



**SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA FACTORS OF SUSTAINABLE
INDIGENOUS TOURISM OF THE MAH MERI IN CAREY ISLAND,
MALAYSIA**

By

ZULIAH BINTI ABD HAMID

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2022

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DEDICATION

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 2022

Chairman : Shazali bin Johari, PhD
Faculty : Forestry and Environment

The main purpose of this study is to understand the influencing factors of sustainable indigenous tourism holistically. Specifically this study aims to examine the influence of community source, social capital and social media on sustainable indigenous tourism of the Mah Meri, in Carey Island, Malaysia. This research contributes to the scope of indigenous tourism and social media. Mah Meri indigenous people of Carey Island, Selangor, were selected due to their strong participation in tourism. Kampung Sungai Bumbon is also declared as a Cultural Village by the government to promote indigenous activities there. This study employs a quantitative approach that forms the use of social media in indigenous tourism development. Apart from social media, this study also employs social capital theory, especially bridging, bonding, and linking. The gap in Social Capital Theory is addressed in relation to social media utilization towards sustainable tourism. The quantitative approach is used in this study to gather and analyze data. Several statistical analyses of SPSS were applied in this study to examine the data and hypotheses testing. Finally, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)- PLS (Partial Least Squares) analysis was executed to evaluate exogenous and endogenous constructs' relation. Results found that the empirical analysis of the direct effects of sustainable indigenous tourism is the research's main theoretical contribution, especially to tourism literature. First, the community sources (including culture, nature and knowledge) and social media (adaption, participation, interactivity and sharing) significantly influenced sustainable indigenous tourism. Secondly, the outcomes revealed that social capital did not influence sustainable indigenous tourism, although past literature demonstrated a significant relationship between these variables. Thirdly, the study also presented an extended research model that combined community sources, social capital, social media and sustainable tourism that had not been tested together in the previous studies. The outcomes of moderating effects through hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicated that the income and educational level were significantly influenced the relationship between social capital and sustainable indigenous tourism. Most of these constructs were tested either separately or with a combination of two related constructs

in the past literature. Thus, the finding of this study added new knowledge to the tourism pieces of literature. Thus, the social capital of the community plays a significant role. It is suggested that the community should be given authority in the decision-making process. Apart from that, they must be empowered and financially supported to run their own tourism business. Therefore, government organizations need to concentrate more on these areas (significant variables) and support the local community to attain a holistic, sustainable tourism practice.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**FAKTOR MODAL SOSIAL DAN MEDIA SOSIAL YANG MEMPENGARUHI
PELANCONGAN ORANG ASLI LESTARI MAH MERI DI PULAU CAREY,
MALAYSIA**

Oleh

ZULIAH BINTI ABDUL HAMID

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Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk memahami faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pelancongan orang asli lestari secara holistik. Secara khusus kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh sumber komuniti, modal sosial dan media sosial terhadap pelancongan pribumi lestari Mah Meri, di Pulau Carey, Malaysia. Penyelidikan ini menyumbang kepada bidang akademik pelancongan Orang Asli dan media sosial. Orang Asli Mah Meri di Pulau Carey, Selangor, dipilih kerana penyertaan mereka yang kuat dalam pelancongan. Kampung Sungai Bumbon juga diisytiharkan sebagai Desa Budaya oleh kerajaan untuk mempromosikan kegiatan Orang Asli di sana. Dalam tesis ini pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan untuk mencapai objektif kajian. Kajian ini mengemukakan penggunaan media sosial dalam pembangunan pelancongan orang asli. Selain daripada media sosial, kajian ini juga menggunakan teori modal sosial, terutamanya merapatkan, mengikat, dan menghubungkan. Jurang dalam Teori Modal Sosial diatasi berkaitan dengan penggunaan media sosial ke arah pelancongan lestari. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dalam kajian ini untuk mengumpulkan dan menganalisis data. Beberapa analisis statistik SPSS diaplikasikan dalam kajian ini untuk memeriksa data dan pengujian hipotesis. Akhirnya, analisis Pemodelan Persamaan Struktural (SEM) - *PLS (Partial Least Squares)* dilaksanakan untuk menilai hubungan konstruk eksogen dan endogen. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa analisis empirikal mengenai kesan langsung pelancongan Orang Asli yang mampan adalah sumbangan teori utama penyelidikan, terutama pada literatur pelancongan. Pertama, sumber masyarakat (termasuk budaya, alam dan pengetahuan) dan media sosial (penyesuaian, penyertaan, interaktiviti dan perkongsian) mempengaruhi pelancongan Orang Asli yang mampan. Kedua, hasilnya menunjukkan bahawa modal sosial tidak mempengaruhi pelancongan Orang Asli yang lestari, walaupun literatur masa lalu menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan antara pemboleh ubah ini. Ketiga, kajian ini juga menyajikan model penelitian lanjutan yang menggabungkan sumber masyarakat, modal sosial, media sosial dan pelancongan lestari yang belum diuji bersama dalam kajian

sebelumnya. Hasil daripada kesan penyederhanaan (*moderating effect*) melalui analisis regresi berganda hierarki menunjukkan bahawa pendapatan dan tahap pendidikan telah mempengaruhi secara signifikan hubungan antara modal sosial dan pelancongan asli yang mampan. Sebilangan besar konstruk ini diuji sama ada secara berasingan atau dengan gabungan dua konstruk yang berkaitan dalam kajian lepas. Oleh itu, penemuan kajian ini menambahkan pengetahuan baru pada kajian lepas pelancongan. Selain itu, modal sosial masyarakat memainkan peranan penting. Masyarakat disarankan agar diberi keutamaan dalam proses membuat keputusan. Selain itu, mereka mesti diberi kuasa (pendayaupayaan) dan sokongan kewangan untuk menjalankan perniagaan pelancongan mereka sendiri. Oleh itu, pihak kerajaan perlu lebih menumpukan perhatian pada faktor-faktor ini (pemboleh ubah yang signifikan) dan menyokong masyarakat setempat untuk mencapai amalan pelancongan yang holistik dan lestari.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

JAKOA	Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli
MCO	Movement Control Order
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
MOTAC	Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
MMCV	Mah Meri Cultural Village



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the whole thesis, highlighting the background of the research study, the problem statement, and the research objectives. The chapter then discusses the research questions, significance of the study via theoretical and managerial implications, the scope of the study, definition of terms and final organization of the thesis.

1.2 Research Background

With many nature attractions dominating the Malaysian tourism sector, many tourism studies in Malaysia have focused on island tourism and ecotourism, with the only limited secondary body of literature exploring indigenous aspects of tourism. Recently, many countries in the region, including Malaysia, have started to recognize the potential for indigenous tourism to diversify the tourism industry and for rural, economic development purposes.

Malaysia is one of the countries in the Asian region that have heavy internet users, with an average of 12 hours per day (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2017). The way of life and the interaction of people have changed rapidly since the development of technology as well as the existence of social media (Cooper, Thai, Claster, Vafadari, & Pardo, 2017; Tiago & Veríssimo; 2014). Some social media, such as Facebook and Instagram are the most commonly used social tools among Malaysians (Yusop and Sumari, 2013).

The presence of online information offers significant assistance in disseminating information. With the existence of social media, travelling to a destination becomes easier, quicker and provides a better experience than many years ago. The important point is that social media and internet tools usage that comes with online travel information increases significantly over the years (Jung et al., 2017). By understanding online travel information as a structuring system in a world of high modernity, it becomes possible to understand the flow of social media and internet tools as well as tourists who are the important elements of tourism (Beedie, 2017).

In this study, Carey Island is as one of the new tourist destinations in Selangor, Malaysia. To dig deeper into the program, we selected a village in Carey Island – Mah Meri Cultural Village (MMCV). Mah Meri Cultural Village was chosen because it has

received preeminent priority from the government as one of the tourism villages in Carey Island.

1.2.1 Tourism in Malaysia

Situated in the Southeast Asia region, Malaysia is bordered with Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, and Indonesia. In 2018, Malaysia has a population of 32.6 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). The country has different ethnic groups from different backgrounds, religious beliefs, languages and culture. Before Independence Day, tourism was 'virtually unknown in Malaysia until the late 1960s' when government developed tourism (Musa, 2000; Marzuki, 2010). Malaysia once highly depended on the primary commodities, however, the global economic regression and slashed oil price forced the government to find an alternative source of income (Habibi et al., 2009). Thus, tourism was identified as a tool to uplift the economy of Malaysia.

The tourism industry is the main contributor to the services sector, constituting approximately 15% of Malaysia GDP or RM201.4 billion in 2017 (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2018). Tourism continues to be the second main source of foreign exchange income after manufacturing sector (Mosbah, & Al Khuja, 2014), expecting foreign tourists to contribute at least RM100 billion to Malaysian economy by 2020. Tourism provides significant benefits to the local economy and is a tool to grow employment opportunities and offer better income distribution to the local people.

Malaysia is a famous tourist destination in the Asia Pacific region (Habibi, Rahim, Ramchandran, & Chin, 2009). Based on the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index published by the World Economic Forum (2017), Malaysia ranked 26th place as the most competitive tourism destination. It is also a global top 10 medical tourism (Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council, 2018). Table 1.x summarises some global achievements and recognition.

Table 1.1 : Selected Global Achievements and Recognitions

	Title	Year	By
1.	4th World's Top Retirement Haven	2015	InternationalLiving.com
2.	Medical Travel Destination of the Year	2015	International Medical Travel Journal (IMTJ) Medical Travel Awards 2015
3.	11th Most Visited Country in the World 2014	2015	UNWTO
4.	Asia's Best Golf Destination	2014, 2015	Creative and Innovative In Culture Anf Tourism Sector
5.	Kuala Lumpur - 2nd World's Best Top Shopping Cities	2015	Muslim Travel Shopping Index (MTSI) 2015
6.	World's Travel Award Asia & Australasia 2016	2015, 2016	World Travel Awards.com
7.	Lonely Planet's Top 10 Cities For Best In Travel	2017	Lonely Planet
8.	Kuala Lumpur - World's 5th Top Shopping Destination 2016	2016	Expedia UK
9.	No.1 World's Top Muslim - Friendly Destination	2015 - 2017	Mastercard-Crescent Rating Global Muslim Travel Index
10.	Kuala Lumpur; Ranked as 10th City in terms of international tourist arrivals by Top 100 City Destinations Ranking 2017 Edition	2017	Euromonitor International

(Source : Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia 2019)

Malaysia has been experiencing tourism difficulty over the past five years when the two most airline tragedies involved Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 and the MH370 flight which occurred in 2014 (Yang, Tjiptono, & Poon, 2018). This has asserted heavy impacted on Malaysia's tourism industry particularly the inbound Chinese tourists. It was reported that over 60% of the booking from Chinese were cancelled (Torr, 2014).

Meanwhile, the security and safety issue has called an alert for the tourism industry (Ayob and Masroni, 2014). For example, the kidnap issues in some islands (i.e. Sipadan Island, Gaya Island) in Malaysia has caused tourists to divert their vacation to other destinations (Chan, 2014; Malay Mail, 2016). In addition to this, high competition from neighbouring countries such as Vietnam and Thailand had further impacted the tourism industry (Jaafar, 2018). In order to win the confidence of foreign tourists, the Malaysian government has allocated RM100 million for promotional and marketing campaign (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2018).

Table 1.2 showed the tourist arrivals and receipts from the year 2009 to the year 2020. The table illustrated continuous increases in the tourist receipts from year to year, except in 2015 and 2020. Suganya (2015) found several factors such as the implementation of six percent Good and Service Tax (GST), uncertain political situation, and world economies depression were led to the decreases in the tourists' arrivals in the year 2015. Meanwhile, Malaysia also recorded a drop of 83.4% in tourist arrivals in 2020 due to the COVID 19 pandemic, closure of international borders, implementation of Movement

Control Order (MCO) and Control Movement Control Order (CMCO) from March 2020 until today (MOTAC, 2021).

Table 1.2 : Tourist Arrivals and Receipts to Malaysia from 2009 – 2018

Year	Arrivals	Receipts
2020	4.33 million	12.7 billion
2019	26.10 million	86.1 billion
2018	25.83 million	84.1 billion
2017	25.94 million	82.1 billion
2016	26.76 million	82.1 billion
2015	25.72 million	69.1 billion
2014	27.44 million	72.0 billion
2013	25.72 million	65.4 billion
2012	25.03 million	60.6 billion
2011	24.71 million	58.3 billion
2010	24.58 million	56.5 billion
2009	23.65 million	53.4 billion

(Source: MOTAC 2021)

1.3 Problem Statement

The sustainable tourism consists of social, economic and environmental aspects as three pillars of sustainability. Kunasekaran et al. (2017) stressed the power of these three pillars in the human life. The whole sustainability will be affected if any of the pillars become weak. The same was applied to indigenous tourism. In general, the ‘activities in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the core of the attraction’ is known as indigenous tourism (Hinch & Prentice, 2004). The sustainability of indigenous tourism highly depends on culture, natural resources and indigenous knowledges. In line with this, UNWTO (2019) also emphasized all tourism stakeholders in protecting and respecting the cultures of indigenous people, their rights and their ancestral traditions. Similarly, past literature also highlighted the crucial roles of indigenous tradition culture and lifestyle as an attraction tool to continuously welcome both local and international tourists (Fletcher, Pforr, & Brueckner, 2016; Normah et al., 2018). However, Siti Hajar and Norlida (2018) discovered that the indigenous tourism which including culture, heritage and lifestyles doesn’t get the deserving attention in past studies. The studies by Zielinski et al. (2020) and Othman et al. (2013) further stressed the limited studies on indigenous communities in Malaysia. Thus, it justifies the need of the further study on indigenous tourism by highlighting their culture, resources and knowledge level.

Furthermore, the development of the industry has become a resources of substantial foreign exchange revenues while enhancing socio-economic of local communities (Giap & Gopalan, 2016; Castro et. al., 2013). In the development of tourism research, information and communication technology has continued to be a vital topic. The development of information and communication technology, which involves the usage of social media and internet tools, has brought awareness to millions of people. This has

created new chances and choices for many people to communicate. In addition, the social media is widely used in tourism industry by marketers, destination managers and tourists themselves (Aftab and Kumar, 2019; Kumar, Shankar & Vrat, 2021; Lee & Jan, 2019; Chua et al., 2021; Hysa, Karasek & Zdonek, 2021). In line with Tourism Malaysia stressed the importance of social media in promoting the tourism destinations in Malaysia while providing 'Unforgettable Experiences in Malaysia' (Tourism Malaysia, 2019). Thus, many travel groups utilised the social media to share the tourism related information including local landmarks, food and beverage, accommodation, tour packages and tourism plan and so on (Raja, 2022; Tas, 2021). However, it is still at infancy level for indigenous tourism. Similarly, there are gaps in contemporary literature on the use of social media among the local indigenous community. Moreover, analysing the uses and applications of information and communication technology (ICT) in the field of indigenous tourism has been relatively less researched by past studies (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014; Lu et al., 2018). Xiang and Gretzel (2010) further pointed out 'the extent to which social media constitute the online tourism domain is not well understood in an objective, comprehensive way'. In addition, more social media studies are carried out from the perspective of the consumer than from the local community (Lu et al., 2018). Hence, it stressed the necessity of the further study on social media in relation to sustainable tourism.

The social capital play essential role in the development of human capital. It provides an appropriate foundation for human resources where they can accomplish their dedication by more participation, enhancing their professional knowledge and mutual understanding (Rezazadeh, Zehi and Ra; 2016). The social capital which including institutions, relations, attitudes, values and norms highly connected with sustainable development (Salari Sardani et al., 2014). Rezazadeh, Zehi and Ra (2016) indicated the social capital moderating the relationship between development of urban tourism and sustainable urban development. Furthermore, a study by Johari and Kunasekaran (2019) revealed the average and strong relationship between social capital and sustainable indigenous tourism dimensions. Although past studies explored the relationship between social capital and sustainable tourism, it not widely discovered in indigenous tourism. In line with thus, Rodriguez-Giron and Vanneste (2019) urged for further study on analysing the relationship between social capital and community-based tourism to provide insights in collective capacity and self-determination. Similarly, Moscardo et al. (2017) and Parmawati et al. (2018) highlighted the limited study on social capital in the development of community-based tourism. Therefore, it underlined the need of the further study on social capital in indigenous tourism.

Furthermore, past literatures indicated that socio demographic indicators (including gender, age, income and educational level) significantly influence the development and sustainability of tourism industry (Almeida -Garcia et al., 2016; Bagri and Kala, 2016 ;Nunkoo and Gursoy 2012). Subsequently, Avaraam et al. (2019) revealed the stronger and significant moderating effects of gender, and education on sustainable tourism development. However, a study by Sinclair-Maragh (2017) showed women have high influences and benefits from the tourism industry compared to male. Comparatively, Jani (2018) provided more supports to male. The contradict findings urged further research

to be executed to explore the moderating effects of socio demography on sustainable indigenous tourism.

1.4 Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to examine the influence of community source, social capital and social media on sustainable indigenous tourism of the Mah Meri, in Carey Island, Malaysia.

The specific objectives of the study are :

1. To examine the direct influences of community resources (culture, natural and indigenous knowledge) on sustainable indigenous tourism of Mah Meri, in Carey Island, Malaysia.
2. To examine the direct influences of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linking) on sustainable indigenous tourism of Mah Meri, in Carey Island, Malaysia.
3. To examine the direct influences of social media (adoption, participation, interactivity and sharing) on sustainable indigenous tourism of Mah Meri, in Carey Island, Malaysia.
4. To analyse the moderating effect of socio-demographic of community (gender, age, income and education level) in the relationship between social capital and sustainable indigenous tourism of Mah Meri, in Carey Island, Malaysia.

1.5 Research Questions

- 1) Does the community source (culture, natural and indigenous knowledge) directly influence the sustainable indigenous tourism of Mah Meri, in Carey Island, Malaysia?
- 2) Does the social capital (bonding, bridging and linking) directly influence the sustainable indigenous tourism of Mah Meri, in Carey Island, Malaysia?
- 3) Does the social media (adoption, participation, interactivity and sharing) directly influence the sustainable indigenous tourism of Mah Meri, in Carey Island, Malaysia?
- 4) Do socio-demographic of community (gender, age, income and education level) have a moderating effect in the relationship between social capital and sustainable indigenous tourism of Mah Meri, in Carey Island, Malaysia.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on examining the influence of community source social capital and social media on sustainable tourism of the Mah Meri in Carey Island, Malaysia. The sample for the study was drawn from total population of Mah Meri community in Carey Island which derived from Department of Orang Asli Development of year 2019. The study was conducted among 202 indigenous community of Mah Meri in Carey Island from April to August 2019. This study adopted purposive sampling methods whereby the researcher only managed to collect data from the Mah Meri community members who agreed and willing to participate in the survey. The data is collected using the survey questionnaire with Five-Likert questionnaire. Partial Least Squares (PLS)- Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis and Hierarchical Multiple Regression were applied in this study to analyse the collected data.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study contributes towards an understanding the influence of community resources, social capital and social media in sustaining the tourism of Mah Meri community in Carey Island, Malaysia. On top of that, the significance of this study can be viewed from the theoretical and managerial as well as academic perspectives.

1.7.1 Theoretical Perspectives

In discovering the mentioned issues and literature gaps, this study is aimed to contribute to the growing body of sustainable tourism. The present study formed a new conceptual framework by combining four components: community resources, social capital, social media and sustainable tourism, which had been explored separately in previous studies. In addition, this combination not been fully executed in indigenous tourism. The outcomes of the study will help to fulfill the research gap in the Social Capital Theory in relation to social media utilization towards sustainable tourism. This study also introduces new constructs named community resources by including culture, natural and indigenous knowledge. Hence, it significantly will contribute to the body of knowledge of indigenous tourism. Finally, the study has also formed a new conceptual framework by combining four theories: Community Based Tourism Theory, Social Capital Theory, Social Media Integrated Theory and Sustainable Tourism Theory, which had been investigated separately in previous studies. Thus, the outcomes of the study will be new insights to the upcoming researchers to examine the model further various tourism fields. Overall, the outcome of the study has added new knowledge to the current tourism literature.

1.7.2 Management Perspectives

Besides theoretical contribution, the findings of the study also intended to provide a new insight to the government bodies including MOTAC, JAKOA, state governments and tourism boards to support their initiatives to promote and sustain the indigenous tourism. The outcomes of the study also expected to provide additional input to the policy and regulations development of indigenous tourism in Malaysia. The study will stress the the necessity of sustaining the tourism of indigenous communities by highlighting the importance of community resources, social capital and social media. In line with industry revolution 4.0 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the findings of the study will assist in creating the awareness on the usage of social media in developing and sustaining the indigenous tourism. The study will give additional input to the strategy formulation policy of sustainable community tourism by highlighting the need of community's culture, nature, knowledge, bonding, bridging, linking, adoption, participation, interactivity and sharing. The results of the research also will contribute additional knowledge to the indigenous communities and local authorities especially through the implementation of policy. Therefore, it can add new insights for the upcoming Tourism Policy or Plan of Malaysia.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

Despite the important theoretical and practical contributions, this research is subject to some limitations. First, the geographical scope of the research is limited since the research was carried out in only Mah Meri Cultural Village. It would be important to extend the geographical scope in other cultural destinations to understand if there are differences according to the level of social media usage. In addition, the study is limited to three exogenous (community resources, social capital and social media) that related Mah Meri community in Malaysia.

1.9 Definition of Terms

- a) **Residents:** The residents of a country are individuals whose centre of predominant economic interest is located in its economic territory. (IRTS, 2008).
- b) **Social media:** An online media where the users are able to participate globally, in distributing and obtaining information as well as sharing news, experiences, problems, photos and videos via a digital network. All of these activities can be done at the fingertips or just a mouse-click (Krahl, 2013).
- c) **Sustainable tourism:** Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities (UNWTO, 2008, p.11-12).
- d) **Indigenous tourism:** Tourism activity in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction (Hinch & Butler, 1996, p.9).

1.10 Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into 5 chapters. The first chapter, which serves as an introduction, is divided into seven major sections: introduction, research background, problem statements, research objective, research question, the significance of the study, and finally, the definition of critical terms used. Chapter two provides an in-depth review of the study's theoretical concepts, specifically the social capital theory, and a review of indigenous tourism and its impacts including tourism sustainability literature. Furthermore, a review of social media will be provided. Chapter three describes and justifies the selection and description of the study site. It also includes the research methodology used, to obtain and analyse information for this study, consisting of the sample and population description, the data collection techniques, research instrument development, followed lastly the statistical procedures.

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