

THE IMPACT OF MEMORABLE ECO-TOURISM EXPERIENCE ON BEHAVIORAL INTENTION AMONG TOURISTS WHO TOOK TRAIN TRIPS TO DABONG, KELANTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the influence of memorable eco-tourism experiences on the behavioral intentions of tourists who have taken train trips to Dabong, Kelantan. Using a quantitative research approach, an online survey will be administered to 384 respondents who have visited this region in Malaysia. The results reveal that hedonism, novelty, meaningfulness, and knowledge are positively associated with tourists' behavioral intentions. This research stands out as the first investigation of memorable eco-tourism experiences towards ecotourism destination in Kelantan. The implications of this study are significant as it offers valuable insights to tour operators and tourism marketers on how to create and promote memorable eco-tourism experiences, ultimately enhancing tourist satisfaction.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Memorable Tourism Experiences, Behavioral Intention, Tourist Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

After the pandemic, the 'Train to Dabong' trip has gained nationwide popularity as people seize the opportunity to explore Malaysia's hidden gems (Berita Harian, 2022). Dabong, a charming village in Kelantan, has become renowned for its natural wonders, including waterfalls and caves. However, beneath its scenic beauty lies a significant issue. Dabong struggles with marketing its services and products compared to other ecotourism destinations, making it difficult for tourists to find relevant travel packages online. This is evident from the limited selection of only six packages offered by local tour operators on the Expedia.com website (2022). Additionally, Dabong lacks diverse activities, experiences, and accommodations, which hampers tourist engagement in the area.

Table 1.1: Number of tourist arrivals at Malaysia's ecotourism destinations (2021)

Number of tourist arrivals at Malaysia's ecotourism destinations (2021)			
Dabong (Kelantan)	Cameron Highland (Pahang)	Hulu Langat (Selangor)	Kinabalu Park (Sabah)
50 000	790 024	344 027	269 819

Source: Statistic Tourist Arrival in Malaysia (2021)

These limitations are reflected in the number of tourists visiting Dabong (Table 1.1), which is lower compared to other popular ecotourism destinations like Cameron Highlands and Kinabatangan. To address this situation, immediate action is required. Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) or authorities in Dabong must prioritize promoting and expanding the range of engaging activities available to enhance the visitor experience. Such improvements have the potential to increase tourist

arrivals and encourage repeat visits to Dabong. This, in turn, would boost profits and position Dabong as a formidable competitor among ecotourism destinations. Moreover, ecotourism can stimulate economic development, enhance social welfare, and contribute to the preservation of natural environments and cultural heritage through awareness creation (Manu et al., 2012).

To effectively market and promote Dabong's destination qualities, destination managers must highlight the unique aspects of memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) alongside offering such experiences on-site. This involves effectively showcasing various local tourist programs, a diverse range of activities, notable tourism infrastructure, and the warm hospitality of local residents in commercials and promotional materials. Research on MTEs supports the notion that novel experiences are better remembered (Kim, Hallab, et al., 2012; Kim, Ritchie, et al., 2012), and experiencing something new, unique, or different enhances the memory of the travel experience (Kim, 2010; Kim, Hallab, et al., 2012; Kim, Ritchie, et al., 2012). Tung and Ritchie (2011) further emphasize the crucial role of destination managers in facilitating an environment that allows tourists to create their own MTEs.

Despite the significance of MTEs in destination positioning, studies on MTEs in ecotourism destinations remain limited. Currently, research has primarily focused on MTEs in areas such as cultural tourism (Siamak, Michael & S. Mostafa, 2019), urban tourism (Chao et al., 2019), museums (Islam et al., 2020), and heritage destinations (Mostafa et al., 2021). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of MTEs on behavioral intentions in the context of ecotourism destinations in Dabong, Kelantan.

There are four objectives of this research and there are:

1. To examine the relationship between hedonism on behavioral intention.
2. To examine the relationship between novelty seeking on behavioral intention.
3. To examine the relationship between tourist meaningfulness experience on behavioral intention.
4. To examine the relationship between tourist knowledge on behavioral intention.

SIGNIFICANT OF STUDY

Practical perspective

The practical significance of this study lies in its potential to provide valuable insights and practical implications for tour operators and tourism marketers. By examining the influence of memorable ecotourism experiences on tourists' behavioral intentions in Dabong, Kelantan, this research offers practical guidance for creating and promoting impactful eco-tourism experiences. The findings highlight the importance of factors such as hedonism, novelty, meaningfulness, and knowledge in shaping tourists' intentions. Armed with this knowledge, tour operators and tourism marketers can strategically design and market eco-tourism experiences that resonate with visitors, thereby enhancing their satisfaction. Ultimately, the study's practical significance lies in its ability to inform and guide industry professionals in their efforts to create memorable and impactful eco-tourism experiences in Dabong, Kelantan, leading to increased visitor satisfaction and potentially boosting the local tourism industry.

Academic perspective

The academic significance of this study is twofold. Firstly, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge by being the first investigation to specifically explore the influence of memorable ecotourism experiences on behavioral intentions within the context of an ecotourism destination in

Kelantan. By focusing on Dabong, the study expands the understanding of how eco-tourism experiences can impact tourists' intentions and sheds light on the unique dynamics and factors at play in this particular destination. Secondly, this study extends to the broader field of tourism research by investigating the factors that drive tourists' behavioral intentions in the context of eco-tourism experiences, the study adds to the theoretical understanding of tourist behavior and decision-making processes. The findings provide valuable insights into the importance of hedonism, novelty, meaningfulness, and knowledge in shaping tourists' intentions, thereby enriching the existing body of knowledge on tourist motivations and preferences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hedonism

Hedonism was described by Kim et al. (2010) as "pleasurable sentiments that stimulate oneself in terms of travel experiences. According to Mannell and Kleiber (1997), hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure. It is an essential component of recreational activities. Hedonism can also be enjoyed while travelling (Xie, 2005). The level of hedonism consumers experience is likely to have an impact on how valuable they believe a product or service to be (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). According to Tung and Ritchie (2011), positive emotions and sensations connected with travel experiences, such as pleasure and enjoyment, were essential to MTE. Kim (2014) also investigated how essential hedonism is to the characteristics of MTE destinations. People seek enjoyment (i.e. pleasure/hedonism) when "consuming" tourist things or experiences, in contrast to other products and activities (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

Novelty

Novelty signifies the property of being new and uncommon, something not experienced before. Novelty seeking is a key driving force behind travel and has been linked to the likelihood that satisfied tourists will not return to the same location. (Kim & Kim, 2015). Since people wish to have an experience that contrasts with their previous experiences, tourists are more likely to choose novel and unusual activities than they would otherwise (Bigné et al, 2009). Numerous research have shown that there is a correlation between the appeal of travel places and travellers' desire for novelty. (Kassean and Gassita, 2013). Additionally, researchers have noted that novelty-seeking has a favourable effect on visitor pleasure (Assaker et al, 2011,.) When an encounter deviates from a visitor's expectations, novel tourism experiences are characterised (Ma et al, 2013).

Meaningfulness

A sense of high value, significance, or an expansion of one's perspective on life and society are all examples of what is meant by meaning (Uriley, 2005). According to earlier studies, the meaningfulness dimension includes thinking about one's significance when travelling or learning about oneself. This dimension is linked to traveler's propensity to look for enriching encounters that contribute to their personal development. Travel is a common experience that many people perceive to be beneficial for themselves discovery (Tung and Ritchie, 2011). Tourists who participate in tourism-related events and buy local goods may discover a chance to gain insight into various viewpoints on relevant issues. These pursuits may enhance one's psychological health and well-being, enabling vacationers to express individuality and discover new locations and cultures (Kim et al., 2012). Meaningfulness can encourage the personal development and transformation of the traveller; when returning home, daily life may be viewed from a new perspective, and the lessons learned may be applied to everyday life (Tarssanen, 2007).

Knowledge

Knowledge (the educational component of the travel experience) is connected to gaining new knowledge and abilities (Kim, 2016; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). This causes travel to important historical

and cultural locations to be significantly motivated by self-education, which enhances knowledge and abilities. Research has shown that visitor happiness benefits plans and returns (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; da Costa Mendes, Oom do Valle, Guerreiro and Silva 2010; Kim et al., 2015; Tapar et al., 2017). Kim, Woo, and Uysal's (2015) research also demonstrated that a high degree of leisure experience satisfaction enhances the chance of a repeat trip. According to studies on tourism motivation, one of the push factors that motivates individuals to travel is the desire to learn. For instance, a lot of individuals travel to learn more about the places they go (especially in terms of geography, history, language, and culture). Discovered that intellectual growth was one of the most important elements of MTEs in a study that tried to understand the "essence" of MIEs Tung and Ritchie (2011).

Behavioural Intention

Swan (1981) defines behavioural intention as an individual's anticipated future behaviour. According to (Baloglu, 2000), it has been linked to observed behaviour. Ajzen (1988, 1991) then introduced the Theory of Planned Behavior to predict behaviours that are not completely under volitional control. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), factors such as attitudes toward a location, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control may impact tourist destination choice and future behavioural intentions. The Theory of Planned Behavior's fundamental propositions is that people are more likely to engage in a specific type of behaviour if they believe it will result in a specific and valuable outcome, that their essential referents will value and approve of the behaviour, and that they have the necessary abilities, resources, and opportunities to engage in such behaviour (Ajzen, 1985; Conner et al., 1999).

Research Hypothesis

The following research hypothesis is based on a conceptual framework; independent variables, namely Hedonism, Novelty, Meaningfulness and Knowledge, were determined and dependent variables, i.e., behavioural intention.

H1: There is a significant relationship between hedonism and behavioural intention.

H2: There is a significant relationship between novelty seeking and behavioural intention.

H3: There is a significant relationship between tourist meaningfulness experience and behavioural intention.

H4: There is a significant relationship between tourist knowledge and behavioural intention.

Research Framework

A study framework has been presented to examine the link to discover the influence of memorable tourist experiences on behavioural intention in Ecotourism. The dependent variable is behavioural intention. The proposed independent variable consist of Hedonism, Novelty, Meaningfulness and Knowledge.

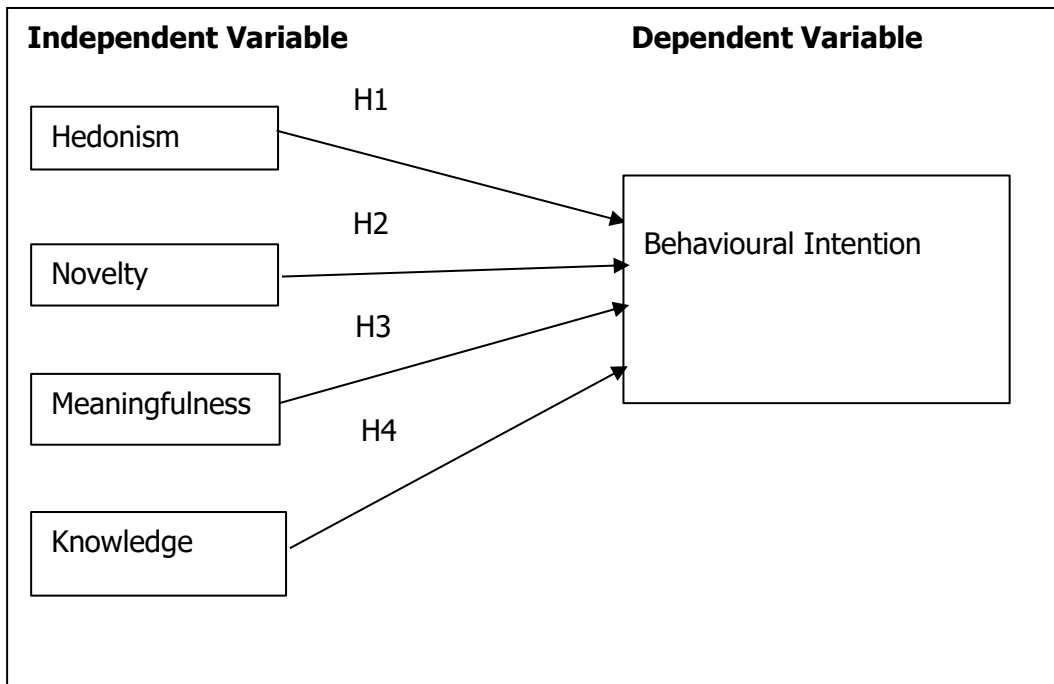


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework Adapted from Kim and Ritchie (2013)

METHODOLOGY

The research design is the plan that outlines how the researcher will answer a set of questions and obtain, analyze, and interpret data. In this study, a quantitative research design was employed, using self-administered questionnaires distributed through a Google Form. The data collection period spanned three months, taking advantage of public holidays and busy tourist seasons. Purposive sampling was used to select 384 individuals who partake trip train to Dabong, a popular eco-tourism destination in Kelantan. Data analysis involved using statistical methods, including descriptive statistics, reliability statistics, Pearson's correlation, and regression, using the SPSS software.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis

This segment information showed the mean score attained as descriptive analysis. Overall mean score and standard deviation of variables and sub-variables were designed based on 5 points Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= somewhat disagree, 4= neutral, 5= somewhat agree, 6= agree, and 7= strongly agree). The overall mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for each variable and measurement are exposed.

The independent variables verified moderate mean score (M= 6.31978, SD= 0.79550). Altogether the dimension variables also scored a moderate mean score where hedonism 6.3645(SD= 0.81758), novelty 6.3202 (SD= 0.83164), meaningfulness 6.2693 (SD= 0.91903) and knowledge 6.3251(SD= 0.86710). Besides, the dependent variable verified middle mean score (M=6.5406, SD=0.72347) where the sub variable named aesthetic gained 6.5406 (SD=0.72347).

Reliability Test

The reliability analysis was conducted in this analysis to determine Cronbach's Alpha values for all variables. The value follows Hedonism (0.877), Novelty (0.906), Meaningfulness (0.893), Knowledge

(0.894) and Behavioural Intention (0.887). All the reliability was above the 0.86 average, usually considered very good (Matkar, 2012).

Demographic Profile

There were a total of 203 sets of questionnaires assigned through the online platform. Table 4.2 displays common of the respondents are male with 50.2% (n=102) related to 49.8% (n=101) are female. In table 4.3, respondents who responded to this survey are speciously age between 21 – 30 years old with the frequency of 136 respondents (67.0%). Based on table 4.4, most of the respondents who answered this survey were single, with 127 respondent (62.6%). The table 4.5 showed most of the respondents in the race are Malay, with 140 respondents (69.0%). Table 4.6 showed most of the respondents in the religion are Islam with 149 respondents (73.4%). Additionally, table 4.7 show that most respondents have a degree with 112 respondents (55.2%). Table 4.8 shows that the majority of respondents who went to Dabong was 1st time which is 121 respondents (59.6%). Lastly, based on table 4.9 shows the average length of stay in Dabong. The highest average length of stay in Dabong is less than 3 days with 163 respondents (80.3%).

Table 1: Respondent Demographic profile

Respondent profile	Classification	Frequency N= 203	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	102	50.2%
	Female	101	49.8%
Age	< 20	18	8.9%
	21-30	136	67.0%
	31-40	42	20.7%
	41 above	7	3.4%
Status	Single	127	62.6%
	Married	76	37.4%
Race	Malay	140	69.0%
	Chinese	36	17.7%
	Indian	23	11.3%
	Other	4	2.0%
Religion	Islam	149	73.4%
	Christian	26	12.8%
	Hindu	15	7.4%
	Buddha	13	6.4%
Education Background	Diploma	33	16.3%
	Degree	112	55.2%
	Master	17	8.4%

	PHD	3	1.5%
	Other	38	18.7%
Frequently visit	1 st time	121	59.6%
	2 nd time	72	35.5%
	More than 3 times	8	3.9%
	Other	2	1.0%
Length of stay	Less than 3 days	163	80.3%
	3-5 days	37	18.2%
	5-7 days	3	1.5%

Hypothesis Testing

There are four (4) possibilities were provided. The first hypothesis establishes a favourable association between hedonism and behavioural intention. The second hypothesis establishes a positive link between novelty and behavioural intention. The third hypothesis establishes a positive link between meaningfulness and behavioural intent. Finally, the fourth hypothesis investigates the link between knowledge and behavioural intention.

Hypothesis	Result	Findings of Data Analysis
H1: There is a positive relationship between hedonism and behavioural intention.	$r = 0.713, p = 0.000$ Strongly positive	H1: Accepted
H2: There is a positive relationship novelty and behavioural intention.	$r = 0.598, p = 0.000$ Strongly positive	H2: Accepted
H3: There is a positive relationship between meaningfulness and behavioural intention.	$r = 0.711, p = 0.000$ Strongly positive	H3: Accepted
H4: There is a positive relationship between tourist knowledge and behavioural intention.	$r = 0.670, p = 0.000$ Strongly positive	H4: Accepted

The above table serves to summarise the findings of this study. Hypotheses that have been tested for this study will be further elaborated as follow:

Hypothesis 1 (H1) proposed that hedonism has a very strong positive link with behavioural intention. The education recorded value of Spearman Correlation Coefficient, which is $r = 0.713$, $p = 0.000$, according to the findings provided in Table 4.16. As a result, the finding supports hypothesis 1 (H1), which states hedonism is positively associated with behavioural intention.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) proposed that novelty has a very strong positive link with behavioural intention. The education recorded value of Spearman Correlation Coefficient, which is $r = 0.598$, $p = 0.000$, according to the findings provided in Table 4.17. As a result, the finding supports hypothesis 2 (H2), which states novelty is positively associated with behavioural intention.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) proposed that meaningfulness has a very strong positive link with behavioural intention. The education recorded value of Spearman Correlation Coefficient, which is $r = 0.711$, $p = 0.000$, according to the findings provided in Table 4.18. As a result, the finding supports hypothesis 3 (H3), which states meaningfulness is positively associated with behavioural intention.

Hypothesis 4 (H4) proposed that tourist knowledge has a very strong positive link with behavioural intention. The education recorded value of Spearman Correlation Coefficient, which is $r = 0.670$, $p = 0.000$, according to the findings provided in Table 4.19. As a result, the finding supports hypothesis 4 (H4), which states that tourist knowledge is positively associated with behavioural intention.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study demonstrate a positive correlation between hedonism, novelty, meaningfulness, and knowledge with behavioral intention among tourists who have taken train trips to Dabong, Kelantan. These results indicate that tourists who have memorable eco-tourism experiences are more likely to exhibit favorable behavioral intentions, such as revisiting the destination or recommending it to others.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made. Firstly, researchers can utilize the eight memorable tourism experience (MTE) factors identified in existing literature to further explore and enhance the understanding of the impact of these factors on behavioral intention. Expanding the study region beyond a single state, such as incorporating multiple ecotourism destinations, would provide a broader perspective and contribute to the generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, there is a need for more methodological research by referencing researchers and organizers. This could involve refining and developing measurement tools or frameworks to better capture the nuances and complexities of memorable eco-tourism experiences and their relationship with behavioral intention. Such research would strengthen the validity and reliability of future studies in this field.

Lastly, it is worth noting that this study primarily employed a quantitative research approach, which provides valuable insights into the relationships between variables but may not capture the full depth and richness of tourists' experiences. Future research could consider incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subjective aspects of memorable eco-tourism experiences and their impact on behavioral intention.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the impact of memorable eco-tourism experiences on behavioral intention. The positive correlation between hedonism, novelty, meaningfulness, and knowledge highlights the importance of creating and promoting memorable experiences to enhance tourists' intentions. The recommendations for future research and the acknowledgement of limitations provide directions for further exploration and development in this field of study.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the impact of memorable eco-tourism experiences on the behavioral intentions of tourists who have taken train trips to Dabong, Kelantan. The findings reveal a positive correlation between hedonism, novelty, meaningfulness, and knowledge with behavioral intention, indicating that tourists who have memorable experiences are more likely to exhibit favorable intentions such as revisiting the destination and recommending it to others. These findings have significant implications for researchers and practitioners in the field of eco-tourism. Researchers can utilize the identified eight memorable tourism experience (MTE) factors from existing literature to further investigate and enhance our understanding of their impact on behavioral intention. Additionally, broadening the study region beyond a single state and incorporating multiple ecotourism destinations would provide a more comprehensive perspective and enhance the generalizability of the findings. In addition, this study emphasizes the importance of creating and promoting memorable eco-tourism experiences to enhance tourists' behavioral intentions. By considering the identified factors and addressing the research recommendations, practitioners can better cater to tourists' preferences and maximize their satisfaction. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge in the field of eco-tourism and offers valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and industry professionals alike.

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APENDICES