

FUN OR FEAR? ON-SITE VERSUS ON-SCREEN EXPERIENCES IN PARANORMAL TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF HASHIMA ISLAND, JAPAN

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Paranormal tourism has seen increased demand, particularly from those tourists who seek unusual or unique experiences. Various paranormal phenomena offer multidimensional experiences for tourists in different physical contexts. Similarly, the advancement of technology has extended the ability to offer more authentic on-screen paranormal experiences. This study aims to explore and compare tourists' on-site and on-screen experiences at Hashima Island, Japan, with an interest in identifying paranormal-related emotions. Tourist reviews and comments from Tripadvisor and YouTube were collected, with data analysis conducted using grounded theory and Leximancer. Key findings indicate that besides core paranormal encounters, some inviolate features also contribute to paranormal experiences, with tour guide services impacting the on-site experience and video filming techniques influencing the on-screen experience. Furthermore, this work revealed several emotional dimensions, with “fear” and “surprise” positively related to paranormal experiences. By comparing on-site and on-screen experiences, this study offers marketing and planning suggestions for destinations seeking to develop and promote paranormal tourism encounters.

Key words: Paranormal tourism; On-site experiences; On-screen experiences; Emotions; Hashima Island

Introduction

Paranormal tourism is a novel type of tourism product emerging from pursuing unusual, different, and challenging experiences. These experiences involve—but are not limited to—ghost hunting, visiting haunted houses or places, and investigating

supernatural activities (Pharino et al., 2018). Paranormal activities attract tourists to sites all around the world, particularly to countries across Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa. For example, many locations in the US promote local “ghost lights” to attract tourists, and there are Big Foot or UFO hunters (Bader et al., 2017). In China, there are many

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tours featuring ghosts and ghouls haunting landmarks (Emperor Tours, 2023). The increasing popularity of paranormal encounters is also evidenced by the accessibility of related entertainment (Bader et al., 2017) including reality TV programs (e.g., *Ghost Adventure* and *Ghost Hunters*) and travel vlogs on social media.

Paranormal encounters can not only be experienced at destinations but also on-screen via online platforms. The advancement of technology makes it easier and more efficient to produce and share paranormal documentaries, photos, and videos, which appeal to those who are seeking “real-world” paranormal encounters more safely and passively (Jacobs, 2010). One crucial question, however, is whether the experience encountered on screen would be similar or different to that at the physical site. There is a lack of empirical studies on paranormal experiences overall but particularly for online delivery (Pharino et al., 2018). Many paranormal-featured destinations and hotels use videos on social media platforms to promote themselves (Houran et al., 2020; Pharino & Pearce, 2019); studies into on-screen paranormal experiences would contribute to the efficiency of their promotion.

Literature Review

Paranormal as a Tourism Phenomenon

Paranormal is defined as some events or phenomena that are impossible to explain or understand, or beyond the normal belief, such as clairvoyance or mind reading. Paranormal activities have become popular and well-known via media platforms, social media, and TV programs over the past few decades. Since 2015, the term “paranormal” has returned more and more hits on platforms like YouTube and individual webpages (Google Trends, 2020). Similarly, the release of a movie, *Paranormal Activity*, on social media streams sparked increased interest in paranormal phenomena, becoming a best-selling movie by generating more than \$100 million in revenue in the US and Canada (Evangelista, 2009; Mashable, 2009; Sentient Decision Science, 2010). Specific paranormal activities have been shown on other social media platforms such as Facebook (e.g., *Paranormal Activity*, over 17 million followers), YouTube (e.g., *The Paranormal Files* channel,

over 506 thousand subscribers), paranormal reality television (e.g., *Paranormal caught on camera*), and Netflix (e.g., *Paranormal series*), demonstrating how paranormal attractions were explored.

Based on these (and other) paranormal activities, “paranormal tourism” has become established as a new phenomenon. Paranormal tourism is considered a form of special interest tourism, as this group of people visit related sites with specific intentions, are involved in interest-based activities to experience unusual sensations, and are full of various emotions during their journey (Pharino et al., 2018). The characteristics of paranormal tourism overlap with many kinds of tourism such as dark tourism, spiritual tourism, religious tourism, and ghost tourism, where supernatural components are expected. Popular paranormal activities primarily involve ghost hunting and visiting haunted houses or places.

Key drivers to visiting paranormal sites include exploring new things, learning about a different culture, and realizing a personal belief (Pharino et al., 2018). The paranormal feeling can be experienced in different ways at different sites. For example, at Tirtar Empul in Bali, tourists participate in spiritual purifying by bathing and drinking holy water. However, in Thailand, while holy water is also used in spiritual activities, tourists do not drink the water; instead, they sprinkle holy water over their heads or bodies. Furthermore, paranormal tourists are more likely to travel with the high intimacy group, such as their partners and close friends (Pharino, 2019). In summary, paranormal tourism is considered to be a customized leisure and recreational activity, which is designed to meet the specific demand and interests of individuals or small groups of people, so that they can achieve their desired satisfaction concerning their paranormal interests (Derrett, 2001; Novelli & Robinson, 2005; Weiler & Hall, 1992).

Facets of Paranormal Tourists' Experiences

Tourist experiences have been conceptualized in different ways and consist of different components. General tourist experiences involve multiple dimensions including emotional, informative, practical, and transformational (Aho, 2001). Godovykh and Tasci (2020) further proposed that experiences are psychologically formed by emotional, cognitive,

sensorial, and conative components, which emerge during the stages of previsit, on-site, and postvisit. As such, anticipation and the remembered portions of the experience are also included in the perceived overall experience (Falk & Dierking, 2013). Godovykh and Tasci (2020) concluded that among four components, emotion is the most distinguishing factor that influences tourist experiences.

Similar to general tourist experiences, the paranormal experience is rich in context. It can be understood from the five perspectives of the Orchestra model (Pearce et al., 2013), including sensory, emotion, behavior, cognitive, and relationship; however, paranormal experiences hold some distinctive features. Multisensory experiences have been reported in paranormal tourism literature, where some specific senses influenced paranormal tourist experiences (Agapito et al., 2013), such as hearing unusual sounds on-site, changing temperatures, and tasting holy water (Pharino, 2019; Pharino et al., 2018).

For paranormal tourist experiences, some common emotions such as happiness, fear, eagerness, surprise, and interest were found at paranormal sites (Butler et al., 2006; Faullant et al., 2011; Fredrickson, 2001; Lane et al., 2009; Overbeek et al., 2012). As paranormal tourists are seeking special interests, not only positive emotions, such as joy and surprise (Prayag et al., 2017) but “negative” emotions, such as fear and awe, are also part of their experience (Sharpley & Stone, 2012). Previous research revealed that emotion has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction, especially the flow of positive emotions (Lin & Kuo, 2016). Fear and annoyance are common negative emotions but are rarely accounted for in evaluating tourists’ experiences (Faullant et al., 2011; Han & Jeong, 2013). How emotions are related to paranormal experiences? And to what extent those “negative” emotions would influence the paranormal experience is unknown.

What paranormal tourists feel and sense is related mainly to what they do on-site. The most typical behavior is taking photos just like any ordinary tourist (Miah et al., 2017; Pearce, 2011); however, when comparing tourist behaviors in different paranormal destinations, some differences were noted in the types of paranormal-related activities they perform (Pharino et al., 2018).

The cognitive component was not systematically identified in paranormal tourism literature. There is recognition though that knowledge and information were occasionally gained during the paranormal experience; this knowledge and information referred to the history of paranormal sites and different cultures or new information about holy rituals (Pharino et al., 2018). And it is also reported that perceiving information about the paranormal site (e.g., knowledge about the legend or the story of a haunted house) can stimulate emotional reactions, especially fear or horror (Escolà-Gascón & Houran, 2021; Houran et al., 2022).

In summary, paranormal tourists’ experiences are orchestrated with many components, such as particular emotions, unusual senses, particular on-site activities, and close relationships with travel companions. It is also noted that there is limited research on exploring multiple dimensions of paranormal tourist experiences. One of the more comprehensive studies to date is the one conducted by Pharino and her colleagues (2018). However, those experience facets were mostly reported from the list provided by the researchers; as an exploratory study, it is acknowledged that the comprehension of the list might be constrained to the researchers’ knowledge. As a relatively complicated form of special interest tourism, examining the multidimensional paranormal experiences from the tourists’ perspective via a qualitative approach is further warranted.

On-Site and On-Screen Tourist Experiences

Systematically examining tourists’ experiences is one of the most effective approaches to improving one’s understanding of tourist behavior. Tourists’ on-site experiences are influenced by a multitude of factors including tourists’ background, perceived destination image, and social-cultural and environmental contacts on-site (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Lin et al., 2007; Pearce, 2005), and the consumption of products and services at the destination (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). As such, on-site experiences not only involve visual expression but also include other sensory dimensions such as sounds, smells, tastes, and touch (Agapito et al., 2013). Being at a paranormal site offers the potential for a heightened involvement/connection to the paranormal activities such as chill temperature

enhancing the eerie feeling; to what extent the on-site experience would affect the paranormal feeling remains untouched. Furthermore, Zatori et al. (2018) revealed that in addition to organizational service elements (e.g., physical environment and facilities), other elements such as emotional stimuli, mental triggers, flow-like engagement, or social involvement might influence the on-site experience.

In the current digital era, tourist experiences are not constrained to physical on-site experiences but also transcend to online platforms. Metz (1982) pointed out that people can vicariously experience a place by connecting to the characters in the film/video. Audiences can also be highly involved and engaged with video narratives and media characters when they watch travel vlogs (Xu, Chen, & Mohammadi, 2021; Xu, Chen, Pearce et al., 2021). Previous studies in this area have focused on how videos work as information sources and how they would change tourists' destination perception and influence their decision-making (Kim & Richardson, 2003; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Du et al. (2022) and Xu, Chen, and Mohammadi (2021) further added that watching tourist-generated videos is a way of consuming travel-related content and visiting the destinations virtually. Accordingly, it is apparent that the elements that influence both on-site and on-screen experiences are associated with stimulating emotions and being involved and engaged in paranormal activities either on-site (e.g., joining the haunting tour) or on-screen (e.g., watching and then writing a comment or sharing experiences online).

Study Direction and Context

In summary, the purpose of this study is to gain a holistic picture of paranormal tourism experiences, and to extend the empirical knowledge in this area. It will achieve this by contrasting on-site and on-screen experiences of a specific paranormal site. Specifically, the research objectives are:

1. to explore the dimensions of paranormal tourist experiences, both on-site and on-screen;
2. to compare and contrast paranormal tourist experiences achieved through on-site and on-screen;
3. to investigate how various emotions are related to paranormal tourist experiences.

Hashima Island, an abandoned island in Japan, is selected as a case study for exploring paranormal tourist experiences. Its selection was guided by two influential factors. Firstly, Japan is one of the Asian destinations that are rich with paranormal resources. Paranormal beliefs are intertwined into Japanese culture, social, and religious contexts, which can be seen in the Japanese folklore (related to death, ghosts, oni, and monsters), rituals, and traditional religions (Shinto and Buddhist religions). For instance, Japanese ghosts are supernatural roots of horror, sorrowful, uncanny, and tragic because they are revengeful and malicious, such as Goryo (the noble dead), the Onryō, the Ubume, Shiryō (Baygelova, 2020; Iwasaka & Toelken, 1994).

Secondly, with its fascinating history, Hashima Island has become one of many paranormal sites in Asia that attracts tourists from around the world to experience something challenging and unusual. Known as Gunkanjima (Battleship Island), the island is a 16-acre patch of land off the southern coast of Japan. In the early 20th century, there were more than 5,000 miners and their families living in high-rise buildings on the island, which made the island the most densely populated area in the world (Forbes, 2018). The mines on the island were shut in 1974, and the island has laid uninhabited since. A few decades on, it became a ghost town with slowly crumbling buildings and grasses growing throughout the cracks. The island is named by Forbes (2018) as a "Ghost Island" and ranked as the most haunted island in Nagasaki, Japan by Mysterious Trip (2020) and Mirror (Beever, 2022), based on its background story where many people died due to harsh conditions while living there (Frater, 2017). It takes about 30 min by boat to visit the island, and the visitors need a guided tour as it is considered too dangerous for the public (Lonely Planet, 2015; Nambi, 2021). After this site was listed as a World Heritage site in 2015, the number of tourists increased dramatically by 500% over 6 years, generating jobs and benefits for local businesses and communities (Palmer, 2018).

Research Methodology

Due to the limited empirical studies available on paranormal tourism activities, this study adopted a qualitative inquiry approach. This was performed in terms of a case study on Hashima Island, using

netnography and grounded theory to collect and analyze the data respectively. These methodological approaches were considered appropriate to explore such a phenomenon as tourists are now quite active online and willing to share their experiences through such platforms. Specifically, tourists are active and wanting to engage with others before, during, and after their trips (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Kozinets, 2006). This consequently provides researchers with large, rich, and naturalistic online data reflecting the realities from tourists' perspectives (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Kozinets, 2002; Rokka, 2010). Furthermore, with the focus being on exploring both on-site and on-screen paranormal experiences, using online data could dually capture both experiences through one medium. The following sections explain the process of how data were collected and analyzed.

Data Collection (Using Netnography)

Netnography is a research technique derived from ethnography and is used to explore the social interactions and relationships among its members based on a shared interest online or called "ethnography on the Internet" (Kozinets, 2002, 2010, 2015). It is an immersion and cocreation of data that members of an online community and the researchers interact with (MacCarthy, 2022). Therefore, it is widely used to investigate social phenomena online, including tourist experiences and feeling (Atsız et al., 2022; Rageh et al., 2013).

There are three reasons for applying this method in this study. Firstly, there are active groups following paranormal phenomena on popular social media sites (e.g., Facebook and YouTube), which provide rich and unfiltered personal opinions on paranormal phenomena. Secondly, the researchers are nonparticipant observers when using the netnography approach. Thus, there is no suggestion of any data being biased by the researcher's presence and not influencing the research outcome (MacCarthy, 2022). Lastly, using netnography is convenient for researchers to collect data as it can be accessed online from anywhere, which is less costly, easier to access, and faster compared to the ethnography method (Atsız et al., 2022; Thanh & Kirova, 2018).

YouTube and Facebook are among the top popular social media where people can upload their footage

to share with others. After closely investigating some key paranormal-related pages on Facebook and YouTube channels, YouTube was considered more appropriate for the nature of this study. This is due to two main reasons. Initially, Facebook pages are more member-based communities, which would lend suitably to a netnographic study. However, on the paranormal-related Facebook pages investigated, the leaders planned for and recorded some paranormal adventures while the others merely followed and watched. The comments posted by the members were more reflections of the relationship between the members rather than sharing their tourist experiences. On the other side, YouTube is a more diverse platform that allows for both community-based channels and channels dedicated to individual vloggers who record their trips to paranormal attractions. The community-based YouTube channels function similarly to Facebook member-based community pages, while the comments posted by said followers of individual vloggers reflected how they felt watching these paranormal-related videos. Therefore, the individual YouTuber's channels are more suitable for netnography study on tourist on-screen experience.

In May 2020, the search "Hashima Island paranormal tourism" returned over 150 videos. From these videos, the top four most viewed videos (with over 100,000 views) were selected for further analysis; their selection was guided by the fact that they were produced by four different vloggers recording their visits to Hashima Island and illustrating their paranormal experiences and feeling. As of May 30, 2020, there were 989 viewer comments posted on these four videos which indicate an extensive data set to achieve part of research objective 1, to explore the paranormal tourist on-screen experience.

All 989 viewer comments were inputted into an Excel spreadsheet by a research assistant. The research assistant then went through each comment and applied the following criteria to remove irrelevant comments (according to the study purpose): 1) not in English; 2) not discussing the travel experience such as promoting someone's channel or commercial products; and 3) illogical such as "Cahn yooh cut hurh?". As a result, 678 comments were retained for further analysis on on-screen experience. A preliminary review of these comments indicated that comments from the third vlog started to reach information saturation point. The

comments from the fourth vlog were retained but no new themes emerged.

Tripadvisor, from a tourism viewpoint, is a platform where tourists share their experience and information after their trips. Heinnonen and Medberg (2018) suggested that some review sites could be an important and useful data source for researching consumer experiences. With specific reference to tourism activities, Tripadvisor is one such review site that provides information to explore tourists' on-site experiences (Chiu & Leng, 2021). Hashima Island has a dedicated page on Tripadvisor (https://www.tripadvisor.com.au/Attraction_Review-g298568-d1384788-Reviews-Hashima_Island-Nagasaki_Nagasaki_Prefecture_Kyushu.html); on May 19, 2020, 1,192 comments were recorded. Using the same filtering criteria as selecting the YouTube comments, a final 186 comments were inputted into an Excel spreadsheet for further analysis. The high exclusion rate was due to the majority of posts being in Japanese, and this study only investigated English comments and reviews.

Data Coding and Analysis (Using Grounded Theory)

The grounded theory focuses on building insight from empirical data/observations, where the researcher adopts no presumed relationships about the phenomenon being explored (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). The purpose of this study was to explore the paranormal tourist experience, identifying distinguishing features for on-site and on-screen experiences; thus, the grounded theory would allow the researchers to firstly identify the facets of paranormal tourist experiences (from the data) and then add their insights to explore the wider dimensions of the online and on-screen paranormal tourist experience (cf. Altinay et al., 2015).

In adopting a grounded theory approach, the first stage was to extract concepts as single units, which was performed through two different approaches—one manual and one automatic—to strengthen the validity of the research findings. For the manual approach, there was a two-step coding procedure involved in extracting concepts. First of all, the research assistant read through all the comments in the two Excel spreadsheets (one for YouTube comments and one for Tripadvisor reviews) and

identified the key concepts from each comment. Secondly, Researcher 1 went through all the comments independently to verify the concept list compiled by the research assistant.

As for the automatic approach, the two Excel spreadsheets were uploaded to Leximancer 4.5, a text-based analysis tool built on exploring relationships between concepts (Phi, 2020). This process was performed to double-check if any significant concepts were not identified through the manual approach. A comparison between the list developed by the research assistant (and then verified by Researcher 1) revealed that no significant concepts were missed. Figure 1 presents the concepts identified by Leximancer.

In a separate situation, Researcher 2 visited the original data spreadsheets to extract the concepts. This list was compared to that produced through the manual approach (of the research assistant and Researcher 1) and the automatic approach (through Leximancer, see Fig. 1). Researcher 1 and Researcher 2 then discussed any variations and revisited the original data to make any necessary revisions to the list accordingly.

The second stage in adopting grounded theory for this study was to examine the similarities and differences among these concepts and to subsequently categorize similar ones into the same groups. This was initially achieved through an automatic approach only, as Leximancer locates concepts based on their co-occurrence in the data. To do this, Researcher 1 and Researcher 2 examined the “themes” identified by Leximancer; themes are shown in Figure 1 as individual circles surrounding a selection of concepts. Leximancer automatically assigns the theme label based on the most frequently mentioned concept within that theme; however, the user can thereafter rename the themes to provide a better reflection of the concepts within each circle.

In exploring the data, some adjective words were identified as key concepts through both the manual and automatic approaches. These concepts included “interesting,” “best,” “worth,” “amazing,” and “beautiful,” among others, indicating some emotional themes might be present. To explore this possibility, Researcher 1 and Researcher 2 applied a manual approach; this started with compiling a list of emotion-related words using the work of Heiy and Cheavens (2014) as a guide. According to Heiy

of the data, in this case the on-screen experience data. The following two subsections present the results of our manual coding and analysis of on-site and on-screen experiences, respectively.

Key Themes in the On-Site Experience

Examining the similarities among the concepts from the Tripadvisor comments, five key themes were categorized: Tour Company, Multisensory Experience, Emotion, Accessibility, and Recommendation. Moreover, by investigating their connections within the original comment texts, the relationship among these themes could be understood by following a tour sequence: before, during, and after. Figure 2 below presents these five themes and how they are associated with each other.

For the on-site experience, before the tour, the paranormal experience started with comparing and choosing the appropriate tour company by considering the prices and languages provided. The discussion on accessibility to Hashima Island was also a key theme before the tour; the weather was one of the concerns, which prevented the landing on the island, and further disappointed the tourists, as commented by a tourist on Tripadvisor: “We took a tour to the island but were unable to dock due to bad weather conditions. Overall the tour was disappointing.”

In the second stage of the experience, during the tour, the multisensory experience was the key theme. However, due to limited access to the island, this multisensory dimension was also limited: only a small number of tourists could land, and even on the island, they were constrained to certain walking tracks and could not get close to buildings. Most of the experiences were around the boat trips, viewing the island from a distance, taking photos, and listening to the tour guides’ interpretations. Although not being able to get close to the paranormal site, some arrangements by the tour companies enabled some tourists to have a paranormal feeling, such as haunting and empathy: the story-telling by the tour guides, the little “incidents” on the boat, and creating particular angles/positions to view the buildings on the island. A typical on-site tour experience is illustrated by this tourist’s comment:

We get to see the famous bridges above our heads in Nagasaki on the way and the tour guide (only in Japanese) showed ruins of the past on our way to the island. We stopped by at an island near by Hashima island, where they had a mini museum explaining Hashima island. We toured around Hashima and the sails men were constantly wiping our windows (rain and sea water), so ensure that we got a good 360 view of Hashima.

Comments after tours were mainly on two themes: recommendations and emotions. They

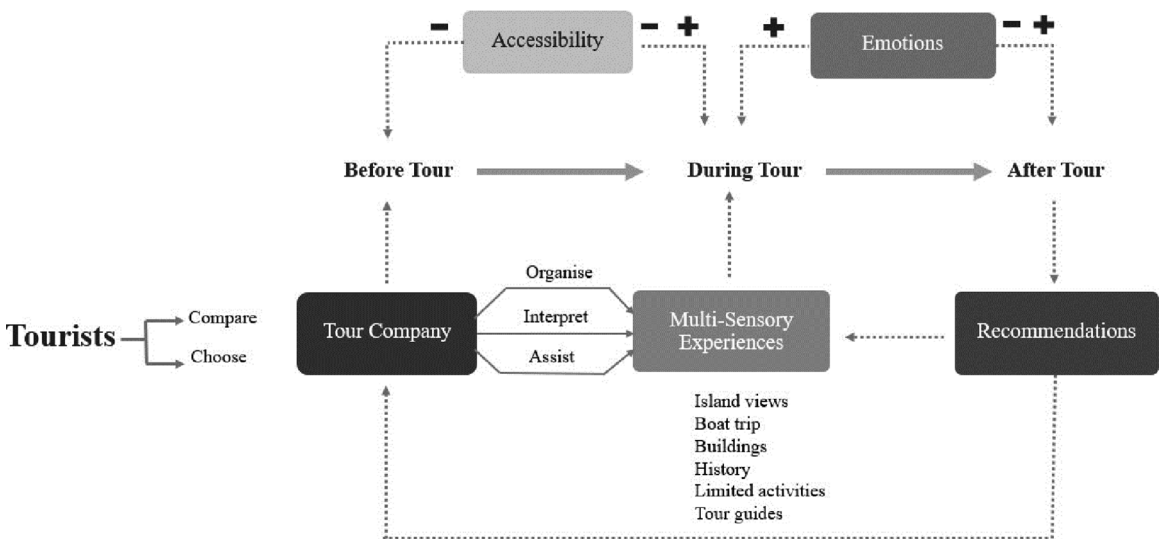


Figure 2. Framework for the manual coding results of onsite paranormal experience.

recommended the island as a unique and special place; they also recommended some particular tour companies, highlighting the services provided. In terms of emotions, these were mixed: both positive and negative. The well-organized tour and the professional site interpretation left the tourists with a worthwhile boat trip; however, being unable to land made them disappointed. A typical comment to sum up the trip experience is: “Even if we cannot see or hear all about the battleship island, worth to visit.”

Key Themes in the On-Screen Experience

Similar procedure was applied to the concepts from YouTube comments, and three key themes were identified: Multisensory Experience, Emotions, and Video Skills. Figure 3 displays the themes of on-screen paranormal experience, the concepts around these themes, and how they are interrelated to form the experience.

For the on-screen experience, the multisensory experiences were what the viewers observed from watching the videos. These experiences were about the sight experience, including the overview of the island and the ocean (e.g. “This island, at least from the image at 3:13 looks like it would be idyllic and peaceful to live there, or at least beautiful location”), and some scenes and details

on the island (such as the remains of the buildings or left-out objects: “that carcass of a four cylinder bike is the only interesting thing for me”; “why are the calculator’s keys clean”), as well as the sound experience, including background music and the vloggers’ monologues and/or screaming (e.g., “At 21:40 there are voices in the background of people talking in a hall or something”). These experiences were shaped by video skills. For example, by applying drone shots and divergent views, the overview of the island and its surrounding area were presented in a way that enabled the viewers to feel the island’s isolation. Special video effects stimulate some emotions, particularly those related to paranormal feelings. For example, by applying a particular filming style, such as zooming in and zooming out, together with background music, the details of the old dolls or broken bikes were presented in a haunted and eerie way. A couple of examples of this kind of comments are: “The toys with sad music in the background made me cry”, and “Every time they focus a place I feel nervous that someone may appear.” There were also comments expressing how impressed they were with the videos, as an audience summarized: “this was one of your best videos. I loved the music, the interplay between old footage and new, between the still shots and the video. Altogether, this was awesome!”

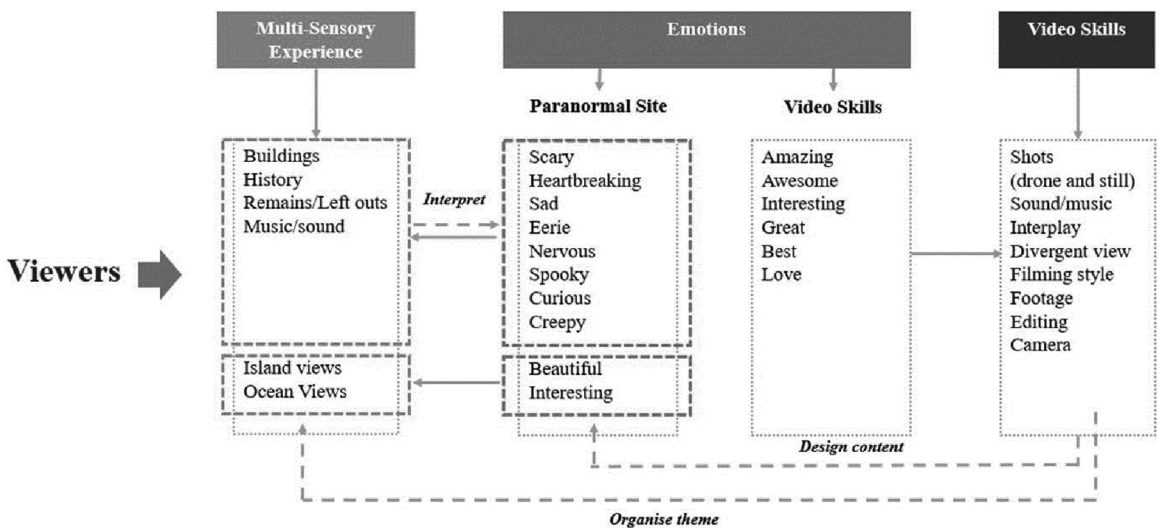


Figure 3. Framework for the manual coding results of on-screen paranormal experience.

Table 1
A Comparison of Experience Dimensions Between On-Site and On-Screen Paranormal Experience by Orchestra Model

Experience Dimensions	Actual (On-Site) Experience	Virtual (On-Screen) Experience
Cognitive	Judging Learning Relating Explaining Thinking <i>Recommending</i> <i>Comparing</i> <i>Choosing</i>	Judging Learning Relating Explaining Thinking <i>Wishing</i> <i>Questioning</i>
Affective	Affections towards the place <i>Affections towards the trip (+ & -)</i>	Affections towards the place <i>Affections towards the video (+)</i>
Sensory	Sight Sound <i>Touch (temperature)</i>	Sight Sound <i>Smell (vicarious)</i>
Relationship	<i>With tour guides</i> <i>With other tourists</i>	<i>With vlogger</i> <i>With other viewers</i>
Behavior	<i>No landing activities</i> <i>Landing island activities</i> <i>Other related activities</i>	<i>Site related (vicarious)</i> <i>Video related: share and re-watch</i>

emotion list, a list of emotions was identified from both experiences. These were then applied with the Junto emotion wheel to assist with the grouping of these emotions. The Junto emotion wheel was developed by The Junto Institution (<https://www.thejuntoinstitute.com/emotion-wheels/>); it contains six wedges (love, fear, anger, sadness, surprise, and joy) each representing a core human emotion; and within each wedge, there are more specific emotions related to the core emotion. Table 2 displays our emotion grouping results; italics were applied to indicate the different emotion words used between the two experiences.

Five of the Junto emotion wedges emerged from the paranormal emotion list: fear, surprise, joy, anger, and sadness, however, there were no paranormal emotions in the “love” wedge. In our collected comments, more are from YouTube; however, the Tripadvisor comments had richer meaning in context, which provides room for expressing the intricacies of their emotions. From Table 2, we can also see that there were more emotions expressed in the on-site experiences than in the on-screen experiences, except in the “fear” wedge. In the on-screen experiences, besides the similar “fear” emotions in the on-site experience, there were additional “fear”

Table 2
Emotion Groups for Both On-Site and On-Screen Experiences

Emotion Groups	On-Site Experience	On-Screen Experience
Group 1: Fear	eerie, scared, <i>strange</i> , weird, <i>frightened</i>	eerie, scared, weird, <i>creepy</i> , <i>curious</i> , <i>anxious</i> , <i>worried</i> , <i>awful</i>
Group 2: Surprise	amazing, surprising, <i>stunned</i> , <i>unbelievable</i> , <i>pleasant</i> , <i>incredible</i> , excited, <i>fantastic</i> , <i>impressed</i> , <i>nice</i> , fascinating, interesting, <i>confused</i>	amazing, surprising, excited, fascinating, interesting
Group 3: Joy	enjoyed, <i>delightful</i> , <i>grateful</i> , <i>joyful</i> , <i>emotional</i> , <i>just fine</i>	enjoyed, <i>admired</i> , <i>respectful</i> , <i>fun</i> , <i>ecstatic</i>
Group 4: Anger	<i>angry</i> , <i>outraged</i>	<i>annoyed</i> , <i>disgusted</i>
Group 5: Sadness	<i>disappointed</i> , <i>upset</i> , sad, <i>lonely</i> , <i>uncertain</i> , <i>lost</i> , <i>so-so</i>	<i>pity</i> , sad, <i>pensive</i>
Group 6: Love		

emotions, such as “creepy,” “curious,” “anxious,” “worried,” and “awful.” Examining the comments related to these words, it was found that they were related to some imagined scenes watching the video.

On Tripadvisor, there are also ratings indicating tourists’ overall experiences (5—Excellent, 4—Very Good, 3—Average, 2—Poor, 1—Terrible). The on-site emotions were mapped with the ratings to explore relationship between emotions and paranormal experiences. In each emotion wedge, there were more specific emotions, and some of them did not have the same ratings; we applied the intensity level to the Junto emotion wheel to help display the

different ratings for different emotions within the same wedge. As there were no experience ratings for the YouTube comments, only the on-site experience emotions are presented in Figure 5.

From the distributions of the emotion clusters in Figure 5, it can be seen that the emotions in the “fear” and “surprise” wedges were associated with the highest ratings. In the “fear” group, there are three emotions rated 5 and two rated between 4 and 5. The three emotions rated 5 are the typical paranormal feelings—something unusual: “weird,” “strange,” and “eerie.” In the “surprise” wedge, there are also three emotions rated 5 that are related to the visitors’ shocks by the scene, followed by

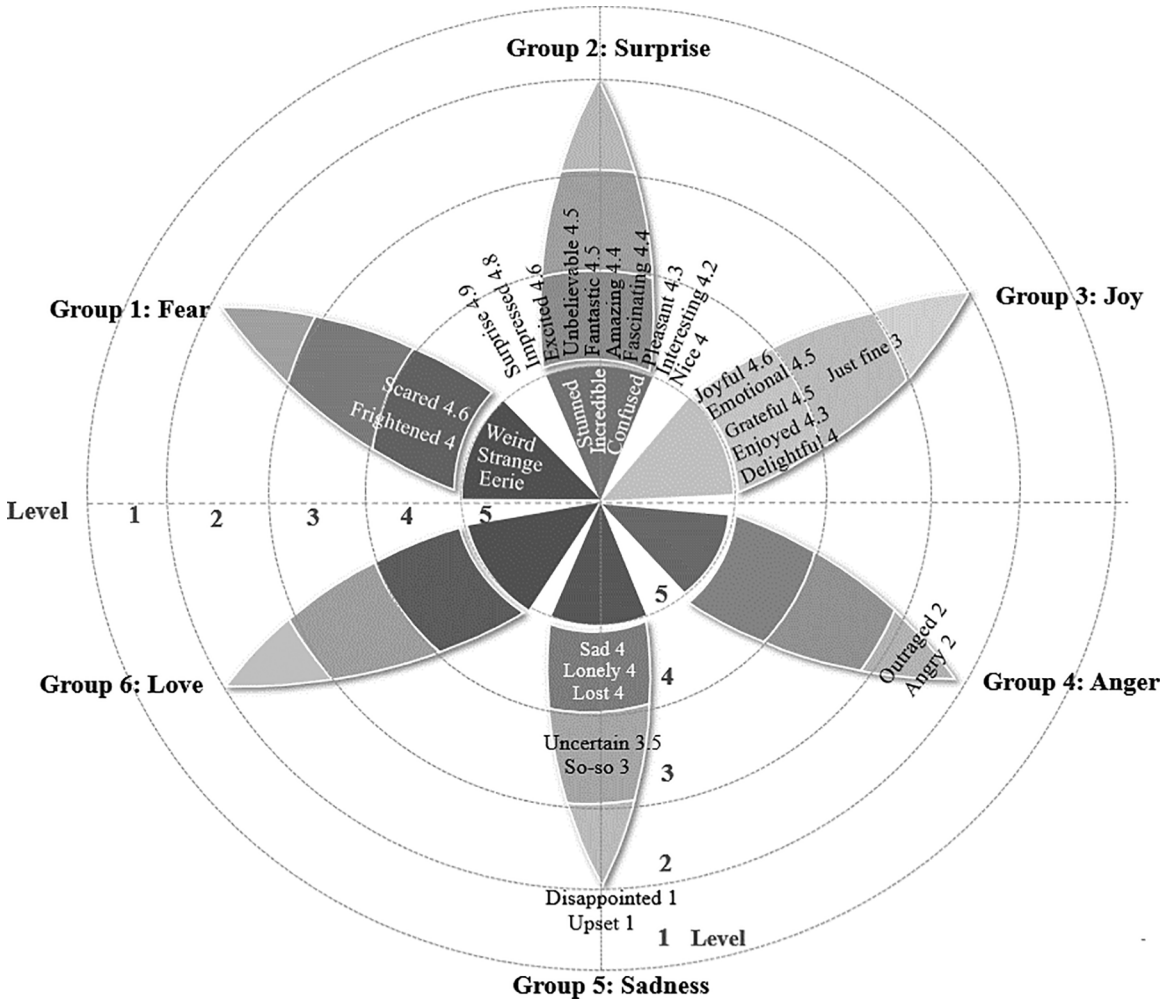


Figure 5. Paranormal emotions wheel.

those paranormal-specific emotions (such as “surprise,” “impressed,” and “excited”) rated closely to 5 while those tour-specific emotions rated closely to 4, such as “interesting” and “nice.” The “joy” wedge had no 5 rating, but most of the emotions were associated with ratings around 4.5, with “just fine” rated 3. Emotions in the “anger” wedge were limited but quite negative, with an average rating of 2. By examining the associated texts closely, it was found that the anger and outrage were caused by unexpected extra charges for the tours. In the “sadness” group, there were several emotional words identified and they were rated across different levels. “Sad,” “lonely,” and “lost” were associated with 4; the first two emotions, “sad” and “lonely,” were related to the tourists’ feelings when they heard about the island’s history; they showed empathy towards the workers in the past; “lost” is associated with tour arrangement: when the tour was well organized and supported with some relevant activities (such as landing on some vantages), or when English brochures were supplied, tourists rated their experience 4 though they felt lost with the tour guide’s Japanese interpretation. Those who commented their trips as “so-so” or “uncertain” rated their overall trips around 3 as they found nothing exciting but the overall tour arrangement was ok. On the other side, “disappointed” and “upset,” associated with rating 1, were the feelings towards the tours, either the trips being canceled or not being able to view the island or get close to the island due to the bad weather. Overall, it can be concluded that those paranormal-specific emotions tended to be associated with higher ratings, even for some “negative” emotions (such as “fear” or “sad”); the tour-specific emotions could be either positively or negatively rated, depending on how the tour was organized.

Discussion and Conclusions

By examining the messages tourists left on TripAdvisor after they visited Hashima Island and the online comments audiences put on YouTube after watching videos of Hashima Island visit, the researchers attempted to display the picture of what tourists encountered at a typical paranormal site. With the assistance of Leximancer and the researchers’ manual coding, it was found that the paranormal site associated with paranormal themes

were located in the core position of this paranormal experience picture. These paranormal themes were shaped by the physical features of the site (such as the building and some little objects) and the relevant history, which resulted in multisensory experiences and mixed emotions. These multisensory experiences and mixed emotions were also influenced by the accessibility and organization of experiencing the site. In the on-site paranormal experience picture, the additional key themes were about the tour experience: the tour activities, the services, and the staff. The multisensory dimension in the on-site experience is relatively limited due to being unable to land on the island, and the paranormal emotions were triggered mainly by the tour guides’ interpretation. While in the on-screen experience, the special effects applied in the video enrich the multisensory experience, such as background sound and details of the site, and lead to the paranormal feeling. Xu, Chen, Pearce et al. (2021) also confirmed that vlogging and editing skills increased audiences’ involvement.

The different extents of paranormal atmosphere exposure result in different levels of emotions aroused. By summarizing the comparison, it was found that among the five emotion groups identified, the on-screen experience has more fear-associated emotions expressed, but the on-site experience has more emotions revealed in other emotion groups; the richer emotions are mostly triggered by the tour guides’ interpretations. When the tour guides’ interpretations focused on the history, there were more “empathy” and “sad” related emotions; when the tour guides’ interpretations were more on describing the scenes and some paranormal experience, the fear-associated emotions aroused. The results are consistent with the work of Hergovich (2003), Escolà-Gascón & Houran (2021), and Houran et al. (2022) that cognitive-affective reactions influence on-site paranormal tourists’ experiences. Pharino et al. (2018) pointed out the importance of close travel companions as they would be able to share knowledge and similar feelings. Combining their findings with the results of this study, it could be inferred that when there is more information available or shared, there are richer emotions involved; and the focus of the interpretation content and the interpretation styles also influence the emotion types aroused.

The emotions with traveler ratings were further mapped out on Tripadvisor, and it was found that the “fear” and “surprise” emotions are associated with the highest rating (close to 5), followed by “joy,” most rated around 4.5. The emotions in “sad” are associated with mixed ratings, with those emotions related to site history or stories associated with a higher rating (4) and those emotions toward the tour associated with a lower rating (1 or 2). The anger-associated emotions were linked with low ratings (2). Contrasted to other types of tourism experiences, it is interesting to find that “fear” emotions, mostly known as negative emotions, are more likely to contribute to a positive paranormal experience. This could be explained by the nature of paranormal experience, which is to pursue something abnormal and experience something thrilling (Parra, 2015). As a type of special interest tourism, if their initial expectations are not met, the overall experience is more likely to be unsatisfied; for paranormal tourists, the essential desire is to be sacred and surprised (Pharino, 2019).

The overall results can be summarized and understood from the perspective of the Stimuli–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model, as presented in Figure 6. The S-O-R model is helpful to understand the mediating role of the internal experience (organism) between stimuli and response (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In this study, the stimuli refer to the paranormal experience; organism is the internal experience, here referring to the emotions; and the response is the rating of the overall trip experience. We can see that paranormal tourism is a typical type of tourism, which consists of core experience, supporting experience, and environmental experience. And the experience of the core elements leads to the emotions that are more likely to contribute to more positive trip outcomes (Core experience: Fear—excellent; Core experience: Surprise—excellent; Core experience: Sadness 1—very good), while the supporting experience and the environmental experience lead to mixed emotions that can contribute to either positive trip outcomes (Supporting experience: Surprise—excellent; Supporting experience: Joy—very good; Environmental experience: Love—very good; Environmental experience: Anger—poor; Environmental experience: Sadness 2—poor).

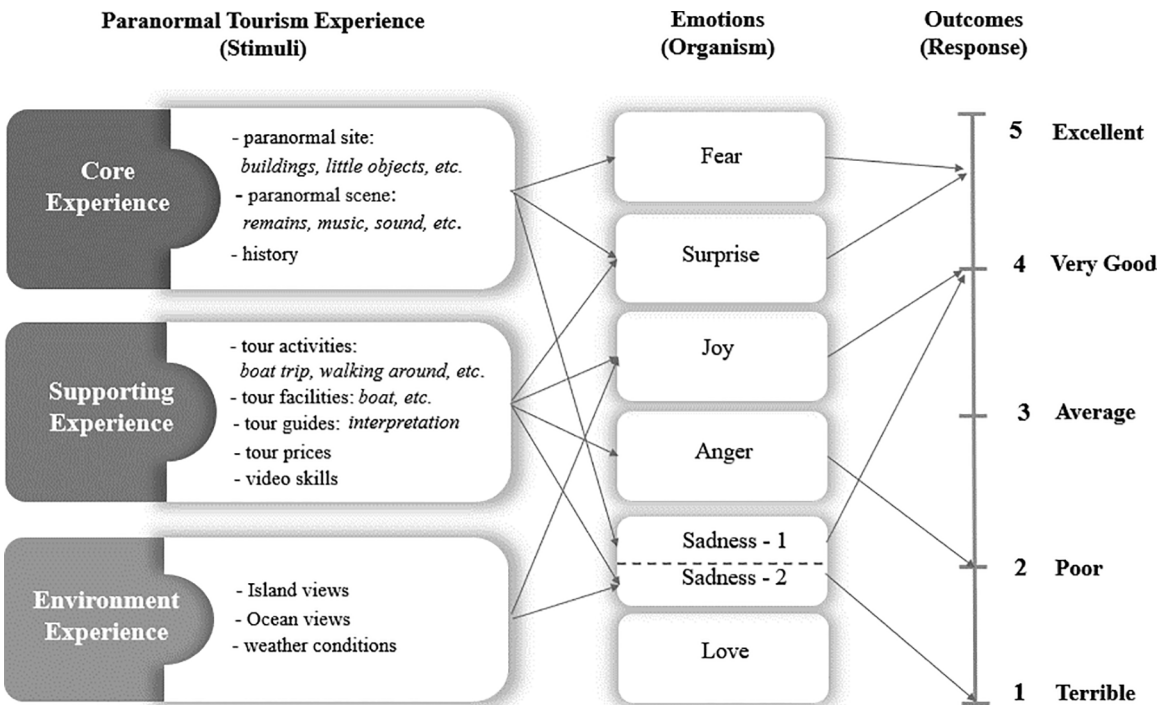


Figure 6. Synthesizing research findings based on S-O-R model.

Joy—very good) or negative trip outcomes (Supporting experience: Anger—poor; Supporting experience: Sadness 2—terrible; Environmental experience: Sadness 2—terrible). By examining the connections between organism (emotions) and the response (trip outcome ratings), we can also see that paranormal tourism is different to general tourism. According to PANAS, scared and nervous (which are within the “fear” wedge in this study) are the negative emotions (Riopel, 2019); and research on general tourism indicates that negative experiences are associated with negative emotions (e.g., sad, anxious) (Zakrisson & Zillinger, 2012). However, in paranormal tourism, the more positive experiences are more likely to be associated with the emotions that were traditionally considered as negative, such as “fear” and “surprise,” than the traditional positive emotions, such as “joy.” This indicates the importance of those factors that elicits the emotions of “fear” and “surprise” in paranormal experience.

The findings of this study could contribute to the literature body on paranormal tourism study and have management implications for paranormal sites. Firstly, previous studies in this area attempted to understand tourists’ feelings towards paranormal experiences by asking tourists to rate a given list of emotions (Pharino et al., 2018); however, this list was the researchers’ guesswork on possible emotions that may be involved; it is very likely some important emotions might be missing. This study identified a list of emotions from both on-site and on-screen paranormal experiences, which covered the key emotion scopes but specified the relevant emotions; this list could be used as a more comprehensive list for further exploration on paranormal-related emotions. Secondly, the “fear” and some “sad” emotions were found to be associated with positive experiences; therefore, those conclusions in the literature indicating that negative emotions are linked to negative experiences should be adjusted. In a conceptual paper, Nawijn and Biran (2019) argued that negative emotions could possibly contribute to multiple positive outcomes; our results can serve as preliminary empirical evidence to their argument. Thirdly, with the increasing popularity of vlogs, this kind of video has become an important information source for potential tourists. The on-screen experience discussed in this study

could be considered part of the pretravel experience; therefore, the differences identified between on-site and on-screen experiences could provide some hints and/or information for paranormal destination management to better plan and organize the on-site experience. For example, there were more “site-related” details encountered in the on-site experience, which leads to more of the “fear-related emotions”; our emotion mapping result also showed that “fear” emotions are more likely to link to a higher rating of experience. It is therefore suggested that the site management should focus on detail designs that may trigger “fear” emotions. Last but not the least, the richer emotions identified from the on-site experiences indicate that more information provided will trigger more emotions and also point out that different interpretation contents and styles would result in different emotions. By looking into the paranormal emotion wheel, it is recommended that the tour companies and the paranormal site management should prioritize providing paranormal-related information. However, the negative emotions associated with a lower rating should not be ignored. For example, “disappointed” and “upset” was closely linked with the lowest rating 1, which indicated that the tourists were least satisfied when their expectations were not met. Therefore, the relevant businesses and authorities should make sure their promised messages are delivered.

Like any research, there are limitations to this study. First of all, this study only examined one single paranormal site, which might include some features of the paranormal experience that only applied to the selected site. For example, the chosen site, Hashima Island, has strong links to World War II, so some experiences are related to history remaining, which would be missing in those sites that are pure about supernatural spirits. And this might be one of the reasons that no “love” emotion emerges in this study. Further research is suggested to investigate experiences across paranormal sites. Secondly, during the data filtering process, most of the data were kept; however, on both data source sites, there were reviews and comments in another language (non-English) which were out of the researchers’ ability to understand and interpret; they were therefore excluded from the analysis. The researchers acknowledge there might be some

missing information and recommend that future studies might try to include data across different languages (and different cultures). Furthermore, while triangulation was applied in the manual data coding process to maximize the study's reliability, it is acknowledged that there may be some possible subjectiveness in the process of emotion coding. There are some researchers who applied various software to conduct sentiment analysis, which might reduce subjectiveness in data coding; however, due to the unique feature of paranormal emotions, the common software might not be suitable to analyze paranormal emotions. Future researchers interested in this area might try to develop a sentiment database for paranormal experiences. Figure 6 presents the possible connections between paranormal tourism experience, emotions, and trip outcomes. However, due to the qualitative nature of this study, these possible connections are our exploration only; quantitative research is suggested to further test these relationships by using Figure 6 as a conceptual framework. Individuals are motivated by emotions to take actions (Bagozzi et al., 1999); in tourism context, these actions can be either to revisit the destination, recommend the destination, or even build relationship with the destination residents. Therefore, this framework should be adjusted and extended to include possible actions by tourists.

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