



# Changing the Meaning of Night: Educational Tourism in Mycelia Forest Cikole

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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the application of educational tourism in night adventure activities in the Mycelia Forest, Cikole, Lembang, West Java, by reviewing marketing communication strategies, tourist experiences, mindset transformation, and the impact on local communities. The research method used was qualitative through semi-structured interviews with 20 informants and field observations. The results of the study show that: (1) education is delivered through the creative integration of video mapping, animation, storytelling guides, information boards, and interactive rides; (2) tourists experience enjoyable organic learning without feeling like they are in a formal setting; (3) there is a transformation in tourists' mindset about educational tourism from formal and boring to creative and enjoyable; (4) the uniqueness of night adventures creates strong differentiation that drives loyalty and word-of-mouth; (5) destinations have a positive impact on local communities through economic improvement, area image, and infrastructure. This research contributes to the development of sustainable, transformative educational tourism strategies that have a positive impact on both tourists and local communities.

*Keywords: Educational Tourism; Marketing Communications; Adventure Tourism; Tourist Behavior; Night Tourism Experiences*

## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini berfokus pada penerapan wisata edukasi dalam aktivitas petualangan malam di Hutan Mycelia, Cikole, Lembang, Jawa Barat, dengan meninjau strategi komunikasi pemasaran, pengalaman wisatawan, transformasi mindset, serta dampak terhadap masyarakat lokal. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 20 informan dan observasi lapangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: (1) penyampaian edukasi dilakukan melalui integrasi kreatif video mapping, animasi, storytelling pemandu, papan informasi dan wahana interaktif; (2) wisatawan mengalami pembelajaran organik yang menyenangkan tanpa merasa berada dalam setting formal; (3) terjadi transformasi mindset wisatawan tentang wisata edukasi dari formal-membosankan menjadi kreatif-menyenangkan; (4) keunikan petualangan

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malam menciptakan diferensiasi kuat yang mendorong loyalitas dan word-of-mouth; (5) destinasi memberikan dampak positif bagi masyarakat lokal melalui peningkatan ekonomi, citra kawasan dan infrastruktur. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan strategi wisata edukasi yang berkelanjutan, transformatif dan berdampak positif bagi wisatawan maupun komunitas lokal.

*Kata Kunci: Wisata Edukasi; Komunikasi Pemasaran; Wisata Petualangan; Perilaku Wisatawan; Pengalaman Wisata Malam*

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism as one of the global strategic sectors has undergone a transformation along with the increasing awareness of the importance of learning in the travel experience (Ateljevic, 2020). This shift is marked by the development of a destination management approach that is no longer solely oriented towards recreation, but also emphasizes educational value for tourists and local communities (Khuza'i et al., 2023). Educational tourism comes as a paradigm that places tourism as a means of interactive and transformative experiential learning, with contributions to knowledge enhancement, cultural preservation, and community empowerment (Akaho, 2024; Beard & Wilson, 2018). At the same time, the adventure tourism segment is showing significant growth due to increased traveler interest in immersive experiences in nature that involve physical challenges and emotional engagement (Sørensen et al., 2025). Recent developments have seen the emergence of night adventure tourism as a form of experiential innovation, where activities previously synonymous with daytime begin to shift to the dark, quiet and novelty of the night (Carvache-Franco et al., 2022; Nguyen & Tran, 2024). This opens up opportunities for deeper ecological learning and self-reflection, while strengthening tourists' emotional connection with nature.

In this context, educational tourism is one of the new approaches in managing tourist destinations that not only emphasizes recreational aspects, but also integrates learning values for tourists. In contrast to conventional tourism that tends to be oriented towards entertainment alone, educational tourism presents experiences that increase knowledge, broaden horizons and foster social and ecological awareness (Mir et al., 2024). In essence, the presence of tourists not only has an economic impact, but also creates educational value for themselves and the surrounding community (Tomasi et al., 2020). The main characteristics of educational tourism include experiential learning, active involvement of tourists, and collaboration between managers, local communities and visitors (Reina-Usuga et al., 2024). Tourists are positioned as not just consumers, but active participants in the learning process through interaction with nature, culture and local community activities (Pratminingsih et al., 2025).

The Cikole area in Lembang, West Java, is one of the leading destinations that offers a pine forest landscape, cool mountain air, and various outdoor activities. This potential makes Cikole a strategic location for the application of the educational tourism approach, a concept that not only provides entertainment, but also actively increases tourist knowledge and provides benefits to local communities (Khuza'i et al., 2023). One form of this is Mycelia Forest Cikole, which develops educational-based night adventure tourism, by utilizing the forest atmosphere at night as a medium for learning and experience. As a destination that already has adventure tourism infrastructure, Cikole including Mycelia has a great opportunity to develop tourism experiences that strengthen emotional and educational connections between tourists, nature and local communities (Manalu et al., 2024). Through Beard & Wilson (2018) approach, destination narratives are shaped not only to attract tourists, but also to build collective awareness about maintaining the sustainability and balance of tourism ecosystems.

A memorable tourism experience is an important element in tourism because it shapes the way tourists remember, value and retell their trip. This experience is understood as an in-depth interaction with the natural, cultural and social elements of the destination that results in lasting

emotional impressions, personal reflections, and long-term attachments (Kou & Xu, 2024). The main shaping elements according to Nogueira & Carvalho (2024) include uniqueness, authenticity, novelty and social interaction, which encourage learning and emotional engagement of tourists. In nature-based educational tourism according to Cloutier et al. (2025), memorable experiences are not only recreation-oriented, but also foster ecological awareness and support for sustainability practices. Educational tourism experiences are proven to be able to create meaningful learning and personal development of tourists according to (Beard & Wilson, 2018).

A number of previous studies have shown that the application of the concept of educational tourism can strengthen the attractiveness of destinations. This is done through the creation of interactive learning experiences for tourists while providing a positive impact on local communities (Bellato & Pollock, 2025). Beard & Wilson (2018) emphasize the importance of educational tourism experiences that are not only oriented towards recreation, but also encourage increased ecological knowledge and environmental conservation. Khuza'i et al. (2023) also highlighted the urgency of developing educational tourism destinations in Indonesia to support sustainable tourism through active involvement of tourists.

However, although educational tourism and adventure tourism have been widely studied, there are still gaps in the application of educational values in depth, especially in the context of night adventure activities. Many destinations have not yet been able to fully design transformative and sustainable learning experiences, so adventure tourism often stops at entertainment and physical challenges (Díaz-Carrión et al., 2020). In fact, night tourism has great potential in presenting new experiential dimensions that support ecological learning and personal reflection (Nguyen & Tran, 2024).

Based on these conditions, this study aims to explore the application of the concept of educational tourism in night adventure activities in Mycelia Forest. This research examines how learning experiences, tourist engagement, and communication between managers and visitors shape memorable and transformative tourism experiences, as well as their impact on local communities, particularly in terms of increasing economic activity, strengthening the image of the area, and developing tourism infrastructure. This study explores the application of educational tourism in night adventure activities in Mycelia Forest with a focus on educational delivery strategies, tourist experiences, mindset transformation, the uniqueness of the destination, and its impact on the local community?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Educational Tourism**

Educational tourism is a new approach to tourism destination management that emphasizes not only recreational aspects but also integrates educational value for tourists. Unlike conventional tourism, which tends to be solely entertainment-oriented, educational tourism offers experiences that enhance knowledge, broaden horizons, and foster social and ecological awareness (Mir et al., 2024). Essentially, the presence of tourists not only has an economic impact but also creates educational value for themselves and the surrounding community (Tomasi et al., 2020). Its main characteristics are experiential learning, active tourist involvement in interactive activities, and strengthening cultural identity and local potential (Akaho, 2024). Tourists are positioned not merely as passive consumers but as active participants who participate in the learning process through interactions with nature, culture, and community activities (Pratminingsih et al., 2025). Therefore, the management of educational tourism destinations must be oriented towards collaboration between managers, local communities, and tourists themselves (Reina-Usuga et al., 2024). In addition to providing educational benefits, educational tourism also has personal impacts, as Carvache-Franco et al. (2022) argues, including increased environmental awareness, cultural appreciation, and new skills relevant to everyday life. Global implementations can be seen in

outdoor learning practices in Japan, agrotourism in Europe, and adventure learning in Africa (Chen et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, educational tourism has developed rapidly in various destinations, such as the Orchid Forest Cikole in Bandung, the Ciasmara Tourism Village in Bogor, and agrotourism destinations in West Java. These practices demonstrate that the direction of national tourism development increasingly emphasizes the importance of educational value in creating sustainable, transformative, and impactful tourism experiences (Khuza'i et al., 2023). Thus, educational tourism can be viewed as an important strategy for balancing entertainment and learning, while providing benefits to both tourists and local communities.

## **2.2. Promotional Communication (Integrated Marketing Communication)**

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is a strategy that consistently integrates various forms of conventional and digital communication to deliver complementary messages. In tourism, according to Hossain et al. (2024) IMC functions not only as a means of information but also to build authentic imagery, emotional bonds, and tourist loyalty, in line with the critical and cross-channel nature of modern travelers. Social media has become a key channel because it enables two-way communication, strengthens destination narratives through tourist experiences, and provides more credible organic promotion than traditional advertising, particularly through user-generated content (Rehman et al., 2022; Yuliarni et al., 2023). The effectiveness of IMC is largely determined by storytelling that emphasizes authentic narratives about local culture, sustainability, and community experiences, which has proven more effective in building emotional closeness and revisit intentions than solely facility-based promotions (Jo et al., 2022). This approach aligns with the educational tourism trend, which emphasizes learning, empowerment, and socio-ecological awareness (Ateljevic, 2020). In addition to promotion, IMC also plays a strategic role in strengthening a destination's brand equity through consistent messaging across channels that build trust and long-term emotional connections with tourists (Yingjie & Mustafa, 2023).

## **2.3. Tourist Motivation and Behavior**

Tourist motivation and behavior are key factors in the development of educational tourism because they influence visit decisions, engagement levels, and the quality of the tourism experience. Tourist motivation is driven not only by recreational needs but also by the desire to acquire knowledge, learning experiences, and new understandings, which are then reflected in tourist behavior at the destination (Cave & Dredge, 2020). This behavior is evident in active participation in educational activities, awareness of local culture, and pro-environmental attitudes. Reflective experiences during travel have been shown to foster environmental awareness, while certain travel motivations, such as adventure tourism, can increase loyalty to sustainable tourism practices (Carvache-Franco et al., 2022). Thus, educational experiences have the potential to transform tourist behavior, both during travel and in everyday life. In addition to tourists, visiting behavior is also shaped by the role of stakeholders through multi-party collaboration and participatory education-based destination management (Price et al., 2025). According to Hillebrand (2022), an ecosystem perspective and a learning-based tourism approach help strengthen the integration of educational values, social cohesion, and community identity, including in post-disaster contexts. Therefore, understanding tourist motivations and behavior is an important foundation for designing sustainable and transformative educational tourism.

## **2.4. Memorable Tourism Experience**

Memorable tourism experiences are a crucial element in tourism because they shape how tourists remember, evaluate, and retell their journeys. These experiences are understood as in-depth interactions with the natural, cultural, and social elements of a destination that result in lasting emotional impressions, personal reflection, and long-term engagement (Kou & Xu, 2024). According to Nogueira & Carvalho (2024), the key elements include uniqueness, authenticity,

novelty, and social interaction, which encourage learning and emotional engagement in tourists. The literature identifies five key aspects of memorable experiences: emotional engagement, learning, novelty, social interaction, and personal values, which have the potential to foster tourist self-transformation, particularly in the context of adventure tourism. From a destination perspective, meaningful experiences have strategic implications because they increase satisfaction, loyalty, and positive image, as well as encourage recommendations through word-of-mouth and digital media (Reina-Usuga et al., 2024). According to Cloutier et al. (2025), in nature-based educational tourism, memorable experiences are not only recreationally oriented but also foster ecological awareness and support for sustainable practices. Educational tourism experiences have been shown to create meaningful learning and personal development for tourists (Beard & Wilson, 2018). In night adventure tourism, the dark, quiet atmosphere and limited lighting create a sense of novelty and emotional closeness to nature, deepening tourists' reflection and understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment.

## **2.5. Adventure Tourism**

According to Farkic (2021), adventure tourism is a rapidly growing tourism segment characterized by physically and emotionally challenging activities, such as hiking, whitewater rafting, rock climbing, and nature exploration, which emphasize direct tourist engagement with the environment. In addition to physical sensations, according to Miller & Mair (2020), adventure tourism provides psychological benefits in the form of increased self-confidence, mental resilience, and a sense of accomplishment, and can strengthen ecological connectedness when designed with educational and social elements. Tourist motivations vary, from seeking challenges to transformational experiences that shape perspectives on themselves and the environment. Further developments are seen in night adventure tourism, which offers novelty through darkness, silence, and limited lighting, creating both a reflective experience and a unique ecological learning opportunity (Nguyen & Tran, 2024). However, Díaz-Carrión et al. (2020) argues that adventure tourism also faces serious challenges, particularly related to safety and the potential for environmental degradation due to uncontrolled management, as well as the limited availability of competent local guides, thus requiring better risk management and governance. When managed with educational tourism principles, adventure tourism can serve as a means of transformative and empowering learning, where tourists gain knowledge through direct experience and active involvement in educational-based activities.

The conceptual framework of this research is built through a synthesis of several key theories: educational tourism, tourism experiences, the social construction of meaning, and environmental interpretation. In this context, night adventure activities in Mycelia Forest are understood as the primary stimulus, offering not only recreation but also direct learning experiences. Based on the concept of educational tourism, tourism activities involving interaction with the natural environment enable tourists to acquire knowledge through real-life experiences (learning by experiencing). This activity is further reinforced by the principles of the experience economy proposed by Pine & Gilmore (2013), where immersive, memorable, and transformational tourism experiences are central to shaping individual perceptions.

Furthermore, the experiences tourists gain are not limited to entertainment but are processed cognitively and socially, resulting in new meanings. This aligns with the social construction theory of Berger & Luckmann (1991), which states that the meaning of reality, including perceptions of night, is shaped through social interactions and experiences. Initially, night is often interpreted as dark, passive, or even fearful. However, through a structured educational tourism experience, supported by informative and engaging environmental interpretation, this meaning can be reconstructed into a more positive one, such as a space for exploration, learning, and appreciation of nature.

### 3. Method

This research used is a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design to explore the phenomenon of educational tourism in night adventure activities in Mycelia Forest. This approach was chosen as by Nogueira & Carvalho (2024) because it is able to contextually understand the meanings, experiences and perspectives of tourists and destination managers, especially in the phenomenon of night adventure tourism which is relatively new and integrated with educational values. The research focus includes three main aspects, namely: (1) educational tourism delivery strategies in the context of night adventures, (2) the formation of memorable tourist experiences through educational activities at night and (3) the impact of tourism on the transformation of the mindset of tourists and the impact of the existence of tourist destinations on the local community. The research location is in Mycelia Forest, Grafika Cikole, Lembang, West Java, as the first night tourist destination in the Lembang area with the concept of mushroom ecosystem-based education.

Data collection was carried out through purposive sampling to select relevant informants, such as destination managers, tourists, and parties involved in the development of the destination, based on previous studies (Reina-Usuga et al., 2024; Gezahegn et al., 2024). To expand informants, snowball sampling was also used, especially in reaching guides and local communities (John & De’Villiers, 2020). The number of informants was 20 people, consisting of 2 tour managers, 13 tourists and 5 local people following the principle of data saturation as in (Akaho, 2024). Semi-structured interviews were used to provide space for narrative exploration, while remaining focused on topics such as educational tourism experiences during nighttime adventure activities, tourist experiences, and the perceptions of tourists and local communities regarding the image and sustainability of the Mycelia Forest destination. Interviews were conducted both in-person and online, with an average duration of 45-60 minutes. Researchers also conducted direct observations of nighttime tourism activities at Mycelia Forest, including tourist interactions with guides, ongoing educational activities, and the dynamics of the nighttime adventure experience. Data analysis used a thematic analysis approach with the following stages:

1. Transcription: All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy.
2. Familiarization: Repeatedly reading the transcripts to understand the overall data.
3. Initial Coding: Assigning codes to data segments relevant to the research questions.
4. Theme Identification: Grouping codes into potential themes.
5. Theme Review: Verifying and refining identified themes.
6. Theme Naming: Giving definitive names to themes that reflect the essence of the data.
7. Narrative Development: Integrating themes with verbatim quotations and literature to answer the research questions.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Delivery of Educational Tourism in Mycelia Forest

The delivery of educational tourism in Mycelia Forest does not use conventional formal approaches, but through creative integration between technology, art, and storytelling adapted to the nighttime atmosphere. This communication strategy blends various mediums cohesively to create a memorable learning experience, in line with the concept of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in tourism which emphasizes consistency of messages across channels and experiences.

A prominent finding concerns the use of visual projection and video mapping. Informant L stated that the visual mapping projected onto the trees helped show the working process of mushroom in the forest ecosystem and made the explanation easier to understand because the visuals were clear. Similarly, informant A noted that educational tourism becomes more attractive when the learning content is presented creatively. These responses indicate that visual elements function as a major channel for delivering ecological knowledge to visitors.

**Figure 1.** Visual video mapping of mushrooms

Source: Authors Documentation (Photo in Mycelia Forest, 2025)

The interviews also show that animation plays an important role, especially for children and family visitors. Informant E explained that the educational aspect was very appealing for children, while informant S said that new information about the many types and functions of mushrooms was presented through amusing animations. These findings suggest that animation helps communicate mushroom-related knowledge in a form perceived as accessible and engaging by visitors.

Another recurring result relates to the role of the guide. Informant S reported that the guide explained how mushroom help trees communicate, while informant F said that the guide's explanation enabled visitors to understand and imagine the forest ecosystem. This shows that guides do not merely provide operational direction, but actively contribute to visitors' understanding through spoken explanation during the tour.

**Figure 2.** Mushroom House Information Board in Mycelia Forest

Source: Authors Documentation (Photo in Mycelia Forest, 2025)

Educational delivery is also reinforced through strategically placed information boards at various points of the destination. These information boards do not simply present scientific facts, but integrate information with Mycelia's thematic narrative that tells the story of five mushroom houses: Rumah Jalar (communication between trees), Rumah Jaga (protection from pests), Rumah Tata (soil and water stability), Rumah Daur (decomposition), Rumah Semai (spore reproduction) and after the five houses there is the Sakrabaha Portal (connecting one place to another). The attractive visual design and easy-to-understand language allow tourists to learn independently while exploring the destination.

In addition, the destination offers interactive educational rides and games. Informant E stated that in the Mili-Mili area there is interactive education that can be played and is suitable for young children. Informant M added that Mili-Mili contains many games that can be played together with groups or friends. These findings indicate that interaction and play are embedded in the way educational content is presented at the site.

Overall, the results demonstrate that educational messages in Mycelia Forest are conveyed through multiple interconnected media and experiences, including projection visuals, animation, guides, signage, and interactive activities.

**Figure 3.** Interactive drum ride that can appear light when played



Source: Authors Documentation (Photo in Mycelia Forest, 2025)

#### **4.2. Tourism as a Fun Learning Space**

The findings show that visitors experienced Mycelia Forest as a place where learning occurs in an enjoyable and informal way. Participants described the destination not as a formal educational setting, but as a leisure space where knowledge is gained through exploration and entertainment. Several interview responses highlight the idea of learning while traveling. Informants S and O described the experience as enjoyable while also providing new knowledge, suggesting that education and entertainment were obtained at the same time. Their responses indicate that visitors did not perceive the learning process as rigid or burdensome.

The results also show that the educational dimension was integrated with the destination's aesthetic appeal. Informant E stated that the place was both "instagramable" and full of knowledge.

This suggests that visitors did not see visual attractiveness and educational value as separate features, but as elements that coexisted in the same tourism experience.

Another important finding concerns the immersive nighttime atmosphere. Visitors reported that the combination of lighting, storytelling, and forest ambience created the impression of entering a different world. This atmosphere shaped the way visitors experienced learning, making it feel closer to adventure and discovery than to formal instruction.

Taken together, these findings indicate that Mycelia Forest functions as a fun learning space where knowledge is embedded in recreational activities, visual enjoyment, and nighttime exploration.

### **4.3. Traveler Mindset Transformation**

The interviews reveal that visiting Mycelia Forest changed some visitors' perceptions of educational tourism. Before the visit, several participants associated educational tourism with formal, monotonous, or less entertaining activities. After experiencing the destination, they described educational tourism differently. Informants L, A, and S stated that they came to realize that educational tourism can be creative, informal, and still enjoyable. Their accounts show a shift in perception from viewing education as something rigid to seeing it as something that can be combined with play and leisure.

The findings also indicate a broader change in how visitors understood the idea of a learning space. Informant F stated that learning can take place in tourism destinations, not only in schools. This response suggests that the experience at Mycelia Forest encouraged visitors to see tourism spaces as possible sites of learning. In addition, visitors expressed appreciation for the creative presentation of educational content. Informant A emphasized that educational tourism can be far more interesting when packaged creatively. This indicates that the manner in which knowledge is delivered influenced how visitors evaluated the meaning and potential of educational tourism. Overall, the results show that Mycelia Forest did not only provide information about mushrooms and forest ecosystems, but also altered how some visitors understood educational tourism and where learning can occur.

### **4.4. Uniqueness of Night Adventure and Traveler Loyalty**

The findings indicate that the nighttime setting was one of the most distinctive features of Mycelia Forest and contributed strongly to visitors' positive responses and loyalty intentions. Visitors repeatedly identified the night-tour format as the main aspect that differentiated Mycelia Forest from other destinations. Informants M, F, and S stated that Mycelia offered a different experience because it combined education, a distinctive atmosphere, and nighttime operation in a way they had not encountered elsewhere. These responses show that visitors perceived the temporal setting of the attraction as central to its uniqueness.

The interviews also show that visitors distinguished Mycelia Forest from attractions focused only on visual appeal. Informants E and M noted that the destination offered not only contemporary entertainment but also knowledge, making it different from other tourist sites. This indicates that visitors valued the combination of visual presentation and educational substance. This uniqueness was reflected in visitors' willingness to recommend the destination. Informants E, L, F, and S stated that Mycelia was worth recommending because it offered a distinctive nighttime experience, a combination of nature, visual art, light, and education, and something different from other tours. These findings suggest that visitor loyalty was expressed primarily through positive word-of-mouth.

In addition, some visitors provided suggestions for future development, such as improving access to information through digital devices, adding audio guides, and developing more interactive rides. This indicates a level of involvement that goes beyond passive consumption and reflects active engagement with the destination experience. Overall, the results show that the

uniqueness of Mycelia Forest lies in its combination of nighttime atmosphere, thematic coherence, and educational content, and that these qualities are closely related to visitors' intention to recommend the destination.

#### **4.5. Socio-economic Impact on Local Communities**

The findings show that Mycelia Forest was perceived as generating socio-economic benefits for local communities in the Cikole area. These benefits were described in relation to area visibility, employment, local business opportunities, infrastructure, and environmental liveliness. One result concerns the destination's contribution to the image and visibility of the area. Informants L and M stated that the Cikole area became more crowded and known by many people. This suggests that Mycelia Forest contributed to increased public attention toward the surrounding area.

The interviews also indicate perceived benefits in terms of employment and local economic activity. Informants F, L, and M stated that the existence of the tourism site created jobs for local people and helped raise local MSMEs, thereby supporting the economy around Cikole. These responses show that the attraction was seen as providing direct and indirect economic opportunities for local residents. Another finding relates to infrastructure and neighborhood activity. Informants M and I stated that the roads in the surrounding area became livelier and more developed following the presence of the tourism attraction. This suggests that the destination was associated not only with visitor arrivals but also with changes in the surrounding physical and social environment.

The findings further indicate that the arrival of visitors supported local consumption, including food and souvenirs sold by local businesses. This points to an economic effect that extends beyond the attraction itself to nearby community enterprises. Overall, the results show that Mycelia Forest was perceived by participants as benefiting local communities through increased visibility of the area, job creation, support for MSMEs, and improvements in the surrounding environment.

### **5. Discussion**

The findings demonstrate that Mycelia Forest does not merely apply educational tourism practices, but redefines how education can be delivered through tourism, particularly in a nighttime setting. Unlike conventional models that rely on one-way information transfer, the integration of video mapping, animation, storytelling, information boards, and interactive rides suggests a shift toward multisensory and immersive knowledge delivery. This aligns with previous findings that emphasize the role of visual and technological mediation in enhancing tourist understanding. As noted by Saxena et al. (2025), creative visual content in tourism can significantly improve the comprehension of educational messages compared to conventional textual approaches, supporting the effectiveness of Mycelia's visual strategy. However, this study extends that argument by showing that visuality alone is not sufficient; its impact becomes stronger when embedded within a coherent narrative and experiential context.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings can be explained through Experiential Learning Theory, but with an important extension. While experiential learning emphasizes "learning by doing", this study shows that learning can also emerge through immersion in a carefully staged environment, even without explicit task-based participation. The nighttime forest setting, combined with light technology and narrative elements, transforms passive observation into an interpretive experience. This complements the argument of Beard and Wilson (2018), who suggest that emotional and imaginative engagement enhances learning, yet the present study adds that environmental atmosphere particularly nighttime conditions act as a catalyst for such engagement.

The concept of temporal differentiation also emerges as a critical contribution. Previous studies have acknowledged the role of novelty and unique services capes in shaping tourist behavior (Pratminingsih et al., 2025). However, this research shows that novelty is not only spatial or visual, but also temporal. Mycelia Forest transforms nighttime traditionally associated with rest into an active, reflective, and educational time-space. This finding extends the work of Nguyen & Tran

(2024), who argue that night tourism provides a distinct emotional atmosphere, by demonstrating that night can also enhance cognitive engagement and knowledge retention, not just emotional depth.

Furthermore, the integration of animation and storytelling supports previous research suggesting that narrative-based communication improves knowledge retention. Zhang & Ramayah (2024) found that authentic storytelling is more effective in building emotional connection and memory than transactional information delivery. In the context of Mycelia Forest, storytelling does not only function as a communication tool but becomes a meaning-making mechanism, allowing visitors to interpret ecological processes such as fungal networks and forest interdependence in a relatable way. Compared to prior studies, this research highlights that storytelling combined with immersive environments produces a deeper interpretive layer, rather than functioning as a standalone technique.

The findings also refine the concept of edutainment. While existing literature often treats education and entertainment as complementary components, this study shows that in Mycelia Forest they are inseparable and co-constructed. Visitors do not consciously distinguish between learning and leisure; instead, learning occurs implicitly through enjoyment. This supports Kou & Xu (2024), who emphasize the importance of engagement and memorability in tourism experiences, but extends their argument by demonstrating that the most effective educational tourism experiences are those in which learning is not perceived as learning at all. This challenges traditional assumptions that educational outcomes require explicit instructional framing.

In terms of mindset transformation, the findings are consistent with transformative learning theory. Sifolo (2024) highlights that well-designed tourism experiences can reshape how individuals perceive environmental issues. Similarly, this study shows that visitors shift from viewing educational tourism as formal and rigid to recognizing it as creative and enjoyable. However, this research adds nuance by showing that transformation occurs at the level of perception of learning contexts, rather than only environmental awareness. In other words, Mycelia Forest does not just teach about ecosystems; it changes how visitors understand where and how learning can take place.

The role of integrated communication is also evident in how different elements of the destination reinforce each other. The consistency between visual media, narrative themes, and interactive elements reflects the principles of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). Saxena et al. (2025) argue that message integration across tourism experiences enhances overall effectiveness, which is reflected in the cohesive design of Mycelia Forest. However, this study contributes further by demonstrating that IMC in educational tourism is not only about message consistency, but about experience consistency, where each touchpoint contributes to a unified learning journey.

Regarding visitor loyalty, the findings support previous studies that link uniqueness and educational value to behavioral intentions. Carvache-Franco et al. (2022) emphasize that word-of-mouth intention reflects strong emotional attachment, while Yingjie & Mustafa (2023) highlight the role of authentic and educational experiences in driving recommendations. This study confirms these relationships but extends them by identifying that multi-layered uniqueness (temporal, conceptual, and experiential) is a key driver of loyalty. Visitors are not only attracted by visual aesthetics but by the combination of night atmosphere, narrative depth, and knowledge content.

Finally, the socio-economic findings align with community-based tourism literature. The involvement of local communities in Mycelia Forest reflects the argument of Reina-Usuga et al. (2024) that collaborative governance enhances sustainability and economic resilience. However, this study contributes by showing that educational tourism can function as a dual-impact system: it educates visitors while simultaneously generating economic opportunities and improving local infrastructure. In line with Saxena et al. (2025), one attraction can act as an anchor for regional

development, yet this research emphasizes that such impact depends on the integration of tourism activities with local participation rather than top-down development.

Overall, this study provides three main contributions. First, it conceptualizes night as a pedagogical medium, not merely a temporal setting. Second, it demonstrates how immersive edutainment transforms ecological knowledge into an intuitive and enjoyable experience. Third, it shows that destination uniqueness and loyalty in educational tourism are driven by the integration of time, narrative, technology, and community involvement. These findings suggest that the future of educational tourism lies not in formalization, but in the creative reconfiguration of experience, where learning becomes an embedded, lived, and meaningful process.

## **6. Conclusions**

This research examines the application of educational tourism in night adventures in Mycelia Forest with a focus on educational delivery strategies, tourist experience, mindset transformation, destination uniqueness, and its impact on the local community. The results show that Mycelia Forest successfully integrates technology, art and storytelling through creative approaches such as video mapping, animation, information boards and interactive rides. This strategy forms a cohesive and experiential educational communication, so that tourists gain learning organically without feeling they are in a formal educational situation. The concept of "learning without realizing" reinforced by the immersive night atmosphere and visual aesthetics creates a fun and memorable learning experience that changes tourists' perceptions of educational tourism that was previously considered formal and boring.

In addition, the experience in Mycelia Forest encourages the transformation of tourists' mindset towards the meaning of educational tourism and learning, from mere entertainment to a meaningful and transformative journey. The uniqueness of this destination lies in the temporal (night tours), conceptual (thematic narrative of the mushroom ecosystem) and substantial (blend of aesthetics and educational content) differentiation that encourages loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and tourist involvement in co-creation. On the other hand, the existence of Mycelia Forest has a positive impact on the Cikole local community through improving the image of the area, creating jobs and empowering MSMEs, as well as improving infrastructure and environmental safety. Overall, this research confirms that education-based night adventure tourism is able to transform the meaning of night into a space for exploration, learning and transformative experiences, as well as being an innovative tourism and community development instrument.

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## **9. Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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