

INTEGRATING THE 4E MARKETING FRAMEWORK (EXPERIENCE, EXCHANGE, EVERYPLACE, AND EVANGELISM): EFFECTS ON CULTURAL HERITAGE VISITATION BEHAVIOR IN CHENGDE, CHINA

Xinli Jiang

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Program in Management
Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship
Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin
Academic Year 2026
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Xinli Jiang

2026



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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were (1) to examine the direct effects of the four dimensions of the 4E marketing model (experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism) and heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visitation behavior, (2) to investigate the mediating mechanisms by testing how perceived destination image and perceived conservation mediate the relationships between (a) the four 4E dimensions and (b) heritage interpretation quality, and cultural heritage visitation behavior, (3) to test the moderating role of source credibility in shaping the strength of the relationships between the four 4E marketing dimensions and cultural heritage visitation behavior, and (4) to develop evidence-based promotion strategies for cultural heritage tourism by translating the empirical findings into actionable recommendations for destination marketing and heritage site management.

This study adopted a quantitative research design with a total of 887 valid responses collected through online and on-site distribution. Reliability and validity were confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, confirmatory factor analysis, and discriminant validity assessments. Structural equation modeling was employed to analyze direct, indirect, and moderated relationships, while bootstrapping procedures were used to test mediation effects. Interaction terms were used to assess the moderating role of source credibility.

Major findings: (1) On the issue of all four 4E marketing dimensions and heritage interpretation quality, all factors significantly influence cultural heritage visitation behavior, with exchange and heritage interpretation quality showing the strongest effects; (2) On the issue of the perceived destination image and perceived conservation, these factors significantly mediate the effects of the 4E marketing dimensions and heritage interpretation quality, indicating that cognitive and evaluative perceptions are key pathways for behavioral engagement; (3) On the issue of the source credibility, this factor significantly moderates all relationships between the 4E marketing dimensions and visitation behavior, enhancing the influence of experiential, participatory, and interpretive inputs; and (4) On the issue of the findings, the findings provide guidance for developing evidence-based promotion strategies for local government, cultural organizations, and tourism enterprises, emphasizing participatory cultural workshops, high-quality heritage interpretation, digital guiding services, transparent communication of conservation practices, and the dissemination of reliable information through expert-endorsed and official communication channels.

Keywords: 4E marketing model, Cultural heritage tourism, Experience economy, Heritage interpretation quality, Perceived destination image, Perceived conservation, Chengde

Advisor's Signature .....

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July 2026

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List of Abbreviation and Glossary

Abbreviation / Glossary	Explanation
AGFI	Adjusted Goodness-Of-Fit Index
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CHVB	Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior
CR	Composite Reliability
CR	Critical Ratios
CTA	China Tourism Academy
CITC	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
DMOs	Destination Management Organizations
EP	Experience
EC	Exchange
EG	Evangelism
EW	Everyplace
EWOM	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
GFI	Goodness-of-Fit Index
DI	Heritage Interpretation Quality
IFI	Incremental Fit Index
KMO	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin
NFI	Normed Fit Index
OTA	Online Travel Agency
PC	Perceived Conservation
PDI	Perceived Destination Image
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
P	Significance Levels
SRMR	Standardized Root Mean Square Residual
SC	Source Credibility

List of Abbreviation and Glossary (continued)

Abbreviation / Glossary	Explanation
SE	Standard Errors
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
β	Standardized Effect Values
χ^2/df	The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
UGC	User-Generated Content
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
WOM	Word-of-Mouth
$\chi 2$	Chi-square

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the foundational elements of the study, providing a comprehensive overview of the research context, objectives, and theoretical underpinnings. It begins by outlining the background and problem statement, highlighting the challenges and gaps in understanding tourist engagement with cultural heritage sites. The chapter identifies specific research gaps that justify the study, followed by a discussion of its theoretical and practical significance, emphasizing contributions to marketing, experience economy, and heritage tourism theory as well as actionable insights for practitioners. It then presents the research questions and objectives, detailing the scope and focus of the investigation. Methodological approaches are described, including data collection, sampling, and analytical techniques, while key constructs and terms are clearly defined to ensure conceptual clarity. Delimitations are specified to delineate the study's boundaries, and the chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis structure, setting the stage for subsequent chapters by establishing a coherent and systematic framework for exploring the factors influencing cultural heritage visiting behavior.

1.1 Background of the Study

1.1.1 Problem Statement

Cultural heritage is a precious legacy accumulated over the long course of human history. It serves as both of the material and spiritual carrier of diverse civilizations, embodying the memory and wisdom of nations (Bihari, 2023), while also playing an invaluable role in cultural inheritance, innovation, and the upgrading of the tourism industry (Wang et al., 2023). It encompasses tangible cultural heritage (such as ancient architecture and historical sites) as well as intangible cultural heritage (such as traditional crafts and folk customs), together forming a diversified cultural ecosystem.

As an integral part of the global tourism industry, cultural heritage tourism has in recent years become a vital bridge between cultural transmission and economic development

(Škrabić Perić et al., 2021) . United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) points out that cultural tourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism market. It not only preserves the memory of human civilization but also promotes cross-cultural communication and regional economic development (Mantra, 2024).

In recent years, cultural heritage tourism has developed rapidly worldwide. As of 2025 there are more than 1,200 world cultural and natural heritage sites globally, of which over 75% are cultural heritage, covering ancient architectural complexes, historic cities, cultural landscapes, and intangible cultural forms (UNESCO, 2025). Culture-related tourism accounts for more than 40% of international travel, with global cultural tourism exceeding 700 million trips in 2023, nearly double the volume of 2010 (UNWTO, 2023).

China, as one of the world's leading countries in cultural heritage, had 43 UNESCO world cultural heritage sites by 2024, ranking among the top globally. These sites span a wide range of categories, including ancient palaces, gardens, the Great Wall, historic cities, and canal systems (Chen et al., 2025). Cultural heritage tourism has become a major growth engine for the domestic tourism market (Alberti & Giusti, 2012). According to the China Tourism Academy (CTA), cultural tourism in China reached over 1.6 billion trips in 2023, accounting for more than 37% of all domestic travel, while revenue from cultural heritage destinations reached RMB 1.8 trillion, representing a 15% year-on-year increase (CTA, 2023).

Chengde city, located in Hebei Province, is one of China's most significant cultural heritage cities, globally renowned for the "Mountain Resort and Its Outlying Temples," which is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Chengde not only features imperial gardens and temple complexes but also embodies the cultural heritage of multiple ethnic groups, including Manchu, Mongolian, Han, and Tibetan traditions, forming a unique historical and cultural landscape. Chengde received 56 million domestic visitors in 2023, generating more than RMB 70 billion in tourism revenue, with cultural heritage tourism contributing nearly 60% (Hebei Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, 2024). In recent years, Chengde has actively promoted the integration of cultural heritage and tourism by developing smart tourism platforms, adopting digital technologies, and creating immersive cultural performances (Zhang et al., 2025). Representative examples include the "AR Guide System for the Mountain Resort" and the large-scale live performance "Royal Ceremony," which have become highlights of Chengde's cultural

tourism (Liu & Zhang, 2025). Meanwhile, Chengde has also sought to expand into international markets, strengthening cultural exchanges with countries along Belt and Road Initiative (Liu & Dunford, 2016). Nevertheless, issues such as product homogenization, insufficient marketing promotion, and limited international visibility constrain its branding as a world-class cultural tourism destination (Chen, 2023).

Despite the rapid growth of cultural heritage tourism worldwide, many destinations continue to face structural challenges in understanding how visitors perceive, interpret, and respond to cultural heritage tourism offerings (Yacoub et al., 2025), particularly within the digital and experience-driven tourism market. Rather than a lack of cultural resources, these challenges increasingly stem from difficulties in translating tourists' experiential perceptions, value evaluations, and information encounters into actual visiting, revisiting, and recommendation behaviors. This indicates that the effectiveness of cultural heritage tourism development depends not only on promotional strategies themselves, but more critically on how visitors cognitively and emotionally process these strategies and transform them into concrete behavioral responses (Cai & Cheng, 2024). Chengde exemplifies this challenge in that, despite its outstanding imperial heritage and multi-ethnic cultural resources, visitors' attention, emotional engagement, and behavioral responses toward the destination remain relatively weak and unstable. Tourism search data indicate that potential visitors demonstrate lower levels of information-seeking and pre-visit interest in Chengde compared with leading destinations such as Beijing and Hangzhou (Mafengwo, 2023), while pronounced seasonality reflects fluctuations in tourists' visiting decisions and participation intensity across different periods (Yu et al., 2023).

Moreover, from the visitor perspective, existing marketing encounters often fail to generate immersive, interactive, and digitally mediated experiences that align with contemporary tourists' expectations, particularly among younger cohorts. Cultural narratives, architectural craftsmanship, and folk traditions are frequently perceived as fragmented or surface-level, limiting tourists' ability to cognitively interpret cultural meaning, emotionally resonate with heritage values, and subsequently share or recommend their experiences (Licsandru & Cui, 2019; Ismagilova et al., 2015). These behavioral patterns ultimately reflect a deeper perceptual issue: tourists have not formed a clear, coherent, and distinctive perceived destination image of Chengde. Although the city's

heritage value is objectively significant, visitors' cognitive understanding, affective responses, and behavioral chioce—such as visiting, revisiting, and recommending—remain fragmented and underdeveloped (Yuan & Vui, 2023). This indicates that tourists' experiential perceptions and information processing do not consistently translate into favorable image formation or sustained behavioral engagement. Without a strong perceived destination image guiding visitors' expectations and decisions, improvements in experiential design or communication channels may have limited behavioral impact. Therefore, examining how tourists perceive marketing experiences, construct destination image, and convert these perceptions into visiting and advocacy behaviors becomes essential for addressing Chengde's cultural heritage tourism challenges.

To address the growing challenges in cultural heritage tourism promotion, increasing scholarly attention has been directed toward the application of marketing theories that are better aligned with the digital and experiential economy (Xue, 2023). Within this context, encouraging actual visits to cultural heritage sites has become a central objective, as on-site engagement enables tourists to directly experience heritage values, deepen cultural understanding, and develop emotional connections that cannot be fully achieved through mediated communication alone. Visiting cultural heritage sites therefore plays a critical role in transforming promotional exposure into meaningful cultural learning, destination image formation, and sustainable tourism behavior.

Among these, 4E marketing model including experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, has been widely recognized as more suitable than the traditional 4P model for explaining tourists' behavior in contemporary tourism contexts (Krongyut et al., 2024). The 4E model shifts the focus from destination-centered marketing inputs to tourist-centered experiential perceptions, emphasizing immersive engagement, interactive value co-creation, omnichannel accessibility, and self-driven advocacy. The core logic of this study is to examine how tourists' perceived marketing experiences, conceptualized through the four dimensions of the 4E model, shape cultural heritage visiting behavior in the context of cultural heritage tourism. Specifically, experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism are treated as independent variables that capture tourists' subjective perceptions of marketing-related encounters before, during, and after their visits, and how these perceptions translate into concrete behavioral outcomes , such as visiting, revisiting, recommending, and engaging with cultural heritage destinations. By shifting the analytical

focus from promotional implementation to tourists' behavioral responses, this study emphasizes that the effectiveness of cultural heritage tourism marketing is ultimately reflected in visitors' decisions and actions rather than in promotional activities alone. Rather than representing managerial strategies or policy interventions, these variables capture how tourists cognitively and emotionally interpret marketing stimuli from an experiential perspective.

Existing studies suggest that the 4E model is particularly effective in addressing tourists' increasing demands for authenticity, interactivity, and personalization in cultural heritage tourism (Wang et al., 2025). Empirical practices further demonstrate its applicability: immersive digital exhibitions enhance experiential depth at the Dunhuang Academy (Sun et al., 2024); social media and cultural-creative products enable omnichannel communication at the Terracotta Army Museum in Xi'an (Yang & Shen, 2024); and visitor word-of-mouth and cultural identification foster evangelism at the Liangzhu Site in Hangzhou (Jinsha et al., 2024). These cases indicate that tourists' perceived engagement with 4E-oriented marketing practices plays a critical role in shaping promotional effectiveness.

For Chengde, adopting the 4E model can enrich immersive cultural performances, strengthen visitor interaction and co-creation, expand communication channels through diverse digital platforms, and build brand loyalty via visitor advocacy (Wang et al., 2023). This approach provides both theoretical and practical guidance for achieving effective promotion of Chengde's cultural heritage tourism in the digital era. First, in terms of experience, Chengde can leverage resources such as *the Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples*, integrating immersive performances and digital-guided tours to enhance cultural engagement and interactivity (Lopes, 2020). Second, regarding exchange, initiatives such as intangible cultural heritage workshops, ethnic cultural interactions, and user-generated content (UGC) platforms can facilitate two-way communication and value co-creation between tourists and local communities (Simon, 2016). Third, in the everyplace dimension, a multi-channel communication matrix that combines online and offline approaches, through short-video platforms, tourism fairs, and international cooperation, can effectively expand market reach (Liu et al., 2025). Finally, in the dimension of evangelism, improving service quality, developing cultural-creative products, and creating

socialized tourism scenarios can stimulate tourists' spontaneous sharing and recommendation.

As a quintessential cultural heritage tourism destination, Chengde's core appeal extends beyond mere sightseeing consumption. Its true value lies in whether visitors can grasp the spatial order of imperial gardens, the historical narratives of the Qing dynasty, and the political and religious symbolism embodied in temple architecture during their exploration. Unlike typical leisure destinations, the "value realization" of cultural heritage sites heavily relies on knowledge translation and meaning construction: if visitors cannot access clear, credible, and easily understandable explanations and guided information, the cultural essence of the destination struggles to translate into tangible experiential value (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016). In reality, many visitors face significant information uncertainty both before and during their trips: On one hand, they often struggle to judge whether they can "understand" the site or if it's worth investing time and money for an in-depth visit, leading to high cognitive costs and decision hesitation (Sanyal & Malik, 2026); On the other hand, against the backdrop of widespread emphasis on conservation, visitor limits, and behavioral norms at heritage sites, tourists frequently question whether "the site is genuinely committed to protection" and whether management is transparent and standardized. Such doubts are amplified when commercial development, crowding levels, and facility updates or renovations appear inconsistent, further eroding trust and a sense of security in the destination. This negatively impacts visitors' willingness to pay, intent to revisit, and positive word-of-mouth dissemination (Ferreira et al., 2025). In other words, whether visitors form stable visitation decisions and sustained supportive behaviors often hinges on two critical conditions: First, whether the destination's interpretive and narrative systems effectively lower comprehension barriers and enhance information transparency (interpretive quality). Second, whether visitors perceive the implementation of heritage protection responsibilities and the reliability of governance capabilities through on-site management and information presentation (perceived protection). These two real-world contradictions collectively form an indispensable contextual foundation for studying cultural heritage tourism behaviors in Chengde.

In the actual touring context of cultural heritage sites like Chengde, "perceived conservation" is rarely an abstract concept. Instead, it emerges as a subjective judgment gradually formed by visitors through continuous exposure to management cues

encountered on-site (Deng et al., 2023). First, visitors frequently encounter various protective measures and management rules—such as visitor caps, timed reservations, circulation controls, no-touching/no-photography notices, and closed-off restoration zones. These arrangements may be understood as necessary conservation tools, yet they also raise questions: Do restrictions stem from genuine preservation needs, or are they driven by administrative convenience or commercial operations? Second, Chengde's heritage landscape features numerous historic structures and landscape elements. During visits, visitors inevitably observe ongoing restoration projects, facility upgrades, and changes in exhibition methods. Insufficient explanations regarding restoration rationale, conservation justifications, or on-site signage can leave visitors uncertain—wondering whether "inadequate protection has caused damage" or "excessive renovation has diminished authenticity." This uncertainty heightens sensitivity toward evaluating management professionalism and respect for heritage value (Deacon & Smeets, 2013). Finally, heritage sites universally face the tension between "conservation and utilization." When visitors perceive excessive commercialization, crowding disrupting order, or discrepancies between conservation guidelines and actual management practices, their judgment about whether the site is genuinely protected and managed transparently and properly is amplified (Cheng, 2015). This perception then extends to evaluations of the destination's credibility, sense of responsibility, and long-term value. Thus, perceived conservation emerges as a critical psychological judgment triggered by multiple cues—regulatory constraints, restoration presentations, and commercialization/crowding (Liu & Chen, 2025). It not only influences visitors' trust in destinations and willingness to pay but may also play a pivotal role in linking informational cues (e.g., interpretive quality, information reliability) to behavioral outcomes like visits, repeat visits, and recommendations.

Within cultural heritage tourism research, perceived destination image is widely recognized as a key psychological factor influencing tourists' evaluations, satisfaction, and behavioral chioce (Chi & Qu, 2008). Destination image is not merely an objective reflection of destination attributes but a subjective construct formed through tourists' cumulative experiences, interactions, and information exposure. It encompasses cognitive understanding, emotional responses, and behavioral tendencies toward a destination (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008). In the case of Chengde, although its imperial heritage and

multi-ethnic cultural resources provide a strong material foundation for image formation, visitors' perceptions remain fragmented, largely due to discontinuous marketing communication and limited experiential coherence across touchpoints. As a result, potential visitors—particularly younger tourists—often lack a clear and distinctive image that motivates heritage visitation (Li et al., 2008). Chengde is generally perceived as a cultural heritage destination characterized by the coexistence of imperial garden culture and multi-ethnic historical traditions, symbolizing royal authority, cultural inclusiveness, and harmony between nature and architecture; however, this image is not consistently internalized or translated into concrete visiting behavior.

In addition to destination image, perceived conservation constitutes another critical mediating mechanism in heritage tourism decision-making. Perceived protection refers to tourists' cognitive assessment of whether cultural heritage resources are adequately conserved, responsibly managed, and sustainably utilized during their visit (Elshaer et al., 2024). As a salient dimension of cognitive destination image in heritage contexts, perceived protection influences visitors' trust in destination governance, ethical evaluations, and willingness to engage in heritage visitation and supportive behaviors (Zhang et al., 2022). When tourists perceive that heritage sites are well protected and professionally managed, they are more likely to interpret their visit as meaningful, responsible, and value-consistent, thereby strengthening both their destination image and their visiting behaviors (Moghavvemi et al., 2025). Accordingly, introducing perceived destination image and perceived protection as mediating variables is essential for explaining how tourists' perceived 4E marketing experiences are transformed into evaluative judgments and cultural heritage visiting behaviors. These mediators help clarify why similar promotional practices may lead to divergent visitation outcomes: while some experiences foster positive image formation and trust in conservation efforts, others fail to translate experiential stimuli into actual heritage visitation (Perry, 2023). By incorporating both perceptual pathways, this study provides a more comprehensive explanation of how marketing experiences influence tourists' decisions to visit cultural heritage sites and engage in culturally responsible tourism behaviors.

With the rapid development of the internet and social media, tourists now access travel information from a variety of channels, including official tourism websites, online travel platforms (e.g., Ctrip, TripAdvisor), short-video and livestreaming platforms (e.g.,

TikTok, YouTube), as well as personal social media sharing. Moreover, in an era dominated by social media and user-generated content, the credibility of information sources has become a crucial contextual factor shaping tourists' perception formation. Tourists increasingly rely on diverse information channels, including official platforms, online travel agencies, social media, and influencer content, yet the quality and reliability of such information vary substantially (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). From the tourist's perspective, perceived source credibility—reflected in the expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of information providers—plays a critical role in shaping visitors' behavioral responses, particularly their willingness to visit, revisit, and recommend cultural heritage sites (Berhanu & Raj, 2020). In cultural heritage tourism, where tourists often lack specialized historical or conservation knowledge, credible sources such as government authorities, cultural institutions, and internationally recognized organizations help reduce uncertainty and enhance confidence in the authenticity and value of heritage experiences (Khater, 2026). This heightened trust facilitates the internalization of marketing messages and experiential cues, thereby strengthening tourists' motivation to engage in on-site visitation and related heritage-supportive behaviors. Conversely, when information sources are perceived as low in credibility or excessively entertainment-oriented, tourists may question the authenticity, conservation responsibility, or cultural seriousness of a destination (Chen et al., 2025), which can weaken visiting behavior and discourage deeper engagement with heritage sites. Therefore, examining the moderating role of source credibility is essential for understanding how tourists translate information exposure into actual visiting behavior. This behavioral perspective not only clarifies the psychological mechanisms underlying heritage visitation decisions but also provides practical insights for guiding Chengde's cultural heritage communication toward building trust, reducing perceived risk, and encouraging sustained visitor participation in a highly competitive tourism environment.

In summary, although cultural heritage tourism has experienced rapid growth at global, national, and local levels, destinations such as Chengde continue to face challenges related to weak image differentiation, limited promotional effectiveness, and insufficient word-of-mouth influence. By integrating the 4E marketing model, perceived destination image, and source credibility into a unified framework grounded in tourists' subjective perceptions, this study seeks to clarify the psychological and communicative mechanisms

underlying effective tourism promotion. This approach not only strengthens theoretical coherence across the problem statement, conceptual framework, and measurement design, but also provides practical insights for enhancing the promotional effectiveness of cultural heritage destinations in an increasingly competitive tourism market.

1.1.2 Research Gaps

In recent years, cultural heritage tourism has become an important focus in tourism research, given its critical role in cultural identity construction, the preservation of intangible heritage, and sustainable tourism development (Pai et al., 2025; Sotiriadis & Shen, 2025). Existing studies have primarily approached this field from the perspective of tourist behavior, analyzing how factors such as service quality and destination attractiveness influence satisfaction (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022) and revisit behavior (Mohammed et al., 2021). These studies have laid a solid theoretical foundation for understanding the behavioral mechanisms of cultural heritage tourism. However, with the continued growth of heritage tourism and the transformation of the communication environment toward digitalization and diversification (Psomadaki et al., 2019), tourists' visiting behavior is increasingly shaped by a complex interplay of perceptual, emotional, and communicative factors (Raja et al., 2023). Tourists' willingness to visit cultural heritage sites is not solely determined by their interest in the destination; it is also jointly influenced by marketing stimuli, the quality of interpretation, the perceived state of heritage conservation, and the credibility of information sources. Therefore, a systematic investigation of the cognitive, emotional, and trust-based mechanisms that affect visiting behavior—based on the tourist's perspective—can more accurately capture the decision-making logic within heritage tourism. This approach also offers new theoretical directions and practical value for enhancing marketing strategies and governance practices in the heritage tourism sector, making it an area in urgent need of further research.

In current tourism research, tourists often face fragmented information, difficulties in cultural understanding, and inconsistencies between promotional messages and actual experiences during their trips (Lee & Lee, 2025; Zhang et al., 2026). These challenges can lead to cognitive biases and unmet expectations, ultimately affecting tourists' overall evaluation of the destination and their willingness to engage in word-of-mouth communication (Lee & Lee, 2025). As such, tourism marketing should not only effectively attract visitors before the trip but also ensure consistent, meaningful, and culturally rich

content and experiences throughout the journey. The 4E marketing model, initially proposed in digital marketing and consumer behavior studies (Novčić & Šegota, 2014), highlights four core dimensions: immersive experience (Experience), interactive co-creation (Exchange), omnichannel visibility (Everyplace), and voluntary promotion (Evangelism). These elements are highly compatible with the participatory characteristics of cultural heritage tourism (Masood et al., 2025). Although the model has been conceptually discussed (Ahmed et al., 2024), empirical research is still needed to determine whether tourists truly experience cultural immersion, participate in co-creation, receive consistent messages across platforms, and voluntarily promote the destination during actual heritage trips.

Moreover, an increasing number of studies have begun to highlight interpretation quality as a significant factor influencing tourist behavior (Lee et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025). Unlike general leisure-oriented destinations, the appeal of cultural heritage sites does not rest solely on their visible physical landscapes; instead, deeper cultural experiences often rely on guided tours, interpretive commentary, signage systems, and multimedia technologies to construct meaning (Qasim Derhem Dammag et al., 2025). Whether the quality of interpretation effectively conveys historical value, cultural logic, and spatial symbolism has become a critical determinant of whether tourists can "understand" and "make sense" of the heritage content (Wei et al., 2025). Therefore, incorporating interpretation quality into the analytical model beyond the 4E marketing framework not only fills a key perceptual gap in the visitor experience pathway but also aligns more closely with the knowledge-dependent characteristics of cultural heritage tourism.

As research on tourist experience advances, destination image has become a central variable in tourism behavior models (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021). A positive destination image can significantly enhance tourist satisfaction, emotional attachment, and behavior (Suban, 2024). Recent studies have begun to explore the relationship between perceived destination image and marketing activities, suggesting that tourists' cognitive and emotional resonance with marketing stimuli is a key mechanism influencing their attitudes and behaviors (Wei et al., 2025). Some scholars view destination image as a direct outcome of marketing communications (Xiao et al., 2022), while others consider it an antecedent of behavioral variables such as loyalty and recommendation intention (Ramesh & Jaunky,

2021). Increasingly, research has confirmed its mediating role between marketing stimuli and tourist responses. Khan et al. (2022) showed that digital marketing enhances tourists' cognitive and emotional perceptions of a destination, indirectly influencing behavioral outcomes. Baber and Baber (2022) demonstrated that social media marketing and e-reputation significantly increase intention to visit through destination image perception. These findings suggest that perceived destination image, as an integration of cognition and emotion, plays a critical role in linking marketing messages to tourist behavior.

In the context of Chengde—a city with deep historical roots and multicultural heritage—the construction of a compelling destination image is particularly important. Chengde is known for its imperial gardens, religious architecture, and multi-ethnic cultural integration, offering rich symbolic and historical value (Li, 2024). However, official promotional narratives often emphasize abstract symbolism and grand storytelling, while tourists tend to focus more on interactivity, authenticity, and emotional resonance during their visits (Hu & Salleh, 2021). The gap between promotional content and actual experience may weaken emotional identification and reduce the willingness to recommend the destination, thus limiting the overall effectiveness of tourism promotion (Balaskas et al., 2025). It is therefore necessary to reconceptualize perceived destination image as a dynamic psychological process and investigate its mediating role between marketing information and tourists' behavior.

At the same time, perceived conservation has gradually emerged as a focal point in cultural tourism research, referring to tourists' subjective evaluation of site preservation, on-site order, and environmental management (Chen et al., 2025). When visitors perceive that a heritage site is being "taken seriously" and "managed in a transparent and orderly manner," they are more likely to develop a sense of trust and cultural responsibility, thereby enhancing their willingness to pay, recommend, and revisit (Cheng et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2025). In world cultural heritage destinations like Chengde, conservation efforts are not only reflected in the physical maintenance and restoration of the site, but also in governance dimensions such as respect for historical authenticity, appropriate control of commercial development, and effective visitor management (Zhang et al., 2025). Consequently, tourists' perceptions of these aspects may directly influence their willingness to visit, support, and promote the destination.

Source credibility is another critical factor that has been widely examined in advertising and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) research (González-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Tourists today acquire travel information from a variety of sources, including official platforms, tourism agencies, influencers, independent bloggers, and peer tourists (Yanjun Kong, 2024). These sources differ significantly in expertise, authority, and reliability, which directly influence how tourists evaluate and adopt information (Tran et al., 2024). In cultural heritage tourism, where concerns about authenticity and historical legitimacy are particularly salient, the credibility of information sources plays an even greater role (Battocchio, 2025). If the source lacks credibility, tourists may develop misunderstandings or distrust (Xu & Liu, 2025). Thus, source credibility can serve as a key moderating variable in the process by which marketing content influences perceived image and, in turn, shapes tourists' behavior. Incorporating this factor into marketing models can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how tourists process information in complex digital environments.

To summarize, although existing research on cultural heritage tourism has made valuable contributions to understanding tourist behavior, destination image construction, and communication strategies, several important gaps remain. First, the immersive, interactive, and participatory aspects of tourist experiences during actual trips have not been sufficiently explored. Second, while the roles of perceived destination image and perceived conservation have gained recognition, their dynamic development and underlying mechanisms in heritage contexts require further investigation. Third, the moderating role of source credibility in shaping tourists' responses in digital communication settings remains underdeveloped. Addressing these gaps, this study proposes an integrated framework that incorporates the 4E marketing dimensions and heritage interpretation quality as antecedents, perceived destination image and perceived conservation as mediators, and source credibility as a moderator. This framework aims to uncover the perceptual and behavioral mechanisms of tourists in the context of Chengde's cultural heritage tourism, contributing both to theoretical development and practical implementation.

1.2 Significance of the Study

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

The theoretical significance of this study lies in the integration of four key conceptual foundations—the 4E marketing model, image theory, source credibility theory, and experience economy theory—into a unified analytical framework tailored to the context of cultural heritage tourism. Together, these theories provide a robust foundation for advancing the scholarly understanding of how immersive marketing strategies shape tourist perceptions and promote destination engagement. This integration contributes across four major theoretical dimensions: contextual expansion of marketing models, enrichment of psychological pathways, refinement of boundary conditions, and elevation of value-based logics in tourism promotion.

First, the study extends the 4E marketing model into the underexplored field of cultural heritage tourism. Originally developed for consumer-driven and digital marketing contexts, the 4E model emphasizes four dimensions—experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism—that highlight participatory, emotionally engaging, and omnichannel forms of value creation. By embedding this model in Chengde's culturally symbolic and historically rooted tourism setting, the study demonstrates that the 4E framework can effectively explain not only digital consumer behavior but also the experiential, affective, and symbolic dynamics central to heritage tourism. Additionally, a fifth marketing-related construct, heritage interpretation quality, is introduced to account for the unique cognitive and emotional demands of understanding complex cultural landscapes, further extending the operational scope of heritage marketing theory. This contextual expansion broadens the theoretical boundary of the model and offers a more nuanced understanding of visitor engagement in cultural destinations.

Second, drawing on image theory, the study reconceptualizes perceived destination image as a key mediating mechanism through which marketing stimuli—including the 4E dimensions and interpretation quality—are cognitively and affectively processed. Rather than treating image as a static post-consumption outcome, this study positions it as a dynamic psychological construct that connects the marketing experience with cultural heritage visiting behavior, such as recommendation, social sharing, or re-visitation. This approach strengthens the explanatory pathway between marketing engagement and actual tourist behavior.

Third, the study introduces perceived conservation as a second mediating variable, capturing tourists' judgments regarding the governance, environmental quality, restoration authenticity, and protection efforts at heritage sites. This construct reflects tourists' cognitive appraisal of institutional responsibility and sustainability, which is especially salient in world heritage contexts such as Chengde. The addition of this construct helps bridge marketing psychology with conservation management, highlighting how perceptions of protection quality shape visitors' trust, satisfaction, and visiting behavior.

Fourth, the inclusion of source credibility theory introduces a critical moderating condition for evaluating the effectiveness of marketing communication in heritage tourism. Given that cultural destinations rely heavily on the authenticity, legitimacy, and symbolism of their narratives, the trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of information sources become key factors in how tourists interpret promotional messages. By theorizing source credibility as a moderator in the relationship between 4E-based marketing stimuli and destination image perception, the study contributes to a more context-sensitive and psychologically grounded understanding of communication effectiveness in tourism.

Finally, experience economy theory provides the macro-theoretical foundation for understanding why experiences, not just products or information, generate value in heritage tourism. The theory emphasizes that meaningful, immersive, and emotionally resonant experiences—often co-created between the tourist and the environment—are the highest form of economic offering. By connecting this theory to the operational dimensions of the 4E model and interpretive service design, the study deepens our understanding of how experiential and symbolic value creation drives tourist behavior, such as advocacy, return visits, and deeper cultural engagement.

In sum, this study contributes a theoretically integrated, empirically testable framework that explains how tourists experience, process, and respond to marketing and interpretive stimuli in heritage settings. By synthesizing the 4E model, image theory, source credibility theory, and experience economy theory—and adapting them to include heritage interpretation quality, perceived conservation, and cultural heritage visiting behavior—the study enhances both theoretical understanding and practical application in the field of cultural tourism marketing.

1.2.2 Practical Significance

From a practical perspective, this study generates actionable insights that will benefit a wide range of stakeholders involved in Chengde's cultural heritage tourism ecosystem. By applying the 4E marketing model to a heritage-based setting, the study provides an evidence-driven and replicable framework for designing more engaging, participatory, and visitor-centered promotional strategies. These contributions support Chengde's efforts to reposition itself as a dynamic cultural brand with stronger competitiveness in both domestic and international tourism markets.

First, the study offers direct guidance for local tourism authorities, destination management organizations, and city-level cultural planners. Through empirical identification of which dimensions of the 4E model most strongly shape tourists' perceptions and promotional responses, the findings assist policymakers in developing targeted initiatives such as immersive cultural programs, integrated digital communication strategies, and co-creation activities with heritage communities. This enhances marketing precision, improves the efficiency of public resource allocation, and strengthens the coherence of Chengde's cultural messaging across multiple platforms.

Second, the results benefit operational stakeholders, including museums, heritage site administrators, cultural institutions, tour operators, and tourism enterprises. By clarifying how marketing stimuli translate into perceived destination image, the study provides a scientific basis for improving interpretive content, narrative design, spatial storytelling, and service delivery. Enhancing the cognitive and emotional resonance of Chengde's heritage resources allow these organizations to cultivate deeper visitor engagement, stimulate positive word-of-mouth dissemination, and increase repeat visitation, thereby strengthening the long-term sustainability of cultural heritage tourism.

Third, the study generates practical implications for local communities and cultural custodians. The integration of the 4E model highlights the value of participatory experiences, intangible heritage workshops, and community interaction. Also, it enables residents and cultural practitioners to play a more active role in heritage interpretation and visitor experience design. This supports community empowerment, strengthen cultural identity transmission, and creates new livelihood opportunities aligned with sustainable tourism development.

Finally, the study offers transferable insights for heritage destinations beyond Chengde, especially other second-tier cultural cities in China and Asia. The integrative analytical framework—linking experience, value exchange, omnichannel visibility, visitor evangelism, destination image construction, and source credibility—are served as a reference model for regions seeking to modernize their cultural tourism promotion. Practitioners and researchers in these destinations are able to adapt the study's findings to improve emotional engagement, enhance digital communication capacity, and strengthen community-based cultural branding.

Overall, the practical significance of this study extends from governmental and institutional stakeholders to communities, tourism enterprises, and visitors themselves. By illuminating how heritage destinations can mobilize the 4E framework, construct compelling destination images, and leverage credible communication sources, the study will contribute to more strategic, participatory, and sustainable cultural heritage tourism development in Chengde and beyond.

1.3 Statement of Research Questions

(1) Under the background of cultural heritage tourism, how do the four dimensions of the 4E model (experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism) and heritage interpretation quality influence cultural heritage visiting behavior?

(2) How does the perceived destination image and perceived conservation play mediating roles between the four marketing dimensions, heritage interpretation quality and cultural heritage visiting behavior?

(3) How does the source credibility play a moderating role between the four marketing dimensions and cultural heritage visiting behavior?

(4) What is the effective promotion strategies for cultural heritage tourism promotion?

1.4 Statement of Research Objectives

(1) To examine the direct effects of the four dimensions of the 4E marketing model (experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism) and heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visiting behavior.

(2) To investigate the mediating mechanisms by testing how perceived destination image and perceived conservation mediate the relationships between (a) the four 4E dimensions and (b) heritage interpretation quality, and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

(3) To test the moderating role of source credibility in shaping the strength of the relationships between the four 4E marketing dimensions and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

(4) To develop evidence-based promotion strategies for cultural heritage tourism by translating the empirical findings into actionable recommendations for destination marketing and heritage site management (e.g., optimizing 4E-based marketing, strengthening interpretation systems, enhancing perceived conservation, and leveraging credible sources).

1.5 Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the influence of the 4E marketing dimensions and heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visiting behavior, integrating perceptual mediators and the moderating role of source credibility. The research framework follows a survey-based approach, collecting data from tourists who have recently visited Chengde's cultural heritage sites. A structured questionnaire was developed based on validated measurement scales from prior studies and adapted to the context of heritage tourism. The instrument captures the four 4E dimensions—experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism—heritage interpretation quality, perceived destination image, perceived conservation, source credibility, and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Sampling employed a combination of purposive and convenience strategies, targeting respondents who had direct experience with the heritage sites to ensure relevance and data validity. Data collection occurred both online, via digital survey platforms, and offline, through on-site distribution using QR codes at key attractions. This dual approach ensured sufficient coverage and diversity of respondents, yielding a final sample of 887 participants.

The study applies structural equation modeling (SEM) to test hypothesized relationships among constructs, assess measurement properties, and examine both direct and indirect effects. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate

reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs, while structural path analysis tested direct, mediating, and moderating effects. Bootstrapping procedures were used to assess the significance of indirect effects, and interaction terms were included to examine the moderating role of source credibility. Fit indices such as χ^2/df, RMSEA, GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, and CFI were employed to ensure model adequacy and robustness.

This methodological approach allows for rigorous testing of the proposed theoretical model, integrating experiential, cognitive, evaluative, and trust-based factors to provide comprehensive insights into cultural heritage visiting behavior. The combination of survey data, validated instruments, and SEM analysis ensures that the findings are both statistically robust and practically relevant for theory development and stakeholder application.

1.6 Definitions of Terms

1.6.1 Experience

Experience refers to the holistic, immersive engagement of tourists with cultural heritage sites, encompassing sensory, emotional, and participatory dimensions. It involves not only observing and appreciating the physical environment but also actively interacting with exhibits, performances, and cultural activities that stimulate curiosity and personal involvement (Madhyamapurush, 2022). The depth of experience influences the extent to which tourists feel connected to the destination, shaping their enjoyment, satisfaction, and likelihood to engage further. Experience also includes the emotional resonance and memorable moments that enhance the perceived value of the visit, contributing to stronger behavioral intentions and engagement outcomes in heritage tourism contexts.

1.6.2 Exchange

Exchange captures the perceived value arising from interactive and reciprocal engagement between tourists and heritage site offerings. It reflects opportunities for co-creation, such as participating in workshops, guided activities, or collaborative cultural events, where visitors actively contribute to the experience (Madhyamapurush, 2022). The concept emphasizes that engagement is mutually beneficial: tourists derive personal enjoyment and knowledge, while the site gains enhanced visitor involvement and promotion. Exchange also encompasses social interactions with other visitors or staff, which can influence perceptions of value, satisfaction, and overall behavioral intention.

By facilitating meaningful participation, exchange serves as a critical driver of cultural heritage visiting behavior and advocacy.

1.6.3 Everyplace

Everyplace refers to the accessibility and availability of cultural heritage information and engagement opportunities across multiple channels and platforms. It encompasses both physical and digital access, including on-site guidance, mobile applications, websites, social media, and other online resources that allow tourists to plan, participate, and reflect on their visit (Madhyamapurush, 2022). The concept emphasizes that engagement is not confined to the physical space of the heritage site but extends across time and digital environments, enabling continuous interaction. By providing convenient and integrated access to information, Everyplace enhances tourists' ability to navigate, understand, and connect with the site, ultimately supporting behavioral engagement and repeat visitation.

1.6.4 Evangelism

Evangelism denotes tourists' willingness to actively share their experiences, recommend heritage sites to others, and act as informal promoters of the destination. It reflects the social dimension of engagement, where individual satisfaction and enjoyment are translated into advocacy behaviors that influence peers, social networks, and potential visitors (Cavadas & Moreira ,2025). Evangelism includes verbal recommendations, online reviews, social media content creation, and participation in community discussions about the site. By encouraging others to visit and participate, tourists who engage in evangelism help amplify the reach and impact of marketing and interpretive efforts. The strength of evangelism reflects both the quality of the experience and the tourists' commitment to promoting cultural heritage.

1.6.5 Heritage Interpretation Quality

Heritage interpretation quality refers to the clarity, depth, and meaningfulness of the information and narratives provided at cultural heritage sites. It encompasses the accuracy, organization, and presentation of content, including signage, guided tours, exhibitions, and educational materials that help visitors understand historical, cultural, and social significance (Weng et al., 2020). High-quality interpretation enables tourists to make cognitive and emotional connections with the site, enhancing comprehension,

appreciation, and engagement. It also supports meaningful experience by providing context, storytelling, and insight that enrich both the affective and intellectual dimensions of the visit. Heritage interpretation quality is therefore a critical factor in motivating participation, enhancing satisfaction, and encouraging advocacy behaviors.

1.6.6 Perceived Destination Image

Perceived destination image refers to the mental representation and evaluation that tourists form regarding a cultural heritage site, encompassing cognitive assessments and affective responses. It includes perceptions of the site's aesthetic value, authenticity, cultural significance, atmosphere, and overall appeal (Najar & Rather, 2023). The image is shaped by both direct experiences and mediated information, such as promotional materials, word-of-mouth, and interpretive content. A positive destination image enhances tourists' emotional connection, reinforces engagement, and increases the likelihood of participation, revisit, and recommendation. By influencing how tourists interpret and value the site, perceived destination image functions as a key determinant in shaping cultural heritage visiting behavior.

1.6.7 Perceived Conservation

Perceived conservation refers to tourists' awareness and evaluation of the preservation, management, and sustainability practices at cultural heritage sites. It encompasses the visible and communicated efforts to maintain the authenticity, structural integrity, and environmental quality of the site (Hernández-Rojas et al, 2021). Tourists' perceptions of effective conservation influence their trust in the site's management, their respect for cultural assets, and their overall engagement with heritage activities. When visitors recognize that heritage resources are carefully protected and sustainably managed, they are more likely to participate responsibly, revisit the site, and advocate for its preservation. Perceived conservation therefore acts as both a motivational and evaluative factor in cultural heritage visiting behavior.

1.6.8 Source Credibility

Source credibility refers to tourists' perception of the reliability, expertise, and trustworthiness of information providers related to heritage tourism. It includes the perceived authority of official sources, the accuracy and clarity of interpretive content, and the consistency of messages delivered through digital platforms, signage, or guided tours

(Sanusi et al, 2022). High source credibility increases tourists' confidence in the information they receive, enhancing their engagement with the site, compliance with guidelines, and responsiveness to interpretive or promotional efforts. By influencing the effectiveness of marketing and interpretive inputs, source credibility serves as a key moderator in translating experiential, informational, and evaluative stimuli into behavioral engagement.

1.6.9 Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior

Cultural heritage visiting behavior refers to the actions and intentions of tourists in engaging with heritage sites, encompassing participation, repeat visitation, and advocacy. It includes observable behaviors such as attending exhibitions, participating in workshops or guided tours, interacting with site staff, and engaging with cultural activities, as well as intentions to revisit or recommend the destination to others (Kanagasapapathy, 2017). This behavior reflects the outcome of multiple factors, including experiential engagement, interpretive quality, perceived destination image, perceived conservation, and the credibility of information sources. Cultural heritage visiting behavior represents both the direct and cumulative impact of marketing, interpretive, and evaluative influences on tourists' engagement with cultural heritage.

1.7 Delimitation of the Thesis

This thesis focuses specifically on cultural heritage tourism in Chengde, China, and the mechanisms through which the 4E marketing dimensions, heritage interpretation quality, perceptual mediators, and source credibility influence tourists' visiting behavior. The study is delimited to tourists who have recently visited key heritage sites, such as the Mountain Resort, Eight Outer Temples, and associated museums, ensuring that respondents have direct experience relevant to the research context. The research concentrates on quantitative survey methods and structural equation modeling, which delimits the study to measurable constructs and observed relationships while excluding qualitative or ethnographic approaches.

Additionally, the study limits its analysis to a defined set of variables, including experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, heritage interpretation quality, perceived destination image, perceived conservation, source credibility, and cultural heritage visiting behavior. Other potentially relevant factors, such as individual motivation, prior

knowledge, socio-cultural background, or situational influences, are not included, delimiting the scope to the constructs central to the proposed theoretical model.

Temporal delimitation is also applied, as data collection captures tourists' perceptions and behaviors during a specific period rather than longitudinally, which restricts the examination of changes over time or across seasons. Finally, the findings are context-specific and may not be directly generalizable to other cultural or geographical settings, particularly destinations with different cultural, historical, or infrastructural characteristics. These delimitations provide a clear boundary for the study while ensuring focused and rigorous examination of the research objectives.

1.8 Outline of Thesis

The thesis is structured to systematically present the theoretical foundation, research design, empirical findings, and practical implications of the study. Chapter 1 introduces the background, research problem, objectives, significance, and methodology, providing definitions of key terms and outlining the delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature, covering the 4E marketing model, experience economy theory, image theory, source credibility theory, and prior research on cultural heritage tourism, establishing the theoretical framework and hypotheses.

Chapter 3 details the research methodology, including the research design, population and sample, data collection procedures, and analytical methods, as well as reliability and validity assessments of the survey instrument. Chapter 4 presents the empirical results, including descriptive statistics, measurement model validation, structural model analysis, mediation and moderation testing, and implications of the findings for the research objectives.

Chapter 5 discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the results, highlighting contributions to marketing and tourism theory, recommendations for local government, cultural organizations, and tourism enterprises, and identifying limitations and directions for future research. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis, summarizing the overall contributions of the study, reinforcing its relevance to cultural heritage tourism, and highlighting potential avenues for ongoing research and application in both academic and practitioner contexts.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter establishes the framework and rationale for investigating cultural heritage tourism in Chengde, focusing on the mechanisms through which marketing, interpretive, and perceptual factors influence tourists' engagement and visiting behavior. The chapter highlights the significance of integrating the 4E marketing dimensions—experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism—with heritage interpretation quality to understand how cognitive, affective, and participatory elements contribute to behavioral outcomes. It further identifies perceived destination image and perceived conservation as key mediators, and source credibility as a moderating factor, providing a comprehensive perspective on the factors shaping cultural heritage visiting behavior.

The research objectives are clearly articulated, emphasizing the examination of direct effects, mediation pathways, and moderation mechanisms. Methodological considerations are outlined, including survey design, sampling strategies, data collection procedures, and the planned use of structural equation modeling, which collectively ensure the rigor and reliability of the empirical analysis. Definitions of key variables establish conceptual clarity, while the delimitations specify the scope of the study, including its geographic focus, target population, and selected constructs.

Additionally, the chapter situates the study within the broader theoretical and practical context, linking the research to gaps in the existing literature on heritage tourism, experiential marketing, and interpretive quality. The chapter also provides an organized outline of the thesis structure, detailing the content and purpose of each subsequent chapter, which facilitates a systematic investigation of both theoretical propositions and practical implications. Overall, Chapter 1 lays a detailed and methodologically grounded foundation for the empirical and analytical work that follows, ensuring a coherent framework for examining the factors influencing tourists' engagement with Chengde's cultural heritage sites.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Building on the research background and problem statement in Chapter 1, this chapter establishes the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework for analyzing visitor behavior in cultural heritage tourism. Focusing on the experiential and communicative context of heritage destinations, it defines the core variables of this study, including the 4E marketing dimensions (experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism), heritage interpretation quality, perceived destination image, perceived conservation, source credibility, and cultural heritage visiting behavior. Through a review of representative literature, the chapter examines how experiential marketing and interpretation quality influence tourists' cognitive and affective perceptions, and how these perceptions mediate the transformation of marketing stimuli into behavioral responses. It further introduces source credibility as a moderating factor that conditions the strength of these relationships. On this basis, an integrated theoretical model and corresponding hypotheses are proposed, providing a clear analytical framework for the empirical research and laying the theoretical groundwork for the research design and methodology presented in Chapter 3.

2.1 Contexts of the Study

2.1.1 The Rise and Development of Cultural Heritage Tourism

Cultural heritage tourism stands as one of the most dynamic and influential sectors within contemporary tourism development. Its essence lies in fulfilling people's spiritual and cultural needs through experiential engagement with historical and cultural sites, traditional customs, ethnic arts, and intangible cultural heritage (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2022). Cultural heritage encompasses not only historical buildings, sites, and artefacts, but also intangible forms such as traditional practices, languages, performing arts, and local knowledge systems (Qiu et al., 2022). The concept of cultural heritage tourism thus embodies a profound integration of travel and culture. It transcends mere sightseeing,

representing a cultural experience and mode of transmission that bridges time and space (Alvarado-Sizzo, 2023).

The origins of cultural heritage tourism can be traced back to the Grand Tour of the 18th and 19th centuries (Ziarkowski, 2023), during which European aristocrats and intellectuals traveled to ancient Roman and Greek sites to cultivate cultural refinement and enhance social status. In the 1970s, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage established the core principle of "protection and transmission," (Jagielska-Burduk et al., 2021) elevating heritage conservation to a matter of global consensus.

In 1996, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) introduced the concept of "sustainable tourism," which promoted a shift from "static protection" toward a model balancing conservation and utilization (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023). Entering the 21st century, the challenges posed by over-commercialization led UNESCO in 2013 to launch the "World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme," (Almeida de Oliveira et al., 2024) emphasizing that tourism should serve heritage protection. This marked the transition of heritage tourism toward "living utilization," in which innovation, immersive experiences, and digital technologies are employed to ensure sustainable development.

Table 2.1 The Development History of Cultural Heritage Tourism

Period	Stage Characteristics	Core Perspective	Landmark Events
18th-19th Centuries	Origin	The core purpose of tourism activities was cultural experience. European nobles and intellectuals sought to enhance their cultural cultivation by visiting cultural relics.	The rise of the European "Grand Tour", a phenomenon where nobles and intellectuals traveled across regions to visit cultural heritage sites.

Table 2.1 (continued)

Period	Stage Characteristics	Core Perspective	Landmark Events
1970s	Static Preservation	Focused on the preservation and restoration of the cultural heritage itself, restricted over-development to prevent tourism activities from damaging the authenticity and integrity of heritage, and emphasized the institutionalized protection of heritage.	In 1972, UNESCO adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, establishing the core principle of “protection and inheritance”.
1990s	Balanced Preservation and Utilization	Recognized that tourism could serve as a supportive force for heritage preservation: it could not only provide funds for heritage protection but also raise the public's awareness of heritage and its conservation, aiming to strike a balance between preservation and utilization.	In 1996, the UNWTO systematically put forward the definition of “sustainable tourism” for the first time.
21st Century	Dynamic Utilization	Broke through the one-way logic of "heritage benefits from tourism" and emphasized the "collaborative governance of tourism and heritage preservation". On the premise of safeguarding the authenticity and integrity of heritage, it promoted the integration of heritage into contemporary life and realized its sustainable development through innovative experiences and digital means.	In 2013, UNESCO released the World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme, clearly stating the orientation that “tourism should serve heritage preservation”.

(Source: Compiled by this study)

Cultural heritage tourism can be classified into multiple categories based on the form and functional attributes of the heritage (as shown in the Figure 2.1). Each category is based on a rich pool of world cultural heritage resources and forms differentiated tourism experience models. According to the form of the heritage, world cultural heritage tourism is usually divided into tangible cultural heritage tourism and intangible cultural heritage tourism. Among them, tangible cultural heritage tourism takes tangible and tangible heritage entities as the core attractions, emphasizing the historical authenticity, artistic uniqueness and scientific research value of heritage (Vaz Serra et al., 2023). Intangible cultural heritage tourism focuses on non-concrete cultural forms and emphasizes the "living inheritance" and "interactive experience" of culture (Gao & Jones, 2021). Tourists can feel the vitality and inheritance of culture through participation and experience.

According to the functional attributes, world cultural heritage tourism can be divided into educational, recreational, experiential and ecological types. Education-oriented cultural heritage tourism takes cultural dissemination and knowledge popularization as its core function (Wu, 2021), and enables tourists to acquire knowledge through professional interpretation systems and interactive projects. Recreational cultural heritage tourism aims to relax body and mind and enjoy slow life (Liu et al., 2023). Experiential cultural heritage tourism is characterized by deep participation and immersion (Xu et al., 2022). Ecocultural heritage tourism takes "coexistence between man and nature" as the core concept (Du et al., 2025).

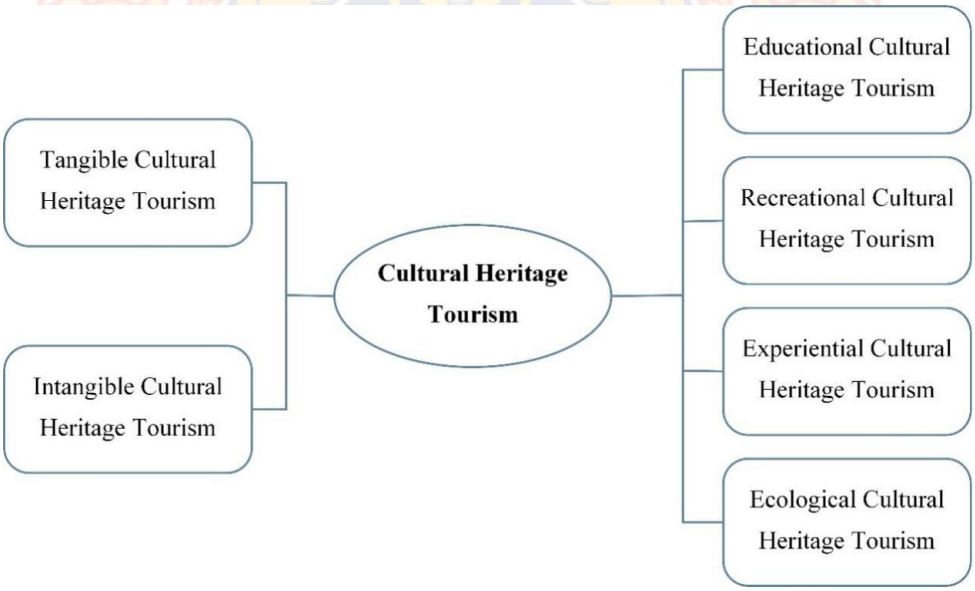

Figure 2.1 Classification of Cultural Heritage Tourism

In terms of its role and significance, cultural heritage tourism serves not only as a vital form of cultural preservation but also as a key driver of regional economic growth (Škrabić Perić et al., 2021). On the one hand, it attracts substantial visitor numbers who spend locally (Panzera et al., 2021), stimulating prosperity in related industries such as catering, accommodation, transport, and cultural and creative products, thereby generating a significant multiplier effect. On the other hand, it creates numerous employment opportunities, particularly in areas such as tour guiding (Farzaliyeva & Abdullayev, 2025), performances, handicrafts, and tourism service management, offering local residents diverse career prospects. Secondly, cultural heritage tourism transcends mere historical display; it embodies cultural identity and values (De Oliveira, 2024; Mantra, 2024). Through tourism activities, heritage is revitalized, transitioning from passive preservation to active social transmission. This transmission not only strengthens community residents' identification with local culture but also bolsters national cultural confidence. Simultaneously, the development of cultural heritage tourism often relies on active community participation (Brooks et al., 2023). Through tourism, local residents not only gain economic benefits but also achieve identity recognition and pride through cultural activities, thereby strengthening community cohesion. At the international exchange level, cultural heritage tourism possesses unique communicative functions globally, serving as a vital pathway for cross-cultural dialogue and understanding (Aririguzoh, 2022). It not only attracts international visitors to gain deeper insights into the host country's history and culture but also enhances the nation's international influence and soft power through cultural dissemination.

Within the global tourism industry, cultural heritage tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing subsectors. More than 40% of international travel involves cultural motivations, with the market maintaining an annual growth rate of 5%–10% and projected to reach several hundred billion dollars by 2025 (UNWTO Data). As shown in Figure 2.2, Europe, the Americas, and Asia are the primary concentration areas for heritage tourism, with destinations such as the Forbidden City in China, the Eiffel Tower in France, and the Colosseum in Italy attracting millions of visitors annually. At the same time, emerging markets represented by China, India, and Southeast Asian countries are experiencing demand growth far exceeding the global average, becoming new centers of expansion. As illustrated in Figure 2.3, the number of world cultural heritage sites continues to increase

across all continents. With appropriate protection and development, world cultural heritage can play a crucial role in promoting tourism growth, stimulating economic development, and disseminating regional culture, thus providing valuable lessons for the sustainable advancement of other heritage destinations.

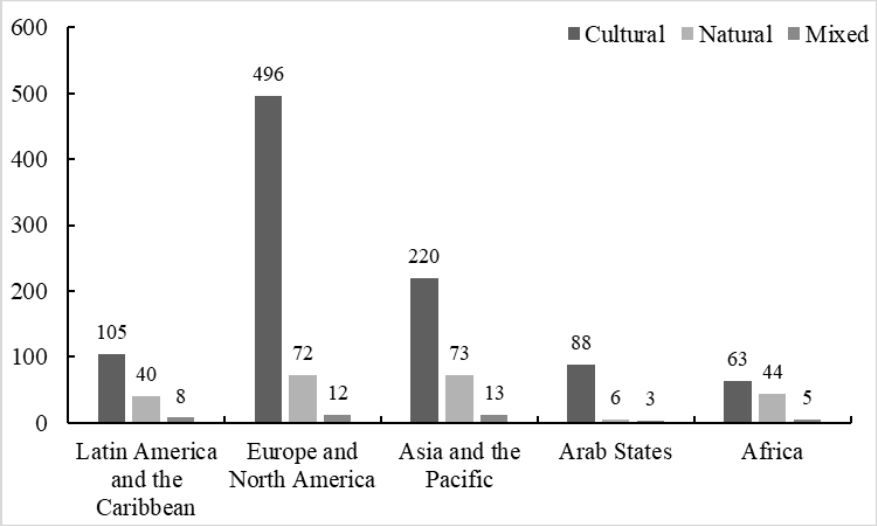

Figure 2.2 The number of World Heritage Sites on each continent

Source: UNESCO, 2025

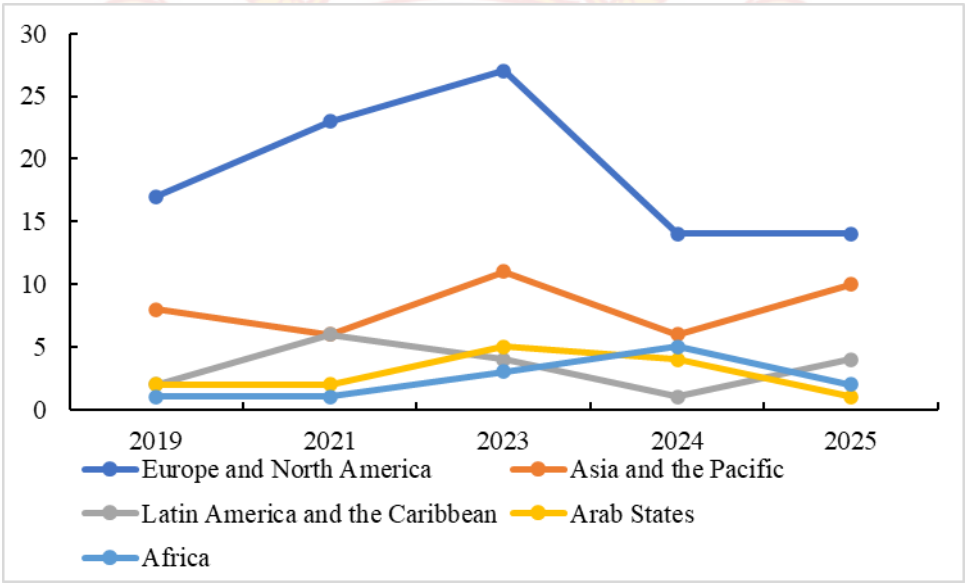

Figure 2.3 The evolution trend of the number of cultural heritages across all continents

Source: UNESCO, 2025

2.1.2 Chinese Cultural Heritage Tourism

China's cultural heritage tourism is driven by both national strategy and industrial integration. With the deepening of industrial integration, cultural heritage tourism is combined with cultural and creative industries, film and television industries, and festival activities, forming a diversified development model of "heritage +" (Li et al., 2022; Lv et al., 2025). Domestic cultural heritage sites have continuously become the key destinations for tourists.

As a big country with cultural heritage resources, China has rich cultural heritage tourism resources covering both material and non-material forms and multiple functional attributes. From the perspective of material cultural heritage tourism, there are ancient buildings and historical architectural complexes such as the Forbidden City in Beijing and the Ancient City of Pingyao in Shanxi Province. Tourists can feel the depth of history in the symmetrical palace layout or the county seat pattern of the Ming and Qing Dynasties (Cao et al., 2025). There are also archaeological sites such as the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor and the Terracotta Army Pit in Shaanxi Province, and the Yin Ruins in Anyang, Henan Province, where the code of ancient civilization is transmitted through the array of terracotta warriors and the oracle bone inscriptions. There are also cultural landscapes such as the Hani Terrace in Yunnan Province and Huangshan Mountain in Anhui Province, which show the ecological wisdom of "integration of nature and man" and the beauty of integration of nature and culture. Intangible cultural heritage tourism focuses on traditional festivals (such as Spring Festival temple fair, Dragon Boat race), folk performances (such as Sichuan opera face changing, Mongolian Nadam), and traditional handicrafts (such as Suzhou embroidery and Jingdezhen ceramics) (Hu et al., 2024), so that tourists can touch cultural vitality through participating in the experience through "living inheritance." From the functional attribute division, Education-type heritage tourism (such as the "little archaeologist" activity of the Terracotta Warriors and horse of Emperor Qin Shi Huang), leisure type heritage tourism (such as the palace garden tour of Chengde Summer Resort), experience-type heritage tourism (such as the writing experience of Dongba culture of the Naxi ethnic group in Lijiang), and eco-type heritage tourism (such as the ecological protection practice of the Hani terrace) together constitute a diversified system of China's cultural heritage tourism.

Table 2.2 List of Chinese Cultural Heritage (Part, Sorted by Registration Year)

Cultural Heritage List	Location	Registration Year
The Great Wall	Beijing, Hebei Province, Shanxi Province, Shaanxi Province, Gansu Province, etc.	1987
The Imperial Palaces of the Ming and Qing Dynasties	Dongcheng District, Beijing (The Palace Museum in Beijing); Shenyang, Liaoning Province (Shenyang Imperial Palace)	1987
Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor and the Terracotta Army Pit	Lintong District, Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province	1987
Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang	Dunhuang City, Gansu Province	1987
Peking Man Site at Zhoukoudian	Fangshan District, Beijing	1987
Ancient Architectural Complex on Wudang Mountain	Danjiangkou City, Shiyan City, Hubei Province	1994
Temple and Cemetery of Confucius and the Kong Family Mansion in Qufu	Qufu City, Shandong Province	1994
Chengde Mountain Resort and Its Outlying Temples	**Chengde City, Hebei Province**	**1994**
Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace, Lhasa	Lhasa City, Tibet Autonomous Region	1994
Old Town of Lijiang	Gucheng District, Lijiang City, Yunnan Province	1997

Source: World Cultural Heritage List, 2025

However, despite its superior resource endowment, China's cultural heritage tourism still faces many challenges in its development (Geng et al., 2022; Ma & Mohame, 2023). It is relatively weak in international publicity, which leads to its global influence failing to match the magnitude of resources (Jiang, 2024); At present, many heritage sites pay too much attention to visual impact and entertainment consumption in the development (Zhang et al., 2023).

Some material heritage sites simplify the interpretation content, focus on the scene of online celebrities clock-in, and ignore the in-depth interpretation of the historical background of ancient construction technology and archaeological sites (Lian & Xie, 2024). Intangible cultural heritage tourism also has the tendency of "superficial evolution", weakening the transmission of cultural connotation (Qiu et al., 2022), resulting in the gradual loss of cultural attributes of heritage sites. In addition, the display forms of some cultural heritage still remain at the level of traditional sightseeing and static display (Cai et al., 2021).

For example, some museums only present cultural relics with text and pictures, without combining VR/AR and other technologies to create immersive experience, which is difficult to meet the young group's consumption preference for interactivity and fun, restricting the spread of cultural heritage and the depth of experience. Due to the lack of innovative experience design or emotional resonance points in some heritage sites, tourists can only "take a quick look at the scenery," which can neither deeply understand the historical and cultural value behind the heritage, nor form a positive momentum of word-of-mouth communication (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2022).

Therefore, the high-quality development of Chinese cultural heritage tourism urgently needs to achieve breakthroughs in international communication, in-depth cultural transmission, innovative display and emotional experience, such as designing international communication content based on multiple heritage types, optimizing cultural interpretation system based on heritage tourism characteristics with different functional attributes, and selecting innovative experience forms for young groups. So as to promote word-of-mouth communication and brand building, and realize the sustainable development and international influence of cultural heritage tourism.

In this context, in-depth research on specific regional cases not only helps to reveal the common problems of Chinese cultural heritage tourism in practice, but also helps to

explore the development path according to local conditions. As an important historical and cultural city in northern China, Chengde has representative and research value due to its unique resources of royal gardens, religious relics and multi-ethnic culture. The analysis of cultural heritage tourism in Chengde City can not only reflect the practical experience and dilemma of the place in the protection and utilization of cultural heritage, but also provide enlightenment for the sustainable development of cultural heritage tourism in the new era.

2.1.3 Cultural Heritage Tourism Development and Challenges in Chengde City, China

The development of Chengde's cultural heritage tourism industry exhibits distinct historical trajectories and phased characteristics. As the Qing dynasty's imperial summer retreat, Chengde gained worldwide renowned for its cultural heritage sites including *the Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples*. These heritage assets possess exceptional value in architectural artistry, landscape design and religious culture, profoundly reflecting the historical imprint of multi-ethnic exchanges and political structures during the Qing era. During the 1980s, alongside the rise of China's tourism industry, Chengde began exploring tourism development of its imperial gardens and religious sites, gradually forming the rudiments of a tourism industry centered on cultural heritage (Hevia, 2001).

In 1994, *the Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples* were formally inscribed on the World Heritage List, marking a new developmental phase for Chengde's tourism sector (Di Giovine, 2008; Hevia, 2001). This historic milestone not only elevated Chengde's international profile but also established cultural heritage as a key driver for advancing local tourism industrialization and branding (Hevia, 2001). Subsequently, through policy guidance, market-oriented operations, and regional collaboration, Chengde progressively established an industrial system centered on cultural heritage tourism. To visually illustrate the cultural richness and architectural heritage that underpin this development trajectory, the following figure 2.4 presents a composite view of iconic scenes from the *Chengde Mountain Resort.*



Figure 2.4 Cultural Heritage Tourism Images of Chengde City
Source: Wikipedia

Within the macro framework of national regional development and cultural strategy, Chengde's cultural heritage tourism industry has been accorded significant strategic importance.

Firstly, under the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei coordinated development strategy (The location is shown in Figure 2.5), Chengde's unique geographical position and rich cultural resources have established it as a pivotal hub for leisure, resort and cultural tourism in northern Beijing (Ju & Xiangyi, 2024). Its function extends beyond accommodating the spillover demand for culture and tourism from the capital; it also serves as a vital bridge connecting North China with Northeast China. Secondly, against the backdrop of national policies promoting a “Cultural Powerhouse” and the “Project for Inheriting and Developing China's Outstanding Traditional Culture”, Chengde's imperial, religious and ethnic cultural heritage is regarded as a vital vehicle for telling China's story to the world and enhancing cultural confidence (Guo, 2018). Chengde's cultural heritage tourism serves not only as a strategic pivot for local economic transformation but also as a vital component in building China's cultural soft power and fostering international cultural exchange. This multifaceted strategic positioning has secured Chengde an irreplaceable place within the national framework of cultural heritage tourism.

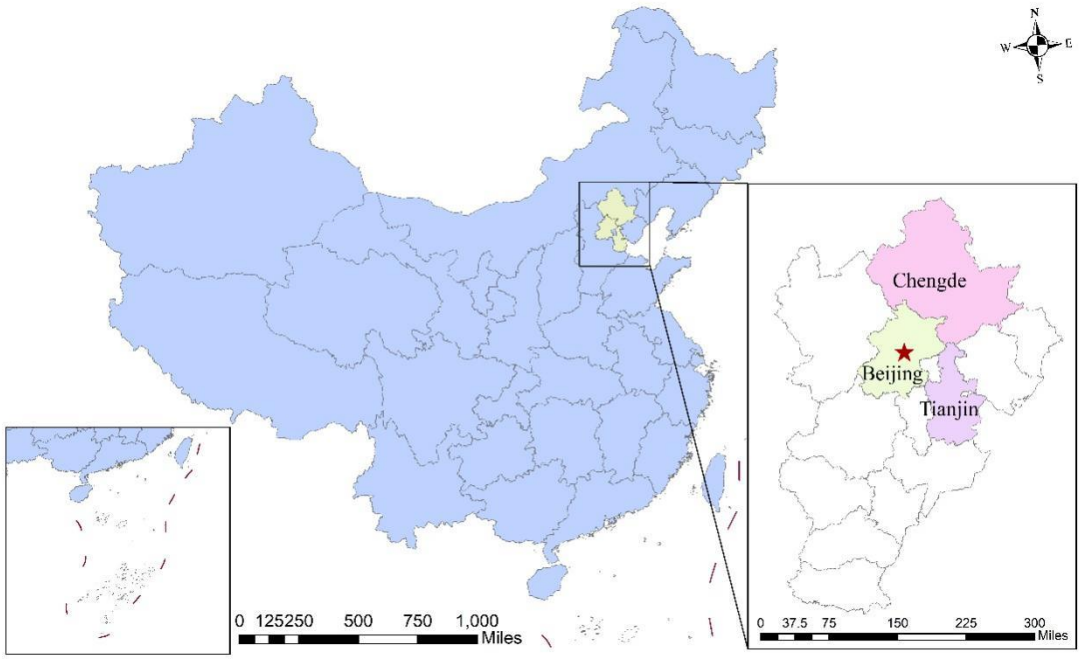

Figure 2.5 The location distribution of Chengde City in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei metropolitan area

Adapted from: Author, 2025

In recent years, Chengde's cultural heritage tourism has demonstrated notable growth characterized by diversification and innovation. From a hardware perspective, continuous improvements in transport infrastructure and tourism support services have enhanced accessibility and reception capacity, creating more convenient travel conditions for visitors (Szymańska et al., 2021). In terms of industrial structure, Chengde has promoted an integrated cultural framework combining imperial, religious, and ethnic traditions through temple fairs, international tourism festivals, and ethnic cultural events, thereby strengthening visitor engagement and experiential richness (Jing & Loang, 2024). In brand development, the city has actively promoted its identity as a "World Heritage Site" and an "International Tourism City," enhancing recognition in domestic and international markets (Liengpunsakul, 2021). Meanwhile, the adoption of digital and smart tourism technologies—such as virtual exhibitions, online guided tours, and immersive interactive installations—has opened new pathways for balancing heritage conservation and utilization while enriching visitor experiences (Zhang et al., 2025).

From a quantitative perspective, Chengde's cultural heritage tourism sector has experienced rapid expansion in recent years. According to official statistics, Chengde

received approximately 84.21 million tourists in 2023, representing a year-on-year increase of 410.81%, and tourism revenue reached RMB 108.829 billion. In 2024, tourist arrivals further increased to approximately 93.27 million, marking a 10.75% growth rate (Statistical Bulletin of Chengde City on National Economic and Social Development, 2023–2024). Following the pandemic-induced downturn during 2020–2021, Chengde demonstrated strong recovery capacity, supported by its World Heritage status, multiple national 5A scenic attractions, and the coordinated development of the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region (Weng & Pan, 2021). Table 2.3 summarizes the phased development history of Chengde's cultural heritage tourism from initial formation to steady expansion.

Table 2.3 The Development History of Cultural Heritage Tourism in Chengde

Period	Phase	Characteristics
2010–2019	Initial Foundation Phase	The cultural heritage tourism industry gradually took shape, with the Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples gaining increasing recognition. Leveraging the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei source market, the sector achieved initial expansion. Scenic area reception capacity and infrastructure were progressively improved, laying the groundwork for subsequent development.
2020–2021	Pandemic Impact Phase	Due to the pandemic, tourist arrivals and tourism revenue declined significantly, placing pressure on scenic area operations. Nevertheless, the conservation of core heritage resources continued, preparing for eventual recovery.
2022	Slow Recovery Phase	Pandemic effects persisted, with tourist arrivals and revenue not yet returning to pre-pandemic levels. The municipal government initiated a high-quality tourism development plan, exploring cultural–tourism integration and digital transformation pathways.

Table 2.3 (continued)

Period	Phase	Characteristics
2023	Rapid Recovery Phase	The tourism market rebounded strongly, receiving approximately 84.2139 million visitors, a year-on-year increase of 410.81%. Tourism revenue reached RMB 108.829 billion, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. The Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples ranked among the top national 5A scenic brands, enhancing the city's brand premium.
2024	Steady Expansion Phase	Tourist arrivals reached approximately 93.2699 million, a year-on-year increase of 10.75%. Guided by the Chengde High-Quality Tourism Development Plan (2022–2035), the city advanced infrastructure improvements, organized festivals and events, and promoted cultural–tourism integration and digitalization, thereby extending the tourism industry chain and increasing economic output.

Source: Compiled by this study

Parallel to practical development, academic research on Chengde's cultural heritage tourism has expanded across multiple dimensions, including digital heritage preservation, conservation technology, community governance, and visitor behavior. Technologically, Whiteman (2023) applied GIS techniques to integrate multi-source historical materials and reconstruct the historical landscapes of the Mountain Resort across different periods, addressing challenges of fragmented records and incomplete relics. Xiangyan et al. (2021) employed 3D laser scanning, UAV oblique photography, and photogrammetry to support preventive conservation of the Mountain Resort's rockeries. At the societal level, Wu et al. (2019) examined local residents' attitudes and support toward tourism development in World Heritage contexts. Additional studies have explored post-visit outcomes such as satisfaction and revisit intention from the perspectives of perceived value, authenticity, and service quality (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022; Mohammed

et al., 2021). Table 2.4 synthesizes representative studies related to Chengde's cultural heritage tourism, highlighting both research contributions and remaining gaps.

Table 2.4 Review of Researches Related to Chengde Cultural Heritage Tourism

Researchers	Research Theme/Characteristics	Research Contribution/Filling the Gap
Whiteman (2023)	Integrates multi-source historical materials through GIS technology to reconstruct the historical landscapes of Chengde Mountain Resort and its surrounding areas in different periods.	Promotes the transformation of cultural heritage protection from "passive restoration" to "active prevention" and "precise restoration".
Xiangyan et al. (2021)	Based on the application of methods such as 3D laser scanning, UAV oblique photography, and close-range photogrammetry, conducts data collection and modeling for the preventive protection of the rockeries in Chengde Mountain Resort.	
Wu et al. (2019)	Through empirical research, investigates the attitudes and support of residents in Chengde World Heritage sites towards tourism development.	
Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022), Mohammed et al. (2021)	Focuses on the "post-tourism outcomes" of cultural heritage tourism, such as tourist satisfaction and revisit intention, and constructs behavioral models from the perspective of consumer behavior based on perceived value, cultural authenticity, or service quality.	Provides a basis for "research perspective criticism" for this study.

Table 2.4 (continued)

Researchers	Research Theme/Characteristics	Research Contribution/Filling the Gap
Novčić & Šegota (2014)	Proposes the 4E marketing model (experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism), which was initially applied to digital and consumer-driven marketing scenarios, emphasizing experientiality, interactivity, and diffusivity.	Fills the gap that the 4E model "has not been systematically applied to the field of cultural heritage tourism".
San Martín & Del Bosque (2008)	Proposes that "destination perceived image" is a key mediating variable that transforms individual experiences into emotional and cognitive destination representations.	Fills the gap in the application of their theory in the "cultural heritage tourism marketing scenario".
González-Rodríguez et al. (2022), Tran et al. (2024)	Discusses the impact of information source credibility on the perception of information reliability in communication and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) research, but does not involve cultural heritage tourism marketing scenarios.	Fills the gap that "the role of information source credibility in heritage tourism marketing has not been fully examined".
Lyu & Zhao (2024)	Points out that Chengde has the unique value of activating symbolic assets in modern digital marketing, but does not deeply explore specific paths.	Combining the 4E model with digital communication characteristics, it provides a specific theoretical framework and practical direction for the "experiential presentation, interactive exchange, and multi-platform communication" of Chengde's symbolic assets.

Despite these achievements, Chengde continues to face substantial challenges in effectively promoting its cultural heritage tourism. First, although Chengde enjoys strong domestic recognition, its international visibility remains limited due to the absence of a systematic global communication strategy. International visitor proportions remain significantly lower than those of comparable heritage destinations such as the Forbidden City or the Great Wall (Wu et al., 2019). Second, promotional channels rely heavily on traditional media and offline events, with insufficient utilization of social media, digital platforms, and cross-platform integration (Qiu, 2023). As of 2024, Chengde's official tourism Weibo and WeChat accounts lag far behind comparable heritage destinations in follower scale and engagement (Han et al., 2024).

Third, tourism products remain largely sightseeing-oriented, with insufficient emphasis on cultural interpretation, narrative storytelling, and experiential depth (Kusumah & Andrianto, 2023). Visitor surveys indicate that guide commentary services are often perceived as lacking contextual richness and cultural depth, limiting emotional resonance and knowledge acquisition (Yu et al., 2023). Finally, regional integration remains weak, with limited coordination between core scenic areas and surrounding heritage sites, resulting in short visitor stays and low spillover effects (Du & Liu, 2025). In 2024, day-trip visitors accounted for approximately 71.5% of total arrivals, with an average stay of only 1.7 days—significantly lower than comparable destinations such as Lijiang and Pingyao.

Overall, while Chengde possesses outstanding cultural heritage resources and has achieved rapid tourism growth, persistent challenges in international communication, digital promotion, heritage interpretation, and regional integration constrain its promotional effectiveness and behavioral transformation among visitors. These realities underscore the necessity of examining cultural heritage tourism in Chengde from the perspective of visitor perception, experience, and behavior, thereby providing a concrete empirical context for the theoretical framework and research model developed in this study.

2.1.4 Marketing Strategy of Cultural Heritage Tourism of Chengde

Against the backdrop of rapid growth and persistent promotional challenges, the marketing strategy for cultural heritage tourism in Chengde requires systematic rethinking from a visitor-centered and behavior-oriented perspective. Traditional promotion in

Chengde has largely emphasized the objective presentation of heritage resources—such as World Heritage status, architectural scale, and historical significance—while paying comparatively limited attention to how tourists experience, interpret, and evaluate these cultural assets throughout their decision-making and visiting processes. In the contemporary digital and experience-oriented tourism environment, effective cultural heritage marketing increasingly depends on how visitors perceive and interpret promotional stimuli rather than on the mere dissemination of heritage information (Cerquetti & Ferrara, 2018). Although Chengde possesses outstanding imperial and multi-ethnic cultural resources, existing marketing practices have primarily focused on resource display and policy-driven promotion, with limited attention to tourists' experiential engagement and behavioral transformation. From a visitor-behavior perspective, marketing strategies must facilitate meaningful interactions that guide tourists from initial awareness to on-site participation and, ultimately, to concrete visiting and revisiting behaviors (Li, 2024).

Within the framework of the 4E marketing model, Chengde's current strategies exhibit structural imbalances that directly affect visitors' behavioral outcomes. The experiential dimension remains underdeveloped in terms of immersive design, emotional resonance, and participatory interpretation, constraining tourists' depth of engagement and willingness to extend their stay or revisit. Similarly, the exchange dimension is often insufficiently articulated, as tourists may not clearly perceive that the cultural, educational, and emotional benefits gained from heritage visits adequately compensate for their investments of time, cost, and effort. Such perceptions weaken tourists' value judgments and reduce their motivation to engage in sustained cultural heritage visitation (Qiu et al., 2019).

From a communication perspective, Chengde's marketing strategies have not fully aligned with the "everyplace" logic of omnichannel engagement. Although official platforms and traditional media remain important, fragmented integration with social media, online travel platforms, and digital storytelling channels limits tourists' continuous exposure and interaction with heritage content. This discontinuity affects how tourists form expectations and make visiting decisions, particularly among younger cohorts who rely heavily on digital information environments (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020). As a result, marketing efforts do not consistently translate into actual visitation.

Visitor-driven evangelism, which plays a critical role in shaping peer influence and travel decisions, also remains weakly activated in Chengde's marketing practice. While positive visitor experiences exist, insufficient mechanisms encourage tourists to share narratives, recommend heritage sites, or engage in sustained advocacy. Given that peer-generated content is often perceived as more credible and persuasive than official promotion, limited evangelism constrains the diffusion of cultural heritage narratives and weakens its impact on potential visitors' visiting behavior (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020).

In addition, two variables that are particularly salient for cultural heritage visitation—heritage interpretation quality and perceived conservation—have not been systematically incorporated into Chengde's marketing strategy. Interpretation quality functions as an informational cue that shapes tourists' understanding of cultural meaning and influences their confidence in heritage value, while perceived conservation serves as an institutional cue reflecting governance responsibility and sustainability. Both perceptions significantly affect tourists' trust, respect for heritage sites, and willingness to visit, revisit, or recommend them (Kaur & Kaur, 2020; Su et al., 2017). When interpretation is fragmented or conservation efforts are not clearly communicated, visitors may hesitate to translate appreciation into active visiting behavior.

Overall, Chengde's cultural heritage tourism marketing strategy requires a shift from resource-oriented promotion toward a visitor-centered, behavior-driven approach. By focusing on how tourists experience marketing stimuli, evaluate destination image and conservation responsibility, and ultimately decide whether to visit cultural heritage sites, this study positions visiting cultural heritage behavior as the core dependent variable. This perspective provides a coherent foundation for defining research variables and objectives, and it justifies the construction of a conceptual model that explains how marketing strategies influence tourists' behavioral engagement with Chengde's cultural heritage in the digital era.

2.1.5 Summary

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the global, national, and regional context of cultural heritage tourism, positioning Chengde as a representative case for examining heritage destination promotion. Globally, cultural heritage tourism has evolved from elite cultural journeys to a dynamic and technology-enabled industry rooted in sustainable conservation, cultural transmission, and immersive experience. In China,

policy support and the rise of integrated “heritage +” models have accelerated the development of diverse heritage tourism forms; however, challenges remain in deep cultural interpretation, innovative experience delivery, and international communication. Against this backdrop, Chengde exemplifies both substantial achievements and critical bottlenecks. As a World Heritage site with unique imperial, religious, and multi-ethnic cultural resources, Chengde has established a diversified cultural tourism system, advanced digital preservation, and enhanced its role within the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei regional strategy. Yet, despite rapid post-pandemic growth, the city continues to face constraints in global visibility, digital marketing, narrative storytelling, and integrated product design—resulting in short visitor stays, limited word-of-mouth dissemination, and insufficient international influence. These dynamics underscore the necessity of studying Chengde’s cultural heritage tourism promotion, not only to illuminate typical challenges for Chinese heritage destinations, but also to explore context-based strategies that enhance experiential value, destination image, and global brand competitiveness in the era of immersive and social-media-driven tourism marketing.

2.2 Parent Disciplines

2.2.1 4E Model

The 4E model, originally conceptualized in the early 21st century within consumer-centric and digital marketing contexts, was formally articulated by Brian Fetherstonhaugh, Global Chairman and CEO of Ogilvy One Worldwide. The model refers to experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism. Compared to the traditional 4P model, the 4E model better aligns with the behavioral logic and demand characteristics of tourists in the digital age (Sulaj & Pfoertsch, 2024), offering new analytical perspectives and practical pathways for marketing cultural heritage tourism.

Against the backdrop of the digital age, consumers have evolved from traditional passive recipients to active participants. They no longer content themselves with one-dimensional product consumption, instead pursuing more emotionally resonant and personalized interactive experiences (Farah et al., 2024). Within this context, the limitations of the traditional 4P marketing model (Product, Price, Place, Promotion), centered on product-centricity, have become increasingly apparent, failing to adequately address users' diverse and profound needs (Batat, 2024).

To address this shift, the 4E model has emerged. Replacing “Product” with “Experience” emphasizes consumers' perceptions and co-creation during engagement; substituting “Price” with “Exchange” highlights value interactions among stakeholders-such as travelers exchanging time and willingness to learn for immersive intangible cultural heritage experiences; “Everyplace” replaces “Place”, underscoring omnichannel accessibility and on-demand availability of information and services; “Evangelism”replaces “Promotion”, highlighting users' spontaneous recommendations and viral dissemination effects (Sulthana et al., 2021). This evolution reflects a fundamental shift in marketing paradigms from “product-centric” to “user experience and relationship-centric” approaches, as shown in Figure 2.6.

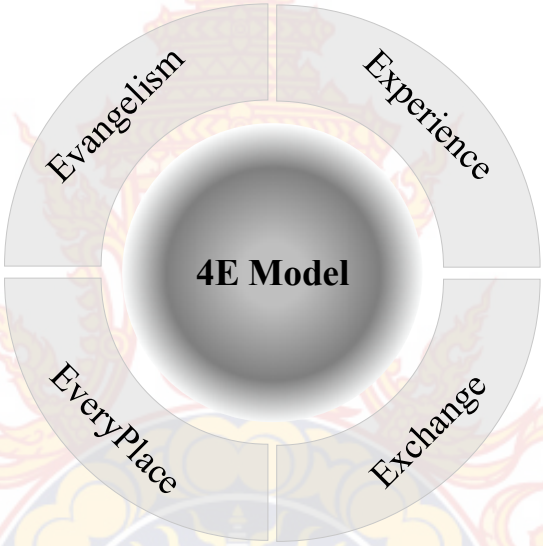

Figure 2.6 The 4E Model
Source: Fetherstonhaugh (2009)

To further elucidate the theoretical underpinnings of this study, it is necessary to systematically elaborate on the four core dimensions of the 4E model and their alignment with cultural heritage tourism promotion.

Firstly, experience emphasizes that the core of marketing is no longer merely product supply, but rather creating unique perceptions and memories for visitors through immersive and interactive approaches (Ferguson, 2025). In cultural heritage tourism promotion, this signifies that heritage sites are not merely objects of contemplation but active arenas for cultural engagement. Through forms such as intangible cultural heritage workshops, immersive performances, digital guided tours, and interactive commentary,

visitors can establish emotional connections with history and culture as “participants” (Olaz et al., 2022). This deepens cultural memory and enhances dissemination value. Secondly, exchange transcends traditional price-based logic, emphasizing the interaction and sharing of diverse values (Sulthana et al., 2021). In cultural heritage tourism promotion, this dimension extends beyond monetary transactions to encompass exchanges of time, learning commitment, and emotional investment (Ye et al., 2024). For instance, when visitors learn court etiquette or participate in religious rituals, they gain cultural knowledge and spiritual fulfilment while fostering mutual benefit between heritage custodians, local communities, and travelers. This “value co-creation” transforms cultural heritage tourism into an open system involving multiple stakeholders and shared rewards (Mijnheer & Gamble, 2019).

Thirdly, everyplace highlights the omnichannel dissemination and accessibility of information and services (Saghiri & Mirzabeiki, 2021). In cultural heritage tourism promotion, this signifies that heritage-related content transcends physical sites, being widely disseminated across multiple platforms and devices. Through digital platforms, social media, short videos, and immersive virtual reality, the narratives of Chengde's cultural heritage can transcend temporal and spatial boundaries to reach broader audiences, thereby expanding reach and enhancing the international influence of cultural heritage tourism (Tong et al., 2023).

Finally, evangelism emphasizes the power of spontaneous user-driven dissemination, positing that truly effective promotion stems from visitors' voluntary sharing and recommendations (Guo & Zhang, 2022). In cultural heritage tourism, travelers' social media posts, featuring travelogues, imagery, and experiential accounts often prove more persuasive and compelling than conventional advertising.

By crafting cultural settings that evoke emotional resonance and identity, heritage sites can inspire visitors to become advocates, transforming them into de facto ambassadors for cultural tourism (Perry, 2023). This fosters a bottom-up promotional effect, thereby amplifying the influence and competitiveness of cultural heritage.

Overall, the 4E model aligns closely with the core objectives of promoting cultural heritage tourism in Chengde. Its emphasis on immersive experiences, value exchange, multi-channel engagement, and word-of-mouth dissemination directly addresses the challenges faced in Chengde's cultural heritage tourism promotion, such as limited

experiential diversity, inadequate value communication, restricted international outreach, and insufficient organic dissemination momentum.

Compared to the traditional 4P framework, the 4E model better reveals the interactive and relational nature of cultural heritage tourism, facilitating the construction of a complete logical chain from visitor participation and co-creation of value to word-of-mouth diffusion (Xue, 2023; Yao et al., 2025). Consequently, this study adopts the 4E model as its theoretical foundation. This approach not only provides a scientific analytical framework for optimizing Chengde's cultural heritage tourism promotion but also offers valuable insights for expanding cultural heritage tourism marketing theory and its localized application.

2.2.2 Experience economy Theory

The experience economy theory was formally proposed by Pine & Gilmore (1999), who argued that economic value creation has evolved through successive stages—from agricultural and industrial economies to service economies, and ultimately to an experience-centered economy. In this advanced stage, experiences themselves become the primary source of value, distinguishing offerings not through functional utility alone, but through memorable, immersive, and emotionally engaging encounters (Ahmed et al., 2024). Consumers are no longer satisfied with standardized products or services; instead, they seek personalized, meaningful, and participatory experiences that can generate lasting memories and symbolic value (Angeloni, 2023).

A central premise of the experience economy is that value is co-created through interaction between providers and consumers. Experiences are not passively delivered but actively constructed through individuals' participation, perception, and emotional engagement within specific contexts (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). This perspective emphasizes the subjective nature of consumption, in which consumers' cognitive interpretations, affective responses, and identity-related meanings jointly determine perceived value. As such, the experience economy shifts analytical focus from "what is offered" to "what is felt, remembered, and shared."

Within the experience economy framework, Pine and Gilmore conceptualized experiences along two key dimensions—customer participation (passive to active) and environmental relationship (absorption to immersion)—forming four experience realms (as shown in Figure 2.7): entertainment, educational, escapist, and esthetic experiences

(Chang & Suh, 2025). These dimensions highlight that high-value experiences typically involve active participation and deep immersion, conditions that are especially relevant to cultural heritage tourism, where learning, emotional resonance, and symbolic identification are central to visitor engagement.

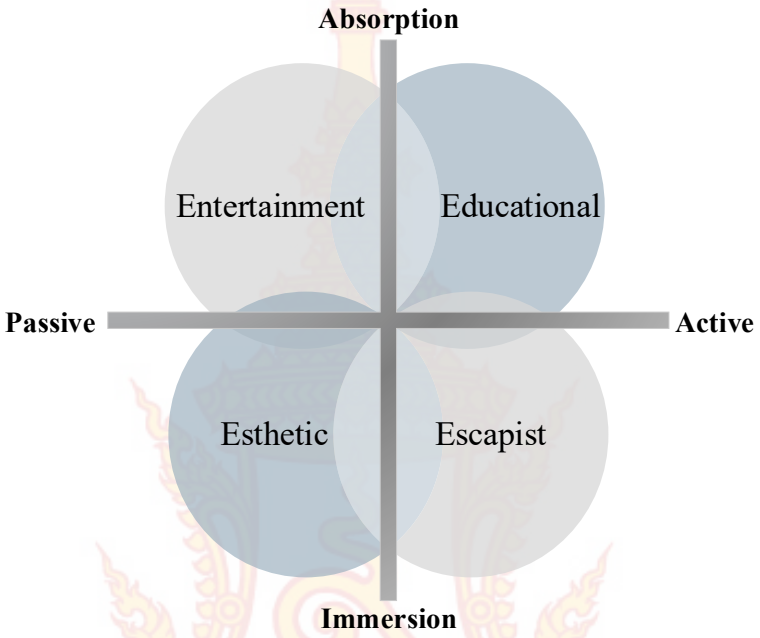

Figure 2.7 The experience economy theory
Source: Pine & Gilmore (1999)

For cultural heritage destinations such as Chengde, the experience economy perspective underscores that heritage resources alone do not guarantee promotional effectiveness. Instead, the transformation of heritage elements into immersive, interactive, and emotionally resonant experiences is essential for value realization (Lin et al., 2025). Activities such as participatory rituals, immersive performances, digital storytelling, and guided interpretation enable visitors to move beyond superficial sightseeing toward deeper cultural understanding and identity connection. Through such experiential engagement, cultural heritage is internalized as personal meaning rather than external information (Manley et al., 2023).

The experience economy theory also provides an important conceptual bridge to contemporary marketing frameworks, particularly the 4E model. While the experience economy establishes the macro-level logic that experiences constitute core economic

value, the 4E model operationalizes this logic within marketing practice by translating experiential value into experience creation, value exchange, omnichannel accessibility, and visitor-driven dissemination (Batat, 2024). In this sense, the experience economy functions as the theoretical origin, whereas the 4E model represents its applied extension in digital and tourism marketing contexts.

Overall, the experience economy theory offers a robust theoretical lens for explaining why experiential design, emotional engagement, and participatory interaction are indispensable in cultural heritage tourism promotion. It clarifies the psychological and value-based foundations upon which tourists interpret marketing stimuli, form destination images, and engage in post-visit advocacy. The experience economy theory is embedded in this study as a foundational logic for understanding how experiential value shapes tourists' perceptions and behaviors in cultural heritage tourism. Within the proposed research framework, by emphasizing immersion, participation, and emotional engagement, the experience economy explains how tourists transform heritage encounters into meaningful cognitive and affective evaluations, which subsequently contribute to the formation of perceived destination image and perceived conservation. These perceptions, in turn, influence tourists' decisions to visit, revisit, and recommend cultural heritage sites. Thus, the experience economy theory functions as a macro-level explanatory foundation that links experiential design and value co-creation to the study's core behavioral outcome, offering a coherent rationale for examining how 4E-based marketing experiences are translated into visiting cultural heritage behavior within the integrated research framework.

2.2.3 Image Theory

Image theory is a psychological decision-making theory that focuses on how individuals make choices in complex social and organizational contexts through mental representations (Beach & Mitchell, 1987). Unlike traditional rational choice theories, image theory emphasizes that decisions are not always based on complete information and logical calculation, but rather filtered, compared, and revised through the individual's preexisting "images" (Abeele et al., 2024). The theory posits that mental schemata may either reinforce prior decisions or trigger modifications when confronted with new information. Thus, image theory provides a unique perspective for understanding how

individuals form perceptions and judgments of external environments under the interplay of cognition and emotion.

In this study, these conceptual elements are integrated into tourism perception and mapped onto the cognitive, emotional, and behavior structure widely applied in destination image research. Specifically, the cognitive dimension corresponds to the value-based evaluation of cultural significance, heritage authenticity, and service quality; the emotional dimension reflects affective connections, cultural identity, and experiential resonance shaped through interaction with heritage spaces; and the visiting behavior dimension aligns with the trajectory- and strategy-related evaluations, such as anticipated engagement, revisit behaviors, and willingness to recommend the destination, as shown in Figure 2.8.

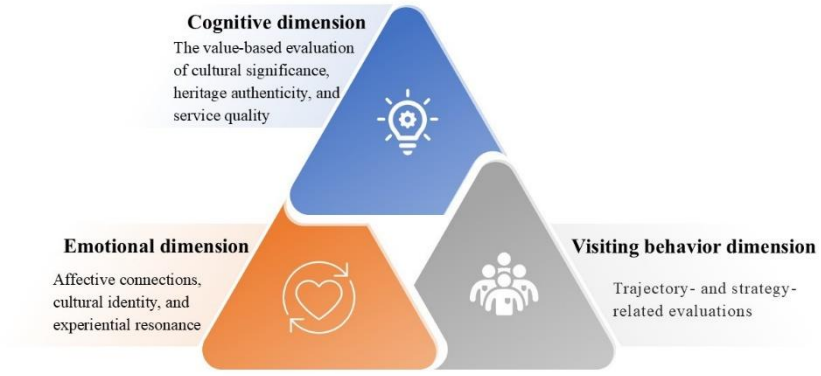

Figure 2.8 Three Dimensions of Tourism Perception

Applying image theory to cultural heritage tourism explains how tourists' perceptions of a destination emerge and evolve through psychological filtering. When tourists perceive consistency between their cultural values and the heritage site's symbolic meaning (cognitive fit), experience emotional fulfillment or nostalgia (affective alignment), and find that the destination offers feasible pathways for participation and cultural learning (behavioral feasibility), their perceived destination image strengthens and subsequently influences satisfaction, loyalty, and recommendation behaviors.

In the context of Chengde's cultural heritage tourism, tourists' "perceived destination image" can be understood as a concrete manifestation of image theory (Hamdy et al., 2024). In the context of cultural heritage tourism, these three dimensions jointly shape tourists' perception and evaluation of a destination. Visitors assess whether a

heritage site aligns with their cultural values and identity (value image), whether it can provide meaningful and enriching cultural experiences aligned with their expectations (trajectory image), and whether supporting infrastructure and technologies facilitate cultural learning and participation (strategic image). When these dimensions are simultaneously satisfied, perceived destination image becomes more positive and reinforces tourists' attitudes and visiting behavior toward the site.

When forming perceptions of Chengde, tourists rely on their value image to assess the city's cultural significance and historical worth. The trajectory image reflects their expectations of the tourism experience (Maghrifani et al., 2022), such as whether visiting *the Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples* provides cultural identification and spiritual fulfillment. The strategic image relates to the actual choices tourists make to achieve their goals, such as utilizing digital guides, sharing on social media, or participating in cultural performances.

This theoretical framework explains how tourists filter and evaluates information about Chengde through psychological images, thereby influencing their satisfaction, emotional identification, and revisit intentions. Consequently, Image Theory not only provides a robust psychological foundation for the mediating role of "perceived destination image" but also enhances this study's theoretical suitability in explaining the logic of tourism decision-making.

Within the framework of image theory, destination image is not a single undifferentiated perception but a composite mental representation consisting of multiple cognitive facets that tourists use to evaluate a destination (Karri & Dogra, 2023). In the context of cultural heritage tourism, two cognitive image facets are particularly salient: interpretation-enabled meaning and conservation/management image. The former reflects tourists' understanding of cultural significance and symbolic value constructed through heritage interpretation, while the latter captures tourists' cognitive assessment of how responsibly and effectively a destination manages, protects, and sustains its heritage resources.

Perceived conservation can therefore be defined as a heritage-specific cognitive destination image, reflecting visitors' evaluations of whether cultural heritage protection is taken seriously, whether management practices are professional and standardized, and whether long-term sustainability responsibilities are fulfilled (Jiaxing Liu et al., 2025).

Through psychological filtering processes emphasized in image theory, tourists integrate observable cues—such as site maintenance, interpretive signage, visitor regulation, authenticity preservation, and institutional governance—into a unified management/responsibility image of the destination. This conservation-related cognitive image subsequently influences tourists' trust, value judgments, and behavioral responses, including visitation decisions, revisit intention, recommendation behavior, and willingness to support heritage conservation (Ginzarly et al., 2022). Accordingly, perceived conservation functions as a critical cognitive image dimension through which heritage-related experiences and management practices shape tourists' decision-making and behavioral outcomes.

2.2.4 Source Credibility Theory

Source credibility theory aims to elucidate the mechanisms through which source characteristics influence tourists' cognitive perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral responses (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). In cultural heritage tourism promotion, the "source" refers to any individual, organization, or media channel that provides destination-related information to tourists, including official tourism authorities, destination management organizations (DMOs), cultural institutions, online travel platforms, social media influencers, traditional media, and other tourists through user-generated content. These sources vary in their levels of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, which in turn shape how tourism information is interpreted, accepted, or rejected by potential visitors (Berhanu & Raj, 2020). Consequently, incorporating source credibility can help reveal how source characteristics moderate visitors' perceptions of destination image and the effectiveness of the 4E marketing strategy during cultural heritage tourism promotion. This provides a theoretical basis for enhancing promotional effectiveness.

Source credibility theory explains the impact of source characteristics on audience attitude change (Briñol et al., 2019; Rosenberg et al., 2022). When the information source is perceived as credible and authoritative, the audience is more likely to accept the information it conveys and thus change their attitudes or behaviors (Li et al., 2025). This theory was initially mainly applied in the fields of political propaganda, advertising, and persuasive communication, providing a theoretical basis for understanding the effects of information dissemination. With the development of research, source credibility theory has gradually expanded from a single "credibility" concept to a multi-dimensional

framework, mainly including three core dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (AlFarraj et al., 2021). Expertise emphasizes the knowledge and ability of the information source in the relevant field; trustworthiness reflects the audience's judgment of the source's fairness and truthfulness; attractiveness includes the source's charisma, social identity, or emotional appeal, as shown in Figure 2.9. These three dimensions work together to determine the audience's acceptance of the information content and the possibility of attitude change. In the modern communication environment, source credibility theory has further expanded to digital media and multi-channel information environments (Chocarro et al., 2021). Opinion leaders on online platforms, social media accounts, and user-generated content (UGC) are all information sources, and their expertise, credibility, and attractiveness significantly influence the audience's cognitive evaluation and behavioral choice (Ghaly, 2023; Muda & Hamzah, 2021). In addition, the match between the information source and the audience, interaction frequency, and emotional identification have also become important factors in measuring source credibility (Luo et al., 2022). This development trend indicates that source credibility is not only related to the information itself but also closely related to the communication environment and audience characteristics, providing theoretical support for the study of information dissemination effects in cultural heritage tourism promotion.

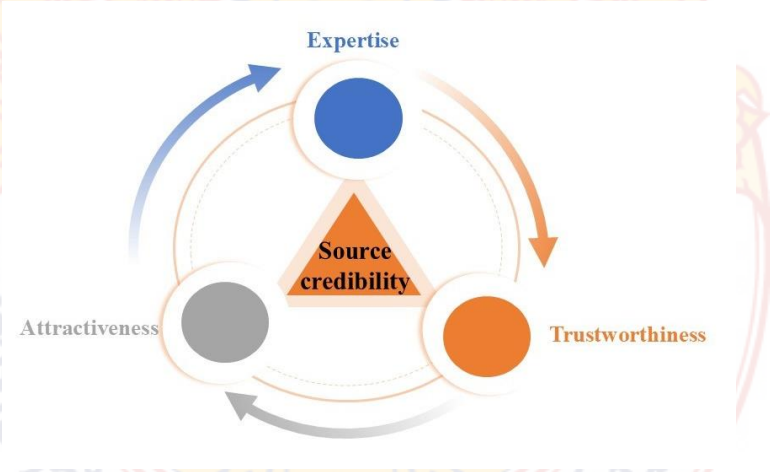

Figure 2.9 The source credibility theory
Source: AlFarraj et al. (2021)

The source credibility theory is highly compatible with the promotion of cultural heritage tourism in Chengde, providing a scientific explanation for the effectiveness of information dissemination and marketing strategies. By introducing the source credibility

theory, it can be revealed that under the condition of high source credibility, the relationship between the 4E marketing strategy (experience optimization, value exchange, omni-channel communication, and word-of-mouth effect) and tourists' perception of destination image may be amplified, while low source credibility may weaken the strategy's effectiveness. Specifically, information sources with high professionalism, such as official explanations from cultural and tourism departments or expert lectures, help enhance tourists' understanding of the authenticity and historical value of Chengde's cultural heritage, thereby improving their experience satisfaction (Leong et al., 2024); sources with strong credibility, such as real tourist reviews or community resident recommendations, can enhance tourists' emotional identification and trust (Li et al., 2025), promoting the formation of behavioral choice; and sources with high attractiveness can capture tourists' attention through personality charm, story-telling, or visual presentation, stimulating active dissemination behavior. These dimensions are highly consistent with the core goals of Chengde's cultural heritage tourism promotion, namely, enhancing tourist participation, strengthening cultural cognition, and enhancing the word-of-mouth effect.

Interpretation Quality and Perceived Conservation as Credibility Cues in Heritage Tourism. Within the framework of source credibility theory, credibility judgments are not formed solely based on who delivers information, but also on how information is presented and how well the destination appears to manage and safeguard its heritage resources (García-Almeida, 2021). In cultural heritage tourism, the quality of heritage interpretation functions as a critical informational cue that shapes tourists' perceptions of professionalism, reliability, and trustworthiness. High-quality interpretation—characterized by clarity, completeness, consistency, and contextual coherence—enhances visitors' confidence in their understanding of heritage value and reduces uncertainty in decision-making (Khater, 2026). When interpretive content is well-structured, accurate, and engaging, tourists are more likely to perceive destination information as credible, thereby facilitating the translation of cognition into intention and actual visiting behavior.

Complementarily, perceived conservation operates as an institutional credibility cue, reflecting tourists' cognitive evaluations of whether heritage protection, management, and governance are taken seriously at a destination (Zhang & Lo, 2024). Visitors tend to integrate observable conservation practices—such as site maintenance, preservation measures, visitor management, and sustainability communication—into an overall

judgment of destination responsibility and trustworthiness (Elshaer et al., 2024). A destination perceived as well-managed and conservation-oriented signals institutional reliability, reinforcing tourists' trust in the authenticity and long-term value of the heritage site.

Together, interpretation quality and perceived conservation serve as dual credibility signals in heritage tourism contexts. While interpretation quality conveys message-level credibility by shaping how cultural meaning is communicated and understood, perceived conservation conveys system-level credibility by signaling responsible governance and sustainability commitment. These cues jointly strengthen tourists' trust, reduce perceived risk, and enhance the persuasive impact of heritage information, thereby increasing the likelihood that cultural heritage perceptions are converted into favorable behavioral responses, such as visitation, revisitation, and recommendation. This perspective further substantiates the role of credibility mechanisms in explaining how heritage-related information influences tourist behavior within the broader source credibility framework.

2.3 Immediate Disciplines

2.3.1 Experience

Experience is one of the core variables in the 4E model. Rather than being a simple extension of the 4P framework, the 4E model reconceptualizes marketing from a consumer-centric perspective, emphasizing experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism as key principles for value creation in the digital era. Within this framework, "experience" replaces "product", emphasizing that marketing should go beyond merely providing functional supplies and focus more on the psychological feelings, emotional connections, and cultural identifications of consumers during the consumption process. From the perspective of theoretical origin, the proposal of "experience" is closely related to the experience economy theory of Pine & Gilmore (2011). The experience economy holds that, following agricultural economy, industrial economy, and service economy, experience has become a new economic value creation model. Consumers not only purchase goods or services, but also expect to obtain immersion, pleasure, and unique memories during the consumption process. Therefore, experience has become an important driving force in modern marketing (Monastyrnaya, 2022).

In terms of the conceptual connotation, experience is not merely an immediate sensory perception; it also encompasses deep interactions at the cognitive, emotional, and identity levels (Dubois et al., 2021). For tourists, experience means obtaining spiritual values beyond the material realm through participation, perception, and resonance in a specific environment (Wang et al., 2023). It encompasses sensory experiences such as vision, hearing, and touch, as well as psychological aspects like knowledge acquisition, emotional resonance, and cultural identification.

In the promotion of cultural heritage tourism, “experience” has unique application value. Firstly, destinations need to highlight the immersive and interactive nature of cultural heritage in their promotion (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2022). Correspondingly, this study operationalizes “experience” based on these theoretical foundations by measuring three sub-dimensions: (1) sensory and perceptual experience, capturing multi-sensory stimulation and environmental immersion; (2) emotional and cognitive experience, reflecting learning, resonance, and psychological engagement; and (3) cultural identity experience, assessing cultural understanding, recognition, and value meaning construction.

Chengde can recreate the landscape of the imperial gardens through virtual reality, showcase Manchu-Mongolian culture through immersive performances, and enhance tourists' participation through interactive explanations. Secondly, experience in promotion emphasizes cultural inheritance and emotional identification (Kang, 2022). Through personal experience, tourists not only gain aesthetic and entertainment satisfaction but also deepen their understanding and respect for history and culture. Finally, from a marketing strategy perspective, the focus of promotion should shift from one-way information transmission to the creation of story-like and context-based experiences, enabling tourists to obtain “warm” cultural memories in cultural heritage tourism (Sumaylo, 2023).

2.3.2 Exchange

Exchange is one of the important variables in the 4E model, reflects a fundamental change in marketing concepts (Epuran et al., 2015). Consumers' decisions no longer solely focus on price differences, but rather they pay more attention to the comprehensive value they can obtain during the consumption process, including material benefits and spiritual satisfaction (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019). From a theoretical perspective, the proposal of “exchange” stems from the basic principles of marketing. The essence of marketing lies

in exchange, and this exchange is not limited to the price and commodity exchange relationship, but also covers the mutual transfer and sharing of value (Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2022). In the context of the experience economy and relationship marketing, the exchange between enterprises and consumers gradually evolves into multi-dimensional value interaction, covering aspects such as functional value, emotional value, social value, and cultural value (Liu et al., 2021).

In terms of conceptual connotation, exchange emphasizes the comprehensive returns that consumers obtain after investing costs such as money, time, and energy (Vidiati et al., 2022). These returns include both tangible material benefits, such as price discounts and travel convenience, and intangible psychological benefits, such as emotional pleasure, cultural identification, and identity value. Compared with a single price orientation, “exchange” pays more attention to the fairness and value perception of tourists in their subjective experiences, thereby determining their consumption satisfaction and loyalty. Correspondingly, this study operationalizes “exchange” across four dimensions: (1) perceived investment–return balance, capturing tourists’ evaluation of time and money spent versus cultural and experiential gains; (2) perceived fairness of value, reflecting whether tourists believe heritage experiences are worth the cost; (3) functional and emotional value return, assessing knowledge gain, enjoyment, and psychological fulfillment; and (4) cultural and identity value return, measuring enhanced cultural identity and belonging.

In cultural heritage tourism promotion, the meaning of “exchange” is particularly prominent. First, it requires destinations to clearly convey the unique value that cultural heritage can bring to tourists, not just the “ticket price”, but the historical depth, cultural thickness, and educational significance it contains (Jia et al., 2025). For example, the Mountain Resort is not just a scenic spot, but also a microcosm of Qing Dynasty history and multi-ethnic cultural exchanges. Secondly, exchange is also reflected in tourists' emotional investment and cultural feedback (Bi et al., 2024).

Through participating in immersive experiences, traditional craft workshops, or cultural festival activities, tourists can gain knowledge and emotional identification in the interaction, while the destination realizes cultural inheritance and economic benefits through this process. Finally, in promotion strategies, emphasizing “exchange” means highlighting the unique value proposition of cultural heritage tourism, allowing tourists to

feel the cultural and spiritual benefits corresponding to their money and time investment, thereby enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the destination (Szromek, 2022).

2.3.3 Everyplace

Everyplace refers to how products or services are transmitted to consumers through specific sales channels, with the core emphasizing the efficiency of physical space circulation (Saghiri & Mirzabeiki, 2021). However, in the digital and networked era, consumers' information acquisition and consumption patterns have broken through the limitations of offline channels and shifted to diversified touchpoints of “everyplace”. Therefore, the 4E model proposes everyplace, emphasizing the diversity, convenience, and ubiquity of channels, influenced by Internet marketing and omnichannel marketing theories (Saghiri & Mirzabeiki, 2021). With the development of information communication technology, especially the popularity of mobile internet and social media, consumers can access and obtain tourism-related information anytime and anywhere, thus redefining the “place” of consumption (Chen et al., 2021). It includes not only physical places (such as travel agencies, tourist centers), but also digital spaces (such as official tourism websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, and social platforms) and virtual spaces (such as virtual reality exhibitions, immersive digital experiences).

In terms of conceptual connotation, everyplace emphasizes the breadth and accessibility of marketing promotion (Levchenko, 2025), that is, achieving high-frequency interactions with consumers through multiple channels to ensure that consumers can conveniently obtain destination-related information and make decisions at any time and any place. Compared with a single-channel model, omnichannel focuses more on the deep integration of online and offline, as well as consistency and interaction across platforms, thereby enhancing the overall communication effect of the destination (Trenz et al., 2020). In line with this logic, this study measures “everyplace” across multiple access and interaction dimensions, including social media exposure, digital navigation convenience, multi-channel information accessibility, diversified online promotional media, virtual/digital tourism service availability, online booking efficiency, diversified payment systems, and availability of responsive customer support, ensuring that the measurement reflects the full scope of omnichannel tourism engagement.

In cultural heritage tourism promotion, the application of “everyplace” is of great significance. First, it requires destinations to break the traditional one-way publicity model and establish a comprehensive communication matrix (Lin, 2022). For example, Chengde can simultaneously utilize official tourism websites, social media such as WeChat and Tik-Tok, online travel agency (OTA) platforms, and digital cultural tourism exhibition halls to form a three-dimensional promotion of “online + offline”. Secondly, “everyplace” not only expands the information coverage but also achieves precise marketing through data tracking and user profiling, improving the promotion efficiency (Vermesan & Bacquet, 2022). Finally, “everyplace” can enhance tourists' decision convenience and participation, for example, through one-click booking on mobile devices, intelligent guidance, AR/VR immersive experiences, enabling tourists to maintain interaction with cultural heritage resources throughout the travel process (Chebli et al., 2021).

2.3.4 Evangelism

Evangelism is an important variable in the 4E model, mainly relies on enterprises' proactive information dissemination, such as advertising, public relations, and sales promotion (Cavadas & Moreira, 2025). However, in the context of the digital and social media era, this enterprise-centered interpretation has become increasingly limited. Consumers are no longer passive recipients of marketing information but have evolved into active creators, interpreters, and disseminators of meaning, emotion, and value (Guo & Zhang, 2022).

Building on this transformation, the 4E model reconceptualizes evangelism by shifting the focus from firm-driven promotion to emotion-and passion-driven consumer advocacy. At its core, evangelism is not defined by the communication tools employed, but by tourists’ strong emotional attachment, enthusiasm, and identity resonance with a destination, which motivate them to voluntarily share, recommend, and defend it. From this perspective, evangelism represents a behavioral manifestation of deep affective engagement rather than a mere extension of promotional tactics.

Theoretically, evangelism is grounded in word-of-mouth (WOM) theory, relationship marketing, and community marketing (Hsu, 2018). WOM has long been recognized as one of the most persuasive forms of communication influencing consumer decision-making (Kim & Hwang, 2021). However, evangelism extends beyond traditional WOM by emphasizing passion-driven advocacy, whereby tourists act as “cultural

ambassadors" who transmit not only information, but also emotions, values, and symbolic meanings. In this sense, WOM constitutes the earliest and foundational transmission mechanism, while contemporary digital networks and social media platforms function as amplifiers that accelerate and expand the diffusion of emotional and passionate expressions.

Conceptually, evangelism highlights consumers' spontaneous post-consumption dissemination behaviors rooted in affective attachment and experiential resonance (Cavadas & Moreira, 2025). Unlike the one-way publicity of enterprises, evangelism is rooted in visitors' affective attachment, enthusiasm, and identity with the experience, motivating them to actively share, recommend, and advocate for a destination. Such emotionally charged communication is characterized by high perceived credibility, strong interactivity, and rapid diffusion, as messages conveyed through genuine passion and personal emotion are more likely to resonate with audiences and stimulate trust and engagement.

In cultural heritage tourism promotion, the role of "evangelism" is particularly important. Firstly, cultural heritage tourism has strong cultural and emotional attributes, and tourists tend to obtain trust and anticipation through others' real experiences (Yang et al., 2023). For example, the positive sharing by tourists after visiting *the Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples* in Chengde can effectively stimulate the interest of potential tourists more effectively than traditional advertising. Secondly, Evangelism can form "secondary dissemination" and "fission effect", especially on social media platforms such as Weibo, Tik-Tok, and Xiaohongshu (Nsereka & Nwanze, 2021). Importantly, such networked dissemination does not create evangelism, but rather serves as a channel through which tourists' passion and emotional identification are externalized and multiplied. From a long-term perspective, evangelism contributes to the formation of a stable destination image and sustained tourist loyalty (Anubha, 2024). When tourists are emotionally inspired to advocate for a destination, cultural heritage promotion evolves from short-term exposure to continuous brand cultivation and value transmission.

Accordingly, this study conceptualizes evangelism as a multidimensional construct reflecting tourists' transition from passive experience recipients to active emotional advocates and cultural communicators. Drawing on Madhyamapurush (2022), evangelism encompasses tourists' emotional identification with the destination's cultural uniqueness,

their enthusiasm for sharing experiences, the sense of cultural belonging developed through participation, engagement in cultural activities, willingness to connect with official destination platforms, and proactive recommendation behaviors. Together, these dimensions capture the extent to which tourists transform emotional resonance and passion into voluntary advocacy, positioning evangelism as a key affective–behavioral outcome within the 4E framework.

2.3.5 Heritage Interpretation Quality

Heritage interpretation quality refers to the effectiveness with which cultural heritage information, meanings, and values are communicated to visitors through interpretive systems, narratives, and media (Weng et al., 2020). Unlike general information provision, heritage interpretation emphasizes meaning-making, learning facilitation, and emotional engagement, enabling visitors to understand, appreciate, and connect with the cultural significance embedded in heritage resources (Dadizadeh & Doğan, 2024) . As cultural heritage tourism increasingly shifts from sightseeing-oriented consumption toward experience- and knowledge-based engagement, interpretation quality has become a critical determinant of visitor perception, satisfaction, and behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, the concept of heritage interpretation originates in interpretive theory and museum studies, where interpretation is defined as a process that reveals meanings and relationships through original objects, firsthand experiences, and illustrative media rather than merely communicating factual information (Brezovec, 2022). Subsequent research has expanded this notion by emphasizing visitor-centered interpretation, highlighting clarity, coherence, storytelling, interactivity, and relevance to visitors' prior knowledge and cultural background (Solomon et al., 2026). Within tourism studies, heritage interpretation quality is increasingly recognized as a key mechanism linking cultural resources to visitor understanding, emotional resonance, and behavioral responses (Moreno-Melgarejo et al., 2019).

Conceptually, heritage interpretation quality encompasses both the content dimension and the delivery dimension of heritage communication. The content dimension focuses on the accuracy, depth, coherence, and cultural authenticity of interpretive information, including historical narratives, symbolic meanings, and conservation messages. The delivery dimension concerns how this information is presented, such as through guided interpretation, signage systems, exhibitions, digital media, storytelling

techniques, and interactive or immersive technologies (Liu, 2020). High-quality interpretation enables visitors to construct meaningful cognitive frameworks, develop emotional connections, and perceive heritage sites as credible, valuable, and worthy of protection.

In the context of cultural heritage tourism, interpretation quality plays a particularly important role because visitors often lack specialized historical or cultural knowledge and rely heavily on interpretive cues to form evaluations (Weng et al., 2020). Clear, engaging, and consistent interpretation reduces cognitive uncertainty, enhances perceived authenticity, and strengthens trust in destination management and governance. Moreover, effective interpretation supports cultural identity formation and value internalization, transforming heritage from static relics into living cultural experiences that visitors can understand, remember, and share (Bao & Bowen, 2025).

From a behavioral perspective, heritage interpretation quality functions as a key informational cue that influences tourists' decision-making processes. High-quality interpretation improves visitors' confidence in their understanding of the site, reinforces perceptions of professionalism and responsibility, and facilitates the translation of experience into visiting intentions, revisit behavior, and advocacy (Khater, 2026). In digital and social media environments, interpretation quality also enhances message credibility and shareability, amplifying its impact beyond the on-site experience.

Accordingly, this study conceptualizes heritage interpretation quality as a multidimensional construct reflecting visitors' evaluation of the clarity, richness, consistency, and engagement of heritage information and interpretation systems. Drawing on prior studies, this variable is operationalized across the following dimensions: (1) clarity and comprehensibility of interpretive content; (2) coherence and logical structure of heritage narratives; (3) cultural authenticity and depth of historical explanation; (4) emotional and storytelling effectiveness; and (5) technological and interactive support for interpretation. Together, these dimensions capture how interpretation quality shapes tourists' cognitive understanding, emotional resonance, and behavioral responses, positioning it as a critical experiential and informational variable within the cultural heritage tourism framework.

2.3.6 Perceived Destination Image

Perceived destination image refers to the overall impression and meaning that tourists construct about a destination based on their cognition, emotions, and socio-cultural experiences (Najar & Rather, 2023). Rather than reflecting objective reality alone, destination image represents a subjective psychological construct formed through information exposure and personal experience, which significantly influences tourists' attitudes, visiting behavior, and destination competitiveness. Since its emergence in tourism research in the 1970s, destination image has become a central concept, emphasizing tourists' holistic perceptions developed through both indirect information contact and direct visitation experiences (Stylidis, 2022). In the digital era, this image formation process is increasingly shaped by user-generated content (UGC), social media narratives, online reviews, and peer sharing, alongside traditional promotional channels (Correia et al., 2025).

Conceptually, perceived destination image is commonly understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, affective, and conative components (Karri & Dogra, 2023). The cognitive component refers to tourists' beliefs and knowledge about a destination's attributes, such as cultural resources, heritage value, landscape, facilities, and service quality. The affective component reflects tourists' emotional reactions, aesthetic appreciation, and cultural resonance generated through exposure to destination-related information or actual experience. The conative component manifests in tourists' intentions to visit, revisit, recommend, or engage in word-of-mouth communication. Overall, perceived destination image is not a simple mirror of objective attributes, but a dynamic construction shaped by personal experience, social interaction, cultural context, and communication channels (Huang et al., 2022). Within the context of this study, perceived destination image is defined as tourists' overall cognitive and emotional evaluation of Chengde as a cultural heritage destination. Specifically, Chengde's destination image is characterized by its unique integration of imperial heritage culture and multi-ethnic cultural landscapes, centered on the Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples. From a cognitive perspective, tourists perceive Chengde as a historical city embodying Qing dynasty royal garden aesthetics, religious architecture, and ethnic cultural diversity, reflected in its architectural forms, ritual spaces, intangible cultural practices, and regional customs. From an affective perspective, Chengde evokes

impressions of solemnity, harmony between nature and culture, historical depth, and spiritual atmosphere, fostering emotional attachment and cultural identification. These cognitive and emotional perceptions jointly construct Chengde's symbolic image as "a royal cultural heritage city where imperial civilization and ethnic cultures coexist."

In cultural heritage tourism promotion, perceived destination image plays a critically important role. It serves as a primary cognitive and affective basis upon which tourists form attitudes, expectations, and travel choices prior to visiting a destination (Dai et al., 2022). For a cultural heritage tourism city like Chengde, whether tourists perceive it as "a place where royal gardens and multiple ethnic cultures blend harmoniously" directly affects its attractiveness, differentiation, and competitive position in the tourism market. Such perceptions are often formed through exposure to others' travel reviews, social media narratives, official promotional content, and past visitation experiences.

Furthermore, a positive perceived destination image helps shape appropriate expectations and enhances tourists' satisfaction, cultural immersion, and emotional resonance during the actual visit (Jing & Loang, 2024). For example, when tourists form a clear cognition of the historical thickness and cultural diversity of Chengde, they are more likely to have emotional resonance when visiting heritage sites such as *the Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples*. After the visit, perceived destination image continues to exert influence through tourists' post-trip evaluations, recommendations, and digital sharing behaviors, thereby contributing to sustained brand building and the long-term transmission of cultural value.

Therefore, perceived destination image is not only a core variable in cultural heritage tourism research, but also a strategic focal point for destination promotion and management (Thuyet, 2023). By systematically shaping and optimizing tourists' cognitive and emotional perceptions, cultural heritage tourism cities such as Chengde can reinforce their unique cultural identity, enhance promotional effectiveness, and achieve a balance between economic development and cultural heritage preservation.

2.3.7 Perceived Conservation

Perceived conservation refers to tourists' subjective evaluation of a destination's efforts, responsibility, and effectiveness in protecting, managing, and sustaining cultural heritage resources. Unlike objective conservation outcomes assessed by experts or institutions, perceived conservation emphasizes visitors' cognitive judgments regarding

whether heritage assets are well preserved, professionally managed, and sustainably developed. As cultural heritage tourism increasingly emphasizes ethical responsibility, sustainability, and long-term value creation, perceived conservation has emerged as a crucial psychological construct shaping tourists' trust, evaluations, and behavioral responses.

From a theoretical perspective, the concept of perceived conservation draws upon research in destination image theory, sustainable tourism, and environmental psychology. Early destination image studies primarily focused on scenic attractiveness and service quality; however, with growing awareness of overtourism, heritage degradation, and sustainability concerns, governance- and responsibility-related perceptions have gradually been incorporated into the cognitive dimension of destination image (Zhang, 2018). In heritage tourism contexts, conservation quality has been recognized as a key indicator through which visitors assess the credibility, legitimacy, and moral standing of destination management (Govindarajo & Khen, 2020). Thus, perceived conservation represents an extension of cognitive destination image, specifically reflecting tourists' evaluations of conservation and management performance.

Conceptually, perceived conservation encompasses tourists' assessments of whether cultural heritage sites are adequately protected, authentically maintained, and responsibly presented. This includes perceptions of conservation investment, management standardization, visitor capacity control, interpretive integrity, and the balance between tourism utilization and heritage protection (Khater, 2026). Importantly, perceived conservation does not require tourists to possess professional conservation knowledge; rather, it is formed through observable cues such as the physical condition of heritage structures, clarity of conservation signage, regulation enforcement, interpretive explanations of protection efforts, and consistency between conservation narratives and on-site practices.

In the context of cultural heritage tourism, perceived conservation functions as a critical institutional and governance-related image cue. When visitors perceive that a destination prioritizes heritage protection, adheres to professional management standards, and demonstrates responsibility toward cultural sustainability, they are more likely to develop trust in destination authorities and perceive the site as authentic and credible (Elshaer et al., 2024). Conversely, visible deterioration, excessive commercialization, or

poorly managed visitor flows can weaken perceived conservation, leading to skepticism, emotional disengagement, and reduced behavioral choice.

Perceived conservation also plays a key role in shaping tourists' moral and affective responses. Heritage tourism often involves encounters with historically significant and symbolically charged spaces, where visitors expect respect, authenticity, and ethical stewardship. Positive conservation perceptions reinforce visitors' sense of respect for cultural values, strengthen emotional attachment, and enhance the perceived legitimacy of tourism development (Jaafar et al., 2015). As such, perceived conservation not only contributes to cognitive evaluations but also indirectly influences affective and behavioral dimensions of visitor response.

Accordingly, this study conceptualizes perceived conservation as a multidimensional construct reflecting tourists' cognitive assessment of heritage protection and management performance. Drawing on previous studies in sustainable and heritage tourism, perceived conservation is operationalized across the following dimensions: (1) perceived effectiveness of heritage protection measures; (2) perceived professionalism and standardization of site management; (3) perceived balance between tourism development and conservation; (4) perceived authenticity and integrity of heritage presentation; and (5) perceived long-term sustainability of heritage use. Together, these dimensions capture how tourists form judgments about conservation responsibility and governance, positioning perceived conservation as a key cognitive mechanism linking experiential encounters to cultural heritage visiting behavior.

2.3.8 Source Credibility

Source credibility refers to the audience's overall perception and evaluation of an information source in terms of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, which determines the degree of acceptance and persuasive power of the communicated content (Sanusi et al., 2022). Source credibility has been widely applied in marketing, advertising communication, and tourism research. In the context of cultural heritage tourism, the credibility of the information source not only refers to whether the information provider has authority and professional knowledge (Kington et al., 2021), but also involves whether tourists are willing to believe and adopt the information content they convey (Wang & Yan, 2022).

The concept encompasses three key dimensions. Firstly, the professionalism of the information source, which is manifested as the familiarity and interpretation ability of cultural heritage-related knowledge (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022). For example, tourism bureaus, scholars, tour guides, and cultural experts are considered more reliable due to their possession of professional knowledge. Secondly, the credibility of the information source, which is reflected in the impartiality and authenticity of the information provider (Kington et al., 2021). For instance, word-of-mouth sharing by tourists, user-generated content on social media, or non-commercial evaluations often tend to evoke trust. The attractiveness dimension is also crucial in cultural heritage tourism, especially in an environment where digital communication and social media are prevalent. Prominent cultural promoters or online influencers with high popularity and charisma can significantly enhance the communication effect of the destination (Kilipiri et al., 2023).In this study, source credibility is measured across these three dimensions (professionalism, credibility, and attractiveness) to align with established theoretical foundations and the questionnaire design.

For cultural heritage tourism promotion, the credibility of the information source directly affects tourists' perception of the destination image and the formation of their attitudes. When information is released by authoritative institutions or influential opinion leaders, it can strengthen the authenticity and uniqueness of cultural heritage, increase tourists' trust and security, and thereby enhance their willingness to visit and satisfaction (Elshaer et al., 2025); while when information comes from word-of-mouth transmission among tourists or online evaluations, it is more likely to create a sense of closeness and resonance, prompting potential tourists to have expectations of a “real experience” (de Almeida Vasconcelos, 2023). Therefore, in cultural heritage tourism promotion, enhancing the credibility of the information source is not only an important part of marketing strategies but also a key approach to shaping the destination image, enhancing tourists' participation and loyalty.

2.3.9 Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior

Cultural heritage visiting behavior refers to tourists’ intentional and observable behavioral responses associated with engaging in cultural heritage tourism, encompassing the full process from pre-visit decision-making to on-site participation and post-visit actions. As the ultimate outcome of tourists’ perceptions, experiences, and evaluations,

visitor behavior has long been recognized as a central dependent variable in tourism research. Early tourism behavior studies primarily focused on destination choice and revisit intention, conceptualizing behavior as a rational outcome of cost–benefit evaluation (Crompton, 1979). However, with the advancement of experiential marketing, cultural consumption, and behavioral psychology, tourism research has increasingly emphasized behavior as a multidimensional construct shaped by cognitive, affective, and contextual factors.

From an evolutionary perspective, research on visitor behavior has gradually shifted from intention-oriented models toward experience-embedded and engagement-focused approaches. While traditional indicators such as visit intention, revisit intention, and recommendation intention have long been used to explain tourism demand (Kaur & Kaur, 2020), recent studies increasingly emphasize observable visitor behaviors that occur before, during, and after the visit. These include on-site participation in cultural activities, interaction with interpretive systems, engagement with digital and physical heritage environments, content sharing based on actual experiences, and responsible conduct at heritage sites (Dadizadeh & Doğan, 2024). In cultural heritage tourism, where meaning construction, learning processes, and identity engagement are central, visitor behavior is therefore understood not merely as a decision to visit, but as a set of culturally embedded actions that reflect tourists' active involvement with heritage values and experiential contexts.

Conceptually, cultural heritage visiting behavior in this study is defined as tourists' deliberate behavioral responses to cultural heritage destinations, manifested through both on-site and post-visit actions. These behaviors include the decision to visit heritage sites, active participation in interpretive and experiential activities, respectful engagement with cultural resources, sharing of heritage experiences, and intentions to revisit or recommend the destination. Importantly, this construct emphasizes behavior rooted in experience and perception, rather than purely transactional consumption. It reflects how tourists translate experiential stimulation, value exchange, information accessibility, advocacy influence, and institutional trust into concrete actions.

Within the context of cultural heritage tourism, cultural heritage visiting behavior carries distinct characteristics compared to mass tourism behavior. Heritage tourists are often motivated by cultural learning, authenticity seeking, emotional resonance, and

ethical considerations related to conservation and sustainability (Ye et al., 2024). As a result, their behaviors are closely tied to perceptions of destination image, interpretation quality, and conservation responsibility. For example, visitors who perceive strong cultural authenticity and effective conservation are more likely to engage deeply with heritage narratives, comply with site regulations, support conservation initiatives, and demonstrate loyalty through revisits and recommendations (Buonincontri et al., 2017).

In the specific context of Chengde, cultural heritage visiting behavior reflects tourists' engagement with imperial heritage landscapes, multi-ethnic cultural traditions, and historically significant architectural complexes. Such behavior includes visiting heritage attractions such as the Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples, participating in guided interpretation or digital storytelling experiences, sharing cultural narratives through social media, and expressing support for heritage preservation through positive word-of-mouth and revisit behavior. These actions collectively indicate the effectiveness of cultural heritage tourism promotion from the visitor's perspective.

Accordingly, this study positions cultural heritage visiting behavior as the core dependent variable, representing the final behavioral outcome of tourists' experiential perceptions and evaluative processes. Drawing on tourism behavior and cultural consumption literature, this construct is operationalized through multiple dimensions, including: (1) visitation and participation behavior; (2) engagement with cultural interpretation and activities; (3) post-visit sharing and recommendation behavior; and (4) revisit and sustained support intentions. By adopting this multidimensional behavioral framework, the study captures both immediate and extended behavioral responses, providing a comprehensive measure of how cultural heritage tourism experiences ultimately translate into meaningful visitor action.

2.4 Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Statement

2.4.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study integrates four complementary theoretical foundations to explain the formation mechanism of visitors' cultural heritage behavior in the context of Chengde. At its core, the framework adopts an expanded 4E model—experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism—together with heritage interpretation quality as key antecedent variables. These independent variables collectively capture the

experiential, value-based, communicative, affective, and interpretive dimensions through which cultural heritage tourism initiatives are perceived and evaluated by visitors. Experience economy theory provides a foundational lens for understanding these antecedents, particularly by emphasizing that tourists pursue memorable, meaningful, and emotionally resonant experiences rather than purely functional consumption. Image theory and conservation-related cognition jointly support the inclusion of perceived destination image and perceived conservation as mediating variables. Source credibility theory is incorporated as a moderating framework, emphasizing that the effectiveness of experiential, interpretive, and communicative strategies depends on tourists' perceptions of the professionalism, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of information sources. Ultimately, the dependent variable of this study—cultural heritage visiting behavior—is conceptualized as tourists' actual and intended engagement with cultural heritage, including visitation, participation, recommendation, and supportive behaviors toward heritage conservation. By integrating the 4E model, experience economy theory, image theory, and source credibility theory, this conceptual framework moves beyond a narrow focus on promotional effectiveness and offers a comprehensive, visitor-centered explanation of how cultural heritage experiences, interpretations, and communications translate into meaningful and sustainable cultural heritage behavior in the digital era.

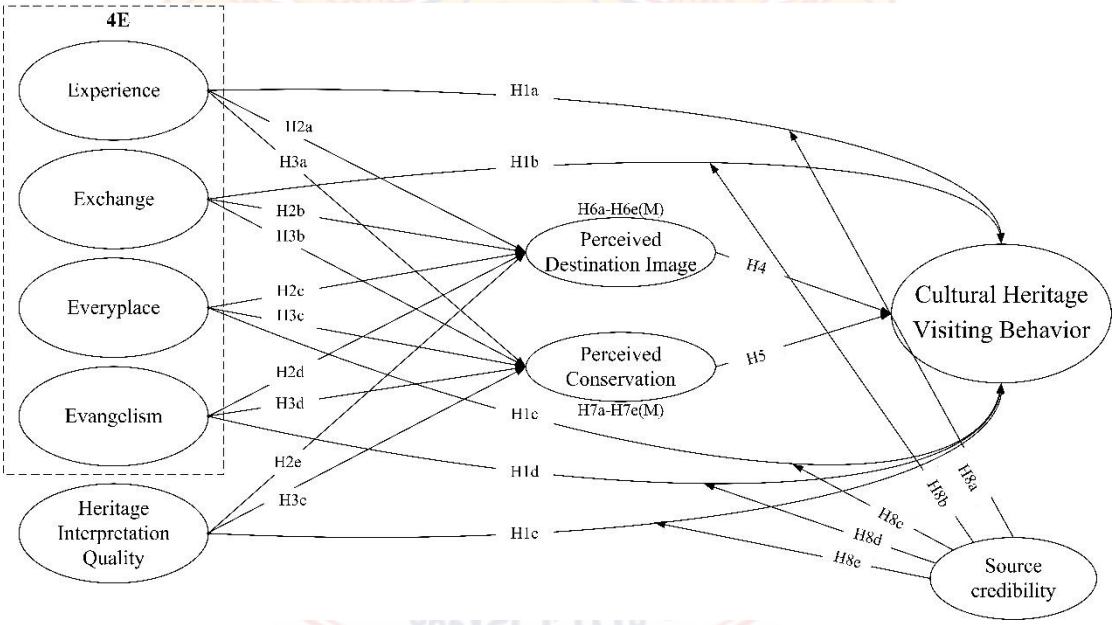

Figure 2.10 The empirical framework of the study

Figure 2.10 illustrates the empirical research framework of this study, which is grounded in the 4E model, experience economy theory, image theory, and source credibility theory, and aims to explain the determinants of visitors' cultural heritage behavior in Chengde. The model identifies five antecedent variables—experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, and heritage interpretation quality—as the key independent variables. Drawing on image theory and sustainability-related cognition, the framework incorporates two mediating variables: perceived destination image and perceived conservation. Perceived destination image captures tourists' integrated cognitive and affective evaluations of Chengde as a cultural heritage destination, while perceived conservation reflects visitors' perceptions of the destination's commitment to heritage protection, sustainability, and responsible management. Together, these mediators explain how experiential and interpretive inputs are transformed into higher-order perceptions that influence behavioral outcomes.

Consistent with the logic of the 4E framework and experience economy theory, the model proposes that experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, and heritage interpretation quality exert direct effects on cultural heritage visiting behavior (H1a–H1e). In addition, these antecedent variables are hypothesized to have significant effects on perceived destination image (H2a–H2e) and perceived conservation (H3a–H3e), reflecting the role of experiential engagement and interpretive quality in shaping tourists' image formation and conservation awareness. Both perceived destination image and perceived conservation are further hypothesized to directly influence cultural heritage visiting behavior (H4 and H5), highlighting their central roles in translating perceptions into action. Moreover, the framework incorporates source credibility as a moderating variable based on source credibility theory. Source credibility, operationalized through professionalism, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, is proposed to moderate the relationships of the four 4E marketing dimensions and heritage interpretation quality with cultural heritage visiting behavior (H8a–H8e). Accordingly, source credibility is positioned as moderating the direct paths from experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, and heritage interpretation quality to cultural heritage visiting behavior. This moderating mechanism suggests that highly credible tourism information strengthens the behavioral effects of experiential, communicative, advocacy-related, and interpretive inputs.

Overall, this framework elucidates the direct, mediated, and moderated pathways through which experiential dimensions, interpretive quality, and information credibility jointly shape visitors' cultural heritage behavior. By integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, the model advances a comprehensive, visitor-centered explanation of how cultural heritage tourism experiences and communications translate into meaningful behavioral engagement in the digital era.

2.4.2 Hypothesis Development

Experience refers to the subjective perceptions, emotions, and interactions that individuals undergo during their engagement with a product, service, or destination, encompassing both sensory stimulation and meaningful participation (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). In tourism contexts, experience plays a central role in shaping how visitors internalize cultural, historical, and aesthetic elements of a destination, thereby influencing their satisfaction, attachment, and subsequent behavioral responses (Neuhofer et al., 2014). When cultural heritage tourists perceive their experiences as immersive, authentic, and personally meaningful, they are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward the destination and translate these perceptions into concrete behavioral actions, such as visiting heritage sites, participating in cultural activities, and engaging in repeat or extended visits (Chen & Rahman, 2018). Accordingly, enriching experiential encounters are expected to directly stimulate visitors' cultural heritage behavior. Therefore, we propose:

H1a: Experience positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Exchange refers to tourists' perceived reciprocal value derived from their interactions with a destination, including not only economic considerations but also intangible benefits such as knowledge acquisition, emotional fulfillment, cultural enrichment, and social recognition (Bagozzi, 1975). In tourism settings, exchange emphasizes the balance between tourists' inputs (e.g., time, effort, expenditure) and the perceived benefits obtained through meaningful experiences and cultural learning (Grönroos, 2011). When visitors perceive that cultural heritage tourism offers high experiential and symbolic value relative to their investment, they are more likely to engage actively in heritage-related activities, deepen their participation, and demonstrate supportive behaviors toward the destination (Kang & Gretzel, 2012). Therefore, positive

perceptions of exchange are expected to encourage visit-related cultural heritage behaviors. Thus, we propose:

H1b: Exchange positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Everyplace highlights the role of omnipresent access to destination-related information, services, and experiences across digital and physical touchpoints, reflecting a shift toward omnichannel communication and interaction in tourism marketing (Kuriachan et al., 2024). In the cultural heritage tourism context, everyplace emphasizes tourists' ability to encounter, access, and interact with heritage content through multiple platforms, such as official websites, social media, mobile applications, and on-site interpretive systems (Mariani et al., 2016). When heritage information and experiences are consistently available and seamlessly integrated across channels, tourists are more likely to develop familiarity, confidence, and motivation to engage in heritage visits and related activities (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Consequently, ubiquitous accessibility is expected to facilitate and strengthen cultural heritage visiting behavior. Therefore, we propose:

H1c: Everyplace positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Evangelism refers to tourists' voluntary and passion-driven advocacy behaviors, whereby they actively share experiences, recommend destinations, and promote cultural heritage through word-of-mouth, storytelling, and digital platforms (Coelho, 2025). In cultural heritage tourism, evangelism arises when visitors develop strong emotional resonance and identity alignment with the destination, motivating them to act as informal cultural ambassadors (Litvin et al., 2008). Such advocacy not only reinforces tourists' own attachment to the destination but also strengthens their behavioral commitment, encouraging deeper engagement, repeat visits, and active participation in heritage-related activities (Fakfare et al., 2024). Therefore, evangelism is expected to directly enhance tourists' cultural heritage visiting behavior. Accordingly, we propose:

H1d: Evangelism positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Heritage interpretation quality refers to tourists' perceptions of the clarity, authenticity, depth, and engagement effectiveness of interpretive content that communicates the historical, cultural, and symbolic meanings of heritage resources. High-quality interpretation facilitates tourists' understanding of cultural significance, enhances emotional immersion, and transforms static heritage elements into meaningful experiences (Ye et al., 2024). In cultural heritage tourism, effective interpretation not only enriches

learning outcomes but also strengthens visitors' motivation to explore heritage sites, participate in cultural activities, and sustain heritage-related engagement (Xiao et al., 2025). Accordingly, when tourists perceive heritage interpretation as informative, engaging, and culturally meaningful, they are more likely to demonstrate active visit behaviors. Therefore, we propose:

H1e: Heritage interpretation quality positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Experience refers to the sensory, cognitive, and emotional engagement that tourists derive from their interactions with a destination, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects of the visit (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). In cultural heritage tourism, immersive and participatory experiences—such as hands-on workshops, guided storytelling, or interactive digital exhibits—enable visitors to connect more deeply with the historical and cultural essence of the site (Radice, 2014). Such enriched experiences foster not only enjoyment but also meaningful interpretation of cultural value, which shapes visitors' perceptions of the destination as unique, authentic, and memorable (Perry, 2023). By enhancing the quality of experience, destinations can positively influence tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations, thereby strengthening their overall perceived destination image. Therefore, we propose:

H2a: Experience positively influences perceived destination image.

Exchange refers to the multidimensional value interactions between tourists and destinations, encompassing not only monetary transactions but also time, emotional engagement, and cultural learning (Bagozzi, 1975). In the context of cultural heritage tourism, exchange manifests when visitors contribute effort, attention, or curiosity in return for enriched cultural knowledge, authentic interactions with local communities, or unique heritage experiences (Prebensen et al., 2013). Such reciprocal value creation strengthens tourists' perceptions of fairness, authenticity, and meaningfulness, which in turn enhances their evaluation of the destination's cultural distinctiveness and attractiveness (Arıca et al., 2023). When visitors perceive exchanges as balanced and rewarding, they are more likely to form a favorable image of the destination as trustworthy and culturally enriching. Therefore, we propose:

H2b: Exchange positively influences perceived destination image.

Everyplace emphasizes the ubiquity of information and service accessibility across multiple channels, allowing tourists to engage with destination content seamlessly in both online and offline contexts (Kuriachan et al., 2024). In cultural heritage tourism, the widespread dissemination of destination-related narratives through digital platforms, social media, and immersive technologies facilitates broader exposure and continuous interaction with cultural assets (Mariani et al., 2022). Such omnichannel presence not only enhances informational transparency but also fosters anticipation and familiarity, enabling tourists to construct a richer and more coherent image of the destination (Yoo & MacInnis, 2005). When visitors perceive destination content as accessible and consistently delivered across diverse platforms, their cognitive and affective evaluations of the destination are significantly reinforced. Therefore, we propose:

H2c: Everyplace positively influences perceived destination image.

Evangelism reflects a form of tourist-driven advocacy grounded in emotional attachment, passion, and identity resonance with a destination, whereby visitors voluntarily share and recommend places they feel strongly connected to. Unlike firm-initiated promotion, evangelism emerges from genuine personal experiences and conveys not only factual information but also emotions, values, and symbolic meanings embedded in cultural heritage tourism. Such emotionally expressive and enthusiastic sharing is typically perceived as more authentic and credible, enabling peer narratives to shape both the cognitive understanding of destination attributes and the affective resonance with its cultural significance. Through repeated exposure to passion-driven advocacy, potential tourists are more likely to form vivid, coherent, and favorable impressions of a destination's cultural uniqueness and historical depth, thereby strengthening the overall perceived destination image. Therefore, we propose:

H2d: Evangelism positively influences perceived destination image.

Heritage interpretation quality refers to tourists' perceptions of the clarity, authenticity, depth, and engagement effectiveness of interpretive content that communicates the historical, cultural, and symbolic meanings of heritage resources. High-quality interpretation facilitates knowledge acquisition, emotional immersion, and cultural understanding by transforming static heritage elements into meaningful narratives and experiences (Ye et al., 2024). In cultural heritage tourism, effective interpretation enhances tourists' appreciation of cultural value and historical significance, thereby strengthening

both cognitive evaluations and affective attachment to the destination (Xiao et al., 2025). As a result, when tourists perceive heritage interpretation as informative, engaging, and culturally meaningful, their overall perceived destination image is positively reinforced. Therefore, we propose:

H2e: Heritage interpretation quality positively influences perceived destination image.

Perceived conservation refers to tourists' overall evaluation of the extent to which cultural heritage resources are effectively protected, maintained, and sustainably managed, as reflected in physical preservation, environmental integrity, cultural continuity, and responsible tourism practices. In cultural heritage tourism, tourists' perceptions of conservation are not formed solely through expert assessments, but are strongly shaped by experiential encounters, interpretive communication, and value-based interactions during the visit. Experience plays a critical role in shaping tourists' perceptions of conservation effectiveness. When visitors engage in immersive, well-designed heritage experiences—such as guided tours emphasizing preservation efforts, participatory conservation activities, or experiential narratives highlighting sustainability—they are more likely to perceive that heritage resources are being responsibly protected and respected. Meaningful experiences that balance access and preservation signal to tourists that conservation and tourism development are harmoniously integrated, thereby strengthening their perception of effective heritage conservation. Therefore, we propose:

H3a: Experience positively influences perceived conservation.

Exchange influences perceived conservation through tourists' evaluations of reciprocal value between visitors and the destination. When tourists perceive that their time, financial contributions, and behavioral efforts—such as entrance fees, donations, or compliance with conservation guidelines—are translated into visible preservation outcomes, they are more likely to judge conservation practices as fair, transparent, and effective. In cultural heritage tourism, such balanced exchange relationships reinforce tourists' belief that tourism revenues and visitor participation contribute meaningfully to heritage protection, thereby enhancing perceived conservation. Therefore, we propose:

H3b: Exchange positively influences perceived conservation.

Everyplace shapes perceived conservation by increasing transparency, accessibility, and continuity of conservation-related information across multiple channels.

The availability of conservation narratives through official websites, social media, mobile applications, on-site signage, and digital interpretation tools enables tourists to observe and understand ongoing preservation efforts before, during, and after their visit. This omnichannel visibility fosters awareness of sustainability practices and reinforces tourists' confidence that heritage resources are actively and responsibly managed. Consequently, consistent and accessible communication across platforms strengthens tourists' perceptions of conservation effectiveness. Therefore, we propose:

H3c: Everyplace positively influences perceived conservation.

Evangelism, as a form of tourist-driven advocacy, also contributes to shaping perceived conservation. When tourists who are emotionally attached to a destination voluntarily share experiences emphasizing protection efforts, respectful management, and sustainability values, such narratives enhance collective awareness and normative expectations regarding conservation. Peer-to-peer communication that highlights responsible tourism practices and preservation outcomes is often perceived as authentic and credible, reinforcing other visitors' confidence that cultural heritage resources are being appropriately safeguarded. As a result, evangelism strengthens tourists' perceptions of conservation effectiveness through socially validated narratives. Therefore, we propose:

H3d: Evangelism positively influences perceived conservation.

Heritage interpretation quality is a direct and essential determinant of perceived conservation. High-quality interpretation communicates not only historical facts but also the significance of preservation, conservation challenges, and sustainability responsibilities. Through engaging narratives, clear explanations, and emotionally resonant storytelling, effective interpretation enables tourists to recognize conservation efforts and appreciate the necessity of protecting cultural heritage for future generations. When tourists perceive interpretive content as informative, sincere, and conservation-oriented, they are more likely to evaluate heritage management as responsible and effective. Therefore, we propose:

H3e: Heritage interpretation quality positively influences perceived conservation.

Perceived destination image represents tourists' integrated cognitive, affective, and conative evaluations of a destination, collectively shaping their overall impression and behavioral tendencies (Crompton, 1979; Stylidis et al., 2017). A favorable destination image enhances tourists' confidence in the authenticity, attractiveness, and cultural value

of heritage sites while reinforcing emotional attachment and approach-oriented behavioral choice (Perry, 2023). In cultural heritage tourism, when visitors perceive a destination as distinctive, credible, and emotionally engaging, they are more inclined to participate in promotional behaviors such as word-of-mouth recommendation, social media sharing, and repeat visitation (Di-Clemente et al., 2022). Thus, a positive destination image becomes a crucial driver of cultural heritage visiting behavior. Therefore, we propose:

H4: Perceived destination image positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Perceived conservation represents tourists' overall evaluation of a destination's efforts in protecting, managing, and sustaining its cultural heritage resources, including physical preservation, environmental protection, and the continuity of cultural value. A high level of perceived conservation enhances tourists' confidence in the destination's responsibility, authenticity, and long-term viability, while also reinforcing moral approval and emotional reassurance toward heritage utilization (Van Le et al., 2026). In the context of cultural heritage tourism, when visitors perceive that heritage sites are well preserved and responsibly managed, they are more likely to feel that their visitation is meaningful, ethically acceptable, and aligned with sustainable values. Such perceptions encourage approach-oriented behaviors, including visiting, revisiting, recommending, and supporting heritage destinations through positive word-of-mouth and continued engagement (Bhardwaj & Sharma, 2025). Thus, perceived conservation functions as an important psychological driver of cultural heritage visiting behavior. Therefore, we propose:

H5: Perceived conservation positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Moreover, perceived destination image serves as a key psychological mechanism linking marketing strategies to tourism promotion outcomes. By integrating cognitive evaluations, affective responses, and visiting behavior, destination image translates experiential engagement, value-oriented exchange, omnipresent communication, and peer advocacy into concrete promotional effects. In cultural heritage tourism, tourists' perceptions of authenticity, cultural resonance, and symbolic meaning are often shaped prior to and during their exposure to the four dimensions of the 4E model, subsequently influencing their willingness to engage in effective promotional behaviors. This indicates that perceived destination image operates as a mediating variable through which the 4E

dimensions and heritage interpretation quality affect cultural heritage visiting behavior (Kanwel et al., 2019; Tosun et al., 2021). Therefore, we propose:

H6a: Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between experience and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H6b: Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between exchange and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H6c: Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between everyplace and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H6d: Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between evangelism and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H6e: Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between heritage interpretation quality and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Moreover, perceived conservation functions as a critical psychological and normative mechanism through which tourism experiences and marketing-related stimuli influence tourists' behavioral engagement with cultural heritage destinations. Beyond aesthetic appreciation or experiential enjoyment, cultural heritage tourism inherently involves tourists' judgments regarding the protection, sustainability, and responsible use of heritage resources. Tourists' perceptions of conservation efforts are shaped through experiential encounters, value exchanges, interpretive communication, and socially transmitted narratives, which collectively inform whether visitation is perceived as meaningful, ethical, and sustainable. When tourists perceive that heritage resources are well protected and respectfully interpreted, they are more likely to develop supportive attitudes and translate these perceptions into approach-oriented behaviors, such as visiting, revisiting, recommending, and advocating for heritage destinations. This suggests that perceived conservation operates as a mediating variable linking the core dimensions of the 4E model and heritage interpretation quality to cultural heritage visiting behavior (Elshaer et al., 2024). Accordingly, we propose the following hypotheses:

H7a: Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between experience and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H7b: Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between exchange and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H7c: Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between everyplace and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H7d: Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between evangelism and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H7e: Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between heritage interpretation quality and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Source credibility refers to the perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of information sources, which shapes how audiences interpret, internalize, and act upon received messages (Hovland, 1953; Ohanian, 1990). In the context of cultural heritage tourism, credible sources—such as official heritage institutions, expert guides, experienced local residents, or authentic peer reviews—enhance tourists' confidence in the accuracy and value of the information they receive, thereby amplifying the effects of promotional efforts (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). When tourists perceive information sources as highly credible, the influence of experiential engagement, value exchange, omnipresent communication, and peer advocacy on effective tourism promotion is strengthened, as trust in the source reinforces both cognitive and affective evaluations that drive visiting behavior (Hsu & Lin, 2023). Therefore, we propose:

H8a: Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between experience and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H8b: Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between exchange and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H8c: Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between everyplace and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H8d: Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between evangelism and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

H8e: Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between heritage interpretation quality and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Table 2.5 Hypothesis Development Statement

Serial number	Hypothetical content
H1a	Experience positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H1b	Exchange positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H1c	Everyplace positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H1d	Evangelism positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H1e	Heritage interpretation quality positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H2a	Experience positively influences perceived destination image.
H2b	Exchange positively influences perceived destination image.
H2c	Everyplace positively influences perceived destination image.
H2d	Evangelism positively influences perceived destination image.
H2e	Heritage interpretation quality positively influences perceived destination image.
H3a	Experience positively influences perceived conservation.
H3b	Exchange positively influences perceived conservation.
H3c	Everyplace positively influences perceived conservation.
H3d	Evangelism positively influences perceived conservation.
H3e	Heritage interpretation quality positively influences perceived conservation.
H4	Perceived destination image positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H5	Perceived conservation positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H6a	Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between experience and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H6b	Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between exchange and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H6c	Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between everyplace and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Table 2.5 (continued)

Serial number	Hypothetical content
H6d	Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between evangelism and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H6e	Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between heritage interpretation quality and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H7a	Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between experience and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H7b	Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between exchange and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H7c	Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between everyplace and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H7d	Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between evangelism and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H7e	Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between heritage interpretation quality and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H8a	Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between experience and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H8b	Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between exchange and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H8c	Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between everyplace and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H8d	Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between evangelism and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
H8e	Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between heritage interpretation quality and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter establishes a systematic theoretical foundation for examining visitor behavior in cultural heritage tourism by reviewing relevant literature and constructing an integrated conceptual framework tailored to the context of Chengde. Drawing on

interdisciplinary perspectives from tourism studies, experiential marketing, communication theory, and consumer psychology, it clarifies the conceptual scope, theoretical bases, and relational logic of the key variables employed in this study.

First, the chapter reviews the evolution of cultural heritage tourism and highlights the increasing importance of experiential engagement, interpretive communication, and perception-based evaluation in shaping visitors' behavioral responses. Within the contemporary digital and experience-oriented tourism environment, cultural heritage destinations are no longer evaluated solely by their resource endowment, but by how visitors perceive, interpret, and trust the information and experiences provided during the visit process.

Second, the chapter systematically defines the core constructs of the research model. Based on the 4E marketing framework, experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism are conceptualized as visitor-perceived dimensions of heritage marketing practices that reflect immersive engagement, value reciprocity, omnichannel accessibility, and visitor-driven advocacy. Heritage interpretation quality is further introduced as a critical informational cue that shapes visitors' understanding, trust, and meaning construction in heritage contexts. Building on image theory, perceived destination image and perceived conservation are conceptualized as two complementary facets of cognitive destination image, reflecting interpretation-enabled meaning and conservation/management evaluation, respectively. Together, they function as key psychological mechanisms through which marketing and interpretive stimuli are translated into behavioral outcomes. In addition, source credibility theory is incorporated to explain how the perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of information sources condition visitors' acceptance of information and experiential cues. Cultural heritage visiting behavior is ultimately defined as the core dependent variable, capturing tourists' actual and intended engagement with heritage sites, including visitation, revisit intention, and recommendation behavior.

Finally, integrating the 4E model, experience economy theory, image theory, and source credibility theory, this chapter develops a comprehensive conceptual framework and corresponding research hypotheses. The proposed model explains how perceived marketing experiences and interpretation quality influence visitors' behavioral responses through the mediating roles of perceived destination image and perceived conservation,

while accounting for the moderating effect of source credibility. By clarifying the direct, mediating, and moderated relationships among these variables, this chapter provides a coherent analytical structure for empirical testing. Overall, this chapter lays a solid theoretical and conceptual foundation for the subsequent research design and methodology presented in Chapter 3, while contributing to a deeper understanding of visitor behavior formation mechanisms in cultural heritage tourism settings.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter establishes a rigorous post-positivist quantitative framework to examine how 4E marketing dimensions effect cultural heritage visiting behavior in Chengde's cultural heritage context. It incorporates perceived destination image and perceived conservation as a mediator and source credibility as a moderator. Using a structured offline questionnaire, a convenience sampling, and SEM analysis, the study combines theoretical precision with practical insight to inform heritage tourism strategy.

3.1 Overview and Justification of Research Paradigm

This study is situated within the philosophical paradigm of post-positivism, which posits that an objective reality exists behind observable phenomena, though human understanding of this reality is inherently imperfect and probabilistic. In the context of cultural heritage tourism, constructs such as experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, heritage interpretation quality, destination image perception, perceived conservation, source credibility, and cultural heritage visiting behavior are treated as real and causally linked, albeit indirectly observable through empirical investigation. These constructs represent systematic psychological and behavioral processes shaped by heritage tourism marketing and are best understood through theory-driven hypothesis testing and statistical modeling. Post-positivism, therefore, offers the philosophical flexibility and methodological rigor necessary for explaining how multi-dimensional marketing experiences shape visitors' perceptions and behaviors in heritage tourism (Ali, 2024).

Ontologically, the research is grounded in critical realism, which holds that marketing-related constructs—such as immersive experiences, symbolic exchanges, interpretive quality, and destination image—exist independently of researcher interpretation, though their manifestations are shaped by subjective perception. While tourists experience these elements subjectively, they arise from objectively designed interventions and are thus measurable. The model assumes that destination image perception

and perceived conservation serve as psychological bridges, translating marketing experiences into tangible visitor behavior. Moreover, source credibility is viewed as a contextual factor that can moderate the influence of marketing stimuli, depending on how much trust tourists place in the information they receive. This layered ontology allows for nuanced modeling of direct, indirect, and conditional relationships among constructs.

Epistemologically, the study adopts an empirical, theory-driven approach consistent with post-positivist thought. By positioning the 4E model, heritage interpretation quality as the central explanatory framework and incorporating perceived destination image and perceived conservation as mediating cognitive construct. The introduction of source credibility as a moderating variable reflects the view that knowledge acquisition is filtered through perceptual biases and trust structures, particularly in the current digital media environment. Empirical testing through Structural Equation Modeling enables the identification of significant paths and interactions among variables, while maintaining openness to model revision based on statistical evidence and contextual interpretation.

Methodologically, the study employs a quantitative, deductive design guided by hypothesis testing and statistical inference. A structured survey instrument, based on previously validated scales, will be used to collect data from tourists engaged in cultural heritage experiences. SEM will allow for testing the direct effects of five independent variables (experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, and heritage interpretation quality), two mediators (destination image perception and perceived conservation), one moderator (source credibility), and one dependent variable (cultural heritage visiting behavior) (Wainstein et al., 2022). The inclusion of source credibility as a moderator adds further complexity and realism to the model by accounting for variations in trust and source evaluation that may influence the strength of marketing communications (Kouam, 2025). This methodological rigor enhances both the explanatory power and generalizability of the findings.

Axiologically, while aiming for empirical objectivity, the research acknowledges that scholarly values inevitably influence research design, variable selection, and interpretation (Tripathi et al., 2024). Recognizing the sociocultural significance of heritage tourism, this study upholds ethical standards by ensuring voluntary participation, data confidentiality, and the cultural sensitivity of its research instruments (Pina et al., 2024).

Moreover, the emphasis on credible information sources not only serves analytical precision but also aligns with a normative commitment to improving the quality of heritage tourism communication in a digitally saturated information environment. The value of this research lies not only in academic contribution but also in its potential to guide more ethical, authentic, and culturally resonant tourism marketing practices.

In summary, this study builds on the expanded 4E marketing model and incorporates additional constructs to reflect the complex psychological and informational processes in cultural heritage tourism. Specifically, it investigates how five independent variables—experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, and heritage interpretation quality—shape tourists' visit behavior toward heritage sites, both directly and indirectly via destination image and perceived conservation. It also examines how source credibility moderates the influence of marketing on perception and behavior. Grounded in post-positivist principles and employing a robust empirical strategy, the study seeks to address the following objectives:

(1) To examine the direct effects of the four dimensions of the 4E marketing model (experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism) and heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visiting behavior.

(2) To investigate the mediating mechanisms by testing how perceived destination image and perceived conservation mediate the relationships between (a) the four 4E dimensions and (b) heritage interpretation quality, and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

(3) To test the moderating role of source credibility in shaping the strength of the relationships between the four 4E marketing dimensions and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

(4) To develop evidence-based promotion strategies for cultural heritage tourism by translating the empirical findings into actionable recommendations for destination marketing and heritage site management (e.g., optimizing 4E-based marketing, strengthening interpretation systems, enhancing perceived conservation, and leveraging credible sources).

In line with the post-positivist paradigm and the research objectives stated above, this study adopts a structured quantitative approach to data collection and analysis, combining the use of a Likert-scale questionnaire with a set of open-ended questions to ensure both standardization and contextual depth. The primary instrument consists of

validated Likert-scale items designed to quantitatively measure experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism and heritage interpretation quality, as well as perceived destination image, perceived conservation, source credibility, and cultural heritage visiting behavior. These closed-ended items allow for the rigorous statistical evaluation of hypothesized relationships via Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Complementing this, an open-ended question is embedded at the end of the survey to solicit participants' subjective insights into what they perceive as the most effective strategies for promoting cultural heritage tourism in Chengde. This combined approach enhances the study's explanatory power by capturing both measurable patterns and nuanced perspectives, thus reinforcing its contribution to both theoretical advancement and practical application in heritage tourism marketing.

3.2 Research Method

3.2.1 Operational Definitions of Variables

Operational definitions specify how abstract theoretical constructs are translated into measurable variables within a given research context (Kerlinger, 1966). In this study, the core constructs—including experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, heritage interpretation quality, perceived destination image, perceived conservation, source credibility, and cultural heritage visiting behavior—are conceptualized based on established literature and adapted to the context of cultural heritage tourism in Chengde. Table 3.1 outlines the operational definitions of the core variables in this study on effective tourism promotion in cultural heritage destinations.

Table 3.1 Operational Definitions of Related Variables

Project	Definition	Reference
Experience	Tourists gain immersive, sensory, and emotionally resonant travel experiences within cultural heritage settings, emphasizing subjective perceptions and the resonance of cultural symbols.	Madhyamapurush (2022)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Project	Definition	Reference
Exchange	Interactions between tourists and destinations, service providers, or fellow travelers during the travel experience encompass information exchange, feedback sharing, and value co-creation.	Madhyamapu rush (2022)
Everyplace	The visibility and consistency of destination information across multiple communication channels—such as social media, travel platforms, and word-of-mouth networks—influence the breadth of awareness.	Madhyamapu rush (2022)
Evangelism	Refers to tourists' passion- and emotion-driven advocacy behavior, whereby visitors, based on strong emotional attachment, enthusiasm, and cultural identity resonance with a destination, voluntarily share experiences, recommend, and promote the destination through interpersonal communication and digital networks.	Cavadas & Moreira (2025)
Heritage Interpretation Quality	The effectiveness with which cultural heritage information, meanings, and values are communicated to visitors through interpretive systems, narratives, and media.	Weng et al. (2020)
Perceived destination image	Tourists' overall cognitive and emotional evaluation of a destination, formed through information exposure and personal experience, encompassing their beliefs about destination attributes, emotional and cultural resonance, and subsequent behavioral choice toward visiting, revisiting, and recommending the destination.	Najar & Rather (2023)
Perceived Conservation	Tourists' subjective evaluation of a destination's efforts, responsibility, and effectiveness in protecting, managing, and sustaining cultural heritage resources.	Hernández-Rojas et al. (2021)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Project	Definition	Reference
Source Credibility	Tourists' perceived evaluation of tourism information sources in terms of professionalism (expertise), trustworthiness (authenticity and reliability), and attractiveness, which determines the extent to which promotional information is accepted, trusted, and influential in shaping destination perceptions and tourism-related decisions.	Sanusi et al. (2022)
Cultural heritage visiting behavior	The overall manifestation of tourists transforming their experiential perceptions and value assessments within cultural heritage contexts into concrete actions such as actual visits, on-site participation, and post-visit recommendations or repeat visits.	Kanagasapapathy (2017)

3.2.2 Variable Measurements

(1) Experience

Experience is conceptualized in this study as tourists' immersive and culturally resonant interactions within the context of cultural heritage tourism. Drawing on the measurement framework proposed by Madhyamapurush (2022), the construct is operationalized through three key dimensions: heritage tourism cultural identity, heritage tourism value identity, and heritage tourism behavioral identity. These dimensions collectively capture how tourists engage with cultural heritage sites not merely as observers, but as participants in meaning-making processes rooted in history, symbolism, and local narratives. The revised measurement items reflect a wide range of experiential elements, including the pursuit of unique and diverse cultural encounters, the desire to understand the historical and cultural essence of a destination, and emotional engagement through spatial design, guided interpretation, local cuisine, interactive performances, and staff interactions. Each item is evaluated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), allowing for an empirical assessment of how deeply tourists internalize and respond to their heritage experiences. This variable plays a foundational role in understanding how experiential engagement contributes to the formation of

perceived destination image and ultimately enhances the effectiveness of tourism promotion strategies in heritage-rich cities like Chengde.

Table 3.2 Detailed Statements used to Measure Experience

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
1. Require the variety of coffee shop experience	EP 1.I seek diverse and unique experiences at cultural heritage sites to enhance my interest in the destination.	Madhyamapurush, 2022
2. Desire to learn about the coffee culture	EP 2.I desire to deeply understand the historical background and cultural essence of the destination.	
3. Using a coffee shop in Chiang Mai gives you a new experience	EP 3. Visiting this cultural heritage site provided me with a novel and immersive experience.	
4. The design of the coffee shop creates a user experience	EP 4. The architectural and spatial design of cultural venues strongly conveyed a sense of local culture.	
5. The design of drinks menu creates experience	EP 5. Guided tours and interpretative content enriched my understanding of the cultural elements.	
6. The design of dessert, bakery, and food menu creates experience	EP 6. Local food, handicrafts, and festivals enhanced my sense of cultural participation.	
7. Service and manners of employees creates experience when visiting a coffee shop	EP 7. The professionalism and attitude of staff improved my overall impression of the destination.	
8. Demonstration of slow bar or coffee roasting creates experience	EP 8.I engaged in cultural performances, rituals, or interactive activities that strengthened my emotional connection and sense of belonging.	

(2) Exchange

The construct Exchange reflects the interactive and value-oriented relationship between tourists and cultural heritage destinations, emphasizing how perceived benefits, engagement quality, and environmental context shape tourists' evaluation of their experiences. Adapted from Madhyamapurush (2022), this variable includes nine revised items encompassing the perceived value of services (EC1–EC3), effectiveness of cultural storytelling and live demonstrations (EC4–EC5), commitment to sustainable practices (EC6), infrastructure support (EC7–EC8), and access to meaningful cultural products (EC9). These dimensions collectively capture how cultural heritage destinations like Chengde facilitate value co-creation and participatory engagement. Measurement employs a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), enabling a nuanced assessment of tourists' exchange-based perceptions in heritage tourism contexts.

Table 3.3 Detailed Statements used to Measure Exchange

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
1. The service you received from the coffee shop is valued for money	EC1. The tourism services provided at cultural heritage sites in Chengde offer good value for the money spent.	Madhyamapurush, 2022
2. The use of coffee shop service in Chiang Mai is valued for your experience (s)	EC2. My experience at cultural heritage sites in Chengde is worth the overall effort and planning.	
3. The use of coffee shop service in Chiang Mai is valued for the time spent	EC3. The time I invested in visiting Chengde's heritage attractions was meaningfully spent.	
4. Each coffee shop has interesting storytelling	EC4. The storytelling at Chengde's cultural sites (e.g., through guided tours, signage, exhibitions) was engaging and informative.	

Table 3.3 (continued)

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
5. The coffee shop with the demonstration of coffee brewing or coffee roasting are considered worth visiting	EC5. Heritage sites that offered live demonstrations (e.g., traditional crafts, rituals, performances) enhanced my visit and were worth attending.	
6. The coffee shop should offer the socially responsible campaign e.g., reduce global warming, using local products, environmental conservation	EC6. I value heritage sites in Chengde that incorporate sustainable practices, such as promoting local culture and environmental conservation.	
7. The coffee shop provide enough spaces for relaxing, working, private zone, and co-working space	EC7. Chengde's heritage sites provided adequate space for leisure, reflection, and quiet cultural engagement.	
8. Location of the coffee shop is located near the tourist attractions, accommodation and provided facilities such as car park, toilet	EC8. The accessibility and convenience of heritage sites—such as proximity to accommodation and the availability of public facilities—contributed to my overall satisfaction.	
9. The coffee shop sells a variety of souvenirs.	EC9. The cultural sites in Chengde offered a meaningful variety of local cultural products or souvenirs that enriched my travel experience.	

(3) Everyplace

The construct Everyplace captures the cross-platform accessibility and digital visibility of cultural heritage tourism destinations. Adapted from Madhyamapurush (2022), this variable emphasizes the role of omnichannel communication and technological integration in enhancing tourists' awareness, convenience, and engagement. The measurement includes ten items that assess dimensions such as social media exposure, ease of navigation via mapping tools, accessibility of digital communication channels, diversity of promotional platforms, and the efficiency of online services (e.g., booking and customer support). Responses are collected using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), providing insights into the extent to which pervasive digital presence facilitates effective destination marketing.

Table 3.4 Detailed Statements used to Measure Everyplace

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
1. The convenience of contacting with the coffee shop	EW1. It is easy to contact the cultural heritage site through online or offline channels.	Madhyamapurush, 2022
2. The convenience of travelling to the coffee shop	EW2. Traveling to the cultural heritage site is convenient and well-supported by digital navigation tools.	
3. The coffee shops is seen by the social media (Facebook/Line/IG)	EW3. I often see the destination being promoted through major social media platforms (e.g., WeChat, Weibo, Douyin).	
4. Route searching through the online map (Google Map/Apple Map) to the coffee shop	EW4. Online maps and mobile apps (e.g., Baidu Maps, Amap) make it easy to search for and navigate to the site.	

Table 3.4 (continued)

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
5. Various communication channels with the coffee shop (Website/Telephone/Page/ Facebook/Line/IG)	EW5. The destination offers multiple digital communication channels (e.g., official website, social media, customer service hotlines).	
6. The coffee shop provided a variety of PR channels (Facebook /Line/IG/Website)	EW6. The heritage site is promoted through a variety of digital media and PR channels, enhancing its visibility.	
7. The coffee shop has delivery service through various platforms (self/Grab Food/Food Panda/Line Man)	EW7. The site provides digital tour guides or virtual experiences through accessible platforms.	
8. Order system of the coffee shop considered fast and correct	EW8. Online booking and ticketing systems for the site are fast, reliable, and user-friendly.	
9. The coffee shop provided a various payment method	EW9. The destination supports various payment options, including digital and mobile payment methods.	
10. The coffee shop offered effectively system to solve customer problems	EW10. The destination has effective online and offline customer service systems to address tourist inquiries and problems promptly.	

(4) Evangelism

Evangelism refers to tourists' proactive dissemination of cultural heritage experiences, typically driven by emotional identification and personal engagement with the destination. Adapted from Madhyamapurush (2022), this construct captures how visitors evolve from passive recipients of information to active cultural advocates. It is measured across six dimensions: perceived uniqueness (EG1), willingness to share experiences (EG2), sense of cultural belonging (EG3), participation in cultural activities (EG4), engagement with promotional platforms (EG5), and efforts in peer recommendation (EG6). These items assess the extent to which visitors voluntarily promote the heritage destination. Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 3.5 Detailed Statements used to Measure Evangelism

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
1. The coffee shop in Chiang Mai is interesting	EG1.This cultural heritage destination impressed me and left a strong emotional impact.	Madhyamapurush, 2022
2. Experience in consuming the Chiang Mai coffee shop should be conveyed to others	EG2. I feel the need to share my cultural heritage tourism experience with others.	
3. Consuming the Chiang Mai coffee shop created the sense of belonging in the coffee community	EG3. Visiting this cultural site fostered a strong sense of connection with the local cultural community.	
4. The coffee shop offers the workshops about coffee	EG4. I participated in hands-on cultural activities (e.g., local workshops, traditional crafts) that deepened my engagement with the site.	

Table 3.5 (continued)

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
5. The coffee shop provides membership system or discount promotion or special compliment	EG5. I am willing to follow or subscribe to the destination's promotional programs (e.g., social media, memberships, or loyalty campaigns).	
6. The coffee shop presents the route to the coffee plantations	EG6. I actively promote this heritage destination by sharing travel routes, cultural information, or planning tips with others.	

(5) Heritage Interpretation Quality

Heritage interpretation quality refers to tourists perceived effectiveness of the services and tools that help them understand the cultural and historical significance of a heritage destination. This construct emphasizes how well interpretive elements—such as signage, multimedia guides, staff explanations, and exhibition content—support visitors in making sense of complex cultural narratives. Adapted and revised from Cheng et al. (2018), the variable is measured through eight items: the clarity and usefulness of digital interpretation tools (DI1), visibility and logical placement of signage and tour routes (DI2), staff's patience and ability to explain cultural content clearly (DI3), diversity and richness of interpretation content (DI4), proactive explanation of symbolic cultural meanings (DI5), cultural sensitivity and respectfulness in interpretation (DI6), accessibility of information about interpretive services (DI7), and the degree to which interpretation enhances understanding of heritage value and satisfaction (DI8). Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates "strongly disagree" and 5 indicates "strongly agree."

Table 3.6 Detailed Statements used to Measure Heritage Interpretation Quality

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
1.The digital interpretive programs at the heritage site provide effective interpretation.	DI1.The digital and multimedia guides (e.g., AR apps, audio devices) helped me clearly understand the historical and cultural significance of Chengde's heritage sites.	Cheng et al. (2018)
2.The signage and tour route signs are easily Spotted.	DI2.Directional signs, informational panels, and route markers were clearly visible and logically placed throughout the temple and landscape complex.	
3.The staff at visitor center serve visitors with Patience.	DI3. Staff members at the visitor centers explained cultural content with patience and answered questions in an easy-to-understand way.	
4.The interpretive programs are rich in variety and sufficient in quantity.	DI4. The interpretation content (e.g., exhibits, tours, live shows) covered diverse aspects of Chengde's history, religion, and ethnic cultures.	
5.The staff at visitor center serve visitors with patience	DI5.The on-site staff proactively explained the deeper meanings of architectural designs, temple rituals, and cultural symbolism.	
6.Interpreters and the staff at visitor center serve visitors with courtesy	DI6.The interpreters or guides communicated with respect and cultural sensitivity, enhancing my understanding of the heritage context.	
7.Visitors can get information about interpretive services at visitor center.	DI7. It was easy to find information about interpretation schedules, language options, and explanation services at the heritage sites.	

Table 3.6 (continued)

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
8.The heritage site provides visitors with the interpretive services that satisfy them.	DI8. The interpretation services helped me gain meaningful insights into Chengde's world heritage value, which enhanced my interest and satisfaction.	

(6) Perceived Destination Image

Perceived destination image refers to tourists' overall cognitive and emotional impressions of a cultural heritage destination, formed through their direct experiences, perceptions of local infrastructure, cultural elements, and interactions with the local environment. In this study, the construct was adapted from Ferreira et al. (2025) and measured across eight dimensions: impressions of historical architecture and landmarks (PDI1), appeal of local cuisine (PDI2), richness of cultural and historical attractions (PDI3), friendliness of local residents (PDI4), cultural distinctiveness of shopping experiences (PDI5), adequacy of tourism infrastructure (PDI6), quality and cultural ambiance of accommodations (PDI7), and culturally reflective dining experiences (PDI8). Together, these items reflect how visitors perceive the attractiveness, cultural value, and authenticity of a destination such as Chengde. Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 3.7 Detailed Statements used to Measure Perceived Destination Image

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
1.Porto Historical Centre	PDI1.I consider this destination's historical architecture and cultural landmarks to be impressive and memorable.	Ferreira et al. (2025)
2.Local gastronomy	PDI2.I find the local cuisine and traditional food experiences in this destination to be appealing.	
3.Cultural/historical attractions	PDI3. The cultural and historical attractions of this destination enrich my understanding of its heritage.	
4.Friendly residents	PDI4. I feel that the local residents are welcoming and enhance the overall tourism experience.	

Table 3.7 (continued)

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
5.Shopping opportunities	PDI5.This destination offers diverse and culturally distinctive shopping opportunities.	
6.Infrastructures	PDI6.The destination provides adequate tourism infrastructure, including transport, signage, and public services.	
7.Quality of accommodations	PDI7. The quality and cultural ambiance of accommodations meet my expectations.	
8.Quality of restaurants and bars	PDI8. Restaurants and dining venues here provide satisfying services and reflect local cultural elements.	

(7) Perceived Conservation

Perceived Conservation refers to tourists' evaluation of how effectively a cultural heritage site is preserved and maintained, particularly in terms of its physical integrity, authenticity, and interpretive transparency. Based on the scale developed by Hernández-Rojas et al. (2021), this study adapts the original items to fit the context of Chengde's heritage landscape. The five items include: perceived reasonability of entrance fees relative to conservation input (PC1), perceived preservation of historical characteristics (PC2), maintenance of architectural authenticity and traditional craftsmanship (PC3), clarity and accessibility of heritage information (PC4), and visible signs of conservation before entering the site (PC5). Each item is measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 3.8 Detailed Statements used to Measure Perceived Conservation

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
1.Normal visit entrance price.	PC1. The ticket price of Chengde's cultural heritage sites is reasonable considering the level of conservation.	Hernández -Rojas et al. (2021)

Table 3.8 (continued)

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
2. Quality of the historical Arabic heritage at the Citadel.	PC2. The historical characteristics of Chengde's royal architecture and religious heritage have been well preserved.	
3. Quality of the historical Christian heritage at the Citadel.	PC3. The decorative and structural details of ancient temples and palaces are maintained with high quality.	
4. Information available about the history of the monument.	PC4. There is clear and accessible information explaining the historical value and conservation efforts of the site.	
5. Historical conservation of the Citadel before entering.	PC5. Before entering, visitors can observe signs of conservation efforts on the exterior heritage structures.	

(8) Source Credibility

Source credibility refers to the degree to which the recipient perceives an information provider as trustworthy, reputable, and knowledgeable, particularly within the context of cultural heritage tourism. Drawing from Luo et al.(2013), this construct has been adapted to reflect tourists' perceptions of online and offline sources that promote heritage destinations. The revised scale captures five key dimensions: general reputation (SC1), user-generated evaluations (SC2), perceived trustworthiness (SC3), perceived expertise (SC4), and overall reliability in recommendation (SC5). These items collectively assess how the perceived credibility of the information source influences tourists' acceptance of promotional content. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), enabling an analysis of how source credibility moderates the relationship between marketing input and perceived destination image.

Table 3.9 Detailed Statements used to Measure Source Credibility

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
1.Based on the rating system of the recommendation provider, this provider is reputable	SC1. The information provided by trusted tourism platforms (e.g., government websites, official tourist boards) is generally regarded as reliable by the public.	Luo et al., 2013
2. Based on the rating system of the recommendation provider, this provider is highly rated by the forum members	SC2. This tourism information source consistently receives high ratings or positive reviews from other users.	
3. Based on the rating system of the recommendation provider, this provider is trustworthy	SC3. The source providing information about cultural destinations is widely regarded as trustworthy.	
4. Based on the rating system of the recommendation provider, this provider is good	SC4. Tourists believe the information provider demonstrates a high level of professional knowledge and expertise.	
5. Based on the rating system of the recommendation provider, this provider is reliable	SC5. The information source is considered reliable when it aligns with historical, cultural, and experiential accuracy.	

(9) Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior

Cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB) captures tourists' behavior to advocate for, promote, and support a cultural heritage destination through word-of-mouth, social sharing, and reputational enhancement behaviors. Adapted from Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021), this construct has been contextualized to the Chengde heritage tourism setting. It includes six items reflecting on-site cultural engagement behavior (CHVB1), post-visit behavior (CHVB2, CHVB3), sharing and recommendation behavior (CHVB4), repeat visitation and continued engagement behavior (CHVB5, CHVB6). All items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 3.10 Detailed Statements used to Measure Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior

Original Items	Revised Items	Source
1. I am willing to participate in related activities.	CHVB1. I am willing to participate in activities related to Chengde's cultural heritage (such as guided tours, interpretive explanations, or exhibitions).	Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021)
2. When I talk about my visit to the city, I will say good things.	CHVB2. When talking with others about my cultural heritage trip to Chengde, I express positive opinions.	
3. I will spread good things about this heritage site in social media.	CHVB3. I would share positive impressions of Chengde's heritage sites through social media platforms.	
4. I would recommend this place to my friends.	CHVB4.I would recommend Chengde's cultural heritage sites (such as the Mountain Resort and temple complexes) to my family and friends.	
5. I will continue to monitor activities related to this heritage site.	CHVB5.I continue to follow new exhibitions, programs, or cultural events related to Chengde's cultural heritage.	
6. I would like to revisit this heritage site.	CHVB6.If given the opportunity, I would be willing to revisit Chengde's cultural heritage sites.	

3.3 Data Collection Administration

3.3.1 Target Population

The target population of this study comprises domestic tourists aged 18 and above who have visited cultural heritage attractions in Chengde within the past 12 months. The selection of a 12-month timeframe ensures that the sample captures visitors across different tourism seasons, including peak summer travel, national holidays, and off-season periods, thereby improving the representativeness of visitor experiences. According to data

from the Chengde Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism (2023), the city received approximately 400,000 to 500,000 cultural tourism visits during the year, with most visitors concentrated in key heritage sites such as *the Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples* (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), the Confucian Temple, Rehe Old Town, and surrounding ethnic cultural villages.

To ensure alignment with the research objectives, this study only invited participants who had first time visit cultural heritage tourism experience and had been exposed to relevant tourism promotion content, including short-video advertisements, themed cultural festivals, online campaigns, or other cultural marketing activities. These individuals were considered capable of subjectively evaluating aspects of tourism promotion—such as attractiveness, message clarity, and perceived consistency with actual experiences—based on direct exposure and on-site engagement.

It is important to note that this study does not aim to have tourists objectively assess the administrative effectiveness of promotional policies. Rather, it focuses on how tourists perceive and internalize marketing stimuli on a psychological level, and how this process contributes to the construction of destination image and subsequent behavior. By selecting respondents with both promotional exposure and travel experience, the study allows for a grounded and experience-based investigation.

3.3.2 Sample Size

Determining an appropriate sample size is essential to ensure statistical reliability and the generalizability of findings. According to Memon et al. (2020), a widely accepted approach in social sciences is to multiply the total number of scale items by a factor ranging from 10 to 20, depending on the complexity of the model and the analysis technique used. In the present study, a total of 65 measurement items were developed to assess key constructs including experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, heritage interpretation quality, perceived destination image, perceived conservation, source credibility, and cultural heritage visiting behavior. Using this guideline, the sample size is calculated as follows:

Sample Size = 65× 10 = 650

Therefore, a sample size of 650 respondents will be targeted for this study. The final actual number of valid responses collected was 887, exceeding the minimum requirement to improve statistical reliability and ensure robust model estimation.

3.3.3 Sampling Techniques

This study adopted a non-probability multi-stage sampling strategy, integrating convenience sampling with quota-based stratification, to ensure both practical feasibility and demographic diversity. This hybrid approach reflects the real-world complexity of tourist flows at cultural heritage sites while enhancing the representativeness of the sample across key visitor demographics—particularly age groups.

In the first stage, convenience sampling was employed to recruit participants at major tourist sites in Chengde, including the Mountain Resort, Puning Temple, Rehe Old Town, and other high-traffic heritage locations. Visitors were approached in public areas such as entrances, exits, and visitor centers. As commonly used in tourism field research (Mason et al., 2010), this method allowed real-time engagement with tourists who had fresh experiential memory and recent exposure to Chengde's tourism promotions, such as digital campaigns, themed exhibitions, and on-site signage.

In the second stage, a quota sampling technique was embedded to ensure proportional representation across key demographic strata, specifically age groups. Respondents were categorized into four age brackets—18–25, 26–35, 36–45, and 46 and above—and research assistants were instructed to monitor response counts in real-time, aiming for balanced distribution across these strata. This helped mitigate age-related sampling bias and allowed for a more accurate assessment of how marketing strategies resonate across generational cohorts. Additional soft quotas were considered for gender and travel type (individual vs. group tourists), although age served as the primary stratification variable.

Several methodological considerations informed the selection of this approach. First, the absence of a complete and accessible sampling frame for tourists visiting Chengde’s cultural heritage sites renders probability-based sampling infeasible. Second, quota-based convenience sampling allows for the inclusion of tourists who have recent and direct experience with Chengde’s tourism marketing efforts—such as exposure to digital campaigns, themed events, and signage-based communication. Third, by implementing stratified quotas and distributing data collection over multiple sites, weekdays/weekends, and time blocks (morning, afternoon, and late afternoon), the study enhanced the diversity and contextual relevance of its sample.

Eligibility criteria required that participants (1) be aged 18 or older, (2) have visited Chengde for cultural heritage tourism within the past 12 months, and (3) recall encountering promotional materials related to Chengde during or prior to their visit. Trained research assistants employed a standardized intercept protocol: screening for eligibility, obtaining informed consent, and administering the survey either via tablet or through a QR code linked to the online questionnaire. To avoid intra-group duplication, only one adult per travel party was surveyed. If a visitor was unable to complete the questionnaire on site, a 24-hour valid online link was offered as an alternative.

Although this non-probability sampling approach limits statistical generalizability, the use of multi-site recruitment, age-based quotas, and temporal variation in data collection mitigates common biases such as time-location clustering and age skew. More importantly, this strategy enabled the study to engage with genuine visitors and collect perception-driven, experience-grounded data—directly supporting the study's theoretical focus on how marketing stimuli, interpretive quality, and conservation perceptions influence tourists' image formation and visiting behavior.

3.3.4 Data Collection Technique

This study employed a structured questionnaire-based survey as the primary data collection method, aiming to capture tourists' first-hand perceptions of marketing effectiveness immediately following their visit to Chengde's cultural heritage attractions. A structured questionnaire is particularly suitable for quantifying latent constructs such as experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, heritage interpretation quality, destination image perception, perceived conservation , source credibility and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

To maximize response coverage and minimize selection bias, the study adopted a dual-mode distribution strategy, integrating both digital (online) and in-person (offline) methods during on-site data collection. For the online component, the questionnaire was developed and deployed using the Questionnaire Star platform, which offers a user-friendly interface, real-time data encryption, and high compatibility with mobile devices. Unique QR codes were generated for the survey and printed on posters, flyers, and display cards distributed at key visitor touchpoints, including exit areas, ticket centers, cultural plazas, hotels, and transportation hubs near heritage sites. Tourists were invited to scan the code and complete the survey on their smartphones immediately after their visit. This

method ensured convenience, efficiency, and minimal disruption to tourist flow (C & Torrentira, 2020).

Simultaneously, the offline component was implemented by trained research assistants at selected sites such as *the Mountain Resort, the Confucian Temple, and Rehe Old Town*. Following a systematic intercept protocol, researchers approached every third visitor or group exiting the site, briefly explained the study, and invited one eligible adult per group (aged 18 or older) to participate by scanning the QR code or completing the questionnaire on-site via tablet. Screening questions ensured participants had (i) visited Chengde for cultural heritage tourism in the past 12 months, and (ii) encountered tourism promotion materials (e.g., short videos, festival ads, online content, etc.).

To ensure data quality and participant rights, the questionnaire began with a detailed informed consent section, clarifying that responses were anonymous, confidential, and voluntary. No personally identifiable information was collected. All responses were encrypted and stored securely through the Questionnaire Star system.

This blended field-based strategy—combining digital reach with in-person engagement—enhanced response rates, diversified the sample across age and travel groups, and enabled the study to capture context-rich, perceptual data grounded in real-time heritage experiences, thereby improving both the validity and generalizability of findings related to Chengde's cultural tourism promotion.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Pilot Study

Prior to launching the full-scale survey, a pilot test is conducted with 30 tourists who had recently visited cultural heritage sites in Chengde. Following established methodological guidelines suggesting that 20–30 cases are sufficient to detect major issues and inform refinement (Presser et al., 2004), participants are recruited both online via Questionnaire Star and offline through QR codes placed at key attractions. Respondents are asked to complete the full questionnaire and provide feedback on item clarity, response scale usability, and the accessibility of the survey platform (Stewart et al., 2020).

Preliminary statistical analyses are performed to assess the psychometric adequacy of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha coefficients are were computed to evaluate internal consistency for each construct, with all values meeting the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

In addition, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is examined to assess the suitability of the data for factor analysis (Ibikunle et al., 2021). The pilot data yields KMO values exceeding the minimum acceptable level of 0.60, indicating that the items possesses adequate shared variance and are appropriate for subsequent Confirmatory Factor Analysis in the main study.

Based on respondent feedback and pilot analytics, several items are refined to enhance wording precision, reduce ambiguity, and improve logical flow. These revisions result in a more coherent, reliable, and user-friendly instrument, thus ensuring that the final questionnaire would effectively capture tourist perceptions and support the rigorous analytical requirements of the full-scale study.

Table 3.11 presents detailed item-level statistics, including mean, standard deviation, corrected item-total correlation (CITC), and Cronbach's alpha if the item were deleted. The mean values for all items range from 3.8 to 4.22, suggesting that respondents generally provided positive evaluations of the constructs. Standard deviations vary from 0.68 to 0.918, reflecting moderate dispersion in responses. Most items exhibit CITC values above 0.60, indicating satisfactory contribution to the overall scale reliability. However, items EW9 and DI6 have lower CITC values of 0.30 and 0.35, respectively, falling below the acceptable threshold. As a result, these items were identified as candidates for deletion to enhance construct reliability and ensure that only items with adequate internal consistency were retained for the main study. The Cronbach's alpha if item deleted remains consistently high across constructs, ranging from 0.80 to 0.936, reinforcing that the majority of items contribute positively to internal consistency.

Table 3.11 Item Analysis for Pilot Test

Construct	Item	Mean	SD	CITC	Cronbach's α if item deleted
Experience	EP1	4.15	0.75	0.65	0.92
Experience	EP2	4.12	0.78	0.62	0.91
Experience	EP3	4.1	0.76	0.61	0.92
Experience	EP4	4.05	0.8	0.6	0.93
Experience	EP5	4.08	0.77	0.63	0.92
Experience	EP6	4.11	0.76	0.64	0.91

Table 3.11 (continued)

Construct	Item	Mean	SD	CITC	Cronbach's α if item deleted
Experience	EP7	4.07	0.79	0.62	0.92
Experience	EP8	4.13	0.75	0.65	0.91
Exchange	EC1	4.2	0.73	0.63	0.91
Exchange	EC2	4.18	0.74	0.64	0.91
Exchange	EC3	4.22	0.72	0.65	0.92
Exchange	EC4	4.1	0.76	0.6	0.91
Exchange	EC5	4.12	0.75	0.61	0.92
Exchange	EC6	4.14	0.74	0.62	0.91
Exchange	EC7	4.13	0.76	0.63	0.91
Exchange	EC8	4.11	0.78	0.6	0.91
Exchange	EC9	4.1	0.77	0.59	0.91
Everyplace	EW1	4.13	0.72	0.61	0.91
Everyplace	EW2	4.16	0.71	0.63	0.92
Everyplace	EW3	4.14	0.73	0.62	0.92
Everyplace	EW4	4.12	0.74	0.61	0.91
Everyplace	EW5	4.15	0.72	0.64	0.91
Everyplace	EW6	4.16	0.7	0.62	0.92
Everyplace	EW7	4.18	0.69	0.63	0.92
Everyplace	EW8	4.17	0.71	0.64	0.91
Everyplace	EW9	3.8	0.85	0.3	0.8
Everyplace	EW10	4.14	0.74	0.62	0.91
Evangelism	EG1	4.18	0.71	0.64	0.92
Evangelism	EG2	4.15	0.72	0.63	0.91
Evangelism	EG3	4.2	0.7	0.62	0.92
Evangelism	EG4	4.17	0.71	0.64	0.92
Evangelism	EG5	4.14	0.73	0.63	0.91
Evangelism	EG6	4.16	0.72	0.63	0.92
Heritage Interpretation	DI1	4.18	0.72	0.63	0.91
Heritage Interpretation	DI2	4.16	0.74	0.62	0.91

Table 3.11 (continued)

Construct	Item	Mean	SD	CITC	Cronbach's α if item deleted
Heritage Interpretation	DI3	4.14	0.75	0.6	0.92
Heritage Interpretation	DI4	4.13	0.76	0.61	0.91
Heritage Interpretation	DI5	4.15	0.73	0.62	0.91
Heritage Interpretation	DI6	3.85	0.8	0.35	0.85
Heritage Interpretation	DI7	4.14	0.74	0.61	0.91
Heritage Interpretation	DI8	4.16	0.72	0.64	0.92
Perceived Destination Image	PDI1	4.18	0.7	0.62	0.92
Perceived Destination Image	PDI2	4.16	0.71	0.61	0.91
Perceived Destination Image	PDI3	4.14	0.73	0.6	0.92
Perceived Destination Image	PDI4	4.19	0.69	0.64	0.91
Perceived Destination Image	PDI5	4.18	0.7	0.63	0.91
Perceived Destination Image	PDI6	4.16	0.72	0.62	0.92
Perceived Destination Image	PDI7	4.18	0.69	0.64	0.92
Perceived Destination Image	PDI8	4.17	0.71	0.63	0.92
Perceived Conservation	PC1	4.1	0.74	0.63	0.91
Perceived Conservation	PC2	4.13	0.72	0.64	0.92
Perceived Conservation	PC3	4.15	0.71	0.65	0.92
Perceived Conservation	PC4	4.12	0.73	0.62	0.91
Perceived Conservation	PC5	4.11	0.75	0.61	0.91
Source Credibility	SC1	4.13	0.72	0.64	0.92
Source Credibility	SC2	4.14	0.71	0.63	0.91
Source Credibility	SC3	4.12	0.73	0.62	0.91
Source Credibility	SC4	4.16	0.7	0.65	0.92
Source Credibility	SC5	4.14	0.74	0.63	0.91
Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior	CHVB1	4.2	0.68	0.64	0.92
Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior	CHVB2	4.18	0.7	0.63	0.91

Table 3.11 (continued)

Construct	Item	Mean	SD	CITC	Cronbach's α if item deleted
Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior	CHVB3	4.17	0.69	0.62	0.91
Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior	CHVB4	4.19	0.72	0.65	0.92
Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior	CHVB5	4.14	0.75	0.61	0.91
Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior	CHVB6	4.16	0.71	0.62	0.92

Table 3.12 summarizes the pretest reliability at the construct level, where Cronbach's alpha coefficients range from 0.895 for perceived conservation to 0.936 for evangelism, all exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. This confirms that each construct reliably measures the intended dimensions, supporting the validity of the instrument.

Table 3.12 Pretest Reliability Statistics

Study variables	Number of questions	Cronbach's α
Experience	8	0.923
Exchange	9	0.915
Everyplace	10	0.91
Evangelism	6	0.936
Heritage Interpretation	8	0.921
Perceived Destination Image	8	0.924
Perceived Conservation	5	0.895
Source Credibility	5	0.916
Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior	6	0.919

Table 3.13 presents the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity for the pilot data. The KMO value of 0.891 indicates excellent sampling adequacy, while Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant ($\chi^2 = 4628.567$, df = 851, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that correlations among items are sufficient for factor analysis. Together, these results confirm that the instrument possesses both strong reliability and factorability, providing a solid foundation for confirmatory factor analysis in the main study.

Table 3.13 Pre-investigation KMO and Bartlett's Test

Test	Index	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.891
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4628.567
	df	851
	Sig.	0

3.4.2 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis serves to summarize, organize, and present the basic characteristics of the data collected, offering foundational insights into the patterns and distributions within the sample (Frenzel, 2023). This type of analysis includes measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) as well as measures of dispersion (standard deviation, variance, and range), thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the dataset. In this study, descriptive statistics will be used to examine responses obtained from tourists who have visited cultural heritage attractions in Chengde, focusing on key constructs such as experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, heritage interpretation quality, destination image perception, perceived conservation, source credibility and cultural heritage visiting behavior. By calculating the central and variability measures for each item and construct, the analysis will reveal general response tendencies, identify any irregularities or outliers, and allow for a preliminary understanding of tourists' perceptions and engagement levels. These insights will support the assessment of data quality, inform subsequent inferential analyses, and guide interpretation of the structural relationships between variables within the tourism marketing context.

3.4.3 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis is a critical procedure for evaluating the internal consistency of measurement instruments, ensuring that the items used to assess latent constructs yield stable and consistent results under similar conditions (El-Den et al., 2020). In the context of this study, reliability analysis serves to confirm that the scale items consistently reflect the dimensions they are intended to measure, namely experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, heritage interpretation quality, destination image perception, perceived conservation, source credibility and cultural heritage visiting behavior. Cronbach's alpha will be employed as the primary statistical method to assess the internal consistency of each multi-item construct. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 or above will be regarded as acceptable, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability for the scale (Kalkbrenner, 2023). The analysis will identify any items that negatively affect overall consistency, allowing for possible revision or removal in order to enhance measurement robustness. Establishing internal reliability is essential to strengthen the psychometric properties of the questionnaire and ensure that the constructs used in the model are measured with precision. This step underpins the validity of subsequent structural equation modeling and reinforces the credibility of conclusions drawn regarding promotional effectiveness in cultural heritage tourism.

3.4.4 Validity Analysis

Validity analysis is a critical procedure to ensure that the measurement scales employed in this study accurately represent the theoretical constructs of experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, heritage interpretation quality, destination image perception, perceived conservation, source credibility and cultural heritage visiting behavior within the context of Chengde's cultural heritage tourism. Content validity was established through expert consultations with tourism scholars and marketing professionals, ensuring alignment between the questionnaire items and existing literature (Liu et al., 2020). Construct validity was examined via Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), with model fit assessed through standardized metrics—factor loadings (>0.6), average variance extracted (AVE≥0.5), and composite reliability (CR≥0.7)—to verify that each construct is empirically distinct and internally consistent (Sureshchandar, 2021). Criterion-related validity was addressed by evaluating the extent to which the proposed constructs significantly predict effective tourism promotion, in accordance with

established destination marketing theory (Azimi et al., 2025). Together, these validation procedures confirm the measurement model's adequacy, thereby strengthening the empirical credibility of the study's findings.

3.4.5 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be employed in this study as a comprehensive statistical technique to analyze the complex causal relationships among latent variables related to effective cultural heritage tourism promotion in Chengde (Sakib et al., 2022). SEM provides the methodological rigor necessary to test both direct and indirect effects simultaneously (Kang et al., 2021). The analysis will begin with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the measurement model. CFA will assess the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs, including experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, heritage interpretation quality, destination image perception, perceived conservation, source credibility and cultural heritage visiting behavior. Factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) will be evaluated to ensure that the observed indicators adequately represent their corresponding latent variables. Model fit will be examined using multiple indices such as the Chi-square statistic, Comparative Fit Index (CFI > 0.90), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI > 0.90), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < 0.08), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR < 0.08), in accordance with established thresholds (Peugh & Feldon, 2020).

Following measurement validation, the structural model will be estimated to test the hypothesized relationships. The model will examine how the experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism and heritage interpretation quality affect cultural heritage visiting behavior both directly and indirectly through the mediator of perceived destination image and perceived conservation. Moreover, the moderating role of source credibility will be tested to determine whether trust in information sources strengthens or weakens the relationship between the independent variables and tourists' perception of the destination image. This approach enables a nuanced exploration of how cognitive, affective, and behavioral mechanisms interact under different levels of source trustworthiness (Putra, 2022).

By leveraging SEM, the study provides a robust, theory-driven framework to empirically validate the conceptual model and uncover key leverage points in enhancing

destination visibility, emotional resonance, and visitor-driven advocacy (El Barachi et al., 2022). The findings will offer practical implications for cultural tourism marketing in mid-sized heritage cities like Chengde, particularly within increasingly digitized and participatory communication environments.

Table 3.14 Structural Equation Modeling Indicators

Index	Ideal Value	Source
$\chi 2$ (Chi-square)	$p>0.05$	Hair et al.
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	CFI>0.95	(2021)
TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index)	TLI>0.95	
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	RMSEA<0.06	
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	SRMR<0.08	

3.4.6 Content Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

To complement the structured items in the questionnaire and allow respondents to freely express their individual views, suggestions, or expectations regarding the promotion of Chengde's cultural heritage tourism, this study includes an open-ended question at the end of the survey. Compared to fixed-response formats, open-ended responses offer richer and more nuanced insights by capturing spontaneous feedback that may not be anticipated in the design of close-ended scales (Knudsen et al., 2022). This allows the study to explore emerging ideas and context-specific concerns directly from tourists' perspectives, contributing to a broader understanding of promotional practices grounded in visitor experience. Incorporating qualitative feedback is particularly valuable for this study, as it helps illuminate how visitors perceive the strengths and limitations of current promotional practices, thereby supporting a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which the four 4E dimensions influence effective tourism promotion-one of the core research objectives.

Content analysis was employed to systematically interpret the textual responses, following established procedures for qualitative data organization and pattern identification (Rouder et al., 2021). The analysis began with a data-cleaning stage, during which incomplete, irrelevant, or incoherent responses were removed. Valid responses were

then read repeatedly and manually coded using an inductive approach to identify recurrent keywords, descriptive expressions, and meaningful semantic units (Baburajan et al., 2021). These initial codes were subsequently grouped into broader thematic categories reflecting visitors' concerns or evaluations, such as perceived service quality, digital accessibility, cultural storytelling effectiveness, and emotional engagement with heritage spaces. The frequency of each theme was tracked to identify prominent patterns that reflect shared perceptions across respondents.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are fundamental to this study, particularly given its engagement with human participants, namely, tourists who have visited Chengde's cultural heritage sites. Prior to participation, all respondents will be presented with a clear and comprehensive explanation of the research purpose, procedures, their rights, and potential risks and benefits. Informed consent will be obtained electronically or in person, emphasizing that participation is entirely voluntary and that individuals may withdraw at any stage without penalty. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, no personal identifiers will be collected, and all data will be securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

The study strictly adheres to the ethical standards and guidelines of academic research, including those required by university institutional review boards (IRBs). Efforts will be made to minimize any form of discomfort or misrepresentation. As the study aims to contribute to more effective cultural heritage tourism promotion in Chengde, it is designed with respect for the autonomy and dignity of all participants. By maintaining transparency, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, the research ensures compliance with high ethical standards throughout the data collection and analysis process.

3.6 Conclusion

This This chapter presents a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous framework to investigate how the 4E marketing dimensions—experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism—alongside heritage interpretation quality, effect cultural heritage visiting behavior. Anchored in a post-positivist paradigm and grounded in critical realism, the study incorporates perceived destination image and perceived conservation as mediating variables and source credibility as a moderating factor. This conceptual

structure enables a nuanced exploration of the psychological and behavioral mechanisms through which marketing interventions influence tourist responses.

Operational definitions for all core constructs were systematically developed based on authoritative literature and contextualized to the specific features of heritage tourism in Chengde. A total of 64 Likert-scale measurement items were adapted from validated sources to ensure reliability and construct validity, covering nine latent variables. In addition, one open-ended question was included to elicit participants' unsolicited suggestions and reflections on tourism promotion strategies, allowing the study to incorporate both standardized metrics and rich qualitative insights grounded in real visitor experiences.

The study employed a non-probability multi-stage sampling strategy, targeting domestic tourists aged 18 and above who had visited Chengde's cultural heritage attractions within the past 12 months and had been exposed to related promotional materials. A target sample size of 960 was determined based on established SEM guidelines, ensuring adequate statistical power. Data were collected through a dual-mode strategy that combined offline face-to-face distribution and online survey access via QR codes generated by the Questionnaire Star platform. To enhance heterogeneity and contextual relevance, data collection was conducted at multiple prominent heritage sites (e.g., *the Mountain Resort, Confucian Temple, and Rehe Old Town*) across varied time periods.

A pilot study involving 30 respondents was carried out to test the clarity, usability, and internal consistency of the instrument, leading to refinements that enhanced both psychometric robustness and respondent comprehension. The final analysis plan includes descriptive statistics, reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha, validity assessment through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test direct, indirect, and moderated effects. Thematic content analysis of open-ended responses will further enrich the findings by uncovering visitor-led insights that may not be captured through closed-ended items.

Overall, this methodological framework provides a robust empirical foundation for hypothesis testing in subsequent chapters. It balances theoretical rigor with contextual relevance, ensuring the study's contribution not only to academic discourse in tourism

marketing but also to practical strategy development for heritage destinations like Chengde.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, beginning with an analysis of the sample and the descriptive statistics of the survey variables, which provide an overview of tourists' demographic characteristics, experiences, and behavioral tendencies in Chengde's cultural heritage tourism. The chapter then evaluates the measurement properties of the constructs, including the fit of the measurement model and assessments of convergent and discriminant validity, ensuring that the indicators reliably capture the theoretical dimensions. Building on this foundation, the structural model is tested to examine both direct and indirect relationships among the 4E marketing dimensions, heritage interpretation quality, perceptual mediators, and cultural heritage visiting behavior. The chapter also explores the moderating role of source credibility in shaping these relationships. Together, these analyses provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which experiential, interactive, interpretive, and evaluative factors influence tourists' engagement and behavioral intentions.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Sample Characteristics

The sample characteristics reveal multiple patterns with analytical implications for understanding cultural heritage tourism behavior in Chengde. Age distribution shows a predominance of young adults, with 36.6% of respondents aged 26–35, followed by 25.7% aged 36–45 and 13.9% aged 18–25, indicating that the majority of visitors are in early to mid-career life stages. This pattern suggests that experiential and leisure-oriented tourism offerings are particularly relevant for these groups, while the 12.4% aged 46–55 and 11.4% above 55 suggest that heritage tourism retains appeal among middle-aged and older visitors, who may prioritize cultural depth and interpretive quality over entertainment-driven experiences. Gender distribution is relatively balanced, with males comprising 52.9% and females 47.1% of the sample, reflecting no substantial gender skew and

implying that heritage tourism strategies should consider broad appeal rather than gender-specific targeting.

Educational attainment is concentrated at the bachelor level (44.3%), with 18.9% holding a master's degree and 11.3% exceeding the master level, while 25.5% have below-bachelor qualifications. This indicates a visitor population with generally high cognitive capacity to process interpretive content, historical narratives, and complex cultural symbolism, suggesting that the provision of detailed heritage interpretation and educational materials may be particularly effective. Monthly income is largely distributed between RMB 6,001–9,000 (39.7%) and RMB 3,000–6,000 (23.7%), indicating a predominantly middle-income population capable of discretionary spending on heritage experiences. The lower proportion of high-income visitors (4.6% above RMB 12,000) and modest representation of low-income respondents (15.3% below RMB 3,000) suggest that pricing and access policies could affect participation among the extremes of the income distribution.

Temporal visitation patterns reveal that 36.6% of respondents visited Chengde within the past 1–3 months, 24.7% within 3–6 months, 19.7% within 6–12 months, 13.8% within the past month, and 5.2% over 12 months ago. This indicates a combination of frequent and occasional visitors, with potential implications for repeat visit promotion and seasonal programming. Place-based visitation data indicate that 61.9% visited the Chengde Museum or Confucian Temple, 57.5% nearby ethnic villages or ancient towns, 47.2% the Mountain Resort (Bishu Shanzhuang), 45.3% the Eight Outer Temples, and 15.6% other locations. These patterns demonstrate both strong engagement with core heritage sites and meaningful exploration of peripheral cultural resources, suggesting that visitor attention is distributed across multiple heritage nodes.

Information channels reveal that social media platforms were the primary source (71.1%), followed by online travel agencies (60.2%), friends' recommendations or personal experience sharing (54.7%), government or official tourism websites (44.5%), offline promotions (20.5%), and other channels (8.7%). This indicates a strong reliance on digitally mediated and peer-influenced information, emphasizing the role of user-generated content and social media in shaping visitation decisions. Motivational patterns indicate that 70.3% were driven by nature enjoyment and relaxation, 60.1% by family or parent-child travel, 48.5% by appreciation of historical and cultural heritage, 32.0% by

learning about religion or ethnic culture, and 18.3% by photography or content creation. These figures reveal that while heritage appreciation is significant, leisure and social dimensions strongly influence visitation behavior.

Travel companion data show that 32.7% traveled with family, 28.1% alone, 18.6% with a tour group, 16.8% with friends, and 3.8% in other arrangements, reflecting a diversity of social contexts in tourism participation. The distribution of companion types, combined with motivations and age groups, indicates interactions between experiential engagement, social interaction, and cultural learning. For example, younger visitors and solo travelers may prioritize self-guided exploration or interactive experiences, whereas family groups may focus on integrative educational and recreational opportunities. The interplay between site visitation patterns, motivations, and information channels suggests that tourists engage with Chengde's cultural heritage through multiple, overlapping pathways that combine digital exposure, on-site experience, and social validation. This heterogeneous pattern of engagement underscores the importance of tailoring interpretive content, marketing communication, and experiential offerings to align with demographic, motivational, and behavioral diversity.

Table 4.1 Sample Information

Category	Item	N	%
Age	18–25	123	13.9
	26–35	325	36.6
	36–45	228	25.7
	46–55	110	12.4
	Above 55	101	11.4
Gender	Male	469	52.9
	Female	418	47.1
Education Level	Below bachelor	226	25.5
	Bachelor	393	44.3
	Master	168	18.9
	Higher than Master	100	11.3

Table 4.1 (continued)

Category	Item	N	%
Monthly Income	Below RMB 3,000	136	15.3
	RMB 3,000–6,000	210	23.7
	RMB 6,001–9,000	352	39.7
	RMB 9,001–12,000	148	16.7
	Above RMB 12,000	41	4.6
Time Since Last Visit	Within the past month	122	13.8
	1–3 months ago	325	36.6
	3–6 months ago	219	24.7
	6–12 months ago	175	19.7
	Over 12 months ago	46	5.2
Places Visited in Chengde	Mountain Resort (Bishu Shanzhuang)	419	47.2
	Eight Outer Temples	402	45.3
	Chengde Museum or Confucian Temple	549	61.9
	Nearby ethnic villages or ancient towns	510	57.5
	Other	138	15.6
Travel Information Channels	Social media platforms	631	71.1
	Government or official tourism websites	395	44.5
	Online Travel Agencies	534	60.2
	Friends' recommendations or personal experience sharing	485	54.7
	Offline promotions	182	20.5
	Other	77	8.7
Main Travel Motivations	Appreciating historical and cultural heritage	430	48.5
	Enjoying nature and relaxation	624	70.3
	Learning about religion or ethnic culture	284	32
	Family time or parent-child travel	533	60.1
	Photography or content creation	162	18.3
	Other	94	10.6

Table 4.1 (continued)

Category	Item	N	%
Travel Companion	Alone	249	28.1
	With family	290	32.7
	With friends	149	16.8
	With a tour group	165	18.6
	Other	34	3.8

4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of the study variables reveal patterns that reflect both the central tendencies and distributional characteristics of tourists' perceptions, evaluations, and behavioral tendencies in Chengde's cultural heritage tourism. Across the 4E marketing dimensions, experience (EP) items exhibit consistently high mean values, ranging from 3.904 to 4.063, indicating that respondents generally perceive the experiential aspects of tourism—such as immersion, engagement, and interactivity—positively. Negative skewness values between -0.571 and -0.801 suggest a slight clustering of responses toward the higher end of the scale, while relatively low kurtosis indicates moderate variation without extreme concentration.

The exchange dimension (EC) demonstrates slightly lower mean scores, from 3.786 to 3.964, reflecting that interactive co-creation and perceived reciprocal value are acknowledged but somewhat less pronounced than experiential perception. Skewness values, ranging from -0.422 to -0.648, again indicate a tendency toward higher ratings, although the presence of modest negative skew suggests that some visitors perceive limitations in value exchange or participatory interactions. The everyplace dimension (EW), encompassing omnichannel accessibility and engagement opportunities, has mean values between 3.821 and 4.103, with EW3 showing the highest mean of 4.103. This pattern highlights the importance of multi-platform visibility and digital access in facilitating cultural heritage engagement, while the skewness and kurtosis values imply consistent positive evaluation without extreme polarization.

Evangelism (EG) scores range from 3.764 to 4.084, with EG1 exhibiting the highest mean, suggesting that visitors are generally willing to share experiences and recommend the destination, although items such as EG5 and EG6 indicate some variability

in proactive advocacy. Heritage interpretation quality (DI) exhibits mean values from 3.801 to 4.012, reflecting that respondents perceive interpretive content as moderately high in clarity, informativeness, and meaningfulness. Slightly negative skewness across DI items suggests that the majority perceive interpretation positively, yet some respondents may encounter interpretive barriers or inconsistencies.

Perceived destination image (PDI) ranges from 3.684 to 4.146, with PDI1 scoring highest, indicating that visitors form a generally favorable cognitive and affective representation of Chengde's heritage sites. Items PDI5 and PDI7 show lower mean values, reflecting potential heterogeneity in image formation or perception gaps among tourists. Perceived conservation (PC) presents more variability, with mean values from 3.721 to 4.062, suggesting that visitors' assessment of preservation efforts, governance transparency, and environmental management varies across sites and measures.

Source credibility (SC) maintains relatively high ratings between 3.964 and 4.103, indicating that respondents generally trust information sources, including official channels, online platforms, and expert guidance. Cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB) shows mean values from 3.821 to 4.118, reflecting active engagement and intention to participate, revisit, and recommend, with CHVB6 achieving the highest score, suggesting strong behavioral intention in specific dimensions such as visit commitment or advocacy. Overall, negative skewness across most items implies a pattern of favorable perceptions and evaluations, whereas moderate kurtosis indicates some dispersion in responses, highlighting nuanced differences in how tourists perceive and engage with experiential, informational, and behavioral aspects of Chengde's heritage tourism.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics Results

Study Variables	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Experience (EP)	EP1	887	4.018	0.781	-0.742	0.428
	EP2	887	4.063	0.756	-0.801	0.516
	EP3	887	3.974	0.804	-0.683	0.337
	EP4	887	3.921	0.836	-0.594	0.184
	EP5	887	4.007	0.789	-0.721	0.401
	EP6	887	3.956	0.822	-0.635	0.273

Table 4.2 (continued)

Study Variables	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
	EP7	887	3.988	0.798	-0.687	0.318
	EP8	887	3.904	0.857	-0.571	0.122
Exchange (EC)	EC1	887	3.887	0.842	-0.534	-0.084
	EC2	887	3.918	0.824	-0.572	0.016
	EC3	887	3.964	0.793	-0.648	0.168
	EC4	887	3.852	0.861	-0.501	-0.126
	EC5	887	3.831	0.874	-0.476	-0.172
	EC6	887	3.915	0.816	-0.591	0.074
	EC7	887	3.786	0.903	-0.422	-0.261
	EC8	887	3.874	0.848	-0.518	-0.093
	EC9	887	3.804	0.889	-0.436	-0.214
Everyplace (EW)	EW1	887	3.946	0.811	-0.603	0.135
	EW2	887	3.987	0.786	-0.655	0.224
	EW3	887	4.103	0.758	-0.824	0.544
	EW4	887	4.021	0.772	-0.706	0.338
	EW5	887	3.958	0.801	-0.628	0.192
	EW6	887	4.046	0.769	-0.751	0.403
	EW7	887	3.821	0.886	-0.447	-0.182
	EW8	887	3.934	0.814	-0.592	0.107
	EW10	887	3.902	0.833	-0.556	0.061
Evangelism (EG)	EG1	887	4.084	0.744	-0.836	0.621
	EG2	887	4.031	0.773	-0.751	0.438
	EG3	887	3.887	0.854	-0.548	0.003
	EG4	887	3.842	0.876	-0.491	-0.101
	EG5	887	3.764	0.918	-0.402	-0.266
	EG6	887	3.811	0.897	-0.435	-0.214

Table 4.2 (continued)

Study Variables	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Heritage Interpretation Quality (DI)	DI1	887	3.968	0.793	-0.676	0.294
	DI2	887	4.012	0.768	-0.724	0.381
	DI3	887	3.887	0.832	-0.573	0.088
	DI4	887	3.954	0.807	-0.642	0.201
	DI5	887	3.826	0.871	-0.468	-0.154
	DI6	887	3.801	0.886	-0.439	-0.203
	DI7	887	3.978	0.781	-0.688	0.317
Perceived Destination Image (PDI)	PDI1	887	4.146	0.722	-0.901	0.816
	PDI2	887	3.918	0.834	-0.613	0.137
	PDI3	887	4.021	0.768	-0.742	0.392
	PDI4	887	3.874	0.812	-0.586	0.104
	PDI5	887	3.756	0.903	-0.401	-0.248
	PDI6	887	3.901	0.801	-0.624	0.185
	PDI7	887	3.684	0.928	-0.352	-0.337
	PDI8	887	3.792	0.874	-0.469	-0.126
Perceived Conservation (PC)	PC1	887	3.721	0.901	-0.384	-0.256
	PC2	887	4.062	0.742	-0.824	0.602
	PC3	887	4.018	0.761	-0.781	0.517
	PC4	887	3.854	0.836	-0.542	0.021
	PC5	887	3.776	0.872	-0.463	-0.148
Source Credibility (SC)	SC1	887	4.103	0.736	-0.861	0.684
	SC2	887	3.964	0.781	-0.694	0.291
	SC3	887	4.021	0.754	-0.752	0.413
	SC4	887	3.987	0.769	-0.716	0.352
	SC5	887	4.044	0.748	-0.781	0.496

Table 4.2 (continued)

Study Variables	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior (CHVB)	CHVB1	887	4.012	0.771	-0.724	0.381
	CHVB2	887	3.954	0.806	-0.661	0.247
	CHVB3	887	3.876	0.852	-0.548	0.012
	CHVB4	887	4.086	0.742	-0.842	0.657
	CHVB5	887	3.821	0.883	-0.471	-0.176
	CHVB6	887	4.118	0.731	-0.903	0.782

4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

4.2.1 Measurement Model and Fit Metrics

Figure 4.1 illustrates the comprehensive measurement model employed in the study, depicting the relationships among latent constructs and their corresponding observed indicators within the context of Chengde's cultural heritage tourism. The model incorporates the four dimensions of the 4E marketing framework—experience (EP), exchange (EC), everyplace (EW), and evangelism (EG)—as exogenous constructs, while heritage interpretation quality (DI), perceived destination image (PDI), perceived conservation (PC), source credibility (SC), and cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB) are modeled as endogenous constructs with hypothesized mediating or outcome roles. Each latent variable is represented by multiple observed indicators, and the standardized factor loadings are annotated along the paths connecting the constructs to their respective items. The majority of loadings exceed 0.70, indicating that the items have strong convergent validity and adequately capture the variance of their underlying constructs. For example, EP indicators such as EP1 and EP3 exhibit loadings above 0.75, demonstrating that respondents consistently recognize the experiential dimension of tourism, while CHVB items such as CHVB4 and CHVB6 show loadings above 0.80, reflecting high consistency in behavioral intention measures.

The model also highlights inter-construct relationships, with positive standardized path coefficients connecting the 4E marketing constructs to perceptual mediators (DI, PDI, PC, and SC) and ultimately to CHVB. These relationships indicate that experiential engagement, value co-creation, and multi-channel accessibility not only influence tourists'

perception of heritage interpretation and destination image but also contribute to perceived conservation efforts and source credibility. The paths among latent variables reveal moderate to strong correlations, suggesting that while constructs such as experience, exchange, and evangelism are related, they remain theoretically distinct, supporting discriminant validity. Moreover, the model accounts for measurement error through residual terms for each indicator, with error variances (e1–e8, e9–e63) depicted in the figure, ensuring that observed scores are appropriately adjusted for unreliability.

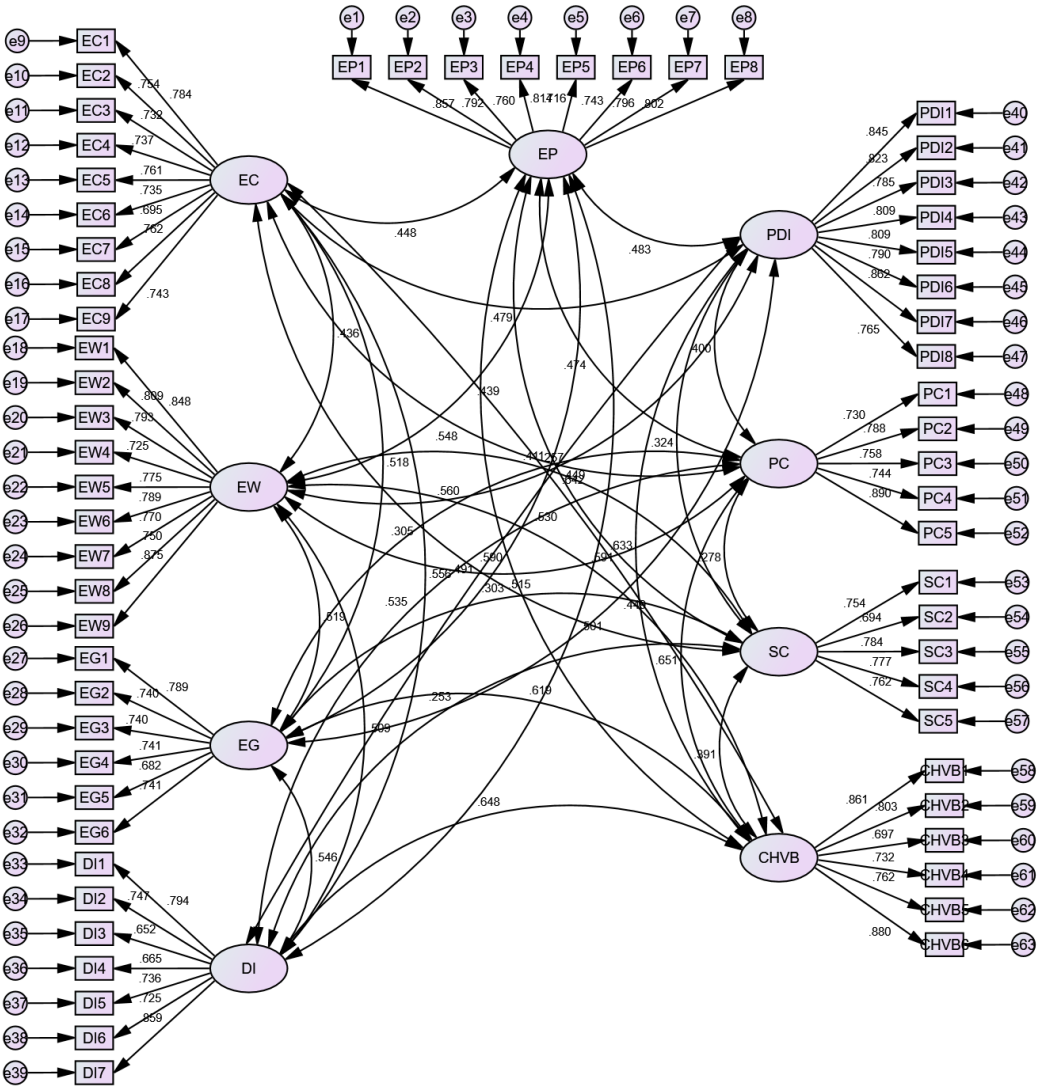

Figure 4.1 Measurement model

Table 4.3 presents the fit metrics for the measurement model, providing quantitative confirmation of its adequacy. The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df = 1.593) is well below the conventional threshold of 3, indicating that the model achieves a parsimonious representation of the data without overfitting. The RMSEA value of 0.026 is substantially below the 0.08 cutoff, suggesting an excellent approximation to the population covariance matrix and minimal residual discrepancy. Absolute fit indices, including the goodness-of-fit index (GFI = 0.911) and adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI = 0.903), exceed the recommended minimum of 0.90, demonstrating that the model captures the observed data structure effectively. Comparative fit measures, including the normed fit index (NFI = 0.923), incremental fit index (IFI = 0.97), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI = 0.968), and comparative fit index (CFI = 0.97), indicate that the hypothesized model fits substantially better than a null model, confirming both incremental and relative fit. The combination of these indices validates that the latent constructs are measured reliably, the observed indicators accurately reflect the underlying theoretical dimensions, and the overall model aligns closely with the conceptual framework of the study.

Table 4.3 Measure Model Fit Metrics

Fit index	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI
Reference standards	<3	<0.08	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9
Result	1.593	0.026	0.911	0.903	0.923	0.97	0.968	0.97

4.2.2 Convergent Validity

Table 4.4 presents the convergent validity assessment for the measurement model, examining factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct. Across all constructs, standardized factor loadings are consistently above 0.65, ranging from 0.682 (EG5) to 0.875 (EW9), indicating that each item strongly reflects its underlying latent variable. High factor loadings suggest that respondents' ratings reliably capture the intended theoretical dimensions, supporting the internal coherence of the measurement items.

Composite reliability values range from 0.869 for source credibility to 0.939 for both everyplace and perceived destination image, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.70, which confirms that each construct demonstrates strong internal consistency and that

measurement error is minimal. These values indicate that the items collectively provide a reliable representation of the latent constructs, ensuring that the variance in observed indicators is primarily attributable to the intended latent variable rather than random error.

Average variance extracted values range from 0.547 for evangelism to 0.659 for perceived destination image, all surpassing the 0.50 benchmark. This demonstrates that more than half of the variance in each construct is accounted for by its respective indicators, confirming that the constructs capture a meaningful portion of the underlying concept. For example, the experience dimension (EP) exhibits a CR of 0.928 and an AVE of 0.618, indicating that its eight items collectively explain a substantial proportion of variance in experiential engagement. Similarly, CHVB, representing cultural heritage visiting behavior, shows a CR of 0.909 and an AVE of 0.627, indicating that behavioral intention items are closely aligned with the construct and provide a robust measurement of tourists' engagement, revisit intention, and advocacy behavior.

The results also highlight that constructs with slightly lower loadings, such as EG5 (0.682) and DI3 (0.652), do not compromise overall convergent validity due to the strong performance of other items within the same construct and the high CR values. Collectively, the convergent validity analysis confirms that the measurement model exhibits adequate item-to-construct alignment, reliable internal consistency, and meaningful variance explained by the latent variables, providing confidence in the robustness of the instrument for subsequent structural modeling.

Table 4.4 Convergence Validity

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Experience	EP1	0.857	0.928	0.618
	EP2	0.792		
	EP3	0.76		
	EP4	0.814		
	EP5	0.716		
	EP6	0.743		
	EP7	0.796		
	EP8	0.802		

Table 4.4 (continued)

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Exchange	EC1	0.784	0.918	0.555
	EC2	0.754		
	EC3	0.732		
	EC4	0.737		
	EC5	0.761		
	EC6	0.735		
	EC7	0.695		
	EC8	0.762		
	EC9	0.743		
Everyplace	EW1	0.848	0.939	0.63
	EW2	0.809		
	EW3	0.793		
	EW4	0.725		
	EW5	0.775		
	EW6	0.789		
	EW7	0.77		
	EW8	0.75		
	EW9	0.875		
Evangelism	EG1	0.789	0.878	0.547
	EG2	0.74		
	EG3	0.74		
	EG4	0.741		
	EG5	0.682		
	EG6	0.741		

Table 4.4 (continued)

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Heritage interpretation quality	DI1	0.794	0.895	0.552
	DI2	0.747		
	DI3	0.652		
	DI4	0.665		
	DI5	0.736		
	DI6	0.725		
	DI7	0.859		
Perceived destination image	PDI1	0.845	0.939	0.659
	PDI2	0.823		
	PDI3	0.785		
	PDI4	0.809		
	PDI5	0.809		
	PDI6	0.79		
	PDI7	0.862		
	PDI8	0.765		
Perceived conservation	PC1	0.73	0.888	0.615
	PC2	0.788		
	PC3	0.758		
	PC4	0.744		
	PC5	0.89		
Source credibility	SC1	0.754	0.869	0.57
	SC2	0.694		
	SC3	0.784		
	SC4	0.777		
	SC5	0.762		

Table 4.4 (continued)

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Cultural heritage visiting behavior	CHVB1	0.861	0.909	0.627
	CHVB2	0.803		
	CHVB3	0.697		
	CHVB4	0.732		
	CHVB5	0.762		
	CHVB6	0.88		

4.2.3 Discriminant Validity

Table 4.5 presents the discriminant validity analysis for the measurement model, using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, where the square root of each construct's AVE is reported on the diagonal and inter-construct correlations are presented in the off-diagonal cells. The diagonal values range from 0.740 (evangelism) to 0.812 (perceived destination image), all exceeding the correlations between constructs. This indicates that each latent variable shares more variance with its own indicators than with any other construct, satisfying the basic requirement for discriminant validity.

The inter-construct correlations show moderate to strong relationships, reflecting theoretically meaningful associations while maintaining construct distinctiveness. For example, experience (EP) exhibits correlations of 0.423 with exchange (EC), 0.418 with everyplace (EW), and 0.487 with evangelism (EG), demonstrating that while these 4E marketing dimensions are related, they remain empirically separable. Cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB) shows substantial correlations with several constructs, particularly with perceived destination image (PDI = 0.605) and heritage interpretation quality (DI = 0.603), reflecting that tourists' behavioral engagement is closely linked to their perceptual evaluation of the destination and interpretive quality, yet the square root of its AVE (0.792) remains higher than these correlations, confirming discriminant validity.

Other constructs, such as source credibility (SC), show lower correlations with 4E dimensions (ranging from 0.214 to 0.375), indicating that while SC contributes to the overall model, it captures a unique aspect of trust in information sources, distinct from

experiential or perceptual constructs. Similarly, perceived conservation (PC) correlates moderately with EP (0.362) and EG (0.458), suggesting that perceptions of preservation are related to visitor engagement but do not overlap conceptually with marketing or interpretive dimensions.

Table 4.5 Discriminant Validity Test

Latent variables	EP	EC	EW	EG	DI	PDI	PC	SC	CHVB
EP	0.786								
EC	.423**	0.745							
EW	.418**	.413**	0.794						
EG	.487**	.467**	.476**	0.74					
DI	.471**	.515**	.477**	.493**	0.743				
PDI	.461**	.448**	.428**	.413**	.461**	0.812			
PC	.362**	.447**	.417**	.458**	.424**	.316**	0.784		
SC	.375**	.272**	.240**	.267**	.236**	.301**	.214**	0.755	
CHVB	.548**	.597**	.559**	.563**	.603**	.605**	.546**	.350**	0.792

Note: The abbreviations used in this table represent the following constructs: EP refers to experience, EC denotes exchange, EW represents everyplace, EG indicates evangelism, DI refers to heritage interpretation quality, PDI denotes perceived destination image, PC represents perceived conservation, SC refers to source credibility, and CHVB denotes cultural heritage visiting behavior.

4.3 Structural Model Path Analysis

4.3.1 Model Fit Metrics for the Structural Model

Table 4.6 reports the fit metrics for the structural model, evaluating the adequacy of the hypothesized relationships among the latent constructs. The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ($\chi^2/df = 1.67$) is well below the conventional threshold of 3, indicating that the structural model achieves a parsimonious representation of the observed covariance structure. The RMSEA value of 0.028 further confirms an excellent approximation to the population covariance matrix, reflecting minimal residual variance. Absolute fit indices, including GFI (0.914) and AGFI (0.907), exceed the recommended benchmark of 0.90, suggesting that the model reproduces the observed data accurately. Comparative and incremental fit indices, including NFI (0.927), TLI (0.968), and CFI

(0.969), all surpass 0.90, demonstrating that the hypothesized model substantially improves fit over a null baseline and captures the underlying theoretical relationships effectively. Collectively, these results indicate that the structural model fits the data well and provides a robust foundation for testing hypothesized path relationships among 4E marketing dimensions, perceptual mediators, and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Table 4.6 Model Fit Metrics

Fit index	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Reference standards	<3	<0.08	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9
Result	1.67	0.028	0.914	0.907	0.927	0.968	0.969

4.3.2 Path Analysis for Direct Effects

Figure 4.2 presents the structural model depicting the hypothesized relationships among the 4E marketing dimensions (experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism), heritage interpretation quality, perceived destination image, perceived conservation, and cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB). Each latent construct is connected to its observed indicators with standardized factor loadings, and direct paths between latent constructs are annotated with standardized coefficients (β) reflecting the strength and significance of hypothesized relationships. The figure shows that the 4E marketing dimensions exert both direct and indirect effects on CHVB, mediated through perceptual constructs such as PDI and PC. Notably, path coefficients from experience (EP) to CHVB (β = 0.12), exchange (EC) to CHVB (β = 0.176), and everyplace (EW) to CHVB (β = 0.123) are all positive and significant, indicating that immersive experience, perceived reciprocal value, and omnichannel accessibility directly enhance tourists' behavioral engagement. Evangelism (EG) also exerts a positive direct effect on CHVB (β = 0.10), though the magnitude is slightly smaller, suggesting that proactive sharing and recommendation behaviors contribute moderately to cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Heritage interpretation quality (DI) shows significant direct effects on both CHVB (β = 0.147) and perceptual mediators, including PDI (β = 0.178) and PC (β = 0.144), indicating that clearer, more informative, and engaging interpretation enhances destination image perception, perceived conservation, and behavioral intention. Perceived destination image (PDI) exerts a strong direct effect on CHVB (β = 0.237), reflecting that positive

cognitive and affective evaluations of Chengde's heritage sites significantly drive behavioral engagement, including revisit intention and advocacy. Similarly, perceived conservation (PC) demonstrates a substantial direct effect on CHVB (β = 0.205), confirming that tourists' recognition of effective preservation and governance practices strengthens their engagement and willingness to participate in heritage activities.

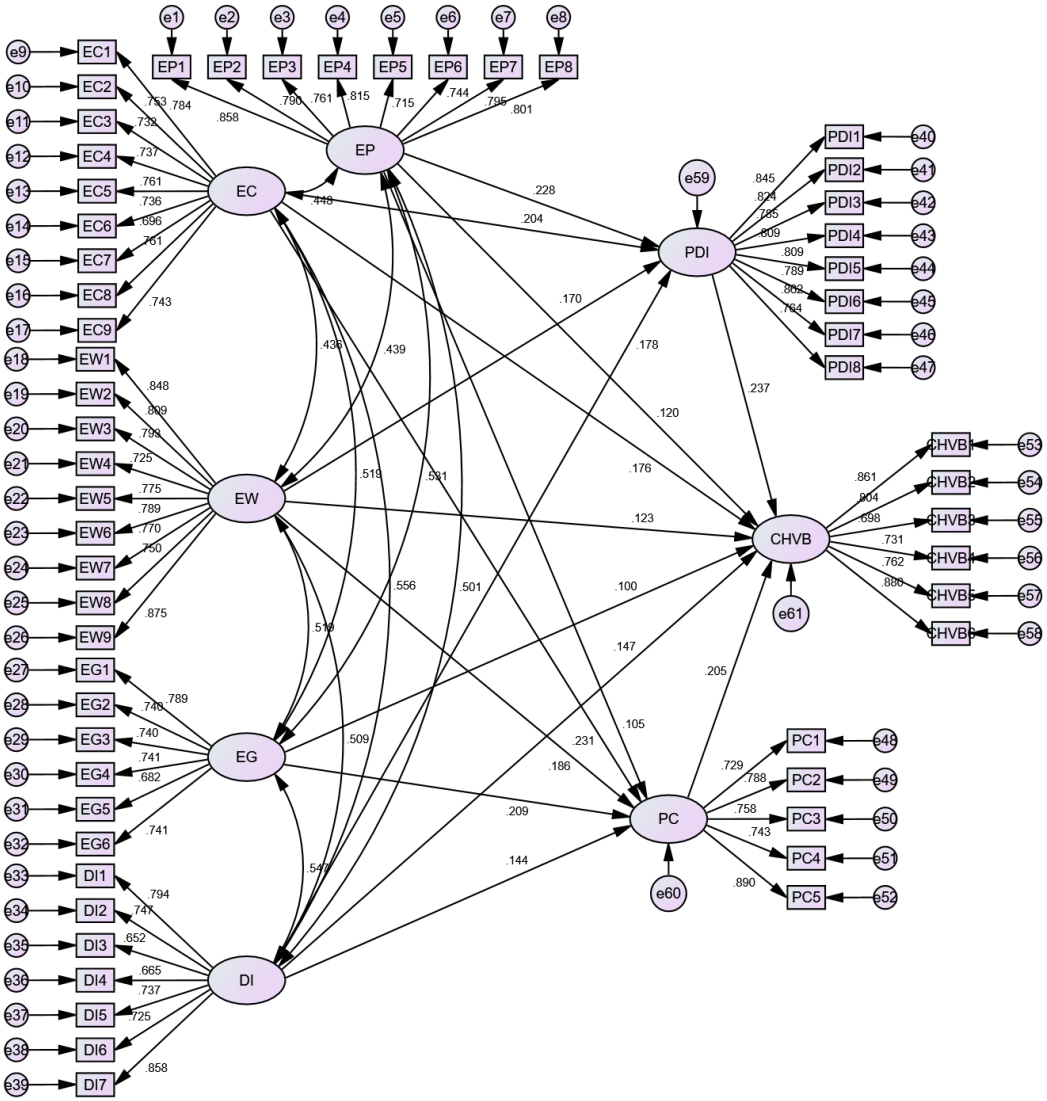

Figure 4.2 Structural model

Table 4.7 presents the results of the structural model path analysis, including standardized effect values (β), standard errors (SE), critical ratios (CR), significance levels (P), and hypothesis testing outcomes. Most hypothesized direct paths are statistically supported, indicating that the 4E marketing dimensions, heritage interpretation quality, perceived destination image, and perceived conservation generally play significant roles

in explaining cultural heritage visiting behavior. However, H2d is not supported, as the path from evangelism to perceived destination image is not statistically significant (β = 0.069, SE = 0.052, CR = 1.587, p = 0.113). This suggests that tourists' willingness to share, recommend, or advocate for Chengde does not necessarily strengthen their cognitive or affective image of the destination. In the context of cultural heritage tourism, evangelism may be more closely related to social expression, personal sharing, or post-visit communication rather than to the formation of destination image itself.

The paths from the 4E marketing constructs to cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB) show that experience (EP) has a positive and significant effect on CHVB (β = 0.120, SE = 0.025, CR = 3.981, p < 0.001), supporting H1a. This indicates that immersive and interactive experiences contribute to tourists' behavioral engagement. Exchange (EC) shows the strongest direct effect among the 4E dimensions (β = 0.176, SE = 0.031, CR = 5.502, p < 0.001), supporting H1b and confirming the importance of value co-creation and participatory interaction. Everyplace (EW) also positively affects CHVB (β = 0.123, SE = 0.027, CR = 4.151, p < 0.001), supporting H1c, suggesting that multi-channel accessibility and information availability facilitate visiting behavior. Evangelism (EG) has a smaller but significant direct effect on CHVB (β = 0.100, SE = 0.038, CR = 2.944, p = 0.003), supporting H1d. Heritage interpretation quality (DI) also significantly influences CHVB (β = 0.147, SE = 0.038, CR = 4.409, p < 0.001), supporting H1e and demonstrating that clear, meaningful, and informative interpretation directly encourages tourist engagement.

For paths leading to perceived destination image (PDI), experience (β = 0.228, SE = 0.033, CR = 6.172, p < 0.001), exchange (β = 0.204, SE = 0.041, CR = 5.254, p < 0.001), everyplace (β = 0.170, SE = 0.035, CR = 4.673, p < 0.001), and heritage interpretation quality (β = 0.178, SE = 0.051, CR = 4.257, p < 0.001) all show significant positive effects, supporting H2a, H2b, H2c, and H2e. These results indicate that tourists' destination image is mainly shaped by experiential immersion, perceived value exchange, multi-channel information access, and interpretive quality. By contrast, the unsupported H2d implies that evangelism does not serve as an image-forming factor in this model. A possible explanation is that destination image is primarily constructed through direct experience, informational processing, and interpretive understanding, whereas evangelism reflects tourists' outward communication behavior after perception has already formed. Therefore, evangelism may influence behavioral engagement directly or through other evaluative

mechanisms, but it does not significantly enhance the internal image construction of Chengde.

The paths to perceived conservation (PC) are all statistically significant. EP positively affects PC ($\beta = 0.105$, SE = 0.029, CR = 2.853, $p = 0.004$), supporting H3a; EC has the strongest effect on PC ($\beta = 0.231$, SE = 0.036, CR = 5.901, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3b; EW also significantly affects PC ($\beta = 0.186$, SE = 0.031, CR = 5.060, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3c; EG significantly influences PC ($\beta = 0.209$, SE = 0.045, CR = 4.880, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3d; and DI has a significant effect on PC ($\beta = 0.144$, SE = 0.044, CR = 3.481, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3e. These findings suggest that tourists' perception of conservation is shaped not only by interpretive information and direct experiences but also by social advocacy and shared narratives. This also helps explain why EG fails to influence PDI but significantly affects PC: advocacy may be more effective in reinforcing tourists' awareness of heritage protection, responsible management, and conservation value than in reshaping their overall image of the destination.

For the direct effects from perceptual mediators to CHVB, perceived destination image has the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.237$, SE = 0.027, CR = 8.071, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4. Perceived conservation also has a substantial positive effect on CHVB ($\beta = 0.205$, SE = 0.036, CR = 6.121, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5. These results indicate that tourists' behavioral engagement is strongly driven by both image-based evaluation and conservation-based evaluation. A favorable image of Chengde can enhance tourists' willingness to visit, revisit, and recommend the destination, while recognition of effective conservation can strengthen trust, responsibility, and heritage-supportive behavior. Overall, Table 4.7 shows that the structural model is largely supported, with the exception of H2d, and the results reveal differentiated mechanisms through which marketing, interpretation, destination image, and conservation perception shape cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Table 4.7 Direct Path Effects

Hypothesis	Structural path	Effect value (β)	SE	CR	P	Results
H1a	EP → CHVB	0.12	0.025	3.981	***	Supported
H1b	EC → CHVB	0.176	0.031	5.502	***	Supported
H1c	EW → CHVB	0.123	0.027	4.151	***	Supported
H1d	EG → CHVB	0.1	0.038	2.944	0.003	Supported
H1e	DI → CHVB	0.147	0.038	4.409	***	Supported
H2a	EP → PDI	0.228	0.033	6.172	***	Supported
H2b	EC → PDI	0.204	0.041	5.254	***	Supported
H2c	EW → PDI	0.17	0.035	4.673	***	Supported
H2d	EG → PDI	0.069	0.052	1.587	0.113	Not supported
H2e	DI → PDI	0.178	0.051	4.257	***	Supported
H3a	EP → PC	0.105	0.029	2.853	0.004	Supported
H3b	EC → PC	0.231	0.036	5.901	***	Supported
H3c	EW → PC	0.186	0.031	5.06	***	Supported
H3d	EG → PC	0.209	0.045	4.88	***	Supported
H3e	DI → PC	0.144	0.044	3.481	***	Supported
H4	PDI → CHVB	0.237	0.027	8.071	***	Supported
H5	PC → CHVB	0.205	0.036	6.121	***	Supported

4.3.3 Path Analysis for Indirect Effects

Table 4.8 presents the bootstrap analysis of indirect effects, showing how perceived destination image (PDI) and perceived conservation (PC) mediate the relationships between the 4E marketing dimensions, heritage interpretation quality (DI), and cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB). For the PDI-mediated paths, H6a indicates that experience (EP) exerts a significant indirect effect on CHVB through PDI, with an effect value of 0.054 and a 95% confidence interval of 0.035 to 0.076. H6b shows that exchange (EC) indirectly affects CHVB via PDI with a coefficient of 0.048 (CI = 0.03–0.071), while H6c demonstrates that everyplace (EW) has an indirect effect of 0.04 (CI = 0.023–0.062). Heritage interpretation quality (DI) also exhibits a significant indirect effect

through PDI in H6e, with a value of 0.042 (CI = 0.025–0.062). These significant paths indicate that cognitive and affective evaluations of the destination partially transmit the influence of experiential engagement, interactive co-creation, multi-channel accessibility, and interpretive quality on tourists' behavioral intentions, suggesting that destination perception functions as a primary evaluative pathway for most 4E marketing inputs and interpretive measures.

H6d, representing the indirect effect of evangelism (EG) through PDI, is not supported, with an effect value of 0.000 and a confidence interval of 0.000 to 0.000. This result highlights that advocacy or experience-sharing behaviors do not influence visiting behavior via destination image. Unlike other marketing dimensions, EG appears to operate independently of tourists' cognitive or affective perceptions, implying that social and promotional behaviors contribute to engagement through alternative mechanisms rather than by enhancing the mental image of the heritage site.

For PC-mediated paths, all hypothesized relationships (H7a–H7e) are supported. H7a shows that EP indirectly affects CHVB through PC with an effect value of 0.022 (CI = 0.008–0.044), while H7b indicates a stronger effect for EC (0.047, CI = 0.027–0.077). H7c and H7d demonstrate indirect effects for EW and EG through PC, with coefficients of 0.038 (CI = 0.022–0.065) and 0.043 (CI = 0.024–0.071), respectively. H7e reveals that DI indirectly influences CHVB via PC with an effect of 0.03 (CI = 0.014–0.057). These results indicate that tourists' perceptions of conservation and preservation practices effectively transmit the influence of both experiential and social dimensions of engagement into behavioral outcomes. Notably, the indirect effect of EG through PC is substantial despite its non-significant mediation through PDI, illustrating that advocacy behaviors are particularly effective in shaping CHVB via evaluative recognition of conservation.

The differential patterns between PDI- and PC-mediated paths reveal that most 4E marketing dimensions and interpretive quality primarily operate through destination perception to affect behavior, while EG uniquely leverages conservation evaluation as its mediating mechanism. H6a–H6c and H6e demonstrate that perceptual destination image is critical for translating experiential, interactive, and interpretive inputs into engagement, whereas H7d shows that even when destination image is not involved, behavioral advocacy can be reinforced through awareness of conservation practices.

Table 4.8 Indirect Effect Bootstrap Analysis

Hypothesis	Mediation path	Effect value	SE	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	Results
H6a	EP → PDI → CHVB	0.054	0.01	0.035	0.076	Supported
H6b	EC → PDI → CHVB	0.048	0.01	0.03	0.071	Supported
H6c	EW → PDI → CHVB	0.04	0.01	0.023	0.062	Supported
H6d	EG → PDI → CHVB	0	0	0	0	Not supported
H6e	DI → PDI → CHVB	0.042	0.01	0.025	0.062	Supported
H7a	EP → PC → CHVB	0.022	0.009	0.008	0.044	Supported
H7b	EC → PC → CHVB	0.047	0.013	0.027	0.077	Supported
H7c	EW → PC → CHVB	0.038	0.011	0.022	0.065	Supported
H7d	EG → PC → CHVB	0.043	0.012	0.024	0.071	Supported
H7e	DI → PC → CHVB	0.03	0.011	0.014	0.057	Supported

Table 4.9 focuses on H8a, assessing the interaction between experience (EP) and source credibility. Both the direct effect of EP on CHVB ($\beta = 0.487$, $p < 0.001$) and the effect of source credibility on CHVB ($\beta = 0.193$, $p < 0.001$) are significant. The interaction term (EP × source credibility) also demonstrates a positive and significant coefficient ($\beta = 0.158$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of source credibility strengthen the impact of experience on tourists' engagement and behavioral intention. This suggests that when tourists perceive information sources as credible, the influence of immersive and interactive experiences on their visiting behavior is amplified.

Table 4.9 Moderation Effect of H8a

Predictor	β	p	Result
Experience → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.487	0	Significant
Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.193	0	Significant
Experience × Source credibility	0.158	0	Moderation supported

Table 4.10 presents the moderation effect for H8b, examining exchange (EC). The direct paths of EC (β = 0.524, p < 0.001) and source credibility (β = 0.193, p < 0.001) are significant, and the interaction term EC × source credibility (β = 0.172, p < 0.001) supports the moderation hypothesis. This finding indicates that the positive effect of value co-creation and participatory engagement on CHVB is enhanced when tourists perceive the sources of information or interpretive content as reliable and trustworthy.

Table 4.10 Moderation Effect of H8b

Predictor	β	p	Result
Exchange → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.524	0	Significant
Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.193	0	Significant
Exchange × Source credibility	0.172	0	Moderation supported

Table 4.11 addresses H8c, testing the interaction between everyplace (EW) and source credibility. The direct effects of EW (β = 0.503, p < 0.001) and source credibility (β = 0.185, p < 0.001) are significant, and the interaction term (EW × source credibility) is also significant (β = 0.166, p < 0.001). This indicates that omnichannel accessibility and multi-platform engagement translate more effectively into behavioral outcomes when tourists trust the sources providing the information, highlighting the importance of credible communication channels in supporting engagement with heritage sites.

Table 4.11 Moderation Effect of H8c

Predictor	β	p	Result
Everyplace → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.503	0	Significant
Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.185	0	Significant
Everyplace × Source credibility	0.166	0	Moderation supported

Table 4.12 presents the moderation results for H8d, examining evangelism (EG). The direct effects of EG (β = 0.468, p < 0.001) and source credibility (β = 0.176, p < 0.001) are significant, and the interaction term (EG × source credibility) is significant as well (β

= 0.149, p < 0.001). This demonstrates that tourists' advocacy and experience-sharing behaviors exert a stronger influence on CHVB when source credibility is high, suggesting that credibility reinforces the behavioral impact of social and promotional engagement.

Table 4.12 Moderation Effect of H8d

Predictor	β	p	Result
Evangelism → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.468	0	Significant
Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.176	0	Significant
Evangelism × Source credibility	0.149	0	Moderation supported

Finally, Table 4.13 reports H8e, assessing the interaction between heritage interpretation quality (DI) and source credibility. Both DI (β = 0.512, p < 0.001) and source credibility (β = 0.181, p < 0.001) show significant direct effects on CHVB, and the interaction term (DI × source credibility) is also significant (β = 0.161, p < 0.001). This indicates that the positive effect of clear, informative, and engaging interpretive content on behavioral intention is magnified when tourists perceive the information sources as credible, emphasizing the moderating role of trust in enhancing the effectiveness of interpretive strategies.

Table 4.13 Moderation Effect of H8e

Predictor	β	p	Result
Heritage interpretation quality → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.512	0	Significant
Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.181	0	Significant
Heritage interpretation quality × Source credibility	0.161	0	Moderation supported

To provide a more intuitive illustration of the moderation effects, Figure 4.3 presents five simple slope plots. The results show that, across all panels, the slope for high source credibility is steeper than that for low source credibility, indicating that source

credibility positively strengthens the effects of experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, and heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visiting behavior.

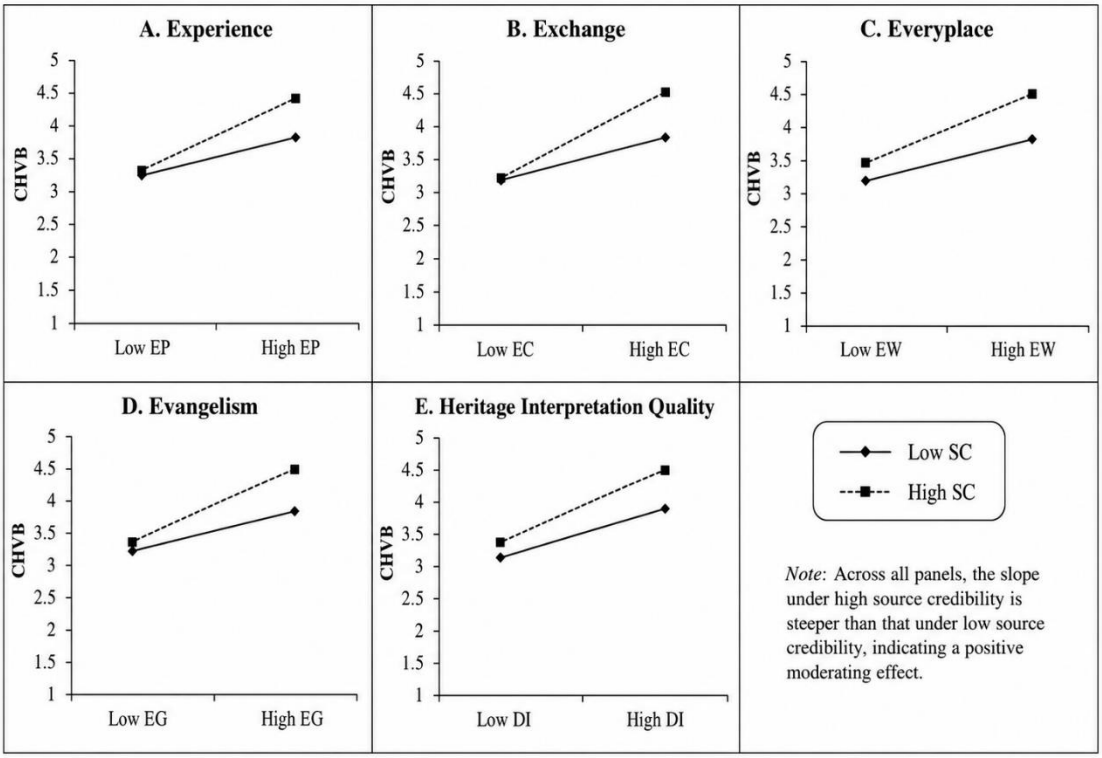

Figure 4.3 Moderating effect of source credibility

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter integrates the key findings from the measurement validation, structural modeling, mediation, and moderation analyses. The measurement model confirmed that the constructs were reliably measured, with indicators demonstrating strong convergent and discriminant validity. Structural path analysis showed that the 4E marketing dimensions and heritage interpretation quality directly influence cultural heritage visiting behavior, while mediation analyses indicated that perceived destination image and perceived conservation function as critical channels through which most marketing and interpretive inputs affect behavioral engagement. Notably, evangelism did not operate through perceived destination image but was significant via perceived conservation, highlighting differentiated mechanisms of influence.

Moderation analyses demonstrated that source credibility consistently enhances the effects of experiential, interactive, omnichannel, advocacy, and interpretive

dimensions on behavioral engagement. High perceived credibility amplifies the translation of marketing and interpretive efforts into tourists' engagement, emphasizing the role of trust in shaping responses to both information and experiential stimuli. The combined results illustrate that tourists' perceptions, evaluations, and confidence in information sources jointly determine the extent to which experiential, social, and interpretive inputs are transformed into active visiting behavior, providing an integrated understanding of the psychological and evaluative processes underlying cultural heritage tourism engagement.



CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a comprehensive synthesis of the study's findings, linking empirical results to theoretical and practical contributions while addressing limitations and directions for future research. It begins by discussing the implications of the findings for relevant theories, including the 4E marketing model, experience economy theory, image theory, and source credibility theory, highlighting how the study extends and refines existing conceptual frameworks. The chapter then considers the practical implications for key stakeholders, including local government, cultural organizations, and tourism enterprises, providing guidance on how to enhance tourist engagement, optimize interpretive programming, and leverage credible communication channels. Finally, the chapter examines the limitations of the study and identifies areas for future research, offering suggestions for methodological improvements, broader contextual applications, and additional variables that could further explain cultural heritage visiting behavior.

RO1. To examine the direct effects of the four dimensions of the 4E marketing model (experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism) and heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visiting behavior.

The direct effect analysis further extends beyond behavioral outcomes by examining how the 4E marketing dimensions and heritage interpretation quality influence perceived destination image. The results of H2a, H2b, H2c, and H2e indicate that experience, exchange, everyplace, and heritage interpretation quality all significantly contribute to the formation of perceived destination image. Among these relationships, experience exhibits the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.228$, SE = 0.033, CR = 6.172, $p < 0.001$), followed by exchange ($\beta = 0.204$, SE = 0.041, CR = 5.254, $p < 0.001$), heritage interpretation quality ($\beta = 0.178$, SE = 0.051, CR = 4.257, $p < 0.001$), and everyplace ($\beta = 0.170$, SE = 0.035, CR = 4.673, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that tourists primarily construct their image of Chengde through direct experiences, meaningful interactions, accessible information, and interpretive understanding. In other words, destination image

is not formed solely through promotional exposure but emerges from a combination of experiential engagement and cognitive processing.

The strongest influence of experience on destination image is particularly noteworthy. Cultural heritage destinations differ from conventional tourism attractions because visitors often seek emotional resonance, cultural immersion, and memorable encounters rather than purely recreational consumption. When tourists participate in cultural performances, explore historic architecture, or engage with local traditions, they are more likely to develop vivid cognitive and affective representations of the destination. This finding is consistent with experience economy theory, which argues that memorable experiences create symbolic value that shapes tourists' perceptions and evaluations of destinations.

Similarly, the significant effects of exchange and heritage interpretation quality indicate that image formation depends not only on what tourists see but also on how they understand and interact with cultural resources. Exchange reflects opportunities for participation and co-creation, allowing tourists to become active contributors rather than passive observers. Heritage interpretation quality provides historical context, cultural meaning, and narrative coherence, enabling visitors to transform fragmented observations into a more integrated understanding of the destination. For Chengde, where imperial culture, religious heritage, and multi-ethnic traditions coexist, interpretive systems play a particularly important role in helping visitors comprehend the deeper significance of heritage resources.

A notable finding is that H2d is not supported, as evangelism does not significantly influence perceived destination image ($\beta = 0.069$, SE = 0.052, CR = 1.587, $p = 0.113$). This result differs from the other dimensions of the 4E model and deserves particular attention. The finding suggests that tourists' willingness to share experiences, recommend destinations, or engage in advocacy behaviors does not necessarily contribute to the formation of their own destination image. Unlike experience, exchange, and interpretation quality, which directly provide cognitive and emotional inputs for image construction, evangelism is primarily an outcome-oriented and socially oriented behavior. It reflects how tourists communicate their experiences to others after evaluations have already been formed rather than serving as a source of image development itself.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding implies that destination image may function as an antecedent of evangelism rather than a consequence of it. Tourists typically develop perceptions of a destination through direct experiences, interactions, and information processing before deciding whether to recommend or promote it. Consequently, while positive destination image may encourage advocacy behavior, advocacy behavior itself may not significantly reshape or strengthen image perception. This explanation is consistent with image theory, which views destination image as a cognitive-affective construct developed through exposure to destination attributes and experiences rather than through subsequent communication activities.

From a practical perspective, the non-significant relationship may also reflect the characteristics of contemporary social media behavior. Many tourists share travel experiences for social interaction, self-presentation, or content creation purposes rather than as a deliberate process of evaluating destination attributes. In such cases, posting photographs, videos, or comments about Chengde may generate visibility and awareness without necessarily deepening the tourist's own cognitive understanding or emotional attachment to the destination. Therefore, social sharing alone may be insufficient to strengthen destination image unless it is supported by meaningful experiences, participatory engagement, and high-quality interpretation.

Taken together, the findings of H2a–H2e demonstrate that destination image is primarily shaped by experiential, interactive, informational, and interpretive factors rather than by advocacy behaviors. This result complements the findings of H1a–H1e by showing that the effectiveness of heritage tourism marketing depends not only on directly stimulating behavioral engagement but also on fostering positive image formation through immersive experiences, value co-creation, accessible information, and meaningful interpretation. The absence of a significant effect for H2d further highlights that not all dimensions of the 4E model operate through identical mechanisms, suggesting that evangelism contributes more directly to behavioral engagement and conservation-related evaluations than to destination image construction.

RO2. To investigate the mediating mechanisms by testing how perceived destination image and perceived conservation mediate the relationships between (a) the four 4E dimensions and (b) heritage interpretation quality, and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

The examination of indirect effects provides a detailed understanding of RO2, focusing on how perceived destination image (PDI) and perceived conservation (PC) mediate the relationships between the 4E marketing dimensions, heritage interpretation quality (DI), and cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB). The bootstrap analysis indicates that PDI significantly mediates the effects of experience (EP), exchange (EC), everyplace (EW), and DI on CHVB (H6a, H6b, H6c, H6e), with indirect effects ranging from 0.04 for EW to 0.054 for EP. These results suggest that tourists' cognitive and affective evaluation of Chengde's heritage sites translates the value of immersive experiences, participatory engagement, multi-channel accessibility, and interpretive quality into stronger behavioral intentions. For instance, when tourists perceive the destination as well-structured, aesthetically engaging, and informative, the experiential and interpretive elements of the visit are reinforced, leading to higher engagement, longer stays, and greater likelihood to revisit or recommend the site.

Notably, evangelism (EG) does not exhibit a significant indirect effect through PDI (H6d not supported), indicating that the behavioral influence of advocacy and experience-sharing operates independently of tourists' cognitive or affective image of the destination. This suggests that while EG directly motivates engagement, its effect is not dependent on how visitors perceive the overall destination quality or experience. Tourists may engage in advocacy or social sharing due to social or motivational incentives, rather than as a result of their evaluation of the destination image, highlighting a distinct pathway through which social influence affects behavior.

For the PC-mediated paths, all 4E dimensions and DI demonstrate significant indirect effects on CHVB (H7a–H7e), with effect values ranging from 0.022 for EP to 0.047 for EC. These findings indicate that tourists' recognition of conservation and preservation efforts provides an additional mechanism linking marketing and interpretive inputs to behavioral engagement. The higher mediated effects of EC and EG suggest that interactive participation and advocacy behaviors are particularly sensitive to evaluative perceptions of conservation. In practical terms, visitors who perceive that heritage sites are well-preserved, managed sustainably, and supported by credible institutional efforts are more likely to translate their engagement into active behaviors, such as participating in cultural activities, following site guidelines, or promoting the destination socially.

Comparing PDI- and PC-mediated pathways reveals differentiated mechanisms. While most 4E dimensions and DI are more strongly transmitted through PDI, reflecting the importance of cognitive and affective evaluation in translating experiential and interpretive inputs into behavior, EG's effect is significant only via PC, emphasizing that social and advocacy behaviors are interpreted by tourists primarily through evaluative awareness of preservation and governance. This distinction underscores the role of perceptual mediation in explaining how different types of marketing and interpretive inputs influence CHVB. PDI captures the pathway through which engagement is reinforced by destination perception, whereas PC captures the pathway through which engagement is reinforced by recognition of preservation and management, highlighting the dual mediating roles of cognitive-affective and evaluative perceptions in shaping tourist behavior.

RO3. To test the moderating role of source credibility in shaping the strength of the relationships between the four 4E marketing dimensions and cultural heritage visiting behavior.

The moderation analysis addresses RO3 by examining how source credibility influences the strength of the relationships between the 4E marketing dimensions and cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB). Tables 4.9–4.13 show that source credibility significantly moderates the effects of all four dimensions of the 4E model as well as heritage interpretation quality (DI) on CHVB. For H8a, the interaction between experience (EP) and source credibility demonstrates a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.158$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the influence of immersive and interactive experiences on tourists' engagement is amplified when the information sources are perceived as credible. This suggests that tourists are more likely to translate experiential engagement into active visiting behavior if they trust the accuracy, reliability, and expertise of the communication channels providing interpretive content and destination information.

Similarly, for H8b, exchange (EC) interacts positively with source credibility ($\beta = 0.172$, $p < 0.001$), showing that the effect of participatory and co-creative engagement on CHVB is strengthened when tourists perceive the information sources as trustworthy. This emphasizes the critical role of credible communication in reinforcing the perceived value of interactive experiences and co-creation opportunities, suggesting that social and institutional validation of participation enhances behavioral outcomes. The moderation

effect is also evident for everyplace (EW) in H8c ($\beta = 0.166$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that tourists' utilization of multi-channel information and digital platforms has a stronger impact on engagement when source credibility is high, demonstrating that accessibility and technological facilitation alone are insufficient without trust in the provided information.

For evangelism (EG) in H8d, the interaction with source credibility ($\beta = 0.149$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that advocacy behaviors are more effective in promoting CHVB when tourists perceive sources as credible, suggesting that peer-driven and self-reported advocacy is reinforced when the underlying information is deemed reliable. Finally, heritage interpretation quality (DI) also exhibits a moderated effect (H8e, $\beta = 0.161$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the impact of clear, informative, and meaningful interpretive content on CHVB is enhanced under conditions of high source credibility. This demonstrates that trust in the source amplifies the behavioral influence of interpretive quality, reinforcing the role of cognitive and evaluative validation in translating perception into action.

Across all five tests, the results reveal a consistent pattern: source credibility strengthens the relationship between each marketing or interpretive dimension and CHVB. The magnitude of the interaction coefficients suggests that credibility plays a critical enabling role, particularly for participatory, experiential, and interpretive inputs, by reinforcing tourists' confidence in the information and enhancing the likelihood of active engagement, revisit intention, and advocacy behaviors. This emphasizes that the effectiveness of the 4E marketing model is contingent not only on the quality of experience, interaction, accessibility, and advocacy but also on the perceived reliability and trustworthiness of the information channels through which these dimensions are communicated.

RO4. To develop evidence-based promotion strategies for cultural heritage tourism by translating the empirical findings into actionable recommendations for destination marketing and heritage site management (e.g., optimizing 4E-based marketing, strengthening interpretation systems, enhancing perceived conservation, and leveraging credible sources).

The empirical findings provide evidence-based guidance for developing promotion strategies for cultural heritage tourism in Chengde. Since exchange and heritage

interpretation quality exert relatively strong effects on cultural heritage visiting behavior, destination marketing should place greater emphasis on participatory engagement and interpretive depth. Cultural heritage promotion should move beyond simple resource display and general publicity by developing interactive workshops, guided cultural activities, hands-on heritage experiences, and narrative-based interpretation. These strategies can help tourists participate more actively, understand cultural meanings more deeply, and transform heritage appreciation into actual visiting, revisiting, and recommendation behavior.

The findings also indicate that experience and everyplace remain important strategic components. Immersive exhibitions, cultural performances, digital guides, mobile applications, online booking systems, and social media communication can enhance tourists' sensory engagement and information accessibility before, during, and after the visit. Evangelism also has practical value because tourists' sharing, reviews, and recommendations can expand communication reach and strengthen behavioral engagement. However, advocacy-oriented promotion should be carefully designed. Social sharing should not only pursue exposure or traffic but should be connected with cultural storytelling, conservation awareness, and meaningful visitor experiences, so that online communication can transmit Chengde's heritage value rather than remain at the level of superficial visibility.

The mediation results suggest that promotion strategies should strengthen both perceived destination image and perceived conservation. Since destination image is shaped mainly by experience, exchange, everyplace, and heritage interpretation quality, Chengde should construct a coherent image around imperial garden culture, religious architecture, multi-ethnic integration, and historical symbolism. At the same time, perceived conservation should be enhanced through visible preservation practices, transparent restoration information, visitor management explanations, and responsible tourism guidance. When tourists perceive that heritage sites are not only attractive but also well protected and responsibly managed, their willingness to engage with cultural heritage tourism becomes stronger.

The moderation results further show that source credibility is essential for improving the effectiveness of promotion strategies. Official websites, social media accounts, tour guides, interpretive signage, online travel platforms, and cultural institutions

should provide accurate, consistent, and authoritative information. For Chengde, where historical narratives, architectural symbolism, religious culture, and ethnic traditions are complex, credible communication is especially important. Expert-led interpretation, institutional endorsement, and reliable digital content can reduce tourists' uncertainty and strengthen the behavioral impact of marketing and interpretation.

From the perspective of the four research objectives, the study shows that the 4E dimensions and heritage interpretation quality directly influence cultural heritage visiting behavior, that perceived destination image and perceived conservation explain important mediating mechanisms, and that source credibility strengthens the transformation of marketing and interpretive inputs into behavioral outcomes. These findings provide a basis for evidence-based promotion strategies. More importantly, the unsupported relationship between evangelism and perceived destination image offers an important practical implication: tourists' willingness to share or recommend does not automatically create a stronger destination image. This means that word-of-mouth promotion and social media communication cannot replace substantive experience design, cultural interpretation, and image construction. For heritage destinations, advocacy should be treated as a communication amplifier rather than the foundation of image formation. A strong destination image still depends on meaningful experience, participatory value, accessible information, and high-quality interpretation.

5.1 Implication to Theories

The principal theoretical contribution of the study lies in the development of an integrated heritage tourism framework that incorporates the 4E marketing dimensions, heritage interpretation quality, perceived destination image, perceived conservation, source credibility, and cultural heritage visiting behavior within a unified explanatory structure. Rather than examining experiential marketing, destination perception, conservation evaluation, and information credibility as separate theoretical issues, the study connects these elements through direct, mediating, and moderating relationships. The integrated framework explains not only whether marketing and interpretive inputs influence cultural heritage visiting behavior, but also how these effects are transmitted through tourists' cognitive, affective, and conservation-related evaluations and under what credibility conditions they become stronger.

5.1.1 Implication to 4E Model

The findings of this study extend and nuance the theoretical application of the 4E marketing model in cultural heritage tourism and reveal notable differences compared with prior research. The direct effects of the four dimensions of the 4E model on cultural heritage visiting behavior confirm that the framework is applicable beyond consumer goods and café contexts. For instance, Pansukkum (2026)'s study in café consumption found experience and everywhere to be primary drivers of visitation decisions among Generation Z consumers, with evangelism and exchange also significant in shaping choice behavior, emphasizing value-for-money and digital accessibility as key factors in consumer engagement. In contrast, the current study shows that exchange produces the strongest direct effect on behavioral engagement in a heritage tourism setting, and heritage interpretation quality—not present in many previous 4E studies—emerges as a critical influence on behavior. This suggests that while the 4E model holds across diverse contexts, the relative strength of each dimension may vary depending on the product or experience domain, with interpretive and cultural meaning playing a more central role in heritage tourism.

More importantly, heritage interpretation quality represents a heritage-specific extension of the 4E model rather than an additional form of general tourism experience. The traditional 4E dimensions primarily capture experiential immersion, reciprocal value, channel accessibility, and visitor advocacy, but they provide limited explanation of how tourists understand historically and culturally complex heritage resources. Heritage interpretation quality addresses this limitation by explaining how historical narratives, cultural symbols, architectural meanings, and conservation values are translated into accessible and meaningful knowledge. Its inclusion therefore extends the 4E model from an experience-oriented marketing framework to a framework that also incorporates cognitive comprehension and meaning construction, both of which are essential to behavioral engagement in cultural heritage tourism.

Further, research such as the Jakarta walking tour case highlights experiential gaps in cultural attractions with weaknesses in interpretive techniques and hands-on activities, supporting the observed significance of experience in motivating engagement (Latifah et al., 2025). However, unlike qualitative insights that focus on environmental and sensory enhancements, the present quantitative results integrate exchange and everyplace with

behavior, indicating that systematic marketing dimensions interact with experiential quality in shaping outcomes. This contrasts with traditional experiential marketing studies, which emphasize the emotional and sensory consequences of experience but often do not incorporate exchange, evangelism, or multi-channel accessibility into behavioral models.

In tourism literature focusing on evangelism, research has highlighted the role of word-of-mouth and social media engagement in fostering community involvement and destination engagement, treating evangelism primarily as an outcome or mediator rather than as a direct marketing input (Sharma, 2022). In the present study, evangelism demonstrated a significant direct effect on visiting behavior within the 4E framework, even though its mediated pathway through perceived destination image was not supported. This finding diverges from Musasa et al. (2026)'s research, which frames evangelism as emergent from experience and inspiration rather than as a direct marketing stimulus. Such divergence underscores that in heritage tourism, advocacy behaviors may operate with distinct mechanisms, reinforcing engagement through evaluative perceptions of conservation rather than through destination image alone.

In comparison with broader experiential marketing research, such as the systematic review by Musasa et al. (2026), the present study's integration of heritage interpretation quality with the 4E dimensions advances the conceptualization of experiential outputs by incorporating cognitive and informational components alongside sensory and emotional dimensions. This extension aligns with emerging tourism research that emphasizes the importance of interpretive meaning and co-creation in enhancing tourist engagement but situates these factors within a robust structural framework that links them to destination behavior.

The current results also resonate with studies on co-creation and its outcomes, showing that participation in value co-creation enhances evangelism and commitment, suggesting broader engagement effects of interactive marketing inputs (Palakshappa et al., 2024). However, whereas previous work primarily establishes co-creation as antecedent to affective constructs like empowerment and commitment, the present study quantifies its direct contribution to behavioral intention, offering empirical evidence for the mechanistic role of exchange.

Lastly, research that explores generation-specific responses to 4E dimensions, such as immersive cultural experience studies among Generation Z, supports the strong

influence of sensory and interactive engagements on participation, which is corroborated here by significant experience effects. However, the inclusion of heritage interpretation quality as a distinct antecedent extends the classical 4E model beyond sensory stimulation, value exchange, channel accessibility, and advocacy. It demonstrates that cultural heritage visiting behavior also depends on whether tourists can understand historical narratives, interpret cultural and architectural symbolism, and recognize the conservation value of heritage resources.

5.1.2 Implication to Experience Economy Theory

The findings provide nuanced implications for experience economy theory, highlighting how different experiential dimensions contribute to behavioral engagement in cultural heritage tourism. Experience (EP) exerts both direct and indirect effects on cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB) through perceived destination image and perceived conservation, suggesting that immersive engagement is most effective when visitors can interpret and contextualize their experiences in relation to the heritage site's authenticity, historical value, and preservation status (Li et al., 2025). This extends traditional applications of experience economy theory by demonstrating that sensory and emotional stimulation alone are insufficient to drive behavioral engagement; cognitive processing and evaluative recognition are necessary components that transform experience into action.

Exchange (EC) emerges as the strongest direct predictor of CHVB, emphasizing the centrality of co-creation in shaping tourist behavior. Visitors who can participate actively in activities, interact with site staff, or contribute to cultural programming perceive higher personal value, which reinforces both immediate engagement and advocacy behaviors (Madhyamapurush, 2022). This finding highlights that in heritage contexts, co-creation not only enhances enjoyment but also bridges experiential and interpretive dimensions, linking participation to meaningful understanding and behavioral commitment.

Everyplace (EW) underscores the importance of multi-channel accessibility, demonstrating that experiential value is extended through seamless integration of digital and physical channels. The availability of pre-visit planning tools, mobile applications, and online interpretive content enhances the depth and continuity of engagement, allowing tourists to prepare for, participate in, and reflect upon their heritage experiences

(Madhyamapurush, 2022). This supports theoretical perspectives that contemporary experiences are not confined to physical spaces but occur across networks of digital, social, and onsite interactions.

Evangelism (EG) exerts a smaller direct effect on CHVB but shows significant indirect influence through perceived conservation, indicating that advocacy and social sharing behaviors enhance engagement when visitors recognize the site's preservation efforts (Cavadas & Moreira ,2025). Tourists' willingness to promote the destination is therefore reinforced by evaluative acknowledgment of sustainable management, suggesting that social and participatory dimensions of experience are mediated by perceptions of heritage stewardship.

Heritage interpretation quality (DI) integrates cognitive and informational dimensions into the experience economy framework. Clear, coherent, and contextually rich interpretive content strengthens both affective engagement and behavioral outcomes, demonstrating that understanding cultural meaning is a critical driver of visitation and participation (Weng et al., 2020). The significance of DI suggests that tourists value not only immersive and participatory experiences but also the intellectual and narrative aspects of heritage interpretation, which provide meaning and justification for engagement.

The interplay among these dimensions indicates that experiential value in heritage tourism emerges from a multi-layered combination of sensory stimulation, participatory interaction, multi-channel accessibility, social influence, and interpretive comprehension. Visitors translate these inputs into behavior through both affective and cognitive pathways, illustrating that experience economy theory in cultural heritage contexts requires integration of emotional, participatory, evaluative, and interpretive mechanisms to fully explain tourist engagement.

5.1.3 Implication to Image Theory

The findings of this study extend the application of image theory by demonstrating how perceived destination image (PDI) functions as a key mediator linking the 4E marketing dimensions and heritage interpretation quality to cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB). The significant indirect effects of experience (EP), exchange (EC), everyplace (EW), and heritage interpretation quality (DI) through PDI indicate that tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations of Chengde's heritage sites shape how marketing and interpretive inputs are translated into engagement. This supports the core

premise of image theory that tourists' behavior is influenced not only by objective characteristics of a destination but also by the mental representations and evaluative perceptions they form during the decision-making process (Beach & Mitchell, 1987).

The study further extends image theory by distinguishing perceived destination image from perceived conservation as two different but complementary psychological pathways. Perceived destination image reflects tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations of the destination, including their understanding of its historical and cultural attributes, aesthetic appreciation, and emotional attachment. Perceived conservation, by contrast, reflects tourists' judgments regarding the condition of heritage protection, the responsibility of site management, the authenticity of restoration practices, and the sustainability of heritage utilization. The first pathway explains how marketing and interpretation shape the perceived attractiveness and meaning of Chengde, whereas the second explains how these inputs shape confidence in heritage stewardship and responsible management. Their simultaneous inclusion provides a more complete account of how experiential and interpretive stimuli are transformed into cultural heritage visiting behavior.

The differential effect of evangelism (EG), which does not operate through PDI, highlights that image formation is more sensitive to direct engagement and interpretive experiences than to advocacy or social sharing behaviors. Its significant indirect effect through perceived conservation further indicates that advocacy may strengthen visiting behavior by reinforcing tourists' recognition of heritage protection and responsible management rather than by improving the general cognitive and affective image of the destination. This differentiated result confirms that perceived destination image and perceived conservation represent distinct psychological mechanisms rather than interchangeable forms of destination perception.

The quantitative results indicate that perceived destination image integrates multiple dimensions of perception, including aesthetic appreciation, historical and cultural understanding, and emotional resonance with the heritage environment. For instance, exchange and experience both show strong mediated effects via PDI, demonstrating that active participation and immersive experiences enhance the formation of a favorable cognitive and affective image, which in turn reinforces visiting behavior (Goeltom & Ahmad, 2024). Everyplace, representing omnichannel accessibility, also contributes

indirectly through PDI, suggesting that the ease of accessing information across platforms strengthens visitors' mental representation and evaluative judgment of the destination (Madhyamapurush, 2022).

Heritage interpretation quality further influences PDI, showing that clear, coherent, and meaningful interpretive content enhances both the cognitive understanding and emotional appreciation of the heritage site. This reinforces the theoretical assertion that destination image is shaped not only by direct experiences but also by informational and narrative cues that facilitate knowledge construction and emotional engagement (Wang & Yan, 2022). The findings demonstrate that PDI serves as a central mechanism through which marketing and interpretive strategies are translated into behavioral outcomes, highlighting the role of cognitive and affective representations in guiding tourists' engagement and decision-making processes. Together with perceived conservation, it forms a dual-pathway mechanism in which destination attractiveness and meaning operate alongside conservation responsibility and management evaluation to shape cultural heritage visiting behavior.

5.1.4 Implication to Source Credibility Theory

The findings provide insights for source credibility theory by demonstrating that tourists' perceptions of information reliability and trustworthiness significantly moderate the effects of the 4E marketing dimensions and heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visiting behavior (CHVB). Source credibility is therefore not conceptualized as a general antecedent that independently produces visiting behavior, but as an effectiveness multiplier that determines the strength with which marketing and interpretive inputs are converted into behavioral engagement. The moderation analysis indicates that high source credibility amplifies the influence of experience (EP), exchange (EC), everyplace (EW), evangelism (EG), and interpretive quality (DI) on CHVB, suggesting that the effectiveness of both marketing and interpretive strategies is contingent upon tourists' confidence in the accuracy, expertise, and reliability of the information provided.

In the case of experience, source credibility strengthens the translation of immersive and interactive engagement into active visitation, implying that even highly engaging activities are more effective when tourists trust the sources communicating information about the site (Madhyamapurush, 2022). Exchange is similarly affected, with co-creation and participatory engagement producing stronger behavioral outcomes under

conditions of high credibility, reinforcing the idea that tourists' perception of value and reciprocity is contingent on the trustworthiness of the interaction context (Kim et al., 2023).

For everyplace, credibility enhances the impact of multi-channel access and digital information on engagement, indicating that the availability of platforms alone is insufficient; tourists are more likely to act on information from sources they consider reliable (Kurhasku-Hoti & Rrustemi, 2025). Evangelism's effect is also magnified by source credibility, showing that advocacy and experience-sharing behaviors influence visiting behavior more strongly when the underlying information is trusted, suggesting that social influence and peer recommendations are effective only when supported by credible content (Cavadas & Moreira ,2025). Heritage interpretation quality exhibits similar patterns, with credibility enhancing the effect of clear and meaningful interpretive content on behavioral outcomes, reinforcing the importance of authority, expertise, and accuracy in shaping tourist responses (Weng et al., 2020).

These findings extend source credibility theory by demonstrating its moderating role within the context of heritage tourism, highlighting that trust in information sources interacts with experiential, interactive, and interpretive elements to influence engagement. Source credibility functions as a conditional strengthening mechanism because it determines whether experiential appeal, value co-creation, omnichannel information, visitor advocacy, and heritage interpretation are accepted as reliable foundations for behavioral decisions. Under conditions of high credibility, these inputs exert stronger effects on cultural heritage visiting behavior, whereas low credibility restricts their capacity to generate visitation, participation, revisitation, and recommendation. The study therefore extends source credibility theory from explaining information acceptance to explaining the conditions under which heritage marketing and interpretation become behaviorally effective.

5.2 Implication to Practitioners

5.2.1 Implications for Local Government

Local government can leverage the findings to enhance experiential and interpretive components of cultural heritage tourism. The direct effects of experience, exchange, everyplace, and heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visiting

behavior indicate that policies supporting immersive activities, interactive programs, and high-quality interpretive systems can significantly increase visitor engagement. Investments in guided tours, cultural exhibitions, and educational initiatives provide opportunities for tourists to actively participate and cognitively process heritage, reinforcing behavioral intentions and deepening their connection with the site.

The mediating role of perceived conservation highlights that government-led preservation and sustainable management practices directly influence tourists' engagement. When visitors perceive heritage sites as well-maintained, authentic, and carefully managed, their participation and revisit intention are strengthened. This underscores the importance of allocating resources to site maintenance, implementing transparent governance, and actively communicating conservation efforts to the public, ensuring that visitors recognize and value the efforts taken to protect and sustain cultural assets.

Source credibility emerges as a crucial factor in amplifying the effectiveness of marketing and interpretive initiatives. Official channels managed or endorsed by local government, such as tourism websites, social media accounts, and interpretive publications, provide authoritative, accurate, and consistent information that enhances tourists' trust. This trust not only strengthens the impact of experiential and interactive programs but also reinforces engagement resulting from advocacy or shared experiences, indicating that credible communication is essential for translating government policies and heritage initiatives into tangible behavioral outcomes.

5.2.2 Implications for Cultural Organizations

Cultural organizations can apply the study findings to design and implement programs that maximize tourist engagement with heritage sites. The strong direct effects of exchange and heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visiting behavior indicate that organizations should prioritize participatory and co-creative activities, such as workshops, hands-on demonstrations, and interactive exhibitions, which allow visitors to actively engage with cultural content. Enhancing interpretive materials to provide clear, informative, and emotionally resonant narratives supports cognitive and affective processing, enabling tourists to form deeper connections with the heritage experience.

The mediating role of perceived destination image and perceived conservation suggests that cultural organizations should integrate interpretive efforts with broader

strategies that reinforce site value and preservation. Programs that communicate the significance, history, and conservation status of heritage sites can elevate tourists' evaluative perceptions, thereby increasing their willingness to participate, revisit, and advocate for the destination. Incorporating digital and omnichannel platforms further allows organizations to extend interpretive content beyond the physical site, supporting visitor preparation, reflection, and sustained engagement.

The moderating effect of source credibility indicates that cultural organizations must ensure that all informational and promotional outputs are perceived as reliable and authoritative. Partnerships with recognized institutions, expert-led tours, and credible content dissemination through official channels enhance the impact of experiential and interpretive initiatives. By aligning participatory programs, high-quality interpretation, and trustworthy communication, cultural organizations can strengthen tourists' behavioral engagement and facilitate meaningful, long-term connections with heritage sites.

5.2.3 Implications for Tourism Enterprises

Tourism enterprises can utilize the findings to enhance service design, marketing strategies, and visitor engagement in cultural heritage tourism. The direct effects of the 4E marketing dimensions, particularly exchange and everyplace, indicate that enterprises should develop interactive and co-creative experiences that allow tourists to participate actively in heritage activities. Offering guided tours, experiential workshops, and hands-on cultural programs can increase engagement, while integrating multi-channel access through mobile apps, online booking platforms, and digital guides facilitates convenience and sustained interaction with the destination.

The mediation effects of perceived destination image and perceived conservation suggest that tourism enterprises should design services that not only provide enjoyable experiences but also reinforce tourists' perceptions of site quality, authenticity, and preservation. Highlighting sustainable practices, educational content, and the cultural significance of heritage sites in promotional materials and on-site interactions can strengthen cognitive and affective evaluations, translating marketing efforts into higher behavioral engagement and advocacy.

The moderating role of source credibility emphasizes that enterprises need to maintain trustworthiness in all communications. Reliable information delivered through official partnerships, expert endorsements, or verified digital platforms enhances the

effectiveness of experiential and interactive services. By ensuring accuracy, transparency, and consistency in the content and service delivery, tourism enterprises can amplify the influence of marketing and interpretive inputs on tourists' visiting behavior, promoting higher engagement, repeat visitation, and positive word-of-mouth.

5.3 Limitation of the Study and Implications of Future Research

5.3.1 Limitation of the Present Study

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First, the data were collected from tourists visiting Chengde's cultural heritage sites, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other geographic regions or types of heritage tourism. The cultural, historical, and infrastructural characteristics of Chengde may influence the relative importance of the 4E marketing dimensions, heritage interpretation quality, and perceptual mediators, making it necessary to exercise caution when applying the results to other destinations.

Second, the study relies on self-reported survey data, which may be subject to social desirability bias, recall bias, or respondent subjectivity, particularly regarding perceptions of conservation, source credibility, and engagement behavior. Although measurement validation and reliability analyses were conducted, these biases cannot be fully eliminated, potentially affecting the accuracy of reported relationships.

Third, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causal relationships. While the structural model and mediation analyses provide evidence of directional effects, longitudinal data would be necessary to capture changes in tourists' perceptions, evaluations, and behaviors over time, and to validate the stability of the identified pathways across repeated visits or seasonal variations.

Finally, while the study incorporates source credibility as a moderator and perceived destination image and perceived conservation as mediators, other potential factors, such as personal motivation, prior knowledge, social influence, or environmental context, were not included. The exclusion of these variables may limit the comprehensiveness of the model and the understanding of additional mechanisms influencing cultural heritage visiting behavior.

5.3.2 Implications for Future Research

Future research can address these limitations in several ways. Comparative studies across different heritage sites or regions could examine whether the relative influence of 4E marketing dimensions, heritage interpretation quality, and perceptual mediators varies by cultural, historical, or infrastructural contexts. Longitudinal designs could provide insights into how tourists' engagement evolves over multiple visits, how experience and interpretation influence long-term behavioral intention, and how the effects of source credibility and perceptual mediators change over time.

Further studies could expand the model by including additional psychological, social, or environmental variables, such as personal motivation, prior knowledge of heritage, peer influence, or on-site crowding, to capture a more holistic understanding of behavioral mechanisms. Experimental or quasi-experimental designs could also test the efficacy of specific interventions, such as enhanced interpretive programs, multi-channel accessibility improvements, or credibility-enhancing communication strategies, to determine their causal impact on engagement.

Finally, future research could investigate cross-cultural differences in response to 4E marketing and interpretive strategies, particularly in destinations that attract international tourists. Such studies would provide valuable insights for global heritage tourism management, helping to tailor marketing, interpretation, and communication strategies to diverse visitor profiles and cultural expectations.

5.4 Conclusion

The study integrates the 4E marketing model with heritage interpretation quality, perceived destination image, perceived conservation, and source credibility to comprehensively examine cultural heritage visiting behavior in Chengde. The results demonstrate that each of the 4E dimensions—experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism—directly influences tourist engagement, with exchange and heritage interpretation quality exhibiting the strongest effects on behavioral intention. Perceived destination image and perceived conservation function as mediators, revealing that cognitive evaluations of the destination and perceptions of effective conservation are key pathways translating marketing and interpretive stimuli into actual visiting behavior. The moderating role of source credibility further underscores the necessity of trustworthy

communication, as credible information amplifies the impact of all 4E dimensions and interpretation quality on tourists' decisions to visit, revisit, and recommend heritage sites.

Empirical evidence indicates that experience enhances sensory and immersive engagement, while exchange fosters interactive co-creation, highlighting the need for participatory and personalized heritage activities. Everyplace strengthens accessibility and exposure through omnichannel and digital platforms, facilitating information processing across pre-visit, on-site, and post-visit stages. Evangelism, while weaker in mediated pathways, still directly motivates visitation, suggesting that tourists' advocacy behaviors may operate independently of perceptual mechanisms such as destination image. Heritage interpretation quality consistently contributes to engagement, reflecting the critical role of narrative clarity, cultural meaning, and informational completeness in heritage contexts.

The findings provide actionable insights for multiple stakeholders. Local government can leverage these results to implement policies that integrate experiential programming, conservation transparency, and credible information dissemination. Cultural organizations can design interpretive and participatory programs that reinforce destination image and perceived conservation, while tourism enterprises can optimize service delivery, digital accessibility, and visitor interaction. Together, these mechanisms facilitate a coordinated ecosystem that strengthens tourist engagement, encourages repeat visitation, and promotes sustainable cultural tourism.

Overall, the study advances theoretical understanding by extending the 4E model into cultural heritage tourism, incorporating cognitive and evaluative mediators, and demonstrating the contextual significance of source credibility. It also provides a robust empirical foundation for designing evidence-based marketing and management strategies that enhance the experiential, informational, and trust-based dimensions of cultural heritage visitation.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire (English Version)

Appendix A. Questionnaire (English Version)



Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship

Of Rajamangala University of Technology, Rattanakosin

Introduction

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. It will take approximately 5–10 minutes to complete. This study explores how visitors' on-site experiences, information exposure, emotional connection, and interactive engagement at Chengde's cultural heritage sites shape their perceptions of the destination and, in turn, influence their willingness to visit, revisit, and promote these heritage locations. The findings will contribute to optimizing marketing strategies for small- and medium-sized heritage destinations, enhancing the quality of heritage interpretation, and encouraging sustainable visitation behavior. All responses are collected anonymously, used for academic purposes only, and will be kept strictly confidential. Please respond truthfully based on your actual experience.

The questionnaire is divided into seven parts, each section are as follows:

Part I: Basic Information Statistics

Part II: Experience

Part III: Exchange

Part IV: Everyplace

Part V: Evangelism

Part VI: Heritage interpretation quality

Part VII: Perceived destination image

Part IX: Perceived conservation

Part X: Source credibility

Part XI Cultural heritage visiting behavior

The instruction of the questionnaire:

Instruction: Please check ☐ in the ✓ and fill form all data with your information truly.

Screening Question (This questionnaire is designed for tourists who have visited Chengde to experience its cultural heritage tourism.):

Have you ever visited Chengde?

☐ Yes → Please continue with the questionnaire.

☐ No → Thank you for your interest.

Section 1: Basic Information Statistics

1. Age:

☐ 18–25 ☐ 26–35

☐ 36–45 ☐ 46-55

☐ Above 55

2. Gender:

☐ Male

☐ Female

3. Education:

☐ Below bachelor ☐ Bachelor

☐ Master ☐ Higher than Master

4. Monthly personal income

☐ Below RMB3,000 ☐ RMB3,000–6,000

☐ RMB6,001–9,000 ☐ RMB9,001–12,000

☐ Above RMB12,000

5. When was your most recent visit to Chengde?

☐ Within the past month ☐ 1–3 months ago

☐ 3–6 months ago ☐ 6–12 months ago

☐ Over 12 months ago

6. Where did you visit in Chengde? (Multiple choices allowed)

☐ Mountain Resort (Bishu Shanzhuang) ☐ Eight Outer Temples

☐ Chengde Museum or Confucian Temple ☐ Nearby ethnic villages / ancient towns

☐ Other (please specify: _____)

7. Through which channels did you obtain travel information about Chengde? (Multiple choices allowed)

☐ Social media platforms (e.g., WeChat Official Accounts, Xiaohongshu, Douyin)

☐ Government or official tourism websites

☐ Online Travel Agencies (e.g., Ctrip, Mafengwo, Qunar)

☐ Friends' recommendations or personal experience sharing

☐ Offline promotions (e.g., posters, brochures)

☐ Other (please specify: _____)

8. What were your main motivations for traveling to Chengde? (Multiple choices allowed)

☐ Appreciating historical and cultural heritage

☐ Enjoying nature and relaxation

☐ Learning about religion or ethnic culture

☐ Family time or parent-child travel

☐ Photography or content creation

☐ Other (please specify: _____)

9. Who did accompany you to visit Chengde?

☐ Alone ☐ With family

☐ With friends ☐ With a tour group

☐ Other (please specify: _____)

Part 2 Experience

(Please draw a ✓ 1-5 below the score that suits you to indicate 'strongly disagree strongly agree')

Items	1	2	3	4	5
EP 1.I seek diverse and unique experiences at cultural heritage sites to enhance my interest in the destination.					
EP 2.I desire to deeply understand the historical background and cultural essence of the destination.					
EP 3. Visiting this cultural heritage site provided me with a novel and immersive experience.					
EP 4. The architectural and spatial design of cultural venues strongly conveyed a sense of local culture.					
EP 5. Guided tours and interpretative content enriched my understanding of the cultural elements.					
EP 6. Local food, handicrafts, and festivals enhanced my sense of cultural participation.					
EP 7. The professionalism and attitude of staff improved my overall impression of the destination.					
EP 8. I engaged in cultural performances, rituals, or interactive activities that strengthened my emotional connection and sense of belonging.					

Part 3 Exchange

(Please draw a ✓ 1-5 below the score that suits you to indicate 'strongly disagree strongly agree')

Items	1	2	3	4	5
EC1. The tourism services provided at cultural heritage sites in Chengde offer good value for the money spent.					
EC2. My experience at cultural heritage sites in Chengde is worth the overall effort and planning.					
EC3. The time I invested in visiting Chengde's heritage attractions was meaningfully spent.					
EC4. The storytelling at Chengde's cultural sites (e.g., through guided tours, signage, exhibitions) was engaging and informative.					
EC5. Heritage sites that offered live demonstrations (e.g., traditional crafts, rituals, performances) enhanced my visit and were worth attending.					
EC6. I value heritage sites in Chengde that incorporate sustainable practices, such as promoting local culture and environmental conservation.					
EC7. Chengde's heritage sites provided adequate space for leisure, reflection, and quiet cultural engagement.					
EC8. The accessibility and convenience of heritage sites—such as proximity to accommodation and the availability of public facilities—contributed to my overall satisfaction.					
EC9. The cultural sites in Chengde offered a meaningful variety of local cultural products or souvenirs that enriched my travel experience.					

Part 4 Everyplace

(Please draw a ✓ 1-5 below the score that suits you to indicate 'strongly disagree strongly agree')

Items	1	2	3	4	5
EW1. It is easy to contact the cultural heritage site through online or offline channels.					
EW2. Traveling to the cultural heritage site is convenient and well-supported by digital navigation tools.					
EW3. I often see the destination being promoted through major social media platforms (e.g., WeChat, Weibo, Douyin).					
EW4. Online maps and mobile apps (e.g., Baidu Maps, Amap) make it easy to search for and navigate to the site.					
EW5. The destination offers multiple digital communication channels (e.g., official website, social media, customer service hotlines).					
EW6. The heritage site is promoted through a variety of digital media and PR channels, enhancing its visibility.					
EW7. The site provides digital tour guides or virtual experiences through accessible platforms.					
EW8. Online booking and ticketing systems for the site are fast, reliable, and user-friendly.					
EW9. The destination supports various payment options, including digital and mobile payment methods.					
EW10. The destination has effective online and offline customer service systems to address tourist inquiries and problems promptly.					

Part 5 Evangelism

(Please draw a ✓ 1-5 below the score that suits you to indicate 'strongly disagree strongly agree')

Items	1	2	3	4	5
EG1.This cultural heritage destination impressed me and left a strong emotional impact.					
EG2. I feel the need to share my cultural heritage tourism experience with others.					
EG3. Visiting this cultural site fostered a strong sense of connection with the local cultural community.					
EG4. I participated in hands-on cultural activities (e.g., local workshops, traditional crafts) that deepened my engagement with the site.					
EG5. I am willing to follow or subscribe to the destination's promotional programs (e.g., social media, memberships, or loyalty campaigns).					
EG6. I actively promote this heritage destination by sharing travel routes, cultural information, or planning tips with others.					

Part 6 Heritage interpretation quality

(Please draw a ✓ 1-5 below the score that suits you to indicate 'strongly disagree strongly agree')

Items	1	2	3	4	5
DI1.The digital and multimedia guides (e.g., AR apps, audio devices) helped me clearly understand the historical and cultural significance of Chengde's heritage sites.					
DI2.Directional signs, informational panels, and route markers were clearly visible and logically placed throughout the temple and landscape complex.					
DI3. Staff members at the visitor centers explained cultural content with patience and answered questions in an easy-to-understand way.					

Items	1	2	3	4	5
DI4. The interpretation content (e.g., exhibits, tours, live shows) covered diverse aspects of Chengde's history, religion, and ethnic cultures.					
DI5.The on-site staff proactively explained the deeper meanings of architectural designs, temple rituals, and cultural symbolism.					
DI6.The interpreters or guides communicated with respect and cultural sensitivity, enhancing my understanding of the heritage context.					
DI7. It was easy to find information about interpretation schedules, language options, and explanation services at the heritage sites.					
DI8. The interpretation services helped me gain meaningful insights into Chengde's world heritage value, which enhanced my interest and satisfaction.					

Part 7 Perceived destination image

(Please draw a ✓ 1-5 below the score that suits you to indicate 'strongly disagree strongly agree')

Items	1	2	3	4	5
PDI1.I consider this destination's historical architecture and cultural landmarks to be impressive and memorable.					
PDI2.I find the local cuisine and traditional food experiences in this destination to be appealing.					
PDI3. The cultural and historical attractions of this destination enrich my understanding of its heritage.					
PDI4. I feel that the local residents are welcoming and enhance the overall tourism experience.					
PDI5.This destination offers diverse and culturally distinctive shopping opportunities.					

Items	1	2	3	4	5
PDI6.The destination provides adequate tourism infrastructure, including transport, signage, and public services.					
PDI7. The quality and cultural ambiance of accommodations meet my expectations.					
PDI8. Restaurants and dining venues here provide satisfying services and reflect local cultural elements.					

Part 8 Perceived conservation

(Please draw a ✓ 1-5 below the score that suits you to indicate 'strongly disagree strongly agree')

Items	1	2	3	4	5
PC1. The ticket price of Chengde's cultural heritage sites is reasonable considering the level of conservation.					
PC2. The historical characteristics of Chengde’s royal architecture and religious heritage have been well preserved.					
PC3. The decorative and structural details of ancient temples and palaces are maintained with high quality.					
PC4. There is clear and accessible information explaining the historical value and conservation efforts of the site.					
PC5. Before entering, visitors can observe signs of conservation efforts on the exterior heritage structures.					

Part 9 Source credibility

(Please draw a ✓ 1-5 below the score that suits you to indicate 'strongly disagree strongly agree')

Items	1	2	3	4	5
SC1. The information provided by trusted tourism platforms (e.g., government websites, official tourist boards) is generally regarded as reliable by the public.					

Items	1	2	3	4	5
SC2. This tourism information source consistently receives high ratings or positive reviews from other users.					
SC3. The source providing information about cultural destinations is widely regarded as trustworthy.					
SC4. Tourists believe the information provider demonstrates a high level of professional knowledge and expertise.					
SC5. The information source is considered reliable when it aligns with historical, cultural, and experiential accuracy.					

Part 10 Cultural heritage visiting behavior

(Please draw a ✓ 1-5 below the score that suits you to indicate 'strongly disagree strongly agree')

Items	1	2	3	4	5
CHVB1. I am willing to participate in activities related to Chengde's cultural heritage (such as guided tours, interpretive explanations, or exhibitions).					
CHVB2. When talking with others about my cultural heritage trip to Chengde, I express positive opinions.					
CHVB3. I would share positive impressions of Chengde's heritage sites through social media platforms.					
CHVB4.I would recommend Chengde's cultural heritage sites (such as the Mountain Resort and temple complexes) to my family and friends.					
CHVB5.I continue to follow new exhibitions, programs, or cultural events related to Chengde's cultural heritage.					
CHVB6.If given the opportunity, I would be willing to visit Chengde's cultural heritage sites again.					

Section XII: Open-Ended Questions

Q1: In your opinion, what aspects of Chengde's cultural heritage tourism promotion have been done well?

(Please specify which elements left a strong impression on you, such as promotional methods, service experience, cultural presentation, or supporting facilities.)

Q2: What areas do you think still need improvement in Chengde's cultural heritage tourism promotion?

(This may include communication channels, promotional content, tourist interaction, use of technology, etc.)

Q3: What additional promotional strategies do you suggest to attract more visitors to Chengde’s cultural heritage sites?

(For example, use of new media, immersive experiences, development of cultural IP, participatory tourist activities, etc.)

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire (Chinese Version)

Appendix B. Questionnaire (Chinese Version)

拉达那哥欣国际创意创业学院

拉加曼加拉理工大学拉达那科欣

参与者：

感谢您抽出宝贵时间参与本次问卷调查，填写时间约为5－10分钟。本研究旨在探讨游客在承德文化遗产旅游地的现场体验、信息接触、情感认同与互动参与等因素，如何影响其对目的地形象的认知，并进一步影响其参观、重游及推荐文化遗产地的行为意愿。本研究结果将有助于优化中小型文化遗产旅游城市的营销策略，提升文化解说服务质量，促进游客的可持续参观行为。所有调查数据匿名填写，仅用于学术研究目的，并将严格保密。请您根据真实旅游体验如实填写问卷。

问卷共分为八个部分：

第一部分：基础信息统计

第二部分：文化遗产体验

第三部分：互动与价值交换

第四部分：信息传播渠道

第五部分：情感认同与传播意愿

第六部分：遗产解释与叙事质量

第七部分：目的地形象感知

第八部分：遗产保护感知

第九部分：信息来源可信度

第十部分：文化遗产旅游行为

第十一部分：开放式问题

填写说明：请在对应选项上打上“√”，或者在相应位置填写信息。

筛选题（本问卷仅面向到访过承德的游客）：

您曾来过承德吗？

☐ 是 → 请继续填写问卷。

☐ 否 → 感谢您的参与。

第一部分：基础信息统计

1.年龄:

☐ 18-25 岁　　☐ 26-35 岁

☐ 36-45 岁　　☐ 46-55 岁

☐ 55 岁以上

2.性别:

☐ 男

☐ 女

3.教育程度：

☐ 本科以下　　☐ 本科

☐ 硕士　　☐ 硕士以上

4. 个人月收入：

☐ 3000 元以下　　☐ 3000 - 6000 元

☐ 6000 - 9000 元　　☐ 9000 - 12000 元

☐ 120000 元以上

5. 您最近一次来承德旅游是什么时候？

☐ 最近 1 个月内　　☐ 1 - 3 个月前

☐ 3 - 6 个月前　　☐ 6 - 12 个月前

☐ 超过 12 个月前

6. 您在承德的主要旅游目的地包括（可多选）：

☐ 避暑山庄　　☐ 外八庙

☐ 承德博物馆或文庙　　☐ 周边民族村 / 古镇

☐ 其他（请注明：_____）

7. 您通过哪些渠道获取了承德旅游信息？（可多选）

☐ 微信公众号 / 小红书 / 抖音等社交媒体　　☐ 政府或官方旅游网站

☐ OTA 平台（如携程、马蜂窝、去哪儿等）　　☐ 朋友推荐或亲身经历分享

☐ 线下宣传（如海报、导览册）

8. 您此次在承德旅游的主要动机是？（可多选）

☐ 欣赏历史文化遗产　　☐ 亲近自然、休闲放松

☐ 学习宗教或民族文化　　☐ 家庭陪伴与亲子出游

☐ 拍照打卡 / 内容创作

9. 您此次承德旅游是与谁同行？

☐ 独自一人　　☐ 家人

☐ 朋友　　☐ 旅行团

第二部分 体验

（请在下方 1－5 分的选项中打 √ 表示您的认同程度：1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）

Items	1	2	3	4	5
EP1. 我希望在文化遗产地获得多样且独特的体验，以提升对目的地的兴趣。					
EP2. 我渴望深入了解目的地的历史背景和文化内涵。					
EP3. 参观这个文化遗产地给我带来了新颖且沉浸式的体验。					
EP4. 文化场所的建筑和空间设计强烈传达了当地文化氛围。					
EP5. 讲解服务和解说内容丰富了我对文化元素的理解。					
EP6. 当地美食、手工艺品和节庆活动增强了我对文化的参与感。					
EP7. 工作人员的专业程度和服务态度提升了我对目的地的整体印象。					
EP8. 我参与了文化演出、仪式或互动活动，增强了情感联结和归属感。					

第三部分 互动与价值交换

（请在下方 1－5 分的选项中打 √ 表示您的认同程度：1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）

Items	1	2	3	4	5
EC1. 承德文化遗产地的旅游服务物有所值。					
EC2. 我在承德文化遗产地的体验值得我所投入的时间和精力。					
EC3. 我在承德文化遗产地花费的时间具有重要意义。					
EC4. 承德文化景点的讲解（如导游解说、标识牌、展览）生动且有信息量。					
EC5. 提供现场展示的遗产地（如手工艺、仪式、表演）提升了我的参观价值。					

Items	1	2	3	4	5
EC6. 我重视那些推崇可持续发展的文化遗产地，如推广本地文化和环境保护的景点。					
EC7. 承德的遗产地为休闲、沉思和安静的文化体验提供了足够空间。					
EC8. 遗产地的可达性和便利设施（如住宿距离、公共设施）提高了我的满意度。					
EC9. 承德文化景点提供丰富的本地文化产品或纪念品，丰富了我的旅行体验。					

第四部分 信息传播渠道

（请在下方 1 - 5 分的选项中打 √ 表示您的认同程度：1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）

Items	1	2	3	4	5
EW1. 通过线上或线下渠道联系文化遗产地十分便捷。					
EW2. 前往文化遗产地的交通便利，数字导航工具也提供了良好支持。					
EW3. 我经常在主流社交媒体平台（如微信、微博、抖音）上看到该目的地的推广信息。					
EW4. 在线地图与移动应用程序（如百度地图、高德地图）使我能够轻松搜索并导航至该遗产地。					
EW5. 该目的地提供多种数字沟通渠道（如官方网站、社交媒体、客服热线）。					
EW6. 该遗产地通过多种数字媒体与公共传播渠道进行推广，增强了其可见度。					
EW7. 该遗产地通过易于访问的平台提供数字导览或虚拟体验。					
EW8. 该遗产地的在线预订与购票系统快速、可靠且用户友好。					

Items	1	2	3	4	5
EW9. 目的地支持多种支付方式，包括移动支付。					
EW10. 该目的地设有高效的线上和线下客服系统，能及时解决游客问题。					

第五部分 情感认同与传播意愿

（请在下方 1－5 分的选项中打 √ 表示您的认同程度：1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）

Items	1	2	3	4	5
EG1. 这个文化遗产地给我留下了深刻印象，并产生了强烈的情感共鸣。					
EG2. 我愿意与他人分享我的文化遗产旅游经历。					
EG3. 参观这一文化遗产地增强了我与地方文化的联系感。					
EG4. 我参与了实践性的文化活动（如本地工坊、传统手工艺），加深了我与该遗产地的联系。					
EG5. 我愿意关注或订阅该目的地的推广项目（如社交媒体、会员计划、忠诚计划）。					
EG6. 我通过分享旅行路线、文化信息或规划建议，积极推广该文化遗产地。					

第六部分 遗产解释与叙事质量

（请在下方 1－5 分的选项中打 √ 表示您的认同程度：1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）

Items	1	2	3	4	5
DI1. 遗产地的数字与多媒体导览工具（如 AR 应用、语音设备）帮助我清晰理解了承德文化遗产的历史与文化意义。。					

Items	1	2	3	4	5
DI2. 寺庙与山庄景区内的方向指示、信息牌和路线标识清晰可见且布局合理。					
DI3. 游客中心的工作人员耐心地讲解文化内容，并以通俗易懂的方式回答问题。					
DI4. 解说内容（如展览、讲解、实景演出）涵盖了承德历史、宗教与多民族文化的多个方面。					
DI5.现场工作人员主动解释建筑设计、寺庙仪式和文化符号背后的深层含义。					
DI6.解说员或导游以尊重和文化敏感的方式交流，增强了我对遗产背景的理解。					
DI7.在遗产地可以方便地获取解说时间安排、语言选项和讲解服务的信息。					
DI8.解说服务帮助我深入了解了承德作为世界遗产的价值，提升了我的兴趣与满意度。					

第七部分 目的地形象感知

（请在下方 1－5 分的选项中打 √ 表示您的认同程度：1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）

Items	1	2	3	4	5
PDI1. 我认为该目的地的历史建筑与文化地标令人印象深刻、值得回忆。					
PDI2. 我觉得该目的地的本地美食与传统饮食体验具有吸引力。					
PDI3. 该目的地的文化与历史景点丰富了我对其文化遗产的理解					
PDI4. 我感受到当地居民的友善态度，这提升了我的整体旅游体验。					

Items	1	2	3	4	5
PDI5.该目的地提供了多样化且具有文化特色的购物选择。					
PDI6.该目的地具备完善的旅游基础设施，包括交通、标识与公共服务。					
PDI7.该地的住宿质量及其文化氛围符合我的预期。					
PDI8.这里的餐饮场所服务满意，且体现了本地文化特色。					

第八部分 遗产保护感知

（请在下方 1－5 分的选项中打 √ 表示您的认同程度：1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）

Items	1	2	3	4	5
PC1. 相对于保护水平而言，承德文化遗产景区的门票价格是合理的。					
PC2. 承德皇家建筑与宗教遗产的历史特征得到了良好保留。					
PC3. 古代寺庙与宫殿的装饰与结构细节维护质量较高。。					
PC4. 有清晰、易获取的信息解释遗产地的历史价值与保护努力。					
PC5. 在进入景区之前，游客可以观察到遗产外部建筑的保护迹象。					

第九部分 信息来源可信度

（请在下方 1－5 分的选项中打 √ 表示您的认同程度：1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）

Items	1	2	3	4	5
SC1. 权威旅游平台（如政府网站、官方旅游局）所提供的信息普遍被公众认为是可靠的。					
SC2. 此旅游信息来源持续获得其他用户的高度评价或积极反馈。					
SC3. 提供文化目的地信息的来源被广泛视为可信赖的。					

Items	1	2	3	4	5
SC4. 游客认为该信息提供者具有较高的专业知识水平与权威性。					
SC5. 当信息内容符合历史、文化与体验的真实性时，该信息来源被视为可靠。					

第十部分 文化遗产旅游行为

（请在下方 1－5 分的选项中打 √ 表示您的认同程度：1=非常不同意，5=非常同意）

Items	1	2	3	4	5
CHVB1. 我愿意参与有关承德文化遗产的相关活动（如导览、解说、展示等活动）。					
CHVB2. 当与他人谈起我的承德文化遗产之旅时，我会表达正面的看法。					
CHVB3. 我愿意通过社交媒体分享对承德文化遗产景点的积极印象。					
CHVB4. 我会向家人朋友推荐承德的文化遗产景点（如避暑山庄和寺庙群）。					
CHVB5. 我会持续关注与承德文化遗产相关的新展览、新节目或文化活动。					
CHVB6. 如果有机会，我愿意再次参观访问承德文化遗产景点。					

第十一部分 开放式问题

Q1：您认为承德在文化遗产旅游推广方面有哪些做得好的地方？请具体说明哪些方面给您留下了深刻印象。

（如宣传方式、服务体验、文化呈现、设施配套等）

Q2：您认为承德在文化遗产旅游的宣传推广中还有哪些需要改进的地方？

（如信息渠道、传播内容、游客互动、技术手段等方面）

Q3：为了吸引更多游客来承德进行文化遗产旅游，您认为还可以采取哪些有效的宣传推广措施？

（如新媒体应用、沉浸式体验、文化 IP 打造、游客参与活动等）

APPENDIX C

Publication of Journal during Ph.D. Study

APPENDIX C. Publication of Journal during Ph.D. Study

heritage

MDPI

Article

Heritage Communication, Perceived Conservation, and Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior Among Chinese Tourists: Evidence from Chengde, China

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Abstract

Chengde, China, is famous for its Qing Dynasty imperial gardens, which are a World Heritage Site. In recent years, it has received increasing attention from heritage research scholars. From a tourism perspective, tourists' visits are important for supporting economic benefits, heritage conservation, and sustainable development. This study integrated the four dimensions of the 4E heritage communication framework—experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism—with heritage interpretation quality to develop a model to uncover cultural heritage visiting behavior. Based on the survey data of 887 Chinese tourists who have visited Chengde's cultural heritage sites, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed. The results showed that experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism, together with heritage interpretation quality, were all positively associated with cultural heritage visiting behavior. Perceived destination image and perceived conservation both significantly predicted cultural heritage visiting behavior and served as significant mediators in most of the proposed indirect relationships; however, the indirect path of evangelism through perceived destination image was not supported. Source credibility strengthened the relationships between the five antecedents and cultural heritage visiting behavior. Therefore, this article encourages the development of high-quality, comprehensive marketing strategies to attract more people to learn about World Cultural Heritage, while simultaneously improving guided tour services and their quality. It also emphasizes building a more positive cultural tourism image and conducting precise public relations to ensure that World Cultural Heritage receives support and attention from governments, educational institutions, and travel agencies.

Keywords: 4E framework; heritage interpretation quality; perceived destination image; source credibility; visitor engagement; World Heritage tourism

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1. Introduction

Cultural heritage tourism is now one of the driving forces for the development of a place, contributing to economic growth and preserving the culture of this area. It is also in line with the development of sustainable tourism, and heritage sites are expected to balance increased visitor numbers, community benefits, cultural continuity, and long-term preservation of cultural resources [1]. General leisure tourism typically emphasizes relaxation and recreational activities. Heritage tourism, on the other hand, is driven by the desire to learn about and experience historical, cultural and symbolic places [2]. Therefore,

it is more strongly influenced by the sense of authenticity, historical significance and other meanings. Many tourists are interested in visiting places with cultural and natural resources for sightseeing and learning about history. Therefore, heritage visitation behavior should not be seen solely as a reaction to physical sites but also as a response to experience design and construction of communicative meaning [3].

As heritage sites have been progressively more experience-oriented and digitally connected, the form of communication for heritage sites has begun to deviate from traditional product-based promotion [4].

In this study, heritage communication refers to the managed and visitor-generated processes through which a heritage site conveys its historical meanings, cultural values, conservation rationale, and opportunities for participation across on-site and digital channels. It is broader than heritage interpretation, which focuses specifically on facilitating understanding and meaning-making, and it differs from destination marketing, whose primary purpose is to position and promote a destination. The four 4E dimensions are therefore used to operationalize visitor-facing communication cues, while heritage interpretation quality is modeled separately as a heritage-specific educational and interpretive stimulus [5].

The 4E marketing framework shifts attention from product-centered marketing toward four visitor-oriented dimensions: experience, exchange, everywhere, and evangelism. Recent tourism research has applied these dimensions to explain how experiential value, accessibility across physical and digital channels, value exchange, and visitor advocacy shape tourism-related evaluations and behavioral responses [6,7]. In the context of heritage, the above attributes can be considered "heritage communication cues" because they influence how visitors perceive the meaning of culture, assess the value of their participation in heritage activities, access interpretations through multiple channels, and share their experiences with others. This interpretation is consistent with the principles of heritage interpretation and presentation outlined by ICOMOS [5]. Although many studies on the image of a heritage site, visitors' experiences, the quality of interpretation and perception of preservation efforts have been conducted, these factors have often been studied in isolation rather than as an integrated way of conveying heritage resources to promote behavioral responses among tourists [8,9], as well as with Huadong's [10] emphasis on the changing role of World Heritage sites in society.

Despite these developments, an important research gap remains. Although previous studies have investigated destination images, interpretation quality and visitor experiences in cultural heritage tourism, little has been done to study how heritage communication mechanisms simultaneously affect conservation awareness and behavior in relation to heritage. Although it has been widely acknowledged that all three should be taken into account for the long-term stability of heritage protection, most prior research has studied heritage visitation and heritage conservation separately [11–14]. There is little research on whether the visitors' conservation consciousness serves as a psychological link for the propagation of heritage communication and interpretation quality to influence behavior. This study addresses this gap by recognizing that visitors evaluate not only destination appeal and service quality but also authenticity, stewardship, conservation visibility, and management legitimacy.

Chengde is a suitable case study area for this problem because it is a major tourist city and a World Heritage site. In 1994, Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples in Chengde were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. The compound has the properties of an imperial garden, palace buildings, temples, ethnic communities and Qing Dynasty political history. These resources have strong heritage values for Chengde, but how these values are conveyed to the public in their experience, understanding, access, trust and perception

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of heritage resource conservation will determine their actual impact. Chengde is thus a suitable case study to investigate the joint effect of heritage communication, quality of interpretation, destination image construction and perceived conservation on the visiting behavior of cultural heritage sites.

From a management perspective, Chengde faces the practical task of balancing visitor access and tourism use with the long-term preservation of its Outstanding Universal Value [15]. This task also requires restoration measures, access restrictions, visitor-flow arrangements, and responsible visitor conduct to be explained in ways that visitors can understand and accept [16]. As heritage information is increasingly delivered through guides, signage, official websites, social media, and digital interpretation, consistency across on-site and online communication channels has become important [4]. These management needs motivate the present study to examine how heritage communication and interpretation are associated with destination image, perceived conservation, and heritage-related visiting behavior.

Considering the above circumstances, perceived destination image has continuously been regarded as one of the main paths through which destination-related stimuli affect tourists' behavior. Destination images are the general impressions that tourists have of a place in terms of appeal, distinctiveness, cultural significance and emotional impact [17]. A good destination image has been identified as enhancing the desire to visit, the wish to return and recommend, etc., in tourism. The creation of images in heritage tourism should turn cultural resources into meaningful and attractive heritage experiences for tourists before they arrive or participate in them [8]. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the four dimensions of the 4E framework will influence cultural heritage tourists' behavior to some extent via a positive destination image.

Destination image alone may be insufficient to explain behavior in a heritage setting. Visitors to cultural heritage sites are generally interested in whether they are enjoyable and attractive; at the same time, they also wish to see responsible and sustainable preservation efforts for the site [15]. In recent years, scholars of heritage tourism have increasingly paid attention to how tourism development and heritage preservation can be achieved simultaneously, rather than independently [18]. When tourists believe that a heritage site is well-preserved, authentic and culturally respected, they will be more willing to visit because they feel that this place has a rich history, is legitimate and worth supporting [19]. Therefore, perceived conservation should be considered a significant mediator of the link between destination communication and cultural heritage visit behavior.

Another important antecedent is heritage interpretation quality. Different from most other kinds of tourism, heritage sites need to rely on interpretation systems to transmit the history and culture of inheritance as well as on education [20]. Interpretation is not simply the delivery of facts; rather, it is the construction of understanding, emotions and judgments that visitors form about a place through that delivery. High-quality interpretation will help the audience enjoy their trip more and thus feel a sense of satisfaction with the heritage site [21].

A third relevant factor is source credibility. In the present day, potential tourists are exposed to tourism information through official agencies, heritage managers, travel platforms, influencers and other tourists in the media. Shang and Luo have found in their tourism communication study that source credibility affects trust, destination image and behavioral intentions [22]. This mechanism is particularly relevant because visitors are more interested in the authenticity and legitimacy of heritage tourism. Therefore, it can be expected that source credibility will strengthen the effect of experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism and heritage interpretation on cultural heritage visiting behavior.

Taken together, Chengde offers a representative empirical case because it has World Heritage Site status, imperial architecture and religious heritage, multi-ethnic cultural memory, and the practical problem of balancing visitor experience with the protection of heritage. Accordingly, this study pursues the following research objectives:

1. To examine how the four dimensions of the 4E heritage communication framework (experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism) and heritage interpretation quality influence cultural heritage visiting behavior, both directly and indirectly through perceived destination image and perceived conservation.
2. To test the moderating role of source credibility in shaping the relationships between the 4E dimensions, heritage interpretation quality, and cultural heritage visiting behavior.
3. To generate evidence-based recommendations for heritage management by translating the empirical findings into practical strategies for strengthening heritage interpretation, conservation awareness, credible communication, and public engagement with cultural heritage.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Heritage Communication and Conservation Perspective Within the S-O-R Framework

2.1.1. S-O-R Framework in Heritage Tourism

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model is used to explain the causes of people's behavior in visiting cultural heritage sites in this paper. Based on the S-O-R model, people's internal states of thought and emotion are affected by external environmental factors; thus, they will respond differently [23]. This view is suitable for cultural heritage tourism because, in addition to the physical attractions of heritage resources, tourists also internalize destination experiences, communication messages and interpretation services to form behavioral responses. In this study, experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, and heritage interpretation quality are conceived as external stimuli; perceived destination image and perceived conservation are regarded as tourists' internal psychological evaluations; and cultural heritage visiting behavior is considered the behavioral response. Source credibility is introduced as a boundary condition, and the impact of destination-related stimuli will differ according to whether tourists consider the source of the information credible, reliable, knowledgeable, and accurate.

2.1.2. Heritage Communication and the 4E Framework

Under the S-O-R framework, the 4Es will be used to specify the main heritage communication stimuli in Chengde's cultural heritage environment. Within contemporary tourism marketing, the 4E framework shifts attention from product-centered marketing toward four visitor-oriented dimensions: experience, exchange, everywhere, and evangelism. Recent tourism research has operationalized these dimensions to explain how experiential value, value exchange, omnichannel accessibility, and visitor advocacy shape tourism-related evaluations and behavioral responses [6]. Rather than treating the 4E framework as an independent grand theory, the present study uses it to specify the visitor-facing communication stimuli embedded within the broader S–O–R process. This positioning is consistent with tourism research emphasizing the role of memorable experiences and destination evangelism in shaping post-visit advocacy [24], as well as heritage research demonstrating the importance of experiential marketing in transforming cultural attractions into meaningful visitor experiences [25]. traditional 4P framework for explaining visitor-oriented tourism experiences. The framework in this paper is not to be used solely for marketing; rather, it is redefined as a system to explore how tourists experience heritage, what value they give to participation in heritage, how they access various channels for heritage information, and

how they spread the meaning of heritage through recommendations and advocacy. Thus, the four dimensions of the model are experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism.

Experience in the 4E heritage communication model refers to the immersive, emotional and participatory attributes of a heritage visit. Exchange is visitors' evaluation of whether the participation in the heritage project is worth the time and money spent, the effort invested, the knowledge gained, and the cultural value received. Everyplace captures the accessibility of heritage information, interpretation, and services across digital and non-digital channels. Evangelism refers to the willingness of visitors to share, recommend and advocate for a heritage site based on their emotional attachment and positive experiences. The four dimensions are closely related to the current participation of the heritage, and visitor responses are affected by experiential meaning, perceived value, communication accessibility, and visitor-generated dissemination.

The 4E framework was selected because it provides a visitor-centered and parsimonious specification of four observable heritage communication touchpoints: experiential engagement, perceived value exchange, omnichannel accessibility, and visitor advocacy [6]. Experience Economy theory explains the experiential value of heritage encounters but does not simultaneously capture exchange, accessibility, and advocacy [26]. TAM and UTAUT are primarily designed to explain the adoption of a particular technology, whereas the present study examines a broader heritage communication environment rather than technology acceptance. Value co-creation and Service-Dominant Logic provide broader relational or service-ecosystem perspectives, but they do not offer the same directly measurable set of visitor-facing communication cues. Accordingly, the 4E framework specifies the content of the external stimuli within the S-O-R process rather than replacing the S-O-R model.

2.1.3. Heritage Interpretation, Perceived Conservation, and Heritage Engagement

The quality of heritage interpretation has been added as another type of stimulus, and cultural heritage sites require interpretation to pass on their historical connotations, cultural symbols, values for preservation, and other significant sites. Uzzell [27] was the first to put forward the idea that the purpose of classical interpretation theory should be to evoke understanding rather than to merely present facts, and later studies have shown that a good interpretation can make visitors more conscious, stimulate emotions, and thus inspire their behavior [28]. Cultural heritage spaces have varied interpretations according to the emotions visitors feel and their sense of identity or meaning they attach to the place [12]. Good interpretations can thus make difficult historical and cultural resources easy to access and interesting for tourists, help change their ideas about a place, and motivate them to have other behaviors [29,30].

Perceived conservation is included as a heritage-specific organism component of the model. The management system of World Heritage Sites now plans to coordinate conservation and display of cultural heritage, improve public interaction, etc. [5,10]. Recently, some empirical studies have also found that heritage interpretation messages can inspire a sense of conservation and pro-environmental behavior among the public, and that their experiences at World Heritage Sites are positively correlated with an intention to support the protection of these sites [16,31]. This supports the present study's claim that perceived conservation is not merely a management result but also a psychological mechanism for visitors that affects their behavior in relation to heritage through communication and interpretation.

The theory of the experience economy is also used to provide an additional theoretical basis for the experiential logic of the stimulus dimension. Poulsson and Kale [26] argue that the value produced is now more closely related to memorable and immersive experiences rather than functional products. The above reasons explain why the experience dimension

is given more weight in the explanation of cultural heritage tourism: Visitors evaluate heritage sites according to their personal participation in, emotions felt during, stories narrated about, and a sense of meaning derived from the visit. Therefore, the theory of the experience economy provides support for explaining how experiential stimuli may motivate tourists' internal evaluations and behavioral responses in line with the S-O-R model.

Perceived destination image and perceived conservation are the organism components of the model. Perceived destination image refers to visitors' overall attribute-based evaluation of Chengde as a cultural heritage destination [32]. The present study focuses exclusively on visitors' perceived destination image rather than the image deliberately projected by destination managers. The construct includes visitors' evaluations of heritage attractions, cultural distinctiveness, local hospitality, tourism infrastructure, accommodation, and dining services. Consistent with the adopted measurement instrument, the eight items are modeled as a single reflective construct rather than as separate cognitive and affective dimensions. The study therefore does not measure an officially projected image or estimate a projected–perceived image gap. Perceived conservation refers to the tourists' subjective evaluations of how well the heritage resources in Chengde are conserved, managed responsibly, respected culturally, and protected visibly [33]. These two are psychological evaluations, not objective attributes of the destination, and they explain how external stimuli are internalized by tourists before being converted into behavior of visiting cultural heritage sites.

Heritage engagement extends the scope of response further from the idea of "visit intention". Research on museums and heritage sites has shown that visitors use heritage encounters to construct their sense of memory, identity, emotion and other contemporary social meanings [9]. Research on interpretation has shown that it can be more participatory and dialogue-oriented to increase the sense of belonging of tourists in heritage tours [34], and studies of community participation have also found that well-organized heritage tourism needs good cooperation among tourists, managers and local communities [11,13]. Therefore, in this study, cultural heritage visiting behavior will be referred to as self-reported heritage-related behavioral engagement rather than simply as a physical visit.

Cultural heritage visiting behavior is the response term in the model. In this study, cultural heritage visiting behavior is operationalized as self-reported heritage-related behavioral engagement rather than objectively tracked on-site behavior. It includes tourists' willingness to participate in heritage-related activities, engage with interpretation and exhibitions, express positive opinions, share heritage experiences, recommend Chengde's heritage sites to others, follow related cultural programs, and revisit cultural heritage attractions. According to this definition, cultural heritage tourism is about behavior, and tourists often exhibit various forms of behavior such as participation, recommendation, sharing, prolonged attention, and repeated visits, rather than a one-time trip.

In short, the S-O-R model offers a general psychological logic for the research model by explaining how external heritage communication and interpretation stimuli are turned into internal evaluations and then into behavior. The four E's are the main communication-related stimuli, and heritage interpretation quality adds a heritage-specific interpretive stimulus. Experience economy theory provides support for the experiential value logic of heritage tourism. Together, these theoretical foundations provide support for the study of how experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism and heritage interpretation quality affect cultural heritage visiting behavior via perceived destination image and perceived conservation, with source credibility acting as a boundary condition in the context of Chengde's cultural heritage.

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2.2. Hypotheses Development

Recently, all four E's of the 4E framework have been applied to tourism and communication studies because they explain how destinations have moved from product-oriented promotion to visitor-oriented value creation. In heritage tourism, this framework can be used to explain tourists' evaluation of their destination, participation, visit intention, revisit intention, recommendation behavior and destination loyalty by connecting external communication cues with tourists' experiential, value-based, accessibility-oriented and advocacy-oriented responses [35]. Experience in this paper refers to the tourists' all-encompassing, emotional and participatory involvement in the destination's activities and cultural environments [6,28]. Exchange is a tourist's judgment of whether the trip was worth the money, time, effort, service quality and cultural value they received during their visit [12,36]. Everyplace refers to the availability of heritage information and services both online and off-site, and evangelism refers to the desire of visitors to recommend, share and advocate for the destination.

The above factors are more likely to influence people's choices in cultural heritage tourism because, as Li et al. [37] have shown, factors such as the attractiveness of a place, the ability to have a good experience, its accessibility, social recommendation, and the depth of cultural understanding are all important. Immersive experiences at heritage sites have been associated with a greater sense of on-site participation and belonging among tourists, and a desire to engage in various ways with the heritage outside of traditional passive observation has also increased. Value-rich tourism exchanges have been associated with a stronger perception that the visit is worth it; therefore, they motivate people to participate in the activity and visit the cultural site repeatedly [38]. All channels can provide tourists with the same content; thus, they can be exposed to it regularly before, during and after their travel to the destination for reference when making decisions [39]. Visitor advocacy and emotionally driven peer recommendation have been linked to a stronger behavioral commitment because personally endorsed destinations are more likely to be revisited, recommended, and actively engaged with. Interpretive systems that can convey the meaning and stories of heritage clearly have also been shown to increase the participation rate in heritage activities and motivate people to explore these sites more thoroughly [40].

Although previous tourism research has indicated that experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism and the quality of heritage interpretation can influence tourist behavioral responses [41], these connections have not been systematically studied in conjunction with an integrated heritage communication and heritage interpretation system for Chengde's cultural heritage tourism area. This gap is particularly relevant in Chengde because its cultural heritage tourism depends not only on historical sites but also on the quality of tourists' experiences, evaluations, access, sharing behaviors, and knowledge. Therefore, the following hypotheses are put forward:

H1a. *Experience positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H1b. *Exchange positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H1c. *Everyplace positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H1d. *Evangelism positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H1e. *Heritage interpretation quality positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

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Perceived destination image refers to visitors' overall attribute-based evaluation of a destination, including its attractiveness, cultural distinctiveness, heritage attractions, local hospitality, tourism infrastructure, and supporting tourism services [42]. Destination images in cultural and heritage tourism are not only based on scenery and general tourism services, but also include historical memory, cultural symbols, a sense of authenticity, storytelling, and the interpretation of heritage meanings [43]. Earlier studies of cultural heritage destinations have indicated that destination image is one of the factors affecting tourists' satisfaction with their travel, their wish to visit and stay in the destination repeatedly, the promotion power of word-of-mouth, and their long-term loyalty to that place [44]. Chengde is a heritage city, so the destination image is relatively important; otherwise, the rich cultural resources here—such as imperial buildings, religious and cultural sites, and multi-ethnic history—would not be known by tourists and thus could not affect their behavior.

In terms of the 4E model, experience, exchange, everyplace and evangelism can all be considered core image-forming communication cues for heritage tourism. Experience can shape the perception of a place through accumulated experiential cues and is not limited to images based on physical features. Exchange will affect the destination's image as it changes people's perception of value and effort in exchange for cultural reward. Everyplace can enhance the image of a place by spreading information more widely, reducing uncertainty, and increasing people's familiarity with cultural heritage. Evangelism may affect the destination image by spreading good word-of-mouth and peer recommendations among visitors.

Although the previous studies have shown that 4E-related stimuli and the quality of heritage interpretation can influence the construction of perceived destination images, their joint effect in the context of cultural heritage tourism in Chengde has not been sufficiently explored. Addressing this gap is important because Chengde's World Heritage resources may not fully enhance its destination image without an integrated understanding of these factors. Therefore, the following hypotheses are put forward.

H2a. *Experience positively influences perceived destination image.*

H2b. *Exchange positively influences perceived destination image.*

H2c. *Everyplace positively influences perceived destination image.*

H2d. *Evangelism positively influences perceived destination image.*

H2e. *Heritage interpretation quality positively influences perceived destination image.*

Perceived conservation is a person's subjectively held view of how well a cultural heritage site is maintained, managed responsibly, respected in terms of culture, and protected visibly. Responsible preservation is often understood by visitors based on their experiences and sense-making during the heritage experience rather than from technical conservation reports [31]. Participatory and well-designed heritage experiences can help strengthen the sense of responsibility for protecting the sites among the public. Interpretation messages can also help visitors understand the cultural value of the heritage site better and inspire conservation-supportive behaviors [16,45]. Therefore, perceived conservation is expected to serve as a heritage-specific link connecting experience, communication accessibility, visitor advocacy and interpretation quality with cultural heritage-visiting behavior.

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H3a. *Experience positively influences perceived conservation.*

H3b. *Exchange positively influences perceived conservation.*

H3c. *Everyplace positively influences perceived conservation.*

H3d. *Evangelism positively influences perceived conservation.*

H3e. *Heritage interpretation quality positively influences perceived conservation.*

Perceived destination image serves as a foundation for tourists' behavior choices by indicating how attractive, unique, culturally rich, emotionally appealing, etc., a tourist views a place to visit [46]. A favorable image of a tourist spot in the field of cultural heritage tourism generally refers to its perception by tourists as culturally valuable and enjoyable; such a perception will increase the desire to visit. A destination image that presents cultural symbols and historical connotations may also make tourists feel more connected to the place emotionally, thus inspiring a greater willingness to participate in extended, non-visual experiences at the site [46]. Heritage destinations with coherent and favorable images have also been shown to attract the recommendation behavior and loyalty of culturally motivated visitors more effectively [47]. Cultural heritage visiting behavior in this study refers to tourists' willingness to engage in activities related to cultural heritage, express positive emotions, share their experiences at heritage sites, recommend these places to others, join heritage programs, and visit them again. In the Chengde area, such behavior includes participating in guided tours, learning about history and culture at exhibition sites and other venues such as the Mountain Resort and temple complex, expressing good experiences and recommending other heritage places in Chengde to friends, following cultural events, and visiting these sites again. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4. *Perceived destination image positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

Negative conservation-related judgments may reduce perceptions of authenticity and hinder visitors' support for a heritage site, whereas favorable conservation evaluations can strengthen perceptions of responsible management and legitimacy. Perceived conservation in cultural heritage tourism does not refer only to the visible preservation of physical sites; rather, it generally encompasses people's judgments about whether a place is being well-managed responsibly, whether its historical values will continue to be passed down, and whether tourism activities are compatible with the purpose of long-term heritage protection [47]. A stronger sense of security and a reliable management system have been linked to an increased respect for heritage and a greater willingness of the public to participate in support activities. When preservation efforts are visible, tourists are more likely to view the site as culturally authentic, well-managed responsibly, and institutionally legitimate; therefore, a stronger cognitive basis for supportive visiting behavior is established [48]. Sustainability-oriented governance cues are related to the perceived conservation because they help visitors understand that heritage use is being regulated, degradation risks are under control, and conservation responsibilities are being fulfilled; thus, there will be less concern about overexploitation and stronger behavior commitment. Interpretive communication that presents the reasons for conservation in an understandable way has also been shown to increase the trust and support of visitors for heritage sites [37]. Therefore, the following proposition can be tested.

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H5. *Perceived conservation positively influences cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

Destination image in the study of tourists' behavior often serves as a mediator, and tourists typically transform the destination's stimuli into behavior through their general assessment of the destination. Therefore, heritage communication, experiential cues, perceived value, social endorsement and interpretation quality may affect the visiting behavior of tourists by changing their perceptions and evaluations of Chengde as a cultural heritage site.

H6a. *Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between experience and cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H6b. *Perceived destination image mediates the path from exchange to cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H6c. *Perceived destination image mediates the path from everyplace to cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H6d. *Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between evangelism and cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H6e. *Perceived destination image mediates the relationship between quality of heritage interpretation and cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

Visitors learn about the quality of conservation from their experience and communication with heritage, as well as from governance mechanisms, rather than from preserved data. Immersive and respectful experiences can cultivate a stronger sense of respect for the inheritance by demonstrating its value in an easy-to-understand manner, thereby increasing people's own will to preserve it [49]. Exchange activities that help tourists experience local culture and are run fairly will encourage them to believe that the tourist site is committed to preserving and showcasing this culture for the future. When visitors repeatedly encounter messages about authenticity, stewardship, and sustainability across multiple communication touchpoints, they may develop more favorable evaluations of heritage conservation. Advocacy by visitors can also promote a sense of social norms for the positive conservation evaluation of the site through peer narratives [50]. Interpretation quality will likely activate this path because conservation value is frequently presented through stories, surroundings and management signals within the interpretive content [51]. As perceived conservation is related to a strong willingness to behave in a certain way, it is reasonable to assume that it serves as an intermediary mechanism connecting these causes to the act of visiting heritage sites. However, such conservation-based mediation has not been applied in the Chengde cultural heritage tourism area yet. Therefore, the following mediation hypotheses are proposed.

H7a. *Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between experience and cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H7b. *Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between exchange and cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H7c. *Perceived conservation mediates the path from everyplace to cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H7d. *Perceived conservation mediates the relationship between evangelism and cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

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H7e. *Perceived conservation mediates the effect of the quality of heritage interpretation on cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

Source credibility in this study refers to the tourists' perception that the information on Chengde's cultural and historical sites is accurate, trustworthy and provided by an official or expert entity. Credibility judgments refer to whether the promotional messages for a destination are deemed credible and thus likely to be effective in motivating tourism through the fostering of trust and a sense of identity [52]. Expert and trustworthy sources have been identified as effective ways to increase the impact of tourism information on destination trust and behavioral intention, as visitors are more likely to believe messages delivered by reliable communicators [53]. In the age of digital travel, the source credibility of users has also changed; thus, consumers now perceive the trustworthiness of information from both individuals and institutions differently [54]. Heritage settings make this mechanism especially prominent because experiential claims, value propositions, omnichannel communications, peer advocacy and interpretive narratives all need a certain degree of source legitimacy before they can effectively drive action. Cultural destinations that are used to create authoritative official accounts, professional and well-informed interpreters, trustworthy platforms, or convincing peer recommendations in their communication are more likely to motivate changes in behavior among their target audience. Although this conditional logic is theoretically sound, whether the strength of the source's credibility directly enhances the behavioral impact of the 4E dimensions and heritage interpretation quality has not been empirically observed in Chengde. Based on the above, the moderating hypotheses are as follows.

H8a. *Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between experience and cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H8b. *Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between exchange and cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H8c. *Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between everyplace and cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H8d. *Source credibility positively moderates the relationship between evangelism and cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

H8e. *Source credibility positively moderates the effect of heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visiting behavior.*

Based on the above theoretical discussion and hypothesis construction, this paper will construct an integrated empirical system to explore the reasons for people's travel behavior in Chengde. The four dimensions of the 4E heritage communication model and heritage interpretation quality are taken as antecedent variables in this framework, perceived destination image and perceived conservation are modeled as mediators, and source credibility is introduced as a moderator. The resulting structure contains the direct, mediating and moderating paths put forward in this paper, as shown in Figure 1.

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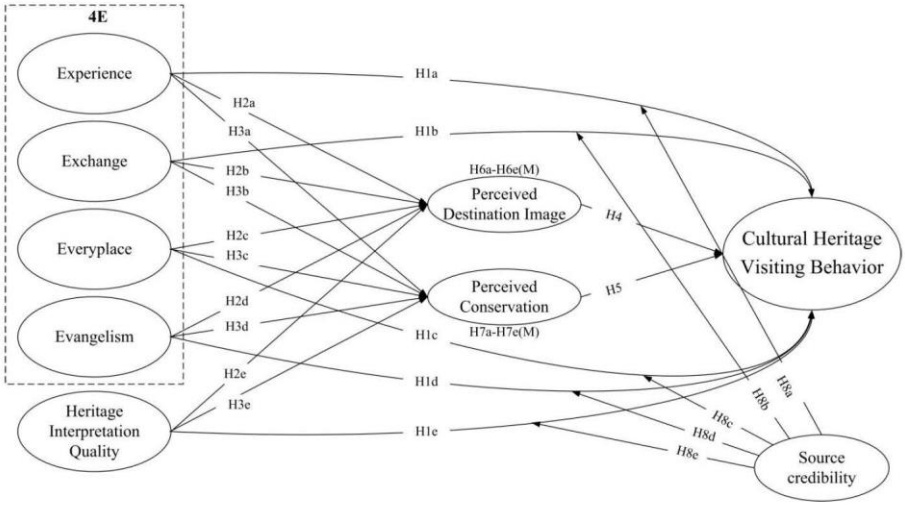

Figure 1. Empirical framework.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Site

Chengde has been selected as the research site because it is a well-known cultural heritage area in China and a typical example of a World Heritage site. Chengde is in the north of Hebei Province, and its Mountain Resort and Outlying Temples are well-known for being listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites in 1994. The site has imperial garden culture, palace architecture, religious buildings, ethnic interactions and the political history of the Qing Dynasty. Chengde's heritage resources are relatively rich and provide tourists with an all-encompassing leisure experience, such as scenic beauty, rich historical stories, architectural symbolism, religious connotations and multiple ethnic cultural memories, etc.

Chengde is a World Heritage Site and is the focus of this study. According to UNESCO, the Mountain Resort and the surrounding temples are now the largest complex of imperial palace-garden and temple sites in China to date, covering an area of 611.2 hectares. The construction of this complex mainly took place from 1703 to 1792, and it includes natural scenery, imperial garden design, palace buildings and temples that reflect the cultural exchange of the Han, Manchu, Mongolian and Tibetan peoples. Its Outstanding Universal Value lies not only in its architectural and landscape achievements but also in the material evidence of Qing dynasty governance, cultural exchange, religious practice and the formation of a multi-ethnic political order. Chengde is thus an ideal empirical site for studying the interpretation of heritage value by visitors and the impact of perceived conservation on heritage-related behavior.

The cultural heritage resources in Chengde offer an appropriate background for studying the visiting behavior of cultural heritage. Chengde has several well-known cultural and historical and natural and tourist attractions, such as the Mountain Resort, Puning Temple, temple compounds, royal residences, old city areas, etc. At the same time, how these resources are transformed into heritage engagement is also influenced by the tourists' own experiences at the destination, their sense of the value of a visit to the site, availability of heritage information, the sharing of travel experiences among tourists, understanding of the interpretation, and perception of conservation efforts. Chengde is therefore suitable for testing the integrated

effects of the 4E heritage communication framework, heritage interpretation quality, perceived destination image, perceived conservation and source credibility.

The representative heritage tourism sites in Chengde included the Mountain Resort and its Outlying Temples, Puning Temple, and Rehe Old Town for data collection in this study. The above places have been chosen because they are closely related to the history and culture of Chengde, and offer visitors a pleasant experience. They offer all kinds of environments for tourists to experience heritage interpretation services, digital and offline destination information, visible conservation practices, and culturally significant tourism activities. Therefore, Chengde can serve as a model case to study the conversion path of cultural heritage resources into tourist behavior.

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

A survey was conducted among Chinese domestic tourists aged 18 and over who had visited the cultural heritage sites of Chengde and could recall their heritage tourism experiences, with 94.8% of the respondents having visited within the previous year. Respondents were also required to have encountered relevant heritage communication content before or during their visits. Non-probability multi-stage sampling was employed, and convenience sampling combined with age-based quota control was used. This sampling approach was adopted because a complete sampling frame of all Chinese tourists who had visited Chengde's cultural heritage sites was unavailable. Convenience sampling was employed for the recruitment of on-site and online participants, and to reduce the proportion of older individuals, age-based quota controls were applied to avoid excessive concentration in particular age groups. Therefore, the sample should be viewed as a context-specific sample of domestic tourists with a Chengde heritage tourism experience rather than a statistically representative sample of all Chinese tourists. The distribution of time since the last visit is shown in Table 1, and most of the respondents have visited Chengde in the past year; only a small number have been there longer than that.

Table 1. Sample Information.

Category	Item	N	%
Age	18–25	123	13.9
	26–35	325	36.6
	36–45	228	25.7
	46–55	110	12.4
	Above 55	101	11.4
Gender	Male	469	52.9
	Female	418	47.1
Education Level	Below bachelor	226	25.5
	Bachelor	393	44.3
	Master	168	18.9
	Higher than Master	100	11.3
Monthly Income	Below RMB 3000	136	15.3
	RMB 3000–6000	210	23.7
	RMB 6001–9000	352	39.7
	RMB 9001–12,000	148	16.7
	Above RMB 12,000	41	4.6

Table 1. *Cont.*

Category	Item	N	%
Time Since Last Visit	Within the past month	122	13.8
	1–3 months ago	325	36.6
	3–6 months ago	219	24.7
	6–12 months ago	175	19.7
	Over 12 months ago	46	5.2
Places Visited in Chengde	Mountain Resort (Bishu Shanzhuang)	419	47.2
	Eight Outer Temples	402	45.3
	Chengde Museum or Confucian Temple	549	61.9
	Nearby ethnic villages or ancient towns	510	57.5
	Other	138	15.6
Travel Information Channels	Social media platforms	631	71.1
	Government or official tourism websites	395	44.5
	Online Travel Agencies	534	60.2
	Friends' recommendations or personal experience sharing	485	54.7
	Offline promotions	182	20.5
	Other	77	8.7
Main Travel Motivations	Appreciating historical and cultural heritage	430	48.5
	Enjoying nature and relaxation	624	70.3
	Learning about religion or ethnic culture	284	32
	Family time or parent–child travel	533	60.1
	Photography or content creation	162	18.3
	Other	94	10.6
Travel Companion	Alone	249	28.1
	With family	290	32.7
	With friends	149	16.8
	With a tour group	165	18.6
	Other	34	3.8

Data were collected through two complementary survey modes. On-site interception was used to recruit visitors with recent first-hand experiences and to verify their eligibility, whereas the online survey enabled the study to reach eligible domestic visitors who were no longer present at the destination. The same questionnaire, eligibility criteria, informed-consent procedure, screening rules, and data-quality standards were applied in both modes.

Questionnaire Star QR codes were used to distribute the questionnaire, and trained research assistants conducted on-site interception. Given that the original questionnaire contained 63 measurement items and according to the general SEM rule of multiplying the number of observed items by 15, a larger sample size for data collection was initially set in the study [55]. After filtering out invalid or missing responses from the collected questionnaires, a total of 887 valid questionnaires were finally obtained for analysis. Several procedural steps were taken to reduce the risk of common method bias. Respondents were informed that participation was anonymous, that there were no right or wrong answers,

and that the collected information would be used only for research purposes. Neutral language was used in the questionnaire items, and they were organized in a mixed order instead of being grouped by construct to reduce the bias of response patterns and social desirability bias. The trained research assistants were instructed not to lead the respondents to particular answers.

3.3. Research Instrument

A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") was used. The questionnaire comprised nine constructs and 65 original items. The four 4E dimensions—experience, exchange, everyplace, and evangelism—were measured using 8, 9, 10, and 6 items, respectively. The items were developed and contextualized with reference to recent applications of the 4E framework, which conceptualize these dimensions in terms of experiential engagement, value exchange, omnichannel accessibility, and visitor advocacy [6]. Heritage interpretation quality was taken from Cheng et al. [56] and had 8 items; 'perceived destination image' was adapted from Ferreira et al. [57] and contained 8 items; 'perceived conservation' was taken from Hernández-Rojas et al. [33] and had 5 items; 'source credibility' was adapted from Luo et al. [58] with 5 items; and 'cultural heritage visiting behavior' was adopted from Rasoolimanesh et al. [59] and had 6 items. All items were adapted to the context of cultural heritage tourism in Chengde. Based on reliability and confirmatory factor analysis screening, the formal analysis retained 63 measurement items: 8 experience items, 9 exchange items, 9 everyplace items, 6 evangelism items, 7 heritage interpretation quality items, 8 perceived destination image items, 5 perceived conservation items, 5 source credibility items, and 6 cultural heritage visiting behavior items. The 63 measurement items retained for the formal statistical analyses are reported in the reliability and validity results and in Appendix A, which presents their English reporting version. The formal survey itself was administered using the finalized Chinese-language questionnaire.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

A small-scale pilot study of 30 tourists who had recently visited the cultural heritage sites in Chengde was conducted before the official survey. The pilot test was conducted to verify the clarity of the items and the user-friendliness of the response form. Based on the results above, all the indicators meet the condition for internal consistency, and the Cronbach's αvalues are all greater than 0.70. The KMO value also exceeded 0.60, and therefore the instrument was suitable for factor analysis [60]. Based on the feedback from respondents and the data in the pilot study, some items in the questionnaire have been modified for better accuracy and logic.

The formal data analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 and IBM SPSS Amos 26.0. SPSS 26.0 was used for data screening, descriptive statistics, Cronbach's α reliability analysis, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test, Bartlett's test of sphericity, Harman's single-factor test, full-collinearity variance inflation factor diagnostics, hierarchical regression analysis, and simple-slope analysis. Amos 26.0 was used for confirmatory factor analysis, the common latent factor assessment, measurement- and structural-model fit evaluation, structural path estimation, and bootstrap analysis of indirect effects.

The formal analysis proceeded in several stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the respondents' characteristics and examine the distributions of the measurement items. Second, the reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed using Cronbach's α, standardized factor loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and confirmatory factor analysis. Third, common method bias was evaluated using Harman's single-factor test, the common latent factor approach, and

full-collinearity variance inflation factor diagnostics. Fourth, structural equation modeling was employed to test the direct effects of the four dimensions of the 4E framework and heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visiting behavior, as well as their effects on perceived destination image and perceived conservation. Bootstrap analysis was then conducted to examine the mediating effects of perceived destination image and perceived conservation. Finally, hierarchical regression analysis with standardized interaction terms was used to test the moderating effect of source credibility, and simple-slope analysis was performed to interpret the antecedent–behavior relationships at high and low levels of source credibility.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1. Sample Characteristics

Table 1 shows the demographics and travel information of the 887 valid respondents. The two largest age groups were respondents aged 26–35 years (36.6%) and 36–45 years (25.7%), so most of the respondents fell within the main working age of the travel population; however, there were still some responses from younger and older travelers. The proportions of male and female respondents were approximately balanced, at about 53% and 47%. The highest proportion of respondents had a college education (44.3%), but there were also groups with lower levels of education, as well as those with master's degrees and higher, indicating a relatively diverse educational background of the participants. The distribution of income was also uneven; the largest income group reported monthly incomes of RMB 6001 to 9000 (39.7%). Travel-related features also met the conditions for this sample in the present study. Most of the respondents had been in Chengde within the last six months, and the highest proportion (36.6%) had been there one to three months prior; therefore, the memories used for perception-based assessment were still relatively recent. In terms of travel companions, the largest group was families (32.7%), followed by those traveling alone (28.1%); thus, many people use different types of travel modes and are not restricted to a single trip type. Multiple-choice items also show that many respondents have been to several well-known historical and cultural places and have gathered travel information from various sources, with differing reasons for their trips. The results indicate that the sample was demographically diverse and suitable for the context-specific statistical analysis conducted in this study.

4.1.2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows that the item means are between 3.684 and 4.146; thus, most respondents rated the research variables as moderately high or high. PDI1 had the highest mean (M = 4.146), so Chengde's historical buildings and cultural sites were perceived positively by most people. CHVB6, EW3, and SC1 also had relatively high mean values (M = 4.118, M = 4.103, and M = 4.103, respectively), indicating a high willingness to revisit, strong exposure to social media promotion, and favorable evaluations of source reliability. PDI7 showed the lowest mean (M = 3.684), followed by PC1 (M = 3.721) and EG5 (M = 3.764); therefore, the evaluation of accommodation-related image, conservation-related price reasonableness and willingness to follow promotional programs were all relatively moderate. Nevertheless, none of the means were below the midpoints of the scales; therefore, the general trend of responses was positive.

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Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Results.

Study Variables	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Experience (EP)	EP1	887	4.018	0.781	−0.742	0.428
	EP2	887	4.063	0.756	−0.801	0.516
	EP3	887	3.974	0.804	−0.683	0.337
	EP4	887	3.921	0.836	−0.594	0.184
	EP5	887	4.007	0.789	−0.721	0.401
	EP6	887	3.956	0.822	−0.635	0.273
	EP7	887	3.988	0.798	−0.687	0.318
	EP8	887	3.904	0.857	−0.571	0.122
Exchange (EC)	EC1	887	3.887	0.842	−0.534	−0.084
	EC2	887	3.918	0.824	−0.572	0.016
	EC3	887	3.964	0.793	−0.648	0.168
	EC4	887	3.852	0.861	−0.501	−0.126
	EC5	887	3.831	0.874	−0.476	−0.172
	EC6	887	3.915	0.816	−0.591	0.074
	EC7	887	3.786	0.903	−0.422	−0.261
	EC8	887	3.874	0.848	−0.518	−0.093
	EC9	887	3.804	0.889	−0.436	−0.214
Everyplace (EW)	EW1	887	3.946	0.811	−0.603	0.135
	EW2	887	3.987	0.786	−0.655	0.224
	EW3	887	4.103	0.758	−0.824	0.544
	EW4	887	4.021	0.772	−0.706	0.338
	EW5	887	3.958	0.801	−0.628	0.192
	EW6	887	4.046	0.769	−0.751	0.403
	EW7	887	3.821	0.886	−0.447	−0.182
	EW8	887	3.934	0.814	−0.592	0.107
	EW9	887	3.902	0.833	−0.556	0.061
Evangelism (EG)	EG1	887	4.084	0.744	−0.836	0.621
	EG2	887	4.031	0.773	−0.751	0.438
	EG3	887	3.887	0.854	−0.548	0.003
	EG4	887	3.842	0.876	−0.491	−0.101
	EG5	887	3.764	0.918	−0.402	−0.266
	EG6	887	3.811	0.897	−0.435	−0.214
Heritage Interpretation Quality (DI)	DI1	887	3.968	0.793	−0.676	0.294
	DI2	887	4.012	0.768	−0.724	0.381
	DI3	887	3.887	0.832	−0.573	0.088
	DI4	887	3.954	0.807	−0.642	0.201
	DI5	887	3.826	0.871	−0.468	−0.154
	DI6	887	3.801	0.886	−0.439	−0.203
	DI7	887	3.978	0.781	−0.688	0.317

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Table 2. *Cont.*

Study Variables	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perceived Destination Image (PDI)	PDI1	887	4.146	0.722	−0.901	0.816
	PDI2	887	3.918	0.834	−0.613	0.137
	PDI3	887	4.021	0.768	−0.742	0.392
	PDI4	887	3.874	0.812	−0.586	0.104
	PDI5	887	3.756	0.903	−0.401	−0.248
	PDI6	887	3.901	0.801	−0.624	0.185
	PDI7	887	3.684	0.928	−0.352	−0.337
	PDI8	887	3.792	0.874	−0.469	−0.126
Perceived Conservation (PC)	PC1	887	3.721	0.901	−0.384	−0.256
	PC2	887	4.062	0.742	−0.824	0.602
	PC3	887	4.018	0.761	−0.781	0.517
	PC4	887	3.854	0.836	−0.542	0.021
	PC5	887	3.776	0.872	−0.463	−0.148
Source Credibility (SC)	SC1	887	4.103	0.736	−0.861	0.684
	SC2	887	3.964	0.781	−0.694	0.291
	SC3	887	4.021	0.754	−0.752	0.413
	SC4	887	3.987	0.769	−0.716	0.352
	SC5	887	4.044	0.748	−0.781	0.496
Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior (CHVB)	CHVB1	887	4.012	0.771	−0.724	0.381
	CHVB2	887	3.954	0.806	−0.661	0.247
	CHVB3	887	3.876	0.852	−0.548	0.012
	CHVB4	887	4.086	0.742	−0.842	0.657
	CHVB5	887	3.821	0.883	−0.471	−0.176
	CHVB6	887	4.118	0.731	−0.903	0.782

The standard deviations ranged from 0.722 to 0.928, were relatively small, and thus the responses were reasonably uniform but not too concentrated. In addition, all skewness values were negative; that is to say, the higher response category tended to occur more often, and all kurtosis values remained within a reasonable range without exhibiting extreme peakedness or flatness. No single item had an unusually large or small proportion, and therefore did not pose a problem for the subsequent factor and structural analyses.

4.2. Reliability and Validity Assessment

4.2.1. Reliability Analysis

A Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or more is generally considered the minimum required for acceptable internal consistency, and values above 0.80 are regarded as having good reliability [61]. Table 3 presents the Cronbach's α coefficients of all the constructs. All constructs exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70. The alphas of the sources and the perceived images of the destinations were 0.868 and 0.939, respectively. Experience (α = 0.927), exchange (α = 0.917), everyplace (α = 0.938), evangelism (α = 0.877), quality of heritage interpretation (α = 0.892), perceived conservation (α = 0.886), and cultural heritage visiting behavior (α = 0.906) were all considered satisfactory to excellent in terms of internal

consistency. The above values show that the items in each scale are measuring the same underlying construct consistently.

Table 3. Reliability analysis.

Study Variables	Number of Questions	Cronbach's α
Experience	8	0.927
Exchange	9	0.917
Everyplace	9	0.938
Evangelism	6	0.877
Heritage interpretation quality	7	0.892
Perceived destination image	8	0.939
Perceived conservation	5	0.886
Source credibility	5	0.868
Cultural heritage visiting behavior	6	0.906

In short, based on the reliability results, the retained scales have good internal consistency and can be used in the following stages for validity analysis and structural model construction.

4.2.2. Validity Analysis

KMO measures the extent to which samples are appropriate for factor analysis, and Bartlett's test of sphericity determines whether the correlation matrix is different from an identity matrix. A KMO value generally greater than 0.60 is considered reasonably suitable for factor analysis; a value exceeding 0.80 is considered very suitable, and a significant Bartlett's test supports the application of factor analysis. As shown in Table 4, the KMO value was 0.967; it exceeds the recommended threshold and is considered to be of good sampling adequacy. Bartlett's test of sphericity was also statistically significant.

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test.

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.967
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	37,627.775
	df	1953
	p	<0.001

4.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis is used to verify whether the observed items effectively cover the proposed latent constructs and whether the entire measurement model conforms to the data [62]. The following hypothesis tests can only be considered valid if the measurement structure meets the requirements for statistical acceptability. Many indicators are used to judge the quality of fit in models, not just one. Table 5 shows the corresponding fit indices. RMSEA was 0.026, and thus the approximation error was small. All of the absolute and incremental fit indices were also above the recommended threshold of 0.90, with GFI = 0.911, AGFI = 0.903, NFI = 0.923, IFI = 0.970, TLI = 0.968 and CFI = 0.970.

Table 5. Measurement model fit indices.

Fit Index	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI
Reference standards	<3	<0.08	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9
Result	1.593	0.026	0.911	0.903	0.923	0.97	0.968	0.97

Convergent validity is tested to see if the items that should measure the same factor are indeed related to each other. The three levels of this assessment are as follows [63]. As shown in Table 6, all the standardized factor loadings were above the recommended lower limit of 0.60. The factor loadings of DI3 and PC5 were 0.652 and 0.890, respectively; all had been deemed suitable for retaining in the model. All the CR values at the construct level were greater than 0.70, and these values ranged from 0.869 for source credibility to 0.939 for everyplace and perceived destination image. Therefore, all of the latent variables meet the requirement for good internal consistency. The AVE values were also all greater than the 0.50 threshold, with values ranging from 0.547 for evangelism to 0.659 for perceived destination image; thus, each construct explained more than half of the variance in its indicators. Together, the factor loadings, CR values and AVE values all meet the general requirements for convergent validity. The above results show that the measurement items have converged reasonably with their intended constructs, and the retained constructs are suitable for structural analysis.

Table 6. Convergent Validity.

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Experience	EP1	0.857	0.928	0.618
	EP2	0.792		
	EP3	0.760		
	EP4	0.814		
	EP5	0.716		
	EP6	0.743		
	EP7	0.796		
	EP8	0.802		
Exchange	EC1	0.784	0.918	0.555
	EC2	0.754		
	EC3	0.732		
	EC4	0.737		
	EC5	0.761		
	EC6	0.735		
	EC7	0.695		
	EC8	0.762		
	EC9	0.743		
Everyplace	EW1	0.848	0.939	0.630
	EW2	0.809		
	EW3	0.793		
	EW4	0.725		
	EW5	0.775		
	EW6	0.789		
	EW7	0.770		
	EW8	0.750		
	EW9	0.875		

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Table 6. *Cont.*

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Evangelism	EG1	0.789	0.878	0.547
	EG2	0.74		
	EG3	0.74		
	EG4	0.741		
	EG5	0.682		
	EG6	0.741		
Heritage interpretation quality	DI1	0.794	0.895	0.552
	DI2	0.747		
	DI3	0.652		
	DI4	0.665		
	DI5	0.736		
	DI6	0.725		
	DI7	0.859		
Perceived destination image	PDI1	0.845	0.939	0.659
	PDI2	0.823		
	PDI3	0.785		
	PDI4	0.809		
	PDI5	0.809		
	PDI6	0.790		
	PDI7	0.862		
	PDI8	0.765		
Perceived conservation	PC1	0.730	0.888	0.615
	PC2	0.788		
	PC3	0.758		
	PC4	0.744		
	PC5	0.890		
Source credibility	SC1	0.754	0.869	0.570
	SC2	0.694		
	SC3	0.784		
	SC4	0.777		
	SC5	0.762		
Cultural heritage visiting behavior	CHVB1	0.861	0.909	0.627
	CHVB2	0.803		
	CHVB3	0.697		
	CHVB4	0.732		
	CHVB5	0.762		
	CHVB6	0.880		

Discriminant validity is used to determine whether the latent variables are empirically different from each other and not too close to one another [64]. Fornell–Larcker criterion is

used in this paper, and the square root of each construct's average variance extracted (AVE) should exceed the correlation coefficients of that construct with all other constructs [65]. This standard does not require a large or small correlation; it only needs to ensure that each construct is independently variable. Table 7 shows the results of discriminant validity. As shown in Table 7, the diagonal elements, which are the square roots of AVE, were all larger than the off-diagonal correlations for all constructs. For example, the square root of AVE for experience was 0.786, and it was higher than all of its correlations with exchange, everyplace, evangelism, heritage interpretation quality, perceived destination image, perceived conservation, source credibility, and cultural heritage visiting behavior. The same pattern was observed for the other constructs as well: perceived destination image (0.812), perceived conservation (0.784), source credibility (0.755), and cultural heritage visiting behavior (0.792). The results show that there is a reasonable distinction among the latent variables, and the constructs are neither redundant nor excessively overlapping. In short, the results of discriminant validity indicate that the measurement model is appropriate for the following hypothesis tests.

Table 7. Discriminant validity test.

Latent Variables	EP	EC	EW	EG	DI	PDI	PC	SC	CHVB
EP	0.786								
EC	0.423 **	0.745							
EW	0.418 **	0.413 **	0.794						
EG	0.487 **	0.467 **	0.476 **	0.74					
DI	0.471 **	0.515 **	0.477 **	0.493 **	0.743				
PDI	0.461 **	0.448 **	0.428 **	0.413 **	0.461 **	0.812			
PC	0.362 **	0.447 **	0.417 **	0.458 **	0.424 **	0.316 **	0.784		
SC	0.375 **	0.272 **	0.240 **	0.267 **	0.236 **	0.301 **	0.214 **	0.755	
CHVB	0.548 **	0.597 **	0.559 **	0.563 **	0.603 **	0.605 **	0.546 **	0.350 **	0.792

Note. Abbreviations in the table are as follows: EP = experience; EC = exchange; EW = everyplace; EG = evangelism; DI = heritage interpretation quality; PDI = perceived destination image; PC = perceived conservation; SC = source credibility; CHVB = cultural heritage visiting behavior. ** $p < 0.01$.

4.4. Structural Model Path Analysis

Structural model analysis was performed to determine whether the hypothesized structural associations among the latent constructs were supported by the data. Before the individual paths were interpreted, the overall structural model was evaluated for fit with the observed data. The same conventional fit criteria used for the measurement model were applied here: chi/df < 3, RMSEA < 0.08, and GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, and CFI > 0.90. Table 8 presents the goodness-of-fit indices of the structural model.

Table 8. Model fit metrics.

Fit Index	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Reference standards	<3.00	<0.08	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90
Result	1.670	0.028	0.914	0.907	0.927	0.968	0.969

As shown in Table 8, the structure of the model met all the requirements. The chi/df value was 1.67 and still below the threshold of 3. RMSEA was 0.028; thus, the approximation error was relatively small. All the comparative and absolute fit indices were also within the recommended range, with GFI = 0.914, AGFI = 0.907, NFI = 0.927, TLI = 0.968, and CFI = 0.969.

Generally speaking, the structural model showed a good fit to the data; therefore, the proposed path structure was statistically acceptable and could be employed for hypothesis testing.

Direct path analysis was used to determine whether the hypothesized paths among the independent variables, mediators, and dependent variable were statistically significant and consistent with the proposed model. The standardized coefficient β indicated the direction and magnitude of each association; the standard error measured estimation precision; the critical ratio reflected the estimate's distance from zero in standard-error units; and the *p*-value indicated whether a path reached statistical significance [66]. Table 9 presents the direct path estimates.

Table 9. Direct path effects.

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Effect Value (β)	SE	CR	*p*	Results
H1a	EP → CHVB	0.120	0.025	3.981	<0.001	Supported
H1b	EC → CHVB	0.176	0.031	5.502	<0.001	Supported
H1c	EW → CHVB	0.123	0.027	4.151	<0.001	Supported
H1d	EG → CHVB	0.100	0.038	2.944	0.003	Supported
H1e	DI → CHVB	0.147	0.038	4.409	<0.001	Supported
H2a	EP → PDI	0.228	0.033	6.172	<0.001	Supported
H2b	EC → PDI	0.204	0.041	5.254	<0.001	Supported
H2c	EW → PDI	0.170	0.035	4.673	<0.001	Supported
H2d	EG → PDI	0.069	0.052	1.587	0.113	Not supported
H2e	DI → PDI	0.178	0.051	4.257	<0.001	Supported
H3a	EP → PC	0.105	0.029	2.853	0.004	Supported
H3b	EC → PC	0.231	0.036	5.901	<0.001	Supported
H3c	EW → PC	0.186	0.031	5.06	<0.001	Supported
H3d	EG → PC	0.209	0.045	4.88	<0.001	Supported
H3e	DI → PC	0.144	0.044	3.481	<0.001	Supported
H4	PDI → CHVB	0.237	0.027	8.071	<0.001	Supported
H5	PC → CHVB	0.205	0.036	6.121	<0.001	Supported

As shown in Table 9, all of the direct paths are positive and statistically significant. In terms of cultural heritage visiting behavior, experience showed a significant positive association (β = 0.120, $p < 0.001$), exchange was also positive (β = 0.176, $p < 0.001$), everyplace showed a significant positive association (β = 0.123, $p < 0.001$), evangelism was also positive and significant (β = 0.100, $p = 0.003$), and heritage interpretation quality positively predicted cultural heritage visiting behavior (β = 0.147, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the above results support H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d and H1e.

The paths of the antecedent variables to perceived destination image were also analyzed. Experience was positively associated with perceived destination image (β = 0.228, $p < 0.001$), exchange also showed a significant positive association (β = 0.204, $p < 0.001$), everyplace was positively associated with perceived destination image (β = 0.170, $p < 0.001$), and heritage interpretation quality also showed a significant positive association (β = 0.178, $p < 0.001$). The above results support H2a, H2b, H2c and H2e. Evangelism was not significantly associated with perceived destination image (β = 0.069, $p = 0.113$), so H2d was not supported. It can be seen that visitor advocacy may be directly associated with heritage-related behavior and the perception of preservation by visitors; however, it does not significantly shape the perceived image of a place in the above-mentioned structural model.

All five antecedent variables were positively and significantly associated with perceived conservation. Experience showed a significant positive association (β = 0.105, $p = 0.004$), exchange showed an even stronger positive association (β = 0.231, $p < 0.001$), everyplace also positively predicted perceived conservation (β = 0.186, $p < 0.001$), evangelism

showed a positive and significant association ($\beta = 0.209$, $p < 0.001$), and heritage interpretation quality also significantly predicted perceived conservation ($\beta = 0.144$, $p < 0.001$). The above results support H3a, H3b, H3c, H3d and H3e.

The paths from the two mediators to the dependent variable were also significant. Perceived destination image was positively associated with the behavior of cultural heritage tourists ($\beta = 0.237$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H4; perceived conservation was also positively associated with the behavior of cultural heritage tourists ($\beta = 0.205$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H5. Generally speaking, the direct-effect results show that the structure of the model is to some extent supported, and they also indicate that perceived destination image and perceived conservation are at the core of the model.

Figure 2 shows the standardized structural model after estimation, and the pattern of direct relationships among the latent constructs is visualized here. This figure will show both the direction and the relative size of the retained structural paths in a single, combined model.

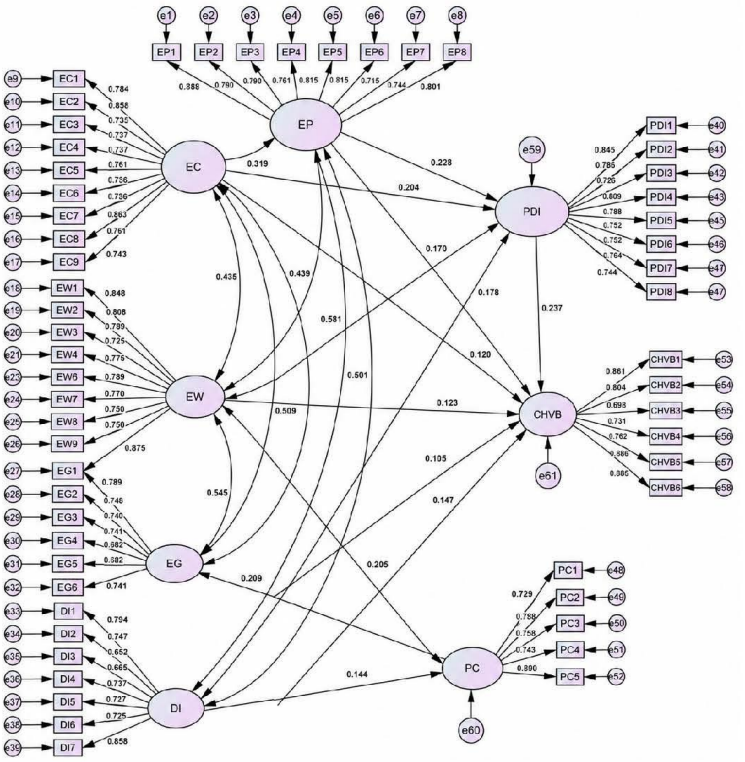

Figure 2. Structural model.

Indirect effects are analyzed to determine how the antecedent variables affect cultural heritage visiting behavior through the proposed mediators. Direct effects alone may not fully reflect the transmission path of heritage communication and interpretation-related antecedents to the dependent variable in this step. Bootstrap confidence intervals were employed to test for mediation in this paper [37]. An indirect effect was considered statistically significant when its 95% confidence interval did not include zero. As shown

in Table 10, the perceived destination image mediates the effect of experience, exchange, everyplace and heritage interpretation quality on cultural heritage visiting behavior. The indirect effect of experience through perceived destination image was 0.054, and the 95% confidence interval was 0.035–0.076. The corresponding indirect effects were 0.048 for exchange, 0.040 for everyplace, and 0.042 for heritage interpretation quality, and all of their confidence intervals did not include zero. The above results support H6a, H6b, H6c and H6e. On the other hand, the indirect effect of evangelism through perceived destination image was only 0.012, with a 95% confidence interval of [−0.003, 0.032]. Because this confidence interval included zero, the mediating effect of perceived destination image in the relationship between evangelism and cultural heritage visiting behavior was not statistically significant; therefore, H6d was not supported.

Table 10. Indirect effect bootstrap analysis.

Hypothesis	Mediation Path	Effect Value	SE	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	Results
H6a	EP → PDI → CHVB	0.054	0.010	0.035	0.076	Supported
H6b	EC → PDI → CHVB	0.048	0.010	0.030	0.071	Supported
H6c	EW → PDI → CHVB	0.040	0.010	0.023	0.062	Supported
H6d	EG → PDI → CHVB	0.012	0.009	−0.003	0.032	Not supported
H6e	DI → PDI → CHVB	0.042	0.010	0.025	0.062	Supported
H7a	EP → PC → CHVB	0.022	0.009	0.008	0.044	Supported
H7b	EC → PC → CHVB	0.047	0.013	0.027	0.077	Supported
H7c	EW → PC → CHVB	0.038	0.011	0.022	0.065	Supported
H7d	EG → PC → CHVB	0.043	0.012	0.024	0.071	Supported
H7e	DI → PC → CHVB	0.030	0.011	0.014	0.057	Supported

Perceived Conservation was also one of the mediators for all five antecedent variables. The indirect effects were 0.022 for experience, 0.047 for exchange, 0.038 for everyplace, 0.043 for evangelism, and 0.030 for heritage interpretation quality, and in all these cases, both the lower and upper 95% confidence interval bounds remained above zero. Therefore, the results are consistent with H7a–H7e.

Interaction terms between the source's credibility and all antecedent variables were introduced for moderation analysis. First, the five antecedent variables and source credibility were all standardized, and then five interaction terms were generated: Experience × Source Credibility, Exchange × Source Credibility, Everyplace × Source Credibility, Evangelism × Source Credibility, and Heritage Interpretation Quality × Source Credibility. Then, all the interaction terms were added to a new model along with their respective main effects to predict cultural heritage visiting behavior. A relatively large positive interaction coefficient indicates that the credibility of the source positively enhances the effect of the antecedent variable on cultural heritage visiting behavior. Table 11 shows the results for H8a to H8e. As shown in Table 11, all five interaction terms were positive and statistically significant. The coefficient for the interaction of experience and source credibility was 0.158 ($p < 0.001$), thus supporting H8a. The coefficient of the interaction term between exchange and source credibility was 0.172 ($p < 0.001$), and thus H8b was confirmed. The interaction term of everyplace and source credibility was 0.166 ($p < 0.001$), supporting H8c. The interaction effect of evangelism and source credibility was 0.149 ($p < 0.001$), supporting H8d. Finally, the interaction term of heritage interpretation quality and source credibility was 0.161 ($p < 0.001$), supporting H8e. In addition, all the direct effects of the antecedent variables and source credibility on cultural heritage visiting behavior were positive and significant in the five moderation models.

Table 11. Moderation Effect of H8a–H8e.

Hypothesis	Path	β	*p*	Result
H8a	Experience → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.487	<0.001	Significant
	Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.193	<0.001	Significant
	Experience × Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.158	<0.001	Moderation supported
H8b	Exchange → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.524	<0.001	Significant
	Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.193	<0.001	Significant
	Exchange × Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.172	<0.001	Moderation supported
H8c	Everyplace → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.503	<0.001	Significant
	Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.185	<0.001	Significant
	Everyplace × Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.166	<0.001	Moderation supported
H8d	Evangelism → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.468	<0.001	Significant
	Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.176	<0.001	Significant
	Evangelism × Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.149	<0.001	Moderation supported
H8e	Heritage interpretation quality → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.512	<0.001	Significant
	Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.181	<0.001	Significant
	Heritage interpretation quality × Source credibility → Cultural heritage visiting behavior	0.161	<0.001	Moderation supported

Therefore, the credibility of the source can strengthen the positive association among the preceding variables and cultural heritage visiting behavior. Based on moderation analysis, the effect of heritage communication and interpretation-related factors on visitation behavior is relatively stronger when destination-related information is considered more credible.

5. Discussion

This study examined how experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, and heritage interpretation quality were associated with cultural heritage visiting behavior among Chinese domestic tourists in Chengde. The findings showed that all five antecedents had significant positive associations with cultural heritage visiting behavior, although the magnitudes of these relationships differed. Exchange produced the strongest direct association among the four dimensions of the 4E framework, while heritage interpretation quality also demonstrated a substantial contribution. The results further showed that perceived destination image and perceived conservation constituted two distinct mediating mechanisms and that source credibility strengthened the relationships between all five antecedents and cultural heritage visiting behavior. These findings support the central logic of the S–O–R framework while extending it to a cultural heritage setting in which visitor responses depend on both destination attractiveness and perceived stewardship legitimacy.

The positive association between experience and cultural heritage visiting behavior is consistent with international tourism research showing that immersive, memorable, and emotionally engaging experiences strengthen tourists' behavioral intentions, recommendations, and revisit decisions [3,41,47]. In cultural heritage settings, experience involves

more than enjoyment or sensory stimulation. Visitors encounter historical narratives, architectural symbols, collective memories, and opportunities for cultural participation, all of which influence how they interpret and respond to a place [9,28]. The present findings therefore confirm that experiential communication can convert historical spaces from passive sightseeing environments into settings of participation, emotional involvement, and meaning construction.

The results also extend previous research by showing that experience functioned as one component of a broader heritage communication system. Although experience had a significant direct relationship with behavior, it also influenced behavior through perceived destination image and perceived conservation. This pattern is consistent with the S–O–R proposition that external stimuli influence behavioral responses through internal evaluations [23]. In the Chengde context, immersive visits, cultural activities, interpretive encounters, and emotionally meaningful experiences appear to strengthen both the attractiveness of the destination and visitors' judgments that its heritage is being responsibly protected. Experience therefore operates simultaneously as an experiential stimulus, an image-forming mechanism, and a conservation-related cue.

Exchange produced the strongest direct association among the four dimensions of the 4E framework. This result accords with previous research identifying perceived value as an important determinant of tourist satisfaction and post-visit behavior [21,36]. Perceived value in tourism is not restricted to price. It includes tourists' evaluations of time, effort, service quality, emotional rewards, cultural learning, accessibility, and the overall worth of the journey [12,38]. In the present study, exchange reflected whether tourists considered their financial expenditure, planning effort, time investment, interpretation services, cultural learning, and supporting facilities worthwhile. Its relatively strong association with cultural heritage visiting behavior indicates that visitors were more willing to participate, recommend, share, follow, and revisit when the experience delivered both cultural meaning and practical value.

The importance of exchange can also be understood in relation to the characteristics of the study sample. Family travel constituted the largest travel-companion category, while relaxation, family time, and appreciation of historical and cultural heritage were among the most frequently reported motivations. These patterns suggest that many respondents evaluated Chengde not only as an individual cultural experience but also as a coordinated family tourism product requiring reasonable prices, convenient access, clear information, sufficient facilities, and meaningful educational value. However, this interpretation should remain cautious. The study did not directly measure family obligation, collectivism, value consciousness, or holiday constraints. The stronger role of exchange should therefore be treated as a context-based explanation rather than direct evidence of a distinct Chinese cultural trait.

Everyplace also had significant associations with cultural heritage visiting behavior, perceived destination image, and perceived conservation. This finding supports recent international research emphasizing the importance of digital and omnichannel tourism communication. Social media, destination websites, online travel agencies, mobile applications, digital maps, and online booking systems influence tourists' information search, destination evaluation, trust, and behavioral intentions [4,39]. The present study shows that this mechanism is also relevant to cultural heritage tourism. Heritage communication no longer occurs only through on-site signs, guides, or exhibitions. It takes place before, during, and after the visit through coordinated online and offline touchpoints.

The role of everyplace is especially relevant to the Chinese domestic tourism environment. The sample showed extensive use of social media platforms, online travel agencies, official tourism websites, mobile navigation, and digital information channels. This sug-

gests that visitors' access to heritage information is embedded in a highly connected digital tourism system. Reliable navigation, online ticketing, mobile payment, social-media promotion, and digital interpretation reduce uncertainty and allow tourists to coordinate the different stages of the heritage visit. The positive relationship between everyplace and behavior therefore reflects not only information availability but also the practical integration of communication, mobility, payment, and service access.

Nevertheless, the strength of this relationship should not be generalized automatically to international tourists. Visitors from countries with different digital ecosystems, platform structures, payment practices, or information-search habits could evaluate omnichannel accessibility differently. For some international visitors, multilingual interpretation, independent travel guides, museum websites, or printed materials could be more influential than domestic social-media platforms or integrated mobile applications. Cross-national research is therefore needed to determine whether everyplace has an equivalent meaning and effect across tourism systems.

Heritage interpretation quality significantly predicted cultural heritage visiting behavior, perceived destination image, and perceived conservation. This finding is consistent with established heritage interpretation research. Interpretation supports mindful engagement by helping visitors understand the cultural, historical, social, and symbolic meanings of heritage resources rather than simply observing their physical appearance [27,28]. More recent studies have shown that effective interpretation strengthens perceived heritage value, historical empathy, cultural inheritance intentions, place attachment, and environmentally responsible behavior [16,20,29,43,56].

The findings reinforce the view that interpretation should not be treated as a secondary visitor service. It is a central communication mechanism through which tourists form cognitive, emotional, and conservation-related evaluations. This function is particularly important in Chengde because the site's significance is embedded in Qing Dynasty governance, imperial garden design, Buddhist architecture, religious symbolism, and multiethnic cultural interaction. These meanings are not always immediately visible to visitors. Clear explanations, professional guides, multimedia resources, signs, exhibitions, and culturally sensitive narratives help transform complex heritage resources into understandable and personally relevant experiences.

The significant influence of interpretation quality on perceived conservation is also theoretically important. Interpretation does not only explain what a site represents; it can also explain why restoration, visitor restrictions, maintenance practices, and responsible behavior are necessary. This result is consistent with research showing that interpretation messages can strengthen conservation awareness and environmentally responsible behavior among visitors [16,31,45]. High-quality interpretation therefore links historical understanding with stewardship legitimacy.

Perceived destination image had the strongest direct association with cultural heritage visiting behavior. This result is consistent with the international tourism literature identifying destination image as a central predictor of intention, recommendation, revisit behavior, and loyalty [42,44,47]. A favorable destination image provides tourists with an overall evaluation of a place's attractiveness, distinctiveness, cultural richness, hospitality, infrastructure, and supporting services. In the present study, tourists who evaluated Chengde more positively as a historical and cultural destination were more likely to participate in heritage activities, recommend the site, share positive experiences, follow related cultural programs, and express willingness to revisit.

The mediation findings further showed that perceived destination image transmitted the effects of experience, exchange, everyplace, and heritage interpretation quality to cultural heritage visiting behavior. This supports previous research suggesting that tourists transform

destination-related stimuli into behavioral responses through their overall evaluations of the destination [8,42]. Experience creates emotional and experiential impressions; exchange shapes value judgments; everyplace increases familiarity and accessibility; and interpretation quality clarifies historical and cultural meaning. Together, these stimuli strengthen the perceived image of Chengde and, in turn, encourage heritage-related engagement.

However, evangelism did not significantly predict perceived destination image, and the corresponding indirect relationship through destination image was unsupported. This result differs from the assumption that positive word-of-mouth and visitor advocacy necessarily contribute to image formation. One explanation is that evangelism occurs after visitors have already formed a relatively stable evaluation of the destination. Sharing, recommending, and promoting a heritage site can therefore reflect an existing behavioral commitment rather than create or substantially revise the visitor's own destination image.

A second explanation concerns the content of the destination-image construct. In this study, perceived destination image included evaluations of historical architecture, cultural attractions, hospitality, infrastructure, accommodation, dining, and shopping. By contrast, evangelism primarily captured emotional impact, sharing, recommendation, community connection, and active promotion. These advocacy behaviors might not directly alter tourists' evaluations of accommodation, food, infrastructure, or destination services. The absence of a significant path therefore suggests that visitor advocacy and destination image are related but conceptually distinct processes.

Evangelism nevertheless had a significant direct association with cultural heritage visiting behavior and a significant indirect association through perceived conservation. This pattern indicates that advocacy-based communication can contribute more clearly to social endorsement and conservation legitimacy than to broad destination-image formation. Visitor advocacy circulates narratives concerning authenticity, cultural value, responsible management, and the need to preserve heritage resources. Social interaction and visitor-generated communication can strengthen behavioral norms and conservation-supportive responses [50]. Community participation research likewise shows that heritage stewardship depends on relationships among tourists, residents, heritage professionals, and management institutions [11,13].

Perceived conservation mediated the relationships between all five antecedents and cultural heritage visiting behavior. This is one of the most important findings of the study. International heritage research increasingly recognizes that visitors respond not only to enjoyment and attractiveness but also to whether a site is authentic, well maintained, culturally respected, and responsibly governed [15,31,33]. The present study extends this literature by showing that perceived conservation is influenced by all five communication and interpretation stimuli.

Experience allows visitors to observe the physical condition and management of heritage resources. Exchange influences whether admission fees, services, and tourism arrangements appear compatible with conservation goals. Everyplace provides repeated exposure to information about preservation, restoration, visitor rules, and heritage value. Evangelism circulates social narratives concerning responsible management and cultural importance. Interpretation quality explains why conservation measures are necessary and how they support the continuity of heritage. Perceived conservation therefore functions as a broad psychological evaluation of stewardship rather than merely an assessment of physical maintenance.

The Chinese context provides a possible explanation for the importance of perceived conservation. Chengde is a World Heritage destination managed within a government-led system of cultural heritage protection. Visitors frequently encounter official signs, restoration notices, regulated routes, institutional interpretation, and formal conserva-

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tion messages. These visible governance cues can strengthen perceptions that the site is legitimate, professionally managed, and worthy of support. However, this explanation remains interpretive because the study did not measure institutional trust, attitudes toward government, authority orientation, or preferences for state-led heritage management.

Tourists from other countries could respond differently to conservation-related cues. In destinations characterized by stronger community-led management, private heritage ownership, religious governance, or decentralized preservation systems, visitors could rely less on official institutions and more on local communities, independent experts, or non-governmental organizations. The meaning of perceived conservation could therefore vary across cultural and governance contexts.

The significant moderating effects of source credibility are consistent with international communication and tourism research. Credible information sources strengthen trust, reduce uncertainty, and increase the persuasive influence of tourism messages [22,53,54]. The present study extends this evidence by demonstrating that credibility strengthened the behavioral associations of all five antecedents. Experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, and heritage interpretation quality were more strongly related to cultural heritage visiting behavior when tourists considered the information source trustworthy, knowledgeable, reliable, and historically accurate.

This result indicates that communication content alone is insufficient. Visitors must also believe that the source presenting the information has the expertise and legitimacy to communicate heritage values. Source credibility is particularly important in cultural heritage tourism because messages often concern historical facts, religious meanings, ethnic cultures, restoration principles, and conservation practices. Inaccurate or overly promotional communication can weaken trust and reduce the educational value of the experience.

The importance of credibility can also be interpreted in relation to China's digital tourism environment. Visitors encounter information from official tourism boards, government websites, online travel agencies, social-media influencers, guides, other tourists, and user-generated reviews. Under these conditions, tourists must evaluate whether heritage information is historically accurate, professionally produced, and institutionally reliable. Official and expert sources can be especially influential when tourists seek information about conservation, religious meaning, historical events, or access restrictions. However, tourists from countries with different levels of institutional trust or stronger preferences for independent information could respond differently to official credibility cues.

Overall, the findings support the S–O–R framework by showing that heritage communication and interpretation stimuli influence cultural heritage visiting behavior through internal psychological evaluations. At the same time, the study refines the organism stage by distinguishing between perceived destination image and perceived conservation. The former captures tourists' overall evaluation of destination attractiveness and supporting services, whereas the latter captures judgments concerning heritage stewardship, authenticity, responsible management, and cultural continuity. These two evaluations are related but not interchangeable.

The findings also demonstrate that source credibility constitutes an important boundary condition. The behavioral influence of heritage communication depends partly on whether tourists trust the information source. This extends the S–O–R framework by showing that the transition from stimulus to response is conditioned by the perceived legitimacy of the communicator.

The observed relationships should not be interpreted as culturally universal. Chengde represents a Chinese imperial, religious, and multi-ethnic World Heritage destination operating within a particular institutional and digital tourism environment. The sample included only Chinese domestic tourists. Family-oriented travel, integrated digital platforms,

reliance on official tourism information, and visible government-led conservation could have contributed to the relative importance of exchange, everyplace, perceived conservation, and source credibility. Nevertheless, the study did not directly measure these cultural or social characteristics.

Future research should therefore conduct cross-national comparisons involving domestic and international tourists, different heritage categories, and different governance systems. Measurement invariance should be established before structural relationships are compared across countries. Such research could determine whether the observed relationships are specific to Chinese domestic tourists or whether they represent more general mechanisms of heritage communication and visitor engagement.

6. Conclusions

The four dimensions of the 4E heritage communication framework and heritage interpretation quality were examined in relation to cultural heritage visiting behavior in Chengde, China; the mediating roles of perceived destination image and perceived conservation were tested, along with the moderating effect of source credibility. The results showed that experience, exchange, everyplace, evangelism, and heritage interpretation quality were all positively associated with cultural heritage visiting behavior, and these associations operated through two distinct cognitive evaluation pathways. The strongest direct predictor of visiting behavior was the perceived image of the destination, and perceived conservation also contributed significantly; thus, cultural heritage visiting behavior was associated with both destination attractiveness and perceived conservation. In addition, source credibility strengthened all focal relationships in the tested models, and it can be seen that the tested relationships were stronger when destination information was perceived as trustworthy, knowledgeable and historically accurate. Based on the above studies, it can be concluded that the process of cultural heritage visiting behavior in Chengde is not a single-stage event but rather the combined operation of multiple interconnected mechanisms, such as heritage communication and interpretation, conservation awareness, cognitive evaluation, and information trust.

Theoretically, the findings address the identified research gap by showing that the four 4E dimensions and heritage interpretation quality are associated with cultural heritage visiting behavior through two distinct internal evaluations: perceived destination image and perceived conservation. The unsupported evangelism–perceived destination image path and the corresponding indirect effect indicate that visitor advocacy may influence heritage-related behavior more directly or through conservation-related evaluations rather than by reshaping visitors' overall destination image. For Chengde, the results emphasize the need to coordinate credible interpretation, visible conservation communication, and consistent on-site and digital access. Similar principles may inform other World Heritage Sites, but the strength and meaning of these relationships should be tested across different cultural settings, governance systems, and visitor profiles.

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Approval was granted on 10 April 2026 and is valid until 10 April 2027. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before questionnaire administration. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed of the purpose and procedures of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. English Reporting Version of the Retained Measurement Items.

Variable	Specific Items
Experience	EP1. I seek diverse and unique experiences at cultural heritage sites to enhance my interest in the destination.
	EP2. I desire to deeply understand the historical background and cultural essence of the destination.
	EP3. Visiting this cultural heritage site provided me with a novel and immersive experience.
	EP4. The architectural and spatial design of cultural venues strongly conveyed a sense of local culture.
	EP5. Guided tours and interpretative content enriched my understanding of the cultural elements.
	EP6. Local food, handicrafts, and festivals enhanced my sense of cultural participation.
	EP7. The professionalism and attitude of staff improved my overall impression of the destination.
	EP8. I engaged in cultural performances, rituals, or interactive activities that strengthened my emotional connection and sense of belonging.
Exchange	EC1. The tourism services provided at cultural heritage sites in Chengde offer good value for the money spent.
	EC2. My experience at cultural heritage sites in Chengde is worth the overall effort and planning.
	EC3. The time I invested in visiting Chengde's heritage attractions was meaningfully spent.
	EC4. The storytelling at Chengde's cultural sites, such as through guided tours, signage, and exhibitions, was engaging and informative.
	EC5. Heritage sites that offered live demonstrations, such as traditional crafts, rituals, and performances, enhanced my visit and were worth attending.
	EC6. I value heritage sites in Chengde that incorporate sustainable practices, such as promoting local culture and environmental conservation.
	EC7. Chengde's heritage sites provided adequate space for leisure, reflection, and quiet cultural engagement.
	EC8. The accessibility and convenience of heritage sites, such as proximity to accommodation and the availability of public facilities, contributed to my overall satisfaction.
	EC9. The cultural sites in Chengde offered a meaningful variety of local cultural products or souvenirs that enriched my travel experience.
Everyplace	EW1. It is easy to contact the cultural heritage site through online or offline channels.
	EW2. Traveling to the cultural heritage site is convenient and well-supported by digital navigation tools.
	EW3. I often see the destination being promoted through major social media platforms, such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin.
	EW4. Online maps and mobile apps, such as Baidu Maps and Amap, make it easy to search for and navigate to the site.
	EW5. The destination offers multiple digital communication channels, such as official websites, social media, and customer service hotlines.
	EW6. The heritage site is promoted through a variety of digital media and public relations channels, enhancing its visibility.
	EW7. The site provides digital tour guides or virtual experiences through accessible platforms.
	EW8. Online booking and ticketing systems for the site are fast, reliable, and user-friendly.
	EW9. The destination supports various payment options, including digital and mobile payment methods.

Table A1. *Cont.*

Variable	Specific Items
Evangelism	EG1. This cultural heritage destination impressed me and left a strong emotional impact.
	EG2. I feel the need to share my cultural heritage tourism experience with others.
	EG3. Visiting this cultural site fostered a strong sense of connection with the local cultural community.
	EG4. I participated in hands-on cultural activities, such as local workshops and traditional crafts, that deepened my engagement with the site.
	EG5. I am willing to follow or subscribe to the destination's promotional programs, such as social media, memberships, or loyalty campaigns.
	EG6. I actively promote this heritage destination by sharing travel routes, cultural information, or planning tips with others.
Heritage Interpretation Quality	DI1. The digital and multimedia guides, such as AR apps and audio devices, helped me clearly understand the historical and cultural significance of Chengde's heritage sites.
	DI2. Directional signs, informational panels, and route markers were clearly visible and logically placed throughout the temple and landscape complex.
	DI3. Staff members at the visitor centers explained cultural content with patience and answered questions in an easy-to-understand way.
	DI4. The interpretation content, such as exhibits, tours, and live shows, covered diverse aspects of Chengde's history, religion, and ethnic cultures.
	DI5. The on-site staff proactively explained the deeper meanings of architectural designs, temple rituals, and cultural symbolism.
	DI6. The interpreters or guides communicated with respect and cultural sensitivity, enhancing my understanding of the heritage context.
	DI7. It was easy to find information about interpretation schedules, language options, and explanation services at the heritage sites.
Perceived Destination Image	PDI1. I consider this destination's historical architecture and cultural landmarks to be impressive and memorable.
	PDI2. I find the local cuisine and traditional food experiences in this destination to be appealing.
	PDI3. The cultural and historical attractions of this destination enrich my understanding of its heritage.
	PDI4. I feel that the local residents are welcoming and enhance the overall tourism experience.
	PDI5. This destination offers diverse and culturally distinctive shopping opportunities.
	PDI6. The destination provides adequate tourism infrastructure, including transport, signage, and public services.
	PDI7. The quality and cultural ambiance of accommodations meet my expectations.
	PDI8. Restaurants and dining venues here provide satisfying services and reflect local cultural elements.
Perceived Conservation	PC1. The ticket price of Chengde's cultural heritage sites is reasonable considering the level of conservation.
	PC2. The historical characteristics of Chengde's royal architecture and religious heritage have been well preserved.
	PC3. The decorative and structural details of ancient temples and palaces are maintained with high quality.
	PC4. There is clear and accessible information explaining the historical value and conservation efforts of the site.
	PC5. Before entering, visitors can observe signs of conservation efforts on the exterior heritage structures.
Source Credibility	SC1. The information provided by trusted tourism platforms, such as government websites and official tourist boards, is generally regarded as reliable by the public.
	SC2. This tourism information source consistently receives high ratings or positive reviews from other users.
	SC3. The source providing information about cultural destinations is widely regarded as trustworthy.
	SC4. Tourists believe the information provider demonstrates a high level of professional knowledge and expertise.
	SC5. The information source is considered reliable when it aligns with historical, cultural, and experiential accuracy.

Table A1. *Cont.*

Variable	Specific Items
Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior	CHVB1. I am willing to participate in activities related to Chengde's cultural heritage, such as guided tours, interpretive explanations, or exhibitions.
	CHVB2. When talking with others about my cultural heritage trip to Chengde, I express positive opinions.
	CHVB3. I would share positive impressions of Chengde's heritage sites through social media platforms.
	CHVB4. I would recommend Chengde's cultural heritage sites, such as the Mountain Resort and temple complexes, to my family and friends.
	CHVB5. I continue to follow new exhibitions, programs, or cultural events related to Chengde's cultural heritage.
	CHVB6. If given the opportunity, I would be willing to revisit Chengde's cultural heritage sites.

Note. The formal questionnaire administered to participants was in Chinese. The items presented in this appendix are the English reporting version translated from the finalized Chinese questionnaire for publication purposes. The translation was reviewed for conceptual consistency, linguistic clarity, and correspondence with the intended meanings of the adapted measurement scales.

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Jiang, X., Jiang, S. and Phakdeephirot, N. (2026). Heritage Communication, Perceived Conservation, and Cultural Heritage Visiting Behavior Among Chinese Tourists: Evidence from Chengde, China. *Heritage*, 9(8): 311, pp. 1-36. https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage9080311.

Essay 2

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