

The Role of Digital Marketing as a Resilience Factor in Cultural Heritage Tourism: A Conceptual Paper

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.806106>

Received: 06 June 2024; Accepted: 12 June 2024; Published: 09 July 2024

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the effects of online destination brand experience, destination brand authenticity, and ethical digital destination marketing on the behavioural intentions of cultural heritage tourism destinations. In this study, a sample of 315 respondents will be collected among the tourists at cultural heritage destinations in Malacca and Penang, Malaysia. The types and sources of data in this investigation will be based on quantitative data, which is primary data obtained through questionnaires. The sampling technique was a purposive sampling technique. The data collection method used in this research is allocating an opinion poll online using Google Forms. The findings of this research will be beneficial for tourism marketers in forming a strategy to attract travellers and enhance the destination's brand image.

Keywords: behavioural intentions towards the destination, destination brand authenticity, online destination brand experience, ethical digital destination marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Social media's explosive expansion has drastically altered how people live their lives (Liu & Zhang, 2019). Social media and other communication tools are widely used in this age of technological disruption to engage, communicate, and gather information that is necessary for everyone. Through social media, tourists can also share their experiences and serve as a resource for prospective tourists seeking information about tourism attractions (Gohil, 2015). In this regard, the promotion of tourist destinations is carried out through official online platforms (for example, the Web and social media). From a tourist destination trade perspective, tourists need space for dialogue and relationships in the form of social media as a means of sensory (multi-sensory) stimulation. Through social media platforms, tourists can capture travel story moments while visiting tourist destinations (Hays, 2013).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The digital revolution is radically changing the world we live in. New digital technologies have introduced important innovations in factories, hospitals, hotels, cities, and territories. Marketing is significant for any type of business since it has made a crucial contribution to the achievement of several successful businesses. Production and supply processes eventually depend on promotional activities. Advertising can be characterised as the way towards presenting and advancing products and services into the market to attract customers. With the increasing number of items and administrations, business organisations have been compelled to think of new strategies to market their products. It is on this premise that e-advertising has been used by organisations to upgrade deals. This has been facilitated by the development of the internet.

The entire world is absolutely reliant on novelties, and in the present-day world, it is vital to be exceptional. However, simply being aware of the new patterns alone is not sufficient. Studies have shown that there has been a late leap forward in marketing innovations within the tourism industry.

As customers are generally attempting to acquire financial and experiential advantages via tourism, it is vital for the players in the industry to make full use of advanced technology in marketing. For instance, online networking involves an enormous assortment of instruments that make it feasible for their clients to share, trade, or post media documents and different kinds of data using different channels on the web. Fundamentally, the development of e-marketing has just come about into huge movements from the shopper and supplier sides. Purchasers turned out to be progressively refined regarding looking for the most reasonable alternatives in settlement, flights, and different issues (Femenia et al., 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Behavioural Intentions

In the competitive world of travel and tourism, understanding what drives behavioural intention becomes crucial for destination marketing organisations (DMOs) to attract and retain visitors. This understanding helps tailor marketing strategies and initiatives to effectively influence travellers' decisions to visit a specific destination. In the context of destination marketing, behavioural intention refers to the likelihood of a potential traveller visiting a specific destination (Chen et al., 2023). It represents their mental readiness, willingness, and commitment to undertake that travel experience. Understanding their intention allows DMOs to predict travel choices and develop targeted marketing campaigns.

In identifying the behavioural intention in destination marketing, there are a few determinants that should be considered. According to Hsu et al. (2005), the main key determinant is the destination image. It is all about the overall impression or perception travellers have of a destination, encompassing its attractions, amenities, atmosphere, and cultural offerings. A positive destination image is a significant predictor of travellers' intention to visit, as it fosters trust, excitement, and anticipation. The discussion on the key determinants of behavioural intention towards a destination continued from time to time. Hsu et al. (2020) emphasised perceived value as the key determinant. The subjective evaluation made by the traveller of the advantages of a place in relation to the expenses, including money, time, and effort, will indicate the behavioural intentions of destination marketing. Travellers are more likely to be drawn to and stay in destinations with high perceived value, such as those that offer affordable travel, rich cultural experiences, and distinctive encounters (Hsu et al., 2020).

In addition to what was already discussed, a traveller's emotional reaction to their experience at a place and their assessment of how well it fulfilled their expectations will indicate their level of satisfaction. High satisfaction leads to positive word-of-mouth recommendations, repeat visits, and increased spending (Taneja et al., 2023). The satisfaction will lead to positive travel motivation. Understanding travellers' motivations allows marketers to tailor their digital marketing messaging and offerings to resonate with their specific needs and desires.

Online Destination Brand Experience

The term "Online Destination Brand Experience" (ODBE) describes the behavioural, emotive, cognitive, and sensory reactions that a traveller experiences when interacting with a destination via digital media. It encompasses everything from browsing websites and social media content to engaging with virtual tours and immersive experiences. In essence, ODBE shapes the traveller's perception and emotional connection to a destination before, during, and even after their visit (Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, & Rubio, 2019).

As per Khan and Fatma (2021) and Li et al. (2022), comprehending the ODBE requires concentrating on four dimensions. The first dimension is sensory, in which engaging visuals, sounds, and interactive elements create a vivid perception of the destination, stimulating travellers' senses and sparking their imagination. Affective content, which is the second dimension, uses storytelling, a positive attitude, and user-generated content to create an emotional connection that makes the destination feel exciting, anticipated, and even nostalgic. The third dimension, which is intellectual, Providing informative content, historical context, and cultural insights deepens travellers' understanding of the destination and its unique appeal. And the last dimension is behavioral. It refers to the intuitive website interfaces, seamless booking processes, and interactive features that encourage engagement and motivate travellers to plan their visit or book their trip.

A compelling ODBE is now essential for success in today's digital landscape, when travellers predominantly use the internet to plan and study their travel destination experiences. Research shows that the ODBE significantly impacts travellers' decision-making processes. Studies by Jiménez-Barreto, Sthapit, and Rubio (2019) confirm that a positive ODBE can influence travellers' consideration, booking rates, and spending. Additionally, a well-designed ODBE makes a place stand out from the competition and draws in potential tourists who might not have otherwise given them any thought. As noted by Li, Zhang, Zhang, and Liu (2022), compelling images, engaging information, and genuine narrative leave a lasting impact and increase brand preference. Brand preference will drive positive word-of-mouth marketing. Travellers who have a positive ODBE are more likely to share their experiences and recommendations with their network, especially on their social media platforms. It is leading to organic word-of-mouth marketing, and these activities can be incredibly valuable for attracting new visitors. Other than that, effective ODBE will also foster emotional connections with the destination, making travellers feel welcome, informed, and excited (Abbasi, Kumaravelu, Goh, & Karpal-Singh, 2021). The impact is leading to higher repeat visits and increased tourism revenue. Therefore, by prioritising and investing in a compelling ODBE, destinations can unlock significant benefits in today's digital era, especially through digital marketing. It will support the growth of tourism-related income, tourist retention, and long-lasting partnerships.

Destination Brand Authenticity

Destination brand authenticity is becoming a crucial distinction for drawing in and keeping travellers in a world full of travel options. It's no longer enough to simply showcase stunning landscapes and exciting activities; travellers seek genuine experiences that connect them with the true essence of a place. Authenticity in the context of destination branding is complicated and can be interpreted in various ways. According to Mohart et al. (2015) and Zhou et al. (2022), authenticity can be explained based on fidelity, credibility, responsibility, and helpfulness. Fidelity refers to consistency and truthfulness in the destination's unique culture, history, and values. While credibility refers to being trustworthy and transparent in communication and marketing efforts (Morhart et al., 2015). Mohart et al. (2015) also emphasise helpfulness by enabling tourists to connect with the local culture and have enriching experiences. Other than the key aspect highlighted by Mohart et al. (2015), Zhou et al. (2022) add another key aspect, which is responsibility, by upholding ethical and sustainable practices that respect the environment and local communities in defining authenticity.

According to Anshori et al. (2020), below are some examples of authentic destination branding:

1. Chefchaouen, Morocco: This "Blue Pearl" embraces its unique cultural heritage by prioritising local handicrafts, traditional architecture, and authentic culinary experiences.
2. Kyoto, Japan: Kyoto showcases its vibrant history through well-preserved temples, geisha districts, and authentic festivals, offering immersive experiences in Japanese culture.

3. Patagonia, Chile: This region emphasises its breathtaking natural beauty and adventure opportunities while promoting responsible tourism practices and supporting local communities.

Crafting an authentic brand message in digital marketing goes beyond showcasing stunning landscapes and cultural icons. It requires a deeper understanding and commitment. The message of digital marketing needs to embrace local identity. Morhart et al. (2015) suggested focusing on local stories and experiences by highlighting the voices and perspectives of the people who call the destination home and showcasing their traditions, crafts, and everyday lives. On another point, Anshori et al., 2020 emphasised supporting local businesses by working collaboratively with local stakeholders to offer genuine experiences that respect their culture and benefit their livelihoods. Zhou et al. (2022) later added showcasing cultural heritage as a key strategy for achieving authenticity. Showcase cultural heritage through celebrating traditions, festivals, historical sites, and architectural styles that embody the destination's distinct character. From the discussion above, as a conclusion, authenticity is an ongoing journey, not a static destination. It requires continuous listening, adapting, and co-creating with local communities and travellers to ensure the destination's true essence shines through.

Ethical digital destination marketing

In the age of hyper-connectivity and digital-first experiences, ethical considerations hold paramount importance in every sphere, including destination marketing. As travellers increasingly seek authentic, responsible, and sustainable adventures, embracing ethical principles in marketing becomes a powerful tool for attracting and retaining conscious consumers. Ethical digital destination marketing refers to promoting a destination while upholding principles of transparency and authenticity. The marketer needs to provide accurate and truthful information about the destination, its attractions, challenges, and cultural nuances. This includes avoiding exaggerated claims, greenwashing, or stereotypical portrayals that misrepresent the destination's true essence (Getz & Page, 2023).

Promoting tourism destinations online requires a delicate balance between enticing visitors and upholding ethical principles. In promoting, the marketer needs to be responsible in their advertising. In every advertisement, the marketer needs to ensure marketing campaigns don't exploit or misrepresent local cultures or traditions. Collaborate with and empower community stakeholders. (Cohen, 2020). Also, we need to avoid cultural appropriation and always be mindful of using sensitive cultural symbols or imagery without proper understanding and respect. Earlier, Moral and Decamp (2018) emphasised sustainable practices by prioritising eco-friendly advertising methods and minimising the environmental impact of digital marketing activities.

In addition to concentrating on promotion and advertising, ethical digital destination marketing must also take traveller privacy and data security seriously. The marketer needs to ensure data security and transparency. It is imperative to provide travellers with a clear explanation of the collection, use, and protection of visitor data in order to ensure compliance with privacy requirements. Also, avoid using targeted advertising or personalisation techniques to exploit or manipulate traveller choices; make it easy for users to opt in and out of marketing communications; and respect their choices regarding data usage (Lumsden, 2021).

UNDERPINNING THEORY

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The TPB (Ajzen, 1991) remains a central pillar in understanding behavioural intentions. It posits three key determinants: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. Recent

advancements expand upon this framework. For instance, Sheeran et al. (2023) propose the “extended TPB” incorporating moral obligation as a crucial factor, particularly in health-related contexts. Similarly, De Vries et al. (2022) suggest integrating habit strength for behaviours performed repetitively and automatically.

Numerous additional factors influence behavioural intentions, including:

- **Motivation:** Intrinsic motivations, driven by personal goals, and extrinsic motivations, fueled by rewards or recognition, can both drive individuals towards specific behaviours (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
- **Emotions:** Positive emotions associated with a behaviour can increase the intention to perform it, while negative emotions can act as deterrents (Osman, 2023).
- **Knowledge and information:** Understanding the consequences and complexities of a behaviour can significantly impact intention (Webb & Sheeran, 2006).
- **Context and situational factors:** Environmental cues, social influences, and resource availability can dynamically influence how intentions translate into actual behaviour (Park et al., 2023).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

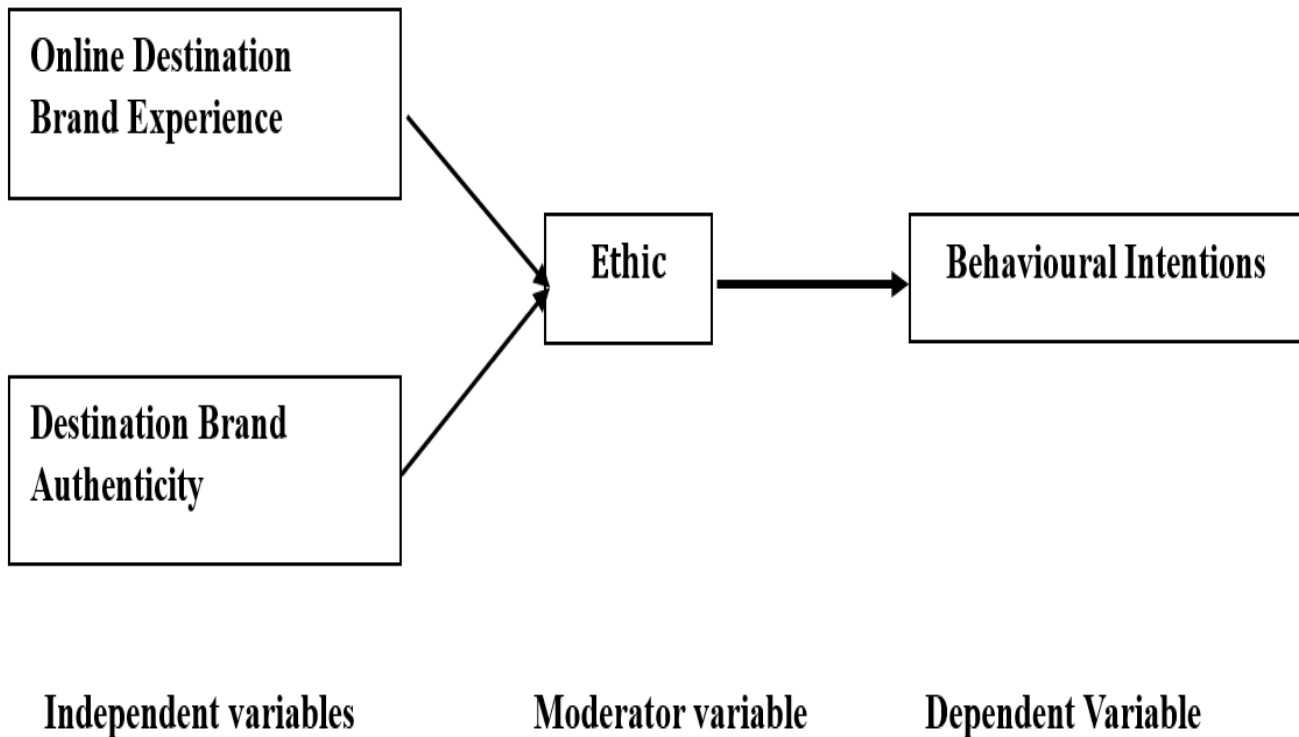


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design Research

This research will adapt a quantitative approach by collecting data from tourists who have visited tourist destinations in Malaysia and Indonesia and actively use social media, such as official government websites, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, to search for information and view reviews from other tourists about tourist destinations in Malaysia and Indonesia. The target respondents for this research are 315 respondents. The type and source of data in this study are quantitative data, which is primary data obtained through

questionnaires. The sampling technique will be the purposive sampling technique. The data aggregation method for this research will be by sharing questionnaires online using Google Forms.

Analysis Technique

In this study, data analysis will use the Partial Least Square (PLS) approach. PLS is a constituent or version-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). PLS-SEM was established to appraise the study framework through two steps. First, the external model (measurement) is run for reliability and validity, including the appraisal of indicator reliability, inside consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Second, the inner (structural) design will be appraised, and the hypothesis will be tested (Hair et al., 2017). Path analysis is conducted by comparing the theoretical and empirical models. The compatibility will result in the acceptance of the theoretical model as an alternative policy that can revise the empirical model. PLS will be used to describe the relationship between dimensions (Parmawati et al., 2018).

- PLS-SEM was chosen for various arguments;
 - More precisely, the conceptual structure is complex in terms of the arrangement of the constructs studied and the pathways constructed among them (direct correlation);
 - PLS-SEM is also a commonly used SEM technique for estimating behaviour concepts and
 - This is a fitness method that is not hindered by the total and allocation of construct indicators belonging to the study model (Henseler et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, digital marketing has emerged as a critical resilience factor in cultural heritage tourism, playing a multifaceted role in promoting, preserving, and enhancing the value of cultural assets. By leveraging digital platforms and tools, stakeholders can reach wider audiences, create engaging experiences, and foster a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage.

The ability of digital marketing to adapt to changing circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has further solidified its importance in ensuring the sustainability of cultural heritage tourism. It has enabled destinations to maintain visibility, engage with potential visitors, and even generate revenue during challenging times. Moreover, digital marketing has facilitated collaboration between various stakeholders, fostering a sense of shared responsibility in preserving cultural heritage.

However, the effective implementation of digital marketing in cultural heritage tourism requires a thoughtful and strategic approach. It necessitates a deep understanding of the target audience, a commitment to authenticity and accuracy in representation, and a willingness to embrace innovation and experimentation. Additionally, it is crucial to strike a balance between commercial interests and the preservation of cultural values, ensuring that digital marketing efforts do not compromise the integrity of cultural heritage.

In conclusion, digital marketing has proven to be an invaluable asset in the realm of cultural heritage tourism. Its capacity to connect, engage, and inspire has transformed the way cultural heritage is experienced and valued. As technology continues to evolve, the role of digital marketing is only set to expand further, offering new and exciting possibilities for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. By embracing digital marketing as a resilience factor, stakeholders can ensure the long-term sustainability and relevance of cultural heritage tourism in an ever-changing world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude is extended to my colleague and former colleague, Dr. Sitti Aminah Baharruddin and Nor Afidah Azmi, for their continuous support, tolerance, and insightful counsel during this trip. Their

knowledge and perceptions have been extremely helpful in determining the course and methods of this study. I would also like to thank them for their valuable input, thought-provoking conversations, and important participation in the brainstorming sessions. Their viewpoints and criticisms greatly helped me to improve the quality of this research.

I express my gratitude to Universiti Teknologi MARA for furnishing the essential resources and facilities that were indispensable for the conduct of my research. We would especially want to thank the Academic Affairs Department's administrative and support staff for their assistance.

Personally, I want to thank my friends and family for their encouragement, understanding, and support during this journey. They have always been a source of spiritual and emotional support for me. I am incredibly grateful to everyone listed above for their help and encouragement, without which this research would not have been feasible.

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