Marketing Strategies of Cultural Cluster and Creative Tourism: A Mediating Role of Tourists' Creative Experience

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Abstract—**Amidst the emergence of cultural and creative clusters, this paper examines tourists' behavioral intentions within creative tourism. Drawing upon The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis, the study investigates the direct impacts of creative experiences, cultural identity, place attachment, and authenticity on tourists' behavioral intentions. Furthermore, it explores the positive mediating role of tourists' creative experiences in linking cultural identity, place attachment, authenticity, and behavioral intentions. The findings have significant implications for management, marketing, and business strategies within cultural and creative clusters. They offer valuable insights into optimizing tourists' experiences and fostering their intention to participate actively in creative tourism activities.**

Keywords—**creative experience, behavioral intentions, cultural identity, place attachment, authenticity**

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Cultural and Creative Clusters (CCC) has gained popularity in the past 20 years (Chapain and Sagot-Duvauroux, 2018), and recent dramatic development in China (Yang *et al.*, 2019). Cultural clusters serve to rejuvenate urban areas and bolster the local creative economy (Mommaas, 2016), as seen in projects like Birmingham's Custard Factory and Dublin's Temple Bar. This study centers on investigating the creative experience, an aspect that has received limited attention regarding its impact on tourism intentions. The study examines the impact of creative experiences on tourism intentions conducted at the Guangzhou Litchi Exposition Park, a provincially acclaimed center for leisure agriculture and rural tourism. It functions as a cultural and creative hub, featuring unique attractions such as Litchi study tours, VR experiences, dining, and live streaming to attract tourists.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There has consistently been a focus on studying customer behavioral intentions and intentions related to tourism. Certain scholars employ the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to elucidate the decision-making processes and behaviors of tourists in the post-pandemic era (Han *et al.*, 2020; Seong and Hong, 2021). While they have established research models delineating the influence of risk, as well as the TPB (including attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) on visit intentions, it is noteworthy that the current regional epidemic situation has stabilized. Consequently, further research is warranted to ascertain the factors that impact tourists' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in the context of creative tourism and how they subsequently shape behavioral intentions. In response to this gap in the literature, this study aims to discover what dimensions affect the creative experience and how the creative experience acts as a mediator between these dimensions and tourist intentions within the realm of creative tourism.

A. Creative Tourism and Creative Experience

Creative tourism is defined as tourism that allows visitors to unleash their creative potential through engaging in destination-specific courses and learning experiences (Richards and Raymond, 2000). Therefore, creative tourism heavily depends on visitors actively participating, learning about their environment, and applying that knowledge to cultivate new skills. In the context of creative tourism, tourists must engage in an experiential process to attain creativity (Tan *et al.*, 2013). The creative experience should be distinctive, offer an escape, and enable tourists to participate in its creation actively. As a result, consumers can be seen as co-creators of experiences during service consumption. Tourists are both the receiver and creators of creative experience.

B. Theory of Planned Behavior and Tourism Intention

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model, developed from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), is widely used for understanding human decision and behavior (Han *et al.*, 2020) and has been effectively applied in the tourism industry to understand tourists' behavior. The TPB comprises three components: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Tommasetti *et al.*, 2018). Attitude refers to the psychological emotions and evaluations, either positive or negative that arise when an individual engages in specific behaviors. Subjective norms are regarded as a person's perceived social pressure to perform a particular behavior (Tommasetti *et al.*, 2018). Perceived behavioral control relates to an individual's perception of their ability to execute a specific action effectively (Ciasullo *et al.*, 2017). According to TPB, these three dimensions influence tourists' behavioral intentions.

Traditional TPB noted that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control independently contribute to behavioral intention. Nevertheless, recent research asserted that attitude acts as a mediating effect between subjective norms and behavioral intention (Tommasetti *et al.*, 2018). In creative tourism, tourists are offered opportunities to connect with local residents and contribute to the vibrant culture of the area, which has an engaged and authentic experience (Network, 2006). In this process, tourists experience local social norms, which positively affects their attitude towards the place they visit and enhances their travel intention. In addition, the participation and co-creation of creative

experiences provide tourists with a greater sense of active involvement and enhance their willingness to travel. Based on the literature review given above, the hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H1: Creative experience positively affects tourists' behavioral intentions.

C. Cultural Identity

Identity is the relationship between the subject (individual or group) and cultural aspects (concepts, values, symbols), shaping cultural identity (Wang *et al*., 2022). Regarding the relationship between cultural identity and perceived experience, cultural identity develops from childhood. Moreover, it is consolidated through constant contact with the nation's common historical and cultural heritage (Kranz and Goedderz, 2020). Such cultural identity is formed based on people's experience, perception, and understanding of culture. Particularly in creative tourism, the related cultural memories would be reproduced and consolidated through the interactive experience, strengthening tourists' sense of belonging (Kranz and Goedderz, 2020). In this case, cultural identity is the antecedent of perceived experience in cultural and creative tourism, and it provides the possibility of understanding the culture and value within the experiential activities for tourists.

Cultural values can shape people's attitudes and influence their acceptance or rejection of specific products or services (Zhang *et al*., 2021). Thus, cultural identity would positively affects people's attitudes. For example, customers might purchase positively if the products contain cultural value or symbols. That is because the perceived spiritual symbol of a product, coupled with self-identity recognition, serves to amplify customers' emotional value. Therefore, the above study suggests the following hypotheses:

H2a: Cultural identity positively affects tourists' behavioral intentions.

H2b: Tourists' creative experience has a positive mediating effect between cultural identity and tourists' behavioral intentions.

D. Place Attachment

The notion of place attachment originated from the principles of Attachment Theory (Swoboda *et al*., 2012) that individuals tend to develop trust or distrust towards significant others based on their early childhood experiences. Place attachment is seen as an emotional bond between the self and a particular location in psychology, which makes people feel "in place" or "at home", instilling a sense of security (Yuksel *et al*., 2010). Place dependence and place identity are the two main components of place attachment (Gross and Brown, 2006). Place dependence refers to functional attachment describing the extent to which a particular location meets visitors' needs (Yuksel *et al*., 2010). Place identity encompasses attitudes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meanings, and behavioral inclinations amalgamated into a singular term (Backlund and Williams, 2004). This composite is manifested through emotional experiences and observable actions. Place attachment to a particular location or destination enables tourists to connect uniquely with the place through involved activities. The visitors' unique involvement, the recognition, and the consciousness of trust

and peace of tourists to that place are the triggers for producing creative experiences (Bricker, 2010).

In addition, some researchers claim that place attachment is considered a precursor to visitors' attitudes and behavioral intentions, playing a significant role in predicting visit outcomes based on tourists' levels of place attachment (Ali *et al*., 2015). Place attachment can directly affect the formation of destination loyalty intention (Patwardhan *et al*., 2019). Accordingly, the hypotheses are suggested below:

H3a: Place attachment positively affects tourists' behavioral intentions.

H3b: Tourists' creative experience has a positive mediating effect between place attachment and tourists' behavioral intentions.

E. Perceived Authenticity

Authenticity is frequently defined as being genuine, reliable, trustworthy, original, and firsthand in substance (Yuksel *et al*., 2010). In tourism, authenticity can describe toured objects, tourist sites, and tourist experiences (Ram *et al*., 2016). In terms of authenticity, it includes three dimensions: objective authenticity, constructive authenticity, and symbolic authenticity. Symbolic authenticity depends on tourists being subjective and experiential (Molleda and Henderson, 2010), which is also regarded as existential authenticity focusing on the state of being of authenticity.

The researchers assert that a person's being is constituted of the self in the external world and a reflection of what extent the self feels true, which interacts with each other. Therefore, existential authenticity is defined as an alternative self-experience in the context of tourism (Kolar and Zabkar, 2010). Creative tourism is the travel for an engaged and authentic experience, and involvement and interactivity are essential for creative experience. When tourists interact with the toured object or tourism site, they proceed with an emotional self-experience because of the existential authenticity. Moreover, the perceived authenticity of tourists benefits the co-creation of creative experiences.

Some researchers found that authenticity positively influences people's attitudes (Ali *et al*., 2015). Moreover, authenticity involves symbolic interaction between the self and others, underscoring the connection between authenticity and subjective norms (Prados-Peña and del Barrio-Garcá, 2018). In addition, the positive relationship between authenticity and perceived behavioral control has been proved (Erickson, 1995). Regarding TPB, tourists' behavioral intention depends on the person's attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Accordingly, the hypotheses are listed below:

H4a: Authenticity positively affects tourists' behavioral intentions.

H4b: Tourists' creative experience has a positive mediating effect between authenticity and tourists' behavioral intentions.

Based on the above study, the structural equation model is depicted in Fig. 1.
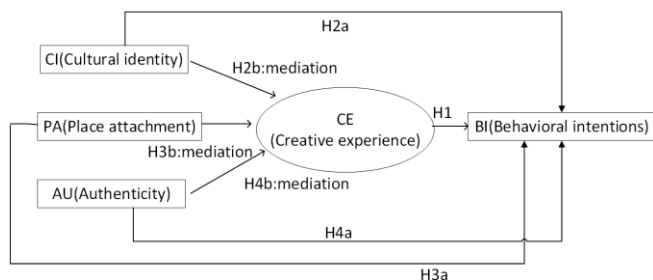
Fig. 1. Hypothesized conceptual mode.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Measurement

In order to examine the suggested hypotheses and conceptual model, Likert 5-point scale as a measurement approach is employed in this study. The Likert 5-point scale as a measurement approach is employed in this study. The Likert 5-point scale from 1 to 5 indicates five options, from "totally disagree" to "totally agree", and the questionnaire contains six parts. The first part is demographic information, including gender, age, education, occupation, and origin. The second part is cultural identity, including five items developed by Tian (Shen, 2014). The third part is place attachment with five items borrowed from Williams (Tian *et al.*, 2020). The fourth part is authenticity, including four items, based on the research of Tian (Williams and Vaske, 2003). The fifth and sixth parts are creative experience and tourists' behavioral intentions, having ten and two items, respectively, based on Su's research (Tian *et al.*, 2020). The measurement items can be seen in Table 2.

B. Data Collection

In order to guarantee the questionnaire's reliability and validity, a preliminary survey was carried out using the measurement criteria stated prior to the official survey. A total of fifty questionnaires were sent out online and were all collected through WeChat and Wenjuanxing platform. The surveyors are Junior college students and teaching staffs who study or live in the neighborhood of The Guangzhou Litchi Exposition Park.

The formal survey was still conducted through online platforms and the questionnaires were sent out to the Junior college students and teaching staffs. During the survey, each surveyor was asked if he/she has been to The Litchi Exposition Park, and only the visitors who have been there before could be interviewees for this survey. Finally, a total of 372 questionnaires were collected, and 320 of them were considered valid. The questionnaire recovery rate was 86%. The demographic information is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the survey (n=320)

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender			
Male		187	58.44
Female		133	41.56
Age			
<18		5	1.56
18-25		272	85.00
26-35		19	5.94
≥36		24	7.50
Education			
Junior college		277	86.56
Undergraduate		9	2.81
Postgraduate		34	10.63
Occupation			
Student		277	86.56
Teaching staff		43	13.44
Origin			
Guangdong Province	Guangzhou	144	45.00
	Shenzhen	19	5.94
	Foshan	21	6.56
	Shantou	28	8.75
	Chaozhou	27	8.44
	others	47	14.69
Other Province		34	10.63

C. Data Analysis

1) The reliability and validity analysis

In this study, the analytical tools are SPSS29.0 and Amos 26.0. The collected data's reliability is firstly checked through SPSS, ensuring good internal consistency in each dimension. After testing, Cronbach's α of each dimension reports a value between 0.840 and 0.9339 (see Table 2 for details). It means that the reliability of data in this study can be considered to be good.

Table 2. Factor analysis and reliability test (n = 320)

Items		Std. Estimate	Alpha	AVE	CR
Cultural Identity			0.840	0.516	0.842
CI1	I have a good impression of the Litchi Exposition Park as a whole.	0.751			
CI2	I think the local history of Litchi Exposition Park is fascinating.	0.787			
CI3	I like the intangible cultural heritage of the Litchi Exposition Park.	0.725			
CI4	I like the traditional culture of the Litchi Exposition Park.	0.630			
CI5	I want to know about the representative traditional culture of the Litchi Exposition Park.	0.690			
Place Attachment			0.843	0.544	0.852
PA1	I feel Litchi Exposition Park is a part of me.	0.677			
PA2	Visiting Litchi Exposition Park says a lot about who I am.	0.626			
PA3	Litchi Exposition Park is the best place for what I like to do.	0.559			
PA4	Doing what I do at Litchi Exposition Park is more important to me than doing it in any other place.	0.924			
PA5	I get more satisfaction out of visiting Litchi Exposition Park than any other.	0.839			
Authenticity			0.863	0.520	0.811
AU1	The Litchi Exposition Park as a whole reflects strong regional cultural characteristics.	0.806			
AU2	The cultural tourism products in Litchi Exposition Park have very cultural characteristics.	0.718			
AU3	I feel like I have integrated into the local culture	0.729			
AU4	The tour provided me with a unique cultural experience.	0.619			
Creative Experience			0.924	0.591	0.935
CE1	I felt I was escaping during the activities	0.805			
CE2	I felt important throughout the activities	0.717			
CE3	I felt relaxed during the activities	0.783			
CE4	I felt secure during the activities	0.816			
CE5	I did something unique and memorable	0.751			
CE6	I did something new and different	0.778			

CE7	The provieded activities have strong participation.	0.703		
CE8	The facilities were friendly interacted.	0.759		
CE9	The activities increased my skills.	0.755		
CE10	I learned a lot through these activities	0.811		
Behavioral Intentions			0.933	0.685 0.813
BI1	I intend to continue to visit the Litchi Exposition Park	0.819		
BI2	I will recommend this Litchi Exposition Park to my friends and others	0.836		

Followed by the reliability check through SPSS, Amos is utilized for reliability and validity analysis. It can be seen in Table 3, $X^2/df = 1.483$, RMSEA=0.039, GFI > 0.9, CFI > 0.9, IFI>0.9, TLI>0.9. The goodness of fit of the measurement model aligns with the guidelines set by Hair *et al*. (Su *et al*., 2020), suggesting a reasonably good fit between the observed data and the proposed model. In addition, from Table 2, all 26 items exhibit factor loadings falling within the range of 0.559 to 0.924, surpassing the threshold of 0.5. Notably, most of these items demonstrate factor loadings exceeding 0.7, indicating strong relationships between the items and their respective dimensions. The Composite Reliability (CR) values for every dimension exceed the threshold of 0.7, indicating good internal consistency. The reliability of the measurement model and the dimensions are accurately measured. Among these, the factor loadings and Composite Reliability (CR) of "Creative Experience" and "Behavioral Intentions" exhibit the most noteworthy values. This indicates that the results in these two aspects demonstrate the highest reliability, and the respective questions within each dimension display the strongest internal consistency. It is worth noting that this might be influenced by the number of questions in a given dimension, with the former having the highest count, while the latter has the fewest. The Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeds 0.5 for all dimensions, suggesting the model effectively represents the constructs under examination (see Table 2). Finally, the results presented in Table 4 show that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each dimension surpasses the correlations among the respective latent variables, which supports the presence of discriminant validity, indicating that the dimensions are separate and distinct from each other.

Table 3. Results of the model fit measures

Index	X²/df	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	IFI	TLI
CFA	1.483	0.039	0.909	0.969	0.969	0.965
Structural model	1.483	0.039	0.909	0.969	0.969	0.965
Fitted Value Value	<3.0	<0.05	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9

Table 4. The discriminant validity

Constructs	CI	PA	AU	CE	BI
CI	0.5164				
PA	0.4210	0.5441			
AU	0.4580	0.4600	0.5199		
CE	0.5700	0.4170	0.4580	0.5908	
BI	0.6500	0.5630	0.6380	0.7160	0.6848
√AVE	0.7186	0.7376	0.7210	0.7686	0.8275

2) Structure Equation Model (SEM) analysis

The proposed Structural Equation Model (SEM) contains five elements: cultural identity, place attachment, authenticity, creative experience, and behavioral intentions. In this SEM analysis, the model's fit is typically deemed satisfactory according to the result of Table 3. Additionally, as shown in Fig. 2, all the hypotheses are supported, and the respective P-value of all hypothesis paths is less than 0.05, suggesting that all the paths are significant (see Table 5 for details).
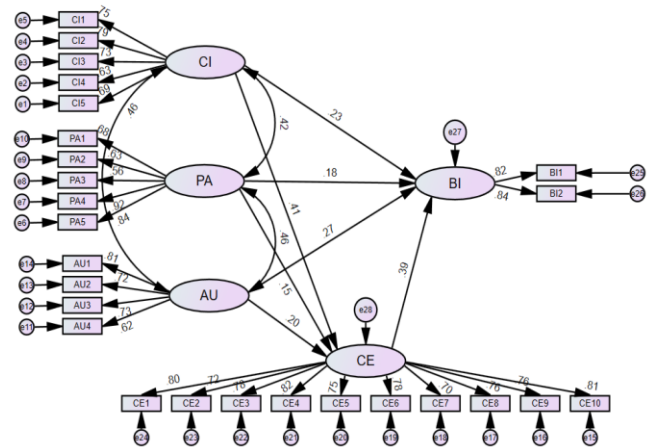

Fig. 2. Structure model.

3) Mediation effect

In this study, the Bootstrap method (Bootstrap = 2000) is employed to assess the mediating effect of creative experience between cultural identity and tourists' behavioral intentions, the mediating effect of creative experience between place attachment and tourists' behavioral intentions, the mediate effect of creative experience between place attachment and tourists' behavioral intentions. According to Table 5, the P-value in each path is less than 0.05, proving that the mediating effect is supported. In addition, the lower and upper values of bias-corrected are more significant than 0, indicating that the range does not include 0 (see Table 6). Therefore, all the mediation effects are considered partial mediating effects. Among them, the indirect impact of creative experience on cultural identity and behavioral intentions is the most significant, accounting for 41.13%.

Table 5. Model path analysis

Path	Unstd.	Std.	S.E.	C.R.	P-Value	Result
CI ➤ CE	0.571	0.415	0.096	5.96	***	Support
PA ➤ CE	0.17	0.151	0.069	2.481	0.013	Support
AU ➤ CE	0.304	0.199	0.103	2.942	0.003	Support
CI ➤ BI	0.371	0.23	0.104	3.566	***	Support
PA ➤ BI	0.238	0.18	0.073	3.282	0.001	Support
AU ➤ BI	0.49	0.273	0.114	4.283	***	Support
CE ➤ BI	0.452	0.385	0.073	6.204	***	Support

Table 6. Mediation effect

Path	Effect	Bootstrapping		BC 95% CI		P Value	Proportion
		Est.	Std.Errorrr	Lower	Upper		
H2b	Indirect	0.160	0.049	0.074	0.263	0.003	41.13%
	Direct	0.230	0.068	0.089	0.360	0.002	
	Total	0.389	0.048	0.294	0.481	0.001	
H3b	Indirect	0.058	0.029	0.016	0.138	0.008	24.37%
	Direct	0.180	0.071	0.046	0.329	0.009	
	Total	0.238	0.073	0.103	0.388	0.001	
H4b	Indirect	0.077	0.037	0.026	0.175	0.003	22.00%
	Direct	0.273	0.069	0.143	0.417	0.001	
	Total	0.350	0.064	0.225	0.479	0.001	

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A. Theoretical Implication

This study establishes a theoretical model incorporating the creative experience, tourists' behavioral intentions, cultural identity, place attachment, and perceived authenticity. Although many researchers have revealed that creative experience could produce when tourists engage in participative activities, encouraging their visiting intentions (Richards and Raymond, 2000), there needs to be more research discussing the mediating role of creative experience. Based on this research, tourists' creative experiences directly affect their behavioral intentions and mediate between cultural identity, place attachment, perceived authenticity, and behavioral intentions. More significantly, cultural identity exerts the most substantial indirect effect on tourists' behavioral intentions through creative experiences, followed by place attachment and perceived authenticity.

B. Managerial Implication

In creative tourism marketing, it is crucial for tourism providers to focus on offering culturally specific activities to engage tourists on multiple sensory levels. These activities should be interactive and immersive, appealing to sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. By enhancing visitors' experiences, tourism providers can encourage them to recommend these activities to others, leading to a shift in marketing strategies from active advertising to word-of-mouth recommendations. This deserves further exploration and examination by marketing practitioners in tourism.

C. Conclusion and Future Direction

Overall, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of creative tourism, shedding light on the mediating role of creative experiences. It also offers practical insights for tourism practitioners. These findings have direct implications for marketing and management in the Cultural and Creative Cluster. For future research, it could be considered to create a more culturally immersive environment by utilizing new media, like VR. Due to its immersive nature and interactivity, the potential of VR application in cultural and creative tourism is worth further exploration and a new attempt for marketing practitioners.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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