

Managing Cultural Authenticity in Tourism Destinations: Impacts on Tourist Satisfaction and Revisit Intention

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received : 13.05.2025 Revised : 20.06.2025 Accepted : 14.07.2025</p>	<p>The role of cultural authenticity in determining the experiences of tourists in heritage and cultural places has been a significant topic of discussion, but the impact that authenticity can be a strategic parameter used to create a lasting behavioural impact has been little researched. This paper conceptualises and empirically considers an empirical study to establish the relationship between authenticity governance practises and their perceived authenticity, quality of tourist experiences, satisfaction, and revisit intention. Riding on the authenticity theory, resource-based view and the experience economy, the concept of authenticity is formulated as a strategic managerial construct and not merely the subjective perception. The information has been gathered using 512 data gathered at a major cultural attraction location with domestic and international tourists and was analysed by confirmatory factor and structural equation modelling. The results indicate that authenticity governance systems, such as cultural preservations activities, community involvement, narrative integrity, and commercialization regulation, are key in increasing the perceived authenticity. Authenticity as perceived has a positive impact on quality of experience of the tourists, which in turn leads to satisfaction and revisit intention. The mediation analysis proves that experience quality is one of the important mechanisms through which authenticity is converted into the results of loyalty. Also, the structural ties are higher between high cultural involvement tourists. The research contributes to the tourism management literature by presenting a complete model of causal relationship between authenticity governance and experiential and behavioural outcomes which offers practise on the sustainability of destination competitiveness.</p>
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>Cultural authenticity, authenticity governance, tourist experience quality, tourist satisfaction, revisit intention, destination competitiveness</p>	

1. INTRODUCTION

Heritage tourism and cultural tourism is currently one of the most high-passing and strategically important spheres of the global tourism business. More and more, leisure travellers are demanding non-hack and pack travel, a more life changing, consumatory-focused experience that enriches their identity [7], [8]. Cultural tourism sites, specified by historical buildings, traditional customs, art, and communal tales have reacted by the centration of authenticity in the proposal of value [4], [10]. Cultural uniqueness and authenticity serve as key differentiation and long term competitiveness sources in highly competitive tourist markets where quality of services and infrastructure have become rather comparable [3], [11]. The explosion of tourism has increased challenges of commercialization and commodification, though, at the same time. Culture rituals can be distorted to suit tourists, heritage

sites re-blended to better appeal to the eye, and storeys can be slightly tailor-made to match what the market wants [4], [12]. Although these adaptations have the potential to make destinations more accessible and lucrative, they can also threaten the cultural purity and undermine the sense of genuine originality of the destination [1], [5]. It is this conflict between authenticity and profitability that has resulted in authenticity being a strategic tool and a management issue. The destination authorities are thus faced with the fine compromising between preserving cultural heritage and being economically viable [1], [5]. Even though the concept of authenticity has been extensively debated in tourism scholarship, the mainstream view of the concept has dealt with authenticity as a result of perception that is created based on the subjective judgments of tourists [1], [3]. The effect of perceived authenticity on satisfaction, quality of

experience, and loyalty intentions have been studied in depth [3], [4], [6], [10]. Nevertheless, not much has been done on the governance and managerial processes that influence the processes of constructing, preserving, and communicating authenticity at the destination level. Practically, authenticity does not just develop on its own; it is affected by cultural preservation policies, community interaction, interpretation approach, and through the formulation of commercialization [5], [12]. There is a critical gap in the perception of how authenticity can be controlled as a strategically effort and not as a kind of experience since there is no unified governance perspective. In addition, more of the available studies tend to test the existence of direct linear correlations of authenticity between the behaviour outcomes but fail to provide adequate explanation of how authenticity is converted to loyalty [3], [10], [11]. The quality of tourist experience could be an essential mediating route, introducing the perception of authenticity into emotion and cognition appraisals that eventually lead to satisfaction and revisit intention [6], [7], [8]. Also, personal-level variations, including the extent of cultural participation might precondition the interpretation and value of authenticity [5]. High cultural involvement tourists might be more susceptible to cues of authenticity and enhance the effects of authenticity on the experiential and behavioural outcomes. However such boundary conditions have not been sufficiently studied in integrated structural models. To overcome these shortcomings, this research restates authenticity as a strategic process managed to be part of the governance processes in destinations. It constructs a multi-dimensional authenticity governance framework that comprises the cultural preservation practises, the community participation, the narrative integrity, and the commercialization regulation [1], [5]. The paper hypothesises and experimentally evaluates a mediated-moderated structural equation configuring authenticity governance with perceived authenticity, tourist experience quality, satisfaction and revisit intention [3], [6], [10], [11] and based on the authenticity theory and experience-based viewpoints [1], [7], [8]. Through merging governance processes with the mediation of experience and moderate at individual level, this study develops a more in-depth and managerial perspective of cultural authenticity role in promoting sustainable destination competitiveness.

2. Theoretical Foundation

Authenticity has existed in the middle seat of the tourism studies, especially when recounted to heritage and cultural tourism [1], [10]. Original

conceptualizations lent weight to object-based authenticity wherein attention is given to the authenticity and originality of the actual cultural objects, historical places, and customary ways of doing things [1]. In this respect, authenticity is assessed based on objective standards of historical correctness, integrity of products of preservation, and integrity of materials. Nevertheless, later research refuted this subjective objectivism by introducing constructive authenticity, which believes that authenticity is socially constructed using discourse, interpretation, and representation in symbols [1], [12]. The notion of authenticity may thus rely on cultural discourses, promotional tactics as well as expectations of the tourists instead of the mere historical validity [12]. Later existential authenticity turned to the subject of the experience of the tourists and focused on the meaning of personal experiences, emotional involvement, and self-extraction when travelling [10], [8]. The combination of these points of view hints that the meaning of authenticity is complex and involves what is tangible, socially mediated images, and what are more personal responses at the experience level [1], [10]. Although authenticity has been explained as a perceptual or experience form, it may be explained in a strategic management perspective. The theory that is useful in this reconceptualization is the resource-based view (RBV). RBV suggests that the sustained competitive advantage is attained when an organisation develops valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources. When properly maintained and shared, cultural authenticity is a type of intangible strategic resource that can be part of a local heritage, community knowledge, and narrative capital [1], [5]. Authentic cultural identity is path-dependent and socially embedded, unlike physical infrastructure which can be copied, and as such, it is hard to duplicate by other destinations competing against one another [1]. Thus, the role of authenticity governance as the preservation policies, the involvement of community and control over commercialization may be viewed as a facility that improves the competitiveness of the destination [5], [12]. This argument is further supported by the perspective of experience economy which bases its value creation on the experiences as the main points of value creation in the modern markets [7], [8]. Value is co-created in tourism situations when visitors are interacting with the local communities and the destination environment. Real cultural contexts are the source of the symbolism and emotional provocation that influence significant and memorable experience [7], [8]. Authenticity has the potential to increase the richness of an experience by leading to a sense of immersion, emotional appeal, and cognitive development [5],

[9]. Therefore, authenticity does not only exist as a characteristic of the destination but rather a driver that enables cultural resources to be translated into the experiential value. Expectation-confirmation theory can be used to explain how the experiential value is converted into the satisfaction. According to this framework, satisfaction is the outcome of comparisons of the initial expectations and the actual performance perceptions. Based on the perceived correspondence of authenticity with the experiences of cultural sincerity or authenticity surpassing expectations of cultural sincerity, tourists have a positive conception of experiences resulting in an increase in satisfaction levels [6], [9]. Satisfaction, on its part, has an effect on post consumption behavioural intentions, such as revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth [3], [11]. This paper, through its combination of the authenticity theory, resource-based theory, and experience economy theory, and expectation-confirmation logic, draws a theoretical framework of exploring the role of authenticity governance in determining perceived authenticity, experiential performance, formation of satisfaction and loyalty to behaviour in the tourism destination [1], [6], [10].

3. Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework

On the basis of the theoretical framework discussed above, this paper constructs a unified structural model, which perceives authenticity as a controllable strategic gimmick, which affects the experiential and behavioural performance in tourist destinations. The presented framework (Figure 1) designates authenticity governance as a precursor of perceived authenticity, which, in its turn, affects the quality of tourist experiences and satisfaction degrees and revisit intention. The model also introduces the cultural involvement as a moderating factor that preconditions the power of chosen structural relationships. Authenticity governance is posited as a higher-order construct with multiple dimensions that indicate destination-level managerial behaviour that comprises the manner of preservation and presentation of cultural resources. In particular, four interrelated dimensions are suggested, these are cultural preservation practises, community participation, narrative integrity, and control over commercialization. The preservation practises are

the policies and activities of preserving tangible and intangible heritage resources. Community involvement sums up the point to which the local stakeholders are engaged in cultural representation and tourism decision-making. Narrative integrity is a characteristic of credibility and coherence of interpretive storytelling and symbolic communication. The regulation of market based adaptations to excessive commodification is solved through commercialization control. Combined, all of these dimensions are a measure of governance competency that can affect the process of authenticity construction and experience by tourists.

Perceived authenticity is hypothesised to be a second-order construct that reflects the general estimate of the genuineness, credibility, and meaning of the cultural offerings of the destination that is made by tourists. Instead of being produced spontaneously, perceived authenticity is likely to be a product of governance that organises cultural experiences. Based on this, authenticity governance is postulated to have a positive effect on the perceived authenticity. The quality of tourist experience is placed as a mediating construct in the framework. The perceived authenticity, based on experience economy theory, increases experiential immersion, emotional connexions, and cognitive enrichment, and thus better experiences. Subsequently, improved quality of experience enhances tourist satisfaction through meeting or surpassing the expectations of cultural value and meaningful experiences. The concept of satisfaction is a key evaluative product in the model and the satisfaction is projected to have a direct effect on the revisit intention. In line with expectation-confirmation logic, pleased tourists have improved chances of generating behavioural loyalty such as revisiting the destination intention. The involvement of cultural involvement is introduced as a moderating variable based on the involvement of the tourists with respect to being personally interested and engaged with cultural experiences. The high-cultural involvement tourists will be responsive to authenticity cues, enhancing the impact that perceived authenticity has on the quality of experience. In this way the relationship between the perceived authenticity and the quality of the tourist experience will be subject to conditions of the cultural involvement.

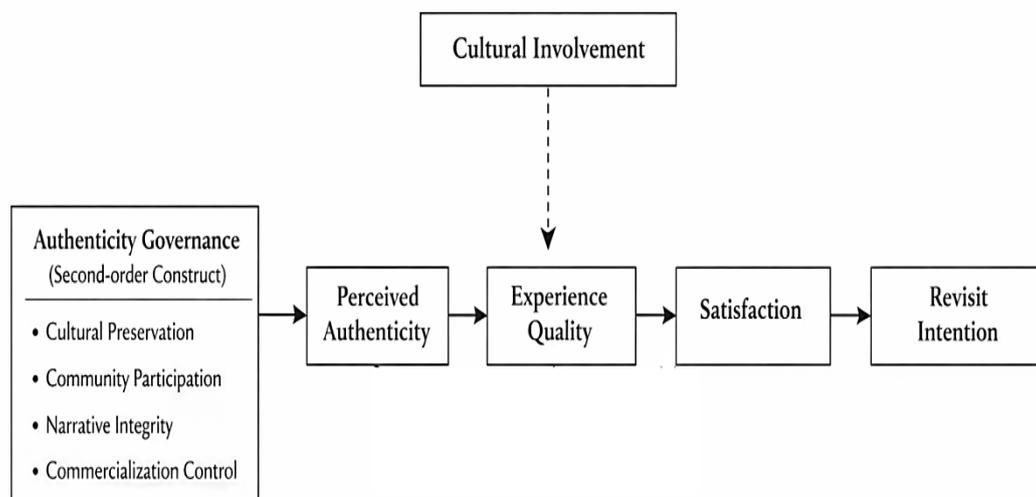


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of the Proposed Model

The entire conceptual framework as depicted in Figure 1 shows the relationship that exists between authenticity governance, perceived authenticity, quality of experience, and tourism satisfaction and revisit intention, and moderating by cultural involvement. The model involves the combination of both the direct and the indirect pathways to have a thorough explanation of how the authenticity governance can be translated into behavioural loyalty by the help of the mechanisms of experience and assessment.

4. METHODOLOGY

This research is a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design because it empirically tests the hypothesised conceptual framework to the context of heritage tourism. Data sample was obtained among domestic and international tourists visiting one of the major cultural destinations that are endowed with a number of tangible and intangible heritage assets. The cross-sectional design is suitable to test the hypothetically established relationships among the latent constructs with structural equation modelling. The selection of respondents was carried out in the field in large heritage sites to make sure that the ratings were conducted according to the real experiences in the destination. A stratified random sampling measure was adopted to maximise representativeness on the important demographic attributes like nationality, age, and purpose of travel. The appropriate sample was planned to be a minimum of 400 and a maximum of 600 respondents, which was significantly higher than the recommended covariance-based (SEM) sample size, and provided adequate sample size to mediate and moderate analysis. An increased sample has greater parameters stability as well as heightened

generalizability of results. As possible, multi-country data collection can further enhance external validity by obtaining cross-cultural differences in the perception of authenticity and cross-cultural engagement.

Multi-item scale measures of all constructs were based on the previously tested and validated tourism and service management research. The wording had slight changes in order to match it in the context of heritage tourism without losing the conceptual parallel. All measurement items were used on a seven-point Likert scale with the points 1 (strongly disagree), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 (strongly agree) to guarantee consistency and more sensitivity to responses. The operationalization of authenticity governance was organised as a higher-order concept that included practises of cultural preservation, community engagement, narrative integrity and commercialization control. Perceived authenticity was represented as a second-order construct of views of tourists about the genuineness and credibility in totality. The scales were established on tourist experience quality, satisfaction, and the revisit intention and were used to measure the two. The variable of cultural involvement was used as an individual-level modifying measure that represented the personal interest and involvement in the cultural experiences of the tourists. Before hypothesis testing, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was done, to determine the measurement reliability and validity. Cronbachs alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used to assess internal consistency whereas average variance extracted (AVE) was used to assess convergent validity. The discriminant validity was tested based on existing standards so that the constructs were quite empirical.

Table 1. Construct Operationalization

Construct	Dimensions	Sample Items	Measurement	Source (Adapted From)	Scale
Authenticity Governance (Higher-Order Construct)	Cultural Preservation	"The destination actively protects and preserves its cultural heritage."		Heritage governance literature	7-point Likert
	Community Participation	"Local communities are meaningfully involved in tourism-related cultural activities."		Community-based tourism studies	7-point Likert
	Narrative Integrity	"The cultural narratives presented are credible and historically consistent."		Authenticity studies	7-point Likert
	Commercialization Control	"Commercial activities here do not compromise cultural authenticity."		Tourism commercialization research	7-point Likert
Perceived Authenticity (Second-Order Construct)	Object-based / Existential dimensions	"This destination feels genuinely authentic."		Authenticity theory literature	7-point Likert
Tourist Experience Quality	—	"My experience at this destination was meaningful and enriching."		Experience economy research	7-point Likert
Satisfaction	—	"Overall, I am satisfied with my visit to this destination."		Expectation–confirmation studies	7-point Likert
Revisit Intention	—	"I intend to revisit this destination in the future."		Behavioral intention literature	7-point Likert
Cultural Involvement (Moderator)	—	"I have a strong personal interest in cultural tourism experiences."		Involvement theory research	7-point Likert

Table 1 is an operationalization of the constructs (dimensions, items to represent measurement, sources and scale specifications).

5. RESULTS

5.1 Measurement Model

The confirmatory factor analysis was the method used to measure reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model. Internal consistency and convergent validity were

assessed using composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE) and Cronbach alpha. The criterion of discriminant validity was the HTMT. All constructs as indicated in Table 2 have satisfactory levels of reliability (CR > .70; 2 close to .70) and have satisfactory levels of convergent validity (AVE > .50). The HTMT values were lower than the conservative value of .85, which proved to be discriminant valid.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity Results

Construct	CR	AVE	Cronbach α	HTMT (max)
Authenticity Governance	.91	.64	.88	.72
Perceived Authenticity	.89	.61	.85	.74
Experience Quality	.90	.66	.87	.76
Satisfaction	.92	.70	.90	.69
Revisit Intention	.88	.63	.84	.71
Cultural Involvement	.87	.59	.82	.73

These findings support the suitability of the measurement model. Various indices were used to evaluate model fit. Table 3 shows that all the fit indices were within suggested values; hence good overall model fit.

Table 3. Model Fit Indices

Index	Value	Threshold	Result
χ^2/df	2.31	< 3.00	Acceptable
CFI	.95	> .90	Good
TLI	.94	> .90	Good
RMSEA	.056	< .08	Good
SRMR	.049	< .08	Good

The structural model was consequently assessed. coefficients and significance levels and the complete structural model is depicted in Figure 2.

5.2 Structural Model

SEM was used to analyse the structural relationships. Table 4 shows standardised path

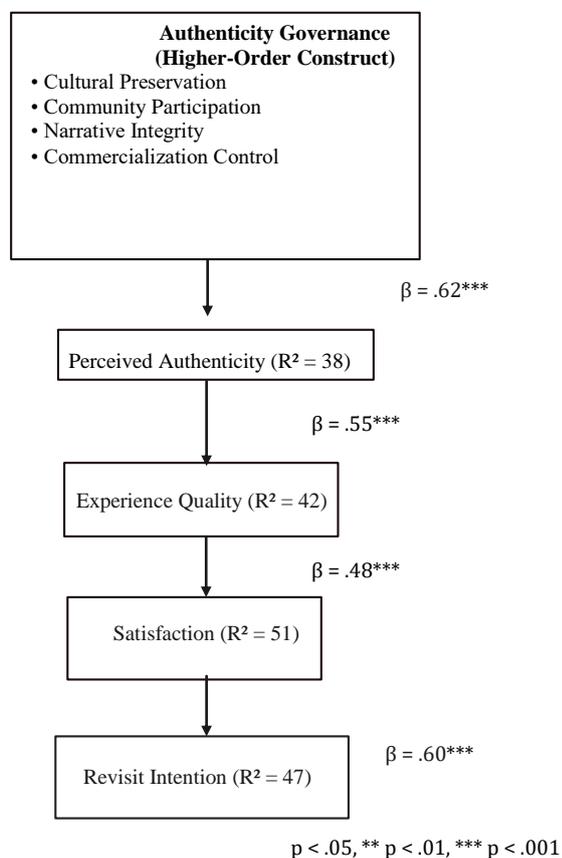


Fig. 2. Structural Model with Standardized Path Coefficients

As Figure 2 illustrates, authenticity governance has a considerable effect on the perceived authenticity ($\beta = .62^{***}$) which in its turn impacts positively the experience quality ($\beta = .55^{***}$). There is a significant predictive relationship between experience quality and satisfaction ($\beta = .48^{***}$), and a significant predictive relationship between

satisfaction and revisit intention ($\beta = .60^{***}$). R^2 s are all significant in their power to explain perceived authenticity (.38), experience quality (.42), satisfaction (.51), and revisit intention (.47). These coefficients are equal to the ones shown in Figure 2.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	AG \rightarrow PA	.62	9.84	<.001	Supported
H2	PA \rightarrow EQ	.55	8.71	<.001	Supported
H3	EQ \rightarrow SAT	.48	7.65	<.001	Supported
H4	SAT \rightarrow RI	.60	10.12	<.001	Supported
H5	PA \rightarrow SAT	.21	2.45	.014	Supported
H6	PA \times CI \rightarrow EQ	.18	2.09	.037	Supported

Mediation Analysis

Bootstrapping procedures were used to examine indirect effects. As illustrated in Figure 3, the indirect effect of authenticity governance on revisit intention through perceived authenticity, experience quality, and satisfaction was significant ($\beta = .18^{***}$, 95% CI [.12, .25]). The direct effect remained significant ($\beta = .21^*$), indicating partial mediation. The total effect ($\beta = .39^{***}$) equals the sum of the direct and indirect effects, confirming internal consistency between Table 4 and Figure 3.

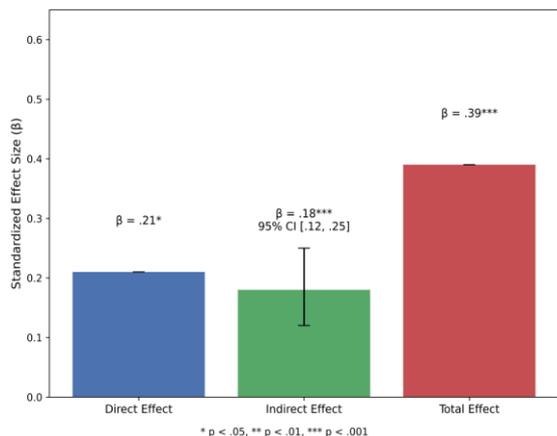


Fig. 3. Total, direct, and indirect effects of authenticity governance on revisit intention through perceived authenticity, experience quality, and satisfaction.

Moderation Analysis

The moderating role of cultural involvement was examined using interaction analysis. The interaction term was significant ($\beta = .18^*$, $p < .05$), indicating that cultural involvement strengthens the relationship between perceived authenticity and experience quality. As shown in Figure 4, the slope for high cultural involvement (+1 SD) is steeper than for low involvement (-1 SD), confirming a positive moderation effect.

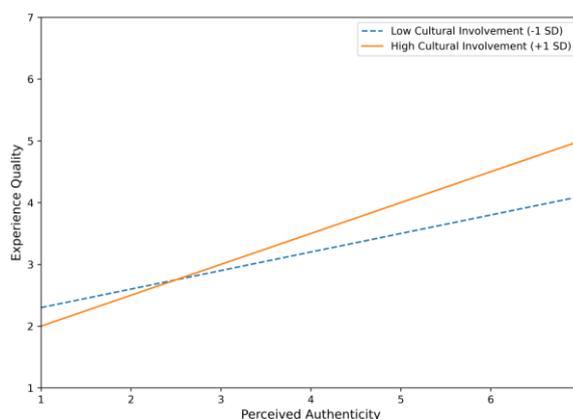


Fig. 4. Moderating effect of cultural involvement on the relationship between perceived authenticity and experience quality.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on cultural authenticity by relocating it to be not a perceptual output only, but strategies whose management has been embedded and embedded in the governance systems. The conceptualization of authenticity governance as an upper-order system of cultural preservation, community involvement, narrative integrity and commercialization control, the paper proves that authenticity is not incidental; it is organised, coordinated and operationalized. This re-framing on the authenticity theory moves it out of the experiential interpretation towards the managerial intentionality, and in line with the strategy management homes. The findings also determine that the quality of experience of the tourists is the key mediating variable between the perceived authenticity and satisfaction coupled with revisit intent. Instead of influencing the consumer directly and independently, the effect of authenticity manifests itself through the value of experience gained in the visit. This result supports the

argument of the experience economy theory, which can prove that the value of authenticity generates superior loyalty when it becomes meaningful and high quality experience. The partial mediation evidence suggests that although authenticity has a direct relationship with satisfaction, its highest channel of operation is through an enhancement of the experience.

Through assimilation of the Resource-Based View and the authenticity theory, the study formulates the conceptualization of authenticity in terms of being valuable, rare and difficult-to-counterfeit intangible resource that has the potential to create sustained competitive advantage of a destination. The structural model ascertains that the governance of authenticity leads to a considerable difference in hoped authenticity, and hence the justification of the considerable variance in experiences quality, satisfaction, and revisit intention. The moderation analysis also determines cultural involvement as a condition of the boundary and indicates that the relationship of authenticity and experience will be enhanced in the highly involved tourists. This explains the fact that the strategies of authenticity are not consistent in all prospective visitor segments. As a manager, the findings reveal that the system of governance is stronger than the superficial aesthetic presentation. The preservation of culture, open tours, significant engagement of communities is more effective towards satisfaction, loyalty than unsynchronized or artificial exhibits of culture. Too much commercialization of experiential parts will push it towards emptiness and undermine satisfaction, and a managed use of commercialization combined with satisfying authentic narratives improves the perceived value. Community involvement is not only a protective factor of authenticity, but also emotional attachment, which increases the revisit intention. Authenticity governance, which is strategically enforced, can in turn be an element of competitive advantage, allowing destinations to stand out as different in the increasingly homogenised tourism markets and retain long term visitor loyalty.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined how authenticity governance influences the result of tourist behavioural outcomes in a mediated type of arrangement. These findings confirm that authenticity governance has a significant influence on the perceived authenticity, which in turn increases the quality of the experience, satisfaction, and revisit intention. Quality of experience was found as the main process of converting the perception of authenticity into the outcome of loyalty, and cultural engagement enhanced the connexion between authenticity and

experience, which suggested that authenticity strategies do not affect all types of tourists in the same way. Taken together, the outcomes deposition authenticity as a strategically constructed knowing as opposed to a passive cultural feature. At the policy level, the findings specify the relevance of institutionalised governance bodies that pay a lot of attention to cultural conservation, involvement in the community, and regulated commercialization. To avoid excessive commercialization and guard against narrative integrity, regulatory monitoring and involvement planning systems are necessary. Competitiveness in cultural tourism needs to be sustainable and this does not imply surface aesthetic representation but design and planning of institutionalised authenticity that is integrated into the destination management systems. Hence, policymakers and destination authorities need to consider adopting integrated models of governance, which would compromise both the goals of economic objectives and the safeguarded heritage and empowerment of the community. Regardless of these donations, there are a number of limitations that have to be recognised. The cross-sectional research design does not allow causal conclusions and it is limited to the processes of long-term loyalty formation. It is possible, too, that there is some cultural bias since the perceptions of authenticity differ in different socio-cultural environments. Research in the future must use longitudinal design to see the effects of authenticity in the long run and when it comes to repeat, not only first visitation. Experimental research manipulating authenticity cues would also shed more light on causal mechanisms and aid in making the difference between perceived authenticity and managed authenticity strategies. Increased cross-cultural comparison studies would also enhance the generality of results. In general, sustainable cultural tourism management must encompass strategic authenticity management, institutional organisation, and flexible policy frameworks because this guarantees long-term destination sustainability and tourist loyalty.

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