

Research Article

# Innovative Experience Strategy to Increase Intention to Re-visit Pematangsiantar Zoo

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**Abstract:** The development of digital technology has led to significant changes in the tourism industry sector, particularly in Indonesia. Innovative experience is one of the key factors in understanding tourist behaviour. This study analyses the relationship between innovative experiences and the value of returning tourists to zoos in Pematangsiantar. The research employed an explanatory quantitative approach, collecting data through a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale administered to 197 tourists, using the Slovin margin of error formula of 0.1. Statistical data processing utilises SPSS to test validity, reliability, normality, and heteroscedasticity, as well as to perform hypothesis testing and conduct simple linear regression. The results showed a significant influence of innovative Experience on tourist return visits ( $R^2 = 0.787$ )—the practical contribution of research in implementing technology-based tourism activities, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia.

**Keywords** Innovative Experience, Return Visit, Tourist Destinations

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Zoos in cities play a crucial role as centres for animal conservation, environmental education facilities, and family-friendly leisure destinations (Aryal et al., 2024; Tribe & Booth, 2003; Zareva-Simeonova et al., 2009). Development of tourist destinations Zoos are currently facing the challenge of transforming into interactive spaces by utilising innovative technology to improve tourist experiences and visits (Walsh et al., 2019). Some previous research results suggest that the adoption of technology will enrich the traveller experience and improve visitor satisfaction (van Nuenen & Scarles, 2021; Xu et al., 2020; Y. Zhang et al., 2022). The zoo tourist attraction in Pematangsiantar is one of the oldest and most famous zoos in North Sumatra. This zoo has excellent potential to answer the challenge of transformation to increase the level of tourist visits. However, to date, scientific studies that specifically review digital transformation and its impact on the increase in zoo visitors are still very much in the process of being published. Limited, especially in Indonesia.

The latest phenomenon indicates a shift in tourists' preferences from conventional experiences to more personalised, immersive, and technology-based ones (Farid et al., 2023;

Tussyadiah et al., 2018). Previous studies have demonstrated that visitor interaction, educational elements, and zoo conservation can foster positive perceptions and enhance visitor participation (Godinez & Fernandez, 2019). A positive visitor experience has a significant correlation with tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Girish & Chen, 2017; Godovykh & Tasci, 2021; Li et al., 2024). Several researchers also explain the same thing that service quality, emotional Experience, and hedonistic Experience are the main factors that drive customer satisfaction and intention to return to tourist destinations (H.-C. Wu et al., 2015; I. Wu, 2020)

In Indonesia, several zoo locations have adopted digital technology as a strategy to increase competitiveness. Ragunan Wildlife Park in Jakarta launched the "Ragunan Zoo" application to provide digital animal information while supporting the concept of Jakarta's smart city even though several studies show that information technology has not significantly affected the Experience of tourists in Jakarta (Zhu & Alamsyah, 2022). The same is also done Gembira Loka Zoo, which intensifies educational campaigns through digital platforms and social media as an effort to reach a broader range of visitors (Pradiatiningtyas, 2022). However, the application of this digital technology has not been evenly distributed across various zoos in Indonesia. Its effectiveness in forming loyalty or intention to revisit has not been evaluated.

The concept of Innovative Experience in traditional zoos, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia, is rarely researched. However, several studies have explored the application of digital technology to improve the Experience of visiting zoos in various developed countries (Lin et al., 2023; Prakoso et al., 2023; Ward et al., 2020; Y. Zhang et al., 2022). Some research topics regarding return visits, including variables such as memory of travel experiences from previous tourist visits, affect return visit intentions (Lu et al., 2022). Additional factors, such as destination image and nostalgia, also contribute to increased loyalty and repeat visits (H. Zhang et al., 2018). Although previous research has explored the role of digital technology in creating memorable experiences, there is still room for further investigation.

As a research gap has been identified above, it is essential to conduct further studies on the role of innovative experience in influencing visitors' intention to revisit, particularly for educational destinations such as zoos in Indonesia, especially in Pematangsiantar City. The main question in the study is how innovative Experience affects the intention to revisit the Pematangsiantar Zoo. The purpose of this research is to determine the magnitude of the influence of innovative Experience on the intention to revisit.

This research is novel in comparison to the results of some previous studies. The research adopts an innovative tourism approach in the context of zoo visits, which are still rarely researched in the scientific literature, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia. This study offers a new perspective on the role of digital in shaping visitor behaviour toward educational destinations. The urgency of research is particularly relevant to the con-

dition of the tourism sector, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The transformation of innovative Experiences in the tourism sector makes a practical and strategic contribution to developing technology-based educational tourism, which still lacks digital innovation.

This research makes significant contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it expands the study of tourism experience by integrating innovative experience variables in the context of visits to zoos in developing countries. Practically, the study results provide a strategic policy design that can increase visits by creating a technology-based tourist destination system such as animal information, digital ticket systems, and interactive educational media.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Smart Experience**

The concept of innovative experience in the tourism industry emphasises the application of technology and creative management to enhance a pleasant tourist experience (Azis et al., 2020; Torabi et al., 2022). The development of information and communication technology is key to creating an informative, interactive, and personalised experience (Gretzel, 2021). This technology will shape tourist satisfaction and behaviour intentions, including repeat visits (Wang & Lin, 2022). Developing smart destinations requires collaborative explanations involving the government, business actors, communities, and the community (Errichiello & Micera, 2021). Digital transformation brings sustainability challenges, with innovative sustainability strengthening the tourism experience, including increasing efficiency and transparency in the tourism system (Shafiee et al., 2021)

Innovative tourism experiences reflect the integration of technology in creating an interactive, personalised, accessible, and sustainable tourism experience. Some indicators of innovative experiences are digital interactivity using QR codes and real-time technology. This technology will enhance the innovative travel experience, increasing visitor engagement and comfort (Lee et al., 2020). Ease of access to information about animals, interactive maps, and multilingual information will reduce tourist barriers and increase comfort during destination exploration activities. Personalising the Experience, including interest-based activity recommendations, activity types, and features for visitors with disabilities, will positively impact visitor satisfaction and loyalty (Gajdošík, 2018).

### **Intention to Revisit**

Return intention is an essential indicator of tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Cong, 2016). The intention to revisit is an interaction between perception and visitor experience during a visit, supported by the image of the destination, the quality of supporting facilities, and service quality (Stumpf et al., 2020; Stylos & Bellou, 2019). A strong image can significantly influence

a tourist's decision to revisit (Hidayat et al., 2017). Customer experience and attractiveness also contribute to satisfaction and intention to make a repeat visit (Alfin et al., 2023). The quality of service also contributes to the intention to return (Sanjaya & Mulyono, 2023).

The intention to make a return visit is a form of visitor loyalty and is a key factor in the success of developing tourist destinations. Various literature reviews explain that the image of destinations, tourist facilities, and service quality are the main determining factors. The image of the destination plays a crucial role in increasing interest in repeat visits, particularly among the younger generation (Cahyanti & Anjaningrum, 2018). The same thing is also explained: a strong image and good access impact tourists' return visits (Hidayat et al., 2017). Tourist facilities trigger repeat visits, and interesting events will strengthen the perception of destinations that encourage repeat visits (Pratiwi & Prakosa, 2021).

In this study, indicators used to measure return visit intentions, such as future return visits (Taraoktavia & Indarwati, 2021), recommendations (Reswari et al., 2024), share experiences on social media, and assess that destinations are worth revisiting (Johan et al., 2022)

### **The Relationship of Smart Experience to Visitor Intent to Return Visit**

The relationship between innovative experience and tourists' intention to revisit is based on the theory of Smart Tourism Framework and Experience-Based Tourism, which emphasises that the Use of innovative technology in tourist destinations can create personalised, interactive, and meaningful experiences, which in turn will increase visitor satisfaction and loyalty (C. Pai et al., 2021; C.-K. Pai et al., 2020; Torabi et al., 2022). Innovative Tourism leverages technology to provide a personalised and interactive visitor experience. Visitors are not only recipients of information but also play a role in tourist trips by utilising technologies such as digital applications, AR/VR, and real-time interaction (Jeong & Shin, 2020; C.-K. Pai et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2024). An individually tailored travel experience through interactive media can increase the emotional interest of visitors and encourage a desire for repeat visits (M. Zhou & Wang, 2024). Innovative tourism technology plays a crucial role in improving the happiness, satisfaction, loyalty, and intention to revisit tourists (Ionescu & Sârbu, 2024; M. Zhou & Wang, 2024). Some of the results also reinforce that positive emotional experiences and perceived creativity by visitors contribute to relationship quality and loyalty, with return intentions and interactions serving as potent mediators (Burhanudin, 2024; Putra et al., 2025; Sari & Burhanudin, 2023).

An in-depth understanding of visitor motivations and expectations will enable zoo managers to design relevant and fulfilling experiences, ultimately increasing return visits (Maghrifani et al., 2022). Marketing strategies based on visitor motivation and satisfaction can enhance tourism loyalty and sustainability (Lim et al., 2016). The Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) approach in smart tourism utilises data and visitor interactions to create more adaptive and loyalty-oriented services (Muniz et al., 2021). CKM helps tourist destinations

manage travel experiences more effectively, develop innovative solutions, and promote smart travel destinations (Kabadayi et al., 2019).

In the context of zoo tourism, interaction with educational and conservation elements can influence post-visit behaviour and intention to return. Some research indicates that experiences during visits involving education and conservation enhance visitor knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours (Aryal et al., 2024; Godinez & Fernandez, 2019). Experiences that instil the value of environmental preservation will create an emotional attraction that influences repeat visit behaviour (B. Zhou et al., 2023). Positive emotional experiences and memories remembered will also affect the intention to revisit tourist destinations (Sari & Burhanudin, 2023).

The relationship between Experience with innovative tourism technologies and intention to visit is not always linear and absolute. Several studies have demonstrated that other factors, including destination attributes, tourist satisfaction, and technological readiness, influence the intention of returning tourists (C. Pai et al., 2021; Torabi et al., 2022). The results of another study also suggest that destination attributes and brand image are not always sufficient to influence visitor intent in the absence of deep emotional support and quality interaction (Qu et al., 2024). A high level of satisfaction does not always guarantee an intention to revisit if there is no update of the content and no personally relevant experiences (Chakraborty et al., 2023).

In general, the Experience of using innovative technology has a positive and significant influence on the intention to return to visit, and its effectiveness depends on the context of the destination, the depth of emotional engagement, and the technology used (Jeong & Shin, 2020; Torabi et al., 2022). Therefore, testing the H1 hypothesis in the context of the Pematangsiantar Zoo is crucial for enriching the technology-based educational tourism literature in developing regions and providing practical insights for more innovative and sustainable management of conservation destinations.

Ho: There is no relationship between innovative Experience and the intention to revisit visitors at Pematangsiantar Zoo

H1: There is a relationship between innovative Experience and the intention to return visitors

### 3. METHODS

The research employed an explanatory quantitative approach to investigate the relationship between innovative experience and tourist return visits to the Pematangsiantar Zoo. The survey method was chosen because it can reveal the causal relationship between independent and dependent variables, as recommended by research in tourism (Jeong & Shin, 2020). The research location is situated at the Pematangsiantar Animal Park in North Sumatra Province. The population consisted of 3,151 visitors during a one-month visit in January 2025, when the study was conducted.

Sampling using the Slovin formula was axial, with a margin of error of 0.1, for 97 respondents (Hair et al., 2021). Purposive sampling techniques were applied that met the criteria of (a) adult visitors ( $\geq 17$  years old), (b) visited at least 2 times, and (c) willing to be research respondents; this approach follows research in the field of tourism (Yulistira & A. S., 2024)

Data were collected using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, ranging from 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good). The research instrument for the independent variable Smart Experience with 12 questions where the indicators (a) Digital Interactivity: Availability of information applications, Use of technology, QR codes for access to information; (b) Ease of access: Animal information, map display, availability of information in various languages; (c) Experience Personalization: Selection of trip types, activity recommendations based on visitor interests, Interactive features for people with disabilities; (d) Eco-friendly technology: Paperless ticketing system, conservation information through interactive media, energy-saving facilities. This variable is a modified SERVQUAL dimension for zoos, as described by Ward et al. (2020) and Aryal et al. (2024). Dependent variables of interest in returning visits with indicators (a) wanting to return to the zoo one day, (b) willing to recommend to friends/family, (c) sharing positive experiences on social media, (d) the zoo is worth visiting repeatedly

Data analysis was conducted in stages, beginning with a validity test, a reliability test, and subsequently a classical assumption test: Normality, Multicollinearity, and Heteroscedasticity (F. Hair Jr et al., 2014). The next stage is to test the model using simple linear regression, with the model  $Y = \alpha + \beta X + \epsilon$ , to examine the effect of innovative Experience on return visit interest. The theoretical framework of the research integrates the Expectation-Confirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980) to explore the relationship between innovative experience and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2020).

The research findings are expected to make an academic contribution through comprehensive testing of a theoretical model and have practical implications for the management of animal tourism destinations. The study's results are expected to provide recommendations for enhancing the quality of tourism visit management (Gössling et al., 2021) and to inform the development of future research incorporating additional variables.

## 4. RESULTS

### Demographic Profile

The demographic profile in the study, with a sample of 97 people, revealed that women were 67% more partisan than men; this is likely due to the fact that women are more likely to be respondents than men. The age distribution where 43.3% (21–30 years), 34% (<20 years), 17.5% (31–40 years), and 5.2% (>40 years) showed a preference for the Use of technology and innovation (Dwivedi et al., 2021) Occupationally, 52.6% are students, 24.7%

are self-employed, 15.5% are in the private sector, and 7.2% are government employees. This data suggests that zoos are a recreational destination for the younger generation, who are typically active users of digital technology.

#### Validity Test

Validity testing of all questionnaire items revealed a significant Pearson correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ), confirming the validity of the construct (Hair et al., 2021). The validity test confirmed that all the question items of the Smart Experience questionnaire (12 items) and the Revisit Intention (4 items) exceeded the critical threshold ( $r > 0.233$  and  $0.279$ , respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ). This explains that the research construct is strong. The high validity of both constructs provides a strong empirical basis for proceeding to the stage of structural model analysis. These results reinforce the relevance of constructs in consumer behaviour research, especially in the service industry using technology (Borah et al., 2023)

#### Reliability Test

Reliability testing assesses the internal consistency between items in each construct being measured. The test results reflect the extent to which the measuring instrument can produce stable and consistent data if repeated measurements are performed. The results of the reliability test are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1** Reliability Test Results

Variable	Alpha Coefficient	Information
Innovative Experience	0,886	Reliable
Intention to Visit Again	0,920	Reliable

Source: Primary data processing, 2025

Reliability analysis confirmed the internal consistency of all strong constructs, with Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.7. Innovative Experience, with a value ( $\alpha = 0.886$ ), demonstrates excellent reliability, validating its ability to measure sensory and interactive dimensions through technology. These results are consistent with experiential marketing theory (Schmitt, 1999) and recent research in digital contexts (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The Return Return Value ( $\alpha = 0.920$ ) indicates very high reliability and strengthens the predictor

role of actual behaviour by Ajzen's 1991 theory of planned behaviour, especially in the context of smart tourism (Chiu et al., 2021)

The normality test is a crucial step in parametric statistical analysis. This assumption ensures that parameter estimates are non-lethal and statistically valid. The results of the normality test are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** Data Normality Test Results

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	p-Value	Mr	Status
<i>Unstandardised residual</i>	0,995	0,266	p>0,05	Normal

Source: Primary data processing, 2025

The normality test values, as shown in Table 2, using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, confirm the normal distribution of the residuals ( $p = 0.266 > \alpha = 0.05$ ), meeting the key assumptions for parametric analysis (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). The results demonstrate a random error distribution and unbiased parameter estimation, supporting the testing of valid hypotheses (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Normally distributed residuals will further increase confidence in the predictive accuracy of models in digital consumer behaviour research (Andrade et al., 2023).

The regression analysis results, presented in Table 3, indicate that the Innovative Experience variable has a significant impact on the intention to return for a visit.

**Table 3.** T-Test of the Influence of Smart Experience on Tourists' Return Visit Interest

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Mr.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.278	1.456		.878	.384
	Innovative Experience	.064	.123	.059	6.917	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Return Visit Intention



Source: Primary data processing, 2025

The values in Table 3 indicate the significance of the regression analysis ( $\beta = 0.059$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $t = 6.917$ ), suggesting a significant positive relationship between innovative experience and return visit intention, which supports H1. Its strong statistical significance underscores the theoretical and practical importance of digital experience design in contemporary tourism and services (Becker et al., 2022). These findings align with previous research results indicating that digital value creation in modern service ecosystems has a positive influence (Bianchi & Andrews, 2015). Mixed analytical meta-analysis evidence also confirms that the findings in the context of tourism and retail have a powerful impact on visitor interest (U Sou, 2023). Research in the field of innovative hotel services has a positive influence on repeat visit intentions (Ibrahim et al., 2019). The same thing also happens in the context of smart tourism (Ionescu & Sârbu, 2024)

The Use of virtual experiments also increased return visit intent to the clothing store and improved customer loyalty programs (Kim et al., 2022). The study's results emphasised the importance of technology adoption and personalisation, as well as the use of innovative services in increasing tourist visits. This insight provides essential information for researchers and practitioners in the tourism sector to explore the Smart Experience variable in increasing the number of visits in the tourism sector (F. Hair Jr et al., 2014; Sarstedt et al., 2019)

### Determinant Coefficients

**Table 4** Determining Coefficients

<b>Model Summary</b>				
<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>Std. Error of the Estimate</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>.887a</b>	<b>.787</b>	<b>.774</b>	<b>1.855</b>
<b>a. Predictors: (Constant), Innovative Experience</b>				

Source: Primary data processing, 2025

The study's results, presented in Table 4, indicate a robust relationship between the independent and dependent variables, as evidenced by the correlation coefficient value ( $R = 0.887$ ). The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.787$ ) indicated that the combination of independent variables in the model could explain 78.7% of the variability in the dependent variable. In comparison, the remaining 21.3% was attributed to variables outside the model. These results demonstrate the effect of 78.7% of variable innovative experiences on tourist visit interest; substantially, this value exceeded the threshold of 0.75 for behavioural studies (F. Hair Jr et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2021)

## DISCUSSION

These results are supported by previous research, which shows that technology adoption has predictive power in the context of innovative services (Azis et al., 2020; Y. Zhang et al., 2022), confirming the increasing explanatory power of experiential models in digital consumer behaviour compared to traditional ones. These findings validate the model's suitability for causal analysis and support its Use in generating data-driven recommendations for technology-mediated consumer behaviour (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Some researchers have shown that integrating technology and education in the tourism industry, such as the use of digital applications, can increase visitor loyalty (Godinez & Fernandez, 2019). Moreover, other research also highlights the importance of tourist satisfaction and good governance in enhancing attraction data in tourist destinations (Godinez & Fernandez, 2019). The same finding was also reported in the context of innovative technology, which identified a strong relationship between the quality of digital experiences and behavioural intentions. These findings validate the theoretical model and support empirical reports on innovative service practices and tourist visit intentions.

A study by Hidayat et al. (2017) found that integrating innovative technology into tourism service activities creates personalised experiences that significantly impact tourist visit intentions. The same concept is also explained by Picazo & Moreno-Gil (2018): the innovative tourism experience, utilising digital technologies such as mobile applications, AR, and AI, enriches the tourist experience and increases visitor loyalty. Meanwhile, Pizam (2016) explained that the adoption of technology in the hospitality context, such as the use of mobile apps and self-service systems, affects tourists' perceptions of convenience and trust, ultimately leading to increased repeat visits. Innovative experiences increase satisfaction and significantly influence tourist behaviour (Frost et al., 2020). Additionally, smart tourism fosters the creation of shared value, resulting in increased engagement (Karl et al., 2015).

**CONCLUSION**

The study showed that innovative Experience significantly and positively affected the intention to return to the Pematangsiantar Zoo. The magnitude of the determination coefficient

value ( $R^2 = 0.787$ ) indicated that the independent variables accounted for 78.7% of the variation in the dependent variable. In comparison, other variables outside the model contributed to the remaining 21.3%. These results are supported by previous researchers' findings, which explain that technology-based experiences and visitor behavioural intentions strengthen theoretical models in the context of educational destinations in Indonesia. The research contribution is both theoretical and practical, as this study expands the framework of smart tourism and Experience Tourism, particularly in developing countries, and provides a data-driven strategic design for digital-based zoo management that impacts satisfaction and return visit intentions.

Based on the research results, it is recommended that zoo managers implement more personalised and adaptive digital features and that the government support digital transformation through regulations and incentives. Future research should develop variables such as media and morality, incorporating emotional involvement, satisfaction, and perception of use value within the context of digital-based tourism.

## 5. LIMITATION

This study possesses multiple limitations that may influence the interpretation of the findings. A cross-sectional design restricts the capacity to monitor temporal changes. The sample size of 97 respondents from a singular place may not adequately represent travellers in other destinations, hence impacting generalizability. The utilisation of non-probability purposive sampling may result in bias. Finally, the model excluded other potentially significant variables, such as contentment and destination image, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of revisit intention. These constraints underscore the necessity for further investigations employing more extensive samples, longitudinal methodologies, and supplementary variables.

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