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# Perceived Innovation in Virtual Reality and Authenticity for Reimagined Cultural Tourism: The Mediating Role of Guest Immersion

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**Abstract**

This article analyzes the impact of the duality between the perceived innovation of virtual reality and the perceived authenticity on guest immersion in a cultural tourism experience, as well as on tourists' intention to visit such a destination. For this, a quantitative study has been conducted with 299 tourists of different nationalities. The PLS results obtained have validated the research hypotheses proposed in this article, except for the direct effect between the perceived innovation of virtual reality and the visit intention. In addition, two mediating roles of immersion have been confirmed; immersion mediates the relation between the perceived authenticity and the visit intention, and it also mediates the relation between the perceived innovation and the virtual reality and the visit intention. The emphasis on authenticity through perceived innovation in virtual reality may provide a renewed opportunity for the advancement and enhancement of cultural tourism.

**Keywords:** Cultural tourism; perceived innovation; virtual reality; perceived authenticity; immersion; visit intention

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## Introduction

Cultural tourism highlights the importance of authenticity and its influence on tourists' behavioral intentions. Tourism authenticity refers to the preservation of traditional practices, art, and history that reflect the cultural identity of a "terroir" (Lit: a connection to a specific place and its local traditions). This authenticity enhances hosts' experiences by encouraging them to revisit and recommend cultural destinations (Bassiony & Chahine, 2024). The debate around the role of authenticity in digital tourism is a dynamic topic in contemporary research (Li et al., 2024). Immersive technologies affect the way the world is perceived by blurring the boundaries between the real and the virtual. Virtual reality (VR) sparks an increasing interest in various fields. It is one of the key technologies of the emerging metaverse. It offers users unlimited possibilities to interact with other individuals in social, professional, and educational contexts. It also creates a connection between the physical and virtual worlds (Buhalis et al., 2023). In this context, cultural attractions and heritage monuments face challenges related to tourist behavior and technological advances, including the integration of digital innovations. These sites must reconcile the provision of cultural experiences enriched by technological trends while preserving local authenticity (Wen et al., 2023). Virtual reality creates visual and interactive tourism experiences, which allows destinations to be planned and previewed in an engaging and immersive way. Tourism experiences offered by virtual reality are rich in symbols, signs, information, and sensory stimuli (Nayyar et al., 2018). Defined as "an interactive digitally generated media that allows participants to create simulated experiences of unreal environments by using a head-mounted display (HMD) of a VR device" (Hobson & Williams, 1995 cited in Kim et al., 2020: 125), this technology promotes new opportunities to reshape the visitor's experience. The underlying rhythmic narratives in virtual reality are considered a source of wealth for cultural tourism (Raptis et al., 2018). Thus, these digital presentations are used as a technique for repositioning cultural tourism offerings (Jung et al., 2016). VR technology enhances tourism by enabling human-machine interaction. It serves as a modern strategy for real-time engagement, acting as a virtual guide to create personalized itineraries. Through visual appeal, rhythm, and narrative, VR enriches the tourist experience, making attractions more enjoyable while allowing visitors to explore culture and history. Therefore, the perceived innovation of VR facilitates the penetration into the life of the local community and allows the visitor to benefit from a unique spiritual experience (Wen et al., 2023).

The use of VR influences tourist behavior. However, little scientific research focuses on this topic in the context of cultural tourism (Wen et al., 2023). Today's tourists look for personalized, emotional, and immersive experiences. Virtual reality plays a key role in tourist decision-making (Jung & Dieck, 2020). For this reason, tourism professionals should know the key factors for accepting to use this technology. Similarly, Han et al. (2019) mentioned a set of attributes of adopting smart glasses in the context of cultural tourism. These attributes are societal impact, perceived benefits, perceived attributes of innovation, and tourist resistance. The perceived innovation of VR technology can change the way a host experiences the destination. The attractiveness of virtual reality raises new parameters (Han et al., 2018). Authentic experience promotes cultural heritage as a source of satisfaction. VR content leads to satisfaction and highlights authenticity (Han et al., 2021). With virtual reality technology, researchers are interested in consumer behavior, particularly in the perceptions of authenticity by users of this immersive technology in tourism contexts (Yung & Khoo Lattimore, 2019). Several heritage tourism sites adopt VR technology innovatively by considering the perception of the authenticity of virtual experiences (Dueholm & Smed, 2014).

Thus, virtual reality visits can potentially substitute real tourism, because of consumers' awareness of the authenticity of virtual experiences (Guttentag, 2010). The authenticity of the virtual tourism experience is a key factor in understanding tourists' behavior when facing such an experience. Although virtual reality is increasingly used in tourism marketing, there is still no comprehensive theoretical model that comprehensively explains tourists' behavior when facing this new technology (Kim et al., 2020). Some questions remain unanswered, including whether these technologies will allow tourists to truly connect with the cultural heritage of a territory or whether, they will degrade the experience due to the additional digital layer between the visitor and the cultural offer (Han et al., 2018). This article explores how the perceived innovation of virtual reality and perceived authenticity influence tourists' immersion and their intention to visit cultural destinations. It also examines immersion's mediating role between these perceptions and visit intention.

**Theoretical framework**

Tourism fosters cultural interaction, introducing visitors and locals to each other's values and ideas, which enhances tolerance and positive attitudes toward tourism (Ahmed & Dar, 2024). Experiential tourism, enriched by arts, festivals, and authentic artifacts, offers unique experiences (Rojek, 2002) and appeals to tourists seeking "light consumption" (Brida et al., 2016). Modern tourists demand personalized, immersive experiences, making virtual reality a powerful tool for showcasing cultural heritage (Wen et al., 2023). VR enhances decision-making by offering a "try before you buy" experience (Calinao & Gamoso, 2024). VR tourism is designed using either holographic photography or computer-generated 3D environments. Though reconstructed and inauthentic, tourists still perceive authenticity in VR experiences, requiring a postmodernist interpretation of authenticity (Gao et al., 2022). Postmodernists assume that authenticity is subjective. With globalization, technologies, and marketing strategies, the boundary between the real and the virtual is blurred. Offers no longer have an original function or utilitarian value but they are replaced by symbols and signs that communicate their meaning to others (Keiningham et al., 2019). In this context, Baudrillard (1991: 311) mentioned that tourist attractions attempt to "*reinvent the real into fiction, precisely because the real has disappeared from our lives*." Thus, authenticity is not about whether the experience is real or virtual, but about the extent to which it creates a pleasant illusion (Ebster & Guist, 2005). UNESCO defines cultural heritage as objects, monuments, collections of buildings and places, and museums that have historical, artistic, aesthetic, scientific, social, and symbolic value (Zhang et al., 2024). Cultural tourism has long been identified as an economic and social contributor; it is the power of regional development (Han et al., 2018). It is a richly valued activity. It reflects the true meaning of modernity, it is the alter trend (Park et al., 2019). Technological innovations like virtual reality in tourism began as pioneer projects and have recently been commercialized, boosting destination competitiveness. Tourism experiences engage mental resources through sensory stimuli, fostering cognitive and emotional absorption. The challenge for professionals is to integrate virtual, augmented, and immersive experiences while balancing digital and traditional offers. This requires understanding consumer behavior, innovation perception, and the projection of local authenticity in virtual spaces. VR content enhances emotions and deepens user immersion. Likewise, it influences the tourists' decisions and feedback (Wen et al., 2023). A positive immersive experience can trigger positive behavioral reactions, namely the visit intention. Virtual experiences offer effective advertising due to the visual richness and interactivity of information (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019). The clientele of cultural tourism is anti-mass tourism and anti-standardization. They want to learn new things in their life, discover, share, and have a unique experience (Hazebroucq, 2007). This new clientele prefers a new form of tourist hospitality called guesthouse and rural gite. The owners of guesthouses and rural gites seek to safeguard family and cultural heritage. Guesthouses contain a strong symbolic value. They are characterized by luxurious and exotic decoration. They trigger a memorable experience where hosts share the life of the owners residing there and extend into the local culture of a country. The guesthouses give the consumption experience a more authentic meaning (Barèges, 2010; Cinotti, 2011).

**Research hypotheses**

The conceptual model attempts to examine the effect of the duality between perceived innovation and authenticity on immersion and visit intention. In addition, this work aims to test the mediating effect of immersion between perceived authenticity and visit intention as well as the mediating effect of immersion between perceived innovation in virtual reality and visit intention.

***The effect of perceived authenticity on immersion in a virtual tourism experience***

Although the quest for authenticity is an old phenomenon, it explains the choice of the post-modern consumer. The authentic consumption experience may reconstruct the meanings embodied in the psychology of the hedonistic consumer. It stimulates emotions and promotes disconnection from stressful daily life (Castéran & Roederer, 2018). Similarly, disconnection is a major motivation for the tourism experience, it is a factor in choosing such a destination (Lenglet & Frochot, 2021). Immersion includes the degree of consumer involvement, the feeling of being in the era evoked by the experience, the loss of awareness of the time factor and the real universe (Volle & Charfi, 2020). Previous studies explored the role of authenticity in the context of virtual environments. Mochocki (2021) demonstrated that the underlying authenticity in historical video games, historical reconstructions, and heritage sites supports player immersion. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested;

H1: Perceived authenticity positively influences immersion in the virtual tourism experience.

***The effect of perceived innovation on immersion in a virtual tourism experience***

Literature highlights cultural heritage and digital technologies. Researchers noted a growing appreciation for the use of these technologies in the cultural domain (Bertaluci & Da-Silva, 2023). The underlying innovation in virtual reality enables people to experience historical sites as if they were personally there. It creates immersive experiences (Zhang et al., 2024). VR environment changes in real time based on the user's interaction and movement, which develops dynamic and responsive images. This increases the user's feelings of immersion in the virtual world (Atzeni et al., 2021). This technology stimulates the senses through asymmetrical and symmetrical artificial representations. It promotes the immersion of the human mind in a virtual experience to highlight a concept, a product/service (Nayyar et al, 2018). It is considered as a new way to experience tourist destinations through immersive and interactive previews (Han et al., 2018). Hence the second hypothesis;

H2: The perceived innovation in virtual reality positively influences immersion in a virtual tourism experience.

***The Effect of perceived authenticity on visit intention***

Authenticity is an important factor that explains behavioral intentions, consumer choice, and brand addiction (Francioni et al., 2021). Kim et al. (2020) revealed that authentic tourism experiences in virtual reality influence cognitive and affective responses, which favors the visit intention. Thus, Lee et al. (2020) showed that VR quality, system reliability, and vividness enhance customers' intentions to visit destinations. Authenticity is attributed to multiple dimensions and derives from natural and sociocultural origins (Fritz & al., 2017). Visit intention is a key metric in tourism research (Bianchi & Milberg, 2017). Authenticity is a powerful argument for encouraging tourists to experience other people's cultures. Similarly, authenticity elicits visit intention (Tan & Huang, 2020). The tourist who has a pleasant virtual experience likes to reactivate the positive memories through a real visit. Previous research also indicates that authenticity exerts an influence on tourists' intentions to visit heritage sites (Chhabra et al., 2003). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed;

H3: Perceived authenticity positively influences the intention to visit a destination or cultural tourist hospitality.

***The effect of perceived innovation on the visit intention***

Virtual reality (VR) influences tourists' decision-making, yet research focuses on its technological aspects rather than user characteristics like innovativeness (Sousa et al., 2024). Lim et al. (2024) highlight VR's impact on guest satisfaction and revisit intention. While technology's effect on tourist behavior is well known, the role of consumer innovation in shaping VR tourism experiences and acceptance remains underexplored (Wei et al., 2019; Bogicevic et al., 2021). Some studies suggest innovation predisposition predicts VR's success in tourism marketing (Sousa et al., 2023), but further research is needed to assess its influence on user behavior (Wei et al., 2019). By relying on the previous reflections, the fourth hypothesis is proposed;

H4: The perceived innovation of virtual reality positively influences the intention to visit a destination or culturally themed tourist hospitality.

***The effect of immersion in a virtual tourism experience on visit intention***

Baloglu (2000) found that visit intention is manifested by stimuli, socio-psychological factors, and images. Therefore, visit intention is the consequence of the tourist's perception, motivations, and attitudes towards a destination as well as tourist hospitality. Tourists' impression corresponds to the mental representation of their knowledge, sensations, and perceptions of a tourist destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Virtual reality helps the professionals of tourism marketing create memorable experiences. It influences the phases of the trip: pre-visit, visit, and post-visit (Marasco et al., 2018). VR experience also influences consumers' decisions about their intentions to visit a destination (Gibson & O'Rawe, 2017). By relying on the research of Jung et al. (2016), we can see the effects of mixed environments (AR and VR) on the experience of visitors and their intentions to revisit a museum. Similarly, if virtual immersion is aesthetically correct, the experience of the tourist is great and increases his intention to revisit a destination. VR has better potential to increase visit intentions than other means of communication (Mura et al, 2017). Therefore, the following hypothesis is as follows;

H5: immersion in virtual experience positively influences the intention to visit a destination or tourist hospitality with a cultural aspect.

***The mediating role of immersion in a virtual tourism experience***

Virtual reality (VR) technology enhances tourism experience by providing immersive interactions with content, allowing tourists to adopt cultural perspectives and experience authenticity (Chabert, 2024). VR technology has made heritage sites attractive by increasing perceived authenticity and encouraging people to visit the sites. Beyond that, authenticity is presented as an essential element to explain the use of VR technology in tourism contexts (Kim & Hall, 2019). Many studies have raised the potential of virtual reality and its influence on the behavioral intentions of tourists as well as the image of a destination (Marasco et al., 2018; Rainoldi et al., 2018). Furthermore, the image of a destination is unique to each person and refers to the impression generated by the perception of the attributes associated with a tourist destination. Virtual reality (VR) is an immersive technology, offering the consumer the opportunity to interact and become the central character of a virtual experience (Harris et al., 2001). So, storytelling has given way to storyliving. In the same context, the perceived innovation of

virtual reality provides the consumer with a pleasant experience to live. This experience has a positive impact on the attitude towards the offer proposed. In addition, it makes customers want to consume it (Pasanen et al., 2019; Marasco et al., 2018). VR influences users through pleasant experiences. The use of immersive virtual devices fuels the immersion of the consumer (Barnes, 2016). This technology can immerse the tourist's pleasure in a virtual or artificial setting. Today's traveler is attracted by the multi-sensory theatricalization of the tourism experience (Jung et al., 2017; Wagler & Hanus 2018). Thanks to the interaction and the "real" sensory designs, virtual reality affects the psychological performance of tourists (Gao et al., 2022). However, Bourgeon-Renault & Jarrier (2018) mentioned that the use of new technologies can lead to harmful consequences by generating "sensory overstimulation". Building on previous insights, we propose examining two mediating effects of immersion in virtual tourism. The mediation hypotheses are as follows:

H6a. Immersion in a virtual tourism experience mediates the relationship between perceived authenticity and visit intention.
H6b. Immersion in a virtual tourism experience mediates the relationship between perceived innovation of virtual reality and visit intention.

## Methodology

A quantitative study has been conducted among cultural hosts. The sample of this study consists of 299 tourists representing various nationalities. The participants were selected by collaborating with the owners of guesthouses and rural gites in Tunisia. These hosts, followers of cultural tourism hospitality have, at one time or another, experienced tourism content in virtual reality. The quantitative survey was conducted from September 20th to October 30th, 2024. The details of the sample size will be presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Details of sample**

| Characteristics | Details | Percentages |
|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Men | 51% |
| | Women | 49% |
| **Age** | 18-24 years | 2% |
| | 25-34 years | 11,8% |
| | 35-49 years | 64,5% |
| | 50-64 years | 21,7% |
| **Nationality** | French | 39% |
| | Belgian | 27% |
| | Italian | 18 % |
| | Tunisian Swiss | 9% |
| | Tunisian German | 7% |
| **Occupations** | Intermediate profession | 39% |
| | Managerial position | 23% |
| | Retired | 23% |
| | Entrepreneur | 15% |

This research examines the impact of the duality between the perceived innovation of virtual reality and perceived authenticity on the immersion of hosts in the tourist experience, and the intention to visit such a destination or cultural tourist hospitality. Thus, this article seeks to test the mediating effect of immersion in a tourist experience in virtual reality. The components of the conceptual model are variables measured through scales from the literature in marketing, particularly tourism marketing. We opted for the measuring instruments used in the field of cultural tourism and characterized by good psychometric quality. The measurement scale developed by Brida et al. (2012) was used to assess perceived authenticity, while the scale by Fornerino et al. (2008) was employed to evaluate immersion. The scale by Tussyadiah et al. (2018) was used to test the intention to visit, and the scale by Agarwal and Prasad (1997) was used to assess the perception innovation.

## Results

### *Results of exploratory analyses*

The exploration analysis shows that the data lends itself to factorization since all KMO values are higher than 0.5 and the Bartlett test value is significant at the threshold of 5%. Cronbach's alpha coefficients (α) are higher than 0.7. Then, it is possible to conclude that the measurement tools are reliable. The results are detailed in the table 2 below:

**Table 2: Results of the exploratory analyses**

| Variables | KMO | Bartlett's test | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived authenticity | 0.834 | 0.000 | 0.930 |
| Perceived innovation | 0.870 | 0.000 | 0.938 |
| Immersion | 0.847 | 0.000 | 0.963 |
| Visit intention | 0.694 | 0.000 | 0.925 |

### *Measurement model*

The results of the confirmatory analysis show that all constructs have a good level of composite reliability that varies between 0.932 and 0.965 and that the items are well correlated with their concepts since their loadings are higher than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2009). Convergent validity was also checked by examining the AVE values that display values that are higher than the acceptability threshold of 0.5 (Chin, 1998). Regarding discriminant validity, the results show that the square root of the AVE of each factor is higher than the shared variance between the latent constructs. This confirms the discriminant validity of all concepts (Fornell & Larker, 1981). The reliability and discriminant validity are detailed in Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Reliability and discriminant validity**

| | Correlation of the constructs | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Construct** | Perceived authenticity | Immersion | Perceived innovation | Visit intention |
| | **0.886** | | | |
| Perceived authenticity Immersion | 0.915 | **0.919** | | |
| Perceived innovation Visit intention | 0.941 | 0.888 | **0.901** | |
| | 0.804 | 0.880 | 0.762 | **0.934** |
| **Cronbach's alpha (α)** | 0.931 | 0.963 | 0.941 | 0.927 |
| **Composite Reliability** | 0.932 | 0.965 | 0.942 | 0.944 |
| **AVE** | 0.785 | 0.845 | 0.811 | 0.872 |

Note: All boldfaced diagonal elements appearing in the correlation of constructs matrix indicate the square roots of AVEs.
* 5-point Likert scale.

### *Structural model*

Before testing the hypotheses, the estimation of the structural model requires examining the predictive quality of the proposed model. In other words, it is appropriate to evaluate the predictive relevance of the latent variables based on the coefficient of determination $R^2$ (Fernandes, 2012). The results obtained are generally satisfactory for the two endogenous variables: the $R^2$ is 0.844 for immersion and 0.778 for the visit intention. The output of the structural analysis for the research model, obtained using the PLS software, is presented in Figure1 below:

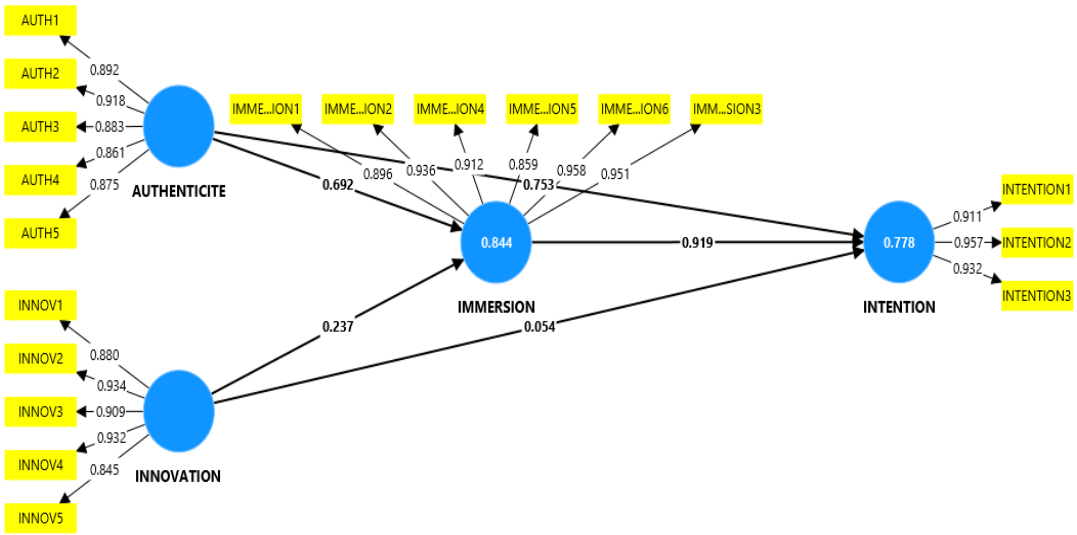


**Figure 1: The research structural model**

To test the direct causal links between the variables being studied, the PLS approach has been adopted. The results provided in Table 4 show that all the hypotheses of this model are validated except for hypothesis 4 which is concerned with the link between perceived innovation and the visit intention of a cultural destination.

**Table 4: Test of direct causal links**

| | β (Path Coefficients) | T de Student | P- values | Hypothesis status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived authenticity ---> Immersion | 0.692 | 12.093 | 0.000 | **Validated** |
| Perceived authenticity ---> Visit intention | 0.753 | 9.243 | 0.000 | **Validated** |
| Immersion ---> Visit intention | 0.919 | 13.338 | 0.000 | **Validated** |
| Perceived innovation ---> Immersion | 0.237 | 4.104 | 0.000 | **Validated** |
| Perceived innovation ---> Visit intention | 0.054 | 0.644 | 0.519 | **Not validated** |

*** p < 0.001

Regarding indirect causal links, as revealed in Table 5, immersion plays a mediating role in the relationship between perceived authenticity and the visit intention of a cultural place. The same role is played between perceived innovation and the visit intention.

**Table 5: Testing mediating effects**

| | β (Path Coefficients) | T de Student | P- values | Hypothesis status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived authenticity -> Immersion -> Visit intention | 0.635 | 9.750 | 0.000 | **Validated** |
| Perceived innovation -> Immersion -> Visit intention | 0.218 | 3.736 | 0.000 | **Validated** |

*** p < 0.001

## Discussion and conclusions

This study examines how perceived innovation and authenticity in VR tourism influence visitor immersion and visit intention, exploring immersion's mediating role. A survey of 299 tourists confirms that perceived authenticity enhances immersion. The results are analyzed within theoretical frameworks, offering recommendations for tourism marketing professionals. The first

research hypothesis examined the relationship between perceived authenticity and immersion of tourism experience in virtual reality. The results of the quantitative study showed that perceived authenticity positively influences the tourist's immersion in the virtual tourism experience. Therefore, this result is a continuation of previous research that confirms the significant relationship between these two variables. Authenticity was introduced into the work of the sociology of tourism by MacCannell (1973) who developed *"The Staged Authenticity Theory"*. Furthermore, individuals look for authentic experiences because their lives are alienated in the modern world. Cultural tourism involves a share of curiosity among visitors. Fun is taken into consideration since authenticity can also be a source of entertainment. Authenticity creates a more subjective experience for the tourist who interacts with technology. Therefore, the tourist is more absorbed by the lived experience (Pallud & Elie-Dit-Cosaque, 2011). The tourism experience in virtual reality is immersive as it reinforces the attractiveness toward local authenticity (Fouinna & EL Ouazzani, 2024). The perceived innovation of virtual reality can create an immersive tourism experience (Zhang & al., 2024), hence the confirmation of the second hypothesis. The third hypothesis of this study also tests the causal link between perceived authenticity and visit intention, confirming a significant relationship. Authenticity enhances the historical and cultural context, aligning with tourists' expectations and fostering emotional engagement. Visitors value the uniqueness and historical depth of museum exhibits, which strengthens their overall experience and intention to visit. The use of authenticity in the cultural tourism experience positively influences behavioral intention (Bassiony & Chahine, 2024). The fourth hypothesis examines the link between perceived VR innovation and the intention to visit cultural tourism sites but was not validated. According to Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation theory, adoption depends on factors like relative advantage, compatibility, ease of use, and trialability. In tourism, if VR feels complex or insufficiently immersive, visitors may hesitate to adopt it. Technologies like VR in smart tourism lack clear definitions, making them unfamiliar and unappealing to tourists (Yu & Hsu, 2024). Additionally, VR may deter real travel by offering virtual alternatives, raising concerns about balancing innovation with authentic experiences (Medai & Wu, 2023). This research confirmed the significant relationship between immersion and visit intention. Literature shows the crucial role of new technologies, particularly virtual reality, in promoting tourism. The virtual telepresence experience could influence the intention to visit a destination. 3D tours help promote virtual immersion by developing the willingness to real visits (Hashish & Lichtlé, 2023).

Little research investigates the mediating role of immersion between perceived VR innovation and visit intention and its mediating role between perceived authenticity and visit intention. The current quantitative study confirmed these two mediations. Many cultural tourism sites have discovered VR in recent years and improved their visitors' experience through innovations that allow them to relive historical events, interact with museum content, or visit remote destinations in virtual environments (Han et al., 2019). Existing literature mentioned that travel intention is influenced by destination image, which can be improved through technological innovation, especially VR and its telepresence effects. Technological innovation provides tourists with an immersive virtual experience. It could motivate people to take real trips (Wu & Lai, 2021; Hoang et al., 2023). Given its close characteristics to the real world, a VR experience can influence consumers' decisions about their visit intentions of a destination (Gibson & O'Rawe, 2017). Immersion in the tourist experience can mediate the relationship between the perceived innovation of virtual reality and the visit intention. The experiential approach views consumers as seekers of extraordinary, immersive experiences rather than utilitarian consumption. They involve imagination, senses, and personal values. Revisit intention reflects a positive experience (Belhsen & Sentel, 2016). Tourists seek unique, authentic experiences (Al Riyami et al., 2022), often tied to heritage and cultural richness (Dhewi et al., 2024). Authenticity evokes emotions and strengthens revisit intention (Islam et al., 2019). Thus, immersion in tourism can mediate the link between perceived authenticity and visit intention.

For theoretical and managerial implications, the examination of the perceived innovation as an extension of the TAM shows the need for additional factors when studying the adoption of technologies such as virtual reality (Wei, 2019). This theoretical implication encourages us to study the effect of the duality between perceived innovation and perceived authenticity on immersion in the tourism experience. Literature has not addressed the mediating role of immersion between perceived innovation and visit intention. Cultural tourism experiences through virtual reality should target tourists who are open to new technologies, as they are likely to appreciate, be satisfied with, and recommend the experience. VR can serve multiple roles in tourism, from promotion to being an independent or complementary attraction (Zhu et al., 2023). It can engage multiple senses (Carlisle et al., 2023) and offer immersive experiences within the metaverse, though challenges like privacy, security, and mental health concerns must be addressed (Camilleri, 2023). VR also has marketing implications, impacting brand strategy and consumer well-being (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Visual appeal and emotional engagement in VR influence behavioral intentions, making it a valuable tool for destination marketing (Marasco et al., 2018). However, this research has limitations that future studies should address. The survey focused on visitors to guesthouses and rural gites in Tunisia, but future research should expand the sample to include hotel visitors, as some hotels also promote cultural tourism. Understanding how different tourist profiles respond to VR is essential (Itani & Hollebeek, 2021). Additionally, perceived innovation and perceived risk are key factors in VR adoption, highlighting the need to emphasize VR's innovative aspects while mitigating potential risks.

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