

# THE INFLUENCE OF PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY AND NOSTALGIC EMOTION ON MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES: EVIDENCE FROM HERITAGE VISITORS TO HUE CITY, VIETNAM

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**Abstract** – *In the context of heritage tourism, authenticity and nostalgia are regarded as core elements shaping memorable tourism experiences. This study examined the effects of three dimensions of perceived authenticity (object-based, constructive, and existential) and two forms of nostalgia (personal and historical) on tourists' memorable experiences in Hue City. Data were collected from 240 domestic and international visitors in 2024 and analyzed using factor analysis and linear regression. The findings revealed that object-based authenticity and both forms of nostalgia exert positive and statistically significant effects on memorable tourism experiences, with personal nostalgia emerging as the strongest predictor. In contrast, constructive and existential authenticity showed no significant effects, reflecting the contextual characteristics of Hue's heritage tourism, where experiences are influenced more by preservation practices, collective cultural values, and institutionalized interpretations than by individual meaning-making. Theoretically, this study contributes to expanding the cognition–affect framework in heritage tourism by clarifying the differentiated roles of authenticity and nostalgia in shaping memorable experiences. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of preserving original heritage values and designing evocative, memory-based experiences to strengthen tourists' emotional attachment and cultural connection to destinations such as Hue City.*

**Keywords:** *authenticity heritage tourism, Hue City, memorable tourism experience, nostalgia.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the rapid expansion of cultural tourism, heritage sites are increasingly regarded not only as repositories of historical value but also as pivotal arenas for generating emotionally and personally meaningful tourism experiences [1–6]. As one of Vietnam's most iconic cultural heritage cities, Hue City presents an ideal setting for exploring the interrelationships between authenticity, nostalgia, and memorable tourism experience (MTE).

A substantial body of research has affirmed the centrality of authenticity in heritage tourism, emphasizing its role as a critical determinant of tourist satisfaction and perceived value [7, 8]. In parallel, nostalgia, encompassing both personal and historical dimensions, has been recognized as a significant psychological mechanism that stimulates travel motivation and deepens engagement with heritage destinations [7, 9, 10]. Nevertheless, there remains a notable paucity of empirical research that elucidates how these two constructs interact to shape memorable tourism experiences, particularly within the Southeast Asian context of Hue City, where distinctive historical and cultural narratives underpin the visitor experience.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to investigate the relationships among perceived authenticity, nostalgic emotions, and memorable tourism experiences in heritage tourism settings. Specifically, the study examines how different dimensions of authenticity and nostalgia influence tourists' MTEs at major heritage sites in Hue City. The research focuses on domestic and international tourists visiting UNESCO-recognized heritage attractions in Hue, thereby clearly defining the research object and scope. Structurally,

the study first reviews relevant theoretical and empirical literature, followed by the development of hypotheses and a conceptual framework, the presentation of research methodology and empirical findings, and finally a discussion of theoretical and managerial implications.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Heritage tourism*

According to ICOMOS [11], heritage is defined as ‘monuments and sites of historical importance’. This definition was later broadened by UNESCO [12] to include cultural elements. Similarly, Timothy [13] stated that heritage refers to what is passed down from the past and holds significance in the present.

In the Vietnamese context, the Cultural Heritage Law [14] classifies heritage into three categories: cultural heritage, natural heritage, and inherited heritage. This study focuses specifically on cultural heritage, which, according to Article 1 of the Law, encompasses ‘material and spiritual values with exceptional scientific, cultural, and historical significance that are preserved and transmitted from previous generations to future ones’ [14]. Therefore, cultural heritage can be broadly understood as encompassing both tangible and intangible cultural expressions handed down from earlier generations, such as monuments, festivals, customs, and traditions that continue to exist and hold meaning for the nation.

### B. *Nostalgic emotion*

Nostalgia is considered a psychological need and an affective state characterized by a high degree of subjectivity [15]. The sources of nostalgia are not limited to one’s personal past experiences [16, 17], but may also derive from an aspirational longing for times or experiences never personally encountered. In the tourism context, nostalgia does not necessarily arise from an individual’s lived experiences; rather, it can emerge through their imaginative connection with another time period [18].

Holak et al. [19] distinguished between personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia. Personal

nostalgia is rooted in individual memories and can be triggered by external stimuli (e.g., familiar places, music, lyrics, scents, and tastes) or internal emotional states [10]. It leads tourists to seek familiar objects or settings that are personally meaningful, often evoking memories of lost places, past relationships, or bygone lifestyles. Personal nostalgia enables tourists to relive cherished moments, reinforcing their self-identity and personal values by reconnecting with their roots.

Conversely, historical nostalgia is constructed from collective memories associated with a particular historical era. It is typically triggered by external stimuli such as direct engagement with cultural rituals or commemorative activities related to historical figures or events [19], or indirectly through books, films, media, or virtual reality technologies. Even mediated experiences can evoke powerful emotional responses, leading individuals to form strong attachments to historical periods they never personally experienced [20], a phenomenon referred to as ‘pseudo-nostalgia’ [21] or ‘vicarious nostalgia’ [19].

### C. *Perceived authenticity*

Authenticity has emerged as a central concept in tourism research, particularly within heritage tourism, where it significantly influences how visitors interpret and emotionally engage with a destination. MacCannell [22, 23] and Kolar et al. [24] were among the first to introduce the concept of ‘staged authenticity’, suggesting that modern tourists, in their pursuit of the ‘real’, often participate in orchestrated experiences that cater to their expectations. Although these experiences may be performative, they are often perceived by tourists as authentic and emotionally resonant.

Building upon this, Wang [25] developed a multidimensional framework of authenticity, which includes objective authenticity (related to the originality and material integrity of heritage objects and sites), constructive authenticity (formed through social discourse and tourists’ expectations), and existential authenticity (emerging from personal emotions and self-actualization during travel experiences).

Chhabra et al. [8] later introduced the concept of ‘neo-authenticity’, emphasizing authenticity as a dynamic and negotiated construct among various stakeholders (tourists, local communities, and organizers), particularly in performative heritage settings. This perspective underscores the socially constructed, context-dependent, and fluid nature of authenticity in contemporary tourism.

This study adopts Wang’s [25] three-dimensional authenticity framework, comprising perceptions of objective, constructive, and existential authenticity as a theoretical lens to analyze the interplay of personal and social factors in shaping meaningful and memorable heritage tourism experiences. This framework has also been applied in studies by Belhassen et al. [26] and Park et al. [27], demonstrating its academic robustness and adaptability.

#### *D. Memorable heritage tourism experience*

Kim et al. [28] conceptualize MTEs as tourism encounters that leave a lasting positive impression on individuals and are selectively recalled over time based on personal evaluations of the experience. Subsequent studies have validated the robustness and applicability of the MTE framework across various tourism contexts, highlighting its effectiveness in capturing the multidimensional nature of tourist experiences [29–31].

A growing body of literature underscores the strategic value of enhancing tourists’ positive memories, noting that such memories foster long-term relationships with destinations and encourage favorable post-visit behaviors such as positive word-of-mouth and revisit intentions [2–4, 32, 33]. Given its empirical validity and widespread adoption, the current study employs the MTE construct as a foundational framework for examining the psychological mechanisms that shape tourist behavior in the context of heritage tourism.

#### *E. The relationship between perception of authenticity, nostalgic emotion, and memorable tourism experience*

In the field of cultural tourism, nostalgic emotion, perceived authenticity, and MTE are identified as critical factors influencing tourist behavior. Leong et al. [9] emphasized that nostalgia plays an essential role in destination choice, particularly for historically significant sites, and contributes to destination loyalty by fostering social connectedness. Building on this, Lee [33] demonstrated that nostalgia mediates the relationship between cultural attractiveness and memorable experiences at repurposed heritage sites.

From a managerial perspective, Kolar et al. [24] conceptualized authenticity as a perceptual construct comprising two dimensions: object-based and existential authenticity, which influence destination loyalty through tourism experience. In the study of Coudounaris et al. [31], they identified key components of MTE, including enjoyment, local culture, involvement, and knowledge, as antecedents of positive tourist behavior. Rasoolimanesh et al. [2] highlighted the mediating role of MTE in transforming perceptions of authenticity and destination image into behavioral intentions such as revisit and recommendation. Additionally, Han et al. [7] found that personal nostalgia and existential authenticity serve as primary drivers for sharing heritage tourism experiences on social media.

In the Vietnamese context, Truong et al. [34] demonstrated the positive influence of perceived authenticity on experience quality and tourist satisfaction. Similarly, Huyen et al. [35] confirmed the mediating role of existential authenticity in the relationship between cultural motivation and revisit intention to Hue’s heritage sites.

However, existing studies predominantly focus on isolated relationships and lack integrative models that comprehensively explain the mechanisms connecting nostalgia, authenticity, and MTE in heritage tourism behavior. Particularly in the case of Hue City, a cultural emblem of Vietnam, exploring these interrelationships offers practical insights for developing heritage tourism

products and communication strategies that align with the expectations of modern tourists.

### III. RESEARCH METHODS

#### A. Research model and hypotheses

##### **Objective authenticity and memorable tourism experience**

Objective authenticity (OA) refers to tourists' perception of the originality and unaltered nature of artifacts, architecture, or physical space at the destination. It is typically associated with tangible heritage elements such as monuments, relics, and traditional buildings, which serve as highlights in heritage tourism. According to Zhang et al. [36], when visitors perceive the original and historical value of a place through authentic artifacts or spaces, they are more likely to evoke nostalgic feelings, increasing emotional engagement and the perceived uniqueness of the experience. Rasoolimanesh et al. [2] further demonstrated that perceived authenticity plays a crucial role in shaping positive and memorable experiences. Therefore, it is hypothesized that the perception of originality in space, artifacts, and landscape at heritage sites positively influences tourists' memorable experiences.

H1: OA has a positive impact on MTE in Hue City.

##### **Constructive authenticity and memorable tourism experience**

Constructive authenticity (CA) refers to authenticity as subjectively interpreted and constructed by tourists based on their perceptions, expectations, and desires rather than the destination's intrinsic originality. Visitors may perceive an experience as 'authentic' if it aligns with their imagined or desired representations. In heritage tourism contexts, where preserving authenticity balances with tourists' expectations, constructive authenticity is particularly relevant. Studies by Rasoolimanesh et al. [2] and Han et al. [7] suggested that both objective and constructive forms of authenticity significantly influence tourists' satisfaction and memory retention. Thus, when experiences align with or surpass personal

expectations, tourists are more likely to consider them memorable.

H2: CA has a positive impact on MTE in Hue City.

##### **Existential authenticity and memorable tourism experience**

Existential authenticity (EA) is derived from an individual's internal sense of truth, emerging when one lives fully in the moment and feels free to express their true self. In tourism, this form of authenticity is often elicited through meaningful activities, immersive cultural engagement, or deep interaction with surroundings. According to Han et al. [7], EA can trigger positive emotions and personal connection with the destination, resulting in intrinsically memorable experiences. Authenticity fundamentally shapes tourists' perceptions and emotions, converting interactions into profound and positive memories [2].

H3: EA has a positive impact on MTE in Hue City.

##### **Historical nostalgia and memorable tourism experience**

Historical nostalgia (HN) is a sentimental longing for a historical period that may not be personally experienced but is constructed through education, media, or collective imagination. In heritage tourism, elements such as ancient architecture, historical reenactments, and traditional festivals can evoke this emotional connection. Particularly, HN fosters cultural appreciation, enhances awareness, and strengthens emotional bonding with the site, which leads to deeper and more memorable experiences [7, 9]. It also enhances satisfaction and encourages revisitation or destination advocacy.

H4: HN has a positive impact on MTE in Hue City.

##### **Personal nostalgia and memorable tourism experience**

Personal nostalgia (PN) involves individual memories and deep emotions related to one's past, often triggered by sensory cues or familiar experiences. In heritage tourism, elements like traditional architecture, folk culture, or familiar landscapes can stimulate these memories, creating strong emotional ties to the destination.

Han et al. [7] highlighted PN as a critical factor in motivating tourists to share their experiences. Moreover, nostalgia aroused during travel can intensify the meaningfulness of the experience, thereby enhancing memorability [2, 9].

H5: PN has a positive impact on MTE in Hue City.

Based on a synthesis of global and Vietnamese literature, the proposed research model, illustrated in Figure 1, incorporates dimensions of authenticity (objective, constructive, and existential) as conceptualized by Wang [25] and Han et al. [7] and nostalgia (historical and personal) based on the study of Han et al. [7], to examine their impact on memorable heritage tourism experience, using measurement scales from Meeprom et al. [37] (see Table 1).

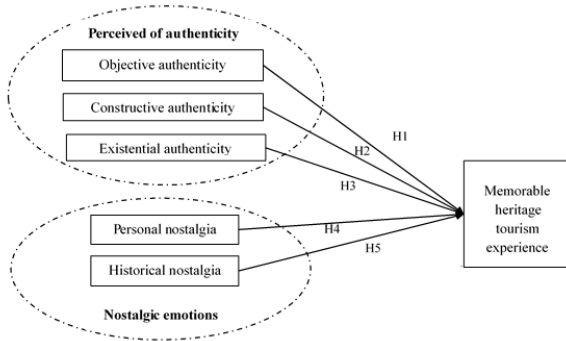


Fig. 1: Proposed research model

**B. Research sample**

Primary data for this study were collected through surveys of domestic and international tourists who had visited heritage sites in Hue Imperial City, the Tombs of Tu Duc, Minh Mang, and Khai Dinh, which are core components of the UNESCO-listed Complex of Hue Monuments [38]. These sites are also among the most visited heritage attractions in Hue, consistently attracting the largest numbers of tourists to the city [39].

- Sampling method: Convenience sampling was employed due to difficulties in accessing a complete sampling frame and the practical challenges of field data collection.

Table 1: Proposed measurement scale

No.	Statement	Code	Source
1. Objective authenticity			
1.1	Heritage elements (e.g., buildings, landscapes) are well-preserved.	OA1	[7, 25]
1.2	I think the heritage sites (e.g., buildings, landscape) here are authentic.	OA2	
1.3	I think the heritage sites (e.g., buildings, landscape) here present local history and culture well.	OA3	
2. Constructive authenticity			
2.1	The overall impression of the heritage inspired me.	CA1	[7, 25]
2.2	I liked the way the site blends with the attractive landscape/scenery/historical ensemble, which offers many other interesting places for sightseeing.	CA2	
2.3	I like the related history about the site and found it interesting.	CA3	
3. Existential authenticity			
3.1	During the visit, I felt the related history, legends, and historical personalities.	EA1	[7, 25]
3.2	I become more self-aware and subjective at this heritage site.	EA2	
3.3	I am able to discover more about myself and life in this atmosphere at this heritage site.	EA3	
4. Personal nostalgia			
4.1	Visiting here felt like returning to the past.	PN1	[7]
4.2	Architecture, landscapes, and atmosphere here reminded me of precious personal memories.	PN2	
4.3	Visiting these heritage sites made me feel connected to my own past.	PN3	
5. Historical nostalgia			
5.1	I can perceive the change that has occurred here between the past and the present.	HN1	[7]
5.2	I can imagine life in this place as it used to be.	HN2	
5.3	This place helps me imagine what previous generations were like.	HN3	
6. Memorable heritage tourism experience			
6.1	I have wonderful memories of my recent heritage tourism experience	MTE1	[37]
6.2	I will not forget my recent heritage tourism experience	MTE2	
6.3	I will remember my recent heritage tourism experience	MTE3	

- Sample size: Exploratory factor analysis and linear regression were conducted to test the hypotheses. According to Hair et al. [40], the minimum sample size should be five times the number of observed variables. With 15 variables in this study, the minimum requirement was 75 respondents. Additionally, based on the regression formula by Tabachnick et al. [41]:  $n = 50 + m \cdot 8$  (where  $m$  = number of independent variables), with five independent variables, the required minimum sample is 130. To mitigate risks of incomplete responses, the study targeted double the minimum sample size, aiming for 260 participants. Data were collected via both online (Google Forms) and face-to-face surveys. A total of 240 valid responses were obtained, meeting

the required sample size.

### C. Data analysis method

The study employed SPSS 26.0 for data processing. Exploratory factor analysis and linear regression were used to test the relationships between authenticity dimensions, nostalgia, and MTE among visitors to Hue City.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Sample structure

The statistical analysis reveals a relatively balanced gender distribution among visitors to heritage sites in Hue. Specifically, male respondents accounted for 121 individuals (50.9%), while female tourists comprised 117 individuals (49.1%).

The occupational structure of tourists visiting Hue City exhibits a diverse profile, reflecting a wide range of target customer segments. The group of office workers and public servants represented the highest proportion (30.7%), followed closely by business professionals (27.3%), suggesting strong purchasing power and demand for high-quality tourism services. Other groups, such as manual laborers (11.3%) and students (10.1%), though smaller in proportion, still demonstrate potential for future market development.

Income data from 230 out of 240 surveyed tourists indicates clear stratification among visitors to Hue City's heritage sites, offering important implications for destination management. Notably, the group with a monthly income above 10 million VND constituted the largest segment (38.7%), highlighting a high-income visitor base. Conversely, those earning less than 5 million VND per month made up the smallest group (10%), consisting mainly of students, retirees, and low-income workers.

About educational background, educational attainment data from 237 out of 240 participants indicate a pronounced trend: the majority of heritage tourists possess high levels of education. Specifically, university graduates comprised the largest segment (51.1%), followed by those holding postgraduate degrees (18.6%). Together, these

groups accounted for nearly 70% of the sample, suggesting that the destination holds particular appeal for intellectuals, researchers, lecturers, and individuals with a deep interest in history and culture.

The data also reveals a nearly even distribution between domestic and international respondents. International tourists accounted for 50.4% of the sample, while domestic visitors comprised 49.6%, reflecting Hue City's balanced appeal to both local and foreign markets.

### B. The relationship between authenticity, nostalgia, and memorable tourism experience

#### Reliability assessment of measurement scales

**Independent variables:** To ensure the reliability of the measurement scales used to assess the influence of perceived authenticity and nostalgia on MTE, Cronbach's Alpha reliability tests were conducted for 15 observed variables. The results show that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each construct are OA = 0.893; CA = 0.792; EA = 0.783; PN = 0.743, and HN = 0.831. All Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency [42]. Furthermore, each observed item showed a corrected item-total correlation greater than 0.30 and had an item-specific alpha value lower than the overall alpha of the construct, confirming that all items meet the required conditions for factor analysis (see Table 2).

**Dependent variable:** Regarding the dependent construct (MTE), the Cronbach's Alpha value based on three observed indicators was 0.756. All items demonstrated corrected item-total correlations above 0.30, and the value of Cronbach's Alpha would decrease if any item were deleted, suggesting that each item contributes meaningfully to the internal consistency of the scale. These results validate the appropriateness of the MTE scale for subsequent factor analysis, which is shown in Table 3.

#### Exploratory factor analysis

To assess the conditions for factor analysis, it is necessary to evaluate the suitability of the data

Table 2: Rotated component matrix for independent variables

Variables	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
OA2	0.893				
OA1	0.881				
OA3	0.766				
HN2		0.899			
HN1		0.791			
HN3		0.763			
EA2			0.849		
EA3			0.805		
EA1			0.700		
CA2				0.865	
CA1				0.756	
CA3				0.727	
PN2					0.907
PN3					0.859
PN1					0.578

Table 3: Rotated component matrix for dependent variables

Variable	Factor
MTE1	0.861
MTE2	0.844
MTE3	0.756

using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett’s test of sphericity. The factor extraction method employed is principal component analysis, accompanied by Varimax rotation.

EFA for independent variables: The KMO and Bartlett’s test for factor analysis showed that the KMO coefficient was 0.778, satisfying the condition  $0.5 \leq KMO \leq 1$ , which indicates that the data are suitable for exploratory factor analysis. In addition, with a significance level of 0 (Sig. = 0.000), the observed variables are correlated with each other, meaning that the measurement variables reflect different aspects of the same underlying factor. The results of the factor analysis showed an eigenvalue of 1.166 (greater than 1). Using principal component extraction and Varimax rotation, five factors were extracted from the 15 variables, with a total explained variance of 75.12% (greater than 50%), thus meeting the analytical requirements. This indicates that 75.12% of the variance in the dataset is explained by the observed variables. Based on the rotated

component matrix, all 15 observed variables had factor loadings greater than 0.5, satisfying the required threshold.

EFA for the dependent variable: The MTE construct, measured through three observed variables, was also subjected to EFA to confirm its factorial validity. The KMO and Bartlett’s test showed a KMO value of 0.802, satisfying the condition  $0.5 \leq KMO \leq 1$ , indicating that the data are suitable for exploratory factor analysis. With a significance level of 0 (Sig. = 0.000), the observed variables are correlated. The factor analysis, with an eigenvalue of 1.376 (greater than 1) using principal component extraction and Varimax rotation, extracted one factor from three variables with an explained variance of 67.47% (greater than 50%), meeting the requirement. All three observed variables had factor loadings greater than 0.5, confirming their validity.

**Multiple linear regression analysis and hypothesis testing**

Following the exploratory factor analysis, the study proceeded with multiple linear regression analysis to test the proposed hypotheses and examine the extent to which the constructs of authenticity and nostalgia influence tourists’ MTE in Hue City.

The regression results assessing the impact of the identified factors on MTE are presented in Table 4. In terms of model fit, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was found to be 0.682, indicating that approximately 68.2% of the variance in the dependent variable (MTE) is explained by the independent variables included in the model. Additionally, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all predictors were below the critical threshold of 10, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a concern in this model [43].

To evaluate the overall fit of the regression model, an F-test was conducted to assess whether the dependent variable is linearly related to the set of independent variables. The ANOVA results revealed a highly significant F-value with a p-value (Sig.) = 0.000, indicating that the model as a whole is statistically significant. In other words, the set of independent variables

collectively provides a strong explanation for variations in tourists’ memorable experiences at heritage destinations in Hue City. This underscores the explanatory power and validity of the model in capturing key psychological mechanisms shaping visitor experiences in the heritage tourism context.

Table 4: Regression analysis results

Model	Unstandardized regression coefficient (Beta)		Standardized regression coefficient (Beta)	Sig.	VIF
	Beta	SE	Beta		
Constant	0.611	0.445	-	0.173	-
OA	0.203	0.079	0.213	0.012	1.457
CA	0.109	0.091	0.107	<b>0.238</b>	<b>1.767</b>
EA	0.110	0.086	0.110	<b>0.202</b>	<b>1.456</b>
HN	0.173	0.083	0.179	0.038	1.233
PN	0.278	0.083	0.263	0.001	1.378

The regression results indicate that the independent variables: OA, PN, and HN are statistically significant, with p-values (Sig.) less than 0.05. Table 4 demonstrates that these factors have a significant impact on MTE in Hue.

Conversely, CA and EA did not show statistically significant effects on MTE, as their p-values exceeded the conventional threshold of 0.05. Accordingly, the standardized regression model can be specified as Equation (1).

$$MTE = 0,611 + 0,213 OA + 0,179HN + 0,263PN \quad (1)$$

Table 5: Results of research hypotheses based on linear regression analysis

Hypotheses	Beta	P-values	Conclusion
H1: OA → MTE	0.213	0.000	Accepted
H2: CA → MTE	0.107	0.238	Rejected
H3: EA → MTE	0.110	0.202	Rejected
H4: HN → MTE	0.179	0.038	Accepted
H5: PN → MTE	0.263	0.001	Accepted

The hypothesis testing results of the proposed research model reveal that three factors have a statistically significant and positive influence on MTE among heritage tourists in Hue: OA, HN, and PN. Among them, OA exerted the strongest influence, with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.370 and a p-value < 0.001. This finding underscores the pivotal role of authenticity reflected in tangible elements such as architecture, artifacts,

and landscapes in shaping deeply memorable experiences for visitors.

PN also had a substantial impact on MTE, with a beta coefficient of 0.263 and a p-value of 0.001. This suggests that emotionally evocative elements that trigger personal memories from the past significantly enhance tourist satisfaction and the memorability of the visit. Likewise, HN was found to have a positive effect on MTE ( $\beta = 0.179, p = 0.038$ ), reflecting tourists’ desire to connect with collective memories and the historical-cultural depth of heritage destinations.

The findings, displayed in Table 5, revealed that CA and EA did not exert a statistically significant effect on MTE (EA  $\beta = 0.110, p = 0.202$ ; CA  $\beta = 0.107, p = 0.238$ ). This suggests that within the context of Hue City’s heritage tourism, MTE is not primarily derived from existential or constructive forms of authenticity, but rather is more strongly influenced by affective, mnemonic, or aesthetic dimensions of the heritage experience.

First, according to Wang’s [25] theoretical framework, EA refers to a psychological state in which individuals experience a sense of being true to themselves, while CA involves the subjective construction of meaning and interpretation of heritage. However, Wang [25] also emphasized that these forms of authenticity are highly contextual and are shaped by cultural characteristics and the interpretive frameworks of the destination. In highly preserved and officially interpreted contexts such as Hue, where heritage is strictly managed and presented within standardized frameworks, tourists’ ability to freely construct or reinterpret meaning (CA) becomes limited. Chronis [44] and Cohen [45] demonstrated that in ‘museumized’ heritage sites, visitors tend to adopt a receptive rather than a co-creative role, thereby diminishing the influence of CA on the formation of memorable experiences.

Second, this finding may also be explained by the dominance of other variables in the model, such as nostalgia, memorability, and object-based authenticity. Recent studies on heritage tourism consistently emphasize that memorable heritage



experiences are more strongly driven by emotional resonance and the tangible value of heritage artifacts, rather than by abstract or subjective perceptions of authenticity like EA or CA [7, 37, 46]. In such cases, the effects of CA and EA may be ‘masked’ by the stronger influence of these affective and cognitive variables, thereby reducing their statistical significance.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study has shed light on the pivotal role of two affective–cognitive factors (authenticity and nostalgia) in shaping MTE at the heritage destination of Hue City. Based on quantitative data analysis, the results indicate that perceptions of OA, PN, and HN all exert a positive and statistically significant influence on MTE. These findings reaffirm that deeply engaging heritage experiences are not solely determined by the tangible values or informational content of a destination, but are also strongly shaped by affective connections and recollections of the past that tourists associate with the heritage setting.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the consolidation and extension of affective–cognitive behavioral models in heritage tourism by elucidating the mechanisms through which authenticity and nostalgia affect MTE. It offers an integrated approach that bridges cognitive elements (authenticity perceptions) with emotional dimensions (nostalgic responses), while empirically reinforcing the central role of MTE as a mediating construct linking destination perceptions to favorable post-visit behavioral intentions.

Regarding the managerial perspective, the findings suggest practical strategies for heritage destination planning and development, particularly in the context of Hue. Preserving the objective authenticity of heritage assets, while simultaneously designing emotionally evocative experiences such as storytelling, traditional performances, or memory-evoking spatial designs, can enhance the overall quality of visitors’ experiences. This, in turn, strengthens tourist attachment and fosters destination loyalty.

The conclusion should be strengthened by clearly acknowledging the study’s limitations and outlining future research directions. A key limitation is the use of convenience sampling, which may reduce the representativeness and generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the research focuses solely on Hue City’s cultural context, limiting its applicability to other heritage settings. Future studies should adopt probability sampling or cross-cultural comparisons to enhance external validity. Further research is also encouraged to examine the mediating roles of nostalgia and MTE, as these factors may explain how authenticity influences tourists’ sharing intentions [7, 37]. Exploring these mechanisms through longitudinal or mixed-method designs could provide deeper insights into how emotional and technological dimensions jointly shape heritage tourists’ online sharing behavior.

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