

Article

Understanding Tourists' Social Networking Site (SNS) Intention with Regards to World Heritage Sites: The Role of Motivation and Overall Image

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Abstract: With the growing recognition of sustainability and environmental protection, World Heritage Sites (WHSs) are becoming popular destinations among tourists. To promote heritage destinations in South Korea via social networking site (SNS) platforms, the importance of joint support from tourists to share their experiences should be emphasized. In this research, we aimed to assess the formation process of WHS tourists' SNS intentions by adopting concepts of travel motivation and overall image. As a part of this study, a survey was conducted among 238 tourists currently living in South Korea who have visited WHSs within the country. The survey results showed that cultural, travel, and social motives led to the construction of the overall destination image. The overall image also affects SNS intention in a positive and significant regard. We also examined the mediating effect of overall image on the relationship between motives and SNS intention. The findings of this study provide further theoretical and practical contributions that can be used to help analyze tourists' motivations and increase the number of international visitors to a particular country.

Keywords: travel motivation; destination image; SNS post intention; cultural heritage tourism; World Heritage Sites



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1. Introduction

Heritage represents a legacy from the past, shapes the present, and is passed on to future generations. Heritage offers unique insights and value for all of humanity [1]. Globally, heritage tourism has been recognized for its profound impact on local economies and its ability to promote cross-cultural understanding [2]. World Heritage Sites have always been an essential point of research in the tourism industry, particularly in studies on tourist loyalty [3], tourism attractiveness [4,5], and sustainable tourism [6,7]. The allure of heritage sites, with their rich tapestry of history and culture, draws millions of visitors to such sites each year. These sites serve not only as a testament to the past but also as a bridge to the future, playing a pivotal role in educating tourists and fostering sustainable tourism practices [8]. Furthermore, according to research by Mahadevan and Zhang [9], WHSs are considered a strong brand in destination marketing.

Of note, South Korea's World Heritage Sites (WHSs), renowned for their rich cultural and historical significance [10], are at a critical juncture of the national tourism industry and contribute to forming another cultural brand, separate from the modern cultural image of K-POP. With the 16 recognized WHSs distributed nationwide, encouraging WHS tourism in South Korea can invigorate the nationwide tourism industry and bolster local economies. With the beginning of the post-COVID-19 era, the landscape of international travel has undergone a transformative recovery. As international travel restrictions gradually eased, the international tourism market began to witness a remarkable resurgence, presenting

new opportunities and challenges for destinations worldwide [1]. This resurgence has been particularly pronounced in South Korea, where the international tourism market has experienced significant growth. Tourists' expectations of traveling to South Korea continue to rise, reaching a peak (100%) in April 2023 [11].

Simultaneously, social networking sites (SNSs) are defined as any online resource that is designed to facilitate engagement between individuals [12]. With the rise of social media, both tourists and destinations now rely on these platforms to shape perceptions and enhance experiences [13]. In South Korea, travelers were identified as emphasizing the use of smartphones in enhancing their cultural and travel experiences [14]. In addition, South Korea has adopted considerable social media big data analytics within the tourism industry in order to create a technological revolution, especially effective when stimulating the rapid recovery of the national tourism industry in the post-COVID-19 era [15]. To increase positive online exposure and improve promotion quality, tourists' posts on SNS platforms are the key resource for destinations to conduct big data analysis in order to assess real-time feedback and determine potential issues [16]. In this sense, it is important to have tourists' support in providing feedback, manifesting in the need to encourage them to engage in experience-sharing activities on SNS platforms.

In previous research in the field of tourism, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has been used to study tourists' visit intention [17–19], and the results of most studies have shown that eWOM has a positive impact on tourists' visit intention. In other words, eWOM plays an important role in encouraging tourists to visit tourist destinations. However, there is very little research on predicting tourists' SNS intentions to share their travel experiences at heritage destinations. Moreover, although researchers have extensively studied travel motivations [20–22], destination image formation [23–26], and SNS post intention [27,28], the authors of studies have seldom integrated these aspects into world heritage tourism with an increasing emphasis on SNSs. In addition, there is a lack of comprehensive research that directly links motivations, destination image, and SNS intention. Specifically, it is crucial to study how tourists' travel motives affect their perception of heritage sites and subsequently influence their willingness to share their travel experiences on SNSs. Lastly, while South Korea supports various SNS platforms and emphasizes the use of big data analytics at tourist destinations, SNS intention has been inadequately examined in previous studies in the context of WHSs in South Korea.

In order to fill these gaps in the literature, this study aims to develop and test a theoretical framework for interpreting tourists' SNS intentions after their visits to WHS destinations. Previous studies by other authors [29–31] have proven that motivation has a positive impact on tourists' willingness to recommend the places they have visited to others. Therefore, in this study, we considered travel motivation as a driving force to predict SNS intention. Moreover, Stavrianea and Kamenidou [32] found that destination image has a significant positive impact on satisfaction and loyalty; simultaneously, they found that satisfaction and loyalty have a positive impact on the intention to generate eWOM [33]. In addition, within the context of heritage tourism, the findings of Rasoolimanesh et al.'s study [34] showed that destination image has a positive and significant impact on eWOM intention. Therefore, the objectives of this study were to (1) identify the activation process of SNS intention for sharing WHS visit experiences; (2) determine the role of travel motivations and overall image in affecting WHS tourists' SNS intention; and (3) examine the impact of diverse dimensions of motivation on evoking WHS tourists' SNS intention.

2. Literature Review

2.1. World Heritage Sites (WHSs)

World Heritage, a special category developed by UNESCO, refers to those sites with cultural heritage, such as monuments, and natural heritage, such as landscapes, that require protection and preservation from people located in diverse nations, regions, cities, and so on. Gravari-Barbas et al. [35] claimed that sites on the World Heritage List developed by UNESCO are well-acknowledged for their "fragility and uniqueness" when exposed

to the threat of “deterioration or disappearance” and emphasized that there is a lack of governance and capacity to protect these sites (p. 4). In this regard, education has been acknowledged as one of the primary objectives for developing and promoting WHSs [36].

The view on the development of WHSs as a part of heritage tourism has experienced a process of transiting from a threat to a development approach [35,37,38]. Some have claimed that the economic impact isolates the benefits of WHSs to tourism development; instead, the conservation projects of WHSs contribute to achieving sustainable objectives that can attain intangible rewards: local health and well-being [36,39,40]. Moreover, WHSs are considered a powerful brand for destination marketing to attract first-time visitors [9,41]. In this sense, studying tourists’ SNS post intention not only helps improve marketing strategies but also contributes to determining the motivating forces of WHSs on tourists’ decision-making process. For example, by studying 680 million Instagram posts about 525 WHSs, Falk and Hagsten [42] found that WHSs with cultural features are more popular than those featuring industrial and pre-historic heritage; the concept of visitor density expanded upon in this study also provides a useful tool for forecasting visitor flows. In light of the above, in this study, we focus on the triggering process of tourists’ SNS post intention for their visits to WHSs in South Korea.

2.2. Travel Motivation

Motivation refers to a psychological need [43,44]. Maslow’s [45] needs theory is one of the most influential theories of motivation. Building upon Maslow’s needs theory and Crompton’s [46] work, the practices of Pearce and Lee [47] have been widely applied in tourism research. For example, their practices have been used in explorations of the relationship between travel motivation and destination behavior [48,49], investigations into the impact of travel motives on tourist satisfaction/behavioral intention [30,50], and studies examining the impact of travel motives on tourist well-being [51,52].

Although motivation has been extensively studied in the context of heritage tourism [53–56], few studies have explored the relationship between motivation, overall image, and tourists’ SNS sharing intentions at WHSs. Therefore, to determine the role of travel motivation in influencing the overall image of WHSs and tourists’ SNS intentions, in this study, we focused on four aspects of tourists’ travel motivation, including travel motives, social motives, prestige motives, and cultural motives. These four travel motivations are frequently used in examining the overall image and tourists’ SNS intentions in heritage tourism and SNS behavior studies.

Travel motives in tourism refer to the diverse reasons and inspirations for a journey to a destination [16]. The positive correlation between motivation and the image of heritage tourism, which has a significant impact on travel intentions, has been examined in a few studies [24,57]. Consistent with these findings, Pereira et al. [25] also demonstrated the relationship between motives and image, which indirectly influence tourists’ attitudes. Social motives in tourism refer to the psychological desire for social interaction and engagement, such as making friends, meeting like-minded people, and participating in social activities [58,59]. In the study by López-Sanz et al. [60], the authors highlighted the fact that social motives are significant in forming travel motivations and image. Additionally, the results of a study by Chavez et al. [30] revealed that social bonding travel motives have a significant positive impact on tourists’ behavior in sharing their travel experiences. Prestige motives in tourism refer to individuals’ desire to attain status or esteem in their community, influencing their decision-making, including their travel behavior [16]. The results of a study by Boley et al. [61] also confirmed that tourists share their travel photos for their own social status and prestige. The findings of Hasan and Neela’s study [62] also indicated that tourists’ prestige motives significantly affect their eWOM intentions in documenting their visit experience. Cultural motives in tourism refer to tourists’ interest in the historical and cultural value of destinations [21]. In their study, Su et al. [21] highlighted the effect of cultural motives in shaping heritage travel motivation and underscored their indirect influence on the formation of the heritage destination image among tourists. Casais and

Sousa [63] studied cultural motives as a key travel motivation, exploring how these cultural motives influence the behavior of pilgrims in pilgrimage travel.

2.3. Destination Image

Destination image is frequently described as impressions of a place or perceptions of an area, and it refers to the subjective interpretation of reality by tourists based on where they have visited or what they have heard of [64–66]. Destination image is the sum of a tourist's beliefs, ideas, and impressions of a destination [46,65]. It has been claimed that the image of a destination conveys the overall experience that visitors can expect [67]. Positive and memorable images are always vital for understanding tourists' destination selection process [68]. The image of a destination is a significant factor affecting an individual's decision to visit the destination or not, whether consciously or unconsciously [69–71].

However, the authors of most previous studies have primarily focused on analyzing the perception and cognitive structure of destination images, and few studies have examined the impact of emotional factors on destination image. Martín and Bosque [72] conducted supplementary research on emotional factors, examining the impact of tourists' motivations and cultural values on the destination's image. Tourists' motivations and cultural values have an impact on a destination's image [24]. Subsequently, Nghiêm-Phú and Bagul [73] suggested that the destination image formation model must start from the perception form and continue to the cognitive form and emotional form. In addition, the findings of recent studies have also confirmed that tourists' motivation affects the perception and judgment of destination image [26]. Su et al. [21] proved in their study that heritage travel motivation has a significant direct influence on heritage destination image. Hence, the positive influences of the four dimensions of travel motivation on building tourists' perceived destination image were also presumed to be influential in world heritage tourism. Moreover, according to the findings of research carried out in recent years, destination image acts as a mediator when exploring tourists' behavioral intentions [25,73]. The authors of previous studies [57,74,75] highlighted the fact that service quality, destination image, and behavioral intention can serve as significant mediating factors influencing intention. In this study, we therefore formed the following hypotheses:

H1: *Travel motives positively affect WHS tourists' overall destination image.*

H2: *Social motives positively affect WHS tourists' overall destination image.*

H3: *Prestige motives positively affect WHS tourists' overall destination image.*

H4: *Cultural motives positively affect WHS tourists' overall destination image.*

2.4. SNS Intention

Social networking site (SNS) intention, also known as sharing intention or post intention, refers to individuals' willingness to upload their travel or purchase experiences on SNS platforms, which could be regarded as a form of online exposure to a certain destination, product, or service [76]. With the adoption of technology in heritage tourism, ICT has been primarily identified as being utilized by WHS tourists to plan their visit and help with comprehending the cultural content presented [76]. As mentioned before, posts on SNSs could aid WHS managers in justifying trends and the density of tourist flow on site [42]. Playing the role of a marketing tool, data analyzed from SNS content can provide information on tourists' demographic background, including their personal characteristics and interests [77].

Individuals' eWOM behaviors on SNS platforms have been widely investigated in marketing studies [78,79]. With regard to the tourism sector, the authors of previous studies have attempted to identify the underlying motivations for tourists' content sharing on SNSs [16,80,81]. In spite of this, only a few studies [27] have examined the driving factors of

WHS tourists sharing behaviors on SNS platforms. As a specific example, Han and Bae [27] examined the driving forces of Korean domestic historical heritage sharing behavior on SNSs; however, the authors did not consider the specific impact of travel motivations. In contrast, Mehmood et al. [82] examined the significant impact of heritage image on forming tourists' behavioral intention, which refers to the way in which they implement their visits in practice. However, only a few studies (e.g., 16, 27) have explored the contributions of heritage image to encouraging tourists to post their travel experiences on SNS platforms. Therefore, a related hypothesis was provided as follows. Figure 1 displays the proposed framework based on the developed hypotheses discussed above.

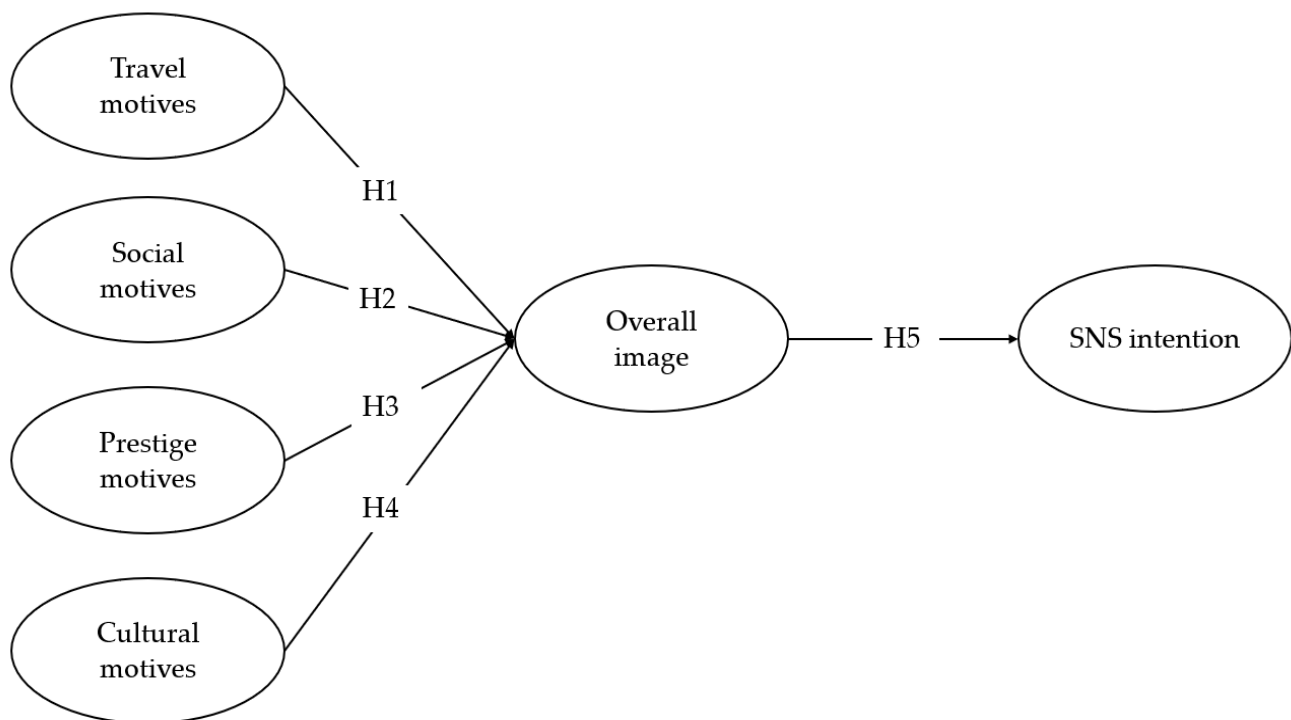


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework.

H5: Overall destination image positively affects WHS tourists' SNS post intention.

3. Methods

3.1. Measurement Items

The online questionnaire was developed via the platform SurveyMonkey and measured six variables with 22 items using five-point Likert-type scales (1 = "totally disagree"; 5 = "strongly agree"). The questionnaire integrated the concept of tourists' travel motivations, overall image, and SNS post intentions. Specifically, the concept of travel motivation explored in this study covered travel, social, prestige, and cultural motives. Five items for travel motives were adopted from the study by Park et al. [16], and two of them were removed during the analysis process due to low estimate values. Three items for social motives were derived from the study by Baloglu and McCleary [58]. Three items measuring prestige motives were measured based on the findings of Park et al.'s study [16]. Four items stating cultural motives were adopted from the study by Su et al. [21]. Moreover, four items measuring overall image were adopted from the studies of Baloglu and McCleary, Dolnicar and Grün, and Qu et al. [58,83,84]. Additionally, three items measuring SNS intention were derived from the study by Park et al. [16]. The questionnaire also included screening questions about previous visits and socio-demographic questions.

3.2. Data Collection

In this study, we aimed to investigate tourists' social networking site (SNS) intention among tourists who had visited cultural WHSs in South Korea. The targeted population contained not only international visitors but also domestic travelers. Thus, before distributing the survey, the questionnaire was translated into Korean to collect responses from domestic travelers. The translation was proofread by English–Korean bilingual experts to ensure the wording was clear, accurate, and easy to understand. Before being formally distributed, the survey was also pre-tested by a group of experienced tourists and experts in heritage tourism to determine the content's validity. Some of the statements were rephrased or reorganized due to comprehension difficulties. In addition, the number and flow of questions displayed and any typographical errors (typos) in the survey were modified based on the feedback.

In this study, we employed a convenience and purposive sampling method to approach WHS tourists living in South Korea. The survey was shared among online communities of foreign residents in South Korea in order to obtain responses from foreign tourists. Simultaneously, data from Korean tourists were collected by approaching those who had uploaded blogs/vlogs about their WHS travel experiences on Korea's SNS platforms (i.e., Naver). All participants were informed that their responses would be used for research only, and their voluntary participation was confirmed during the first stage. Data were collected from early September to mid-October 2023, and a total of 297 respondents participated in the survey. As this study identified tourists who have been to World Heritage Sites only, the questionnaire results given by tourists who had never been to WHSs before were not recorded. Negative responses to both screening questions "Have you ever visited any World Heritage Sites in South Korea?" and "Have you ever visited the UNESCO World Heritage Sites before?" were eliminated from the dataset used for data analysis. In the end, after data screening, only 238 responses qualified for the data analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis

The analysis tools SPSS (version 23) and Stata (version 18.0) were utilized to conduct the data analysis. First, descriptive statistics were examined to provide information on the demographic composition of the respondents. Second, Cronbach's alpha (α) values for all constructs were tested to check their reliability. Third, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was utilized to examine the constructs' credibility and validity. Lastly, SEM was examined to determine the efficiency of the proposed model and hypotheses as well as to identify the indirect effects within the model.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Characteristics

As displayed in Table 1, of the total 238 respondents, 25.2% were male and females accounted for 74.8% of the respondents. The age of the respondents was grouped into 20–29 (36.1%), 30–39 (34.5%), 40–49 (19.3%), and 50–65 (10.1%). Regarding the marital status of the respondents, 136 (57.1%) reported that they were single, 95 (39.9%) reported that they were married, and 7 (2.9%) chose the option "other". The proportion of respondents who had achieved an education level of high school, associate degree, bachelor's degree, or post-graduate was 5.9%, 8.4%, 55.5%, and 50.3%. The highest proportion noted for the respondents' occupation was full-time (48.7%), followed by student (16.0%), self-employed (11.8%), other (10.9%), part-time (9.2%), and unemployed (11.8%). The annual household income of the respondents was mainly between KRW 20,000,000 and less than KRW 100,000,000 (71.5%). We differentiated the respondents into Koreans (74.8%) and foreigners (25.2%).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the survey respondents.

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	60	25.2
	Female	178	74.8
Age (M = 34)	20–29	86	36.1
	30–39	82	34.5
	40–49	46	19.3
	50–65	24	10.1
	Single	136	57.1
Marital status	Married	95	39.9
	Other	7	2.9
	High school	14	5.9
Educational level status	Associate degree	20	8.4
	Bachelor’s degree	132	55.5
	Post-graduate	72	30.3
	Full-time	116	48.7
Occupation	Part-time	22	9.2
	Self-employed	28	11.8
	Unemployed	8	3.4
	Student	38	16.0
	Other	26	10.9
Annual household income (KRW)	Under KRW 20,000,000	37	6.1
	20,000,000—less than 40,000,000	74	24.6
	40,000,000—less than 60,000,000	44	25.3
	60,000,000—less than 80,000,000	26	21.6
	80,000,000—less than 100,000,000	29	10.8
Nationality	100,000,000 and over	28	11.8
	Korean	178	74.8
	Foreign	60	25.2

Note: \$USD1 = 1330 Korean Won (KRW).

4.2. CFA Results

The reliability and validity of the measurement items adopted in the conceptual model were tested via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The results displayed acceptable goodness-of-fit statistics (χ^2 (154) = 288.453; $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 1.873$; GFI = 0.892; CFI = 0.946; TLI = 0.933; RMSEA = 0.061; SRMR = 0.061). All factor loading values were in the range of 0.549 to 0.957, all of which reached the standard of succeeding 0.5 cited by Hair et al. (1998) [85]. The Cronbach’s alpha values for all constructs surpassed the acceptable criteria at 0.7 [86]. Simultaneously, the average variance-extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were between 0.505 and 0.732, succeeding the criterion of 0.5 [87]. Additionally, the composite reliability (CR) results for all constructs ranged from 0.749 to 0.891, surpassing the suggested standard of 0.7 [85]. Furthermore, the square root values of AVE values for all constructs were higher than their correlation coefficient values. Thus, the internal consistency and discriminant validity for all constructs were determined to be at an acceptable level. The detailed CFA results are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. CFA results.

Item	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
(1) Travel motives ($\alpha = 0.715$)			
travel2_To have some time for a break from routine life	0.726	0.505	0.749
travel3_To visit a destination that most people think deserves to be visited	0.828		
travel4_To experience different cultures	0.549		

Table 2. Cont.

Item	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
(2) Social motives ($\alpha = 0.805$)			
social1_To spend time with family/friends	0.551	0.540	0.772
social2_To show this WHS to my family/friends	0.717		
social3_To share this visit with my family/friends	0.896		
(3) Prestige motives ($\alpha = 0.842$)			
prestige1_To gain prestige on SNSs	0.891	0.677	0.857
prestige2_To attain status on SNSs	0.957		
prestige3_To increase self-esteem or respect	0.567		
(4) Cultural motives ($\alpha = 0.899$)			
cultural1_Being interested in the history of the WHS	0.803	0.640	0.876
cultural2_To have the historical information about the site	0.854		
cultural3_To visit the site for learning about the past/history	0.842		
cultural4_To visit the historical heritage site	0.692		
(5) Overall image ($\alpha = 0.873$)			
image1_The overall image of the WHS I visited is positive	0.804	0.627	0.875
image2_It was worth coming to the WHS	0.818		
image3_The WHS is a good place to visit	0.809		
image4_The WHS has a good reputation	0.761		
(6) SNS intention ($\alpha = 0.887$)			
sns_intention1_I will post my visit to the WHS on SNSs	0.924	0.732	0.891
sns_intention2_I will share my visit to the WHS with other SNS members	0.884		
sns_intention3_I will post pictures of the WHS on SNSs	0.749		

Table 3. Correlation matrix.

	M (SD)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Travel motives	3.934 (0.724)	0.711 ^a					
(2) Social motives	3.846 (0.737)	0.521 ^b	0.735				
(3) Prestige motives	2.688 (0.958)	0.094	0.098	0.823			
(4) Cultural motives	3.871 (0.714)	0.351	0.447	0.204	0.800		
(5) Overall image	4.205 (0.633)	0.508	0.541	0.022	0.562	0.792	
(6) SNS intention	3.948 (0.781)	0.334	0.351	0.177	0.412	0.499	0.856

Goodness-of-fit of the model: χ^2 (154) = 288.453; $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 1.873$; GFI = 0.892; CFI = 0.946; TLI = 0.933; RMSEA = 0.061; SRMR = 0.061.

Note: ^a is the square root of the AVE value; ^b shows the correlation coefficients.

4.3. SEM Results

The proposed model and hypotheses were sequentially examined by adopting structural equation modeling (SEM). The model fit indices present satisfactory values, as suggested by Bryne [88] ($\chi^2 = 303.129$, $df = 159$, $\chi^2/df = 1.906$, GFI = 0.887, CFI = 0.942, TLI = 0.931, RMSEA = 0.062, SRMR = 0.069). Of the five hypotheses developed, two were supported at a significance level of 0.001, two were supported at a significance level of 0.01, and one was unsupported with an unacceptable significance level ($p > 0.05$). Specifically, overall image was positively affected by travel motives ($\beta = 0.279$), social motives ($\beta = 0.239$), and cultural motives ($\beta = 0.363$). Thus, Hypotheses 1, 2, and 4 were supported. Nevertheless, an insignificant effect of prestige motives on overall image was identified, thereby disproving Hypothesis 3. Moreover, overall image positively influenced SNS intention ($\beta = 0.514$), supporting Hypothesis 5. The total variances in overall image and SNS intention were R-square = 0.493 and 0.265. The detailed SEM results are displayed in Table 4 and Figure 2.

Table 4. SEM results.

Paths				Coef.	z	Decision
H1:	Travel motives	→	Overall image	0.279 **	3.12	Supported
H2:	Social motives	→	Overall image	0.239 **	2.81	Supported
H3:	Prestige motives	→	Overall image	−0.093	−1.60	Rejected
H4:	Cultural motives	→	Overall image	0.363 ***	5.20	Supported
H5:	Overall image	→	SNS intention	0.514 ***	9.31	Supported

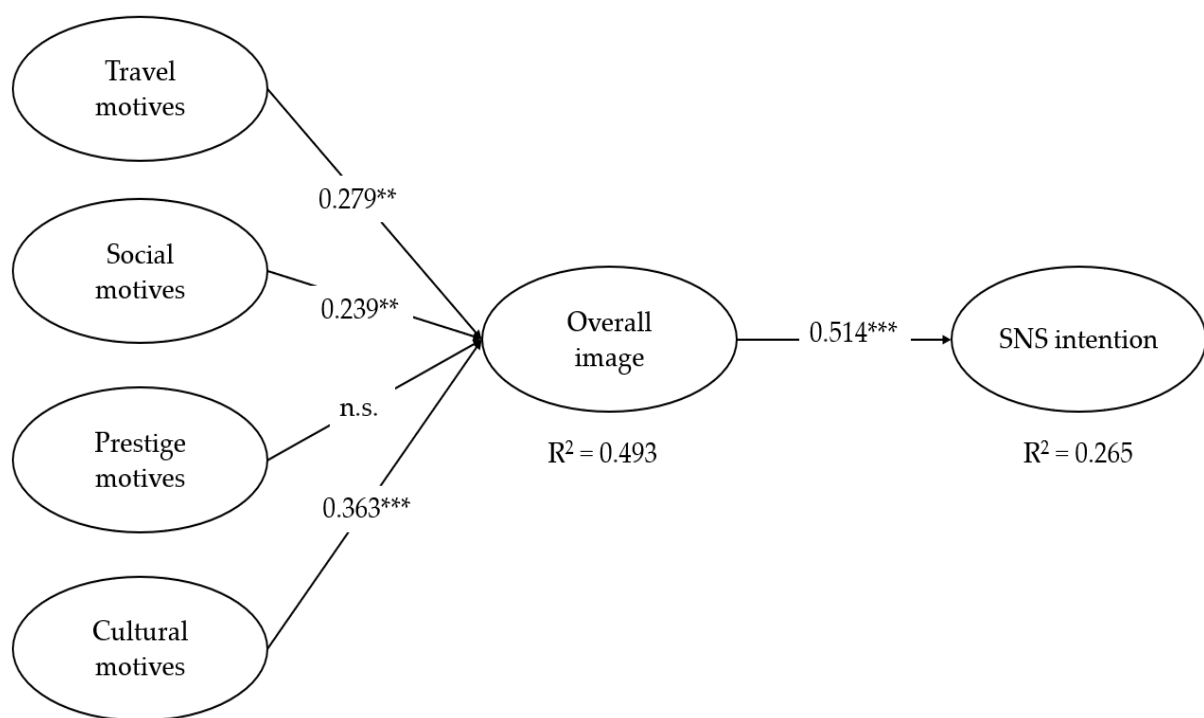
Total variance explained:

R^2 for overall image = 0.493; R^2 for SNS intention = 0.265

Goodness-of-fit statistics:

$\chi^2 = 303.129$, $df = 159$, $\chi^2/df = 1.906$, GFI = 0.887, CFI = 0.942, TLI = 0.931, RMSEA = 0.062, SRMR = 0.069

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

**Figure 2.** SEM results. Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$, n.s. = non-significant.

The indirect impact of the variables used in this study was evaluated. As presented in Table 5, travel motives ($\beta = 0.179$, $p < 0.01$), social motives ($\beta = 0.221$, $p < 0.01$), and cultural motives ($\beta = 0.226$, $p < 0.001$) had significant influences on SNS intention. However, no indirect impact was found between prestige motives and SNS intention ($p > 0.05$).

Table 5. Indirect effect results.

Indirect Paths			Coef.	z
Travel motives	→	SNS intention	0.179 **	2.82
Social motives	→	SNS intention	0.221 **	2.59
Prestige motives	→	SNS intention	−0.042	−1.56
Cultural motives	→	SNS intention	0.226 ***	4.19

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

5. Discussion

In this study, we explored the formation process of SNS intention by merging two variables of motivation and overall image. First, the findings of this study demonstrate

that travel motives, social motives, and cultural motives significantly and positively affect overall image, reaffirming the findings of previous studies [16,21,60]. In particular, the relationship between cultural motives and overall image shows the highest level of significance, suggesting cultural motives as the most influential determinant of forming tourists' destination image. In addition, aligning with previous findings indicating that overall image has a positive and significant effect on tourists' behavioral intentions [69,82,89], the significant relationship between overall image and SNS intention found in this study further verifies the impact of tourists' perceptions of WHS destinations on their intention to post or share their travel experiences on SNS platforms. Notably, three motives were further found to have an indirect impact on SNS intention via overall image, thus reinforcing the impact of destination image when exploring behavioral intention, as identified in previous studies [73–75]. Nevertheless, in contrast with previous studies examining prestige motives as the key factor involved in the formation of destination image [16,61,90], in this research, we did not observe a significant relationship between prestige motives and destination image; concurrently, no indirect impact of prestige motives on SNS intention was identified. This means that tourists may not view visiting WHSs as a method that can be used to stimulate their social reputation or status. In this sense, when making decisions to post about their experience at WHS destinations, rather than focusing on reputation and fame, they may instead focus on the other rewards that they can obtain from SNS exposure. For example, tourists may be more inclined to explore other cultures and pay more attention to learning about history [21,63]. The results highlighted above make theoretical and practical contributions to our understanding of the behavior of tourists at WHSs.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The findings of the present study have notable theoretical implications. First, while the authors of previous studies have primarily focused on studying tourists who have visited WHSs in China or Western countries [21,91–93], in this study, we examined tourists' behavioral intention within the context of South Korea. A conceptual framework was examined to identify the motivators of behavioral intention to post or share experiences or comments on SNS platforms among tourists to WHSs in South Korea. This study enriches heritage tourism research, in particular in investigating WHSs with diverse cultural backgrounds.

Second, the process of obtaining information on SNS sharing intentions within the context of WHSs in South Korea forms the first attempt to employ three validated motives (i.e., travel, social, and cultural motives) as antecedents and their overall image of WHSs as a mediator of sharing their experiences on SNS platforms. Notably, it is important to mention that the primary motivation of tourists before visiting WHSs in Korea plays a crucial role in their willingness to share their travel experiences on SNSs based on the actual image they perceive of the destination. The significant relationships examined in the current context of WHS tourism also align with previous findings in other tourism settings [24,26,73] and SNS behavior studies [27,30].

Third, the findings of this study also further aid in determining the impact of diverse motivation attributes on evoking tourists' SNS intention. With consistent efficacy identified from travel, social, and cultural motives, motivation theory still has some degree of explanatory power in interpreting tourists' willingness to share or post about their travel experiences on SNS platforms in the WHS tourism context. In contrast, the divergence in the effectiveness of prestige motives demonstrates that this specific dimension shows less adaptability when comprehending tourists' SNS intention in the WHS tourism settings.

5.2. Practical Implications

According to the results of this study, there are three practical implications as follows. Initially, the significance of cultural motives infers that WHS managers should leverage cultural features to enhance attractiveness. WHS destinations should prioritize enhancing tourists' cultural experiences and emphasize cultural representation when promoting the historical and cultural value underlying heritage sites. To achieve this goal, tourists can

be offered the opportunity to take part in appropriate guided tours and view artistic performances that reference the characteristics of the tourist destination. In addition, the on-site design of tour routes should provide tourists with an immersive cultural experience to enable them to experience the attractions to the fullest without having to visit the same location repeatedly [94]. Importantly, convenient facilities for the elderly and children need to be established to better enable them to visit such sites and increase their enjoyment. Furthermore, the planners and managers of WHSs should symbolize cultural characteristics that highlight the specific site's uniqueness, such as designing a dedicated logo and creating an official mascot. Furthermore, planners and managers of WHSs can develop cultural and creative products for the site to attract more tourists. It would be even more beneficial if the official social media accounts of the site promote traditional events in cooperation with the government to promote the site's history and culture.

Alternatively, WHS destinations should strengthen tourists' social and travel experiences. This requires the destinations to ensure that traveling on-site can provide tourists with opportunities to strengthen their social networks and enjoy a variety of activities. In this sense, it is suggested that WHS planners and managers should organize events or activities that enable all age ranges to participate. Likewise, WHS planners and managers can design various cultural experience areas for tourists of different age groups so that such sites can play a greater role in tourism. Importantly, it bears repeating that more convenient facilities for the elderly and children need to be established to better enable them to visit such sites and increase their enjoyment. Meanwhile, the importance of preparing brochures and materials to guide tourists during their visit cannot be ignored. Furthermore, to increase publicity, WHSs can establish interactive activities such as photo booths that allow tourists to post their memorable moments on SNS platforms. Additionally, installing leisure areas is also especially crucial for WHSs so that they can offer travel experiences different from the perceived culture and enable a wide range of tourists to access them. Planning different types of promotional events and festivals online or offline will also offer tourists dynamic experiences.

Finally, we suggest strengthening the destination image of WHSs as a successful example of heritage conservation. As such, avoiding over-exploration of the heritage itself, damage to the heritage during maintenance, and the loss of its original features during renovation are all methods that can be used to protect WHSs. With regard to WHS tourists, it is necessary to promote to them what measures of heritage protection are being practiced on site. In this regard, those managing WHS destinations can plan educational programs that promote conservation knowledge around heritage. As a specific example, educational activities can be carried out with younger tourist groups to cultivate their awareness of protecting world cultural heritage from an early age. Moreover, the implementation of an appropriate flow/crowd management strategy can not only better protect cultural relics and prevent premature damage to cultural treasures but also leave tourists with the impression of managing such sites in an orderly manner.

6. Conclusions

Emphasis on the development of heritage tourism based on World Heritage Sites has increased the value of historical authenticity and the sense of presence. Tourists' posting and sharing behaviors on SNS platforms play a vital role in this spreading process, thus culminating in the vital call for an understanding of the intricate dynamics of SNS intention. The findings of this study offer valuable insights into tourists' behavioral intentions at WHSs, enriching heritage tourism research by providing empirical evidence. By examining the relationships between tourists' motivations and their overall image of WHS destinations, in this study, we were able to determine the significant effects of travel, social, and cultural motives on shaping tourists' perceptions. The mediating role of overall image in influencing tourists' intentions to share experiences on social media platforms is also highlighted. The significant relationship between overall image and SNS intention seems to be strengthened by tourists' perceptions, which in turn encourages their engagement on SNS

platforms. Motives relating to prestige, however, were not found to significantly impact destination image or SNS intention, emphasizing the fact that cultural and experiential rewards gained from SNS exposure appeared to be more compelling for tourists. The findings of this study provide actionable recommendations for WHS managers, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing cultural experiences, enhancing social and travel experiences, and preserving heritage while simultaneously promoting conservation measures. This study not only advances our theoretical understanding but also provides practical guidance and highlights the importance of further research to enrich the knowledge base of WHS tourism management and marketing strategies.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Some limitations of the present study were identified as potential directions for future research into identifying the behavioral intentions of tourists to WHSs. First, there was an imbalance in the gender ratio in the demographic statistics. The authors of future studies should therefore focus on identifying if perceptions from diverse genders will make a difference to the final results. Second, there was also disparity in the proportions noted in the respondents' nationality, which means the current sample might not be sufficient to explore cross-cultural effects. As WHSs are globally renowned, the authors of future studies are advised to include more foreign respondents in their research to determine behavioral differences between tourists from different countries or regions. In addition, although natural heritage sites are a crucial part of heritage tourism, they only account for a minor part of Korea's WHS development. As such, the authors of future studies are encouraged to explore WHS tourists' natural motives in those regions with more natural destinations included. Third, as the current study involves quantitative research, it is suggested that qualitative research be carried out in future studies to provide an in-depth understanding of World Heritage Site tourists' behavioral intentions. Fourth, a significant proportion of respondents in this study were over the age of 40. The authors of future studies should therefore collect more data from different age ranges to examine the impact of age differences on WHS tourists' SNS intention. Lastly, the authors of future studies could improve the generalizability of the current theoretical framework in WHS destinations by analyzing participants from diverse cultural backgrounds.

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