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Museum Experiences and Attitudes Toward Tangible Cultural Heritage in Kazakhstan: Evidence from Domestic and International Tourists

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Abstract: This study examined authentic tourism and museum experiences, and attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage values among local and foreign tourists visiting museums in Kazakhstan, by gender, age, and education. A comparative correlational survey model was adopted. Data were collected through a demographic information form, an authentic tourism experience scale, and an attitude scale towards tangible cultural heritage. An independent sample t-test compared participants' authentic tourism and museum experiences and attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage by gender. One-way analysis of variance compared the same scale scores across education level and age. Multiple regression analysis tested the relationships between participants' tourism and museum experiences and attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage. A significant difference was found only in the Experience Quality sub-dimension regarding gender. Female tourists reported higher experience quality than males. Regarding age groups, tourists under 35 had higher scores for objective authenticity and experience quality. As the education level increased, significant increases were observed in the sub-dimensions of authentic tourism experience and in attitude scores towards tangible cultural heritage. Regression analysis revealed that authentic tourism and museum experiences significantly and positively influenced attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage ($\beta=0.431$; $R^2=0.18$; $F=96.59$, $p<0.05$). Because the results suggested that Museum experiences can strengthen cultural heritage awareness, museum managers should develop layered strategies for different visitor profiles.

Keywords: Cultural heritage tourism, authentic tourism experience, museum experience, tangible cultural heritage, Kazakhstan

Museums are institutions established to research and exhibit tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment. According to the current definition of the

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International Council of Museums (ICOM, 2022), museums are permanent institutions that serve social development, are open to the public, and acquire, preserve, research, communicate, and exhibit the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for educational, research, and recreational purposes. Today, visitors perceive museums not merely as spaces where objects are displayed, but also as dynamic spaces offering diverse experiences (Arslan Kalay et al., 2024; Bozdogan & Sunbul, 2016). They have strategic importance from a societal perspective, as they support identity formation, foster economic growth, promote creativity, and enhance overall well-being.

Tourism offers opportunities to explore, learn about, and engage with people, societies, and places through direct contact. The sustainability of these opportunities requires the preservation of authentic environmental, cultural, and historical assets. In this context, museums become a crucial tool for tourism (Sartayeva & Saraç, 2025). Internal and external factors, including exhibition quality, level of interaction, staff engagement, and accessibility, influence the quality of museum visits, and a high-quality museum visit directly enhances perceived benefit and learning.

Kazakhstan, possessing a rich cultural heritage, holds significant potential for its preservation and promotion. The country has over 25,000 historical and cultural heritage sites, 254 of which are national monuments (Qazaq Culture, 2024). It joined UNESCO in 1992 and made its first inscription on the World Heritage List in 2003 with the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi. Today, the country is represented on this list with 6 different sites (UNESCO, 2024). The development of innovative presentations in cultural heritage sites, particularly through digital interactive storytelling, remains critically important for the transmission of heritage to younger generations (Unal, 2019).

The concept of an authentic tourism experience is directly related to the physical environment and to an individual's capacity for meaning-making, cultural awareness, and critical thinking (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Wang, 1999; Yeoman et al., 2007). Authentic tourism is seen as a transformative way to explore the world, allowing travelers to connect deeply with local cultures and communities. Unlike traditional tourism that often isolates visitors in chain hotels, authentic tourism offers a genuine experience by immersing travelers in the local lifestyle, history, and customs. This form of sustainable tourism not only enriches the travel experience but also benefits host communities economically and culturally (Lokal Travel, 2026).

Museum environments stand out as spaces where visitors can connect with the past, make sense of cultural identity, and experience aesthetic pleasure; this characteristic strengthens the sense of authenticity (Chronis, 2012). Individuals with higher levels of education have a more developed sense of authenticity. They are seen to process the information presented in museum environments more systematically, using higher-level cognitive processes such as contextualization, comparison, and interpretation more effectively (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Kesner, 2006).

The relationship between authentic tourism and museum experiences, and how this relationship is reflected in cultural heritage attitudes, is a research question that has been extensively addressed in the literature, yet significant gaps remain. Existing studies largely focus on the context of West and Southeast Asia (Richards, 2011; Su et al., 2020). Destinations such as Kazakhstan, located in the former Soviet geography and possessing its own unique heritage dynamics, are often overlooked (Qazaq Culture, 2024). Furthermore, quantitative research that directly links museum experience to tangible cultural heritage attitudes and comparatively examines demographic differences (gender, age, education) remains limited (Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2019; Poria et al., 2004).

The current study aims to fill this gap and make an original contribution to the literature by comparing local and foreign tourists within the same sample. Thus, the study's findings will provide a basis for developing practical recommendations for museum management in

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Kazakhstan and for testing the theory of heritage tourism across different cultural contexts (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Wang, 1999).

Authentic Tourism Experiences

Authenticity, in tourism literature, is positioned as a theoretical response to the individual's search for escape from everyday life, shaped by a critique of modernity. In this context, objective authenticity refers to the historically original, unaltered, and documented nature of an object or place. In contrast, constructed authenticity refers to an authenticity produced through social negotiation and collective meaning-making. Existential authenticity encompasses the deep connection an individual establishes with their own essence and the possibility of discovering their potential self during the experience process. In this dimension, internal transformation and the search for meaning come to the forefront, independent of the object's authenticity (Wang, 1999).

Empirical research shows that objective and existential authenticity are among the key factors determining the intention to visit heritage tourism sites (Atzeni et al., 2022), and scholars have found that existential authenticity is more pronounced in cultural heritage sites (Kim & Jamal, 2007). Authenticity is also understood not as a static, objective category, but rather as a relational process constantly reproduced among the visitor, the place, and the discourse (Chronis, 2012). Against this backdrop, the orientation towards authenticity is also considered a measurable attitudinal construct that reflects individual differences (Stepchenkova & Park, 2021). All these dimensions reveal that the authentic tourism experience is not only a perceptual but also an effective and existential process. Therefore, its measurement requires a multidimensional approach.

Museums are among the leading institutions offering authentic tourism experiences (Richards, 2011). In these environments, visitors can connect with the past, understand cultural identity, and experience aesthetic pleasure. These features together reinforce the sense of authenticity (Chronis, 2012). The quality of the experience plays a decisive role in perceived values, attitudes, and behavioral intentions (Su et al., 2020).

Museum Experience and Quality

The quality of a museum experience is a holistic evaluation of all the interactions a visitor has within the museum, and this experience takes shape within a multi-layered structure. According to the Contextual Learning Model, the museum experience is shaped at the intersection of three fundamental dimensions: personal context (the individual's prior knowledge, motivation, and identity), social context (those visited together, guide interaction, group dynamics), and physical context (the layout of the space, exhibition design, accessibility) (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Guzel & Bagceci, 2025). This approach shows that museum experience cannot be reduced to a single variable; rather, it is the product of interconnected dynamics. Interactive exhibitions deepen visitors' conceptual understanding and spatial experience (Mortensen, 2011). The educational potential of museum environments is not limited to content transfer. It encompasses effective and critical dimensions and has the capacity to transform the visitor's perception of the world (Ballantyne & Uzzell, 1998).

Individuals with high learning motivation process these environments more systematically (Packer & Ballantyne, 2002), while their cognitive competence level directly strengthens their perception of the exhibition (Bitgood, 2002). When evaluated in terms of the integration of digital technologies, virtual reality applications complement the traditional museum experience and qualitatively enrich visitor participation (Ay et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2020). This effect is particularly evident in young visitors (Jung et al., 2016; Zollo et al., 2022).

All these dimensions demonstrate that the quality of the museum experience is more than mere abstract satisfaction. It is an integrated reflection of cognitive, effective, and social processes, thus necessitating its measurement through multidimensional approaches.

Tangible Cultural Heritage and Tourism

Tangible cultural heritage encompasses physical existing heritage elements such as monuments, historical buildings, archaeological sites, and objects. Integrating these assets into tourism enriches the visitor experience and reinforces public awareness of the importance of preserving heritage values. Studies conducted within the context of heritage education show that such learning experiences positively transform individuals' attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage (Dönmez & Yeşilbursa, 2023; Guzel & Bagceci, 2025). Awareness of tangible cultural heritage is measurable through metaphorical perceptions and is considered a significant indicator of how individuals internalize the concept of heritage (Gunden, 2021; Temizel & Sartayeva, 2021). Poria et al. (2004) also found that visiting heritage sites creates an emotional connection between tourists and the site, and this connection strengthens long-term conservation attitudes

In UNESCO's (2024) terminology, tangible cultural heritage is divided into two main categories: immovable (monuments, sites, historic urban fabrics, archaeological landscapes) and movable (works of art, manuscripts, archaeological finds, ethnographic objects). These categories should be considered both as physical entities and as living documents carrying the identity, knowledge, and value systems of past civilizations. Thus, visits to heritage sites go beyond mere tourist consumption. They enable individuals to actively participate in the process of making meaning of history, culture, and collective memory (Poria et al., 2004).

When considered specifically in the context of Kazakhstan, the country's more than 25,000 heritage sites (Qazaq Culture, 2024) represent not only a geographical richness but also tangible reflections of regional identity and historical continuity. Supporting cultural heritage sites with digital narratives is crucial for developing heritage awareness among younger generations (Avci & Sartayeva, 2020; Unal, 2019). Attitudes towards heritage preservation are strongly linked to educational level and individual heritage experiences (Uzun, 2020). All these findings clearly show that preserving tangible cultural heritage is not merely a matter of physical intervention. It is a comprehensive awareness process requiring the individual's attitude, cognitive, and affective participation.

The three theoretical perspectives informing this study—Wang's (1999) multidimensional authenticity framework, Falk and Dierking's (2013) Contextual Learning Model, and Pine and Gilmore's (1999) Experience Economy—are not independent lenses. They are converging ones. Wang's framework identifies what visitors seek (objective, constructed, and existential authenticity); the Contextual Learning Model explains how the museum environment shapes the conditions under which that search occurs, through the intersection of personal, social, and physical contexts; and the Experience Economy provides the demand-side logic linking memorable, staged experiences to lasting attitudinal outcomes. In this integrated view, a museum visit in a heritage-rich setting, such as Kazakhstan, functions simultaneously as an encounter with authenticity, a contextually embedded learning event, and an experiential consumption act. It is through this convergence that attitudes toward tangible cultural heritage are formed and reinforced. The present study operationalizes this integrated framework by examining authentic tourism experience and museum experience as joint predictors of heritage attitudes across demographically diverse visitor profiles.

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Research Objective and Questions

The aim of the current study is to examine the authentic museum experiences and attitudes of tourists (both domestic and foreign) visiting museums in Kazakhstan towards tangible cultural heritage values. In this context, the study sought answers to the following questions:

- Do tourists' experiences with authentic tourism and museums in Kazakhstan differ according to gender?
- Do tourists' experiences with authentic tourism and museums in Kazakhstan differ according to age groups?
- Do tourists' experiences with authentic tourism and museums in Kazakhstan differ according to education level?
- Do tourists' attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage values in Kazakhstan differ by gender?
- Do participants' attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage values differ according to age groups?
- Do participants' attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage values differ according to education level?
- Do participants' experiences with authentic tourism and museums significantly influence their attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage values?

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, comparative-correlational survey design. Survey-based designs are widely employed in social science research when the goal is to describe population characteristics and examine relationships among variables across large samples without experimental manipulation (Babbie, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The comparative dimension of the design enables systematic group-based comparisons, in this case across gender, age, and educational level, which is consistent with Creswell's (2012) "between-group comparison" structure in non-experimental quantitative inquiry. The correlational dimension examines the directional relationships among authentic tourism, museum experiences, and attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage, aligning with Fraenkel et al.'s (2012) definition of correlational research as a design suited to identifying the nature and strength of relationships among variables in naturalistic settings. The comparative-correlational survey model was preferred over experimental designs given the ethical and logistical constraints of randomly assigning tourists to conditions, and the purely qualitative approaches given the study's aim to generalize patterns across a demographically diverse visitor sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population and Sample

This study used convenience sampling. Following Lee et al. (2020), every second person who completed a museum visit was asked whether they would participate in the research, and the survey was administered to those who agreed. Three inclusion criteria were used in the selection of participants: (1) data collection from foreign participants who visit museums, (2) these foreign visitors having a good level of English regardless of their nationality, and (3) participants being at least 18 years old (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The study was conducted with 426 domestic and foreign tourists who visited museums in Kazakhstan. The survey instrument was administered in English; accordingly, participation was limited to individuals who met the English proficiency criterion specified above. While a sample size of 200-300 is considered sufficient in survey research (Babbie, 2020), the number of participants in this study significantly exceeded this threshold.

As shown in Table 1, 227 (53.3%) of the participants were female and 199 (46.7%) were male. When age groups are examined, the highest percentage was in the 26-35 age group with 25.4%. Regarding nationality, Kazakhs ranked first with 137 people (29.4%), followed by Uzbeks with 76 people (16.3%) and Russians with 70 people (15.0%). Most participants (75.6%) were employed, and regarding education level, bachelor's degree graduates (47.7%) were the most numerous.

Table 1

Demographic Distribution of Tourists Visiting Kazakhstan within the Scope of the Research

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Female	227	53,3
	Male	199	46,7
Age	25 and below	60	14,1
	26-35	108	25,4
	36-45	93	21,8
	46-55	102	23,9
	56 and above	63	14,8
Nationality	Azerbaijan	39	8,4
	Kazakhstan	137	29,4
	Kyrgyzstan	58	12,5
	Russia	70	15,0
	Tajikistan	36	7,7
	Turkmenistan	39	8,4
	Ukraine	11	2,4
	Uzbekistan	76	16,3
Occupation	Employed	322	75,6
	Unemployed	19	4,5
	Retired	52	12,2
	Student	33	7,7
Education	Elementary School	33	7,7
	High School	32	7,5
	Associate degree	67	15,7
	Bachelor's Degree	203	47,7
	Master's/Doctorate	91	21,4

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Data Collection Tools

Three data collection tools were used in the instrument: a demographic information section, an Authentic Tourism Experience Scale, and an Attitude Scale towards Tangible Cultural Heritage. The demographic information form included questions about participants' gender, age, nationality, occupation, and education level.

The second section, "Authentic Tourism Experience Scale," consisted of 26 items (Appendix A). The scale included questions about participants' perceptions of objective and existential authenticity, the quality of their experiences, their perceived value, attitudes, and behavioral intentions. The three-item objective authenticity and six-item existential authenticity scales were adapted from those used in the studies by Atzeni et al. (2022) and Stepchenkova and Belyaeva (2021). The six-item quality of experience scale was adapted from the scale used by Domínguez-Quintero et al. (2019). The four-item value scale used by Su et al. (2020), the three-item attitude scale used by Rauschnabel et al. (2017), and the four-item behavioral intentions scale used by Kim et al. (2020) were applied. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).

The third section included an additional scale to determine tourists' attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage. The scale was developed by compiling items from scales developed by Dönmez and Yeşilbursa (2023), Gunden (2021), and Uzun (2020). The scale comprised 15 statements regarding tangible cultural heritage elements (Appendix B). The statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale as follows: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. On the scale, a scoring system of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 was used for positive statements, and reverse coding was used for negative statements, assigning 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Analyses were conducted to determine the distinguishability of the attitude scale items in terms of the local population's attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage.

Survey forms were distributed online and through face-to-face interviews and administered to tourists visiting museums in Kazakhstan between June and October 2025. To assess the validity of the attitude scale towards tangible cultural heritage, an exploratory factor analysis was employed. Based on the validity and reliability analyses conducted on the sample for this research, a single subscale structure consisting of 15 items was tested.

Data Analysis

Before analyzing the data collected, the structure of each variable was examined. At this stage, a missing data analysis was performed; none were present. The data were then tested for normality. The normality assumption is used to determine which statistical analyses can be applied. In literature, skewness and kurtosis values are frequently examined to determine whether a distribution is normal. In the social sciences and with Likert scales, no consensus on the range within which data are normally distributed exists. For instance, Tabachnick et al. (2007) stated that skewness and kurtosis values should be within ±1.5 of 0 for a normal distribution. According to George and Mallery (2010), the values should be in the range of +2 and -2. The skewness and kurtosis values of the scales and all their sub-dimensions used in this study were within acceptable limits.

An independent-samples t-test compared participants' attitudes towards authentic tourism experiences, museum experiences, and gender tangible cultural heritage. To compare the same scale scores across educational status and age variables, a one-way analysis of variance was used. Given the multiple dependent variables tested across groups, a Bonferroni correction was applied to control Type I error inflation. Effect sizes were calculated using partial eta squared (η^2) and interpreted according to Cohen's (1988) classification (η^2 = .01 small, .06 medium, .14 large). The relationships between participants' tourism experiences,

museum experiences, and attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage were tested using Multiple Regression Analysis.

Before the inferential analyses, additional assumption checks were conducted. For the independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA, Levene's test assessed the homogeneity of variance; results confirmed that the assumption was met for all comparisons. The independence of observations was ensured by the survey design, which required each participant to complete the instrument individually and only once. For the multiple regression analysis, multicollinearity was examined using Variance Inflation Factors (VIF); all VIF were below 5, indicating no problematic multicollinearity among the predictors.

Validity and Reliability Analyses

Authentic Tourism Experience Scale

External model estimation was performed for the 26-item Authentic Tourism Experience Scale used. One item (m4) belonging to the Existential Authenticity scale and one item (m15) belonging to the Experience Quality scale, both with factor loadings below the 0.40 threshold, were removed from the scale in accordance with Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) suggestion. The model was re-analyzed (Karatepe et al., 2020).

As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the structures ranged from 0.70 to 0.783, and the CR coefficients ranged from 0.818 to 0.850, indicating that internal consistency was achieved. These results support the scale's reliability, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha. Factor loadings and AVE values were examined to test convergent validity. As seen in the table, the AVE values ranged from 0.529 to 0.659. According to these values, convergent validity was achieved due to the AVE coefficients (>0.50) (Henseler et al., 2016). In this respect, the validity and reliability of the authentic tourism experience scale for tourists visiting Kazakhstan were sufficient and acceptable. These values indicate that the scale has high validity and reliability.

Table 2
Validity and Reliability Analyses of Measurement Instruments

Factor	Item	Factor Load	Cronbach's a	AVE	CR
Objective Authenticity	A1	0,781	0,703	0,629	0,835
	A2	0,794			
	A3	0,803			
Existential Authenticity	A4*	-	0,773	0,526	0,846
	A5	0,641			
	A6	0,626			
	A7	0,774			
	A8	0,823			
	A9	0,742			
Quality of Experience	A10	0,740	0,783	0,529	0,848
	A11	0,749			

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Table 2
Continued

	A12	0,749			
	A13	0,759			
	A14	0,633			
	A15*	-			
Value	A16	0,722	0,703	0,529	0,818
	A17	0,720			
	A18	0,743			
	A19	0,723			
Attitude	A20	0,799	0,700	0,620	0,830
	A21	0,819			
	A22	0,752			
Behavioral Intentions	A23	0,708	0,736	0,559	0,835
	A24	0,772			
	A25	0,769			
	A26	0,739			

Note. Since the factor loading was below the 0.40 threshold, it was removed from the scale.

Validity and Reliability of the Attitude Scale Towards Tangible Cultural Heritage

Table 3 presents the results of the EFA and Cronbach's alpha analysis for the attitude scale towards tangible cultural heritage. As shown in Table 3, a single-factor structure was formed for the scale in the exploratory factor analysis. The KMO coefficient for the 15 items was 0.79, and the sample size is consistent with the factor analysis. According to Bartlett's test results, there was a significant relationship among the variables (Chi-square = 2587.09; $p < 0.01$). The factor loadings of the scale items ranged from 0.40 to 0.59. The total eigenvalue of the single-factor structure was 3.64 and explained 39.46% of the total variance. The reliability coefficient was 0.86, based on Cronbach's alpha analysis of the scale items.

Table 3
Results of Factor Analysis of the Attitude Scale Towards Tangible Cultural Heritage

Item	Factor Load	Eigen Value	Cronbach alpha
C11	0,589	3,648	0,86
C12	0,576		
C2	0,572		
C1	0,562		
C14	0,534		
C10	0,528		

Table 3
Continued

C15	0,496
C8	0,481
C7	0,480
C13	0,439
C6	0,437
C3	0,420
C9	0,414
C4	0,403
C5	0,401

Note. KMO=0.79; Bartlett Chi-square=2587.09, p<0.01; Explained Variance=39.46%.

Results

Comparisons by Gender

Table 4 presents a comparison of tourists' authentic and museum experiences by gender. As shown in Table 4, no significant difference was found between female and male participants on the subscales Objective Authenticity, Existential Authenticity, Perceived Value, Attitude, and Behavioral Intentions ($p > 0.05$). However, a significant difference was found in the Experience Quality subscale based on gender ($t = 2.223$; $p = 0.027$). Female tourists scored higher on the experience quality scale than male tourists. No significant difference in the museum experience scale was observed by gender ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4
A Comparison of Tourists' Authentic Tourism Experiences and Museum Experiences by Gender

Sub Scale	Gender	N	Mean	Sd	t	p
Objective Authenticity	Female	227	4,14	0,35	-0,035	0,972
	Male	199	4,14	0,36		
Existential Authenticity	Female	227	4,23	0,35	1,511	0,132
	Male	199	4,18	0,35		
Quality of Experience	Female	227	4,38	0,35	2,223	0,027*
	Male	199	4,30	0,36		
Perceived Value	Female	227	4,22	0,31	0,301	0,763
	Male	199	4,21	0,35		
Attitude	Female	227	4,18	0,39	-0,364	0,716
	Male	199	4,20	0,41		
Behavioral Intentions	Female	227	4,18	0,35	1,328	0,185
	Male	199	4,13	0,35		

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Table 4
Continued

Museum Experience	Female	227	4,14	0,35	0,628	0,530
	Male	199	4,12	0,33		

Note. *p<0,05

According to t-test analyses, participants' attitude scores towards tangible cultural heritage did not differ significantly by gender (t (1) = 1.032, p = 0.302). See Table 5.

Table 5
Comparison of Tourists' Attitudes Towards Tangible Cultural Heritage by Gender

Sub Scale	Gender	N	Mean	Sd	t	P
Attitude Towards Tangible Cultural Heritage	Female	227	4,18	0,20	1,032	0,302
	Male	199	4,16	0,26		

Comparisons of Age Groups

Table 6 shows that no significant differences were found between age groups in the subscales of Existential Authenticity, Perceived Value, Attitude, and Behavioral Intentions (p > 0.05). However, significant differences were found between age groups on the subscales of Objective Authenticity (F = 2.452; p = 0.045) and Experience Quality (F = 4.792; p = 0.001). Further analyses using the Scheffe test revealed that tourists under 35 years of age had higher scores on objective authenticity and experience quality than older groups. No significant differences were observed between age groups regarding museum experience (p > 0.05).

Table 6
Comparison of Tourists' Authentic Tourism and Museum Experiences Regarding Age Groups

Sub Scale	Age Groups	N	Mean	Sd	F	p	η^2
Objective Authenticity	25 and below	60	4,25	0,38	2,452	0,045*	0,029
	26-35	108	4,10	0,34			
	36-45	93	4,11	0,36			
	46-55	102	4,11	0,36			
	56 and above	63	4,19	0,30			
	Total	426	4,14	0,35			
Existential Authenticity	25 and below	60	4,25	0,36	1,368	0,244	0,018
	26-35	108	4,25	0,32			
	36-45	93	4,20	0,34			
	46-55	102	4,15	0,34			
	56 and above	63	4,19	0,40			
	Total	426	4,21	0,35			
Quality of Experience	25 and below	60	4,46	0,38	4,792	0,001*	0,048
	26-35	108	4,40	0,33			
	36-45	93	4,36	0,37			
	46-55	102	4,25	0,36			

Table 6
Continued

	56 and above	63	4,27	0,32			
	Total	426	4,34	0,36			
Perceived Value	25 and below	60	4,30	0,38	1,339	0,255	0,019
	26-35	108	4,20	0,31			
	36-45	93	4,20	0,31			
	46-55	102	4,20	0,34			
	56 and above	63	4,19	0,32			
	Total	426	4,21	0,33			
Attitude	25 and below	60	4,24	0,48	0,442	0,778	0,04
	26-35	108	4,18	0,41			
	36-45	93	4,16	0,36			
	46-55	102	4,19	0,39			
	56 and above	63	4,21	0,38			
	Total	426	4,19	0,40			
Behavioral Intentions	25 and below	60	4,16	0,46	0,049	0,996	0,001
	26-35	108	4,16	0,33			
	36-45	93	4,15	0,30			
	46-55	102	4,16	0,39			
	56 and above	63	4,14	0,30			
	Total	426	4,15	0,35			
Museum Experience	25 and below	60	4,21	0,36	1,297	0,270	0,014
	26-35	108	4,12	0,37			
	36-45	93	4,14	0,38			
	46-55	102	4,08	0,31			
	56 and above	63	4,11	0,27			
	Total	426	4,13	0,34			

Note. *p<0.05; further analysis was performed using the Scheffe test. Attitude scores towards tangible cultural heritage did not show significant differences according to age groups (F = 0.798; p = 0.527>0.05). See Table 7.

Table 7
Comparison of Tourists' Attitudes Towards Tangible Cultural Heritage by Age Group

Age Group	N	Mean	Sd	F	p	η^2
25 and below	60	4,22	0,31	0,798	0,527	0,013
26-35	108	4,17	0,19			
36-45	93	4,17	0,22			
46-55	102	4,15	0,24			
56 and above	63	4,16	0,20			
Total	426	4,17	0,23			

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Comparisons Based on Education Level

As seen in Table 8, no significant difference was found in the 'Behavioral Intentions' subscale regarding education level ($F = 2.165$; $p = 0.072$). Significant differences were found across all other subscales (Objective Authenticity, Existential Authenticity, Quality of Experience, Perceived Value, Attitude) by education level ($p < 0.01$). Scheffe's advanced analyses revealed that elementary and high school graduates had lower perceptions of authentic tourism experiences compared to associate's, bachelor's, and master's/doctoral graduates. Similarly, a significant difference was found in the museum experience scale based on education level. As education levels increased, museum experiences were found to contain richer, more positive content.

Table 8
Comparison of Tourists' Authentic Tourism Experiences and Museum Experiences According to Their Education Level

	Education Level	N	Mean	Sd	F	p	η^2
Objective	Elementary	33	3,84	0,37	8,009	0,000**	0,073
	High School	32	4,14	0,32			
	Associate degree	67	4,09	0,31			
	Bachelor's Degree	203	4,18	0,34			
	Master's/Doctorate	91	4,20	0,37			
	Total	426	4,14	0,35			
Existential	Elementary	33	3,95	0,43	6,866	0,000**	0,067
	High School	32	4,09	0,30			
	Associate degree	67	4,27	0,33			
	Bachelor's Degree	203	4,23	0,34			
	Master's/Doctorate	91	4,23	0,32			
	Total	426	4,21	0,35			
Quality of	Elementary	33	3,99	0,36	9,276	0,000**	0,088
	High School	32	4,36	0,33			
	Associate degree	67	4,39	0,35			
	Bachelor's Degree	203	4,37	0,35			
	Master's/Doctorate	91	4,38	0,34			
	Total	426	4,34	0,36			
Perceived Value	Elementary	33	3,98	0,37	7,892	0,000**	0,072
	High School	32	4,05	0,28			
	Associate degree	67	4,29	0,32			
	Bachelor's Degree	203	4,25	0,29			
	Master's/Doctorate	91	4,22	0,37			
	Total	426	4,21	0,33			
Attitude	Elementary	33	3,92	0,34	10,062	0,000**	0,010

Table 8
Continued

	High School	32	3,95	0,41			
	Associate degree	67	4,32	0,36			
	Bachelor's Degree	203	4,24	0,37			
	Master's/Doctorate	91	4,17	0,43			
	Total	426	4,19	0,40			
Behavioral	Elementary	33	4,00	0,54	2,165	0,072	0,021
	High School	32	4,13	0,25			
	Associate degree	67	4,22	0,35			
	Bachelor's Degree	203	4,16	0,33			
	Master's/Doctorate	91	4,16	0,33			
	Total	426	4,15	0,35			
	Elementary	33	3,84	0,42	7,936	0,000**	0,072
	High School	32	4,27	0,34			
	Associate degree	67	4,16	0,39			
	Bachelor's Degree	203	4,13	0,31			
	Master's/Doctorate	91	4,14	0,29			
	Total	426	4,13	0,34			

Note. **p<0.01; further analysis was performed using the Scheffe test.

Table 9 shows significant differences in tourists' attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage by educational level (F = 10.086; p < 0.01). According to Scheffe's advanced analyses, associate's, bachelor's, and master's/doctoral degree graduates have higher, more positive attitude scores than primary and elementary school graduates.

Table 9
Comparison of Tourists' Attitudes Towards Tangible Cultural Heritage Regarding Their Education Level

Educational Level	N	Mean	Sd	F	p	η^2
Elementary	33	3,94	0,39	10,086	0,000**	0,089
High School	32	4,06	0,22			
Associate degree	67	4,19	0,19			
Bachelor's Degree	203	4,21	0,18			
Master's/Doctorate	91	4,23	0,24			
Total	426	4,17	0,23			

Note. **p<0.01; Scheffe's advanced analysis was used.

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The Impact of Authentic Tourism Experiences and Museum Experiences on Attitudes Towards Tangible Cultural Heritage

Table 10 presents the results of the regression analysis examining the effects of authentic tourism and museum experiences on attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage. Before the analysis, VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values were calculated, and the values ranged between 1.00 and 1.00. These values (VIF < 3) indicated no multicollinearity among the variables (Yurt, 2023). The established linear regression model was significant ($F = 96.59$; $p < 0.001$). Authentic tourism and museum experiences explain 18% of the variation in participants' attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage ($R^2 = 0.18$). According to the beta value ($\beta = 0.431$; $p < 0.001$), museum experience has a statistically significant positive effect on attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage. The model explains 18% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.18$), which represents a moderate effect size according to Cohen's (1988) classification, and indicates that additional variables beyond museum and authentic tourism experience also contribute to heritage attitudes. This finding indicates that tourists with rich museum experience develop a stronger commitment to the values of cultural heritage conservation.

Table 10
Regression Analysis Results

Model	Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	T	P	Tollerance	VIF
1	(Fixed)	2,974	0,122		24,323	0,000**		
	Museum Experience	0,290	0,030	0,431	9,828	0,000**	1,00	1,00

Note. **p < 0,01; Dependent Variable: Attitude Towards Tangible Cultural Heritage; R = 0,43; $R^2 = 0,18$; F = 96,59; p < 0,001.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined authentic tourism and museum experiences, as well as attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage values, among local and foreign tourists visiting museums in Kazakhstan, while controlling for gender, age, and education. Overall, participants reported high levels of positive perceptions of authentic tourism and museum experiences. Regarding gender, a significant difference was found in the experience quality dimension, favoring women. No significant differences were found in other dimensions or attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage regarding gender. Across age groups, younger tourists had significantly higher perceptions of objective authenticity and experience quality than older tourists. However, no significant age-related differences were found in the dimensions of museum experience and attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage. As the educational level increased, significant improvements were observed across almost all sub-dimensions of both authentic tourism experience and museum experience. Attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage also showed significant differences by education level. The study's results also highlighted that museum experience significantly and positively predicted attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage.

Authentic Tourism Experience and Museum Life

The study's findings reveal that participants' authentic and museum experiences largely followed a similar pattern with respect to the gender variable. No significant differences were observed among the sub-dimensions of Objective Authenticity, Existential Authenticity,

Perceived Value, Attitude, Behavioral Intentions, and Museum Experience. A significant difference was found in the Experience Quality dimension in favor of female tourists. Female participants' perceptions in this dimension were more positive than those of males, suggesting that the museum environment can offer a highly authentic and meaningful experience regardless of gender.

However, gender plays a limited but determining role in the qualitative evaluation of the experience. The literature has documented that female tourists place greater importance on emotional and aesthetic values in the museum experience than male tourists do. They develop higher expectations regarding service quality and exhibit a more detail-oriented attitude (Hudson & Thal, 2013; McIntosh & Prentice, 1999; Poria et al., 2004). The conclusion that gender is not a determining factor in the objective, existential, and perceptual dimensions of authenticity supports the idea that the fundamental layers of meaning in cultural experience have a universal character (Wang, 1999).

According to the findings, a partial differentiation was observed in participants' authentic tourism experiences based on age groups. Tourists under 35 reported higher perceptions of Objective Authenticity and Experience Quality. However, no significant difference was found between age groups in the sub-dimensions of Existential Authenticity, Perceived Value, Attitudes, and Behavioral Intentions. No significant age-based differentiation emerged in the Museum Experience dimension. The fact that young tourists approach the historical authenticity of objects and the holistic quality of the experience with greater sensitivity is consistent with findings in the experience economy literature, which show that younger generations demand authentic, personal, and unique experiences (Pasaco-González et al., 2023; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). It is also known that young individuals use digital and interactive elements in museum environments more effectively, which positively affects perceptions of experience quality (Jung et al., 2016; Neuhofer et al., 2015). The fact that existential authenticity and behavioral intentions do not differ by age indicates that the search for cultural meaning is not exclusive to younger generations and that visitors, regardless of age, can derive meaningful insights from museum environments (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Wang, 1999).

Educational level stands out as the demographic variable that most consistently differentiates authentic tourism experiences from museum experiences in this study. In all sub-dimensions except Behavioral Intentions, a significant increase in positive perception was observed as educational level increased; Scheffe's advanced analyses revealed that the scores of primary and secondary school graduates lagged those of participants with associate degrees or higher. This finding suggests that educational level is directly related not only to knowledge accumulation but also to meaning-making capacity, historical context-building skills, and critical sensitivity to cultural content.

Considering the information-intensive nature of museum environments, individuals with higher educational levels use higher-level cognitive processes more effectively, such as contextualizing objects, making comparisons, and generating interpretations (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Kesner, 2006). The literature also documents a strong correlation between educational level and the quality of cultural tourism experiences; researchers have found that individuals with high learning motivation process museum environments systematically. This study's findings confirm this relationship in Kazakhstan (Bitgood, 2002; Packer & Ballantyne, 2002).

The Debate on Attitudes Towards Tangible Cultural Heritage

The study's findings revealed that participants' attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage do not differ significantly by gender. Female and male tourists exhibited similar and highly positive attitudes in this dimension. The significance of this finding is that the gender

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difference observed in the quality-of-experience dimension is equalized at the level of heritage attitudes, demonstrating that cultural preservation awareness is shaped independently of gender.

While the literature suggests that female tourists have stronger emotional and identity-based connections to heritage sites (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999; Poria et al., 2004), this convergence in heritage attitudes indicates that museums provide a gender-neutral foundation for heritage awareness. This result also highlights cultural heritage's capacity to bring individuals together around a collective identity and shared historical memory (Chronis, 2012). This study makes a unique contribution to the literature by demonstrating that cultural heritage awareness among museum visitors in Kazakhstan extends across demographic groups. However, the strength of this pattern warrants further investigation with more representative samples.

Participants' attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage did not differ significantly according to age groups. Tourists across age groups exhibited similar, highly positive attitudes in this dimension. This finding reveals that the age-based differentiation observed in objective authenticity and quality of experience loses validity at the attitudinal level, and that the value of heritage preservation exhibits an awareness pattern that is not age-dependent. This result contradicts the common assumption that younger generations are detached from heritage awareness and suggests that across generations, ownership and preservation motivation for Kazakhstan's cultural heritage are similar. This situation can be partly explained by the strong emphasis on national cultural identity conveyed by Kazakhstan's heritage sites. Experiences grounded in a collective historical narrative can produce attitudinal convergence across individual demographic differences (Chronis, 2012; Qazaq Culture, 2024). The literature also emphasizes that visiting heritage sites creates an emotional bond in individuals, thereby strengthening attitudes towards preservation regardless of age (Poria et al., 2004).

Educational level was a determining factor in participants' attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage, as tourists with associate's degrees or higher had significantly higher heritage attitude scores than those with primary or secondary school diplomas. This finding suggests that higher education equips individuals with the capacity to construct historical context, engage in critical reading, and produce cultural meaning, and this capacity is directly reflected in attitudinal sensitivity towards heritage values.

The importance of this pattern lies in the fact that education has a consistent and parallel effect on both the quality of experience and heritage attitudes. This effect reveals that cognitive enrichment and value-based sensitization progress together. While the positive relationship between educational level and heritage conservation attitudes has been documented across different cultural contexts in the literature, confirming this relationship with quantitative data in the Kazakhstan context constitutes a unique contribution to the field (Gunden, 2021; Dönmez & Yeşilbursa, 2023). Uzun's (2020) study also showed that heritage conservation awareness is strongly related to formal education. The current research also confirms this trend in the tourist sample.

Impact of Authentic Tourism Experiences and Museum Life on Attitudes Towards Tangible Cultural Heritage

One of the study's prominent findings is that authentic tourism and museum experiences significantly and positively predict attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage. This finding shows that museum experience, beyond being merely an aesthetic or informational practice, can transform an individual's attitudinal structure towards cultural heritage values. This suggests that museums may function as important contexts for developing heritage awareness. It is thought that the quality of the experience and the perception of authenticity cumulatively contribute to heritage conservation attitudes, and that repeated or high-quality visits may

contribute to attitudinal change over time. The literature emphasizes that museum experience connects individuals with the past, creating cultural and historical ties. This connection, over time, transforms into tangible conservation attitudes and a consciousness of heritage ownership (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Poria et al., 2004). The pursuit of authentic experiences directly fuels interest in cultural heritage sites. This interest is integrated with the conservation drive, particularly evident in the existential dimension of authenticity (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Wang, 1999). The model explains only a relatively limited portion of the change in attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage. This explanation indicates that additional factors, such as cultural identity, sense of belonging, and prior heritage experience, influence the attitudinal structure and that these variables should be included in the model in future research (Atzeni et al., 2022; Stepchenkova & Park, 2021).

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have several implications for both museum management and cultural heritage policies. The finding that authentic tourism and museum experiences significantly and positively influence attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage suggests that museums should be positioned as strategic educational environments that shape societal awareness of heritage. Significant differences identified by educational level necessitate the development of inclusive presentation strategies that include visitors with lower levels of education. In this regard, visual aids, simple narrative language, and interactive guiding applications come to the forefront. Findings regarding age groups indicate that integrating technology-based tools such as augmented reality, virtual reality, and mobile applications into experience designs for young museum visitors will significantly enhance the quality of the experience (Jung et al., 2016; Zollo et al., 2022). In Kazakhstan, integrating heritage site management with the museum experience and raising exhibition standards can play a vital role in transmitting the region's unique cultural identity to future generations.

Limitations

While this study is valuable for its findings, it has several limitations. First, the study's use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of its findings to all museum visitors in Kazakhstan. Random sampling methods can help reach a broader, more representative segment of the population (Babbie, 2020). Second, using only quantitative measurement tools in the study limits the ability to capture in-depth statements from participants about their museum experience and heritage attitudes. Adopting qualitative or mixed methods approaches in future studies will help close this gap. Third, the study has a limited focus on a single country and a specific time, ignoring differences in seasonal visitor behavior. Fourth, evaluating the overall experience without differentiating among museum types prevents identifying effects specific to museum types. Fifth, considering that the regression model explains only a portion of the variance in the dependent variable, including variables such as cultural identity, sense of belonging, and prior heritage experience in future studies could significantly increase its explanatory power.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to museum managers, cultural heritage policymakers, and tourism planners. Given that the museum experience significantly influences attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage, museum managers need to develop layered experience strategies tailored to visitor profiles. In this context, the adoption of visual materials and interactive guidance for visitors with lower levels of education, and

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digital tools such as augmented reality and virtual reality for younger visitors, is crucial. In Kazakhstan, integrating heritage site management with the museum experience, raising exhibition standards, and developing multilingual guiding services will directly enhance the quality of the experience for foreign tourists. Future studies should include comparative analyses based on museum types, work with international samples, adopt longitudinal designs, and utilize mixed methods approaches, all of which will make valuable contributions to the field.

Conclusion

This study comprehensively reveals how authentic tourism and museum experiences, and attitudes towards the tangible cultural heritage of local and foreign tourists visiting museums in Kazakhstan, differ according to demographic variables and the direction of the relationships between these variables. The quality of the museum experience directly and strongly influences an individual's attitude towards cultural heritage preservation. Education stands out as the most consistent determinant variable for both authentic tourism experience and heritage attitudes. The entirety of these relationships is theoretically supported by Wang's (1999) existential authenticity theory and Falk and Dierking's (2013) contextual learning model. The present study offers a unique contribution to the heritage tourism literature by using quantitative data to examine the relationship between museum experience and heritage attitudes in transition economies such as Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's potential to become a significant cultural tourism destination with its World Heritage sites and thousands of heritage sites is directly proportional to investments in the quality of museum experiences.

Informed Consent form

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study prior to their participation.

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Authors Contributions

Z.S., S.Ö.A and G.K. conceptualized the study, led the design of the research process. All authors contributed to the design of the research instruments and the research process. S.B., K.S and G.K coordinated the research team and managed all correspondence with the journal. Z.S., S.Ö.A., S.B and Ö.S. reviewed and edited the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study comprised with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, it underwent internal ethical review and was granted

expedited approval, as it presented minimal risk and involved voluntary, anonymous participation. Participants were informed of the study's objectives, their right to withdraw at any stage and the assurance of confidentiality. No personally identifiable information was gathered, and all data was used solely for academic and research purposes.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data is not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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