Article

The Relationship between Cultural Tourist Experience and Recommendation Intention: Empirical Evidence from Montenegr

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Abstract: The cultural tourist experience emerges as an essential part of the offer of tourism services and is considered a crucial factor for tourism destination development. Although the existing literature has investigated the effect of cultural tourism, empirical evidence on the impact of cultural tourist experience on tourist behavior remains scarce. Therefore, this study aims to explore the relationship between different dimensions of cultural tourist experience and recommendation intention. Using Structural Equation Modelling, based on a sample of 80 tourists who visited Montenegro, the results indicate a statistically significant relationship between different dimensions of the cultural tourist experience and the recommendation intention of Montenegro as a destination. More precisely, the findings reveal that sensory, social, and emotional dimensions positively impact recommendation intention. Furthermore, the social dimension has a stronger effect than sensory and emotional dimensions. This study extends current research on cultural tourism by providing a better understanding of the relationship between components of cultural tourist experience and tourist behaviors, and, as such, can serve as a premise in improving destination management strategy.

1. Introduction

Contemporary trends in tourism emphasize cultural experience as a foundation for a more delightful journey [1], which is reflected in the expansion of cultural programs [2]. In fact, offers of cultural tourism should fill the free time of tourists during their holidays [3] and make their stay at the destination more interesting and meaningful [4]. According to [5], cultural programs encompass a variety of activities with the purpose of satisfying the needs of tourists for entertainment and education, as well as providing active recreation and interaction with other tourists during their stay at the destination. Due to their authenticity and specific values, these programs serve not only as a basis for differentiating tourist offers but also as a reliable mechanism for improving the overall image of a destination [6].

Regarding cultural programs as pull factors that stimulate positive perceptions of destination attractiveness [7], these programs are considered a key determinant of tourists' decision-making process to visit one destination. Ref. [8] emphasized that if cultural programs are implemented in a high-quality manner, they can significantly boost tourist satisfaction and thus increase opportunities for re-visiting specific tourist destinations.

Accordingly, the study by [9] suggests that visitors whose expectations associated with the offers of cultural tourism are completely met will spend more on other products and services offered at the destination. Therefore, cultural programs in tourism can be understood as a vital segment that can ensure business success and improve the overall tourist experience [10].

Moreover, experience in tourism is considered to be an integral part of tourist vacation and a key segment of the offer of tourism services [11]. Recent work by [12] emphasized that travel experience may be an effective tool in improving the destination image to

potential segments. Creating unique interactive tourist experiences is considered critical in achieving satisfaction and shaping tourists' attitudes toward a destination [13]. In addition, it is well-known that tourists' experience influences their behavioral intention [14]. Accordingly, Ref. [15] underscored the notion that managers in the tourism sector need to provide tourists with memorable experiences, which in turn may stimulate loyalty and thus improve destination competitiveness.

While the focus on cultural tourism and customer experience is prominent in the relevant literature, the analysis associated with customer tourist experience and tourist behavior is still far from clear. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between cultural tourist experience and their recommendation intention using data from Montenegro. More precisely, following previous scholars [16] who argued that different dimensions of customer experience may generate different effects on customer behavior, we examine how the dimensions of the cultural tourist experience in isolation are related to tourist behavior intention. This individual versus aggregated approach provides better insight into the role of various dimensions of the cultural tourist experience in the creation of tourist behavior. In this regard, current research draws attention to the implication of different experience dimensions for determining tourist behavior. Moreover, the majority of studies dealing with tourist experience, cultural programs, and tourist behavior are oriented toward more developed countries [17]. Using data that provide information on cultural tourist experience and their behaviors during their stay in Montenegro, we fill this gap in the literature, thereby providing deeper insight within a less-developed country characterized by strong economic transition.

The paper is organized as follows: the next section presents the theoretical framework, followed by a description of the empirical methodology; then, we present the study findings, and the discussion and conclusions are finally presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Tourist Experience

Given that experience in tourism is multifaceted by nature, the term "experience" is not easy to define uniformly [18]. The tourist experience is considered to be a socially constructed term that includes multiple interpretations of the social and substantial components of the overall experience of tourists during their stay at the destination [19]. This experience is strongly personal by nature and depends on many factors beyond the control of tourism managers, such as the motives, emotions, previous experiences, and individual characteristics of tourists [20]. Accordingly, Pine and Gilmore [21] defined experience as the phenomenon of a subjective character that encompasses an individual's responses on the emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical levels. Several scholars examine experience through the prism of self-expression and argue that experience in tourism improves personal competencies and helps in formatting one's personality [22]. Such experiences are special and meaningful; they encourage the creation of unique value and a positive mood and thus influence favorable behavioral outcomes [23].

Ref. [24] identified five different dimensions of customer experience: social, cognitive, behavioral, sensory, and emotional dimensions. In this context, social experience is understood as an immanent personal response to multiple interactions that occur with customer service personnel [25]. While cognitive experience represents personal thinking and conscious mental processes, behavioral experience refers to visible reactions of an individual that are stimulated by intense moments [26]. Sensory experience is based on the human senses and emerges from their mutual interaction [27]. According to [28], emotional experience is described as moods and emotions that arise during a tourist journey.

In addition to being the core of a tourist's vacation, experience in tourism is also recognized as a fundamental component of the overall tourist product [29]. Several empirical studies confirm the positive relationship between tourist experience and their behavior outcomes.

2.2. The Relationship between Cultural Tourist Experience and Recommendation Intention

Although tourism literature acknowledges the importance of cultural tourism [30] and tourist experience [31], empirical research regarding the relationship between cultural tourism experience and behavioral outcomes remains scarce. In order to establish a theoretical framework, we will review previous literature that examined the relationship between cultural tourism offer, tourist experience, and behavioral intentions.

As a complex system, cultural tourism integrates the whole range of values that cultivate human action because it satisfies psychological motives, develops human individuality, and stimulates social cohesion and exchanges of cultural values [32]. Importantly, formatting self-identity through cultural tourism and acquiring different cultural values are considered powerful motivators of tourists' journeys [33]. Postmodern tourists tend to, in addition to leisure and recreation, gain new knowledge about the destination they visit [34]. Therefore, the desire for permanent education and self-expression has determined the need of modern tourists to engage in various cultural activities that provide individual development and social interaction [35]. Accordingly, cultural tourism should be treated as an extremely important aspect of the tourism industry that satisfies multiple interests of visitors while simultaneously providing them with a unique, deep cultural experience of an emotional, educational, and psychological nature [36].

Turning to customer experience, several scholars investigated the effects of memorable tourist experiences on their behaviors in the context of cultural tourism that could be relevant for our research. The tourist experience is considered to determine the perceived value of service, which in turn affects satisfaction and thus stimulates various aspects of tourists' behavior [37]. Working on a sample composed mostly of a U.S. population, Chen and Rahman [38] confirmed a significant relationship between memorable experiences of cultural tourists and behavior outcomes. Working on a sample of 301 participants visiting Taiwan, Kim [39] showed that memorable tourist experience emerges as a predictor of future behavioral intentions. The authors further revealed that the tourist experience is a critical tool for increasing tourist loyalty toward a destination. Similarly, Suhartanto et al. [40] examined the link between tourist experience, perceived value, motivation, satisfaction, and loyalty for tourists in Bandung, Indonesia. The authors highlighted the main role of experience quality in boosting tourist outcomes, suggesting motivational factors to be a partial mediator between experience quality, satisfaction, and loyalty. Likewise, Lu et al. [41] found tourist experience to be a critical determinant of loyalty, emphasizing that the relevant function of tourists' motivation in strengthening experience quality and perceived value. Ref. [42] analyzed the impact of memorable tourist experiences on their willingness to repeat their visits. More precisely, using a sample of 261 tourists from Korea visiting China, the authors demonstrated that memorable experiences of tourists can significantly improve re-visit intention, which results in favorable loyalty outcomes. In Egypt, Ragb et al. [43] underscored the moderating role of tourists' travel experience in the process of tourists' loyalty formation, suggesting a moderating effect of tourists' experiences between destination image and loyalty behaviors. Analyzing the effects of tourist experience within the sample composed of tourists visiting India, Ref. [44] proposed a strong link between tourist experience and re-visit intention through destination image evaluations. The findings by [45] revealed a positive effect; however, they indicated that tourist experience influences loyalty-related outcomes through satisfaction. Accordingly, in [46], it was underscored that creating memorable tourist experiences is regarded as an efficient approach in shaping future tourist behavioral intentions, such as retention and word of mouth. In this regard, the study of [47] suggested that memorable tourist experiences should be treated as a key driver of overall destination progress, which ensures a positive destination image and thus contributes to better positioning. Given the growing demand for more personalized and interactive experiences in tourism [48], destinations tend to ensure a variety of personal and participative experiences for tourists to meet their specific interests [49]. Thus, in ref. [50], it was emphasized that it is important for destination managers to go beyond the

basic needs of tourists in order to generate memorable tourist experiences and encourage their loyalty toward the destination through repeat visits.

Existing literature mainly investigated the aggregated effects of tourist experience on their behavior [51]; however, these studies have neglected the idea that tourist experience dimensions, when in isolation, might have different effects on tourist behaviors. Some scholars claimed that not all tourist experience dimensions effectively encourage loyalty-related outcomes; instead, only specific dimensions will elicit loyalty behaviors [52,53]. Therefore, we propose that the simultaneous incorporation of cultural tourist experience dimensions is not necessary for achieving improved behavioral intentions. This study, therefore, considers the independent effects of tourist experience dimensions to better understand their impact on behavioral outcomes. More precisely, our intention is to examine how specific dimensions of cultural tourist experiences influence the tourists' recommendation intention.

Ref. [28] proposed three dimensions that are the most relevant for orchestrating customer experience: social, sensory, and emotional experience. Therefore, we propose that the aforementioned experience dimensions play a fundamental role in creating tourist experiences that trigger various tourist outcomes. As ref. [54] demonstrated, the sensory, social, and emotional aspects of experience emerge as the most powerful drivers regarding the purchase behaviors; our study predicts that these tourist experience dimensions may act as independent determinants of loyalty-related behaviors.

In ref. [55], it was revealed that sensory experience has a strong impact on loyalty-related intentions; in fact, the findings suggested that delightful sensory experience might generate positive emotional arousal of customers, which could be reflected on their satisfaction and thus increase the likelihood of recommendation. The existing literature has recognized that social interaction, as part of social experience, affects satisfaction and helps the creation of tourists' attitudes toward a particular destination [56]. More precisely, it is considered that social interaction could enable tourists to develop emotional values toward a destination, which positively influences their satisfaction and purchase intention [54]. Similarly, in ref. [57], it was argued that emotions emerge as key drivers of satisfaction and post-experience behaviors. Therefore, the emotional experience of a tourist is considered to be one of the strongest influencing factors of word of mouth and repeat visit intention [58].

Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *The sensory experience of tourists has a positive impact on recommendation intention.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *The social experience of tourists has a positive impact on recommendation intention.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *The emotional experience of tourists has a positive impact on recommendation intention.*

3. Empirical Methodology

3.1. Data

To examine the link between cultural tourist experience and recommendation intention, a questionnaire containing 28 questions regarding tourists' socio-demographic characteristics, factors associated with their cultural experience, and behavioral intentions was created. Data on 80 tourists who visited Montenegro were collected through a survey conducted at the Naval Heritage Collection Museum in the municipality of Tivat from July to October 2020. More precisely, the data contains 25 people from Montenegro, 14 people from ex-Yugoslavia, 18 people from the EU, 7 people from the UK, 9 people from ex-USSR, 1 person from Asia, 4 people from North America, 1 person from South America, and 1 person from Africa. The museum is situated a short distance from the promenade in the Porto Montenegro nautical village and is located in a restored facility. A mega-yachting port named "Porto Montenegro" has a favorable geographical position for the strong

development of nautical, heritage, and cultural tourism. Therefore, it is one of the main tourist attractions in the country. Its potentials enable the further development of different types of tourism such as elite, nautical, and cultural with an emphasis on museums, visitor centers, galleries, and similar venues. It is noticeable that Porto Montenegro is a port not only of local importance but also seems to be a strong factor in the development of Montenegro as a tourist destination at the national level and a turning point in achieving the desired quality of tourism services [59]. Therefore, the Naval Heritage Museum was chosen since it offers various cultural programs and themed exhibitions that enhance the cultural tourism offered.

3.2. Variables

Recommendation intention. In line with previous scholars [57,60], our dependent variable named RECOMMENDATION was conceptualized as a tourist's willingness to recommend a destination to others. Intention to recommend was measured by a one-item scale where 1 = "not", 2 = "probably not", 3 = "neutral", 4 = "probably yes", and 5 = "yes", adopted from [61].

Furthermore, we created three variables to test the effect of different dimensions of cultural tourist experience on recommendation intention.

Sensory Tourist Experience. We measure sensory tourist experience as the sum of the following items: interior, lighting, temperature, cleanliness, and colors. These items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 = "I completely agree" to 1 = "I do not agree at all".

Social Tourist Experience. We measure social tourist experience as the sum of the following items: information, kindness, competence, professionalism, and interaction. The scale for each component is from 5 = "I completely agree" to 1 = "I do not agree at all".

Emotional Tourist Experience. We measure emotional tourist experience as the sum of the following items: satisfaction, happiness, frustration, lock, serenity, anger, and fulfillment. As in the previous cases, all the items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale where 5 represented "I completely agree" and 1 represented" I do not agree at all". Notably, the items anger and frustration are integrated into the emotional tourist experience dimension as they are related to negative service experience [62]. In other words, anger and frustration are part of the emotional tourist experience as tourists may feel angry or frustrated if the service they obtain does not meet their expectations [63,64]. The item lock refers to the feeling of being confined in the museum.

In Table 1, we present the descriptive statistics for the study's variables.

Table 1. Definition of variables and descriptive statistics (N = 80).

Variable	Definition	Mean	SD	Min	Max
RECOMMENDATION INTENTION	Would you recommend Tivat to your friends/relatives? (values coded inversely)	4.40	1.00	1.00	5.00
INTERIOR	Did the interior of the museum make you want to leave the building?	3.80	1.44	1.00	5.00
LIGHTING	Was the lighting in the museum pleasant? (values coded inversely)	4.20	0.96	1.00	5.00
TEMPERATURE	Was the room temperature adequate? (values coded inversely)	4.26	0.99	1.00	5.00
CLEANLINESS	Were the rooms clean? (values coded inversely)	4.44	0.91	1.00	5.00
COLORS	Were the colors of the room pleasant? (values coded inversely)	4.26	0.95	1.00	5.00
INFORMATION	Did employees provide accurate information? (values coded inversely)	4.38	1.02	1.00	5.00
KINDNESS	Were the employees kind? (values coded inversely)	4.38	0.99	1.00	5.00
COMPETENCE	Were the employees competent? (values coded inversely)	4.34	0.98	1.00	5.00
PROFESSIONALISM	Were the employees professional? (values coded inversely)	4.35	0.99	1.00	5.00
INTERACTION	Did employees encourage interaction? (values coded inversely)	4.04	1.14	1.00	5.00
PLEASURE	Did you feel great pleasure during the visit to the museum? (values coded inversely)	4.29	1.00	1.00	5.00
HAPPINESS	Did the visit to the museum make you happy? (values coded inversely)	4.15	0.99	1.00	5.00
FRUSTRATION	Did the visit to the museum make you frustrated? (values coded inversely)	2.35	1.51	1.00	5.00
LOCK	Did you feel locked up while visiting the museum?	3.58	1.35	1.00	5.00
SERENITY	Did you feel serenity in the museum? (values coded inversely)	3.43	1.13	1.00	5.00
ANGER	Did a visit to the museum make you feel angry?	3.93	1.40	1.00	5.00
FULFILLMENT	Were your expectations fulfilled?	1.59	0.81	1.00	4.00

3.3. Empirical Model

Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), which provides the possibility of examining the causal relationships between variables [65]. Structural modeling includes a set of statistical methods used for analysis, as well as algorithms, and is extremely suitable for testing complex relationships between latent constructs [66]. The SEM model is presented in accordance with the defined hypotheses.

4. Results

The results of the hypothesis tested using Structural Equation Modelling are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Measurement paths using SEM.

Measurement Path	Unstandardized Regression Weight	S.E.	C.E	*p*-Value
Sensory experience				
Inferior	0.48			
Lighting	1.08	0.25	1.97	*
Temperature	1.20	0.16	6.78	***
Cleanliness	1.10	0.17	7.27	***
Colors	1 (fixed)	0.15	7.26	***
Social experience				
Information	1.33			
Kindness	1.23	0.20	6.63	***
Competence	1.23	0.19	6.47	***
Professionalism	1.25	0.19	6.50	***
Interaction	1 (fixed)	0.19	6.49	***
Emotional experience				
Satisfaction	1.33	0.31	4.30	***
Happiness	1.14	0.28	4.08	***
Frustration	1.03	0.34	3.06	**
Lock	1 (fixed)			
Serenity	0.17	0.21	0.82	0.41
Anger	1.21	0.34	3.54	***
Fulfillment	1.02	0.24	4.24	***

Notes: *** = *p* < 0.001; ** = *p* < 0.05; * = *p* < 0.1.

Table 3. Results of the structural model.

Antecedent variable → Consequent Variable	Regression Weight	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	*p*-Value
Sensory experience of tourists → Recommendation intention	0.23	0.10	2.22	***
Social experience of tourists → Recommendation intention	0.73	0.14	5.24	***
Emotional experience of tourists → Recommendation intention	0.38	0.14	2.81	***

Notes: *** *p* < 0.001.

In Table 2, characteristics that include interior, lighting, temperature, cleanliness, and colors were found to have a significant impact on the formation of sensory experience dimension, which confirms an appropriate choice of the items in this category. In the context of the social experience dimension, the results indicate that characteristics, such as information, kindness, competence, professionalism, and interaction, have a statistically significant impact on the formation of the social experience dimension. Furthermore, the results show that characteristics that refer to satisfaction, happiness, frustration, lock, anger, and fulfillment significantly define the emotional experience dimension; conversely, the characteristic related to serenity does not show statistical significance.

The results from Table 3 demonstrate that the relationship between the sensory experience dimension and the recommendation intention is statistically significant and positive

(*p*–value < 0.001). Thus, Hypothesis 1, stating that the cultural sensory experience of tourists has a positive impact on recommendation intention, is supported. Our findings align with those of [67], who found evidence for the positive impact of sensory experience on tourist behaviors through remembered sensory impressions. In a similar vein, Ref. [68] highlighted the importance of sensory impressions as strong contributors to the long-lasting memory of tourists' experiences, asserting that remembered experiences are powerful drivers of loyalty-related outcomes, such as recommendation or re-visiting intention. As could be noted from Table 3, the results also indicate that the social experience dimension exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on the recommendation intention (*p*–value < 0.001). Therefore, the hypothesis that the social experience of tourists has a positive impact on recommendation intention is confirmed. This finding supports previous research that underscored the importance of social aspects of cultural tourists' experience for satisfaction and positive word of mouth [69] and suggested employees to be one of the strongest factors that influence tourist loyalty [70]. Hypothesis 3 predicts that the emotional experience of tourists has a positive impact on recommendation intention. The results support H3 because a statistically significant relationship was found (*p*–value < 0.001). This finding is consistent with previous literature [71], indicating a close relationship between emotional experience and favorable behavioral outcomes. For instance, in [4], the positive impact of positive emotions on tourists' willingness to re-visit destinations was revealed; earlier research by [72] underscored that emotional experience leads to excellent destination evaluations and positive word of mouth.

Notably, we can observe that the strongest coefficient is generated for the social experience dimension, followed by the emotional experience dimension and, finally, the sensory dimension. Regarding the importance of the social dimension, our results support those from [73], who demonstrated that intangible social aspects of a destination offer are better predictors of tourists' satisfaction than tangible physical aspects. Moreover, ref. [74] recognized employees to be the most critical factor in achieving total satisfaction of consumer in the context of the hotel industry. As emphasized by [75], employees, as part of tourist encounters, have a critical role in stimulating tourists' active participation and might therefore increase satisfaction, which leads to improved behavioral outcomes. The significance of the social experience is obvious; therefore, we posit that tourists' intention to recommend depends mostly on the social aspects, particularly human resources. This is why employees' competencies and skills become key factors that can improve tourist behavior. For example, human aspects of tourist experience, referring to kindness, professionalism, competence, information, and interaction, appear to be highly appreciated by tourists during their stay at a destination. In other words, when employees show strong interaction skills, tourists will perceive a high value of the social experience, so they will be more likely to share positive word of mouth. This fact should draw the attention of service providers to focus on facilitating social interactions with tourists as well as promoting hospitality in order to enhance the experience of tourists' and thus improve competitiveness.

The obtained results explicitly show that cultural experiences that tourists perceive as pleasant can motivate their intention to recommend a destination. The findings obtained by this research enrich previous works that examine the link between offers of cultural tourism, tourist experience, and tourist behavior and provide analysis on how different dimensions of the tourist cultural experience influence tourist behavior. Furthermore, this article highlights the important role of sensory, social, and emotional experience in the prediction of tourists' behavior outcomes, highlighting, however, the major role of the social dimension. These findings do not deviate from those obtained in previous literature, suggesting that with the improvement of multiple performances of the service environment, including the competencies of employees in the tourism sector, destinations can achieve positive tourist experiences [73,76], which further encourage re-visits and recommendation intentions [77]. Based on this fact, it is evident that designing a context in which the value of the experience in tourism is generated through positive sensory, emotional, and social stimuli leads to superior cultural tourist experiences and thus positive tourist behavior.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Cultural experience appears as an increasingly popular concept aiming to attract new segments of tourists and complement their overall experience at the destination [78]. Despite the clear consensus on the importance of cultural tourist experience as essential for destination success, there is still insufficient evidence on the impact of cultural tourist experiences on tourist behavior [1]. Furthermore, to fully comprehend the impact of cultural tourist experience on behavioral intention, an analysis of different cultural experience components is necessary in order to understand their effects [18] and thus provide clear directions for destination development. Therefore, this study investigates the relationship between the dimension of cultural tourist experience and behavioral outcomes, measured by recommendation intention.

Our study confirmed that the cultural experience of tourists positively affects their willingness to recommend a destination to others. The findings show the positive impact of all three cultural tourist experiences (i.e., sensory, social, and emotional dimensions) on recommendation intention. The results support the first hypothesis, indicating the relationship between sensory tourist experience and recommendation to be positive. That is, tourists with positive perceived sensory experiences will be more likely to provide favorable recommendations; therefore, we suggest that physical setting attributes referring to interior, lighting, cleanliness, temperature, and colors will be of crucial importance in developing positive word of mouth intention towards a destination. The further analysis clarifies the relationship between social tourist experience and recommendation, showing that the effect of social tourist experience on recommendation behavior is significant and positive, which supports the second hypothesis. Further analyses demonstrate a significant relationship between emotional tourist experience and recommendation behaviors, which confirms the third hypothesis. The results illustrate that specific tourists' emotions involving satisfaction, happiness, frustration, lock, anger, and fulfillment are powerful predictors of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in cultural tourism. This supports findings by [22], who stressed that perceived delightful emotional experience would influence tourist satisfaction and loyalty behaviors toward a destination, which in turn contributes to the improvement of destination competitiveness.

It is observed that tourists' willingness to recommend depends strongly on the social interaction they experienced; thus, the level of information, kindness, competence, professionalism, and interaction skills of human resources become key in strengthening tourist loyalty-related behaviors. This finding is in line with the study of [79] that revealed that social interaction and physical environment, as strong predictors of the sensory and social experience of tourists, may drive loyalty behaviors and positive word of mouth. However, social experience dominated the other experience dimensions in predicting intention to recommend.

These findings all contribute to prior research by providing empirical evidence of the effects of cultural tourists' experiences on positive recommendation behaviors. In other words, this study revealed that the perceived cultural experience of tourists corresponds to their future loyalty intentions. To be more precise, when tourists perceive sensory, social, and emotional experiences as pleasant, the likelihood that they will share positive recommendations will be higher. Therefore, it can be concluded that the establishment of the relationship between the perceived quality of cultural services offered and the cultural experience of tourists is a necessary condition for achieving loyalty behaviors and thus an important determinant of the overall progress of the tourist destination.

The existing literature has begun to pay increasing attention to the importance of cultural experience within the tourism sector [1,80]. This research represents an attempt to comprehend the cultural tourist experience, as well its effects on tourists' behaviors; therefore, our article makes several relevant contributions to this emerging stream of study.

First, by identifying essential components of cultural experience in tourism using a multidimensional method approach, this article responds to the call for more detailed analyses of the multifaceted nature of cultural tourist experience [78]. Furthermore, this

research has developed context-specific measurements of cultural experience within the tourism sector. Compared to previous studies that have used an aggregated approach to examine the tourist experience, this article examined independent factors that affect the cultural experience of tourists. Going beyond prior research, we believe our study provides more comprehensive insight into the concept of cultural tourist experience; thus, further research could adopt our measurement scale to examine the antecedents and consequences of cultural experience within the tourism sector.

Second, this article underscores the significance of cultural tourist experience for reinforcing their word of mouth intention towards the destination. To the best of our knowledge, no previous study in the tourism literature examined the relationship between cultural tourist experience and recommendation intention. Based on the massive body of literature on the tourist experience, three components (including sensory, social, and emotional tourist experience) were considered to be essential constructs of cultural tourist experience, and their effects on tourists' recommendation intention were analyzed. The obtained findings show that the sensory, social, and emotional tourist experience has a positive effect on recommendation intention. Therefore, the theoretical arguments related to cultural tourist experience were enriched, and the relevant roles of its emotional, physical, and social aspects in tourists' behavioral prediction were underscored. This indicates that physical, social, and emotional stimuli evoke responses in tourists who generate their cultural experience and ultimately shape behaviors and attitudes toward a destination. This is also an important implication of the present study and is consistent with earlier research by [79], who identified the physical environment and social interaction as critical determinants of visitor experience that generate supreme loyalty.

Notably, this study is the first to consider the effects of the cultural tourist experience on recommendation intention within the countries that used to make up ex-Yugoslavia, thereby filling a massive gap in tourism literature.

Third, our study found that the social tourist experience was of the greatest importance in shaping the cultural experience of tourists that drives positive word of mouth. This highlights the role of the social tourist experience as the most important cultural tourist experience dimension in the development of tourists' recommendation intention. Moreover, our findings indicate that its impact on tourists' recommendation intention is much stronger than that of the sensory or emotional dimensions of the cultural tourist experience. This is in line with previous research conducted by [75], who demonstrated that social interactions of tourists appear to be the strongest predictor of favorable behavior outcomes. As stressed by [38], a higher level of cultural contact helps create an unforgettable tourist experience, thereby leading to positive recommendations. This is because communication with local people helps tourists to experience the tradition, culture, and hospitality of the destination more closely, which provides them with meaningful cultural experience, which consequently leads to loyalty.

However, these findings differ from previous research conducted by [81], who revealed a non-significant impact of social experience on customer loyalty within the retail sector. Therefore, our findings could be explained by the conceptualization of cultural tourist experience as context-specific. Perhaps in this turbulent environment, in which tourists are actively engaged at multiple levels [82] and interact with other tourists, residents, and employees, the factors that generate the social aspect of the cultural tourist experience are of greater value and thus enhance recommendation intention.

5.1. Managerial Implications

This study can serve tourist managers for planning tourism policy regarding cultural products at the destination level. First, tourism managers must understand which destination attributes that have the most impact on tourists' positive cultural experience and intention to recommend. Such information may be beneficial for managers to enhance the attractiveness of the cultural services offered for the longer term. Importantly, tourism managers must understand the perception of cultural experience in order to establish

quality standards of the overall cultural product; the ability of tourism managers to ensure a delightful cultural tourist experience by developing and offering proper cultural services can act as a competitive advantage that could, in turn, result in positive outcomes. This essentially means that by improving the manner in which cultural offer is experienced by tourists, their overall assessment of cultural experience may have more favorable effects, which in turn may influence their willingness to recommend the destination to others. In this regard, our analysis can serve tourism managers in planning strategic policy at the destination level to improve tourist behavioral outcomes by highlighting the importance of various aspects of the cultural tourism experience. The findings provide evidence to tourism managers to invest in the sensory, social, and emotional aspects of tourist experience as they can generate memorable cultural experiences of tourists, which will have significant impacts on the recommendation behaviors and thus, destination competitiveness.

Moreover, our analysis shows that the greatest effect of social experience is on recommendation intention. This finding shows that satisfying tourists' social aspects of service are more effective than sensory or emotional aspects. This may be because tourists consider that human services can better meet their cultural experience-oriented needs and with a greater effect than physical services. Therefore, this research should help tourism managers to comprehend the importance of human resources in order to improve the competencies of employees as a significant part of social experience, which can significantly determine the overall cultural tourist experience.

Finally, tourism managers should focus on the cultural cultivation of tourists by orchestrating interaction points and facilitating a supporting environment that stimulates tourists' cultural contact and provides them with deeper cultural experiences.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research

Although the obtained results indicate the importance of the cultural tourist experience for the recommendation intention, we believe that future studies should be focused on certain limitations of this research. Given that we examined three dimensions of the tourist experience, it is important to examine the relationship between the omitted dimensions related to the cognitive and behavioral experiences and tourist behavior intention. In addition, further research could investigate the effects of cultural tourist experience on various behavioral outcomes, such as satisfaction, re-visit intention, purchase intention, and similar effects.

Furthermore, as the current research is limited to tourists who visited Montenegro, the study findings could not be generalized. Future research should include more countries in order to obtain more general conclusions and thus provide significant contributions to the improvement of cultural tourism strategies. Although the sample size met empirical requirements, it was quite small. Therefore, further research should cover a larger sample and include tourists visiting the destination in order to improve the validity of the findings.

master's student at the Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management, University of Montenegro, as part of her thesis.

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