



AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE IN TOURISM AND COMMODIFICATION: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Defining authenticity and authentic experience is a complex process. The actual meaning of authenticity is 'original'; however, there are different interpretations based on various perspectives such as objectivism, constructivism, and post-modernism. Under the current changing and globalizing environment, cultural boundaries are weakening and traditions lose their core form. Power and politics play important role in heritage preservation and authorization of the authentic experience. The search for authentic experience has become one of the main drives for people to travel. The increase in the demand for authentic products and experiences has resulted in the commodification of cultural elements. On the other hand, cultural tourism not only creates jobs for local people but also led them to embrace their culture. Globalization, capitalism, standardization, and social media are some examples of variables influencing authentic expertise within the context of tourism. Future research should consider such variables. The purpose of this paper is to provide an understanding of the role of authenticity in touristic experience by reviewing the relevant literature.

1. Introduction

The definition of authenticity differs depending on the perspective that the researchers hold. While, for the objectivists, the object is the main element to define authenticity, for the constructivists, authenticity is more like a subjective concept. Postmodernists, on the other hand, reject the idea of true authenticity at all (Wang, 1999). Authenticity has become a very popular concept in tourism literature as the tourist demand has shifted towards unique experiences from standardized tourist experiences. High tourist demand for traditional authentic experience has led to an excessive supply of commodified non-original cultural elements. Henna nights, Ramadan and local food in Turkey (Aktürk, Durak, & Arslan 2019; Ger & Holt 2000; Sandıkcı & Omeraki 2007), fishing activity in Waanyi (Smith, 2006), the heritage in Scotland (Bryce, Murdy, & Alexander 2017), lands in popular tourist destinations (Young & Markham 2020), yoga in India (Bowers & Cheer 2017) puppet shows in Taiwan (Pradana 2018) and traditional music in China (Su 2019) are some examples of commodification around the world.

The literature on authenticity and commodification reflects both positive and negative perspectives. On one side, commodification is blamed for deteriorating the local culture and on the other side; it is praised for preserving the cultural elements, which will extinct otherwise. The discussions around issues such as; how to define authenticity, is authenticity necessary to experience local culture and whether commodification is beneficial for the local culture or not will remain in the tourism literature for a

long time. The purpose of this paper is to provide an understanding of the role of authenticity in touristic experience by reviewing the relevant literature.

2. Authenticity

The origin of the word 'authentic' comes from the Greek word 'authentikos' which means 'principle, genuine'. The literal meaning of the word is 'of the same origin', 'actual, not false', 'conforming to reality, or 'worthy of trust, reliance, belief'. The current use of the word authenticity does not differ from its original meaning. The word is also used to describe the process of building people, a re-creation of history, preservation of heritage, and tourism marketing.

According to Taylor (1992), authenticity is the search for our 'true selves', as each person is unique and finding 'true self' is an individual journey. In other words: 'finding your own fulfillment.' According to the author, the originality in each person is waiting to be discovered and isolation is the way to achieve that. Similarly, Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) explain authenticity in five different phases building on the idea of finding 'true self'. Fairness is the first phase, which includes the presentation of different values and belief systems to the self. Ontological authentication is after finding the true self and

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reaching self-actualization, sharing experiences with other people, and improving new perspectives. Educative authenticity is to understand each other's values and different perspectives and empathizing with each other. Catalytic authenticity is going beyond understanding and appreciating each other's values and having reflections of this on our behaviors. Tactical authenticity is the creation of stimuli towards a change. Both of these perspectives involve relationships of people with themselves and with other people. Thus, these authors study authenticity as a way to increase the welfare of society by building better people and better relations. Other interpretations of authenticity include relationships between people and objects or places as well. In this respect, authenticity has become an experience and the term 'authentic experience' has emerged.

Wang (1999) discusses authenticity from objectivist, constructivist, and postmodernist perspectives. According to objectivists, the authenticity of the object experienced is important rather than the experience itself. On the other hand, constructivists claim that each person has different expectations from an authentic experience and these expectations shape people's perceptions towards authenticity. The postmodernist view does not accept the concept of authenticity at all, as to experience authenticity, one has to go back in time. The counterargument to the postmodernist view is that staged authenticity may be a way to protect the original (Cohen 1995 cited in Wang 1999). Existential authenticity is observed in two parts; inter-personal and intra-personal. Intra-personal authenticity is composed of bodily feelings such as relaxation, and self-making through tourism activities. Inter-personal authenticity is family ties and touristic *communitas*. Through touristic *communitas*, people feel like a part of that community and experience authenticity. Departing from these views it could be argued that the authenticity of a place is in its uniqueness, and discovering that uniqueness may be the main attraction for the tourists which consequently results in the authentic experience becoming a product for consumption. According to Ger and Holt (2000), authenticity is just a fluctuating trend. After a while, people usually stop caring about originality and uniqueness, and consuming authenticity in its fancy package becomes more important for them. According to Wu, Lee, and Jian (2017), the concept of authenticity is ambiguous due to the constant change in environmental circumstances. Especially in the destinations receiving multicultural tourists, the culture will change through interaction and the sense of place will be renegotiated. Also, recent studies have revealed that tourists are looking for object authenticity as well as existential authenticity (Bryce et al. 2017; Park, Choi, & Lee 2019).

2.1. Authenticity and Commodification

Commodification is turning cultural elements into

products and services for tourist consumption. Ger and Holt (2000) have observed Turkish wedding ceremonies- henna night- and the difference between old traditional and contemporary ones. Results showed that contemporary ones have lost their original meanings and they cannot go beyond a replica of original henna night. In their example of henna night, the traditional henna nights usually take place at home with a limited budget. However, in contemporary ones, people rent a restaurant or café, pay for food, service, and send invitations. There are many event management companies organizing professional henna nights. According to the authors, the process of turning traditional ceremonies and rituals into consumption products will influence the perspective towards the authenticity of these types of events. The new version of this ritual is no longer seen as a ritual that represents the separation of mother and daughter, it is a product to sell for companies, a different style of wedding for people.

Sandıkçı and Omeraki (2007) have observed the Ramadan festivals which were reemerged after a while. According to the authors the local government aims to create a spirit of togetherness by reminding the society of their collective history. On the other hand, Ramadan festivals lead people to consume more. The festival offers a nostalgic atmosphere with food sellers dressed as Ottoman men, and shows which were popular during Ottoman time. Fine-dining restaurants and hotels also offer an 'authentic' experience, during the month of Ramadan. Decoration, music, menu, service all adjusted according to Ottoman style during Ramadan. Further, traditions that are no longer common among Turkish people are also performed for profit.

The Henna Night and Ramadan Festivals demonstrate that the concept of authenticity is perceived as a marketing tool by companies. On the other hand, consumers want the authentic experience to follow trends. The aforementioned studies were conducted in Turkey which is a developing country with a growing economy. The environment in developing countries is usually dynamic and the residents in these countries feel pressure to adopt a modern lifestyle without leaving their traditions. The reasons behind commodification in developing countries may not necessarily be the consumer market or uninformed upper-class people looking for new experiences. Change in society, in family structure and lifestyles of people, result in deformation of traditions. The meaning behind the traditions was long lost, as it does not serve the modern lifestyle. For example, Henna Nights symbolize the sadness of the bride who leaves her family, especially her mother behind. Henna Nights are no longer sad events, on the contrary, they are quite cheerful. Women already leave home for college, and marrying a man is no longer signifies a separation from the family. However, under the changing environment, the modification of such

traditions which no longer serve the modern lifestyle seems to be the only way to embrace the culture and preserve it.

2.2. Authenticity and Heritage

Heritage can be both tangible and intangible. The word 'heritage' was originated from 'inheritance' and means 'transferring from one generation to other.' (Nuryanti 1996). Traditions, historical sites, stories, food, and culture are some examples of heritage.

There are different perspectives towards heritage in literature. According to Ashworth (2008), the heritage has no past value; rather it serves more to contemporary economic, political and social purposes. The author also points out that one can experience the past through present values, and it is impossible to understand the way of life in the past. Heritage is a subjective concept, as it is difficult to define it. Hewison (1989) expands the definition of heritage as 'anything you want. Some authors also emphasize the intangible aspect of heritage. Smith (2006) relates heritage to social and cultural identity, as a result of his observation of fishing women in Waanyi. According to the author, heritage has meaningful with what it represents, so all heritage is intangible. The author states that collective memory is a tool for binding people and fishing is the heritage for those women in Waanyi, even if it means nothing for the non-locals. There are also positive examples of the preservation of cultural heritage. Wu, Lee, and Jian (2017) give examples of Zhengxing street in Taiwan, in which the local lifestyle and traditions are integrated into the work of the creative class to promote creative tourism. The popularity of the street among tourists did not lead to the deformation of the local culture.

Some researchers study heritage in relation to power and politics. 'The political power of various groups as well control not only whose interpretation and definition of authenticity prevails, but also what will be saved or remembered at all' (Richter 2005, p 266). Similarly, Bruner (2005) states that labeling someplace as 'authentic' depends on the power relations. Also, the dominant class has a higher representation in history. For example, museums are important places to learn history and understand it. However, museums reflect the lives of the dominant class of the period only; they are inadequate to represent the whole society (Hewison 1989).

Richter (2005) points out that heritage is not necessarily old to be authentic, as people may produce an object and turn that activity into a tradition, and in a few years it becomes their heritage and label it as authentic. Sea, sand, sun tourism is not the only type of tourism. Companies are in search of new products and experiences to offer tourists to differentiate themselves from competitors. The post-colonial theory assumes that the east is 'exotic, mysterious, sensual, splendid, cruel, despotic and sly' while the western world is modern, superior (Said 1978 cited in Echther & Prasad 2003). For the

tourism industry, the exotic East is a very convenient arena to produce authentic experiences for Western tourists (Caton & Santos 2009).

3. Authentic Experience in Tourism

MacCannell (1973) was the first author to discuss the term authenticity within the context of tourism. According to him, tourists want to experience backstage tourism and they believe that people behind tourism operations will be sincerer and spontaneous. To meet tourist demand, the 'staged authenticity' was created by the tourism companies. The companies started to present the backstage of tourism activities to the tourists to provide an authentic experience for them. However, when local people started to act in the backstage, it has also become the front stage and lost its authenticity. A vicious cycle has begun. Discovering other peoples' mysterious lives is always attractive. A TV program in the USA that broadcasts 24 hours of a real family receives a lot of attention from the audience (Baudrillard, 1994). The creator of the program asserts that the family was not pretending, however it is obvious that they did not go on their lives like usual. In the end, the family ends up with divorce and according to the author, the main reason for divorce is the program. High ratings of this program show how people like to see other peoples' privacy. They feel themselves joining the others' life and they enjoy it. This article was written in 1994 when the internet was not so widespread. Nowadays, due to internet 'other cultures' became familiar and because it is no longer mysterious and lost its attractiveness. Besides people's lives became more transparent due to Social Media. Because of this transparency, in this era, humans are closer to achieve educative and catalytic authenticity. At some point, when the unknown becomes known, people will start to understand each other and appreciate each other's values and lifestyles.

Some authors do not agree with MacCannell (1973). Richter (2005) argues that staged authenticity is more ethical instead of selling actual people's lives as a tourism product. Wang (1999) points out that authenticity is beyond the relationship between tourist and touristic objects. Tourists can feel authentic experience by sharing this experience with other people. The connection with the other people has become more important than the tour itself. Taylor (2001) asserts that tourist is the only person to decide whether the experience is authentic or not. Further, the reality of the tourism product that has been prepared for tourists cannot be questioned by outsiders, as soon as there is a real contact between host and guest.

Tourists seek authenticity in their travel experience to find their true selves and one way to do this is escaping from their natural environment (Wang 1999). Addition to this Bayraktaroğlu (2019) proposed a memetic model on tourist experiences to understand "seeking" phenomenon in the context

of focus and goal. Tourism destination planners are aware of the importance of finding a distinctive characteristic of their city to attract tourists. In this way, tourists can experience a new authentic culture in each destination. However, in Smith's (2006) example fishing activity was authentic for the women in Waanyi due to the collective memory they share. Tourists will not experience the authenticity of the fishing activity, as they do not have the collective memory. However, by participating in the fishing activity, they may feel a part of society and experience existential authenticity (Wang 1999). Research shows that the perception of authenticity reinforces the place attachment of tourists (Yılmazdoğan & Atanlar 2021). Considering authenticity as a subjective concept, it is impossible to assess the value of the experience for the tourists.

According to Bruner (2005) states, tourists can find something from themselves in the places they visit, even if they have never been to the destination before. For example, tourists visiting New Salem have different expectations and meanings attached to the destination. Bruner (2005) observed existential authenticity among tourists visiting New Salem, as they feel connected to the place and a part of that society. On the other hand, in their research on diaspora, Bryce et al. (2017) revealed that tourists travel to their homelands to experience both objective and existential authenticity. Authors add that to meet the demands of the tourists the providers have created an 'authentically imagined past', not to disappoint them.

Another example of commodification was observed in Europe where the Viking Heritage was recreated to develop a tourism product (Halewood & Hannam, 2001). The Viking towns were created to provide a fully authentic experience for both tourists and locals. The Viking time dresses, goods, events were recreated. The authenticity of the Viking towns lies in the objects those accurately reflect the history. However, tourists do not care about accuracy, as they want to experience existential authenticity. Related to this point, Caton and Santos (2009) stress that tourists realize that what they have experiences is not representing real culture, but as long as they have fun, the authenticity of their experience is not important. Another study supporting this point was conducted in an Australian indigenous community in Djabugay (Dyer, Aberdeen, & Schuler 2003). Tourists are aware that these shows do not represent the real culture of the local community. However, it is more comfortable for them to watch the dance show of local people while drinking their cocktails, instead of joining their primitive lives. People only want nostalgia, not the hardships of life in the past.

In a study conducted in New York, researchers have tested the impact of authenticity on the satisfaction from the cultural heritage. The results supported the positive influence of authenticity on the satisfaction (Domínguez-Quintero, González-Rodríguez, & Paddison 2020). Recent studies revealed that

tourists are looking for objective authenticity as well as existential authenticity. A study among tourists in the Greek Islands showed that tourists perceive restaurants more authentic when the locals dine there, availability of regional specialties, and fresh meals rather than the atmosphere (Skinner, Chatzopoulou, & Gorton 2020). Other studies revealed the significant influence of constructive and existential authenticity on satisfaction (Sezerel & Karagöz 2020) and the intention to revisit among tourists (Park et al. 2019). The perception of authenticity is also influenced by the attitude of tourists, while the realists do not consider some heritage sites as authentic, while postmodernists are (Stepchenkova & Park 2021). Also, Sezerel and Karagöz (2020) showed the significant influence of individualist values on objective and existential authenticity among tourists visiting Cappadocia, Turkey.

On the other hand, Eco (1990) asserts that there is not real authenticity; the authentic experiences are fake causing detachment from reality. For example, wax museums that preserve history create a sense of reality for what is not real. According to the author, it is a city that is like 'Disneyland of history'; a weak representation of the historical period. It was more like a fantasy world in which history is polished. The author also points out that simulation and interpretation of history came to a point that people like to live in a fantasy world as they admire the excellence of the fake, which they cannot find in reality.

'Museums advertise is not historical, but visual. Everything looks real, and therefore it is real; in any case, the fact that it seems real is real, and the thing is real even if, like Alice in Wonderland, it never existed.' (Eco 1990, p 8)

Another example is the spread of fake portraits of Napoleon in Louisiana. In the nineteenth century, many French artists came to the USA and make portraits of Napoleon. These fake portraits were valued, even if it was known that they are not real (Eco 1990).

3.1. Commodification in Tourism

The above examples create some questions such as 'Does it matter if the object itself is authentic or not?', 'Can staged authenticity (MacCannell 1973) be beneficial for the local people or tourists?' According to Dyer et al. (2003), locals are happy about presenting their culture to tourists coming from different parts of the world, even if there is a threat of misrepresentation of their culture. It seems that it does not matter for the locals if their tourism product is authentic or not, as soon as they get a job and income.

Robinson (1999) states that to ensure sustainable tourism development, the culture of host countries should be well preserved. Sustainable development plans do not pay enough attention to preserving local culture due to specific reasons. The first reason

is that culture is seen as a commodity. As tourism generates income in touristic destinations, especially in poor countries, locals are willing to sell what they have. Tourists want to experience mysterious, eastern other culture and locals want to earn money out of it. Locals believe that tourists should have lots of money, as they have means to come from different parts of the world and they are in search of a story to tell when they return to their countries. Therefore, they start to produce cultural elements just for tourist consumption. Regarding this point, the culture of a place is commoditized and has no longer deep and sacred meaning for locals.

Similarly, Ballengee-Morris (2002), argues that as a fast-growing industry, tourism is an important contributor to the economy. With the development of the tourism industry, developing countries start to turn everything they have into money. Their culture becomes an attractive product for the people from developed western countries who want to explore other cultures which are still in the developing process. The fast growth of the tourism industry and developing countries' need for economic growth are the main reasons to exploit the resources in these countries. Hewison (1989) blames heritage industry and tourism to destroy heritage through commodification. The increase in the entertainment activities in museums to attract more people is one reason for the commodification. Modifying products or services according to consumer needs is a way to increase sales and revenue. The commodified touristic product is shaped by tourists' needs and lost its uniqueness. According to some authors, the fabrication of a local cultural element reduces its value and authenticity (Ballengee-Morris 2002).

The contribution of international tourism to a country's economy is huge and every country wants a share from that. One of the purposes of the local government for commercializing the Ramadan festival (Sandıkcı & Omeraki 2007) in Istanbul is to increase consumption and create cash flow. Viking tourism aims to remind European countries that they have bonds and invite them to explore their roots, in other terms create a tourism demand (Halewood & Hannam 2001). Governments are not the only actors in tourism activities worldwide. Hughes (1995) points out that, in today's capitalist world, in the tourism industry governments are not the only authorities, as some big companies have more power than states and their major goal which is profitability creates consumption-oriented people. Chain hotels, for example, adopt the strategy of 'think globally, act locally' which necessitates using local elements of local culture that the hotel was built in. As a result of globalization and capitalism, cultural differences were weakened and unique authenticity for each place is lost.

There are also positive views about commodification. According to Lowenthal (1998), heritage is interpreted in present meaning and it may be a source to use present purposes. According

to post-modernists, nothing can be authentic, as there is no original (Wang 1999). It can be argued that commodification is a way to use heritage for present purposes. In a place where no originals could be found, 'staged authenticity' is the closest form of authenticity. Furthermore, tourism generates money, creates employment, and increases wealth in the host community. Many authors pointed out the economic benefits of the commodification of the culture for the sake of tourism. (Bowers & Cheer 2017; Pradana 2018; Su 2018; Su 2019; Young & Markham 2020). The recent literature shows that the results of this may be both negative and positive despite the positive economic impacts. For example, the commodification of the land has created some tensions between tourists and locals due to the limitations of the land use of the locals (Young & Markham 2020). In China, the restoration of traditional houses for tourism led local people to lose their properties, and external investors benefit from tourism-related commodification economically. Also, locals are excluded in the decision-making process, while only heritage experts have the power to define what is authentic and what is not (Su 2019).

On the other hand, people who benefit from tourism by having extra income are happy about the commodification of their culture (Bowers & Cheer 2017). For example, in an ancient town in Turkey that became popular after TV Shows shot in the destination, locals compromise their culture by proving non-local food to the tourists (Aktürk et al. 2019). Similarly, in another historic village in Turkey, locals prefer to sell authentic food to tourists, as it generates the most income, while they do not make traditional rugs due to the low volume of sales (Ayazlar & Karakulak 2016). Local people in such towns are in the lower-income group and the authenticity of the products they sell is the last thing they care about. The extra income they generate which will allow them to have a better life is their priority and it would be unfair to blame them for wanting a better life.

The commodification of the culture is at the national level in some countries. For example, Singapore and Hong Kong have revised their tourism strategy after the decline in tourist arrivals. Both of the countries focused on their cultural assets and put more effort than ever to preserve their culture (Li 2003). The positive side of the commodification through the preservation of the local culture is supported in recent studies and well (Pradana 2018; Su 2019). In Bali, the Balinese shadow puppet performance is evaluated within the context of commodification and authenticity from economic, social, and cultural perspectives. While commodified puppet show creates profit for the locals, the increase in the popularity of the puppet show protect the art from extinction on the positive side, it leads to cultural degradation on the negative side (Pradana 2018). Even the performers agree on the positive impacts of the commodification of the culture; the

traditional music players in China play an active role in the commodification of traditional music for the sake of preservation. Because the players play a role in the commodification process, they can keep the important aspects of their traditional art of music, as it may not be attractive for the tourists in its raw form. For the players, it is better to modify the music and sell it to the tourist, than to lose it altogether (Su 2019). 'Along with the increased attention to sustainability in tourism studies, more broadly, the role of authenticity, more specifically, can have significant implications for sustainability outcomes.' (Rickly 2018, p. 735).

Chhabra, Healy, and Sills (2003) studied the authenticity expectations in Scottish Highland Games held in North Carolina. According to the authors, authenticity is a copy of the original which is adjusted to conform to modern society which is inevitable. The authors show a positive attitude towards staged authenticity (Chhabra et al. 2003) unlike the other authors who worked on traditions (Ger & Holt 2000; Sandıkcı & Omeraki 2007). Because of the culture's dynamic and changing nature, there would never be a stable cultural event; every generation will interpret it differently. Furthermore, Chhabra et al. (2003) and Grünewald (2002) disagree with Eco's (1990) point about the reality of authenticity. According to the authors, there will be no staged authenticity, unless there is real authentic material and even if culture has lost its meaning when it was commoditized and staged, there should be a cultural base that locals produce a performance out of it.

There are also some debates on whether commodification has impacts on tangible elements of the culture in the literature. In their study on Viking Heritage Tourism in Europe Halewood and Hannam (2001) show that although tourism products may have lost their meanings and authenticity through mass production, authenticity is a priority in some markets. Management Company is very sensitive to be accurate about the authenticity of the object. Viking heritage tourism products are authorized as authentic by experts. Also after the emergence of these markets, most of the old and forgotten things were produced again.

Also, Indians in the USA, Canadian Inuit, and the Maori in New Zealand found a way to control commoditization by training people, producing qualified art, and protecting their philosophy (Wall & Mathieson 2006). On the other hand, tourism leads to the deterioration of traditional art forms, such as the decrease in quality and fake artifacts, producing art according to tourists' wishes. Similarly, according to too Bowers and Cheer (2017), the aim of the tourists visiting India for yoga is selfish which contradicts the very nature of yoga itself. Also while some residents earn money from tourists, some of them are disturbed by the fact that their yoga culture is plundered. The disruption of the culture has been also observed in the local language through tourist

brochures (Heller, Pujolar & Duchêne 2014) and the traditional music (Mokgachane, Basupi, & Lenao 2019) and the traditional performances (Pradana 2018)

Some authors raise ethical concerns regarding cultural tourism. It may not be ethical to promote tours to explore 'other' cultures, as it may be seen as racism (Cohen 1996 cited in Ballengee-Morris 2002). According to Lane and Waitt (2001), tourists develop a stereotype due to the promotional campaigns they encounter before their visit. Nevertheless, Dyer et al. (2003) refute this point, as they claim that cross-cultural interaction between tourists and locals gives tourists a different perspective of the local community other than some stereotypes. People learn more about aboriginal culture after they watch the show and they are affected by the aboriginal lifestyle.

4. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research in authenticity should take into consideration the concepts, such as; globalization, capitalism, changing economics and power relations, and mass consumption. The authenticity has evolved from object authenticity to existential authenticity both of which are necessary to have the full authentic experience.

Another recommendation for future research is the relationship between authenticity and social media. Social media is the most powerful marketing tool of the last two decades. The authenticity of the Facebook, Instagram posts is not usually questioned by the viewers. The polished images of some landscapes disappoint tourists who visit the actual place. While social media determines the popularity of the destinations, the difference between the experience and the social media image may destroy the image of the destination.

The recent pandemic has changed every aspect of our lives and the authenticity will be redefined together with many other concepts in tourism. The number of attractions offering virtual visits such as museums, heritage sites has increased. Virtual events brought 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell 1973) to our homes. The authenticity of the virtual experience compared to the actual experience and the impact of the pandemic on the authenticity perspectives could be further studied.

5. Conclusion

Authenticity is a very difficult concept to define, as the debates on what is authentic and what is not are never-ending. The authentic experience starts with the individual. Even if the other people, objects, and places are the necessary elements of an authentic experience, the experience of the individual experience is always at the center of the discussions on authenticity. The current study aimed to analyze authenticity within the context of tourism where the individual is the primary actor. Authentic experience creates different senses in each individual and

internalization of the experience is the one main condition to name an experience as authentic.

The main discussions on authenticity in literature are mostly on the commodification of the tangible and intangible culture for the sake of tourism (Ballengee-Morris 2002; Halewood & Hannam 2001; MacCannell 1973; Su 2019; Young & Markham 2020). Although, authentic experience in tourism caused commodification of cultural elements and loss in the meaning of traditions, the positive impacts of its community may outweigh for the host communities.

The uniqueness of the experience could be explained by the following example. Venice is probably the most visited tourist destination in the world. The city is congested, their cultural elements are commodified and local people are not happy to see tourists there anymore. And yet, people never stop visiting Venice, as each tourist has a unique experience in Venice. Most tourists buy a mask when they visit Venice even if they know they are fabricated and cheap compared to hand-made original ones. Even if it is cheap and far from the original, however, after the trip is over, it will not be just a mask for that person. It will be a unique object to remember that trip and it will spark the feelings experienced during the trip.

Furthermore, it is not fair to assume that the only responsible for loss of meaning in traditions is tourism. Since the industrial revolution has started, the world is changing faster, traditions and meanings are changing every day. According to Hughes (1995), authenticity has a different meaning in today's globalized world and it should be studied from a different perspective. Diagnosing differences between local culture and its representations through artifacts is no longer sufficient in the study of authenticity. The perspective of different stakeholders and the concepts such as globalization, social media, and virtual environments should be taken into consideration.

Tourism planners need to focus on tourism products appealing to both object and existential authenticity. Tourists are looking for a unique and authentic experience. Protecting the local culture while promoting tourism is a very difficult job for local tourism authorities. Social media is a powerful tool for the promotion of local culture; however, the control over social media is minimal. A post on Instagram creates more effect than million-dollar ad campaigns. The authenticity of a destination should be emphasized in the social media posts through objects, experiences, and places. The expert opinion should be included while creating content for the social media, as the culture will inevitably be commodified to become marketable on social media.

This paper attempted to review the literature on authenticity in a tourism context. The results showed that the definition of authenticity has evolved and still evolving. The authentic experience is unique for each individual and therefore, it is very hard to reach a consensus on the question 'What is authenticity?'

More empirical research is needed to answer this question.

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