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Social Media in Influencing Tourist Visit Decisions: Psychological and Emotional Complexity in Gen Z in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: The management of initial Hajj deposit funds in Indonesia presents significant challenges due to prolonged waiting periods and the productive utilization of funds under the wadiah safekeeping scheme. These practices raise concerns regarding contractual suitability, financial accountability, and distributive justice.
Research Gap: Existing Hajj fund management arrangements have not adequately addressed the incompatibility between long-term productive investments and safekeeping contracts, particularly regarding the equitable distribution of investment benefits to prospective pilgrims who cancel their pilgrimage.
Novelty: This study proposes a normative reformulation of initial Hajj deposit management by integrating Islamic capital market investments, distributive justice, and maqashid al-shariah principles into a more equitable contractual framework.
Method: This research employs a normative juridical approach supported by conceptual and Islamic economic analyses. Primary legal materials include Law Number 34 of 2014, relevant regulations, and DSN-MUI fatwas, complemented by scholarly literature concerning wadiah contracts and Islamic investment instruments.
Results: The findings reveal that applying wadiah contracts to long-term productive funds creates contractual inconsistencies and distributive justice concerns. Islamic capital market instruments, particularly State Sharia Securities (SBSN), corporate sukuk, and fixed-income Islamic mutual funds, offer potentially more appropriate alternatives through transparent returns, prudent investment management, and proportional benefit distribution.
Conclusion: Reformulating Hajj deposit management through Sharia-compliant investment mechanisms could strengthen legal certainty, protect prospective pilgrims' economic rights, promote distributive justice, and support sustainable Hajj financing while advancing the objectives of maqashid al-shariah.

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, information technology is developing rapidly, supported by the development and capabilities of the internet, which has become a part of every sector of life (Malik & Al-Emran, 2018). The development of information technology that connects people and is carried out online for interaction is known as social media. It has become one of the main platforms influencing human behavior and preferences in every social and economic aspect in the real world (Al-Emran & Salloum, 2017), has many functions (Al-Qaysi & Al-Emran, 2017) and makes life easier for people and companies (Alghizzawi et al., 2018; Salloum & Al-Emran, 2018).

Social media enables the creation of interactive content in cyberspace for mutual exchange (Weng & Huang, 2018), a means of change and progress (Leung et al., 2013), and can influence real-life behavior (S.-E. Kim et al., 2017). Therefore, it can be considered a tool that can provide valuable information for business purposes, one of which is tourism e-marketing (Islam, 2021). Social media plays a crucial role in various aspects of tourism, particularly for reservations, knowledge and experience exchange, and marketing of tourist destinations (Harrigan et al., 2017). Studies on the influence of social media on tourist destination choices are numerous and diverse (see Tham et al., 2020). Social media is considered capable of improving business performance and is an effective communication tool for obtaining information, identifying options, assessing, and making decisions about tourist destinations for both existing and prospective visitors (Song & Yoo, 2016; Pop et al., 2022). Information from experienced tourists with potential visitors can be exchanged through videos and photos to attract other potential visitors (Paul & Roy, 2017).

Social media platforms play a role in destination marketing strategies and provide tourists with the opportunity to share travel experiences in real-time (M. M. Khan et al., 2022). The most widely used social media and networking sites for sharing travel information and experiences include Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok (Edosomwan et al., 2011; Keelson et al., 2024), related to tourist destinations (Javed et al., 2020). This development has led to an increase in online information and content about tourist destinations (Narangajavana Kaosiri et al., 2019) and has become a platform for interaction, sharing online information, and exchanging ideas (Javed et al., 2020; Islam, 2021). Pantano et al., (2019), have examined the impact of online information quality on tourists' decision-making processes, highlighting the need to analyze how online information influences tourists' intentions and satisfaction due to the lack of evidence based on data and methods. Most research on travel decisions is currently influenced by the abundance of information obtained from social media and some on digital marketing (Islam, 2021; Khan et al., 2022; de Amorim et al., 2024).

Online reviews and recommendations have become crucial as a source of information for individuals engaging in tourism activities. This is because many business organizations utilize digital marketing to create relevant and engaging content to promote their destinations through images, videos, and other posts that can influence potential tourists' choice of destination (Toral et al., 2018; M. Kim & Kim, 2020). The content created must also be easily accessible and understandable for tourists to choose products and services (Racherla & Friske, 2012), which then reviews tourists' opinions regarding creation, experience, and satisfaction after a tourist visit (Lam et al., 2020). Previous literature has focused more on various factors, including brand image, brand trust, relationship quality, and service quality, with an emphasis on the interaction between tourist intention and satisfaction, as well as on digital interactions (M. G. Kim et al., 2014; Choi et al., 2018; Garay, 2019). Furthermore, this study adds to the evidence of tourist behavior and revisit intentions that are still unanswered through online content (Tham et al., 2020) by connecting the complexity of psychology and emotional aspects that mediate this relationship, especially for generation Z.

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, shares many similarities with Millennials, according to research (Huang & Petrick, 2009; Dolot, 2018; Hysa et al., 2021), although they differ significantly. This generation is open to new things, both technology and exploring new places, with social media being their primary communication medium. Generation Z is highly open to the world and frequently engages in various activities, including travel, despite often facing financial constraints due to not yet having professional jobs and still relying on their parents. Consequently, their travel activities are still domestic, with family or friends. Generation Z's goals for traveling include exploration, socializing, and seeking unique experiences (Yoo & Gretzel, 2024; Popșa, 2024), self-expression, and gaining social recognition through uploads (Kitsios et al., 2022), including Generation Z in Indonesia.

Indonesia as a country with a very large population of social media users and abundant tourism potential can be an opportunity and challenge when trying to increase tourism visits for Gen Z. The tourism needs of this generation are not only in the visual information aspect but also in experiences to fulfill their psychological and emotional needs, such as; social recognition, peer pressure, happiness and satisfaction felt during and after the visit. This study is present to fill the research gap that is still minimal in quantitatively examining the psychological and emotional complexity of the influence of social media on the visit decisions of Gen Z tourists in Indonesia. This study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how the dimensions of psychological complexity and emotional aspects mediate the relationship between social media exposure and tourist visit decisions, in order to help tourism industry players optimize digital-based marketing strategies that are effective and relevant to the characteristics of Generation Z. The results of this study are expected to provide benefits for tourism industry players to design effective marketing strategies by utilizing social media that can touch the psychological complexity and emotional aspects of Gen Z. As a reference to enrich the literature and develop tourism programs and facilities that suit the needs of the young digital generation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrative Theoretical Foundation: S-O-R Framework and TPB

This study examines how social media influences the travel behavior of Generation Z by integrating the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). Within the S-O-R framework, social media serves as the external stimulus (S), characterized by visual information, interactivity, user-generated content (UGC), and traveler reviews (Sotiriadis, 2017; Lin & Rasoolimanesh, 2024). The organism (O) component representing the individual's internal state is defined by two primary mediating pathways: psychological complexity (involving cognitive processes, identity evaluation, and social pressure) and emotional aspects (ranging from affective arousal and excitement to the Fear of Missing Out phenomenon) (L. Wang et al., 2026; Bigne et al., 2020). Finally, the traveler's decision to visit constitutes the ultimate behavioral response (R) (Majeed et al., 2020). Positioning psychological complexity and emotional aspects as mediators' rests on a fundamental theoretical rationale. Based on S-O-R and TPB principles, exposure to social media stimuli does not immediately trigger a physical action; instead, the digital information first transforms the individual's mental and emotional states (Kamboj et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2013). The integration of TPB reinforces this perspective by demonstrating that subjective norms (social pressure) and perceived behavioral control shaped via social media must be processed within the individual's psychological and emotional realms before manifesting as actual travel intentions and decisions (Shekhar et al., 2026; (T. J. Lee et al., 2025).

The Role of Social Media in Psychological Complexity

The impact of social media on psychological complexity has attracted considerable attention in numerous studies, particularly regarding the impact of intensive social media use on users' mental health and well-being (Sharma et al., 2023). These effects emerge when excessive social media use can increase the risk of anxiety, stress, and psychological disorders, varying depending on individual characteristics and digital literacy levels. Social media significantly impacts users' psychological complexity, particularly in the context of social communication, pressure to perform perfectly, and self-image disturbances. In addition to its negative impacts, media in the context of tourism plays a positive role in influencing the psychological complexity of Generation Z's tourism journeys, in line with the development of digital technology and the information consumption patterns of this generation. Generation Z lives within a phygital ecosystem where the boundaries between physical reality and digital space have become increasingly blurred (Benckendorff et al., 2019). To elucidate specific dimensions of this psychological complexity such as peer pressure, the need for social recognition, and self-identity formation this study draws upon two key social psychological theories. The first is Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954); on social media, exposure to ideally curated travel content triggers upward social comparison, often leading to psychological stress and anxiety regarding social status acceptance (Chae, 2018; Schmuck et al., 2019). The second is Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000); for Generation Z, travel activities shared on digital platforms serve as a means to reinforce self-identity and gain social recognition from their peer groups (Gretzel & Yoo, 2013; Deci et al., 2017). Several studies have shown that social

media functions as a stimulus that influences the psychological state of Generation Z users, by building self-congruence and trust that form the basis for tourism decision-making (W. Wang & Iahad, n.d.). Exposure to visual and interactive tourism content can activate social communication mechanisms and the need for recognition, creating psychological pressure to choose destinations for self-expression and social recognition (Yamagishi et al., 2024). Social media influences the formation of self-perception and self-image through social interactions and content, triggering emotional and psychological complexity to recover and meet established social expectations (Z. Huang et al., 2025). Thus, social media, which plays a crucial role in shaping psychological complexity, drives travel decisions. Through a combination of interacting psychological factors, it creates unique and multidimensional travel motivations among Generation Z.

H1: Psychological complexity has a significant positive effect on travel decisions among Generation Z.

The Role of Social Media on Emotional Aspects

Regarding tourism behavior, social media plays a crucial role in shaping the emotional aspects of Generation Z (Hayes, 2021). The explanation of how social media triggers this affective appeal can be understood through Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973), which posits that media users do not merely absorb information passively but actively select and consume media to satisfy specific needs. These needs include the pursuit of emotional gratification, entertainment, and tension release (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Mao, 2022). Generation Z grew up in the digital era, receiving varied inspiration and facilitating social interaction. Visual, interactive, and easily accessible content on social media can stimulate emotional responses. Therefore, it can be said that emotionally, social media can lead to happiness, enthusiasm, and pride, which are key drivers in motivating travel. S. Wang et al., (2022), showed that the quality and attractiveness of social media content increase the intensity of positive emotions such as joy and hope, which contribute to interest and travel decisions. Interaction with user-generated content and testimonials on social media can create strong emotional resonance that enhances the user's emotional bond with the destination (Sykora et al., 2022; Correia et al., 2025). Furthermore, Chakrabarti, (2024) highlighted the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) triggered by social media activity as an emotional factor that drives Generation Z to make decisions. This also impacts tourism activities, preventing them from feeling left behind or missing out on valuable experiences (D. Lee et al., 2024). Therefore, it can be said that social media not only serves as a communication and marketing tool but also as a key trigger for deep and complex emotional aspects in Generation Z, encouraging them to travel (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). Optimal marketing strategies that integrate these emotional elements can capture attention and build strong personal bonds, especially with today's younger target market.

H2: Social media has a significant positive effect on emotional aspects in Generation Z.

The Role of Social Media and Tourist Visit Decisions

Social media shapes consumer behavior and has now become a major force, including in the tourism sector. Generation Z, a demographic group, has unique information consumption patterns and is highly active on social media. Extensive research has demonstrated that social media plays a role beyond simply being a source of information and influencing travel decisions, offering visual content, testimonials, and social interactions that enhance destination appeal (S. Wang et al., 2022; Y. Wang & Guo, 2025; S. Khan et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2025). Social media exposure ultimately contributes to increased travel intentions by providing authentic and inspiring travel experiences. Tourism research consistently shows that social media can fundamentally change the tourist decision-making process, which is generally divided into pre-travel, during-travel, and post-travel stages (Tikhonova, 2020; Lallukka, 2021; Gulati, 2024; Shahzad et al., 2024). During the pre-travel phase, Generation Z primarily seeks information and inspiration through social media sources such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube (Şchiopu et al., 2023; Yamagishi et al., 2024; Berry et al., 2025). In some cases, social media becomes a primary reference, surpassing traditional media such as official tourism websites (Milano et al., 2011; Duarte Alonso et al., 2013). Furthermore, Generation Z travelers validate and use it in their search for new ideas and destinations, sparking their interest in visiting by viewing engaging visual content that sparks interest and a desire to travel. Meanwhile, post-trip, social media can also impact future revisit intentions (J. Li et al., 2025). This is because social media platforms can foster ongoing interactions and evoke memories of previous travel experiences.

H3: Social media use has a positive and significant impact on the visit decisions of Generation Z tourists.

The Role of Psychological Complexity in Tourist Visit Decisions

A person's decision to visit a tourist destination is not triggered solely by a single factor or a single action, but rather by the complex interaction of various psychological factors within the individual (Smallman & Moore, 2010). Psychological complexity sometimes reinforces or contradicts each other, ultimately resulting in a final choice (Peterson & Flanders, 2002). The psychological complexity of travelers refers to a series of processes and internal characteristics of individuals in processing information, evaluating destination options, and making travel decisions (McCabe et al., 2016). The psychological complexity of Generation Z encompasses various factors such as social pressure (peer pressure), the need for social recognition, the formation of self-identity, and anxiety that develop due to intensive interaction with social media, ultimately influencing Generation Z's decision to travel to fulfill their psychological and social needs. Currently, Generation Z is driven to travel and validate their personal image in social networks. This is a response to the complex digital pressures and expectations that affect every aspect of their lives. Furthermore, social anxiety and the need for social acceptance can lead to a discontinuation of travel intentions, where travel activities act as a coping mechanism for psychological distress and restore mental well-being (Zhu et al., 2020; P. Li et al., 2024).

H4: Psychological complexity has a significant positive effect on travel decisions among Generation Z.

The Role of Emotional Aspects in Tourist Visit Decisions

Travel decisions in tourism activities are driven not only by rational needs, such as cost or time efficiency, but also by factors fundamentally driven by the pursuit and management of emotions. In other words, tourism is the purchase of experiences aimed at producing desired emotional states (Harrison, 2003; Knobloch et al., 2017). Emotional aspects refer to the feelings, affections, and psychological reactions experienced by individuals during the decision-making process and during their visit to a destination. Emotions are important drivers that ultimately influence preferences and behavior in tourism. The influence of emotional aspects on tourism visit decisions is a crucial factor frequently investigated in studies of tourist behavior (Walters & Li, 2017; Pestana et al., 2020). Emotions are drivers that influence experiences related to liking and interest, ultimately leading to the decision to choose and visit a tourist destination. Thus, emotional aspects can play a role in strengthening the attractiveness of a destination by building a more personal connection between tourists and the destination (Biswas et al., 2021). In Generation Z, emotional aspects also play a significant role in motivating them to travel (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2024). Generation Z seeks travel experiences not only for enjoyment but also to fulfill their emotional needs (such as relaxation, healing, and happiness). Therefore, these emotional aspects can play a role in Generation Z's travel decision-making, providing for their needs and providing a form of digital social interaction.

H5: Emotional aspects have a significant positive effect on travel decisions among Generation Z.

The Role of Psychological Complexity as a Mediator

Previous research has demonstrated a strong relationship between social media, psychological factors, and travel decisions (W. Wang & Iahad, n.d.; Ivasciuc et al., 2024). The conceptual framework in this study is built on various relevant psychological complexities that refer to deeper internal mechanisms triggered by social media exposure prior to the actual decision to visit. These complex and multidimensional psychological complexities include social pressure, anxiety, the need for recognition, and the formation of self-identity (Mishra et al., 2009; Zhang & Qin, 2023). Positioning psychological complexity as a mediating factor is crucial, given the existence of contradictory academic findings (a research gap). Several studies note that intense social media exposure does not always correlate directly with actual travel behavior; in some instances, excessive exposure leads merely to passive inspiration such as digital window shopping or triggers social media fatigue, which diminishes the intention to travel (Dhir et al., 2018; Salo et al., 2019; Zheng & Ling, 2021). This inconsistency points to the existence of a black box mechanism mediating the relationship (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Zhao et al., 2010). In the context of tourism, particularly among Generation Z, who are connected to social media, psychological complexities play a significant role as a mediator in the relationship between social media exposure and travel decisions. Social media, as a source of information and social interaction, will generate

psychological stress due to social comparison and complex validation needs, which ultimately motivate the decision to visit a tourist destination (W. Wang & Iahad, n.d.). In line with this, several researchers have found the effect of social media use on travel intentions among adolescents, and found that psychological complexity strengthens the relationship between social media and travel intentions (Karaiskou, 2025; Wei et al., 2025). Furthermore, the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) aspect that arises from social media activity, which is part of psychological complexity, drives travel decision-making to avoid missing out on important social experiences (Hodkinson, 2019; Saini et al., 2025). Thus, psychological complexity can bridge social media exposure and interaction to direct the impulse in travel decision-making by introducing emotional pressures and needs that Generation Z responds to.

H6: Psychological complexity mediates the influence of social media on travel decisions among Generation Z.

The Role of Emotional Aspects in Mediating

Besides directly influencing travel decisions, emotional aspects are also considered to be important mediators in the relationship between social media influence and travel decisions. Several social media platforms, through various platforms, not only provide visual and interactive destination information but also evoke emotions such as anticipation, excitement, and strong curiosity. Consequently, these emotions ultimately strengthen a person's tendency to visit the destination featured on social media. The mediating role of emotional aspects offers a theoretical explanation for studies finding a weak direct link between social media and actual visitation. Without deep emotional engagement (emotional resonance), visual stimuli from social media fail to drive consumers toward a decision to visit (Hosany et al., 2017; Cunha et al., 2026). Several studies (Lee et al., 2024; Çetinkaya & Yıldız, 2025) highlight the role of the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) phenomenon triggered by travel content on social media in travel decisions. FoMO can function as an emotional trigger that encourages travel decisions to avoid missing out on trending and popular social experiences (Saini et al., 2025; Kumar & Kumar, 2025; D. Kim & Wongsa, 2025). This confirms that social media can activate emotional responses that can ultimately influence destination preferences and subsequently travel planning. Travel experiences are subsequently expressed on social media, ultimately eliciting positive emotions and strengthening future revisit decisions, including for Generation Z. This is because this generation tends to seek social validation and authentic experiences that can be shared on their digital platforms (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018; Yamagishi et al., 2024; Rodrigues et al., 2024). From this literature, it appears that the emotional perspective mechanism is an important mediator in explaining how visually appealing and interactive social media translates into an influence on travel decisions (S. Wang et al., 2022). This emotional aspect has played a crucial role in mediating the relationship between social media influence and travel decisions, especially among Generation Z, who are highly active on digital platforms. Social media not only provides destination information and inspiration but also triggers intense emotional responses such as anticipation, excitement, and satisfaction, which strengthen travel decisions.

H7: Emotional aspects mediate the influence of social media on travel decisions among Generation Z.

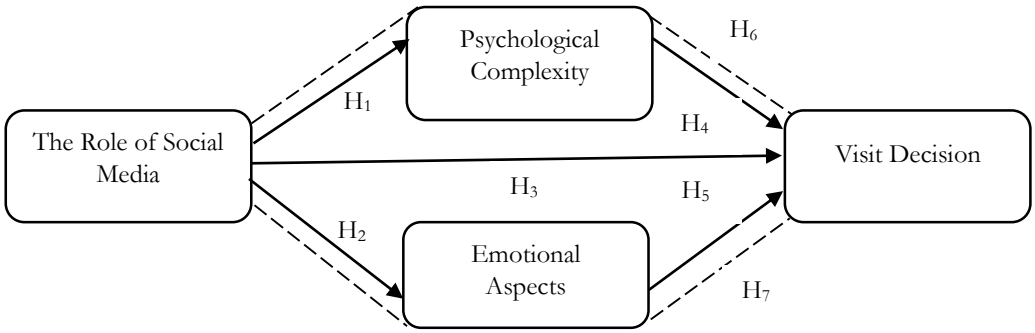


Figure 1. Research Framework

METHOD

This study was designed to examine the influence of social media on travel decisions for Generation Z in the natural tourism of the Southern Mountains Coast of Central Java and Yogyakarta by considering the mediating role of psychological complexity and emotional aspects. The population of this study was Generation Z tourists who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. This study employed a non-probability sampling technique using a purposive sampling approach (combined with incidental sampling at the tourist sites). This choice was necessitated by the absence of a precise sampling frame for the Gen Z tourist population at the research locations. Specific inclusion criteria were established for respondents: (1) Generation Z individuals aged 18–28; (2) active users of at least one social media platform (Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook) for seeking travel information within the last six months; and (3) individuals who had visited or were planning to visit natural tourist attractions along the Southern Mountain coast of Central Java and Yogyakarta. The respondent identification and recruitment process was conducted using a hybrid approach (offline and online). Offline, questionnaires were distributed directly at key gathering points within the tourist areas to capture a diverse range of tourist characteristics. Online, Google Forms links were disseminated through regional travel-oriented social media communities. To mitigate potential selection bias arising from the dominance of specific user groups, the questionnaire included screening questions at the beginning.

The target sample size was determined based on the approach of J. Hair & Alamer (2022), which suggests a sample size of 5 to 10 times the number of indicators/parameters, resulting in a minimum target of 230 respondents. Based on an a priori power calculation analysis using the G*Power application (assuming an effect size of $f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, and statistical power $(1-\beta) = 0.80$), the minimum sample size required to test both direct and mediating (indirect) effects is 148 respondents. The actual sample size of 230 respondents yielded a statistical power exceeding 0.90, providing robust statistical strength to simultaneously detect mediation effects across multiple variables while minimizing the risk of Type II errors (J. F. Hair, 2021). The demographic profile showing that the majority of respondents resided in or traveled within the Central Java and Yogyakarta regions is acknowledged as a research limitation regarding the generalizability of the findings (external validity). Cultural characteristics, price sensitivity levels, and social media usage patterns among Gen Z tourists outside of Java may involve different dynamics; therefore, generalizing these results to the entire Gen Z population in Indonesia requires caution.

Data collection was carried out through direct distribution of questionnaires using the Google Forms online survey platform containing questions related to the research variables for the period November-May 2026. The data collection design of this research is cross-sectional (one point in time). The author realizes that the cross-sectional design has limitations in confirming causality inferences explicitly and has the potential to give rise to reverse causality such as individuals who already have the intention or have already made a travel decision tend to be more active in searching for and interacting with social media content related to that destination. This limitation of temporal causality is emphasized as a study limitation that is recommended to be tested further through longitudinal or experimental research in the future. Given that the data were collected using single-source, cross-sectional self-report instruments, potential threats from Common Method Bias (CMB) were addressed through both procedural and statistical measures. Statistically, Harman's Single-Factor Test revealed that the primary single factor accounted for only 45.37% of the variance (below the 50% threshold), confirming that Common Method Bias does not pose a significant issue contaminating the research model (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Kock, 2015).

The measurement constructs of this study include the role of social media (as seen from visual content, testimonials, social interactions), psychological complexity (peer pressure, need for social recognition, self-identity), emotional aspects (pride, happiness, experiential motivation), and visiting decisions at tourist attractions (intention to explore, actual visits, desire to revisit, recommendations to others, perceptions of satisfaction that drive decisions). The survey of these constructs used a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree) to measure respondents' opinions and perceptions. A 6-point Likert scale (an even number of options) was deliberately chosen to eliminate the neutral center category. This choice is based on the argument that Indonesian respondents tend to exhibit central tendency bias a preference for choosing a safe, middle-ground answer. By removing the neutral option, respondents are encouraged to make a more decisive, rational choice effectively a forced-choice scenario leaning toward agreement or disagreement, without compromising the instrument's

reliability or the availability of optimal data variance for multivariate analysis (Garland, 1991; Chomeya, 2010).

The design for testing causality and mediation relationships was quantitative explanatory using a structured questionnaire. Hypothesis testing employed a structural equation model (Structural Equation Modeling-SEM), with a variance-based method, namely Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was chosen because it is ideal for testing complex models with many mediating variables simultaneously. Data analysis was conducted in two main stages: the outer model and the inner model. The outer model aimed to test the validity and reliability of the instrument through a convergent validity test with a factorial loading value of at least 0.7, an average variance extracted (AVE) > 0.5, and a reliability test with Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7. In addition, discriminant validity testing was also conducted using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT < 0.90) to ensure the distinctness of the measured constructs. Next, the inner model was tested to see the relationship between the latent constructs of direct and indirect influence between research variables, which were analyzed based on the values of the path coefficient, t-statistic, and R-square, as well as a bootstrapping procedure to test the significance of the mediation effect.

RESULTS

Understanding the direct and indirect influences on tourist visit decisions for Generation Z, in this study researchers collected responses from tourists who visited various tourist attractions on the South Coast of Central Java and Yogyakarta. In accordance with the aims and objectives of the study in investigating the behavioral practices of Generation Z in conducting tourism, it was seen from the influence of external and internal factors of respondents in making tourist visits. Details of respondent characteristics seen from the demographic aspect are presented including age, gender, education level, occupation, residence, and access to technology and social media where those who met the criteria to be sampled were 224 respondents.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Category	Total	Percentage
Age	≤ 18	16	7,14
	> 18- ≤ 22	107	47,77
	> 23- ≤ 28	101	45,09
Gender	Male	106	47,32
	Female	118	52,68
Education	Junior High School	5	2,23
	Senior High School	111	49,55
	Diploma	35	15,63
	Bachelor	59	26,34
	Postgraduate	14	6,25
Residential Area	Central Java	124	55,36
	Yogyakarta	79	35,27
	Other	21	9,37
Accessed Social Media Platforms	Social networking	116	51,79
	Content Media	108	48,21
Reasons for Visiting	Searching for Social Media Content	78	34,82
	Relaxation and Escape	84	37,50
	Following Trends/FoMO	62	27,68
Visit Intensity (last 1 year)	1-2 times	99	44,20
	times	87	38,84
	> 5 times	38	16,96

Source: Processed data (2026)

The majority of respondents in this study showed that the age of generation Z was mostly in the age range of 18-22 years (47.77%), female (52.68%), high school educated (49.55%), domiciled in Central Java province (55.36%) which represents the respondent profile from demographic and geographical aspects. Furthermore, the results of the study also showed that the reasons for respondents' visits were almost evenly distributed in the aspect of social media use although the majority were for Relaxation

and Escape reasons (37.50%) with an average visit intensity of 1-2 times (44.20%), visits to the South Coast of Central Java and Yogyakarta, which means showing the integration of media in building tourist visits mediated by the complexity of psychology and emotional aspects.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
The Role of social media	4,656	1,016	1	6
Psychological Complexity	4,653	1,020	1	6
Emotional Aspects	4,647	1,020	1	6
Visit Decision	4,745	1,005	1	6

Source: Processed data (2026)

Furthermore, descriptive statistics show that studies related to the role of social media, psychological complexity, emotional aspects, and visit decisions, all appear to show positive perceptions. The role of social media shows an average score of 4.656, indicating that Generation Z has a positive perception of social media use. Psychological Complexity and Emotional Aspects also have high averages, 4.63 and 4.67, respectively, indicating that Generation Z has high psychological complexity and emotional aspects. Visit decisions have a positive value with an average value of 4.745, which means that across all variables, Generation Z experiences positive conditions in making visits.

Table 3. Factor Loadings, Reliability and Validity Test

Variable	Item	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
The Role of social media	KV1	0,748	0,883	0,912	0,633
	KV2	0,831			
	TES1	0,848			
	TES2	0,790			
	IS1	0,821			
	IS2	0,729			
Psychological Complexity	TS1	0,800	0,844	0,890	0,618
	TS2	0,723			
	PS1	0,753			
	PS2	0,813			
	ID1	0,788			
	ID2	0,728			
Emotional Aspects	RB1	0,720	0,864	0,896	0,590
	RB2	0,721			
	KB1	0,758			
	KB2	0,800			
	MP1	0,811			
	MP2	0,778			
Visit Decision	NM	0,702	0,859	0,895	0,586
	KA	0,790			
	KU	0,871			
	RO	0,799			
	PK	0,760			

Source: Processed data (2026)

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

Reliability and validity in this study are seen from the constructs consisting of factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extraction (AVE). To ensure the content validity of the research instrument (J. F. Hair, 2021), each construct is measured using specific indicators. First, the role of social media is measured through three indicators reflecting visual content, testimonials, and social interaction. Second, psychological complexity is measured through three indicators representing peer pressure, the need for social recognition, and self-identity. Third, emotional aspects are measured through three indicators describing pride, happiness, and experience-based motivation. Visit decisions are measured through four indicators encompassing the intention to explore, actual visits, the desire to revisit, recommendations to others, and the perception of satisfaction that drives decision making.

The results show that the factor loadings for all variables have values that exceed the recommended threshold of 0.7. These results indicate that the items accurately represent their respective constructs. The role of social media has a loading between 0.729 and 0.848, psychological complexity ranges from 0.723 and 0.813, emotional aspects range from 0.720 to 0.811, and the visit decision item has a loading value between 0.702 and 0.871. In terms of Cronbach's alpha, the study results all show values above 0.7, which indicates strong internal consistency. The CR value shows results exceeding the threshold value of 0.7, while for the AVE values all above 0.5, so it can be said that the convergent validity is adequate. Overall, these results show that the items forming the construct in building a reliable measurement model are very good.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

Construct	1	2	3	4
The Role of social media	0,796			
Psychological Complexity	0,622	0,786		
Emotional Aspects	0,760	0,614	0,768	
Visit Decision	0,643	0,716	0,645	0,766

Source: Processed data (2026)

Discriminant validity testing uses the Fornell-Larcker Criterion to compare the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct with its correlation. The diagonal value explains the variance captured by the construct indicators. The results of the table show that all diagonal values are higher than the off-diagonal correlation, which means that the constructs are different from each other or are not over-correlated. For example, the square root of the role of social media has a correlation of 0.796, which is higher than the correlation of psychological complexity (0.622) and emotional aspects (0.760), indicating that the constructs are discriminatively valid.

To address concerns regarding potential overlap between closely related constructs—specifically between Psychological Complexity and Emotional Aspects discriminant validity was also evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, as recommended in recent methodological literature (Henseler et al., 2015). The analysis results indicate that all HTMT values between constructs fall below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (HTMT Social Media Role Psychological Complexity = 0.712; HTMT Social Media Role Emotional Aspects = 0.810; HTMT Psychological Complexity Emotional Aspects = 0.745). This confirms that all constructs are empirically and conceptually independent, free from multicollinearity issues, and genuinely measure distinct psychological and emotional dimensions.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model) and Model Fit

The overall model fit was evaluated by assessing the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value. The research model yielded an SRMR value of 0.062. This value falls below the recommended threshold of 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Henseler et al., 2016), indicating that the structural model demonstrates a very good fit. The model's explanatory power was evaluated using the R^2 values of the endogenous constructs. The results show that the psychological complexity construct had an R^2 value of 0.268 (26.8%), while the emotional aspect construct had an R^2 value of 0.413 (41.3%). Meanwhile, the primary endogenous variable—visit decision yielded an R^2 value of 0.682 (68.2%); this indicates that the combined roles of social media, psychological complexity, and emotional aspects explain 68.2% of the variance in Generation Z's visit decisions, a level classified as having strong (substantial) predictive power in tourism consumer behavior research (J. F. Hair, 2021). The remaining 31.8% of the variance is influenced by factors outside the model, such as cost efficiency, geographic accessibility, and other qualitative variables.

Next, the practical significance of each path was evaluated using effect size (f^2) based on Cohen's (1988) criteria (0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large). The analysis results indicate that the role of social media exerts a medium f^2 effect on psychological complexity ($f^2 = 0.118$) and a very large effect on the emotional aspect ($f^2 = 0.705$). Regarding the visitation decision, it makes a dominant direct contribution ($f^2 = 0.812$), whereas the emotional aspect exerts a medium effect ($f^2 = 0.284$) and psychological complexity exerts a small yet significant effect ($f^2 = 0.041$). Furthermore, the model's predictive relevance was assessed via blindfolding analysis to obtain the Q^2 value (Geisser-Stone's Predictor Sample Reuse). The Q^2 values for psychological complexity (0.162), the emotional aspect (0.258), and the visitation decision (0.451) are all well above zero (0) (J. F. Hair, 2021), demonstrating

that the structural model possesses highly adequate predictive relevance for predicting tourism visitation decisions.

Direct Effect

The next step after validating the measurement model is to examine the structural relationships between core variables by examining the parameter coefficient values and t-statistic values presented in the bootstrapping algorithm. This begins with presenting the results of the direct effects analysis, which examines the path coefficients, compares the t-table and t-statistic values, and establishes a significance level at alpha 0.05 (5%) for each hypothesized relationship. The study focuses on how the role of social media, psychological complexity, and emotional aspects can influence and directly impact visit decisions. The results of this study can provide suggestions and insights into the strength and direction of the relationships between variables to evaluate the research hypothesis.

Table 5. Direct Effect Estimation

Path	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Note
The Role of social media => Visit Decision	0,189	2,630	0,009	Strong support
The Role of social media => Psychological Complexity	0,760	20,490	0,000	Strong support
The Role of social media => Emotional Aspects	0,643	14,225	0,000	Strong support
Psychological Complexity => Visit Decision	0,149	2,116	0,035	Strong support
Emotional Aspects => Visit Decision	0,499	7,798	0,000	Strong support

Source: Processed data (2026)

The role of social media has a path coefficient of 0.189 ($t = 2.630$, $p < 0.001$), which indicates that the role of social media has a higher value leading to a greater influence of psychological complexity for generation Z. The role of social media can also influence the relationship to visit decisions by having a positive effect with a path coefficient of 0.760 ($t = 20.490$, $p < 0.000$), thus indicating that social media can encourage visit decisions. The role of social media can also have a positive and strong effect on emotional aspects with a path coefficient of 0.643 ($t = 14.225$, $p < 0.000$). Psychological Complexity and Emotional Aspects as connecting variables of social media and visit decisions have positive path coefficients of 0.149 ($t = 2.116$, $p < 0.035$) and 0.499 ($t = 7.798$, $p < 0.000$). These results provide strong support for the hypothesis that the role of social media, psychological complexity, and emotional aspects can all have a positive impact on visiting decisions in generation Z.

Indirect Effect

This study also explores the mediating role of psychological complexity and emotional aspects to link the role of social media in influencing visit decisions for generation Z. Table 6 shows the results of the mediation analysis in demonstrating the indirect influence of the role of social media on visit decisions through psychological complexity and emotional aspects. This analysis includes path coefficients, t-values that are above the threshold of 1.96, and p-values that confirm the significance of the influence, as statistical evidence whether psychological complexity and emotional aspects significantly mediate the relationship. Understanding these mediation paths can add depth to the model and see the central role of psychological complexity and emotional aspects in improving tourist visit decisions for generation Z.

Table 6. Mediating Effects of Psychological Complexity and Emotional Aspects

Path	Indirect Effect	t-value	p-value	Note
The Role of social media => Psychological Complexity => Visit Decision	0,113	2,085	0,038	Strong support

The Role of social media => Emotional Aspects => Visit Decision	0,320	6,866	0,000	Strong support

Source: Processed data (2026)

The role of social media has an indirect effect of 0.113 on visiting decisions ($t = 2.085$, $p < 0.038$), which indicates that psychological complexity partially mediates the relationship between the role of social media and visiting decisions. Furthermore, the role of social media has an indirect effect on visiting decisions of 0.320 ($t = 6.866$, $p < 0.000$), which indicates that social media on visiting decisions is mediated through emotional aspects.

To precisely determine the nature of the mediation, a Variance Accounted For (VAF) analysis was conducted based on the approaches of Zhao et al. (2010) and J. F. Hair (2021). The calculation regarding the indirect effect of social media on visit decisions via psychological complexity yielded a VAF of 12.9% (classified as partial mediation, as VAF < 20% yet the indirect effect was significant). The mediation path via emotional aspects resulted in a VAF of 29.6% (20% ≤ VAF ≤ 80%), confirming a role of partial mediation (specifically, complementary partial mediation). The direct effect of social media on visit decisions was significant and substantial (0.760; $p < 0.000$), confirming that psychological complexity and emotional aspects act as partial mediators that reinforce rather than replace the direct influence of social media exposure on travel decisions.

All direct and indirect hypotheses in this study were significantly supported; consequently, a critical evaluation was conducted to rule out potential methodological artifacts or overfitting. An assessment of the instrument using Harman's single-factor test revealed that Common Method Bias (CMB) accounted for less than 50% of the variance (specifically 45.37%), indicating the absence of significant common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The adequacy of the sample size ($N = 224$) relative to the number of constructs, combined with the high degree of indicator variation, confirms that the support for these hypotheses reflects actual empirical phenomena regarding Generation Z within the digital tourism ecosystem, rather than resulting from data overfitting.

Figure 2 shows the bootstrapping results depicting the relationships between constructs in a structural equation model (SEM) and the relationships between latent variables and their indicators. The latent variables in this study include the Role of social media, Psychological Complexity, Emotional Aspects, and Visit Decision, where each variable is indicated by the observed variables that are appropriate. The path coefficients from the bootstrapping results indicate the strength of the relationship between constructs. For example, the path from the Role of social media to Psychological Complexity has a coefficient of 19.617, while the path from Psychological Complexity to Visit Decision has a coefficient of 2.058. The R-squared value for the latent variables reflects the explanatory power of the model. The R^2 value for the role of social media, for example, is 26.769, indicating that the independent variables explain most of the variance.

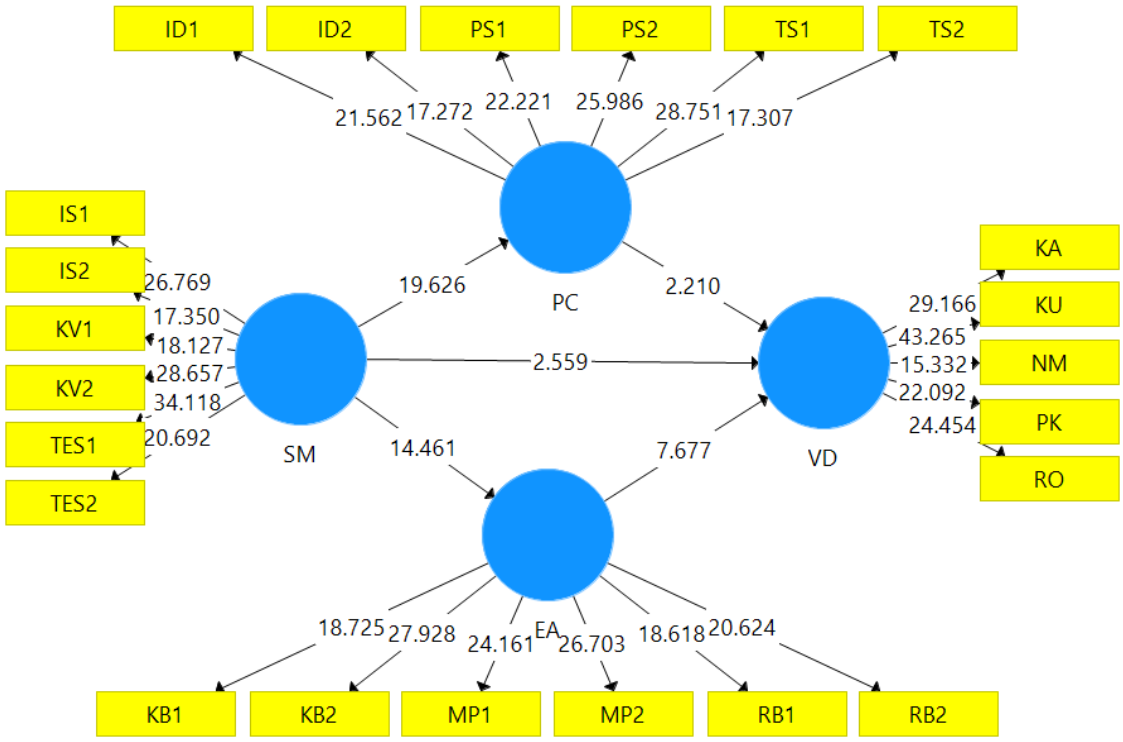


Figure 2. Bootstrapping Test Results

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show the relationship between how complex Generation Z makes tourist visit decisions influenced by social media factors, and psychological complexity, as well as emotional aspects, underlined as having an important role as a mediator. The positive relationship between the Role of social media and psychological complexity indicates that Generation Z in using social media by viewing visual content, testimonials from their generation peers, which are strengthened by social interactions, can lead to individual psychological complexity. This study is in line with the conclusions conveyed by W. Wang & Iahad, n.d., where exposure to visual and interactive tourism content can create psychological pressure for self-disclosure and social recognition (Yamagishi et al., 2024), the formation of perception and self-image (Z. Huang et al., 2025). Thus, social media can have an impact on the activities of Generation Z to always maintain their interactive relationships so that negative psychological impacts do not occur by being active on social media. Furthermore, the role of social media also drives the emergence of emotional aspects in Generation Z. social media contains messages related to visual content, with several testimonials given by peers and strong social interactions between them elicit emotions for Generation Z who have feelings of pride when together, happy to meet on social media, and encourage many experiences for them from the results of interacting with each other. These results are consistent with studies by S. Wang et al., (2022), who found that the quality and attractiveness of social media content increase the intensity of positive emotions, interactions with user-generated content and testimonials on social media can create strong emotional resonance (Sykora et al., 2022; Correia et al., 2025), and Chakrabarti, (2024) who highlighted the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) in social media activities. Furthermore, the decision to visit for Generation Z at the southern coast destinations of Central Java and Yogyakarta has a strong reference to these tours, because the media provides this information in interesting visual content based on the visiting experiences of their peers. This finding supports the research conducted by (S. Wang et al., 2022; Y. Wang & Guo, 2025; S. Khan et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2025), where social media contributes to visits with authentic and inspiring tourism experiences.

The complexity of psychology itself in influencing the decision to visit for Generation Z is very important to encourage peers to visit together, together telling experiences that have been passed as a form of social recognition and showing their identity as part of their peers. This result is consistent with the study of the complex interaction of individual psychological factors (Smallman & Moore, 2010), can

reinforce or conflict with each other in the final choice (Peterson & Flanders, 2002), and processing information, evaluating destination choices, and making travel decisions (McCabe et al., 2016). The emotional aspect contributes to the decision to visit related to the feeling of pride of Generation Z if they have made a visit that comes into their mind, of course with a feeling of happiness because the visit has been experienced, with the encouragement to have a strong experience of visiting tourist attractions that have been informed by their peers. This is consistent with findings that tourism generates emotional states (Harrison, 2003; Knobloch et al., 2017), driving destination experiences and attractions (Biswas et al., 2021; Haddouche & Salomone, 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2024). The study results indicate that psychological complexity and emotional aspects partially mediate the role of social media in travel decisions (complementary partial mediation). Therefore, the test results indicate that psychological complexity and emotional aspects play a full mediating role, where social media not only provides information but also triggers various psychological complexities and increases Generation Z's emotions. Visual content and narratives on social media are very effective in evoking psychological and emotional states in Generation Z, which ultimately drives travel decisions. Most travel decisions made by Generation Z are made after experiencing psychological pressure and individual emotional aspects that are processed and rationalized, although not solely due to social media exposure. These results align with findings that psychological complexity can strengthen the relationship between social media and travel intentions (Karaiskou, 2025; Wei et al., 2025). Furthermore, regarding the tourist experience for Generation Z expressed on social media for social validation and authentic experiences published on their digital platforms (according to studies: Haddouche & Salomone, 2018; Yamagishi et al., 2024; Rodrigues et al., 2024).

The complex psychological and emotional makeup of Generation Z, which influences their decision-making process for travel, requires appropriate strategies to be implemented for this generation. The first strategy is to create content on social media that is not only informative but also able to evoke emotional resonance by creating authentic stories, engaging visuals, and narratives that touch on values and aspirations, which can ultimately enhance emotional continuity and influence travel decisions. The next strategy is to understand the psychological complexity of Generation Z, where social pressure and validation of needs demand a personal and fast-paced communication approach. To achieve this, using relatable influencers with two-way interaction skills can enhance a sense of social presence to reduce anxiety and build trust. Third, building community spaces on social media for sharing experiences, social support, and recognition. Through this marketing strategy, exclusivity, limited-time offers, and real-time content can be used to leverage FoMO (FoMo) as part of efforts to encourage faster travel decisions. Social media analytics and psychographic surveys can also be used to understand users' emotional reactions and psychological complexities to tailor content to suit marketing strategies to remain relevant and effective. The implementation of such a strategy is in line with the characteristics of the digital native generation who like and value authenticity, interactivity, and emotional experiences in consuming social media content.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the role of social media, psychological complexity, emotional aspects significantly influence visit decisions, which in turn, can improve visit decisions and accelerate the action of visiting tourist attractions in the South Coast of Central Java and Yogyakarta. The findings of the study have shown and answered the research question, that the role of social media encourages generation z to have psychological complexity and emotional aspects that ultimately encourage accelerated information and decision making of generation Z. Psychological complexity and emotional aspects function as important mediators, linking the role of social media with visit decisions and underlining their role as a mechanism for creating visit decision outcomes in generation Z. This underlines that affective values (joyful, inspired, or depressed due to FoMO) are the main driving force of Generation Z's behavior in making visits that can actually outperform cognitive aspects (such as quality of facilities or price). This study has limitations including related to the specific demographic focus on the digital native generation who are highly dependent on social media, has not differentiated the types of psychological complexity and emotional aspects that interact with the type of social media content, and has not tested actual visit decisions or post-visit behavior. So, the suggestions and recommendations based on the study results are to conduct comparative research by including tourists

from other generations and adopt a more detailed emotional model to specifically test the types of social media content.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Conceptualization, research design, methodology development, and the formulation of the integrated framework linking customer relationship marketing, direct service quality, and social media marketing activities to customer satisfaction through customer experience were carried out by Yahya Tanjung, Ari Prabowo, Yuli Amida Pohan, and Aisyah Azhar Adam. Data collection, including questionnaire design, distribution, and administration to motorcycle consumers in Medan City, was conducted by Yahya Tanjung and Ari Prabowo. Formal analysis, including measurement model assessment, structural model evaluation, and PLS-SEM analysis using SmartPLS 3.0, was performed by Yahya Tanjung and Yuli Amida Pohan. Original draft preparation and writing were conducted by Yahya Tanjung, while review, editing, and revision were performed by Ari Prabowo, Yuli Amida Pohan, and Aisyah Azhar Adam. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of this work.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used AI-assisted tools, such as grammar checkers and language enhancement software, solely for the purpose of improving readability and refining the language of the manuscript. No generative AI tools were used for statistical data analysis using PLS-SEM, interpretation of results, conceptual framework development, or core scientific writing. The authors take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the research findings and the final content of this article.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. The research was conducted independently, and the results are presented objectively and without bias. The authors have no affiliation with or financial interest in any social media platform, tourism destination, or related organization mentioned in this study that could be perceived as influencing the analysis or conclusions of this research.

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