

Factors Influencing the Quality of Cultural Tourism Experiences: Integrating Don Ca Tai Tu and Cai Luong Performing Arts in the Mekong Delta

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ABSTRACT: This article presents a conceptual framework and research protocol for investigating the factors that influence the quality of cultural tourism experiences associated with *Đờn ca tài tử* (Southern Vietnamese folk music) and *Cải lương* (Vietnamese traditional opera) in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. Recognised by UNESCO as a Representative Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013, *Đờn ca tài tử* embodies the cultural soul of Southern Vietnam. Despite its heritage significance and the growing global shift toward experience-based tourism, the integration of these traditional performing arts into tourism offerings remains underdeveloped and empirically understudied. This article addresses three critical research gaps: the absence of an integrated theoretical framework combining Experience Economy Theory, Authenticity Theory, Co-creation Theory, Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE), and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model; the lack of quantitative studies employing structural equation modelling in this context; and the scarcity of comprehensive research on cultural tourism experiences tied to these art forms in the Mekong Delta. The proposed research employs an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, combining qualitative interviews with artisans, managers, and tourists, followed by a quantitative survey of 400-500 respondents analysed using PLS-SEM. This article contributes to the theoretical advancement of cultural heritage tourism research and offers practical implications for sustainable tourism development in the Mekong Delta.

KEYWORDS: Cultural tourism, intangible cultural heritage, *Đờn ca tài tử*, *Cải lương*, tourist experience, authenticity, co-creation, S-O-R model, Mekong Delta, Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The global shift towards experience-based cultural tourism

The global tourism landscape has undergone a fundamental transformation over the past two decades. Pine and Gilmore's (1998) seminal work on the experience economy heralded a paradigm shift wherein businesses no longer merely sell goods or services but orchestrate memorable experiences that engage customers on emotional, physical, intellectual, and even spiritual levels. This shift has profound implications for cultural tourism destinations worldwide. Richards (2018) and the UNWTO (2020) have documented how the strategic development of traditional arts as distinctive cultural tourism products has become a priority for numerous nations seeking sustainable competitive advantage in an increasingly crowded global tourism market.

Within this evolving landscape, cultural tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry. The UNWTO (2018) defines cultural tourism as a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. Smith and Robinson (2006) and Smith (2009) have emphasised that contemporary cultural tourism extends beyond the mere consumption of pre-existing cultural products to encompass the active construction of meaning by tourists through their interactions with heritage.

1.2 Intangible cultural heritage and performing arts in tourism

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) occupies a particularly significant position within cultural tourism. Unlike tangible heritage, monuments, buildings, and archaeological sites, ICH encompasses living expressions inherited from ancestors and transmitted to descendants, including oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and festive events. The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) has catalysed global attention to ICH, recognising its vital role in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of globalisation.

Performing arts heritage, including traditional music, dance, theatre, and storytelling—represents a uniquely dynamic form of

ICH. As Qian and Li (2024) observe, performing arts heritage offers tourists opportunities for immersive, multi-sensory engagement that transcends the visual consumption characteristic of tangible heritage experiences. However, the commodification of performing arts for tourism consumption presents a persistent tension: how can heritage be made accessible and appealing to tourists without compromising its authenticity and cultural integrity? This tension, which Wang (1999) identified as central to authenticity discourse in tourism, is particularly acute in contexts where traditional arts are adapted, abbreviated, or otherwise transformed for tourist consumption.

International experience offers instructive precedents. In Japan, Kabuki theatre has been successfully adapted for tourism through reduction from 8-10 hours to 60-90 minute performances, incorporating modern sound and lighting technology and electronic subtitles to enhance accessibility for international audiences. Similarly, traditional Chinese opera has been studied by Zheng et al. (2025), who surveyed 481 tourists using PLS-SEM to demonstrate that emotional and socio-economic values significantly influence tourist behaviour through cultural identity and satisfaction. In Indonesia, the Wayang Golek puppet theatre has been abbreviated from 7 hours to 15 minutes (a 96% reduction), serving 140,000 tourists annually while maintaining UNESCO recognition.

1.3 The Vietnamese context: *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương*

Vietnam possesses a remarkably rich tapestry of intangible cultural heritage, including *Hát Xoan*, *Dân ca Ví Giặm Nghệ Tĩnh*, *Bài Chòi*, *Then*, *Xòe Thái*, and numerous other traditions recognised at national and international levels. Among these, *Đờn ca tài tử* (Southern Vietnamese folk music) holds a pre-eminent position. UNESCO inscribed *Đờn ca tài tử* on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on December 5, 2013.

Đờn ca tài tử is a distinctive musical art form that emerged and flourished in Southern Vietnam during the late 19th century. It embodies what Trần Văn Khê (2004) characterised as a unique synthesis of “scholarly and folk” elements, combining the refined musical traditions of Huế court music with the expressive spontaneity of Southern folk culture. The art form is characterised by its improvisational nature: performers incorporate personal variations and emotional nuances into their renditions, making each performance a unique artistic expression. The instrumental ensemble typically features the “four absolutes”, *đàn kìm* (moon lute), *đàn cò* (two-stringed fiddle), *đàn tranh* (zither), and *đàn bầu* (monochord), while the vocal repertoire encompasses twenty principal compositions (*Nhị thập huyền tổ bản*) across four modal categories: *Bắc* (joyful), *Hạ* (solemn), *Nam* (leisurely), and *Oán* (melancholic).

Cải lương, which emerged in 1918 in Mỹ Tho (now part of Đồng Tháp province), represents a theatrical evolution from *Đờn ca tài tử*. This Vietnamese operatic form synthesises the musical foundation of *Đờn ca tài tử*, the theatrical traditions of *hát bội* (Central Vietnamese classical opera), and Western spoken drama. The soul of *Cải lương* resides in the *vọng cổ* (“nostalgia for the past”) rhythm in 32 beats, with the foundational composition “*Dạ cổ hoài lang*” composed by Cao Văn Lầu in 1919. The relationship between *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* is deeply symbiotic: the former provides the musical foundation upon which the latter builds its dramatic structure.

1.4 The Mekong delta: Cradle of Southern cultural heritage

The Mekong Delta (*Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long*) constitutes the geographical and cultural heartland of both *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương*. This region of twelve provinces, characterised by its intricate network of rivers, canals, and alluvial islands, possesses what Trần Ngọc Thêm (2014) and Huỳnh Công Tín (2015) have identified as distinctive cultural characteristics rooted in the “open, generous, and heroic” spirit of its inhabitants.

The Mekong Delta's tourism significance has grown substantially in recent years. According to the Mekong Delta Tourism Association, the region welcomed over 35 million visitors in the first half of 2025 alone, representing a 17.6% year-on-year increase. The region has launched more than 70 new tourism products in 2025, including heritage-focused tours that integrate traditional crafts, riverine culture, and performing arts. Key destinations for cultural tourism include Mỹ Tho City (Đồng Tháp province), An Bình Islet (Vĩnh Long province), Mỹ Khánh Tourism Village (Cần Thơ City), and the Cao Văn Lầu Memorial Site (Bạc Liêu City).

1.5 Research problem and significance

Despite the heritage significance of *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* and the growing tourism potential of the Mekong Delta, the integration of these performing arts into tourism offerings remains underdeveloped. Researcher Nhân Hùng (2025), in his book “*Đờn ca tài tử trong không gian du lịch*” (*Đờn ca tài tử in the Tourism Space*), conducted surveys at numerous Mekong Delta



tourism destinations and concluded, “Overall, the results are not yet high, and the position of traditional Southern Vietnamese folk music in the tourism landscape remains modest and unstable. The most obvious bottleneck is the lack of attractiveness and appeal in the organisation and performance of ĐCTT for tourists.”

Nhâm Hùng (2025) has proposed various models for integrating Đòn ca tài tử into tourism spaces, including performances on tourist buses, “Full Moon Night in the Orchard” tours, and “Cải lương on the flooded fields” experiences. However, these proposals remain largely conceptual, lacking empirical validation regarding their impact on tourist experiences. Meanwhile, scholars such as Trần Văn Khê (2004) have repeatedly warned about the risk of quality degradation if heritage commercialisation is not undertaken with appropriate sensitivity and expertise.

This research addresses three critical gaps in the existing literature:

Gap 1 - Theoretical: No study has integrated Experience economy theory (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), Memorable tourism experience (Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012), Authenticity theory (Wang, 1999), Co-creation theory (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), and the S-O-R model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) within the context of intangible heritage performing arts tourism.

Gap 2 - Methodological: Domestic research on heritage exploitation for tourism has predominantly employed qualitative methods or descriptive statistics, lacking quantitative studies using structural equation modelling (SEM) to measure the impacts of various factors on tourist experiences.

Gap 3 - Content: No comprehensive study has examined the factors influencing cultural tourism experience quality specifically associated with *Đòn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* in the Mekong Delta, the cradle of these art forms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Cultural tourism and intangible heritage

The scholarly discourse on cultural tourism has evolved considerably since the concept gained academic currency in the 1980s. The UNWTO (2018) provides the most widely accepted definition, characterising cultural tourism as tourism in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions of a destination. Smith (2009) extended this conceptualisation by emphasising that cultural tourism is not merely the consumption of pre-existing cultural products but a process of meaning-making through interaction with heritage.

Poria, Butler and Airey (2003) made a crucial theoretical contribution by arguing that heritage tourism is determined not primarily by the characteristics of the heritage itself but by tourists' perceptions of whether a site relates to “their own heritage”. This subjective dimension is particularly significant for intangible heritage, where emotional connection and cultural meaning play decisive roles in shaping tourist experiences.

The concept of creative tourism, as articulated by Richards and Raymond (2000) and elaborated by Richards (2018), offers a generative framework for understanding how tourists can move beyond passive consumption to active participation. Creative tourism provides tourists with opportunities to develop their creative potential through active involvement, a principle that has direct applicability to performing arts tourism, where tourists might participate in workshops, learn traditional instruments, or engage directly with artisans.

2.2 Đòn ca tài tử and Cải lương: Heritage context

Đòn ca tài tử embodies what Trần Văn Khê (2004) characterised as a “scholarly yet folk” aesthetic, a musical form that simultaneously carries the refinement of court traditions and the expressive spontaneity of folk culture. This duality presents both opportunities and challenges for tourism development. On one hand, the art form's sophistication and cultural depth offer rich material for immersive cultural experiences. On the other hand, its complexity and the skill required for authentic performance create barriers to accessibility for tourists with limited cultural backgrounds.

The improvisational character of *Đòn ca tài tử*, wherein performers incorporate personal variations and emotional expression into each rendition, constitutes a distinctive feature that distinguishes it from more formalised performance traditions. As Nguyễn Khánh Hoàng (2024) has observed, this improvisational quality reflects a philosophical orientation toward spontaneity and emotional authenticity that resonates with contemporary tourists' desire for “authentic” experiences.

The relationship between *Đòn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* offers a particularly interesting case for tourism development. *Cải lương* represents a theatrical elaboration of the musical foundation provided by *Đòn ca tài tử*, incorporating dramatic narrative, character



development, and theatrical spectacle. This relationship suggests possibilities for tiered tourism products: introductory experiences focusing on *Đờn ca tài tử* music, more comprehensive experiences incorporating *Cải lương* theatrical elements, and extended immersive experiences combining both forms with opportunities for tourist participation.

Recent developments in Vietnam indicate growing recognition of the tourism potential of these art forms. Long An province, for instance, has over 950 traditional Southern Vietnamese folk music clubs with more than 15,000 members and hosts over 30 competitions, performances, and festivals annually. Tây Ninh province has integrated *Đờn ca tài tử* into its tourism strategy, positioning it as a hallmark of the southeastern region. However, challenges persist, including limited funding, thin succession pools, and the absence of formal training programmes.

2.3 Theoretical foundations

2.3.1 Experience economy theory

Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience economy theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how businesses can create value through the orchestration of memorable experiences. The authors propose four experiential realms, entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics, that collectively constitute the “*experience economy*”. In tourism contexts, Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007) have demonstrated the applicability of this framework, showing how experience dimensions influence tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

For performing arts tourism, the Experience Economy framework offers several insights. First, it suggests that tourism products must move beyond mere performance consumption to create multi-dimensional experiences that engage tourists intellectually, emotionally, and sensorially. Second, it implies that the value of a tourism experience lies not in the performance itself but in the memories and meanings that tourists construct from their engagement with the performance.

2.3.2 Authenticity theory

Wang's (1999) tripartite conceptualisation of authenticity has become a touchstone for tourism scholarship. Wang distinguishes the following:

1. **Objective authenticity:** The original, historically verifiable authenticity of cultural objects and performances
2. **Constructive authenticity:** The socially constructed authenticity negotiated among stakeholders, shaped by expectations and beliefs
3. **Existential authenticity:** The subjective emotional state of tourists when they experience deep connection with themselves and their communities through tourism experiences

Zhang et al. (2020) empirically tested the structural relationships among these authenticity types in cultural heritage tourism contexts, finding that objective authenticity positively influences constructive and existential authenticity, with postmodern authenticity playing a moderating role.

For *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* tourism, existential authenticity assumes particular importance. Tourists seek not merely to “watch” a performance but to “feel” the soul of Southern Vietnamese culture. If performances are perceived as commercially motivated “soulless shows”, experiential value diminishes significantly. This insight has direct implications for performance design: maintaining authenticity while ensuring accessibility requires careful attention to the emotional and spiritual dimensions of the art form.

2.3.3 Co-creation theory

Vargo and Lusch's (2016) service-dominant logic and Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) co-creation framework have fundamentally reshaped understanding of value creation in tourism. The central proposition is that value is always co-created through interaction between service providers and customers. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) identified four building blocks of co-creation experience: Dialogue, Access, Risk-benefit assessment, and Transparency (DART).

In the context of *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* tourism, co-creation implies that tourists can transition from passive spectators to active co-creators by participating in workshops, learning instruments, singing along, or engaging in dialogue with artisans. This shift from “having/doing” to “becoming” (Romana, 2013) represents a fundamental reorientation of the tourist experience and a key factor influencing experience quality.

Wen, Ha and Tan (2025), in their study of the Tujia Bai Shou dance in China, demonstrated that cultural commodification, when appropriately managed, can become a form of sustainable cultural preservation. Their findings suggest that integrating heritage into tourism spaces can generate livelihoods and attract younger generations to participate in preservation efforts.



2.3.4 Memorable tourism experience (MTE)

Kim, Ritchie and McCormick (2012) developed the Memorable tourism experience scale (MTES), comprising seven dimensions: Hedonism, Novelty, Local culture, Refreshment, involvement, Service quality, and Environment. This scale has become a standard instrument for measuring tourist experiences across diverse contexts.

Coelho and Gosling (2018), in their comprehensive review of MTE literature, identified Hedonism, Involvement, Novelty, and Local culture as the most consistently validated dimensions for predicting tourist behaviour. For performing arts tourism, these dimensions suggest that experiences should be enjoyable (hedonism), offer opportunities for active engagement (involvement), provide encounters with the unfamiliar (novelty), and connect tourists with local cultural traditions (local culture).

2.3.5 Theory of planned behaviour (TPB)

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned behaviour provides a framework for understanding how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control shape behavioural intentions. In tourism research, TPB has been extensively applied to explain revisit intention and other behavioural outcomes. Huong, Trang and Phuong (2024), in their study of international tourists in Vietnam, found that destination brand-related factors had the highest impact coefficient (0.655) on revisit intention.

Esfandiar and Hadinejad (2025), in their critical review of TPB applications in tourism, noted that while TPB is widely applied, it requires supplementation with emotional and contextual factors to fully explain tourism behaviour.

2.3.6 The S-O-R model

Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how environmental stimuli influence emotional and cognitive states, which in turn shape behavioural responses. The model has been extensively applied in tourism research to examine how destination attributes (stimulus) influence tourist emotions and cognitions (organism), leading to satisfaction and behavioural intentions (response).

This research adopts the S-O-R model as the overarching framework for structuring relationships:

- **Stimulus:** Tourism product and performance attributes (programme structure, interaction level, language support, performance space, artist skills, storytelling, guide quality, promotion effectiveness)
- **Organism:** Tourists' emotional memory and perceived value
- **Response:** Tourist satisfaction and revisit intention

2.4 Proposed conceptual framework

Synthesising the theoretical foundations outlined above, this research proposes an integrated conceptual framework that positions eight stimulus factors as influencing tourist experiences (measured through emotional memory and perceived value), which in turn shape satisfaction and revisit intention. Perceived authenticity is theorised as a moderating variable that amplifies the effects of stimulus factors on organism variables.

The eight stimulus factors are:

1. **Programme length and structure (RD):** The duration and organisation of the performance
2. **Interaction level (INT):** Opportunities for tourist participation and engagement
3. **Subtitles/Narration support (SUB):** Language accessibility for international tourists
4. **Performance space quality (SPA):** The physical and atmospheric environment of the performance venue
5. **Artists' skills and expressiveness (ART):** The technical proficiency and emotional communication of performers
6. **Storytelling ability (STO):** The narrative quality and cultural interpretation embedded in the performance
7. **Guide quality (GUI):** The knowledge, communication skills, and cultural sensitivity of tour guides
8. **Promotion effectiveness (PRO):** The quality and reach of marketing communications

Perceived authenticity (PAU) is theorised as moderating the relationships between each stimulus factor and the organism variables (emotional memory and perceived value). The organism variables, Emotional memory (MEM) and Perceived value (COV), mediate the relationships between stimulus factors and response variables, Satisfaction (SAT) and Revisit intention (RI).

2.5 Research hypotheses

The conceptual framework generates eighteen hypotheses organised into five groups:

❖ **Group 1: Stimulus → Organism Effects**

- H1a-H1b: Programme length and Structure positively influence Emotional memory and Perceived value
- H2a-H2b: Interaction level positively influences emotional memory and perceived value.
- H3a-H3b: Subtitles/Narration support positively influences Emotional memory and Perceived value
- H4a-H4b: Performance space quality positively influences Emotional memory and Perceived value
- H5a-H5b: Artists' skills and expressiveness positively influence emotional memory and perceived value.
- H6a-H6b: Storytelling ability positively influences Emotional memory and Perceived value
- H7a-H7b: Guide quality positively influences Emotional memory and Perceived value
- H8a-H8b: Promotion effectiveness positively influences Emotional memory and Perceived value

❖ **Group 2: Moderating effects of Perceived authenticity**

- H9a-H9p: Perceived authenticity positively moderates the relationships between stimulus factors and emotional memory/perceived value.

❖ **Group 3: Within-Organism relationships**

- H10: Emotional memory positively influences Perceived value

❖ **Group 4: Organism → Response effects**

- H11: Emotional memory positively influences satisfaction
- H12: Perceived value positively influences satisfaction
- H13: Emotional memory positively influences Revisit Intention
- H14: Perceived value positively influences Revisit Intention
- H15: Satisfaction positively influences Revisit Intention

❖ **Group 5: Mediating effects**

- H16: Emotional memory mediates the relationships between stimulus factors and satisfaction.
- H17: Perceived value mediates the relationships between stimulus factors and satisfaction.
- H18: Satisfaction mediates the relationships between MEM and COV and revisit intention

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research philosophy and design

This research adopts an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2018), combining two research philosophies:

- *Post-positivism in the quantitative phase*: acknowledging that knowledge is constructed from measurable causal relationships
- *Pragmatism at the overarching level*: allowing flexible integration of qualitative and quantitative methods to best address the research questions

The mixed-methods approach is appropriate for this research because the phenomenon under investigation, tourist experiences of intangible heritage performing arts, involves both objectively measurable attributes (e.g., performance duration and facility quality) and subjectively constructed meanings (e.g., emotional resonance and cultural significance). The qualitative phase enables exploration and contextual understanding, while the quantitative phase enables hypothesis testing and generalisation.

3.2 Research procedure

The research proceeds through two sequential phases:

❖ **Phase 1: Qualitative research**

The qualitative phase serves to explore, refine, and supplement the factors, scales, and contextual understanding relevant to tourist experiences of *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương*. Data collection employs two methods:

- **Semi-structured in-depth interviews**: 25-30 participants, including *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* artisans, heritage and tourism managers, tour operators, tour guides, and tourists who have experienced these performances. Participant selection is based on deep knowledge of the field and practical experience.



- **Focus group discussions:** 2-3 groups, each comprising 6-8 tourists who have participated in tourism activities featuring *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* performances.

Data analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis procedure: (1) familiarisation with data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; (6) producing the report.

Phase 2: Quantitative research

The quantitative phase tests the theoretical model and research hypotheses. PLS-SEM (Partial least squares structural equation modelling) is selected over CB-SEM for three reasons (Hair et al., 2022): (1) The research objective is prediction and explanation of variance in dependent variables; (2) the model has a complex structure with multiple variables; (3) the research context is exploratory.

3.3 Scale development and refinement

The measurement scales are adapted and developed through a four-step procedure:

- **Step 1- Adaptation:** Validated scales from prior research are translated and contextually adjusted. Sources include Kim, Ritchie and McCormick (2012) for MTE dimensions, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) and Vargo and Lusch (2016) for co-creation, Zheng et al. (2025) for performing arts tourism, and Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) for service quality.
- **Step 2- Refinement:** Through qualitative research and expert review (5-7 experts, including artisans, cultural researchers, and tourism managers), the Content Validity Index (CVI) is assessed. Items with I-CVI < 0.78 are removed or revised (Polit & Beck, 2006).
- **Step 3 - Pilot test:** A pilot survey of 50 tourists examines clarity, completion time, and preliminary reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.7$).
- **Step 4 – Main survey:** 400-500 valid tourist responses are collected.

3.4 Sampling and data collection

The minimum sample size of 400-500 tourists satisfies the requirements for PLS-SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2022). A convenience sampling method combined with quota sampling (according to the proportion of domestic and international tourists at each destination) is employed.

Data collection sites are located in key Mekong Delta provinces: Mỹ Tho City (Đồng Tháp province), An Bình Islet (Vĩnh Long province), Mỹ Khánh Tourism Village (Cần Thơ City), and the Cao Văn Lầu Memorial Site (Bạc Liêu City). These locations are selected for their significance as centres of *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* heritage and their established tourism infrastructure.

3.5 Data analysis

Data analysis employs SmartPLS 4.0 software:

1. Descriptive statistics: SPSS 26.0 for sample description
2. Measurement model assessment: Composite Reliability (CR > 0.7), Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha > 0.7$), Convergent Validity (AVE > 0.5), and Discriminant Validity (HTMT < 0.85). Multicollinearity is checked (VIF < 5).
3. Structural model assessment: Variance explained (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). Bootstrapping with 5000 resamples estimates path coefficients (β), t-values, and p-values for hypothesis testing.
4. Mediation analysis: Bootstrap procedures test indirect effects.
5. Multi-group analysis (MGA): Differences between domestic and international tourist groups are compared, requiring prior measurement invariance of composite models (MICOM) testing (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016).

3.6 Experimental design (Proposed)

To evaluate the effectiveness of an improved performance model compared to traditional formats, a controlled experiment is proposed at a representative destination (Thới Sơn Islet, Mỹ Tho), drawing on the 10-15 minute script model proposed by Nhâm Hùng (2025).

Participants are randomly assigned to two groups: **Group A** (control - traditional performance) and **Group B** (experimental - enhanced performance with structured narrative, interactive elements, bilingual subtitles, and narration). Each group comprises a minimum of 50 tourists. Measurement occurs pre-intervention (T1) and post-intervention (T2). The independent samples t-test and

paired t-test compare differences. Confounding variables are controlled through identical space, the same artisans, the same timing, and randomisation.

3.7 Research ethics

The research adheres to strict ethical principles: informed consent obtained prior to participation; personal data coded and securely stored; anonymity guaranteed; identities not disclosed in reporting.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This article has presented a comprehensive conceptual framework and research protocol for investigating the factors influencing cultural tourism experience quality associated with *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* in the Mekong Delta. The proposed research addresses significant theoretical, methodological, and content gaps in the existing literature by integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, the experience economy, authenticity, co-creation, MTE, TPB, and S-O-R, within a unified framework.

The research holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the advancement of cultural heritage tourism scholarship by empirically testing an integrated model in the under-researched context of intangible heritage performing arts. Methodologically, it demonstrates the application of mixed-methods and PLS-SEM to cultural tourism research in Vietnam. Practically, the findings will provide evidence-based recommendations for heritage managers, tourism operators, and policymakers seeking to enhance tourist experiences while preserving the authenticity and cultural integrity of these important heritage forms.

Future research directions include: longitudinal studies examining changes in tourist experiences over time; comparative studies across different performing arts traditions in Vietnam and Southeast Asia; investigation of the role of digital technologies in enhancing performing arts tourism experiences; and examination of community perspectives on heritage commodification and tourism development.

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