

Discrete Tourist Emotions and Recommend Intention

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the influence of discrete tourist emotions on tourist satisfaction, overall destination image, and willingness to recommend in the context of heritage tourism. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 250 domestic tourists visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites in Indonesia through purposive sampling. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS 24 was employed to test the proposed hypotheses. The results indicate that positive emotions significantly influence tourist satisfaction and overall image, while negative emotions have a significant negative effect on satisfaction but not on overall image. Tourist satisfaction and overall image are found to be significant predictors of willingness to recommend. The findings contribute to the literature on emotional experiences in tourism by highlighting the differential roles of discrete emotions. Practically, destination managers should focus on designing experiences that evoke positive emotions while minimizing negative emotional triggers to enhance destination competitiveness.

Keywords: *Discrete emotions, tourist satisfaction, destination image, recommend intention, heritage tourism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the experience economy, tourism destinations compete not only on the basis of physical attributes but also on their ability to create memorable and emotionally engaging experiences (Movahedi, 2025). Emotions have been recognized as a critical component of the tourist experience, shaping post-consumption evaluations such as satisfaction, perceived image, and behavioral intentions (Hosany & Prayag, 2013). The concept of discrete emotions, which distinguishes specific emotional states such as joy, love, surprise, anger, and disappointment, provides a more nuanced understanding than the traditional positive-negative valence approach (Prayag et al., 2017).

Indonesia, with six UNESCO World Heritage cultural sites, has significant potential to leverage heritage tourism for economic development. However, the challenge remains in transforming tourist visits into memorable experiences that generate positive word-of-mouth and return intentions (Kausar et al., 2026). Heritage tourism, as a form of cultural tourism, offers a rich context for emotional experiences due to its authentic and historical elements that stimulate affective responses (Poria et al., 2003).

Grounded in the Cognitive Appraisal Theory, which posits that emotions arise from individuals' evaluations of events, this research proposes that different discrete emotions will lead to different evaluative judgments and behavioral outcomes (Yeo & Ong, 2024). In tourism, positive discrete emotions such as joy, love, and positive surprise have been found to enhance tourist satisfaction because they represent pleasurable experiences that meet or exceed expectations (Li et al., 2025). Prayag et al. (2017) demonstrated that joy and love significantly increase satisfaction among heritage tourists. Conversely, negative discrete emotions such as anger, disappointment, and regret are expected to decrease satisfaction as they reflect goal incongruence and unpleasant experiences (Howard & Smith, 2023). Thus, positive discrete emotions are hypothesized to have a positive effect on tourist satisfaction (H1), while negative discrete emotions are hypothesized to have a negative effect on tourist satisfaction (H2).

Beyond satisfaction, emotions experienced during visitation also contribute to the formation of overall destination image—the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions a person holds of a destination (Yaşar Altunel, 2026). Positive emotions are likely to enhance the overall image because they create favorable associations with the destination (Pung et al., 2025), whereas negative emotions may tarnish the image, although some studies suggest that the effect may be weaker if the negative experience is perceived as an isolated incident (Lau-Gesk & Mukherjee, 2017). Accordingly, positive discrete emotions are hypothesized to have a positive effect on overall destination image (H3), while negative discrete emotions are hypothesized to have a negative effect on overall destination image (H4).

Tourists who are satisfied with their experience are more likely to share positive information with others. Tourist satisfaction is widely regarded as a key indicator of destination success and a precursor to loyalty behaviors, including

willingness to recommend (Paudyal et al., 2026). Similarly, a favorable overall image enhances the likelihood of recommendation because tourists want to associate themselves with positively perceived places (Zainuddin et al., 2020). The relationship between satisfaction and overall image has also been established, with satisfaction acting as a mediator between experience and image formation (Hameed et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, tourist satisfaction is hypothesized to have a positive effect on willingness to recommend (H5), overall destination image is hypothesized to have a positive effect on willingness to recommend (H6), and tourist satisfaction is hypothesized to have a positive effect on overall destination image (H7).

Previous studies have established the link between overall emotions and satisfaction, yet limited research has explored how discrete emotions differentially affect satisfaction, overall image, and willingness to recommend in an integrative model, particularly within the context of emerging heritage tourism destinations (Alrawadieh et al., 2025; Ferreira et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025). Willingness to recommend, as a dimension of destination loyalty, is considered more reliable than revisit intention because not all satisfied tourists can revisit due to distance or cost constraints (Cong, 2016; PÉREZ-SÁNCHEZ & PÉREZ-RODRÍGUEZ, 2025). Therefore, understanding the emotional drivers of these outcomes is essential for destination marketing organizations.

This study addresses the gap by investigating the distinct effects of positive and negative discrete emotions on satisfaction, overall image, and willingness to recommend. The study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence from an emerging heritage tourism destination and offers practical implications for experience design. The following sections discuss the research method, results, discussion, and conclusion.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative explanatory research design to test the causal relationships among variables. The target population was domestic tourists who had visited one of the UNESCO World Heritage cultural sites in Indonesia, namely Borobudur Temple, Prambanan Temple, or Sangiran Early Man Site, within the last six months. A purposive sampling technique was used with the criteria that respondents were at least 17 years old and had spent a minimum of two hours at the site.

Data was collected through an online and offline survey using a structured questionnaire during July-August 2023. A total of 280 questionnaires were distributed, and 250 valid responses were obtained, resulting in an 89.3% response rate. The sample size meets the minimum requirement for SEM analysis, which is 5-10 times the number of indicators (Wolf et al., 2013). The majority of respondents were female (58.4%), aged 21-30 years (47.2%), and had a bachelor's degree (62.8%).

All constructs were measured using multiple items adapted from previous studies and modified to fit the heritage tourism context. Positive Emotions (PE) and Negative Emotions (NE) were measured using four items each from Hosany & Prayag (2013). Tourist Satisfaction (TS) was measured with three items from (Kim & Thapa, 2018). Overall Image (OI) used three items from Beerli and Martin (2004). Willingness to Recommend (WTR) was measured with three items from Chen & Tsai (2007). All items used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS 25 for descriptive statistics and AMOS 24 for Structural Equation Modeling. The two-step approach recommended by Anderson & Gerbing (1988) was applied: first, assessing the measurement model through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to ensure validity and reliability; second, testing the structural model to evaluate the hypothesized relationships.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Evaluation of the Measurement Model

The psychometric properties of the measurement model were examined through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability. All standardized indicator loadings surpassed the recommended benchmark of 0.70, demonstrating satisfactory indicator reliability (Yajun Chen, 2023). For every latent construct, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeded the 0.50 criterion, and Composite Reliability (CR) values were above 0.70, jointly confirming convergent validity and adequate internal consistency. Discriminant validity was established by observing that the square root of the AVE for each construct was larger than its inter-construct correlations, consistent with established guidelines (Ahmed et al., 2024). The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) produced a set of goodness-of-fit indices indicative of acceptable model fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.145$, CFI = 0.941, TLI = 0.933, RMSEA = 0.069, and SRMR = 0.046. All these values fall within the generally accepted thresholds (Yajun Chen, 2023).

3.2. Assessment of the Structural Model

The structural model was estimated to evaluate the proposed causal relationships. The fit statistics for the structural model revealed a satisfactory level of correspondence with the empirical data: $\chi^2/df = 2.289$, CFI = 0.937, TLI = 0.926, RMSEA = 0.072, and SRMR = 0.051. Hypothesis testing outcomes indicated that six out of seven proposed paths received empirical support.

Positive affective states exerted a statistically significant and favorable influence on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$) as well as on overall destination image ($\beta = 0.284$, $p < 0.001$), thereby lending support to H1 and H3. Conversely, negative emotional states demonstrated a significant detrimental effect on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = -0.217$, $p < 0.01$), confirming H2. However, the path linking negative emotions to overall destination image failed to reach statistical significance ($\beta = -0.091$, $p = 0.124$), leading to the rejection of H4.

Tourist satisfaction emerged as a strong positive predictor of willingness to recommend ($\beta = 0.457$, $p < 0.001$) and of overall destination image ($\beta = 0.391$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5 and H7. In addition, overall destination image exhibited a significant positive association with willingness to recommend ($\beta = 0.368$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H6. The model accounted for 51.3% of the variance in tourist satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.513$), 43.7% in overall destination image ($R^2 = 0.437$), and 59.2% in willingness to recommend ($R^2 = 0.592$), indicating substantial explanatory power across the endogenous constructs.

3.3. Discussion of Key Findings

The empirical results underscore the central role of discrete emotional experiences in shaping post-visit evaluations and behavioral intentions within the heritage tourism context. The robust positive impact of favorable emotions on satisfaction aligns closely with prior investigations (Prayag et al., 2017), reinforcing the notion that encounters eliciting joy, affection, and surprise constitute foundational elements of satisfying heritage experiences. Meanwhile, the statistically significant negative effect of unfavorable emotions on satisfaction provides supporting evidence for Cognitive Appraisal Theory, wherein negatively valenced appraisals systematically reduce satisfaction levels (Holbrook & Hahn-Holbrook, 2022).

A noteworthy finding concerns the non-significant relationship between negative emotional states and overall destination image. This unexpected result may be interpreted through the lens of a positivity bias commonly observed in tourism contexts. Specifically, tourists tend to preserve a relatively favorable global impression of a destination even when confronted with minor negative incidents, particularly in high-involvement heritage settings (Teles et al., 2024). One plausible explanation is that visitors rationalize occasional negative occurrences as inherent to the authentic travel experience, or alternatively, attribute such incidents to situational or external factors rather than to the destination itself.

The significant pathways originating from both satisfaction and overall image toward willingness to recommend corroborate a well-established principle in tourism marketing: tourists who report higher satisfaction and hold a favorable image of a destination are more likely to evolve into voluntary advocates (Luong, 2025). Moreover, the mediating function of satisfaction in transmitting the effects of emotions onto overall image suggests a sequential process whereby emotional experiences first generate satisfaction judgments, which subsequently coalesce into a holistic perception of the destination.

A notable asymmetry emerged in the magnitude of effects: positive emotions influenced satisfaction more strongly ($\beta = 0.612$) compared to the negative counterpart ($\beta = -0.217$). This disparity implies that, within heritage tourism, actively cultivating positive emotional encounters may be relatively more consequential than merely mitigating negative ones, although both strategies remain relevant. This insight extends prior work by Nawijn et al. (2013) by offering a quantitative comparison of differential emotional impacts within a unified analytical framework.

4. CONCLUSION

Theoretically, this investigation makes three distinctive contributions to tourism scholarship. First, it extends the Cognitive Appraisal Framework by empirically demonstrating how favorable versus unfavorable emotional states differentially influence post-consumption behaviors. Second, it integrates affective, cognitive, and conative dimensions into a unified analytical model, offering a more holistic interpretation of how tourists construct meaning from their experiences. Third, by situating the analysis within an emerging economy context, the study addresses the prevailing Western-centric bias in emotion research.

Practically, destination managers and heritage site administrators should deploy interpretive strategies and narrative tools that evoke positive affective responses—such as wonder, pride, and delight. At Borobudur Temple, for example, sunrise experiences paired with historically rich storytelling can effectively amplify visitors' positive emotional arousal. Given the detrimental impact of service failures on satisfaction, formal service recovery protocols must also be established to mitigate negative feelings. Furthermore, marketing communications should prioritize emotional resonance over functional attributes, using visuals and testimonials that highlight prior visitors' pleasurable affective journeys.

Several methodological limitations nonetheless warrant acknowledgment. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences, suggesting that longitudinal studies could better capture the temporal dynamics of emotional experiences. The exclusive focus on domestic tourists limits generalizability, indicating the value of comparative work between local and international visitors. The analysis also examined only broad valence (positive versus negative), leaving room for deeper exploration of discrete emotions such as pride, nostalgia, or boredom. Finally, future research should investigate potential moderators—including cultural background, travel motivation, and personality traits—to yield more nuanced insights into affective dynamics within heritage tourism.

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