

Motivating Factors for Generation Z Participation in Mosque Tourism

Amirah Azmi¹, Mazni Saad²

Department of Tourism, Kulliyah of Sustainable Tourism and Contemporary Languages, International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia^{1,2}

amirahnabihahazmi@gmail.com¹, maznisaad@iium.edu.my²

*Corresponding author: maznisaad@iium.edu.my

Abstract—Mosque tourism has emerged as an important component of Islamic and cultural tourism in Malaysia. Despite strong institutional support, participation among younger visitors, particularly Generation Z (Gen Z), remains limited. This study explores the motivations influencing Gen Z participation in mosque tourism activities in Malaysia. A qualitative research design was employed using semi-structured interviews with five Gen Z visitors who had experienced mosque tourism. The findings reveal that Gen Z participation in mosque tourism is primarily motivated by educational and cultural learning, immersive and reflective experiences, and digital relevance. While architectural aesthetics attract initial interest, sustained engagement depends on meaningful interpretation and experiential design. The study is limited to four mosques in Peninsular Malaysia. Mosque tourism initiatives should integrate youth-oriented storytelling, experiential learning, and respectful digital engagement. Enhancing youth engagement contributes to cultural continuity and to the appreciation of heritage among younger generations. This study provides youth-centred empirical insights into the motivation for mosque tourism, drawing on experiential theory in the Malaysian context.

Keywords: Generation Z; Heritage Tourism; Islamic Tourism; Mosque Tourism; Tourism Motivation.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Mosque tourism is a growing trend in the context of Islamic religious and cultural tourism, whereby it is now considered a significant part of Islamic tourism, as well as religious tourism and cultural tourism, especially in those countries that are predominantly

Muslim with strong religious backgrounds, history, and unique architectural practices (Rahman et al., 2026). Conventionally perceived mainly as places of worship, mosques have taken on more social and cultural functions, serving as places of learning, social gathering, and a source of heritage. Regarding tourism, mosques are becoming places where tourists can experience Islamic culture, history, and values, thereby enhancing intercultural understanding and appreciation of heritage (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

The growing importance of Islamic tourism is also reflected in industry reports. The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) developed by Mastercard and CrescentRating estimates that the Muslim travel market will reach approximately USD 225 billion by 2028, indicating the increasing demand for Muslim-friendly destinations and Islamic heritage attractions such as mosques (CrescentRating, 2024). This trend highlights the increasing relevance of mosque tourism as part of the broader Islamic tourism ecosystem.

Mosque tourism has been a planned activity in national tourism development agendas in most Muslim majority destinations. The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have encouraged visitor-friendly cultural icons, such as mosques, which are accessible to both Muslim and non-Muslim visitors, through guided tours, visitor centres and interpretation resources (Battour & Ismail, 2016). These programs demonstrate how mosque tourism can serve as an educational, cultural diplomacy, and heritage protection venue when properly handled.

Mosque tourism is a component of larger Islamic tourism policies in Malaysia, spearheaded by the Islamic Tourism Centre within the Ministry

of Tourism, Arts and Culture. Architectural heritage and symbolism have promoted mosques such as the Putra Mosque, National Mosque, and Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Mosque as tourist attractions. These programs aim to portray mosques as open spaces where people can learn about Islam, Malaysian culture, and national identity. Nonetheless, although firmly supported by the institution and promoted as a tourism product, participation in mosque tourism activities remains uneven.

Like other forms of mosque tourism, the current practice in Malaysian mosque tourism emphasises architectural appreciation and factual explanation, often in short form and delivered informally. Although these methods can offer only entry-level information, they might not be entirely satisfactory for the experiential demands of modern visitors, especially younger couples and generations seeking a higher level of meaning, engagement, and personal connection when visiting a specific site (Yaman et al., 2023). The limited depth of interpretation may reduce visitors' emotional involvement and learning outcomes, thereby weakening memorability and diminishing intentions to revisit. Consequently, mosque tourism is perceived as visually appealing but experientially shallow, particularly among younger segments.

While mosque tourism has its challenges in terms of the form of informal explanation, Generation Z (Gen Z), or more individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, generally, are an ever more significant market segment in the tourism industry and a focal point in terms of long-term sustainability of heritage tourism (Priporas et al., 2017). The current generation has been raised in a digitally mediated world and has been identified as highly technologically literate, exposed to world cultures, and highly active on social media. More importantly, Gen Z shows a preference for experience-based education and authenticity, which are important for personal and identity development (Lee et al., 2023).

Previous studies indicate that Gen Z tourists prefer involvement, emotional experiences, and meaningful stories over passive sightseeing, unlike past generations. The criteria they use to decide where to go are not solely determined by destination characteristics, but also by how experiences are popularised, framed, and interpreted in digital environments. Experience depth and shareability are particularly significant for their engagement because social media platforms fundamentally shape their

awareness, expectations, and post-visit reflections (Robinson & Schanzel, 2019).

Although the role of Gen Z in tourism studies is becoming increasingly significant, little has been done to investigate their involvement in religious and mosque tourism. The broad range of existing mosque tourism research in Malaysia has emphasised architectural appreciation, visitor satisfaction, and destination branding, with visitors often treated as a homogeneous group, without accounting for generational differences in motivation and experience (Isa et al., 2024). As such, there is still a gap in empirical research on Gen Z's perceptions of mosque tourism, the factors that lead them to attend these events, and how these events can be structured to meet their expectations and anticipations.

This gap is critical to address because younger generations are highly relevant to the future of religious heritage tourism. In the absence of meaningful Gen Z involvement, the mosque tourism programme may not stand a chance of surviving in an ever-experience-focused tourism world. Knowledge of youth motivation is thus important in creating both culturally sensitive and experiential tourism in mosques.

The objective of this study is to examine the motivations influencing Gen Z's participation in mosque tourism activities in Malaysia, particularly the roles of experiential learning, immersion, emotional engagement, and digital relevance, to provide youth-centred empirical evidence and practical insights for developing more meaningful and sustainable mosque tourism experiences.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Mosque Tourism as Religious and Heritage Tourism

Mosque tourism is often discussed alongside broader religious, Islamic, and heritage tourism. In a bibliometric analysis of 83 Scopus-indexed studies (2004-2025), Yasin et al. (2025) highlighted a growing scholarly interest that mainly focused on the themes of visitor experience, cultural interactions, and motivations. Religious tourism is travel with faith interests, spiritual and fulfillment, whereas heritage tourism focuses on a destination's historical, cultural, and symbolic resources (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). These areas overlap with mosque tourism, which involves visits to mosques that play a sacred and cultural role.

According to Battour and Ismail (2016), mosque tourism is a subsector of Islamic tourism that encompasses aspects of non-worship cultural learning, education, and heritage appreciation. Mosques represent both tangible and intangible heritage, including architectural design, spatial arrangement, decorative objects, religious meanings, historical accounts, and shared practices. Mosque tourism thus needs effective interpretive methods that can convey both tangible qualities and cultural and spiritual meanings.

Mosque tourism has also become part of national tourism policies in some of the Muslim majority travel destinations across the globe. For example, destinations like Turkey and the United Arab Emirates are promoting iconic mosques and fostering cultural appreciation by organising guided tours, visitor education programmes, and providing interpretive materials (Battour and Ismail, 2016). These projects indicate the potential of mosque tourism as a valuable instrument of cultural diplomacy and heritage education when experiential design and interpretation are prioritised.

In Malaysia, mosque tourism is also supported by national tourism initiatives led by the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture. ITC promotes mosques not only as places of worship but also as cultural and educational attractions where visitors can learn about Islamic civilisation and Malaysian identity. Through initiatives such as mosque tourism programmes and interpretive visitor experiences, mosques are increasingly positioned as platforms for intercultural understanding and heritage education (ITC, 2024).

The Islamic Tourism Centre has encouraged the development of Islamic tourism in Malaysia, including mosque tourism. Mosques are marketed as welcoming places where visitors of all kinds can participate and learn about Islamic culture and Malaysian identity. Nevertheless, empirical research indicates that mosque tourism in Malaysia focuses primarily on architecture rather than experiential aspects or storytelling (Yaman et al., 2023). The architectural focus can limit the deeper learning and emotional attachment, especially for those who visit the place in search of something significant.

2.2 Gen Z Tourism Motivation and Engagement

The term Gen Z is usually understood as referring to members of the generation born between 1997 and 2012, characterised by the impact of digital technology, worldwide connectivity, and rapid

access to information (Priporas et al., 2017). Gen Z has often been described in tourism research as seeking experiential, authentic, and meaningful travel experiences, which are believed to play an important role in personal development and identity creation (Lee et al., 2023).

In contrast to earlier generations, the Gen Z tourist segment is more interested in learning, emotional engagement, and experiential activities than in traditional sightseeing. Their travel intentions are directly connected to experiences that enable them to interact with locals, reflect on themselves, and immerse themselves in the culture rather than watch it (Robinson & Schanzel, 2019). Social media has become central to Gen Z's influence on travelling behaviour, destination awareness, expectations, and visit sharing.

Research has demonstrated that Gen Z utilises digital platforms to be inspired to travel, and visual content, peer recommendations, and user-generated media have a substantial impact on decision-making (Priporas et al., 2017). Studies also indicate that digital journeys stimulate curiosity, facilitate active tourist participation, and reshape travel experiences, influencing destination selection and visit decisions among modern travellers (Al-Romeedy et al., 2025; Konar et al., 2025). Nonetheless, the digital influence is not confined to destination decision-making, and Gen Z appreciates the experiences that can be shared and discussed in the online environment. This highlights the importance of experience and storytelling influence on youth engagement.

Traditional interpretive approaches in heritage tourism, focused on static exhibits and factual descriptions, do not usually appeal to Gen Z. Younger visitors are more willing to engage with heritage tourism through narratives, interactive experiences, and ways of relating heritage stories to the modern world (Md Sawari et al., 2024). Without this interaction, heritage sites would be seen as having a surface beauty and a lack of associated feelings.

2.3 Experience Economy Theory

The Experience Economy theory developed by Pine and Gilmore (1999) is also a valuable model for explaining how tourism experiences generate value beyond goods and services. Depending on the degree of visitor involvement and immersion, the theory defines four experiential realms, i.e., educational, aesthetic, escapist, and entertainment. The theory states that when visitors are actively engaged in one

or more of these dimensions of experience, memorable experiences will be created.

Educational and escapist experiences are specifically appropriate in the realms of tourism and heritage. Educational experiences entail active learning and cognitive processes, whereas escapist experiences enable visitors to engage with their setting on an emotional and psychological level (Moscardo, 2014). These dimensions are particularly crucial to religious heritage tourism, with learning, reflection, and emotional connection being the primary aspects of visitor experience.

Experiential value is closely related to storytelling, interaction, and digital mediation for Gen Z. According to Gretzel et al. (2015), digital technologies can enhance tourism experiences through pre-visit anticipation, on-site engagement, and post-visit reflections. When applied appropriately, digital tools complement authentic experiences rather than replacing them.

Applying the Experience Economy Theory to mosque tourism suggests that the aesthetic realm may initially attract people's attention. Yet, long-lasting engagement is possible through the application of educational interpretation and immersive experiences. Such an approach to motivation works exceptionally well for Gen Z, as it prioritises experience design over passive consumption.

2.4 Research Gap

A recent study on the implementation of digital storytelling found a significant enhancement through the persuasiveness of promotional messages (Chang et al., 2025). However, the study is limited to travel intentions to cultural heritage destinations.

Despite its growing academic presence in the Islamic and heritage tourism literature, the current literature has largely focused on mosque tourism through architectural appreciation, destination branding, visitor satisfaction, and management perspectives rather than on visitor-centred experience motivation (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Yaman et al., 2023). Mosque tourism is primarily discussed from an institutional, or supply-side, perspective. However, little is made of how the various visitor groups experience and perceive the activities of mosque tourism.

Simultaneously, there has been a surge in tourism research on Gen Z, which emphasises this cohort's prioritisation of experiential learning, authenticity, emotional involvement, and digital

mediation experiences (Priporas et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2023). Nevertheless, these studies are primarily focused on general leisure tourism, urban tourism, and digital travel behaviour, with little attention to a mosque tourism setting (Robinson & Schanzel, 2019).

In the Malaysian context, the study of mosque tourism is among the few youth-oriented studies conducted. Current Malaysian literature tends to focus on architectural attributes and overall visitor satisfaction, without analysing generational distinctions and experience motivations among younger tourists (Isa et al., 2024; Yaman et al., 2023). As a result, there is a lack of empirical knowledge about how Gen Z approaches mosque tourism and what drives them to participate.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative research design to understand the subjective motivations that can inform Gen Z's participation in mosque tourism in Malaysia. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate, as the research aimed to explore lived experiences, interpretive meanings, and personal reflections rather than quantifying the relationship between predetermined variables (Creswell and Poth, 2018). As religious and heritage tourism motivations are strongly rooted in personal identity, emotion, and cultural interpretation, qualitative enquiry can offer a deeper understanding of how young visitors create meaning when they visit mosques.

3.1 Sampling and Participants

A recommended sample size in qualitative tourism studies ranges from approximately 15 to 25 participants, as this is generally considered sufficient to achieve thematic saturation in studies examining shared experiential motivations. However, qualitative research does not follow a fixed rule for determining sample size, as the adequacy of participants is primarily determined by the point at which data saturation is achieved. According to Sharma et al. (2024), methodological guidelines for qualitative studies often rely on "rules of thumb", where sample sizes may vary considerably depending on the research design and scope, and smaller samples may be acceptable when rich and focused data are obtained. In this study, five participants were considered sufficient as thematic saturation was reached, where subsequent interviews produced no new codes or conceptual insights.

Several methods were used to recruit participants to reduce selection bias. The recruitment

was conducted within the premises of four large mosques in Peninsular Malaysia that actively receive visitors. Moreover, all participants had frequently visited mosques for tourism-related purposes, either independently or as part of an organised visit. The social media invitations were also sent to youth travel and heritage-interest communities to ensure that digitally active participants were involved. This multi-source approach to recruitment increased diversity and minimised over-dependence on personal networks.

These attempts were made to ensure variation in gender, educational background, religious orientation, and the frequency of visiting mosques. It also included both Muslims and non-Muslims, which provided the study with an opportunity to investigate the motives of mosque tourism, except for the strictly devotional ones. The representation of participants with varying levels of religiosity enriched the interpretative richness of the results and contributed to intercultural interest.

Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved. The point of saturation was identified when interviews conducted after that time yielded no new codes or conceptual insights, and the themes were observed to be consistent across participants.

3.2 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method due to their flexibility and ability to focus on the concepts (Bryman, 2016). The interviews were either face-to-face in the mosque visitor areas or online via video conferencing platforms, lasting 45 minutes, depending on participants' availability.

The interview guide included open-ended questions that explored participants' motivations for visiting mosques, their perceptions of architectural and cultural value, their emotional and reflective experiences of visiting mosques, and the impact of digital media on awareness and post-visit experience. Elaboration and clarification were encouraged by probing questions. All the interviews were recorded on audio tape with the participants' consent, and therefore verbatim transcription was done to ensure accurate analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

The study employed the six-step thematic analysis framework by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis was initiated by repeatedly reading the transcripts to become familiar with the data. Primary

open coding was conducted to identify significant textual units related to motivations and experiences. The codes were then placed under broader conceptual categories, out of which initial themes were derived.

Themes were repeatedly checked to ensure internal consistency and differentiation between the categories. Conceptual clarity and alignment with the Experience Economy Theory were used to identify final themes, which were then defined and named. The coding was done manually to maintain close contact with the data, and a second academic reviewer triangulated it to further improve inter-coder reliability. Any differences in interpretation were debated until a consensus was reached.

3.4 Reliability and Ethical Concerns

Several strategies were employed to enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Member checking was conducted with 5 subjects, each of whom was provided with a summary of their interpretation of the interviews to verify its accuracy. The analytical process involved peer debriefing to question assumptions and refine theme development. To minimize bias, reflexive journaling was used during data collection and analysis to record the researcher's assumptions. The findings section was based on thick descriptive accounts to justify transferability.

Informed consent was obtained from the participants, who were informed of the voluntary nature of participation and guaranteed confidentiality. Participants' identities were protected using alias.

3.5 Limitations

Despite the enhanced validity from the enlarged sample, the study is geographically confined to four mosques in Peninsular Malaysia. Since the architecture of mosques, visitor management procedures, and community involvement approaches may differ by region, their results may not be fully applicable to rural mosques, East Malaysia, or global Islamic heritage settings. Also, though the religious orientation was incorporated, the study did not examine differences based on levels of religiosity. The future studies ought to include greater geographical sampling and possible mixed-method courses to further justify these dimensions of motivation.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicated four interconnected themes that explain Gen Z's perception and experience of

mosque tourism. These are educational and cultural learning motivation, appeal as a first attraction, immersive and reflective experiences, and the impact of digital media and shareability. Verbatim excerpt for five participants is presented to enhance credibility and provide analytical transparency into the youth's thoughts. Although the number of participants was limited, data saturation was achieved after five interviews, as subsequent responses did not produce new codes or conceptual insights and the emerging themes were consistently repeated across participants.

4.1 Educational and Cultural Learning Motivation

Educational and cultural learning proved to be the most potent motivational factor for Gen Z to participate in mosque tourism. The participants underlined that they participated in this to explore the meanings behind architectural features, religious activities, and historical accounts, rather than just looking at the physical structures.

One participant explained:

"I am more interested when they explain why the mosque is designed like this, not just when it was built. When I understand the meaning, I appreciate the place more." (P1)

Another similarly noted:

"If there is someone who explains the history and the symbols, I feel like I learn something new. Without that, it feels empty." (P3)

These descriptions suggest that Gen Z is interested in thoughtful, rather than superficial, information. The participants appreciated storytelling, which links physical attributes such as design and space organization to broader Islamic values, cultural practices, and community history. This finding aligns with Moscardo (2014) that the heritage interpretation literature, which emphasises that meaningful learning occurs when visitors connect tangible heritage with intangible meanings. By doing so, they made architectural appreciation a significant learning experience.

In terms of the Experience Economy Theory, this theme aligns with the sphere of education, where active cognitive interaction increases memorability and emotional involvement. As one participant remarked:

"When I understand the story behind the mosque, I remember the visit longer. It feels more meaningful, not just a short visit." (P5)

4.2 Aesthetic Appeal as an Initial Attraction

Visual appeal and architecture were also cited as features that attract visitors from Gen Z to mosques. More often than not, participants cited distinctive designs, cultural pressures, and visual impact as reasons they came the first time, which was, in most cases, triggered by images found on social networks.

One participant stated:

"I wanted to visit because the mosque looked very beautiful. I saw it on social media and felt curious." (P2)

Another added:

"The design really caught my attention. It looks peaceful and unique compared to other buildings." (P4)

Although aesthetics provided an effective visual entry point, the respondents reported that visual appreciation alone was insufficient to maintain their interest. Those experiences which were based on photography or observing architecture were said to be short and two-dimensional, as was expressed in the comment:

"After taking photos, there was nothing much to do." (P4)

These reactions indicate that aesthetic appeal is a prelude to visitation and does not guarantee meaningful interactions. In line with the latest findings on persuasive destination imagery such as Chang et al., 2025, visual beauty can pique curiosity, however, the depth of experience determines whether the visit will be remembered. Aesthetic experiences may be superficial unless they include interpretative or immersive features.

4.3 Immersive and Reflective Experiences

Another key theme was the desire for immersive and reflective experiences. Participants expressed appreciation for mosque environments that felt calm, welcoming, and non-intimidating. Rather than structured or formal programmes, Gen Z visitors valued the freedom to explore at their own pace and engage in quiet reflection.

One participant described this experience as follows: *"I like when the mosque feels peaceful and welcoming. I can sit quietly and think. It makes me feel calm."* (P5)

Another participant added: *"When the environment is relaxed, I feel more connected. I do not feel rushed or uncomfortable."* (P1)

These responses indicate that Gen Z perceives mosque tourism not only as a cultural activity but also as an opportunity for emotional and spiritual reflection. They appreciate calm, welcoming, and non-intrusive environments that allow them to explore at their own pace, contemplate, and emotionally connect with the space.

This aligns with the escapist dimension of the Experience Economy, where visitors immerse themselves in an environment that allows them to momentarily disconnect from everyday routines (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Significantly, immersion was not associated with entertainment or performance but with atmosphere and emotional comfort. This finding is consistent with previous research, such as Augustina et al. (2025), which suggests that mosque tourism experiences that prioritise ambience, inclusivity, and reflective space can enhance Gen Z engagement without compromising religious integrity.

4.4 Digital Relevance, Shareability, and Identity Expression

Digital media played a significant role in shaping Gen Z awareness, expectations, and post-visit engagement with mosque tourism. Participants frequently cited social media as their primary source of information and inspiration for visiting mosques.

One participant noted: "Most of the time I find out about mosques from social media. If people share something interesting, I want to see it myself." (P2)

Beyond influencing visitation decisions, participants also valued experiences that could be meaningfully shared online. Shareability was associated not only with visual content but also with educational value.

As one participant explained: "*If I learn something interesting, I like to share it. It makes the visit feel more valuable.*" (P4)

However, participants were also aware of the need to maintain respect for religious spaces. Digital engagement was viewed positively when it supported learning and awareness rather than self-promotion.

One participant stated: "*Sharing is okay, but it should respect the mosque. It should educate, not just show off.*" (P3)

The participants emphasised that spiritual and reflective motivations influence their tourism

experiences, often intertwined with digital engagement. This finding supports the existing literature, e.g., Al-Romeedy et al. (2025) and Konar et al. (2025), which emphasises the role of digital media as an experiential enhancer. For Gen Z, digital platforms extend the experience beyond the physical visit by enabling reflection, discussion, and the expression of identity, enhancing the meaningfulness and memorability of mosque tourism for this generation.

Notably, there was a nuanced tension between digital shareability and the sanctity of religious space. Although participants appreciated the opportunity to record and share valuable knowledge online, they also demonstrated an understanding of the limits of appropriate behaviour in sacred spaces. This dual awareness is indicative of a particular psychological impulse among Gen Z which is the need to balance the expression of identity with cultural veneration. There is no ethical negotiation in visibility and reverence as there is in conventional leisure tourism and in mosque tourism, there must be ethical negotiation. This observation implies that online interaction in a religious heritage context is not necessarily promotional but identity-forming, mediated by moral consciousness. This subtle dynamic is a unique input to the study of youth motivations in the context of sacred tourism.

4.5 Theoretical Integration: Mapping Motivations to the Experience Economy

The results can be clearly superimposed on the Experience Economy Theory by Pine and Gilmore. Educational and cultural learning corresponds with the field of education, in which active memory improves memorability. The aesthetic attraction is associated with the aesthetic world, where visitors admire the environment's beauty and are relatively inactive.

The escapist realm is associated with immersive and reflective experiences that involve emotional engagement and a sense of disconnection from surrounding routines. It is also important to note that the entertainment world was not given much priority, implying that Gen Z is not interested in performative entertainment in the mosque setting, but rather in reflection.

Digital shareability can expand beyond the initial four realms and prove to be a hybrid experience, enhancing the knowledge and continuing even after the physical visit through digital reflection, narration, and identity expression (Pietroni, 2025). This extension dimension

illustrates how religious tourism experiences are currently taking place simultaneously in both physical and virtual spaces.

This mapping makes the study's theoretical contribution more powerful, as it demonstrates how Experience Economy Theory operates in a unique way in a sacred heritage setting.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper is built on the Experience Economy Theory, which posits that Gen Z is more inclined to judge mosque tourism by its depth of experience rather than its physical qualities. Although aesthetic value in architecture serves as an initial attraction, especially when enhanced by digital presence, the continued interest relies on interpretative significance, affective appeal, and the possibility of reflective immersion. Pictures may arouse interest, yet experience-based content fosters recall and perceived value.

The most important motivational dimension was found to be educational and cultural learning. The participants always gave high priority to interpretive narratives that relate architectural features to historical context, Islamic philosophy, and cultural symbolism. This is an indication of the education component of the Experience Economy Theory, where active cognitive engagement increases the appreciation in the long term. In its turn, aesthetic appreciation, which is equivalent to the aesthetic realm, was not enough to involve it further. The reflective and immersive moods, in line with the escapist world, further reinforced emotional attachment, allowing the person to ponder peacefully in a religious space.

Digital mediation was not a motivating force but a consummate one. Online platforms were found to impact awareness and reflection on the post-visit, as well as the manifestation of identity. Nonetheless, participants showed sensitivity to the sanctity of the religious space, which reveals a negotiated compromise between space-sharing and reverence. This moral contradiction is one of the unique features of youth participation in sacred heritage tourism, and it can add theoretical significance to the study of experiential motivation in religious settings.

In practice, the results indicate that the mosque management committees and tourism authorities need to focus on engaging youth in the interpretive design rather than on architectural display. A positive contribution to meaningful participation without undermining the integrity of religion can be made through story-based

interpretation, even-handed and open-ended forms of engagement, and contemplation of spatial planning. Moreover, strategies of respectful virtual interaction can be used to align youth expression and sacred standards, as well as to have an educational effect beyond the physical visit.

The findings of the study should be interpreted in light of the qualitative nature of the study and the geographical area covered across four mosques in Peninsular Malaysia. Although the findings shed light on critical motivational patterns, they need to be further validated at a larger scale across other typologies of mosques and in other cultural contexts. Future studies that use comparative and mixed-methods designs might also help improve theoretical application and enhance generalizability.

On the whole, this work contributes to research on mosque tourism by shifting the architectural focus from supply-based to visitor-based experiential incentives. It shows that, for Gen Z, architectural beauty is the starting point, and interpretive richness, contemplative immersion, and ethical mediated digital interactions are the sustaining factors. Mosque tourism can attract younger generations through well-thought-out experiential strategies and maintain spiritual sensitivity in an increasingly experience-driven tourism environment.

6.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers would like to express their deepest gratitude to all those who have supported them in completing their mosque tourism investigations.

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