



The effects of memorable tourism experiences on behavioral intentions at heritage sites through mixed-methods research[‡]

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of memorable tourism experiences on behavioral intention in heritage tourism. These experiences are expected to affect their tourism-related decisions considerably. To acquire comprehensive information, both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were employed. It was designed in two phases. In addition to collecting 574 questionnaires in Phase 1, 17 in-depth interviews were conducted in Phase 2 using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative findings revealed that knowledge, refreshment, hedonism, and meaningfulness had a substantial impact on behavioral intentions. Qualitative findings provided support for knowledge and hedonism. The latter also demonstrated that guided tours in Troy influence tourist experiences and future decisions. These findings are expected to enable practitioners to better comprehend the effects of MTEs on tourists' behavioral intentions in heritage tourism. Future research could explore relationships between memorable experiences and attributes such as satisfaction or motivation, and compare data from domestic and international visitors.

KEYWORDS

Memorable tourism experiences, behavioral intentions, tourism, world heritage, Troy, heritage tourism

INTRODUCTION

Experiences are the essence of travel, and tourism is all about generating them (Cohen, 1979). For tourism businesses to thrive and gain a competitive advantage, they are expected to offer experiences that leave a lasting impression on visitors and encourage them to return (Kim, 2014). Travelers consider memorable experiences the ultimate kind of experience (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Culture and heritage, on the other hand, enhance visitors' experiences and are essential to preserving the industry's sustainability. Therefore, the impact of cultural heritage on tourists' experiences is worth exploring and requires a deeper understanding of tourists' experiences and behavioral intentions at cultural heritage sites (Wu & Li, 2017).

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Tourists base their travel decisions on memorable past experiences (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004). A memorable tourism experience (MTE) is remembered after the event and affects behavioral intentions (Ali et al., 2016; Coundounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Vada et al., 2022). Most studies confirm that tourists with remarkable experiences are more likely to return and recommend (Bhandari et al., 2024). Despite growing research on MTEs, more studies are needed as tourism experiences vary by destination, activities, background, and culture (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018; Hosseini et al., 2023). For example, Nguyen et al. (2024) noted that perceptions of heritage sites have not been sufficiently examined qualitatively, and that the impact of MTE components on heritage visitors' behavior is understudied (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

This research investigates the influence of MTEs on behavioral intentions at heritage sites, using a sample from Troy, a World Heritage Site visited by 584.877 tourists in 2019 (Çanakkale KTB, 2024). Despite the mythological significance of Troy in Western literature, its visitor attributes have been under-researched so far. Therefore, this is believed to be pioneering research to investigate the impact of MTEs on behavioral intentions at heritage sites such as Troy using mixed methods. It assesses the relationship between visitor experience and behavioral intentions, with remarkable theoretical and practical implications for tourism (Sihombing et al., 2024). Given the lack of a theoretical approach to MTEs (Anaya & Lehto, 2023), this study seeks to provide insights into MTEs and help establish a theoretical basis. This research has also been designed in line with calls for more research on MTEs (Lee, 2015; Akkuş, 2017; Demir & Demirel, 2019; Demir, 2019; Seyfi et al., 2020; Arslan & Şimşek, 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). The results are expected to enable tourism practitioners to better comprehend the role of MTEs in shaping tourists' behavioral intentions in heritage tourism. The practical findings are expected to provide an actionable perspective for improving service quality and visitor satisfaction more sustainably. Drawing upon the existing literature, the research question was formed as follows: ***'How memorable tourism experiences of visitors in Troy affect their behavioral intentions?'***

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Memorable Tourism Experience (MTEs) At Heritage Sites

Tourist experiences are central in tourism literature (Hosseini et al., 2023), with definitions highlighting their importance for development and satisfaction. Larsen (2007:15) describes a tourist experience as a past travel event that becomes part of long-term memory. Positive experiences follow tourism activities (Kim et al., 2012). Hosseini et al. (2023) add that not all experiences are memorable; those that stand out are vividly retained and more easily retrieved. Memorable experiences enhance tourist value and influence future travel decisions (Morgan & Xu, 2009). People tend to revisit destinations where they previously enjoyed themselves or spoke positively about their holidays, based on their assessments of those experiences. Understanding how tourists perceive and evaluate touristic products is vital for destination competitiveness and tourism sustainability (Demir & Demirel, 2019). Research on MTEs spans various settings, including smart destinations (Shin et al., 2023), hiking (Wang et al., 2024), wildlife (Sthapit et al., 2024), children (Xiong et al., 2025), rural tourism (Soleymani et al., 2025), coffee tourism (Chen et al., 2021), astrotourism (Rodrigues et al., 2023), wine tourism (Santos et al., 2019), senior tourists (Huang et al., 2024), and culture/heritage tourism (Jian et al., 2023).

Cultural heritage reflects societies and offers tourists activities (Zhang et al., 2018). Since culture influences tourists' experiences, it is vital for cultural destinations to understand how to create memorable experiences (Chen & Rahman, 2018). Chandralal et al. (2015) found that life and culture are common themes linked to MTEs. Kim (2014) identified culture as one of ten destination features aiding in MTEs. Zare (2019) noted that aspects such as togetherness, independence, spontaneity, flexibility, and distinctiveness enhance travelers' experiences. The MTE scale by Kim et al. (2012), based on a small sample, lacks generalizability and requires broader tourism contexts and larger samples (Hosseini, 2023).

The scale of Kim et al. (2012) could be interpreted in light of Pine and Gilmore's (1999) four realms of a memorable experience: entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist. Entertainment and

education correspond to MTE dimensions such as hedonism, novelty, and learning, which reflect joy and information gaining during the visit. The aesthetic appeal resonates with local culture and significance, reflecting tourists' satisfaction with the atmosphere, authenticity, and the importance of the place. Lastly, escapist is associated with refreshment and involvement, as these signify immersion, renewal, and active engagement. For example, Kastuti and Sugiarto (2025) discussed escapism under the subheading refreshment, illustrating the theoretical proximity between the two dimensions.

Memorable Tourism Experiences and Behavioral Intention

Hypotheses were based on the MTEs scale factors by Kim et al. (2012). Hedonism involves seeking pleasure (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997), a pleasant emotion that may affect the vividness of MTEs (Wei et al., 2019). Sthapit and Coudounaris (2018) noted that hedonistic visitor recollections might relate more to the attraction than to actual experiences, and thus require more evidence. Conversely, Tiwari et al. (2022) argue that hedonic factors play a key role in creating MTEs and revisits. Ryu et al. (2010) found hedonic values influence behavioral intentions, suggesting hedonic memories can impact future decisions. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: Hedonism positively impacts behavioral intentions.

'Novel pleasure travel, which involves an altered routine and the experiencing of different things, people, and environments, may move an individual back toward the desired level of arousal' (Lee & Crompton, 1992, p. 734). This interpretation closely resembles Mitas and Bastiaansen's one (2018: 99): "The sense that one is experiencing something new, and the sense that one is experiencing something different from usual daily life". Additionally, it is what tourists are looking for, and people tend to remember new experiences more vividly than repeated ones. There are studies that have concluded that novelty values have an impact on behavioral intentions such as intention to revisit (Jang & Feng, 2007; Williams & Soutar, 2009). "The more novelty value guests obtain, the more positive tendencies they were likely to show for the future" (Dedeoğlu et al., 2018, p. 17). However, Tiwari et al. (2024) state that studies measuring novelty, MTEs, and intention to revisit are quite rare. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Novelty positively impacts behavioral intentions.

Tung and Ritchie (2011) contend that engaging with locals and learning about their culture while on vacation contributes to more MTEs, a finding empirically supported by Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013). It is also important to have a companion during holidays, as the lack of a companion was identified in the literature by Crawford and Godbey (1987) as one of the constraints on leisure travel under the sub-category 'interpersonal constraints'. Local culture has a positive impact on behavioral intentions, such as the intention to revisit the destination (Kim et al., 2010; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Tsai, 2016). Based on the relevant literature, it is understood that social interaction and exposure to local culture may enable visitors to have unique experiences and MTEs. However, some studies have found no impact of local culture (Gohary et al., 2020), underscoring the need for more empirical research across different settings. Therefore, the following hypothesis is offered:

H3: Local culture positively influences behavioral intentions.

According to Kozak (2002), the primary psychological motivations for vacationing are escape and relaxation, which was empirically proved by Boo and Jones's study (2009). Travelers' memories of their trip are positively impacted by refreshment (Kim, 2010). Refreshment was found to be the strongest predictor of tourist satisfaction by Gohary et al. (2020). In addition, Kim and Ritchie (2014) found that refreshment is one of the MTEs that positively affect behavioral intentions.

Individuals who enjoy being refreshed on their travels are more likely to create memorable experiences. The following hypothesis, therefore, is proposed:

H4: Refreshment positively impacts behavioral intentions.

Some people view travel as an internal process of self-improvement and evolution rather than just a means of taking in sights, people, and locations (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). They value their travel experiences, which helps them earn more MTEs. This was also empirically supported by De Freitas Coelho et al. (2018), who found that cultural exchanges enhance special moments and circumstances that can result in a memorable trip for the visitor. Meaningful, thrilling emotions, engagement, and a sense of personal connection to the trip are essential components of an MTE (Loureiro, 2014). However, some research on MTEs has revealed that meaningfulness was not unequivocally experienced (Cornelisse, 2018), and some studies have shown no impact of meaningfulness on behavioral intentions (Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Yu et al., 2019). This shows that more empirical studies are required. Therefore, the following hypothesis is offered:

H5: Meaningfulness positively influences behavioral intentions.

Experiences that are personally meaningful and strongly tied to their interests are more likely to stick in their memories than those that are not (Kim & Ritchie, 2014), and high degrees of involvement in a consumer experience boost its memorability (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). In tourism-related studies, it has been shown that involvement with local culture and residents' way of life can lead to high levels of intention to revisit the destination (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). However, the number of such studies is quite limited, and more research is needed. Hence, the hypothesis presented below is offered:

H6: Involvement will positively impact behavioral intentions.

Travel is motivated by a common desire to learn new things (Dias & Dias, 2019). Research on the motivations behind tourism indicates that the desire to gain knowledge is one of the push factors that makes people more likely to travel (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). People who have interactions with the host community and acquire information about local customs, lifestyle, and language are more inclined to revisit in the future (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). Based on the relevant literature, the following hypothesis is presented:

H7: Acquiring knowledge while traveling positively impacts behavioral intentions.

A shared desire to learn something new motivates traveling (Dias & Dias, 2019). Earlier research on tourism motivation demonstrates that the intention to learn something new is among the push factors that drive people to travel (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Those who engage with the host community of a destination and learn about local traditions, lifestyles, and language are more likely to visit the destination again in the future (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). Based on the existing literature, the hypothesis presented below is offered by the researchers:

H7: Acquiring knowledge while traveling positively impacts behavioral intentions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, a mixed-methods approach to MTEs was utilized, as recommended by Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) and Brochado et al. (2022). With increased popularity in social research, mixed methods seek to bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative processes (Baškarada & Koronios, 2018). It enhances data accuracy, offers a comprehensive perspective, and reduces single-method biases (Denscombe, 2008). This research combines qualitative and quantitative data to accurately understand visitors' memorable experiences and the measurable relationships among key variables. This is believed to improve the validity of the findings, as the findings

complemented and supported each other. In this study, a quantitative research process (Phase 1) and a qualitative research process (Phase 2) were conducted to address the research question. In the former, researchers utilized questionnaires; in the latter, they utilized semi-structured interviews.

Data Instrument

In Phase 1, the questionnaire had three sections and two scales: a) The MTE scale by Kim (2012), adapted to Turkish by Akkuş (2017), with 22 items across 7 dimensions, showing high reliability (0.914); b) The behavioural intentions with 3 items scale adapted by Fakih et al. (2016) from Zeithaml et al. (1996), translated into Turkish by Çetinsöz and Polat (2018); c) demographic questions on gender, age, and visit frequency to Troy. The 5-point Likert scale ranged from 'strongly disagree' (=1) to 'strongly agree' (=5). No modifications were made to the wording of the questionnaire.

In Phase 2, a semi-structured interview was used, based on Rasoolimanesh et al.'s (2021) research to explore MTEs and behavioral intentions of heritage tourists. Participants were also asked about their gender, age, visit frequency, and the year of their Troy visits. The Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Ethics Committee examined the ethical requirements of the study in two separate ethics applications and approved both (Reference Dates and Numbers: 04.05.2023 - 06/08 and 03.10.2024 - 14/34).

Sample and Data Collection

In Phase 1, a smaller, representative sample was used to gather realistic data (Patton, 1987). Based on Gürbüz and Şahin's (2014:130) table, a minimum sample size of 384 was required for a universe of 100,000 at 95% confidence. However, over 574 questionnaires were collected by the end, with data gathered in person (191) and online (383) from October 2023 to August 2024. Using a convenience sampling technique, data were collected in person at the Troy Archaeological Site and the Troy Museum. Participants were informed of the study's purpose before completing questionnaires. Table 1 details the Phase 1 participants.

Table 1. Details of the Research Participants in Phase 1 (*Source: Own research*)

Gender	n	%	Number of Visits	n	%	Age	n	%
Male	310	54	Once	322	56.1	18-25	187	32.6
Female	264	46	Twice	91	15.9	26-35	146	25.4
			Three times	41	7.1	36-45	130	22.6
			Four times	19	3.3	46-55	72	12.5
			Five and more times	101	17.6	56 and over	39	6.9

In Phase 2, interviews with Troy visitors were conducted from October 10 to December 13, 2024, using adapted convenience and purposive sampling. Of 20 approached, 17 agreed to be interviewed. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) saturation recommendation, interviews lasted 10 to 29 minutes and were conducted via phone (6), online (7), and in person (4). Table 2 details the Phase 2 participants. In Phase 2, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. There is a lack of prior theoretical foundation for the concept of MTEs (Anaya & Lehto, 2023). Developing MTEs into a solid framework is important (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). Grounded theory was chosen for Phase 2 due to its emphasis on inductive analysis, its use in cultural heritage contexts (Goulding, 1999), and its role in assessing MTEs (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Its goal is to generate hypotheses and gain insights rather than universal laws (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). Online interviews were transcribed by Microsoft Teams, then listened to and corrected by researchers. The coding process followed Corbin and Strauss (1990): Reviewing literature and data to find research gaps, focusing on memorable tourist experiences. The interviews were reviewed

multiple times, and MTE categories were listed. Axial coding helped characterize tourist experiences, while selective coding involved reviewing transcripts, coding decisions, and contrasting concepts. After analysis, five main nodes were identified.

Table 2. Details of the Interviewees (*Source: Own research*)

P	Age	Gender	Number of Troy Visits	Year of Troy Visit*	P	Age	Gender	Number of Troy Visits	Year of Troy Visit*
P1	28	M	7	2024	P10	45	F	2	2023
P2	33	M	2	2022	P11	64	F	4	2022
P3	40	F	3	2023	P12	55	M	6	2023
P4	21	F	2	2024	P13	24	M	1	2022
P5	20	F	3	2024	P14	45	M	3	2023
P6	38	M	3	2023	P15	33	M	1	2020
P7	21	F	1	2023	P16	63	M	10 and more	2023
P8	36	F	10 and more	2023	P17	30	M	10 and more	2024
P9	60	M	1	2024					

*For interviewees who visited Troy more than once, the year of their most recent visit is given.

FINDINGS

Quantitative Analyses and Findings (Phase 1)

Analytics Strategy

In the analysis, missing data were first addressed, and the data were evaluated for normality using skewness and kurtosis. Skewness values below 2 and kurtosis values below 7 are deemed acceptable (West et al., 1995). The most extreme values are a kurtosis of 3,403 and a skewness of 1,7409, both from the knowledge sub-dimension. Subsequently, the model fit was assessed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The goodness of fit for the model was evaluated using multiple indices, including chi-square, X^2/df , NNF, NNFI, PNFI, CFI, IFI, RFI, RMR, SRMR, GFI, AGFI, PGFI, RMSEA. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), with a threshold of 0.70 for acceptability. Finally, the research hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis.

Model Estimation

Model fit was determined by CFA. In the first CFA, one item from the hedonism scale was excluded from the analysis because its factor loading was below 0.50. The repeated CFA results indicate that the research model consisting of 8 factors is valid and reliable at an acceptable level. As a result of CFA, the model fit goodness-of-fit values were determined as $X^2/df = 4.13.68$ ($X^2 = 925.60$ $df=224$), NNF=.98 NNFI=.98 PNFI=.79 CFI=.98 IFI=.98 RFI=.97 RMR=.073 SRMR=.063 GFI=.88 AGFI=.84 PGFI=.66 RMSEA=.074. The t-values of the observed variables in the measurement model ranged between 14.09 and 29.46, and the standardized factor loadings ranged between 0.57 and 0.94. Thresholds for model fit indices are set at ≥ 0.90 for CFI values, ≥ 0.08 for RMSEA, and SRMR values, as recommended by Hair et al. (2010). According to Anderson and Gerbing (1988), these values prove the structural validity of the measurement model. Table III presents the standardized factor loadings and t-values for the observed variables in the measurement model, as well as the mean, explained variance, CR, and alpha values for the latent variables. The CR values of the latent variables range between 0.79 and 0.92, and AVE values between 0.56 and 0.78. The AVE value is an important indicator of construct validity, and 0.50 is accepted as the threshold value; CR should exceed 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 3. CFA Results (*Source: Own research*)

Observed/Latent Variables	SLF	t-value	AVE	CR	Alpha
Hedonism			.70	.87	.865
Hed1	.71	19.02			
Hed2	.91	27.57			
Hed3	.88	26.21			
Involvement			.56	.79	.77
Inv1	.57	14.09			
Inv2	.79	21.75			
Inv3	.86	24.39			
Meaningfulness			.63	.83	.81
Mean1	.86	24.94			
Mean2	.90	26.96			
Mean3	.59	15.07			
Local Culture			.65	.85	.85
LC1	.80	21.88			
LC2	.82	22.62			
LC3	.80	21.63			
Novelty			.62	.83	.83
Nov1	.71	18.66			
Nov2	.85	23.82			
Nov3	.80	21.76			
Knowledge			.78	.92	.91
Know1	.80	22.99			
Know2	.91	28.18			
Know3	.94	29.46			
Refreshment			.77	.91	.91
Ref1	.81	23.27			
Ref2	.93	28.73			
Ref3	.88	26.46			
Behavioral Intentions			.76	.90	.90
BI1	.75	20.76			
BI2	.93	29.10			
BI3	.92	28.63			

SLF: Standardized Loading Factors, AVE: Average Variance Extracted, CR: Composite Reliability

Discriminant validity was assessed using the AVE square root values. For discriminant validity to be established, the AVE square root value of a construct should be higher than its correlation value with other variables. Table 4 presents the AVE square-root values and correlations of the latent variables. In the table, the AVE square root values for all variables were found to be greater than the correlation value between them. Therefore, it is considered acceptable to assess construct validity with reference to Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Table 4. Correlation Values (Source: Own research)

	BI	KNOW	REF	NOV	LC	MEAN	INV	HED
BI	(.87)							
KNOW	.80*	(.88)						
REF	.71*	.74*	(.88)					
NOV	.59*	.59*	.73*	(.79)				
LC	.60*	.64*	.62*	.67*	(.81)			
MEAN	.70*	.69*	.72*	.69*	.66*	(.79)		
INV	.66*	.67*	.71*	.70*	.66*	.85*	(.75)	
HED	.86*	.78*	.67*	.60*	.65*	.73*	.73*	(.84)

* p<0.01. Values in parentheses are AVE square root values.

According to Table IV, behavioral intention has a significant and positive relationship with Knowledge ($r=.80$, $p<.01$), Refreshment ($r=.71$, $p<.01$), Novelty ($r=.59$, $p<.01$), Local Culture ($r=.60$, $p<.01$), Meaningfulness ($r=.70$, $p<.01$) and Involvement ($r=.66$, $p<.01$), Hedonism ($r=.86$, $p<.01$).

Hypothesis Tests

To identify key factors influencing MTEs on behavioral intentions, we used multiple regression analysis, which Hair et al. (2010) regard as ideal for explaining a dependent variable with multiple independent variables. VIF and tolerance values indicated no multicollinearity, as VIF values were below 3 (Hair et al., 2010).

In the analysis, hedonism, knowledge, refreshment, and meaningfulness were found to have a major impact on visitors' behavioral intentions. It also revealed that the most influential attributes of the MTEs were knowledge, hedonism, and refreshment. Therefore, it is possible to set the regression formulation as:

Behavioural Intentions = 0.250 Constant + 0.424 Hedonism + 0.292 Knowledge + 0.133 Refreshment + 0.077 Meaningfulness + 0.060 Involvement – 0.007 Novelty – 0.028 Local Culture

Table 5 shows that it explains 68% (0.680) of behavioral intentions. Findings demonstrate that a 1-unit increase in hedonism is associated with a 0.424 increase in visitors' behavioral intentions (sig. = 0.000). In knowledge, refreshment, and meaningfulness, it increases behavioral intentions by 0.292 (sig. = 0.000), 0.133 (sig. = 0.000), and 0.077 (sig. = 0.041), respectively.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis (Source: Own research)

H		Variable	Unstanda rdized Coefficien ts B	Std. Erro r	Standardize d Coefficients β	t	p (Sig.)
		(Constant)	.250	.121		2.056	.040
H1	Supported	Hedonism	.424	.041	.408	10.384	.000
H2	Not Supported	Novelty	-.007	.031	.008	.228	.820
H3	Not Supported	Local Culture	-.028	.031	-.029	-.886	.376
H4	Supported	Refreshment	.133	.037	.138	3.610	.000
H5	Supported	Meaningfulness	.077	.039	.080	2.052	.041
H6	Not Supported	Involvement	.060	.038	.061	1.516	.119
H7	Supported	Knowledge	.292	.044	.267	6.682	.000

R: 0.825 R²:0.680 F: 171.796 p:0.000

As a World Heritage Site since 1998, the Archaeological Site of Troy offers tourists a unique experience through its rich mythology, which inspired two masterpieces of Western literature.

Mythological stories, particularly those found in the Iliad and Odyssey, enhance the pleasure of a trip to Troy, demonstrating the power of hedonism, knowledge, and meaningfulness in shaping behavioral intentions. Also, tourists believe that they may rejuvenate themselves by visiting Troy. Tourists in Troy did not believe that they were involved. This may result from the limited number of activities/events within the archaeological site of Troy. Since the study site was an archaeological site, it also makes sense that the local culture variable had no significant effect. Lastly, it was concluded that tourists in Troy did not expect to find novelty during their visit, which is an interesting finding, as knowledge and meaningfulness have a significant impact on behavioral intentions. It could result from research participants who view Troy as just another archaeological site.

Qualitative Analyses and Findings (Phase 2)

Based on the qualitative data analysis, five parent nodes of barriers emerged from the 17 semi-structured interviews: *Experience*, *Memorable Factors*, *What to Mention about Troy*, *Difference from Other Sites*, *Intention to Revisit Troy* (See Figure 1).

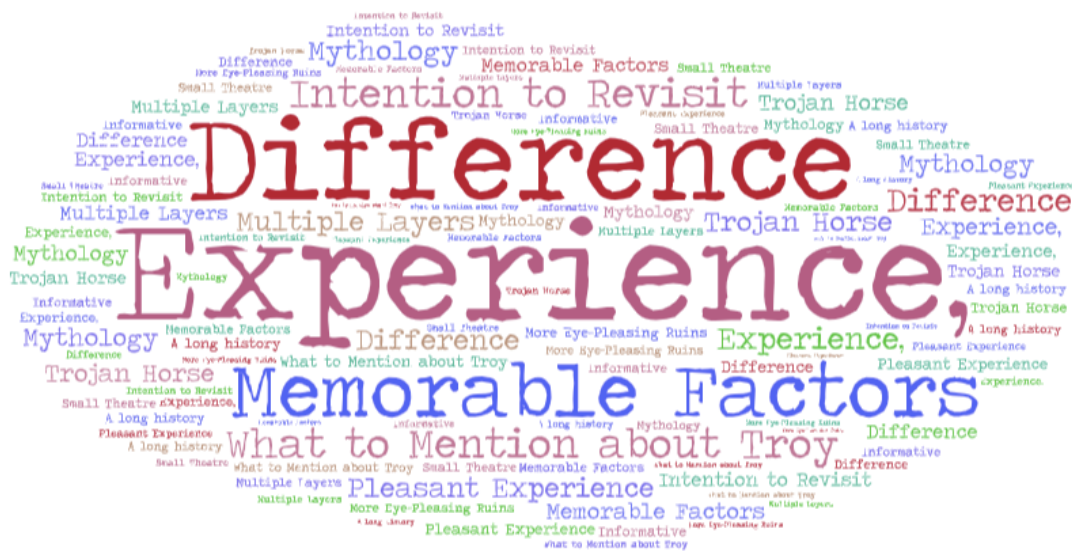


Figure 1. Word Cloud of Themes (Source: Own research)

Under the parent node of **Experience**, three constituent nodes were found: *Pleasant Experience* (6), *Informative* (5), and *Hoped to See More Eye-Pleasing Ruins* (3). When interviewees were asked to evaluate their overall experiences during their Troy visit, six people stated that it was an enjoyable experience: **RP1**: “When I first visited the Troy archaeological site, I found it to be a really pleasant experience.” Five people found their visit informative: **RP8**: “It’s already worth it every time I go. Because, as I mentioned, you come across a new layer or learn something new about Troy every day. That’s how I would phrase it.” Three individuals expressed their disappointment at not seeing more visually appealing ruins in Troy: **RP5**: “Unfortunately, not much remains visible in Troy.”

Under the parent node of **Memorable Factors**, three constituent nodes were discovered: *A long history* (4), *Trojan Horse* (3), *Small Theatre* (4). Troy’s lengthy history stuck in the minds of four research participants: **RP14**: “There, I witnessed the height of theatrical acoustics, traveled back in time three thousand years, and still go there nearly every year.” Four interviewees recalled the small theatre from their visit to Troy: **RP16**: “I was quite impressed by the small theatrical area there. I thought it was fascinating that people there truly acted out everyday situations while doing theatre.” The importance of the Trojan horse at the archaeological site was emphasized by three other interviewees: **RP13**: “At least in a symbolic sense, it was good to have the Trojan horse around.”

Under the parent node of **What to Mention about Troy**, interviewees were asked what they would like to share with their friends and family about their trip to Troy. Two constituent nodes were discovered: *Trojan Horse* (7) and *Multiple Layers* (3). Seven interviewees emphasized that they wanted to tell their loved ones about the Trojan Horse and its story: **RP3**: “Now, I bring up the Trojan horse if it's a young person. It effectively captures them.” Three people focused on the multiple layers of Troy: **RP15**: “Being so near to a place that was rebuilt so many times and is so historic made me sad not to go before my visit.”

Under the parent node of **Difference from Other Sites**, interviewees identified how Troy differed from other archaeological sites, and two constituent nodes were found: *Lacking number of Eye-pleasing Archaeological Ruins* (5) and *Its Mythology* (3). Five people stated that there are fewer eye-pleasing archaeological ruins compared to other sites: **RP11**: “There aren't many obvious items, but it has come to light through archaeological research; perhaps it will be similar to Göbeklitepe, as the discoveries will be made there—whether in the ruins of Sardis, Ephesus, or Hierapolis—are far more evident. Here, the remains are not as visible.” Therefore, guided tours are important in Troy according to some interviewees: **RP7**: “For instance, I visited Ephesus alone rather than with a tour, but I was still able to explore the city a bit more and found it to be an interesting area. Without a doubt, I would recommend it to others. But I believe you can gain that information by visiting Troy with a tour guide.” According to three interviewers, Troy stands out from the others because of its mythology: **RP16**: “The tales of Troy and other locations are completely different; for example, the Greeks and Achaeans do not fight each other. There are no epics or legends about a girl being abducted or about a beauty contest, so if we look at the epics in this way, Troy is, in my opinion, far superior.”

Nearly every interviewee (except for RP17) expressed an **Intention to Revisit Troy**, and 10 of these interviewees said they would like to do so because they think they might learn something new: **RP10**: “Of course, I'd like to. Every visit gives you the opportunity to learn something new, and every person you see or interact with may have quite distinct experiences.” Three of these 10 people wish to revisit Troy with a tour guide: **RP15**: “Although I learned something from my first visit, I believe I would notice something more in-depth if I read the Iliad myself and went again with a guide. That is why I would like to go.”

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contributions

Troy has traditionally been a popular tourist destination, drawing thousands of visitors each year. Troy's mythological history sets it apart from other locations, and it has grown into one of Türkiye's most popular destinations. The absence of Troy-related empirical studies on experience or behavioral intentions in the literature enhances this research's originality. Besides, the influence of MTEs on behavioral intentions has only been the subject of one mixed-method study in the literature (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), and its hypotheses were not proposed based on the seven factors of MTEs as offered by Kim et al. (2012), which is another originality of this research. The results from Phase 1 show that the best way to influence tourists' behavioral intentions is to have a thorough understanding of Troy and its archaeological site. The more knowledge Troy visitors have, the more likely they are to revisit the site, talk positively about it, or recommend it to others. The analysis supported **H7**, and its findings aligned with those of Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022), who concluded that tourists are more likely to revisit the destination if they get informed about it. This finding was also consistent with Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017), who concluded that knowledge, one of the MTEs' attributes, significantly influences behavioral intentions. This quantitative finding was also supported by qualitative findings, such as the parent node ‘*Intention to Revisit*’ and the constituent node ‘*Informative*’ under the parent node ‘*Experience*’. In Phase 2, more than half of participants stated that they would like to revisit Troy for the sake of new knowledge.

Both the quantitative and qualitative results on “*Hedonism*” indicate that tourists were motivated to return to Troy by their positive experience there. This result aligns with the findings of Tiwari et al. (2022), who proposed that hedonistic variables play a major role in the formation of an MTE

associated with visitors' propensity to return. Similarly, Ryu et al. (2010) found empirically that hedonic values influence behavioral intentions.

Quantitative findings on '*Refreshment*' show that visitors could refresh themselves during their visit in Troy, which can significantly affect their behavioral intentions. Nevertheless, no noteworthy qualitative findings were found on this factor. The quantitative finding is consistent with Kim and Ritchie (2014) but not with Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022), which found no significant effect of refreshment on behavioral intentions. This could result from the different study areas. However, the qualitative results for "*Refreshment*" did not reveal any noteworthy nodes. The disparity ought to result from the various methods used for gathering the data.

H5 was supported by quantitative data on "*Meaningfulness*", which concurred with Loureiro's (2014) conclusion that one of the most important components of an MTE is meaningful emotions. On the other hand, Yu et al. (2019) found no significant impact of meaningfulness on behavioral intentions. One possible explanation for this difference could be the widespread mythology surrounding Troy. In addition to exploring the archaeological site, tourists in Troy learn about the legends and may find their experience there more meaningful than at other sites and destinations. Still, the qualitative findings for '*Meaningfulness*' did not reveal any significant nodes.

The quantitative findings on '*Involvement*' did not support **H6**. Furthermore, no discernible influence was found on behavioral intentions in the qualitative research on this component. Involvement in tourism could lead to a high intention to revisit the destination, according to Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022). This must be the result of the study location being an archaeological site and of the limited activities conducted within the Troy archaeological site.

H3 was not supported by the analysis on '*Local Culture*', and no noteworthy nodes pertaining to this factor were found in Phase 2. These results did not support those of Kim et al. (2010), Kim and Ritchie (2014), and Tsai (2016), who concluded that interacting with locals and learning about their culture positively influence behavioral intentions. The finding on "*Local Culture*" supports that of Gohary et al. (2020), who found no evidence of its influence on behavioral intentions. As in Gohary et al. (2020), it is considered that, because the study region was unsuitable for interacting with local culture, no substantial effects of local culture were observed.

H2 was not supported by the quantitative findings on '*Novelty*'. This did not align with those of Jang and Feng (2007), Williams and Soutar (2009), and Dedeoğlu et al. (2018). Troy is known as "the ruin of the ruins" because there are not many visually appealing ruins on the site, which could explain the findings. On the other hand, the quantitative findings revealed the parent node '*Difference From Other Sites*'. There were two participant groups in Phase 2. One group said that Troy is different from other cities because there are not enough visually appealing ruins there, while the other group contended that Troy is special because of its mythology (such as the Trojan Horse narrative). The potential cause of these discrepancies in the findings could be attributed to varying data collection methodologies.

In summary, this research used mixed-methods techniques to examine behavioral intentions and MTEs to better understand how these factors influence behavioral intentions. The MTEs scale developed by Kim et al. (2012) was tested by this research and improved knowledge in one of the World Heritage Sites. The results revealed that further research is required to develop a solid theory of MTEs.

Practical Contributions

This study has certain practical implications for the directorate of the archaeological site and the stakeholders of the tourism activities in Troy. The findings demonstrate that acquiring knowledge about Troy and its stories matters for future behavioral intentions. Similar to the findings of Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022), this research highlights the importance of guided tours and tour guides in Troy, making them perhaps the most prominent tourist stakeholders. Therefore, experts and archaeologists are expected to organize regular seminars on Troy's archaeology for tour guides, which will require efficient collaboration among the directorate, the chamber of tour guides, and the university. In addition to tour guides, the directorate should develop methods for visitors without guided tours to obtain more information during their visit to the archaeological site of Troy. They could benefit from recent technologies such as augmented and virtual reality

(for example, the screens placed on the ground floor of the Troy Museum and the Experience Museum at the archaeological site of Ephesus) rather than relying solely on information boards within the archaeological site. In these technologies, more focus might be on the multiple layers of Troy, which is one of the memorable factors in Troy according to the research participants. Trojan Horse is one of Troy's most prominent and distinctive features. Visitors are occasionally permitted to enter up to its belly and experience the hidden Greek soldiers (part of Troy mythology), which could be a memorable part of the Troy visit. However, this is not always available to visitors (For example, the horse was under construction for the full year in 2023). Therefore, this opportunity should always be open to visitors, which could positively contribute to their MTEs in Troy. Visitors in Troy did not seem to feel involved. More events and activities may be organized within the archaeological site, with both locals and tourists participating. These may be hosted at Troy's small theatre (Odeon), which was recognized as one of the city's memorable features based on the qualitative research. According to the findings, some visitors were dissatisfied with Troy's lack of visually appealing ruins. From a tourism perspective, this may be placed on the agenda to establish a sustainable strategy, in accordance with archaeological considerations, to address this unhappiness.

The memorability of heritage tourism experiences could be enhanced through various measures. These include developing compelling narratives, fostering sensory-rich environments, and integrating interactive components—particularly technological ones—that deepen visitor engagement. Conversely, maintaining authenticity should be considered essential. These factors may contribute to more sustainable and memorable tourism experiences.

CONCLUSION

This research presents empirical evidence on the influence of memorable tourism experiences on behavioral intentions at World Heritage Sites, using Troy as a case study. To date, this is the most thorough study on Troy's visitors. The results enable a deeper comprehension of tourists' experiences and future behavioral intentions, providing a basis for stakeholders and practitioners to enhance tourist experiences at World Heritage Sites such as Troy.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

There is a lack of research on tourists at the Troy Archaeological Site in the existing body of literature. Future scholars can investigate the effect of motivation on MTEs or add additional variables, such as satisfaction, to their research model. Similar studies could be repeated at other heritage destinations, and their results could be compared to those in this study. In addition, they could focus on visitors to the Troy Museum and conduct the research with a sample of museum visitors.

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Declaration of Generative AI Usage

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used *ChatGPT (GPT-5.5, OpenAI)* to improve the readability and language of the manuscript. After using this tool, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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