

THE PARADOX OF SMART TOURISM: DOES TECHNOLOGY EMPOWER OR DISCOURAGE EXPERIENCE SHARING

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to develop a model for showing the process of sharing memorable experiences created at tourists destinations or digital tourism supported by smart tourism technology (STT). A survey was conducted on 136 tourists who stayed in home-based accommodations and shared experiences on Instagram, which were later reposted by the destination's official Instagram account. In this study, a quantitative method was used, and the questions were addressed using the SMART PLS 4.1.0.9 tool. Furthermore, data were collected using a purposive sampling method from 136 visitors in West Sumatra who had completed their stay, shared experiences in the form of photos or videos on social media, and had posts reposted by the destination's official account. The results showed that tourists tended to place greater importance on the emotions evoked by travel experiences compared to those arising from interaction with smart tourism technology (STT) services when evaluating overall happiness. Both theoretical insights and practical applications were further discussed.

Keywords: *Sharing Tourism Experiences, Tourist Happiness, Smart Tourism Technology, Generations.*

1. Introduction

In the world of internet-based communication and tourism promotion, social media has become one of the fastest-growing technologies in the digital landscape (Leung et al. 2013; Koo et al., 2016; Sigala, 2017; Boes et al., 2016; Su et al., 2021). Within smart tourism technology (STT), social media plays a central role as a platform for information exchange and engagement (Yun et al., 2018; Serra Femenia & Neuhofer, 2018; Flores-crespo et al., 2022). Consequently, the act of sharing travel experiences online has become a prominent theme in contemporary tourism studies. Although this body of work has enriched the understanding of digital communication in tourism, it has also shown certain limitations. Despite increasing attention, existing studies have primarily emphasized destination-oriented sharing, treating social media as a channel for highlighting places visited (Boes, et al 2016; Conti & Lexhagen, 2020; Chen et al., 2021). Previous studies have also examined how post-trip sharing influences the tourism experiences from the perspective of the sharer (Ba & Song, 2022b). However, there is limited knowledge about how social media mediates the transformation of intimate and authentic encounters, such as homestay experiences in natural settings, into shareable narratives that transcend destination highlights. This gap becomes particularly salient when considering the paradoxical role of technology in shaping tourists experiences.

STT is often recognized as tools for improving efficiency and convenience during travel; (Koo et al., 2016; Nengovhela & Muganda, 2020). However, their contribution to travel satisfaction and happiness remains contested, since memorable tourism experiences are shaped primarily by emotional and experiential factors rather than functionality alone (Zhang et al., 2017; Pai et al., 2020; Torabi et al., 2022). Some studies even caution that excessive connectivity may undermine social interaction with local communities and reduce the authenticity of travel encounters (Nisa et al., 2023). This juxtaposition of results confirms paradox, as STT may simultaneously empower tourists by facilitating efficiency while also constraining them by diminishing meaningful interactions. The paradox is critical to investigate because it challenges the prevailing assumption that technological advancement unilaterally improves tourists

experiences (Wang et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Jeong & Shin 2019; Chang et al., 2024; Mishra et al., 2024). Ignoring this duality risks overlooking how STT fundamentally influences tourist happiness and sharing behavior, thereby limiting both theoretical development and practical strategies for sustainable tourism management. Nevertheless, few studies have critically explored how this contradictory dynamic influences tourists' willingness and behavior to share memorable experiences online (Bourliataux-Lajoinie, 2019). Addressing this paradox is essential for advancing theoretical understanding of how technology and lived experience jointly shape sharing behavior in tourism.

There remains a limited understanding of how social media-based STT influences the behavioral process of experience sharing despite previous investigations of the relationships between tourist happiness, satisfaction, and return intentions (Li et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2020; Ba & Song, 2022). Studies have largely treated sharing as a byproduct of visiting destinations, focusing on the dissemination of highlights rather than the transformation of authentic encounters, such as homestays in natural landscapes, into shareable narratives. Moreover, little attention has been paid to intergenerational differences in how tourists construct and communicate these narratives, despite evidence that different cohorts engage with digital technologies in distinct ways (Calvo-porrall & Pesqueira-sanchez, 2019; Mude, 2022). Addressing this gap allows the current study to sharpen its theoretical contribution by explicitly linking STT, tourist happiness, and sharing behavior, an intersection that has been underexplored in the existing literature. This issue is particularly relevant because the paradoxical role of STT may affect generations differently, while Gen Y often use social media to extend social connections and entertainment (Sari et al., 2025). Gen Z's higher screen dependency may intensify the risk of reduced authentic interactions during travel (Tirtawati et al., 2019). Therefore, examining generational contrasts provides a critical lens for understanding how STT, tourist happiness, and sharing behavior intersect, an underexplored dimension in the current study.

Generational differences are not merely contextual but function as a potential moderator in the relationship between STT, tourist happiness, and sharing behavior. Gen Y and Gen Z exhibit distinct patterns of technology use and social engagement (Hysa et al., 2021), which can either amplify or mitigate the paradoxical effects of STT on happiness and willingness to share experiences. Gen Z relies heavily on visual and video platforms, depending on online reviews, visual media, and influencers (Ivasciuc et al., 2025), while millennials (Gen Y) prefer to use user-generated content (UGC) on Instagram. Their social media activities also differ from previous generations, as both generations are less interested in traditional commercial advertising (Nur et al., 2021). Recognizing this moderating role emphasizes why generational contrasts are important for understanding how digital technology shapes tourism outcomes in a contemporary context.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Smart Tourism Technology

STT refers to the integration of advanced digital tools, big data, and connectivity aimed at creating personalized, efficient, and interactive travel experiences (Koo et al., 2016; Serra Femenia & Neuhofer, 2018). STT comprises diverse applications such as mobile apps, online travel platforms, social networking sites, IoT devices, artificial intelligence, and immersive technologies like VR/AR. These tools enable tourists to gather information, plan trips, and interact with destinations in real time (Huang et al., 2019; Y. Zhang & Sotiriadis, 2022; Hussain et al., 2024)). Recent work refines the STT/STD concept by emphasizing integrated data systems and user-centric services, including AI-driven personalization and platform interconnectivity, as key drivers of experience enhancement and resident well-being (Wei et al., 2024).

A significant body of work shows the empowering role of STT in improving efficiency, accessibility, and decision-making. Online reviews, algorithm-driven recommendations, and real-time booking systems reduce uncertainty and increase convenience for tourists (Lee et al., 2018; Nengovhela & Muganda, 2020). STT is not only about efficiency but also relates to welfare and policy (Dwyer, 2024). From a theoretical standpoint, this empowerment corresponds to *Information Processing Theory*, where access to rich and timely information improves decision

quality. Similarly, service personalization theory suggests that customized digital services heighten satisfaction by relating offerings to individual needs (Gretzel et al., 2015). Scholars caution that the excessive use of STT may discourage meaningful social interactions and reduce the authenticity of tourism encounters (Nisa et al., 2023) even though the technologies are often recognized for improving efficiency, accessibility, and convenience during travel (Lee et al., 2018; Nengovhela et al., 2020). This juxtaposition confirms paradox, as STT may simultaneously empower tourists by reducing uncertainty and facilitating personalized services, while at the same time constraining them by weakening local engagement and diminishing emotional depth. The contradictory results are not merely descriptive but point to a critical gap in the literature. When tourism experiences are shaped as much by social and emotional immersion as by efficiency (Boes et al., 2016; Torabi et al., 2022; Konstantopoulou & Varelas, 2024), understanding this paradox becomes essential. It determines whether STT typically improves or undermines tourist happiness, and whether this happiness translates into willingness to share experiences on social media. Addressing this unresolved tension provides both theoretical value, by clarifying the dual role of technology, and practical implications for designing sustainable, balanced tourism strategies.

From a psychological perspective, the paradox resonates with theories of happiness. Deci et al., 2017 distinguished between hedonic happiness, derived from comfort, efficiency, and immediate pleasure, and eudaimonic happiness, rooted in meaning, growth, and authentic connections. Although STT supports hedonic happiness through convenience and entertainment, it may limit eudaimonic happiness by reducing opportunities for cultural immersion and authentic engagement (Moon & An 2022; Filep & Moyle, 2024). Similarly, Evers et al., (2012) framework of subjective well-being (SWB) claims that happiness includes both cognitive evaluations (life satisfaction) and affective states. Satisfied and happy tourists tend to share their experiences (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024). Tourism experiences mediated by STT may hence elevate positive affect but simultaneously constrain deep satisfaction related to authentic encounters. Within Seligman's PERMA model (2011), STT can reinforce *positive emotion*, *engagement*, and *achievement* but undermine *relationships* and *meaning* when digital reliance overshadows local interaction (Mendes et al., 2022).

Tourist happiness, as shaped by the balance between hedonic and eudaimonic pathways, is crucial because it directly predicts behavioral outcomes. Empirical studies have shown that happy tourists are more likely to revisit destinations and engage in positive word-of-mouth (Zhang et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2020). In the digital era, this extends to sharing behavior, as happiness motivates tourists to transform memorable encounters into compelling narratives, images, and reviews disseminated on social media (Wong et al., 2020). Therefore, integrating STT's paradoxical effects with psychological theories of happiness provides a stronger conceptual foundation for understanding how technology and lived experiences jointly shape tourists' willingness to share.

H.1. Smart tourism technology statistically has a direct impact on Tourist Happiness

2.2 Tourists Memorable and Happiness

Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) is commonly defined as a tourism encounter that leaves a lasting impression on tourists and continues to influence their perceptions of destinations over time (Kim et al., 2010). MTE is inherently subjective, shaped by tourists' interactions with local culture, natural environments, service providers, and fellow tourists. Unlike ordinary experiences, it is distinguished by the ability to evoke emotions and generate strong recollections that transcend even the trip.

The significance of MTE is more than mere recollection. Studies have shown that memorable experiences strongly influence tourists' satisfaction, happiness, and behavioral intentions, including revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth (H. Zhang et al., 2017; Hussain et al., 2024). Therefore, MTE serves not only as a desirable outcome of tourism but also as a determinant of tourists' long-term attachment to destinations and the willingness to recommend to others.

In the digital age, MTE is increasingly expressed through sharing behaviors on social media. Memorable encounters provide tourists with compelling narratives and emotional highlights the motivation to communicate online, often in the form of photos, videos, and personal stories (Wong et al., 2020). The act of sharing reinforces the value of the experience for tourists while simultaneously shaping the perceptions of potential tourists. Therefore, MTE functions not only as a driver of tourist happiness but also as a catalyst for experience-sharing behavior in online communities. Building on this perspective, it becomes crucial to examine the psychological foundations of happiness, since happiness mediates how memorable experiences are internalized, sustained, and ultimately transformed into shareable narratives.

Tourist happiness has increasingly been conceptualized through psychological well-being theories, distinguishing between hedonic happiness, derived from pleasure, satisfaction, as well as positive affect, and eudaimonic happiness, arising from meaning, authenticity, and personal growth (Ryan & Deci., 2001; Konstantopoulou & Varelas, 2024). Within tourism studies, happiness is often framed as SWB, reflecting tourists' cognitive evaluations of satisfaction and their affective states during and after travel experiences (Meng et al., 2020). This dual perspective provides a comprehensive basis for understanding how tourism contributes not only to immediate pleasure but also to long-term well-being.

Several psychological mechanisms explain how tourism experiences translate into happiness. Satisfaction with travel services and experiences is a central determinant of hedonic happiness (Y. Kim, 2024), while expectation–disconfirmation and value perception theories emphasize the role of fulfilled or exceeded expectations in shaping positive affect (Pai et al., 2020). In addition to satisfaction, memory formation, recollection, and storytelling processes improve eudaimonic aspects of happiness, allowing tourists to derive meaning from their experiences long after the trip (Meng et al., 2020). Similarly, moral emotions, such as gratitude and pride during co-created experiences, have been shown to elevate happiness beyond functional service delivery.

Tourist happiness is deeply tied to the nature of experiences encountered, whether functional, emotional, or social. Memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) that foster authentic engagement, local attachment, and social interaction are particularly associated with heightened happiness (H. Zhang et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2020). STT plays paradoxical role in this process. Despite the ability to improve hedonic happiness by reducing uncertainty and providing personalized convenience, the technologies can also diminish eudaimonic happiness should authenticity or social immersion be disrupted (Nisa et al., 2023). Since happiness has been established as a critical driver of behavioral intentions, including revisit and experience-sharing, its formation becomes central to understanding digital behaviors in tourism. Happy tourists tend to transform memorable encounters into compelling narratives, images, and reviews shared on social media, thereby amplifying the co-created value of tourism (Z. Su et al., 2019 ; Hussain, 2024). Therefore, integrating MTE, psychological perspectives on happiness, and the paradoxical role of STT provides a comprehensive framework for explaining how memorable experiences are internalized and subsequently expressed through sharing behavior in online communities.

H.2 *Higher levels of Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) are expected to increase Tourist Happiness (TH).*

2.3. Sharing tourism experiences in social media

Experience-sharing behavior on social media refers to the ways tourists communicate travel experiences through digital platforms, often in the form of text, photos, videos, and online reviews (Xie et al., 2020). Social media functions as a central hub for tourists to document, narrate, and disseminate their journeys, providing both personal expression and a source of information for other tourists. This behavior has become integral to the modern tourism experience, bridging individual memories with collective digital narratives.

Tourists are motivated to share experiences on social media for diverse reasons, including self-presentation, altruism, social connection, and emotional release (Ba & Song, 2022a). Sharing allows tourists to showcase their identity, help others make informed decisions, maintain social

ties, and relive positive emotions. Information Processing Theory (Daft et al., 1986) further suggests that tourists actively find and provide experiential knowledge online as a way to reduce uncertainty in travel decision-making.

Experience sharing has significant implications for both destinations and tourists. For destinations, UGC shapes image, reputation, and future visitation patterns (Çevrimkaya & Zengin, 2023; Vargas-Sánchez & Saltos, 2019). For tourists, sharing reinforces positive emotions, fosters satisfaction, and can even contribute to sense of happiness (Lee et al., 2018; Pai et al., 2020). Therefore, the act of sharing is not merely communicative but also experiential, feeding back into the overall tourism experience.

Most studies on social media sharing remain destination-oriented, focusing on highlights of attractions or landmarks, despite the growing body of investigations (Boes et al., 2016; Conti & Lexhagen, 2020). Little attention has been given to how XZ/. Moreover, intergenerational differences in sharing behavior remain underexplored, even though evidence shows that Gen Y and Gen Z use social media in distinct ways (Porrall & Sanchez, 2019). Addressing these gaps is essential to understanding how memorable experiences and smart technologies jointly shape sharing behavior.

H.3. *Tourists Happiness is expected to have a direct statistical effect on experience-sharing behavior.*

2.4. Tourist Happiness and Experience-Sharing Behavior: A Theoretical Lens

Tourist happiness has been consistently attributed to positive behavioral outcomes such as revisit intentions and word-of-mouth recommendations (Zhang et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2020) and encourages the use of mobile social media to share travel experiences (Ye Chen et al., 2021). However, the mechanisms through which happiness translates into experience-sharing behavior remain underexplored. To address this gap, two complementary theoretical perspectives can be applied, namely Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (Choi et al., 2021; Moon & An 2022) and Social Exchange Theory (SET). (Ahmad et al., 2023; Hatamleh et al., 2023).

From the UGT perspective, individuals engage with media to satisfy psychological needs, including enjoyment, self-presentation, information-seeking, and social interaction (Katz et al., 1974; Choi et al., 2021; Moon & An 2022). When experiencing happiness, tourists tend to share travel stories, images, and reflections as a way of extending positive emotions, reinforcing self-identity, and connecting with peers online (Leung et al., 2013; Ahmad et al., 2023; Hatamleh et al., 2023). In this sense, happiness serves as an emotional trigger, motivating gratifications such as hedonic enjoyment and social belonging through social media sharing.

Within the framework of SET, tourists' willingness to share experiences on social media is primarily driven by the pursuit of relational benefits and enhanced relationship quality, as these perceived rewards outweigh the potential costs of disclosure (Mitchell & Shannon, 2018 ; Ahmad et al., 2023; Hatamleh et al., 2023). Sharing travel experiences online can be seen as a form of social exchange where tourists provide valuable information and emotional narratives to others while expecting intangible rewards such as recognition, reciprocity, and enhanced social reputation (Xu et al., 2025). When feeling happy, tourists tend to engage in these exchanges, perceiving the benefits of sharing as outweighing potential costs (e.g., time, privacy concerns).

Collectively, the highlighted perspectives show that happiness influences not only the propensity to share but also the *form* of sharing. Hedonic happiness, derived from comfort and pleasure, tends to drive sharing of lighthearted and visually appealing moments ("Instagrammable" content). In contrast, eudaimonic happiness, rooted in meaning and authentic connections, motivates the sharing of deeper narratives reflecting cultural immersion or personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018). Therefore, tourist happiness shapes both the likelihood and the nature of experience-sharing behavior on social media, offering a theoretical bridge between SWB and digital communication in tourism.

2.5. Generations and technology

Generational differences not only shape values and lifestyles but also influence how tourists

interact with STT and engage in sharing behaviors (Ivasciuc et al., 2024). Technology adoption frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) acknowledge the role of moderating factors, including age and generational cohort, in shaping variations in technology acceptance (Asoba, 2022). Gen X, while digital adopters rather than natives, tend to rely heavily on online reviews and recommendations when making travel decisions, positioning social media as an informational tool rather than a platform for self-expression (Sigalat et al., 2020; Hysa et al., 2021). In contrast, Gen Y (Millennials), characterized by high connectivity and strong social networks, frequently use STT and social media to share experiences, reinforce identity, and cultivate relational benefits, reflecting openness to social exchange in digital communities (Rungruangjit & Charoenpornpanichkul, 2024; Butt et al., 2024). Gen Z, with digital habits that influence how the method of searching for information, purchasing, and sharing content (Ivasciuc et al., 2024), shows the most intensive use of digital platforms, with real-time sharing practices that emphasize entertainment, visual storytelling, and interactive engagement (Skinner et al., 2018; Mude, 2022). This generation adopts a more centralized processing route, evaluating content more critically and valuing authenticity and message quality (Serrano-Malebrán et al., 2025). However, their heightened screen dependency may limit authentic local interactions, reflecting how STT can simultaneously enable and constrain memorable experiences (Tirtawati et al., 2019).

The comparison confirms generational cohorts not only differ in digital literacy but also in the mechanisms through which happiness translates into sharing behavior. In summary, Gen X tends to share primarily for informational purposes, Millennials engage for social validation and identity-building, and Gen Z shares for entertainment and immediacy. Although previous studies separately addressed the empowering versus discouraging effects of STT (Tsai et al., 2016; Huang et al., 2017) the role of happiness in driving storytelling and sharing behaviors (Moreno et al., 2023; Su et al., 2019) as well as generational contrasts in technology adoption and digital engagement (C. F. Chen & Chou, 2019) only few empirically examined how these elements interacted within a single framework. In particular, the moderating effect of generational cohorts on the pathway from STT → Tourist Happiness → Sharing remains underexplored. This omission is critical because different generations not only vary in digital literacy but also in motivations and gratifications in online sharing, with Gen X often sharing for informational utility, Millennials for social identity and relational benefits, and Gen Z for immediacy and entertainment (Calvo, 2019; Hysa et al., 2021; Rungruangjit & Charoenpornpanichkul, 2024). By explicitly testing whether these distinct generational orientations condition the translation of tourist happiness into sharing behavior, the current study aimed to address a clear gap and advance the theoretical integration of STT, psychological well-being, and social media engagement in tourism studies.

H.4. The Generations/cohort has a significant moderating effect on the direct impact of tourist Happiness on experience-sharing behavior.

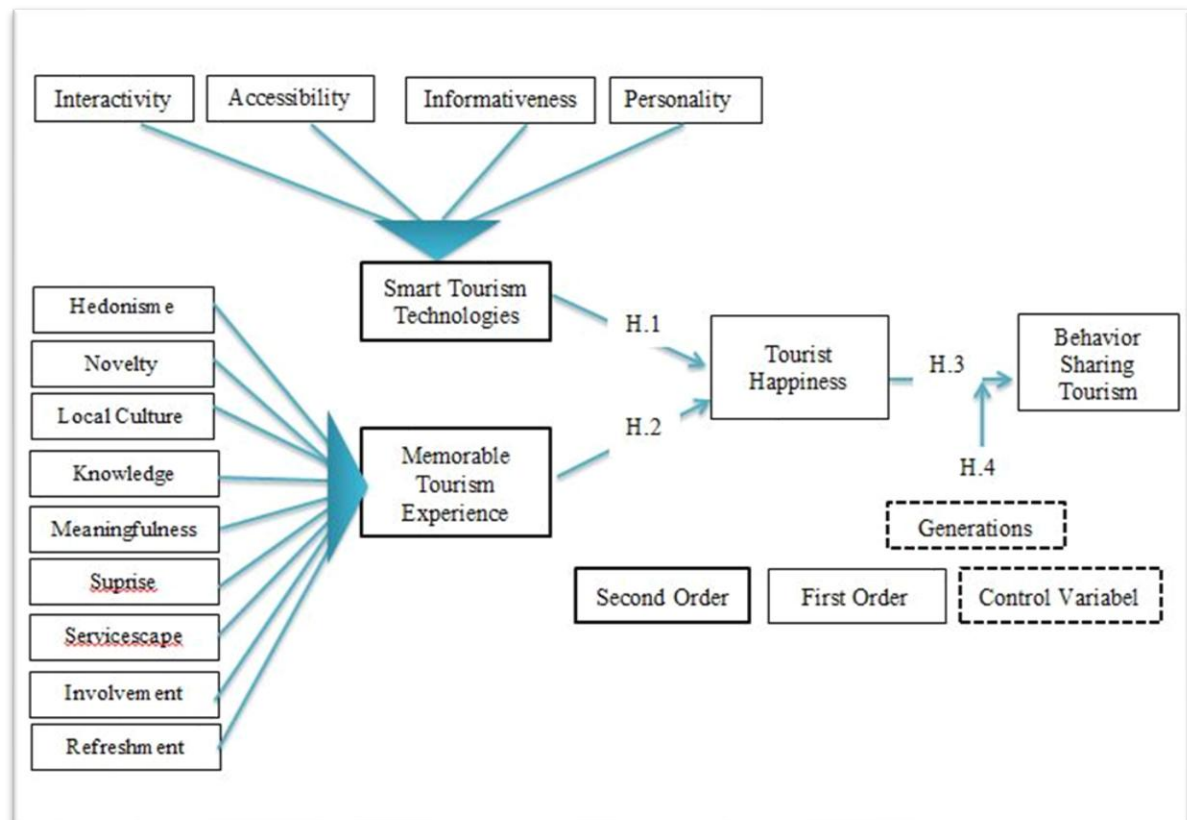


Fig. 1. Research Model

3. Research Methods

This study used a quantitative survey design with a cross-sectional method, specifically appropriate for testing causal relationships between latent constructs in tourism investigations. A survey method was chosen because it allows for the systematic collection of standardized responses from tourists, providing measurable indicators of smart tourism technology use, happiness, and sharing behavior. The use of Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) is justified as it is suitable for studies with moderate sample sizes, complex models including moderating effects (generational cohorts), and an emphasis on prediction rather than covariance fit (Hair et al., 2014)

Data were collected from 17 tourists destinations offering home-based accommodations in west Sumatra. Furthermore, purposive sampling was applied to ensure respondents met clearly defined criteria relevant to the study context of sharing tourism experiences (Asoba, 2022). A tourists who shared an experience while staying at home-based accommodations located in various natural tourists attractions in West Sumatra through personal social media account, and whose content was later reposted by the official account, was identified by a group of research experts through Stories or Reels during July-September (holiday season). Tourists were selected at designated destinations considered representative of smart tourism environments, based on the following criteria: (1) prior experience with STT (e.g., mobile applications, social media, or online booking platforms); (2) active engagement in sharing travel experiences on social media; (3) visited or stayed at destinations offering authentic cultural or natural encounters that could be transformed into shareable narratives; (4) uploading travel-related content, such as Instagram Stories, and tagging the official accounts of home-based accommodations at the destination; and (5) interaction with accommodation managers, reflected through reposts of tourists' stories on official social media accounts.

Data collection was conducted in two stages, namely a pilot study with 30 respondents, to minimize respondents fatigue and refine full data collection strategies (Burchell & Marsh, 1992),

and a full-scale survey over three months. A total of 520 direct messages were sent to tourists' Instagram accounts, resulting in 186 responses, while 334 accounts were private and could not be reached. After screening for completeness, 136 valid responses were retained for analysis.

The sample size was determined by applying best-practice guidelines for PLS-SEM, considering statistical power, model complexity, and methodological recommendations transcending the traditional "10× rule" ((Wolf et al., 2013; Kock & Hadaya, 2018). Since PLS-SEM supports estimation with smaller samples but requires larger cohorts for moderation and multigroup testing, a range of 100–300 respondents consistent with prior tourism studies was targeted (Hair et al., 2014 Fauzi, 2022) From the data collection process, 136 valid responses were obtained, exceeding the minimum threshold and ensuring sufficient power for the hypothesized model.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed in Google Forms and distributed through direct messages (DMs) on Instagram. This recruitment strategy was selected because Instagram served as the primary platform where tourists actively shared tourism experiences, making it an effective medium to reach respondents who met the purposive sampling criteria. Each DM included a brief introduction to the study along with the questionnaire link, thereby facilitating targeted participation from tourists who had previously engaged in experience-sharing behavior on social media.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Respondents' demographic profile

The demographic profile of the respondents in the main survey was diverse in terms of gender, education level, length of travel, generation, and social media usage. classification of respondent's generational cohorts was based on age, taken from the primary data. The results showed 56.42% of respondents belonged to Gen Y, a cohort that actively engaged with technology and enjoyed traveling (Hysa, 2021; Sari, 2025). Further details of the respondent profile are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Demographics of the research

Demographic Variable	Range	Number Of Respondents	
		F	%
Gender	Male	40	29.63
	Female	95	70.37
Generation	X	49	35.01
	Y	79	56.42
	Z	12	8.57
Social media usage	Heavy User	43	31.85
	Medium User	57	42.22
	Light User	35	25.93
Education Level	High School	20	14.81
	Some Collage	10	7.41
	Collage Graduate	80	59.26
	Post Graduate	25	18.52
Length Of Travel	1 Night	107	78.7
	2 Nights	25	18.4
	> 2 Nights	3	2.2

4.2. Measurement Model Assessment

The final results were discussed in two separate sections, measurement model, presented first, followed by structural model testing. The study began with a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure the reliability and validity of the variables, using well-established measurement scales (Marsh et al., 2019). However, some studies in the literature considered a value of 0.50 acceptable for factor loadings (Chen et al., 2007; Hair et al., 2019). Factor loadings should ideally

exceed 0.70, as required in the social sciences and the SmartPLS program (Çevrimkaya & Zengin, 2023). In total, 8 items were excluded, leaving 42 constructs to be analyzed for the full study model, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - CFA and measurement model

Variable	Item	FL	Mean	SD
Smart Tourism Technology	Informativeness			
	1. Helpful for evaluating Destination destinations	0.730	4.108	1.142
	2. Helpful for evaluating Destination and travel destinations	0.825	4.029	1.066
	3. Helps me successfully complete my trip by using the detailed information provided	0.842	4.151	0.921
	4. Satisfied with the accuracy of the information provided	0.804	4.000	0.982
	Accessibility			
	1. can use anytime and anywhere	0.834	4.388	0.956
	2. can be easily used	0.850	4.194	0.988
	3. can be easily found	0.835	4.233	0.954
	Interactivity			
	1. I was able to find many questions and answers from other tourists	0.740	3.799	1.040
	2. Very responsive to me	0.862	4.108	0.987
	3. Social media that I use is interactive	0.868	4.108	0.879
	4. Easy to share tourism information content	0.909	4.115	0.937
	Personality			
	1. Allows me to receive appropriate information	0.883	4.112	0.887
	2. Gives me an easy-to-follow path with various links	0.875	4.086	0.885
	3. Can interact to get personalized information	0.839	4.007	0.978
	4. The information provided is suitable for my personal needs.	0.882	4.115	0.930
Memorable Tourism Experience	Hedonisme			
	1. This trip, I'm very excited about	0.775	4.324	0.954
	2. Indulge in various activities during the travel experience	0.714	4.216	0.995
	Local Culture			
	1. Have a favorable impression of the local culture of the tourists destination	0.854	4.259	0.939
	2. Opportunity to experience local culture up close	0.809	4.043	1.003
	3. Locals in the Destination, feel friendly	0.794	4.000	1.004
	Novelty			
	1. Discovering new things through a staycation experience	0.837	4.187	0.894
	2. This trip was a unique experience	0.826	4.194	0.889
	3. This experience felt different from my previous trips.	0.802	4.115	0.914
	Refreshment			
	1. Enjoy a sense of freedom by relieving stress during travel	0.818	4.317	0.975
	2. During this trip, I felt a sense of freedom from my daily routine.	0.814	4.345	0.887
	3. Had a refreshing experience, during this trip	0.806	4.273	1.037
	Knowledge		3.993	0.925
	1. Get a wide variety of information, related to this destination during the trip	0.738	4.115	0.914

	2. Have experiences related to new cultures, during vacation	0.746	3.741	0.999
Meaningfulness				
	1. Feel like you're doing something important by vacationing in this destination	0.825	4.022	0.917
Suprise				
	1. Provides value that was unexpected before	0.829	3.993	0.925
	2. A surprising experience I had while at this destination	0.795	3.899	1.034
	3. This destination offers a surprising new experience	0.761	3.950	0.999
Servicescape				
	1. Be in a comfortable environment	0.806	4.252	0.930
	2. Enjoy a variety of beautiful environments	0.797	4.345	0.911
Involvement				
	1. Very interested in engaging with this activity	0.835	4.050	0.916
	2. Visiting a place I really wanted to visit	0.854	4.223	0.906
Tourist Happiness				
	1. During my travels, I can think about what a happy life I have compared to the ideal state	0.943	3.914	1.000
	2. During my travels, I can feel good about my life, although I have my ups and downs	0.932	3.914	1.063
Sharing Tourism Experience				
	1. The activity of sharing travel experiences creates a good impression of myself	0.921	4.014	1.007
	2. receiving positive feedback from others	0.908	4.036	0.899
	3. Sharing travel experiences, is the same thing that other social media influencers have done.	0.919	4.065	0.954

Source: Processed primary data (2024)

The results of the discriminant validity analysis are shown in Table 2. The square root of the AVE for each construct should be higher than its correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The empirical evidence derived from the data analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 - Analysis of discriminant validity

	Fornell-Larcker Criterion				Heterotrait -Monotrait Ratio			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1. Sharing Tourism Experience (STE)	0.916							
2. Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE)	0.763	0.803			0.808			
3. Smart Tourism Technology (STT)	0.543	0.753	0.841		0.575	0.775		
4. Tourist Happiness (TH)	0.437	0.445	0.358	0.937	0.494	0.481	0.387	
Reliability coefficient	0.907	0.973	0.971	0.868				
Cronbach's alpha	0.862	0.970	0.972	0.904				
Composite Reliability	0.868	0.971	0.973	0.940				
AVE	0.879	0.707	0.644	0.839				

Convergent validity is supported when the composite reliabilities and Cronbach's alpha are greater than 0.7 and the AVEs are greater than 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). All these assumptions were met, as shown in Table 3. To measure the predictive ability of the structural model, the R square test was used. Interpretation R^2 values is as follows, ≥ 0.75 : Strong (Substantial), $0.50 \leq R^2 < 0.75$: Medium (Moderate) and $0.25 \leq R^2 < 0.50$: Weak (Hair et al., 2014). The sharing tourism experience variable could be explained by tourist happiness, smart tourism technology, and memorable tourism experience variables by 59.5%, while the remaining

40.5% was explained by variables not included in this study. Interesting results were obtained when examining the magnitude of the influence of smart tourism technology in explaining memorable tourism experiences, a value of 57.2% was found. This confirmed that the memorable experience felt by tourists at home-based accommodation was formed by 57.2% of the influence of smart tourism technology. However, these two variables collectively accounted for only 19.7% of tourists' happiness.

Table 4 - R Square Test

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Sharing Tourism Experience (STE)	0.595	0.586
Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE)	0.572	0.569
Tourist Happiness (TH)	0.197	0.185

Structural Model

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to assess the developed hypotheses. Consequently, 49.5% of the variance was attributed to tourist happiness, while 31.8% was explained by behavioral sharing of tourism experiences. As presented in Figure 2, all four attributes of STT showed no significant influence on tourist happiness, leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 1 (H_1 ; $\beta = -0.012$ $t = 0.110$). On the other hand, nine attributes of memorable tourism experiences confirmed a significant relationship with tourist happiness, thereby supporting Hypothesis 2 (H_2 ; $\beta = 0.709$ $t = 6.150$). The results further showed that tourist happiness was significantly related to behavioral sharing of tourism experiences, lending support to Hypothesis 3 (H_3 ; $\beta = 0.565$ $t = 8.185$). Table 4 provides an overview of the hypothesis results.

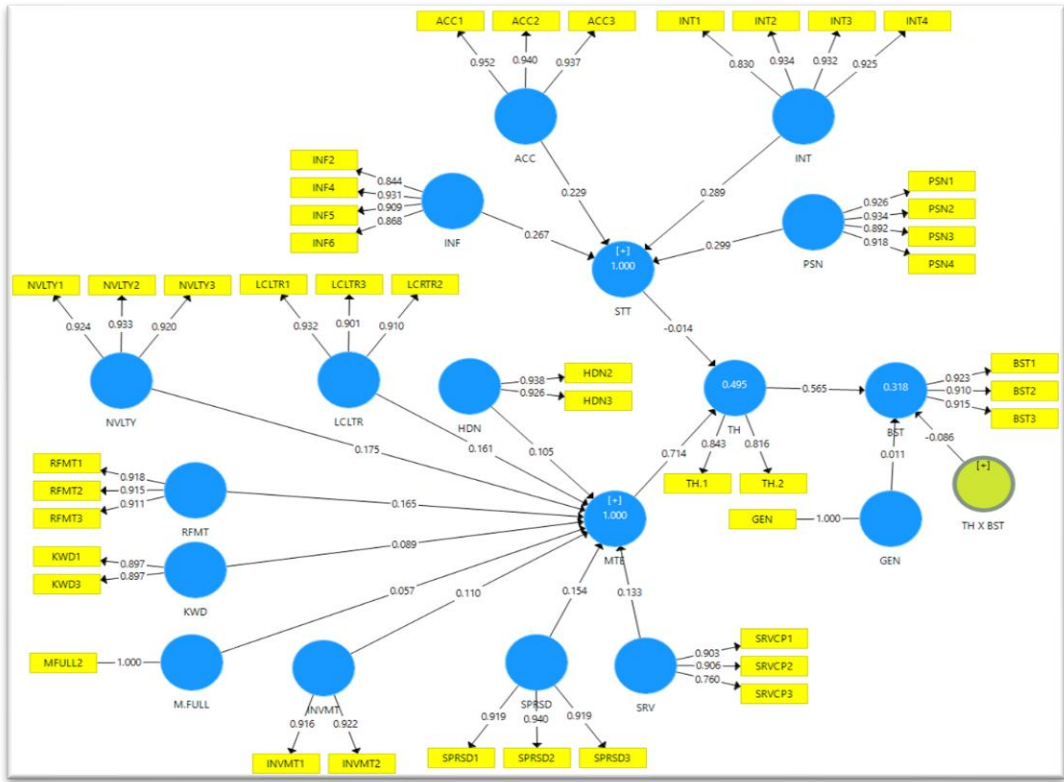


Fig. 2. Result of Structural Model

Table 5 - Summary of hypothesis results.

	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	t-value	Remark
H.1	STT - > TH	0.051	0.395	Unsupported
H.2	MTE - >TH	0.407	2.822	Supported

H.3	TH - > BST	0.124	0.058	Supported
H.4	TH - > GEN ->BST	0.197	1.292	Unsupported

4.3. Discussion

H.1 The results showed that STT did not significantly affect tourist happiness in the context of West Sumatra. This can be understood by considering the distinctive characteristics of the destination and the expectations of its visitors. In line with previous arguments, STT primarily provides functional efficiency rather than emotional fulfillment (Lee et al., 2022; Pai et al., 2020; Torabi et al., 2022) On one hand, STT empowers tourists by reducing uncertainty and supporting personalized services, on the other hand, the technologies may discourage authentic interactions with local communities, thereby weakening emotional depth and cultural immersion (Nisa et al., 2023) The paradox supports the view that technological advancement does not unilaterally foster tourism experiences but instead generates both empowering and constraining outcomes for tourist happiness.

West Sumatra is primarily known for its natural attractions and cultural authenticity, such as Ngarai Sianok, Lake Maninjau, the Harau Valley, and the cultural richness of the Minangkabau tradition. Tourists who visit these destinations are often motivated by a desire to experience nature, local culture, and culinary heritage rather than digital convenience. Consequently, happiness is derived more strongly from emotional immersion and social connectedness than from the functional efficiency provided by technology. This corresponds to theories of authenticity in tourism (Cohen, 1988) and SWB (Chen et al., 2021)

H.2 The results of the second hypothesis provided strong evidence that memorable tourism experiences (MTE) had a significant and direct influence on tourist happiness. This reinforced previous studies, emphasizing the central role of emotional experiences in shaping tourists' SWB (Kim et al., 2012 ; Sthapit et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2017). Unlike the functional attributes provided by smart tourism technology, which primarily contribute to comfort and efficiency, the MTE dimension resonates more strongly with the emotional and psychological components of travel, leading to increased hedonic and eudaimonic happiness (Su et al., 2019; Konstantopoulou & Varelas, 2024)

The empirical evidence specifically showed that tourists derived happiness not merely from the availability of digital facilitation but from experiential values such as cultural immersion, novelty, and meaningful involvement during their stay. The results were consistent with psychological well-being theories, asserting that authentic engagement, positive affect, and meaningful encounters constitute the foundation of enduring happiness (Deci et al., 2017; Filep & Moyle, 2024) In this study, the nine MTE dimensions collectively explained a substantial explanatory power for tourist happiness, confirming that the quality of emotional and memory-evoking experiences served as a stronger predictor of happiness compared to technology-mediated services.

The result contributed to bridging the gap in tourism studies by empirically validating that MTE was not only an antecedent of satisfaction and revisit intentions but also a crucial driver of happiness as a distinct construct. Theoretically, the result advanced the integration of MTE into frameworks of SWB and experiential value co-creation. Practically, it emphasized the need for destination managers and home-based accommodation providers to prioritize experiential design that fostered novelty, surprise, and cultural authenticity, while balancing digital facilitation with opportunities for meaningful social and environmental engagement.

H.3 Previous studies consistently showed memorable tourism experiences and happiness drove tourists to share experiences online (Zhang & Sotiriadis, 2022; Erore Sthapit et al., 2024;) but the current study found limited support for this relationship. Although tourists may feel happy during their trip, this happiness does not automatically translate into sharing behavior. UGT provides a partial explanation, namely sharing is motivated not only by enjoyment but also by social validation, relational benefits, and identity-building (Wei et al., 2024) SET also emphasizes that individuals weigh costs and benefits, namely when perceived risks outweigh social benefits, even happy tourists may refrain from sharing (Zhiqi & Rasoolimanesh, 2023)). Therefore,

happiness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for experience sharing.

According to SET, individual decisions to engage in social behavior, including sharing experiences on social media, are based on a reciprocal evaluation of the benefits gained and the costs incurred. In the context of tourism, the happiness felt by tourists after experiencing a memorable event can increase the perception of the benefits of sharing, such as gaining social recognition, strengthening relationships, and providing recommendations to digital community. Consequently, happiness serves as an intrinsic motivator for expressing experiences through social media.

Consistent with the SET principle, tourists also consider potential costs, such as privacy risks, negative criticism, or low social returns from sharing experiences. Although happiness creates a positive incentive to share, actual behavior significantly depends on whether tourists perceive the social benefits as greater than the potential costs. Therefore, the current study expanded the application of SET in tourism by showing that happiness was not only the end result of an experience but also emotional resource tourists negotiated in digital social exchanges.

H.4 Privacy concerns emerged as an additional explanation for the inconsistent relationship between happiness and sharing behavior. Privacy Concern Theory posits that tourists avoid using technologies perceived as threatening to personal data security (Afolabi et al., 2021). In this study's context, tourists may hesitate to post location-based content or personal images despite experiencing happiness, due to fears of surveillance, data misuse, or negative feedback. The results emphasized the importance of integrating privacy factors into the study of smart tourism experiences, as privacy risks could undermine both the willingness to use STT and the willingness to share memorable experiences online.

The study tested the moderating role of Generations X, Y, Z in the relationship between tourist happiness and sharing behavior. As analyzed, generational differences did not significantly moderate this relationship. This contrasted with previous investigations where Millennials and Gen Z showed higher digital literacy, more intensive social media use, and distinct motivations for sharing (Calvo-porrall & Pesqueira-sanchez, 2019; Rungruangjit & Charoenpornpanichkul, 2024). One possible explanation is that while generational cohorts differ in digital preferences, the fundamental decision to share is influenced more strongly by perceived relational benefits and privacy concerns than by age cohort. Therefore, the non-significance of generational moderation refines theory by identifying boundary conditions for generational effects in digital tourism contexts.

Theoretically, this study advanced an integrated framework linking STT, tourist happiness, and sharing behavior, while addressing the paradox of empowerment versus discouragement. As analyzed, tourist happiness was not a linear predictor of sharing, rather, it was contingent upon perceived benefits, privacy concerns, and contextual factors. Practically, destination managers should balance technological efficiency with opportunities for authentic engagement while also addressing tourists' concerns about data privacy. Designing digital platforms that are interactive, trustworthy, and respectful of privacy can foster both happiness and willingness to share experiences online.

4.4. Conclusion and Implication

In conclusion, for all industries, people tended to prioritize experiences with the products purchased, and these experiences could generate happiness. This study considered tourism as one of the industries directly providing memorable experiences through the consumption of services. Memorable experiences were felt by tourists starting from the pre-destination stage, where technology played a crucial role in facilitating search, evaluating alternatives, and supporting decision-making in choosing and visiting a destination. Before arriving, tourists carried numerous expectations and desires, which later led to the comparison of the expectations with the reality encountered during vacation. Meanwhile, pleasure and satisfaction that emerged were often shared as memorable moments. The closest medium used by tourists for this sharing was social media, with Instagram being the most popular platform in Indonesia in particular. Instagram not

only provided experiential value for tourists but also influenced potential tourists in the pre-destination process in searching and comparing information.

Based on the analyses that only four destinations managed their official social media accounts with sufficient detail, the study emphasized the urgent need for destination managers to adopt more interactive and strategic strategies. Practical recommendations included fostering interactivity through timely responses and participatory features (e.g., polls, live sessions), adopting a content strategy that emphasized authenticity, and user-generated material, and ensuring consistency in posting schedules. Building trust also required transparent communication, showcasing safety and cultural authenticity, and constructively handling negative feedback. Finally, integrating smart tourism technology features such as direct booking links, interactive maps, or chatbots could strengthen both visitor confidence and engagement. These steps not only improved tourists' perceptions of destination reliability but also increased the willingness to share experiences online, creating a virtuous cycle of digital word-of-mouth.

Based on analyses, smart tourism technology, specifically Instagram, did not directly affect tourist happiness. However, Instagram did not exert a moderate influence on creating a memorable experiences for tourists. Tourists who felt happy tended to share their happiness through the available social media platforms. Social media served as a reflection of tourists' emotions, beliefs, and preferences about travel experiences (T. Zhang, 2020) This was also reinforced by (T. B. Kim et al., 2021) where the nature of experiences provided tourists with a distinctive outcome shaped by their interactions and feelings toward STT (resources and destinations). Although tourists might participate in similar activities at the same destination, the level of memorability varied across individuals. These differences led to diverse evaluations of the experience, and the adoption of STT could further influence memorability by enabling access to relevant information through social media.

New Contributions of This Study

1. The results show that STT was contextual; in nature- and culture-based destinations such as West Sumatra, happiness was more influenced by social interaction, local attachment, and authentic experiences than by digital efficiency. These results reinforced the STT paradox, namely technology provides convenience, but does not automatically increase tourist happiness. The position of MTE was also strengthened as the main predictor of tourist happiness, surpassing the functional role of STT.
2. By linking Tourist Happiness with SET, happiness functioned as emotional energy that motivated sharing. However, tourists still weighed the "costs and benefits" before engaging in sharing behavior.
3. Privacy concerns were identified as a significant barrier to sharing behavior, complementing the existing literature on the relationship between happiness and sharing.
4. The results showed the limitations of generational theory. Despite differences in digital literacy, the decision to share was determined more by relational benefits and privacy concerns than by age. This added a new nuance to the generational literature, as generational effects on digital behavior in tourism were not always significant, specifically in culture- and nature-based destinations.

4.5 Limitations and future studies

This study was limited to home-based accommodation destinations for providing tourists with experiences of natural beauty. The nine destinations were located in foothill areas and showed the beauty of lakes in cold-climate regions. In West Sumatra, these destinations were recognized as cold areas without snow. Out of the nine, four were situated in Harau Valley, a natural attraction renowned for its valleys and stunning mountain ranges. All destinations were in areas with temperatures below 30°C. Therefore, future studies were recommended to examine memorable tourism experiences with reduced reliance on technology, specifically social media, during the experiential stage at destinations. The direction was critical due to the conclusion that Instagram, as a form of smart tourism technology, did not directly generate happiness for tourists.

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