

The effect of memorable tourism experiences on tourists' behavioral intentions: Mediating role of tourist satisfaction

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Abstract

Purpose: Despite the value of crafting memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) receiving increasing acknowledgment, there has been limited exploration of the nature and outcomes of MTEs in ethnic tourism. Thus, this study aims to delineate the MTEs components in ethnic tourism and employ stimulus-organism-response theory to investigate the relationships among MTEs, tourist satisfaction, and behavioral intentions.

Design/methodology/approach: Data was collected from 209 tourists visiting ethnic tourism destinations in Guizhou Province, China, using a self-administered questionnaire. PLS-SEM was employed to examine the research model and hypotheses.

Findings: The results confirmed a positive impact of MTEs on tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Furthermore, tourist satisfaction was identified as a mediator in the relationship between MTEs and behavioral intentions.

Research limitations/implications: The research design was cross-sectional and relied on data from tourists in specific tourism contexts. When investigating MTEs, this study focuses on positive aspects and ignores negative MTEs.

Practical implications: This study bears significance for the effective administration and promotion of ethnic tourism destinations. It provides tangible insight into destination management organizations, contributing to the prosperity and sustainability of ethnic tourism.

Originality/value: The current research enriches investigations concerning MTEs in ethnic tourism. It combines general and situational dimensions to measure MTEs and explores how MTEs influence tourists' behavioral intentions.

Keywords: Memorable Tourism Experience, Tourist Satisfaction, Behavioral Intention, Revisit Intention, Stimulus-Organism-Response, Ethnic Tourism

Introduction

Ethnic tourism promotes the distinctive customs and traditions of indigenous and exotic communities to the public (Smith, 2012). The primary draws for tourists in this form of tourism are the ethnic groups themselves and their seeming exotic-ethnic cultures, offering tourists unique experiences (Wang et al., 2020). In many countries, ethnic tourism is considered a method to alleviate poverty and encourage sustainable development in various regions (Mayuzumi, 2022; Phommavong & Sörensson, 2014; Tian et al., 2023). It holds promise for contributing to preserving cultural heritage, rejuvenating local culture, and nurturing creativity

(Yang et al., 2022). Moreover, in certain Asian countries, ethnic tourism can reconstruct gender hierarchies and elevate women's social status (Trupp & Sunanta, 2017).

As a unified multi-ethnic country, China comprises 56 unique ethnic groups. Among these, the Han ethnicity accounts for over 90% of the population, whereas the other 55 ethnic groups are collectively known as ethnic minorities. These ethnic minority groups are predominantly located in the remote western regions. Since the initiation of the Western China Development Strategy in 2000, the Chinese government has consistently increased investment in infrastructure construction in these ethnic minority regions. Consequently, an increasing number of ethnic minority communities have been built into ethnic tourism destinations (Su & Sun, 2020), attracting tourists seeking respite from the urban hustle and bustle.

China has eight ethnic minority regions: the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (Guangxi), Guizhou Province (Guizhou), Inner Mongolia, the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Ningxia), Qinghai Province (Qinghai), Tibet, Xinjiang, and Yunnan Province (Yunnan). Over the past decade, these eight ethnic minority regions have witnessed continuous growth in ethnic tourism. However, global tourism has suffered significant repercussions due to COVID-19. Guizhou consistently led the eight ethnic minority regions in terms of total tourism revenue for eight consecutive years before the pandemic. Nevertheless, the current progress in tourism recovery in Guizhou is inconsistent with that in Guangxi and Yunnan. According to official regional statistical reports, Guizhou's total tourism revenue amounted to 86.78 billion USD in 2020, trailing behind Yunnan (97.16 billion USD) and Guangxi (109.01 billion USD). Guangxi surpassed Guizhou's tourism revenue by approximately 36.47% in 2021, reaching 135.97 billion USD. For a tourism destination, attracting more tourists signifies the potential to generate more tourism revenue. Hence, understanding tourists' behavioral intentions is paramount for developing and revitalizing ethnic tourism in Guizhou.

Customer satisfaction is considered a crucial antecedent of behavioral intention (Rust & Zahorik, 1993). Tourist satisfaction forms the foundation for ensuring repeat visits and fostering positive communication regarding a destination (Nasir et al., 2020). Customers are no longer content with high-quality goods and services but pursue unique experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Some researchers have found that memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) can directly or indirectly influence tourists' behavioral intentions (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022; Sharma & Nayak, 2019). Despite the extensive discussion on MTEs as a critical driver of tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions, empirical evidence from ethnic tourism remains insufficient.

Researchers have developed various scales to measure MTEs, enriching existing research; however, a universal consensus on the composition or representation of MTEs has yet to be reached (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). Kim et al. (2012) introduced a pioneering scale of MTEs to advance the comprehension of them. Nevertheless, some scholars have noted that this scale may not adequately reflect the characteristics of specific tourism segments, recommending caution in its application in promotion and replication (Hosany et al., 2022; Hosseini et al., 2022). Although all tourism is experiential, segment markets such as ethnic tourism have unique traits that lead tourists to generate more specific MTEs (Wong et al., 2020). However, far too little attention has been paid to explore the MTEs tourists acquire at ethnic tourism destinations.

The tourism consumption systems theory is extensively employed in studying MTEs (Kim, 2018). However, Hosany et al. (2022) advocate for additional theoretical perspectives to elucidate MTEs. Tourists' decision-making processes are generally intricate and encompass multiple aspects related to social influence, individual emotions, and other psychological characteristics (Chen et al., 2023). Regarding this, the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory offers insights into comprehending how tourists perceive external stimuli and their

corresponding attitudes and reactions (Kani et al., 2017). Thus far, there has been insufficient research on ethnic tourism that utilizes SOR theory to explore the relationship between MTEs, tourist satisfaction, and behavioral intentions.

Given the research gaps in current studies, this study extends the boundaries of existing literature in two significant dimensions. First, it investigates the components of MTEs within ethnic tourism. Second, it employs the SOR theory to examine how MTEs influence tourists' behavioral intentions in ethnic tourism and how tourist satisfaction mediates this process. This study aims to comprehensively understand the aspects in which ethnic tourism destinations should focus their efforts on creating MTEs to enhance tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit and recommend to others, consequently generating sustainable economic revenue for the destination.

Literature Review

Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Theory

The SOR theory suggests that stimuli from both the social and physical environments can impact an individual's internal state, thereby eliciting a series of approach or avoidance responses. Stimuli represent external factors that change the internal condition of a person (Hsiao & Tang, 2021). In tourism, stimuli act as the initial triggers for tourist behavior, encompassing a variety of elements entering tourists' cognition and compelling them to take action, whether consciously or unconsciously (Koo & Ju, 2010). Organisms denote the intrinsic cognitive and affective states of an individual, which mediate the entire process from stimuli to response (Ruan et al., 2020). The response is an individual's eventual reaction to particular stimuli and internal states (Hsiao & Tang, 2021) and is manifested as either approach or avoidance behavior.

The rationale for selecting SOR theory for this study is as follows. First, the effectiveness of the SOR theory in exploring tourist behavior and behavioral intentions has been widely demonstrated. For example, using the SOR model, Jiang (2022) examined the correlation between natural soundscapes and tourists' emotions and behaviors. Chen et al. (2023) investigated how rural tourism experiences influence tourists' intentions toward green consumption. Nevertheless, the utilization of the SOR model in ethnic tourism remains deficient. Second, in SOR theory, stimuli serve as a precursor to organismic responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). MTEs can act as stimuli, triggering tourists' internal state and subsequent behaviors. Tourist satisfaction is a cognitive-affective state (San Martín et al., 2019) reflecting tourists' internal state. This interaction demonstrates the potential of the SOR paradigm. Consequently, this study adopts SOR theory to investigate the relationship between MTEs (stimulus) and tourists' behavioral intentions (response) in ethnic tourism, as well as the mediating role of tourist satisfaction (organism) in this process. In addition, this study primarily centers on stimuli, namely the MTEs that tourists acquire at ethnic tourism destinations, because they serve as the starting point for tourists' subsequent perceptions and behaviors.

Stimulus: Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs)

Unlike everyday experiences, tourism experiences result from interactions with several components that are closely related to the destination (Shin et al., 2023). They reflect tourists' subjective psychological state while enjoying a service (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). However, not every tourism encounter automatically evolves into MTEs (Kim et al., 2012). Experiences during a visit to a destination are transient and delicate; only experiences etched in memory enable tourists to recall and reminisce (Sharma & Nayak, 2019). Thus, Kim et al. (2012)

elaborated that tourism encounters that can be recollected after particular events are considered MTEs. This definition is adopted in this study.

Effort has been made to identify the relevant dimensions of MTEs; however, the results have been inconsistent. Kim et al. (2012) were among the trailblazing scholars who conceptualized the structure of MTEs, delineating hedonism, novelty, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge as MTEs' seven dimensions. Many studies have tested these dimensions in various contexts (Chen et al., 2023; Kim, 2018; Li et al., 2022; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022; Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022; Zhang et al., 2018). Subsequently, Manthiou et al. (2023) proposed *tourismscape*, transformation, amusement, reversal, and contemplation as the crucial components of MTEs. Furthermore, some studies have explored MTEs in specific tourism contexts. For example, Wong et al. (2019) delineated ethnic entertainment, ethnic interaction, and scenery as the three aspects of MTEs in ethnic tourism. In a survey of international tourists, Chen et al. (2020) found that novelty, social interaction, hedonism, and meaningfulness constituted their MTEs. Subsequently, Hosseini et al. (2022) emphasized the crucial components of MTEs in dark tourism. Despite acknowledging the importance of MTEs, there remains no consensus on their definitive constituents.

Kim (2014) proposed that MTEs are influenced by psychological factors and the attributes of tourism destinations. Tourism destination attributes typically include both general and specific attributes. The former refers to the common attributes that a destination usually possesses (Fajriyati et al., 2020), whereas the latter represents the specific resources or experiences a destination offers. Thus, Hosseini et al. (2023) proposed that MTEs dimensions may vary depending on the environment. MTEs should have both general and situational dimensions (Hosany et al., 2022). A frequently employed instrument for measuring MTEs was Kim et al.'s (2012) scale, which has a degree of universality. In a survey of ethnic tourism, Wong et al. (2019) called for further research to validate their MTE scale across different ethnic tourism destinations. Therefore, this study combines the scales introduced by Kim et al. (2012) and Wong et al. (2019) to assess MTEs in ethnic tourism.

Hedonism represents pleasurable sensations that excite tourists (Kim, 2010) and embodies the joyous element of tourism experience consumption (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022). Unlike other products and activities, tourists primarily seek enjoyment when consuming tourism products (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Refreshment is the most prominent characteristic of tourism experiences, distinguishing them from daily experiences (Kim, 2014), which is a state of mental health (Tinsley et al., 1993). Local culture involves how tourists perceive the local populace and their encounters with the indigenous culture and language (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022). Meaningfulness relates to the feeling of accomplishing something significant and a value derived from tourism experiences (Kim, 2014). When tourists broaden their perspectives and deepen their comprehension of the world through tourism experiences, these encounters often become some of the most memorable in their lives (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Knowledge includes personal facts, experiences, and information (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Tourists aspire to learn new knowledge, acquire new skills, and gain fresh insight through tourism experiences, which is a motivating factor for travel (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Involvement represents a condition of enthusiasm or curiosity regarding tourism destinations (Kim et al., 2012; Rather & Hollebeek, 2021), thereby intensifying tourists' emotions and enriching their cognitive assessment experience (Swinyard, 1993). Novelty arises from new experiences (Kim et al., 2012). Travelers frequently select destinations that provide a variety of cultures and ways of life to satisfy their desire and enthusiasm for encountering novel or alternative experiences (Kim & Ritchie, 2014).

In ethnic tourism, scenery is the primary resource and dominant factor showcasing the uniqueness of the ethnic culture. Tourists visiting ethnic tourism destinations are drawn to natural resources, including mountains, caves, and lakes, as well as cultural architecture and attractions (Wong et al., 2019). Ethnic entertainment serves as a medium for conveying cultural imagery and is incorporated into tourism products to elicit tourists' interest (Yang et al., 2016). Various entertainment performances and activities, dining services, accommodation, shopping, and sightseeing continue to emerge in ethnic areas, attracting tourists from around the world (Li et al., 2016). Ethnic interaction encompasses both formal and informal interactions between tourists and locals (Wong et al., 2019).

Within the existing literature, there has been a dearth of studies that combine both general and situational dimensions to measure MTEs, particularly in ethnic tourism. Wong et al. (2019) observed that previous research overlooked how tourist satisfaction functions concerning the connection between MTEs and behavioral intentions. Recognizing how ethnic tourism contributes to promoting economic development and maintaining social stability, it is essential to comprehend the composition of MTEs, their relationship with tourist behavioral intentions, and the role of tourist satisfaction in this process.

Organism: Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction refers to a favorable response stemming from customers' positive evaluation of a consumption experience (Oliver, 1980). In line with the expectancy-disconfirmation framework, perceived performance surpasses anticipated performance, leading to satisfaction, whereas dissatisfaction arises when perceived performance falls short of anticipated performance (Kim, 2018). However, some researchers have criticized this point. Barsky (1992) contended that insufficient evidence supports the notion that expectations drive satisfaction, particularly in situations in which tourists have low initial expectations. In practice, translating low expectations into satisfaction is challenging, and tourists often struggle to evaluate destinations and their attributes before experiencing them (Kim, 2018; Sharma & Nayak, 2019). Moreover, tourists typically purchase experiences within the tourism sector, while the expectancy-disconfirmation model reflects consumer satisfaction regarding functional products (Lu et al., 2022).

Given that the expectancy-disconfirmation model may not fully capture tourist satisfaction, many researchers consider overall satisfaction a robust measure, particularly when studying tourist behavior (Sharma & Nayak, 2020; Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022). In this study, tourist satisfaction refers to tourists' overall emotional response to a particular destination's products and services (Chi et al., 2020), representing a cognitive-affective state.

Behavioral Intentions

Returning customers and customer loyalty can enhance businesses' cost efficiency and provide financial advantages (Chen et al., 2020). However, the tourism industry differs from other service sectors in that the desire to explore new destinations drives tourists' decisions (Crompton, 1979). Even if tourists are satisfied with the destination they have visited, their pursuit of novelty may lead them not to revisit it. Thus, tourist loyalty and behavioral intentions have become essential metrics in assessing management and marketing strategies.

According to Chen and Tsai (2007), tourists' behavioral intentions refer to their judgments regarding the probability of returning to a particular tourism destination and endorsing it to others. Revisit intention represents an individual's future planned behavior, reflecting their inclination to revisit a specific place (Akbari et al., 2021). Recommendation intention signifies tourists' willingness to communicate their tourism experiences with others (Lai et al., 2018). When customers enjoy a product or service, their willingness to suggest it to others increases

(Wirtz & Chew, 2002). For a tourism destination, positive word-of-mouth not only shapes its positive image but also elevates its visibility among individuals who may not be well acquainted with it (Phillips et al., 2013). In this study, behavioral intentions include revisiting and recommending intentions.

Hypothesis Development

MTEs and Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a mental state that emerges when tourists engage in a tourism experience (Sharma & Nayak, 2019). Given that experiences can deliver value, evoking various experiences, particularly MTEs, can enhance tourist satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009). Prior investigations have established a cause-and-effect connection between MTEs and tourist satisfaction. For example, Kim (2018) discovered that tourists' overall satisfaction is positively affected by the MTEs they obtained at their destination. In a survey of coffee tourists, a positive correlation between MTEs and tourist satisfaction was observed by Chen et al. (2021). This conclusion was further corroborated by Jeong (2023). Furthermore, Gohary et al. (2020) investigated how MTE dimensions impact tourist satisfaction and found that, except for local culture, all other dimensions positively influenced tourist satisfaction. However, in heritage tourism, Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022) confirmed that only three dimensions—local culture, involvement, and knowledge—significantly affect tourist satisfaction. Thus, with support from the literature mentioned above, the subsequent hypothesis is posited:

H1. MTEs positively influence tourist satisfaction.

MTEs, Tourist Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intention

Satisfaction serves as the primary catalyst for revisit intention and recommendations (Hollebeek & Rather, 2019). Customers who feel positive about a service or product exhibit heightened commitment and loyalty (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022). Likewise, they are more inclined to return to the same place and eager to communicate their favorable tourism experiences with acquaintances (Hanafiah et al., 2019). An investigation by Jeong et al. (2019) revealed that tourist satisfaction significantly influences their behavioral intentions. This viewpoint was further supported by Stavrianea and Kamenidou (2022) through evidence from island tourism.

Experiences as stimuli are assumed to lead to repeated experiences if they are satisfactory, as tourists desire to replicate these experiences (Brakus et al., 2009). Tourist satisfaction stands as a pivotal precursor to behavioral intentions, with tourists' experiences at a destination molding their level of satisfaction (Suhartanto et al., 2020). Sharma and Nayak (2019) established a paradigm among MTEs, tourist satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. They found that MTEs indirectly impacted behavioral intentions through tourist satisfaction. However, Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022) observed that only three dimensions of MTEs indirectly influenced tourists' behavioral intentions through tourist satisfaction. Prior studies suggest that when tourists obtain MTEs at a tourism destination, their likelihood of satisfaction with that destination increases, subsequently reinforcing their behavioral intentions. The following hypotheses encapsulate our expectations:

H2. Tourist satisfaction positively influences behavioral intention.

H3. Tourist satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between MTEs and behavioral intention.

MTEs and Behavioral Intention

Past experiences retained in personal memory serve as valuable sources of information because they are considered highly credible (Kim, 2018). If a tourism destination offers MTEs, the likelihood of tourists revisiting that destination increases (Zhang et al., 2018). While past literature has emphasized that tourist satisfaction is the most vital construct affecting behavioral intentions, Sharma and Nayak (2019) found that MTEs are the most significant influencing factor. Considerable focus has been directed towards how MTEs affect behavioral intentions. In ethnic tourism, Wong et al. (2019) confirmed that MTEs positively influence tourists' behavioral intentions. Subsequently, Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022) examined how MTEs dimensions affect behavioral intentions. They observed that novelty influences tourists' word of mouth, whereas local culture determines revisit intentions. Furthermore, Chen et al. (2021) discovered that for coffee tourists, MTEs positively impact their behavioral intentions. Similarly, in a study involving island tourists, Stavrianea and Kamenidou (2022) identified the positive effects of MTEs on loyalty. Hence, considering the preceding discussion, the subsequent hypothesis is posited.

H4. MTEs positively influence behavioral intention.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model.

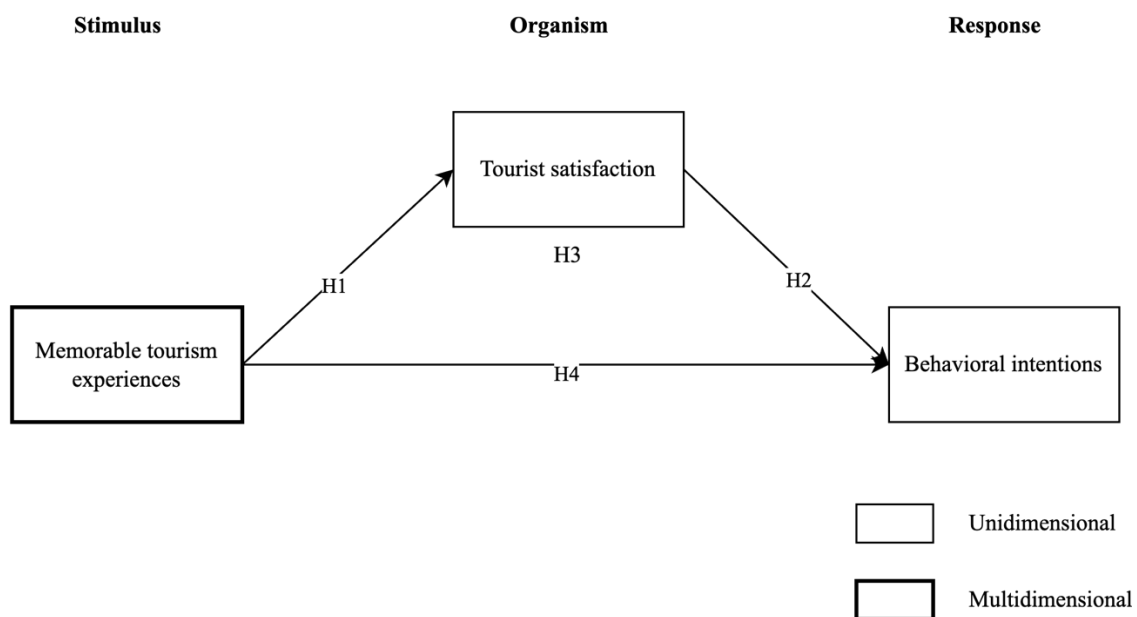


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Methods

Measures

This study used a quantitative methodology to collect data via a questionnaire. MTEs serve as a multidimensional construct incorporating ten dimensions. These dimensions collectively constitute the different aspects of MTEs. Thus, this study includes one second-order composite construct (MTEs) and two reflective constructs (tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions). All measurement items were adjusted and revised based on previous studies to ensure their suitability for the particular context of this research. Items assessing MTEs were adapted from previous works by Kim et al. (2012) and Wong et al. (2019). Similarly, measurement items for tourist satisfaction were sourced from Wong et al. (2019), while those for behavioral intentions

were drawn from Kim (2018). All items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Sample and Data Collection

The questionnaire was structured into three sections. The first consisted of screening questions to identify suitable respondents, including “Are you 18 years or older?” and “Are you a tourist rather than a local resident?” The second section gathered demographic data from respondents. The last part encompassed the measurement items for each construct. Given that the measurement items were sourced from English literature, the questionnaire was initially formulated in English and subsequently translated into Chinese using professional translation software, followed by back-translation into English. Two bilingual translators proficient in English and Chinese were invited to scrutinize the questionnaire for accuracy.

Data were collected from early August 2023 to early September 2023 using purposive sampling. Judgment sampling was used to select suitable respondents. Data were gathered from five representative ethnic tourism destinations in Guizhou Province, China: Huangguoshu Waterfall, XiaoQikong Scenic Spot, Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village, Zhaoxing Dong Village, and Zhenyuan Ancient Town. Five trained assistants approached tourists at the exits of these ethnic tourism destinations. The assistants outlined research purposes after confirming that the tourists met the eligibility criteria and invited them to partake in the survey. Tourists who agreed to participate were required to scan a QR code to answer the questions. A total of 237 questionnaires were collected. After filtering out incomplete or erroneous responses, 209 valid responses were obtained, resulting in an effective response rate of 88%.

As Faul et al. (2009) suggested, the G*Power technique was employed to assess whether the sample size was adequate. The conceptual model used in this study contained three main variables. Considering a medium effect size (0.15), a power level of 0.80, and an alpha level of 0.05, the calculated minimum sample size was 77. Thus, the 209 valid questionnaires collected were deemed sufficient for the subsequent data analysis.

Table 1 provides an overview of respondents' profile. The study included 98 males (46.9%) and 111 females (53.1%). Most tourists fell within the age bracket of 26 to 55 years. Regarding educational level, 28 participants had finished high school or lower, 60 had received vocational or technical education, 95 reached a bachelor level, and 26 held postgraduate qualifications. Over half of the tourists (53.6%) had visited these destinations multiple times. Most tourists (54.6%) preferred traveling with friends and family. Within the respondent group, 6.2% had a monthly income below 3,000 RMB, 5.3% had an income exceeding 15,000 RMB, and most reported monthly incomes ranging from 3,001 to 8,000 RMB.

Table 1
Respondents' Profile (N = 209)

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	98	46.9%
	Female	111	53.1%
Age	18-25 years old	24	11.5%
	26-35 years old	31	14.8%
	36-45 years old	56	26.8%
	46-55 years old	72	34.4%
	56 years old and above	26	12.4%
Education level	High school or below	28	13.4%
	Undergraduate	95	45.5%
	Postgraduate	26	12.4%
	Vocational/Technical	60	28.7%
Type of tourists	First time visit	97	46.4%

Travel with whom	Repeat visit	112	53.6%
	Alone	20	9.6%
	Husband/wife	35	16.7%
	Boyfriend/girlfriend	30	14.4%
	Friends	61	29.2%
	Family	53	25.4%
Monthly income	Organized tour group	10	4.8%
	RMB 3,000 or below	13	6.2%
	RMB 3,001-5,000	89	42.6%
	RMB 5,001-8,000	47	22.5%
	RMB 8,001-10,000	28	13.4%
	RMB 10,001–15,000	21	10.0%
	More than RMB 15,000	11	5.3%

Data Analysis

PLS-SEM has gained popularity in tourism research (e.g., Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022; Suhartanto et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2018) due to its flexibility regarding data distribution assumptions and handle small sample sizes (Hair et al., 2022). Moreover, given the complexity of our model which involves a second-order construct and a mediator, PLS-SEM is deemed appropriate for evaluating mediating effects (Hair et al., 2022). Thus, this study analyzed data with SmartPLS 4.0.9.2 software (Ringle et al., 2022). In line with Cain et al. (2017), the multivariate normality of collected data was examined firstly. The results revealed that Mardia's multivariate skewness ($\beta = 23.252$, $p < 0.01$) and Mardia's multivariate kurtosis ($\beta = 246.538$, $p < 0.01$) fell outside the bounds of multivariate normality. As recommended by Hair et al. (2022) and Ramayah et al. (2018), the model evaluation through PLS-SEM encompasses scrutinizing both the measurement and structure models.

The current research gathered data from a singular origin, potentially leading to common method variance (CMV). To handle this potential issue, a full collinearity assessment was conducted (Kock, 2015; Kock & Lynn, 2012). This assessment involved regressing all constructs against a common variable. A variance inflation factor ($VIF \leq 3.3$) was established as the threshold for determining the absence of bias stemming from the single-source data. Upon examination, all constructs exhibited VIF values below 3.3 (Table 2), indicating the absence of any CMV concerns within the collected data.

Table 2

Full Collinearity Testing

Behavioral Intentions	MTEs	Tourist satisfaction
3.241	1.976	1.998

Findings

Measurement Model Assessment

Checking reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity are three parts of measurement model assessment. Given the inclusion of a second-order construct (MTEs) in this study, the validity and reliability of first-order factors were scrutinized prior to the second-order factor. Specifically, the criteria for loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were set at ≥ 0.5 , ≥ 0.7 , and ≥ 0.5 , respectively (Hair et al., 2022). As presented in Table 3, all loadings exceeded 0.5, the AVE values surpassed 0.5, and the CR values were above 0.7, confirming the validity and reliability of all measurements.

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) criterion (Henseler et al., 2015; Franke & Sarstedt, 2019). The HTMT provides corresponding

assessment criteria based on the similarity of concepts: ≤ 0.85 or ≤ 0.90 . In this study, the HTMT values consistently meet a more stringent criterion of ≤ 0.85 (see Table 4), thus confirming the distinctiveness of all constructs from each other.

Table 3
Measurement Model

First Order	Second Order	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Hedonism		MHE1	0.895	0.901	0.694
		MHE2	0.816		
		MHE3	0.792		
		MHE4	0.826		
Refreshment		MRE1	0.813	0.876	0.638
		MRE2	0.787		
		MRE3	0.785		
		MRE4	0.809		
Local Culture		MLC1	0.863	0.908	0.767
		MLC2	0.906		
		MLC3	0.859		
Meaningfulness		MME1	0.815	0.867	0.685
		MME2	0.839		
		MME3	0.828		
Knowledge		MKN1	0.831	0.863	0.678
		MKN2	0.830		
		MKN3	0.808		
Involvement		MIN1	0.871	0.916	0.784
		MIN2	0.920		
		MIN3	0.864		
Novelty		MNO1	0.796	0.886	0.660
		MNO2	0.808		
		MNO3	0.829		
		MNO4	0.817		
Scenery		MSC1	0.797	0.942	0.643
		MSC2	0.806		
		MSC3	0.783		
		MSC4	0.852		
		MSC5	0.799		
		MSC6	0.771		
		MSC7	0.805		
		MSC8	0.810		
		MSC9	0.793		
Ethnic Entertainment		MEE1	0.818	0.914	0.681
		MEE2	0.821		

Ethnic Interaction		MEE3	0.786	0.936	0.676
		MEE4	0.884		
		MEE5	0.815		
		MEI1	0.765		
		MEI2	0.820		
		MEI3	0.829		
		MEI4	0.780		
		MEI5	0.864		
		MEI6	0.836		
		MEI7	0.855		
Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs)		Hedonism	0.644	0.932	0.579
		Refreshment	0.737		
		Local Culture	0.715		
		Meaningfulness	0.735		
		Knowledge	0.666		
		Involvement	0.753		
		Novelty	0.796		
		Scenery	0.891		
		Ethnic Entertainment	0.849		
		Ethnic Interaction	0.790		
Tourist Satisfaction		TS1	0.892	0.883	0.655
		TS2	0.761		
		TS3	0.809		
		TS4	0.771		
Behavioral Intentions		BI1	0.772	0.870	0.573
		BI2	0.739		
		BI3	0.791		
		BI4	0.722		
		BI5	0.758		

Table 4
Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	1	2	3
1. Behavioral Intentions			
2. MTEs	0.781		
3. Tourist Satisfaction	0.846	0.442	

Structural model assessment

Following the guidelines proposed by Hair et al. (2020), the structure model assessment was examined from the path coefficient, t-values, p-values, and standard errors. This assessment utilized a bootstrapping technique with 5,000 iterations. Addressing concerns raised by Hahn and Ang (2017) regarding the adequacy of p-value as the sole criterion for hypothesis testing, this study incorporated p-values, confidence intervals, and effect sizes. Table 5 and Table 6 present the outcomes of the direct and indirect hypotheses.

MTEs to tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.393$, $p < 0.001$), tourist satisfaction to behavioral intentions ($\beta = 0.502$, $p < 0.001$), and MTEs to behavioral intentions ($\beta = 0.495$, $p < 0.001$) were found to be positively related. Thus, H1, H2, and H4 were supported. In evaluating the mediating effect, bootstrapping, an effective technique advocated by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008) was utilized. Significant mediation is indicated when the confidence interval does not encompass zero. The MTEs \rightarrow TS \rightarrow BI pathway ($\beta = 0.197$, $p < 0.001$) was significant. Furthermore, the bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals did not span zero, thereby confirming the support for H3.

Table 5*Hypothesis Testing Direct Effects*

		Std. beta	Std. dev.	t-value	p-value	BCI LL	BCI UL	f ²	Decision
H1	MTEs \rightarrow TS	0.393	0.086	4.565	$p < .001$	0.229	0.517	0.182	Supported
H2	TS \rightarrow BI	0.502	0.090	5.602	$p < .001$	0.348	0.645	0.689	Supported
H4	MTEs \rightarrow BI	0.495	0.090	5.517	$p < .001$	0.348	0.646	0.672	Supported

Table 6*Hypothesis Testing Indirect Effect*

		Std. Beta	Std. Dev.	t-value	p-value	BCI LL	BCI UL	Decision
H3	MTEs \rightarrow TS \rightarrow BI	0.197	0.053	3.746	$p < .001$	0.116	0.291	Supported

PLS-Predict

A procedure based on holdout samples was introduced by Shmueli et al. (2019), which employs PLS-Predict to generate predictions at the construct or item level, subsequently validating the predictive relevance through tenfold cross-validation. If all item discrepancies (PLS-LM) are negative, this indicates a high level of predictive capability within the model. Conversely, if all discrepancies are positive, it suggests a lack of substantial predictive relevance in the model. When the majority of discrepancies are negative, it signifies a medium predictive power, while a low predictive capacity is suggested if only a minority of discrepancies are negative. As shown in Table 7, all errors in the PLS model were lower than those in the LM model, confirming the high predictive power.

Table 7*PLS-Predict*

	PLS		LM		PLS-LM		Q ² predict
	RMSE	MAE	RMSE	MAE	RMSE	MAE	
BI1	0.832	0.657	0.973	0.778	-0.141	-0.121	0.307
BI2	0.828	0.635	0.943	0.745	-0.115	-0.110	0.280
BI3	0.811	0.603	0.936	0.727	-0.125	-0.124	0.250
BI4	0.830	0.642	0.908	0.708	-0.078	-0.066	0.246
BI5	0.901	0.688	1.032	0.813	-0.131	-0.125	0.246

Discussion and Conclusion

With increasing attention to MTEs, numerous studies have endeavored to comprehend their nature, structure, antecedents, and consequences. This research investigates the constitution of MTEs in ethnic tourism and delves into their relationships with tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The current findings corroborate earlier research outcomes. Specifically,

this study reaffirmed the positive impact of MTEs on tourist satisfaction (H1) and behavioral intentions (H4), consistent with previous findings (Chen et al., 2021; Jeong, 2023; Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2021; Wong et al., 2019). Furthermore, this study validated the positive impact of tourist satisfaction on behavioral intentions (H2), underscoring its pivotal role in fostering repeat visits and positive recommendations in accordance with the existing literature (Chi & Han, 2021; Hanafiah et al., 2019; Jeong et al., 2019; Nasir et al., 2020). Additionally, the current research identified that tourist satisfaction functioned as a mediator in connecting MTEs and behavioral intentions. This finding addresses a research gap noted by Wong et al. (2019), wherein earlier studies in ethnic tourism often overlooked the influence of tourist satisfaction when examining the relationship between MTEs and behavioral intentions. This study provides evidence supporting past studies (e.g., Gohary et al., 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022) regarding MTEs indirectly impact behavioral intentions through tourist satisfaction.

Theoretical Implications

This study offers a crucial addition to the current knowledge concerning ethnic tourism. Initially, it makes a pioneering attempt to comprehensively measure the structure of MTEs by integrating both general and specific dimensions, thus expanding the boundaries of the existing literature. While MTEs are intricately linked to the characteristics of travel places, prior studies have predominantly concentrated on MTEs stemming from the general attributes of the place, with limited exploration into MTEs originating from specific attributes of the place.

Second, this study elucidates how MTEs acquired by tourists at ethnic tourism destinations influence their future behavioral intentions through SOR theory. As external stimuli, MTEs impact tourists' internal state, subsequently affecting their responses. Tourist experiences that linger in memory lead to recall and reminiscence (Sharma & Nayak, 2019), thereby influencing future decision-making processes (Zhang et al., 2018). Therefore, tourists who obtain MTEs at ethnic tourism destinations are more inclined to return and communicate favorable recommendations to others. MTEs enable tourists to gain fulfillment that exceeds their expectations and thus to feel satisfied with an ethnic destination, which elevates their probability of revisiting the ethnic destination in the future and advocating it to their friends and family.

Finally, it affirms the mediating function of tourist satisfaction in linking MTEs to tourists' behavioral intentions. While prior research has explored the associations among these concepts, this study is a comprehensive investigation conducted in ethnic tourism. This study emphasized the pivotal significance of tourist satisfaction in shaping tourists' decision-making processes, impacting their intentions to return, make recommendations, and share positive feedback with others.

Practical and Social Implications

Destination management organizations (DMOs) can attain concrete and valuable insights from this study, as it holds referential implications for ethnic tourism destination administration and promotion. In an experience-driven economy, tourists place greater emphasis on creating memorable experiences rather than simply seeking high-quality products and services. Most tourism destinations have historically centered their marketing and management strategies on products, sometimes neglecting the desires and experiences of tourists (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2018). Compared to other industries, customers in the tourism sector have an innate desire for novelty. Even if tourists receive highly satisfactory products and services at a destination, they may be less inclined to revisit in the future. However, experiences that linger in tourists' memories evoke positive and pleasurable perceptions, influencing their future decision-making. Furthermore, when tourists share their travel experiences with others, they

typically discuss those unforgettable experiences. Potential tourists may visit a destination because they aspire to have similar experiences.

Moreover, DMOs must consider various aspects when creating MTEs for tourists, including hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, novelty, involvement, scenery, ethnic interactions, and ethnic entertainment. The distinctiveness and authenticity of ethnic tourism allow tourists to encounter different cultures, languages, customs, and traditions, participate in unique ethnic activities and festivals, and experience distinctive natural landscapes and local lifestyles. All of these experiences in ethnic tourism destinations are novel and uncommon for tourists, often resulting in the creation of MTEs.

Apart from MTEs, acknowledging the substantial influence of tourist satisfaction on shaping tourists' behavioral intentions is crucial. This acknowledgment holds valuable implications for fostering the long-term growth of ethnic tourism destinations. Satisfied tourists are more inclined to display favorable behavioral intentions, such as returning to their destination, suggesting it to others, or sharing enjoyable experiences. Hence, DMOs should create a welcoming and satisfying environment that can attract more tourists, stimulate economic growth, and generate employment opportunities in ethnic tourism destinations. Additionally, tourism development in ethnic destinations relies on the local pristine and natural environment, and it should avoid excessive commercialization and inauthenticity driven by the desire to cater to tourists' needs, thus fostering a thriving and sustainable ecosystem for ethnic tourism.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Further exploration is necessary as certain limitations exist in the current research. First, a cross-sectional survey was employed to obtain data from tourists in ethnic tourism settings. Thus, caution is needed in generalizing the findings. Future research could use longitudinal surveys to collect data across time periods and expand the study to encompass different tourism destinations. Second, this study focused exclusively on the positive aspects of MTEs. Kim (2022) argued that not all MTEs are positive, as negative MTEs can also influence tourists' behavioral intentions. Hence, forthcoming studies ought to investigate both favorable and unfavorable aspects of MTEs to attain a comprehensive understanding. Finally, this study primarily focused on examining how MTEs drive tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions. However, factors influencing tourists' behavioral intentions are multifaceted, as previous studies have indicated that tourist engagement, authenticity, and destination image also play significant roles (e.g., Kim, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Future research should incorporate additional factors into existing models for further investigation.

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