

## **MODELLING THE MALAYSIAN HERITAGE FOOD LOYALTY INTENTION: THE EFFECTS OF SUBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, AND SATISFACTION OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS' FOOD CULTURAL EXPERIENCE**

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### **Abstract**

Cultural heritage food experience holds a boundless impression on tourists' loyalty towards a tourism destination. To attract more international tourists to Malaysia, the role of Malaysian Heritage Food as the most valuable asset need to be expanded by safeguarding the uniqueness of the food culture from fading. Hence, this study aims to investigate international tourists' perspectives on Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF), delineate the dimensions of Subjective Knowledge, Perceived Importance of Malaysian Food Culture, and Food Culture Involvement and to scrutinize the significant effect of predictors on Loyalty Intention. Finally, to examine the mediating effect of Tourist Satisfaction on the association of Tourist Attitude and Loyalty Intention, quantitative survey was conducted via self-administered questionnaire. The Structural Equation Modeling was performed to examine the hypotheses which backbone by the Expanded Rational Expectations Intention model. Findings demonstrated that international tourists had consumed MHF. All the tested variables have significant effect on Loyalty Intention. Finally, this study assists to endure the unique Malaysian food culture and to strengthen Malaysia as a food tourism destination in the world.

**Keywords:** Malaysian Heritage Food, perspectives, international tourists, food culture, safeguarding.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Asian countries constitute more than 50% of the total international tourist arrivals as reported by World Tourism Organization (WTO) since 1995, and this was experienced at about 4% of annual growth. This total figure is expected to reach up to 1.5 billion by the year 2020 (Chung, 2004). According to Salleh (2009), tourism market is currently monopolized by Asia and the Pacific region and Malaysia is recognized by Tourism Malaysia to be the highest rank of international tourist arrivals compared to the other ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries. Besides, UNWTO/Global Tourism Economy Research Centre, (GTERC) (2016) also reported that Malaysia is one of the highest potential countries for tourism destination which was contributed at about 9.3% from the total number of international tourists' arrival to Asia

and Pacific region in 2015. Besides, tourism, travel, and visitation provides similar meaning of the actions taken by individuals for specific reasons. Tourism is described as doing special travelling activities outside individuals' ordinary atmosphere and escaping from daily routines for a certain period in less than a year (Prebensen, 2007). According to UNWTO (2013), Malaysia was ranked fourth as the most famous shopping and food destination in 2013. Due to the expected benefits of tourism industry gained by the national economy as stated in the National Key Economic Areas (NKEA), the government must give a serious attention towards this industry. Hence, the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia need to boost the tourism industry in attracting more tourists to choose this country as their primary destination for visiting.

In addition, the identity of a nation and its relationship with local or regional food establishment are no longer standing in isolation. Many researchers had raised thoughtful discussions on the issue of food culture as one of the Malaysian identity for tourism attraction (Jones and Jenkins, 2002; Boyne, Hall, and Williams, 2003). Thus, the colourful arrays of food in Malaysia has fabricated the image of a nation, reflecting the country's multiracial society sharing diverse food cultures. This was described by Suhaimi, Salehuddin, and Zahari (2014) as a form of silent story-telling told by the locals to the international societies. In addition, local food seizes its role to safeguard the tourism industry by maintaining the authenticity of a particular destination, amplifying the national economies, and has a pleasant, natural impact on the infrastructures (DuRand, et al., 2003). For years, international tourists come and visit Malaysia for many reasons; educational, recreational, cultural, business, and food (Clayton, 2002). One of the essential attributes in a destination that attracts most visitors is the regional food (Symons, 1999) as it has aesthetic values and a symbol of cultural beliefs (Ritchie and Zins, 1978). Furthermore, food culture is the antecedent in experiencing a culinary heritage. Kumar (2013b) affirmed the role of culture as a push motivator in guiding the tourists to experience a novel and authentic local cuisines. Everett and Aitchison (2008) also revealed that food tourism is able to enhance the identity of a region, conserve the cultural and heritage aesthetic values, and strengthen the sociocultural identity even if a community has to face with food globalization phenomenon.

Besides, it can be seen that food as the main element of promising source of income (Amuquandoh, 2011) and there are also several studies that were supported food as a strong predictor of attraction for the tourists' visit purposes (Kumar, 2013a; Mak et al., 2012a; Jalis, et al., 2009; Correia, Moital, Da Costa, and Peres, 2008). However, most of the researches were focused on the destination and marketing perspectives, but very little were focused on investigating tourism heritage culinary from the consumers' (international tourists) perspective. Therefore, more research should be conducted on the heritage food specifically on the importance of Malaysian Heritage Food that will contribute to the growth of immature literature on food tourism. Since literature addressing the issue of MHF in Malaysia's gastronomy adapting the consumer behaviour approach is still insufficient and the literature linked with the international tourist knowledge, as well as their attitude and perception on culinary are very few especially on Malaysia food tourism (Philips, Asperin, and Wolfe 2013), thus the realism of examining international tourist knowledge, attitude, and satisfaction as predictors for the willingness to revisit a destination is imperative to be revealed. In light of this, the extensive model suggested in this research is stemmed from the attitude-behavioural intention psychological approach (Ajzen and Fishben, 2001; Ajzen 1991).

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Food Cultural Experience in Tourism**

A country's image is typically represented by the exclusivity in various aspects including food culture (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Philips, Asperin, and Wolfe, 2013). Various attempts have been made worldwide in sustaining each country's heritage food so it can be a winning point from the perspective of international tourists (Omar et al., 2011). Among the countries with a strong image of food tourism are Italy, Thailand, France, Australia, Canada (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010), Hong Kong, and Singapore (Tsai and Horng, 2012). In Malaysia, it is undeniable that food has started to gain a significant attention in creating a strong reason for travellers to come and visit the country (Zakariah, Khuzaimah, and Mohamad, 2012). However, the image of Malaysia as a popular destination for food tourism is still perplexing because it is overshadowed by the country's image of pleasant nature, historical values, and amazing skyscrapers (Aziz and Zainol, 2009). Past literatures have shown that tourists do not simply come to Malaysia merely for the purpose of savouring the MHF. They are highly interested to visit the country due to other reasons, for instance enjoying the country's tourist attractions like the beaches, building and monuments, and for shopping purposes (Mat Som, Marzuki, Yousefi, and Abu Khalifeh, 2012). In order for Malaysia to be among the world's renowned food destinations besides Singapore and Thailand, the nation has to implement aggressive promotional strategies on heritage food because it is still lag far behind at the moment (Karim, Chua, and Salleh, 2010). Even though thousands of cuisines are offered to the local and international tourists, MHF is facing a serious problem in terms of lack

of promotional effort for commercialisation.

Apart from that, the existence of heritage food still fails to make Malaysia wins much attention among the international tourists especially for the first-time visitors. As contented by Elis (2009), the international tourists are in a state of catastrophe due to the perplexity towards the authenticity of local food in Malaysia. Seery (2010) also agreed that the authenticity and cultural values of heritage food of a destination are given lesser attention now, hence deteriorating the level of youngsters' culinary knowledge and their awareness of old-fashioned cuisines. This research must be able to fill in the gap by examining the tourists' knowledge on heritage food and to investigate the level of its popularity among tourists. Food is indeed a promising gizmo which represents local cultures and it has a huge potential in portraying a good image of a tourist destination. As tourists usually quench for authentic, novel, and popular food and beverages while on vacation (Seo, Kim, Oh, and Yun, 2013; Chang, Kivela, and Mak, 2010), they are keen to be involved with unique and memorable cultural food experiences from a destination. Furthermore, Seery (2010) mentioned that individuals choose certain destinations because of the cuisines available in those places. Although local cuisine is commonly utilised as an effective marketing tool for tourist attractions (Amira, 2009), the research on the significant role of food in attracting tourists is still deemed insufficient and has almost been ignored (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; DuRand et al., 2003). Besides, many countries always limit and ignore the perception of food as an attractive element in their countries from tourist perspectives (Boniface, 2003). As such, understanding tourist food consumption's behaviour is essential to provide tourists with memorable experience of MHF consumption and to promote Malaysia as an exciting global culinary destination.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is developed by adapting the modified Expanded Rational Expectations Intention (EREI) model created by Sapp (1991) as an appropriate tool. Pertaining to the scope of this study, the researchers had bordered the framework by only inspecting the attitude-intention relationship. Therefore, the theoretical framework of this study grounded on the modified EREI model by Sapp (1991) include (i) knowledge; (ii) belief; (iii) attitude; and (iv) intention.

### 2.2.1 Antecedents of Loyalty Intention

The determinants of loyalty intentions in consumer behavior and marketing studies have been investigated since decades ago. Although the drivers for loyalty intention are copious, this study would only examine the effect of attitude, perceived importance of food culture, food culture involvement, knowledge, and satisfaction since they are still under-research related to the proposed MHF loyalty intention model. Due to scope and limitation of the study, it seems unattainable to inspect all indicators concurrently in one research study. While satisfaction is always seen to be an important aspect in revenue generation and customer retention, (Kao et al., 2007; Smith and Wright, 2004), the mediating effect of satisfaction on attitude and loyalty intention relationship is necessary to be further explored which is one of the research contribution. A total of ten research hypotheses were outlined in the theoretical framework as illustrated in Fig. 1.

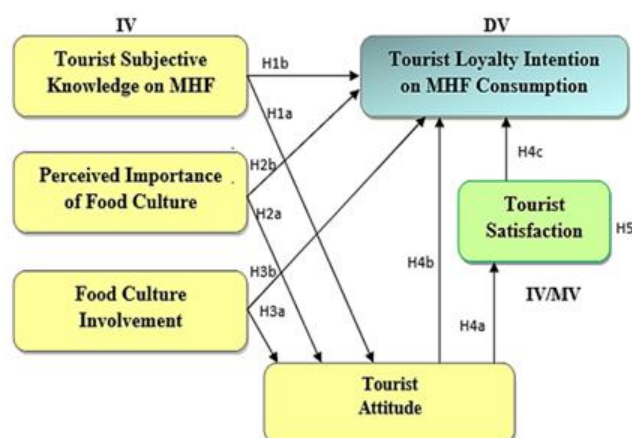


Fig. 1. Loyalty Intention Model with Ten Research Hypotheses

### 2.2.2 Relationship of Subjective Knowledge on Tourist Attitude and Loyalty Intention

In the study of food consumption, several studies have delineated the linkage between food, attitude, and

loyalty intention. The established linkage of knowledge and attitude is successfully supported by previous researchers. For instance, the importance of knowledge on sustainable organic food consumption was demonstrated by several scholars (Shariff, Amran, and Goh, 2012; Aertsens et al., 2011; Gracia and De Magistris, 2007), highlighting the significant association of knowledge with attitude and intention to consume organic food. Subjective knowledge was demonstrated to have a positive direct effect on consumer attitude towards consuming organic food in Flanders, Belgium (Aertsens et al., 2011). Pal (2012) stressed that high level of product knowledge will accelerate a positive attitude and forecast an optimistic behaviour compared to individuals with low level of knowledge. To the best of researcher's knowledge, no such empirical study has been explored that tests the relationship of international tourist's subjective knowledge on MHF. According to the statement, a pair of hypotheses advanced within this research are suggested: **Hypothesis 1a:** Subjective Knowledge has a significant effect on Tourist Attitude; **Hypothesis 1b:** Subjective Knowledge has a significant effect on Loyalty Intention.

### *2.2.3 Relationship of Perceived Importance of Food Culture on Attitude and Loyalty Intention*

The importance of food culture in tourism that shapes tourists' behavioural intention is a phenomenal issue that has gained considerable attention and application in behavioural research, tourism sector, and marketing (Nam and Lee, 2011). However, research on the perceived importance of Malaysian food culture is still limited especially related to food tourism. The linkage between culture and intention has been proved positively by Liu, Furrer, and Sudharshan (2001) in a study that investigate the relationship between culture and behavioural intention towards services. Furthermore, as elucidated by Yasami (2013), tourist perception of Iranian culture has a positive relationship on the intention to visit Iran. Also, Omar, Omar, and Karim (2014) observed a positive intention to repurchase halal food among Muslim tourists in Malaysia as a result of high level on perceived importance towards halal criteria. For that rationale, subsequent hypotheses are delivered to fill in the research gaps: **Hypothesis 2a:** Perceived Importance of Food Culture has a significant effect on Tourist Attitude; **Hypothesis 2b:** Perceived Importance of Food Culture has a significant effect on Loyalty Intention.

### *2.2.4 Relationship of Food Culture Involvement on Attitude and Loyalty Intention*

The postulation of tourists' immersion with the destination's food culture can reflect their attitude and intention such as repeat visitation, repurchase of food, loyalty, and recommendation to family and friends. A study by Shen, Schüttemeyer, and Braun (2009) that explored tourist intention to visit Suzhou demonstrated that the involvement of cultural tour has an incredible influence on intention. Moreover, Shenoy (2005) claimed that in-depth involvement of cultural food in the tourists' travelling experiences would enhance their hedonic attitude upon consumption and help them accomplish a pleasurable experience. Thus, it is assumed that the more international tourists get involved in MHF cultural practices, the more they are likely to have a positive attitude which directly stimulates their loyalty intention to either repurchase MHF or revisit Malaysia to savour MHF in the near future. In this case, two plausible hypotheses are proposed: **Hypothesis 3a:** Food Culture Involvement has a significant effect on Tourist Attitude; **Hypothesis 3b:** Food Culture Involvement has a significant effect on Loyalty Intention.

### *2.2.5 Relationship of Attitude on Satisfaction and Loyalty Intention*

The relationship of attitude, past experience, and perceived value on satisfaction was established by Kozak and Rimmington (2000) in a study investigating tourist satisfaction in Mallorca, Spain. In food tourism, tourists' attitude upon experiencing food has played a big role in measuring and predicting the overall tourist satisfaction with their holiday (Handerson, 2009; Corigliano and Antonioli, 2002; Neild, Kozak, and LeGrys, 2000). Moreover, as mentioned in Shenoy (2005), satisfaction on the tourist attractions is higher when the tourists have hedonic attitude which motivate them seeking for authentic cuisines. In Rajesh (2013), attitude is one of the promising elements which has a relationship with tourist satisfaction. However, attitude cannot solely stand when foreseeing individual behavioural intention. Numerous findings have been reported on the attitude and behaviour relationship (Huang, 2007; Ryu and Jang, 2006). Ryu and Jang (2006) also have successfully demonstrated a significant effect of attitude towards intention to consume local food and beverages. Similarly, the relationship between tourist attitude and revisit intention is positive (Lee, 2010; Thomas, Quintal, and Phau, 2010). Lee (2010) discovered that food attitude was found to have a positive association with intention to eat ethnic food and intention to visit a destination. Due to the fact that "attitude influences purchases only through intention" (Bray, 2008, p. 436), attitude construct is important in predicting intention in the proposed model which align with Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) TRA that established a direct relationship between attitude and intention. Owing to the statements, two delineated propositions are as follows: **Hypothesis 4a:** Tourist Attitude has a significant effect on Tourist Satisfaction; **Hypothesis 4b:** Tourist Attitude has a significant effect on Loyalty Intention.

### 2.2.6 Tourist Satisfaction and Loyalty Intention

The satisfaction-loyalty relationship has been widely established in various field of study especially in consumer behaviour. There are many references linking food as part of tourist satisfaction that have been meticulously documented (Arasl and Baradarani, 2014; Smith and Costello, 2009; Hall and Mitchell, 2000). For instance, Arasl and Baradarani (2014) examined the significant effect of Jordan's local cuisines to the European tourists while Smith and Costello (2009) conducted the importance of performance analysis on food tourism satisfactions. As demonstrated by Tran (2011), tourist satisfaction has a positive significant relationship with loyalty intention to revisit and recommend Nha Trang, Vietnam. Also, a study investigating the effect of tourist satisfaction also established a positive significant effect towards predicting the intention to revisit Sun Moon Lake, Taiwan (Kuo, 2011). Hence, the stated empirical evidences affirming the strong linkage between tourist satisfaction and loyalty intention has led the researchers to propose the following hypothesis: **Hypothesis 4c**: Tourist Satisfaction has a significant effect on Loyalty Intention.

### 2.2.7 Tourist Satisfaction as Mediating Variable

Besides performing as independent variable, tourist satisfaction also serves as a mediator that mediates the attitude-intention association. It is expected that tourist positive attitude will have a strong intention to become loyal if they are satisfied based on previous findings. Earlier finding by Oliver (1977) established the positive linkage between attitude and satisfaction, which was later supported by Shipp (2013), and Czepiel and Rosenberg (1977). The scholars addressed the fact that satisfied customers are driven by the feeling of positivity in their experiences of consuming certain products or services. Furthermore, satisfaction construct is established as a mediator between attitude and intention (Li, 2007). However, this study did not clarify the effect of satisfaction although it was proven to have a strong relationship with both attitude and intention. Thus, the researchers had decided to appreciate satisfaction as mediating effect in the model hence the following hypothesis is drawn: **Hypothesis 5**: Tourist Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Tourist Attitude and Loyalty Intention.

## 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this research, the group of interest was international tourists who matched the following selection criteria: (1) international tourists above 18 years old; (2) international tourists who stayed in Malaysia for at least 24 hours (Choi, Chan, and Wu, 1999) but no more than one consecutive year (Williams, 2004; WTO, 2001) and conforming to the specific requirements in the screening questions; (3) international tourists who experienced MHF while in Malaysia and (4) international tourists who could understand English language. Next, purposive sampling is acknowledged that corresponds to the respondents' opinions and experiences in the pertinent issue (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2000). A total of 1000 questionnaires were administered to the target respondents meanwhile the response rate for this survey was 71.9%. Thus, this value is claimed to be imperative and reliable by Johnson and Owen (2003) as 80% is claimed to be the benchmark for the most perfect response rate. Next, Structured Equation Modeling (SEM) via AMOS version 21 was employed to analyze the causal relationships among these constructed models to establish MHF as a predictor of tourism attraction.

## 4 FINDINGS

### 4.1 Model Fitness and Unidimensionality

Fig. 2 shows the constructed pooled measurement model after it is subjected to the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) procedure for model fitness accomplishment. The researchers had decided to incorporate Root Mean Square of Error Approximation (RMSEA) and Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) for the Absolute Fit, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) are chosen for the Incremental fit category and Chi Sq/df has been elected for the final category that is Parsimonious Fit. The fitness indexes for the measurement model achieved from the pooled CFA (PCFA) procedure are presented in Fig. 2.

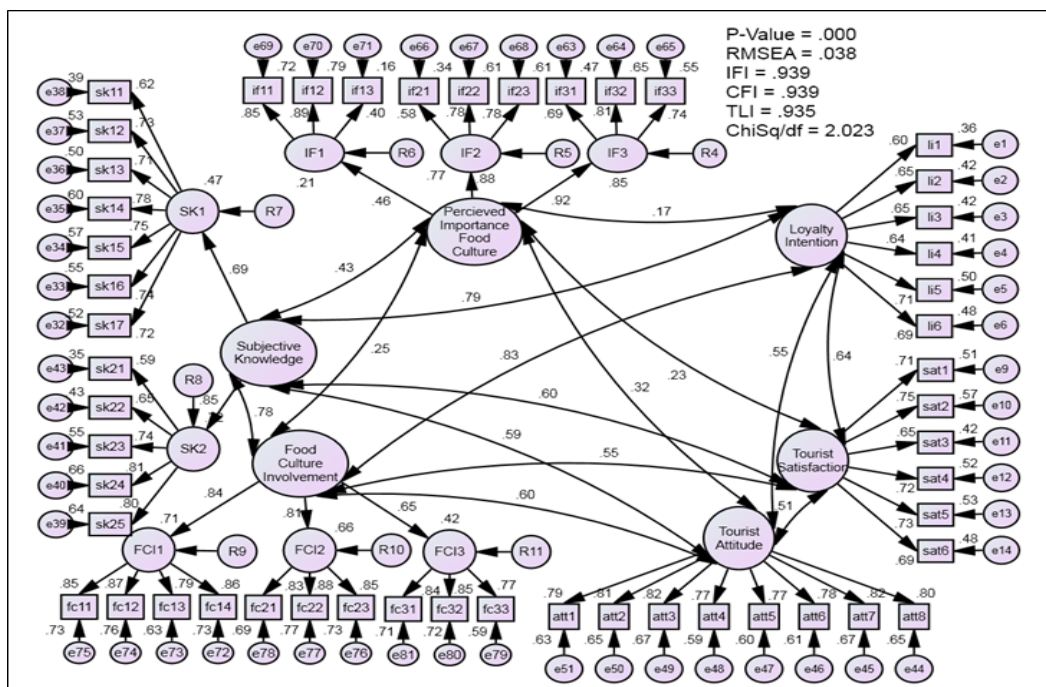


Fig. 2 Results of CFA Show the Factor Loading for Items and Component

Besides, the RMSEA value has satisfactorily achieved the required level which is .038. This index is claimed as “the most informative criteria in co-variance structure modeling” (Byrne, 2010, p.80) as it could explicate the error of estimated population co-variance matrix. The same goes to the IFI, CFI and TLI indexes whereby all of them have achieved the required level with index values of .939, .939 and .935 respectively. For the Chisq/df index, it is reported to have a value less than 3.0 which is 2.023. Indisputably, since the PCFA does not account for unidimensionality requirement once it has achieved the model fitness (Zainudin, 2012), no modification and item deletion have been made and all items have positive factor loadings as the indication of unidimensionality. Hence, the entire fitness indexes have achieved the desired values in the sense that the measurement model has adequately fitted the data and achieved both unidimensionality and construct validity (Zainudin, 2015). Then, the measurement model has to undergo the validity and reliability assignment after completing the model fitness evaluation.

## 5 CONCLUSION

To summarise, analysis of the results show all the formulated hypotheses are supported with the exception of H4b. H1a and H1b were supported that could reveal that Subjective knowledge has a significant effect on Tourist Attitude and Loyalty Intention. The causal relationship has been found to be significant for H2a and H2b which confirmed both these hypotheses propose the Perceived Importance of Food Culture as a significant effect on Tourist Attitude and Loyalty Intention. Meanwhile, Hypotheses H3a and H3b postulate that Food Culture Involvement has a significant effect on Tourist Attitude and Food Culture Involvement also has a significant effect on Loyalty Intention. Analysis revealed that Tourist Attitude has a significant effect on Tourist Satisfaction which approves hypothesis H4a. Later, it was found that Tourist Satisfaction has a significant effect on Loyalty Intention and thus supports the hypothesis H4c. Despite this, hypothesis H4b which proposes Tourist Attitude on Loyalty Intention is not supported. This finding seems inconsistent with the previous studies. The insignificant result can be explained by the introduction of satisfaction variable as mediating factor in predicting Loyalty Intention. Furthermore, this echoes to the Anderson and Mittal (2000) proclamation that satisfaction has a strong connection with attitude and has overshadowed attitude in explaining behaviour. Also, this study only adapts affective attitude measurement which might not reflect attitude holistically. In other words, extra measures for attitude might be helpful for the researchers to overcome the indirect (neither disagreement nor agreement) respond for some measures. That is to say, Subjective Knowledge, Perceived Importance of Food Culture, Food Culture Involvement and Tourist Satisfaction have significant effects on Loyalty Intention. Meanwhile Tourist Attitude’s effects on Loyalty Intention are not significant. Subjective Knowledge has shown to have the strongest contribution towards Loyalty Intention. Regarding the latter, this study clearly answers the fourth research objective promptly. The

next section will deliberately present the findings corresponding to the researcher's final objective of this research study. Essentially, earlier understanding on each proposed construct and the development of theoretical framework and hypotheses based on well-established theories were explained. In order to predict international tourist loyalty intention, a proposed innovative model adapted from modified EREI and SCT became the fundamentals of this study with some proper modifications. On the whole, six variables in the study namely (i) Subjective Knowledge; (ii) Food Culture Involvement; (iii) Perceived Importance of Food Culture; (iv) Tourist Attitude; and (v) Tourist Satisfaction have been identified by the researchers as the potential key elements that influence tourist (vi) Loyalty Intention towards MHF consumption. In establishing the MHF Loyalty Intention model, SEM has successfully attested to the positive significant effect of all predictors towards the dependent variable to accept the Tourist Attitude. Finally, Tourist Satisfaction as a mediating variable has a full mediation on the Tourist Attitude and Loyalty Intention paths which shows a significant finding.

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