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Exploring Cambodian Generation Z's Perceptions of Urban and Rural Tourism Destinations: A Study of Destination Image, Travel Motivation, and Intention to Visit

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Abstract: *This study explores Cambodian generation Z's perceptions of urban and rural tourism destinations by examining the relationships of destination image, travel motivation, intention to visit, and a moderator of tourism destination type. Data were collected from 166 Cambodian generation Z and analyzed using SPSS Version 26 for descriptive statistics and reliability analysis and SmartPLS4 for assessing the measurement and structural models using PLS-SEM. The findings revealed that Cambodian generation Z shows their strong desire for rural tourism destinations with abundant heritage, cultural, and natural resources in provincial areas over urban tourism destinations. Although Cambodian generation Z showed high intention to visit tourism destinations, no significant differences were found between urban and rural tourism destinations or between male and female groups. Furthermore, destination image does not directly affect intention to visit; however, travel motivation fully mediates this relationship. Moreover, tourism destination type significantly moderates destination image-travel motivation relationship and strengthens the destination image-travel motivation-intention to visit indirect effect. This study underlines the key role of travel motivation in shaping younger travelers' behavior and provides substantial theoretical and practical implications for destination management and tourism development strategies concentrating on generation Z travelers.*

Keywords: Perceptions, tourism destinations, destination image, travel motivation, intention to visit

Introduction

Tourism is an important part of strategic sectors in Cambodia since it contributes significantly to national socio-economic development by generating employment, alleviating poverty, and stimulating foreign exchange earnings. Cambodia's tourism industry has focused on international tourists; however domestic tourists are also becoming increasingly important. Both international and domestic tourists provide local tourism businesses and communities with a steady and substantial source of income (ODC, 2023). Cambodia offers a diverse array of tourism products, with Phnom Penh and Siem Reap serving as major urban tourism hubs,

while the northeastern and southwestern provinces are notable for rural and nature-based tourism experiences (Travel, 2024).

It is particularly important to understand tourist perceptions, as understanding their perceptions can help attract visitors. Particularly, their perceptions directly influence travel choices, satisfaction, and repeat visitation, and ultimately shape the success and reputation of destinations (Jeronimo Viana et al., 2021). Generation Z is becoming a larger portion of Cambodia's domestic visitors. Characterized by their desire for authentic, meaningful, and experience-driven travel, the generation Z seeks adventure, cultural immersion, and sustainability, often organizing independent or small-group trips (Marques et al., 2025; Keever & Rourke, 2021). Generation Z travelers are shaped by social media and online platforms, which establish their preferences and expectations. Their travel choices also reflect significant environmental and social consciousness, making them a vital demographic for encouraging sustainable tourism development. Generation Z demonstrates varied perceptions and preferences for urban and rural destinations. Urban destinations appeal to this generation for cultural richness, exciting city life, and diverse recreational activities (Keever & Rourke, 2021). However, rural destinations attract generation Z travelers seeking nature-based experiences, sustainability, authenticity, and opportunities for meaningful contact and communication with local communities (de Araújo et al., 2025). These distinctions show that urban and rural destinations provide complementary yet separate potential for domestic tourism growth, emphasizing the need to understand generational perceptions in both contexts.

Despite the growing importance of youth tourism in Cambodia, few studies have systematically compared generation Z's perceptions of urban and rural tourism destinations. Hence, this study about the perceptions of Cambodian generation Z of urban and rural tourism destinations by examining the relationships between destination image, travel motivation, and intention to visit, as well as the moderating role of tourism destination type fills out the lacking gap.

This present study aims to explore Cambodian generation Z's perceptions of urban and rural tourism destinations by analyzing the relationships between destination image, travel motivation, and intention to visit. Particularly, this study seeks to identify preferred tourism destinations, assess differences in intention to visit across destination types and gender, and evaluate the moderating role of tourism destination type. By applying a structural model, this study provides empirical insights into how these factors influence travel behavior among Cambodian generation Z.

Literature Review

Generation Z and Perceptions of Tourism Destination

Generation Z, typically defined as persons born from 1997 to 2012, has emerged as an increasingly prominent segment in the global tourism market (Ivasciuc et al., 2025). Previous

studies showed that this generation Z prefers authentic, meaningful, and sustainable travel experiences, with trip planning, information search, and booking largely made through mobile applications and online platforms (Pro, 2025; Ivasciuc et al., 2025; Ilhan et al., 2023).

Further research showed that experience values influence generation Z's intention to visit. This generation shows strong preferences for wellness, adventure, and cultural immersion, alongside heightened awareness of environmental and social impacts. In the contexts of both urban and rural tourism destinations, generation Z prioritizes destinations that offer immersive and experience-driven opportunities. Urban destinations are typically seen as attractive due to their diversity of activities, thriving culinary scenes, cultural events, and accessibility, whereas rural destinations appeal through nature-based experiences, authenticity, and conservation-oriented tourism (Lu et al., 2025). These varied perceptions demonstrate that destination image varies significantly between urban and rural contexts, influencing travel motivation and intention to visit.

Moreover, generation Z travelers show a strong desire for authenticity and local engagement. Studies by Ivasciuc et al. (2024), and Ferries (2025) indicate that this generation consciously avoids typical "tourist trap" experiences, favoring instead connections with local communities, exploration of everyday lifestyles, and appreciation of traditional architecture and cultural heritage. Particularly, this generation Z values travel experiences that support physical and mental wellbeing, including wellness retreats, nature-based relaxation, and mindfulness-oriented activities.

Overall, the research emphasizes the variety of factors that influence generation Z's desire to visit tourist destinations, including wellbeing, authenticity, and experience values. However, empirical research comparing how generation Z perceives urban versus rural tourism destinations—particularly within emerging tourism markets such as Cambodia—remains limited. To eliminate this gap, this study looks at how Cambodian generation Z perceives urban and rural tourism destinations by concentrating on destination image, travel motivation, and intention to visit.

Destination Image

Destination image denotes an individual's overall perception of a destination influenced by a combination of cognitive and affective evaluations. Cognitive image refers to travelers' opinions and understanding of a place's physical features, such as infrastructure, safety, accessibility, and attractions. In addition, affective image reflects travelers' emotional responses and feelings toward a destination, including excitement, pleasure, or relaxation (Liu et al., 2024). Together, these aspects form a holistic evaluation that affects tourists' attitudes and decision-making processes.

Extant literature consistently reveals a substantial association between destination image and travel motivation. Azeez (2022) and Phillips and Jang (2007) argued that destination image

impacts travelers' expectations and perceived value, hence influencing their underlying motivations for travel. When travelers retain a favorable impression of a destination, they are more likely to acquire stronger motivation to visit, which subsequently enhances their intention to travel. Destination image works as a critical antecedent of both motivational and behavioral outcomes.

Importantly, destination image-travel motivation relationship varies across different tourism destination types. Chi and Pham (2024) found that in nature-based and eco-tourism destinations, perceptions of environmental quality, landscape, and natural authenticity relate to motivations such as curiosity, excitement, and adventure. This suggests that the image of rural or nature-oriented destinations is strongly interwoven with tourists' experience and emotional reasons. Conversely, in urban tourism contexts, destination image is typically determined by perceptions of convenience, cultural vibrancy, and modern facilities. Yamaguchi (2025) demonstrated that cultural features and urban lifestyle elements significantly influence tourists' cognitive evaluations of city destinations, hence influencing motivation in distinct ways.

The findings by Azeez (2022), Phillips and Jang (2007), Chi and Pham (2024), and Yamaguchi (2025) indicate that destination image is not a uniform construct but rather context-dependent, with its influence on motivation differing between urban and rural contexts. The interaction between cognitive and affective destination image is important for generation Z travelers. However, limited empirical research has systematically explored the influences of destination image on travel motivation and intention to visit both urban and rural destinations. To address this lacuna, this study investigates the critical role of destination image in determining travel motivation and intention to visit, with a particular emphasis on the comparison of urban and rural tourism destinations in Cambodia.

Travel Motivation

Travel motivation refers to a multifaceted construct shaped by psychological, social, and environmental factors that drive persons to participate in tourism activities. Travel motivation is generally conceptualized through the push–pull framework (Chi & Pham, 2024). Push factors are intrinsic needs such as escape, relaxation, adventure, and self-development, whereas pull factors relate to destination-specific features, including natural scenery, cultural heritage, attractions, and recreational opportunities (Ngoc & Anh, 2024). Together, these motivational forces influence tourists' destination preferences and intention to visit.

Escape motivation is widely regarded as one of the key push factors. It expresses individuals' desire to momentarily detach from routine, work-related stress, and daily pressures in search of rest, relaxation, and psychological regeneration. Empirical studies have consistently revealed a strong association between escape motivation and intention to visit, as travel represents a tangible means of fulfilling the need to retreat from everyday environments (Vespestad et al., 2025; Zhang & Zhang, 2022). When individuals clearly perceive travel as an

opportunity to detach themselves from stressful or repetitive environments, their intention to visit alternative destinations grows stronger and more purposeful.

Learning and self-enrichment motivation constitutes another key push factor, particularly among younger travelers. This dimension expresses the desire to learn new knowledge, skills, and experiences through exposure to diverse environments and cultures. Travel provides opportunities for experiential learning, cultural exchange, and personal growth that extend beyond formal education (Pearce & Foster, 2007). Young tourists who are motivated by learning are often drawn to destinations that offer novel experiences, challenge their adaptability, and broaden their worldviews. Such experiences contribute to both personal and professional development, which reinforces travel motivation and intention (Irimiás, 2023).

Attraction-based motivation refers to a pull-oriented need for novelty, excitement, and distinctive destination features. Previous research reveals that young travelers are particularly responsive to destinations, where offer cultural tourism and adventure-based experiences (Porutiu et al., 2021). Sugiama et al. (2024) further highlights that travel planning and commitment are heavily affected by natural, culturally, and recreationally attractive places.

Cultural motivation also plays a vital role in influencing travel decisions. Studies by Chiriko and Chiriko (2020) and Yibing (2021) suggest that cultural distinctiveness encourages intellectual curiosity and provides educational and emotional value. These cultural motivations frequently encourage not only initial visitation but also revisit intention and positive destination advocacy.

Travel motivation comprises a dynamic interaction of push and pulls factors that collectively shape travelers' intention to visit. Limited empirical research has examined how specific motivational factors operate within a comparative urban-rural tourism destination framework. Therefore, this study investigates travel motivation as a mediating construct linking destination image to intention to visit.

Intention to Visit

Intention to visit is the deliberate decision or inclination of an individual to visit a particular tourist destination. Intention to visit is affected by a complicated interaction of cognitive assessments, affective reactions, and motivating factors (Susanti et al., 2023).

Travel motivation significantly influences intention to visit. Previous studies reveal that person's motivations directly affect their willingness to visit specific destinations (Seyanont, 2017). When travelers think that a destination may satisfy their intrinsic and extrinsic travel needs, their intention to visit becomes stronger and more intentional.

Destination image influences intention to visit. A positive destination image has been found to boost travel motivation and favorably effect destination choice, on-site satisfaction, experiencing quality, and revisit intention (Kanwel et al., 2019). Positive cognitive and affective evaluations of destinations may enhance traveler's confidence in their choice to visit.

Although growing researches have examined generation Z's sustainable and experience-driven travel preferences, limited empirical studies have integrated destination image, travel motivation, and intention to visit within a comprehensive explanatory framework. Moreover, comparative analyses of how these relationships differ between urban and rural tourism destinations remain scarce. Hence, this study examines Cambodian generation Z's intention to visit urban and rural tourism destinations by investigating the destination image-travel motivation-intention to visit relationships, with a moderator of tourism destination type.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The conceptual model (see Figure 1) of this study is developed with destination image (DI) measured by two sub-constructs borrowed from the destination image model developed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999), including cognitive image (CI) referring to beliefs or knowledge about an attribute of tourism destination and affective image (AI) referring to emotional responses or feelings about tourism destinations. Furthermore, travel motivation (TM) has four sub-constructs drawn from the push and pull motivation theory developed by Dann (1981), including escape (E), learning (L), attractions (A), and culture (C), which influences the intention to visit to tourism destination (IV).

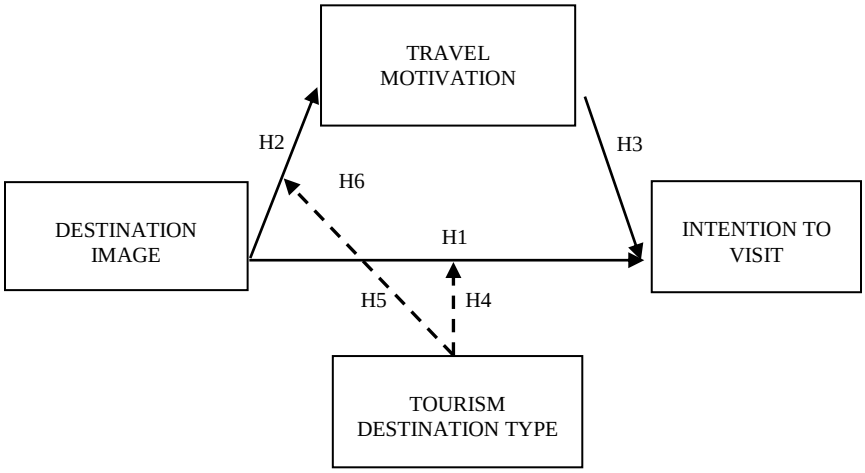

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Research Questions

The study's research questions are listed below:

1. What are the most attractive tourism destinations for Cambodian generation Z?
2. What are Cambodian generation Z's intention to visit tourism destinations?
3. How does Cambodian generation Z's intention to visit differ between urban and rural tourism destinations?
4. How do male and female Cambodian generation Z's intention to visit differ?
5. What is the relationship between destination image, travel motivation, and intention to visit?
6. How does tourism destination type moderate the relationship between destination image, travel motivation, and intention to visit?

Hypotheses

- *Hypothesis 1:* There is a significant relationship between destination image and intention to visit.
- *Hypothesis 2:* There is a significant relationship between destination image and travel motivation.
- *Hypothesis 3:* There is a significant relationship between travel motivation and intention to visit.
- *Hypothesis 4:* Tourism destination type moderates the relationship between destination image and intention to visit.
- *Hypothesis 5:* Tourism destination type moderates the relationship between destination image and travel motivation.
- *Hypothesis 6:*Tourism destination type moderates the relationship between destination image and intention to visit through travel motivation.

Measures

The study examines the relationship between destination image, travel motivation, intention to visit, with a moderation of tourism destination type. Destination Image (DI) is a higher order construct measured by two lower order constructs, including Cognitive Image (CI) with 5 items and Affective Image (AI) with 4 items adapted from Baloglu and McCleary (1999). Higher order construct of Travel Motivation (TM) are measured by four lower order sub-constructs, including Escape (E) measured by 4 items adapted from Dann (1981), Learning (L) measured by 4 items adapted from Crompton (1979), Attraction (A) measured by 4 items adapted from Klenosky (2002), Culture (C) with 4 items from Kim and Prideaux (2005), and Intention to Visit (IV) with 4 items based on the theory of planned behavior developed by Ajzen (1991).

Table 1. Measures

Constructs	Items		Sources
Cognitive Image	CI1	This destination offers good quality infrastructure and facilities for tourists.	(Baloglu & McCleary, 1999)
	CI2	There are many different activities and attractions available in this destination.	
	CI3	This destination is secure and safe for tourists.	
	CI4	This destination offers excellent transportation and accessibility.	
	CI5	This destination has friendly and hospitable local people.	
Affective Image	AI1	I feel good when thinking about visiting this destination.	
	AI2	I feel relaxed and comfortable in this destination.	
	AI3	I am thrilled with this destination's atmosphere.	
	AI4	I feel joyful and satisfied when visiting this destination.	
Escape	E1	I travel to get away from the stresses of my everyday life.	(Dann, 1981)
	E2	I can forget my academic and work pressure when traveling to this destination.	
	E3	I wish to get away from my usual atmosphere.	
	E4	I feel more liberated and relaxed when traveling to this destination.	
Learning	L1	I travel to experience different cultures and lifestyles.	(Crompton, 1979)
	L2	I like learning new things when traveling to this destination.	
	L3	I wish to discover new places and traditions.	
	L4	I can learn more about different people when traveling to this destination.	
Attraction	A1	The natural beauty of this destination attracts me to visit.	(Klenosky, 2002)
	A2	There are fascinating tourism activities and attractions in this destination.	
	A3	I like facilities and entertainment opportunities in this destination.	
	A4	I wish to go there since there are so many things to see and do.	
Culture	C1	I would like to experience the local way of life in this destination.	(Kim & Prideaux, 2005)

		C2	I travel there because of the traditional lifestyle and customs.	
		C3	I visit this destination to experience local festivals and foods.	
		C4	I appreciate this destination's culture heritage.	
Intention to Visit		IV1	I intend to visit this type of destination.	(Ajzen, 1991)
		IV2	I will recommend this destination to others.	
		IV3	I plan to visit this destination when I have a chance.	
		IV4	I will revisit this destination in the future.	

Methodology

To explore Cambodian Generation Z's perceptions of urban and rural tourism destinations, this study employed quantitative approach. Five-Likert survey questions were created to collect data from 203 Cambodian youth. Pilot tests are conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of constructs of the study. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques are utilized to get sampling for this research. SPSS Version 26 is used to assess reliability and descriptive of constructs and demographic profiling of respondents. Structural Equation Modelling using SmartPLS4 is utilized to analyze and interpret the relationship between destination image, travel motivation, intention to visit, and the moderator of tourism destination type.

Results

In this study, to produce reliable results, data analysis is performed by conducting data screening and cleaning, respondent profiling, descriptive statistics, common method bias, and followed by measurement model assessments, full structural model assessments, as well as model explanatory power and predictive relevance assessments.

Data Screening and Cleaning

To ensure the quality of data, dataset was screened and cleaned. Outliers, data missing, respondent's misconduct, and impermissible data were assessed using SPSS. The results revealed that there was no missing and impermissible data. Based on boxplots, item (IV1) indicated extreme outliers, but did not affect the reliability and validity of construct (IV). Hence, this item was retained. 37 respondents with the values of standard deviations less than 0.25 were removed. As a result, 166 respondent data points were defined to analyze the quantitative data and produce results.

Respondent Profile

The total number of respondents in this study comprised 166 Cambodian generation Z, including 80 males (48.2%) and 86 females (51.8%). Most respondents were aged 16-19

(36.1%) and 20-29 (63.9%). In addition, 123 respondents (74.1%) studied for a bachelor's degree, 24 (14.5%) at master's degree, and 19 (11.4%) at high school. Most respondents (74.1%) frequently traveled to tourism destinations 1-5 times a year.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of the most attractive tourism destinations for Cambodian generation Z showed that Cambodian generation Z mostly prefers to visit heritage, cultural and natural tourism destinations in top-ten provinces, including Siem Reap 105 (63.3%), Kampot 67 (40.4%), Preah Sihanouk 45 (27.1%), Koh Kong 44 (26.5%), Kep 42 (25.3%), Kampong Speu 37 (22.3%), Mondulkiri 32 (19.3%), Kampong Thom 28 (16.9%), and Preah Vihear 25 (15.1%) whilst only 13 (7.8%) desire to visit Phnom Penh as capital city. This result indicated that most of Cambodian generation Z intends to travel to tourism destinations in the provinces throughout Cambodia rather than staying and walking around the city. Statistics on attractive tourism destination are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Attractive Tourism Destinations

	Responses	Percent of Cases
Siem Reap	105	63.3%
Kampot	67	40.4%
Preah Sihanouk	45	27.1%
Koh Kong	44	26.5%
Kep	42	25.3%
Kampong Speu	37	22.3%
Mondulkiri	32	19.3%
Kampong Thom	28	16.9%
Preah Vihear	25	15.1%
Pursat	22	13.3%
Takeo	22	13.3%
Kampong Cham	21	12.7%
Battambang	19	11.4%
Stung Treng	19	11.4%
Tboung Khmum	19	11.4%
Ratanakiri	18	10.8%
Kampong Chhnang	17	10.2%
Kandal	15	9.0%
Kratie	15	9.0%
Prey Veng	15	9.0%
Phnom Penh	13	7.8%
Banteay Meanchey	13	7.8%

Oddar Meanchey	10	6.0%
Pailin	7	4.2%
Svay Rieng	6	3.6%

Descriptive statistics of intention to visit (see Table 3) revealed that Cambodian generation Z expressed a positive intention to visit tourism destination and has a strong desire to travel to a specific tourism destination (IV = 4.070, SD = 0.653). Cambodian generation Z strongly intend to visit tourism destination (IV1 = 3.920, SD = 0.763), recommend tourism destinations to others (IV2 = 4.110, SD = 0.739), plan to visit tourism destination when they have a chance (IV3 = 4.140, SD = 0.738), and revisit tourism destinations (IV4 = 4.110, SD = 0.786).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Intention to Visit

	Mean	Std. Deviation (SD)
IV1	3.920	0.763
IV2	4.110	0.739
IV3	4.140	0.738
IV4	4.110	0.786
IV	4.070	0.653

Note: *IV = Intention to Visit*

To compare the difference in intention to visit between urban and rural tourism destinations and between male and female Cambodian generation Z, an independent sample t-test was analyzed. Statistical results (see Table 4) revealed that there are insignificant differences in Cambodian generation Z's intention to visit between urban and rural tourism destinations ($t(164) = -0.120$, $p = 0.905$) in mean scores for urban tourism destination (Urban = 4.060, SD = 0.541) and rural tourism destination (Rural = 4.073, SD = 0.699). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.013, 95% confidence interval: -0.232 to 0.206) was too small. In addition, there are also insignificant differences in intention to visit between male and female Cambodian generation Z ($t(164) = -0.961$, $p = 0.338$) in mean scores for male Cambodian generation Z (Male = 4.019, SD = 0.580) and female Cambodian generation Z (Female = 4.116, SD = 0.715). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.098, 95% confidence interval: -0.298 to 0.103) was too small. Overall, these results revealed that both male and female Cambodian generation Z have the same intention to visit tourism destinations and desire to visit the same urban and rural tourism destinations.

Table 4. Differences in Intention to Visit

			Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
										Lower	Upper
Urban	4.060	0.541	3.036	0.083	-0.120	164.000	0.905	-0.013	0.111	-0.232	0.206
Rural	4.073	0.699									
Male	4.019	0.580	3.250	0.073	-0.961	164.000	0.338	-0.098	0.102	-0.298	0.103
Female	4.116	0.715									

Note: *F = F-statistics, t = t-statistics, df = Degree of Freedom*

Common Method Bias

Common method bias was checked using variance inflation factor (VIF). A VIF value of more than 3.3 indicates pathological collinearity, which could be a sign that common method bias has tainted the model (Kock, 2015). The results of collinearity statistics revealed that all values of VIF are less than 3.3 (see Table 5). Hence, there is no issue of common method bias in this study.

Table 5. Variance Inflation Factors for Common Method Bias

Path of Constructs	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)
CI -> E	1.246
CI -> L	1.246
CI -> A	1.246
CI -> C	1.246
CI -> IV	1.613
AI -> E	1.246
AI -> L	1.246
AI -> A	1.246
AI -> C	1.246
AI -> IV	1.625
E -> IV	1.422
L -> IV	2.462
A -> IV	2.411
C -> IV	1.991

Note: *CI = Cognitive Image, AI = Affective Image, E = Escape, L = Learning, A = Attraction, C = Culture, IV = Intention to Visit*

Measurement Model Assessment

The initial measurement of structural equation modelling is measurement model assessment. This measurement model is used to assess the quality of constructs in the study. In this study, there were reflective-reflective higher order constructs. Hence, the measurement model (see Figure 2) assessment are defined as two steps, including lower order construct assessment and higher order construct validation.

Lower Order Construct Assessment

Lower order construct assessment is utilized to check the quality of all lower order constructs. For this assessment, factor loadings, multicollinearity, reliability, and convergent validity were evaluated as shown in Table 6.

A factor loading of more than 0.70 is preferred (Vinzi et al., 2010), and in social science research, researchers typically find weaker outer loadings (< 0.70). Items with factor loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 will be removed unless the deletion of those could improve composite reliability (CR) or average variance extracted (AVE) above the suggested value (Hair et al., 2017). Statistics revealed that all factor loadings are greater than 0.70, except E3 of the construct "Escape" (0.692) fell between 0.40 and 0.70 but did not influence the composite reliability and average variance extracted. Hence, there were no items being deleted.

The variance inflation factor (VIF) is evaluated to verify multicollinearity. Multicollinearity has an issue when the values of VIF exceeds 5 (Joseph F. Hair Jr. et al., 2021). The statistics revealed that all the values of VIF are less than 5. Hence, there is no collinearity issue in this study.

Reliability of constructs is checked based on Cronbach's Alpha, and composite reliability. The results revealed that both statistics exceeded the suggested threshold of 0.70 (Jr et al., 2018). Furthermore, the AVE exceeded the acceptable level; convergent validity was therefore acceptable at 0.50. Fornell & Larker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio were also evaluated to check discriminant validity. Discriminant validity statistics revealed that each construct has the square root of AVE greater than its correlation with other constructs and the ratio values of Heterotrait-Monotrait were below liberal threshold of .90 (Henseler et al., 2015). Fornell & Larker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio were presented in Table 7.

Table 6. Factor Loadings, Multicollinearity, Reliability, Convergent Validity for Lower Order Constructs

Constructs	Items	Outer loadings	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Cognitive Image	CI1	0.779	1.995	0.880	0.913	0.677
	CI2	0.815	2.150			
	CI3	0.828	2.362			
	CI4	0.844	2.357			
	CI5	0.845	2.388			
Affective Image	AI1	0.835	2.348	0.898	0.929	0.766
	AI2	0.888	2.788			
	AI3	0.900	3.072			
	AI4	0.877	2.665			
Escape	E1	0.739	1.832	0.805	0.865	0.617
	E2	0.854	2.168			
	E3	0.692	1.536			
	E4	0.846	1.562			
Learning	L1	0.889	2.912	0.914	0.940	0.795
	L2	0.872	2.411			
	L3	0.917	3.487			
	L4	0.889	2.922			
Attraction	A1	0.824	1.949	0.877	0.915	0.731
	A2	0.913	3.126			
	A3	0.839	2.300			
	A4	0.840	2.179			
Culture	C1	0.755	1.662	0.849	0.897	0.685
	C2	0.796	1.857			
	C3	0.878	2.412			
	C4	0.875	2.025			
Intention to Visit	IV1	0.833	2.008	0.886	0.922	0.746
	IV2	0.843	2.133			
	IV3	0.883	2.767			
	IV4	0.895	2.878			

Note: *CI = Cognitive Image, AI = Affective Image, E = Escape, L = Learning, A = Attraction, C = Culture, TDT = Tourism Destination Type, IV = Intention to Visit*

Table 7. Fornell & Larker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

	CI	AI	E	L	A	C	IV
CI	***0.823***	0.499	0.408	0.572	0.627	0.540	0.607
AI	0.444	***0.875***	0.427	0.538	0.629	0.388	0.580
E	0.381	0.409	***0.786***	0.516	0.413	0.405	0.494
L	0.515	0.492	0.491	***0.892***	0.755	0.733	0.610
A	0.552	0.565	0.407	0.675	***0.855***	0.679	0.707
C	0.476	0.365	0.392	0.652	0.599	***0.828***	0.706
IV	0.538	0.520	0.468	0.552	0.628	0.643	***0.864***

Note: *Bold, diagonal, and italicized elements are the square roots of Average Variance Extracted-AVE. Below the diagonal ones are the correlations between the values of constructs (Fornell & Larcker Criterion), and above are the values of Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio-HTMT, CI = Cognitive Image, AI = Affective Image, E = Escape, L = Learning, A = Attraction, C = Culture, IV = Intention to Visit*

Validation of Higher Order Construct

In this study, there are two higher order constructs, including destination image (DI) measured by cognitive image (CI) and affective image (AI), and travel motivation (TM) measured by escape (E), learning (L), attraction (A), and culture (C).

Destination image (DI) and travel motivation (TM) are measured as reflective-reflective higher order constructs. To establish the validation of higher order constructs, factor loadings, multicollinearity, reliability, and convergent validity for higher order constructs were assessed (see Table 8). Statistics revealed that all factor loadings of destination image and travel motivation have a value greater than the threshold 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017), except item "Escape" of travel motivation construct was less than 0.70 (0.672) but did not affect composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Hence, no items of higher order constructs were removed. In addition, all values of variance inflation factors of all higher order constructs were less than 5. Hence there were no collinearity issues. Although Cronbach's alpha for destination image construct was slightly below the recommended threshold (0.615), the composite reliability value exceeded the recommended threshold (0.839), which indicates acceptable internal consistency reliability. Following the recent PLS-SEM recommendations, composite reliability was primarily prioritized over Cronbach's alpha. Hence, the reliability of higher order constructs was established. In addition, all higher order constructs achieved adequate convergent validity, with the values of AVE exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50. Furthermore, discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio and Fornell-Larcker criterion (see Table 9). The statistics of discriminant validity revealed that despite the value of HTMT between destination image and travel motivation slightly exceeding the recommended threshold 0.90 < (0.962), the value of AVE square root of all higher order constructs were greater than its correlations with other constructs, indicating that the Fornell-Larcker criterion results supported acceptable discriminant validity. Hence, all the construct items were retained for theoretical reasons and

content validity consideration. As a result, the reflective-reflective higher order constructs of destination image and travel motivation were validated.

Table 8. Factor Loadings, Multicollinearity, Reliability, Convergent Validity for Reflective-Reflective Higher Order Constructs

Constructs	Items	Outer loadings	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Destination Image	CI	0.857	1.246	0.615	0.839	0.722
	AI	0.843	1.246			
Travel Motivation	E	0.672	1.344	0.822	0.883	0.656
	L	0.877	2.397			
	A	0.851	2.014			
	C	0.825	1.904			

Note: *CI = Cognitive Image, AI = Affective Image, E = Escape, L = Learning, A = Attraction, C = Culture*

Table 9. Fornell-Larcker Criterion, and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio for Reflective-Reflective Higher Order Constructs

	DI	TM
DI	***0.85***	0.962
TM	0.688	***0.81***

Note: *Bold, diagonal, and italicized elements are the square roots of Average Variance Extracted-AVE. Below the diagonal ones are the correlations between the values of constructs (Fornell & Larcker Criterion), and above are the values of Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio-HTMT, DI = Destination Image, TM = Travel Motivation*

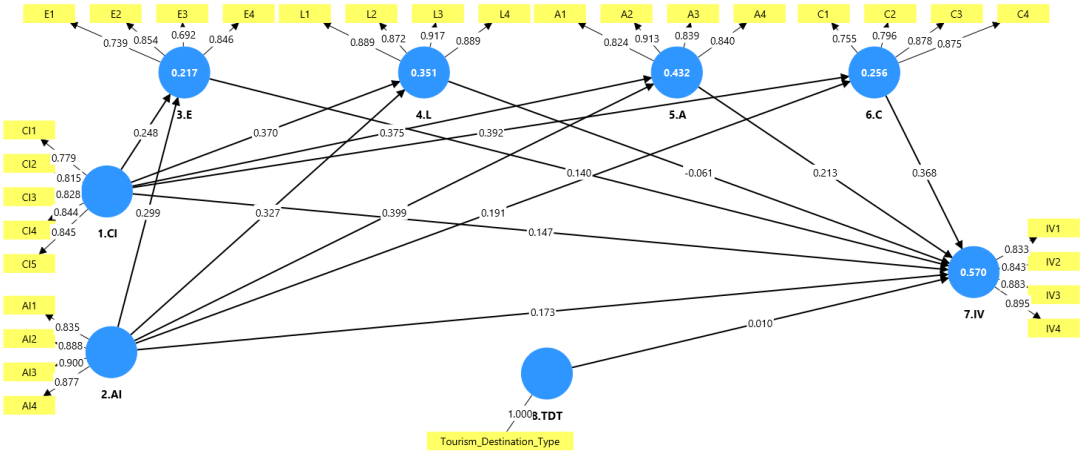

Figure 2. Measurement Model

Structural Model Assessment

Following the measurement assessment, structural model assessment (see Figure 3) was conducted to determine path of constructs in the study. The collinearity of constructs was reconfirmed by assessing the values of variance inflation factor (VIF). Statistical results of structural analysis using 10,000 sub-sample bootstrapping procedures revealed that all VIF values are less than 5; hence there were no collinearity issues.

Following this, the evaluation of paths was done to test hypotheses, including H1: There is a significant relationship between destination image and intention to visit; H2: There is a significant relationship between destination image and travel motivation; H3: There is a significant relationship between travel motivation and intention to visit; H4: Tourism destination type moderates the relationship between destination image and intention to visit; H5: Tourism destination type moderates the relationship between destination image and travel motivation; and H6:Tourism destination type moderates the relationship between destination image and intention to visit through travel motivation. The results of path analysis (see Table 10) revealed that there is insignificant relationship between destination image and intention to visit (B = 0.218, t = 1.724, P = 0.085), not supporting H1. In contrast, there are significant and positive relationships between destination image and travel motivation (B = 0.477, t = 4.639, P < 0.001), supporting H2, and between travel motivation and intention to visit (B = 0.533, t = 6.988, P < 0.001), supporting H3. Moreover, tourism destination type does not moderate the relationship between destination image and intention to visit (B = 0.051, t = 0.390, P = 0.697), not supporting H4, but significantly positive moderates the relationship between destination image and travel motivation (B = 0.278, t = 2.057, P = 0.040), supporting H5. Furthermore, tourism destination type marginally significant moderates the relationship between destination image and intention to visit through travel motivation (B = 0.148, t = 1.910, P = 0.056). Especially, the indirect effect of destination image on intention to visit through travel motivation is stronger when tourism destination type is high (TDT = 1) (B = 0.403, t = 5.681, P < 0.001) compared to low tourism destination type (TDT = 0) (B = 0.254, t = 4.083, P < 0.001), supporting H6. Overall, the results indicated that destination image alone does not directly influence Cambodian generation Z's intention to visit, but destination image may influence their intention to visit through travel motivation. The effect of destination image on Cambodian generation Z's motivation varies across different tourism destination types. In addition, the impact of destination image on Cambodian generation Z's intention to visit operates primarily through travel motivation and is contingent upon tourism destination type.

Table 10. Path Analysis

Hypotheses	B	Standard deviation (SD)	T statistics	P values	Results
Direct Relationship					
DI -> IV	0.218	0.126	1.724	0.085	Not supported

DI -> TM	0.477	0.103	4.639	0.000	Supported
TM -> IV	0.533	0.076	6.988	0.000	Supported
TDT x DI -> IV	0.051	0.132	0.390	0.697	Not supported
TDT x DI -> TM	0.278	0.135	2.057	0.040	Supported
Moderated Indirect Relationship					
TDT x DI -> TM -> IV	0.148	0.078	1.910	0.056	Supported
Probing Moderated Indirect Relationship					
DI -> TM -> IV TDT at one	0.403	0.071	5.681	0.000	
DI -> TM -> IV TDT at zero	0.254	0.062	4.083	0.000	

Note: *H = Hypothesis, B = Beta Coefficient, DI = Destination Image, TM = Travel Motivation, TDT = Tourism Destination Type, IV = Intention to Visit*

Model Explanatory Power and Predictive Relevance

The model's explanatory power was assessed using R^2, which indicates the variance in endogenous constructs explained by exogenous variables (Shmueli & Koppius, 2011). As shown in Table 11 and Figure 3, destination image, travel motivation, tourism destination type, and their interaction term jointly explained 54.1% of the variance in intention to visit (R^2 = 0.541), indicating substantial explanatory power. Moreover, destination image, tourism destination type, and their interaction term accounted for 48.8% of the variance in travel motivation (R^2 = 0.488), demonstrating moderate-to-high explanatory power.

Effect size (f^2) was examined to assess the contribution of each exogenous construct by observing changes in R^2 when a predictor was omitted. Following Jacob Cohen's (1988) guidelines, destination image showed a small effect (f^2 = 0.022), whereas travel motivation had a medium effect on intention to visit (f^2 = 0.317). However, tourism destination type showed no effect on intention to visit (f^2 = 0.000), and the interaction effect between tourism destination type and destination image to intention to visit was negligible (f^2 = 0.001). Regarding travel motivation, destination image showed a small-to-moderate effect (f^2 = 0.106), while tourism destination type had no effect on travel motivation (f^2 = 0.000), and the interaction effect between tourism destination type and destination image to travel motivation indicated a small effect (f^2 = 0.027).

Predictive relevance was evaluated using Q^2. The Q^2 value for intention to visit (Q^2 = 0.364) and travel motivation (Q^2 = 0.461) were both well above zero, which indicates strong predictive

relevance and good out-of-sample predictive power of the structural model (Hair et al., 2017). Overall, these findings showed that the proposed structural model demonstrates strong predictive accuracy and explanatory power for both endogenous constructs.

Table 11. Model Explanatory Power and Predictive Relevance

Exogenous Constructs	Endogenous Constructs	R-Square	F-Square	Q-Square
DI -> IV	IV	0.541	0.022	0.364
TM -> IV			0.317	
TDT -> IV			0.000	
TDT x DI -> IV			0.001	
DI -> TM	TM	0.488	0.106	0.461
TDT -> TM			0.000	
TDT x DI -> TM			0.027	

Note: *DI = Destination Image, TM = Travel Motivation, TDT = Tourism Destination Type, IV = Intention to Visit*

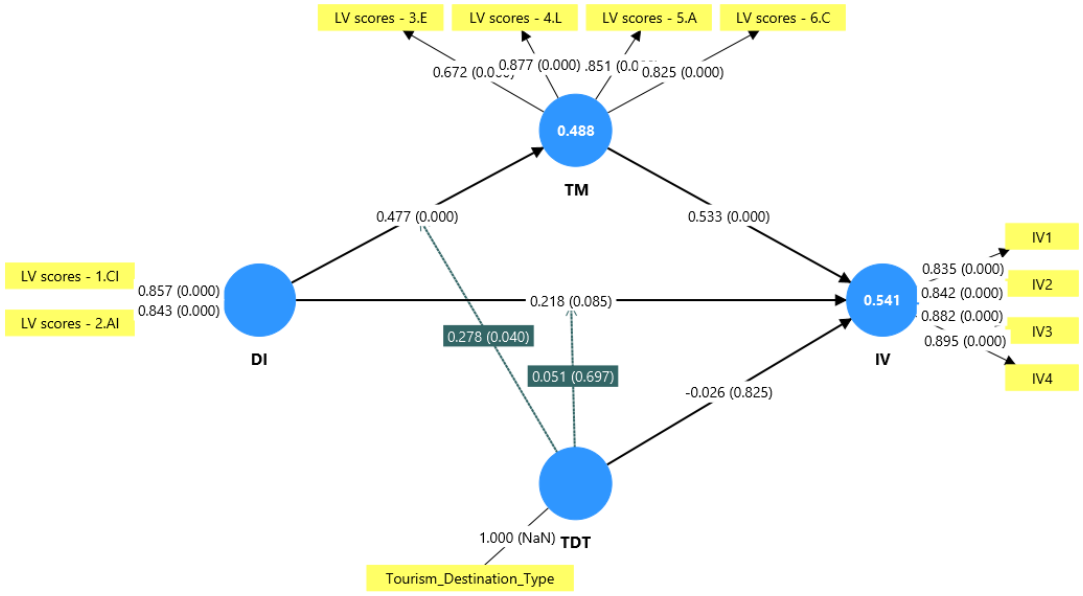

Figure 3. Structural Model

Discussion

This study explored Cambodian generation Z's perceptions of tourism destinations by examining the relationships between destination image, travel motivation, intention to visit, and the moderation of tourism destination type.

The results revealed that Cambodian generation Z mostly prefers to visit heritage, cultural, and natural tourism destinations located in provincial areas, such as Siem Reap, Kampot, and Preah Sihanouk emerged as the most attractive destinations rather than urban destinations like Phnom Penh capital city, which shows Cambodian generation Z's increasing needs for authentic experiences, cultural immersion, and nature-based activities. This is aligned with previous tourism studies indicating that younger visitors prefer meaningful and experiential travel over traditional urban attractions. This pattern suggests that Cambodian people, in particular Cambodian younger travelers are becoming more interested in eco-tourism, rural tourism, heritage, cultural and natural tourism.

Furthermore, the analysis of intention to visit indicated that Cambodian generation Z shows a high level of travel intention, including strong willingness to recommend, revisit, and plan to visit in the future. Especially, both male and female Cambodian generation Z have the same intention to visit to both urban and rural tourism destinations. This suggests that Cambodian generation Z' travel desire is comparatively consistent across demographic groups and destination contexts, which highlight that motivational and psychological factors play a more important role than demographic characteristics.

Moreover, the structural path analysis showed that contrary to many previous tourism studies finding a significant direct effect, destination image does not directly affect intention to visit. However, destination image significantly affects travel motivation, which in turn strongly influences intention to visit. This finding shows travel motivation as the primary mechanism through which cognitive and affective evaluations convert into behavioral intention to visit, which indicates that travel motivation plays a mediating role in the relationship between destination image and intention to visit. Furthermore, tourism destination type significantly moderates the relationship between destination image and travel motivation, as well as the indirect relationship between destination image and intention to visit through travel motivation. Along with this, the indirect effect was notably stronger for high level tourism destination type (rural tourism) than for low level tourism destination type (urban tourism). This showed that rural tourism destination increases the motivational impact of destination image than urban one. Favorable rural tourism destination images, including natural beauty, cultural authenticity, and escape from routine, are more effective in stimulating Cambodian generation Z's travel motivation, which is in line with the growing pattern of experiential and nature-based tourism, particularly among younger travelers who desire novelty, relaxation, and natural and cultural immersion.

Overall, the results revealed that destination image alone is insufficient to directly influence intention to visit among Cambodian generation Z. Destination image significantly affects travel motivation, in turn strongly influencing intention to visit, which indicates that the critical meditating role of travel motivation in the relationship between destination image and intention to visit, as well as a moderated mediating role of tourism destination type on the indirect effects of destination image on intention to visit through travel motivation. These findings extended theoretically the destination image and motivation framework by integrating mediating role of

travel motivation, and moderating role of tourism destination type within a moderated mediation framework. This also provided meaningful implications for destination marketers, tourism planners and policy makers who aims to attract young travelers, particularly in the context of developing countries, like Cambodia.

Conclusion

This study provides a deeper understanding of Cambodian generation Z's perceptions of urban and rural tourism destinations, by examining the relationships of destination image, travel motivation, intention to visit, and tourism destination type. The findings revealed that Cambodian generation Z shows their strong desire for heritage, cultural, and natural tourism destinations, particularly in provincial areas, while they consistently show high intentions to travel to tourism destination regardless of gender or tourism destination type. Due to favorable rural tourism destination images and resources, rural tourism destination is a driver of travel motivation of Cambodian generation Z.

The results confirm that travel motivation plays a significant mediating role between destination image and intention to visit, whereas destination image alone does not directly influence intention to visit. Furthermore, tourism destination type significantly moderates the relationship between destination image and travel motivation and strengthens the indirect effect of destination image on intention to visit through travel motivation. These findings extended existing tourism models by demonstrating the moderated mediation role of tourism destination type in the context of younger travelers' behavior in a developing country.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends existing tourism behavior models by adding moderated mediation analysis within the context of generation Z tourism in developing countries. Practically, the results offer important implications for tourism planners and policymakers, tourism practitioners, and marketers. Destination branding and promotion strategies should focus on enhancing both cognitive and affective images of rural tourism destinations while designing motivationally attractive tourism products that focus on cultural authenticity, natural beauty, and environmental, cultural, and experiential value. Additionally, urban tourism destination development should add more innovative and experiential elements to be in line with generation Z's travel desire. Despite its contributions, this study is still limited. The sample is limited to Cambodian generation Z, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research could employ longitudinal designs, mixed-method approaches, or cross-cultural comparisons to further validate and extend the proposed model of this study. However, this study provided valuable empirical evidence for understanding younger travelers' behavior and offers actionable insights for sustainable tourism development and destination management in Cambodia.

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