International Journal of Social Science and Human Research

ISSN (print): 2644-0679, ISSN (online): 2644-0695

Volume 09 Issue 02 February 2026

DOI: 10.47191/ijsshr/v9-i2-46, Impact factor- 8.007

Page No: 1292-1305

Curious Minds and Digital Influence: Attitudes Toward Dark Tourism

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ABSTRACT: This research attempts to examine the cognitive and digital determinants of the attitudes towards dark tourism sites. In particular, the contribution of curiosity and the moderating effect of social media exposure. Dark tourism has recently attracted increased attention from tourism researchers for its potential to provide an experience that can highlight history, memory, and morality. However, empirical research into the combined influence of psychological needs and social media on prospective tourists' attitudes towards dark tourism sites remains scant. Methodology: To fill this gap, a quantitative survey was distributed among Jakarta residents aged 18 years and above who have not been to the particular dark tourism sites. Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied to test the hypothesized research model. In particular, the measurement model was evaluated to establish whether it has reached required levels of reliability and validity. Then, the structural model was used to examine whether hypothesized relationships are significant. Findings: The results of the study show that curiosity has a strong and significant positive effect on tourists' attitudes towards dark tourism sites. Moreover, social media exposure does not moderate the curiosity-attitude relationship. The research model has an acceptable level of explanatory power and shows evidence of predictive relevance. Research Limitations/Implications: The results of the study add to the theory of dark tourism. Practically, the research can be used by museum managers and heritage sites to enhance public engagement with their museum and increase their number of visitors.

KEYWORDS: Dark Tourism, Curiosity, Social Media Exposure, Attitudes Toward Dark Tourism, Digital Engagement

I. INTRODUCTION

Dark tourism is when people visit places that are associated with death, suffering and tragedy in the past. This phenomenon has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention due to its variety in terms of moral, cultural and psychological aspects (1). The management and maintenance of these sites draw attention to the complexities of combining aspects associated with commemoration, educational imperatives among school children, commercialisations of tragedies, together with acknowledging visitors' emotional needs (2,3). Inter/Intra-cultural research has revealed that other reasons for taking a trip vary widely, depending on the culture. For instance, a journey to Con Dao, Vietnam had spiritual and respectful purposes driving it while the Western perspective tends to be more of curiosity with respect to tragedy (4).

Curiosity is recognized as a significant psychological factor influencing tourists' perceptions of dark tourism. Curiosity drives people to explore the site of tragedy, not only due to an attraction to morbid aspects but also in pursuit of knowledge, understanding historical trauma, and reflecting on human mortality (5). It should also be noted that this type of curiosity is relative and multi-faceted; one of its sources may be the cultural value and sacredness of the death of martyrs (4) or even a lack of artefacts that inspire reflective views on history (6). The model of Curiosity should be further conceptualized because tourists' attitude is one of the major antecedents of behavioral intentions in the TPB framework (7).

The new ways social media is being used by consumers have fundamentally altered the character of how tourists interact with destinations. Digital platforms are therefore quickly becoming the primary means of accessing content that shapes how people become aware of narratives that arouse curiosity and ultimately influence travellers' expectations and pre-visit attitudes, such as TikTok and Instagram (8). Although there are studies demonstrating the impact of exposure to social media on travel decision-making (9), dark tourism does require an investigation into these more nuanced roles.

However, literature which explicitly positions social media exposure as a moderating variable of the relationship between curiousness and tourists' attitudes with respect to DT is still very scarce (10). Most previous studies also considered social media to be an independent or mediating variable. This limitation suggests further research is needed to clarify the extent and mechanisms through which exposure to digital content can strengthened or weakened curiosity in shaping tourist attitudes, especially within non-western settings.

Studies in dark tourism tend to focus on the Western world., tourist's visits to memorial sites (6,11). Hence, this research selected Jakarta Indonesia as an Asian urban context. Jakarta is home to several heritage sites marked by past tragedies, including the Pancasila Sakti Museum and the Jakarta History Museum. These locations present layered narratives of national history, colonial rule, and episodes of political violence (12).

The novelty of this study is based on three main reasons. First, this study provides a good answer to fill the gap in the previous model, by looking at the relationship between curiosity and the attitude of tourists regarding dark tourism moderated by social media exposure. Second, the study will use Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 2020) as the theory rarely used to study dark tourism in the urban context in Indonesia. Third, this study is related to the recent discussions on digital affordances by demonstrating that technology platforms influence individuals' emotional response and evaluations in response to a specific issue, especially when they are exposed to information about the history of dark tourism (13).

Based on the background and the gap of the problem stated above, the study aims to find out whether or not the exposure to social media can weaken or strengthen the relationship between curiosity and the attitude of tourists visiting dark tourism sites in Jakarta. The findings from this study are expected to provide managerial implications for museum owners and heritage managers to design ethical curiosity-based digital communication strategies to improve public engagement in encouraging and supporting ethical commemoration (14).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Dark Tourism

Dark tourism is defined as the act of travel to sites historically associated with death, tragedy, and human suffering (15). In recent years, this has been expanded to sites of conflict, disaster landscapes, and colonial heritage sites, and scholarship is moving away from debates of definition to the complex ethical and moral consumption of tragedy, particularly with respect to the representation of suffering and the commodification of traumatic history (2). For example, the commercialization of tragic events like the tourism that developed after the terror attacks in Manchester reflects the complex interplay of memorialization and commercial appeal (2). This raises several ethical questions with regard to moral boundaries, visitor motivations, and site managers' responsibility for an ethical interpretation framework.

One's cultural background can significantly influence one's reasons to visit dark-themed heritage. In many Western studies, such motivation can be related to thrill-seeking or the drive to see something extraordinary. In contrast, research in several Asian nations has revealed that many visitors are actually motivated by a sense of spirituality, remembrance, or respect (4,16). This demonstrates that Western-developed theories cannot be successfully applied in non-Western countries. In Indonesia, the concept of tragic heritage is primarily informed by periods of political unrest and the nation's colonial history, which in turn both inform Indonesia's national identity.

B. Theoretical Framework: Theory of Planned Behavior

To explore the possible factors that might attract someone to tourism activities outside the boundaries of legality or ethics, the study bases itself on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (7). TPB suggests that an individual's behavioral intention results from their attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control and has been previously used as a basis for research on the travel industry (9). While TPB is a popular framework for travel research (17,18), there are very few travel-related studies based on TPB theory regarding tourism practices in the legal or moral grey area, especially in the Asian countries (19,20). For this reason, the traditional TPB view on the subject might be missing some factors that influence people's decision-making process in such circumstances. To this end, the present study builds upon the original framework and introduces some psychological factors in conjunction with digital media's impact to contribute to a better understanding of motivations for visiting sensitive sites.

A recurring theme across several chapters in this volume centres on issues related to visitors' attitude formation about dark tourism. Here, the authors demystify the abstractedness of the term by simply referring to the end-cognition of an individual about engaging in such a visit, be it a favourable or unfavourable dis-position towards a site associated with prior collective violence or trauma (21,22). Indeed, opinions about dark tourism phenomena in real life do not stem from a single source. The complex and macabre narratives visitors interpret at these sites engage multiple components, including a cognitive effort in making sense of them and the mediating effects of the visitors' affective response and individual morality towards an event or person that underpins it (2,21). This implies that visitor outcomes, in terms of whether a visit to a dark tourism site is deemed meaningful or on the contrary off-putting, are likely to vary considerably from one visitor to the next (23). A better understanding of these more proximal and unobservable components of visitors' experience of sites is therefore important as it gives a more in-depth account of why a visit is perceived as both meaningful and legitimate or, at other times, as morally ambivalent or questionable (4,24). It should also be noted that the integration of additional constructs such as curiosity and exposure to social media by several contributors furthers the theoretical understanding of the formation of an attitude in spaces whose consumption has more often been typified as socially and morally transgressive or illicit (25).

C. Curiosity and Attitude Formation in Dark Tourism

Curiosity is defined as a cognitive urge to seek new information and to make sense of a phenomenon that is not fully understood (5,26) state that there are four forms of cognitive expression for curiosity: finding something new to be pleasant, a desire to fill information gaps, seeking a stimulation or challenge, and having an interest in other people. These four factors of curiosity can help to explain the visitor attraction. Visitors may come across places of past tragedy, conflict, or collective memory for a number of reasons. For example, their curiosity is rarely related to the search for excitement. Visitors usually have a realistic intention to interpret the past and fully understand the social conditions under which certain events took place (27).

Curiosity for learning, moral reflection, or understanding of historical events makes visitors consider a dark tourism site meaningful and ethically legitimate to visit (Magano et al., 2022; Stone & Sharpley, 2013). At the same time, Kashdan et al. (2019) discuss that curiosity occurs in conditions when an individual tries to address a knowledge gap to make sense of other people's experience. This view seems to be related to the deprivation sensitivity and social curiosity. Conversely, if a curiosity is only stimulated by an interest in excitement or impressive visuals, visitors may develop an unclear or conflicting attitude towards the site. Ethical concerns and empathy with victims in such cases are more likely to influence the visitors' responses (29,30). For these reasons, a variety of people interpret the same dark tourism destination differently based on the kind of curiosity. For this reason, this research argues:

H1: Curiosity has a positive and significant influence on tourists' attitudes toward dark tourism in Jakarta.

D. Social Media Exposure as a Moderating Variable

Social media exposure is a construct that refers to the frequency, duration, and intensity of attention paid to online content, particularly on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (31). In recent studies of tourism behavior, the role of social media as an information source is considered, but it is also recognized as a potent socio-cognitive setting that preforms and extends perceptions, meaning making, and anticipatory emotions before a visit (8). In dark tourism, which has at its center stories of loss, conflict, and collective memory, social media may have a direct role as a symbolic frame, revealing, interpreting, and in some cases, sensationalizing historical suffering (30,32). Online representations of dark sites, mediated by curated aesthetics, short-form storytelling, or influencers' commentary, can shape expectations and conceptions about the moral, educational, and emotional value of visitation (33).

In this study, social media exposure is placed in the model as a moderating variable in recognition of its potential to influence the way in which curiosity is translated into attitude. There is some evidence from previous research that digital exposure to a site can either strengthen or weaken epistemic and emotional connection depending on the narrative quality and ethical framing of content (34,35). Exposure to content that is historically grounded, educationally focused, and ethically responsible can be presumed to further visitor epistemic curiosity, and therefore, strengthen the positive value of the construct on attitudes toward dark tourism visitation (36). Exposure to content that sensationalizes a site, including spectacle-driven images, viral storytelling trends, selfie culture, and the aestheticization and commodification of tragedy, could weaken the relative importance of reflective motives and raise ethical concerns (30,37). Social media exposure, then, is a double-edged construct that could either facilitate or distort psychological pathways of dark tourism decision-making (34). The following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

H2: Social media exposure moderates the relationship between curiosity and tourists' attitudes towards dark tourism in Jakarta.

To sum up, the review of literature reveals the significance of curiosity on attitude toward illicit tourism and inequable local influence of SNS exposure that burgeons although inconstant against tourism. Notwithstanding the evidence provided, a few studies have specifically investigated how social media interacts with an intrinsic motivation such as curiosity to affect visitor attitude. To fill this gap, we first proposed a renewal conceptualization framework which combine curiosity, social media exposure and attitudes toward visiting illegal tourist sites to validate the hypothesis.

On the basis of the TPB, curiosity was conceptualized as a significant predictor of attitudes towards visiting dark tourism attractions and social media exposure was proposed to moderating variable. This framework extends prior works by including psychological motivation and digital impact in an urban city community of Jakarta.

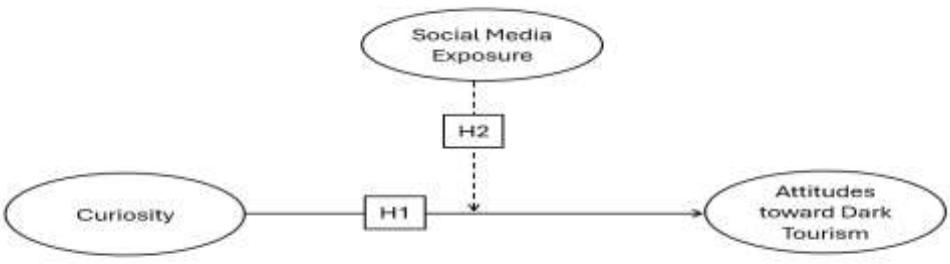


Fig.1.Research Framework

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted in this study to investigate the empirical association between curiosity, exposure of social media and attitude intention toward visiting dark tourism sites. Country of origin was the main formative construct but within a predictive and theory extending model so PLS-SEM has been employed as the main method. PLS-SEM allows to model more complex models with moderation and to increase variance explained, if the focus of behavioral research on these topics is followed (38). The approach allows for a robust examination of behavioural predictors in this novel tourism contexts, particularly those related to digital engagement and perception of the destination.

B. Research Context and Sampling Procedure

This study was carried out in Jakarta, Indonesia and concentrated on three dark tourism sites based on historical legacy of Jakarta: Museum Pancasila Sakti, Museum Sejarah Jakarta (Fatahillah Museum) and Taman Prasasti Museum. These can be seen to embody diverse historical stories that pertain to conflict among the political parties, colonial legacy, and struggle for national freedom which are potentially interesting for exploring visitors' psychological responses and digital interest toward dark heritage places.

The population in this research was people living within Greater Jakarta area (Jabodetabek) who were at least 18 years of age, used social media actively and had never visited the museums. We used purposive sampling to ensure that those who responded to the survey were eligible. To be eligible, some screening questions at the end of the interview were positive. In total 330 valid questionnaires were returned (110 for each museum context in order to sustain a proportional distribution sample). This sample size meets the recommended minimum levels for SEM in terms of statistical power and '10-times rule' (i. e. sufficiently large) representation to assess moderating effects and model complexity.

C. Instrument Development and Measurement

The questionnaire items were based on established measurement scales in prior research. Curiosity was modified from the work of Kashdan et al. (2019), and measured across four subscales: joyous exploration, deprivation sensitivity, thrill seeking, and social curiosity. The measure for social media exposure was modified from Satria & Suharyono (2017) of attention, duration, intensity to the travel content associated with dark tourism attraction destinations. Attitude to the Visit was adapted from Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (2020) and Yozukmaz & Kiliç (2022), and designed to assess participants' behavioral beliefs and evaluations toward visiting dark tourism destinations. All the indicators were measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Content validity was established using expert review by two specialists in tourism and digital behavior, respectively, followed by a (n= 30) pre-test for clarity and wording appropriateness as well as reliability. The findings from this study demonstrated that all the items were understandable and appropriate for full scale data collection.

D. Data Analysis Techniques

PLS-SEM analysis was conducted with the SmartPLS 3 application following the established steps and procedures, including two steps. The measurement model testing phase assessed the reliability with Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability, convergent validity with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (cut-off of 0.50) and discriminant validity with the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The second phase, structural model evaluation, involved hypothesis testing by assessing the path coefficients and significance levels using bootstrapping. The endogenous construct expressiveness was measured by R^2, and an effect size (f^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) were used to determine the strength of the contribution and prediction accuracy. Fine, the moderating role of social media exposure in interest and attitude toward visiting was tested by the interaction-term method. In the context of an emerging tourism market, in general, this methodological approach provided robust model testing and enriched the empirical insights on motivation toward dark tourism and digital impact.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Respondent Profile

A total of 330 valid responses were collected from residents of the Greater Jakarta region. The sample was relatively balanced in gender, with 56% male and 44% female participants. Most respondents were young adults, dominated by the 18–24 age group (32%), followed by 35–44 years (27%) and 25–34 years (23%), indicating stronger engagement and curiosity about dark tourism among younger, digitally connected populations. In terms of domicile, the majority lived in Jakarta, particularly West, Central, and North Jakarta, with additional respondents from surrounding cities such as Bekasi, Bogor, Depok, and Tangerang. This distribution reflects the accessibility of urban cultural heritage sites to metropolitan residents.

Educationally, most respondents had senior high school or vocational backgrounds (59%), followed by diploma (20%) and bachelor's degrees (16%), suggesting that dark tourism appeals across education levels. Occupationally, students formed the largest group (39%), followed by private employees and entrepreneurs. Income data indicate a predominantly middle-income profile, consistent with urban travelers who are active in tourism yet price-conscious. Overall, the sample represents a young, urban, digitally active population well suited for examining social media exposure and dark tourism attitudes.

Table 1. Respondent Demographic Characteristics (N = 330)

Characteristic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	145	0.44
Male	185	0.56
Age		
18–24 years	105	0.32
25–34 years	77	0.23
35–44 years	89	0.27
45–54 years	43	0.13
>55 years	16	0.05
Domicile		
Central Jakarta	45	0.14
West Jakarta	50	0.15
South Jakarta	43	0.13
East Jakarta	33	0.10
North Jakarta	45	0.14
Bogor	27	0.08
Depok	28	0.08
Tangerang	28	0.08
Bekasi	31	0.09
Education		
Junior High School/Equivalent	9	0.03
Senior High School/Vocational	195	0.59
Diploma (D1/D2/D3)	66	0.20
Bachelor's Degree (S1)	53	0.16
Postgraduate (S2/S3)	7	0.02
Occupation		
Student	130	0.39
Private Employee	98	0.30
Civil Servant/State-Owned Employee	11	0.03
Entrepreneur	69	0.21
Unemployed	22	0.07
Monthly Income		
< Rp1,000,000	45	0.14
Rp1,000,000 – Rp3,000,000	86	0.26
Rp3,000,001 – Rp5,000,000	114	0.35
Rp5,000,001 – Rp10,000,000	66	0.20
> Rp10,000,000	19	0.06

Source: Primary Data Processing, 2025

B. Social Media Behavior and Dark Tourism Content Preferences

Respondents' social media activity shows a clear preference for image-driven platforms. Instagram was the most frequently used platform (57%), followed by TikTok (52%) and YouTube (45%), highlighting the importance of visual and short-form video content in travel information seeking, especially among digital natives. In contrast, traditional platforms such as Facebook (20%) and X (7%) were less frequently used, indicating a shift from text-based communication toward experiential and algorithm-driven media. WhatsApp (14%) played a minor role, functioning mainly as a communication channel rather than a discovery tool.

Many respondents reported encountering tourism-related content incidentally while scrolling through social media feeds. Rather than actively searching for dark tourism information, they often came across posts about historical or tragic destinations through algorithmic recommendations. Short videos and images about memorials or historical topics shaped early impressions of destinations in a concise and accessible format. Preferences for dark tourism content leaned strongly toward informative and narrative-driven material, particularly historical stories, factual explanations, and educational visuals. These patterns suggest that interest in dark tourism is motivated not only by curiosity but also by a desire for meaningful historical understanding.

Table 2. Social Media Usage and Dark Tourism Content Preferences

Most Frequently Used Social Media (each respondent could choose two platforms)		
Instagram	187	0.57
TikTok	170	0.52
YouTube	149	0.45
Facebook	65	0.20
X (formerly Twitter)	21	0.07
WhatsApp	47	0.14
Average Time Spent on social media per Day		
< 1 hour	18	0.06
1–2 hours	145	0.44
3–4 hours	85	0.26
5–6 hours	61	0.18
> 6 hours	21	0.07
Preferred Dark Tourism Content on social media (each respondent could choose more than one type of content)		
Photos/videos of tragic or historical sites	150	0.46
Historical stories or dark facts behind sites	181	0.55
Horror/paranormal content at sites	97	0.30
Visitor reviews or personal experiences	88	0.27
Educational or informative narratives	143	0.43

Source: Primary Data Processing, 2025

C. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to examine respondents' perceptions of curiosity, social media exposure, and attitudes toward dark tourism. The findings indicate that many respondents show genuine interest in dark tourism sites, recalling past tragedies and expressing curiosity about the historical narratives behind them. Their interest reflects both emotional and cognitive engagement, as respondents tend to prefer educational and historically grounded content over emotionally provocative material. Survey responses also reveal that participants are frequently exposed to tourism-related content on social media, often encountering posts about historical or tragic destinations through algorithm-driven feeds rather than intentional searches. Short visual content on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube appears to shape early destination images and influence awareness prior to visiting decisions. Overall, positive mean scores across study variables suggest that respondents hold favourable attitudes toward dark tourism, perceiving it not only as recreation but as a meaningful and educational experience.

D. Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model assessment was performed by examining the standardized factor loadings, thus assessing convergent validity. As shown in Table 2, the indicators of Attitudes toward Dark Tourism, Curiosity, and Social Media Exposure have loading values above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). The results also indicate that all items significantly contribute to their respective latent constructs and meet the basic criteria for convergent validity.

The factors of Attitudes toward Dark Tourism vary from 0.824 to 0.876, reflecting the high indicator reliability for each item. In other words, the respondents are consistent in their agreement regarding the positive attitudes and affective evaluations about dark tourism destinations in Jakarta, supporting the theoretical consistency of the attitudinal construct to predict visitor evaluations. The Curiosity construct also shows good psychometric properties, with the factor loadings varying from 0.738 to 0.928. The lowest loading is found for CR4 (0.738), which is still above the recommended threshold and is thus still contributing sufficiently to the latent construct. In contrast, the highest loading for CR1 (0.928) demonstrates the salience of the emotional excitement and enthusiasm in constituting visitor curiosity. The variation in the loading strengths can be interpreted in terms of the multidimensionality of curiosity, which in this context involves the affective arousal, cognitive interest, and the desire to gain a deeper understanding of the historical information.

The construct of Social Media Exposure also has excellent convergent validity, with the loading values from 0.849 to 0.918. The substantial loading values can be interpreted to suggest that the respondents have high frequency of encountering, engaging with, and paying attention to social media information about dark tourism destinations, which is also theoretically sound in terms of social media's external influence as an antecedent of destination awareness and perception.

Table 2. The result of Loading Factors

Variable	Code	Items	Loading Factor
Attitudes toward Dark Tourism (7,40) Yozukmaz and Kiliç (2022)	ATT1	I am confident that visiting dark tourism destination in Jakarta will provide an enjoyable experience.	0,830
	ATT2	I believe that dark tourism destination in Jakarta are interesting destinations to visit.	0,876
	ATT3	I feel optimistic that visiting dark tourism destination in Jakarta will be a memorable and valuable experience.	0,824
	ATT4	I have positive feelings when imagining visits to dark tourism destination in Jakarta.	0,829
	ATT5	I have a positive attitude toward visiting dark tourism destination in Jakarta.	0,868
Curiosity (26,41)	CR1	I feel enthusiastic and excited when exploring dark tourism destination in Jakarta.	0,928
	CR2	I feel dissatisfied if the historical information presented in dark tourism destination is incomplete or lacks depth.	0,903
	CR3	I am interested in learning about the dark side of history presented in dark tourism destination, such as past tragedies or conflicts.	0,867
	CR4	I want to know about other visitors' experiences when they visit dark tourism destination in Jakarta.	0,738
Social Media Exposure (42) Satria and Suharyono (2017)	ME1	I frequently encounter social media content about dark tourism destination in Jakarta.	0,849
	ME2	I spend a considerable amount of time watching, reading, or exploring social media content related to dark tourism destination in Jakarta.	0,918
	ME3	I pay special attention to the information presented in social media content about dark tourism destination in Jakarta.	0,863

Source: Primary Data Processing, 2025

To sum up, the model shows that all constructs have strong convergent validity based on high and statistically significant factor loadings. These results are also in line with theoretical expectations and show that the measurement items are appropriate and can be used in the next step for the analysis of the structural model.

To examine the measurement model's reliability and convergent validity, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are used. As displayed in Table 3, the internal consistency of all constructs is high. The Cronbach's Alpha values of all constructs are higher than the recommended threshold value of 0.70 and range from 0.850 to 0.900, which means excellent reliability for the three constructs (Hair et al., 2019). The Composite Reliability values range from 0.909 to 0.926 and are also higher than the recommended value of 0.70, which means the indicators are stable in assessing the latent variables.

Table 3. Validity Convergent and Reliability Test

Variable	Code	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attitudes toward Dark Tourism	ATT	0,900	0,926	0,715
Curiosity	CR	0,882	0,920	0,743
Social Media Exposure	ME	0,850	0,909	0,769

Source: Primary Data Processing, 2025

To evaluate the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model, Cronbach's Alpha, CR, and AVE were calculated. The results in Table 3 show that all constructs have strong internal consistency reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha values of each construct are above the recommended value of 0.70, ranging from 0.850 to 0.900, showing good reliability for the three constructs (Hair et al., 2019). CR values for all constructs are also high (ranging from 0.909 to 0.926), indicating good stability of the indicators to measure their respective latent variables.

In addition, all the AVE values for each construct were above the minimum recommended value of 0.50, suggesting an acceptable level of convergent validity. The AVE for Attitudes toward Dark Tourism is 0.715, Curiosity is 0.743, and Social Media Exposure is 0.769, indicating that the amount of variance captured by the construct is more than 70% of the total variance of its indicators. Therefore, it can be concluded that the measurement model has good psychometric properties and can be used for the assessment of the structural model.

E. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The assessment of the measurement and structural model was performed in multiple steps. In this process, all latent variables have to meet reliability, validity and predictive relevance criteria which are commonly recommended in current SEM-PLS publications. The results of this evaluation are shown below. In their entirety, they provide evidence that the measures and structural relationships of the hypothesized research model possess an acceptable degree of psychometric quality and explanatory power.

Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Discriminant validity indicates the degree to which a construct is truly distinct from other latent variables in the model. The Fornell–Larcker criterion was used to evaluate discriminant validity, which suggests that the square root of the AVE of each construct must exceed its highest correlation with other constructs. Table 4 shows that the diagonal elements, Attitudes (0.846), Curiosity (0.862), Moderating Effect (1.000), and Social Media Exposure (0.877) in each row are all higher than the correlations in each column in the same row and column.

For instance, the diagonal value of Curiosity is 0.862, and the correlation between Curiosity and Attitudes is 0.797 and between Curiosity and Social Media Exposure is 0.608. Therefore, the value 0.862 of Curiosity is higher than the correlation values in this row and column. The same occurs with Social Media Exposure, with a diagonal value of 0.877, being higher than the value of the correlation between Social Media Exposure and Attitudes (0.717) and the value of the correlation between Social Media Exposure and Curiosity (0.608). It is important to note that in this situation, each latent variable can account for more variance in its own indicators than in other constructs. Thus, our results clearly show that the latent constructs used in this study are conceptually distinct from one another. The Fornell–Larcker standard is satisfied, and discriminant validity is established.

Table 4. Discriminant validity Fornell-Larcker results

	Attitudes toward Dark Tourism	Curiosity	Moderating Effect 1	Social Media Exposure
Attitudes toward Dark Tourism	0,846			
Curiosity	0,797	0,862		
Moderating Effect 1	-0,409	-0,491	1,000	
Social Media Exposure	0,717	0,608	-0,459	0,877

Source: Primary Data Processing, 2025

Discriminant Validity (HTMT Criterion)

In addition to the Fornell–Larcker criterion, the more recent Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) was also examined as a more

stringent and reliable indicator for potential discriminant validity issues in reflective measurement models (43,44). As can be seen in Table 5, all HTMT values are well below the conservative threshold of 0.90. The highest HTMT ratio is found for the correlation between Attitudes and Curiosity (0.888). All other HTMT values vary between 0.422 and 0.815, which is still well below the cutoff value for suspect overlap between constructs.

Table 5. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Attitudes toward Dark Tourism	Curiosity	Moderating Effect 1	Social Media Exposure
Attitudes toward Dark Tourism				
Curiosity	0,888			
Moderating Effect 1	0,422	0,525		
Social Media Exposure	0,815	0,703	0,500	

Source: Primary Data Processing, 2025

The results of the HTMT provide further evidence that the constructs are not too highly correlated and that concerns about measurement redundancy are not warranted in this study. The results are in line with the Fornell–Larcker criterion discussed above and support discriminant validity.

Multicollinearity Assessment (VIF Values)

Before testing the structural model, VIF values were calculated to assess the presence of multicollinearity among the predictor variables, which could potentially affect the stability of the regression estimates by inflating the standard errors and distorting the interpretation of the path coefficients. As can be seen in Table 6, the VIF values are between 1.393 and 1.744, much lower than the conservative threshold of 5.0, which indicates the absence of multicollinearity and that each predictor provides unique information in explaining the endogenous construct. Therefore, the structural paths can be interpreted.

Table 6. VIF value of structural model

	Attitudes toward Dark Tourism
Attitudes toward Dark Tourism	
Curiosity	1,744
Moderating Effect 1	1,393
Social Media Exposure	1,677

Source: Primary Data Processing, 2025

Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was evaluated using the standardized path coefficients and their associated t-statistics and p-values obtained through the bootstrapping method. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Path Coefficients

	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values	Results
Curiosity -> Attitudes toward Dark Tourism	0,593	11,086	0,000	H1 supported
Moderating Effect 1 -> Attitudes toward Dark Tourism	0,033	1,060	0,290	H2 Not supported

Source: Primary Data Processing, 2025

H1 is supported by the model, as Curiosity positively and significantly predicts Attitudes ($\beta = 0.593$, $t = 11.086$, $p < 0.001$). This provides empirical evidence that Curiosity is a predictor of visitors' positive attitudes toward a dark tourism destination. The magnitude of the path coefficient also suggests a meaningful effect, which can be explained by the fact that cognitive and affective arousal of visitors is of special importance in the dark tourism context.

The results do not support H2, as Social Media Exposure does not moderate the relationship between Curiosity and Attitudes (β

= 0.033, t = 1.060, p = 0.290). The non-significant coefficient of the interaction term indicates that the positive effect of Curiosity on Attitudes is not influenced by respondents' Social Media Exposure. In other words, higher levels of the latter do not result in a stronger or a weaker effect of Curiosity on the dependent variable.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The goodness of fit of the model was assessed by the coefficient of determination (R 2). As shown in Table 8, the value of R2 for the endogenous construct, Attitudes toward Dark Tourism, was 0.724 and that of the adjusted R2 was 0.721. This means that 72.4% of the variance of the endogenous construct, Attitudes, was explained by its exogenous determinants, Curiosity and Moderating Effect. This was a very high value. As a guideline, Hair Jr et al. (2021) stated that when the value of R2 was 0.75 or higher, this would be considered as an excellent value. Therefore, the high value of R2 in this study could be said to indicate that the model can explain the underlying patterns and associations of the phenomenon under investigation in a realistic manner.

Table 8. Coefficient of determination

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Attitudes toward Dark Tourism	0,724	0,721

Source: Primary Data Processing, 2025

Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

In order to further test the model's predictive relevance, the Q^2 value was computed using a blindfolding procedure. As shown in Table 9, the Q^2 value for Attitudes toward Dark Tourism is 0.507, which is significantly above the minimum value of 0.00 and, therefore, indicates that the model has good predictive relevance and can produce precise predictions for observations that have been left out of the estimation process. The fact that there are no Q^2 values for the other constructs is not a surprise, as they are exogenous in the structural model.

Table 9. Predictive relevance

	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
Attitudes toward Dark Tourism	1650,000	812,893	0.507
Curiosity	1320,000	1320,000	
Moderating Effect 1	330,000	330,000	
Social Media Exposure	990,000	990,000	

Note: SSO = sum of squares of observations; SSE = sum of squared errors; Q2 = predictive relevance.

Source: Primary Data Processing, 2025

V. DISCUSSION

The Role of Curiosity in Shaping Attitudes Toward Dark Tourism

The positive effect of Curiosity on Attitudes toward Dark Tourism is consistent with existing literature, which highlights the cognitive and affective components of exploratory motivation. This finding aligns with Kashdan et al. (2019) who define curiosity as a psychological state that is marked by a need or desire to gain knowledge, have exposure to new experiences, and encounter novelty. Dark tourism sites, with their evocative narratives, tragic pasts, and contested moral terrains, are likely to elicit such exploratory states. In addition, this finding supports previous claims by Forero et al. (2022) and Madhuwanthi & Dassanayake (2022) regarding the role of curiosity-driven motivations in visitors' desire to experience sites related to death, tragedy, or historical trauma. This study takes this a step further by showing that curiosity not only influences visitation intention but also significantly impacts visitors' overall evaluative attitudes toward dark tourism.

This is in line with Ajzen's (2020) Theory of Planned Behavior, which suggests that attitudes are formed based on salient beliefs and cognitive evaluations about an object. In this case, the cognitive stimulation provided by curiosity may lead to higher perceived value, richer emotional engagement, and deeper meaning-making, which in turn, contribute to more positive attitudes towards dark tourism sites.

The Non-Significant Moderating Effect of Social Media Exposure

Contrary to the hypothesis, the moderating role of Social Media Exposure was not observed in the relationship between Curiosity and Attitudes. The results run counter to the previous studies (e.g., Michelle & Susilo, 2021; Satria & Suharyono, 2017) that social

media increases information searching, helps form the destination image, and strengthens the relation between motivation and attitude.

The non-occurrence of the moderation might be explained in the following theoretical arguments. First, social media exposure could only affect the general awareness about the dark tourism site but may not be strong enough to have the power to further amplify the specific cognitive pathway of curiosity. Piscarac and Yoo (2024) and Seccardini and Desmoulins (2023) state that media often represents the tourism destination in fragmented, entertainment-oriented, or superficial ways that do not contribute to deepening the intellectual and emotional engagement invoked by curiosity.

Second, curiosity as an intrinsic psychological construct does not necessarily need to be triggered by an external stimulus in the media. According to Loewenstein (1994) Information Gap Theory, curiosity is elicited by perceiving a gap between current and desired knowledge. Internal cognitive processes like this could be operative regardless of social media exposure levels. This might be why high or low exposure levels did not lead to a difference in the effect of curiosity on attitude.

Third, the social media content itself about dark tourism in Jakarta may not be rich, detailed, narrative enough, or have a sufficient level of interpretation to serve as an amplifying stimulus. The previous research (39) has also shown that the visitors' evaluation of dark tourism is determined by the degree of meaningful historical interpretation rather than the shallow, promotional, or UGC.

Theoretical Contribution to Dark Tourism Research

The results of the current study have both theoretical and managerial implications. At the theoretical level, the findings can be seen as a response to a range of recent studies on dark tourism. First, from the social science tourism perspective, the results of the proposed model confirm the central importance of curiosity as a psychological precursor in formulating tourist attitudes, alongside previously reported motivational categories, such as education, empathy, and remembrance (27,45). This study's approach, unlike many similar ones, was able to reveal curiosity as a consistent and robust attitudinal antecedent in the context of contemporary urban dark tourism.

Second, the empirical absence of a social media exposure moderation effect is another contribution that runs counter to popular opinion. Namely, there is no evidence for the current study's original hypothesis that an effect of social media would act as a cognitive–emotional intensifier in the context of interpreting the dark past. This is counter to the notion of tourism motivation and destination perception in mainstream tourism, in which the positive impacts of digital exposure are pervasive. Third, this study made a contribution to the attitudinal modeling of dark tourism by using curiosity theory to incorporate one of the attitudinal components of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2020). In doing so, it attempted to close the gap between psychological motivation theories and the social and cultural aspects of dark heritage processes.

Implications for Dark Tourism in Jakarta

The result shows that improving richness of interpretation, cognitive absorption, and narrative inquiry has a greater impact on influencing visitor attitudes than mere social media exposure. Thus, museum and heritage managers in Jakarta should focus on immersive storytelling, historically enriched content creation, structured interpretation, and guided experiences, as well as narrative depth and authenticity. These elements create more meaningful emotional and intellectual experiences for dark tourism visitors, rather than relying solely on social media-driven exposure without strengthening the interpretive depth of the sites.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examines the relationships among dark experience, unique learning experience, curiosity, social media exposure, attitudes toward visiting, and intention to visit dark tourism destinations in Jakarta using a quantitative approach. The findings show that cognitive and experiential factors play a central role in shaping visitors' attitudes and behavioral intentions. Interpretive richness, reflective learning, and narrative-driven curiosity are more influential in attitude formation than social media exposure alone. Although social media acts as a moderator in the structural model, its influence is selective and mainly strengthens certain psychological processes rather than functioning as a primary driver of intention. The measurement model demonstrates strong reliability and validity, confirming the robustness of the structural relationships. Theoretically, this study contributes to dark tourism literature by emphasizing meaning-making and reflective engagement as key motivational mechanisms. It also extends existing frameworks by showing how digital environments interact with psychological factors in shaping tourist behavior. Methodologically, the research highlights the suitability of PLS-SEM for testing complex moderation effects in tourism studies.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that museum managers and dark tourism operators in Jakarta should prioritize immersive storytelling, interpretive depth, and historical authenticity to enhance visitor engagement. Improving narrative quality through guided interpretation and emotionally meaningful content is likely to influence attitudes more effectively than relying solely on social media presence. Digital platforms should complement, not replace, experiential storytelling. However, the study has limitations: the sample involved individuals who had not visited the sites, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and the focus on three Jakarta destinations restricts generalizability. Future research could expand to broader cultural contexts, apply qualitative or mixed methods to capture deeper emotional experiences, or use longitudinal and experimental designs to explore causal mechanisms. Additional variables such as perceived authenticity, emotional engagement, and digital influences may further

enrich the model. Overall, the study underscores the primacy of curiosity, cognitive learning, and interpretive depth in shaping dark tourism attitudes and intentions, positioning social media as a complementary influence.

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