



Souvenir purchasing as a dual-logics trade-off: a Q-methodology study of international tourists' valuations in Vietnam

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Abstract

International tourists often seek “authentic” souvenirs but end up buying standardized items or nothing. This study explains that paradox with a dual-logics mechanism combining meaning-authenticity (symbolic value, memory, identity) and transaction-logistics (exchange clarity, risk reduction, mobility constraints). Using Q-methodology plus ethnographic observation, 36 international tourists in Vietnam sorted 46 statements on souvenir valuation. Factor analysis identified two subjective frameworks: Factor 1—meaning-driven culture seekers who prioritize symbolic value, cultural authenticity, and ties to local artisans; Factor 2—experience-first, risk-averse tourists who favor experiential spending, regret impulsive buys, and demand clear pricing and quality signals. Results show tourists shift between these logics depending on situational triggers (time pressure, bargaining friction, signal availability). The paper advances a middle-range theory with four testable propositions explaining when authenticity intentions are realized or suppressed by transactional frictions under mobility constraints, offering directions for future research and practical strategies for destination managers to convert tourist intentions into purchases.

Keywords Souvenir · Authenticity · Dual-logics · Q-methodology · Mobilities · Vietnam

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1 Introduction

Souvenirs are a form of consumer tourism practice through which travellers create post-trip value—anchoring memories and experiences in objects, places and the logistics of transport. Seen as mnemonic artefacts, souvenirs serve to display, preserve or give memory-laden items (Gordon 1986). In the context of tourist consumption, shopping is both a support activity and a constitutive part of the destination experience, where value is negotiated between needs and wants, pleasure and symbol, and utility (Badu-Baiden et al. 2024; Sirakaya-Turk et al. 2015). Describing motives or market segments alone cannot resolve the tension between tourists' stated desires for “authentic” objects and the practical realities of mobility that often prevent those desires being realised (Howard 2016; Novy 2018).

Framed by the new mobilities paradigm, research on souvenirs still contains important theoretical gaps. Modern mobility places human actors, objects, information and infrastructure at the centre of consumption, shaping interactions, regulatory constraints and movement-related risks (Sheller 2017). Souvenirs are therefore both cultural items and logistical problems: they must be movable—fitting luggage limits, offering convenience at the point of purchase, reliable pricing, and feasible transport.

Debates about authenticity in tourism require clarity about whether authenticity is a property of the object, a subjective perception, or a mode of practice and discourse in interactions between visitors and local contexts (Shepherd 2002; Wang 1999). Scholarship on souvenirs needs an explanatory model for how tourists trade off authenticity/meaning against convenience and transactional safety at the point of sale (Su et al. 2024). Traditional survey methods are useful for measuring correlations between variables but struggle to capture the either/or subjective structures and context-dependent priorities that shape tourists' decisions (Brown 1980; Watts and Stenner 2012).

How authenticity becomes, or does not become, a value driving purchasing behavior in souvenir consumption remains incompletely explained (Atasoy and Eren 2023; Lin and Wang 2012). Existing souvenir studies have shown that tourists value authenticity, memory, symbolism, craftsmanship, and local identity in the items they purchase (Guo and Zhu 2023; He and Timothy 2023; Lin and Wang 2012; Sthapit and Björk 2019). However, these studies often consider authenticity as a direct (or indirect through perceived value) motivator for purchase intention or return intention, primarily in linear, mediating, or chain-mediated models (Atasoy and Eren 2023; Chang et al. 2022; Lin and Wang 2012), while paying less attention to the conditions under which authenticity loses its behavioral power in the context of real-world markets, such as shopping channels, the level of “experience,” or functional attributes, price, and usability (He and Timothy 2023; Su et al. 2023; Sthapit and Björk 2019).

This creates a theoretical gap between authenticity as a symbolic value and purchasing as a contextual activity, shaped by risk, uncertainty, mobility, and transaction conditions such as convenience, utility, exchange value, or perceived cost (Atasoy and Eren 2023; Fu et al. 2018; Su et al. 2023). We address this gap by theorizing souvenir purchasing as a trade-off between two logics, in which the logic of meaning (authenticity, memory, and identity—and the logic of transactions—logistics, risk, and exchange value), work together to shape whether tourists translate cultural interest into actual purchasing behavior (Fu et al. 2018; He and Timothy 2024; Shen et al. 2026; Sthapit and Björk 2019).

To address this paradox, the study proposes a dual-logics model governing souvenir purchases. The first logic—*Meaning-Authenticity*—privileges symbolic value (localness, craft distinctiveness) and material tokens that preserve memory or serve as meaningful gifts. The second—*Transaction-Logistics*—emphasises transactional value (market setting, transparent pricing, low bargaining, ease of payment) and mobility-friendly attributes (packability, carryability, safety, low transport risk). The core distinction is not merely preference but how value (worthiness/authenticity) and risk (hassle, financial loss, transport difficulty, effort) are defined. This links souvenir research to mobilities and consumer value theory, where value is judged against costs and constraints (Sheller 2017; Zeithaml 1988).

These two logics interact rather than exclude one another. Crucially, tourists differ in how they construe “value” and “risk” under conditions of movement. The study employs Q methodology combined with ethnographic observation to uncover the structure of subjective viewpoints and the situational conditions that trigger each logic. It asks:

- How do international tourists’ subjective valuations of souvenirs coalesce into distinct interpretive frameworks that reflect competing logics of meaning and transaction under mobility constraints?
- In what ways do the meaning-authenticity and transaction-logistics logics diverge in their construction of “value” and “risk”, and how do these divergent constructions shape tourists’ purchase justifications or avoidance strategies?

The research contributes in three ways: (i) theoretically, by shifting focus from descriptive segmentation to a dual-logics model that explains purchasing as a trade-off between meaning and object mobility; (ii) in mobilities scholarship, by showing that movement is not merely background context but a structuring force in value formation; (iii) methodologically and practically, by offering a framework that links subjective orientations to situational triggers, informing both future research and destination management strategies to better convert authenticity intentions into realised purchases. This study is therefore not designed to segment tourists into fixed consumer types. Instead, it seeks to explain a recurring purchase paradox: why tourists who value cultural authenticity may still avoid buying souvenirs when transactional and mobility-related frictions become too high. The dual-logics framework allows the paper to connect symbolic valuation with practical feasibility, showing how authenticity becomes behaviorally effective only when it is supported by clear signals, manageable risk, and purchase conditions compatible with tourist mobility.

2 Literature reviews

2.1 Souvenirs in tourism

Souvenirs function as physical bridges between travel experiences and tourists’ memories, identities and social ties (Gordon 1986). They are not mere commodities; they carry symbolic value, reflect local culture and materialize the experience of a place (Shen and Lai 2022; Swanson and Timothy 2012). Recent work highlights that souvenirs help retain memories of people and places, foster attachment to destinations, and extend the trip’s emotional effect after return (Liu et al. 2024; Wilkins 2011). Authors also note that utilitarian

souvenirs, everyday items, can strengthen recollection and enrich the lived experience over time (Lupu et al. 2025; Sthapit and Björk 2019).

However, a souvenir's meaning is not fixed. The memory value attached to an object may fade, shift with its display context, or be discarded as living circumstances and social relations change (Collins-Kreiner and Zins 2011; Masset and Decrop 2021). This shows that meaning is a dynamic process rather than an intrinsic property of the product; buying a souvenir is therefore a complex valuation practice influenced by multiple, shifting factors.

2.2 Logic meaning-authenticity: authenticity as symbolic value

The Meaning-Authenticity logic treats souvenirs as tangible proof of travel experiences, things that cue and preserve memories tied to a trip (Lupu et al. 2025; Wilkins 2011). Items bought on site can extend the trip's emotional life after return; utilitarian souvenirs, household goods, decorations, clothing, are particularly effective at anchoring recollection and deepening lived experience over time, suggesting that a souvenir's value may be expressed through its useful life and ongoing use (Liu et al. 2025; Sthapit and Björk 2019).

Meaning attached to an object, however, is not immutable. Several studies show that the memory value of souvenirs can fade, shift with changes in display or domestic context, or even disappear as living circumstances and social relationships evolve, sometimes resulting in disposal (Collins-Kreiner and Zins 2011; Masset and Decrop 2021). Conversely, in certain cases a souvenir can reactivate memory and prompt preservation as a way of maintaining ties to the past (Masset and Decrop 2021). This underlines that meaning is a dynamic process rather than an inherent property of the product.

Souvenirs are tied to personal and community identity: they symbolise identity while preserving temporal and spatial aspects of the experience, functioning as identificatory objects (Morgan and Pritchard 2005). Authenticity therefore becomes a crucial condition for transforming an ordinary commodity into a meaningful object. Tourists commonly assess authenticity through craft production, artisan skill, and the recognisability of the maker (Littrell et al. 1993; Torabian and Arai 2016). Criteria such as uniqueness, workmanship, quality and documented cultural or historical associations underpin perceptions of authenticity (Littrell et al. 1993).

Following Wang (Wang 1999), authenticity here is not merely an objective attribute of the object (objective authenticity) but also a subjective construction produced in experience (constructive authenticity). Visitors seek connections between an item and its story, its maker, and the cultural context of the place.

2.3 Logic transaction-logistics: authenticity as a transactional signal

While the Meaning-Authenticity logic explains why tourists want certain souvenirs, the Transaction-Logistics logic explains whether and how they can buy them in concrete decision settings. This logic centres on transactional and logistical constraints: the buyer's ability to assess a product, the reliability of information, ease of payment, packing and transport, purchase timing, and associated risks (Sheller and Urry 2006). Under conditions of mobility, souvenirs are not only cultural objects but logistical ones—subject to luggage limits, durability concerns, carryability and damage risk (Harris and Magrizos 2023; Swanson and Timothy 2012).

Empirical work shows that labels, maker information, branding and thoughtful display help shoppers link an item to place, stimulate interest, and raise purchase acceptance (He and Timothy 2024). For souvenirs tied to intangible cultural heritage, performance, certification and tradition narratives strengthen perceived authenticity, brand recognisability and identity, thereby encouraging purchases (Guo and Zhu 2023). In practice, authenticity therefore operates also as a transactional signal: readable cues that reduce uncertainty and reassure buyers the object is “the real thing.” (Pandey et al. 2024).

Online environments amplify the Transaction-Logistics logic because tourists cannot touch or closely inspect goods. Research finds that e-commerce conveys authenticity through storytelling, imagery, geographic information and interactive formats; meaning remains important online but must be translated into legible transactional signals or it will not overcome uncertainty (Xu et al. 2023).

This logic also helps explain the common contradiction where tourists desire meaningful, authentic souvenirs yet rely on quick heuristics—labels, brands, displays—to decide. Authenticity functions simultaneously as cultural value (logic 1) and as a tool to lower transaction risk (logic 2). Qualitative and quantitative studies confirm that clear markers of craft versus mass production, traditional techniques, and culturally informed design increase perceived authenticity and aid purchase decisions (Littrell et al. 1993).

2.4 A dual-logics mechanism for souvenir valuation and purchase

The literature reviewed so far shows that souvenir buying cannot be fully accounted for by appeals to meaning, memory and identity alone, nor by treating shopping as routine consumer behaviour. In practice, tourists continually negotiate between two coexisting logics. The first, meaning-authenticity, seeks objects that anchor memory, express identity and sustain attachment to a place—turning an experience into a tangible, symbolic trace (Lupu et al. 2025; Morgan and Pritchard 2005; Shen and Lai 2022; Swanson and Timothy 2012; Wilkins 2011). The second, transaction-logistics, makes purchase contingent on accessible and verifiable signals in the marketplace—product information, display, story, seller interaction, retail setting and social proof that reduce uncertainty (Guo and Zhu 2023; He and Timothy 2024; Xu et al. 2023).

The tension between these logics points to a core question for souvenir studies: what makes an item both meaningful and purchasable across different shopping contexts? Authenticity signals operate as a bridge between symbolic value and transactional feasibility (Shen and Lai 2022; Suttikun and Meeprom 2021). In other words, rather than treating memory/identity and the shopping context as separate sets of variables, we need an integrated framework to explain how tourists translate meaning-seeking into concrete purchase decisions. Here, authenticity is not just an intrinsic property of an object but a conditional signal shaped by sales channel, point-of-sale experience and available information (Fu et al. 2018; Sthapit et al. 2018; Suttikun and Meeprom 2021).

Existing sources clearly outline both dimensions. One strand emphasizes souvenirs as memory anchors that produce emotional and symbolic value (Lupu et al. 2025; Shen and Lai 2022; Swanson and Timothy 2012). The other focuses on how shoppers infer authenticity from cues such as craftsmanship, maker identity, storytelling and the purchase context (Guo and Zhu 2023; Littrell et al. 1993; Xu et al. 2023). However, much prior work lists these factors or treats cultural meaning and buying conditions separately, leaving unex-

plained why people who equally value authenticity nonetheless make different purchasing choices depending on context, channel and the seller's signalling (Kim et al. 2012; Oyedele et al. 2025).

This study proposes the dual-logics mechanism as an integrative explanatory frame: souvenir purchasing is a trade-off between symbolic value and the signals/conditions that make purchase practicable. By foregrounding how authenticity is both an evaluative value and a transactional cue, the mechanism accounts for situational shifts in preference and provides a basis for examining how sellers and destinations can better align meaning-rich offerings with the logistical realities of tourist mobility.

3 Research methods

3.1 Research design

This study adopted an ethnographically informed Q-methodology design to examine how international tourists evaluate souvenirs in Vietnam. The methodological design follows the central logic of the paper: tourists may express interest in authentic souvenirs, yet their actual purchasing decisions are shaped by practical constraints such as price uncertainty, bargaining discomfort, product portability, quality assessment, and time pressure. The study therefore required a method that could capture both subjective valuation and situated purchase conditions.

Q-methodology was selected because it is designed to identify shared configurations of subjectivity rather than measure the statistical prevalence of attitudes across a population (Brown 1980; Stephenson 1953; Watts and Stenner 2012). In this study, each Q-sort was treated as a holistic expression of how a participant prioritized competing meanings, values, and risks when evaluating souvenirs. This makes Q-methodology suitable for examining the trade-off between meaning-authenticity and transaction-logistics, because the method reveals how participants organize preferences in relation to one another rather than rating isolated variables.

Ethnographic observation complemented the Q-design by situating these subjective viewpoints within real-world marketplace interactions. Ethnography enables researchers to examine how meanings are produced through situated practices, spatial arrangements, and everyday interactions rather than through abstract attitudes alone (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Madden 2017). In this study, ethnographic observation helped identify the contextual conditions under which souvenirs valuation occurred, including seller-tourist communication, product display, price negotiation, authenticity cues, packaging, luggage concerns, and time pressure. Thus, Q-methodology identified the structure of tourist subjectivities, while ethnographic observation clarified how these subjectivities were activated, constrained, or displaced in specific purchase settings.

The study was conducted in three stages. First, exploratory ethnographic observations and informal conversations were used to build contextual knowledge and develop the course of possible viewpoints. Second, 36 international tourists completed a Q-sort using 46 statements on souvenir valuation. Third, factor interpretation integrated factor arrays, post-sort explanations, and ethnographic fieldnotes to construct empirically grounded interpretations of the two valuation logics.

3.2 Ethnographic observations

Ethnographic observations were conducted at souvenir shops frequently visited by international tourists in Vietnam, including local markets, handicraft shops, tourist streets, retail spaces at historical sites, and airport souvenir shops (Trinh et al. 2014). These locations were chosen because they represent different levels of cultural signaling and transaction structures: traditional markets often involve bargaining and informal interaction between sellers, handicraft shops tend to emphasize the identity and origins of the craftsman, shops at historical sites connect products to the story of the place, while airport shops offer convenience and standardized retail conditions (He and Timothy 2023; Trinh et al. 2014).

Observations focused on how tourists approached souvenir products, reading labels, inquiring about origin or price, reacting to bargaining, handling fragile or bulky items, evaluating packaging and deciding to buy, delaying, or leaving (Chang et al. 2022). Field notes recorded observable interaction patterns, product signaling activities, seller communication, pricing activities, and travel-related concerns such as baggage limits, travel schedules, and uncertainty about transport or customs restrictions (Chang et al. 2022; Lupu et al. 2025).

The primary observation is non-participatory observation, supplemented by short, informal conversations with tourists where appropriate, consistent with tourism observation practices (Rossetti 2024). The researcher does not interfere with the tourists' purchasing decisions. Informal exchanges typically occur after tourists have completed or abandoned a purchase and focus on the reasons why they bought, hesitated, negotiated, or decided not to buy (Sthapit and Björk 2019). These conversations are not considered a separate interview dataset. Instead, they serve as contextual material for developing the forum, refining the Q-questionnaire, and interpreting the narratives about the factor in accordance with recommended Q-methodology procedures (Seghezze et al. 2023).

3.3 Concourse and Q-set

The concourse, understood as the full range of possible statements and opinions surrounding souvenir purchasing, was developed from three sources: ethnographic observations, informal conversations with tourists and relevant literature on souvenirs, authenticity, tourist shopping, perceived value, and mobilities. This approach ensured that the Q-set reflected both theoretical concerns and field-based expressions of tourist experience.

Initial statements were generated around seven thematic domains: memory and symbolic value, uniqueness and localness, craft and authenticity, provenance and transparency, seller interaction and shopping atmosphere, pricing and quality uncertainty, and logistical or mobility constraints such as luggage, fragility, time pressure, and ease of carrying. The initial pool was then refined to remove duplication, avoid compound wording, and ensure a balance between meaning-oriented and transaction-oriented positions.

From this pool we refined a Q-set of 46 statements covering key areas: memory and symbolic value; uniqueness, craft and localness; provenance and transparency; shopping experience and seller interaction; fear of overpaying; convenience and carryability; and purchase venue (market, supermarket, airport). Statements were numbered S01–S46 and presented in both English and Vietnamese to ensure clear understanding.

Before the main Q-sort process, the Q-set was pretested with five international tourists who met the same inclusion criteria as the main participants. The pilot assessed statement

clarity, linguistic accessibility, sorting difficulty, and completion time. Feedback from the the pilot led to minor wording revisions, removal of overlapping items, and clearer sorting instructions. The average completion time was approximately 25 min.

3.4 P-set and Q-sort data collection

The P-set consisted of 36 international tourists who had spent at least three days in Vietnam and had engaged with souvenir-shopping spaces during their trip. Participants were selected through purposive sampling because Q-methodology requires theoretically relevant participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation rather than statistically representative respondents (Watts and Stenner 2012).

In Q-methodology, sample adequacy is not assessed through statistical representativeness but through the capacity to reveal distinct and interpretable configurations of subjectivity (Brown 1980; Watts and Stenner 2012). Unlike survey research, where large samples are required to estimate population distributions, Q-methodology prioritizes the diversity and richness of viewpoints. The purpose is therefore not population-level generalization but the identification of recurring subjective structures (Stephenson 1953). Previous Q-studies commonly employ relatively small purposive samples because factors are extracted from correlations among persons rather than variables (Watts and Stenner 2012; Zabala 2014).

The final P-set included 19 men and 17 women, with a mean age of 29.11 years ($SD=6.19$, range 21–43), representing 18 nationalities. The diversity of national backgrounds, travel styles, and souvenir-shopping experiences helped ensure the inclusion of varied perspectives on authenticity, risk, mobility, and value.

For the Q-sort procedure, each participant sorted the 46 statements into a forced, quasi-normal distribution grid using an 11-point scale from -5 (“strongly disagree”) to $+5$ (“strongly agree”) (see Fig. 1). The forced distribution encouraged participants to make comparative judgments among statements rather than evaluate each item independently. This procedure is central to Q-methodology because it reveals the relative structure of meaning within each participant’s viewpoint (Brown 1980; Watts and Stenner 2012).

The Q-sort process followed three steps. First, participants read all 46 statements and sorted them into three preliminary piles: agree, neutral or unsure, and disagree. Second, they placed the statements onto the forced distribution grid, beginning with the extreme

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
2	3	4	5	6	6	6	5	4	3	2

Fig. 1 Participants sorted 46 statements into a forced, quasi-normal distribution

positions at +5 and −5 before filling the middle columns. Third, after completing the sort, participants were invited to explain why they placed particular statements at the extreme ends of the grid. In practice, the depth of post-Q-sort explanation varied across participants because many international tourists were traveling on scheduled tours and had limited time available for extended follow-up discussion. While participants generally completed the Q-sort carefully and thoroughly, only a smaller number were able to provide detailed verbal explanations after the sorting exercise. These post-sort explanations were used to support factor interpretation and to clarify the meanings behind the numerical arrays.

3.5 Data analysis

Q-analysis was carried out in Python following standard Q-procedures: we built a person-by-person correlation matrix, extracted factors, applied Varimax rotation, and calculated factor arrays. Using Python scripts ensured transparency and reproducibility: scripts checked Q-sort integrity, estimated factor loadings, assigned participants to factors, computed factor z-scores, and identified distinguishing and consensus statements.

To integrate quantitative and qualitative evidence, we used a joint display approach based on Creswell and Creswell (2018). Specifically, we produced a table (Table 1) that pairs the top distinguishing z-scores for each statement with illustrative interview excerpts from participants representing each factor. This combined presentation makes it easy to see how numerical patterns align with lived meanings and highlights the contrasts between the two valuation logics.

We factor interpretation on four sources of evidence: the factor arrays, the highest and lowest ranking statements for each factor, distinguishing statements between factors, and post-sort explanations from participants with strong factor loadings. We then use ethnographic fieldnotes to contextualise these interpretations, particularly in relation to bargaining, authenticity signaling, product portability, pricing ambiguity, and uncertainty in purchase settings.

To strengthen analytical transparency, we thematically coded observational fieldnotes to identify recurring marketplace situations and behavioral triggers relevant to souvenir valuation. We focused the coding on six observational themes: authenticity purchase cue seeking, bargaining discomfort, pricing uncertainty, artisan or maker interaction, portability and luggage concerns, and hesitation or avoidance. We then compared these themes with Q-statements, distinguishing z-scores, and post-sort explanations to examine how observed marketplace situations corresponded with the two extracted viewpoints.

We developed a fieldnote-to-Q integration matrix to document the analytical link between observational evidence, Q-statements, and factor interpretation. This matrix did not treat ethnographic observation as a separate standalone dataset. Instead, it functioned as a traceability device, showing how field-based observations informed concourse development, Q-set refinement, and the interpretation of situational triggers within the dual-logics mechanism.

Table 2 presents the fieldnote-to-Q integration matrix. It illustrates how recurring observational patterns linked to specific Q-statements and factor interpretations. For example, observations of tourists asking about handmade production and product origin linked to S19, S20, S29, and S36, supporting the interpretation of Factor 1 as meaning-authenticity oriented. By contrast, observations of tourists avoiding bargaining, expressing concern over

Table 1 Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence for Distinguishing Statements

Logic	Code	Statement	Z_F1	Z_F2	Illustrative quote
Meaning-Authenticity (Factor 1)	S20	I prefer handmade items to mass-produced goods	2.08	-0.91	"I want to know who made it and what its story is. Without a story, it's just a product." (P3-F1, New Zealand)
	S36	Seeing the artisans making the products made me want to buy them even more	1.98	-0.31	"When I see them working, I can feel the heart and soul in each product. It's no longer just something inanimate." (P12-F1, Germany)
	S08	I bought gifts to directly support local artisans	1.88	-0.15	"I want my money to go directly to the people doing the work, not through intermediaries. That's the most sustainable way to support the culture." (P11-F1, Australia)
	S19	Cultural authenticity is a top priority	1.61	-0.81	"If it's not authentic, I can buy it anywhere; I don't need to travel all the way to Vietnam." (P15-F1, France)
	S07	I like to own a genuine piece of local culture	1.12	-1.79	"I'll bring back something small, but it has to be authentic to the place I visited." (P7-F1, Netherlands)
	S29	Clear labeling of origin increases trust	1.52	0.42	"If there were labels clearly indicating the craft village and the people involved, I would feel much more at ease." (P18-F1, Japan)
Transaction-logistics (Factor 2)	S11	I prefer spending on experiences (food, tours) rather than material things	-0.96	2.17	"I'd rather eat a nice meal or take a tour to get more local experiences, and often just leave the things I buy as souvenirs." (P5-F2, English)
	S16	I often regret buying souvenirs impulsively	-0.83	2.17	"I often bought things impulsively, brought them home only to regret it later. Now I always think carefully before buying." (P9-F2, USA)
	S26	I'm worried about unclear pricing and being overcharged	-0.33	1.93	"I'm not knowledgeable enough to know if this is worth the money. If the price is ambiguous or the origin is unclear, then I'll pass." (P14-F2, Canada)
	S28	It's difficult to assess the quality when I'm not an expert	-0.94	1.63	"I'm not an expert in ceramics or silk, so if there aren't clear labels, I wouldn't dare buy it." (P22-F2, France)
	S14	Photos and memories are enough; I don't need souvenirs	-0.58	1.72	"For me, the meaning of a trip is the memories and the feeling of the experience, not the possessions. I travel every year, and having a house full of souvenirs is pointless." (P2-F2, Sweden)
	S31	Bargaining annoys me, so avoid buying from them	-1.31	1.29	"I hate bargaining. At the market, the seller quotes a high price, and when you try to negotiate a lower price, it's stressful. I prefer buying from places where prices are clearly displayed." (P29-F2, Singapore)

Z-scores are in bold for factors with higher values. Quotes are selected from post-Q-sort interviews of participants with the highest factor load in each group

unclear prices, or abandoning fragile items linked to S26, S28, S31, S09, and S38, supporting the interpretation of Factor 2 as transaction-logistics oriented.

We found that this integration procedure helped avoid treating analytical evidence as anecdotal (Table 3). Instead, the fieldnotes served scientifically to interpret the situational conditions under which meaning-authenticity was activated into purchase, or displaced by transaction-logistics concerns.

Table 2 Fieldnote-to-Q intergration matrix

Observational theme	Example from fieldnotes	Related Q statements	Interpretive link
Authenticity cue seeking	Tourists asked whether items were handmade, locally produced, or linked to a specific craft village	S19, S20, S29, S46	Supports Factor 1 by showing how cultural authenticity and provenance operate as symbolic value and trust signals
Artisan or maker interaction	Tourists spent more time at stalls or shops where they could observe craft-making or hear stories about the maker	S08, S20, S36	Supports Factor 1 by showing how direct contact with makers activates meaning-oriented purchasing
Bargaining discomfort	Some tourists left markets after prolonged price negotiation or after sensing pressure from sellers	S15, S26, S31	Supports Factor 2 by showing how transactional friction suppresses purchase intention
Pricing uncertainty	Tourists compared prices across stalls, asked for clarification, or delayed purchase when prices were not clearly displayed	S25, S26, S28, S29	Supports Factor 2 by showing how uncertainty about value and quality increases perceived risk
Portability and luggage concerns	Tourists avoided ceramics, large textiles, or fragile items because of luggage weight, breakage risk, or flight constraints	S09, S10, S17, S38, S41	Supports the transaction-logistics logic by showing how mobility constraints shape purchase avoidance
Purchase hesitation or avoidance	Tourists photographed products, expressed interest, but left without buying because of uncertainty, clutter concerns, or preference for experiences	S11, S14, S16, S28	Supports Factor 2 by showing how experience-first and risk-averse orientations override symbolic interest

Table 3 Sample Observational fieldnote excerpts

Setting	Observation excerpt	Analytical memo
Craft-oriented shop	A tourist asked whether the item was handmade and who produced it. After hearing the maker's story, the tourist purchased the item despite its higher price	Artisan visibility and provenance reduced uncertainty and activated symbolic valuation
Local market	A tourist compared prices across several stalls, appeared uncomfortable during bargaining, and left without purchasing	Bargaining friction and unclear pricing weakened purchase intention
Heritage-site retail space	A tourist examined labels and asked whether the product was linked to the local destination. The tourist showed more interest after reading origin information	Clear origin information functioned as both authenticity cue and trust signal
Airport souvenir store	A tourist selected a small packaged item, noting that it was easier to carry and safer for the flight	Mobility convenience shaped purchase feasibility

4 Research results

4.1 Overview of factor analysis

The results are presented as interpretive logics rather than statistically representative tourist segments. Each factor represents a shared way of organizing authenticity, symbolic value, transaction risk, and mobility constraints in souvenir purchasing. This interpretation is consistent with the purpose of Q-methodology, which is to identify structured viewpoints rather than estimate the prevalence of attitudes in a wider population.

We conducted the Q-method analysis on 36 completed Q-sorts. A two-factor solution provides the clearest and most theorized interpretable structure of tourists' subjective valuations of souvenirs. Together, the two factors explained 54% of the total variance, indicating that the solution captured a substantial proportion of shared viewpoint structure within the P-set. The scree plot also supports the retained two-factor solution (Fig. 2).

To ensure consistency in reporting, this study distinguishes between significantly significant factor loadings and primary flagged Q-sorts. The significance threshold for factor loadings was calculated using the standard Q-methodological formula: $2.58 \times 1/\sqrt{46} = 0.380$ at $p < 0.01$, where 46 refers to the number of Q statements. Based on this threshold, 19 Q-sorts showed significant loadings on Factor 1, while 22 Q-sorts showed significant loadings on Factor 2. These figures should be interpreted as significant loading counts, not as mutually exclusive participating groups. They therefore should not be added together to represent the total P-set. In Q methodology, a Q-sort may show a significantly significant loading on more than one factor, may load significantly on the opposite pole of a factor, or may remain unassigned before final interpretive use. For this reason, significant loading counts provide evidence of the statistical strength of each factor but do not by themselves determine final participant assignment.

To support transparent factor interpretation, the study then applied a primary flagging procedure. We assigned each Q-sort to the factor on which it had the strongest absolute sig-

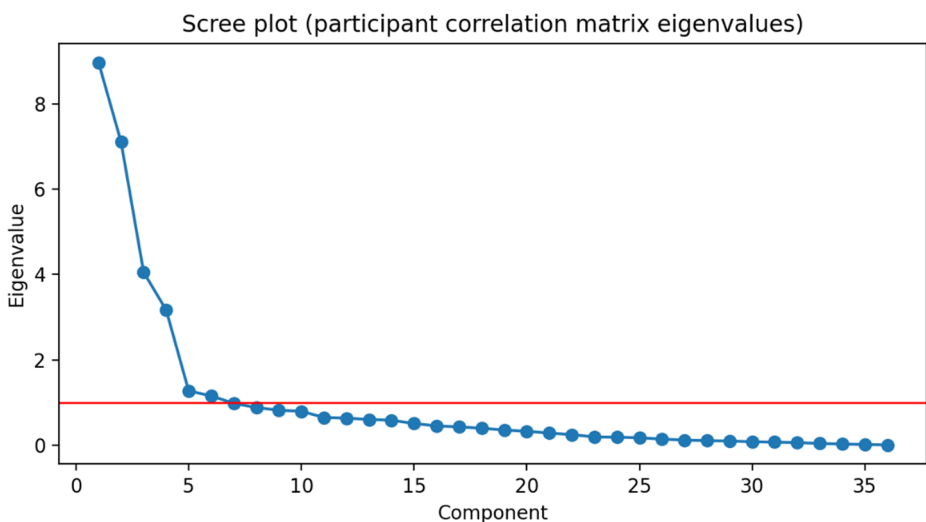


Fig. 2 Scree plot of eigenvalues from the participant correlation matrix

nificant loading, provided that the loading met the $p < 0.01$ threshold. Using this operational procedure, 15 Q-sorts were mainly flagged on Factor 1 and 20 Q-sorts on Factor 2, while one Q-sort remained unflagged. This reporting is therefore fully consistent with the total P-set of 36 participants.

Table 4 presents the individual loading structure used to determine primary flagging. We include this table to make the assignment procedure transparent and to avoid confusion between significant loadings and final factor association. The table confirms that the final flagging procedure is consistent with the total P-set: the procedure mainly flagged 15 Q-sorts on Factor 1, 20 Q-sorts on Factor 2, and leaves one Q-sort unflagged.

Both factors demonstrate strong composite reliability, with Factor 1 = 0.931 and Factor 2 = 0.906. The standard errors of z-scores were also small, with Factor 1 = 0.060 and Factor 2 = 0.065. These indicators suggest stable and interpretable viewpoint structures. We rely on factor interpretation not only on the primary flagged Q-sorts but also on factor arrays, distinguishing statements, consensus statements, post-sort comments, and ethnographic fieldnotes. This clarification is important because the study does not treat the two factors as conventional sample subgroups. Rather, the factors represent two structured ways of organizing value, authenticity, risk, and mobility constraints in souvenir purchasing. Factor 1 captures a meaning-authenticity logic, while Factor 2 captures a transaction-logistics logic. The following sections interpret these factors through their idealized Q-sort arrays, distinguishing statements, and supporting qualitative evidence.

4.1.1 Distribution of loadings and defining Q-sorts for factors

According to the flagging rule at a significance level of $p < 0.01$, the number of flagged Q-sorts for the main factors is 15 (Factor 1) and 20 (Factor 2), respectively. Overall, both factors have a sufficient number of defining Q-sorts to construct the factor array (idealized Q-sort) and for interpretation (Table 5).

4.1.2 Factor arrays

Table 6 presents the factor array (ideal Q-sort scores) and z-scores of 46 statements for each factor. Figure 1 displays a heatmap showing the z-scores of all statements, arranged according to the absolute contrast [F1-F2].

Table 4 Factor characteristics and flagging summary

Factor	Significant loading threshold	Significant loading count	Primary flagged Q-sorts	Composite reliability	SE of z-scores
Factor 1	loading $\geq$ 0.380	19	15	0.931	0.060
Factor 2	loading $\geq$ 0.380	22	20	0.906	0.065

The total P-set included 36 completed Q-sorts. Significant loading counts indicate the number of Q-sorts reaching the statistical loading threshold on each factor. These counts are not mutually exclusive and should not be added together. Primary flagged Q-sorts were assigned to the factor on which each Q-sort had the strongest significant absolute loading. One Q-sort remains unflagged. We factor based interpretation on factor arrays, distinguishing statements, consensus statements, primary flagged Q-sorts, post-sort comments, and ethnographic fieldnotes

Table 5 Factor loadings, communality, and primary flagging

Participant	F1	F2	Communality_h2
1	-0.255	-0.585	0.407
2	-0.278	-0.557	0.388
3	-0.222	-0.498	0.297
4	-0.264	-0.501	0.321
5	-0.302	-0.548	0.392
6	-0.317	-0.631	0.499
7	-0.289	-0.616	0.463
8	-0.291	-0.603	0.448
9	-0.161	-0.655	0.455
10	0.743	0.030	0.553
11	0.655	0.175	0.460
12	0.746	0.122	0.571
13	0.753	0.198	0.606
14	0.723	0.166	0.550
15	0.763	-0.084	0.589
16	0.784	0.027	0.615
17	0.755	0.186	0.605
18	0.806	-0.069	0.654
19	0.735	0.279	0.618
20	0.734	0.166	0.566
21	-0.565	0.359	0.448
22	-0.388	0.519	0.420
23	-0.495	0.492	0.487
24	-0.415	0.556	0.481
25	-0.468	0.442	0.414
26	-0.490	0.500	0.490
27	-0.400	0.414	0.331
28	-0.512	0.368	0.398
29	-0.331	0.569	0.433
30	-0.079	-0.580	0.343
31	0.006	-0.459	0.211
32	-0.023	-0.725	0.526
33	-0.261	-0.468	0.287
34	-0.037	-0.364	0.134
35	-0.101	-0.593	0.362
36	-0.004	-0.505	0.255

Among the 46 statements, z-scores range from -1.79 to 2.17, with an average $|F1-F2|$ of approximately 1.22 (median 1.10). Most differences are moderate, while a small number are strongly polarized. The top 10 statements according to $|F1-F2|$ clearly show two opposing directions: one half $F1-/F2+$, and the other half $F1+/F2-$, reinforcing that the two factors represent two clusters of opposing viewpoints (Fig. 3).

Table 6 Factor arrays (ideal Q-sort)–Score và z-score by factor

Statement	Statement	Score_F1	Z_F1	Score_F2	Z_F2
S01	Souvenirs are a way to show I have been to a place.	–2	–0.59	–4	–1.69
S02	I look for unique items to tell a personal travel story.	3	1.17	–1	–0.42
S03	A souvenir helps me relive my trip after I return home.	2	0.80	–4	–1.67
S04	I buy souvenirs as gifts for family or friends.	–1	–0.52	–2	–1.07
S05	Collecting souvenirs from different trips is a personal hobby.	–1	–0.28	–3	–1.38
S06	Buying souvenirs feels like a personal reward for the trip.	–2	–0.65	–3	–1.12
S07	I like owning a real “piece” of local culture.	3	1.12	–4	–1.79
S08	I buy souvenirs to support local artisans directly.	5	1.88	0	–0.15
S09	My luggage is already too heavy; buying souvenirs becomes a burden.	–2	–0.75	2	0.73
S10	I avoid fragile items because they might break during the trip home.	–1	–0.57	1	0.54
S11	I prefer spending on experiences (food, tours) rather than objects.	–2	–0.96	5	2.17
S12	Many souvenirs look low quality, so I skip buying them.	2	0.68	0	–0.10
S13	I do not buy if I cannot imagine using the item at home.	–2	–0.71	1	0.49
S14	Photos and memories are enough for me; I do not need souvenirs.	–2	–0.58	4	1.72
S15	Pushy selling or strong pressure to buy makes me leave.	1	0.55	1	0.60
S16	I often regret souvenir purchases made on impulse.	–2	–0.83	5	2.17
S17	Convenience matters most to me (small, light. easy to pack).	–2	–0.68	–1	–0.38
S18	I prefer souvenirs that are practical and usable in daily life.	–1	–0.45	2	0.75
S19	Cultural authenticity is my top priority when choosing souvenirs.	4	1.61	–2	–0.81
S20	I prefer handmade items over mass-produced products.	5	2.08	–2	–0.91
S21	Natural materials (wood, fabric, ceramic) appeal to me more than plastic.	2	0.94	0	–0.01
S22	Good design matters more than large size.	2	0.90	1	0.24
S23	I value products that blend tradition with a modern style.	3	1.08	–1	–0.27

Table 6 (continued)

S24	I care about sustainability in how souvenirs are made.	3	1.17	0	-0.12
S25	The price must match the quality and perceived value.	-1	-0.22	2	0.94
S26	I worry about unclear pricing and being overcharged.	-1	-0.33	4	1.93
S27	I doubt whether many “local” souvenirs are truly locally made.	2	0.77	3	1.49
S28	It is hard to judge quality when I am not an expert.	-2	-0.94	4	1.63
S29	Clear labels about origin or the maker increase my trust.	4	1.52	1	0.42
S30	A simple return or warranty policy makes me more willing to buy.	-2	-0.59	1	0.28
S31	Bargaining makes me uncomfortable, so I avoid buying.	-3	-1.31	3	1.29
S32	I prefer buying at local markets rather than hotels or airports.	0	0.18	0	0.21
S33	Buying at the airport at the last minute feels convenient and safe.	-4	-1.49	-2	-0.89
S34	A clean, well-designed shop makes me stay longer and consider buying.	-2	-0.79	0	-0.14
S35	Staff who speak good English make the shopping experience easier.	-2	-0.63	-1	-0.29
S36	Seeing artisans making the product makes me more likely to buy.	5	1.98	-1	-0.31
S37	Time pressure makes me buy quickly and sometimes feel dissatisfied.	-1	-0.30	-1	-0.61
S38	Good protective packaging makes me more willing to buy.	-2	-0.75	-2	-0.73
S39	Reliable international shipping would encourage me to buy more.	-3	-1.02	-1	-0.57
S40	Being able to pay by card or mobile payment would encourage me to buy.	-2	-0.69	-2	-0.83
S41	Clear information on carry-on size and weight limits matters for my decision.	-2	-0.87	0	0.00
S42	I avoid buying if I am unsure about customs rules in my country.	-1	-0.41	-1	-0.56
S43	Care instructions in English are important for me.	-2	-0.91	0	-0.03
S44	Having different size options (small, medium, large) helps me decide.	-2	-0.93	-2	-0.69
S45	Buying online at the destination and shipping home is attractive to me.	-2	-0.62	-2	-0.83
S46	For expensive item, proof of authenticity (make, certificate) matters to me.	5	1.95	2	0.76

4.2 Factor interpretation

4.2.1 Factor 1: meaning-driven culture seekers

Factor 1 represents individuals who view souvenirs as extensions of their journeys, valuing items that tell stories and affirm personal identity. This group emphasizes the origin, maker, and narrative of a product, as shown in S20 (valuing items with a story), where F1 scores strongly (Score=5; $Z=2.08$), while F2 disagrees (Score=-2; $Z=-0.91$). A New Zealand

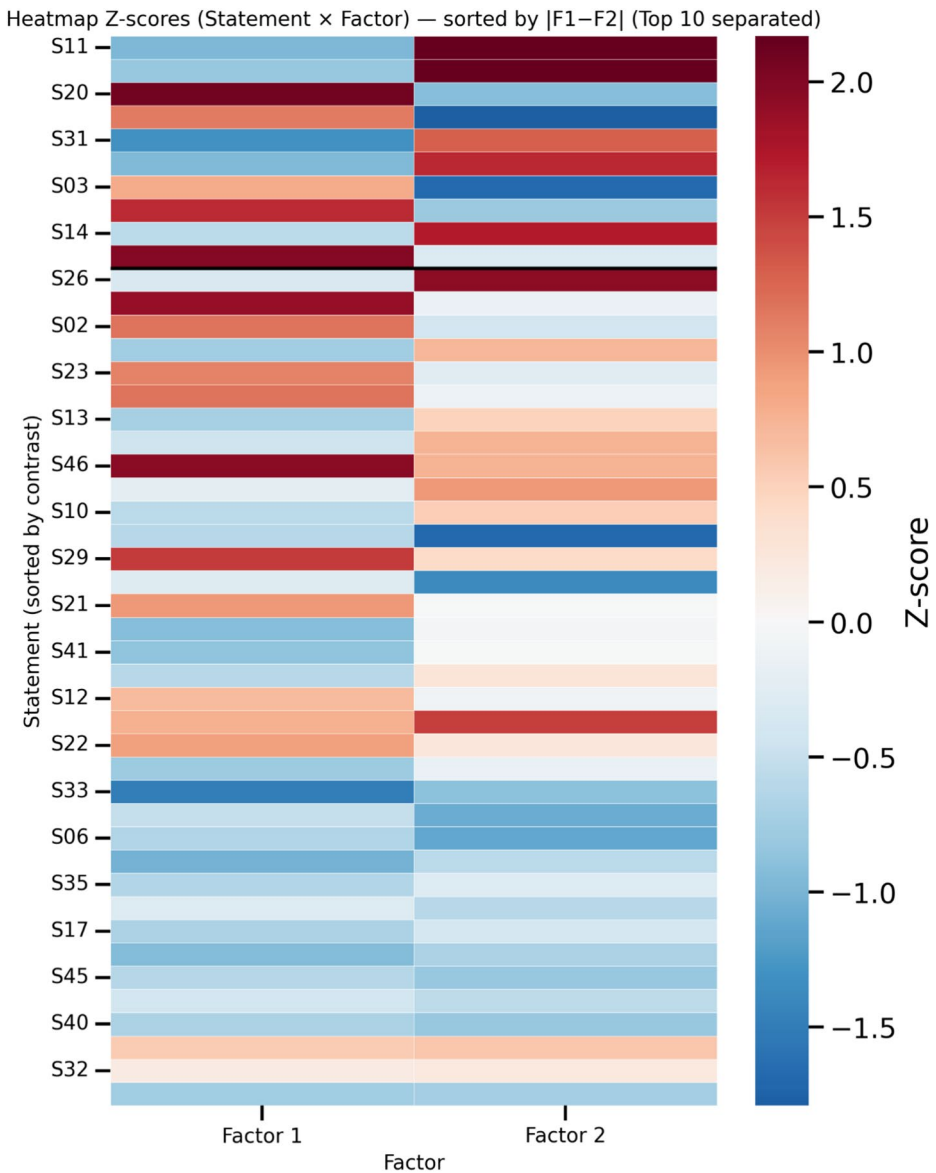


Fig. 3 Heatmap of z-scores sorted by $|F1-F2|$; the dividing line separates the top 10 statements that most strongly differentiate F1 and F2

traveler expresses, “*I want to know who made it and the story behind it. Without a story, it's just an item.*” (P3-F1).

F1 does not prioritize experience over purchasing; they are selective, buying only when the item fits the journey's spirit. Souvenirs are seen as symbolic artifacts anchoring memories. Agreement with S07 (F1 = 3; Z = 1.12) supports this, as travelers desire pieces of local

culture, illustrated by a Dutch traveler: “*I just want something that reflects where I've been.*” (P7-F1).

F1 opposes behaviors that diminish the meaning of purchases, strongly rejecting last-minute airport buys (S33) and haggling interactions (S31). They believe that tension in transactions can disrupt the emotional context necessary for meaningful purchases. As one traveler notes, “*If I have to haggle, I lose interest; I want to buy in a pleasant mood.*” (P12-F1).

Overall, F1 is characterized as a selective group that is willing to invest time to understand the stories behind items. Ideal souvenirs involve traces of craftsmanship and cultural context, serving as meaningful artifacts for memories (Fig. 4).

4.2.2 Factor 2: Pragmatic experience-first, risk-averse

Factor 2 reflects a pragmatic and risk-averse mindset, prioritizing budget and energy for travel experiences (food, tours) and only purchasing souvenirs when conditions feel secure. For example, S11 (prioritizing experiences over souvenirs) receives strong agreement (F2=5; Z=2.17): “*I'd rather have a great meal or join a tour for local experiences. Souvenirs often sit unused, so I don't find them necessary*” (P5-F2).

This group aims to minimize regret and control impulsivity, as shown by S16 (F2=5; Z=2.17). Unlike F1, F2 is sensitive to buyer's remorse, illustrated by a traveler: “*When I see interesting and cheap souvenirs, I often buy on impulse, but regret the clutter when I get home. Now, I carefully consider whether to buy*” (P9-F2).

F2 manages purchase risks by valuing price transparency and quality certainty, seen in S26 (concerns about unclear pricing: F2=4; Z=1.93) and S28 (difficulty assessing quality: F2=4; Z=1.63). Travelers are deterred by unclear pricing, as one shared: “*I'm not expert*

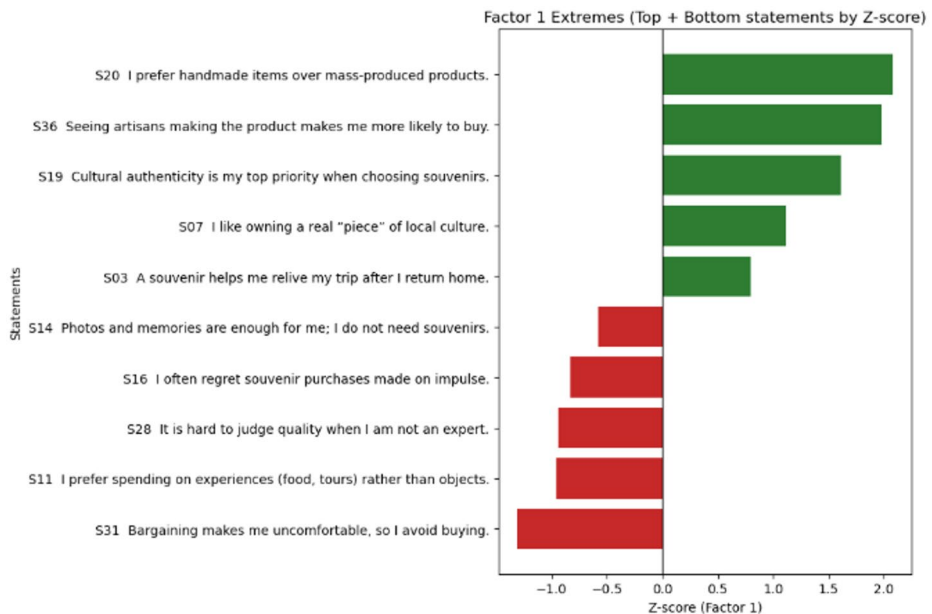


Fig. 4 Factor 1 extremes (Top & Bottom statements by Z-score)

enough to judge if this is worth the money. If the price is unclear or the origin is questionable, I won't buy" (P14-F2). S14 (photos and memories are sufficient: $F2=4$; $Z=1.72$) indicates they prefer memories/photos over risky purchases.

In the negative extremes, F2 strongly rejects the symbolic role of souvenirs, with S07 ($F2=-4$; $Z=-1.79$), S03 ($F2=-4$; $Z=-1.67$), and S01 ($F2=-4$; $Z=-1.69$). They are not convinced that souvenirs enhance the trip's value, as one traveler stated: "I don't need items to remind me of where I've been. The meaning of the trip is having photos of local culture and the experience itself" (P2-F2).

Overall, F2 emphasizes experience while avoiding impulsive purchases, valuing memories over souvenirs, and showing less interest in authenticity/local craftsmanship (Fig. 5).

4.3 Core opposite axis and descriptive meaning

When juxtaposing the two factors, the core opposing axis is clearly revealed: F1 views souvenirs as symbols/stories/identity, while F2 sees them as risky expenditures that are less prioritized than experiences. Table 5 presents the 10 statements with the greatest differences between the two factors (distinguishing statements, $p<0.01$).

The distinguishing statements at $p<0.01$ indicate systematic and significant differences that structure the interpretive axis. When z-scores are aligned (see Table 7 and Fig. 5—error bars chart), a prominent opposing axis emerges between two decision-making strategies for souvenir purchases: one leans towards symbolic meaning and cultural authenticity, while the other prioritizes experience, risk reduction, and optimizing transaction interactions (Fig. 6).

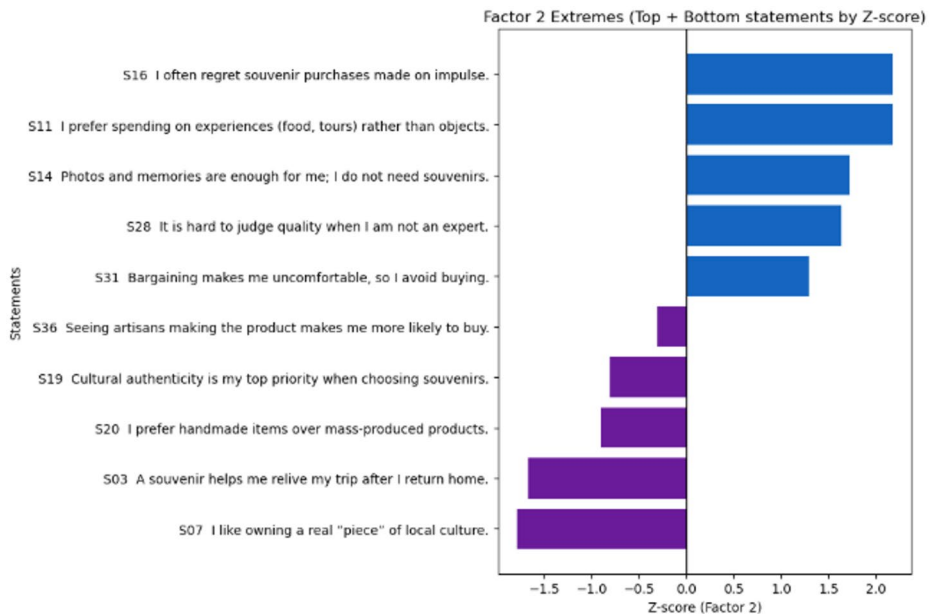


Fig. 5 Factor 2 extremes (Top & Bottom Statements by Z-score)

The study shows a clear division between the two groups regarding their attitudes towards souvenir shopping. Factor 2 prioritizes experiences and avoids risks, while Factor 1 emphasizes spiritual and cultural value (Fig. 7).

4.4 Consensus statements

Table 8 presents the consensus statements at $p < 0.01$, showing that despite differences in motivations and priorities, both groups dislike being pressured to buy (S15), tend to favor local markets (S32), and show moderate concern for transaction conveniences.

5 Discussion

The findings refine the initial paradox by showing that authenticity does not automatically lead to purchase. Tourists may value handmade, local, or culturally meaningful objects, yet still avoid purchase when pricing, quality assessment, bargaining, portability, or time pressure generates uncertainty. The contribution of the study therefore lies not in classifying tourist into fixed consumer types, but in explaining the mechanism through which authenticity-oriented intentions are either activated or suppressed under conditions of transactional friction and mobility constraint.

Table 7 Distinguishing Statements ($p < 0.01$) by Factor

Statement	Statement_EN	Z_F1	Z_F2	DeltaZ	AbsDeltaZ	SE_z_approx
S11	I prefer spending on experiences (food, tours) rather than objects.	-0.96	2.17	-3.13	3.13	0.86
S16	I often regret souvenir purchases made on impulse.	-0.83	2.17	-3	3	0.82
S20	I prefer handmade items over mass-produced products.	2.08	-0.91	2.99	2.99	0.82
S07	I like owning a real “piece” of local culture.	1.12	-1.79	2.91	2.91	0.8
S31	Bargaining makes me uncomfortable, so I avoid buying.	-1.31	1.29	-2.6	2.6	0.71
S28	It is hard to judge quality when I am not an expert.	-0.94	1.63	-2.57	2.57	0.71
S03	A souvenir helps me relive my trip after I return home.	0.8	-1.67	2.47	2.47	0.68
S19	Cultural authenticity is my top priority when choosing souvenirs.	1.61	-0.81	2.42	2.42	0.66
S14	Photos and memories are enough for me; I do not need souvenirs.	-0.58	1.72	-2.3	2.3	0.63
S36	Seeing artisans making the product makes me more likely to buy.	1.98	-0.31	2.29	2.29	0.63

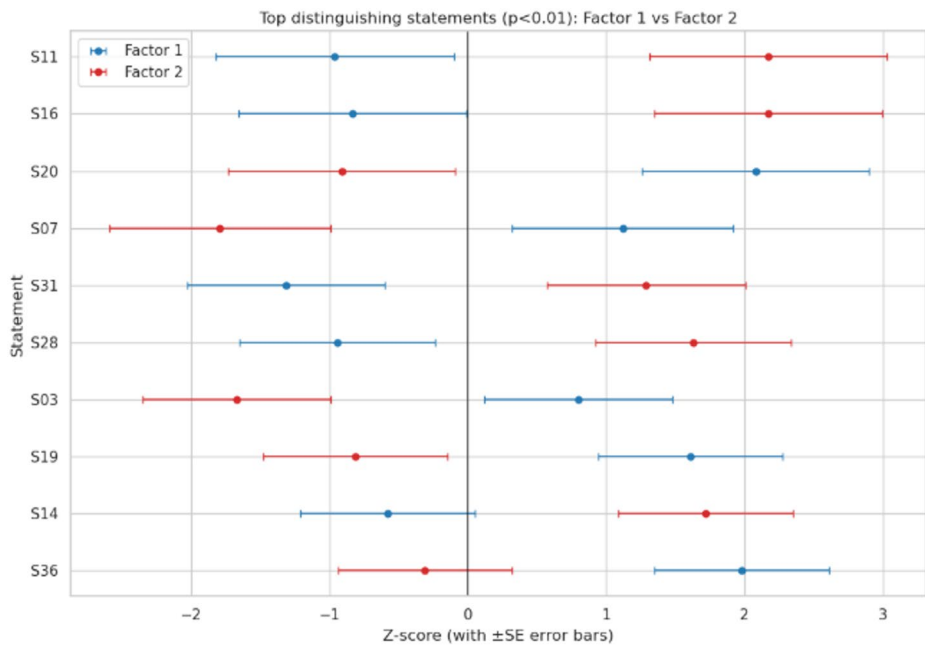


Fig. 6 Error bars chart illustrating the top distinguishing statements

5.1 Dual-logics mechanism: justifications for purchasing or not purchasing

The results from Q-methodology reveal that souvenir purchasing behavior cannot be fully explained by a simple list of influencing factors or the assumption that authenticity automatically leads to purchases. Instead, the extracted factors illustrate competing valuation modes or justifications for buying or not buying, termed the dual-logics mechanism.

Factor 1 emphasizes symbolic meaning and authenticity. Souvenirs are viewed as objects that encapsulate experiences and extend connections to places after travel. This aligns with the idea of souvenirs as “evidence of travel” and symbols of memory (Gordon 1986; Swanson and Timothy 2012). Authenticity here involves not only correct materials but also meaningful cultural ties, addressing travelers’ needs for uniqueness and storytelling (Littrell et al. 1993; Wilkins 2011).

Factor 1 also illustrates that purchasing motivations extend beyond aesthetics, forming part of identity practices in tourism. Travelers choose items that signify their engagement with local culture, aligning with research characterizing souvenirs as cultural practices (Morgan and Pritchard 2005; Swanson and Timothy 2012). This explains the preference for handcrafted items and origin stories over mass-produced goods (Littrell et al. 1993; Torabian and Arai 2016).

In contrast, Factor 2 concentrates on transactional constraints and logistics influencing purchasing behavior. Travelers evaluate souvenirs through risk (quality, price transparency), costs (time, bargaining), and portability. This emphasizes a recent argument in tourism literature: authenticity functions as a signal requiring confirmation within transactional contexts. When signals are weak or uncertain, travelers adopt risk-minimizing strategies (Guo

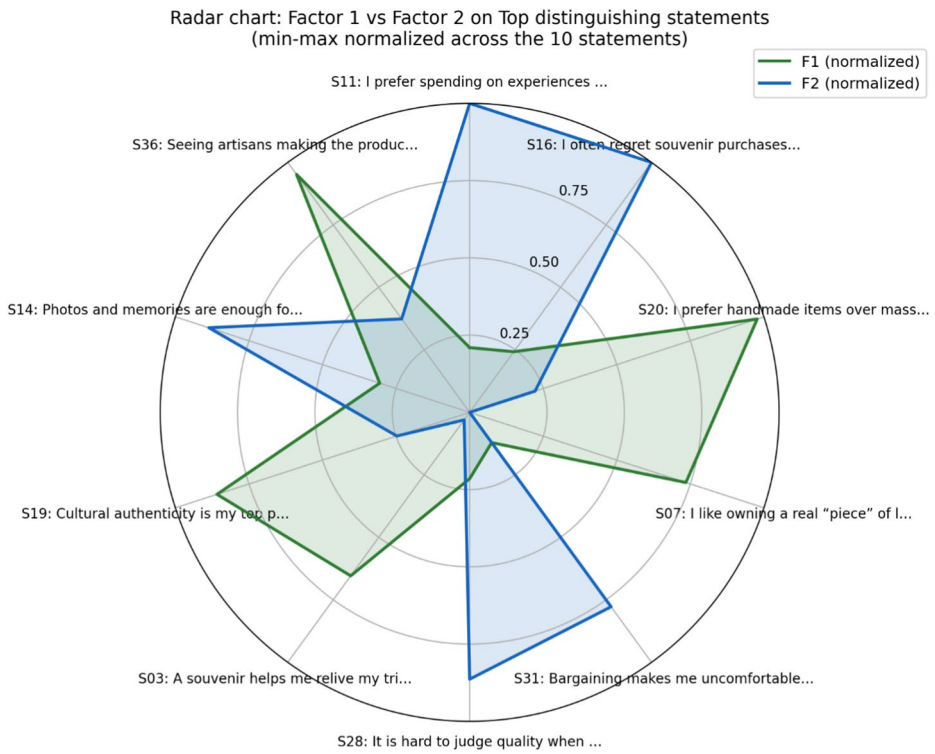


Fig. 7 Radar chart comparing F1 and F2 on the top distinguishing statements

Table 8 Consensus Statements ($p < 0.01$)

Statement	Statement (English)	Z (Factor 1)	Z (Factor 2)	$ Z_{F1} - Z_{F2} $
S15	Pushy selling or strong pressure to buy makes me leave	0.55	0.6	0.05
S32	I prefer buying at local markets rather than hotels or airports	0.18	0.21	0.03
S38	Good protective packaging makes me more willing to buy	-0.75	-0.73	0.02
S40	Being able to pay by card or mobile payment would encourage me to buy	-0.69	-0.83	0.14
S42	I avoid buying if I am unsure about customs rules in my country	-0.41	-0.56	0.15
S45	Buying online at the destination and shipping home is attractive to me	-0.62	-0.83	0.21

and Zhu 2023; He and Timothy 2024; Shen and Lai 2022). Even appealing products may lose value due to perceived risks (Zeithaml 1988).

Factor 2 can be robustly linked to mobilities approaches to shopping, which see consumption as entangled with movement, schedules, and transportation (Hoogendoorn-Lanser, et al. 2019; Sheller 2014; Spierings 2023). Heaviness or risk associated with souvenirs can make not purchasing a rational choice, not necessarily reflecting disinterest in culture (Hoogendoorn-Lanser et al. 2019; Spierings 2023; Wang et al. 2018).

Overall, this logic suggests that purchasing decisions are driven by the need to reduce uncertainty. Travelers prioritize clear pricing and verifiable quality. While authenticity acts as a signal, weak signals heighten risks and limit purchasing (He and Timothy, 2023; Guo and Zhu 2023). Favorable conditions increase the likelihood of purchasing meaningful souvenirs.

5.2 Interaction mechanism: When is meaning–authenticity “activated” into purchase?

The most significant contribution of the dual-logics mechanism is that Meaning-Authenticity does not automatically translate into purchase behavior; this transformation depends on whether the sales environment provides sufficient signaling resources to (i) create meaning and (ii) reduce transaction uncertainty. From an authenticity perspective, this aligns with the argument that authenticity in tourism is context-dependent; the interpretative process relies on signals (origin, process, artisan presence, material information) that play a crucial role (He and Timothy 2024; Trinh et al. 2014; Wang 1999).

From a consumption perspective, this mechanism illustrates the shift from symbolic value to practical value, where risks and non-monetary costs determine whether meaning is actualized into behavior (Zeithaml 1988).

In other words, the research suggests that conflicts between the two logics often arise not from contradictions among travelers but from market structures and experience design that compel them to prioritize transactional logic in uncertain contexts. Phenomena such as avoiding traditional markets, discomfort with haggling, or preferring clearly labeled prices do not necessarily reject culture but rather reflect reactions to transactional friction. This corresponds with observations that souvenir buying behaviors are heavily influenced by interaction norms and social comfort levels at points of sale, particularly in cross-cultural contexts (Collins-Kreiner and Zins 2011; Masset and Decrop 2021).

5.3 Theoretical model and testable propositions

From the structure of the two factors, we synthesize a middle-range theory on souvenir purchasing through the dual-logics mechanism (Fig. 8), comprising four testable propositions:

- *P1 (Intent)*: Meaning-Authenticity increases the intention to purchase souvenirs by attributing symbolic value to the items.
- *P2 (Transformation)*: Transaction-Logistics regulates the process of converting intention into behavior—higher transactional friction reduces the likelihood of purchase, even with strong intent.
- *P3 (Weighting)*: Under the pressures of mobility (end of journey, near flight times), decision-weighting shifts toward feasibility, causing convenience and transaction safety criteria to overshadow symbolic criteria.
- *P4 (Channel Substitution)*: When transactional friction is high in traditional channels, travelers tend to substitute with standardized channels (airport stores, online) to minimize risk.

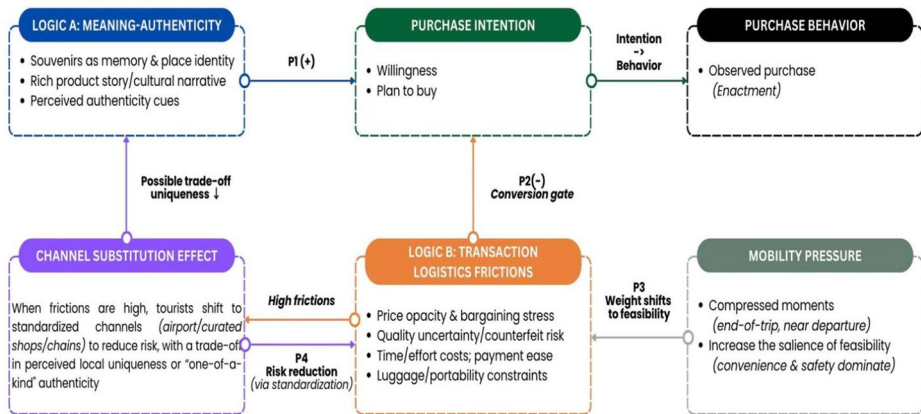


Fig. 8 The dual-logics mechanism model with P1-P4

5.4 Implications for souvenir research and destination management

The findings of this study reinforce the need for an integrated framework to avoid reductionism in souvenir research. Emphasizing Meaning-Authenticity alone risks romanticizing material culture while downplaying practical implementation barriers. On the other hand, prioritizing Transaction-Logistics may lead to viewing souvenirs merely as commodities, overlooking the symbolic mechanisms that contribute to their tourism value (Swanson and Timothy 2012; Wilkins 2011). The dual-logics mechanism allows for both aspects to be included in a cohesive model, wherein authenticity functions as both cultural significance and a signal that operates within the market context.

The findings indicate that increasing souvenir sales requires not only enhancing authenticity through craftsmanship but also reorganizing the signaling system and reducing transactional friction to facilitate the conversion of intention into action. This insight aligns with recent research emphasizing standardized information and source signals as tools to build consumer trust in cultural products (Guo and Zhu 2023; He and Timothy 2024). Furthermore, since tourism is inherently a mobile practice, addressing logistical risks (such as packaging, transportation, and carry-on regulations) can significantly influence purchasing behavior at destinations in short time frames (Sheller and Urry 2006).

We do not intend these results as populated-level generalizations about international tourists in Vietnam. Instead, they offer interpretive and theoretical insights into recurring subjective logics that shape souvenir valuation. The study's contribution lies in explaining how authenticity-oriented intentions are either activated or suppressed under specific transaction and mobility conditions.

6 Conclusion

This study explores the souvenir purchasing behavior of international tourists in Vietnam through the lens of the dual-logics mechanism—an integrated framework that incorporates two competing valuation modes. Findings from Q-methodology reveal two stable viewpoint

structures: Factor 1 (Meaning-Authenticity) prioritizes symbolic value, viewing souvenirs as objects that anchor memories associated with cultural stories and place identity; Factor 2 (Transaction-Logistics) emphasizes the feasibility of transactions, purchasing only under transparent conditions and controlled risks.

The study makes three primary theoretical contributions. First, it shifts the focus from descriptive segmentation to the dual-logics model, explaining purchasing behavior as a trade-off between symbolic meaning and the mobility of the objects. Second, it clarifies the dual nature of authenticity—as both a cultural value constructed through experience and a signal that reduces uncertainty in transactions. Third, it proposes four testable propositions (P1-P4) regarding the conditions for transforming intention into action. This study therefore suggests that authenticity does not function independently as a purchase driver. Its behavioral effect depends on whether marketplace conditions provide sufficient transactional clarity and mobility compatibility for symbolic value to become actionable. In this sense, souvenir purchasing is the best understood as a situated valuation process in which meaning and feasibility must align before purchasing takes place. This study does not claim statistical generalization for all international tourists. Instead, it identifies two theoretically significant subjective logics by which tourists evaluate souvenirs in terms of cultural significance, transactional uncertainty, and mobility limitations. The dual logic mechanism explains how intentions toward authenticity only become feasible when symbolic value is supported by transactional clarity and mobility compatibility. However, the study has certain limitations. Due to the nature of Q-methodology, the sample is not intended to generalize the prevalence of each factor among all tourists but instead provides valuable portraits of typical viewpoints for theoretical development. The specific context of Vietnam may also influence the prominence of certain criteria, necessitating caution when extrapolating to other contexts.

Future research could test the P1-P4 model through larger surveys or channel-based experiments. Cross-cultural and cross-destination comparisons could help identify the boundary conditions of the mechanism. Additionally, intervention studies on authenticity signaling design could provide empirical evidence for management recommendations.

Purchasing souvenirs is both a symbolic and practical practice. The dual-logics mechanism explains how travelers navigate between seeking meaning and managing mobility constraints, opening pathways for deeper integration between research streams on souvenirs, authenticity, and mobilities in tourism.

Statement: The authors bear full responsibility for the content of this paper, which has utilized AI to enhance translate, clarity and coherence.

Author contributions V.H.H. and Q.D.T. conceived and designed the study and jointly led the project administration. V.H.H., Q.D.T., and T.-D.N.T. conducted literature review and field surveys. T.-D.N.T. and T.M.-P.T. collected and curated the data. Q.D.T. performed the primary data analysis and produced the initial results. V.H.H. and T.M.-P.T. drafted the first manuscript version. All authors (V.H.H., Q.D.T., T.-D.N.T., and T.M.-P.T.) contributed to interpretation of results, critically revised the manuscript for important intellectual content, and approved the final version for submission. All authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Data availability No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Declaration

Conflict of interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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