

**A STUDY ON TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED  
TRAVEL EXPERIENCES IN EMPOWERING  
WOMEN**

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TRAVEL EXPERIENCES IN EMPOWERING  
WOMEN**

by

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**IN LOVING MEMORY OF**

Poopale Ratthinan S/O Ponniah  
(1951- 2004)  
Arvaliammal D/O Jaganathan  
(1947-2013)

A family is the compass that guides us.  
They are the inspiration to reach great heights,  
and our comfort when we occasionally falter.  
—Brad Henry

***-Bala's Bunch-***

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*Without whom none of this would have been possible...*

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
D-I-Y	Do It Yourself
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
Wi-Fi	Wireless Fidelity

# **KAJIAN MENGENAI PENINGKATAN PENGALAMAN PELANCONGAN MELALUI TEKNOLOGI DALAM MEMPERKASAKAN WANITA**

## **ABSTRAK**

Penyertaan wanita sebagai entiti penting dalam industri pelancongan selaku penggiat industri atau pelancong semakin berkembang. Dalam pada itu, perkembangan teknologi masa kini telah mengubah platform perkhidmatan, kaedah penyediaan, perancangan serta pengalaman pelancongan yang ditawarkan. Evolusi teknologi ini selain meningkatkan pengalaman pelancongan turut mewujudkan lebih banyak peluang untuk kaum wanita melancong. Di samping itu, teknologi membantu pemerksaan wanita dengan memberikan mereka kuasa untuk membuat keputusan, merancang, membeli and memilih pengalaman pelancongan yang memenuhi keperluan mereka. Kajian antropologi silang-budaya ini meneroka maksud simbolik pelancongan yang tersendiri bagi wanita, faktor-faktor asas yang memotivasikan wanita untuk menggunakan teknologi serta bagaimana peningkatan pengalaman menggunakan teknologi ini memperkasakan mereka. Kaedah penyelidikan etnografi kontemporari 'step-in-step-out' telah digunakan di mana data dikumpul melalui sesi temubual bersama tiga puluh empat orang wanita yang sedang melancong di sekitar George Town, Penang. Hasil dapatan kajian telah dianalisa menerusi kaedah pengekodan tema dengan bantuan perisian NVivo 10. Penemuan kajian menunjukkan bahawa aspek budaya, demografi dan gaya hidup mempengaruhi makna pelancongan selain mengubah persepsi wanita tentang kehidupan. Di samping itu, kekangan yang dihadapi oleh kaum wanita ekoran peranan, norma, kepercayaan dan nilai berasaskan budaya masing masing turut mempengaruhi faktor motivasi untuk menggunakan

teknologi. Peningkatan pengalaman pelancongan melalui teknologi turut meningkatkan kemampuan wanita dalam merancang aktiviti pelancongan, membuat keputusan dan menangani cabaran tanpa mengharapkan bantuan orang lain. Pemerkasaan secara individu mahupun berkelompok ekoran penggunaan teknologi mendorong wanita untuk berdikari dengan kekuatan dan hak untuk menyuarakan pendapat mereka. Kajian ini mengisi jurang penyelidikan silang budaya dalam antropologi pelancongan dengan memaparkan kepentingan peningkatan pengalaman pelancongan menggunakan teknologi sebagai elemen yang mendorong pemerkasaan kaum wanita di mana wanita berupaya membuat keputusan, pilihan serta merancang pengalaman mereka tersendiri dan pada masa yang sama, mencabar pegangan stereotaip yang telah lama berakar umbi.



# **A STUDY ON TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED TRAVEL EXPERIENCES IN EMPOWERING WOMEN**

## **ABSTRACT**

Women's participation as an important entity of the travel industry both as producers and consumers is growing. On the other hand, technology is transforming the way travel is researched, purchased, provided and experienced. The rise of new technologies has not only enhanced the travel experiences but also created greater opportunities for women to travel. The enhanced experiences contribute toward empowerment by giving women autonomy in making decisions, notable purchasing power and choosing better outcomes of journey experiences. This cross-cultural anthropological study explores the symbolic meaning women attach to travel, the underlying motivation aspects for using technology and how technology-enhanced travel experiences relates as a form of empowerment. Contemporary ethnography method was adopted using the 'step-in-step-out' method by interviewing thirty-four women travelling around George Town, Penang. Data was analysed using thematic coding with the assistance of NVivo 10 software as a tool to manage and organize the data. Understanding the meanings women attach to travel reflected how the meanings are patently influenced by culture, social-demographic traits and lifestyle. It showed that the subjective meaning is significant in transforming their lives where women's attitude towards travel is also changing as a result of technology. Exploring the underlying motivation factors for women to use technology throughout their travel showed that the prescribed actions or behaviour on the surface is motivated by constraints ascribed through their roles, norms, beliefs and values of their culture. By

discovering technology-enhanced travel experiences in each stages of travel (pre, during. post), the findings display women becoming the creators of their own experience where integration of technology prompted shift in travel planning by eliminating brokers and strengthening women's capacity to choose and make decisions while negotiating the travel constraints. Personal and collective empowerment help women grow as a person, stronger and more in control. This study fills the gap of women's voices in cross-cultural tourism anthropology research and signifies technology-enhanced travel experience in empowering women by impacting women's choices, decisions, and experiences while contributing towards the deconstruction of firmly rooted stereotypes.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Context of the Research

‘Are you going alone?’, ‘Is it safe?’, ‘Has your husband agreed and given you his permission?’, ‘Who will take care of the children?’, and ‘How about your work?’ These are some common questions posed to women while discussing topics pertaining to travel. On the contrary, no question arises when a male announces his travel intention. When a woman decides to leave for a vacation, she has a mountain of concerns about her travel destination, safety of the vacation spot, expenditures and budget, sufficient time for planning, sensible stay place, and travel activities during vacation. It is evident that women seem to continuously face more constraints than men do, mainly due to their status, role, social norms, family responsibilities, and economic deprivation (Henderson et al., 1989; Wearing, 1990; Deem, 1996; Khan, 2001). The present cutting-edge technology has a significant role in facilitating and enhancing travel experiences while empowering women across the globe (Buhalis, 2008; Mkono, 2012; Neuhofer, 2014).

Grasping the fact that technology has promoted greater equality between men and women, this study looked into how technology enhanced travel experiences contribute as a form of empowerment for women. In particular, this study responds to the multiple calls for anthropology to embed technology exclusively by placing focus on the dearth of women’s voices within the tourism sphere (Rothschild, 1981; Pfaffenberger, 1992; Bray, 2013; Pritchard, 2018). Technology tends to affect women’s choices, decisions, and experiences; while simultaneously contributing towards the deconstruction of firmly rooted stereotypes. The number of new age women grasping the opportunity to travel in their own right have escalated

substantially; for the sake of their pleasure and satisfaction while breaking away from their typical identities or society-imposed roles (Riley, 1988; Gibson & Jordan, 1998; McArthur, 1999; Harris, 2002; Harris & Wilson, 2007).

According to Selstad (2007), greater focus in anthropology is placed upon the host groups that struggle to come to terms with tourism and tourists. In recent years, more attention has been paid to the experiences of the tourists themselves. The prominent place to begin to address questions concerning travel experience is with the tourists and the tourist-generating scenarios from which they come (Nash, 1981). Studies about anthropological tourism linked with empowerment are significant to enhance awareness concerning the voices of cross-cultural women (Chick, 1984). During the early-modern anthropology studies, when the first wave of feminism took place, more voices of women travellers in the study of culture included engaging dialogues with women in those cultures (Tamanoi, 1990). The concept of empowerment within the tourism domain warrants anthropological enquiry to assure women's ability in making strategic life choices (Cheater, 1999).

If women believe that they deserve leisure, it would be useful to describe how women can empower themselves through leisure, primarily because women's empowerment is possible by creating women-sensitive environment (Deem, 1986; Henderson, 1991; Jordan & Gibson, 2004; Khan, 2011). In general terms, women are constrained from travelling due to a number of significant factors (Henderson et al., 1989). Apart from being subjected to social restrictions (Mowl & Towner, 1995; Deem, 1996; Khan, 2011), the decision-making task amongst women seems to remain mainly in the hands of the men (Scott, 1997). Changes in economic and social values have led to some changes in travel trends. Women have become accustomed to using

technology not only in empowering them to travel freely, but also in making important decisions about their lives. Smith (1979) asserted that women are the tastemakers of American tourism and tend to dominate the decision-making process as married couples. She added that these women gain a sense of achievement and pose influence on other women after their travel.

Recent studies have shown that women have begun adapting to seamless travel technologies to escape from stereotypical social or travel norms (Thanuskodi, 2013; Petrovic et al., 2016; Yong et al., 2016; Ratthinan & Selamat, 2017; Ying et al., 2017; Ratthinan & Selamat, 2018). Konwiser (2012) mentioned that women use technology devices and applications, such as smartphones and travel websites, to search, study, and select travel information anywhere and anytime. The shift in travel technologies offers women parity with men. To date, women are an integral part of tourism. A report by the George Washington University School of Business in year 2016 asserted that nearly two-third of travellers had been women. Additionally, it highlighted that 73% of travel agents stated that women were more likely to travel on their own than men. Additionally, Brennan (2011) claimed that women made 80% of all travel decisions. Prior studies concerning online presence and active participation in travel signified higher usage of technology by women, when compared to men (Wilson, 2006; Kim et al., 2007; Mazman et al., 2009; Narasimhamurthy, 2014; Tavakoli, 2015; Genoe et al., 2016). Technology has transformed the conventional way of travel planning with more flexibility and customer-oriented services (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Del Chiappa, 2011; Tribe & Liburd, 2016; Ratthinan & Selamat, 2017).

As anthropologists have always weighed in the impact of tourism on host societies (Nash, 1981), this study investigated the contributions of technology towards

empowering women as consumers of tourism. The growing attention in the field of anthropology has led to evaluating the impacts of emerging travel technologies that can influence every aspect of women's behaviour. In this vein, this study responds to the calls for an ethnographic approach to consider the uprising issues related to new media, for instance, technology-enhanced travel experiences (Miller & Slater, 2000; DiMaggio et al., 2001) and their effect in empowering women.

### **1.1.1 Gender and tourism in anthropology**

Over the years, tourism's contribution to economic and social development is widely acknowledged in the literatures. However, little attention has been paid to how the industry benefits women and men, in relation to tourism and gender equality. Tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for women, which makes the gender equality perspective highly relevant. Therefore, rigorous gender analysis in the thinking, development, practices and evaluation of tourism specifically on women is needed. Without a gender dimension and a reframing of policies, any attempts to build sustainable tourism policies and business will be negated. In that vein, this study extends the pursuit to provide women's perspective to understand the nature and consequences of tourism development in empowering them. Both in theoretical and practical terms, the position of gender within tourism development processes is viewed as a critical and relevant. Given that gender is a system of culturally constructed identities that combine to form systems of meaning expressed as ideologies of femininity that engage with socially structured interactions (Byrne-Swain and Henshall 2002), gender oriented research in tourism is concerned with issues of equality, power, and construction of knowledge in the society. Tourism related activities and practices are constructed out of gendered societies, therefore the relations

between and among tourism consumers are gendered through the impact of social practices, power, and control.

In anthropology, from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, attention was diverted from identifying mere differences in travel preferences and behaviors between genders to such as access and rights to participate and empowerment issues (Gibson, 2001). The focus on gender and tourism was further by international efforts, such as the United National World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the setting up of the Sustainable Development Goals to promote gender equality and women's empowerment across the world. Women deserve a fair future but are denied this because men control most resources and decision-making processes in tourism. According to the UNWTO, gender equality is an essential component of a sustainable tourism industry. The growing number of women at the heart of decision-making in tourism continues to help the advancement of women. Making women the primary focus in tourism studies have created awareness of the diversity and the differences among women.

Travelling to new horizons offers women an alternative lens to evaluate themselves away from their mundane lives, work, family members or domestic responsibilities; a moment where they can find time and space for reflection and self-development (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Despite the portrayal of women as fixtures of the home, a gap is present between how much women have travelled and recorded. Regardless of access to economic opportunities and resources, travel constraints tacitly lead to persistent gender disparities. Wilson and Little (2005) revealed that women are free to travel, except the fact that social and gendered norms continue to constrain them. Such norms affect women's capacity to start, maintain or increase travel, apart from impacting the quality of their travel (Hung & Petrick, 2010). Women address

their travel limitations by adopting the technology as a negotiation tool, while discovering new possibilities and realising their full potential.

Another critical criterion that was weighed in was the call by anthropologists Graburn (1983), as well as Nash and Smith (1991), for more contributions concerning cross-cultural anthropology. This is to understand the aspect of tourism by taking into account the significance of non-Western voices. Graburn (1983) asserted that several demographic factors, such as discretionary income, cultural self-confidence, and socio-symbolic reversals of cross-cultural participants, are apt for describing the nuances of their lives. Meanwhile, Nash and Smith (1991) opined that cross-cultural studies are beneficial for anthropology as such investigations allow the comparison between cultures at varied levels of social intricacy in exploring the causes and effects through anthropological lens. Apart from bridging the gaps that exist in gender and tourism anthropological records, this study tapped on the cross-cultural perspective to add to the limited body of knowledge by placing focus on the experiences of both Western and Asian women.

The term 'Western' denotes culture and place where women derive from the West or European nations or races, distinguished from those from Eastern or Oriental regions. Henderson et al., (1989) narrated in detail the history of leisure undertaken by Western women. During the 1800s, women from the upper class, inclusive of queens, empresses, and noblewomen, were usually engaged in travel activities to accompany their spouses. Condemnation of travel amongst women in most religions as futile and waste of time, confined them as the primary caregiver with inferior status amidst the patriarchal society. They were subjugated by archaic societal views which further placed constriction in their liberty (Deem, 1986; Mowl & Towner, 1995; Khan, 2011). Green et al., (1990) explained that travel for Western women was beyond an activity



that they merely participated in, as it served as an ideal avenue for social interaction with friends or strangers; reflecting a break from their domestic role. In fact, travel has turned into a liberation outlet amongst women, which no longer has heavy influence by the patriarchal structures to dictate sex roles, family structures, work, and appropriate characteristics that should be portrayed by any woman (Henderson, 1989).

The study will also explore the experiences of women from the Asian sub-regions with socially-constructed identities (Hall, 2009), as well as rich in mixed cultural values, beliefs, and gender norms (Knight, 2000). In comparison to their Western counterpart, literatures show that their participation in tourism appeared to be active only after the 21st century (Moser & Wallach, 2017; Yang et al., 2017). Moser and Wallach (2017) discovered that Asian women were still bound by cultural, religious, and spiritual beliefs, which greatly constrained their leisure activities. However, the emerging tourism activities noted in Asia reflects the growing number of Asian women travelling and transforming their lives across the challenging discriminatory gender practices within the tourism sphere (Shuib et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2017). Wilson and Ypeij (2012) reported that tourism, along with the incorporation of technology, assisted in creating transformation in gender relations, mainly due to its impact on the behaviour of women's personal and family travel types.

### **1.1.2 Empowerment and technology enhanced travel experiences**

Deem (1986) explained that the empowerment of women in tourism is possible when the environment is sensitive of women's needs, constraints and experiences. It is an environment where efforts are continually made to offer travel opportunities that are of interest and within women's needs or requirements. Harris (2002) also cited that travelling gives women autonomy to make decision based on her conditions,

constraints and choices. In the context of this study, women have become empowered in a social construct through travel activities and the habit of using technology or digital platforms. Women seeking greater autonomy (Henderson, 1994) and increase the quality as well as equality of life see this important opportunity. During this time, women are able to challenge stereotype while they extend their self beyond personal comfort zones to experience self-empowerment. (McNamara and Prideaux, 2010). One of the genuine aspects of women empowerment is the focus on identifying and monitoring the power and basic elementary right affording women more autonomy to manage their lives in daily basis.

In light of relative power, focusing on technology and empowerment, is in line with the current trends (Henderson, 1994; Swain, 1995). Travelling is common amidst women for multiple purposes, for instance, education, employment, pilgrimage, migration, and leisure (Henderson et al., 1989). The proliferation of cutting-edge technologies, pro-women policies, as well as the development of economy, education, and employment opportunities, have increased both the mobility and the presence of women within the public sphere (Mandle, 1979). As the traditionally male-dominated public leisure sphere has become increasingly available to women via social and technological change; this study proceeds on the premise to document woman's travel experiences and empowerment.

This study explores the developments of technology enhanced travel experience from a gender perspective by highlighting the experiences and challenges for women's empowerment. It pinpoints the significance of travel in their lives and identifies ways to mitigate or negotiate travel constraints towards advancing gender equality and women's empowerment globally. There is a great need for new research in anthropology to explore on gender and tourism in cultural contexts worldwide to

understand the role of technology which work best for women's empowerment in tourism. Although discourses on women's travel experiences is still missing, the multiplying effect of technology in tourism suggest that the empowerment and technology is worth discovering.

Pfaffenberger (1992) had put forward that more anthropologists should consider technology in their investigations to iron out central issues pertaining to universal human activity. In responding to this call; Downey, Dumit and Williams (1995) embarked on an anthropological investigation that probed into cultures upheld by the community and the impact of technology while Bray (2007) found that one of the fundamental ways in which gender is expressed in any society is through technology where women are viewed to fear or dislike technology whereas men are viewed a natural when it comes to technology. In 2001, Pfaffenberger criticized Anglo-American anthropologists for ignoring the aspect of technology and gender in anthropology given that within the context of tourism, technology has transformed the rigid conventional wayward to a more flexible and customer-oriented service (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Del Chiappa, 2011; Tribe & Liburd, 2016; Ratthinan & Selamat, 2017). In a similar vein, Yu et al., (2014) discovered that technology had great potential in empowering travellers through the allowance of two-way interaction. The role of women was transformed from being passive receivers to active creators of travel experience, (Gretzel et al., 2006).

The term technology enhanced travel experiences refers to the improvement in value and quality of travel experiences with the help of technology (Le et.al, 2014) as people use technologies to generate better experience and expectations of their entire journey using technologies. Upon adopting a holistic and integrative approach, the term 'technology', particularly for this study, refers to various applications, devices,

and platforms used by women (consumers) and travel stakeholders (companies, bodies, and agencies). Advances brought in by the technological frame within the tourism context are associated with rapid accessibility, real-time personalisation, and customised services for travellers (Buhalis, 2003). According to Buhalis and Jun (2011), travel technology is composed of mainly hardware and software, along with groupware, NetWare, and intellectual capacity (human ware), for the development, programming, and sustainability of the system. Appendix A further elaborates the term 'technology' in light of this study. Pine and Korn (2011) added that technology encompasses a spectrum of domains, including information, computing, communication, entertainment.

Cheater (1999) suggested that new technologies empowers women. She asserted that access to information, as well as the ability to make decisions or share opinions to influence others, are some outcomes of technology that develop the consciousness of one's empowerment. The very term 'empowerment' here refers to a journey that challenges the assumptions regarding power, as well as the way things are and can be (Cheater, 1999; Kabeer, 1999). In this capacity, technology in tourism function as a potential catalyst of change (Neuhofer 2014) that has not only changed traditional tourist experiences but has offered opportunities for new types of tourist experiences to be created. Women represent 64% of the global travel market (Bond, 2015) and the technology served as an effective medium in search of their personal tourism space (Myers, 2010; Bulik, 2011). Scott and Frew (2014) claimed that the omnipresence of technology within the tourism domain has benefitted women in enhancing their experiences. While technology has turned into the backbone that enhances the nature of travel experience and customer behaviour; it is essential to comprehend how technology empowers women.

Ownership, access, and usage of travel technology among women are strongly evident to date (Kim et al., 2007; Mazman et al., 2009; Narasimhamurthy, 2014; Tavakoli, 2015; Wilson, 2016; Genoe et al., 2016). The Europe and several developing Asian countries, including China, Japan, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and South Korea, appear to record high level of mobile phone usage across the community and firm expectations of connectivity (Wu & Pearce, 2017). This rising trend of digital event has attracted women from generations X and Y into becoming active travellers, besides influencing travel experiences (Binkhorst et al., 2009). This study contests the tradition of cultural anthropology that has been disregarding the very aspect of technology as the locus of culture (Wilson & Peterson 2002). It demonstrates that technology in tourism has eased and empowered women's lives as travel consumers. As consumers of technology, peeling the layers of women's background and the cultural systems is crucial in order to explain their purpose for adopting the technology in the first place (Parr, 1999). As such, this study highlights and documents the impact of technology on enhancing empowerment and amplification of women's voices to engender stereotypes about women and technology. Using the fifth Sustainable Development Goal as its focus, this study explores the potential of technology enhanced travel experiences contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment.

### **1.1.3 George Town: The Pride of Penang**

The history of Penang offers an interesting overview about its heritage, key events, and people that have shaped it and determined its character witnessed to date (Flower, 2011). Also known as Pearl of the Orient, Penang or Pulau Pinang is located in the northern corridor of Peninsular Malaysia. The island and the mainland are

connected by two bridges for land vehicles to commute, whilst ferries cross the Malacca Straits to one of Malaysia's prime tourist destinations (Mohaidin, Wei & Ali Murshid, 2017). Penang is one of the most visited cities in Malaysia, with over 6.5 million tourists visited George Town in 2017 (The Sun Daily, 2017) due to its culture-rich assets and interesting gastronomic experiences. The British occupation in the 18th century and the point of transit for traders turned George Town into an integral seaport. After the 20th century, industrial growth and tourism were rampant in Penang. At present, manufacturing and tourism are notably the significant contributors to the Penang economy (Gin, 2015).

George Town, also fondly known as 'Tanjung' amidst Penangites, has long been acknowledged as a cosmopolitan port-city (Gin, 2015), which never fails to offer multifaceted travel experience. Unique, well-preserved historical and heritage architectures, a melting pot of multi-racial populace, streetscape, religious houses, and to top it off, the undisputed food haven, makes it a bucket-list destination for both locals and foreigners. The capital city is a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Khoo, Samat, Badarulzaman & Dawood, 2015) that was awarded as the best place to visit in 2017 by CNN, Lonely Planet's Top 10 Cities list for Best in Travel 2016, and the world's best destination for food by Lonely Planet in 2014. While preserving its culture and heritage, George Town boasts about its advanced infrastructures by offering free wireless internet access in public areas with more than 1,550 hotspots (Khoo et al., 2015), thus gradually turning into a hub for digital nomads (Lielacher, 2016) and travellers across the globe. A walk down in the George Town streets exposes travellers to the lifestyle of a diverse community. Apart from the aesthetic and artistic values, George Town is known for its progressive access to street art, murals, and metal sculptures (Ngiom, 2011), which significantly provide the local cultural an interesting

identity and a visual sense of place through tangible and intangible elements (Escorteganha et al., 2013).

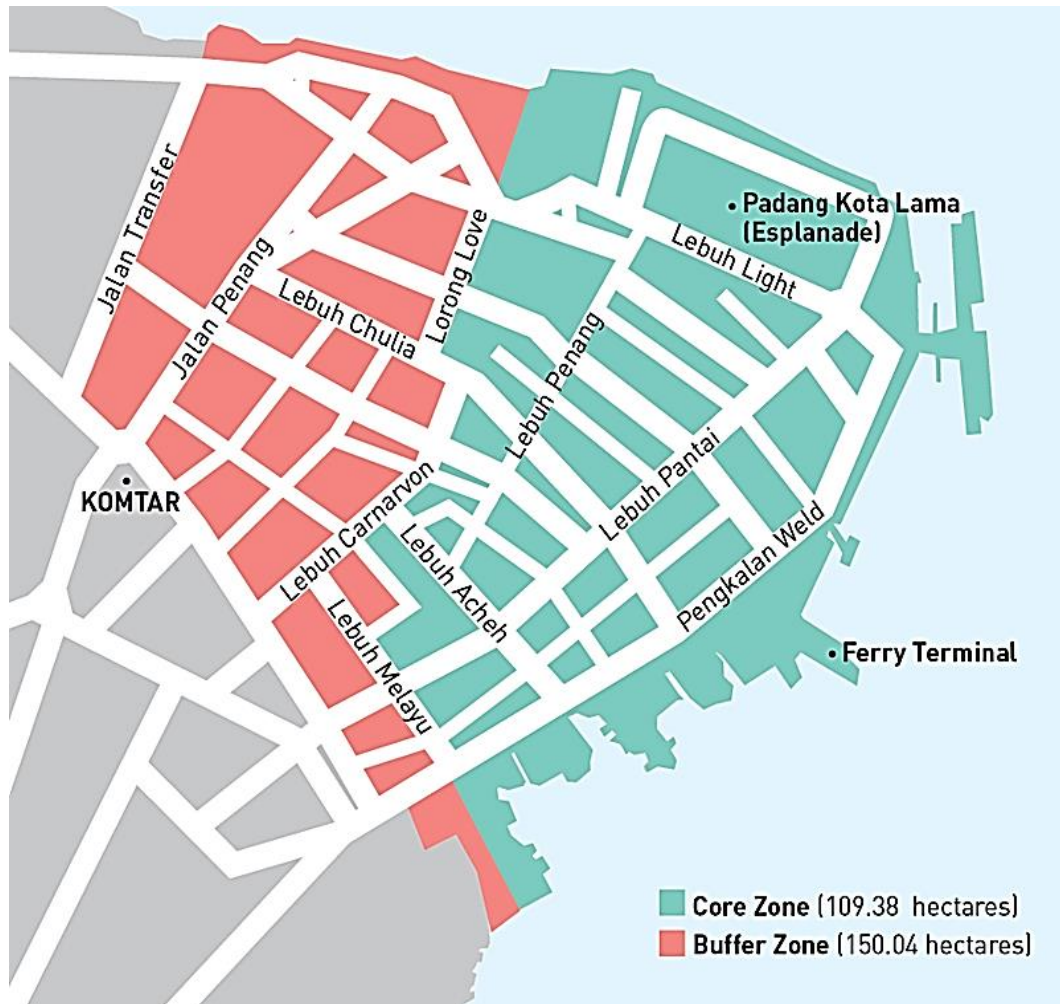


Figure 1.1. Map of George Town, Penang

Source: myPenang.gov.my

It might be odd to begin a study which stresses the importance of qualitative studies with a statistical section. However, the data indicates the composition of women who travel and use technology in Penang to further strengthen and justify this study. According to the statistics from Tourism Malaysia, a total of 6.3 million tourists visited Penang in 2017. The Penang Tourist Survey 2017 conducted by Universiti

Sains Malaysia and Penang Global Tourism gave an overview of tourist profiles to Penang in 2017. The survey, which involved 4611 tourists (2405 international and 2206 domestic) that was conducted between March and December 2017, revealed a balanced composition of international and domestic women travellers, as well as technology use for travel purpose in Penang. A large number of women from the European bloc and the Southeast Asia who had visited Penang then were single with age ranging between 18 and 35.

The data further proves that the number of women will continue to increase in future with the emergence of tourism savvy technology that has become women's indispensable guide to travel. Besides taking step in to carve out a good niche for itself in tourism – its food is its biggest selling point, followed by its arts and heritage, Penang Island has a strong reputation for technology development, infrastructure and facilities becoming a hub for digital nomads (Lielacher, 2016). Towards bridging the digital gap, an ‘Internet Access for All’ initiative was launched by the Penang State Government in 2009. This pioneering effort is another first in Malaysia, with the aim of providing free wireless internet around public tourism areas with more than 1,550 hotspots (Khoo et al., 2015).



Table 1.1  
*Penang Tourists Survey 2017*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>International (%)</b>	<b>Domestic (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	46.7	35.7	41.4
Female	53.3	64.3	58.6
<b>Age</b>	<b>International</b>	<b>Domestic</b>	<b>Total</b>
18-25	32.5	56.4	44.0
26-35	41.8	29.4	35.8
36-49	15.2	9.6	12.5
>50	10.2	4.6	7.7
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>International</b>	<b>Domestic</b>	<b>Total</b>
Single	65.8	73.8	69.7
Married	32.3	25.5	29.1
Divorced / Widowed	1.8	0.6	1.3
<b>Source of information</b>	<b>International</b>	<b>Domestic</b>	<b>Total</b>
Internet / Social Media	40.0	29.8	34.3
Friends/Relative/WoM	27.6	23.5	25.3
Past experience	13.6	30.6	23.1
Magazine / Paper/Guide	10.5	5.8	7.9
TV / Radio	1.7	4.2	3.1
Travel agency / Tour Co	3.2	1.5	2.3
Tourism fair	1.2	3.0	2.2
Tourism Office	1.2	0.9	1.0
In-flight information	1.0	0.7	0.8

Source: USM-PGT

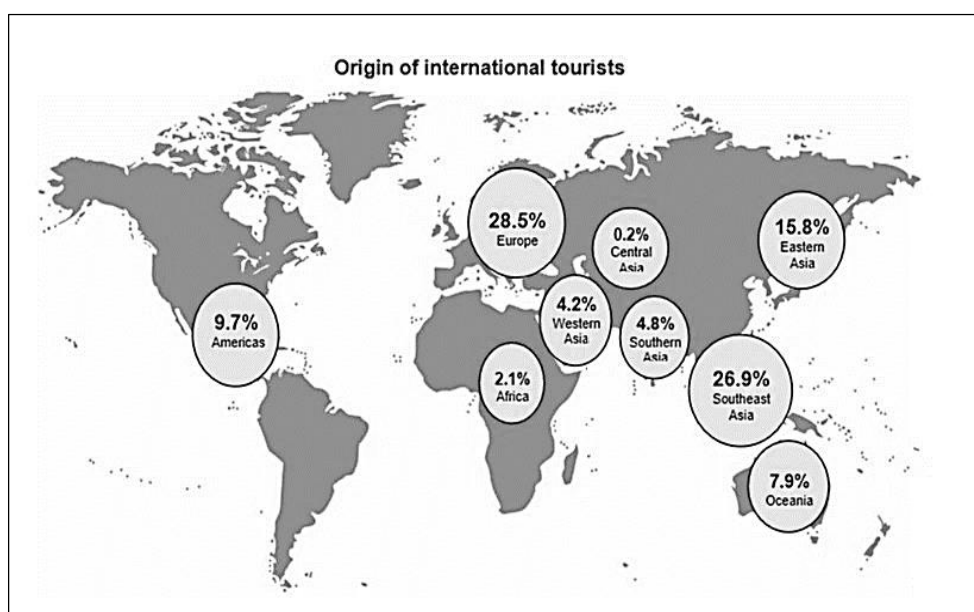


Figure 2.1. Origin of international tourists in Penang 2017

Source: USM-PGT

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Tourism is relevant to many theoretical and real-world issues in anthropology. Divided conceptually into two halves, one seeks to understand the origins of tourism, and the other reveals tourism's impacts. The problem is that most studies fail to explore the impacts and importance for tourists throughout all stages of tourism. In this case, women's perspective will be important as the study explore the ways in which technology contribute as a form of empowerment for women. Given that very little research has been carried out into the gender dimensions of this relationship, this will be a first attempt to unpack the role of technology enhanced experiences in empowering women. The participatory role of and the contributions by women, mainly as tourism consumers, have inadvertently advanced the needs of women within the context of developing nations. The discourses of anthropological tourism have primarily focused on issues linked with women as host, employment patterns, and sex tourism, while scarcely on women's experiences as tourism consumers (Nash, 1981; Pritchard, 2007).

Hitherto, an in-depth review that involved 2155 doctoral studies in light of tourism anthropology and sociology disciplines from the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand exhibited that only 292 studies were in line within the anthropology domain (Canosa, Moyle, Moyle, & Weiler, 2018). Anthropology studies are gradually turning away from the prevalent focus on host communities, while feminist has begun exploring women's experiences as consumers (Swain, 1995; Veijola & Jokinen, 1994). It is noteworthy to emphasise that studies about women's travel experiences and technology in tourism anthropology are lacking in number, while technology empowering women seems to be a relatively new area that is emerging within the context of critical tourism studies.

Based on a survey regarding the anthropological tourism literature, Crick (1994) asserted that there is a pressing need for ethnographic studies on tourist experiences. When most anthropologists appear to be interested in investigating the impact of the touristic process to the host society, the area of personal travel experiences amongst tourists still remains a fertile investigation ground for anthropology with a plenitude of theoretical possibilities (Nash, 1981). In a similar vein, most anthropological tourism studies carried out in the Southeast Asian region seem to draw on culture, identity, heritage, eco-tourism, rural tourism, geography, socio-economy, and employment issues (Din, 1982; King, 2009; Kunjuran & Hussin, 2016; Karim, 2016). Meanwhile, studies on Asian women empowerment in tourism are skewed towards the role of women as host in rural tourism, socio-economy or entrepreneurship progress, employment constraints, sex tourism, and impression on indigenous women (Benthall, 1988; Mason, 1999; Milgram, 2001; Yahaya & Yahaya, 2014; Selamat, Aziz & Endut, 2015; Ahmad & Ahmad, 2016).

Only a handful of studies have assessed the experiences or empowerment of women as travellers, and the role of technology in empowering women (Hashim, 2007; Yusof, 2009; Hashim et al., 2011; Ratthinan & Selamat, 2017; Khoo-Lattimore & Wilson, 2017; Ying et.al, 2017; Suhaimi & Lokman, 2018). Out of the seven studies, only one study by Ratthinan & Selamat (2017) focused on the role of technology empowering women as travellers while the rest explored women's experience using technology in general. With technology having the ability to dominate and reshape travel experiences, a pressing need exists to redress the ambiguity that is present across anthropological tourism studies concerning women's voices and choices. It is to signify their empowerment as the drivers of travel, instead of playing the passive recipients.

When most travel practices, experiences, choices, and actions are associated to power and power relations in the social world; women have begun using their travelling freedom (Shaw, 2001) to challenge their lack of power or their dissatisfaction towards societal views regarding the expected roles and behaviours of women. Thus, it is imminent to comprehend the conditions and the outcomes of women's technology-enhanced travel experiences, particularly distinguished from being consumers (Risman, 2004, 2009; Figueroa et al., 2015). The significance of technology in empowering women adds to travel typology that transforms their everyday experiences and results in the emergence of new types of anthropology studies, as prescribed by Pfaffenberger (1992) and Bray (2007). Technology-enhanced travel experience is relatively a new under-theorised form of empowerment that demands more research work that extends and deepens the area of tourism gender.

The existing literature insufficiently addresses women's experiences, conditions, constraints, and positions within the tourism sector that embeds technology. Xiao and Smith (2006) prescribed the adoption of a more critical lens amongst tourism scholars, whereas Wilson and Harris (2006) proposed travel as an unconventional lens to assess women's personal time-space, a moment of self-reflection away from their routine domestic chores. Studies concerning travel experiences are virtually absent from the academic discourse, despite serving as a platform through which one experiences the world and the self, as well as its embodiment that has a crucial role in the performance of tourism (Pritchard et al., 2007; Small, 2007). Figueroa et al., (2015) substantiated that out of 466 tourism gender research journals between year 1985 and 2012, only six papers (1.3%) reported on gender and travel experiences.

Most of these studies focused on Western women as the participants, while disregarding non-Western women from varied nations with divergent cultural background, religious orientation, living conditions, and lifestyles. Hence, a cross-cultural study is substantial to reflect the nuances of women's travel experiences across diverse background. This aids in discerning the fact that women are varied and the Western-centric experience is far from being the standard. Such notion adds to the existing critical tourism scholarship of anthropology, while simultaneously laying a platform for future research work that emphasises on non-Western or Asian women. In assessing cross-cultural women, the varied lifestyles echoed by age, occupation, marital status, race, class, sexual preference, and nationality are central in their daily lives and it is vital to understand their experiences. According to Uriely (1997) postmodern tourism is characterised by the diverse motivations, experiences, and environments of travellers. Nash and Smith (1991) claimed that social requirements or cultural obligations can be ignored during travel.

On the other hand, technology usage in the modern tourism have given women the opportunity to amplify their voices, and help to create experiences that they have ownership over. The key finding of the second edition of the Global Report on Women in Tourism released in 2019 by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) substantiated that women's empowerment in the travel tourism industry has partly been due to technology becoming more easily accessible to women. Due to that, women have become financially independent and challenge stereotypes. Access to technology, control of it, and the ability to create and shape it, is a fundamental issue of women's human rights.

This is in line with the Goal Five of the Sustainable Development Goals which manifest global awareness pertaining to empowerment via technology that identifies usage of technology as a form of liberation amongst women from their typical identities. Hence, incorporating the stance of technology usage as a form of empowerment is crucial across critical tourism studies, precisely by looking at women's empowerment via technology usage from the household, community, national and global level. Here, the two significant aspects of travel and technology boost greater equality between men and women, thus enhancing the quality of travel experience, while technology influencing women's choices, decisions, and experiences, besides contributing towards empowerment by deconstructing the firmly rooted stereotypes in their lives.

The study focuses on technology enhanced travel experiences as a form of liberation that help end the gender technology gap and empower women to create innovative solutions to advance equality in their communities. For instance, with a mobile phone, women are able to stay abreast, connected and negotiate their travel constraints such as making things less daunting for the women worldwide. They are in charge of all the financial decision-making and have some pretty notable purchasing power. Besides that, technology offers women the chance to interact and empower both themselves and other women in their journeys. These tourism initiatives have utilized new technologies in innovative ways whereby digital platforms offer new avenues for collaboration and awareness raising, bringing women together in new ways. Within this perspective the study seeks three research objectives and research questions to evaluate technology advances and empirical analyses of gender within tourism.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The objectives outlined for this thesis are listed in the following: -

- 1) To understand the meanings women attach to travel;
- 2) To identify the underlying motivations for technology usage by women travellers; and
- 3) To explore the role of technology in enhancing travel experiences that contributes as a form of empowerment.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

Motivated by the problem statement and gaps identified in the literature, several research questions were formulated to explore the correlations between women, technology, and travel experiences with the emphasis revolving around the context of empowerment. **The three research questions are to identify:**

- 1) What are the meanings women attach to travel?
- 2) What are the underlying motivation factors for women to use technology to travel?
- 3) How do technology-enhanced travel experiences contribute as a form of empowerment?

### **1.5 Relevance and Rational for the Study**

Henderson et al., (1989) suggested that experience is the most appropriate way to examine leisure for all people, and specifically for women. Therefore, the locus of this study is primarily to redress the ambiguity lurking across tourism studies regarding women's voice to signify their travel experiences in light of technology, as well as

linking these travel experiences with the notion of empowerment via tourism sphere. According to Kinnaird et al., (1996) and Berdychevsky et al., (2013), gender relations tend to affect the way men and women build their travel experiences. This study complies with this stance, in that it progresses on the premise that women's ideas, experiences, and feelings, should and need to be documented. Conventionally, women's tourism experiences are constrained by male-dominated values and attitudes at destinations, apart from facing constrictions posed by social constraints and restrictions (Swain, 1995). Pizam and Milman (1984) mentioned that most tourism studies are merely concerned with understanding the impacts on host communities, instead of on women and its extended effect.

First, this study extends the academic pursuit of tourism anthropology that places focus on women (Reiter, 1975; Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Swain, 1995; Aitchison, 1996; Deem, 1996) and bridges the gaps on women's experiences as consumers of tourism. While restoring the absence of their voices, this study highlights the role of technology-enhanced travel experiences that contributes as a form of empowerment amongst women. The study shows that technology goes beyond creating significant opportunities for women to engage in travel activities. As a matter of fact, technology empowers women as creators of their own experiences with high potential of empowering others along the process (Gretzel et al., 2006; Wong & Liu, 2011; Korneliussen, 2014; Yu et al., 2014). Technology grants women the freedom to express their hybrid identities in new ways (Aitchison & Reeve, 1998). It will highlight the prospect of technology empowerment which amplifies women's voices, choices and experiences in the tourism sector.



Second, the study expands the theoretical knowledge within the anthropological field of technology and empowerment. Given that women are actively engaged in technology-enhanced travel, the various ways in which they exercise power is crucial in breaking down empowerment as a process. Technology-enhanced travel experiences contribute toward empowerment by giving women notable purchasing and decision-making power, while selecting the best outcomes of their travel experiences. That being said, the study findings discuss issues pertaining to women, which have a function in deciphering their varied identities, roles, conditions, and constraints in light of technology usage. Given that women face various travel constraints while some feel that they are not entitled to leisure (Deem, 1986; Wearing & Wearing, 1988; Henderson & Dialeschki, 1991), technology has turned into a negotiation tool as a means to address those constraints and to make their presence felt within the public sphere.

Third, the cross-cultural input of this study expands the knowledge of Western and Asian women. Anthropologists Nash and Smith (1991), along with Graburn (1983), call for more contribution of cross-cultural anthropology within the tourism domain. Exploring women's narratives exposes the extent of constraints, conditions, and choices they face and they have. Shaping the women's social landscape greatly helps to uncover gendered power and the aspects of gendered physical mobility, which are reckoned and further explored as potential tools in altering the gendered structure of power. This enables the emergence of fresh stances at the intersection between gender tourism and emerging technology, which directly influences the distinct needs of Western and Asian women in tourism initiatives. This substantiates that reported by Lee and Gretzel (2014), wherein cross-cultural inquiry displays social identities that have a significant impact on technology use and online consumer behaviours.

Fourth, ethnography has been the method of choice for extensive anthropological fieldwork over a century (Graburn, 2002). On the contrary to the conventional ethnography method where researchers build rapport and immerse in the field, this study adopted a contemporary ethnography method by undertaking the ‘step-in-step-out’ method (Madden, 2010). Graburn (2002), along with Frohlick and Harrison (2008), emphasised on the challenges and the importance of engaging ethnography in tourism research. Given the nature of tourist as an amorphous group with shifting population, diverse nationality, socioeconomic class, ages, genders, cultural background, marital status, profession, and limited time to spare; contemporary ethnography offers new strategies. This study responds to the call by Chick (1998) to include ethnography of leisure using cross-cultural validity to add to the existing anthropological and contemporary ethnography globally and locally.

Finally, technological innovations have escalated competitive pressure on the hospitality and tourism industry, thus demanding a shift away from focusing on facilities and services that offers co-created experiences (Knutson et al., 2007). Beginning from the stakeholders as well as businesses perspective, it is crucial to study the tourism market in light of gender issues, apart from identifying factors that affect the motivations, the behaviour, and the experiences of women whilst travelling. This study bridges the gap on an alternative perspective to develop suitable or appropriate devices, applications, and marketing strategy that best suited to meet the travel needs of women. The outcomes expand as practical knowledge for tourism destinations and stakeholders at large (Volo, 2009; Frochot & Batat, 2013). The need to comprehend women traveller’s experience about technology acceptance is vital to determine the right marketing strategies in promoting new tourism niche. This enhances market