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CONTENTS

FOREIGN EXPERIENCE IN THE EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION OF FREE ECONOMIC ZONES.....	51
Mamadiev Elyor	
IMPROVING ORGANIZATIONAL AND ECONOMIC MECHANISMS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY GUEST HOUSES	55
Boynazarov Ulugbek Egamberdievich	
IMPROVING METHODS OF ORGANIZING AND DEVELOPING DOMESTIC TOURISM MARKETS IN UZBEKISTAN	61
Daminov Mirvokhid Isroilovich	
THE IMPACT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURISM SECTOR.....	67
Dilsora Ibodovna Ibodova	
IMPACT OF STUDENTS AGED OVER 40 ON ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND BUDGETING BASED ON THE COMPETENCY ECOSYSTEM.....	74
Nigora Ikrom qizi Primova	
ОЦЕНКА ЭФФЕКТИВНОСТИ ПРОМЫШЛЕННЫХ ПРЕДПРИЯТИЙ ХОРЕЗМСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ: ЭКОНОМЕТРИЧЕСКОЕ МОДЕЛИРОВАНИЕ И СЦЕНАРНОЕ ПРОГНОЗИРОВАНИЕ НА 2026–2030 ГОДЫ	80
Юсупов Шерзодбек Бахтиёр угли	
IMPROVING THE METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSING THE PROCUREMENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES	87
Ergashev Jahongir Bakhodirovich	
MULTIVARIATE ECONOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF FACTORS AFFECTING HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN SURXONDARYO REGION	93
Abdunazarova Shahnoza Norquchqor qizi	
СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫХ ЦИФРОВЫХ УСЛУГ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА И УЗБЕКИСТАНА	99
Юсифов Магамед Исмаил оглу, Гасанли Расул Шахин оглу, Белалова Гузаль Анваровна	
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MINING INDUSTRY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GREEN ECONOMY.....	105
Xudayberdiyeva Kamila Sadillovna, Fozilova Zumrad Ahmadovna	
IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY OF CLOTHING MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN UZBEKISTAN THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION	111
Axmedova Gaziza Azim kizi	
КОМПЛЕКСНАЯ ОЦЕНКА ПОТЕНЦИАЛА РЕГИОНАЛЬНОГО АГРОПРОМЫШЛЕННОГО ИНТЕГРИРОВАНИЯ НА ОСНОВЕ МОДЕЛИ АНР-TOPSIS	115
Аликулов А.Б.	
APPLICATION OF CLUSTER METHODS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE AND IMPROVEMENT OF ECONOMIC MECHANISMS IN SAMARKAND CITY	121
Tashov Mizrob Maxmudovich	
THE ROLE AND PROSPECTS OF THE GREEN ECONOMY IN THE SERVICE SECTOR.....	130
Musayeva Shoirazimovna, Usmonova Dilfuza Ilkhomovna	
FACTORS AFFECTING THE EFFICIENCY OF REGIONAL ENTERPRISES	135
Nigora Zokirjon qizi Toxirova	
CURRENT STATE OF ATTRACTING INVESTMENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN THE REGIONS OF UZBEKISTAN AND THE METHODOLOGY OF ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	142
Temurbek Olimovich Mamayunusov	
PRESUPPOSITION SHIFTS IN CROSS-LINGUISTIC RENDERING OF ANECDOTAL NARRATIVES: A COMPARATIVE INQUIRY INTO TRIGGER RETENTION AND TRANSFORMATION	148
Umaraliyeva Dildora Taxirjanovna	

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND RURAL PUBLIC SERVICE QUALITY: AN EMPIRICAL ECONOMETRIC ANALYSIS.....	156
Bek Hunsia, Feruza Mansurovna Ollokulova	
COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S LABOR ACTIVITY ON THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM.....	164
Ahrorova Asila Abduaziz qizi	
IMPROVING TAX ADMINISTRATION IN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ENVIRONMENT.....	170
Azizbek Khurramov	
FORMATION OF FINANCIAL RESULTS AT MOTOR TRANSPORT ENTERPRISES.....	180
Shanazarova Nilufar Baratovna	
ARIMA-BASED ANALYSIS OF SMALL BUSINESS ACTIVITY IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR OF SURKHANDARYA REGION.....	185
Fayziyeva Aziza Azamat qizi	
ASSESSMENT OF AGRARIAN SECTOR EFFICIENCY THROUGH THE SFA MODEL.....	192
Utanov Bunyod Kuvandikovich	
АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ УПРАВЛЕНИЯ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫМ ВНЕШНИМ ДОЛГОМ.....	196
Шомуродов Равшан Турсункулович, Жуманазаров Шахобиддин Дилмурод угли	
MODERN METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO MANAGING EDUCATIONAL SERVICES MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.....	201
Shamshieva Nargizakhon Nosirkhuja kizi	
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC COTTON GINNING ENTERPRISES: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS, DIAGNOSTICS, AND IMPROVEMENT DIRECTIONS.....	208
Orif Jumayevich Murodov	
ANALYSIS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF STATE INTERVENTION IN THE PRODUCT QUALITY MANAGEMENT PROCESS IN UZBEKISTAN.....	219
Atakulov Askad Raimkulovich	
ИНТЕГРИРОВАННАЯ МОДЕЛЬ ФОРМАЛИЗАЦИИ НЕФОРМАЛЬНОЙ ЗАНЯТОСТИ И РАСШИРЕНИЯ СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ ЗАЩИТЫ В АГРАРНЫХ РЕГИОНАХ (НА ПРИМЕРЕ КАШКАДАРЬИНСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ).....	224
Бобоназарова Юлдуз Ботировна	
THE ECONOMIC ESSENCE OF RESOURCE USE EFFICIENCY AND ITS ROLE IN INDUSTRIAL ECONOMICS.....	229
Baymanova Mavlyuda Djurayevna, Aipova Iroda Ikramovna	
THE ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: EVIDENCE FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.....	234
Ismatova Diyora Sirojiddin qizi, Ubaydullayeva Gulchexra Erkabayevna	
ЭКОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ УСТОЙЧИВОСТЬ И РЕСУРСНАЯ АДАПТИВНОСТЬ ОТРАСЛИ МАШИНОСТРОЕНИЯ В РОССИИ, КИТАЕ, ИНДИИ.....	239
Викторова Наталья Геннадьевна, Абрамчикова Наталья Викторовна, Ван Байянь	
ENSURING ORGANIZATIONAL AND ECONOMIC MECHANISMS FOR HOUSING STOCK MANAGEMENT.....	249
Aminova Naima Umar qizi	
STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH: PRACTICAL APPROACHES AND IMPROVEMENTS.....	253
Baymuradov Shokhruxh Makhmudovich, Dilmurodov Komiljon Ahmad o'g'li	
IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF SMALL ENTERPRISES IN THE SERVICE SECTOR (A CASE STUDY OF TASHKENT REGION).....	259
Ashirov Alisher	
IMPROVING THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND ECONOMIC MECHANISMS FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF SERVICE ENTERPRISES IN UZBEKISTAN.....	264
Kurbanova Rahima Jamshedovna	
INNOVATIVE IDEAS OF YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS AND INFRASTRUCTURE FACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL INNOVATIVE BUSINESSES.....	270
Ergashev Oybek Khaydaralievich	

MARKETING CHARACTERISTICS OF POSITIONING ORGANIC DRIED FRUIT PRODUCTS IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETS	274
Khidirov Shokhrukh	
TYPOLOGIZATION OF THE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL AND DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISTRICTS OF SURKHANDARYA REGION BASED ON STATISTICAL AND NEURAL NETWORK APPROACHES.....	280
Normurodov Asliddin Alijon ugli	
THE ROLE OF FOREIGN EXPERIENCE IN ANALYSING THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE AUDIT OF FINANCIAL LIABILITIES	291
Palvanov Xusniddin Bekimmatovich	
DIGITAL SKILLS AND LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY: A SCENARIO ANALYSIS BASED ON AN INTEGRATED STATISTICAL MODEL	297
Madraimov Xabibulla Madaminovich	
АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ СТРУКТУРЫ АКТИВОВ И ПАССИВОВ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫХ БАНКОВ УЗБЕКИСТАНА	303
Т.И. Бобакулов	
АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ ФИНАНСИРОВАНИЯ ВНЕШНЕТОРГОВУЮ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ КОМПАНИЙ С ДОКУМЕНТАРНЫМИ АККРЕДИТИВАМИ	308
М.Т. Ибодуллаева	
ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ИНТЕГРИРОВАННОГО МЕХАНИЗМА УПРАВЛЕНИЯ ОСНОВНЫМИ СРЕДСТВАМИ В УСЛОВИЯХ ИННОВАЦИОННОЙ ЭКОНОМИКИ	312
Мусаева Жамила Кароматовна	
ПРОБЛЕМНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИЯ КОНКУРЕНТОСПОСОБНОСТИ КОММЕРЧЕСКИХ БАНКОВ УЗБЕКИСТАНА	320
Ш.Т. Ибодуллаев	
THE IMPORTANCE OF STATE SUPPORT AND INVESTMENT POLICY IN ENSURING THE FINANCIAL STABILITY OF MASS MEDIA ENTERPRISES.....	325
Sharipova Shahlo Istamovna	
CURRENT STATUS AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS OF MOTOR TRANSPORT SERVICES	329
Rakhimov Azamat Hamrakulovich	
ПРИМЕНЕНИЕ ЭКСТРЕМАЛЬНЫХ МОДЕЛЕЙ В ОЦЕНКЕ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО ПОТЕНЦИАЛА ПРЕДПРИЯТИЯ.....	333
Мусаева Шоира Азимовна	
MULTI-FACTOR ECONOMETRIC MODELS OF WATER RESOURCE USE IN ENSURING REGIONAL ECONOMIC STABILITY.....	341
Xaitbaev Jasurbek Otaxanovich	
СОВЕРШЕНСТВОВАНИЕ ПРАКТИКИ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЯ ИНСТРУМЕНТОВ ЭЛЕКТРОННОГО ДОКУМЕНТООБОРОТА В КОММЕРЧЕСКИХ БАНКАХ.....	345
Шомуродов Равшан Турсункулович	
THE WAYS OF IMPROVING COMPETITIVENESS IN COMPANIES OF THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY	350
Buriev Khakim Toshimovich, Usmanov Ilxom Achilovich, Tolibov Abduazim Zoxid ugli	
MACROECONOMIC MODELS AND PROSPECTS OF TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY IN UZBEKISTAN	357
Sharipboyev Hasanboy Marks ugli, Sharipov Kuvondik Baxtiyorovich	
THE IMPACT OF HRM PRACTICES ON ACADEMIC STAFF WORK EFFICIENCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.....	366
Sultonboyeva Munira Bahodirovna, Sultanova Kamila Muktorali Kizi	
THE ECONOMIC ROLE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREEN ECONOMY IN UZBEKISTAN.....	374
Inatullayeva Intizor Jamshid qizi	
ОЦЕНКА ФИЗИОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ПОКАЗАТЕЛЕЙ КРУПНОГО РОГАТОГО СКОТА, ЗАВЕЗЁННОГО В РЕСПУБЛИКУ КАРАКАЛПАКСТАН ИЗ-ЗА РУБЕЖА, С ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕМ ЦИФРОВЫХ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ.....	378
Аскарова Нилуфар Бахтияровна	

COOPERATIVE MECHANISMS FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL TOURISM ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS.....	382
Shohruxbek Ruziyev	
IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY OF RESOURCE UTILIZATION IN METALLURGICAL ENTERPRISES: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND MODERN DEVELOPMENT TRENDS	393
Matkuliev Akbar Karimovich	
TAX INCENTIVES GRANTED TO ENTERPRISES LOCATED IN SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES	397
Torayeva Nafisa Odiljonovna	
REQUIREMENTS FOR TRANSITIONING TO ELECTRONIC BUSINESS AND CONDITIONS FOR DIGITALIZATION.....	402
Ismoilov Diyorbek Ismoiljon ugli	
DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE ENERGY AS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN ENSURING A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY AND ENERGY SECURITY	407
Ergash Bobobekov	
ANALYSIS OF WAGE DYNAMICS IN THE EXAMPLE OF SURKHANDARYA REGION BASED ON PANEL DATA.....	412
Abdunazarova Shahnoza Norquchqor kizi	
THE ROLE OF MARKETING STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING THE MARKET COMPETITIVENESS OF CARPET INDUSTRY ENTERPRISES	420
Arzieva Sevinch Shomurot kizi	
CONSUMER PROPERTIES OF FOOD PRODUCTS IN UZBEKISTAN: TRADITIONS, TRANSFORMATION AND NEW QUALITY STANDARDS.....	425
Gayrat Pardaev	
DIRECTIONS FOR STIMULATING ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE TAX SYSTEM.....	431
Yakhshimuratova Khasiyat Khudaybergenovna	
THE ROLE OF E-COMMERCE IN THE ECONOMY OF UZBEKISTAN AND ITS DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS	435
Kambaraliyeva Intizor Suxrobovna	
Aliyarov Olim Abdug'aparovich	
ISSUES OF IMPROVING PRE-TRIAL TAX DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISMS BASED ON INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE	439
Solihova Xumora Xasan kizi	
INCREASING THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF DIVIDEND POLICY IN UZBEKISTAN COMPANIES.....	446
Akmal Komiljonovich Shermukhamedov	
COMMUNITY-BASED HERITAGE TOURISM MODELS AS A TOOL FOR ENHANCING HANDICRAFT DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN	451
Olimjonova Farog'at Dilmurod qizi	
Amiriddinova Muslima Zayniddin qizi	

COMMUNITY-BASED HERITAGE TOURISM MODELS AS A TOOL FOR ENHANCING HANDICRAFT DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. This paper examines the history of national handicraft tourism in Uzbekistan and its close relationship with the country's cultural heritage and historical development. The study explores how traditional handicrafts can contribute to tourism development and how this process can be enhanced through increasing visitor flows to handicraft centers and craft-based tourism destinations.

Uzbekistan, as one of the key centers of the historic Silk Road, possesses a rich handicraft tradition that continues to play an important role in the national tourism industry. The paper analyzes how community-based heritage tourism models can be applied to the development of traditional crafts in Uzbekistan, with particular attention to the involvement of local communities, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the promotion of sustainable tourism.

In the context of globalization and rapid technological advancement, traditional crafts are no longer viewed merely as remnants of the past, but rather as dynamic cultural resources that contribute to economic development, social cohesion, and the strengthening of national identity. Uzbekistan has significant opportunities to enhance its position as a competitive cultural tourism destination by strengthening cooperation among local communities, artisans, tourism agencies, and public institutions, while simultaneously preserving its rich intangible cultural heritage for future generations.

Keywords: tourism, handicrafts, community-based tourism, silk weaving, embroidery, heritage tourism, Bukhara metal engraving, Khiva wood carving, Samarkand suzani, master classes, workshops.

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается история национального ремесленного туризма в Узбекистане и его тесная связь с культурным наследием и историей страны. Исследуется, каким образом традиционные ремёсла могут использоваться для развития туризма и как данный процесс может усиливаться по мере увеличения числа посетителей ремесленных центров и туристических направлений, основанных на ремесленных традициях.

Узбекистан, являясь одним из ключевых центров исторического Шёлкового пути, обладает богатым ремесленным наследием, которое и сегодня играет важную роль в развитии туристической отрасли страны. В работе анализируются возможности применения моделей общинного туризма, основанного на сохранении культурного наследия, для развития традиционных ремёсел в Узбекистане. Особое внимание уделяется участию местных сообществ, сохранению культурного наследия и развитию устойчивого туризма.

В условиях глобализации и интенсивного технологического развития традиционные ремёсла рассматриваются не как наследие прошлого, а как динамичный культурный ресурс, способствующий экономическому развитию, укреплению социальной сплочённости и сохранению национальной идентичности. Узбекистан обладает значительным потенциалом для укрепления своих позиций как конкурентоспособного направления культурного туризма посредством расширения сотрудничества между местными сообществами, мастерами-ремесленниками, туристическими агентствами и государственными институтами, а также сохранения богатого нематериального культурного наследия для будущих поколений.

Ключевые слова: туризм, ремёсла, общинный туризм, шелкоткачество, вышивка, культурный туризм, бухарская художественная чеканка по металлу, хивинская резьба по дереву, самаркандская сюзане, мастер-классы, ремесленные мастерские.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, tourism has experienced unprecedented growth and has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy (Richards, 2018). Alongside mass tourism, alternative forms of tourism such as cultural tourism, heritage tourism, and community-based tourism have gained increasing importance. These forms of tourism aim to preserve local traditions, cultural values, and identities while simultaneously creating economic opportunities for local communities.

Uzbekistan, located at the heart of the historic Silk Road, possesses a rich cultural and historical heritage. One of the most valuable components of this heritage is its traditional handicrafts, which reflect the nation's history, way of life, and artistic creativity. Crafts such as ceramics, silk weaving, embroidery, wood carving, and metal engraving have been practiced for centuries and continue to hold significant cultural and economic value today.

One effective approach to integrating handicrafts into tourism development is community-based heritage tourism. This model actively involves local communities in tourism activities, helping to preserve traditional skills, support small-scale entrepreneurship, and provide authentic experiences for visitors (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). Therefore, examining the contribution of community-based heritage tourism models to the promotion of handicrafts in Uzbekistan is both timely and relevant.

This research is important because it investigates handicrafts as a key component of cultural heritage tourism and sustainable development. Handicrafts not only produce artistic goods but also serve as a source of income, employment, and cultural identity for local populations. In Uzbekistan, numerous traditional crafts are practiced in rural regions, where tourism can contribute significantly to improving local livelihoods and supporting sustainable economic development.

The study was inspired by the growing interest of both domestic and international tourists in authentic cultural experiences. Tourists increasingly seek destinations where they can interact with local communities, observe traditional production processes, and purchase handmade products created by skilled artisans (Smith, 2009; Richards, 2018). Despite Uzbekistan's considerable potential, community-based handicraft tourism remains underutilized. This study seeks to contribute to both academic literature and practical policymaking by analyzing how community-based heritage tourism models can support the promotion and long-term sustainability of Uzbek handicrafts.

Aim and Objectives. The primary aim of this study is to examine how community-based heritage tourism models can be applied to the development of traditional handicrafts in Uzbekistan.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives were established:

- To examine the demographic characteristics and visitation patterns of tourists participating in handicraft tourism;
- To evaluate tourists' perceptions of Uzbek handicrafts in terms of quality, authenticity, and uniqueness;
- To analyze the relationship between tourists' perceptions and their purchasing behavior;
- To identify the challenges and opportunities associated with the development of community-based handicraft tourism in Uzbekistan.

Limitations of the Study. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the number of survey participants and interview respondents was limited due to time and accessibility constraints. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent all regions of Uzbekistan.

Second, the research focuses primarily on selected handicraft centers, including Rishtan and Margilan. Consequently, the results may not be fully generalizable to other regions of the country.

Finally, language barriers and the subjective nature of respondents' opinions may have influenced the accuracy of the collected information. Nevertheless, these limitations do not substantially diminish the value of the study. The findings provide a useful foundation for future research on community-based heritage tourism and the sustainable development of traditional handicrafts in Uzbekistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, handicraft tourism has attracted considerable attention not only in Uzbekistan but also worldwide. Scholars emphasize that handicrafts are not merely artistic products; they also contribute significantly to local socio-economic development by creating employment opportunities and supporting small-scale entrepreneurship (Richards, 2018).

According to Smith (2009), cultural tourism encourages visitors to explore local customs, traditions, and craftsmanship, thereby strengthening community identity and cultural sustainability. Similarly, Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) argue that cultural tourism enhances interactions between visitors and host communities, fostering cultural understanding and promoting sustainable tourism development. Traditional crafts establish

emotional and cultural connections between tourists and local residents, generating long-term benefits for tourism destinations. Such interactions increase visitor satisfaction and encourage repeat visitation.

Historians such as Kamr (2016) and Allworth (2014) note that handicrafts historically played a crucial role in facilitating cultural exchange along the Silk Road. Beyond their economic value, handicrafts served as symbols of cultural communication and social interaction among different civilizations. According to these scholars, traditional craftsmanship remains an essential component of the region's cultural continuity and identity.

Several researchers have specifically focused on Uzbek handicrafts. Alimova (2017) highlights the use of natural dyes, locally sourced materials, and symbolic patterns in traditional craft production. Muminova (2020) examines the evolution of silk weaving in Margilan and analyzes how modern production technologies have been integrated while preserving traditional weaving techniques. These studies demonstrate that regional specialization remains one of the defining characteristics of Uzbek handicrafts.

The *"ustoz–shogird"* (master–apprentice) system plays a vital role in preserving craftsmanship quality and cultural authenticity (Haydarov, 2022). This traditional knowledge-transfer mechanism ensures the continuity of skills, values, and artistic techniques across generations. Researchers agree that weakening this system may lead to a gradual loss of authenticity and traditional knowledge.

International recognition of Uzbek handicrafts as an element of intangible cultural heritage has further increased scholarly interest in this field. UNESCO and other cultural organizations emphasize the importance of traditional crafts in cultural diplomacy, heritage preservation, and sustainable development. Government development strategies also identify handicraft tourism as an important sector for enhancing Uzbekistan's competitiveness in the global tourism market and supporting rural entrepreneurship.

Researchers observe that handicraft development is closely linked to the availability of local natural resources. Textile weaving is concentrated in silk-producing regions, pottery flourishes in clay-rich areas such as Rishtan, leatherworking develops in livestock-producing regions, and wood carving is associated with areas rich in timber resources. This relationship explains the diversity and regional specialization of handicrafts throughout Uzbekistan.

Socio-economic reforms have also influenced the historical development of handicrafts. Reforms implemented during the reign of Amir Temur are widely recognized for strengthening craftsmanship, encouraging trade, and improving the organization of artisan activities. These reforms contributed to the institutional development of handicrafts and enhanced their economic and cultural significance.

Studies on cultural tourism promotion frequently highlight handicraft festivals and international exhibitions. Events such as the Rishtan Pottery Festival and the International Handicrafts Festival provide opportunities for cultural exchange, skills demonstration, and international recognition of Uzbek craftsmanship. These events attract scholars, artisans, and tourists from around the world, thereby strengthening the global visibility of Uzbekistan's cultural heritage.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Such an approach enables a comprehensive examination of handicraft tourism development in Uzbekistan by combining statistical data with real-life observations and experiences.

Data Collection Methods. The data used in this study were collected through the following methods:

Survey Method. A structured survey was conducted in 2025 involving 60 respondents. The participants included both domestic and international tourists, visitors to handicraft exhibitions, and individuals engaged in cultural tourism activities. The purpose of the survey was to identify tourists' motivations, measure their level of satisfaction, evaluate their awareness of Uzbek handicrafts, and assess their interest in purchasing handicraft products.

The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions designed to gather information on tourists' experiences, perceptions, and purchasing behavior related to handicraft tourism. The collected responses were subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify major trends and patterns.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and discusses the results of the surveys and interviews conducted as part of this study. The structure of this chapter follows the sequence outlined in the Research Methodology section.

In 2025, a survey was conducted among 60 participants, of which 57 responses were considered valid for analysis. The collected data were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) in accordance with the research objectives (RO1–RO4).

The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years (56.1%), followed by those aged 26–35 years (24.6%). This finding indicates a particularly high level of interest and participation in handicraft-related tourism among younger generations. The significant representation of respondents aged 26–35 years further suggests that young adults constitute an important segment of the handicraft tourism market.

A smaller proportion of respondents belonged to the 36–50 age group (14.0%), while participants under the age of 18 (1.8%) and over the age of 50 (3.5%) represented only a limited share of the sample. These results indicate that handicraft tourism in Uzbekistan is particularly attractive to younger and middle-aged visitors, who are generally more interested in cultural experiences, heritage-related activities, and authentic local products (Table 1).

Table 1
Age analyses¹

1. What is your age group?					
		Frequency	percent	Valid percent	cumulative percent
Valid	Under 18	1	1.8	1.8	1.8
	18–25	32	56.1	56.1	57.9
	26–35	14	24.6	24.6	82.5
	36–50	8	14.0	14.0	96.5
	above 50	2	3.5	3.5	100.0
	Total	57	100.0	100.0	

The gender distribution of respondents shows a higher participation rate among female respondents (61.4%) compared to male respondents (38.6%). This indicates that women demonstrated greater interest in handicraft products and related tourism activities. This tendency may be associated with their stronger engagement in cultural design, shopping behavior, artistic preferences, and heritage-based tourism experiences (Table 2).

Table 2
Gives date on our participant's gender²

What is your gender?		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	cumulative percent
Valid	Male	22	38.6	38.6	38.6
	Female	35	61.4	61.4	100.0
	Total	57	100.0	100.0	

The second table shows that respondents visited several regions of Uzbekistan for handicraft-related tourism. Samarkand was identified as the most attractive destination, accounting for 26.3% of responses. It was followed by the Fergana Valley (22.8%) and Bukhara (21.1%), both of which are well known for their rich craft traditions and cultural heritage.

Tashkent (17.5%) and Khiva (12.3%) were also mentioned by respondents, although to a relatively lesser extent. These findings highlight Samarkand's important role as a center of cultural and handicraft tourism, while also confirming the significance of traditional artisan centers across Uzbekistan (Table 3).

Table 3
Visiting handicraft-related tourism³

3. Which regions of Uzbekistan have you visited for handicraft-related tourism?					
		Frequency	percent	Valid percent	cumulative percent
Valid	Fergana valley	13	22.8	22.8	22.8
	Bukhara	12	21.1	21.1	43.9
	Khiva	7	12.3	12.3	56.1
	Samarkand	15	26.3	26.3	82.5
	Tashkent	10	17.5	17.5	100.0
	Total	57	100.0	100.0	

¹ author's development

² author's development

³ author's development

The next table shows that more than half of the respondents (54.4%) reported visiting handicraft markets or workshops occasionally, while 29.8% stated that they visit such places frequently. Only 15.8% of respondents indicated that they visit them rarely.

These results demonstrate a generally positive level of engagement with handicraft markets and suggest a stable demand for craft-related tourism experiences (Table 4).

Table 4

	Descriptive Statistics ⁴				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
5. How would you rank Uzbekistan's handicrafts?	57	3	5	4.68	.602
6. Where did you first learn about Uzbek handicrafts?	57	1	6	2.79	1.655
7. In your opinion, what makes Uzbek handicrafts unique?	57	1	5	2.54	1.513
Valid N (listwise)	57				

Relationship Between Perception and Purchase Behavior (RO3). The correlation analysis indicates a weak positive relationship between tourists' overall evaluation of Uzbek handicrafts and their perception of uniqueness ($r = 0.251$, $p > 0.05$). In addition, the relationship between perceptions of Uzbek handicrafts (Q5 and Q7) and purchase or recommendation behavior (Q11) was found to be very weak and statistically insignificant ($p > 0.05$).

These findings suggest that although tourists generally value Uzbek handicrafts highly, positive perception alone does not necessarily lead to actual purchasing or recommendation behavior. Other factors, such as price, accessibility, product availability, and tourist awareness, may also influence buying decisions.

Overall, the results show a low positive association between the evaluation of handicrafts and the perception of uniqueness ($r = 0.251$, $p = 0.060$) (Table 5).

Table 5

		Correlations ⁵		
		5. How would you rank Uzbekistan's handicrafts?	7. In your opinion, what makes Uzbek handicrafts unique?	11. Have you personally purchased or recommended Uzbek handicrafts to tourists?
5. How would you rank Uzbekistan's handicrafts?	pearson correlation	1	.251	.060
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.060	.657
	N	57	57	57
7. In your view, what distinguishes Uzbek handicrafts ?	pearson correlation	.251	1	.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.060		.696
	N	57	57	57
11. Have you personally purchased or recommended Uzbek handicrafts to tourists?	pearson correlation	.060	.053	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.657	.696	
	N	57	57	57

Low correlations were found between tourists' perceptions and their purchase or recommendation behavior ($r = 0.060$ – 0.053 , $p > 0.05$). This suggests that although tourists generally have a positive attitude toward Uzbek handicrafts, such perceptions do not directly translate into purchasing or recommendation behavior. These findings indicate opportunities for strengthening marketing initiatives and customer engagement strategies to enhance the conversion of positive perceptions into actual consumer actions.

RO4: Investment in Heritage Tourism and Visitor Participation. The survey results indicate that tourists consider handicrafts to be one of the most important factors attracting visitors to cultural destinations (Mean = 4.79). Community-based activities also contributed significantly to enhancing the overall travel experience (Mean = 4.67).

⁴ author's development

⁵ author's development

The level of interaction with heritage sites, local communities, and handicraft activities was moderate (Mean = 1.51 out of 3), reflecting differences in the degree of visitor participation across destinations and activities.

Correlation analysis produced the following results:

- Significance of handicrafts and community-based initiatives: $r = 0.539$, $p = 0.001$ (statistically significant);
- Visitor engagement and the perceived importance of handicrafts: $r = 0.104$ (not statistically significant).

These findings confirm that community-based heritage tourism contributes positively to tourist satisfaction and supports the promotion of handicrafts. The results are consistent with the core principles of Community-Based Heritage Tourism (CBHT), which emphasize local participation, cultural preservation, and meaningful visitor experiences.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the contribution of national handicrafts to heritage and community-based tourism in Uzbekistan, as well as tourists' perceptions, visiting behavior, and interactions with local artisans. The research combined survey data collected in 2025 from 60 respondents, field observations, and statistical analysis conducted using SPSS.

The findings indicate that handicrafts are not only valuable cultural and historical assets but also an important component of Uzbekistan's modern tourism industry and creative economy. According to the survey results, the majority of respondents were young and economically active tourists aged between 18 and 35 years, suggesting significant potential for the future development of handicraft-based tourism. Furthermore, most respondents perceived Uzbek handicrafts as highly valuable, authentic, and important in attracting tourists, particularly to rural areas.

The study also revealed that community-based tourism projects involving local artisans contribute positively to tourists' overall experiences. A positive relationship was identified between the perceived importance of handicrafts and visitor satisfaction, confirming that handicrafts play an important role in heritage tourism and visitor experiences (UNESCO, 2019).

The SPSS analysis provided empirical evidence supporting the research objectives:

RO1 (Tourist Demographics and Visiting Behavior):

The findings revealed that tourists frequently visit handicraft markets and workshops. More than half of the respondents reported visiting such places occasionally, while nearly one-third visited them regularly. This demonstrates a sustained interest in experiential cultural tourism.

RO2 (Tourists' Perceptions of Uzbek Handicrafts):

Descriptive statistics showed a high overall evaluation of Uzbek handicrafts (Mean = 4.68), indicating strong positive perceptions regarding their quality, authenticity, and cultural value.

RO3 (Perceptions and Purchasing Behavior):

Although respondents highly valued Uzbek handicrafts, no significant relationship was found between positive perceptions and actual purchasing or recommendation behavior. This suggests that appreciation alone may not automatically translate into economic engagement. Improved accessibility, personalized marketing approaches, and enhanced promotional strategies may help strengthen consumer participation.

RO4 (Participation and Contribution to Heritage Tourism):

A statistically significant positive correlation was identified between the perceived importance of handicrafts as tourist attractions and enhanced travel experiences resulting from community-based projects ($r = 0.539$, $p < 0.001$). This finding provides strong evidence that handicrafts can contribute meaningfully to sustainable tourism development.

Practical Implications: The "Vodiy Gavharlari" Project. The "Vodiy Gavharlari" project can be considered a practical example of applying research findings to real-world tourism development. As a community-based digital platform, the project connects artisans, tourists, investors, and cultural institutions within a unified ecosystem.

The project has the potential to address several issues identified during the survey by:

- Strengthening interaction between tourists and artisans through live workshops and experiential activities;
- Transforming cultural appreciation into economic value through personalized handicraft products and direct purchasing opportunities;
- Supporting artisans through microfinance mechanisms, grants, and access to international markets;
- Promoting cultural preservation while encouraging sustainable economic development.

By combining heritage conservation with modern technologies, the project demonstrates how handicraft tourism can generate sustainable income opportunities while preserving the authenticity of traditional cultural practices.

In conclusion, handicraft tourism represents a valuable instrument for preserving cultural heritage, supporting local communities, and enhancing Uzbekistan's tourism competitiveness. Strengthening community participation, improving market accessibility, and integrating digital technologies into tourism initiatives will further contribute to the sustainable development of the sector.

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