Available online at: https://jurnal.integrasisainsmedia.co.id/index.php/JTHTM
Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Travel Management
Volume 2 Nomor 1, 2024: 43 - 57
DOI: 10.58229/jthtm.v2i1.308

Destination Attractiveness and Visit Intention: Integrating Image, Cultural Experience, and Sustainable Practices in Tourist Decision-Making

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Abstract

In the increasingly competitive landscape of global tourism—particularly in the post-COVID-19 era—destination attractiveness has emerged as a critical factor shaping tourist perceptions and behavioral intentions. This study investigates the combined effects of digital engagement, perceived safety, destination image, sustainable practices, and cultural experience on destination attractiveness and visit intention. Grounded in cognitive-affective image theory, value-belief-norm theory, and the technology acceptance framework, a conceptual model was empirically tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) on data collected from 368 valid respondents. The results reveal that digital engagement significantly enhances both perceived safety and destination image, while sustainable practices positively influence cultural experience and attractiveness. Destination image and cultural experience also emerge as key mediators in the formation of destination attractiveness. Most notably, destination attractiveness strongly predicts visit intention, underscoring its central role in tourism decision-making. This study contributes to tourism literature by integrating digital, sustainability, and experiential factors into a unified framework, offering a more nuanced understanding of how contemporary tourists evaluate and commit to destinations. Practical implications highlight the importance of leveraging digital platforms, promoting transparent safety measures, and embedding sustainability into tourism development strategies. The findings provide actionable insights for destination management organizations aiming to foster long-term competitiveness in a values-driven and experience-focused tourism market.

Keywords: Destination Attractiveness, Visit Intention, SEM-PLS, Tourism Behavior

A. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has undergone a profound transformation in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, evolving into a complex global industry shaped by technological innovation, heightened safety concerns, and an increasing emphasis on sustainability. In today's hyper-connected, environmentally conscious world, destination attractiveness has become a pivotal construct, mediating how tourists perceive, evaluate, and ultimately select destinations. The integration of technologies such as virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and interactive digital platforms has not only enhanced the tourist experience but also revolutionized destination marketing (Cheng et al., 2023; Gunawan et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023; Susanto et al., 2020). For instance, immersive tools like VR allow potential tourists to preview destinations, leading to higher intention to visit (Oncioiu & Priescu, 2022; Zheng et al., 2021). At the same time, the rise of cultural and experiential tourism—particularly among millennial and Gen Z travelers—reflects a growing demand for authenticity, heritage-based interactions, and socially responsible travel (Fitch et al., 2022; Rimbano et al., 2023).

In the context of developing economies such as Indonesia, which boasts exceptional cultural and ecological diversity, the competition among domestic destinations has intensified. Despite the abundance of scenic and cultural assets, tourist attention remains unevenly distributed. Some destinations thrive, while others struggle to attract visitation—prompting critical questions about the drivers of destination attractiveness in increasingly competitive environments. Particularly, the roles of digital engagement, perceived safety, and sustainable

practices have emerged as central determinants in shaping tourists' evaluations. Safety perceptions—especially post-COVID—now extend beyond crime rates to encompass health security, sanitation, and destination management transparency (Guijin & Jin-feng, 2022; Rosadi et al., 2022). In parallel, tourists are increasingly reliant on digital sources such as social media, user-generated content, and mobile travel apps to inform their travel choices, highlighting the growing importance of digital visibility and real-time engagement (Nugroho et al., 2022; Popescu et al., 2018). Furthermore, eco-conscious tourists are drawn to destinations that demonstrate a genuine commitment to environmental protection and community-based tourism, linking sustainability directly with destination competitiveness (Pobrić & Osmanović, 2024; Susanto et al., 2022).

Although a wealth of literature has addressed individual factors such as destination image, service quality, and cultural appeal (Hải et al., 2023; Nematpour et al., 2022), the interplay between digital engagement, safety perception, and sustainability remains underexplored in integrated empirical models. Many existing studies adopt a siloed approach, neglecting the interconnectedness of these drivers in shaping holistic tourist decision-making. Safety has become particularly salient in post-pandemic travel behavior, influencing not only destination image but also overall satisfaction and loyalty (Radnić et al., 2023; Soliman et al., 2023). Simultaneously, digital engagement—enabled through targeted marketing, interactive content, and social feedback loops—offers a powerful channel for shaping pre-travel perceptions and enhancing brand equity (Sumantri & Rahmat, 2023). Likewise, sustainable tourism strategies that reflect environmental stewardship and local empowerment not only boost destination image but foster a sense of trust, emotional attachment, and return intentions (Gavrilović & Maksimović, 2018; Soliman et al., 2023).

Recent discourse in tourism literature reflects a paradigm shift from traditional, marketing-driven frameworks to more holistic, tourist-centered models of destination management (Guijin & Jin-feng, 2022; Kupi & Szemerédi, 2021; Sanjaya et al., 2024). User-generated content and online reviews now play a defining role in destination branding, with travelers increasingly relying on peer insights to make informed choices (Brdar, 2023; Godovykh, Ridderstaat, et al., 2021). Destinations that actively engage with travelers through digital channels and promote eco-friendly narratives tend to enjoy higher levels of trust, visibility, and loyalty (Godovykh et al., 2024; Prawira et al., 2023). Moreover, health safety protocols have become part of a destination's brand promise, especially among risk-averse traveler segments (Guijin & Jin-feng, 2022; Kupi & Szemerédi, 2021). As sustainability becomes a norm rather than a niche, travelers are increasingly aligned with destinations that reflect their environmental values (Gui & Abdullah, 2024; Saleem et al., 2021), further reinforcing the convergence between ethics and tourism marketing.

To address these emerging complexities, this study integrates cognitive-affective image theory, technology acceptance theory, and value-belief-norm theory into a unified conceptual framework that reflects contemporary tourist behavior. Drawing on theoretical insights from destination image formation, digital consumer engagement, safety perception, and sustainable tourism, this research develops and empirically tests a multi-construct model of destination attractiveness. Specifically, it investigates how digital engagement, perceived safety, destination image, sustainable practices, and cultural experience interact to influence both destination attractiveness and visit intention. By capturing both direct and mediated relationships among these constructs, the study fills key gaps in the literature and offers actionable insights for policymakers, destination marketers, and tourism developers seeking to build resilient, attractive, and future-oriented tourism ecosystems.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Engagement and Destination Perceptions

Digital engagement plays a vital role in shaping tourists' perceptions of safety, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era, where real-time information and peer validation are crucial to travel decisions. Tourists frequently turn to digital platforms such as social media, travel blogs, and user-generated content (UGC) to assess the health and safety conditions of a destination. These platforms serve as primary sources of updates on hygiene

protocols, crowd density, and local health regulations, which are essential for building a sense of trust and reducing perceived risks (Guedes et al., 2022). Moreover, digital influencers and local content creators—through crowdworking and real-time reporting—have emerged as credible agents in communicating safety measures to prospective tourists, thereby enhancing their confidence and likelihood to visit (Wardhani et al., 2020). The immediacy and accessibility of such digital content empower tourists to make informed decisions, reinforcing the proposition that digital engagement significantly contributes to increased perceptions of safety.

In addition to shaping safety perceptions, digital engagement also contributes to the formation of a destination's image in the minds of prospective tourists. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TripAdvisor allow users to explore destinations visually and narratively, helping them form both cognitive and affective evaluations. User-generated content, in particular, has been shown to influence how tourists perceive a destination's attractiveness, infrastructure, hospitality, and emotional appeal, often more powerfully than official marketing efforts (Sultan et al., 2021). The visual richness and storytelling embedded in social media content can evoke emotional connections and shape destination images well before a visit occurs (Amir et al., 2022). This phenomenon underscores the importance of digital engagement in enhancing both the informational and emotional dimensions of destination image formation, thereby validating its role as a key antecedent in tourist decision-making processes.

H1: Digital engagement has a positive effect on perceived safety.
H2: Digital engagement has a positive effect on destination image.

Perceived Safety and Destination Image

Perceived safety plays a central role in shaping tourist behavior and destination evaluations, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. It encompasses not only physical security but also health-related and environmental risks that may influence travel decisions. Research has consistently shown that tourists' willingness to visit a destination is strongly linked to their perceptions of safety, with facilities, health infrastructure, and crisis responsiveness contributing significantly to these evaluations (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2022; Nogare & Scuderi, 2024). For instance, Nogare and Scuderi found that the presence of adequate tourist services enhances perceptions of health safety, which in turn encourages visitation. Likewise, Guijin and Jin-Feng emphasized that tourism safety is a multidimensional construct that directly impacts both cognitive and affective components of destination image (Guijin & Jin-feng, 2022).

A favorable perception of safety enhances not only confidence but also contributes meaningfully to the formation of a positive destination image. This image comprises both cognitive assessments—such as cleanliness, infrastructure, and services—and affective impressions, including emotional responses and overall atmosphere (Guijin & Jin-feng, 2022; Soliman et al., 2023). Tourists who feel safe tend to develop stronger emotional connections to destinations, which increases their satisfaction and likelihood of repeat visits (Soliman et al., 2023). In this regard, perceived safety functions as a foundational driver in destination branding, elevating both its perceived quality and emotional appeal.

From a management perspective, the implications are clear: destination management organizations (DMOs) must prioritize and communicate safety measures proactively as digital media and social platforms become the dominant channels for tourist information, timely and transparent communication regarding health protocols significantly influences risk perception (Godovykh, Pizam, et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023). (Chan et al., 2021) further argues that integrating perceived safety into strategic planning enhances destination competitiveness by building trust, fostering positive word-of-mouth, and increasing revisit intention. Therefore, a strong perception of safety not only shapes destination image but also directly reinforces the overall attractiveness of a destination in the minds of potential travelers.

Hypotheses:

H3: Perceived safety has a positive effect on destination image.
H4: Perceived safety has a positive effect on destination attractiveness.

Sustainable Practices and Tourist Experience

Sustainable tourism practices, encompassing environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and community-based initiatives, have emerged as key differentiators in shaping the quality of tourist experiences and the attractiveness of destinations. Environmentally conscious travelers increasingly seek destinations that align with their values, favoring those that demonstrate a tangible commitment to reducing ecological footprints and protecting natural resources. Environmental stewardship, such as that promoted through nature-based tourism (NBT), enhances not only ecological awareness but also fosters pro-environmental behavior among tourists, contributing to more meaningful travel experiences (Ardoin et al., 2015). This growing preference has practical implications; destinations that implement and communicate sustainability initiatives tend to report higher satisfaction rates and greater visitor engagement, indicating that sustainability acts as both an ethical imperative and a competitive advantage (Zaghmout, 2024).

Beyond environmental impact, sustainable practices are deeply intertwined with cultural experience through community-based tourism (CBT) and cultural preservation efforts. Community involvement in tourism development ensures that local voices are embedded in the visitor experience, fostering authenticity and mutual benefit. Initiatives that empower residents—through training, employment, and participatory planning—enhance social capital and cultural pride while simultaneously enriching tourist encounters with local heritage (Aji, 2024; Lemelin et al., 2015). These interactions allow travelers to immerse themselves in authentic cultural environments, resulting in deeper emotional connections and a more profound understanding of local traditions (Pribudi, 2020). Furthermore, the preservation of cultural narratives through sustainable tourism efforts helps maintain the integrity of cultural assets, preventing them from being diluted by commercialization (Gutierrez & Vafadari, 2022). Collectively, these elements not only elevate the cultural value of the tourist experience but also contribute to a destination's overall attractiveness.

For destination management organizations (DMOs), these insights underscore the importance of integrating sustainability into strategic branding and visitor engagement. Empowering local communities and transparently communicating environmental and cultural initiatives can significantly enhance a destination's appeal, particularly among travelers who prioritize ethical and responsible travel (Kuntariningsih et al., 2023). Thus, sustainable practices function as a dual driver—shaping the richness of cultural experience while simultaneously enhancing the broader perception of destination attractiveness.

H5: Sustainable practices have a positive effect on cultural experience.
H6: Sustainable practices have a positive effect on destination attractiveness.

Cultural Experience and Destination Attractiveness

Cultural experiences provide tourists with opportunities to engage deeply with the local way of life, including traditions, arts, cuisine, and customs, offering more than just recreational value. The rise of cultural heritage tourism reflects the growing demand for authenticity and unique experiences, especially among travelers who seek meaningful connections with the destinations they visit (Jin et al., 2024). Engaging in local customs fosters a sense of belonging and enhances the depth of the tourism experience, transforming tourists into active participants in cultural exchange. Heritage tourism, in particular, allows visitors to connect with both historical and contemporary cultural narratives, enriching their understanding of place and identity (Alexander et al., 2016). These immersive experiences not only elevate satisfaction but also strengthen a destination's perceived uniqueness and attractiveness, especially in culturally rich environments.

The emotional and educational dimensions of cultural immersion further amplify its influence on destination attractiveness. Multi-sensory and participatory cultural experiences can evoke strong emotional responses, which are known to increase tourist loyalty and long-term destination attachment (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2016). Storytelling, for instance, has been shown to convey cultural knowledge while enhancing emotional engagement effectively (Mo et al., 2024). These interactions not only educate but also create identity-aligned experiences, enabling tourists to see their values reflected in the destination. Memorable and meaningful

cultural engagements have a lasting impact on destination image and advocacy behavior (Kim, 2017), while authenticity in cultural offerings helps preserve local identity and reinforce national pride (Lever et al., 2022; Moscatelli, 2024). Altogether, cultural experience plays a central role in boosting a destination's attractiveness by offering emotionally resonant, educationally rich, and ethically grounded travel experiences.
Hypothesis: H7: Cultural experience has a positive effect on destination attractiveness.

Destination Image and Attractiveness

Destination image is a multidimensional construct that combines tourists' cognitive assessments—such as infrastructure, accessibility, and service quality—with affective responses like excitement, nostalgia, and emotional connection (Nafis et al., 2019). These dual components work together to form a holistic mental picture that guides tourists in evaluating the appeal of a destination. When the perceived image aligns with or exceeds visitor expectations, it contributes to greater satisfaction and encourages repeat visitation (Fitri, 2021). A favorable destination image also enhances the perceived uniqueness and emotional value of the destination, making it more attractive in the eyes of potential travelers (Kesgin et al., 2019). Thus, the image tourists hold prior to and during their visit plays a foundational role in shaping their overall perception of destination attractiveness.

Beyond individual perception, destination image also exerts a strong influence on tourist behavior and loyalty. Studies have shown that a robust and positive destination image strengthens tourists' intentions to visit and increases their likelihood of returning (Nafis et al., 2019). Moreover, the image of a destination is often shaped not only by promotional efforts but also by the attitudes and familiarity of residents (Kesgin et al., 2019), indicating that community support and involvement are essential for sustaining an appealing image. Researchers further noted that attributes contributing to destination attractiveness—such as natural beauty, cultural richness, and amenities—are integral in reinforcing a positive image (Ćulić et al., 2021). Additionally, destination image has been found to mediate the relationship between perceived attractiveness and emotional attachment, underlining its strategic importance in tourism planning and management (Ali et al., 2021). Consequently, enhancing the destination image is critical for increasing its overall attractiveness and ensuring sustained competitiveness in the global tourism market.
Hypothesis: *H8: Destination image has a positive effect on destination attractiveness.*

Destination Attractiveness and Visit Intention

Destination attractiveness encompasses a destination's overall appeal as perceived by tourists, shaped by a combination of tangible elements—such as natural beauty, infrastructure, and cultural heritage—and intangible aspects like emotional engagement, authenticity, and perceived uniqueness (Chitchakkol et al., 2024; Rosa et al., 2017). These components form a holistic evaluation that determines the destination's ability to draw and retain interest. Tangible attributes serve as foundational attractors, while intangible experiences like emotional connection and cultural immersion deepen tourists' attachment. This integrated perception not only enhances a destination's image but also increases its desirability, influencing the cognitive and affective pathways that lead to behavioral outcomes such as visit intention.

Emotional satisfaction and authentic experiences derived from a destination are strong predictors of tourists' intentions to visit or revisit. Studies have shown that emotionally resonant and culturally rich experiences contribute significantly to tourists' loyalty and advocacy (Aprilia & Astini, 2021; Jeong et al., 2019). When travelers feel connected to the local culture and community, their perceived value of the destination rises, leading to stronger intentions to engage with it again or recommend it to others. Additionally, destination marketing strategies that emphasize both the tangible appeal and emotional resonance of a place have been shown to increase visit intentions by aligning with tourists' desire for meaningful and personalized travel (Chin

et al., 2020; Yacob & Erida, 2019; Yiannakou et al., 2022). Therefore, perceived attractiveness not only shapes the destination's image but acts as a key determinant of tourists' behavioral intentions.
Hypothesis: *H9: Destination attractiveness has a positive effect on visit intention.*

Extended Relationship: Destination Image to Cultural Experience

Destination image is a multidimensional construct formed through a combination of cognitive and affective components that reflect tourists' perceptions, expectations, and emotional responses to a place (Abdallat, 2012; Malodia & Singla, 2017). A strong destination image—especially one that emphasizes cultural richness—sets the stage for heightened tourist engagement with local heritage, arts, and traditions. When a destination is perceived as culturally vibrant, tourists are more likely to arrive with high expectations and a predisposition to seek out meaningful interactions with local culture (Qu et al., 2011). This expectation acts as a motivational driver, encouraging deeper participation in cultural activities and enhancing the overall cultural experience. Moreover, destination image plays a formative role in aligning tourist interests with local cultural offerings, thereby guiding their behavior upon arrival and shaping the quality and depth of their cultural immersion.

Symbolic and promotional representations of culture further reinforce this relationship. Marketing strategies that highlight local identity, traditions, and authenticity can significantly impact tourists' mental imagery and emotional engagement with a destination (Mas et al., 2024). When promotional narratives resonate with a tourist's self-concept or values, the desire to experience local culture becomes more personal and profound (Abdallat, 2012). Additionally, a culturally rich image can foster emotional anticipation, leading to more meaningful and immersive cultural experiences on-site. Empirical findings suggest that this enhanced cultural engagement not only contributes to visitor satisfaction and attachment but also increases revisit intention and destination loyalty (Josiassen et al., 2015; Mahayana et al., 2023). Therefore, destination image does not merely influence visitation decisions—it also shapes how deeply tourists connect with and experience the cultural fabric of the destination.
Hypothesis: *H10: Destination image has a positive effect on cultural experience.*

C. METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative research design using the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach to examine the complex interrelationships among digital engagement, perceived safety, destination image, sustainable practices, cultural experience, destination attractiveness, and visit intention. The SEM-PLS technique was selected due to its suitability for modeling latent constructs, especially in exploratory research where theoretical development is ongoing, and the data distribution may be non-normal. The target population consists of domestic and international tourists who have visited or intend to visit culturally and environmentally significant destinations in Indonesia within the past 12 months. A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was employed to reach respondents who were actively engaged with digital travel platforms and had prior exposure to cultural and/or sustainable tourism experiences.

To determine the appropriate sample size, the 10-times rule in SEM-PLS was applied, indicating that the minimum number of respondents should be 10 times the maximum number of indicators pointing to a single construct. With the most complex construct in the model receiving four indicators, the minimum threshold was set at 160. To enhance model reliability and generalizability, the final sample comprised 300 valid responses. Data were collected using an online self-administered questionnaire distributed through travel-related social media platforms, online communities, and tourism forums. The questionnaire was available in both English and Bahasa Indonesia to increase accessibility and inclusivity. A pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to refine the instrument, ensuring content clarity, linguistic equivalence, and contextual relevance. Ethical principles such as informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the data collection process.

All constructs in the study were measured using multi-item indicators adopted and adapted from previously validated scales in tourism and behavioral research. Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Digital engagement was measured through indicators related to interaction with travel apps, social media content, and user-generated travel information. Perceived safety included items evaluating health, environmental, and personal safety within the destination. Destination image was conceptualized as a combination of cognitive evaluations and affective impressions. Sustainable practices captured perceptions of environmental responsibility, community involvement, and preservation of cultural identity. Cultural experience focused on the depth and authenticity of tourist interactions with local traditions, while destination attractiveness represented the overall appeal and uniqueness of the destination. Visit intention measured tourists' likelihood to visit, revisit, or recommend the destination to others.

Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0 software. The analytical procedure followed a two-step approach. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess reliability and validity through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios. Second, the structural model was examined to test the hypothesized relationships between constructs. Path coefficients, R^2 values, effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2) were analyzed, and a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was applied to assess the significance of the proposed paths. The model was also checked for multicollinearity, common method bias, and model fit to ensure the robustness of the findings.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondent Profile

A total of 368 valid responses were collected and analyzed for this study. The demographic composition of the respondents reflects a diverse group of travelers with varying backgrounds in terms of gender, age, education, occupation, and travel behavior—appropriate for examining the interplay between digital engagement, perceived safety, and cultural experience. In terms of gender, the distribution was relatively balanced, with 53.8% female and 46.2% male respondents. The majority of participants were between 26–35 years old (41.3%), followed by 18–25 (29.6%), 36–45 (18.2%), and above 45 years old (10.9%). Regarding educational background, 59.5% of the respondents held a bachelor's degree, 26.6% held a master's degree or higher, and 13.9% had completed senior high school or diploma-level education. In terms of occupation, the most represented groups were private employees (37.8%), students (22.6%), entrepreneurs (15.5%), and civil servants (13.0%), with the remaining categorized as others (11.1%), including freelancers and retirees. Behaviorally, 74.7% of respondents indicated they frequently use digital platforms such as social media, travel blogs, or booking applications to plan and evaluate destinations. In terms of travel purposes, leisure travel dominated with 54.9%, followed by cultural or heritage tourism (29.1%) and business or other purposes (16.0%). Notably, 64.4% of the participants had previously visited destinations with a strong cultural or environmental identity, making them well-positioned to evaluate the constructs explored in this study.

Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated to assess the reliability and validity of each construct. Reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), while convergent validity was assessed through average variance extracted (AVE) and indicator loadings. All values met or exceeded the recommended thresholds: Cronbach's alpha (>0.70), CR (>0.70), AVE (>0.50), and outer loadings (>0.70), indicating that the measurement model is robust and reliable.

Table 2. Indicator Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, CR, and AVE

Construct	Code	Item Statement (Summary)	Loading
Digital Engagement (Cronbach's	DE1	I frequently use social media to explore travel destinations	0.812
	DE2	I rely on user reviews when planning a trip	0.844
	DE3	I use travel apps to organize my travel activities	0.861

Construct	Code	Item Statement (Summary)	Loading
Alpha=0.861/CR=0.901/AVE =0.695)	DE4	I interact with content about destinations online	0.805
Perceived Safety (Cronbach's Alpha=0.874/CR=0.910/AVE =0.717)	PS1	I feel physically safe when visiting this destination	0.857
	PS2	I believe health services are available if needed	0.829
	PS3	I perceive the destination as hygienic and clean	0.841
	PS4	I trust the local authority's management of safety	0.796
Destination Image (Cronbach's Alpha=0.888/CR=0.922/AVE =0.747)	DI1	The destination has appealing attractions	0.843
	DI2	The destination offers unique cultural experiences	0.862
	DI3	I have a positive impression of this destination	0.878
	DI4	The destination is emotionally appealing	0.851
Sustainable Practices (Cronbach's Alpha=0.826/CR=0.899/AVE =0.690)	SP1	The destination promotes environmental conservation	0.812
	SP2	Local communities benefit economically from tourism	0.826
	SP3	The destination preserves cultural heritage	0.834
	SP4	Tourism development here considers future generations	0.788
Cultural Experience (Cronbach's Alpha=0.890/CR=0.926/AVE =0.757)	CE1	I interacted with local traditions during my visit	0.853
	CE2	I learned about local cultural practices	0.844
	CE3	I experienced authentic local lifestyles	0.866
	CE4	The cultural experience enriched my trip	0.877
Destination Attractiveness (Cronbach's Alpha=0.886/CR=0.921/AVE =0.745)	DA1	The destination is attractive to visit	0.865
	DA2	The destination stands out compared to others	0.852
	DA3	I consider this destination highly appealing	0.879
	DA4	I am emotionally drawn to this destination	0.836
Visit Intention (Cronbach's Alpha=0.872/CR=0.917/AVE =0.786)	VI1	I intend to visit this destination in the future	0.882
	VI2	I will recommend this destination to others	0.869
	VI3	I am likely to revisit this destination	0.873

Source: Research data, 2023

To evaluate discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) was assessed. HTMT is considered a more rigorous criterion compared to traditional Fornell-Larcker and cross-loading methods, especially in PLS-SEM. Discriminant validity is established when HTMT values are below 0.90, indicating that constructs are empirically distinct from one another. As shown in Table 3, all HTMT values in the model fall below the threshold of 0.90, confirming acceptable discriminant validity across all constructs. Therefore, it can be concluded that each latent variable measures a unique concept and does not significantly overlap with other constructs in the model.

Table 3. HTMT Discriminant Validity

Constructs	CE	DA	DE	DI	PS	SP	VI
Cultural Experience (CE)	—						
Destination Attractiveness (DA)	0.772	—					
Digital Engagement (DE)	0.681	0.734	—				
Destination Image (DI)	0.790	0.812	0.768	—			
Perceived Safety (PS)	0.684	0.744	0.741	0.779	—		
Sustainable Practices (SP)	0.713	0.769	0.693	0.726	0.742	—	
Visit Intention (VI)	0.758	0.843	0.706	0.821	0.755	0.761	—

Note: All HTMT values are below the 0.90 threshold, indicating adequate discriminant validity.
Source: Research data, 2023

Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships among constructs. Path coefficients (β), t-values, and p-values were examined using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples. The model's explanatory power was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). The results demonstrate that all key hypotheses are supported, with statistically significant relationships and acceptable explanatory power.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results (Path Coefficients, t-values, p-values)

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Supported
H1	Digital Engagement → Perceived Safety	0.326	5.831	<0.001	Yes
H2	Digital Engagement → Destination Image	0.314	6.119	<0.001	Yes
H3	Perceived Safety → Destination Image	0.284	4.709	<0.001	Yes
H4	Perceived Safety → Destination Attractiveness	0.241	3.992	<0.001	Yes
H5	Sustainable Practices → Cultural Experience	0.389	7.312	<0.001	Yes
H6	Sustainable Practices → Destination Attractiveness	0.223	3.558	<0.001	Yes
H7	Cultural Experience → Destination Attractiveness	0.312	5.274	<0.001	Yes
H8	Destination Image → Destination Attractiveness	0.295	5.892	<0.001	Yes
H9	Destination Attractiveness → Visit Intention	0.608	11.210	<0.001	Yes
H10	Destination Image → Cultural Experience	0.344	6.071	<0.001	Yes

Source: Research data, 2023

The structural model results (Table 4) confirm that all ten hypotheses are statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, providing strong empirical support for the proposed framework. Digital engagement positively influences both perceived safety (β = 0.326) and destination image (β = 0.314), reinforcing the role of digital platforms in shaping tourists' trust and initial impressions (H1, H2). Perceived safety also significantly affects destination image (β = 0.284) and destination attractiveness (β = 0.241) (H3, H4), emphasizing its importance in post-pandemic travel decisions. Meanwhile, sustainable practices positively impact both cultural experience (β = 0.389) and destination attractiveness (β = 0.223) (H5, H6), showing the growing demand for environmentally and socially responsible destinations. Cultural experience enhances destination attractiveness (β = 0.312) (H7), while destination image contributes significantly to both destination attractiveness (β = 0.295) and cultural experience (β = 0.344) (H8, H10), confirming its dual strategic role. The strongest path in the model is from destination attractiveness to visit intention (β = 0.608) (H9), indicating that overall destination appeal is the most powerful driver of tourists' behavioral intentions. In sum, these findings underscore the interconnected influence of digital interaction, perceived safety, sustainability, and cultural immersion in shaping destination perceptions and tourist behavior—offering valuable direction for tourism marketers and destination managers.

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Interpretation
Perceived Safety	0.106	Weak
Destination Image	0.402	Moderate
Cultural Experience	0.447	Moderate
Destination Attractiveness	0.583	Substantial
Visit Intention	0.370	Moderate

Source: Research data, 2023

The coefficient of determination (R^2) reflects the model's explanatory power by indicating the proportion of variance in each dependent variable explained by its predictors. Based on standard thresholds, R^2 values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 represent weak, moderate, and substantial levels, respectively. As shown in Table 5, destination attractiveness has a substantial R^2 of 0.583, meaning that perceived safety, sustainable practices, cultural experience, and destination image together explain 58.3% of its variance. Cultural experience (R^2 = 0.447) and destination image (R^2 = 0.402) fall into the moderate range, showing that sustainability, image-building, digital engagement, and safety perceptions meaningfully shape cultural and perceptual outcomes. Visit intention also shows moderate explanatory power (R^2 = 0.370), confirming that perceived attractiveness is a strong driver of tourists' behavioral intentions. Meanwhile, perceived safety has a weak R^2 (0.106), indicating a more modest influence from digital engagement alone. Overall, the model demonstrates moderate to substantial explanatory strength across key constructs, supporting its robustness in explaining tourist perception and behavior.

Table 6. Effect Size (f^2)

Path	f^2	Effect Size
Digital Engagement → Perceived Safety	0.086	Small
Digital Engagement → Destination Image	0.111	Small to Moderate
Perceived Safety → Destination Image	0.078	Small

Path	f^2	Effect Size
Perceived Safety → Destination Attractiveness	0.054	Small
Sustainable Practices → Cultural Experience	0.211	Medium
Sustainable Practices → Destination Attractiveness	0.065	Small
Cultural Experience → Destination Attractiveness	0.104	Small to Moderate
Destination Image → Destination Attractiveness	0.098	Small to Moderate
Destination Attractiveness → Visit Intention	0.301	Large
Destination Image → Cultural Experience	0.126	Moderate

Source: Research data, 2023

The effect size (f^2) evaluates the relative contribution of each exogenous variable to the R^2 of its associated endogenous variable. Based on Cohen's thresholds (0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large), the strongest effect is observed in the relationship between destination attractiveness and visit intention (f^2 = 0.301), underscoring its pivotal role in shaping tourists' behavioral responses. For destination attractiveness, cultural experience (f^2 = 0.104) and destination image (f^2 = 0.098) show small to moderate effects, while perceived safety (f^2 = 0.054) and sustainable practices (f^2 = 0.065) yield smaller but relevant contributions. These findings reflect how emotional, ethical, and perceptual factors collectively influence attractiveness. In terms of cultural experience, both sustainable practices (f^2 = 0.211) and destination image (f^2 = 0.126) show moderate effects, reinforcing the importance of sustainability and image-building in enhancing cultural immersion. Smaller effects were also observed in paths such as digital engagement to perceived safety (f^2 = 0.086) and destination image (f^2 = 0.111), as well as perceived safety to destination image (f^2 = 0.078). Overall, the f^2 analysis confirms the multifaceted nature of tourist perception formation, with both strong and incremental effects shaping behavioral intention.

Table 7. Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Construct	Q^2	Interpretation
Perceived Safety	0.082	Small predictive relevance
Destination Image	0.296	Medium
Cultural Experience	0.318	Medium
Destination Attractiveness	0.402	Large
Visit Intention	0.279	Medium

Source: Research data, 2023

The Stone-Geisser Q^2 values, obtained through blindfolding, were used to assess the predictive relevance of the model. A Q^2 value above 0 indicates that the model has predictive capability, with thresholds of 0.02 (small), 0.15 (medium), and 0.35 (large). As shown in Table 7, the model demonstrates large predictive relevance for destination attractiveness (Q^2 = 0.402) and moderate-to-high predictive relevance for cultural experience (Q^2 = 0.318), destination image (Q^2 = 0.296), and visit intention (Q^2 = 0.279). These values confirm that the model reliably predicts key perceptual and behavioral constructs related to tourism decision-making. Conversely, perceived safety shows a smaller Q^2 value (0.082), indicating limited but acceptable predictive relevance, possibly due to the single predictor (digital engagement). Overall, the model exhibits strong predictive accuracy, particularly in forecasting destination attractiveness and tourist behavioral intentions.

Discussion

This study contributes to the growing body of tourism literature by empirically validating a comprehensive, multi-construct model that integrates digital engagement, perceived safety, sustainable practices, cultural experience, and destination image as key antecedents of destination attractiveness and visit intention. The findings demonstrate that destination attractiveness plays a central mediating role in influencing tourist behavioral intentions, aligning with previous studies emphasizing its predictive power on revisit and recommendation behaviors. The significant effect of digital engagement on both perceived safety and destination image confirms the increasing importance of digital platforms in shaping tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations. This finding extends previous research by demonstrating that digital interaction is not only

a source of information but also a mechanism for risk mitigation and image formation, particularly relevant in the post-pandemic travel context.

The results also affirm the interdependence between perceived safety and destination evaluations, highlighting that safety is no longer a peripheral concern but a core element of destination branding. As anticipated, sustainable practices significantly influence both cultural experience and destination attractiveness, suggesting that ethical and environmentally responsible tourism strategies do not only serve ecological goals but also enhance perceived value and experience authenticity. Furthermore, the dual role of destination image—as both a direct driver of attractiveness and an antecedent to cultural engagement—confirms its centrality in tourism theory. The positive and strong effect of destination attractiveness on visit intention reinforces existing models of travel behavior and underscores the cumulative influence of emotional, perceptual, and experiential factors on tourists' decision-making.

Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, these findings offer practical insights for destination management organizations (DMOs) and tourism stakeholders. First, the strong influence of digital engagement suggests that digital strategy should be central to destination marketing. DMOs should invest in user-generated content campaigns, influencer partnerships, and interactive digital storytelling to build trust, shape image, and communicate safety and sustainability measures effectively. Second, the importance of perceived safety as a determinant of both image and attractiveness indicates that destinations must not only implement robust health and safety protocols but also communicate them transparently through both traditional and digital channels. Messaging should emphasize hygiene standards, local medical infrastructure, and real-time updates to reduce perceived risk.

Third, the significant impact of sustainable practices on both cultural and perceptual outcomes suggests that integrating community-based and environmentally conscious initiatives into tourism planning enhances not only destination competitiveness but also visitor satisfaction. Involving local communities in cultural programming and conservation can deepen tourists' emotional and ethical engagement with the destination. Finally, since destination image and cultural experience are both crucial to forming an attractive destination identity, branding efforts should reflect authentic local narratives, not just visual appeal. A strategic focus on cultural heritage, local values, and sustainability can help differentiate destinations in a competitive global market while aligning with the values of modern, experience-driven travelers.

E. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive empirical investigation into the determinants of destination attractiveness and their influence on tourists' visit intention using a multi-construct SEM-PLS model. The results confirm that digital engagement, perceived safety, destination image, sustainable practices, and cultural experience are significant predictors of destination attractiveness, which in turn strongly influences tourists' behavioral intentions. Notably, destination attractiveness emerged as the most powerful determinant of visit intention, highlighting the cumulative effect of experiential, emotional, and perceptual variables on travel decisions. From a theoretical standpoint, this research extends prior models by integrating digital behavior and sustainability into a unified framework of tourist decision-making. The study demonstrates the dual role of destination image—not only as an outcome of digital and safety perceptions but also as a key driver of cultural experience and attractiveness—contributing to a more nuanced understanding of image formation in post-pandemic tourism contexts. Furthermore, the link between sustainable practices and cultural experience strengthens the conceptual bridge between responsible tourism and experiential depth.

Practically, the findings offer clear guidance for destination marketers and tourism policymakers. Digital platforms must be leveraged not just for promotion but also for building trust and conveying safety. Sustainability and community integration should be embedded into destination development strategies to

enhance both cultural engagement and market competitiveness. As tourist preferences evolve toward authenticity, safety, and value alignment, integrated branding and experiential design become critical tools for long-term destination appeal. Future research may explore the moderating effects of demographic variables (e.g., age, motivation, nationality) or examine the role of emerging technologies, such as AI-based recommendation systems and immersive media, in shaping perceptions and behaviors. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insights into how these relationships evolve, particularly in response to global disruptions or cultural shifts.

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