

Tourism Revival: Destination Image and Perceived Value as key Drivers of Tourist Intentions

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ABSTRACT

The travel and tourism industry is a critical component of Malaysia's economy, contributing significantly through foreign exchange generation and job creation. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted this sector, resulting in a sharp decline in tourist arrivals. As the pandemic ended, the tourism industry needs to undergo a revival. This study aims to explore the relationships between digital marketing strategies, destination image, perceived value, and tourist visit intention. Specifically, the research focuses on an entertainment theme park on the west coast of Malaysia. Utilising a quantitative study to identify key determinants of tourist visit intention, the findings indicate that destination image and perceived value are the most influential factors, with destination image being the most significant. The study offers recommendations and suggestions for future research, outlining strategies for effective marketing campaigns to attract tourists, rejuvenate the tourism industry, and stimulate economic growth. Emphasising the importance of marketing strategies, this research highlights its potential to enhance tourist visit intention, promoting sustainable growth and prosperity in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: Tourists' visit intention; Destination image; Perceived value; Tourism marketing

INTRODUCTION

The travel and tourism industry is highly important in Malaysia and has a significant impact on the country's economy. It contributes directly and indirectly to various aspects of economic growth. In fact, it holds the distinction of being the third largest contributor to Malaysia's overall economic development, illustrating its extensive connections to different sectors of the economy (Hamid et al., 2021). Tourism in Malaysia has seen significant growth over the years, becoming a crucial sector for the country's economy. Malaysia attracted 26 million tourists in 2019, ranking 22nd globally in terms of tourist arrivals and known for its unique natural attractions, diverse cultures, and harmonious society, which have been key factors in drawing international tourists (Yasin & Farihin, 2023). Despite challenges such as economic downturns and health scares, Malaysia has maintained a strong tourism sector through aggressive promotional efforts and the development of new tourist landmarks (Yasin & Farihin, 2023; Badaruddin, 2010). Tourism is a vital economic sector for many countries, including Malaysia, where it contributes significantly to GDP, employment, and foreign exchange earnings. According to Tourism Malaysia (2023), the country recorded a steady recovery in tourist arrivals post-pandemic, underscoring the importance of understanding the factors that influence tourists' behavioural intentions. In the increasingly competitive global tourism market, destination image, social media marketing, and perceived value have emerged as key determinants in shaping tourists' intentions to visit specific destinations (Assaker & Hallak, 2013; Wang et al., 2021).

This study, therefore, would like to examine the intertwined effects of destination image, perceived value, and social media marketing on tourists' intention to visit, using Malaysia as the empirical context. By integrating

these constructs into a unified framework, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of tourism behaviour in an increasingly digital and experience-driven environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the post-pandemic recovery era, the tourism sector is undergoing a critical phase of revival, prompting a renewed focus on the factors that drive tourist behavioural intentions. Tourist visit intention refers to the possibility of tourists visiting a specific tourism destination (Luo & Ye, 2020). They conducted research on how generativity influences tourists' motivations to visit museums, such as seeking knowledge, cultural appreciation, and contributing to society.

Among these, destination image and perceived value have emerged as pivotal constructs shaping tourists' desire to visit or revisit a location. Numerous studies confirm that the destination image plays a crucial role in influencing tourist behaviour, including both initial visit intentions and loyalty through repeat visits (Phillips & Jang, 2010; Jin et al., 2020; Nazir et al., 2022; Azeez, 2021). Destination image refers to the perception or mental representation that individuals have of a particular destination or place they intend to visit. It encompasses the overall impression, beliefs, and attitudes that individuals hold about a destination, including its attractions, facilities, culture, and reputation (Baber & Baber, 2022). Based on study conducted by Wijaya and Thio (2023), destination image significantly influences young travellers' intention to visit a destination. According to Rodrigues et al. (2023), the perception of a destination's image plays a crucial role in tourists' decision-making process and their desire to visit a place.

Positive destination image attributes, such as safety measures, cleanliness, sustainability practices, and reliable healthcare systems, influence tourists' visit intentions despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. A favourable destination image can enhance the overall travel experience and increase tourist satisfaction, both of which are significant predictors of return intention (Azeez, 2021; Ahmed, 2023).

Another critical factor is perceived value, which reflects the tourists' overall assessment of the benefits received relative to the costs incurred during their visit. High perceived value has been shown to directly affect tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Ahmed, 2023; Phillips & Jang, 2010), increasing the likelihood of both recommendation and return. Perceived value can be defined as the consumer's comprehensive evaluation of the usefulness of a product, which is based on their perceptions of what they receive and what they provide in return (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019). Based on the study conducted, it emphasized the positive associations between travellers' behaviours, attitudes, and perceived value.

In tandem with these psychological and experiential dimensions, the role of social media marketing has become increasingly influential. Social media marketing is the utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for a business user (Gaffar et al., 2021). Moreover, Baber and Baber's (2022) research investigated the influence of social media marketing efforts, e-reputation, and destination image on tourists' intention to visit and according to the research from Sun et al. (2021), social media marketing is recognized as a powerful tool in influencing tourist visit intention. Tourists now rely heavily on digital content—both user-generated and destination-generated—as part of their travel decision-making process. This content not only directly impacts their visit intentions but also enhances the perceived image of the destination (Hua et al., 2017; Giannopoulos et al., 2022; Aboalghanam et al., 2025). Social media platforms allow for real-time sharing of experiences, which shapes the perceptions of potential tourists when the communicative richness and accessibility of social media content reduce the perceived distance between the tourist and the destination while increasing its appeal (Aboalghanam et al., 2025; Wang & Luo, 2025). Furthermore, the co-creation of online content by tourists contributes to a more engaging and authentic destination image, further strengthening intentions to visit (Giannopoulos et al., 2022). However, overt commercialisation of the content may also affect the audience's responses. Negative comments, fake news, and controversies can directly affect customers' behaviour (Hossain et al., 2023; Oriakhi et al., 2023). Excessive use of social media marketing can also lead to consumer fatigue and reduce the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, which in turn can negatively impact consumer intentions (Harwinda et al., 2024). Looking at the inconsistent findings from past studies, it is important for this study to investigate the impact of social media marketing in influencing visitors' intention to visit tourist destinations.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research used in the study is based on primary data gathered through a questionnaire. For this research study, descriptive research has been opted for, where survey questions were utilised through Google Form, distributed to the targeted groups. The study focuses on a specific tourist destination that is a water theme park located in Malacca. Respondents were those residing in the neighbouring states of Melaka, that is Johor and Negeri Sembilan, who are in closer proximity to the park. A purposive sampling technique was used to gather data from individuals who have not yet visited the water theme park but have some knowledge about the location. To ensure the accurate selection of respondents, the survey link was posted on the theme park's website. The survey used five-point Likert scale and adopted from past studies as presented in the table below.

Table 1. Measurement of variables

Variables	Items	Source
Social Media Marketing	1. Liveliness in the theme park's official social media account in sharing its activities, news and updates. 2. Frequency of interaction between the theme park's official social media account with followers. 3. Number of polls filled out by the theme park social media followers. 4. Number of likes and comments shared by the theme park's official social media account. 5. The amount of information shared by the theme park on its official social media account. 6. Attractiveness of information shared by the theme park operator in its official social media account. 7. Quality of information shared by the theme park in its official social media account. 8. Variety of information shared by the theme park in its official social media account. 9. Result of online reviews about the theme park's social media account. 10. I can easily access the theme park's official social media account. 11. I can easily find information about the theme park on its social media account. 12. Clarity of information about facilities at the theme park shared by its official social media. 13. I am skilled in handling social situations. 14. Accuracy of information shared by the theme park's official social	Gaffar et al. (2021)

	media account. 15. Credibility of information shared by the theme park's official social media account.	
Destination Image	1. I have a great knowledge of the facilities provided by the theme park. 2. I believe that the theme park has a good reputation. 3. I think the theme park will offer an exciting experience. 4. I think the theme park will offer a pleasant experience. 5. I feel comfortable around people. 6. I think the theme park will offer a relaxing experience.	Gaffar et al. (2021)
Perceived Value	1. Travelling to a theme park is worth the price. 2. Compared to other destinations, travelling to the theme park is a good deal. 3. Travelling to the theme park offers good value for money. 4. I have a soft heart. 5. Travelling to the theme park meets my travel needs.	Al-Ansi & Han (2019)
Tourist Visit Intention	1. I will likely visit the theme park in the next month. 2. I intend to visit the theme park in the near future. 3. I would choose the theme park as the destination for my next holiday. 4. I would prefer to visit the theme park over other similar destinations	Baber & Baber (2022)

The number of samples is determined by G*Power using 3 numbers of predictors with an actual power of 0.80. The final result of G*Power for the sample size of this research is 77. However, in accordance with Schoenfeld (2003), increasing the sample size by a factor of two in a research project can result in a more precise estimation of effects and enhance the statistical power of a study, enabling the identification of minuscule effects. Hence, this research doubles up the sample size from 77 of respondents to 154 of respondents. This approach helps to improve the accuracy and reliability of the research findings, making the conclusions drawn from the data more valid. Thus, the new sample size is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 2. Revised sample size of the respondents (Memon et al., 2020)

State	Sample Size
Melaka	78
Johor	46
Negeri Sembilan	30

FINDINGS

Findings are divided into four sections, which include descriptive analysis, reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha), correlational analysis (Pearson Correlation) and multiple regression analysis. Questionnaire was distributed and feedback received from 174 respondents. All data collected through questionnaires were

extracted and analysed via Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Screening process was used to ensure that the research meets its objective. It was indicated at the beginning of the survey that the survey is only applicable to visitors who have an intention to visit the water theme park but have not been to the theme park. Therefore, out of 174 respondents collected, 28 responses were removed as they were identified as irrelevant for the research data analysis, resulting in 146 final data.

Table 2 below illustrates that based on the standard deviation, the data are less dispersed as it recorded a value of .545, .544, .619 and .578 for social media marketing, destination image, perceived value and tourist visit intention. The standard deviation also shows that the respondents are consistent with their opinions on the variable of Destination Image (DI), followed by Social Media Marketing (SMM), Tourist Visit Intention (TVI) and Perceived Value (PV). The data also shows no sign of normality issue.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

	SMM	DI	PV	TVI
Mean	4.143	4.324	4.297	4.179
Median	4.071	4.400	4.000	4.000
Mode	4.000	4.000	4.000	4.000
Std. Deviation	0.545	0.544	0.620	0.578
Skewness	-0.602	-0.677	-0.454	-0.334
Kurtosis	0.817	0.429	-0.265	0.480

The result of the reliability test is shown in Table 4. Based on the result, the reliability analysis shows that social media marketing, destination image and perceived value have excellent and very good Cronbach's alpha values. Based on the result above, all the variables fall under good strength association. Therefore, each set of questions has internal consistency to measure the single idea of independent variable.

Table 4. Result of the reliability analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Result
Social Media Marketing	0.910	Excellent
Destination Image	0.853	Very good
Perceived Value	0.924	Excellent
Tourist Visit Intention	0.868	Very good

Result of the correlation analysis, in addition, shows that destination image has a moderate positive relationship with tourist visit intention ($r = 0.717$, $p < 0.01$). There is also a moderate association between perceived value ($r = 0.668$, $p < 0.01$), social media marketing ($r = 0.565$, $p < 0.01$).

The regression analysis shows that the Adjusted R Square indicates that 55.7% of the variance of Tourist Visit Intention among social media respondents is explained by the determinants of Social Media Marketing, Destination Image, and Perceived Value. The remaining 44.3% of the variations would be explained by other variables. This means that the independent variables, such as destination image, perceived value, and social media marketing, have a moderate ability to predict or account for the variability in tourist visit intention.

The result shows that destination image has the highest value of beta which is 0.503 ($p\text{-value} = <0.001$). Therefore, it can be concluded that destination image is the most significant determinant factor which contributes

towards tourist visit intention to water theme park, followed by perceived value with beta coefficient value of 0.3-8 (p -value = <0.001), while social media marketing has the lowest beta value of -0.026 and not significant, which indicates that social media marketing is not a determinant factor to tourist visit intention. This is due to the potential for social media to create unrealistic expectations and perceptions of destinations.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings from the correlation analysis reveal insightful relationships between the independent variables—destination image, perceived value, and social media marketing—and the dependent variable, tourist visit intention. The moderate positive correlation between destination image and tourist visit intention ($r = 0.717$, $p < 0.01$) underscores the pivotal role that a favourable destination image plays in influencing tourists' decisions. This significant relationship suggests that tourists are more inclined to visit destinations that are perceived positively, reinforcing the importance of managing and promoting a strong, appealing image of tourist attractions (Yuan & Vui, 2023).

Similarly, perceived value ($r = 0.668$, $p < 0.01$) also shows a moderate positive relationship with tourist visit intention, indicating that tourists' perceptions of value, which likely encompass the quality, price, and overall experience associated with the destination, are crucial in shaping their visit intentions. This reinforces the need for destination managers to focus on enhancing the perceived value through superior service delivery, competitive pricing, and offering unique experiences that resonate with potential visitors (Ćorluka et al., 2024).

However, the relationship between social media marketing and tourist visit intention ($r = 0.565$, $p < 0.01$) is notably weaker than that of the other independent variables. The regression analysis further elaborates this by showing that social media marketing not only has the lowest beta value (-0.026) but also a negative impact on tourist visit intention. This finding is critical as it challenges the common assumption that social media marketing is inherently beneficial for tourism promotion. The negative beta suggests that social media, while a powerful tool, may lead to unrealistic expectations, thereby diminishing tourist satisfaction and, ultimately, visit intentions. This outcome emphasizes the necessity for tourism marketers to carefully craft social media content that accurately represents the destination to avoid creating inflated or misleading perceptions (Guerreiro et al., 2024).

This study provides evidence that, while social media undoubtedly serves as a powerful marketing tool for the tourism sector, several pertinent factors can affect its effectiveness in converting online engagement into actual visitations. One significant challenge is the disparity in trust levels toward information sourced from social media. Research indicates that, despite an increasing reliance on social media platforms for travel-related information, tourists often exhibit scepticism regarding the authenticity and reliability of the content they encounter Berhanu & Raj (2020). This lack of trust can impede the conversion of social media engagement into real-life travel intentions.

The nature of content presented on social media can also significantly impact its effectiveness. Studies show that while visually appealing and engaging social media content can attract attention, it often fails to provide the comprehensive information travellers require when making decisions about destinations (Sharma et al., 2017). Tourists generally prefer detailed information on practical aspects, such as safety, accommodation, and local attractions, which may not be thoroughly covered in typical social media posts. As such, even high levels of engagement do not necessarily translate into a higher intention to visit, as the content may not meet the informational needs of potential visitors (Sharma et al., 2017).

Additionally, the highly competitive nature of social media marketing in tourism complicates its effectiveness. With an excess of travel-related posts and advertisements saturating social media platforms, individual messages risk being lost in the noise, leading to diminished visibility and impact on recipient behaviour (Kurniawati et al., 2022). When potential tourists are bombarded with similar marketing messages from various destinations, their decision-making processes can become overwhelmed, leading to indecision or avoidance entirely, which ultimately decreases the likelihood of them visiting a particular destination (Icoz et al., 2018).

The multiple regression analysis provides additional depth to these relationships by indicating that 55.7% of the

variance in tourist visit intention is explained by the combination of destination image, perceived value, and social media marketing, as reflected by the Adjusted R Square value. This moderate explanatory power implies that while these factors are significant, there are other unexamined variables that also influence tourist visit intentions. Future research should therefore consider additional determinants, such as tourist motivations, environmental factors, and cultural influences, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of what drives tourists to choose specific destinations (Sahoo et al., 2024).

The findings, overall highlight the preeminent role of destination image in shaping tourist visit intentions, while also revealing the nuanced and potentially adverse effects of social media marketing. This underscores the importance of a balanced and accurate promotional strategy that aligns tourists' expectations with the actual experiences offered by the destination. The study's insights contribute to a more informed approach to tourism marketing, where understanding the complex interplay of perceived value, destination image, and social media influence is essential for effectively attracting and retaining visitors.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis has revealed that variables such as destination image and perceived value play a significant role in influencing tourist visit intention, with destination image emerging as the most influential determinant. Additionally, the study underscores the crucial role of social media marketing as a medium for delivering information regarding destination image and perceived value to tourists, thereby contributing to the sustainability of the park. By prioritising the enhancement of destination image and perceived value through strategic digital marketing initiatives, the theme park operators can effectively influence tourists' intention to visit the park, thereby contributing to its long-term success for the sustainability of the park and competitiveness in the water theme park industry. The research underscores the need for operators to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy that emphasises the enhancement of destination image and perceived value, while still leveraging the power of social media marketing. Although social media marketing is seen as a significant medium for communicating with the target market, it needs to be used with caution. Despite inconsistent findings from the past studies with regards to the use of social media marketing in influencing customers' behaviour, this study provides insight to the practitioners that social media marketing does not work in every situation, thus, practitioners need to identify the most effective ways of communicating with the target audience. Theme park operators specifically need to focus more on enhancing the image of the tourist destination and the values they can offer to the visitors. This study catalyses further exploration and innovation in the realm of digital marketing strategies for tourism, paving the way for a more resilient and vibrant tourism industry in Malaysia and beyond. Future research should further explore the potential of nature-based tourism, and answers to the insignificant effect on tourist visit intentions need to be explored.

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Conflict Of Interest Statement

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

Authors' Contributions

Zurina Ismail wrote and revised the article, supervised research progress, anchored the review, and approved the article submission. Muhammad Amiruddin Shah Ahmad Nizam and Nabilah Nasir carried out the research, collected the data, performed data analysis, and wrote the first draft of the article.

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