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# The role of personalization in fostering visitor engagement and recommendation intentions

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**Abstract**

*Technological support has facilitated favorable conditions and enabled interactions for visitors, as well as for the promotional and business activities of destinations. In particular, the applicating of digital technology to on-the-spot custom tailoring services to enables service personalization, engagement, and targeted marketing that has fostered positive relationships with tourists, thereby create a sustainable competitive advantage. The purpose of this study is to measure the impact of various factors on tourist engagement and the likelihood of tourists recommending tailoring services in Hoi An. The survey targeted individuals who have utilized technology to interact with and access such services in Hoi An. The findings indicate that all identified factors promote tourist engagement, which in turn strengthens their intention to recommend the services, with technology playing a primary role. These results underscore the significance of a co-creation process between customers and businesses within this specific context.*

***Keywords:*** *Digital Technology, Tourist Engagement, Service Personalisation, Custom Tailoring Services, Customer Co-Creation, Sustainable Competitive Advantage.*

## Introduction

Hoi An is emerging as a travel destination that is entirely distinct from anywhere else in Vietnam or the world. The experiences of domestic and international tourists now extend beyond simply experiencing local culture with ancient houses and temples, and ecotourism tours, and is now also regarded as a unique destination offering an express tailoring service for garments. The difference here lies not only in dedication and highly affordable pricing, but also in rapid turnaround and a high degree of personalization. Consequently, many travelers today choose Hoi An for the experience of having custom-made clothing tailored to their personal preferences while on their trip. The development of bespoke tailoring services here has benefited significantly from the boom in technology and globalization. Tailors here leverage the power of social media platforms to carry out their marketing activities easily and effectively. Furthermore, videos shared by travelers about their tailoring experiences have strengthened the sense of connection within the travel community in Hoi An, while also gaining widespread traction. This has helped to sustain and develop this traditional craft, while also creating numerous jobs for local workers.

Although traditional tailoring is a long-established type of service, however, empirical research on the factors influencing tourist engagement with this service has not yet been fully explored. At the same time, in the wake of COVID-19, travelers' perceptions and behaviors have shifted. They have a greater need to see the experiences of those who have gone before them, as well as gaining a more thorough understanding of information regarding the product and the service provider. All of this is strongly supported by digital transformation. Therefore, this study focuses on evaluating the impact of Perceived Personalization, digital transformation, and tourist participation on tourist engagement, This, in turn, encourages them to make recommendations to friends and family, and to post positive comments on social media.

In particular, the context of bespoke tailoring services demands a high degree of tourist participation and maximum personalization. As demonstrated in research by

Gretzel et al. (2015) and Buhalis & Amaranggana (2015), perceived personalization in the context of bespoke services entails aligning with a customer's aesthetic tastes, preferences, preferred styles, and desired fit. Yi and Gong (2013) and Prebensen et al. (2014) argue that the customer's tailoring journey always involves a partnership between the customer and the tailor, they participate together in selecting designs and fabrics, as well as making adjustments - a perspective rooted in the theory of Value Co-creation. Within the cultural heritage space of traditional craft villages, a traveler's subjective impressions of a bespoke itinerary reflect their perceived authenticity. These elements are clearly reflected in the express tailoring service in Hoi An. A memorable digital travel experience with this service begins with reading reviews, Online consultation, selection of fabrics and styles, 3D body scanning, fittings, and final product collection during your visit to Hoi An. These elements will create a memorable travel experience, thereby fostering connection, and spread the word (Wong and Lai, 2019; Seyfi et al., 2020).

## Literature Review

Recent global economic and political volatility has encouraged a more budget-conscious approach to travel. Consequently, smart and economical travel has become a growing trend among travelers worldwide. Beyond seeking cultural immersion, visitors are increasingly prioritizing cost-effectiveness - a need that the destination of Hoi An fulfills perfectly. In addition to offering sustainable tourism options such as eco-tourism and cultural tourism, Hoi An provides significant economic value, allowing travelers to obtain custom-tailored clothing - crafted to their personal preferences - at a fraction of the typical cost.

Academic research on this topic has already been explored in several countries. Studies in this field suggest that digital transformation amplifies the impact of emotional experiences (Bekele & Raj, 2024; Xiong and Zhang, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025; Jokom, Semuel & Wijaya, 2025; Surendar, 2026; Ren et al., 2026; Jalil et al., 2026), thereby fostering greater engagement between travelers and tourism services. Nowadays, this type of service enhances the visitor experience through the support of digital technology. At the same time, the opportunity for visitors to enjoy a unique, tailored service experience serves as a key highlight of this offering. It requires the active participation of the customer throughout the service process, from start to finish (Uslu & Tosun, 2024; Noyola-Aguilar et al., 2024; Dan Wang, Ching-Cheng Shen, & Hsi-Lin Liu, 2023; Jun Lei & Sid Suntrayuth, 2023; Lin & Jiang, 2026; Vu Truc Phuc & Nguyen Giang Chau, 2026). This encompasses everything from reviewing the service, selecting fabrics and styles, and taking measurements, to fittings, actual use, and providing feedback. It is precisely this process that gives the service an essential, defining characteristic: personalization. Personalization distinguishes services, elevates the role of tourists, and fosters interaction between tourists and service providers - all of which ultimately drive tourist engagement (Ke Xue, Xuanyu Jin, & Yifei Li, 2025; Suryana, 2026; Soey Sut Ieng Lei, Xiaoye Li, Shun Ye, & Hanwei Zeng, 2026; Roman Egger & Joanne Yu, 2025). When tourists are behaviorally and emotionally engaged, they become willing to recommend (the destination/experience) to others (Ruixia Chen, Zhimin Zhou, Ge Zhan, & Nan Zhou, 2020; Seyfi, Rasoolimanesh, Hall, & Hatamifar, 2022; Wael Tambosi, 2024; Soliman, Buaniaw, Assalihee, & Noipom, 2026). Consequently, destinations can reach a large number of potential customers at a minimal promotional cost, while benefiting from the credibility of the sources through which these customers are reached. This implies that bespoke (tailor-made) services require not only customer participation and personalization but also digital transformation - both to enhance service differentiation and to boost tourist engagement- thereby fostering an intention to recommend the destination to friends, family, and others. Based on this rationale, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1 Tourist participation drives tourist engagement in the context of on-demand tailoring services

H2 Personalization drives tourist engagement in the context of on-demand tailoring services

H3 Digital transformation drives tourist engagement in the context of on-demand tailoring services

H4 Tourist engagement drives the intention to provide recommendations in the context of on-demand tailoring services

## 3. Methodology

This study was conducted in Hoi An. Technology has facilitated and enhanced the experiences of tourists, as well as the communication and business operations of destinations. In particular, the application of digital technology to express tailoring services - enabling service personalization, interaction, and marketing - has fostered positive relationships with tourists, thereby creating a sustainable competitive advantage. Conversely, digital technology can also introduce unexpected risks that negatively impact the relationship between tourists and destinations.

The study involved a literature review to identify influencing factors and appropriate measurement items, which were then adapted to the current research context and validated by subject-matter experts and a group of 20 tourists. Based on this process, a survey questionnaire was

developed and printed in both English and Vietnamese versions.

Participation in the survey was restricted to tourists who had used express tailoring services and had utilized digital platforms to experience them. The relationships within the model were tested and measured using SPSS 20 and AMOS 20 software.

The measurement scales used in this study were adapted from previous research: Digital Transformation (Nikopoulou et al., 2023); Perceived Personalization (Shanahan et al., 2019, Zhou et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2024); Tourist Participation (Yi & Gong, 2013; Lei & Suntrayuth, 2023); Perceived Risk (Quintal et al., 2010); Tourist Engagement (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019; So et al., 2019) and Recommendation Intention (Prayag et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2020).

Survey questionnaires were distributed directly to 325 tourists; 322 responses were collected, of which 8 were subsequently discarded as invalid. The specific survey results are as follows: regarding gender, males accounted for 54.6% and females for the remainder; the majority were international tourists, with domestic tourists making up only 28.8%. In terms of income, 45.5% earned between 15 and 20 million VND per month, while the rest earned over 20 million VND per month. Regarding the purpose of the trip, 38.6% traveled for cultural exploration and 50.2% for leisure, with the remainder traveling for other purposes.

## 4. Results

### *Refining the Measurement Tool*

Reliability testing of the scales, conducted in accordance with the recommendations of Hair et al. (1998), revealed that two observed variables - TD1 and TP5 - had item-to-total correlation coefficients below 0.3; consequently, these variables were removed to improve the construct's alpha value. Following the removal of variable DT5, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients and item-to-total correlation coefficients ranged from 0.867 to 0.900 and from 0.664 to 0.840, respectively. The alpha coefficients for the six latent variables were determined to be 0.894 (TD), 0.900 (RI), 0.977 (TE), 0.877 (TP), 0.885 (PP), and 0.875 (PR), indicating a reliable measure. Furthermore, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) results demonstrated that the scales satisfied the criterion of unidimensionality, based on eigenvalues greater than 1 (Kaiser, 1970).

### Measurement Model Assessment

Tests for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) indicated that the study's indicators demonstrated a satisfactory fit with the model; specifically: $\chi 2$ / df = 1.994, GFI = .861, TLI = .933, CFI = .940, IFI = .941, RMSEA = .056. As shown in Table 1, the AVE values exceed 0.5, and the factor loadings of the observed variables within each construct are all above 0.5. Therefore, the measurement model is acceptable, and the constructs demonstrate unidimensionality.

***Table 1. CFAs' results within the six latent factors***

| | | | Estimate | S.E. | C.R. | P | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| RI3 | <--- | RI | 0.847 | | | | 0.804 |
| RI2 | <--- | RI | 0.883 | 0.049 | 19.573 | *** | |
| RI1 | <--- | RI | 0.785 | 0.05 | 16.382 | *** | |
| RI4 | <--- | RI | 0.73 | 0.049 | 14.736 | *** | |
| RI5 | <--- | RI | 0.766 | 0.051 | 15.789 | *** | |
| PP3 | <--- | PP | 0.799 | | | | 0.778 |
| PP5 | <--- | PP | 0.778 | 0.066 | 14.725 | *** | |
| PP1 | <--- | PP | 0.765 | 0.064 | 14.43 | *** | |
| PP4 | <--- | PP | 0.768 | 0.061 | 14.48 | *** | |
| PP2 | <--- | PP | 0.781 | 0.063 | 14.784 | *** | |
| PR1 | <--- | PR | 0.803 | | | | 0.764 |
| PR3 | <--- | PR | 0.764 | 0.068 | 14.305 | *** | |
| PR4 | <--- | PR | 0.731 | 0.069 | 13.568 | *** | |
| PR2 | <--- | PR | 0.775 | 0.068 | 14.568 | *** | |
| PR5 | <--- | PR | 0.746 | 0.07 | 13.902 | *** | |
| TD4 | <--- | TD | 0.92 | | | | 0.828 |
| TD3 | <--- | TD | 0.842 | 0.046 | 20.538 | *** | |
| TD5 | <--- | TD | 0.813 | 0.047 | 19.223 | *** | |
| TD2 | <--- | TD | 0.724 | 0.05 | 15.739 | *** | |
| TP3 | <--- | TP | 0.829 | | | | 0.802 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TP1 | <--- | TP | 0.819 | 0.063 | 16.261 | *** | |
| TP2 | <--- | TP | 0.785 | 0.064 | 15.403 | *** | |
| TP4 | <--- | TP | 0.772 | 0.062 | 15.061 | *** | |
| TE2 | <--- | TE | 0.763 | | | | 0.769 |
| TE4 | <--- | TE | 0.821 | 0.069 | 14.978 | *** | |
| TE5 | <--- | TE | 0.712 | 0.079 | 12.755 | *** | |
| TE3 | <--- | TE | 0.772 | 0.067 | 13.971 | *** | |
| TE1 | <--- | TE | 0.774 | 0.07 | 14.021 | *** | |

Heeler and Ray (1972), Fornell and Larcker (1981), and Campbell (2012) suggest assessing the internal consistency reliability of each construct (Composite Reliability), convergent validity via AVE, and discriminant validity by comparing AVE and MSV. As shown in Table 2, CR values exceed 0.70, indicating excellent scale reliability; with AVE values ≥ 0.50, all constructs demonstrate satisfactory convergent validity. All AVE values exceed MSV values, indicating that each construct is distinguishable from the others.

***Table 2. Discriminant validity of the constructs***

| | **CR** | **AVE** | **MSV** | **RI** | **PP** | **PR** | **TD** | **TP** | **TE** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| RI | 0.901 | 0.646 | 0.388 | **0.804** | | | | | |
| **PP** | 0.885 | 0.606 | 0.453 | 0.496*** | **0.778** | | | | |
| **PR** | 0.875 | 0.584 | 0.416 | 0.480*** | 0.556*** | **0.764** | | | |
| **TD** | 0.896 | 0.685 | 0.399 | 0.375*** | 0.551*** | 0.505*** | **0.828** | | |
| **TP** | 0.878 | 0.643 | 0.452 | 0.449*** | 0.541*** | 0.576*** | 0.468*** | **0.802** | |
| **TE** | 0.878 | 0.592 | 0.453 | 0.623*** | 0.673*** | 0.645*** | 0.632*** | 0.672*** | **0.769** |

*† p < 0.100, * p < 0.050, ** p < 0.010, *** p < 0.001*

**Structural Model**

Specifically, the model yielded a p-value of 0.000 and the following fit indices: GFI = 0.861, TLI = 0.925, IFI = 0.934, CFI = 0.934, and RMSEA = 0.067. The relative Chi-Square/df ratio (2.395) fell within the recommended range. These fit indices met the requirements, indicating that the structural model fits the data well and is suitable for testing the study's hypotheses; in other words, all fit indices fell within the recommended thresholds, demonstrating a good model fit.

Structural equation modeling analysis was also conducted to test the study's hypotheses. The results are presented in Table 3.

***Table 3. Hypothesis Verification Result***

| **Path** | | | **Estimate** | **S.E.** | **C.R.** | **P** | **Results** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TE | <--- | TP | 0.367 | 0.057 | 6.126 | *** | Accepted |
| TE | <--- | TD | 0.275 | 0.049 | 4.847 | *** | Accepted |
| TE | <--- | PP | 0.332 | 0.065 | 5.257 | *** | Accepted |
| RI | <--- | TE | 0.631 | 0.087 | 9.995 | *** | Accepted |
| TE | <--- | TP | 0.367 | 0.057 | 6.126 | *** | Accepted |

The research results indicate that all hypotheses are supported. The strongest relationship is observed between TP and TE (β = 0.365, p < .000), followed by PP/TE (β = 0.332, p < .000) and TD/TE (β = 0.275, p < 0.000). These findings drive a strong relationship between TE and RI (β = 0.631, p < .000). The results align with prior studies discussed in the research background.

**Moderating Effects of Perceived Risk**

As proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), it is necessary to verify whether the fit of the proposed model remains within acceptable limits when the moderating variable - perceived risk- is introduced. The results demonstrate a perfect fit between the data and the proposed model structure (CMIN = 0, df = 0, and fit indices of 1.000). The results of the hypothesis testing regarding the moderating effect of PR within the research model are presented in Table 4.

*Table 4: Moderating Effects of Perceived Risk*

| Relationship | β | S.E. | C.R. | p | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PR -> TE | .173 | .048 | 3.569 | <.001 | Supported |
| TD × PR -> TE | .065 | .036 | 1.574 | .116 | Not supported |
| TP × PR -> TE | -.027 | .036 | -.606 | .544 | Not supported |
| PP × PR -> TE | .005 | .039 | .118 | .906 | Not supported |

The results of the analysis regarding the moderating role of PR indicate that PR has a direct impact on TE: $\beta = 0.173$, $p < 0.001$; PR does not moderate TD/TP/PP -> TE: $\beta = 0.065$, $p = 0.116$; $\beta = -0.027$, $p = 0.544$; and $\beta = 0.005$, $p = 0.906$, None of the three moderation hypotheses were supported; this indicates that the moderating role of perceived risk was not confirmed within the proposed model.

## 5. Conclusion

Empirical research results show that memorable service experiences are a key factor shaping intention to revisit a destination. In particular, for garment services in Hoi An, digital transformation, personalization and customer participation are important premises in promoting visitor engagement, thereby leading to recommendation/WOM intention. Among these factors, the strongest influence on tourist engagement stems from the tourist's participation in the service process. This participation creates opportunities for personalized services and proactive interaction by the tourist, fostering a sense of co-creation. Digital transformation and the sense of personalization inherent in bespoke tailoring services actively facilitate the entire customer journey - from searching for information, previewing designs and fabrics, and visualizing styles, to booking services and making payments. It enhances the virtual experience and enables interaction anytime, anywhere. This customer journey fosters greater engagement, which, crucially, serves as a powerful driver for word-of-mouth and recommendations.

Furthermore, the fact that the moderating role of perceived risk was not confirmed in this study highlights the context-dependent nature of this type of service. In other words, the direct involvement of visitors in the service process, the sense of personalization, and the valuable support provided by technology have effectively diminished visitors' perceptions of risk regarding the service. The unique characteristics of the garment services in Hoi An suggest that destination managers should proactively cultivate an image centered on the experience. In this context, competitiveness should be driven by emotions, interaction, and personalization - anchored in the value of traditional craftsmanship and enhanced by the integration of technology.

For managers, designing a customer journey with a focus on experience - where customer co-creation plays a pivotal role - is essential. Beyond considerations such as product design, speed, and pricing, every stage of the journey -from initial online consultation and appointment scheduling to in-person consultations, measurements, follow-up care, and special offers - should be enhanced to provide a personalized experience. The long-term strategic goal is to sell an experience and maintain a sense of localization, rather than merely facilitating commercial transactions. Furthermore, while leveraging the benefits of digital transformation, it is crucial to ensure that the traditional value of the service remains intact.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that could be addressed in future research. First, the study focuses on a single destination at a single point in time; therefore, extended research could explore these relationships across different destinations and over a longer period rather than at a single moment. Furthermore, future studies could delve deeper into the impact of the destination's cultural environment - such as the enthusiasm of bespoke service providers - and its physical environment on word-of-mouth or recommendation intentions.

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