

Social media and the tourist experience: a study of UNESCO cultural heritage sites in Pakistan

Uzma Naz and Musa Khan

*Riphah Institute of Media Sciences, Riphah International University,
Islamabad, Pakistan*

South Asian
Journal of
Marketing

33

Received 29 November 2024
Revised 5 July 2025
2 September 2025
29 November 2025
12 April 2026
Accepted 12 April 2026

Abstract

Purpose – This study explores how social media platforms shape and mediate the tourist experience at UNESCO cultural heritage sites in Pakistan. It analyses user content to uncover key drivers of visitor satisfaction and sustainable heritage tourism. The research contributes to understanding the digital dynamics of cultural tourism and provides insights for enriching heritage site management and visitor experience strategies.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is based on inductive thematic content analysis of tourist reviews on UNESCO cultural heritage sites in Pakistan.

Findings – The research identifies several recurring themes that are pivotal to the visitor experience: empathy, experience, authenticity, atmospherics and service quality.

Practical implications – These insights carry substantial implications for the management and promotion of cultural heritage tourism at UNESCO heritage sites in South Asia. They advocate for a strategic emphasis on enriching visitors' experience, improving site amenities and implementing sustainable tourism practices.

Social implications – These insights convey considerable implications for the management and promotion of cultural heritage tourism on UNESCO heritage sites in Pakistan. They advocate for a strategic emphasis on enriching visitors' experience, improving site amenities and implementing sustainable tourism practices.

Originality/value – The findings emphasize authenticity's role in strengthening connections to history and enhancing the educational and emotional dimensions of cultural tourism. The results further highlight the significance of immersive experiences in boosting visitor satisfaction and underscore the necessity of providing high-quality services to meet diverse tourist expectations.

Keywords Cultural heritage, Tourism, UNESCO cultural heritage sites, Social media communication

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage tourism at Pakistan's UNESCO World Heritage Sites is not only about protecting old monuments. It is also about how these places are managed and how visitors actually experience them. For managers and policymakers, it is important to understand what visitors like, what they find difficult, and what disappoints them. This kind of feedback helps them improve basic services, site amenities, information, and cleanliness, while still protecting the heritage itself. Visitors' comments on digital platforms such as TripAdvisor show both the strengths of these sites and the recurring problems that need attention. These insights can guide a more strategic focus on enriching visitors' experiences, improving facilities, and promoting sustainable tourism practices that support both conservation and local communities. However, despite their global recognition, many UNESCO heritage sites in Pakistan face persistent managerial challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited visitor services, weak digital engagement strategies, and insufficient responsiveness to visitor feedback. In an increasingly competitive tourism marketplace, destination managers must not only preserve historical assets but also manage visitor perceptions, online reputation, and experiential



© Uzma Naz and Musa Khan. Published in *South Asian Journal of Marketing*. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/>

South Asian Journal of Marketing
Vol. 7 No. 1, 2026
pp. 33-50
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 2738-2486
p-ISSN: 2719-2377
DOI 10.1108/SAJM-11-2024-0032

quality. Failure to address these issues may weaken destination image and reduce competitive positioning in regional and global tourism markets.

The tourism industry in Pakistan represents a significant economic sector characterized by its diverse natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and historical landmarks. The country's tourism offerings encompass a wide array of attractions, including mountainous regions such as the Karakoram and Himalayan ranges, historical sites like the ancient city of Mohenjo-Daro, and the architectural marvels of Lahore's Mughal heritage, as well as cultural festivals and culinary experiences reflecting its multicultural society. Pakistan boasts a heterogeneous cultural heritage that complicatedly narrates the rich historical and cultural tapestry of the nation, embodying the remarkable achievements of its predecessors and significantly enriching the global landscape of its cultural heritage. The primary objective of this investigation is to examine six cultural heritage sites designated by UNESCO, namely the Taxila Ruins, Mohenjo-Daro Archaeological Ruins, Buddhist Ruins at Takht-i-Bahi, Rohtas Fort, Historical Monuments at Makli Thatta, and Fort and Shalimar Gardens (Somuncu and Khan, 2010).

Taxila Ruins are situated in the Punjab province of Pakistan, an ancient archaeological site that dates back to the Gandhara civilization. It served as a significant center of learning and commerce along the Silk Road. Taxila's ruins comprise Buddhist monasteries, stupas, and ancient universities, reflecting its importance as a hub of Buddhist culture during the ancient period (Marshall, 1960). Moenjodaro Archaeological Ruins located in the Sindh province, is one of the most important urban settlements of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. The archaeological ruins at Moenjodaro represent a well-planned urban center dating back to the 3rd millennium BCE. These ruins provide valuable insights into the urban planning, social organization, and technological advancements of one of the world's earliest civilizations (Possehl, 2002). Buddhist Ruins at Takht-i-Bahi positioned in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Takht-i-Bahi is a Buddhist monastery complex dating back to the 1st-century CE. It served as a prominent center of Buddhist learning and pilgrimage in ancient Gandhara. The site includes stupas, monastic cells, courtyards, and other architectural features, offering a glimpse into the flourishing Buddhist civilization of the region. Remains of Buddhist architecture can be seen in Taxila, an ancient Gandhara city that is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Marshall, 1960). Rohtas Fort located near Jhelum in Punjab, Rohtas Fort is a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its military architecture and historical significance. Constructed in the 16th-century by the Pashtun king Sher Shah Suri, the fort served as a strategic stronghold against Mughal expansion. Historical Monuments at Makli Thatta situated near Thatta in Sindh, is a vast necropolis containing numerous tombs, mausoleums, and monuments spanning several centuries. These historical structures represent the funerary architecture of various dynasties, including the Soomro, Samma, and Mughal periods. The Makli Necropolis and other historical monuments in Thatta serve as reminders of the artistic ability of the medieval Sindhi civilization. Fort and Shalimar Gardens located in Lahore, Punjab, the Lahore Fort and Shalimar Gardens are iconic landmarks reflecting the grandeur of Mughal architecture and garden design. The Lahore Fort, also known as Shahi Qila, served as a royal residence and administrative center during the Mughal era. The Shalimar Gardens, built by Emperor Shah Jahan in the 17th century, exemplify the Mughal concept of paradise gardens, featuring terraced lawns, fountains, and pavilions amidst lush greenery. The Mughal era's architectural genius is demonstrated by the Lahore Fort and Shalimar Gardens. The Rohtas Fort is a representation of military might and strategic planning (Ahmed and Hussain, 2016). Its formidable construction and thick walls serve as a reminder of the military might of a bygone period.

For social scientists, cultural heritage tourism is an important area of research. Efficient planning, management, and promotion of the nation's cultural legacy can yield significant economic benefits, as World Heritage Sites are a global public good with cross-border impacts that benefit all nations, people groups, and generations (Bertacchini *et al.*, 2011). Earlier studies indicate that, along with other recreational and cultural businesses, heritage tourism is

frequently promoted as an urban development policy to diversify local economies (Lak *et al.*, 2020). According to Rider *et al.* (2020), given the significance of cultural heritage, Pakistan should realign its management strategies to enhance tourism development. Earlier research suggests that online reviews continue to be the most important source of information for decision-making in the travel industry (Kim and Kim, 2022). Consistent with earlier research, this study aims to conduct online reviews of these heritage sites by Pakistani and international tourists using the social media platform TripAdvisor. As per Surugiu *et al.* (2023), TripAdvisor is an invaluable database marketing tool for travel agencies and companies. A total of 445 visitor reviews were sourced from the TripAdvisor platform, in alignment with previous studies such as Saleem and Umar (2023) and Gursoy *et al.* (2021), which emphasize the growing importance of online reviews as credible sources of tourist experiences. TripAdvisor was selected due to its widespread use, user-generated content features, and its established role as a reliable and influential platform for travel decision-making and destination assessment. Although UNESCO's cultural heritage sites in Pakistan have received appreciation from TripAdvisor reviewers for maintaining and enhancing the cultural narrative of Pakistan, many discrepancies are also mentioned.

While prior research has examined heritage preservation policies and the economic significance of cultural tourism in Pakistan, limited scholarly attention has been given to visitors' experiential narratives as expressed through digital platforms. In particular, there is a lack of systematic analysis of user-generated content to understand how authenticity, site management, service quality, and emotional engagement shape overall visitor satisfaction. Identifying this gap and aligning with the stated research objective of exploring tourist experiences, the following research question has been formulated: How do visitors' online reviews on the TripAdvisor platform reflect and shape their experiences at UNESCO cultural heritage sites in Pakistan? Addressing this question not only informed specific dimensions of visitor experiences but also provided strategic insights into improving site management, thereby emphasizing the practical and theoretical importance of this research. The study is critical both practically and theoretically. Practically, insights derived from analyzing findings from TripAdvisor reviews inform heritage site management by highlighting areas of strength and identifying specific elements requiring improvement. Theoretically, however, this exploration contributes to the broader academic discourse on the roles of digital platforms in shaping contemporary tourist experiences and decision-making behaviors (Gursoy *et al.*, 2021; Rider *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, this study holds considerable importance in bridging the identified research gap and enhancing knowledge about interactive digital platforms' impact on cultural heritage tourism.

2. Literature review

2.1 Social media, tourism, and user-generated content

The relationship between social media and tourism has attracted a lot of scholarly interest, especially when it comes to cultural heritage sites. In addition to providing a forum for post-visit reviews, social media sites can affect prospective tourists' opinions and decision-making. A growing body of literature suggests that social media platforms have significantly transformed the nature of tourism by influencing how tourists search for information, form destination images, and evaluate services, thereby reshaping how they experience destinations and attractions (Leung *et al.*, 2013; Narangajavana *et al.*, 2017). According to Tham *et al.* (2020), these platforms play a vital role in tourists' decision-making processes, influencing their travel choices and destination preferences. Earlier studies describe that social media enhances visitors' engagement with cultural heritage sites by enabling participatory storytelling, co-creation of meaning, and ongoing interaction with heritage narratives, thereby strengthening their connections with historical and cultural contexts (Giaccardi, 2012; Lund *et al.*, 2018). Despite widespread acknowledgment of the impact of social media in tourism literature, there is still limited research specifically exploring its role in the context of

cultural heritage sites in Pakistan (Hussain Abbasi and Khan, 2022). UNESCO-designated cultural heritage sites, with their intrinsic cultural and historical significance, present unique challenges and opportunities regarding visitor management, engagement, and preservation (Ryan and Silvano, 2009; Sharma, 2023).

Cultural heritage serves as a means of advancing intercultural understanding and peace (Nazir *et al.*, 2023). Liu *et al.* (2022) reported that the tourism industry in Pakistan has a prominent role in economic growth, and cultural heritage tourism is one of the most attractive tourism genres that attracts a large sum of tourists in Pakistan. User-generated content (UGC) enables widespread participation by enabling people to express their thoughts, concerns, and support for historical places. This democratization might increase the visibility of hazards and encourage a group response to cultural heritage site conservation concerns. Earlier studies suggest that the data provided by previous visitors helps tourists when they visit historical spots by offering practical information, setting expectations about site conditions, and highlighting potential risks and opportunities during the visit (Antonio *et al.*, 2020). According to Gursoy *et al.* (2021), tourists benefit from the variety of information left by previous visitors to discover different aspects during every stage of their trip. This represents the importance of user-generated content in terms of services, particularly tourism. Previous studies further support this notion; for instance, as per Ginzarly *et al.* (2022), digital media not only form the way meanings are created but also emphasize the importance of understanding visitors' experiences by appealing to different interpretations, which ultimately improve cultural heritage growth and publicity. In terms of digital storytelling and interactive reviews, digital media play a critical role in shaping visitors' perceptions (Correia *et al.*, 2025; Lund *et al.*, 2018). Prior research indicates that, among other platforms, TripAdvisor has become a vital tool for tourists because its reviews and ratings influence destination image, perceived service quality, and tourists' willingness to visit or recommend cultural heritage sites (Ganzaroli *et al.*, 2017; Saoualih *et al.*, 2024; Van der Zee and Bertocchi, 2018). Previous research further suggests that content generated by visitors on social media platforms actively constructs narratives and shapes expectations (Correia *et al.*, 2025). The content created by end users meaningfully influences the overall experience of visitors and their perceptions of authenticity. UGC represents a range of opinions and successfully supports cultural conservation initiatives (Choo, 2023; Xu *et al.*, 2023).

Heritage sites, in addition to offering a place for recreation and study, distinguish a locality, generate income, preserve the past, and promote history (Mensah, 2023). To emotionally engage tourists with a location or attraction, a sense can lead to the formation of strong emotions towards that destination or attraction. According to Rodwell (2012), the World Heritage Convention (1972) highlighted its primary intent of the preservation of natural and cultural heritage sites. The convention, however, has drifted from its original principles. It should lead to sustainable development by advocating a return to a more expansive ethic of community protection and conservation. Its role is crucial for developing countries like Pakistan, whose 5000-year-old heritage is crumbling in Mohenjo-Daro due to erosion and being extremely neglected. In Pakistan, as well as other countries, there has been extensive political exploitation of ancient sites. At Mohenjo-Daro, one of the two most significant sites associated with the Indus Valley Civilization, a concert took place on 30 April 2014. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), a well-known political party in Pakistan, arranged this performance to honor the traditions of Sindh, the province that includes Mohenjo-Daro (Siddiqui, 2018). It was a callous act of neglect that a place was used for the concert, which is otherwise banned for excavation due to acute sensitivity (Siddiqui, 2018). The managers of the heritage monument share responsibility for finding a practical solution to the problem with other relevant parties, such as UNESCO World Heritage sites, governments, state parties, local government officials, traditional leaders, and community leaders (Mensah, 2023). Tourism destinations started trying to promote their distinctive or differentiating qualities and assets to boost their positions in the global market to meet growing competition (Ayala, 1996). Promoting the heritage of these sites is significant to society not only in terms of economic

benefits but also in shaping a healthier society. Any field that encourages tolerance and compassion is a powerful source of bringing positive change in society. In a place like Pakistan, where clashing religious, cultural, social, and political values have historically led to the loss of tangible heritage, it is a major area of concern.

2.2 Digital media, authenticity, and heritage management

The advent of social media has fundamentally transformed the way tourists engage with and experience cultural heritage sites. Digital media platforms such as TripAdvisor, Facebook, and Instagram, etc. provide a free platform to tourists who can create their own content and share it globally to influence potential visitors. Several studies have highlighted that the role of virtual word-of-mouth (WOM) communication on social media platforms significantly impacts destination image and visitor expectations (Leung *et al.*, 2013). These platforms let visitors be involved in numerous forms of communication. They post reviews, share visual content in the form of photos and videos, and engage with other tourists to create an active and interactive environment for sharing experiences (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). Various studies claim that the interaction of tourists on social media creates a sense of community among users. They utilize these platforms as a public sphere and often share their knowledge and personal experiences about destinations (Munar and Jacobsen, 2014). Other studies further reveal that the content generated by users on digital platforms impacts the decision-making processes of tourists. For instance, Fotis *et al.* (2011) argue in this regard that reviews usually posted on digital media platforms perform as a vital source of information, influencing tourists' choice of destinations. In the context of UNESCO cultural heritage sites, social media content can enhance visitors' understanding and appreciation of cultural significance, thereby enriching their overall experience (Chung and Buhalis, 2008). More recent work emphasizes that the strategic use of digital media platforms can be helpful in improving site management, reputation building, and visitor engagement (Jia *et al.*, 2025; Zhang and Szabó, 2024). Reviews on platforms such as TripAdvisor, therefore, provide valuable insights for advancing both tourism research and practice (Olorunsola *et al.*, 2023; Van der Zee and Bertocchi, 2018).

Comparative studies from other regions further illustrate the analytical value of UGC. For example, Riswanto *et al.* (2023) examined over 6,600 Google Travel reviews of heritage sites in India, identifying key predictors of visitor satisfaction such as physical features, cultural significance, and atmosphere. In Vietnam, Quang *et al.* (2024) analyzed more than 23,000 TripAdvisor reviews of the Cu Chi tunnels, showing that emotional engagement and reflective experiences strongly shaped perceptions of war heritage. In Mexico, Ghermandi *et al.* (2020) mapped cultural ecosystem services by analyzing geotagged photos from social media, highlighting differences between domestic and international visitors. UNESCO heritage sites, renowned for their outstanding universal value, continue to draw the interest of global travelers due to their rich cultural and historical significance. Yet, as their popularity increases, so too do the challenges associated with their conservation and effective management (Adie and Falk, 2021).

Scholars have increasingly pointed to the role of digital media, particularly social media platforms, in addressing some of these concerns. Tang (2014) emphasizes that visitor feedback shared through digital channels can serve as a valuable tool for site administrators by facilitating direct communication that helps align visitor expectations with sustainable tourism practices. These platforms not only aid in marketing efforts but also serve as interpretive spaces where cultural narratives are communicated, enhancing visitors' understanding and appreciation of heritage sites. Timothy (2011) suggests that interaction of visitors via digital platforms encourages potential tourists to engage with cultural heritage more profoundly, even before they visit the site physically. Earlier research suggests that digital media platforms, particularly TripAdvisor, Instagram, and Facebook, offer firsthand information in the form of reviews and stories that shape tourists' perceptions and expand their knowledge about cultural heritage (Li and Wang, 2011). Studies argue that authenticity is increasingly influenced by user-generated content, as visitors rely on peer-shared images, stories, and evaluations to

construct what they perceive as “real” or “authentic” heritage experiences, which in turn underpins many heritage tourism decisions. Research such as that conducted by [Ning \(2017\)](#) reveals that images and narratives shared online by users assist other visitors in constructing a sense of authenticity, which sometimes leads to emotional attachment of tourists with the sites. In this context, digital media not only serves as a storytelling platform but also plays an active role as a space for the exploration of shared culture ([Mkono and Markwell, 2014](#)). Social media can advance the visitor experience; on the other hand, however, it may also cause overcrowding and the commodification of culture, which may sometimes lead to environmental degradation. As [Weng et al. \(2019\)](#) argue, the viral popularity of certain destinations, fueled by social media exposure, can place undue pressure on fragile heritage sites, potentially undermining their integrity. Moreover, concerns have been raised about the reliability of content generated by tourists. In some cases, visitor-shared information may distort or oversimplify cultural narratives, posing risks to the preservation of historical accuracy and values ([Kim and Fesenmaier, 2017](#)). In essence, existing research underscores that digital media platforms play a pivotal role not only in disseminating information and promoting engagement, but also in fostering more informed, responsible, and meaningful heritage tourism experiences. However, the challenges associated with social media-driven tourism highlight the need for strategic management and sustainable practices to preserve the cultural integrity and authenticity of heritage sites. This literature review underscores the importance of integrating social media insights into the management and promotion strategies of UNESCO cultural heritage sites in Pakistan, paving the way for a balanced approach to cultural heritage tourism.

2.3 Theoretical framework

In the digital media age, particularly after the rise of Web 2.0, audiences evolved into prosumers, a combination of consumers and producers. Today, most users act as amateur producers. Digital media has empowered individuals not only to consume content but also to create it. Users can freely share their opinions without the gatekeeping that is common in traditional media. This democratization has encouraged individuals to raise their voices and share feedback on political issues or the services and products they use. This study is based on the feedback of individuals (Tourists) after visiting the sites. In this context, UGC theory is directly relevant because it provides a lens to understand how TripAdvisor reviews, as prosumer-generated texts, shape other visitors’ expectations and decisions about UNESCO cultural heritage sites in Pakistan. User-Generated content theory has been employed to analytically support the empirical data and findings. Previously, this theory has been commonly applied in studies of digital media users’ experiences and tourism. The concept was initially introduced during the 1990s to describe media created by amateur producers rather than by professional media organizations ([Berthon et al., 2015](#); [Bolin, 2021](#)). Previous studies have found that the development of user-generated content closely associates with the emergence of interactive media platforms. As per [Jenkins \(2006\)](#) and [Bolin \(2021\)](#), this development enabled cultural industries, particularly the tourism industry and media benefit from feedback and content created by common users. The theory suggests that content created by site visitors, for instance, online reviews, considerably influences other tourists’ perceptions, behaviors, and decisions regarding travel experiences and using the services. It further highlights how these contents shape collective knowledge, expectations of visitors, satisfaction, credibility, and perception of authenticity. Earlier studies prove that, among other platforms, TripAdvisor plays a crucial role in this regard ([Marine-Roig and Clave, 2015](#)). To analytically examine the influence of online reviews on the decision-making processes of tourists and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction after their experiences at the selected UNESCO sites in Pakistan, this study applied user-generated content (UGC). The theory provides a deep insight to support empirical data on how digital interactions and visitor-generated content enthusiastically shape visitor experiences and contribute widely to the field of tourism.

3. Methodology

This paper adopted a qualitative research approach and relied on user-generated content obtained from TripAdvisor. One of the reasons for choosing the TripAdvisor platform is its wide recognition explored in previous studies for providing rich, authentic insights into visitors' perceptions, emotions, and experiences (Gursoy *et al.*, 2021; Saleem and Umar, 2023). Content generated by users, prosumers, and amateurs is increasingly applied in tourism research due to its ability to capture genuine expressions of tourists' feelings and sentiments. According to existing studies, this approach is crucial for understanding the nuances of cultural heritage tourism (Thanh and Kirova, 2018).

A total of ($n = 445$) reviews were gathered from TripAdvisor, covering six prominent UNESCO cultural heritage sites in Pakistan. These sites include, the Taxila Ruins, Mohenjodaro Archaeological Ruins, Buddhist Ruins at Takht-i-Bahi, Rohtas Fort, Historical Monuments at Makli Thatta, and Fort and Shalimar Gardens. Data were collected through WebHarvy, an advanced web scraping software known for its efficiency in extracting large volumes of textual data from online platforms (Laksono *et al.*, 2019).

The collected data (reviews) were stratified into four reviewer categories, including International/Foreign Tourists ($n = 156$), National Tourists ($n = 163$), Overseas Nationals ($n = 47$), and Unknown ($n = 79$). Such classification and methods are applied to previous studies as well, such as (Christou, 2022; Kwok *et al.*, 2017). Instead of applying predefined categories, each review was first open-coded for recurring ideas and expressions, for example, (genuine architecture, memorable journey, peaceful ambiance, helpful staff, felt welcomed, etc.). These codes were then classified into five primary themes: authenticity, experience, atmosphere, service quality, and Empathy (Chen *et al.*, 2024). To ensure that themes were formed from visitors' own words, this bottom-up approach was adopted. This approach provides an understanding of how tourists articulate their experiences online (Tussyadiah, 2014). A purposive sampling strategy was used to collect the reviews, ensuring thematic saturation while representing a broad range of visitor perspectives—including International/Foreign Tourists, National Tourists, Overseas Nationals, and reviews of unknown origin. The possibility of self-selection bias in publicly posted reviews is acknowledged, as individuals with particularly positive or negative experiences may be more motivated to share their views, which could affect the prevalence of certain themes. Furthermore, since this study depends merely on TripAdvisor, we acknowledge the limitation of drawing insights from a single platform, which may not fully capture the perspectives of travelers who share their experiences through other channels. Reviewer backgrounds, cultural contexts, and personal attitudes can also influence how heritage sites are perceived and evaluated, potentially introducing cultural bias into user-generated content. These constraints should be considered when interpreting and generalizing the findings. To ensure ethical integrity, no personally identifiable information was collected; only anonymized, publicly available data were analyzed in accordance with TripAdvisor's terms of service.

3.1 Thematic analysis

To identify and extract themes from the user-generated content, an inductive thematic analysis approach was adopted. Earlier studies suggest that inductive reasoning allows researchers to derive patterns and insights directly from the data without imposing preconceived categories or theories (Thomas, 2006). To maintain the validity of the findings, the study adopted several strategies, such as achieving triangulation by comparing and contrasting the identified themes with existing literature on the subject matter (Creswell and Poth, 2016). In the context of cultural heritage tourism, the findings derived from this study provide valuable implications for the management and promotion of these sites, contributing to a deeper understanding of tourists' needs and expectations. As shown in Table 1, the dataset comprised 445 TripAdvisor reviews distributed across national, international, overseas national, and unknown tourist categories.

Table 1. Distribution of tourist categories and review counts

Tourist category	Number of tourists	Number of reviews
National (Local) Tourists	163	163
International (Foreign) Tourists	156	156
Overseas National Tourists	47	47
Unknown	–	79
Total	366	445

Source(s): Compiled by the authors from TripAdvisor data

In order to systematically analyze the data, we adopted the six-phase thematic analysis model outlined by [Braun and Clarke \(2021\)](#). [Figure 1](#) illustrates the iterative process we followed, beginning with data familiarization and coding, and proceeding through theme development, refinement, and naming, to ensure a bottom-up derivation of visitor experience themes. This structured approach provides the methodological backbone for the detailed discussion of how authenticity, atmospherics, experience, service quality, and empathy emerged from the inductive coding of user-generated content.

Selected reviews were divided into four major categories: Pakistani/national reviewers, foreigners/international, overseas Pakistanis, and unknown reviewers based on their origin. Subsequently, manual coding was performed on the selected categories and identified 3,000 initial codes were identified, which were carefully refined and divided into five themes, each with multiple subthemes. These results were revised and validated by expert consultation. The findings provide insights into the critical components within each category that influence visitors’ perceptions and experiences at Pakistani UNESCO cultural heritage sites.

4. Findings and discussion

The five key dimensions examined in this study are authenticity, visitor experience, service quality, atmospherics, and empathy. Beyond identifying these themes, the findings reveal how user-generated review function as mechanisms of destination evaluation and informal performance audits. In line with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) literature, online narratives not only reflect individual experiences but actively shape destination image and perceived brand credibility ([Kim and Kim, 2022](#)). Thus, the themes identified in this study should be interpreted not merely as descriptive categories, but as strategic dimensions influencing destination positioning, visitor loyalty, and competitive advantage in the heritage tourism market. These dimensions provide a thorough understanding of how visitors perceive

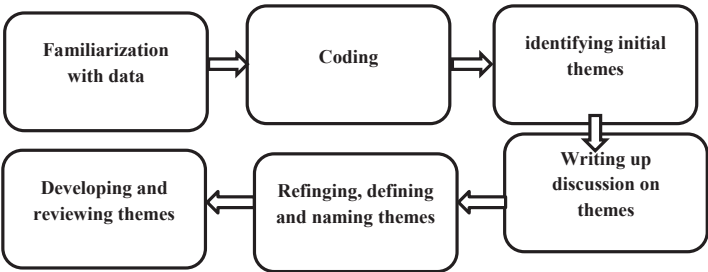


Figure 1. Data analysis process. Source: [Braun and Clarke \(2021\)](#)

the destination and draw attention to important areas of managing, preserving, and promoting cultural heritage sites. The results emphasize the significance of immersive experiences in raising tourist satisfaction, the need for high-quality services, the importance of authenticity in promoting a closer connection with the past, and the importance of an empathic approach to heritage preservation. The findings encourage Pakistan's administration and marketing of cultural heritage tourism and stakeholders to prioritize tourist experiences, improve site infrastructure, and implement sustainable tourism practices.

Table 2 summarizes how the five core themes, Authenticity, Experience, Atmospherics, Service Quality, and Empathy, emerged from the inductive coding of 445 TripAdvisor reviews. For each theme, we list illustrative code words drawn directly from reviewers' comments and show the frequency with which each theme appeared across the four reviewer categories (International/Foreign Tourists, National Tourists, Overseas Nationals, and Unknown). This overview sets the stage for our deeper discussion of how each theme manifests differently depending on the visitor profile.

4.1 Authenticity

A crucial component of the tourism experience is authenticity, particularly in the case of cultural heritage tourism. Travelers frequently look for genuine experiences that allow them to engage with the sites' historical and cultural significance. Authenticity is very important in heritage tourism. According to research, authentic cultural displays greatly increase visitor satisfaction and have the potential to change how heritage places are preserved. It is a major concern for cultural heritage tourists. When posting about their experiences on social media, travelers also take authenticity into account, which influences the behavior and expectations of potential visitors. The quality of being "real and genuine" or "authentic and real" is referred to as authenticity (Chhabra, 2005). In heritage tourism, authenticity is essential for increasing visitor satisfaction and destination appeal. Genuine cultural experience influences outlooks and encourages revisiting historical sites and is essential for improving the perception of the destination (Gursoy *et al.*, 2021). In the present study, a recurring theme in the reviews is authenticity, which suggests that users value these sites and think they authentically depict Pakistan's rich cultural legacy. Remarkable locations such as Mohenjo-Daro and Taxila are

Table 2. Inductive theme distribution and example code words

S.No.	Theme	Examples of code words	International (n = 156)	National (n = 163)	Overseas nationals (n = 47)	Unknown (n = 79)	Total (n = 445)
1	Authenticity	genuine architecture, cultural roots	30	45	10	13	98
2	Experience	memorable journey, immersed in history	50	55	15	27	147
3	Atmospherics	peaceful ambiance, scenic surroundings	40	30	8	13	91
4	Service Quality	helpful staff, clean facilities	20	25	7	13	65
5	Empathy	staff were patient, felt welcomed	16	8	7	13	44

commended for their capacity to immerse tourists in prehistoric times and offer a genuine window into history. Since authenticity encourages a closer relationship with history and culture, it is crucial to preserve the integrity and relevance of these locations. The process of forming the idea of authenticity is heavily influenced by the “genuineness” of the experiences (Gursoy *et al.*, 2021). Codes such as the second oldest, capital of Gandhara, Achaemenian rule, Buddhist temples, Corinthian antiquities, bone relics of Buddha, mausoleums, and carvings reflect visitors’ perception of the authenticity of the place. These findings support previous research suggesting that authenticity enhances satisfaction and revisit intentions (Chhabra, 2005; Gursoy *et al.*, 2021). However, this study extends prior work by showing that authenticity also strengthens digital destination narratives in emerging markets. When visitors describe sites using historically grounded terminology, they actively reinforce the cultural legitimacy of Pakistan’s heritage assets. From a marketing perspective, authenticity operates as a core brand differentiator that strengthens trust and positive online reputation.

Sample responses: Authenticity

Review 1: Here is tangible proof of the second oldest civilization in the world, the Indus Valley Civilization.

Review 2: Makli Hill is one of the largest necropolises in the world.

Review 3: Nice collection of artifacts excavated within an approximate 10-km area.

Review 4: Such a lovely place to see Gandharan artwork.

Review 5: A fascinating tour discovering the 2000-year-old history of Buddhism.

4.2 Experience

Tourist satisfaction is greatly increased by immersive experiences, which offer a sensory-rich interaction with the location’s surroundings. Immersive technologies and narrative techniques at historical sites can significantly improve visitors’ experiences, making them more memorable and shareable. Accessibility, engagement, and general contentment are just a few of the elements of the tourist interaction that are included in the experience dimension. The quality of a tourist’s experience is defined as the affective component of the experience they have while visiting a destination (Otto and Ritchie, 1995). Positive reviews frequently highlight the immersive experiences offered at locations where visitors can explore Mughal architecture and lush landscapes, such as Shalimar Gardens and Lahore Fort. Negative comments, on the other hand, could point out areas that should be improved to improve the entire visitor experience. Knowledge and improved comprehension are the main takeaways from historic tourism experiences (Gursoy *et al.*, 2021). Most of the reviews expressed an element of awe. Awe is the emotion of being impressed by a place’s historical richness (Gursoy *et al.*, 2021). Codes like Super picturesque, fascinating, sophisticated, spectacular, mystic, captivating, grandeur, thriving, pleasant, stunning, inspiring, splendid, extraordinary, unique, wonderful, astonished, paradise, magic, treasure from times, city of wonders, city of contrasts and marvels, stunning Fantastic, decaying elegance, breathtaking, reflected visitors’ experience of the visit to these heritage sites. However, they showed their concerns regarding cleanliness and maintenance of the sites, which are discussed in service quality and empathy. Consistent with Otto and Ritchie (1995), the affective dimension of experience plays a central role in overall satisfaction. The prevalence of emotionally charged descriptors such as “breathtaking” and “astonished” indicates that experiential intensity enhances memorability and shareability. In digital environments, such emotionally rich narratives increase the persuasive power of reviews, thereby influencing potential tourists’ decision-making processes and contributing to destination image formation.

Sample responses: Experience

Review 1: A walk-through time that is very enlightening.

Review 2: It is really soothing to visit these gardens.

Review 3: Mythic place in a wonderful mysterious city with no (or almost no) tourists. Extremely friendly encounters, very photogenic too.

Review 4: Was really sad to see the way they are treating it.

Review 5: It was by-far worth a visit to see the excavations and history unfold in front of you.

4.3 Atmospherics

Atmospherics is another important dimension mentioned by the reviewers in the reviews of Pakistan's cultural heritage sites. Kotler (1973) used atmospherics in the field of marketing for the first time. The idea refers to Earth's atmosphere figuratively. The atmosphere of cultural heritage sites influences visitor behavior and ought to be considered when determining the quality of cultural tourism experiences (Kılıçarslan and Caber, 2018). Codes such as 120°, warm summer evenings, weather, very little shade, very dark, breeze, killing hot, mosquitos, most humid weather, heat, sun, winter relaxing place, headscarf, global warming, dried up river, showed visitors concerns about the sites most of them recommended to visit place in winter as summer weather is not very suitable as there is no availability of shade and water and restaurants. These concerns are to be taken seriously by the authorities to achieve tourists' satisfaction with these historic sites. It is important to make the environment comfortable for tourists by providing proper facilities and by working on site infrastructure so that their experience is comfortable, and they review positively on social media sites, which eventually encourages new visitors to visit the heritage Site. The findings demonstrate that environmental discomfort, particularly extreme weather and lack of shade, negatively influences visitor evaluations. In line with Kotler's (1973) concept of atmospherics, the physical environment significantly shapes consumer responses. In heritage contexts, poor environmental planning may weaken otherwise strong authenticity perceptions. Therefore, site infrastructure improvements are not merely operational concerns but strategic marketing necessities affecting visitor satisfaction and online reputation.

Sample responses: Atmospheric

Review 1: HOT, HOT, HOT but worth spending as much time as possible on the site. Bring plenty of water.

Review 2: A lot to see so make sure u have plenty of fluids during summer months

Review 3: Better not to visit in the heat of summers

Review 4: Many of our summer evenings have been spent here.

Review 5: About 45 C degree and no shade available

4.4 Service quality

It is important for tourism destination management to provide high-quality service because it affects visitors' experiences as well as their social media reviews. Better service quality raises visitor happiness and encourages more favorable online reviews, both of which have an impact on how prospective tourists perceive a destination discovered as much. According to UNWTO (2003), "quality in tourism" is the outcome of a process that implies meeting all reasonable consumer needs, requirements, and expectations for goods and services at a reasonable price, by the underlying quality determinants, which include safety and security, hygienic practices, accessibility, transparency, authenticity, and harmony of the tourism activity with its human

and natural surroundings. In the service industry, quality is defined from the viewpoint of the client and ought to be aligned with their expectations. Services have a significant impact on how visitors view a place. Sites with well-kept amenities, competent personnel, and effective visitor services may receive positive reviews. On the other hand, grievances regarding inadequate facilities or inadequate details may diminish the entire experience. To increase satisfaction and promote repeat business, it is imperative to invest in high-quality services and guest amenities. It is essential to maintain appropriate hygiene conditions at heritage sites (Mensah, 2023). Codes like No security, front office, rubbish, information center, rubbish bins, fine for littering, taxi, patrol, staff, informed, friendly, small broken taxi, site caretaker, services, guidebook, water, Pakistan handbook, map, description, water construction, traffic, on-site toilets' food, drink, airport, hotel, restaurant, govt run motel, public transport, souvenir shops, refreshments, snacks, tickets, cheap, world-famous kebabs, wheelchair, short of cash, tasty food, clean toilets, local bus, were recurrent in customers' reviews regarding services. They showed concern regarding the proper availability of hygienic conditions, transportation services, restaurants, shops, food, water, and toilets at these sites. Unfortunately, these basic facilities are not provided at such valuable tourist sites. Officials must take a look into the matter. The service-related concerns expressed by visitors align with UNWTO's (2003) definition of quality tourism as meeting consumer expectations regarding safety, hygiene, and accessibility. Inadequate service provision not only reduces immediate satisfaction but also amplifies negative eWOM effects. Since online reviews serve as influential information sources for prospective tourists (Kim and Kim, 2022), improving service quality is critical for sustaining a positive destination image and long-term competitiveness.

Sample responses: Service Quality

Review 1: You might not find anything to eat in a nearby area

Review 2: You will be unable to find any quality eatables inside the park

Review 3: Due to lack of financial resources in the country, amenities are limited
Review 4: There clearly is little or no security

Review 5: You can't find any tuck shop inside fort

4.5 Empathy

Empathy in heritage tourism improves visitors' comprehension and appreciation of the past by strengthening their ties to cultural monuments. Establishing an empathetic mindset among tourists is crucial, as it frequently manifests in their social media narratives, shaping public perception and attitudes toward heritage conservation. Previously, empathy has been defined only as the degree of comprehension and responsiveness exhibited by site management or staff towards the wants and concerns of visitors. Empathy in cultural heritage tourism is emphasized since it has a notable effect on visitor satisfaction and loyalty. However, in the present study, empathy is viewed by tourists towards the heritage sites. We may see empathy from a different perspective, and that is unique to the present study, as it is said that in the tourism industry, empathy means understanding other cultures and questioning repressive power structures. It encourages more profound intersubjective relationships and constructive social change (Tucker, 2016). We may argue that the codes like miserable condition, shame, zero maintenance, sad, heartbreaking, Government, politicians, festivals, prey of our neglect, bad, broken, collapsed, deteriorating, neglect of the Archeology department, international donations, cheap repairs, crumbling, UN visit are some codes that reflect empathy of tourists towards these magnificent sites. Beyond being descriptive, this empathetic stance indicates that visitors are not only consumers of cultural heritage but also active stakeholders who call attention to neglect, mismanagement, and threats to preservation. Their emotional reactions reveal a form of advocacy, where disappointment and concern are transformed into a critique of institutional practices and appeals for better conservation. This shows that empathy

in visitor narratives functions as both an effective response and a socio-political commentary, broadening the understanding of heritage tourism as an arena where cultural identity, governance, and public accountability intersect. The empathy dimension represents one of the most distinctive findings of this study. Unlike traditional interpretations that focus on staff responsiveness, visitor-generated empathy in this context reflects emotional advocacy for heritage preservation. In line with [Tucker \(2016\)](#), such narratives demonstrate that tourists increasingly perceive themselves as stakeholders rather than passive consumers. This shift suggests that heritage tourism operates within a participatory digital culture where visitors co-create meaning, accountability, and public discourse on conservation practices.

Sample responses: Empathy

Review 1: People are clambering all over the ruins in full view of “guards” Visit before it all disappears.

Review 2: The fort is populated with villagers and houses built with the bricks of the fort. What a total shame.

Review 3: With the orange train being built to pass nearby, the foundations of the gardens may be affected due to the vibrations.

Review 4: I hope Pakistan preserves this site (and many more) so that our future generations could also enjoy it.

Review 5: The site has recently been threatened by erosion, and, despite conservation efforts funded by both the Pakistani government and UNESCO, it is considered endangered. Some archaeologists say that it will be gone by 2030 unless there is a major new conservation initiative.

5. Conclusion

This study offers an in-depth exploration of how visitors’ experience and perceive UNESCO cultural heritage sites in Pakistan, drawing insights from a rich quantity of TripAdvisor reviews. By analyzing these first-hand narratives, the research uncovers both the positive impressions and the underlying concerns shared by tourists. Elements such as the authenticity of heritage representations, the overall atmosphere of the sites, the quality of services, and the empathetic engagement of staff emerge as central to shaping visitor satisfaction. The findings suggest that when visitors perceive a site as genuine and faithful to its historical context, they are more likely to report a meaningful and fulfilling experience. Similarly, the ambiance of a site, such as, its aesthetics, cleanliness, and sensory appeal, alongside the professionalism and cultural sensitivity of staff, play crucial roles in enhancing or diminishing the quality of a visit. These findings underline the importance of not only preserving heritage structures but also thoughtfully managing the visitor experience in a way that respects and reflects the cultural essence of each site. Beyond highlighting these key dimensions, the study also brings attention to several persistent challenges. Issues such as staff indifference, lack of informative signage or educational content, and poorly maintained infrastructure continue to hinder the potential of these sites to deliver enriching experiences. Recognizing these gaps, the study advocates for a series of thoughtful, sustainable interventions. These include upgrading interpretive materials to help visitors better understand the historical significance of sites, improving basic amenities and access roads, and investing in staff training programs that emphasize hospitality, cultural awareness, and storytelling skills. Moreover, the results point to the vital role that collaborative governance must play in shaping the future of heritage tourism in Pakistan. Efforts to preserve and promote cultural heritage should not rest solely on government institutions or tourism departments but must actively involve local communities, heritage experts, artists, and other stakeholders. Supporting local artisans, incorporating community narratives, and integrating heritage sites into the local economy are just a few of the ways tourism can be both culturally

respectful and economically empowering. Theoretically, this study contributes to heritage destination marketing literature by demonstrating how user-generated reviews operate as informal brand audits of UNESCO cultural sites in an emerging tourism economy. By integrating authenticity, experiential engagement, service quality, atmospherics, and empathy into a unified analytical framework, the research advances our understanding of how digital narratives shape destination image and visitor expectations.

From a managerial perspective, the findings highlight the need for structured digital monitoring of online reviews to inform real-time decision-making. Heritage authorities should prioritize environmental comfort measures such as shaded pathways and hydration facilities, improve interpretive signage and storytelling, and implement staff training programs focused on hospitality and cultural communication. Integrating visitor feedback into strategic planning can enhance both satisfaction and electronic word-of-mouth outcomes, strengthening the competitive positioning of Pakistan's UNESCO sites.

To maintain progress and adapt to evolving visitor expectations, continued research is essential. Long-term studies that monitor how changes in site management affect visitor satisfaction can offer valuable feedback loops for policymakers and practitioners. Integrating digital feedback, particularly user-generated content, into heritage site planning and evaluation processes offers a practical way to remain responsive and data-informed. Finally, this research emphasizes that the future of cultural heritage tourism in Pakistan hinges on a delicate balance: preserving the historical soul of each site while creating spaces that resonate with today's travelers. By prioritizing authenticity, empathy, and meaningful engagement and actively listening to the voices of visitors, Pakistan can not only protect its cultural treasures but also position them as powerful drivers of education, dialog, and sustainable development.

References

- Adie, B.A. and Falk, M. (2021), "Residents' perception of cultural heritage in terms of job creation and overtourism in Europe", *Tourism Economics*, Vol. 27 No. 6, pp. 1185-1201, doi: [10.1177/1354816620943688](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354816620943688).
- Ahmed, N. and Hussain, A. (2016), "The recreational value of Rohtas fort, Pakistan", *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 21 No. 7, pp. 782-794, doi: [10.1080/10941665.2015.1075563](https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2015.1075563).
- Antonio, N., Correia, M.B. and Ribeiro, F.P. (2020), "Exploring user-generated content for improving destination knowledge: the case of two world heritage cities", *Sustainability*, Vol. 12 No. 22, 9654, doi: [10.3390/su12229654](https://doi.org/10.3390/su12229654).
- Ayala, H. (1996), "Resort ecotourism: a paradigm for the 21st century", *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 37 No. 5, pp. 46-53, doi: [10.1177/001088049603700523](https://doi.org/10.1177/001088049603700523).
- Bertacchini, E., Saccone, D. and Santagata, W. (2011), "Embracing diversity, correcting inequalities: towards a new global governance for the UNESCO World Heritage", *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 278-288, doi: [10.1080/10286632.2010.528833](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2010.528833).
- Berthon, P., Pitt, L., Kietzmann, J. and McCarthy, I.P. (2015), "CGIP: managing consumer-generated intellectual property", *California Management Review*, Vol. 57 No. 4, pp. 43-62, doi: [10.1525/cmr.2015.57.4.43](https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2015.57.4.43).
- Bolin, G. (2021), "User-generated content (UGC): understanding the activity of media use in the age of digital reproduction", pp. 267-280, doi: [10.1515/9783110740202-015](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110740202-015).
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2021), "One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis?", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 328-352.
- Chen, J., Lotsos, A., Zhao, L., Wang, C., Hullman, J., Sherin, B., . . . and Horn, M. (2024), "A computational method for measuring 'open codes' in qualitative analysis", arXiv preprint arXiv: 2411.12142.
- Chhabra, D. (2005), "Defining authenticity and its determinants: toward an authenticity flow model", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 44 No. 1, pp. 64-73, doi: [10.1177/0047287505276592](https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287505276592).

- Choo, L.S. (2023), "User-generated content on online platforms: a novel method for investigating heritage destination value", *Heritage and Society*, Vol. 19, pp. 1-22, doi: [10.1080/2159032x.2023.2226569](https://doi.org/10.1080/2159032x.2023.2226569).
- Christou, P.A. (2022), "How to use thematic analysis in qualitative research", *Journal of Qualitative Research in Tourism*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 79-95, doi: [10.4337/jqrt.2023.0006](https://doi.org/10.4337/jqrt.2023.0006).
- Chung, J.Y. and Buhalis, D. (2008), "Web 2.0: a study of online travel community", in *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2008*, Springer, pp. 70-81.
- Correia, R., Aksionova, E., Venciute, D., Sousa, J. and Fontes, R. (2025), "User-generated content's influence on tourist destination image: a generational perspective", *Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 167-185.
- Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. (2016), *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Fotis, J., Buhalis, D. and Rossides, N. (2011), "Social media impact on holiday travel planning: the case of the Russian and the FSU markets", *International Journal of Online Marketing*, Vol. 1 No. 4, pp. 1-19, doi: [10.4018/ijom.201100101](https://doi.org/10.4018/ijom.201100101).
- Ganzaroli, A., De Noni, I. and van Baalen, P. (2017), "Vicious advice: analyzing the impact of TripAdvisor on the quality of restaurants as part of the cultural heritage of Venice", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 61, pp. 501-510, doi: [10.1016/j.tourman.2017.03.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.03.019).
- Ghermandi, A., Camacho-Valdez, V. and Trejo-Espinosa, H. (2020), "Social media-based analysis of cultural ecosystem services and heritage tourism in a coastal region of Mexico", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 77, 104002, doi: [10.1016/j.tourman.2019.104002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.104002).
- Giaccardi, E. (2012), *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding Heritage in a Participatory Culture*, Routledge, London.
- Ginzarly, M., Srour, F.J. and Roders, A.P. (2022), "The interplay of context, experience, and emotion at World Heritage Sites: a qualitative and machine learning approach", *Tourism Culture and Communication*, Vol. 22 No. 4, pp. 321-340, doi: [10.3727/109830421x16345418234065](https://doi.org/10.3727/109830421x16345418234065).
- Gursoy, D., Akova, O. and Atsız, O. (2021), "Understanding the heritage experience: a content analysis of online reviews of World Heritage Sites in Istanbul", *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 311-334, doi: [10.1080/14766825.2021.1937193](https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2021.1937193).
- Hussain Abbasi, M. and Khan, M. (2022), "Nation branding through religious tourism in Pakistan by utilizing social media tools", *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 632-643, doi: [10.57119/jdss.v3i2.632-643](https://doi.org/10.57119/jdss.v3i2.632-643).
- Jenkins, H. (2006), *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, New York, NY.
- Jia, S., Chi, O.H., Martinez, S.D. and Lu, L. (2025), "When 'old' meets 'new': unlocking the future of innovative technology implementation in heritage tourism", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, Vol. 49 No. 3, pp. 640-661, doi: [10.1177/10963480231205767](https://doi.org/10.1177/10963480231205767).
- Kılıçarslan, D. and Caber, M. (2018), "The impacts of perceived crowding, and atmospherics on visitor satisfaction at cultural heritage sites: a comparison of Turkish and British visitors to Topkapı Palace", *Istanbul Journal of Tourism and Services*, Vol. 9 No. 17, pp. 1-18.
- Kim, J. and Fesenmaier, D.R. (2017), "Sharing tourism experiences: the posttrip experience", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 56 No. 1, pp. 28-40, doi: [10.1177/0047287515620491](https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287515620491).
- Kim, S. and Kim, Y.K. (2022), "Regulatory framing in online hotel reviews: the moderating roles of temporal distance and temporal orientation", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol. 50, pp. 139-147, doi: [10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.01.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.01.006).
- Kotler, P. (1973), "Atmospherics as a marketing tool", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 49 No. 4, pp. 48-64.
- Kwok, L., Xie, K.L. and Richards, T. (2017), "Thematic framework of online review research: a systematic analysis of contemporary literature on seven major hospitality and tourism journals", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 29 No. 1, pp. 307-354.

- Lak, A., Gheitasi, M. and Timothy, D.J. (2020), "Urban regeneration through heritage tourism: cultural policies and strategic management", *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, Vol. 18 No. 4, pp. 386-403, doi: [10.1080/14766825.2019.1668002](https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2019.1668002).
- Laksono, R.A., Sungkono, K.R., Sarno, R. and Wahyuni, C.S. (2019), "Sentiment analysis of restaurant customer reviews on tripadvisor using naïve bayes", *2019 12th international conference on information and communication technology and system (ICTS)*, IEEE, pp. 49-54.
- Leung, D., Law, R., Van Hoof, H. and Buhalis, D. (2013), "Social media in tourism and hospitality: a literature review", *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 30 Nos 1-2, pp. 3-22, doi: [10.1080/10548408.2013.750919](https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.750919).
- Li, X. and Wang, Y. (2011), "China in the eyes of western travelers as represented in travel blogs", *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 28 No. 7, pp. 689-719, doi: [10.1080/10548408.2011.615245](https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2011.615245).
- Liu, Y., Sadiq, F., Ali, W. and Kumail, T. (2022), "Does tourism development, energy consumption, trade openness and economic growth matters for ecological footprint: Testing the environmental kuznets curve and pollution haven hypothesis for Pakistan", *Energy*, Vol. 245, 123208, doi: [10.1016/j.energy.2022.123208](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.energy.2022.123208).
- Lund, N.F., Cohen, S.A. and Scarles, C. (2018), "The power of social media storytelling in destination branding", *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, Vol. 8, pp. 271-280, doi: [10.1016/j.jdmm.2017.05.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2017.05.003).
- Marine-Roig, E. and Clave, S.A. (2015), "Tourism analytics with massive user-generated content: a case study of Barcelona", *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 162-172, doi: [10.1016/j.jdmm.2015.06.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2015.06.004).
- Marshall, J. (1960), *A Guide to Taxila*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Mensah, J. (2023), "UNESCO world heritage sites and sustainable local community development", *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 128-143.
- Mkono, M. and Markwell, K. (2014), "The application of netnography in tourism studies".
- Munar, A.M. and Jacobsen, J.K.S. (2014), "Motivations for sharing tourism experiences through social media", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 43, pp. 46-54, doi: [10.1016/j.tourman.2014.01.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.01.012).
- Narangajavana, Y., Fiol, L.J.C., Tena, M.Á.M., Artola, R.M.R. and García, J.S. (2017), "The influence of social media in creating expectations. An empirical study for a tourist destination", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 65, pp. 60-70, doi: [10.1016/j.annals.2017.05.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.05.002).
- Nazir, F., Santos, N. and Silveira, L. (2023), "Heritage tourism and peace interdependency: news content analysis on the destruction and the rebuilding drives of Jahanabad Buddha Statue, Swat, Pakistan", *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 769-788.
- Ning, W. (2017), "Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience", in *The Political Nature of Cultural Heritage and Tourism*, Routledge, pp. 469-490.
- Olorunsola, V.O., Saydam, M.B., Lasisi, T.T. and Ozturen, A. (2023), "Exploring tourists' experiences when visiting Petra archaeological heritage site: voices from TripAdvisor", *Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 81-96, doi: [10.1108/cbth-05-2021-0118](https://doi.org/10.1108/cbth-05-2021-0118).
- Otto, J.E. and Ritchie, J.B. (1995), "Exploring the quality of the service experience: a theoretical and empirical analysis", *Advances in Services Marketing and Management*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 37-61.
- Possehl, G.L. (2002), *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*, Rowman Altamira Walnut Creek, CA.
- Quang, T.D., Dang Vo, N.M., Van Nguyen, H., Thi Nguyen, Q.X., Ting, H. and Vo-Thanh, T. (2024), "Understanding tourists' experiences at war heritage sites in Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam: a netnographic analysis of TripAdvisor reviews", *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 43 No. 4, pp. 624-643, doi: [10.1080/02614367.2023.2249252](https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2023.2249252).
- Rider, J., Skillings, D. and De Taisne, F. (2020), "The role of culture in post-emergency reconstruction: case studies from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indonesia", *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 51 No. 3, pp. 621-641, doi: [10.1080/03068374.2020.1794557](https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2020.1794557).

- Riswanto, A.L., Kim, S. and Kim, H.-S. (2023), "Analyzing online reviews to uncover customer satisfaction factors in Indian cultural tourism destinations", *Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 13 No. 11, p. 923, doi: [10.3390/bs13110923](https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13110923).
- Rodwell, D. (2012), "The UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 1972-2012: reflections and directions", *The Historic Environment: Policy and Practice*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 64-85, doi: [10.1179/1756750512z.0000000004](https://doi.org/10.1179/1756750512z.0000000004).
- Ryan, J. and Silvano, S. (2009), "The World Heritage List: the making and management of a brand", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 5 No. 4, pp. 290-300, doi: [10.1057/pb.2009.21](https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2009.21).
- Saleem, S. and Umar, R.M. (2023), "A netnography study on memorable cultural tourism experiences: insights from Asian Cultural Heritage Site Tourists", *Journal of Promotion Management*, Vol. 29 No. 2, pp. 280-303, doi: [10.1080/10496491.2022.2143990](https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2022.2143990).
- Saoualili, A., Safaa, L., Bouhatous, A., Bidan, M., Perkumienė, D., Aleinikovas, M., Šilinskas, B. and Perkumas, A. (2024), "Exploring the tourist experience of the majorelle garden using VADER-based sentiment analysis and the latent dirichlet allocation algorithm: the case of TripAdvisor reviews", *Sustainability*, Vol. 16 No. 15, p. 6378, doi: [10.3390/su16156378](https://doi.org/10.3390/su16156378).
- Sharma, A.K.D.C.V. (2023), "The impact of tourism on the preservation of UNESCO cultural heritage sites in India 2023".
- Siddiqui, R.A. (2018), "Community archaeology in Pakistan: three sites in Gandhara as a case study (Doctoral dissertation, Bilkent Üniversitesi (Turkey))".
- Somuncu, M. and Khan, A.A. (2010), "Current status of management and protection of Taxila world heritage site, Pakistan", *Ankara Üniversitesi Çevre Bilimleri Dergisi*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 45-60.
- Surugiu, C., Surugiu, M.R. and Grădinaru, C. (2023), "Targeting creativity through sentiment analysis: a survey on Bucharest city tourism", *Sage Open*, Vol. 13 No. 2, 21582440231167346, doi: [10.1177/21582440231167346](https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231167346).
- Tang, Z. (2014), "Sustainable tourism and property rights: a case study on the World Heritage Site of Wulingyuan in China from the perspective of property rights economics", *The Historic Environment: Policy and Practice*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 275-287, doi: [10.1179/1756750514z.00000000063](https://doi.org/10.1179/1756750514z.00000000063).
- Tham, A., Mair, J. and Croy, G. (2020), "Social media influence on tourists' destination choice: importance of context", *Tourism Recreation Research*, Vol. 45 No. 2, pp. 161-175, doi: [10.1080/02508281.2019.1700655](https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2019.1700655).
- Thanh, T.V. and Kirova, V. (2018), "Wine tourism experience: a netnography study", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 83, pp. 30-37, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.10.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.10.008).
- Thomas, D.R. (2006), "A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data", *American Journal of Evaluation*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 237-246, doi: [10.1177/1098214005283748](https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748).
- Timothy, D.J. (2011), *Cultural Heritage and Tourism: An Introduction*, Vol. 4, Channel View Publications, doi: [10.2307/jj.30945662](https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.30945662).
- Tucker, H. (2016), "Empathy and tourism: Limits and possibilities", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 57, pp. 31-43.
- Tussyadiah, I.P. (2014), "Toward a theoretical foundation for experience design in tourism", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 53 No. 5, pp. 543-564, doi: [10.1177/0047287513513172](https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513513172).
- UNWTO (2003), "Sustainable development in tourism", *Quality in Tourism*, available at: <http://sdt.unwto.org/en/content/quality-tourism>
- Van der Zee, E. and Bertocchi, D. (2018), "Finding patterns in urban tourist behaviour: a social network analysis approach based on TripAdvisor reviews", *Information Technology and Tourism*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 153-180, doi: [10.1007/s40558-018-0128-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-018-0128-5).
- Weng, L., He, B.-J., Liu, L., Li, C. and Zhang, X. (2019), "Sustainability assessment of cultural heritage tourism: case study of pingyao ancient city in China", *Sustainability*, Vol. 11 No. 5, 1392, doi: [10.3390/su11051392](https://doi.org/10.3390/su11051392).

- Xu, H., Cheung, L.T., Lovett, J., Duan, X., Pei, Q. and Liang, D. (2023), "Understanding the influence of user-generated content on tourist loyalty behavior in a cultural World Heritage Site", *Tourism Recreation Research*, Vol. 48 No. 2, pp. 173-187, doi: [10.1080/02508281.2021.1913022](https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2021.1913022).
- Zeng, B. and Gerritsen, R. (2014), "What do we know about social media in tourism? A review", *Tourism Management Perspectives*, Vol. 10, pp. 27-36, doi: [10.1016/j.tmp.2014.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2014.01.001).
- Zhang, Y. and Szabó, Z. (2024), "Digital Transformation in the tourism industry: a Comparative literature review", *Advances in Economics, Management and Political Sciences*, Vol. 72 No. 1, pp. 178-191, doi: [10.54254/2754-1169/72/20240667](https://doi.org/10.54254/2754-1169/72/20240667).

Corresponding author

Uzma Naz can be contacted at: un91990@gmail.com