

Assignment 3

Name: Muhammad Irfan

Student ID:

1 which aspect of culture are benign commodified for tourism purposes (festivals, craft, traditions)?

In tourism, several aspects of culture are commodified to attract visitors and generate revenue. The most commonly commodified elements include:

1. **Festivals**

Traditional festivals are often adapted or modified to suit tourist expectations, including changes in scheduling, performances, or formats. While this can promote cultural awareness, it may also lead to the loss of authenticity.

2. **Crafts and Handicrafts**

Local artisans often produce traditional crafts for sale to tourists. However, mass production and commercialization can dilute the original meaning, quality, or technique of these crafts.

3. **Traditions and Rituals**

Cultural practices, ceremonies, and rituals are sometimes staged or shortened for tourist consumption. This may simplify or alter their original purpose and spiritual significance.

Other commodified cultural elements can include:

- **Cuisine:** Traditional foods are often modified for international palates.
- **Dress and Costume:** Traditional clothing may be worn as performance attire rather than for cultural significance.
- **Music and Dance:** Performances are often stylized for entertainment rather than authenticity.

2. How has the commodification changed these cultural aspects or the way public engage with them?

Festivals – From Sacred Celebration to Spectacle

Growing up, I remember local festivals like **Basant (kite festival)** and **Eid melas** being deeply rooted in family and religious traditions. Basant, for instance, used to be a

spontaneous celebration—neighbours flying kites from rooftops, music in the background, and people sharing sweets. It was a time of genuine community bonding.

But in recent years, I've noticed a big shift. **Basant, where it still happens unofficially, feels like an event made for Instagram.** Commercial organizers have taken over, selling expensive kites, tickets to rooftop parties, and branded food stalls. The simple joy of the event has turned into a business. Even the music now is often tailored for tourists or influencers rather than reflecting local taste.

I saw how many elders in my family began to distance themselves from these festivals—they felt the spiritual or communal core was missing. On the flip side, young people seem to enjoy the entertainment side more. It's not wrong, but it's definitely different.

2. Crafts – Cultural Identity Replaced by Market Trends

In my travels across interior Sindh and Punjab, I've met many artisans—especially women—who make beautiful **Ajrak**, pottery, and hand-embroidered textiles. As a child, I saw these crafts at home, given as gifts during weddings, or worn during cultural events.

Now, many of these items are being sold at roadside stalls, tourist shops, and Instagram pages. The designs are sometimes flashy or mixed with foreign influences to attract more buyers. I once asked a woman selling Sindhi rillis (embroidered quilts) why the patterns looked different, and she said, *“Yeh tourist ko pasand aata hai, asli design kaam bikta hai”* (Tourists prefer this; original designs don't sell much).

It made me sad and proud at the same time—sad that the original meanings were being lost, but proud that these women were at least earning and gaining visibility.

3. Traditions – From Ritual to Performance

I once attended a **Sufi music night** at a heritage site organized for foreign tourists. The music was mesmerizing, but I couldn't ignore how the setting felt too polished. Dancers performed rehearsed routines, and the shrine area was fenced off for VIPs. I've also seen dhol players and fakirs perform in hotels or curated shows, repeating chants without the usual emotion or connection.

I compared this with the shrines I visited as a child—where qawwals would sing with raw passion, and devotees danced not for cameras but out of genuine spiritual expression. Now, when I see these rituals staged for tourists, it feels like a performance rather than worship.

Final Thoughts (Personal Reflection)

Commodification has made our culture more **visible and valuable**—it's on social media, in tourist brochures, and even international festivals. But it's also made parts of it feel **less personal, less sacred**. As someone who cherishes my cultural roots, I sometimes feel torn: proud that our traditions are appreciated globally, but concerned that we're slowly changing them to fit a market instead of preserving them for their true meaning.

Still, I believe there's a middle path—**sensitive tourism**, where locals lead the storytelling, and culture is shared respectfully, not repackaged.

3. What are the negative impact of such commodification local communities?

Negative Impacts of Commodification on Local Communities (From Personal Experience)

Having grown up in a culturally rich area, I've seen firsthand how the increasing influence of tourism and commercialization has brought unintended harm to the very communities that keep our traditions alive. While tourism brings money and exposure, here are the negative effects I've personally observed:

1. Loss of Authenticity and Cultural Meaning

One of the most painful changes I've seen is how **authentic cultural expressions are altered or even diluted** to please tourists. For example, I attended a local **Mehfil-e-Milad** organized for a group of foreign visitors. The event was supposed to be a religious and spiritual gathering, but instead, it was shortened, filled with rehearsed performances, and stripped of many of its traditional practices.

It felt like a "show," not a spiritual experience. The locals who used to participate with full devotion stood on the sidelines, almost like they were outsiders to their own event.

2. Community Becomes a Backdrop

In some cases, local people are **treated more like props than hosts**. I once visited a village where a tour company arranged a "rural lifestyle experience." The tourists were taken to homes, offered tea, and encouraged to take photos of women doing embroidery or cooking. It felt exploitative.

The women later told me they **didn't feel respected**, just observed. They weren't paid fairly, and their privacy was compromised. Over time, I noticed some villagers stopped participating in these tours altogether because they felt uncomfortable being put on display.

3. Economic Inequality and Exploitation

Yes, tourism brings income—but often not to the people who **preserve the culture**. I’ve seen artisans sell handmade items for hours at local fairs, while middlemen or shop owners take the largest cut. Once, I helped a friend from a village sell her embroidery directly online. She made more in one week than she did in a whole month through local stalls.

This made me realize how **unfair and unbalanced the system is**. Commodification benefits the organizers, tour companies, or urban-based sellers—not always the local artists or families.

4. Cultural Fatigue and Identity Conflict

Some elders in my community often express how they **don’t recognize their own traditions anymore**. They feel like things are being done “for show” rather than for meaning. One elder once said to me, “*Yeh sab rooh nikal gayi hai. Sirf jism reh gaya hai*” (The soul has left these traditions; only the body remains).

At the same time, young people face a dilemma—they want to keep traditions alive but also want to earn from them. This creates confusion between **cultural pride and cultural performance**.

5. Environmental and Social Strain

With more tourists comes more traffic, more trash, and more noise. During big festivals like Urs or cultural fairs, our small towns often become overcrowded. I’ve seen streets clogged, prices of food and transport go up, and even local resources like water being strained. Locals sometimes suffer quietly while the tourists enjoy the show.

Final Thoughts (Personal Reflection)

From my experience, commodification is a double-edged sword. While it has created opportunities, it has also caused **emotional disconnect, unfair profit distribution, and a loss of sacredness**. The worst part is seeing how locals are often **pushed to the background** while their culture is showcased in a polished, tourist-friendly version.

To truly benefit local communities, I believe we need **ethical tourism**—where local voices are heard, traditions are respected, and profits are shared fairly. Until then, the soul of our culture risks being sold in pieces.

4. What strategies can be used to balance tourism development with cultural preservation?

- **Balancing Tourism Development with Cultural Preservation: A Personal Perspective**
- As someone who has grown up in a culturally rich but increasingly touristic region, I've seen both the positive and negative sides of tourism. While it has helped bring recognition and income to local communities, it has also threatened the authenticity and depth of our traditions. Based on what I've observed and experienced, here are some strategies that, in my opinion, can help **balance tourism growth with cultural preservation**:

- **1. Community Involvement in Decision-Making**
- From what I've seen, tourism projects that involve **local voices from the beginning** tend to be more respectful and sustainable. A few years ago, in a nearby village known for its pottery, a cultural tourism initiative was launched. Initially, it failed because the organizers never consulted the potters—they just built a display area and brought in tourists. The artisans felt disrespected and didn't participate much.
- Later, when the second phase of the project included the artisans in planning and gave them control over how their work was displayed and sold, the project began to thrive. Tourists were able to interact with real craftsmen, and the community took pride in showcasing their art. That experience showed me that **empowering locals to lead their own narratives** can preserve authenticity while benefiting from tourism.

- **2. Promote Cultural Education for Tourists**
- I once volunteered at a local heritage museum where tourists often visited but left with only a superficial understanding of our culture. In response, we started offering **interactive sessions**—short workshops on embroidery, Ajrak printing, and storytelling sessions led by elders. These were optional but attracted many curious tourists.
- Through this, I realized that **when tourists are educated and respectful**, they engage more deeply and are less likely to demand 'entertaining' but inauthentic performances. Promoting understanding—not just consumption—of culture is a powerful tool for preservation.

- **3. Encourage Sustainable Tourism Practices**
- During a festival in our town, I noticed how excessive tourism caused littering, traffic jams, and even damage to cultural sites. One year, a local youth group (including myself) partnered with municipal authorities to launch a “**Respect Our Culture, Respect Our Land**” campaign. We set up recycling bins, distributed brochures on local customs, and guided tourists around sensitive areas.
- That experience taught me that **sustainable tourism isn't just about the environment—it's also about cultural respect**. Small actions, like asking tourists not to photograph sacred rituals or wear modest clothing in shrines, can go a long way in protecting local values.

- **4. Support and Train Local Artists and Performers**

- One of my friends is a folk singer who used to perform at weddings and local events. When tourism increased, he began performing for hotels and tourist groups. At first, he had to change his style to fit their taste, but with some support from a local cultural NGO, he received training on how to present his music in a way that was both authentic and understandable to international visitors.
- This helped him retain his cultural style while still earning from tourism. I believe **training local artists in cultural entrepreneurship**—how to price their work fairly, explain their traditions, and use digital platforms—can help them balance identity and income.

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- **5. Cultural Zoning and Limits on Commercialization**
 - I've seen parts of old towns turned into completely commercial tourist markets—souvenir shops replaced family homes, and loud tour groups disrupted daily life. In contrast, one historic district nearby introduced **zoning rules**: certain areas were kept residential or spiritual, while specific zones allowed for cultural commerce.
 - This helped maintain the local feel and protected sacred sites. Based on this, I believe having clear **boundaries—physical, cultural, and ethical—is essential** in keeping tourism from overpowering community life.

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- **Final Reflection**
 - In my personal experience, **balance comes from respect**—respect for the people, their stories, and their right to protect what's meaningful to them. Tourism doesn't have to destroy culture; it can celebrate it, **if done thoughtfully**. The key is to keep the community at the center, to make culture an experience to be shared—not a product to be sold.
 - With proper planning, education, and local leadership, tourism can help preserve culture rather than replace it.