
The Dynamics of Visitor Experiences in Nighlfe Tourism at Nightclubs in Yogyakarta

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of music, atmosphere, social interaction, and socio cultural dynamics in shaping the experiences of nightclub visitors in Yogyakarta City. This study employed a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews and participant observation involving 11 informants across three nightclubs in Yogyakarta. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, while triangulation and member checking techniques were applied to ensure data validity. The findings reveal that visitor experiences are shaped by five main themes: sensory and atmospheric experiences, social interaction, motivational and emotional experiences, socio-cultural dynamics, and perceptions of the nightclub. Music, atmosphere, and social interaction were identified as dominant factors influencing visitors' comfort, emotional relaxation, and social experiences. The study also shows that nightlife tourism in Yogyakarta has distinctive characteristics influenced by the local cultural context and Yogyakarta's identity as a tourism and student city. This research contributes to experiential tourism studies by demonstrating that nightlife tourism experiences are formed through interconnected sensory, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions.

Keywords: Experiential Tourism, Nightclub, Visitor Experience, Nightlife Tourism Yogyakarta

Article info:

Submitted: April 17, 2026 | Revised: June 5, 2026 | Accepted: June 12, 2026

How to cite:

Anggraini, F. D., & Ermawati, K. C. (2026). The Dynamics of Visitor Experiences in Nightlife Tourism at Nightclubs in Yogyakarta. *Jurnal Sains Terapan Pariwisata*, 11(2), 204-216. <https://doi.org/10.56743/jstp.v11i2.837>

INTRODUCTION

Nightlife tourism has become an integral part of urban tourism development by providing social, emotional, and entertainment experiences for visitors. As a component of nightlife tourism, nightclubs have experienced rapid growth in major cities, including Yogyakarta. The development of nightclubs has increasingly transformed them into spaces for social interaction and lifestyle expression within urban society (Leon, 2020; Yeganeh, 2020; Evan, 2020). The growth of nightclubs in Yogyakarta indicates a rising public interest in nightlife activities as part of the urban tourism experience. This phenomenon positions nightclubs not only as entertainment venues but also as spaces for the construction of social and cultural experiences among visitors (Mayasari, 2021; Romadhon, 2021).

Nightclubs serve as places for entertainment while simultaneously functioning as arenas for complex and dynamic social interaction. Eldridge (2021) argues that nightclubs symbolize lifestyle and vibrant nightlife within modern cosmopolitan and global cities. Visitor experiences in nightclubs are influenced by various factors, including music, atmosphere, social interaction, and personal motivations (Carlini et al., 2018; Feltmann et al., 2021; Kadokura et al., 2024). Previous studies have shown that nightclub visitors primarily seek entertainment, relaxation, social interaction, and temporary escape from daily routines (Palamar et al., 2023; James, 2026). These conditions highlight that nightclubs function not only as entertainment venues but also as experiential spaces that shape visitors' emotional and social experiences (Halkiopoulous et al., 2021; Nghiêm-Phú, 2020; Phucharoen et al., 2023; Christou et al., 2022).

Nightclubs are among the most popular nightlife venues where visitors can express themselves, socialize with peers, and escape from everyday routines (Monterrubio et al., 2021; Orzel, 2023; Alam & O'Connell, 2024). Experiences in nightclubs provide opportunities for individuals to explore identities and lifestyles that may not be accessible in everyday life. Nightclubs and their visitors also represent luxurious and exclusive lifestyles, often requiring relatively high levels of economic and social capital within the nightlife industry (Gavev, 2023; Rietveld, 2022; Dart, 2022). Nightclub experiences often become memorable moments that enrich individuals' life narratives. Brochado et al. (2021) explain that nightclubs offer unique and unforgettable experiences by combining elements such as music, lighting design, and stimulating atmospheres that create energetic and captivating environments for visitors.

Yogyakarta, with its rich cultural heritage and vibrant nightlife, represents an interesting setting for understanding nightlife phenomena within a local context. This study seeks to bridge the knowledge gap in the literature on nightlife tourism in Yogyakarta. The research contributes to a broader understanding of global nightlife phenomena while providing specific insights into the unique dynamics and patterns of nightclub nightlife in Yogyakarta. The existence of nightclubs in Yogyakarta reflects the dynamic development of the nightlife industry in Indonesia, including its associated economic and social potential. The increasing presence of nightclubs as nightlife tourism destinations demonstrates the strong attraction of urban nightlife culture. Nightclubs provide entertainment while also serving as centers of social interaction, cultural expression, and memory creation (Garcia, 2018; Tutenges, 2022; Nofre, 2023; Fahrul, 2024).

Research on nightlife tourism has predominantly focused on visitor behavior, motivations, nightlife lifestyles, and the social risks associated with nightlife activities.

However, studies specifically examining the formation of visitor experiences in nightclub-based nightlife tourism in Yogyakarta remain relatively limited. Previous research has not extensively explored visitor experiences from the perspective of experiential tourism, particularly in relation to emotional experiences, social interactions, atmosphere, and the construction of visitors' social identities. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the dynamics of visitor experiences in nightclub nightlife tourism in Yogyakarta. Specifically, the study aims to analyze the role of music, atmosphere, social interaction, and socio-cultural dynamics in shaping visitor experiences within nightlife tourism at nightclubs in Yogyakarta.

Visitor experience is an essential element in the tourism industry as it reflects the interaction between tourists and destinations. In the context of nightlife tourism, visitor experiences are shaped through emotional, social, sensory, and behavioral dimensions that emerge during entertainment activities (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Prentice, 2020). Schmitt (1999) explains that tourism experiences can be formed through the dimensions of sense, feel, think, act, and relate, which influence how visitors perceive and interpret a tourism destination. Nightlife tourism refers to a form of tourism centered on nighttime entertainment activities such as nightclubs, music performances, and other social activities (Smith & Eldridge, 2019). Within the context of urban nightlife tourism, nightclubs represent entertainment destinations that offer distinctive social experiences, atmospheres, and interactions for visitors (Maulidya, 2017; Nurlela et al., 2024; Whiting, 2024).

Based on this background, the research question of this study is how music, atmosphere, social interaction, and socio-cultural dynamics shape visitor experiences in nightclub nightlife tourism in Yogyakarta. This study contributes to the fields of experiential tourism and nightlife tourism by demonstrating how nightclub visitor experiences are constructed through the interaction between nightlife atmospheres, social relationships, and the local cultural context of Yogyakarta.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research design employed a qualitative approach aimed at analyzing the role of music, atmosphere, social interaction, and socio-cultural dynamics in shaping visitor experiences within nightlife tourism at nightclubs in Yogyakarta. The qualitative approach emphasized an in-depth understanding of the research process in order to gain comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The research participants consisted of 11 nightclub visitors aged between 21 and 34 years old, representing diverse backgrounds such as university students, private-sector employees, entrepreneurs, and creative workers. Eight participants were regular nightclub visitors, while the remaining three were first-time visitors to nightclubs in Yogyakarta. The diversity of participants' backgrounds was intended to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives regarding nightlife tourism.

In-depth interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of visitor experiences, music preferences, social interactions, and other factors influencing nightclub experiences. Participant observation was also carried out to directly observe interactions among visitors and the atmosphere within the nightclubs. The study was conducted at three major nightclubs in Yogyakarta, selected based on their popularity, visitor intensity, and

distinctive nightlife characteristics. These locations were chosen to provide diverse representations of visitor experiences within the context of nightlife tourism in Yogyakarta.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, in which informants were intentionally chosen based on criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. The inclusion criteria required participants to have visited nightclubs in Yogyakarta and to be willing to participate in in-depth interviews and participant observation. Prior to the interviews, all participants were informed about the objectives of the study and provided consent to participate. Participant identities were kept confidential through the use of codes or pseudonyms in order to protect informants' privacy.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Informants

Informant	Age (Years)	Occupation	Visit Intensity
P1	22	University Student	Regular visitor
P2	28	Private Employee	Regular visitor
P3	24	Creative Worker	First-time visitor
P4	31	Freelancer	Regular visitor
P5	27	Postgraduate Student	Regular visitor
P6	25	Entrepreneur	Regular visitor
P7	26	Graphic Designer	Regular visitor
P8	23	University Student	Regular visitor
P9	30	Content Creator	First-time visitor
P10	31	Business Owner	Regular visitor
P11	28	Entrepreneur	First-time visitor

Source: Author 2025

Interviews were conducted using questions focused on the experiences and perceptions of nightclub visitors in Yogyakarta. The in-depth interviews were carried out face-to-face, with each interview lasting approximately 45–80 minutes. Participant observation was conducted by observing the nightclub atmosphere, patterns of interaction among visitors, responses to music and entertainment, and the social dynamics that emerged during nightlife activities. Observations were undertaken during nighttime operational hours throughout the research period. The following table presents the interview materials addressed to the research informants.

Table 2. Interview Materials for Informants

Interview Topics	Description
Visitor experiences	Asking informants to describe their experiences in nightclubs related to music, atmosphere, and social interactions occurring within the venue.
Factors influencing nightclub selection	Exploring factors influencing informants in choosing nightclubs, including location, nightclub image, and recommendations from friends.
Visitor preferences and motivations	Investigating participants' preferences and motivations in choosing nightclubs as nightlife tourism destinations, including what they seek and expect from the experience.
Perceptions of nightclubs	Examining participants' perceptions of various nightclub aspects related to image, service quality, facilities, and products provided.
Responses to social and cultural dynamics	Asking informants to respond to the socio-cultural dynamics within nightclub environments, particularly interactions among visitors and prevailing social norms.

Source: Author 2025

Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Data collection was terminated after reaching the saturation point, where additional interviews no longer generated new or significant themes or information. Interview and observation data were transcribed and coded to identify major themes related to visitor experiences, entertainment preferences, social interactions, and socio-cultural dynamics in nightclubs. The data were subsequently categorized into several major themes and interpreted in accordance with the research objectives. Data validity was ensured through triangulation by comparing findings from in-depth interviews and participant observation. In addition, member checking was conducted with several participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations and their alignment with the participants' actual experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on in-depth interviews and participant observation involving 11 nightclub visitors in Yogyakarta, several major themes shaping visitor experiences in nightlife tourism were identified. These themes were derived through thematic analysis involving open coding,

data categorization, and theme grouping based on recurring patterns of experiences, perceptions, motivations, and social interactions emerging from interview and observation data. The analysis resulted in five major themes illustrating the dynamics of visitor experiences in Yogyakarta nightclubs.

Table 3. Theme Development Process

Initial Codes	Category	Main Theme
Energetic music, attractive lighting, comfortable atmosphere	Sensory experience	Sensory experience and atmosphere
Meeting friends, social relations, visitor interactions	Social interaction	Social interaction
Entertainment, relaxation, stress relief	Emotional experience	Motivation and emotional experience
Social norms, social comfort, visitor behavior	Cultural dynamics	Socio-cultural dynamics
Service quality, facilities, nightclub image	Visitor perception	Perceptions of nightclubs

Source: Author 2025

The theme development process was conducted through thematic analysis by identifying recurring initial codes derived from in-depth interviews and participant observation. The identified codes were subsequently grouped into categories based on similarities in meaning before being developed into the main research themes. This process demonstrates that visitor experiences in Yogyakarta nightclubs are shaped by a combination of sensory experiences, social interactions, emotional experiences, socio-cultural dynamics, and perceptions of service quality and nightclub atmosphere. The resulting themes were then used as the basis for a more in-depth analysis of nightclub visitor experiences.

Table 4. Themes and Subthemes of Nightclub Visitor Experiences

Theme	Subthemes	Findings
Sensory experience and atmosphere	Music, lighting, atmosphere	Music and nightclub atmosphere influence visitors' comfort and enjoyment

Social interaction	Friendship, community, social relations	Nightclubs serve as spaces for building social interaction and new connections
Motivation and emotional experience	Entertainment, relaxation, escapism	Visitors attend nightclubs for entertainment and temporary escape from daily routines
Socio-cultural dynamics	Social norms, social comfort	Visitors hold different perceptions regarding nightclub norms and culture
Perceptions of nightclubs	Image, services, facilities	Reputation and service quality influence visitor experiences

Source: Author 2025

The findings indicate that nightclub visitor experiences in Yogyakarta are multidimensional experiences shaped through the combination of sensory, social, emotional, and cultural factors. These findings demonstrate that nightlife tourism functions not only as a form of entertainment but also as a space for constructing social and emotional experiences within urban society.

The theme of sensory experience and atmosphere reveals that music, lighting, and nightclub ambiance are the primary factors shaping visitors' comfort and enjoyment. Most informants stated that variations in music and lighting arrangements create a more vibrant and engaging entertainment experience. The findings suggest that sensory experience constitutes the most dominant element in shaping visitor satisfaction in Yogyakarta nightclubs. Music, lighting, and atmosphere function not merely as supporting entertainment elements, but also as the core of nightlife tourism experiences that influence visitors' emotional engagement. This finding is consistent with Schmitt's (1999) concept of sense experience, which explains that experiences are formed through sensory stimulation such as sound, visual elements, and spatial atmosphere.

These findings also reinforce previous studies by (Carlisle & Ritchie, 2021; Daelemans et al., 2024; Ketkaew et al., 2024), which identified sensory elements as primary factors in shaping nightlife experiences. However, this study demonstrates a different context, as the sensory experiences of nightclub visitors in Yogyakarta are also influenced by the city's cultural identity as both a tourism destination and a student city. Consequently, the atmosphere of nightlife entertainment in Yogyakarta differs from that of more liberal metropolitan cities. One informant explained this experience in the following interview excerpt.

"In my opinion, the music and atmosphere in nightclubs really affect my mood. If the music fits and the lighting is good, the atmosphere becomes more exciting and makes me want to stay longer." (P2, regular visitor, 28 years old).

The theme of social interaction indicates that nightclubs are perceived not only as entertainment venues but also as social spaces for building relationships and social

connections. Interactions among visitors create more adaptive experiences and strengthen emotional engagement during nightclub visits. These findings support Schmitt's (1999) concept of relate experience, which emphasizes the importance of social relationships and group identity in shaping tourism experiences. Unlike several previous studies that positioned nightclubs merely as spaces of hedonistic entertainment, this study found that nightclubs in Yogyakarta are also perceived as social environments that provide visitors with a sense of social connectedness and emotional comfort.

The findings are also consistent with studies by (Ebejer, 2021; Kish Bar-On et al., 2024), which argued that nightlife functions as a social space for self-expression and the formation of temporary social communities. However, this study reveals that social interactions in Yogyakarta nightclubs tend to be more fluid and are not always oriented toward specific social groups, allowing new visitors to establish spontaneous social interactions. This condition is reflected in the following interview excerpt.

"I like going to nightclubs because I can hang out with friends and meet new people. Sometimes small interactions like chatting or dancing together make the atmosphere much more enjoyable." (P7, regular visitor, 26 years old).

The theme of motivation and emotional experience demonstrates that visitors possess diverse motivations for attending nightclubs. Some informants visited nightclubs to seek entertainment and enjoyment, while others perceived them as spaces for relaxation and temporary escape from everyday routines. These findings indicate that nightlife tourism serves psychological functions, including stress relief and the search for emotional comfort. The findings reinforce the concept of experiential tourism, which emphasizes that tourism experiences are not only physical in nature but also involve visitors' emotional and psychological experiences.

This study also differs from several previous studies that predominantly emphasized hedonistic aspects of nightlife (Anggraini et al., 2022). In the context of Yogyakarta, some visitors instead perceived nightclubs as spaces for emotional relaxation rather than merely symbols of a hedonistic lifestyle. This perspective is illustrated in the following interview excerpt.

"Sometimes I go to nightclubs just to relieve stress after work. The atmosphere makes my mind feel more relaxed and helps me forget daily routines for a while." (P4, first-time visitor, 24 years old).

The theme of socio-cultural dynamics indicates that social and cultural norms within the nightclub environment also influence visitor experiences. Some informants felt comfortable with the open social atmosphere, while others expressed discomfort toward certain behaviors that developed within nightclub settings. These findings demonstrate that visitor experiences are shaped through the interaction between individual freedom and the social norms operating within nightlife environments. The findings support the study by Alam and O'Connell (2026), which argued that urban nightlife shapes specific patterns of behavior and social interaction among its visitors.

The theme of perceptions of nightclubs reveals that nightclub image, service quality, and available facilities influence visitors' perceptions and satisfaction. Nightclubs with strong reputations and comfortable facilities tend to provide more positive experiences for visitors.

These findings indicate that service quality is an important factor in shaping overall satisfaction in nightlife tourism experiences.

The findings further demonstrate that the five identified themes are interconnected in shaping nightclub visitor experiences in Yogyakarta. Sensory experiences through music and atmosphere encourage more fluid social interactions, while these social interactions strengthen visitors' emotional experiences in seeking entertainment, relaxation, and escapism. At the same time, socio-cultural dynamics and perceptions of service quality contribute to determining visitors' levels of comfort and satisfaction within nightclub environments.

This study contributes to the field of experiential tourism by demonstrating that nightlife tourism experiences in Yogyakarta nightclubs are shaped through the interrelation of sensory experiences, social relationships, emotional experiences, and urban cultural dynamics. The findings also reveal that nightlife tourism in Yogyakarta possesses distinctive characteristics compared to nightlife experiences in other metropolitan cities, as it is influenced by local cultural contexts and Yogyakarta's identity as both a tourism city and a student city.

The principal finding of this study is that nightclub visitor experiences in Yogyakarta are shaped not only by nightlife entertainment activities but also by complex social and emotional experiences. The study found that visitors perceive nightclubs as spaces for building social connections, seeking emotional relaxation, and expressing self-identity within an urban cultural context. These findings extend the concept of *experiential tourism* by demonstrating that nightlife tourism in Yogyakarta possesses unique characteristics shaped by the city's identity as a cultural and educational city, distinguishing it from nightlife experiences in other metropolitan areas.

Theoretically, this study strengthens the concepts of experiential tourism and experiential marketing proposed by Schmitt (1999) by demonstrating that nightlife tourism experiences are continuously formed through the combination of sensory, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions. Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for nightclub managers in designing nightlife experiences that are more oriented toward visitors' emotional comfort and social interaction. Managers should therefore pay greater attention to atmospheric quality, social safety, music variation, and service quality in order to enhance overall visitor experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that nightclub visitor experiences in Yogyakarta are shaped through the combination of sensory experiences, social interactions, emotional experiences, socio-cultural dynamics, and perceptions of service quality. The findings reveal that nightclubs are perceived not only as entertainment venues but also as social spaces and environments for emotional relaxation among visitors. This study contributes to the field of experiential tourism by showing that nightlife tourism experiences in Yogyakarta possess distinctive characteristics influenced by the local cultural context and Yogyakarta's identity as both a cultural and student city. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of managing atmosphere, service quality, and social comfort in enhancing nightclub visitor experiences. Based on the findings, several recommendations can be proposed as follows:

1. Nightclub managers are encouraged to improve the quality of the entertainment atmosphere through the management of music, lighting, and spatial ambiance that align with visitor preferences in order to create more engaging and memorable nightlife tourism experiences.
2. Nightclub managers should pay greater attention to service quality, social safety, and visitor comfort, as these factors significantly influence visitors' perceptions and overall satisfaction within nightclub environments.
3. Local governments are advised to manage nightlife tourism in a balanced manner by considering tourism development, visitor safety and comfort, as well as the preservation of Yogyakarta's local cultural values.
4. Future studies are recommended to involve more diverse informants and employ broader research approaches in order to gain deeper insights into the dynamics of nightlife tourism and nightclub visitor experiences.

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