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The Mediating Role of Social Media Exposure in the Relationship between Dark Experience, Unique Learning Experience, and Attitude toward the Dark Tourism Destinations: Evidence from Museum Pancasila Sakti

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the mediating effect of Social Media Exposure on the relationship between Dark Experience and Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination as well as between Unique Learning Experience and Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination at Museum Pancasila Sakti Jakarta. Quantitative explanatory research was used in this study. The respondents were the museum visitors that were approached with purposive sampling using questionnaires. Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling or known as (PLS-SEM) was used to collect data. The result showed that Dark Experience does not significantly affect Visitors' Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination. However, Dark Experience partially mediates through Social Media Exposure toward Visitors' Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination since Dark Experience has a positive effect on Social Media Exposure. Also, Unique Learning Experience positively affects Social Media Exposure and Visitors' Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination. While Social Media Exposure partially mediates between Unique Learning Experience toward Visitors' Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination. In conclusion, this study has proven that Social Media Exposure has a significant role in visitors' experience about dark tourism. This study provides an empirical perspective about dark tourism using experience, learning, and digital perspective to form visitors' attitude.

Keywords : dark tourism, dark experience, unique learning experience, social media exposure, attitude

A. Introduction

As people have started visiting these types of tourist attractions more often there has been more research done on dark tourism (Adelan et al., 2023; Effendy et al., 2025). It can involve any place that relates to death, tragedy, war and sorrow of humans. When people visit dark tourism, they can receive affective reactions similar to regular forms of tourism. But also learn about history and what happened at that location (Light, 2017; Mavragani et al., 2022). They can be interested in dark tourism because they want to know more about those places or learn from them.

Several history-based sites in Indonesia represented those characteristics; one of them is Museum Pancasila Sakti. The museum exhibited artifacts, dioramas, and history narration about political conflict, violence, and death. According to Stone's dark tourism spectrum (2006), Museum Pancasila Sakti could be categorized under Dark Exhibitions because it presents death, suffering, and political violence through museum collection and history narration while functioning as an educational and commemorative museum. The aforementioned reasons allow the museum to become the context of this study to measure dark tourism experience.

Dark Experience and Unique Learning Experience are two dimensions of dark tourism experience used in the present study. Dark Experience pertains to visitors' experiences regarding death, tragedy, human violence and suffering, while Unique Learning Experience indicates visitors' opportunities to learn about history and gain knowledge about past occurrences (Light, 2017; P. Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Both dimensions can be present at once, for example, visitors can experience dark sides of tourism destination while simultaneously attempting to find their destinations' historical significances (Light, 2017; P. Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Other literature also suggests that tourists who visit dark tourism sites may not only do so because of interest towards death and tragedy but may also want to learn and reflect upon their experience (Allman, 2017; Vorina et al., 2024).

These experiences may not directly lead to positive Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination because tourists could react differently to their experience at dark tourism sites (Mthethwa, 2024). For example, death and tragedy tourists encounter may evoke positive and/or negative emotions, while tourists can also think and seek knowledge about what occurred at the destination (Lundin et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important to understand how experiences at dark tourism sites shape visitors' attitudes, especially those visiting sensitive tourism destinations like Museum Pancasila Sakti.

Advancements in social media use have added a new digital element to dark tourism. Online platforms have become outlets to promote, share, and discuss dark destination storytelling and visitor experiences (Ironside & Smith, 2025). Websites like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube allow dark tourism information and content created by visitors to reach broader audiences and shape visitor interactions at dark tourism sites. Social media platforms and

electronic word-of-mouth communication has been found to influence tourists' feelings and destination appraisal (Menon et al., 2025). At the same time, digital experiences of dark tourism may come with ethical implications on representations of death, suffering, and tragedy (Moravcikova et al., 2025). Thus, this study will also examine if Social Media Exposure can act as both a promotional construct and potential moderator between Dark Experience and Unique Learning Experience and visitors' perspectives on dark tourism destinations.

Based on preliminary literature search through Google Scholar and Publish or Perish, only few studies empirically examined how Dark Experience and Unique Learning Experience are related to Social Media Exposure and Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination, especially in Indonesia context. Moreover, previous studies also showed inconsistency regarding how dark tourism experiences could affect visitor responses. For example, Lewis et al. (2022) concluded that Dark Experience became a significant predictor to visitors' attitude toward dark tourism while study conducted in Museum Prasasti, Jakarta stated that Unique Learning Experience had greater positive motivation whereas Dark Experience had lesser motivation toward visiting dark tourism destination (Masnadi et al., 2026). This difference suggests the necessity to study whether Social Media Exposure acts as a mediating mechanism of how dark tourism experiences affect visitors' attitude toward dark tourism destination.

For this reason, this study aims to analyze how Social Media Exposure played as a mediating variable between Dark Experience, Unique Learning Experience, and Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination toward Museum Pancasila Sakti visitors. This study would benefit from combining both experiential, learning and digital perspective to build and explain visitors' attitude toward dark tourism destination. Additionally, this study also adds practical implication by suggesting strategy development for dark tourism destinations to educate, maintain authenticity, and show respectful intention through digital communication to visitors.

B. Literature Review

Dark tourism

Dark tourism is characterized by visiting sites where death, tragedy, conflict, and human suffering occurred while giving visitors an emotional experience (Dang, 2021). Dark tourists seek emotions related to death and tragedy but may also be motivated to learn about history and gain knowledge (Griffiths, 2019). Dark Experience and Unique Learning Experience emerged as two critical constructs related to dark tourism. Pancasila Sakti Museum caters to both constructs by offering historical objects, dioramas, and stories about political conflict, violence, and death while also instilling visitors with knowledge and remembrance.

However, these emotions and cognitive aspects do not always create positive attitudes toward dark tourism destinations. Exposure to social media may influence visitor attitudes by showing history, destination description, and other visitor experiences to help them understand and evaluate dark tourism destinations. Past studies have found social media to be significant in sharing and interpreting dark tourism experiences; however, overly graphic content can desensitize historical locations (Martini & Buda, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to find if Social Media Exposure mediates the relationship between Dark Experience and Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination and Unique Learning Experience and Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination at the Pancasila Sakti Museum.

Dark Experience

Dark Experience (DE) refers to emotional, cognitive, and reflective feelings that people receive while interacting with the dark history of death, tragedy, or suffering in destinations (Lewis et al., 2021; Martini & Minca, 2021). Curiosity and knowledge-seeking are partial experiences visitors look for when trying to understand tragic events (Magano et al., 2022). Nostalgia, sadness, surprise, and reflection are also sparked when consumers deal with historical representation (Mthethwa, 2024). Furthermore, authenticity confirms distinctive historical objects and narratives can strengthen knowledge-seeking and vividness (Fabros et al., 2023). Destination meaningful experiences can affect individuals' Destination evaluations. Tourists who have experienced darker feelings are more likely to form a positive attitude. Therefore, based on the above arguments, H1 is proposed:

H1: Dark experience has a positive and significant effect on Attitude Toward Visiting Dark Tourism Destination.

DE can also affect individuals' intention to search for additional information about dark tourism destinations via social media. Emotional experience, curiosity, knowledge-seeking could encourage people to read more about historical events and what other tourists experienced on their dark visit (Bolan & Simone-Charteris, 2018). Dark Experience will serve as a trigger that increases attention to digital content about dark tourism destinations. The more intense experience consumers get from dark tourism destinations; the more likely they will be exposed to the destination's content (Addeo & Punziano, 2025). Therefore, based on the above arguments, it was proposed that:

H3: Dark Experience has a positive and significant effect on Social Media Exposure.

Unique Learning Experience

Unique Learning Experience (ULE) was defined as the learning visitors experienced through destination's history, storytelling, artifacts, and surrounding about death, tragedy, conflict, or suffering (Raušl et al., 2022). Visitors could learn about these historical events through authentic, emotional,

and reflective experiences at dark tourism destination (Lewis et al., 2022). Unique to dark tourism destinations is they offered learning experience that were informal (outside of school or college) as well having purpose of remembering back what happened (Mavragani et al., 2022; P. Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Unique Learning Experience at Pancasila Sakti Museum could be experienced through artifacts, dioramas, documentation, and history narration about G30S/ PKI.

Authentic and meaningful experience can improve visitor cognitive engagement and create positive evaluation toward destinations (Fang et al., 2025). Also, the new knowledge visitors get from experiencing unique learning at dark tourism destinations can increase their effort to search for more information from social media, such as watching documentary, reading history description, and sharing or reading other traveler's experience (S. A. R. Hosseini et al., 2022). Therefore, it is expected that Unique Learning Experience would not only create positive attitude but would also increase engagement with dark tourism destination related content on social media. Based on those arguments, the researcher proposed that:

H2: Unique Learning Experience had positive and significant effect on Attitude Toward Visiting Dark Tourism Destination.

H4: Unique Learning Experience had positive and significant effect on Social Media Exposure.

Exposure Social Media

Social Media Exposure (SME) has been described as how people acquire information from social media in terms of reach (frequency, duration, attention), (Michelle & Susilo, 2021; Satria & Suharyono, 2017). In the context of tourism destination research, social media sharing information and user-generated content (UGC) could affect tourists' cognitive image and assessment of tourism destinations (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020; Sultan et al., 2021) . Hence, for dark tourism destination, visitors will gain more exposure towards historical events, tragedies, artifacts, and experience shared by others through digital social media platforms, allowing them to learn more about dark tourism destinations and forming their attitude (Kumar, 2024). Thus,

H5: Social Media Exposure positively and significantly affects Attitude Toward Visiting Dark Tourism Destinations.

Social Media Exposure is also hypothesized to mediate visitors' experience since exposure to social media could reinforce information associated with Dark Experience and Unique Learning Experience factors and allow visitors to learn more about dark tourism destination from various angles. Thus, SME is expected to mediate the path between dark experience, learning experience, and visitors' attitude. Thus:

H6: Social Media Exposure mediates the effect of Dark Experience on Attitude Toward Visiting Dark Tourism Destinations.

H7: Social Media Exposure mediates the effect of Unique Learning Experience on Attitude Toward Visiting Dark Tourism Destinations.

Attitude Toward Visiting Dark Tourism Destination

Attitude Toward Visiting Dark Tourism Destination (ATT) is defined as an individual' evaluative statement or judgments about visiting dark tourism destination which can be either favorable or unfavorable (Moral-Moral, 2024). The theory of planned behavior defines attitude as the individual' degree of evaluation of behavior being favorable or not (Ajzen, 2020) . Fishbein and Ajzen (1977) defined attitude as being comprised of behavioral beliefs about consequences of behavior and evaluation of those consequences. In other words, attitude can be described as individuals" overall feeling about behavior which is derived from ones" beliefs about that behavior, judgments towards that behavior and an individuals' emotional response to a behavior (Mirawati et al., 2016; Rocklage & Luttrell, 2021).

Applying this definition to visiting dark tourism destinations, attitude toward visiting dark tourism destination will be reflective of the visitor's feelings about visiting a place that normally involve death, tragedy, conflict, or suffering. Visitor's that hold favorable thoughts and beliefs about visiting dark tourism destinations would have a positive attitude towards visiting them. While visitor's who perceive visiting dark tourism destinations as meaningless, not interesting, not useful, or not worthwhile would be deemed to have an unfavorable or negative attitude toward visiting dark tourism destinations (Effendy et al., 2025; Patterson et al., 2024). In this research dark experience and unique learning experience were proposed as determinants that would affect attitude while social media exposure was shown to strengthen both paths. Therefore, ATT will be used as the outcome variable because it serves as visitors' overall evaluation of visiting dark tourism destinations. After identifying each variables' definition and placement in the model the relationships between each are formed to explain the hypothesized mechanism of how visitors form an attitude about visiting dark tourism destinations. Figure shows the conceptual framework of this study.

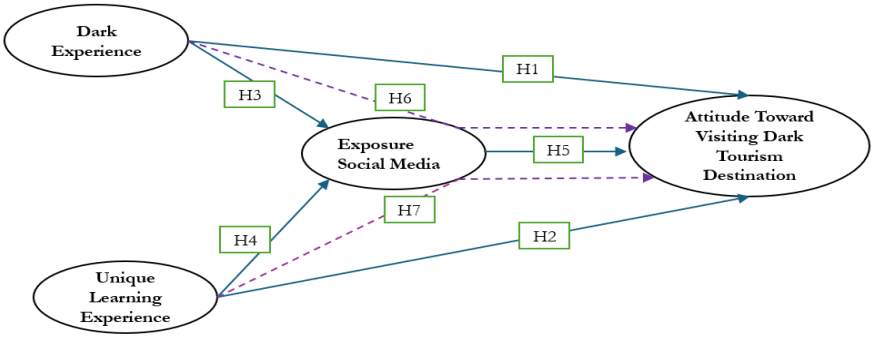


Figure 1. Research Framework

C. Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the causal relationship between Dark Experience and Unique Learning Experience to Attitude Toward Visiting Dark Tourism Destination, as well as analyze the role of Social Media Exposure as a mediating variable. Quantitative approaches are suitable when research aims to test the relationships between variables through numerical measurements and statistical hypothesis testing (Pandey et al., 2023). The research was conducted at the Pancasila Sakti Museum, Jakarta, in February 2026, This research involved 210 respondents. The sample count is considered adequate for PLS-SEM analysis based on methodological recommendations that emphasize the importance of considering statistical power, model complexity, and number of predictors, rather than relying solely on the traditional 10-times rule (Hair et al., 2021). people who are domiciled in the Greater Jakarta area and are at least 18 years old. Sampling was carried out using purposive sampling, with respondents who had experience visiting the Pancasila Sakti Museum as the main criterion.

Primary data collection was conducted through a questionnaire via five-point Likert scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Partial Least Square–Structural Equation Modeling approach (PLS-SEM) was used for analysis purposes since it allows analyzing the relationship between constructs simultaneously, as well as enables testing the direct and indirect effect through mediation effect (Hair et al., 2021). The procedures included assessing the measurement model for evaluating reliability and validity of the study's construct and evaluating the structural model for assessing the relationships between the study variables. Hypotheses were evaluated using the bootstrapping procedure while the mediation effect of Social Media Exposure was assessed through testing indirect effect. The procedure follows Hair et al. (2021) guidelines of assessing PLS-SEM which include assessment of measurement model, assessment of structural model, and mediation analysis.

Table1. Variable Measurement and Operationalization

Variable	Code	Indicator / Measurement Item
Dark Experience (DE) Lewis et al. (2021)	DE1	I am interested in experiencing paranormal or unusual activities at Museum Pancasila Sakti.
	DE2	I am interested in visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti because it is associated with unusual or tragic events.
	DE3	I am interested in visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti to satisfy my fascination with unusual and disturbing events.
	DE4	I am interested in seeking stories related to the tragic events associated with Museum Pancasila Sakti.
	DE5	I am interested in visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti to satisfy my curiosity about how the victims of

Variable	Code	Indicator / Measurement Item
		the historical events died.
	DE6	I am interested in visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti to witness or understand death and dying related to the historical events.
	DE7	I am interested in seeing the objects, remains, or evidence associated with the tragic events at Museum Pancasila Sakti.
Unique Learning Experience (ULE) Lewis et al. (2021)	ULE1	Visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti would allow me to experience something different from ordinary tourism activities.
	ULE2	Visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti would provide me with a new experience.
	ULE3	I am interested in visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti because it offers an experience that many people have not had.
	ULE4	Visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti would increase my knowledge about historical events in Indonesia.
	ULE5	Visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti would provide me with a unique opportunity to learn about Indonesian history and culture.
	ULE6	I am interested in visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti to learn about the historical legacy associated with the G30S/PKI events.
Social Media Exposure (SME) Satria & Suharyono (2017); Rosengren (1974)	SME1	I frequently see content about Museum Pancasila Sakti on social media.
	SME2	I spend a considerable amount of time watching, reading, or exploring content about Museum Pancasila Sakti on social media.
	SME3	I pay close attention to information about Museum Pancasila Sakti presented through social media content.
Attitude Toward Dark Tourism Destination (ATT) Lewis et al. (2021)	ATT1	Visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti would be enjoyable for me.
	ATT2	Visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti would be pleasant for me.
	ATT3	Visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti would be beneficial for me.
	ATT4	Visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti would be a valuable experience for me.
	ATT5	I have a positive attitude toward visiting Museum Pancasila Sakti.

D. Result and Discussion

Result

According to table 2. The characteristic of 210 respondents shows that the respondents were almost equally distributed by gender. However, more female respondents were selected as the participants than male respondents, which is 114 female respondents (54.29%) and 96 male respondents (45.71%). Age group reveals that most of the respondents were 18–24 years old (73 respondents, 34.76%), followed by the age group 25–34 years old (25.71%), 35–44 years old (22.38%), and ≥45 years old (17.14%). Collectively, respondents who fell into the age category of 18–34 years old were 60.47% of all respondents. This showed that the age of most respondents was young adults. Domicile-wise, there were 127 respondents who lived in Jakarta (60.48%) and 83 respondents who lived in Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi (39.52%). This illustrated that most respondents lived in Jakarta and its metropolitan area. The determination was considered appropriate since the study aimed to analyze tourist motivation visiting dark tourism destinations that were located in Jakarta.

Table 2. Questionnaire Distribution Data

Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	96	45.71%
	Female	114	54.29%
Age	18–24 years	73	34.76%
	25–34 years	54	25.71%
	35–44 years	47	22.38%
	≥45 years	36	17.14%
Domicile	Jakarta	127	60.48%
	Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi	83	39.52%
Education	Junior high school	9	4.29%
	Senior high school	109	51.90%
	Diploma	56	26.67%
	Bachelor's degree or higher	36	17.14%
Occupation	Entrepreneur	87	41.43%
	Private-sector employee	58	27.62%
	Student	21	10.00%
	Civil servant	14	6.67%
	Unemployed	30	14.29%
Monthly income	< IDR 3 million	53	25.24%
	IDR 3–5 million	46	21.90%
	IDR 5–10 million	92	43.81%
	> IDR 10 million	9	4.29%
	Prefer not to disclose	10	4.76%

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Respondents' highest education level was predominately senior high school graduate, with a frequency of 109 respondents (51.90%), followed by diploma (26.67%), bachelor's degree or higher (17.14%), and junior high school

graduate (4.29%). Respondents' occupation showed that entrepreneurs were the biggest group (41.43%), followed by private-sector employees (27.62%), unemployed (14.29%), students (10.00%), and civil servants (6.67%). Respondents' monthly income showed that most of the respondents have monthly income ranging from IDR 5–10 million (43.81%), followed by less than IDR 3 million (25.24%), IDR 3–5 million (21.90%). Respondents with more than IDR 10 million comprised 4.29% of the samples and 4.76% opted not to answer this question. In general, based on demographics profile, it can be concluded that the samples were fairly young Indonesian adults living in Jakarta with mixed education, occupation, and income level, which can be considered suitable for this study to analyze their attitude and behavioral intentions to visit dark tourism destinations in Jakarta.

Table 3. Measurement model

Variables	Items	Factor Loading	AVE	CR	CA
Dark Experience	DE1	0.859	0.883	0.915	0.684
	DE2	0.831			
	DE3	0.879			
	DE4	0.865			
	DE5	0.790			
	DE6	0.859			
	DE7	0.817			
Unique Learning Experience	ULE1	0.880	0.932	0.945	0.711
	ULE2	0.910			
	ULE3	0.909			
	ULE4	0.880			
	ULE5	0.834			
	ULE6	0.739			
Social Media Exposure	SME1	0.900	0.877	0.924	0.803
	SME2	0.903			
	SME3	0.885			
Attitude Toward Dark Tourism Destination	ATT1	0.856	0.929	0.945	0.741
	ATT2	0.865			
	ATT3	0.892			
	ATT4	0.734			
	ATT5	0.778			

Source: Processed Data (2026)

The measurement model was evaluated using four criteria, which included indicator reliability, convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and discriminant validity. As shown in Table 3, all indicator loadings ranged from .734 to .910 which is above the recommended level of 0.70. This showed that all the indicators sufficiently loaded on their respective latent constructs. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted values were between 0.877 and 0.932 which is well above the required minimum of 0.50, thus indicating that the convergent validity was satisfactory. Moreover, all the Composite Reliability

values ranged from 0.915 to 0.945, which was above the recommended value of 0.70 thus indicating that there was high internal consistency of the indicators within each construct. The Cronbach' Alpha values ranged from .684 to .803. The Cronbach' Alpha value for Dark Experience (.684) was considered acceptable for the study as it was exploratory in nature. This is because Cronbach' alphas for composites was high (0.915) and all the indicator loadings were above 0.70. All the other constructs had Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	ATT	DE	SME	ULE
ATT				
DE	0.572			
SME	0.781	0.646		
ULE	0.631	0.856	0.683	

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Discriminant validity was tested by using Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Table 4). HTMT results ranged from 0.572 to 0.856. The maximum HTMT value was 0.856 between Dark Experience and Unique Learning Experience. All HTMT values were lower than the suggested threshold of 0.90 (Hair et al., 2014), implying that constructs are empirically distinct. While the relationship between Dark Experience and Unique Learning Experience were found to have the largest HTMT value, this ratio is still below the criterion value. Thus, the finding suggests that measurement model meets all requirements for convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and discriminant validity. Therefore, the measurement model was found to be fit to be evaluated by examining the structural model and testing research hypotheses.

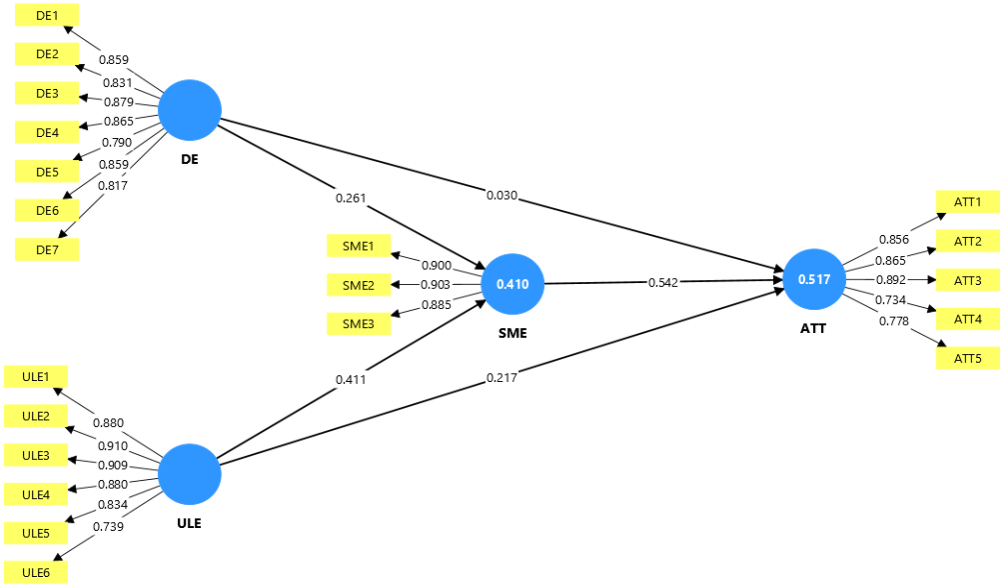


Figure 2. Structural model

As can be seen in Figure 2, Dark Experience (DE) and Unique Learning Experience (ULE) positively relate to Social Media Exposure (SME) and Attitude Toward Dark Tourism Destination (ATT). The path coefficient for DE → SME is 0.261, and ULE → SME is 0.411, demonstrating that ULE relates to SME more strongly than DE does. SME also demonstrated the strongest direct effect on ATT (β = 0.542), followed by ULE → ATT (0.217). However, DE shows a very weak direct relationship with ATT (0.030). These findings show that SME is vital to respondents' ATT toward dark tourism destinations while DE has little direct effect on ATT.

Table 5. R-square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
ATT	0.517	0.510
SME	0.410	0.404

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Table 5 shows the coefficient of determination (R 2) values for endogenous constructs. R 2 for ATT is 0.517, suggesting that DE, ULE, and SME explained 51.7% variance of Attitude Toward Dark Tourism Destination and 48.3% remaining is explained by other variables not included in model. SME has an R 2 value of 0.410, which means that DE and ULE explained 41.0% variance in Social Media Exposure while other 59.0% of variance is explained by variables not added in the model. Adjusted R 2 values are 0.510 for ATT and 0.404 for SME.

Table 6. F-square

	ATT	DE	SME	ULE
ATT				
DE	0.001		0.041	
SME	0.359			
ULE	0.031		0.100	

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Table 6 shows the f^2 effect sizes. This statistic measures how much the R^2 value will decrease if a predictor is removed from an endogenous construct. It can be seen that SME → ATT had the highest effect size ($f^2 = 0.359$) which is considered large, suggesting Social Media Exposure contributes the most towards explaining ATT. DE → ATT had a near zero effect size ($f^2 = 0.001$), while ULE → ATT had a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.031$). SME was predicted by both DE ($f^2 = 0.041$) and ULE ($f^2 = 0.100$), both of which were small effect sizes, though ULE contributed more than DE. From these results from the structural model, it can be determined that Social Media Exposure is the strongest construct when explaining Attitude Toward Dark Tourism Destination, while Dark Experience contributes the least towards attitude on a direct level. As mentioned before, bootstrapping results still need to be assessed

in order to determine statistical significance with regards to t-statistics and p-values prior to accepting any of the proposed hypotheses.

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing

	Path Coefficient	T-value	P- value	**Results**
DE -> ATT	0.030	0.365	0.715	H1 Rejected
DE -> SME	0.261	2.530	0.011	H2 Supported
SME -> ATT	0.542	7.718	0.000	H3 Supported
ULE -> ATT	0.217	2.483	0.013	H4 Supported
ULE -> SME	0.411	4.572	0.000	H5 Supported
DE -> SME ->ATT	0.141	2.322	0.020	H6 Supported
ULE -> SME -> ATT	0.223	3.791	0.000	H7 Supported

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Table 7 reported hypothesis testing results at 5% significance level. H1 was not supported because DE did not significantly predict ATT. However, H2, H3, H4, and H5 were supported. Dark Experience had a positive and significant effect on SME whereas SME positively and significantly influenced ATT. Moreover, ULE significantly affected both ATT and SME. These results showed that visitors' dark experience was highly related to exposure to social media contents. On the other hand, learning experience relates visitors to social media exposure and attitude toward dark tourism destinations.

Mediation analysis also confirmed that H6 and H7 were supported. SME significantly mediated the relationship between DE and ATT and ULE and ATT. As the direct effect of DE on ATT was insignificant, while indirect effect through SME was significant, the results implied that SME fully mediated the relationship between DE and ATT. On the other hand, because both direct and indirect effects were significant, SME partially mediated the relationship between ULE and ATT.

Discussion

The first hypothesis is rejected because Dark Experience has no effect on ATT ($\beta = 0.030$, $p = 0.715$). The result shows that people who seek dark, weird, or tragic objects and locations do not necessarily have positive ATT towards dark tourism destinations. The finding contrasts with Lewis et al. (2022) who reported positive relationship between dark experience and attitude towards dark tourism. However, it aligns with research conducted on Museum Prasasti in Jakarta where Dark Experience was found to be least motivation for visitors whereas learning about history and heritage motivated visitors to visit Museum Prasasti the most (Masnadi et al., 2026). The similar trend was also found in Mount Merapi's study showing weak impact of Dark Experience compared with unique learning experience motive (Effendy et al., 2025). Therefore, it can be argued that dark experience may hold different meanings depending on dark tourism destination being studied. In Jakarta where dark tourism attractions mainly emphasize historical event and heritage preservation,

learning and understanding may become more important than experiencing something dark.

In contrast, Dark Experience exerts a significant influence on Social Media Exposure ($\beta = 0.261$, $p = 0.011$) and Social Media Exposure exerts a significant influence on Attitude ($\beta = 0.542$, $p < 0.001$). More importantly, Social Media Exposure significantly mediates the relationship between Dark Experience and Attitude ($\beta = 0.141$, $p = 0.020$). This might indicate that individuals may be encouraged first to look for information or consume content regarding dark tourism on social media when they have dark experiences and this then facilitates the formation of their attitudes. Indeed, previous research found support for curiosity and interest leading to greater exposure to informative dark tourism content on social media (Martini & Buda, 2020). Parallel research studying tourism destinations generally has also revealed social media exposure leading to destination-based responses among tourists (Sharma, 2020). Therefore, in extending previous findings, the present study provides insight into social media functioning as not only a source of information but also as a mediating mechanism through which dark tourism motivations can lead to attitude formation. The results also indicate that Unique Learning Experience positively affects Attitude ($\beta = 0.217$, $p = 0.013$) and Social Media Exposure ($\beta = 0.411$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, Social Media Exposure was found to significantly mediate Unique Learning Experience's relationship to Attitude ($\beta = 0.223$, $p < 0.001$). These results are supportive of scholarship that views learning about and coming to understand historical events as part of dark tourism experiences (S. Hosseini et al., 2024; Mthethwa, 2024).

In sum, Social Media Exposure was the most influential variable within the proposed model. This assertion is supported by not only its positive effect on Attitude ($\beta = 0.542$), but also through its significant mediator effects along both paths (Dark Experience -> Social Media Exposure -> Attitude; Unique Learning Experience -> Social Media Exposure -> Attitude). The implication of these findings is that although individuals may develop attitudes toward dark tourism based on their attraction towards dark experiences, individuals can also form their attitudes by simply learning about the destination through information exposures. Social media specifically has been noted as an outlet to communicate history and learning associated with dark tourism attractions and recent research has shown that social media engagement and sharing emotional experience plays an important role in dark tourism. As such, destination managers should focus less on exposing visitors to fearful and morbid representations of death and concentrate more on marketing their destinations through social media by educating potential visitors about the authenticity and historical relevance of their sites in a respectful manner.

E. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that visitors' motivations and experiences related to dark tourism do not directly form attitudes toward dark tourism destinations. Dark Experience did not directly influence Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination but mediated via Social Media Exposure. On the other hand, Unique Learning Experience contributed directly and indirectly to attitude through Social Media Exposure. These results emphasize the mediating role of Social Media Exposure in developing visitors' motivations and experiences into favorable attitudes.

This study's results may also suggest that learning and interpretation may be more vital factors influencing visitors' experience than macabre curiosity. Marketing communication to attract tourists to dark tourism destinations in Jakarta should focus on gaining knowledge about historical facts, fun in learning, authenticity, and worthy interpretation on social media. Overall, this study provides insights into integrating experience, learning, and digital exposure to tourists when developing dark tourism attitudes.

There are several limitations of this study. First, because this study utilized cross-sectional quantitative methods, the results only indicate the respondents' perceptions at one moment in time and cannot show changes that may occur over time concerning attitude toward dark tourism or social media exposure. Second, the sample only includes 210 respondents from the Jakarta metropolitan area, which may affect generalizing the results to visitors from other regions or countries. Third, data were collected using self-reported questionnaires that may be affected by respondents' interpretation of questions and response styles. Finally, this study was only developed based on Dark Experience, Unique Learning Experience, Social Media Exposure, and Attitude toward Dark Tourism Destination. Therefore, other potential factors were not examined.

Future research could implement longitudinal or experimental methods to analyze tourists' attitude toward dark tourism before visiting, during exposure to destination information, and after their experiences. Studies could also sample more considerable populations from different areas to increase the results' generalizability. Moreover, researchers could include other factors such as curiosity toward death and tragedy, authenticity, emotional engagement, historical interest, destination image, perceived value, social media use experience, or cultural proximity. Qualitative or mixed-method approaches could also allow visitors to explain their experience with death, sorrow, and historical suffering when visiting dark tourism destinations. Finally, future research may look into different social media platforms and types of dark tourism content to examine various digital storytelling methods to develop favorable attitudes toward dark tourism.

F. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that this study was conducted without any competing interests that could compromise the objectivity of the research. No personal relationships, institutional affiliations, or financial considerations influenced the research process, the interpretation of the findings, or the preparation of this manuscript. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the paper.

G. Declaration of AI Use

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors utilized ChatGPT (OpenAI) as an auxiliary tool to refine the organization and structure of the written content and to support the development of the research framework. The tool was used to assist in arranging the flow of ideas, improving the logical connection between sections, and exploring the conceptual components relevant to the research topic. The selection of research concepts, methodological decisions, analysis of findings, and academic interpretations remained the responsibility of the authors. The authors have critically reviewed the AI-assisted suggestions and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the final manuscript.

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