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The Power of Buzz: What Makes a Factory Fabulous? A Study on College Students' Tourism Behavior in Visiting Tourism Factories

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Abstract
Amid Taiwan's growing domestic tourism market, understanding college students' travel behavior toward tourism factories has become crucial for operators. Previous studies have primarily focused on experiences and satisfaction associated with tourism factories, yet have generally neglected a systematic investigation into how word of mouth influences the transformation process from behavioral intention to actual visit behavior among younger populations. Using the theory of planned behavior, this study investigates how word of mouth influences attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, further affecting behavioral intention and actual visit behavior. To explore the research objectives, data were collected from 161 college students who had previously visited tourism factories, and analyzed using the structural equation modeling method via Smart-PLS software. The results of the PLS-SEM analysis indicate that word of mouth exerts a significantly positive influence on college students' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In turn, these three variables significantly impact behavioral intention, demonstrating a strong positive effect on actual visit behavior. For college students' choices about where to travel, the importance of external social influences and practical considerations is greater than that of individual attitudes, which played a role in influencing behaviour, highlighting the important influence of word-of-mouth on decision-making again. Findings address the research gap in tourism factory studies targeting young consumers and provide managerial insights for developing marketing strategies. The results offer practical guidance for tourism factory operators to attract college students, contributing to strategic development in Taiwan's post-pandemic tourism industry.

Key Words: tourism factories, word-of-mouth marketing, theory of planned behavior

JEL Classification: M20, M31

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the emergence of tourism factories as an innovative integration of industrial production and tourism experience has drawn increasing attention worldwide. The factories extend

transparency and improve consumer experiences by opening their production processes to the public. They also enhance consumer experiences through educational, participatory, and recreational opportunities (Botorić, 2024; Sun et al., 2022). These facilities can now fulfill both functions, which was previously considered difficult due to their dual significance as cultural and economic tourism resources. For example, as of 2023, Taiwan's 158 registered tourism factories produced an output value of NT$6.6 billion and attracted 22.3 million visits, representing their increasing role in the domestic tourism economy.

The development of tourism factories began in Taiwan in the 1990s and was formalized in 2003 when the government introduced the concept of "industrial tourism." This was a stimulus for industrial tourism development, and tourism factories expanded considerably across the sectors of food, crafts, and technology (Yeh et al., 2019). According to the Industrial Development Administration, output value and visitor numbers will reach unprecedented levels by the year 2024, supporting projections of growth and highlighting the increasing cultural and economic value of tourism factories. However, the onset of COVID-19 in 2020 halted any advances toward this end, and total domestic tourists dropped 25 percent relative to 2019 (Tourism Administration, 2021). Despite these challenges, the domestic tourism market is gradually recovering, particularly driven by the interest of younger demographics.

College students have gradually become an influential consumer group in Taiwan's tourism sector. Characterized by high curiosity, greater flexibility, and stronger responsiveness to peer influence, they represent a key target for tourism factories marketing (Chen, 2012). Understanding the behavioral mechanisms that determine their tourism choices is paramount for effective marketing processes. Prior research indicates that the preferences of the normative influences can directly impact consumers' behavior in cultural and domestic travel (Etminani-Ghasrodashti et al., 2023; Duhnea et al., 2024), so their travel consumption is appropriate for academic exploration. Also, the outcome of research from Alsharif et al. (2024) contains some implications regarding social media shaping aspects of customer experience, satisfaction, and attitudes, which were found to impact behavioral decisions made by customers. The other study conducted by Alsharif and Isa (2025) identified that consumers were encouraged by the advertising content (e.g., user reviews), and this stimulation can lead to behavioral responses. However, previous research has not considered in detail the psychological processes through which WOM influences behavioral formation. This study provides an application of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) to fill this research gap.

According to TPB, individuals are more likely to perform a behavior if they have a positive attitude toward it, perceive social support, and believe they have the ability to carry it out (Chen et al., 2023). In the context of this study, behavior refers to actual visits to tourism factories by college students, including planning trips, participating in guided tours, engaging in interactive experiences, and making purchases.

Despite the predictive power of TPB, the role of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication has not been sufficiently integrated into such models. Especially for college students, interpersonal influence and peer recommendations are often the final determinants that shape their perceptions and behavioral intentions. This explains why WOM has influence over behavioral intentions (My, 2023). While both qualitative and quantitative methods have enriched the field of consumer behavior research (Alvino et al., 2020), they often fail to capture the subtle psychological mechanisms that influence behavior, especially those originating from socially influenced responses.

The study is based on the work of Hashim et al. (2025), who used the TPB as their theoretical framework, and builds on Alsharif and Isa (2025), who found a significant effect of WOM on tourists' behavioral intentions. In the existing literature, authors have mostly used TPB to see the relationship between behavioral intention and actual behavior. Few studies have used WOM as one of the external variables in TPB to verify whether WOM fulfills any influence on attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intentions in whatever tourism contexts. Therefore, the present study aims to offer a combined model to measure the WOM influence on university students' perceived

attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, behavioral intentions, and actual participation in tourism factory activities. The study aims to extend TPB in tourism behavior and generate some concrete marketing strategies to reach the youth market, thereby providing industry practitioners with actionable insights to inform their promotional strategies.

To achieve these research objectives, Section 2 presents a literature review covering the background of tourism factories, the TPB framework, and hypothesis development. Section 3 describes the research methodology, including questionnaire design and sampling strategy. Section 4 provides data analysis and findings. Section 5 discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the results. Finally, Section 6 concludes with a summary, research limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Domestic Tourism in Taiwan

In recent years, factors such as rising national income, the implementation of the two-day weekend policy, improved transportation infrastructure, and the accelerated flow of media and information have led to increasing public participation in leisure activities and growing expectations for travel quality in Taiwan, thereby driving the robust development of the domestic tourism market (Kung, 2018). According to a domestic tourism survey conducted by the Tourism Bureau, Ministry of Transportation and Communications (2016), the domestic tourism rate in Taiwan reached 93.2%, with an average of 8.5 trips per person annually and a total tourism expenditure of NT$300.1 billion. These figures indicate that domestic tourism has become a significant part of daily life for many Taiwanese citizens. Even under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the number of domestic tourist visits still reached 143 million. The government's "Safe Travel Program" further stimulated domestic demand, effectively boosting the overall revenue of the tourism industry.

According to a report by the Central News Agency (2023), tourism factories attracted approximately 17 million visits in 2022. This suggests that most tourism factories in Taiwan are still primarily oriented towards local tourists; meanwhile, there are only a small number of international tourists (Lee, 2016). Thus, it is strategically significant to identify the intention of young people, such as college students, to visit tourism factories for the future development of this industry.

2.2 Research related to tourism factories

As an innovative industrial model that combines industry and leisure tourism, tourism factories have gradually emerged in Taiwan since the early 2000s. As the number and types of tourism factories continue to increase, the academic community has conducted extensive discussions on their business strategies, service design, tourist behavior, and educational functions. According to the suggestions of Yang et al. (2024), in order to meet the diverse needs of tourists, personalized itinerary design should be provided and various interactive activities should be integrated to enhance tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Jóźwiak and Sieg (2021) pointed out in their research that tourism factories not only serve as tourist attractions but also enhance educational functions by designing specific learning activities and using differentiation strategies to highlight their uniqueness, so as to attract more tourists and improve economic benefits. Interactivity and education are key factors affecting service experience (Hsieh & Chuang, 2020; Streimikiene, Bathaei, 2025). Through innovative service design and experiential marketing strategies, tourism factories can effectively improve customer satisfaction and loyalty (Yeh et al., 2019). Previous research results have shown that the most effective marketing strategy is to integrate experience activities with product sales, especially for young consumers. Emotional appeals and storytelling marketing have also been shown to significantly improve customer experience satisfaction,

thereby enhancing their consumer behavior (Júnior et al., 2023). Although the above studies have put forward research suggestions on the business strategies, service design and tourist behavior of tourism factories, they have not analyzed the behavior of college students in detail. As young people with strong learning ability and exploratory spirit, college students have a higher demand for innovation, interaction and educational experience (Wong & Chapman, 2023), which makes them an important potential customer group for tourism factories.

2.3 Theory of planned behavior

TPB was proposed by social psychologist Ajzen in 1985 as a model to extend the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Ajzen added the important facet of "perceived behavioral control" to TRA to explain the external constraints or ability limitations that individuals face when confronting actual actions in addition to intentional behavior. This theory attempts to explain and predict human behavior more comprehensively, especially in situations where external factors cannot be fully controlled. This theory has gradually become an important theoretical basis in the field of behavioral tourism (Chen et al., 2023; Hamid & Bano, 2022). Nam (2023) incorporated push-pull factors as well as cognitive dissonance theory into a TPB framework to examine tourists revisit intentions. Furthermore, Hashim et al. (2025) found related to attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control from the TPB model are important determinants of revisit intention of family visitors to water parks. Although Hashim et al. (2025) and Nam (2023) employed TPB to examine the mechanisms underlying tourist behavior, their research primarily focused on the direct effects of TPB's core constructs on behavioral intention. However, they paid relatively little attention to the specific antecedents of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. To address this gap, the present study adopts the perspective of WOM marketing to investigate its potential influence on these three components, thereby enhancing the theoretical extension and explanatory power of TPB in studying tourist behavior.

2.4 Word of mouth and theory of planned behavior

As a form of information transmission, WOM can be achieved through face-to-face oral communication as well as through other channels to communicate with consumers (Li et al., 2023). Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) further believed that WOM communication is also the transmission of information about other people's "past behavioral habits" and becomes an important factor affecting the receiver's response to external information. Azhar et al. (2022) pointed out that WOM communication is incorporated into the TPB to understand the application and basis of consumer behavior in the TPB expanded by WOM. Iriobe and Abiola-Oke (2019) explored the impact of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on the three variables of TPB for the choice of religious tourism destinations, and proposed the role of eWOM in moderating subjective norms and perceived behavioral control on intention to revisit. Nam (2023) combined cognitive dissonance theory, TPB and WOM to explore the influencing factors in the tourism purchase decision-making process. Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) and My (2023) integrated eWOM into TPB antecedents to explore tourism location intention.

2.5 Hypotheses Development

2.5.1 Word of mouth and attitude

WOM, which is a non-formatted and socialized informal communication, is influential and has an informal influence on travel behavior and attitudes (Kaur & Kaur, 2023). Before tourism activities, individuals build impressions of destinations on shared experience, recommendations, and reviews (Shen, 2021). Information from either families, friends, or online communities, is seen as credible and influences

cognitive and emotional evaluation (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). College students trust external information and engage with it more as they have less travel experience, which makes them more reactive (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Trust in the source amplified the force of WOM and motivated further WOM sharing (Loureiro et al., 2018). In addition, attitudes about online platforms and online reviews shape our perceptions of various tourism services (Marine-Roig, 2019). When responding to positive WOM, individuals unconsciously build trust and emotional bonds that develop into favorable attitudes (Zeba & Ganguli, 2016), and trust that was created initially may persist over time to influence sense-making after expected or surprise feedback (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Based on this information, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Word of mouth has a positive impact on attitude.

2.5.2 Word of mouth and subjective norms

Subjective norms reflect the social expectations and perceived pressure individuals experience, influencing their behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). When people value others' opinions and seek social approval, subjective norms strongly affect behavior (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). This is particularly true for college students, who are more influenced by peers, family, and friends. These individuals are often the primary sources of WOM.

Md Husin (2016) noted that WOM from trusted sources shapes decisions through personal stories and digital sharing. Such insights, especially during travel planning, guide expectations and encourage social conformity (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Schepers and Wetzels (2007) confirmed a strong link between WOM and subjective norm, identifying it as a core factor in shaping behavior in social contexts. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H2: Word of mouth has a positive impact on subjective norms.

2.5.3 Word of mouth and perceived behavioral control

Perceived behavioral control is about one's belief in their ability and resources to perform the behavior, which is influenced by internal and external factors (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). In tourism, travelers can enhance their perceived behavioral control if they feel informed and capable. WOM can be a key source in this perception.

Md Husin (2016) offered that credible WOM from someone known to the individual directly impacts behavioral control. Because travelers receive practical and/or experiential oral communication, it can offer them advice/travel assistance about ease, resources, and impediments that enhance their confidence in making decisions and managing situations that may arise. With its two-way nature, it is more persuasive and can directly impact one person by helping them reassess self-efficacy based on accounts from close others.

When faced with most travel activities, especially unfamiliar ones like tourism factory visits, college students can use stories of success heard from trusted referents and feel confident in their ability to manage the trip. Ran et al. (2021) suggested that similar input can strengthen perceived behavioral control. Thus, we suggest the following hypotheses:

H3: Word of mouth has a positive impact on perceived behavioral control.

2.5.4 Attitude and behavioral intention.

In the TPB, attitude is a central construct that refers to how people determine a behavior's outcomes. For example, a positive attitude is created when a person perceives the outcomes as positive, thus creating intentions to act (Özel & Çoban, 2023). In tourism, a person's attitude includes emotional

and cognitive assessments of the destination and trip experiences based on their destination and experience beliefs and past experiences (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Travelers hold a higher level of intentions with positive attitudes, but behavioral attitudes tend to be strong and negative attitudes tend to decrease intentions (Bianchi et al., 2017). For example, if a college student believes they are going to learn, relax, or socialize on a tourism factory visit, they are more likely want to go. Han et al. (2020) point out that perceived value leads to positive evaluations, ultimately leading to intention. Based on this logic, we suggest the following hypotheses:

H4: Attitude has a positive impact on behavioral intention.

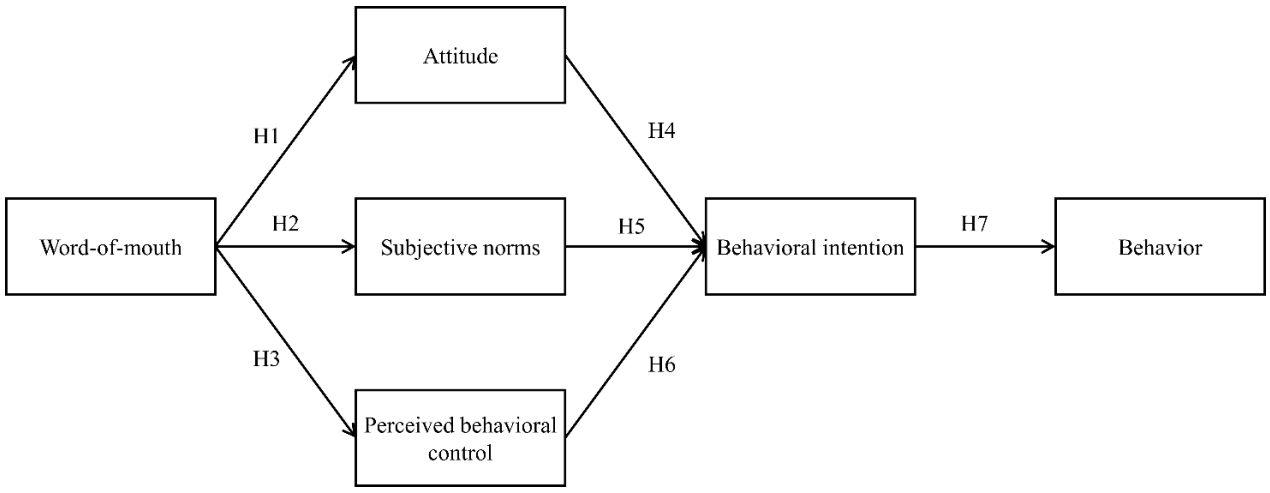
2.5.5 Subjective norms and behavioral intention.

Subjective norm in the TPB is perceived social pressure from referents (people that matter to you) (Ajzen, 1991). People will likely change their intentions when they perceive they are influenced in a way that matters to others (Belanche et al., 2019). Tourism is a social process, and individuals might be implicitly drawn to the group's values in making their decisions. The factors influencing college students' intention to visit tourism factories would be enhanced by support from significant referents, such as family and peers (Dang, 2022). Sun et al. (2017) verified the positive effects of subjective norm on intention, specifically in socially meaningful contexts. As a result, we assume that peer encouragement will influence college students' potential to travel to tourism factories. We propose the following hypotheses:

H5: Subjective norms have a positive impact on behavioral intention.

2.5.6 Behavioral intention and behavior

Graph 1. **Research framework**



Source: Authors

Perceived behavioral control is defined as the confidence an individual has in their ability to perform a behavior. When people feel capable and have the tools to explore tourism, the intention to do so is strengthened (Song et al., 2015; Hamid & Bano, 2022). Travel intentions are impacted by time, ability, and knowledge about the location (Bianchi et al., 2017). For college students, the available time, ability to acquire transportation, finances, and familiarity with a tourism factory visit form their perceived control and willingness to engage in tourism activities (Singh et al., 2018). Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H6: Perceived behavioral control has a positive impact on behavioral intention.

Behavioral intention is a good predictor of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Strong intentions usually end in action because we want to achieve our goals (Bianchi et al., 2017). If students have a strong intention to visit tourism factories, then the likelihood that they will show up is much greater. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H7: Behavioral intention has a positive impact on behavior.

Figure 1 presents the research framework developed in this study based on the literature review.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This study adopted a questionnaire survey method. The questionnaire design was based on a scale that had been verified for reliability and validity in previous relevant important literature to ensure content validity. The questionnaire was measured using a Likert 5-point scale, and the subjects filled in the answers based on their subjective perception of each description. This study utilized the five-point Likert scale to simplify the responding process for the participant to simplify the cognitive demand of answering the items. According to Revilla et al. (2014), a five-point scale will yield better response efficiency and understanding for the participant than longer scales when many questionnaire items are used, or the samples consist of individuals from differing backgrounds. This approach leads to improved completion rates and better quality of data. The study also adopted the parallel translation method, with three researchers translating simultaneously and comparing the similarity of the meaning of the translated questions in the questionnaires with each other to obtain the most accurate results. In terms of variable operational definitions and questionnaire question design, the TPB mainly refers to and modifies the studies of Ajzen (1991), Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), and Iriobe and Abiola-Oke (2019) to design TPB variable questions in line with the direction of this study. In order to ensure that the important questions in the questionnaire can be accurately conveyed to the respondents, after the design is completed, the questionnaire is tested for expert validity and face validity by five experts and scholars to confirm that the content of the designed questions can be clearly conveyed to the respondents.

3.2 Questionnaire construction and sampling method

This research relied on a snowball sampling design. All participants were, however, students enrolled in a college for tourism. The initial participants were first-year students who had previously participated in tourism factories visits. Subsequently, this cohort passed the questionnaire on to fellow members within the same college cohort who also participated in tourism factories visits. This sampling method helped guarantee that all participants had a common understanding of tourism-related experiences, reducing the sampling bias's impact. This study uses a questionnaire survey method to measure the respondents' attitudes and opinions on the issue. The questionnaires for this study were distributed from August 15, 2024 to August 28, 2024, and were distributed to college students. There are approximately 800 students enrolled in the College of Tourism at the university. After excluding third-year students who are required to participate in off-campus internships and first-year students with whom junior classmates have limited contact, the estimated target population for this study was approximately 500 individuals. Using the Sample Size Calculator, the needed sample size was 217. We have 220 responses. To enhance measurement validity, questionnaires with incomplete responses, duplicate entries, and random or insincere answers were excluded as invalid samples. Thus, 161 valid sample responses were used for this study. The questionnaire in this study includes 4 questions on WOM recommendation,

4 questions on attitude, 7 questions on subjective norms, 5 questions on perceived behavioral control, 3 questions on behavioral intentions and 6 questions on actual behaviors, with a total of 29 questions.

3.3 Data analysis method

The questionnaire was designed based on the research purpose and framework. The collected questionnaire data was sorted and invalid questionnaires were eliminated before data analysis. The statistical methods used included: (1) Reliability and Validity Analysis (2) Descriptive Statistics, which uses demographic background statistical variables to examine and describe the distribution of sample data. (3) One-Way ANOVA: used to test whether there are significant differences in the means of multiple groups of samples. (4) This study uses the T test to examine whether there is a significant difference in the means of two categories of samples on a certain dependent variable. When there is a significant difference in the test, this study uses the Scheffé's method for testing.

3.4 Common method bias

To evaluate the common method bias (CMB), we checked the factor level variance inflation factors (VIFs). We concluded that all VIF values were below the 3.3 threshold (ranging from 1.000 to 1.272), indicating that common method bias was absent (Kock, 2015). In addition, Harman's single factor test was followed by factoring using an exploratory factor analysis (fixed on one-factor extraction and not rotatable) to examine the total variance of the single extracted factor and to assess whether its total variance was below the cut-off of 50% (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The single factor explained 27% of the total variance, which fell below the cut-off of 50%. Therefore, no CMB was detected.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

In the descriptive statistical analysis of the sample structure of this study, the gender ratio was 51.6% males and 48.4% females, and the ratio of male and female samples was equal. In terms of the grade of college students, the majority of respondents were seniors, accounting for 29.8%, followed by sophomores, accounting for 27.3%. Among the monthly travel frequency, 41.1% travel once every two to three months, followed by once a month accounting for 29.2%. Among the members traveling together, friends and classmates account for the largest proportion at 67.1%, followed by family members and relatives, accounting for 26.7%. As for the purpose of traveling to tourism factories, relaxing body and mind accounted for the largest proportion at 47.8%, followed by traveling with friends and family at 33.5%. Finally, in terms of how to collect tourism factories traveling information, off-campus visits accounted for the largest proportion at 34.8%, followed by KOL recommendations at 33.5%.

Table 1. **Distribution of sample demographic variables**

Variables	Content	Number of samples	Percentage	Variables	Content	Number of samples	Percentage
Gender	Male	83	51.6%	Members traveling together	Friends and classmates	108	67.1%

	Female	78	48.4%		Family and relatives	43	26.7%
Grade	Freshmen	18	11.2%		Traveling alone	10	6.2%
	Sophomore	44	27.3%	Purpose of traveling	Traveling with family and friends	54	33.5%
	Junior	26	16.1%		Relaxing body and mind	77	47.8%
	Senior	48	29.8%		Learn something new	27	16.8%
	Graduate school and above	25	15.5%		Brand story	2	1.9%
Travel frequency	Once a month	47	29.2%	Collect travel information	Recommended by family and friends	51	31.7%
	Once every two to three months	66	41.0%		Recommended by KOL	54	33.5%
	Once every three to six months	41	25.5%		Off-campus visits	56	34.8%
	More than once every six months	7	4.3%				

Source: Authors

4.2 Descriptive statistical analysis of the scale

This study developed a TPB scale and modified it according to the research subjects. The research results showed that the respondents had a higher degree of agreement on the WOM recommendation facet, with a mean of 4.09, followed by the perceived behavioral control facet, with a mean of 4.01, and the lowest facet was attitude, with a mean of 3.25. This shows that college students consider WOM recommendation as a more important factor in choosing to travel to tourism factories. The item with the highest mean was "before visiting a tourism factories, I will look for relevant WOM and reviews on social media", with a mean of 4.19, showing the importance of social media in WOM transmission. These results reflect that WOM recommendation has a considerable impact on the travel decision-making process of college students, and the reviews and opinions on social media have become an important basis for their judgment. The second is the perceived behavioral control facet, with a mean of 4.01, indicating that students generally feel a strong sense of control over factory tourism activities. The mean for "the transportation convenience of the tourism factories will affect my decision whether to visit" is 4.26, reflecting that transportation convenience is one of the main factors considered by students. This means that when students choose tourism factories as a tourist destination, they will pay attention to the controllability of the environment and itinerary, and adjust their visit plans accordingly.

The facet with the lowest mean was attitude, which showed that college students tended to be reserved about visiting tourism factories. The mean of the item "I think visiting tourism factories is a good opportunity to increase knowledge and experience" was the highest, reaching 4.06, indicating that college students generally believe that tourism factories have educational value. However, regarding the intention to actually participate in activities traveling to tourism factories, such as "in my recent travel plans, I would consider engaging in activities traveling to tourism factories," the mean was only 2.93, indicating that students had a low willingness to actually participate in activities traveling to tourism factories. This reflects that although students recognize the educational significance of tourism factories, its tourism appeal still needs to be improved for college students.

Table 2. **Mean and standard deviation of scale items**

Variables	Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Word-of-mouth recommendation (WOM)	1. Before visiting a tourism factory, I will search for relevant word-of-mouth information.	4.07	0.923
	2. Before visiting a tourism factory, I will refer to other people's word-of-mouth reviews.	4.17	0.831
	3. Before visiting a tourism factory, I will rely on word-of-mouth recommendations from family, friends, or colleagues.	3.94	0.958
	4. Before visiting a tourism factory, I will look for relevant word of mouth and reviews on social media.	4.19	0.910
Attitude (ATT)	1. In my recent travel plans, I would consider engaging in activities traveling to tourism factories.	2.93	1.207
	2. I will actively participate in relevant activities traveling to tourism factories.	2.99	1.126
	3. In the future, I will actively collect information about tourism factories activities.	3.01	1.095
	4. I think visiting tourism factories is a good opportunity to increase knowledge and experience.	4.06	0.937
Subjective norms (SN)	1. I will decide to visit a tourism factory based on the approval of my family and friends.	3.51	0.988
	2. I will follow the advice of my family and friends and visit tourism factories.	3.45	1.037
	3. I will decide to visit a tourism factory because of the unique local festivals.	3.63	1.030
	4. I will decide to visit a specific tourism factories based on the recommendations of travel experts.	3.44	1.077
	5. I will decide to visit a tourism factory based on recommendations from advertising media.	3.57	0.934
	6. I will decide to visit a tourism factory based on the recommendation of a KOL.	3.61	1.195
	7. I will decide to visit a tourism factory based on recommendations from social media.	3.77	0.917
Perceived behavioral control (PBC)	1. I understand how to choose a tourism factory that suits me as a travel destination.	3.65	1.103
	2. I have sufficient financial resources to visit tourism factories and enjoy their activities.	3.97	1.075

	3. I will adjust my choice of tourism factories according to weather conditions.	4.11	1.040
	4. The transportation convenience of the tourism factories will affect my decision whether to visit.	4.26	1.016
	5. I will decide whether to visit a tourism factory based on whether I have suitable companions.	4.05	1.065
Behavioral intention (BI)	1. I think visiting a tourism factory requires sufficient advance planning.	3.71	1.218
	2. I think tourism factories can be an independent tourist itinerary and does not need to be combined with other itineraries.	2.68	1.348
	3. I am willing to buy related products or souvenirs when visiting tourism factories.	3.65	1.091
Actual behavior (AB)	1. I will share the advantages of this tourism factory with others.	3.70	1.018
	2. I will recommend others to visit this tourism factory.	3.47	0.981
	3. I will encourage my family and friends to buy products provided by this tourism factory.	3.30	0.980
	4. The products of this tourism factory are my first choice for purchasing related products.	3.23	1.080
	5. I will increase my purchases of this tourist factory's products in the future.	3.20	1.113
	6. If there are similar tourism factories, I will actively visit them.	2.94	1.088

Source: Authors

4.3 Structural Model

This study used the partial least squares (PLS) method in the structural equation model (SEM) to analyze and explore the impact of WOM, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on behavioral intentions. Hair et al. (2017) indicated that discriminant validity is established when the absolute value of the correlation coefficients between constructs is lower than the square root of each construct's average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 3, the absolute values of the correlation coefficients among the constructs in this study are all lower than their respective square roots of AVE, except for the correlation between BI and AB, which is slightly higher than the square root of AVE for BI. Moreover, according to Kline (2023), an absolute correlation coefficient below .850 can also be considered evidence of discriminant validity. As presented in Table 3, the absolute values of the correlation coefficients among constructs range from .199 to .746, thereby confirming the presence of discriminant validity in this study."

Table 3. **Discriminant Validity Assessment**

Constructs	WOM	ATT	SN	PBC	BI	AB
WOM	**.821**					
ATT	.358	**.745**				
SN	.508	.300	**.728**			
PBC	.396	.370	.376	**.707**		
BI	.199	.451	.355	.412	**.699**	

AB	.222	.523	.345	.518	.746	**.782**

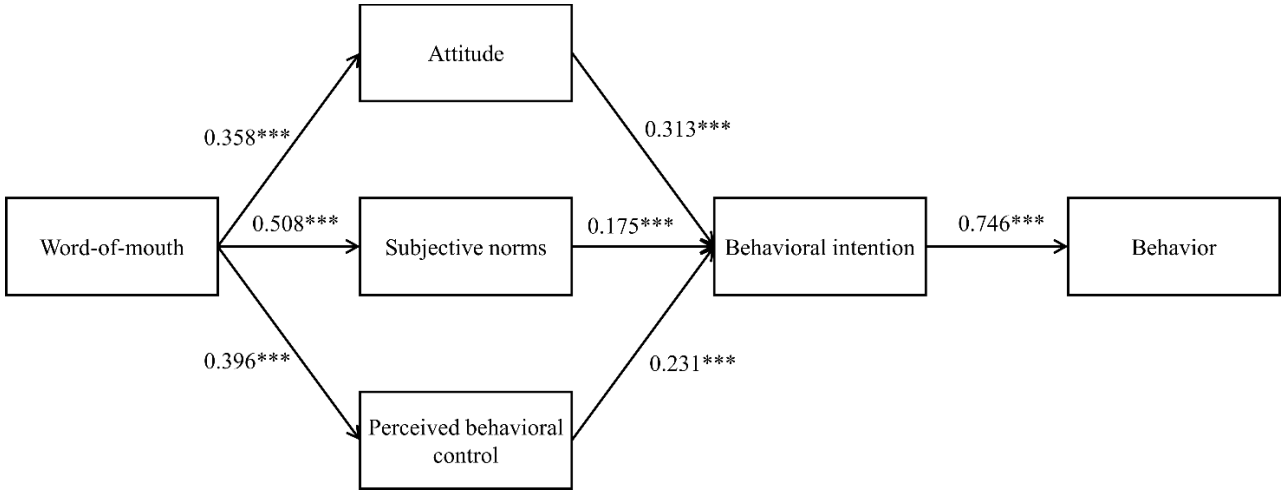
Note: The numbers in the lower triangle of the discriminant validity matrix represent Pearson correlation coefficients, while the numbers on the diagonal represent the square root of AVE. The abbreviations in the table are defined as follows: WOM: word-of-mouth recommendation; ATT: attitude; SN: subjective norms; PBC: perceived behavioral control; BI: behavioral intention; AB: actual behavior.

Source: Authors

The path coefficient of WOM to attitude is 0.358 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that WOM has a significant impact on the attitudes of college students participating in tourism factories activities, indicating that after obtaining positive WOM information, students will have a more positive attitude towards visiting tourism factories. The impact of WOM on subjective norms is stronger, with a path coefficient of 0.508 ($p < 0.001$). When there is positive WOM communication among the family, friends or community around students, students are more likely to be influenced by these external factors and decide to visit tourism factories. The path coefficient of WOM on perceived behavioral control is 0.396 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that WOM can not only affect students' attitudes and social norms, but also enhance their perception of control over visiting tourism factories. When students obtain more positive WOM information, they will be more confident that they can successfully plan and participate in activities traveling to tourism activities.

The path coefficient of attitude to behavioral intentions is 0.313 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that students' positive attitude towards visiting tourism factories will significantly enhance their intentions to visit. The impact of subjective norms on behavioral intentions is relatively weak, with a path coefficient of 0.175 ($p < 0.001$), but it is still significant, which shows that the influence from people around them (such as the expectations of the family, friends or community) has a certain positive effect on students' intentions to visit.

Graph 2. **Research facet path analysis diagram**



Source: Authors

The path coefficient of perceived behavioral control to behavioral intentions is 0.231 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that when students feel that they are capable and can control the itinerary of visiting tourism factories, their intentions to visit will be significantly enhanced. It indicates that students' assessment of their own abilities and resources (e.g., time, money, transportation convenience, etc.) are important factors in determining whether they will take further action. The path coefficient of behavioral intentions to actual behaviors is 0.746 ($p < 0.001$), which is one of the strongest relationships in this model. The

research results show that if students form a strong intention to visit a tourism factory, they are likely to convert this intention into actual behavior.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Importance of Word-of-Mouth

This study aimed to explore how WOM influences college students' travel behavior toward tourism factories through the lens of TPB. The results revealed that WOM significantly enhances students' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, confirming the central hypotheses of this research model. Specifically, the path analysis indicated that WOM had the strongest impact on subjective norms, followed by perceived behavioral control and attitudes. These results align with previous studies (e.g., Azhar et al., 2022; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012) emphasizing the persuasive role of WOM in shaping social expectations and personal confidence toward tourism activities. Azhar et al. (2022) and Iriobe and Abiola-Oke (2019) also indicated that WOM has surpassed traditional media in its influence among younger populations, particularly eWOM. Consistent with these international findings, the present study revealed that university students heavily rely on reviews and recommendations from key opinion leaders (KOLs) on social media. This alignment highlights the role of digital evaluations as a common source of information for university students globally. It underscores the cross-cultural consistency of social influence in travel behavior worldwide.

5.2 The Role of Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control

Regarding the core TPB variables, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control were all found to positively affect behavioral intentions. This result echoes the findings of Hashim et al. (2025), who employed the TPB to investigate visits to water parks. Among them, attitudes exhibited a moderate influence, suggesting that while college students recognize the educational and experiential value of tourism factories — as evidenced by their agreement that "visiting tourism factories is a good opportunity to increase knowledge and experience" (Mean = 4.06) — such recognition does not automatically translate into strong travel intentions. The finding is equally evaluated by Liu et al. (2021) in the study of Chinese tourists, in which a positive mindset must be accompanied by other factors, such as risk perception and confidence in control, before it can be the driving factor for behavioral intention.

Perceived behavioral control was also a significant predictor, emphasizing the importance of logistical feasibility. For instance, the item "the transportation convenience of the tourism factories will affect my decision whether to visit" scored the highest among perceived behavioral control items (Mean = 4.26), highlighting practical considerations as a major determinant of behavior. This also echoes the findings of Bano and Siddiqui (2024), which showed that when participants possessed sufficient resources and capabilities, their behavioral intention significantly increased.

Behavioral intentions, in turn, strongly predicted actual visiting behaviors. Students who developed strong intentions to visit were highly likely to convert these into concrete actions, such as sharing experiences and recommending tourism factories to others, as reflected in the high mean scores for actual behavior items like "I will share the advantages of this tourism factories with others" (Mean = 3.70). This finding is also in accordance with the study of Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), which reported that positive behavioral intention in tourism contexts is highly predictive of revisit and recommendation intentions. Thus, the present study's findings correspond to what has been found in the previous research uniformly. Therefore, the present study's findings align with previous research.

In contrast, in the current study, subjective norms had a relatively weaker effect on behavioral intention than other TPB variables. This result can be clarified by the attributes of the sample. According to Balıkçıoğlu Dedeoğlu et al. (2022), younger and more highly educated populations tend to make

behavioral decisions based on personal attitudes, showing relatively lower dependence on social expectations or others' opinions. Because the sample consisted of university students from Taiwan, there was a considerable degree of independence in obtaining new knowledge, assessing information, and undertaking travel-related decisions in these cases, which reduced the effect of personalized, subjective norms. In addition, as noted by Azhar et al. (2022), modern young consumers increasingly rely on virtual communities and digital platform reviews, such as social media WOM, rather than advice from real-life friends and family. This "depersonalized" source of information disperses and weakens the social pressure function of subjective norms.

5.3 Theoretical implications

This study offers several important theoretical contributions to behavioral science and tourism theory. First of all, a comprehensive understanding of the TPB and the influence mechanism of WOM communication, this study highlights the importance of WOM communication in travel planning. While previous TPB applications have predominantly focused on the impact of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on behavioral intention, this study further demonstrates that WOM can simultaneously influence all three core components of the TPB. This indicates that WOM is not merely an external source of information but also a critical social cognitive factor that shapes travel behavioral tendencies, extending the theoretical application of TPB in social and experiential tourism contexts.

Second, the research emphasizes the importance of resource availability and action feasibility within perceived behavioral control in shaping behavioral intention, especially for tourism activities such as visiting tourist factories, which require prior planning and transportation considerations. Students' capacity to participate in such activities was contingent on their control over timing, accessibility to transportation, and financial costs. This supports the practical aspect of control beliefs in TPB, and indicates that future tourism applications of TPB could consider adding explicit conditions and context variables.

5.4 Practical implications

The results of this study present a number of valuable practical implications for tourism factory operators. First of all, the findings indicate that highlighting the educational and entertainment features of tourism factories can increase willingness for university students to visit tourism factories. For example, in 2024, the Taiwan Soy Milk Museum established storytelling sessions about cultural heritage along with DIY experiential courses which strengthened students' positive perceptions of the factory and consequently resulted in an increase in intention to engage in the visit. Operators should continue to improve and promote such experiential content in order to realise higher education and entertainment value to heighten the overall appeal.

Secondly, the study finds that the WOM from people is extremely relevant to deciding whether or not the students would go to the tourism factories. This means that tourism factories are better off making a positive impact on social media and online reviews. They should use the evaluations positively promote it and develop an online reputation, and then maintain it to improve its branding trust and influence, and to encourage visitation.

Lastly, to enhance students' perceived behavioral control, tourism factories should provide access to convenient transportation, clear itinerary information, and provide fair pricing to lower uncertainty during the visiting process and increase the feeling of control by students allowing behavioral intentions to be better translated into actual participation. Practically, operators may want to consider implementing time-sensitive offers and discounts for groups to help encourage decision-making. Moreover, integrating tourism factories into other travel itineraries may help improve actual visitation.

6. Limitations and Future Research agendas

First, the research cohort was limited to undergraduate students from the University of Tourism and Hospitality Management. This led to a limited sample source, so external validity and generalizability can be assured. Shortcomings such as this, impact on the general ability to generalise findings to other demographics, particularly separate cohorts of potential consumers that behave and value differently like working professionals or married families, amongst other social-role groups. This means that the findings from this study, cannot be relied upon with any certainty to indicate behaviour and values of the general public or family market. Therefore, future research could also differentiate participant profiles such as single, couples and families to enhance comparative tourism behaviours and generalizability and practical relevance of the findings.

Second, this study generated data in the form of questionnaire responses, collected at one point. This cross-sectional data design is for longitudinal studies, able to eliminate any CMB, due to being a different time-period collection of measurement. CMB has the ability to impact and inflate or distort the perceivable relationship(s) between variables. With the application of statistical methods employed in this study, CMB could have still been an influence, due to the fact that time-series collection methods cannot be applied until longitudinal data design is adopted. CMB may be rejected with other data collection methods included to confirm positive and negative causal relationships amongst the dependent variables impeded, due to the variable being negatively determined, though with real-time measurement collection, the internal validity would be resolved significantly. Future studies may need to adopt longitudinal data designs, gather data over several phases, or utilize third-party data identification sources to quantify causal or position interrelationships further and confirm overall stability amongst the variables. Ultimately, a more longitudinal approach would help resolve the limitations of previous research, improve internal validity, and create important theoretical contributions.

7. Conclusions

The study examined the effects of WOM on college students' behavioral intentions and actual visits to tourism factories, based on three mediating variables: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The findings showed that WOM positively affected attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, which assists in the behavioral intentions and leads to behavioral engagement. This shows that the decision processes related to college students' decisions to visit tourism factories, were a combination of personal attitudes and social aspects of the decision, as well as perceived control. This behaviour reflects the complicated process of decision-making and the factors that influence it. Ultimately, the aim of this study was to add to the understanding of WOM and its role in presenting tourism factory activities to participants. Through positive WOM communication the attitudes of the visitor would be enhanced, as well as, social identification and confidence in controlling the behavior of visitation which would all enhance the intention to visit and the ultimate behavior of visiting. For tourism factory operators, it is important to develop positive WOM actively and understand that customers' attitudes and social influences matter when trying to get increased visitors. The results of this study expand on the understanding of consumer behavior mechanisms for college students in the area of tourism behavior, and present specific recommendations for tourism factories and related businesses to apply in marketing strategies. These recommendations will contribute to new insights and breakthroughs in the tourism sector, finding new means of attracting young people to visit and promoting sustainable development of tourism factories.

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