

Wanderlust Meets Faith: Unveiling Sabah as a Halal Destination for Gen Z Travellers through the Lens of the Extended TPB

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Abstract

The number of tourists visiting Sabah, Malaysia, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z), is increasing rapidly. However, the role of key attributes in shaping Gen Z's travel intentions remains underexplored. As a result, it is important to examine the factors that influence Gen Z's decision-making processes when selecting a destination, particularly Sabah. Research on young travellers using the extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is currently lacking. Therefore, the goal of this study is to investigate how tourist attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, halal-friendly characteristics, and destination trust relate to Gen Z's inclination to visit Sabah. The study used the extended TPB framework. Following the literature review, this research utilized survey questionnaires where all measurement items were adopted from past research. The data collection involves 300 Gen Z respondents. Subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and destination trust were found to have a significant impact on visit intention. However, attitude and halal-friendly attributes did not influence visit intention among Gen Z. As the study is cross-sectional research, where data was collected as a snapshot, the findings cannot be generalized to other generations or countries. Expanding this research to include local Muslim visitors would offer a more comprehensive understanding of halal tourism behaviour and be beneficial to industry practitioners.

Keywords: gen Z, visit intention, attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, halal-friendly attributes, destination trust.



1.0 Introduction

Generation Z (Gen Z) refers to individuals who were born between 1995 and 2010 and are currently aged 14 to 29 years old (Böhlich & Axmann, 2020; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). This generation highly values creativity, uniqueness, and authenticity, with flexibility, choice, convenience, and integration playing crucial roles in shaping their lifestyle and decision-making (Hoxha & Zeqiraj, 2020). One area where these traits are particularly evident is in their approach to travel. Having grown up in an era of rapid globalization, Gen Z views travel as an opportunity to broaden their horizons and explore the deeper meaning of life.

These two trends are becoming increasingly intertwined due to Gen Z's strong interest in travel and the rising demand for halal tourism. The increasing demand for halal tourism is largely attributed to the expanding global Muslim population (Suhartanto, Dean, & Wibisono, 2021). The expected growth of the Muslim population between 2015 and 2060 is 32%, with an anticipated 70% increase by 2060 (Possamai & Blasi, 2020). By 2030, the global Muslim population is projected to reach 2.19 billion, nearly matching the Christian population at 2.24 billion (Kata, 2011). As a result, the tourism sector is shifting its focus towards halal tourism to accommodate the specific needs of Muslim travellers (Rasul, 2019). Since Muslims adhere to Shariah principles in all aspects of life, including travel, the demand for tourism services that align with Islamic teachings is increasing (Almuhzzi & Alsawaf, 2017; Mannaa, 2020).

Situated in the northern part of Borneo Island, the Malaysian state of Sabah is renowned as one of the country's most popular tourist destinations. It attracts both domestic and international visitors, with many drawn to its breathtaking natural reserves, which serve as the state's primary tourism attraction (Boyd et al., 2021). According to Geraldine (2018), Sabah's stunning natural beauty and diverse wildlife have solidified its reputation as one of Malaysia's top travel destinations. Recent tourism statistics further highlight its growing popularity. From January 2023 to April 2024, Sabah recorded a significant increase in visitor numbers, with domestic arrivals reaching 2.3 million, an increase of 30.4% from the previous year while international arrivals surged to 1.2 million, marking a 62.7% increase from 2022. Overall, the total tourist arrivals from 2023 to mid-2024 stood at more than 3.6 million (Sabah Tourism, 2024).



A solid comprehension of the factors that influence tourists' decisions is essential to sustain and further develop Sabah's tourism industry. Tourism research often employs the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to analyse how visitors perceive a location (Meng & Cui, 2020). However, as Bianchi et al. (2017) pointed out, studies extending the TPB model to accurately predict tourists' overall behaviour when choosing travel destinations remain limited. To address this gap, this study is designed to analyse and build a framework that expands the TPB model to better explain tourists' intentions to visit Sabah, providing deeper insights into the factors that influence travel decisions. The study of tourist behaviour in relation to halal tourism continues to evolve (Gani & Abdul Muhaemin, 2024). More research is necessary as this market grows to fully comprehend its potential and the elements affecting travellers' opinions and decisions. Notably, limited studies have explored how halal-friendly attributes shape Muslim travellers' perceptions (Aji & Muslichah, 2022). In order to address the demands of both Muslim and non-Muslim travellers, the halal tourism industry's strategy, policies, and services must be informed by continuing studies in this area (Gani & Abdul Muhaemin, 2024). But prior research, for instance by Jalasi et al. (2022), has mostly concentrated on Muslim tourists traveling abroad, which has led to small sample sizes that restrict the findings' generalizability to the Muslim community at large. By expanding their coverage to include local Muslim travellers, future research could obtain a more comprehensive understanding of halal tourism behaviour (Jalasi, Azwa Ambad, & Mohd Ishar, 2022).

At the same time, Gen Z is emerging as the largest and most influential consumer demographic, making them a key target for marketers across various industries, including tourism (Liu, Wang, Zhang, & Qiao, 2022). This study intends to look into the factors influencing Gen Z's choice of halal vacation locations given their growing influence. While previous research has explored this topic, significant limitations remain (Ghazanfar, Janani, Yen, & Karpal Singh, 2021). For instance, Sodawan & Hsu (2022) identified potential sample bias in their study due to an overrepresentation of young respondents, emphasizing the need for a more systematic sampling approach to ensure representativeness. Similarly, Sujood et al. (2023) tested their proposed model on a limited sample of Indian Gen Z individuals, highlighting the need for future studies to consider more diverse samples to enhance generalizability.



Theoretically, the TPB assumes the main predictors of behavioural intention are attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. In the context of the tourism industry, the theory has been widely applied to foresee tourist behavioural intentions. However, the theory is context-sensitive, and its explanatory power can be enhanced by consolidating constructs that are domain-specific (Ajzen, 2011). The original theory does not articulate the influence of Islamic values and perceptions of Shariah compliance that characterise halal tourism. Moreover, few studies have expanded the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) model to forecast travellers' decision-making processes when choosing a destination, according to Bianchi et al. (2017). Consequently, the role of key attributes in shaping Gen Z's travel intentions remains underexplored. To bridge this gap, this research aims to expand the TPB model by incorporating factors specific to halal tourism and Gen Z travellers (Ghazanfar, Janani, Yen, & Karpal Singh, 2021). By doing so, this study seeks to explore deeper insights into the motivations and preferences of Gen Z tourists in the context of halal destinations. The TPB theory can be further strengthened by integrating additional constructs that are consistent with the perspective of Islam. Specifically, this study integrates religion-based evaluative and trust-based assurance, which are halal-friendly attributes and destination trust, into the model to reflect these unique motivational dimensions.

Despite growing interest in halal tourism, existing research has primarily focused on international Muslim travellers and outbound travel contexts. This has led to a limited understanding of domestic Muslim Gen Z travellers and their destination decision-making patterns. Furthermore, most TPB-based studies assumed that intention is shaped mainly by personal attitudes and social norms. Yet, recent tourism behaviours among Gen Z indicate a stronger reliance on credibility, authenticity, and trust signals, particularly when selecting culturally meaningful destinations. Although halal-friendly attributes and destination trust have been examined in prior studies, they are often considered separately or in non-domestic contexts. This leaves their combined role in shaping Gen Z's travel intention underexplored, especially within emerging halal destinations such as Sabah. Therefore, there is a need to extend the TPB by integrating contextual and trust-based constructs to better explain travel intention among Muslim Gen Z travellers and to offer destination managers more targeted insight into building effective halal tourism strategies.



Generally, the objective of this research is to identify the factors influencing Gen Z tourists in choosing the state of Sabah as a halal destination. Specifically, it looks at how travel intentions are influenced by attitudes, perceived behavioural control, perceived value, subjective norms, and destination trust. It also examines how halal-friendly attributes influence Gen Z's travel preferences.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

TPB is a psychological framework designed to explain the psychological factors influencing human behavioural intentions (Ajzen, 1991). The application of this framework in tourism research and other studies has been extensively used to identify behavioural intentions (Han & Kim, 2010). Attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, travel intention, and actual tourist behaviour are the main constituents of the TPB (Ajzen, 1991). Several studies have demonstrated that tourists' intentions to visit a particular destination is significantly influenced by their attitude, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms. Furthermore, a visitor's intention and actual travel behaviour are directly and favourably impacted by their sense of behavioural control (Anantamongkolkul & Kongma, 2020).

Although the original TPB model effectively describes and predicts tourist behavioural intentions, researchers suggest its expansion by incorporating additional constructs or modifying causal relationships to enhance its applicability in specific contexts (Ajzen, 1991; Meng & Cui, 2020). The extended TPB model provides a more comprehensive understanding of visitor behaviour by integrating additional relevant factors (Abbasi, Kumaravelu, Goh, & Dara Singh, 2021). Previous research indicates that incorporating new constructs can improve the predictive capability of TPB, particularly in explaining travel intentions and actual tourist activities (Bayramov, 2022).

Halal-friendly features and destination trust function as important contextual and psychological beliefs that influence decision-making in halal tourism and among Gen Z tourists. Destination trust serves as a belief-based antecedent that directly shapes intention rather than as a simple post-consumption evaluation for Gen Z, who place a high value on authenticity, credibility, and value alignment. Similarly, halal-friendly features reinforce travellers' perceived capacity to act in a way that is consistent with their cultural and religious identity



by acting as contextual behavioural enablers. Although previous halal tourism studies have looked at these constructs separately, there has not been much integrated application of them within a longer TPB framework tailored to Gen Z's travel choices in Sabah. Thus, this extension offers a context-specific theoretical refinement by aligning TPB with the identity-driven, socially attuned, and authenticity-seeking travel orientation of Gen Z in emerging halal destinations.

2.2 Visit Intention

A person's expected future action, such as going, returning, recommending, or spreading the word, is referred to as their behavioural intention. In studying Muslim tourists' visit intentions in non-Islamic countries, visit intention (VI) is an important construct (Sodawan & Hsu, 2022). The study of behavioural intentions has gained significant attention, particularly in tourism research, and is widely examined in consumer behaviour studies (Agag & El-Masry, 2016; Yadav, Kumar Dokania, & Swaroop Pathak, 2016).

2.3 Tourist Attitude

An individual's assessment of a specific behaviour, which may include both favourable and unfavourable opinions, is referred to as their attitude. It describes the extent to which a person holds a positive or negative opinion about a particular action (Ajzen, 1991). Tourist attitudes (TA) influence behavioural intentions, which subsequently impact actual behaviours (Ghazanfar, Janani, Yen, & Karpal Singh, 2021). Numerous tourism-related studies have demonstrated a high positive correlation between opinions towards a location and the intention to visit (Hasan, Abdullah, Islam, & Neela, 2020; Bianchi, Milberg, & Cúneo, 2017). Thus, it was proposed:

H1: Attitude influences visit intention among Gen Z tourists.

2.4 Subjective Norms

Subjective norms (SN) refer to the perceived social pressure from influential individuals to participate in or abstain from a particular activity (Belanche, Casallo, & Flavian, 2019; Bianchi, Milberg, & Cúneo, 2017). Typically, these norms are shaped by an individual's perception of how influential figures, such as family, friends, and colleagues, view a specific action. This perception subsequently



influences their motivation to conform to these expectations (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970). Previous research in marketing and tourism highlights the significance of subjective standards in shaping people's decisions and behaviours (Hasan, Abdullah, Islam, & Neela, 2020; Quintal, Thomas, & Phau, 2015). Thus, it was proposed:

H2: Subjective norm influences visit intention among Gen Z tourists.

2.5 Perceived Behavioural Control

According to Ajzen (1991), perceived behavioural control (PBC) is a person's evaluation of their capacity to carry out a specific behaviour while accounting for opportunities and resources. It is influenced by factors such as time, financial resources, and accessibility (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). Because people are more inclined to engage in a behaviour if they believe they have control over it, perceived behavioural control plays a crucial role in influencing behavioural intentions in the tourism industry (Han, Hsu, & Sheu, 2010). Research suggests that behavioural intentions are positively influenced by a tourist's ability to manage time, costs, and other constraints (Sujood, Sheeba, & Naseem, 2021; Ghazanfar, Janani, Yen, & Karpal Singh, 2021). Thus, it was proposed that:

H3: Perceived behavioural control influences visit intention among Gen Z tourists.

2.6 Halal-Friendly Attributes

According to Battour et al. (2014), halal-friendly attributes (HFA) are characteristics of a place that appeal to Muslim tourists, such as the provision of halal food, places for prayer, alcohol-free areas, and gender-segregated recreational activities. Muslim travellers consider both tangible and intangible elements of Islamic principles when selecting tourism services (Eid, 2015). According to Mursid & Anoraga (2021), Muslim tourists' propensity to return is strongly influenced by the perceived value of a halal-friendly destination. Key factors influencing this perception include the social environment, facilities, food and beverage offerings, and service quality. These factors contribute to an overall positive travel experience and enhance destination loyalty. Thus:

H4: Halal-friendly attributes influence Gen Z's visit intention.



2.7 Destination Trust

Destination trust (DT) is defined as visitors' confidence in the reliability and credibility of a destination's offerings (Abubakar, Ilkan, Meshall Al-Tal, & Eluwole, 2017). It assures travellers that the services provided at a location are trustworthy, safe, and free from risks or inconveniences (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). Consumer trust in tourism destinations is shaped by their perceptions of service quality and authenticity (Reza Jalilvand et al., 2012). Abubakar et al. (2017) found that electronic word-of-mouth positively influences destination trust. Additionally, Al-Ansi & Han (2019) highlighted that halal-friendly destination attributes are directly linked to tourists' confidence in a destination's credibility. Thus:

H5: Destination trust influences Gen Z's visit intention.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

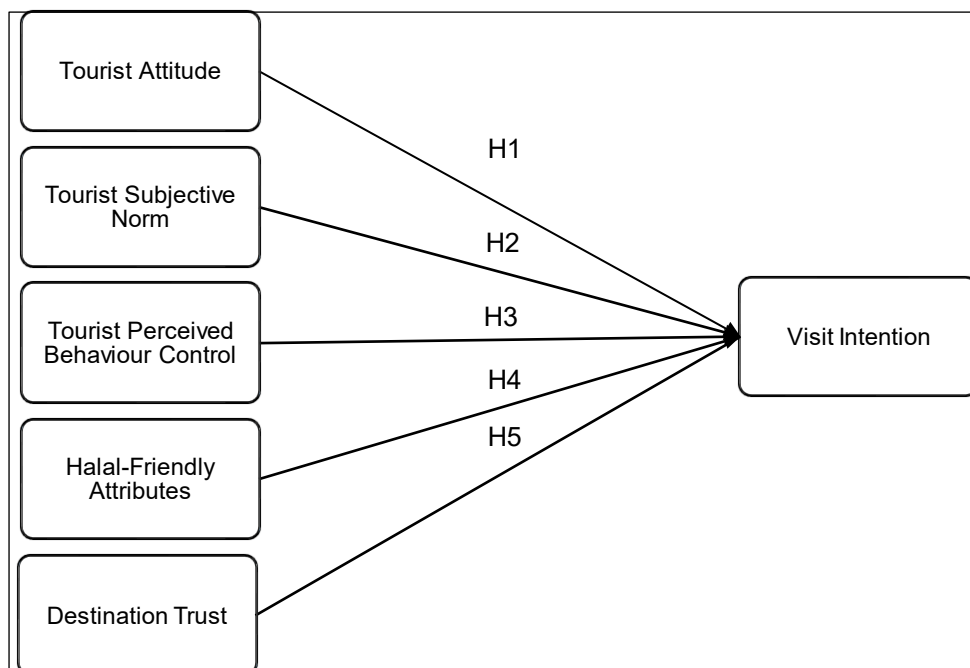


Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Data Collection Method

A non-probability sampling technique, namely purposive sampling, is used in this study. Instead of employing a random selection procedure, non-probability sampling depends on the researcher's judgement when choosing participants (Singh, 2018). Purposive sampling involves deliberately selecting participants based on study-relevant characteristics. This method is non-random and does not require a predefined sample size or strict selection criteria (Bernard, 2002; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006). Data will be collected through an online survey questionnaire. Moreover, purposive sampling was employed to ensure that respondents possessed relevant travel experience or the intention to visit Sabah. These criteria are important for meaningful responses within the study's theoretical framework. This approach is also consistent with previous TPB-based tourism studies that used non-probability sampling due to the contextual specificity of the research setting (Lam & Hsu, 2004; Han et al., 2019).

Purposive sampling was appropriate because the objective of this study was to examine visit intentions specifically among Muslim Gen Z travellers, who represent the primary consumer segment in halal tourism behaviour research. Therefore, selecting respondents who met the religious and generational characteristics ensured construct relevance and measurement validity. This approach aligns with non-probability sampling guidelines for targeted behavioural studies where the population is conceptually bounded (Bernard, 2002; Ajzen, 1991).

In compliance with ethical guidelines, written informed consent was provided to each participant prior to participation. The respondents were clearly and thoroughly informed about the research objectives, methodology, and analytical approach, as well as the nature of participant involvement. Only those who voluntarily agreed to contribute would complete the questionnaire. Consent was obtained by having respondents select a consent checkbox within the survey. All participants' confidentiality and anonymity were preserved throughout the study.

3.2 Unit of Analysis and Questionnaire Design

The unit of analysis in this study focuses on Generation Z, which refers to individuals born between 1995 and 2010, aged 14 to 29 years old (Böhlich & Axmann, 2020; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). However, only



those aged 18 to 29 years old will be eligible to take part in the research. According to Roscoe's (1975) theory, which states that a sample size larger than thirty but less than five hundred is appropriate for most behavioural research, the recommended sample size is 250 respondents (Memon et al., 2020).

The questionnaire consist of two sections: Section A collects demographic information, including six items: respondent's age, gender, religion, job title, monthly income, and travel frequency (Sodawan & Hsu, 2022). Section B examines the independent constructs influencing Gen Z's choice of Sabah as a halal destination and the dependent construct of Gen Z's intention to visit Sabah. Each construct in Section B consists of five items and uses a five-point Likert scale. The items for all constructs are adapted from past studies. They cover Tourist Perceived Behavioural Control (Bianchi et al., 2017; Abbasi et al., 2021; AL Ziadat, 2015), Tourist Attitude (Abbasi et al., 2021; Bianchi et al., 2017; Han et al., 2010), Tourist Subjective Norm (Bianchi, Milberg, & Cúneo, 2017; AL Ziadat, 2015), Perceived Value (Iniasta-Bonillo et al., 2016; Eid & El-Gohary, 2015), Destination Trust (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Liu, Wang, & Fang, 2019), Halal-Friendly Attributes (Muharam & Asutay, 2022), and Travel Intention (Atzeni, Del Chiappa, & Mei Pung, 2022; Lam & Hsu, 2006). The questionnaire was distributed via google form link starting from early February until end of March 2025.

4.0 Results

4.1 Demographic Analysis

A data cleaning process was performed prior to analysis. First, responses were screened for eligibility, and three cases were removed because the respondents were non-Muslims, which is a key inclusion criterion in halal tourism research. Second, the dataset was checked for missing values, and none were identified. Third, potential outliers were examined using standardized z-scores ($>\pm 3.29$) and skewness and kurtosis thresholds based on Kline (2005). The data were found to be within acceptable limits, indicating that no extreme outliers were present. Therefore, the final dataset consisted of 300 valid and usable responses for further analysis.

The final sample for statistical analysis thus consists of 300 valid responses, with no missing data identified. The data reveals that 51% of respondents are aged between 21 and 24 years, while 45% fall



within the 18-20 age group. Additionally, 2.7% of respondents are aged 25-27, and 1.3% are between 28 and 29 years old. Gender-wise, most respondents are female, accounting for 67.7% (203 respondents), while males constitute 32.3% (97 respondents).

Regarding employment status, 93.7% of respondents are students, while the remaining respondents work in the private and government sectors. In terms of monthly income, 98% earn less than RM4,849, whereas only 2% have a monthly income ranging between RM4,850 and RM10,959. Travel frequency data indicates that 46.7% (140 respondents) travel once a year, 26.7% travel 2–3 times per year, 3.7% travel more than three times annually, and 23% seldom travel. According to Kline (2005), skewness values exceeding ± 3.0 are considered extreme, while kurtosis values above 10.0 may indicate potential issues, and values exceeding 20.0 are highly problematic. In this study, skewness values fall within ± 3 , and no kurtosis values exceed 10.0, indicating that the data is normally distributed based on Kline's (2005) criteria.

4.2 PLS-SEM Analysis

The Smart PLS-SEM 3.0 software is used in this study to analyse the empirical data and confirm the hypothesis. According to Hair et al. (2017), the analysis is conducted in two stages: the measurement model evaluation and the structural model assessment, which is used to analyse the hypotheses that have been put forth. Based on the suggestions of Fornell & Larcker (1981), factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were examined to determine convergent validity.



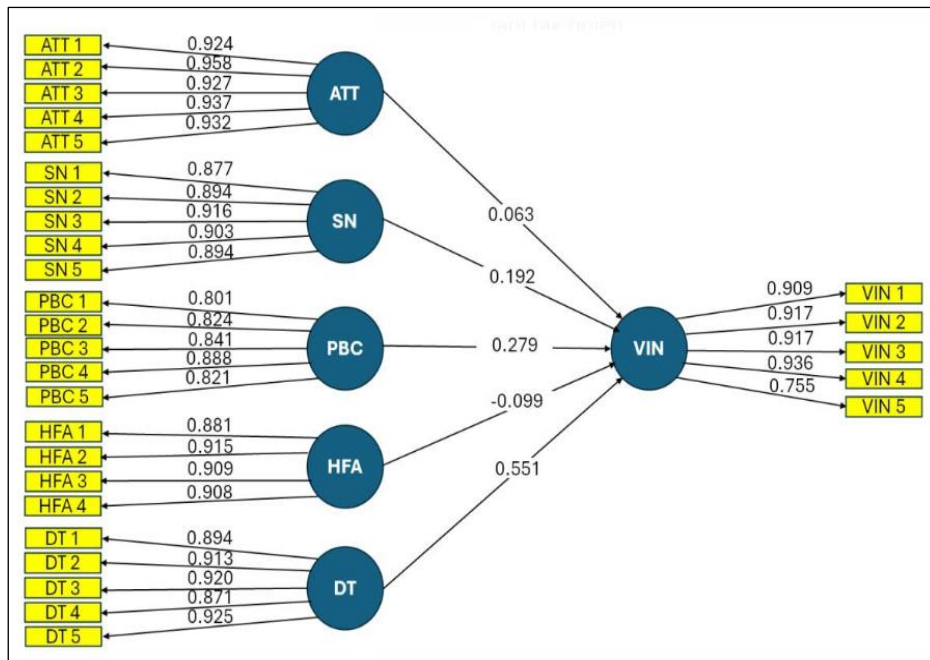


Figure 2 : Outer Model

Figure 2 illustrates the outer model of this research. The lowest observed factor loading across all items was 0.755 (VIN 5), surpassing the threshold of 0.60 as recommended by Chin et al. (1997). To validate the measurement model depicted in Figure 2, we assessed convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency. Table 1 below shows the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results. Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating internal consistency reliability, while average variance extracted (AVE) values were all above 0.50, meeting the recommended convergent validity criterion (Cheung et al., 2024; Hair et al., 2021). All constructs exceeded the minimum acceptable value, confirming satisfactory reliability. Every factor loading satisfied the minimum requirement of 0.5, which validates the establishment of convergent validity, and was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). The AVE values for each construct surpassed the 0.5 cut-off, as indicated in Table 1 (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 1 : Convergent Validity and Reliability

Constructs	Items	Loadings ^a	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a) ^b	Composite reliability (rho_c) ^b	Average variance extracted (AVE) ^c
Tourist Attitude	ATT1	0.924	0.964	0.965	0.972	0.875
	ATT2	0.958				
	ATT3	0.927				
	ATT4	0.937				
	ATT5	0.932				
Tourist Subjective Norm	SN1	0.877	0.939	0.940	0.954	0.805
	SN2	0.894				
	SN3	0.916				
	SN4	0.903				
	SN5	0.894				
Tourist Perceived Behavioural Control	PBC1	0.801	0.892	0.897	0.920	0.698
	PBC2	0.824				
	PBC3	0.841				
	PBC4	0.888				
	PBC5	0.821				
Halal-Friendly Attributes	HFA1	0.881	0.925	0.929	0.947	0.816
	HFA2	0.915				
	HFA3	0.909				
	HFA4	0.908				
Destination Trust	DT1	0.894	0.945	0.946	0.958	0.819
	DT2	0.913				
	DT3	0.920				
	DT4	0.871				
	DT5	0.925				
Visit Intention	VIN1	0.909	0.932	0.938	0.949	0.791
	VIN2	0.917				
	VIN3	0.917				
	VIN4	0.936				
	VIN5	0.755				

a All item-loadings >0.6 indicates indicator reliability (Chin et al., 1997).

b All composite reliability (CR) >0.7 indicates internal consistency (Gefen et al., 2000).

Prior to assessing the measurement model's fit, we evaluated discriminant validity to ensure that each construct was distinct from the others. As recommended by Fornell & Larcker (1981), this entailed

verifying that the square root of each construct's average variance extracted (AVE) was greater than its correlations with other constructs. Additionally, the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion was applied in accordance with the guidelines of Henseler & Schubert (2023). The HTMT values for all constructs remained below the recommended thresholds of 0.90 for constructs measuring similar content and 0.87 for those assessing different content further reinforcing discriminant validity. To determine the HTMT inference, complete bootstrapping was performed, where a two-tailed test with a 0.10 significance level, utilizing a 90% confidence interval during the bootstrapping process, was performed based on the recommendation by Henseler et al. (2015). Table 2 shows the HTMT results.

Table 2 : Discriminant Validity

	ATT	DT	HFA	PBC	SN	VIN
ATT						
DT	0.839					
HFA	0.742	0.852				
PBC	0.544	0.645	0.552			
SN	0.712	0.744	0.688	0.744		
VIN	0.742	0.875	0.694	0.790	0.803	

Discriminant validity is confirmed when the lower and upper confidence interval limits remain below 1 (Henseler et al., 2015). Moreover, Franke & Sarstedt (2019) asserted that when HTMT values are lower than 1.00, discriminant validity is established. In this study, all reflective constructs had HTMT values ranging from 0.544 to 0.875, confirming the presence of discriminant validity. Based on the findings in Table 2 and 3, the study provides strong evidence supporting discriminant validity. Furthermore, multicollinearity was evaluated using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values. VIF values above 10 indicate potential multicollinearity concerns (Henseler et al., 2015). However, this study shows that no multicollinearity issues were detected, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3 : Multicollinearity Analysis Results

	VIF
ATT>VIN	3.086
DT>VIN	4.485
HFA>VIN	2.922
PBC>VIN	2.014
SN>VIN	2.801

Model fit was assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), which was 0.054, indicating a good model fit below the recommended threshold of 0.08 (Hair et al., 2021). The coefficient of determination (R^2) for Visit Intention was 0.62, indicating substantial explanatory power. In addition, Q^2 predictive relevance values, calculated via blindfolding, were above zero ($Q^2 = 0.41$), confirming the predictive relevance of the structural model.

Table 4 : Summary of Hypothesis Test

Hyp	Ind.	β	Mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	f2	P values	Decision
H1	ATT>VIN	0.063	0.066	0.058	1.081	0.006	0.280	Not Supported
H2	SN>VIN	0.192	0.193	0.055	3.490	0.060	0.000	Supported
H3	PBC>VIN	0.279	0.278	0.051	5.435	0.176	0.000	Supported
H4	HFA>VIN	-0.099	-0.097	0.052	1.903	0.015	0.057	Not Supported
H5	DT>VIN	0.551	0.546	0.076	7.258	0.309	0.000	Supported

The results presented in Table 4 indicate significant influences on visiting intention, including tourist subjective norm ($\beta = 0.192$, $p = 0.000$), tourist perceived behavioural control ($\beta = 0.279$, $p = 0.000$), and destination trust ($\beta = 0.551$, $p = 0.000$). These findings support H2, H3, and H5. However, tourist attitude ($\beta = 0.063$, $p = 0.280$) and halal-friendly attributes ($\beta = 0.015$, $p = 0.057$) do not have a significant effect on visiting intention, meaning H1 and H4 are not supported. Among all factors, destination trust has the strongest impact, exhibiting the largest significant effect ($f^2 = 0.309$) on visiting intention. In summary, Figure 3 visually represents the model's findings.

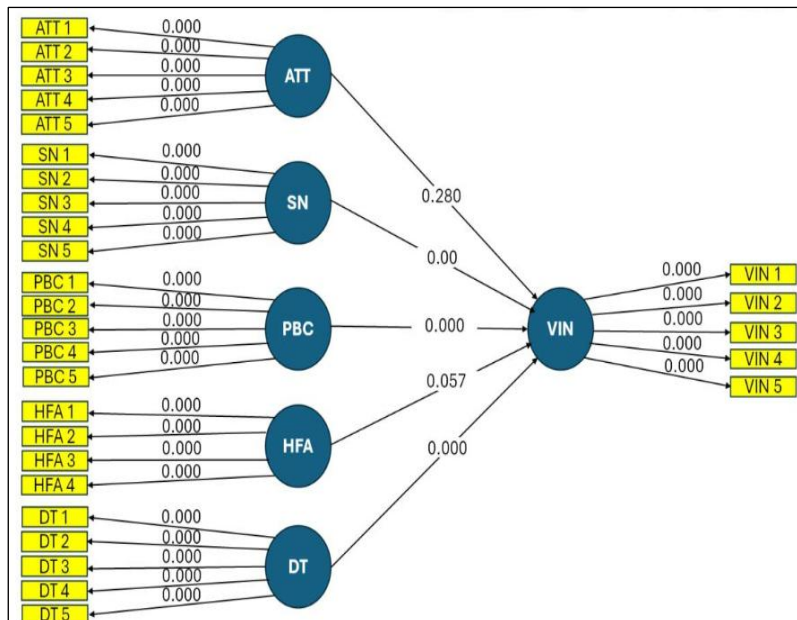


Figure 3 : Structural Model

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

This section discusses the hypotheses by evaluating the five constructs that influence Gen Z's decision to visit Sabah as a halal destination.

5.1 Tourist attitude positively influences Gen Z's visit intention (H1)

The hypothesis is not supported because the p-value for ATT is greater than 0.05. This implies that Gen Z's intention to visit is not greatly influenced by the attitudes of tourists. Previous studies have identified attitude as a key factor in predicting tourist visit intentions (Hasan et al., 2020; Bianchi et al., 2017). However, this finding implies that not all tourists develop a positive attitude towards visiting Sabah. Additionally, Sparks (2007) described attitude formation as influenced by "push-and-pull-related beliefs," which shape both positive attitudes and future behavioural intentions.

5.2 Tourist subjective norm positively influences Gen Z's visit intention (H2)

The hypothesis is supported because the SN p-value is less than 0.05. This suggests that Gen Z's intention to visit is highly influenced by subjective norms, supporting the notion that social

influences play a critical role in shaping people's choices and behaviours. This outcome is in line with previous studies by Quintal (2015), Hasan et al. (2020), and Bui et al. (2022), which also discovered that travel intentions are positively impacted by subjective norms.

5.3 Tourist perceived behavioural control influences Gen Z's visit intention (H3).

The hypothesis is supported by the p-value of less than 0.05, which shows that Gen Z's visit intentions are significantly influenced by perceived behavioural control. This suggests that tourists are more likely to visit Sabah when they perceive they have control over the necessary resources and opportunities to do so. This finding is aligned with prior research by Hussein et al. (2020), Sujood et al. (2021), Ghazanfar (2021), and Bui et al. (2022), all of which confirmed that perceived behavioural control positively affects travel intention.

5.4 Halal-friendly attributes influence Gen Z's visit intention (H4).

The hypothesis is not supported because the p-value for HFA is greater than 0.05, suggesting that Gen Z's intention to visit is not significantly influenced by halal-friendly features. While previous studies have identified halal-friendly attributes as crucial in predicting tourist visit intentions (Mursid & Anoraga, 2021; Eid & El-Gohary, 2015), this study suggests that they are not a determining factor for Gen Z tourists. Aji et al. (2022) and Sodawan (2022) reported similar results, indicating that Muslim tourists' intentions to travel to non-Muslim countries were not directly influenced by Islamic values.

5.5 Destination trust influences Gen Z's visit intention (H5).

As the p-value for DT is significantly below 0.05, the hypothesis is supported. This demonstrates that destination trust has a strong positive influence on Gen Z's visit intention, making it the most influential factor among all independent variables ($\beta = 0.551$). Trust in a tourism destination reflects consumers' confidence in the quality and reliability of its offerings. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Reza et al. (2012), Abubakar et al. (2017), and Al-Ansi (2019), which also highlighted the positive impact of destination trust on travel intention.

6.0 Implications of the Study

This research intends to assess and validate tourist visit intentions by extending the original Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) model. It incorporates two additional constructs; destination trust and halal-friendly attributes to provide a more comprehensive explanation, evaluation, and prediction of tourists' intentions to visit Sabah. The revised model integrates the core TPB constructs, including tourist attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, alongside these newly added factors. The findings indicate that this extended model significantly influences tourist visit intention, ultimately contributing to an increase in actual travel behaviour. Among the key findings, destination trust emerged as the most influential factor for Gen Z tourists, who heavily rely on credible sources when selecting travel destinations. Trust in a destination's reputation and reliability plays a critical role in influencing their travel decisions.

Given this, local authorities should focus on strengthening the credibility of Sabah as a tourist destination by disseminating reliable information through multiple channels and maintaining consistent, transparent communication. Enhancing trust can foster a sense of security and reliability, positively influencing tourists' final travel decisions. This research underlines the importance of destination trust in shaping tourist behaviour and suggests that improving trust can increase visit intention. Therefore, the local government should prioritize and focus on developing a strong and trustworthy destination image to attract more visitors. The extended TPB model proposed in this study offers valuable insights for improving tourist visit intentions. Specifically, to enhance tourist behaviour, the local government should prioritize destination trust, as it is the most significant factor in influencing visit intentions. It should also strengthen perceived behavioural control by ensuring that tourists have the confidence in their ability to visit and enjoy Sabah. Finally, it should foster positive subjective norms by leveraging local influencers and community support to shape social perceptions and encourage travel decisions. By strategically addressing these factors, the local government can effectively increase both travel intentions and actual tourist behaviour.

7.0 Research Limitations

Notwithstanding its contributions, this research has several limitations. Firstly, most of the Gen Z participants in the survey are



either currently studying or have recently entered the workforce. As a result, their travel patterns may be influenced by financial constraints and peak-season pricing, potentially leading to less favourable attitudes towards travel. Secondly, the cross-sectional research design used in this study makes it more difficult to determine causal relationships between the constructs. The study does not take into consideration potential shifts in respondents' attitudes or actions over time because the data were gathered all at once. Thirdly, the extended theoretical model proposed in this study does not encompass all potential constructs related to tourist visit intention. Factors such as past experiences and word-of-mouth recommendations were excluded, despite their potential impact on tourist decision-making.

8.0 Recommendations for Future Research

A few suggestions are made to improve further research in this field, building on the limitations that have been identified. Firstly, the scope of the study should be expanded by including a broader range of tourists rather than focusing solely on Gen Z. Future research could also examine other generational cohorts, such as Millennials or Baby Boomers, to determine whether the factors influencing visit intentions remain consistent across different age groups and demographics. Secondly, a longitudinal research design should be used in future studies to document how visitor attitudes and behaviours evolve over time. A longitudinal approach would give a more dynamic understanding of visit intentions and deeper insights into how attitudes form and change. Thirdly, future studies can incorporate additional context-specific constructs to further improve the predictive capability of the TPB model. Future studies could explore variables such as tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and emotional attachment to a destination. Additionally, examining the interplay between visit intention and other psychological or behavioural factors could contribute further towards a more comprehensive understanding of tourist decision-making. When these recommendations are taken into account, a more in-depth and holistic perspective on the factors influencing tourist visit intentions can be attained in future research, ultimately contributing to more effective tourism planning and marketing strategies.



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