A SOCIAL CAPITAL PERSPECTIVE ON TOURISM: HOW DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES DRIVE GENERATION Y'S REVISIT INTENTIONS THROUGH TRUST IN CHIANG MAI

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Received: May 5, 2026 / Revised: July 10, 2026 / Accepted: July 16, 2026

Abstract

Purpose: As global tourism recovers post-pandemic, capturing Generation Y requires rethinking hospitality paradigms. This study applies Social Capital Theory to examine how destination attributes drive revisit intentions among European Gen Y tourists in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and to identify the mediating role of destination trust.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: A quantitative design was used, and survey data from 458 European tourists were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Findings: Structural analysis indicates that traditional service quality does not affect revisit intentions among this digital-native cohort. Conversely, perceived convenience, cultural experiences, and physical attractions have robust direct effects. Safety functions as a strict hygiene factor, fully mediated by trust, whereas convenience and attractions show complementary partial mediation.

Originality/Value: This research theoretically updates Social Capital Theory, confirming that for modern travelers, institutional capital (seamless infrastructure and digital autonomy) supersedes traditional interpersonal capital in trust formation. Practically, it urges Destination Management Organizations to redirect investments from traditional hospitality training toward smart infrastructure.

Keywords: Social Capital Theory, Revisit Intention, Generation Y, Destination Trust, Destination Attributes

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Introduction

Destination attributes, such as safety protocols, cultural authenticity, and infrastructural convenience, serve as the strategic architecture for destination survival and the critical engine for social capital accumulation in a hyper-competitive market (Kastuti et al., 2024; Pai et al., 2025; Ratasuk & Thai, 2026; Susanta, 2025). In the post-COVID-19 landscape, capturing the highly mobile Generation Y demographic is a vital mandate, requiring Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) to foster environments where digital autonomy aligns with authentic engagement (Chhabra et al., 2025; Dziadkiewicz et al., 2023; Pan & Ratasuk, 2025). This alignment is fiercely tested in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

European Generation Y tourists represent a particularly important and lucrative segment for Chiang Mai, characterized by an extended average length of stay and high travel expenditure. Globally, Generation Y comprises approximately 40.79% of the tourism market and is recognized as a fast-growing, high-spending demographic with an estimated core market value of $286 billion (Ngamcharoen et al., 2025). In Thailand, European tourists consistently demonstrate an extended length of stay, averaging nearly 9.7 days per trip with an average expenditure exceeding 45,500 Thai Bahts (Supapakorn, 2022). This demographic is financially significant, with European tourists contributing over 460 billion Thai Bahts in annual tourism revenue to the country, matching or exceeding the per-capita expenditure of other major global source markets (Madhyamapurush, 2023; Supapakorn, 2022).

Recent statistical data indicates a strong post-pandemic recovery in European arrivals to Thailand, with northern destinations seeing a steady influx of travelers seeking experiential tourism. The European travel market exhibited a rapid, V-shaped recovery, surpassing pre-pandemic levels as early as 2022 (Jaroensutasinee, 2025). By 2024, Thailand as a whole welcomed over 35 million international arrivals, generating approximately USD 42.7 billion in tourism receipts (Tedjakusuma, 2026). Northern Thailand captured a significant portion of this growth, with Chiang Mai alone generating USD 3,338 million in 2024, of which USD 1,365 million came directly from international tourists (Jiarakul et al., 2026). This upward trajectory continued into 2025, with Chiang Mai accommodating more than 11.9 million visitors and generating USD 3,484 million in tourism revenue (Jiarakul et al., 2026).

To attract European Gen Y tourists amidst regional competition and geopolitical disruptions, the destination must rapidly pivot away from traditional high-touch service toward seamless digital convenience and cultural immersion (Baedcharoen, 2016; D'Souza, 2025).

Despite this demographic imperative, the extant tourism literature disproportionately relies on traditional, service-dominant paradigms, largely ignoring the specific behavioral shifts of digital-native tourists in Southeast Asia (Bowen & Whalen, 2016; Luo & Ratasuk, 2024; Seyfi et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). Specifically, current models fail to adequately explain how traveler loyalty is forged purely through the accumulation of interpersonal and institutional trust, independently of traditional service metrics (Marinao Artigas et al., 2017; Wang & Li, 2023).

To systematically bridge this gap, this study deploys Social Capital Theory (SCT) as its foundational framework, isolating Trust as the singular mechanism driving traveler loyalty. SCT posits that consistently delivering fundamental destination attributes builds a reservoir of social capital, forging deep, trust-based bonds that compel repeat visitation even as the relevance of traditional service interventions wanes (Song et al., 2023; Vuong et al., 2025). For local policymakers, cultivating this deep-seated trust offers a theoretically sound mechanism to reduce visitor attrition, mitigate perceived risks, and secure a sustainable competitive advantage for Chiang Mai.

Objectives

To address identified theoretical gaps, this study examines the direct effects of core destination attributes (perceived safety, cultural experiences, convenience, and attractions) on the revisit intentions of European Generation Y tourists in Chiang Mai. Grounded in Social Capital Theory, it further investigates the mediating role of destination trust in the relationship between these attributes and behavioral loyalty. Ultimately, the research evaluates the diminished relevance of traditional service quality for this digital-native demographic, highlighting a strategic shift toward institutional capital and infrastructural reliance over conventional service encounters.

Literature Review

The contemporary tourism landscape necessitates a paradigmatic shift from viewing destinations as mere collections of physical commodities to understanding them as relational entities (Amaro et al., 2025; Hang & Ratasuk, 2025; Pan et al., 2024). To capture this complexity, this manuscript synthesizes the empirical evidence through the lens of Social Capital Theory. The overarching conceptual narrative posits that structural and experiential destination attributes, namely perceived safety, service quality, cultural heritage experiences, perceived convenience, and attractions, function as strategic investments in the host-visitor relationship (Huang et al., 2025). However, these attributes do not, in and of themselves, secure long-term loyalty, particularly among the highly mobile, digitally autonomous Generation Y. Instead, these features are the necessary inputs for generating a critical psychological resource: trust (Thang, 2025). Within this framework, trust represents the accumulated social capital between the tourist and the destination. For the modern traveler, navigating a globalized environment fraught with perceived risks, it is this deeply rooted interpersonal and institutional trust that effectively mitigates vulnerability. The theoretical synthesis of this study argues for a full-mediation model: destination attributes initiate the exchange, but it is the successful crystallization of these experiences into enduring trust that ultimately drives the behavioral commitment to revisit.

Theoretical Framework: Social Capital Theory and Core Construct Evolution

Social Capital Theory (SCT) originated in sociology, with seminal contributions from scholars such as Bourdieu (2011), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000), who collectively defined it as the tangible

and intangible value derived from social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust. In its contemporary evolution within business and tourism research, SCT has transitioned from explaining community civic engagement to deciphering stakeholder relationships. In the context of tourism, social capital serves as the invisible connective tissue that binds a tourist to a destination, fostering a cooperative environment that drives competitive advantage (Ambarwati et al., 2023).

At the core of this theoretical network is the variable of trust. The seminal and widely accepted academic definition by Mayer et al. (1995) frames trust as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another, based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor. In contemporary tourism literature, this concept has evolved into destination trust, signifying a traveler's confidence in a locale's reliability, integrity, and benevolence (Liu et al., 2019). Trust is critical because tourism is inherently an experiential, intangible product consumed at the point of production, which requires a high degree of consumer vulnerability (Shneikat et al., 2025). Consequently, trust acts as the primary risk-reduction mechanism. The ultimate dependent outcome variable in this nomological network is revisit intention. Rooted in the broader concept of customer loyalty (Zeithaml et al., 1996), revisit intention is defined as an individual's conscious readiness and willingness to return to a previously visited destination. It remains the paramount indicator of destination sustainability, as retaining an existing tourist requires significantly fewer resources than acquiring a new one (Noti & Myshketa, 2024).

The Impact of Destination Attributes on Revisit Intention

To systematically understand the antecedents of loyalty, extant literature consistently evaluates specific destination attributes as independent variables. Safety and security are fundamental prerequisites for travel (Uddin et al., 2026). Aligned with basic human needs, prior studies consistently demonstrate a positive relationship between a secure environment and the willingness to travel, as physical and psychological safety directly dictate the viability of the tourism experience (Akamavi et al., 2023). Similarly, traditional service quality, defined by Parasuraman et al. (1985) as the gap between customer expectations and perceived performance, has long been championed as a direct driver of loyalty in service marketing. However, the relevance of highly standardized service is currently being challenged by the preferences of Generation Y, demanding fresh empirical scrutiny. Prior studies of European Gen Y's behavior toward tourist destinations suggest that they are not a monolithic cohort (Octaviany & Mardiyana, 2024; Pooja et al., 2025). It is crucial to identify different age groups within this demographic (Beginning, Mid, and Late Gen Y), as these internal demographic factors significantly affect their service preferences and travel mobility (Bank of America Institute, 2026; Vašaničová & Melnyk, 2024).

Furthermore, cultural and heritage experiences provide the authenticity that modern tourists crave. Immersion in local customs and history transforms a generic trip into a memorable event, with empirical evidence frequently linking high cultural authenticity to positive behavioral intentions (Zhu et al., 2025). Perceived convenience, encompassing destination accessibility, digital infrastructure, and ease of navigation, has emerged as a critical contemporary variable (Prakaisak et al., 2026). Seamless

logistical experiences significantly reduce travel friction, positively influencing the overall evaluation of the trip (Hui et al., 2025). Finally, the physical and natural attractions of a destination serve as the primary pull factors. The quality, uniqueness, and maintenance of these sites are consistently positively correlated with a traveler's desire to return. Drawing upon this established literature, the following baseline direct-effect hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Perceived safety and security positively influence the revisit intention of European Generation Y tourists.

H2: Service quality positively influences the revisit intention of European Generation Y tourists.

H3: Cultural and heritage experiences positively influence the revisit intention of European Generation Y tourists.

H4: Perceived convenience positively influences the revisit intention of European Generation Y tourists.

H5: Attractions positively influence the revisit intention of European Generation Y tourists.

The Mediating Role of Trust

While the aforementioned direct relationships dominate traditional tourism models, Social Capital Theory provides the fundamental principles to logically explain why these relationships are frequently mediated in practice (Van Ninh & Van Tam, 2026). SCT dictates that networks and relationships are built upon repeated, positive exchanges that foster norms of reciprocity (Ari et al., 2024). When a destination consistently delivers a secure environment, seamless convenience, high-quality attractions, and authentic cultural engagement, it signals competence and benevolence to tourists (Yacoub et al., 2025).

These positive evaluations do not immediately bypass cognitive processing to trigger a return trip; rather, they accumulate to form a robust shield of trust. For instance, high perceived safety directly builds confidence in the destination's governance, while rich cultural experiences build interpersonal trust with the host community. Similarly, seamless convenience and reliable attractions prove the destination's institutional capability (Tan et al., 2025). Once this trust is established, the perceived risks of future travel are neutralized, compelling the tourist to return to a verified, safe psychological harbor (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). Therefore, SCT logically explains that trust serves as the vital psychological conduit that translates destination investments into actual traveler loyalty (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Based on these theoretical principles, the following mediation hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Trust mediates the relationship between perceived safety and security and revisit intention.

H2a: Trust mediates the relationship between service quality and revisit intention.

H3a: Trust mediates the relationship between cultural and heritage experiences and revisit intention.

H4a: Trust mediates the relationship between perceived convenience and revisit intention.

H5a: Trust mediates the relationship between attractions and revisit intention.

Demographic Control Variables

To ensure internal validity and isolate the variance explained by the Social Capital framework,

this study includes gender, age, income, and education as control variables (Monfort et al., 2025). Prior research demonstrates that these demographics introduce exogenous variance into trust and revisit intention: gender affects safety and risk perception (Carballo et al., 2022); age shapes service preferences and travel mobility (Cecconi et al., 2025); income dictates the financial capacity to travel regardless of destination attributes (Cecconi et al., 2025); and education influences the depth of cultural engagement (Yang et al., 2026).

Methodology

This quantitative, deductive study utilizes Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the proposed framework. PLS-SEM was selected over Covariance-Based SEM (CB-SEM) due to its superior suitability for prediction-oriented research aimed at maximizing explained variance (R^2). Additionally, it robustly handles non-normally distributed data and complex models involving multiple mediators (Hair et al., 2019; Ratasuk, 2024).

Population and Sampling

This study utilized a purposive sampling method, where respondents were approached offline to complete an online questionnaire, targeting European Generation Y tourists in Chiang Mai. The target population and respondents were clearly identified as individuals who had engaged in individual tourism and had visited Chiang Mai at least once during the past years. To ensure adequate statistical power for the PLS-SEM analysis, the minimum required sample size was calculated as 276 using the inverse square root method (Kock & Hadaya, 2018). The final dataset yielded 458 valid responses, safely exceeding this threshold. Demographically, the sample was slightly male-dominant (55.0%). The largest participant segments consisted of individuals aged 29 to 32 years (33.6%), those holding a Bachelor's degree (31.0%), and those earning a monthly income between 3,001 and 5,000 Euros (44.5%).

Table 1 Respondents' Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)	
Gender	Male	252	(55.0%)
	Female	206	(45.0%)
Age	25-28 years old	97	(21.2%)
	29-32 years old	154	(33.6%)
	33-36 years old	110	(24.0%)
	37-40 years old	64	(14.0%)
	41-43 years old	33	(7.2%)

Table 1 Respondents' Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics (Cont.)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)	
Education	High School or Lower	34	(7.4%)
	Associate Degree	105	(22.9%)
	Vocational Training	93	(20.3%)
	Bachelor's Degree	142	(31.0%)
	Master's Degree	52	(11.4%)
	Doctoral Degree	32	(7.0%)
Monthly Income	Under 1500 Euro	23	(5.0%)
	1501-3000 Euro	127	(27.7%)
	3001-5000 Euro	204	(44.5%)
	5001-7000 Euro	74	(16.2%)
	Over 7001 Euro	30	(6.6%)

Data Collection

Data collection was executed through an online, self-administered questionnaire utilizing an offline purposive sampling approach. To efficiently approach the target sample in a realistic setting, QR codes linked to the survey were distributed in person at prominent tourist locations and transit hubs within the destination. During this offline phase, researchers purposively targeted individuals with a European appearance who visually fit the Generation Y age demographic. To ensure the sample's validity, a rigorous filtering procedure was implemented at the start of the survey. Respondents were required to answer mandatory screening questions verifying their region of origin (Europe) and birth year (Generation Y parameters) before they were granted access to the full questionnaire.

Instrument Development

The research instrument was systematically structured into four distinct sections. The first section comprised the aforementioned screening criteria. The second section captured the respondents' demographic profiles, while the third section gathered data regarding their general travel behaviors and usage patterns. The fourth and final section contained the measurement items for the theoretical constructs. To ensure content validity and reliability, all constructs were measured using established, validated scales from prior high-tier academic literature, which contribute a satisfactory level of reliability. We clearly identified the Cronbach's alpha values for the reliability test (ranging from 0.866 to 0.915), ensuring they exceeded the standard acceptable threshold alongside a composite reliability (CR) ranging from 0.901 to 0.936 (which is greater than 0.7), and established validity, with an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ranging from 0.609 to 0.747 (which is greater than 0.5) (Lyu & Ratasuk, 2024; Naing & Ratasuk, 2025; Nguyen-Phuoc et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Saut & Song, 2022). Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each item using a standardized 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly

disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis was conducted using WarpPLS 8.0 via a two-step procedure. First, the measurement model was evaluated: internal consistency was confirmed (Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability > 0.70), convergent validity was established (outer loadings > 0.708; AVE > 0.50), and discriminant validity was rigorously verified using the HTMT ratio (< 0.85). Second, the structural model was assessed. Collinearity and Common Method Bias were ruled out (Full Collinearity VIF < 3.3). Model predictive power and hypothesized relationships were analyzed using R^2 and standardized path coefficients (β), with the statistical significance of direct and indirect effects determined via bootstrapping.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC: PIM-REC 029/2567). Prior to the survey, participants provided digital informed consent, acknowledging the study's academic purpose, their right to withdraw voluntarily without penalty, and the guarantee of complete anonymity and confidentiality, with no personally identifiable information collected.

Results

Prior to evaluating the structural relationships among the latent variables, the measurement model was assessed to establish indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Convergent validity was evaluated by examining the outer factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), Cronbach's Alpha, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all reflective constructs, as presented in Table 2. Indicator reliability was confirmed as all item loadings ranged from 0.714 to 0.902, exceeding the recommended 0.708 threshold and demonstrating that each construct captures more than 50% of the indicator's variance. Internal consistency was subsequently established, with Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.866 to 0.915 and Composite Reliability values ranging from 0.901 to 0.936, both satisfying the strict 0.70 minimum requirement (Ratasuk & Naing, 2025). Finally, convergent validity was robustly supported, as the AVEs for all latent variables ranged from 0.609 to 0.747, well above the 0.50 acceptable threshold.

Table 2 Convergent Validity and Internal Consistency Reliability

Variables	Question Items	FL	CR	CA	AVE
Revisit Intention (RI)	RI1: I would like to visit Chiang Mai again.	0.902	0.922	0.892	0.703
	RI2: I will recommend Chiang Mai as a tourist destination to others.	0.826			
	RI3: I would speak positively about Chiang Mai to others.	0.855			
	RI4: I will encourage my friends or relatives to visit Chiang Mai.	0.881			
	RI5: I would suggest that my friends or relatives visit Chiang Mai.	0.714			
Perceived Safety and Security (PSS)	PSS1: I feel safe from crime in Chiang Mai.	0.856	0.936	0.915	0.747
	PSS2: I feel safe while traveling in Chiang Mai during the daytime.	0.857			
	PSS3: I feel safe while traveling in Chiang Mai at night.	0.883			
	PSS4: I feel safe using the public transport in Chiang Mai.	0.857			
	PSS5: Overall, I felt safe while traveling in Chiang Mai.	0.867			
Service Quality (SQ)	SQ1: I consider the general service in Chiang Mai to be excellent.	0.850	0.925	0.899	0.712
	SQ2: Overall, my hotel provided a high level of service quality.	0.825			
	SQ3: The locals in Chiang Mai are helpful.	0.862			
	SQ4: Restaurants in Chiang Mai provided a high level of service quality.	0.844			
	SQ5: Chiang Mai International Airport provided a high level of service quality.	0.838			
Cultural and Heritage Experience (CHE)	CHE1: I had good impressions of the local people of Chiang Mai.	0.860	0.932	0.909	0.733
	CHE2: I closely experienced the local culture in Chiang Mai.	0.858			
	CHE3: I think Chiang Mai has a lot of interesting cultural activities on offer.	0.844			
	CHE4: I would like to get more involved in Chiang Mai's cultural activities.	0.862			
	CHE5: The more I see, hear, and sense about Chiang Mai's culture, the more I want to experience it.	0.856			

Table 2 Convergent Validity and Internal Consistency Reliability (Cont.)

Variables	Question Items	FL	CR	CA	AVE
Perceived Convenience (PC)	PC1: I can easily book hotels in Chiang Mai anytime via mobile booking.	0.875	0.935	0.914	0.744
	PC2: I can easily navigate Chiang Mai because the directional signs are clear and helpful.	0.847			
	PC3: Chiang Mai's transport is easy to access.	0.861			
	PC4: Chiang Mai offers easy payment and ticketing.	0.855			
	PC5: Overall, I found it convenient to travel to Chiang Mai.	0.873			
Attractions (A)	A1: Chiang Mai's attractions are easily accessible (roads, transport, and signage).	0.839	0.910	0.877	0.671
	A2: I find that Chiang Mai's attractions are well-maintained and clean.	0.763			
	A3: I find that Chiang Mai's attractions are reasonably priced.	0.848			
	A4: Foreign language leaflets would be helpful at Chiang Mai's attractions.	0.797			
	A5: Overall, I found it worthwhile visiting Chiang Mai's attractions.	0.845			
Trust (T)	T1: Chiang Mai is capable of facilitating tourism.	0.716	0.901	0.866	0.609
	T2: Chiang Mai performs its role of facilitating tourism very effectively.	0.829			
	T3: I have confidence in Chiang Mai as a tourist destination.	0.826			
	T4: I think that the locals in Chiang Mai would have high integrity.	0.797			
	T5: I will not be disappointed by visiting Chiang Mai.	0.834			
	T6: Overall, traveling in Chiang Mai satisfied me.	0.829			

Remarks: FL = Factor Loading; CR = Composite Reliability; CA = Cronbach's Alpha; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations. Detailed in Table 3, the Fornell-Larcker criterion shows that the square roots of the AVEs for all constructs are greater than their highest correlations with any other latent variable. To provide a more contemporary and conservative assessment, the HTMT ratio was evaluated at 0.369-0.752, below the strict 0.85 threshold; discriminant validity was conclusively established, confirming that the theoretical constructs measure uniquely different phenomena (Zhu & Ratasuk, 2024).

Table 3 Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion and HTMT Ratio)

Variables	RI	PSS	SQ	CHE	PC	A	T
RI	(0.838)	0.409	0.381	0.403	0.393	0.409	0.627
PSS	0.454	(0.864)	0.411	0.430	0.426	0.438	0.435
SQ	0.427	0.453	(0.844)	0.459	0.434	0.518	0.371
CHE	0.450	0.472	0.508	(0.856)	0.396	0.498	0.405
PC	0.437	0.466	0.479	0.434	(0.862)	0.445	0.369
A	0.468	0.489	0.584	0.557	0.496	(0.819)	0.394
T	0.752	0.500	0.434	0.468	0.427	0.467	(0.780)

Remarks: Diagonal values in bold and parentheses represent the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Values above the diagonal represent the latent variable correlations (Fornell-Larcker). Values below the diagonal represent the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios. RI = Revisit Intention; PSS = Perceived Safety and Security; SQ = Service Quality; CHE = Cultural and Heritage Experience; PC = Perceived Convenience; A = Attractions; T = Trust.

The structural model was also assessed for collinearity, common-method bias, and overall predictive power. The Full Collinearity Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) values for all constructs ranged from 1.490 to 1.862, below the conservative 3.3 threshold. The model is free of pathological collinearity, and the data are confirmed to be free of significant Common Method Bias.

The structural model's quality and explanatory power were evaluated using the Coefficient of Determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and overall Goodness-of-Fit (GoF). The model demonstrates substantial explanatory capability, accounting for 31.4% of the variance in the mediating variable, Trust ($R^2 = 0.314$), and explaining 49.0% of the variance in the ultimate dependent variable, Revisit Intention ($R^2 = 0.490$). Furthermore, the Stone-Geisser Q^2 values for Revisit Intention (0.490) and Trust (0.317) are strictly greater than zero, establishing robust out-of-sample predictive relevance. The overall predictive performance was validated by a Tenenhaus Goodness-of-Fit index of 0.571, which substantially exceeds the 0.36 threshold, indicating large explanatory power and confirming an excellent fit between the simulated theoretical model and the empirical data 3.

Hypothesis Testing Results

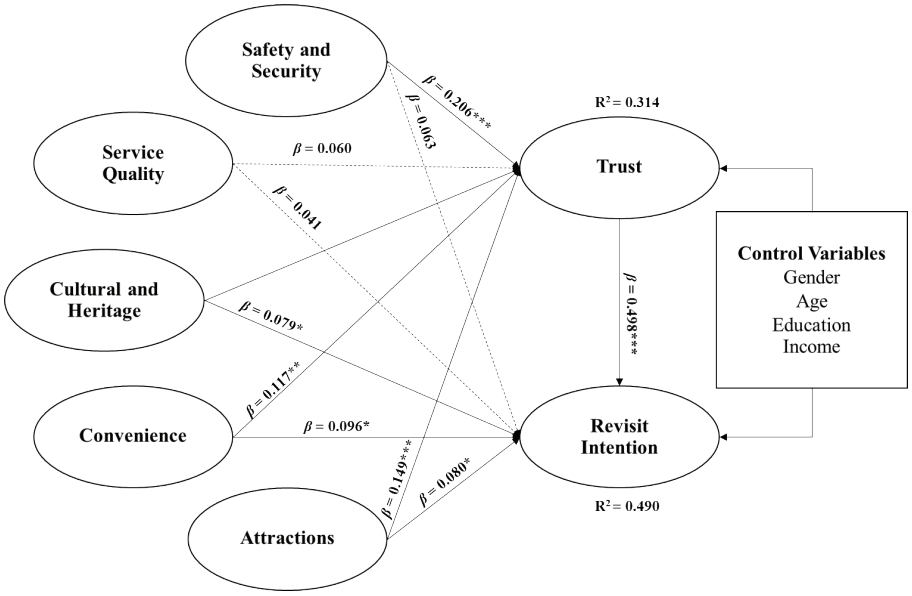


Figure 1 PLS-SEM Results

Remarks: *** = $p \leq 0.001$, ** = $p \leq 0.01$, and * = $p \leq 0.05$

Direct Effects

The structural model was evaluated using standardized path coefficients (β) to test the direct hypotheses, as shown in Figure 1 and Table 4. Results revealed that foundational attributes failed to directly drive loyalty: neither perceived safety ($\beta = 0.063$, $p = 0.089$; H1 rejected) nor service quality ($\beta = 0.041$, $p = 0.190$; H2 rejected) reached statistical significance, indicating that basic safety and traditional high-touch service are not direct motivators for Generation Y tourists. Conversely, the remaining attributes demonstrated significant positive impacts. Cultural/heritage experiences provided a significant behavioral pull ($\beta = 0.079$, $p = 0.044$; H3 supported). Perceived convenience emerged as the strongest direct driver ($\beta = 0.096$, $p = 0.019$; H4 supported), underscoring the need for seamless digital logistics. Finally, accessible attractions also confirmed a significant positive relationship with revisit intention ($\beta = 0.080$, $p = 0.041$; H5 supported).

Table 4 Results of Direct Effects Hypothesis Testing

	Hypothesis and Path Relationship	*β*	*P*	Result
H1	Perceived Safety and Security → Revisit Intention	0.063	0.089	Not Supported
H2	Service Quality → Revisit Intention	0.041	0.190	Not Supported
H3	Cultural and Heritage Experiences → Revisit Intention	0.079	0.044	Supported
H4	Perceived Convenience → Revisit Intention	0.096	0.019	Supported
H5	Attractions → Revisit Intention	0.080	0.041	Supported

The Mediating Role of Trust

Specific indirect effects were assessed to determine whether Trust mediates the relationship between destination attributes and revisit intention (Table 5). Perceived safety demonstrated a highly significant, fully mediated indirect effect ($\beta = 0.103$, $p < 0.001$; H1a supported), confirming that safety functions strictly as a foundational prerequisite to generate necessary institutional trust. Conversely, trust failed to mediate the relationship for service quality ($\beta = 0.030$, $p = 0.184$; H2a rejected) and cultural experiences ($\beta = 0.054$, $p = 0.051$; H3a rejected), indicating the latter operates via a direct-only pathway. However, the model confirmed complementary partial mediation for both perceived convenience ($\beta = 0.058$, $p = 0.038$; H4a supported) and attractions ($\beta = 0.074$, $p = 0.012$; H5a supported). These attributes not only directly incentivize return visits but simultaneously build a critical reservoir of trust.

Table 5 Results of Mediation (Indirect Effects) Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis & Indirect Path Relationship		β	95% CI (LL, UL)	*P*	Result
H1a	Safety → Trust → Revisit Intention	0.103	[0.038, 0.168]	< 0.001	Supported (Full)
H2a	Service Quality → Trust → Revisit Intention	0.030	[-0.035, 0.095]	0.184	Not Supported
H3a	Culture → Trust → Revisit Intention	0.054	[-0.011, 0.119]	0.051	Not Supported
H4a	Convenience → Trust → Revisit Intention	0.058	[-0.007, 0.123]	0.038	Supported (Partial)
H5a	Attractions → Trust → Revisit Intention	0.074	[0.009, 0.139]	0.012	Supported (Partial)

Remarks: LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit.

Effects of Control Variables

The model controlled for exogenous demographic factors: Gender, Age, Education, and Income. While Gender, Age, and Education had no significant impact, Income exhibited a minor but statistically significant effect on both Revisit Intention ($\beta = 0.087$, $p = 0.030$) and Trust ($\beta = -0.120$, $p = 0.005$). Crucially, the inclusion of these controls did not alter the significance or direction of the primary hypothesized paths, confirming the robustness of the structural model.

Discussion

This study set out to empirically examine the direct and indirect mechanisms through which destination attributes, specifically perceived safety, service quality, cultural experiences, convenience, and attractions, drive the revisit intention of European Generation Y tourists in Chiang Mai, utilizing Social Capital Theory to isolate the mediating role of trust. The structural analysis yielded a complex and highly insightful set of outcomes that challenge several traditional tourism paradigms. Foremost, the data revealed that traditional service quality failed to demonstrate any significant direct or indirect impact on revisit intention. From a sociological perspective, the author must explain why these results align with or contradict other researchers' findings, as this influences the overall quality of the research paper.

The finding that traditional service quality does not drive loyalty directly contradicts the foundational models proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) and contemporary hospitality studies by Tosun et al. (2015), which have long championed service quality as the primary engine of customer loyalty. However, interpreted from a sociological standpoint, these results perfectly align with emerging research on digital-native cohorts. European Generation Y tourists, characterized by their digital autonomy, increasingly prioritize self-sufficiency over traditional high-touch service. Sociologically, this indicates a shift in relationship building: interpersonal dependency on host staff is being replaced by institutional trust in a destination's digital and physical infrastructure.

Conversely, the results confirm that cultural and heritage experiences, perceived convenience, and attractions exert significant direct effects on the intention to return. This aligns with the findings of Zhou et al. (2023) on the pull of cultural authenticity and with those of Ozturk et al. (2016) on the importance of navigational ease. When comparing the variables, perceived convenience and attractions emerged as the most robust drivers, exhibiting both significant direct and indirect effects through trust (complementary partial mediation). Interestingly, perceived safety and security demonstrated full mediation, with an indirect-only effect. This supports the theoretical propositions of Han et al. (2021), confirming that safety is a strict hygiene factor. Safety alone does not actively motivate a European Gen Y tourist to book a return flight; rather, it serves as a baseline prerequisite that establishes the institutional trust necessary for loyalty even to be considered.

Conclusions

Theoretical Contribution

This study advances the theoretical understanding of destination loyalty by rigorously validating Social Capital Theory (SCT) within a modern, cross-cultural tourism context. The most provocative theoretical advancement is the empirical rejection of traditional service quality as a driver of revisit intention among Generation Y tourists, challenging foundational service-dominant paradigms. For this demographic, traditional interpersonal capital is rapidly being superseded by institutional capital, such as reliable infrastructure and digital convenience, and SCT should be updated to reflect that self-sufficiency is a primary currency for trust formation. Furthermore, the research successfully isolates trust as the central node and necessary psychological crystallization of physical destination attributes, proving that features like convenience and attractions are foundational inputs that must be converted into relational capital to bridge the tourist to the destination. Finally, the finding of full mediation for perceived safety clarifies its structural role as a strict hygiene factor; safety alone does not generate the behavioral pull for a return trip, but rather serves as the absolute prerequisite that establishes the baseline institutional trust necessary for loyalty even to be considered.

Practical Implications

The empirical insights derived from this study offer highly actionable directives for Destination

Management Organizations (DMOs), policymakers, and local hospitality practitioners. Because traditional service quality is no longer the definitive driver of loyalty among Gen Y tourists, stakeholders must pivot their investment strategies from traditional white-glove hospitality training toward enhancing the destination's intangible and physical infrastructure. Practitioners should prioritize an infrastructure-over-service approach. A real practical example for hoteliers and attraction managers in Chiang Mai involves reallocating budgets from heavy concierge staffing toward seamless digital solutions, such as implementing mobile keyless room entry, QR-code-based ticketing for historical sites, and AI-driven local transportation guides.

Furthermore, because safety serves as the foundation of trust, policymakers must pursue a visible safety strategy. It is insufficient for Chiang Mai to be safe; safety must be actively and transparently communicated to mitigate the risk perceptions of long-haul European travelers. Practical implementations include deploying multilingual tourist police applications with real-time GPS tracking and visible safety certifications at all transit hubs. Finally, local businesses must recognize that attractions and convenience act synergistically to build trust. Destination marketers should bundle authentic cultural workshops with seamless transport options, ensuring that the friction of navigating the city does not erode the trust built by its cultural richness.

Recommendations

Limitations and Future Research

While providing robust empirical insights, this study acknowledges several methodological limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish long-term causality for dynamic constructs like trust; future research should use longitudinal designs to track trust persistence and actual repeat visits. Second, focusing solely on European Generation Y tourists in Chiang Mai limits generalizability. The observed insignificance of service quality may reflect Western cultural preferences for independence. Future studies must conduct cross-cultural comparative analyses, such as with Asian cohorts, to ascertain if the preference for digital convenience over human service is a universal generational shift or a culturally bound phenomenon. Finally, future models should incorporate digital engagement and social media influence as additional mediators of social capital accumulation.

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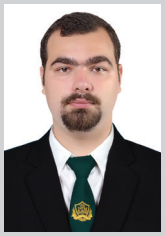
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