*Article*

# Reflections of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi in Light of Visitor Comments

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## Abstract

*This study aims to reveal how intangible cultural heritage is perceived and experienced through visitors' comments about the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi on the TripAdvisor platform. This research attempts to explain the process of making sense of the tomb experiences within the framework of Social Representation Theory, developed by Serge Moscovici (1988). The research was conducted using document analysis, a qualitative research design. 119 online visitor comments collected between May 26 and June 30, 2025, were analyzed using MAXQDA software. Based on the data obtained, eight main themes were identified: information and promotion, services and infrastructure, spiritual and emotional experience, accessibility and transportation, visitor satisfaction, physical space and architecture, cultural and historical awareness, and criticism and suggestions. The findings indicate that visitors consider the tomb not merely a place of worship, but a multidimensional experiential space surrounded by aesthetic, historical, cultural, and emotional meanings. It demonstrates that the shrine is positioned in individuals' mental representations as a social object integrated with identity, belonging, and spirituality. In this context, the study reveals the decisive role played by online user narratives in the collective meaning-making and social construction of cultural heritage.*

*Keywords:* Intangible Cultural Heritage, Khoja Ahmet Yesevi Tomb, Social Representation Theory, Experience, TripAdvisor.

## Introduction

The ability of tribes and nations to achieve civilization depends on their ability to evaluate the world from a multidimensional and holistic perspective. This multifaceted approach requires coexistence and harmony of state, politics, society, culture, religion, science, and art. It has been observed that the harmony achieved between culture, science, and state influences how societies perceive the world, paving the way for the formation of universal values, and thus, leading to a stronger position in the historical process (Çelepi, 2016). In this context, all material and spiritual accumulation passed from generation to generation is considered heritage. Many elements, such as the natural environment, indigenous and wildlife elements, historically significant battlefields, traditional lifestyles, food and beverage culture, folkloric practices, language, literature, music, art, and sports, fall within this scope (Deniz & Aydın, 2022).

As of 2012, the Republic of Kazakhstan has registered three elements as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These elements are the Tamgali Stone, the Silk Road route, and the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmet Yesevi. It is known that as of the same year, 12 other sites within the borders of Kazakhstan were also nominated for the World Heritage List (Syzdykova et al., 2018). In this context, the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmet Yesevi, located in Turkestan, Kazakhstan, was built between 1389 and 1405 during the Timur period. Ahmed Yesevi's teachings played a significant role in the deep devotion of Turkish society to Islam. Through this teaching, the Turks developed an understanding emphasizing universal values such as love, peace, and tolerance, centering humanity and God. The tomb, one of the most magnificent structures in Central Asia, has undergone various restoration efforts at different periods. Consequently, the area where the tomb is located was designated a "Historical and Cultural Protection Zone" in 1989. Restoration activities were initiated by the Republic of Turkey in 1992. Following the completion of the renovation process, the tomb was inaugurated in October 2000, on the 1500th anniversary of the founding of the city of Turkestan. Ultimately, the Tomb of Khoja Ahmet Yesevi was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2003 (Ahmet Yesevi University, 2015).

This study analyzed user comments regarding the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi on the TripAdvisor platform using the MAXQDA program. One hundred nineteen comments were analyzed between May 26 and June 30, 2025. The study sought to understand how individuals perceived and experienced the tomb. The study explored the process of interpreting these experiences within the framework of the Social Representation Theory developed by Serge Moscovici. This study is unique in that it examines the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi, which holds great religious and

cultural significance, within the framework of intangible cultural heritage through visitor comments. A national and international literature review revealed no studies addressing the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi in this context. In this respect, the study fills a gap in the literature. It offers a different perspective on the role of public narratives shared in digital environments in the visibility of intangible cultural heritage.

## Conceptual Framework

*Intangible Cultural Heritage*

Heritage is a valuable element passed down from the past to the present. Furthermore, it is considered a concept that forms the collective memory of societies and reflects their level of civilization, encompassing knowledge and expertise inherited through lifestyle and beliefs (Isa et al., 2018). In this context, intangible cultural heritage encompasses all non-material expressions of culture and represents both the richness of humanity's living heritage and a fundamental tool for preserving cultural diversity (Lenzerini, 2011). The value of this heritage manifests itself in the multifaceted nature of the knowledge, experience, and skills transmitted between generations (Sullivan, 2015). In this regard, knowledge's social and economic value, particularly for minority groups and mainstream social structures, is another dimension that deserves special attention (Petronela, 2016).

With the adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2003, the protection of cultural traditions has become a priority internationally (Alivizatou-Barakou et al., 2017). In this convention, intangible cultural heritage encompasses practices and representations accepted by societies and individuals as their own cultural heritage and compatible with universal principles of human rights, equality, sustainability, and mutual respect among cultural communities. These practices are evaluated alongside the necessary knowledge, skills, tools, objects, artefacts, and places. Furthermore, such cultural heritage is constantly reproduced by societies interacting with their environment and historical context. Thus, it provides individuals and communities with a sense of identity and continuity, contributing to preserving cultural diversity and developing human creativity (Van Zanten, 2004).

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) elements have strong historical ties to local communities and regions (Yu, 2008). These elements are critical in creating new scenarios in today's globalized and competitive environment. Protecting intangible cultural heritage is even more vital today, especially as cultural diversity and identity are increasingly eroded, lifestyles are becoming more standardized, production

facilities are relocated to different regions, and community structures begin to disintegrate (Cominelli & Greffe, 2012). This type of heritage is inherently fragile and requires human intervention. Like all cultural assets, intangible heritage is the product of a dynamic process; its emergence, development, continuity, and potential extinction are shaped over time (Liu, 2022). Furthermore, intangible cultural heritage plays a decisive role in the sustainable development of cultural tourism by enriching tourists' cultural experiences and contributing to the preservation of local traditions and identities (Wasela, 2023). In this context, Table 1 below categorizes intangible cultural heritage elements.

*Table 1. Classification of Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements*

| Intangible Cultural Heritage | |
|---|---|
| ✓ Performing arts | ✓ Building a single structure/group |
| ✓ Tradition and culture | ✓ Buildings/monuments |
| ✓ Oral traditions | ✓ Technical infrastructure |
| ✓ Fine arts/crafts | ✓ Documentation and registration |
| ✓ Knowledge, practice, and living heritage | ✓ Place of worship |

*Source: Mustafa & Saleh (2017).*

Intangible cultural heritage elements of artistic quality are considered within the scope of visual arts and reflect the aesthetic beauty of symmetry and balance, harmony and unity, and the contrast of light and shadow through aesthetic elements such as form, pattern, color, line, and tone. Viewing such works of art contributes to acquiring knowledge and creates aesthetic pleasure and an emotional experience in the viewer, allowing them to internalize the information more comfortably and pleasantly. Therefore, visual aesthetic elements directly contribute to the work's artistic value. Furthermore, they enable the formation of common psychological responses to the perception of beauty among individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, geographic regions, and cultural backgrounds (Chen, 2022).

*Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi*

Ahmed Yesevi was born in the second half of the 11th century in Sayram, located on the Karasu branch of the Shayar River, which flows into the Tarem River in Western Turkestan (Aslanapa, 1995). Ahmed Yesevi, who played an influential role in the Turks embracing Islam, expressed Islamic thought in Turkish poetry, making significant contributions to the spread of this faith among the Turkic communities of Central Asia. Initially influential in the Seyhun-Tashkent region, the Yesevi order eventually spread through the dervishes to Transoxiana, Khorasan, Azerbaijan, and

Anatolia. Ahmed Yesevi's spiritual and intellectual influence was decisive in the city of Yesi, now known as Turkestan, becoming an important religious center in the 12th century (Koçu, 1994). Synthesizing ancient Turkish beliefs with Islamic understanding, Yesevi pioneered the development of a system of thought based on values such as love of God, tolerance, humanity, and wisdom, which form the foundation of Turkish Sufism. Considered the first Turkish Sufi, Khoja Ahmed Yesevi was buried in Yesi after his death. His small tomb, built in the 12th century, was later rebuilt as a complex by order of Emir Timur. This structure has been considered an important place of pilgrimage in almost every period from its construction to the present day (Kuru, 2021).

Following the death of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi, a modest mausoleum was built in his memory. This structure is considered to have a square plan with sides approximately 10 meters long. Over time, the mausoleum attracted considerable public interest, becoming an important center of faith and hosting numerous visitors. However, it is known that the structure was looted and destroyed at various times throughout history. The structure's fate, however, changed radically when Timur visited the mausoleum. Timur ordered the construction of a monumental structure at this sacred site, reflecting the architectural style of the time, and personally took the project under his patronage. Timur handed oversight of the construction process to Ubeydullah Sadr and entrusted the architect to Khoja Husayn Shirazi, one of the renowned masters of the period. Although much of the structure was completed, construction activities were left unfinished after Timur died in 1405 (Özbey, 2020).

According to accounts of the tomb's construction, it is believed that Khoja Ahmed Yesevi's miracles continued even after his death. It is also said that he appeared in a dream to the great Turkish ruler Emir Timur, who lived approximately two centuries after him, and gave him the glad tidings of the conquest of Bukhara. Following this dream, Timur embarked on an expedition, conquered Bukhara, and headed to Yesi to visit Yesevi's tomb. Following this visit in 1396, Timur ordered the construction of the mausoleum, and this task was assigned to Khoja Hüseyin Shirazi, a renowned architect from the city of Yesi. However, each attempt failed, and the structure was observed to be continually collapsing. Timur then stood guard over the structure and witnessed the destruction being carried out by an ox. Struggling to understand this, Timur again saw Yesevi in his dream, who informed him that a mausoleum for his teacher, Arslan Baba, should be built first, followed by his own. Accordingly, the mausoleum of Arslan Baba in Otırar was built first, and the Khoja Ahmet Yesevi mausoleum began later. The construction process took approximately two years. At the end of this process, a mosque, a dervish lodge, a kitchen, and various

service buildings were added to the tomb. A large area surrounding the tomb was also incorporated into this structure, and revenues from irrigation channels were allocated as foundation revenue. Today, Kazakhs consider visiting the tomb of Khoja Ahmet Yesevi a sacred act of worship. After spending the night at the Arslan Baba tomb, they visit the tomb of Ahmet Yesevi during the day (Nalbant, 2012: 46-48).

In Sufism, the age of 63, the age at which the Prophet Muhammad passed away, is considered a symbol of spiritual maturity and perfection. In this context, the forty-day retreat of believers aged 63 to purify themselves from worldly desires is considered an important practice for self-discipline. In line with this understanding, the underground space where Khoja Ahmet Yesevi lived in seclusion from the age of 63 is located a short distance from the tomb and later became a museum with additional structures constructed on it. The museum displays a map showing the geographical regions where Yesevi's scholarly influence spread, and special areas for worship are designated for visitors. Immediately adjacent to this structure is the house where Yesevi lived before retreating underground, which has been converted into a museum and opened to the public. The museum displays personal belongings of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi, as well as various tools related to daily life during the period, such as a water well, a horse-drawn carriage, grinding stones, and a spinning wheel. Further from these two structures is the bathhouse used by Yesevi's disciples (Türk, 2022).

The Khoja Ahmet Yesevi Mausoleum, the largest mausoleum within Kazakhstan, also stands out as one of the most visited holy sites in the region. It is noteworthy that since its construction, the mausoleum has been considered an important religious center in Turkestan and has become a popular pilgrimage destination among Muslims. Among Kazakhs, the belief that three visits to the shrine of the late Khoja Ahmet Yesevi in Turkestan are equivalent to a pilgrimage to Mecca has become widespread. It is interpreted as a strong indicator of the sacred value and respect the Khoja Ahmet Yesevi Mausoleum holds in the eyes of the people. Furthermore, a visit to the Khoja Ahmet Yesevi Mausoleum is commonly referred to as a "small pilgrimage," and Turkestan is thus known as the "Second Mecca" (Zholdassuly & Baızhanova, 2022).

*Social Representation Theory*

Developed by Serge Moscovici in the early 1960s as a strong continuation of the French sociological tradition, the theory of social representations has become one of the foundational theories in social psychology (Rateau et al., 2011). Social representations relate to the collective cognitions, common sense, and thought systems of communities or groups of people and are always linked to social, cultural, or

symbolic objects. Simply put, they are considered representations of something. However, no single, definitive definition exists among proponents of this concept, and Moscovici has offered various definitions (Höijer, 2011). Moscovici (1988) defined social representations as stocks of thought that provide individuals with meaning and coherence through the thought contents that arise in daily life and the connections between these contents in areas such as religious beliefs and political views. These representations enable individuals to classify objects and individuals, compare and explain behaviors, and view them as objective parts of the social environment. He also emphasized that social representations exist in individuals' minds and the world and can therefore be analyzed separately.

The Theory of Social Representations necessitates the analysis of anonymous realities as a critical step in understanding social structure. Representations are in constant interaction and communication with each other. While they sometimes oppose one another, they also transform by adapting. As a result of this process, some representations disappear and reappear in new forms. Sometimes, one representation may gain dominance over others due to the need of individuals or communities to explain a person or entity consistently and coherently. However, a change in this hierarchical structure among representations, or the threat of the disappearance of a particular thought image, leads to the disruption and upheaval of the entire social order (Öner, 2022).

The formation of social representations is explained through two fundamental processes. The first process simplifies, summarizes, and structures complex information schematically. For example, making general judgments about a particular individual and the group to which that person belongs, or having negative experiences in a foreign country, shaping the general perception of that country, are examples of this process. The second process involves an individual's effort to internalize new information by associating it with their mental structure. Previously acquired knowledge plays a decisive role in perceiving and evaluating new experiences. For example, if a country frequently receives negative media coverage, the behavior of individuals from that country will likely be evaluated negatively. In this case, pre-existing negative representations tend to be reinforced as they encounter similar stimuli (Minibas, Poussard & Bastounis, 2008). Regarding this topic, Üzelgün (2015) states that there are three basic approaches in studies on social representations. These are:

*Structural Approach*: This is the first approach to define social representations within the general epistemological framework of psychology (Abric, 1993; Guimelli, 1993). According to this perspective, representations comprise peripheral elements

organized around a stable core. The core serves as the fundamental function of giving meaning to the representation, holding other concepts and images together, and defining the representation. At the same time, peripheral elements are semantic components that, like the electrons of an atom, confer relative dynamism and flexibility on the representation through change and interaction. Thus, while the core preserves the essence of the representation, peripheral elements adapt to environmental changes, enabling the flexibility of representations within the social context (Wagner et al., 1996).

*Genetic Approach*: It transforms social consensus into variation and emphasizes differences between individuals and social positions (Doise, 1993; Clemence et al., 2014). This approach, which examines individual differences and systematic variations in symbolic and social relations shaped by powerful social and institutional influences within the framework of electrical physics, has been used to explain the logic or organizing principles of this field of representations. For this purpose, it utilizes quantitative methods such as correspondence analysis, focusing on the societal level of analysis (e.g., social identities, norms, and laws). Thus, the genetic approach contributes to understanding the dynamic structure of social representations and their diversity within social contexts (Doise et al., 1999).

*Dialogical Approach*: This approach relies heavily on qualitative methods such as face-to-face interviews, group discussions, media and communication analyses, and narrative analysis. The social object highlighted in this approach is at the center of the intersubjective relationship. In other words, interactions between at least two subjects can define the representation process. The basic analytical unit is conceptualized as a triangle with the represented object at one corner and the Ego and Alter (the other) at the other two corners (Markova, 2003).

## Methodology

*Purpose and Importance of Research*

The primary objective of this study is to understand how the intangible cultural heritage of the Khoja Ahmed Yesevi Mausoleum is perceived and experienced through visitor reviews shared on TripAdvisor and to reveal visitors' opinions about the mausoleum. A conceptual framework was developed by reviewing relevant literature per the study's objectives. One hundred nineteen visitor reviews were obtained using TripAdvisor (Chua & Banerjee, 2013), which is considered the world's largest and most popular travel guidance platform. This study, based on social representation theory, examines visitors' individual narratives to analyze how the spiritual, religious, cultural, and social experiences experienced at the mausoleum are reflected in the

context of intangible cultural heritage. The originality of this study lies in analyzing a site of high cultural and religious significance, the Khoja Ahmed Yesevi Mausoleum, within the context of intangible cultural heritage through visitor reviews. A review of existing national and international literature on the subject revealed no studies evaluating the Khoja Ahmed Yesevi Mausoleum within the context of intangible cultural heritage. In this respect, the study not only fills the gap in the literature but also offers a new perspective on how public narratives in digital media affect the visibility of intangible cultural heritage.

*Design of Research*

This study was conducted using document analysis, a qualitative research design. Comments shared by visitors regarding the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi were examined, and through these comments, how intangible cultural heritage is perceived and experienced was analyzed. Document analysis aligns with the purpose of this research because it allows for the systematic examination of existing written sources. Karppinen & Moe (2012) noted the value of document analysis in their study. The authors stated that data obtained from books, articles, and other documents can be equivalent to information obtained by researchers through interviews. They also noted that the direct involvement of the researcher in methods such as interviews and observations can influence participants' responses. In contrast, they emphasized that document analysis conducted on pre-produced texts provides more objective and uninfluenced data. For these reasons, the document analysis method was chosen for this study.

*Universe and Sample of Research*

The population of this study consists of all visitors who have visited the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi and shared their experiences in writing. The study examined all user comments about the tomb without any specific sampling. In this context, the study accessed the entire population, and all these comments were evaluated as data. Because all comments were publicly available on digital platforms, they were included in the analysis directly and without restrictions.

*Data Collection Tools of Research*

Research data was collected from TripAdvisor's digital travel platform between May 26, 2025, and June 30, 2025. Visitor comments regarding the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi were included in the study from among the platform's publicly available content. The comments were considered a qualitative data source because

they were created in a natural context and provided direct access to user experiences. No intervention was made during the data collection process; only content already published on the platform was used.

*Data Collection and Analysis of Research*

As part of the research, 119 reviews obtained from TripAdvisor were analyzed using the MAXQDA program. The MAXQDA program was chosen for its comprehensive nature, systematic coding process, ability to structure themes, and visual representation of data. All themes obtained were analyzed separately and evaluated in detail following the coding process. The research sought answers to the following questions:

- ✓ How do visitors describe their experiences at the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi?
- ✓ How are visitors' perceptions of the tomb shaped within the context of intangible cultural heritage elements?
- ✓ How are the physical space, architectural features, and the tomb's symbolic value reflected in visitor reviews?
- ✓ What are visitors' opinions on accessibility, transportation, and infrastructure services to the tomb?
- ✓ What are the informative and promotional evaluations in visitors' reviews on TripAdvisor?
- ✓ What criticisms and suggestions do visitors express?

## Results

As part of the research, 119 visitor reviews of the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi, shared on TripAdvisor, were systematically analyzed using the MAXQDA program. This section analyzes the user reviews' emotional, cognitive, and experiential elements across themes and presents detailed multidimensional data that informs the emergence of social representations of tomb visitation.
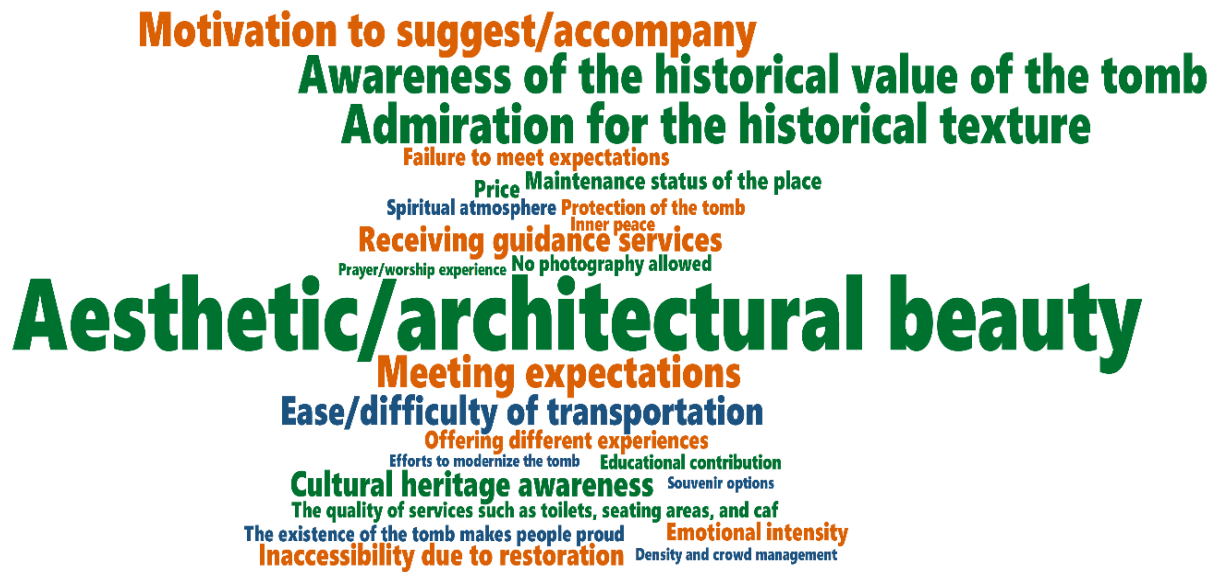
*Figure 1. Code Cloud for the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi*

In this study, Code Cloud was initially created using the MAXQDA program. Figure 1 shows the 25 most frequently expressed statements by participants. The most frequently occurring statements were aesthetic/architectural beauty (34), admiration for the historical fabric (17), awareness of the tomb's historical value (16), motivation to accompany a suggestion (14), meeting expectations (13), ease/difficulty of transportation (11), awareness of cultural heritage (9), and receiving guidance services (9). The abundance of statements such as aesthetic/architectural beauty, admiration for the historical fabric, and awareness of the tomb's historical value is striking in this cloud. It suggests that visitors perceive the tomb as a religious site and an artistic and historical asset. Furthermore, statements such as motivation to accompany a suggestion and meeting expectations highlight social and cultural motivations, demonstrating that the tomb holds individual and collective significance for visitors.
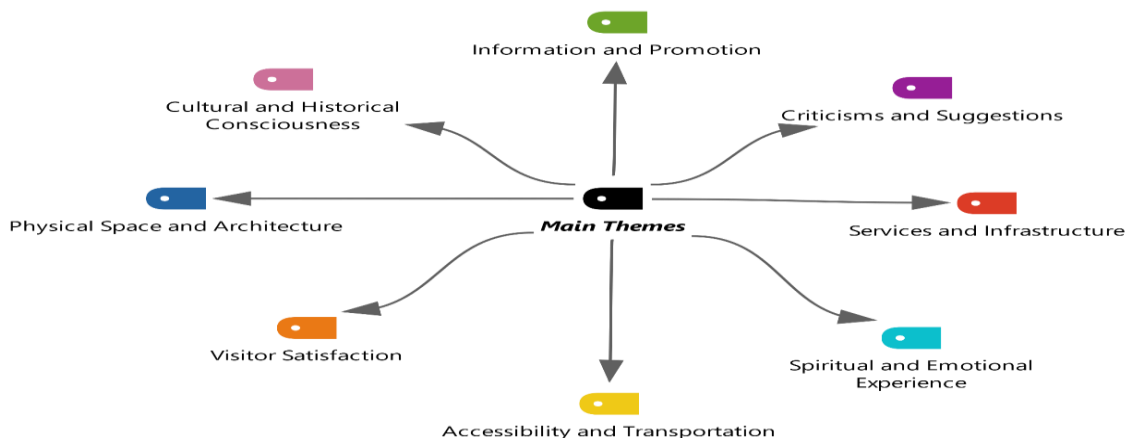


*Figure 2. Main Themes Regarding the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi*

In this part of the research, themes were created to identify visitors' opinions about the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi and systematically analyze the data. Figure 2 below visualizes the eight main themes that emerged from the analysis. These themes were information and promotion, criticisms and suggestions, services and infrastructure, spiritual and emotional experience, accessibility and transportation, visitor satisfaction, physical space and architecture, and cultural and historical consciousness. This classification demonstrates the multidimensional nature of visitor comments. Based on these themes, it becomes clear that visiting the tomb is a spiritual experience and a multidimensional process involving spatial, information-based, service-oriented, and historical awareness. These themes reveal that visitors' relationship with the tomb has rational and emotional dimensions.
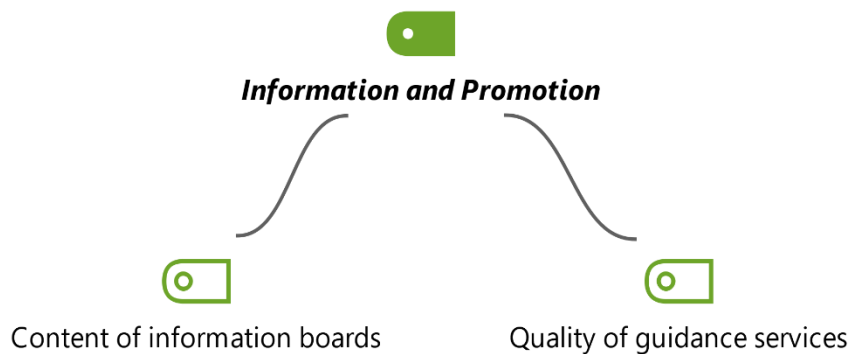


*Figure 3. Subcodes Related to Information and Promotion*

Figure 3 visualizes the subcodes related to the theme of information and promotion. Of the 119 TripAdvisor reviews included in the analysis, only one participant commented on this theme. The visitor stated that the information boards within the area were sufficient and expressed satisfaction with the guidance services they received. This finding demonstrates that not only the spatial presence but also the information and narrative content presented in a tourism destination have a decisive impact on the visitor experience.
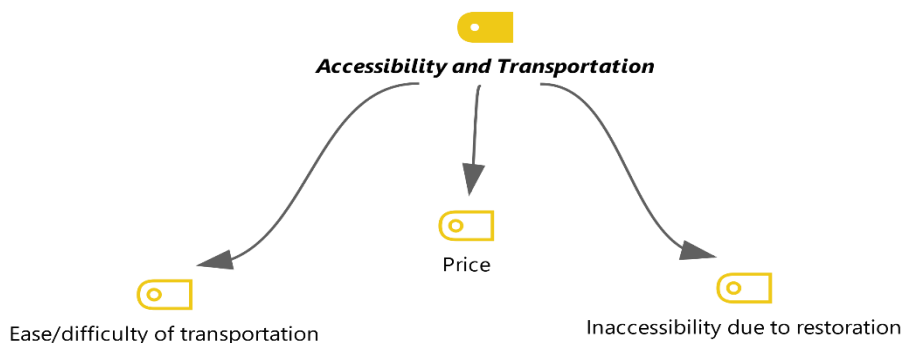


*Figure 4. Subcodes Related to Accessibility and Transportation*

Figure 4 shows the subcodes related to accessibility and transportation in visitor comments. The most frequently mentioned theme was ease/difficulty of access, and 11 comments addressed this issue. The data revealed that accessibility varies depending on the visitor's location. However, most visitors noted that access to the tomb was challenging, yet the structure's architectural splendor and historical fabric were sufficient to justify this effort. It demonstrates that aesthetic and spiritual expectations can overshadow access barriers in cultural heritage sites.

Furthermore, the tomb's closure to visitors during specific periods due to restoration work has led to some disappointment. Participants' perceptions of the tomb's entrance fee also varied. Three visitors stated that there is a fee, while two stated that there is no fee. This difference suggests a potential inconsistency in information systems and is considered a factor that can directly impact visitor satisfaction.
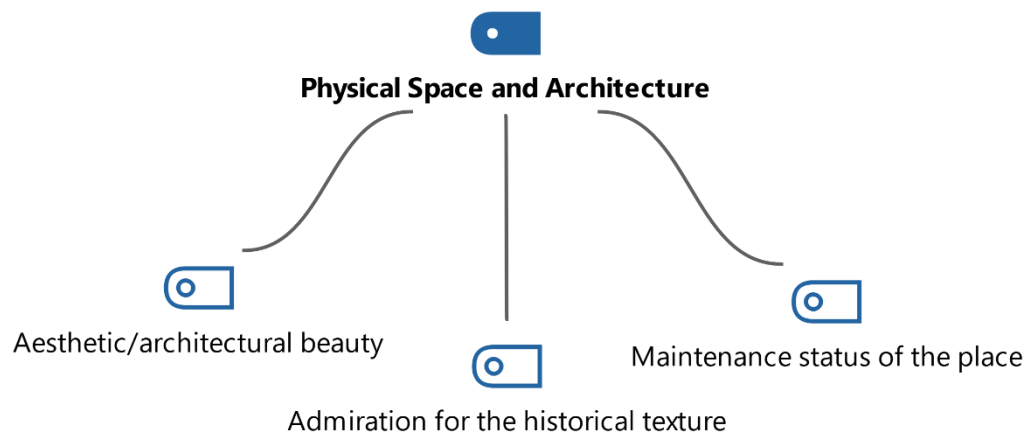
**Physical Space and Architecture**

Aesthetic/architectural beauty

Admiration for the historical texture

Maintenance status of the place

*Figure 5. Subcodes Related to Physical Space and Architecture*

Figure 5 is a visual that combines subcodes related to physical space and architecture. Visitors frequently expressed their admiration for the tomb's aesthetic/architectural structure. The structure's grandeur, ornamentation, symmetry, and historical texture evoked aesthetic pleasure and admiration in visitors. The tomb's cleanliness and state of maintenance were also prominent factors in architectural evaluations. It demonstrates that the tomb's aesthetic value as a cultural heritage also makes a strong impression.
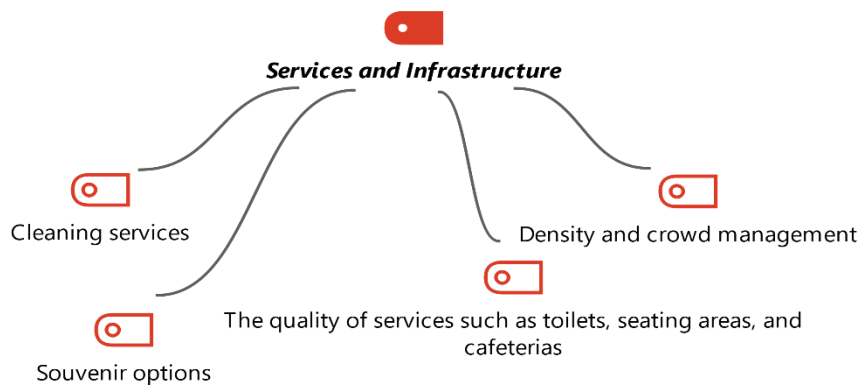
*Figure 6. Subcodes Related to Services and Infrastructure*

Figure 6 displays the subcodes under the theme of services and infrastructure. The comments analyzed indicate that physical infrastructure services such as restrooms, parking, and recreation areas are sufficient. On the other hand, some visitors indicated that the facilities were adequate. It suggests inconsistencies in service quality and a need to improve standards in such spaces.



*Figure 7. Subcodes for Visitor Satisfaction*

Figure 7 shows the subcodes for visitor satisfaction. Examining these codes reveals that the majority were generally satisfied with their visit to the shrine, were spiritually fulfilled, and would like to visit again. However, there were also a small number of visitors whose expectations were not met or dissatisfied due to service disruptions. This figure clearly demonstrates that satisfaction varies depending on individual experiences and expectations.
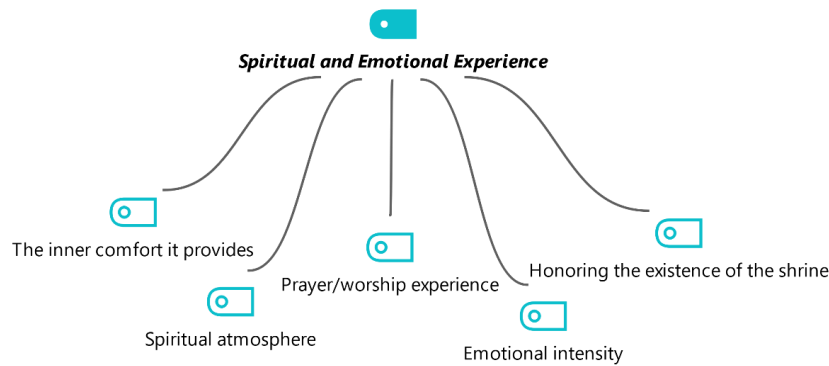
*Figure 8. Subcodes Related to Spiritual and Emotional Experience*

Figure 8 presents the subcodes under the theme of spiritual and emotional experience. Visiting the shrine appears to have a substantial spiritual and emotional impact on visitors. Some visitors shared experiences of prayer, inner peace, and spiritual fulfillment, while others described the visit as one of the most special moments of their lives. These comments demonstrate that the shrine is not only a historical structure but also a powerful spiritual center.
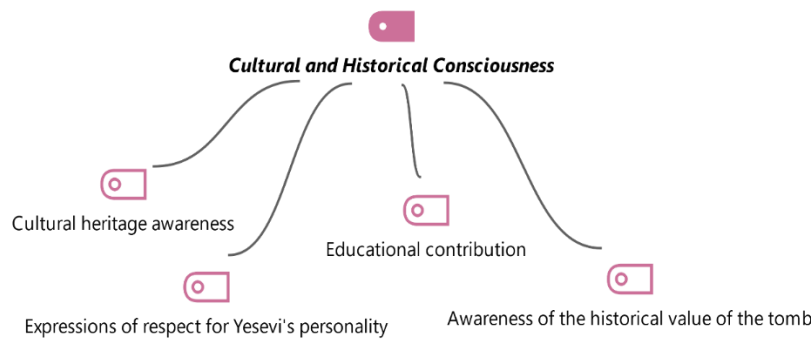


*Figure 9. Subcodes Related to Cultural and Historical Consciousness*

Figure 9 shows the subcodes related to cultural and historical awareness. These subcodes indicate that visitors know the tomb's historical significance and emphasize its need to be preserved as cultural heritage. It demonstrates that visitors approach the tomb with not only a spiritual but also a historical responsibility.
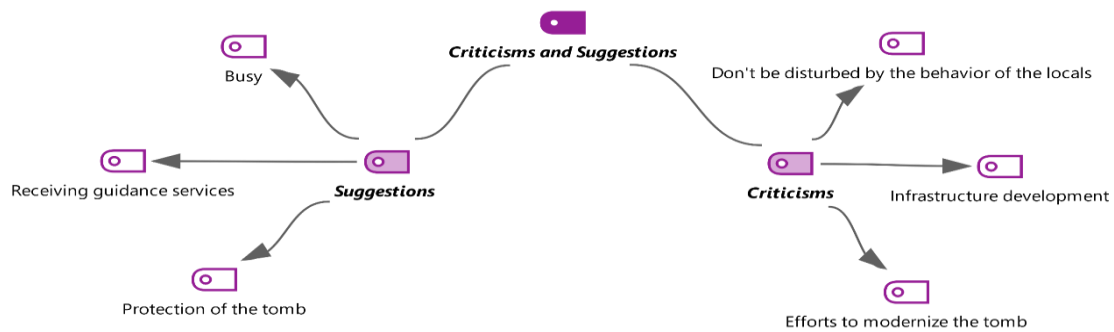
*Figure 10. Subcodes for Criticism and Suggestions*

Figure 10 presents the subcodes reflecting visitors' criticisms and suggestions regarding the tomb. It is particularly noteworthy that participants expressed dissatisfaction with the attitudes of the local people and concerns about the tomb's modernization process. It reflects the importance visitors place on preserving the authenticity of cultural heritage. Consequently, suggestions for preserving the tomb to preserve its historical and spiritual fabric are prominent. Furthermore, statements suggesting that professional guidance would be beneficial for a more meaningful visit are also considered a significant finding.
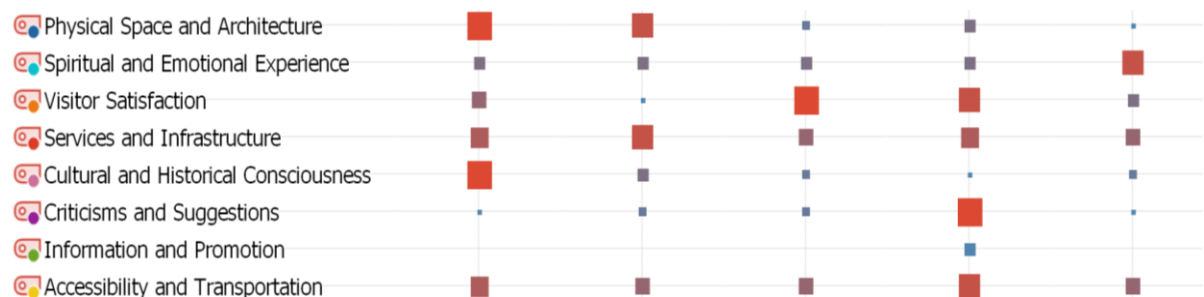


*Figure 11. Visitors' Viewing Intensity*

Figure 11 is a graph showing the density of visitors' opinions. This density indicates the degree to which specific topics are prominent and which areas users share the most opinions on. The graph reveals that emotional experience and architectural features are the most frequently commented areas, while comments on technical details such as access, information, and services are relatively rare. It demonstrates that the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of the visitor experience are at the forefront.
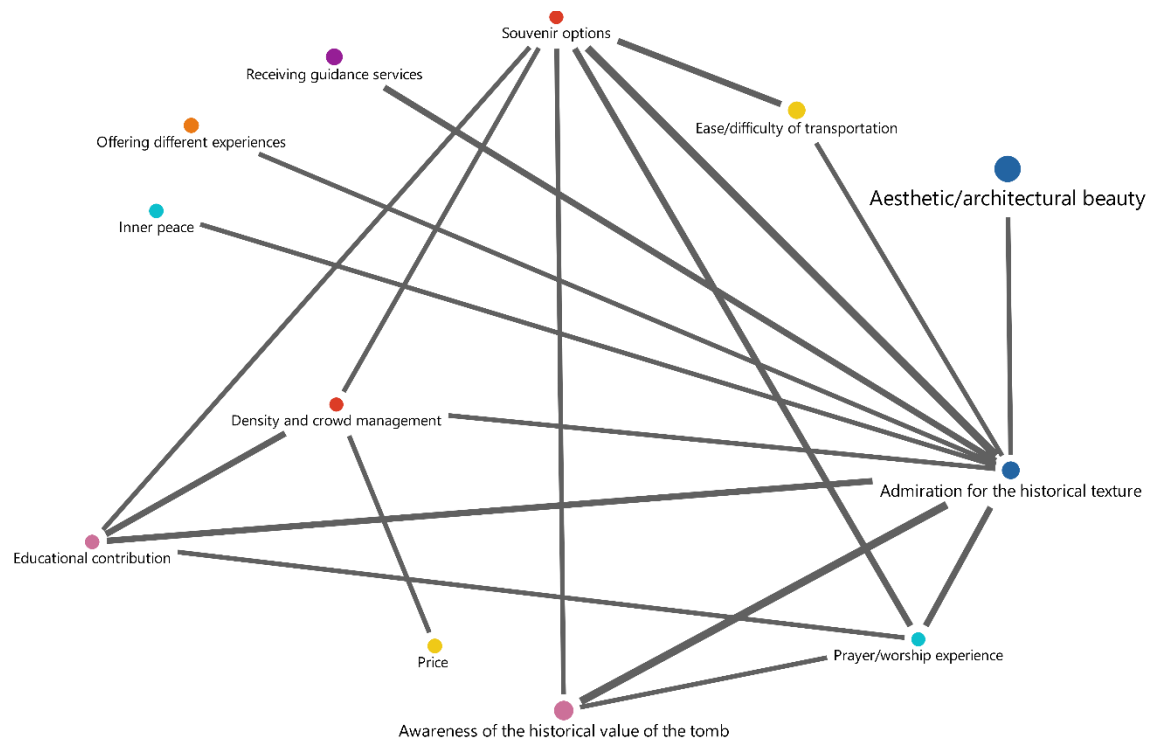
*Figure 12. Code Map of the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi*

Finally, Figure 12 shows the code map for the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi. This map visualizes the relationships among all themes and subcodes and which concepts occupy a more central position. The code map reveals the interconnectedness of concepts such as architecture, historical value, spirituality, and satisfaction, and how these concepts shape the visitor experience. The map conceptually visualizes the overall structure of the study, enabling holistic analysis of the interpretations.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This study explores the concept of intangible cultural heritage (Dondolo, 2005), defined as the totality of a society's material and spiritual values, within the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi framework. Visitor comments regarding the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi on TripAdvisor were examined and analyzed within the framework of Social Representation Theory. Social Representation Theory aims to explain how individuals and groups make sense of social reality and how they organize and share knowledge and experiences (Moscovici, 1988). Based on this perspective, 119 visitor comments shared on the platform were analyzed using the MAXQDA program, and eight main themes were identified. These central themes are information and promotion, criticism and suggestions, services and infrastructure, spiritual and emotional experience, accessibility and transportation, visitor satisfaction, physical space and architecture, and cultural and historical awareness. Spiritual-emotional

experience, physical space and architecture, and cultural-historical awareness demonstrate that social representations are not merely cognitive content but also intertwined with emotional orientations and identity affiliations. The prominence of expressions such as aesthetic/architectural beauty, admiration for the historical fabric, and spiritual peace demonstrates that the visitor experience impacts both cognitive and emotional levels. The research findings demonstrate that the tomb is not merely a physical structure in the collective memory of visitors, but also a carrier of historical belonging, spirituality, and cultural identity. Analysis revealed that visitors generated various social representations by evaluating the tomb multidimensionally, including its aesthetic architecture, sacred atmosphere, and historical significance.

Notably, visitors to the shrine refer to it as a minor pilgrimage, demonstrating that the visit was perceived as a sacred ritual. It demonstrates that the shrine is associated with religious practice by the public and holds a significant place in cultural memory. In their study, Cominelli & Greffe (2012) argue that intangible cultural heritage fosters the identities of local communities and plays a significant role in strengthening social bonds. In this context, it is safe to say that the Shrine of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi is a powerful heritage site that ensures cultural continuity in collective memory and individual experiences.

The study reveals individuals' expectations, mental images, and meaning-making regarding the tomb. It contributes to Moscovici's Theory of Social Representation by thoroughly examining the content dimension of social representations using qualitative analysis methods. In this context, a dialogic approach can be used to explain how the represented object (the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi) is positioned within the triangle of Ego (visitor) and Alter (community/others). The tomb is a significant social object in constructing visitors' identity and cultural belonging. Consequently, the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yesevi is not merely a historical structure that visitors observe, but a social space they experience through meaning-making, reconstructing their cultural identities. In this respect, the tomb is seen as a site that requires multidimensional evaluation in terms of academic research and cultural heritage policies.

Several recommendations were developed within the scope of the research. The physical and digital representations of cultural heritage sites should be designed to complement each other. For example, this direction could be considered in multilingual and interactive information systems, augmented reality-supported guidance applications, and administrative monitoring of digital platforms where visitors can share their experiences. Infrastructure improvements should be made to increase visitors' access to information, wayfinding, and spatial perception.

Furthermore, educational programs that holistically present the shrine's cultural, historical, and religious aspects should be supplemented with content for children and youth. It is also recommended that user data obtained from platforms like TripAdvisor be regularly monitored, and decision-makers should consider feedback from these comments.

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