



Research Paper

## The effect of existential authenticity and object-based authenticity on the behavior intention of slow tourists

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### Abstract

The research is carried out to understand slow tourists' behavior through analyzing the impact of perceived authenticity. The SPSS and AMOS software were used to analyze the structural equation model (SEM). In this study, authenticity was considered from both object-based and existential authenticity. Data was collected from 518 tourists who have visited Hue or slow destination at least once. The results show that both existential and object-based authenticity had a positive impact on desire and intention to join slow tourism. In addition to the direct effect, existential authenticity is considered as a mediator in the relationship between object-based authenticity and intention to revisit the destination. Based on the results, theoretical and managerial implications are discussed to propose solutions to improve the rate of slow tourists.

**Keywords:** Authenticity; Behavior intention; Existential authenticity; Object-based authenticity

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### I. Introduction

Globalization forces individuals to work harder, live faster, produce more and consume more. This pace shapes economic life and alters the way people perceive their surroundings and environmental factors (Su, Huang, Hsu, & Chang, 2017). Faced with issues such as climate change and environmental pollution, tourism researchers and travel companies are striving to develop new types of tourism towards sustainable development goals, such as ecotourism, volunteer tourism, and peace tourism (Goodwin & Francis, 2003). One of the sustainable tourism types that has gained popularity recently is slow tourism. The "slow philosophy" has been applied to slow food and slow living (J. Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). Basically, slow tourism involves slowing down travel, enriching the tourism experience on both the journey and the destination, while taking care of environmental benefits (J. Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). This kind of tourism shares common ideas with sustainable tourism models such as responsible tourism and ecotourism. Responsible tourism refers to the responsibility of tourist in "treating local people as people", "respecting local culture", and "treating softly on the environment at the destination" (Lea, 1993). With these meanings, slow tourism is suitable for sustainable development goals through authentic experiences (Meng & Choi, 2016). Thus, slow tourism and slow destinations bring authentic experiences as well as the benefits that accrue to the localities (Timms & Conway, 2012).

Despite of the increasing popularity of slow tourism, there is little research on the behavior of slow tourists. Therefore, understanding and predicting the behavior of slow tourists is important to develop appropriate marketing strategies. In order to achieve this goal, the factors influencing the tourist's decision-making process take on an important meaning. Slow tourism activities offer more authentic experiences, so slow tourists tend to have a strong intention towards authenticity and an intention to participate in authentic activities (Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011; Shen, Guo, & Wu, 2014). Hence, individuals whose seeking authentic experiences are especially sensitive are potential customers of slow tourism explain in detail the decision-making process of slow tourists. This research contributes to the knowledge base of slow tourism while also playing an important role in explaining the motivations and perceived of authenticity that shape the behavioral intentions of slow tourists.

## **II. Literature review**

### **2.1. Slow tourism and slow tourist**

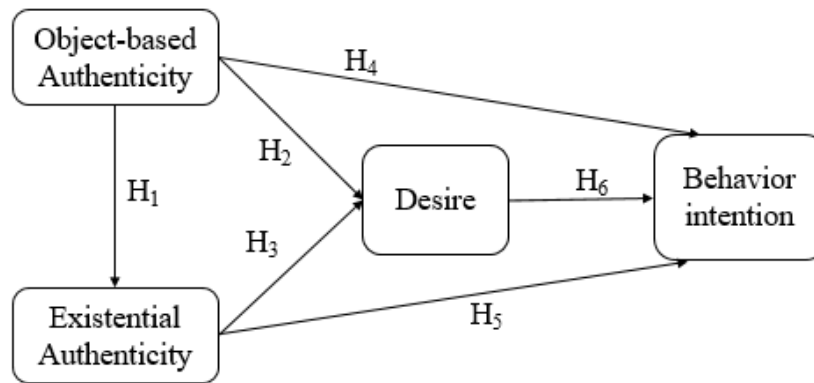
The concept of slow tourism is considered relatively new and so far there is no precise definition (Oh, Assaf, & Baloglu, 2016). The origin of this concept stems from some social movements such as slow food and slow city (CittaSlow) that began in Italy in the 1980s and 1990s (Fullagar, 2012). In the original concept, slow tourism emphasizes its close relationship with speed and movement towards the destination in order to reduce emissions and environmental pollution, thus slow tourism is often associated with the concept of sustainable tourism. However, researchers argue that slow tourism is not just about moving slowly, but also includes elements of space-time, or in other words, provides a better experience, a longer stay, enjoying local products, connecting with locals, bringing joy and reducing stress, and benefiting health (J. E. Dickinson, Lumsdon, & Robbins, 2011; Timms & Conway, 2012). Today, people are becoming increasingly tired of fast-paced lifestyles, easily stressed, and out of control (Howard, 2012). Therefore, people have a desire to "slow down" to find opportunities for relaxation and reduce stress. Choosing slow tourism partially reflects the motivations and goals that tourists aim for through the benefits that slow tourism brings such as "escaping daily routines"; "escaping stress"; "escaping city life"; and "escaping traffic or noise pollution; relaxing; learning about the culture of the destination, experiencing the products and supporting the local residents; at the same time expressing themselves, having new experiences and discovering local and regional regions (Meng & Choi, 2016; Oh et al., 2016).

### **2.2. Authenticity in tourism**

MacCannell (1973) was the first to introduce the concept of authenticity in a clear and explicit way. In his study, he indicated that a better understanding of the tourist experience can be achieved by examining the various structural tendencies between the object reality and the tourist experience. The difference between the modern and the primitive was also clarified. However, Wang (1999) provided a clearer definition of authenticity and demonstrated that object authenticity and existential authenticity can be completely unrelated. According to Wang (1999), existential authenticity does not depend on the object, but on the activity and can be divided into two dimensions: within individuals (intrapersonal) and between individuals (interpersonal). Similarly, Reisinger and Steiner (2006) argue that existential authenticity and object-based authenticity are entirely separate concepts and cannot be explored simultaneously. On the other hand, some researchers examine authenticity from a constructivist perspective, the constructivist view holds that authenticity as a phenomenon does not allow for any possibility of management or creation, presentation, or communication of it, thus making it more suitable for management (Cohen, 1988; Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003; Peterson, 2005). In fact, authenticity and commercial activity are not contradictory but rather complement each other (Apostolakis, 2003; Yeoman, Brass, & McMahon-Beattie, 2007). Specifically, this is demonstrated in the field of cultural heritage conservation, where commercial activities contribute to preserving cultural values and traditional customs, preventing them from being modernized and lost (Cohen, 1988; Naoi, 2004). Through tourism activities, local economies are stimulated and local cultures are promoted, while ensuring the integrity of cultural heritage sites and regions (Van der Borg, Costa, & Gotti, 1996). In common view, Goulding (2000) also believe that the fundamental purpose of commerce in tourism is not to destroy authenticity but to expose its value to the general public. Authenticity in studies by Goulding (2000), McIntosh (2004), and Chhabra et al. (2003) is clearly related to objects such as art, handicrafts, souvenirs, and existing experiences. Regardless of the perspective, authenticity in tourism reflects the interest and perception of tourists towards the authenticity of the destination, which is related to the objects of the destination or the existing experiences of tourists (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010).

## **III. Research model and hypothesis**

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of existential authenticity and object-based authenticity on the behavior intention of slow tourist. Slow tourism intention is considered from the perspective of tourists' actual travel experiences. In this study, slow tourism intention is the intention to return to the tourism destination in the future. The impact of perceived authenticity in shaping the intention of slow tourism behavior was examined. Perceived authenticity is considered in both aspects of perceived existential authenticity and perceived object-based authenticity. The study examines both direct and indirect effects of perceived authenticity on the desire and intention for slow tourism. Using the SEM analysis technique, the most suitable model will be proposed, and the results of the study will be interpreted and discussed.



**Figure 1**-The proposed research model

Slow tourism is different from mass tourism, so when traveling, tourists need to clearly define the objectives they want to achieve (Oh et al., 2016). In addition, slow tourism also brings benefits such as being environmentally friendly, connecting with nature and local communities, and maintaining a sustainable pace of growth for the destinations. In the field of tourism, authenticity has been found to impact tourist behavior (Sims, 2009), slow tourism (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Lee et al., 2020; Meng & Choi, 2016), heritage tourism (Chhabra et al., 2003), and cultural heritage tourism marketing (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). Studies also indicate that authenticity is a precursor to behavioral intention (Lee et al., 2020; Meng & Choi, 2016).

Some studies have also demonstrated the relationship between perceived authenticity and desire (Lin & Wang, 2012; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011; Shen et al., 2014). Ramkissoon and Uysal (2011) also found that perceived authenticity plays a significant role in changing the cultural behavioral intentions of tourists. In addition, Lin and Wang (2012) confirmed that perceived authenticity influences tourists' intention to purchase souvenirs. These studies have demonstrated that individuals with a strong orientation toward authenticity perception and those who deeply perceive authenticity in tourism activities have a higher intention to engage in more authentic activities. Desire can have a stronger impact on behavior when an individual has sufficient motivation (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001; Meng & Choi, 2016). Therefore, individuals who have a higher perception of authenticity will have a clearer desire to choose slow tourism. Hence, the following hypotheses are formed:

- H<sub>1</sub>: Object-based authenticity has positive effect on existential authenticity.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Object-based authenticity has positive effect on the desire
- H<sub>3</sub>: Existential authenticity has positive effect on the desire
- H<sub>4</sub>: Object-based authenticity has positive effect on the behavior intention.
- H<sub>5</sub>: Existential authenticity has positive effect on the behavior intention.
- H<sub>6</sub>: Desire has positive effect on the behavior intention.

This study is designed to assess the impact of two components of perceived authenticity, namely, existential authenticity and object-based authenticity, on the desire and intention to engage in slow tourism. In order to achieve the research objectives, the qualitative and quantitative methods are used on the basis of research by Koufteros (1999) and Nguyen Van Thang (2017). Firstly, relevant studies and theories on slow tourism, tourism intention, and perceived authenticity in slow tourism and tourism in general were gathered and analyzed. At the end of this process, a preliminary questionnaire and scale were developed.

The quantitative research method is used to quantify the relationships between factors through the use of statistical, econometric, or purely mathematical tools. In other words, it is the process of determining correlation coefficients between factors and testing whether these coefficients are significantly different from zero at an appropriate level of statistical significance (Koufteros, 1999). After the preliminary research process, the formal study is conducted using data collection methods through online surveys and direct interviews. At the end of the survey process, the collected data will be encoded and cleaned before being analyzed and processed using SPSS and AMOS software. With a sample size of 518, techniques such as analyzing reliability through Cronbach's Alpha and factor analysis were used to remove inappropriate measurement scales. The results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were then used in the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the convergence, discriminant, and unidirectional nature of the factors and to determine the composite reliability coefficient. The final step was to apply structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the suitability of the model and the theoretical relationships and to draw conclusions about the appropriateness of the data for the proposed hypotheses (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

## IV. Result

### 4.1. Demographical findings

The study was conducted based on opinions collected from 518 tourists in who has visited Hue or slow destination at least once. The time of collection was from April 2022 to September 2022. Among the 518 respondents, there were 202 males, accounting for 39%, and 316 females, accounting for 61%. 45.8% of the tourists were aged between 30 and 50, and the rest were aged between 20 and 30, with 155 tourists for nearly 30%. The remaining were tourists aged 60 or older. The survey was conducted in Hue through travel companies and tourist groups visiting Hue, therefore 100% of the tourists had actual experiences in Hue. Hue is the former imperial capital of Vietnam, where architecture and invaluable cultural heritage are preserved, including 7 tangible and intangible heritage recognized by UNESCO, more than 1,000 historical relics have been listed, including 166 relics recognized at various levels, more than 500 festivals, and three cultural heritage sites recognized by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and included in the national intangible cultural heritage list, including Hue singing recognized in 2015, Deng weaving of the Ta Oi ethnic group recognized in 2016, and the ADa Koonh traditional festival of the Pa Co people (2019). In addition, Hue is the only place in Vietnam where all types of terrain converge, from high mountains to open seas, from mountain forests, to flat lands, dunes, and lagoons. Nature has endowed Hue with spectacular cultural and natural heritage, such as the Perfume River, Mount Ngu, the Tam Giang - Cau Hai lagoon system covering an area of over 22,000 hectares, the largest in Southeast Asia; the intact Bach Ma National Park, and the beautiful Lang Co Bay. This ecosystem has created unique and distinctive characteristics for the local community in Hue. With these features, Hue is a perfect destination for slow tourism to enjoy peace, learn about culture, lifestyle, and experiences of tourists.

**Tables 1.** Participants' demographics

Variables	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	202	39.0
Female	316	61.0
<b>Age</b>		
20 - 30	155	29.9
30 - 40	135	26.1
40 - 50	102	19.7
50 - 60	108	20.8
>60	18	3.5
<b>Income per month</b>		
Less than 7 million	126	24.3
7-10 million	273	52.7
10-15 million	70	13.5
15 - 20 million	40	7.7
> 20 million	9	1.7
<b>Times</b>		
1st	450	86.9
2rd	53	10.2
>2	15	2.9

### 4.2. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

After the collected data was cleaned, it was analyzed using reliability coefficient measurement for each factor. The analysis results showed that after the first analysis, some measurements did not meet the condition of inter-correlation coefficient, and were thus excluded from the model. At the end of the analysis, 22 out of the initial 26 measurements met the condition. All factors had Cronbach's Alpha coefficient greater than 0.6. Therefore, these 22 measurements were kept for further analysis.

**Table 2-Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) coefficients**

Factor	Items	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Object-based Authenticity	OPA1	0.557	0.875	0.893	0.627
	OPA2	0.782			
	OPA3	0.773			
	OPA4	0.703			
	OPA5	0.728			
	OPA6	0.676			
	OPA7	0.385			
Existential Authenticity	EPA1	0.751	0.925	0.911	0.672
	EPA2	0.755			
	EPA3	0.777			
	EPA4	0.787			
	EPA5	0.750			
	EPA6	0.795			
	EPA7	0.731			
Desire	MM1	0.787	0.865	0.872	0.697
	MM2	0.802			
	MM3	0.649			
Behavior intention	YD1	0.659	0.860	0.858	0.659
	YD2	0.688			
	YD3	0.690			
	YD4	0.765			
	YD5	0.590			

**4.3. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)**

The result of EFA factor analysis shows that the KMO coefficient is 0.875. The Bartlett's test is statistically significant and the total variance extracted is 63.599%. The factors with factor loading less than 0,5 were sequentially excluded from the model and only the factors that meet the conditions were retained. The study results show that the observed variables are not scrambled, so the names of the factors are kept the same as the original for the next part of the study.

**4.4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)**

The indices reflecting the fit of CFA model are presented in Table 3, which shows that all indicators meet the established standards. This result indicates that the research model is completely appropriate for the surveyed market data. In addition, the factor analysis results confirm that the composite reliability (CR) of the measurement items meets the condition of >0.7 and the average variance extracted (AVE) is >0.5, ensuring convergence of the measurement items (Table 2). On the other hand, the largest shared variance (MSV) value is <AVE, indicating the distinctiveness of the measurement items.

**Table3: CFA model fit**

STT	Condition	CFA result	
		Result	Conclusion
1	TLI > 0.9	TLI = 0.957	Satisfy
2	CFI > 0.9	CFI = 0.966	Satisfy
3	GFI >0.9	GFI = 0.940	Satisfy
4	CMIN/df <3	Cmin/df = 2.834	Satisfy
5	RMSEA < 0.08	RMSEA = 0.060	Satisfy

**4.5. SEM and Hypothesis testing**

After the CFA analysis, the author proceeded to analyze the linear structural model (SEM) and test the hypotheses. The results are shown in Figure 1 and Table 4 below. The model fit indices are all within the

acceptable range, as the TLI, CFI, GFI coefficients are all greater than 0.9, the Chi-squared/df ratio is less than 3, and the RMSEA is less than 0.08.

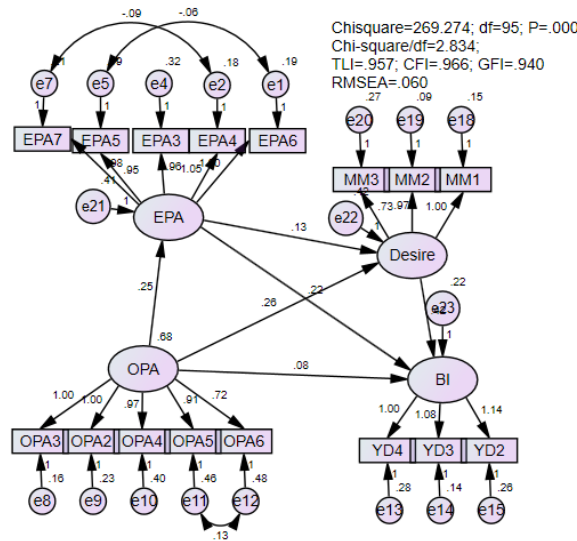


Figure 2-The result of SEM

Table 4-The result of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	The relationship		Standardized Regression weight	P	Conclusion	
H <sub>1</sub>	Existential authenticity	<---	Object-based authenticity	0.302	***	Supported
H <sub>2</sub>	Desire	<---	Object-based authenticity	0.304	***	Supported
H <sub>3</sub>	Desire	<---	Existential authenticity	0.131	0.006	Supported
H <sub>4</sub>	Behavior Intention	<---	Object-based authenticity	0.112	0.015	Supported
H <sub>5</sub>	Behavior Intention	<---	Existential authenticity	0.249	***	Supported
H <sub>6</sub>	Behavior Intention	<---	Desire	0.479	***	Supported

The hypothesis testing results indicate that all six hypotheses related to the relationships among the factors are supported. In other words, both existential authenticity and object-based authenticity positively and directly influence tourists' intention to engage in slow tourism. Additionally, object-based authenticity indirectly affects tourists' intention through the existential authenticity and desire. Existential authenticity has direct and indirect effects on tourists' behavioral intentions. The R<sup>2</sup> value of perceived authenticity is 0.091, which indicates that object-based authenticity explains 9.1% of the variance in perceived authenticity. Similarly, both types of authenticity explain 13.4% of the variance in desire. Finally, 41.1% of the variance in behavioral intention is explained by both types of authenticity and desire.

### V. Conclusion and implications

Based on a literature review, four factors measuring the constructs were identified for the formal quantitative study. The steps of testing the reliability of the measures, conducting EFA, and CFA were carried out to examine the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measures. This served as the basis for the authors to refine the initially proposed theoretical research model to fit the survey data. The results of the study showed that both the construct of perceived authenticity and the construct of object-based authenticity can be validly measured as latent constructs. Perceived authenticity was found to be a construct that depends on tourist experiences, which is consistent with the findings of Kolar and Zabkar (2010). The results of the study are summarized in the following section:

Firstly, the construct of objectivity has a positive effect on the construct of perceived authenticity. This finding is consistent with the studies of Kolar and Zabkar (2010); Dai, Zheng, and Yan (2021). Existential authenticity also plays a mediating role in the relationship between the construct of object-based authenticity and desire. This is deemed appropriate because most "objects" at a destination are static, such as landscapes, buildings, art crafts, historical artifacts, and they are the main attractions that appeal to tourists. At the destination, tourists are not only attracted by the scenery but also interact with locals, tour guides, service providers, and hear from those around them such as friends, relatives, and those who have had prior experience, which forms their desire and liking for the destination. This result is consistent when considering the context of

a destination with unique cultural features and recognized cultural heritage as in the study by Correia and Pimpao (2008); Yang, Lin, and Han (2010); Mohammad and Som (2010).

Secondly, authenticity is examined from the perspective of tourists' experiences, thus, the relationship between authenticity and desire and behavioral intention is enhanced in the field of tourism. Previous studies have shown a relationship between authenticity and satisfaction and loyalty in tourism (Park, Choi, & Lee, 2019), the engagement to destination are also consistent with the current study's findings, as both authenticity dimensions have a direct and positive impact on the intention to engage in slow tourism at the destination. Authenticity was also first examined for its role of MGB in Lee et al. (2020) research, but only in a general sense without examining authenticity based on object and existential authenticity specifically. The study results indicate that both types of authenticity have a positive influence on desire and behavioral intention. This is consistent with the study by (Girish & Lee, 2020), who examined the relationship between authenticity and the components of the planned behavior model (TPB) in Spain. Therefore, this finding emphasizes that the authenticity that tourists experience in Hue plays an important role in their decision-making process.

Thirdly, both types of authenticity have direct and indirect influences on the intention of slow tourism through desire. This research result is consistent with the studies of Lee et al. (2020); Meng and Choi (2016). In fact, before traveling, tourists usually plan their destination beforehand, and their own experiences are re-verified through attitudes and advice from those around them before they make their selection. Although Hue is an ideal destination for slow tourism, with mountains, rivers, seas, many tangible and intangible heritages, known as the "Ao Dai Capital," the "Festival City," or the "Culinary Capital," the tourism results in the past show that most tourists only focus on the core area - the city center without paying attention to the surrounding tourist spots such as Pha Tam Giang or areas of rivers, lakes, streams, waterfalls, and craft villages. This is also one of the reasons why tourists have not had many experiences in these areas, and have not truly experienced and interacted with the scenery and local life. The research results also show that both types of existential authenticity and object-based authenticity, have a strong impact on the intention of slow tourism. Therefore, if suitable tourism products are designed flexibly according to the customers' needs, with a balance and distribution among the regions in Hue, tourists will have more choices and more exciting experiences when choosing Hue as their destination.

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