

Psychological and Behavioural Consistency Value Seeking of Tourists in Niche Tourism: Nostalgia, Authenticity Perception, and Satisfaction

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Introduction: This study proposed a model based on Izard's theory of differential emotions to examine the effects of heritage nostalgia on perceived authenticity towards tourist satisfaction and the moderation of self-congruity in Chinese niche tourism.

Methods: We examined descriptive statistics to obtain an overview of the sample by using computer program SPSS 22. Then, for evaluation, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed as the appropriate statistical tool, and the statistical approach was implemented using the Smart PLS 3.0 computer program.

Results: The results of partial least squares structural equation modelling showed that heritage nostalgia positively affects existential and object-based authenticity. Existential and object-based authenticity positively influences tourist satisfaction. Self-congruity positively moderates the relationship between existential or object-based authenticity and heritage nostalgia.

Conclusion: The linkage mechanism of tourists' psychology and behavior in heritage tourism has been explored, the internal mechanisms such as heritage nostalgia, tourists' authenticity and tourists' satisfaction have been discovered, and the internal mechanism of tourists' consistency of psychology and behavior has also been explained.

Keywords: heritage nostalgia, perceived authenticity, tourist satisfaction, self-congruity, niche tourism

Introduction

Heritage tourism motivates people to experience different symbols and items of the past at tourist destinations.¹ It provides the experience of continual transformation occurring in the developing relationship between cultural heritage and tourism.² Cultural heritage is developed in accordance with a specific scale of meanings and values.³ Diverse cultural heritages, which stimulate the development of various tourism products and heritage destinations, attract tourists.^{4,5} Some heritage attractions are major tourist destinations having universal significance; other heritage attractions are fashioned for special interest groups, which results in niche tourism creation.^{6,7} Therefore, niche tourism is a segment of the tourism industry that provides small tourism destinations and specific products. These destinations are visited for adventures, different experiences, and religious reasons.⁸⁻¹⁰

In cultural heritage tourism, particularly in niche tourism, the meanings, images, and values of a heritage site are more decisive than the intrinsic value of the site,^{3,11} which results in a puzzling relationship between the perceived value and emotion.¹²⁻¹⁵ Some

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studies have identified the relationship among nostalgia, authenticity, and satisfaction in cultural tourism.^{16–21} However, most previous studies in cultural heritage tourism domains did not sufficiently differentiate types of nostalgia. From psychological perspective, nostalgia usually comprises both cognitive and emotional reactions.²² Different emotions induced from nostalgic experiences tend to influence people's behaviour differently,²³ and this nature of nostalgia with complicity highlights the importance of conceptualising and measuring the nostalgia of tourism by utilising a multidimensional approach.²⁴

Chi and Chi (2020) first conceptualised and developed a three-dimensional scale to measure vicarious or historical nostalgia evoked by heritage tourism and examined a proposed theoretical framework by using the data collected in America and China. Their study demonstrated that heritage tourists utilise historical nostalgia to satisfy their needs for seeking authenticity, which can significantly influence their satisfaction and revisit intention. Moreover, their findings offered profound contributions to the tourism industry and nostalgia literature. However, they used only well-known historical sites with universal significance, such as the Statue of Liberty in America and the Great Wall in China, and a research gap remained in the niche tourism domain. They called for further studies investigating tourists' historical nostalgia in other context when exploring other nostalgia elements in heritage tourism. This paper responds to this call and attempts to bridge the research gap.²⁴

In this study, a research model based on Izard's differential emotion theory and literature review was proposed, and a four-dimensional scale was first developed to measure heritage nostalgia evoked by niche heritage tourism. The measurement items of heritage nostalgia were adapted from Jain et al (2019) and were modified according to Chinese cultural settings. Moreover, self-congruity was included as a moderating variable because the degree of congruity is likely to influence the emotions and perceived value.^{14,29} The current understanding of the relationship between emotions and cognition was expanded from the perspective of heritage tourists, and the moderating influence of self-congruity on the relation between heritage nostalgia and perceived authenticity was explored at niche heritage sites. The main contributions of this paper are as follows:

1. We investigated cognitive–affective variables towards the experience of tourists during niche tourism.
2. We explored the mediating effects of authenticity between heritage nostalgia and satisfaction.

3. We confirmed the moderating effects of self-congruity on niche heritage tourism.

The reminder of this paper is organised as follows: In the literature review and theoretical framework section, the theoretical basis is provided for this study and relevant research hypotheses are proposed. The research method module provides the case and research process. The findings verify the research hypothesis through the quantitative research, and finally this paper presents the theoretical and practical contributions.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Izard's Theory of Differential Emotions

Izard's theory of differential emotions has been a critical concept of emotional cognition since the 1970s. It is used to study the interactions between the emotional states of people and cognitive processes²⁵ and has its roots in psychology, which emphasises the emotions and indicates the importance of cognitive variables.²⁶ According to Izard's theory, emotions decide not only the cognitive directivity and selectivity of an individual but also their subsequent actions.²⁷ Thus, Izard's theory presents a satisfactory theoretical background to investigate the effects of heritage nostalgia on perceived authenticity towards the satisfaction of tourists in heritage tourism.

The study framework followed three steps of Izard's theory of differential emotions. First, the emotion comes directly from the stimulation of the neural-evaluative component of an emotion by the internal and external environment.^{25,28} In niche heritage tourism, nostalgia is involuntarily stimulated in tourists as physiological response to particular states. Second, emotions can influence people's cognition processes, that is, the nostalgia of tourists affects the perceived authenticity related to their existential experiences or objects. Third, according to Izard's theory, interactions between a particular emotion patterns and cognition lead to novel emotional experiences.²⁸ In this scenario, tourist satisfaction is influenced because of interactions between perceived authenticity and nostalgia.

Heritage Nostalgia and Perceived Authenticity

Heritage nostalgia is a reflection of the past comprising a combination of emotions and memories, which can be passed on and shared through groups of people.^{23,30}

Nostalgia was previously perceived as a feeling of sickness because it led to remembrance and sorrow, and the only treatment for it was a revisit or repatriation.³¹ Holak and Havlena (1998) revealed that emotion complexity led to a nostalgic practice, and researchers have reported contrary societal influences. Smeekees (2015) showed how national nostalgia is likely to be associated with optimistic in-group directions.³² Therefore, nostalgia is regarded as the desire to revisit apparently perfect bygone days and demands memory stimulation and longing for positive and negative situations, such as those evoking cosiness, warmth, and sorrow.³³

In psychological and marketing domains, nostalgia is commonly conceptualised as an emotion-related construct that comprises both contradictory emotions and cognitive reactions.²² Nostalgia can be categorised into personal and vicarious or historical nostalgia.^{23,34} Personal nostalgia is associated with a person's memory, which can be evoked by an object or event experienced by the person.³⁵ Vicarious or historical nostalgia is unrelated to the person's experience or living memory, which can be evoked by a heritage object or historical event.²³ Therefore, historical nostalgia is closely associated with and facilitated by heritage tourism,²⁴ and small groups of people may share the heritage nostalgia evoked by an object or event in an unusual environment of niche heritage attractions.

The unusual environment refers to an environment outside of people's daily life, study and work (including natural and cultural environments). In this environment, the psychological and behavioural characteristics of tourists easily tend to be abnormal.^{36,37} Tourists with historical nostalgia vary in age, and multiple age groups experience the influence of nostalgia. This effect is well-recognised.^{38–40} Since 2003, researchers have confirmed the positive effects of nostalgia on tourism. For example, nostalgia is a powerful motivator and leads to an increase in the marketing capacity of tourism organisations.^{39,41–44} Moreover, nostalgia benefits the overall experience of tourists.^{45,46} Specifically, nostalgia addresses the emotional associations of tourists with places and other elements, which are important characteristics in heritage tourism.⁴⁷ Studies have indicated nostalgia to be connected with the perceived authenticity of cultural heritage sites. For instance, Vesey and Dimanche (2003) stated that "in destinations related to heritages, tourists desire the history via pictures of what they believe the history was like". Kulczycki and Hyatt (2005) reported that staged

authenticity is important to heritage and nostalgia experiences of tourist.

Authenticity is the quality of being "real" and "authentic" or "genuine and real".^{38,48} Scholars have proposed authenticity as an intangible asset, and authenticity is the perspective or value perceived by witnesses of a location or product.^{49,50} However, philosophers have sustained a long-lasting interest in authenticity involving a practice and feeling.⁵¹ From the philosophical perspective, authenticity is a projection of how real a person is to themselves in balancing the rational and emotional self.⁴³ In heritage tourism, authenticity is often connected to substances, locations, attractions, and emotions.⁵² As a special trait, authenticity is innately discovered within objects such as products, events, cultures, and places and is presented as external to visitors.^{53,54}

Authenticity is related to either objects or visitor experience,⁵⁵ which is objective or subjective, respectively. In terms of objects, authenticity is considered a scientific or historical object, which is either original or perfectly imitative,⁴¹ whereas in terms of visitor experience, authenticity is conceptualised as the existential, mutual process of understanding—supporting the perception that visitors positively construct their own significance by negotiating different environmental elements.⁵⁶ Wang (1999) and Reisinger and Steiner (2005) have widely analysed different methods and understandings of the perceived authenticity.^{57,58} Wang (1999) used several techniques in three major categories: objective, constructive, and existential. Objective and constructive categories concern physical products, and the existential category is connected to tourists' experience. According to Wang, objective and constructive categories can coexist to form object-based authenticity. For the existential category, Wang utilised the existential method to describe tourists' activities.

Tourist nostalgia can trigger judgments regarding perceived authenticity and match their current circumstances to past experiences.⁵⁹ Some tourists prefer to visit specific tourism sites to relive their past and learn about their heritage.⁶⁰ Therefore, for people, in addition to providing experiences such as relaxation, fun, diversion, and traditional food taste, heritage tourism spots have become places to experience the "good old days".⁵⁹ Researchers have regarded nostalgia as an optimistic mindset regarding the past; however, nostalgia is accepted as emotional response.^{61–66} Previous studies have shown the relation between nostalgia motivation and perceived authenticity.^{13,15,67} Both nostalgia motivation and perceived authenticity are determined using bygone practices concerning people, experiences, or circumstances, and the positive relations between object-based or existential authenticity and

nostalgia are endorsed in other settings.^{68,69} Therefore, the hypotheses adopted are as follows:

H1. Heritage nostalgia positively influences object-based authenticity.

H2. Heritage nostalgia positively influences existential authenticity.

Relationship Between Perceived Authenticity and Tourist Satisfaction

Authenticity leads to a drastic increase in the perceived satisfaction of tourists,⁷⁰ and perceived satisfaction is essential to evaluate destination goods, tourist attractions, and services.^{71,72} Del Bosque and Martín (2008) defined satisfaction as the cognitive-affective state of an individual developed from the visitor's activities.⁷³ Studies on tourist satisfaction have employed overall perceived performance and expectation–disconfirmation models.^{74–78} According to the expectation–disconfirmation model, tourists hold expectations before they experience or purchase things. If the outcome of tourists exceeds their anticipation, positive disconfirmation is achieved, which results in consumer satisfaction.⁷⁶ Researchers have reported that in heritage tourism, the perception of tourists about authenticity rather than actual authenticity contributes to satisfaction.⁷⁹

Authenticity is a crucial precursor of tourist satisfaction and a key element that affects the overall evaluation of tourists.^{54,80} Nguyen and Cheung (2016) acknowledged the direct effect of authenticity as a single variable on the satisfaction of cultural heritage tourist. In cultural heritage tourism studies, authenticity has been investigated as a single variable or as authenticity with double object-based and existential dimension.⁸¹ Girish and Chen (2017) and Nguyen and Cheung (2016) have proven the explicit effect of authenticity as the single variable on cultural heritage tourist satisfaction, and Lee et al (2016) analysed the immediate effects of authenticity on satisfaction as a double (object-based and existential) variable.^{19,82,83} We considered that the authenticity dual dimension is highly comprehensive and can provide considerable information regarding actual correlations among the analysed variables. Therefore, the investigation of whether our data can prove the individual positive effect of the dual dimensions of authenticity on satisfaction is meaningful. Based on the aforementioned references and literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3. Object-based authenticity positively influences tourist satisfaction.

H4. Existential authenticity positively influences tourist satisfaction.

Furthermore, according to the hypothesis of the direct influence of heritage nostalgia on object-based and existential authenticity and of object-based and existential authenticity on tourist satisfaction, when object-based and existential authenticity is improved, heritage nostalgia can positively affect tourist satisfaction. This phenomenon indicates that object-based and existential authenticity can play a mediating role in the relationship of heritage nostalgia with tourist satisfaction. The proposed study hypotheses of the mediating effect are as follows:

H5: Object-based authenticity presents a mediating effect between heritage nostalgia and tourist satisfaction.

H6: Existential authenticity presents a mediating effect between heritage nostalgia and tourist satisfaction.

Moderating Effect of Self-Congruity

Self-congruity refers to the extent to which the self-image of a consumer matches to the personality of a user of a typical brand. Self-image is a person's subjective feeling and viewpoint regarding themselves.⁸⁴ According to self-congruity theory, people hold several thoughts about themselves and behave accordingly to strengthen their self-image.²⁹ Therefore, people are likely to buy products or services in line with their original self-concept to achieve self-consistency.²⁹ People are aware of what they would like to be and what they are. A study confirmed the relation between self-congruity and customer emotions.²⁹ In their study on “lounge user” behaviour at the airport, Lee et al (2016) stated that self-congruity leads to the drastic generation of cognitive value awareness and positive emotional responses for revisit intention. The gaming field proofs validated the positive relation between self-congruity and customer emotions.²⁹

Self-congruity, as a cognitive matching process, considerably influences the emotional experience produced in a certain purchasing situation, as shown in hospitality studies.^{29,85} Cognitive and emotional experiences are different, but they interact with mental processes.²⁹ This indicates that nostalgia, as an emotion, is related to tourist self-congruity. For instance, a positive emotional experience of nostalgia and image congruity can lead to an increase in tourists' perceived nostalgia. Congruity, the degree of self-image matching of a person to the image of the tourism destination, may lead to different self-congruity-processing styles.⁸⁶ Similarly, tourism spot categorisation entails a small generalisation of previous emotions,

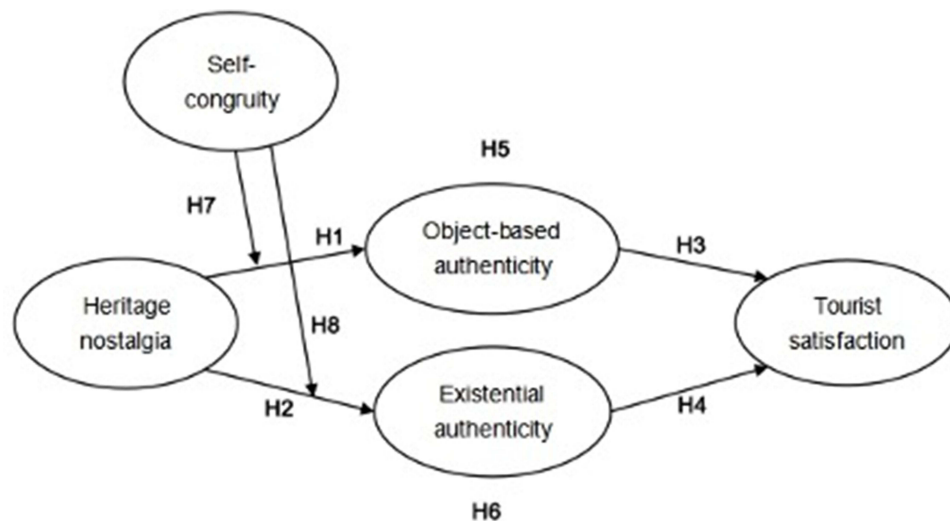


Figure 1 Research model.

such as nostalgia, towards the experiences of tourists. Thus, high self-congruity influences the state of mind of tourists in their perceived authenticity judgments. Based on self-congruity theory, we proposed that the relationship of heritage nostalgia with perceived authenticity is moderated through perceived self-congruity.

H7. Self-congruity moderates the relationship of object-based authenticity with heritage nostalgia.

H8. Self-congruity moderates the relationship of existential authenticity with heritage nostalgia.

Research Framework

The properties of five constructs are proposed. These constructs include an exogenous variable (heritage nostalgia), three endogenous variables (existential authenticity, object-based authenticity, and tourist satisfaction), and a moderator (self-congruity). The exogenous and endogenous variables of the constructs are measured with “formative” and “reflective” indicators, respectively, which are associated with “cause” and “effect” classification.⁸⁷ Figure 1 illustrates the proposed research model.

Research Design and Methods

Research Case

Five cultural heritage destinations (Figure 2) from the Zhejiang province of China were selected in this study. Zhejiang holds importance as the birthplace of the ancient philosophy of mind and behaviour or neo-Confucianism, which represents “the essence of Chinese civilisation” and “the Chinese Renaissance”.⁸⁸ It is also the hometown of the

first Chinese Nobel Prize winner for medicine, Ms. Tu Youyou, who coined a cure for malaria from a traditional herbal remedy by studying hundreds of old manuscripts while searching for ancient wisdom. Because in China, Zhejiang plays a role with increasing importance in the development of heritage tourism, and its niche attractions are more appealing than those of often crowded destinations (considering the prevention of COVID-19 spread), we selected five cultural heritage destinations from five counties of the Zhejiang province (Liu Ji Temple in Wenchen, Kunqu Opera in Yongjia, Guci Lyric in Ruian, Lounge Bridge in Taishun, and Bowl Kiln Village in Cangnan) as the study fields.

The Wencheng county is named after an ancient literary magnate, Liu Ji’s posthumous title “Wencheng”, and Liu Ji Temple is a traditional Chinese building with an architectural style, which is substantially integrated with the natural landscape and cultural heritage (Figure 2A).

The Yongjia county has a history that spans over 1800 years and preserves the oral and intangible cultural heritage of “Kunqu Opera in Yongjia” (Figure 2B). Ruian is the originating place of “Guci Lyric”, a type of ballad singing in the local dialect with a drum rhythm, which can be traced back to the Qing dynasty (Figure 2C). The Taishun county was founded in the Ming dynasty (1452) with many ancient “lounge bridges”, which are roofed Chinese wooden bridges constructed using exquisite technology (Figure 2D). The Bowl Kiln village in the Cangnan County is known as “a living museum” of ancient porcelain manufactures (Figure 2E). According to the authors, each attraction is a niche cultural heritage site associated with spiritual, moral, methodological, objective, and



A Liu Ji Temple in Wencheng



B Kunqu Opera in Yongjia



C Guci Lyric in Ruian



D Lounge Bridge in Taishun



E Bowl Kiln Village in Cangnan

Figure 2 Cultural heritage destinations (A–E). Source: Self-employed.

subjective characteristics, which are usually observed and cherished by small groups of people but are often ignored by others.

Research Method

First, the researchers examined descriptive statistics to obtain an overview of the sample by using computer program SPSS 22. Then, for evaluation, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed as the appropriate statistical tool, and the statistical approach was implemented using the Smart PLS 3.0 computer program.

This study adopted PLS-SEM for three reasons. First, the proposed model comprises reflective and formative variables, and the model with the second-order formative constructs can be tested by employing the two-step approach. Thus, PLS-SEM is a suitable approach for the data treatment because it can handle both reflective and formative second-order constructs.^{89,90} Second, PLS-SEM not only presents the advantage of mathematical calculations but also is conducive to solving problems with a minimal demand for the sample size. For example, it allows samples of 200 or fewer cases.⁹¹ Finally, PLS-SEM is applicable to the moderation analysis,⁹² which enables theoretical exploration and verification.

Measurement Scales

Heritage nostalgia was measured using items adapted from the study of Jain et al (2019). Considering Chinese cultural settings, heritage nostalgia measurement items were categorised into four dimensions: past imagery, positive emotions, negative emotions, and collective nostalgia. All these dimensions were formative indicators. Authenticity items were measured by considering the specific context of a particular cultural heritage site. The authenticity variable was measured from a double perspective by following the study of Kolar and Zabkar (2010). Four and six items exist in object-based and existential authenticity, respectively. These items were designed to illustrate reflective indicators. Tourist satisfaction was evaluated as cognitive judgement obtained from the experiences of tourists after their stay at the destination.⁹³ We selected six items as loading factors for measurements. These items were designed to illustrate reflective indicators. The self-congruity construct was measured with the items adapted from the studies of Sirgy and Su (2000) and Das (2014) and was modified according to the cultural heritage context.^{94,95} All the item statements of construct measurements used the seven-point

Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = moderately disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree).

Data Collection and Sampling

The data were collected in 2020 during the field study at five cultural heritage sites. The data collection process was organised as a part of the Zhejiang Heritage Tourism Research Project in the autumn (low) and summer (high) seasons. Both the holiday and cultural tourists visit the study area in these two seasons. The study sample for testing the proposed model included Chinese tourists, who visited any of these five heritage sites. In this study, questionnaires were distributed at the exits of relevant scenic spots through convenience sampling. A total of 250 questionnaires were released in this study. After incomplete and invalid questionnaires were removed from the returned questionnaires, 204 questionnaires were finally used for analysis, with an effective rate of 81.6%.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 204 (valid) travellers participated in this survey during the investigation period of 6 weeks (Table 1). The proportion of male adults was approximately 54%. Among all the participants, the largest group constituted people under the age of 30 years, comprising 34.8% of the sample, and the second-largest group was aged between 41 and 50 years. Overall, 65.2% of the participants were unmarried. Most participants held bachelor's degrees (79.9%), and the largest group had a monthly income of 5001–10,000 RMB.

Analysis of Scale Reliability and Validity

Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Nunnally (1978) have suggested several standards to evaluate convergence validity as follows: the factor loading, composite reliability, average of variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's α should exceed 0.7, 0.7, 0.5, and 0.7, respectively. Moreover, R^2 and path coefficients were majorly referenced to explain the study model.^{96,97} The R^2 values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 in a PLS path model were described as weak, moderate, and substantial, respectively, by Chin (1998a, p. 323) and were associated with reflective indicators. Table 2 presents the statistical data analysis results obtained using PLS-SEM. When the factor loading of an

Table 1 Profile of Respondents

Characteristic	Valid N	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Gender (valid N = 204)			
Male	110	53.9	53.9
Female	94	46.1	100.0
Age (valid N = 204)			
30 years old or less	71	34.8	34.8
31–40 years	46	22.5	57.3
41–50 years	58	28.5	85.8
51 years or above	29	14.2	100.0
Marriage (valid N = 204)			
Unmarried	133	65.2	65.2
Married	71	34.8	100.0
Education (valid N = 204)			
High school	9	4.4	4.4
University	31	15.2	19.6
College	132	64.7	84.3
Postgraduate and above	32	15.7	100.0
Employment (valid N = 204)			
Farmer	2	1.0	1.0
Business staff	35	17.2	18.2
Civil servant or public Institution	109	53.4	71.6
Soldier, Armed Police or Public Security	2	1.0	72.6
Student	41	20.1	92.7
Culture staff or teachers	7	3.4	96.1
Private or individual workers	8	3.9	100.0
Monthly Income (valid N = 204)			
Under 2000 RMB	39	19.1	19.1
Between 2001–5000 RMB	38	18.6	37.7
Between 5001–10,000 RMB	98	48.1	85.8
Above 10,001 RMB	29	14.2	100.0

item was <0.7 , the item was deleted. This deletion led to an increase in the average variance extraction and composite reliability. The scale item of “collective nostalgia”: “I would like others to also experience what I am feeling right now” was deleted because its factor loading did not attain the specified standards.

For other scale items, the factor loading was between 0.783 and 0.967. The R^2 values of existential authenticity, object-based authenticity, and tourist satisfaction were 0.434, 0.436, and 0.719, respectively, which were moderate and substantial. For “past imagery”, “positive emotion”, “negative emotion”, “collective nostalgia”, “object-based authenticity”, “existential

authenticity”, and “tourist satisfaction”, the Cronbach’s α values were 0.929, 0.913, 0.918, 0.863, 0.942, 0.944, and 0.978, respectively, and the composite reliability (CR) values were 0.946, 0.940, 0.942, 0.917, 0.958, 0.956, and 0.982, respectively. The average variance extractions (AVE) were within 0.779–0.899. These statistical analysis results confirmed that the study model presents high convergent validity. At the level of second-order construct, we obtained the parameter estimates for the significance of weight (t-value), indicator weight, and variance inflation factor (VIF). The recommended indicator weight was >0.2 ,⁹⁸ and for VIF, the common acceptable threshold was <3.33 .⁹⁹ VIF value were <3.33 , and hence, the results did not pose a multi-collinearity problem (Table 2). Table 2 presents these results.

Because for negative emotions, the indicator weight was only 0.006, which is less than the significance threshold of 0.2, this indicator was excluded from the model discriminant validity test. For the discriminant validity of the PLS model, the AVE value of each construct must be >0.5 , and the AVE square root must be larger than the coefficient value of each construct pair.⁹⁷ In our model (excluding negative emotions), all the AVE values and AVE square roots satisfied the discriminant validity requirements. Table 3 presents the results.

Path Coefficients and Mediating Analysis

PLS is used to determine if the path coefficient is significant by following the re-sample procedure for *t*-testing. We adopted bootstrapping⁹⁸ as the resampling method. Table 4 presents the *t*-value verification results. Hypothesis H1 is true ($\beta = 0.660$, $t = 11.432 > 1.96$, and $p < 0.001$); hence, heritage nostalgia positively influences object-based authenticity. Hypothesis H2 is true ($\beta = 0.659$, $t = 11.224 > 1.96$, and $p < 0.001$); thus, heritage nostalgia positively influences existential authenticity. Hypothesis H3 is true ($\beta = 0.297$, $t = 3.329 > 1.96$, and $p < 0.001$); hence, object-based authenticity positively influences tourist satisfaction. Hypothesis H4 is true ($\beta = 0.583$, $t = 6.515 > 1.96$, and $p < 0.001$); therefore, existential authenticity positively influences tourist satisfaction.

Table 5 presents the mediating effects of perceived authenticity. Hypothesis H5 is true (the indirect effect is 0.196, and $p < 0.001$), and hypothesis H6 is true (the indirect effect is 0.384, and $p < 0.001$). Figure 3 presents the results of the structural model.

Moderating Effects of Self-Congruity

The moderating effects of self-congruity were verified using hypotheses H7 and H8. Based on the path coefficient analysis, Table 6 and Figure 4 present the analysis results

Table 2 Analysis of Scale Reliability and Convergence Validity

Construct and Scale Item	Mean	SD	Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Past imagery				0.929	0.946	0.779
Many memories	5.48	1.332	0.859			
A lot of thoughts	5.40	1.284	0.893			
Coming images	5.30	1.391	0.893			
Bygone days	5.08	1.498	0.872			
Relieved moment	5.30	1.370	0.859			
Positive emotions				0.913	0.940	0.796
Joy	5.47	1.193	0.925			
Pleasant	5.35	1.233	0.939			
Calm	5.33	1.218	0.908			
Relaxed	5.48	1.197	0.944			
Negative emotions				0.918	0.942	0.802
Pain	2.98	1.349	0.893			
Anxiety	3.00	1.711	0.783			
Melancholy	3.12	1.744	0.931			
Regret	3.57	1.781	0.841			
Collective nostalgia				0.863	0.917	0.786
Sharing feeling with family	5.35	1.602	0.876			
Sharing feeling with friends	5.15	1.337	0.851			
Community memories	5.17	1.475	0.931			
Object-based authenticity				0.942	0.958	0.851
Architecture impression	5.50	1.090	0.913			
Peculiarities of interior design	5.53	1.052	0.937			
Attractive historical town	5.71	1.056	0.931			
Heritage information	5.62	1.037	0.908			
Existential authenticity				0.944	0.956	0.784
Arrangements connected	5.78	1.029	0.859			
Insight into the historical era	5.70	1.020	0.909			
Related history and legends	5.60	1.076	0.918			
Religious & spiritual experience	5.63	1.063	0.928			
Peaceful atmosphere	5.68	1.019	0.887			
Human history and civilization	5.52	1.142	0.804			
Tourist satisfaction				0.978	0.982	0.899
Overall satisfied	5.56	1.060	0.950			
Happy with this visit	5.61	1.080	0.952			
Feel right in choosing site	5.54	1.089	0.967			
Glad to visit heritage area	5.56	1.079	0.923			
Delighted to see the heritage	5.56	1.101	0.949			
Feel happy for experience	5.55	1.084	0.947			
Self-congruity				0.928	0.944	0.740
The cultural heritage's value are regularly communicated to me	5.35	1.200	0.866			
We view ourselves as partners in charting the direction of cultural heritage	5.15	1.332	0.917			
The image of cultural heritage is consistent with how I see myself	5.17	1.205	0.918			
The successor of the cultural heritage are congruent with how I would like to see myself	5.00	1.292	0.851			
The successor of the cultural heritage are mirror image of me	4.73	1.344	0.766			
I am quite similar to the typical tourists of this heritage tourism	5.08	1.284	0.833			

(Continued)

Table 2 (Continued).

Construct and Scale Item	Mean	SD	Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Second-order formative constructs	First-order constructs			Weights	t-value	VIF
Heritage nostalgia	Past imagery			0.497***	27.837	2.151
	Positive emotions			0.400***	24.318	2.256
	Negative emotions			0.006	0.111	1.101
	Collective nostalgia			0.271***	16.727	1.462

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3 Discriminant Validity

	EXA	OBA	TSA	PIM	PEM	CNO
Existential authenticity (EXA)	0.885					
Object-based authenticity (OBA)	0.836	0.922				
Tourist satisfaction (TSA)	0.832	0.785	0.948			
Past imagery (PIM)	0.560	0.563	0.577	0.883		
Positive emotions (PEM)	0.560	0.552	0.577	0.695	0.892	
Collective nostalgia (CNO)	0.572	0.580	0.557	0.494	0.520	0.817

Note: Bold figures on the diagonal are the square roots of AVE values.

Table 4 Path Coefficients Analysis

Hypothesis	Path Coefficients	t-Statistics
H1: Heritage nostalgia → Object-based authenticity	0.660	11.432***
H2: Heritage nostalgia → Existential authenticity	0.659	11.224***
H3: Object-based authenticity → Tourist satisfaction	0.297	3.329***
H4: Existential authenticity → Tourist satisfaction	0.583	6.515***

Note: ***Represents $p < 0.001$.

Table 5 Mediating Effects of Perceived Authenticity

Hypothesis	Effect	p-value
H5: Heritage nostalgia → Object-based authenticity → Tourist satisfaction	0.196	0.000
H6: Heritage nostalgia → Existential authenticity → Tourist satisfaction	0.384	0.000

of moderating effects. Hypothesis H7 is true ($\beta = 1.257$, $t = 2.086 > 1.96$, and $p < 0.05$), (95% CI [0.051, 2.463]). Self-congruity moderates the relationship between object-based authenticity and heritage nostalgia. The high and low levels of self-congruity strengthen and weaken, respectively, the positive relationship between object-based authenticity and heritage nostalgia (Figure 4A). Hypothesis H8 is true ($\beta = 1.403$, $t = 2.626 > 1.96$, $p < 0.01$), (95% CI: [0.335, 2.471]). Self-congruity moderates the relation between existential authenticity and heritage

nostalgia. The high and low levels of self-congruity strengthen and weaken, respectively, the positive relationship between existential authenticity and heritage nostalgia (Figure 4B).

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on Izard's theory of differential emotions and literature review, this study investigated the impact of heritage nostalgia on tourists' perception of authenticity towards satisfaction and the moderating role of self-congruity in niche tourism. Heritage nostalgia has a positive impact on existential authenticity and object-based authenticity, which highlights the importance of positive emotions for matching tourists' authenticity perception. Existential authenticity and object-based authenticity positively influence tourist satisfaction, and the positive emotions of tourists can be significantly

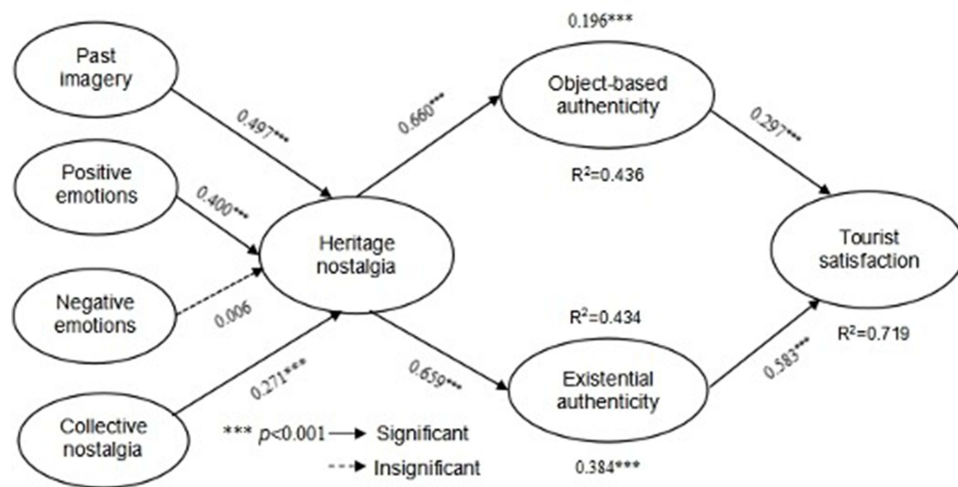


Figure 3 Results of the structural model.

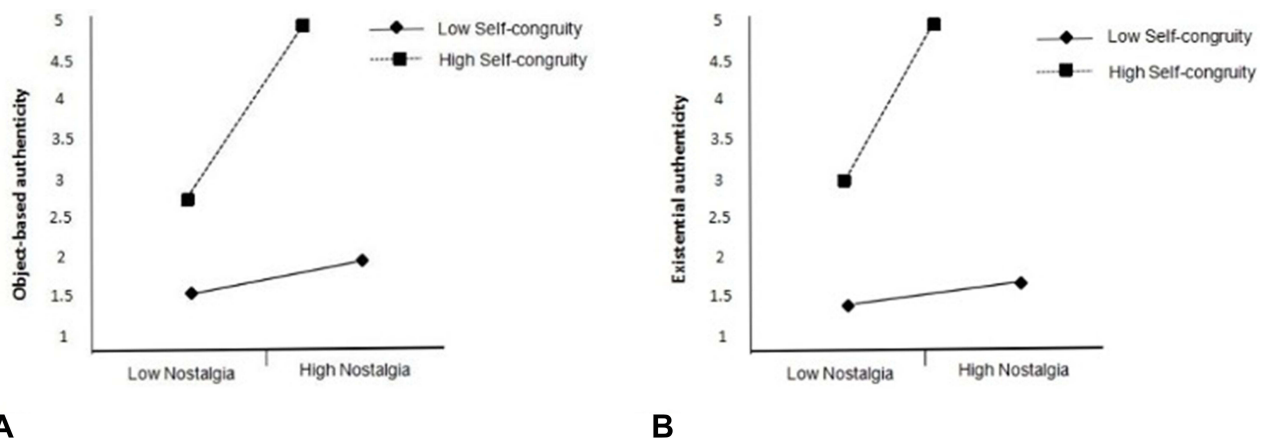


Figure 4 Moderating effects of self-congruity. (A) Moderating effects of self-congruity on the relationship between heritage nostalgia and object-based authenticity. (B) Moderating effects of self-congruity on the relationship between heritage nostalgia and existential authenticity.

strengthened. Moreover, tourists lacking positive emotions are susceptible to fatigue and cognitive difficulty during heritage tourism. Self-congruity can moderate the relation between heritage nostalgia and object-based or existential authenticity for bridging tourists' self-consistency. In the context of niche heritage tourism, the differential positive emotions of heritage nostalgia can improve the psychological and behavioural consistency of tourists through two dimensions of authenticity perception, which in turn contribute to tourists' satisfaction.

Theoretical Contribution

This study examined the effects of heritage nostalgia on perceived authenticity towards tourist satisfaction and the moderation of self-congruity for niche heritage tourism.

Some outcomes agreed with the results of previous studies as follows:

(i) The study model revealed that heritage nostalgia significantly influences authenticity. The findings indicated that tourists with higher heritage nostalgia perceived higher authenticity regarding cultural heritage sites. The outcomes are partially in line with the results of previous studies, such as Smith and Campbell (2017), which reported the direct influence of nostalgia on perceived authenticity.¹⁰⁰ (ii) Concentrating on the research model, connections indicated that heritage nostalgia leads to high levels of satisfaction, mediated through existential and object-based authenticity, among tourists, and existential authenticity plays a stronger mediating role than object-based authenticity. (iii) This study revealed a significant

Table 6 Moderating Effects of Self-Congruity

Hypothesis	Coefficients	BootLLCI	BootUICI	t-Statistics
H7: Heritage Nostalgia* Self-congruity → Object-based authenticity	1.257	0.051	2.463	2.086*
H8: Heritage Nostalgia* Self-congruity → Existential authenticity	1.403	0.335	2.471	2.626**

Notes: *Represents $p < 0.05$; **Represents $p < 0.01$.

association that reflected a positive effect of perceived authenticity on tourist satisfaction. This finding is in line with the literature reports.²⁰

Moreover, this study confirmed the moderating influence of self-congruity on the relationship between existential or object-based authenticity and heritage nostalgia. From the methodological perspective, this study applied a novel mediated and moderated model. The model demonstrated “interesting relationships” in heritage tourism that have not been examined in other studies, and thus, can highly comprehensively contribute to the discovery of factors leading to niche heritage tourism development.

Managerial Implication

The study results widely and practically contributed to managerial implications. First, the results showed that heritage nostalgia positively affects existential and object-based authenticity. Thus, heritage nostalgia should be actively cultivated in niche heritage tourism. To engage tourists who are highly prone to nostalgia, tourist product designers can employ customised advertisement with the scenery of old places and old pictures and other approaches to develop a nostalgic atmosphere.¹⁰¹ Tourism authorities must retain the characteristics of ancient cultural settings to maintain a simple and beautiful ecological environment to well preserve both the tangible and intangible attraction heritage to trigger the tourists’ heritage nostalgia.

Second, because perceived existential and object-based authenticity play a mediating role between tourist satisfaction and heritage nostalgia and positively affect tourist satisfaction, tourism managers should protect the integrity of authentic heritage by developing the historical allusions, folk songs, and folk customs and by properly preserving traditional architectures, local cultures, and historical landmarks to provide a true picture.¹⁰² Moreover, these managers must encourage local craftsmen to demonstrate their creation process so that the tourists can experience the culture and history and advertise dynamic charms of niche heritage.⁴⁷ These charms may include local cuisine and traditional festivals. Because existential authenticity more strongly affects tourist satisfaction than object-based authenticity, tourism managers are encouraged to

use culture plus modern technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality technologies.⁴⁶

Finally, because the relationship of heritage nostalgia with existential or object-based authenticity is positively moderated through self-congruity, tourism managers must plan to satisfy expectations concerning similarities between tourists’ self-congruity and the cultural heritage value. Consequently, tourism authorities must provide settings that agree with tourists’ experiences of the excitement, sincerity, and communication of cultural heritage by exploring related cultural and gastronomic events with faithful and comprehensive information. Moreover, tourists can interact with locals and experience their traditions and customs through different activities, such as ceramic making and singing folk songs with local residents. This practice can enhance the quality of visitors’ authentic perceptions and allow them to develop nostalgia during their excursions.

Limitations and Future Research

This study presents several limitations. First, all the heritage sites selected for investigation are situated in China’s Zhejiang province. Future studies should employ this model to examine whether the findings differ with places. Second, the used sample size satisfies PLS path modelling requirements; however, future studies can target a large sample size for relatively better validation. Finally, in-depth studies based on the proposed model must obtain an approach to attract many heritage tourists, such as testing the samples according to age to determine whether there is a significant difference among multiple age groups.

Ethics Statement

We declare that participants in our research study allow us to use their data for academic research and publication. All the participants were anonymous and their data was protected. All the programs in our research study were approved by the Institutional Review Board of Zhejiang Gongshang University, all participants provided informed consent to take part in this study, in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Author Contributions

All authors made substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; took part in drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; agreed to submit to the current journal; gave final approval of the version to be published; and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Disclosure

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest in this work.

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