

Examining Cultural Heritage Awareness's Influence on Tourist Satisfaction: Mediating Role of Cultural Identity and Commercialization

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Abstract: Purpose: This study investigates the impact of cultural heritage awareness on tourist satisfaction, emphasizing the mediating role of cultural identity and the moderating influence of tourism commercialization within the context of heritage tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The aim is to understand how cultural awareness translates into meaningful experiences and satisfaction for tourists visiting heritage sites. Method: A quantitative research approach was employed, collecting data from 222 heritage tourists across various cultural sites in Saudi Arabia. Well-established measurement scales were adapted from prior studies. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the relationships among cultural heritage awareness, cultural identity, tourism commercialization, and tourist satisfaction. Findings: Results reveal that cultural heritage awareness significantly enhances tourist satisfaction. Cultural identity also plays a crucial mediating role in this relationship, reinforcing the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive connection between tourists and cultural experiences. Additionally, tourism commercialization was found to significantly moderate the relationship, indicating that commercial elements, when aligned with heritage values, can enhance satisfaction levels. Originality/Implications: This study contributes to the growing literature on heritage tourism by introducing a multi-dimensional model that integrates identity and commercialization dynamics. It offers theoretical and practical insights for enhancing visitor experiences through culturally rooted and strategically commercialized heritage tourism.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage Awareness, Tourist Satisfaction, Cultural Identity, Tourism Commercialization, Heritage Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has turned into one of the key pillars in many countries' socio-economic development, with cultural heritage tourism being a highly dynamic and powerful sub-sector. Cultural heritage tourism is travel that is aimed at experiencing the sites, artifacts, and activities that genuinely reflect

the narratives and inhabitants of yesterday and today (Zhou & Ramli, 2025). As travel at the global level is more and more aiming for rich experience and travel meaning, places abound in cultural stories and heritage have gotten competitive edge (Fu et al., 2025). Heritage tourism not only brings travel economic advantages but also cultural continuity, educational value, and civic pride (Cui et al., 2025). Among numerous determinants of tourist experiences, cultural heritage awareness the degree to which tourists identify, value, and comprehend the cultural and historical heritage of a destination has become an academic topic of interest for its potential in framing visitor experiences and satisfaction (Xiaofeng et al., 2025). At the same time, cultural identity has become a necessary prism through which tourism experiences are framed and appraised (Gaonkar & Sukthankar, 2025). Tourists tend to understand heritage in their own cultural terms, which influences how significant or rewarding they find the experience (Y. Yang et al., 2025). Also, with globalization and mobility, the intersection of one's sense of cultural self and consciousness of other cultures has become more salient, offering new dynamics in cultural tourism (Chen et al., 2025). Understandings of how awareness and identity together affect satisfaction provide more insight into tourist behavior, and has pragmatic application to destination management and cultural heritage preservation (Wei & Zhang, 2025). In this regard, the present study investigates how cultural heritage awareness and cultural identity combine to form tourist satisfaction, with control for the role of tourism commercialization as a moderator on such relationships. There are several empirical investigations that have underscored the importance of cultural heritage consciousness in boosting tourist satisfaction (Talukder & Hoque, 2025). For example, Wang et al. (2025) assert that conscious tourists of the history and cultural significance of a site are likely to appreciate the value of the trip, thus leading to higher satisfaction. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2025) found that tourists feel a more satisfied and deeper sense of emotion when they are emotionally connected to the heritage that they are experiencing whether ethnicity, history, or cultural heritage. Awareness gives rise to meaning and attachment, which is a significant antecedent to tourism satisfaction (Lv et al., 2025). Cultural identity also plays a key role in influencing how tourists perceive and evaluate their experiences. Mazlan et al. (2025) observed that high cultural-identity tourists would tend to enjoy heritage-type experiences affirming or elevating their sense of being. Cultural identity becomes a key motivator and satisfaction measure for ethnic and diaspora tourism (J. Yang et al., 2025). In addition, the sense of belonging and pride generated through exposure to sites that are culturally

significant has been proven to influence tourist attitudes and behavior (Zou, 2024). According to Syefriani et al. (2024) study, tourists who come back to sites of spirituality or ancestral nature have higher satisfaction levels when their cultural identity is activated through heritage experiences. Aside from direct influences, scholars have examined the influence of mediating and moderating variables on the relationship between cultural factors and satisfaction (Mgxekwa-Qumba & Kruger, 2024). Vicol (2024) postulated that cultural identity might be a psychological connection between awareness and satisfaction, particularly in heritage places. Furthermore, commercialization in tourism has been examined within the context of authenticity and its influence on tourist perception (Zhao, 2024). While commercialization may increase convenience and accessibility, the latter can also replace perceived authenticity and has the consequence that is negative to satisfaction especially for culturally aware tourists (Leong et al., 2024). Chan et al. (2024) stressed that the impact of commercialization is contingent upon tourists' expectations and the degree by which the heritage is being managed in either a preserved or commodified form. Collectively, these findings emphasize that cultural heritage awareness and cultural identity do not occur independently; they affect each other and external factors like commercialization to guide tourist satisfaction (Zhao et al., 2024). However, attempts at combining these variables into a shared conceptual framework that can help explain their relationship have been few. Therefore, this research seeks to fill that gap by exploring the direct, mediating, and moderating impacts of these variables on tourist satisfaction in cultural heritage sites. In spite of a growing body of literature on cultural tourism, there still exist some empirical gaps that have not been filled (Zuo et al., 2024). For example, although numerous studies have considered the effects of cultural heritage consciousness and cultural identity on tourist satisfaction in isolation, much less research has considered them within an integrated model (Li et al., 2024). Most of the previous studies approach awareness and identity as independent or unrelated constructs, not paying attention to how they can affect one another or function in a sequential manner in shaping satisfaction (Rasoolimanesh & Lu, 2024). There is a lack of empirical insight about whether cultural identity operates as a process by which cultural awareness converts into satisfaction a mediation path that can unlock deeper psychological processes (Son et al., 2023). Second, the function of tourism commercialization is still not well theorized here. While research has suggested that commercialization can influence authenticity and satisfaction perceptions (Genc & Gulertekin Genc, 2023), its interactive function specifically as a moderator has not been extensively

explored with regard to cultural awareness. This matters since commercialization in itself is not negative; it may either water down or enrich the visitor experience based on tourists' cultural awareness levels and expectations (Liu et al., 2023). The subtle effect of commercialization varies between heritage tourism segments but is largely regarded in empirical studies from a dual perspective of 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' (Zhang et al., 2023). Additionally, most research bases its findings on Western or Eurocentric tourism scenarios, frequently dismissing the nature of these phenomena in non-Western environments where heritage is inextricably linked with existing traditions and religious beliefs (Qiu & Zuo, 2023). Within these places, the phenomena of cultural identity and consciousness may exist differently, making localized research essential (Anini & Benamar, 2023). There is also limited empirical research examining the cognitive and affective processes by which awareness and identity create satisfaction, particularly in dense cultural settings where heritage is not just seen but felt (Worku Tadesse, 2023). Finally, the models that do exist rely on linear models, dismissing potential mediation and moderation effects that provide a more advanced understanding of tourist behavior. By failing to account for the intricate relationship between internal (identity, awareness) and external (commercialization) factors, existing studies have resulted in remarkable theoretical and practical lacunae (Zhou et al., 2023). The present research fills these gaps by hypothesizing and empirically examining a conceptual model encompassing the direct impacts of cultural heritage identity and awareness, the mediating position of cultural identity, and the moderating position of tourism commercialization in influencing tourist satisfaction. The main aim of this research is to explore the impact of awareness of cultural heritage on tourist satisfaction in cultural tourism areas. Specifically, the study intends to analyze whether cultural identity plays a significant role as a mediator between awareness and satisfaction. It also wishes to assess the moderating effect of commercialization of tourism in the link between cultural heritage awareness and tourist satisfaction. These goals rest on the understanding that tourist experiences are not only influenced by what is provided at the destination but also by the manner in which tourists cognitively and affectively interact with cultural aspects depending on their awareness and alignment of identity. Following these goals, the research is informed by the following research questions:

1. Does cultural heritage awareness significantly influence tourist satisfaction?
2. Does cultural identity directly influence tourist satisfaction?

3. Does cultural identity mediate the relationship between cultural heritage awareness and tourist satisfaction?

4. Does tourism commercialization moderate the relationship between cultural heritage awareness and tourist satisfaction?

By answering these queries, the research hopes to offer a complete comprehension of tourist interaction with cultural heritage attractions and how intrinsic psychological elements and extrinsic situational elements combine to impact satisfaction outcomes. The findings are intended to yield benefits to both theoretical scholarship and the empirical management of cultural tourist destinations.

Theoretical ground for this study borrows from Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT) and Social Identity Theory (SIT). Cognitive Appraisal Theory stipulates that individuals evaluate experiences based on the extent to which such experiences align with their values, beliefs, and expectations (Wang et al., 2023). In the context of cultural tourism, cultural heritage consciousness is the initial cognitive signal through which tourists evaluate the meaning and significance of heritage encounters. When guests become aware and appreciate the richness of a destination's culture, they positively assess the experience, leading to greater satisfaction (Zheng et al., 2023). CAT hence provides us with a basis for studying the cognitive interface between awareness and satisfaction. Social Identity Theory, posits that individuals derive some part of their self-concept through membership of their social or cultural group (Qiu, 2023). This means in tourism that the cultural identity of tourists can influence how they perceive and emotionally respond to heritage experiences (Deng et al., 2023). When tourists believe that heritage aspects convey or resonate with their identity, they experience belongingness and emotional fulfillment, leading to higher satisfaction (Zou et al., 2023). SIT emphasizes the mediating function of cultural identity, suggesting identity as a cognitive frame of reference through which awareness is filtered to shape satisfaction. Furthermore, Commodification Theory provides a useful model in understanding the work of tourism commercialization in moderation. Based on the theory, commercialization of culture may result in increased accessibility and appeal or in the decline of cultural authenticity (Shahrin & Hussin, 2023). Tourists who are very culture-heritage aware might respond differently to commercialization: some like the convenience, while others find it compromises the authenticity of the experience. Thus, commercialization acts as a moderator of the relationship between awareness and satisfaction in changing the context under which cultural interactions take place. Overall, CAT describes the direct cognitive route from awareness to

satisfaction, SIT rationalizes the mediating function of cultural identity, and Commodification Theory describes how commercialization alters the effect of cultural awareness. By grounding itself in these well-established theories, the research is theoretically sound and well placed to make significant contributions to both practice and theory in cultural heritage tourism studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural heritage also significantly contributes to the general tourism experience through building a deep sense of connection between tourists and the historical and cultural story of the destination (Zhou & Ramli, 2025). Most studies have noted that familiarity with a destination's cultural heritage both tangible such as monuments and artifacts and intangible such as traditions, language, and folklore plays an important role in the perceived value of a tourism experience (Cui et al., 2025). When travelers are educated and participate in the cultural heritage of a destination, they are more apt to form an emotional connection and display greater satisfaction. Researchers such as Gaonkar and Sukthankar (2025) highlight that heritage interpretation increases tourists' knowledge and appreciation, which subsequently improves satisfaction and the probability of positive word-of-mouth encouragement. In addition, cultural heritage awareness serves as an intellectual filter that enables tourists to make sense of the environment in meaningful ways, consistent with destination image and pre-visit expectations (Chen et al., 2025). Some researchers contend that the degree of cultural awareness among tourists is not a passive byproduct of the trip but an active process shaped by the communication strategies, interpretive services, and authenticity of experiences of the destination (Talukder & Hoque, 2025). Authenticity, specifically, has been found to be a mediating factor between cultural heritage awareness and tourist satisfaction. For Zhang et al. (2025), tourists feel more satisfied when they view heritage attractions as authentic, not commercialized or staged. Local community participation, narratives, and conservation efforts have key functions here in validating the sense of authenticity as well as raising awareness (Mazlan et al., 2025). In addition, satisfaction is also enhanced where tourists perceive that their presence helps support the maintenance of local heritage and traditions, which creates a feeling of responsible tourism (Zou, 2024). Hence, the interaction between awareness of cultural heritage and tourist satisfaction is three-dimensional, encompassing

perceptual, emotive, and behavioral elements that are highly entrenched within both the demand and supply sides of the tourist experience.

3. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Cultural heritage consciousness has been widely researched as a catalyst of tourist behavior and satisfaction, especially in heritage and culture tourism environments (Mgxeakwa-Qumba & Kruger, 2024). The evidence in the literature has repeatedly demonstrated that tourists who are conscious and informed about a destination's cultural heritage tend to have enhanced trip experiences (Zhao, 2024). For example, Chan et al. (2024) discovered that heritage consciousness makes a positive contribution to the quality of the tourist experience, particularly when tourists can cognitively and emotionally relate with the cultural and historical elements of the destination. Likewise, Zuo et al. (2024) reinforced that when visitors recognize a personal or collective connection with cultural heritage, their satisfaction is higher because the experience becomes more significant. Cultural heritage consciousness also goes beyond physical contact with locations it involves interpretation, context, and perceived authenticity of heritage resources, all of which impact satisfaction outcomes (Rasoolimanesh & Lu, 2024). In addition, empirical studies in other areas like East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East demonstrate high validity in the relationship between awareness and positive appraisals of the tourist experience (Genc & Gulertekin Genc, 2023), which indicates that this connection is robust across cultures. Based on the empirical consensus, cultural heritage awareness is suggested to have a significant impact on tourist satisfaction because it affects perception formation, value acknowledgment, and emotional involvement (Zhang et al., 2023). The more aware the tourists are of the cultural and historical aspects of a place, the more they can situate their experience, resulting in greater appreciation as well as higher cognitive satisfaction (Anini & Benamar, 2023). Heritage-conscious tourists are more inclined to make associations, relate past experiences with present ones, and judge the destination more favorably (Zhou et al., 2023). Furthermore, cultural consciousness tends to foster curiosity, induce immersion within historical surroundings, and leave associations of value (Zheng et al., 2023). A number of researches also emphasize the significance of interpretation facilities like guided tours, museums, and audio media that increase understanding and support satisfaction through closing the gaps between historical information and

subjective experience (Deng et al., 2023). Thus, when cultural heritage is not only offered but interpreted properly, and visitors are cognizant of its meaning, their satisfaction is considerably increased. Therefore, one can reasonably assume that awareness of cultural heritage plays an important role in tourists' satisfaction.

H1: Cultural heritage awareness significantly influences the tourist satisfaction.

Cultural identity has become an important psychological concept in tourism research, representing a feeling of belonging and identification with a specific cultural group or tradition (Shahrin & Hussin, 2023). Tourists usually prefer destinations that are consistent with their actual or desired cultural identity, and the consistency makes them feel more comfortable, proud, and emotionally satisfied (Zou et al., 2023). Empirical studies have also indicated that cultural identity may be both a driver and a result of cultural tourism. For example, Qiu (2023) established that cultural identity enhances affective ties with heritage destinations, thus enhancing overall satisfaction with the trip. In heritage tourism, tourists often read cultural aspects on the basis of their identity, which enhances their experience and results in greater satisfaction (Wang et al., 2023). Moreover, research in diaspora and ethnic tourism contexts indicates that returning to one's heritage greatly increases personal satisfaction and emotional satisfaction (Worku Tadesse, 2023). Cultural identity thus assumes a shaping function in determining how tourists experience and judge their tourism experiences.

Looking at such empirical evidence, it is clear that cultural identity makes a significant contribution to tourist satisfaction through emotional resonance, perceived relevance, and value congruence (Qiu & Zuo, 2023). Those tourists who identify themselves with the culture of a place tend to experience more profound levels of immersion and meaning-making, which improves satisfaction at cognitive and affective levels (Liu et al., 2023). Cultural identity also encourages openness to interact with local communities, rituals, and symbols, hence adding value to the quality of the tourism experience. The strength of this identity link is likely to impact not only satisfaction but also repeat visit likelihood as well as word-of-mouth intentions (Son et al., 2023). In multicultural tourist settings, when visitors observe their own culture being displayed or can learn something about a culture that speaks to their values of identity, satisfaction is increased because of personal relevance and common understanding (Li et al., 2024). Thus, it is predicted that cultural identity positively affects tourist satisfaction.

H2: Cultural identity significantly influences the tourist satisfaction.

Whereas both cultural heritage consciousness and cultural identity have separately been connected to tourist satisfaction, new studies indicate that cultural identity can act as a mediating influence between heritage consciousness and satisfaction (Zhao et al., 2024). In other words, consciousness of cultural heritage can affect the way people connect that knowledge to their sense of identity and ultimately their levels of satisfaction (Leong et al., 2024). It has been evidenced that heritage experiences that reinforce one's cultural identity are most likely to result in satisfying emotional reactions (Vicol, 2024). Religious and ethnic tourism research, for instance, demonstrates that recognition of sacred or ancestral places frequently evokes or reinforces cultural identity, which in turn enhances satisfaction through emotional connection (Syefriani et al., 2024). Correspondingly, heritage commemorations and festivals have been found to increase cultural awareness while at the same time strengthening identity salience and visitor satisfaction (J. Yang et al., 2025). Considering that there is interaction between heritage awareness and identity formation, it is reasonable to suggest a mediating role of cultural identity in the awareness-satisfaction relationship (Lv et al., 2025). As soon as tourists come to know about cultural heritage aspects either through orchestrated explanation or individual exploration they will probably internalize and personalize that knowledge relating to their own cultural identity (Wang et al., 2025). This engagement of identity provides an affective link that increases the perceived relevance and importance of the experience, thus resulting in greater satisfaction (Wei & Zhang, 2025). In addition, the mediating process is underpinned by cognitive-affective theories of tourism behavior, where awareness precipitates a process of cognitive appraisal subject to filtering through identity markers and personal values, which, in turn, influences satisfaction outcomes (Xiaofeng et al., 2025). Empirical studies by Y. Yang et al. (2025) corroborate that identity-based interpretation of cultural places is an important mediating factor in satisfaction assessment. Hence, it is hypothesized that cultural identity significantly mediates the relationship between cultural heritage awareness and tourist satisfaction.

H3: Cultural identity significantly mediates the relationship of cultural heritage awareness and the tourist satisfaction.

Tourism commercialization refers to the commodification of cultural heritage to appeal to broader tourist markets through packaging, branding, and monetization (Fu et al., 2025). While commercialization can enhance accessibility and promotion, several studies caution that excessive commercial influence may dilute authenticity and impact tourist

satisfaction negatively (Zhou & Ramli, 2025). Empirical research indicates a multifaceted relationship between commercialization and satisfaction conditioned by tourist type and expectations. For example, Xiaofeng et al. (2025) identified that authentically sensitive tourists respond negatively if heritage experiences seem too staged or commercialized. Contrarily, some may welcome the convenience and enjoyment value provided by commercialization (Chen et al., 2025). Moreover, tourists' judgments are also influenced by the perceived balance between profit and cultural preservation. Wang et al. (2025) also underscored that whenever commercialization serves to enhance heritage conservation or community welfare, its impact on satisfaction is more positive. This tension suggests a moderation effect where commercialization moderates the impact of heritage awareness on satisfaction either positively or negatively based on context (Mazlan et al., 2025). With this subtle consideration, commercialization of tourism is predicted to act as a moderator between cultural heritage awareness and tourist satisfaction (Syefriani et al., 2024). The existence of commercialization would then heighten or lower the impact depending on the extent to which tourists perceive it (Zhao, 2024). For tourists who prioritize convenience, infrastructure, and interpretive equipment facilitated through commercialization, greater heritage awareness would result in even higher satisfaction (Zhao et al., 2024). Conversely, for culture-led tourists who value authenticity and conservation, over-commercialization can hinder the beneficial role of heritage awareness by creating inauthentic or trivialized portrayals (Rasoolimanesh & Lu, 2024). Commercialization therefore represents a contextual variable that influences how awareness becomes satisfaction. A number of studies, such as Liu et al. (2023), validate the argument that heritage interpretation and commercial packaging need to balance each other in order to sustain satisfaction. This evidence affirms the hypothesis that tourism commercialization acts as a moderator between awareness of cultural heritage and tourist satisfaction.

H4: Tourism commercialization significantly moderates the relationship of cultural heritage awareness and the tourist satisfaction.

4. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The model and its interfaces proposed herein rest on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Identity Theory, both of which provide solid frameworks for examining how cultural awareness, identity, and context

influence behavior and satisfaction outcomes. TPB argues that behavior (e.g., satisfaction in tourism contexts) is determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Anini & Benamar, 2023). Here, awareness of cultural heritage shapes the attitudes of tourists, and the identity includes subjective norms related to cultural values, both of which impact satisfaction. Identity Theory also outlines how individuals seek consistency among their self-concept and experiences (Wang et al., 2023). Tourists' satisfaction increases when they experience heritage that is compatible with their identity, and the congruence results in increased satisfaction. Additionally, commercialization moderation is in line with Expectation-Confirmation Theory, as misalignments between expected authenticity and perceived commercialization influence satisfaction (Deng et al., 2023). Therefore, the integration of such theories provides an integrated outlook on how awareness, identity, and commercialization blend to influence tourist satisfaction (Figure 1).

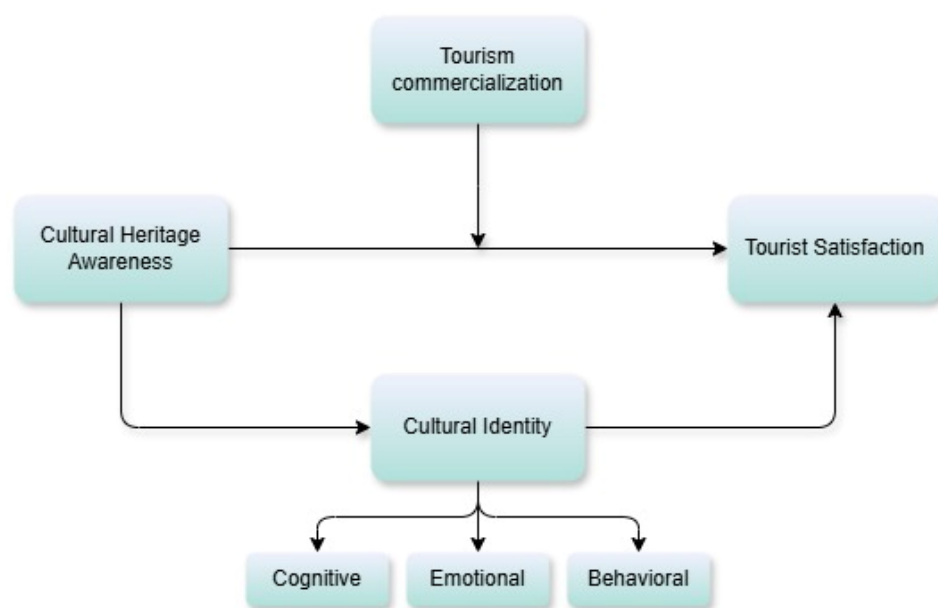


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

5. METHODOLOGY

This study employed the quantitative study design to investigate the inter-linkages between cultural heritage awareness, cultural identity, tourist commercialization of tourism, and tourist satisfaction in the context of heritage tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Its central purpose was to assess how the said constructs are inter-related in order to trigger the tourist experiences with a specific focus on the mediating role of cultural identity and moderating role of tourist commercialization. Due to the

exploratory nature of the research design and richness in hypothesized relationships, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed as the major method of analysis. PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate for this research since it can handle intricate path models, latent constructs with multiple indicators, and predictive direction, which makes it an ideal tool for the analysis of direct and indirect effects in the conceptual framework. The data collection was conducted at several cultural and heritage-enriched locations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, such as historical museums, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, traditional markets, and restored ancient villages that receive domestic and international visitors. There were 222 usable responses collected from heritage tourists using structured questionnaires that were administered in-person at the heritage sites. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used because of the exploratory purpose of the study as well as the availability of the tourists during their visits. Participants were from different demographic backgrounds, and inclusion criteria demanded that they must have spent considerable time interacting with the cultural and heritage content of the sites. The questionnaire items were initially borrowed from highly tested and validated measures in earlier empirical studies to provide the reliability and construct validity of the measuring instrument. The questionnaire was constructed in English and translated into Arabic with a back-translation method to guarantee linguistic and conceptual equivalence for local respondents. Cultural heritage awareness was measure in the study based on an 18 items scale which was adopted from the work of (Shimray & Ramaiah, 2019). To measure cultural identity we opt a 12 items scale of (Fu & Luo, 2023). Tourism commercialization was measured based on Zhang et al. (2021) 5 items scale. A three items scale for tourist satisfaction was adopted from the work of (Tian et al., 2020). The measurement tool included several reflective constructs: cultural heritage awareness, tourism commercialization, tourist satisfaction, and cultural identity (broken down into emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions). All items were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Prior to the analysis of the main data, the dataset for missing values and outliers was screened, and simple descriptive statistics were computed. PLS-SEM was conducted through SmartPLS 4 software. Analysis was carried out in two main phases: initially, the measurement model was assessed to test the reliability and validity of the constructs using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE); then, the structural model was tested to verify the proposed relationships between variables, such as

path coefficients, t-values, and significance levels derived through a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. Moreover, R^2 , F^2 , model fit indices, and Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) were also computed to examine the model's explanatory power, predictive relevance, and discriminant validity.

6. RESULTS

Table 1 also displays the internal consistency and construct validity measures of all latent variables used in the research, utilizing Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Cronbach's Alpha for all constructs is more than the minimum requirement of 0.70, which means that there is a high degree of internal consistency between the items. Cultural heritage awareness recorded the highest Cronbach's Alpha of 0.938, supporting the reliability of items in measuring this construct. Likewise, Composite Reliability for all values exceeds the threshold of 0.70 with a rating that ranges from 0.888 (Behavioral) to 0.945 (Cultural heritage awareness), indicating high internal consistency of the measurement models. In terms of AVE, the majority of constructs are higher than the typical threshold of 0.50, affirming sufficient convergent validity. Emotional (0.798), Tourist satisfaction (0.777), and Cognitive (0.723) constructs, for instance, reflect very strong convergence, meaning that a large amount of variance is accounted for by the construct and not by measurement error. Cultural heritage awareness (0.504) and Cultural identity (0.521) are slightly higher than the cut-off, which implies borderline but adequate convergent validity. Together, the figures confirm that all measurements applied in the study are reliable and valid for structural model estimation.

Table 1: Variables Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Cultural Heritage Awareness	0.938	0.945	0.504
Tourism Commercialization	0.900	0.926	0.714
Tourist Satisfaction	0.857	0.913	0.777
Cultural Identity	0.905	0.921	0.521
Emotional	0.873	0.922	0.798
Behavioral	0.833	0.888	0.667
Cognitive	0.872	0.913	0.723

Table 2 and Figure 2 presents the factor loadings, t-values, and p-values for every measurement item for each of the constructs. The factor loadings

of all are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, showing high correlations between the indicators and their associated latent variables. For Cultural heritage awareness, 17 indicators were tested, all of which produced medium to high loadings from 0.607 (CH3) to 0.794 (CH7), all with strong t-values greater than 8.8, validating their statistical significance. Cultural identity items were further categorized into three dimensions: Behavioral, Cognitive, and Emotional. Indicators of Behavioral identity had high loadings, particularly CIB3 at 0.885 with a t-value of 48.563.

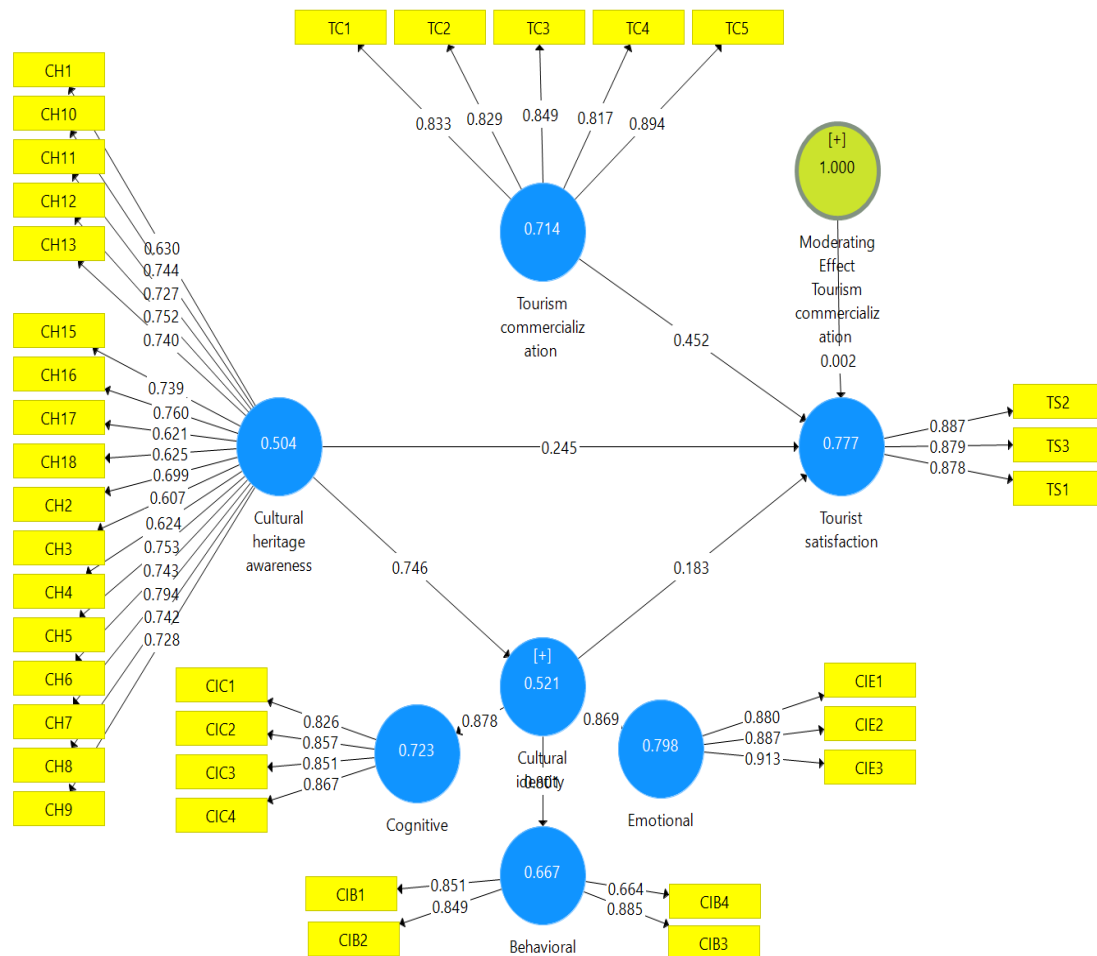


Figure 2: Estimated Model

Likewise, the Cognitive indicators (CIC1–CIC4) had a range of 0.826 to 0.867 with extremely significant t-values, whereas Emotional identity indicators (CIE1–CIE3) provided the highest loadings in total, which reached 0.913 with a t-value of 91.943. Indicators of Tourism commercialization and Tourist satisfaction also reflected consistently high loadings, all greater than 0.817, with extremely significant t-values, reflecting superior indicator reliability. All these confirm that every measurement item significantly and strongly measures its specified construct.

Table 2: Measurement Items Factor Analysis

Variable	Indicator	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values
Cultural Heritage Awareness	CH1	0.630	11.432	0.000
	CH10	0.744	16.059	0.000
	CH11	0.727	22.982	0.000
	CH12	0.752	18.739	0.000
	CH13	0.740	17.935	0.000
	CH14	0.739	24.619	0.000
	CH15	0.760	18.644	0.000
	CH16	0.621	10.718	0.000
	CH17	0.625	12.703	0.000
	CH2	0.699	15.231	0.000
	CH3	0.607	8.811	0.000
	CH4	0.624	12.675	0.000
	CH5	0.753	18.674	0.000
	CH6	0.743	20.855	0.000
	CH7	0.794	22.341	0.000
	CH8	0.742	15.768	0.000
	CH9	0.728	13.061	0.000
Cultural Identity	Behavioral			
	CIB1	0.851	34.516	0.000
	CIB2	0.849	21.016	0.000
	CIB3	0.885	48.563	0.000
	CIB4	0.664	8.536	0.000
	Cognitive			
	CIC1	0.826	27.223	0.000
	CIC2	0.857	22.369	0.000
	CIC3	0.851	40.074	0.000
	CIC4	0.867	42.723	0.000
	Emotional			
	CIE1	0.880	43.691	0.000
	CIE2	0.887	57.802	0.000
	CIE3	0.913	91.943	0.000
Tourism Commercialization	TC1	0.833	36.322	0.000
	TC2	0.829	28.590	0.000
	TC3	0.849	22.695	0.000
	TC4	0.817	30.077	0.000
	TC5	0.894	47.547	0.000
Tourist Satisfaction	TS2	0.887	43.931	0.000
	TS3	0.879	47.987	0.000
	TS1	0.878	37.256	0.000

Table 3 tests discriminant validity through the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of correlations between constructs. The findings are such that all HTMT values are below the conservative standard of 0.90, thus

establishing adequate discriminant validity among the constructs. For example, HTMT is 0.848 between Behavioral and Cultural identity, and 0.796 between Cultural heritage awareness and Tourist satisfaction both below threshold. One significant outcome is the fairly high HTMT between Tourism commercialization and Cultural heritage awareness (0.818), indicating a moderately strong relationship but within reasonable discriminant limits. Additionally, the Tourism commercialization moderating effect is not extremely collinear with other constructs, since its HTMT values are still low (e.g., 0.222 against Tourism commercialization and 0.262 against Tourist satisfaction). These findings ensure that the constructs reflect different phenomena, meeting a fundamental requirement for structural equation modeling to go further.

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Behavioral								
Cognitive	0.610							
Cultural Heritage	0.474	0.784						
Awareness								
Cultural Identity	0.848	0.726	0.774					
Emotional	0.639	0.734	0.761	0.747				
Moderating Effect	0.284	0.384	0.327	0.388	0.338			
Tourism								
Commercialization								
Tourism	0.379	0.621	0.818	0.615	0.604	0.222		
Commercialization								
Tourist Satisfaction	0.354	0.662	0.796	0.675	0.762	0.262	0.837	

Table 4 summarizes the estimated and saturated model fit statistics. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) of 0.051 for the saturated model and 0.082 for the estimated model are below the traditional cutoff of 0.10, signifying a good model fit. In the same manner, the d_ULS and d_G measures, which indicate the difference between the empirical and model-specified correlation matrices, are also within acceptable limits especially for the saturated model (d_ULS = 1.032, d_G = 0.572). The Chi-Square values for both models are quite high, something typical in models that are very complex and have large samples, but the absolute values are less important than comparative measures. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) scores are slightly below the ideal benchmark of 0.90, standing at 0.722 and 0.718, respectively, suggesting room for slight improvement but not substantial model misfit. Taken together, these statistics support the appropriateness of the structural model and validate its use for hypothesis testing.

Table 4: Model Fit Statistics

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.051	0.082
d_ULS	1.032	1.177
d_G	0.572	0.769
Chi-Square	870.809	970.703
NFI	0.722	0.718

Table 5 displays the R-square and adjusted R-square values, together with F-statistics to determine the explanatory power and the independent variables' contribution to the dependent constructs. The R-square values confirm that the model captures a high level of variance in principal constructs. For instance, the R² for Cognitive (0.771), Emotional (0.755), and Behavioral (0.642) exemplify a strong explanatory capability. Tourist satisfaction also has a relatively high R² of 0.626, with the implication that 62.6% of the variation in satisfaction is accounted for by the predictors. Cultural identity has a moderate R² of 0.556, which suggests that it is similarly meaningfully determined by its antecedents. F-statistics are additional evidence for model adequacy, particularly for paths from Cognitive (3.364), Behavioral (1.793), and Emotional (3.079) to Cultural identity. The F-statistic values of Cultural heritage awareness and Tourism commercialization are still within reasonable levels, indicating their support to the model. The findings emphasize the stability of the structural relationships posited in the research.

Table 5: R & F Square Statistics Model Goodness of Fit Statistics

	R-Statistics		F-Statistics				
	R Square	R Square Adjusted	Behavioral	Cognitive	Cultural Identity	Emotional	Tourist Satisfaction
Behavioral	0.642	0.640					
Cognitive	0.771	0.770					
Cultural Heritage Awareness					1.253		0.046
Cultural Identity	0.556	0.554	1.793	3.364		3.079	0.038
Emotional	0.755	0.754					
Tourism Commercialization							0.236
Tourist Satisfaction	0.626	0.619					

Table 6 and Figure 3 provides the last structural model findings and confirms that all the posited relationships are significant. Awareness of cultural heritage greatly affects Tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.245$, $t = 2.579$, p

= 0.005), corroborating the fact that people who are more aware of their cultural heritage are more satisfied when they participate in cultural tourism. Cultural identity also has a great impact on Tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.183$, $t = 2.176$, $p = 0.015$), supporting the fact that good identity leads to a better tourism experience.

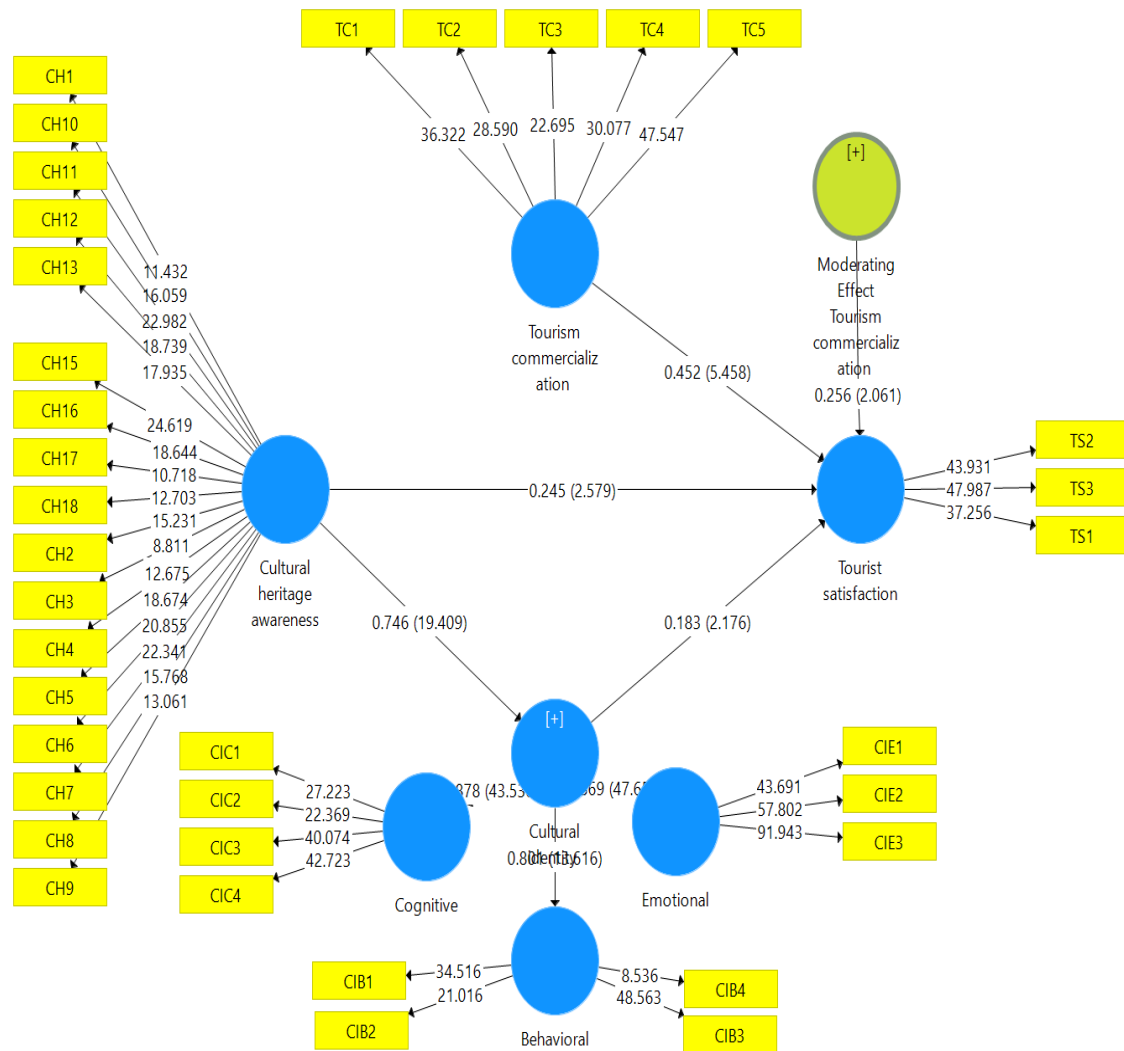


Figure 3: Structural Model for Path Analysis

Notably, Cultural identity is also seen to mediate the link between Cultural heritage awareness and Tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.136$, $t = 2.130$, $p = 0.017$), indicating that the awareness-satisfaction connection is partially explained through increased cultural identity. Moderation analysis indicates Tourism commercialization strongly enhances the effect of Cultural heritage awareness on Tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.256$, $t = 2.061$, $p = 0.000$), implying commercial interventions can enhance the positive impact of heritage awareness. All path coefficients are statistically significant, verifying the theoretical framework and practical implications from the research.

Table 6: Path Analysis

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Cultural Heritage Awareness Significantly Influences the Tourist Satisfaction.	0.245	0.251	0.095	2.579	0.005
Cultural Identity Significantly Influences the Tourist Satisfaction.	0.183	0.177	0.084	2.176	0.015
Cultural Identity Significantly Mediates the Relationship of Cultural Heritage Awareness and the Tourist Satisfaction.	0.136	0.133	0.064	2.130	0.017
Tourism Commercialization Significantly Moderates the Relationship of Cultural Heritage Awareness and the Tourist Satisfaction.	0.256	0.688	0.034	2.061	0.000

7. DISCUSSION

Cultural heritage tourism has evolved from a special interest segment into a pillar of contemporary tourism economies, wherein historical, traditional, and identity-based experiences drive the attitudes and behaviors of tourists. As the world is becoming increasingly globalized yet culturally aware as a traveler's arena, knowledge of cultural psychology and consumer perception as related to tourist attitudes and behaviors is crucial. This research aimed to examine the contribution of cultural heritage awareness, cultural identity, and tourism commercialization in shaping tourist satisfaction. With a well-structured conceptual model and empirical testing, the research findings present rich relationships beyond what lies on the surface, probing into the cognitive and emotional processing tourists experience when interacting with cultural heritage. The confirmation of all four hypotheses provides strong empirical evidence for further discussion regarding how tourists find satisfaction via cultural meaning-making, identity affirmation, and engagement with commercialized heritage sites. The confirmation of the first hypothesis that awareness of cultural heritage

substantially contributes to tourist satisfaction affirms the increasing body of literature that focuses on the importance tourists attach to authentic, knowledgeable cultural interactions. Visitors who arrived at destinations with a deeper appreciation for the cultural, historical, or religious significance of places reported much higher degrees of satisfaction. This corroborates earlier research by Shahrin and Hussin (2023), who conclude that consciousness breeds emotional connection, gratitude, and identification, resulting in an enriched experience. The information uncovered that knowledge not only increased visitors' respect for the destination but also improved their assessment of its authenticity, value, and educational influence. Fundamentally, being aware culturally changed a sightseeing excursion to an experiential, contemplative experience, supporting the theory that cognitive awareness has a significant influence on emotional reactions. Also, this result supports experiential consumption theory, which suggests that knowledge and meaning perceived in an experience enhance consumer satisfaction. For support of the second hypothesis, research validates that cultural identity has a significant role in shaping tourist satisfaction. The relationship explains the influence of individual cultural constructs on how experience is consumed and internalized. Visitors who most strongly bonded with cultural values national, ethnic, or global, shared identities reported most satisfaction when their travels spoke to those values. This finding supports previous work, including Qiu (2023), implying that heritage experiences are often sites of identity affirmation or discovery. Notably, cultural identity was seen to impact not just satisfaction with content but also emotional depth of the experience, like pride, nostalgia, or sense of belonging. Cultural tourists who shared culturally congruent backgrounds reported enhanced involvement, while those venturing into alternate cultural settings felt enriched by cross-cultural learning. These discoveries bring to the foreground cultural identity as both a filter through which tourist experiences are viewed and a source of satisfaction when cultural attachments are reaffirmed or extended. Destination marketers and heritage managers must subsequently consider diversity of cultural backgrounds and design interpretative strategies that resonate with diverse identities in order to achieve maximum satisfaction outcomes. The third hypothesis, that cultural identity would mediate the relationship between awareness of cultural heritage and tourist satisfaction, was also proven. This mediation points to the transformative process of transmuting sheer awareness into satisfaction through the activation of personal or social identity. While awareness yields cognitive knowledge, internalization of

cultural meaning through identity leads to increased, more personalized feelings of satisfaction. This discovery affirms the assertions of Zhou et al. (2023), who found identity to be an interpretive filter upon which tourists assess heritage experience significance. The discoveries found that tourists with higher cultural identities reported that heightened awareness led to greater emotional connection, which increased satisfaction. On the other hand, weak or misfit tourists experienced a diluted translation of awareness to satisfaction, which suggests that identity is a bridge that enables out-of-system knowledge to be internalized. These results offer significant theoretical contribution in highlighting the significance of locating cultural identity as not just a direct cause of satisfaction, but also as a significant psychological mechanism that enhances the impact of heritage awareness. The fourth hypothesis, that tourism commercialization moderates the link between cultural heritage awareness and tourist satisfaction, was also confirmed, establishing that the environment in which the heritage is being consumed is a major determinant of tourist experiences. Notably, the moderation effect revealed that the intensity of the link between awareness and satisfaction differed based on the level of perceived commercialization. In the moderately commercialized environments when amenities, guided services, and souvenirs coexisted but didn't dominate the cultural story awareness made a more significant positive contribution to satisfaction. Yet in highly commercialized environments where cultural heritage was overshadowed by commodification, even culturally aware tourists manifested lower levels of satisfaction. This observation captures the two-sided nature of commercialization in cultural tourism, explained by Qiu and Zuo (2023): commercialization has the potential to increase accessibility and interpretive richness, while it undermines perceived authenticity and sacredness. The findings suggest that heritage managers need to find a delicate equilibrium between commercial appeal and cultural integrity. In addition, the interaction effect indicates that tourists' responses to commercialization are not absolute but are shaped by their cultural awareness level those with high cultural awareness are more sensitive to perceived authenticity violations, and thus more impacted by over-commercialization. Together, the acceptance of all four hypotheses offers an integrated picture of how tourists interact with cultural heritage destinations in cognitive and emotional aspects. The research adds to current literature through the discovery of the multifaceted interrelations between awareness of cultural heritage, tourist satisfaction, and cultural identity, and also the contextual role of commercialization. The research goes beyond linear cause-and-effect theory, presenting a dynamic model

with consideration of internal belief systems and external situational influences. The findings stress that effective heritage tourism is not just about keeping artifacts alive or marketing places it involves having an understanding of tourists' construction of meaning, articulation of identity, and reaction to authenticity. For professionals, these findings serve to underscore the need for creating culturally rich, identity-aware, and carefully commercialized experiences that really speak to tourists. Future studies can extend the model by studying longitudinal identity and satisfaction changes or cross-cultural differences in heritage use. In the end, the study confirms that culture is not merely something tourists consume it is something they experience, negotiate, and interpret through their travels.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to the theoretical knowledge of cultural heritage awareness, cultural identity, and tourism commercialization in the context of tourist satisfaction. The study uses cultural theory, identity theory, and tourism behavior literature to expand the conceptual framework to include empirically testing the mediating effect of cultural identity and tourist commercialization as moderators between cultural heritage awareness and tourist satisfaction. The breakdown of cultural identity into its affective, cognitive, and behavioral elements yields a sophisticated theoretical framework that further illuminates how tourists make meaningful connections to cultural destinations. In addition, findings also validate the idea that cultural heritage knowledge is not enough in itself to generate satisfaction unless passed through the prism of individual and shared identity. By incorporating tourism commercialization as a contextual moderator, the research enhances the debate on how commercialized activities affect tourist experiences and cultural attachment. This multifaceted strategy not only fills theoretical lacunas but also opens up further studies on identity and commercialization dynamics in heritage tourism settings. Practically speaking, this study offers policy recommendations to tourism policymakers, cultural heritage managers, and destination marketers wishing to maximize tourist satisfaction through strategic cultural heritage marketing. The study highlights the need for crafting cultural heritage experiences that not only retain authenticity but also promote emotional, cognitive, and behavioral identification among tourists. Heritage site managers can create interpretive material, narrative

components, and interactive activities that enable tourists to emotionally and intellectually connect with destination cultural stories. Furthermore, the positive moderating effect of tourism commercialization indicates that thoughtfully designed commercial interventions like souvenir stores, local craft displays, or festive events can augment visitor satisfaction without watering down cultural value. Tourism administrators must therefore balance commercial profitability with cultural authenticity, so that revenue-enhancing activity serves and does not dominate the heritage experience. Furthermore, awareness campaigns and social media tactics can also be utilized to promote public awareness of heritage conservation while complementing contemporary tourism aspirations.

9. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This research, although rich in insights, is not without its shortcomings. First, the study is largely based on cross-sectional information, limiting inferences about causal relations among variables. A longitudinal design would have provided more insight into the dynamics of cultural identity and tourist satisfaction over time, particularly over repeat visits. Secondly, the use of self-report data in the study introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, especially in relation to culturally sensitive factors such as heritage awareness and identity. In addition, the research was carried out within one particular geographical and cultural setting, which may restrict the applicability of the results to more extensive or diverse groups of tourists with different heritage orientations and values. Although the sample size and quantitative rigour enhance the validity of the results, the multifaceted nature of human conduct in tourist situations demands more flexible and multifaceted data collection techniques like observational or ethnographic ones. Subsequent studies can extend this work through cross-cultural comparative analysis of cultural heritage awareness and identity formation, whether and how similar patterns persist in alternative national, ethnic, or religious contexts. Researchers might also explore the impact on heritage perception and satisfaction of varying types of commercialization, from grassroots entrepreneurship to corporate tourism industries, across different cultural landscapes. Moreover, the role of digital technologies, including virtual storytelling or augmented reality, in constructing the cognitive and affective relationships between tourists and heritage places could be the focus of future research. The model could be extended with variables such as perceived authenticity, nostalgia, or local involvement to better capture the complexity of the tourist experience in heritage

destinations. Finally, incorporation of voice from host communities can illuminate the reciprocal effect of tourism on both host culture and tourist perception, giving the heritage tourism dynamic a two-way view.

10. CONCLUSION

Overall, this study provides an in-depth explanation of how cultural heritage awareness, cultural identity, and tourism commercialization work together to impact tourist satisfaction. According to the results, tourists who have more knowledge about a destination's heritage are more likely to report higher satisfaction levels, particularly where such awareness is evident through the manifestation of strong cultural identity. The fragmentation of identity into affective, behavioural, and cognitive factors helps to untangle the complex way individual affinity towards heritage influences overall tourist satisfaction. Furthermore, the contribution of tourism commercialization in moderation introduces an essential level of understanding through the reality that good commercial activities can reinforce the impact of heritage awareness in satisfaction as long as they maintain and develop cultural integrity. These findings have extensive implications for theory and practice, necessitating more convergent heritage tourism development with identity formation being in a harmonious alignment with mindful commercialization. As places compete internationally for cultural tourists, this study reinforces the importance of authenticity, identity resonance, and responsive commercial strategies to generate memorable and meaningful experiences for tourists. Ultimately, producing satisfaction in heritage tourism is not so much about offering the past as about connecting it to contemporary identities and expectations of modern tourists. Future research can take a cue from here to explore further how culture, business, and identity intersect to revive tourism in the modern world.

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