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## Destination Management Organization (DMO) Website Features: Does Its Influence Users' Intention To Visit A Destination?

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### Abstract

This paper examines the influence of Destination Management Organization (DMO) website features toward the intention of users to visit a destination. Using the quantitative approach, the experience of individuals who had browsed DMO website was tapped and through online surveys, 213 questionnaires were successfully collected. Through a series of analyses; frequency, descriptive and regression analysis, some useful insights on the issue investigated was obtained. The findings clearly revealed that the DMO website features; informativeness, design and interactivity significantly contributed to the prediction of the users' intention to visit a destination. These scenarios undoubtedly drawn several practical implications

**Keywords:** Destination Management Organization (DMO), Website Features, Intention

### Introduction

Destination website in addition to the other options such as social media, brochures, guidebooks, and travel agents, is one of the mediums for visitors and tourists in particular to get information about a destination that they want to visit. The Destination Management Organization (DMO) is a strategic pioneer in destination creation whose primary role is to develop and work on all destination components (marketing, attraction, convenience, access, and pricing) (Estêvão et al., 2020). The existence of the internet has commended the DMO to make their websites as a mechanism in promoting destinations to the tourists. Web marketing is an important and efficient way for DMOs to promote their destinations while lowering marketing costs (Kumar et al., 2021).

Visitors or tourists who have a specific objective for traveling will usually browse travel related websites to get information about the destination (Jeon et al., 2017b). Given that, functional website features such as information, design, and interactivity are presented to understand the user perceptions. In line with this, the informativeness refers to the ability of websites to offer useful and necessary information to the user on the accuracy and utility of the destination

(Choi et al., 2016). Design, on the other hand is concerned with creating an orderly and good aesthetic presence for the website to enhance the user experience (Vila et al., 2021). In addition, interactivity is communication that involves interacting through an online platform (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019).

In Malaysia, almost every state has its own tourism website that aims to promote its attractions. Sabah as one of the 14 states in Malaysia through the Sabah Tourism Board (STB) website was awarded as the Asia Pacific Tourism Board for the best website category from TravelMole in 2019 (Sabah Tourism Board, 2019). TravelMole aims to recognize and give credit to websites, social media, or smartphone applications used by Asia Pacific travel companies and destinations. In terms of applying their creative approach to design, graphics, photography, copywriting, and using online technology, TravelMole is a landmark for the tourism industry. The Sabah Tourism Board website is known as part of the DMO serves to provide support, especially on tourism activities such as business events, promotions, and destination marketing.

In line with that, users who have the intention to travel usually visit travel-related websites to find detail information about the destination (Jeon et al., 2017a). Information retrieval is important for tourists to choose a destination and it is crucial to understand the style of tourist looking for travel information (Arif & Du, 2019). Not only that, the design that organized and appealing appearance of the website can increase user experience. Hamid et al. (2017) mentioned that website information quality and design both may have high importance to the users to build interest in the destination. This includes the interactivity elements that greatly improve virtual interaction about the destination and stimulate interest toward the destination (Hamid et al., 2017; Bogicevic et al., 2019). Based on suggestions by the WTO and the ECT (2008), interactivity is one of the significant factors for developing a good tourism website. In this respect, some scholars include interactivity as a measurement variable for assessing the efficiency or adequacy of destination websites (Gonzalez & Cavia, 2015; Türker, 2020).

Based on the preceding idea, one major question arises, to what extent that the informativeness, design and interactivity of the DMO website influence users' intention to visit a particular destination? Following this, it is argued that these attributes or features of the websites may carry different influences on the users' travel intention. Based on the literature, many available studies have focused on general websites and travel intention and were mostly conducted in other parts of the world. However, there is a lack of research on travel websites and travel intention in Sabah, despite the fact that Sabah is one of Malaysia's most popular tourist destinations, particularly for marine, nature, and cultural tourism (Hamid et al., 2017; Chong et al., 2018). Thus, in order to fill the void, this study empirically investigates the influence of Sabah Tourism Board website features on users' intentions to visit the state as a tourist destination, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic. The framework of the study is illustrated in Figure 1.

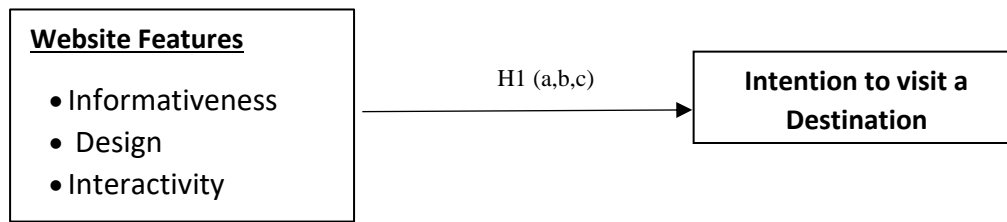


Figure 1: Study framework

The relationship between the variables of interests (independents against dependent variable) are conjectures through one main hypothesis and three sub-hypotheses.

*H1: Website features influence users' intention to visit a particular destination*

*H1a: Website informativeness influence users' intention to visit a particular destination*

*H1b: Website design influence users' intention to visit a particular destination*

*H1bc: Website interactivity influence users' intention to visit a particular destination*

## Literature Review

### DMO Website

Websites have become one of the most effective communication platforms for sending information to the potential tourists. There are many types of websites, such as portal pages, travel agent websites, online group sites, public institution sites, and others. This also includes tourism-related websites that focus on the exchange of information between various users in the field of tourism. Tourism related websites are divided into two groups known as tourism authority websites and travel websites (Vila et al., 2018). The tourism authority website is the official tourism organization platform that encourages people to visit destinations, places of interest, or tourist regions. Travel websites on the other hand, are media that provide local travel services such as transportation, day trip services, hotels, restaurants and many more to replace destination management companies. The function of a travel website is to provide information related to the destination to the local and international tourists. Through travel websites, tourists can book transportation, day trip facilities, restaurants and hotels (Xue & Zhang, 2020).

Online travel information resources are divided into four groups (No & Kim, 2015). First, are personal or travel blogs and internet cafes that provide information on travel products such as itineraries, accommodations, and restaurants. Second, are tourism business or travel websites such as travel agencies, airlines and hotels. Third, are websites for social media such as Twitter, Facebook or Instagram. Fourth, are the websites of tourism-related agencies such as the Tourism Association, local governments, and the DMO.

The main function of DMO is to supply reliable information and provide an indirect experience to potential tourists (Jeon et al., 2017b; Kullada & Kurniadjie, 2020). DMO created websites as an advertising tool to promote destinations and as a basic tool to convey information about destinations to tourists (Jeon et al., 2017b). With a DMO website, marketers can use the useful details and clear formats to advertise and visually attract various potential visitors. This is because DMO strategies and mechanisms are varies in which one of them is to provide information that enable to increase the number of the potential tourists (No & Kim, 2015).

## **Website Features**

Generally, online features help in improving the web user's browsing experience by giving significant information, a sense of pleasure and the chance to connect with the product or service operators (Liao et al., 2021). These aspects develop a special relationship between features of the destination website and tourist's tendency to visit the destination (Zhou et al., 2019). Functional website features like informativeness, design, and interactivity are shown to provide user impressions towards the website (Kim et al., 2019). For example, informativeness elements help to meet the user's needs on the navigation information about the destination (Jeon et al., 2017b; Gao & Bai, 2014).

Design elements on the other hand aid in the navigation experience (Jeon et al., 2017b; Knogler, 2020). Pallud and Straub (2014) identified that the elements of destination websites such as the context of information, services, design, and content on the website can satisfy the potential tourists and this can stimulate their interest to visit a destination. Thus, the behaviour of travel buying decisions online can be predicted by website characteristics and to be an important factor in evaluating the browsing experience of websites.

In terms of the online aspect, interactivity refers to the interactions involving peoples and computer networks that are able to respond to the needs and wants of the tourists. Websites should provide users with interactivity capacity in obtaining the information that they need and simplify the booking process, connecting and supporting with customer service (Jeon et al., 2017a; Oh & Sundar, 2015).

## **Informativeness of DMO Website**

Informativeness features in DMO websites are described as the ability to deliver the relevant information of destination to the potential tourists (Choi et al., 2016). In the decision-making process, before travel, tourists normally need the information to choose a destination and services in terms of accommodation, transportation, activities and tour packages. According to Jeon et al (2017b), tourists who have the potential to visit the destination usually have task-oriented objective, such as searching specific destination information through tourism websites to obtain intended information. Due to this, the accuracy of the information on the DMO website would have an indirect effect on the user's intentions to visit a destination (Chung et al., 2015).

Jeong and Shin (2019) clarified tourists will learn more about what, when, who and how to select the destination when they are searching or browsing information through the website. Thus, travel and tourism websites will provide information on the attractions (Putra et al., 2018). Not only that, based on the tourists' ability and preference, they may make a change in terms of tourism matters such as services, locations, or rates. As stated by Zhang et al. (2018) the DMO website needs to include information that could be useful and up-to-date to encourage engagement of potential tourists during the information-seeking phase. The website can satisfy the users' demand by providing other website link options to accommodate the information-seeking process.

## **Design of DMO Website**

In general, the design of a tourism website consists of a systematic and attractive appearance that has been found to enhance the user flow experience (Chung et al., 2015). This is because

the effectiveness and attractiveness of the website attract users to explore the website in depth. A well-designed website can make the navigation experience easier by using well-prepared information, images, and visual elements. Therefore, website design is very important to create a state of psychological immersion and increase the probability of users staying longer on the website (McDowell et al., 2016; Visinescu et al., 2015). Not only that, website design features are crucial in getting a positive response which leads to enjoyment and playfulness effect (Hasan, 2016).

Evaluation of visual aspects such as the interface and graphics of a website creates a streamlined for user experience. Munar and Jacobsen (2014) revealed the form of destination website design can ensure tourists' interest in the destination. The visual factors need to be measured as the potential tourists create the destination image through the website where the initial information and the image are provided. Moreover, well-designed travel websites can attract users' attention and influence interest toward a destination (Türker, 2020; Pallud & Straub, 2014).

### **Interactivity of DMO Website**

Interactivity is the interaction between two or more parties in an online communication network (Hamid et al., 2017). In the tourism sector, to connect with potential visitors, the DMO website has been used as an innovative method to create engaging virtual tourism experiences. This can create the intention of the tourists to visit the destination. This is because the interactivity of tourism websites may be a one-way flow of information that changes between visitors and organizations through interactive communication (Jeon et al., 2017b). In addition, prospective tourists will have virtual experiences, such as viewing panoramas, animations and interactive photos without going to the destination (Jung et al., 2015). This is considered part of the tourism organization's efforts to improve the experience of future visitors. As a result, more travel DMOs have used the opportunity to create their websites and add an interactive virtual experience element to their potential visitors (Chung et al., 2017). In addition, the DMO website has periodically updated the contents to allow users to post and exchange travel-related feedback, comments, opinions, and personal experiences that can then be used as information for others. For this reason, the interactivity features of the website have become a significant element for establishing a flow state of customer communication online medium (Kim et al., 2019).

### **DMO Website Influence Intention to Travel**

Intentions to travel are articulated and studied within the scope of travel behaviours, which are considered part of a complex decision-making and process. This process, perhaps involves various determinants and interrelated components (Hennessey et al., 2016). The tendency of tourists to engage with destinations is considered as a key condition for engagement in tourism activities. Thus, tourists' engagement with destinations in the pre-travel phase determines the probability of the actual engagement behaviour at the location (Zhang et al., 2018). It is assumed that by withholding other factors continuously, exposure to destination marketing campaigns such as advertisements and the effectiveness of a website is more likely to increase the intention to travel to the destination (Hennessey et al., 2016).

DMO websites need to understand and deliver successful experiences on their websites as it can influence tourist satisfaction and ability to memorize input and visual (Franzoni & Bonera,

2019; Ali et al., 2016). The information on the DMO website indirectly influences people's intentions to visit the destination (Molinillo et al., 2016; Chung et al., 2015). However, other researchers argued that websites that have good information can only convince and motivate tourists to visit certain destinations (Nugraha & Sudirman, 2019). Due to this, the display of clear basic information about the destination website is the most effective method of persuading a visit.

Basically, a destination website is one of the platforms for prospective tourists to make a first impression about a destination. Low-quality tourism websites may cause potential tourists to seek other sources of information or even change their preferred destination (Nugraha & Diryana, 2019). As mentioned by Rahnamai et al (2015), DMO websites are very important as a system of marketing that facilitates and attract tourists to visit destinations. In fact, the quality of destination websites has been considered an important desire in the intentions and attitudes of tourists (Barreto & Martínez, 2018).

### **Research Methodology**

This study proposed a causal relationship between website features toward the intention of users to visit the state as a tourist destination. Thus, the quantitative approach and survey questionnaire was opted for data collection. As this study explicitly focuses on Sabah Tourism Board Website, the population and unit of analysis were among those who browsed this website and had never visited Sabah but had the intention to visit after the Covid-19 Pandemic ended. Non-probability sampling method with convenience sampling was applied as the best method in obtaining the basic information quickly and efficiently.

The survey instrument comprises five sections in which section A is related to informativeness features of the website and section B dealing with design features. Items in these sections mostly adapted from (Jeon et al., 2017b; Chang and Chen, 2008). Section C dealt with the interactivity features while section D covers the intention to visit a destination. Items in these sections were directly adapted from (Jeon et al., 2017b; Giannopoulos and Mavragani, 2011). The demographic profile of the respondents is probed in section E. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree was utilized. The survey items used simple words and language to reduce any potential ambiguities. A pilot study was conducted to verify and confirm the reliability and validity of the items used. Cronbach's alpha reliability test was operationalized, and the instruments were confirmed as valid and reliable for actual data collection.

The data collected from the subject is undertaken via online survey using Qualtrics, a web-based software. The potential respondents were identified through researchers' friends and connections. The survey was carried out with the procedures. The direct link of Qualtrics survey was given to the respondents through social media such as WhatsApp and Telegram. The respondents are posted with screening questions as to whether they have ever visited the Tourism Sabah Website and have visited Sabah before. This is to ensure the respondents meet the criteria set by the researchers. Those met the criteria required to explore the site and subsequently have to complete the questionnaire based on their overall experience browsing the website. A total of two hundred thirteen (213) completed questionnaires were successfully collected. The data were then coded and keyed using a Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS).

## Findings

### Respondent Profiles

The majority of respondents were females with 44.1 percent (n=94) against 55.9 percent (n=119) of males. 59.6 percent (n=127) were single followed by 35.2 percent (n=75) married and 5.2 percent (n=11) were divorced. 49.3 percent (n=105) were between 21-30 years old, followed by 30.0 percent (n=64) between 31-40 age group, 14.6 percent (n=31) in between 41-50 age group, 3.3 percent (n=7) between 50 and above and 2.6 percent (n=6) under 20 years old. 65.3 percent (n=139) were public and private employees followed by 21.6 percent (n= 46) students and 12.2 percent were self-employed.

### Descriptive Statistic

A descriptive statistic was undertaken on the independent variables and the dependent variable. Table 1 shows the result.

Table 1

#### *Descriptive Statistic*

Item	Items	M	S.D
<b>Informativeness</b>			
INFO1	This website supplies relevant	4.22	.909
INFO2	This website is informative about travel-related products	4.42	.795
INFO3	This website provides comprehensive information.	4.31	.765
INFO4	This website is not boring	4.11	.660
INFO5	The website is pleasant to use	4.43	.673
<b>Design</b>			
DES 1	The design of this website makes it easier to look for information	4.23	.754
DES 2	This website looks attractive	4.24	.822
DES 3	The layout of this website is visually comforting	4.18	.776
DES 4	This website looks nice	4.17	.747
DES 5	The graphical elements (colours, pictures) on this website are visually appealing	4.37	.812
<b>Interactivity</b>			
INT1	I can download travel materials easily on this website	4.20	.742
INT2	This website tries to communicate through regular emails and newsletters	4.11	.774
INT3	On this website, I can quickly jump from one page to another	4.26	.872
INT4	I can choose which link and when to click on this website	4.25	.765
INT5	This website has a contact area	4.54	.754
<b>Intention to Visit a Destination</b>			
IVD1	The comprehensive information in the website influence me to visit Sabah after post Covid 19	4.37	.813
IVD2	The information about travel related products in the website influence me to visit Sabah after post Covid 19	4.34	.856
IVD3	The colour and pictures provided on the website influence me to visit Sabah after post Covid 19	4.25	.777
IVD4	The design of the website appeals me to visit Sabah post Covid 19	4.28	.731



IVD5	The travel material that I can download from the website attract me to visit Sabah after post Covid 19	4.38	.761
IVD6	The communication through regular email and newsletters that provided in the website influence me to visit Sabah after post Covid 19	4.40	.724

Scale: 1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Slightly, 4= Agree, 5=Strongly agree

On the informativeness, the magnitude of the mean scores of the five items was between 4.11 to 4.43 indicates that most of the respondents agree with the information provided on the website. The mean scores ranging from 4.17 to 4.24 clearly indicated that respondents agreed with five items measuring the website's design features. In regard to interactivity features, the majority of respondents agreed with all the items probes with the mean scores ranging from 4.11 to 4.54. Lastly, the six items measuring the intention to visit a destination. Sabah in particular produced the mean score ranging from 4.25 to 4.38 which indicates that respondents agreed with the statement in the items.

### Hypotheses Testing

#### Website Features and Users' Intention to Visit a Destination

In response to the objective and to test the hypotheses, regression analysis was utilised. Regression analysis investigates and models the relationship between the variables of interest. A linear relationship is assumed between a dependent or response variable Y of interest and one or several independent, predictor or regressor variables. One main hypothesis and three sub-hypotheses were tested. Table 2 below show the regression analysis output of the main hypothesis.

Table 2

*Regression Analysis between Website Features and Intention to Travel*

Predictor	Website Features
DV: Intention to visit the destination	.324***
R <sup>2</sup>	.727
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.725
R <sup>2</sup> Change	.727
F – Change	560.805***

Note: \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

As a main hypothesis (H1), website features are able to explain 72.7 percent ( $R^2 = .727$ ,  $F$ -change = 560.805,  $p < .001$ ) of the observed variance in users' intention to visit a destination. The Beta value ( $\beta = .324$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) demonstrated that website features (informativeness, design and interactivity) significantly contributed to the prediction of the users' intention to visit a destination. This finding strengthens the notion made by Barreto and Martínez (2018) as well as Carlson and O'Cass (2011) that the website features not only giving significant information, but provide a sense of pleasure and the chance to connect with the products and service provided.

#### Informativeness and Users' Intention to Visit a Destination

This section analysis is to discover the relationship between Informativeness and users' intention to visit a particular destination. Table 3 shows the regression analysis output.

Table 3

*Regression Analysis between Informativeness and users' intention to visit a particular destination*

Predictor	Design
DV: Intention to visit the destination	.619***
R <sup>2</sup>	.444
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.441
R <sup>2</sup> Change	.444
F – Change	168.422***

Note: \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

On the first sub-hypothesis (H1a), regression analysis implies that informativeness able to explain 32.5 percent ( $R^2 = .325$ , F – Change = 102.051,  $p < .001$ ) of the variance in users' intention to visit a destination. The beta value ( $\beta = -.564$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) demonstrated that the informativeness as part website features influence users' intention to visit a destination. This is in line with previous researchers' notion that information about a destination can be processed by potential visitors from a variety of sources, including the website (Jeong et al., 2011). This result strongly supports Chung et al. (2015) that the content of the information on DMO websites directly influence the intentions of individuals to visit the destination.

#### **Website Design and users' intention to visit a destination**

For the second sub-hypothesis (H1b), the predictor variable is design of the DMO website and users' intention to visit a destination. Table 4 shows the regression analysis output.

Table 4

*Regression Analysis between design and users' intention to visit a destination*

Predictor	Infomativeness
DV: Intention to visit the destination	.564***
R <sup>2</sup>	.325
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.323
R <sup>2</sup> Change	.326
F – Change	102.051

Note: \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

The result of the second sub hypothesis (H1a) shows that the design produced 44.4 percent ( $R^2 = .444$ , F-change =168.422,  $p < 0.001$ ) of the variance in users' intention to visit a destination. The value of ( $\beta = -.619$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) demonstrated that the design of the DMO website significantly influence users' intention to visit a destination. It means that the users are interested in the design features in the DMO website and this stimulate their intention to visit a destination. This result supports Chung et al (2015) that website design features affect the user's attitude towards the destination and develops the interest to visit a destination (Pourabedin & Biglari, 2020).

#### **Website Interactivity and Users' Intention to Visit a Destination**

In the fourth sub-hypothesis (H1c), the predictor variable is interactivity and users' intention to visit a destination as a criterion variable as depicted in Table 5.

Table 5

*Regression Analysis between interactivity and users' intention to visit a destination*

Predictor	Interactivity
DV: Intention to visit the destination	.685***
R <sup>2</sup>	.525
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.523
R <sup>2</sup> Change	.525
F – Change	233.353

Note: \*p &lt; 0.05, \*\*p &lt; 0.01, \*\*\*p &lt; 0.001

Referring to the third sub-hypothesis (H1c), interactivity able to explain 52.5 percent ( $R^2 = .525$ ,  $F - \text{Change} = 233.353$ ,  $p < .001$ ) of the variance in users' intention to visit a destination. The beta value ( $\beta = .685$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) shows that interactivity as part of website features has a positive impact on users' intention to visit a destination. This is concurred with Wu (2018) that the interactivity features such as contact sections, travel materials, communication tools can build users' first impression towards the destination before they have an actual visit to the destination. In addition, when the tourist engaged more with the DMO website, they will have a pleasant flow experience during the planning phase. Jeon et al (2017b) emphasized that high interactivity towards the website can make a pleasant flow experience for the user. The interactivity on the website not only can keep users' engagement but stimulate their interest in the destination.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Deriving from the hypotheses testing, this study able to shed lights in understanding the influence of DMO website features toward users' intention to visit a destination. In this context, the website features, namely website informativeness, design and interactivity evidently important in promoting the destination or a mechanism in stimulating destinations to the potential tourists. All those mentioned attributes exhibit a strong relationship with the users' intention to visit a destination. This indicates that the DMO websites becoming a significant platform not only for users to understand the products and services offered but spur their intention to visit a destination. These scenarios undoubtedly drawn the practical implications.

Since this paper specifically looking at the Sabah state tourism website, thus, it clearly portrays that this "Land Below the Wind State" is having an attractive website. In other words, Sabah Tourism Board website has gained recognition among the users. This is evident when the website informativeness, design, and interactivity not only able to attract users to visit or browsing but turn their perception into intention to visit. This is in line with Sabah in which having a glorious and magnificent tourism resources either on it nature marine resources, nature treasures, adventure and culture that give the local and international tourists opportunities of commencing the richness and diverse activities. With this, the state government authority and those closely associated with state tourism should not ignore the positive sign but must take a proactive action. The website managers or IT specialists who managing the websites should continuously upgrading the functionality, manage the website performance, facilitate hosting and server management, maintaining and update the website content. They must ensure that the graphic elements, image, themes and colours used for the website must be attractive and consistent to stimulate users' attention. The interactivity

features must also be enhanced as this is the communication or marketing tools for users to obtain information about the destination. This clearly strengthening the notion that websites that have good information can only convince and motivate users to visit or browsing and spend more time on it. As a conclusion, maintaining these elements definitely will portray a good image of Sabah in the eyes of the users as a potential visitor and in turn bringing revenue and income to the state through their actual visitation.

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