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Factors influencing memorable emotional experiences and return intentions of tourists in the context of Vietnamese tourism

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Abstract

The integration of authenticity and direct participation, digital technology, are factors that contribute to enhancing positive experiences for visitors. Within the context of services, the ways in which these elements shape the visitor experience and elevate the value of co-creation become increasingly evident. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the factors that influence tourists' memorable experiences, thereby shaping and reinforcing their intention to revisit. An analysis of previous research indicates that the diverse cultural, political, and economic contexts from which tourists originate demonstrate to researchers that the external environment plays a role in shaping their experiences. Furthermore, the study concludes that the extent to which various factors exert an influence differs depending on the research model and the specific context. This implies that the diversity of contexts should be explicitly addressed and empirically validated in research conducted across different time periods and economies. The study also anticipates that various risk factors will influence the experience of this type of service. It supports the perspective that, within a service context, consumption models rooted in co-creation and experience warrant investment. Throughout the customer journey in tourism services, it is essential to create a profound emotional impact by encouraging customer participation, leveraging technological support, and preserving a distinct identity.

Keywords: *Tourism, Co-creation, Experience, Revisit, Participation.*

Introduction

Technology has been supporting and reshaping the global tourism industry (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). Beyond facilitating internal operations with greater precision and speed, technology also enables more effective marketing. The global trend toward robust digital transformation has prompted businesses to consider enhancing the digital experience for their customers. Today, digital travel experiences encompass far more than just quick and convenient online booking and payment; they also involve accessing insights from previous travelers via social media platforms. However, such modernization brings challenges that the tourism sector must address - specifically concerning customer emotions, digital experiences, and personalization.

Numerous academic studies have explored and measured the effectiveness of digital travel experiences-influenced by factors such as digital transformation, perceived authenticity, and tourist participation while also examining their role in shaping travelers' intentions to revisit. Empirical evidence indicates that technology - enabled support enhances visitor interaction and enriches the visitor experience by stimulating multi-sensory engagement (Neuhofer et al., 2014; Buhalis et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the digital landscape has prompted shifts in visitor behavior driven by the need to keep pace with emerging trends and streamline their travel journeys while also fostering more active participation in digital integrated experiences, which in turn necessitates a higher degree of personalization. This perceived authenticity - a personal connection to a cultural space (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006) - serves as a core driver of cultural tourism (Wang et al., 2006).

Consequently, there is a notable gap in research concerning digital journeys within traditional tourism services; specifically, the complementary roles - as well as the

potential conflicts- between digital transformation and authenticity in the creation of memorable experiences remain under-explored. Notably, Bekele and Raj (2024) conducted a bibliometric review of existing research, revealing a distinct shift in the focus of studies on digital transformation: the emphasis has moved away from processes and toward an experience-oriented approach within the digital transformation journey. Furthermore, within the context of traditional, craft-based tourism, digital technology is frequently viewed merely as a supporting tool, failing to fully account for its role in value co-creation - such as facilitating multi-dimensional emotional interactions or enabling pre-visit reviews - which are essential for fostering memorable experiences.

Literature Review

Memorable Tourism Experiences

Memorable experiences are positive recollections of past events or activities that remain in a customer's mind (Stavrianea, 2024). In the context of tourism, a memorable experience refers to a traveler's encounter during a trip that leaves a lasting, positive impression, helping to shape a favorable relationship with the destination (Hosany, Sthapit, & Björk, 2022). Such experiences are meaningful, recalled long after the trip has concluded (Hosany, Sthapit, & Björk, 2022), and are inherently subjective and emotionally charged for each individual traveler (Hosany et al., 2022) - meaning they vary from person to person. Memorable emotional experiences serve as predictors for traveler behaviors, including satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty; they also influence a traveler's willingness to recommend the destination to friends and family, as well as their likelihood of returning (Vu et al., 2024). Furthermore, positive and meaningful experiences associated with a destination foster traveler loyalty (Kahraman & Çifçi, 2023) and influence future decision-making (Mai, Ryan, & Cockburn-Wootten, 2026). By enhancing the traveler's sense of well-being, these experiences function as a tool for building relationships and establishing a competitive advantage for tourism businesses (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022).

Revisit intention

Revisit intention refers to a traveler's desire or likelihood to return to a specific destination (Tiwari, Bajpai, & Pandey, 2023). This desire stems from a destination's ability to offer engaging and unique experiences, positive perceived value, and an appealing image - all while meeting or exceeding travelers' needs (Zhang, Wu & Buhalis, 2018). In the work of Awang et al. (2026) and Hu & Shen (2022), this is conceptualized as a willingness to repeat a tourism activity, return to a destination, engage in positive word-of-mouth, provide recommendations, or repeat an experience (Ren et al., 2022). Hasan et al. (2023) suggest that the intention to revisit is a key post-purchase behavior, serving as a primary driver of both destination loyalty and actual return visits. More broadly, it can be viewed as an element of the post-trip experience - a conscious decision informed by that experience (Respati et al., 2025).

Numerous empirical studies conducted across various contexts have demonstrated that the intention to revisit drives the actual future behavior of tourists. This intention serves as a psychological mechanism that translates experiences from a previous trip into future actions; it acts as an indicator of loyalty (Ren et al., 2022) and serves as a metric for marketing effectiveness, sustainability, and economic viability (Lin, 2024; Eviana N., 2025).

Digital Transformation

In a recent study, Bekele and Raj (2024) evaluated the role of digital transformation in shaping the tourist experience throughout the travel journey. The authors argue that digital transformation has redefined how technology is leveraged to create value for tourists and enhance efficiency for tourism businesses. Previously, Sustacha et al. (2023) offered a multidimensional perspective on digital technology, suggesting that various digital domains facilitate greater interaction and enrich the experiences of travelers. Building on this, Jokom, Semuel, and Wijaya (2025) recently conducted an empirical study involving international tourists in Indonesia to examine and evaluate this perspective. Their findings confirm that digital transformation can indeed amplify the process of creating memorable experiences. Similarly, Do and Vu (2026) have shown that the shaping of memorable tourist experiences is, in significant part, built upon a foundation of digital transformation. Therefore, this study proposes the following:

> H1: Digital transformation positively supports the creation of memorable experiences for tourists within tourism services.

Perceived Authenticity

Perceived authenticity refers to the sense of genuineness that tourists attribute to a destination. It relates to a customer's subjective assessment of the authenticity of cultural resources (Rickly et al., 2025), the perceived genuineness of an experience - whether through aesthetics, education, or entertainment (Cheng, Chi, & Han, 2023) -the personal connection a tourist feels toward specific tourism activities (Zhu et al., 2025), or the extent to which an experience acts as a trigger for memories and emotions (Nguyen & Dung, 2025). This suggests a profound relationship between perceived authenticity and the memorable emotional experiences of tourists. This relationship may manifest through either a direct or an

indirect process. In this regard, Rickly et al. (2023) has demonstrated a direct relationship between authenticity and meaningful experiences; empirical evidence for this direct link specifically between authenticity and memorable tourism experiences (MTE) has been established in the contexts of coffee tourism (Nguyen & Dung, 2025) and heritage tourism in Hue City (Van Hue & Hong Ngoc, 2025).

> H2: Perceived authenticity positively contributes to the creation of memorable experiences for tourists within tourism services.

Tourist participation

Tourist participation refers to the proactive behavior of tourists in co-creating value; they actively engage in the consumption process - such as by seeking and sharing information, interacting with others, and demonstrating responsible behavior (Uslu & Tosun, 2024; Nguyen Thi Cam Truong, Bui Huy Hai, & Le Nguyen Manh Hau, 2024) - thereby fostering emotional well-being and satisfaction (Uslu & Tosun, 2024). Meanwhile, Noyola-Aguilar et al. (2024) define participation as the degree to which tourists take an active role in their experience, allowing businesses to personalize services according to individual needs. In the hospitality sector, participation is viewed as the co-production and co-consumption of value (Sadighha et al., 2025). It can be understood that, in today's tourism landscape, tourist participation in service processes reflects a high level of proactivity - not only in terms of time and financial investment but also regarding interaction, skills, and knowledge (Uslu & Tosun, 2024; Noyola-Aguilar et al., 2024). A higher degree of proactivity leads to a richer experience. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

> H3: Tourist participation positively contributes to the creation of memorable experiences for tourists within the service context.

Memorable experiences and intention to revisit

The results of numerous global studies also demonstrate a positive correlation between experiences and behavioral intentions. For travelers, the recollection of positive and meaningful experiences serves as a catalyst for their future intentions and behaviors. Furthermore, such experiences strengthen long-term relationships with destinations and influence future travel choices (Tiwari, Bajpai & Pandey, 2023; Stavrianea, 2024; Vu, Hoang & Nguyen, 2024). Based on this, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

> H4: Memorable experiences foster tourists' intentions to revisit within the context of tourism services.

Conclusion

A review of prior research indicates that a memorable service experience is a key factor in shaping the intention to revisit a destination. In the context of tourism services in Vietnam, digital transformation, perceived authenticity, and customer participation serve as critical antecedents for creating such memorable experiences, which in turn drive the intention to return. The participation of tourists in the service process facilitates personalization and proactive engagement, fostering a sense of co-creation. Furthermore, digital transformation and the perception of authenticity in tourism services actively support processes such as information seeking, service booking, and payment, while also enhancing virtual experiences and enabling interaction anytime, anywhere. This customer journey has inspired and reinforced memorable experiences for travelers. Crucially, these memorable experiences serve as a powerful driver for the intention to return. This underscores the significant role of emotional impact within a service experience - it is no longer merely a matter of the price, service quality, or a commercial transaction, but rather the entire journey as a whole.

The research findings extend the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework within the service sector. In this model, the "Stimulus" component comprises TP, PA, and TD; the "Organism" represents the customer's emotional state; and the "Behavioral Response" is operationalized as the intention to revisit. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of co-creation between the customer and the business as a key factor in enhancing the value of the customer experience. Digital transformation is no longer merely a matter of the technology; it serves as a mechanism for enhancing customer experience across digital touchpoints. The research also suggests that risk is a factor contingent upon the research context and the specific stage within the customer journey.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that could be addressed in the future research. First, as this study focuses solely on a review of the existing literature, the future research should incorporate empirical investigations to validate the proposed model. Furthermore, conducting in-depth research on the impact of the digital transformation - as well as tourists' perceived risks regarding such transformation - across various services and destinations would provide a more objective perspective.

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