The Influence of Experiential Value on Authentic Happiness through Destination Image

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A B S T R A C T		A R T I C L E I N F O
This research aims to determine how the value of tourists' experiences influences authentic happiness and destination image and investigates how destinations participate as mediators. In this research, the independent variable is used Experiential value which consists of 4 dimensions: aesthetics, playfulness, consumer return on investment (CROI), and social value. Destination image as a mediating variable that has 3 dimensions: cognitive image, affective image, unique image, and authentic happiness as an independent variable that includes 3 dimensions: pleasant life, engaged life, and meaningful life. The research used an explanatory survey method with a sample of 302 respondents who had camped at Cozy Land, Green Grass and Tangkal Pinus. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the suitability of questionnaire items, model fit and hypotheses used. The research results show that simultaneously there is no significant influence, but partially the value of experience has a significant influence on authentic happiness and destination image. However, destination image does not have a significant effect on authentic happiness, so destination image cannot play a mediating role. Researchers recommend increasing the value of experiences to increase tourists' authentic happiness.		

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, positive psychology has been shaped by two major movements: the movement of authentic happiness and the well-being movement (Fu & Wang, 2021). Both movements stem from the work of Seligman, along with several empirical studies in collaboration with other researchers in the field of positive psychology worldwide (Scorsolini-Comin et al., 2013). Dr. Martin Seligman, considered the father of positive psychology, introduced a new theory of happiness called authentic happiness in his book "Authentic Happiness," published in 2002. Authentic Happiness aims to redefine what happiness truly means (M. Seligman, 2011). Unlike momentary happiness, Authentic Happiness is seen as more enduring and fulfilling, encompassing a sense of purpose and positive emotional engagement. According to M. Seligman (2011), authentic happiness suggests that people make choices by estimating how much happiness (life satisfaction) they can achieve, opting for paths that maximize satisfaction.

Research on authentic happiness has been widely conducted in fields such as psychology, education, organizational behavior, and religion, yet studies in tourism and hospitality remain far fewer (Fu & Wang, 2021). The theory of authentic happiness or the emphasis on pleasure and meaning has been promoted in tourism studies (Filep & Deery, 2010), but authentic happiness has not yet become a central focus in the conceptual framework of tourism research. This is significant because, according to Nawijn (2010), tourism is one of the ways to enhance happiness. Filep (2014) also stressed the need to adopt new alternatives for conceptualizing tourist happiness, such as authentic happiness. Moreover, research has shown that tourist happiness, aligned with the theory of authentic happiness, plays a crucial role in influencing tourist flows and accommodation choices (Filep & Deery, 2010; Fu & Wang, 2021; Paniagua et al., 2022).

Hsee et al. (2009) argued that travelers care not only about their experience and satisfaction but, more importantly, they seek authentic happiness. Authentic happiness is essential in guiding tourists' decisions and behavior (Bagheri et al., 2023; Paniagua et al., 2022; Park & Ahn, 2022). A psychology study found that vacations do not significantly impact post-trip happiness (de Bloom et al., 2009) when the trip is primarily for relaxation. Another study conducted by Yu et al. (2020) in the tourism industry revealed that perceived cultural distance is not a significant predictor of existential authenticity. This is because not all tourists seek authenticity in their travels; some prefer to enjoy familiar or socially desired ways of living while traveling.

Several researchers have argued that authentic happiness ultimately contributes to the success of the tourism industry, as it can influence loyalty (Bagheri et al., 2023; Paniagua et al., 2022; Park & Ahn, 2022). When tourists experience authentic happiness during their travels, it can encourage positive behavioral intentions, such as revisiting the destination or recommending it to others (Fu & Wang, 2021). This makes it extremely important. In line with this research, Park & Ahn (2022) found that positive travel experiences contributing to tourists' authentic happiness can enhance behavioral intentions, such as revisiting the destination or recommending it, thereby impacting the industry's growth and success. According to Kluger (2013), the pursuit of happiness has become one of the most important goals of modern society and public policy. Therefore, happiness management plays a crucial role in various businesses (Knobloch et al., 2016).

Authentic Happiness can be analyzed based on three different elements: positive emotions, engagement, and meaning (Filep & Deery, 2010; Fu & Wang, 2021; M. E. P. Seligman, 2002). Seligman emphasizes that in the theory of authentic happiness, long-term subjective well-

being comes from a life filled with meaning, engagement, and pleasure (M. E. P. Seligman, 2002). Additionally, its foundation focuses on directing attention toward humanistic goals, rather than mere self-interest or materialistic pursuits (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). One contrasting perspective on the theory of authentic happiness comes from critics who argue that it may oversimplify the complexity of human happiness and well-being. They suggest that the emphasis on achieving prosocial or altruistic goals as the key to true happiness may not universally apply to all individuals or cultures (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008). Some critics argue that the theory may overlook the importance of individual differences, personal preferences, and cultural variations in defining and experiencing happiness (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008).

Bandung is a metropolitan city in West Java, Indonesia, known for its natural beauty and rich cultural and culinary diversity. Often referred to as the "City of Flowers," Bandung offers a wide range of tourist attractions, from culinary tourism, historical sites, educational tours, shopping destinations, to recreational spots (https://disbudpar.bandung.go.id/c_destinasi/destinasi_list, accessed at 20.30, February 1, 2024). One of the most popular tourist activities in Bandung today is camping. Tangkal Pinus, Cozy Land, and Green Grass are tourist destinations that focus on camping and outdoor activities. These three destinations are located in the Cikole Pine Forest area and offer similar products, including camping, campervans, outdoor activities, and event venues. Below are the average visitor data for these three destinations.

Table 1. The average num ber of tourists at three areas

No	Tourist Destination	Average Number of Tourist Visits per Month
1	Tangkal Pinus	5500
2	Cozy Land	4500
3	Green Grass	2525

Source: olah data 2024

Based on Table 1, it is evident that the number of tourist visits to the three destinations varies despite offering similar types of products. Tangkal Pinus recorded the highest number of visits, with 5,500 tourists. Cozy Land comes in second, with an average of 4,500 visits. Green Grass ranks last, with an average of 2,525 visits per month, a significant difference compared to the other two destinations. However, after conducting interviews with the managers of these destinations, it was revealed that the average number of visitors fluctuates significantly.

All three destinations offer unforgettable experiences with various products, such as campervan stays, glamping, and camping, all modified for maximum comfort. The camping experience here is not just ordinary; it is tailored to meet the needs of tourists. Each offers an authentic natural atmosphere with stunning views of pine trees. Accommodation options range from standard camping to premium camping programs. However, there are differences among them. For example, Tangkal Pinus emphasizes comfort and optimizes the visitor experience by limiting guest capacity and offering a private camping concept. In addition, Tangkal Pinus provides a unique experience, such as allowing visitors to feed alpacas. On the other hand, Green Grass offers a different experience by maintaining the authenticity of the location where tourists stay, without premium camping facilities or modified camping setups.

The camping concept here stays true to its original form, encouraging tourists to immerse themselves in nature.

In the tourism and marketing industry, tourist experiences are becoming increasingly important (Vogt, 2011). Buhalis (2010) highlights the importance of the tourist experience in the future of tourism. Filep & Deery (2010) emphasize that assessing tourists' motivations and satisfaction during key phases of their travel experience can reflect their happiness evaluation. Kim et al. (2015) suggest that the motivations and personal values of tourists, particularly those engaging in activities like hiking, are effective predictors of subjective well-being (authentic happiness). During the tourism experience, how consumers perceive and engage with the moment has a significant impact on their level of enjoyment, satisfaction, and even happiness, which fluctuates according to their level of attention (Loureiro et al., 2019).

Customers experience high levels of authentic happiness when their consumption experiences are enjoyable (Grzeskowiak & Sirgy, 2007; Sirgy et al., 2007). Coghlan (2015) applied the challenge-model of charity to explore how tourism experiences can enhance participants' well-being, finding that various meaningful activities, giving and connecting with others, positive experiences and satisfaction, and social interactions effectively boost authentic happiness. Relaxation experiences are also known to help individuals improve their personal health and can have a positive impact on authentic happiness (Siegenthaler, 1997). Hwang & Lee (2019) argue that by enhancing experiential value, tourists can form positive memories and reduce negative emotions, which in turn can improve authentic happiness.

Several studies have identified that authentic happiness has a significant influence on satisfaction and behavioral intention and can be considered a key precursor to both (Khan & Hussain, 2013; H. Kim et al., 2015; Shin, 2008; H.C. Wu et al., 2017). Unlike previous studies, this research adds that authentic happiness affects loyalty, ultimately impacting the success of the tourism industry (Bagheri et al., 2023; Paniagua et al., 2022; Park & Ahn, 2022). Other studies show that holiday travel increases tourists' happiness (Veenhoven, 2011) and boosts happiness more before trips compared to travel during regular workdays (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Nawijn et al., 2010).

Further research shows that experiential value in the tourism industry influences authentic happiness and behavioral intention (Bagheri et al., 2023; Fu & Wang, 2021). Fu & Wang (2021) suggest that future research should investigate destination image as a mediating variable in the relationship between experiential value and authentic happiness. Unlike previous studies, Han et al. (2019) in their research indicate that what mediates the effect of authentic happiness on customer retention is customer satisfaction.

Destination image is generally the impression tourists have of a destination (Haider & Rein, 1993). A positive image held by tourists can create high expectations, and if these meet or exceed their expectations, it can enhance happiness and leave lasting memories. Destination image influences tourists' decisions in choosing destinations, evaluating their travel experiences, and determining their intention to revisit in the future (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Chon & Usa, 1990). Iordanova & Stylidis (2019) found that the intensity of tourists' experiences is positively related to destination image, indicating that tourists' experiences play a central role in shaping the image of a destination. Additionally, understanding the components that influence the image helps in determining target markets (Goodall, 1990).

In today's economy, many tourists seek unique and memorable experiences to create positive feelings that distinguish themselves and bring happiness (Ketter, 2018; Zhong et al., 2017). Previous research shows that positive tourist experiences generally enhance happiness, whereas disappointing experiences at tourist destinations have a negative impact (Milman, 1998). Positive experiences during a trip can increase overall happiness, and interactions can be identified as one of the most important factors enhancing happiness (S. Chen et al., 2019). Furthermore, happiness enhances tourists' understanding of their experiences (Pearce, 2009).

Research in tourism has found that overall tourism experiences can boost happiness levels (Gillet et al., 2016). Specifically, for entrepreneurs in tourism, these experiences are seen as a key aspect influencing business success, innovation, and competitiveness (Ellis & Rossman, 2008; Kirillova et al., 2017; Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). The main goal of travel marketing today is not just to increase the number of tourists but also to strengthen long-term relationships with them. This is achieved by managing their experiences while at the destination, thus enhancing their happiness levels (Park & Ahn, 2022). This new consumption pattern has also driven businesses to focus on the tourist experience and incorporate specific values into their products or services to inspire memorable and fulfilling experiences (Oh et al., 2007).

Research on the effect of experiential value on authentic happiness through destination image in Indonesia's tourism industry remains limited. The researcher selected experiential value as a key variable and destination image as a mediating factor, as the application of experiential value contributes significantly to marketing strategies, and destination image is considered a crucial factor in the success of destination marketing (Stylidis et al., 2017). Companies can utilize this concept to create unique, enjoyable, and memorable experiences for customers, ultimately enhancing consumer satisfaction (Styawan & Astuti, 2014). Moreover, although experiential value is not a new idea, there is still little academic research in marketing that explores the importance of customer experiences (Jahromi et al., 2015).

The theoretical approach used to examine the issue of authentic happiness is rooted in positive psychology, specifically drawing on Seligman's (2002) theory of authentic happiness to understand the psychology of tourists through a different concept of happiness (M. Seligman, 2011). Positive psychology encompasses research on topics such as positive emotions, happiness, well-being, kindness, gratitude, and other expressions of desirable aspects of human existence (Compton & Hoffman, 2018). Meanwhile, issues related to experiential value and destination image will be analyzed through the theoretical approach

of Marketing for Tourism and Hospitality by Kotler et al. (2021). Based on the research context outlined above, further studies are needed to test the validity of the theory regarding the relationship between experiential value, destination image, and authentic happiness as applied to Cozy Land, Green Grass, and Tangkal Pinus. This research will focus on the experiential value of tourists and how it impacts their level of authentic happiness.

1.1 Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism

According to Kotler, Bowen, Mankens, et al. in the book Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism, marketing is the process through which companies create value for customers and society, build strong customer relationships to gain value from them in return, while also providing benefits to society (Kotler et al., 2021). The American Marketing Association defines marketing as the activities, institutions, and processes aimed at creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Marketing for the tourism industry has now evolved into a multi-dimensional collaborative effort driven by technological advancements and the growing demand for authentic co-creation experiences (Fyall et al., 2019).

In the study of marketing for tourism and hospitality, consumer behavior is a key area of focus and serves as the middle theory for this research. Consumer behavior is the study of how consumers make choices in searching for, evaluating, purchasing, and using products and services that they believe will fulfill their needs (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). It explains how people decide to allocate their money, time, and effort on goods sold by marketers, and includes an understanding of which products and brands consumers choose, as well as the reasons, timing, and locations of their purchases (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).

The book Marketing for Tourism and Hospitality also discusses the marketing mix. According to Kotler et al. (2021), the marketing mix is a set of controllable tactical marketing tools that companies combine to generate the desired response in the target market. The marketing mix includes everything a company can do to influence demand for its product (Kotler et al., 2021). The many possibilities can be grouped into four categories, known as the 4Ps: product, price, place, and promotion (Kotler et al., 2021).

1.2 Psychology Humanistic

The second grand theory used in this research is humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychology is a combination of existential, transpersonal, and constructivist theories, encompassing a broad range of inquiry (Schneider et al., 2015). Developed by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, humanistic psychology emphasizes the importance of individual subjective experience and the potential for personal growth and self-actualization. Positive psychology is a general term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and supportive institutions (Seligman et al., 2005). Positive psychology will serve as the middle theory in this research.

1.3 Authentic Happiness

Authentic happiness is a concept that goes beyond mere feelings of pleasure; it encompasses engagement, meaning, and purpose in life (Tandler et al., 2020). According to Seligman and Royzman (2003), authentic happiness synthesizes three traditional theories of happiness: hedonism, desire theory, and objective list theory. These approaches highlight the importance of pleasure (hedonism), well-being (desire theory), and a meaningful life (objective list theory) in creating lasting happiness (Peterson et al., 2007).

Various scholars offer nuanced definitions of authentic happiness. For example, Seligman (2002) characterizes it as a stable and enduring state of well-being, while Cropanzano and Wright (2001) emphasize the predominance of positive emotions over negative ones. Fu and Wang (2021) and Headey et al. (2010) further emphasize that authentic happiness is rooted in internalized values and life meaning, making it a more stable emotional state anchored in significant life experiences.

Previous research has identified three main dimensions for measuring authentic happiness: pleasant life (positive emotions), engaged life (deep involvement in meaningful activities), and meaningful life (a sense of purpose). These dimensions have been applied across various fields, such as psychology and tourism (Seligman, 2002; Filep & Deery, 2010; Fu & Wang, 2021).

The model of authentic happiness integrates three key dimensions that shape individual well-being. The first dimension, positive emotion (the pleasant life), emphasizes maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain, aligning with hedonistic principles (Tandler et al., 2020). The second, engagement (the engaged life), highlights the importance of being deeply involved in meaningful activities where individuals invest their time and energy into experiences they find fulfilling. The third dimension, meaning (the meaningful life), focuses on living a life driven by personal strengths and virtues, allowing individuals to find purpose beyond personal satisfaction (Seligman, 2002; Filep & Deery, 2010; Fu & Wang, 2021). Together, these dimensions form a comprehensive model of authentic happiness, integrating positive emotions, engagement, and purpose as essential components of long-term well-being.

1.4 Destination Image

Destination image is a critical factor influencing tourist destination choice, as travelers tend to select destinations with strong, positive images (Stylos et al., 2016). It is a concept widely discussed in tourism studies, often defined as the combination of internal and external factors shaping the perception of a place (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), destination image can be described as the impressions or perceptions of a location held by individuals.

This makes destination image a vital element for improving the effectiveness of tourism marketing (Zahra, 2012). It is recognized as a significant factor in the success of destination marketing strategies (Stylidis et al., 2017). For the purposes of this research, destination image is understood as the individual's perception or impression of a destination (Gartner, 1994; Haider & Rein, 1993; Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

Previous research identifies several dimensions for measuring destination image, which are commonly categorized into cognitive, affective, and unique components. Cognitive image refers to the knowledge and beliefs about a destination, while affective image captures the emotions and feelings associated with it. Unique image highlights the distinguishing elements that set the destination apart from others (Agapito et al., 2013; Qu et al., 2011; Stylos et al., 2016).

The model of destination image integrates three main dimensions: Affective Image, which involves the emotions and feelings associated with the destination; Cognitive Image, which is based on the information and beliefs one holds about the destination; and Unique Image, which refers to the distinctive characteristics that differentiate the destination from others (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Agapito et al., 2013; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Setiawan et al., 2020). These dimensions collectively form a comprehensive framework for understanding how destination image is constructed and how it influences tourist behavior.

1.5 Experiential Value

Experiential value refers to the perceived benefit or value that customers derive from their direct or indirect interaction with a product or service. It is often categorized as either active, which involves physical or mental engagement with a product or service, or reactive, which stems from consumer evaluation and response (Holbrook, 1999). In the context of services, experiential value is highly subjective and is based on individual perceptions of quality and attributes (Leong et al., 2015). According to Tsai et al. (2024), experiential value is driven by the consumer's interaction with a product or service, which has a lasting impact on their preferences and post-consumption experience.

Experiential value plays a crucial role in shaping customer satisfaction and influencing behaviors such as purchase intentions and recommendations. Lewis and Chambers (2000) note that the experiential value perceived by consumers reflects their views on what is created and delivered by a service provider (Fu & Wang, 2021). This value can arise either from direct interaction with a product or through indirect appreciation, such as observing a service from a distance (Mathwick et al., 2001).

Experiential value is often measured across several dimensions, including aesthetics, playfulness, efficiency, and consumer return on investment (CROI). These dimensions reflect the degree to which a product or service provides intrinsic enjoyment, visual appeal, and functional benefits (Mathwick et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2022). For example, experiential value can be assessed by how aesthetically pleasing a service encounter is, how much it enhances consumer playfulness, or how efficiently it meets consumer expectations and provides value for the investment (Norris et al., 2023).

The experiential value model encompasses four primary dimensions: Aesthetic, which involves the consumer's reaction to the harmony and unity of physical objects or performances; CROI, which measures the perceived economic benefits and efficiency derived from a service; Playfulness, a self-initiated and inwardly directed experience that fosters personal enjoyment; and Social Value, which facilitates connections with other social groups or peers and enhances the effectiveness of products and services (Jan et al., 2023; Mathwick et al., 2001; Wu & Liang, 2009). These dimensions collectively shape the overall experiential value perceived by consumers and influence their behavior in terms of satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth recommendations.

2. METHODS

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How does experiential value influence authentic happiness among tourists?
2. Does destination image mediate the relationship between experiential value and authentic happiness?

Hence, this study employs a quantitative research approach. This research provides an overview of the study variables, including experiential value, destination image, and authentic happiness. In addition, this research also test the hypothesized relationships between these variables. The hypotheses are as follow:

1. Experiential value has a positive and significant effect on authentic happiness through destination image.
2. Experiential value has a positive and significant effect on authentic happiness.
3. Experiential value has a positive and significant effect on destination image.
4. Destination image has a positive and significant effect on authentic happiness.

Moreover, an explanatory survey method is used to collect data through questionnaires distributed to tourists at Cozyland, Green Grass, and Tangkal Pinus. The population comprises tourists who have visited the three destinations. A stratified random sampling technique is used to select a sample of 373 respondents, ensuring representation from each destination.

Data is collected through questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The SEM analysis examines the direct and indirect effects of experiential value on authentic happiness through destination image. Validity and reliability tests are conducted to ensure the quality of the data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results of Descriptive Testing

Based on the data processing results from distributing questionnaires to 302 tourist respondents who had visited Cozyland/Green Grass and Tangkal Pinus, the recap of responses for the experiential value, destination image, and happiness variables is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Mean Score Experiential Value

No.	Items	Mean score
	Experiential Value	
1	Aesthetically, the campground is very appealing	4.22
2	I appreciate the layout design of the campground.	4.32
3	I like the decoration and the environment of the campground.	4.19
4	Camping at the campground allows me to break away from my routine.	4.25
5	Camping at the campground makes me feel like I'm in a different world.	4.14
6	Camping at the campground helps me forget my problems.	4.06
7	I greatly enjoy camping at the campground.	4.30
8	Camping at the campground can be adjusted to fit my schedule.	4.17
9	The products available at the campground meet my needs.	4.15
10	Camping at the destination enhances my quality of life.	4.16
11	The price offered is commensurate with the experience gained.	4.10
12	Camping at the campground helps me socialize with others.	3.97
13	Camping at the campground allows me to meet people with similar interests..	4.10
	Destination Image	
1	The environment at the campground has a good quality.	4.30
2	The infrastructure at the campground has a good quality.	4.25
3	The infrastructure at the campground is adequate.	4.25
4	There are many activities that can be done at the campground.	4.15
5	I find the campground to be very clean.	4.18
6	I feel relaxed when at the campground.	4.30
7	I feel more energized after camping at the campground.	4.23
8	The campground has a natural environment, making it stand out from others.	4.13
9	The campground offers unique attractions or activities compared to other campgrounds.	4.05
	Happiness	
1	The camping experience at the campground was very memorable.	4.29
2	I am very happy to camp at the campground.	4.33
3	Camping at the campground creates beautiful memories.	4.22
4	I had an unforgettable experience after camping at the campground.	4.22
5	When I was here, time felt like it passed so quickly.	4.20

No.	Items	Mean score
6	Camping here brought me and my friends/family closer together.	4.29
7	The activities and facilities provided here offer opportunities to practice.	4.08
8	I feel more appreciative of nature after camping at the campground.	4.26
9	I have become more grateful after camping at the campground.	4.30
10	The activities offered at the campground helped me gain new knowledge.	4.09

The table provides insights into experiential value, destination image, and happiness related to camping at the campground. In the experiential value variables, respondents found the design and aesthetics of the campground highly appealing, with the highest-rated item being the layout design (4.32). Camping is appreciated as an escape from routine and a way to enjoy a different world (4.25 and 4.14, respectively). Activities enhance enjoyment and meet campers' practical needs, with scores above 4.0 for enjoyment (4.30), schedule flexibility (4.17), and quality-of-life improvement (4.16). Social interactions were moderately rated, with socialization (3.97) being the lowest, indicating room for improvement in fostering community interactions.

Moreover, in the destination Image variable, the campground's environmental quality and relaxing atmosphere are rated highly (both at 4.30), reflecting its natural appeal. Infrastructure quality and adequacy were also well-rated (both at 4.25), supporting a positive perception of the facilities. Activities and attractions were slightly less appreciated, with unique attractions scoring lower (4.05), suggesting an opportunity to innovate and stand out further.

Finally, overall happiness levels were high, with respondents expressing memorable (4.29) and unforgettable experiences (4.22). Strengthening bonds with friends or family and increasing appreciation for nature scored highly (4.29 and 4.26, respectively). Opportunities for personal growth and learning were moderately rated (4.08 and 4.09), indicating some scope to expand educational or skill-enhancing activities.

3.2 Hypothesis Testing

The structural model analysis is illustrated in Table 3. The result shows that the direct effect of experiential values to destination image has significant effect with a P=0.001P = 0.001P=0.001, and the effect size (1.06) lies within the confidence interval [1.013, 1.128]. The rejection of H0 and acceptance of H1 is justified. The direct effect of Experiential Value to Authentic Happiness is significant (P=0.004) with an effect size of 1.73, supporting the conclusion that experiential value enhances authentic happiness. The direct effect of Destination Image to Authentic Happiness is non-significant effect (P=0.917P), with the confidence interval including zero ([-2.115, 0.464]), confirming no relationship between these variables.

Table 3. The structural model analysis

Dimension	Lower Bounds	Upper Bounds	P - Value	Impact Effect
Direct Effect				
Experiential value- Destination image	1.013	1.128	0.001	1.06
Experiential value- Authentic happiness	0.454	2.948	0.004	1.73
Destination image- Authentic happiness	-2.115	0.464	0.917	0.01
Indirect Effect				
Experiential value- Destination image- Authentic happiness	-2.166	0.499	0.917	-0.011 (1.06*-0.01)
Total Effect				
Experiential value- Destination image	0.860	1.333	0.001	1.061
Experiential value- Authentic happiness	1.425	2.115	0.001	1.715
Destination image- Authentic happiness	-3.895	0.862	0.917	-0.10

Morever, the analysis concludes no significant indirect effect of experiential value on authentic happiness through destination image (P=0.917, indirect effect = -0.011). This is consistent with the direct effects and indicates no mediating role for destination image. The total effect of experiential value on authentic happiness (1.715, P=0.001) confirms that the primary pathway is direct rather than mediated through destination image. The reported confidence intervals support the significance or lack thereof for the respective hypotheses. For significant relationships, the intervals exclude zero, while for non-significant ones, they include zero.

Therefore, Hypotheses 2 and 3 are appropriately rejected based on significant P-values. Whereas, hypotheses 4 and 1 are correctly accepted due to non-significant P-values.

3.3. Discussion

Experiential value is a marketing concept that reflects the perceived benefits or value customers derive from their interactions with a product or service. It has become a vital element of modern business strategies, as it significantly influences customer satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term success. Enhancing experiential value requires understanding customer needs and expectations, as well as ongoing innovation to meet and exceed those expectations. In this study, experiential value is shaped by dimensions derived from prior research (Jan et al., 2023; Keng et al., 2007; Mathwick et al., 2001; Norris et al., 2023;

Prebensen & Rosengren, 2016; Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022; Weretecki et al., 2021; Wu & Liang, 2009). These dimensions include **aesthetics**, **playfulness**, **Customer Return on Investment (CROI)**, and **social value**.

Experiences that provide emotional and cognitive value enhance authentic happiness. Activities that deeply engage tourists and offer meaningful experiences contribute to long-term happiness. Authentic happiness combines pleasurable experiences (hedonism theory), well-being (desire theory), and a meaningful life (objective list theory) (Peterson et al., 2007). It is a subjective assessment of experiencing more positive emotions and relatively few negative ones (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001). Unlike general happiness, authentic happiness evaluates how an individual experiences **pleasure**, **engagement**, and **meaning** in life. This study draws on multiple sources (Filep & Deery, 2010; Fu & Wang, 2021; Seligman, 2002) to define three key dimensions of authentic happiness: **a pleasant life**, **an engaged life**, and **a meaningful life**.

Tourists who experience authentic happiness during their visits tend to develop a more positive perception of the destination, which can encourage them to return and recommend it to others. Destination image encompasses the beliefs, ideas, and impressions individuals hold about a destination (Haider & Rein, 1993). It is a critical factor in successful tourism marketing (Stylidis et al., 2017), as it shapes tourists' expectations and influences their experiences. If a destination's image is positive and realistic, it can enhance the overall tourist experience. This study combines insights from prior research (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Agapito et al., 2013; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Chen et al., 2015; Qu et al., 2011; Setiawan et al., 2020; Stylos et al., 2016) to identify three dimensions of destination image: **cognitive image**, **affective image**, and **unique image**.

This study investigates the impact of experiential value on authentic happiness through destination image. The findings reveal that experiential value does not have a significant indirect effect on authentic happiness through destination image. However, experiential value does have a significant positive direct impact on both destination image and authentic happiness. These findings align with prior research (Deng & Tang, 2020; Wang, 2011; Leong et al., 2015), which confirmed that experiential value positively influences destination image. Additionally, the **CROI dimension** was found to have the strongest influence on shaping experiential value, consistent with Wang (2011).

The study further demonstrates that experiential value significantly affects authentic happiness, corroborating previous findings (Bagheri et al., 2023; Fu & Wang, 2021; Hwang & Lee, 2019). This supports the assertion by Hwang & Lee (2019) that enhancing experiential value helps create positive memories and reduce negative emotions, thereby improving authentic happiness. Tourists experience high levels of authentic happiness when their consumption experiences are enjoyable (Grzeskowiak & Sirgy, 2007).

However, the results also indicate that destination image does not significantly affect authentic happiness, suggesting it does not mediate the relationship between experiential value and authentic happiness. This contradicts Fu & Wang (2021), who argued that destination image can mediate this relationship, and Chen & Li (2018), who demonstrated that destination attributes, such as image and service quality, significantly predict tourist happiness.

In conclusion, while experiential value plays a direct role in enhancing authentic happiness and shaping destination image, the latter does not act as a mediator. These findings highlight the importance of focusing on enhancing experiential value to create memorable and fulfilling tourist experiences.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships between experiential value, destination image, and authentic happiness in the context of tourism. The findings highlight several key insights. First, Experiential value significantly and positively influences authentic happiness. Tourists who derive meaningful, enjoyable, and engaging experiences are more likely to achieve a heightened sense of authentic happiness. The CROI dimension emerged as the strongest contributor to shaping experiential value, emphasizing the importance of providing customers with tangible and intangible returns for their time and investment. Second, Experiential value also significantly impacts destination image, affirming its role in shaping tourists' perceptions and expectations. Enhancing experiential value through aesthetic appeal, playfulness, and social engagement can improve how a destination is perceived, encouraging repeat visits and recommendations. Third, the study found no significant indirect effect of experiential value on authentic happiness through destination image. This indicates that while experiential value and destination image are independently important, destination image does not mediate the relationship between experiential value and authentic happiness. Fourth, destination image was not found to have a significant direct impact on authentic happiness. This challenges prior research that suggests destination image is a critical predictor of tourist happiness and highlights the need for further exploration of the factors influencing authentic happiness in tourism contexts.

The findings underscore the importance of focusing on enhancing experiential value to directly improve tourist satisfaction and happiness. While destination image remains vital for attracting tourists, its role as a mediator in shaping authentic happiness is limited. Tourism stakeholders should prioritize creating memorable and meaningful experiences to foster positive emotions and long-term satisfaction.

Further research could explore the role of other potential mediators, such as service quality or cultural connections, in the relationship between experiential value and authentic happiness. Comparative studies across different cultural or geographical contexts could also provide deeper insights into how tourists perceive and experience authentic happiness.

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