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From Authenticity to Consumption: The Commodification of Intangible Heritage in the Cultural Tourism Economy: A Critical Approach in Light of the Frankfurt School

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Abstract

The study analyzes the transformation of intangible cultural heritage within the cultural tourism economy, with a focus on processes of commodification and cultural reconfiguration, It adopts a critical approach grounded in the Frankfurt School, particularly the concept of the "Cultural Industry" developed by Adorno and Horkheimer, to examine how living cultural practices are turned into consumable and market-oriented products, The study concludes that, despite dominant narratives of preservation and development, cultural tourism often leads to the standardization and simplification of heritage under market logic and tourist expectations, Authenticity is understood as a socially constructed and dynamic concept that is continuously reshaped within tourism contexts, Ultimately, the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and cultural tourism is characterized by a structural tension between cultural preservation and economic rationalization, whereby capitalist logic contributes to transforming heritage into a commodified cultural good.

Keywords: *Intangible Cultural Heritage, Cultural Tourism, Commodification, Frankfurt School, Authenticity.*

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Introduction

Contemporary societies have witnessed profound transformations in the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural forms. Within the broader context of globalization, culture has increasingly become integrated into economic systems, transforming symbolic practices into valuable commodities capable of generating profit, attracting investment, and stimulating tourism. Among the cultural domains most affected by these transformations is intangible cultural heritage, which encompasses oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, festive events, traditional craftsmanship, and collective forms of cultural knowledge.

Historically, such cultural expressions emerged within specific social contexts and served functions related to identity formation, social cohesion, collective memory, and the transmission of cultural values. However, the growing expansion of cultural tourism has altered the social positioning of these practices, Rather than being primarily performed for local communities, many forms of intangible heritage are increasingly reproduced and exhibited for external audiences, particularly tourists seeking cultural experiences perceived as authentic and distinctive.

This transformation raises important theoretical and sociological questions concerning the relationship between heritage and market forces, does the integration of intangible heritage into tourism industries contribute to its preservation and transmission? Or does it lead to its commodification, reducing complex cultural practices to simplified products tailored to consumer expectations? Furthermore, how is authenticity reconstructed within tourism markets, and who possesses the authority to define what constitutes authentic heritage?

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These questions resonate strongly with the critical tradition of the Frankfurt School. Through their influential critique of modern capitalism, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer introduced the concept of the Cultural Industry to explain how cultural production becomes subordinated to economic rationality.

In this framework, culture is no longer valued primarily for its expressive, educational, or emancipatory capacities but increasingly for its exchange value and profitability. Cultural products become standardized, repetitive, and designed for mass consumption, contributing to forms of symbolic domination and ideological reproduction.

The incorporation of intangible cultural heritage into cultural tourism reflects many of the dynamics identified by Frankfurt School theorists. Heritage practices are frequently packaged, marketed, and consumed as cultural attractions, often detached from their original meanings and transformed into spectacles intended to satisfy market demand. Consequently, the study of heritage tourism offers a productive field for examining the contemporary manifestations of the cultural industry and its impact on cultural authenticity.

This article seeks to critically investigate the relationship between intangible heritage, tourism, and commodification through a Frankfurt School perspective. Specifically, it examines the extent to which market-oriented tourism reshapes the symbolic meaning of heritage and transforms cultural authenticity into a consumable commodity.

Objectives of the Study

This article aims to:

1. Examine the conceptual relationship between intangible cultural heritage and cultural tourism.

2. Analyze the notion of authenticity within heritage studies and tourism scholarship.

3. Investigate the processes through which heritage becomes commodified within tourism markets.

4. Apply Frankfurt School theory to the analysis of cultural tourism and heritage consumption.

5. Explore forms of symbolic domination generated through the commercialization of cultural practices.

6. Discuss possibilities of cultural negotiation and resistance against the homogenizing tendencies of global tourism markets.

1. Conceptualizing Intangible Cultural Heritage: Between Collective Memory and Cultural Meaning

The concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional heritage approaches that primarily focused on monuments, archaeological sites, and material artifacts, Unlike tangible heritage, intangible heritage refers to living cultural expressions transmitted across generations and continuously recreated by communities in response to their social and historical environments, According to UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage encompasses oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge concerning nature, and traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO, 2003, p. 2).

From a sociological perspective, intangible heritage cannot be reduced to a collection of cultural practices, Rather, it constitutes a symbolic system through which communities construct collective meanings, preserve historical continuity, and reproduce social identities, Heritage functions as a repository of collective memory that enables groups to establish a sense of belonging and cultural distinctiveness across time (Halbwachs, 1992, pp. 38–42).

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Maurice Halbwachs argues that memory is fundamentally social in nature because individuals remember through collective frameworks provided by society, Cultural practices, rituals, and oral traditions therefore serve as mechanisms through which communities maintain continuity between past and present, Intangible heritage operates as a social archive that embodies historical experiences and transmits cultural knowledge across generations (Halbwachs, 1992, p 52).

Similarly, Pierre Nora emphasizes that modern societies increasingly rely on symbolic sites and cultural practices as "lieux de mémoire" (sites of memory), particularly in contexts characterized by rapid modernization and social transformation, Heritage practices become symbolic anchors that preserve collective identities in the face of cultural fragmentation (Nora, 1989, pp 12–15).

Beyond memory, intangible heritage performs important social functions. Emile Durkheim's sociological perspective suggests that collective rituals and ceremonial practices contribute to social cohesion by generating what he calls "collective effervescence." Through participation in shared cultural practices, individuals reaffirm their membership within a moral community and strengthen social solidarity (Durkheim, 1912/1995, pp 217–220).

Furthermore, cultural heritage represents a significant source of symbolic capital. Pierre Bourdieu argues that cultural practices possess symbolic value that extends beyond their immediate utility, Communities invest cultural meanings into traditions, rituals, and forms of knowledge that become markers of distinction and identity. Heritage therefore functions not merely as a cultural resource but also as a field of symbolic power through which social groups negotiate recognition and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 248–251).

However, the increasing globalization of culture has profoundly altered the conditions under which heritage is produced, transmitted, and experienced, As global tourism expands, heritage practices increasingly enter circuits of economic exchange, Cultural expressions that once existed primarily within local social contexts become repositioned as attractions, performances, and marketable experiences for external audiences (Smith, 2006, pp. 44–49).

This transformation introduces a fundamental tension between two competing logics. The first conceives heritage as a living cultural process embedded in collective memory and social practice, The second treats heritage as an economic resource capable of generating symbolic and financial value within tourism markets, It is precisely within this tension that debates surrounding authenticity, commodification, and cultural tourism emerge (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, pp. 149–151).

The shift from lived cultural experience to market-oriented representation raises critical questions regarding the future of intangible heritage, When cultural practices are transformed into commodities, their meanings become increasingly influenced by market demand rather than communal significance, Consequently, heritage may cease to function primarily as a medium of collective memory and become reconfigured as a consumable cultural product designed to satisfy external expectations (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, pp. 150–152).

From a critical theoretical perspective, this transformation represents more than a simple economic adaptation. It reflects a broader process through which culture becomes integrated into capitalist systems of production and consumption, The symbolic value of heritage is gradually subordinated to exchange value, creating conditions under which cultural authenticity itself becomes a marketable commodity. Such developments provide the foundation for examining heritage through the critical lens of the Frankfurt School and its theory of the Cultural Industry.

2. *Authenticity as a Contested Concept in Heritage Tourism*

Authenticity occupies a central position within contemporary debates surrounding cultural heritage and tourism, Indeed, few concepts have generated as much theoretical controversy within heritage studies as the notion of authenticity, While tourism industries frequently promote cultural experiences as "authentic,"

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scholars have demonstrated that authenticity is neither a fixed nor an objective attribute inherent in cultural practices.

Rather, it is a socially constructed concept whose meaning varies according to historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts (Cohen, 1988, pp. 373–375).

The growing importance of authenticity emerged alongside the expansion of modern tourism, As industrialization and urbanization transformed social life, many individuals developed a desire to encounter what they perceived as genuine cultural experiences beyond the routines of modern society, Tourism increasingly became associated with a search for cultural difference, historical continuity, and symbolic authenticity (MacCannell, 1976, pp. 3–8).

Dean MacCannell argues that modern tourists are motivated by a quest for authenticity because contemporary social life is often experienced as fragmented, artificial, and alienating. Consequently, tourists seek access to supposedly authentic cultural realities that appear untouched by modernity, However, MacCannell demonstrates that what tourists frequently encounter are not authentic realities themselves but carefully staged representations designed specifically for tourist consumption (MacCannell, 1976, pp. 91–107).

The notion of "staged authenticity" constitutes one of the most influential contributions to tourism studies, According to MacCannell, tourism industries frequently construct performances that create the illusion of authenticity while simultaneously controlling and managing visitor experiences, Cultural practices become selectively presented to correspond with tourist expectations, resulting in representations that appear authentic while being carefully organized for commercial purposes (MacCannell, 1976, pp. 98–103).

This perspective challenges essentialist understandings of heritage by suggesting that authenticity is not an inherent quality of cultural objects or practices. Rather, authenticity emerges through social processes of representation, interpretation, and validation. What is considered authentic depends largely upon who possesses the authority to define authenticity and under what circumstances such definitions are produced (Bruner, 1994, pp. 399–401).

Scholars have subsequently developed multiple interpretations of authenticity. Wang identifies three major forms of authenticity within tourism studies: objective authenticity, constructive authenticity, and existential authenticity (Wang, 1999, pp. 350–353).

Objective authenticity refers to the authenticity of original cultural objects and traditions. This perspective assumes that authentic heritage possesses identifiable characteristics that distinguish it from reproductions or modifications, Heritage institutions and preservation agencies often rely upon this understanding when establishing criteria for cultural conservation (Wang, 1999, p. 351).

Constructive authenticity, by contrast, emphasizes that authenticity is socially negotiated rather than objectively determined, cultural practices become authentic because social actors collectively agree to perceive them as authentic.

Thus, authenticity functions as a symbolic label produced through discourse, representation, and cultural authority.

Existential authenticity shifts attention from cultural objects to individual experiences, According to this perspective, tourists may experience authenticity through feelings of self-discovery, emotional engagement, or meaningful social interaction regardless of whether the cultural performance itself is historically authentic (Wang, 1999, pp. 358–360).

These theoretical developments reveal the complexity of authenticity within contemporary tourism economies, Rather than representing a stable cultural reality, authenticity increasingly functions as a dynamic and contested social construct.

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The commercialization of heritage further complicates this situation. Tourism industries often transform authenticity into a valuable economic resource capable of attracting visitors and generating revenue, In this context, authenticity becomes less a matter of cultural continuity and more a matter of marketability, Cultural practices are evaluated according to their capacity to satisfy tourist expectations concerning tradition, uniqueness, and cultural difference (Cohen, 1988, pp. 377–379).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that heritage itself is not simply inherited from the past but actively produced in the present, Heritage emerges through processes of selection, interpretation, and representation that transform cultural practices into objects of display and consumption, Consequently, authenticity becomes closely linked to exhibition rather than merely preservation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, pp. 149–151).

Within tourism markets, cultural expressions frequently undergo adaptation to enhance their attractiveness, Traditional performances may be shortened to accommodate tourist schedules, Rituals may be reorganized to improve visibility and accessibility, Cultural narratives may be simplified to facilitate audience comprehension. Such modifications illustrate how authenticity becomes negotiated between cultural practitioners, tourism institutions, and consumer expectations (Greenwood, 1989, pp. 174–177).

The Frankfurt School provides an especially useful framework for understanding these transformations. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that capitalist societies increasingly subject cultural production to economic rationality, Under such conditions, culture becomes integrated into systems of exchange and consumption, where its value derives less from its intrinsic meaning than from its market potential From this perspective, authenticity itself becomes commodified.

Rather than preserving cultural distinctiveness, tourism industries may produce standardized versions of authenticity designed for mass consumption. What tourists consume is not necessarily authentic culture but representations of authenticity packaged according to market demand, The paradox is that authenticity, originally understood as resistance to artificiality, becomes itself an industrial product generated through commercial mechanisms (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, pp. 120–125).

This phenomenon reflects broader dynamics of cultural capitalism; As cultural practices become incorporated into tourism economies, authenticity acquires exchange value, Heritage is increasingly evaluated according to its ability to attract consumers, generate revenue, and contribute to destination branding, Consequently, cultural meanings risk becoming subordinated to economic objectives (Harvey, 2001, pp. 394–397).

Furthermore, authenticity often becomes entangled with power relations. Institutions such as tourism agencies, heritage organizations, governments, and international bodies frequently possess significant authority in determining which cultural practices are recognized as authentic. Such processes may privilege certain interpretations while marginalizing alternative understandings held by local communities themselves (Smith, 2006, pp. 80–85).

The question of authenticity therefore extends beyond heritage preservation to encompass issues of representation, authority, and symbolic power, Authenticity is not merely a descriptive category but also a political and economic resource subject to negotiation and contestation.

Ultimately, the debate surrounding authenticity reveals a fundamental contradiction at the heart of heritage tourism. Tourism depends upon authenticity as a source of attraction and legitimacy, yet the very processes through which tourism promotes authenticity may simultaneously transform, simplify, and commodify the cultural practices it seeks to preserve, This contradiction provides a crucial foundation for understanding the broader processes of commodification that characterize contemporary cultural tourism.

3. *Cultural Industry and the Commodification of Intangible Heritage: A Frankfurt School Perspective*

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The commodification of intangible cultural heritage cannot be adequately understood without examining the broader structural transformations that have reshaped the relationship between culture and capitalism in modern societies.

While heritage is often presented within public discourse as a domain of collective memory, identity preservation, and cultural continuity, critical theory reveals that contemporary cultural production increasingly operates within systems governed by market rationality, It is within this context that the Frankfurt School's concept of the Cultural Industry provides a powerful theoretical framework for analyzing the transformation of heritage into a consumable commodity.

The concept of the Cultural Industry was developed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in Dialectic of Enlightenment as a critique of the increasing integration of culture into capitalist systems of production, According to these theorists, culture in advanced capitalist societies no longer functions primarily as a sphere of critical reflection or human emancipation. Instead, it becomes organized according to the same principles that govern industrial production, namely efficiency, predictability, standardization, and profitability (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, pp. 94–98).

For Adorno and Horkheimer, the significance of the Cultural Industry lies in its capacity to transform cultural expressions into commodities that can be produced, distributed, and consumed on a mass scale, Cultural products are no longer valued primarily for their aesthetic, symbolic, or educational qualities; rather, they are evaluated according to their exchange value and market performance; As a result, culture becomes increasingly subordinated to economic imperatives (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, pp. 106–108).

This theoretical insight has profound implications for understanding contemporary heritage tourism. Intangible cultural heritage, once embedded within everyday social practices and collective experiences, increasingly enters economic circuits where it is packaged, promoted, and marketed as a cultural product, Traditional dances, rituals, festivals, oral traditions, and artisanal knowledge become attractions designed to generate tourism revenue and enhance destination competitiveness. In this process, heritage ceases to function exclusively as a medium of cultural transmission and becomes integrated into systems of commercial exchange (George, 2010, pp. 41–45).

A crucial concept for understanding this transformation is commodification. Commodification refers to the process through which objects, practices, ideas, and social relations acquire exchange value and become subject to market transactions. Within capitalist economies, phenomena that were previously outside the sphere of commerce are increasingly transformed into commodities capable of generating profit (Marx, 1976, pp. 125–128).

Karl Marx's analysis of commodity production provides important foundations for understanding cultural commodification. Marx argues that commodities possess both use value and exchange value, Use value refers to the practical or social function of an object, whereas exchange value refers to its market value within systems of economic exchange.

Applied to intangible heritage, this distinction reveals a fundamental transformation. Historically, heritage practices possessed use value insofar as they contributed to social cohesion, identity formation, collective memory, and cultural reproduction. Under conditions of tourism commercialization, however, heritage increasingly acquires exchange value as a marketable cultural attraction; The economic significance of heritage may gradually overshadow its original social functions (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009, pp. 18–22).

The Frankfurt School extends this Marxian analysis by emphasizing the consequences of commodification for culture itself. Adorno argues that when cultural forms become commodities, they undergo processes of standardization and simplification designed to maximize consumption. Diversity, complexity, and critical content are often sacrificed in favor of accessibility and profitability (Adorno, 1991, pp. 98–103).

Standardization represents one of the defining characteristics of the Cultural Industry. Industrial systems depend upon the production of predictable and reproducible products. Consequently, cultural commodities

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are increasingly organized according to formulaic structures that facilitate mass consumption, What appears as diversity frequently conceals underlying uniformity (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, pp. 120–122).

Within cultural tourism, standardization manifests through the transformation of unique heritage practices into repeatable performances. Festivals are scheduled according to tourist calendars, Rituals are condensed into manageable durations. Traditional performances are reorganized into formats that can be easily consumed by visitors regardless of cultural background. Such modifications often reduce cultural complexity while enhancing market efficiency (Greenwood, 1989, pp. 174–177).

Closely related to standardization is the concept of pseudo-individualization. Adorno argues that cultural industries create the illusion of uniqueness while simultaneously reproducing standardized content, Consumers are encouraged to perceive cultural products as distinctive even though they conform to highly predictable patterns.

This phenomenon is particularly visible in heritage tourism. Destinations frequently market cultural experiences as unique and authentic expressions of local identity. However, the presentation of heritage often follows globally recognizable tourism formulas, Despite claims of uniqueness, visitors encounter highly standardized representations of culture designed to satisfy universal tourist expectations (Richards, 2018, pp. 19–22).

Another crucial concept is reification, Drawing upon Marx and later developed by Georg Lukács, reification refers to the process through which human activities, social relationships, and cultural meanings become transformed into object-like entities detached from their social origins (Lukács, 1971, pp. 83–87).

Intangible heritage is particularly vulnerable to reification because it originates as a living social process rather than a material object. Rituals, performances, oral traditions, and communal practices derive their significance from active participation within specific social contexts; When these practices are transformed into tourist attractions, they risk becoming detached from the social relations that originally gave them meaning, Heritage becomes an object of observation rather than a medium of collective experience (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, pp. 64–67).

From a Frankfurt School perspective, reification contributes to the loss of critical and emancipatory dimensions of culture, Heritage becomes something to be consumed rather than lived, The tourist observes cultural performances as spectacles, while the underlying social meanings become increasingly obscured (Adorno, 1991, pp. 110–113).

The notion of spectacle further deepens this critique. Guy Debord argues that modern capitalism increasingly organizes social life through representations and images. In the "society of the spectacle," social reality is mediated through visual consumption, where appearances become more important than lived experiences (Debord, 1994, pp. 12–15).

Heritage tourism frequently exemplifies this process. Cultural practices are transformed into visual spectacles designed for observation, photography, and consumption. The success of a heritage performance may depend less upon its cultural significance than upon its visual appeal and marketability, consequently, symbolic meaning risks being subordinated to aesthetic presentation.

The commodification of heritage also contributes to what Adorno describes as the erosion of cultural autonomy, Autonomous culture possesses the capacity to challenge dominant ideologies and stimulate critical reflection, However, when culture becomes dependent upon market forces, its ability to resist prevailing economic logics diminishes. Cultural production increasingly adapts to consumer demand and commercial interests (Adorno, 1991, pp. 131–135).

In the context of tourism, this means that heritage practices may gradually evolve according to external expectations rather than internal cultural needs. Communities may modify traditions to enhance their

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attractiveness to visitors, creating situations in which market demand becomes a significant force shaping cultural reproduction (Shepherd, 2002, pp. 189–191).

Nevertheless, it would be overly simplistic to assume that commodification inevitably results in the complete destruction of cultural meaning. Contemporary scholars emphasize that local communities often engage strategically with tourism markets, Rather than merely surrendering to commercial pressures, cultural actors may selectively adapt traditions while maintaining elements of cultural significance and social control (Cohen, 1988, pp. 381–383).

Despite these complexities, the Frankfurt School remains highly relevant because it highlights the structural power of capitalism in shaping cultural production. Heritage tourism operates within economic systems that prioritize profitability, competitiveness, and consumer satisfaction, These imperatives inevitably influence how heritage is represented, performed, and valued.

Consequently, the commodification of intangible cultural heritage should not be understood merely as an economic process, It represents a broader transformation in which cultural meanings become reorganized according to market logic. The transition from lived tradition to consumable attraction reflects a shift from cultural value to exchange value, from collective memory to commercial spectacle, and from cultural autonomy to market dependency, Such dynamics constitute the central mechanisms through which the Cultural Industry reshapes heritage within contemporary tourism economies.

4. *Tourism, Spectacle, and the Production of Consumable Culture*

The expansion of cultural tourism in the contemporary era has profoundly transformed the ways in which culture is represented, experienced, and consumed. Tourism no longer functions merely as a form of travel; it has become a major mechanism through which cultural meanings are produced and circulated globally. Within this framework, intangible cultural heritage increasingly operates as a symbolic resource that can be displayed, marketed, and consumed, the transformation of heritage into a tourist attraction reflects broader processes through which culture becomes integrated into what critical theorists describe as economies of spectacle and symbolic consumption.

A particularly influential contribution to understanding these transformations is Guy Debord's theory of the spectacle, In The Society of the Spectacle, Debord argues that advanced capitalist societies are characterized by the replacement of direct social experience with mediated representations, Social relations increasingly become organized through images, symbols, and spectacles that shape how reality is perceived and understood (Debord, 1994, pp. 12–14).

According to Debord, the spectacle is not merely a collection of images but a social relationship mediated by images, Individuals engage with representations rather than with reality itself. Within this context, consumption extends beyond material goods to encompass experiences, identities, and cultural meanings. The spectacle transforms social life into an object of observation and consumption (Debord, 1994, pp. 17–20).

Heritage tourism exemplifies this dynamic. Cultural practices that once functioned as integral components of communal life increasingly become performances designed for spectators. Rituals, dances, festivals, oral traditions, and ceremonial practices are often reconfigured as visual events intended to attract and entertain visitors. Consequently, heritage becomes less a lived cultural experience and more a spectacle organized for consumption (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, pp. 57–60).

This process involves what scholars describe as the performatization of culture. Cultural expressions are selectively reconstructed and staged to meet the expectations of external audiences, traditional practices may be modified to increase visual appeal, facilitate audience comprehension, or fit tourism schedules. As a result, the presentation of heritage frequently prioritizes visibility and marketability over cultural complexity and contextual authenticity (Edensor, 2001, pp. 61–64).

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The transformation of culture into spectacle is closely linked to the emergence of what John Urry calls the "tourist gaze," Urry argues that tourism is fundamentally organized around visual consumption, Tourists do not simply encounter places and cultures; they observe them through socially constructed expectations that shape what is considered worthy of attention and appreciation (Urry & Larsen, 2011, pp. 1–5).

The tourist gaze is influenced by media representations, travel narratives, promotional campaigns, and institutional discourses. Before arriving at a destination, tourists often possess preconceived images of the cultures they expect to encounter. Tourism industries respond by organizing cultural experiences that correspond to these expectations, thereby reinforcing particular representations of cultural identity (Urry & Larsen, 2011, pp. 16–19).

Within heritage tourism, this dynamic frequently results in the selective presentation of culture. Certain traditions are highlighted because they appear visually appealing, exotic, or distinctive, while others are marginalized because they are considered less attractive to tourists, consequently, tourism contributes to the construction of simplified and often stereotypical images of cultural communities (Salazar, 2012, pp. 865–869).

One of the most significant consequences of this process is the production of cultural exoticism. Tourism industries frequently market heritage through narratives emphasizing difference, uniqueness, and otherness, Cultural practices are represented as extraordinary, timeless, and fundamentally distinct from modern life. Such representations increase tourist interest but may simultaneously distort cultural realities.

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism provides valuable insight into these mechanisms of representation. Said argues that dominant institutions often construct representations of cultural others according to ideological frameworks that serve specific political and economic interests, Although originally developed in relation to colonial discourse, this perspective remains relevant for understanding how tourism industries produce and circulate images of cultural difference (Said, 1978, pp. 1–5).

In many cases, tourism does not simply represent culture; it actively produces particular versions of culture, Heritage becomes curated according to market expectations, leading to the creation of cultural narratives that are easily consumable and commercially attractive, This process contributes to what Jean Baudrillard describes as simulation, whereby representations become increasingly detached from their original referents and acquire an independent reality of their own.

The commercialization of heritage therefore involves more than economic exchange. It entails the production of symbolic realities specifically designed for consumption. Tourists often engage not with culture itself but with carefully constructed representations of culture, These representations function as commodities whose value depends upon their capacity to generate interest, attract visitors, and produce economic returns (Baudrillard, 1994, pp. 6–8).

From a Frankfurt School perspective, these developments reflect the broader expansion of the Cultural Industry into the sphere of heritage. Cultural expressions become increasingly organized according to principles of entertainment, visibility, and profitability, The symbolic richness of heritage is often condensed into simplified narratives that can be easily consumed within tourism markets (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, pp. 120–125).

Moreover, the transformation of heritage into spectacle contributes to symbolic domination. Cultural communities may find themselves represented through images and narratives over which they possess limited control Tourism institutions, marketing agencies, and global media frequently play a significant role in determining how heritage is displayed and interpreted, As a result, cultural identities become subject to external processes of definition and classification (Smith, 2006, pp. 100–105).

The spectacle of heritage thus operates as both an economic and ideological phenomenon. Economically, it generates revenue through cultural consumption. Ideologically, it shapes perceptions of cultural identity

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by privileging certain representations while excluding others; Heritage becomes a site where power, representation, and consumption intersect.

Ultimately, tourism contributes to the transformation of intangible heritage into consumable culture Cultural practices are increasingly valued not solely for their social significance but also for their capacity to function as attractions within global markets, This transformation illustrates how contemporary capitalism extends beyond material production to encompass the production and consumption of symbolic meanings themselves.

Conclusion

The contemporary integration of intangible cultural heritage into cultural tourism economies represents one of the most significant transformations affecting cultural production in the age of globalization. While tourism is frequently celebrated as a mechanism for heritage preservation, cultural revitalization, and economic development, a critical examination reveals a far more complex reality. The incorporation of heritage into market systems introduces tensions between cultural continuity and commercial profitability, between symbolic meaning and exchange value, and between collective memory and consumer demand.

Drawing upon the theoretical contributions of the Frankfurt School, this article has demonstrated that the commercialization of intangible cultural heritage cannot be understood merely as a neutral economic process. Rather, it reflects broader structural dynamics through which culture becomes increasingly subordinated to market rationality, The concept of the Cultural Industry developed by Adorno and Horkheimer provides a powerful analytical framework for understanding how cultural expressions are transformed into commodities governed by principles of standardization, predictability, and profitability.

The analysis has shown that authenticity, often presented as the defining characteristic of heritage tourism, is itself a contested and socially constructed concept. Far from representing an objective cultural reality, authenticity frequently becomes a symbolic resource produced, negotiated, and marketed within tourism economies, Heritage practices are often modified, reconstructed, and staged to correspond with tourist expectations, creating tensions between cultural preservation and commercial adaptation.

Furthermore, the commodification of heritage involves processes of standardization and reification through which living cultural practices are transformed into consumable products, Rituals, performances, festivals, and oral traditions become detached from their original social contexts and reorganized according to the demands of tourism markets, As exchange value increasingly supersedes cultural value, heritage risks becoming a spectacle designed primarily for consumption rather than a medium of collective memory and social reproduction.

The article has also highlighted the importance of spectacle and representation in contemporary tourism. Heritage is increasingly experienced through mediated images, curated performances, and symbolic narratives constructed for external audiences, Tourism industries actively participate in producing representations of cultural identity that are visually attractive, commercially viable, and compatible with dominant consumer expectations, in this process, culture is often transformed into a marketable image whose value depends upon its ability to generate attention and consumption.

Nevertheless, the relationship between heritage and commodification should not be understood in deterministic terms. Cultural communities are not merely passive victims of market forces, Various forms of negotiation, adaptation, and resistance continue to emerge within heritage tourism contexts, Local actors frequently seek to balance economic opportunities with cultural preservation, developing strategies that enable them to maintain degrees of symbolic autonomy while engaging with tourism economies.

Despite these possibilities, the critical perspective advanced by the Frankfurt School remains highly relevant in contemporary heritage studies. It reminds us that cultural preservation cannot be evaluated solely according to economic indicators such as tourist arrivals, revenue generation, or destination competitiveness. Genuine safeguarding of intangible heritage requires attention to the social relationships,

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collective memories, symbolic meanings, and cultural practices that constitute the living foundations of heritage itself.

Ultimately, the central challenge facing heritage tourism lies in reconciling economic sustainability with cultural integrity, As intangible cultural heritage becomes increasingly incorporated into global circuits of consumption, scholars, policymakers, and cultural communities must critically reflect upon the conditions under which heritage is preserved, represented, and consumed, Without such critical reflection, the pursuit of cultural preservation may paradoxically contribute to the very processes of commodification and symbolic erosion it seeks to prevent.

The transition from authenticity to consumption therefore constitutes not merely an economic transformation but a profound sociological and cultural question concerning the future of heritage in an increasingly commodified world.

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