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Role of Perceived Authenticity in Souvenir Buying Decisions among Tourists in Bandar Hilir Melaka

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Abstract: This study looks into the influence of perceived authenticity in tourists' souvenir purchasing selections in Bandar Hilir, Melaka, a UNESCO World legacy site known for its rich cultural legacy. The purpose of the study is to comprehend how visitors' attitudes, subjective norms, and sense of behavioral control are influenced by their perception of authenticity and how this affects their purchasing decisions. Grounded on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the study utilizes a quantitative method, utilizing a structured questionnaire to collect data from both domestic and international tourists visiting Bandar Hilir. This research contributes to the body of knowledge on consumer behavior in the context of cultural tourism by shedding light on the cognitive processes underlying the purchasing behavior of visitors. The results are also likely to have practical consequences for local artists and marketers.

Keywords: *Perceived Authenticity, Souvenir Buying Decisions, Theory of Planned Behavior, Cultural Tourism, Bandar Hilir Melaka, Consumer Behavior*

1. Introduction

This study aims to identify the role of perceived authenticity in souvenir purchasing decisions among tourists in Bandar Hilir, Melaka, a historic city. Several issues have been identified within this study. The first issue is that Malaysia lacks a souvenir that truly represents the country for international tourists to take home. It is further specified that Malaysia does not have a distinctive souvenir that reflects its identity due to its diverse cultures. For instance, when tourists visit Australia, the souvenirs they typically bring back are often related to kangaroos or koalas because Australia has established these animals as national icons. Similarly, in the Middle East, tourists usually bring back carpets as souvenirs. In contrast, Malaysia lacks a 'signature souvenir' that distinctly represents the country. The second issue is whether souvenir sellers can meet the demands of international tourists in terms of souvenir choices. Additionally, this study seeks to understand tourists' travel information and their souvenir preferences (Salina, 2015).

The perception of authenticity among tourists plays a crucial role in determining the value and significance of souvenirs. Tourists visiting Melaka often seek items that are unique to the region and that embody the cultural essence of the place. The increasing commercialization of tourism in Melaka has led to the proliferation of mass-produced souvenirs that may lack the depth of cultural connection. These items, often made cheaply and quickly, can sometimes overshadow the more authentic, artisan-produced goods. While these mass-produced items may still hold appeal for some tourists due to their affordability and convenience, they do not offer the same level of cultural authenticity as handcrafted goods.

Tourism is not a new activity. This sector has long been an economic driver for many countries, with several nations competing in the era of globalization to attract tourists. However, some countries also promote domestic tourism to encourage economic growth around tourist destinations. To develop this sector, many places with unique natural features have been opened and enhanced for tourism purposes. In Malaysia, the tourism industry has shown positive growth, with 4.5 million foreign tourist arrivals recorded in the first quarter of this year, mostly from ASEAN countries. The Deputy Minister of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, Khairul Firdaus Akhbar Khan, is optimistic that the country can achieve its target of 16.1 million tourists this year, with tourism revenue estimated to exceed RM49 billion (Chan, 2023).

The global tourism industry is currently expanding rapidly, with countries utilizing their natural and historical resources as tourist attractions. Indirectly, this industry helps countries generate revenue. Malaysia is also not left behind in this service sector. This study selects Bandar Hilir Melaka as the research location because it is rich in historical and cultural heritage, making it a major tourist destination in Malaysia. Melaka offers various attractions, from historical sites to modern entertainment, along with comfortable

accommodation options (Fam, Mohd Taib, Norfaridatul Akmaliah, Fadhlur, Azmi, Abdul Mutalib, Hamidah and Mohamad Fadzil Izad, 2017).

The selection of souvenirs is a process influenced by various factors, including personal preferences, cultural significance, and economic considerations. Previous studies on consumer behavior suggest that these factors are interrelated and can vary significantly depending on the demographic and psychographic characteristics of tourists (Wang, Yaouyuneyong, Sullivan, and Burgess, 2024). This diversity in behavior highlights the need for a thorough exploration of the elements that influence souvenir choices.

2. Literature Review

Bandar Hilir, located in the heart of Melaka, is a vibrant and historically significant area that attracts millions of tourists each year. Known for its rich cultural heritage, diverse architectural styles, and status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Bandar Hilir offers a unique blend of historical landmarks, cultural experiences, and bustling markets. Tourists visiting this area are often drawn to the diverse range of souvenirs available, which serve as tangible memories of their visit and as symbols of the local culture.

The act of purchasing souvenirs is a deeply ingrained part of the tourist experience. Souvenirs serve not only as personal mementos but also as gifts that represent the culture and identity of the destination. In a culturally rich area like Bandar Hilir, the authenticity of these souvenirs plays a crucial role in influencing tourists' purchasing decisions. Authentic souvenirs, which are perceived as genuine representations of the local culture, history, and traditions, are highly valued by tourists who seek to bring home a piece of the place they have visited.

Theoretical overview

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991, is a psychological theory that seeks to explain human behavior through three core components: Attitude Toward the Behavior, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control. These components interact to shape an individual's behavioral intentions, which in turn influence the actual behavior. In this study, TPB is an ideal theoretical framework to explore how perceived authenticity influences tourists' decisions to purchase souvenirs.

The Theory of Planned Behavior provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors that influence tourists' decisions to purchase authentic souvenirs in Bandar Hilir, Melaka. By examining how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control interact with perceived authenticity, researchers can gain deeper insights into the cognitive and social processes that drive souvenir-purchasing behavior among tourists. This application of TPB not only enhances the understanding of consumer behavior in tourism but also helps in developing strategies to promote authentic cultural products to tourists (Ajzen and Madden, 1986).

Authenticity

Perceived authenticity refers to the extent to which consumers believe a product or experience accurately represents the true essence or culture of a destination (Wang, 1999). In the context of tourism, authenticity is often linked to the historical and cultural significance of a destination, as well as the originality and craftsmanship of the products associated with it (Chhabra, Healy & Sills, 2003).

Tourists' perceptions of authenticity can significantly influence their purchasing decisions. Authentic souvenirs are often seen as more valuable and meaningful, as they provide a deeper connection to the destination (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). This perceived value can lead to a greater willingness to purchase and a higher level of satisfaction with the tourism experience (Ye, Qiu & Yuen, 2019).

Attitude toward Souvenir Purchase

Attitude toward souvenir purchase refers to a tourist's overall positive or negative evaluation of the act of buying a souvenir. In the context of perceived authenticity, a favorable attitude is likely to emerge if the tourist perceives the souvenir as an authentic representation of the destination's culture. This positive attitude, in turn, significantly influences the intention to purchase. Ajzen (1991) argues that attitudes are

crucial predictors of behavior, as they reflect an individual's favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior in question. Lee et al (2015) found that tourists with positive attitudes toward buying authentic products are more likely to engage in purchasing behavior. Studies by Ye, Qiu, and Yuen (2019) demonstrate that perceived authenticity enhances the value of souvenirs, leading to a more favorable attitude toward purchasing them. Attitudes towards authenticity are also shaped by individual cultural values, as identified in research by Papadopoulou, Vardarsuyu and Oghazi (2023), where cultural congruence enhances the perceived value and thus the attitude toward the purchase.

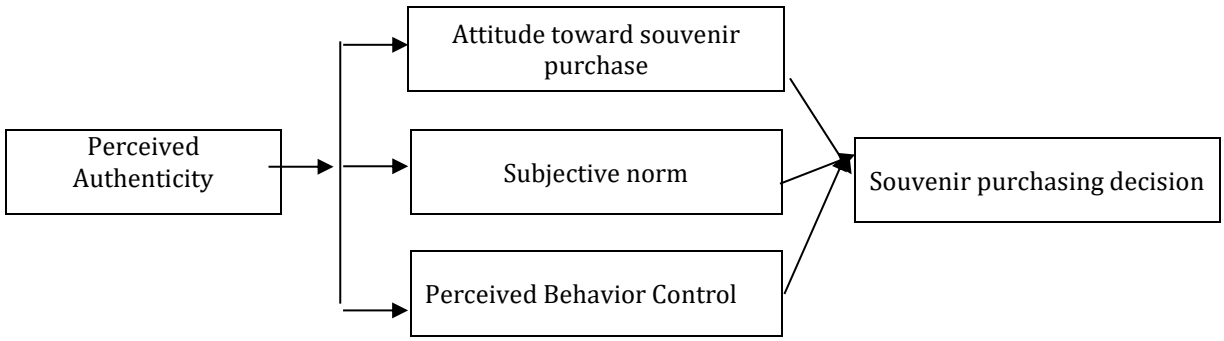
Subjective norm

Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure to engage or not engage in a behavior. In the context of souvenir purchasing, it involves the influence of family, friends, or cultural expectations on a tourist's decision to buy authentic souvenirs. According to Quintal, Lee, and Soutar (2010), subjective norms strongly influence tourists' decisions to engage in culturally respectful behavior, including the purchase of authentic souvenirs. Lam and Hsu (2006) demonstrated that tourists often feel compelled to purchase souvenirs that align with the cultural expectations of their social group. Subjective norms are influenced by cultural background, with research by Fang, Huang, Meng and Bai (2024) indicating that collectivist cultures place a higher emphasis on group expectations, impacting buying behavior. Meanwhile, research by Swanson and Timothy (2012) suggests that subjective norms can also amplify the effects of perceived behavioral control, making tourists more likely to purchase authentic souvenirs if they believe they will meet social expectations.

Perceived behavior control

Perceived behavioral control refers to the individual's perception of their ability to perform the behavior, considering internal and external factors (Ajzen, 1991). This involves the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior, which, in this case, is the purchase of authentic souvenirs. Tourists' perceived behavioral control can be influenced by factors such as their confidence in identifying authentic souvenirs, the availability of authentic products, and the financial or time constraints they face (Sparks, 2007). This perception can either facilitate or hinder the decision to purchase authentic souvenirs.

Conceptual Framework



(Adaptation from Theory of Planned Behavior)

3. Methodology

Methods for collecting literature

The entire basis for this conceptual study is a survey and analysis of the literature, along with data from earlier empirical studies. Several publications were looked through during the literature evaluation, and it was discovered that a few researchers had done high-quality work. This information is crucial for understanding how this study was put together. The Google search engine and online digital books were two further techniques that were employed.

This section delineates the study methodologies utilized by researchers to collect data from participants. To guarantee the validity and correctness of the data gathered by the goals of the study, every method or methodology used must be appropriate and in line with the study's environment. Additionally, the research equipment, study design, and methodology are described in detail in this paper.

Data collection for future research

This research aims to understand how perceived authenticity influences souvenir-buying decisions among tourists in Bandar Hilir, Melaka. To achieve this, the research will adopt a quantitative methodology, employing a survey-based approach. The following sections outline the research design, sampling method, data collection process, and data analysis techniques.

The target population for this study consists of international and domestic tourists who visit Bandar Hilir, Melaka. This location is a popular tourist destination known for its rich cultural heritage and variety of souvenirs. A stratified random sampling method will be employed to ensure that both international and domestic tourists are adequately represented. The population will be divided into two strata: international tourists and domestic tourists, and random samples will be drawn from each stratum (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The sample size will be determined using Cochran's formula (Cochran, 1977), which is appropriate for determining sample sizes in large populations. An estimated sample size of 300 respondents will be targeted to ensure adequate power for statistical analysis.

A structured questionnaire will be used as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire will be designed to measure the key variables: Perceived Authenticity, Attitude Toward Souvenir Purchase, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Souvenir Buying Decision. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" will be employed to measure the constructs. This scale is widely used in behavioral research to assess attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions (Likert, 1932).

Data will be analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 26.0. This software is widely used for social science research and offers a range of statistical tools for data analysis (Pallant, 2020). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution) will be used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their responses to the survey items. Multiple regression analysis will be employed to test the relationships between perceived authenticity (independent variable) and the mediating variables (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control) on the souvenir buying decision (dependent variable) (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019). The PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2017) will be used to conduct mediation analysis, examining the indirect effects of perceived authenticity on souvenir-buying decisions through the mediating variables. Multiple regression and mediation analyses are appropriate for testing the complex relationships between variables in the TPB framework and understanding the mediating effects of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

4. Findings

The literature found was very helpful in assisting the researcher to understand this conceptual paper very well and led the researcher to some meaningful findings. In this section, the findings from relevant literature are summarized to provide insights into how perceived authenticity influences souvenir-buying decisions among tourists. These findings are categorized based on key themes identified in the literature.

Perceived authenticity plays a crucial role in the decision-making process of tourists when purchasing souvenirs. Tourists are increasingly seeking souvenirs that they perceive as authentic, which they believe capture the essence of the culture, history, and uniqueness of the destination (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). Authenticity in souvenirs is often associated with items that are handmade, locally produced, and reflective of traditional craftsmanship (Chhabra, 2005). Studies have shown that souvenirs perceived as authentic are more likely to be purchased because they are viewed as more valuable and meaningful (Suttikun and Meeprom, 2021). Literature indicates that the higher the perceived authenticity of a souvenir, the stronger the tourist's intention to purchase it. Tourists are motivated by the desire to bring back items that are not only representative of their travel experience but also serve as tangible memories of the destination (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). Perceived authenticity also enhances the cultural and symbolic value of souvenirs, making them more desirable. This cultural value is particularly significant in heritage sites like Bandar Hilir, and Melaka, where souvenirs often embody the rich history and cultural identity of the area (UNESCO, 2008).

Furthermore, tourists' attitudes toward purchasing authentic souvenirs are influenced by their personal values, experiences, and the perceived cultural significance of the item. A positive attitude towards authenticity often leads to a higher likelihood of purchase (Wang, 1999). Tourists who value authenticity are likely to view the purchase of such souvenirs as a way to support local communities and preserve cultural heritage.

There is also a growing trend among tourists towards ethical consumption, where the authenticity of a souvenir is linked to its ethical production and the fair treatment of artisans (Tamer, Rasha and Miral, 2024). This ethical perspective further strengthens the positive attitude toward buying authentic souvenirs. Tourists who have previously had positive experiences with authentic souvenirs are more likely to develop a favorable attitude toward purchasing similar items in the future.

Subjective norms, or the perceived social pressure to purchase authentic souvenirs, play a significant role in tourists' buying decisions. These norms are often shaped by cultural expectations, peer influence, and the desire to conform to social standards (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). In many cultures, there is an expectation to bring back souvenirs that are authentic and representative of the destination. This cultural expectation can strongly influence tourists' purchasing behavior, especially in heritage-rich locations like Bandar Hilir, and Melaka (Ham and Weiler, 2002). The influence of peers and family members can also impact the decision to purchase authentic souvenirs. Tourists may feel encouraged or obligated to buy authentic items to meet the expectations of their social circle (White, Smith, Terry, Greenslade and McKimmie, 2009).

Perceived behavioral control refers to the tourists' perception of their ability to purchase authentic souvenirs, considering factors such as accessibility, price, and their knowledge or confidence in identifying authentic products (Ajzen, 1991). The ease of finding authentic souvenirs can significantly influence purchase decisions. If tourists perceive that authentic items are readily available and easy to access, they are more likely to buy them (Creswell, 2014). Tourists who feel confident in their ability to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic souvenirs are more likely to make a purchase. This confidence is often built through prior knowledge or positive past experiences (Lee et al, 2007). The perceived affordability of authentic souvenirs also plays a role. Tourists may be willing to pay a premium for items they perceive as genuinely representative of the local culture, but price sensitivity can still impact the final decision.

In a nutshell, the previous literature consistently shows that perceived authenticity, when positively influencing attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, leads to a higher likelihood of souvenir purchases. Tourists who perceive a souvenir as authentic, feel social pressure to purchase it, and believe they have the control to make the purchase are more likely to follow through with the buying decision. The decision to purchase authentic souvenirs is a complex process influenced by multiple factors, including emotional attachment to the destination, the desire for tangible memories, and the perceived quality and uniqueness of the souvenir (Swanson, 2004)

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from the literature suggest that tourists are increasingly prioritizing authentic souvenirs that they perceive as truly reflective of the destination's culture and heritage. These souvenirs are often handmade, locally produced, and imbued with traditional craftsmanship, which tourists value as tangible memories of their travel experiences. The study also highlighted the importance of factors such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in the souvenir purchasing process. A positive attitude towards authentic souvenirs, influenced by personal values and social expectations, combined with the ease of access and confidence in identifying authenticity, significantly enhances the likelihood of purchase.
In the context of Bandar Hilir, Melaka, a heritage-rich area with a vibrant cultural history, the role of perceived authenticity in souvenir buying is particularly relevant. The cultural and symbolic significance of the souvenirs available in this area plays a crucial role in attracting tourists and encouraging them to make purchases that serve as lasting reminders of their visit.

Based on the conclusions drawn from this research, the following recommendations are proposed for stakeholders, including local artisans, souvenir retailers, and tourism authorities in Bandar Hilir, Melaka.

Enhance the Authenticity of Souvenirs
Local artisans and retailers should focus on producing and promoting souvenirs that reflect the authentic cultural and historical heritage of Melaka. Efforts should be made to ensure that the design, materials, and production processes of these souvenirs are deeply rooted in local traditions. This not only adds value to the products but also enhances their appeal to tourists seeking authentic experiences.

Educate Tourists on Authenticity
Tourism authorities and souvenir retailers should implement educational initiatives to help tourists better understand and appreciate the authenticity of local souvenirs. This could include informational brochures, guided tours that highlight traditional craftsmanship, and in-store displays that explain the cultural significance of various souvenirs. By increasing tourists' knowledge and awareness, they are more likely to make informed purchasing decisions that favor authentic items.

Promote Ethical and Sustainable Practices
Given the growing trend of ethical consumption, it is recommended that souvenir producers and retailers in Melaka adopt and promote sustainable and ethical practices in the creation of their products. This includes fair trade practices, the use of environmentally friendly materials, and transparent production processes. Tourists are more likely to purchase souvenirs when they are confident that their purchases support ethical and sustainable practices.

Leverage Digital Platforms
To reach a wider audience, local artisans and retailers should consider leveraging digital platforms to showcase and sell authentic Melaka souvenirs. E-commerce websites, social media, and virtual marketplaces can help bridge the gap between local producers and international tourists, allowing them to purchase authentic souvenirs even after their visit. This not only boosts sales but also extends the reach of Melaka's cultural heritage beyond its geographical boundaries.

Foster Collaboration Among Stakeholders
Collaboration among local artisans, retailers, tourism authorities, and cultural institutions is essential to preserving the authenticity of Melaka's souvenirs. Joint initiatives, such as cultural festivals, craft workshops, and exhibitions, can help promote the unique cultural identity of Melaka and attract tourists who are interested in authentic cultural experiences. These collaborations can also provide a platform for artisans to showcase their work and connect with potential customers.

Regularly Update Product Offerings
While maintaining authenticity, it is also important for souvenir producers to regularly update and innovate their product offerings to meet changing tourist preferences. This could include creating limited-edition items, introducing modern twists on traditional designs, or collaborating with contemporary artists. By keeping the product offerings fresh and relevant, local artisans can sustain tourists' interest and encourage repeat purchases.

In sum, by embracing authenticity as the cornerstone of the souvenir industry in Bandar Hilir, Melaka, stakeholders not only preserve the rich cultural heritage of the region but also create lasting, meaningful connections with tourists that transcend the mere act of purchasing, turning each souvenir into a cherished embodiment of the Melakan experience.

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