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Research article

Digital engagement, online brand experience, and social media credibility shaping visit intention via destination trust

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of digital engagement, online brand experience, and social media credibility on intention to visit via destination trust. It aims to elucidate the mediating effect of destination trust on the relationship between digital stimuli and behavioral intention within the framework of heritage tourism. A quantitative research design was used employing survey data from prospective visitors to a major heritage destination in Indonesia. The relationships and mediation effects among the constructs were tested using Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The results show that trust in a destination strongly affects the intention to visit. Digital engagement impacts the intention to visit indirectly through destination trust. Both online brand experience and social media trust positively impact destination trust and the intention to visit. The results indicate that trust serves as the primary psychological mechanism that connects digital marketing activities and tourists' behavioral intentions. The experience and trust of the online content are more important than the level of interaction. This study identifies destination trust as the primary motivator of visit intention in the context of digital tourism marketing. Strengthening visitor trust through the provision of credible information and the cultivation of favorable brand experiences is vital. The results give a theoretical basis for trust-based destination marketing models and offer empirical evidence to tourism managers about trust-centered digital marketing communications.

KEYWORDS

Destination trust; digital engagement; intention to visit; online brand experience; social media credibility

Introduction

Tourism destinations have increasingly utilized social media as a strategic communication tool to shape favorable destination perceptions and stimulate tourists' intention to visit particular destinations (Ardiansyah et al. 2024 ,Chamoli et al., 2025). Through social media platforms, destinations can disseminate information rapidly, engage with potential visitors, and showcase destination attributes through various forms of digital content. However, the expansion of digital communication has simultaneously reduced the ability of destination management organizations to fully control destination narratives. Official tourism authorities face growing challenges in managing information related to safety, accessibility, authenticity, and destination value because user-generated content (UGC), online reviews, and influencer-generated content often receive greater attention than official communication channels (Garg et al., 2021). While such digital content increases destination visibility, it may also generate fragmented and inconsistent perceptions among potential visitors. Tourism consumption inherently involves substantial uncertainty because travelers must invest time, financial resources, and emotional expectations before experiencing a destination. Consequently, trust becomes a critical prerequisite for travel decision-making. Nevertheless, many

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destinations continue to emphasize digital engagement as a visibility-building mechanism rather than a trust-building process. As a result, high levels of online engagement do not necessarily translate into stronger intentions to visit (Suliyanto, 2025, Christian et al., 2025). Recent studies have similarly demonstrated that social media communication, destination perception, and digital engagement significantly influence tourists' travel decision-making processes and behavioral intentions (Susanto et al., 2024, Suleman et al. 2026a). The increasing dependence on digital information is particularly evident in heritage tourism destinations. Conservation policies, visitor management regulations, and access restrictions have altered the way tourists evaluate destination attractiveness. Rather than relying primarily on direct physical experiences, potential visitors increasingly depend on social media content, destination websites, online reviews, and influencer-generated narratives when forming travel expectations (Hasibuan et al., 2025). Digital platforms have consequently become central spaces where destination perceptions are constructed and negotiated. However, discrepancies between digital representations and actual destination conditions may generate uncertainty and skepticism among potential visitors. Contradictory information regarding visitation policies and destination regulations may further weaken confidence in destination quality and accessibility. Such conditions create a paradox in which tourists may develop strong digital engagement with a destination without demonstrating equivalent levels of behavioral commitment or travel intention (Hasibuan et al., 2025).

Recent tourism studies illustrate how digital technologies influence travelers' information-searching behavior and destination evaluation processes (Du et al., 2026). Social media platforms, online reviews, and algorithm-driven recommendations have become dominant sources of tourism information. Although travelers frequently engage with destination-related content, passive exposure to digital information does not automatically generate behavioral responses (Durand et al., 2024). Destination-related posts often attract likes, comments, and shares without necessarily leading to actual travel planning. Scholars argue that this disconnection emerges because digital impressions alone are insufficient to establish psychological certainty. Tourism decisions are characterized by perceived risk and uncertainty, requiring travelers to develop confidence before committing to a destination. Therefore, digital engagement should not merely be viewed as a communication outcome but also as a mechanism that contributes to trust formation (Johnson et al., 2026). Similar findings indicate that meaningful social media engagement positively influences destination perceptions and strengthens tourists' behavioral intentions when accompanied by psychological assurance and trust-building processes (Susanto et al., 2024, Azhari et al., 2026). Research on digital tourism marketing remains fragmented in explaining how digital communication influences tourist behavior (Hasibuan et al., 2025). Existing studies predominantly examine social media interaction, destination image, or digital communication as direct predictors of visit intention (Abbasi et al., 2023). Relatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how digital engagement, online brand experience, and social media credibility collectively influence tourist decision-making. Furthermore, destination trust is frequently examined as an outcome rather than as a mediating mechanism that transforms digital exposure into behavioral intention (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022). Previous studies have shown that social media interaction may enhance travel intention through perceived value and destination evaluation; however, the psychological process underlying such relationships remains insufficiently explained (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022). In addition, social media credibility is often treated as a contextual factor rather than a central explanatory construct. Previous studies published in the African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure have also focused primarily on destination image, social media communication, and tourist behavioral responses independently, leaving insufficient understanding of how trust integrates these relationships within a single explanatory framework (Susanto et al., 2024; Arsyad & Soerjanto, 2025). These limitations highlight the need for a more comprehensive model capable of explaining the psychological mechanisms underlying digitally influenced travel decisions.

The Information Adoption Model (IAM) provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for addressing these issues. IAM explains how individuals evaluate information based on perceived usefulness and credibility before internalizing that information and developing attitudes or behavioral intentions (S. Zhang et al., 2013, Suleman et al. 2026b). Within tourism contexts, travelers evaluate not only the informational content itself but also the credibility of information sources and the quality of message presentation. These evaluations influence information acceptance, trust formation, and subsequent behavioral responses. The model is particularly relevant in social media environments where information abundance is accompanied by considerable variation in content quality and credibility. Therefore, IAM offers a robust framework for understanding how digital engagement, online brand experience, and social media credibility contribute to destination trust and ultimately influence visit intention (S. Zhang et al., 2013, Firellsya et al. 2024). The urgency of this research is further reinforced by ongoing transformations in heritage tourism governance. Heritage destinations increasingly implement visitation restrictions and conservation policies to preserve cultural and environmental resources (Baber & Baber, 2023). Such policies require destination managers to develop effective communication strategies capable of maintaining tourist interest

while simultaneously managing visitor expectations (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). Trust becomes particularly important under these circumstances because tourists often evaluate destinations without direct access to physical experiences. When visitors perceive destination information as unreliable or inconsistent, they may question the attractiveness and value of the destination itself (Farsani et al., 2014). Effective digital communication therefore becomes a critical determinant of destination competitiveness and sustainable tourism development. Recent studies further demonstrate that destination image, social media communication, and trust significantly influence tourist behavioral intentions within increasingly competitive tourism environments (Arsyad & Soerjanto, 2025; Phi & Duong, 2024). Understanding the mechanisms through which digital communication generates trust and behavioral commitment has consequently become an important research priority in heritage tourism contexts (Ahmed, 2024).

This study aims to examine the influence of digital engagement, online brand experience, and social media credibility on visit intention through destination trust. Specifically, the study investigates whether destination trust serves as a psychological mechanism that explains how digital communication influences tourists' behavioral intentions. By integrating engagement, experiential, and credibility perspectives within a single framework, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of tourist decision-making processes in digitally mediated environments. The proposed model moves beyond the assumption of direct effects by emphasizing the importance of cognitive and psychological mechanisms in shaping travel behavior. Heritage tourism destinations provide an ideal context for examining trust because they combine cultural significance with physical vulnerability. Trust helps reduce discrepancies between idealized digital representations and actual destination conditions, particularly when access restrictions limit direct experiences. Potential visitors are more likely to accept regulatory constraints and rely on digital information when they perceive destination communication as credible and trustworthy. In this context, trust serves as a critical mechanism through which digital engagement, experiential perceptions, and information credibility influence travel intentions. This study contributes to the tourism literature in several ways. First, it integrates digital engagement, online brand experience, and social media credibility into a unified framework explaining visit intention through destination trust. Second, it extends the application of the Information Adoption Model within heritage tourism contexts by positioning destination trust as a central psychological mechanism. Third, it responds to recent calls for theory-driven tourism research by providing a comprehensive explanation of how digital communication influences behavioral intentions. Finally, this study contributes to recent discussions in the African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure regarding destination credibility, social media influence, destination image, and tourist behavioral intentions by highlighting the mediating role of destination trust within digital tourism environments (Susanto et al., 2024; Arsyad & Soerjanto, 2025; Phi & Duong, 2024, Suleman et al. 2026c). The findings are expected to provide valuable theoretical insights and practical guidance for destination managers seeking to strengthen trust, enhance destination competitiveness, and increase tourist visitation through effective digital communication strategies.

Literature review

IAM

The IAM explains how individuals receive, evaluate, and utilize information based on perceptions of information quality, usefulness, and credibility (S. Zhang et al., 2013). Initially developed to explain information acceptance in digital environments, the model emphasizes that individuals do not passively receive information but actively assess its relevance, trustworthiness, and value before incorporating it into their decision-making processes. Information quality and source credibility influence whether information is internalized and subsequently affects attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral intentions. Within tourism contexts, IAM is particularly relevant because travel decisions are characterized by uncertainty, perceived risk, and information asymmetry. Potential travelers often rely on destination-related information obtained through digital platforms before experiencing a destination directly. Consequently, the adoption of online information becomes a critical process through which tourists evaluate destination attractiveness and form behavioral intentions (S. Zhang et al., 2013). The increasing use of social media and user-generated content has expanded the applicability of IAM beyond its original focus on information usefulness and credibility. Contemporary digital environments expose tourists to diverse forms of content that combine informational, emotional, and experiential elements. Recent studies suggest that travelers evaluate not only the factual quality of information but also the vividness, interactivity, storytelling capability, and emotional appeal of digital content when making tourism-related decisions. Such developments indicate that information adoption is no longer a purely cognitive process but also involves affective and experiential evaluations that shape destination perceptions and behavioral responses. As digital tourism communication becomes

increasingly interactive, the role of social influence, peer endorsement, and influencer credibility has become more prominent in determining whether information is accepted and trusted by users (S. Zhang et al., 2013). Previous tourism studies consistently demonstrate that information credibility and perceived usefulness remain fundamental determinants of information adoption in online environments. However, recent research suggests that the effectiveness of digital communication also depends on tourists' level of engagement with content, the experiences generated through digital interactions, and the perceived credibility of communication sources. Studies published in tourism literature indicate that social media interactions, destination-related content, and digital storytelling significantly influence destination evaluations by enhancing information acceptance and reducing uncertainty (Susanto et al., 2024; Phi & Duong, 2024). These findings support the argument that information adoption in tourism contexts extends beyond information processing and contributes directly to the formation of destination-related beliefs and behavioral intentions.

Within the framework of this study, IAM provides a theoretical explanation for how digital engagement, online brand experience, and social media credibility influence tourists' behavioral intentions through destination trust. Digital engagement increases tourists' exposure to and involvement with destination-related information. Online brand experience enriches the cognitive and emotional interpretation of that information, while social media credibility determines the extent to which the information is perceived as reliable and trustworthy. Through the information adoption process, these digital stimuli contribute to the development of destination trust, which subsequently influences tourists' intention to visit. Therefore, destination trust can be viewed as the psychological outcome of information adoption and as a mechanism through which digital communication translates into behavioral commitment. The application of IAM in this study contributes to the growing body of tourism research that emphasizes the importance of information evaluation processes in shaping tourist behavior. Unlike traditional tourism decision-making models that focus primarily on destination attributes, IAM highlights how tourists process, interpret, and internalize destination-related information before forming travel intentions. The model therefore provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for explaining why trustworthy, engaging, and experiential digital communication is more likely to generate positive behavioral outcomes than mere exposure to destination-related content. Accordingly, IAM serves as an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding the relationships among digital engagement, online brand experience, social media credibility, destination trust, and visit intention.

Digital engagement

Digital engagement refers to the extent to which individuals cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally interact with destination-related digital content (C. Zhang et al., 2025). The concept encompasses various forms of online interaction, including viewing, liking, sharing, commenting, and developing emotional connections with destination-related information. Unlike simple exposure, digital engagement reflects a deeper level of involvement that indicates personal relevance and psychological investment in the content (Mannheim et al., 2025). Within tourism contexts, digital engagement represents travelers' active participation in destination-related communication processes, allowing them to develop familiarity and emotional attachment toward a destination. Higher levels of engagement indicate stronger attention, interest, and involvement, thereby increasing the likelihood that destination-related information will be processed and internalized (C. Zhang et al., 2025). The IAM suggests that individuals are more likely to adopt information when they perceive it as useful, relevant, and credible (S. Zhang et al., 2013). Digital engagement enhances information processing because actively engaged users devote greater cognitive resources to evaluating and interpreting destination-related information. Through repeated interaction with digital content, travelers become more familiar with destination attributes and are more likely to incorporate such information into their existing belief systems. Consequently, engagement increases the perceived importance of destination information and facilitates information acceptance. Nevertheless, engagement alone is insufficient to generate trust. The credibility and reliability of the information source remain essential factors influencing whether engagement ultimately translates into trust formation (S. Zhang et al., 2013). Previous studies consistently demonstrate the positive influence of digital engagement on tourism-related outcomes. Research conducted by Ndasi & Cheung (2026) revealed that social media engagement contributes significantly to trust formation and visit intention within hospitality and tourism contexts. Similarly, Salonen et al. (2024) found that emotional engagement generated through interactive online communication strengthens tourists' emotional attachment to destinations and increases their willingness to visit. Recent evidence also indicates that social media interactions enhance destination perception and influence behavioral intentions by encouraging deeper psychological involvement with destination-related content (Susanto et al., 2024). Although scholars differ regarding whether cognitive or emotional engagement exerts a stronger influence on tourist behavior, the literature generally agrees that greater

engagement facilitates stronger information internalization, more favorable destination evaluations, and increased trust formation. Therefore, digital engagement is expected to contribute positively to destination trust and visit intention.

H1: Trust in a destination is positively influenced by digital engagement.
H2: Intention to visit a destination is positively influenced by digital engagement.

Online brand experience

Online brand experience refers to tourists' sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral responses generated through interactions with destination-related digital content (Brakus et al., 2009). Such experiences emerge from exposure to destination images, videos, stories, virtual tours, and other forms of interactive communication available through digital platforms. Unlike brand image, which represents a set of perceptions about a destination, online brand experience reflects the actual responses generated during interactions with destination-related content (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). These experiences shape tourists' impressions before physical visitation and contribute to the development of emotional connections with destinations. Consequently, online brand experience has become an important component of destination branding and digital tourism marketing strategies (Bu et al., 2020). From the perspective of the Information Adoption Model, online brand experience influences how individuals evaluate and accept destination-related information (S. Zhang et al., 2013). Digital experiences that are immersive, emotionally appealing, and informative enhance information usefulness and increase the likelihood of information adoption. Rich online experiences help tourists visualize destinations, reduce uncertainty, and form more favorable destination perceptions. As tourists increasingly rely on digital information during travel planning, positive online experiences contribute to stronger confidence in destination-related claims and encourage trust formation. Therefore, online brand experience represents an important mechanism through which digital information influences tourist decision-making processes (S. Zhang et al., 2013).

Existing studies consistently support the positive role of online brand experience in influencing tourism behavior. Akoglu & Özbek (2022) demonstrated that online brand experiences strengthen trust and encourage favorable behavioral responses toward tourism destinations. Similarly, Chang & Cheng (2023) reported that positive digital experiences enhance emotional attachment and increase tourists' intention to visit destinations. Recent tourism research further suggests that experiential communication contributes to destination competitiveness by creating memorable and meaningful interactions that differentiate destinations in increasingly crowded digital environments (Arsyad & Soerjanto, 2025). Although previous studies differ regarding whether emotional attachment or destination authenticity constitutes the dominant mechanism, they generally agree that positive online brand experiences foster trust and strengthen visit intention. Accordingly, online brand experience is expected to positively influence destination trust and intention to visit.

H3: Online brand experience has a positive impact on destination trust.
H4: Online brand experience has a positive impact on intention to visit.

Credibility on social media

Social media credibility refers to the extent to which users perceive information shared through social media platforms as trustworthy, accurate, reliable, and believable (Bahar & Hasan, 2025). Credibility is shaped by multiple factors, including source expertise, information accuracy, peer recommendations, influencer endorsements, and platform reputation (Connors & Hingston, 2026). Within tourism contexts, credibility plays a crucial role because travelers frequently depend on social media content to evaluate destinations before making travel decisions. Credible information reduces uncertainty, facilitates destination evaluation, and increases confidence in travel planning processes. Conversely, information perceived as unreliable or misleading may increase perceived risk and delay decision-making (Octavia & Tarigan, 2025). Consequently, credibility represents a fundamental determinant of the effectiveness of tourism communication on social media platforms. Within the Information Adoption Model, credibility is one of the primary determinants of information acceptance (S. Zhang et al., 2013). Information that is perceived as credible is more likely to be accepted, internalized, and incorporated into decision-making processes. Even highly engaging content may fail to influence behavior if users question its accuracy or reliability (Resdiansyah & Pardede, 2024). Credibility therefore serves as a critical filter through which destination-related information must pass before affecting tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions. In tourism settings, credible social media content strengthens confidence that destination representations accurately reflect actual destination conditions and experiences (Revaliana & Susilawaty, 2023). Empirical studies consistently support the positive influence of credibility on trust and behavioral outcomes. Hossain et al. (2025) found that perceived credibility of online tourism information significantly predicts destination trust

and travel intention. Similar findings indicate that trust in user-generated content reduces perceived risk and increases travelers' willingness to visit destinations. Recent studies further emphasize that social media credibility strengthens destination evaluations and behavioral intentions by enhancing confidence in destination-related information (Susanto et al., 2024). These findings confirm that credibility functions as a central mechanism linking information exposure with trust formation and behavioral commitment. Therefore, social media credibility is expected to positively influence destination trust and visit intention.

H5: Credibility on social media has a positive impact on destination trust.
H6: Credibility on social media has a positive impact on visiting intention.

Destination trust

Destination trust refers to tourists' confidence that a destination is reliable, safe, and capable of delivering the experiences promised through its communication and promotional activities (Su et al., 2022). Trust encompasses beliefs regarding destination integrity, competence, transparency, and dependability. Within tourism contexts, trust is particularly important because travel decisions involve uncertainty, financial commitment, and experiential risk. Tourists often rely on mediated information rather than direct experience when evaluating destinations. Consequently, trust serves as a critical psychological mechanism that reduces uncertainty and facilitates travel-related decision-making (Lee et al., 2025). The Information Adoption Model explains trust as an outcome of information evaluation and acceptance processes (S. Zhang et al., 2013). When travelers perceive destination information as useful, credible, and relevant, they are more likely to internalize that information and develop positive beliefs regarding the destination. Trust emerges as a result of successful information adoption and subsequently influences behavioral responses. From this perspective, trust functions as a bridge between information processing and behavioral intention. Destination trust therefore represents an appropriate mediating mechanism through which digital communication variables influence tourists' intention to visit (S. Zhang et al., 2013). The mediating role of trust has received considerable empirical support within tourism research. Wang & Yan (2022) demonstrated that destination trust mediates the relationship between destination image and visit intention. Chamoli et al. (2025) further reported that trust significantly influences tourists' willingness to revisit destinations and recommend them to others. Recent tourism studies also indicate that trust serves as a key mechanism linking destination perceptions, social media communication, and behavioral intentions (Arsyad & Soerjanto, 2025; Phi & Duong, 2024). Although scholars differ regarding whether trust functions primarily as an antecedent or mediator, the literature consistently recognizes its importance in transforming positive perceptions into behavioral commitment. Accordingly, destination trust is expected to positively influence visit intention and mediate the relationships between digital communication variables and behavioral outcomes.

H7: Destination trust positively influences visit intention.
H8: Destination trust mediates the relationship between digital engagement and visit intention.
H9: Destination trust mediates the relationship between online brand experience and visit intention.
H10: The relationship between social media credibility and visit intention is mediated by destination trust.

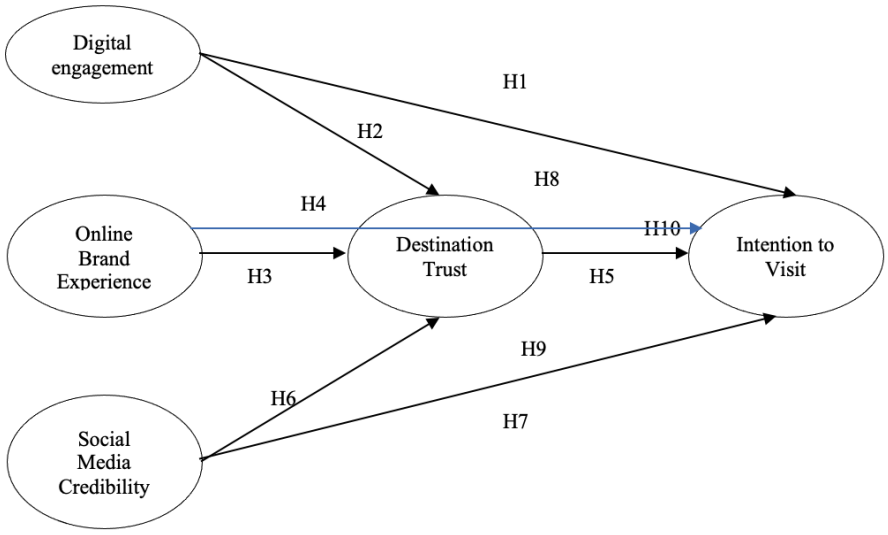

Figure 1. Research model

Materials and methods

Research design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to measure both causal and non-causal relationships between the variables of digital engagement, online brand experience, social media credibility, destination trust, and intention to visit (Hair et al., 2022). A deductive approach was used to test the hypotheses formulated based on the Information Adoption Model. The analysis focused on the individual level, specifically potential tourists who had viewed destination-related content on social media. Perceptions and current intentions were captured through a single data collection. This design is suitable for understanding the formation of behavioral intentions resulting from digital information processing. A variance-based structural equation modeling approach was used to examine the structural relationships among the variables.

Research object and population

The research object of this study is Borobudur Temple, one of Indonesia's most prominent UNESCO World Heritage tourism destinations. Borobudur was selected because destination managers increasingly rely on digital communication and online promotional activities to maintain tourist interest while simultaneously implementing visitor management and conservation policies. Consequently, potential tourists frequently depend on digital information sources when evaluating the attractiveness and accessibility of the destination. This context provides an appropriate setting for examining the influence of digital engagement, online brand experience, and social media credibility on destination trust and visit intention. The target population consists of domestic tourists who engage with Borobudur-related posts on social media, including Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook, and who are social media users. They must be 18 years of age or older, active on social media, and aware of Borobudur as a tourist destination. This population was selected because intention to visit is only meaningful to people who have already been mentally affected by the destination. This study primarily targets potential tourists and excludes residents and tour operators, which is necessary to ensure the scope of the dependent variable captures true travel intentions (Hair et al., 2022). This study sample included a population defined using a non-probability purposive sampling method (Hair et al., 2022). Participants were identified based on two key criteria: (1) they were at least 18 years old and (2) they had consumed Borobudur-related content on social media (i.e., Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or Facebook). It was determined that only individuals who met these criteria would be able to provide in-depth perceptions and visit intentions to the destination. To establish a minimum sample size, the ten-fold rule was applied for PLS-SEM, which stipulates at least ten times the number of structural paths directed to the construct. For destination trust, there are three paths from digital engagement, online brand experience, and social media credibility. Therefore, the minimum sample size was set at 120 respondents. For greater statistical power and increased model stability, this study targeted a final sample size of 250 respondents. This sample size is in line with recent tourism research using PLS-SEM analysis and mediation analysis (Hair et al., 2022).

Sampling technique and sample size

We employed a non-probability purposive sampling technique (Hair et al., 2022). Respondents were selected based on two screening criteria: exposure to Borobudur-related content on social media and interest in leisure travel. Online distribution provided the opportunity to obtain responses from a geographically diverse audience. To calculate the minimum sample size, we used the ten-fold rule for PLS-SEM, which states that the sample size should be at least ten times the maximum number of structural paths directed at a single construct. Therefore, a minimum sample size of 120 respondents was required. However, to improve statistical power and model stability, the study targeted between 250 and 300 respondents. This sample size is consistent with recommendations for PLS-SEM studies and exceeds the minimum requirement established by the ten-times rule (Hair et al., 2022). This sample size aligns with the majority of recent tourism studies utilizing PLS-SEM. The final dataset contained only fully completed and valid questionnaires.

Data collection procedure

The authors developed a questionnaire, using Google Forms, to collect and quantify participant responses. They provided respondents with a link to the survey via social media and tourism-related online communities. In response to the survey, the authors provided a consent form explaining the study and stating that they would protect participants' identities. The authors developed screening questions at the beginning of the survey to verify that respondents met the eligibility criteria. Respondents answered questions related to their perceptions of online content related to Borobudur that they had encountered. The authors estimated that the survey would take between 8 and 10 minutes to complete. The authors conducted data collection

over four weeks to minimize temporal bias. Inconsistent and incomplete responses were discarded as prerequisites for subsequent analysis.

Measurement and instrument development

The measurement instrument was developed by adapting validated scales from prior studies and contextualizing them to the Borobudur tourism setting. All constructs were measured using multiple indicators adapted from established studies. Responses were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). To ensure linguistic equivalence, the questionnaire was translated from English into Indonesian and subsequently back-translated into English. This procedure was undertaken to preserve the conceptual meaning of the original measurement items. The authors informed their respondents that to avoid symmetry and to reflect the richness of the theory, they had provided a different number of indicators for each variable. To maintain consistent meaning, the authors translated the indicators into Indonesian and then translated the Indonesian back into English.

Digital engagement

Based on (Mannheim et al., 2025; C. Zhang et al., 2025):

1. I pay attention to social media posts about Borobudur.
2. When I see content about Borobudur, I feel emotionally connected.
3. I engage with social media content related to Borobudur.
4. I connect with Borobudur through social media.
5. I have a sustained interest in content related to Borobudur.

Online brand experience

Based on (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022; Brakus et al., 2009):

1. Online materials related to Borobudur are visually appealing.
2. Social media content related to Borobudur makes me feel something.
3. Digital content related to Borobudur makes me think about visiting.
4. Online content related to Borobudur is memorable.

Social media credibility

Based on (Bahar & Hasan, 2025; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020):

1. I trust information about Borobudur on social media.
2. I trust social media content about Borobudur.
3. I trust the source of posts related to Borobudur on social media.
4. I trust social media content about Borobudur, and I think it is accurate.
5. I believe information about Borobudur on social media is not misleading.
6. I trust information about Borobudur on social media.

Trust in destination

Based on (Su et al., 2022):

1. I trust Borobudur as a tourism destination.
2. Borobudur delivers what it promises online.
3. I feel confident choosing Borobudur as a destination to visit.

Intention to visit

Based on (Andjarwati et al., 2023; Baber & Baber, 2023b):

1. I plan to travel to Borobudur in the near future.
2. I will prioritize Borobudur as a potential travel destination.
3. I intend to research additional details regarding traveling to Borobudur.
4. I plan to travel to Borobudur and will budget my time and money accordingly.

Data analysis techniques

Data analysis used SmartPLS software and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2022). This method is useful for predictive modeling with complex mediation. The analysis involves two stages: the measurement model and the structural model. Evaluation of the measurement model involved indicator loadings, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity evaluation involved the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-to-monotrait ratio (HTMT). For the structural model, path coefficients, t-values, and p-values were evaluated through bootstrapping (5,000 resamplings). Indirect effects analysis assessed the mediating effect of trust on goals.

Reliability and validity

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with a recommended reference value above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022). For convergent validity, an AVE value greater

than 0.50 was indicated. Discriminant validity is proven when the square root of the AVE is greater than the correlation between constructs and the HTMT value is less than 0.85. Common method bias is reduced by varying the scale anchors and by using anonymity. Common method bias was assessed procedurally and statistically. Procedural remedies included respondent anonymity, voluntary participation, and careful questionnaire design. Statistical assessment was conducted using Harman's single-factor test, whereby common method bias is considered unlikely if a single factor does not account for the majority of the total variance.

Results and discussion

Outer loading measurement

The purpose of outer loading analysis is to consider the strength of the relationship between each indicator and its associated latent construct. An indicator loading value of .70 or higher is considered the threshold for convergent validity acceptance, indicating that the indicator explains a sufficient amount of variance in the construct. Indicators with loadings below .70 are considered for removal to ensure construct reliability and average extracted variance. Retaining indicators with outer loadings above .70 ensures that each construct is rigorously evaluated in terms of the indicators that constitute its definitional or conceptual breadth. This outcome criterion is also useful in measurement models by reducing measurement error and increasing model reliability. This is why an outer loading value above .70 is the primary threshold for indicator adequacy in this study.

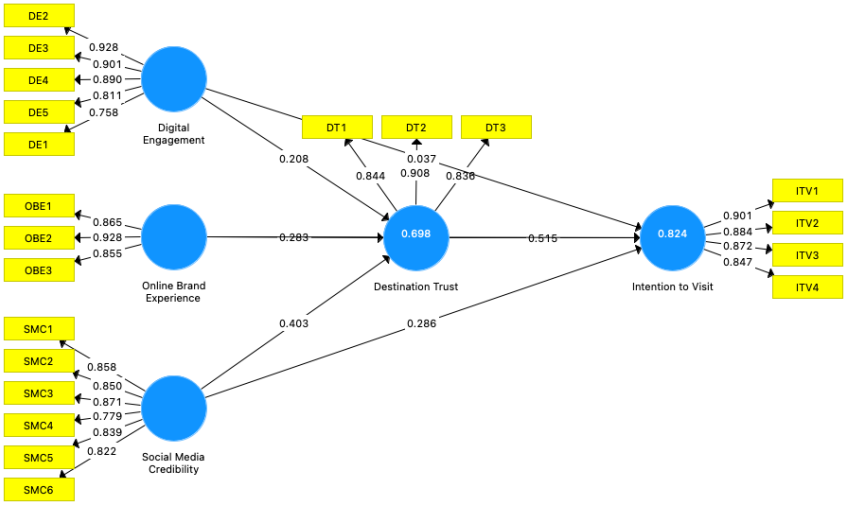

Figure 2. Outer Loading

Table 1. Outer Loading

Indicator	Destination Trust	Digital Engagement	Intention to Visit	Online Brand Experience	Social Media Credibility
DE2		0,928			
DE3		0,901			
DE4		0,890			
DE5		0,811			
DT1	0,844				
DT2	0,908				
DT3	0,836				
ITV1			0,901		
ITV2			0,884		
ITV3			0,872		
ITV4			0,847		
OBE1				0,865	
OBE2				0,928	
OBE3				0,855	
SMC1					0,858
SMC2					0,850
SMC3					0,871
SMC4					0,779
SMC5					0,839
SMC6					0,822
DE1		0,758			

All measurement items showed strong reliability for indicators. The outer loading values from 0.758 to 0.928 and exceeded the recommended value of 0.70. This notes that each indicator sufficiently portrays its construct. The Digital Engagement loadings, reflect, on average of engagement intensity. The Destination Trust indicators loaded between 0.836 and 0.908, which means stable measurement of the perception of trust. The Intention to Visit indicators from 0.847 to 0.901 means measurement of the behavioral intention is confirmed to be consistent. The Online Brand Experience indicators loadings between 0.855 and 0.928 means strong representation in the experience. The Social Media Credibility indicator loadings are from

0.779 to 0.871, and it means the perception of credibility was captured. All indicators have met the requirement for convergent validity.

Discriminant validity

To demonstrate that each construct represents a distinct empirical phenomenon, discriminant validity is assessed by evaluating the variance shared among the constructs compared to the variance explained by each indicator. Discriminant validity testing indicates that a construct is more strongly related to its indicators than to other constructs in the model. This demonstrates that the constructs are both non-redundant and empirically separate, and that discriminant validity is crucial for confirming that the relationship is not the result of measurement overlap. This is particularly important in complex models that include mediating variables because it helps clarify the concept being examined. By focusing on the uniqueness of each latent variable, discriminant validity becomes a crucial factor in this study.

Table 2. Discriminant validity Fornell

Variable	Destination Trust	Digital Engagement	Intention to Visit	Online Brand Experience	Social Media Credibility
Destination Trust	0,863				
Digital Engagement	0,770	0,860			
Intention to Visit	0,875	0,779	0,876		
Online Brand Experience	0,767	0,810	0,784	0,883	
Social Media Credibility	0,796	0,825	0,833	0,782	0,837

Evaluating the Fornell–Larcker criterion involves comparing the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) with the inter-construct correlations. The diagonal values (0.863–0.883) are higher than the values for the correlations with other constructs. This suggests acceptable discriminant validity at the construct level. However, some correlations were remarkably close (e.g., Destination Trust–Intention to Visit = 0.875) to the square root of the AVE (0.876) which indicates proximity between trust and intention. This is explainable through the theory that trust is a strong precursor of behavioral intention thorough tourism studies.

Table 3. Discriminant validity HTMT

Variable	Destination Trust	Digital Engagement	Intention to Visit	Online Brand Experience
Destination Trust				
Digital Engagement	0,885			
Intention to Visit	1,014	0,860		
Online Brand Experience	0,906	0,919	0,890	
Social Media Credibility	0,913	0,899	0,915	0,880

Some of the values in the HTMT analysis are above the conservative threshold of 0.90, such as:
Destination Trust–Intention to Visit = 1.014
Destination Trust–Online Brand Experience = 0.906
Destination Trust–Social Media Credibility = 0.913
Intention to Visit–Online Brand Experience = 0.919
Intention to Visit–Social Media Credibility = 0.915

Because of these values, one may be concerned with discriminant validity particularly between Destination Trust and Intention to Visit. The Fornell–Larcker results and the close constructs suggest that discriminant validity is less of a concern since the correlation does not suggest measurement redundancy. Following the contemporary SEM-PLS literature, the presence of this pattern may be acceptable when constructs are behaviorally interdependent, yet theoretically distinct.

Reliability and construct validity

Reliability and construct validity are evaluated to assess the consistency and representation of each construct. For composite reliability, a value above 0.70 is considered adequate for consistency, and for convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) is used, where a value above 0.50 indicates that a construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. This means reliability is high enough to ensure that the indicators measure the same single construct. Indicators with adequate AVE values indicate that they measure the construct and not measurement error. This is the belief that the measurement model is reliable and valid, and that with these two measurements, confidence in the structural model analysis is high.

Table 4. Reliability and construct validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Destination Trust	0,828	0,831	0,898	0,745
Digital Engagement	0,910	0,918	0,934	0,739
Intention to Visit	0,899	0,899	0,930	0,768
Online Brand Experience	0,859	0,863	0,914	0,780
Social Media Credibility	0,914	0,918	0,933	0,701

Multicollinearity was assessed using the variance inflation factor (VIF). All VIF values ranged between 1.624 and 3.811, remaining below the recommended threshold of 5.00. Therefore, multicollinearity was not considered a concern in this study. These constructs have demonstrated good internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from a low of 0.828 to a high of 0.914. Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.898 to a high of 0.934, also exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.70. All Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values used to ensure convergent validity ranged from a low of 0.701 to a high of 0.780. This indicates that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. Reliability and convergent validity have been demonstrated across all constructs

Effect size (f^2)

To assess the substantial effect of each exogenous construct on the endogenous variable, an effect size (f^2) is calculated. This metric represents the change in explained variance (R^2) when one of the predictors is added or removed from the model. Effect sizes are generally defined as small (0.02), medium (0.15), and large (0.35). The emphasis of f^2 is on the practical significance of the relationship, in contrast to the emphasis of significance testing. This is particularly true in behavioral studies, where significant effects can be statistically significant but practically insignificant. The emphasis in f^2 shifts the analysis from hypothesis testing to defining the relevance of the theory. Thus, effect size estimates are used as a complement to path coefficients.

Table 5. Effect size

Variable	Destination Trust	Digital Engagement	Intention to Visit
Destination Trust			0,455
Digital Engagement		0,036	0,002
Intention to Visit			
Online Brand Experience		0,081	0,029
Social Media Credibility		0,152	0,114

Effect size (f^2) was calculated to show the substantive impact of each exogenous construct on the corresponding endogenous variable. F^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large effects, respectively. The findings indicate that Destination Trust → Intention to Visit has the greatest effect size ($f^2 = 0.455$), suggesting that the substantive impact of trust on the intention to visit is the greatest. Destination trust is indeed the key psychological factor that converts digital stimuli into behavioral intentions. Social Media Credibility → Destination Trust has, from the range ($f^2 = 0.203$), a medium and large effect size. This infers that the credibility of information on social media is a leading factor in establishing trust in Borobudur as a destination. It can distinctly illustrate the responsive role of the good trust in the authentic digital content in the tourism decision process. Online Brand Experience → Destination Trust is $f = 0.103$ (medium effect size). This shows that the experiential dimension of the digital brand interaction contributes trust formation, and is less than the effect of credibility. Digital Engagement → Destination Trust shows, at $f = 0.061$, small to medium effect size. This is the result, from the range, that engagement behavior vertically (likes, comments, shares) enhance trust formation, and in the previous influencing factors, regardless of content, significantly contributes to trust formation. For the variable Intention to Visit, Social Media Credibility → Intention to Visit has a small to medium effect ($f^2 = 0.096$) and Online Brand Experience → Intention to Visit has a small effect ($f^2 = 0.031$). On the other hand, Digital Engagement → Intention to Visit has a negligible effect ($f^2 = 0.002$), supporting the finding that trust, and not just engagement, is crucial to creating intent to visit.

R^2 squared (R^2)

The predictive accuracy of the model for the endogenous construct is assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2). The R^2 value indicates the amount of variance in the dependent variable that is attributed to the independent variable. R^2 values of 0.25, 0.5, and 0.75 are considered to reflect weak, moderate, and substantial explanatory power, respectively. Meaningful factors of the predicted variable are more likely to be captured in models with higher R^2 values. The R^2 in a mediation model reflects how well the intermediary constructs contribute to the final outcome. The R^2 value provides a model with an assessment of its predictive accuracy, although it does not establish a causal relationship. Therefore, the R^2 is used to assess how well the proposed model is able to provide explanations.

Table 6. R-square

Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Destination Trust	0,698	0,696
Intention to Visit	0,824	0,822

Predictive relevance was assessed using the blindfolding procedure. The Q^2 value for Destination Trust was 0.491, while the Q^2 value for Intention to Visit was 0.612. Since both values exceeded zero, the model demonstrated satisfactory predictive relevance and confirmed its ability to predict endogenous constructs effectively (Hair et al., 2022). The model displays good explanatory power.

Destination Trust: $R^2 = 0.698$ - This shows Digital Engagement, Online Brand Experience, and Social Media Credibility collectively account for 69.8% of the variance in Destination Trust.

Intention to Visit: $R^2 = 0.824$ - Here, Digital Engagement, Online Brand Experience, Social Media Credibility, and Destination Trust account for 82.4% of the variance in intention to visit.

Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis testing helps determine the significance and direction of relationships in the model. I used path coefficient assessments, t-statistics, and p-values from the bootstrapping method. A t-value greater than 1.96 and a p-value less than 0.05 (significant at the 95% confidence level) are evidence of a significant relationship. A positive path coefficient (θ) is assumed to provide direct evidence of an effect in the stated direction of the hypothesized relationship. A negative coefficient assumes an effect opposite to the stated one. When examining mediation effects, indirect paths are assessed to determine whether the hypothesized construct mediates the influence of the exogenous variable on the hypothesized endogenous variable. The indirect effect is tested for statistical significance and, regardless of the significance of the direct effect, supports the existence of mediation. This method adds precision to the direct and indirect relationships and, overall, increases the inferential power of the structural model.

Table 7. Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Digital Engagement to Intention to Visit	0,037	0,038	0,052	0,711	0,477
Digital Engagement to Destination Trust	0,208	0,211	0,095	2,189	0,029
Online Brand Experience to Destination Trust	0,283	0,279	0,080	3,543	0,000
Online Brand Experience to Intention to Visit	0,135	0,134	0,061	2,202	0,028
Destination Trust to Intention to Visit	0,515	0,514	0,048	10,773	0,000
Social Media Credibility to Destination Trust	0,403	0,405	0,070	5,774	0,000
Social Media Credibility to Intention to Visit	0,286	0,287	0,061	4,693	0,000
Destination Trust mediate Digital Engagement to Intention to Visit	0,107	0,108	0,049	2,181	0,030
Destination Trust mediate Social Media Credibility to Intention to Visit	0,208	0,208	0,039	5,309	0,000
Destination Trust mediate Online Brand Experience to Intention to Visit	0,146	0,144	0,045	3,233	0,001

The relationship between Digital Engagement and Intention to Visit is not significant ($\beta = 0.037$, $p = 0.477$). This shows that engagement by itself is not a sufficient indicator of a person's travel intentions. Digital Engagement → Destination Trust is significant and positive ($\beta = 0.208$, $p = 0.029$), which is consistent with engagement being used to increase trust. Online Brand Experience → Destination Trust is also significant ($\beta = 0.283$, $p < 0.001$), which means trust is boosted by trust. Online Brand Experience → Intention to Visit is significant ($\beta = 0.135$, $p = 0.028$), which indicates that digital brand experience operates psychologically and behaviorally. The relationship between Destination Trust and Intention to Visit has the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.515$, $p < 0.001$). This shows that trust is the most important factor affecting someone's intention to visit. Social Media Credibility → Destination Trust is significant ($\beta = 0.403$, $p < 0.001$). This shows that reliable information increases trust. Social Media Credibility → Intention to Visit is also significant ($\beta = 0.286$, $p < 0.001$), which proves that social media credibility directly impacts a person's behavior.

Trust was a significant mediator of:
Digital Engagement → Intention to Visit ($\beta = 0.107$, $p = 0.030$)
Online Brand Experience → Intention to Visit ($\beta = 0.146$, $p = 0.001$)
Social Media Credibility → Intention to Visit ($\beta = 0.208$, $p < 0.001$)
It was determined that trust is the psychological mediator that transforms the digital stimuli into an intention to visit. Most notably, the mediation effect was strongest for Social Media Credibility, indicating that of the digital drivers, credibility is the most trust reliant.

Discussion

H1: Digital Engagement → Destination Trust

The findings indicate that digital engagement positively influences destination trust (β = 0.208, p = 0.029), supporting H1. This result suggests that active interaction with destination-related content contributes to the development of trust toward Borobudur as a tourism destination. According to the Information Adoption Model (IAM), individuals who actively engage with information are more likely to process, evaluate, and internalize that information, thereby strengthening their beliefs regarding the object being evaluated (S. Zhang et al., 2013). Frequent interaction with destination-related content enables tourists to develop familiarity with the destination and reduce uncertainty regarding expected travel experiences. This finding is consistent with the study of Ndasi & Cheung (2026), which reported that social media engagement enhances trust formation within tourism and hospitality contexts. The result also supports Salonen et al. (2024), who found that emotional engagement through digital interaction strengthens tourists' attachment to destinations. Although the magnitude of the effect is relatively modest compared with other predictors, the significance of the relationship demonstrates that engagement contributes to the trust-building process. The finding confirms that digital engagement functions not merely as an indicator of online activity but also as a mechanism that facilitates psychological connection and trust formation toward tourism destinations.

H2: Digital Engagement → Intention to Visit

The results reveal that digital engagement does not significantly influence intention to visit (β = 0.037, p = 0.477), leading to the rejection of H2. This finding indicates that interacting with destination-related content alone is insufficient to generate actual travel intentions. Users may like, share, comment on, or follow destination content without necessarily developing a commitment to visit the destination. Social media engagement may therefore reflect curiosity, entertainment, or social interaction rather than genuine travel planning. This result supports the argument that engagement represents only the initial stage of the decision-making process. The finding is consistent with IAM, which proposes that information exposure and interaction do not automatically lead to behavioral outcomes unless the information is accepted and trusted. The insignificant direct effect suggests that trust serves as a more critical psychological mechanism in transforming digital interaction into behavioral commitment. Consequently, destination marketers should not assume that high engagement metrics automatically translate into increased visitation intentions.

H3: Online Brand Experience → Destination Trust

The findings demonstrate that online brand experience positively influences destination trust (β = 0.283, p < 0.001), supporting H3. This result indicates that positive sensory, emotional, and cognitive experiences generated through digital content contribute significantly to tourists' confidence in the destination. Immersive visuals, compelling storytelling, and engaging online interactions help potential tourists form favorable evaluations before physically visiting the destination. The finding aligns with the Information Adoption Model, which emphasizes the role of information presentation in shaping information acceptance and evaluation (S. Zhang et al., 2013). Positive digital experiences reduce uncertainty and strengthen perceptions regarding destination authenticity and reliability. The result is consistent with Akoglu & Özbek (2022), who found that online brand experiences enhance trust and positive behavioral outcomes. The finding also supports Chang & Cheng (2023), who reported that experiential digital communication strengthens emotional attachment and destination evaluation. Therefore, online brand experience represents an important mechanism for establishing trust in heritage tourism destinations.

H4: Online Brand Experience → Intention to Visit

The results indicate that online brand experience positively influences intention to visit (β = 0.135, p = 0.028), supporting H4. This finding suggests that memorable and emotionally engaging online experiences encourage tourists to consider visiting Borobudur. Digital experiences allow potential visitors to imagine themselves at the destination, thereby stimulating travel-related motivation and anticipation. The finding is consistent with experiential marketing theory, which argues that consumers respond not only to functional information but also to emotional and experiential stimuli. Previous studies have similarly reported that online brand experiences contribute positively to travel intentions by creating emotional attachment and destination attractiveness (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022; Chang & Cheng, 2023). Although the effect is smaller than that of destination trust, the result confirms that digital experiences play a meaningful role in motivating travel behavior. The finding highlights the importance of investing in visually appealing and emotionally engaging destination communication strategies.

H5: Social Media Credibility → Destination Trust

The findings show that social media credibility positively influences destination trust (β = 0.403, p < 0.001), supporting H5. Among the antecedents of destination trust, social media credibility exhibits the strongest effect. This result indicates that tourists place considerable importance on the reliability, accuracy, and

trustworthiness of destination-related information when evaluating tourism destinations. The finding strongly supports the Information Adoption Model, which identifies credibility as a key determinant of information acceptance (S. Zhang et al., 2013). Information perceived as credible is more likely to be accepted and incorporated into decision-making processes. The result is consistent with Hossain et al. (2025), who found that credible tourism information significantly enhances destination trust. The finding further suggests that tourists rely heavily on trustworthy digital information to reduce uncertainty and perceived risk associated with travel decisions. Consequently, destination managers should prioritize content accuracy, transparency, and authenticity when developing social media communication strategies.

H6: Social Media Credibility → Intention to Visit

The results indicate that social media credibility positively influences intention to visit ($\beta = 0.286$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H6. This finding demonstrates that credible information directly contributes to tourists' willingness to visit Borobudur. Travelers are more likely to commit to travel plans when they perceive destination information as accurate, trustworthy, and reliable. This result is consistent with previous tourism studies that identify credibility as a critical determinant of behavioral intention. Credible information reduces perceived risk and increases confidence in travel decisions. The finding suggests that tourists are more influenced by trustworthy information than by promotional messages alone. For heritage tourism destinations, where access regulations and conservation policies may influence visitor perceptions, maintaining information credibility becomes particularly important for sustaining tourist interest and encouraging visitation.

H7: Destination Trust → Intention to Visit

The findings reveal that destination trust positively influences intention to visit ($\beta = 0.515$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H7. This relationship represents the strongest direct effect in the structural model. The result indicates that trust serves as the primary psychological mechanism underlying travel intentions. Tourists are more likely to plan visits when they believe that the destination is reliable, safe, and capable of delivering the experiences promised through digital communication. This finding supports previous studies conducted by Wang & Yan (2022) and Chamoli et al. (2025), both of which emphasize the central role of trust in shaping tourism behavior. The result also aligns with IAM, which suggests that trust emerges through information evaluation and subsequently influences behavioral outcomes. The substantial effect size further demonstrates that trust is more influential than engagement, experience, or credibility in predicting visit intention. Therefore, trust functions as the final psychological determinant that converts positive destination perceptions into concrete behavioral intentions.

Mediating role of destination trust

The findings confirm that destination trust significantly mediates the relationships between digital engagement, online brand experience, social media credibility, and intention to visit. The indirect effects are significant for digital engagement ($\beta = 0.107$, $p = 0.030$), online brand experience ($\beta = 0.146$, $p = 0.001$), and social media credibility ($\beta = 0.208$, $p < 0.001$). These results demonstrate that digital communication variables influence visit intention not only directly but also through the development of trust.The strongest indirect effect occurs in the relationship between social media credibility and intention to visit, highlighting the central role of credibility in trust formation. This finding reinforces the Information Adoption Model by demonstrating that information credibility and quality contribute to behavioral intentions through psychological evaluation processes. Destination trust therefore acts as the cognitive mechanism through which tourists transform digital information into behavioral commitment. The findings extend previous tourism research by confirming that trust functions not merely as an outcome of digital communication but as a strategic mechanism that connects online experiences with travel behavior. Consequently, destination managers should focus not only on increasing visibility and engagement but also on fostering trust through credible and meaningful digital communication.

Conclusion

The study elucidates that the most influential factor when predicting intentions to visit is trust in the destination. Trust in the destination serves as the mediator between digital engagement and intentions to visit, suggesting that digital engagement does not contribute to the formation of visit intentions in a direct manner. Both destination trust and intentions to visit are influenced by online brand experience and the credibility of social media. It appears as though the formation of trust in the destination is key, rather than

digital engagement, when predicting visit intentions. In fact, the role of engagement in the process is minimal when compared to the perceived reliability and the experiential quality of the online information. In this regard, the study assists in the advancement of the tourism marketing field by elucidating the role of trust in a destination as a mediator in the relationship between digital interaction and visit intentions. It demonstrates that trust must exist in tourism-based models, and when integrated with online engagement, social media credibility, and online brand experience, a more comprehensive explanation is provided. It appears as though the role of trust in this case is a psychological one in that it converts digital stimuli into actions or behaviors. In this regard, the study offers a more refined assertion about the role of digital engagement, in that it is primarily indirect and not direct. The research findings state that for destination managers, it would be futile to simply raise social media activity without increasing visitation. Instead, marketing efforts should focus on hypothesis building through trust of potential tourists and credible, authentic, and good quality content marketing with a consistent brand messaging woven through their digital brand ecosystem. Effective brand marketing through their digital ecosystem as a trusted source of destination information creates online immersive quality storytelling, online good quality photos and many other interactive features. This research has limited its attention span to a single cross-sectional study on one heritage destination. This limitation has affected its generalizing capacity, hence, it has limited the ability to draw causative inferences. Part of the self-reported survey data may distort the study as a case of common method bias. Psychological variables such as perceived risk, the emotional, and psychological attachment to a destination were omitted in the study. The authors of this study are highly encouraged to conduct the same research in other culturally diversified tourist destinations to test this model. For this study, the authors would like to recommend the use of longitudinal studies that will capture the relative change in trust formation as it occurs chronologically over a given time. Other constraints and challenges that are seen as a deterrent to increasing trust should be introduced to the study for a more robust explanation of the phenomenon observed. This refers to perceived risk that may be associated with the destination, the travel motivation of the tourists, and the image of the destination.

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