

Value Creation in Cultural Tourism Experiences Along with Local Stakeholders: A Case Study of Lalbagh Fort at Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Abstract

This article investigates the capacity of Heritage Tourist Attraction (HTA) managers to partner with host communities to co-innovate cultural tourism products and co-create value. The research report focuses on site management and the local community in building meaningful visitor engagement, the case study site is the Lalbagh Fort, a major heritage site in Bangladesh. A qualitative research approach was employed and 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with five stakeholder groups: site management, the local community, media and public representatives, tourism agencies, and academics/researchers. Results show that co-operation between site management and local stakeholders has the potential to significantly improve the quality of visitor experiences, create stronger stakeholder networks, and sustainable heritage tourism development. In addition, the results demonstrate that community involvement, stakeholder participation, marketing innovation, and collaboration with tourism organizations contribute to facilitating value co-creation in the context of cultural tourism. This plays a part in the development of the theories of Service-Dominant Logic, Consumer Culture Theory, and Value Co-creation Theory in that it demonstrates the importance of stakeholder collaboration in heritage tourism management. The results indicate that stakeholders’ meaningful participation contributes to the formation of genuine and memorable cultural tourism experience.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Innovation, Value Co-Creation.

1. Introduction

A heritage site is a structure, historical location, or pristine natural area valued for its contribution to a nation's or region's legacy (Saini & Grover, 2023), shaped by language, culture, identity, and location (Paddison and Biggins, 2017). Tourism administrators generally view heritage as a resource to be developed (Smith, 2016), with the preservation and display of significant artifacts and locations remaining a key goal of heritage tourism destinations (Sardak et al., 2020). Heritage tourist attractions form one of the most significant parts of the tourism system (Bezova, 2021), ranging from small locally owned sites to major attractions (Leask, 2016), and their management challenges are often similar: competitive markets, diminishing resources, and balancing commercialization against conservation (Carbone & Thangadurai, 2025). Recent studies note a gap in the literature on the benefits local communities can jointly generate for tourists through collaboration with heritage site management on innovation (Mijnheer & Gamble, 2019) closing this gap could support more innovative marketing and site economic viability (Lan et al., 2021).

This paper examines the role of stakeholders in the innovation that co-creates value for visitors, drawing on interviews with both site management and local communities to understand how their collaboration can enhance the tourist experience. Stakeholder opinions and interests are treated as central to generating collective value. The study contributes to three theories Consumer Culture Theory, Value Co-Creation Theory, and Service-Dominant Logic showing how strategies from local stakeholders and site management jointly shape unified, value-adding visitor experiences, and recommends closer partnership to drive innovation. The literature review covers heritage sites, cultural tourism experiences, and local stakeholders; the methodology section describes the research design and data collection; and the results section presents findings from the stakeholder interviews.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The concept of 'Cultural Tourism Experiences'

Tourism is understood not merely as monetary gain but as a form of experience (Streimikiene et al., 2020; Mahato et al., 2021), rooted in feelings that provide personal fulfilment and purpose (Keskin et al., 2024; Bargeman et al., 2020). The terms 'tourism' and 'cultural tourism' are often used interchangeably (Ajayi et al., 2025), with tourism defined as temporary movement to places outside one's home or workplace for cultural interest, to gain new knowledge and experiences (William et al., 2025; Samaroudi et al., 2020). Cultural tourism specifically refers to movement toward a cultural attraction a heritage site, artistic manifestation, or arts and drama outside one's home (Štátná et al., 2020). 'Culture' spans intellectual and spiritual development, a way of life, and the works of an artistic community (Zhu & Rahman, 2025). Tourist engagement is positively associated with cultural contact (Yu, Li & Xiao, 2020), which is positively associated with Memorable Tourism Experience (Chen, 2025).

The limited socio-cultural perspective in designing Memorable Tourism Experiences reflects how personal characteristics and socio-cultural context shape perceptions of tourism services and products (Solís-Radilla et al., 2019). Tourism and culture have long been closely intertwined (Pham Hong, Ngo & Pham, 2021), with cultural sights and events providing a key incentive for travel; only recently, however, has cultural tourism been recognized by the UNWTO as a major driver of international tourism consumption (Richards, 2018).

Tourism experience research emerging in the 1970s was initially dismissed as shallow an attempt to seek authenticity or escape one's surroundings (Cohen, 1979) with early studies focused on understanding visitors' ideas and feelings as recorded in journals or interviews (Chong, 2020).

The UNWTO defines cultural tourism as tourism in which visitors' essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and consume tangible and intangible cultural attractions in a destination (UNWTO General Assembly, 2017). Its primary objective is to enhance the quality of life and livelihoods of local communities who preserve cultural heritage and customs (Ma et al., 2021). One key type is heritage tourism, which involves visiting historical sites, museums, and monuments to learn about a place's history (Vílcea, Popescu & Niță, 2023).

Beyond heritage sites, this can involve exploring ruins, historical buildings, and monuments (Brůha et al., 2025; 2020). Art tourism centres on experiencing a destination's art and creativity, including gallery visits, cultural events, and local street art and crafts (Upadhyay & Vij, 2020; Wu et al., 2021). Religious tourism involves visiting temples, churches, mosques, and pilgrimage sites (Rashid, 2018; Huang et al., 2019). Culinary tourism explores local cuisine through traditional dishes, food markets, and cooking classes (Wijaya, 2019; Kaushal & Yadav, 2021). Music and performing arts tourism centres on concerts, festivals, and shows (Io, 2019; Zheng et al., 2020).

Cultural tourists can be divided into five categories by centrality and depth of experience purposeful, sightseeing, casual, incidental, and serendipitous tourists (Duxbury et al., 2025; McKercher, 2020). A grounded-theory model of memorable cultural tourism experiences identifies six influencing elements: prior perceived significance, authenticity, engagement, cultural exchange, culinary attraction, and service quality (Seyfi et al., 2019). Cultural tourism is also a tool for economic growth and regeneration (Lak et al., 2019), generating additional revenue for private and public sectors that helps preserve cultural resources that might otherwise decline (Saarinen, 2019; Hughes & Allen, 2005). As the boundary between economic and cultural activity blurs, cultural tourism increasingly emphasizes jobs and income over cultural promotion (Hayes et al., 2022; Richards, 2025).

2.2. Value creation in Cultural Tourism Experiences along with local stakeholders

Value creation refers to the process by which a business, organization, or individual enhances the overall value of a product, service, or endeavour (Namisango, Kang & Rehman, 2021) a concept central to business, economics, and management (Sjödin et al., 2020) and highly relevant to cultural tourism (Carvalho et al., 2023). In this context, value creation extends beyond monetary gain to delivering meaningful visitor experiences, preserving cultural heritage, and benefiting local stakeholders (Freudenreich et al., 2020; Moric et al., 2021), spanning visitor experience, heritage preservation, community engagement, education, cultural exchange, and promotion of art and creativity (Nobre & Sousa, 2022). Paddison and Biggins (2017) define 'local stakeholders' as all individuals and public or private entities that may be favourably or unfavourably affected by tourism development within a destination.

Local communities are therefore key destination stakeholders, consistent with Freeman's (1984) concept of stakeholders as any group or individual who can affect, or be affected by, an organization's objectives an inclusive framing that treats all stakeholders as deserving fair consideration (Kiely, 2013). Lochrie's (2016) case study underscores the critical role local communities play in tourism growth, and treating residents with respect while listening to their concerns can mitigate tourism's negative social effects (Li et al., 2021). Co-creation with external stakeholders can improve innovation performance, though findings are mixed (Kim et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2023), and the volume of co-creation is not itself a direct indicator of innovation performance; rather, product innovation mediates the relationship (Sharma & Bhat, 2022; Markovic & Bagherzadeh, 2018). Tourists tend to view co-creation through lenses of social connection, creativity, novelty, environmental awareness, sustainability, enjoyment, and unforgettable experiences (Rachão et al., 2021).

Mijnheer and Gamble's (2023) study of stakeholder perspectives on church tourism in Dublin identifies theories of stakeholder collaboration centred on adding value through collaborative synergy and innovation, with each stakeholder's viewpoint given weight (Pererva, 2021). Swangjang and Kornpiphat (2021) categorize tourism stakeholders by power, legitimacy, and urgency characteristics that render stakeholder interactions inherently competitive (Chygryn et al., 2020), with power identified as the most influential of the three (Paddison & Biggins, 2017). Residents' value co-creation behaviour can support the sustainable development of heritage tourism (Carvalho & Alves, 2023); their emotional solidarity and participation in value co-creation are shaped significantly by their perceptions of tourism development's benefits and costs, with emotional solidarity also mediating this relationship (Lan et al., 2021). Tourism is often credited with generating social value and enabling tourism entrepreneurship to drive social change (Rosalina et al., 2021; Manniche et al., 2021), shaping experiences for both tourists and local stakeholders alike (Breiby et al., 2020).

Tourism generates positive socio-cultural effects such as employment, infrastructure development, income generation, and improved social services (Kumar et al., 2023), functioning as a social force supporting broader human development (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2022), though it can also erode local culture and language (Mariani et al., 2020). Photographic interviewing offers another way to add value in cultural tourism, drawing out deeper personal stories and the layered meanings tourists attach to their experiences (Katahenggam & Wee, 2020; Chen & Xu, 2023; Bapiri et al., 2024). More recently, augmented reality has enabled time-lapse navigation of cultural landmarks, overlaying historical imagery onto the real environment (Börcsök et al., 2023; De Luca et al., 2022).

2.3. Heritage Tourist Attraction and Lalbagh Fort

Heritage tourist attractions hold significant cultural and historical importance, drawing visitors worldwide (Parga-Dans et al., 2020). One notable example is Lalbagh Fort, a 17th-century Mughal architectural site in Dhaka, Bangladesh (Tabassum, 2019), constructed in 1678 as a testament to Mughal-era architectural intelligence (Amin et al., 2025), its location along the Buriganga River underscoring its historical role as a key defensive structure (Wescoat & Fischer, 2022). Its design blends Mughal and Bengali architectural styles, with gateways, halls, and carvings symbolizing the era's artistic skill (Siddique et al., 2023), and its museum houses artifacts, weaponry, and historical records offering visitors insight into the past (Charya et al., 2020), giving tourists an immersive understanding of Bangladesh's history and culture (Horaira & Devi, 2021). The number of heritage tourist attractions has risen since the turn of the millennium, intensifying competition for visitors and funding (Chapman et al., 2020).

Research on Lalbagh Fort remains limited, particularly regarding its value creation process with local stakeholders; existing studies largely address the site's importance and economic potential, including socio-economic factors, travel cost methods, and facilities, alongside considerable adjustments in heritage tourist attraction administration (Islam & Farjana, 2020). Strengthening a heritage site's innovativeness as an attraction requires partnership between site management and local stakeholders (Mijnheer & Gamble, 2019), with management orientation shifting from a curatorial, access-restricted approach toward one emphasizing accessibility and participation (Kitsios et al., 2022).

2.4. Research Gap

Existing research on heritage tourism motivations finds that social/personal and educational factors account for most visitors' motivations (Sinambela, 2021), with nostalgia a wish to 'travel back in time' to a simpler past a frequent driver (Chark, 2021; Su et al., 2020). Visitors also seek education, whether to learn about history and culture generally, deepen a specific hobby, or introduce children to a location's heritage (Bekele & Champion, 2019; Mijnheer & Gamble, 2022). However, minimal research examines how local stakeholders and heritage site management co-create experiences through joint innovation (Lan et al., 2021; Mijnheer & Gamble, 2019).

While knowledge of cultural and heritage tourism and visitor experiences continues to grow, research on collaborative innovation between site management and local stakeholders to co-create visitor value at heritage attractions remains limited, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh, and the contribution of stakeholder-enabled innovation to the cultural tourism experience remains under-explored. This paper addresses that gap by examining the partnership between site management and local stakeholders at Lalbagh Fort and how innovation supports value co-creation and improved visitor experiences.

2.5. Research Objective

This research seeks to assess the role of site management, and its collaboration with local stakeholders to innovate and co-create value in the cultural experience offering at Lalbagh Fort. The specific objectives are:

1. To study the dynamics of the site management and local stakeholders at Lalbagh Fort.
2. To review the process by which engagement with stakeholders can foster innovation within the heritage tourism attraction.
3. To analyze the process of value co-creation in the enhancement of cultural tourism experiences for visitors.

2.6 Research Questions

- 1: In what ways does managing heritage attractions promote innovation among local partners?
- 2: How does innovation with local stakeholders influence the value co-creation process?
- 3: What is the role of the participants of value co-creation process in the development of cultural tourism experience for visitors?

3. Theoretical Framework

Three theories are used to understand the experience of the visitors in cultural tourism. Service-dominant logic theory, consumer culture theory and value co-creation theory helps to explore innovative relationships between the local community and the site management.

Stakeholder Theory is central to understanding the diverse actors in heritage tourism development. Freeman (1984) argues that organizational success requires accounting for the needs of all stakeholders who influence, or are influenced by, an organization's activities. In cultural tourism, stakeholders include site management, local communities, tourism agencies, media, researchers, and visitors; their synergistic interaction promotes knowledge sharing, joint decision-making, and resource bundling that generates value. Here, Stakeholder Theory helps explain how Lalbagh Fort's management and local interests engage in a collaborative innovation process to shape joint cultural tourism experiences through value co-creation.

Service-Dominant Logic centres value creation on the exchange of services between organizations (Klafke et al., 2021), with the parties involved acting as active, dynamic resources within complex interactions (Islam et al., 2021). Value Co-Creation Theory marks a shift from viewing groups as passive value definers to active participants who cooperate to build meaning (Priharsari et al., 2020), while Consumer Culture Theory frames group behaviour as a complex, interconnected 'culture' of practices (Arnould et al., 2019). Value co-creation also reflects how

customers perceive, understand, and use a product termed consumer agency (Arnould, 2006) through which consumers contribute value to products and services (Cova & Dalli, 2009).

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to investigate the partnership between site managers and local stakeholders in delivering innovation and co-creating cultural tourism experiences at Lalbagh Fort, Bangladesh. A qualitative approach was chosen for its capacity to comprehensively explore stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, and interactions in situ (Xu et al., 2020), yielding deeper insight into human behaviour, social relationships, and contextual meaning than quantitative approaches allow.

The study follows an interpretivist research philosophy, holding that reality is socially constructed and shaped by individuals' subjective experiences (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). This informed an inductive approach aimed at deriving understanding from stakeholders' lived experiences and identifying emergent themes around collaboration, innovation, and value co-creation (Mijnheer & Gamble, 2023).

A case study approach centred on Lalbagh Fort was adopted for its relevance and significance as a heritage tourist attraction in Bangladesh. This design was chosen for its capacity to examine a current phenomenon within its real-world context (Schoch, 2020), and the research followed a cross-sectional design, with all data collected at a single point in time.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather in-depth perspectives from different stakeholder groups, allowing participants to speak openly while keeping conversations aligned with the research purpose (Brown & Danaher, 2019). A snowball sampling technique was applied, in which initial participants identified other knowledgeable stakeholders connected to Lalbagh Fort (Corazza et al., 2024), enabling access to rich data across stakeholder groups.

The study's methodology follows the Research Onion framework (Saunders et al., 2007), guiding decisions on research philosophy, approach, design, strategy, time horizon, sampling, data collection, and analysis. It also draws on Stakeholder Theory, Service-Dominant Logic, Value Co-Creation Theory, and Consumer Culture Theory as the principal theoretical structure for exploring stakeholder partnership, innovation, and value creation in cultural tourism.

Figure 1 summarizes this methodological structure using the Research Onion model (Saunders et al., 2007).

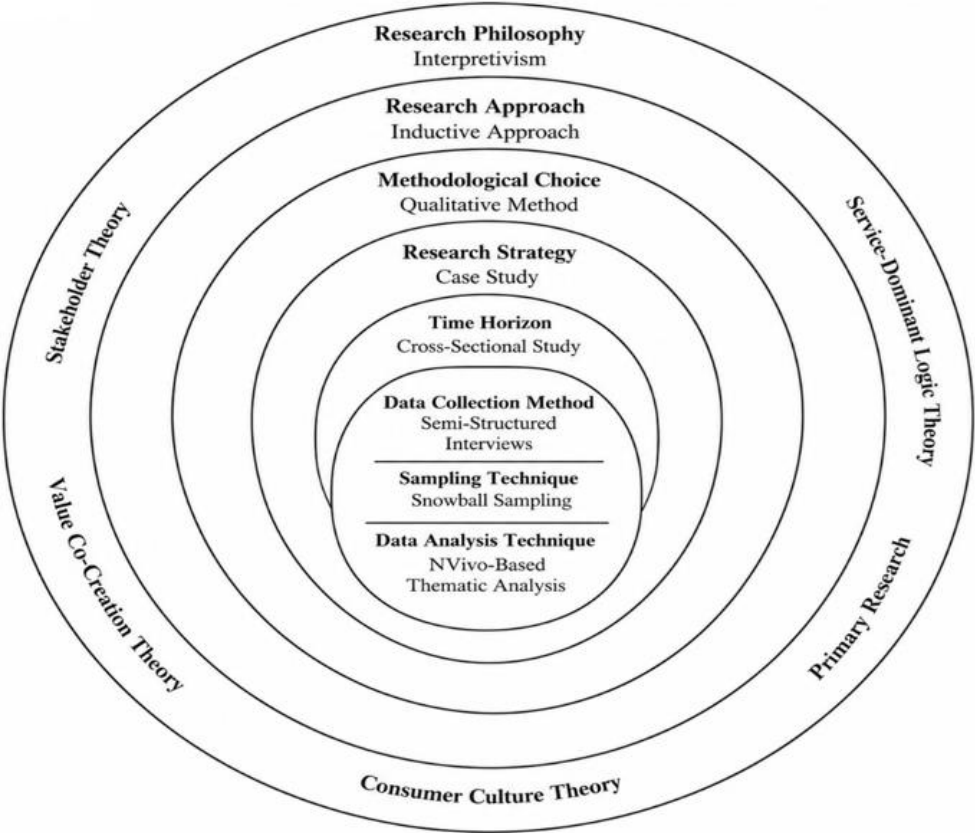


Figure 1. Research Onion Framework of the Study.

As Figure 1 shows, this research is interpretivism-based and it was conducted through an inductive way. A qualitative case study approach was used, and data were gathered through semi-structured interviews employing snowball sampling. The data were analyzed using a NVivo supported thematic analysis. The research is also bolstered by Stakeholder Theory, Service Dominant Logic Theory, Value Co-Creation Theory and Consumer Culture Theory.

There are many stakeholders of Lalbagh Fort including internal and external. A stakeholder map for Lalbagh Fort is created, which is provided by Freeman’s (1984) “Stakeholder Theory” taken as a guideline. There have several stakeholders figure out in Figure 2.

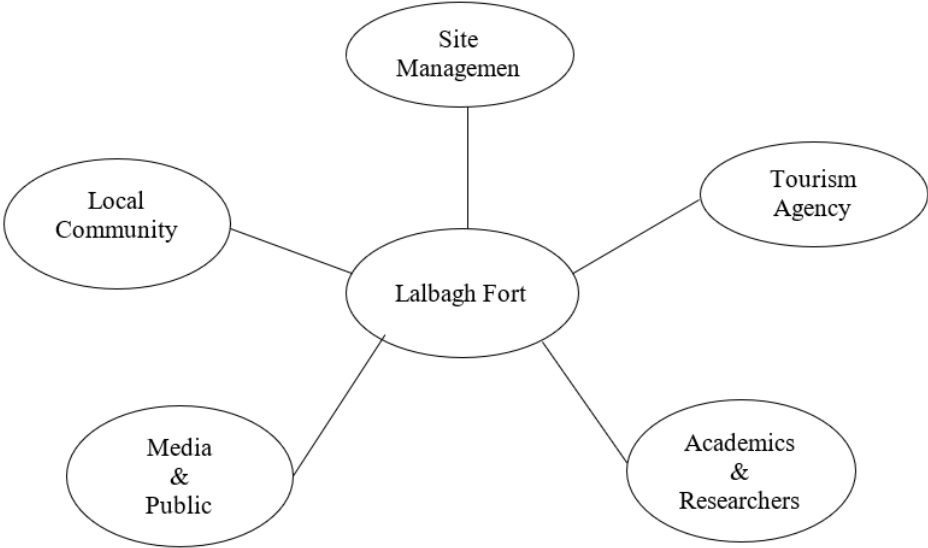


Figure 2. Stakeholder Map of Lalbagh Fort.

In Figure 2, internal stakeholders are shown as circles and external stakeholders as octagons, illustrating their roles and reciprocal relationships. Site management ensures Lalbagh Fort's supervision, maintenance, and visitor management, while tourism agencies organize excursions and study tours to enhance visitor experience. Academics and researchers engage with communities to understand the meanings and values visitors attach to the site, and media channels social, electronic, and print help widen participation and attract new visitors.

4.1. Data Collection

To examine these influences, semi-structured interviews were conducted with diverse stakeholder groups connected to Lalbagh Fort, focusing on stakeholder collaboration, innovativeness, and value co-creation in cultural tourism experiences. This format allowed respondents to voice their opinions freely and offer varied perspectives on the site's development and administration.

The research involved both internal and external stakeholders. The site management, local community, media and public, tourism, and academic and researcher bodies were the main stakeholder groups. These stakeholders were chosen on the basis of their direct and/or indirect association with the marketing, management, conservation and enhancement of the Lalbagh Fort as a heritage tourism site.

To ensure participant comfort and effective communication, interviews were conducted in Bangla and later translated into English for analysis and reporting. Drawing on multiple stakeholder groups provided a holistic view of collaborative innovation and stakeholder engagement in shaping value co-creation and the cultural tourism experience. Table 1 shows the distribution of interview participants.

Table 1. Distribution of Interview Participants by Stakeholder Group.

Stakeholder Group	Code	Number of Participants
Site Management	SM	3
Local Community	LC	4
Media and Public	MP	2
Tourism Agency	TA	3
Academics and Researchers	AR	3
Total		15

4.2. Ethical Considerations

Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the semi-structured interviews. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage, and confidentiality of their responses was assured.

Formal ethical approval from an institutional review board or ethics committee was not sought for this study, as the research was self-funded and did not involve any external or institutional grant funding that would have triggered a mandatory ethics committee review. Nonetheless, due consideration was given throughout the study to research ethics and the wellbeing of participants, as reflected in the informed consent procedures described above.

5. Data Analysis

The interviews were analyzed by a qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. An inductive approach to coding was used to discover patterns of subjects, themes and the relationships in support of the research objectives. Such a solution allowed the knowledge discovery from participants' experiences and views, instead of depending exclusively on predefined categories (Ingram et al., 2022).

The analysis applied explanation-building, involving theoretically grounded analysis of patterns among emergent themes (Grodal et al., 2021). Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English before being imported into NVivo, where relevant responses were coded to match recurring concepts and stakeholder opinions, while irrelevant content was discarded to maintain focus on the research aim.

Key themes, sentiments and stakeholder opinions were drawn out using manual and automatic coding. Memos, coding references and thematic classification were applied to analyse qualitative data from interviews. Identifying patterns of collaboration, innovation, and value co-creation across stakeholder groups was enabled by this coding stage.

In NVivo, a hierarchy chart and codebook were developed to support theme development and verification, keeping the interview data closely tied to the study's goals and theories. The final analysis identified three main theoretical groupings comprising nine key themes, illustrating how stakeholder collaboration drives innovation and value co-creation at Lalbagh Fort, as shown in Figure 3.

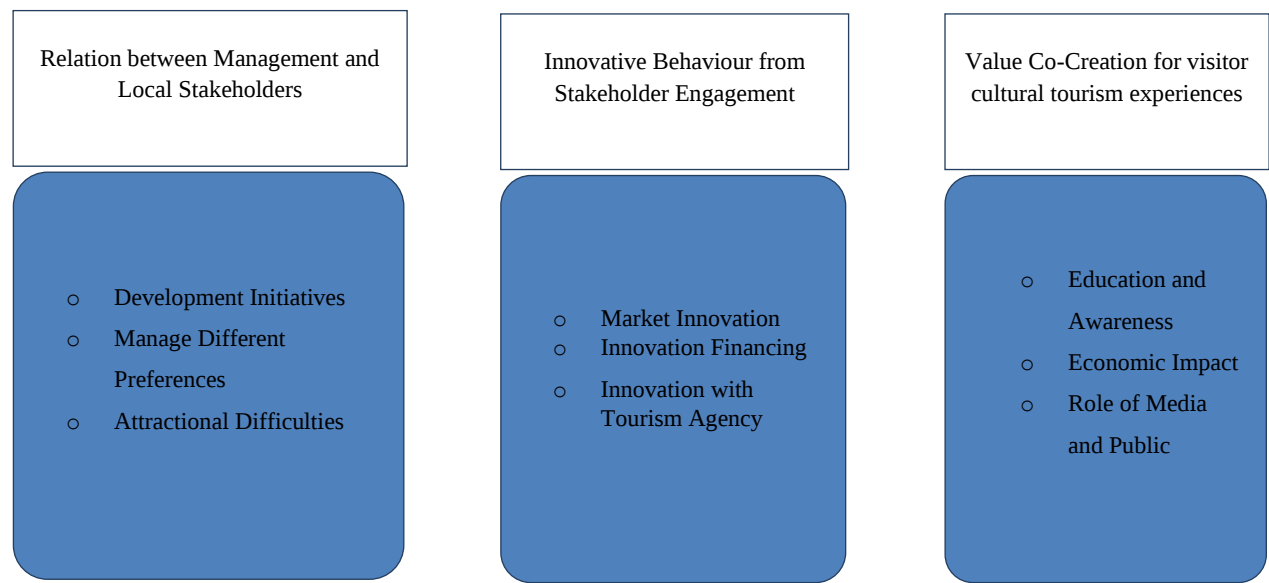


Figure 3. Key themes and groupings from interview data analysis.

6. Results

6.1. Relationship between Management and Local Stakeholders

6.1.1. Development Initiatives

Infrastructure development at Lalbagh Fort requires coordination between site management, the host community, and local government, particularly for housing, roads, drainage, and public utilities. As SM-3 noted, “We can reconstruct and renovate the pond view.” Other buildings within the fort also need repair, with crumbling concrete and exposed rebar in some areas; SM-1 added, “With certain limitations, it is possible to reconstruct the risky part which can pose risk to our visitors.”

Local residents also criticized the heritage site's poor condition, despite viewing Lalbagh Fort as a symbol of local identity and pride. LC-1 explained, “It's a busy place, and the streets are narrow; the drainage system is outdated, which is affecting the area, and it is taking tourists away from Lalbagh Fort.” These findings suggest that poor infrastructure and environmental quality around the site can undermine visitor experience and the destination's overall appeal, underscoring the need for closer coordination between site management, local residents, and government to improve conditions and support long-term sustainable tourism.

6.1.2. Managing Different Preferences

Interviews revealed mixed views on relations between site authorities and the local community: some felt local stakeholders were insufficiently engaged in site activities, while others described site management as cooperative and respectful. SM-1 said, “We have a good working relationship with the community at large, and they are the recipients of our cooperative behaviour,” though SM-2 flagged concerns about environmental degradation and crowding nearby. This suggests existing cooperation could be strengthened through greater stakeholder participation and communication between the parties.

6.1.3. Attractional Difficulties

Despite its historical importance, Lalbagh Fort faces challenges that could reduce its appeal to tourists, including traffic, accessibility issues, and competition from nearby heritage sites. AR-2 noted, “Poor promotional and marketing activities may result in ignorance by the local residents.” This suggests that more active promotion and community-based initiatives are needed to raise visitor awareness and strengthen the site's appeal as a heritage tourism destination.

6.2. Innovative Behaviour from Stakeholder Engagement

6.2.1. Market Innovation

Old Dhaka's food and culture have drawn many prominent food stalls in recent years. LC-3, a local shopkeeper, suggested, “As there have different types of tourists’ presence, the site management can work jointly with the restaurants such as the menu setting which include the entrance ticket of Lalbagh fort or the entrance ticket with some restaurant package discount can be offered.” TA-1 proposed linking with tourism entities through websites and advertisements, while MP-1 observed that food quality positively affects site visits: “If the food quality is good, the visitors not only come to eat good food, but also to visit Lalbagh fort too.”

6.2.2. Innovation Financing

Lalbagh Fort's revenue is deposited into government funds, with an annual budget covering mostly operating expenses, leaving limited room for development. AR-1 warned, “As Lalbagh fort is an ancient architectural structure, it erodes day by day. If it's not preserved by its authority, it might be demolished in near future.” Following recent US funding for renovating the fort's bath area, AR-2 suggested that further national and

international funding could help reduce erosion. MP-1 added that vloggers with national and international reach could highlight the site's weaker aspects, helping attract funding from various entities.

6.2.3. Innovation with Tourism Agency

Tourism agencies can play a vital role in creating value through innovative offerings, such as group picnics that attract tourists to Lalbagh Fort. MP-2 suggested, "Tourism agency can offer picnic package for the tourists that may include transportation, expert tour guide with explanation the history, refreshment, photography and binding memory like souvenir for attracting tourists," adding that such packages could also include nearby historical spots to diversify visits across age groups. AR-3 noted, "The teenage may like the show doesn't like adult people. Tourism agency can segment different styles presentations, shows for different ages' visitors."

6.3. Value Co-Creation for Visitor Cultural Tourism Experiences

6.3.1. Education and Awareness

Management should run educational programs to raise awareness of Lalbagh Fort's historical and cultural significance within the local community, fostering a sense of pride and ownership that supports value co-creation. As MP-2 explained, "The learning and belongingness among local community give cooperative behaviour for the visitor's value adding contributions which can be done by informal learning and campaign."

6.3.2. Economic Impact

Management decisions should aim to generate positive economic impact for the local community, including promoting local businesses, creating employment such as local guide positions, and contributing to the local economy. LC-4 noted that tourist inclusion "generates demand for local businesses, including restaurants, cafes, souvenir shops, and transportation services, growth of small businesses, street hawkers, and cultural merchandises" when visitors have positive, memorable experiences. LC-1 added, "The influx of tourists improves the livelihood the local communities" though Lalbagh Fort's overall economic contribution remains modest rather than dominant.

6.3.3. Role of Media and Public

Media and digital platforms social media, websites, campaigns, reviews, documentaries, and articles play a significant role in promoting cultural tourism experiences, with engaging storytelling deepening visitors' emotional attachment to the destination. TA-3 noted, "When we offer tourists to visit the site, at first, they see the review of the visitors. Their feedback is proportionate to visit the site." Positive reviews can enhance the value of the experience, while criticism can guide improvements; TA-2 added, "When we share the positive event memory in the social media, more customer engagement occurs," with user-generated content further shaping the site's narrative.

7. Discussion

7.1. The Relationship Between Local Stakeholders and Management on Innovation

Stakeholder collaboration is considered essential to heritage tourism development, spanning community engagement, cross-sector cooperation, and partnerships with external organizations (Wondirad et al., 2020; MacDonald et al., 2022). Findings suggest that Lalbagh Fort's management and community maintain a cooperative relationship, with differences in interests and expectations rarely disrupting the tourism experience. As with Watson and Waterton (2022), constructive dialogue and mutual understanding help mitigate such tensions, echoing Mijnheer and Gamble's (2023) call for heritage management practices responsive to, rather than in conflict with, stakeholder expectations. Tourism agencies can further support value co-creation by mediating between site management, local stakeholders, and visitors (Bozzelli et al., 2019).

7.2. The Significance of Identity Representation in Value Co-Creation Among Site Management and Local Community

Tourists increasingly seek authentic experiences (Sheldon, 2020), and local community engagement makes a considerable contribution to tourism by preserving residents' way of life and cultural, environmental, and traditional features that form key attractions. Tourism expansion alongside community participation supports sustainable development and economic, environmental, and cultural benefits, while active community involvement improves the tourism experience and promotes eco-friendly quality. Communities who see themselves as proud partners in the tourism site tend to engage more fully with it (Hughes & Scheyvens, 2021), while strong site-management identity representation strengthens the site's branding and draws local communities into collaborative development (Adom, 2019).

7.3. Enhancing Innovation-Driven Value Co-Creation Between Site Management And Local Community

Co-creation surfaces innovative ideas from voices that might otherwise go unheard, with the business impact of innovation shaped by how site management adapts current market approaches (Vargo et al., 2020). Enhancing innovation-driven value co-creation between site management and the local community requires stronger communication channels and feedback loops, alongside incorporating local perspectives into decision-making to foster a more inclusive, sustainable partnership. Joint initiatives and development programs can strengthen these relationships (De Silva et al., 2020), while building trust through transparency and accountability can further strengthen cooperation, with ongoing assessment helping ensure strategies continue to benefit both parties (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020).

8. Conclusion

8.1. Heritage Management Contribution

The results could serve as a foundation to emphasize the potential of cooperation among site authorities and local communities in upgrading the cultural tourist product at the Lalbagh Fort. Coordination with other agencies and involvement of stakeholders are key to ensuring a quality visitor experience and facilitating sustainable heritage tourism development.

8.2. Managerial Implications

The authors recommend that site management engage a local constituency in planning and decision making. Communication channels can be improved; participation of stakeholders can be encouraged, and awareness programmes can be implemented to foster collaboration and make the Lalbagh Fort more attractive.

8.3. Theoretical Contributions

This research adds to SDL Theory, Consumer Culture Theory, and Value Co-Creation Theory by revealing the mechanisms of cooperation among stakeholders and innovation that allow co-creation of value in the context of heritage tourism. The results highlight that meaningful experiences for visitors are produced through a number of stakeholders' cooperation.

9. Limitations and Future Research

This study is confined to one heritage tourism destination and is based on qualitative data gathered at one time. Future studies may explore multi-heritage sites, culture tourists' perspectives, and/or cultural tourists' voices to understand value co-creation in cultural tourism.

Author Contributions Statement:

All authors (Tasfia Afrin Faria, Md Abdul Bashir, Hishamuddin Bin Ismail, Md Faiz Ahmad, Mahbubur Rahaman, and Md. Adam Shafiullah) contributed to the conception and design of the study and to the analysis and interpretation of the data, participated in drafting and critically revising the manuscript for important intellectual content, and approved the final version to be published. All authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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