beyond recreational travel into broader personal development.

Despite these positive outcomes, researchers also acknowledge that female solo travel remains constrained by safety concerns, social expectations, and perceived travel risks. Karagöz et al. (2020) reported that anxiety and perceived insecurity significantly reduce travel intention, while Ngwira et al. (2020) and Nematpour et al. (2024) found that Muslim female travellers additionally negotiate family expectations and cultural norms before travelling independently. Rather than preventing travel entirely, these constraints encourage women to seek reassurance through information searching, digital communities, and shared travel experiences. Consequently, contemporary female solo travel reflects a continuous negotiation between empowerment and perceived risk, highlighting the importance of online platforms that simultaneously inspire confidence and reduce uncertainty.

## 2.3 TikTok as a Digital Tourism Ecosystem

Recent tourism research increasingly recognises TikTok as more than a social networking application. It functions as a digital tourism ecosystem where destination information, personal storytelling, influencer communication, and peer

interaction coexist to shape travel behaviour. Dramićanin et al. (2023) and Belza et al. (2024) demonstrate that TikTok significantly influences destination awareness through emotionally engaging short videos, while Booking.com (2024) reports that travellers increasingly rely on TikTok for destination inspiration and travel recommendations.

Unlike conventional destination marketing, TikTok integrates multiple persuasive elements within a single platform. Influencers contribute credibility and social proof by documenting authentic travel experiences (Pop et al., 2021; Rajput & Gandhi, 2024), whereas user generated content increases perceived authenticity and trust (Gozali & Tunjungsari, 2024). Simultaneously, captions, hashtags, comments, likes, shares, and favourites reinforce social interaction and community participation, strengthening users' confidence in travel decisions. Cao et al. (2021) further explain that narrative immersion within short videos stimulates emotional transportation, making audiences more receptive to travel messages than traditional promotional materials.

These findings collectively suggest that TikTok influences travel behaviour through the interaction of visual storytelling, creator credibility, and community engagement rather than through isolated communication features.

## 2.4 TikTok and Female Solo Travel Behaviour

While studies have established the importance of TikTok in destination marketing and documented the growing popularity of female solo travel, relatively few studies integrate these two research streams. Existing research primarily examines influencer marketing (Pop et al., 2021), destination image (Dramićanin et al., 2023), or solo female travel motivations (Shukor & Kattiyapornpong, 2024) independently.

Furthermore, previous investigations largely rely on questionnaire surveys that examine travellers' perceptions after exposure to social media. Comparatively little attention has been given to analysing the actual content characteristics of TikTok posts, including captions, hashtags, comments, and engagement indicators, despite these features representing the primary communication mechanisms through which users experience the platform. Analysing naturally occurring TikTok content therefore offers an opportunity to understand how platform specific stimuli generate psychological responses associated with empowerment, confidence, and behavioural intention among female solo travellers. This perspective aligns with the Stimulus Organism Response framework adopted in the present study.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

This study employed a qualitative content analysis to examine how TikTok content influences female solo travellers. Content analysis was selected because it enables the systematic examination of naturally occurring digital communication, including videos, captions, hashtags, comments, and engagement metrics, thereby providing insight into how tourism-related meanings are constructed and communicated (Vespestad & Clancy, 2021).

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to identify information-rich cases that aligned with the study objective (Dawadi, 2020). Seventy publicly accessible TikTok videos relating to female solo travel were selected using keywords and hashtags such as #solotravel, #femalesolotravel, and #solofemaletraveler. Videos were included if they focused on female solo travel, were publicly accessible, demonstrated visible audience engagement, and contained supporting textual elements such as captions or comments.

Data extracted from each post included the video's core message, captions, hashtags, likes, comments, shares, favourites, and audience interactions.

The data were collected from TikTok over a four-week period. Videos were retrieved using the TikTok search function with predefined keywords and hashtags, including #solotravel, #solofemaletravel, #solofemaletraveler, #solotravelwoman, and related search terms. To minimise algorithmic bias, searches were performed using multiple keywords and repeated on different days before compiling the final dataset.

Purposive sampling was employed to identify information-rich cases that directly addressed the research objective (Dawadi, 2020). Videos were included when they:

- focused primarily on female solo travel;
- were publicly accessible;
- were presented in English or contained English captions;
- contained captions or audience comments suitable for qualitative analysis; and
- displayed visible engagement indicators, including likes, comments, shares, or favourites.

Videos were excluded if they:

- promoted commercial advertisements without personal travel experiences;
- consisted solely of duplicated or reposted content;
- focused on group travel or family travel rather than solo female travel;
- contained insufficient textual information for analysis; or
- were inaccessible during the data collection period.

After the screening process, 70 videos met all inclusion criteria and formed the final dataset. The sample size was considered appropriate because thematic saturation was achieved, whereby

additional videos produced limited new thematic insights while recurring patterns became increasingly consistent. Similar sample sizes have been adopted in previous qualitative content analyses of social media tourism content.

For each selected video, the researchers extracted information relating to the video's core message, caption, hashtags, audience comments, likes, comments, shares, favourites, and visual characteristics. These data formed the basis for subsequent thematic coding and descriptive analysis.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Dawadi (2020), involving data familiarisation, initial coding, theme generation, theme refinement, and interpretation. Manual coding was conducted using Microsoft Excel to categorise recurring themes related to empowerment, self identity, destination highlights, safety, motivation, and community support. Descriptive summaries of content frequency and engagement metrics were subsequently produced to complement the thematic findings.

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Dawadi (2020). Analysis consisted of five stages:

1. repeated familiarisation with all selected Tiktok videos;
2. open coding of captions, hashtags, comments, and visual and visual content;
3. grouping related codes into broader thematic categories;
4. reviewing and refining themes through repeated comparison across videos; and
5. interpreting the final themes in relation to the study objectives.

Manual coding was conducted using Microsoft Excel. Initially, each TikTok post was treated as one unit of analysis. Separate coding columns were created for core message, caption tone, caption theme, hashtag, comment theme, engagement metrics, and visual characteristics. During the first coding cycle, descriptive codes were assigned to recurring concepts identified within the content. Similar codes were subsequently merged into higher-order themes through constant comparison across all 70 videos.

The coding framework evolved iteratively throughout the analysis. For example, initial codes such as confidence, encouragement, self-belief, and independence were consolidated under the broader theme of Empowerment and Motivation, whereas codes relating to reflection, confidence building, and self-discovery were grouped under Self-Identity and and Growth. This iterative process continued until no substantial new categories emerged.

**Table 1.** Coding framework based on the S-O-R framework

| S-O-R Construct | Operationalisation in This Study                                           | Example                                                  |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Stimulus        | TikTok videos, captions, hashtags, creator narratives, destination visuals | Empowerment videos, destination highlights               |
| Organism        | Psychological reactions inferred from captions and audience comments       | Confidence, inspiration, courage, reassurance, curiosity |
| Response        | Behavioural expressions observed in comments and engagement                | Desire to travel, trip planning, sharing, saving, liking |

To enhance analytical consistency, all coded data were reviewed repeatedly, and earlier coding decisions were revisited whenever new patterns emerged. The final coding framework was applied consistently across all selected videos before descriptive summaries and thematic interpretations were produced.

Although Microsoft Excel was used as the primary coding platform, descriptive frequencies and engagement statistics were subsequently calculated to identify dominant themes across captions, hashtags, comments, and core content messages.

### Word Cloud Generation

Word cloud visualisations were generated to complement the thematic analysis by illustrating the relative prominence of frequently occurring textual concepts. Separate word clouds were produced for content core messages, caption tones, hashtags, caption themes, and audience comment themes.

Following completion of the manual coding process, coded keywords and phrases were exported from Microsoft Excel into Network View at Atlas.ti. Prior to visualisation, duplicate words, punctuation, common stop words, conjunctions, and non-meaningful terms were removed to improve readability. Word size within each figure represents the relative frequency of coded terms rather than statistical significance. The word clouds were therefore used as visual summaries to support the thematic findings rather than as independent analytical techniques.

The interpretation of the findings was informed by the Stimulus Organism Response framework, which guided the analysis of how TikTok content characteristics function as digital stimuli that evoke psychological responses and

influence behavioural outcomes. The theoretical rationale for applying the framework has been established in the literature review and therefore is not repeated here.

### 3.3 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To enhance credibility, all selected videos were reviewed repeatedly throughout the coding process, and coding decisions were cross checked across captions, hashtags, comments, and engagement indicators to ensure consistency. As the study analysed only publicly accessible TikTok content, no personal or private information was collected, and ethical principles relating to unobtrusive online research were observed (Vespestad & Clancy, 2021).

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### THE TIKTOK CONTENT CORE MESSAGES FEATURE FEMALE SOLO TRAVEL

To understand their common traits, it is important to examine what makes TikTok posts on female solo travel attractive and influential. This section explores key attributes, including core content messages, emotional tones in captions, and hashtags used to reach a wider audience.

During thematic analysis, the coding framework was informed by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. Rather than coding only descriptive content categories, the analysis also identified textual indicators that reflected potential organism states and behavioural responses. Organism states were inferred from audience expressions of confidence, empowerment, inspiration, curiosity, reassurance, and reduced fear appearing within captions and user comments. Response categories were identified through explicit behavioural expressions such as intentions to begin solo travel, destination planning,



information seeking, content sharing, and engagement behaviours including likes, comments, shares, and favourites. These categories were interpreted qualitatively to understand how TikTok content may facilitate behavioural intention rather than to establish causal relationships.

## CONTENT CORE MESSAGE

Table 2 presents the diversity of content core messages gathered from TikTok short videos. The second column displays the frequency of the content category. The table further encompasses the engagement data for these 10 content core messages, including the count of likes, comments, shares, and favourites.

The study finds that "Empowerment and Motivation" is the most prominent core message, appearing in 48 posts and receiving the highest engagement, including likes, comments, shares, and favourites. This supports previous research by Umur (2024) and Asri et al. (2024), showing that female travellers seek strength and encouragement from travel vlogs, trusting content creators more than traditional marketing.

"Self-Identity and Growth" follows with 25 posts, showing that female travellers use TikTok for inspiration and personal development. Silva et al. (2020) and Ghadhan et al. (2023) suggest that solo travel fosters self-reflection and growth, enhancing identity and decision-making.

"Destination Highlights" (13 posts) and "Personal Experiences" (10 posts) receive moderate engagement, emphasizing travel inspiration and authenticity. As Asri et al. (2024) mention, social media helps users discover new places and trust travel stories from creators. Other core messages include "Challenges and How to Overcome Them" and "Social Connection" (9 posts each) with lower engagement. "Travel Tips and Hacks" (7 posts) is

valued for decision-making, aligning with Pop et al. (2021), showing users rely on creators' travel experiences.

Less frequent but impactful topics include "Cultural Immersion" (5 posts), "Budget and Cost Management" (2 posts), and "Safety and Security" (2 posts). These reflect key concerns for female solo travellers, such as cultural experiences, financial planning, and safety. Silva et al. (2020), Ghadhan et al. (2023), and Yozukmaz (2024) confirm that safety influences destination choices, as females may be more vulnerable to risks like theft and harassment.

## *Empowerment Emerges as a Collective Digital Narrative Rather than an Individual Travel Motive*

The findings demonstrate that empowerment extends beyond a personal motivation for female solo travel and instead functions as the dominant narrative constructed within the TikTok ecosystem. Empowerment consistently appeared across the platform's core content messages, caption themes, caption tones, and audience comments, indicating that the discourse surrounding female solo travel is collectively reinforced through both content creators and viewers. This suggests that empowerment is socially reproduced through repeated digital interaction rather than communicated solely through individual travel experiences.

Previous studies have primarily conceptualised empowerment as an internal motivation driving women to travel independently (Silva et al., 2020; Hamid et al., 2021; Terziyska, 2021). In contrast, the present findings indicate that TikTok transforms empowerment into a shared community narrative where viewers actively validate and reinforce one another's travel aspirations through comments, engagement, and emotional support. This extends existing

**Table 2.** Table of descriptive content core messages

| Content Core Message                | Frequency | Average Likes | Average Comments | Average Shares | Average Favourites |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Empowerment and Motivation          | 48        | 4196794       | 22569            | 337913         | 96577              |
| Self-Identity and Growth            | 25        | 982733        | 7592             | 126872         | 22656              |
| Destination Highlights              | 13        | 260351        | 3044             | 39627          | 15409              |
| Personal Experiences                | 10        | 675934        | 5900             | 55620          | 15071              |
| Challenges and How to Overcome Them | 9         | 585305        | 4752             | 72121          | 9373               |
| Social Connection                   | 9         | 683797        | 4667             | 65424          | 11674              |
| Travel Tips and Hacks               | 7         | 1146893       | 5840             | 409450         | 33059              |
| Cultural Immersion                  | 5         | 550303        | 3688             | 51109          | 13362              |
| Budget and Cost Management          | 2         | 800937        | 3554             | 353760         | 29507              |
| Safety and Security                 | 2         | 822437        | 3012             | 355860         | 26020              |

knowledge by demonstrating that empowerment within social media operates simultaneously as personal motivation and collective social influence.

Practically, these findings suggest that tourism organisations should move beyond destination promotion by developing communication strategies that emphasise confidence, independence, and authentic female travel experiences. Such narratives appear more effective in encouraging behavioural intention than purely promotional destination content.

The findings align with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, explaining how TikTok content influences female solo travellers. Subiakto (2023) engaging travel videos act as stimuli (S), triggering emotions and perceptions (O), leading to responses (R) like engagement, sharing, or travel decisions. Empowerment content boosts confidence, while safety-related content helps females make informed travel choices, shaping their solo travel experiences.

## DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TIKTOK CONTENT CORE MESSAGES FEATURING

### FEMALE SOLO TRAVEL

#### CAPTION TONE

Table 3 presents the descriptive data that examines the tone of different captions from the TikTok posting. The most common tone in TikTok captions is “Empowering,” making up 22.42% of all captions. This tone fosters a sense of belonging among female travellers by creating a supportive community. Asri et al. (2024) highlight that TikTok influencers significantly shape travel desires, with 11.52% of captions using an “Inspirational” tone to motivate travellers.

The second most common tone is “Excited” (13.94%), influencing female travellers’ solo travel decisions. Other notable tones include “Reflective,” “Encouraging,” and “Adventurous” (5% to 10%), while less frequent tones like “Vulnerable,” “Reassuring,” and “Independent” appear in under 5% of captions.

These findings suggest that TikTok captions encourage female solo travel by emphasizing empowerment and independence. This aligns with Abad and Borhon (2021), who found that positive

**Table 3.** Table of descriptive of caption tone

| Caption Tone  | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Empowering    | 37        | 22.42      |
| Excited       | 23        | 13.94      |
| Inspirational | 19        | 11.52      |
| Reflective    | 18        | 10.91      |
| Encouraging   | 12        | 7.27       |
| Adventurous   | 12        | 7.27       |
| Confident     | 8         | 4.85       |
| Motivational  | 7         | 4.24       |
| Supportive    | 6         | 3.64       |
| Inclusive     | 3         | 1.82       |
| Informative   | 3         | 1.82       |
| Positive      | 3         | 1.82       |
| Engaging      | 3         | 1.82       |
| Vulnerable    | 2         | 1.21       |
| Reassuring    | 2         | 1.21       |
| Appreciative  | 1         | 0.61       |
| Relaxed       | 1         | 0.61       |
| Proud         | 1         | 0.61       |
| Humorous      | 1         | 0.61       |
| Sentimental   | 1         | 0.61       |
| Independent   | 1         | 0.61       |
| Emotional     | 1         | 0.61       |
| Total         | 165       | 100        |

and engaging tones enhance a destination's appeal and strengthen travellers' emotional connections.

Using the SOR theory, caption tones act as stimuli (S), triggering emotional and cognitive responses (O) like empowerment and excitement, leading to behavioural outcomes (R) such as engagement, sharing, or travel plans. An “Empowering” caption can boost confidence, while an “Excited” tone may encourage trip planning. Overall, caption tones shape perceptions, emotions, and behaviours related to solo travel on TikTok.

## HASHTAG

Table 4 shows the frequency and percentage of

TikTok hashtags associated with solo female travel.

The most used TikTok hashtag for solo travel is #solotravel (45%), followed by #solotravelwoman (11%), #solofemaletraveller (7%), #solofemaletravel (6%), and #solotraveling (6%). Other hashtags like #solotraveller and #solotrip (5%) highlight solo travel as a major topic on TikTok.

These hashtags mainly focus on solo female travellers, appealing to females seeking relatable and inspiring travel content. Polson (2021) noted that hashtags help create virtual communities where travellers share experiences and support each other, making solo travel more social. The

**Table 4.** Table of descriptive of hashtag

| Hashtag             | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| #solotravel         | 45        | 45.00      |
| #solotravelwoman    | 11        | 11.00      |
| #solofemaletraveler | 7         | 7.00       |
| #solofemaletravel   | 6         | 6.00       |
| #solotraveling      | 6         | 6.00       |
| #solotraveler       | 5         | 5.00       |
| #solotrip           | 5         | 5.00       |
| #femalesolotravel   | 2         | 2.00       |
| #destinasisolo      | 1         | 1.00       |
| #femalesflyingsolo  | 1         | 1.00       |
| #solo               | 1         | 1.00       |
| #solobackpacker     | 1         | 1.00       |
| #solobalapan        | 1         | 1.00       |
| #sologirl           | 1         | 1.00       |
| #sologirltravelling | 1         | 1.00       |
| #sololeveling       | 1         | 1.00       |
| #solotravelmalaysia | 1         | 1.00       |
| #solowomentravel    | 1         | 1.00       |
| #tipssolotravel     | 1         | 1.00       |
| #women              | 1         | 1.00       |
| #womenwhotravel     | 1         | 1.00       |
| #solotraveltips     | 1         | 1.00       |
| #alone              | 1         | 1.00       |
| #beingalone         | 1         | 1.00       |
| #solorreise         | 1         | 1.00       |
| #solotravelquotes   | 1         | 1.00       |
| Total               | 100       | 100.00     |

rise in female solo travel aligns with Talukdar and Tripathi (2023), showing it as a growing trend, challenging traditional views that link travel to masculine bravery.

Less common hashtags include #femalesolotravel (2%), #sologirltravelling, #femalesflyingsolo, and #solo (each 1%). Despite their lower popularity, they highlight diverse solo female travel experiences and foster smaller, meaningful communities. According to the SOR theory, hashtags act as a stimulus (S), triggering

emotions like curiosity and motivation (O) and leading to responses (R) such as engagement and solo trip planning. #solotravel may evoke thoughts of freedom, while #solotravelwoman fosters empowerment and community, ultimately influencing travel behaviour.

**Hashtags function as digital communities rather than search labels**

Although hashtags are commonly viewed as tools for content categorisation, the present findings

suggest that they perform a broader social function within TikTok. The dominance of hashtags such as #solotravel and #solofemaletravel indicates the formation of highly visible digital communities where women collectively exchange experiences, encouragement, and practical travel advice. Rather than simply increasing discoverability, hashtags appear to normalise female solo travel by creating repeated exposure to positive travel narratives.

Earlier studies primarily describe hashtags as mechanisms for organising online information (Shkvorchenko & Koltsova, 2019). The present study extends this understanding by demonstrating that hashtags simultaneously facilitate community identity, reinforce social norms, and reduce perceived travel uncertainty among prospective female solo travellers.

## CAPTION

Table 5 describes the frequency and percentage of distribution of themes identified in TikTok video captions. This data demonstrates the significance of motivational and self-empowering content captions.

The most common theme in TikTok captions is "Empowerment" (28.13%, 27 times), highlighting how captions motivate female solo travellers to challenge societal norms and embrace independence. Largo (2024) stated that TikTok's algorithm supports this by promoting content that inspires females to travel alone, aligning with the idea that social media fosters female empowerment through travel.

"Encouragement" follows at 21.88% (21 times), emphasizing the role of motivational captions in boosting confidence among hesitant female travellers. Umur (2024) stated that social media fosters global connections, allowing females to seek support and inspiration from others,

aligning with the notion that online communities create a sense of belonging for female travellers.

Other key themes include "Personal Growth" (13.54%, 13 times) and "Independence" (12.50%, 12 times). Ghadhan et al. (2023) and Silva (2020) stated that solo travel helps females build confidence and break societal limitations, aligning with the idea that independent travel contributes to self-discovery and empowerment. Travelers report feeling inspired, free, and willing to leave their comfort zones.

"Self-Accomplishment" and "Positive Experience" each appear 7 times (7.29%), while "Travel Advice" is noted 6 times (6.25%). Riggert (2020) stated that these themes reinforce the idea that captions foster a sense of unity and empowerment, aligning with research on the role of social media in shaping travel motivations.

The least common theme is "Emotional Escape" (3.13%, 3 times). While less frequent, it still affects personal growth and self-discovery. Somasiri et al. (2022) stated that emotional escape in captions highlights the importance of solitude for personal fulfilment, aligning with findings that solo travel is a form of self-care.

Using SOR theory, caption themes act as a stimulus (S), triggering emotions like motivation and empowerment (O), leading to responses (R) such as engagement and solo travel decisions. "Empowerment" captions promote strength and independence, while "Encouragement" captions foster confidence and connection, ultimately influencing travel behaviour.



**Table 5.** Table of descriptive of caption

| Caption Theme       | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Empowerment         | 27        | 28.13      |
| Encouragement       | 21        | 21.88      |
| Personal growth     | 13        | 13.54      |
| Independence        | 12        | 12.50      |
| Self-accomplishment | 7         | 7.29       |
| Positive experience | 7         | 7.29       |
| Travel advice       | 6         | 6.25       |
| Emotional escape    | 3         | 3.13       |

## COMMENT

The following Table 6 displays 16 themes of comments derived from 70 videos focused on female solo travel. The frequency and percentage are also presented in the table.

The table highlights "Empowerment" as the most prevalent theme, appearing 182 times (17.25%). This reinforces the idea that empowerment is a key motivator for female travellers, enabling them to assert independence and break societal norms. Silva et al. (2020) emphasized that autonomy is a crucial factor driving females to explore new destinations, while Umur (2024) found that empowerment plays a significant role in their travel choices. These findings align with how TikTok content often showcases personal strength and resilience in solo travel experiences.

Following closely, "Desire to Start" appears 158 times (14.98%), reflecting the influence of TikTok in encouraging hesitant travellers to embark on their journeys. Research by Asri et al. (2024) suggests that social media influencers shape travel motivation by presenting visually appealing destinations. This supports the notion that aspirational content on TikTok inspires viewers to transition from passive observers to active travellers.

"Inspiration", ranking third with 124 mentions (11.75%), underscores TikTok's dual role as an informational and emotional catalyst. Gozali and Tunjungsari (2024) observed that TikTok effectively portrays authentic travel experiences, influencing viewers' travel intentions. Similarly, their findings resonate with the idea that engaging content fosters a sense of wanderlust and adventure among female travellers.

Another notable theme, "Self-Discovery and Personal Growth", appears 101 times (9.57%), illustrating the transformative impact of solo travel. Hamid et al. (2021) identified that many females embark on solo trips to rediscover themselves, overcome challenges, and gain confidence. This perspective reinforces the idea that solo travel is more than just exploration. It is also a path to self-realization.

Meanwhile, "Travel Constraints", mentioned 87 times (8.25%), highlight challenges like financial limitations, safety concerns, and societal expectations. According to Nematpour et al. (2024) and Ngawira et al. (2020), female travellers often adopt strategies such as forming online support networks and leveraging digital tools to navigate these obstacles. Their research suggests that despite these constraints, females continue to push boundaries and redefine solo travel experiences.

Less common themes such as "Emotional Escape" (28 mentions, 2.65%), "Personal Development" (22 mentions, 2.09%), "Emotional Fulfilment" and "Travel Preference" (20 mentions each, 1.90%), and "Freedom" (14 mentions, 1.33%) provide additional insight into personal motivations for solo travel. Zhang et al. (2024) pointed out that many females seek solo travel to escape daily stress, a perspective echoed by Hamid et al. (2021), who highlighted the therapeutic nature of travel for emotional relief and renewal.

From a SOR theory perspective, comment themes act as a stimulus (S), triggering emotional reactions such as motivation, inspiration, and empowerment (O), ultimately leading to responses (R) like engagement, interactions, and the decision to travel solo. For instance, "Empowerment" comments evoke strength and autonomy, while "Inspiration" and "Desire to Start" encourage action, illustrating how social media influences female travel behaviour.

**Table 6.** Table of descriptive of comment

| Comment Theme                      | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Empowerment                        | 182       | 17.25      |
| Desire to start                    | 158       | 14.98      |
| Inspiration                        | 124       | 11.75      |
| Self-discovery and Personal Growth | 101       | 9.57       |
| travel constraint                  | 87        | 8.25       |
| Positive experience                | 63        | 5.97       |
| Safety concern                     | 54        | 5.12       |
| Overcoming fear                    | 49        | 4.64       |
| Seeking courage                    | 46        | 4.36       |
| Social connection                  | 45        | 4.27       |
| Independence                       | 42        | 3.98       |
| Emotional escape                   | 28        | 2.65       |
| Personal development               | 22        | 2.09       |
| Emotional fulfilment               | 20        | 1.90       |
| Travel preference                  | 20        | 1.90       |
| Freedom                            | 14        | 1.33       |

**THE ATTRIBUTES OF TIKTOK POSTS  
FEATURING FEMALE SOLO TRAVEL**

To understand TikTok's influence on female solo travellers, it's essential to examine key attributes in related posts. These include core content messages, caption tones, hashtag usage, and themes in captions and comments, all shaping viewers' perceptions of solo travel. This section analyses these attributes, focusing on content categories, emotional tones in captions, audience-reaching hashtags, and engaging themes.

**THE DOMINANT CONTENT CORE  
MESSAGE IN THE SHORT VIDEO POSTS IN  
TIKTOK FEATURING SOLO FEMALE  
TRAVELLERS**

The analysis shows that “Empowerment and Motivation,” “Self-Identity and Growth,” and “Destination Highlights” are the main themes in TikTok posts about female solo travel. These themes reflect travellers’ aspirations, personal growth experiences, and interests in various destinations.

Using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, these themes act as external stimuli (S) that trigger emotional and cognitive responses (O) through video captions, hashtags, and comments, influencing perceptions and travel decisions (R). Engagement metrics on TikTok reflect these effects.

Wang et al. (2022) found that TikTok's short-form videos drive higher engagement than text-based content, making user-generated content (UGC) a powerful and authentic influence on travel choices. Doni et al. (2022) highlighted that TikTok's focus on empowerment and motivation appeals to travellers seeking confidence and self-reliance, generating emotional responses that encourage female viewers to pursue solo travel.

Similarly, studies by Samuel et al. (2024) and Thelwall et al. (2022) show that videos of females overcoming fears create strong emotional connections, increasing engagement and inspiring viewers to develop confidence and independence.

The "Self-Identity and Growth" theme highlights how solo travel fosters self-discovery and independence. Nguyen and Hsu (2023) linked solo travel to transformative experiences, influencing behaviour and personal growth. Naor and Mayseless (2020) also emphasized that solo travel offers an escape from routine, encouraging deep reflection and self-awareness.

Meanwhile, "Destination Highlights" attract travellers by showcasing unique locations. Cheng et al. (2023) noted that TikTok helps female travellers research destinations by offering diverse and reliable insights. This content reduces uncertainty (S), creates positive impressions (O), and enhances travel interest (R). Asri et al. (2024) observed that TikTok influencers significantly shape young travellers' destination preferences.

Overall, the SOR theory provides a framework for understanding how TikTok content influences female solo travellers by triggering emotional and cognitive responses that shape travel attitudes and decisions.



**Figure 1.** World Cloud Analysis for the Content Core Messages

## CAPTION TONE AS A MOTIVATIONAL FACTOR

Empowerment and inspiration are key themes in TikTok videos about female solo travel, emotionally resonating with viewers and reinforcing the reasons for travelling alone. Encouraging captions like "You are stronger than you think" urge females to embrace independence and challenge societal norms, boosting their confidence. Saleh et al. (2023) highlight that such captions are essential for promoting empowerment, especially among females.

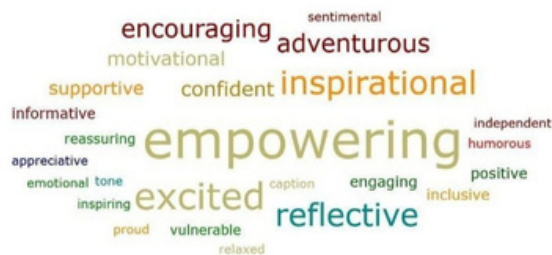
Using the SOR theory, these captions act as stimuli (S) that shape cognitive responses (O), leading to behavioural changes (R), such as an increased desire for solo travel. By emphasizing bravery, determination, and self-reliance, they inspire viewers to take action.

Similarly, inspirational captions like "Sometimes, the best company is your own" or "Solo travel taught me to love myself" promote self-discovery and transformation. These messages encourage introspection and personal growth,

motivating individuals to embrace new experiences. Chen et al. (2023) noted that such tones provide encouragement and validation for solo female travellers. Through the SOR framework, these captions create positive emotions (O), leading to actions (R) like planning solo trips. Overall, empowering and inspirational captions act as strong stimuli, driving engagement and influencing behaviour, ultimately boosting confidence and encouraging solo travel.

## HASHTAGS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON TRAVEL DECISIONS

Popular TikTok hashtags like #solotravel and #solotravelwoman helps female solo travellers connect, categorize content, and boost engagement by making posts more discoverable. Shkvorchenko and Kolysova (2019) noted that hashtags act as content facilitators, allowing users to find relevant topics easily. These hashtags create a sense of community, uniting solo female travellers with shared goals, experiences, and challenges.



**Figure 2.** World Cloud Analysis for the Caption Tones

Using the SOR theory, hashtags serve as stimuli (S) that attract viewers to specific content, sparking emotions of connection and inspiration (O). Increased hashtag visibility helps normalize female solo travel, reducing stigma and fostering confidence in its safety. This internal response (O) often leads to behavioural outcomes (R), such as planning solo trips.

Additionally, females use hashtags to discuss travel experiences and highlight the lack of female travel influencers, offering a platform for engagement and support. Polson (2021) emphasized that TikTok, like other social media, allows users to share experiences with a global audience, promoting solo travel. Sebova et al. (2021) stated that hashtags help normalize female solo travel, making it more accepted.

Through the SOR framework, hashtags act as stimuli (S) that spark interest and emotional engagement, prompting internal reflection (O) and leading to actions (R) such as engaging with solo travel content, joining female travel communities, or embarking on solo trips.

## THE MOST INFLUENTIAL FACTOR IN SHORT VIDEOS TIKTOK POSTS INFLUENCING FEMALES TO TRAVEL SOLO

Analysing TikTok posts on female solo travel shows that captions and comments are key in influencing this behaviour. Captions often focus on empowerment, encouragement, and personal growth, while comments highlight empowerment, the desire to start, and inspiration, all motivating females to travel solo.

## VISUAL OF THE SHORT VIDEO TIKTOK POSTS

The table lists the most important parts of content about travel alone by females, starting with the Core Message, which is the main topic of each post. The visual description accompanies the primary message, offering a succinct summary of the visual information in the TikTok posts. Table 7 also presents the engagement metrics, which include frequency (FREQ), likes (L), comments (C), shares (S) and favourites (FAV), indicating the level of user interaction with the content.

TikTok content significantly influences female solo travellers through three key themes, which are Empowerment and motivation, Self-Identity and growth, and Destination Highlights. These themes shape decision-making by evoking emotions, fostering connections, and inspiring action. Using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, TikTok videos act as stimuli (S) that capture attention through engaging visuals and sounds. Captions, hashtags, and comments represent the organism stage (O), where viewers interpret content, shaping their thoughts and emotions. The response (R) is reflected in user engagement, such as likes, shares, comments, and travel decisions.

Among these themes, Empowerment and Motivation are the most prominent, showcasing adventurous female travellers and emphasizing resilience, independence, and confidence. These visuals attract attention (S), create emotional connections (O), and inspire viewers to step out of their comfort zones (R). With an average of 4,189,794 likes, this theme highly encourages solo

4,189,794 likes, this theme highly encourages solo travel. Similarly, Self-Identity and growth highlight personal development and self-discovery, often depicted through peaceful landscapes and cultural interactions. The content stimulates aspirations for self-exploration (S), encourages reflection (O), and motivates solo travel (R), supported by an average of 982,733 likes. Meanwhile, Destination Highlights showcase scenic locations and cultural experiences, generating curiosity and excitement (S). Captions and hashtags add context (O), increasing the inclination to explore new places (R), as reflected in an average of 260,351 likes.

Applying SOR theory reveals how TikTok posts influence female solo travellers by engaging them emotionally and cognitively, leading to behavioural responses such as content engagement and actual travel decisions. The findings highlight the power of visual and narrative elements in shaping travel behaviour, aligning with the study’s objective of identifying the most influential factors in TikTok travel content.

Table 7. Table of content core messages

| Content Core Message       | Visual Description                                                                                                                        | FREQ | L       | C     | S      | FAV   |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------|-------|--------|-------|
| Empowerment and Motivation | Posts that encourage solo female travellers to embrace independence, face challenges with confidence, and push beyond their comfort zone. | 48   | 4196794 | 22569 | 337913 | 96577 |
| Self-Identity and Growth   | Post that often document cultural immersion, reflection, and self-identity                                                                | 25   | 982733  | 7592  | 126872 | 22656 |
| Destination Highlights     | Posts that highlight tourist destination's scenic landscapes, iconic landmarks, and local cultures, including recommendation              | 13   | 260351  | 3044  | 39627  | 15409 |

COMMENT THEME: EMPOWERMENT, DESIRE TO START, AND INSPIRATION

TikTok's comment sections are crucial in showcasing motivational factors for solo female travellers. The Empowerment theme is evident as many viewers express how TikTok posts boost their

confidence and capability to travel alone. Comments like “This is exactly what I need to hear” and “I feel empowered to start planning my first solo trip” highlight the positive impact of empowering content. This aligns with Regita and Muttaqien (2023), who found that female travel influencers on TikTok empower others by sharing



their solo travel experiences. Content creators often emphasize freedom and self-discovery, appealing to females seeking empowerment through travel.

Beyond empowerment, many comments reflect a strong interest in starting a solo travel journey. Users frequently share how TikTok content has influenced their decision-making, with remarks like “I am booking my first solo trip after seeing this” and “I have always wanted to travel alone, now I am ready.” This supports Gozali and Tunjungsari (2024), who note that TikTok's emphasis on authenticity plays a key role in motivating travel intentions. These comments show that TikTok posts inspire many females to begin solo travelling.

The theme of Inspiration is also prominent, with viewers expressing how TikTok content has encouraged them to overcome fears and believe in their ability to travel alone. Comments such as “You inspired me to overcome my fears” and “Your journey makes me believe I can do this too” illustrate the power of shared experiences. From the SOR theory perspective, these inspirational themes serve as stimuli (S) that evoke emotions of bravery and ambition (O), leading to action (R), such as planning a solo trip. This aligns with CB et al. (2023), who emphasize that social media is key in inspiring and connecting female travellers, influencing their travel decisions through shared experiences and success stories.



**Figure 3.** World Cloud Analysis for the Comment Hemes

**CAPTION      THEME:      EMPOWERMENT,  
ENCOURAGING AND PERSONAL GROWTH**

TikTok captions about female solo travel act as strong motivators, focusing on Empowerment, Encouragement, and Personal Growth. These captions serve as stimuli (S) that influence thoughts and emotions (O), leading to actions (R) such as considering or starting solo travel, aligning with the SOR theory.

Empowering captions like “You are stronger than you think” and “Solo travel is about discovering yourself” boost confidence and encourage independence. They engage viewers by reinforcing the idea that females can travel alone safely and boldly. This supports CB et al. (2024), who found that young travellers rely on e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth) to shape their travel perceptions. Positive social media messages can enhance female travellers' confidence, making them feel safer and more empowered to explore new places. Through the SOR lens, these captions (S) foster confidence and reduce anxiety (O), leading to the motivation (R) to embark on solo travel.

Encouragement captions challenge social norms, urging females to embrace solo travel. Phrases like “This is your sign to book the trip” and “Leave the fear behind, the world awaits” push viewers to step out of their comfort zones. Umur (2024) highlights that solo travel symbolizes independence and a challenge to gender norms, promoting broader societal change. These captions (S) encourage females to overcome societal barriers (O) and take action (R) by starting their solo travel journeys.

Personal Growth is another key theme, emphasizing that solo travel is not just about visiting places but also about self-discovery. Many captions align with females' aspirations for independence and personal development, increasing their motivation to travel alone. Hamid

et al. (2023) note that empowering captions indirectly highlight the benefits of solo travel, inspiring females to pursue it as a path to growth. In SOR theory, these captions (S) encourage self-reflection (O), leading to a response (R) of deciding to travel solo.

Although the SOR framework has traditionally been applied in quantitative studies to examine causal relationships between external stimuli, psychological states, and behavioural responses, the present study adopts the framework as an interpretive lens rather than a causal model. The objective is not to statistically test the S→O→R sequence but to interpret how naturally occurring TikTok content reflects potential stimuli, inferred psychological reactions expressed by users, and behavioural intentions embedded within audience interactions. Accordingly, the framework provides conceptual guidance for organising and interpreting qualitative findings rather than empirically validating causal pathways.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined how TikTok influences female solo travel by analysing naturally occurring content from 70 publicly accessible TikTok videos through qualitative content analysis. The findings demonstrate that empowerment, self identity, destination storytelling, and community engagement consistently dominate TikTok communication related to female solo travel. Across captions, hashtags, audience comments, and engagement metrics, empowerment emerged as the central narrative, suggesting that TikTok functions not only as a destination information source but also as a digital community that reinforces confidence, independence, and travel aspirations among women.

Unlike previous studies that primarily relied on questionnaire surveys to investigate travel

intention, this study analysed actual social media content generated by creators and audiences. This approach provides direct insight into how travel narratives are constructed, shared, and reinforced within the TikTok environment. The findings therefore contribute a richer understanding of the digital communication processes that shape female solo travel beyond traditional self-reported behavioural measures.

### 5.1 Theoretical Implications

The present study makes several theoretical contributions to tourism and digital communication research. First, it extends the application of the SOR framework by demonstrating how qualitative social media content analysis can be interpreted through the model. While previous SOR studies have predominantly employed survey or experimental designs to examine causal relationships between digital stimuli and behavioural intentions, the present study adopts the framework as an interpretive lens for understanding naturally occurring interactions within social media environments. This broadens the methodological application of the SOR framework beyond its conventional quantitative use.

Second, the findings contribute to the growing literature on female solo travel by demonstrating that empowerment is not simply an internal travel motivation but also a socially constructed digital narrative. Empowerment appeared consistently across content creators' messages and audience interactions, indicating that confidence and independence are collectively reinforced through online communities rather than experienced solely at the individual level.

Third, the study extends research on TikTok tourism by shifting attention from influencer effectiveness or destination promotion towards the broader communication ecosystem of the platform.

Rather than examining creators alone, the study highlights the combined influence of captions, hashtags, audience comments, and engagement indicators in shaping travel-related perceptions and behavioural intentions.

Collectively, these findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of how short-form social media contributes to female solo travel by integrating digital storytelling, community participation, and user engagement within a single analytical framework.

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# Predicting Johor Bahru's Destination Image Through Social Media Influence, Influencer Endorsement, and Social Media Usage Among Malaysian Young Adults

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 08/5/2026

Accepted : 17/6/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Destination Branding;  
Destination Image;  
Digital Tourism  
Communication;  
Influencer Endorsement;  
Social Media Influence

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Research paper

**Abstract** - This study investigates the influence of social media influence, influencer endorsement, and social media usage on Johor Bahru's destination image among Malaysian young adults. Despite the growing importance of digital tourism communication, limited empirical studies have examined the strongest social media related factors influencing Johor Bahru's destination image among young adults in Malaysia. Guided by Media System Dependency Theory, this study adopted a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach. Data were collected from 210 Malaysian young adults aged 18 to 35 years through a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The instrument employed a five-point Likert scale and underwent pilot testing and Cronbach's Alpha reliability assessment to ensure internal consistency. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Version 29 through descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. The findings showed that social media influence had the highest descriptive mean score ( $M = 3.775$ ,  $SD = 0.877$ ), indicating strong agreement that social media shapes tourism perceptions. Multiple regression analysis further showed that social media usage was the strongest predictor of Johor Bahru's destination image ( $\beta = .625$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by influencer endorsement ( $\beta = .278$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, social media influence did not significantly predict destination image ( $\beta = .030$ ,  $p = .655$ ). The regression model explained 78.2% of the variance in destination image perception ( $R^2 = .782$ ). The findings highlight the strategic importance of active social media engagement and influencer credibility in strengthening destination branding and digitally driven tourism promotion strategies among young adults in Malaysia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism destination image has become increasingly shaped by digital communication ecosystems, particularly through the rapid expansion of social media platforms and influencer driven content. Contemporary tourists no longer rely solely on traditional destination marketing materials, as travel related perceptions are now constructed through user generated content, visual storytelling, online reviews, and interactive social media engagement (De Las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2020; Tran & Rudolf, 2022). The transformation of tourism communication has significantly altered how destinations are evaluated, remembered, and promoted among younger audiences. Young adults, particularly Generation Z, actively utilise platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook to search for travel information, compare destinations, and validate travel decisions through peer interaction and influencer recommendations (Akin & Şener, 2024; Wang & Park, 2022). Research further demonstrates that social media exposure contributes directly to destination awareness, emotional attachment, and behavioural intention through continuous digital engagement and virtual travel experiences (An et al., 2021; Tham et al., 2020). Within this context, destination image is no longer formed exclusively through physical visitation but increasingly through mediated digital experiences that shape tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations before travel occurs (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Consequently, tourism stakeholders are increasingly integrating social media communication strategies into destination branding efforts to enhance competitiveness and visibility within highly saturated tourism markets (Fathy et al., 2024; Lasisi et al., 2023).

The growing influence of social media influencers has further intensified the role of digital communication in tourism marketing and

destination image formation. Influencers function as opinion leaders who shape travel related attitudes through perceived authenticity, parasocial interaction, credibility, and experiential narratives shared across digital platforms (Han & Balabanis, 2023; Su et al., 2021). Unlike conventional advertising, influencer generated content is often perceived as more relatable and trustworthy, particularly among young consumers who value experiential authenticity and peer based recommendations (Kapitan et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021). Previous studies indicate that influencer endorsements significantly affect destination attractiveness, travel intention, and online engagement by creating aspirational travel imagery and emotional attachment toward destinations (Pop et al., 2021; Omeish et al., 2024). Furthermore, the increasing dominance of short form visual platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels has amplified the persuasive capacity of influencer marketing within tourism communication (Bishqemi & Crowley, 2022; Eman & Refaie, 2023). Nevertheless, existing literature remains heavily concentrated on global tourism destinations and broad international contexts, with limited empirical attention given to secondary urban tourism destinations in Malaysia. This creates an important contextual gap, particularly in understanding how digitally mediated tourism communication influences the image construction of Johor Bahru among Malaysian young adults.

Johor Bahru has experienced substantial tourism and urban development growth due to its strategic geographical location, proximity to Singapore, expanding entertainment infrastructure, and evolving cultural tourism offerings. Attractions such as theme parks, urban leisure spaces, cultural food experiences, and lifestyle tourism activities have strengthened its position within Malaysia's domestic tourism sector (Othman & Samsudin, 2021; Samsudin et al., 2023). However, destination image remains vulnerable to issues associated with

urban congestion, inconsistent tourism narratives, and uneven digital representation across online platforms. In an era where travel decisions are increasingly influenced by algorithmic visibility, online engagement metrics, and social media interaction, understanding the influence of digital communication variables on destination image becomes strategically important for tourism development (Nguyen et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2024). Although previous studies have examined social media and travel behaviour independently, limited research has simultaneously investigated the combined influence of social media exposure, influencer endorsement, and social media usage intensity on Johor Bahru's destination image among young adults. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationships between these variables and determine the strongest predictor influencing destination image formation. The findings are expected to contribute to destination branding literature while offering practical insights for destination marketing organisations and tourism stakeholders in developing digitally integrated tourism promotion strategies targeting young travellers in Malaysia.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Foundation

This study is underpinned by Media System Dependency Theory, which explains how individuals increasingly depend on media platforms to obtain information, form perceptions, and guide behavioural decisions in situations characterised by uncertainty and information seeking (Rohmah & Rahmawati, 2023; Semujju, 2020). Within the tourism context, social media platforms function as influential information systems where young adults rely on digital content, influencer narratives, online reviews, and user-generated experiences to evaluate destinations and shape travel-related attitudes. The theory suggests that higher levels of media

dependency strengthen the influence of media messages on cognitive, affective, and behavioural outcomes. In tourism communication, this dependency is particularly significant among young adults who actively use Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and other digital platforms for travel inspiration and destination evaluation (Akin & Şener, 2024; Wang & Park, 2022). Influencer endorsements and social media interactions further reinforce destination image formation by creating perceived authenticity, trust, and emotional connection between audiences and destinations (Pop et al., 2021; Su et al., 2021). Consequently, Media System Dependency Theory provides a relevant theoretical lens for explaining how social media influence, influencer endorsement, and social media usage intensity contribute to the formation of Johor Bahru's destination image among Malaysian young adults.

### 2.2 Destination Image in Digital Tourism Communication

Destination image is widely recognised as a critical determinant of tourists' perceptions, satisfaction, behavioural intentions, and destination competitiveness in tourism studies. Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020) explained that the destination image comprises cognitive and affective evaluations developed through accumulated information, emotional interpretation, and experiential expectations associated with a particular destination. In the contemporary tourism environment, destination image formation is increasingly mediated through digital communication technologies rather than traditional tourism promotion channels alone. Tran and Rudolf (2022) argued that social media platforms have transformed destination branding practices by enabling interactive communication, user participation, and real-time content dissemination. Through digital environments, tourists are exposed to visual narratives, online reviews, travel blogs,

and immersive media content that significantly shape their perceptions before they visit in person.

Research further demonstrates that social media communication contributes positively to destination brand awareness, engagement, and perceived destination quality. Huerta Álvarez et al. (2020) found that continuous social media interaction strengthens destination brand equity and enhances emotional engagement among tourists. Similarly, Dedeoğlu et al. (2020) reported that tourism-related social media sharing significantly improves destination awareness and tourists' perceptions of destination attractiveness. These findings indicate that the destination image is increasingly influenced by digitally mediated experiences, in which tourists actively construct perceptions through online interactions and content consumption. Consequently, tourism stakeholders and destination marketing organisations are increasingly prioritising digital communication strategies to improve destination visibility and maintain competitiveness within highly saturated tourism markets (Fathy et al., 2024). Within this context, Johor Bahru's destination image is likely to be influenced by digital tourism communication patterns, particularly among young adults who are highly engaged with social media.

### *2.3 Social Media Influence and Destination Perception*

Social media influence has become one of the most dominant factors shaping tourism-related decision-making among young adults. The rapid expansion of digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube has transformed how tourists search for information, evaluate destinations, and form travel expectations (Akin & Şener, 2024). Young adults increasingly rely on social media content because these platforms provide accessible, visually engaging, and socially validated tourism information that aligns with their

lifestyle preferences and consumption behaviour (Hendrickx, 2024). Research by Tham et al. (2020) highlighted that contextual relevance and authenticity within social media content significantly influence tourists' destination selection processes. The visual and interactive nature of social media enables destinations to create aspirational tourism imagery that stimulates emotional attachment and travel motivation among potential tourists.

Previous studies also demonstrate that user generated content plays a central role in destination image formation. Hua et al. (2024) emphasised that user generated travel content positively shapes cultural perception and destination attractiveness among Generation Z tourists. Similarly, Yamagishi et al. (2023) revealed that social media content significantly influences tourists' visit intention through emotional stimulation and cognitive evaluation processes. The increasing dependency on digital tourism content further reinforces social media's role as a persuasive communication mechanism affecting travel related attitudes and behaviour (Azazi & Shaed, 2020). Moreover, social media platforms encourage active interaction through comments, sharing, liking, and virtual engagement, creating stronger destination familiarity and social validation among users (Chen et al., 2024). These findings collectively suggest that social media influence significantly contributes to how young adults perceive and evaluate tourism destinations, including urban destinations such as Johor Bahru.

### *2.4 Influencer Endorsement and Tourism Behaviour*

Influencer endorsement has emerged as a powerful digital marketing strategy within tourism communication and destination branding. Social media influencers function as opinion leaders who influence audiences through experiential



storytelling, visual representation, and perceived authenticity (Han & Balabanis, 2023). Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, influencers establish continuous interaction with followers, creating parasocial relationships that strengthen audience trust and emotional engagement (Su et al., 2021). Hill and Qesja (2022) argued that influencer authenticity significantly affects audience perception and behavioural response within the travel industry. Influencers who are perceived as trustworthy, relatable, and knowledgeable are more likely to influence tourists' attitudes toward destinations and travel related decision making.

Several tourism studies have reported significant relationships between influencer endorsement and destination attractiveness. Pop et al. (2021) found that influencer credibility positively affects tourists' decision journeys, particularly during information search and destination evaluation stages. Similarly, Shah et al. (2024) reported that influencer marketing significantly shapes travel destination choices among young consumers by increasing destination awareness and emotional attachment. Omeish et al. (2024) further demonstrated that social media usage intensity moderates the influence of social media influencers on destination image and visitation intention, indicating that highly active social media users are more susceptible to influencer persuasion. Hernández Méndez and Baute Díaz (2023) also highlighted that different categories of influencers generate varying levels of tourism marketing effectiveness depending on audience trust, niche relevance, and communication style. Despite extensive global research on influencer marketing, empirical studies focusing specifically on Johor Bahru's destination image within the Malaysian tourism context remain limited. Therefore, examining influencer endorsement alongside social media influence and social media usage intensity is important for

understanding the digital determinants shaping destination image among Malaysian young adults.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the influence of social media, influencer endorsement, and social media usage on Johor Bahru's destination image among Malaysian young adults. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to examine statistical relationships, measure behavioural tendencies, and evaluate the predictive influence of independent variables on destination image perception. Asryan (2024) explained that quantitative research is suitable for analysing measurable constructs and identifying relationships between variables through systematic statistical procedures. The study also utilised a cross-sectional survey design, which enabled the collection of empirical data from respondents at a single point in time. This design was appropriate because the study focused on current patterns of digital engagement and destination perception among young adults within the Malaysian tourism context.

#### 3.2 Research Approach

The study employed a survey based research approach using a structured questionnaire instrument. Survey research is widely used in tourism and social media studies because it enables efficient collection of standardised data from large populations while allowing statistical generalisation and comparison across variables. Ngo et al. (2022) highlighted that survey methods are effective for examining behavioural patterns and social media engagement within tourism research contexts. The present study focused on measuring respondents' perceptions regarding

social media influence, influencer endorsement, social media usage intensity, and Johor Bahru's destination image. Therefore, a structured survey approach was appropriate to obtain quantifiable data suitable for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

### 3.3 Sampling and Data Collection

The target population consisted of Malaysian young adults aged between 18 and 35 years old who actively use social media platforms for travel information and tourism engagement. This demographic group was selected because young adults are among the most active social media users and are significantly influenced by digital tourism communication and influencer-generated content (Akin & Şener, 2024; Hendrickx, 2024). The study employed convenience sampling to ensure broader representation of respondents with similar demographic and social media engagement characteristics. A total of 210 respondents participated in the study, exceeding the minimum recommended sample size for quantitative behavioural research and improving the reliability of statistical estimation procedures (Gumpili & Das, 2022).

Data collection was conducted using a self-administered online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. Online distribution was considered appropriate because the respondents were digitally connected individuals familiar with social media platforms and online interaction. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, namely demographic information and measurement items related to the study constructs. A five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used to measure respondents' perceptions and attitudes toward the variables examined in the study.

### 3.4 Research Instrument and Pilot Testing

The research instrument was developed by adapting constructs from previous tourism, influencer marketing, and social media studies to ensure content validity and construct relevance. Schnitzlein (2024) emphasised that carefully structured questionnaire design improves measurement accuracy and response consistency. The instrument measured four primary constructs, namely social media influence, influencer endorsement, social media usage, and destination image. Prior to the actual data collection process, a pilot study was conducted to evaluate the clarity, readability, and consistency of the questionnaire items. Reliability testing was performed using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency. According to Raykov et al. (2024), reliability coefficients above the acceptable threshold indicate that the measurement items consistently represent the intended constructs. The pilot testing process, therefore, strengthened the reliability and suitability of the instrument for the main study.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Version 29 through descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution, percentage, mean score, and standard deviation, were used to summarise respondents' demographic profiles and response patterns (Cooksey, 2020). Inferential statistical analysis was subsequently performed using Pearson correlation analysis to examine the strength and direction of relationships between the independent variables and Johor Bahru's destination image. Multiple regression analysis was also employed to identify the strongest predictor influencing destination image formation among young adults. These statistical techniques were appropriate because they allow systematic examination of predictive relationships and statistical significance between behavioural variables within quantitative tourism research.

(Asryan, 2024).

### 3.6 Theoretical Lens

This study was guided by Media System Dependency Theory, which explains that individuals increasingly depend on media platforms for information acquisition, perception formation, and behavioural guidance in modern communication environments (Semujju, 2020). Within tourism contexts, social media platforms function as influential communication systems where young adults rely on online reviews, influencer endorsements, user generated content, and visual narratives to evaluate tourism destinations. Rohmah and Rahmawati (2023) argued that higher levels of media dependency increase the influence of media content on individuals' cognitive and behavioural responses. In the present study, social media content, influencer communication, and tourism related digital interaction were conceptualised as media stimuli influencing destination image perception among Malaysian young adults.

### 3.7 Ethical Consideration

The study adhered to ethical research principles throughout the data collection and analysis process. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire. No personal identifying information was collected, ensuring respondent anonymity and confidentiality. The online survey format also allowed respondents to participate without coercion or external pressure. All collected data were used strictly for academic purposes and analysed in aggregate form to maintain privacy and ethical integrity throughout the research process.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Profile of Respondents

This section presents the findings derived from the quantitative data analysis conducted using IBM SPSS Version 29. The analysis focuses on respondents' demographic characteristics and the relationships between social media influence, influencer endorsement, social media usage, and Johor Bahru's destination image among Malaysian young adults. Descriptive statistical analysis was performed to summarise respondents' profiles and identify patterns of social media engagement relevant to tourism behaviour and destination perception. Understanding respondents' demographic background is important because demographic variables such as age, education level, employment status, and social media usage intensity may influence tourism information seeking behaviour and digital interaction patterns. The findings provide empirical insights into how digitally connected young adults perceive Johor Bahru as a tourism destination through social media exposure and online communication environments.

Table 1 presents the descriptive demographic profile of the respondents involved in the study. The findings indicate that female respondents constituted the majority of the sample, representing 62.9% ( $n = 132$ ), while male respondents accounted for 37.1% ( $n = 78$ ). This distribution suggests stronger participation among female young adults, which aligns with previous studies indicating that female users tend to demonstrate higher engagement with tourism related social media content and online travel interaction. In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents were between 22 and 25 years old, with 41.9% aged 24 to 25 and 41.0% aged 22 to 23. This demonstrates that the study largely captured perspectives from digitally active emerging adults who are highly exposed to social media communication and influencer generated tourism

**Table 1.** Table of descriptive demographic

| Characteristics               | Descriptions               | Frequency | Valid Percentage(%) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Gender                        | Male                       | 78        | 37.1                |
|                               | Female                     | 132       | 62.9                |
| Age                           | <18                        | 10        | 4.8                 |
|                               | 19-21                      | 11        | 5.2                 |
|                               | 22-23                      | 86        | 41.0                |
|                               | 24-25                      | 88        | 41.9                |
|                               | 26-28                      | 8         | 3.8                 |
|                               | 29+                        | 7         | 3.3                 |
| Level of Education            | High School and equivalent | 21        | 10.0                |
|                               | Diploma                    | 39        | 18.6                |
|                               | Bachelor's Degree          | 136       | 64.8                |
|                               | Master's Degree            | 14        | 6.7                 |
| Employment Status             | Student                    | 110       | 52.4                |
|                               | Unemployed                 | 7         | 3.3                 |
|                               | Self-Employed              | 5         | 2.4                 |
|                               | Employed Part Time         | 11        | 5.2                 |
|                               | Employed Full Time         | 77        | 36.7                |
| Monthly Income                | Below RM2,000              | 137       | 65.2                |
|                               | RM2,000 - RM3,999          | 58        | 27.6                |
|                               | RM4,000 – RM5,999          | 11        | 5.2                 |
|                               | RM6,000 and above          | 4         | 1.9                 |
| Social Media Usage            | A few times a week         | 3         | 1.4                 |
|                               | Once a day                 | 5         | 2.4                 |
|                               | Multiple times a day       | 202       | 96.2                |
| Visited Johor Bahru           | Yes                        | 167       | 79.5                |
|                               | No                         | 43        | 20.5                |
| Primary Source of Information | Friends and Family         | 43        | 20.5                |
|                               | Social media               | 158       | 75.2                |
|                               | Travel Agencies            | 3         | 1.4                 |
|                               | Travel Websites            | 6         | 2.9                 |

content. Grosemans et al. (2020) highlighted that individuals within this age category actively explore identity, lifestyle, and experiential consumption patterns, including tourism related activities and digital engagement behaviour.

The educational background of respondents further reflects a relatively educated sample population, where 64.8% possessed a Bachelor's

Degree qualification, followed by Diploma holders at 18.6%. This finding suggests that the respondents are likely to possess higher levels of digital literacy and information evaluation capability when interacting with tourism related social media content. In terms of employment status, students represented the largest respondent category at 52.4%, followed by full time employees at 36.7%. This demographic composition is

consistent with the study's focus on young adults who are highly active within digital communication environments and frequently utilise social media for travel inspiration and destination exploration. Additionally, the majority of respondents reported monthly incomes below RM2,000, indicating that affordability and accessible tourism information may significantly influence travel decision making behaviour among this demographic group.

The findings also reveal exceptionally high levels of social media engagement among respondents. A substantial 96.2% reported using social media multiple times a day, demonstrating that social media platforms have become deeply integrated into their daily communication and information seeking behaviour. This supports the argument by Akin and Şener (2024) that young adults increasingly depend on digital platforms for tourism related information and destination evaluation. Furthermore, 79.5% of respondents had previously visited Johor Bahru, indicating that most respondents possessed some level of familiarity or experiential exposure toward the destination. Most importantly, social media emerged as the dominant primary source of tourism information, accounting for 75.2% of responses, while traditional information sources such as travel agencies and travel websites recorded minimal influence. This finding strongly reinforces the growing dominance of digital tourism communication and highlights the significant role of social media platforms in shaping destination image, travel perception, and tourism behaviour among Malaysian young adults.

## OBJECTIVE 1

### **To Examine the Level of Social Media Influence, Influencer Endorsement, Social Media Usage, and Johor Bahru's Destination Image Among Malaysian Young Adults**

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to

determine the level of social media influence, influencer endorsement, social media usage intensity, and Johor Bahru's destination image among Malaysian young adults. Mean score analysis was employed to identify respondents' overall perception and agreement levels toward each construct measured in the study. According to Cooksey (2020), descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation provide important insights into respondents' behavioural tendencies and response distribution patterns. The findings indicate that all variables recorded moderately high to high mean scores, suggesting that social media related factors significantly influence respondents' tourism perception and destination evaluation processes. Table 2 presents descriptive data examining the tone of different captions from the TikTok posting.

The findings revealed that social media influence recorded the highest mean score ( $M = 3.775$ ,  $SD = 0.877$ ), indicating a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the role of social media content in shaping their perceptions toward Johor Bahru as a tourism destination. This finding suggests that respondents are strongly influenced by online travel content, destination-related posts, reviews, videos, and visual tourism narratives available across digital platforms. The result supports previous studies by Tham et al. (2020) and Chen et al. (2024), which found that social media communication significantly affects destination awareness, travel motivation, and tourism decision making among young adults. The relatively low standard deviation also indicates consistency in respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of social media on destination image formation.

Social media usage intensity also demonstrated a high mean score ( $M = 3.667$ ,  $SD = 0.927$ ), reflecting that respondents actively engage with social media platforms multiple times daily for information seeking, entertainment, and tourism



**Table 2.** Table of descriptive of caption tone

| Variables                       | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|---------------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Social Media Influence          | 3.775 | 0.877          |
| Influencer’s Endorsement        | 3.483 | 0.952          |
| Social Media Usage              | 3.667 | 0.927          |
| Johor Bahru's Destination Image | 3.685 | 0.906          |

*Note: Scale range 1-5 (Strongly Disagree – Strongly Agree)*

related exploration. This finding reinforces the argument that young adults are highly dependent on digital communication environments for travel inspiration and destination evaluation (Akin & Şener, 2024). Frequent exposure to tourism related exploration. This finding reinforces the argument that young adults are highly dependent on digital communication environments for travel inspiration and destination evaluation (Akin & Şener, 2024). Frequent exposure to tourism related content potentially increases familiarity, emotional attachment, and positive perception toward destinations such as Johor Bahru. Meanwhile, Johor Bahru’s destination image recorded a moderately high mean score ( $M = 3.685$ ,  $SD = 0.906$ ), suggesting that respondents generally possess positive perceptions regarding the city’s tourism attractiveness, accessibility, and travel appeal.

In contrast, influencer endorsement recorded the lowest mean score among the variables, although the level remained moderately high ( $M = 3.483$ ,  $SD = 0.952$ ). This indicates that while respondents acknowledge the importance of influencer recommendations and endorsements, influencer marketing may exert a slightly lower influence compared to general social media exposure and overall social media usage behaviour. Nevertheless, the findings remain consistent with Pop et al. (2021) and Omeish et al. (2024), who argued that influencer credibility and authenticity significantly contribute to destination attractiveness and travel intention among digitally connected youth populations. Overall, the descriptive findings

demonstrate that social media related variables play a substantial role in shaping destination image perception among Malaysian young adults, with social media influence emerging as the most dominant construct in this study.

**OBJECTIVE 2**

**To Examine the Influence of Social Media Influence, Influencer Endorsement, and Social Media Usage on Johor Bahru’s Destination Image Among Young Adults in Malaysia**

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the combined effects of social media use, influencer endorsement, and social media use on Johor Bahru’s destination image among Malaysian young adults. Regression analysis is an important inferential statistical technique used to determine the predictive strength of independent variables toward a dependent variable and to evaluate the overall explanatory power of the research model (Asryan, 2024). In this study, social media influence, influencer endorsement, and social media usage were treated as predictor variables, while Johor Bahru’s destination image represented the dependent variable. The analysis aimed to determine the extent to which digital communication-related factors contribute to destination image formation among young adults.

Table 3 presents the model summary for the regression analysis. The findings indicate a strong positive relationship between the independent variables and Johor Bahru’s destination image, as

**Table 3.** Model summary of social media influence, influencers' endorsement and social media usage on Johor Bahru's destination image among young adults in Malaysia

| Model 1 | R        | R Square  | Adjust R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---------|----------|-----------|-----------------|----------------------------|
|         | .885*    | .782      | .779            | 3.83163                    |
| 1       | Residual | 3024.266  | 206             | 14.681                     |
|         | Total    | 13897.167 | 209             |                            |

a. Independent : Social Media Influence, Influencers' Endorsement and Social Media Usage

b. Dependent : Destination Image of Johor Bahru

reflected by the correlation coefficient value of  $R = 0.885$ . This demonstrates that social media influence, influencer endorsement, and social media usage collectively exhibit a very strong association with respondents' perception of Johor Bahru as a tourism destination. According to behavioural and tourism research standards, an  $R$  value approaching 1.0 indicates a substantial predictive relationship between the variables examined. The findings therefore suggest that digital communication environments significantly contribute to the development of destination image among young adults in Malaysia.

The coefficient of determination value,  $R$  Square = 0.782, further indicates that approximately 78.2% of the variance in Johor Bahru's destination image can be explained by social media influence, influencer endorsement, and social media usage collectively. This reflects a high explanatory power of the regression model, suggesting that the selected independent variables are substantial predictors of destination image perception. The Adjusted  $R$  Square value of 0.779 also demonstrates consistency and stability within the regression model after accounting for the number of predictor variables included in the analysis. Meanwhile, the standard error of the estimate recorded a value of 3.83163, indicating an acceptable level of prediction accuracy within the regression model.

The findings strongly support the growing body of tourism literature highlighting the

dominant role of social media communication in shaping destination branding and tourism perception among digitally connected youth populations. Previous studies by Nguyen et al. (2022) and Tham et al. (2020) similarly found that social media exposure significantly influences destination attractiveness, travel intention, and tourism decision making among young travellers. The strong predictive relationship identified in this study further reinforces the argument that digital tourism communication has become a central mechanism influencing how destinations are perceived and evaluated in contemporary tourism environments. Social media platforms provide continuous exposure to visual tourism narratives, user generated content, influencer recommendations, and interactive engagement that collectively strengthen destination familiarity and emotional connection among audiences.

The findings also highlight the strategic importance of influencer endorsement and social media engagement in destination branding initiatives. Influencer driven communication enables tourism stakeholders to establish perceived authenticity, trust, and relatability among young audiences, thereby strengthening destination attractiveness and behavioural intention (Pop et al., 2021; Han & Balabanis, 2023). Furthermore, the exceptionally high explanatory power of the model indicates that social media related variables are highly relevant determinants of destination image formation in the Malaysian tourism context. Therefore, destination marketing organisations and

tourism stakeholders should strategically integrate influencer marketing, user generated content, and interactive social media campaigns to strengthen Johor Bahru’s tourism image and maintain competitiveness within increasingly digital tourism markets.

Anova Table

Table 4 presents the ANOVA results for the multiple regression model examining the influence of social media influence, influencer endorsement, and social media usage on Johor Bahru’s destination image among Malaysian young adults. The findings indicate that the overall regression model is statistically significant, with an F value of 246.861 and a significance level of  $p < .001$ . This demonstrates that the combination of the independent variables significantly predicts Johor Bahru’s destination image and confirms that the regression model is appropriate for explaining the relationship between digital communication variables and destination perception. The

regression sum of squares value of 10872.801 further indicates that a substantial proportion of variation in destination image is explained by the predictor variables, while the residual sum of squares value of 3024.266 represents unexplained variance not accounted for within the model. The highly significant ANOVA result suggests that social media influence, influencer endorsement, and social media usage collectively contribute meaningfully to destination image formation among young adults in Malaysia. These findings are consistent with previous tourism studies which argued that digital communication environments significantly influence tourists’ cognitive evaluation, emotional attachment, and behavioural intention toward destinations (Nguyen et al., 2022; Omeish et al., 2024). The results therefore reinforce the importance of strategically leveraging social media communication and influencer marketing to strengthen Johor Bahru’s tourism branding and destination competitiveness within digitally driven tourism markets.

**Table 4.** ANOVA of social media influence, influencers' endorsement and social media usage on Johor Bahru's destination image among young adults in Malaysia

|   | Model      | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F       | Sig.  |
|---|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------|
| 1 | Regression | 10872.801      | 3   | 3624.267    | 246.861 | <.001 |
|   | Residual   | 3024.266       | 206 | 14.681      |         |       |
|   | Total      | 13897.167      | 209 |             |         |       |

a. Independent : Social Media Influence, Influencers' Endorsement and Social Media Usage

b. Dependent : Destination Image of Johor Bahru

Beta Coefficient Table

Table 5 presents the beta coefficient analysis examining the individual contribution of social media influence, influencer endorsement, and social media usage toward Johor Bahru’s destination image among Malaysian young adults. The findings indicate that social media usage emerged as the strongest predictor influencing destination image, recording the highest

standardised beta coefficient value ( $\beta = .625, p < .001$ ). This demonstrates that increased frequency and intensity of social media engagement significantly strengthen respondents’ perceptions of Johor Bahru as a tourism destination. The result suggests that continuous exposure to tourism related digital content, online interaction, travel videos, reviews, and visual narratives substantially shapes destination evaluation among young adults. The strong predictive influence of social media

**Table 5.** Coefficients of social media influence, influencers' endorsement and social media usage on Johor Bahru's destination image among young adults in Malaysia

| Model | Variables                | Unstandardised Coefficients(B) | Standardised Coefficients Beta | t     | Sig.  | Sig.  |
|-------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1     | (Constant)               | 3.679                          |                                | 3.104 | .002  | <.001 |
|       | Social Media Influence   | .031                           | .030                           | .447  | .655  |       |
|       | Influencers' Endorsement | .264                           | .278                           | 5.017 | <.001 |       |
|       | Social Media Usage       | .610                           | .625                           | 9.402 | <.001 |       |

a. Dependent : Destination Image of Johor Bahru

usage supports Media System Dependency Theory, which argues that individuals increasingly depend on digital communication platforms for information acquisition and perception formation (Semujju, 2020). The finding is also consistent with previous studies by Chen et al. (2024) and Wang and Park (2022), which found that active social media engagement significantly affects destination awareness, travel motivation, and tourism behavioural intention among digitally connected youth populations. In the present study, the high beta coefficient indicates that young adults who frequently engage with social media are more likely to develop positive destination perceptions through repeated digital exposure and interactive communication experiences.

The findings further reveal that influencer endorsement also significantly influences Johor Bahru's destination image, recording a positive and statistically significant beta coefficient ( $\beta = .278$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This indicates that influencer recommendations, perceived credibility, and tourism related endorsements positively contribute to destination attractiveness among young adults. Influencers function as persuasive opinion leaders capable of shaping tourism perception through authentic storytelling, experiential narratives, and parasocial interaction with followers (Han & Balabanis, 2023; Su et al., 2021). The findings therefore reinforce the growing importance of influencer marketing within tourism branding strategies, particularly when targeting digitally

active young audiences. However, an important finding emerged whereby social media influence did not significantly predict Johor Bahru's destination image ( $\beta = .030$ ,  $p = .655$ ) despite recording high descriptive mean values in earlier analysis. This suggests that general exposure to social media content alone may not directly influence destination perception unless supported by active engagement behaviour and credible influencer communication. In other words, passive exposure to tourism related content may be insufficient to shape strong destination evaluations without deeper interaction and perceived authenticity. This finding challenges the assumption that all forms of social media exposure exert equal influence on tourism perception and highlights the greater importance of usage intensity and influencer credibility within digital tourism communication. Consequently, destination marketing organisations should prioritise interactive social media engagement and strategic influencer collaboration rather than relying solely on generic social media visibility to strengthen Johor Bahru's destination image among young adults.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrates that social media related variables play a significant role in shaping Johor Bahru's destination image among Malaysian young adults, with social media usage emerging as the strongest predictor influencing destination

perception. The findings indicate that frequent engagement with digital platforms, tourism related content, and influencer communication substantially strengthens destination attractiveness, familiarity, and travel interest among young adults. Influencer endorsement was also found to significantly contribute to destination image formation through credibility, authenticity, and persuasive digital storytelling, while general social media influence alone did not exert a statistically significant direct effect within the regression model. These findings suggest that active engagement and meaningful digital interaction are more influential than passive social media exposure in shaping tourism perceptions. The study contributes theoretically by extending the application of Media System Dependency Theory within digital tourism communication and destination branding research. Practically, the findings provide important implications for destination marketing organisations, tourism stakeholders, and policymakers in Johor Bahru. Tourism promotion strategies should prioritise interactive social media engagement, user generated content, and strategic influencer collaborations to strengthen destination competitiveness and audience engagement among digitally connected young travellers. The study also highlights the increasing importance of data driven digital tourism marketing approaches in enhancing destination visibility and sustaining tourism growth within contemporary digital communication environments.

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# Strengthening Tourist Revisit Intention Through Social Media Marketing and Quality Tourism Facilities at TMII

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 18/5/2026

Accepted : 17/6/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Social Media Marketing;  
Tourism Facilities;  
Visiting Decision;  
Revisit Intention; Tourist  
Loyalty

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Research paper

**Abstract** - This study examines how social media marketing and tourism facilities affect tourists' visits and revisits to Taman Mini Indonesia Indah. The research strategy was quantitative, and the tool used was survey. Data were acquired by distributing surveys to 200 TMII visitors. The gathered data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) with the use of SmartPLS. The analysis examined variable correlations using validity, reliability, and hypothesis testing. The results show that social media marketing and tourism facilities have a good and significant effect on tourists' visiting decisions. Also, social media marketing has a good and considerable effect on revisit intention. However, tourism facilities had no substantial direct effect on revisit intention. Meanwhile, Visiting decision is an important factor influencing tourist's inclination to revisit TMII. The findings imply that efficient social media marketing tactics and excellent visitor experiences are vital in driving repeat visitation and in enhancing tourist loyalty. This study is confined to TMII visitors and may not accurately reflect travelers in other destinations. Future studies should use wider samples and other variables relevant to tourist behaviour. Tourism managers need to improve guest experiences and enhance digital marketing methods to boost revisit intention. The study contributes to the development of sustainable tourism through the increased visitor interaction and attractiveness of destination. This study shows how social media marketing, tourism amenities, visiting decisions, and revisit intention affect Indonesian tourism locations.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a key industrial sector contributing to Indonesia's economic growth. The tourism industry is expected to play a central role in the regional economy. Along with social progress and technological advancements, the tourism sector has undergone a significant transformation, particularly in marketing practices and

service delivery to tourists. Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII) is one such destination that plays a crucial role in national tourism development. TMII serves not only as a cultural and educational tourism landmark but also as a preferred destination for domestic and international tourists.

As a leading tourist destination in Jakarta, TMII faces the challenge of maintaining and increasing visitor numbers amidst increasingly fierce competition. In addition to competing destinations, TMII must adapt to changing tourist destination selection behavior. Today's tourists expect friendly, timely, and professional service. They expect accurate and up-to-date information on operating hours, ticket prices, and tourist activities, as well as well-managed basic services such as ticket sales, supervision, and cleanliness (Nisak et al., 2024). Modern tourists increasingly rely on social media information when deciding whether to visit. Advances in information technology have impacted various aspects of life, including the tourism industry. The most prominent change is the adoption of social media as an effective marketing tool (social media marketing). Social media platforms enable tourism operators to reach a wider audience, increase engagement, and strengthen the destination's image. Conversely, inadequate social media management can hinder the effective dissemination of information about TMII to the public.

Social media is a digital platform or channel for online social interaction. Users can communicate, exchange messages, share content, and build social networks. In Indonesia, using social media to promote tourist destinations has become a key strategy, given the high levels of internet and social media use. In this context, social media marketing strategies are highly relevant for TMII managers who aim to attract new visitors and retain existing ones. Research by Wijayanti et al. (2024) shows that social media marketing has a

positive impact on visitors' decision-making and return intentions.

Tourist facilities are the physical services and amenities provided by site managers to support tourism activities at a location (Murdani & Martha, 2023). The availability and quality of these facilities, as well as promotional programs, play a critical role in shaping visitor satisfaction. Adequate facilities, such as cleanliness, comfort, security, and accessibility, are key factors influencing the tourist experience (Kotler et al., 2016). These facilities support tourist activities during visits and participation in on-site programs. These facilities influence consumer decisions, especially when price differences between service providers are not significant. According to Cholis et al. (2023), the more comprehensive and high-quality the facilities available, the more likely consumers are to choose a service provider based on perceived value and comfort. TMII facilities require improvements and updates to meet increasingly high visitor expectations. This challenge is exacerbated by changing tourist behavior, with visitors becoming increasingly selective in choosing destinations that are safe, comfortable, and offer experiences (Gretzel, 2021). As tourist mobility increases, factors such as the completeness of facilities and promotional strategies become key considerations in decision-making. Facilities contribute to visitor comfort during activities, and high-quality facilities can increase positive perceptions and overall customer satisfaction (Rahmadi, 2021).

The visit decision is the stage at which consumers decide to purchase or exchange money for the right to use goods or services (Hapsara & Ahmadi, 2022). To improve decision-making, managers must consider a destination's attractiveness and its surrounding facilities. Revisit intention refers to a tourist's desire or tendency to return to a destination in the future, influenced by

positive impressions obtained during a previous visit (Abdon Elake et al., 2024). According to Khoni'ah & Sidanti (2022), the intention to revisit reflects a customer's willingness to make repeat purchases in the future as a direct response to an initial purchase within a certain period. Meanwhile, according to Abdurrohman and Wibawanto (2021), revisit intention is a tourist behavior that responds positively to service quality, thereby motivating repeat visits. Revisit intention within a certain time period indicates loyalty to a destination (X. Chen et al., 2020).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Social Media Marketing

Social media-based marketing is a digital marketing method that uses online networking channels to introduce and market a product (Satria Nugraha & Adialita, 2021). Taan et al. (2023) define social media marketing as a strategy that involves promoting on social networking sites to increase awareness, recall, and response to a brand, product, business, individual, or other entity. Social media allows users to communicate, share information, and interact. It is an integral element of contemporary life and offers great potential for organizations and brands to achieve their goals. A clear understanding of the benefits of social media enables companies to make informed decisions and use social media platforms as effective marketing tools (Hasniaty et al., 2022). Marketing using social media is a sales method that leverages electronic tools to attract buyers, improve the company's image, and drive sales of goods or services.

Social media provides opportunities for interaction using text, images, audio, and video. Social media marketing involves promoting products or services on online social media platforms by uploading relevant content, such as

images and videos (Kotler & Keller, 2016). With advances in information technology, social media has become a primary means for companies to communicate directly with users. With its interactive features, companies can deliver promotional messages more quickly, effectively, and precisely. Using engaging, creative, and consistent content not only helps build relationships with customers but also expands market reach. In this way, social media marketing can significantly contribute to increasing and achieving sales targets.

Social media marketing is a way to promote a business that is accessible to everyone, enabling a broader reach. Therefore, it can be concluded that social media marketing is an activity that uses social media platforms to increase business visibility online and to advertise products and services. Social media sites help build positive relationships between people and businesses. Through social media, people can exchange ideas, information, and even communicate with one another. Augustine and Sulaiman (2024) found that social media marketing and recreational facilities influence visitors' intention to return. This finding is supported by Kristia and Irmawati (2024), who also showed that social media marketing positively influences visitation intentions, particularly through creative and interactive content.

Gunelius (S. Gunelius, 2011) identified four indicators of social media marketing: content creation, content sharing, connection building, and community development (trust). These indicators aim to attract user attention, expand reach, and strengthen personal relationships with users. Furthermore, context, communication, collaboration, and connection are important metrics for evaluating the success of social media marketing, ultimately contributing to increased awareness, trust, and sales (Kristia & Irmawati, 2024). Based on this description, the following

hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is an influence of social media marketing on visiting decisions

H2: If social media marketing is good, it can increase interest in returning visitors.

## 2.2 Tourist Facilities

Tourist facilities include amenities provided and enjoyed by visitors, specifically for guests and other visitors. Tourist facilities are crucial components that influence the visitor experience at a destination. These facilities assist visitors in carrying out desired activities, thereby ensuring a satisfying recreational experience (Abdon Elake et al., 2024). Tourist facilities also play a crucial role in determining tourist visit decisions. Factors such as cleanliness, comfort, completeness of supporting facilities, and ease of access are key determinants of a positive experience (Mella & Hulu, 2023).

Good facilities can attract visitors and are essential for tourism development because they shape expectations and perceptions, helping align visitors' expectations with actual conditions. Therefore, visitors often prefer destinations with appropriate facilities (Wulandari, 2022). Sekartjakrarini (2015) stated that tourism facilities are a key factor in developing tourism products because they provide convenience, comfort, health, cleanliness, security, and safety for tourists. Yulita and Safrizal (2023) stated that facilities encompass all amenities provided by operators to meet tourists' emotional and functional needs and to create comfort in using services. Nurmala et al. (2020) proposed that facility evaluation should include cleanliness, aesthetic quality, completeness, and security. Thus, it can be concluded that tourism facilities are places that provide services to visitors and help them feel comfortable when visiting a tourist destination. Research conducted by Dewi and Purnomo (2022) showed that facility variables positively influence tourists' intention to revisit a

tourist destination. From this description, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H3: There is an influence of tourist facilities on the decision to visit

H4: If tourism facilities are good, it can increase the likelihood of a repeat visit.

## 2.3 Decision to Visit

The decision to visit is a form of consumer belief and attitude that is influenced by the process and includes an action. The decision to visit a destination arises when someone decides to go on vacation, beginning with gathering information about the destination. This activity aims to identify the needs required during the trip. Visitors can obtain the information they need quickly and accurately, thereby helping them make decisions that align with their needs (Sepdwiyan Donargo et al., 2022).

According to Kotler & Keller (2016), the purchase decision indicator describes the purchasing decision-making process as a series of steps consumers follow when purchasing goods or services. This process includes the stages consumers go through during the purchasing process, such as problem identification, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. This process is comparable to the purchase decision-making process.

1. Problem identification: Purchasing begins when the customer recognizes a problem and a need that must be met.
2. Information search: People influenced by desires may try to find additional relevant information through exploring the expansion of their desired needs.
3. Evaluation of alternatives: The process of analyzing various options and is determined to meet the buyer's needs.
4. Decision to visit: The decision to visit this

4. situation is included in the situation and is truly related to the transaction.
5. Post-Visit Behavior: The salesperson's role extends beyond the customer's purchase and visit; it continues, and this responsibility doesn't end after the transaction. After the customer completes the transaction, the traveler will experience satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the product they chose.

Research conducted by Maulana et al. (2025) found that tourists' tourism experience and satisfaction significantly influence their decision to return. The decision to visit and the experience gained play a significant role as intervening variables linking tourism quality to return intention. Based on this description, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H5: The decision to visit influences tourists' return.

## 2.4 Interest in Returning

Revisit intention is the future intention to return to a tourist destination, formed from perceptions of the destination's quality, satisfaction, and reputation (C. Chen & Tsai, 2007). Revisit intention is achieved through customer satisfaction, which can lead someone to return, build loyalty to a product or service, or remain loyal to a frequently visited location. This drive arises because customers have had the same service before and want to share their positive experiences with others. (Rizkiana et al., 2025). According to Cheng and Lu (2013), the intention to revisit has several stages that can serve as a reference for observing the process of repeat purchase intention in individuals. Indicators of these stages include:

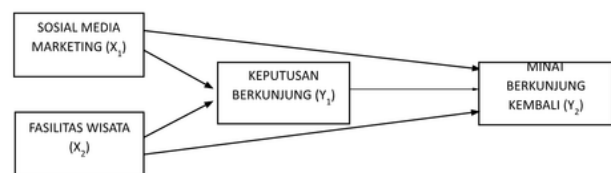
1. Revisiting Intention - The desire of visitors to return to a tourist destination after having had a previous experience at that location.
2. Recommendation Intention - Visitors' desire to recommend a tourist destination they've visited to those closest to them, such as friends,

3. relatives, or family. This intention arises because the destination is perceived as meeting their travel needs.
4. Promotion Intention - The desire of visitors to promote a tourist destination to a wider audience after visiting and doing activities there.

\_Revisit intention is influenced by many factors. According to Sappewali et al. (2022), tourist attractions are the main factor driving visits, comprising aspects that attract and satisfy tourists to a destination. Tourists' knowledge of a place, including its geography, demographics, facilities, climate, history, culture, attractions, and safety, plays a crucial role in shaping positive perceptions of a destination, thereby increasing the likelihood of repeat visits. A strong destination, whether through its natural beauty, comprehensive facilities, or quality of service, can shape positive perceptions that motivate tourists to return (Hernawati, 2025).

## 2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework aims to determine the influence of variables on one another. The independent variables in this study are Social Media Marketing (X1) and Tourism Facilities (X2). The dependent variables are Visiting Decision (Y1) and Returning Intention (Y2). Based on the relationship between the variables, the conceptual framework can be formulated as follows:



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design



This study applies quantitative technique with cross-sectional survey design to examine the interaction among Social Media Marketing, Tourist Facilities, Visiting Decision and Revisit Intention at Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII), Jakarta. Primary data were collected by a questionnaire on a 1–5 Likert scale.

### *3.2 Population and Sample*

The demographic of this study was tourists who visited Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII) Jakarta. Because there was no sampling frame of all TMII visitors, purposive sampling was used in this study. The technique was considered appropriate because the study needed respondents who matched the eligibility requirements and had sufficient experience or exposure to TMII to evaluate the research constructs.

The criteria of respondents were: (1) minimum 17 years old; (2) have visited Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII); (3) have sufficient knowledge or experience of TMII to evaluate its tourism facilities and visiting experience; and (4) voluntarily filled the questionnaire. Respondents were asked about their frequency of visit and sources of information on TMII to make sure their answers met the objectives of the study.

Two hundred valid questionnaires were returned and used for analysis. The researchers employed purposive sampling to acquire respondents that were deemed to be relevant to the research environment and competent to offer informed judgements on Social Media Marketing, Tourist Facilities, Visiting Decision and Revisit Intention.

### *3.3 Data Collection Procedure*

Data collection was done by distributing questionnaires directly at TMII and also through an

online survey. The questionnaire was composed of assessments of Social Media Marketing, Tourist Facilities, Visiting Decision, and Revisit Intention plus respondent's attributes. Data collection occurred in January to February 2026.

### *3.4 Measurement Instrument*

The research instrument was adapted from the indicators of prior investigations. Social Media Marketing is adopted from Gunelius (2011); Tourist Facilities from Sekartjakrarini (Sekartjakrarini, 2015); Visiting Decision from Kotler and Keller (2016); and Revisit Intention from Cheng & Lu (2013). All indicators were measured via a 1-5 Likert scale.

### *3.5 Measurement Model Specification*

All constructs were stated as reflective constructs, where the indicators are assumed to be manifestations of their underlying latent variables and are expected to alter in response to changes in the constructs. Social Media Marketing was measured by content creation, content sharing, connection building, and trust. Tourist Facilities were measured by convenience, comfort, health, cleanliness, security and safety. Visiting Decision was measured by problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, visiting decision and post-visit behaviour. Revisit Intention was measured by revisiting, recommendation and promotion intentions.

The reflecting measurement model was evaluated by the indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator reliability, internal consistency and convergent validity were examined by outer loadings, composite reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), respectively. Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell & Larcker criterion. All the assessments

were consistent with the stated PLS-SEM standards.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

The data were analysed by Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) since this study intends to investigate the explanatory and predictive links between Social Media Marketing, Tourist Facilities, Visiting Decision, and Revisit Intention. PLS-SEM is excellent for prediction-oriented research and models with many latent constructs.

The analysis was performed in two steps. First, the measuring model was tested to evaluate the reliability and validity of the constructs based on the outer loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity. Second, the structural model was evaluated in terms of the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>), the variance inflation factor (VIF), the effect size (f<sup>2</sup>), the predictive relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>), and the path coefficients.

The significance of the hypothesised correlations was tested by bootstrapping. The link was significant when p-value was less than 0.05 and t-statistics was greater than 1.96. Interpretation considered both statistical significance and size of the correlations. PLS-SEM was deemed adequate

with 200 respondents as it does not impose tight assumptions of multivariate normality and enables the evaluation of the proposed model's explanatory and predictive capacities.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Respondent Description

Respondent descriptions explain the characteristics of individuals who participated in this study as questionnaire respondents. Based on the study results, which involved 200 respondents through questionnaire distribution, the following characteristics were identified.

Based on the data in the Table 1, the respondents in this study were mostly female, namely 107 people (53.5%). Furthermore, based on age, the majority were 21-30 years old, containing 151 people (75.5%). Next, based on residence, the majority of respondents lived in Jabodetabek, namely 174 people (87%). Based on occupation, most respondents worked as employees, namely 81 people (40.5%). Furthermore, the majority of respondents had visited TMII 2-3 times, namely 91 people (45.5%). Respondents knew TMII more through social media, namely 106 people (53%). The main reason respondents visited TMII was that it was a suitable place for family tourism, namely 131 people (65.5%).

**Table 1.** Respondent description

| Demographics | Frequency                        | N   | %    |
|--------------|----------------------------------|-----|------|
| Gender       | Man                              | 93  | 46.5 |
|              | Woman                            | 107 | 53.5 |
| Age          | < 20 Years                       | 25  | 12.5 |
|              | 21 - 30 Years                    | 151 | 75.5 |
|              | 31 - 40 Years                    | 21  | 10.5 |
|              | > 41 Years                       | 3   | 1.5  |
| Residence    | Greater Jakarta                  | 174 | 87   |
|              | Outside Jabodetabek              | 26  | 13   |
| Work         | Employee                         | 81  | 40.5 |
|              | Indonesian National Armed Forces | 38  | 19   |
|              | Indonesian National Police       | 21  | 10.5 |

Table 1. Continued

| Demographics                          | Frequency                            | N   | %    |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|------|
|                                       | Self-employed<br>Students            | 60  | 30   |
| How many times have you visited TMII? | First time                           | 40  | 20   |
|                                       | 2 – 3                                | 91  | 45.5 |
|                                       | 4 – 5                                | 35  | 17.5 |
|                                       | > 5                                  | 34  | 17   |
| How did you hear about TMII?          | Brochure                             | 1   | 0.5  |
|                                       | Advertisement                        | 5   | 2.5  |
|                                       | Social media                         | 106 | 53   |
|                                       | Friends/Relatives                    | 88  | 44   |
| What's interesting about TMII?        | Dancing Fountain                     | 1   | 0.5  |
|                                       | Complete Public Facilities           | 25  | 12.5 |
|                                       | Affordable Ticket Prices (Discount)  | 43  | 21.5 |
|                                       | A Perfect Place for Family Vacations | 131 | 65.5 |
| Total                                 |                                      | 200 | 100  |

Source: Primary Data

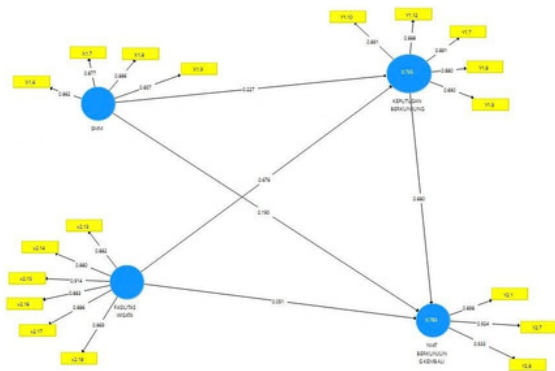


Figure 2. The Results of Full Model Analysis (Processed Data, 2025)

Table 2 indicates that all external loading values exceed 0.7. This shows that every indication for every variable is trustworthy, that the indicators are important for measuring the variables, and that the measurement model as a whole is strong. Consequently, the measurement model in this study satisfies the criteria for convergent validity and is prepared to advance to the structural equation modeling phase.

Table 2. Measurement model

| Variable           | Indicator                                         | Item  | Loading Factor | Composite Reliability | AVE   |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------|----------------|-----------------------|-------|
| SMM                | 1. Content Creation                               | X1.6  | 0.862          | 0.926                 | 0.758 |
|                    | 2. Content Sharing                                | X1.7  | 0.877          |                       |       |
|                    | 3. Connection Building                            | X1.8  | 0.886          |                       |       |
|                    | 4. Trust<br>(S. Gunelius, 2011)                   | X1.9  | 0.857          |                       |       |
| Tourist Facilities | 1. Convenience                                    | X1.13 | 0.882          | 0.956                 | 0.785 |
|                    | 2. Comfort                                        | X1.14 | 0.880          |                       |       |
|                    | 3. Health                                         | X1.15 | 0.914          |                       |       |
|                    | 4. Cleanliness                                    | X1.16 | 0.883          |                       |       |
|                    | 5. Security                                       | X1.17 | 0.886          |                       |       |
|                    | 6. Safety<br>(Sekartjakrarini, 2015)              | X1.18 | 0.869          |                       |       |
| Decision to Visit  | 1. Problem Introduction                           | Y1.10 | 0.891          | 0.949                 | 0.789 |
|                    | 2. Information Search                             | Y1.12 | 0.888          |                       |       |
|                    | 3. Alternative Evaluation                         | Y1.7  | 0.891          |                       |       |
|                    | 4. Decision to Visit                              | Y1.8  | 0.880          |                       |       |
|                    | 5. Post-Visit Behavior<br>(Kotler & Keller, 2016) | Y1.9  | 0.890          |                       |       |

**Table 2:** Continued

| Variable              | Indicator                  | Item | Loading Factor | Composite Reliability | AVE   |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|------|----------------|-----------------------|-------|
| Interest in Returning | 1.Revisiting Intention     | Y2.1 | 0.898          | 0.942                 | 0.843 |
|                       | 2.Recommendation Intention | Y2.7 | 0.924          |                       |       |
|                       | 3.Promotion Intention      | Y2.8 | 0.933          |                       |       |
|                       | (Cheng & Lu, 2013)         |      |                |                       |       |

Source: Primary Data

#### 4.2 Discriminant Validity

Table 3 shows that each indicator item has the highest loading on the latent construct it measures.

The data obtained showed that social media marketing (0.871), tourism facilities (0.886), decision to visit (0.888), and intention to revisit (0.918) were significant.

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity of the Fornell-Larcker criteria

| Variables              | Tourist Facilities | Decision to Visit | Interest in Returning | Social Media Marketing |
|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Tourist Facilities     | 1.0.886            |                   |                       |                        |
| Decision to Visit      | 1.0.866            | 0.888             |                       |                        |
| Interest in Returning  | 1.0.799            | 0.875             | 0.918                 |                        |
| Social Media Marketing | 1.0.839            | 0.794             | 0.772                 | 0.871                  |

Source: Primary Data

#### 4.3 R-Square Test

The R-Squared test evaluates the degree to which independent factors affect the dependent variable. According to Table 4, the R<sup>2</sup> values for the decision to visit and the intention to revisit are

0.765 and 0.783, respectively. This suggests that social media marketing and tourist facilities have a 76.5% influence on the decision to visit. The intention to revisit is influenced by the decision to visit, as indicated by 78.3% of respondents.

**Table 4.** R-Square

|                       | R Square | R Square Adjusted |
|-----------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Decision to Visit     | 1.0.765  | 0.762             |
| Interest in Returning | 1.0.783  | 0.779             |
| Decision to Visit     | 1.0.765  | 0.762             |

Source: Primary Data

#### 4.4 Multicollinearity Test

A multicollinearity test is a test used to determine whether there is a relationship among the independent variables in a regression model. This

examination aims to ensure that these variables can stand alone in the regression model without influencing each other. A commonly used cutoff value for multicollinearity is a tolerance  $\leq 10$

(Ghozali, 2021). If the VIF is >10 or the tolerance is <0.1, multicollinearity is present. If the VIF is <10 or the tolerance is >0.1, multicollinearity is not present.

The results of the inner model multicollinearity test in Table 5 indicate that all

inner VIF values are <10, which means there is no multicollinearity between constructs, with values ranging from 3.384 to 5.325. Therefore, these data indicate that there is no multicollinearity among the latent variables in the structural model in this study, so the study can proceed.

**Table 5.** Co-ordination

|                          | <b>Tourist Facilities</b> | <b>Decision to Visit</b> | <b>Interest in Returning</b> | <b>SMM</b> |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Tourist Facilities       |                           | 3,384                    | 5,325                        |            |
| Decision to Visit        |                           |                          | 4,252                        |            |
| Intention to Visit Again |                           |                          |                              |            |

Source: Primary Data

#### 4.5 Effect Size ( $f^2$ )

As shown in Table 6 above, is used to assess the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Based on the standard assessment criteria, an F-squared value above 0.02 indicates small influence, above 0.15 indicates medium influence, and above 0.35 indicates large influence. A value less than 0.02 is interpreted as having no effect (Hair et al., 2021).

Referring to Table 4, the decision to visit variable is influenced by the independent variables, with an R-squared of 0.765. In the decision to visit variable, the SMM variable has a small influence (0.064), while the tourism facilities variable has a large influence (0.574). In the intention-to-revisit variable, the SMM shows a small influence (0.046), while the tourism facilities variable shows no influence (0.002), and the decision to visit shows a large influence (0.501).

**Table 6.** F-Square

|                          | <b>Tourist Facilities</b> | <b>Decision to Visit</b> | <b>Interest in Returning</b> | <b>SMM</b> |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Tourist Facilities       |                           | 0.574                    | 0.002                        |            |
| Decision to Visit        |                           |                          | 0.501                        |            |
| Intention to Visit Again |                           |                          |                              |            |
| SMM                      |                           | 0.064                    | 0.046                        |            |

Source: Primary Data

This study employed testing with SRMR, an acronym for Standardized Root Mean Square Residual. Hair et al. (2021) assert that an SRMR score under 0.08 signifies a satisfactory model fit. Hu and Bentler (1999) asserted that an SRMR

score under 0.08 signifies a satisfactory model fit. Hu and Bentler (1999) asserted that an SRMR value of 0.08 signifies a favorable model fit. Moreover, Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003) assert that an SRMR score below 0.10 is deemed



acceptable (indicating an adequate fit). According to Table 7, the SRMR value of 0.044 indicates that

the model is acceptable.

**Table 7.** SRMR

|      | Saturated Model | Estimated Model |
|------|-----------------|-----------------|
| SRMR | 1.0.044         | 0.044           |
| NFI  | 1.0.884         | 0.884           |

Source: Primary Data

In Table 8, the Q2 value measures the accuracy of a model's predictions. A model is considered to have good predictive ability if the Q2 value is above 0. However, if the Q2 value is negative, it indicates that the model cannot predict

well (Musyaffi et al., 2022). Table 8 shows that the variables for decision to visit (0.595) and intention to revisit (0.650) have values higher than 0.000. This indicates that the model has good predictions.

**Table 8.** Q2

|                          | SSO       | SSE      | Q <sup>2</sup> (=1-SSE/SSO) |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------------------------|
| Tourist Facilities       | 1200,000  | 1200,000 |                             |
| Decision to Visit        | 1,000,000 | 405,007  | 0.595                       |
| Intention to Visit Again | 600,000   | 210,256  | 0.650                       |
| SMM                      | 800,000   | 800,000  |                             |

Source: Primary Data

#### 4.6 Hypothesis Testing

The purpose of hypothesis testing is to determine

whether a hypothesis or assumption is statistically true or false, and to decide whether to accept or reject it.

**Table 9.** Path coefficient

|                                                | Original Sample (O) | T Statistics ( O/STDEV ) | P Values | Result       |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Tourist Facilities → Decision to Visit         | 0.676               | 9,439                    | 0.000    | Accepted     |
| Tourist Facilities → Interest in Returning     | 0.051               | 0.609                    | 0.543    | Not Accepted |
| Visiting Decision → Returning Intention        | 0.680               | 8,310                    | 0.000    | Accepted     |
| Social Media Marketing → Visiting Decision     | 0.227               | 2,961                    | 0.003    | Accepted     |
| Social Media Marketing → Interest in Returning | 0.190               | 2,582                    | 0.010    | Accepted     |

Source: Primary Data

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Effect of Social Media Marketing on Decision to Visit

The results showed that Social Media Marketing has a favourable and substantial effect on Visiting Decision ( $\beta = 0.227$ ,  $t = 2.961$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). This finding shows that social media has a vital role in influencing travellers to decide to visit TMII. This is explained by the function of social media as a source of information in the tourism decision-making process. Tourists need knowledge on attractions, activities, facilities, costs, accessibility, and expected experiences before they visit a destination. Visual, interactive, and easily available ways to provide this information are made possible by social media. This allows guests to get information about the destination and to evaluate TMII before making a decision to visit.

This interpretation is corroborated by the profile of respondents. Social media was the most common source of knowledge regarding TMII, with 106 respondents (53%) reporting that they obtained their information from social media. This result shows that social media is not only a vehicle of promotion but also an important channel of information in the destination selection process. Thus, from a managerial standpoint, TMII should give priority to the informational and interactive content of social media. Add to the promotional content practical information on attractions, activities, facilities, prices, operating information, and visitor experiences. Such content could lessen information confusion and help tourists' decision-making. This finding is consistent with the findings of Iqbal et al. (2025) and of Wijayanti et al. (2024) who discovered that social media marketing had a substantial effect on tourists' visiting decisions. The results further support the concept that social media is not only a promotional medium but also a significant source of information in aiding tourists

in evaluating and selecting tourism sites.

### 5.2 Impact of Social Media Marketing on Revisit Intention

Social Media Marketing has a favourable and substantial impact on Revisit Intention ( $\beta = 0.190$ ,  $t = 2.582$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ). It implies that the role of social media does not end once the tourist has made the first visit. Repeated exposure to destination-related content could sustain the tourists' awareness of TMII and increase the interest to revisit. This is consistent with prior tourism studies which found that social media marketing could affect tourists' future behavioural intentions. Social media allows locations the opportunity to inform tourists about new attractions, events, deals and experiences, following their first visit. This type of communication can serve as a reminder of the destination, providing tourists with fresh reasons to contemplate a repeat visit. This shows that TMII's social media approach should be aimed at not only future visitors, but also former visitors (Denita et al., 2025; Wilopo & Nuralam, 2025). Information for prior guests may include new attractions, seasonal activities, events, family programs, and updates or upgrades to destination amenities. Thus, social media might be an effective tool not only for the acquisition of visitors but also for the retention of visitors.

### 5.3 The Impact of Tourist Facilities on the Decision to Visit

Tourist Facilities are the most influential factor in the visiting decision in the suggested model ( $\beta = 0.676$ ,  $t = 9.439$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This research indicates that physical amenities and supporting facilities of TMII are very essential factors influencing tourists' decisions to visit. The path coefficient is significantly higher than Social Media Marketing, which indicates that despite the importance of digital communication, tourists' destination choices

and overall evaluation.

This outcome is particularly significant to TMII because the location attracts people for relaxation, culture, and family-oriented activities. Therefore, visitors need to have facilities that enable them to perform numerous types of activities and provide convenience throughout their stay. Therefore, the upgrading of amenities can boost the trust of travellers to pick TMII as their tourism destination. From the administrative standpoint, TMII should continue to maintain the quality and accessibility of supporting facilities. Facility management should not only increase the quantity of facilities, but also ensure cleanliness, comfort, safety, accessibility, and usability.

#### *5.4 Effect of Tourism Facilities on Revisit Intention*

Contrary to the strong effect of the Tourist Facilities on Visiting Decision, the Tourist Facilities do not have a significant direct effect on Revisit Intention ( $\beta = 0.051$ ,  $t = 0.609$ ,  $p = 0.543$ ). The result suggests that the availability or quality of the amenities is not sufficient to create the tourists' intention to return to TMII. This conclusion is different from the result of Dewi and Purnomo (2022), who found that the association between tourism facilities and revisit intention was favourable. The difference can be linked to various characteristics of the locations and responders. Facilities may be quite essential when tourists initially assess whether a site is acceptable for a visit. The choice to return may involve additional psychological and experiential elements.

The finding is crucial because it distinguishes between the role of amenities in initial destination choice and that in future behavioural intention (Tarigan & Mary, 2024). The necessary environment for a pleasant visit can be created by facilities, but tourists may need other reasons to return, such as new experiences,

destination image, satisfaction, perceived value, emotional attachment, or fresh attractions. Therefore, TMII administrators should not rely solely on facility enhancements to boost repeat visitation. Facility quality must be complemented by experience-oriented programming, engaging destination communication, and constant expansion of attractions and activities.

#### *5.5 The influence of Visiting Decision on Revisit Intention*

Visiting Decision had a favourable and significant effect on Revisit Intention ( $\beta = 0.680$ ,  $t = 8.310$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This is the strongest structural relationship involving Revisit Intention in the present model. The finding implies that the visiting decision of the visitors is significantly related to their further desire to revisit TMII. The finding implies a relationship between location choice and future behavioural intention. A positive decision by tourists to visit a destination might provide a significant basis for considering the destination again in the future. The first decision is in the assessment of the destination by the tourists and their readiness to spend resources for the visit.

This conclusion also explains why Visiting Decision has a significant direct effect on Revisit Intention (Asmoro & Tuti, 2023). Facilities may be the initial factor that contributes to the formulation of a favourable visiting choice, while the latter intention to revisit may be based on a more general appraisal of the location. Thus, the finding points to the necessity of conceptualising the tourism choice process as a sequence rather than as fragmented links. TMII needs to be a compelling first choice destination, and the actual visit will need to offer enough value and reason for subsequent trips.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Research indicates that social media marketing

significantly influences an individual's decision to visit TMII, as well as their likelihood of returning, in the context of tourism facilities. Tourists are more likely to patronize a business with an effective social media marketing strategy. Tourist amenities exert a favorable and substantial influence on visitation rates. This indicates that tourists' choices are affected by comprehensive, enjoyable amenities and high-quality services. Social media marketing enhances intents to revisit. This indicates that social media marketing and appealing content can incentivize tourists to revisit. The influence of visitor amenities on return is inconsequential. The deficiency in security and sanitation at TMII's tourism facilities may dissuade individuals from revisiting, so diminishing the site's visual appeal, which is essential for attracting visitors. The decision to visit favorably influences the inclination to return. Favorable visitor experiences will promote return visits.

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# Tourist Experience at Cultural Destinations: An Empirical Study on the Role of Smart Tourism Technologies

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 28/5/2026

Accepted : 17/6/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Smart Tourism  
Technologies; Cultural  
Tourism; Tourist  
Experience; Technology-  
Enhanced Tourism  
Experience; Cultural  
Destinations

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Research paper

**Abstract** - This study examines the relationship between Smart Tourism Technologies (STTs) and Overall Tourist Experience at cultural destinations. It further considers tourist experience through five dimensions: Satisfaction, Engagement, Learning and Knowledge, Convenience, and Emotional Experience. A quantitative, descriptive-analytical design was adopted. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale and convenience sampling. Data from 61 valid responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, exploratory factor analysis, and linear regression in SPSS. The findings indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship between STTs and Overall Tourist Experience ( $\beta = .590$ ,  $R^2 = .349$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Significant positive relationships were also observed across all five dimensions, with the strongest relationship found for Satisfaction ( $\beta = .592$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the weakest for Convenience ( $\beta = .376$ ,  $p = .003$ ). The study provides empirical evidence for understanding technology-enhanced tourist experiences in cultural destinations. Drawing on the technology-enhanced tourism experience perspective, the findings suggest that the role of smart technologies extends beyond functional convenience to include tourists' evaluative, engaging, cognitive, and emotional experiences.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has undergone a substantial digital transformation as technologies have become increasingly embedded in destination operations and tourist activities. Smart Tourism Technologies (STTs), including mobile applications, social media, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things (IoT), have expanded the ways in which tourists access information, communicate with destinations, make decisions, and interact with tourism environments (Gretzel et al., 2015; Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). The increasing use of digital platforms for travel planning, navigation, information

search, and experience sharing has consequently made technology an important part of contemporary tourism practices (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Law et al., 2010). Beyond operational efficiency, the growing integration of these technologies has also drawn attention to their role in shaping tourists' perceptions and experiences.

Smart tourism represents a broader transformation of tourism systems in which digital infrastructure, connected services, data, and technological applications are brought together to create more responsive tourism environments (Gretzel, 2018; Wu et al., 2024). Technologies can provide tourists with timely information, facilitate interaction, and support more personalised forms of destination engagement. Mobile technologies can also mediate tourists' interactions with destinations by influencing how information and experiences are accessed during travel (Wang et al., 2013). This development has gradually shifted attention from technology as a means of service delivery towards technology as part of the tourism experience itself. Previous research has consequently examined the role of digital technologies in areas such as accessibility, interaction, personalisation, satisfaction, and experiential value (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Liberato et al., 2018; Alnawafleh et al., 2025).

This shift is particularly relevant to cultural tourism, where the value of the destination is closely connected with history, heritage, traditions, identity, and cultural expression. Cultural tourism encompasses experiences associated with both tangible resources, such as monuments, buildings, museums, and artefacts, and intangible elements, including traditions, rituals, customs, and other cultural expressions (Dela Santa & Tiatco, 2019). Cultural destinations also contribute to local economic development, employment, destination identity, and the preservation and presentation of

cultural resources (Shankar, 2015; Irandu & Shah, 2016). At the same time, cultural heritage is not simply a collection of physical resources. Its interpretation and representation can vary according to institutional, social, and cultural perspectives, making the visitor experience an important part of how heritage is encountered and understood.

The application of smart technologies provides new possibilities for this experience. Augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), mobile applications, QR-based information systems, and digital interpretation tools can provide additional information and alternative ways of engaging with cultural resources (Fadli et al., 2022; Pervolarakis et al., 2023). Such technologies can allow visitors to access information at the point of experience, explore historical narratives, and interact with destination content through digital interfaces. Consequently, technology can extend the ways in which tourists encounter cultural resources beyond conventional forms of interpretation. However, the value of such technologies cannot be understood solely in terms of their technical functionality; their relevance also depends on how they become incorporated into the tourist experience.

This experiential dimension has received increasing attention in tourism technology research. Neuhofer et al. (2012) conceptualised technology-enhanced destination experiences around two important developments: tourists increasingly participate in the co-creation of their experiences, while technology increasingly mediates those experiences. Their subsequent typology further demonstrated that the nature of technology-enhanced tourism experiences varies according to the degree of technology implementation and tourist co-creation (Neuhofer et al., 2014). This perspective provides a useful basis for

understanding Smart Tourism Technologies as more than functional tools and for examining their relationship with different dimensions of tourist experience. Recent empirical synthesis also provides evidence of a positive relationship between smart technology and tourism experience, while identifying informativeness and interactivity as particularly important attributes (Sustacha et al., 2023).

Despite these developments, smart tourism and cultural tourism have often been examined through partially separate research streams. Smart tourism research has frequently concentrated on technological capabilities, destination management, connectivity, and service-related outcomes, whereas cultural tourism research has placed greater emphasis on heritage, authenticity, interpretation, and experiential meaning. Recent work on smart tourism technology in heritage tourism has begun to address this intersection, but empirical attention to tourists' experiences in cultural settings remains limited (Balakrishnan et al., 2023).

The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between Smart Tourism Technologies and Overall Tourist Experience at cultural destinations. Overall Tourist Experience is considered as a multidimensional construct comprising Satisfaction, Engagement, Learning and Knowledge, Convenience, and Emotional Experience. Drawing on the technology-enhanced tourism experience perspective, the study examines whether tourists' engagement with Smart Tourism Technologies is associated with their overall experience and with these individual dimensions. By bringing together smart tourism technology, cultural tourism, and a multidimensional understanding of tourist experience, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence on the role of technology in shaping experiences within culturally significant tourism environments.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Smart Tourism Technologies

The increased use of digital technologies has significantly transformed the tourism industry, contributing to the emergence of smart tourism as an important area of research. Smart tourism destinations utilise advanced technologies to improve connectivity, operational efficiency and overall destination performance. These developments reflect the growing importance of digital infrastructure in optimising tourism resources and enhancing service delivery (Koo et al., 2016). In this context, the integration of smart tourism technologies such as mobile applications, cloud computing, and the Internet of Things has enhanced destinations' competitiveness by improving tourist engagement and service efficiency (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013; Lamsfus et al., 2015).

The role of technology in tourism has grown beyond just operational support. It now shapes how tourists plan, experience, and perceive their travel. More travellers are using digital platforms, especially mobile devices and the internet, to get real-time information during their trips. This change has made the internet a key source of travel information. It greatly affects destination choices and decisions, while also reducing uncertainty in travel planning (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Law et al., 2010). In cultural tourism, access to real-time information can help tourists better understand the historical and cultural significance of the places they visit.

### 2.2 Tourist Experience in Smart Tourism

Recent studies have further detailed how smart tourism technologies affect tourist behaviour. People now see smarter technologies as tools that not only make things easier and more efficient but

also change how tourists view value, decide to use services, and what benefits they get from their experience. While the functionality of technology remains essential, recent research shows that the quality of experience is becoming increasingly important. This quality centres on how user interact with the technology and their satisfaction while using it (Gretzel et al., 2015; Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). The experiential dimension of smart tourism has gained increasing importance in recent studies. Existing literature suggests that experiential dimensions exert a stronger influence on tourists' perceptions and attitudes, as modern tourists increasingly seek meaningful and engaging experiences rather than purely functional efficiency (Buonincontri & Micera, 2016). In this regard, tourist engagement, satisfaction, and co-creation have become important elements in understanding tourism experiences. Visitor engagement has also been examined as a distinct experiential construct in tourism research (Taheri et al., 2014).

The concept of memorable tourism experience has also gained considerable attention in tourism research. Tourist satisfaction is often associated with the extent to which tourism experiences meet tourists' expectations and perceived experiential value (Oliver, 2014). Tourists increasingly seek experiences that are emotionally engaging, meaningful, and personally enriching (Kim et al., 2012; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011). These experiential dimensions are particularly relevant in cultural tourism, where emotional connection and experiential richness are central to tourist satisfaction.

### *2.3 Smart Technologies in Cultural Tourism*

Cultural tourism has emerged as one of the rapidly growing segments within global tourism. Tourists are increasingly moving away from mass tourism and toward more meaningful, experience-oriented travel. Cultural heritage tourism, which involves

engaging with the traditions, history, and identity of destinations, has gained considerable importance in contemporary contemporary tourism studies (Nyaupane et al., 2006; Sethi, 2005). Heritage itself is a complex and evolving concept that includes both tangible artefacts and intangible cultural expressions, and its interpretations often differ among stakeholders (Dela Santa & Tiatco, 2019). In the changing tourism landscape, the integration of smart technologies into cultural destinations has created new opportunities to enhance interpretation, accessibility, and visitor engagement. Technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) allow tourists to visualise historical settings, access layered information, and interact with heritage resources in a more immersive way (Fadli et al., 2022; Pervolarakis et al., 2023). These technologies transform traditional methods of heritage interpretation into more engaging and participatory experiences, thereby enriching tourist interaction with cultural destinations.

However, the development and promotion of cultural tourism also involve several challenges. Conflicts often arise among governments, local communities, and tourism stakeholders regarding the representation and utilisation of cultural resources. In many cases, state-driven narratives dominate heritage interpretation, resulting in selective representations of culture and the marginalisation of alternative community perspectives. This reflects the ideological nature of heritage, in which cultural representation is often linked to social identity and power structures (Lowenthal, 2015; Smith, 2006). Despite the increasing integration of smart technologies within tourism, existing smart tourism frameworks largely reflect an urban bias. Most smart tourism concepts have been developed within the context of smart cities, where infrastructure, mobility systems, and digital connectivity are comparatively advanced



(Gretzel, 2018). This creates limitations when applying smart tourism concepts to culturally distinct destinations, many of which are located in heritage-sensitive or infrastructure-constrained environments.

#### 2.4 Theoretical Foundation

The growing integration of digital technologies into tourism has changed the way destination experiences are created and experienced. Neuhofer et al. (2012) proposed the concept of Technology-Enhanced Destination Experiences to explain this development, emphasising that tourists are increasingly active participants in creating their own experiences, while technology has become an important medium through which these experiences are shaped. From this perspective, technology is not limited to supporting the delivery of tourism services; it can also contribute to creating richer, more interactive destination experiences.

The perspective was further developed by Neuhofer et al. (2014), who demonstrated that technology and tourist involvement can combine in different ways to produce technology-enhanced tourism experiences. Their typology highlights the importance of technology implementation and co-creation in understanding how experiences are enhanced. This provides a useful theoretical basis for examining the relationship between Smart Tourism Technologies and tourists' experiences, particularly when digital tools provide information, facilitate interaction, enhance convenience, and support tourists' engagement with a destination.

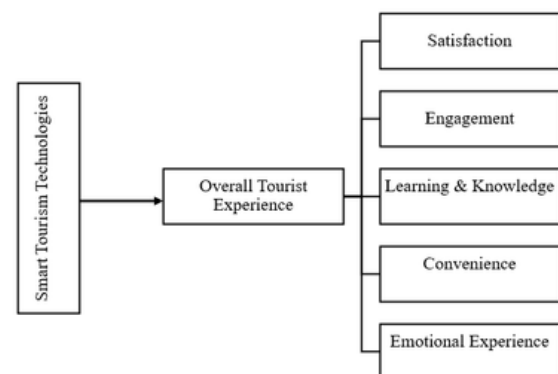
For cultural destinations, this perspective suggests that Smart Tourism Technologies can become part of the tourist experience rather than serving only as functional support. The experience is examined through five dimensions: Satisfaction, Engagement, Learning and Knowledge, Convenience, and Emotional Experience, which

represent different aspects through which tourists may evaluate and experience their visit. Accordingly, the study proposes that the use of Smart Tourism Technologies is positively associated with Overall Tourist Experience and examines this relationship empirically using Pearson's correlation and linear regression analysis.

#### 2.5. Research Gap

Existing studies on smart and cultural tourism have primarily developed through different research streams, with comparatively less attention to their integration. While smart tourism research has focused strongly on technological functionality, connectivity, and destination management, cultural tourism research has given greater attention to authenticity, heritage interpretation, and experiential value (Gretzel, 2018; Balakrishnan et al., 2023). Although recent research has begun to connect smart technologies with heritage tourism, empirical evidence concerning their relationship with tourists' experiences in cultural destinations remains comparatively limited (Balakrishnan et al., 2023; Sustacha et al., 2023).

#### 2.6. Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework of the Study (Developed by the researcher based on Neuhofer et al. (2012, 2014) and relevant literature)

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework developed for the study. The framework proposes a

positive relationship between Smart Tourism Technologies and Overall Tourist Experience at cultural destinations. In the model, Smart Tourism Technologies constitute the independent variable.

Overall Tourist Experience is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct comprising Satisfaction, Engagement, Learning and Knowledge, Convenience, and Emotional Experience. These five dimensions represent different aspects through which tourists may experience and evaluate their visit to a cultural destination. Satisfaction reflects the extent to which the visit meets tourists' expectations; Engagement represents their active involvement and interest during the experience; Learning and Knowledge captures the extent to which the visit contributes to their understanding of the culture and heritage; Convenience reflects the ease of accessing information and completing activities during the visit; and Emotional Experience represents the feelings of enjoyment, connection, and memorability associated with the destination.

The framework is informed by the technology-enhanced tourism experience perspective, which views technology as an element that can become integrated into the tourism experience and contribute to the way tourists interact with and experience a destination (Neuhofer et al., 2012, 2014). Accordingly, the study proposes that Smart Tourism Technologies are positively associated with Overall Tourist Experience. This proposed relationship is examined empirically using Pearson's correlation and linear regression analysis. The five dimensions are used to operationalise the broader Overall Tourist Experience construct and are additionally examined at the dimension level to provide a more detailed understanding of the relationship.

### 2.7. Objectives

- To examine the use of Smart Tourism Technologies at cultural destinations.
- To assess tourists' Overall Tourist Experience at cultural destinations in terms of Satisfaction, Engagement, Learning & Knowledge, Convenience, and Emotional Experience.
- To examine the relationship between Smart Tourism Technologies and Overall Tourist Experience at cultural destinations.
- To examine the relationship between Smart Tourism Technologies and the individual dimensions of Overall Tourist Experience.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative approach to examine tourists' perceptions of Smart Tourism Technologies and their relationship with Overall Tourist Experience at cultural destinations. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using five-point Likert-scale items from tourists who had visited a cultural destination. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables systematic measurement of respondents' perceptions and the statistical examination of relationships among study variables using numerical data (Creswell, 2014). The collected data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, with the methodology covering the research design, data collection, sampling, instrument development, measurement of constructs, and data analysis.

### 3.1 Research Design

The study follows a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive component summarises respondents' characteristics and their perceptions of Smart Tourism Technologies and Overall Tourist Experience using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, while the analytical component examines relationships

among the study variables (Veal, 2018). The analytical component examines the relationships between Smart Tourism Technologies and Overall Tourist Experience using Pearson's correlation and linear regression analysis. Additional regression analyses are conducted to examine the relationships between Smart Tourism Technologies and each of the five dimensions of Overall Tourist Experience: Satisfaction, Engagement, Learning and Knowledge, Convenience, and Emotional Experience.

### 3.2 Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed online to respondents who had visited a cultural destination. The online mode facilitated the distribution of the questionnaire and collection of responses within the study period. Respondents were provided with information about the purpose of the study, and the collected responses were used for statistical analysis of Smart Tourism Technologies and tourist experience.

### 3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study adopted a convenience sampling technique for collecting responses. The technique was considered suitable due to accessibility and time limitations associated with the data collection process. To ensure that the responses were relevant to the study's focus, participants were first screened for their recent experience visiting a cultural destination. Among the 67 responses received, 61 respondents reported having visited a cultural destination, whereas 6 respondents reported no such visit. Since direct experience of a cultural destination was considered necessary to assess the role of smart tourism technologies in the tourist experience, the six responses were excluded from the analysis. The final analysis was therefore based

on 61 eligible responses.

### 3.4 Instrument Design

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire developed to collect information on respondents' use and perceptions of Smart Tourism Technologies and their experience at cultural destinations. The questionnaire was developed with reference to the study objectives and relevant literature on smart tourism and technology-enhanced tourism experiences. The instrument included demographic and visit-related questions followed by Likert-scale items measuring Smart Tourism Technologies and the dimensions of Overall Tourist Experience.

The questionnaire included a screening question to determine whether respondents had visited a cultural destination, followed by questions relating to respondents' demographic characteristics and the measurement of the study constructs. The measurement section initially comprised 24 Likert-scale statements. Seven items measured the use of smart tourism technologies (STT1–STT7). Tourist Experience was represented through five dimensions: Satisfaction (three items), Engagement (three items), Learning and Knowledge (three items), Convenience (two items), and Emotional Experience (two items). A further four items (IMP1–IMP4) initially assessed the perceived impact of smart tourism technologies.

All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The responses were subsequently examined for reliability and construct validity before the variables were used in the main statistical analysis.

### 3.5. Measurement Items

The measurement section comprised 24 Likert-

scale statements covering the use of smart tourism technologies, tourist experience and the perceived impact of smart tourism technologies. Tourist Experience was operationalised through five dimensions: Satisfaction, Engagement, Learning and Knowledge, Convenience, and Emotional Experience. The instrument initially also included four items intended to assess the perceived impact of smart tourism technologies.

The measurement items were developed by the researcher based on the study objectives and the conceptual dimensions identified in prior research on smart tourism technology, visitor engagement and tourist experience. Since the study focuses specifically on tourists' experiences of smart tourism technologies at cultural destinations, the items were worded to reflect the context of technology-enabled cultural visits rather than being directly adopted from a single existing scale.

**Table 1.** Measurement item

| Construct                            | Code    | Measurement Item                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Use of Smart Tourism Technologies    | STT 1   | I use mobile applications for travel planning.                                                                |
|                                      | STT 2   | I rely on digital maps/navigation during my visit.                                                            |
|                                      | STT 3   | I use online platforms for booking tickets/services.                                                          |
|                                      | STT 4   | I access information through QR codes or digital displays.                                                    |
|                                      | STT 5   | I use social media for travel-related information.                                                            |
|                                      | STT 6   | Smart technologies make travel planning easier.                                                               |
|                                      | STT 7   | Digital interpretation tools at the destination (e.g., displays, information centres) enhanced my experience. |
| Satisfaction                         | SAT 1   | I am satisfied with my visit to the cultural destination.                                                     |
|                                      | SAT 2   | The experience met my expectations.                                                                           |
|                                      | SAT 3   | I would rate my overall experience as satisfactory.                                                           |
| Engagement                           | ENG 1   | I felt actively engaged during my visit.                                                                      |
|                                      | ENG 2   | The experience was interactive and interesting.                                                               |
|                                      | ENG 3   | I felt interested and motivated to explore more at the destination.                                           |
| Learning and Knowledge               | LEARN 1 | I learned new things about culture and heritage.                                                              |
|                                      | LEARN 2 | The information provided enhanced my understanding.                                                           |
|                                      | LEARN 3 | The visit increased my knowledge about the destination.                                                       |
| Convenience                          | CONV 1  | Technology made my visit more convenient.                                                                     |
|                                      | CONV 2  | Information was easily accessible.                                                                            |
| Emotional Experience                 | EMO 1   | I felt emotionally connected to the destination.                                                              |
|                                      | EMO 2   | The visit was enjoyable and memorable.                                                                        |
| Impact of Smart Tourism Technologies | IMP 1   | Smart tourism technologies improved my overall experience.                                                    |
|                                      | IMP 2   | I prefer destinations with advanced technological facilities.                                                 |
|                                      | IMP 3   | Technology increases my satisfaction during travel.                                                           |
|                                      | IMP 4   | I am willing to revisit destinations that use smart technologies.                                             |

The measurement items were developed by the researcher based on the study objectives and the conceptual dimensions identified in prior research on smart tourism technology, visitor engagement and tourist experience. Since the study focuses

specifically on tourists' experiences of smart tourism technologies at cultural destinations, the items were worded to reflect the context of technology-enabled cultural visits rather than being directly adopted from a single existing scale.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The collected responses were coded and organised before statistical analysis. The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, with descriptive and inferential procedures applied to examine the measurement constructs and their relationships (Field, 2013). The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, respondent eligibility was assessed using the cultural-destination-visit criterion. The eligible responses were then subjected to reliability and validity assessment of the measurement constructs. Descriptive statistics were used to examine respondents' perceptions of smart tourism technologies and the dimensions of tourist experience. Pearson's correlation analysis

was employed to examine the associations among the principal constructs. Finally, linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between smart tourism technologies and overall tourist experience, followed by separate regression models for the five dimensions of tourist experience.

A screening criterion was applied to determine whether respondents had visited a cultural destination. Of the 67 responses received, 61 respondents reported having visited a cultural destination, whereas 6 respondents indicated they had not. The six responses were excluded from the subsequent statistical analysis. Accordingly, the final analytical sample consisted of 61 eligible respondents.

**Table 2.** Demographic and travel profile of respondents

| Characteristics                      | Category                       | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Gender                               | Male                           | 32            | 52.5           |
|                                      | Female                         | 29            | 47.5           |
|                                      | Total                          | 61            | 100            |
| Educational Level                    | Undergraduation and Below      | 22            | 36.1           |
|                                      | Post Graduation                | 27            | 44.3           |
|                                      | PhD                            | 12            | 19.7           |
|                                      | Total                          | 61            | 100            |
| Type of Cultural Destination Visited | Religious site                 | 26            | 42.6           |
|                                      | Historical monument            | 22            | 36.1           |
|                                      | Heritage city                  | 6             | 9.8            |
|                                      | Museum                         | 5             | 8.2            |
|                                      | Traditional/folk cultural site | 2             | 3.3            |
|                                      | Total                          | 61            | 100            |
| Frequency of Travel                  | Once a year                    | 19            | 31.1           |
|                                      | 2-3 times a year               | 29            | 47.5           |
|                                      | More than 3 times a year       | 13            | 21.3           |
|                                      | Total                          | 61            | 100            |

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 presents the demographic and travel characteristics of the 61 respondents included in the study. The gender distribution is relatively

balanced, although male respondents constitute a slightly larger share of the sample, with 32 respondents (52.5%), compared with 29 female



respondents (47.5%). This indicates that the study did not have a pronounced imbalance between male and female participants.

In terms of educational level, postgraduate respondents form the largest group (44.3%,  $n = 27$ ), followed by respondents in the undergraduate and below category (36.1%,  $n = 22$ ). A further 19.7% ( $n = 12$ ) of the respondents hold a Ph.D. qualification. The educational distribution, therefore, shows that a substantial proportion of the respondents had higher educational qualifications, which is relevant to a study examining perceptions and use of technology at cultural destinations.

The type of cultural destination visited shows a clearer concentration. Religious sites were the most frequently reported destination type, accounting for 42.6% ( $n = 26$ ) of the responses. This was followed by historical monuments at 36.1% ( $n = 22$ ). Heritage cities represented 9.8% ( $n = 6$ ), while museums accounted for 8.2% ( $n = 5$ ). Traditional or folk cultural sites constituted the smallest category, with 3.3% ( $n = 2$ ) of respondents. Thus, the sample mainly represents visitors to religious sites and historical monuments, with comparatively fewer respondents from the other types of cultural destinations.

With regard to travel frequency, nearly half of the respondents, 47.5% ( $n = 29$ ), reported travelling 2–3 times a year. Those travelling once a

year accounted for 31.1% ( $n = 19$ ), while 21.3% ( $n = 13$ ) reported travelling more than three times a year. Overall, the distribution suggests that most respondents had some regular travel experience, with the largest proportion travelling two to three times annually.

Taken together, the profile indicates that the sample comprises respondents with varied demographic backgrounds and travel patterns, while the destination experience represented in the data is concentrated particularly around religious sites and historical monuments. This profile provides important context for interpreting the subsequent findings concerning smart tourism technologies and tourist experience.

### 4.3 Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with reliability examined separately for each construct (Pallant, 2020). Reliability was examined separately for each construct to assess the consistency of the items representing the respective dimensions. The results of the reliability analysis are presented in Table 3.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .739 to .921, indicating satisfactory to high internal consistency across the measured constructs. The Smart Tourism Technologies scale

**Table 3.** Reliability

| Construct                            | No. Items | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Smart Tourism Technologies           | 7         | 0.921               |
| Satisfaction                         | 3         | 0.900               |
| Engagement                           | 3         | 0.860               |
| Learning and Knowledge               | 3         | 0.859               |
| Convenience                          | 2         | 0.739               |
| Emotional Experience                 | 2         | 0.759               |
| Impact of Smart Tourism Technologies | 4         | 0.829               |

Source: Primary Data

recorded the highest reliability coefficient ( $\alpha = .921$ ), followed by Satisfaction ( $\alpha = .900$ ), Engagement ( $\alpha = .860$ ), Learning and Knowledge ( $\alpha = .859$ ), Impact of Smart Tourism Technologies ( $\alpha = .829$ ), Emotional Experience ( $\alpha = .759$ ), and Convenience ( $\alpha = .739$ ). The item-level reliability statistics did not indicate that any item needed to be removed to improve the internal consistency of its respective construct.

#### 4.4 Exploratory Factor Analysis

The suitability of the data for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO value was .802, indicating satisfactory sampling adequacy, while Bartlett's test was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(276) = 1128.997$ ,  $p < .001$ , confirming sufficient interrelationships among the items for factor analysis. EFA was conducted using Principal Axis Factoring with Promax rotation, allowing the extracted factors to correlate. A four-factor empirical structure was obtained. The seven Smart Tourism Technology items showed strong and consistent loadings on a common factor, and the Learning and Knowledge items displayed a relatively clear factor pattern. However, some overlap was observed among the originally specified dimensions. In particular, the four Impact of Smart Tourism Technologies items did not form a distinct factor and loaded alongside the Convenience items, while the Satisfaction and Engagement items also showed empirical overlap.

The factor structure was therefore considered alongside the conceptual content of the measurement items. The four Impact of Smart Tourism Technologies items represented distinct concepts: overall experience, destination preference, satisfaction, and revisit intention. These concepts either overlap with the dimensions of

Tourist Experience or represent distinct behavioural outcomes, making their retention as a separate construct conceptually problematic. Accordingly, the Impact of Smart Tourism Technologies was excluded from the final analytical model to avoid conceptual overlap between the predictor and the tourist experience outcome. The original responses were retained in the dataset for transparency, but the four items were excluded from the subsequent regression analysis. The EFA therefore provided exploratory evidence for the measurement structure while also identifying areas of conceptual overlap that informed the final model specification.

#### 4.5 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the respondents' perceptions of Smart Tourism Technologies and the dimensions of Overall Tourist Experience. The mean and standard deviation for each construct are presented in Table 4.

The descriptive results indicate generally favourable perceptions of smart tourism technologies and tourist experience. Smart Tourism Technologies recorded a mean score of 3.6698 (SD = 1.0260). Among the five dimensions of Tourist Experience, Learning and Knowledge recorded the highest mean ( $M = 4.0273$ ,  $SD = .6973$ ), followed by Convenience ( $M = 3.9508$ ,  $SD = .7784$ ) and Satisfaction ( $M = 3.8907$ ,  $SD = .7739$ ). Emotional Experience recorded a mean of 3.8279 ( $SD = .7353$ ), while Engagement recorded 3.8361 ( $SD = .7996$ ). The overall Tourist Experience score was 3.9066 ( $SD = .6109$ ), indicating a generally positive experiential assessment among the respondents.

#### 4.6 Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between Smart Tourism Technologies and the dimensions of Tourist

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics

| Construct                  | N  | Mean   | SD     |
|----------------------------|----|--------|--------|
| Smart Tourism Technologies | 61 | 3.6698 | 1.0260 |
| Satisfaction               | 61 | 3.8907 | 0.7739 |
| Engagement                 | 61 | 3.8361 | 0.7996 |
| Learning and Knowledge     | 61 | 4.0273 | 0.6973 |
| Convenience                | 61 | 3.9508 | 0.7784 |
| Emotional Experience       | 61 | 3.8279 | 0.7353 |
| Overall Tourist Experience | 61 | 3.9066 | 0.6109 |

Source: Primary Data

Experience. The results indicated statistically significant positive relationships between Smart Tourism Technologies and Satisfaction ( $r = .592$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Engagement ( $r = .478$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Learning and Knowledge ( $r = .453$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Convenience ( $r = .376$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Emotional Experience ( $r = .482$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Smart Tourism Technologies was also positively correlated with overall Tourist Experience ( $r = .590$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

The five dimensions of Tourist Experience were also positively associated with one another. The strongest relationship was observed between Satisfaction and Engagement ( $r = .734$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Although the dimensions were related, the observed correlations did not indicate extreme correlation-based redundancy among the principal constructs.

**Table 5.** Correlation

| Variables                  | STT   | Satisfaction | Engagement | Learning & Knowledge | Convenience | Emotional Experience | Overall Tourist Experience |
|----------------------------|-------|--------------|------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| STT                        | 1000  | 0.592        | 0.478      | 0.453                | 0.376       | 0.482                | 0.590                      |
| Satisfaction               | 0.592 | 1000         | 0.734      | 0.507                | 0.590       | 0.625                | 0.862                      |
| Engagement                 | 0.478 | 0.734        | 1000       | 0.503                | 0.509       | 0.565                | 0.828                      |
| Learning & Knowledge       | 0.453 | 0.507        | 0.503      | 1000                 | 0.550       | 0.529                | 0.756                      |
| Convenience                | 0.376 | 0.590        | 0.509      | 0.550                | 1000        | 0.509                | 0.786                      |
| Emotional Experience       | 0.482 | 0.625        | 0.565      | 0.529                | 0.509       | 1000                 | 0.798                      |
| Overall Tourist Experience | 0.590 | 0.862        | 0.828      | 0.756                | 0.786       | 0.798                | 1000                       |

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  $N = 61$ .

Source: Primary Data

Pearson correlation analysis showed that Smart Tourism Technologies (STT) had positive and statistically significant relationships with all dimensions of Tourist Experience. The strongest association was observed between STT and Satisfaction ( $r = .592$ ,  $p < .01$ ), followed by Emotional Experience ( $r = .482$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Emotional Experience ( $r = .798$ ,  $p < .01$ ),

Engagement ( $r = .478$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Learning and Knowledge ( $r = .453$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Convenience ( $r = .376$ ,  $p < .01$ ). STT was also positively associated with Overall Tourist Experience ( $r = .590$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

The five dimensions of Tourist Experience were also positively correlated with Overall Tourist Experience, with correlations ranging from .756 to

.862. Satisfaction showed the strongest association with Overall Tourist Experience ( $r = .862, p < .01$ ), followed by Engagement ( $r = .828, p < .01$ ), Emotional Experience ( $r = .798, p < .01$ ), Convenience ( $r = .786, p < .01$ ), and Learning and Knowledge ( $r = .756, p < .01$ ). The positive correlations between Smart Tourism Technologies and the five dimensions provide initial evidence of the relationships examined in the subsequent regression analyses.

#### 4.7 Regression Analysis

To examine the relationship between Smart Tourism Technologies and Tourist Experience, linear regression analysis was conducted with Smart Tourism Technologies as the independent variable and Tourist Experience as the dependent construct. Since Tourist Experience was theoretically specified as a multidimensional construct comprising Satisfaction, Engagement, Learning and Knowledge, Convenience, and Emotional Experience, separate regression models were additionally estimated for each dimension.

**Table 6.** Regression

| Dependent Variable         | R     | R <sup>2</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | $\beta$ | t     | p     |
|----------------------------|-------|----------------|-------------------------|---------|-------|-------|
| Overall Tourist Experience | 0.590 | 0.349          | 0.337                   | 0.590   | 5.618 | <.001 |
| Satisfaction               | 0.592 | 0.351          | 0.340                   | 0.592   | 5.649 | <.001 |
| Engagement                 | 0.478 | 0.228          | 0.215                   | 0.478   | 4.175 | <.001 |
| Learning & Knowledge       | 0.453 | 0.205          | 0.192                   | 0.453   | 3.905 | <.001 |
| Convenience                | 0.376 | 0.141          | 0.127                   | 0.376   | 3.115 | 0.003 |
| Emotional Experience       | 0.482 | 0.232          | 0.219                   | 0.482   | 4.225 | <.001 |

*\*\* $\beta$  = standardised regression coefficient; N = 61.*

Source: Primary Data

The dimension-level regression results show that Smart Tourism Technologies were positively and significantly associated with all five dimensions of Tourist Experience. Satisfaction recorded the strongest predictive relationship ( $\beta =$

##### 4.7.1 Overall Tourist Experience

The regression model examining the relationship between Smart Tourism Technologies and overall Tourist Experience was statistically significant,  $F(1,59) = 31.561, p < .001$ . The model produced an  $R^2$  of .349, indicating that Smart Tourism Technologies explained approximately 34.9% of the variance in Tourist Experience. The standardised regression coefficient was positive and statistically significant ( $\beta = .590, t = 5.618, p < .001$ ). The finding indicates that higher levels of Smart Tourism Technology use were associated with higher overall Tourist Experience.

##### 4.7.2 Dimension Level Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between Smart Tourism Technologies and each dimension of Tourist Experience. The results for the overall construct and its five dimensions are presented in Table 6.

482,  $R^2 = .232, p < .001$ ) and Engagement ( $\beta = .478, R^2 = .228, p < .001$ ) also showed significant positive relationships with Smart Tourism Technologies. Learning and Knowledge were significantly predicted by Smart Tourism

Technologies ( $\beta = .453$ ,  $R^2 = .205$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Although the relationship with Convenience was comparatively weaker, it remained statistically significant ( $\beta = .376$ ,  $R^2 = .141$ ,  $p = .003$ ).

Overall, the results indicate that Smart Tourism Technologies are positively associated with Tourist Experience both at the aggregate level and across its five specified dimensions.

#### 4.8 Regression Diagnostic

Regression assumptions were examined using residual diagnostics, including the histogram, normal probability plot, and standardised residual-versus-predicted-value plot. The residuals showed an approximately normal pattern, and the scatterplot did not indicate a pronounced nonlinear or funnel-shaped pattern. One observation produced a standardised residual of approximately  $-3.96$  and was examined as a potentially unusual observation. The case was retained because there was no evidence that the response was invalid or resulted from a data-entry error. The final analysis, therefore, retained all 61 eligible respondents.

## 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results provide consistent evidence of a positive relationship between Smart Tourism Technologies and Overall Tourist Experience at cultural destinations. Smart Tourism Technologies were moderately and positively associated with Overall Tourist Experience ( $r = .590$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the regression model was statistically significant ( $F(1,59) = 31.561$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, technology-related experiences accounted for a meaningful proportion of the variation in tourists' overall experience, although the remaining variation indicates that tourist experience is also shaped by factors beyond technology.

This finding can be understood through the

Technology-Enhanced Tourism Experience perspective proposed by Neuhofer et al. (2012). The perspective suggests that tourism experiences are increasingly mediated by technology and that tourists participate more actively in creating their experiences. Technology, therefore, becomes part of the experience-creation process rather than remaining merely a functional support mechanism. The positive relationship found in the present study is consistent with this proposition. It suggests that at cultural destinations, digital maps, online platforms, QR-based information, social media, and digital interpretation tools can be part of how tourists access, understand, and interact with the destination. The finding is also consistent with Neuhofer et al. (2014), who conceptualised technology-enhanced tourism experiences according to the interaction between technology implementation and tourist co-creation.

The dimension-level results provide further support for this interpretation. Smart Tourism Technologies showed significant positive relationships with Satisfaction ( $\beta = .592$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Emotional Experience ( $\beta = .482$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Engagement ( $\beta = .478$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Learning and Knowledge ( $\beta = .453$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and Convenience ( $\beta = .376$ ,  $p = .003$ ). Satisfaction produced the strongest predictive relationship, while Convenience showed the weakest, although it remained statistically significant. This pattern is important because it suggests that the role of technology in the present study is not restricted to making a visit easier. Its relationship with engagement, learning and emotional experience indicates that digital resources may also become part of how tourists interact with and interpret cultural destinations.

The relatively strong relationship with Learning and Knowledge is particularly relevant to cultural tourism. The mean score for this dimension was the highest among the five experience



experience dimensions ( $M = 4.0273$ ,  $SD = .6973$ ). Cultural destinations depend substantially on visitors' ability to access and interpret historical and cultural information, and digital technologies can provide additional channels through which such information is encountered. The present finding, therefore, supports the view that technology can complement, rather than simply replace, conventional forms of cultural interpretation. The findings concerning Emotional Experience also require a cautious interpretation. Although it had the lowest mean among the five dimensions ( $M = 3.8279$ ,  $SD = .7353$ ), its relationship with Smart Tourism Technologies was statistically significant ( $\beta = .482$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This suggests that technology can be associated with tourists' emotional responses, but it should not be assumed that technology alone produces those emotions. At cultural destinations, emotional responses may also arise from the heritage resource itself, the physical setting, personal memories, cultural meanings and the visitor's direct encounter with the site. In this respect, the findings are compatible with the technology-enhanced tourism experience perspective: technology can mediate and enrich an experience without becoming a substitute for the destination itself. Neuhofer et al. (2012) specifically position technology as part of experience co-creation rather than as the experience in isolation.

Overall, the findings provide empirical support for applying the technology-enhanced tourism experience perspective to cultural destinations. The theory helps explain why Smart Tourism Technologies can be associated not only with functional aspects such as Convenience, but also with evaluative, behavioural, cognitive and emotional dimensions of the tourist experience. At the same time, the  $R^2$  values show that technology does not explain the entirety of the tourist experience. The present findings should therefore

be interpreted as evidence of a meaningful positive association, rather than evidence that technology alone determines the quality of a cultural tourism experience.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The study examined the relationship between Smart Tourism Technologies and Overall Tourist Experience at cultural destinations. The findings indicate a significant positive relationship between the two constructs, with Smart Tourism Technologies also showing significant relationships with Satisfaction, Engagement, Learning and Knowledge, Convenience, and Emotional Experience. The results suggest that technology can contribute to tourists' experiences beyond functional convenience by supporting engagement, learning and the overall evaluation of cultural visits. The study therefore provides empirical support for the relevance of the technology-enhanced tourism experience perspective in understanding tourist experiences within cultural destinations. Given the relatively small sample and convenience sampling approach, the findings should be interpreted within the scope of the study rather than generalised to all cultural destinations. Future research could use larger and more diverse samples across specific cultural and heritage destinations, employ probability or destination-based sampling where feasible, and examine additional factors such as authenticity, perceived value, technology acceptance and behavioural intentions to develop a more comprehensive understanding of technology-enhanced cultural tourism experiences.

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# Organizational Culture, Work Environment, and Leadership Increase Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Employee Performance

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 15/6/2026

Accepted : 11/7/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Organizational Culture;  
Work Environment;;  
Leadership; Work  
Performance; Employee  
Loyalty

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Research paper

**Abstract** - This study examines the influence of organisational culture, work environment, and leadership on employee loyalty, with employee performance as a mediating variable, among employees of Archipelago Group hotels in Jakarta and West Java, Indonesia. A quantitative survey approach was employed, with data collected through structured questionnaires from 200 respondents selected using purposive sampling. The data were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS to examine the relationships among the variables and the mediating role of employee performance. The findings indicate that organisational culture positively influences employee loyalty both directly and indirectly through employee performance. Leadership influences employee loyalty indirectly through employee performance, whereas the work environment has a direct effect on employee loyalty but no significant indirect effect through employee performance. The study is limited to Archipelago Group hotels in Jakarta and West Java, which may restrict the generalisability of the findings. Future research should encompass broader geographical areas, other hospitality sectors, and additional variables associated with employee loyalty. From a practical perspective, hotel managers should strengthen organisational culture, improve workplace conditions, and adopt leadership practices that enhance employee performance and loyalty, thereby supporting workforce stability and reducing turnover. This study contributes to the hospitality management literature by clarifying the mediating role of employee performance in the relationships between organisational culture, work environment, leadership, and employee loyalty within the Indonesian hotel context.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indonesian hotel industry has demonstrated a consistent recovery trend, characterised by increases in the number of accommodation establishments and hotel room occupancy rates. Throughout 2024, the occupancy rate of star-rated hotels in Indonesia averaged approximately 56–59%, indicating a steady recovery in the national tourism sector. Official data indicate growth in the number of accommodation establishments and higher occupancy rates, signalling increased activity within the hotel industry and a corresponding need for qualified and loyal human resources (Kementrian Pariwisata, 2025).

Employees are central to organisational success because they are not merely recipients of organisational objectives but active participants in achieving them. They serve as planners, implementers, and controllers and therefore play an important role in accomplishing organisational goals. Employee loyalty reflects an employee's psychological attachment and commitment to an organisation (Reza & Andalas, 2024). It can also be understood as an individual's strong desire to remain with an organisation (Amin et al., 2024) and is an important component of organisational success because it reflects employees' commitment and attachment to their employer (Laksana et al., 2024). Both employee loyalty and work performance may contribute to achieving organisational goals. Work performance refers to how individuals carry out their roles and contribute to organisational objectives (Zaid et al., 2021). It can also be understood in terms of the quality and quantity of work employees accomplish in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. Accordingly, good work performance may reflect employees' capabilities and loyalty to the organisation (Jaya & Adnyani, 2020).

Organisational culture is an intangible social force that guides employees towards behaviours and practices expected within an organisation (Agmasari & Septyarini, 2022). It encompasses the norms and principles governing how individuals interact and communicate within an organisation and how their performance contributes towards organisational goals (Dewanti & Wahyudi, 2025). Organisational culture may also involve integrating individuals' prior lifestyles and behaviours into shared norms and philosophies, thereby fostering collective energy and a sense of group pride in pursuing common goals (Kusuma, 2022). When employees identify with an organisation's shared values, beliefs, and norms, they may demonstrate greater loyalty (Widuri et al., 2025). Consistent with this perspective, Hendrix and Abrian (2022) found that organisational culture plays an important role in enhancing employee loyalty. Organisational culture may also positively contribute to employee performance (Zaid et al., 2021).

The work environment encompasses the conditions in which employees undertake their work activities and may have either positive or negative implications for their ability to achieve desired outcomes (Widuri et al., 2025). Aldiman et al. (2023) described the work environment as the conditions surrounding employees that may influence how they perform tasks assigned by the organisation. The physical work environment may therefore affect employee performance. Supporting this relationship, Ishak (2021) found that the work environment positively affected employee performance.

Leadership refers to the ability to unite and motivate individuals and groups towards achieving shared goals (Pratikno & Nugraha, 2016). Effective leadership can facilitate communication among team members while providing the guidance, encouragement, and motivation required to achieve organisational objectives (Putri & Mani, 2023).



Leadership also involves establishing organisational goals, influencing followers' behaviour to achieve those goals, and facilitating change within groups and organisational culture (Tirtadidjaja & Sarudin, 2022). Previous research has indicated that leadership significantly influences employee loyalty (Pratikno & Nugraha, 2016). Moreover, both transactional and transformational leadership styles have been associated with employee work performance (Wen, 2022).

Previous studies have produced mixed findings regarding the determinants of employee loyalty. Organisational culture has been found to influence employee loyalty (Widuri et al., 2025), whereas Rosanne et al. (2025) reported that a multitasking culture did not significantly affect employee loyalty. Similarly, Aldiman et al. (2023) found that the work environment had a relatively strong influence on employee loyalty, whereas Riyadi (2025) reported no significant effect. Conflicting findings have also emerged regarding leadership. Several studies have reported significant relationships between organisational culture or leadership and employee loyalty (Kartika et al., 2022; Rahmatila, 2025; Tirtadidjaja & Sarudin, 2022), whereas Salju (2023) found that leadership did not significantly affect employee work performance.

These inconsistent findings indicate that the relationships among organisational culture, work environment, leadership, employee loyalty, and work performance require further investigation. Moreover, previous studies have predominantly examined direct relationships between these variables, with comparatively limited attention given to the mediating role of employee work performance, particularly within the hospitality industry and large hotel chains such as the Archipelago Group. Addressing this research gap, the present study examines the influence of

organisational culture, work environment, and leadership on employee loyalty, with employee work performance as a mediating variable, among employees of Archipelago Group hotels.

### *1.1 Theoretical Basis and Hypothesis Development*

#### **Organisational Culture**

Organisational culture is an intangible social force that guides employees towards behaviours and practices expected within an organisation (Agmasari & Septyarini, 2022). It encompasses the shared attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs that shape behaviour within and beyond an organisation (Amin et al., 2024). Organisational culture also comprises the norms, customs, beliefs, and values established within an organisation, which may influence how employees behave and perform their roles (Francis, 2024). As a distinctive organisational identity, it differentiates one organisation from another while shaping employees' mindsets, attitudes, and approaches to work. Consequently, organisational culture may influence operational effectiveness and the achievement of organisational goals (Sembiring et al., 2025). In this regard, Rahmatila (2025) described organisational culture as a system of shared meanings collectively understood by organisational members that distinguishes one organisation from another.

Organisational culture provides a framework that guides employees' behaviour and supports the achievement of organisational goals. It may be understood as a pattern of fundamental assumptions developed or adopted by a group and subsequently embedded within the organisation (Tirtadidjaja & Sarudin, 2022). An organisational culture that reflects institutional values may therefore strengthen employee loyalty and enhance employee performance. Key dimensions of organisational culture include innovation and risk-

taking, attention to detail, outcome orientation, people orientation, team orientation, and stability (Robbins & Judge, 2014).

Previous empirical studies provide support for the relationships between organisational culture, employee loyalty, and employee performance. Hendrix and Abrian (2022) found that organisational culture positively influenced employee loyalty, suggesting that employees who identify with organisational values and norms may develop a stronger attachment to the organisation. Similarly, Prandnyana and Suwandana (2019) reported that organisational culture influenced employee performance. These findings suggest that a supportive organisational culture may not only strengthen employees' loyalty but also enhance their performance. Furthermore, because employee performance may contribute to stronger employee loyalty, it is proposed that employee performance mediates the relationship between organisational culture and employee loyalty. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Organisational culture has a positive influence on employee loyalty.

H2: Organisational culture has a positive influence on employee performance.

H3: Employee performance mediates the relationship between organisational culture and employee loyalty.

### **Work Environment**

The work environment encompasses the physical and non-physical conditions in which employees perform their daily duties. Physical aspects of the work environment include lighting, air conditioning, noise levels, and the condition of work equipment (Putra & Sriathi, 2019). More broadly, the work environment is the setting in which employees carry out their activities and may influence their performance (Fitri et al., 2023).

A safe, comfortable, and supportive work environment may enhance employees' well-being and enable them to perform their duties effectively (Agmasari & Septyarini, 2022). Similarly, Mon and Herman (2024) described the work environment as a combination of tools, surrounding conditions, work methods, and arrangements that affect employees at both individual and group levels. Tambunan (2018) further emphasised that although the work environment is not directly involved in an organisation's production process, it may directly influence the employees responsible for carrying it out.

A comfortable, functional, and supportive workplace can facilitate employees' performance of their duties while fostering positive interpersonal relationships, mutual respect, and effective collaboration. Non-physical aspects of the work environment, including supportive relationships and a positive workplace atmosphere, may also contribute to employees' psychological well-being and ability to perform effectively (Agmasari & Septyarini, 2022). Consequently, a conducive work environment may strengthen both employee performance and loyalty. Previous research has also demonstrated relationships between the work environment and these employee outcomes (Fitri et al., 2023). A supportive work environment may therefore enhance employee loyalty, both directly and indirectly, by improving employee performance. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: The work environment has a positive influence on employee performance.

H5: The work environment has a positive influence on employee loyalty.

H6: Employee performance mediates the relationship between the work environment and employee loyalty.

### **Leadership**

Leadership is the process by which leaders influence and guide employees towards productive behaviour and the achievement of organisational goals. It involves establishing organisational goals, influencing followers' behaviour towards achieving those goals, and facilitating development within groups and organisational culture (Tirtadidjaja & Sarudin, 2022). Leadership may also be understood as an interpersonal process through which an individual directs and influences a group to work collaboratively towards shared objectives (Pratikno & Nugraha, 2016). Similarly, Wahyudi (2016) described leadership as the ability to influence and mobilise individuals within a group by integrating and coordinating their competencies.

Leadership also involves the ability to influence others through direct or indirect communication (Dewanti & Wahyudi, 2025). Effective leaders can inspire and encourage employees to accomplish their responsibilities and work towards common organisational goals (Putri & Mani, 2023). Appropriate leadership practices may therefore improve employee performance by providing direction, motivation, and support while fostering a safe and comfortable work environment. Leadership may also strengthen employees' attachment and commitment to the organisation. Supporting this relationship, Wardana (2024) reported that leadership influenced employee loyalty. Thus, effective leadership may influence employee loyalty both directly and indirectly through enhanced employee performance. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7: Leadership has a positive influence on employee performance.

H8: Leadership has a positive influence on employee loyalty.

H9: Employee performance mediates the relationship between leadership and employee loyalty.

## Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the quality and quantity of work accomplished by employees in fulfilling their assigned duties and responsibilities (Mangkunegara, 2017). Employee performance may be influenced by both organisational and individual factors. Organisational factors include reward systems, quality of supervision, workload, organisational values and interests, and workplace conditions, whereas individual factors may include age, length of service, work-related abilities and skills, family-related circumstances, and life satisfaction (Zaid et al., 2021).

Employee performance can also be understood in terms of the extent to which employees' work outcomes meet organisational targets, including expectations relating to quality, quantity, productivity, and overall effectiveness (Jabbar & Supriyadi, 2025). Relevant dimensions of employee performance include work quality, work quantity, working time, and cooperation (Wardhana, 2021). Employees who perform effectively may develop a stronger sense of achievement and attachment to their organisation, potentially contributing to greater employee loyalty. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H10: Employee performance has a positive influence on employee loyalty.

## Employee Loyalty

Employee loyalty reflects employees' commitment, attachment, and willingness to contribute their abilities and efforts to an organisation. Loyal employees may demonstrate dedication through responsible behaviour, honesty, discipline, enthusiasm, and a willingness to apply their skills and abilities to support organisational objectives (Armadita & Sitohang, 2021). Employee loyalty

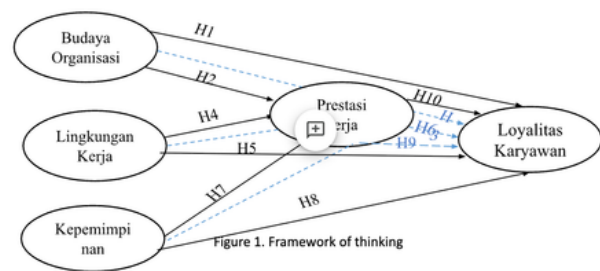
can also be understood as a psychological attitude towards an organisation that encourages employees to remain with it despite changes in internal organisational conditions (Jaya & Adnyani, 2020). Similarly, Pratama (2023) defined employee loyalty in terms of commitment and employees' willingness to comply with, implement, and uphold organisational rules consciously and without coercion.

Employee loyalty is further reflected in employees' willingness to contribute their abilities, skills, ideas, and time towards achieving organisational objectives while avoiding actions that could harm the organisation. It may be reflected through indicators such as compliance with organisational regulations, responsibility, willingness to cooperate, a sense of belonging, and dedication to the organisation (Fitri et al., 2023). Similarly, Marentek (2021) described loyalty as an individual's willingness and ability to follow and implement organisational expectations with awareness and accountability.

Taken together, these perspectives indicate that employee loyalty extends beyond employees' intention to remain with an organisation or their compliance with organisational rules. It encompasses psychological attachment, dedication, responsible behaviour, and a willingness to contribute towards shared organisational goals. In the present study, employee loyalty is therefore conceptualised as an outcome that may be influenced by organisational culture, the work environment, and leadership, both directly and indirectly through employee performance.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative survey approach. Quantitative research involves collecting data from a defined population or sample using research instruments and analysing the resulting



**Figure 1.** Framework of Thinking

data statistically to test the proposed hypotheses (Sugiyono, 2017). The study population comprised employees of Archipelago Group hotels in Jakarta and West Java, Indonesia. Data were collected between October and December 2025 using a structured online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire measured five constructs: organisational culture, work environment, leadership, employee performance, and employee loyalty.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that respondents met the characteristics relevant to the research objectives. Respondents were eligible to participate if they met the following inclusion criteria: (a) they were permanent, contract, or daily employees of an Archipelago Group hotel; (b) they had been employed for at least one year; (c) they were directly involved in hotel operational or administrative activities; and (d) they voluntarily agreed to participate and complete the questionnaire. The final sample comprised 200 respondents. This sample was used for partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), taking into consideration the number of indicators and structural paths specified in the research model.

Respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions regarding the study constructs were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with 3 representing neutral. Higher scores indicated greater agreement with the corresponding

questionnaire statements (Sugiyono, 2023). The measurement indicators for each construct were adapted from established literature. Organisational culture was measured using six dimensions: (a) innovation and risk-taking, (b) attention to detail, (c) outcome orientation, (d) people orientation, (e) team orientation, and (f) stability (Robbins & Judge, 2014). The work environment was measured using six indicators: (a) workplace lighting, (b) temperature and air circulation, (c) cleanliness and safety, (d) relationships among colleagues, (e) work facilities, and (f) workspace layout (Sedarmayanti, 2017). Leadership was assessed using five indicators: (a) leaders' communication skills, (b) motivation and inspiration, (c) role modelling and integrity, (d) decision-making, and (e) employee participation and empowerment (Yukl, 2013).

Employee performance was measured using five indicators: (a) quality of work, (b) quantity of work, (c) timeliness, (d) initiative and responsibility, and (e) cooperation (Mangkunegara, 2017). Employee loyalty was assessed using five indicators: (a) affective commitment, (b) continuance commitment, (c) normative commitment, (d) compliance with organisational rules and values, and (e) willingness to exert additional effort for the organisation (Sangadji & Sopiah, 2013). Data were analysed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS. The analysis involved evaluating

both the measurement and structural models. The measurement model was assessed for convergent validity and construct reliability. Convergent validity was evaluated using outer loadings and average variance extracted (AVE), whereas construct reliability was assessed using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha. The structural model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), the significance of the path coefficients, and the model's predictive capability. The direct and indirect effects were also examined to determine the mediating role of employee performance in the relationships between organisational culture, work environment, leadership, and employee loyalty.

Table 1 presents the respondents' demographic profile. In terms of age, the largest group comprised respondents aged 20–30 years, with 83 respondents (41.5%). Based on gender, the majority of respondents, 102 people (51%), were male. Based on educational background, the majority were high school/vocational high school (106 people) (53%). The longest employment period was <5 years, with 129 people (64.5%). The most common employment status was contract employees, with 112 (56%). Respondents by position were mostly staff/attendants, at 101 (51%). The most common work unit was Five Pamanaukan, with 30 people (15%).

**Table 1.** Respondent description

|                 | Characteristics               | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Age:            | ≤ 20 Years                    | 61        | 30.5%          |
|                 | 21 - 30 Years                 | 83        | 41.5%          |
|                 | 31 - 40 Years                 | 23        | 11.5%          |
|                 | > 40 Years                    | 33        | 16.5%          |
| Gender:         | Man                           | 102       | 51%            |
|                 | Woman                         | 98        | 49%            |
| Last Education: | High School/Vocational School | 106       | 53%            |
|                 | D3                            | 29        | 14.5%          |
|                 | D4/S1                         | 59        | 29.5%          |
|                 | S2S3                          | 51        | 2.5%0.5%       |



**Table 1.** Continued

|                   | Characteristics               | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Age:              | ≤ 20 Years                    | 61        | 30.5%          |
|                   | 21 - 30 Years                 | 83        | 41.5%          |
|                   | 31 - 40 Years                 | 23        | 11.5%          |
|                   | > 40 Years                    | 33        | 16.5%          |
| Gender:           | Man                           | 102       | 51%            |
|                   | Woman                         | 98        | 49%            |
| Last Education:   | High School/Vocational School | 106       | 53%            |
|                   | D3                            | 29        | 14.5%          |
|                   | D4/S1                         | 59        | 29.5%          |
|                   | S2S3                          | 51        | 2.5%0.5%       |
| Length of Working | ≤ 5 Years                     | 129       | 64.5%          |
|                   | 5 – 10 Years                  | 37        | 18.5%          |
|                   | >10 Years                     | 34        | 17%            |
| Employee Status   | Daily Worker                  | 30        | 15%            |
|                   | Contract employees            | 112       | 56%            |
|                   | Permanent employees           | 58        | 29%            |
| Position          | Staff / Attendant             | 101       | 50.5%          |
|                   | Supervisor                    | 27        | 13.5%          |
|                   | Assistant                     | 15        | 7.5%           |
|                   | Manager                       | 25        | 12.5%          |
|                   | Others                        | 31        | 16%            |
| Work Unit         | Five PGC Jakarta              | 15        | 7.5%           |
|                   | Haper Cawang                  | 15        | 7.5%           |
|                   | Aston Kemayoran               | 22        | 11%            |
|                   | Five Jababeka Cikarang        | 19        | 9.5%           |
|                   | Harper Cikarang               | 23        | 11.5%          |
|                   | Five Karawang                 | 15        | 7.5%           |
|                   | Five Pajajaran Bogor          | 21        | 10.5%          |
|                   | Five Pamanukan                | 30        | 15%            |
|                   | Five Cimanuk Garut            | 20        | 10%            |
|                   | Neo Cirebon                   | 20        | 10%            |
| TOTAL             |                               | 200       | 100.0%         |

In Table 2, the evaluation of the measurement model is carried out in two stages, namely testing. Construct reliability is tested using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) (mark  $\geq 0.70$ ), as well as testing construct validity through outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE  $\geq 0.50$  (Ahmad et al., 2016). All

variable values exceed the requirements and are declared reliable. Two indicators of the work environment construct (Cleanliness and Safety) and two indicators of employee loyalty (Ongoing Commitment and Willingness to Go the Extra Mile) were removed during the measurement model evaluation because their outer loading

values did not satisfy the minimum threshold of 0.70. Eliminating these indicators improved

construct validity and reliability while maintaining the theoretical integrity of the constructs.

**Table 2.** Evaluation of model measurement

| No | Variable                                               | Indicator                                                        | Item | Outer Loading | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1  | Organizational Culture (X1)<br>(Robbins & Judge, 2014) | 1 Innovation and the courage to take risks                       | X1.1 | 0.766         | 0.890                 | 0.580                            |
|    |                                                        | 2 Attention to detail                                            | X1.2 | 0.750         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 3 Results orientation                                            | X1.3 | 0.740         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 4 Orientation to humans                                          | X1.4 | 0.755         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 5 Team orientation                                               | X1.5 | 0.774         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 6 Stability (consistency of values and norms)                    | X1.6 | 0.785         |                       |                                  |
| 2  | Work Environment (X2)<br>(Sedamaryanti, 2011)          | 1 Lighting/workplace                                             | X2.1 | 0.735         | 0.893                 | 0.627                            |
|    |                                                        | 2 Temperature and air circulation                                | X2.2 | 0.784         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 3 Cleanliness and safety                                         | -    | -             |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 4 Relationships between coworkers                                | X2.4 | 0.779         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 5 Work facilities                                                | X2.5 | 0.827         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 6 Workspace layout                                               | X2.6 | 0.829         |                       |                                  |
| 3  | Leadership (X3)                                        | 1 Leader communication skills                                    | X3.1 | 0.782         | 0.924                 | 0.669                            |
|    |                                                        | 2 Providing motivation and inspiration                           | X3.2 | 0.856         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 3 Exemplary behavior and integrity                               | X3.3 | 0.872         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 4 Decision-making                                                | X3.4 | 0.708         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 5 Participation and empowerment of subordinates                  | X3.5 | 0.866         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 6                                                                | X3.6 | 0.812         |                       |                                  |
| 4  | Work Performance (Y1)<br>(Mangkunegara, 2017)          | 1 Quality of work                                                | Y1.1 | 0.800         | 0.910                 | 0.669                            |
|    |                                                        | 2 Quantity of work                                               | Y1.2 | 0.835         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 3 Punctuality                                                    | Y1.3 | 0.827         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 4 Initiative and responsibility                                  | Y1.4 | 0.838         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 5 Cooperation                                                    | Y1.5 | 0.790         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        |                                                                  |      |               |                       |                                  |
| 5  | Employee Loyalty (Y2)<br>(Sopiah & Mamang, 2013)       | 1 Affective (emotional) commitment                               | Y2.1 | 0.759         | 0.890                 | 0.731                            |
|    |                                                        | 2 Ongoing commitment (desire to continue working)                | -    | -             |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 3 Normative commitment (sense of obligation to the organisation) | Y2.3 | 0.896         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 4 Compliance with company rules and values                       | Y2.4 | 0.903         |                       |                                  |
|    |                                                        | 5 Willingness to go the extra mile for the organisation          | -    | -             |                       |                                  |

As shown in Table 3, discriminant validity was tested using the Fornell and Larcker criteria (1981) to ensure that the constructs being tested are significantly different from each other, the value in

the table should be > 0.5. This indicates that each variable has good discriminant validity, meaning the variables can be distinguished from one another and are not significantly correlated.

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity-Fornell Lacker

|                        | Loyalty | Leadership | Organizational culture | Work Environment | Work Performance |
|------------------------|---------|------------|------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Loyalty                | 0.855   |            |                        |                  |                  |
| Leadership             | 0.641   | 0.818      |                        |                  |                  |
| Organizational Culture | 0.699   | 0.691      | 0.762                  |                  |                  |
| Work Environment       | 0.704   | 0.692      | 0.701                  | 0.792            |                  |
| Work Performance       | 0.716   | 0.623      | 0.699                  | 0.622            | 0.818            |

As shown in Table 4, the multicollinearity test is a test that looks at the correlation between independent variables in the regression model used in the study, according to (Ghozali, 2021). A good regression model is one in which the multicollinearity test shows no correlation among the independent variables. The multicollinearity test can be performed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value. If the VIF is  $<5$ , there is no

multicollinearity in the study. The VIF ranges from 2.172 to 2.755, which, in accordance with the  $<5$  provision, indicates that there is no significant multicollinearity problem in the model. This indicates that the independent variables in the model can simultaneously contribute uniquely to the dependent variable without significant interference among them.

**Table 4.** Multicollinearity test

|                        | Loyalty | Leadership | Organizational culture | Work Environment | Work Performance |
|------------------------|---------|------------|------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Loyalty                |         |            |                        |                  |                  |
| Leadership             | 2,370   |            |                        |                  |                  |
| Organizational Culture | 2,755   |            |                        |                  | 2,287            |
| Work Environment       | 2,416   |            |                        |                  | 2,342            |
| Work Performance       | 2,172   |            |                        |                  | 2,345            |

As demonstrated in Table 5, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) test measures the extent to which the model can explain the variation in the dependent variable (Sugiyono, 2017). An  $R^2$  value close to 1 indicates a good model according to Ghozali's book. (Ghozali, 2016). The R Square value for the Loyalty variable is 0.644, indicating that 64.4% of the variation in employee loyalty is explained by organizational culture, work environment, leadership, and work performance. In comparison, the remaining 35.6% is influenced by other variables outside the research model. This value falls within the strong category. Meanwhile, the R Square value for the Work Performance variable is 0.540, indicating that 54.0% of the variation in work performance can be explained by

organizational culture, work environment, and leadership. In comparison, 46.0% is influenced by other, unstudied factors. This value is in the medium category. Based on these results, the structural model has good explanatory power because all endogenous variables have R Square values above 0.50.

$Q^2$  measures how much of the observed variance is explained by the model, and the estimated parameters can be used to predict the data (refer to Table 6).  $Q^2 > 0$  indicates that the model has good predictive power for the dependent variable. (Latan & Ghozali, 2015). Table 6 shows that the  $Q^2$  value is used to assess the model's predictive ability for endogenous constructs. A

model has predictive relevance if the  $Q^2$  value is  $> 0$ . Based on the blindfolding results, the  $Q^2$  values for all constructs are above 0, indicating that the model has good predictive ability. The highest value is in the Leadership variable at 0.537, indicating very good predictive ability, while other constructs, such as Loyalty (0.453),

Organisational Culture (0.410), Work Environment (0.435), and Work Performance (0.498), also fall into the strong predictive relevance category. Thus, it can be concluded that the research model effectively predicts the variables studied and is suitable for further hypothesis testing.

**Table 5.** Determination coefficient test ( $R^2$ )

|                  | <b>R Square</b> | <b>R Square Adjusted</b> |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Loyalty          | 0.644           | 0.637                    |
| Work Performance | 0.540           | 0.533                    |

**Table 6.** Prediction Accuracy Test ( $Q^2$ )

|                        | <b>SSO</b> | <b>SSE</b> | <b><math>Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)</math></b> |
|------------------------|------------|------------|--------------------------------------|
| Loyalty                | 600,000    | 328,114    | 0.453                                |
| leadership             | 1200,000   | 555,083    | 0.537                                |
| organizational culture | 1200,000   | 707,938    | 0.410                                |
| work environment       | 1000,000   | 565,346    | 0.435                                |
| work performance       | 1000,000   | 502,362    | 0.498                                |

The F-test is conducted (see Table 7) to test whether all independent variables have a simultaneous effect on the dependent variable (Y). If the significance value is  $< 0.05$ , then the alternative hypothesis is accepted (Sugiyono, 2017). Table 7 shows the results of the effect size test ( $f^2$ ), indicating that the organizational culture variable has a moderate effect on work performance (0.177), while leadership (0.036) and work environment (0.030) have only small effects.

Regarding loyalty, the work performance variable has a moderate contribution (0.153) as the main mediator, while work environment (0.100) and organisational culture (0.036) have relatively small contributions, and leadership shows a very small effect (0.011). This indicates that employee loyalty is more influenced by increased work performance than the direct influence of other exogenous variables.

**Table 7.** F square

|                        | <b>Loyalty</b> | <b>Leadership</b> | <b>Organizational Culture</b> | <b>Work Environment</b> | <b>Work Performance</b> |
|------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Loyalty                |                |                   |                               |                         |                         |
| Leadership             | 0.011          |                   |                               |                         | 0.036                   |
| Organizational Culture | 0.036          |                   |                               |                         | 0.177                   |
| Work Environment       | 0.100          |                   |                               |                         | 0.030                   |
| Work Performance       | 0.153          |                   |                               |                         |                         |

If the t-statistic value is higher than 1.96 and the p-value is lower than 0.05, the hypothesis results can

be accepted (Sugiyono, 2017). As shown in Table 8, organisational culture and work environment

have been shown to positively affect employee loyalty and performance. Leadership has a positive effect on work performance but not on employee loyalty, as the p-value is  $0.247 > 0.05$ . In addition,

performance also has a positive and significant effect on employee loyalty. Thus, hotel employee loyalty is more influenced by organizational culture, work environment, and work performance than direct leadership.

**Table 8.** Path coefficient

|                                            | Original Sample (O) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (O/STDEV) | P Values | Results  |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------|
| Organizational culture -> Loyalty          | 0.188               | 0.083                      | 2,280                  | 0.023    | Accepted |
| organizational culture -> work performance | 0.436               | 0.088                      | 4,982                  | 0.000    | Accepted |
| leadership -> work performance             | 0.196               | 0.079                      | 2,466                  | 0.014    | Accepted |
| work environment -> Loyalty                | 0.293               | 0.077                      | 3,821                  | 0.000    | Accepted |
| work environment -> work performance       | 0.181               | 0.084                      | 2,161                  | 0.031    | Accepted |
| leadership -> Loyalty                      | 0.094               | 0.081                      | 1,159                  | 0.247    | Rejected |
| work performance -> loyalty                | 0.344               | 0.089                      | 3,851                  | 0.000    | Accepted |

If the t-statistic value is higher than 1.96 and the p-value is lower than 0.05, then the hypothesis result can be accepted (Sugiyono, 2017). As shown in Table 9, the indirect effect coefficient is 0.150; the T-statistic is 3.063 ( $> 1.96$ ), and the P-value is 0.002 ( $< 0.05$ ), indicating that organizational culture, through work performance, significantly influences employee loyalty. The indirect

coefficient value is 0.062, and the T-statistic is  $1.858 < 1.96$ . The P-value is  $0.064 > 0.05$ , so work performance does not significantly mediate the influence of the work environment on employee loyalty. The indirect effect coefficient is 0.067, the T-statistic is  $2.024 > 1.96$ , and the P-value is  $0.044 < 0.05$ , indicating that work performance significantly mediates the influence of leadership on employee loyalty.

**Table 9.** Indirect effects (mediation of work performance)

|                                                                | Original Sample (O) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (O/STDEV) | P Values | Results         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|----------|-----------------|
| Organizational Culture -> Work Performance -> Employee Loyalty | 0.150               | 0.049                      | 3,063                  | 0.002    | Significant     |
| Work Environment -> Work Performance -> Employee Loyalty       | 0.062               | 0.033                      | 1,858                  | 0.064    | Not Significant |
| Leadership -> Work Performance -> Employee Loyalty             | 0.067               | 0.033                      | 2,024                  | 0.044    | Significant     |



## DISCUSSION

The influence of Organisational Culture on Employee Performance and Loyalty. The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that organizational culture has a positive and significant effect on employee performance and loyalty. This finding is in line with Robbins and Judge (2014) who stated that a strong organizational culture can shape positive work behavior, increase engagement, and encourage employees to achieve optimal performance. The organizational culture at the Archipelago Group Hotel, which emphasizes results-oriented teamwork and values stability, is a dominant factor in improving employee performance. In addition, organizational culture also has a direct effect on employee loyalty. Wardana et al. (2024) research found that consistent organizational values and norms can foster a sense of belonging, leading employees to stay and commit to the organization.

Although the work environment significantly influences employee performance and employee loyalty directly, the mediation analysis demonstrates that work performance does not significantly mediate this relationship ( $T = 1.858$ ;  $p = 0.064$ ). This finding suggests that improvements in the work environment contribute directly to employee loyalty rather than indirectly through enhanced work performance. Therefore, employee loyalty appears to be influenced more by employees' immediate perceptions of workplace comfort, safety, and organizational support than by changes in their performance.

The Influence of the Work Environment on Employee Performance and Loyalty. The work environment has been shown to have a positive and significant impact on employee performance and loyalty. A comfortable, safe, and adequately equipped work environment enhances employees' psychological well-being, leading to improved

performance. This finding aligns with Fitri et al.'s (Fitri et al., 2023) findings that both physical and non-physical work environments significantly impact employee productivity and loyalty. In the hospitality industry, which demands excellent service, a conducive work environment is crucial for maintaining workforce stability and reducing turnover rates.

The influence of Leadership on Employee Performance and Loyalty. The results of this study indicate that leadership significantly influences performance, but does not directly influence employee loyalty. This finding indicates that leadership at the Archipelago Hotel Group functions more as a driver of performance improvement than as a direct factor in shaping loyalty. These results align with Putri and Mani (2023), who stated that effective leadership improves performance through motivation and inspiration, whereas organizational and work-environment factors have a greater influence on employee loyalty.

However, through work performance as a mediating variable, leadership indirectly influences employee loyalty, so leadership still plays a strategic role in building long-term loyalty.

The mediating role of Job Performance on Employee Loyalty. Job performance has been shown to influence employee loyalty and to act as a significant mediator. This suggests that employees who demonstrate high performance tend to have higher commitment and loyalty to the organization. This finding supports research by Zaid et al. (2021), which states that job performance reflects employee engagement and tangible contributions, which ultimately shape loyalty.

## CONCLUSION

Organisational culture is the most impactful factor

on employee performance, which subsequently contributes to increased employee loyalty. The work environment significantly influences employee loyalty directly. However, employee performance does not significantly mediate the relationship between the work environment and employee loyalty. Therefore, improving workplace conditions contributes directly to strengthening employee loyalty. Having a safe, comfortable, and supportive work environment positively impacts employee performance and loyalty. On the other hand, leadership does not directly influence employee loyalty, but it has a positive and significant influence on employee performance. This means that the leadership function has a stronger influence on employee performance than on shaping loyalty. Employee performance significantly influences employee loyalty and serves as a mediator, strengthening the effects of organizational culture, work environment, and leadership on loyalty. Therefore, loyalty to the Archipelago Hotel Group is shaped more by employee performance, organizational culture, and a conducive work environment.

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# Comparing Malay and Chinese Perspectives on Sustainable Tourism Content and Decision-Making through Short-Form Social Media Videos in Malaysia

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 11/7/2026

Accepted : 25/7/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Ethic comparison;  
Influencer credibility;  
Responsible travel;  
Short-form video;  
Sustainable tourism

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Research paper

**Abstract** - This study examines differences between Malay and Chinese respondents in how sustainable tourism content presented through short-form social media videos influences tourism decision-making in Malaysia. The growing use of platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts has increased their importance in tourism communication and destination promotion. However, sustainability messages may be interpreted and translated into behavioural outcomes differently across culturally diverse groups. Guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), this study examines attention, internalisation, attitude, behavioural intention, and actual sustainable tourism behaviour. Two research questions were addressed: (1) What are the levels of attention, internalisation, and attitude toward sustainable tourism messages presented in short-form travel videos among Malaysian tourists? (2) To what extent do tourists engage in sustainable travel behaviours after watching short-form travel videos? A quantitative survey was conducted with 159 Malaysian respondents comprising Malay and Chinese participants. Independent-samples t-tests were used to compare the two groups. The findings indicate significant differences across several dimensions, with Malay respondents generally reporting higher levels of attention, attitude, behavioural intention, and sustainable tourism behaviour than Chinese respondents. The findings highlight the importance of combining engaging visuals and entertainment with clear sustainability messages to effectively communicate sustainable tourism to culturally diverse audiences in Malaysia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has experienced a strong recovery and growth in recent years, supported



by the rapid expansion of digital media and social media platforms. Globally, international tourist arrivals reached approximately 1.4 billion in 2024, an 11% increase from 2023 (World Tourism Barometer, 2024). This recovery highlights tourism's continued importance to national economies and social development. At the same time, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has emphasised sustainable tourism development as a global priority, reflecting growing awareness of the need to balance tourism growth with environmental protection, cultural preservation, and community well-being.

In Southeast Asia, tourism growth has been remarkably rapid, and countries in the region are actively promoting sustainability to mitigate the negative impacts of mass tourism. Malaysia, like neighbouring countries such as Thailand, has positioned tourism as a key economic sector while also facing growing sustainability challenges. Before the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, tourism contributed approximately 15.9% of Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Malaysia Investment Development Authority, MIDA, 2021). More recently, Malaysia recorded 16.9 million foreign visitors between January and May 2025, an increase of about 20% over the same period in the previous year (Travel and Tour World, TTW, 2025). These figures highlight the rapid growth of Malaysia's tourism industry and raise significant concerns about how to manage it sustainably.

Alongside tourism growth, short-form video platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts have become increasingly influential in shaping tourists' perceptions of destinations and travel decisions. These platforms provide visually engaging, fast-paced content that can quickly attract attention and shape attitudes. Recent studies have shown that environmentally

friendly short-form videos significantly enhance behavioural intentions for low-carbon, sustainable tourism through both cognitive and emotional processes (Chen & Cheng, 2023). Similarly, Zhou (2024) found that cognitive absorption factors such as immersion, attention, and interaction in short-form video travel content significantly increase users' willingness to travel, highlighting the importance of engagement in influencing travel behaviour. Furthermore, Qiu et al. (2024) demonstrated that perceived platform usefulness, influencer credibility, and entertainment value strongly influence tourists' attitudes, which in turn significantly predict travel intentions. These findings suggest that social and technological features of short-form video content play a critical role in shaping tourists' attitudes and decision-making processes.

The continued recovery of international and domestic tourism has increased the importance of managing tourism growth in ways that protect environmental resources, preserve cultural heritage, and benefit local communities. Malaysia's tourism sector has continued to attract a substantial number of visitors, with a total of 6,002,175 recorded this year, underscoring the sector's continued importance to the country. Malaysia's National Tourism Policy (NTP) 2020–2030 identifies sustainability as a key direction for the tourism sector, with "Practising Sustainable and Responsible Tourism" included among its transformation strategies. The policy also envisions Malaysia as "a sustainable tourism destination rich in culture" (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia [MOTAC], 2026). This continued growth highlights the importance of understanding how to communicate sustainability messages effectively to tourists and translate them into responsible travel decisions.

Moreover, Malaysia is a multicultural society, and ethnic background may influence how

individuals interpret, internalise, and respond to sustainability messages. Malay and Chinese tourists represent two significant segments of the domestic tourism market, each shaped by distinct cultural values, media consumption patterns, and social norms (Idris, 2011). These cultural differences may affect levels of attention to sustainable tourism behaviour. However, limited research has explicitly examined segment-specific differences in the sustainability of short-form video content among Malay and Chinese tourists.

Although previous research has examined the influence of short-form videos on tourism intention and sustainable tourism behaviour, less attention has been given to whether audiences from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds respond differently to sustainability messages presented through these platforms. Malaysia provides an appropriate context for such a comparison because its multicultural population includes diverse cultural, social, and value orientations. Understanding these differences is important because the same sustainability message may attract attention, be internalised, and influence behavioural intentions differently across audience groups. Therefore, comparing Malay and Chinese respondents can provide a more nuanced understanding of how short-form social media content communicates sustainable tourism messages and how these messages may influence tourism-related decision-making.

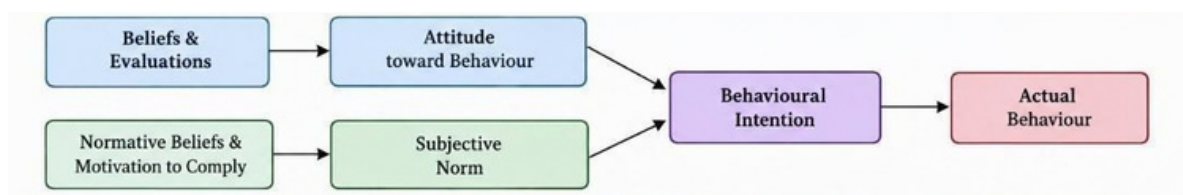
Therefore, this study aims to examine differences between Malay and Chinese tourists in Malaysia in their responses to sustainable tourism content in short-form videos and their subsequent tourism decisions. Specifically, the study addresses two research questions: (1) What are the levels of attention, internalisation, and attitude towards sustainable tourism messages presented in short-form videos and their subsequent tourism decisions. Specifically, the study addresses

two research questions: (1) What are the levels of attention, internalisation, and attitude towards sustainable tourism messages presented in short-form travel videos among Malaysian tourists? (2) To what extent do tourists engage in sustainable travel behaviours after watching short-form travel videos? These questions provide a clear basis for the descriptive and comparative analyses presented in the findings. The study also examines whether significant differences exist between Malay and Chinese respondents across five constructs: attention, internalisation, attitude towards sustainable tourism, behavioural intention, and actual sustainable tourism behaviour.

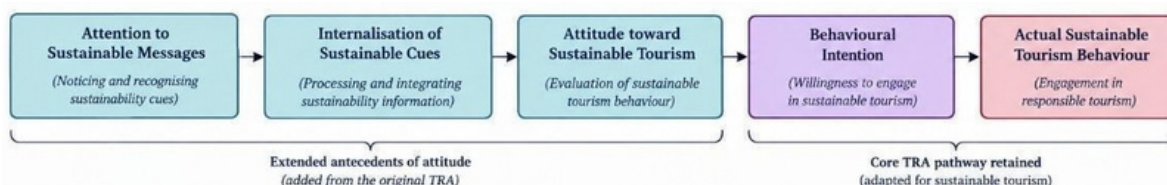
## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), explains behavioural decision-making through the relationships among attitudes, subjective norms, behavioural intention, and actual behaviour (see Figure 1). According to TRA, individuals form behavioural intentions based on their evaluation of a behaviour and perceived social expectations, with intention subsequently influencing behaviour. In the context of sustainable tourism, the theory has been applied to explain environmentally responsible and socially responsible tourism decisions. Previous studies have also demonstrated the relevance of behavioural theories in explaining tourists' sustainable intentions and consumption decisions (Patwary et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023; Luongo et al., 2024).

In this study, TRA is adapted and extended to examine how attention to sustainability messages and internalisation of sustainability cues may contribute to attitudes and behavioural intentions, which may subsequently influence actual sustainable tourism behaviour. As illustrated in Figure 2, the proposed framework extends the conventional TRA sequence by incorporating



**Figure 1.** Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen, 1975)



**Figure 2.** Conceptual Framework of This Study

attention and internalisation as cognitive antecedents and actual behaviour as the behavioural outcome. In other words, the proposed framework modifies the TRA's front end by introducing two sustainability-specific cognitive processes.

### 2.1 Attention to Sustainability Message

Attention to sustainability messages represents the initial cognitive engagement with sustainability-related cues embedded in short-form travel videos. Prior research suggests that attention is a prerequisite for effective message processing, as sustainability cues are unlikely to influence attitudes or intentions when viewers are engaged (Qu et al., 2022; Han et al., 2022). Based on the literature reviewed, research hypothesis (RH) 1 proposes that a significant difference exists between Malay and Chinese respondents in their attention to sustainable tourism messages in short-form travel videos.

### 2.2 Internalisation of Sustainability Cues

Internalisation of sustainability cues refers to the extent to which sustainability values are adopted into an individual's personal belief system. Studies indicate that internalised values are stronger predictors of sustainable behaviour than surface-

level awareness or external pressure (Wut et al., 2023; Xue et al., 2024). Based on the literature reviewed, RH2 proposes that Malay and Chinese respondents differ significantly in their internalisation of sustainability cues in short-form travel videos.

### 2.3 Attitude toward Sustainable Tourism

Attitude towards sustainable tourism reflects an individual's overall evaluation of sustainable tourism practices. In line with TRA, attitude serves as a key mediator between cognitive antecedents and behavioural intention, with positive attitudes increasing the likelihood of engaging in sustainable tourism behaviours (Patwary et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2024). Based on the literature reviewed, RH3 posits a significant difference in attitudes towards sustainable tourism between Malay and Chinese respondents.

### 2.4 Behavioural Intention

Behavioural intention represents tourists' readiness and willingness to engage in sustainable travel practices and is a central predictor of behaviour with the TRA framework. Empirical evidence indicates that exposure to sustainability-oriented digital content positively influences intentions to

make eco-friendly and responsible tourism choices (Chen et al., 2023). Based on the literature reviewed, RH4 proposes that a significant difference exists between Malay and Chinese respondents in their sustainable tourism behavioural intention.

### *2.5 Actual Behaviour*

Actual behaviour refers to observable sustainable tourism actions, such as conserving resources, maintaining cleanliness, respecting local culture, and supporting local communities. Including actual behaviour allows this study to examine whether positive intentions translate into tangible actions, thereby addressing the intention-behaviour gap highlighted in sustainable tourism (Wur et al., 2023). Based on the literature reviewed, RH5 proposes that a significant difference exists between Malay and Chinese respondents in their actual sustainable tourism behaviour.

### *2.6 Ethnic Perspective among Malays and Chinese*

Ethnic and cultural background may influence how individuals interpret sustainability messages, form attitudes, and make tourism decisions. In the Malaysian context, Malay and Chinese communities have distinct cultural and historical backgrounds that may contribute to differences in values, social norms, and consumption patterns. However, such differences should not be interpreted as fixed characteristics of all individuals within an ethnic group, as substantial variation may exist within each group.

For Chinese respondents, Confucian values have been associated with concepts such as harmony, responsibility, social relationships, and moral conduct. Previous research has found that Confucian values can contribute to environmentally responsible attitudes and behaviour by encouraging responsibility towards society and the natural

environment (Ma et al., 2018; Chen & Liu, 2025; Li & Wei, 2023). These values may therefore influence how Chinese tourists interpret sustainability-related information and evaluate responsible tourism practices.

Malay respondents in Malaysia are predominantly Muslim, and Islamic principles include stewardship, responsibility, moderation, cleanliness, and care for creation. Such principles may provide a cultural and religious context through which environmental and social responsibility is understood (Sian et al., 2010). Previous research has also highlighted the role of cultural and religious values in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviour among Malays and Chinese in Malaysia.

Nevertheless, cultural or religious background alone cannot fully explain individual tourism behaviour. Factors such as personal values, social influence, perceived benefits, cost, convenience, travel opportunities, and exposure to sustainability information may also affect sustainable tourism decisions. Therefore, this study does not assume that all Malay or Chinese respondents hold identical values. Instead, it examines whether statistically significant differences exist between the two groups in attention, internalisation, attitudes, behavioural intentions, and actual sustainable tourism behaviour.

### *2.7 Sustainable Tourism*

Sustainable tourism refers to tourism development and practices that consider the needs of tourists, host communities, the environment, and the tourism economy while protecting resources for future generations. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC, 2018) provides global criteria and principles for sustainable tourism that emphasise responsible destination management,



environmental conservation, social and cultural considerations, and economic sustainability.

Sustainable tourism can be understood through three interconnected dimensions: environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Environmental sustainability focuses on conserving natural resources, protecting biodiversity, reducing pollution, and minimising the negative ecological impacts of tourism. Social sustainability emphasises respect for local culture, community participation, social inclusion, and the equitable distribution of tourism benefits. Economic sustainability focuses on maintaining long-term economic viability through employment, support for local businesses, and fair distribution of tourism-related benefits (Alhaddi, 2015).

These dimensions are particularly relevant to tourism decision-making because tourists may consider sustainability when selecting destinations, accommodation, transportation, activities, and tourism businesses. Previous studies have shown that environmentally responsible values and sustainability-oriented information can influence tourists' attitudes and behavioural intentions (Patwary et al., 2022; Chen & Cheng, 2023). Social media can further support sustainable tourism by increasing awareness of responsible travel practices and exposing users to sustainability-related information. Consequently, short-form social media videos serve as an important communication channel for conveying environmental, social, and economic sustainability messages to potential tourists.

## 2.8 Short-form Video

Short-form social media videos are brief videos designed for rapid consumption and commonly distributed on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. These videos typically combine visual elements, audio, text, music, and

concise storytelling to attract viewers' attention and encourage engagement (Zhou, 2024). Their algorithm-driven distribution can increase repeated exposure to content that matches users' interests, thereby influencing engagement and information processing (Liu et al., 2023).

In tourism, short-form social media videos have become an important source of travel inspiration and destination information. Features such as audio-visual quality, storytelling, influencer credibility, and audience interaction can influence viewers' travel motivation and intentions (Asdecker, 2022; Zhu et al., 2024). Short-form videos can also communicate sustainability-related information by presenting environmental conservation, local community support, cultural preservation, responsible travel practices, and eco-friendly tourism options (Chen & Cheng, 2023; Liu et al., 2023).

For this study, sustainable short-form tourism videos were defined as short tourism-related videos that contain at least one sustainability-related message or visual cue. Examples included environmental conservation, protection of natural resources, respect for local culture, support for local communities, responsible travel practices, and environmentally friendly tourism choices. This definition was provided to respondents before they answered the questionnaire to ensure a consistent understanding of the concept.

Based on the presented literature, the research hypotheses are as follows:

RH1: There is a significant difference between Malay and Chinese respondents in their attention to sustainable tourism messages in short-form travel videos.

RH2: There is a significant difference between Malay and Chinese respondents in their internalisation of sustainable tourism messages in



in short-form travel videos.

RH3: There is a significant difference between Malay and Chinese respondents in their attitudes towards sustainable tourism messages in short-form travel videos.

RH4: There is a significant difference between Malay and Chinese respondents in their sustainable travel behavioural intentions.

RH5: There is a significant difference between Malay and Chinese respondents in their self-reported sustainable tourism behaviour.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey to examine differences between Malay and Chinese respondents in their responses to sustainable short-form social media tourism content. A quantitative approach was appropriate because the study aimed to collect numerical responses from a relatively large group of participants and statistically compare the mean scores of the two ethnic groups across several constructs.

Quantitative survey methods are particularly suitable when researchers seek to measure attitudes, perceptions, intentions, and behavioural responses using standardised instruments and statistical procedures. The study measured five key constructs: attention to sustainability messages, internalisation of sustainability cues, attitude towards sustainable tourism, behavioural intention, and actual sustainable tourism behaviour.

#### 3.1 Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprises Malaysian travellers who frequently watch short-form tourism-related videos on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. To enable meaningful cross-cultural comparisons, the study focuses on respondents

from diverse ethnic backgrounds, with particular emphasis on Malay and Chinese participants, as their cultural values and social norms may influence how sustainability messages are attended to, internalised, and translated into tourism behaviour. The population spans different generations, capturing variations in digital literacy, media engagement, and travel behaviour across age groups. According to the latest data from Tourism Malaysia, domestic tourism recorded 69.7 million domestic visitor trips in the first quarter of 2025, up 18.9% year-on-year and 25.5 million domestic visitor trips in the first quarter of 2025, up 37.6% year-on-year. The scale of domestic travel suggests a substantial pool of Malaysian travellers engaged with tourism content, supporting the feasibility of recruiting a sample from this population.

The intended sample size is 150–200 respondents, which is considered sufficient for quantitative analyses, including multiple regression and correlation. Following Tabachnick and Fidell (2019), the minimum sample size for regression is calculated as  $50 + 8m$ , where  $m$  represents the number of independent variables; with three independent variables in this study (attention, internalisation, and attitude), a minimum of 74 participants would be required, making the proposed 150–200 sample size more than adequate. Additionally, Hair et al. (2021) note that a sample exceeding 150 is appropriate for multivariate analysis, providing stable estimates and sufficient statistical power.

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit respondents who met the study's inclusion criteria. Participants were required to be Malaysian residents, belong to either the Malay or Chinese ethnic group, have experience watching short-form social media videos such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, or YouTube Shorts, and have sufficient familiarity with tourism-related content to respond to questions concerning sustainable tourism

messages. Recruitment was conducted by distributing the questionnaire to individuals who met these criteria. Respondents self-identified their ethnic group in the demographic section of the questionnaire, allowing the researchers to classify participants into the Malay and Chinese comparison groups. A total of 159 valid responses were obtained, comprising 78 Malay respondents and 81 Chinese respondents. The purposive sampling approach was selected because the research required participants with relevant exposure to short-form tourism content rather than a general population sample.

### 3.5 Research Instrument

The questionnaire serves as the primary data collection instrument, which is divided into six sections, each corresponding to a construct

examined. Each construct is measured using statements on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents received a brief explanation of sustainable short-form tourism content. They were informed that the term referred to short, tourism-related videos that convey messages or visual information about environmental protection, conservation of natural resources, respect for local culture, support for local communities, responsible travel practices, or environmentally friendly tourism choices. This explanation was provided to minimise differences in interpretation and to ensure that respondents answered the awareness question using a consistent definition. Table 1 demonstrates the instrument design according to the research question and hypotheses.

**Table 1.** Instruments for data collection

| Variables                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Measurement items (Likert scale)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Source                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <p>Attention to Sustainability Messages</p> <p>RQ1: What are the levels of attention, internalisation, and attitude towards sustainable tourism messages presented in short-form travel videos among Malaysian tourists?</p> <p>RH1: There is a significant level of attention among respondents towards sustainable tourism messages in short-form travel videos.</p>         | <p>1. I usually notice when short-form videos include messages about protecting the environment or local communities. (adapted)</p> <p>2. I pay attention to travel videos that highlight responsible or eco-friendly tourism. (adapted)</p> <p>3. I am attracted to short-form videos that feature nature conservation or local culture. (adapted)</p> <p>4. I focus more on travel videos that show authentic and ethical travel practices. (adapted)</p> <p>5. I easily get attention for sustainability messages in short-form videos (adapted)</p> | Liu et al. (2023).    |
| <p>Internalisation of Sustainability Cues</p> <p>RQ1: What are the levels of attention, internalisation, and attitude towards sustainable tourism messages presented in short-form travel videos among Malaysian tourists?</p> <p>RH2: There is a significant level of internalisation among respondents towards sustainable tourism messages in short-form travel videos.</p> | <p>1. The sustainability values shown in short-form videos match my personal values.</p> <p>2. I feel personally motivated to support responsible travel after watching such videos.</p> <p>3. These videos make me reflect on my role in environmental conservation.</p> <p>4. I act in line with the sustainability messages I see online.</p> <p>5. I feel that watching these videos strengthens my belief in sustainable living.</p>                                                                                                               | Liu et al., (2023)    |
| <p>Attitude Towards Sustainable Tourism</p> <p>RQ1: What are the levels of attention, internalisation, and attitude towards sustainable tourism messages presented in short-form travel videos among Malaysian tourists?</p> <p>RH3: There is a significant level of attitude among respondents towards sustainable tourism messages in short-form travel videos.</p>          | <p>1. I feel that travelling sustainably is a positive and meaningful behaviour. (adapted)</p> <p>2. I believe sustainable tourism benefits both the environment and local people. (adapted)</p> <p>3. I think being a responsible tourist is personally meaningful. (adapted)</p> <p>4. I feel good when I engage in eco-friendly and cultural travel activities. (adapted)</p> <p>5. I feel I am contributing to society when supporting sustainable tourism. (adapted)</p>                                                                           | Rahman et al. (2023). |

**Table 1.** Continued

| Variables                                                                                                                                                                                         | Measurement items (Likert scale)                                                                             | Source               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| RQ2: To what extent do tourists engage in sustainable travel behaviours after watching short travel videos?                                                                                       | 1. I plan to choose destinations that promote sustainability. (adopted)                                      | Rahman et al. (2023) |
| RH4: Attention, internalisation, and attitude towards sustainable tourism messages in short-form travel videos have a significant positive influence on sustainable travel behavioural intention. | 2. I intend to travel in an environmentally responsible way. (adopted)                                       |                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 3. I am willing to support eco-friendly tourism businesses. (adopted)                                        |                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 4. I intend to recommend sustainable destinations to others. (adopted)                                       |                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 5. I will consider sustainability messages when deciding where to travel. (adapted)                          |                      |
| Actual Sustainable Behaviour                                                                                                                                                                      | 1. I have taken green actions (reduce waste/ eco-friendly accommodation/ transport) during travel. (adapted) | Rahman et al. (2023) |
| RQ2: To what extent do tourists engage in sustainable travel behaviours after watching short travel videos?                                                                                       | 2. I support local businesses when visiting new destinations. (adapted)                                      |                      |
| RH5: Attention, internalisation, and attitude towards sustainable tourism messages in short-form travel videos have a significant positive influence on actual sustainable travel behaviour.      | 3. I try to conserve the environment and culture according to rules and regulations. (adapted)               |                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 4. I share sustainability-related travel content on social media. (adapted)                                  |                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 5. I avoid visiting places that exploit nature or culture. (adapted)                                         |                      |

### 3.6 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and independent-samples *t* tests. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise the participants' demographic characteristics and response patterns. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the measurement items for each construct. A coefficient of 0.70 or above was considered an acceptable indicator of internal consistency.

Independent-samples *t* tests were conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between Malay and Chinese respondents in their attention to sustainability messages, internalisation of sustainability cues, attitude towards sustainable tourism, behavioural intention, and actual sustainable tourism behaviour. This statistical procedure was appropriate because the study compared the mean scores of two independent groups. Statistical significance was assessed using a *p*-value of less than 0.05. Cohen's

*d* was also calculated to determine the effect size or magnitude of the differences between the two groups. The effect size was interpreted as small (0.20), medium (0.50), or large (0.80).

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Reliability Analysis

A reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the measurement items used in the study. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each construct, with values of 0.70 or above generally considered acceptable for social science research. The results in Table 2 indicate that all five constructs demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency. Attention recorded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.828, internalisation recorded 0.893, attitude recorded 0.898, behavioural intention recorded 0.902, and actual sustainable behaviour recorded 0.797. These results indicate that the measurement items within each construct were sufficiently consistent for subsequent statistical analysis.

**Table 2.** Reliability analysis results

| Variables             | No of items | Cronbach's Alpha | Interpretation         |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Attention             | 5           | 0.828            | Good reliability       |
| Internalisation       | 5           | 0.893            | Excellent reliability  |
| Attitude              | 5           | 0.898            | Excellent reliability  |
| Behavioural intention | 5           | 0.902            | Excellent reliability  |
| Actual behaviour      | 5           | 0.797            | Acceptable reliability |

The reliability coefficients indicate that the scales demonstrated adequate internal consistency and were suitable for subsequent analyses.

#### 4.2 Demographic Profile

Table 3 presents the respondents' demographic profile, including age, gender, ethnicity, preferred social media platform, and awareness of sustainable tourism content in short-form videos.

The age group of this study is distributed into four categories. The 13–28 age category represented the largest proportion of respondents in the study (75.5%,  $n = 120$ ). This group broadly overlaps with Generation Z, although the study does not classify all respondents aged 13–28 as Generation Z because generational boundaries vary across sources. Therefore, age is reported as a category rather than as a strict generational classification. The age group aged 29 to 44 comprises 9.4% ( $n = 15$ ), and the age group aged 45 to 60 comprises 10.7% ( $n = 18$ ). Lastly, the smallest percentage of the category groups is 61–79, at 6% ( $n = 3.8$ ). In this study, 54 % ( $n = 87$ ) of the respondents are male, and 45 % ( $n = 7$ ) are

female. The percentage of male respondents is higher than that of female respondents. The ethnic groups chosen are Chinese and Malay. 50.9% ( $n = 81$ ) of the respondents are Chinese, and 49.1% ( $n = 78$ ) are Malay. The quantities of each ethnic group are equal; the difference between the two groups is 1.8%.

Respondents who prefer Instagram Reels tend to score higher on the scale. The most significant finding is that respondents select the highest preference level (on the Instagram Reels scale), at 35% ( $n = 56$ ), followed by 27% ( $n = 44$ ), indicating that more than half of respondents prefer Instagram Reels. Other than that, the lower preference level (scale 0-for) for Instagram Reels is 17.6% ( $n = 2$ ), lower than TikTok (23.3%,  $n = 37$ ) and YouTube Shorts (22.6%,  $n = 36$ ). Overall, Instagram Reels is the most preferred platform, followed by TikTok, while YouTube Shorts is the least preferred. Among 159 respondents, 128 are aware of short-form videos on sustainable tourism.

**Table 3.** Demographic profile of respondents

| Variables | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------|----------|---------------|----------------|
| Age       | 13-28    | 120           | 75.5           |
|           | 29-44    | 15            | 9.4            |
|           | 45-60    | 18            | 10.7           |
|           | 61-79    | 6             | 3.8            |

**Table 3.** Continued

| Variables | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------|----------|---------------|----------------|
|           | Total    | 159           | 100            |
| Gender    | Male     | 87            | 54.7           |
|           | Female   | 72            | 45.3           |
|           | Total    | 159           | 100            |
| Ethnic    | Chinese  | 81            | 50.9           |
|           | Malay    | 78            | 49.1           |
|           | Total    | 159           | 100            |

### 4.3 Discussion on Research Questions

#### 4.3.1 Measurement of The Level of Attention, Internalisation, and Attitude Towards Sustainable Tourism Messages Presented in Short-Form Travel Videos

As for the first research question, Table 4 shows that 61% of respondents strongly agreed that they noticed sustainability messages in short-form videos. Additionally, the findings indicate strong and sustained engagement with eco-friendly media. Approximately 64% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they actively paid attention to sustainable travel videos. Similarly, 70.4% were attracted to short-form videos highlighting environmental conservation and local heritage. Ethical travel content commanded particularly strong attention, with 76.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing that such content attracted greater focus. Furthermore, 62.9% agreed or strongly agreed that sustainability cues in short-form videos readily captured their attention.

These findings suggest that short-form videos provide a potentially effective communication environment for presenting sustainability-related tourism messages. The consistently high levels of positive responses across attention, attraction, and engagement indicate that sustainability content can gain visibility among viewers when communicated

through concise and visually appealing formats. The particularly high response for ethical travel content (76.1%) suggests that messages emphasising responsible and values-based tourism may be especially relevant to contemporary audiences. Likewise, the strong attraction to content featuring environmental conservation and local heritage (70.4%) indicates that sustainability messages may become more engaging when linked to tangible destinations, cultural assets, and meaningful tourism practices.

The findings further imply that short-form video content may serve as an initial point of engagement through which tourists encounter and process sustainability-related information. Rather than relying solely on lengthy or text-based communication, tourism stakeholders may benefit from integrating clear sustainability cues into visually compelling short-form content. Nevertheless, these results primarily demonstrate respondents' reported attention and engagement; they should not be interpreted as conclusive evidence that exposure to such videos directly produces sustainable tourism behaviour. Instead, the findings establish a strong foundation for examining whether this heightened attention and engagement subsequently translates into sustainability-oriented attitudes, intentions, or actions.



**Table 4.** Frequency and percentage of attention to sustainability messages

| Item                                                                                                                | Rate              | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| A1. I usually notice when short-form videos include messages about protecting the environment or local communities. | Strongly Disagree | 4             | 2.5            |
|                                                                                                                     | Disagree          | 16            | 10.1           |
|                                                                                                                     | Neutral           | 42            | 26.4           |
|                                                                                                                     | Agree             | 49            | 30.8           |
|                                                                                                                     | Strongly Agree    | 48            | 30.2           |
|                                                                                                                     | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| A2. I pay attention to travel videos that highlight responsible or eco-friendly tourism.                            | Strongly Disagree | 4             | 2.5            |
|                                                                                                                     | Disagree          | 12            | 7.5            |
|                                                                                                                     | Neutral           | 42            | 26.4           |
|                                                                                                                     | Agree             | 55            | 34.6           |
|                                                                                                                     | Strongly Agree    | 46            | 28.9           |
|                                                                                                                     | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| A3. I am attracted to short-form videos that feature nature conservation or local culture.                          | Strongly Disagree | 4             | 2.5            |
|                                                                                                                     | Disagree          | 7             | 4.4            |
|                                                                                                                     | Neutral           | 37            | 23.3           |
|                                                                                                                     | Agree             | 51            | 32.7           |
|                                                                                                                     | Strongly Agree    | 60            | 37.7           |
|                                                                                                                     | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| A4. I focus more on travel videos that show authentic and ethical travel practices.                                 | Strongly Disagree | 2             | 1.3            |
|                                                                                                                     | Disagree          | 7             | 4.4            |
|                                                                                                                     | Neutral           | 29            | 18.2           |
|                                                                                                                     | Agree             | 66            | 41.5           |
|                                                                                                                     | Strongly Agree    | 55            | 34.6           |
|                                                                                                                     | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| A5. I easily get attention for sustainability messages in short-form videos                                         | Strongly Disagree | 4             | 2.5            |
|                                                                                                                     | Disagree          | 16            | 10.1           |
|                                                                                                                     | Neutral           | 39            | 24.5           |
|                                                                                                                     | Agree             | 52            | 32.7           |
|                                                                                                                     | Strongly Agree    | 48            | 30.2           |
|                                                                                                                     | Total             | 159           | 100            |

As detailed in Table 5, the findings demonstrate a strong alignment between sustainability content and respondents' personal values. Overall, 64.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the sustainability values conveyed through short-form videos aligned with their personal principles. Exposure to these videos also appeared to foster responsible tourism orientations, with 74.3% agreeing or strongly

agreeing that the content motivated them to support responsible tourism practices. In terms of personal reflection, 69.8% agreed or strongly agreed that the content prompted them to consider their individual role in environmental conservation. This positive orientation was further reflected in behavioural alignment, with 66.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they aligned their actual actions with sustainability cues encountered online. Finally,

71.7% agreed or strongly agreed that exposure to short-form travel videos reinforced their commitment to sustainable living.

These findings suggest that short-form travel videos may extend beyond awareness-building by encouraging more personal, action-oriented engagement with sustainability. The relatively high level of agreement across all dimensions indicates that sustainability messages delivered through concise, visually engaging content can resonate with viewers' existing values while strengthening their motivation to adopt responsible tourism practices. Notably, the progression from value alignment and personal reflection to behavioural alignment and commitment suggests that such

content can link cognitive and affective responses to everyday sustainability intentions. The particularly high proportions reporting greater motivation to support responsible tourism (74.3%) and a reinforced commitment to sustainable living (71.7%) further indicate that short-form videos can function as persuasive communication tools rather than merely informational media. This supports the view that social media content can influence tourism-related attitudes and behavioural orientations when sustainability messages are presented in accessible and personally meaningful formats. However, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of perceived influence and self-reported behavioural alignment rather than definitive proof of actual behavioural change.

**Table 5.** Frequency and percentage of internalisation of sustainable cues

| Item                                                                                       | Rate              | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| B1. The sustainability values depicted in short-form videos align with my personal values. | Strongly Disagree | 2             | 1.3            |
|                                                                                            | Disagree          | 11            | 6.9            |
|                                                                                            | Neutral           | 44            | 27.7           |
|                                                                                            | Agree             | 60            | 37.7           |
|                                                                                            | Strongly Agree    | 42            | 26.4           |
|                                                                                            | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| B2. I feel personally motivated to support responsible travel after watching such videos.  | Strongly Disagree | 1             | 0.6            |
|                                                                                            | Disagree          | 12            | 7.5            |
|                                                                                            | Neutral           | 28            | 17.6           |
|                                                                                            | Agree             | 71            | 44.7           |
|                                                                                            | Strongly Agree    | 47            | 29.6           |
|                                                                                            | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| B3. These videos make me reflect on my role in environmental conservation.                 | Strongly Disagree | 1             | 0.6            |
|                                                                                            | Disagree          | 10            | 6.3            |
|                                                                                            | Neutral           | 37            | 23.3           |
|                                                                                            | Agree             | 59            | 37.1           |
|                                                                                            | Strongly Agree    | 52            | 32.7           |
|                                                                                            | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| B4. I align my actions with the sustainability messages I see online.                      | Strongly Disagree | 3             | 1.9            |
|                                                                                            | Disagree          | 11            | 6.9            |
|                                                                                            | Neutral           | 39            | 24.5           |
|                                                                                            | Agree             | 66            | 41.5           |
|                                                                                            | Strongly Agree    | 40            | 25.2           |
|                                                                                            | Total             | 159           | 100            |

**Table 5.** Continued

| Item                                                                               | Rate              | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
|                                                                                    | Total             | 159           | 100            |
|                                                                                    | Strongly Disagree | 2             | 1.3            |
|                                                                                    | Disagree          | 10            | 6.3            |
| B5. I feel that watching these videos strengthens my belief in sustainable living. | Neutral           | 33            | 20.8           |
|                                                                                    | Agree             | 64            | 40.3           |
|                                                                                    | Strongly Agree    | 50            | 31.4           |
|                                                                                    | Total             | 159           | 100            |

As detailed in Table 6, the findings indicate a strong positive orientation towards sustainable tourism among the respondents. Overall, 83.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that travelling sustainably constitutes positive and meaningful behaviour. Similarly, 79.2% perceived sustainable tourism as generating mutual benefits for both the environment and local communities. Notably, 84.9% agreed or strongly agreed that being a responsible tourist was personally important to them, representing the highest level of positive response across the items. In addition, 78.6% reported that engaging in eco-friendly travel activities provided them with a sense of personal satisfaction. A comparable proportion, 76.1%, agreed or strongly agreed that supporting sustainable tourism enabled them to feel that they were contributing to society.

Taken together, these findings suggest that respondents generally associate sustainable tourism with positive personal and societal meanings. The strong agreement that sustainable travel represents meaningful behaviour indicates that sustainability is not perceived solely as an environmental concern but may also be understood as a personally valued form of tourism participation. The high level of perceived personal importance attached to being a responsible tourist (84.9%) further suggests that responsible tourism resonates with respondents' individual values and self-perceptions. Meanwhile, the findings on personal satisfaction and societal

contribution indicate that sustainable tourism may provide both intrinsic and socially oriented benefits, whereby environmentally responsible practices are associated with personal fulfilment and a sense of contributing to the wider community.

The finding that 79.2% perceived benefits for both the environment and local communities is also noteworthy. It suggests that respondents recognise sustainability as having a broader scope that extends beyond environmental protection to include community-related outcomes. This perception is consistent with a more holistic understanding of sustainable tourism, in which environmental stewardship and local community well-being are viewed as interconnected considerations. However, these findings primarily reflect respondents' attitudes and perceptions. While the consistently high positive responses indicate a favourable orientation towards sustainable tourism, they should not be taken as direct evidence that respondents consistently engage in sustainable travel behaviours. Further analysis of behavioural intentions or actual practices would be necessary to establish whether these positive perceptions translate into sustained responsible tourism behaviour.

**Table 6.** Frequency and percentage of attitude towards sustainable tourism

| Item                                                                              | Rate              | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| C1. I feel that travelling sustainably is a positive and meaningful behaviour.    | Strongly Disagree | 1             | 0.6            |
|                                                                                   | Disagree          | 8             | 5.0            |
|                                                                                   | Neutral           | 18            | 11.3           |
|                                                                                   | Agree             | 62            | 39.0           |
|                                                                                   | Strongly Agree    | 70            | 44.0           |
|                                                                                   | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| C2. I believe sustainable tourism benefits both the environment and local people. | Strongly Disagree | 1             | 0.6            |
|                                                                                   | Disagree          | 7             | 4.4            |
|                                                                                   | Neutral           | 25            | 15.7           |
|                                                                                   | Agree             | 50            | 31.4           |
|                                                                                   | Strongly Agree    | 76            | 47.8           |
|                                                                                   | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| C3. I think being a responsible tourist is personally important to me.            | Strongly Disagree | 2             | 1.3            |
|                                                                                   | Disagree          | 2             | 1.3            |
|                                                                                   | Neutral           | 20            | 12.6           |
|                                                                                   | Agree             | 42            | 26.4           |
|                                                                                   | Strongly Agree    | 93            | 58.5           |
|                                                                                   | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| C4. I feel good when I engage in eco-friendly and cultural travel activities.     | Strongly Disagree | 0             | 0              |
|                                                                                   | Disagree          | 7             | 4.4            |
|                                                                                   | Neutral           | 27            | 17.0           |
|                                                                                   | Agree             | 53            | 33.3           |
|                                                                                   | Strongly Agree    | 72            | 45.3           |
|                                                                                   | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| C5. I feel I'm contributing to society when supporting sustainable tourism.       | Strongly Disagree | 0             | 0              |
|                                                                                   | Disagree          | 6             | 3.8            |
|                                                                                   | Neutral           | 32            | 20.1           |
|                                                                                   | Agree             | 48            | 30.2           |

Table 7 summarises the mean scores for attention, internalisation, and attitudes towards sustainable tourism messages.

Based on a five-point Likert scale, the three independent variables indicate agreement and strong agreement with sustainable content. The first

**Table 7.** Summarises the mean scores for attention, internalisation, and attitudes towards sustainable tourism messages

| Variables       | Mean Score |
|-----------------|------------|
| Attention       | 3.86       |
| Internalisation | 3.89       |
| Attitude        | 4.24       |

Based on a five-point Likert scale, the three independent variables indicate agreement and strong agreement with sustainable content. The first research question aims to measure the level of attention, internalisation, and attitude towards sustainable tourism messages presented in short-form travel videos. The finding shows that respondents agree they pay attention to sustainable short-form videos ( $M = 3.86$ ). This result indicates that the respondents have focused on videos that feature sustainable content, such as nature, the environment, and culture. Moreover, the respondents are aware of videos that show responsible and ethical practices. Align with the previews by Han et al., 2022; Li & Tay, 2024: attention to sustainable short-form videos is an action that involves recall and understanding of content. This means short-form video can capture respondents' attention and deliver sustainable travel content. Additionally, supported by Kullolli et al. (2023) Gen Z is the age group that is highly influenced by social media, which is the main respondent in this study. The reason for this is that Gen Z have smartphones and constantly engages with social media, which makes them pay close attention towards social content.

Moreover, the internalisation of sustainable cues was also found to agree among respondents ( $M = 3.89$ ). This means that respondents are motivated to support responsible travel and are more concerned about the environment because the sustainable content strengthens their acceptance of sustainable tourism. Consistent with Wut et al. (2023), an individual adopts sustainability values derived from media messages, and their belief becomes more about doing the right thing and aligns with their self-concept. This means that the respondents are not only aware of the videos but also cognitively processed and accepted them. Respondents internalise sustainable cues rather than just consuming content.

Lastly, attitude has the highest mean score ( $M = 4.24$ ), indicating a positive attitude towards sustainable tourism content. This is because respondents feel good about travelling responsibly and believe that sustainability aligns with their personal beliefs and behaviour. Aligning with Ashraf et al. (2020), attitude refers to an individual's overall positive or negative evaluation of performing something. This means that respondents have a positive attitude towards the sustainable travel video.

#### *4.3.2 The Extent To Which Tourists Engage in Sustainable Travel Behaviours after Watching Short-form Travel Videos*

As for the second research question, Table 8 presents respondents' behavioural intentions towards sustainable tourism. Overall, the findings indicate a strong inclination towards sustainability-oriented travel choices. The most prominent result concerned respondents' intention to travel in an environmentally responsible manner, with 76.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. Similarly, 76.7% indicated that they intended to recommend sustainable destinations to others, suggesting that sustainability may extend beyond personal travel choices to positive word-of-mouth intentions.

A further notable finding was that 74.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would consider sustainability messages when deciding where to travel. This suggests that sustainability-related information may play a meaningful role in destination decision-making. In addition, 74.2% expressed an intention to choose destinations that promote sustainability, while 79.3% indicated a willingness to support eco-friendly tourism businesses. Taken together, these findings demonstrate consistently positive behavioural intentions across destination selection,



environmentally responsible travel, support for sustainable tourism businesses, and recommendation of sustainable destinations.

However, these findings should be interpreted as indicators of behavioural intention rather than evidence of actual sustainable tourism behaviour. Although the high levels of positive responses suggest that sustainability is relevant to respondents' intended travel decisions, intentions

responses suggest that sustainability is relevant to respondents' intended travel decisions, intentions do not necessarily translate into consistent behaviour in practice. Nevertheless, the findings provide evidence of a favourable behavioural orientation towards sustainable tourism and indicate respondents' potential readiness to incorporate sustainability considerations into future travel-related decisions.

**Table 8.** Frequency and percentage of behavioural intention towards sustainable tourism

| Item                                                                       | Rate              | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| D1. I plan to choose destinations that promote sustainability.             | Strongly Disagree | 1             | 0.6            |
|                                                                            | Disagree          | 7             | 4.4            |
|                                                                            | Neutral           | 33            | 20.8           |
|                                                                            | Agree             | 73            | 45.9           |
|                                                                            | Strongly Agree    | 45            | 28.3           |
|                                                                            | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| D2. I intend to travel in an environmentally responsible way.              | Strongly Disagree | 2             | 0.6            |
|                                                                            | Disagree          | 6             | 4.4            |
|                                                                            | Neutral           | 29            | 18.2           |
|                                                                            | Agree             | 63            | 39.6           |
|                                                                            | Strongly Agree    | 59            | 37.1           |
|                                                                            | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| D3. I am willing to support eco-friendly tourism businesses.               | Strongly Disagree | 0             | 0              |
|                                                                            | Disagree          | 4             | 2.5            |
|                                                                            | Neutral           | 29            | 18.2           |
|                                                                            | Agree             | 55            | 34.6           |
|                                                                            | Strongly Agree    | 71            | 44.7           |
|                                                                            | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| D4. I intend to recommend sustainable destinations to others               | Strongly Disagree | 3             | 1.9            |
|                                                                            | Disagree          | 5             | 3.1            |
|                                                                            | Neutral           | 28            | 17.6           |
|                                                                            | Agree             | 60            | 37.7           |
|                                                                            | Strongly Agree    | 63            | 39.6           |
|                                                                            | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| D5. I will consider sustainability messages when deciding where to travel. | Strongly Disagree | 1             | 0              |
|                                                                            | Disagree          | 9             | 5.7            |
|                                                                            | Neutral           | 29            | 18.2           |
|                                                                            | Agree             | 55            | 34.6           |
|                                                                            | Strongly Agree    | 65            | 40.9           |
|                                                                            | Total             | 159           | 100            |

Based on Table 9, the findings indicate a generally strong orientation towards sustainable tourism practices. The most prominent result concerned conserving the environment and culture in accordance with relevant rules and regulations, with 83.0% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this practice. Similarly, 78.6% reported supporting local businesses when visiting new destinations, suggesting a strong recognition

of tourism's role in contributing to local economic development. Avoiding destinations that exploit natural or cultural resources also received substantial support, with 76.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this practice.

Overall, these findings suggest that respondents exhibit positive behavioural orientations towards environmental

**Table 9.** Frequency and percentage of actual behaviour towards sustainable tourisms

| Item                                                                                                | Rate              | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| E1. I have taken green actions (reducing waste/eco-friendly accommodation/transport) during travel. | Strongly Disagree | 3             | 1.9            |
|                                                                                                     | Disagree          | 9             | 5.7            |
|                                                                                                     | Neutral           | 37            | 23.3           |
|                                                                                                     | Agree             | 59            | 37.1           |
|                                                                                                     | Strongly Agree    | 51            | 32.1           |
|                                                                                                     | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| E2. I support local businesses when visiting new destinations.                                      | Strongly Disagree | 0             | 0              |
|                                                                                                     | Disagree          | 8             | 5              |
|                                                                                                     | Neutral           | 25            | 15.7           |
|                                                                                                     | Agree             | 60            | 37.7           |
|                                                                                                     | Strongly Agree    | 66            | 41.5           |
|                                                                                                     | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| E3. I work to conserve the environment and culture in accordance with the rules and regulations.    | Strongly Disagree | 0             | 0              |
|                                                                                                     | Disagree          | 5             | 2.5            |
|                                                                                                     | Neutral           | 22            | 13.8           |
|                                                                                                     | Agree             | 56            | 35.2           |
|                                                                                                     | Strongly Agree    | 76            | 47.8           |
|                                                                                                     | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| E4. I share sustainability-related travel content on social media.                                  | Strongly Disagree | 13            | 8.2            |
|                                                                                                     | Disagree          | 19            | 11.9           |
|                                                                                                     | Neutral           | 39            | 24.5           |
|                                                                                                     | Agree             | 42            | 26.4           |
|                                                                                                     | Strongly Agree    | 46            | 28.9           |
|                                                                                                     | Total             | 159           | 100            |
| E5. I avoid visiting places that exploit nature or culture.                                         | Strongly Disagree | 2             | 1.3            |
|                                                                                                     | Disagree          | 6             | 3.8            |
|                                                                                                     | Neutral           | 30            | 18.9           |
|                                                                                                     | Agree             | 49            | 30.8           |
|                                                                                                     | Strongly Agree    | 72            | 45.3           |
|                                                                                                     | Total             | 159           | 100            |

conservation, support for local communities, and the responsible of tourism resources. The relatively high level of agreement across these practices indicates that sustainability is reflected not only in respondents' general attitudes but also in several self-reported tourism-related actions. However, the results should be interpreted as indicators of self-reported sustainable practices rather than definitive evidence of consistent behaviour in actual travel contexts. In particular, the comparatively lower level of agreement regarding sharing sustainability-related travel content on social media (55.3%) suggests that sustainable practices may be more readily expressed through direct travel choices than

through online advocacy or content-sharing behaviour.

The descriptive results for the second research question show the extent to which respondents demonstrated sustainable travel behavioural intention and actual sustainable behaviour following exposure to short-form travel videos. The findings indicate that respondents generally demonstrated a positive level of sustainable travel behavioural intention and actual sustainable behaviour, with mean scores of 4.01 and 4.09. This suggests that short-form travel videos can encourage viewers to consider and engage in more responsible travel practices.

**Table 10.** Table of total mean score of behavioural intention and actual sustainable behaviour

| Variables                    | Mean Score |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Behavioural Intention        | 4.09       |
| Actual Sustainable Behaviour | 4.01       |

Note. five-point Likert scale

*4.3 Discussion on Examining Differences Between Malay and Chinese Respondents in Their Responses to Sustainable Tourism Content*

To examine differences between Malay and Chinese respondents, an independent-samples t test is conducted on the variables' attention, internalisation, attitude, intention, and behaviour towards sustainability, based on the data analysis shown in the table below.

The independent-samples t-test results indicate that Malay respondents reported significantly higher levels of attention to sustainability messages than Chinese respondents on items A1-A4 ( $p < 0.05$ ). The effect sizes ranged from small to large (Cohen's  $d = -0.43$  to  $-0.77$ ), indicating meaningful differences between the two groups. Item A5 also recorded a higher mean score among Malay respondents, although the difference was marginally significant ( $p = 0.050$ ;  $d = -0.31$ ).

Overall, the findings suggest that Malay respondents in this sample reported greater attention to sustainability-related content in short-form tourism videos.

One possible explanation is that cultural and religious values may influence how sustainability-related information is perceived. Previous research has associated Islamic principles with stewardship, responsibility, and care for the environment, while studies on Chinese visitors have also identified the role of cultural values in environmentally responsible behaviour (Sian et al., 2010; Ma et al., 2018; Li & Wei, 2023). However, these cultural explanations should not be interpreted as deterministic. Attention to sustainability content may also be influenced by individual interests, prior travel experience, social media exposure, and the video's presentation style. Therefore, the higher attention score among Malay

**Table 11.** Independent-samples t test of attention to sustainability messages

| Items | Chinese Mean (SD) | Malay Mean (SD) | T(df)         | Sig. (2-tailed) | Cohen's d | Effect Size  | Conclusion                           |
|-------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| A1    | 3.38 (1.08)       | 4.15 (0.91)     | -4.87(154.46) | <0.001          | -0.77     | Medium-Large | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| A2    | 3.51 (1.14)       | 4.10 (0.78)     | -3.85(142.02) | <0.001          | -0.61     | Medium       | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| A3    | 3.73 (1.08)       | 4.24 (0.86)     | -3.33(151.23) | 0.001           | -0.52     | Medium       | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| A4    | 3.85 (0.94)       | 4.23 (0.84)     | -2.69(156.11) | 0.008           | -0.43     | Small-Medium | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| A5    | 3.62 (1.06)       | 3.95 (1.06)     | -1.98(156.77) | 0.050           | -0.31     | Small        | Marginally significant(Malay higher) |

respondents should be interpreted as a difference observed within this sample rather than evidence that one ethnic group is inherently more environmentally conscious than the other.

Moreover, the results show that Chinese attention to sustainable video is lower because the emphasis on religion-based environments is weaker in Malay. This is because Chinese in Malaysia practice a variety of religions and beliefs, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, as Ismail and Alice (2025) note. Although many Chinese believe in Confucianism, they do not practice it, meaning the sustainable practices and values are not implemented in daily life. To explain this, institutions that promote Confucianism, such as the Kong Institute, focus more on language and cultural education, explicitly promoting Confucian values, while the Chinese have limited awareness of the philosophy's teachings (as supported by Ngu et al., 2021). Which means individuals who do have this responsibility will pay more attention to sustainable content.

As a result, Malays pay more attention to sustainable content than the Chinese do. This can be further explained using the TRA. Individuals' behaviour is influenced by attitude and subjective norms. Malays have a positive attitude and strong subjective norms towards sustainability. This is because Malay teachings are deeply linked to

stewardship, meaning that environmental sustainability is their religious duty rather than a social responsibility.

In contrast, the Chinese exhibit lower attitudes and subjective norms towards sustainability. This is because the Chinese view Confucianism more positively as a cultural and linguistic tradition than as a set of ethical values, meaning that, for them, environmental sustainability is a personal choice rather than a necessity. Even the Chinese's attention towards sustainability content is moderately positive, but it is lower among themselves.

In Table 14, the independent-samples t-test results for Malay and Chinese participants are compared regarding their internalisation of sustainable messages in short-form travel videos. The results show that Malay respondents demonstrated significantly higher mean scores than Chinese respondents. From item B1 to B5 ( $p < 0.05$ ), with the effect size ranging from small to large (Cohen's  $-0.43$  to  $-0.88$ ), indicating differences in internalised sustainable content. Overall, Malay respondents showed greater internalisation of sustainable short video content than Chinese respondents.

In Table 12, the independent-samples t-test results for Malay and Chinese participants are

compared regarding their internalisation of sustainable messages in short-form travel videos. The results show that Malay respondents demonstrated significantly higher mean scores than Chinese respondents. From item B1 to B5 ( $p < 0.05$ ), with the effect size ranging from small to large (Cohen's  $-0.43$  to  $-0.88$ ), indicating differences in internalised sustainable content. Overall, Malay respondents showed greater internalisation of sustainable short video content than Chinese respondents.

In the independent-samples t-test results, Malay and Chinese are compared with respect to the internalisation of sustainable messages in short-form travel videos (see Table 12). The results show that Malay respondents demonstrated significantly higher mean scores than Chinese respondents. From item B1 to B5 ( $p < 0.05$ ), with the effect size ranging from small to large (Cohen's  $-0.43$  to  $-0.88$ ), which shows differences in internalised sustainable content. Overall, Malay respondents showed greater internalisation of sustainable short video content than Chinese respondents.

The reason for this is that Malays accept and internalise sustainable content because of the strong influence of Islam. Aligned with Sian et al. (2010), Islam is a religion not only focused on ritual but also emphasises Al-Din (Way of Life). It is a style that governs conduct, including all aspects

of life. To fulfil a Muslim responsibility, Malays will internalise sustainability deeply, ingraining these practices into their perceptions, feelings, and motivations. On the other hand, the Chinese see sustainability as a personal preference rather than compulsory. Even though Confucianism influences Chinese culture, it is not enforced in daily practices. They are values supported by Sian et al. (2010), indicating they are not fully aligned with the philosophy's sustainable values.

In conclusion, Malays are more likely to internalise sustainable content than the Chinese. This can be further explained using TRA: when individuals accept values, internalisation of beliefs will occur. Malay internalises sustainable content because it is part of the way of life. In contrast, Chinese people internalise less sustainable content because, in their perception, it is not compulsory. Even the Chinese internalisation of sustainability content is moderately positive, but it is lower among themselves.

Table 13 presents the independent-samples t-test results comparing Malay and Chinese attitudes towards sustainable messages in short-form travel videos. The results show that Malay respondents demonstrated significantly higher mean scores than Chinese respondents. From item C1 to C5 ( $p < 0.05$ ) except for C3 ( $p > 0.05$ ), with the effect size ranging from small to large (Cohen's  $= -0.27$  to

**Table 12.** Independent-samples t test of internalisation to sustainability messages

| Items | Chinese Mean (SD) | Malay Mean (SD) | T(df)         | Sig. (2-tailed) | Cohen's d | Effect Size  | Conclusion                           |
|-------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| B1    | 3.59 (0.95)       | 4.04 (0.9)      | -3.04(156.99) | 0.003           | -0.48     | Small-Medium | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| B2    | 3.70 (0.93)       | 4.21 (0.83)     | -3.59(156.08) | <0.001          | -0.57     | Medium       | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| B3    | 3.65 (0.94)       | 4.26 (0.83)     | -4.29(155.87) | <0.001          | -0.68     | Medium       | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| B4    | 3.58 (0.96)       | 4.08 (0.88)     | -3.57(156.58) | <0.001          | -0.88     | Large        | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| B5    | 3.69 (0.96)       | 4.21 (0.86)     | -3.56(156.21) | <0.001          | -0.57     | Medium       | Significant Difference(Malay higher) |



**Table 13.** Independent-samples t test of attitude to sustainability messages

| Items | Chinese Mean (SD) | Malay Mean (SD) | T(df)         | Sig. (2-tailed) | Cohen's d | Effect Size  | Conclusion                           |
|-------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| C1    | 3.99 (0.93)       | 4.44(0.77)      | -3.32(153.41) | 0.001           | -0.53     | Medium       | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| C2    | 4.04 (0.98)       | 4.40 (0.80)     | -2.55(152.62) | 0.012           | -0.4      | Small-Medium | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| C3    | 4.29 (0.90)       | 4.51 (0.9)      | -1.71(155.87) | 0.090           | -0.27     | Medium       | No Significant difference            |
| C4    | 3.9(0.96)         | 4.5(0.66)       | -4.60(142.42) | <0.001          | -0.73     | Medium-Large | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| C5    | 3.93 (0.91)       | 4.45(0.78)      | -3.89(155.27) | <0.001          | -0.62     | Medium       | Significant Difference(Malay higher) |

-0.73), which shows there are differences in attitude towards sustainable contents. Overall, Malay respondents showed a stronger attitude toward sustainable short video content than Chinese respondents.

The reason for this is that Malay has a strong religious orientation in Islam. Islam encourages attitude, priorities, social welfare, harmony and shared responsibility. These characteristics enable Malay to contribute positively to the principles of stewardship, justice, and environmental care. This makes Malay perceive sustainable content as meaningful and morally important in their attitude.

The differences may be associated with the cultural and social contexts in which sustainability messages are interpreted. Previous research indicates that cultural values can influence environmentally responsible attitudes and tourism behaviour. Islamic principles concerning stewardship and responsibility may provide one context through which Malay respondents interpret sustainability messages, while Confucian values have also been linked to environmental responsibility among Chinese visitors (Sian et al., 2010; Ma et al., 2018; Chen & Liu, 2025). However, cultural background is only one possible influence. Individual attitudes may also be affected by perceived benefits, personal values, previous experiences, cost, convenience, and social influence. The findings, therefore, indicate a

difference between the two respondent groups in this sample, rather than suggesting that Malay and Chinese respondents possess fundamentally different attitudes towards sustainability.

As shown in Table 14, the independent-samples results for Malay and Chinese are compared with respect to their intentions toward travel. The results show that Malay respondents demonstrated significantly higher mean scores than Chinese respondents. From item D1 to D5 ( $p < 0.05$ ), with the effect size ranging from medium to large (Cohen's  $d = -0.55$  to  $-0.87$ ), which shows there are differences in behavioural intention towards sustainable travel. Overall, the Malay respondents showed greater intent to engage in travel.

These findings are consistent with the TRA perspective, which posits that favourable attitudes and perceived social expectations can strengthen behavioural intentions. Previous research has similarly found that attitudes, cultural values, and sustainability-related information can influence tourists' intentions to engage in responsible tourism practices (Patwary et al., 2022; Chen & Cheng, 2023; Luongo et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the lower mean scores among Chinese respondents should not be interpreted as a lack of concern for sustainability. Differences in behavioural intention may also reflect factors such as perceived cost, convenience, travel opportunities, personal

**Table 14.** Independent-samples t test of intentional behavioural towards sustainability

| Items | Chinese Mean (SD) | Malay Mean (SD) | T(df)         | Sig. (2-tailed) | Cohen's d | Effect Size  | Conclusion                           |
|-------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| D1    | 3.69 (0.93)       | 4.26(0.65)      | -4.44(143.74) | <0.001          | -0.70     | Medium       | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| D2    | 3.84 (0.96)       | 4.32 (0.78)     | -3.48(153.05) | <0.001          | -0.55     | Medium       | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| D3    | 3.95 (0.90)       | 4.49(0.62)      | -4.33(140.54) | <0.001          | -0.68     | Medium       | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| D4    | 3.73(0.95)        | 4.49(0.73)      | -5.63(150.10) | <0.001          | -0.89     | Large        | Significant difference(Malay higher) |
| D5    | 3.77 (0.99)       | 4.44(0.99)      | -4.84(147.18) | <0.001          | -0.77     | Medium-Large | Significant Difference(Malay higher) |

priorities, and social influence. The results, therefore, suggest differences in the strength of reported intentions within the sample rather than an inherent difference between the two ethnic groups.

In the independent-samples t-test results, Malay and Chinese are compared in their actual behaviour towards sustainable travel (refer to Table 15). The results show that Malay respondents demonstrated significantly higher mean scores than Chinese respondents. From items E2, E3, and E5 ( $p < 0.05$ ), with effect sizes ranging from medium to large (Cohen's  $d = -0.55$  to  $-0.77$ ), indicating differences in behavioural intention towards sustainable travel. However, two items, E1 and E4, show no significant difference. Item E1 is "I have taken green actions during travel, " and item E4 is "I share sustainability-related travel content on social media. Moreover, the mean scores of two of these items are lower than those of other items. It can be doubted that Malays and Chinese are less likely to engage in green actions and share sustainable content on their personal social media. Overall, Malay respondents showed greater actual behaviour in sustainable travel than Chinese respondents.

The reason for this is that Malays are collectivist, which encourages individuals to act in ways that align beliefs and behaviour, as supported by Sian et al. (2010). This makes Malay practise

sustainable behaviour in line with their teaching. Conversely, Chinese people are more individualistic, which is associated with lower sustainability behaviour because it does not align with tangible rewards. Even though respondents show intention and awareness of sustainable content, this does not directly translate into real-life sustainable practices, such as content sharing, due to social perception concerns and psychological barriers, as noted by Shahzalal (2024). Moreover, respondents are less motivated to take actions due to a lack of car convenience, cost, time and distance support, as supported by et al. (2025). This is because awareness and intention are not enough if easy, eco-friendly options are not provided that tourists can practice.

The findings on actual sustainable tourism behaviour indicate that positive attitudes and behavioural intentions do not necessarily translate into equally strong behavioural outcomes. This distinction is important because sustainable tourism research has identified an intention-behaviour gap, whereby individuals may express positive intentions but face practical barriers to implementing sustainable practices (Wur et al., 2023). Factors such as cost, convenience, availability of sustainable options, travel infrastructure, and situational constraints may affect whether tourists can act on their sustainability intentions.

From the perspective of TRA, behavioural intention is an important predictor of actual behaviour; however, the transition from intention to action may be affected by circumstances beyond an individual's direct control. The present findings, therefore, suggest that exposure to sustainability messages and positive attitudes may contribute to sustainable tourism decision-making. However, short-form social media content alone may not be sufficient to guarantee actual behavioural change. Tourism marketers should therefore combine persuasive sustainability messages with practical information, such as the locations of eco-friendly facilities, sustainable transportation options, community-based tourism opportunities, and specific actions tourists can take during their trips.

In summary, Malay and Chinese results show positive attitudes towards sustainable tourism, but Chinese responses are lower than those of Malays. The reason for this is the Malays' internalisation of mobility, which aligns their religious and implementation beliefs with reality and translates them into real life. Moreover, Chinese respondents may hold positive sustainability values. However, practical factors such as cost, convenience, accessibility, and the availability of sustainable tourism options may influence whether these values translate into actual behaviour.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined differences between Malay and Chinese respondents in their responses to sustainable tourism content presented through short-form social media videos in Malaysia, guided by the TRA. Overall, the findings indicate favourable orientations towards sustainability across attention, internalisation of sustainability cues, attitudes, behavioural intentions, and self-reported sustainable tourism behaviour. This overall pattern suggests that short-form social

media content provides a relevant context in which sustainability-related messages are noticed, interpreted, and associated with positive tourism orientations.

The comparative findings reveal a consistent pattern: Malay respondents reported significantly higher levels of attention, internalisation, and behavioural intention than Chinese respondents. Differences were also evident across most dimensions of attitude, although the importance attached to being a responsible tourist did not differ significantly between the two groups. Regarding self-reported sustainable tourism behaviour, Malay respondents reported stronger engagement in supporting local businesses, conserving environmental and cultural resources, and avoiding destinations perceived as exploiting these resources. However, the absence of significant differences in other behavioural practices indicates that the observed group differences were not uniform across all aspects of sustainable tourism behaviour.

Taken together, the findings suggest that cultural-group differences may be relevant to how sustainability messages are attended to, internalised, and translated into tourism-related intentions and selected practices. However, these differences should be interpreted cautiously, as the study captures respondents' reported perceptions, intentions, and behaviours rather than objectively observed conduct. The findings, therefore, do not establish that ethnicity directly determines sustainable tourism behaviour. Rather, they highlight the importance of recognising differences in audience responses when developing sustainability communication through short-form social media, while acknowledging that other individual and contextual factors may also shape sustainable tourism engagement.

The findings contribute to the understanding

of sustainable tourism communication by showing that audiences from different cultural backgrounds may respond differently to sustainability messages presented through short-form social media. However, the results should not be interpreted as evidence that one ethnic group is inherently more sustainable than another. Cultural and religious values may provide part of the context for interpreting sustainability messages. However, individual characteristics, social influence, perceived benefits, cost, convenience, previous experiences, and access to sustainable tourism options may also influence tourism decisions. From a practical perspective, tourism marketers and content creators should develop short-form social media content that combines attractive visuals and entertainment with clear, actionable sustainability messages. Content can highlight practical actions such as reducing waste, respecting local culture, supporting local businesses, conserving natural resources, and selecting environmentally responsible tourism services. Marketers should also consider cultural differences, avoid stereotypes, and use inclusive messaging that enables audiences from diverse backgrounds to identify with sustainable tourism practices.

Future research could expand the sample to include other Malaysian ethnic groups and a larger number of respondents to improve the generalisability of the findings. Future studies could also compare different age groups or generations to determine whether age and social media usage patterns influence responses to sustainable tourism content. Longitudinal or experimental research could further examine whether repeated exposure to sustainability-oriented short-form videos produces sustained changes in actual tourism behaviour rather than only short-term intentions. In addition, future research could examine specific platform characteristics, influencer credibility, video quality,

emotional appeals, and different types of sustainability messages to identify which content strategies are most effective in encouraging responsible tourism behaviour.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors extend their profound gratitude to the advisors and colleagues whose scholarly insights, constructive feedback, and steadfast support substantially enriched this work.

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# The Importance of Event Monitoring in Enhancing Communication and Crisis Preparedness in Muslim Majority Country: Malaysia as a Case Study

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 13/7/2026

Accepted : 03/8/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Event Monitoring; Crisis Preparedness; Stakeholder Engagement; Risk Assessment; Documentation; Event Communication

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Research paper

**Abstract** - This study aims to examine the importance of monitoring and communication in event planning, where unpredictable risks, socio-cultural sensitivities, and operational uncertainties frequently threaten event success. Hosted in a Muslim-majority, multicultural, and religiously diverse country, the research focuses on improving crisis preparedness through risk assessment, stakeholder engagement, and proper documentation. A qualitative research approach was adopted, conducting structured interviews with ten participants involved in event management and practice in Malaysia, including relevant authorities and tourism industry players. The data collected was thematically analysed to identify key themes related to event monitoring and communication. Findings showed that event monitoring and communication played a key role in ensuring event effectiveness and crisis preparedness. Risk assessment was identified as important in anticipating operational and reputational issues, while stakeholder engagement strengthened coordination and trust among organisers, authorities, and participants. Proper documentation was also found to support accountability, post-event evaluation, and future event improvements. This study was limited to selected respondents involved in event management in Malaysia as well as authorities responsible for formulating policies to safeguard the welfare of the majority Muslim community, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future studies may include larger samples or comparative studies involving different types of events. These findings provide guidance for event organisers in improving monitoring systems, communication strategies, and documentation procedures to enhance event management practices.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The event management industry has grown in line with the increasing demands of the tourism industry every year. Lee (2025) has said in this regard that from merely existing alongside travel, the event industry, which includes MICE, festivals and mega events, has become fundamentally integrated into the tourism infrastructure. It has become one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing sectors worldwide. Over the past few decades, the industry has experienced substantial growth, reflecting its increasing economic, social and cultural importance in contemporary society (Toscani et al., 2024). The events industry's transition from hosting small-scale local gatherings to coordinating international mega-events is one of the most significant structural shifts in modern hospitality and tourism. It is not just about selling more tickets but about a completely different operational and economic ecosystem. As an event grows in size, its management becomes increasingly complex.

One of the main challenges is the occurrence of risks and uncertainties that can affect the success of an event and subsequently negatively impact not only the reputation of an event organiser, but also the image of a country. These risks can include visitor safety, crowd control issues, technical failures or even weather disruptions. Therefore, events such as corporate conferences, exhibitions, festivals, religious gatherings, and community programs require extensive planning and coordination to ensure their success. As events continue to grow in scale and complexity, the need for an effective management system that ensures smooth operations, safety, and stakeholder satisfaction has become increasingly important. One of the key elements that contributes to successful event management is event monitoring and communication, which play a vital role in ensuring that all aspects of the event are controlled

and executed properly. Without a proper monitoring system, such risks may go unnoticed until they escalate into serious problems. Risk assessments enable organisers to identify potential threats and prepare appropriate mitigation strategies in advance. Effective communication can support this process by ensuring relevant information is quickly conveyed to decision-makers and response teams. Although literature broadly acknowledges the importance of risk assessment and communication in mitigating operational breakdowns, conventional frameworks predominantly treat crisis management through a Western or culturally homogeneous lens (Lu et al., 2023; Dowson & Lamond, 2023). Existing studies largely focus on physical safety, crowd control, and emergency logistics (Still, 2020; Łuczak et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2023), leaving a notable literature gap regarding how event monitoring systems handle real-time socio-cultural and religious friction.

The significance of this study becomes evident when examining a series of recent incidents that expose the flaws in existing event monitoring systems. These include the controversy surrounding the offensive conduct of the international band The 1975 at the 2023 Good Vibes Festival (Astro Awani, 2023), which blatantly violated the law and offended the sensitivities of the Muslim majority and the issue of scantily clad models at the 2024 Sepang MotoGP event (NST Online, 2024), which sparked public concern regarding attire that failed to adhere to the principles of decency and morality enshrined in the Rukun Negara. This was obvious during the 2023 Coldplay concert, which sparked protests and calls for the cancellation of large-scale concerts due to religious sensitivities, ultimately compelling the government to introduce an on-stage emergency monitoring system known as the "Kill Switch" (Berita Harian, 2023), enabling authorities to immediately cut off the power supply should an artist violate guidelines concerning the

Muslim community. A domino effect resulting from a failure to monitor compliance early on forced the event to be cancelled at the last minute, causing financial losses across the tourism supply chain, including hotels, logistics providers, and vendors.

By investigating event monitoring within Malaysia's unique socio-religious environment, this study bridges a vital empirical gap in crisis management literature. It expands conventional event risk models, which traditionally prioritise physical safety, to encompass socio-cultural risk governance, stakeholder alignment, and real-time compliance monitoring. In doing so, this research offers a nuanced framework for organisers and policymakers operating in culturally diverse, faith-sensitive markets. This framework aims to prevent such incidents from recurring and to ensure the success of events that not only attract tourists but also showcase the nation to the world. It provides a concrete framework for government agencies and private organisers to detect potential violations early, regulate on-site conduct in real-time, and, above all, uphold the cultural and religious sensitivities of the Muslim-majority population.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Event monitoring and communication have become increasingly important in contemporary event management due to the increasing complexity of events and the need for timely decision-making. In the event and tourism management literature, event monitoring is defined not as a single action, but as an ongoing, systematic process of tracking, evaluating, and managing data before, during, and after an event. Because events are high-risk, time-sensitive, and deeply connected to host destinations, the ability to identify potential risks and communicate effectively has become increasingly important in enhancing crisis preparedness and event resilience. In modern event management, this definition has expanded to

include strict public health and environmental controls. Academic studies document a shift in which monitoring serves as a critical public health mechanism, requiring event managers to track physical variables such as crowd density, venue capacity and indoor ventilation to implement immediate risk reduction and safeguard the well-being of attendees (Melly et al., 2023). Meanwhile, in the wider public space, local authorities rely on similar monitoring procedures to control immediate externalities such as traffic congestion, vandalism, littering and noise pollution (Maguire, 2022). From a strategic perspective, research by Ramely et al. (2023) defines monitoring as an organization's alertness to surrounding conditions that could disrupt the effectiveness of an event. It also requires organisers to continuously assess external variables such as changing travel regulations, local economic downturns, or sudden political shifts. The authors note that this proactive posture allows event managers to adapt to changing market conditions and protect business continuity.

Previous studies have emphasised that effective monitoring enables event organisers to identify operational issues, assess potential risks, and respond promptly to unexpected situations. At the same time, communication facilitates information sharing among stakeholders and supports coordination throughout the event lifecycle. Together, these practices contribute to better event performance and improved crisis preparedness. This study reviews the existing literature on event monitoring and communication, focusing on three key dimensions: risk assessment, stakeholder engagement, and proper documentation.

### 2.1 Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is a fundamental component of event management, due to the inherent nature of events involving uncertainty, complexity and

exposure to a variety of operational, safety and financial risks. Effective risk assessment enables event organisers to identify potential hazards, assess their likelihood and impact, and implement appropriate mitigation strategies before the risks escalate into a crisis. According to Li and Wang (2022), large-scale events present many risk factors that can significantly affect the operations and outcomes of the event. The authors emphasise that risk assessment is an important part of event risk management because it allows organisers to identify and prioritise the factors that have the greatest impact on the success of the event. They argue that risk assessment is essential to understand the degree of influence of different risks on event operations. While Li and Wang (2022) provide a strong baseline for risk prioritisation, their model primarily treats risk through a static, operational lens, offering limited insight into fast-evolving external contingencies.

Hutton et al. (2025), in their study of security at large-scale events, identified four key factors underpinning effective event security: risk assessment, stakeholder coordination, communication mechanisms, and preparedness planning. The study found that occupational health and safety requirements, duty of care obligations, and organisational preparedness for risk and crisis are important considerations for sustainable event management. This study effectively demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of security, yet its focus remains heavily weighted toward physical safety and legal liability, leaving socio-cultural and moral risk governance underexplored. Jones and Naidoo (2022) also emphasised that risk management in events cannot be done ad hoc, but it requires a structured process based on international standards involving phased steps that involve identifying, assessing, mitigating and then monitoring. Their study also shows that risk assessment is the initial step to crisis prevention; if risks are not identified

early, they can become crises. This reliance on standardised, phased frameworks where the authors assume predictable environments, however, often lacks the flexibility required to navigate real-time, non-technical disruptions such as religious or community backlash. This is in line with the modern definition of risk management as a continuous process.

It can be concluded here that a good event organiser must conduct a risk assessment before, during, and after the event. Risk information must also be clearly communicated to all stakeholders because communication is important to ensure the mitigation plan is successful. Ultimately, synthesising these perspectives highlights that while current literature establishes the structural necessity of risk assessment, it predominantly treats risks as physical or operational, underscoring a clear need to expand risk models into socio-cultural contexts.

## 2.2 Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement has been widely recognised as a critical component in ensuring the success of event management. Events typically involve multiple stakeholders, including organisers, sponsors, government authorities, service providers, and participants, each contributing to the planning, execution, and evaluation processes. Effective engagement among these stakeholders is essential to ensure coordination, shared understanding, and the successful delivery of event objectives. Karsokiene et al. (2025) describe stakeholders as a network of actors including government agencies, local entrepreneurs, communities and consumers whose collaboration is essential for inclusive, long-term programming and sustainable development. The same for a study by Rangkuti (2025), which emphasises governance and community empowerment as important stakeholders. Event monitoring needs to involve



communication and coordination among them. This is to ensure that all parties remain aligned throughout the event lifecycle. Both Karsokiene et al. (2025) and Rangkuti (2025) successfully frame stakeholders as an interconnected network, but they understate the inherent power dynamics and conflicting priorities that often arise between regulatory authorities and private event organisers.

Citrawijaya (2025) reveals that proactive communication enables organisations to navigate unexpected operational shifts far more effectively, directly protecting the long-term reputation of the event or organisation and operational continuity. Although Citrawijaya (2025) rightly highlights proactive communication as a protective measure for brand equity, the study assumes open communication channels already exist, ignoring environments where rapid regulatory shifts occur with little notice. Nevertheless, according to Hubner et al. (2024), engagement is not just communication between stakeholders but also includes the process of collaboration and active involvement. This is because meaningful engagement enhances coordination, strengthens trust, and supports the overall effectiveness of event delivery. The authors make a vital distinction between passive communication and active collaboration, providing a crucial framework for multi-agency crisis response. This is particularly important in complex event environments where multiple parties must work together to achieve shared objectives. For events and tourism, support from local host communities prevents friction and maintains the authentic cultural identity that attracts visitors. Meanwhile, governments and local authorities must collaborate in providing the permits, licenses and legal clearances needed to operate safely and legally. The same goes for the workers, suppliers and transportation vendors who are responsible for handling the day-to-day operations. Without productivity and reliable delivery of goods, a business or event comes to a

complete standstill.

Overall, stakeholder engagement is a fundamental element of successful event management. It enhances coordination, ensures alignment of objectives, and supports effective communication among all parties involved. In addition, strong stakeholder engagement contributes to improved decision-making and increases the likelihood of successful event outcomes. Critically, while the literature agrees on the necessity of stakeholder synergy, existing models treat engagement as a static agreement rather than an ongoing negotiation of cultural, socio-political, and operational alignment.

### *2.3 Proper Documentation*

Documentation provides a formal record of decisions, actions, approvals, and communications throughout the event lifecycle. It promotes accountability by ensuring that responsibilities, decisions, and actions are clearly recorded and can be traced when necessary. This is particularly important when multiple stakeholders are involved in an event. A study done by Thylstrup et al. (2022) explicitly explores how record-keeping systems act as the primary structural vehicle for tracking organisational processes. It establishes that creating a systematic, unalterable record of key decisions is what truly enables an organisation to carry out successful key actions and hold actors accountable for past actions. This study provides valuable insights into structural accountability. However, their perspective treats documentation largely as a post-hoc audit tool rather than an active, real-time mechanism for crisis response.

Proper documentation can be served as evidence that event organisers have undertaken appropriate planning and risk management measures. In the event of disputes, accidents, or legal claims, documented records provide proof of

compliance and due diligence. A comprehensive study analysing risk management at mass events emphasises that safety protocols must be rooted in a legal framework in which event organisers maintain clear risk ownership (Hutton et al., 2025). This is because events, by their nature, bring people into confined spaces under tight time constraints, generating significant logistical, financial and physical uncertainties, requiring documentation that records administrative procedures, communication protocols and structured contingency plans to create lasting organisational protection (Rodrigues, 2025). Both Hutton et al. (2025) and Rodrigues (2025) effectively establish the legal and defensive value of record-keeping, yet their analyses remain narrowly confined to formal legal liabilities and financial claims.

When disputes arise, having these structured, step-by-step risk maps documented serves as direct evidence that organisers fulfilled their "standard of care" to prevent negligence claims and protect long-term brand equity (Rodrigues, 2025). This emphasis on standard legal protection overlooks how real-time documentation can serve as proof of adherence to non-legal guidelines, such as local socio-religious codes and community standards.

In summary, proper documentation is a critical component of event management that supports accountability, risk management, stakeholder communication, and organisational learning. By maintaining accurate records of event activities, decisions, and incidents, event organisers are better equipped to demonstrate compliance, coordinate stakeholder actions, and respond effectively to unexpected situations. Furthermore, documentation provides valuable insights for post-event evaluation and continuous improvement, contributing to the overall effectiveness and sustainability of event management practices. Thus, while existing literature thoroughly justifies

documentation as a tool for legal defence and administrative oversight, there remains a gap in examining how continuous real-time documentation supports live compliance monitoring during unexpected operational disruptions.

Overall, the literature suggests that effective event monitoring relies on the integration of risk assessment, stakeholder engagement, and proper documentation. Risk assessment enables event organisers to identify and mitigate potential threats before they escalate into crises, while stakeholder engagement facilitates collaboration, communication, and coordination among parties involved in the event. Proper documentation complements these processes by providing accurate records of decisions, actions, and outcomes, thereby supporting accountability, organisational learning, and informed decision-making. Together, these elements strengthen operational control, enhance crisis preparedness, and contribute to the successful planning, implementation, and evaluation of events. As events grow in scale, the need for effective event monitoring becomes increasingly important. Larger events involve more stakeholders and operational complexities, increasing the likelihood of unforeseen issues. Again, effective monitoring allows organisers to detect potential problems early and take corrective actions before they develop into major disruptions, thereby supporting smooth event operations and successful event outcomes. This proactive approach contributes to smoother event operations, better decision-making, and an enhanced attendee experience.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research design executed in three sequential phases: a literature-based framework design, primary stakeholder interviews, and an expert validation stage.

### 3.1 Phase 1: Preliminary Framework Design

A systematic review of academic literature, government guidelines, and policy frameworks surrounding Islamic tourism and event governance was initially conducted. This phase established the baseline theoretical foundations and identified preliminary evaluation characteristics prior to fieldwork execution. These insights informed both the interim framework structure and the semi-structured interview protocol.

### 3.2 Phase 2: Data Collection and Qualitative Analysis

To analytically evaluate and refine the framework characteristics, structured interviews were conducted with 10 purposely selected stakeholders directly involved in Islamic events, tourism, and regulatory governance in Malaysia. Purposive sampling ensured cross-sector representation, comprising government officials, private event organisers, and tourism and cultural representatives. Participants were selected based on their operational experience in managing public events and their familiarity with Islamic event management principles. Using a focused qualitative cohort aligns with established research standards, where targeted samples provide rich, context-specific insights (Wutich et al., 2024). While foundational literature indicates code saturation can occur around nine interviews (Hennink et al., 2017; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022), sample size adequacy depends primarily on analytical complexity and group homogeneity (Zimmer et al., 2023). In this study, code saturation was systematically monitored and verified during data collection rather than assumed from literature thresholds. Interviews lasting between 45 and 60 minutes were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed concurrently. Data collection was concluded when sequential transcript analysis yielded no novel first-order codes or distinct sub-themes, confirming thematic

### 3.3 Phase 3: Expert Validation and Model Finalisation

Following thematic synthesis, a second round of expert validation was conducted to refine the finalised framework. Three independent experts specialising in Islamic tourism, event management, and religious governance were engaged to review the proposed model. The experts evaluated the framework across two key parameters: religious authenticity (ensuring strict alignment with Shariah principles) and practical applicability (assessing operational feasibility for real-world event execution). Feedback from this panel was integrated to establish the final proposed Islamic Event Framework.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed three key themes associated with effective event monitoring and communication: risk assessment, stakeholder engagement, and proper documentation. These themes were consistently highlighted by the respondents as important elements in ensuring smooth event operations, enhancing communication effectiveness, and strengthening crisis preparedness.

The findings indicate that risk assessment is considered a fundamental component of event monitoring. Most respondents emphasised the importance of identifying potential risks before and during an event to minimise disruptions and ensure operational continuity. Several respondents noted that risk assessment enables organisers to anticipate issues related to safety, logistics, crowd management, and programme execution. As shown in Table 1, all ten participants agreed that risk assessment is an important component of event monitoring. The findings indicate a strong consensus among participants regarding the importance of identifying and evaluating potential

risks throughout the event lifecycle.

**Table 1.** Perception of risk assessment in event monitoring

| Response | Frequency |
|----------|-----------|
| Agree    | 10        |
| Disagree | 0         |
| Total    | 10        |

To evaluate the extent of risk assessment integration in event monitoring, participant responses were coded into positive and negative thematic units, as summarised in Table 2 below. As shown in Table 2, the qualitative coding +Y refers

to “Yes” or confirmation and -N is “No” during qualitative content analysis under the Risk Assessment dimension, it yielded exclusively positive responses (n = 10 total units), with no negative units recorded.

**Table 2.** Evaluation of risk assessment in event monitoring

| Positive |                                 |      | Negative |       |      |
|----------|---------------------------------|------|----------|-------|------|
| Code     | Theme                           | Unit | Code     | Theme | Unit |
| +Y1      | Post-mortem                     | 3    | -N       |       | 0    |
| +Y2      | Carried out risk identification | 4    |          |       |      |
| +Y3      | No detail                       | 3    |          |       |      |

Participants generally viewed risk assessment as a proactive measure that enables event organisers to anticipate potential problems and implement preventive actions before disruptions occur. The findings suggest that risk assessment contributes significantly to crisis preparedness and operational effectiveness by allowing organisers to respond promptly to emerging threats. Data analysis reveals that participants reached a consensus on the absolute priority of safety over other operational or financial considerations. P6 participant clearly stated:

*“The most important risk in an event is safety.”*

The findings of Hutton et al. (2025), who examined event safety via a multi-stakeholder lens involving event planners, law enforcement, and medical workers, are consistent with this participant insight. The participants' direct emphasis on safety aspects supports the argument

that, although various event stakeholders often approach risk management from different perspectives, they share a unifying primary objective, which is preventing the burden of harm. By validating participant statements against the framework of Hutton et al. (2025), the data indicate that an event cannot achieve its strategic, economic, or sociocultural goals if its core operational security infrastructure fails to function.

Another participant responded:

*“Risk assessment is a must, and it must be conducted before and after the event to ensure any unwanted incident could be avoided during the event and in the future”*

This finding suggests that respondents view risk assessment as a proactive mechanism for preventing operational failures. The result is consistent with Jones and Naidoo (2022),

highlighting that systematic risk assessment enhances organisational preparedness and supports effective event management. Overall, this data analysis demonstrates that risk assessment is not merely a planning document prepared prior to an event; rather, it encompasses the entire real-time event monitoring process. Without clear risk indicators serving as benchmarks, monitoring data collected during the event would lack context and fail to translate into swift mitigation actions. Consequently, the ability to detect, assess, and respond to security threats at the event site establishes risk assessment as a fundamental pillar of a safe and sustainable event management ecosystem.

However, the effectiveness of this risk monitoring instrument cannot be achieved through the efforts of the organiser alone or by a limited number of parties. Given that safety dynamics at event venues involve multiple operational layers, the implementation of holistic event monitoring requires coordination across organisational boundaries. Accordingly, this analysis will explore stakeholder engagement to understand how collaborative networks among various parties influence the effectiveness of event monitoring. As emphasised by participant P4:

*“The success of Islamic tourism in Malaysia is the result of strategic cooperation with tourism industry players and government agencies that*

*jointly develop and promote the Muslim-friendly tourism here”.*

The importance of stakeholder engagement in the Malaysian context is viewed as even more critical when dealing with specific market niches, such as Islamic tourism and Muslim-friendly events. Research data indicates that the monitoring and management of this tourism ecosystem cannot be driven in isolation; instead, it requires full alignment between the private sector and government regulatory bodies. The statement from P4 reveals that the event monitoring model within Malaysia’s tourism ecosystem extends beyond the physical logistics management at event venues, but it entails strategic monitoring of standards and compliance. Collaboration between industry players such as event organisers, hoteliers, and travel agencies and government bodies like the Islamic Tourism Centre and JAKIM ensures that the events organised consistently align with Malaysia’s reputation as a global hub for Islamic tourism. This finding supports the study by Citrawijaya (2025), which examines the role of communication strategies in effective crisis management across various industries and highlights how tailored approaches can mitigate risks, preserve reputation, and foster stakeholder trust. The importance of stakeholder engagement is summarised in Tables 3 and 4, with which all participants agreed.

**Table 3.** Stakeholders’ engagement in event monitoring

| Response | Frequency |
|----------|-----------|
| Agree    | 10        |
| Disagree | 0         |
| Total    | 10        |



**Table 4.** Evaluation of stakeholders' engagement in event monitoring

| Positive |                                                           |      | Negative |       |      |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------|----------|-------|------|
| Code     | Theme                                                     | Unit | Code     | Theme | Unit |
| +Y1      | Follow stakeholder's requirements                         | 4    | -N       |       | 0    |
| +Y2      | Work strategically with individual partner                | 3    |          |       |      |
| +Y3      | Embrace the concept of obtaining feedback for improvement | 3    |          |       |      |

The summary tables above clearly demonstrate an absolute consensus among participants regarding the importance of stakeholder engagement in driving the effectiveness of event monitoring. This data confirms that the evolution of modern event management can no longer proceed in isolation. The alignment of participant views, supported by global literature ranging from physical risk management (Hutton et al., 2025), sustainable governance (Rangkuti et al., 2025), and reputation crisis management (Citrawijaya, 2025) to tourism supply chain resilience (Karsokiene et al., 2026), reinforces the argument that multi-stakeholder engagement is no longer merely an operational choice but a strategic necessity. In conclusion, the integration of transparent information and the

sharing of responsibilities among the public sector, private sector, and local communities are key to ensuring that the event monitoring process safeguards the short-term safety of the event site while maintaining the long-term resilience of the tourism destination.

Finally, there is proper documentation, which serves as a bridge connecting current monitoring operations with future strategic planning. Without a robust documentation system, information gathered during risk monitoring would be lost, thereby hindering knowledge transfer within the organisation. A study involving 10 participants confirmed this, with all of them in agreement, as shown in Tables 5 and 6.

**Table 5.** Proper documentation in event monitoring

| Response | Frequency |
|----------|-----------|
| Agree    | 10        |
| Disagree | 0         |
| Total    | 10        |

**Table 6.** Evaluation of stakeholders' engagement in event monitoring

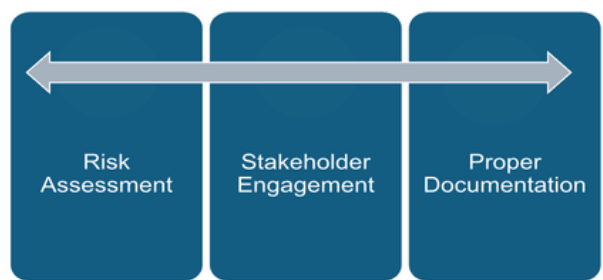
| Positive |                   |      | Negative |       |      |
|----------|-------------------|------|----------|-------|------|
| Code     | Theme             | Unit | Code     | Theme | Unit |
| +Y1      | After post-mortem | 6    | -N       |       | 0    |
| +Y2      | No-detail         | 4    |          |       |      |

Based on data collected via structured interview instruments, all ten participants unanimously agreed that maintaining log records, visitor density data, and post-event reports is crucial for risk management. However, in-depth

analysis revealed that while participants acknowledged the theoretical function of documentation, they did not provide extensive narrative commentary on it compared to aspects such as physical security and inter-agency

cooperation. The participants' tendency to simply agree—without elaborating on this variable—can be understood in light of the study by Biaett and Richards (2020), which notes that while event organisers and destination managers generally acknowledge the importance of documentation, monitoring data is often neglected and not critically analysed once the event's wrap-up phase is complete. From the perspective of industry resilience, the participants' implicit acceptance of the importance of this documentation remains a critical foundation, as highlighted by the study of Karsokiene et al. (2026), which asserts that consistent documentation of the tourism supply chain is key to destination endurance. Therefore, although this documentation variable was less frequently discussed verbally by the participants, their consent demonstrates that documentation is recognised as an essential supporting instrument in event governance.

Overall, the study data indicate a unanimous consensus among all ten participants that the three initially proposed key variables—risk assessment, stakeholder engagement, and proper documentation—constitute the fundamental pillars underpinning the event monitoring framework. The combination of these three variables is recognised as a robust operational foundation for managing risks at event sites. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

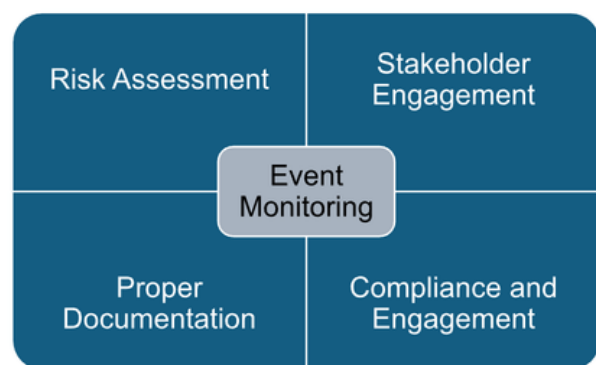


**Figure 1.** Initial Event Monitoring Framework

However, in-depth thematic analysis reveals that this event monitoring framework is not static. Beyond the original three variables, some participants actively expanded the framework's structure by proposing a new, standalone variable as a fourth dimension: Compliance and Engagement. The emergence of this fourth variable demonstrates that, within the modern tourism landscape, the function of event monitoring must evolve from monitoring internal operations to monitoring external governance. The participants' proposal to establish the variables of compliance and engagement is supported by the destination endurance model from the study by Karsokiene et al. (2026), which emphasises that the resilience of a tourism destination depends on the strategic integration of the supply chain. Viewed through this lens, compliance serves as a mandatory monitoring instrument to ensure that all industry players consistently adhere to national standards (such as the Muslim-Friendly standard in Malaysia, as cited by P4). Meanwhile, the engagement aspect of this new variable aligns with Citrawijaya's (2025) arguments regarding cross-industry crisis management. Effective monitoring requires transparent, two-way communication between government agencies and private organisers. Integrating "compliance and engagement" as this fourth variable directly resolves the inefficiencies in post-event data management that frequently occurred in the past. Under this approach, records and information gathered during monitoring are no longer neglected or lost once the event concludes. Instead, they are actively shared between the government and industry players. The identification of this new variable derived from participant suggestions not only complements but also strengthens the existing event monitoring framework, thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability and success of the tourism destination.

In conclusion, the analysis of field data unequivocally validates the integration of four key variables in the development of a comprehensive event monitoring framework. This framework proves critical for enhancing crisis management within the event management industry, particularly in Muslim-majority nations like Malaysia, where various cultural and religious sensitivities must be upheld. The identification of the fourth variable, 'Compliance and Engagement,' derived from participant input has elevated the model from a standard operational monitoring tool to a strategic instrument for managing destination reputation. The following is the final framework resulting from this study, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 above illustrates how the interaction between risk assessment, stakeholder engagement, and proper documentation, supported by the new variable of compliance and engagement, forms a robust chain of defence. Through this final framework, event organisers and government agencies possess clear guidelines to monitor physical risks and prevent reputational crises involving the sensitivities of the Muslim majority, thereby ensuring the long-term resilience of the tourism destination.



**Figure 2.** Final Framework of Event Monitoring in Muslim Majority Country

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concludes that event monitoring can serve as an important safeguard in managing crises within the events and tourism industries. This is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where event planning needs to consider religious and cultural sensitivities alongside operational requirements. The study demonstrates that relying solely on reactive measures after an issue occurs is insufficient; proactive preparation and continuous monitoring are needed throughout the event planning and implementation process. The study also confirms that risk assessment, stakeholder engagement, and proper documentation are fundamental elements of effective event planning and operations. However, beyond confirming these established elements, the study demonstrates how they can be further strengthened through an integrated monitoring approach. This development reflects the practical insights obtained from the study and highlights the importance of monitoring as a continuous process that supports early risk identification, stakeholder communication, and crisis preparedness.

Thematic analysis revealed that industry practitioners do not view these elements in isolation or as static components. This led to the emergence of a fourth critical variable, which is compliance and engagement. The combination of these four variables in the final framework illustrated in Figure 2 demonstrates that effective crisis management requires a holistic, integrated approach. In conclusion, the framework developed through this study is not merely a tool for ensuring safety on the ground, but it serves as a strategic guide to protect the tourism industry of Muslim-majority nations from being embroiled in sensitivity-related crises that could undermine long-term economic resilience.

Based on the four-variable framework validated by the study data, several practical measures are proposed for the attention of the

industry and the authorities. Firstly, event organisers should establish a dedicated team responsible not only for physical security but also for monitoring compliance, specifically by vetting the backgrounds of invited panellists, performance content, and event concepts to ensure alignment with local cultural norms prior to the event. Furthermore, the method of maintaining log records needs to be upgraded to a centralised digital system. This step is crucial to ensure that post-mortem report data is not lost, thereby enabling organisers to learn from past mistakes when planning future events. To ensure the effectiveness of this initiative, local authorities and relevant ministries are encouraged to develop a digital platform that enables the direct sharing of information with private organisers. Consequently, this two-way communication will facilitate organisers in receiving advance notice regarding any policy changes or guidelines concerning current sensitivities.

In conclusion, regulatory agencies need to issue specific guidelines detailing how to manage risks associated with the sensitivities of the Muslim majority. This would enable private event organisers to clearly incorporate these elements into their risk assessment forms. To evaluate the effectiveness of this framework, future researchers are encouraged to test this four-variable model using quantitative methods. Such a step is crucial for statistically determining the strength of the relationship between each variable and the effectiveness of crisis management. Future studies could also examine differences in the implementation of this framework across various Malaysian states that adopt distinct approaches to tourism regulation, in order to understand how local policy factors influence the level of compliance among event organisers.

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# Effect of Promotional Exposure on Malaysian Generation Z Shopping Tourism Revisit Intention

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 16/7/2026  
Accepted : 18/7/2026  
Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Malaysian Generation Z;  
Promotional Exposure;  
Revisit Intention;  
Shopping Tourism

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Research paper

**Abstract** - This study investigates the extent to which promotional communication exposure—through social media promotions, influencer endorsements, short-form content, and save/share prompts—predicts revisit intention among Malaysian Generation Z (Gen Z) shopping tourists. Guided by the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model, the study used a cross-sectional online survey (N = 200) to measure promotional exposure and stated revisit intention, followed by bivariate correlation and simple linear regression analyses. The results indicate a clear positive association: greater exposure to targeted digital promotions was associated with stronger intentions to return for shopping, suggesting that promotional stimuli may operate through cognitive (awareness and perceived savings) and affective (interest) pathways. However, the findings are tempered by the cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported intentions, convenience sampling, and modest internal consistency for some scales; therefore, causality and translation into actual behaviour remain to be established. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to test perceived monetary value and establish causal links between exposure and observed revisit behaviour. In practice, managers should prioritise platform-appropriate, value-oriented promotions, including short-form video, micro-influencers, and time-limited deals, with clear save/share calls to action (CTAs) and trackable codes to convert exposure into visits. Socially, affordable and ethical promotional practices may broaden youth participation. The study’s originality lies in isolating promotional exposure as a single predictor within an S–O–R framing of Malaysian Gen Z shopping tourism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z (Gen Z) represents an increasingly significant emerging segment

within the shopping tourism market, making an examination of their behavioural intentions both relevant and timely. Shopping tourism, defined by shopping as a primary motive or a major planned activity during travel, has emerged as a critical pillar of destination competitiveness and tourism consumption worldwide. In Malaysia, shopping consistently accounts for a large share of domestic tourism expenditure, underscoring its economic importance to local destinations and retailers (DOSM, 2020). However, the landscape of destination marketing is undergoing a seismic shift. Traditional advertising is increasingly being supplanted by a fragmented, algorithm-driven digital environment, particularly among Gen Z, aged 18–28. As “digital natives,” Gen Z does not merely consume content; it is an active participant whose travel and consumption decisions are profoundly shaped by continuous exposure to social media promotions, influencer narratives, and short-form video content.

Previous studies have established that promotional communication influences consumers’ purchasing behaviour, particularly through online promotions and influencer-generated content (Qing et al., 2024; Asyraff et al., 2023). In tourism research, factors such as perceived monetary value, experiential attributes, and promotional strategies have also been examined in relation to tourist satisfaction and purchasing behaviour (Abidin & Mahdzar, 2021). Although broader research has explored the role of social media and influencer marketing in tourism (Wang & Iahad, 2025), limited empirical attention has been given to promotional exposure as a direct predictor of revisit intention, particularly among Gen Z shopping tourists.

Specifically, the extent to which tourists’ frequency of exposure to and attention toward promotional deals, influencer endorsements, and shareable content translates into an intention to

revisit remains insufficiently established. This gap limits destination marketers’ understanding of whether digital promotional exposure can generate tangible repeat visitation. Guided by the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework (Widaningsih & Putranto, 2025), this study therefore aims to empirically examine the direct relationship between promotional exposure and revisit intention among Malaysian Gen Z shopping tourists, thereby providing theoretical clarity and practical insights into converting digital promotional reach into repeat tourism visits.

This study is an exploratory pilot investigation designed to isolate the specific impact of promotional exposure on revisit intention. Given the multifaceted nature of tourism decision-making, which is typically influenced by numerous antecedents, this research intentionally adopts a focused, single-variable scope. This design choice aims to establish a clear, empirical baseline for understanding the direct predictive power of digital promotional stimuli among Malaysian Gen Z. While this approach limits the model’s broader predictive complexity, it provides the necessary foundational clarity to justify and inform more expansive, multivariate research in future studies.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

While initial research designs for tourism behavioural models often explore multiple antecedents, this study intentionally adopts a focused scope. By isolating ‘Promotional Communication Exposure’ as the primary independent variable within the S-O-R framework, this research aims to provide theoretical clarity on how digital promotional reach; specifically it translates into revisit intention, without the confounding effects of multiple predictors.

### 2.1 Stimulus–Organism–Response

The S-O-R framework serves as the foundational basis for this study. The S-O-R was originally derived from environmental psychology and widely used in tourism and consumer research. The framework explains how external cues (stimuli) influence internal processing (organism) and subsequent behavioural responses (response) (Azman et al., 2025). In the context of shopping tourism, promotional communications (stimulus) can affect responses regarding revisit intention (response). This study focuses on the critical organism phase, examining how Gen Z processes these digital stimuli to form revisit intentions.

The S-O-R model has also been applied in shopping tourism research to explain tourists' behavioural decision-making (Said et al., 2024). Within this framework, based on articles published in academic journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science databases between 1979 and 2021, Said et al. (2024) found that environmental and retail-related factors, such as store environments, price discounts, and cultural influences, function as stimuli (S) that shape tourists' internal cognitive and affective evaluations, including satisfaction, perceived value, and positive affect, which represent the organism (O). These internal evaluations subsequently influence behavioural outcomes, such as purchasing behaviour and destination revisit intention, representing the response (R). This application demonstrates the relevance of the S-O-R framework for explaining how external shopping-related stimuli can translate into tourists' behavioural intentions.

## 2.2 Heuristic Processing: Why Gen Z Relies on Promotional Cues

The influence of promotional exposure on Generation Z (Gen Z) can be further understood through Dual-Process Theory, which distinguishes between systematic and heuristic information processing. As digital natives exposed to

substantial volumes of online information, Gen Z consumers may rely on heuristic cues to evaluate destinations efficiently rather than engaging in extensive information processing. Promotional cues, including influencer endorsements, limited-time offers, engagement indicators, and shareable content, can therefore function as cognitive shortcuts for assessing destination attractiveness (Widaningsih & Putranto, 2025). In this context, promotional exposure may facilitate decision-making by transforming digital information into more immediate evaluations and behavioural intentions.

Wang and Iahad (2025) similarly highlighted the increasing role of social media and influencer marketing in shaping Gen Z travel choices and shopping behaviour. Short-form content on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, together with influencer endorsements, can influence younger tourists' destination interest and travel-planning behaviour, particularly when promotional content communicates attractive deals or perceived value. Nevertheless, limited research has specifically isolated Promotional Communication Exposure as a single predictor of Revisit Intention, particularly within the Malaysian shopping-tourism context. This gap provides the rationale for the present study.

Trust and attitude may also constitute important internal processes through which digital information influences Gen Z consumer responses. Chin et al. (2024) found that brand recognition and service quality contribute to trust, which subsequently strengthens positive attitudes and booking intentions among Gen Z consumers. As digital natives, Gen Z generally expect basic platform usability; therefore, tourism platforms need to emphasise organisational credibility, transaction security, and reliable service quality to strengthen trust and convert favourable attitudes into purchasing behaviour (Chin et al., 2024).

However, because the present study specifically examines the direct relationship between Promotional Communication Exposure and Revisit Intention, these broader organismic variables are acknowledged as relevant theoretical mechanisms but are not included as empirical predictors in the current research.

### *2.3 Promotional Exposure as Social Proof and FOMO*

Promotional exposure has become an important mechanism through which Gen Z obtains, evaluates, and responds to tourism-related information. Unlike conventional advertising, promotional communication on social media is embedded in influencer recommendations, short-form videos, user-generated content, online reviews, and peer-shared posts. Recent studies indicate that influencer characteristics and digital content can shape Gen Z consumers' perceptions and tourism intentions (Hussain et al., 2025), while TikTok and other social media platforms increasingly influence the travel-related intentions of younger consumers (Fong et al., 2025). Thus, promotional exposure is particularly relevant to Gen Z because it occurs within their everyday digital environments and through sources they frequently engage with.

Beyond its informational function, promotional content also provides social validation. Influencer-led content on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram can create "social proof," whereby individuals interpret others' behaviours as cues for appropriate or desirable actions (Wang & Iahad, 2025). This effect is particularly relevant to Gen Z, as viral shopping content may trigger fear of missing out (FOMO), transforming a discount or promotional offer into an indicator that a destination is trending or socially desirable. Consequently, the shareability and social visibility of promotional content may be as influential as the

promotional value itself.

Social interaction further strengthens this effect. Likes, comments, shares, and saves enable promotional messages to circulate through peer networks, increasing repeated exposure and reinforcing perceptions of a destination's attractiveness. In shopping tourism, such exposure may be associated with discounts, seasonal campaigns, events, new products, and limited-time offers, thereby sustaining destination awareness and encouraging consideration of future visits. Promotional exposure may also generate emotional responses, including excitement, curiosity, and FOMO. Attractive visuals, influencer endorsements, and time-sensitive offers can enhance psychological engagement and message memorability (Hussain et al., 2025). Therefore, promotional exposure should be conceptualised not simply as the frequency of encountering advertisements, but as a multidimensional process involving information, social influence, emotional stimulation, and digital engagement. For Malaysian Gen Z shopping tourists, these combined mechanisms may enhance destination awareness and strengthen revisit intention, providing a basis for examining promotional communication exposure as a determinant of intention to revisit shopping tourism destinations.

### *2.4 The Interplay of Experience, Value, and Promotion*

The role of experiential attributes in shaping revisit intention has traditionally been examined through physical destination characteristics, such as mall ambience, retail variety, entertainment, and service quality. However, the increasing integration of digital media into tourism decision-making suggests that these attributes may no longer function solely as direct predictors of revisit intention. Instead, they may operate through consumers' perceptions of value, which are

increasingly shaped by digital promotional exposure. For Gen Z, promotional content encountered through social media can serve as an initial interpretive filter through which physical destination experiences are anticipated and evaluated (Truong & Bui, 2025). When promotional content establishes strong expectations of value, the destination's experiential attributes may subsequently be evaluated against those expectations. This highlights the growing importance of digital framing in shaping how consumers perceive and respond to physical tourism experiences.

This perspective is further supported by Hasan et al. (2026), who reviewed 79 peer-reviewed publications over a 10-year period from 2015. Their findings indicated that the integration of artificial intelligence, digital marketing, and integrated marketing communication has emerged as a powerful strategy for enhancing visitor experiences. The findings reinforce the argument of Truong and Bui (2025) that promotional communication extends beyond information provision, influencing how young tourists perceive a destination's value and attractiveness.

Evidence from multichannel shopping also demonstrates the potential interaction between promotional communication and consumer experience. In Pakistan, Iqbal et al. (2025) examined online and physical shopping behaviour and found that the positive influence of these shopping experiences on repurchase intention was strengthened when sales promotions were applied. This finding suggests that promotional incentives can enhance the behavioural outcomes associated with both digital and physical shopping experiences.

Collectively, these studies indicate that promotional communication should not be viewed as separate from experiential attributes. Rather, it

can shape expectations, reinforce perceived value, and strengthen the behavioural effects of consumers' experiences. For Gen Z shopping tourists, therefore, promotional communication exposure represents a potentially important independent predictor of revisit intention, particularly within an increasingly integrated online–offline tourism environment.

### 2.5 Research Gap

Although Gen Z has become an increasingly important consumer segment, existing research on digital promotional communication remains fragmented, particularly in relation to tourism and revisit behaviour. Recent studies have primarily examined how Gen Z responds to specific promotional formats and message characteristics. For example, Marumbwa and Govender (2025) found that personalisation, credibility, interactivity, and media richness positively influence Gen Z's attitudes towards promotional messages on instant messaging platforms, whereas perceived irritation and invasiveness contribute to advertising avoidance. However, their study was geographically and contextually limited to a specific regional setting and focused on instant messaging promotions, restricting the generalisability of its findings to other digital channels and tourism contexts. Its cross-sectional design also provides limited insight into behavioural outcomes beyond immediate attitudes.

Similarly, Yahya (2024) highlighted Gen Z's scepticism towards traditional, push-based advertising and identified authenticity, transparency, and social proof as important elements of effective digital promotion. However, as a systematic literature review, the study synthesised secondary evidence rather than empirically testing these relationships among specific Gen Z subgroups. Consequently, regional, cultural, and contextual variations remain



insufficiently addressed.

Furthermore, tourism studies have generally examined promotional activities alongside broader marketing-mix factors (Wang & Iahad, 2025; Azman et al., 2025), leaving limited empirical evidence on the independent effect of promotional communication exposure on revisit intention. In particular, this relationship remains underexplored among Malaysian Gen Z shopping tourists. Addressing this gap, the present study isolates promotional communication exposure as the primary independent variable within the S-O-R framework and empirically examines its predictive effect on revisit intention. Accordingly, the study proposes:

H1: Promotional communication exposure has a significant positive effect on revisit intention among Malaysian Gen Z shopping tourists.

Figure 1 below presents the framework of this study.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey research design to empirically examine the relationship between Promotional Communication Exposure and Revisit Intention. A quantitative approach was selected to provide objective, numerical evidence of the predictive power of promotional stimuli, which was appropriate for establishing generalisable patterns within the Malaysian Gen Z shopping tourism market. The cross-sectional design was particularly suited to

this exploratory pilot study, as it allows for the collection of data at a single point in time, facilitating an efficient assessment of consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions among a mobile and dispersed population.

Conceptually, this study is grounded in the S-O-R framework. Originally derived from environmental psychology, the S-O-R model posits that external environmental cues (stimuli) influence internal cognitive or affective states (organism), which subsequently manifest in approach or avoidance behaviours (response). In this investigation, Promotional communication exposure functions as the “Stimulus,” while revisit intention represents the “Response.” By framing the study within this model, the research moves beyond descriptive observation to provide a theoretically justified examination of how digital marketing inputs translate into behavioural outcomes.

#### 3.2 Population and Sampling Strategy

The target population for this study comprised Malaysian Gen Z residents, specifically those aged between 18 and 28. This cohort was selected due to their status as digital natives, characterised by high levels of digital literacy and an active engagement with social commerce, which makes them the primary demographic for the digital promotional strategies under investigation. The inclusion criteria required participants to have prior shopping-tourism experience—defined as having visited malls, outlet centres, duty-free outlets, or retail precincts within the preceding 12 months.

Given the mobile nature of this demographic and the challenges of accessing a statistically representative list of all Malaysian Gen Z tourists, a non-probability purposive sampling strategy was employed. This approach is widely accepted in social science research involving digital-first

cohorts, as it enables targeted recruitment of respondents with the specific characteristics (age and tourism experience) required to provide valid data (Saunders et al., 2019). The data were collected via a structured, self-administered online questionnaire disseminated through university networks and various social media platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, to ensure broad reach within the target demographic.

### 3.3 Sample Size and Justification

The study achieved a total of 200 usable responses. This sample size is statistically robust for the proposed analysis. According to Green (1991), the recommended minimum sample size for regression analysis is governed by the formula  $N \geq 50 + 8m$ . With a single-predictor model, this study easily exceeds the minimum threshold. Furthermore, Hair et al. (2009) suggest that a minimum sample size of approximately 200 is adequate for obtaining stable parameter estimates in multivariate analyses. The subjects-to-variables ratio (10:1 or higher) has been satisfied, ensuring that the results possess sufficient statistical power to minimise the risk of Type II errors and to provide a stable foundation for the reliability and regression analyses conducted.

### 3.4 Research Instrument

The questionnaire was developed based on validated instruments to ensure content validity. Promotional Communication Exposure was adapted from Qing et al. (2024), incorporating items that capture exposure frequency, attention to content, influencer endorsements, the utility of promotional deals, and digital engagement behaviours such as saving, sharing, or bookmarking. Revisit Intention was measured using established scales that assess future travel plans and the likelihood of returning to the shopping destination. All items were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1

(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), which provides a balanced range for respondents to express their attitudes without the complexity of larger scales.

To ensure clarity and suitability, the instrument underwent a pilot test involving three participants who met the inclusion criteria. The pre-test served as a quality-assurance measure to identify and rectify wording ambiguities, assess the average completion time (targeted at 5–10 minutes), and verify the questionnaire's flow. Minor linguistic refinements were made based on this feedback to ensure uniformity in item construction and to align the terminology with the linguistic conventions familiar to Malaysian Gen Z.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS (Version 27). The procedure began with systematic data screening; the dataset was inspected for missing values and inconsistent responses. Where minor missingness occurred and was found to be random, mean-within-scale imputation was utilised to preserve the integrity of the dataset.

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to profile the respondents' demographic characteristics and to provide an overview of variable levels. Internal consistency reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha; given the exploratory nature of this pilot study, an alpha value approaching or exceeding the 0.60 -- 0.70 threshold is considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to establish the direction and strength of the association between the independent and dependent variables. Finally, simple linear regression was executed to test the primary research hypothesis (H1). The analysis adhered to ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent, guaranteeing respondent anonymity, and

ensuring participation was entirely voluntary.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Demographic Profiles

This study surveyed 200 Malaysian Gen Z tourists, aged 18–28, with a gender-balanced sample (50.5% male, 49.5% female). Participants demonstrated moderate purchasing power, with 32.5% reporting monthly allowances of RM2,000–2999. Regarding

shopping tourism 1–2 times annually, frequently purchasing souvenirs, local products, apparel, and vintage items. Domestic travel remains central to this cohort, with 58.5% citing Malaysia as their most recent shopping destination and 64.5% identifying it as their favourite. These results illustrate a clear preference for value-oriented, culturally distinctive shopping experiences, highlighting the dominance of domestic tourism within the travel patterns of Malaysian Gen Z.

**Table 1.** Respondent demographic profile

| Demographic Variables                   | Questions Items                                                           | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| A1. Gender                              | Male                                                                      | 101       | 50.5       |
|                                         | Female                                                                    | 99        | 49.5       |
| A2. Age                                 | 18-20                                                                     | 57        | 28.5       |
|                                         | 21-23                                                                     | 54        | 27         |
|                                         | 24-26                                                                     | 43        | 21.5       |
|                                         | 27-28                                                                     | 46        | 23         |
| A3. Total Monthly Allowance             | <RM1,000                                                                  | 36        | 18         |
|                                         | RM1,000–1999                                                              | 51        | 25.5       |
|                                         | RM2,000–2999                                                              | 65        | 32.5       |
|                                         | ≥RM3,000                                                                  | 48        | 24         |
| A4. Shopping Tourism Frequency          | 1–2 times                                                                 | 107       | 53.5       |
|                                         | 3–5 times                                                                 | 61        | 30.5       |
|                                         | More than 5 times a year                                                  | 32        | 16         |
| A5. Types of items frequently purchased | Souvenirs & Local Products (crafts, local merchandise, traditional items) | 63        | 31.5       |
|                                         | Apparel (clothes, footwear, bags)                                         | 48        | 24         |
|                                         | Vintage / Second-hand / Merchandise / Bargain items                       | 42        | 21         |
|                                         | Accessories & Beauty (accessories, jewelry, beauty products)              | 25        | 12.5       |
|                                         | Food & Snacks (local snacks, light meals)                                 | 22        | 11         |
|                                         | Home / Decoration / Tools / Electronics                                   | 5         | 2.5        |
|                                         | None / No preference / Anything                                           | 5         | 2.5        |
| A6. Most recent shopping destination    | Domestic                                                                  | 117       | 58.5       |
|                                         | Asia                                                                      | 40        | 20         |
|                                         | Europe                                                                    | 24        | 12         |
|                                         | North America                                                             | 8         | 4          |
|                                         | South America                                                             | 5         | 2.5        |
|                                         | Africa                                                                    | 3         | 1.5        |
|                                         | Oceania                                                                   | 3         | 1.5        |
| A7. Favourite Shopping Destination      | Domestic                                                                  | 129       | 64.5       |
|                                         | Asia                                                                      | 28        | 14         |
|                                         | Europe                                                                    | 25        | 12.5       |
|                                         | North America                                                             | 8         | 4          |
|                                         | South America                                                             | 5         | 2.5        |
|                                         | Africa                                                                    | 3         | 1.5        |
|                                         | Oceania                                                                   | 2         | 1          |

### 4.2 Reliability and Descriptive Analyses

Mean levels of promotional exposure and revisit intention were high on the five-point scale, indicating frequent exposure and a strong stated

propensity to revisit. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for promotional exposure and revisit intention were .626 and .640, respectively. Given the exploratory nature of the study, these values were interpreted cautiously; item-level results are presented in

Table 2.

**Table 2.** Reliability analysis result

| Variables                 | Number of Items | Cronbach's alpha |
|---------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| IV - Promotional Exposure | 5               | 0.626            |
| DV - Revisit Intention    | 5               | 0.640            |

Next, based on the five-point Likert scale, promotional exposure had an overall mean of 4.22, indicating that respondents were high levels of exposure to and engagement with online promotional content (see Table 3). Social media

exposure and influencer endorsements were perceived as important sources of information when planning shopping-related trips. This reflects the digitally driven behaviour of Gen Z tourists.

**Table 3.** Descriptive analysis result (promotional exposure)

| Promotional Exposure                                                                                                                                   | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------|
| D1. Exposure to social media posts (e.g., TikTok, Instagram) showcasing deals or discounts for this destination encouraged interest in shopping there. | 4.32 | 0.844          |
| D2. Influencer posts or endorsements influenced my decision to consider this shopping trip.                                                            | 4.13 | 0.831          |
| D3. Online promotional information is typically reviewed before planning a shopping-related trip.                                                      | 4.23 | 0.781          |
| D4. Promotional content made this trip seem like a good money-saving opportunity.                                                                      | 4.20 | 0.813          |
| D5. Online promotional content about this destination is often saved, shared, or bookmarked for later reference when shopping for offers.              | 4.26 | 0.827          |
| Total                                                                                                                                                  | 4.22 | 0.819          |

*Note. Five-point Likert-type scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.*

Furthermore, based on the five-point Likert scale, revisit intention recorded a high overall mean of 4.27, suggesting strong future behavioural intentions toward shopping destinations. The

highest means were observed for intention to revisit within the next 12 months ( $M = 4.38$ ), indicating a high likelihood of repeat visits driven by shopping opportunities.

**Table 4.** Descriptive analysis result (revisit intention)

| Revisit Intention                                                                                        | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------|
| E1. I intend to visit this shopping destination within the next 12 months.                               | 4.38 | 0.818          |
| E2. I am likely to choose this destination for shopping because it offers good value.                    | 4.23 | 0.823          |
| E3. I plan to make a dedicated trip primarily for shopping to this destination.                          | 4.19 | 0.804          |
| E4. I am likely to include this destination in my future travel plans because of its shopping offerings. | 4.24 | 0.785          |
| E5. I would consider returning to this destination specifically for shopping in the future               | 4.34 | 0.787          |
| Total                                                                                                    | 4.27 | 0.803          |

*Note. Five-point Likert-type scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.*

Table 5. Pearson correlation result

| Independent Variable | Dependent Variable(Revisit Intention) |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Promotional Exposure | .532                                  |

Table 6. Significant 2-tailed result

| Variables                                             | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Promotional Exposure (IV) with revisit intention (DV) | < .001          |

For this digitally engaged Gen Z sample, promotional exposure functions as an effective stimulus that elevates revisit intention; possibly because promotions convey clear monetary benefits (discounts, bundle deals) and generate social signals (shareability). In practice, promotional messaging that is platform-fit (short-form video, influencer micro-influencer collaborations), value-explicit, and includes “save/share” calls to action (CTAs) is most likely to convert exposure into planned revisits, which aligns with the studies by Azman et al. (2025) and Wang and Iahad (2025).

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between Promotional Communication Exposure and Revisit Intention. The results revealed a statistically significant positive effect ( $p < .001$ ), providing empirical support for H1. This finding indicates that greater exposure to promotional communication is associated with stronger intentions to revisit shopping destinations among digitally engaged Gen Z tourists. The result further suggests that promotional communication functions as an important stimulus within the S-O-R framework, translating digital promotional cues into behavioural intentions. Accordingly, the findings highlight the importance of strategically designed digital promotional activities, particularly social media promotions and influencer-generated content, in encouraging revisit intention among Gen Z shopping tourists.

5. DISCUSSION

The positive relationship between promotional exposure and revisit intention ( $p < .001$ ) suggests that digital marketing is associated with revisit intention for Malaysian Gen Z shopping tourism. This finding can be interpreted when viewed through the lens of the respondents' demographic characteristics, specifically their financial profiles and consumption patterns. Based on the demographic profile collected in this study, a majority of respondents (56.5%) report a monthly allowance of RM2,000 or more, suggesting this cohort has reasonable disposable income. However, the high receptivity to promotional content; such as time-limited deals and value-oriented messaging, indicates that these individuals are "value-conscious" rather than "price-insensitive." For this demographic, promotional exposure functions as a cognitive tool that validates their purchasing decisions. They may use digital promotions to maximise their "value for money," transforming a standard shopping trip into a "smart" or "strategic" experience that aligns with their financial planning.

The demographic results also indicate a preference for visually distinctive product categories. The heavy preference for Souvenirs/Local products (31.5%), Apparel (24%), and Vintage/Bargain items (21%) highlights a consumer base driven by aesthetic and cultural value. These categories are highly visual and trend-sensitive, which may help explain the relevance of the "Stimulus" phase in the S-O-R framework.



Digital promotions, specifically short-form videos and influencer content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, are well suited to showcase these specific item categories. The content allows Gen Z to pre-visualise their shopping experience, effectively bridging the gap between digital discovery and physical acquisition.

Through the S-O-R lens, this study demonstrates that the digital environment functions not merely as an information source but as an experiential filter for Malaysian Gen Z shopping tourists. Promotional content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok can provide a virtual preview of products, particularly visually and tactilely appealing items such as local crafts, apparel, and vintage finds. When promotional stimuli effectively communicate these offerings, they may enhance awareness, attractiveness, and interest, thereby strengthening the intention to revisit. This finding aligns with recent evidence that influencer endorsements, social campaigns, and social-commerce features can stimulate younger travellers' intentions to visit or revisit shopping destinations (Asyraff et al., 2023; Hasan et al., 2026; Iqbal et al., 2025; Qing et al., 2024).

Although isolating Promotional Communication Exposure as the sole predictor enhanced analytical clarity and enabled a focused examination of its relationship with Revisit Intention, this approach also represents a limitation. The exclusion of other potentially relevant factors may not fully capture the complex, multifaceted nature of tourists' decision-making about revisiting. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported intentions, convenience sampling, and relatively modest internal consistency of some measurement items limit the generalisability and comprehensiveness of the findings. Accordingly, the results should be interpreted with appropriate caution. The discussion and conclusions presented in this study, therefore, reflect preliminary

empirical evidence rather than definitive proof of the factors determining shopping-tourism revisit intentions among Malaysian Gen Z tourists. Future studies should incorporate additional predictors, broader samples, and longitudinal designs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of revisit intentions.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrates that promotional exposure serves as a predictor of revisit intention among Malaysian Gen Z shopping tourists, confirming that targeted digital stimuli significantly influence future travel behaviour. By isolating this variable within the S-O-R framework, the research advances understanding of digital-first tourism, establishing promotional communication as a critical cognitive and affective catalyst for repeat visitation. Managerially, retailers should prioritise platform-specific strategies, such as short-form content and micro-influencer partnerships, that are integrated with explicit, value-oriented messaging. The use of trackable promotional mechanisms, including unique codes and QR check-ins, may help to bridge the gap between digital exposure and tangible visits. At a policy level, tourism authorities should facilitate collaborative initiatives, such as unified campaign windows or student shopping weeks, and support influencer-led storytelling that emphasises affordability. Further investment in digital infrastructure, such as centralised promotional portals, will enhance the credibility and traceability of these efforts. In conclusion, promotional communication exposure represents a testable marketing factor for destination marketers. While this study provides foundational evidence, future research should extend designs to further examine potential causal relationships and explore the interplay between promotional exposure and other experiential drivers.

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# Understanding Muslim Tourist Experience Through RIDA Framework: A Comparative Analysis of Generation X And Generation Z

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 24/7/2026

Accepted : 27/7/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Assured; Generation Z, Generation X; Muslim-friendly tourism; RIDA framework

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Research paper

**Abstract** - Muslim tourists are often treated as a homogeneous market despite potential differences in travel expectations across generational cohorts. This study examines the perceptions of Generation X and Generation Z Muslim tourists regarding Johor Bahru as a Muslim-friendly destination using the Responsible, Immersive, Digital, and Assured (RIDA) framework. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was employed, involving 100 purposively selected Muslim tourists. Data were collected using a structured five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analysed using independent-samples t-tests at the 0.05 significance level. The findings revealed positive evaluations across all four RIDA dimensions for both generations. The Assured dimension received the highest mean ratings, while Immersive recorded the lowest for both groups. However, no statistically significant differences were identified between Generation X and Generation Z across any of the RIDA dimensions. These findings suggest that faith-based destination attributes—including halal authenticity, religious comfort, safety, and accessible Muslim-friendly facilities and digital services play a more influential role in shaping destination perceptions than generational differences. From a managerial perspective, destination managers should prioritise developing a robust, cross-generational Muslim-friendly tourism ecosystem while strengthening immersive experiences that foster deeper engagement with local heritage, culture, and communities. Although the study is limited by its focus on a single destination and the use of non-probability sampling, it provides one of the earliest empirical comparisons of generational perceptions using the

emerging RIDA framework. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on Muslim-friendly tourism and offer practical insights for enhancing urban destination management in Malaysia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Muslim-friendly tourism has grown, and it is no longer just about providing halal food and prayer rooms; it is about the experience of being truly welcomed and satisfied as a Muslim tourist. The southernmost port of Malaysia, Johor Bahru, is particularly noteworthy. It has extensive tourism facilities, is close to Singapore, and has gradually established itself as a destination that is conducive to Muslim tourists (Zaidi et al., 2025). A good national image does, however, raise questions about the reality of the visitor experience compared with the expectations of the diverse groups of visitors. This is particularly relevant as the tourism industry becomes more experience oriented and digitally connected, with tourists increasingly seeking personalised, authentic, and convenient travel experiences.

The RIDA framework provides a modern approach for evaluating to assess this. The four dimensions of this framework are Responsible, Immersive, Digital, and Assured, reflecting environmentally and socially responsible practices, engagement in local culture, heritage, traditions and community, availability of online resources (information, reviews, maps, booking tools, and trip planning services), and halal authenticity, safety, religious comfort, and reliability of Muslim friendly offerings (CrescentRating, 2024; Noor & Bahardeen, 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025). Together, these aspects transform the assessment of “Muslim-friendly destinations” from a functional product to a rich and holistic 'visitors experience'.

Though this framework is comprehensive, two gaps are found in the literature, which are interconnected. Firstly, empirical research using the RIDA framework at the destination level in Malaysia is still limited. Secondly, much research treats Muslims as a homogenous group. However, changes in the tourism industry have also highlighted the importance of understanding tourists according to their different needs, behaviours, and expectations. There is evidence that preferences and expectations differ between different generational cohorts, e.g. Generation X and Generation Z. Comparing these two cohorts is therefore useful because they grew up in different technological and social environments, which may shape how they evaluate and experience tourism destinations. This variation also serves as a reminder to appreciate the diversity of experiences and perspectives within the Muslim community. Generation X is more concerned with reliability, comfort and safety while Generation Z is more concerned with digital engagement, authenticity and sustainability (Jiang et al., 2022; Popşa, 2024; Suhaine et al., 2025). This indicates that these generations may have distinct perceptions of the characteristics within the RIDA framework, yet these differences have seldom been explored in the context of a Muslim-friendly urban environment.

The purpose of this article is therefore to explore the possible significant differences between the experiences of Gen X and Gen Z Muslim tourists in Johor Bahru along the four dimensions of responsible, immersive, digital and assured experiences. The null hypothesis for this study is that there are no significant differences between the cohorts, and the alternative hypothesis is that at least one generational difference exists. The study will focus on developing this comparative perspective to identify whether segmentation by generation can provide valuable insights beyond the common needs shared by all Muslim tourists.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Muslim-Friendly Destination Experience

Muslim-friendly tourism involves providing services and facilities that help tourists practice their Islamic beliefs and traditions while traveling. A distinctive aspect of this type of tourism is that it offers accommodations that respect modesty, access to places for prayer, Islam-friendly activities, and the availability of halal food. However, the experience of travel goes beyond the trip itself; factors such as service quality, safety, cultural sensitivity, information availability, and service providers' credibility all contribute to the overall travel experience. This means that the concept of being Muslim-friendly is not simply about the destination as a product; it also encompasses the experiential aspects at the destination level.

For example, Malaysia has established standards and actively promotes itself as a Muslim-friendly destination, laying the groundwork for providing halal services. Johor Bahru, in particular, has a unique urban environment. Its proximity to Singapore, its status as Malaysia's gateway city in the south, a robust visitor economy, and rich cultural diversity create significant potential to cater to both local and international Muslim visitors. However, it is essential to recognize that local assessments remain critical, complementing national strategies. The experiences visitors have with services and environments at the city level can significantly impact a destination's performance. A deeper understanding of visitors' perceptions can highlight vulnerabilities that may not be reflected in aggregated destination rankings (Zaidi et al., 2025).

Through empirical research, scholars have found that factors such as destination trust, service quality, safety perceptions, availability of prayer

facilities, and halal food play crucial roles in influencing the behavior of Muslim travelers. These elements reduce uncertainty and allow individuals to engage in religious activities outside of their homes. Furthermore, it has been discovered that attributes of Muslim-friendly destinations correlate with perceived value, visitor satisfaction, destination image, and tourist loyalty (Sodawan & Hsu, 2022). This suggests that destination managers must focus not only on physical infrastructure but also on providing reassurances. For instance, if the location of a prayer room is not clearly indicated, it may be of little use; likewise, if visitors are uncertain about the authenticity of halal claims, the value of these offerings diminishes.

### 2.2 The RIDA Framework

The RIDA framework has been designed to adapt to the evolving nature of Muslim travel. It encompasses four dimensions: Responsible, Immersive, Digital, and Assured, going beyond the traditional focus on Halal food and prayer facilities (CrescentRating, 2024; Noor & Bahardeen, 2025). These dimensions enhance the overall tourist experience. "Responsible" pertains to the governance of tourism; "Immersive" relates to the depth of cultural engagement; "Digital" involves access to information and services; and "Assured" reflects confidence in the availability of cultural and practical resources. Responsibility includes various aspects such as environmental sustainability, cleanliness, community well-being, ethical service, and adherence to Islamic values. It carries both universal and faith-based implications in Muslim-friendly tourism. Indicators of destination quality include environmental stewardship and ethical practices, while the responsible provision of facilities tailored for both Halal and Muslim-friendly visitors is particularly significant for this demographic. Wibowo et al. (2025) assert that responsibility is a key factor that



enhances the competitiveness and sustainability of Halal tourism activities.

Immersion involves engaging positively with local culture, Islamic heritage, and community life. It distinguishes a place that merely welcomes Muslim visitors from one that offers meaningful learning and participation opportunities. Authentic heritage interpretation, community involvement, and spiritual connections help foster a sense of place. The Johor Bahru study will focus on significant cultural experiences, genuine Islamic heritage, traditional knowledge, spiritual benefits, and impactful Muslim community engagement through memorable events. Digital tools, such as online platforms, social media, reviews, digital maps, and trip planning apps, facilitate travel by helping visitors find halal facilities and simplifying planning for Muslim travelers. Although digital resources seem more attractive to younger tourists, their importance spans all ages due to the widespread use of smartphones and online booking. It's essential to assess digital access levels without assuming they're limited to Generation Z.

Finally, Assurance in Islam covers key points and is vital to providing a Muslim-friendly travel experience. This includes authentic halal food, safety, staff awareness of halal needs, facilities for religious practices, and reliable services. These factors build Muslim travelers' trust that the destination will consistently meet their religious requirements. The credibility of Muslim-friendly offerings depends on reducing risks related to religion, safety, and functionality. Clear communication of halal facilities and trustworthy services tailored to the Muslim faith increases destination appeal and popularity among Muslim visitors (CrescentRating, 2024; Wibowo et al., 2025). These four dimensions authenticity, safety, staff understanding, and service reliability—are interconnected components of the destination system that promote trust and confidence. The

assurance process is credible when supported by responsible governance, and digital tools ensure access to halal and prayer facilities.

Additional reasons for visitors to connect with a destination through engaging activities may seem unnecessary. However, if one aspect is lacking, it can negatively affect other areas. For example, an authentic heritage site may not be accessible to Muslim visitors if essential prayer information is missing. Similarly, a strong digital platform won't resolve issues related to misleading halal labeling or service quality. The strength of the RIDA system lies in its ability to evaluate the multi-faceted experiences of life and maintain a comprehensive record of the facts for each dimension. This framework can be applied to large cities like Johor Bahru, which offer a wide range of activities, accommodations, dining options, and business opportunities, not limited to a single resort. Visitors often face challenges in identifying providers that vary significantly in their Muslim-friendly offerings. To address these gaps, digital mapping and information resources can be implemented, while the assurance dimension allows visitors to assess the credibility of their choices. Good governance can help establish standards for various operators, and immersive programming can showcase the city's cultural wealth, creating a sense of unity and enjoyment that enhances its appeal to visitors.

In this context, RIDA effectively integrates destination management into the everyday experiences of Muslim travelers. This assessment focuses on tourists' perceptions, as the presence of facilities does not always guarantee a positive experience. A space may have amenities but could be difficult to locate, poorly managed, or inadequately marketed. Visitors' observations, expectations, and interpretations collectively shape to their overall journey, providing critical insights into destination performance from the demand side.

The study by Jiang et al. (2022) has demonstrated that these perceptions can significantly influence travel intentions. By analysing visitors' evaluations of the RIDA dimensions, we can gather valuable information beyond what is provided by supply-side inventories and certifiers, ultimately enhancing the experience for Muslim travelers.

### *2.3 Generational Cohorts and Tourist Evaluation*

Generational cohort analysis suggests that individuals with different backgrounds and experiences have varying values and consumption patterns in society, the economy, and technology. In tourism studies, Generation X is characterized as practical, safety-conscious, reliable, and convenience-oriented while being interested in authentic experiences. In contrast, Generation Z, who have grown up in a digital age, is associated with social media usage, diverse experiences, innovation, authenticity, and sustainability (Popşa, 2024; Suhaineh et al., 2025). These characterizations imply that the dimensions of Responsible and Immersive Destination Attributes (RIDA) may vary across generations. However, it's crucial to view these profiles as tendencies rather than rigid categories. The adoption of digital technologies isn't limited to any specific age group, and sustainability issues can resonate with people of all ages.

Moreover, due to the influence of Muslim identity, there are shared religious needs that may transcend generational divides. Both Generation X and Generation Z may seek safe spaces, services aligned with Islamic values, prayer areas, and reliable halal food. Thus, while the mode of communication may differ across cohorts, an assessment of a destination's performance in meeting the needs of Muslim travelers remains fundamentally unchanged. Generation X grew up in a different world but has embraced the digital realm for information, navigation, and booking.

They may view technology as a tool that enhances certainty and convenience in travel. Conversely, Generation Z is accustomed to technology and expects a seamless experience involving social media, peer reviews, and mobile services. The difference in their technological backgrounds can create a “Digital Difference,” but it isn't guaranteed. If tools like maps, booking systems, and destination data effectively address similar travel problems, both groups can evaluate these resources in a similar way, even if they use them in different ways.

Additionally, the themes of Responsibility and Immersion in tourism apply across generations. While discussions about sustainability often focus on younger consumers, older visitors also value cleanliness, ethical service, and community welfare. An appreciation for authenticity is not limited to Generation Z; Generation X travelers can also be interested in understanding heritage and seeking trustworthy interpretations during their travels. Therefore, examining generational hypotheses requires more nuance than relying on broad statements. If statistically significant differences are identified between cohorts, tailoring distinct destination development strategies may be beneficial. Conversely, if the differences are not statistically significant, a single strategy with targeted communication adjustments might suffice. One aspect likely to be, consistent across generations is the importance of faith-based needs and risk aversion. The need for halal authenticity, safety, and the ability to fulfill religious obligations are important across all ages. However, factors such as staff responsiveness, expectations of facilities, and perceptions of reliable service may vary with travel experience or life stage.

This study will explore whether the common religious ground of Muslim-friendly tourism outweighs potential generational differences. Research has shown that tourist perceptions

significantly influence destination selection and travel behavior (Jiang et al., 2022; Ivančsóné Horváth et al., 2025), and cohort studies indicate that different tourist groups exhibit varying characteristics regarding information search and preference formation when selecting travel destinations. Yet, few studies have directly contrasted Muslim tourists from Generation X and Generation Z within the same multi-dimensional framework of tourism destinations. Existing RIDA studies are mainly conceptual or focused on selected indicators, with limited research conducted in Johor Bahru. This comparison aims to examine whether there are differences in cohort means across each RIDA dimension.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design and Participants

The study employed quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The subjects included Muslim tourists aged 46 to 61 (Generation X) and 14 to 29 (Generation Z) who had visited Johor Bahru. Purposive sampling was employed, with three eligibility criteria: participants must be Muslim, have previously visited Johor Bahru, and fall within one of the following age groups: 30–40, 40–50, or 50–60. The final sample comprised 100 eligible respondents, with equal representation from Generation X and Generation Y-Z. All respondents reported prior visits to Johor Bahru; 57 of them indicated they visited twice a year, while the remaining respondents stated they visited 3 to 5 times a year. Data collection was conducted using both paper-based and electronic questionnaires. Physical forms were distributed through direct engagement with eligible participants, and online questionnaires were shared via Google Forms, WhatsApp, and Facebook. The final sample included 64 females and 36 males. Among the respondents, 59 held bachelor's degrees, 22 had

completed secondary school, 14 possessed diplomas, and five had earned master's degrees.

#### 3.2 Instrument and Quality Assessment

The structured questionnaire comprised questions related to demographics, travel profiles, and RIDA measures, which were rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire included seven items about the responsible dimension, six items for the immersive dimension, and six for the assured dimension. These items addressed themes such as responsible Islam-appropriate service delivery, cultural and community involvement, digital tour support, and assurance on matters of faith. The face and construct validity of the wording, construct alignment, scale applicability, and overall suitability for both groups were assessed by two tourism academics on April 7 and 17, 2026. Adjustments were made based on their feedback before data collection. The reliability of the gathered data was evaluated through internal consistency using IBM SPSS Statistics 27, based on a pilot test involving 30 respondents. The findings indicated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.858 for the Responsible dimension, 0.912 for the Immersive dimension, 0.830 for the Digital dimension, and 0.943 for the Assured dimension. All values surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), thereby validating the use of these scales in the main survey.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics 27 was utilized to compute the mean and standard deviation for each cohort. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the means between cohorts across each dimension of RIDA. The significance of the differences was evaluated at  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; a p-value less than 0.05 indicated a significant difference

between groups, while a p-value greater than 0.05 suggested insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis (Pallant, 2020). Unfortunately, the degrees of freedom, confidence intervals, and effect sizes for the analyses presented in the thesis could not be reconstructed, as this information was not included.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Findings

Both cohorts evaluated Johor Bahru positively across all four RIDA dimensions. In both groups, the Assurance dimension received the highest

ranking, while Immersion ranked the lowest. Notably, Generation Z demonstrated a higher mean score for the Digital dimension, whereas the means for the other constructs were relatively consistent. Table 1 presents the descriptive results and the inferential test conducted to meet the comparative objective. The results from the four tests did not reach statistical significance, so the null hypothesis could not be rejected for the variables responsible, immersive, digital, and assured. Thus, within the constraints of this sample and analytical framework, cohort membership did not appear to differentiate the evaluations of Johor Bahru's RIDA attributes among Muslim tourists.

**Table 1.** A comparative analysis between generation X and generation Z across the dimensions of RIDA

| Dimension   | Gen X M (SD) | Gen Z M (SD) | t      | p     | Decision        |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------|-------|-----------------|
| Responsible | 4.19 (0.69)  | 4.15 (0.50)  | -0.331 | 0.741 | Not significant |
| Immersive   | 3.97 (0.77)  | 3.90 (0.69)  | -0.500 | 0.618 | Not significant |
| Digital     | 4.12 (0.74)  | 4.28 (0.54)  | 1.254  | 0.213 | Not significant |
| Assured     | 4.31 (0.81)  | 4.37 (0.55)  | 0.436  | 0.664 | Not significant |

*Note.*  $n = 50$  per cohort. Tests were evaluated at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Values reproduce the thesis tables; the thesis did not report degrees of freedom, confidence intervals or effect sizes.

#### 4.1.1 Responsible

The study compared the attitudes of various generational cohorts towards responsible tourism, revealing that Generation X had a mean value of 4.19 (SD = 0.69), significantly higher than that of the other cohorts. Their strongest support was for sustainable tourism development, which received a mean rating of 4.24. Other closely ranked factors included the perceived role of providers in ensuring halal and Muslim-friendly facilities (M = 4.22) and the ethical treatment of Muslim tourists (M = 4.20). Additionally, aspects such as cleanliness (M = 4.18), compatibility of tourism activities with Islamic principles (M = 4.16), respect for Islamic values (M = 4.10), and environmentally responsible practices (M = 4.08) also received positive ratings. Generation Z also placed a high value on

responsible tourism, with a mean score of 4.15 (SD = 0.50). They rated the commitment to providing halal and Muslim-friendly facilities the highest at 4.44. This commitment was consistently reported as being significant over the past two years. Generation Z also prioritized sustainable tourism development (M = 4.32) and cleanliness in attractions (M = 4.16). Other positive ratings included environmentally responsible practices (M = 4.14), activities aligned with Islamic principles (M = 4.06), ethical service (M = 4.02), and respecting Islamic values in service delivery (M = 3.96). To examine potential differences between the two cohorts, an independent-samples t-test was conducted, which showed no statistically significant difference ( $t = -0.331$ ;  $p = 0.741$ ). This suggests that both generations have developed an awareness and appreciation for responsible

behavior in tourism.

#### 4.1.2 Immersive

The scores for the Immersive experience were notably high among Generation X, with a mean of 3.97 and a standard deviation of 0.77. The lowest rated connection with the local Muslim community in this group had a mean score of 4.02. Participants also emphasized the importance of meaningful cultural experiences and learning about local culture, both scoring a mean of 4.00. Additionally, appreciation for authentic Islamic features received a score of 3.98, closely followed by memorable engagement at 3.94. Spiritual enrichment scored somewhat lower at 3.84. These findings suggest that Generation X possesses a positive and reassuring depth in their cultural and spiritual understanding.

Similarly, Generation Z gave the Immersive experience a favourable rating, with a mean score of 3.90 and a standard deviation of 0.69. Within this cohort, memorable engagement was the highest-rated aspect at 4.00, followed closely by meaningful cultural experiences at 3.98. Other aspects included connection with the Muslim community at 3.94, learning about local traditions at 3.92, and appreciation of authentic Islamic heritage at 3.82. The lowest rated element for this generation was spiritual enrichment, which received a mean score of 3.74. Statistical comparisons between the two generations revealed no significant differences ( $t=-0.500$ ,  $p=0.618$ ).

#### 4.1.3 Digital

Digital tools were particularly well-regarded by Generation X, achieving a mean score of 4.12 (SD = 0.74). Among these tools, digital maps for locating halal facilities received the highest rating, averaging 4.34. This was closely followed by digital trip planning support (M = 4.24), online

booking convenience (M = 4.22), and online reviews (M = 4.12). Other notable ratings include the representation of destinations on social media (M = 4.04), the availability of Muslim-friendly information (M = 4.00), and the accuracy of official information provided by Tourism Johor (M = 3.98). These findings suggest that the on-demand travel needs of this older demographic are effectively met by digital resources.

In contrast, Generation Z's assessment of digital tools was even more favorable, with an average score of 4.28 (SD = 0.54). Among all digital tools, digital trip-planning platforms stood out with a commendable average score of 4.44. Both digital maps and online booking platforms each received a high rating of 4.38. Additionally, Gen Z rated their ability to access Muslim-friendly information online at 4.22, while perceptions of destinations on social media scored 4.20. The ratings for online reviews and the accuracy of official information were 4.10 and 4.04, respectively. Despite these positive evaluations, inferential analysis indicated no statistically significant difference between the two generations, with  $t(1.254)$  and a  $p$ -value of 0.213.

#### 4.1.4 Assured

Assured achieved the highest overall score among the participants, with a mean score of 4.31 and a standard deviation of 0.81. The aspect rated highest was comfort in fulfilling religious obligations, with a mean of 4.36, closely followed by the availability of suitable Muslim-friendly facilities at 4.34 and halal authenticity at 4.32. Additionally, considerations for safety and staff awareness of religious needs garnered a mean score of 4.30. The reliability and consistency of services also received noteworthy mention, reflecting a mean score of 4.26. These findings indicate that the comfort and confidence levels regarding travel destinations are crucial and are significantly influenced by



participants' faith.

Generation Z also rated Assured highly, recording a mean score of 4.37 (SD = 0.55). The highest rating in this group was for religious comfort, with a mean of 4.48. Halal authenticity and service reliability were scored at 4.38, followed by safety and the availability of suitable facilities at 4.36, and staff understanding of religious needs at 4.28. Notably, statistical analysis revealed no significant difference between the two groups' evaluations, as indicated by  $t = 0.436$  and  $p = 0.664$ . Consequently, there was no challenge to the null hypothesis across the four tests.

#### 4.2 Discussion

The absence of statistically significant differences between generational cohorts makes it difficult to consider the destination's experience with Muslims solely through a generational lens. Although there are differences in lifestyle and travel habits between Generation X and Generation Z (Jiang et al., 2022; Popşa, 2024; Suhaineh et al., 2025), both generations had similar perceptions of Johor Bahru, suggesting that generational differences are less important in this context than common religious and functional needs. The term 'Assured' dominates the evaluation of travelers, reflecting key elements of the travel experience for Muslims, including halal authenticity, safety and access to facilities for Muslims, as previously found in studies on the role of faith-based attributes on tourist behaviour (Sodawan & Hsu, 2022; Wibowo et al., 2025). This implies that 'RIDA' is an underlying framework for evaluating the merits that is not age-dependent. The 'Digital' dimension was described differently for the cohorts, but was not statistically significant. Digital tools are no exception to this rule, as they are essential to both generations; thus, the destination's infrastructure is changing to match the new age of visitors, challenging the stereotype of older visitors as digitally disengaged. This

emphasises the need to design accessible digital services that are not geared towards youth marketing (Ivančsóné Horváth et al., 2025). The 'Responsible' criterion was also given similar importance across generations, as it is expected in the governance of the destination, such as sustainability, cleanliness, ethical service and halal facilities. All age groups show concern for sustainability when evaluating Muslim-friendly destinations, further highlighting its importance. However, the 'Immersive' dimension did not suggest a lack of awareness of cultural experiences; rather, cultural engagement was considered less important than assurance, responsibility and digital support in the context of Johor Bahru.

This study adds to the empirical work on the RIDA framework by examining common priorities and gaps in the experience development of various cohorts. It raises doubt about the exclusive use of generational explanations to devise strategies for destinations that are "Muslim-friendly". Notably, the lack of significant differences does not mean the cohorts are equivalent, as the sample sizes are small, so robustness claims cannot be made. The results indicate that generation-based segmentation is not adequate for the development of Muslim-friendly destinations, and recommend the need for a more in-depth segmentation, which takes into account the travel purpose, the expectations of the Muslim guest regarding religious services, the Muslim guest's digital confidence, their previous experiences, and their desired cultural interaction. This change in how generations are stereotyped to how they are segmented by needs can better reflect the diversity among generational cohorts.

For some dimensions, there is no distinction between visitor groups, and these dimensions are strategically important according to the RIDA framework. In the case of the Assured dimension, for instance, the universal needs of destinations are emphasised, and for the Digital dimension, the

enabling infrastructure is emphasised. The Immersive dimension, however, presents developmental investment opportunities as it is the lowest among both cohorts. The framework provides direction for a dual decisioning process, identifying characteristics which require universal investment and experiences to improve. To alleviate uncertainty, destination managers need to guarantee the veracity of the offerings they ensure, including their reliable halal claims and staff expertise. Signs of trust and attractiveness can be increased by using clear signage, accurate facial information and regular service monitoring. Digital development should be easily available to everyone and involve information that is accurate for all. Social media is great to engage younger visitors, but basic information should be as easy to find as possible for all visitors. Sustainability and Islamic practices can go hand in hand to promote responsible tourism. Good communication of cleanliness, environmental care and halal provisions is important. Community involvement is crucial because their participation makes responsible policy awareness more visible in visitors' experiences. Johor Bahru can link the story of the heritage sites and local traditions together through interpretive trails and community-based activities to enhance the sense of immersion. Digital platforms can support these efforts and help ensure their authenticity by co-developing with local communities.

The methodological limitations suggest that caution is warranted when interpreting the results. Purposive sampling does not necessarily yield a representative sample, but it does ensure that those suitable for the study are included. The sample is small and includes only experienced visitors to Johor Bahru, but because of the cohort size, all groups are the same. The thesis includes t-values and p-values but not assumption tests, degrees of freedom, confidence intervals, or effect sizes. This

does not imply that there are no statistical differences, but rather that the results indicate no difference. Further research using larger samples and equivalence testing would help examine generational similarities more effectively. It also breaks down the two types of comparison: ranking and statistical comparison, with "Assured" at the top and "Immersive" at the bottom of cohorts. But the rankings and the small mean differences are not necessarily a sign of different market segments. Inferential results and the substantive meaning of each dimension should be taken into account when making managerial decisions to prevent misinterpretations that would suggest the differences are significant when, in fact, they are not. Last but not least, the comparison should be based on Johor Bahru, not on all Muslim tourists. The patterns observed may be attributable to the effects of the destination context, and multi-destination research using the same RIDA measures might reveal whether it is Johor Bahru or whether there is a larger pattern of Muslim-friendly destinations. Overall, the study indicates that although there are generational differences, the expected ones were not apparent in this research. These are the qualities that should be taught to both generations, built into the curriculum through specific marketing campaigns, and evaluated for their impact on behavior and attitudes toward embracing Islam. These methods can be used to allocate resources to best meet visitors' needs and to provide a foundation for assessing the effectiveness of cohort-specific interventions in measuring satisfaction and return visits.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to assess differences in the evaluations of Johor Bahru by Generation X and Generation Z Muslim tourists, utilizing the RIDA framework for analysis. The results indicated no significant differences across the dimensions of

Responsibility, Immersion, Digital, or Assurance. Both generational cohorts placed the highest priority on assurance, while immersion received the lowest relative ratings. The key conclusion drawn is that common Muslim-friendly criteria may take precedence over generational differences in how tourists evaluate a destination's performance. For effective destination management, Johor Bahru should concentrate on fostering a strong cross-generational foundation grounded in halal authenticity, prayer-related comfort, safety, reliable services, cleanliness, and accessible digital information. Although segment-specific marketing campaigns can be advantageous, they should complement this shared service framework. Cultural and community-based experiences also present a significant opportunity for growth, particularly through enhanced interpretation of Islamic heritage and fostering meaningful local engagement.

It is important to note that these findings are limited to a single city, two generational cohorts, and a non-probability sample. Additionally, the youngest eligible respondents were minors, and the thesis did not address research ethics or consent procedures; these aspects should be clearly articulated before journal submission. Future research should consider employing probability sampling or multi-site studies, including samples of Millennials and Baby Boomers, and reporting on assumption checks, confidence intervals, and effect sizes. Moreover, qualitative interviews or mixed methods could offer insights into why participants provide similar ratings, while structural models could explore how the RIDA dimensions influence destination image, satisfaction, loyalty, and intentions to revisit.

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# Artificial Intelligence (AI) Service Adoption in Muslim-Friendly Hotels: Extending TAM with Shariah-Compliance Trust, Tech-Savviness, and Halal Integrity Threat

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 24/7/2026

Accepted : 03/8/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Artificial intelligence,  
Halal Integrity, Muslim-Friendly Hotels;  
Technology Acceptance Model

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Conceptual paper

**Abstract** - This paper extends the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to examine the determinants of Artificial Intelligence (AI) service adoption within Malaysian Muslim-friendly hotels. Synthesizing literature across information systems, internal quality management, and Islamic hospitality, the study develops a robust conceptual framework that bridges technical automation with socio-religious values. The model maps out consumer tech-savviness and Shariah-compliance trust as independent variables, perceived usefulness and ease of use as mediators, and adoption intention as the dependent variable. The framework reveals that while trust and tech-savviness drive technical acceptance, perceived halal integrity threats act as a critical negative moderator that weakens adoption intentions. Ultimately, these insights provide hotel operators with a strategic blueprint to deploy smart features without compromising religious compliance, successfully protecting internal service quality while mitigating customer anxieties.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global market for Muslim-friendly tourism and halal hospitality is expanding fast, driven largely by shifting demographic trends and the rapid growth of the global Muslim population. Malaysia has long been a leader in this space, pioneering formal standardisations like the "MS 2610:2015 Muslim-Friendly Hospitality Services — Requirements" guidelines to regulate how hotels serve Muslim guests (Hashim & Mohd Fauzi, 2022). At the same time, the wider tourism sector is pushing hard into digital transformation. Destinations are adopting smart city concepts, electronic tracking tools, and interactive systems to



improve travel planning (Azmad et al., 2023). However, when you drop autonomous technology into a space governed by strict religious requirements, it creates psychological challenges that standard hospitality models cannot fully explain.

Traditional technology adoption models usually look at consumer behaviour through a purely functional lens. Efficiency, speed, and convenience dominate the conversation. But in value-driven sectors like halal hospitality, efficiency is only half the story. Muslim travelers are not just looking for a fast check-in; they need absolute certainty that their religious obligations remain intact throughout their stay. Introducing autonomous AI systems that operate without visible human oversight can trigger cognitive dissonance and anxiety for practicing Muslims. When human touchpoints disappear, guests judge digital systems by specific e-service quality traits, viewing system reliability, responsiveness, and privacy protections as vital parts of a good brand experience (Mohd Ridzuan et al., 2022).

To deal with these shifts, researchers are modifying standard adoption models to see how digital platforms shape consumer attitudes. Classic frameworks focus heavily on how easy a system is to use (Davis, 1989). Yet, empirical evidence from the hospitality industry shows that customer satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between using self-service systems and a guest's long-term behavioral intentions (Hamid et al., 2022). In the halal market, customer choices are guided by structural risk factors that directly impact trust, satisfaction, and whether a guest will recommend a hotel to others (Al-Ansi et al., 2019). Unmonitored automated systems can heighten these perceived risks, leaving a major gap in our understanding of how religious compliance and automation work together.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Core Theoretical Foundation: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Technology Acceptance Model, developed by Davis (1989), is still the go-to framework for predicting how people accept new technology. Rooted in consumer psychology, TAM argues that a user's behavioral intention to adopt a system depends on two core cognitive beliefs functioning as mediating variables. In his seminal work, Davis (1989) explicitly defined Perceived Usefulness as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance". Furthermore, the second core construct, Perceived Ease of Use, was defined as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort" (Davis, 1989). Hospitality researchers have tested this model across various tools, from mobile check-in apps to self-service kiosks. If a smart hotel interface is intuitive and easy to navigate, guests naturally view the system more favorably.

In the classic model, ease of use directly improves usefulness because a system that is easy to manage helps users extract its functional benefits with less frustration (Davis, 1989). Hospitality scholars have expanded these basic variables to look at modern digital systems, proving that user self-efficacy and system configurations heavily shape final intentions. In value-laden service environments, simple models fall short. Researchers argue that the standard parsimonious variables of TAM must be supplemented with contextual determinants to capture the nuanced realities of customer psychology when digital systems are integrated into interactive hotel settings (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Therefore, we treat traditional TAM constructs as vital psychological mediators standing between internal consumer traits and final adoption choices.



## *2.2 Technology and E-Service Environments in Hospitality*

Hotels are increasingly relying on self-service technologies (SSTs) and online applications to streamline operations and improve service delivery. How guests evaluate these digital platforms depends heavily on e-service quality parameters, where system availability, privacy protections, and overall efficiency drive positive customer engagement (Mohd Ridzuan et al., 2022). When a hotel switches to automated tools, the user's initial interaction with the digital interface sets the tone for how they view the brand's reliability. Furthermore, green and sustainable hotel research confirms that customer satisfaction completely mediates the relationship between interacting with self-service systems and a guest's long-term behavioural intentions (Hamid et al., 2022).

Smart tourism tools in value-driven markets must adapt to the specific expectations of the target audience. In Malaysia, hotel operators have to balance automated customer interfaces with localized hospitality standards. Modern travelers expect seamless electronic interactions throughout their trips, making it essential for operators to understand how electronic service quality links up with technology acceptance (Mohd Ridzuan et al., 2022). This balance helps hotels maintain their competitive edge while deploying smart systems across regional hotel networks.

## *2.3 Internal Metrics and the Concept of Muslim-Friendly Hotels (MFH)*

The Muslim-Friendly Hotel (MFH) concept in Malaysia provides a clear operational framework designed to align hospitality services with Shariah principles. Research shows that keeping service quality stable in an MFH depends heavily on internal quality metrics and human workforce variables (Islam et al., 2022). Structural modeling

confirms that the internal measurement of service quality (INTQUAL)—which looks at management expectations and service reliability—alongside employee relations, including superior and co-worker influences, serves as a critical driver predicting overall organizational service performance (Islam et al., 2022).

These internal dynamics and employee relationships traditionally form the backbone of service quality in certified hotels. However, introducing customer-facing automated systems shifts this human-centric baseline (Islam et al., 2022). Moving operational tasks from human staff to autonomous AI applications changes the visible signs of service quality that guests rely on. To prevent technology adoption from disrupting this internal service ecosystem, technology acceptance models must incorporate domain-specific religious variables. This allows us to evaluate how automation changes customer perceptions of service performance, building directly on established internal quality baselines (Islam et al., 2022).

## *2.4 Shariah Principles and Technical Integrity*

When technology is used to execute or monitor processes governed by religious law, Shariah compliance becomes a strict requirement. For instance, in digital finance, innovations like blockchain-based smart contracts are recognized as valid tools to enforce Shariah agreements, provided they actively minimize structural risks and align with Islamic ethics (Zulkepli et al., 2023). Similarly, using AI in halal hospitality shifts the job of verifying eligious compliance from human staff to digital algorithms. This transition introduces a unique psychological threat: the fear that a data miscalculation or an automated error could breach religious rules.

This intersection highlights the role of Shariah-Compliance Trust (SCT) as a core Independent Variable in our framework. In value-driven hospitality environments, structural risks and psychological threats can easily wipe out the benefits of technical convenience (Zulkepli et al., 2023). For an automated system to be perceived as useful, consumers must trust that the technology will accurately maintain strict religious guidelines without making mistakes. Understanding how digital systems interface with religious compliance requires a balanced look at technical capabilities, structural risks, and religious trust.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

To validate this conceptual framework empirically, we recommend a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. This approach aligns with established methods used to study smart tourism adoption and technical preferences in the Malaysian hospitality landscape (Hamid et al., 2022). The target population consists of domestic and international Muslim tourists who use digital services or stay in recognized smart accommodations across Malaysia's primary tourism hubs. Because a centralized, exhaustive list of all hotel guests is unavailable, researchers should use a non-probability purposive and convenience sampling approach, mirroring successful empirical data collection strategies used in regional hospitality studies (Islam et al., 2022; Mohd Ridzuan et al., 2022).

Measurement scales should rely strictly on verified items adapted from leading literature to ensure high content validity. The baseline constructs of Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use should be drawn directly from foundational technology acceptance indices (Davis, 1989). Items for internal hotel service benchmarks should be adapted from validated internal quality

metrics (INTQUAL) used to measure service performance in Muslim-friendly environments (Islam et al., 2022). Technical interface quality and systemic risk dimensions should be structured using established e-service quality and technical acceptance frameworks (Mohd Ridzuan et al., 2022). All items should be evaluated using a standardized 7-point Likert scale to ensure measurement precision.

Given the structural complexity of this model—which involves simultaneous mediating pathways and a key moderating construct—Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) represents the most appropriate statistical technique. To properly analyze the quantitative data, this study will strictly follow the standard two-step approach involving the evaluation of the measurement model and the structural model to establish indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity before testing the hypothesized direct and indirect structural paths (Hamid et al., 2022; Mohd Ridzuan et al., 2022).

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

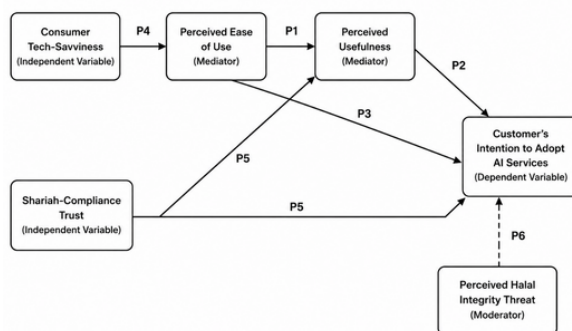
#### 4.1 Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the thorough synthesis of technology acceptance literature and Islamic tourism dynamics, this paper presents a comprehensive conceptual framework. The model demonstrates how traditional cognitive elements interact with deep-seated religious values and technical capabilities to dictate final consumer adoption patterns.

The theoretical model synthesized in this study extends the boundaries of traditional technology acceptance frameworks by integrating specific socio-religious parameters. The primary

structural pathways are formally defined through six core research propositions:

- 1.P1: Perceived ease of use (Mediator) exerts a direct positive influence on the perceived usefulness (Mediator) of AI services in Muslim-friendly hotels.
- 2.P2: Perceived usefulness (Mediator) exerts a direct positive influence on the customer's intention to adopt AI services (Dependent Variable).
- 3.P3: Perceived ease of use (Mediator) exerts a direct positive influence on the customer's intention to adopt AI services (Dependent Variable).
- 4.P4: Consumer tech-savviness (Independent Variable) acts as a direct positive antecedent to the perceived ease of use of AI systems.
- 5.P5: Shariah-compliance trust (Independent Variable) exerts a strong positive influence on both the perceived usefulness and final adoption intention of AI services.
- 6.P6: Perceived halal integrity threat (Moderator) negatively moderates the relationship between Shariah-compliance trust and adoption intention, such that the positive effect of trust is significantly weakened when the perceived threat is high.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

## 4.2 Theoretical Synthesis

The structural relationships between Perceived

Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, and Behavioral Intention form the baseline cognitive engine of the proposed framework, consistent with the foundational tenets of technology acceptance theory (Davis, 1989). In a smart hospitality environment, when an AI-powered service layer is perceived as frictionless and easy to operate, consumers are significantly more likely to recognize its functional utility, thereby mirroring empirical validation patterns observed across diverse tourism applications (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Furthermore, these primary paths align with models demonstrating that digital systems are positively received when they provide clear, actionable benefits that enhance the overall efficiency of the experience (Hamid et al., 2022).

However, the introduction of technology alters the internal dynamics traditionally governed by human workforce relationships. Prior research establishes that internal service quality (INTQUAL) and supportive employee relations are the primary structural determinants securing hospitality performance in accredited environments (Islam et al., 2022). The proposed framework shows that when automation modifies these human interactions, Shariah-compliance trust functions as an essential independent variable to restore consumer confidence. In value-driven markets, functional utility cannot be evaluated independently of the system's moral and religious legitimacy.

Crucially, the framework establishes Halal Integrity Threat as a powerful negative moderator, capturing the unique psychological friction that arises when automated systems introduce operational uncertainty. In general smart tourism planning, technical errors are often treated as minor inconveniences that merely disrupt consumer engagement configurations (Mohd Ridzuan et al., 2022). However, within the halal sector, systemic

risks regarding compliance carry significant weight, directly affecting trust and organizational reputation (Zulkepli et al., 2023). By positioning halal integrity threat as a moderator, the framework explains why a highly tech-savvy consumer might completely reject a functionally superior AI service if they perceive that the underlying algorithm poses a risk to their religious compliance.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This paper makes several vital contributions to hospitality and technology management literature by successfully contextualizing the Technology Acceptance Model within the specialized domain of halal hospitality. It directly answers academic calls to incorporate specific socio-religious variables into consumer psychology, moving beyond generic risk and utility metrics (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003). By linking Shariah-compliance trust, technical efficacy, and halal integrity threats to established internal hotel quality benchmarks, the study establishes a rigorous theoretical foundation that bridges data-driven information systems with value-driven Islamic marketing principles, expanding the scope of smart tourism research (Hamid et al., 2022; Islam et al., 2022; Mohd Ridzuan et al., 2022).

### 5.2 Practical Industry and Policy Implications

For hotel operators and technology developers targeting the Malaysian Muslim-friendly tourism market, the practical insights derived from this model are explicit. Management must recognize that deploying advanced AI systems without transparent religious validation can alienate their primary consumer base, meaning that automated systems must be designed to complement the internal quality metrics (INTQUAL) and positive

employee relationships that traditionally secure service performance standards in certified hotels (Islam et al., 2022).

Hotels should implement front-facing digital interfaces that clearly display real-time, AI-verified halal sourcing and privacy configurations to mitigate consumer anxiety, thereby building trust and minimizing perceived integrity threats (Mohd Ridzuan et al., 2022; Zulkepli et al., 2023). Furthermore, regulatory bodies can utilize this conceptual framework to design digital audit guidelines, ensuring that smart tourism developments in Malaysia remain sustainably aligned with both technological progress and religious preservation (Hamid et al., 2022).

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<https://doi.org/10.22452/basirah.vol13no2.1>



# Food-Choice Motives Influencing UiTM Students' Intention to Consume Kadazan-Dusun Ethnic Food in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 30/7/2026

Accepted : 03/8/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Kadazan-Dusun; Ethnic food; Food-choice motives; Intention to consume; University students

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Research paper

**Abstract** - This study examines the effects of price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience on UiTM students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among diploma and bachelor's degree students in the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management. Data were collected through a bilingual online questionnaire adapted from established food-choice studies. After data screening, 192 valid responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson's correlation and multiple regression. All five food-choice motives were positively correlated with intention to consume. The regression model explained 52.2% of the variance in intention. Sensory appeal was the strongest predictor ( $\beta = .341$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by familiarity ( $\beta = .289$ ,  $p < .001$ ), price ( $\beta = .195$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and health ( $\beta = .161$ ,  $p = .010$ ). Convenience did not make a significant unique contribution ( $\beta = -.110$ ,  $p = .085$ ). The findings indicate that students' intention is primarily influenced by sensory enjoyment, recognition of the cuisine, perceived value for money and health considerations. Food operators and tourism stakeholders should therefore emphasise consistent sensory quality, culturally informative presentation, reasonable pricing and credible nutritional information. Universities may also strengthen familiarity through food demonstrations, tasting activities and cultural programmes. The study contributes to ethnic-food research by comparing the relative effects of five food-choice motives among young consumers situated within Sabah's indigenous culinary environment.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ethnic food extends beyond nourishment by embodying the history, identity and

collective knowledge of its community of origin. Ingredients, preparation techniques, preservation practices and eating customs transmit cultural knowledge across generations while reflecting local ecological resources and social values (Harmayani et al., 2019; Ting et al., 2017). In tourism and hospitality, ethnic cuisine contributes to destination distinctiveness by enabling consumers to experience local culture through taste, aroma, presentation and social interaction (Kim & Eves, 2012; Ting et al., 2019). Increased mobility, migration and digital food communication have further expanded consumers' exposure to culturally distinctive cuisines, strengthening their relevance to destination marketing and consumer-behaviour research (Ting et al., 2019; Youn, 2024).

Ethnic-food consumption is shaped by functional, sensory, psychological and cultural considerations. Taste, aroma, appearance, healthfulness, affordability, convenience and familiarity may reduce uncertainty and influence consumers' willingness to try or repeatedly consume culturally distinctive dishes (Kim & Eves, 2012; Ting et al., 2017). However, the relative importance of these motives varies across consumer groups and settings. Ting et al. (2017) found that health and sensory appeal positively influenced non-Dayak Malaysians' intention to consume Dayak food, whereas Arsil et al. (2022) identified distinctive taste, personal preference, origin and tradition as important motivations for consuming Padang food. These findings indicate that ethnic-food choice involves both practical evaluations and the cultural meanings associated with a cuisine.

Research in tourism settings further demonstrates that ethnic-food intention cannot be explained through a single universal model. Ting et al. (2019) identified national and regional differences in tourists' intentions to consume ethnic

food, while Fam et al. (2020) found that Chinese, European and Malaysian tourists differed in the motives influencing their intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun food in Sabah. Ahmad et al. (2020) also showed that food-choice motives shaped attitudes towards Pakistani ethnic food, which subsequently influenced purchase intention together with subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. More recent studies indicate that perceived authenticity and media influence contribute to millennials' intention to consume Chetti Malacca cuisine, while visual presentation affects perceived risk and purchase responses towards ethnic food (Ismail & Latip, 2024; Youn, 2024). Positive local-food experiences may also strengthen cultural understanding and subsequent behavioural intentions towards both the cuisine and its destination (Lin et al., 2023).

Sabah provides an important context for examining these issues because its food landscape reflects the traditions of numerous indigenous communities. The Kadazan-Dusun community possesses a distinctive culinary heritage based on locally available fish, rice, root crops, wild fruits, herbs and traditional preservation methods (Harmayani et al., 2019; Yakin et al., 2022). Foods such as hinava, tuhau, bosou, pinasakan, linopot, bambangan, losun and butod illustrate the cuisine's sour, fermented, aromatic and savoury characteristics (Harmayani et al., 2019; Ramli et al., 2023). These foods are embedded in household practices, agricultural traditions and cultural celebrations, while their growing presence in restaurants and food-tourism activities has increased their relevance to contemporary hospitality and tourism (Fam et al., 2020; Yakin et al., 2022). Although commercialisation may modify preparation and marketing practices, Kadazan-Dusun food continues to function as a marker of cultural identity (Yakin et al., 2022).

Geographical proximity, however, does not necessarily ensure extensive knowledge or regular consumption among younger consumers. Ramli et al. (2023) found that 46.8% of students surveyed at Universiti Malaysia Sabah demonstrated a low level of knowledge of Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food, while their evaluations of health, convenience, sensory characteristics, price and habit were generally modest. Although informative, that study was primarily descriptive and did not determine the relative contribution of these motives to intention to consume. Evidence based on tourists or the general public may not adequately explain student behaviour because university students differ in cultural exposure, purchasing power, food routines and access to traditional dishes.

The present study addresses this gap by examining whether price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience predict UiTM students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food in Kota Kinabalu. Specifically, it assesses students' perceptions of these five food-choice motives and determines which motive exerts the strongest influence on intention to consume. By applying established food-choice motives to an under-researched indigenous cuisine, the study extends ethnic-food consumption research among young adults in Sabah. Its findings may also assist food operators, educators and tourism stakeholders in developing strategies to enhance the visibility, accessibility and continued appreciation of Kadazan-Dusun cuisine.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 *Ethnic food and Kadazan-Dusun cuisine*

Ethnic food refers to food rooted in the culinary heritage of a particular cultural or ethnic community. Its identity is shaped by locally available ingredients, inherited preparation

knowledge and customary practices associated with the community's history and environment (Harmayani et al., 2019; Ting et al., 2017). It therefore embodies geographical, ecological, historical and symbolic meanings beyond its physical and nutritional attributes.

Ethnic cuisine may be consumed by members of the originating community, other local residents and tourists, but these groups may value different characteristics. Consumers with a cultural connection to the cuisine may emphasise familiarity, memory and continuity, whereas outsiders may seek novelty, authenticity and cultural learning. Ting et al. (2019) found that national and regional backgrounds altered relationships within an ethnic-food consumption model. Fam et al. (2020) similarly reported that sensory appeal was particularly important among Chinese tourists, while convenience and mood influenced Malaysian tourists' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun food.

Kadazan-Dusun cuisine reflects generations of indigenous knowledge concerning Sabah's natural resources, agricultural practices and food-preservation methods. Fish, rice, wild fruits, vegetables and aromatic plants are prepared through fermentation, pickling, acid marination, leaf wrapping and slow simmering, as illustrated by bosou, hinava, linopot, pinasakan and tuhau (Chan, 2017; Harmayani et al., 2019; Yakin et al., 2022). These methods create distinctive sour, fermented and aromatic profiles while demonstrating adaptation to locally and seasonally available ingredients. Foods such as bambangan and tuhau also function as cultural identity markers, although commercial production and modified preparation practices have introduced contemporary forms (Yakin et al., 2022).

Existing ethnic food studies offer an important comparative basis for

Kadazan-Dusun cuisine. Ting et al. (2017) established that sensory appeal and health were the primary positive determinants of intention to consume Dayak food among non-Dayak Malaysians. Arsil et al. (2022) demonstrated that consumers' motivations towards Padang food were structured around its distinctive taste, personal preference, origin and traditional meaning. Ahmad et al. (2020) further showed that food-choice motives may operate indirectly through attitude before influencing purchase intention, while Ismail and Latip (2024) highlighted the relevance of authenticity and media-related factors among millennial consumers of Chetti Malacca cuisine. Visual cues are also important because food presentation may facilitate consumers' processing of an unfamiliar cuisine, reduce perceived risk and strengthen purchase intention (Youn, 2024).

These studies confirm that ethnic food consumption is influenced by multiple attributes, but their findings cannot be transferred uncritically across populations. Previous Kadazan-Dusun food research has primarily focused on tourists or descriptively examined students' knowledge and food-selection evaluations (Fam et al., 2020; Ramli et al., 2023). Consequently, limited evidence is available concerning the relative influence of specific food-choice motives on university students' intention to consume. Examining price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience simultaneously may provide a clearer explanation of which considerations are most relevant to younger consumers in Sabah.

### *2.1.1 Selected Kadazan-Dusun ethnic foods*

Kadazan-Dusun cuisine reflects indigenous knowledge of Sabah's natural environment, local ingredients and traditional preparation practices. Foods such as bambangan, bosou, butod, hinava, linopot, losun, pinasakan and tuhau were selected

in this study because they represent a range of sensory characteristics, levels of familiarity and preparation methods relevant to consumers' food choices (Harmayani et al., 2019; Ramli et al., 2023). Bambangan is a wild mango commonly consumed fresh or preserved as a sour condiment, while bosou is a traditional fermented fish preparation characterised by a distinctive aroma and sour-salty flavour (Chan, 2017; Harmayani et al., 2019). Butod refers to sago grubs obtained from sago palm trunks and may be consumed raw or cooked (Chan, 2017). Hinava is prepared from fresh fish marinated with lime, chilli, ginger and shallots, while linopot consists of rice wrapped in leaves and traditionally served with indigenous accompaniments (Chan, 2017; Harmayani et al., 2019).

Other selected foods include losun, a mild wild spring onion commonly served as a vegetable dish; pinasakan, a preserved fish preparation simmered with turmeric and souring ingredients; and tuhau (*Etlingera coccinea*), an aromatic wild ginger stem typically prepared as a pickle or sambal (Chan, 2017; Harmayani et al., 2019). The distinctive taste, aroma, appearance and preparation of these foods make sensory appeal particularly relevant to their acceptance, while differences in consumers' prior knowledge and exposure highlight the importance of familiarity. Some traditional ingredients and preparation methods may also shape perceptions of health, whereas their availability in markets, restaurants and commercial forms relates to convenience and accessibility (Yakin et al., 2022). Ramli et al. (2023) further demonstrated uneven levels of recognition of Kadazan-Dusun foods among university students, indicating that familiarity with the cuisine does not necessarily extend equally across individual dishes. These characteristics provide an appropriate context for examining how sensory appeal, familiarity, health, convenience and price influence

students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

## 2.2 Food-choice motives

Food choice is a multidimensional decision shaped by consumers' evaluations of both the intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of food. Steptoe et al. (1995) developed the Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ) to measure nine motives underlying food selection: health, mood, convenience, sensory appeal, natural content, price, weight control, familiarity and ethical concern. The FCQ has subsequently been adapted to different cultural, consumer and food contexts by selecting dimensions relevant to the population and product being investigated. In ethnic-food research, selected FCQ motives have been used to explain consumers' attitudes and intentions towards culturally distinctive cuisines, including Dayak and Pakistani foods (Ahmad et al., 2020; Ting et al., 2017). Research on local food consumption similarly identifies sensory appeal, health concern, cultural experience and interpersonal relationships as important consumption motivations (Kim & Eves, 2012). Based on the characteristics of university students and the measures included in the survey instrument, the present study examines five motives: price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience.

### 2.2.1 Price

Price reflects consumers' perceptions of affordability and value for money. In the original FCQ, this dimension assesses whether food is perceived as inexpensive, reasonably priced and worth the amount paid (Steptoe et al., 1995). Price may be particularly relevant to university students because their food choices are often made within limited discretionary budgets. A favourable price evaluation does not necessarily indicate a

preference for the cheapest option; rather, it may represent an acceptable balance between monetary cost and the expected sensory, cultural and consumption experience.

Previous ethnic-food studies have reported mixed findings regarding the role of price. Ting et al. (2017) found a significant relationship between price and intention to consume Dayak food, although the positive direction contradicted their hypothesised inverse relationship. Ahmad et al. (2020) similarly reported that price significantly influenced tourists' attitudes towards Pakistani ethnic food. These findings suggest that consumers may interpret reasonable pricing as an indication of accessibility and value rather than assessing cost in isolation. In the present study, students who perceive Kadazan-Dusun food as affordable and offering good value are therefore expected to demonstrate stronger intention to consume.

H1: Price positively influences students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

### 2.2.2 Sensory Appeal

Sensory appeal refers to consumers' evaluations of a food's taste, aroma, appearance and texture. These attributes provide an immediate basis for judging the expected enjoyment and acceptability of a food product (Steptoe et al., 1995). Sensory cues may be especially influential in ethnic-food settings because consumers are sometimes required to evaluate dishes containing unfamiliar ingredients, flavour combinations or preparation methods. Attractive visual presentation and recognisable sensory qualities may facilitate evaluation and reduce the perceived risk associated with trying an unfamiliar cuisine.

Empirical evidence consistently supports the importance of sensory appeal in ethnic-food



consumption. Ting et al. (2017) identified it as a positive predictor of Malaysians' intention to consume Dayak food, while Arsil et al. (2022) found that distinctive and spicy taste played a central role in consumers' motivations for selecting Padang food. Youn (2024) further demonstrated that the visual presentation of ethnic food influences perceived risk and purchase intention. These findings indicate that favourable evaluations of taste, aroma, appearance and texture are likely to strengthen students' willingness to consume Kadazan-Dusun food.

H2: Sensory appeal positively influences students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

### 2.2.3 Familiarity

Familiarity refers to the extent to which consumers recognise a food, have encountered or consumed it previously, or associate it with foods from their childhood and regular eating practices. The FCQ conceptualises familiarity through consumers' preference for foods they usually eat, foods they recognise and foods similar to those consumed during childhood (Steptoe et al., 1995). Familiarity may make culturally distinctive foods easier to interpret and evaluate because consumers can connect them with established knowledge and previous experiences. Evidence from traditional-food research also identifies familiarity as an important driver of consumption, although its influence may vary across cultural contexts (Pieniak et al., 2009).

Findings from ethnic-food studies remain inconsistent. Ahmad et al. (2020) found that familiarity significantly influenced tourists' attitudes towards Pakistani ethnic food. In contrast, Ting et al. (2017) reported that familiarity did not directly predict intention to consume Dayak food, possibly because respondents had limited knowledge of the cuisine despite having previously

tried it. Such variation suggests that the effect of familiarity depends on the extent and quality of consumers' cultural and experiential exposure. As many respondents in the present study reside in Sabah and reported family as their main source of awareness, familiarity is expected to strengthen their confidence in recognising and selecting Kadazan-Dusun food.

H3: Familiarity positively influences students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

### 2.2.4 Health

Health motivation concerns the extent to which consumers select food based on its perceived contribution to nutrition and well-being. In the FCQ, health-related evaluations include perceptions of vitamin and mineral content, fibre, protein and the ability of food to support a healthy lifestyle (Steptoe et al., 1995). In an ethnic-food context, health perceptions may be informed by the ingredients and preparation methods associated with a particular dish. However, such perceptions may vary because traditional foods differ considerably in their nutritional composition, processing techniques and serving practices.

Health has demonstrated relevance in previous studies of indigenous and ethnic food. Ting et al. (2017) identified health as a significant positive predictor of intention to consume Dayak food. Among Universiti Malaysia Sabah students, health also recorded the highest mean among the food-selection factors examined, although respondents' overall assessment fell between neutral and agreement (Ramli et al., 2023). These findings indicate that perceived nutritional qualities may encourage ethnic-food consumption, particularly when consumers receive credible and dish-specific information about ingredients and preparation methods. Students who perceive Kadazan-Dusun food as nutritious and beneficial to

their well-being are therefore expected to report stronger intentions to consume.

H4: Health positively influences students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

### 2.2.5 Convenience

Convenience concerns the time, accessibility and effort involved in obtaining, preparing and consuming food. The FCQ measures this motive through characteristics such as ease of preparation, short preparation time and availability in shops or other food outlets (Steptoe et al., 1995). Convenience is particularly relevant to university students, whose food decisions may be influenced by academic schedules, transportation, food-outlet availability and limited time for meal preparation.

Its influence on ethnic-food intention, however, is not consistent across consumer groups. Fam et al. (2020) found that convenience influenced Malaysian tourists' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun food in Sabah, suggesting that accessibility and ease of consumption may be important to visitors. Conversely, Ting et al. (2017) reported no significant relationship between convenience and intention to consume Dayak food. The contrasting evidence may reflect differences between tourists and local consumers, as visitors may depend more strongly on restaurant availability and ease of access. The relevance of convenience to Sabah-based university students therefore requires direct empirical examination.

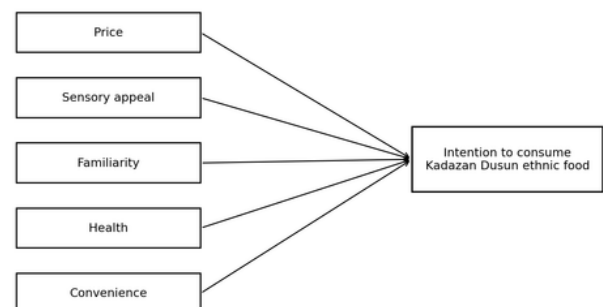
H5: Convenience positively influences students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

## 2.3 Intention to Consume and Conceptual Framework

Intention to consume refers to an individual's stated willingness, readiness or plan to perform a

particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, intention captures the motivational factors underlying behaviour, including how strongly individuals are willing to try and how much effort they plan to invest in performing the action. It is regarded as the most immediate antecedent of behaviour, although its translation into actual behaviour also depends on the degree of control individuals possess over the action (Ajzen, 1991).

Although food-choice motives are not core constructs of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, they may function as salient evaluations that shape consumers' attitudes and readiness to select a particular cuisine. Ahmad et al. (2020), for example, modelled food-choice motives as antecedents of attitude, which subsequently influenced ethnic-food purchase intention together with subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. The present framework is grounded primarily in the Food Choice Questionnaire and positions price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience as direct predictors of intention to consume, consistent with Ting et al. (2017). This parsimonious approach enables the unique contribution of each motive to be assessed while controlling for the others. However, the framework does not represent a complete Theory of Planned Behaviour model because attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control were not directly measured.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework of the Study (adapted from Ting et al., 2017)

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, correlational and cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships between price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health, convenience and students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food. The target population comprised full-time diploma and bachelor's degree students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Sabah Branch, Kota Kinabalu Campus, with an accessible population of 494 students from the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample-size table, 214 respondents were initially targeted. Convenience sampling was employed because respondents were recruited based on their accessibility and willingness to participate within the specified data-collection period. A total of 220 responses were received. During data screening, 28 incomplete questionnaires were excluded, resulting in 192 valid responses for analysis, representing 38.9% of the accessible population.

Although the final sample was slightly below the initial target, it remained adequate for multiple regression analysis. Green (1991) recommends a minimum sample size of  $N \geq 50 + 8m$  for testing the overall regression model and  $N \geq 104 + m$  for testing individual predictors, where  $m$  represents the number of independent variables. With five predictors, the respective minimum requirements were 90 and 109 respondents. Therefore, the final sample of 192 substantially exceeded both recommendations and was considered adequate for assessing the overall model and the individual effects of the five food-choice motives on intention to consume. Nevertheless, the use of convenience sampling restricts the generalisability of the findings beyond the sampled population.

Data were collected using a self-administered

bilingual questionnaire in English and Bahasa Melayu. Section A measured demographic characteristics, while Section B assessed familiarity with Kadazan-Dusun foods, sources of awareness and whether respondents had known, encountered or consumed specific dishes. Section C measured price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience, whereas Section D assessed intention to consume. Items were adapted from Ting et al. (2017) and Ramli et al. (2023) and measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument contained three price items, six sensory-appeal items, three familiarity items, five health items, six convenience items and six consumption-intention items.

A pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to assess questionnaire clarity and internal consistency. The final questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms for one month beginning on 14 November 2025, with the survey link shared through WhatsApp, Telegram and Instagram. Participation was voluntary, and incomplete or invalid responses were excluded before analysis.

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 17. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations summarised the respondent profile and study variables. Cronbach's alpha assessed internal consistency, with values of .70 or above considered acceptable. Pearson's correlation examined bivariate relationships, while multiple linear regression determined the unique contribution and relative strength of each food-choice motive. Statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$ .

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Respondent Profile

The final sample comprised 192 respondents. Most were female (82.3%), aged between 22 and 25 years (57.3%), Christian (67.2%), Bumiputera Sabah (85.4%) and residents of Sabah (89.1%). Bachelor's degree students accounted for 66.7% of the sample, while the remainder were diploma students. This profile indicates that the findings predominantly represent young, Sabah-based students and should therefore be interpreted cautiously rather than generalised to the wider UiTM student population.

Most respondents reported being familiar with Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food (91.1%). This high level of awareness may be partly explained by the composition of the sample, as the majority were Bumiputera Sabah and had their permanent residence in Sabah. However, respondents' general acknowledgement of familiarity should be distinguished from the multi-item familiarity construct used in the subsequent correlation and regression analyses, which assessed the extent to which Kadazan-Dusun food was recognised, routinely consumed and associated with previous eating experiences.

Family was the principal source of awareness of Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food, accounting for 77.1% of responses, followed by friends at 19.3%. Festivals and social media collectively represented only 3.6% of respondents' exposure. These findings highlight the importance of family and interpersonal networks in transmitting indigenous food knowledge across generations. At the same time, the limited contribution of festivals and social media suggests that organised cultural activities and digital communication played a relatively minor role in introducing the cuisine to this group.

Exposure also varied across individual food items. Tuhau was the most widely tried or recognised food (83.4%), followed by bambangan (80.3%), linopot (71.0%) and bosou (65.8%). Hinava was reported by 56.5% of respondents, whereas losun, pinasakan and butod were less frequently identified or consumed. This variation indicates that broad familiarity with Kadazan-Dusun cuisine does not necessarily correspond to equal knowledge or experience of all its dishes. Some foods appear to have greater visibility and accessibility, while others may remain more closely associated with particular households, localities or cultural occasions.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics, internal consistency and Pearson correlations

| Construct         | M    | SD   | $\alpha$ | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6 |
|-------------------|------|------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---|
| 1. Price          | 3.91 | 0.77 | .793     | —      |        |        |        |        |   |
| 2. Sensory appeal | 4.29 | 0.67 | .872     | .435** | —      |        |        |        |   |
| 3. Familiarity    | 4.03 | 1.02 | .862     | .316** | .632** | —      |        |        |   |
| 4. Health         | 3.91 | 0.78 | .928     | .384** | .499** | .490** | —      |        |   |
| 5. Convenience    | 3.54 | 0.84 | .866     | .523** | .473** | .393** | .373** | —      |   |
| 6. Intention      | 4.30 | 0.70 | .912     | .439** | .637** | .602** | .507** | .327** | — |

Note.  $N = 192$ .  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha. \*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

## 4.2 Descriptive Statistics, Reliability and Correlations

As shown in Table 1, intention recorded the highest mean ( $M = 4.30$ ), followed closely by sensory

appeal ( $M = 4.29$ ). Familiarity ( $M = 4.03$ ), price ( $M = 3.91$ ) and health ( $M = 3.91$ ) were also evaluated positively. Convenience had the lowest mean ( $M = 3.54$ ), indicating greater uncertainty about

availability and ease of preparation. Cronbach's alpha ranged from .793 to .928, demonstrating acceptable to excellent internal consistency.

All five motives were positively and significantly correlated with intention at  $p < .001$ . Sensory appeal had the strongest bivariate association ( $r = .637$ ), followed by familiarity ( $r = .602$ ), health ( $r = .507$ ), price ( $r = .439$ ) and convenience ( $r = .327$ ). The correlations among predictors ranged from .316 to .632, with no coefficient approaching a level that would by itself indicate severe redundancy.

**Table 2.** Multiple regression results

| Hypothesis | Relationship                           | B     | SE   | $\beta$ | t      | p      | Decision      |
|------------|----------------------------------------|-------|------|---------|--------|--------|---------------|
| H1         | Price $\rightarrow$ intention          | .178  | .057 | .195    | 3.137  | .002   | Supported     |
| H2         | Sensory appeal $\rightarrow$ intention | .356  | .075 | .341    | 4.752  | < .001 | Supported     |
| H3         | Familiarity $\rightarrow$ intention    | .199  | .047 | .289    | 4.241  | < .001 | Supported     |
| H4         | Health $\rightarrow$ intention         | .144  | .056 | .161    | 2.596  | .010   | Supported     |
| H5         | Convenience $\rightarrow$ intention    | -.092 | .053 | -.110   | -1.730 | .085   | Not supported |

Note. Dependent variable: intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.  $R = .723$ ;  $R^2 = .522$ ; adjusted  $R^2 = .509$ ;  $F(5, 186) = 40.671$ ,  $p < .001$ .

#### 4.4 Discussion

The regression model explained 52.2% of the variance in students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food, indicating that the five food-choice motives collectively provided meaningful explanatory power. Sensory appeal, familiarity, price and health had significant positive effects, whereas convenience did not make a significant unique contribution. These findings suggest that intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun food is influenced more strongly by sensory evaluation, prior familiarity, perceived value and health considerations than by convenience. However, the findings should be interpreted in relation to the sample profile, which was predominantly female, Bumiputera Sabah and resident in Sabah. This concentration may have increased respondents' prior exposure to Kadazan-

#### 4.3 Regression and Hypothesis Testing

The multiple regression model was statistically significant,  $F(5, 186) = 40.671$ ,  $p < .001$ , and explained 52.2% of the variance in intention to consume ( $R^2 = .522$ ; adjusted  $R^2 = .509$ ). Four of the five hypotheses were supported. Sensory appeal was the strongest predictor ( $\beta = .341$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by familiarity ( $\beta = .289$ ,  $p < .001$ ), price ( $\beta = .195$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and health ( $\beta = .161$ ,  $p = .010$ ). Convenience had a small negative coefficient and was not significant ( $\beta = -.110$ ,  $p = .085$ ); therefore, H5 was not supported.

Dusun cuisine and influenced the strength of the observed relationships, particularly for familiarity and sensory appeal.

Sensory appeal emerged as the strongest predictor of intention to consume, suggesting that taste, aroma, texture, appearance and presentation are central to students' evaluations of Kadazan-Dusun food. This finding is consistent with Ting et al. (2017), who identified sensory appeal as a significant predictor of intention to consume Dayak food, and Arsil et al. (2022), who found distinctive taste to be central to consumers' motivation towards Padang ethnic food. Youn (2024) similarly demonstrated that visual presentation can influence perceived risk and purchase responses towards ethnic food. In the present study, the strong effect of sensory appeal may also reflect respondents' relatively high exposure to the cuisine, as many



were culturally and geographically close to Kadazan-Dusun food. Their evaluations of taste, aroma and texture may therefore have been informed by previous encounters rather than expectations of an entirely unfamiliar cuisine.

Familiarity was the second strongest predictor, indicating that recognition and previous exposure increased students' willingness to consume Kadazan-Dusun food. This finding differs from Ting et al. (2017), who reported no significant direct effect of familiarity on Dayak food intention, but is consistent with Ahmad et al. (2020), who found familiarity to be an important antecedent of attitude towards Pakistani ethnic food. The present sample provides a plausible explanation, as most respondents were Sabah-based, had prior familiarity with the cuisine and identified family as their main source of awareness. Familiarity may therefore reflect repeated exposure, family-based knowledge, previous consumption and confidence in recognising particular dishes rather than simple awareness. The relatively strong familiarity effect may consequently be weaker among consumers with less cultural or geographical exposure to Kadazan-Dusun cuisine.

Price also had a significant positive effect, indicating that students were more willing to consume Kadazan-Dusun food when they perceived it as affordable and offering satisfactory value for money. Ahmad et al. (2020) similarly found that price influenced attitudes towards Pakistani ethnic food, while Ting et al. (2017) reported a significant positive relationship between price and Dayak food intention despite hypothesising an inverse association. These findings suggest that price may represent perceived value and accessibility rather than merely a preference for the cheapest option. This consideration is especially relevant to university students, whose food choices may be influenced by limited discretionary budgets.

Health was the weakest of the four significant predictors, although its positive effect indicates that perceived nutritional value still contributed to intention to consume. This result supports Ting et al. (2017), who identified health as a significant determinant of Dayak food intention, and complements Ramli et al. (2023), who reported health as an important food-selection factor among Universiti Malaysia Sabah students. Respondents may associate traditional ingredients such as fish, wild vegetables, fruits and herbs with freshness and nutritional value. Nevertheless, health perceptions should be interpreted cautiously because the nutritional characteristics of Kadazan-Dusun dishes vary according to ingredients and preparation methods. Health-related promotion should therefore rely on credible, dish-specific information.

Convenience was positively correlated with intention to consume at the bivariate level but became negative and statistically non-significant when the other predictors were controlled. The negative coefficient should not be interpreted as evidence that convenience discourages consumption; rather, convenience did not explain additional variance beyond sensory appeal, familiarity, price and health. This result is consistent with Ting et al. (2017), who found no significant effect of convenience on Dayak food intention, but differs from Fam et al. (2020), who found convenience relevant among Malaysian tourists consuming Kadazan-Dusun food. The difference may reflect the present sample's greater exposure to the cuisine. Students living in Sabah may encounter Kadazan-Dusun food through family, local markets, cultural events or familiar eateries and therefore place less emphasis on accessibility than tourists.

The predominance of female respondents should also be considered when interpreting the results. Because the sample was not gender-

balanced, the estimated relationships largely reflect the evaluations of female students. However, as no gender-based subgroup or interaction analysis was conducted, the study cannot determine whether male and female students differ in their responses to sensory appeal, familiarity, price, health or convenience. Future research should employ more balanced or stratified samples to assess whether these relationships vary by gender, ethnicity or place of residence.

Overall, the findings reinforce the context-dependent nature of ethnic-food consumption. Cultural and geographical proximity can shape consumers' exposure to a cuisine and, consequently, the importance assigned to particular food-choice motives (Fam et al., 2020; Ting et al., 2019). Other studies have likewise identified different combinations of authenticity, media influence, novelty and food-related motivations across consumer groups (Cengiz & Cengiz, 2023; Ismail & Latip, 2024). In this study, the predominantly Sabah-based sample may have strengthened the influence of familiarity and sensory evaluation on intention to consume. Therefore, the relative importance of the predictors should be interpreted within the demographic and cultural composition of the sample, and replication with more diverse respondents is recommended.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the effects of price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience on UiTM students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food in Kota Kinabalu. The model explained 52.2% of the variance in intention to consume, indicating that the selected food-choice motives provided substantial explanatory power. Sensory appeal emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by familiarity, price and health, whereas convenience did not make a statistically significant

unique contribution. These findings suggest that students are more likely to consume Kadazan-Dusun food when they perceive it as appetising, recognise the dishes and ingredients, consider the food reasonably priced and associate it with positive health attributes.

The study contributes theoretically by demonstrating the applicability of selected Food Choice Questionnaire dimensions to an indigenous-food context. It also highlights the importance of examining food-choice motives simultaneously rather than relying solely on bivariate relationships. Although convenience was positively correlated with intention to consume, its effect became non-significant after the other motives were controlled. This indicates that convenience did not explain additional variance beyond sensory appeal, familiarity, price and health. The findings further extend research on Bornean ethnic cuisine by showing that the relative influence of food-choice motives may differ according to consumers' geographical, cultural and experiential proximity to the cuisine. While sensory appeal was consistent with previous findings on Dayak food, the significant role of familiarity suggests that repeated exposure and local cultural experience are particularly relevant among Sabah-based students.

From a practical perspective, food operators should prioritise the consistent sensory quality of Kadazan-Dusun dishes, particularly their taste, aroma, texture and visual presentation. Menu descriptions should explain unfamiliar ingredients, preparation methods and cultural meanings in an accessible manner without compromising authenticity. Pricing strategies should emphasise value rather than low price alone. Student-sized portions, tasting platters, set meals and campus pop-up stalls may reduce the perceived financial risk of trying unfamiliar dishes while encouraging exposure to a wider range of Kadazan-Dusun

foods.

Universities, tourism organisations and food businesses can also strengthen familiarity through repeated and meaningful cultural engagement. Cooking demonstrations, food-tasting sessions, cultural storytelling and Kaamatan-related activities may be incorporated into hospitality education, student orientation programmes and campus events. As social media represented only a minor source of awareness in this study, culturally accurate short-form videos, chef demonstrations and student-generated content could be used to improve the visibility of less familiar dishes. Health-related promotion should remain evidence-based and specific to individual dishes, ingredients and preparation methods rather than presenting all traditional foods as inherently healthy.

These initiatives may also generate wider social and economic benefits. Increased exposure among younger consumers can support the intergenerational transfer of culinary knowledge, strengthen demand for indigenous ingredients and create opportunities for local food producers and small enterprises. Collaboration among universities, Kadazan-Dusun community practitioners, tourism agencies and food operators may therefore position food promotion not only as a commercial strategy but also as a means of sustaining Sabah's culinary identity and supporting inclusive local development.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted in light of several limitations. Convenience sampling and the concentration on students from one faculty restrict the generalisability of the results. The sample was predominantly female, Bumiputera Sabah and resident in Sabah, which may have contributed to the high reported level of familiarity with Kadazan-Dusun food. In addition, the cross-sectional and

self-reported design measured intention to consume rather than actual purchasing or eating behaviour. The model was also limited to five food-choice motives and did not incorporate potentially relevant factors such as perceived authenticity, attitude, subjective norms, food neophobia, cultural identity, media influence and perceived behavioural control.

Future research should employ probability or stratified sampling across faculties, universities and geographical locations to obtain a more diverse sample. Comparative studies could examine differences between indigenous and non-indigenous consumers, Sabah residents and visitors, or students and working adults. Longitudinal and behavioural studies are also needed to determine whether intention to consume translates into actual food choice. Structural equation modelling could be used to test indirect relationships through attitude, authenticity, enjoyment or cultural identity. Experimental research may further evaluate how menu descriptions, visual presentation, tasting formats, social media content and pricing strategies influence responses to familiar and unfamiliar Kadazan-Dusun dishes.

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# An Expert-Informed Framework for Sustainable MICE Operations: Evidence from Suwon City, South Korea

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 03/8/2026

Accepted : 04/8/2026

Online : 30/9/2026

## KEYWORDS

Sustainability; MICE;  
UNSDGs; City branding;  
Suwon city; South Korea

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## ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION

Research paper

**Abstract** - This study addresses the implementation gap between global sustainability agendas and the operational realities of secondary MICE destinations, using Suwon City, South Korea, as an informed framework case study. While Suwon strives to compete with mega-destinations, it faces critical challenges in operationalising international sustainability standards and overcoming fragmented governance within its distinct structural ecosystem. To address these issues, this research was guided by three specific objectives: (1) to identify core operational and governance challenges in Suwon City's MICE ecosystem; (2) to formulate an integrated, actionable framework combining environmental stewardship and local stakeholder collaboration; and (3) to provide strategic policy recommendations for municipal authorities and convention organisers. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study utilised Focus Group Interviews (FGIs) with 10 industry experts over three months to derive robust operational insights. The findings establish a four-pillar framework: Sustainable Hosting Facilities, Sustainable Transportation, Sustainable Food & Beverage, and Post-Event Management. Results indicate that a successful sustainable MICE transition requires a shift from isolated initiatives to integrated destination governance, digital innovation, and localised supply chain resilience. Practically, the research offers actionable plans for policymakers, including zoning for specialised MICE districts, incentivising AI-driven hybrid event technologies, and mandating localised procurement networks to ensure corporate accountability. This research offers a scalable, context-adaptive model for secondary cities, transforming sustainability



from a branding narrative into a measurable, accountable corporate practice.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector has emerged as a cornerstone of urban economic development, destination branding, and regional regeneration (Kaewsaengorn et al., 2026; Kumar et al., 2026). As cities compete to establish themselves as attractive destinations for business events, the concept of a MICE city brand has become increasingly important. A strong MICE city brand reflects a city's ability to host high-quality events while showcasing its infrastructure, accessibility, cultural attractions, and commitment to sustainability. Thus, at the global level, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework for promoting sustainable economic, social, and environmental development. Of the 17 SDGs, SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth is closely linked to the MICE industry as business events generate employment, stimulate tourism, attract investment, and support local businesses. In addition, MICE activities contribute to SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) by encouraging innovation and infrastructure development, SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by promoting sustainable urban destinations, SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through greener event management practices, and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by fostering collaboration among governments, businesses, academic institutions, and international organizations.

However, the extent to which the MICE sector genuinely contributes to the SDGs remains debatable. Jung et al. (2024), in a bibliometric analysis of 159 event-tourism studies, found that

although the literature demonstrates moderate alignment with the SDGs, the focus is disproportionately concentrated on economic growth and tourism development, while SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) remain significantly underrepresented. This imbalance suggests that the current discourse on sustainable MICE development is relatively narrow, emphasising economic and environmental outcomes over broader social sustainability objectives. Consequently, while integrating the SDGs into MICE city branding may enhance a destination's global image and competitive advantage, its credibility depends on whether sustainability principles are embedded in policies and practices rather than used solely as branding narratives. Therefore, a critical examination of how MICE city branding aligns with the SDGs is necessary to determine whether these initiatives constitute substantive contributions to sustainable development or primarily serve as marketing strategies.

Moreover, the rapid expansion of the global business events industry has historically driven resource-intensive consumption, significant carbon footprints, and systemic strain on local municipal infrastructures (Li & Schmid, 2026). In response to global climate accords and shifting market demands, contemporary tourism governance has necessitated a paradigm shift from volume-driven growth toward sustainable, resilient, and ESG-aligned (Environmental, Social, and Governance) operational frameworks (Korea Tourism Organisation, 2026). While primary metropolitan hubs such as Seoul have successfully institutionalised standardised green-event practices and destination-management models (Han & Wanyi, 2026), secondary and emerging cities face distinct structural bottlenecks. These include fragmented stakeholder governance, limited capital

capacity for large-scale infrastructure, and a lack of localised execution strategies tailored to unique regional ecosystems (Kaewsaengorn et al., 2026).

This study proposes an expert-informed framework designed to evaluate and enhance sustainable MICE operations in Suwon City to address this gap. This research investigates how secondary cities can optimise resource management, streamline multi-agency governance, and foster long-term destination competitiveness by synthesising expert insights with empirical readiness assessments. The specific objectives of this research are: (1) to identify the core operational and governance challenges confronting Suwon City's MICE ecosystem; (2) to formulate an integrated, actionable framework combining environmental stewardship and local stakeholder collaboration; and (3) to provide strategic policy recommendations for municipal authorities and convention organisers. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader literature on destination governance and sustainable tourism by offering a scalable model for secondary cities seeking to balance economic vitality with ecological responsibility. However, a substantial gap remains in translating these high-level benchmarks into actionable, expert-informed operational frameworks tailored to secondary metropolitan destinations. Destination managers and municipal policymakers require context-specific strategies that bridge structural readiness, multi-stakeholder governance, and eco-efficient venue management.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Sustainability MICE Industry

Sustainability has become a dominant theme in MICE research as the industry faces increasing pressure to reduce its environmental footprint while maintaining economic viability and operational resilience. Although literature broadly agrees that

sustainability is essential for the long-term competitiveness of MICE destinations and enterprises, existing studies vary considerably in their emphasis, with many focusing on isolated sustainability practices rather than adopting a holistic perspective that integrates environmental, social, and economic dimensions.

Wee et al. (2021) provided one of the most comprehensive overviews through a decade-long systematic literature review, identifying five core green practices that underpin sustainable MICE development: green venues, accessibility, sustainable advertising and promotion, food and beverage management, and waste management. These practices were proposed as responses to the industry's significant environmental challenges, including carbon emissions, excessive resource consumption, and waste generation. While the review establishes an important conceptual framework for sustainable MICE, it remains largely descriptive. It offers limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness or implementation challenges of these practices across different destination contexts.

Subsequent empirical studies have sought to operationalise these sustainability dimensions. For example, Cahyadi et al. (2025) investigated green food practices in Indonesia and found that the industry continues to face significant deficiencies in standardised sustainable food management and waste reduction. Using the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), the study identified local and organic sourcing, storage optimisation, and sustainable packaging as priority strategies for improving environmental performance. Although these findings provide practical guidance for enhancing food and beverage sustainability, their emphasis on a single operational component illustrates a broader tendency in the literature to address sustainability through fragmented initiatives rather than integrated destination-wide

strategies.

Beyond environmental practices, recent research has increasingly recognised organisational capabilities as critical drivers of sustainability. Yuan et al. (2025) demonstrated that operations management, strategic management, and stakeholder management significantly enhance the resilience and long-term sustainability of MICE enterprises in post-pandemic China. Their findings suggest that sustainable MICE development extends beyond environmental initiatives and require organisational adaptability and effective governance. Nevertheless, the study focuses primarily on enterprise-level performance, offering limited insight into how these organisational capabilities interact with broader destination sustainability objectives.

Similarly, Warintarawej et al. (2025) highlighted stakeholder collaboration as a key prerequisite for sustainable MICE ecosystems in Thailand. The study identified weak inter-organizational collaboration and inadequate data sharing as significant barriers to sustainability and proposed developing collaborative information systems to strengthen coordination. While the findings emphasise the importance of digital collaboration and stakeholder trust in facilitating sustainable practices, they also reveal that technological solutions alone are insufficient without institutional commitment and effective governance mechanisms. Business process automation plays a critical role in addressing institutional pressures for sustainable event management (Ramadhan et al., 2026).

Overall, the literature demonstrates a growing shift from viewing sustainability solely as environmental management toward recognising the importance of organisational resilience, stakeholder collaboration, and strategic governance in sustainable MICE development. However, existing

research remains fragmented, often examining individual sustainability dimensions in isolation and within specific national contexts. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how environmental practices, organisational capabilities, and collaborative governance can be integrated into a comprehensive sustainability framework for the MICE industry. Addressing this gap would provide a more robust understanding of how destinations and MICE organisations can simultaneously achieve environmental responsibility, operational resilience, and long-term competitiveness.

## 2.2 City Brand

Literature increasingly positions MICE as a strategic mechanism for city branding, emphasising its contributions to destination competitiveness, stakeholder engagement, and urban development. However, existing studies present a more nuanced picture, suggesting that the effectiveness of MICE city branding depends on multiple contextual and managerial factors rather than the mere presence of MICE activities.

Ahn et al. (2016) argued that successful MICE city branding in Busan City relies heavily on internal stakeholder engagement, particularly residents' perceptions of brand authenticity. Their findings identified brand reality as the strongest determinant of residents' brand commitment, followed by partnership, organisational culture, and departmental coordination. Furthermore, brand commitment was shown to encourage brand citizenship behaviour and strengthen residents' brand pride. While these findings highlight the importance of resident participation in creating a sustainable city brand, the study primarily focuses on internal branding dynamics within a single city context, limiting its generalizability to destinations with different socio-cultural and governance structures.

The integration of emerging technologies into MICE has also attracted growing scholarly attention. An et al. (2025) examined Korean industry experts' perceptions of the Metaverse. They found that, despite its ability to enhance accessibility, promotional effectiveness, and immersive visitor experiences, it was not perceived as a substitute for face-to-face interactions. Instead, Metaverse was viewed as a complementary platform that expands engagement opportunities while preserving the unique value of physical events. These findings challenge optimistic narratives about digital transformation, suggesting that technological innovation alone cannot replace the experiential, social, and relational dimensions that underpin successful MICE destinations. Consequently, the competitiveness of host cities continues to depend largely on their physical infrastructure, destination identity, and experiential offerings.

Similarly, Marchesani and Masciarelli (2025) extended the discussion by examining the relationship between MICE tourism and smart city development. Their longitudinal analysis of 30 Italian smart cities demonstrated that MICE tourism positively contributes to urban mobility and smart city initiatives. Nevertheless, the study revealed that increased visitor volumes lead to unintended consequences, including increased crime and security concerns, which may weaken the long-term sustainability of destination branding. These findings suggest that while MICE can stimulate urban development, its benefits are contingent upon effective governance and the capacity of local authorities to mitigate the negative externalities associated with increased tourism.

Overall, the existing literature indicates that MICE has evolved beyond its traditional role as an event sector into a strategic city-branding instrument. Nevertheless, current research also demonstrates that its effectiveness is contingent on

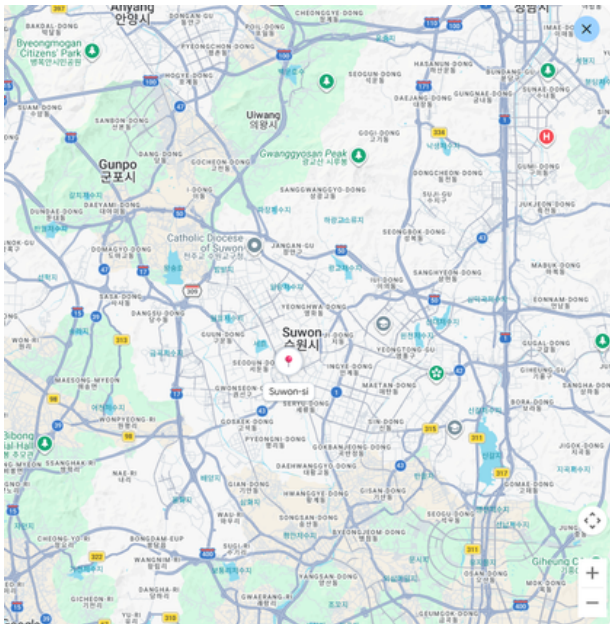
achieving a balance between stakeholder engagement, technological innovation, and sustainable urban governance. Rather than viewing MICE as an inherently beneficial branding strategy, future research should adopt a more critical perspective by examining the contextual conditions under which MICE contributes to long-term destination competitiveness and resilient city branding.

### *2.3 Suwon City, a MICE Destination*

Suwon is the largest city and the capital of Gyeonggi province (see Figure 1), South Korea's most populous province (Pinem et al., 2023). As a new venue that opened in 2019, the Suwon Convention Centre (SCC) is a leading MICE venue in southern Gyeonggi Province, offering extensive facilities, including convention and exhibition halls. Strategically located, SCC is part of a larger complex that includes a hotel, department stores, and an aquarium, providing integrated experience for business and leisure visitors alike. The Suwon Convention Bureau offers seamless event support through services such as financial assistance, accommodation booking, and virtual event exploration via the "SUWON MICE CITY" platform. The Bureau also provides special services, such as shuttle buses and unique venue banquets, to ensure the success of international conferences and major events (Suwon Convention and Visitor's Bureau, n.d., 2026).

Most importantly, Suwon's local efforts closely align with broader national strategies. Under the South Korean government's national policy framework, which designates MICE as a core strategic driver for high-value tourism, regional economic balance, and national export infrastructure, local governments are strongly encouraged to foster regionally specialised MICE ecosystems.





**Figure 1.** Suwon City, South Korea (Source: Map of Suwon-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea." Google Maps, Accessed 31 Aug. 2026, [www.google.com/maps](http://www.google.com/maps))

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, incorporating snowball sampling to recruit participants for Focus Group Interviews (FGIs) and to examine and establish sustainable MICE operations for Suwon City. Given the emergent nature of sustainable MICE practices and the limited prior research and established tools in this domain, qualitative methods were deemed most appropriate to facilitate deep interaction and uncover rich, in-depth insights that cannot be easily obtained through quantitative surveys (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Following Krueger and Casey (2015), the FGI procedure was systematically structured into five distinct stages: 1) planning and protocol design, 2) expert participant recruitment, 3) interview execution, 4) qualitative data analysis, and 5) derivation and synthesis of results. To support the primary FGI process and triangulate the

findings, supplementary techniques, including a systematic literature review, status analysis of municipal practices, and targeted case studies, were conducted concurrently.

#### 3.2 Participants and Sampling

This study utilised a purposive snowball sampling approach to recruit ten experts with specialised, high-level knowledge of sustainable MICE and destination management. Selection criteria were strictly defined to include individuals with at least 5 years of professional or academic experience directly involved in sustainable tourism or event management in South Korea. The sample was strategically balanced to comprise five industry practitioners and five academics. This heterogeneous composition ensures a robust triangulation of perspectives: industry practitioners provide direct insights into operational realities and challenges, whilst the academic cohort offers theoretical rigour and broader contextual grounding.

The panel's relevance to Suwon City is justified by its capacity to provide external, high-level validation of the proposed framework. The experts offer a scalable perspective that transcends local institutional knowledge by cross-referencing national MICE standards with the specific operational requirements of secondary cities. This approach ensures the framework applies to Suwon's unique structural ecosystem whilst remaining aligned with broader South Korean sustainability mandates. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Qualitative data saturation was achieved as consistent themes and conceptual patterns emerged across the discussions, indicating that further interviews would not yield significant new insights.

Each FGI lasted approximately 90 minutes



and was conducted in a dedicated, quiet meeting room to ensure a confidential and comfortable environment. A trained moderator guided each session using a semi-structured protocol designed to elicit deep insights whilst allowing for flexible exploration of emergent topics. Two research assistants served as notetakers, capturing non-

verbal cues, contextual nuances, and verbatim quotes to ensure methodological rigour. All sessions were audio-recorded with explicit consent to guarantee accuracy during transcription. All participants were anonymised using alphanumeric identifiers from Participant 1 (P1) to Participant 10 (P10) to maintain strict confidentiality. The profiles of the participants are organised in Table 1.

**Table 1.** FGI interview participants

| Participants | Years of Working in the MICE Industry | Position          | Field                                    | Education |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------|
| P1           | 15                                    | Managing Director | MICE Industry                            | PhD       |
| P2           | 7                                     | Director          | MICE Industry                            | Master    |
| P3           | 10                                    | Professor         | Academic                                 | PhD       |
| P4           | 15                                    | CEO               | MICE Industry                            | Master    |
| P5           | 5                                     | Director          | Seoul Tourism Organisation               | Master    |
| P6           | 10                                    | Professor         | Academic                                 | PhD       |
| P7           | 5                                     | Professor         | Academic                                 | PhD       |
| P8           | 10                                    | Professor         | Academic                                 | PhD       |
| P9           | 5                                     | Consultant        | Seoul Tourism MICE Agency Support Centre | Master    |
| P10          | 10                                    | Director          | Suwon MICE City                          | Master    |

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analysed using systematic thematic analysis, as suggested by Taylor et al. (2025), to ensure analytical rigour and a credible framework. Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a systematic approach to examining expert perspectives and allows themes to emerge from participants' discussions regarding sustainable MICE operations. Each focus group discussion was audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The transcripts were systematically analysed through data familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, review, and refinement (Naeem et al., 2023).

The findings are discussed for the three-fold objective: (1) to identify the core operational and governance challenges confronting Suwon City's MICE ecosystem; (2) to formulate an integrated, informed framework combining environmental stewardship and local stakeholder collaboration; and (3) to provide strategic policy recommendations for municipal authorities and convention organisers. As for the core operational and governance challenges, the thematic analysis of the FGI transcripts revealed critical insights into the operational standards and management practices that event organisers must consider when hosting sustainable MICE events in Suwon City. Four overarching themes emerged drawing upon the collective expertise of the ten MICE professionals, reflecting distinct areas of

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

within the municipal MICE industry: (1) Sustainable Hosting Facilities, (2) Sustainable Transportation, (3) Sustainable Food & Beverage (F&B), and (4) Post-Event Sustainability Management. Each theme encompasses specific action items evaluated across environmental, economic, and social dimensions, aligning directly with broader sustainability frameworks.

4.1 Sustainable Hosting Facilities

Participants identified critical sustainability action items for event venues across environmental, economic, and social dimensions. A strong emphasis was placed on integrating environmental impact reduction with economic viability when selecting and managing venue infrastructure. Key

environmental strategies included rigorous recycling, separate collection practices, and post-event monitoring. Economically, the adoption of digital platforms for a one-stop system was highlighted for its operational efficiency and potential to reduce paper and material waste. Furthermore, experts emphasised the development of reusable products with clear usage guides to minimise single-use items.

"Digital signage and event planning platforms are replacing paper-based materials, reducing waste and streamlining operations" (P 5).

The specific action items, sustainable factors, and goals from the FGI analysis for hosting facilities are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Sustainable hosting facilities

| Action Plan                                                                               | Sustainable Factors | The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Recycling and separate collection practice checklist and monitoring after the event       | Environment         | 15                                          |
| By utilising the results of holding a sustainable event, post-promotion and branding.     | Economy             | 11                                          |
| Creating reusable products and distributing usage guides                                  | Environment         | 9                                           |
| Establishment and utilization of one-stop digital system by implementing digital platform | Economy             | 13                                          |

4.2 Sustainable Transportation

Actionable sustainability measures related to transportation were frequently cited, with a primary focus on alternative energy and eco-friendly vehicles to minimise carbon footprints urban event logistics.

"Sustainable transport includes shifting from private vehicle use to low-emission public transport, such as battery electric buses and rail systems powered by renewable electricity, alongside safe and inclusive infrastructure for walking and cycling" (P 1).

Beyond environmental considerations, the social dimension of transportation was addressed by recommendations that prioritise accessibility for socially disadvantaged groups. Environmentally, encouraging active mobility, such as walking, and ensuring access to shared bicycle options were seen as vital for short-distance travel. Economically, prioritising service contracts with transport providers utilising smart alternative energy sources within the region was deemed crucial for a holistic regional sourcing approach. Table 3 outlines these transport-related action measures.

Table 3. Sustainable transportation

| Action Plan                                                                                 | Sustainable Factors | The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Recommendations for the use of transportation that are considered socially disadvantaged    | Society             | 10                                          |
| Guidance on walking, securing, and recommending the movement of shared bicycles             | Environment         | 13                                          |
| Utilisation of green mobility for protocol, transport vehicles, and group buses             | Environment         | 13                                          |
| Priority contract with transportation provider using smart alternative energy in the region | Economy             | 7                                           |

4.3 Sustainable Food and Beverage

Participants (i.e., P1, P2, P9) unanimously identified sustainable practices applicable to the F&B sector for MICE events. A significant finding was the emphasis on using local food (see Figure 2) to bolster the regional economy while reducing carbon footprints by minimising transportation distances. Experts prioritised requesting reusable



Figure 2. Traditional organic Korean vegetable side dishes (banchan) served at a local dining establishment in Suwon City represent sustainable, locally sourced culinary practices. (Source: Author)

Table 4. Sustainable food and beverage

| Action Plan                                                    | Sustainable Factors | The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Providing sustainable, organic, local food                     | Environmental       | 11                                          |
| Request reusable tableware from suppliers                      | Environmental       | 11                                          |
| Contract with local eco-friendly food and beverage suppliers   | Economy             | 13                                          |
| Provide a list of the restaurants that practice sustainability | Society             | 11                                          |

4.4 Post Event Management

Participants frequently highlighted sustainable

tableware from suppliers to reduce waste, aligning with circular economy principles drastically. Contracting with local eco-friendly F&B suppliers was also highlighted for environmental and community economic benefits. Providing a curated list of sustainable restaurants was proposed as a social initiative to empower attendees to make responsible dining choices.

*“Suwon City is actively promoting sustainable local food practices through various initiatives to visitors and international tourists. These include supporting local farms, encouraging community gardens, and implementing food waste reduction programs. The city also focuses on reducing food transportation distances and promoting healthy eating habits through educational programs” (P 10).*

Table 4 indicates sustainable food and beverage practices.

practices for the post-event management phase, underscoring that environmental stewardship

extends beyond an event's conclusion to amplify its long-term municipal impact. Derived action items focused on leveraging sustainable event outcomes, selecting sustainably certified facilities for future operations to foster a green supply chain, and maintaining documented ESG management for enhanced accountability. Furthermore, purchasing eco-friendly products was directly linked to national agendas such as the Green New Deal. Fostering this comprehensive framework aims to cultivate an innovative, eco-friendly MICE ecosystem.

*"Using digital platforms, establish and implement a one-stop digital system to allow registration, promotion, operation, and post-management control... manage full event operation from registration to post-management" (P 2).*

The specific post-event management strategies derived from the analysis are structured in Table 5.

Table 5. Post-event management

| Action Plan                                                                                          | Sustainable Factors | The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Consider selecting sustainable and eco-friendly certified facilities and venues                      | Environment         | 11                                          |
| Documented ESG Management / Consider your own MICE facilities                                        | Society             | 9                                           |
| Purchasing sustainable and eco-friendly products for the implementation of the Green New Deal policy | Environment         | 15                                          |
| Eco-friendly event to build an eco-friendly, innovative MICE ecosystem                               | Economy             | 11                                          |

4.5 Expert Informed Framework

As shown in Figure 3, the word cloud aggregates core semantic markers extracted from expert interviews on the sustainable MICE framework. High-frequency terms cluster around structural pillars such as environmental stewardship, strategic partnerships, and resource optimisation. The visual prominence of terms such as destination competitiveness, recycling, and waste monitoring underscores the critical consensus among stakeholders that sustainable transformation relies heavily on green innovations, waste reduction, and technological integration. To visually synthesise the qualitative themes and action plans derived from the expert-informed framework, a word cloud was generated using the Python Wordcloud package (version 1.9+, integrated with Matplotlib). Figure 3 shows a word cloud of these qualitative themes and action plans derived from the expert-informed framework.



Figure 3. Word Cloud of the Expert-informed Sustainable MICE Framework

The empirical findings from the FGIs with MICE industry experts provide clear, multidimensional insights into the core operational sustainability, governance structures, and management frameworks needed to advance sustainable MICE operations in secondary municipal destinations such as Suwon City. Based

on the systematic thematic analysis of expert perspectives across four primary operational domains, sustainable MICE transition is demonstrated to be a holistic endeavour that intricately bridges environmental stewardship, economic viability, and social equity. This aligns closely with Kaewsaengorn (2026), who emphasised that secondary cities must adopt triangulated readiness assessments and localised governance models to overcome capital constraints and successfully implement international standards such as ISO 20121. To maximise the future impact of the Suwon Convention Centre and establish Suwon as a premier global host, policymakers should focus on district integration, specialised tech infrastructure, and progressive sustainability mandates. Municipal policymakers must transition from isolated venue management to a highly integrated ecosystem approach to elevate Suwon's position within the competitive global MICE landscape. First, the formal designation of the urban periphery surrounding Gwanggyo Lake Park as a specialised MICE District is imperative.

Second, maximising international traveller transit efficiency necessitates a multi-modal transport link; specifically, an autonomous vehicular loop or a dedicated premium express corridor in connecting Suwon KTX Station directly to the convention Centre to bypass urban congestion. Finally, to address the paradigm shift toward hybrid event architecture, integrating on-site, high-fidelity Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Extended Reality (XR) broadcast studios with automated real-time translation booths and holographic displays is crucial. The empirical viability of these synchronised spatial, logistical, and technological interventions is demonstrated by the Seoul Metropolitan Government, which has successfully scaled comparable MICE clusters and smart-city infrastructures to solidify its global market leadership.

Furthermore, despite the shared objective of achieving low-carbon operations, the results demonstrate that expert priorities across different functional areas are highly heterogeneous yet strategically complementary. Within the realm of sustainable hosting facilities (Table 2), experts placed paramount importance on rigorous recycling checklists, separate collection post-monitoring (Goal 15), and the establishment of one-stop digital systems (Goal 13). This heavy emphasis on digital platform integration substantiates the findings of Chang and Chang (2022), who argued that reducing paper-based material waste through smart technological infrastructure is a prerequisite for long-term venue viability. Similarly, transportation strategies (Table 3) revealed a dual focus: environmental measures, such as green mobility for group buses and the promotion of shared bicycle networks (Goal 13), were tightly coupled with social responsibility considerations, such as recommending accessible transit options for socially disadvantaged groups (Goal 10). This multi-dimensional prioritisation echoes broader municipal frameworks that view urban transport decarbonization as inseparable from inclusive community access (Korea Tourism Organisation, 2025).

Interpreted through the lens of destination governance and stakeholder collaboration, the FGI findings highlight that F&B operations and post-event management serve as critical catalysts for regional economic integration. In the F&B sector (Table 4), contracting with local eco-friendly suppliers emerged as the leading economic priority (Goal 13), directly supporting regional farm networks and reducing carbon footprints associated with food transportation distances—a strategic initiative actively championed by municipal bodies such as Suwon City (P 10). This localised sourcing model aligns with sustainable destination principles by keeping economic value within the host



community while simultaneously offering sustainable dining lists to empower attendee choice. Moreover, post-event management strategies (Table 5) highlighted that sustainability efforts must extend far beyond an event's conclusion to foster an innovative, eco-friendly MICE ecosystem. Experts strongly advocated purchasing eco-friendly products aligned with national agendas, such as the Green New Deal (Goal 15), and selecting certified green venues (Goal 11), thereby institutionalising a continuous green supply chain.

The expert-informed sustainable MICE framework strongly supports the achievement of SDGs 11, 12, and 13 while contributing to SDGs 7, 10, and 15. Specifically, SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 13: Climate Action, SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, and SDG 15: Life on Land. In this study, sustainable hosting facilities emphasise recycling, reusable products, and digital platforms to reduce waste and improve operational efficiency. Transportation strategies promote green mobility, renewable energy, shared bicycles, and inclusive access for disadvantaged groups, supporting low-carbon urban development. Sustainable food and beverage practices prioritise local sourcing, reusable tableware, and eco-friendly suppliers, strengthening regional economies and responsible consumption. Furthermore, post-event management encourages ESG practices, the use of certified green venues, and eco-friendly procurement, creating a resilient, innovative, and environmentally responsible MICE ecosystem.

Ultimately, this study extends the foundational work on destination competitiveness by demonstrating that transforming secondary cities into sustainable business event hubs requires more than superficial green practices; it demands

an expert-informed, structurally integrated framework. Over time, combining digital operational efficiency, local supply chain integration, and documented ESG management transforms municipal event sectors into high-value, resilient tourism destinations. In summary, the insights provided by seasoned MICE professionals offer crucial strategic directions for municipal authorities and event organisers, establishing a scalable model that balances economic vitality with long-term ecological responsibility.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study addressed the gap between global sustainability agendas and the operational realities of secondary MICE destinations by using Suwon City as a case study. It developed a practical four-pillar framework comprising Sustainable Hosting Facilities, Sustainable Transportation, Sustainable F&B, and Post-Event Management drawing on expert perspectives. The findings demonstrate that sustainable MICE development extends beyond environmental initiatives and requires integrated governance, stakeholder collaboration, and technological innovation. Localised supply chains, and ESG-oriented practices, secondary cities can strengthen their competitiveness while balancing economic growth with environmental and social sustainability by leveraging digital platforms. The informed framework, therefore, offers a practical reference for cities seeking to transform sustainability principles into implementable MICE strategies.

The study contributes theoretically by shifting the sustainability discourse from why sustainability is important to how it can be operationalised. It bridges the implementation gap between global sustainability frameworks and local destination management, while extending destination governance theory by demonstrating

that effective sustainability strategies must reflect the infrastructure, institutional capacity, and stakeholder ecosystem of secondary cities.

From a managerial perspective, the findings provide actionable guidance for policymakers and event organisers. Priorities include developing designated MICE districts with integrated transport systems, adopting AI-enabled hybrid event technologies, strengthening local sustainable procurement networks, and implementing ESG reporting with measurable sustainability indicators. These strategies can improve operational efficiency, visitor experience, and destination competitiveness while supporting long-term sustainable development.

This study is limited by its qualitative design, its focus on 10 industry experts, and its spotlight on Suwon City, which may restrict broader generalisation. Future research should quantitatively validate the proposed framework across diverse MICE destinations. Future studies could evaluate the practical implementation of the framework by examining completed MICE events in Suwon City. Such evaluations would identify which sustainability practices are most feasible, effective, and challenging during actual event operations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by the ANCHOR program through the Gangwon ANCHOR Center, funded by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Gangwon State (GS), Republic of Korea (2026-ANCHOR-10-003). Additional support was provided by the Kyungdong University Research Fund, 2025.

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