

AI-Assisted Travel Planning and Psychological Determinants of Wellness Tourism Value among Generation Z in Malaysia

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100700663>

Received: 29 July 2026; Accepted: 03 August 2026; Published: 10 August 2026

ABSTRACT

The increasing adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in tourism has transformed how travellers search for information, evaluate destinations, and plan travel experiences. Simultaneously, the growing popularity of wellness tourism among Generation Z has created a need to understand tourists' value perceptions. This study examines the effects of escapism, place attachment, memorable wellness tourism experience, and hedonic well-being on perceived value while investigating the moderating role of AI-assisted travel planning among Malaysian Generation Z wellness tourists. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed, and data were collected from 414 respondents aged 18 to 28 using a structured online questionnaire distributed through convenience sampling. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and hierarchical regression analysis. Findings revealed that all four psychological factors significantly and positively influenced perceived value. Memorable wellness tourism experience emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.451$, $p < 0.001$), followed by hedonic well-being ($\beta = 0.273$, $p < 0.001$), place attachment ($\beta = 0.214$, $p < 0.001$), and escapism ($\beta = 0.118$, $p < 0.01$). The regression model explained 77.3% of the variance in perceived value ($R^2 = 0.773$). Furthermore, AI-assisted travel planning significantly strengthened the relationships between all four psychological factors and perceived value, indicating that AI-enabled tools enhance tourists' ability to identify, personalise, and maximise wellness tourism experiences. The originality of this study lies in integrating AI-assisted travel planning with psychological determinants of wellness tourism value within a single moderated framework. The findings contribute to the growing AI-driven consumer behaviour literature and offer practical insights for tourism marketers, destination managers, and wellness tourism operators seeking to design personalised, technology-enabled wellness experiences that resonate with Generation Z travellers.

Keywords: AI-Assisted Travel Planning, Wellness Tourism, Generation Z, Perceived Value, Consumer Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

The global wellness tourism industry has experienced substantial growth over the past decade as consumers increasingly prioritise health, well-being, and quality of life in their travel decisions. According to the Global Wellness Institute (2025), the global wellness economy reached approximately USD 6.3 trillion in 2023 and is projected to exceed USD 9.9 trillion by 2029. Wellness tourism emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors within the industry, generating an estimated USD 830 billion in tourism expenditures worldwide in 2023 and expected to surpass USD 1.3 trillion by 2028. This rapid expansion reflects changing consumer preferences towards travel experiences that promote physical health, mental wellness, emotional restoration, and personal development. As a result, wellness tourism has evolved from a niche market into a significant segment of the global tourism industry (Dini & Pencarelli, 2021).

Among contemporary travel markets, Generation Z has become an increasingly influential consumer segment (Lu, Pongsakornrungsilp, Klamsaengsai, Ketkaew, Tonsakunthaweeteam & Li, 2025). Born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z represents the first generation to grow up entirely in a digital environment and is characterized by high levels of technological engagement, social connectivity, and information accessibility. Recent studies indicate that Generation Z travelers prioritize authentic experiences, self-development, emotional well-being, and meaningful travel encounters when selecting destinations (Ivancsóné Horváth, Kupi, & Kundi, 2025; Ivasciuc et al., 2025). Compared to previous generations, they are more likely to seek experiences that support personal fulfillment and mental wellness while simultaneously relying on digital platforms for travel planning and decision-making. Consequently, wellness tourism has become increasingly attractive to Generation Z travelers due to its emphasis on stress reduction, mindfulness, self-care, and emotional balance.

A study by Florido-Benítez and del Alcázar Martínez (2024) mentioned that the growing reliance on digital technologies has also transformed the tourism decision-making process. Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly integrated into travel planning through AI-powered chatbots, virtual assistants, recommendation systems, itinerary generators, and personalised travel platforms (Koo, Shin, Gretzel & Xiang, 2025). Recent developments in generative AI technologies such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and other AI-assisted applications have further enhanced travellers' ability to search for information, compare alternatives, generate travel itineraries, and personalise travel experiences according to individual preferences (Balakrishnan, Dwivedi, Malik & Baabdullah, 2021; Huang & Rust, 2021). AI-assisted travel planning has therefore emerged as an important component of contemporary tourism behavior, particularly among younger travelers who demonstrate high levels of digital literacy and technology adoption (Koo, Shin, Gretzel & Xiang, 2025).

Within the tourism industry, AI applications are increasingly utilised to improve customer engagement, support personalised recommendations, and enhance consumer decision-making processes. By analyzing consumer preferences and behavioral patterns, AI technologies enable tourism organizations to provide customized travel experiences that align with travelers' specific needs and motivations (Mariani & Baggio, 2022). Recent studies suggest that Generation Z travellers are among the most frequent users of AI-powered travel tools because they value convenience, personalisation, and instant access to information when making travel-related decisions (Ivasciuc et al., 2025). Consequently, understanding how AI-assisted travel planning interacts with tourists' psychological motivations has become increasingly important for tourism marketers and destination managers seeking to create personalised customer experiences.

In the context of wellness tourism, psychological factors play a crucial role in influencing tourists' evaluations of travel experiences (Karagianni et al., 2025). Wellness tourists are often motivated by desires for relaxation, emotional restoration, self-discovery, and overall well-being. Previous studies have identified escapism, place attachment, memorable tourism experiences, and hedonic well-being as important determinants of tourists' perceptions and behavioural outcomes (Karagianni et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2023; Sthapit et al., 2025). Escapism enables individuals to temporarily disengage from daily stressors and routine responsibilities, while place attachment reflects the emotional bonds individuals form with destinations. Similarly, memorable wellness tourism experiences contribute to long-term positive recollections of travel experiences (Sthapit, Björk & Coudounaris, 2022), whereas hedonic well-being captures feelings of enjoyment, happiness, and emotional satisfaction derived from tourism activities (Joshnloo, 2025). Collectively, these factors influence how tourists evaluate the benefits received from their travel experiences.

Perceived value has long been recognized as a key construct in consumer behavior and tourism research because it reflects tourists' overall assessment of benefits obtained relative to costs incurred. In wellness tourism, perceived value extends beyond functional and economic considerations to include emotional, psychological, and experiential benefits. Tourists increasingly evaluate wellness tourism experiences based on their ability to improve well-being, provide meaningful experiences, and generate positive emotional outcomes (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021; Vada & Prentice, 2022). Therefore, understanding the factors that contribute to perceived value is essential for tourism providers seeking to attract and retain Generation Z travellers in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Despite growing interest in wellness tourism and AI-enabled travel technologies, several research gaps remain. First, existing wellness tourism studies have primarily focused on tourist satisfaction, loyalty, destination image,

and behavioural intentions (Karagianni et al., 2025), with relatively limited attention given to perceived value as a key outcome variable. Second, while previous studies have examined psychological factors and AI-related technologies independently, limited research has investigated how AI-assisted travel planning influences the relationship between psychological determinants and perceived value in a wellness tourism context. Third, empirical evidence focusing specifically on Generation Z travelers remains relatively scarce, particularly in emerging tourism markets such as Malaysia, where wellness tourism development continues to gain momentum.

Addressing these gaps is important because AI-assisted travel planning may strengthen tourists' ability to identify destinations, experiences, and wellness activities that align with their psychological needs and personal preferences. Through personalised recommendations and intelligent information processing, AI technologies may enhance tourists' experiences and influence how psychological motivations translate into perceptions of value (Chu & Liu, 2026). Understanding these relationships can provide valuable insights for tourism organisations seeking to leverage AI-enabled technologies to improve customer engagement, market segmentation, and personalised service delivery.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of escapism, place attachment, memorable wellness tourism experience, and hedonic well-being on perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists in Malaysia. In addition, the study investigates the moderating role of AI-assisted travel planning in strengthening the relationships between these psychological factors and perceived value. The findings contribute to the growing literature on AI-driven consumer behaviour and wellness tourism while providing practical implications for tourism marketers, destination managers, and wellness tourism operators seeking to develop more personalised and value-enhancing experiences for Generation Z travellers.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Perceived Value in Wellness Tourism

Perceived value has long been recognized as a central concept in consumer behavior and tourism research because it influences tourists' evaluations, satisfaction, loyalty, and future behavioral intentions (Gan, Zheng, Li, Li & Shen, 2023). Ivancsóné Horváth, Kupi, and Kundi (2025) defined perceived value as a consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product or service based on perceptions of what is received relative to what is given. In tourism contexts, perceived value extends beyond monetary considerations to encompass emotional, experiential, social, and psychological benefits derived from travel experiences. Consequently, tourists may perceive high value even when tourism products are relatively expensive, provided that the overall benefits exceed the associated costs.

The importance of perceived value has become increasingly evident in wellness tourism. Unlike conventional tourism, wellness tourism focuses on enhancing physical health, emotional well-being, stress management, and personal development. Therefore, tourists often evaluate wellness experiences based on intangible outcomes such as relaxation, emotional restoration, happiness, and self-improvement rather than solely on functional attributes. Carvache-Franco et al. (2021) found that perceived value significantly influenced tourists' behavioural intentions and future travel decisions. Similarly, Vada and Prentice (2022) reported that tourism experiences that improve well-being positively affect tourists' evaluations and destination loyalty.

Recent developments in wellness tourism further highlight the importance of value creation. According to the Global Wellness Institute (2025), wellness tourism continues to grow faster than the overall tourism industry, indicating increasing consumer demand for experiences that deliver meaningful personal benefits. This trend is particularly relevant among Generation Z travelers, who place considerable emphasis on authenticity, emotional fulfillment, self-development, and experiential consumption when evaluating tourism products and services (Ivancsóné Horváth, Kupi, & Kundi, 2025; Ivasciuc et al., 2025). As a result, understanding the factors that contribute to perceived value has become increasingly important for wellness tourism providers seeking to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving marketplace.

Although previous studies have established perceived value as a key determinant of tourism outcomes, there remains a need to better understand the psychological factors that contribute to value perceptions among

Generation Z wellness tourists. Therefore, this study examines four psychological determinants, namely escapism, place attachment, memorable wellness tourism experience, and hedonic well-being, as antecedents of perceived value.

Escapism and Perceived Value

Escapism refers to an individual's desire to temporarily withdraw from routine activities, responsibilities, and stressful situations through participation in leisure and tourism experiences. Chu and Liu (2026) mentioned that tourism scholars have consistently identified escapism as one of the primary motivations underlying travel behaviour because tourism provides opportunities for individuals to seek relaxation, novelty, and psychological relief from everyday pressures. In contemporary society, increasing work demands, academic pressures, and digital fatigue have intensified individuals' need for temporary psychological escape.

Previous tourism studies have demonstrated that escapism contributes positively to tourists' evaluations of travel experiences. Experiences that enable tourists to disconnect from routine environments and immerse themselves in enjoyable activities often lead to greater emotional satisfaction and more positive perceptions of travel quality. Wellness tourism is particularly relevant in this context because many wellness activities, including mindfulness retreats, forest therapy, meditation programmes, and spa experiences, are specifically designed to facilitate psychological restoration and stress reduction.

Recent evidence suggests that wellness tourism experiences contribute significantly to emotional recovery and subjective well-being. Liu et al. (2023) found that wellness tourism experiences positively influenced tourists' perceptions of well-being and satisfaction by providing opportunities for relaxation and psychological recovery. Similarly, Liu, Zhou, and Sun (2023) highlighted that stress relief and emotional restoration remain among the most important motivations driving participation in wellness tourism activities. These findings suggest that individuals who successfully fulfil their escapist motivations are likely to perceive greater benefits from their travel experiences.

The relevance of escapism is particularly evident among Generation Z travellers. Despite being highly connected through digital technologies, Generation Z faces increasing levels of academic stress, career uncertainty, information overload, and social media-related pressure. Consequently, wellness tourism has emerged as an attractive means of achieving emotional balance and psychological recovery. Because perceived value reflects tourists' evaluation of the benefits received from tourism experiences, travellers who experience successful psychological escape may perceive greater value from wellness tourism participation.

The growing adoption of AI-assisted travel planning may further enhance the role of escapism in wellness tourism experiences. AI-powered recommendation systems, virtual travel assistants, and personalized itinerary generators enable travelers to identify destinations and wellness activities that align with their psychological needs and stress-relief goals (Koo, Shin, Gretzel & Xiang, 2025). For Generation Z travellers, who frequently rely on digital technologies when making travel decisions, AI-assisted travel planning may facilitate the selection of wellness experiences that provide greater opportunities for emotional restoration and temporary escape from daily pressures. Consequently, travellers who utilise AI-enabled planning tools may derive greater value from wellness tourism experiences that successfully fulfil their escapist motivations.

However, while previous studies have explored the role of escapism in influencing satisfaction and well-being, limited research has examined its direct relationship with perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Escapism positively influences perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists.

Place Attachment and Perceived Value

Place attachment refers to the emotional and psychological bond that individuals develop with a destination through meaningful interactions and experiences. It reflects feelings of belonging, identity, familiarity, and emotional connection toward a specific place (Ramkissoon et al., 2024). Tourism researchers have increasingly recognised place attachment as an important factor influencing destination evaluations because emotional bonds

often shape how individuals interpret and remember tourism experiences. Previous studies consistently demonstrate that place attachment contributes positively to tourism outcomes. Dandotiya and Aggarwal (2022) argued that individuals who develop stronger emotional connections with destinations tend to report more favourable evaluations of their experiences. Similarly, Pratminingsih, Johan, and Salsabil (2022) found that place attachment positively influences destination loyalty and revisit intentions. More recently, Ramkissoon et al. (2024) concluded that place attachment remains one of the most influential predictors of positive behavioural outcomes in tourism settings.

The significance of place attachment may be particularly pronounced within wellness tourism. Wellness destinations often emphasise natural environments, peaceful surroundings, and opportunities for self-reflection. Such characteristics encourage visitors to form emotional bonds with destinations, as they associate these locations with positive emotions, relaxation, and personal well-being. Consequently, tourists who feel emotionally connected to wellness destinations may perceive greater benefits from their experiences and develop stronger evaluations of tourism value.

AI-assisted travel planning may also contribute to the development of place attachment among Generation Z travellers. Through personalised recommendations and intelligent destination matching, AI technologies can help travellers identify destinations that correspond with their personal interests, lifestyle preferences, and wellness goals. Such personalised destination selection may increase the likelihood of meaningful interactions with places and strengthen emotional connections with destinations. As Generation Z travellers increasingly rely on AI-enabled technologies during travel planning, AI-assisted travel planning may enhance the influence of place attachment on perceived value by facilitating more personally relevant tourism experiences.

Generation Z travellers also demonstrate a growing preference for authentic and meaningful experiences that create a sense of connection and belonging. Rather than merely visiting destinations, they increasingly seek experiences that generate emotional significance and personal relevance (Ivancsóné Horváth, Kupi, & Kundi, 2025). Therefore, place attachment may play an important role in shaping how this generation evaluates wellness tourism experiences. Despite growing evidence linking place attachment to satisfaction and loyalty, few studies have specifically examined its influence on perceived value in the context of wellness tourism. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Place attachment positively influences perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists.

Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience and Perceived Value

The concept of memorable tourism experiences has received considerable attention in tourism literature due to the increasing importance of experiential consumption (Brochado, Veríssimo & De Oliveira, 2022). According to Kim et al. (2012), a memorable tourism experience is positively remembered and recalled after the event. Unlike routine service encounters, memorable experiences leave lasting impressions that continue to influence tourists' attitudes and evaluations long after the trip ends (Sthapit, Björk & Coudounaris, 2022).

The Experience Economy perspective suggests that consumers increasingly value experiences that create emotional engagement, personal meaning, and unique memories (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007; Marciszewska & Wanagos, 2024). This trend is particularly relevant within wellness tourism because wellness experiences often involve self-discovery, emotional restoration, personal transformation, and meaningful interactions. Such experiences are likely to remain memorable and contribute significantly to tourists' overall evaluations of their travel experiences.

Empirical evidence consistently supports the importance of memorable experiences in tourism. Kim (2018) reported that memorable tourism experiences significantly influence tourists' behavioural intentions and loyalty. Similarly, Brochado, Veríssimo, and De Oliveira (2022) found that memorable experiences shape tourists' future evaluations and travel decisions. More recently, Sthapit et al. (2025) identified memorable wellness tourism experiences as important outcomes of wellness tourism participation and highlighted their role in influencing tourists' emotional responses and behavioural outcomes.

The importance of memorable experiences is particularly relevant for Generation Z travellers. Research suggests that Generation Z actively seeks unique, authentic, and meaningful experiences that can be shared with others and integrated into their personal identities (Ivancsóné Horváth, Kupi, & Kundi, 2025). Social media platforms further amplify the significance of memorable experiences because travellers frequently document and share experiences that generate emotional impact and personal significance. Consequently, memorable wellness tourism experiences are likely to contribute strongly to tourists' perceptions of value.

The emergence of AI-assisted travel planning has created new opportunities to enhance memorable tourism experiences. AI-powered travel technologies can analyze travelers' preferences and generate personalized recommendations that increase the likelihood of engaging in meaningful and emotionally rewarding wellness activities. For Generation Z travellers, who are highly receptive to personalised digital experiences, AI-assisted travel planning may help identify unique wellness experiences that create stronger memories and emotional engagement (Koo, Shin, Gretzel & Xiang, 2025). Therefore, AI-enabled personalisation may amplify the positive influence of memorable wellness tourism experiences on perceived value.

Although previous studies have established the importance of memorable tourism experiences in shaping satisfaction and loyalty, fewer have examined their impact on perceived value in wellness tourism settings. Given that memorable experiences create lasting psychological benefits, they are expected to enhance tourists' evaluations of value. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Memorable wellness tourism experience positively influences perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists.

Hedonic Well-Being and Perceived Value

Hedonic well-being refers to an individual's experience of happiness, pleasure, enjoyment, and positive emotions. Unlike eudaimonic well-being, which emphasizes meaning and self-realization, hedonic well-being focuses on emotional satisfaction and pleasurable experiences (Joshnloo, 2025). In tourism settings, hedonic well-being is reflected through feelings of enjoyment, relaxation, excitement, and emotional fulfilment generated during travel experiences.

Wellness tourism is inherently associated with well-being enhancement because its primary objective is to improve individuals' physical, mental, and emotional conditions. Consequently, positive emotional outcomes are often regarded as important indicators of successful wellness tourism experiences. Previous studies have shown that tourists who experience higher well-being tend to evaluate their tourism experiences more positively. Vada and Prentice (2022) found that tourism experiences that enhance well-being positively influence destination loyalty and future behavioural intentions. Similarly, Liu et al. (2023) reported that wellness tourism experiences contribute significantly to tourists' emotional well-being and satisfaction.

The growing emphasis on mental health and emotional well-being among Generation Z further underscores the importance of hedonic well-being in tourism decision-making. Recent studies indicate that younger travelers increasingly prioritize experiences that improve happiness, emotional balance, and overall quality of life (Ivasciuc et al., 2025). Therefore, wellness tourism experiences that successfully generate positive emotions are likely to be perceived as providing greater value (Dini & Pencarelli, 2021).

AI-assisted travel planning may further strengthen the relationship between hedonic well-being and perceived value (Marino-Romero, Robina-Ramírez, Pavón-Pérez & Roets, 2025). By providing personalized recommendations based on travelers' preferences and behavioral patterns, AI technologies can help individuals select wellness experiences that maximize enjoyment, relaxation, and emotional fulfilment. This capability is particularly relevant for Generation Z travellers, who frequently utilise digital technologies when planning leisure activities. Consequently, AI-assisted travel planning may increase the extent to which positive emotional outcomes translate into stronger perceptions of tourism value.

Despite growing interest in well-being research, few studies have directly examined the relationship between hedonic well-being and perceived value in the context of wellness tourism. As perceived value reflects tourists'

assessment of the benefits gained from tourism experiences, positive emotional outcomes are expected to contribute significantly to value perceptions. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Hedonic well-being positively influences perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists.

AI-Assisted Travel Planning as a Moderator

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence into tourism has fundamentally transformed how travellers search for information, evaluate alternatives, and plan travel experiences (García-Madurga & Grilló-Méndez, 2023). AI-assisted travel planning refers to the use of AI-powered technologies, including conversational chatbots, recommendation systems, virtual assistants, itinerary generators, and generative AI applications, to support travel-related decision-making (Koo, Shin, Gretzel & Xiang, 2025). These technologies enable travelers to access personalized recommendations, process large volumes of information efficiently, and customize travel experiences according to individual preferences (Balakrishnan, Dwivedi, Malik & Baabdullah, 2021; Huang & Rust, 2021).

Recent advancements in AI technologies have significantly improved the personalisation capabilities of tourism service providers. AI-powered systems can analyze user preferences, behavioral patterns, travel histories, and demographic characteristics to generate recommendations that align with individual needs. Mariani and Baggio (2022) argued that AI and data analytics technologies have become increasingly important in enhancing customer experiences and supporting more effective tourism marketing strategies. Consequently, AI-assisted travel planning is increasingly recognised as a valuable tool for improving travel decision-making and customer satisfaction.

The relevance of AI-assisted travel planning is particularly evident among Generation Z travellers. As digital natives, Generation Z consumers are highly comfortable with technology-enabled decision-making and frequently utilise digital platforms when planning travel experiences. Recent studies indicate that younger travellers increasingly rely on AI-powered tools to search for destinations, compare tourism products, and personalise travel itineraries (Ivancsóné Horváth, Kupi, & Kundi, 2025; Ivasciuc et al., 2025). These technologies reduce information search costs while simultaneously increasing the likelihood that travellers identify experiences that align with their psychological needs and preferences.

From a theoretical perspective, AI-assisted travel planning may strengthen the influence of psychological factors on perceived value. Travellers motivated by escapism may utilise AI-powered recommendation systems to identify destinations that facilitate stress relief and emotional restoration. Similarly, AI-generated recommendations may help tourists discover destinations that foster stronger emotional attachment and provide more meaningful experiences. In addition, AI-assisted personalization may enhance the likelihood of selecting wellness activities that maximize enjoyment and emotional well-being. Therefore, AI technologies may amplify the benefits associated with psychological motivations, thereby strengthening perceived value.

Although previous studies have separately examined tourism psychology and AI-enabled travel technologies, limited research has investigated how AI-assisted travel planning interacts with psychological determinants of tourism value. Addressing this gap is particularly important given the growing reliance on AI technologies among Generation Z travellers. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5a: AI-assisted travel planning positively moderates the relationship between escapism and perceived value.

H5b: AI-assisted travel planning positively moderates the relationship between place attachment and perceived value.

H5c: AI-assisted travel planning positively moderates the relationship between memorable wellness tourism experience and perceived value.

H5d: AI-assisted travel planning positively moderates the relationship between hedonic well-being and perceived value.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature, this study proposes that escapism, place attachment, memorable wellness tourism experience, and hedonic well-being positively influence perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists. Furthermore, AI-assisted travel planning is proposed to strengthen these relationships by enabling travelers to identify, personalize, and optimize wellness tourism experiences that align with their psychological needs and preferences. The proposed framework, as shown in Figure 1, provides an integrated perspective on the interactions among psychological determinants, AI-enabled travel planning, and wellness tourism value.

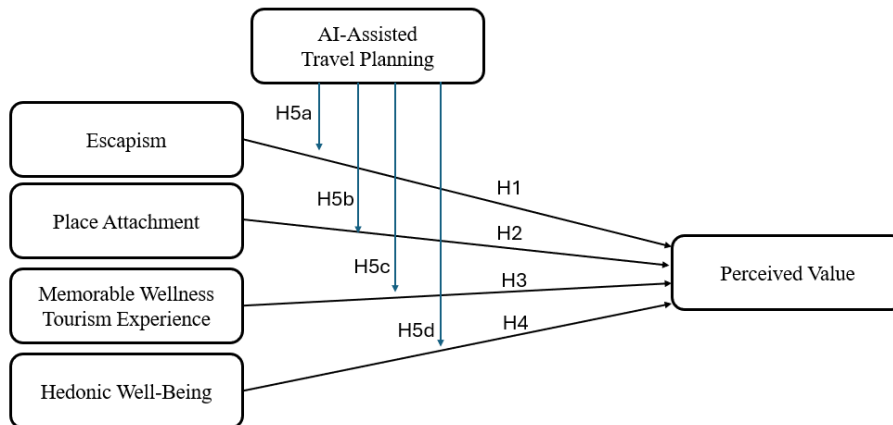


Figure 1: Conceptual framework developed from the literature review.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the influence of psychological determinants on perceived value and the moderating role of AI-assisted travel planning among Generation Z wellness tourists in Malaysia. A quantitative approach is appropriate because it enables the systematic examination of relationships among variables and facilitates hypothesis testing through statistical analysis. Quantitative methods are widely employed in business, management, tourism, and consumer behaviour research due to their ability to provide objective, reliable, and generalisable findings.

A cross-sectional survey design was utilised whereby data were collected from respondents at a single point in time. The conceptual framework consists of four independent variables, namely escapism, place attachment, memorable wellness tourism experience, and hedonic well-being, one moderating variable, namely AI-assisted travel planning, and one dependent variable, namely perceived value. The proposed relationships were tested using correlation, multiple regression, and hierarchical regression analyses.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised Generation Z travellers in Malaysia who had previously participated in wellness tourism activities. Generation Z generally refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012. For this study, respondents aged 18 to 28 were selected because they represent the economically active segment of Generation Z and are increasingly involved in independent travel planning and tourism decision-making. To ensure respondents possessed relevant experience, participation was restricted to individuals who had previously engaged in wellness tourism activities such as spa retreats, wellness resorts, meditation programmes, yoga retreats, nature-based wellness activities, health-oriented holidays, and other tourism experiences designed to enhance physical, mental, or emotional well-being.

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed due to its practicality in reaching respondents who fulfilled the screening criteria. The questionnaire was distributed through online platforms, social media

communities, travel-related groups, and university networks. A total of 414 usable responses were obtained and retained for analysis. According to Hair and Sabol (2025), a minimum sample size of 200 is generally considered adequate for multivariate statistical analyses. Therefore, the sample size of 414 exceeded the recommended threshold and was considered sufficient to support the statistical procedures employed in this study.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The online survey approach was selected because Generation Z travellers are highly active users of digital technologies and online communication platforms. Prior to participation, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, the anonymity of their participation, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Screening questions were included at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that participants met the study requirements: belonging to Generation Z and having prior experience in wellness tourism. Respondents were required to provide informed consent before proceeding to the questionnaire. Data collection lasted 8 weeks, and only completed questionnaires were included in the final analysis.

Research Instrument

The research instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire adapted from established scales in tourism, consumer behaviour, well-being, and technology adoption literature. Minor wording modifications were made to ensure suitability within the Malaysian context of wellness tourism. The questionnaire comprised three sections.

Section A collected respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, education level, monthly income, occupation, travel frequency, and prior participation in wellness tourism. Section B measured the independent variables and the moderating variable. The independent variables included escapism, place attachment, memorable wellness tourism experience, and hedonic well-being. The moderating variable, AI-assisted travel planning, was measured using four items assessing respondents' utilisation of AI-powered technologies such as travel recommendation systems, AI chatbots, itinerary generators, and personalised travel planning applications. Section C measured perceived value as the dependent variable. The construct was assessed using five items capturing respondents' overall evaluation of the benefits received from wellness tourism experiences relative to the resources invested. All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The Likert scale was selected due to its widespread application in behavioural and management research and its ability to capture varying levels of respondent agreement.

Pilot Study

A pilot study involving 30 respondents was conducted prior to the main survey to assess the clarity, readability, and reliability of the questionnaire. The pilot respondents met the same eligibility criteria as the main study participants. Feedback from the pilot study indicated that the questionnaire items were easily understood and relevant to the study context. Several minor revisions were made to improve wording clarity and reduce ambiguity. The pilot study also provided preliminary evidence of the measurement scales' reliability through Cronbach's Alpha analysis.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. According to Hair et al. (2022), Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.70 indicate satisfactory reliability, while values above 0.60 remain acceptable in exploratory studies. As presented in Table 1, all constructs demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability. Escapism recorded the lowest reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.637$), while perceived value recorded the highest ($\alpha = 0.906$). These results indicate that all constructs possessed satisfactory internal consistency and were suitable for subsequent statistical analyses.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis (Pilot study results, n = 30)

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Escapism	3	0.637
Place Attachment	4	0.707
Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience (MWTE)	4	0.831
Hedonic Well-Being (HWB)	4	0.826
AI-Assisted Travel Planning	4	0.861
Perceived Value (PV)	5	0.906

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29. Prior to hypothesis testing, data screening procedures were conducted to identify missing values, incomplete responses, and outliers. Only complete and usable questionnaires were retained. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and to examine the distributions of the study variables. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe demographic profiles, while means and standard deviations were calculated for all constructs.

Subsequently, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of relationships among variables. To test Hypotheses H1–H4, multiple regression analysis was performed. The regression model is expressed as follows:

$$PV = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ESC + \beta_2 PA + \beta_3 MWTE + \beta_4 HWB + \varepsilon$$

Where: PV = Perceived Value; ESC = Escapism; PA = Place Attachment; MWTE = Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience; HWB = Hedonic Well-Being; β_0 = Constant; β_1 – β_4 = Regression Coefficients; ε = Error Term.

To test the proposed moderating effects (Hypotheses H5a–H5d), hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. In the first stage, the independent variables (escapism, place attachment, memorable wellness tourism experience, and hedonic well-being) together with the moderating variable, AI-assisted travel planning (AITP), were entered into the regression model. Prior to creating the interaction terms, all predictor variables were mean-centred to minimise potential multicollinearity issues. In the second stage, four interaction terms were generated by multiplying the mean-centred moderator with each mean-centred independent variable, namely $ESC \times AITP$, $PA \times AITP$, $MWTE \times AITP$, and $HWB \times AITP$. A significant interaction coefficient indicates a moderating effect and shows whether AI-assisted travel planning strengthens the relationship between the psychological determinant and perceived value.

To ensure the robustness of the regression results, multicollinearity diagnostics were assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values. Following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2022), VIF values below 5.0 and tolerance values above 0.20 indicate that multicollinearity is not a serious concern. The diagnostic results confirmed that the assumptions of regression analysis were satisfactorily met.

Overall, the combination of descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, and hierarchical regression analysis provided a comprehensive assessment of the relationships among the study variables and enabled the testing of both the direct and moderating effects proposed in the conceptual framework. These analytical procedures effectively addressed the study objectives

and provided empirical evidence regarding the influence of psychological determinants and AI-assisted travel planning on perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists in Malaysia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

A total of 414 usable questionnaires were collected and analysed. The findings indicate that female respondents constituted most of the sample (58.0%), while male respondents accounted for 42.0%. In terms of age distribution, most respondents were between 21 and 24 years old (46.4%), followed by those aged 18 to 20 (29.7%) and 25 to 28 (23.9%). Most respondents possessed a diploma or bachelor's degree qualification (67.4%), reflecting the educational characteristics of Generation Z travellers. Regarding travel behaviour, approximately 71.0% of respondents reported participating in wellness tourism activities at least once or twice annually, while 29.0% indicated more frequent participation. This finding suggests that wellness tourism is becoming increasingly popular among Generation Z travellers in Malaysia.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were conducted to examine respondents' perceptions of the study variables. As shown in Table 2, all variables recorded mean scores above 3.80, indicating generally positive perceptions among respondents.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Escapism (ESC)	3.92	0.71
Place Attachment (PA)	4.01	0.68
Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience (MWTE)	4.12	0.63
Hedonic Well-Being (HWB)	4.05	0.66
AI-Assisted Travel Planning (AITP)	3.88	0.74
Perceived Value (PV)	4.08	0.61
Valid N (listwise) = 414		

Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.63$), suggesting that respondents generally perceived their wellness tourism experiences as meaningful and memorable. This was followed by Perceived Value ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.61$) and Hedonic Well-Being ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.66$). Place Attachment recorded a mean score of 4.01 ($SD = 0.68$), while Escapism obtained a mean score of 3.92 ($SD = 0.71$). AI-Assisted Travel Planning recorded a mean score of 3.88 ($SD = 0.74$), indicating a moderate-to-high level of AI utilisation among Generation Z travellers when planning wellness tourism experiences.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the study variables. The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that all variables were positively and significantly correlated with perceived value. Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience exhibited the strongest relationship with perceived value ($r = .801$, $p < .01$), followed by Hedonic Well-Being ($r = .715$, $p < .01$), AI-Assisted Travel Planning ($r = .647$, $p < .01$), Place Attachment ($r = .618$, $p < .01$), and Escapism ($r = .563$, $p < .01$). These results provide preliminary evidence that all variables are positively associated with perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	ESC	PA	MWTE	HWB	AITP	PV
ESC	1.000					
PA	.462**	1.000				
MWTE	.511**	.578**	1.000			
HWB	.495**	.527**	.634**	1.000		
AITP	.401**	.433**	.518**	.476**	1.000	
PV	.563**	.618**	.801**	.715**	.647**	1.000

Note: **p < 0.01.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the influence of escapism, place attachment, memorable wellness tourism experience, and hedonic well-being on perceived value. The overall regression model, as in Table 4, was statistically significant, $F(4, 409) = 347.612$, $p < .001$, explaining 77.3% of the variance in perceived value ($R^2 = .773$). The findings indicate that all four psychological determinants significantly influenced perceived value.

Table 4: Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value	Sig.
0.879	0.773	0.771	347.612	0.000

In Table 5, Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience emerged as the strongest predictor of perceived value ($\beta = .451$, $p < .001$), followed by Hedonic Well-Being ($\beta = .273$, $p < .001$), Place Attachment ($\beta = .214$, $p < .001$), and Escapism ($\beta = .118$, $p = .006$). The results suggest that Generation Z travellers place greater emphasis on memorable and emotionally rewarding wellness experiences when evaluating tourism value. While escapism remains significant, experiential and emotional outcomes appear to exert stronger influences on perceived value.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Results

Predictor	Standardized β	t-value	p-value	Decision
Escapism (ESC)	0.118	2.764	0.006	Supported
Place Attachment (PA)	0.214	4.783	0.000	Supported
Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience (MWTE)	0.451	9.841	0.000	Supported
Hedonic Well-Being (HWB)	0.273	5.927	0.000	Supported

Moderating Effect of AI-Assisted Travel Planning

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine whether AI-Assisted Travel Planning moderates the relationships between the psychological determinants and perceived value. Interaction terms were created by multiplying AI-Assisted Travel Planning with each independent variable.

Table 6: Regression Analysis for the Moderating Effect

Interaction Term	Standardized β	t-value	p-value	Decision
ESC $\times$ AITP	0.122	2.711	0.007	Supported
PA $\times$ AITP	0.148	3.208	0.001	Supported
MWTE $\times$ AITP	0.231	4.916	0.000	Supported
HWB $\times$ AITP	0.174	3.786	0.000	Supported

The results in Table 6 indicate that all interaction terms were statistically significant, supporting the moderating role of AI-Assisted Travel Planning. The strongest moderating effect was observed in the relationship between Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience and Perceived Value ($\beta = .231$, $p < .001$), followed by Hedonic Well-Being ($\beta = .174$, $p < .001$), Place Attachment ($\beta = .148$, $p = .001$), and Escapism ($\beta = .122$, $p = .007$).

These findings suggest that AI-assisted travel planning strengthens the influence of psychological determinants on perceived value. Travellers who utilise AI-powered planning tools are more likely to identify wellness destinations, activities, and experiences that align with their personal preferences and psychological needs. Consequently, AI technologies enhance the benefits derived from wellness tourism experiences and increase perceived value.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 7 presents the summary of the hypothesis testing results. The findings indicate that all proposed hypotheses were supported. Escapism, place attachment, memorable wellness tourism experience, and hedonic well-being were found to have significant positive effects on perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists. In addition, AI-assisted travel planning significantly moderated the relationships between all psychological determinants and perceived value. These findings suggest that both psychological factors and AI-enabled travel planning contribute to enhancing wellness tourism value among Generation Z travellers in Malaysia.

Table 7: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standardized β	p-value	Decision
H1	Escapism $\rightarrow$ Perceived Value	0.118	0.006	Supported
H2	Place Attachment $\rightarrow$ Perceived Value	0.214	0.000	Supported
H3	Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience $\rightarrow$ Perceived Value	0.451	0.000	Supported
H4	Hedonic Well-Being $\rightarrow$ Perceived Value	0.273	0.000	Supported
H5a	AI-Assisted Travel Planning moderates Escapism $\rightarrow$ Perceived Value	0.122	0.007	Supported
H5b	AI-Assisted Travel Planning moderates Place Attachment $\rightarrow$ Perceived Value	0.148	0.001	Supported
H5c	AI-Assisted Travel Planning moderates Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience $\rightarrow$ Perceived Value	0.231	0.000	Supported
H5d	AI-Assisted Travel Planning moderates Hedonic Well-Being $\rightarrow$ Perceived Value	0.174	0.000	Supported

The results demonstrate that all direct and moderating relationships proposed in the conceptual framework were statistically significant. Among the direct effects, memorable wellness tourism experience emerged as the strongest predictor of perceived value. Regarding the moderating effects, AI-assisted travel planning exerted the strongest influence on the relationship between memorable wellness tourism experience and perceived value. These findings provide empirical support for the proposed framework and highlight the importance of integrating psychological determinants and AI-enabled travel planning in understanding wellness tourism value among Generation Z travellers.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From a tourism perspective, the findings demonstrate that psychological factors remain fundamental drivers of perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists. Memorable wellness tourism experience emerged as the strongest predictor of perceived value, indicating that tourists place substantial importance on meaningful, engaging, and emotionally rewarding experiences when evaluating wellness tourism offerings. This finding supports the notion that modern tourists increasingly seek transformational and experience-based travel rather than merely consuming tourism products and services. For wellness tourism providers, creating unique and memorable experiences through personalised wellness activities, authentic destination encounters, and emotional engagement opportunities is therefore essential for enhancing tourists' perceptions of value.

The significant influence of hedonic well-being further suggests that wellness tourism experiences that promote happiness, relaxation, enjoyment, and emotional fulfillment are more likely to generate favorable evaluations among Generation Z travelers (Dini & Pencarelli, 2021). This finding reinforces the core objective of wellness tourism: improving tourists' physical and psychological well-being. As younger travellers increasingly prioritise mental health, self-care, and emotional balance, wellness tourism operators should focus on designing experiences that enhance tourists' emotional satisfaction and overall quality of life.

Similarly, the positive effects of place attachment and escapism highlight the importance of destination environments in shaping perceptions of tourism value. Wellness destinations that successfully foster emotional connections and offer opportunities for psychological escape from daily routines are more likely to elicit positive evaluations from visitors. Destination managers should therefore emphasize authentic local experiences, nature-based attractions, cultural immersion, and restorative environments to strengthen tourists' emotional bonds with destinations and enhance perceived value.

From a business and management perspective, the findings provide valuable insights into how tourism organisations can leverage artificial intelligence to improve customer value creation and strengthen competitive advantage (García-Madurga & Grilló-Méndez, 2023). The significant moderating role of AI-assisted travel planning demonstrates that AI technologies are not merely operational tools but strategic resources that enhance customer decision-making and experience personalisation. By analyzing customer preferences, behavioral patterns, and travel motivations, AI-powered recommendation systems, virtual assistants, and itinerary generators enable tourism businesses to deliver more relevant, customized experiences. The strongest moderating effect observed between memorable wellness tourism experience and perceived value suggests that AI-driven personalisation can significantly improve the alignment between customer expectations and tourism offerings. This finding highlights the growing importance of consumer analytics in the tourism industry. Through AI-enabled data analysis, tourism organisations can better understand customer needs, predict travel preferences, and design tailored wellness experiences that maximise customer satisfaction and perceived value.

The findings also support the growing digital transformation agenda within the tourism industry. As Generation Z consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms and AI-powered tools during travel planning, tourism organisations must integrate intelligent technologies into their marketing, customer relationship management, and service delivery processes. The adoption of AI-assisted travel planning can enhance customer engagement, improve service quality, and support data-driven decision-making, ultimately contributing to organisational performance and long-term competitiveness. Furthermore, the study contributes to the emerging intersection between tourism management and business intelligence by demonstrating how psychological motivations and AI-enabled technologies jointly influence consumer value creation. The results suggest that successful tourism organisations should combine customer-centric experience design with AI-driven analytics to develop more

personalised, meaningful, and value-enhancing tourism experiences. Such an approach enables tourism businesses to respond more effectively to changing consumer expectations while simultaneously strengthening destination competitiveness and sustainable business growth.

Overall, the findings indicate that the future success of wellness tourism businesses will depend not only on the quality of tourism experiences offered but also on their ability to strategically utilise artificial intelligence to understand, personalise, and optimise customer experiences. By integrating tourism experience management with AI-driven consumer analytics, organisations can create superior customer value and establish a stronger competitive position within the rapidly expanding wellness tourism market.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study investigated the influence of psychological determinants on perceived value among Generation Z wellness tourists in Malaysia and examined the moderating role of AI-assisted travel planning. The findings provide empirical evidence that psychological factors remain important drivers of value creation in wellness tourism, with memorable wellness tourism experience emerging as the most influential determinant. The results also demonstrate that AI-assisted travel planning strengthens the influence of psychological factors on perceived value, highlighting the growing importance of AI-enabled technologies in contemporary tourism decision-making.

The study contributes to the literature by integrating wellness tourism psychology and AI-assisted travel planning within a single framework. While previous studies have largely examined tourism experiences and technology adoption separately, this research demonstrates that AI technologies can enhance the value creation process by facilitating more personalised and relevant travel experiences. The findings, therefore, extend current understanding of AI-driven consumer behavior and support the application of AI-enabled solutions in tourism marketing and customer engagement. From a practical perspective, tourism organisations should prioritise the development of memorable and emotionally meaningful wellness experiences while leveraging AI-powered tools to personalise travel planning and destination recommendations. Such initiatives may help tourism providers better address the evolving preferences of Generation Z travellers and strengthen perceived value in an increasingly competitive tourism environment.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focused exclusively on Generation Z travellers in Malaysia and employed a cross-sectional research design, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. The use of non-probability convenience sampling and fully self-reported measures collected through a single survey instrument also raises the possibility of self-selection and common method bias; future studies are encouraged to incorporate probability sampling where feasible and to apply common method bias diagnostics (e.g., Harman's single-factor test) alongside confirmatory factor analysis to further establish construct validity. Future studies may extend the research by examining different generational groups, cultural settings, or tourism segments. Researchers are also encouraged to investigate additional AI-related constructs, such as trust in AI recommendations, AI personalisation, AI-generated travel content, and AI adoption intention, to further explore the role of artificial intelligence in tourism experiences. Furthermore, future studies may incorporate outcome variables such as tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, revisit intention, and electronic word-of-mouth to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour in AI-enabled tourism environments.

In conclusion, the findings underscore the importance of combining psychological insights with AI-assisted travel planning to better understand value creation among Generation Z wellness tourists. As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly embedded within tourism services, its ability to enhance personalised experiences is expected to play a critical role in shaping future wellness tourism consumption.

Author Contributions Statement

Supervision and Conceptualization: Fadhilah Zainal Abidin; Methodology: Nur Hairunnisa Hanaser, Muhammad Za'im Rizal, and Fadhilah Zainal Abidin; Formal Analysis and Investigation: Nur Hairunnisa Hanaser and Muhammad Za'im Rizal; Data Collection: Nur Hairunnisa Hanaser and Muhammad Za'im Rizal;

Writing – Original Draft Preparation: Nur Hairunnisa Hanaser and Muhammad Za'im Rizal; Writing - Review and Editing: Fadhilah Zainal Abidin. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Funding Statement

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in this study. Prior to participation, respondents were informed of the research's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. All participants agreed to participate before completing the questionnaire.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to all respondents who participated in this study for their valuable time and cooperation. The authors are also grateful to the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Melaka, for its continuous support throughout the completion of this research. Special appreciation is extended to all individuals who contributed directly or indirectly to the successful completion of this study.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests relevant to the content of this study.

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