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## EXAMINING THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE TOURISM STUDENTS' INTENTION TO SERVE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE ACCOMMODATION SECTOR

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### Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that influence tourism students' intentions to serve people with disabilities in the accommodation sector. Using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study examines the roles of attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control in shaping students' service intention. The respondents will be students enrolled in the Bachelor of Tourism Management program at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, selected through purposive sampling. The data for this study will be collected using an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The data obtained will be analyzed descriptively using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and correlation analysis. The findings are expected to guide education and policy efforts in promoting inclusive practices in the tourism industry.

### Keywords:

Tourism Students, People with Disabilities, Inclusive Tourism, Accommodation Sector, Theory of Planned Behavior

## Introduction

Tourism, as a reflection of societal development and lifestyle, plays a significant role in shaping inclusive economic growth. One emerging challenge in the global tourism landscape is ensuring accessibility and equity for people with disabilities (PWD), who represent approximately 15% of the global population, or over one billion individuals (WHO, 2023). Despite this substantial demographic presence, PWD continue to face systemic exclusion from travel experiences due to physical, social, and attitudinal barriers, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Hackett et al., 2019).

In Malaysia, the Department of Social Welfare (JKM) reported 736,603 registered persons with disabilities as of 2023, representing about 2.2% of the population (DOSM, 2024). Although legal frameworks such as the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 (Act 685) exist to guarantee equal access to public services and infrastructure, implementation within the hospitality sector remains inconsistent. Accommodation facilities, in particular, often lack universal design, accessible amenities, and trained personnel capable of effectively serving disabled guests (Bauer, 2018; Saad, 2025). Issues such as narrow doorways, the absence of ramps, and uninformed service staff exacerbate the travel burden faced by PWD, resulting in reduced participation in tourism activities.

Given that tourism students are future professionals within the accommodation industry, their preparedness to serve PWD is crucial. Students' attitudes, social influences, and confidence in their ability to accommodate diverse needs may significantly influence the inclusivity of future hospitality services. However, existing research predominantly emphasizes demand-side issues such as traveler constraints while overlooking supply-side readiness, particularly among students and emerging workforce segments (Adam, 2018; Liu et al., 2017). This study adopts the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine how attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape tourism students' intentions to serve PWD in the accommodation sector. The findings aim to inform educational strategies, training programs, and policy interventions that promote disability-inclusive service culture in Malaysian tourism. In aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), this research contributes to building a more inclusive tourism ecosystem.

## Literature Review

### *Disability in Malaysia*

PWD is people with a physical, hearing or visual impairment or any combination that affects their mobility or their use of buildings and related amenities. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (2024), there are seven types of disabilities which is visually impaired, hearing, physical, learning, speech, mental and multiple disabilities. As of 2023, the total number of registered PWD has increased to 736 603 compared to 674 548 in 2022, with notable rises in categories such as physical, learning and mental disabilities. PWD in Malaysia encounter various barriers beyond employment, including accessibility and social stigma. Infrastructure and facilities often do not accommodate the needs of PWD, and digital platforms or online services are frequently designed without considering accessibility standards (UNICEF Malaysia, 2021). Social attitudes and misconception further hinder the inclusion of PWD in Malaysian society. UNICEF (2021) reported that over 50% of Malaysians are uninformed about disability issues, and one in three believe that children with disabilities

should be hidden from public view. This social stigma contributes to the marginalization of PWD and limits their participation in economic and social activities.

### ***Attitudes of Accommodation Staff Toward Disabled Guest***

PWD often face negative attitudes from accommodation service providers in Malaysia, which significantly affect their travel experience. Many PWD reported encountering rude or unwelcoming behavior from hotel staff, especially in lower-star hotels, where the lack of hospitality training and awareness leads to feelings of discrimination and exclusion (Darcy, 2010; Stumbo & Pegg, 2010; Darcy & Pegg, 2011). These negative experiences from accommodation service providers not only affect the immediate travel experience but also impact the long-term willingness of PWD to engage in tourism activities. When PWD encounter discrimination or poor service, it reduces their confidence and independence in traveling, thereby limiting their participating in tourism (Buhalis et al., 2012). The attitude of service providers is a critical factor influencing the overall travel experience of PWD. Even with accessible facilities, PWD often face exclusion or discomfort due to the poor understanding and discriminatory behaviors of some accommodation staff. This highlights that accessibility is not only about physical structures but also about the human element, how service providers engage with and support PWD during their stay (Saad, 2025). Without fostering a culture of respect, empathy, and professionalism, the full potential of accessible tourism cannot be realized.

### **Theoretical Background and Hypotheses**

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), offers a useful framework for understanding service intentions in the hospitality industry. TPB posits that behavioral intention is shaped by three core constructs: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This model has been widely applied in various service domains to predict intention and behavior, including in health care, education, and tourism (Lee et al., 2018; Smith & Jones, 2020). In the context of tourism students, attitudes reflect their personal evaluation of serving PWD, subjective norms capture the perceived social pressure to perform such behavior and perceived behavioral control indicates their self-assessed ability to deliver inclusive services. When these constructs align positively, students are more likely to engage in behavior that promotes accessibility and inclusion. Table 1 summarizes previous research on PWD within the framework of the TPB.

**Table 1: Summary of Past Studies about PWD and TPB**

Variables	Findings	References
Attitudes of Service Providers	PWD face negative attitudes, poor training, discrimination, and exclusion; respectful human engagement is as important as facilities.	Darcy (2010); Stumbo & Pegg (2010); Darcy & Pegg (2011); Buhalis et al. (2012); Saad (2025)
Attitude	Positive attitudes increase intention to serve PWD.	Ajzen (1991); Tsai (2007); Syarif et al. (2024)
Subjective Norms	Social support and pressure encourage inclusive service.	Ajzen (1991); Syarif et al. (2024); Nunkoo & Ramkissoon (2010)
Perceived Behavioral Control	Confidence, skills, and resources strengthen the intention to serve PWD.	Ajzen (1991); Tsai (2007); Syarif et al. (2024)

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Intention to work with PWD	Strong predictor of behavior; training and awareness boost motivation.	Ajzen (1991); Fathy & Fouad (2020); Supaporn (2017)
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### ***Attitude***

Attitudes in TPB refers to the degree to which an individual has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior in question (Ajzen, 1991). In this research context, it refers to how positively or negatively tourism students perceive serving PWD. Positive attitudes towards disability inclusion are expected to increase students' intention to engage in accessible and inclusive tourism services. This relationship has been supported by prior research. For example, a study on travel intentions of people with physical disabilities found that attitude had a positive significant effect on travel intention (Tsai, 2007). Similarly, Syarif et al. (2024) reported that attitude positively influenced travel intentions among tourist with disabilities.

H1: Attitude towards serving PWD positively influences tourism management students' intention to provide inclusive service.

### ***Subjective Norms***

Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform a behavior, based on the expectations of important referents such as peers, instructors, family, or society (Ajzen, 1991). Syarif et al. (2024) found that subjective norms had a positive and significant effect on travel intentions among tourists with disabilities, indicating that social influences can motivate participation despite barriers. In this study, exploring the subjective norms perceived by tourism management students will help identify the social and institutional pressures that influence their intentions to serve PWD. When students perceive that their social environment supports and values serving PWD, they are more likely to intend to do so. This has been empirically validated, Syarif et al. (2024) demonstrated that subjective norms significantly impacted travel intentions of tourists with disabilities. Moreover, Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2010) found that subjective norms influenced tourists' intentions in a tourism context.

H2: Subjective norms positively influence tourism management students' intention to provide inclusive service to PWD.

### ***Perceived Behavioral Control***

Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to perform a behavior, influenced by internal factors such as skills and knowledge, and external factors like available resources (Ajzen, 1991). Research in tourism and disability contexts confirms the importance of PBC in predicting behavioral intentions. Syarif et al. (2024) reported that perceived behavioral control significantly influenced travel intentions among tourists with disabilities, indicating that feeling capable and having access to resources encourages PWD participation. In this research, measuring tourism students' perceived behavioral control will reveal their self-efficacy and perceived barriers in serving PWD. Higher perceived control is expected to strengthen students' intentions to engage in inclusive service behaviors. Supporting this, Tsai (2007) found PBC to be a significant predictor of travel intention among people with physical disabilities. Syarif et al. (2024) also confirmed the positive effect of PBC on travel intentions.

H3: Perceived behavioral control positively influences tourism students' intention to provide inclusive service to people with disabilities.

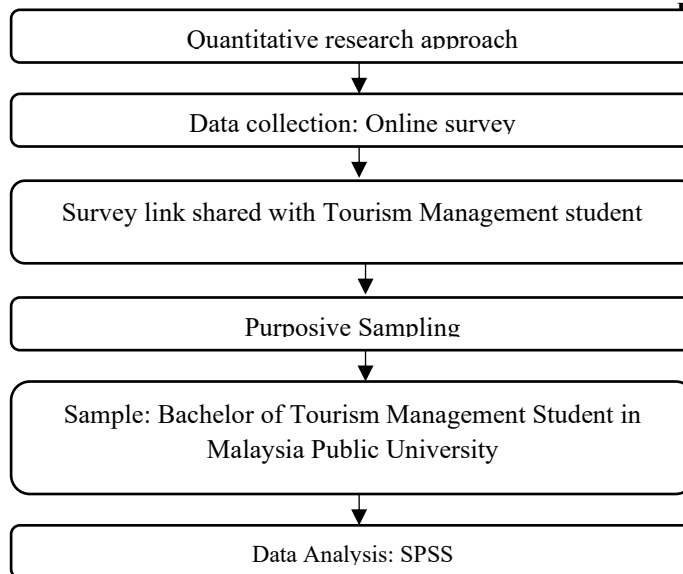
### ***Intention Towards Serving People with Disability***

Intention towards serving PWD in the accommodation sector is a crucial behavioral outcomes that reflect tourism students' willingness and readiness to engage with PWD. Past studies have shown that intention is a strong predictor of actual behavior in service provision context, especially when guided by TPB, which posits that intention is influenced by attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). In tourism and hospitality, intention to serve PWD has been linked to positive attitudes about inclusivity, perceived social expectations to be accommodating and confidence in one's ability to provide appropriate service (Fathy & Fouad, 2020). Empirical evidence also suggest that perceived behavioral control plays a vital role in forming intention. Tourism students who believe they have the necessary skills, experience, knowledge and supports have more tendencies to serve PWD effectively. Furthermore, accessible tourism research emphasizes that enhancing perceived behavioral control through training and awareness can reduce barriers and increase the motivation to serve PWD (Supaporn, 2017).

H4: Intention towards serving PWD is positively influenced by attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control.

### **Methodology**

In this study, a quantitative research approach will be employed. The data collection will be conducted through an online survey. The survey link will be shared with tourism students via Tourism Managements students' communication channels and relevant students' groups to ensure accessibility and reach. A purposive sampling technique will be employed for data collection. The sample will consist of students enrolled in Bachelor of Tourism Management in Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. The data collected from the questionnaire will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. This study also applies correlation analysis to understand the relationship between attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control with students' intention to serves PWD in the accommodation sector.



**Figure 1. Research Method Process**

### Conclusion

This study aims to explore the factors influencing tourism students' intentions to serve people with disabilities (PWD) in the accommodation sector by applying the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). As future service providers, tourism students play a critical role in shaping an inclusive hospitality environment. By examining attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, the study seeks to provide insights into students' readiness to deliver accessible services. The findings are expected to guide educational institutions, policymakers, and industry stakeholders in developing targeted interventions and curriculum enhancements that support disability-inclusive tourism, aligning with national policies and global sustainability goals.

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