

Socio-Demographic Differences in Tourists' Perception of Memorable Tourism Experience and Destination Personality: A Case Study of Banja Luka

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Abstract

Although memorable tourism experience and destination personality have attracted increasing attention in tourism research, a limited number of studies have examined these concepts within a unified analytical framework, particularly in relation to tourists' socio-demographic characteristics. The aim of this study was to examine differences in the perception of memorable tourism experience and destination personality in relation to tourists' socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, education level, employment status, and monthly income), as well as the number of visits to the destination and travel companions. The study included 110 respondents, comprising both domestic and international tourists who visited the city of Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Data were collected through both on-site and online questionnaires using a convenience sampling approach and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 23. The results indicate statistically significant differences in the perception of memorable tourism experience and destination personality based on respondents' gender and number of visits to the destination, while no significant differences were found for the remaining variables. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing insights into memorable tourism experience and destination personality within a unified socio-demographic framework in the context of Banja Luka, a destination that has received limited attention in this type of tourism research. These findings provide useful insights for identifying target tourist segments and developing marketing strategies aimed at positioning and differentiating Banja Luka in the tourism market.

Keywords: memorable tourism experience, destination personality, socio-demographic characteristics, tourists, Banja Luka

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Introduction

In recent years, memory has emerged as the most important characteristic of the tourism experience, giving rise to the concept of memorable tourism experience (MTE) (Brunner-Sperdin, Peters, 2009; Kim et al., 2012a). Tourists are increasingly driven by the desire for new and unique experiences that result in lasting memories and revisit intentions. Therefore, providing an MTE is considered a key means of gaining a competitive advantage in positioning a destination in the tourism market (Morgan et al., 2010). One of the ways to differentiate a destination from its competitors is by emphasizing its brand personality. The concept of destination personality (DP) has developed based on the principles of brand personality. Imagining a destination as a person may seem unusual or even unimaginable at a conscious level for many people, but previous research has shown that tourists tend to identify with destinations whose personality is similar to their own (Kim, 2000). Recent studies also confirm that tourists tend to perceive destinations more positively when there is a perceived similarity or congruence between their self-concept and DP (Bekk et al., 2016; Kovačić et al., 2022). DP can also represent the tourist's attitude toward that destination (Usakli, Baloglu, 2011). However, visitors' perception of a destination is primarily shaped by their tourism experience (Zhang et al., 2018).

Although MTE has received growing scholarly attention, studies that explicitly examine its relationship with tourists' socio-demographic characteristics have emerged relatively recently (Tešin et al., 2025; Ye et al., 2025; Dahanayake et al., 2024; Gebrewold, Getachew, 2021; Horvat et al., 2018). In contrast, research on DP has largely focused on selected socio-demographic variables (Kovačić et al., 2022; Šagovnović, Kovačić, 2021; Kim et al., 2018; Kim, Stepchenkova, 2017; Jovanović, 2014; Bilim, Bilim, 2014). However, research on simultaneously examining socio-demographic differences in tourists' perceptions of both MTE and DP within a single analytical framework remains very limited.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to analyze differences in the perception of MTE and DP in relation to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, level of education, employment status, and monthly income), number of visits to the destination, and travel companions. The purpose of the study is to identify key characteristics of tourists visiting Banja Luka, an urban tourist destination in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the main factors contributing to the formation of an MTE and the perception of DP. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing insights into MTE and DP within a unified socio-demographic framework in the context of Banja Luka, thereby making the findings particularly relevant for destination management and marketing.

Literature review

Memorable tourism experience

An MTE is a positive experience that remains in the tourist's memory and is recalled long after the trip has ended (Kim et al., 2012a). Such experiences constitute a key source of information in tourists' decision-making processes, particularly when considering destination revisits (Marschall, 2012). Moreover, the concept of MTE has been recognized as an important driver of destination competitiveness and a key determinant of future tourist behavior and loyalty (Zhang et al., 2018; Hosseini et al., 2021).

In terms of MTE, several studies have been conducted to determine its core elements and structure (Tung, Ritchie, 2011a, 2011b; Kim et al., 2012a; Chandralal et al., 2015; de Freitas Coelho, de Sevilha Gosling, 2018). However, the most frequently cited and widely applied measurement framework in the literature is the seven-dimensional Memorable Tourism Experience Scale (MTES) proposed by Kim et al. (2012a).

Previous studies suggest that the perceived importance of different dimensions of MTE may vary according to tourists' socio-demographic traits (Chandralal et al., 2015). However, empirical evidence directly examining the relationship between tourists' socio-demographic characteristics and MTE re-

mains relatively limited. For example, Tešin et al. (2025) examined memorable city breaks in Serbian cities (Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Niš), identifying hedonic experience, local culture, and refreshment as the most salient dimensions, with socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, marital status, income, and travel companions significantly shaping these experiences. Ye et al. (2025) explored MTE in the context of intangible cultural heritage tourism in Wuxi (China), highlighting the role of gender, age, place of origin, travel companions, trip purpose, education level, and monthly income in shaping tourists' experiences. Similarly, Dahanayake et al. (2024) identified distinct tourist segments based on memorable wellness experiences in Sri Lanka, while Gebrewold and Getachew (2021) reported variation in MTE expectations across experiential dimensions in Gondar (Ethiopia), influenced particularly by age and gender. Overall, previous studies indicate that MTE is a multidimensional construct shaped by experiential and contextual factors, as well as socio-demographic characteristics, with findings varying across different tourism settings.

Destination personality

A DP refers to the attribution of human characteristics to a tourism destination. Since destinations can be considered brands in themselves, they may also be associated with human traits (Božić, 2016). DP encompasses characteristics that tourists perceive as desirable but do not necessarily possess themselves, so by visiting a particular destination, they seek to experience these characteristics (Usakli, Baloglu, 2011). These may include traits such as sincere, exciting, and energetic (Kovačić et al., 2020).

The concept of DP has evolved from the brand personality concept (Aaker, 1997). The most widely used scale for measuring brand personality is the Brand Personality Scale (BPS), developed by Aaker (1997). Initially, the BPS, with certain modifications, was applied in measuring DP. Over time, it became evident that the scale was not entirely suitable for this purpose, leading to the need for a separate scale tailored specifically for measuring DP. Based on Aaker's (1997) scale, Kovačić et al. (2020) developed the Destination Personality Scale (DPS), which is fully adapted to describe the personality of a tourist destination.

Recent studies examining the relationship between tourists' socio-demographic characteristics and DP suggest that DP perceptions have been shown to vary across different visitor profiles and contextual factors. Kovačić et al. (2022) found statistically significant differences in the perception of destination sophistication in relation to respondents' employment status and income level, indicating that socio-economic conditions can shape how certain personality traits of a destination are perceived. Similarly, Šagovnović and Kovačić (2021) reported significant differences in DP perception between first-time and repeat visitors, as well as between domestic and international city break tourists, highlighting the role of prior experience and travel context in shaping destination-related perceptions. In addition, Kim et al. (2018) demonstrated that gender, age, cultural background, and prior travel experience influence the perception of destination personality dimensions, while Kim and Stepchenkova (2017) identified systematic differences in DP perception between Eastern and Western tourists in the context of Jeju Island (South Korea).

Memorable tourism experience and destination personality

Although MTE and DP have both attracted increasing attention in tourism research, their interrelationship remains insufficiently explored. Only a limited number of studies have examined the link between MTE and DP, suggesting that this relationship has not yet been systematically addressed in the literature. Several studies have examined MTE alongside destination image and DP, primarily focusing on destination image and DP as antecedents of MTE (Dagustani et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018; Kim, 2018; Kim et al., 2012b). In contrast, fewer studies have investigated MTE as a factor shaping tourists' perceptions of DP. Tešin et al. (2023) investigated the influence of MTE on perceived DP in the context of major

Serbian city destinations (Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Niš). Kopuz (2023) likewise confirmed the effect of MTE on tourists' perception of DP in the context of Banja Luka. These studies suggest that individual DP dimensions can be shaped by multiple MTE dimensions. In particular, hedonism emerged as one of the most influential dimensions affecting tourists' perceptions of DP, while the effects of other MTE dimensions varied across DP traits.

To the best of our knowledge, no prior research has systematically examined socio-demographic differences in tourists' perceptions of both MTE and DP within a single analytical framework. Building on the findings of Kopuz (2023), there is a clear need for further investigation that incorporates tourists' socio-demographic characteristics, number of visits to the destination, and travel companions, in order to gain a deeper understanding of MTE and DP perceptions in the case study of Banja Luka.

Based on the theoretical framework, the study proposes testing the following hypotheses:

H1: There are differences in the perception of MTE and DP according to visitors' gender.

H2: There are differences in the perception of MTE and DP according to visitors' age.

H3: There are differences in the perception of MTE and DP according to visitors' level of education.

H4: There are differences in the perception of MTE and DP according to visitors' employment status.

H5: There are differences in the perception of MTE and DP according to visitors' income level.

H6: There are differences in the perception of MTE and DP according to the number of visits to the destination.

H7: There are differences in the perception of MTE and DP according to travel companions.

Methods and data

Instrument

The research employed a questionnaire consisting of three parts. The first part measured socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as gender, age, place of residence, level of education, employment status, and monthly income. In addition, respondents were asked about the number of previous visits to Banja Luka and their travel companions. The second part measured a DP using the DPS developed by Kovačić et al. (2020). The DPS consists of five dimensions: sincerity (benevolent, sentimental, open, pleasant, convivial); excitement (energetic, fun, lively, dynamic); competence (reliable, responsible, dedicated, serious, organized, attentive); sophistication (smooth, balanced, gentle, charming); and ruggedness (mysterious, spontaneous, free, uncontrollable, resistant). Respondents rated how well each item from the scale described Banja Luka as a tourist destination on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (does not describe at all) to 5 (completely describes it). The third part measured an MTE using the MTES developed by Kim et al. (2012a). The MTES consists of 24 statements grouped into 7 dimensions: hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree; 5 - strongly agree).

Procedure

The research was conducted in October 2022 in the city of Banja Luka. Data were collected using a mixed-method survey approach, combining paper-and-pencil questionnaires and an online survey

administered via Google Forms. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of anonymity, and notified that the data would be used solely for scientific purposes. Paper questionnaires were distributed on-site, primarily in selected accommodation facilities in Banja Luka, including hotels and private accommodation establishments, with the assistance of staff. The online survey was disseminated through social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn). Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 23. For the research purposes, descriptive statistics and reliability analyses, T-test and ANOVA test were applied. Prior to conducting parametric tests, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were assessed to ensure the appropriateness of the analyses.

Study sample

The study sample consisted of 110 respondents, including both domestic and international tourists who had visited Banja Luka. Two main criteria were used to select the participants: (1) they had to be aged 18 years and older; and (2) they had to be non-residents of Banja Luka, in order to ensure that the sample consisted of actual tourists. A convenience sampling approach was applied due to the exploratory nature of the study and the practical feasibility of reaching tourists both on-site and online during the data collection period. This approach may involve certain inherent limitations, including potential self-selection and accessibility bias.

Domestic tourists were defined as respondents residing in Bosnia and Herzegovina (excluding Banja Luka), while international tourists were defined as respondents residing outside Bosnia and Herzegovina. The sample consisted of 32.7% domestic tourists and 67.3% international tourists. The study sample comprised a higher proportion of female than male participants. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 70 years, with an average age of 31 years. Most respondents had completed secondary education. The largest share of the sample was employed and reported average monthly income levels. Monthly income was measured using self-perceived income categories (below average, average, above average, and without income), due to potential differences in purchasing power and national economic standards among respondents from different countries. Regarding the number of visits to the destination, the majority of respondents had visited Banja Luka more than five times. In terms of travel companions, respondents most frequently traveled with friends.

Table 1. *Socio-demographic characteristics and travel information of respondents*

Gender		Monthly income	
Male	38.2%	Below average	13.6%
Female	61.8%	Average	52.7%
Age		Above average	27.3%
Average age= 31.39		Without income	6.4%
Standard deviation = 11.400		Number of visits	
Range (18-70)		One time	24.5%
Education level		2-3 times	14.5%
Elementary school	/	4-5 times	10%
Secondary school	36.4%	More than 5 times	50.9%
Higher school	8.2%	Travel companions	
Faculty	29.1%	Alone	12.7%
Master studies	22.7%	Family (without children)	14.5%

PhD	3.6%	Family (with children)	15.5%
Employment status		Friends	36.4%
Pupil	0.9%	Boyfriend/girlfriend/Spouse	16.4%
Student	29.1%	Other (work/college trips)	4.5%
Employed	61.8%		
Retired	3.6%		
Unemployed	4.5%		

Results

Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis

Descriptive statistics and reliability analyses were conducted for both the MTES and the DPS, revealing high internal consistency across all dimensions, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and reliability of MTES and DPS

MTES	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	DPS	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Hedonism	4.05	0.983	0.950	Sincerity	4.19	0.869	0.941
Novelty	3.62	1.149	0.951	Excitement	4.03	0.906	0.947
Local culture	4.19	0.978	0.949	Competence	3.75	0.909	0.939
Refreshment	4.17	0.887	0.948	Sophistication	3.78	0.886	0.940
Meaningfulness	3.65	1.147	0.956	Ruggedness	3.86	0.941	0.951
Involvement	4.05	1.056	0.947				
Knowledge	3.62	1.097	0.951				

To assess the overall level of memorability of the tourism experience in Banja Luka, the mean values of the seven MTE dimensions were examined (Table 2). The results indicate that respondents assigned the highest mean value to the local culture dimension. In contrast, the lowest mean values were recorded for the knowledge and novelty dimensions. With regard to DP, the mean values of the five DP dimensions were also examined. The results show that the sincerity dimension recorded the highest mean value, while the competence dimension had the lowest mean value (Table 2).

T-test by gender

The results of the T-test revealed statistically significant gender differences in two dimensions of MTE: hedonism (marginal significance) and involvement. Male respondents reported higher mean scores for hedonism ($M = 4.28$) compared to female respondents ($M = 3.92$), and also indicated greater involvement in tourism activities at the destination ($M = 4.33$) than female participants ($M = 3.87$).

Table 3. T-test results

MTES	Mean		t	p	DPS	Mean		t	p
	M	F				M	F		
Hedonism	4.28	3.92	1.910	0.059	Sincerity	4.30	4.11	1.198	0.234

Novelty	3.86	3.47	1.747	0.083	Excitement	4.21	3.92	1.801	0.075
Local culture	4.33	4.11	1.135	0.259	Competence	3.91	3.66	1.404	0.163
Refreshment	4.35	4.06	1.748	0.083	Sophistication	3.90	3.71	1.124	0.263
Meaningfulness	3.84	3.54	1.411	0.161	Ruggedness	4.14	3.69	2.662	0.009
Involvement	4.33	3.87	2.225	0.028					
Knowledge	3.84	3.48	1.714	0.089					

With regard to DP, a statistically significant difference was observed for the ruggedness dimension. Male respondents ($M = 4.14$) perceived Banja Luka as more rugged compared to female respondents ($M = 3.69$). Based on these T-test results for both the MTE and DP dimensions, H1 is confirmed.

ANOVA test by age

The results of the ANOVA test showed no statistically significant differences between age groups across the dimensions of MTE. Similarly, the ANOVA results indicated no statistically significant differences between age groups in terms of the perception of DP dimensions. Accordingly, H2 is rejected.

Table 4. Results of ANOVA test by age

MTES	F	p	DPS	F	p
Hedonism	0.941	0.458	Sincerity	0.845	0.521
Novelty	0.986	0.430	Excitement	0.568	0.724
Local culture	0.288	0.919	Competence	1.120	0.355
Refreshment	0.450	0.812	Sophistication	0.494	0.780
Meaningfulness	0.643	0.667	Ruggedness	0.469	0.798
Involvement	0.656	0.658			
Knowledge	0.575	0.719			

ANOVA test by education level

The results of the ANOVA test showed that there are no statistically significant differences across different education levels with regard to MTE and the perception of DP. Therefore, H3 is rejected.

Table 5. Results of ANOVA test by education level

MTES	F	p	DPS	F	p
Hedonism	0.425	0.790	Sincerity	0.071	0.991
Novelty	0.588	0.672	Excitement	0.893	0.471
Local culture	0.251	0.909	Competence	0.087	0.986
Refreshment	0.573	0.683	Sophistication	0.346	0.847
Meaningfulness	0.286	0.886	Ruggedness	0.572	0.684
Involvement	0.327	0.859			
Knowledge	0.545	0.703			

ANOVA test by employment status

The results of the ANOVA test indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in the dimensions of MTE and DP across respondents' employment status. Therefore, H4 is rejected.

Table 6. *Results of ANOVA test by employment status*

MTES	F	p	DPS	F	p
Hedonism	0.411	0.746	Sincerity	1.150	0.332
Novelty	1.627	0.188	Excitement	0.804	0.494
Local culture	0.878	0.455	Competence	0.844	0.473
Refreshment	1.275	0.287	Sophistication	1.317	0.273
Meaningfulness	1.939	0.128	Ruggedness	0.688	0.561
Involvement	1.619	0.189			
Knowledge	1.886	0.136			

ANOVA test by monthly income

The ANOVA test showed that there are no statistically significant differences in respondents' perceptions of MTE or DP based on their monthly income. Accordingly, H5 is rejected.

Table 7. *Results of ANOVA test by monthly income*

MTES	F	p	DPS	F	p
Hedonism	0.295	0.829	Sincerity	0.406	0.749
Novelty	0.392	0.759	Excitement	0.071	0.975
Local culture	0.156	0.926	Competence	0.680	0.566
Refreshment	0.484	0.694	Sophistication	0.780	0.508
Meaningfulness	0.785	0.505	Ruggedness	0.166	0.919
Involvement	0.472	0.703			
Knowledge	0.603	0.615			

ANOVA test by number of visits to the destination

The results of the ANOVA test indicated statistically significant differences in the novelty dimension of the MTE, depending on the number of visits to the destination.

Table 8. *Results of ANOVA test by number of visits to the destination*

MTES	F	p	DPS	F	p
Hedonism	1.287	0.283	Sincerity	0.806	0.493
Novelty	3.907	0.011	Excitement	1.217	0.307
Local culture	0.590	0.623	Competence	1.896	0.135
Refreshment	1.462	0.229	Sophistication	0.785	0.505
Meaningfulness	1.422	0.241	Ruggedness	1.488	0.222
Involvement	1.483	0.223			
Knowledge	2.262	0.085			

When statistically significant differences were identified in ANOVA test, LSD post hoc test was applied to determine which groups differed. The LSD post hoc test was selected due to its suitability for exploratory research and its sensitivity in detecting group differences in studies with relatively small sample sizes (Field, 2013). The LSD post hoc test revealed significant differences between respondents visiting

the destination for the first time and those who had visited 4–5 times ($MD = -1.133$, $p = 0.005$), as well as between respondents who had visited 4–5 times and those who had visited more than 5 times ($MD = 1.140$, $p = 0.002$).

Table 9. *Results of the LSD post hoc test for novelty according to number of visits*

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean difference (I-J)	p
First time	2-3 times	-0.487	0.166
	4-5 times	-1.133	0.005
	More than 5 times	0.007	0.980
2-3 times	First time	0.487	0.166
	4-5 times	-0.646	0.138
	More than 5 times	0.493	0.118
4-5 times	First time	1.133	0.005
	2-3 times	0.646	0.138
	More than 5 times	1.140	0.002
More than 5 times	First time	-0.007	0.980
	2-3 times	-0.493	0.118
	4-5 times	-1.140	0.002

For the DP dimensions, the ANOVA test results showed no statistically significant differences based on the number of visits. Overall, these findings indicate that H6 is partially supported.

ANOVA test by travel companions

The ANOVA test results indicate that tourists' travel companions do not significantly influence their perceptions of MTE and DP, thus H7 is rejected.

Table 9. *Results of ANOVA test by travel companions*

MTEs	F	p	DPS	F	p
Hedonism	0.665	0.678	Sincerity	1.143	0.343
Novelty	1.460	0.199	Excitement	1.114	0.359
Local culture	0.881	0.512	Competence	0.758	0.605
Refreshment	1.346	0.244	Sophistication	1.546	0.171
Meaningfulness	0.612	0.720	Ruggedness	1.240	0.292
Involvement	0.984	0.440			
Knowledge	0.660	0.682			

Discussion

This study sought to provide insights into differences in tourists' perceptions of MTE and DP across various socio-demographic characteristics, as well as according to the number of visits and travel companions. With regard to MTE, the results indicate that local culture stood out the most. This suggests that authentic cultural elements and interactions with the locals play a central role in shaping memorable

experiences in Banja Luka, potentially because such elements provide a sense of authenticity and immersion that is particularly valued in urban tourism contexts. Such findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of local culture in urban tourism experiences (Satrya et al., 2024; Bingöl, 2024). In contrast, the dimensions of knowledge and novelty were the least memorable elements of visiting Banja Luka. The lower evaluation of the knowledge dimension may be related to the nature of city trips, which is typically characterized by short duration, leading to a decreased sense of knowledge gain (Iskhakova et al., 2023). Similar patterns were also observed in previous research on MTE in cities (Tešin et al., 2025). The novelty dimension also received lower mean values, which may be partly explained by the structure of the sample, as a large proportion of respondents were repeat visitors. This finding is in line with the conceptualization of novelty that reflects differences in tourists' experiences compared to their previous visits (Kim et al., 2012a). Accordingly, for repeat visitors, the perceived level of novelty tends to decrease as the destination becomes more familiar over time.

In terms of DP, Banja Luka was most strongly perceived as a sincere destination. This perception may result from direct contact with local residents, who are often described as hospitable and approachable, thereby reinforcing perceptions of sincerity (Kopuz, 2023). Interactions with local residents may significantly shape tourists' emotional impressions of the destination and contribute to the development of more authentic and positive destination perceptions. Such findings are consistent with previous studies, where sincerity emerged as one of the most highly rated dimensions, particularly in urban tourism contexts (Šagovnović, Kovačić, 2021; Kim et al., 2018; Apostolopoulou, Papadimitriou, 2015). In contrast, respondents perceived Banja Luka the least as a competent destination. This may be explained by the fact that direct experience with a destination can reveal its limitations and weaknesses, which may reduce tourists' confidence in the city's effectiveness and efficiency (Apostolopoulou, Papadimitriou, 2015). Additionally, perceptions of competence are often associated with highly developed tourism infrastructure, organization, and international recognition, which destinations such as Banja Luka are still in the process of developing. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies (Tešin et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2018; Apostolopoulou, Papadimitriou, 2015).

The results further confirmed that gender shapes the memorability of the tourism experience and the perception of DP. Male tourists place more emphasis on hedonic aspects and active engagement in their tourism experiences. This suggests that male tourists are more likely to value dynamic, activity-oriented, and excitement-based travel experiences. These findings contrast with previous studies, which reported stronger tendencies toward hedonism and involvement among female tourists (Tešin et al., 2025; Gebrewold, Getachew, 2021; Davies et al., 2017; Vespestad, Mehmetoglu, 2015). On the other hand, male tourists perceived Banja Luka as more rugged compared to female tourists. Rugged destinations encompass the traits of being masculine, raw, tough, and oriented toward outdoor activities (Božić, 2016). One possible explanation for these findings may be that Banja Luka is recognized for outdoor-based activities, particularly rafting (Kovačić et al., 2019). Although the present study does not include data on participation in specific activities, previous tourism research has shown that adventure and outdoor activities are often associated with higher levels of involvement and perceptions of destination ruggedness (Pomfret, Bramwell, 2014; Yu et al., 2026). Similar patterns were observed in the study by Kim et al. (2018), where male visitors assigned higher scores to excitement-related attributes, whereas female visitors placed greater emphasis on comfort.

Also, tourists who have visited the destination several times (4-5 visits) experienced novelty more than first-time visitors and very frequent visitors (more than 5 times). One possible explanation for this pattern may lie in differences in travel motivation and levels of familiarity with the destination. While first-time visits are often driven by general sightseeing motives, moderately repeated visits (4-5 visits) may allow tourists to move beyond surface-level attractions and discover new aspects of the destination. In contrast, very frequent visitors may perceive the destination as largely familiar, focusing less on novelty and more on other experiential aspects. Although travel motivation was not directly examined in the present study, previous research has highlighted the role of previous visit experience in shaping travel motivation (Maghrifani et al., 2022).

The findings suggest that respondents' age, education level, employment status, monthly income, and travel companions do not play a decisive role in shaping the perception of MTE. Similar patterns were reported in previous studies, although some socio-demographic differences were identified in specific contexts (Tešin et al., 2025; Horvat et al., 2018). The absence of significant differences in the present study may partly reflect the relatively homogeneous nature of tourists' experiences in the context of urban tourism, where visitors may share similar travel patterns regardless of their socio-demographic background. At the same time, these findings may also be partly attributed to the single-destination research context, as well as to the sample size and structure, which may have limited the statistical power to detect differences. In addition, potential measurement limitations may have influenced these results. With regard to DP, perceptions appear to be largely stable across different socio-demographic characteristics, number of visits, and travel companions. Similar findings were observed in previous research in urban tourism contexts, although differences were identified between first-time and repeat tourists (Šagovnović, Kovačić, 2021). In contrast, Kovačić et al. (2022) confirmed the influence of tourists' occupation and income in the context of a cultural route, indicating that the role of socio-demographic variables may depend on the type of tourism product and destination context. This may suggest that DP perceptions are shaped not only by tourists' individual characteristics, but also by the specific experiential attributes of the destination itself.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that local culture represents the most prominent dimension of MTE, while sincerity emerged as the most distinctive dimension of DP in the context of Banja Luka as an urban tourist destination. Among the socio-demographic characteristics, gender was found to shape tourists' perceptions of both MTE and DP. Furthermore, the number of visits to the destination was found to shape the perception of MTE.

To the best of our knowledge, this study represents the first empirical attempt to examine socio-demographic differences in tourists' perceptions of both MTE and DP within a single research framework. It contributes to the literature on MTE by providing new insights into the role of tourists' socio-demographic characteristics in shaping MTE. In addition, the study advances destination branding research by highlighting the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the perception of the less frequently examined DP dimension of ruggedness in an urban tourism context.

This study also offers practical implications for destination management by highlighting gender-based and number of visits differences in tourists' perception of MTE and DP. These differences indicate varying tourism interests and expectations between male and female tourists, which should be considered when designing tourism products and experiences. With regard to the number of visits, marketing and communication strategies may be tailored to emphasize experiential elements relevant to specific visitor segments, thereby supporting long-term tourist loyalty. Finally, understanding these findings can assist destinations in identifying distinct target segments, improving tourism products and services, and developing strategies for more effective positioning and differentiation in the tourism market.

This study has several limitations. It was conducted on a relatively small sample and focused on a single urban destination in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should expand the scope to include multiple destinations, different tourism contexts, and broader tourist segments in order to validate and extend the present results. Although international tourists were included in the sample, it is possible that the category of foreign residents does not fully capture cross-cultural differences, as some respondents residing abroad may maintain strong cultural and emotional ties to the destination. Future research could benefit from a more detailed classification of tourists based on nationality, cultural background, and place of upbringing, in order to better capture potential cultural differences in the perception of MTE and DP.

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