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Heritage Tourism and Tourist Experience: A Systematic Literature Review on Monuments, Motivation, Image, and Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

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The study of heritage tourism has experienced a significant increase over the past few decades, but theoretical disunity still prevails concerning the nature of tourist motivation, destination image, on-site experience, and satisfaction in the heritage context. By performing a Bibliometric and Systematic Literature Review of Scopus-indexed papers, this study aims to synthesise four core behavioural constructs and identify conceptual, methodological, and contextual gaps. A total of 48 peer-reviewed articles published between 2003 and 2025 were reviewed based on the SPAR-4 SLR and indicated the use of the Theory Context Method (TCM) framework. The findings indicate that the existing heritage tourism literature is predominantly concentrated in European and East Asian contexts, with limited representation from the Global South, particularly the monuments preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in India. The most researched variables are motivation and image, whereas experience remains the least developed. This article contributes to the literature by synthesizing theoretical knowledge of the four fundamental constructs of heritage tourism, methodological constraints, and future research directions. Practical recommendations are provided to heritage managers and policymakers, including the need for better interpretive measures, visitor engagement programmes, and context-sensitive site management, especially in ASI-managed heritage monuments.

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1. Introduction

Introduction:

Heritage tourism is now one of the fastest-growing segments of world tourism, inspired by the rising popularity of cultural identity, historiography, and the preservation of shared societal values (Timothy, 2017; Farmaki, 2020). This includes physical heritage (architecture, monuments, and archaeological sites) and intangible expressions (rituals, performances, and collective memory) that link current civilizations to their origins (ICOMOS, 2011; Park et al., 2019). Heritage attractions offer tourists the chance to learn and be educated as well as to experience emotional satisfaction, personal meaning, and symbolic identity, which makes them very strong in affecting travel behaviour (Chhabra et al., 2004; Chhabra, 2010; Otoo et al., 2020). Meanwhile, modern tourism research is becoming increasingly aware that visitor behaviour at heritage sites is multidimensional and developed through the complex interactions of motivation, destination image, on-site experience, and satisfaction in destinations (Lu et al., 2015; Su et al., 2020). Motivation is the psychological stimulus that triggers travel, and the perceived image is the mediator between expectations and cognitive-affective reactions to the heritage setting (Nguyen & Cheung, 2016). A combination of these leads to satisfaction, behavioral intentions, and the overall experience of heritage (Huang et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2021). Nevertheless, even with massive improvements, the current literature still studies these constructs in a disjointed format. The literature is mainly biased toward motivation, image perception, or satisfaction and does not examine the way these constructs interplay as a structural sequence during the heritage visit (Bui & Le, 2015; Rickly-Boyd, 2012). This theoretical deficiency is counterproductive to the creation of a comprehensive perspective of visitor behavior in a heritage setting, thus restricting conceptual progress and the strategic planning of heritage tourism development.

The elements that determine heritage tourism behavior are a causal, sequential process where the internal motives of tourists trigger the travel decision-making process, set expectations, and affect the process by which tourists construct an on-site image of a heritage destination, both cognitively and affectively (Nguyen & Cheung, 2016; Su et al., 2020). Such a positive image further increases visitors' interaction with heritage attributes, helping to shape their emotional and educational outcomes, which in turn lead to their satisfaction and the overall quality of the experience (Huang et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2021). Furthermore, satisfaction mirrors the review of the visit, but it is also an indicator of post-experience behavior, such as loyalty and recommendation, as well as the desire to assist in cultural preservation (Park et al., 2019). Thus, motivation, image, experience, and satisfaction are four constructs that are interconnected as part of an ongoing behavior mechanism that cannot be studied as independent variables. However, as the reviewed literature demonstrates, this structural relationship remains insufficiently examined in heritage tourism research and has received limited scholarly attention on emerging destinations such as ASI-managed monuments in India, making an integrative synthesis particularly necessary.

Several studies have investigated the motivation to visit archaeological sites, showing that tourists are motivated to visit or revisit archaeological sites because of cultural learning, identity confirmation, and emotional attachment (Ashraf et al., 2020; Lwoga & Mwankunda, 2020). The other significant literature corpus focuses on the increasing importance of digital and immersive technologies in the conservation, documentation,

and management of built heritage, showing how these technologies allow for increased accuracy of preservation and enhance the experience of visitors (Saricaoglu & Saygi, 2022; Sertalp et al., 2023). Furthermore, community participation has turned out to be an essential factor of sustainable heritage conservation and sustainable tourism development, and many studies have demonstrated that community participation, knowledge, and cultural attachment of the people living around a particular site greatly affect conservation results, site management, and authenticity of the visiting experience (Castillo and Menéndez, 2014; Darabseh et al., 2017; Esichaikul & Chansawang, 2022; MacLellan et al., 2020). Together, all these lines of inquiry depict that heritage tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon that cuts across the psychological, technological, and socio-cultural aspects.

The context of Indian heritage is not merely nationally important but also globally relevant, as Indian monuments constitute a part of the shared legacy of human civilization and have existed as internationally recognized tourism sites. Nonetheless, the existing literature on global heritage tourism is still skewed towards research performed in Europe and China, as well as other parts of the East Asian continent, which creates a geographical imbalance in the development of the theory (Farmaki, 2020; Tolkach et al., 2021). ASI-protected monuments are a unique type of heritage landscape that is both religiously diverse and archaeologically rich, and incorporates unique management issues, including conservation, interpretation, and community stewardship. However, they are not well represented in major scholarly research on the behavioral constructs of motivation, perceived authenticity, and on-site experiences (Su et al., 2020; Nguyen & Cheung, 2016). Thus, incorporating ASI-monitored heritage sites within a systematic review strengthens the evidence base worldwide, enhances inclusive and culturally diverse heritage tourism research, and can help address existing Western- and East Asia-centric bias while including the perspectives of the Global South in the theoretical discourse.

This gap is even more pronounced for heritage destinations in the Global South, where cultural sites are abundant but academically underrepresented (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019; Wang et al., 2024). According to the Press Information Bureau (2026), India is home to more than 3,600 nationally protected heritage structures that reflect diverse civilizations, religions, and architectural traditions. These sites are regulated by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which plays a crucial role in sustaining national identity, community pride, and tourism-driven development. Despite such richness, Indian heritage attractions, especially those managed by the ASI, have received proportionately less scholarly attention in the area of behavioral tourism models than heritage sites in Europe, East Asia, or North America (Huebner, 2011; Su et al., 2018).

Thus, the major research question, which inspired this study, is the lack of a theoretical and unified synthesis capability, integrating motivation, perceived on-site image, satisfaction, and holistic experience in heritage tourism scholarship, as well as the realization of the contextual realities and developmental importance of emerging heritage destinations in India, such as ASI-protected monuments. Therefore, a systematic evaluation of the current research is necessary to summarize the existing results, determine conceptual disintegration, demonstrate changes in methodology, and suggest directions for future investigation (Li et al., 2019; Baum et al., 2020; Tolkach et al., 2021; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2021; Çikik et al., 2022; Ogretmenoglu et al., 2025).

Table 1. Studies Review for SLR and Bibliometric Analysis: A chronological Table

Authors & Year	Source Title	Type of Review	Data Source	No. of Articles Reviewed	Interval Time	Key Motives
Gomezelj (2016)	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	Systematic Review + Bibliometric	Web of Knowledge	79	Up to 2014	To map the intellectual structure of innovation research in hospitality and tourism and identify research gaps and theoretical foundations.
Bhowmik (2021)	Anatolia	Bibliometric Review	Scopus	1,966 screened	2000–2020	To identify conceptual structures, emerging themes, and research clusters in heritage tourism globally using CiteSpace.
Rosalina et al. (2021)	Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Management	Systematic Quantitative Literature Review	Seven databases	125	1981–2020	To clarify the definitions of rural tourism and examine the challenges in developed and developing countries.
Janjua et al. (2021)	SAGE Open	Systematic Literature Review (PRISMA)	Six databases	94	2010–2020	To synthesize research on sustainability in rural homestays and identify gaps in the economic, social, and environmental dimensions.
Zhang et al. (2023)	Heritage Science	Bibliometric Analysis	Web of Science (SSCI)	805	2002–2022	To visualize global trends, hotspots, and frontiers in cultural heritage tourism research using CiteSpace.
Hernández-Garrido et al. (2023)	Enlightening Tourism	Bibliometric Analysis	Web of Science	813	1991–2023	To map knowledge domains in geotourism management and identify dominant themes such as geoconservation and sustainable tourism.
Mendoza et al. (2023)	Sustainability	Systematic Literature Review	Scopus, WoS, IEEE, ScienceDirect	146	2018–2022	To examine how digital technologies (3D, AR/VR, ICT) support the preservation and dissemination of tangible and intangible heritage.
Soni et al. (2024)	Enlightening Tourism	Bibliometric Analysis	Scopus	41 journals (1982–2023)	1982–2023	To explore publication patterns, themes, and emerging research areas related to female travellers and solo travel.
Salim et al. (2024)	Conservation & Management of Archaeological Sites	Systematic Literature Review (PRISMA)	Scopus	115	-	To understand how archaeotourism impacts built heritage and to identify global conservation challenges and approaches.
Singh & Bhuyan (2024/2025)	Research in Hospitality Management	SPAR-4-SLR + Bibliometric	Scopus & Web of Science	174	1979–2024	To map the thematic evolution, business aspects, and research frontiers in religious tourism using performance and network analysis.
Panigrahy & Verma (2025)	Journal of Tourism Futures	SLR + Bibliometric	Scopus	150 (from 407 screened)	2013–2024	To evaluate how computer vision technologies enhance tourism experiences (emotion detection, AR, crowd management and sustainability).

Source: Author Compilation

To address these gaps, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of Scopus-indexed research papers spanning more than two decades. The objectives are to:

RQ1: What are the key motivational factors that influence tourists' visits to heritage monuments?

RQ2: How do tourists perceive the on-site image of heritage monuments?

RQ3: What factors shape tourist satisfaction and overall experience at heritage sites?

RQ4: What conceptual and empirical gaps exist in heritage tourism research, and what future directions can be identified from the literature?

By integrating global evidence with contextual insights drawn from India's ASI-protected monuments, this review contributes to

strengthening the theoretical structure, improving managerial understanding, and supporting sustainable heritage conservation and tourism strategies at both national and international scales. The findings aim to advance knowledge of how culturally significant destinations may better interpret, engage, and satisfy visitors in a competitive and increasingly experience-oriented tourism landscape.

2. Literature Review

The Push-Pull Theory is widely used to explain tourist motivation in heritage tourism, whereby people travel due to internal psychological factors (push), such as nostalgia, cultural curiosity, and identity exploration, and external destination characteristics (pull) that attract them to certain heritage sites (Poria et al., 2004; Battour et al., 2014). Recent research has also combined Self-Determination Theory (SDT) with an emphasis on the role of intrinsic motivators, such as emotional fulfilment and self-connection in the heritage context, which is significantly stronger than extrinsic rewards (Otoo et al., 2020). Heritage identity has also been connected to motivation; the more one perceives cultural affinity, the more they are willing to experience historical sites and stories (Murphy et al., 2018). Such a diversity of motivation strategies highlights the importance of having a harmonized model to decipher how motives mediate the further perception of heritage sites, a question addressed by destination image research.

While the above theories explain why tourists choose to visit heritage sites, they do not adequately account for how these motivational orientations shape the cognitive and affective images tourists form upon encountering a heritage site. The Cognitive-Affective Model has been popularly used in tourism studies to conceptualize destination image, especially in the context of heritage tourism. This model is based on the premise that tourists first develop cognitive appraisals of tangible features of a destination, such as authenticity, heritage interpretation, and aesthetic appeal, which in turn generate affective responses, including feelings of pride, belonging, and excitement. A combination of these cognitive and emotional elements forms an overall destination image (Lu et al., 2015; Huete-Alcocer et al., 2020). Perceived authenticity in heritage settings is critical in reinforcing positive affective responses and, therefore, strengthening the overall image of the destination (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). Remarkably, it is mentioned that, according to previous research, emotional dimensions tend to have a stronger impact than rational assessment when assessing the worth of heritage sites by tourists (Nguyen & Cheung, 2016). Although destination image is theoretically relevant, this phenomenon is under-researched as a mediating factor between tourist motivation and satisfaction, which is a pivotal gap in the literature on heritage tourism. Over the past few years, researchers have begun to rely on user-generated content (UGC), such as textual narratives, photographs, and geotagged information shared on social media platforms, to measure the perceived destination image of tourists, providing real-time and experience-based insights into the perception of tourists (Lee & Park, 2023; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020; Tseng et al., 2015). The cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image do not operate in isolation; once on-site, tourists actively engage with heritage attributes, and the quality of that engagement is shaped by interpretation, atmospherics, and co-creation, constituting the experiential dimension of heritage tourism.

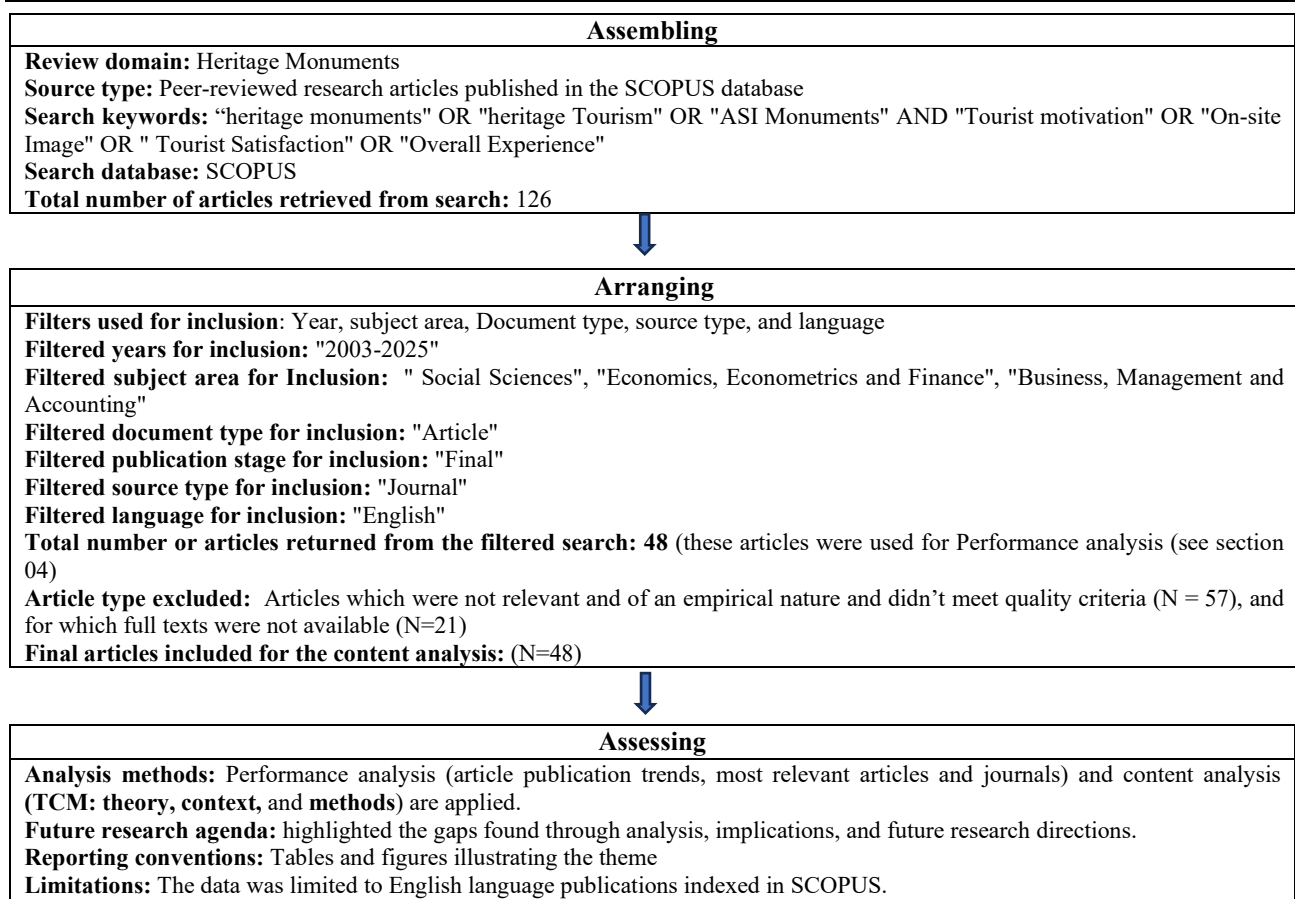
Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory is the most common interpretation of tourist satisfaction, and satisfaction is determined by the degree to which the on-site image meets or exceeds visitors' prior expectations (Huang et al., 2015; Weng et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025). The context of heritage is especially delicate in terms of satisfaction formation, as visitors expect emotional enrichment, education benefits, and authenticity, which are not necessarily consistent with the realities present on the site (Bui & Le, 2015). Satisfaction also dictates behavioral reactions such as the intention to revisit, advocate, willingness to pay, and conservation behavior participation (Park et al., 2019). Critical gaps remain in our understanding of how satisfaction interacts with emotional experiences and identity-based motives at heritage monuments. The richness of the on-site experience ultimately converges in an evaluative outcome: tourist satisfaction, which in turn governs post-visit behavioral intentions such as revisit likelihood, word-of-mouth, and conservation engagement.

Heritage tourist experience is conceptualized as multidimensional and influenced by personal experiences, quality of interpretation, atmosphere, sensual experience, and engagement with physical and immaterial heritage objects (Kempiak et al., 2017). The Co-Creation and Experience Economy models point out that visitors actively create meaning in the process of heritage encounter, particularly when interpretation allows linking to deeper societal or ancestral narratives (Su et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2025). In contexts such as ASI-managed heritage sites, where interpretive quality and heritage storytelling may vary across geographical regions, the on-site experience is likely to play a decisive role in shaping visitor satisfaction and cultural appreciation. However, this relationship requires direct empirical investigation. However, the literature is not clear on the role of experience as an intermediary between perception and the result of behavior in heritage sites.

Taken together, the four theoretical constructs, motivation, destination image, satisfaction, and experience, have been examined individually, with little empirical research undertaken to test the hypotheses of their interrelationships in the context of heritage tourism. This theoretical discontinuity limits a comprehensive understanding of heritage visitor behavior and is particularly acute in under-represented contexts such as ASI-managed sites in India, where the cultural, experiential, and managerial dimensions of heritage tourism have yet to be systematically studied. To fill the current gap, we refer to the Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), where tourist motivations and destination attributes serve as stimuli, and overall tourist experience is conceptualized as a response, representing a holistic outcome of visitors' internal evaluations. Although theoretically relevant, the application of SOR to combine these constructs in heritage tourism is limited, which is why it is important to have a unified model to support theory and inform evidence-based management practices (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019).

3. Methods

To ensure that the systematic literature review is open, thorough, and can be repeated, this study uses the SPAR-4 SLR methodology suggested by Paul et al. (2021). The framework has four main parts: Scientific Procedures, Analysis, Rationales, and Reporting.

Figure 1. Systematic review process using SPAR-4 SLR protocol

Source: Author Compilation (Developed from the insights of Paul et al. (2021), framework)

3.1. Analysis

Following the SPAR-4 SLR protocol, the screening process was conducted in two stages. A total of 126 articles were retrieved from the Scopus database. After removing duplicates and applying subject-area filters, 69 articles proceeded to title and abstract screening. Of these, 48 articles met the eligibility criteria, including thematic relevance, document type, language, and full-text availability, and were included in the final dataset. The remaining 21 articles were excluded due to access restrictions, and additional papers were excluded for failing to meet the relevance or quality criteria. The selected 48 articles were then coded thematically across four constructs: tourist motivation, destination image, on-site experience, and tourist satisfaction. The 2003–2025-time frame was chosen because all relevant documents obtained during the systematic search were within this period. Since the number of studies included in the present study is relatively limited, to guarantee a comprehensive and representative study of the research area, all available and eligible publications during this period were included.

3.2. Rationale

There was a scholarly reason for each methodological choice, and there were also established protocols. The Scopus database is only used because it is known for indexing high-quality international papers in several fields (Paul et al., 2021). We chose English-language literature so that the meaning and scholarly analysis would be the same. By not including subjects that weren't connected to tourism, the review was able to stay focused on its

main topic. Also, publications that didn't have full text available were left out to keep the analysis strict. Only including final-stage, peer-reviewed journal articles ensured that the information was reliable and relevant to academics. To keep things fair and thorough, the screening and eligibility processes were done in two steps: first by title/abstract, and then by full-text review.

The final dataset in the current study consists of 48 articles; such sample sizes are not exceptional, as previous studies in tourism and management, e.g., Loureiro et al., 2024, Soni et al., 2024, Jain et al., 2023, and Joshipura et al., 2025, have used hybrid systematic literature review and bibliometric methods, in which the emphasis is put on conceptual relevance and analytical depth instead of the absolute sample size. Furthermore, methodological contributions point out the fact that influential review articles give precedence to theoretical synthesis and systematic synthesis rather than massive datasets (Paul et al., 2021; Sox et al., 2015). This justifies the suitability of a targeted dataset in developing and dispersed areas of research.

3.3. Reporting

For reporting the results, the bibliometric R Studio (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) and the TCM approach (Paul et al., 2023) were utilised. Descriptive statistics and theme synthesis are used to report the results of this review. Figure 01 flowchart shows the steps in the screening process and the points at which decisions

are made. The included studies are examined to identify conceptual clusters, methodological patterns, and geographical distribution. The following sections examine the main ideas that came up in the review. This will help us better understand how heritage tourism and visitor conduct affect each other. This methodological structure, which is based on SPAR-4-SLR, ensures that the review may be repeated and is in line with the best practices for systematic literature reviews in tourism and social sciences.

4. Performance analysis & Scientific Mapping

In this section of the review, bibliometric performance analysis and scientific mapping were used to examine the performance of heritage tourism scholars. The performance study entailed both the descriptive statistics (trends in publishing, number of citations, etc.) and the most cited papers in this area. We also applied scientific methods of mapping, such as thematic mapping and thematic development, to get structural trends and changes of

ideas in the literature. Such methods enable us to know more about the intellectual field and emerging research frontiers in the field (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021).

4.1. Database Information

Table 2 presents the bibliometric profile of the 48 papers that are contained in this systematic literature review (SLR), indicating the depth and significance of the study on heritage tourism. It is a dataset that spans between 2003 and 2025 and encompasses more than 20 years of scholarly research on topics such as heritage monuments, tourist motivation, on-site image, satisfaction, and overall experience. The papers belonged to 30 various academic sources, and this proves that the field is multidisciplinary. The papers reviewed are a combination of both old and new research, and the mean age was 8.9 years. These publications are renowned and valuable in the academic world, as the average number of citations per document is 84.25.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Database

Description	Results
Timespan	2003:2025
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	30
Documents	48
Document Average Age	8.9
Average citations per doc	84.25
References	2845
Keywords Plus (ID)	120
Author's Keywords (DE)	173
Authors	126
Authors of single-authored docs	7
Single-authored docs	8
Co-Authors per Doc	2.71
International co-authorships %	18.75
DOCUMENT TYPES	Full Published Articles
Total Articles	48

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The reviewed literature contained 2,845 references, and this fact proves that the authors were rather engaged with the past studies. There are also numerous themes in the dataset, both system-generated Keywords Plus (ID) (120) and Author Keywords (DE) (173). This shows that there were numerous ideas and concepts that were researched in this sector, and that there were 126 authors on the selected manuscripts, with only 8 articles having a single author. This demonstrates that individual and collective scholarly activities were carried out. The number of co-authors is 2.71 on average, which indicates that the level of academic collaboration is good. Interestingly, the number of co-authors who were of other countries was 18.75 per cent of the total articles. This demonstrates that the global intellectual exchange is moderate and significant. The documents are all full-length, peer-reviewed journal publications, and this is a guarantee of good methods and credibility of the research. Altogether, these bibliometric features

indicate the strong literature analysed in this SLR, the impact of which affects the fields further. These results suggest that the research on heritage tourism is currently in its middle growth phase as opposed to being a mature discipline, with scattered publications in different journals and minimal global cooperation (18.75%). The citation mean is relatively high, which indicates conceptual significance, but the data used are relatively small and reflect a fragmented and niche research field, especially with motivation, image, experience, and satisfaction as behavioural constructs.

4.2. Highly cited article

The analysis of the citations of the Top academic publications is presented in table 3 in heritage tourism indicates that they have contributed significantly to the discussion on the subject of authenticity, motivation, and tourist satisfaction.

Table 3. Most cited publications

Author	Title	Journal	Total Citation	Total Citation per/Year
Chhabra D (2003)	“Staged Authenticity and Heritage Tourism”	“Annals of Tourism Research”	714	31.043
Airey D (2004)	“Links Between Tourists, Heritage, and Reasons for Visiting Heritage Sites”	“Journal of Travel Research”	253	11.5
Chhabra D (2010b)	“Back to the Past: A Sub-Segment of Generation Y's Perceptions of Authenticity”	“Journal of Sustainable Tourism”	95	5.938
Chen X (2018)	“Reputation, Subjective Well-Being, and Environmental Responsibility: The Role of Satisfaction and Identification”	“Journal of Sustainable Tourism”	87	10.875
Nguyen Thh (2016)	“Chinese Heritage Tourists to Heritage Sites: What are the Effects of Heritage Motivation and Perceived Authenticity on Satisfaction?”	“Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research”	84	8.4
Asmelash Ag (2019)	“The Structural Relationship Between Tourist Satisfaction and Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development in Tigray, Ethiopia”	“Heliyon”	82	11.714
Agyeiwaah E (2018)	“Domestic Tourists to Elmina Castle, Ghana: Motivation, Tourism Impacts, Place Attachment, and Satisfaction”	“Journal of Sustainable Tourism”	62	7.75
Alexander M (2018)	“What Pulls Ancestral Tourists ‘Home? An Analysis of Ancestral Tourist Motivations”	“Tourism Management”	54	6.75
Chhabra D (2010)	“Branding Authenticity”	“Tourism Analysis”	20	1.25
Nguyen Thh (2020)	“A Reflective-Formative Hierarchical Component Model of Perceived Authenticity”	“Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research”	16	2.667
Armish R (2021)	“Regional Competitiveness of a Post-Mining City in Tourism: Ombilin Coal Mining Heritage of Sawahlunto, Indonesia”	“Regional Science Policy and Practice”	9	1.8
Chen X (2022)	“When Technology Meets Heritage: A Moderated Mediation of Immersive Technology on the Constraint-Satisfaction Relationship”	“Current Issues in Tourism”	7	1.75

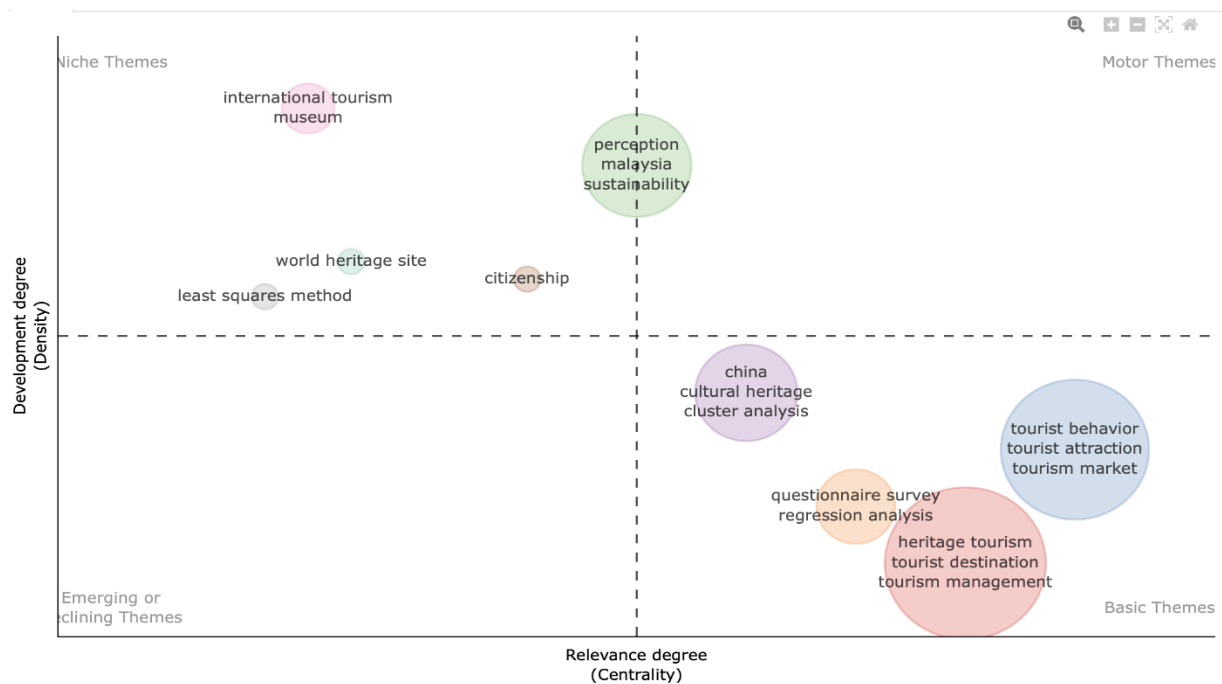
Source: Authors' own elaboration

The article that has the highest number of citations is the article by Chhabra (2003) titled Staged Authenticity and Heritage Tourism that was written in the Annals of Tourism Research. It has 714 citations and 31.043 citations per year on average, which is why it is crucial research on the authenticity of heritage tourism. Airey (2004) examined the relationship between tourist motivations and heritage interaction (Journal of Travel Research, 253 citations), and Chhabra (2010) examined authenticity from a generational perspective (Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 95 citations). Two articles by Nguyen (2016) and Asmelash (2019) enabled us to appreciate the role of motivation and satisfaction in sustainable heritage tourism. They are also cited 84 and 82 times, respectively. Their annual citation level (8.4 and 11.714) demonstrates that the level of interest in these research areas is increasing. New themes can be found in recent publications, such as that of Chen (2022) on immersive technology in historic tourism and that of Nguyen (2020) on hierarchical models of perceived authenticity; nevertheless, they lack as many citations (7 and 16, respectively). Special-to-place research is also included in the table, in Ghana (Agyeiwaah 2018) and ancestral tourism (Alexander 2018). These works prove that heritage experiences unique to particular locations are becoming popular in the academic field. Overall, the reference list demonstrates that much scholarly research has been conducted about such matters

as authenticity, motivation, satisfaction, and technological integration in historic tourism. It also demonstrates that further research can be made in the need areas that are not researched much yet, including digital heritage experiences and regional heritage competitiveness, as represented in Armish (2021) and Chen (2022). Overall, the citation pattern shows a distinct intellectual development in the study of heritage tourism, shifting towards a more sophisticated set of models that include satisfaction, sustainability, and technology (after 2015). Nevertheless, even with this development, the act of incorporating behavioural constructs into a single framework is still minimal, meaning that there is still a theoretical fragmentation in this area of research.

4.3. Thematic Map

Figure 2 presents the thematic map generated using R-Studio Biblioshiny, highlights the major themes of heritage tourism based on their centrality (relevance) and density (development). The map shows the intellectual landscape of the field and reveals the levels of maturity and significance of research themes. In the upper-right quadrant (motor themes), the questionnaire survey theme is the most prevalent, as is the tourism market and the regression analysis theme.

Figure 2. Thematic Map

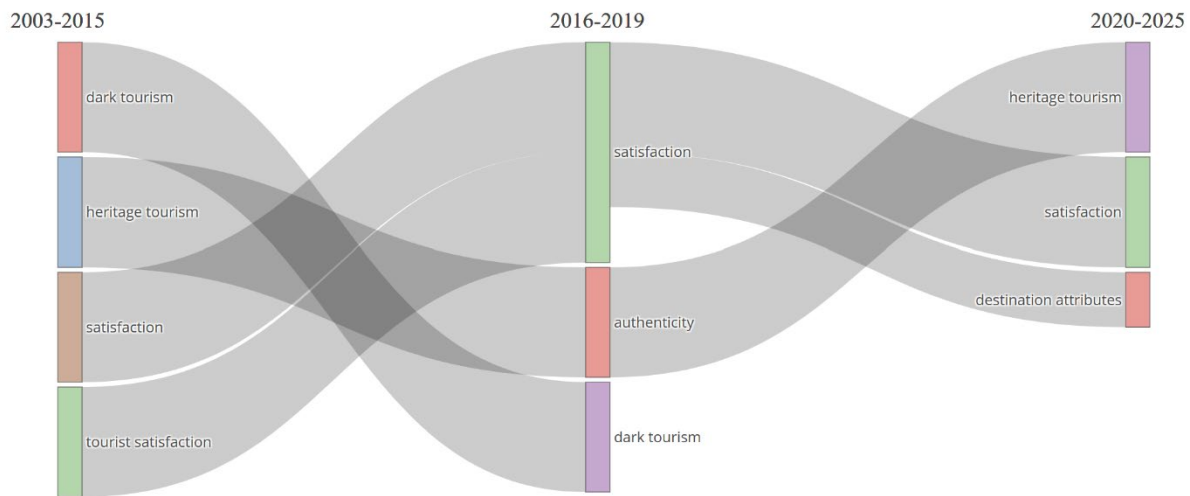
Source: Authors' own elaboration from R-studio Biblioshiny

They are not only well developed but also central themes, and thus important to the development of contemporary heritage tourism research. The strength of their presence in the literature illustrates how common it has become to use surveys and quantitative analysis tools to research tourist behaviour, destination performance and visitor satisfaction. Asmelash & Kumar (2019), Battour et al. (2012) have also used similar methodologies in empirical studies on tourists' experiences. The basic themes (the lower right part of the quadrant) are the biggest category, consisting of the following themes: heritage tourism, tourist destination, tourism management, cultural heritage, and China. Heritage tourism research is based on these topics because of their high centrality. But their relative sparseness implies that, even after the considerable academic interest they have received, additional theoretical integration and conceptual development are required. These themes are also found in the work of Chhabra (2003, 2010), Nguyen (2016) and Alexander (2018), who also highlight the need for a more robust conceptual base in the discipline. The niche themes are located in the upper left quadrant: tourist satisfaction, interactive tourism and sustainability. Themes with high centrality are also high-density, meaning that they are well developed in specialised research areas, although they have weak links to the existing heritage tourism literature. Previous studies (Chen, 2018; Agyeiwaah, 2018; Asmelash, 2019) have also investigated various aspects of sustainability, stakeholders' participation and conservation, offering potential to explore additional integration between tourist motivation, experience and satisfaction with these themes. The lower left quadrant includes new or old themes such as least squares and research methodology. They are positioned on the fringe, therefore indicating either new methodological trends or trends that are not studied or researched in as much detail. It points out that there are opportunities in future research to apply more advanced analytical methods, such as PLS-SEM and digital analytics, for heritage tourism research. Overall, the thematic

structure reveals that current research in the field of heritage tourism is predominantly quantitative and survey-based, with the core of the general conceptual framework comprising heritage tourism, destination management, and cultural heritage. Specialised themes, however, such as sustainability and tourist satisfaction, remain relatively isolated and require greater theoretical integration among destination management, tourist experience, tourist motivation, and tourist satisfaction to develop this field further.

4.4. Thematic Evolution

Figure 3 illustrates the thematic evolution, demonstrating the development of the principal themes of the research on heritage tourism throughout 3 time periods: 2003-2015, 2016-2019, and 2020-2025. This Sankey chart depicts that the area of academic work has broadened, evolved, and diversified with time passing. The most significant themes between 2003 and 2015 were heritage tourism, dark tourism, satisfaction, and tourist satisfaction. Throughout this period, the foundation was set to research the behaviour of visitors as well as how they experience visiting heritage and dark tourism sites and the cultural and social significance of tourism. Two studies that are significant in demonstrating how authenticity and the staged experience are taking over significance in shaping the feeling and thinking of tourists are Chhabra (2003), Chhabra (2010a), and Chhabra (2010b). In the period between 2016 and 2019, the field began to unite and expand its interests. The concept of satisfaction became a major unifying concept and linked the past discussions on tourist experiences with contemporary ones of authenticity and the ongoing research on dark tourism. An acquisition of authenticity as an independent problem demonstrates that scholars are becoming increasingly concerned with personal, emotional, and symbolic elements of heritage experiences, as they are depicted by Nguyen (2016) and Otoo et al. (2020).

Figure 3. Thematic Evolution (2003-2025)

Source: Authors' own elaboration from R-studio Biblioshiny

As the chart demonstrates, the most recent time (2020-2025) will involve more theme refinement and specialisation. Satisfaction is an eminent and recurrent theme, yet the other new spheres of interest, such as destination qualities, have arisen. This indicates a shift towards the business and management of historic site experience. The importance of heritage tourism still exists, but now there exists a greater emphasis on the practical destination design and experience differentiation. It will most likely happen due to new technologies and post-COVID tourism changes. The development of the destination features is indicative of an increased demand for some site-specific attributes, such as accessibility, interpretation, service quality, and aesthetics, which influence how the visitors perceive and remain attached to a location. Generally, the changing trend of topic over the last few years represents a transition between the general conceptual investigation (e.g. dark tourism and visitor contentment) to more concrete, experience-focused and management-oriented issues in the present decade. This demonstrates that the academic discipline is expanding and that the stakeholders in heritage tourism have shifted their priorities in the actual world. Thematic development also goes to support the fact that heritage tourism research has shifted from the conceptual exploration stage towards more experience-based and managerial-oriented. Nevertheless, the failure to have a consistent sequence of behaviour over the different time periods emphasises the unavailability of cumulative theory-building, which explains the necessity of having a coherent conceptual framework.

5. Thematic Synthesis

The synthesis of 48 Scopus-indexed studies presented in Table 4 reveals that although motivation, image, satisfaction, and experience are widely examined in heritage tourism, the field remains theoretically fragmented, lacking cohesive models

linking these four constructs. Studies focusing on visitor motivation commonly highlight cultural learning, nostalgia, and authenticity-seeking as key determinants of behavioural intentions (Amorim et al., 2022; Otoo et al., 2020). However, our SLR shows that motivational triggers are not frequently connected with on-site perceptual outcomes such as cognitive and affective destination image, despite evidence that interpretive quality, ambience, and visual aesthetics strongly influence tourist perception (Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz, 2020). Similarly, satisfaction studies emphasise expectation fulfilment and service quality yet often disregard the emotional and identity-based outcomes that shape heritage experience continuity (Huang et al., 2015; Park et al., 2019). Notably, very few studies examine experience as a mediating mechanism, even though our review confirms that engagement, storytelling, and atmosphere significantly predict satisfaction and loyalty behaviour (Kempiak et al., 2017). The existing evidence, therefore, indicates a clear theoretical gap: heritage visitor behaviour must be understood as an interdependent behavioural sequence, where motivation influences perceived image, which then shapes experience and satisfaction, a relationship that remains underdeveloped in empirical research, particularly for underrepresented heritage destinations such as ASI-managed monuments in India, which were not directly represented in the reviewed corpus and thus constitute a clear priority for future empirical research. Addressing this gap will furthermore enhance theoretical advancement but also provide heritage managers with an integrated evidence base for improving interpretation, infrastructure, and visitor engagement strategies.

5.1. Content Analysis Synthesis

Table 4. Thematic synthesis of 48 Scopus articles

<i>Authors and years</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Theory</i>	<i>Constructs/characteristics</i>	<i>Methods</i>	<i>Key Findings</i>
<i>Amorim et al., 2023</i>	To analyse tourists' motivations and interests in visiting the Western Region of Portugal, and identify key tourism types and attractions.	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; Cooper et al.'s Consumer Decision-Making Model	Tourist Motivation, Types of Tourism (Sun & Sea, Cultural, Leisure, Creative, Nature, Food), Decision-Making, Tourist Preferences	Quantitative; Survey of 355 tourists in Portugal; Descriptive Analysis via SPSS	Sun and sea, cultural, leisure, and nature tourism were most preferred; motivations aligned with physical and cultural needs; lack of offers and information hindered visits; strong potential for creative tourism.
<i>Armis et al., 2021</i>	To examine the regional competitiveness and performance of Sawahluntos' mining heritage tourism attributes using visitor perception data.	Destination Competitiveness Models, Relevance-Determinance Analysis (RDA); Competitive Performance Analysis (CPA)	Mining Heritage, Tourist Satisfaction, Destination Attributes (e.g., Accessibility, Cuisine, Hospitality, Cultural Heritage), Competitiveness	Quantitative; 107 tourists surveyed using a structured questionnaire; RDA and CPA conducted using SPSS	Hospitality, cuisine, accessibility, and safety are higher-impact core attributes. Mining heritage and natural beauty were not key determinants of competitiveness. Supporting services need improvement to enhance overall competitiveness.
<i>Asmelash et al., 2019</i>	To examine the structural relationship between tourist satisfaction and four dimensions of sustainable heritage tourism (economic, environmental, socio-cultural, and institutional) in Tigray, Ethiopia.	Sustainable Tourism Framework; Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	Economic Sustainability, Environmental Sustainability, Socio-cultural Sustainability, Institutional Sustainability, Tourist Satisfaction	Quantitative; Survey of 392 tourists using a structured questionnaire; SEM using AMOS	Socio-cultural, institutional, and economic sustainability significantly predict tourist satisfaction. Environmental sustainability was not a significant predictor. Cultural exchanges and local involvement are key to tourist satisfaction.
<i>Babolian Hendijani & R., 2016</i>	To examine how various dimensions of local food experiences influence international tourists' overall satisfaction in Indonesia.	Tourist Satisfaction Theory; Experiential Consumption Framework	Food Experience (Heritage, Serving, Environment, Variety, Availability, Sensory, Ingredients), Tourist Satisfaction	Quantitative; Survey of 343 international tourists at Soekarno-Hatta Airport and tourist sites in Jakarta; EFA and multiple linear regression using SPSS	Two food-related experience factors, 'Heritage' and 'Ingredients', significantly predicted tourist satisfaction. The study confirmed the importance of local food in shaping cultural experience and recommended using food as a strategic tool in tourism marketing.
<i>Bandaru et al., 2020</i>	To identify tourism attributes influencing foreign tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention in India's heritage destinations.	Formulated 'Foreign Tourists Revisit Intention Theory'	Tourism Accessibility, Tourism Accommodation, Tourism Attractions, Core Heritage, Tourism Experience, Tourist Satisfaction, Revisit Intention	Quantitative; 289 foreign tourists surveyed at heritage sites; CFA and SEM using AMOS	All tourism attributes positively affect satisfaction; satisfaction and core tourism experience significantly influence revisit intention.
<i>Battour et al., 2014</i>	To examine the relationship between tourism motivations (push and pull) and tourist satisfaction, and to test the moderating effect of Islamic norms and practices (religion) in Malaysia.	Push and Pull Motivation Theory; Moderation Theory	Push Motivation, Pull Motivation, Tourist Satisfaction, Islamic Norms and Practices (INP)	Quantitative; Survey of 508 Muslim tourists in Malaysia; EFA, CFA, and PLS-SEM (SmartPLS) for testing moderation	Both push and pull motivations positively influenced tourist satisfaction. Islamic norms and practices significantly moderated the relationship between pull motivation and satisfaction, but not between push motivation and satisfaction.
<i>Bhuiyan et al., 2020</i>	To measure Tourists' satisfaction at two major Muslim heritage sites in Dhaka, "Lalbagh Fort and Ahsan Manzil", and identify influencing factors.	Tourist Satisfaction Theory: Attribute-Based Evaluation	Attraction, Information, Staff and Access, Environment, Facilities, Tourist Satisfaction	Quantitative; 100 tourists surveyed using a structured questionnaire; Descriptive analysis and Multiple Regression using SPSS	Tourist satisfaction is significantly influenced by attraction, information, staff and access, and environment. The facilities dimension was not statistically significant. Recommendations include better staff training, site maintenance, and promotion.
<i>Bonn et al., 2007</i>	To investigate the effects of physical environmental elements (atmospherics) on visitors' perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural intentions in heritage/cultural attractions.	Stimulus "Organism Response (SOR) Model; Environmental Psychology Framework	Ambience, Layout & Design, Social Environment, Attitude Toward Attraction, Intention to Revisit, Word-of-Mouth	Quantitative; Survey of 500 visitors at 4 cultural attractions in Florida; Multiple regression analysis	Ambience and layout significantly affect attitude, revisit, and word-of-mouth intentions. Social environment impacts attitude and revisit intention, but not word-of-mouth. Physical surroundings play a critical role in perception and branding.
<i>Bui et al., 2015</i>	To explore differences in perception of destination image, satisfaction with service attributes, and future intentions between domestic and international tourists at Ha Long Bay, Vietnam.	Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory; Perceived Performance Model; Destination Image Theory	Destination Image, Core Attributes, Basic Attributes, Augmented Attributes, Tourist Satisfaction, Intention to Recommend, Intention to Return	Quantitative; Survey of 650 tourists (domestic and international); Factor analysis, ANOVA, and regression using SPSS with bootstrapping	International tourists had higher expectations and rated services lower than domestic tourists. Destination image influenced satisfaction in both groups. Augmented services significantly influenced recommendation and revisit intention for international visitors. Core and basic services were more important for domestic visitors' satisfaction.

Authors and years	Objectives	Theory	Constructs/characteristics	Methods	Key Findings
Chen et al., 2017	To assess battlefield tourist motivations at Kinmen Island, Taiwan, and identify differences based on demographics (gender, age, nationality).	Push–Pull Theory; Battlefield Tourism Motivation Framework; Heritage Motivation	Personal Motives (PEM), Spiritual Motives (SPM), Experience Motives (EXM), Physical Motives (PHM), Emotional Motives (EMM); Demographic Factors	Quantitative; Survey of 437 domestic and international tourists at Kinmen; EFA, t-tests, ANOVA using SPSS	Five motivational factors were identified. Age and nationality significantly influenced motivation (older and culturally tied tourists showed higher scores). Gender did not. Chinese and Taiwanese tourists scored higher on spiritual, emotional, and experiential motives than foreign tourists. Cultural/political identity shapes battlefield tourism motivation.
Chhabra & D., 2010a	To explore how a sub-segment of Generation Y conceptualises authenticity in heritage tourism and whether their authenticity ideologies inspire heritage tourism behaviour.	Authenticity Theories (Essentialist, Constructivist, Existentialist, Negotiated, Theoplicity); Market Segmentation	Authenticity Ideologies, Tourist Motivation, Heritage Tourism, Generational Preferences, Social Predictors (Party Size, Ethnicity)	Quantitative; Survey of 194 university students in the US using stratified and purposive sampling; Exploratory Factor Analysis and Logistic Regression	Essentialist authenticity was most valued by Gen Y respondents, but it was negotiated authenticity (Theoplicity) and social factors (party size, ethnicity) that best predicted heritage tourist behaviour. Existentialist and constructivist ideologies had little influence.
Chhabra & D., 2010b	To examine the relationship between authenticity expectations and tourist satisfaction at heritage sites and offer insights into branding strategies for heritage tourism targeting Generation Y.	Consumption Model of Authenticity: Existentialist, Objectivist, Constructivist, Negotiated, and Theoplicity Views	Authenticity (Objectivist, Existentialist, Negotiated), Tourist Satisfaction (Education, Connectedness, Restoration)	Quantitative; Survey of Generation Y students from US universities; EFA, regression models with satisfaction as dependent variable	Objectivist authenticity is linked with educational satisfaction. Negotiated authenticity influenced emotional connectedness. Educational and emotional dimensions vary by repeat visits and ethnicity. Authenticity is a valuable branding tool for heritage sites.
Chhabra et al., 2003	To examine the role of perceived authenticity in heritage tourism and its influence on tourist satisfaction using the example of a Scottish Highland festival in the US.	Staged Authenticity; Perceived Authenticity; Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory	Staged Authenticity, Tourist Satisfaction, Perception of Tradition, Ethnic Representation, Event Authenticity	Quantitative; Likert scale surveys at a cultural festival; Correlation between perceived authenticity and satisfaction	High perceived authenticity was possible even in staged contexts. Visitor groups differed significantly in their perception of authenticity, which influenced satisfaction and expenditure.
Cui et al., 2025	To identify destination attributes perceived by tourists along the Grand Canal in Beijing, evaluate their asymmetric effects on tourist satisfaction, and explore the influencing mechanisms using quantitative and qualitative methods.	Three-Factor Theory); Asymmetric Impact-Performance Analysis; Stimulus Organism “Response Model”	Heritage Value, Cultural Display, Supporting Facility, Commercial Service, Social Impact, Overall Ambience, Tourist Satisfaction	Mixed Methods; Survey of 708 tourists in two canal sections (Old City and Tongzhou); PCA, Dummy Variable Regression, Penalty-Reward Contrast Analysis, and In-depth Interviews	Tourist satisfaction is influenced by asymmetric effects of destination attributes. Social impact and ambience act as excitement factors, while heritage value and commercial services are performance factors. Supporting facilities and cultural displays are basic factors needing improvement.
Farmaki & A., 2013	To conceptualise dark tourism from both supply and demand perspectives by examining two sites in Cyprus.	Dark Tourism Spectrum; Push–Pull Motivation Theory; Supply, Demand Integration Model	Dark Tourism Motivation, Site Interpretation, Supply-side Strategy, Tourist Perception, Memory, Empathy	Qualitative; 12 semi-structured stakeholder interviews; 2 focus groups with local and foreign visitors	Dark tourism demand is driven by empathy, curiosity, and identity. Supply shapes experiences through projection and narrative framing. A revised segmentation approach was proposed based on emotional depth and tourist–site relevance.
Guo et al., 2022	To review and map the evolution, themes, and methodologies of research on regional tourism performance using bibliometric analysis.	Tourism Performance Index Framework; Regional Competitiveness and Efficiency Models	Tourism Performance, Competitiveness, Tourism Efficiency, Knowledge Networks, Bibliometric Indicators	Bibliometric Analysis; 418 articles from WoS Viewer (2004–2020); Cite Space and Gephi used for co-citation, co-occurrence, and cluster analysis	Thematic trends include heritage tourism, rural tourism, governance, and cultural tourism. Major tools include DEA, entropy index, and spatial analysis. Research is moving toward sustainability and performance optimisation at the regional level.
Harahsheh et al., 2024	To identify and explore the motivations behind second home ownership in northern Jordan and understand its implications for tourism and community development.	Push–Pull Theory; Holistic Motivation Framework	Serenity, Adventure, Cultural Connection, Community Engagement, Landscape Engagement	Qualitative; Semi-structured interviews with 10 second home owners; Thematic analysis	Motivations were rooted in escape, relaxation, cultural ties, and nature connection. Social and environmental values outweighed financial motives. Implications include community integration, sustainability, and targeted tourism strategies.

Authors and years	Objectives	Theory	Constructs/characteristics	Methods	Key Findings
<i>Minh et al. (2023)</i>	To examine the extent to which tourist expectations and tourist experiences with destination attributes (heritage, price, people, amenities, safety) influence tourist satisfaction in Hoi An, Vietnam.	Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory, SERVQUAL Model; Destination Attributes Framework	Tourist Expectations, Tourist Experiences, Heritage Attributes (Heritage, Price, People, Amenities, Safety), Tourist Satisfaction	Quantitative; Structured questionnaire (n=269); Correlation and multiple regression analysis using SPSS	Tourist experiences (staff, amenities, safety, price, people) significantly influenced satisfaction; tourist expectations had weak or no significant effect except for heritage expectations. The expectation-experience gap emphasises the need for experience-focused service enhancement.
<i>Huang et al., 2015</i>	To examine the effects of both cognitive and affective interpretive tour guiding outcomes on tourist satisfaction and behavioural intention in a heritage tourism setting.	Cognitive-Affective Model of Tourist Satisfaction; Interpretation Theory; Consumer Satisfaction Theory (Oliver, 1993)	Cognitive Outcome, Affective Outcome, Tourist Satisfaction, Behavioural Intention (Word-of-Mouth, Behavioural Loyalty)	Quantitative; Survey of 282 inbound Chinese tourists at Sovereign Hill, Australia; Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM)	Cognitive interpretation outcome had stronger direct and indirect effects on tourist satisfaction and behavioural intention than affective outcomes. Tourist satisfaction mediated the effect of interpretation outcomes on behavioural intention. Results confirmed the cognitive-affective satisfaction model but suggested their independence in this setting.
<i>Huebner & A., 2011</i>	To explore how destination image and co-creation of experiences at Bran Castle are influenced by popular culture, tourists' expectations, and interpretive services.	Destination Image Theory; Co-Creation of Experience; Reflexive Epistemology	Destination Image, Popular Culture Influence, Tour Guide Interpretation, Visitor Experience, Co-Creation	Qualitative; Re-analysis of Banyai (2010) data, including 20 travel blogs and interviews with 3 guides; Content analysis and interpretive framework	Discrepancies between tourist-held images and guide interpretations enrich the experience rather than detract. Destination image is shaped by pop culture, and authenticity is co-created at the site through multiple stakeholder perspectives.
<i>Huete Alcocer et al., 2020</i>	To examine the influence of cognitive and affective image components on overall image and their impact on satisfaction at a heritage site.	Destination Image Theory; Cognitive-Affective Image Model; Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory	Cognitive Image, Affective Image, Overall Image, Tourist Satisfaction	Quantitative; PLS-SEM using SmartPLS; Survey at Segobriga Archaeological Park (Spain)	Affective image was more influential than cognitive in determining overall destination image. Both dimensions significantly influenced satisfaction. Destination image is key to heritage site competitiveness.
<i>Huh et al., 2006</i>	To assess satisfaction with cultural/heritage destinations using an expectation-satisfaction grid and conduct market segmentation based on satisfaction levels.	Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory; Market Segmentation	Destination Attributes, Tourist Satisfaction, Segment Profiles	Quantitative; Survey of tourists in the Virginia Historic Triangle; Cluster analysis, correlation, and regression	Destination attributes significantly influenced overall satisfaction. Segmentation revealed distinct tourist groups with varying attribute expectations and satisfaction patterns.
<i>Huo et al., 2007</i>	To evaluate tourist satisfaction with the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum in Samoa and its role in tourism strategy.	Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory; Visitor Experience Model	Visitor Satisfaction, Museum Attributes, Word-of-Mouth, Revisit Intention, Demographic Variables	Quantitative; Visitor survey; Correlation analysis, ANOVA, and descriptive statistics	Higher satisfaction was linked to higher revisit and recommendation intention. The museum played a critical role in diversifying tourism offerings. Recommends enhancing interpretation and international marketing.
<i>Kempiak et al., 2017</i>	To explore the visitor experience at heritage attractions across the pre-visit, on-site, and post-visit stages, and propose a conceptual model of heritage tourist experience.	Experience Economy Co-creation Theory; Servicescape; S-O-R Framework; Motivation Theory; Visitor Experience Model	Motivation, Decision-making, Audio-Visual Communication, Atmospherics, On-site Engagement, Information, Heritage Preservation, Visitor Satisfaction, Knowledge Acquisition, Revisit Intention, WOM	Quantitative; Survey of 195 visitors across 6 heritage sites in Northern Ireland; EFA, descriptive analysis, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests using SPSS	Five core factors- audio/visual communication, atmospherics, on-site engagement, information, and heritage preservation—shape experience. Accuracy and clarity of information enhance knowledge and satisfaction, which significantly drive revisit intentions and WOM. Social media played a minor role in pre-visit decisions.
<i>Kim et al., 2013</i>	To examine the relationships between the ritualisation of tourism destinations and tourist behaviour, ritual performance (social and personal), and tourist satisfaction at cultural heritage sites.	Ritual Theory	Ritualisation of Tourism Destination, Ritualisation of Tourist Behaviour, Social Ritual Performance, Personal Ritual Performance, Tourist Satisfaction	Quantitative; Survey of 572 tourists at cultural heritage sites in South Korea; Path analysis using AMOS; CFA and reliability testing conducted	Ritualisation of tourist behaviour significantly affects both social and personal ritual performance, which in turn impacts tourist satisfaction. Personal ritual performance significantly influenced satisfaction, while social ritual performance did not.
<i>Lu et al., 2015</i>	To examine the influence of perceived authenticity and tourist involvement on destination image and satisfaction, and test the mediating effect of destination image at a historic district in China.	Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory; Destination Image Theory; Cognitive-Affective Model	Perceived Authenticity, Tourist Involvement, Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction	Quantitative; Survey at Litchi Bay, China; Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	Perceived authenticity and involvement positively affected destination image. Image fully mediated the link between authenticity and satisfaction and partially mediated the involvement's effect. Involvement also directly influenced satisfaction.

Authors and years	Objectives	Theory	Constructs/characteristics	Methods	Key Findings
Lynch et al., 2010	To assess cultural tourists' motivations and satisfaction at Mi'kmaw tourism sites, and to explore sustainable tourism development from Mi'kmaw community perspectives.	Community-Based Tourism: Sustainability Theory	Cultural Authentic Economic Cultural Community Involvement Learning, Experience, Opportunities, Preservation, Socially	Mixed Methods: Tourist surveys and Mi'kmaw key informant interviews	Tourists were highly satisfied and motivated by cultural learning and authenticity. Mi'kmaw stakeholders emphasised education, cultural preservation, and community control as key pillars for sustainability.
Magee et al., 2015	To investigate how dark heritage sites can be managed to facilitate transformative service experiences for visitors and promote global citizenship.	Servicescape Theory; Transformative Service Research (TSR); Co-creation Theory; Dark Tourism; Symbolic Interactionism	Servicescape (Physical, Natural, Social, Symbolic Dimensions), Visitor Engagement, Transformative Experience, Symbolic Meaning	Qualitative; Multiple case studies of 4 dark heritage sites (Auschwitz, Dachau, Mauthausen, Sachsenhausen); In-depth interviews (n=40), visitor interviews (n=84), document analysis, observational study	Authenticity and interpretation of servicescapes (especially symbolic and social dimensions) are critical in creating transformative experiences. Site managers seek to shift from 'dark tourism' to sensitive, educational, and morally reflective visitor engagement, emphasising empathy, remembrance, and co-creation of meaning.
Maulina et al., 2024	To examine the effects of perceived price, authenticity, and value on tourist satisfaction, and their impact on revisit intentions in the Old City (Oud Batavia), Jakarta.	Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory; Theory of Reasoned Action; Authenticity and Value Theories	Perceived Price, Perceived Authenticity, Perceived Value, Tourist Satisfaction, Revisit Intentions	Quantitative; 406 domestic tourists surveyed using a structured questionnaire; PLS-SEM analysis via SmartPLS	Perceived price, authenticity, and value significantly influence satisfaction, which strongly affects revisit intentions. Preserving historical sites and offering value-based experiences are key to repeat visits.
McIntosh 2004	To explore tourists' motivations and perceptions toward Maori cultural tourism in New Zealand.	Cultural Appreciation Framework; Host-Guest Interaction Theory	Cultural Appreciation, Authenticity, Gazing, Lifestyle, Personal Interaction, Informal Learning	Qualitative; In-depth interviews with international tourists; Thematic analysis	Five key dimensions shaped appreciation: gazing, lifestyle understanding, authenticity, personal interaction, and informal learning. Findings support the sustainable and mindful development of indigenous tourism.
Murdy et al., 2018	To explore motivational factors influencing ancestral tourists and identify market segments based on motivations.	Push-Pull Theory; Diaspora and Legacy Tourism Framework	Ancestral Motivation, Heritage Motivation, Mass Tourism Motivation	Quantitative; Survey of 282 ancestral tourists in Scotland; EFA and cluster analysis	Three core motivations identified: ancestral, heritage, and mass. Four clusters emerged: full immersion, ancestral enthusiast, general interest, and heritage-focused. Personal ancestry was the dominant motivation.
Nguyen & T. H. H., 2020	To develop a multidimensional and formative hierarchical model of perceived authenticity in heritage tourism.	Authenticity Theory, Reflective-Formative Hierarchical Component Model	Objective Authenticity, Constructive Authenticity, Existential Authenticity, Perceived Authenticity (Higher-order construct), Tourist Satisfaction	Quantitative; Survey conducted in Hong Kong; PLS-SEM; EFA, CFA, HCM development	Perceived authenticity is best represented as a second-order formative construct comprising three lower-order constructs. The model showed strong reliability, validity, and predictive power on tourist satisfaction.
Nguyen et al., 2016	To explore how Chinese heritage tourists interpret and perceive authenticity and examine the impact of heritage motivation and perceived authenticity on tourist satisfaction.	Consumer-Based Model of Authenticity; Objectivism, Constructivism, and Existentialism; Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory	Heritage Motivation, Perceived Authenticity (Objective, Constructive, Existential, Comparison to Expectation), Tourist Satisfaction	Mixed Methods; 202 Chinese tourists surveyed at six heritage sites in Hong Kong; PCA, CFA, and SEM using SPSS and AMOS; Sobel test for mediation	Perceived authenticity significantly influences tourist satisfaction and mediates the relationship between heritage motivation and satisfaction. Heritage motivation alone does not directly predict satisfaction. Objective authenticity was the most dominant dimension among Chinese tourists.
Otoo et al., 2020	To identify diaspora tourists' motivations, develop and validate a reliable measurement scale, and test its predictive validity in explaining satisfaction, destination image, attachment, and intention.	Social Identity Theory; Push-Pull Theory; Travel Career Ladder (Pearce & Lee)	Homeland Attachment, Nostalgia, Heritage Exploration, Identity Connection, Cultural Roots	Quantitative; Seven-stage scale development process; Survey with mature diaspora tourists; EFA, CFA, SEM	Developed a five-factor scale of diaspora tourist motivation. Identity and ancestral linkage were dominant. Scale effectively predicted satisfaction, attachment, and future intention.
Park et al., 2019	To investigate the influence of different dimensions of authenticity on tourist satisfaction and loyalty at a heritage site in Korea.	Authenticity Theory	Objective Authenticity, Constructive Authenticity, Existential Authenticity, Tourist Satisfaction, Tourist Loyalty	Quantitative; Survey of 535 tourists at Hahoe Village; SEM	Constructive and existential authenticity significantly predicted tourist satisfaction, which in turn influenced all three types of loyalty. Constructive authenticity was the strongest predictor.

Authors and years	Objectives	Theory	Constructs/characteristics		Methods	Key Findings
Poria et al., 2004	To identify and classify motivations for visiting heritage sites and assess how tourists' self-perception of heritage links to motivation.	Push–Pull Theory; Heritage Attachment Perspective; Emotional and Learning Motivation Model	Heritage Learning	Experience, Experience, Experience, Connection,	Quantitative; Structured interviews with English-speaking international tourists leaving Israel; EFA and interpretability approach	Three motivational categories emerged: heritage, learning, and recreation. A strong link was found between self-identification with the site and emotional motivation. Marketing and interpretation should consider tourists' personal heritage connection.
Prayag et al., 2018	To develop and test an integrated model linking tourist motivation, perceived tourism impacts (positive and negative), place attachment, and tourist satisfaction among domestic visitors to a dark heritage site in Ghana.	Cognitive-Affective-Behavioural System, Experiential Consumption Theory	Tourist Motivation, Tourism Impacts (Positive/Negative), Place Attachment (Place Identity, Dependence, Social Bonding), Tourist Satisfaction		Quantitative; Structured survey with 414 domestic tourists at Elmina Castle; SmartPLS-based SEM analysis	Motivation was positively associated with both perceived positive and negative tourism impacts, place attachment, and tourist satisfaction. Place attachment and tourism impact also influenced satisfaction. The study confirmed that cognitive and affective components jointly predict tourist satisfaction at dark heritage sites.
Rickly-Boyd & J. M., 2012	To explore how tourists perceive, define, and engage with the concept of authenticity in a reconstructed pioneer village and how these perceptions shape their heritage experience.	Constructivist Theory of Authenticity; Symbolic, Objective, and Existential Authenticity	Perceived Authenticity, Tourist Motivation, Pioneer Community Experience, Historical Verisimilitude, Landscape Experience		Qualitative; Mixed-method approach including textual analysis, participant observation, interviews with interpreters, and surveys (n=110) using Likert scale and open-ended questions	Tourists define authenticity in diverse ways: verisimilitude, originality, genuineness, and authority. Symbolic authenticity played a key role in shaping the pioneer experience. Most tourists accepted the site's authenticity and used it to co-construct personal and historical narratives. Experience was driven more by emotional and symbolic engagement than by objective authenticity.
Secondi et al., 2011	To develop a structural model identifying elements that modify heritage Tourists motivations, including tourism industry structure and perceived value for money.	Motivation Theory; Infrastructure & Resource-Based View	Tourist Resources, Value for Money, Enterprise Infrastructure, City Infrastructure, Mobility, Tourist Motivation		Quantitative; Survey of 1,645 tourists in Cuenca, Spain; SmartPLS 2.0 used to estimate structural model; Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)	Tourist resources and infrastructure factors significantly influence motivation. Value for money has a smaller but direct impact. The most relevant predictor of tourist motivation is the perception of available tourist resources. Model shows high reliability and validity.
Su et al., 2020	To examine how travel motivation influences tourist satisfaction at a heritage destination through mediators such as engagement, experience, and destination image. To investigate how the perceived reputation of a destination affects tourists' subjective well-being (SWB) and environmentally responsible behaviour (ERB), mediated by satisfaction and identification with the destination.	Push–Pull Theory; Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory; Visitor Engagement and Experience Models	Travel Motivation, Visitor Engagement, Visitor Experience, Destination Image, Tourist Satisfaction		Quantitative; Survey of 352 visitors at Hoi An, Vietnam; PLS-SEM using SmartPLS	Motivation had significant indirect effects on satisfaction via engagement, experience, and image. The study proposed a comprehensive structural model and emphasised on-site measurement of tourist experience for a more accurate assessment.
Su et al., 2018		Signalling Theory; Social Identity Theory; Relationship Quality Framework	Destination Reputation, Tourist Satisfaction, Destination Identification, Subjective Well-being (SWB), Environmentally Responsible Behaviour (ERB)		Quantitative; Survey of 539 tourists at Yuelu Mountain National Park, China; Structural Equation Modelling (AMOS); CFA and Bootstrapping for mediation effects	Destination reputation positively affects satisfaction and identification, which in turn significantly predict SWB and ERB. Both satisfaction and identification mediate the effects of reputation on outcomes. Reputation is a strong signal that enhances tourists' psychological attachment and pro-environmental behaviour.
Tasci et al., 2016	To examine host–guest reciprocal perceptions of service personnel characteristics in cross-cultural tourism settings and their implications for sustainable tourism and satisfaction.	Mutual Gaze Theory Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA); Social Exchange Theory; Cultural Perception Framework	Host Perception, Guest Perception, Job Satisfaction, Trip Satisfaction, Service Personnel Traits, Cultural Similarity, Environmental Consciousness		Quantitative; Survey with 889 respondents (Turkish hosts and European guests); IPA and regression analysis using SPSS; importance and performance ratings of 26 service personnel traits	Hosts evaluated their performance lower than guests did, especially on important dimensions like trustworthiness and environmental consciousness. Environmental consciousness was significantly related to job and trip satisfaction. The study highlights the need for cross-cultural alignment in host–guest interactions for sustainability.
Ung et al., 2010	To assess tourist satisfaction and experience at Macau's heritage attractions and evaluate the role of heritage in a casino-driven tourism context.	Destination Image Theory; Heritage Tourism Experience Framework	Tourist Satisfaction, Heritage Attributes, Experience Quality, Visitor Expectations, Urban Heritage Appeal		Quantitative; Tourist survey; Descriptive and inferential statistics	Heritage sites significantly contributed to tourist satisfaction and offered a distinct identity apart from casino tourism. Challenges included managing urban development alongside heritage preservation.

Authors and years	Objectives	Theory	Constructs/characteristics	Methods	Key Findings
Vareiro et al., 2019	To identify which destination attributes, influence tourists' satisfaction and intention to revisit a cultural destination using cluster-based analysis.	Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory; Cognitive-Affective Satisfaction Model	Destination Tourist Revisit Destination Image	Quantitative; Survey of 432 tourists in Guimarães, Portugal; Cluster analysis and logistic regression	Global quality of the destination was the strongest predictor of revisit intention. Differences in satisfaction and revisit likelihood were evident across visitor segments.
Wang et al., 2024	To analyse tourists' experiences of rice terraces in Japan based on Google Maps reviews, exploring seasonal perceptions, overall experience, and causes of dissatisfaction.	Netnography, Visitor Experience Theory, Agricultural Heritage Tourism	Agricultural Seasonality, Landscape, Visual Perception, Accessibility, Sense of Place, Genfukei, Nostalgia	Mixed Methods; Content analysis of 70 rice terrace sites (n> 30 reviews each) using qualitative coding and frequency analysis	Seven experiential themes were identified. Visitor satisfaction varies by season. Negative experiences are linked to abandonment, lack of uniqueness, and accessibility. Emphasises the cultural significance and emotional connection to the landscape.
Xu et al., 2021	To investigate the impact of leisure constraints on tourists' satisfaction and heritage conservation behaviour at cultural heritage sites, and how immersive technology moderates these relationships.	Leisure Constraints Theory, Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory	Intrapersonal Constraints, Interpersonal Constraints, Structural Constraints, Tourist Satisfaction, Heritage Conservation Behaviour (Low- and High-Effort), Immersive Technology Quality	Quantitative; Survey of 495 visitors at Mogao Grottoes, China; PLS-SEM using SmartPLS and SPSS PROCESS macro for moderated mediation	Interpersonal and structural constraints negatively influence satisfaction, which positively affects conservation behaviour. Satisfaction mediates the effect of constraints on behaviour. Immersive technology quality moderates these relationships, alleviating negative impacts of constraints, especially structural, on satisfaction and behaviour.
Zhang et al., 2018	To examine motivational determinants for participating in creative tourism and the influence of perceived authenticity (objective and existential) on intended participation in creative activities.	Self-Determination Theory; Authenticity Theory (Objective & Existential); Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory	Tourist Motivation (Sightseeing, Self-Improvement, Escape/Relaxation), Objective Authenticity, Existential Authenticity, Intended Participation, Vernacular Heritage, Service Quality, Participatory Experience	Quantitative; 412 valid responses from creative tourists at Albergue Art Space, Macau; EFA, Correlation, and Multiple Regression using SPSS	All hypotheses were supported. Tourist motivation significantly predicted both types of authenticity, which in turn influenced participation. Sightseeing had the strongest influence. Authenticity is both an outcome and an antecedent of participation. Service quality and vernacular heritage were also key predictors.
Zhou et al., 2020	To explore and compare the effects of self-congruity (SC) and functional congruity (FC) on tourist satisfaction (TS) and destination loyalty (DL) in red tourism.	Self-Congruity Theory; Functional Congruity; Destination Image; Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory	Self-Congruity, Functional Congruity, Tourist Satisfaction, Destination Loyalty	Quantitative; Survey of 332 tourists at Shaoshan; SEM using AMOS; Nested model comparison	SC has a strong effect on FC and DL, comparable to FC's effect on TS. SC better explains the symbolic value of red tourism. SC is more influential on loyalty than FC, emphasising emotional identity in red tourism.

Source: Authors' own elaboration

6. Discussion

This discussion section answers four core research questions using tabular data and thorough details. The first question examines what motivates tourists to visit heritage sites. The second question examines tourists' views of heritage monuments on-site. Third, what elements affect tourist satisfaction and heritage site experience? The fourth question indicates significant research needs and future directions from our findings' synthesis.

6.1. RQ1

Drawing on the retrieved literature, Table 5 explores the 10 major motivational variables that compel tourists to visit heritage monuments, as determined by significant research. Cultural curiosity and learning top the list, as tourists endeavour to investigate history and heritage for intellectual enrichment (Amorim et al., 2022; Chhabra, 2010). The demand for authenticity is closely associated with historical curiosity, highlighting the significance of real and historically enriched

experiences (Chen & Tsai, 2017). Emotional incentives, including nostalgia and personal connections, especially for diaspora tourists, are also key factors (Otoo et al., 2020). Additional motivations encompass spiritual or religious importance, social standing, and the desire for respite and relaxation, illustrating both internal (push) and external (pull) stimuli. Concepts such as dark tourism, aesthetic allure, and the educational significance of heritage interpretation enhance the motivational framework. Ultimately, group influence and social bonding underscore the significance of companionship and peer choices in determining travel behaviour. The varied motivations highlight the complex nature of historical tourism and the need to create experiences that cater to both emotional and cognitive tourist needs.

Table 5. Top 10 Motivational Factors in Heritage Tourism

	Motivational Factor	Supporting Studies	Key Insight
1	Cultural Curiosity / Learning	Amorim et al. (2022); Chhabra (2010)	Tourists are motivated by the opportunity to learn about history, culture, and heritage.
2	Authenticity and Historical Interest	Chhabra (2010); Chen & Tsai (2017)	Authentic experiences and historical narratives attract heritage tourists.
3	Emotional Connection / Nostalgia	Otoo et al. (2020); Chhabra (2010); Farmaki (2013)	Nostalgia and emotional ties play a key role, especially for diaspora and repeat visitors.
4	Religious or Spiritual Significance	Chen & Tsai (2017); Farmaki (2013)	Heritage sites with religious relevance serve as pilgrimage or spiritual destinations.
5	Social Status and Identity Expression	Amorim et al. (2022); Battour et al. (2012)	Some tourists seek recognition or affirm their identity through cultural visits.
6	Escape and Relaxation (Push Motives)	Battour et al. (2012); Amorim et al. (2022)	Many tourists are driven by the desire to escape daily life and seek peace or novelty.
7	Interest in Dark/Conflict Heritage	Farmaki (2013); Chen & Tsai (2017)	Dark tourism sites are driven by curiosity about war, suffering, or tragic events.
8	Aesthetic Appreciation (Visual Appeal)	Amorim et al. (2022); Chen & Tsai (2017)	Scenic beauty and architectural aesthetics enhance the motivation to visit.
9	Heritage Interpretation and Educational Value	Chhabra (2010); Amorim et al. (2022)	Interpretive services and storytelling increase motivation and engagement.
10	Group Influence / Social Interaction	Amorim et al. (2022); Battour et al. (2012)	Peer influence and social bonding contribute to the decision to visit heritage sites.

Source: Authors' own elaboration

6.2. RQ2

Table 6, shows the top ten factors that affect how tourists see the on-site image of heritage monuments, based on important real-world studies. The idea of authenticity is at the top of the list. Even faked authenticity is seen as a good thing and makes the site look better overall (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003). The cognitive and affective destination pictures are very similar. Studies show that emotional responses typically have more of an impact on how people feel than logical evaluations (Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz, 2020). Factors like cleanliness, upkeep of the site, and cultural interpretation are very important since they have a direct

impact on visitors' educational and aesthetic experiences (Cui et al., 2025; Bui & Le, 2015). The noises, flora, and number of people at the venue all affect how tranquil or busy it seems. Other factors that contribute to the overall picture include the quality of service, the style of the building, and how crowded it is. Studies also show that when expectations before a visit don't match up with what happens, it might hurt perception (Huebner, 2011). Lastly, how tourists see things in the media and in popular culture might change their expectations, which can make them more or less satisfied with what they find. These facts all go to the idea that perception is complex and includes both physical traits and emotional experiences that can't be seen.

Table 6. On-Site Image Perception Factors

	On-site Image Factor	Supporting Studies	Key Insights
1	Authenticity (Perceived vs. Staged)	Chhabra et al. (2003)	Tourists highly value authenticity, even if it is "staged"; it contributes positively to the image.
2	Destination Image (Cognitive + Affective)	Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz (2020)	Affective image (emotions/feelings) is more influential than factual/cognitive components.
3	Cleanliness and Maintenance	Implied across several studies, including Bui & Le (2015); Cui et al. (2025)	Well-maintained sites are perceived more positively and enhance the visual appeal.
4	Interpretation and Cultural Display	Cui, Zhang, & Wang (2025)	The quality of interpretive signage and displays impacts educational and aesthetic perceptions.
5	Environmental Ambience (Noise, Greenery, etc.)	Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz (2020); Bui & Le (2015)	Surroundings, landscaping, and atmosphere contribute to a tranquil or chaotic site image.
6	Service Quality (Staff, Guides, Facilities)	Cui et al. (2025); Chhabra et al. (2003)	Interactions with staff and facility management shape the emotional image of a place.
7	Crowding and Visitor Management	Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz (2020); Huebner (2011)	High crowding leads to negative image perception, especially in sensitive heritage zones.
8	Visual Appeal and Architecture	Chhabra et al. (2003); Bui & Le (2015)	Monument design, scale, and aesthetics significantly enhance image perception.
9	Expectation vs. Reality Discrepancy	Huebner (2011)	Gaps between promotional image and experience damage on-site perception.
10	Popular Culture and Media Influence	Huebner (2011)	An image shaped by films/media can lead to expectations that either elevate or disappoint.

Source: Authors' own elaboration

6.3. RQ3

Based on recent research, Table 7 shows the top ten factors that affect the level of tourist satisfaction and how good their entire experience is at heritage sites. The quality of heritage interpretation is at the top of the list. Clear signs, interesting stories, and knowledgeable guides all make visitors comprehend and enjoy the experience much more (Cui et al., 2025; Chhabra

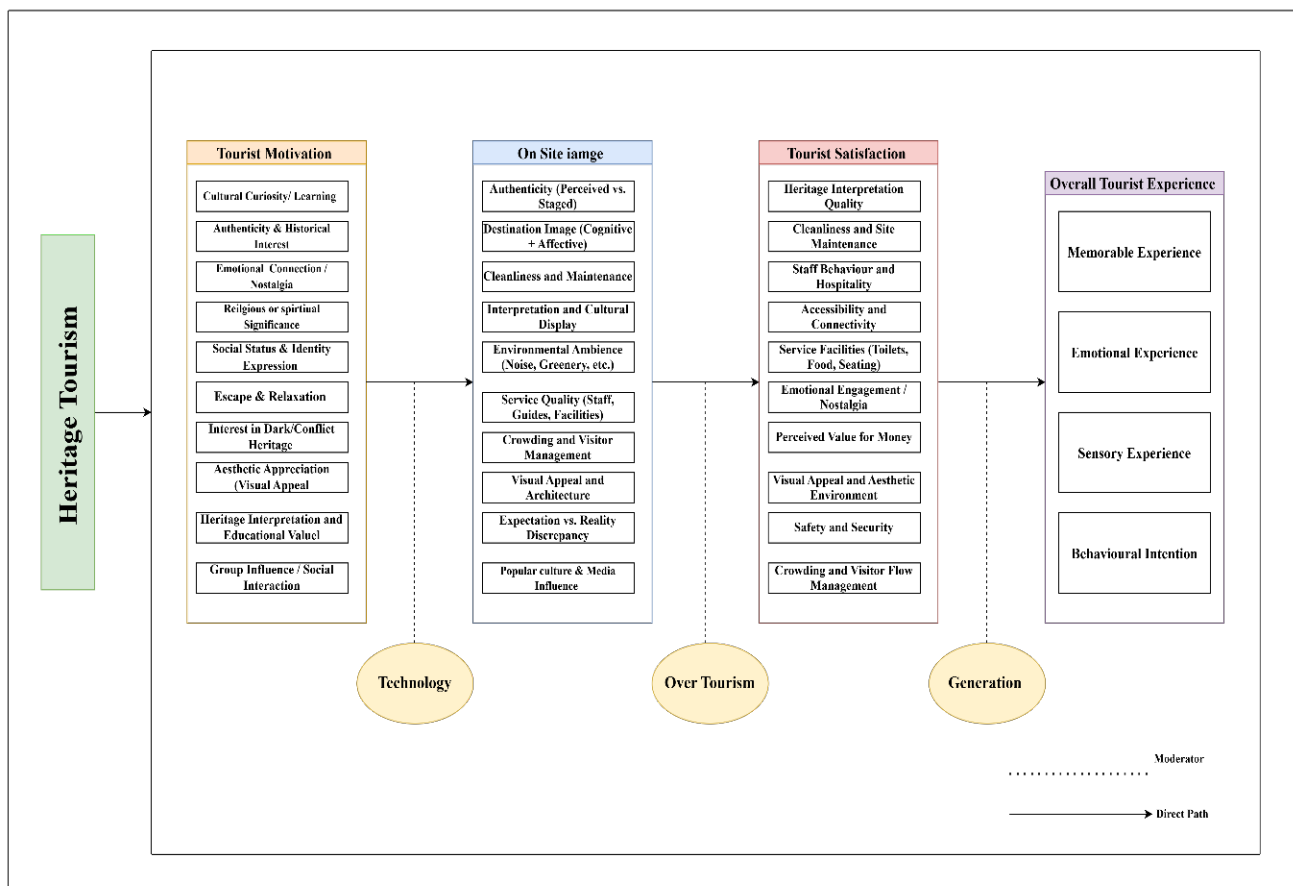
et al., 2003). Like this, cleanliness and upkeep of the site are also important because they affect how clean the place seems and how comfortable the visit is overall (Bhuiyan & Darda, 2020). Another important factor is how staff act and how welcoming they are. Staff who are kind and helpful considerably improve the visitor experience (Ho et al., 2023). Concerns about accessibility, service facilities, and safety are also quite important, showing that tourists expect to be able to get to places easily, be comfortable,

and feel safe (Bandaru & Venkateshwarlu, 2020; Bhuiyan & Darda, 2020). Emotional involvement and nostalgia are two more complicated elements, especially for heritage sites that are important to a person's culture or family (Chhabra, 2010). Perceived value for money is another factor that affects satisfaction with the cost of the event (Battour et al., 2012). Lastly, how a place looks and how effectively it handles crowds affect the sensory and mental aspects of the visit. Places that look good and handle crowds well are more likely to give people good experiences. These results show that tourist satisfaction at heritage sites is based on a mix of real service quality factors and emotional ties. Both of these are important for making visitors' experiences memorable and rewarding.

Building on the synthesis of findings from RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, the current study suggests an integrated conceptual framework that identifies the interrelationships between tourist motivation, on-site image, tourist satisfaction, and overall tourist experience in the context of heritage tourism (see Figure 4). The framework considers tourism behaviour as a sequential and interlocked process, in which the initial motivational constructs, including cultural interest, seeking authenticity and emotional attachment, affect the development of destination image based on cognitive

and affective responses. These evaluations on perception in turn determine the quality and nature of the on-site experience that includes aspects of interpretation, environmental ambience, service interactions and visitor engagement. Tourist satisfaction is seen as a byproduct of such experience, where actual experiences are compared to the expectation before the experience and the difference between the experience and expectation. One of the strongest contributions of the work is the fact that the overall tourist experience has been explicitly introduced as a multidimensional construct where the evaluative satisfaction is not the only part of the visit that is memorable, emotional, and sensory, unlike previous research studies. Besides, the framework also recognises the impact of the modern contextual factors such as technological changes, overtourism effects, and generational variations, which have the potential to influence the perceptions and experiences of tourists in dynamic heritage environments. The combination of these factors into a coherent framework makes the study fill in the gaps in current literature and provides a basis on which empirical research can be conducted in future, especially concerning heritage destinations that are underrepresented, like those under the ASI management.

Figure 4. Conceptual model of Tourist Behaviour in the context of Heritage Tourism



Source: Authors' own elaboration

6.4. RQ4

Table 8 details the research directions for the future by summarising some of the main gaps found during the systematic review and aligning them with the framework proposed. The table points out some of the research gaps in the heritage tourism field

and suggests systematic opportunities to conduct further empirical studies. Specifically, it highlights the necessity of integrated models, which consider tourist motivation, destination image, and on-site experience as interdependent processes, but not independent constructs (Su et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2021).

Table 8. Themes, Research Gaps and Future Research Questions in Heritage Tourism

Theme	Proposition (Research Gaps)	Research Question	Citations
Integrated Framework of Tourist Motivation and On-site Experiences	An integrated structural framework combining tourist motivation and on-site experiences significantly improves understanding of tourist behaviour at heritage sites.	How do tourist motivational factors influence on-site experience perceptions at ASI-protected heritage monuments?	Su et al. (2020); Xu et al. (2021); Nguyen & Cheung (2016)
Emotional and Sensory Dimensions of Heritage Tourism	Emotional and sensory elements such as nostalgia and empathy significantly influence tourist satisfaction and enhance visitor experience at heritage sites.	What roles do emotional and sensory dimensions play in shaping visitor satisfaction and overall experiences at heritage monuments?	Chhabra (2010a; 2010b); Huete Alcocer et al. (2020); Otoo et al. (2020)
Regional and Emerging Heritage Circuits	Tourist motivations, site perceptions, and satisfaction differ significantly between established heritage sites and emerging regional heritage circuits.	How do visitor experiences and satisfaction at emerging regional heritage circuits differ from those at popular, established heritage sites?	Asmelash & Kumar (2019); Armis & Kanegae (2021)
Role of Technological Interventions in Heritage Experiences	Digital technology significantly enhances visitor satisfaction and positively influences perceived authenticity and on-site experiences at heritage monuments.	To what extent do digital technologies (AR, VR, digital storytelling) influence visitor satisfaction, perceived authenticity, and on-site experience at ASI-protected heritage monuments?	Chen (2022); Ho et al. (2023); Xu et al. (2021)
Generational Preferences and Heritage Tourism	Generational differences significantly influence visitor motivations, perceptions of authenticity, and satisfaction at heritage sites.	How do motivational factors, site image perceptions, and satisfaction levels differ among Gen Y, Gen Z, and older generations visiting heritage monuments?	Chhabra (2010a); Murdy et al. (2018)
Institutional and Policy Contexts in Heritage Tourism	Institutional governance and policy initiatives significantly affect tourist motivation, site image perception, and visitor satisfaction at heritage sites.	How do institutional regulations, governance frameworks, and policy initiatives like 'Adopt a Heritage' influence visitor satisfaction, on-site image perceptions, and motivations at ASI-protected monuments?	Cui et al. (2025); Ministry of Culture (2023)
Crowding and Overtourism Impacts	Crowding significantly reduces visitor satisfaction and negatively impacts perceived authenticity and site image at heritage monuments.	In what ways does perceived crowding affect tourist satisfaction, authenticity perceptions, and the overall visitor experience at heritage sites?	Huebner (2011); Huete Alcocer et al. (2020); Bhuiyan et al. (2020)

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The results also suggest that emotional and sensory aspects like nostalgia, compassion, and emotional involvement are under-researched, whereas they are highly important in determining the overall tourist experience (Chhabra, 2010a; Otoo et al., 2020). Contextually, regional heritage circuits, such as the Kangra district, still receive little scholarly interest, which implies that comparative research on them based on more established heritage destinations is more significant (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019). Also, the increasing role of digital technologies, such as augmented and virtual reality, has great potential to increase authenticity and visitor experience, but it is not sufficiently developed yet, especially in the Indian setting (Chen, 2022; Ho et al., 2023). Generational differences are also referred to as a new area where further exploration is needed by the review because of the changing travel behaviours and preferences among Millennials and Generation Z (Murdy et al., 2018). Moreover, the problem of institutional interventions and governance is not adequately assessed concerning its effect on visitor perception and satisfaction, i.e., the Adopt a Heritage programme (Cui et al.,

2025). Crowding and overtourism issues are also considered serious concerns that can influence authenticity and visitor experience, but the empirical data in the ASI-managed heritage sites is not very extensive (Huebner, 2011). In sum, these research directions support the necessity of context-sensitive, methodologically sound, and theoretically combined research, thus they give the basis to develop heritage tourism scholarship according to the framework suggested in this paper.

7. Conclusion

The results of this review are very substantial in terms of managerial and policy implications for the development of heritage tourism. To begin with, the concept of motivation and its influence on destination image and experience implies that site managers should enhance their visitor-focused interpretation strategies, such as storytelling, signage, and guided tours, to meet visitors' cultural expectations and identity requirements and increase their perceived authenticity and engagement. Secondly,

the fact that positive on-site experiences are highly predictive of satisfaction implies a need to enhance visitor infrastructure, access, pedestrian flow, and safety, particularly at ASI-protected sites, where the aged heritage buildings demand sensitive treatment of visitors. Third, as experience and satisfaction relate to behavioural intention, including repeat visitation and heritage advocacy, policymakers ought to embrace sustainable heritage tourism programmes that make communities participate, enhance digital (e.g., AR/VR) and conservation education as a means of promoting responsible tourist behaviour. Lastly, the scarcity of studies in India implies that there is an immediate need for evidence-based management practices to address the cultural, geographic and socio-economic diversity of the Indian heritage sites to benefit the purpose of the national heritage management and sustainable tourism development. And outcomes also point to the result of a systematic review, which indicates that a number of key trends in the development of heritage tourism research are evident in the four behavioural constructs under analysis. Research that has investigated tourist motivation has continuously identified cultural learning, authenticity-seeking and identity affirmation as the most prevalent motivators of heritage tourism, although such motivations are studied disproportionately within East Asia and Europe and have a small presence in South Asia and the Global South. Concerning destination image, the studies reviewed show that continued use of cognitive-affective models; however, a minor number of the studies discuss the concept of perceived authenticity or emotional resonance, despite their acknowledged significance in heritage settings. The results also indicate that the satisfaction of tourists is mainly measured in terms of expectancy-disconfirmation paradigms, but the satisfaction is frequently evaluated without the involvement of emotional and experience aspects of heritage settings, which are the core of satisfaction. Notably, the analysis supports the fact that on-site experience is the least developed construct, and a limited number of studies investigate multidimensional experiential constructs like interpretive engagement, sensory immersion or co-creation processes. Among the 48 articles selected, a few of them take an integrated approach of combining motivation, image, experience, and satisfaction in one empirical model, proving the conceptual disjointedness that was identified in the previous tourism literature. This suggests that there is potential for future research to elaborate on behavioural models that are more holistic for heritage tourism experiences.

7.1. Theoretical Implications

This study enriches the heritage tourism theory as it suggests an integrated framework that is based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) paradigm. Although the earlier studies have to a large extent been able to examine these constructs in isolation, drawing on theories such as push/pull motivation, expectancy/disconfirmation and cognitive/affective models (Nguyen & Cheung, 2016; Su et al., 2020) this study has successfully brought them together into a single framework that would give a more comprehensive understanding of the tourist behaviour in heritage settings. In particular, the framework conceptualises motivational drivers and destination attributes as

stimuli, cognitive-affective assessments of destination image and satisfaction as the organism, and overall tourist experience as the response, thus broadening the traditional scope of SOR theory application in tourism studies.

Moreover, this integrative strategy emphasises the interaction between cognitive, affective and experiential aspects, which in turn, shows how cultural motivations, heritage interpretation, and perceived authenticity interact, resulting in the final impact on the overall experience of the tourists. By highlighting the vital importance of emotional and nostalgic dimensions, the findings also address unexplored areas of the literature since, although widely recognised (Chhabra, 2010; McIntosh, 2004), rarely been empirically included in a comprehensive behavioural framework. By placing the emotional constructs of nostalgia, existential authenticity, and emotional connectedness as central forces and not peripheral products of the organismic process, this study highlights their importance as central drivers rather than peripheral outcomes of the organismic process. On the whole, the proposed framework can be a contribution to theory by filling the gaps between the various streams of research and providing a holistic and dynamic explanation of heritage tourism motivation, perception, emotion, and experience by adopting an integrative and dynamic framework (Poria et al., 2004; Prayag et al., 2018).

7.2. Practical Implications

There is substantial research on heritage tourism, yet there are also some significant research gaps. First, there isn't enough awareness and research on heritage sites in developing countries, especially India's ASI-protected monuments, in the context of international tourism presence and research (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019; Prayag et al., 2018). Most of the research that has been done so far has focused on global symbols or UNESCO-designated monuments in Europe and East Asia. This has left places like Himachal Pradesh, which are rich in legacy but have been ignored by policymakers, underexplored. Second, most of the present evidence comes from cross-sectional and mono-method research that only uses self-administered questionnaires. Longitudinal and mixed-methods study designs that can track how tourists' views, motivations, and experiences evolve are very much needed (Nguyen, 2020; Lynch et al., 2010). Third, not many studies have used GIS, AR/VR, or UGC (user-generated content) to look at how digital images affect destination image and tourist engagement (Xu et al., 2021; Huebner, 2011). The results of this SLR have important real-world ramifications. Tourism planners may greatly improve the cognitive and emotional aspects of the visitor experience by improving interpretive guide services through training, storytelling tactics, and visual aids (Huang et al., 2015; Kempiak et al., 2017). The review shows that governments, especially in India, need to improve basic amenities at ASI monuments, including signs, cleanliness, internet access, and resources in many languages, to fulfil changing tourist needs (Chhabra et al., 2003; Bui & Le, 2015). Heritage tourism may be more sustainable and satisfying for visitors if cultural stories, technology-enabled experiences, and inclusive infrastructure development are all planned together. This can help close the gap between preservation and participation.

7.3. Limitations and Future Research

The systematic literature review (SLR) provides a general overview of the latest research in the area of explaining what attracts tourists to heritage sites, how satisfied they become during their visits, their perceptions of the sites, and their experiences. Nevertheless, certain issues should be mentioned to allow the research to be improved in the future. To begin with, the authors only investigated articles published in English, reviewed by professionals in the field, and available in the Scopus database. Although Scopus contains much information, this method will never avoid language and indexing bias. Due to this, there is a possibility of missing important academic work written in languages other than English or even those that were indexed in local databases. It might also be biased against thorough research in non-Western-oriented or popular articles, excluding such subjects as South Asia, Africa, or Latin America. Secondly, this review did not search in the grey literature, such as conference proceedings, theses, government policy reports, and practitioner white papers. Such papers may contain novel concepts or empirical evidence that is not in the empirical scholarly conversation. To achieve improved outcomes, next time, the number of such academic databases as the Web of Science (WoS) and Google Scholar can be included in addition to the existing ones. Such an approach would cover a wider variety of culturally diverse heritage tourism scenarios, particularly in locations such as India, Vietnam, and Indonesia, which have a high concentration of heritage infrastructure without much focus from other researchers.

Further studies should also employ advanced bibliometric or meta-analytical techniques to examine the dynamics of themes across time, citation networks, theory convergence, and the role played by key authors in the literature of heritage tourism. Further empirical research may also employ superior analytical tools such as Covariance-Based (CB-SEM) or Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to acquire further insights regarding complex latent variables such as emotional motivation, nostalgia-driven engagement, and experiential authenticity. Applying more sophisticated data analytics techniques, such as machine learning, natural language processing, and text mining on massive data (such as user-generated reviews, social media posts, and metrics of how visitors interact with AR) may also indicate deeper insights into how visitors behave, how satisfied they are, and how they perceive things. Because of these new ways of doing things and the results of this study, we suggest the following thematic areas for future research:

- Frameworks, which examine the interactions between tourist motivation and on-site heritage events (Su et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2021).
- Emotional and physical, such as nostalgia and empathy, influence the level of happiness among the visitors and the quality of their experience (Chhabra, 2010a; Otoo et al., 2020).
- Looking into regional and new heritage cycles, particularly in places that have not been researched in depth to understand the variation between familiar and new heritage tourist

destinations (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019; Armis & Kanegae, 2021).

- What impact will such changes in technology as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and digital storytelling make on post-COVID tourist experiences? (Chen, 2022; Ho et al., 2023).
- Examining the patterns in the way younger generations (Gen Y and Gen Z) act and prefer compared to older generations in heritage tourism locations (Murdy et al., 2018; Chhabra, 2010a).
- Considering the institutional and policy contexts, such as governance structures and CSR initiatives, such as the one named Adopt a Heritage, to determine their impact on visitor motivation and happiness (Ministry of Culture, 2023; Cui et al., 2025).
- Looking at the impacts of the overcrowding and excess number of visitors on the happiness of visitors, their sense of authenticity, and the place image will be beneficial in improving visitor management (Huebner, 2011; Huete Alcocer et al., 2020).

By addressing these gaps and merging the mentioned themes, the study of heritage tourism will significantly enhance both the theoretical framework and practical uses. Moreover, the future study directions can assist directly with the making of culturally sensitive strategies, the use of technology, and policy-sensitive approaches. The strategies would contribute to the preservation of heritage sites and enhance visitor experiences in all heritage sites globally.

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