

The Role of Cultural Journalism in Shaping Experiential Tourism Trends in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT: Vietnam's cultural and heritage tourism is growing rapidly, yet there is limited understanding of how media content shapes tourists' motivations and behaviors. High-quality journalistic content such as credible, informative, and emotionally engaging can inspire travelers, but the mechanisms linking media exposure to participation intention remain underexplored. This study examines the impact of journalistic content quality on participation intention in indigenous culture tours, considering the mediating role of travel inspiration and the moderating effect of social media engagement. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Uses and Gratifications Theory, 317 young Vietnamese travelers were surveyed, and collected data were analyzed using PLS-SEM through SmartPLS 3. The results show that journalistic content quality enhances travel inspiration, which in turn strengthens participation intention, while meaningful social media engagement amplifies this effect. Interestingly, the study also reveals that not all social media interactions are equally effective, with superficial engagement potentially reducing motivation. These findings highlight the importance of content authenticity, emotional resonance, and interactive engagement in shaping cultural tourism behavior. Overall, the study provides theoretical insights into the role of media and psychological processes in tourism behavior and offers practical guidance for journalists, marketers, and policymakers to create authentic and engaging content that motivates cultural tourism.

KEYWORDS: Cultural journalism; cultural tourism participation intention; indigenous culture tour; social media engagement; travel inspiration.

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture has long been recognized as a dynamic and multifaceted concept, encompassing both artistic expressions and the broader ways of life that define societies. The aesthetic tradition, originating in Ancient Greece, viewed culture as a means of achieving intellectual and moral perfection. However, with the rise of anthropological and sociological thought, culture came to be understood as the complex whole of human life including knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, 1920). The twentieth century marked a turning point with the emergence of cultural industries and, later, creative industries (UNESCO, 2006; Hartley, 2007), which placed culture at the center of economic and media systems. As a result, culture has increasingly become mediated, industrialized, and commodified shaping new patterns of communication, consumption, and identity. Within this evolving cultural landscape, cultural journalism occupies a distinctive role as a mediator between artistic, social, and economic domains. Historically associated with the high culture tradition (Basso, 2006), cultural journalism has transformed alongside the diversification of cultural production and the expansion of digital media (Kristensen, 2010). It operates at the intersection of journalistic and aesthetic paradigms, balancing informational objectivity with interpretive and evaluative discourse (Jaakkola, 2012). As Jaakkola notes, the practice of cultural journalism involves a framing between the epistemic paradigms of journalistic and aesthetic tradition, which reconciles generalist and specialist perspectives. In this sense, cultural journalism not only reports on cultural phenomena but also shapes them by defining what is newsworthy, valuable, or worthy of attention in contemporary culture.

The rise of digital platforms has further blurred the boundaries between cultural journalism, lifestyle reporting, and consumer-oriented content (Fürsich, 2012; Kristensen & From, 2012). Cultural journalists increasingly produce hybrid narratives that combine factual reporting, storytelling, and affective engagement encouraging audiences to not merely read about culture but to experience it. This transformation is particularly relevant to the field of experiential tourism, which emphasizes authentic,

The Role of Cultural Journalism in Shaping Experiential Tourism Trends in Vietnam

participatory, and emotionally resonant encounters with local cultures. In Vietnam, where tourism development is deeply intertwined with heritage, crafts, and community identity, cultural journalism plays a crucial role in communicating cultural values, curating experiences, and inspiring travel behaviors. The interplay between journalism and tourism has recently attracted growing attention, particularly in the context of post-pandemic recovery and sustainable development. Government representatives have underscored the strategic importance of journalism in promoting tourism and disseminating national policies. The Vietnam National Authority of Tourism emphasized that journalistic communication plays a vital role in implementing governmental guidelines, enhancing public awareness, and accelerating the recovery of the tourism industry after COVID-19. This recognition reflects how journalism, especially cultural journalism, functions not only as an informational channel but also as an instrument of socio-cultural influence, shaping perceptions, aspirations, and behavioral trends among both domestic and international tourists.

Despite this growing recognition, scholarly attention to the influence of cultural journalism on tourism, especially experiential and cultural forms, remains limited. While previous research has examined cultural journalism in terms of media practice, cultural representation, and creative industries (Santos Silva, 2012; Golin & Cardoso, 2009; Hanusch, 2012), little is known about how journalistic content shapes tourists' inspiration and intention to participate in cultural tours. This gap is particularly salient in the Vietnamese context, where both journalism and tourism are undergoing rapid digitalization and localization. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the role of cultural journalism in shaping experiential tourism trends in Vietnam. Specifically, it examines how the quality of journalistic content influences travel inspiration and cultural tour intention, and how social media engagement may further reinforce this relationship. By integrating perspectives from media studies, cultural theory, and tourism behavior, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how media discourse constructs cultural experience and motivates tourist engagement in the digital age. The research paper is divided into five parts: (1) introduction; (2) conceptual framework and hypothesis development; (3) methodology; (4) results and discussion; and (5) implications and conclusion.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Cultural Journalism and Journalistic Content

Cultural journalism represents a complex and hybrid field that has evolved in tandem with the shifting definitions and expanding scope of culture itself. The notion of culture is inherently fluid, heterogeneous, and interdisciplinary which encompasses anthropology, philosophy, semiotics, politics, communication, and everyday practices (Santos Silva, 2012). As early as 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn identified 164 different definitions of culture, underscoring its multidimensional and ever-changing nature. In the contemporary digital era, the convergence of media and technology continues to redefine cultural boundaries, rendering culture more participatory, collective, and networked (Kristensen, 2010). Within this context, cultural journalism emerges not merely as a reflection of cultural phenomena but as a mediating practice that articulates, interprets, and constructs meanings within society's evolving cultural landscape.

Historically, cultural journalism originated as a specialized form of reporting tied to the realms of high culture and the arts, catering primarily to an elite audience of connoisseurs (Basso, 2006). Over time, however, its scope expanded alongside the broadening conception of culture itself from the aesthetic and intellectual focus on fine arts to the anthropological and sociological perspectives proposed by scholars such as Tylor (1920). With the rise of mass culture, cultural journalism began to engage with popular forms of expression, entertainment, and everyday life, reflecting broader shifts in both media practices and societal values (Golin & Cardoso, 2009). Since the 1980s and particularly in the digital age, cultural journalism has undergone profound transformations in editorial strategies, economic models, and narrative formats. While some researchers argue that traditional criticism and in-depth cultural analysis have declined in favor of more entertainment-oriented and commercially driven content (Jaakkola, 2012), others maintain that cultural journalism has not diminished but rather adapted to new forms of production and consumption (Fürsich, 2012). These adaptations have given rise to hybrid genres such as lifestyle features, informal reviews, and cultural guides that prioritize experience, leisure, and participation over analytical critique (Santos Silva, 2014).

In contemporary media practice, the quality of journalistic content within cultural journalism is assessed not only through traditional standards of accuracy, depth, and credibility, but also through its capacity to evoke emotional engagement and foster experiential connection. High-quality cultural journalism integrates factual information with aesthetic and affective dimensions, inspiring readers to imagine, feel, and participate in cultural experiences. As Kristensen (2014) observes, the blurred boundaries between cultural, lifestyle, and consumer journalism reflect a new participatory paradigm, one in which journalistic storytelling acts as a mediator of cultural experience and a catalyst for behavioral change. Within the domain of experiential tourism, this evolving form of journalistic content plays a crucial role. By narrating local heritage, traditions, and creative practices through

The Role of Cultural Journalism in Shaping Experiential Tourism Trends in Vietnam

vivid and evocative storytelling, cultural journalism stimulates travel inspiration and shapes readers' intentions to engage in cultural tourism. Consequently, the quality of journalistic content defined by its clarity, credibility, narrative engagement, and emotional resonance becomes a key determinant of how media discourse contributes to the development of experiential tourism trends in Vietnam and beyond.

Travel Inspiration

Travel inspiration refers to the psychological and emotional processes that stimulate individuals to consider, plan, and eventually engage in travel experiences (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009). It represents the cognitive and affective starting point of the tourist decision-making process, shaping awareness, interest, and behavioral intention toward destinations. According to Hasan et al. (2018), inspiration occurs when external stimuli evoke an internal desire to act, which is manifested as the urge to explore new places, cultures, or experiences. These stimuli often arise from visual or narrative cues embedded in media content, interpersonal communication, or exposure to cultural symbols and representations. Within the framework of experiential tourism, travel inspiration operates as a catalyst that transforms curiosity into intention and participation. Inspirational triggers such as journalistic storytelling, cinematic imagery, and social media narratives activate imagination and emotional anticipation, allowing potential tourists to envision themselves as part of meaningful and memorable experiences (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

The expansion of cultural journalism has diversified the sources and forms of travel inspiration by constructing narrative frameworks that emphasize authenticity, creativity, and identity (Kristensen & From, 2015). Through its representations of local culture, art, and heritage, journalism functions as both an informational and affective medium disseminating knowledge while simultaneously engaging readers emotionally. By doing so, it shapes perceptions of destinations as immersive spaces of cultural discovery and participation. In Vietnam, media portrayals frequently highlight the richness of ethnic traditions, gastronomy, handicrafts, and natural landscapes, serving as affective stimuli that promote experiential and culturally rooted tourism. Empirical evidence further underscores the influence of narrative-driven media in fostering inspiration: Kang & Gretzel (2012) demonstrated that storytelling and aesthetic presentation enhance imaginative engagement and destination desirability, while Hyun (2025) emphasized that storytelling in community-based and sustainable tourism contexts can evoke emotional resonance, social responsibility, and motivation for culturally meaningful participation.

In the digital era, social media has emerged as a powerful mediator of travel inspiration by enabling individuals to experience destinations vicariously through user-generated content and visual storytelling. According to the Social Media Influence Theory (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), these platforms democratize the process of inspiration, fostering a continuous cycle of imagination, sharing, and participation. They transform tourists from passive consumers of information into active co-creators of travel meaning and cultural interpretation. In the Vietnamese context, the synergy between cultural journalism and social media has become increasingly significant: together, they bridge the gap between media representation and experiential tourism behavior. Through interactivity, visual appeal, and narrative continuity, this integration not only informs and inspires travelers but also amplifies their engagement, which shapes motivations, destination choices, and the overall experiential depth of tourism in the digital age.

Experiential Tourism in The Context of Vietnam

Experiential tourism, emphasizing multisensory engagement and personal meaning-making, has emerged as one of the defining paradigms of contemporary tourism development. As Urry & Larsen (2011) and Agapito et al. (2013) highlight, tourist experiences are fundamentally corporeal and multisensory, requiring destinations and tourism operators to design stimuli that engage sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. Sensory-rich storytelling, visual imagery, and immersive cultural narratives, particularly those disseminated through travel journalism and digital media have become essential tools for shaping visitors' perceptions and influencing travel decisions. Research on travelogues and media representation shows that written, photographic, and cinematic portrayals of destinations evoke imagination, stimulate emotional connection, and frame expectations of authenticity and meaning (Crouch & Desforges, 2003; Pan & Ryan, 2009). In this regard, experiential tourism transcends traditional sightseeing to promote active participation, cultural learning, and self-reflection, which turns travel into a process of co-creation between visitors, hosts, and local environments.

In Vietnam, experiential tourism has become a strategic priority within the country's pursuit of sustainable and competitive tourism development. Following the post-pandemic recovery, the tourism sector has demonstrated strong revitalization, largely supported by communication campaigns and the growing influence of cultural journalism. According to the Vietnam National Authority of Tourism (VNAT), Vietnam welcomed approximately 18 million international visitors and over 110 million domestic travelers in 2024, generating total revenue of about VND 935 trillion. Building upon this momentum, the Vietnam Tourism Association, at its national conference "Journalism Accompanying Vietnam's Tourism Development" held in Hanoi in January

The Role of Cultural Journalism in Shaping Experiential Tourism Trends in Vietnam

2025, reaffirmed the essential role of communication agencies, journalists, and particularly the Vietnam Tourism Journalists' Club in promoting tourism recovery and experience-based innovation. The 2025 targets from 22–23 million international arrivals, 120-130 million domestic tourists, and revenue between VND 980–1,050 trillion, which reflect not only ambitious growth expectations but also a strategic shift toward experiential and sustainable tourism models that emphasize cultural immersion and green transformation.

In practice, experiential tourism in Vietnam manifests through diverse local initiatives and community-based programs that foreground authenticity and cultural participation. Destinations such as Hội An, Sa Pa, Ninh Bình, and Huế have successfully integrated cultural heritage with experiential design, which encourages tourists to join craft-making workshops, local gastronomy classes, or ethnic homestays that provide direct interaction with community life. Coastal provinces like Quang Nam and Khanh Hoa have piloted green experience routes combining ecotourism and cultural education, while the Mekong Delta region promotes agro-tourism that connects travelers with farming and riverine lifestyles. The northern mountainous areas, home to numerous ethnic minorities, are leveraging storytelling-based tourism where local guides and cultural journalists collaborate to create authentic narratives of tradition and identity. These developments align with the broader policy orientation under the National Green Growth Action Plan (Decision No. 882/QĐ-TTg, 2022), which underscores the integration of environmental stewardship and cultural sustainability into tourism practices.

Cultural journalism, within this framework, serves not merely as a promotional instrument but as a form of experiential mediation that stimulates imagination and emotional resonance. Through feature articles, travel documentaries, and digital storytelling, journalists construct sensory and affective representations of destinations depicting heritage, gastronomy, and landscapes in ways that invite readers to experience culture vicariously before traveling. This aligns with global trends in experiential media, where travel content on social networks and online platforms co-creates anticipation and engagement through narrative immersion (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In Vietnam, collaborations between tourism authorities and media outlets such as VTV4's Vietnam Discovery exemplify this convergence: they blend journalism, storytelling, and cultural advocacy to inspire meaningful travel. Thus, experiential tourism in Vietnam represents not only a response to evolving consumer preferences but also a strategic pathway for sustainable national development anchored in cultural authenticity, community participation, and the communicative power of journalism.

The Relationship Between Journalistic Content Quality, Travel Inspiration and Participation Intention

This study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1991), which posits that behavioral intention is determined by three psychological components: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of tourism, exposure to media content, particularly journalistic storytelling, can shape these determinants by influencing how individuals evaluate destinations, perceive social expectations, and assess their ability to engage in tourism activities. Additionally, the Inspiration Theory (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009) provides a complementary perspective by explaining how emotional and imaginative engagement triggered by media stimuli can transform passive perception into active motivation. Integrating TPB and inspiration theory offers a comprehensive lens through which to understand how journalistic content quality stimulates travel inspiration and ultimately drives participation intention toward indigenous culture tours.

Media content plays a pivotal role in constructing cultural meanings and emotional resonance through journalistic storytelling. Journalistic content quality refers to the extent to which tourism-related journalism demonstrates credibility, informativeness, creativity, and affective appeal (Zhang & Zhou, 2020). High-quality journalistic narratives engage audiences both cognitively and emotionally by emphasizing authenticity, human-centered stories, and local distinctiveness (Nam et al., 2024). Within the framework of inspiration theory, these qualities serve as external stimuli that evoke curiosity, admiration, and the desire to explore. In Vietnam, travel journalism increasingly highlights themes of ethnic diversity, ecological preservation, and community life through platforms such as Vietnam Tourism Review and VTV4's Vietnam Discovery. Such storytelling not only transmits factual information but also stimulates emotional engagement, which allows audiences to imagine immersive encounters with indigenous cultures. Therefore, when journalistic content is perceived as credible, rich, and aesthetically engaging, it is likely to inspire individuals to pursue authentic cultural experiences. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Journalistic content quality has a significant relationship with travel inspiration towards indigenous culture tours in Vietnam.

Travel inspiration functions as the psychological bridge that converts emotional engagement into behavioral intention. According to Gretzel & Fesenmaier (2009), inspiration arises when individuals experience affective arousal and imaginative engagement that trigger a desire to act. Once inspired, individuals are more likely to form favorable attitudes, visualize participation, and develop concrete intentions to travel. Within the TPB framework, travel inspiration strengthens positive

The Role of Cultural Journalism in Shaping Experiential Tourism Trends in Vietnam

attitudes toward indigenous culture tours, reinforces subjective norms that value cultural appreciation, and enhances perceived control by fostering confidence in planning and participation (Han et al., 2020). Empirical studies support this relationship, for instance, Kang & Gretzel (2012) found that narrative-rich and aesthetically appealing media increase destination desirability, while Pérez et al. (2013) demonstrated that affective storytelling encourages responsible tourism intentions. In the Vietnamese context, where cultural journalism often celebrates local authenticity and sustainable practices, travel inspiration becomes a key motivational factor linking media influence to actual travel behavior. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Travel inspiration has a significant relationship with participation intention towards indigenous culture tours in Vietnam.

While high-quality journalistic content informs, educates, and persuades audiences, its ultimate impact on behavior depends on the level of inspiration it generates. TPB suggests that external communication can shape behavioral intentions indirectly through internal psychological processes. Here, travel inspiration serves as that mediating mechanism, which could translate cognitive evaluation and emotional resonance into a concrete desire to participate. When audiences consume compelling journalistic narratives about Vietnam's indigenous regions such as Sa Pa, Ha Giang, or the Central Highlands, which are not only exposed to credible information but also experience emotional uplift, imagination and aspiration to explore. This transformation from perception to motivation exemplifies the mediating effect of inspiration. In this sense, journalistic content quality influences participation intention not directly, but through the psychological process of inspiration that converts media exposure into travel motivation. Empirical evidence supports this mediating relationship. For instance, Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier (2009) demonstrated that mediated storytelling such as shared travel videos and articles enhances tourists' sense of presence and emotional engagement, which in turn stimulates behavioral intentions. Similarly, Kang & Gretzel (2012) found that narrative imagery in digital media influences both the affective and cognitive dimensions of inspiration, mediating the link between media exposure and intention to visit. In a more recent study, Sihombing et al. (2024) confirmed that memorable and emotionally rich travel experiences, often triggered by media narratives, act as psychological mediators transforming informational stimuli into concrete travel decisions. Within the Vietnamese context, this mechanism is observable in the growing influence of cultural journalism and social media storytelling that promote indigenous destinations through affective and experience-based narratives. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Travel inspiration mediates the relationship between journalistic content quality and participation intention towards indigenous culture tours in Vietnam.

The Moderating Role of Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement represents the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement of users when interacting with tourism-related content across digital platforms (Kasemsarn & Nickpour, 2025). It includes activities such as liking, sharing, commenting, following influencers, and participating in destination-centered discussions. These forms of engagement enhance users' sense of connectedness and co-creation in the tourism experience. In the context of cultural and heritage tourism, SME sustains tourists' exposure to visual storytelling, peer experiences, and community narratives that reinforce emotional resonance with destinations and foster experiential motivations (Luong, 2025).

Grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (Katz et al., 1973), SME can be understood as a response to individuals' psychological and social needs for information, inspiration, entertainment, and interaction. In tourism settings, engagement with social media not only satisfies the need for destination knowledge but also strengthens emotional stimulation and social validation. High levels of SME amplify the psychological connection between travel inspiration and participation intention by enhancing emotional arousal, destination imagery, and perceived social endorsement. For example, when individuals frequently engage with inspirational travel posts or cultural storytelling on social networks, they are more likely to transform abstract inspiration into concrete behavioral intentions such as planning, booking, or joining indigenous culture tours. Conversely, low levels of SME may weaken this linkage, as passive media consumption provides limited affective involvement and reduces personal identification with cultural destinations (Kasemsarn & Nickpour, 2025). Thus, SME acts as a contextual amplifier that magnifies the influence of travel inspiration on participation intention through mechanisms of emotional contagion, social approval, and perceived accessibility. Empirical evidence supports this moderating effect such as Luong (2025) found that Vietnamese youth with higher levels of social media engagement demonstrate stronger behavioral intentions toward adventure and cultural tourism due to their sustained exposure to peer-generated narratives and active participation in digital communities. In Vietnam's contemporary tourism landscape, where social media serves as a dominant arena for cultural promotion and youth engagement, social media engagement is therefore expected to strengthen the relationship between travel inspiration and participation intention toward indigenous culture tours. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Social media engagement moderates the relationship between travel inspiration and participation intention towards indigenous culture tour in Vietnam.

The Role of Cultural Journalism in Shaping Experiential Tourism Trends in Vietnam

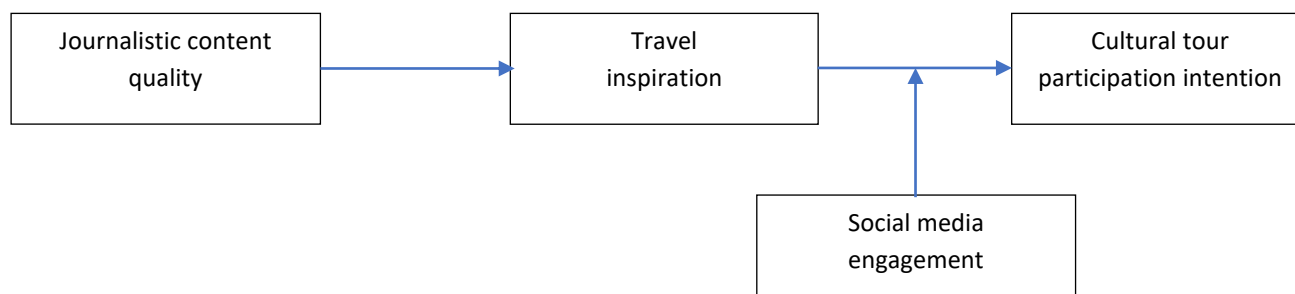


Figure 1. Research Model

III. METHODOLOGY

Measurement Instrument and Questionnaire Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a structured questionnaire to empirically examine the proposed conceptual model. Quantitative methods are particularly suitable for identifying and testing causal relationships among latent constructs (Creswell, 2009). A cross-sectional survey design was applied to investigate how journalistic content quality influences travel inspiration and participation intention toward indigenous culture tours in Vietnam, with social media engagement acting as a moderating variable. All constructs were operationalized using multiple-item five-point Likert scales (1 = “Strongly disagree,” 5 = “Strongly agree”) adapted from prior validated studies to ensure both content validity and reliability.

The measurement items were carefully contextualized to fit the Vietnamese tourism setting. Journalistic Content Quality (JCQ) was measured using 4 items reflecting informativeness, credibility, and aesthetic presentation, adapted from Jaakkola (2012) and Richards (2014). Travel Inspiration (TI) was assessed with 4 items capturing emotional arousal and imaginative engagement, adapted from Pan & Ryan (2009) and Hanusch (2010). Cultural Tour Participation Intention (CI) included 3 items reflecting tourists’ willingness and plan to participate in indigenous cultural tours, adapted from Altunel & Erkurt (2015) and Sihombing et al. (2024). Social Media Engagement (SME) was measured with 5 items addressing interaction, sharing, and emotional involvement with travel content, adapted from Kasemsarn & Nickpour (2025) and Luong (2025).

Sampling and Data Collection

This study employed a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire to examine the role of cultural journalism in shaping experiential tourism trends in Vietnam. The questionnaire was carefully designed based on prior literature to ensure clarity, content validity, and alignment with the research objectives. A pilot test was conducted before the official survey to evaluate the wording, logical flow, and ease of understanding, after which minor adjustments were made to improve reliability and accuracy. The main data collection was carried out within October 2025, employing both online and offline methods. The online survey was distributed via email and social media platforms, while printed questionnaires were administered at universities, cultural events, and local tourism communities to ensure diverse respondent backgrounds. After removing incomplete or invalid responses, a total of 317 valid questionnaires were retained for data analysis. The respondents represented a wide range of demographic characteristics. Regarding gender, both male and female participants were included. In terms of age, participants ranged from those under 18 years old to those above 35 years old. The educational backgrounds of respondents varied, including high school or below, college/bachelor’s degree, and postgraduate level. The occupations of participants consisted of students, government employees, private sector employees, self-employed individuals, and others. Their reported monthly income levels ranged from under 10 million VND to above 30 million VND. This sample size of 317 respondents is considered sufficient for structural equation modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS 3, allowing robust testing of the proposed conceptual framework and hypotheses related to the influence of cultural journalism on experiential tourism behaviors in Vietnam.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 317 respondents who participated in the survey. In terms of gender, female participants accounted for a higher proportion (62.1%) compared to males (37.9%), reflecting the growing presence of women in the cultural tourism audience. Regarding age distribution, the largest group was between 18 and 25 years old (53.0%), followed by those aged 26 to 35 (24.6%), under 18 (13.2%), and above 35 (9.2%). This indicates that the majority of respondents were young adults, an age group that tends to be highly active on social media and more open to experiential and culture-based tourism activities. In terms of educational background, most respondents held or were pursuing a college or bachelor’s degree

The Role of Cultural Journalism in Shaping Experiential Tourism Trends in Vietnam

(66.6%), while 18.6% had postgraduate qualifications, and 14.8% had completed high school or below. This suggests a generally well-educated sample, consistent with the information-oriented nature of cultural journalism and experiential tourism trends. With respect to occupation, students formed the largest proportion (42.9%), followed by private sector employees (24.9%), self-employed individuals (14.2%), government employees (11.7%), and others (6.3%). This occupational mix highlights the inclusion of diverse professional backgrounds, ensuring a balanced perspective on media consumption and travel behavior. Monthly income levels also varied among participants: 38.2% earned under 10 million VND, 35.6% earned between 10 and 20 million VND, 17.4% earned between 20 and 30 million VND, and 8.8% earned above 30 million VND. These figures indicate that the sample represents a range of economic conditions, capturing both budget-conscious travelers and those with higher discretionary spending potential. Overall, the demographic profile demonstrates a young, educated, and diverse respondent group, characteristics that align with the target audience for cultural journalism and experiential tourism in Vietnam.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	120	37.9
	Female	197	62.1
Age	Under 18	42	13.2
	18–25	168	53.0
	26–35	78	24.6
	Above 35	29	9.2
Education level	High school or below	47	14.8
	College/Bachelor's degree	211	66.6
	Postgraduate	59	18.6
Occupation	Student	136	42.9
	Government employee	37	11.7
	Private sector employee	79	24.9
	Self-employed	45	14.2
	Other	20	6.3
Monthly income (in VND)	Under 10 million	121	38.2
	10–20 million	113	35.6
	20–30 million	55	17.4
	Above 30 million	28	8.8
Total		317	100

Source: Data analysis by SPSS 27

Reliability and Validity Assessment

Table 2 presents the results of construct reliability and convergent validity for all latent variables in the model. The values of Cronbach's Alpha for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019), ranging from 0.840 (CI) to 0.910 (SME), indicating strong internal consistency among the measurement items. Similarly, the rho_A values ranged from 0.842 to 0.917, further confirming the reliability of the constructs. The Composite Reliability (CR) values were all above 0.70, with scores between 0.893 and 0.933, suggesting that the constructs consistently measure their intended concepts. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs also exceeded the minimum criterion of 0.50, ranging from 0.677 (JCQ) to

The Role of Cultural Journalism in Shaping Experiential Tourism Trends in Vietnam

0.763 (TI), which confirms good convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results demonstrate that all constructs exhibit satisfactory levels of internal consistency and convergent validity, ensuring the reliability and validity of the measurement model for further structural analysis.

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
CI	0.840	0.842	0.904	0.760
JCQ	0.845	0.872	0.893	0.677
SME	0.910	0.917	0.933	0.736
TI	0.896	0.901	0.928	0.763

Source: Data analysis by SmartPLS 3

Table 3 presents the results of discriminant validity assessment using both the Fornell–Larcker Criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct should be greater than its correlations with other constructs. Moderating Effect 1 in this table refers to the interaction mediator variable generated when testing the moderation effect, for example, the moderating effect of Social Media Engagement (SME) on the relationship between Travel Inspiration (TI) and Participation Intention (CI). As shown in the table, the diagonal values (ranging from 0.823 to 0.874) are higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlations, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity among all constructs. Furthermore, the HTMT values were all below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), ranging from 0.016 to 0.914. This further supports that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another. The absence of excessively high correlations between constructs suggests that each latent variable captures a unique conceptual domain within the model. Overall, both the Fornell–Larcker and HTMT criteria confirm adequate discriminant validity, reinforcing the robustness of the measurement model and supporting its suitability for subsequent structural analysis.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Assessment

	Fornell-Larcker Criterion					Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)				
	CI	JCQ	Moderating Effect 1	SME	TI	CI	JCQ	Moderating Effect 1	SME	TI
CI	0.872									
JCQ	0.331	0.823				0.364				
Moderating Effect 1	-0.013	-0.298	1.000			0.016	0.331			
SME	0.290	0.511	-0.440	0.858		0.329	0.558	0.463		
TI	0.795	0.518	-0.267	0.542	0.874	0.914	0.572	0.280	0.599	

Source: Data analysis by SmartPLS 3

Discriminant Validity Assessment

The Role of Cultural Journalism in Shaping Experiential Tourism Trends in Vietnam

Table 4 presents the structural equation modelling results derived from PLS-SEM analysis. All hypothesized relationships were statistically significant, with t-values exceeding the threshold of 1.96 and p-values below 0.05, confirming strong empirical support for the proposed model. The findings provide meaningful insights into how Journalistic Content Quality (JCQ), Travel Inspiration (TI), and Social Media Engagement (SME) interact to influence Cultural Tour Participation Intention (CI), offering theoretical and practical implications for cultural tourism promotion in the digital era.

Firstly, the results demonstrate that JCQ has a positive and significant effect on TI ($\beta = 0.518$, $t = 11.910$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting that journalistic storytelling quality, characterized by credibility, authenticity, emotional resonance, and narrative coherence, can effectively evoke travelers' curiosity and stimulate their inspiration to explore cultural destinations. Similar to the findings of Jaakkola (2012) and Richards (2014), this study confirms that well-crafted journalistic narratives can trigger emotional arousal and cognitive engagement that lead to heightened travel inspiration. In the context of Northern Vietnam's cultural tourism, high-quality journalistic pieces depicting authentic local life, traditional crafts, and natural landscapes can ignite a sense of wonder and motivation among potential tourists. Such content fosters imaginative engagement that precedes actual travel intention.

Secondly, the path from Travel Inspiration (TI) to Cultural Tour Participation Intention (CI) was found to be strong and significant ($\beta = 0.910$, $t = 21.553$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. This confirms the theoretical assumption that travel inspiration is a key psychological mechanism transforming media exposure into behavioral intention. Consistent with the works of Pan and Ryan (2009) and Hanusch (2010), inspiration acts as a bridge between cognitive stimulation and emotional desire, turning abstract attraction into concrete travel plans. Similarly, Sihombing (2024) emphasized that inspiration fosters not only motivation but also commitment to experiencing culture-rich destinations. In this sense, inspired individuals develop a more personal and affective connection to cultural heritage, which enhances their willingness to participate in local experiences.

Table 4. Structural Equation Modelling Results Estimates

Paths	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Hypothesis Results
H1: JCQ -> TI	0.518	0.518	0.044	11.910	0.000	Accepted
H2: TI -> CI	0.910	0.912	0.042	21.553	0.000	Accepted
H3: JCQ -> TI -> CI	0.472	0.473	0.048	9.755	0.000	Accepted
H4: Moderating Effect 1 -> CI	0.117	0.124	0.048	2.450	0.015	Accepted
SME -> CI	-0.127	-0.125	0.035	3.632	0.000	

Source: Data analysis by SmartPLS 3

Thirdly, the mediating role of Travel Inspiration between JCQ and CI was verified ($\beta = 0.472$, $t = 9.755$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. This mediation underscores that journalistic content does not directly drive cultural tour participation intention; rather, it shapes perception and emotion, which subsequently fuel inspiration and intention. This result is in line with the argument of Altunel and Erkurt (2015) that emotional activation is essential for transforming exposure to cultural information into actionable travel behavior. When journalistic content vividly portrays cultural authenticity, aesthetics, and meaning, it enhances tourists' internal imagery and aspiration, which in turn strengthens their intention to visit.

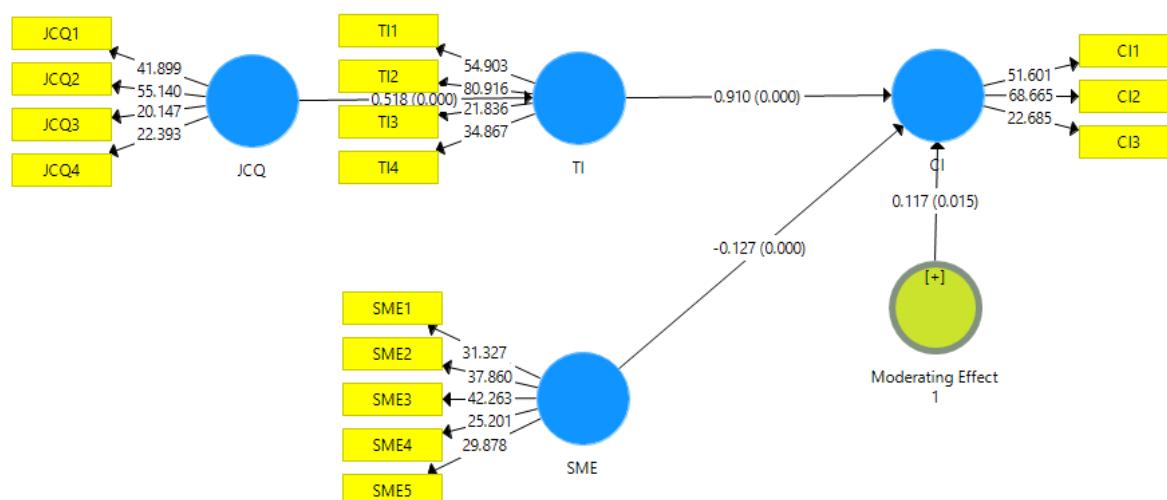


Figure 2. PLS Bootstrapping Model

However, the direct effect of Social Media Engagement (SME) on Cultural Tour Participation Intention (CI) was found to be negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.127$, $t = 3.632$, $p < 0.001$). A plausible explanation is that not all forms of social media engagement necessarily foster meaningful cultural connection. In the Vietnamese context, where online cultural content is often dominated by influencer marketing and entertainment-oriented posts, users may experience information overload or perceive cultural representations as inauthentic. Such dynamics could reduce genuine motivation to participate in real world cultural experiences. This finding contrasts with Luong (2025), who reported a positive influence of SME on travel intention, suggesting that the effect of social engagement may vary depending on content authenticity and audience perception. In this study, excessive or superficial engagement may have led to what can be termed “inspiration fatigue,” where overexposure to digital stimuli results in emotional saturation and diminished behavioral motivation. Thus, while SME remains an important communication channel, it is the quality and depth of engagement rather than its frequency that determine whether social interaction translates into actual cultural travel intention.

The moderating role of SME on the JCQ–CI relationship was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.117$, $t = 2.450$, $p = 0.015$), supporting H4. This indicates that the level and meaningfulness of engagement on social media can strengthen the positive influence of journalistic content quality on cultural tour participation intention. When audiences actively engage by commenting, sharing, or discussing cultural narratives, they are more likely to internalize and emotionally connect with journalistic stories. Consistent with the findings of Kasemsarn & Nickpour (2025), interactive and participatory digital behaviors amplify message credibility, emotional involvement, and behavioral intention. Therefore, social media serves as both an amplifier and a filter: meaningful engagement can enhance the persuasive effect of journalistic content, whereas superficial engagement may diminish it.

Overall, these findings collectively reinforce the conceptual model that journalistic storytelling quality indirectly shapes cultural travel participation intention through the mediating role of travel inspiration and the moderating influence of social media engagement. The study extends prior frameworks by integrating media communication and tourism psychology, demonstrating that narrative quality and digital interaction jointly shape tourist behavior. It supports the view of Jaakkola (2012) that journalistic credibility and narrative depth form the foundation of audience trust and emotional arousal, which, when coupled with inspired cognition as proposed by Pan & Ryan (2009), convert passive consumption into active travel motivation.

V. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several notable theoretical contributions to the fields of tourism studies and media communication. First, it extends the Theory of Planned Behavior by empirically demonstrating that travel inspiration serves as a critical psychological mechanism linking journalistic content quality to cultural tour participation intention. While previous research has highlighted the role of media exposure in shaping attitudes and intentions, this study clarifies that emotional and cognitive engagement, rather than mere exposure, is the primary driver of behavioral motivation. Secondly, the study integrates the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) into tourism research by showing how social media engagement can moderate the effect of journalistic content quality on participation intention. It provides evidence that interactive and meaningful engagement rather

The Role of Cultural Journalism in Shaping Experiential Tourism Trends in Vietnam

than passive consumption, which enhances the persuasive impact of high-quality cultural journalism and highlights the role of digital interactivity as an amplifier of narrative influence. Finally, by focusing on indigenous culture tourism in Vietnam, the research adds context-specific insights into how narrative quality, emotional arousal, and digital behaviors jointly shape tourist decision-making. This contributes to a deeper understanding of media-driven motivation in experiential tourism contexts, particularly among young, digitally engaged audiences.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide valuable guidance for journalists, content creators, and tourism practitioners seeking to enhance cultural tourism participation. Firstly, for journalists and media producers, the results emphasize that high-quality storytelling must go beyond merely conveying information. To inspire travel, content should be emotionally engaging and culturally authentic, highlighting the uniqueness of local traditions, landscapes, and daily life. By crafting narratives that evoke curiosity, empathy, and imagination, journalists can stimulate travel inspiration that eventually translates into tangible behavioral intentions. Visual elements, personal stories, and immersive reporting can all contribute to a stronger emotional connection with potential tourists.

For destination marketers and tourism agencies, the study underscores the importance of an integrated media strategy that combines credible journalistic content with opportunities for audience engagement. Marketing campaigns should not only disseminate high-quality stories about indigenous regions but also encourage interactive participation, such as sharing content, commenting on posts, or joining online cultural discussions. This interaction allows audiences to internalize the narratives and form a deeper emotional attachment to the destination, increasing the likelihood of actual cultural tour participation. Social media strategists also need to reconsider the conventional focus on engagement metrics such as likes or shares. The moderating role of social media engagement in this study highlights that the quality and meaningfulness of interactions matter more than sheer quantity. Encouraging active engagement and reflection through discussions, community storytelling, or participatory campaigns can amplify the persuasive effect of journalistic content, while superficial or entertainment-focused content may lead to inspiration fatigue and diminish motivation to visit.

Finally, policymakers and cultural preservation stakeholders can leverage these insights to promote sustainable and responsible tourism. By supporting authentic storytelling that respects the values and traditions of indigenous communities, digital campaigns can foster cross-cultural understanding and economic benefits for local populations. Training programs for journalists and content creators can emphasize ethical and engaging representation of cultural heritage, ensuring that tourism promotion contributes positively to both communities and visitors.

Limitation and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that provide avenues for future research. Firstly, the sample is limited to young, digitally active Vietnamese respondents, which may limit generalizability to other age groups or cultural contexts. Secondly, the research focuses on indigenous culture tours, and findings may not fully apply to other tourism segments. Future studies could explore cross-cultural comparisons, longitudinal designs, and the differential impact of content types across digital platforms to validate and extend the current model.

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The Role of Cultural Journalism in Shaping Experiential Tourism Trends in Vietnam

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