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THE MODERATING INFLUENCE OF DOMESTIC TRAVELER PERCEIVED RISK IN FAMILY TOURISM

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Abstract

Risk is fundamental in the choice evaluation and behaviour of tourists. Understanding tourists' shifting preferences towards a destination is imperative in the post-COVID era. Compared to other types of tourism, literature on family tourism travel behaviour has been limited, especially for outbound family tourists shifting to domestic destinations for holidays. This study used 220 samples for data analysis with Smart PLS 4.0. The findings show that perceived destination image directly affects the intention to travel domestically. The perceived risk significantly moderates this relationship. Enhancing the destination's image by emphasising its unique qualities and mitigating unfavourable conditions by establishing a secure environment is crucial.

Keywords: Family travel, travel motivation, perceived destination image, perceived risk, intention to travel domestically

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INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has witnessed a growing emphasis on family tourism in recent years. Family tourism has emerged as a substantial and constantly expanding market for 30% of worldwide leisure travel. Family travellers represent more than one-third of all leisure travellers in the United States (World Metrics, 2023). According to Expert Market Research (2024), family tourism expenditures are projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 4.7% until 2032. Its growth rates are expected to exceed those of other essential components of customer operations in the tourism industry (Li et al., 2020). It encompasses travelling and embarking on holiday adventures with family members for leisure, recreation, and bonding. They indicate that families are a key market segment for tourist destinations, as they make up a significant proportion of leisure travellers in many countries. This highlights the family's role in fostering interest in tourism-related activities, allowing family members to participate in leisure and tourism (Hassan, 2021).

Understanding how perceived risk influences the relationship between family travel motivation, family-perceived destination image, and the intention to travel for family tourism can provide valuable insights for destination marketers and policymakers. The perceived risk associated with a destination has been identified as a significant moderating factor in the relationship between these variables. Perceived risk, which can encompass concerns about safety, security, and potential negative experiences, can influence an individual's willingness to travel to a particular destination.

Thus, this study adopts the concepts of travel motivation and perceived destination image to examine their effect on behavioural intention, defined as the intention to travel domestically. Additionally, risk perception is hypothesised to moderate the relationship between family-perceived destination image and intention to travel domestically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family Travel Motivation and Intention to Travel Domestically

The concept of travel motivation and intention to travel are critical factors that influence individuals' decisions to embark on trips to specific destinations. According to Douglas (2024), travel motivation stems from a desire to take leisure vacations to reduce stress, enjoy nature, admire beautiful landscapes, and learn new things. This can be influenced by internal factors such as personal desires, aspirations, and interests and external factors like cultural attractions, natural landscapes, or social influences (Hin et al., 2024). The concepts of push and pull motivation, as defined by Crompton (1979), suggest that people are pulled to specific destinations by external factors and pushed to travel by internal factors. Push factors refer to the socio-psychological motivations that encourage

people to travel, originating from intrinsic human desires. In contrast, pull factors attract individuals to a particular destination once they have decided to travel.

Nowadays, families view vacationing as a chance to spend quality time and strengthen bonds, resulting in increased happiness and togetherness (Schänzel, 2021). Such trips provide children's education and learning opportunities and create positive memories. Escaping the daily routine and nurturing familial relationships are also crucial aspects of family travel, which can increase the sense of belonging among family members. Family travel can also help with conflict resolution, problem-solving, and strengthening relationships while relaxing from work pressures. Through leisure and travel, families can participate in activities, socialise, and meet new people, strengthening their unity (Cheung et al., 2021).

Malaysia focuses on domestic tourism, of which family tourism is a part (Mohtar & Azizi, 2020). The country is renowned for its vibrant tropical climate, pristine beaches, rich local cuisine, lush rainforests, and multicultural heritage, making it a popular tourist destination for global travellers (Arokiasamy, 2021). The market for family vacations is expected to grow as the pandemic has redefined what tourists seek in a holiday. The emphasis on relaxation, wellness, safety and sustainability will drive this expansion (Peluso & Pichierri, 2021). Destinations that can adapt to these new preferences will benefit the most in the evolving tourism market.

A study of Korean tourists discovered that the pandemic had influenced tourists' preference for short-haul destinations (Sohn et al., 2021). Meanwhile, in a Polish study, tourists who preferred to travel altered their behaviour by avoiding crowded spots, abstaining from international travel, and opting for domestic travel (Balińska & Olejniczak, 2021). Family tourists consider domestic self-drive tourism safer than international tourism (Yeoman et al., 2022). According to Matiza (2022), this is referred to as the "home is safer than abroad bias". Thus, based on the above studies, the hypothesis is as follows:

H₁: Family travel motivation positively influences the intention to travel domestically.

Family Travel Motivation and Family Perceived Destination Image

Attributes and perceptions about a destination usually impact travel motives to that destination (Kim, 2014). According to Crouch and Ritchie (2011), destinations that are well-known for their scenic value and natural beauty should make the most of these advantages to gain a competitive advantage. A beautiful landscape with natural surroundings is one of the selling points of any tourist

destination. It has been generally accepted in the literature that destination image influences tourist behaviours (Bigne et al., 2001).

Studies have shown that travel motivation influences destination image (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008), tourists' attitudes toward destinations (Lam & Hsu, 2006), and destination choice (Kim & Lehto, 2013). In the post-pandemic era, family travel motivation and destination image play a critical role in domestic travel decisions, supporting family health. They contribute to family cohesion and overall well-being. Thus, based on the above studies, the hypothesis is as follows:

H₂: Family travel motivation positively influences family perceived destination image.

Family Perceived Destination Image and Intention to Travel Domestically

In tourism literature, many studies have examined destination image as a multidimensional construct consisting of cognitive and affective components about the place (Sotiriadis, 2015), by which an individual evaluates the different aspects and characteristics of a destination according to their impressions and feelings (Carballo et al., 2021; Shehab et al., 2023). Cognitive and affective destination images strongly influence behaviour intention (Souiden et al., 2017)—a positive or negative destination image results in positive or negative behavioural intention. Past research on destination image outcomes revealed that a destination's cognitive and affective evaluations significantly influence pre-visit and post-visit travel behaviour (Baloglu, 2000).

The overall destination image might be rated positively or negatively based on the features associated with the destination (Baloglu, 2000). Endah et al. (2017) identified a positive correlation between perceived image and the intention to travel or visit. Most tourists choose destinations with the most favourable image (Lin et al., 2007). The image of a destination is crucial in destination selection and directly influences tourists' travel intentions (Bonn et al., 2005). Based on this rationale and literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₃: Family-perceived destination image positively influences the intention to travel domestically.

The Moderating Influence of Risk Perception

This study incorporates perceived risk as a moderating variable, as the literature suggests that risk perception influences visitor behaviour. Travellers with lower perceived risk are more likely to visit or recommend destinations (Chaudhuri, 2000), while those with higher perceived risk show varied attitudes and

preferences (Gladwell, 1990). Differences in risk perception align with diverse values, cultural backgrounds, and behavioural intentions. Research indicates that crises impact tourists' attitudes and travel choices (Karl, 2018), with the pandemic intensifying psychological stress and altering risk perception and responses (Bavel et al., 2020).

Perceived risk can create positive or negative images in the traveller's mind and have great significance in the tourist's decision to visit or avoid those destinations. Hsieh et al. (2016) discovered that risk perception influences travellers' decision-making highly. According to Kim et al. (2008), perceived risk creates barriers to consumer decision-making and influences tourist destination selection. Choosing a tourist destination often involves various perceived risks, ranging from disappointment with the expected experience through the waste of precious vacation time to the fear of physical harm due to disease, crime, or terror. Previous research suggests that customers' perceived risk can moderate among various variables such as satisfaction, willingness to spend, perceived crowding, and intention to revisit (Yin, 2020). Based on this rationale and literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₄: Risk perception moderates the relationship between family-perceived destination image and intention to travel domestically

METHODOLOGY

The target population of this research was all Malaysian family travellers. A quantitative study was conducted in Malaysia to investigate the risk perception that acts as a moderating factor for family travellers to travel domestically during the post-pandemic period. The sampling design was purposive. Inclusion criteria include adults aged 21 and above who used to travel abroad with family in the past five years (2019-2023) and have visited any domestic destination for leisure holidays at least once in the past six months.

The context selected for this research is domestic destinations in Peninsular Malaysia: Langkawi, Penang, Melaka, Johor, and Terengganu. These five destinations provide diverse experiences that cater to family interests, making them suitable for family holidays. Each destination offers various attractions suitable for different age groups within the family. Furthermore, these destinations garnered positive reviews and recommendations, further justifying their suitability for family travel (Zamri, 2022).

Due to the absence of a sampling frame, the study employed a non-probability purposive sampling technique (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Empirical data were collected via online platforms (WhatsApp and email) and face-to-face interactions (onsite). Data collection spanned approximately three months, from mid-October 2023 to mid-January 2024. A total of 240 questionnaires were

gathered, 70 collected electronically and 170 via paper-based methods. Ultimately, 220 responses were considered valid. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). A two-stage procedure with two main steps assessed the research model. The first stage tested the convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability of the constructs and their measurement items. The next stage tested the hypothesised relationships between the constructs.

RESULTS AND FINDING

Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the study respondents includes information on gender, occupation, education level, age, ethnic group, household monthly income, financial sources, and family status. The survey had 220 participants. Of the 220 participants, 59.1% were female and 40.9% were male. Regarding occupation, 55% were employed in the private sector, 25.5% in government positions, 11.8% were self-employed, and 7.7% were employed in other occupations.

The educational background revealed that 69.5% had tertiary education (Diploma/Degree), 28.2% had higher degrees (Master/PhD), and a small fraction held professional certificates (1.4%) or secondary education qualifications (0.9%). The age distribution showed that 54.1% were 41-50, 27.3% were 31-40, 10.9% were 51-60, 4.1% were 61-70, and 3.6% were 21-30.

The ethnic composition was primarily Bumiputera (72.3%), followed by Chinese (18.2%) and Indian (9.5%). In terms of household monthly income, 35% earned MYR12001 and above, 31.4% earned MYR9001-12000, 16.4% earned MYR6001-9000, 14.5% earned MYR3001-6000, and 2.7% earned below MYR3000. Most families had double incomes (66.4%), while 33.6% had single incomes. The majority of respondents were part of a nuclear family (73.6%), with other family statuses including single parents (4.5%), couples without children (5%), three generations living together (3.6%), empty nesters (1.4%), and others (11.8%).

Assessment of the Measurement Model

Initially, the measurement model was examined to assess the validity and reliability of the instruments, following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2022). Subsequently, the structural model was analysed to test the developed hypotheses. For the measurement model, loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) were evaluated. The criteria required loading values to be ≥ 0.5 , AVE to be ≥ 0.5 , and CR to be ≥ 0.7 . As shown in Table 2, the AVEs are all above 0.5, and the CRs exceed 0.7 (Hair et al., 2022). Discriminant validity was then assessed using the HTMT criterion proposed by

Henseler et al. (2015). Based on this criterion, as summarised in Table 1, discriminant validity was achieved on all constructs, with values below 0.85.

Table 1: Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Constructs	1	2	3	4
Intention to Travel				
Perceived Destination Image	0.514			
Risk Perception	0.543	0.76		
Travel Motivation	0.541	0.795	0.739	

Table 2: Measurement Model Assessment.

Construct	Items	FL	AVE	CR
TM	TM1	0.693	0.529	0.917
	TM2	0.695		
	TM3	0.606		
	TM4	0.788		
	TM5	0.823		
	TM6	0.813		
	TM7	0.78		
	TM8	0.855		
	TM9	0.503		
	TM10	0.638		
PDI	PDI_CI1	0.796	0.649	0.965
	PDI_CI2	0.698		
	PDI_CI3	0.79		
	PDI_CI4	0.822		
	PDI_CI5	0.834		
	PDI_CI6	0.848		
	PDI_CI7	0.881		
	PDI_CI8	0.768		
	PDI_CI9	0.784		
	PDI_CI10	0.718		
	PDI_CI11	0.802		
	PDI_AI1	0.906		
	PDI_AI2	0.928		
	PDI_AI3	0.928		
PDI_AI4	0.961			
ITD	ITD1	0.898	0.868	0.952
	ITD2	0.947		
	ITD3	0.949		

Construct	Items	FL	AVE	CR
RP	RP_HPR1*	-	0.503	0.947
	RP_HPR2*	-		
	RP_HPR3*	-		
	RP_HPR4	0.833		
	RP_HPR5	0.865		
	RP_FINR1	0.987		
	RP_FINR2*	-		
	RP_FINR3	0.820		
	RP_SPR1	0.844		
	RP_SPR2*	-		
	RP_SPR3	0.863		
	RP_SPR4	0.809		
	RP_SR1	0.883		
	RP_SR2	0.913		
	RP_TR1	0.976		
	RP_TR2	0.975		
	RP_TR3*	-		
	RP_FUNR1	0.987		
	RP_FUNR2	0.986		
	RP_DR1	0.911		
	RP_DR2	0.92		
	RP_DR3	0.917		
	RP_DR4	0.922		
	RP_DR5	0.898		
	RP_TRAVELR1	0.838		
	RP_TRAVELR2	0.657		
RP_TRAVELR3	0.863			
RP_TRAVELR4	0.835			

Note(s): * Items removed due to low loadings

Assessment of the Structural Model

The hypothesis testing results in Table 3 illustrate the relationships among travel motivation (TM), perceived destination image (PDI), risk perception (RP), and intention to travel (ITD). H1 indicates that higher motivation leads to higher travel intention ($\beta=0.314$, $p=0.001$). H2 confirms that travel motivation positively influences perceived destination image ($\beta=0.735$, $p<0.001$). H3 reveals that a better destination image boosts travel intention ($\beta=0.254$, $p=0.006$). Lastly, H4 highlights a significant moderating effect of risk perception, where higher risk perception weakens the positive impact of destination image on travel intention ($\beta=-0.13$, $p=0.031$). These findings emphasise the roles of motivation and image in travel decisions while acknowledging risk perception as a critical moderating factor.

Table 3: Hypothesis testing of the study

	Relationship	Beta (β)	t-value	p-values	Decision
H ₁	TM -> ITD	0.314	3.198	0.001	Accepted
H ₂	TM -> PDI	0.735	16.664	0.000	Accepted
H ₃	PDI -> ITD	0.254	2.505	0.006	Accepted
H ₄	RPx PDI -> ITD	-0.13	1.865	0.031	Accepted

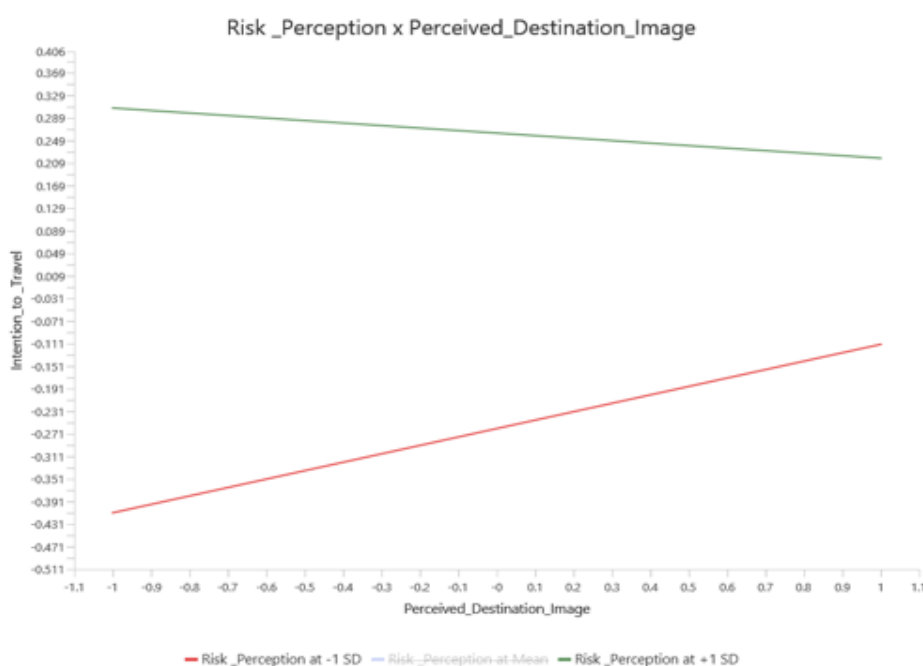


Figure 1: Moderating effect of risk perception on perceived destination image and intention to travel relationship

Figure 1 demonstrates the moderating role of risk perception in the relationship between perceived destination image and intention to travel. The red line represents individuals with low-risk perception (-1 SD), and it has a positive slope, indicating that as the perceived destination image improves, their intention to travel rises substantially. The green line, on the other hand, shows individuals with high-risk perception (+1 SD), and it has a negative slope, indicating that their inclination to travel lowers as the perceived destination image improves. This suggests that while a positive destination image increases travel intention for low-risk perception, it has the opposite effect on those with high-risk perception, stressing the need to resolve safety issues to effectively promote travel intention.

CONCLUSION

This research has comprehensively analysed the moderating influence of perceived risk on family tourism in the post-pandemic period. The findings underscore the significance of travel motivation and perceived destination image in shaping the intention to travel domestically among family tourists. The study's conclusions are justified by robust data analysis and align with existing tourism behaviour and risk perception literature.

The findings indicate that travel motivation substantially enhances the perceived destination image and the intention to travel domestically. Key intrinsic and extrinsic motivators—such as the desire for relaxation, family bonding, and exposure to new environments—play a pivotal role in shaping family travel decisions. Furthermore, the strong positive correlation between destination image and travel intention underscores the importance of cultivating a favourable destination image to attract family tourists. These insights highlight the need for destinations to actively manage and promote an appealing image to encourage family tourism.

However, the study also uncovered that the perceived destination image does not mediate the relationship between travel motivation and intention, indicating that these factors independently influence travel decisions. This is a critical insight for destination marketers, emphasising the need to address motivational factors and destination image to boost tourism separately.

The moderating effect of risk perception is particularly significant in the context of post-pandemic family tourism. The analysis demonstrates that high-risk perception can weaken the positive impact of a favourable destination image on the intention to travel. This finding is crucial for tourism stakeholders, as it underscores the necessity of implementing and communicating effective safety measures to mitigate perceived risks. Destinations that convincingly demonstrate their safety protocols are more likely to convert positive perceptions into actual travel plans, especially among family tourists prioritising safety.

The findings of this research offer valuable contributions to several key stakeholders. For destination marketers and policymakers, the study highlights the importance of promoting travel motivation by emphasising intrinsic and extrinsic benefits, such as relaxation, family bonding, and educational opportunities for children. Enhancing the unique attributes of destinations, including natural beauty, cultural attractions, and family-friendly amenities, is crucial. Given the significant moderating effect of perceived risk on travel intentions, addressing safety concerns is paramount. Implementing and effectively communicating rigorous safety measures and health protocols to potential tourists is essential for reducing perceived risks.

Tourism industry stakeholders can use these insights to develop targeted marketing strategies catering to family tourists' needs and concerns.

Creating tailored packages that address motivational factors and safety concerns can attract more family tourists. Furthermore, tourism businesses can develop products and services aligned with family tourists' motivational drivers, such as family-centric experiences promoting bonding and education. In the academic community, this research opens avenues for further exploration of the interplay between travel motivation, destination image, and perceived risk. Future studies could investigate these relationships in different cultural contexts or among other types of tourists, broadening the understanding of tourism behaviour. The theoretical contributions of this research highlight the independent roles of travel motivation and destination image, as well as the moderating influence of perceived risk, providing valuable insights to refine existing models of tourist behaviour.

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