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Saleem, S. & Umar, R. M. (2023) A Netnography Study on Memorable Cultural Tourism Experiences : Insights from Asian Cultural Heritage Site Tourists. Journal of Promotion Management, 2023:2, s. 280-303.

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2022.2143990>

# **A Netnography Study on Memorable Cultural Tourism Experiences: Insights from Asian Cultural Heritage Site Tourists**

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This is an original manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Journal of Promotion Management on 13 November 2022 available at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10496491.2022.2143990>

## **Abstract**

Cultural tourism is a rapidly growing industry across the globe. This study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge of tourist experiences at cultural destinations. To this end, the study explores the factors that contribute to memorable cultural tourism experiences at cultural heritage sites, specifically museums. Using WebHarvy, a total of 502 online reviews were collected from a popular tourism website, namely TripAdvisor. The collected reviews concern 14 heritage museums in 10 Asian countries. Netnography was employed as a content analysis technique. The results revealed five contributing factors of memorable cultural tourism experiences: authenticity, engagement, culinary attraction, atmospherics, and quality of service. Theoretically, this study adds to our understanding of memorable cultural tourism experiences by identifying a novel dimension, namely atmospherics. In other words, this research highlights the importance of ambiance and environment in tourism experiences at cultural heritage sites. Thus, the study provides insights for heritage site managers on how to make the tourism experience memorable.

**Keywords:** memorable, tourism experience, authenticity, engagement, culinary attraction, atmospherics, quality of service.

## **Introduction**

Providing a memorable tourism experience to visitors is at the forefront of the marketing strategy of any tourism destination (Ritchie et al., 2011). Memorable tourism experiences (MTE) lead to many positive attitudes among tourists, such as destination image, behavioral intentions (Sharma & Nayak, 2019), destination loyalty (Kim, 2018), and destination satisfaction (Gohary et al., 2020), to mention a few. Seyfi et al. (2020) argue that people are different in terms of their beliefs, attitudes, and values, so their needs for tourism experiences are different, too. For that reason, designing and providing a memorable tourism experience is quite difficult (Knobloch et al., 2017). In this regard, Kim et al. (2012) have provided one of the most substantial models for memorable tourism experience research. According to them, MTEs are experiences that can be remembered, reconstructed, and described by tourists after their visit. The efforts of previous researchers to conceptualize and measure MTEs are quite

significant (Kim & Ritchie, 2014), as they provide a better foundation for further inquiry (Wei et al., 2019). However, the MTE model by Kim et al. (2012) has been criticized, as their study used a student sample instead of tourists, which limits its generalizability (Chandralal et al., 2015). Furthermore, some scholars have argued that the underlying constructs of memorable tourism experiences in the existing literature are more subjective than objective (Chen & Rahman, 2018). As a result, several MTE studies have yielded divergent findings, and overall research on memorable tourism experiences has been limited (Chandralal et al., 2015). Seyfi et al. (2020) also recently emphasized that MTE scholars rarely address the cultural tourist as a focal entity in their investigations and lack insight into what influences their experiences of cultural heritage sites. Cultural tourism is a type of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourist is to explore, learn, experience cultural emotions, intellect fulfillment, and spirituality, and consume various cultural material products and attractions at tourist destinations (Richards, 2018; Du Cros & McKercher, 2020). Cultural tourism includes historical and cultural heritage, arts and architecture, culinary heritage, music, creative industries, literature, and living culture (i.e., beliefs and traditions, value systems, and lifestyles) (Richards, 2018). According to the World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) report on Tourism and Cultural Synergies (2018), cultural tourism is a significant part of the tourism industry. For example, the UNWTO report indicates that cultural tourism is incorporated into the tourism policies of 89% of countries worldwide. Also, the report predicts that cultural tourism will become part of the tourism policies of many more national tourism administrations. Furthermore, the cultural tourism market is significant in size, accounting for 39% of total global tourism, or approximately \$516 billion, in 2017 (World Tourism Organization, 2018). To sum up, cultural tourism is a well-recognized economic and social contributor (Han et al., 2019; Richards, 1996).

The literature on cultural tourism is still in its infancy, and only a few studies have looked at cultural tourism experiences at cultural heritage sites to shed light on what makes cultural tourism experiences memorable. Existing studies on memorable cultural tourism experiences (MCTE) focus on specific destinations, such as Istanbul (Altunel & Erkurt, 2015) and Paris (Seyfi et al., 2020). A recent study of MCTE by Seyfi et al. (2020) has several limitations, such as a small number of respondents from one location (i.e., Paris), so its findings cannot be generalized in a cross-cultural context. Also, Seyfi et al. (2020) called on future researchers to further validate and extend MCTE research through quantitative and qualitative studies. Moreover, previous MCTE studies have focused on the holistic tourism experience across all kinds of cultural attractions. Due to the broad focus on all types of cultural attractions, there is a research gap in studying MCTE for specific kinds of cultural attractions. Scholars have argued that a cultural tourist might look for a different type of experience than a regular tourist when visiting a museum (Stylianou-Lambert, 2011). To the authors' best knowledge, none of the MCTE studies has focused on cultural tourism experiences at specific cultural attractions, such as museums. Museums are powerful cultural institutions that both reflect and shape culture by presenting important historical and cultural knowledge, artifacts, and heritage to people (Shaffer, 2020). More specifically, museums, depending on their subject matter, provide a unique experience for the cultural tourist (Stylianou-Lambert, 2011). In a nutshell, museums are distinct attractions in terms of cultural tourism; thus, focusing on the tourist experience at museums is likely to provide new insights into the characteristics of MCTE. The study aims to answer the research question: What are the dimensions of the memorable cultural tourism experience (MCTE) that facilitate the stakeholders of heritage and cultural museums? We

chose Asia as the context for investigating the factors that contribute to memorable cultural tourism experiences (MCTE). Asia has a diverse range of living cultures and preserved heritage sites, which makes it more appealing to tourists. Asia's tourism industry is rapidly expanding; in Southeast Asia, for example, the total contribution of travel and tourism has risen from US \$291 billion to 301 billion and is expected to rise to 528 billion by 2025 (WTTC, 2015 and WTTC, 2017). Thus, there is a need to address issues concerning the integration of tourists' cultural experiences. It is crucial to acknowledge that Asian tourists' perceptions of tourist destinations differ from those of other tourists because of their cultural values, beliefs, distinctive characteristics, preferences, and behavior (Yang et al., 2018).

To address the abovementioned research gaps, we examine online reviews posted by cultural tourists on a popular tourism website, namely TripAdvisor. The tourism experience, by its very nature, is an end-to-end phenomenon (Dias & Dias, 2019), encompassing the broad range of activities that a tourist engages in, from information seeking to post-visit feelings. Tourist reviews provide a brief account of an individual tourist's complete journey, from information search to post-purchase feelings (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019). Besides, online reviews are considered to be more appropriate than traditional closed-ended investigation tools such as surveys (Chandralal et al., 2015). In doing so, the research aims to contribute to theory and literature. From a theoretical point of view, the findings of this study add to existing knowledge on MCTE at a specific type of cultural attraction, namely museums. From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study will support museum managers in better promoting MCTE from a marketing and management perspective. The COVID pandemic has resulted in a staggering 70 to 80 percent drop in museum visitors globally since 2020 (Rubin, 2021). A museum-based understanding of MCTE is very important for the recovery and growth of post-pandemic tourism at museums. Furthermore, the practical implications are important from an Asian context, as cultural tourism is one of the key elements of the United Nations' (UN) sustainable development agenda both for the Asia-Pacific region and internationally (Unitar, 2022). Cultural tourism provides numerous benefits to society, governments, and businesses (World Tourism Organization, 2018). Therefore, policymakers are interested in learning more about the characteristics that influence tourist destinations, as this will aid them in managing services such as travel packages to these locations and thus promoting tourism (Kumail et al., 2022). The insights into MCTE from an Asian point of view would help in creating policies that assist governments to meet the UN's sustainable development agenda.

The study is organized as follows: First, we provide a literature review of key topics, namely cultural tourism, memorable tourism experiences, and online reviews. In the following section, the study method is explained, including a description of the data collection and analysis techniques. The next section then presents a discussion on the results. Finally, the conclusion, limitations, and future research directions are presented in the last section of the study.

## **Literature review**

### **Cultural tourism**

"Cultural tourism" refers to the movement of individuals from their habitual places of residence to cultural attractions to seek information and knowledge to satisfy their own cultural demands (Richards, 2007). More precisely, "all movements of people to specific cultural attractions, such as heritage sites, artistic and cultural manifestations, the arts, and drama outside their usual place of residence" (Richards, 1996, p.24). However, Richards (2007) emphasized that there

are significant ambiguities in the existing literature when it comes to defining cultural tourism adequately. More recently, Richards (2018) provided a more comprehensive definition according to which cultural tourism is an activity in which a tourist's key motivation is to explore, learn, experience, and consume various tangible and intangible cultural products and attractions at tourist destinations.

These tangible and intangible cultural products/attractions involve various material, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual features of society, which include historical and cultural heritage, arts and architecture, culinary heritage, music, creative industries, literature, and living culture, e.g., beliefs and traditions, value systems, and lifestyles. Recently, Du Cros and McKercher (2020) defined cultural tourism in a marketing context as “a form of tourism that relies on a destination's cultural heritage assets and transforms them into a product that can be consumed by tourists.” A critical review of the cultural tourism definitions and their conceptual and theoretical underpinnings is clearly beyond the scope of this study. For such details, see Du Cros and McKercher (2020). Instead, the goal here is to investigate what makes for a memorable cultural tourism experience (MCTE). The preceding definitional discussion provides context for understanding the motivations of tourists to visit a cultural attraction. Previous studies have shown significant differences in the motivations of tourists to engage in cultural tourism (Jovicic, 2016). For instance, Han et al. (2019) argued that an appetite for understanding foreign or native cultural history motivates millions of tourists to engage in cultural tourism every year. Furthermore, these tourists have a desire for authentic cultural experiences in heritage, arts, ethnicity, crafts, cuisine, and music, etc. A study by Richards (1996) suggested that museums, heritage, festivals, folklore, and architecture are regarded as attractions by cultural tourists. Similarly, Murphy and Boyle (2006) listed the arts, festivals, events, architecture, museums, cuisine, and galleries as the attractions of cultural tourism. It is widely believed that in large and historic cities, museums and theaters are examples of developing attractions for cultural tourism (Lawrence, 2008). These attractions provide differentiated experiences and thus offer an opportunity to enhance the cultural experience for tourists (Han et al., 2019). The present study, using Richards' (2018) and Du Cros and McKercher (2020) definitions, examines tourists' reviews of cultural and heritage museums in determining the characteristics that contribute to memorable cultural tourism. Heritage can be both tangible and intangible—for example, tangible sites include architecture, museums, artifacts, and parks, and intangibles include local culture and traditions, mythology, poetry, and literature, etc. (Taheri et al., 2020). Quite often, tangible and intangible heritage co-exist, and as a whole, they are also called cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2017). Taheri et al. (2020) emphasized that heritage sites must preserve culture to reap economic benefits from visitors and their engagement with cultural heritage. To sum up, scholars' growing research interest demonstrates the greater importance of memorable tourism experiences from the point of view of tourism destinations, such as visit intentions (Wong et al., 2020) and country image (Kladou et al., 2022), to mention a few. However, in the literature, there is a lack of clarity about the goals of managing a heritage site for memorable tourism experiences (Bec et al., 2019).

### **Memorable tourism experience**

According to many researchers, a memorable tourist experience is the outcome of a tourist's experience in their memory. Memory is “an alliance of systems that work together, allowing us to learn from the past and predict the future” (Baddeley, 1999, p. 1). Memory is said to be a more general concept than “memorable.” For instance, memorable refers to something that is

unforgettable, or is related to something special, while memory, on the other hand, involves general loading of information (Caru & Cova, 2003). In the same vein, Wei et al. (2019) concluded that memory is a continuous natural process that starts with the encoding of experience input and is completed when information is extracted. Some memories last for a very short time, while others are long-lasting. According to Kim (2010), MTEs are affected by the tourist's semantic memory, which refers to the previous knowledge stored in the mind of the tourist in the form of attributes and images, and episodic memory, which is the tourist's involvement in and emotions about the activities. She further suggests that a memorable tourism experience constitutes an episodic memory. Kim et al. (2012) considered MTEs as autobiographical memory, which involves the emotional aspects of tourists.

A recent systematic literature review revealed nine categories of MTEs: tourist intention and behavior, marketing, social media, MTE scale, accommodation and quality of service, gastronomy tourism, cultural tourism, creative tourism, and rural tourism (Hosseini et al., 2021). Kim et al. (2012) developed a generic scale of memorable tourism experiences that includes seven distinctive constructs: novelty, social interaction, local culture, meaningfulness, refreshment, knowledge, and involvement. However, in recent literature, researchers have called for additional research to examine predictors of memorable tourism experiences (Wei et al., 2019). Subsequently, many niche market segments have been investigated, such as memorable coffee tourism experiences (Chen et al., 2021), astrotourism and memorable tourism experiences (Rodrigues et al., 2022), selfie tourism and memorable tourism experiences (Trinanda et al., 2021), and memorable ethnic minority tourism experiences (MEMTEs) (Wong et al., 2020), to mention a few. Considering the scope and application of a memorable tourism experience across a range of tourism settings, a generic scale is insufficient to cover all the factors that make an experience memorable to a tourist. Therefore, another research stream in this regard is ongoing to investigate how certain human elements affect a memorable tourism experience. For example, tourists having higher hedonism attributes are expected to have a positive, memorable tourism experience (Tiwari et al., 2021).

Different researchers have documented several of the benefits of MTE with respect to how it improves service providers' competitiveness (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017), facilitates revisit decisions (Marschall, 2012), and influences word of mouth behavior (Oh et al., 2007). Scholars, like Tung and Ritchie (2011) and Kim (2014), have discussed how to move from merely providing an experience to making it memorable. This is a very crucial question: what makes an experience memorable? (Mgxekwa et al., 2019). Tung and Ritchie (2011) defined it as "an individual's subjective evaluation and undergoing (i.e., affective, cognitive, and behavioral) of events related to his/her tourist activities, which begin before (i.e., planning and preparation), during (i.e., at the destination), and after the trip (i.e., recollection)" (p. 1369). It involves the components that are selectively constructed from a tourist experience, which can be easily remembered, recalled, and reconstructed by a tourist after the trip. Kim et al. (2012) defined a memorable tourism experience as "a tourism experience remembered and recalled after the event has occurred." Also, the aforementioned scholars have specified various experiential dimensions to create a memorable tourism experience, such as refreshment, hedonism, meaningfulness, local culture, knowledge, involvement, and novelty. Zhang et al. (2018) further divided these dimensions into cognitive MTEs, namely meaningfulness, knowledge, and local culture, and affective MTEs, namely refreshment, hedonism, involvement, and novelty. Some researchers also suggest that destination-related attributes and tourist

psychological traits are crucial factors for a memorable tourism experience (Wei et al., 2019). Though several attempts have been made to explore the factors which contribute to MTEs, the results are somewhat mixed and contradictory (Zhang et al., 2018). There is very little knowledge of MTE in terms of cultural tourism. Memories play an important role in engagement and thus tourism scholars argue that creating positive memories in the minds of tourists is more advantageous for tourist destinations than eliciting positive feelings and satisfaction (Angelino et al., 2021). As a memorable tourism experience leads to greater satisfaction and destination loyalty (Azis et al., 2020), understanding tourists' experiences is critical for better managing a cultural tourism attraction (Chen & Rahman, 2018). Thus, the objective of the present study is to identify factors involved in MCTE, such as cultural heritage site attributes that can provide a memorable experience for tourists. Mgxekwa et al. (2017) found seven factors, namely accessibility, quality of service, convenience, interpretation, amenities, modern facilities, and technology. More recently, Seyfi et al. (2020) found six dimensions of a memorable cultural tourism experience: the prior perceived significance of the experience, authenticity, engagement, cultural exchange, culinary attraction, and quality of service.

### **Online reviews**

Online reviews are "peer-generated product evaluations posted on company or third-party websites" (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010, p. 186). Scholars have emphasized that online reviews are valuable information sources for tourism research and practice (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019), as they help us understand the consumer decision-making process (Ye et al., 2011). Online reviews are significant for the tourism industry as they allow visitors to freely express their experiences regarding a tourist destination. These reviews do indeed influence the perceptions of potential consumers (Toral et al., 2018) and affect their choices for products, services, and retailers (Thakur, 2018). Instead of relying on insufficient or sometimes unclear descriptions of products and services, consumers base their decisions on fellow consumers' first-hand experiences (Guo et al., 2017). For instance, consumers regard online content as authentic (Garner, 2022), as it provides useful information and motivation, and thus has a greater ability to convert potential visitors into actual visitors (Ferreira et al., 2022; Rosado-Pinto et al., 2020). From a company's point of view, online reviews are crucial as they provide insights into how to improve the tourist destination, thus helping the company to obtain a competitive advantage (Simeon et al., 2017). Managers of destinations continuously explore and exploit unique attributes that help them create a memorable experience (Toral et al., 2018). Online reviews are also regarded as a key source to gain insights into these attributes (Ferreira et al., 2022). Increasingly, online reviews have been used in tourism and hospitality research (e.g., Jyotsna & Maurya, 2019; Ferreira et al., 2022; Rosado-Pinto et al., 2020). The number of reviews analyzed in such studies has ranged from as few as a hundred to as many as a hundred thousand. With the emergence of Web 2.0, consumers can express their views and experiences. Consumers' views and experiences provide marketers with potential avenues of identifying consumption patterns and predicting future behavior (Jyotsna & Maurya, 2019). To sum up, online reviews are gaining popularity among scholars as they provide unique insights into the tourist experience (Jyotsna & Maurya, 2019; Tan & Yeo, 2020). Thus, we can say that online reviews by tourists represent relevant and credible tourist data that can provide us with insights into memorable cultural tourism experiences.

## Methodology

### Data collection

As of January 2022, TripAdvisor is the most visited website in the travel, tourism, and hospitality category, with 114 million visitors. Expedia, the world's largest online travel agency (OTA), comes in second place with 66 million visitors ("Most visited travel & tourism websites worldwide 2022 j Statista," 2022). Expedia (OTA) only allows its customers to share their feedback on subscribed services. Moreover, in the context of cultural tourism to museums, Expedia seems irrelevant. For example, OTAs such as Expedia have little to do with tourists visiting public places such as museums, and thus obtaining consumer insights about these locations is not very valuable to OTAs. As mentioned previously, TripAdvisor is extremely relevant for this study because it allows anyone to write about their experiences at cultural and tourist attractions, hotels, and restaurants. Also, previous studies on cultural tourism show that online reviews on TripAdvisor are not only relevant (Jyotsna & Maurya, 2019) but also a credible source of tourist cultural experiences (Simeon et al., 2017). More recently, Ganzaroli et al. (2020) have emphasized that TripAdvisor can advance and precipitate tourists' ability to efficiently access, dispense, elaborate, and share information in a symmetrical manner. To sum up, the selection of TripAdvisor instead of other tourism platforms is justified based on its popularity, credibility, ease of free access to tourists, and the high relevance of its reviews for tourism research. According to TripAdvisor's official website, more than one billion reviews and the opinions of nearly eight million businesses are available on TripAdvisor, helping tourists and travelers alike. Furthermore, their travel guidance is available in 43 markets and 22 languages ("US Press Center j About Tripadvisor," 2022). The objective of the study was to explore the factors that contribute to a memorable cultural tourism experience (MCTE) in Asia. Therefore, we have included the maximum number of heritage museums from South Asia to ensure generalizability. A country-wide search for heritage museums was conducted on the TripAdvisor website for each South Asian country. We have included museums that have ratings ranging from 4 to 4.5 but have excluded museums that have only a few reviews. As a result, we found 14 heritage museums in 10 Asian countries (see Table 1). Criteria for the sample size of online reviews have varied across different studies in this line of research. For example, Cenni and Goethals (2017) have analyzed 300 reviews to determine the impact of language differences on review characteristics. Moreover, Jyotsna and Maurya (2019) collected 79 online reviews to explore the indicators of an authentic experience of a village destination. Recently, Ferreira et al. (2022), using 1789 reviews from TripAdvisor, have developed a tourism experience model (TEM). Considering the exploratory nature of this research study, we have collected 502 reviews that were posted by tourists from 29 countries from 2011 to 2019. For details of respondent location, see Table 2.

**Table 1: Museum Location**

Sr No	Country Name	Museums
1	Hong Kong	Hong Kong Heritage Museum Hong Kong Cultural Centre Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre Sun Museum Hong Kong Museum of History
2	Singapore	Asian Civilization Museum
3	India	Bagore ki Haveli Museum



4	Macau	Historic center of Macau
5	Taiwan	Kaidagelan Cultural Museum
6	Pakistan	Lok Virsa
7	Bhutan	National Folk Heritage Museum, Bhutan
8	Korea	National Folk Museum of Korea
9	Japan	Tokyo Camii & Turkish Culture Centre
10	Vietnam	Vietnam Museum of Ethnology

**Table 2: Respondent Location**

Country/Region	Reviews
East/Southeast Asia (China, Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines)	299
South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka)	171
Middle East (Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Oman, Qatar, Jordan, UAE)	32
Total	502

## Data analysis

In previous studies, scholars have used a vast variety of analytical techniques to analyze online reviews, such as regression analysis, content analysis, and advanced techniques of machine learning, namely Naive Bayes classification, LDA, and neural network models, to mention a few (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019). In tourism studies, netnography analysis, which is an analysis of consumers' online reviews of their experiences, is becoming an increasingly popular data analysis technique (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). For example, recently, Jyotsna and Maurya (2019) and Vo Thanh and Kirova (2018) have performed netnographic analysis of tourist reviews posted on TripAdvisor. In comparison to other qualitative research methods, netnography offers greater advantages in terms of storytelling and good understanding of complex social phenomena, thus aiding researchers in developing themes that reflect consumer views on their experience (Vo Thanh & Kirova, 2018). The goal of this study is to find out what makes cultural tourism experiences memorable, and a netnographic analysis of online reviews is thus an appropriate analytical strategy. Following previous studies (e.g., Jyotsna & Maurya, 2019), we used the Nvivo software package and performed content analysis on selected reviews. The content analysis process has yielded the 100 most frequently used words. These frequently used words were used to generate the themes.

To understand the contextual meaning of these words, we have further performed textual analysis to capture the contextual meanings associated with these words. Using a textual analysis query, Nvivo took us to the exact location of a word and thus provided insights into how and why a particular word is used in the review. This analysis further verifies whether the meanings of words were in the context of the focal phenomenon, i.e., the tourist experience in a museum. Besides following previous studies (e.g., Bogicevic et al., 2013), we performed a word tree analysis to enable us to examine how tourists have used specific words, keywords, and phrases. In other words, the word tree branches depict the connections between the

transcribed words. For details, see Figure 1. Finally, we removed the propositions, general words, and similar words, and carefully selected a list of 25 meaningful words. Based on their functional similarities, these words were coded under five themes, and these themes were given titles from previous literature. We found that four of the five themes were closely related to the existing dimensions of tourist experience with cultural attractions. However, we have found an additional novel dimension, namely atmospherics. For details, see Table 3.

## Findings and discussion

This study aims to explore the factors that contribute to memorable cultural tourism experiences in Asia. To achieve the objective, the study analyzed tourists' online reviews of 14 heritage museums in ten Asian countries. Our data analysis reveals five factors that contribute to a memorable cultural tourism experience. Among these five factors, authenticity is the most sought-after, with a higher frequency of occurrence (33%) in the data (see Figure 2). The novel finding of this study is that we have identified a new dimension to MCTE, namely "atmospherics." This newly explored dimension was present in approximately 18% of reviews, and its frequency of occurrence was 324.

**Table 3**

Contributing factors	Frequently repeated words	Frequency
Authenticity	Culture, History, Heritage, Old, People, Architecture, Building	619
Engagement	Good, Great, Interesting, Nice, Dance	473
Culinary Attraction	Food, Nice	53
Atmospherics	Well, Exhibition, Display, Beautiful	324
Quality of Service	Free, Fee, Entrance, Worth, Station, Located, Walk, Quite	392

**Figure 1: Word Tree for the term**

## Text Search Query - Results Preview



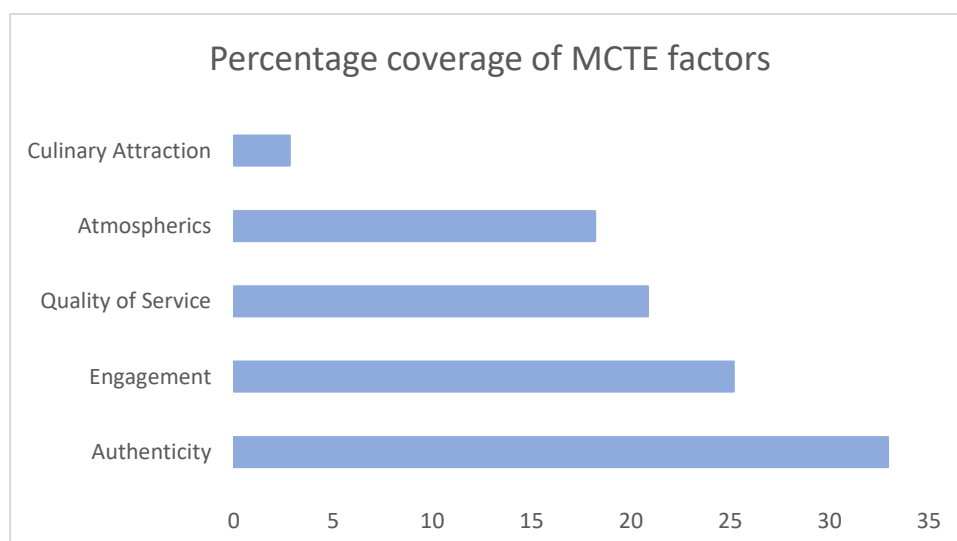
## Authenticity

Recently, Seyfi et al. (2020), based on content analysis of tourists' interviews, found authenticity as one of the dimensions of a memorable cultural tourism experience. Our analysis of tourist online reviews also supports the notion that "authenticity" is indeed a factor that contributes to the MCTE. According to the authors, tourists' novel and authentic perceptions of the destination, such as living history, living heritage, inspiration from the buildings' architecture and impressions, and peculiarities regarding interior design and architecture, lead to authenticity. Content analysis in the present study revealed that culture, history, heritage, old people, architecture, and building are the most repeated words, consistent with Seyfi et al. (2020) findings. Some of the original reviews are provided as examples in Table 4. From these responses, we can see that tourists are intrigued by the authenticity of culture, artifacts, history, and heritage, to mention a few.

**Table 4 Sample Response: Authenticity**

<i>Good exposure to Chinese culture and art: outstanding special exhibits once in a while.</i>
<i>It's definitely a visit to get to know more about the ancient China and HK history.</i>
<i>Good for kids to learn Hong Kong Heritage.</i>
<i>Very old artifacts and paintings, even to the modern ones. Each and every gallery took hours to be explored.</i>
<i>It is marvel of wonder to look at the history and observe how people from the past live.</i>
<i>Good demonstration of traditional architecture multi storied Bhutanese house.</i>
<i>I was really fascinated by the building structure itself.</i>

**Figure 2**



The concept of authenticity emerged to differentiate the economic valuation of authentic and non-authentic artwork in museums. Later, it was adapted by different lines of tourism research (Dominguez-Quintero et al., 2020). Hence, it is considered a fundamental concept in cultural

tourism consumption (Casteran & Roederer, 2013). It is defined as the “genuineness of a tourist destination” (MacCannell, 1973, p. 590). It is divided into three dimensions: object authenticity, constructive authenticity, and existential authenticity (Lee et al., 2016). Objective authenticity is an inherent characteristic of an object that helps tourists interpret whether an object is authentic—in other words, the characteristics that make it a museum-like property (Wang, 1999). Constructive authenticity, on the other hand, is the subjective interpretation of objective characteristics rather than their inherent characteristics (Lee et al., 2016). Existential authenticity in turn is a prospective state of personal connection with a tourist destination, which emerges by participation in tourist activities (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Reisinger (1994) noted that authenticity is one of the aspects that cultural tourists commonly desire their destination to fulfill. Hence, based on the discussion, it can be argued that the most repeated words fall into the category of authenticity and are composed into a dimension of memorable cultural tourism experience.

## Engagement

The findings of the study revealed that the second dimension of a memorable cultural tourism experience is engagement. Recently, Seyfi et al. (2020) have defined the criteria for engagement as constituting absorption, passion, and enthusiasm for visiting a cultural site. Word query analysis as well as word search analysis revealed similar words like “good,” “great,” “interesting,” “nice” and “dance.” Some of the related online reviews are presented in Table 5. We can see that tourists have expressed their engagement with several words, such as “surprising,” “great,” “interesting” and “amazing.” Visitor engagement is defined as “paying attention to the exhibit by looking at it, reading accompanying labels or directions, and touching or manipulating the exhibit” (Boisvert & Slez, 1994). Engagement usually includes emotional connection, attachment, devotion, and commitment toward a tourist destination (Taheri et al., 2014). Since it has been studied in related disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, organizational behavior, and marketing, literature in tourism research is scarce (Brodie et al., 2011), but has gained traction in recent years (Bryce et al., 2015). For example, Chen and Rahman (2018) claimed that visitor engagement influences memorable tourism experiences in a cultural tourism context. A good understanding of customer engagement with the destination can lead to better management and marketing of heritage sites (Bryce et al., 2015). Alrawadieh et al. (2019) predicted that an engaged visitor has a greater level of destination loyalty toward a heritage tourism site.

**Table 5 Sample Response: Engagement**

<i>This museum is surprisingly good.</i>
<i>Great displays plenty to see and never crowded.</i>
<i>Very interesting indeed!</i>
<i>We could have spent even more time in this nice and quiet museum but we had other commitments.</i>
<i>Thanks to my cousin, I could experience the amazing dance show at this place.</i>
<i>This museum is surprisingly good.</i>

## Culinary attraction

The third dimension of a memorable tourism experience revealed by this study was culinary attraction. This finding is also in line with previous research, e.g., according to the criteria given by Seyfi et al. (2020), which are cuisine, cheese, recipes, etc. Drawing inferences from

this framework, word query analysis revealed only the word “food,” while text search analysis revealed the repeated use of “nice” as an adjective preceding cafe, restaurant, etc. Hence, we included culinary-related responses of “nice” in the culinary attraction dimension as well. A sample of the results of the text search analysis for this category is provided in Table 6. The following examples clearly show that tourists are indeed talking about the culinary experience, such as nice cafes, delicious food, etc. Culinary tourism is a niche of the tourism industry that is defined as “emphasizing unique foods and dishes from the culture of the host region” (Green & Dougherty, 2008, p. 148). Liu (2016) asserted that culinary attraction has two aspects, namely food quality and novelty, and that these dimensions are intertwined. Agyeiwaah et al. (2019) concluded that food commonly serves two purposes. For example, it is a biological need as well as an experiential element of the cultural appeal of a destination. Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2014) claimed that offering culinary experiences to visitors is a worthwhile option that represents a valuable cultural dimension for both the hosts and guests. According to Lee (2015), food is a primary factor in the overall experience of cultural tourism, which the tourist will remember for a long time and consider in future decision-making.

**Table 6 Sample Response: Culinary Attraction**

<i>There is café downstairs serving food.</i>
<i>There's a nice café here which can be bonus.</i>
<i>Portuguese egg tart, nougat, etc. Delicious but pricey.</i>
<i>Buy the local wine. It tastes like whiskey.</i>
<i>A good taste of “Ara” the local drink made of rice...</i>

## Atmospherics

The fourth dimension of a memorable cultural tourism experience that we have identified is the atmospherics of the museum. Under this category, tourists have mentioned exhibitions, displays, and beautiful things. The result of the text search analysis is presented below in Table 7. The example below clearly shows that tourists are indeed talking about the atmospherics, such as organization, display, ambience, etc. Kotler (1973) coined the term “atmospherics,” which he defined as the intentional control and design of physical environment cues. It constitutes all the efforts that a service provider employs to create an emotional environment to increase the probability of consumption. According to Kotler (1973), atmosphere is a powerful tool for increasing sales, retaining customers, influencing consumer decision-making, and dividing socioeconomic class and lifestyle. Baker (1986) renamed atmospherics as “service environment” and categorized it into three groups of elements: design factors, which include clutter, color, and layout; social factors, including individuals such as customers and employees; and finally, ambience factors, including fragrance, light, and sound, etc. Atmospheric cues were first offered by Kotler as a means to enhance purchase probability. By that time, implications were found in other contexts like destination characteristics (Chung & Shin, 2004; Volgger, 2019). Mattila and Gao (2017) reported that atmospherics have a positive impact on the flow of tourist experiences and the meanings that tourists attach to them. Bonn et al. (2007) were pioneers in noticing that atmospherics are a significant part of creating an

ideal experience for cultural tourists. Hence, they argued that design, ambience, display, attraction, and exhibit are important considerations for cultural and heritage attractions. Recently, Tan and Yeo (2020) collected customer reviews from TripAdvisor regarding three pastry shops in a UNESCO heritage city to examine the tourist experience. Their study found that atmospheric was a significant dimension of the tourist experience in their examination. Reisinger (1994) claimed that atmosphere is one of the elements of cultural products desired by cultural tourists. Based on our analysis, we believe that atmospherics are a part of the cultural tourism experience that will be memorable.

**Table 7 Sample Response: Atmospherics**

<i>The whole museum is well organized, and you will learn a lot in short time.</i>
<i>The exhibition I saw is about traditional Chinese painting and all of the artwork is carefully selected.</i>
<i>Different types of houses on display outdoors are fascinating.</i>
<i>It is intimate, ambience is beautiful and it's not overwhelming.</i>

### **Quality of service**

Our analysis revealed the quality of service as the fifth dimension of a memorable cultural tourism experience. Seyfi et al. (2020) include public transport, taxi drivers, tour guides, lodging, shopping, traffic, safety, and security as indicators of the quality of service. In the present study, the analysis revealed that free, fee, entrance, worth, station, located, walk, and quiet were the most repeated words used by tourists in online reviews in the context of the quality of service. Sample reviews for text search analysis are presented in Table 8. The example below clearly shows that tourists are indeed talking about quality of service, such as cheap fees, worth spending money on, and easy to reach location.

Ryan (1997) defines the quality of service as the gap between tourists' expectations and perceptions of the performance of the service. Moon and Han (2019) concluded that the tourist experience is very much interlinked with the perception of cost. Similarly, value and price are very important considerations for tourists while predicting the quality of their experience. Alcoba et al. (2017) noted that quality of service is the basic element of a service provider's image, which is an individual's perception of the provider based on the meaning they create from a service experience. Seyfi et al. (2020) explain that quality of service enhances tourists' memorable experiences. Tan and Yeo (2020) found that service quality is the utmost dimension of the tourist experience, which led them to revisit the decision. Hence, the results of word query analysis and text search analysis proved that customers have shown deep concerns about value, prices, and costs.

**Table 8 Sample Response: Quality of Service**

<i>Free museum full of history and heritage exhibitions.</i>
<i>Getting there is easy by KCR train and the entrance fee is only HKD 10.</i>

<i>The entrance fee was very cheap.</i>
<i>It is worth every penny you spend on it.</i>
<i>It located in Tsim Sha Tsui 5 mins walk to MTR station, and 2 mins walk Star Ferry.</i>
<i>While it is located in industrial area and requires a short walk from the metro it demonstrate how passionate individuals in Hong Kong are dedicated to promote Chinese art to the local and tourists.</i>
<i>Located in Tai Wai, bit walkable distance from Tai Wai MTR.</i>
<i>This museum is quite out of the way but it is not very difficult to find.</i>

## Conclusions

Customer experience is becoming a core concept in the tourism sector. Similarly, MTE is now gaining the attention of many researchers. Multiple studies have been conducted, utilizing numerous methodologies. However, previous researchers suggest that there is a scarcity of literature on the factors that contribute to a memorable cultural tourism experience (MCTE). This study is an attempt to improve the understanding and interpretation of memorable tourism experiences in the context of Asian heritage museums. For this purpose, qualitative data was collected from a popular tourism website, TripAdvisor, and a grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data to gain insights. Five dimensions of a memorable cultural tourism experience were found by the study, namely, authenticity, engagement, culinary attractions, atmospherics, and quality of service. By using a different data set, which is online reviews, and methodology, i.e., netnography, the overall results were in line with the previous research. Notably, this study contributed to the existing literature on memorable cultural tourism experiences by adding a new dimension. Based on previous literature, it is named atmospherics. Cultural tourism is a growing sector that offers numerous avenues for researchers. Based on behavioral theories, it is highly likely that finding the exact components of a memorable cultural tourism experience will help the researcher to seek their influence on the multiple behavioral responses of tourists. According to the managerial viewpoint, the results of this study are very significant, as it has been documented in the literature that established destinations seldom focus on the experiential needs of tourists. Understanding of MCTEs will be very helpful for managers of cultural sites or museums. Previous literature suggests that it is of major importance to create a memorable experience during every visit because this encourages revisits and long-term relationships with visitors. All authentic, objective and subjective features of the cultural museum must be present in conjunction with high-quality service, superior cuisine, and a welcoming ambiance.

## Limitations and future research

Overall, this study provides a deeper understanding of memorable cultural tourism experiences. However, the study has a few limitations. For example, the interpretation of secondary data based on tourist feedback can involve the researcher's personal bias. Since the data is collected for museums located in multiple countries in Asia, the results can only be generalized to museum management in Asian markets. Future researchers should conduct similar studies on other types of cultural sites, for example, cultural festivals and industrial heritage, etc. Due to its museum setting, the present study found five components or dimensions of tourist experience, which are authenticity, engagement, culinary attraction, atmospherics, and quality



of service. Perhaps future research may be able to add another dimension based on cultural festivals or industrial heritage. Future researchers may also extend the findings by collecting large-scale primary data. Similarly, it could be interesting to examine the impact of a memorable cultural tourism experience on behavioral intentions, for example, to pay a premium and revisit the attraction. Finally, future researchers may perform a cross-cultural comparison of online reviews to gain insights into similarities and differences in MCTE across cultures.

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