

# From Inazuma to Japan: The Role of Experience Economy in Video Game-Induced Tourism

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# INTRODUCTION

## Research Motivation

### Media-induced tourism

- A type of tourism where many people travel to a destination or attraction as a result of exposure to media content (Iwashita, 2008).
- Forms: Literary Tourism, Music-induced Tourism, and Film/TV-induced Tourism.

Video game-induced tourism has received less scholarly attention than other forms of media-induced tourism (Dubois & Gibbs, 2018).

Understanding how in-game experiences contribute to video game-induced tourism can support destination promotion while offering insights for developers to design games with higher quality and value.



# INTRODUCTION Video game-induced tourism

The gaming industry continues to grow rapidly, with global revenue reaching \$197 billion in 2025 (Game World Observer, 2025).

As game development technologies become more advanced and player demographics become increasingly diverse, video game-induced tourism has emerged as a growing phenomenon.



Left: New York City; Right: Liberty City (GTA IV)  
(Source:Hypebeast.com)



Left: Fushimi Inari Shrine; Right: Narukami Shrine (Genshin Impact)  
(Source: Alamy.com)

# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Without authenticity, the relationship between games and tourism may disappear because players lack anchorage points to connect virtual experiences with the real world (Dubois et al., 2021; Carvalho & Silveira, 2024; Zhu et al., 2025).

The Experience Economy theory offers an appropriate framework for examining the multidimensional nature of in-game experience (Dubois & Gibbs, 2018; Oh et al., 2007).

- To examine the effect of authenticity on the four dimensions of the experience economy and destination image
- To investigate how the four experiential dimensions influence destination image and travel intention.
- To assess the effect of destination image on travel intention.



# LITERATURE REVIEW Experience Economy (1)

The Experience Economy is a shift from service delivery to staging experiences to create memorable and personalized events for consumers (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 1999).

- **Educational experience** is when consumers engage their minds to enhance their knowledge or learn new skills.
- **Entertainment experience** is when customers are primarily engaged by performances or activities that occupy their attention to make them "feel" amused or delighted.
- **Esthetic experience** allows tourists to be enriched by sensual environments and unique physical settings while simply "being there".
- **Escapist experience** is when an individual becomes completely engrossed in an activity that allows them to "become" part of a different world, time, or place.



# LITERATURE REVIEW Experience Economy (2)

The experience economy framework has been applied across various tourism contexts, including B&Bs, cruise vacations, wine tourism, festivals, and museums (Oh et al., 2007; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012; Getz & Carlsen, 2008; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011).

The importance of each dimension may vary depending on the context (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011).

In video game-induced tourism, Rainoldi et al. (2022) and Dubois and Gibbs (2018) apply the Experience Economy as a theoretical framework to explain the appeal of video game experiences compared with traditional media, while Zhu et al. (2025) use it to discuss experience design and marketing. However, all three studies used qualitative methods.



# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Authenticity

**Object-related authenticity** refers to the perceived genuineness of virtual representations of physical entities such as art, artifacts, or buildings. (Nam et al., 2023).

- It includes an objective authenticity (verifiable factual truth) and a constructive authenticity (how "real" an object feels based on personal expectations) (Nam et al., 2023).
- Travel experience is influenced not only by the authentic nature of an object, but also by how travelers perceive the authenticity of it (Lee et al., 2024).



# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Relationship between Authenticity and Experience (1)

Authentic cultural content in games helps players better understand and learn about a culture (Duan and Guo, 2025). The realistic game environments help players connect virtual experiences with real-life logic and personal memories, making learning through gameplay more meaningful (Zhu et al., 2025).

**H1a: Authenticity positively influences Education.**

The perceived authenticity of in-game objects can make the virtual environment more believable and engaging, thereby enhancing the enjoyment of the experience. (Mochocki, 2021).

**H1b: Authenticity positively influences Entertainment.**



# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Relationship between Authenticity and Experience (2)

The meticulously crafted realism and multisensory imitation of the game world provide players with a “dual enjoyment of visual and auditory senses,” thereby fostering aesthetic appreciation (Zhu et al., 2025).

**H1c: Authenticity positively influences Esthetics.**

When players perceive the virtual world as adhering to real-world logic and visual verisimilitude, they are more likely to achieve a state of immersion, allowing them to feel as if they have been "transported" to a believable alternative reality (Zhu et al., 2025)

**H1d: Authenticity positively influences Escapism.**

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Relationship between Authenticity and Destination Image

**Destination image** is a general and subjective assessment that includes both cognitive aspects, such as knowledge of destination attributes, and affective aspects, such as emotional responses (Dubois et al., 2021; Li & Jiang, 2025).

Authenticity positively affects tourists' affective responses, shaping visitors' thoughts and contributing to knowledge gain, which in turn predicts their intention to visit the actual physical site (Atzeni et al., 2022).

Authentic cultural elements in games facilitate psychological processes that shape both the cognitive and affective images of a destination among foreign players (Duan and Guo, 2025).

**H2: Authenticity positively influences Destination Image.**



# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Relationship between Experience and Destination Image (1)

Video games can function as educational tools to arouse interest and curiosity about different topics and destinations (Carvalho & Silveira, 2024), shaping a player's cognitive representation of a destination.

**H3a: Education positively influences Destination Image.**

Interactions with non-player characters (NPCs) in video games can evoke strong emotional responses and make the experience more active and engaging (Rainoldi et al., 2022), thereby strengthening affective engagement and enhancing the overall destination image.

**H3b: Entertainment positively influences Destination Image.**



# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Relationship between Experience and Destination Image (2)

Visual and audio aesthetics significantly improve a player's cognitive and affective perception of a destination's image (Yin et al., 2024). Promoting "picturesque environments" through the screen forms expectations and images in the minds of potential tourists (Dubois & Gibbs, 2018).

### **H3c: Esthetics positively influences Destination Image.**

By giving players a sense of agency and presence, video games can turn a virtual space into a meaningful "place" in the mind, fostering "place attachment". This attachment reinforces the player's cognitive and affective perception of the destination (Xie, 2025).

### **H3d: Escapism positively influences Destination Image.**



# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Relationship between Experience and Travel Intention (1)

**Travel intention** refers to the inclination or desire of individuals or groups to engage in travel or participate in tourism activities (Li & Jiang, 2025).

The curiosity arising from educational experience can serve as a direct behavioral catalyst, prompting players to visit real locations to verify their virtual learning (Uzunogullari et al., 2025; Zhu et al., 2025).

**H4a: Education positively influences Travel Intention.**



# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Relationship between Experience and Travel Intention (2)

The "excitement" generated by gameplay bypasses rational evaluation and leads to an immediate behavioral impulse to visit the physical site (Zhu et al., 2025; Uzunogullari et al., 2025).

**H4b: Entertainment positively influences Travel Intention.**

The intense arousal from beautiful virtual scenery can lead to favorable behavioral intentions immediately after exposure without requiring complex cognitive processing (Oh et al., 2007).

**H4c: Esthetics positively influences Travel Intention.**



# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Relationship between Experience and Travel Intention (3)

Escapist experience may motivate players to visit the actual destination in order to pursue real-life experiences similar to those encountered in the game (Sajid, 2018; Rainoldi et al., 2022).

**H4d: Escapism positively influences Travel Intention.**



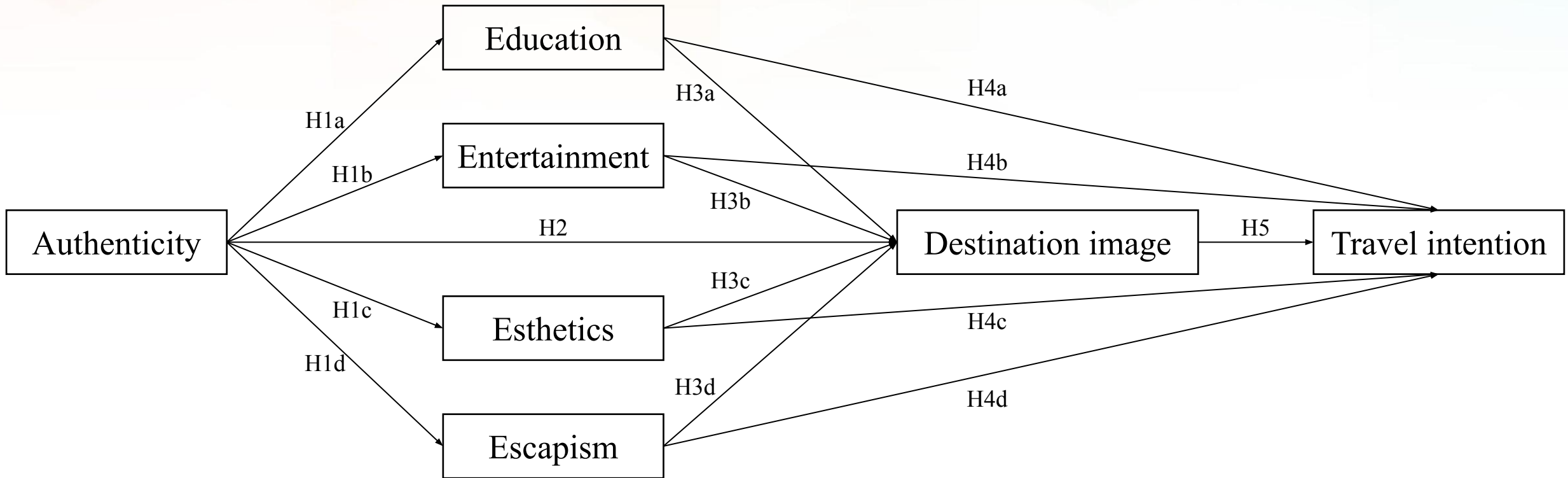
# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Relationship between Destination Image and Travel Intention

Tourists with a more positive destination image are more likely to choose and visit that real-world location (Crompton and Ankomah, 1993).

**H5: Destination image positively influences travel intention.**

# RESEARCH FRAMEWORK



# METHODOLOGY

## Research context: Inazuma vs Japan

- Monthly active players ~ 15.9M from all over the world
- High discussion volume, ranking #1 on X in 2024
- In 2025 alone, related videos on TikTok garnered more than 2.5 billion views, ranking #9
- Official YouTube Channel has over 8 million subscribers, and over 2 billion total video views
- Well representing past political system and isolationism, natural landscapes and architecture, and traditional culture such as costumes, food, arts, festivals, etc.

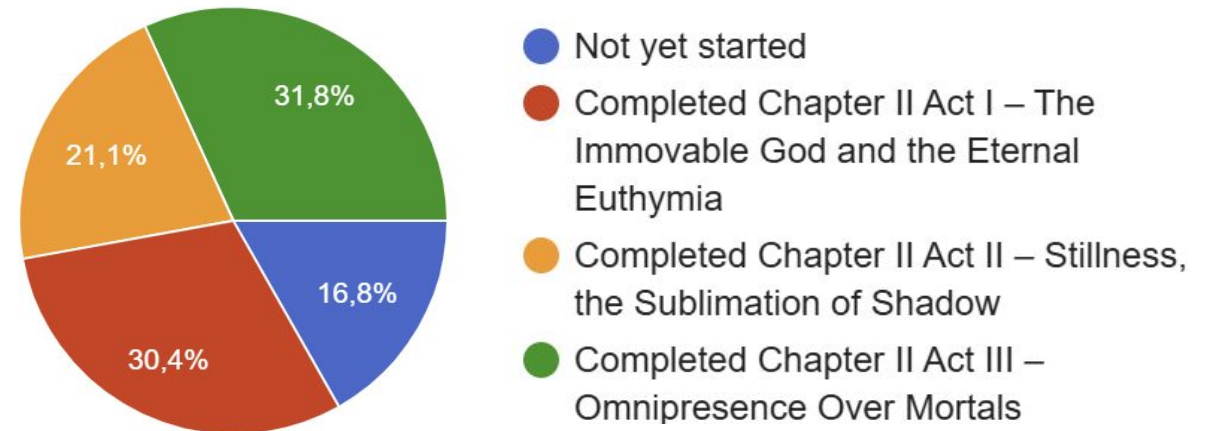
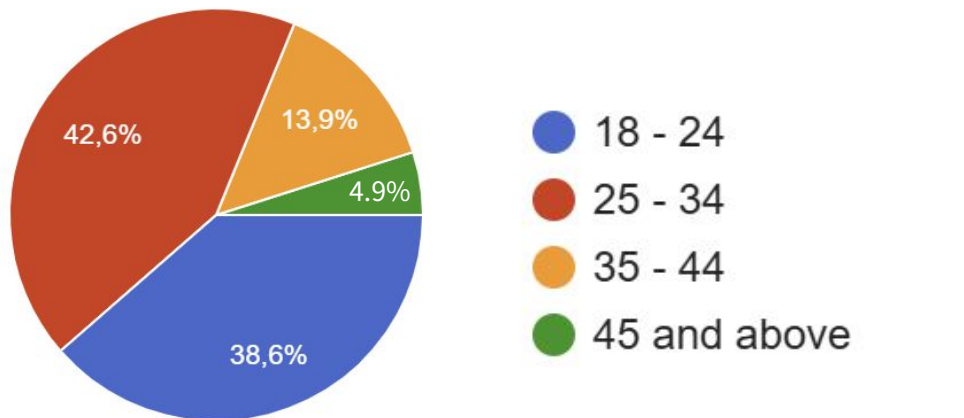
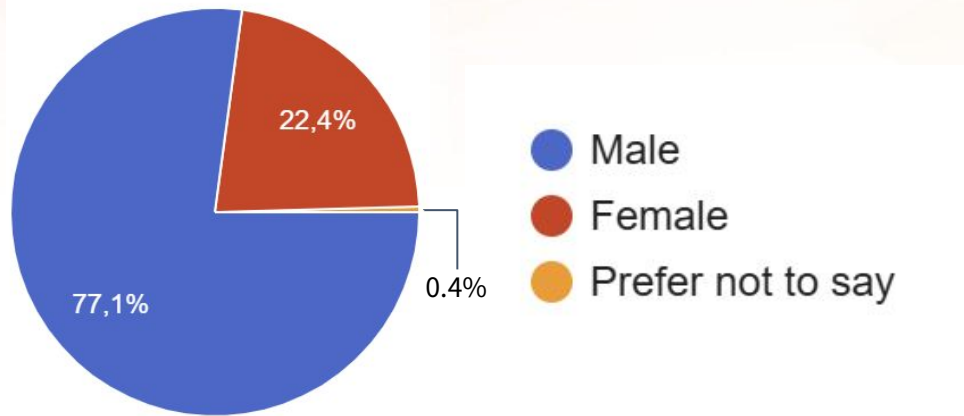


# METHODOLOGY

- Convenience sampling approach
- Online survey distributed through Genshin Impact community Facebook and Discord
- Filtering criteria
  - Active players (played at least in the last 3 months)
  - Completed Inazuma quests or explored the Inazuma region
- A total of 222 participants were recruited.



# PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE



# MEASURES

Constructs	Sample Measures	Number of Items	Scales	References
<b>Authenticity</b>	The landscapes and architecture of Inazuma were as accurate as the real Japanese cultural sites.	5	5-point Likert scale	Nam et al., 2023
<b>Education</b>	The experience in Inazuma provided has made me more knowledgeable about Japan.	6	5-point Likert scale	Oh et al., 2007
<b>Entertainment</b>	Watching the activities of characters and NPCs in Inazuma was very entertaining.	6	5-point Likert scale	
<b>Esthetics</b>	The setting of Inazuma provided pleasure to my senses.	6	5-point Likert scale	
<b>Escapism</b>	I felt I played a different character while in Inazuma.	6	5-point Likert scale	
<b>Destination Image</b>	On a scale of 1-5, what is your opinion of Japan after experiencing Inazuma: Interesting - Boring	8	5-point semantic differential scale	Molinillo et al., 2018
<b>Travel Intention</b>	After exploring Inazuma, I want to visit Japan.	3	5-point Likert scale	Arbia et al., 2025

# DATA ANALYSIS

The hypotheses were tested using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4.0.

Measurement model: All factor loadings were above 0.640.

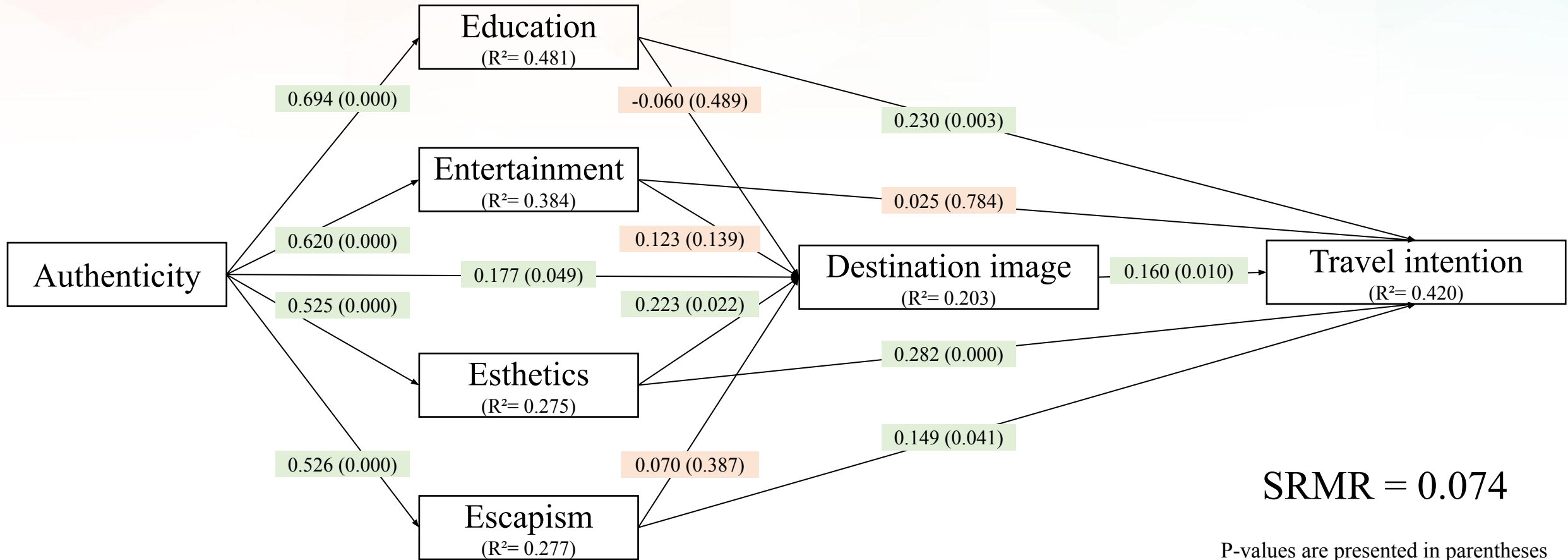
	Reliability			Convergent validity
	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Authenticity	0.833	0.837	0.889	0.667
Education	0.838	0.842	0.886	0.609
Entertainment	0.786	0.789	0.862	0.612
Esthetics	0.780	0.781	0.850	0.531
Escapism	0.824	0.834	0.883	0.653
Destination Image	0.813	0.825	0.861	0.510
Travel Intention	0.836	0.848	0.901	0.753

# DATA ANALYSIS

Discriminant validity - Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) - Matrix

	Authenticity	Education	Entertainment	Esthetics	Escapism	Destination Image	Travel Intention
Authenticity							
Education	0.824						
Entertainment	0.764	0.690					
Esthetics	0.636	0.648	0.846				
Escapism	0.624	0.690	0.673	0.520			
Destination Image	0.411	0.318	0.460	0.468	0.325		
Travel Intention	0.591	0.625	0.595	0.668	0.594	0.421	

# STRUCTURAL MODEL RESULTS



# STRUCTURAL MODEL RESULTS

Hypotheses		Path Coefficient	P values	Results
<b>H1a</b>	Authenticity → Education	0.694	0.000	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H1b</b>	Authenticity → Entertainment	0.620	0.000	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H1c</b>	Authenticity → Esthetics	0.525	0.000	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H1d</b>	Authenticity → Escapism	0.526	0.000	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H2</b>	Authenticity → Destination Image	0.177	0.049	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H3a</b>	Education → Destination Image	-0.060	0.489	<b>Not Supported</b>
<b>H3b</b>	Entertainment → Destination Image	0.123	0.139	<b>Not Supported</b>

# STRUCTURAL MODEL RESULTS

Hypotheses		Path Coefficient	P values	Results
<b>H3c</b>	Esthetics → Destination Image	0.223	0.022	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H3d</b>	Escapism → Destination Image	0.070	0.387	<b>Not Supported</b>
<b>H4a</b>	Education → Travel Intention	0.230	0.003	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H4b</b>	Entertainment → Travel Intention	0.025	0.784	<b>Not Supported</b>
<b>H4c</b>	Esthetics → Travel Intention	0.282	0.000	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H4d</b>	Escapism → Travel Intention	0.149	0.041	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H5</b>	Destination Image → Travel Intention	0.160	0.010	<b>Supported</b>



# DISCUSSION

Authenticity significantly strengthens all four experiential dimensions and destination image, consistent with Zhu et al. (2025).

Aesthetics is the only experiential dimension that shapes destination image and also directly increases travel intention, consistent with Oh et al. (2007).

Education still promotes travel intention, possibly because gameplay creates a knowledge gap, curiosity, and a desire to verify game-based knowledge in real life. This interpretation can be discussed alongside Carvalho and Silveira (2024).

Escapism also increases travel intention directly, possibly because players may want to pursue real-life experiences similar to those experienced by their in-game characters (Dubois & Gibbs, 2018; Uzunogullari et al., 2025).

Entertainment alone is not sufficient to shape destination image or travel intention.

Destination image also has a significant positive effect on travel intention, which is consistent with the well-established view in tourism research that a favorable destination image increases visit intention.

# DISCUSSION Implications

## Theoretical Contribution

- Extend experience economy theory by adding authenticity as an antecedent of the 4Es.
- Not all experiential dimensions influence tourism outcomes in the same way.
- Esthetics plays the strongest role in shaping destination image.
- Education and Escapism appear to influence travel intention even without significantly shaping destination image.

## Managerial Implications

- Destination marketers and game developers should emphasize authenticity and esthetics, as these help build a stronger destination image and ultimately increase travel intention.
- Educational and escapist experiences also encourage travel intention. Therefore, narrative engagement and immersive gameplay may be important design antecedents.



# DISCUSSION Limitations and Suggestions

## Limitations:

- Focuses on one game only, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.
- Measures travel intention rather than actual travel behavior. Therefore, the findings cannot confirm whether players will actually visit Japan.

## Suggestions for future research:

- Examine whether these relationships remain consistent across different game genres, destinations, and player groups.
- Further examine other antecedents of in-game experience such as perceived agency and narrative transportation.

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