

## **IDENTIFYING TOURIST RESPONSE TOWARDS VIRTUAL TOUR**

**Siti Mahera Ahmat Amin**

Pensyarah, Fakulti Pengurusan Hospitaliti dan Pelancongan,  
Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka

**Hartini Adenan**

Pensyarah, Fakulti Pengurusan Hospitaliti dan Pelancongan,  
Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka

**Dina Syamilah Zaid**

Pensyarah, Fakulti Pengurusan Hospitaliti dan Pelancongan,  
Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka

**Dziela Muhamad Parid**

Pensyarah, Fakulti Pengurusan Hospitaliti dan Pelancongan,  
Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka

*Corresponding Author's Email: sitimahera@kuim.edu.my*

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**ABSTRACT**

COVID 19 brought the global tourism industry to a standstill started March 2020. In response, many of the tourism players has upgrade their services to stay in touch with their clients. One of the innovative approach which is the Virtual Tour (VT) has become the most popular option among the hospitality players especially the tourism sectors whereas this approach is believe to be the best alternative for the visitors. This conceptual paper has integrated the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) models to determine the factors that affect a person's decision to adopt VTs as temporary alternatives during times of crises. Data were collected from the focus group that already experience the VTs at any tourism spots to gather the response from those tourists in order to occupy with the implementation of any VTs among the tourism stakeholders in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** *virtual tour, tourist experience, virtual reality*

## **ABSTRAK**

### **MENGENAL PASTI RESPON PELANCONG TERHADAP JELAJAH MAYA**

*COVID 19 menyebabkan industri pelancongan global terhenti bermula Mac 2020. Sebagai tindak balas, ramai pengamal pelancongan telah menambah baik perkhidmatan mereka untuk terus berhubung dengan pelanggan mereka. Salah satu pendekatan inovatif ialah Jelajah Maya (VT) menjadi pilihan paling popular dalam kalangan pemain hospitaliti khususnya sektor pelancongan di mana pendekatan ini diyakini menjadi alternatif terbaik untuk pengunjung. Kertas konsep ini telah menyepadukan model Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) untuk menentukan faktor yang mempengaruhi keputusan seseorang untuk menggunakan VT sebagai alternatif sementara semasa krisis. Data dikumpul daripada kumpulan fokus yang pernah mengalami VT di mana-mana tempat pelancongan untuk mengumpul maklum balas daripada pelancong tersebut bagi memenuhi pelaksanaan VT di kalangan pihak berkepentingan pelancongan di Malaysia.*

*Kata kunci : jelajah maya, pengalaman pelancong, realiti maya*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The spread of COVID-19 throughout the world had given the nightmare to the tourism industry as whole include in Malaysia. Many tourism stakeholders were affected due to this pandemic. The implementation of the first Movement Control Order started on March 2020 has brought the tourism industry in Malaysia to a standstill. Many innovative approaches had been adopted by the tourism players in order to keep the visitor's attention toward their tourist attractions (El Said & Aziz, 2021). According to Khalid Harun (2021) as the President of the Association of Malaysian Travel Agencies (MATA, the tourism sector is advised to try and explore the usage of virtual 3d tour which is already widely used by other countries as an effort to pull back the tourist to involve in the tourism sector and experience the new norm of tour activities during the pandemic.

In response, various tourism stakeholders has been practicing various of approaches include the virtual tours (VTs) to keep their attractions firmly in the minds of potential visitors. The virtual tour nowadays no longer the new thing for the Malaysian tourism players since some of them already make use of this kind of experience as the new approach in their marketing tools. It was said that virtual tour or virtual reality play a key role in tourist experience and behavior, such as interplanetary voyages, trips to fantasy worlds, sporting events, and large theme parks (Dewailly, 1999).

In the offline world, the tourist tend to visit destinations based on the travel motivation studies includes consumer motivation, decision making, product satisfaction, overall acceptability of holiday experiences, pleasure in the vacation environment and the interaction with local inhabitants. As now everyone need to practice social distancing, opportunities for travel and new experiences can feel limited hence all the tourism operators should consider putting little creativity and assistance from technology to convince the tourists that travel isn't always be physical but by having the virtual tour experience from home also can bring in an interesting moments.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Some studies on virtual tour have paid attention to the tourist behavior, such as enjoyment of virtual tour content and the choice of a destination portrayed in virtual tour. Myung, Lee and Jung (2018) believe that although the virtual tour technology has demonstrated its capability and potential as a useful marketing tool, more theoretical studies on tourist responses toward the virtual tour are necessary to identify which factors affecting the tourist experience during the virtual tour that they presented to get their confidence in using this platform.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Evidences from many empirical studies found out that most of researchers highlighted on the impact of the virtual reality technologies on tourist experience yet lack of studies were found when it comes to the factors that should be considered by the tourism stakeholders when they decide to make use of the virtual tour technology as the new norm due to the COVID 19 outbreak.

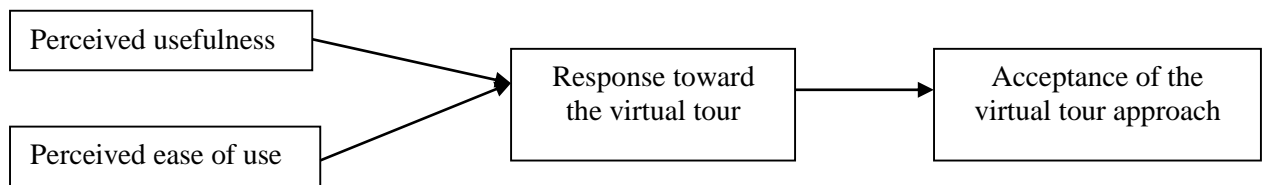
### ***Virtual tour***

Different economic sectors reacted differently to the crisis, the most interesting of which was the travel and tourism sector, which had always relied on tourist desires for novelty and firsthand experiences. Somehow, Osman and Heba (2021) agreed that the only way that the tourism sectors can survive throughout this outbreak situation is by investing in technological innovation—in other words, virtual tours (VTs) became the only product that cultural and heritage attractions could offer during the pandemic. William and Hobson (1995) define virtual reality as the act of using the three-dimensional (3D) world of an innovative technology, is formed via a combination of visual, kinetic, and audio elements so that users can actually experience a real object from a tourist perspective.

Stainton (2021) propose the definition of virtual tour in the simplest form is the tourist watch the tourist destination video provided and response effectively toward it. Meanwhile Osman and his partner (2021) interpret that virtual tour may be define to few other statements and thus lacks a generally accepted definition but best it can be described as a simulation of an existing location that is composed of a sequence of video images.

For the Malaysian tourist, virtual tour is still considered a new approach for them unlike the Westerners whose likely seem more particular and concerned on the virtual reality approach. Due to the pandemic since March 2020, the Malaysian had turned out their focus to this kind of approach whereby they can entertain themselves from their own living area with the family, furthermore the Movement Control Order that continuously had been implemented by Malaysia National Security Council with few months gap in between.

Huang et al (2016) confidence that the virtual world can benefits the stakeholders well by offering vast of experience to get the tourist engagement with the tourism destination. The operators that succeeded in get the great engagement from their online visitors surely will attract them to visit in real after the MCO ended ant the travel industry went back to normal. Somehow it seems difficult to find out what makes the clients feel satisfied and response well toward the virtual tour that the operators had offered. In this research, the researcher decides to use the TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) theory proposed by Fred Davis (1989) as guideline to address the gap in the literature by examining user's motivation which also influence engagement to the virtual tour experience which in return will motivate them to visit the destination in reality soon. The proposed theoretical framework stated as below:



Based on the above illustrated framework, researchers viewed all three factors: perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and response toward the virtual tour. According to Mohammad (2009), he believes that response toward the VT was a main determinant of whether the tourist will actually accept this kind of approach or either not.

#### ***Interrelationship between perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use in predicting tourist response***

There are only few related studies were found on the importance of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use in predicting the tourist response or behavior. As reported by Mohammad (2009) high correlation existed between these two variables whereby his statement has been supported by other researchers as well. The same researcher also proposed that potential users will select and use information reports based on a trade off between perceived usefulness and ease of use. In another study in the medical field, the researchers pointed out that the patients kindly detected the ease of use referring to participants` level of computer anxiety and self-efficacy. While for another variable which is perceived usefulness referring to the benefits that they might be getting from the system that they were currently using (Portz, Bayliss, Bull, Boxer, Bekelman, Gleason and Czaja, 2019). These two variables obviously indicated as important in getting the tourist response when experiencing the virtual tour.

#### ***Interrelationship between the response and the acceptance***

Portz and his other teammates (2019) points out that the participants response were influenced by the two variables mentioned above and once they have acquired the bad or good response from the system they were experiencing, it surely will lead to the acceptance or rejection of this kind of approach. Although tourism industry aware that this kind of marketing approach still new thing for them, but somehow this research will help them to realize what to be improvised in practicing this approach widely.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Methods for collecting literature*

This conceptual paper is based solely on a review and analysis of research and data from previous empirical studies. For the literatures, researched reviewed several journals and found out there were few researchers that have done a good write up and producing relevant journals that may be as the main reference for constructing this conceptual paper. Other methods that being used was the google search engine and also the digital books that can be found online.

### *Data collection for future research*

To proceed with this research, a qualitative study will be used and the population to be studied would be the respondents that already experience any virtual tour as the focus group. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure the background of our sample will be relevant. For ethical reasons, participants will be asked to read and sign a consent form stating that they willingly participated in the study and that any answers provided will be used as data and compiled into a report. The participants will also be informed that participation in the survey is completely confidential and voluntary and they are free to leave at any time.

## **FINDINGS FROM LITERATURE**

Literatures found were very helpful in assisting the researcher to understand this conceptual paper very well and lead the researcher to some meaningful findings. Based on the empirical studies, it was found that its agreeable that the perceived of usefulness and the perceived ease of use are the important factors in influencing the virtual tour users hence turn them to a repeat customer or either only one time customer for the tourism stakeholders.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Referred to the literatures, some of the recommendations for the future research are stated below:

Recommendation 1: Other researchers that might be interested to conduct the similar study might be thinking to change another theory model since some researchers questioned on the possibility of determining the tourist response and behaviors by adding up those two variables in the framework

Recommendation 2: It would be interesting to investigate the participants that considered as non users referring to those who never participate with virtual tour so that it will give better input to this research study

These are some of the recommendations for the future researchers that interested with this topic, which was not possible in this study because of time constraints.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings above led me to draw a conclusion and make recommendation for future research. It is obvious that the combination of those three factors mentioned in the above framework got positive correlation with the tourist response or behaviors in experiencing the VT (Virtual tour). The tourism industry should no longer hesitate to utilize the virtual tour approach since this is one of the way for the stakeholders to survive and tap new markets with the new norm condition at the moment.

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