

Reframing Domestic Tourism Performance in Malaysia: The Dominance of Perceptual Drivers over Structural Determinants in Contemporary Tourism Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Domestic tourism has evolved into a key component for sustaining economic resilience in Malaysia, particularly during and following the COVID-19 disruption. Although current research has primarily focused on structural variables including infrastructure, accessibility, and governmental backing, there has been insufficient consideration of the impact of perceptual drivers on tourism performance. This study seeks to investigate the relationship between structural factors (destination accessibility, tourist infrastructure, and government support) and perceptual elements (marketing and promotion, and safety measures) in affecting domestic tourism performance in Malaysia. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was utilized, collecting data from 167 domestic travellers at designated urban tourism destinations. The data were analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis to assess both bivariate connections and the relative explanatory strength of the predictors. The results reveal that while all variables show positive correlations with domestic tourism performance, only marketing and promotion, as well as safety standards, display statistically significant impacts when evaluated concurrently. Conversely, structural drivers including infrastructure, accessibility, and government support exhibit no substantial independent effect within the multivariate model. These findings suggest a significant transformation in tourism dynamics, where performance is more closely linked to perceptual and demand-driven factors than to mere structural conditions. The study enhances tourism literature by offering a comprehensive viewpoint that emphasizes the increasing significance of tourist perception, confidence, and participation in shaping tourism performance in the contemporary landscape.

Keywords: Domestic Tourism Performance, Accessibility, Marketing and Promotional, Infrastructure, Government Support, Safety Protocol

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the tourism industry contributes an important role in economic development by generating substantial growth, creating employment opportunities, stimulating infrastructural development, and enhancing national welfare. The UNWTO recognizes tourism as the key driver for socio-economic growth through job creation, entrepreneurship, earnings of foreign exchange, and development of infrastructures. Global tourism has undergone significant recovery following COVID-19 disruption, with 975 million international visitors recorded from January to September 2023, indicating an 87% resurgence from pre-pandemic figures and a 38% rise compared to 2022. Additionally, international tourism receipts could reach USD 1.4 trillion in 2023, accounting for 93% of pre-pandemic tourism revenues, while the sector's

contribution to global GDP is projected to rise to USD 3.4 trillion, about 3% of global GDP. These figures reflect the continuing importance of tourism for global economic recovery and sustainable development (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2023). International and domestic tourism have significant roles in enhancing economic resilience; however, they operate as separate categories, each possessing its own set of strategic implications requiring careful consideration. Domestic tourism involves travel within national borders, providing convenience and accessibility compared to international travel (Yusof et al., 2021). Historically, the occurrence of domestic tourism has emerged as a foundational element and has consistently maintained its significance within the framework of national economies. In the context of Malaysia, the significance of this sector cannot be overstated, as it plays a crucial role in supporting economic stability while simultaneously fostering growth through the stimulation of local enterprises and the advancement of regional development plans.

Recent tourism data reveals robust evidence of how domestic tourism supports Malaysia's financial markets. According to Department of Statistics Malaysia [DOSM] 2024, domestic tourism brought in 68.4 million visitors who spent RM28.1 billion within the first seven months of 2024 while domestic tourism numbers grew by 23.8% than the 2023 figures for the same period. Domestic tourism recorded 213.7 million times during 2023 marking a 24.6% growth since 2022 while total expenses reached RM84.9 billion through that period. Despite these positive trends, the sector faces persistent challenges. Malaysians' travellers often favor international destinations due to superior infrastructure and more competitive promotional campaigns (Chong & Tan, 2022). Additional barriers include inadequate domestic infrastructure, outdated marketing strategies, and limited governmental support, all of which have hindered the full potential of Malaysia's domestic tourism sector. The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened these challenges, significantly reducing domestic travel and revenue in 2021 (Deraman et al., 2021). While numerous studies have explored aspects of domestic tourism such as service quality, tourist incentives, and affordable accommodations, critical areas such as destination accessibility, infrastructure development, marketing strategies, government policies, and safety remain underexplored in the post-pandemic context. This study identifies structural determinants as fundamental enablers including destination accessibility, tourism infrastructure, and governmental support, while perceptual drivers include demand-focused elements such as marketing, promotion, and safety measures that influence tourists' perceptions, confidence, and decision-making processes. Neglecting these factors could impede recovery efforts and weaken Malaysia's competitive standing in the global tourism market. Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by investigating these variables as key determinants for improving domestic tourism performance in Malaysia.

The findings aim to support the objectives of the National Tourism Policy (2020–2030) by promoting sustainable tourism practices and facilitating economic recovery. Additionally, the insights from this study may help the hotel industry to create new tourism packages and improve their service quality as well as enhance their destination branding by combining local attractions. Achieving these goals requires collaboration among all stakeholders, as their collective efforts are critical for success. The recovery of domestic tourism is expected to drive economic development and reestablish Malaysia as a competitive and resilient player in the global tourism industry. By addressing the challenges faced by tourism agencies, entrepreneurs, and operators, this study provides actionable recommendations to enhance service offerings and marketing strategies, ultimately improving Malaysia's overall tourism competitiveness (Chong & Tan, 2022)

Problem Statement

Domestic tourism is a crucial source for Malaysia's economy, substantially enhancing GDP development, generating jobs, and facilitating cultural interchange. Nonetheless, despite its economic significance, the sector encounters continuous challenges that impede its long-term sustainability and expansion. The diminishing revenue growth in the hotel business, which fell from 34.4% in 2022 to 18.4% in 2023, appears as a concerning indicator of these issues, revealing fundamental shortcomings in the sector (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). The disparity between the growth of domestic tourism and hotel performance indicates significant structural inefficiencies that necessitate immediate intervention. Among the various

challenges that hinder development is the prevalence of inadequate infrastructure, which is especially apparent in rural areas and ecotourism destinations. It has been observed that over 60% of rural tourism sites have been identified by inadequate road access, which significantly constrains both their appeal and economic sustainability. Similarly insufficient transportation infrastructure and lacking digital connectivity has limited access to high-potential destinations, including Borneo and various other ecotourism sites, thereby constraining the mobility of domestic travellers and consequently limiting the economic advantages that could accrue to local communities. The existence of these infrastructure deficits engenders substantial bottlenecks that inhibit the sector from fully capitalizing on its inherent potential.

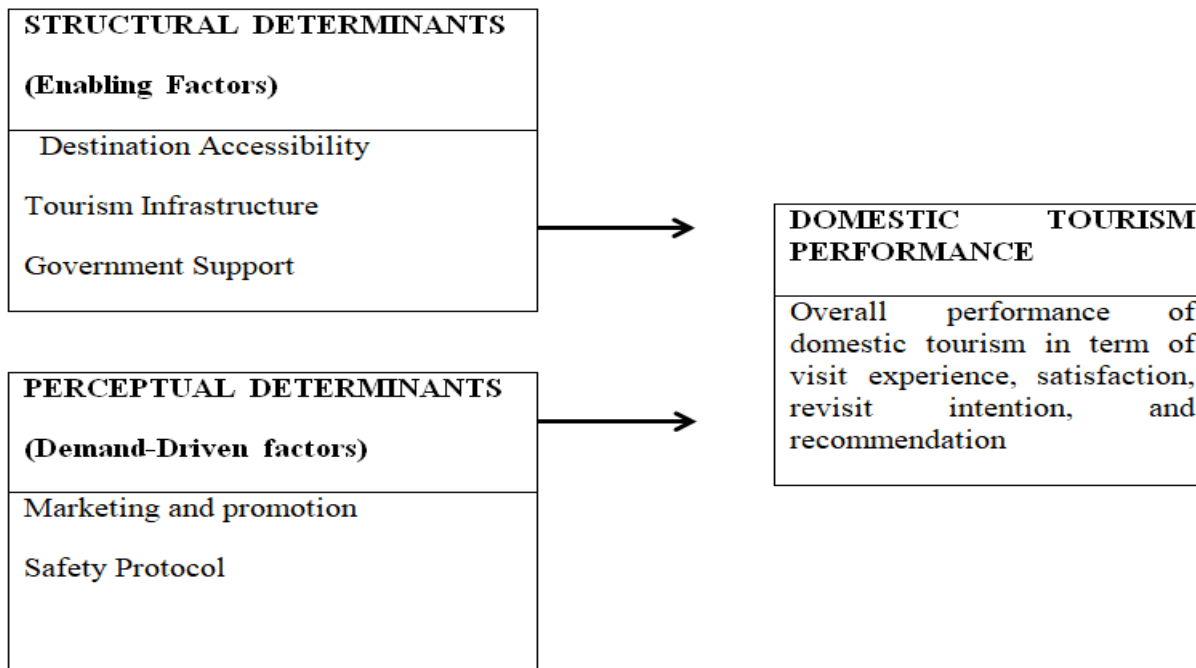
The COVID-19 pandemic significantly intensified these pre-existing challenges, resulting in financial losses that surpassed RM100 billion, which was mainly due to the imposition of travel restrictions and an extensive decline in consumer confidence (Fitria et al., 2022). Regardless of the observable indications of restoration within the sector, the persistence of inconsistent and inadequately enforced health and safety protocols continues to be seen as a substantial obstacle to the resurgence of domestic tourism, especially in relation to lesser-known destinations. The low level of standard hygiene measures severely undermines the confidence of tourists, which in turn causes the slow recovery of the sector and constrains its capacity to attract domestic travelers. Another significant issue that requires attention is the noticeable disparity in the allocation of marketing and promotional resources and efforts. Considering large-scale investments and promotional efforts directed towards well-established destinations like Langkawi and Kuala Lumpur, it is noteworthy that numerous rural and ecotourism locations continue to experience crucial underdevelopment and lack of promotion (Li et al., 2023). A survey conducted in the year 2023 indicated that approximately 70% of Malaysian tourists lacked awareness concerning alternative domestic travel options, subsequently highlighting the inadequacy of the current digital marketing strategies employed in this context. The shortage of targeted promotional initiatives, as well as the absence of virtual tourism experiences and insufficient community-driven engagement, considerably complicates the existing issue, leaving behind missed opportunities for economic diversification and the development of regional tourism.

In response to those issues, it is imperative to recognize that the resolution of Malaysia's domestic tourism constraints requires the implementation of a comprehensive and multidimensional strategy. The enhancement of rural infrastructure, the strengthening of digital connectivity, and the improvement of transport networks are fundamentally essential to unlocking the potential inherent in high-value destinations. Furthermore, the execution of rigorous and systematically enforced health protocols is of the highest priority in reinstating traveler confidence, especially in the context of the post-pandemic landscape. Furthermore, the execution of targeted digital marketing strategies, together with community engagement initiatives and the provision of virtual tourism experiences, has the potential to act as highly effective mechanisms for the promotion of lesser-known destinations, thus allowing a more equitable distribution of the benefits associated with tourism.

Research Framework

This study employs a comprehensive approach that analyzes domestic tourism performance from both structural and perceptual aspects. Structural determinants denote the essential circumstances that facilitate tourism activities, encompassing destination accessibility, tourism infrastructure, and governmental backing. These variables denote the physical and institutional framework that promotes tourist growth and guarantees the operational preparedness of destinations. Conversely, perceptual determinants include the demand-driven factors that affect tourist decision-making, particularly promotional and safety standards. These characteristics influence travellers' views, confidence, and involvement, especially in contemporary tourism environment distinguished by heightened risk awareness and more dependence on digital information. The approach suggests that both structural and perceptual factors are related to domestic tourism performance; however, their relative impact may vary when assessed simultaneously. Structural elements establish the essential circumstances for tourism, whereas perceptual aspects are anticipated to exert a more direct influence on travel behaviour and performance outcomes. Accordingly, this study investigates the degree to which these factors influence domestic tourism performance within a complex framework.

Figure 1: Research Framework



Significance of the Study

Practical Contributions

This research offers significant insights related to essential stakeholders within the domestic tourism sector of Malaysia, that includes tourism agencies, business proprietors, hoteliers, and policymakers. The findings presented herein will assist tourism agencies in the optimization of promotional strategies, as well as in the more effective allocation of resources dedicated to infrastructure development initiatives. Business owners and hoteliers possess the capacity to utilize these discoveries to enhance the quality of service provided, facilitate the design of appealing travel packages, and ultimately improve the overall customer experience, thus contributing to an increase in domestic tourism demand. Furthermore, it is imperative that policymakers implement the research outcomes to develop tourism policies that are grounded in empirical evidence, strategically allocate subsidies, and invest in essential infrastructure projects, all of which are important to foster sustainable growth within the industry. This study systematically addresses the various obstacles that hinder the advancement of Malaysia's domestic tourism sector, specifically focusing on the issues of inadequate infrastructure, ineffective marketing strategies, and insufficient government support. In doing so, it provides a comprehensive set of practical recommendations aimed at fortifying the sector and subsequently encouraging economic growth.

Theoretical Contributions

This study significantly contributes to the academic discourse related to domestic tourism, especially in the context of the post-pandemic era, by effectively addressing and bridging the existing research gaps that have been identified in the literature. This research seeks to expand upon the existing body of literature, which has predominantly concentrated on aspects such as service quality, pricing, and overarching tourism trends, by proposing a more holistic framework that carefully investigates the complex relationships among destination accessibility, infrastructure development, marketing strategies, and government policies. Through the integration of these elements, the present study significantly advances theoretical models related to tourism resilience and competitiveness, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the various factors that exert influence on the performance of domestic tourism. The findings serve to enhance the current framework concerning tourism while simultaneously providing novel insights into the development of sustainable tourism practices within the context of emerging economies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research on domestic tourism highlights the significance of structural and strategic variables in influencing tourism performance, particularly within the contemporary tourism landscape. Essential elements including destination accessibility, marketing and promotion, tourism infrastructure, governmental support, and safety measures are recognized as essential determinants affecting tourist behavior and the overall competitiveness of destinations. These variables perform both independently and interactively, enhancing the appeal, accessibility, and perceived value of tourism locations.

Domestic Tourism

Domestic tourism is acknowledged as a crucial element of national tourism frameworks, especially in developing nations where internal travel demand fosters economic stability, regional advancement, and job creation. In Malaysia, its significance has been further emphasized following the COVID-19 pandemic, during which impediments to international travel heightened domestic tourism as a principal means of sustaining economic activity (Yusof et al., 2021). The findings highlight the economic importance of domestic tourism but largely interpret tourism performance as a function of structural preparedness rather than individual adaptability. Traditionally, studies have emphasized structural determinants such as infrastructure development, destination accessibility, and governmental support as the primary factors influencing tourism performance. These qualities are typically regarded as essential prerequisites that enhance destination competitiveness and promote tourism flows. This assumption predominantly embodies a supply-side viewpoint, which may inadequately account for tourist outcomes in modern environments characterized by variable demand conditions and perception-driven factors.

Recent tourism research challenges this structural dominance by illustrating that tourism activity is increasingly influenced by perceptual and psychological aspects. Travelers today demonstrate increased sensitivity to perceived risk, safety assurance, and trust, which directly affect travel intentions and destination selection (Fitria et al., 2022). Simultaneously, digitalization has enhanced the significance of marketing and communication in influencing destination image and travellers' engagement, hence transforming marketing from a supportive role to an essential component in tourist demand (Li et al., 2023). Moreover, changing travel behaviors demonstrate that visitors have transitioned from being passive recipients of destination characteristics to active assessors of perceived value, safety, and experience allure (Bilinska et al., 2023; Dragicevic, 2024). This change highlights a significant deficiency in current literature: structural and perceptual variables are often analyzed separately, leading to an inadequate comprehension of the real formation of tourism performance. Although structural variables may facilitate tourism activity, they do not inherently lead to performance without the reinforcement of positive beliefs and active engagement. Thus, the persistent dependence on structure-centric explanations jeopardizes the recognition of the progressively influential role of demand-driven mechanisms. Therefore, a more integrated perspective is required that simultaneously considers structural enablers and perceptual drivers within a unified analytical framework. Bridging this gap is crucial for enhancing theoretical comprehension and for aligning tourism plans with the changing dynamics of post-pandemic travel pattern in Malaysia.

Destination Accessibility

Destination accessibility is generally recognized as a crucial factor in tourism growth, since it directly affects the convenience with which tourist may access and interact with a location. It includes the accessibility and quality of transportation systems, connectivity, and supporting infrastructure that enable tourist movement (Rucci & Porto, 2022). In Malaysia, accessibility is recognized as a crucial facilitator of tourist expansion, especially in connecting metropolitan centres with peripheral and rural areas. Current literature consistently identifies accessibility as a fundamental requirement for tourism performance, as deficient transportation infrastructure and restricted connectivity might hinder visitor growth and diminish location appeal (Chan et al., 2023). Government interventions, especially in transportation development and infrastructure investment, significantly strengthen the relevance of accessibility in improving destination competitiveness and regional

integration. These viewpoints indicate that accessibility serves as a prerequisite that facilitates tourism activities and fosters wider economic advantages, such as job creation and local business development.

Recent discussions suggest that the direct impact of accessibility on tourism performance may be more constrained than previously anticipated. Although accessibility enhances travel, it does not inherently result in increased visitation or greater performance outcomes without robust demand-side incentives. In modern tourism, especially in the post-pandemic landscape, travellers' choices are more influenced by perceptual elements such as perceived safety, destination attractiveness, and commercial communication. Consequently, accessibility may serve more as an enabling element than a principal determinant of tourism performance. This indicates that while destination accessibility is crucial for tourist development, its impact is probably indirect relative to more immediate perception-based factors. Consequently, its function must be examined within a comprehensive framework that includes for both structural conditions and operational responses in influencing domestic tourism performance.

Marketing and Promotional

Marketing and promotion are fundamental in shaping tourist demand, since they affect the perception, evaluation, and selection of destinations by tourists. These activities include numerous strategies such as digital marketing, social media interaction, and experiential promotion, all of which enhance destination awareness and appeal. In Malaysia, programs like the "Cuti-Cuti Malaysia" campaign illustrate how focused promotional strategies may stimulate domestic tourism by increasing awareness and fostering emotional engagement with prospective tourists. Current literature emphasizes that marketing operates not only as a communication instrument but also as a strategy framework that influences travellers' attitudes and behavioural intentions (Li et al., 2023). The growing utilization of user-generated material, narrative techniques, and digital platforms has revolutionized marketing into a dynamic process that actively shapes destination image and perceived value. Moreover, technological integration, embracing mobile applications and interactive media, contributes to visitor involvement and fosters more precise decision-making. These results suggest that marketing exerts a direct and significant influence on tourism involvement.

Existing literature further highlights that, in post-pandemic conditions, marketing efficacy is intricately connected to the capacity to reestablish confidence and mitigate concern among travellers. Promotional methods that convey safety, trust, and experiential value are essential in shaping travel decisions, since tourists increasingly depend on digital information and peer-generated content to assess locations. Thus, marketing has transitioned from a secondary function to a fundamental factor influencing tourism performance. This indicates that marketing and promotion have a direct and substantial impact on domestic tourism performance by influencing perception, engagement, and intention to act. Consequently, its function beyond mere support of tourist activities to actively stimulating demand, especially in contexts where travellers' confidence and perception are critical to decision-making.

Tourism Infrastructures

Tourism infrastructure represents the physical and organizational infrastructures that support tourism operations, including transportation systems, lodging, and recreational services (Putri & Taufik, 2022). It works as a crucial element of destination development, since the presence of quality infrastructure improves service delivery, accessibility, and the overall visitor experience. In the Malaysian context, divergent infrastructure development between urban and rural areas has been recognized as a continual limitation on tourism distribution and destination competitiveness (Gong et al., 2023). A significant body of research identifies infrastructure as a crucial structural facilitator that enhances tourism growth through improved connectivity, operational efficiency, and destination preparedness. Infrastructure investments correlate with enhanced economic outcomes, such as job generation and regional growth, especially in underdeveloped areas. These viewpoints regard infrastructure as an essential prerequisite that supports the operational efficacy of tourism systems.

Nonetheless, its direct impact on tourism performance has come under scrutiny in modern situations. In locations with established basic infrastructure, its marginal influence on tourist decision-making is constrained, as traveller's prioritize experiential value, perceived allure, and safety over mere physical characteristics. This is especially apparent in post-pandemic contexts, where psychological and perceptual aspects significantly impact travel intentions. Thus, tourism infrastructure is more accurately perceived as a facilitating condition rather than a principal driver of domestic tourism performance. Its impact is expected to be indirect, functioning with demand-driven elements that more directly influence tourist pattern and destination selection.

Government Support

Government support significantly influences the tourism sector through policies, financial assistance, and regulatory structures that affect industry development. It includes activities including subsidies, tax incentives, infrastructure investment, and policy interventions designed to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism sector (Agovino et al, 2023). In Malaysia, government initiatives, especially during and during the COVID-19 pandemic have been crucial in stabilizing the industry, aiding businesses, and promoting domestic travel). Academic evidence demonstrates that government engagement promotes tourist development by alleviating operational restrictions, fostering investment, and encouraging innovation within the industry. Incentive programs and public-private partnerships are showing the ability to bolster industry resilience and facilitate the recovery of tourism operations during crises. These viewpoints consider government support as a structural mechanism that fortifies the institutional and economic base of tourist systems.

Notwithstanding its significance, the direct impact of governmental support on tourism performance is frequently less apparent at the consumer level. Policy interventions generally function indirectly by enhancing infrastructure, service quality, and market circumstances, rather than directly influencing individual travel options. As a result, travellers may not perceive governmental policies as direct benefits on their travel preferences, especially when compared with more concrete and experience-oriented considerations. In modern tourist settings, particularly in the post-pandemic landscape, travellers are increasingly attuned to perceptual indicators such as safety, trust, and destination attractiveness. Thus, although governmental support is crucial for facilitating tourist development and maintaining sector stability, its impact on domestic tourism performance is expected to be indirect and influenced by other demand-driven factors.

Safety Protocol

Health and safety considerations have emerged as a crucial factor in tourism decision-making, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Safety protocols which include cleanliness measures, health screening procedures, and contactless service delivery are now perceived not merely as operational necessities but as tangible indicators of destination reliability. The implementation of standardized health guidelines in Malaysia's tourist sector has bolstered public confidence and stimulated domestic travel. Empirical research increasingly demonstrate that travellers evaluate places based on perceived safety, with risk evaluation significantly influencing travel intentions. Destinations that displaying reliable and transparent safety protocols are more likely to draw tourists, as these practices diminish ambiguity and amplify the perceived control over travel-associated risk factors (Fitria et al., 2022). This ethical shift signifies that safety perceptions constitute a critical determinant of a travel occurrence, rather than simply impacting the quality of the experience.

The efficacy of safety protocols relies on both execution and communication. Effective communication of safety protocols and evident adherence enhance confidence, but discrepancies especially among minor operators can undermine destination credibility and discourage tourist participation. This indicates that safety incorporates not only regulatory compliance but also the control of perceptions. In regard of these dynamics, safety protocols directly impact domestic tourist performance by promoting confidence, trust, and travel intention. Their influence is direct and oriented towards consumers, setting them apart from structural conditions that function more indirectly. Consequently, safety issues have become a key component influencing tourism demand in the post-pandemic context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Research design is the structured framework guiding the research process to collect valid and reliable data that addresses research objectives (Cooksey, 2020). This study employs a quantitative research approach, ideal for analyzing relationships between domestic tourism performance and factors such as accessibility, marketing, infrastructure, government support, and safety protocols. Exploratory methods were utilized to classify and summarize influencing factors, while dependence analysis examines variable relationships. Additionally, causation analysis is conducted to establish possible cause-and-effect relationships. A cross-sectional time horizon is adopted, collecting data at one point in time to reflect post-COVID-19 conditions. Field environments were used to gather data directly in natural tourism settings in Malaysia, providing authentic insights into real behavior dynamics. The unit of analysis focuses on individual domestic tourists, whose perceptions and experiences gathered through questionnaires.

Population and Sample Size

The study's population consists of domestic tourist in Malaysia who travelled during the post-COVID-19 era (2021–2023), reflecting contemporary travel pattern in a recovery-phase tourism context. A convenience sample method was employed to enable quick data collection from participants at designated urban tourism sites. Data were gathered at high-traffic locations including KLCC, Batu Caves, and Sunway Lagoon, which were identified for their substantial tourist crowds, accessibility, and relevance in Malaysia's domestic tourism sector. The selection of these locations may allow engagement with a varied population of active domestic travellers. The required number of participants was calculated utilizing G*Power, predicated on a statistical power of 0.80, a significance level of 0.05, and a medium impact size. The study revealed that a minimal sample size was adequate to identify significant connections among the variables. The final sample of 167 responders surpasses this threshold, hence ensuring sufficient statistical power for correlation and multiple regression analyses. While the utilization of convenience sampling restricts the generalizability of the results; however, it is appropriate for acquiring real-time impressions and psychological understandings in a realistic study context.

Research Instrument

An online questionnaire will be adopted as the primary research instrument to collect data on independent and dependent variables. It is distributed via email, social media (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp), and in person at tourist hotspots in Malaysia. The questionnaire, available in English and Malay, is divided into three sections: Section A (demographics), Section B (independent variables), and Section C (dependent variable). Responses are collected using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) for simplicity, precision, and standardization (Loureiro et al., 2024). The instrument will be reviewed by academic experts for clarity, content validity, and suitability. All questionnaires were distributed both online and in-person at selected urban tourism locations.

Pilot Test

A pilot test will be conducted with 20 purposely selected domestic tourists who travelled during the post-COVID-19 period and academic experts. The test aimed to assess the clarity, reliability, and validity of the questionnaire. Data analysis using SPSS revealed Cronbach's alpha of over 0.7, confirming the instrument's reliability. The findings match recommendation standards for quantitative pilot research which confirms the instrument's potential for operational deployment.

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha Result

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items	Level
Destination Accessibility	0.871	4	Good

Marketing and Promotional	0.902	4	Excellent
Tourism Infrastructure	0.815	4	Good
Government Support	0.911	4	Excellent
Safety Protocol	0.875	4	Good
Domestic Tourism Performance	0.912	4	Excellent
All Variable	0.964	24	Excellent

Data Collection

Data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire disseminated through several channels, including email, social media platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp), and direct distribution at selected tourist attractions. This multi-modal strategy was implemented to broaden response reach, cover varied participant demographics, and expand the overall representativeness of domestic travellers. Prior participating, respondents received a comprehensive explanation of the study's objective, thus ensuring their understanding of the research's objectives and scope. This aimed to reduce response ambiguity and improve the accuracy of the collected data (Li et al., 2023). Participation was entirely optional, and respondents could withdraw at any point without repercussions. All ethical issues were rigorously adhered to during the data collection process. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by not recording any personally identifiable information. The gathered data were utilized exclusively for research objectives and managed in compliance with recognized research ethics guidelines.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves systematically applying statistical techniques to organize, describe, and interpret the collected data, ensuring meaningful conclusions can be drawn. The responses from the questionnaires will be processed using SPSS version 30, a software tool widely used for its capacity to perform reliable and comprehensive data analysis. The study used a combination of descriptive statistics to summarize the data, correlation analysis to explore relationships between variables, and multiple regression analysis to examine the predictive power of independent variables on domestic tourism performance. Additionally, the pilot test data will undergo reliability and validity assessments to ensure the robustness of the research instrument. These methods are chosen to ensure a rigorous, data-driven exploration of the study's hypotheses (Yulianto, 2024).

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis is utilized to summarize and represent the key features of the acquired data in a systematic and coherent manner. This approach offers a summary of the sample profile and emphasizes general patterns within the dataset, which acts as an initial phase prior to executing further statistical analysis. This study employed descriptive statistics to analyze respondents' demographic data, including age, gender, education level, occupation, and travel history. Essential statistical metrics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, are utilized to define the distribution and central trends of the data (Cooksey, 2020). These indicators enable a coherent understanding of the sample composition and the overarching trends of the variables being examined. Descriptive analysis offers a thorough summary of the dataset, simplifying the detection of similarities and variances across respondents, which assists in the interpretation of following inferential studies. This ensures that the results are based in a distinct empirical framework and strengthens the overall rigor of the research.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis examines variable interdependencies to determine the extent and orientation by which operating factors influence domestic tourism results (Dong, 2023). The results will present Pearson correlation

coefficients (r) that scale between -1 and $+1$ to evaluate variable relationships. Positive r values reflect direct relationships while negative values indicate inverse relations. Default values correspond to non-relationships. Through this analysis, important associations between important variables and the dependent variable will become apparent. For example, marketing efforts displaying strong positive connections to tourism performance indicate better marketing initiatives will boost tourism results.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis is performed to evaluate the consistency of the measurement equipment in accurately collecting the intended constructs. It assesses the degree to which the items within each scale generate stable and consistent outcomes across observations. This study evaluates internal consistency dependability through Cronbach's alpha, with scores above 0.70 often deemed satisfactory (Harbison & Simmons, 2024). The analysis examines the association among items within each concept to identify measurement discrepancies. Elevated reliability coefficients signify that the items consistently measure the same underlying construct. This bolsters the instrument's trustworthiness and reinforces the stability of the acquired data. Overall, the satisfactory reliability results indicate that the questionnaire is appropriate for further statistical analysis, as it produces consistent and reliable findings across the sample.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis is employed to assess the collective and individual impacts of the independent variables which include destination accessibility, marketing and promotion, tourist infrastructure, government assistance, and safety protocols on domestic tourism performance. This technique allows for the evaluation of the relative significance of each predictor while incorporating the effects of other variables in the model (Li et al., 2023). The analysis quantifies the degree to which variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables, as represented by the coefficient of determination (R^2). Furthermore, regression coefficients assess the direction and magnitude of the associations between each predictor and domestic tourism performance, while significance levels ascertain the statistical relevance of these correlations. Multiple regression analysis, by integrating all variables concurrently, offers a more comprehensive knowledge of the factors influencing domestic tourism success than bivariate analysis. This method is very effective for determining which factors have independent effects when assessed in a multivariate context.

FINDINGS

Demographic profile

Table 2 summarizes the demographic attributes of the 167 respondents, offering contextual understanding of the profile of domestic tourists in Malaysia. The gender distribution is reasonably equitable, with females (52.1%) somewhat surpassing males (47.9%), signifying equivalent engagement among genders. The sample consists mainly of young individuals, with the most significant group aged 21–23 years (37.1%), followed by those aged 24–26 and 27 years and older (each 23.4%). This indicates that domestic tourism is predominantly influenced by young people who are generally more receptive to digital interaction and marketing initiatives. Most respondents possess a bachelor's degree (41.3%) or a diploma (28.1%), indicating a relatively knowledgeable cohort adept at assessing travel-related material.

From an employment standpoint, employed adults constitute the largest section at 36.5%, followed by students at 29.9%, reflecting a blend of financially active and transitional demographics. Leisure constitutes the predominant motive for travel (55.1%), markedly surpassing business and social trips, underscoring the experiential character of domestic tourism demand. The travel frequency suggests that most respondents traveling one to three times per year (32.3%), followed by four to six times (24.6%), implying a constant yet moderate involvement in domestic travel. Overall, the profile reveals that domestic tourism is predominantly driven by youthful, educated, and economically active persons, explaining the significant impact of perceptual factors like marketing and safety in following analyses.

Table 2: Summary of the Participant's Profile

Demographic Profile	N	(%)
Total	167	100
Gender		
Male	80	47.9
Female	87	52.1
Age		
21-23	62	37.1
24-26	39	23.4
27 and above	39	23.4
18-20	27	16.2
Level of Education		
Bachelor's Degree	69	41.3
Diploma	47	28.1
Master's Degree	30	18
PhD	21	12.6
Occupational		
Employed	61	36.5
Student	50	29.9
Self-employed	26	15.6
Retired	19	11.4
Unemployed	11	6.6
Travel Purpose		
Leisure	92	55.1
Visiting friends/family	40	24
Business	35	21
Travel Frequency		
1-3 times per year	54	32.3
4-6 times per year	41	24.6
Rarely	34	20.4
Once a month	29	17.4
Never	9	5.4

Reliability Coefficient

Table 3 displays the internal consistency results for all constructs evaluated in this study. The Cronbach's alpha values for the independent variables range from 0.704 to 0.753, while the dependent variable has a value of 0.717, signifying acceptable reliability across all measures. Marketing promotion ($\alpha = 0.704$) and safety protocol ($\alpha = 0.714$) satisfy the minimum criterion for internal consistency, whereas tourism infrastructure ($\alpha = 0.753$), destination accessibility ($\alpha = 0.788$), and government policies and support ($\alpha = 0.751$) exhibit

comparatively greater reliability. The dependent variable, domestic tourism performance, exhibits adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.717$). Although the alpha values are adequate, they are moderate and do not reflect exceptionally high internal consistency. This signifies that despite the measurement items exhibit enough coherence, they may reflect somewhat varied dimensions of each construct, an occurrence not unusual in behavioural and perception-based research. This heterogeneity can improve the instrument's capacity to represent the multifaceted character of tourism-related constructions instead of imposing undue consistency. The results confirms that all constructs demonstrate sufficient reliability, justifying the assessment instrument's consistency and its appropriateness for further statistical analysis.

Table 3: Reliability Coefficient

Section	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Item
Tourism Infrastructure	0.753	4
Destination Accessibility	0.788	4
Marketing Promotion	0.704	4
Government Policies & Support	0.751	4
Safety Protocol	0.714	4
Domestic Tourism Performance	0.717	4

Correlation Analysis

The correlation between the independent factors and domestic tourism performance was evaluated using Pearson correlation analysis, as detailed in Table 4. Within the predictors, marketing and promotion have the most robust correlation with domestic tourism performance ($r = 0.589$), followed by destination accessibility ($r = 0.499$), safety protocols ($r = 0.483$), tourist infrastructure ($r = 0.457$), and government policies and support ($r = 0.419$). The results indicate that although all parameters correlate with tourism performance, the intensity of these correlations differs, with marketing-related initiatives exhibiting the most significant relationship. The notably greater association between marketing and promotion underscores the significance of demand-driven elements in determining tourism outcomes, especially in affecting travellers' awareness, interest, and decision-making processes. The moderate correlations identified for infrastructure, accessibility, and policy-related variables indicate that these elements may serve as fundamental conditions that facilitate tourism activity rather than as key determinants of performance.

It is also noteworthy that inter-correlations among the independent variables are significantly elevated, especially between destination accessibility and government policies ($r = 0.701$) and between tourist infrastructure and destination accessibility ($r = 0.677$). This suggests a level of conceptual interconnection across structural factors, indicating that these variables may function synergistically rather than independently in affecting tourism performance. The correlation analysis validates significant connections among all variables, offering preliminary support for the hypothesis proposed relationship. The fluctuation in correlation strength highlights the necessity for additional multivariate analysis to ascertain the relative impact of each element when evaluated concurrently.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

		Tourism Infrastructure	Destination Accessibility	Marketing Promotion	Government Policies	Safety Protocol	Domestic Tourism
Tourism Infrastructure	Pearson Correlation	1	.677**	.507**	.648**	.603**	.457**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0	0	0	0

	N	167	167	167	167	167	167
Destination Accessibility	Pearson Correlation	.677**	1	.627**	.701**	.594**	.499**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0	0	0	0
	N	167	167	167	167	167	167
Marketing Promotion	Pearson Correlation	.507**	.627**	1	.532**	.497**	.589**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0		0	0	0
	N	167	167	167	167	167	167
Government Policies	Pearson Correlation	.648**	.701**	.532**	1	.667**	.419**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0		0	0
	N	167	167	167	167	167	167
Safety Protocol	Pearson Correlation	.603**	.594**	.497**	.667**	1	.483**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0		0
	N	167	167	167	167	167	167
Domestic Tourism	Pearson Correlation	.457**	.499**	.589**	.419**	.483**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0	0	
	N	167	167	167	167	167	167

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was performed to assess the collective impact of tourist infrastructure, destination accessibility, marketing and promotion, government policies and assistance, and safety protocols on domestic tourism performance. The model summary (Table 5) reveals a modest degree of explanatory power, evidenced by a R value of 0.639 and a R² of 0.408. This signifies that nearly 40.8% of the variance in domestic tourism performance is explained by the five predictors incorporated in the model. The adjusted R² (0.389) further substantiates the model's stability, signifying an adequate fit relative to the value of variables considered.

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.639	0.408	0.389	2.01869	0.408	22.164	5	161	0

The ANOVA findings (Table 6) indicate that the whole regression model is statistically significant ($F = 22.164$, $p < 0.001$), affirming that the independent factors collectively enhance the prediction of domestic tourism success. This signifies that the model offers a substantial interpretation of tourism performance beyond just random variation.

Table 6: Anova

Model	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	451.61	5	90.322	22.164	0
	Residual	656.09	161	4.075		
	Total	1107.701	166			

The coefficient analysis (Table 7) signifies that marketing, and promotion is the most important predictor ($\beta = 0.409$, $p < 0.001$), exhibiting a robust and substantial beneficial impact on domestic tourism performance. This discovery underscores the essential significance of promotional activities in influencing tourist behavior and stimulating demand. The safety protocol demonstrates a notable beneficial effect ($\beta = 0.207$, $p = 0.018$), indicating that health and safety assurance is a crucial element in bolstering travel confidence and participation. Conversely, tourist infrastructure ($\beta = 0.106$, $p = 0.240$), destination accessibility ($\beta = 0.100$, $p = 0.319$), and government policies and support ($\beta = -0.076$, $p = 0.435$) exhibit no statistically significant effects. This suggests that these characteristics do not independently influence domestic tourism performance when evaluated in conjunction with other variables in the model.

The disparity between correlation and regression findings confirms that although structural factors such as infrastructure and accessibility correlate with tourism performance at the bivariate level, their impact is reduced in a multivariate framework. This suggests that their effects may be indirect or dependent on more reliable demand-driven factors, such as marketing and perceived safety. Generally, the findings highlight that domestic tourism performance is predominantly shaped by perceptual and behavioral factors rather than structural elements, with marketing and safety identified as the principal contributors within the suggested model.

Table 7: Coefficients

Model	Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	5.341	1.17	—	4.563	0	—	—
	Tourism Infrastructure	0.093	0.079	0.106	1.18	0.24	0.455	2.198
	Destination Accessibility	0.094	0.094	0.1	0.999	0.319	0.366	2.732
	Marketing Promotion	0.422	0.082	0.409	5.123	0	0.576	1.737
	Government Policies	-0.067	0.086	-0.076	-0.782	0.435	0.391	2.56
	Safety Protocol	0.177	0.074	0.207	2.387	0.018	0.489	2.046

DISCUSSIONS

Discussion on Major Finding

This study intended to investigate the factors affecting domestic tourism performance in Malaysia in a post-pandemic context. The data indicate a varied pattern of influence, whereby not all variables contribute equally when evaluated concurrently. Bivariate associations suggest that all determinants are positively associated with tourism performance; however, multivariate analysis reveals that only marketing and promotion, as well as safety protocols, maintain statistical significance. This distinction emphasizes the necessity of transcending

apparent associations to better understand the relative strength and independence of each predictor. The findings highlight a significant structural transformation in tourism dynamics, where performance is more influenced by perceptual and cognitive factors rather than solely by structural or organizational constraints. In this setting, variables that directly affect traveller perception and confidence have greater explanatory value than those that function at a foundational or background level. This transition signifies evolving tourist expectations, especially in contexts distinguished by greater uncertainty and a heightened dependence on digital information.

Discussion of Key Determinants

Marketing and promotion are the primary determinants, demonstrating that domestic tourism performance is greatly affected by visibility, engagement, and experience representation. The strength of this association indicates that traveller decisions are mainly determined by how destinations are conveyed and perceived, rather than only by their intrinsic physical attributes. Promotional activities cultivate awareness, establish expectations, and forge emotional connections that manifest in actual travel behaviour. This finding's significance is further amplified by the increasing prevalence of digital platforms, where user-generated content, curated social media interaction, and tailored advertisements are crucial in establishing destination attractiveness. In this context, marketing serves as an amplifier that stimulates demand by converting knowledge into perceived value. Consequently, locations that adeptly establish themselves through captivating narratives and interactive involvement are more inclined to attract domestic travellers.

The safety procedure also substantially impacts and highlights the enduring importance of trust in tourism decision-making. Despite the resolution of the intense health issue, an expectation of safety persists in traveller behaviour. Observable compliance with hygiene standards, risk mitigation strategies, and contactless service provision diminishes uncertainty and bolsters confidence, therefore promoting travel engagement. The enduring nature of this effect signifies that safety has evolved into a fundamental aspect of the overall travel experience, rather than only a transient reaction to crisis situations. It influences both the decision to travel and the perceptions of service quality and destination dependability. In this context, safety functions as a reinforcing mechanism that maintains demand by enhancing traveller confidence.

The results indicate that marketing and promotion have the most substantial and significant beneficial impact on domestic tourism performance. This shows that tourism demand currently is significantly influenced by visibility, engagement, and experiential representation rather than solely by physical or structural characteristics. This result illustrates the growing influence of digital ecosystems on travel behaviour. Modern travellers are affected by curated material, social media narratives, and tailored marketing methods that alter location perception and appeal. The robustness of this correlation signifies that marketing performs not just as a communication instrument but also as an important process in shaping tourism demand. This data theoretically supports the assumption that tourism performance is increasingly influenced by perception-based mechanisms. Marketing increases awareness, diminishes uncertainty, and fosters emotional engagement, consequently directly affecting behavioural intention. In Malaysia, where domestic travellers are extensively linked and digitally engaged, promotional methods are essential for stimulating tourism engagement.

Re-evaluating the Role of Structural Determinants

In contrast, tourism infrastructure exhibits no substantial independent influence, indicating that its function is more supplementary than decisive. Although infrastructure is crucial for enabling tourism, its impact appears to be decreasing when perceptual factors are considered. This suggests that infrastructure alone is inadequate to increase demand unless supported by elements that actively engage and attract travellers. A comparable trend is noted concerning destination accessibility. While accessibility has a positive correlation with tourism performance, it lacks statistical significance in the regression model. This reveals that accessibility serves as a fundamental prerequisite for travel rather than a direct motivator. In environments when accessibility is adequately established, its impact decreases in comparison to more dynamic factors. Government policies and support also do not demonstrate a direct impact, highlighting the indirect nature of policy influence on tourism performance. Policy interventions normally operate through processes including

infrastructure development, industrial support, and regulatory frameworks, which may not be readily apparent to tourists. Thus, their influence is mediated through additional factors instead of directly determining travel decisions.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations need to be acknowledged while evaluating the findings of this study. The sample consists of 167 domestic tourists, primarily drawn from urban and high-traffic areas. This provides relevant insights into active tourist demographics; nevertheless, it may limit the applicability of the findings to rural or underdeveloped tourism environments, where structural constraints such as infrastructure and accessibility could exert a more evident influence. Secondly, the study utilized a cross-sectional approach, capturing perceptions at a singular point in time. Considering that tourism activity is dynamic and determined by fluctuating economic conditions, technological progress, and post-pandemic recovery stages, the findings may not reliably reflect persistent psychological patterns or shifts in tourist preferences. Third, the analysis depends on self-reported data, which may be vulnerable to response bias, including social desirability and perceptual subjectivity. While these measures are prevalent in tourism research, they may not adequately reflect genuine travel behaviour or objective performance results. Finally, the model corresponds to 40.8% of the variance in domestic tourism performance, suggesting that further relevant variables have not been investigated. Variables such as perceived service quality, destination image, experiential value, and digital engagement may indirectly influence tourism performance through mediators like trust, perceived value, and tourist satisfaction, while contextual elements including perceived risk, value co-creation, and traveller involvement can act as moderators affecting the intensity and direction of these associations. These elements necessitate additional examination to achieve a more thorough and mechanism-based understanding of tourism performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research may expand upon the current study by broadening the sampling frame by including rural and developing tourism areas. This extension will enhance the study of how structural elements, especially infrastructure and accessibility, affect tourist performance in underdeveloped contexts. This method would provide significant comparisons between urban and rural environments, hence improving the generalizability of the results. A longitudinal research strategy would further enhance future studies by analyzing changes in travel preferences over time. Considering the dynamic landscape of post-pandemic recovery, evaluating changes in traveller preferences and risk perceptions would provide extensive insights into the sustainability of prevailing patterns, particularly about the ongoing significance of safety and marketing.

Additional advancement can be achieved by integrating other variables that represent the experience and technological aspects of tourism. The elements such as digital engagement, perceived service quality, destination image, and tourist satisfaction, as well as mediating variables such as trust and perceived value, and moderating conditions including perceived risk and value co-creation, may offer an in-depth and mechanism-oriented overview of tourism performance. The implementation of mixed method approaches also would strengthen the analytical depth. Integrating quantitative results with qualitative insights, such as interviews or case studies, can reveal elaborate cognitive motivations and contextual dynamics that conventional survey instruments may not fully capture, thereby enhancing both theoretical and practical contributions.

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