

## Entrepreneurship as a Tool for Presenting Authentic Experiences through Spiritual Tourism Development

Teimour Marjani

*Industrial Management Department, University of Science and Culture, Tehran, Iran  
marjani@usc.ac.ir*

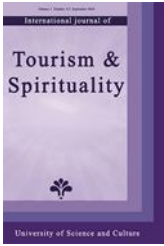
Afsaneh Pourjam

*Tourism Department, University of Science and Culture, Tehran, Iran  
a.pourjam@usc.ac.ir*

### **Abstract**

Although today it is common to categorize spiritual tourism separately as a type of tourism, spirituality can be found at the heart of any travel. What might be taken as granted is that the tourist is going to add something to his/her self and, in this respect, some degree of spirituality can be sought in every type of tourism. Therefore, through entrepreneurship and innovation it would be possible to focus on the development of businesses which are able to offer some degree of spirituality to tourists according to their needs. This paper seeks to provide a deeper view of the relationship between authentic experiences and spiritual tourism and the role of entrepreneurship in utilizing this relationship in order to enrich tourists' experiences. In other words, the spiritual dimension of every type of tourism is discussed and the necessity of its reinforcement through entrepreneurship in tourism and a systematic approach towards the issue is considered.

**Keywords:** spiritual tourism, spiritual entrepreneurship, spirituality, authenticity, self



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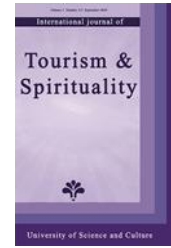
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## **1 Introduction**

In the last four decades of 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we have been witness to significant historical events, technological innovations and extensive social and cultural changes in both the western and nonwestern parts of the world. The world of today is faced with rapid changes (Baumen, 2000), a world which is encountering high speed economic changes as a consequence of globalization, accelerated technological progress and the revolution of communications and information. Although these forces have increased wealth in the world, they have also resulted in an increase in the tempo of life, the collapse of time and space, cultural pluralization, the di-differentiation of social domains, a fragmentation of life styles, a pervasive consumerism, a commoditization of all domains of life, an increasing sense of risk and personal insecurity in a world of fluctuating relationships, uncertain life chances and a post-modern trend of philosophical skepticism (Beck, 1992).

Today, given the apparent superficiality and inauthenticity in modern life and self-alienation of modern people, it is supposed that truth and authenticity should be looked for elsewhere: in other historical eras, in other cultures or in unaffected and more pure life styles. Spirituality then, can be a solution to meet the psychological and social challenges originating in contemporary life style. Therefore, seeking authenticity encourages modern people to travel. But, seeking authenticity does not always have a successful outcome and tourists usually fail to meet their expectations and experience authenticity because scenes, things and monuments are manipulated by the providers of tourism experiences in destinations and authenticity is dependent on the physical features. So, it is now necessary to provide an appropriate definition for the authenticity according to current issues and define the concept as an inner experience which is independent from the physical features of things and monuments in order to find an appropriate solution for the fulfillment of this inner need of modern tourists. Entrepreneurship and providing innovative experiences for tourists through entrepreneurial activities and innovation in services and products can be a useful instrument in this regard. Therefore, this paper attempts to clarify the relationship between authentic experiences of tourists and spirituality in order to manage their tendency towards authentic experiences through spiritual entrepreneurship.

## **2 Theoretical Framework**



According to Triller (1972), the origin of the authenticity concept refers to museums in which experts had been examining the authenticity of objects (Cohen, 1988). Today, the concept of authenticity has developed and it is a modern value that is closely related to the influence of modernity on social life. If an individual does not find authenticity in their social world to provide the feelings of being real and the experience of reality, there remains no other option except looking inside themselves to find the reality. The conflict between self and society is maximized these days and the concept of authenticity is a path to address this inner experience (Berger, 1973). The problem which exists in utilizing the concept of authenticity is that it is a psychological concept which is entered in sociological analyses. Therefore, sociological theorizing about tourism in the last three decades of 20<sup>th</sup> Century has mainly focused on the relationship between tourism and western modernity (MacCannell, 1973, 1976; Wang, 2000), in particular considering authenticity as a cultural motivation – though to varied degrees among people (Cohen, 1979). MacCannell addresses the authenticity seeking in tourism as the traditional pilgrimage because both of them are looking for authentic experiences. He argues that seeking of authenticity by modern people is similar to the prioritizing of sacred things in primary societies and, therefore, it can be compared to religious quests for everlasting truth. But, MacCannell believes that tourism facilities have the tendency towards creating inauthentic tourism spaces for optimistic tourists who considers them as real ones so that, staged authenticity is the result of tourism development. But not all situations fall into this category and, therefore, four different situations must be differentiated (Table 1).

**Table (1): types of touristic situations**

Tourists' Impression of Scene			
Nature of Scene	Real	Real	Staged
		(1) Authentic	(3) Denial of Authenticity (Staging Suspicion)
	Staged	(2) Staged Authenticity (Covert Tourist Space)	(4) Contrived (Overt Tourist Space)

**Reference: MacCannell, 1973**

It seems that what MacCannell (1973) addresses in his valuable work as staged authenticity and its related discussions which say that modern people seek authenticity out of modernity and local people stage it for them has the potential to be the base of a paradigm in sociological studies. But the argument contributed to the clarification of multiple meanings of authenticity (e.g. Burner, 2005; Cohen, 2007) and classified it in three categories of authenticity identified by Wang (1999, 2000).

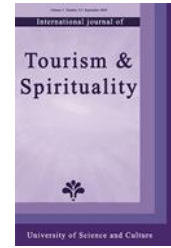
### **Objective Authenticity**

Authenticity involves authentic objects which are exposed to tourists. Authentic experiences occur when objects are considered as being authentic. Therefore, an objective and observable criteria is used to examine authenticity so that, even though tourists perceive that they achieved an authentic experience, if the objects they observe is not real or is staged according to MacCannell, their experience may be not authentic.

### **Subjective Authenticity**

The idea is the social interpretation, not measurable objective features of the observed things. Objects are not considered as being authentic merely because they are inherently authentic but they are considered to be authentic from various viewpoints, approaches, beliefs and perspectives. Hence, this concept is relative, negotiable and dependent on the context and can reflect ambitions, stereotypes and expectations from what is being observed.

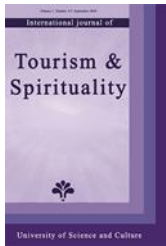
### **Existential Authenticity**



Individual spiritual or mental feeling rose from tourist activities. In such experiences, people feel that being placed in a situation different from their usual life, they have reached an authentic experience and they can represent themselves. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, tourism sociological studies moved away from the authenticity. Authenticity begins to decline under the impact of two historical developments: the post-modern shift in tourism and the development of nonwestern tourism. Some radical post-modernists like Baudrillard (1994) denied the existence of original things in modern society and there are only some similarities with authentic things. However, some others believe that enjoyment and looking for hobbies are now replaced with seeking authenticity among post-modern tourists (Ritzer & Liska, 1997).

### **2-2 Commodification in Tourism**

Commodification is a process in which things and activities take economic value in a way that they are perceived as goods and services. The fundamental question in this regard is what happens for other senses of commoditized things particularly religious, cultural and social senses especially under the impact of tourism. Rituals, traditions, local customs and folklore all can be commoditized. Moreover, since this process often begins by cultural mediators and tourism entrepreneurs outside the local community, it may result in foreigners taking advantage of local community and their resources. Besides, the process of commodification can also influence cultural products. Trying to provide them to the public more extensively may bring about the change of their nature to adapt to tourists' taste (Boorstin, 1964). For instance, there may occur some changes in the material or color of handicrafts (Cohen, 1983). Therefore, the commodification process can expose tourism to criticisms because it cause the attraction of both the authenticity of objects and activities and tourist' experiences of authentic things.



### **2-2-1 Commodification of Authenticity**

Much of the existing literature around the nature of modern tourism is based on three major assumptions: first, tourism leads to the commodification of different aspects of life in societies. Second, it is said that the commodification of authenticity ruins the cultural products and people relationships, and third, staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973) discourages the desire of tourists to achieve authentic experiences. So that, seeking objective and subjective authenticity leads tourism businesses towards the commodification of cultural products that may result in the alteration of cultural products nature in one hand fulfillment of tourists' hopes on the other hand. Therefore, providing a definition of authenticity which is not object based and is independent from cultural goods is necessary to step away from commodification in tourism and also fulfilling tourists' hope for experiencing authenticity. It seems existential authenticity is an appropriate option in this regard.

### **2-3 Spiritual Tourism and its Emergence**

People and societies have been interested in spirituality from the beginning of civilization (Haq & Medhekar, 2014). Spirituality is a new concept but not a new phenomenon. Some studies take spirituality as a solution to personal and social degradation emerging from contemporary lifestyles and it has turned out to be an important field in sociology and business recently and various businesses have begun to address different aspects of spirituality on different businesses and markets is observable throughout the world (Haq & Wang, 2010). The tourism industry has recognised this change and has identified a new product called spiritual tourism. In the world of today, spiritual tourism has created business opportunities for all countries with different cultures and religions (Haq & Medhekar, 2014). Moreover, a new economy emerged in 1990, influencing both markets and businesses and making significant changes in individual's perceptions and activities (Lofgren and William, 2006). The emergence of the experience economy is a characteristic of new economy; it is about customers' involvement through personal interpretation and images which means creating a unique, memorable and extraordinary experience for every customer. Pine and Gilmore (1999), in their seminal text 'Experience Economy', argue that a significant change is observable in current customers in such a way that they are not going to buy only goods and services anymore but they are increasingly seeking what truly involves them. Pine and Gilmore emphasize that in the future, personal experiences create competitive advantage for

companies and businesses and experiences will become the most favorable goods provided in the market (Fonland, 2012).

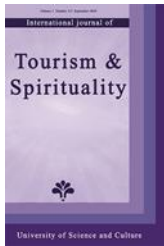
#### **2-4 Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship is an interdisciplinary subject in which many different disciplines, such as economics, psychology, anthropology, sociology and management, have been influential (Moghimi, 1381: 2). Undoubtedly, the process of economic development of developed countries indicates the fact that undeveloped countries have ignored the importance of entrepreneurship in the process of economic development. Entrepreneurs seek opportunities and innovation is an instrument for their success. Entrepreneurship can be in the form of creating new businesses or doing entrepreneurial actions and innovation in existing businesses (Dariani & Moghimi, 1387). Entrepreneurship can also be an appropriate instrument for organizations to adapt to environmental needs. Since tourism is a complicated, multidimensional and fast changing environment, entrepreneurship in tourism businesses is a necessity for the survival of organizations and tourism development in destinations. Today, according to Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy framework, tourism organizations and destinations must be able to provide unique experiences to tourists to achieve competitive advantage to survive in the competitive market.

#### **2-5 Spiritual Tourism**

Lofgren (2003) emphasizes that new economy involves a culturalization process in a way that production and consumption expands to integrate to each other. Lofgren believes that while economic thinking colonizes diurnal culture, it may also happen conversely. Social and economic activities take a cultural identity and energy is invested in the production of spaces, images and manifestations. These changes in economy result in the development of what Fonland (2012) calls 'spiritual enterprises'. The cultural turn in the economy has led to the development of spiritual entrepreneurship which is applied to entrepreneurs who are marketing spiritual values, such as individual growth, holism and deep values (it will be discussed later in this paper) in the new era philosophy. In these enterprises, spirituality of new era is a major element of production and marketing strategies (Fonland, 2012). The experience economy also emphasizes the involvement of tourists in the personalized and unique experiences and seeks to provide different and





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memorable experiences for every customer. As mentioned earlier, the ability to provide personalized and unique experiences will create sustainable competitive advantages for companies and businesses in the future.

### **2-6 Typology of Spiritual Tourists**

In the literature, different typologies of spiritual tourists have been identified but the typology selected for the purpose of this study is the one presented by MacKay and Fesenmaier (1998) that classifies spiritual tourists into five categories:

- i. Pre-contemplators: Never been interested in spiritual tourism and not considered to be in the spiritual tourism market at the moment (though they could be encouraged to start 'contemplating').
- ii. Contemplators: They would consider buying a spiritual tourism product or service since they consider themselves as regular tourists, but have not actively searched or bought yet.
- iii. Ready for action: Decided to go for spiritual tourism and looking for options available in the spiritual tourism market.
- iv. Active: These tourists go for spiritual tourism but not on a regular basis.
- v. Maintainers: This group is always in the market for spiritual tourism and regularly buys spiritual tourism products and services.

The purpose of seeking spirituality is the reduction of internal conflicts and increasing the sense of tranquility and peace with oneself, others and the world; seeking for spirituality is always part of a journey to find growth and change. Today, many people dream of a new world without disease, war, poverty, pollution, hunger and discrimination, a world in which human rights, social justice, environmental protection, moral consumption and peace are emphasized. In a world in which people have global worries, it is believed that to reach to reach these goals, a shift from consumerism to internal change and spiritual journeys is required. In the future, the interest in spirituality will be reflected in the increase of demand for products and services of spiritual journeys (Reisinger, 2008).

### **2-7 Maslow Hierarchy of Needs and Classification of Spiritual Tourists**



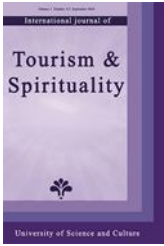
Maslow (1943) classified human needs into five categories: psychological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem and self-actualization. The question here is that where among these categories, spiritual tourists are placed and which category of needs is in priority for them? Are only tourists in the higher level of needs inclined to spiritual tourism? McKercher's typology provides an answer to these questions. It is based on five types of tourist ranging from strongly purposeful tourists with spiritual motives for tourism to the tourists with no spiritual motives for tourism (McKercher, 2002). 'The five types based on their depth of spiritual experience and intention indicate the extent of spirituality as a significant factor in their destination decision making process' (McKercher & Cros, 2003). Hence, these are discussed in the following:

- Purposeful spiritual tourist: Personal spiritual growth is the main reason for visiting and this 'purposeful' tourist has a deep intention.
- Sightseeing spiritual tourist: Personal spiritual growth is the main reason for visiting but this 'sightseeing' tourist has a lesser spiritual experience.
- Casual spiritual tourist: Personal spiritual growth is a casual motivation for the visit and this 'casual' tourist also has a lower spiritual experience.
- Incidental spiritual tourist: Personal spiritual growth had no element of influence on tourism decision of this 'incidental' tourist and by the journey he had a chance/occasional spiritual experience.
- Serendipitous spiritual tourist: Personal spiritual growth had no element of influence on the tourism decision of this 'serendipitous' tourist, but by luck he/she ended up having a deep spiritual experience after the journey.

### **2-8 Cohen Typology of Tourists' Experiences**

The five modes of tourism experiences presented by Cohen (1979) could also be seen in conjunction with the other typologies discussed above:

- The Recreational Mode: Leisure travel with a recreational mode of experience is more entertainment oriented, and the main motivation for the tourist is to have fun.
- The Diversionary Mode: This mode of tourism experience is similar to recreational, except that it is not 'meaningful', even in the oblique sense; it is a meaningless pleasure, even when sightseeing and experiencing a 'sacred sight'.



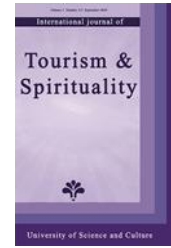
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- The Experiential Mode: This mode of tourism experience is described as the state when alienated individuals become aware of their alienation and want to have a more profound experience than the recreational and diversionary modes. They still do not have the strong intention as such, but incidentally are very willing to occasionally experience it.
- The Experimental mode: In this mode of leisure travel, the tourist plays the role of an experimental ‘seeker’ and is engaged in a quest for an alternative experience in many different directions. Cohen argues that tourists in the experimental mode of experience could be the ones most easily converted into the existential mode.
- The Existential Mode: This tourist mode can be described as being fully committed towards the sacred or ‘spiritual’ centre, and they have a deep faith in regular tourism experiences from an existential (i.e. “this is the central purpose of life”) perspective.

### **Discussion**

Regarding the above discussion of authenticity, spirituality and spiritual enterprises, now it is necessary to address the issue that there is an evident gap between tourists’ demand and what they actually experience in the destination. This gap relates to the lack of knowledge about tourists and not understanding their expectations to achieve an authentic experience. Therefore, it seems that businesses and providers of tourism services should be able to present an appropriate modern definition of authenticity in order to help them and also tourists to provide and receive authentic experiences. Considering authenticity as dependent on the authentication of objects and monuments, the authenticity of tourists’ experiences will be altered when doubting in the authenticity of objects and monuments. In one hand, when tourists take the authenticity of his/her experience as being staged, his/her desire to experience authenticity will be unfulfilled and on the other hand, in postmodern point of view, there is no authentic thing and there are only similarities to authentic things because every single thing will be experienced differently in different times, different places by different people, so only similarities are experienced not authenticity. Lately, Cohen and Cohen (2012) suggest that validating process should be focused on instead of focusing on the authenticity issue. A broader look should be taken which is proportionate with inner needs of tourists. If so, then tourists feel that they have experienced authenticity by being in different situations and addition of something to their self. Here, the role of spiritual businesses and spiritual tourism will be prominent,

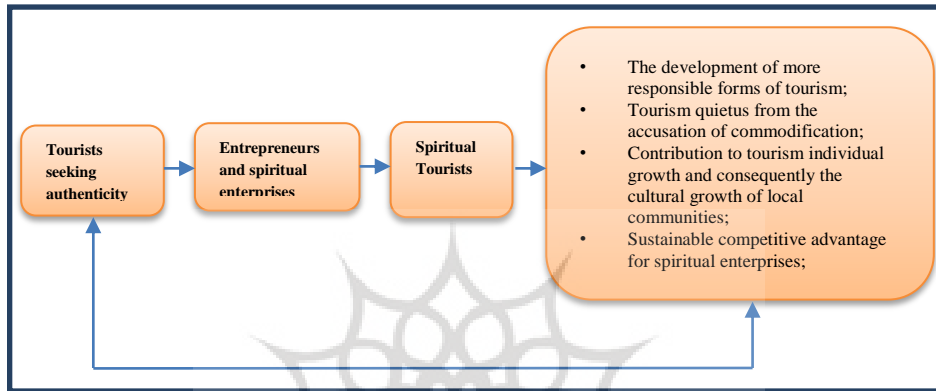


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entrepreneurs who are able to understand the needs of modern tourists to provide them an appropriate level of spirituality and authentic experiences according to their needs and expectations.

Considering different forms of understanding and experiencing authenticity by people, spiritual travel takes different forms that include many objectives and meanings. People who are looking for cultural treasures or visiting archaeological remains or museums may not only visit ancient places and taking part in festivals in their itinerary but also they may show interest in understanding and learning about spiritual ceremonies, arts, music and paintings. Those interested in environmental based tourism may be inclined to watching the wildlife, flora and fauna and take part in the environmental based activities like bird watching and so on in order to become spiritually refreshed. Those interested in rural tourism products may go to organic farms and local producers to know local products and test them or doing activities such as fishery, riding or watching birds and animals. Moreover, since spirituality is a crucial element of overall health (holism), those activities which help to improve general body health like yoga, spa, meditation, hydrotherapy and so on and receiving medical services in destinations are parts of different spiritual travels through which businesses can provide different levels of spiritual experiences to tourists. Besides, some people are trying to grasp knowledge of self, personal growth and life skills. Stress management, life and relationship strategies and the like can be part of tourism product when individuals and tourists are looking for attitude improvement and spiritual refreshment (Reisinger, 2008). Therefore, tourists' desire to experience authenticity can be directed towards the market of spiritual tourism by spiritual businesses instead of remaining unfulfilled. Figure (1) provides a systematic approach to the mentioned process. Hence, tourists who are seeking authentic experiences in different levels are considered as the input of the system that their desire is headed towards various spiritual experiences by spiritual businesses to form the spiritual tourism market.

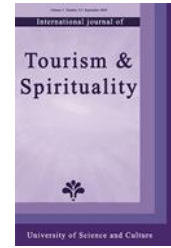
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**Fig 1. A systematic approach**

In the future, tourism will not be limited to sightseeing and consumption of goods but will go much further. The tourism industry can respond to people's need to mental and spiritual balance by the replacement of their holiday experiences with spiritual experiences that improve the quality of life, health and self-development of people (Reisinger, 2008). Although tourists do not necessarily travel with the aim of achieving spiritual tranquility and satisfaction, their decision to travel often has a subconscious spiritual aspect that must be argued (sharply & Jepson, 2011).

Tourism development with the spirituality approach and achieving spiritual experiences by tourists have some significant achievements for local communities, destinations and generally for the world community. Paying attention to spirituality in different forms of tourism has led to tourists and businesses being more concerned with resource reservation and moral consumption and consequently more responsible tourism and a step towards sustainable tourism. Moreover, by accepting the existential authenticity concept and emphasizing spirituality in tourism, tourism would not be considered as an industry which is going to commoditizing cultures and values and will be acquitted from this accusation. Another beneficial consequence which spiritual tourism will bring about is the contribution to tourists' personal growth and, consequently, the cultural development of local and destination communities that can be a valuable goal for tourism. Besides, it is a necessity for tourism businesses to provide



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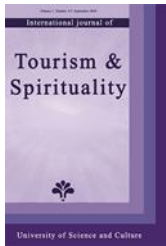
unique spiritual experiences to survive in today volatile environment and responding to various expectations of tourists to create sustainable competitive advantages for them.

#### **4- Conclusions**

It has been more than three decades that MacCannell added the authenticity concept to the sociological studies of tourists' motivation and experiences. Since then, authenticity has become a fundamental in tourism studies. However, extensive use of this concept has revealed its ambiguities and limitations. Critics have questioned its benefit and validation because most of tourists' motivations and experiences cannot be explained through the common authenticity concept. Forms of travel like VFR, going to the environment, visiting Disneyland, entertainments like fishery, hunting, sports and so on cannot be explained through MacCannell definition of authenticity. But the problem is that how an ambiguous concept can be a base for tourism studies? Wang (1999) propose the question that should we ignore these limitations or the authenticity must be redefined to be more explanative?

The current paper considered a redefinition of authenticity and accepts the existentialists' application of this concept. This definition is close to the post-modernist approach to the authentic experiences which believes that there is no authentic thing in the current world and what is experienced is only similarities so that authenticity should be looked for inside people not outside or in the past. Therefore, by accepting the definition existential authenticity, tourists' motivations and intentions can be led towards spiritual experiences. In this regard, spiritual tourism is beneficial instrument. Then, the result is that, spirituality exists in every forms of travel. Spiritual Tourism is not only a journey with religious motivations anymore and authenticity is not only looked for the cultural elements. Spiritual tourism activities are not limited to pilgrimage and visiting religious places. There are many places for spiritual tourism in the world. While a large number of them are cultural but they include natural places and sceneries.

What is interpreted as self-alienation and lack of authenticity in the modern life has encouraged tourists to seek spiritual experiences. In order to prevent tourists to become disappointed in experience authenticity, spiritual enterprises must be developed and institutionalized in tourism. The existence of spiritual enterprises in tourism is not only a necessity for tourism but also for the businesses to survive in the contemporary world.



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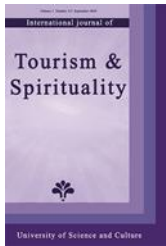
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