

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PLACE BRANDING STRATEGIES IN A RURAL VILLAGE: A CASE STUDY OF KAMPUNG AGONG, KAMPUNG BAKAR KAPOR, PENAGA, PENANG

¹*Sathis Rao Chinniah and ²Tengku Fauzan Binti Tengku Anuar

^{1,2} Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan,

*Corresponding author E-mail: sathisrao18@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: *This research investigates the intricacies of technology adoption in the tourism industry, specifically focusing on Kampung Agong. Employing a quantitative methodology and structured questionnaires, the study explores the relationships between key variables such as effort expectancy, performance expectancy, social influence, technological factors, behavioural intention, and place branding. Descriptive statistics give a broad picture of the demographics and attitudes of the participants. Inferential statistics, such as regression analysis within the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) framework, reveal the intricate relationships between these variables. Results reveal a significant inverse relationship between behavioural intention and place branding, emphasizing the need for aligning promotional efforts with the actual technological offerings. Efforts expectancy, performance expectancy, and technological factors emerge as pivotal influencers of tourists' intentions, suggesting a strategic focus on enhancing technological features and continuous development. Social influence plays a crucial role in place branding, emphasizing the importance of positive word-of-mouth and community endorsements. The structural model further demonstrates the impact of technological factors on both behavioural intention and place branding. Policy implications highlight the necessity of promoting accurate information, enhancing technological features, leveraging positive social factors, and investing in continuous technological development. These insights contribute to shaping effective policies and strategies for technology adoption in Kampung Agong's tourism industry, providing a roadmap for policymakers and stakeholders to optimize tourists' technological experiences in this rural setting.*

Keywords: Place branding strategies, Rural village, SEM

1. INTRODUCTION

Kampung Agong in Penaga, Penang, exemplifies the challenges faced by rural villages in harnessing their cultural, historical, and natural assets for tourism and economic growth [1, 2, 3]. Despite possessing distinct features, the village struggles with the absence of a well-defined place branding strategy, hindering its ability to communicate unique offerings to potential tourists. Without a cohesive brand identity, Kampung Agong may be overshadowed by more prominently marketed destinations [4]. Understanding and addressing the perception of performance expectancy is crucial, as it influences tourists' decisions to visit. Effort expectancy, indicating the ease of access and overall visitor experience, is essential, necessitating attention to infrastructure and accessibility challenges [2, 3]. Limited engagement with social networks and community involvement further impedes positive word-of-mouth marketing and influence on potential visitors, highlighting the need for strengthened social ties in Kampung Agong.

The study focuses on the crucial role of place branding in driving tourism and economic progress, particularly in rural areas with untapped growth potential like Kampung Agong in Penaga, Penang. The primary objective is to assess the effectiveness of place branding strategies, including performance expectations, effort expectations, social influence, and technological factors, on tourism development in this unique rural community [5]. Performance expectancy, reflecting the perceived advantages of visiting a destination, is a key factor influencing tourists' decision-making. Understanding the alignment between travelers' expectations and the perceived performance of Kampung Agong will illuminate the village's appeal. Efforts to improve accessibility and enhance visitor experience are crucial for a remote community like Kampung Agong, as they provide insights into potential infrastructure enhancements [6].

Social Influence, whether virtual or physical, significantly shapes the decisions and perspectives of potential visitors.

Analyzing how social networks impact place branding activities in Kampung Agong underscores the importance of community participation [7]. In the digital era, technological factors, online platforms, and virtual experiences play a vital role. Evaluating their impact on place branding provides insights into leveraging digital platforms for effective destination marketing [3, 5, 8]. Understanding the mediating role of behavioral intention in the relationship between variables and place branding initiatives is crucial for a deeper comprehension of visitors' intentions and actions. The study aims to offer practical recommendations for enhancing place branding in rural villages like Kampung Agong, encompassing strategies for community engagement, infrastructure development, technological integration, and collaborative efforts [8, 9]. By contributing insights into the dynamics of Kampung Agong, Penaga, and Penang, the research aims to inform policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders on optimizing place branding strategies for sustainable tourism and economic development in rural settings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Place Branding

Place branding has emerged as a crucial element in destination management and tourism development, evolving within the broader context of marketing strategies. The literature review explores key theoretical perspectives and empirical studies that shape our understanding of place branding, laying the groundwork for investigating its effectiveness in the rural village of Kampung Agong. Rooted in marketing, place branding involves strategic efforts to shape and manage the perception of a specific geographic location [10]. A pivotal concept is destination image, which influences tourist choices and satisfaction based on marketing efforts and visitor experiences [11]. Successful place branding incorporates various components, as outlined by the Brand Identity Prism, including physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image [1]. Understanding place

attachment is crucial for comprehending the emotional connection individuals form with a location, impacting perceptions, attitudes, and intentions [4]. Rural locations, facing unique challenges, must balance preserving natural and cultural assets with the need for economic development through tourism [5, 6]. Rural areas encounter obstacles due to limited resources, both financial and human, when competing with urban destinations.

Efforts Expectancy

Expectancy, a crucial element of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), plays a fundamental role in understanding consumers' perceptions of the simplicity of adopting and using technology. This literature review focuses on the theoretical foundations, empirical findings, and key factors related to effort expectancy, particularly in the contexts of place branding and rural tourism. Efforts Expectancy involves users' perceptions of the effort required to interact with a specific technology and the ease of use it offers, influencing users' willingness to adopt and use technology, aligning with Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) [10, 11].

Research consistently underscores the pivotal significance of effort expectancy in technology adoption. Venkatesh and Bala (2008) demonstrated that users significantly influence their intentions to adopt information technology through their perception of its ease of use. In the realm of place branding and rural tourism, understanding tourists' effort expectations is crucial. Tourists often utilize various platforms and technologies, such as mobile applications and online information portals, impacting their overall enjoyment and experience [12]. Tourists' expectations regarding the ease of using technology for place branding activities become integral to their perceptions of usability and convenience [13].

Performance Expectancy

Performance expectancy, a key element in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), is instrumental in shaping users' perceptions of the benefits and utility derived from adopting a specific technology. This literature review offers a comprehensive examination of the theoretical foundations, empirical studies, and crucial insights related to performance expectancy, focusing on its relevance in the realms of technology adoption, place branding, and rural tourism. Numerous studies affirm the significance of performance expectations in technology adoption. They conducted a meta-analysis, confirming that perceived performance gains significantly influence users' intentions to adopt technology and highlighting its universality across contexts [13, 14]. In the context of place branding and rural tourism, performance expectancy assumes paramount importance. Tourists engaging with technology-driven place branding initiatives seek benefits such as enhanced information access and improved travel planning [15]. The perceived performance gains influence tourists' decisions and satisfaction, shaping the effectiveness of place branding strategies. Rural destinations, characterized by unique cultural and natural attributes, can significantly benefit from leveraging performance expectations in technology adoption [11]. Technology has the potential to enhance tourists' experiences by offering real-time information and facilitating engagement with local communities.

Success in technology adoption in rural tourism hinges on community support and active involvement. Community

engagement influences tourists' perceptions of performance expectancy, extending beyond individual users to encompass collective efforts in embracing and promoting technology-enabled place branding initiatives [9]. Performance expectancy emerges as a critical determinant in the acceptance and utilization of technology within place branding and rural tourism contexts. As the thesis evaluates place branding strategies in Kampung Agong, understanding tourists' perceptions of performance expectancy will provide crucial insights for crafting effective and impactful technology-driven initiatives [2, 3, 5].

Social Influence

Social influence, a pivotal component in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), holds significant sway in shaping users' perceptions and behaviours toward technology adoption. This literature review critically examines theoretical foundations and empirical studies on social influence, providing a comprehensive understanding of its impact on technology acceptance. Rooted in UTAUT by Venkatesh, social influence refers to individuals' perception of the expectations and pressures from their social network to use a particular technology. The review incorporates diverse studies, illustrating how social factors consistently influence users' technology adoption decisions [6, 7].

Studies affirm that users are more inclined to adopt technology when influenced by social expectations and pressures [8]. In the context of place branding and rural tourism, social influence plays a pivotal role in shaping tourists' decisions, as evident in studies on social media impact [9] and local community involvement [10]. The synthesis of empirical studies demonstrates the pervasive influence of social influence across diverse contexts, providing a robust foundation for understanding tourists' technology acceptance in the rural setting of Kampung Agong.

Technological factors

Technological factors play a crucial role in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), influencing users' decisions about technology adoption. This literature review delves into empirical studies across diverse contexts, providing a nuanced understanding of how technological considerations shape user perceptions. The Venkatesh meta-analysis establishes the significance of factors like perceived technological advantages, compatibility, and complexity in determining users' intentions to adopt technology, forming the foundational basis for subsequent studies [12]. Davis's model demonstrates that users are more inclined to adopt technology perceived as easy to use, underscoring the impact of perceived ease of use as a vital technological factor. A study extends this understanding to educational technology adoption, emphasizing the role of perceived ease of use in shaping users' acceptance of mobile learning technologies [17].

In the tourism context, the influence of technological factors such as information accessibility and usability on destination image and tourist satisfaction [13]. An analysis of online review platforms emphasizes the interplay between technological factors and user engagement in the hospitality and tourism industries [14]. Research on real-time co-creation extends the understanding of technological factors to destination management, emphasizing the role of

agility and localness in enhancing tourists' experiences. This synthesis of empirical studies underscores the multifaceted nature of technological factors, consistently emerging as critical determinants in various contexts of technology adoption [15]. From general technology acceptance to educational technology and destination-related technologies in tourism, technological factors play a pivotal role in shaping users' perceptions and decisions. As the thesis evaluates place branding strategies in Kampung Agong, these empirical insights provide a strong basis for understanding how diverse technological considerations in the rural tourism setting influence tourists' interactions with technology.

Behavioural Intention

Behavioural Intention, a crucial mediator in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), signifies users' willingness to adopt and engage with technology. This literature review explores empirical studies across diverse contexts, providing nuanced insights into the mediating role of Behavioural Intention in technology acceptance. Davis's seminal Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) establishes the foundation, asserting that perceived ease of use and usefulness directly influence users' behavioural intention, subsequently impacting actual technology use. Venkatesh UTAUT incorporates Behavioural Intention as a central mediator, suggesting that various independent variables directly influence users' behavioural intention, influencing actual technology use. A study on mobile banking services supports the mediating role of behavioural intention, showcasing how users' intentions mediate perceived ease of use, usefulness, and actual adoption [16].

An exploration of online shopping in health information technology both underscore the mediating effect of behavioural intention, providing insights into e-commerce and healthcare contexts. Deshpande's [17] investigation into social media adoption affirms the mediating role of behavioural intention, shedding light on the psychological processes behind users' perceptions and actual adoption. These studies consistently highlight the pivotal role of Behavioural Intention as a mediator in technology acceptance, bridging the gap between users' perceptions and actual engagement across diverse contexts [18]. As the thesis evaluates place branding strategies in Kampung Agong, these insights form a robust foundation for understanding how tourists' intentions mediate their actual engagement with technology in a rural tourism setting.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study design adopts a quantitative methodology, utilizing a structured questionnaire as the primary instrument for systematic data collection in the context of technology adoption in the tourism industry. The decision to employ a quantitative approach is grounded in the research's objective to quantify stakeholders' perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors in Kampung Agong's tourism sector. The structured questionnaire ensures comparability and uniformity in responses, facilitating a rigorous statistical analysis of numerical data. This methodological choice aligns with the need for methodical data collection, promoting objectivity and reducing subjective interpretation risks [18]. The structured questionnaire serves as a central data collection tool, ensuring consistency and comparability across responses. Carefully

designed questions aim to reveal nuanced understandings of determinants affecting technology adoption, including performance expectations, social influence, technological factors, behavioural intention, and actual usage [19]. The methodical approach enhances response objectivity, contributing to the study's reliability and validity.

Quantitative methodology offers the advantage of identifying and elucidating patterns and connections within the data. Statistical analyses, such as regression analysis, enable the discernment of significant relationships and quantification of their magnitude. This analytical depth enhances the nuanced understanding of factors impacting technology adoption in the tourism industry [19]. The questionnaire's development aligns with theoretical frameworks and research goals. Likert scales, structured forms, and open-ended questions capture complex variables and facilitate the conversion of qualitative observations into numerical data. This deliberate approach ensures genuine responses and a seamless transition from qualitative to quantitative analyses [20]. The questionnaire probes participants on aspects like Effort Expectancy, Performance Expectancy, Social Influence, Technological Factors, Behavioral Intention, and Place Branding, translating their perceptions into quantifiable dimensions [21].

Likert scales enable participants to attribute numerical values to their attitudes and perceptions, supporting statistical analyses and pattern categorization. Structured forms optimize data collection, creating a single repository for systematic analysis. The questionnaire's deliberate design facilitates a meticulous exploration of technology adoption determinants in Kampung Agong's tourism industry [22]. The study's participant selection criteria focus on individuals actively involved in tourism-related activities in Kampung Agong, including business owners, employees, and stakeholders. These criteria ensure a comprehensive examination of technology's effects on operational efficiency and consumer relations, with participants offering diverse perspectives based on practical experiences [19].

In the culmination of data gathering, the analysis takes center stage, with a dual approach encompassing descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics serve as the artist's brush, portraying a preliminary portrait of the research landscape. Demographic context, painted with means and standard deviations, provides insights into participants' average attributes and the degree of dispersion. This statistical canvas captures the heterogeneity within factors like occupational responsibilities, age, gender, and educational attainment [20, 21]. Means offer a core trend, revealing prevailing attitudes, while standard deviations add complexity by indicating the dispersion of opinions. Frequency distributions briefly illustrate the distribution of individuals across demographic categories, presenting a mosaic of participant profiles.

The subsequent shift to inferential statistics represents a symphony exploring the intricate connections among variables. Regression analysis, conducted using SmartPLS, orchestrates this exploration within the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) framework. The analytical symphony begins with the correlation between Efforts Expectancy and Behavioral Intention, unraveling the impact of perceived exertion on technology interaction. Performance Expectancy takes the spotlight next, showcasing how anticipated benefits influence the intention to adopt

technology. Social Influence, akin to a communal orchestration, is examined for its impact on individual choices, emphasizing the ensemble effect. The final movement focuses on Technological Factor, unraveling how compatibility with the technological environment influences intention. As the symphony progresses, Behavioral Intention emerges as a crucial intermediary, revealing how it mediates the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable, Place Branding. SmartPLS, with its expertise in handling latent variable models, enhances the precision of this inferential dance. The use of regression coefficients provides insights into the convergence of perceptions, social dynamics, and technological compatibility impacting technology adoption in the tourism industry of Kampung Agong.

4. ESTIMATED RESULTS

Table 1 presents the estimated results of descriptive statistics for key variables related to technology adoption in the tourism industry of Kampung Agong. The sample size (N) is 128. The table showcases the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation for each variable, including Performance Expectancy, Efforts Expectancy, Social Influence, Technological Factor, Behavioural Intention, and Place Branding. These statistics offer a snapshot of the central tendencies and variability within the dataset, providing a foundation for understanding participants' perspectives and attitudes towards technology adoption in the context of place branding strategies.

Table 1: Estimated Results of Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Performance Expectancy	128	4	5	4.2708	0.4219
Efforts Expectancy	128	3.33	5	4.2552	0.41089
Social Influence	128	3.33	5	4.0469	0.48555
Technological Factor	128	3.67	5	4.2214	0.37943
Behavioural Intention	128	3.33	5	4.2005	0.41692
Place Branding	128	3	5	4.2578	0.43515

Table 2 displays the results of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test for the inner model, focusing on the relationships between variables such as Place Branding and Behavioural Intention. The VIF values assess the extent of multicollinearity, with lower values indicating lower correlation between variables. In this table, the diagonal elements represent the VIF for each individual variable, while the off-diagonal elements display the VIF values between pairs of variables. The results suggest that the variables have VIF values within acceptable limits, indicating minimal multicollinearity and supporting the reliability of the inner model for understanding the relationships between Place Branding and Behavioural Intention, as well as other contributing factors like Efforts Expectancy, Performance Expectancy, Social Influence, and Technological Factor.

Table 2 Inner model – Matrix VIF Test

Variable	Place Branding	Behavioural Intention
Place Branding		
Behavioural Intention	1.973	
Efforts Expectancy	1.689	1.644
Performance Expectancy	1.352	1.337
Social Influence	1.250	1.043
Technological Factor	2.153	1.781

Table 3 presents the results of the Structure Model, outlining the paths, beta coefficients, standard deviations, T statistics, and P values for the relationships between constructs. The significant negative path from Behavioural Intention (BI) to Place Branding (AU) highlights that as Behavioural Intention decreases, Place Branding increases. Positive paths from Efforts Expectancy (EE), Performance Expectancy (PE), and Technological Factor (TF) to Place Branding indicate that higher levels of these factors contribute to increased Place Branding. Additionally, the positive path from Technological Factor to Behavioural Intention signifies a direct positive impact on Behavioural Intention.

Table 3 Results of Structure Model

Construct	Path	Beta	SD	T-value	P values
Place Branding	BI -> AU	-0.863	0.129	6.673	0.000
	EE -> AU	0.295	0.087	3.381	0.001
	PE -> AU	0.337	0.105	3.205	0.001
	SI -> AU	-0.157	0.116	3.295	0.000
	TF -> AU	0.302	0.123	2.453	0.014
Behavioural Intention	TF -> BI	0.434	0.066	6.594	0.000
	EE -> BI	0.152	0.096	1.594	0.111
	PE -> BI	0.089	0.079	1.129	0.259
	SI -> BI	-0.324	0.070	4.630	0.000

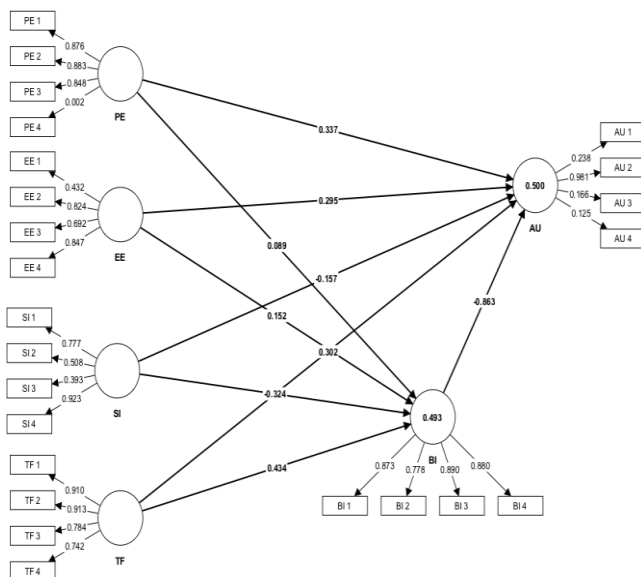


Figure 1. Construction of SEM on SmartPLS

5. CONCUSSION

The estimated results of the structural model provide valuable insights into the dynamics of technology adoption in the context of the tourism industry in Kampung Agong. The negative path from behavioral intention to place branding suggests a noteworthy inverse relationship, implying that as tourists' behavioral intention to use technology decreases, their actual engagement with technology increases. Aligning promotional efforts and strategies with actual technological offerings ensures that tourists' intentions are effectively translated into technology use.

Policymakers and tourism stakeholders should focus on aligning promotional campaigns with the actual technological experiences available to tourists. This may involve providing accurate information about the technological features and benefits to manage tourists' expectations and enhance their overall satisfaction. Efforts should be directed toward enhancing technological features related to effort expectancy, performance expectancy, and technological factors. Improvements in these areas are likely to positively influence tourists' behavioral intentions, leading to increased technology adoption in the tourism industry. Recognizing the significant impact of social influence on place branding, policymakers should explore strategies to leverage positive social factors. Encouraging positive word-of-mouth, social engagement, and community endorsements can contribute to a favorable technological environment that fosters increased adoption among tourists. Given the positive impact of technological factors on both behavioral intention and place branding, continuous investment in technological advancements and infrastructure is crucial. Policymakers should support initiatives that enhance the overall technological landscape of Kampung Agong to attract and retain tech-savvy tourists.

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