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How heritage experiential quality, heritage experiential value, heritage destination authenticity and escapism motivation enhance tourist behavioural intention towards World heritage tourism sites

Masimba Elvis Manyangara[a], Phillip Dangaiso[a], Divaries Cosmas Jaravaza[b], Wilbert Manyanga[c], Paul Mukucha[b], Munyaradzi Chibaro[d] and James Kanyepe[d]

[a] Department of Marketing, School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe; [b]Department of Marketing, Bindura University of Science Education, Bindura, Zimbabwe; [c]Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, North West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa; [d]Department of Logistics and Supply Chain Management, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana

ABSTRACT

This study examined how escapism motivation mediates the nexus between heritage experiential quality and tourist behavioural intention. The study further examined the effect of heritage destination authenticity on heritage experiential quality. Data were conveniently collected from 400 tourists visiting World Heritage Tourism Sites in Zimbabwe. A quantitative methodology was employed. The research findings revealed that heritage experiential quality dimensions, which include heritage physical environment, heritage outcome quality, heritage access quality and heritage interactional quality, positively influence tourist behavioural intention towards heritage tourism sites. The research also revealed that behavioural intention of tourists towards heritage tourism sites is enhanced by escapism motivation and heritage experiential value. The study further established that heritage experiential quality significantly improves escapism motivation and heritage experiential value. In addition, the study revealed that heritage destination authenticity positively influences heritage experiential quality. Lastly, the study highlighted that escapism motivation partially mediates the nexus between heritage experiential quality and tourist behavioural intention. The findings of this research contribute to heritage tourism literature. It is strongly recommended that heritage destination marketers and managers should consider heritage experiential quality, heritage experiential value, heritage destination authenticity and escapism motivation when developing strategies that enhance tourist behavioural intention.

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Introduction

Heritage tourism focuses on visiting cultural and historical sites. It relates to travelling with the intention to experience sites, activities, and items that significantly mirror the stories, culture and history of each place, in a way that is authentic (Carreira et al., 2022). Consequently, a critical objective of heritage tourism is to provide tourists with dependable information about the destination, so that they can appreciate the culture and history of the destination. Heritage tourism is a vital form of tourism that responds to rising interest in history, local culture, and heritage (Dinis et al., 2024; Pung et al., 2025). Heritage tourism sites are considered vital drivers that meaningfully contribute to overall national tourism income, with considerable effect on regional and national tourism expansion (Carreira et al., 2022). Damanik and Yusuf (2022) posited that heritage tourism positively leads to tourism growth through attraction of tourists who are interested in the culture and history of a tourism site.

CONTACT Masimba Elvis Manyangara manyangara6@yahoo.com Department of Marketing, School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe

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Heritage tourism represents a vibrant and significant element of the overall global tourism industry, reflecting a major global movement towards heritage and cultural tourism. It has further emerged as a leading form of tourism (Chi et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2025). More notably, it is associated with historical and creative content (Ziarkowski, 2023), thus becoming a vital destination for tourists. It is of paramount importance to note that experiential quality plays a pivotal role in heritage tourism. Experiential quality refers to a tourist's overall assessment of the superiority of the experiences encountered during their interaction with a particular destination. Experiential quality is a core variable in understanding the behavioural intention of tourists within the tourism sector and it plays a crucial role in determining tourists' perceptions and behaviours (Hanafiah et al., 2025). An examination of heritage tourism literature reveals that experiential quality significantly leads to better satisfaction, improved loyalty, and a higher probability of future tourist visits to the heritage tourism site. Hussein and Hapsari (2021) posited that in heritage tourism, experiential quality is regarded as a significant antecedent of behavioural intention. Tourist behavioural intention refers to a tourist's anticipated behaviour towards a destination, such as intention to revisit the destination and positive recommendation to family and friends (Pung et al., 2025).

While prior studies in heritage tourism discourse have expounded the significance of experiential quality towards tourist behavioural intention, huge empirical gaps still exist in heritage tourism literature (Hussein & Hapsari, 2021). The first gap in literature is the lack of studies in heritage tourism sites in Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economies that quantitatively expounded how heritage experiential quality affects tourist behavioural intention. Most existing studies examining heritage tourism were conducted in Europe and Asia. Examples include Carreira et al. (2022) in Spain, Domínguez-Quintero et al. (2019) in Spain, Pung et al. (2025) in Italy, Chi et al. (2024) in China, Lu et al. (2022) in China, Wang et al. (2025) in China, and Hussein and Hapsari (2021) in Indonesia. Prior empirical studies did not endeavour to expound the effect of heritage experiential quality on tourist behavioural intention in a Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economy, consequently creating a huge heritage tourism and marketing literature gap. To cover this noteworthy empirical gap, it is critical to quantitatively examine how heritage experiential quality dimensions drive behavioural intention of tourists visiting Zimbabwe's heritage tourism sites.

The second gap is the lack of empirical studies that quantitatively examined how escapism motivation mediates the nexus between heritage experiential quality and behavioural intention. Escapism motivation can be defined as the process of escaping one's everyday routine in search of extraordinary routines or experiences (Baghel & Dubey, 2026; Vespestad et al., 2026). Existing scholars extensively examined the interplay between experiential quality, experiential satisfaction and perceived value (Hanafiah et al., 2025; Hussein & Hapsari, 2021; Wu et al., 2018). To add novelty and value to the body of knowledge, this study co-opted escapism motivation as a mediating variable on the nexus between heritage experiential quality and tourist behavioural intention. Destination authenticity is acknowledged as the overall perceptions of tourists on how honest their experiences of a cultural site feel (Pung et al., 2025).

The third gap is that the majority of present studies in tourism have examined heritage destination authenticity in relation to tourism motivation, place attachment, satisfaction and destination image (Carreira et al., 2022; Chi et al., 2024), consequently creating a huge gap in literature on how heritage destination authenticity significantly influences heritage experiential quality (Carreira et al., 2022). To cover this significant empirical gap, it is critical to quantitatively examine how heritage destination authenticity predicts heritage experiential quality.

Grounded in the existing gaps, this paper aims to address three critical objectives, namely, to establish the effect of heritage experiential quality dimensions on behavioural intention of tourists; to ascertain the effect of heritage destination authenticity on heritage experiential quality, and to test how escapism motivation mediates the nexus between heritage experiential quality dimensions and behavioural intention of tourists using the TOURQUAL model. The study seeks to provide clear answers to the subsequent questions: Do heritage experiential quality dimensions improve behavioural intention of tourists? How does heritage destination authenticity affect heritage experiential quality? What effect does escapism motivation have on the interaction between heritage experiential quality dimensions and behavioural intention of tourists?

This paper makes substantial contributions to heritage tourism: Firstly, the paper quantitatively examines the interaction between dimensions of heritage experiential quality and behavioural intention in a Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economy, a study area heavily ignored by researchers in heritage tourism. Secondly, the study quantitatively examines the effect of heritage destination authenticity on heritage

experiential quality, a research area notably overlooked by researchers as well (Carreira et al., 2022). Lastly, the study improves heritage tourism literature by examining how escapism motivation mediates the interplay between heritage experiential quality and behavioural intention of tourists, a research area previously overlooked by researchers.

Theoretical literature

TOURQUAL model

The Service quality model (SERVQUAL model) and Service performance model (SERVPERF model) measurement items have been extensively used in tourism and hospitality studies (Wu et al., 2018). However, both models fall short in addressing experiential quality. Wu et al. (2018) and Alves de Medeiros et al. (2026) queried the applicability of the SERVQUAL model in examining service quality in the tourism and hospitality sector. Consequently, to effectively measure experiential quality in heritage tourism, the Tourism Service Quality Model (TOURQUAL model) was considered in this study. The TOURQUAL model has been applied successfully to examine quality in World Heritage Sites (Alves de Medeiros et al., 2026; Souza-Neto et al., 2024). Manyangara et al. (2025) postulated that the TOURQUAL model developed by Mondo and Fiates (2017) examines quality in tourism based on physical environment quality, access quality, human and interactional quality, technical quality, and experience quality dimensions.

The four dimensions of heritage experiential quality adopted in this study, namely, heritage physical environment (HPEQ), heritage access quality (HAC), heritage outcome quality (HOC), and heritage interactional quality (HIC), significantly link with the TOURQUAL model. Heritage physical environment refers to the visible and tangible physical facilities of a heritage tourism site which include buildings provided to tourists (Hussein & Hapsari, 2021; Manyangara et al., 2025). Heritage experiential quality is quantified through assessing heritage interaction quality and it relates to the interpersonal interactions that exist between tourists and employees employed at a particular heritage tourism site (Hussein & Hapsari, 2021; Sevilmiş et al., 2024). Human interaction that exists between employees and customers significantly shapes behavioural intention of the customer towards the company (Sevilmiş et al., 2024). Heritage outcome quality indicates benefits derived by tourists from visiting a particular heritage tourism site (Wang et al., 2025). Benefits obtained by tourists include emotional satisfaction, relaxation from boring routine activities and knowledge about the heritage site. Heritage access quality refers to the ease of accessing information about the site and how easy the site is to access and navigate through (Hussein & Hapsari, 2021; Wu et al., 2018).

Hypotheses and conceptual framework development

An examination of existing literature in tourism and marketing, reveals that there is a minimal number of empirical studies in Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economies that examined how escapism motivation mediates the interplay between heritage experiential quality and behavioural intention, using the TOURQUAL model. In addition, there are few studies in tourism that examined the effect of heritage destination authenticity on experiential quality (Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2019). Comparable research studies conducted in American, Asian, and European nations were used to provide an empirical foundation for this paper. Consequently, the uniqueness of this paper is grounded on its focus on how escapism motivation mediates the nexus between heritage experiential quality and behavioural intention, using the theoretical foundation of the TOURQUAL model. Lastly, the study is novel because it examines the effect of heritage destination authenticity on heritage experiential quality in a Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economy, a research area which is heavily overlooked by researchers.

Destination authenticity is defined as the overall perceptions of tourists on how honest their experiences of a cultural site feel (Pung et al., 2025). Tourists effectively search for authentic experiences in heritage tourism sites, demonstrating a significant desire for real encounters (Uslu et al., 2024). Authentic experiences improve the quality of heritage and cultural tourism sites, thus producing a positive image of the destination (Uslu et al., 2024). According to Pung et al. (2025), when a tourist is significantly experienced with a particular heritage destination, authenticity influences experiential quality, which in turn

improves tourists' heritage perceived value. Destination heritage authenticity further motivates tourists to develop a favourable perception of the image of heritage destinations. Meanwhile, Dominguez-Quintero et al. (2019) posited that existential authenticity, which is a dimension of authenticity, significantly influences experiential quality. Further exploring empirical studies on heritage destination authenticity Carreira et al. (2022) clearly highlighted that a considerable number of studies in tourism have examined heritage destination authenticity in relation to tourism motivation, place attachment and destination image. Empirical studies establish that heritage tourism destinations that deliver genuine, dependable and original experiences that accurately reflect its unique nature, culture, landscape and history positively enhance experiential quality of the heritage site. Despite the positive relationship that exists between heritage destination authenticity and heritage experiential quality, there are a limited number of studies that examined the relationship between heritage destination authenticity and heritage experiential quality in Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economies. Consequently, this has created a huge gap in literature on how heritage destination authenticity significantly predicts heritage experiential quality. Based on this observation, the researchers therefore formulated the following hypothesis:

H_1: Heritage destination authenticity significantly influences heritage experiential quality.

The TOURQUAL model postulates that access quality, quality of physical environment, interactional quality and outcome quality, are the dimensions of tourism quality (Manyangara et al., 2025). On the other hand, existing literature in tourism reveals that the quality of the physical environment, access quality, outcome quality and interactional quality, are dimensions of experiential quality (Feng et al., 2020; Hanafiah et al., 2025). Hussein and Hapsari (2021) further posited that the four variables are the dimensions of heritage experiential quality. A study conducted in Malang City, Indonesia, by Hussein and Hapsari (2021), revealed that dimensions of heritage experiential quality, which include heritage interactional quality, heritage physical environment quality, and heritage aspects, enhance behavioural intention of tourists. Hussein and Hapsari (2021) noted that behavioural intention refers to tourist loyalty towards a heritage tourism site and is recognised by the ability of tourists to come back and visit. Uddin et al. (2026) conducted a quantitative study in Bangladesh and established that dimensions of experiential quality effectively enhance behavioural intention of tourists towards tourism sites. A study conducted in Hong Kong by Wu et al. (2018) revealed that dimensions of heritage experiential quality, which include physical environment quality, outcome quality, interactional quality, and access quality, accelerate tourist behavioural intention towards cruise tourism. Dimensions of experiential quality have a strong and significant influence on tourist behavioural intention (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Uddin et al., 2026). Briliana et al. (2023) revealed that the physical environment, which is a dimension of experiential quality, significantly influences tourist satisfaction towards a tourism site, further motivating tourists to be loyal towards the site. After an examination numerous studies conducted in tourism, it can be concluded that dimensions of experiential quality, which include physical environment quality, interactional quality, outcome quality and access quality, significantly enhance behavioural intention. Existing empirical findings disclose that heritage experiential quality is a multidimensional construct and it significantly capture both intangible and tangible aspects of heritage tourism experience. Tourists are motivated to return and visit the same heritage tourism site when heritage experiential quality exceed their expectations. The examination of prior studies disclosed that Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economies that participate in tourism and hospitality lack studies that quantitatively examined how tourist behavioural intention is influenced by dimensions of heritage experiential quality. Consequently, literature from Asia, America, and Europe motivated the researchers to formulate the following hypotheses:

H_{2a}: Heritage physical environment quality significantly influences behavioural intention.

H_{2b}: Heritage interactional quality substantially influences behavioural intention.

H_{2c}: Heritage access quality effectively influences behavioural intention.

H_{2d}: Heritage outcome quality significantly influences behavioural intention.

H_{2e}: Aggregate heritage experiential quality substantially influences behavioural intention.

Heritage experiential value refers to the value derived from tourist experience upon their interaction with a particular heritage tourism site (Hussein & Hapsari, 2021). A quantitative research study conducted in Malang, Indonesia, by Hussein and Hapsari (2021), revealed that dimensions of heritage experiential quality, which include heritage interactional quality, heritage physical environment quality and heritage aspects, enhance heritage experiential value. A study conducted in Malaysia by Hanafiah et al. (2025) established that the four dimensions of experiential quality which include outcome, physical environment, interaction and access, substantially improve tourist perceived value. Experiential quality plays a significant role in enhancing perceived value (Hanafiah et al., 2025). Empirical studies by Hapsari (2018) and Jin et al. (2015) indicate that a noteworthy interaction exists between dimensions of experiential quality and perceived value. The studies affirm that experiential quality predicts perceived value. Available empirical findings clearly establish that tourists tend to perceive heritage experiential quality to be high value when the level of heritage experiential quality exceed their expectation. An examination of available empirical studies reveals that Sub-Saharan African countries lack research studies that examined how heritage experiential quality influences heritage experiential value. Building from prior empirical studies conducted in Asia, it is evident that dimensions of experiential quality drive perceived value. Consequently, the researchers developed the following hypothesis:

H_3: Heritage experiential quality significantly predicts heritage experiential value.

Tourism literature widely acknowledges escapism motivation as a multi-layered motivation which influences the behaviour of tourists and loyalty towards a destination. It is frequently identified by the wish for novelty, the need to move away from monotony, and the quest for relaxation (Musa et al., 2025). Escapism motivation has been strongly recognised as a major powerful force behind tourist behavioural intentions to travel again. From the available empirical evidence, it appears escapism motivation, destination loyalty and behavioural intention in the form of intention to visit again are significantly related (Musa et al., 2025). Baghel and Dubey (2026) and Thongtammachat et al. (2026) posited that escapism motivation effectively inluences tourist behavioural intention, which, in this case, is the intention to visit a tourism site again. The scholars clearly highlighted that escapism motivation is a driving force behind the intent of tourists to come back and visit. A study conducted in Hainan City, China, by Wang et al. (2025), revealed that escapism motivation, a dimension of overall tourism motivation, significantly influences tourists' intention to revisit Hainan City. The study further revealed that escapism motivation, experiential quality and behavioural intention of tourists in the form of intent to visit again, are significantly related. From the results of the study, it can be concluded that experiential quality, escapism motivation and tourist behavioural intention are strongly related. Lastly, Dean and Suhartanto (2019) conducted a study in Indonesia and revealed that escapism motivation (a push factor in tourism), experiential quality and behavioural intention, are significantly related. Tourism and hospitality marketing body of knowledge lacks studies that examined how escapism motivation significantly mediates the interaction between experiential quality and behavioural intention. However, this study is unique because, after reviewing existing literature, it is rational to assume that escapism motivation may significantly function as a possible mediator on the nexus between heritage experiential quality dimensions and tourist behavioural intention. The researchers, therefore, formulated the following three hypotheses:

H_4: Experiential quality significantly predicts escapism motivation.

H_5: Escapism motivation significantly influences behavioural intention.

H_6: Escapism motivation significantly mediates the interaction between experiential quality and behavioural intention.

Perceived value is significantly viewed as vital determinant of behavioural intention (Chaichi et al., 2025; Uddin et al., 2026). Uddin et al. (2026) further conducted a quantitative study in Bangladesh and established that perceived value influences the loyalty of tourists towards tourism sites in Bangladesh. Similarly, Hussein and Hapsari (2021) conducted a quantitative research study in Malang, Indonesia, and established that heritage experiential value effectively influences the behavioural intention of tourists.

The study affirms that tourists are motivated to revisit heritage tourism sites by heritage experiential value. Existing empirical evidence revealed that higher perceived value influences tourist satisfaction, while at the same time fostering tourist loyalty in the form of intention to visit again (Hanafiah et al., 2025). Empirical studies demonstrate that tourists who successfully perceive a heritage tourism destination as having higher heritage value are more likely to develop destination attachment, recommend the heritage tourism destination to family and friends and return and visit same destination. Exploration of existing studies in tourism and hospitality literature reveals that the majority of studies were conducted in Asia. On the other hand, Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economies involved in tourism and hospitality substantially lack research studies that examined how perceived value affects tourist behavioural intention. Consequently, based on the literature on heritage tourism, the researchers formulated the following hypothesis:

H_7: Heritage experiential value significantly predicts behavioural intention.

Figure 1 shows how the interaction between heritage experiential quality dimensions and behavioural intention is significantly mediated by escapism motivation. Figure 1 further indicates that heritage destination authenticity influences heritage experiential quality. Meanwhile, heritage experiential value is influenced by heritage experiential quality.

Methodology

Research design

To effectively examine how tourist behavioural intention towards heritage tourism sites is influenced by heritage experiential quality, heritage experiential value and escapism motivation, a quantitative methodology was adopted. Quantitative methodology aspects that include positivism philosophy, explanatory research design, deductive approach and survey strategy were taken into consideration in this study (Saunders et al., 2019). Quantitative methodology was used in this because the method is more objective since it relies on standardized research instruments and statistical procedures. The study developed a total of 11 hypotheses. Consequently, it was imperative to adopt quantitative methodologies and test the hypotheses.

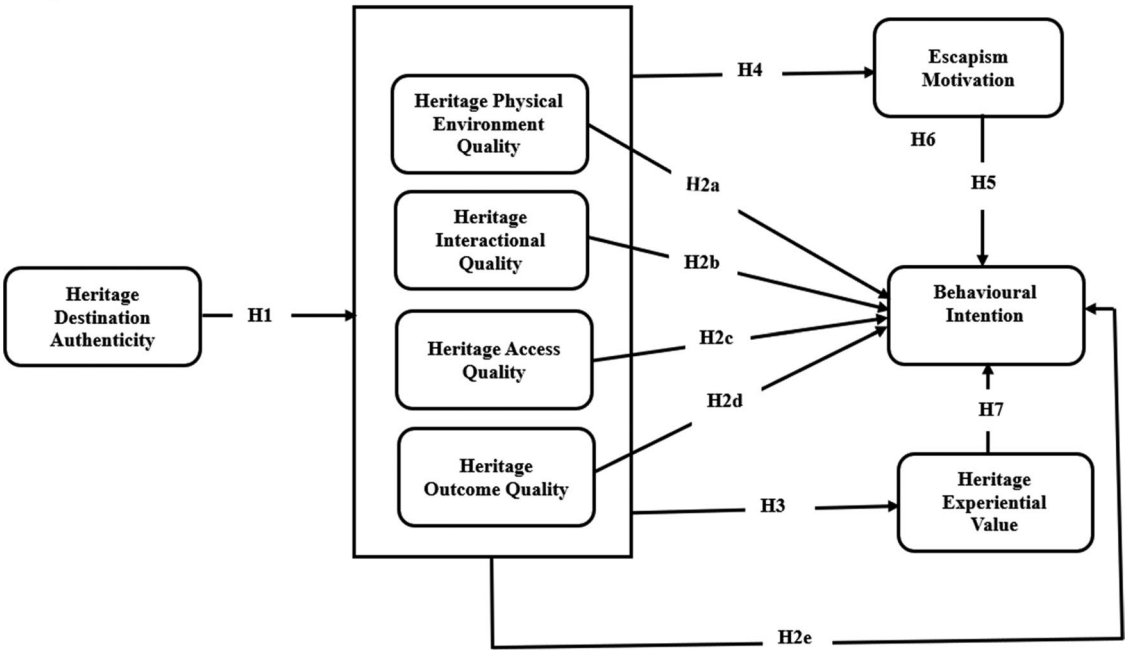


Figure 1. Factors influencing behavioural intention.

Questionnaire design and measures

The study adopted a quantitative methodology to effectively answer the three questions: Do heritage experiential quality dimensions improve behavioural intention of tourists? How does heritage destination authenticity affect heritage experiential quality? What effect does escapism motivation have on the interaction between heritage experiential quality dimensions and behavioural intention of tourists? Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from tourists to answer the three questions. Prior studies also adopted structured questionnaires to gather data from heritage tourism sites (Carreira et al., 2022; Pung et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). The questionnaire was divided into six sections. Two experts (professors) were designated to examine content validity of the questionnaire. A total of 24 measurement items presented in Annex A were used to measure the variables under study. The measurement items were adopted and modified to suit the objectives of this research. Measurement items adopted were suitable for Zimbabwe. The developed research instrument was reviewed and cleared by Chinhoyi University of Technology Research Ethics Committee (CUT/SEBS/2025/21/05 is the ethics permit number). The ethics permit was granted on 20 May 2025. A pilot test of the instrument was then conducted with 20 participants at a tourism site in Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe. Measurement items of each construct produced construct reliability values of more than 0.7, clearly confirming acceptable internal consistency. Measurement items adopted were suitable for Zimbabwe.

Data collection and sampling

Zimbabwe is endowed with three national parks which are designated World Heritage Sites. These are Matobo, Victoria Falls and Mana Pools (Manyangara et al., 2026). The researchers conveniently collected data from tourists who visited these three World Heritage Sites from the 1st of June 2025 to the 31st of August 2025. A total of 130 questionnaires were collected from Matobo, 130 from Mana Pools, while a total of 140 were collected from Victoria Falls. Domestic and international tourists aged 18 years and above, who visited Matobo, Victoria Falls and Mana Pools were the targeted population. Tourists under 18 years of age were not permitted to take part in this research study. Tourists were approached as they entered the gate of the heritage site and they were requested to provide consent in writing, highlighting voluntary involvement in the overall research process. Researchers proceeded with issuance of the research instrument and tourists were politely requested to complete the instrument during their period of vacation at the tourism site. Data were collected from a total of 400 tourists. However; 378 questionnaires were considered for data analysis, excluding 22 questionnaires that were not fully completed. A large sample size was considered in this study because it captures population diversity, as larger sample sizes produce more constant and representative estimates that can be successfully generalized to the wider population. (Saunders et al., 2019). Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was applied in this study because it made it easy to gather data from tourists. Data was collected from available tourists (Saunders et al., 2019). However, convenience sampling generally leads to biased sample selection because respondents are chosen based on their availability rather than random selection (Saunders et al., 2019).

Ethical standards

Ethical standards aligned to the Helsinki Declaration were applied in the overall research process. Consequently, respondents were not requested to provide contact details and names. Thus, the principle of confidentiality and anonymity were significantly upheld. Tourists participated willingly in the study; they were not coerced to take part in the research process. Responses from tourists were recorded exactly as provided without alteration and omission. Thus, data were not manipulated to suit the objectives of the study.

Data analysis methods

Hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in AMOS. This followed a two-step analysis technique measurement model assessment through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and

structural model evaluation in SEM. Co-variance-based SEM (CB SEM) was applied. Squared Multiple Correlations (SMC) and Average Variance Extracted were used to evaluate convergent validity while discriminant validity was assessed by comparing construct correlations against the square roots of AVE. Discriminant validity was further examined using Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations. Moreover, construct reliability was assessed using Cronbach alpha and composite reliability. The following fit indices were used to assess the model: ratio of chi square to degrees of freedom χ^{2}/DF, Adjusted Good Fit Index (AGFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Good Fit Index (GFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI).

Results and discussions

Sample characterisation

The researchers hand delivered 400 questionnaires to tourists as they entered the gate of the tourism site, and 378 were deemed fit for data analysis, producing a 94.50% response rate. The main demographic highlights were that 53.2% were male tourists, 32.5% of the tourists who visited heritage tourism sites were aged between 30 years and 34 years, and 72.5% attained higher and tertiary education. Furthermore, most tourists who visited heritage tourism sites (85.4%) were Zimbabweans. Table 1 shows the socio-demographics information of tourist who visited heritage tourism sites.

Common method bias

Common method bias (CMB) poses a significant threat to data validity. To ensure data validity, researchers should guard against CMB. In this paper, CMB was examined by Harman's single factor. The findings of the Harman single-factor test clearly revealed that a single-factor solution only described a general variance equal to 32.11%, which is lower than the ordinary threshold of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, Common Latent Factor (CLF) test was further applied to evaluate CMB. The researchers included a common latent factor into the measurement model and standardized factor loading with common latent factor were compared with standardized factor loading without common latent factor. Results of the test revealed that the variances that exist between the standardized factor loadings ranged between 0.04 and 0.08, which are all lower than the suggested threshold value of 0.20 (Williams et al., 2010). Consequently, the outcome verified that CMB was not likely to impact the study. Multicollinearity was evaluated in this research through variance inflation factors (VIFs). The outcome of the VIFs in Table 4 substantiate that all VIFs were under the threshold of 5, suggesting that multicollinearity did not pose a negative threat to the study (Hair et al., 2017).

Assessment of validity and reliability for lower order construct

The Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios were applied to evaluate discriminant validity. Henseler et al. (2015) postulated that the HTMT ratio must be lesser than 0.85 for concepts that are diverse from a particular theoretical standpoint and under 0.90 for concepts that are theoretically

Table 1. Tourist demographic information.

Characteristic	Attribute	Frequency	Percent (%)
Tourist gender	Female	177	46.8
	Male	201	53.2
Tourist age	18–23 years	45	11.9
	24–29 years	86	22.8
	30–34 years	123	32.5
	35–39 years	73	19.3
	40 years and above	51	13.5
Educational level	Secondary	104	27.5
	Higher & Tertiary	274	72.5
Tourist nationality	Zimbabwean	323	85.4
	Non-Zimbabwean	55	14.6

Source: Research data (2026).

Table 2. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Constructs	HPEQ	HIQ	HAQ	HOQ	HDA	HEV	EM	BI
Heritage physical environment quality (HPEQ)								
Heritage interactional quality (HIQ)	0.640							
Heritage access quality (HAQ)	0.679	0.701						
Heritage outcome quality (HOQ)	0.768	0.712	0.668					
Heritage destination authenticity (HDA)	0.620	0.677	0.766	0.738				
Heritage experiential value (HEV)	0.743	0.687	0.743	0.765	0.689			
Escapism motivation (EM)	0.674	0.763	0.687	0.639	0.763	0.710		
Behavioural intention (BI)	0.729	0.679	0.701	0.738	0.690	0.633	0.789	

Source: Research data (2026).

Table 3. Construct validity and reliability.

	CR	AVE	HPEQ	HIQ	HAQ	HOQ	HAD	HEV	EM	BI
HPEQ	0.831	0.622	**0.788**							
HIQ	0.837	0.630	0.259	**0.794**						
HAQ	0.834	0.626	0.345	0.390	**0.791**					
HOQ	0.835	0.627	0.149	0.530	0.453	**0.791**				
HAD	0.833	0.624	0.240	0.478	0.568	0.521	**0.790**			
HEV	0.840	0.637	0.250	0.678	0.761	0.651	0.623	**0.798**		
EM	0.836	0.629	0.156	0.401	0.603	0.534	0.348	0.619	**0.793**	
BI	0.842	0.641	0.234	0.459	0.567	0.566	0.453	0.345	0.645	**0.801**

Notes: Highlighted in bold are square roots of AVE while construct correlations are just below the diagonal; CR represents composite reliability; AVE represents Average Variance Extracted.
Source: Research data (2026).

comparable. The outcomes for the HTMT ratios are displayed in Table 2. The findings highlight that the eight variables under assessment ranged between 0.620 and 0.789, and were all lower than 0.85, signifying positive discriminant validity (Cheung et al., 2024). In addition, the findings in Table 3 reveal that discriminant validity was successfully attained because, applying the Fornell and Larcker principle, the square roots of the Average Variance Extract (AVE) exceeded the inter-construct correlations for variables under study. Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and values ranged between 0.622 and 0.641, as displayed in Table 3. To successfully achieve construct validity, Hair et al. (2019) expounded that each AVE should be equivalent to or above 0.5, and that Composite Reliability (CR) must be bigger than the corresponding AVE. Research results presented in Table 3 clearly show that the conditions were satisfied. The Squared Multiple Correlations (SMC) values in Table 4 are bigger than 0.25, further confirming the existence of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Cronbach alpha (**α**) and Composite Reliability (CR) were used to evaluate internal consistency of the research instrument. As revealed by the research findings in Table 4, the lowermost alpha value was 0.832 (heritage physical environment quality) and the uppermost was 0.842 (behavioural intention). Meanwhile, composite reliability results presented in Table 3 range from 0.831 (heritage physical environment quality) to 0.842 (behavioural intention). Therefore, according to Hair et al. (2019), the lowermost condition of 0.7 for both measures was satisfied.

Validity and reliability statistics of the measurement model are presented in Table 3.

Table 4 presents findings of psychometric properties of the measurement model for lower order constructs.

Hypotheses testing

Hypotheses testing for first order construct

Table 5 shows results of the measurement model fit indices.

The results of hypotheses H_{2a} to H_{2d} were established using structural equation modelling, and findings from the test are displayed in Table 6. Meanwhile, the findings highlighted in Table 5 show the measurement model (χ^{2}/DF = 2.186, GFI = 0.927, AGFI = 0.938, NFI = 0.926, TLI = 0.937, CFI = 0.929, RMSEA = 0.050); results of the model were satisfactory. As shown in Table 6, the heritage physical

Table 4. Psychometric properties of the measurement model.

Constructs	Items	λ	SMC	α	VIFs
Heritage physical environment quality	HPEQ1	0.789	0.623	0.832	2.649
	HPEQ2	0.780	0.608		2.551
	HPEQ3	0.797	0.635		2.740
Heritage interactional quality	HIQ1	0.799	0.638	0.836	2.762
	HIQ2	0.795	0.632		2.717
	HIQ3	0.788	0.621		2.639
Heritage access quality	HAQ1	0.786	0.617	0.834	2.613
	HAQ2	0.790	0.624		2.660
	HAQ3	0.798	0.637		2.756
Heritage outcome quality	HOQ1	0.794	0.630	0.834	2.703
	HOQ2	0.789	0.622		2.646
	HOQ3	0.793	0.629		2.695
Heritage experiential value	HEV1	0.808	0.653	0.841	2.882
	HEV2	0.796	0.634		2.732
	HEV3	0.789	0.623		2.653
Heritage destination authenticity	HDA1	0.801	0.642	0.833	2.793
	HDA2	0.790	0.624		2.660
	HDA3	0.779	0.607		2.544
Escapism motivation	EM1	0.780	0.608	0.836	2.555
	EM2	0.810	0.656		2.908
	EM3	0.790	0.624		2.661
Behavioural intention	BI1	0.789	0.623	0.842	2.654
	BI2	0.797	0.635		2.740
	BI3	0.815	0.664		2.976

Notes: λ represents Standardized factor loadings; SMC represents Squared Multiple Correlation; AVE refers to Average Variance Extracted**; α** signifies Cronbach Alpha; VIFs refers to Variance Inflation Factors.
Source: Research data (2026).

Table 5. Measurement model.

Model fit indices	Outcomes of measurement	Limit	Outcome
χ^2/DF	2.186	≤3.000	Fit
Good Fit Index (GFI)	0.927	>0.900	Fit
Adjusted Good Fit Index (AGFI)	0.938	>0.900	Fit
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.926	>0.900	Fit
Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)	0.937	>0.900	Fit
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.929	>0.900	Fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.050	<0.080	Fit

Source: Research data (2026).

Table 6. Results of hypotheses.

Hypotheses	Hypothesised relationship	SRW	CR	Outcome
H_{2a}	Heritage physical environment quality → behavioural intention	0.345	7.295***	Supported
H_{2b}	Heritage interactional quality → behavioural intention	0.363	7.801***	Supported
H_{2c}	Heritage access quality → behavioural intention	0.298	9.123***	Supported
H_{2d}	Heritage outcome quality → behavioural intention	0.412	8.342***	Supported

Notes: the acronym SRW refers to standardised regression weight; CR effectively stands for critical ratio and *** signifies significant at $p < 0.001$.
Source: Research data (2026).

environment substantially improves behavioural intention of tourists (SRW= 0.345, CR= 7.295, p < 0.001). Accordingly, H_{2a} was supported. Additionally, the results presented in Table 6 indicate that heritage interactional quality positively predicts behavioural intention of tourists (SRW= 0.363, CR= 7.801, p < 0.001). Consequently, H_{2b} was supported. Based on the findings displayed in Table 6, H_{2c} was confirmed because heritage access quality improves the behavioural intention of tourists (SRW= 0.298, CR= 9.123, p < 0.001). The findings of H_{2d} (SRW= 0.412, CR= 8.342, p < 0.001) presented in Table 6, clearly indicate that behavioural intention of tourists is effectively enhanced by heritage outcome quality. Therefore, H_{2d} is supported.

The results of hypotheses H_{2a} to H_{2d} are clearly illustrated in Table 6.

Assessment of validity and reliability for higher order construct

Heritage experiential quality (HEQ) was conceptualized as a higher order construct comprised of four first order dimensions that includes heritage physical environment quality (HPEQ), heritage interactional quality (HIQ), heritage outcome quality (HOQ) and heritage access quality (HAQ). In AMOS, the observed measurement items were successfully specified as reflective indicators of their respective first order construct whereas, the four first order construct were successfully specified as dimensions of the second order construct HEQ. Therefore, it can be noted HEQ was modelled as a higher order latent construct with HPEQ, HIQ, HOQ and HAQ loadings onto it.

Table 7 presents findings of psychometric properties of the measurement model for higher-order construct.

To attain construct validity, Hair et al. (2019) illustrated that each AVE should be equal to or above 0.5, and that Composite Reliability (CR) must be bigger than the corresponding AVE. Research results presented in Table 7 clearly show that the conditions were satisfied. The Squared Multiple Correlations (SMC) values presented in Table 7 are significantly greater than 0.25, further confirming the presence of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Cronbach alpha (**α**) and Composite Reliability (CR) were used to assess the internal consistency of the research instrument used to gather data. Lastly, results presented in Table 7 clearly indicate that all factor loadings ranged between 0.778 and 0.798 surpassing the minimum recommended value of 0.50, strong evidence of satisfactory convergent measurement.

Hypotheses testing for second order construct

Table 8 shows results of the measurement model fit indices.

The results of hypotheses H_1, H_{2e}, H_3, H_4, H_5, H_7 were tested using structural equation modelling, and findings from the test are displayed in Table 9. Meanwhile, the findings highlighted in Table 8 show the measurement model (χ^2/DF = 2.213, GFI = 0.932, AGFI = 0.940, NFI = 0.922, TLI = 0.924, CFI = 0.939, RMSEA = 0.057); outcomes of the model were acceptable.

The six hypothesised paths (H_1, H_{2e}, H_3, H_4, H_5 and H_7) were statistically substantial, confirming the proposed associations. Heritage destination authenticity significantly affects heritage experiential quality (H_1: $\beta = 0.246$, $t = 2.321$, $p < 0.01$). Heritage experiential quality substantially influences behavioural intention (H_{2e}: $\beta = 0.280$, $t = 3.879$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, heritage experiential quality effectively fosters heritage experiential value (H_3: $\beta = 0.272$, $t = 3.642$, $p < 0.01$). Heritage experiential quality significantly influences escapism motivation (H_4: $\beta = 0.217$, $t = 2.290$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, escapism motivation substantially influences behavioural intention (H_5: $\beta = 0.110$, $t = 2.108$, $p < 0.01$). Lastly, heritage experiential value

Table 7. Psychometric properties of the measurement model.

Constructs	Items	λ	SMC	α	AVE	CR
Heritage experiential quality	HPEQ	0.798	0.637	0.867	0.621	0.867
	HIQ	0.789	0.623			
	HAQ	0.786	0.618			
	HOQ	0.778	0.605			

Notes: **λ** represents standardized factor loadings; SMC represents Squared Multiple correlation; AVE refers to Average Variance Extracted**; α** signifies cronbach alpha; CR denotes Composite reliability; HPEQ denotes heritage physical environment quality; HIQ represents heritage interactional quality; HOQ denotes heritage outcome quality and HAQ refers to heritage access quality.
Source: Research data (2026).

Table 8. Measurement model.

Model fit indices	Outcomes of measurement	Limit	Outcome
χ^2/DF	2.213	≤3.000	Fit
Good Fit Index (GFI)	0.932	>0.900	Fit
Adjusted Good Fit Index (AGFI)	0.940	>0.900	Fit
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.922	>0.900	Fit
Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)	0.924	>0.900	Fit
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.939	>0.900	Fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.057	<0.080	Fit

Source: Research data (2026).

Table 9. Results of hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Path	B	*t*	Remark
H_1	Heritage destination authenticity →heritage experiential quality	0.246	2.321**	Accepted
H_{2e}	Heritage experiential quality→ behavioural intention	0.280	3.879**	Accepted
H_3	Heritage experiential quality→ heritage experiential value	0.272	3.642**	Accepted
H_4	Heritage experiential quality→ escapism motivation	0.217	2.290**	Accepted
H_5	Escapism motivation→ behavioural intention	0.110	2.108**	Accepted
H_7	Heritage experiential value→ behavioural intention	0.263	3.423**	Accepted

Notes: β denotes beta, *t* denotes t statistics and ** denotes $p < 0.01$.
Source: Research data (2026).

Table 10. Bootstrap analysis of mediating effect.

				95% confidence interval	
Hypothesis	Path	β	P-value	Lower 2.5%	Upper 97.5%
H_6	Direct effect HEQ→BI	0.2800	0.01	0.0325	0.3000
	Indirect effect HEQ→EM→BI	0.1045	0.01	0.0480	0.1790

Notes: β means beta and CI refers to the confidence interval.
Source: Research data (2026).

substantially influences behavioural intention (H_7: $\beta = 0.263$, $t = 3.423$, $p < 0.01$). The findings are presented in Table 9.

Test of mediation effect

The bootstrapping method with a total of 5000 iterations was applied to test how escapism motivation mediates the interaction between heritage experiential quality and behavioural intention of tourists (HEQ→EM→BI). The 95% confidence interval (CI) was calculated. The research outcome presented in Table 10 shows that the direct effect of heritage experiential quality (HEQ) on behavioural intention (BI) was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.2800$, $p < 0.01$, Boot CI: 0.0325–0.3000). Furthermore, the indirect effect of heritage experiential quality on behavioural intention through escapism motivation was also positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.1045$, $p < 0.01$, Boot CI: 0.0480–0.1790). Based on the findings of direct and indirect effects that were statistically significant escapism motivation partially mediates the nexus between heritage experiential quality and behavioural intention. Consequently, H_6 was supported.

Discussion

Zimbabwe is endowed with three national parks which are designated World Heritage Sites. These are Mana Pools, Matobo and Victoria Falls National Parks. Mana Pools is a unique United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site strongly renowned for its superior pristine wilderness and outstanding biodiversity. Matobo is another listed UNESCO World Heritage Site in Zimbabwe, popularly known for its unique granite kopjes and balancing rock formations. Lastly, Victoria Falls National Park is another UNSECO World Heritage Site in Zimbabwe and the park is home to one of the largest waterfalls in the world (Manyangara et al., 2026).

However, it is worth noting that Zimbabwe and other Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economies that possess heritage tourism sites lack studies that examined how heritage experiential quality can enhance tourist behavioural intention towards the heritage tourism sites. Furthermore, there is inadequate academic research that expounded how heritage experiential quality is significantly enhanced by heritage destination authenticity (Carreira et al., 2022). Lastly, examination of existing tourism heritage literature reveals that there is a huge gap in literature because studies that examined how escapism motivation mediates the interaction between heritage experiential quality and behavioural intention are sparse. Consequently, the study aimed to cover the present gaps in heritage tourism literature.

The findings of H_1 clearly revealed that heritage destination authenticity positively predicts heritage experiential quality. This suggests that experiential quality of heritage tourism sites is improved by authenticity of a particular heritage tourism site. Destination authenticity significantly improves

experiential quality of heritage tourism sites. Destination authenticity positively influences tourist experiential quality towards heritage tourism sites. The result derived from this study analysis is in tandem with present understanding that heritage destination authenticity and heritage experiential quality are positively related (Domínguez-Quintero et al. 2019; Pung et al., 2025). As expected, H_{2a} findings confirm that heritage physical environment quality and tourist behavioural intention are substantially related. The outcome suggests that heritage physical environment quality positively predicts behavioural intention of tourists towards heritage tourism destinations. Superior and unique physical environment of heritage tourism destinations significantly improves behavioural intention of tourists in the form of intention to return and visit heritage tourism sites. Heritage physical environment quality acts as a strong catalytic agent that positively fosters tourist behavioural intention towards heritage tourism destinations. The result agrees with existing heritage tourism literature (Hussein & Hapsari, 2021; Uddin et al., 2026).

Regarding $H_{2b,}$ the results obtained from the quantitative analysis reveal that heritage interactional quality plays an important role of improving tourist behavioural intention towards heritage tourism destinations. The outcome indicates that heritage interactional quality effectively predicts behavioural intention of tourists towards heritage tourism sites. The findings further highlight that heritage interactional quality positively fosters positive tourist behavioural intention in the form of tourists' intention to revisit the same heritage destination. The result agrees with prior studies (Hussein & Hapsari, 2021).

The H_{2c} results further revealed that heritage access quality and behavioural intention of tourists towards heritage sites are positively related. This suggests that tourists who find it easy to access heritage tourism sites develop positive behavioural intentions in the form of intention to return and visit heritage tourism sites again. Heritage destinations that are easily accessible to tourists positively enhance behavioural intention. Tourists develop positive attitudes towards heritage destinations that are easily accessible. The result is in line with prior studies in heritage tourism literature (Uddin et al., 2026; Wu et al., 2018).

In addition, the H_{2d} results clearly indicate that heritage outcome quality positively influences tourist behavioural intention. This suggests that heritage tourism sites that provide tourists with some form of comfort, convenience and relaxation, generally drive positive tourist behavioural intention in the form of tourist intention to visit heritage tourism sites again. The results of the study are in line with present heritage tourism literature (Uddin et al., 2026; Wu et al., 2018). Furthermore, the H_{2e} results indicate that aggregate heritage experiential quality effectively influences tourist behavioural intention towards heritage destinations. This significantly suggests that tourists who successfully perceive heritage experiences as high quality are more likely to develop favourable behavioural intentions (Hussein & Hapsari, 2021; Uddin et al., 2026).

As anticipated, the H_3 results revealed that heritage experiential quality positively predicts heritage experiential value. The findings illustrate that tourist satisfaction with a particular heritage tourism site is driven by experiential quality of the tourism site. Heritage experiential quality significantly fosters heritage experiential value. Consequently, the superior the experiential quality the higher the level of experiential value. The findings of H_3 are in line with previous studies by Hanafiah et al. (2025), Hapsari (2018) and Hussein and Hapsari (2021).

When examining the results of $H_{4,}$ it is evident that heritage experiential quality of the sites significantly advances escapism motivation of tourists. The outcome from the study clearly suggests that tourist desire to escape daily routine and travel to a heritage tourism site is significantly enhanced by experiential quality of the heritage tourism site. The finding supports prior studies which expounded that escapism motivation is effectively driven by experiential quality of a particular heritage site (Dean & Suhartanto, 2019; Wang et al., 2025). Moreover, the H_5 findings revealed that escapism motivation and tourist behavioural intention are significantly related. The outcome clearly suggests that the desire of tourists to escape daily routine positively predicts tourist behavioural intention in the form of intention to revisit heritage destinations in future. The outcome of H_5 is in line with prior studies in tourism literature (Baghel & Dubey, 2026; Musa et al., 2025; Thongtammachat et al., 2026).

The current study further examined the interaction between escapism motivation, heritage experiential quality and tourist behavioural intention, a research area in heritage tourism that is heavily fragmented. Consequently, examination of results of $H_{6,}$ reveal that escapism motivation partially mediates the nexus between heritage experiential quality and behavioural intention. The findings suggest that

heritage experiential quality influences tourist behavioural intention through escapism motivation (the desire to escape daily routines). Heritage experiential quality influences tourist behavioural intention partly through increased escapism motivation. Results of H_6 agree with existing literature (Dean & Suhartanto, 2019; Wang et al., 2025).

The findings of H_7 indicate that heritage experiential value predicts behavioural intention of tourists towards heritage tourism destinations. The outcome provides clear evidence that tourists that are satisfied with heritage tourism sites tend to possess a higher experiential value. The higher the level of tourist experiential value, the higher the behavioural intention of the tourist towards heritage tourism sites. The results from this study are significantly in tandem with prior studies by Hanafiah et al. (2025) and Hussein and Hapsari (2021).

The overall findings of this study derived from Zimbabwe a Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economy involved in heritage tourism are in line with prior studies conducted in advanced Europe and Asian counties such as Carreira et al. (2022) in Spain, Domínguez-Quintero et al. (2019) in Spain, Pung et al. (2025) in Italy, Chi et al. (2024) in China, Lu et al. (2022) in China, Wang et al. (2025) in China; Hussein and Hapsari (2021) in Indonesia.

Theoretical implications

In Zimbabwe and other Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economies, this research represents a ground-breaking investigation into how escapism motivation mediates the interaction between heritage experiential quality and tourist behavioural intention using the TOURQUAL model. The researchers further examined how heritage destination authenticity influences heritage experiential quality, a research area heavily disregarded by researchers in heritage tourism (Carreira et al., 2022). Consequently, this research provides substantial theoretical contribution to tourism literature through integrating heritage experiential quality dimensions linked to the TOURQUAL model scales with escapism motivation and tourist behavioural intention. First, the research findings expand the scope of the TOURQUAL model through demonstrating its significance in expounding heritage experiential quality. While previous studies extensively applied the model to general tourism, this research clearly confirms that its dimensions, which include access quality, outcome quality, physical environment quality, and interactional quality, are relatively effective in capturing the symbolic and multi-sensory nature of heritage experiences.

Second, the study findings clearly revealed that dimensions of heritage experiential quality, which are heavily linked with the TOURQUAL model, significantly influence tourist behavioural intention, which, in this case, is the intention to visit again. The findings from the study advance this relationship through indicating that heritage experiential quality is a multifaceted construct, consequently contributing to improved construct conceptualization and evaluation in tourism and hospitality research. The findings clearly affirm that heritage experiential quality dimensions enhance the behavioural intention of tourists.

Third, escapism motivation was co-opted into the study as a mediating variable that mediates the interaction between heritage experiential quality and behavioural intention of tourists. The findings significantly advance heritage tourism literature through highlighting that heritage experiential quality influences tourist behavioural intention through escapism motivation. Through confirming the mediating role of escapism motivation on the nexus between heritage experiential quality and tourist behavioural intention, the study shifted from direct relationship models, thereby advancing the theoretical body of knowledge in heritage tourism.

Fourth, the research findings further improve theoretical understanding through validating the influence of heritage destination authenticity on heritage experiential quality. The findings affirm that heritage destination authenticity is a key driver that shapes the experiential quality of a particular heritage site.

Fifth, the study advances theory through suggesting that heritage experiential quality dimensions drive escapism motivation and heritage experiential value. Based on the findings, the study contributes to the advancement of literature in heritage tourism.

Lastly, the study findings advance the theory and heritage tourism body of knowledge through unearthing that both heritage experiential value and escapism motivation improves tourist behavioural intention towards heritage tourism sites.

Practical implications

From a practical point of view, the study provides heritage destination marketers and managers guidelines for developing positive tourist behavioural intention in the form of tourist intent to visit heritage sites again. It is of paramount importance to understand the practical implications of heritage experiential quality, escapism motivation and heritage experiential value on behavioural intention of tourists towards heritage tourism sites. The research outcomes from the study on the nexus between heritage physical environment and behavioural intention confirm that heritage physical environment quality and behavioural intention are related. Based on the research results, heritage destination marketers and managers should ensure that the physical environment quality of heritage tourism sites, which includes accommodation and restaurant facilities, is well maintained and clean at all times. The overall heritage tourism site should be clean and safe because a physical environment that is clean, safe and well-maintained leads to positive behavioural intention which influences tourists to return and visit heritage destinations again.

Heritage interactional quality and behavioural intention of tourists towards heritage tourism sites are significantly related. A positive interaction between tourists and employees of heritage tourism sites improves tourist behavioural intention. Consequently, heritage destination marketers and managers managing heritage destinations are advised to invest in employee training programs focused on consumer engagement and customers handling as this will improve overall customer services and customer handling. Improved customer engagement and handling influence positive tourist behavioural intention, in this case, the intention to come back and visit the heritage tourism site.

The research outcomes also clearly revealed a positive interaction between heritage access quality and tourist behavioural intention. Based on the outcomes, the better the access quality of the destination and information relating to the destination, the more the tourist wants to return to visit. Thus, heritage destination marketers and managers are recommended to focus on improving accessibility of information regarding the tourism site. Information should be accessible on both digital marketing and traditional marketing platforms. Easy access of information motivates tourists to return and visit. Moreover, heritage destination marketers and managers should make sure that heritage tourism sites are easy to access through provision of transfer vehicles to the destination because easy access influences tourists to come back and visit.

The findings on the interplay between heritage outcome quality and behavioural intention clearly affirms that tourist behavioural intention towards heritage tourism sites is significantly enhanced by heritage outcome quality. Based on the research outcomes, heritage destination marketers and managers are recommended to ensure that meaningful value is derived by tourists from their visit. Therefore, heritage destination marketers and managers should focus on delivering heritage tourism activities that provides education, as well as memorable and emotional experiences that tourists may always remember. This will drive them to return and visit.

The research results on the nexus between heritage experiential quality and escapism motivation confirmed that heritage experiential quality significantly predicts escapism motivation. Therefore, the need to escape from daily routine and eventually visiting a heritage tourism site is significantly driven by experiential quality of a particular heritage tourism site. Accordingly, heritage destination marketers and managers are encouraged to increase awareness of experiential quality derived by tourists from visiting a particular heritage tourism site as this will significantly attract more tourists who intend to escape daily routine through visiting heritage destinations. Awareness should be increased on digital marketing and traditional marketing platforms. Examination of the findings shows that escapism motivation and behavioural intention of tourists towards heritage tourism sites are significantly related. Consequently, heritage destination marketers and managers are highly recommended to focus on aggressively promoting heritage tourism sites on both digital and traditional marketing platforms as tourism sites where tourists can escape daily and boring routines. Heritage destination marketers and managers are further recommended to frame destination marketing campaigns in line with the escape narratives.

The research findings highlighted that heritage destination authenticity positively improves heritage experiential quality. Consequently, heritage destination marketers and managers are recommended to focus on authenticity preservation as a strategy to improve tourist experience. Heritage destination marketers and

managers should further preserve historic architecture, cultural traditions, artifacts and landscapes, ensuring that tourists perceive the heritage site as genuine. This advances heritage experiential quality.

The results from the study on the relationship between heritage experiential quality and heritage experiential value, confirm that heritage experiential quality is a significant driver of heritage experiential value. Based on the research results, heritage destination marketers and managers should ensure that staff at the tourism site are able to quickly manage tourist challenges. This significantly improves experiential value. Heritage destination marketers and managers should focus on provision of clean and safe accommodation facilities. Clean and safe facilities substantially enhance experiential quality. Heritage experiential value is improved by heritage tourism sites that are easily accessible. Therefore, heritage destination marketers and managers are recommended to provide transfer vehicles for easy accessibility of the heritage tourism site.

In addition, the research findings indicate that heritage experiential value positively influences behavioural intention. Based on the findings, heritage destination marketers and managers are encouraged to use testimonial marketing content where they feature satisfied tourists who perceive high value. Satisfied tourists tend to spread positive word of mouth which generally improves behavioural intention of tourists. Heritage destination marketers and managers are further encouraged to continuously improve experiential value through provision of superior quality tourism services as this drive's positive behavioural intention. Common heritage experiences that are experienced by tourists in Zimbabwe's three heritage tourism sites include pristine natural environments, unique biodiversity and protected ecosystems.

Lastly, the findings of the study reveal that escapism motivation partially mediates the nexus between heritage experiential quality and behavioural intention towards heritage tourism sites. Based on the findings, heritage destination marketers are advised to develop market campaigns that promote heritage tourism destinations as sites of disconnecting from boring everyday routines. This may improve the relationship that exists between heritage experiential quality and behavioural intentions of tourists towards heritage tourism sites.

Implications for future studies

The research may present some challenges in generalising the results to other heritage tourism destinations in Sub-Saharan Africa since the study was restricted to Zimbabwean World Heritage Sites. Consequently, future studies should be extended to heritage destinations of other Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economies to eliminate the effect of generalization. This study adopted quantitative research methodologies. Consequently, future scholars should consider mixed methodologies because they provide more comprehensive findings by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were collected once off using questionnaires, following a cross-sectional time-frame. Future scholars are advised to consider the longitudinal time-frame because it allows researchers to collect data on more than one occasion to determine possible variations and make valid conclusions. This study adopted convenience sampling. However, the method leads to biased sample selection because respondents are chosen based on their availability rather than on random basis. Future research studies should apply simple random sampling methods which substantially minimise bias in selecting the sample. Finally, scholars in tourism are advised to quantitatively examine the mediating effect of destination trust on the nexus between heritage destination authenticity and destination image.

Conclusion

The key purpose of this study was to quantitatively examine how escapism motivation mediates the interaction between heritage experiential quality dimensions and tourist behavioural intention towards heritage tourism sites, using the TOURQUAL model in Sub-Saharan Africa emerging economy context. The study further examined the effect of heritage destination authenticity on heritage experiential quality. Structural equation modelling was used to test the research model. The findings of this study provide a clear overview on how escapism motivation mediates the interaction between heritage experiential quality dimensions and tourist behavioural intention towards heritage tourism sites. The findings further provide clear a view on how heritage destination authenticity influence heritage experiential quality in

emerging markets of Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings significantly extend the geographical applicability of previous evidence to a Sub-Saharan African context. The findings establish that heritage experiential quality dimensions that includes heritage physical environment, heritage outcome quality, heritage access quality and heritage interactional quality positively predicts tourists' behavioural intention towards heritage tourism sites. This demonstrates that heritage experiential quality is a significant predictor of tourist behavioural intention. Delivering superior quality and memorable tourism experiences drive positive tourist behavioural intention in form of tourists' intention to revisit heritage destination. The findings also establish positive influence of escapism motivation and heritage experiential value on tourists' behavioural intention. This highlight that the need to escape boring daily routine significantly influences tourists' behavioural intention in form of tourist intention to revisit the destination. The finding further demonstrates that when tourist positively perceive greater value from heritage experiences with the destination there are more likely to revisit the heritage destination. The study further establish that heritage experiential quality significantly improves escapism motivation and heritage experiential value. The study also determined that heritage destination authenticity positively predicts heritage experiential quality. Finally, the study concluded that escapism motivation partially mediates the nexus between heritage experiential quality and tourist behavioural intention towards heritage tourism sites.

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Ethical approval

The authors were granted ethical clearance by the Chinhoyi University of Technology Research Ethics Committee to conduct the study and collect primary data from the study respondents. Ethical considerations were also integrated into the research process.

Author contributions

CRediT: **Masimba Elvis Manyangara**: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Phillip Dangaiso**: Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Divaries Cosmas Jaravaza**: Formal analysis, Methodology; **Wilbert Manyanga**: Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – review & editing; **Paul Mukucha**: Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Munyaradzi Chibaro**: Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology; **James Kanyepe**: Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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About the authors

Masimba Elvis Manyangara holds a PhD in Marketing, a Post-graduate Diploma in Higher Education (CUT), MCom Marketing strategy (MSU), MCom Strategic Management (GZU) and a BSc International Marketing (CUT). He is a full-time lecturer in the Department of Marketing, School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences at Chinhoyi

University of Technology (CUT). His research spans Destination Marketing, Destination Attachment, Branding, Consumer Behaviour, Service Quality, Digital Marketing and Marketing Strategy.

Phillip Dangaiso is a doctoral researcher at the University of South Africa (UNISA). He Holds a BBS Marketing (Hons) Degree (BUSE), An MCom Marketing Strategy (MSU) And A Post-Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (CUT). He is a full-time lecturer in the Department of Marketing, School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences at Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT), Zimbabwe. He writes on Green Marketing, Social Marketing, Services Marketing, Digital Transformation and Fin Tech. Marketing Strategy.

Divaries Cosmas Jaravaza is a distinguished academic with a PhD in Business from WITS Business School. Dr Jaravaza is a specialist in accounting education, marketing, advertising, and cultural perceptions. His extensive educational background includes a Master of Commerce in Marketing Strategy, an MBA, and multiple diplomas in marketing, accountancy, and business management. Dr. Jaravaza has over a decade of teaching experience at Bindura University of Science Education and Mutare Teacher College.

Wilbert Manyanga is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at WorkWell Research Unit. His research interests include social media marketing, digital marketing, online consumer behaviour, customer experience and artificial intelligence. He Holds a PHD in Marketing from Chinhoyi University of Technology.

Paul Mukucha holds a PhD in Business Management from Nelson Mandela University (South Africa). He is a researcher-par-excellence and head of Marketing at Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE), Zimbabwe. Dr Mukucha writes on services Marketing, Supply Chain Management, social Marketing and Brand Management.

Munyaradzi Chibaro is a seasoned academic and industry expert with a strong background in supply chain management. Currently, he serves as a Lecturer at the University of Botswana, where he delivers courses on logistics and transport management. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Logistics, Materials, and Supply Chain Management from Chinhoyi University of Technology, as well as a Master of Commerce in Strategic Management from Great Zimbabwe University. His research interest include, logistics, procurement and transport management.

James Kanyepe is a distinguished researcher and consultant in the field of supply chain management. He is a Chartered Member of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT), an internationally recognized professional body. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil), Master of Science (MSc), and Bachelor of Science (BSc)- all in Supply Chain Management. He is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Botswana and his research interest include logistics management, procurement and supply chain management.

ORCID

Masimba Elvis Manyangara http://orcid.org/0009-0004-8449-9714
Phillip Dangaiso http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4495-0601
Divaries Cosmas Jaravaza http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8930-1242
Wilbert Manyanga http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6710-0140
Paul Mukucha http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6264-6574
Munyaradzi Chibaro http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4139-5139
James Kanyepe http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6871-8831

Data availability statement

Data is available from the corresponding author upon request.

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