

TOURIST SATISFACTION AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTION IN A HALAL DARK TOURISM CONTEXT: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT - Post-tsunami, Aceh has established tourism as one of the main economic revitalization strategies. However, external shocks in the form of the covid-19 pandemic and slowing global economy have hindered the recovery of the Acehnese tourism sector. The formulation of appropriate strategies requires accurate input about the behavior of dark tourists. Therefore, this study aims to propose a framework for the development of halal dark tourism as a unique value proposition for the Acehnese tourism sector. This framework incorporates the determinants of local and foreign dark tourists' satisfaction, revisit intention, and word-of-mouth (WOM). The framework can be a useful input for Acehnese tourism stakeholders to attract more tourists to Aceh. The study will use the quantitative survey design, collecting primary data using surveys. The study begins with a review of the literature, followed by the development of the instrument, pre-testing, and preliminary analysis.

Keywords: Dark tourism, satisfaction, behavioral intention, Aceh

ABSTRAK – Kepuasan Wisatawan dan Niat Perilaku pada Konteks Pariwisata Gelap: Kerangka Konseptual. Pasca bencana tsunami, Aceh telah menetapkan pariwisata sebagai salah satu strategi pemulihan ekonomi. Akan tetapi, external shock dalam bentuk pandemi Covid-19 telah memperlambat pemulihan sektor pariwisata Aceh. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan pariwisata Aceh melalui penguatan dark Halal tourism. Perumusan strategi yang tepat membutuhkan input yang tepat mengenai perilaku wisatawan gelap di Aceh. Oleh karena itu, riset ini mengkaji determinan kepuasan, niat berkunjung kembali, dan word of mouth (WOM) wisatawan gelap Muslim nusantara dan mancanegara ke destinasi-destinasi dark tourism di Aceh. Hasil penelitian ini akan menjadi input berharga bagi stakeholder pariwisata Aceh untuk menarik lebih banyak wisatawan ke Aceh. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain survei kuantitatif, di mana data primer dikumpulkan menggunakan survei sebagai instrumen. Penelitian ini bermula dengan tinjauan literatur, dilanjutkan dengan pengembangan instrumen, uji pilot, pengumpulan, dan analisis data.

Kata Kunci: Pariwisata gelap, kepuasan, niat perilaku, Aceh

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INTRODUCTION

Dark tourism refers to the concept of traveling to sites that are linked to death, disaster, and suffering, driven by curiosity, empathy, and desire to learn from past tragedies (Khil et al., 2024). This form of tourism began gaining attention following the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster in 2004 (Muskat et al., 2015). Dark tourism can potentially become a catalyst of post-disaster socioeconomic revitalization, in addition to becoming a means to improve the social resilience of the affected communities (Lin et al., 2018; Liu-Lastres et al., 2020; Rindrasih, 2019). These are driven by the growth of visitors who have the desire to learn from past events, creating a positive impact on the local economy, particularly through more employment opportunities and offering of local products and services. Dark tourism also provides a space for the affected community to narrate how they have rebuilt their community following a given disaster (Liu-Lastres et al., 2020). This “rebuilding” narration helps visitors to better understand the local history and context, generating empathy and respect while supporting social resilience (Biran et al., 2014). For Muslim tourists, dark tourism creates a space for spiritual rejuvenation in which they could reflect and learn from past tragedies.

Aceh has long made dark tourism as part of its tourism value propositions. Tsunami memorial sites have been transformed into tourism destinations so that society does not forget the catastrophe, and so that tourists can gain unique, emotional, and transformative experiences. Numerous religious and non-religious events and festivals have been held to remember the tsunami disaster, for example *Renungan Tsunami* and *Festival Smong*. As a Muslim-majority province, Aceh also offers halal tourism to attract local and international Muslim and non-Muslim tourists. The rich and Islamic culture of Aceh, Islamic law, and tsunami are the main pull factors for halal tourists. Aceh therefore uniquely offers a tourism experience that integrates dark and halal tourism.

Even so, the number of incoming tourists to Aceh is still low regionally and nationally. As a tourist destination, Aceh ranked seventh within Sumatera and seventeenth nationally (Statistik, 2025a). Additionally, the number of visitors after the pandemic (2024) was still lower than the period prior to it (2019), with a deficit of 2.7 million visitors. Of the 16 destinations ranked above Aceh, only North Sumatera (with a deficit of 5.1 million visitors) and Riau (with a deficit

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of 513 thousand visitors) have not fully recovered post-pandemic (Statistik, 2025a). This condition has contributed to unequal restoration of economic and social resilience in Aceh. In 2024, Aceh was the poorest province in Sumatera and tenth poorest nationally (Statistik, 2025b). Therefore, there is urgency for appropriate strategies to develop tourism that integrates dark and halal tourism as a means to improve economic empowerment and social resilience.

The integration of dark and halal tourism in Aceh is a unique and valuable resource and strategy. Religious values that are embedded in the Acehnese society, in addition to halal tourism principles, persuade tourists to reflect and learn from the tsunami disaster through an Islamic lens. Tourists who are moved by and satisfied with their experience from tsunami sites would be more likely to return to Aceh and recommend it as a destination to their family and friends. Therefore, this study proposes a conceptual framework on the determinants of halal dark tourists' (1) satisfaction, (2) revisit intention, and (3) word-of-mouth (WOM). This framework can be useful to develop more effective strategies integrating dark and halal tourism to improve the local economy and social resilience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Tourist satisfaction may be determined or hindered by internal and external factors. At the same time, satisfaction may lead to certain behaviors. This mechanism is explained by the stimulus–organism–response (SOR) theory. This theory explains how a stimulus can influence the cognitive and emotional conditions of tourists (organism), which in turn can influence them to do or not do something (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). This mechanism can also be understood as a sequence of input–process–output, where the stimulus functions as an input that is processed internally of its recipient to generate a future behavior. This theory has been used to explain how tourists' experience and perception influence satisfaction, revisit intention, and WOM (Wang et al., 2023).

Site Experiential Memorability

Site experiential memorability is directly correlated with tourist satisfaction. A destination that offers a meaningful and memorable experience, especially in

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relation to the dark narrative, tends to significantly enhance tourist satisfaction. Kunwar and Karki (2019) assert that dark tourism can enrich the overall tourist experience and promotes their positive evaluation of a given destination. As tourists find meaning and emotional resonance in their experience, their satisfaction not only increases, but their intention to revisit and inform others about the destination also increases.

Memorable tourism experience is an important determinant of future behavior, including the intention to revisit. Kim et al. (2015) found that such factors as involvement, hedonism, and exposure to local culture contribute significantly to the intention of tourists to revisit and give positive WOM. In the dark tourism context, memorable elements are often related to the emotional load and narrative depth of the destination, which in turn forms a memorable tourism experience.

Additionally, emotionally moving experiences also increase WOM in the context of dark tourism. Past studies show that positive WOM is strongly correlated with the satisfaction and revisit intention of tourists. They tend to share their experience on multiple platforms—traditional and digital—thus extending the reach of destination-related information (Abubakar et al., 2017). The cultural narrative that accompanies dark tourism also enhances tourists' intention to share the wisdom, creating a continuous discourse that enhances the visibility of the destination (Tan & Lim, 2018).

Local Culture

Immersing in the local culture is a central aspect of dark tourism and has a significant influence on tourist satisfaction. When tourists are exposed to the elements of local culture—through guided tours, historical narratives, or traditional cuisine—they report higher levels of satisfaction. Yu et al. (2019) show that the integration of local culture into tourism experience does not only positively influence tourist satisfaction but also improve their positive WOM intention. The integration of local culture into dark tourism can also improve revisit intention. Bowal and Ghosh (2023) found that tourists who revisit a dark tourism destination are motivated by their initial experience, especially if it is linked to the local cultural narrative. This link fosters emotional involvement and participation, which can form loyalty and encourage revisit. Positive



experience, particularly that which is enriched with interaction with the local culture, is typically shared by tourists with families, friends, or social media. In the context of dark tourism, the unique experience offered creates a strong and lasting narrative, improving tourists' WOM tendency. This generates a chain effect that influences the intention of potential tourists to visit similar destinations. Saryatun et al. (2024) argue that when local cultural elements become the dominant part of the tourism experience, tourism, WOM, and revisit intention are improved.

Experience Quality

Experience quality in the context of cultural heritage is the main determinant of tourist satisfaction and future behavioral intention Chen and Chen (2010). This construct is also relevant in the context of dark tourism, where memory and emotional impact of the experience are deep-rooted in the culture. Tourists who report high experience quality in the dark tourism context feel more satisfied, which in turn stimulates their higher intention to revisit and positive WOM (Nugraha et al., 2021). The emotional dimension attached to this experience also enhances their overall satisfaction, suggesting the significance of emotional experience in the tourism sector as a whole (Su et al., 2016).

Alsiehemy (2023) shows that high-quality dark tourism experience does not only influence the immediate satisfaction of tourists but also contributes to their intention to revisit and recommend the destination to others. This finding aligns with Nugraha et al. (2021), who state that memorable tourism experience, characterized by emotional and sensory involvement, are important determinants of positive WOM.

The meaningful engagement of tourists with contents exploring complex or challenging history can generate a transformative experience and improve their satisfaction (Lin, 2024). This can encourage tourists to share their experience positively, improving the likelihood of their revisit and recommendation of the destination. These findings altogether suggest that the deep and enthusing nature of dark tourism can create a strong emotional bond and improve satisfaction, which in turn could enhance revisit intention and WOM.

Memorable Tourism Experience

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Memorable tourism experience is a strong determinant of dark tourist satisfaction. A unique and unforgettable experience significantly improves tourist satisfaction, consequently improving revisit intention. In the dark tourism context, in which emotions such as fear and awe often emerge, experience quality becomes an element that can substantially enhance tourist satisfaction. A memorable experience has a strong impact on satisfaction and can potentially influence tourists' positive WOM intention (Nugraha et al., 2021).

Torabi et al. (2022) argue that memorable experiences not only improve tourist satisfaction but also their loyalty towards a destination, reflected in the intensity of their intention to revisit it. They found that the emotional engagement experience by tourists at dark tourism destinations significantly influences their desire to return and recommend their experience to others. This shows that emotional engagement in dark tourism produces richer and more immersive experience, which translates into a stronger sense of satisfaction. Certain aspects of memorable tourism experience, such as local culture and personal relevance, likewise enhances tourists' behavioral intention, including their intention to revisit and deliver WOM (Melani & Verinita, 2020). Therefore, satisfaction and long-term bond with dark tourism destinations can be shaped by tourists' emotional and meaningful experience at the destination.

Tourist Satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction has a significant effect on the intention to revisit a dark tourism destination. Intellectual engagement and emotional catharsis at dark tourism sites can augment the factors that influence revisit intention (Hasan et al., 2018; Prodan, 2021). As tourists become satisfied with their dark tourism experience, they tend to demonstrate a higher tendency to return and share their experience with others. Fascinating narratives and immersive experiences at those sites can facilitate this process, encouraging tourists to not only return but also actively promote their experience through informal means, inducing the number of incoming travelers.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study.

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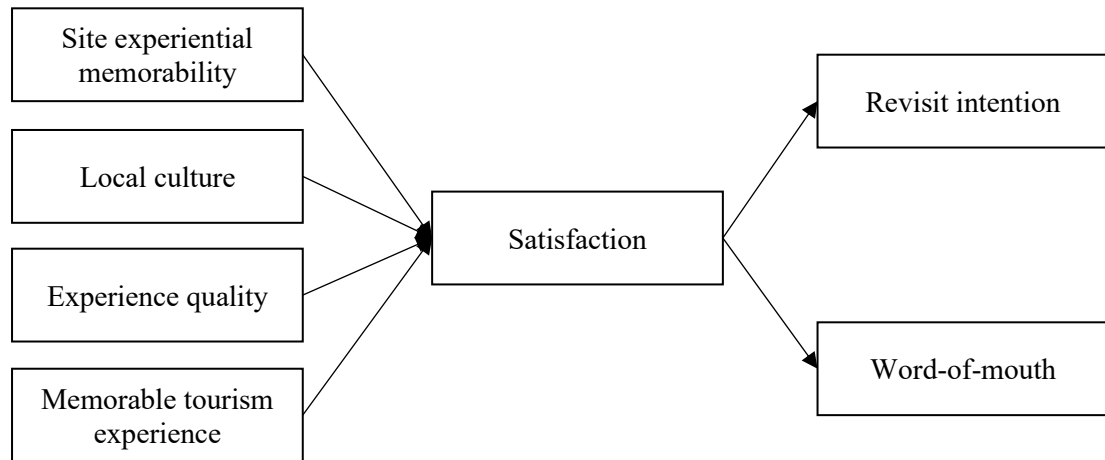


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study will employ quantitative survey design and collect primary data using questionnaires. The study will begin with a literature review, followed by instrument development, pilot test, and data collection and analysis.

Population and Sample

The population comprises domestic and international Muslim tourists. GPower computation shows that the minimum sample size is 114 respondents, based on a power of 0.80. Nonetheless, data will be collected from 200 respondents to mitigate for potential response bias and missing values. Respondents will be randomly selected. The survey locations are tsunami sites in Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar, Aceh Jaya, and Aceh Barat, for example the Tsunami Museum, Grand Mosque of Baiturrahman, PLTD Apung, and mass burial grounds. Quantitative data will be analyzed using regression and comparative analyses.

Data Collection and Analysis

The research instrument measures experience gained from tsunami sites, local culture, experience quality, memorable tourism experience, satisfaction, revisit

intention, and WOM of dark tourists (Figure 1). The items are adapted from previous studies (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Kuo et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017; Wu & Cheng, 2018; Zhang et al., 2021) and measured on a five-point scale from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”.

CONCLUSION

This paper proposes a conceptual framework to measure estimate the determinants of satisfaction and behavioral intention of dark tourists in the context of tsunami memorial sites. The framework will be tested in a separate study following primary data collection. Initial review of the literature suggests that site experiential memorability, local culture, memorable tourism experience, and experience quality can improve dark tourist satisfaction and positive behavioral intention.

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