

AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF FILM TOURISM: EXAMINING TOURIST DESTINATION CHOICES AND REVISIT INTENTION IN ZHANGJIAJIE

Siqi Cao

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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Siqi Cao

2026



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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were (1) to explore the underlying motivational, experiential, and perceptual factors that shape tourists' engagement with Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination, (2) to examine how tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and engagement influence revisit intention in the context of film tourism in Zhangjiajie, (3) to investigate the mediating role of tourist engagement in the relationships between tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and revisit intention, and (4) to assess how location moderates the relationship between tourist engagement and revisit intention.

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design that integrated qualitative exploration with quantitative analysis. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with 30 tourists who had visited Zhangjiajie and were aware of its film-related characteristics. The interview data were analyzed using grounded theory procedures, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which identified key dimensions such as cinematic immersion, film-related environment, media-influenced perception, emotional engagement, and cultural interpretation. These findings informed the development and refinement of the measurement model. The quantitative phase was based on 755 valid questionnaires collected from tourists visiting Zhangjiajie. Reliability and validity were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, KMO and Bartlett's tests, and confirmatory factor analysis. Structural equation modeling was employed to examine direct relationships, mediation effects, and moderation effects within the proposed framework.

Major findings: (1) On the issue of the study, it reveals that tourists' engagement in Zhangjiajie is shaped by a combination of cinematic experience, motivational drivers, and destination image, with engagement emerging as a dynamic process integrating emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement; (2) On the issue of the results, they show that tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image all have significant positive effects on revisit intention, with engagement identified as the strongest predictor; (3) On the issue of the findings, they indicate that tourist engagement significantly mediates the relationships between experience, motivation, destination image, and revisit intention, confirming a partial mediation mechanism; and (4) On the issue of the results, they demonstrate that location significantly moderates the relationship between engagement and revisit intention, such that favorable accessibility conditions strengthen the translation of engagement into behavioral intention.

Keywords: Film tourism, Tourist engagement, Revisit intention, Tourist experience, Tourist motivation, Perceived destination image, Zhangjiajie
Advisor's Signature .....

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List of Abbreviation and Glossary

Abbreviation / Glossary	Explanation
AR	Augmented Reality
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CMB	Common Method Bias
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CMB	Common Method Bias
CR	Composite Reliability
ELOC	External Locus of attribution
ET	Engagement
FTD	Film Tourism Destinations
GDP	The Gross Domestic Product
ILOC	Internal Locus of Attribution
KMO	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin
LO	Location
MGA	Multi-Group Analysis
PBC	Perceived Behavior Control
PI	Perceived Destination Image
RI	Revisit Intention
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SRMR	Standardized Root Mean Square Residual
TE	Tourist Experience
M	Tourist Motivation
TPB	The Theory of Planned Behavior
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
VR	Virtual Reality
$\chi 2$	Chi-square

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the foundational framework for the study by introducing the research background, identifying the core research problem, and highlighting the existing gaps in the literature related to film tourism. It then outlines the theoretical and practical significance of the research, followed by a clear presentation of the research questions and objectives that guide the study. The chapter further explains the overall research methodology, emphasizing the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Key concepts are defined to ensure conceptual clarity, and the scope and delimitations of the research are specified to establish clear boundaries. Finally, the structure of the thesis is presented to guide the reader through the subsequent chapters. Together, these elements offer a comprehensive overview of the study and set the stage for the theoretical and empirical analyses that follow.

1.1 Background of the Study

1.1.1 Research Problem Statement

Tourism is one of the most significant sectors driving global economic growth, generating employment, fostering cultural exchange, and promoting regional development (Li et al., 2024). As a substantial contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of many countries, the tourism industry has profound economic implications, impacting sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and retail. Beyond its economic benefits, tourism also contributes to environmental conservation, particularly when destinations preserve their landscapes and heritage sites to attract visitors (Khater et al., 2024). As tourism continues to diversify to meet evolving consumer interests, niche markets such as film tourism have emerged as unique drivers of economic growth.

Film tourism, defined as travel motivated by the desire to visit locations featured in film and television productions, has gained considerable momentum in recent years (Becker, 2021). This type of tourism capitalizes on the global reach of media, transforming ordinary locations into iconic attractions. Through cinematic portrayals, film tourism

enhances destination branding, drawing tourists seeking authentic experiences tied to popular films. These portrayals often evoke emotional connections and curiosity, making film tourism a powerful tool for promoting regional economic revitalization and preserving local landscapes and cultural elements. Furthermore, film tourism plays a role in cultural diplomacy, enhancing the international reputation of host countries and attracting diverse tourist demographics.

The economic implications of film tourism are considerable, involving direct and indirect contributions to the local economy (De Santi et al., 2023). Direct contributions include increased spending on accommodation, food, and travel, as tourists visit film locations. Indirectly, film tourism promotes the destination through media and marketing, attracting further visitors and investments. Moreover, the cultural impact extends beyond mere economics (Francis, 2020). By showcasing local landscapes, customs, and narratives, films can enhance cultural appreciation and preservation, offering a narrative medium that fosters a deeper connection between the destination and its visitors (Graham, 2020). The intersection of cinema and tourism has long been a subject of academic and industrial interest (Cheng & Yang, 2022). With the advent of globalization and the ease of travel, destinations portrayed in movies have increasingly become tourist attractions (Ghosh et al., 2021). This phenomenon, commonly referred to as "film tourism," has been examined in various contexts, from Hollywood's global reach to the impact of Bollywood on Indian tourism (Lang et al., 2021).

In recent years, the rise of film tourism in China has been particularly noteworthy, driven by both domestic and international film productions. Locations such as Zhangjiajie, the filming site for the globally popular movie “Avatar”, and Hengdian World Studios, known as “China's Hollywood,” have become iconic destinations attracting millions of visitors annually. The strategic use of film in these locations not only showcases China's diverse landscapes and historical heritage but also aligns with the nation's broader goals to boost cultural tourism (Ünüvar & Ahmed, 2022). Film tourism has played a crucial role in transforming these once obscure destinations into globally recognized tourism hubs. For instance, Zhangjiajie, a UNESCO Global Geopark, saw a significant increase in tourists after the release of Avatar. The region experienced a surge in tourist numbers, with Zhangjiajie National Forest Park attracting 4.5 million tourists in 2020 alone, a 40% increase from previous years. The financial injection from these tourists contributes

directly to local economies, creating new opportunities for tourism-related businesses, including hotels, restaurants, and transport services.

The economic contributions of film tourism are seen not only in direct tourism-related revenues but also in the rise of ancillary industries. The creation of large-scale film sets, for example, has led to the development of entertainment complexes and media production hubs. Hengdian World Studios, which boasts over 100 film and television sets, contributes significantly to the local economy of Dongyang city in Zhejiang Province (Cui et al., 2024). In 2020, Hengdian's tourism-related revenue surpassed RMB 2 billion, and the region's cultural industry has grown substantially, employing tens of thousands of individuals in film production, hospitality, and tourism services (Zhang, 2024). Similarly, other regions benefiting from film tourism have witnessed a rise in hotel and accommodation development, with new hotels opening each year to cater to increasing numbers of visitors. This growth in infrastructure has provided job opportunities and fueled regional development, especially in rural and less-developed areas.

Zhangjiajie, renowned for its unique sandstone pillars that inspired the floating mountains in the film Avatar, has leveraged its natural landscapes to promote film tourism. In 2023, Wulingyuan District, encompassing Zhangjiajie, welcomed approximately 15.9 million tourists, generating nearly 22 billion yuan in tourism revenue (Wu et al., 2025). The influx of visitors has bolstered local employment, particularly in hospitality, transportation, and tour services. However, the tourism flow exhibits significant fluctuations across seasons, with peak visitation occurring during public holidays and summer months, while the off-peak seasons see a sharp decline in tourist numbers. These patterns emphasize the necessity of sustainable strategies to balance seasonal visitor pressure and maintain consistent tourism revenue.

Zhangjiajie has successfully attracted large numbers of domestic tourists by leveraging their association with iconic films. The continued development and promotion of film and television hubs are expected to further integrate the entertainment and tourism industries, enhancing visitor experiences while supporting sustainable regional growth. These trends underscore the broader potential of film tourism to diversify local tourism economies and enhance China's cultural visibility on the global stage (Cui, 2023). Nonetheless, several unresolved challenges continue to limit the full realization of this potential.

In the increasingly competitive global tourism market, revisit intention has become a vital indicator for evaluating the long-term effectiveness of destination branding, particularly in the context of film tourism (Han et al., 2025). Revisit intention reflects not only tourists' overall satisfaction and emotional attachment but also the capacity of destinations to convert short-term media-driven attention into sustained behavioral loyalty. International film tourism destinations such as New Zealand and the United Kingdom have demonstrated that cinematic exposure can be successfully transformed into stable patterns of repeat visitation when tourist experience, engagement, and destination image are effectively aligned. By contrast, many Chinese film tourism destinations continue to rely heavily on first-time visits stimulated by media exposure, with comparatively limited emphasis on fostering enduring psychological connections and repeat visitation (Nakayama, 2021). This imbalance constrains the potential for long-term economic stability and increases dependence on novelty-oriented demand (Lin, 2024). Accordingly, a deeper understanding of the psychological and experiential mechanisms that drive revisit intention has become essential for enhancing destination competitiveness and supporting the sustainable development of emerging film tourism hubs such as Zhangjiajie.

Although Chinese film tourism destinations have achieved substantial domestic popularity, high visitor volume alone does not necessarily translate into strong revisit intention. In many cases, tourists' initial interest generated by cinematic exposure is not consistently transformed into emotional engagement, favorable destination image, or long-term behavioral commitment. Existing research suggests that this gap is closely related to how tourists interpret cinematic representations, evaluate on-site experiences, and integrate symbolic meanings into their overall perception of the destination (Portegies, 2010). When experiential quality, motivational fulfillment, and perceived image are insufficiently aligned, tourists may exhibit limited emotional resonance and reduced intention to revisit, regardless of initial attraction (Jiang et al., 2024).

Tourist behavior in film tourism settings is fundamentally shaped by the interaction between external stimuli and internal psychological processes. From a psychological perspective, tourists do not merely respond to cinematic landscapes or promotional imagery but actively interpret, evaluate, and internalize these stimuli through their motivations, perceptions, and attitudes (Luong & Nguyen, 2025). Emotional connection to film narratives, immersion in cinematic environments, and symbolic interpretation of

place meanings play a central role in shaping engagement and behavioral intention (Li et al., 2024). Understanding these internal mechanisms is therefore critical for explaining why certain film tourism destinations are more successful than others in fostering revisit intention.

Within this context, tourist experience has evolved from passive sightseeing to a multidimensional process involving emotional resonance, narrative immersion, and place-making (Chen & Chen, 2025). As domestic tourism demand becomes more experience-oriented, the ability of film tourism destinations to design immersive experiences that generate engagement and positive destination image has become a key determinant of tourist satisfaction and long-term loyalty (Cui, 2023). Consequently, empirical investigation into how tourist experience, perceived destination image and motivation are translated into engagement and revisit intention is essential for advancing both theoretical understanding and practical development of film tourism.

Engagement, which captures the depth of tourists' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement with a destination (Cheng et al., 2020). In China's rapidly expanding film tourism sector, engagement is increasingly visible through phenomena such as visitors dressing in costume, participating in film reenactments, or sharing content on social media platforms like Xiaohongshu and Douyin (Guo et al., 2024). These actions not only reflect a deeper psychological connection to the destination but also play a role in user-driven destination marketing. As domestic tourism shifts from passive consumption to co-creation and interactivity, understanding engagement becomes essential for explaining why certain destinations succeed in building loyal visitor bases while others fail to maintain relevance.

Destination image plays a critical role in shaping tourists' decision-making behavior in film tourism; however, unlike conventional tourism contexts, destination image in film tourism is primarily constructed through the representational mechanisms of the film and television industry (Quintal & Phau, 2015). Cinematic productions embed destinations within specific narratives, visual aesthetics, and symbolic meanings, transforming physical locations into emotionally charged and culturally mediated spaces. In China, this film-mediated image formation is evident across major film tourism destinations. Zhangjiajie's image is largely shaped by its cinematic representation as the fictional "Hallelujah Mountains" in Avatar, emphasizing fantasy and ecological

transcendence; Hengdian World Studios derives its image from large-scale historical reconstructions designed for film and television production, reinforcing associations with dynastic narratives and performative heritage; while Chongqing's image emerges from contemporary film portrayals that highlight urban verticality, nightlife, and everyday street realism. These differentiated images are products of film industry narratives rather than general tourism branding, and they directly influence tourists' motivations, expectations, and behavioral intentions (Ding et al., 2025).

Research into travel motivation has long been a key focus in tourism studies, as understanding what drives tourists is essential for effective marketing and management (Yousaf et al., 2018). Motivation is commonly classified into internal factors, such as the pursuit of relaxation, excitement, or emotional connection with a place (Yoo et al., 2018), and external factors, including media exposure, cinematic appeal, and culturally shaped social expectations (Luong, 2024). In film tourism contexts, external motivations often arise from visually compelling narratives, peer sharing on social media, or perceived social value in visiting iconic filming locations. Attribution theory, which explains how individuals assign meaning to observed stimuli and derive intention from both personal desire and contextual cues (Hillebrandt & Barclay, 2017). By examining how internal drives and external cinematic stimuli jointly shape perceived value and behavioral outcomes, this study advances a more nuanced framework for understanding motivation in film tourism.

In recent years, tourist engagement has become an increasingly valuable concept in tourism decision-making studies. Tourist participation refers to the active involvement of visitors in the experiences offered by a destination, where they go beyond being passive observers to engage in activities that strengthen their connection to the location (Voase, 2002). In the context of film and television tourism, this participation often involves interacting with film-related elements, such as visiting filming locations, joining themed tours, or engaging in activities inspired by the films or television shows associated with the destination. Engagement plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between tourist motivations and actual behavioral outcomes. It enhances emotional attachment, cognitive involvement, and immersive experiences, which in turn increase travel intentions and destination loyalty (Fang et al., 2023). However, despite its importance, engagement has received limited attention as a mediating variable in film tourism studies. Existing

literature often treats engagement as a secondary outcome of motivation, rather than a central mechanism through which motivations and destination image shape tourist behavior (Sabiote-Ortiz et al., 2024).

As one of China's most representative film tourism destinations, Zhangjiajie provides a focused empirical context for examining how cinematic media exposure shapes tourists' on-site experience and subsequent behavioral intentions. This study concentrates exclusively on tourists visiting Zhangjiajie and investigates how tourist motivation, tourist experience, and perceived destination image jointly influence tourist engagement, which in turn affects their revisit intention. The study analyzes the internal psychological mechanisms through which Zhangjiajie's iconic film-related landscapes and symbolic imagery—popularized through global media—are transformed into tourists' emotional involvement and behavioral commitment. These findings not only enhance destination marketing strategies but also support the cultivation of sustainable revisit behaviors in Zhangjiajie.

1.1.2 Research Gap

In recent years, film tourism has gained sustained scholarly attention as an important form of deep integration between cultural communication and tourism consumption. A substantial body of research has examined topics such as cinematic landscape reproduction, destination marketing, residents' support, and destination attractiveness (Castro et al., 2023), consistently indicating that film and television works can significantly enhance a destination's visibility, emotional atmosphere, and economic development potential (Cui & Song, 2025). Within this context, film tourism—characterized by strong emotional penetration, rich symbolic meaning, and pronounced immersive experiences—enables tourists to establish close situational connections between real physical spaces and on-screen imagery (Berga Rodrigues et al., 2025). Although existing studies have explored the uniqueness of film tourism through perspectives such as emotional resonance, media influence, and symbolic consumption, further advancement is still needed to systematically elucidate tourists' underlying psychological mechanisms and the pathways through which these mechanisms shape revisit behavior.

In the field of tourist behavior research, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has long been applied to explain tourism intention, emphasizing the predictive roles of

attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Esfandiar & Hadinejad, 2025). Although this body of research provides valuable insights for understanding revisit behavior in film tourism contexts, it offers limited explanation of the deeper question of why tourists develop specific beliefs and motivations. This limitation becomes particularly salient in film tourism settings, where emotions are intense and narratives are highly salient, as tourists' beliefs and motivations often carry stronger affective meanings and symbolic attributes. Against this backdrop, attribution theory offers an important complementary perspective by distinguishing internal and external motivational sources—such as personal interest, emotional identification with films, social influence, media exposure, and situational conditions—to explain tourist behavior (Graham, 2020). Thus, understanding how tourists cognitively and emotionally process these internal and external cues within immersive filmic environments is essential for uncovering the psychological construction of motivation.

At the same time, tourist experience has gained increasing prominence in theoretical models explaining tourist behavior. According to the experience economy framework, tourists interact with destinations through multiple experiential dimensions—entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism—which stimulate emotional resonance, identity alignment, and deeper cognitive processing (Northey et al., 2025). Moreover, perceived destination image, as a key factor influencing attitudes, satisfaction, and behavioral intention, has been shown to significantly shape tourism decision-making at both cognitive and affective levels (Nematpour et al., 2025). Although destination image is often treated as an outcome construct formed through information exposure or on-site perception, relatively few studies adopt an integrated perspective to examine how it interacts with tourists' motivations, actual experiences, and emotional processing (Steriopoulos et al., 2023). This gap is particularly salient in film tourism, where the formation of destination image depends not only on the destination's physical and environmental attributes but is also jointly shaped by cinematic narratives, symbolic imagery, and tourists' own motivations (Billore, 2025). Therefore, further exploring how destination image influences tourists' emotional engagement and behavioral intentions within cinematic contexts holds substantial theoretical and practical significance.

Moreover, engagement is regarded as a key psychological bridge linking situational stimuli with behavioral responses, typically manifested through tourists'

emotional involvement, cognitive attention, and interactive behaviors within the destination context (Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2024). Engagement not only shapes the perceived quality of activities or environmental experiences but also substantially influences behavioral outcomes such as loyalty, satisfaction, and revisit intention (Ahmed et al., 2024). In the context of film tourism, tourists often develop heightened engagement as they experience film scenes, interpret narrative symbols, and immerse themselves in the destination atmosphere, which further strengthens their inclination to revisit (Yen et al., 2024). However, whether such emotional identification can ultimately be translated into actual revisit behavior is significantly constrained by external situational factors—particularly geographic location, spatial distance, and travel convenience (Sun et al., 2024). Even when tourists exhibit strong engagement due to immersive or emotionally resonant experiences, the realization of revisit intention may still depend on spatial conditions such as travel costs and accessibility (Baghirov et al., 2023). Therefore, incorporating location as a moderating variable into the analytical framework helps more accurately reveal how engagement transforms into revisit intention under different spatial conditions, thereby deepening the understanding of the mechanisms linking cultural experience, emotional involvement, and behavioral responses in film tourism contexts.

Zhangjiajie, as one of China's most representative film tourism destinations, derives its strong visual appeal and cultural symbolism from the interaction between its unique landscape features and cinematic narratives (Hao et al., 2024). Against this backdrop, the present study takes Zhangjiajie film tourism as the entry point and proposes an integrated analytical framework that positions tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image as antecedents, engagement as a mediating mechanism, and revisit intention as the behavioral outcome, while incorporating tourists' geographic location as a moderating factor. The study aims to uncover the cognitive–affective–behavioral transformation pathways underlying tourist behavior in film tourism contexts, deepen the understanding of visitor behavioral mechanisms within Zhangjiajie's cinematic tourism setting, and expand the theoretical and practical boundaries of research in this field.

1.2 Significance of the Study

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

First, by employing the experience economy model, this research deepens understanding of how film tourism destinations can design immersive and emotionally resonant experiences aligned with cinematic narratives. Traditional applications of this model have focused on entertainment, retail, and mainstream tourism; however, its integration into film tourism in Zhangjiajie reveals how cinematic environments act as staged experiences that evoke engagement, symbolic meaning, and personal memory. Through this lens, tourist experience functions as a key antecedent that stimulates emotional involvement and strengthens revisit intention. This perspective contributes to existing literature by demonstrating that film-related destinations operate not merely as physical places, but as experiential products shaped by narrative immersion and aesthetic stimulation.

Second, the study advances attribution theory by examining how tourists interpret internal and external sources of tourist motivation when engaging with a film-based tourism environment. While existing tourism literature has acknowledged attributional processes more broadly, limited attention has been given to how travelers assign meaning to motivations stimulated by emotionally charged, media-influenced settings. By identifying how tourists attribute their motivations either to internal enjoyment, narrative resonance, or external influences such as social encouragement and media exposure, this research refines the theoretical utility of attribution theory in film tourism. In particular, it illustrates how motivational attributions influence engagement and subsequent revisit intention, thereby clarifying the psychological processes underlying behavior in a cinematic destination context.

Third, the study enriches image theory by introducing a cognitive-evaluative perspective to explain how perceived destination image influences both engagement and behavioral outcomes. Unlike intention models that emphasize social norms or perceived control, image theory highlights the role of goals, values, and identity–destination compatibility in shaping evaluations. This approach is especially relevant in Zhangjiajie, where tourist perceptions are shaped simultaneously by media representations and on-site interactions with iconic film-related landscapes. By analyzing how tourists process destination information through cinematic imagery, symbolic meaning, and personal

relevance, the study demonstrates that perceived destination image acts not only as a cognitive evaluation but also as an important antecedent that strengthens engagement and revisit intention.

Fourth, the incorporation of location as a moderating variable extends existing theoretical discussions by emphasizing the role of spatial feasibility in converting psychological engagement into behavioral intention. While prior research has primarily examined engagement as a psychological construct, this study highlights that its effect on revisit intention is not uniform. For tourists living closer to Zhangjiajie, high engagement is more easily translated into repeat visitation due to lower travel costs and higher behavioral feasibility. For long-distance travelers, the same level of engagement may not yield equivalent revisit intentions. This moderated relationship provides a refined understanding of how geographical context shapes the behavioral implications of engagement, contributing a novel spatial dimension to theories used in film tourism research.

Collectively, these theoretical extensions underscore the value of an integrative, cross-disciplinary framework in explaining behavioral patterns within film tourism. By bridging emotional experience, motivational attribution, cognitive evaluation, and spatial context, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how tourists interact with media-constructed destinations. This approach not only fills key theoretical gaps but also lays a robust foundation for future research exploring the evolving nexus between cinematic narratives and tourism behavior.

1.2.2 Practical Significance

Insights for local government. This study provides meaningful implications for local government and policymakers in Zhangjiajie by identifying the key psychological and experiential factors that shape tourists' revisit intention within the context of film tourism. By understanding how tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image enhance engagement, and how this engagement subsequently drives revisit intention—particularly among tourists from locations with higher travel feasibility—local authorities can more effectively develop targeted tourism policies. These findings support decision-making related to infrastructure improvement, destination planning, visitor flow management, and cultural landscape preservation, enabling Zhangjiajie to strengthen its position as a globally recognized film tourism destination.

Moreover, recognizing the moderating role of location helps policymakers allocate resources strategically, designing differentiated services and marketing for local, regional, and long-distance tourist segments..

Benefits for the film industry, the results offer valuable insights for the film industry, especially regarding how cinematic representations influence tourists' motivations, perceptions, and emotional engagement with Zhangjiajie. Understanding which aspects of the destination most effectively stimulate motivation or enhance destination image can support location selection, narrative design, set construction, and promotional collaboration between filmmakers and tourism authorities. By aligning cinematic storytelling with elements that bolster tourist engagement, film producers can amplify the cultural and commercial value of film projects associated with Zhangjiajie. This alignment not only enhances the attractiveness of the destination for film audiences but also reinforces the long-term synergy between cinematic content and tourism development..

Lastly, for tourism agencies and destination marketers, this study provides a data-driven basis for designing more precise and effective marketing strategies. By identifying how experiential, motivational, and image-related factors shape engagement and revisit intention, agencies can develop tailored promotional campaigns that emphasize Zhangjiajie's cinematic landscapes, narrative associations, and iconic film-related attractions. Additionally, incorporating insights about tourists' geographical location enables agencies to segment markets more effectively and adapt communication strategies to the behavioral patterns and practical constraints of different tourist groups. These evidence-based approaches can significantly enhance brand positioning, increase tourist retention, and support sustainable development of film tourism in Zhangjiajie.

1.3 Statement of Research Questions

RQ1: How do motivational, experiential, and perceptual factors shape tourists' engagement with Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination?

RQ2: How do tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and tourist engagement influence revisit intention in the context of film tourism in Zhangjiajie?

RQ3: How does tourist engagement mediate the relationships between tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and revisit intention?

RQ4: How does perceived travel accessibility moderate the relationship between tourist engagement and revisit intention?

1.4 Statement of Research Objectives

RO1: To explore how motivational, experiential, and perceptual factors shape tourists' engagement with Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination.

RO2: To examine how tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and tourist engagement influence revisit intention in the context of film tourism in Zhangjiajie.

RO3: To examine the mediating role of tourist engagement in the relationships between tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and revisit intention.

RO4: To examine the moderating role of perceived travel accessibility in the relationship between tourist engagement and revisit intention.

1.5 Methodology

This study adopts a mixed methods design to investigate the mechanisms through which tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image influence tourist engagement and revisit intention in the context of film tourism in Zhangjiajie. The use of a mixed methods approach is appropriate because the research problem involves both interpretive and explanatory dimensions. On the one hand, it is necessary to explore how tourists understand and construct their film tourism experiences. On the other hand, it is equally important to test the structural relationships among the core variables in a systematic way.

The research therefore combines qualitative and quantitative methods in a sequential manner. The qualitative phase is used to explore the underlying dimensions of tourist engagement and to identify how motivational, experiential, and perceptual factors are embedded in tourists' narratives. Semi structured interviews are conducted with tourists who have visited Zhangjiajie and are aware of its cinematic associations, and the data are analyzed through grounded theory procedures, including open coding, axial

coding, and selective coding. This phase provides conceptual insights and supports the refinement of the research framework.

The quantitative phase is then employed to test the proposed model and hypotheses. Survey data are collected through a structured questionnaire, and the resulting data are analyzed using reliability and validity tests, descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling. This phase makes it possible to evaluate the direct, mediating, and moderating relationships among tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, location, and revisit intention.

By integrating qualitative exploration with quantitative verification, this study is able to provide both interpretive depth and empirical rigor. The methodological design therefore ensures that the research findings are conceptually grounded, statistically supported, and closely aligned with the study objectives.

1.6 Definitions of Terms

1.6.1 Film Tourism

Film tourism refers to a form of tourism in which individuals are motivated to visit destinations that have been featured in films, television series, or other visual media. It involves the interaction between mediated representations and physical environments, where tourists' expectations are shaped by cinematic imagery prior to the visit and are subsequently interpreted through on-site experiences (Northey et al., 2025). In this study, film tourism is understood as a hybrid phenomenon that integrates symbolic imagination and real-world perception. Zhangjiajie serves as a typical case, as its landscapes have been widely associated with globally recognized film productions, which contribute to the formation of a distinctive cinematic identity. As such, film tourism here extends beyond simple sightseeing and reflects a process in which tourists seek to experience, verify, and reinterpret film-induced meanings through direct engagement with the destination (Hao, 2025).

1.6.2 Tourist Experience

Tourist experience refers to the overall set of cognitive, emotional, and sensory responses that emerge from tourists' interaction with a destination. It encompasses perceptions of the physical environment, emotional reactions to the setting, and the meanings constructed through participation in tourism activities (Li et al., 2025). In the

context of film tourism, tourist experience is not limited to direct sensory perception but is also shaped by prior exposure to cinematic representations. This leads to a layered experiential structure in which tourists interpret real-world landscapes through film-related imagination and narrative association. As a result, tourist experience reflects both immediate on-site interaction and mediated symbolic understanding. In this study, it represents a key antecedent variable that captures how tourists perceive and internalize their encounters with Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination (Song et al., 2015).

1.6.3 Tourist Motivation

Tourist motivation refers to the internal and external drivers that stimulate individuals to engage in tourism activities and influence their behavioral decisions. It includes psychological needs such as curiosity, relaxation, emotional fulfillment, and the desire for novel or meaningful experiences, as well as external influences such as media exposure and social recommendations (Aguilar-Rivero et al., 2024). In film tourism contexts, motivation is often closely linked to interest in films, attachment to cinematic narratives, and the desire to experience locations associated with familiar visual representations. These motivations shape not only the decision to visit a destination but also the level of involvement during the visit. In this study, tourist motivation is conceptualized as a foundational factor that influences both engagement and behavioral intention, reflecting its role in initiating and sustaining the tourism experience.

1.6.4 Perceived Destination Image

Perceived destination image refers to tourists' overall evaluation of a destination based on their cognitive beliefs and affective impressions. It is formed through the integration of multiple information sources, including media representations, prior knowledge, and direct experience (V.G et al., 2021). In film tourism contexts, destination image is strongly influenced by cinematic portrayals, which shape tourists' expectations before the visit and guide their interpretation of the destination during the experience. This results in a dynamic image formation process, where pre-existing perceptions may be reinforced, adjusted, or reinterpreted through on-site encounters. In this study, perceived destination image represents an important perceptual factor that influences both engagement and revisit intention, reflecting how tourists mentally construct and evaluate Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination.

1.6.5 Tourist Engagement

Tourist engagement refers to the extent to which tourists are cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally involved in their interaction with a destination. It reflects a deeper level of participation beyond passive observation, encompassing attention, immersion, emotional connection, and active involvement in tourism activities (Teng, 2021). In the context of film tourism, engagement is shaped by the interaction between cinematic imagination and real-world experience, where tourists actively interpret, explore, and connect with film-related environments. Engagement is therefore not only an outcome of experience but also a process through which meaning is constructed and reinforced. In this study, tourist engagement is conceptualized as a central mechanism linking experiential, motivational, and perceptual factors to behavioral intention, highlighting its key role in transforming internal responses into future actions.

1.6.6 Revisit Intention

Revisit intention refers to the likelihood that tourists will return to a destination in the future. It represents a key indicator of tourist loyalty and reflects the overall evaluation of the tourism experience. Revisit intention is influenced by multiple factors, including perceived value, emotional attachment, satisfaction, and engagement (Lee et al., 2020). In film tourism contexts, revisit intention may also be shaped by the desire to relive cinematic experiences, deepen familiarity with the destination, or explore new aspects of film-related settings. In this study, revisit intention serves as the primary outcome variable, capturing tourists' future behavioral tendencies and providing an important basis for understanding destination sustainability and long-term attractiveness.

1.6.7 Location

Location refers to tourists' subjective evaluation of the travel-related conditions connecting their place of residence with Zhangjiajie. In this study, location is not limited to objective geographical distance. It also reflects how tourists perceive the availability of travel information, the manageability of the journey, the affordability of travel costs, and the convenience of transportation (Rahmawati et al., 2021). These perceived location-related conditions influence the practical feasibility of returning to the destination. Favorable location conditions may facilitate the translation of tourist engagement into revisit intention, whereas unfavorable conditions may constrain revisit intention despite a high level of engagement.

1.7 Delimitation of the Thesis

This thesis is limited to the study of film tourism in Zhangjiajie, with particular attention to the relationships among tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, tourist engagement, location, and revisit intention. The research focuses specifically on tourists who have visited Zhangjiajie and recognize its film-related characteristics, rather than on general visitors or other tourist segments. The study is further delimited by its emphasis on a selected set of constructs derived from the literature review and qualitative findings. Although tourist behavior may be influenced by many other factors, this thesis concentrates only on the variables included in the proposed research model in order to maintain conceptual clarity and analytical focus. In methodological terms, the thesis is confined to a mixed methods design that combines qualitative interviews and quantitative survey analysis. The quantitative phase is based on cross-sectional data collected at one point in time, which means that the study examines perceptions and intentions within a specific period rather than across a longer temporal process. These delimitations help define the scope of the research and ensure that the study remains focused on its central objectives.

1.8 Outline of Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters, each addressing a specific component of the research.

Chapter One introduces the background and significance of the study, outlines the research objectives and questions, and presents the overall research framework. It also describes the methodology, defines key terms, and clarifies the scope and delimitations of the study.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature on film tourism, tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, and revisit intention. Based on this review, the chapter develops the theoretical framework and proposes the research hypotheses.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology in detail. It describes the research design, data collection procedures, measurement development, pilot study, and analytical techniques used in both the qualitative and quantitative phases.

Chapter Four reports the empirical findings of the study. It first presents the qualitative analysis results, followed by the quantitative analysis, including reliability and validity testing, descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling.

Chapter Five discusses the findings in relation to the research objectives and existing literature, and outlines the theoretical and practical implications of the study. It also addresses the limitations of the research and provides suggestions for future studies, followed by the overall conclusion.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has established the conceptual and empirical foundation of the study by outlining the background, research problem, objectives, and methodological approach. It has highlighted the growing importance of film tourism as a dynamic intersection between cultural production and tourism development, with particular emphasis on Zhangjiajie as a representative case. Despite the increasing popularity of film tourism destinations, the chapter identified a critical gap between initial tourist attraction driven by cinematic exposure and the formation of sustained revisit intention. This gap underscores the need to examine the underlying psychological and experiential mechanisms that shape tourist behavior.

In response to this research problem, the chapter defined four research objectives and corresponding questions, focusing on the roles of tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, and location. It further justified the adoption of a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative exploration with quantitative verification to ensure both conceptual depth and empirical rigor. Key constructs were clearly defined, and the scope and limitations of the study were specified to maintain analytical focus.

Overall, this chapter provides a structured introduction to the research by linking theoretical perspectives with practical challenges in film tourism. It sets the stage for the subsequent literature review by clarifying the key variables and relationships to be examined. By doing so, it establishes a coherent framework for understanding how cinematic representation, psychological processes, and contextual factors jointly influence tourist engagement and revisit intention in Zhangjiaji

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a comprehensive literature review, examining the critical theories, frameworks, and empirical studies relevant to understanding the dynamics of film tourism. This chapter explores foundational concepts, including attribution theory, the experience economy model and image theory, to analyze the factors influencing tourist revisit intention in film tourism contexts. By focusing on Zhangjiajie as a case study, this chapter illuminates the interplay between experience, motivation, perceived destination image, location and engagement in shaping tourist revisit intention. These insights provide a theoretical foundation for analyzing how cinematic portrayals can enhance destination appeal.

2.1 Contexts of the Study

Understanding the relationship between cinema and tourism requires a deep dive into the nuances of both individual sectors and their intersection. The allure of visiting a location depicted in a film has long possible affects d travel decisions, and this phenomenon has become more pronounced with the rise of global cinema (Dodds & Butler, 2019).

2.1.1 Film Tourism

Film tourism is an evolving niche market within the tourism industry, characterized by the attraction of visitors to locations featured in films and television shows (Sousa et al., 2021). This sector exploits the scenic and narrative elements of cinema to enhance tourist experiences, offering a rich blend of entertainment, cultural education, and economic opportunity for destinations (Ponsignon & Derbaix, 2020). The essence of film tourism extends beyond mere visits to shooting locations; it encompasses a full program of related activities that deepen and diversify the tourist experience.

Key aspects of film tourism include exploring actual shooting locations which often become iconic landmarks due to their cinematic associations (Canavan, 2024).

Additionally, many destinations develop film and TV towns or studios that serve as permanent attractions (Araújo Vila et al., 2021). These facilities often feature replicas of film sets and offer behind-the-scenes tours, allowing tourists to immerse themselves in the cinematic world. The experience is further enriched through cultural and creative activities such as film-themed exhibitions, festivals, and workshops that explore film-making techniques and the historical context of the films.

Material artifacts and film-related souvenirs contribute to film tourism by reinforcing symbolic attachment and memory of cinematic experiences, enabling tourists to sustain emotional connections with film narratives beyond the on-site visit (Michopoulou et al., 2022). Advances in technology have introduced interactive and immersive experiences through virtual and augmented reality, enabling tourists to engage with film scenes in innovative ways (Han et al., 2019). Moreover, educational components such as guided tours led by experts provide insights into the filmmaking process, the significance of the filming locations, and the films' cultural impacts (Domínguez-Azcue et al., 2021).

Film tourism also functions as a multi-stakeholder industry shaped by interactions among film producers, destination management organizations, tourism enterprises, local governments, and host communities (Thelen et al., 2020). Film and television productions construct symbolic narratives and visual representations of places, while tourism authorities and destination managers translate these representations into marketable experiences through infrastructure development and destination branding. Tourism enterprises operationalize film-related experiences for visitors, and local governments provide institutional support through policy coordination and resource allocation. The effectiveness of film tourism development therefore depends on the alignment of these stakeholders in delivering coherent experiences that meet visitor expectations and sustain destination competitiveness (Lao et al., 2023).

Collectively, these elements create a comprehensive film tourism program that not only entertains but also educates tourists, fostering a deeper connection to the cinematic arts. Such programs not only stimulate local economies by increasing tourist traffic but also promote cultural understanding and appreciation, positioning film tourism as a significant and dynamic segment of the global tourism industry.

2.1.2 Film Tourism Destinations

Pookaiyaudom and Tan (2020) suggest film tourism destinations are the captivating confluence of two powerful global industries: cinema and tourism. These are locales that, by virtue of their cinematic representation, have been catapulted into the limelight, drawing tourists keen to experience the magic of their favorite film scenes in real life. The allure of these destinations lies not just in their physical beauty, but also in the narratives and emotions associated with them due to their portrayal on the silver screen.

Consider the sweeping vistas of New Zealand, which, after featuring as the mystical Middle Earth in 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy, have become synonymous with epic adventures and breathtaking landscapes. Or take the idyllic island of Santorini in Greece, whose sun-drenched cliffs and azure waters have played backdrop to countless romantic films, making it a top choice for honeymooners and couples.

Table 2.1 provides a comprehensive overview of renowned film and television tourism destinations around the world, including several notable locations within China. For instance, it lists Hobbiton in New Zealand, famous for its depiction as The Shire in 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy, and Highclere Castle in the United Kingdom, known as the setting for 'Downton Abbey'. This organization not only showcases the global spread of film tourism but also emphasizes the cultural and economic impact of cinematic portrayals on these destinations. By providing this structured comparison, the table effectively illustrates the significant role that film and television have played in transforming these locales into sought-after tourist destinations, thereby underscoring the global and diverse nature of film tourism.

Table 2.1 Famous Film and Television Tourism Destinations

Destination	Location	Famous for	Notable Films/Shows
Hobbiton	New Zealand	The Shire in 'The Lord of the Rings'	'The Lord of the Rings' Trilogy
Highclere Castle	United Kingdom	Setting of Downton Abbey	'Downton Abbey'
Dubrovnik	Croatia	King's Landing in 'Game of Thrones'	'Game of Thrones'

Table 2.1 (continued)

Destination	Location	Famous for	Notable Films/Shows
Monument Valley	USA	Iconic Western Film Backdrop	'Stagecoach', 'The Searchers'
Skellig Michael	Ireland	Luke Skywalker Hideout	'Star Wars: The Force Awakens'
Matamata	New Zealand	Hobbiton, The Shire	'The Hobbit' Series
Alberobello	Italy	Fairy tale trulli houses	Various Italian Films
Angkor Wat	Cambodia	Ancient Temple Complex	'Lara Croft: Tomb Raider'
Wulingyuan	China	Inspiration for Pandora	'Avatar'
Zhangjiajie	China	Hallelujah Mountains in 'Avatar'	'Avatar'
Hengdian World Studios	China	"Hollywood of the East"	Various Chinese Historical Dramas
Qin Imperial Palace	China	Royal Palace in various dramas	'Hero', 'The Emperor and the Assassin'

The benefits reaped by these destinations from their cinematic fame are manifold. The immediate and most evident advantage is the boost in tourism. Film enthusiasts, curious travelers, and fans flock to these places, eager to tread the paths of their favorite characters, capture the iconic views, or simply soak in the ambiance. This influx leads to significant economic uplifts, as local businesses, from hotels and restaurants to guided tour operators and souvenir shops, thrive on the increased demand (Upadhaya et al., 2022). The ripple effect of this can often rejuvenate entire local economies, creating jobs, promoting cultural exchanges, and fostering community pride.

However, the meteoric rise of a destination as a film tourism hotspot is not without its set of challenges. A predominant concern is the potential eclipsing of the destination's intrinsic value and diverse offerings by its cinematic identity (Huerta-Viso et al., 2024). In such cases, the place becomes overwhelmingly identified with a particular film or series, possibly neglecting its historical, cultural, or natural significance.

Additionally, the sudden and often unexpected surge in tourism can strain the infrastructure and natural resources of a location. Popular sites may face issues of overcrowding, waste management, and environmental degradation. Local communities, while benefiting economically, might grapple with disruptions in their daily life, inflated property prices, and a shift in cultural dynamics.

In essence, film tourism destinations represent a delicate balance of opportunity and responsibility. While cinema serves as a potent tool for global promotion and economic development, it is imperative for stakeholders, from local authorities to tour operators, to adopt sustainable practices. This ensures that the charm and integrity of these destinations remain intact for future generations of movie buffs and travelers alike.

2.1.3 Zhangjiajie as a Film Tourism Destination

Zhangjiajie, located in Hunan Province, China, exemplifies a thriving film tourism destination, largely due to its association with James Cameron's film Avatar. Following the release of Avatar, Zhangjiajie became renowned as the inspiration for the film's iconic Hallelujah Mountains, sparking a global wave of interest (Saro-Wiwa, 2024). This connection has established Zhangjiajie as a film tourism case study within China, demonstrating how destinations can effectively utilize cinematic associations to enhance their visibility and appeal (Hao et al., 2024). Through targeted marketing campaigns, including the memorable slogan "Pandora is far, but Zhangjiajie is near." Zhangjiajie has positioned itself as an earthly parallel to the mythical landscapes of Avatar. This branding strategy not only attracts dedicated fans of the film but also appeals to nature enthusiasts seeking an otherworldly experience within China. The area's distinctive sandstone pillars and lush forests have attracted numerous film and television productions, establishing Zhangjiajie as a hub for cinematic tourism that goes beyond a single film narrative (Zeng et al., 2025). While "Avatar" remains a foundational aspect of Zhangjiajie's film tourism identity, other productions have contributed to its growing reputation as a visually iconic location. Chinese fantasy films and historical dramas have also capitalized on Zhangjiajie's ethereal scenery, such as the popular Chinese film Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons and the series The Sorcerer and the White Snake, each of which integrates the area's landscapes into their narratives. These films introduce a broader cinematic appeal that draws diverse tourist demographics, including fans of Chinese mythology and fantasy genres, as well as international tourists intrigued by the scenery.

Zhangjiajie's film tourism offerings encompass a strategically designed array of activities that cater to diverse cinematic tastes, transforming its unique landscapes into immersive, multi-dimensional experiences (Hao et al., 2024). Themed scenic tours introduce visitors to prominent filming sites, including areas featured in both international films (Lao et al., 2022), such as Avatar, and domestic productions like Journey to the West and The Sorcerer and the White Snake, thereby reinforcing Zhangjiajie's identity as a versatile film tourism destination. To enhance engagement, architectural features such as the Zhangjiajie Grand Canyon Glass Bridge and cliff-side skywalks allow tourists to physically interact with the dramatic vistas often showcased in films, simulating cinematic viewpoints while incorporating thrilling, high-altitude experiences. Supplementing these physical encounters, Zhangjiajie integrates virtual reality (VR) installations and interactive exhibits, which enable visitors to engage with iconic scenes from various films through digital augmentation, creating a seamless blend of virtual and physical tourism (Leung et al., 2024). Additionally, live performances such as the Tianmen Fox Fairy show reflect the cultural heritage depicted in Chinese mythology-based films, offering culturally resonant spectacles against Zhangjiajie's mountainous backdrop. Finally, ecotourism initiatives that include guided hikes and biodiversity tours align with the ecological themes often portrayed in cinematic representations, promoting sustainability while allowing visitors to appreciate the region's biodiversity (Saoualih et al., 2024). Together, these activities not only enrich the film tourism experience but also support Zhangjiajie's sustainable tourism objectives by fostering an appreciation for its natural and cultural landscapes.

The integration of film tourism has brought substantial benefits and notable challenges to Zhangjiajie (Hao et al., 2024). Economically, film tourism has fueled rapid growth, driving revenue through a sharp increase in visitor numbers and boosting local businesses, including accommodations, transportation, dining, and retail. This economic influx has fostered a strong hospitality industry in Zhangjiajie, creating jobs and encouraging infrastructure investments that contribute to regional development (Gao et al., 2024). Furthermore, Zhangjiajie's global visibility, bolstered by film tourism, has positioned it as a cultural and natural icon, strengthening its role as a representative of Chinese heritage in the international tourism landscape (Zhao et al., 2024).

However, despite its popularity, the development of Zhangjiajie's film tourism faces specific challenges that limit its potential growth and sustainability. High visitor

traffic, particularly during peak seasons, places pressure on Zhangjiajie's fragile ecosystems, with increased waste, trail erosion, and impacts on biodiversity . While Zhangjiajie has implemented visitor caps, eco-friendly policies, and conservation measures, the balance between tourism demand and environmental protection remains a key challenge.

Practical factors such as accessibility, affordability, and the quality of tourism infrastructure significantly influence tourists' ability to realize their travel intentions (Fidelus-Orzechowska et al., 2024). While Zhangjiajie's cinematic appeal is a primary draw, logistical barriers like travel costs and accessibility constraints prevent many tourists from actualizing their intent to visit (Hammer et al., 2024). This issue underscores a need to examine how perceived behavioral control shapes tourists' intentions and highlights the practical considerations that must be addressed to facilitate increased tourism to Zhangjiajie.

A second critical issue involves the role of social norms and destination image in influencing Chinese tourists' attitudes and motivations toward film tourism destinations. In the context of China's collectivist culture, subjective norms—shaped by societal expectations and peer influence—play an integral role in shaping tourism behavior (Fu et al., 2023). The collective perception of Zhangjiajie as a desirable destination, amplified by its association with films such as Avatar, not only impacts its attractiveness but also influences tourists' attitudes and motivation. Similarly, Zhangjiajie's image as an iconic landscape associated with popular media profoundly affects how it is perceived within social circles, thereby shaping individuals' motivation to visit (Hao et al., 2024). Despite its importance, current research has not fully addressed how these normative influences and destination image work together to impact tourists' attitudes and behavioral motivations specifically within the context of film tourism.

Film tourism has gained prominence as a compelling area of research, particularly in destinations like Zhangjiajie, which became globally recognized due to its association with the film *Avatar*. While previous studies have examined tourist motivations in film tourism, gaps remain in understanding how perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, attitudes, motivations, and perceived destination image influence tourist behavior. Existing research suggests that media exposure plays a role in shaping tourist decisions; however, the extent to which tourists develop deeper engagement with the destination

beyond their initial cinematic attraction remains insufficiently explored (Hao et al., 2024). Furthermore, recent studies highlight the impact of moral elevation and cause-related marketing on tourism behavior, yet their integration into film tourism research is limited (Yang et al., 2023). Addressing these gaps, this study seeks to extend the literature by incorporating a comprehensive framework that examines the psychological and behavioral dimensions of film tourists' decision-making.

Table 2.2 Development Milestones of Zhangjiajie as a Film Tourism Destination

Development Time Stage	Development Status	Film Tourism Achievements, Tourist Numbers, and Successes
Early 2000s	Initial emergence as a scenic destination with primary appeal to domestic tourists.	Recognized nationally as a natural heritage site; early film projects attracted an initial surge of domestic tourists, setting the foundation for future growth.
2009-2012	Rapid rise in global visibility following Avatar; Zhangjiajie landscapes promoted as the inspiration for Pandora.	International fame as "Pandora on Earth"; significant increase in tourist numbers with over 30% annual growth, including a marked rise in foreign visitors.
2013-2016	Infrastructure upgrades to accommodate rising tourist volume, both domestic and international.	Major projects like the Zhangjiajie Grand Canyon Glass Bridge and high-capacity cable car systems completed; annual visitors exceeded 40 million by 2016.
2017-2019	Enhanced visitor experience through cultural integration and digital innovation; focus on broadening appeal.	VR attractions and Tianmen Fox Fairy show introduced; these additions enriched the site's appeal, drawing both cultural enthusiasts and tech-savvy tourists.

Table 2.2 (continued)

Development Time Stage	Development Status	Film Tourism Achievements, Tourist Numbers, and Successes
2020-Present	Expansion in the number of film locations to diversify appeal; strong emphasis on sustainability.	Established multiple film sites beyond Avatar, attracting a growing base of domestic and foreign tourists; annual visitor numbers approached 50 million by 2023.

Table 2.3 outlines the significant milestones in Zhangjiajie's evolution as a film tourism destination, capturing each development stage's focus, achievements, and impact on tourist attraction. Beginning with its early appeal to domestic tourists, Zhangjiajie's global visibility surged following its association with Avatar, leading to increased international tourism. Subsequent infrastructure enhancements, such as the Zhangjiajie Grand Canyon Glass Bridge, enabled the region to handle rising tourist numbers. Recent years have seen diversified film sites and advanced technological integrations, further broadening Zhangjiajie's appeal.

The development of Zhangjiajie's film tourism is inseparable from sustained government support, which has provided the foundation for its success as a premier tourism destination. Strategic initiatives at both national and local levels have played crucial roles in enhancing infrastructure, preserving environmental integrity, and promoting Zhangjiajie's cinematic appeal.

Table 2.3 National Policies Supporting Film Tourism Development in Zhangjiajie

Policy/Measure Name	Content of the Policy	Sources and Issuance Date
13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020)	Emphasized the development of tourism as a pillar of regional economic growth, specifically encouraging sustainable tourism in ecologically significant regions like Zhangjiajie.	National Development and Reform Commission, 2016

Table 2.3 (continued)

Policy/Measure Name	Content of the Policy	Sources and Issuance Date
14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025)	Focuses on high-quality tourism, promoting rural and ecological tourism in areas like Zhangjiajie; includes strategic investment in infrastructure and digital tourism tools.	National Development and Reform Commission, 2021
Beautiful China Initiative	Aims to enhance the environmental quality and sustainable tourism of natural heritage sites, promoting Zhangjiajie as an international model for eco-friendly tourism.	Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2018
Guidelines on Promoting Film Tourism	Encourages the integration of film tourism with local tourism economies, supporting the infrastructure and marketing of destinations like Zhangjiajie that feature prominently in media.	State Council of China, 2019
Tourism Industry Development Plan	Outlines strategies for infrastructure improvements, visitor experience enhancements, and environmental protection to support Zhangjiajie's tourism growth sustainably.	Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2020
National Ecological Civilization Pilot Zone	Designates regions like Zhangjiajie as pilot areas to develop tourism based on ecological preservation, supporting controlled visitor access and resource conservation.	Ministry of Ecology and Environment, 2021

Table 2.3 (continued)

Policy/Measure Name	Content of the Policy	Sources and Issuance Date
Rural Vitalization Strategy	Promotes rural tourism and cultural heritage preservation in scenic regions, with policies to encourage sustainable development in Zhangjiajie through community-based tourism.	Central Committee of the Communist Party, 2018
Tourism Digitalization Initiative	Advocates for integrating digital technology in tourism management, providing funding for smart tourism solutions in Zhangjiajie, such as digital ticketing and visitor flow control.	Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2021

Table 2.3 presents a comprehensive overview of key national policies that underscore the Chinese government's commitment to advancing Zhangjiajie as a model of film tourism. The table categorizes these policies by name, outlines their specific content, and details their sources, including issuance dates, reflecting a strategic approach that intertwines economic growth with environmental sustainability. Policies like the 13th and 14th Five-Year Plans establish tourism as a cornerstone for regional development, explicitly prioritizing ecological areas such as Zhangjiajie for enhanced infrastructure and sustainable tourism practices (Chen et al., 2024). The Beautiful China Initiative and the National Ecological Civilization Pilot Zone designation further emphasize environmental protection, positioning Zhangjiajie as a model for eco-friendly tourism. Additionally, policies such as the Tourism Industry Development Plan and the Guidelines on Promoting Film Tourism specifically encourage the integration of cinematic tourism with local economies, providing support for infrastructure and branding efforts that enhance Zhangjiajie's visibility as a film tourism destination. This policy framework illustrates a targeted national effort to sustain Zhangjiajie's appeal and long-term viability as a film tourism site, fostering both ecological preservation and economic resilience in alignment with China's broader tourism and environmental goals.

Additionally, the development of Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination has been a collaborative effort involving local government, tourism agencies, and private stakeholders, all of whom aim to enhance both accessibility and visitor engagement. Zhangjiajie has strategically expanded its infrastructure to support an influx of film-driven tourists by establishing an extensive network of transportation, including cable cars, scenic elevators, and glass bridges (Bhattarai & Conway, 2021). The Bailong Elevator, as an example, provides direct access to high-altitude viewpoints, catering to tourists who seek to experience the dramatic vistas showcased in films. Additionally, the Zhangjiajie Glass Bridge—the world's longest and highest glass-bottomed bridge—offers tourists a thrilling way to experience the landscape, attracting visitors through a combination of natural beauty and adrenaline-inducing design. These infrastructure advancements underscore Zhangjiajie's commitment to becoming a leading film tourism site by balancing visitor satisfaction with sustainable accessibility.

Table 2.4 Local Government Policies and Measures to Support Tourism in Zhangjiajie

Policy/Measure Name	Content of the Policy	Source and Issuance Date
Zhangjiajie Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan	Focuses on expanding transportation networks, such as high-capacity cable cars and improved road access, to enhance site accessibility and manage tourist flow.	Zhangjiajie Municipal Government, 2017
Zhangjiajie Eco-Tourism Development Policy	Enforces waste management regulations, visitor caps during peak seasons, and establishes eco-friendly zones to minimize tourism's ecological footprint.	Zhangjiajie Environmental Protection Bureau, 2018
Cultural Heritage Protection Initiative	Promotes the integration of cultural tourism by supporting local arts, traditional performances, and exhibitions to preserve Zhangjiajie's cultural identity.	Zhangjiajie Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2019

Table 2.4 (continued)

Policy/Measure Name	Content of the Policy	Source and Issuance Date
Zhangjiajie Smart Tourism Initiative	Implements digital tools, including online ticketing, real-time visitor monitoring, and mobile tourism apps, to improve visitor experience and optimize crowd management.	Zhangjiajie Municipal Government, 2020
Environmental Carrying Capacity Management Regulation	Establishes monitoring and limits on tourist numbers to protect natural resources, focusing on maintaining ecological balance in popular scenic areas.	Zhangjiajie Municipal Government, 2021
Sustainable Tourism Development Fund	Provides financial support for local businesses and infrastructure projects that promote sustainable tourism, encouraging eco-friendly and community-based tourism models.	Zhangjiajie Tourism Development Bureau, 2022
Wulingyuan Scenic Area Protection Policy	Designates specific areas within Wulingyuan for conservation, restricting high-impact activities and implementing reforestation projects to preserve the natural landscape.	Wulingyuan District Administration, 2019

Table 2.4 highlights the local government's concerted efforts to enhance and sustain tourism in Zhangjiajie, demonstrating a robust commitment to supporting film tourism while balancing environmental and cultural preservation. The table catalogs key policies and measures enacted by the Zhangjiajie Municipal Government and related bureaus, illustrating a multi-faceted approach to tourism management. Initiatives such as the Zhangjiajie Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan and Zhangjiajie Smart Tourism Initiative underscore a focus on accessibility and visitor experience, facilitating tourism flow through improved transport networks and digital management tools that optimize

crowd control. Policies like the Eco-Tourism Development Policy and Environmental Carrying Capacity Management Regulation reveal an emphasis on environmental sustainability, with stringent measures designed to protect the fragile ecosystems that draw film-driven and nature-oriented tourists. Additionally, the Cultural Heritage Protection Initiative and Sustainable Tourism Development Fund demonstrate a commitment to preserving Zhangjiajie's cultural assets and promoting community-inclusive tourism (Gai et al., 2024). Collectively, these policies underscore the local government's strategic approach to fostering Zhangjiajie's status as a premier film tourism destination while ensuring its long-term environmental and cultural integrity.

Film tourism in Zhangjiajie presents a range of distinct advantages that contribute to its growing reputation as a cinematic destination. The region's unique natural landscapes, particularly the sandstone pillars of the "Hallelujah Mountains" from Avatar, offer an unparalleled visual appeal that attracts global audiences and serves as a memorable backdrop for both international and domestic productions. The economic impact of film tourism in Zhangjiajie has been significant, generating increased revenue through heightened tourist visitation and stimulating local industries such as hospitality, dining, and transportation. Additionally, the infusion of film tourism has bolstered Zhangjiajie's cultural image, transforming it into a symbol of China's natural heritage while also promoting cultural preservation through performances and events that reflect local Tujia and Miao traditions. This intersection of natural allure and cultural vibrancy, supported by infrastructure improvements and eco-tourism initiatives, has positioned Zhangjiajie as a premier site for sustainable tourism growth (Xu et al., 2024).

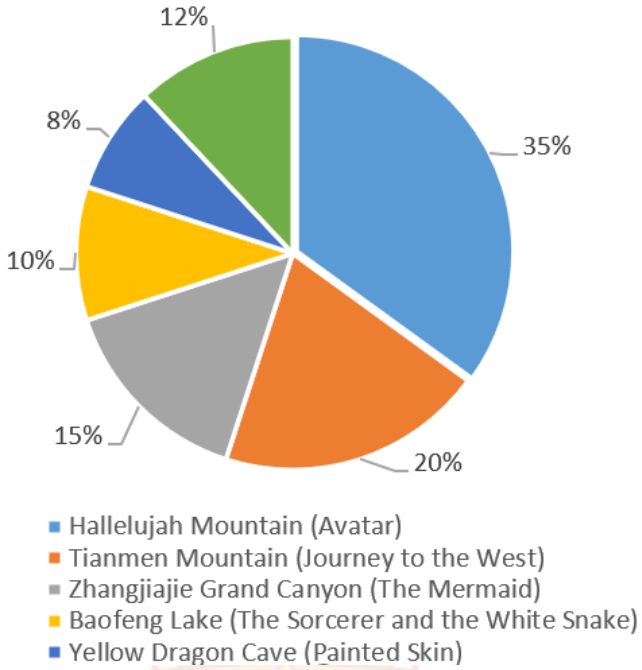

Figure 2.1 Popularity of Zhangjiajie's Film Locations as a Percentage of Visitor Attraction
Source: National Film Board official website, 2023

Figure 2.1 illustrates the relative popularity of key film tourism locations within Zhangjiajie based on their association with notable films. The chart highlights Hallelujah Mountain, inspired by Avatar, as the most popular location, attracting 35% of film-motivated tourists. Tianmen Mountain, featured in Journey to the West, follows with 20%, while the Zhangjiajie Grand Canyon, associated with The Mermaid, attracts 15% of visitors. Baofeng Lake and Yellow Dragon Cave, known for their roles in The Sorcerer and the White Snake and Painted Skin, draw 10% and 8% of tourists, respectively. The Wulingyuan Scenic Area, which has appeared in various productions, accounts for 12% of film tourism interest. This distribution reflects how different cinematic associations impact Zhangjiajie's appeal as a diverse and iconic film tourism destination (Liu et al., 2024).

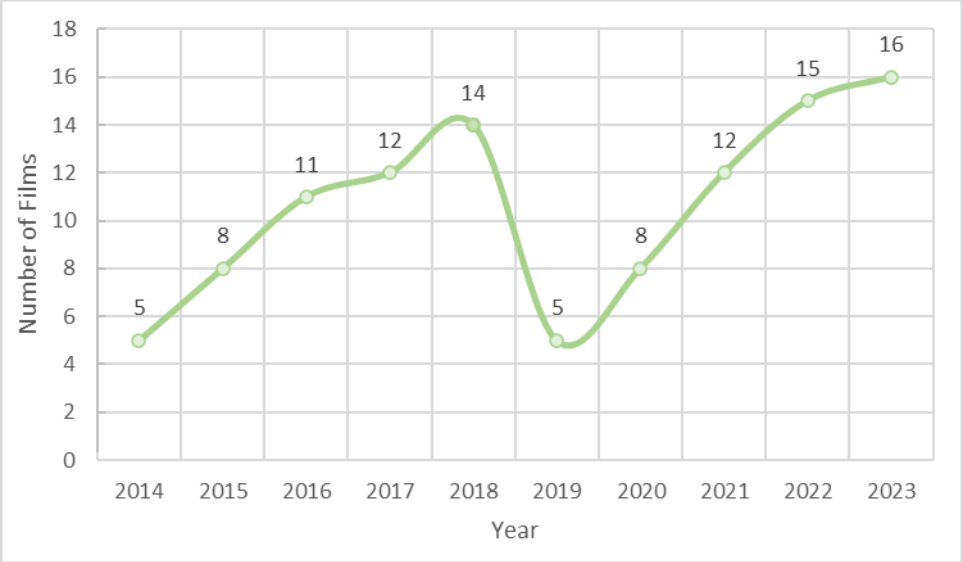

Figure 2.2 Annual Number of Films Set in Zhangjiajie (2014–2023)
Source: National Film Board official website, 2023

Figure 2.2 illustrates the yearly trend in the number of films shot in Zhangjiajie from 2014 to 2023. The data reveals an upward trajectory in film activity, with notable peaks and troughs. Beginning with 5 films in 2014, the count steadily increases, reaching a high of 14 films in 2018. However, a significant drop to 5 films is observed in 2019 and 2020, likely due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted production schedules and limited international travel. Following this decline, the number of films set in Zhangjiajie rebounds from 2021 onwards, climbing to 16 films in 2023. This pattern highlights the resilience of Zhangjiajie's appeal as a film tourism destination, as it continues to attract diverse productions despite temporary setbacks. The data underscores Zhangjiajie's established reputation within the film industry and its recovery amidst challenging global conditions.

In response to growing interest, Zhangjiajie has diversified its film tourism offerings to include guided film location tours, interactive exhibits, and themed adventure activities. For instance, visitors can participate in scenic photography tours to capture the iconic landscapes featured in films, or experience virtual reality (VR) installations that bring cinematic scenes to life in an immersive way (Chuangxin et al., 2025).

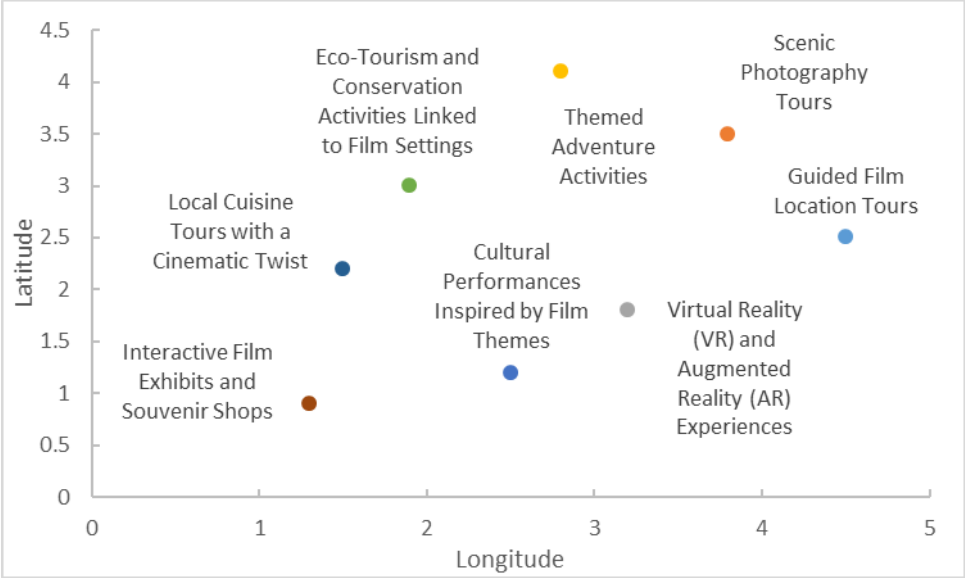

Figure 2.3 Activities of Film Tourism Activities in Zhangjiajie

Source: Zhangjiajie Tourism Bureau, 2023

Figure 2.3 illustrates the spatial distribution of various film tourism activities within Zhangjiajie, as represented by latitude and longitude coordinates. Each point corresponds to a specific activity, such as “Guided Film Location Tours,” “Scenic Photography Tours,” and “Eco-Tourism and Conservation Activities Linked to Film Settings.” This distribution highlights the diversity of attractions in Zhangjiajie, tailored to enhance the film tourism experience by offering an array of activities suited to different tourist interests (Bai & Zhang, 2024). Activities like “Guided Film Location Tours” and “Scenic Photography Tours” are positioned at higher latitudes, indicating locations possibly favored for scenic or panoramic views, whereas experiences such as “Interactive Film Exhibits and Souvenir Shops” are situated at lower latitudes, likely in more accessible areas to cater to a broad visitor demographic.

Table 2.5 Comparative Analysis of Zhangjiajie as a Film Tourism Destination

Aspect	Advantages of Zhangjiajie	Disadvantages of Zhangjiajie
Unique Natural Scenery	Distinctive quartz sandstone formations, such as the "Hallelujah Mountains" from Avatar, offer globally recognizable scenic appeal.	Limited by high visitor volume pressures and potential environmental impact, which can affect long-term sustainability of the scenery.

Table 2.5 (continued)

Aspect	Advantages of Zhangjiajie	Disadvantages of Zhangjiajie
Diverse Tourism Activities	Offers a range of tourism experiences beyond film locations, including the glass bridge, Tianmen Mountain cableway, and eco-tourism.	Infrastructure may struggle to support peak-season tourist numbers, impacting overall visitor experience and tourism quality.
Lower Production Costs	Lower labor and filming costs than many Western locations, with additional government incentives for film industry projects.	Limited availability of high-end production facilities and services compared to major Western film locations, which may deter some international projects.
Cultural and Natural Fusion	Rich Tujia and Miao cultural heritage allows for unique cultural narratives, enhancing the storytelling potential in film projects.	Cultural elements may not be as globally recognizable as those in places like Paris or New York, which can affect Zhangjiajie's international appeal.
International Recognition	Has gained attention from films like Avatar, helping to establish Zhangjiajie as a scenic landmark with cinematic relevance.	Overall global brand recognition is still limited compared to established film locations, impacting its competitiveness in the international tourism market.
Environmental Sustainability	Government and local initiatives aim to maintain ecological balance with visitor caps and eco-friendly policies.	Fragile ecosystem remains at risk from heavy tourism and filming activities, with limited comprehensive sustainability measures compared to developed countries.

Table 2.5 (continued)

Aspect	Advantages of Zhangjiajie	Disadvantages of Zhangjiajie
Policy Flexibility	Supports the film industry with incentives, providing benefits for domestic film projects.	Foreign film productions may face restrictive approval processes and content limitations, making it challenging for international projects to be based in Zhangjiajie.

Table 2.5 provides a comparative analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination, relative to other domestic and international film locations. The table outlines several key aspects, including Zhangjiajie's unique natural scenery, diverse tourism activities, lower production costs, and cultural richness, which together establish it as a compelling destination for film tourism. However, it also highlights potential challenges, such as infrastructure limitations, relatively low international brand recognition, environmental pressures, and policy restrictions that may affect its appeal to foreign film productions (Utami, 2025). This balanced assessment underscores Zhangjiajie’s potential as a film tourism hub while identifying areas for improvement to increase its competitiveness on a global scale.

From a film tourism perspective, Zhangjiajie’s destination image is primarily constructed as a cinematic landscape of fantasy, transcendence, and ecological otherworldliness. Through its association with “Avatar” and subsequent fantasy-oriented productions, the destination is widely perceived not merely as a natural scenic site, but as a film-mediated space that embodies imaginative worlds, mythic narratives, and visual spectacle. This film-induced image emphasizes immersion, visual awe, and emotional escapism, positioning Zhangjiajie as a place where cinematic fantasy is translated into lived experience (Zhao & Park, 2025).

Zhangjiajie’s film tourism sector has a promising trajectory, given the growing global fascination with cinematic travel experiences. As international travel demand recovers and digital technology advances, Zhangjiajie is well-positioned to develop immersive and interactive film-based experiences, such as virtual reality tours that recreate famous scenes, thereby enhancing visitor engagement (Leung et al., 2024). Sustainable tourism practices, including controlled visitor numbers, conservation efforts, and eco-

friendly infrastructure, will be crucial to maintain the ecological integrity of Zhangjiajie's unique landscapes, preserving its appeal for future generations (Pai et al., 2025). The success of Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination demonstrates the power of cinematic media in shaping travel motivations and enhancing destination branding. With sustained investment in eco-friendly infrastructure, effective marketing strategies, and cultural integration, Zhangjiajie can continue to leverage its cinematic heritage to attract visitors from around the world. As film tourism evolves, Zhangjiajie stands as a model for destinations aiming to harness the allure of cinema while preserving the integrity of their natural and cultural assets.

2.2 Parent Discipline

2.2.1 Experience Economy Model

The experience economy model, introduced by Pine & Gilmore (2011), provides a foundational framework for understanding how consumers derive value from engaging, staged, and memorable experiences. Within this model, experiences are categorized into four realms—entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics—each representing a distinct mode of consumer participation and immersion. These four dimensions have been widely adopted in tourism research to conceptualize how destinations can craft emotionally resonant and psychologically meaningful experiences (Murray et al., 2024).

Within the context of film tourism, the experience economy model is particularly relevant, as cinematic destinations are inherently designed to transform narrative representation into lived experience. In natural film settings such as Zhangjiajie, aesthetic and escapist experiences are primarily generated through visually spectacular landscapes that enable tourists to immerse themselves in film-inspired fantasy worlds. From a behavioral perspective, experience structured through these four realms functions not merely as an outcome of visitation but as an antecedent shaping deeper psychological processes. Memorable experiences can foster greater emotional involvement (Spence & Gao, 2024), which in turn enhances engagement, a key mechanism that connects experience to behavioral intention (Zhang et al., 2024). Simultaneously, experience-based evaluations contribute to the formation of perceived destination image, as tourists cognitively and affectively assess the destination based on its aesthetic quality, narrative value, and immersive potential (Moritz et al., 2024). In film tourism contexts, where

experience is closely intertwined with media representations, these processes become particularly salient.

By conceptualizing tourist experience through the four experiential realms, the experience economy model offers a robust theoretical foundation for examining film tourism in Zhangjiajie. It enables tourist experience to be understood as a structured, multi-dimensional construct that plays a critical antecedent role in shaping tourists' psychological responses. This application deepens theoretical alignment between experience economy theory and film tourism research by illustrating how cinematic settings, aesthetic cues, and narrative associations create immersive and memorable on-site experiences. Consequently, the model provides a coherent conceptual basis for analyzing how experience-driven processes operate within a single film tourism destination, supporting a more nuanced understanding of tourists' behavioral mechanisms in Zhangjiajie.

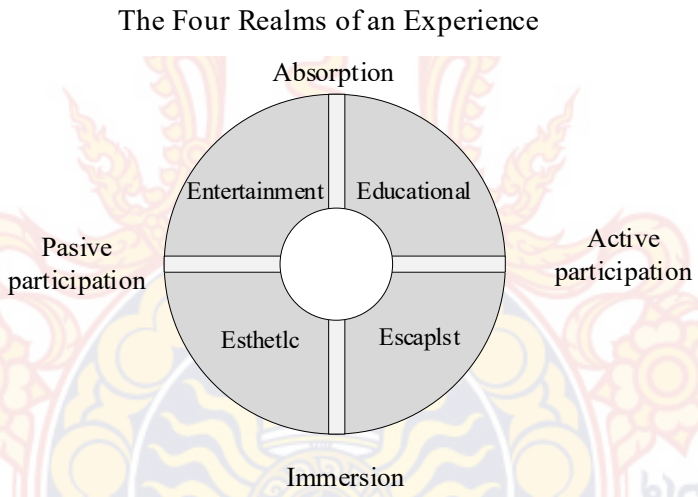

Figure 2.4 Experience Economy Model
Source: Pine & Gilmore (2011)

2.2.2 Attribution Theory

Attribution theory provides a psychological framework for understanding how individuals explain the causes of events and behaviors (Weiner, 1985). Central to this theory is the concept of locus of causality, which distinguishes between internal attributions (causes perceived as originating within the individual, such as effort, desire, or emotional affinity) and external attributions (causes perceived as situational or environmental, such as social influence, media exposure, or infrastructural conditions). In

tourism research, attribution theory has been increasingly applied to understand how tourists form evaluations, assign responsibility, and develop behavioral intentions based on their interpretations of both internal and external stimuli.

Internal attributions—such as personal interest in a destination, emotional identification with film narratives, or the desire for self-fulfillment—are often key motivational factors driving tourist behavior (Jung & Ha, 2025). These motivations tend to align with positive attitudes toward the destination and a stronger intention to engage in travel activities. Conversely, external attributions include factors such as media portrayals, peer recommendations, cultural norms, or perceived constraints like cost and accessibility. These external drivers may shape behavior indirectly by influencing subjective norms or perceived feasibility of travel (Uğur, 2024). In particular, tourists influenced by cinematic representations may attribute their desire to visit a location to the symbolic appeal and social value constructed by the film, rather than intrinsic interest—thereby reinforcing the relevance of external attribution mechanisms (Du & Cheong, 2025)

In film tourism contexts, attribution theory is especially valuable for explaining how tourist motivation is shaped by these internal and external cues. Attributional processes are not merely cognitive but are deeply embedded in emotional and symbolic engagement, especially when tourists seek meaning beyond functional travel goals (Lin, 2025). Furthermore, destination image is actively constructed as tourists evaluate why a destination appeals to them, assigning meaning to both internal emotional resonance and external symbolic cues. Internal attributions tend to strengthen the affective dimension of destination image through emotional immersion and narrative identification, while external attributions shape its cognitive dimension by structuring expectations related to place characteristics, cultural significance, and social value (Rozmiarek, 2025).

Thus, attribution theory offers a theoretical lens to interpret how tourists assign meaning to film-related destinations, and how these attributions—whether driven by intrinsic desire or external reinforcement—inform their perceived image of the destination and their revisit intention. This dual-path understanding aligns with the complexity of modern tourist behavior, which increasingly reflects an interplay between personal identity and socially constructed narratives.

2.2.3 Image Theory

Destination image formation theory explains how individuals construct, evaluate, and revise their perceptions of a destination through the interaction of information exposure, cognitive judgment, and affective response. Destination image is commonly understood as a multidimensional mental representation comprising beliefs about destination attributes and emotional evaluations of the destination as a whole (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Rather than emerging from a single source, destination image is formed through the combined influence of prior knowledge, promotional communication, media representation, social interaction, and direct travel experience. These information sources shape tourists' expectations before visitation and provide the cognitive and emotional basis through which destination attractiveness is assessed.

Gartner's destination image formation framework further distinguishes among different image formation agents according to the degree of control exercised by destination organizations and the credibility attributed to each information source (Gartner, 1993). Promotional materials and official advertising represent induced sources, whereas films, television programs, social media content, interpersonal communication, and independent media coverage function as comparatively autonomous sources of image formation. In film tourism, cinematic representation is particularly influential because it embeds landscapes within visual narratives, symbolic meanings, and emotional contexts. Such representations do not merely communicate destination attributes but transform physical places into imagined environments associated with particular stories, identities, and affective expectations.

Destination image is not fixed after its initial formation. Pre-visit images are evaluated and reconstructed through tourists' direct encounters with the destination. On-site experience may confirm, strengthen, modify, or weaken the image established through cinematic and other mediated representations (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). When the actual environment is consistent with prior expectations, tourists are more likely to develop favorable cognitive evaluations and positive emotional responses. When discrepancies emerge, destination image may be revised through comparisons between cinematic imagination and experienced reality. This dynamic perspective positions perceived destination image as an evolving outcome of information exposure and experiential

interpretation rather than as a stable perception formed exclusively before travel (Nematpour et al., 2025).

Within film tourism, perceived destination image also shapes the depth of tourists' engagement with the destination. A destination perceived as visually distinctive, symbolically meaningful, culturally attractive, and capable of providing suitable tourism services is more likely to attract sustained attention and stimulate emotional and behavioral involvement (V.G et al., 2021). Cinematic imagery can enhance tourists' willingness to explore filming locations, interpret narrative associations, participate in film-related activities, and establish an emotional connection with the destination. Perceived destination image therefore operates not only as an evaluative judgment but also as a psychological foundation for tourist engagement.

Destination image formation theory also provides a basis for explaining revisit intention. Favorable destination beliefs and affective impressions increase the perceived desirability of returning, while the confirmation of film-induced expectations strengthens destination attachment and behavioral loyalty (V.G et al., 2021). In this study, perceived destination image is therefore positioned as an antecedent of both tourist engagement and revisit intention. Its direct influence reflects the role of cognitive and affective evaluation in behavioral decision-making, while its indirect influence through engagement captures the process through which a favorable image develops into deeper psychological involvement and subsequently strengthens revisit intention.

2.3 Immediate Discipline

2.3.1 Tourist Experience

Tourists' experience refers to the subjective, emotional, and cognitive responses formed through interaction with a tourism destination, often shaped by immersive, memorable encounters that go beyond functional service delivery (Li et al., 2024). Rooted in the experience economy model proposed by Pine & Gilmore (2011), the measurement of tourist experience is informed by four experiential realms: entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism, which together reflect different aspects of tourists' overall destination experience. These dimensions are mapped across two continua: passive-to-active participation and absorption-to-immersion, enabling a nuanced understanding of how individuals consume and internalize destination offerings (Xue et al., 2022). In the

context of film tourism, where the destination is often tied to cinematic narratives and symbolic representations, these experiential realms become especially salient in shaping perception, satisfaction, and revisit intention (Teng, 2021).

Entertainment involves pleasurable and enjoyable activities that draw tourists' attention through performance, storytelling, or interactivity (Luo & Fan, 2023). In film tourism destinations, this is reflected in reenactments, film-themed shows, or guided tours that recreate iconic scenes, offering tourists immediate gratification and light-hearted engagement. Education, on the other hand, emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge or understanding, particularly when tourists learn about the film's background, production process, or cultural symbolism associated with the location (Pérez García et al., 2021). For example, interpretive signage in Zhangjiajie inform visitors about cinematic context and local heritage, enhancing cognitive immersion.

The esthetic dimension focuses on passive but deeply immersive appreciation of the destination's visual and sensory qualities, such as natural scenery, architectural design, or cultural atmosphere (Malvica et al., 2024). Finally, escapism refers to a tourist's complete absorption into a fantasy or alternate reality, often facilitated by narrative immersion and symbolic associations with film settings (Irimiás et al., 2021). Tourists seeking to 'step into the movie' experience an emotional detachment from daily life and temporary identity transformation, a hallmark of the escapist realm. Such immersive detachment has been found to strengthen psychological involvement and post-visit attachment (Pantelidis et al., 2024).

These four experiential realms are not mutually exclusive but interact to form a holistic tourist experience. In the film tourism context, the combination of esthetic appreciation, narrative escapism, cultural learning, and interactive entertainment enables tourists to develop emotional connections and lasting memories, which may subsequently influence their overall satisfaction and revisit intention (Soonsan et al., 2025). In this study, the four experiential realms provide the conceptual basis for measuring tourist experience, while the empirical model examines tourist experience as an overall construct rather than estimating the four realms as separate latent variables.

2.3.2 Tourist Motivation

Tourist motivation refers to the internal and external psychological drivers that influence an individual's decision to visit and potentially revisit a destination, particularly in contexts shaped by cinematic representations (Damiasih, 2025). Internal motivations stem from personal interests, emotional needs, or cognitive desires, such as the pursuit of enjoyment, narrative immersion, cultural learning, and self-fulfillment. Tourists may be internally motivated by a fascination with specific films, a desire to experience cinematic landscapes in real life, or an interest in historical and cultural themes portrayed on screen (Tran et al., 2025). These motivations often align with favorable attitudes toward the destination, influencing positive expectations and the likelihood of revisit. Moreover, emotional resonance with film narratives can lead to symbolic identification and a strong affective bond with the destination, reinforcing long-term loyalty behaviors (Tran et al., 2025).

External motivations, on the other hand, are shaped by social expectations, media influence, and structural or contextual facilitators (Galiakbarov et al., 2024). For instance, recommendations from peers, family approval, social media trends, and influencer endorsements may act as extrinsic motivators, encouraging individuals to visit film-related destinations for social validation or group conformity. These external drivers reflect the TPB concept of subjective norms, whereby individuals are influenced by perceived social pressures or normative expectations. Additionally, factors such as accessibility, cost, and infrastructure contribute to perceived behavioral control, shaping whether tourists feel capable of realizing their travel intentions despite logistical constraints (Awais-E-Yazdan et al., 2025).

Motivation is rarely singular but involves a combination of affective, symbolic, and utilitarian drivers (Abrutyn, 2025). In film tourism settings, the interplay between internal fascination with cinematic content and external validation from social circles or travel media creates a complex motivational structure. In this study, tourist motivation is treated as an overall construct that incorporates motivational sources associated with personal interests, emotional needs, cinematic appeal, media exposure, and social influence.

2.3.3 Perceived Destination Image

Perceived destination image refers to the mental representations, impressions, and associations that individuals form about a destination, particularly in response to mediated portrayals such as film (Billore, 2025). Within the framework of image theory, these images are not passive reflections but structured cognitive constructs shaped by an individual's values, goals, and evaluative strategies (Das et al., 2024). Cinematic representation becomes a powerful source for constructing and reinforcing these destination images, especially as films integrate visual aesthetics, narrative symbolism, and emotional cues that influence how tourists evaluate the desirability and relevance of a place (Ma et al., 2023). For instance, a film showcasing the serene landscapes and rich cultural tapestry of an FTD can instill a sense of wonder and curiosity, fostering positive attitudes and a desire to experience the destination firsthand (Deng & Chen, 2023). Conversely, if the portrayal is marred by negative connotations or lackluster visuals, it can dampen interest and generate unfavorable attitudes.

In the context of film tourism, perceived destination image is particularly shaped by cinematic portrayals, symbolic associations, and narrative immersion. Visual elements in films—such as landscapes, architecture, or atmosphere—serve as powerful image-building tools that influence pre-visit expectations and emotional connections (Nautiyal et al., 2022). For instance, Zhangjiajie's depiction as the inspiration for Avatar's "Hallelujah Mountains" has constructed an image of the destination as fantastical and ecologically sublime, attracting tourists who are motivated by both aesthetic appeal and emotional immersion. These constructed images interact with tourists' motivations and engagement levels, shaping their anticipated experiences and, in turn, influencing revisit behaviors. In summary, perceived destination image is not only shaped by media exposure but also dynamically reconstructed through on-site experiences, peer-sharing, and personal values. Understanding how these images are formed and how they influence tourists' revisit intentions is thus essential for advancing both theoretical modeling and practical destination branding strategies.

2.3.4 Engagement

Tourist engagement refers to the depth of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement that individuals exhibit in their interactions with a destination. Engagement is not merely passive consumption but involves active psychological and physical

participation, which can significantly influence destination perception and post-visit behaviors (Zhu & Cheng, 2025). Engagement is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, comprising emotional engagement (feelings of attachment or excitement), cognitive engagement (mental absorption and curiosity), and behavioral engagement (participation in destination-based activities), each of which contributes to the overall tourism experience (So et al., 2023).

Conceptually, engagement is a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, and behavioral engagement (Zhang et al., 2025). Emotional engagement reflects the affective attachment formed through symbolic resonance with cinematic settings; cognitive engagement represents the mental effort invested in processing, interpreting, and internalizing film-related information; and behavioral engagement involves active participation in destination-specific activities such as themed tours, costume reenactments, or film scene recreations (Lara et al., 2025). These dimensions collectively shape how deeply tourists become involved with the place, beyond superficial consumption.

In film tourism destinations like Zhangjiajie, the nature and depth of engagement can vary depending on narrative relevance, interactivity, and physical setting. Emotional engagement may be enhanced by symbolic landscapes (e.g., the "Avatar Mountains" in Zhangjiajie), while cognitive engagement might arise from learning about film history or production during guided tours. Behavioral engagement is evident in participatory activities such as role-playing, social media sharing, or VR simulations of cinematic scenes. These immersive experiences not only strengthen tourists' connection with the destination but also increase the likelihood of repeat visitation (Li et al., 2024).

In summary, engagement serves as a central process in shaping tourist behavior in film tourism. By facilitating immersive, emotional, and interactive connections between tourists and cinematic destinations, engagement strengthens perceived destination image and plays a crucial role in encouraging revisit intention. Understanding the multifaceted role of engagement helps inform experience design and marketing strategies that foster long-term tourist loyalty.

2.3.5 Location

Location represents the travel-related conditions arising from the spatial relationship between tourists' place of residence and Zhangjiajie. Although geographical distance provides the structural basis of location, tourists do not necessarily respond to physical distance alone (Rahmawati et al., 2021). Their behavioral decisions are also shaped by how they perceive the time, financial cost, transportation convenience, information availability, and overall difficulty associated with reaching the destination. Consequently, the behavioral influence of location is expressed through tourists' evaluation of whether a return trip is feasible and manageable.

From the perspective of distance decay, greater spatial separation generally increases the resources required for travel and may reduce the likelihood of repeated spatial interaction. However, the effect of distance is not uniform because transportation systems, travel information, personal financial capacity, and journey convenience may alter how tourists experience geographical separation (Aguilar-Rivero et al., 2024) . A relatively distant destination may still be regarded as accessible when transportation is convenient and costs are manageable, whereas a geographically closer destination may be perceived as difficult to revisit when travel arrangements are inconvenient. Location should therefore be understood as a contextual condition whose behavioral effect is mediated by tourists' perceptions of travel feasibility.

In film tourism, strong engagement generated by cinematic landscapes, narrative associations, and emotional immersion may increase tourists' willingness to revisit. Nevertheless, this psychological willingness must operate within the practical conditions associated with tourists' place of origin. When travel information is readily available, transportation is convenient, costs are affordable, and the journey is perceived as manageable, engagement is more likely to develop into revisit intention (Rahmawati et al., 2021). When these location-related conditions are unfavorable, the behavioral effect of engagement may be weakened. In this study, location is therefore positioned as a moderating variable that captures tourists' perceived feasibility of travelling from their place of residence to Zhangjiajie.

2.3.6 Revisit Intention

Revisit intention refers to a tourist's expressed likelihood or conscious willingness to return to a previously visited destination, often regarded as a key indicator of post-visit behavioral loyalty (Stylos & Bellou, 2018). It reflects not only the tourist's satisfaction with past experiences but also the perceived value and emotional connection developed during the visit (Li et al., 2023). In tourism behavior studies, revisit intention is typically conceptualized as a future-oriented construct, influenced by multiple psychological antecedents such as attitude, motivation, perceived destination image, and engagement (Ding et al., 2022).

Revisit intention is deeply intertwined with tourists' affective and narrative-driven experiences (Lu et al., 2025). Destinations that gain visibility and symbolic meaning through cinematic representation offer immersive, emotionally resonant experiences that can encourage repeat visitation (Zeng et al., 2025). These film-related experiences often enhance tourists' identification with the location, foster strong engagement, and strengthen the perceived uniqueness of the destination. A destination that aligns well with the expectations shaped by cinematic imagery is more likely to generate positive affective evaluations and future visitation plans (Tran et al., 2025).

Revisit intention is not only determined by emotional satisfaction but also influenced by structural and contextual factors, including accessibility, cost, and time (Tang et al., 2025). Moreover, engagement has emerged as a significant psychological driver, especially in film tourism scenarios where tourists actively participate in narrative-based, performative, or virtual experiences (Shen & Cheng). When tourists are cognitively and emotionally engaged during their visit, they are more likely to develop a sense of personal attachment to the destination, which increases the likelihood of return visits and positive word-of-mouth (Ferreira et al., 2025).

In summary, revisit intention functions as a pivotal outcome variable in film tourism, bridging psychological constructs, understanding its formation not only helps clarify the long-term effects of cinematic influence on tourism but also provides actionable insights for destination planners seeking to improve revisit retention.

2.4 Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Statement

2.4.1 Theoretical Framework

This study develops an integrated theoretical framework to explain revisit intention in the context of film tourism by synthesizing insights from the experience economy model, attribution theory, and image theory. Each theoretical lens contributes a distinct explanatory dimension, collectively offering a comprehensive understanding of how tourists process film-related experiences and subsequently form behavioral intentions. Grounded in the experience economy model, tourist experience is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct encompassing entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism. These experiential realms illuminate how immersive environmental cues, narrative associations, and sensory stimulation in film tourism settings influence tourists' emotional immersion and interactive responses. Accordingly, tourist experience is positioned as a core antecedent that shapes engagement and indirectly affects revisit intention.

Attribution theory provides a psychological foundation for understanding tourist motivation, distinguishing internal motives—such as personal enjoyment, identity connection, and emotional resonance—from external motives related to media influence, social encouragement, or situational opportunities. In film tourism contexts, motivations driven by cinematic imagery or personal identification with film narratives function as cognitive–affective triggers that predispose tourists toward higher engagement and more positive destination-related evaluations. Complementing these perspectives, image theory conceptualizes perceived destination image as the outcome of tourists' cognitive and affective processing of cinematic portrayals, environmental attributes, symbolic meanings, and personal relevance. In this framework, perceived destination image serves as an evaluative judgment that not only shapes tourists' engagement with Zhangjiajie but also contributes to their subsequent behavioral intentions.

Building upon these theoretical foundations, the proposed framework positions tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image as key antecedents, each contributing uniquely to the formation of tourist engagement, which acts as the central psychological mechanism driving revisit intention. The model further incorporates location as a moderating variable, recognizing that the strength of the engagement–revisit intention link varies according to tourists' spatial distance from Zhangjiajie. This

integration acknowledges that while engagement enhances the desire to revisit, its behavioral translation is contingent upon the practical feasibility associated with travel distance. Through this multi-theoretical integration, the framework provides a holistic explanation of how tourists experience, interpret, and evaluate film tourism environments, how these processes foster engagement, and how engagement ultimately shapes revisit intention within the spatial realities of tourist origin. This comprehensive approach advances theoretical understanding of film tourism behavior and guides the development of empirically testable hypotheses in the following section.

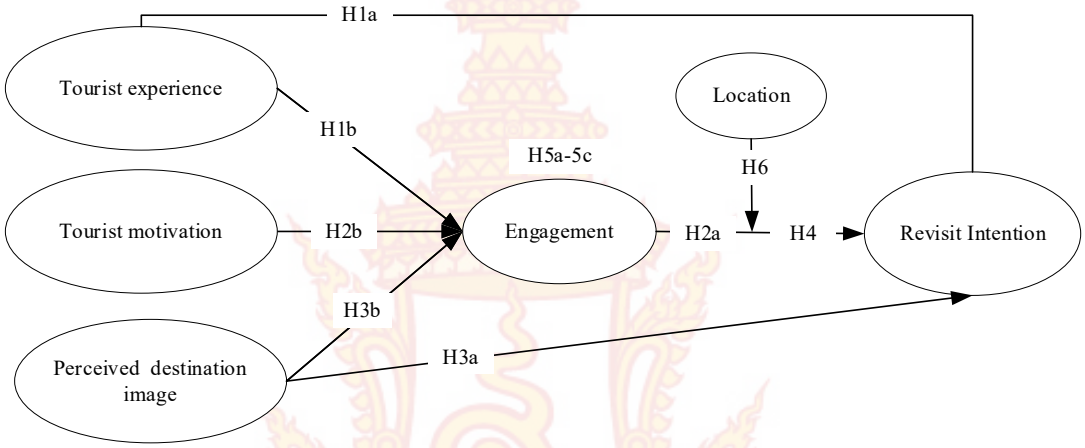

Figure 2.5 Conceptual model of study

Figure 2.5 presents a comprehensive theoretical model developed to investigate the mechanisms influencing tourists' revisit intention in film tourism contexts. The model identifies tourist experience, tourist motivation and perceived destination image as the independent variables; engagement as the mediating variables; location as the moderating variables and revisit intention as the dependent variable. The model proposes that tourist experience exerts direct effects on engagement and revisit intention (H1a–H1b). Meanwhile, based on attribution theory, tourist motivation, tourist motivation is also hypothesized to directly affect engagement and revisit intention (H2a-H2b). In addition, the model further posits that perceived destination image has significant direct effects on engagement and revisit intention (H3a–H3b). Additionally, engagement is proposed to directly influence revisit intention (H4). Finally, the framework includes a comprehensive set of mediated hypotheses to reflect layered causal relationships: engagement is expected to mediate the effects of both tourist experience, tourist motivation and perceived

destination image on revisit intention (H5a–H5c), while location is hypothesized to moderate the effects of both engagement and revisit intention(H6).

2.4.2 Hypotheses Statement

Rich and immersive experiences not only generate satisfaction but also leave lasting impressions that contribute to tourists' behavioral loyalty (Flavián et al., 2024). When tourists feel emotionally connected, mentally stimulated, or aesthetically impressed during their visit, they are more inclined to consider returning to the same destination (Suban, 2024). Where the environment is imbued with symbolic meaning and narrative familiarity, the quality of the on-site experience can significantly influence the willingness to revisit (Chen et al., 2023). Hence, this study posits:

H1a: Tourist experience positively affects revisit intention.

Tourist experience refers to the psychological, emotional, and sensory responses that arise from visitors' interactions with a destination across four dimensions: entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Aesthetic environments and escapist narratives in tourism settings have been shown to evoke heightened personal involvement, leading tourists to participate more actively in destination-related activities (Xue et al., 2022). In film tourism contexts, experiential elements such as cinematic landscapes, interactive attractions, and narrative immersion not only enhance tourists' enjoyment but also stimulate active behavioral responses, such as taking themed photos, attending film-based performances, or sharing experiences online (Chang & Suh, 2025). These forms of participation reflect higher levels of engagement, which is conceptualized as an outcome of affective and experiential richness. Hence, this study posits:

H1b: Tourist experience positively affects engagement.

Tourist motivation plays a central role in shaping long-term behavioral outcomes such as revisit intention. Visitors driven by strong internal motivations—such as emotional attachment, personal interest in film narratives, or cultural identification—are more likely to form enduring connections with a destination, which translate into the desire for repeated experiences (Brogni et al., 2023). External motivations, such as social influence or the symbolic value of visiting a well-known film site, further reinforce this behavioral tendency by increasing the perceived worth of return visits (Crompton, 2024). Hence, this study posits:

H2a: Tourist motivation positively affects revisit intention.

Tourist motivation refers to the internal and external drivers that stimulate individuals to seek out and participate in travel experiences. It plays a fundamental role in shaping the degree to which tourists emotionally and behaviorally engage with a destination (Zhou et al., 2025). When tourists are intrinsically motivated—by factors such as curiosity, personal interest, or emotional resonance with a film—they are more likely to immerse themselves in related activities and experiences (Juliana et al., 2025). Likewise, extrinsic motivations, including social influence or media exposure, can enhance tourists' desire to interact with the destination environment and its offerings (Lian et al., 2025). In cinematic destinations, motivated individuals often exhibit higher levels of participation, such as reenacting film scenes, joining guided tours, or engaging in themed performances. Hence, this study posits:

H2b: Tourist motivation positively affects engagement.

Perceived destination image encompasses tourists' overall impressions, emotions, and beliefs about a destination, formed through both cognitive evaluations and affective responses. A favorable image enhances destination attractiveness, builds emotional resonance, and aligns with tourists' expectations, thereby strengthening their behavioral intentions (Nguyen & Duong, 2024). In tourism research, perceived image has been widely recognized as a decisive factor influencing loyalty-related outcomes, such as revisit intention and recommendation (Tkatch et al., 2025). Especially in visually and symbolically rich settings, a strong and appealing destination image encourages tourists to return in pursuit of similar emotional and aesthetic experiences. Hence, this study posits:

H3a: Perceived destination image positively affects revisit intention.

Perceived destination image refers to the set of cognitive impressions and affective evaluations through which tourists interpret a destination's attributes, symbolic meanings, and experiential relevance. A favorable destination image can evoke emotional attachment, heighten interest, and stimulate deeper involvement with tourism activities, particularly when the destination carries strong cultural, aesthetic, or narrative associations (Nguyen & Duong, 2024). Positive image perceptions enhance tourists' willingness to interact with the environment, engage in experiential activities, and immerse themselves in destination-specific meanings (Wang et al., 2025). When tourists perceive a destination such as Zhangjiajie as aesthetically appealing, symbolically rich, or closely aligned with

film-based narratives, they are more likely to develop heightened psychological involvement during their visit. Hence, this study posits:

H3b: Perceived destination image positively affects engagement.

Engagement reflects the depth of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement that tourists develop during their interaction with a destination, and has been consistently linked to post-visit loyalty behaviors (Zhou & Yu, 2022). When tourists feel deeply engaged—through immersive experiences, personal relevance, or interactive participation—they are more likely to form lasting emotional bonds with the destination (Ahmed et al., 2024). Such bonds enhance the likelihood of repeated visits, as engagement fosters a sense of attachment and fulfillment that tourists seek to recreate (González-Reverté et al., 2025). In the context of film tourism, where narrative immersion and symbolic meaning play a central role, engagement becomes a strong predictor of revisit intention by reinforcing both affective satisfaction and experiential memory. Hence, this study posits:

H4: Engagement positively affects revisit intention.

Engagement encompasses emotional resonance, focused attention, and active participation, making it a vital mechanism through which experiences are internalized and evaluated (Steriopoulos et al., 2023). When tourists encounter destinations that stimulate aesthetic enjoyment, immersive interaction, or symbolic connection—as outlined in the Experience Economy framework—they are more likely to enter a state of deep engagement (tom Dieck et al., 2018). This immersive state, in turn, strengthens their affective connection to the destination and promotes post-visit behavioral intentions such as loyalty and revisit (Sun et al., 2025).

Similarly, when tourists are driven by internal desires (e.g., emotional fulfillment or narrative fascination) or external influences (e.g., social validation or media exposure), these motivations manifest more clearly when individuals are actively involved and emotionally invested in the tourism setting (Carvache-Franco et al., 2024). As tourists translate their motivational impulses into active exploration, participation, and emotional identification with the destination, engagement amplifies the intensity and memorability of their experiences (Zhou et al., 2025). This engaged state reinforces their psychological attachment, making them more inclined to revisit. Accordingly, engagement is positioned

as a mediating construct that channels the effects of both experiential stimuli and motivational drivers into revisit intention (Guan et al., 2025).

In addition, engagement can further refine how destination image is developed and retained. Tourists who are emotionally and behaviorally involved tend to process destination-related cues more deeply, leading to more vivid and favorable image construction (Wang et al., 2024). Through this intensified involvement, engagement influences how tourists interpret both the physical and symbolic elements of the destination, enhancing the coherence and appeal of the overall image. A positive and emotionally resonant image then acts as the psychological anchor that encourages revisit behavior (Rodrigues et al., 2024). Hence, this study posits:

H5a: Engagement mediates the relationship between tourist experience and revisit intention.

H5b: Engagement mediates the relationship between tourist motivation and revisit intention.

H5c: Engagement mediates the relationship between Perceived destination image and revisit intention.

Location represents the spatial distance between tourists' place of origin and the destination, shaping the practical feasibility of repeat visitation. The role of spatial distance as a behavioral constraint, noting that greater travel distance increases cognitive effort, financial cost, and time requirements, which collectively reduce the likelihood that psychological intentions will translate into actual behavior (Li et al., 2025). Tourist behaviors are influenced not only by internal psychological factors but also by external structural conditions that facilitate or hinder repeat travel (Wang & Yoon, 2025). In settings where emotional involvement is high, long-distance travelers often experience weaker behavioral continuity due to logistical barriers, whereas tourists residing nearer to a destination exhibit stronger re-visitation tendencies when comparable levels of engagement are present (Nguyen & Luong, 2025). Engagement generated through cinematic symbolism, narrative resonance, and immersive environmental cues may strengthen revisit intentions, yet the extent to which such engagement results in actual behavioral commitment is dependent on spatial accessibility (Shi & Phakdee-auksorn, 2025). Distant tourists may experience strong engagement but face greater constraints that attenuate the behavioral influence of their emotional responses. Hence, this study posits:

H6: Location moderates the relationship between engagement and revisit intention.

Based on the integrated framework proposed in this study, the hypotheses reflect a coherent cognitive–emotional–behavioral pathway that links tourist experience, motivation, and perceived destination image to revisit intention through engagement, with location serving as a contextual moderator. These assumptions collectively describe how tourists' experiential perceptions, motivational drivers, and evaluative judgments shape their emotional involvement and subsequent behavioral tendencies in film tourism settings. The full set of hypotheses is presented in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6 Hypothesis Statements

Hypothesis	Statement
H1a	Tourist experience positively affects revisit intention
H1b	Tourist experience positively affects engagement.
H2a	Tourist motivation positively affects revisit intention.
H2b	Tourist motivation positively affects engagement.
H3a	Perceived destination image positively affects revisit intention.
H3b	Perceived destination image positively affects engagement.
H4	Engagement positively affects revisit intention.
H5a	Engagement mediates the relationship between tourist experience and revisit intention.
H5b	Engagement mediates the relationship between tourist motivation and revisit intention.
H5c	Engagement mediates the relationship between perceived destination image and revisit intention.
H6	Location moderates the relationship between engagement and revisit intention.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has systematically reviewed the theoretical foundations and empirical advancements relevant to tourist behavior within the context of film tourism, establishing the conceptual underpinnings for analyzing revisit intention in Zhangjiajie. By integrating

the experience economy model, attribution theory, and image theory, the chapter presents a comprehensive framework for understanding how tourists perceive, interpret, and act upon film-related experiences. These theoretical perspectives collectively illuminate the psychological mechanisms through which cinematic narratives, environmental stimuli, and personal meanings shape destination evaluations and behavioral intentions.

Within this integrated framework, tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image are identified as key antecedents that influence tourists' psychological responses. Tourist experience, conceptualized through the four realms of entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism, captures the immersive and affective qualities of film tourism encounters. Tourist motivation, viewed through attribution theory, reflects internal drivers—such as personal enjoyment and symbolic identification—as well as external triggers linked to social or media influence. Perceived destination image represents tourists' cognitive–affective evaluations of Zhangjiajie based on cinematic portrayals, environmental features, and symbolic associations. Together, these antecedent constructs establish the psychological foundation for understanding engagement and revisit intention.

The chapter also highlights the distinctive characteristics of Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination. The region's iconic landscapes, narrative symbolism, and global cinematic exposure create a unique experiential environment that shapes tourists' expectations and enhances their emotional involvement. These attributes not only inform experience-based interpretations but also contribute to the formation of meaningful destination images, reinforcing Zhangjiajie's identity as a cinematic and cultural symbol.

Moreover, the chapter emphasizes the pivotal role of tourist engagement—an affective, cognitive, and behavioral construct—in translating psychological stimuli into revisit intention. Engagement serves as the central mechanism through which experience, motivation, and destination image exert influence on behavioral outcomes. Additionally, location is introduced as a crucial contextual factor that conditions the engagement–revisit relationship. By acknowledging spatial distance as a behavioral constraint, the framework recognizes that engagement may translate more strongly into revisit intention for tourists living closer to Zhangjiajie than for those residing farther away.

Overall, this chapter establishes the theoretical rationale for the study's research model and mixed-method design. The integrated framework provides a multidimensional

lens through which to examine how experience, motivation, engagement, perceived destination image, and location jointly shape revisit intention in film tourism. These insights form the basis for the development of research hypotheses and guide the empirical investigation presented in the subsequent chapters.



CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed to investigate the factors influencing tourist intentions to visit Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are utilized, including semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires, to capture a comprehensive view of tourists' perceptions, motivations, and attitudes toward Zhangjiajie. Key constructs—tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, location and revisit intention—are examined through rigorous data collection and analysis methods, including Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), ensuring robust, credible insights into film tourism dynamics.

3.1 Overview and Justification of Research Paradigm

At the core of this study lies the post-positivist philosophical paradigm, a framework that recognizes the complexities of objective reality while acknowledging the limitations of human perception and the potential for error in empirical observation. Post-positivism, in contrast to strict positivism, maintains that reality exists independently of human cognition but that our understanding of this reality is inherently imperfect and probabilistic. By emphasizing a balance between objectivity and critical reflection, post-positivism enables a rigorous yet flexible exploration of these constructs.

Ontologically, the study aligns with critical realism, which posits that constructs such as tourist motivation, experience, and revisit intention reflect real-world phenomena, yet must be interpreted through subjective perceptions and contextual variation (Lai et al., 2024). Epistemologically, it relies on empirical investigation, recognizing that while causal patterns can be identified through observation and measurement, conclusions remain tentative and open to refinement (Abend et al., 2013). Methodologically, this paradigm supports the use of quantitative tools, particularly Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), to examine direct and indirect relationships among key variables such as motivation, experience, engagement, perceived destination image, and revisit intention.

SEM enables robust hypothesis testing while accommodating latent constructs and mediating effects, offering nuanced insights into how cinematic elements influence tourist decision-making (Abend et al., 2013). Axiologically, the study maintains ethical transparency and methodological rigor, aiming to minimize researcher bias and ensure objectivity throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Lim, 2023). While acknowledging that complete neutrality is unattainable, the study adheres to principles of critical self-reflection and academic responsibility.

Qualitative inquiry acknowledges that tourists' interpretations of cinematic symbolism, narrative resonance, and destination meaning are culturally situated and cannot be fully captured through predetermined scales. Through in-depth exploration, the qualitative phase informs construct refinement and ensures conceptual validity. The objectives of the qualitative research is:

(1) To explore the underlying motivational, experiential, and perceptual factors that shape tourists' engagement with Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination.

Quantitative research offers a structured and empirical approach to examining the relationships among psychological, experiential, and perceptual factors that influence tourists' revisit intentions in film tourism contexts. By employing standardized measurement scales and statistical modeling techniques, the research seeks to uncover causal pathways and assess the strength of key predictors in influencing revisit behavior. The objectives of the quantitative research are:

(2) To examine how tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and engagement influence revisit intention in the context of film tourism in Zhangjiajie.

(3) To investigate the mediating role of tourist engagement in the relationships between tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and revisit intention.

(4) To assess how location moderates the relationship between tourist engagement and revisit intention.

3.2 Qualitative Research

This qualitative study is centered on conducting interviews with tourists who have visited film tourism sites. These interviews aim to identify the underlying motivations that drive tourists to visit film tourism destinations in Zhangjiajie.

3.2.1 Research Tools

To address the exploratory objective of identifying the motivational, experiential, and perceptual factors that shape tourists' engagement with Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination, this study employs a semi-structured interview approach. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to articulate their perceptions, emotions, and interpretations in depth while providing sufficient thematic guidance to ensure alignment with the conceptual constructs of the study. Table 3.1 provides a structured overview of the semi-structured interview framework utilized in this study. The table categorizes questions into thematic dimensions relevant to understanding tourists' perceptions and experiences of Zhangjiajie as film tourism destinations.

Table 3.1 Interviewee Related Questions

Number	Interview Questions
Q1	What motivated you to visit Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination? Could you describe any internal or external factors that influenced your decision?
Q2	How have films, media portrayals, or cinematic imagery shaped your expectations of Zhangjiajie before your trip?
Q3	Can you describe the specific aspects of Zhangjiajie that felt connected to the films you have seen? How did these elements influence your anticipation or emotional response?
Q4	During your visit, what experiences did you find most immersive, memorable, or meaningful? Why did these moments stand out to you?
Q5	How did the natural scenery, atmosphere, and cultural features of Zhangjiajie contribute to your overall experience?
Q6	What were your perceptions or mental images of Zhangjiajie during your visit? How did these compare with your pre-trip expectations shaped by film content?

Table 3.1 (continued)

Number	Interview Questions
Q7	In what ways did your visit make you feel more involved or engaged with the destination? Can you describe moments when you felt strongly connected, attentive, or emotionally absorbed?
Q8	Did any symbolic, aesthetic, or narrative elements of Zhangjiajie enhance your sense of engagement during the trip? If so, how?
Q9	How did interactions with film-related locations, viewpoints, or storytelling features influence your engagement with the destination?
Q10	Were there any aspects of the experience that strengthened or weakened your connection with Zhangjiajie during the visit? Please explain.
Q11	From your perspective, what characteristics make Zhangjiajie a compelling or distinctive film tourism destination?
Q12	Is there anything else about your motivations, experiences, or perceptions of Zhangjiajie that you feel contributed to your level of engagement with the destination?

3.2.2 Data Collection Administration

3.2.2.1 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for the qualitative phase of this study is defined as individual tourists who have participated in film tourism activities in Zhangjiajie. Participation refers not merely to physical visitation but to engaging with the destination through a film-related lens—such as recognizing its cinematic associations, forming expectations shaped by film or media portrayals, or interacting with landscape features symbolically linked to popular films. These individuals provide rich narrative accounts that illuminate how tourist motivation, tourist experience, and perceived destination image shape their engagement with the destination.

Table 3.2 Selection Criteria for Qualitative Interview Participants

Criteria Category	Description
Travel Experience	Individuals who have visited Zhangjiajie within the past three years to ensure recency and reliability of recall.
Film Tourism Awareness	Demonstrated awareness of the destination's cinematic associations—for example, recognizing media portrayals that influenced expectations or destination choice.
Participation in Activities	Engagement in film-related activities (e.g., location tours, photography, performances, exhibitions).
Motivational Clarity	Capacity to articulate internal and external motivations related to the visit and to describe how cinematic imagery or narratives influenced their decision-making.
Perceptual Insight	Ability to describe perceived destination image formed prior to and during the visit, including cognitive and affective evaluations shaped by media exposure.
Diverse Representativeness	Inclusion of participants from different ages, regions, and socio-cultural backgrounds to capture multiple perspectives on film tourism experiences.
Reflective Capacity	Willingness and ability to provide detailed reflections on their experiences, emotions, and engagement processes during the visit.

3.2.2.2 Sampling Method

This study employs a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling to identify information-rich participants who have engaged in film tourism in Zhangjiajie. Purposive sampling is first utilized to select individuals who meet the core criteria of the qualitative inquiry, including recent visitation, clear awareness of Zhangjiajie's cinematic associations, and the ability to articulate their motivations, perceptions, and experiential interpretations in depth. This approach ensures that all interviewees possess direct and meaningful engagement with the destination's film-related attributes. To complement this initial selection, snowball sampling is subsequently applied, inviting early participants to recommend others who share similar film tourism

experiences and reflective capacity. This dual strategy allows the study to reach participants who may not be easily accessible through conventional recruitment channels, while still maintaining relevance to the research objectives (Naderifar et al., 2017).By integrating purposive and snowball sampling, the qualitative phase captures a diverse yet conceptually coherent set of perspectives, thereby enhancing the richness and credibility of insights into the antecedents of tourist engagement in film tourism contexts.

3.2.2.3 Sample Size

Determining an appropriate sample size is essential for ensuring the credibility and depth of qualitative research findings. Nair (2023) suggests that approximately 30 interviews are often sufficient for achieving data saturation in semi-structured qualitative studies, a view echoed by Braun and Clarke (2021), who argue that 20 to 30 participants typically yield rich and meaningful insights for thematic analysis. In light of these recommendations and in alignment with the revised research objectives, this study will recruit approximately 30 participants who have visited Zhangjiajie.

3.2.2.4 Data Collection Method

The primary data for the qualitative phase were collected through semi-structured interviews with tourists who had visited Zhangjiajie with explicit awareness of its cinematic associations. Semi-structured interviewing was chosen because it balances thematic consistency with the flexibility needed to elicit rich, personal accounts of tourists' motivations, experiential interpretations, perceptual evaluations, and engagement processes. This method aligns with the exploratory aim of identifying underlying psychological mechanisms that cannot be fully captured through standardized quantitative measures. To ensure that participants met the study's eligibility requirements, a brief pre-screening questionnaire was administered during the recruitment stage. This screening verified that individuals had recently traveled to Zhangjiajie, understood its connections to film or media representations, and were able to reflect articulately on their experiences. Only those who satisfied these criteria were invited to participate in the interviews.

All interviews were conducted individually and lasted approximately 35–50 minutes. Most sessions were held through online video conferencing tools to enhance accessibility and allow participation from tourists residing outside the region. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and the confidentiality protocols governing their

responses. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, including explicit permission for audio recording. Recording the interviews ensured the accuracy of the data, facilitated verbatim transcription, and supported rigorous qualitative analysis.

3.2.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using NVivo 12, a software widely employed in tourism and social science research for managing, organizing, and interpreting unstructured textual data. NVivo supports systematic coding and theme development, making it particularly suitable for identifying the underlying motivational, experiential, and perceptual factors that shape tourists' engagement with Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination (Rasheed et al., 2024).

Following qualitative research protocols, a structured coding process will be applied to ensure thorough data categorization and insight extraction. Coding, as explained by Choetkiertikul et al. (2021), entails dividing data into meaningful units and assigning codes to these units, thereby creating an organized framework for analysis. This method enables a comprehensive assessment of the interview content and ensures all relevant insights are systematically categorized. Continual coding as data are imported into NVivo will further support the management of complex information while capturing nuanced perspectives.

The analysis process in NVivo will consist of several key steps:

First, all interview transcripts were read multiple times to ensure familiarization with the data and to gain an initial understanding of participants' descriptions of film-related motivations, on-site experiences, destination perceptions, and moments of engagement. This initial immersion enabled the researcher to identify preliminary patterns and meaningful segments of text.

Next, open coding was conducted in NVivo to break the data into discrete units. Codes were created inductively to reflect participants' motives for visiting Zhangjiajie, their affective and sensory experiences during the trip, evaluative impressions of the destination shaped by cinematic imagery, and expressions of cognitive or emotional engagement. These open codes were then refined through axial coding, during which related codes were grouped into broader conceptual categories that revealed connections among constructs—such as links between film-induced expectations and perceived

destination image, or between immersive experiential moments and heightened engagement.

In the selective coding stage, overarching themes were developed that represented the core dimensions emerging from the interviews. These themes captured how cinematic associations shaped tourist motivations, how experiential encounters with iconic landscapes influenced emotional involvement, how tourists constructed cognitive–affective images of the destination, and how these processes collectively contributed to engagement. NVivo's visualization tools, including hierarchical node maps and cluster analyses, were used to examine relationships among themes and to support interpretive clarity..

Throughout the analysis, constant comparison techniques ensured that coding remained consistent and grounded in the data. Reflexive memo writing was also used to record analytic decisions, emerging insights, and interpretations of how tourists make meaning of their film tourism experiences. This rigorous and iterative process enabled a nuanced understanding of how motivational, experiential, and perceptual pathways contribute to tourists' engagement with Zhangjiajie, providing essential qualitative foundations for the subsequent quantitative model.

3.3 Quantitative Research

3.3.1 Operational Definitions of Variables

To enhance the precision and methodological rigor of this research, the study presents the operational definitions of the key variables examined, thereby clarifying their conceptual boundaries and measurement frameworks.

Table 3.3 Operational Definitions of Related Variables

Construct	Operational Definition	Source
Tourist experience	The psychological, emotional, and sensory responses arising from interactions with a destination, measured across entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism.	Song et al. (2015)

Table 3.3 (continued)

Construct	Operational Definition	Source
Tourist motivation	Tourist motivation refers to the psychological drivers that encourage individuals to visit a film tourism destination, including interest in film-related landscapes, enjoyment and novelty seeking, and influences shaped by media exposure and travel context.	Aguilar-Rivero et al. (2024)
Perceived destination image	Tourists' film-induced mental representation of a destination formed through cinematic narratives, visual aesthetics, symbolic meanings, and on-site experiential confirmation, encompassing both cognitive evaluations and affective responses shaped by media exposure.	V.G et al. (2021)
Engagement	The degree of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement with a film tourism destination, reflected in participation, immersion, and personal relevance.	Teng (2021)
Location	Location refers to the tourist's geographic origin or spatial distance from Zhangjiajie, representing travel cost, accessibility, and feasibility of revisiting.	Rahmawati et al.(2021)
Revisit intention	The conscious willingness or likelihood of a tourist returning to the same film tourism destination in the future.	Lee et al. (2020)

3.3.2 Variable Measurements

(1) Tourist Experience

The variable Tourist experience is measured based on the experience economy framework and adapted from Song et al. (2015) to fit the film tourism context of Zhangjiajie. The scale includes fourteen items that capture tourists' experiential responses across four experiential dimensions: entertainment (e.g., enjoyment and interest generated by film-related settings), education (e.g., learning about cinematic narratives or cultural themes), esthetics (e.g., appreciation of visually appealing and symbolic landscapes), and

escapism (e.g., feeling detached from daily routine through immersive environments). All items are rated on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, allowing for a consistent assessment of the multidimensional experiential responses elicited during the visit.

Table 3.4 Detailed Statements used to Measure Tourist Experience

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
Tourist experience	1. The experience of temple stay is fun.	TE1. I found the film settings in Zhangjiajie enjoyable and entertaining.	Song et al. (2015)
	2. The experience of temple stay is enjoyable.	TE 2.Experiencing the film-inspired landscapes made my visit feel lively and engaging.	
	3. The experience of temple stay is entertaining.	TE 3. The cinematic elements of the destination provided a high level of entertainment during my trip.	
	4. The experience of temple stay is interesting.	TE4. The film-themed attractions and environments captured my interest throughout the visit.	
	5. The experience of temple stay makes me more knowledgeable.	TE5. My visit helped me learn more about the films, stories, or cultural themes associated with Zhangjiajie.	
	6. The experience of temple stay is highly educational.	TE6. The destination offered meaningful insights related to its cinematic background and cultural significance.	
	7. The experience of temple stay allows me to learn more about Buddhism.	TE7. I gained new knowledge about the narratives or cinematic elements that shaped Zhangjiajie's film identity.	

Table 3.4 (continued)

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
	8. The experience of temple stay allows me to forget about my daily routine.	TE8. Being in the film-related environment allowed me to temporarily escape from my daily routine.	
	9. The experience of temple stay allows me to have a break from routine.	TE9. The immersive atmosphere of the destination made me feel mentally refreshed and detached from everyday life.	
	10. The experience of temple stay gives me a chance to see myself in a new way.	TE10. The cinematic setting encouraged personal reflection and gave me a new perspective on myself.	
	11. The experience of temple stay is attractive.	TE11. The film-inspired landscapes and viewpoints were visually appealing.	
	12. The experience of temple stay is pleasant.	TE12. The sensory experiences (e.g., scenery, atmosphere) at the destination were aesthetically pleasing.	
	13. The experience of temple stay is appreciable.	TE13. I appreciated the artistic or symbolic qualities of the film-related environment.	
	14.The experience of temple stay allows me to harmonize myself with the environment.	TE14. The natural and cinematic environment made me feel emotionally connected and in harmony with the surroundings.	

(2) Tourist Motivation

The variable Tourist motivation was measured using items adapted from Aguilar-Rivero et al. (2024). The scale consists of eighteen items that capture the key psychological drivers influencing tourists' decisions to visit Zhangjiajie within a film tourism context. All items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, with higher scores indicating stronger motivation to visit the destination.

Table 3.5 Detailed Statements used to Measure Tourist Motivation

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
Tourist motivation	1. Visiting the filming location.	M1.Visiting filming location in Zhangjiajie was an important reason for my trip.	Aguilar-Rivero et al. (2024)
	2.Experiencing new sensations.	M2.I wanted to experience new and exciting feelings inspired by the films associated with Zhangjiajie.	
	3. Learning new cinematic facts.	M3. I was motivated to learn more about the films, stories, or cinematic elements connected to Zhangjiajie.	
	4.Scenic beauty.	M4. The scenic beauty shown in films encouraged me to visit Zhangjiajie in person.	
	5.Cultural experience.	M5.I was motivated to explore the cultural or symbolic meanings portrayed in films featuring Zhangjiajie.	
	6.Proximity to the main vacation destination.	M6. The location of Zhangjiajie made it convenient to include in my overall travel plan.	

Table 3.5 (continued)

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
	7.Engaging in exhibition-related activities.	M7. I was interested in participating in film-themed activities or exhibitions during my visit.	
	8.Sharing experiences.	M8. Sharing film-related travel experiences with others motivated me to visit Zhangjiajie.	
	9.Enjoying the atmosphere.	M9. I wanted to enjoy the unique atmosphere created by Zhangjiajie's film-related landscapes.	
	10. Watching different films.	M10. Watching films featuring Zhangjiajie increased my desire to visit the destination.	
	11.Participating in cinematic activities.	M11. I was motivated to engage in cinematic or film-inspired activities at the destination.	
	12. Viewing different formats (shorts, documentaries, etc.)	M12. My interest in various film formats (e.g., blockbusters, documentaries) strengthened my motivation to visit Zhangjiajie.	
	13.Professional reasons.	M13. My visit was partly driven by professional or academic interests related to film or tourism.	
	14. Enjoying cinema.	M14. My general enjoyment of cinema increased my motivation to visit Zhangjiajie.	

Table 3.5 (continued)

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
	15.Rest and relaxation.	M15. I was motivated to experience relaxation in a setting associated with films I enjoyed.	
	16.Entertainment.	M16. I expected visiting film-related locations in Zhangjiajie to be entertaining and enjoyable.	
	17.Escaping from daily routine.	M17. I wanted to escape my daily routine by immersing myself in a film-related environment.	
	18.Networking with film industry professionals.	M18. I was motivated by opportunities to connect with people who share an interest in film or film tourism.	

(3) Perceived Destination Image

Perceived destination image refers to the cognitive and affective impressions that potential tourists form about a destination, particularly influenced by its cinematic portrayal, visual atmosphere, and associated tourist infrastructure. In the context of film tourism, this study adopts a multidimensional approach based on V.G et al. (2021). These elements reflect how tourists interpret both the symbolic and practical aspects of each location as film tourism destinations. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Table 3.6 Detailed Statements used to Measure Perceived Destination Image

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
Perceived destination image	1.Good reputation of the Cayman Islands.	PI1. Zhangjiajie is widely recognized for their strong reputations as iconic film tourism destinations.	V.G et al. (2021)

Table 3.6 (continued)

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
	2.Cultural and historical attractions.	PI2. These destinations offer compelling cinematic elements—such as Zhangjiajie's Hallelujah Mountains that enhance their appeal.	
	3.General level of service.	PI3. The quality of tourism services (e.g., film-themed tours, transport, accommodations) at Zhangjiajie meets the expectations of film-motivated tourists.	

(4) Engagement

Engagement with film tourism destinations refers to the emotional, cognitive, and social involvement tourists exhibit when interacting with film-related environments. Drawing on Teng (2021), this study defines engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing affective enthusiasm, attention to content, and active participation in social or film-related activities. In film tourism contexts like Zhangjiajie, where immersive narratives and symbolic associations are central, tourists are encouraged not only to observe but to emotionally and socially connect with cinematic spaces. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was used to measure responses.

Table 3.7 Detailed Statements used to Measure Engagement

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
Engagement	1. I am passionate about this film tourism site.	ET1. I feel passionate about visiting film tourism destinations like Zhangjiajie.	Teng (2021)
	2. I am enthusiastic about this film tourism site.	ET2. I feel enthusiastic when exploring cinematic landscapes in Zhangjiajie, such as the Hallelujah Mountains from *Avatar*.	

Table 3.7 (continued)

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
	3. I pay attention to everything regarding this film tourism site.	ET3. I actively follow media content, films, and updates related to Zhangjiajie as a film destination.	
	4. I enjoy interacting with a like-minded community in film tourism.	ET4. I enjoy meeting other tourists who share an interest in film tourism at Zhangjiajie.	
	5. I enjoy actively participating in film tourism community discussions.	ET5. I participate in online discussions and forums about my film tourism experiences in Zhangjiajie.	
	6. In general, I enjoy exchanging ideas with others in the film tourism community.	ET6. I enjoy sharing and exchanging travel stories related to my film tourism experiences in Zhangjiajie.	

(5) Location

The variable Location was measured using items adapted from Rahmawati et al.(2021). The scale consists of four items capturing tourists' spatial position and travel feasibility in relation to the destination, including information visibility, perceived travel comfort, affordability, and transportation ease. All items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, with higher scores indicating greater perceived accessibility and feasibility of traveling from one's place of residence to the destination.

Table 3.8 Detailed Statements used to Measure Location

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
Location	1. Visibility.	LO1. I can easily obtain information about traveling from my place of residence to Zhangjiajie.	Rahmawati et al.(2021)
	2.Comfortable environment.	LO2. The overall travel distance and journey from my location to Zhangjiajie feel manageable and comfortable for me.	
	3.Affordability.	LO3. The travel cost required to visit Zhangjiajie is affordable based on my personal financial situation.	
	4. Transportation Ease.	LO4. Transportation options from my location to Zhangjiajie are convenient and easy to access.	

(6) Revisit Intention

Revisit intention refers to a tourist's self-reported likelihood or willingness to return to a previously visited destination. Drawing on Lee et al. (2020), this study adapts the construct to the context of film tourism and specifically measures revisit intention with reference to Zhangjiajie. The five revised items assess future preference, behavioral commitment, short-term likelihood, conditional return, and loyalty despite competing options. These items reflect tourists' emotional and cognitive inclinations to revisit Zhangjiajie based on its cinematic appeal and the engagement experienced during the visit. All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Table 3.9 Detailed Statements used to Measure Revisit Intention

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
Revisit intention	1. Disney will be my first choice in the future.	RI1. Among similar destinations, I would prioritize revisiting Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination.	Lee et al. (2020)

Table 3.9 (continued)

Construct	Original Items	Revised Items	Source
	2. I will visit Disney again.	RI2. I plan to visit Zhangjiajie again in the future to experience its film-related attractions.	
	3. I would revisit Disney in the near future.	RI3. I am likely to revisit Zhangjiajie within a short period of time.	
	4. I intend to revisit Disney if I would come to the destination again.	RI4. If I return to this region, I would definitely include Zhangjiajie as part of my itinerary.	
	5. I will visit Disney again even if there are other theme parks near the destination	RI5. Even if other destinations are nearby, I would still prefer to revisit Zhangjiajie for its film tourism appeal.	

3.3.3 Data Collection Administration

The data collection process is a critical component of this study, designed to gather reliable and context-specific information regarding the factors influencing revisit intention to Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination. Participants were recruited through online film tourism communities, specifically targeting individuals who had previously visited Zhangjiajie with an awareness of its cinematic associations. A pre-screening process ensured that participants met the study's eligibility criteria including their knowledge of film-related elements and their engagement with the destination. The survey was distributed through digital platforms, providing a convenient and accessible means of participation. The use of online distribution allowed for reaching a broad demographic, while maintaining cost and time efficiency. All responses were collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality and to protect participants' privacy. The data collected were solely for academic research purposes, ensuring adherence to ethical standards throughout the data collection process.

3.3.3.1 Target Population

The target population for this study consists of adult tourists (aged 18 and above) who have visited Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination with explicit awareness of its cinematic associations. This age restriction ensures that participants can provide informed consent and minimizes ethical concerns associated with surveying minors. By focusing on previous visitors, the study captures firsthand experiences of Zhangjiajie as a film-related destination, enabling respondents to reflect on their motivations, emotional responses, and engagement with the destination's film-themed environments. The sampling frame is comprised of tourists who have visited Zhangjiajie within the last two years, ensuring that the responses are based on recent, relevant experiences. This definition aligns with the study's objectives by focusing on individuals who have had direct exposure to Zhangjiajie's film tourism offerings, ensuring that the data collected reflects the perceptions and engagement of tourists with the film tourism context. This targeted population ensures that the study will provide meaningful insights into the factors influencing tourist engagement and revisit intention, based on real experiences at Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination.

3.3.3.2 Sample Size

Determining an appropriate sample size is essential for ensuring sufficient statistical power and the reliability of the empirical results. According to Wolf et al. (2013), the sample size should be at least 15 times the number of measurement items included in the study. As the questionnaire contained 50 measurement items, the minimum required sample size was calculated as follows:

$$50 \times 15 = 750$$

Accordingly, the minimum target sample size was set at 750 respondents. After data screening, a total of 755 valid questionnaires were retained for the final analysis.

3.3.3.3 Sampling Techniques

This study employed convenience sampling, a widely used non-probability sampling technique in tourism research, particularly when the target population is dispersed and no comprehensive sampling frame is available. As film tourism visitors to Zhangjiajie cannot be identified through any public registry or centralized database, probability sampling was not feasible. Convenience sampling therefore provides a practical method for reaching individuals who recently visited the destination and can offer

accurate, experience-based responses regarding film-induced perceptions, engagement, and revisit intention.

To ensure that only qualified respondents participated, an eligibility screening question was embedded at the beginning of the survey, confirming that individuals: (i) screen for eligibility (aged ≥18; visited the destination), (ii)had visited Zhangjiajie within the past two years, and (iii) were aware of its cinematic associations (e.g., Avatar landscape interpretations). Eligible participants were then invited to complete the questionnaire via a QR-code link or online survey portal. Responses were collected on a voluntary and anonymous basis. To reduce clustering effects from close social networks, participants were instructed to complete the survey individually rather than as a group. Although convenience sampling does not allow statistical generalization in the same manner as probability sampling, its use is methodologically appropriate for examining experience-related, psychological, and perceptual constructs in film tourism, where first-hand experiential relevance is prioritized over population-level representativeness.

3.3.3.4 Data Collection Technique

This study adopts a mixed-method data collection approach that integrates both online and offline questionnaire distribution to enhance sample diversity and data validity. The offline component involves distributing printed surveys at major film tourism sites in Zhangjiajie, targeting tourists who are directly engaged with cinematic attractions. The online component is conducted through platforms such as Questionnaire Star and distributed via film tourism communities, travel forums, and social media groups where potential respondents with relevant travel experiences are active. This dual-channel strategy ensures broad coverage and contextual relevance, capturing informed responses about tourist motivation, on-site experience, engagement, perceived destination image, and revisit intention. To ensure the accuracy and cultural relevance of the bilingual questionnaires, the study utilizes a back-translation procedure. The original English version of the questionnaire was translated into Chinese, followed by a reverse translation into English by an independent translator. This method helps ensure consistency and avoids potential misinterpretations across the two versions. The final versions of the questionnaires, both in English and Chinese, were then distributed to the target population. This approach enhances the reliability and cross-cultural applicability of the survey instruments, ensuring that the responses collected are valid and meaningful.

3.3.3.5 Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted to refine the questionnaire and ensure the clarity, reliability, and contextual relevance of the measurement items prior to the main data collection. A small-scale pretest was administered to a subset of the target population—tourists who had previously visited Zhangjiajie for film-related purposes. Following methodological guidelines suggesting that a sample of approximately 20–30 participants is sufficient to identify issues related to item wording, scale reliability, and survey flow (Provencher et al., 2018), the pilot included around 30 respondents. Feedback from the pilot was used to revise ambiguous items, adjust question sequencing, and confirm the suitability of the constructs for the film tourism context. This process ensured the robustness of the final questionnaire for subsequent large-scale data collection.

Table 3.10 presents the item analysis results of the pilot study, providing initial evidence on the internal consistency and measurement quality of the constructs. The mean values of most items range between approximately 3.5 and 4.4, indicating that respondents generally held moderately positive to positive evaluations toward the film tourism experience in Zhangjiajie. The standard deviations remain within an acceptable range, suggesting a reasonable dispersion of responses without excessive variability.

Regarding item reliability, the corrected item–total correlation values largely exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.50, demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency across most measurement items. In particular, the items under tourist experience, engagement, and revisit intention exhibit relatively strong item–total correlations, indicating that these items are well aligned with their respective constructs. The Cronbach's alpha if item deleted values further confirm the stability of the scales, as the removal of most items would not substantially improve overall reliability, implying that the majority of items contribute meaningfully to their constructs.

However, two items under tourist motivation, namely M16 and M17, display comparatively lower corrected item–total correlations, falling below the recommended threshold. Their inclusion also leads to a slight decrease in the internal consistency of the construct, as reflected in the Cronbach's alpha if item deleted values. This suggests that these items may not adequately capture the underlying dimension of tourist motivation within the film tourism context. Consequently, both items were considered for removal in

the subsequent refinement process to enhance the overall reliability and construct validity of the measurement model.

Table 3.10 Item Analysis for Pilot Test

Construct	Item	Mean	SD	CITC	Cronbach's α if item deleted
Tourist experience	TE1	4.01	0.77	0.71	0.875
Tourist experience	TE2	3.73	0.63	0.71	0.905
Tourist experience	TE3	4.15	0.71	0.72	0.921
Tourist experience	TE4	3.67	0.68	0.73	0.916
Tourist experience	TE5	4.19	0.67	0.65	0.878
Tourist experience	TE6	3.89	0.89	0.65	0.945
Tourist experience	TE7	4.44	0.72	0.71	0.924
Tourist experience	TE8	3.64	0.87	0.68	0.905
Tourist experience	TE9	3.84	0.79	0.69	0.911
Tourist experience	TE10	3.61	0.84	0.71	0.892
Tourist experience	TE11	4.42	0.75	0.73	0.875
Tourist experience	TE12	4.38	0.77	0.62	0.886
Tourist experience	TE13	3.76	0.75	0.63	0.926
Tourist experience	TE14	4.16	0.66	0.57	0.851
Tourist motivation	M1	4.32	0.82	0.67	0.862
Tourist motivation	M2	4.06	0.68	0.56	0.855
Tourist motivation	M3	4.03	0.61	0.64	0.854
Tourist motivation	M4	3.74	0.79	0.66	0.936
Tourist motivation	M5	3.59	0.65	0.61	0.92
Tourist motivation	M6	4.4	0.88	0.67	0.897
Tourist motivation	M7	4.4	0.89	0.56	0.86
Tourist motivation	M8	4.13	0.87	0.56	0.899
Tourist motivation	M9	3.84	0.71	0.71	0.897
Tourist motivation	M10	3.85	0.6	0.62	0.867
Tourist motivation	M11	4.23	0.88	0.58	0.893
Tourist motivation	M12	4.4	0.73	0.65	0.89

Table 3.10 (continued)

Construct	Item	Mean	SD	CITC	Cronbach's α if item deleted
Tourist motivation	M13	4.39	0.89	0.7	0.912
Tourist motivation	M14	4.28	0.89	0.59	0.914
Tourist motivation	M15	4.14	0.86	0.67	0.855
Tourist motivation	M16	3.58	0.69	0.45	0.8
Tourist motivation	M17	3.66	0.72	0.5	0.82
Tourist motivation	M18	3.96	0.84	0.61	0.899
Perceived destination image	PI1	4.4	0.86	0.66	0.9
Perceived destination image	PI2	4.11	0.7	0.66	0.936
Perceived destination image	PI3	3.51	0.65	0.68	0.916
Engagement	ET1	3.6	0.77	0.7	0.866
Engagement	ET2	4.16	0.88	0.75	0.857
Engagement	ET3	3.51	0.81	0.65	0.914
Engagement	ET4	3.66	0.77	0.61	0.853
Engagement	ET5	4.05	0.63	0.71	0.909
Engagement	ET6	4.19	0.78	0.6	0.944
Location	LO1	4.15	0.9	0.64	0.908
Location	LO2	3.72	0.64	0.57	0.889
Location	LO3	4.21	0.76	0.56	0.914
Location	LO4	3.74	0.86	0.74	0.896
Revisit intention	RI1	3.83	0.82	0.72	0.905
Revisit intention	RI2	4.25	0.81	0.69	0.944
Revisit intention	RI3	4.15	0.81	0.63	0.889
Revisit intention	RI4	4.35	0.71	0.58	0.946
Revisit intention	RI5	4.16	0.69	0.58	0.941

Table 3.11 further demonstrates that the pretest questionnaire achieved satisfactory reliability across all study variables. The Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.880 to 0.940, all exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, which indicates strong internal consistency of the measurement scales. Among the constructs, revisit intention shows the highest reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.940, followed by tourist experience at 0.920 and perceived destination image at 0.910. Tourist motivation, engagement, and location also present acceptable reliability coefficients of 0.900, 0.880, and 0.890 respectively. These results suggest that the revised questionnaire items are sufficiently stable and coherent for measuring the intended constructs in the context of film tourism at Zhangjiajie.

Table 3.11 Pretest Reliability Statistics

Study variables	Number of questions	Cronbach's
Tourist experience	14	0.920
Tourist motivation	18	0.900
Perceived destination image	3	0.910
Engagement	6	0.880
Location	4	0.890
Revisit intention	5	0.940

Table 3.12 reports the results of the KMO and Bartlett's test conducted to examine the suitability of the pilot data for factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy reaches 0.893, indicating a high level of common variance among the items and confirming that the dataset is appropriate for factor extraction. In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity is statistically significant, with an approximate chi-square value of 5210.437, 741 degrees of freedom, and a significance level of 0.000. This result shows that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that sufficient intercorrelations exist among the measurement items. Together, these findings provide further support for the structural adequacy of the questionnaire and justify proceeding to the main investigation.

Table 3.12 Pre-investigation KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.893	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5210.437
	df	741
	Sig.	0.000

3.3.4 Data Analysis

To thoroughly investigate and interpret the collected data, a multi-step analytical process will be employed, utilizing a range of statistical methods to ensure comprehensive and accurate insights are drawn from the survey responses. Before conducting descriptive, reliability, and structural analyses, preliminary data screening will be performed to ensure the suitability of the dataset. Missing values will be inspected and handled using listwise deletion for severe cases and simple imputation for minor omissions. Outliers will be checked through standardized scores and removed where necessary. Normality assumptions will be assessed using skewness and kurtosis thresholds, while multicollinearity will be examined through Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to ensure acceptable independence among variables. These procedures help ensure that the data meet the basic statistical assumptions required for CFA and SEM, thereby improving the reliability and interpretability of subsequent analyses.

3.3.4.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis is a branch of statistics that deals with the organization, summarization, and visualization of data, offering a simple overview of the main aspects of the collected information without delving into deeper interpretations or inferences about the data (Frenzel, 2023). It is a foundational step in the broader analytical process, paving the way for more sophisticated analytical techniques.

In this study, descriptive analysis will be applied to responses collected from tourists who have visited Zhangjiajie. The analysis will focus on key variables, including tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, location and revisit intention. For each variable, statistical indicators such as mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values will be calculated. This will offer a comprehensive snapshot of tourists' perceptions and behavioral tendencies, laying the

groundwork for subsequent structural modeling and comparative analysis across destinations.

3.3.4.2 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis is a pivotal statistical technique used in research to determine the consistency and stability of measurement scales (Kalkbrenner, 2023). It assesses whether the instrument used, such as a questionnaire, yields reliable, repeatable, and consistent results across different instances and under varying conditions. It is essential for validating the accuracy and credibility of the research findings, ensuring that the results are not products of measurement errors or inconsistencies.

In alignment with the methodological framework of this study, reliability analysis will be performed on the questionnaire items used to measure key constructs, including tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, location and revisit intention. The internal consistency of each multi-item scale will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with a threshold of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable for demonstrating good reliability. This process helps to identify any items that may reduce the overall consistency of the constructs, allowing for further refinement and ensuring that each scale reliably reflects its intended conceptual domain. Establishing measurement reliability is essential to enhance the overall robustness of the study and to support valid interpretations of tourist behavior across Zhangjiajie.

3.3.4.3 Common Method Bias (CMB) Test

Considering that this study relies on cross-sectional, self-reported data to examine tourists' perceptions of Zhangjiajie, common method bias (CMB) is a potential concern. To test for CMB, Harman's one-factor test is first conducted (Howard et al., 2024). All measurement items are entered into an unrotated exploratory factor analysis. If a single factor does not account for the majority of the variance, CMB is unlikely to be a serious issue (Fuller et al., 2016).

In addition, a marker variable approach is employed to statistically control for method variance. This involves including a theoretically unrelated variable to assess the extent of common variance and adjust the model accordingly (Texas et al., 2012). These tests enhance the internal validity of the structural model.

3.3.4.4 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is a statistical approach that identifies the underlying structure of data by examining relationships among observed variables to reveal latent factors (Sakib et al., 2022). This method simplifies complex datasets by grouping correlated items into cohesive factors, offering a concise representation of unobserved constructs that underpin the observed data. CFA is instrumental in clarifying multifaceted concepts, particularly in high-dimensional datasets, enabling researchers to distill meaningful insights from a diverse array of observed variables.

In this study, CFA will be applied to assess the validity of six key constructs: tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, location and revisit intention. These variables are operationalized through multiple indicators drawn from established literature and adapted to the context of film tourism in Zhangjiajie. The analysis will evaluate model fit using indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and standardized factor loadings. Acceptable factor loadings (≥ 0.60) and evidence of convergent and discriminant validity will be required to confirm the robustness of the measurement model (El Barachi et al., 2022). Validating the measurement model through CFA will ensure that all constructs are measured reliably, providing a sound foundation for the subsequent structural analysis of how cinematic experiences influence tourist behavior across different destinations.

3.3.4.5 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a multifaceted statistical modeling technique that enables the examination of complex relationships among observed and latent variables. It is a comprehensive method that combines factor analysis and multiple regression analysis, allowing for the evaluation of both direct and indirect effects among interrelated constructs. SEM is especially valuable when dealing with intricate theoretical models involving numerous variables and hypotheses, providing a rigorous and holistic approach to test the proposed relationships and to understand the structural interdependencies between variables (Kang et al., 2021).

In this study, SEM will be used to test the proposed structural relationships among six key constructs: tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, location and revisit intention. These variables are derived from

established theoretical models and adapted to the context of film tourism in Zhangjiajie. SEM is particularly suitable for this study because it integrates both measurement and structural components, enabling the simultaneous estimation of latent constructs—such as tourist experience, motivation, engagement, destination image, and revisit intention—and the mediating and moderating paths among them.

By employing SEM, the study will evaluate how tourist experience, motivation and perceived destination image influence revisit intention directly and indirectly through engagement. The model's fit will be assessed using widely accepted indices, including the Chi-square statistic, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (Peugh & Feldon, 2020). Path coefficients will be analyzed to determine the significance and strength of each hypothesized relationship. This approach ensures a rigorous validation of the conceptual model, offering a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and experiential mechanisms underlying tourist loyalty in the context of film tourism.

Table 3.13 Structural Equation Modeling Indicators

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

3.3.4.6 Mediation Analysis

To evaluate the mediating mechanism underlying the structural relationships in this study, the mediating role of engagement is tested using the bias-corrected bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals (Tofighi, 2020). Bootstrapping offers a rigorous and distribution-free approach for mediation analysis, particularly suited for detecting indirect effects whose sampling distributions are often non-normal. In this research framework, engagement is conceptualized as the central

psychological pathway through which tourists' experience, motivation, and perceived destination image are translated into revisit intention. As a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive focus, emotional involvement, and behavioral immersion, engagement reflects the extent to which tourists internalize and respond to film-related stimuli during their visit. The mediation test examines whether initial drivers—such as meaningful experiential encounters, strong motivational impulses, or favorable destination images—exert their influence on revisit intention primarily through heightened engagement with the cinematic environment of Zhangjiajie. Identifying significant indirect effects would indicate that engagement functions as a psychological bridge connecting tourists' antecedent perceptions to their loyalty-oriented behavioral responses. This analytical process enriches the explanatory depth of the structural model by revealing how film tourism experiences stimulate engagement and how such engagement, in turn, shapes tourists' willingness to revisit the destination.

3.3.4.7 Multi-Group Analysis (MGA)

To examine whether the structural relationships in the proposed model vary across different tourist subgroups, this study employs Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) within the SEM framework. MGA enables systematic comparison of path coefficients across demographic segments such as age, gender, income level, or travel characteristics, allowing the study to determine whether tourists with different backgrounds process film-related experiences in similar or divergent ways (Wang et al., 2019). This is particularly relevant in the context of film tourism in Zhangjiajie, where visitors differ widely in their familiarity with cinematic content, travel motivations, and patterns of engagement with film-related landscapes. Prior to conducting cross-group comparisons, measurement invariance is assessed using established procedures for testing configural, metric, and scalar invariance to ensure that the latent constructs—tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, and revisit intention—are interpreted equivalently across subgroups (Jeong & Lee, 2019). Establishing invariance safeguards the validity of subsequent comparisons and prevents biased conclusions arising from structural inconsistencies. Once invariance is confirmed, MGA evaluates whether key structural paths, particularly those linking experience, motivation, and destination image to engagement and revisit intention, differ significantly between subgroups. Detecting such variations offers deeper insight into how different types of tourists respond

to film tourism environments, thereby supporting more precise segmentation and the development of targeted marketing and management strategies for Zhangjiajie's film tourism market.

3.4 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are integral to this research, especially given the involvement of human participants. Following Bouma (2000) principles, this study is grounded in a commitment to uphold the dignity and respect of all participants involved. The research process ensures that all participants are treated with the utmost respect, recognizing their autonomy and right to privacy. To further protect confidentiality, all questionnaires are completed anonymously, and no personally identifiable information is collected at any stage. All data are stored on password-protected and encrypted devices accessible only to the research team, and will be retained solely for academic purposes for a period of three years before being permanently deleted.

The literature review conducted in this study is approached with academic integrity, ensuring that all sources are appropriately cited and acknowledged. The review is comprehensive, drawing on a wide range of scholarly work to provide a balanced and informed foundation for the study. This approach not only upholds the principle of respect for the intellectual contributions of other scholars but also ensures that the research is built on a solid academic base, contributing to the ongoing discourse in the field of film tourism.

In assessing the benefits and risks associated with the research, careful consideration has been given to the potential impact on participants and the broader community. The study aims to provide significant benefits, including a deeper understanding of how cinema influences tourism in Zhangjiajie, which could inform future tourism strategies and policies. At the same time, risks are minimized through careful design and implementation of the research methods. Participants are not exposed to any harm, and the research is designed to avoid any form of exploitation or undue burden on those involved.

Voluntary and informed participation is a cornerstone of this study. Participants are fully informed about the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement, and their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Participants who choose to withdraw may do so freely, and any incomplete

or withdrawn responses will be immediately excluded from analysis to safeguard their autonomy. Informed consent is obtained prior to data collection, ensuring that participants make voluntary decisions to partake in the study based on a clear understanding of what their participation entails.

Finally, this study adheres to the principle of being public and informative. The findings of the study will be shared with the academic community and other relevant stakeholders through publication in reputable journals and presentations at conferences. This commitment to dissemination ensures that the research contributes to public knowledge and is accessible to those who can benefit from the insights generated. The transparency of the research process and the sharing of results align with the ethical responsibility to contribute to the broader understanding of the dynamics between cinema and tourism behavior.

In conclusion, by adhering to these ethical principles—ensuring anonymity, protecting data, implementing a clear withdrawal mechanism, and upholding academic integrity—the study strengthens the credibility of its findings and contributes responsibly to the academic and broader community, upholding the standards expected of scholarly research.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a systematic and empirically grounded methodological framework for examining the psychological and experiential determinants of tourists' revisit intentions in the context of film tourism. The chapter first outlined the qualitative phase, which utilized semi-structured interviews to refine conceptual boundaries and ensure that core constructs reflected tourists' lived interpretations of cinematic symbolism, experiential immersion, and destination perception. Insights from this phase informed the development and contextual adaptation of measurement scales used in the quantitative study.

The quantitative component then implemented a structured questionnaire administered through both online and offline channels, targeting adult tourists who had previously visited Zhangjiajie with explicit awareness of its cinematic associations. A mixed convenience-based sampling approach, supported by eligibility screening, ensured that only respondents with authentic and recent film-related experiences were included.

Procedures for questionnaire translation, back-translation, pilot testing, and ethical safeguards further enhanced the reliability and cultural validity of the survey instrument.

A multi-step analytical strategy was introduced, including data screening, descriptive statistics, reliability testing, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), mediation analysis, and multi-group analysis (MGA). These analytical procedures collectively ensure that the hypothesized relationships are tested within a robust measurement and structural framework. By incorporating data quality checks—including missing value management, outlier screening, normality assessment, and multicollinearity diagnostics—the study strengthens the empirical rigor required for SEM-based inference.

Overall, this methodological design provides a coherent, theoretically informed, and empirically robust foundation for analyzing how tourists' film-induced motivations, experiential encounters, and destination perceptions shape engagement and revisit intention. The framework also allows for the examination of how location moderates key psychological pathways, offering deeper insight into spatial constraints in film tourism behavior. The next chapter will present the empirical results derived from this methodological approach, providing evidence-based interpretations of the mechanisms through which cinematic tourism environments influence tourists’ loyalty to Zhangjiajie.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

This chapter presents the empirical results of the study through an integrated qualitative and quantitative approach. It begins with the findings of the qualitative research, where grounded theory is applied to systematically analyze interview data through stages of data presentation, open coding, axial coding, conceptual development, and selective coding, thereby uncovering the underlying mechanisms of tourist engagement in film tourism contexts. Building upon these insights, the chapter then reports the results of the quantitative analysis, including assessments of data reliability and validity, descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural model testing. These analyses collectively evaluate the measurement properties of the constructs and examine the hypothesized relationships among tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, location, and revisit intention. The chapter concludes by synthesizing the key findings from both methodological strands, providing a comprehensive empirical foundation for subsequent discussion and interpretation.

4.1 The Findings of the Qualitative Research

4.1.1 Data Presentation

Table 4.1 presents the demographic profile of the 30 interview participants involved in the qualitative phase of the study. The sample was designed to reflect variation in gender, age, educational background, and visit frequency so that different perspectives on film tourism in Zhangjiajie could be captured through the interviews.

The gender composition shows participation from both male and female tourists, with a relatively balanced distribution across the sample. This balance helps ensure that the interview data include a range of views and experiences rather than reflecting the perspective of only one gender group. In terms of age, the participants are distributed across four groups, namely 18–25, 26–35, 36–45, and 46–55. Among these, the 26–35 group appears most frequently, followed by the 36–45 group. This pattern suggests that young and middle aged adults form the main body of the interview sample, which is

consistent with the characteristics of tourists who are often active in media consumption, destination exploration, and experience oriented travel. At the same time, the inclusion of participants from the 18–25 and 46–55 groups broadens the interpretive range of the data and allows the study to consider how film tourism may be understood differently across age cohorts.

Educational attainment also varies across the participants. Most interviewees hold a bachelor degree, while several participants report master or doctoral education, and a smaller number have a high school background. Such variation is useful in qualitative inquiry because it introduces different ways of interpreting landscape, culture, film symbolism, and destination meaning. Participants with more advanced education may offer more reflective or abstract interpretations of cinematic associations and destination image, whereas those with other educational backgrounds may emphasize immediate sensory impressions, emotional reactions, or practical travel experiences. This diversity contributes to the depth of the interview material.

Visit frequency further differentiates the sample. Both first time visitors and repeat visitors are represented, although repeat visitors account for a larger proportion. This distinction is important for the present study because repeat visitors may describe Zhangjiajie through accumulated familiarity, deeper comparison across visits, and stronger emotional attachment, whereas first time visitors are more likely to interpret the destination through expectation, novelty, and media shaped imagination. Including both groups makes it possible to observe how engagement may emerge either through anticipation and first encounter or through repeated contact and reinforced meaning.

The participant profile shown in Table 4.1 therefore provides an appropriate basis for the subsequent qualitative analysis. The variation across demographic background and travel experience makes it possible to examine film tourism engagement in Zhangjiajie from multiple angles, particularly in relation to motivation, experience, perception, and the ways tourists interpret the destination through cinematic associations.

Table 4.1 Participant Overview

ID	Gender	Age Group	Education	Visit Frequency
P1	Male	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P2	Female	36–45	Bachelor	Repeat
P3	Male	18–25	Bachelor	First Time
P4	Male	26–35	Master/PhD	Repeat
P5	Female	46–55	High School	Repeat
P6	Male	36–45	Bachelor	Repeat
P7	Female	26–35	Bachelor	First Time
P8	Male	26–35	Master/PhD	Repeat
P9	Male	36–45	High School	Repeat
P10	Female	18–25	Bachelor	First Time
P11	Male	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P12	Female	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P13	Male	36–45	Bachelor	Repeat
P14	Male	46–55	Master/PhD	First Time
P15	Female	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P16	Male	26–35	High School	First Time
P17	Female	36–45	Master/PhD	Repeat
P18	Male	18–25	High School	Repeat
P19	Female	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P20	Male	46–55	Bachelor	First Time
P21	Female	26–35	High School	Repeat
P22	Male	36–45	Bachelor	Repeat
P23	Female	26–35	Master/PhD	Repeat
P24	Male	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P25	Male	36–45	High School	Repeat
P26	Female	18–25	Bachelor	First Time
P27	Male	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P28	Female	36–45	Master/PhD	Repeat
P29	Male	46–55	Bachelor	Repeat
P30	Female	26–35	Bachelor	First Time

4.1.2 Open Coding

The open coding process focused on identifying the initial meaning units embedded in participants' descriptions of Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination (Glaser & Strauss, 1998). Through line by line examination of the interview transcripts, raw statements were first transformed into preliminary concepts and then grouped into broader conceptual categories. As shown in Table 4.2, the coding results indicate that tourists' narratives were not limited to descriptions of physical scenery, but were consistently shaped by cinematic association, emotional response, media based expectation, experiential immersion, and cultural interpretation.

One prominent pattern is that Zhangjiajie was frequently perceived through a film related lens. Categories such as film related environment, cinematic influence on perception, and nature cinema fusion suggest that the destination was experienced not simply as a natural scenic site, but as a landscape already mediated by film imagery and prior visual imagination. For many participants, cinematic representation functioned as a filter through which the destination was anticipated and later interpreted.

Another major tendency concerns the emotional and experiential depth of the visit. Categories including cinematic engagement and cinematic immersion show that participants often moved beyond recognition of film locations toward a stronger sense of personal involvement. The destination became meaningful because it enabled emotional resonance with familiar films and created the impression of entering a cinematic world in reality. This indicates that film tourism engagement is shaped not only by visual recognition, but also by affective participation.

The open coding results also reveal that the tourist experience involved active comparison and interpretation. The category film vs. reality contrast reflects how participants evaluated the relationship between mediated expectations and actual on site experience. At the same time, film themed activities emerged as an important experiential mechanism through which cinematic identity was reinforced in practice. These findings suggest that engagement was produced through the interaction between symbolic imagination and concrete destination encounter.

A further insight concerns the extension from cinematic attraction to broader cultural meaning. The category cultural significance indicates that some participants gradually moved from film based interest to a deeper appreciation of Zhangjiajie's heritage

and symbolic value. This shows that cinematic association may serve as an entry point, while the actual experience can generate wider cultural understanding.

Table 4.2 Examples of Open Coding Process

Participant Quote (Raw Data)	Initial Concept (Code)	Conceptual Category
"The cinematic elements in Zhangjiajie were much more vivid than I expected, especially the Hallelujah Mountains." (P3)	Cinematic landscape elements	Film-related Environment
"When I visited the Avatar filming locations, I could feel a deep connection to the film's world." (P6)	Emotional connection to film	Cinematic Engagement
"I wasn't sure what to expect, but the media portrayals definitely made the natural surroundings seem more surreal." (P12)	Media influence on expectations	Cinematic Influence on Perception
"The natural beauty of the area seemed enhanced by the stories I'd heard about the films being shot here." (P14)	Enhanced landscape perception	Nature-Cinema Fusion
"It was exciting to see the iconic film locations, which made me feel like I was part of the movie." (P7)	Immersion in cinematic world	Cinematic Immersion
"What stood out most were the film-themed tours, which helped me connect to the destination's cinematic identity." (P21)	Film-themed engagement	Film-themed Activities
"I had always seen Zhangjiajie in movies, but seeing it in real life gave me a sense of wonder I couldn't have imagined." (P19)	Real-life vs. film experience	Film vs. Reality Contrast
"The cultural heritage elements added a deeper layer to my understanding of the site, beyond just its cinematic associations." (P30)	Cultural depth in tourism	Cultural Significance

4.1.3 Axial Coding

Axial coding was conducted to move beyond the fragmentation of open coding and to clarify the relationships among the conceptual categories identified from the interview data (Glaser & Strauss, 1998). At this stage, the analysis focused on linking categories to their causal conditions, contextual settings, intervening conditions, action or interaction strategies, and consequences. This procedure made it possible to organize the interview material into a more coherent explanatory structure and to reveal how different dimensions of the film tourism experience in Zhangjiajie were connected.

As shown in Table 4.3, several categories were found to be closely associated with the formation of tourist engagement. Film related environment emerged as an important category because participants repeatedly described the destination through visually striking and symbolically recognizable cinematic features. Its causal basis lay in the intensity of film related landscape elements and the strong cinematic associations attached to Zhangjiajie. Within contexts such as iconic film locations and film themed tours, tourists drew on prior film exposure and media portrayals to interpret the scenery. Their responses often involved immersive observation and photography, which in turn generated a strong sense of entering the film world and fostered emotional connection to the destination.

Cinematic engagement developed at a deeper affective level. This category was not limited to visual recognition, but reflected the emotional depth produced by direct contact with film related settings. In contexts such as Avatar associated locations and on site experiences, participants' pre existing attachment to films functioned as an important intervening condition. Actions such as close observation and interaction with guides or fellow tourists strengthened emotional involvement and reinforced participants' connection with the narrative world of the film.

Cinematic influence on perception reveals that perception was shaped long before the actual visit took place. Media portrayals and prior cinematic imagery created strong expectations about Zhangjiajie, and these expectations became an interpretive lens through which the destination was experienced. Participants often reflected on the relationship between anticipation and reality, and this comparative process contributed to positive confirmation of media shaped expectations and to satisfaction with the perceived authenticity of the site.

The category nature cinema fusion indicates that participants did not separate the natural environment from its filmic significance. Instead, the scenic beauty of Zhangjiajie was frequently understood through cinematic enhancement. Natural landmarks became more meaningful because they were seen as connected to remembered film scenes. This relationship encouraged tourists to compare real landscapes with their film based imagination, producing not only aesthetic appreciation but also a sense of cinematic wonder.

Cinematic immersion represents one of the most central categories in the axial coding process. It reflects a more concentrated form of involvement in which the destination was experienced as an immersive cinematic environment rather than merely a place connected to film. This category developed through the interaction of emotionally significant film memories, highly recognizable locations, and active exploratory behaviors such as deep site engagement and participation in themed activities. The consequences were especially strong, often taking the form of emotional resonance and a feeling of being absorbed into the cinematic experience.

Film themed activities served as an important experiential mechanism that translated symbolic film associations into concrete engagement. Through guided tours, interactive installations, and other organized experiences, tourists were able to interact with the destination in ways that reinforced its cinematic identity. These activities increased participants' understanding of the film world and strengthened their attachment to Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination.

Film vs. reality contrast adds an interpretive dimension to the findings. Participants did not simply consume the destination as a direct extension of cinema, but frequently reflected on differences between screen based imagination and real world experience. This comparison, shaped by prior expectations and actual encounter, often produced surprise and wonder rather than disappointment. Such responses suggest that discrepancy itself may become part of the engagement process in film tourism.

Cultural significance broadens the analytical scope of the coding results. Some participants moved beyond the immediate cinematic frame and began to interpret Zhangjiajie through local heritage, cultural landmarks, and symbolic meaning. In these cases, the film tourism experience became connected to a wider process of cultural understanding. Storytelling, reflection, and attention to historical context contributed to

deeper appreciation of the destination and strengthened participants' sense of cultural identity.

Table 4.3 Axial Coding Results

Conceptual Category	Causal Conditions	Context	Intervening Conditions	Action/Interaction Strategies	Consequences	Frequency
Film-related Environment	High intensity of film-related landscape features; Strong cinematic associations of the destination	Iconic film locations like Hallelujah Mountains; Film-themed tours	Tourists' prior exposure to the film; Media portrayals of Zhangjiajie	Immersive observation of landscapes; Photography of film-related locations	Strong sense of being in the film's world; Emotional connection to the destination	82
Cinematic Engagement	Emotional depth from film association; Immersion in the film's setting	Film-related locations like Avatar filming spots; On-location experiences	Tourists' emotional attachment to the film; Media exposure to cinematic world	Immersive observation; Engaging in conversations with tour guides and fellow tourists	Heightened emotional involvement; Increased connection with film's narrative	91
Cinematic Influence on Perception	Media portrayals creating high expectations; Prior cinematic imagery shaping perceptions	Media representations of Zhangjiajie as a film destination	Tourists' pre-trip expectations based on film content	Reflecting on how media shaped expectations; Comparison of real-life and film experiences	Positive reinforcement of media expectations; Satisfaction with authenticity of the location	74

Table 4.3 (continued)

Conceptual Category	Causal Conditions	Context	Intervening Conditions	Action/Interaction Strategies	Consequences	Frequency
Nature-Cinema Fusion	Strong connection between natural beauty and filmic representation	Scenic beauty of Zhangjiajie enhanced by cinematic associations	Tourists' understanding of film's portrayal of nature; Desire to see iconic scenes in person	Exploring natural landmarks; Comparing film and reality	Enhanced perception of the destination; A sense of cinematic wonder	78
Cinematic Immersion	Intense involvement in the cinematic setting; Realization of film's emotional impact	Immersive cinematic environments such as Avatar landscapes	Tourists' prior film experiences; Emotional connection to the film	Engaging in deep exploration of iconic filming locations; Participating in themed activities	Complete immersion in the cinematic experience; Emotional resonance with the film	80
Film-themed Activities	Engagement with film-related events; Participation in cinematic tours and exhibitions	Film-related tours; Interactive media installations; On-location experiences	Tourists' interest in film tourism; Availability of film-related events	Active participation in film tours and activities	Increased understanding of the cinematic world; Greater connection to the destination's film identity	68

Table 4.3 (continued)

Conceptual Category	Causal Conditions	Context	Intervening Conditions	Action/Interaction Strategies	Consequences	Frequency
Film vs. Reality Contrast	Realization of the difference between media portrayals and actual experience	Comparison between expectations from media and the real destination	Tourists' expectations set by films; Discrepancy between film and reality	Reflecting on the difference between film and real life; Discussing discrepancies with other tourists	Sense of wonder and surprise; Recognition of the difference between film fantasy and reality	82
Cultural Significance	Integration of cultural heritage with cinematic tourism	Cultural landmarks; Film locations with historical context	Tourists' interest in local culture; Familiarity with cultural symbols in the film	Reflecting on the cultural significance of the film locations; Storytelling about cultural heritage	Deeper understanding of the cultural context; Strengthened cultural identity	87

Table 4.4 further refines this analytical process by presenting an axial coding paradigm centered on cinematic immersion. This paradigm shows that immersion was produced through the combined effect of strong film related landscape features, highly recognizable contexts, pre existing emotional attachment to films, and active visitor responses such as observation, photography, and interaction. The consequences of this process were not limited to enjoyment, but extended to emotional attachment, nostalgic resonance, and a stronger experiential bond with the destination. In this sense, cinematic immersion can be understood as a pivotal mechanism through which film induced expectations, on site experiences, and emotional engagement were integrated within the broader tourist experience of Zhangjiajie.

Table 4.4 Axial Coding Paradigm for "Cinematic Immersion"

Coding Element	Key Conceptual Categories (Examples)
Causal Conditions	High intensity of film-related landscape features; Strong cinematic associations of the destination
Context	Iconic film locations (e.g., Hallelujah Mountains); Film-themed tours; Film-related events at Zhangjiajie
Intervening Conditions	Tourists' previous exposure to films; The destination's media portrayals; Tourists' emotional attachment to the film
Action/Interaction Strategies	Immersive observation of landscapes; Photography of film-related locations; Engaging in conversations with tour guides or other film enthusiasts
Consequences	Strong sense of immersion in the film's world; Heightened emotional connection to the destination; Reinforcement of cinematic nostalgia

4.1.4 Conceptual Understanding

The axial coding results make it possible to move from category description to conceptual interpretation by clarifying how different dimensions of the film tourism experience are interconnected. Rather than functioning as independent elements, the identified categories collectively reflect a layered process through which tourists construct meaning in Zhangjiajie under the influence of cinematic representation.

A central insight emerging from the analysis is that tourist experience is structured by a continuous interaction between mediated imagination and on site encounter. Cinematic influence on perception indicates that tourists approach the destination with pre formed expectations derived from films and media portrayals. These expectations do not disappear upon arrival. Instead, they actively shape how landscapes are recognized, how attention is directed, and how experiences are evaluated. Film related environment and nature cinema fusion further demonstrate that the physical setting is interpreted through this pre existing cinematic frame, resulting in a perceptual merging of natural scenery and film imagery.

Building upon this perceptual foundation, engagement develops through both emotional and behavioral processes. Cinematic engagement and cinematic immersion suggest that tourists do not remain passive observers. Emotional attachment to film narratives enables a transition from recognition to involvement, while immersive environments encourage deeper experiential participation. Actions such as exploration, photography, and interaction with others represent not only behavioral responses but also mechanisms through which meaning is reinforced. In this sense, engagement can be understood as a process of experiential deepening, where tourists progressively move from seeing to feeling and from observation to participation.

At the same time, the experience is not unidirectional or uncritical. The presence of film vs. reality contrast indicates that tourists actively compare cinematic imagination with actual experience. This comparison introduces an interpretive dimension, where similarity may confirm expectations and difference may generate reflection or surprise. Rather than weakening the experience, such comparison often enriches it by adding cognitive involvement and interpretive complexity.

The analysis also reveals that experiential meaning may extend beyond cinematic association toward broader cultural understanding. Cultural significance shows that some tourists begin to interpret the destination in relation to heritage, symbolism, and local context. In these cases, film tourism serves as an entry point that gradually leads to a more comprehensive perception of place. The destination is no longer experienced only as a film location, but as a culturally meaningful environment shaped by both representation and reality.

4.1.5 Selective Coding

The selective coding stage aimed to integrate the categories identified in the axial coding process and to establish a coherent explanatory framework centered on a core category (Glaser & Strauss, 1998). Through constant comparison and iterative refinement, the analysis indicates that the various dimensions of the film tourism experience in Zhangjiajie converge around the core idea of constructing the tourist experience through film tourism. This core category captures how tourists interpret, engage with, and assign meaning to the destination through the interaction between cinematic representation and on site experience.

As presented in Table 4.5, several higher level categories were identified by linking axial themes with the underlying open coding concepts. Cinematic immersion emerges as a central component, drawing together elements such as film related environment, cinematic engagement, and immersive exploration. This category reflects how visual recognition, emotional response, and experiential interaction collectively contribute to a sense of being embedded within a cinematic world. At the same time, cultural engagement extends this process by incorporating cultural perception, historical awareness, and reflective comparison between film and reality. This indicates that engagement is not limited to film related attraction, but may evolve toward broader cultural interpretation.

The category of authenticity and media influence highlights the role of pre trip expectations and evaluative judgment. Media portrayals and film related imagery shape initial perception, while tourists subsequently assess the authenticity of their experience through comparison and participation. Emotional connection and engagement further emphasizes the affective dimension of the process, where immersion is translated into a sense of belonging and emotional resonance. In parallel, film tourism expectations capture the cognitive dimension, particularly how tourists interpret similarities and differences between imagined and actual experiences.

Table 4.5 Selective Coding Process - Core Category Development

Core Category	Associated Axial Themes	Open Coding Themes
Cinematic Immersion	Cinematic Environment, Cinematic Engagement, Cinematic Perception, Immersive Exploration	Emotional connection to film, High intensity of film-related landscape features, On-location experience
Cultural Engagement	Cultural Perception, Historical Connection, Film vs. Reality Contrast	Cultural depth in tourism, Storytelling in the landscape, Reflective observation of historical landmarks
Authenticity and Media Influence	Media Influence on Expectations, Authenticity Seeking, Film-related Activities	Media portrayals shaping perceptions, Seeking non-commercialization, Film-themed engagement

Table 4.5 (continued)

Core Category	Associated Axial Themes	Open Coding Themes
Emotional Connection and Engagement	Cinematic Immersion, Tourist Engagement, Emotional Response to Film Environments	Immersion in cinematic world, Sense of belonging, Emotional resonance with the place
Film Tourism Expectations	Nature-Cinema Fusion, Film vs. Reality Contrast, Real-life vs. Film Experience	Real-life experience vs. film depiction, Enhanced landscape perception, Immersive cinematic world

Table 4.6 further illustrates how these categories relate to the core category in an integrated structure. Film related environment functions as a foundational layer that provides the initial sensory and symbolic entry into the cinematic space. Cinematic engagement and cultural engagement operate at an interpretive level, transforming perception into meaningful understanding. Emotional connection represents a participatory layer, where tourists actively internalize the experience through affective involvement. Film tourism expectations introduce a cognitive dimension, guiding interpretation and evaluation, while authenticity seeking remains present throughout the process as an ongoing mechanism of validation.

Table 4.6 Axial Coding Integration Matrix - How Categories Relate to Core Category

Main Category	Relationship to Core Category: "Constructing the Tourist Experience through Film Tourism"	Integration Pattern	Sequence in Immersion Process
Film-related Environment	Foundation layer - provides sensory input that connects tourists to cinematic elements of the destination	Foundational	1st
Cinematic Engagement	Interpretive layer - transforms sensory experiences into emotional and cognitive involvement with the film's world	Interpretive	2nd

Table 4.6 (continued)

Main Category	Relationship to Core Category: "Constructing the Tourist Experience through Film Tourism"	Integration Pattern	Sequence in Immersion Process
Cultural Engagement	Interpretive layer - links cultural understanding to filmic representations, enhancing emotional responses	Interpretive	3rd
Emotional Connection	Participatory layer - allows tourists to actively engage emotionally and connect deeply to the destination's cinematic experience	Participatory	4th
Film Tourism Expectations	Cognitive layer - guides tourists in processing and interpreting the differences between film representations and real-world experiences	Cognitive	5th
Authenticity Seeking	Evaluative/Guiding layer - tourists assess authenticity, guided by media portrayals and personal experiences	Evaluative/ Guiding	Throughout

The integration patterns summarized in Table 4.7 provide a more abstract representation of how these dimensions interact to produce higher order outcomes. The tourist experience is constructed through multiple forms of integration, including the combination of sensory perception and cinematic imagery, the linkage between cultural meaning and film narrative, and the alignment between perceived authenticity and mediated expectation. These processes culminate in experiential immersion, where sensory, emotional, and cognitive elements converge into a unified experience. At a more advanced level, cultural place making reflects the outcome of this process, where the destination is not only experienced but also interpreted as a meaningful place shaped by both cinematic association and cultural understanding.

Table 4.7 Integration Patterns and Higher-Order Outcomes in Constructing the "Tourist Experience"

Integration Pattern / Higher-Order Outcome	Relationship to Core Category: "Constructing the Tourist Experience through Film Tourism"	Integration Type	Position in Immersion Process
Sensory–Cinematic Integration	Synergistic layer – integrates sensory experiences (visual, auditory, etc.) with cinematic landscapes for heightened emotional involvement	Synergistic	1st–2nd
Cultural–Cinematic Integration	Synergistic layer – integrates cultural perception with cinematic experiences, enhancing tourists' emotional and cognitive connection	Synergistic	2nd–3rd
Narrative–Cinematic Fusion	Synergistic layer – integrates narrative understanding with sensory and emotional experiences of the destination	Synergistic	2nd–5th
Authenticity–Cinematic Alignment	Validating layer – guides tourists to assess the authenticity of their experiences based on filmic and real-world references	Validating	4th–5th
Experiential Immersion	Peak layer – represents the culmination of sensory, emotional, and cognitive experiences in a unified, immersive experience	Cumulative	Final
Cultural Place-Making	Outcome layer – the final construction of place identity, cultural meaning, and lasting engagement through film tourism	Outcome	Final

4.2 Results of Quantitative Research

4.2.1 Data Reliability and Validity Analysis

The results of the reliability and validity analysis are presented in Tables 4.8 and 4.10. Prior to interpreting the empirical findings, it is necessary to clarify the meaning and analytical role of the statistical indicators employed in this section. Cronbach's alpha is used to assess the internal consistency of measurement scales, reflecting the extent to

which multiple items jointly capture the same underlying construct. Values above 0.70 are generally considered acceptable, while values exceeding 0.90 indicate very high reliability (Mohamad et al., 2015). The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy evaluates whether the data are suitable for factor analysis by examining the proportion of common variance among variables, with values closer to 1 indicating better suitability. Bartlett's test of sphericity examines whether the correlation matrix significantly differs from an identity matrix, thereby indicating whether sufficient correlations exist among variables to justify factor extraction.

As shown in Table 4.8, all constructs exhibit Cronbach's alpha coefficients above the recommended threshold, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. In particular, tourist experience and tourist motivation demonstrate very high reliability, with coefficients of 0.958 and 0.961 respectively. This suggests that the measurement items within these constructs are highly cohesive and capture consistent underlying dimensions related to film-based experiential and motivational processes. Tourist engagement and revisit intention also display strong reliability, with values of 0.899 and 0.885, indicating stable measurement of emotional involvement and behavioral intention. The constructs of location and perceived destination image yield Cronbach's alpha values of 0.835 and 0.814 respectively. Although slightly lower than the other constructs, these values remain well above the acceptable level, reflecting adequate internal consistency given the relatively smaller number of measurement items. Overall, the reliability results indicate that the measurement scales used in this study are robust and suitable for further empirical testing.

Table 4.8 Reliability Statistics

Study Variables	Number of Questions	Cronbach's α
Tourist Experience	14	0.958
Tourist Motivation	16	0.961
Perceived Destination Image	3	0.814
Tourist Engagement	6	0.899
Location	4	0.835
Revisit Intention	5	0.885

Table 4.9 reports the results of the KMO and Bartlett's test, which provide additional evidence regarding the suitability of the dataset for factor analysis. The KMO value of 0.968 indicates an excellent level of sampling adequacy, suggesting that the variables share a high degree of common variance and are appropriate for uncovering latent constructs. This high value reflects not only the adequacy of the sample size but also the structural coherence of the measurement items. In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity yields a highly significant result, with an approximate chi-square value of 26086.837 and a significance level of 0.000, indicating that the observed correlation matrix is not an identity matrix. This confirms the presence of significant interrelationships among the variables and supports the feasibility of conducting factor analysis. These findings collectively demonstrate that the data meet the necessary statistical requirements for subsequent exploratory and confirmatory analyses, thereby providing a solid empirical foundation for testing the proposed research model.

Table 4.9 KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.968
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	26086.837
	df	1128
	Sig.	0

4.2.2 Descriptive Analysis

4.2.2.1 Sample Information

Table 4.10 presents the demographic and travel-related characteristics of the respondents, offering a detailed overview of the sample structure and its representativeness. A total of 755 valid responses were collected, providing a solid empirical basis for subsequent quantitative analysis.

In terms of gender distribution, the sample is relatively balanced, with 50.9 percent male respondents and 49.1 percent female respondents. This near-equal distribution reduces potential gender bias and enhances the generalizability of the findings across different tourist groups.

Regarding age composition, the sample is dominated by young and middle-aged individuals. Respondents aged 18–25 account for the largest proportion at 27.9

percent, followed by those aged 36–45 at 24 percent and 26–35 at 22.4 percent. Participants aged 46–55 represent 18.9 percent, while those under 18 and above 55 account for relatively smaller shares of 2.6 percent and 4.1 percent respectively. This distribution reflects that film tourism in Zhangjiajie primarily attracts young and middle-aged tourists, who are generally more exposed to film and media content and more likely to engage in experiential tourism activities.

In terms of educational background, the sample exhibits a relatively high level of education. Undergraduate degree holders constitute the majority at 73.8 percent, followed by master's degree holders at 15.5 percent and doctoral degree holders at 10.7 percent. The absence of lower education categories suggests that the respondents tend to possess strong cognitive and interpretive abilities, which is particularly relevant for understanding constructs such as perceived destination image and engagement.

The distribution of monthly income indicates a concentration in the middle-income range. The largest group falls within the 3,001–6,000 CNY bracket at 30.9 percent, followed closely by the 6,001–10,000 CNY group at 28.5 percent and the 10,001–15,000 CNY group at 23.6 percent. Lower-income respondents below 3,000 CNY account for 5 percent, while higher-income groups above 15,000 CNY collectively represent a smaller proportion. This pattern suggests that film tourism in Zhangjiajie is particularly appealing to middle-income individuals, who may balance budget considerations with experiential consumption preferences.

From a geographical perspective, respondents are widely distributed across different regions, indicating good spatial representativeness. Central China accounts for the largest share at 22.9 percent, followed by Northern China at 22.6 percent and Eastern China at 21.3 percent. Southern China represents 15.1 percent, while Southwestern China and Northeastern China account for 5.7 percent and 4.9 percent respectively. Additionally, respondents from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and overseas collectively contribute a smaller but notable proportion, reflecting the broader appeal of Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination beyond mainland China.

In terms of occupation, company employees constitute the largest group at 44.1 percent, indicating that working professionals form the core segment of visitors. Civil servants and public institution employees represent 18.4 percent, while business owners and entrepreneurs account for 15.4 percent. Students make up 12.8 percent of the sample,

and smaller proportions are observed for freelancers, retirees, and other occupations. This occupational structure suggests that the sample includes a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds, enhancing the robustness of the analysis.

Finally, the frequency of visits reveals that nearly half of the respondents, 47.5 percent, are first-time visitors, while 38.4 percent have visited Zhangjiajie two to three times, and 14 percent have visited four times or more. This distribution indicates a balanced mix of first-time and repeat tourists, which is particularly valuable for examining revisit intention and engagement. The presence of a substantial proportion of repeat visitors also suggests that Zhangjiajie possesses a certain level of destination attractiveness and loyalty potential within the film tourism context.

Table 4.10 Sample Information

Category	Item	N	%
Gender	Male	384	50.9
	Female	371	49.1
Age Group	Under 18	20	2.6
	18–25	211	27.9
	26–35	169	22.4
	36–45	181	24
	46–55	143	18.9
	Above 55	31	4.1
Education Level	Undergraduate	557	73.8
	Master's	117	15.5
	Doctoral	81	10.7
Monthly Income	Below 3,000 CNY	38	5
	3,001–6,000 CNY	233	30.9
	6,001–10,000 CNY	215	28.5
	10,001–15,000 CNY	178	23.6
	15,001–20,000 CNY	59	7.8
	Above 20,000 CNY	32	4.2

Table 4.10 (continued)

Category	Item	N	%
Region of Origin	Northern China	171	22.6
	Eastern China	161	21.3
	Central China	173	22.9
	Southern China	114	15.1
	Southwestern China	43	5.7
	Northeastern China	37	4.9
	Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan	39	5.2
	Overseas	17	2.3
Occupation	Student	97	12.8
	Company employee	333	44.1
	Civil servant/Public institution	139	18.4
	Freelancer	25	3.3
	Business owner/Entrepreneur	116	15.4
	Retired	21	2.8
	Others	24	3.2
Number of Visits	1 time	359	47.5
	2–3 times	290	38.4
	4 times or more	106	14

4.2.2.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.11 presents the descriptive statistics of all measurement items, including mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, which provide an initial understanding of respondents' perceptions and the distributional properties of the data. The mean values of most items range between approximately 3.2 and 3.8, indicating that respondents generally hold moderately positive evaluations toward the film tourism experience in Zhangjiajie. This suggests that while the destination is perceived favorably, there remains variation in individual experiences and attitudes across different dimensions.

For tourist experience, the mean values fall within a relatively consistent range, with several items such as TE11, TE13, and TE14 showing comparatively higher scores, reflecting stronger agreement with aspects related to visual appeal, aesthetic

appreciation, and immersive experience. In contrast, items such as TE3 and TE9 exhibit relatively lower mean values, suggesting that certain experiential dimensions, particularly those related to specific emotional or cognitive responses, may be less strongly perceived by some respondents. The standard deviations for these items are generally around or slightly above 1, indicating a moderate level of variability in responses.

Tourist motivation demonstrates a similar pattern, with mean values clustering around the mid-to-upper range. Items such as M11, M13, and M15 record relatively higher mean values, suggesting that motivations related to emotional engagement, narrative interest, and relaxation are particularly salient. Conversely, items such as M4 and M10 show comparatively lower means, indicating that not all motivational drivers are equally influential. The relatively higher standard deviations for several motivation items imply heterogeneity in motivational structures among tourists.

Perceived destination image presents stable mean values across all items, suggesting a consistent evaluation of the destination's image. The relatively moderate standard deviations indicate that respondents share broadly similar perceptions, although some variation remains. For engagement, items such as ET3 and ET5 exhibit higher mean values, reflecting stronger involvement in media-related attention and experiential interaction, while other items demonstrate slightly lower levels of agreement, indicating differences in the depth of engagement among individuals.

The location construct shows mean values above 3.6 across all items, suggesting that respondents generally perceive accessibility and travel conditions as favorable. The relatively consistent standard deviations indicate that perceptions of location-related factors are relatively stable across the sample. Revisit intention also demonstrates moderately positive mean values, with RI3 and RI5 showing relatively stronger agreement, indicating a general willingness among respondents to revisit Zhangjiajie, although not at an overwhelmingly high level.

In terms of distributional characteristics, the skewness values for all items fall within an acceptable range, generally between -1 and 0, indicating a slight negative skewness and suggesting that responses tend to lean toward agreement. The kurtosis values are also within acceptable limits, indicating that the data do not exhibit extreme peakedness or flatness. These results suggest that the data approximate normal distribution conditions,

thereby meeting the assumptions required for subsequent parametric analyses, including structural equation modeling.

Table 4.11 Descriptive Statistics Results

Study variables	Item	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Tourist Experience	TE1	3.456	0.934	-0.493	-0.294
	TE2	3.407	0.941	-0.499	-0.305
	TE3	3.287	1.01	-0.258	-0.662
	TE4	3.33	1.105	-0.389	-0.654
	TE5	3.403	1.07	-0.465	-0.444
	TE6	3.595	1.033	-0.78	-0.016
	TE7	3.472	0.992	-0.62	-0.119
	TE8	3.446	1.075	-0.542	-0.267
	TE9	3.307	0.939	-0.416	-0.455
	TE10	3.641	1.173	-0.984	0.289
	TE11	3.713	1.033	-0.8	0.426
	TE12	3.609	1.182	-0.694	-0.177
	TE13	3.732	1.213	-0.982	0.159
	TE14	3.702	1.157	-0.899	0.236
Tourist Motivation	M1	3.346	0.95	-0.441	-0.347
	M2	3.359	0.958	-0.452	-0.021
	M3	3.299	1.121	-0.27	-0.698
	M4	3.24	1.013	-0.217	-0.738
	M5	3.297	1.109	-0.313	-0.772
	M6	3.334	1.094	-0.398	-0.583
	M7	3.584	1.041	-0.766	-0.073
	M8	3.416	1.009	-0.546	-0.301
	M9	3.389	1.082	-0.418	-0.436
	M10	3.248	0.933	-0.423	-0.547
	M11	3.669	1.047	-0.73	0.281
	M12	3.503	1.225	-0.609	-0.393
	M13	3.649	1.281	-0.817	-0.32

Table 4.11 (continued)

Study variables	Item	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis
	M14	3.599	1.223	-0.76	-0.2
	M15	3.816	1.2	-0.875	-0.029
	M16	3.648	1.169	-0.686	-0.211
Perceived Destination Image	PI1	3.47	0.946	-0.532	0.15
	PI2	3.434	0.947	-0.408	-0.076
	PI3	3.478	1.054	-0.422	-0.463
Engagement	ET1	3.547	1.224	-0.599	-0.523
	ET2	3.579	1.27	-0.54	-0.749
	ET3	3.762	1.202	-0.692	-0.448
	ET4	3.38	1.199	-0.246	-0.868
	ET5	3.668	1.148	-0.691	-0.296
	ET6	3.526	1.254	-0.4	-0.934
Location	LO1	3.683	1.114	-0.819	0.147
	LO2	3.65	1.103	-0.72	0.014
	LO3	3.69	0.992	-0.731	0.426
	LO4	3.705	1.003	-0.804	0.612
Revisit Intention	RI1	3.461	1.219	-0.478	-0.663
	RI2	3.475	1.279	-0.446	-0.823
	RI3	3.685	1.224	-0.543	-0.737
	RI4	3.374	1.206	-0.238	-0.892
	RI5	3.604	1.213	-0.615	-0.579

4.2.2.3 Structural Equation Model Analysis

Structural equation modeling was employed to test the proposed relationships among tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, location, and revisit intention. This method is appropriate because it allows the simultaneous examination of multiple direct, mediating, and moderating relationships within a single analytical framework.

Before hypothesis testing, the overall fitness of the structural model was assessed. The model fit indices indicate that the model demonstrates a good fit to the data.

Specifically, the chi square divided by degrees of freedom is 1.795, which is below the recommended threshold of 3. The RMSEA value is 0.032, indicating a very good level of approximation. In addition, GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, and CFI all exceed 0.90, further confirming that the structural model is acceptable and suitable for path analysis.

On this basis, the structural equation model was used to examine the hypothesized direct effects, mediating effects of engagement, and the moderating effect of location. The results provide empirical support for the proposed framework and suggest that the relationships among the core constructs are statistically meaningful. This establishes a solid foundation for the subsequent hypothesis testing and interpretation of the structural paths.

4.2.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

4.2.3.1 Measurement Model and Fit Index

Figure 4.1 presents the measurement model obtained from confirmatory factor analysis, illustrating the relationships between the latent constructs and their corresponding observed indicators. Each latent variable, including tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, location, and revisit intention, is operationalized through multiple measurement items, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of construct validity. The standardized factor loadings associated with each indicator provide evidence regarding the extent to which the observed variables reflect their underlying constructs.

The factor loadings shown in the model indicate that the majority of items load strongly on their respective constructs, with most values exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.60. This suggests that the indicators exhibit satisfactory convergent properties and are capable of capturing the theoretical dimensions they are intended to measure. In particular, the tourist experience construct demonstrates consistently high loadings across its multiple items, reflecting the richness and multidimensionality of experiential perception in the film tourism context. Tourist motivation also displays relatively stable loadings, indicating that different motivational dimensions are coherently integrated within the construct. For perceived destination image, although the number of items is relatively limited, the factor loadings remain within an acceptable range, suggesting that the construct retains adequate explanatory power.

The engagement construct shows strong and consistent loadings across its indicators, reflecting a clear representation of tourists' emotional and behavioral involvement with the destination. Similarly, the location construct, which captures accessibility and travel-related conditions, demonstrates acceptable loadings despite its relatively concise measurement structure. Revisit intention also presents robust factor loadings, indicating that the items effectively capture tourists' behavioral intentions and future visitation tendencies. Overall, the measurement model reflects a well-specified factor structure, with clear associations between latent variables and observed indicators.

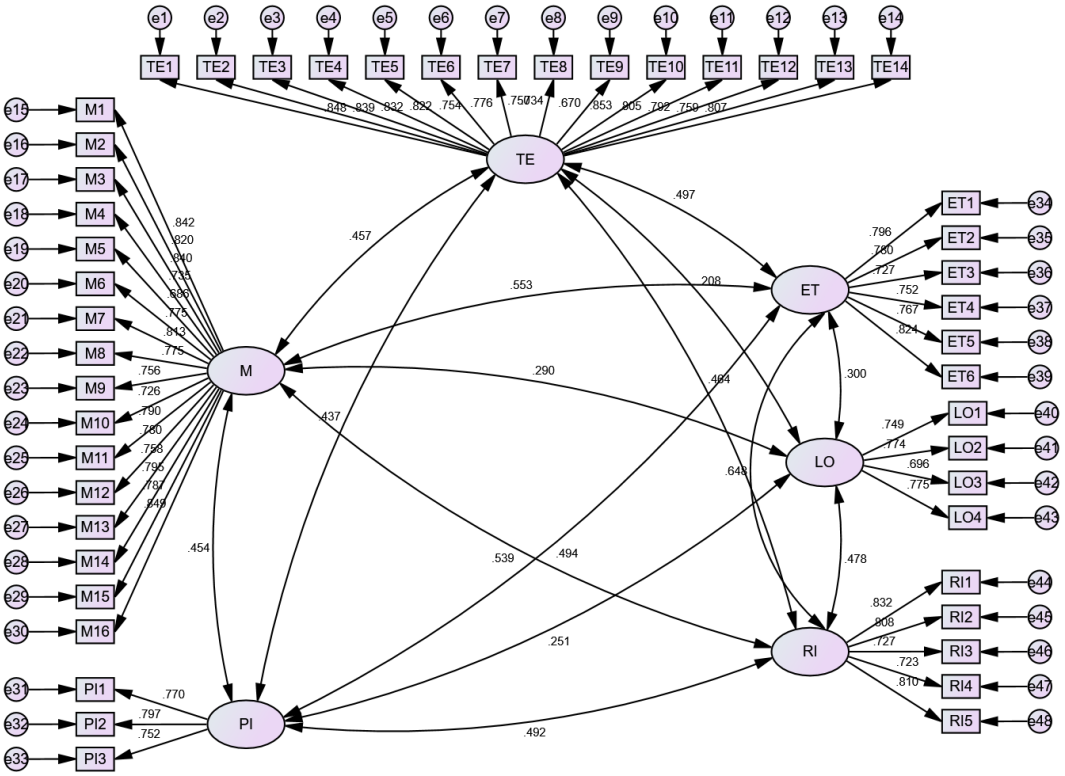

Figure 4.1 Measurement model

To further evaluate the adequacy of the measurement model, a series of goodness-of-fit indices are reported in Table 4.12. The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio is 1.763, which falls well below the recommended threshold of 3, indicating that the model achieves a good balance between model complexity and explanatory power. The root mean square residual is 0.036, and the root mean square error of approximation is 0.032, both of which are substantially lower than the threshold of 0.08, suggesting that the

residual differences between the observed and estimated covariance matrices are minimal. These indices indicate that the model provides a close approximation to the empirical data.

In addition, absolute fit indices, including the goodness-of-fit index and adjusted goodness-of-fit index, reach 0.911 and 0.902 respectively, both exceeding the recommended level of 0.90. This suggests that the overall model structure adequately reproduces the observed data patterns. Incremental fit indices further confirm the robustness of the model, with the normed fit index at 0.930 and the incremental fit index at 0.968, indicating substantial improvement over the null model. The Tucker–Lewis index and comparative fit index, with values of 0.966 and 0.968 respectively, also exceed the recommended thresholds, demonstrating a high degree of model fit and confirming that the specified measurement structure aligns well with the underlying data.

The combination of strong factor loadings and consistently high model fit indices provides empirical support for the validity of the measurement model. The constructs exhibit clear dimensional structures and satisfactory convergent validity, indicating that the measurement items effectively capture the intended theoretical concepts. This establishes a reliable and statistically sound foundation for subsequent structural equation modeling and hypothesis testing in the following sections.

Table 4.12 Measure Model Fit Index

Fit Index	χ^2/df	RMR	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI
Reference Standards	<3	<0.08	<0.08	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90
Result	1.763	0.036	0.032	0.911	0.902	0.93	0.968	0.966	0.968

4.2.3.2 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is assessed to examine whether the measurement items of each latent construct are sufficiently correlated and collectively capture the same underlying concept (Clark & Watson, 2019). This is typically evaluated through three key indicators: factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). Factor loadings reflect the strength of the relationship between observed variables and their corresponding latent constructs, while CR indicates the internal consistency of

the construct, and AVE measures the amount of variance captured by the construct relative to measurement error.

As presented in Table 4.13, the standardized factor loadings for all items are above the acceptable threshold of 0.60, with most values exceeding 0.70. This suggests that the observed indicators have strong explanatory power for their respective latent variables. In particular, the tourist experience construct demonstrates consistently high loadings across its 14 items, indicating that the experiential dimensions in the film tourism context are well represented. Similarly, tourist motivation exhibits stable and relatively high loadings across its 16 items, reflecting a coherent and reliable measurement structure.

In terms of internal consistency, the composite reliability values for all constructs exceed the recommended benchmark of 0.70. Specifically, tourist experience (CR = 0.958) and tourist motivation (CR = 0.961) show particularly high reliability, suggesting strong internal coherence among their measurement items. The remaining constructs, including perceived destination image (CR = 0.814), tourist engagement (CR = 0.899), location (CR = 0.835), and revisit intention (CR = 0.885), also demonstrate satisfactory levels of reliability, indicating that the items within each construct consistently measure the same underlying concept.

The AVE values further support the presence of convergent validity. All constructs report AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, with tourist experience (AVE = 0.619), tourist motivation (AVE = 0.606), and revisit intention (AVE = 0.608) showing relatively strong explanatory power. Although perceived destination image and location have comparatively lower AVE values (0.594 and 0.559 respectively), they still exceed the minimum requirement, suggesting that the constructs capture an adequate proportion of variance from their indicators.

Table 4.13 Convergence Validity

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Tourist Experience	TE1	0.832	0.958	0.619
	TE2	0.821		
	TE3	0.817		
	TE4	0.805		
	TE5	0.738		

Table 4.13 (continued)

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
	TE6	0.759		
	TE7	0.737		
	TE8	0.719		
	TE9	0.654		
	TE10	0.834		
	TE11	0.784		
	TE12	0.771		
	TE13	0.745		
	TE14	0.789		
Tourist Motivation	M1	0.827	0.961	0.606
	M2	0.802		
	M3	0.826		
	M4	0.723		
	M5	0.674		
	M6	0.76		
	M7	0.796		
	M8	0.76		
	M9	0.741		
	M10	0.712		
	M11	0.771		
	M12	0.761		
	M13	0.743		
	M14	0.781		
	M15	0.772		
	M16	0.835		
Perceived Destination Image	PI1	0.663	0.814	0.594
	PI2	0.689		
	PI3	0.653		

Table 4.13 (continued)

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Tourist Engagement	ET1	0.751	0.899	0.598
	ET2	0.73		
	ET3	0.681		
	ET4	0.7		
	ET5	0.731		
	ET6	0.775		
Location	LO1	0.664	0.835	0.559
	LO2	0.681		
	LO3	0.638		
	LO4	0.688		
Revisit Intention	RI1	0.773	0.885	0.608
	RI2	0.738		
	RI3	0.676		
	RI4	0.675		
	RI5	0.76		

4.2.3.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity examines the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs in the model (Hill & Hughes, 2007). In this study, the Fornell–Larcker criterion is applied, whereby the square root of the average variance extracted for each construct is compared with the inter-construct correlation coefficients. Discriminant validity is considered satisfactory when the square root of AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs.

As shown in Table 4.14, the diagonal elements represent the square roots of AVE for each latent variable, while the off-diagonal elements indicate the correlations between constructs. The square root of AVE for tourist experience (0.790) is greater than its correlations with tourist motivation (0.440), perceived destination image (0.388), engagement (0.469), location (0.183), and revisit intention (0.433). A similar pattern is observed for all other constructs. For instance, tourist motivation has a square root of AVE

of 0.784, which exceeds its correlations with perceived destination image (0.402), engagement (0.514), location (0.258), and revisit intention (0.500).

Perceived destination image (0.773), tourist engagement (0.775), location (0.749), and revisit intention (0.781) also demonstrate the same pattern, with each construct's square root of AVE exceeding all corresponding inter-construct correlations. Although some relationships, such as between engagement and revisit intention (0.585), exhibit relatively higher correlation values, they remain below the respective square root of AVE, indicating that the constructs are related but still empirically distinguishable.

All correlation coefficients are statistically significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting meaningful associations among constructs. However, the absence of excessively high correlations confirms that multicollinearity is not a concern and that each construct captures a unique aspect of the film tourism experience.

These results indicate that the measurement model satisfies the criteria for discriminant validity. Each latent variable is sufficiently distinct from the others, supporting the theoretical structure of the model and ensuring that subsequent structural analysis can be conducted with confidence.

Table 4.14 Discriminant Validity Test

Latent variables	TE	M	PI	ET	LO	RI
TE	0.79					
M	.440**	0.784				
PI	.388**	.402**	0.773			
ET	.469**	.514**	.426**	0.775		
LO	.183**	.258**	.210**	.259**	0.749	
RI	.433**	.500**	.424**	.585**	.409**	0.781

Note: TE refers to Tourist Experience; M refers to Tourist Motivation; PI refers to Perceived Destination Image; ET refers to Tourist Engagement; LO refers to Location; RI refers to Revisit Intention. The coefficients represent inter-construct correlations, and the diagonal values indicate the square roots of the average variance extracted, all supporting discriminant validity at the 0.01 significance level.

4.2.4 Structural Model Analysis

4.2.4.1 Model Fit Metrics for the Structural Model

Figure 4.2 illustrates the structural model of the study, in which tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image are specified as exogenous constructs, while tourist engagement functions as a key mediating variable, and revisit intention represents the final endogenous outcome variable. From the overall structure, the model clearly reflects a layered mechanism: upstream perceptual and motivational factors influence engagement, which in turn drives behavioral intention, while direct paths to revisit intention are also retained to capture potential partial mediation effects.

From the left side of the model, tourist experience (TE) is measured by fourteen observed indicators, all loading strongly on the latent construct, indicating that the experiential dimension is well captured in terms of sensory, emotional, and cognitive responses to film-related environments. Similarly, tourist motivation (M) is represented by multiple indicators reflecting both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, suggesting a comprehensive coverage of tourists' decision drivers. Perceived destination image (PI), although measured with fewer items, still exhibits stable loadings, indicating that the cognitive–affective evaluation of the destination is sufficiently represented.

Moving to the structural paths, the arrows connecting TE, M, and PI to engagement (ET) indicate that these three antecedent variables jointly contribute to the formation of tourists' engagement. Among these, the path from tourist motivation to engagement appears relatively strong, suggesting that motivation plays a prominent role in driving active involvement with the destination. The path from tourist experience to engagement also demonstrates a clear positive relationship, reflecting the importance of on-site experiential quality in enhancing tourists' emotional and behavioral participation. Perceived destination image contributes as well, indicating that pre-visit and on-site perceptions shape the depth of engagement.

At the downstream level, engagement (ET) shows a strong direct path to revisit intention (RI), highlighting its central role as a proximal predictor of behavioral intention. This supports the theoretical assumption that engagement acts as a key mechanism through which upstream factors are translated into future behavioral decisions. In addition to this indirect pathway, direct paths from tourist experience, motivation, and perceived destination image to revisit intention are also present, indicating that these

constructs exert both direct and indirect influences. The coexistence of these paths suggests a partial mediation structure rather than a fully mediated model.

The covariance relationships among exogenous variables are also specified in the model. Tourist experience, motivation, and perceived destination image are interconnected, indicating that these constructs are not independent in practice but rather jointly shape tourists' overall evaluation and behavioral responses. For instance, higher motivation is often associated with stronger experiential involvement, and both are closely linked to more favorable destination images.

The measurement part on the right side of the model shows that engagement and revisit intention are each measured by multiple indicators with satisfactory loadings, further supporting the reliability and validity of these constructs within the structural framework. The relatively consistent magnitude of factor loadings across constructs suggests that the measurement quality is stable throughout the model.

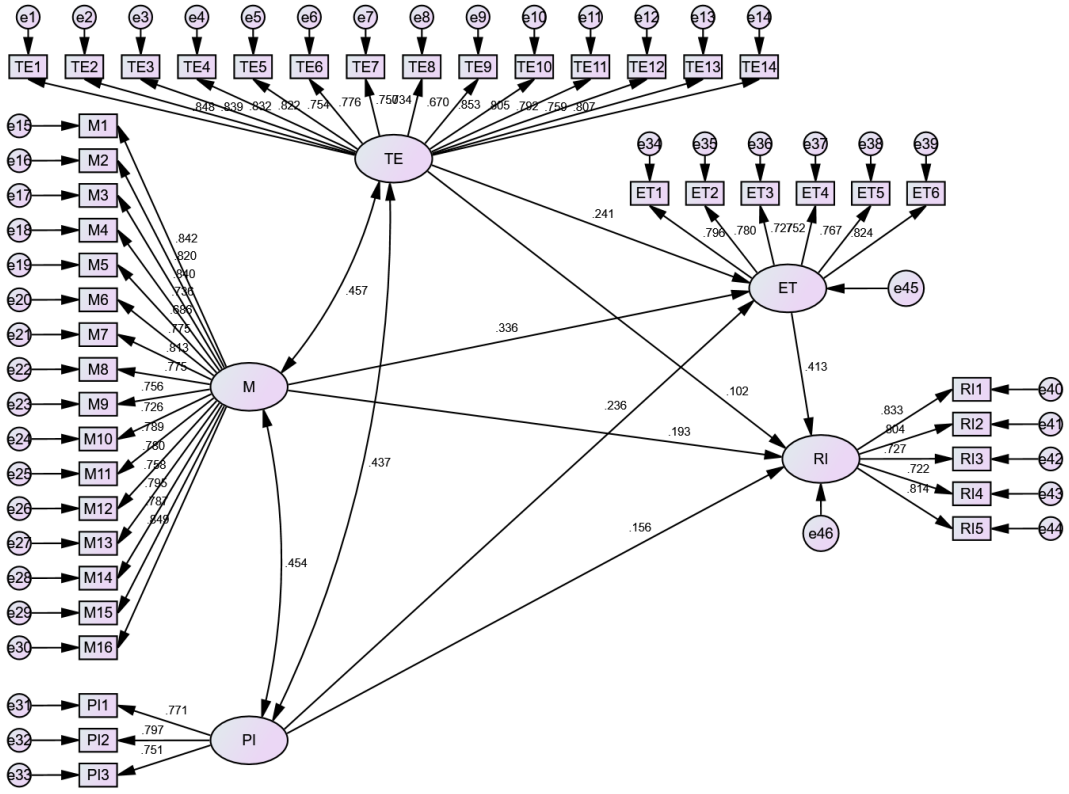

Figure 4.2 Structural model

Table 4.15 reports the fit indices for the structural model. The χ^2/df value of 1.795 falls well below the recommended threshold of 3, indicating an acceptable level of model fit relative to complexity. The RMSEA value of 0.032 suggests a very low approximation error. Incremental and absolute fit indices, including GFI (0.918), AGFI (0.909), NFI (0.936), TLI (0.969), and CFI (0.971), all exceed the recommended standard of 0.90, confirming that the model provides a good representation of the observed data.

These results indicate that the structural model not only fits the data well from a statistical perspective, but also reflects a coherent theoretical structure in which experiential, motivational, and perceptual factors are systematically linked to engagement and revisit intention in the context of film tourism.

Table 4.15 Model Fit Index

Fit Index	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Reference Standards	<3	<0.08	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90
Result	1.795	0.032	0.918	0.909	0.936	0.969	0.971

4.2.4.2 Path Analysis for Direct Effects

The direct effects among the latent constructs were examined to test the proposed hypotheses regarding the relationships between tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, engagement, and revisit intention. The results are presented in Table 4.16, including standardized coefficients, critical ratios, and significance levels.

The findings indicate that all hypothesized direct relationships are statistically significant and in the expected direction. First, tourist experience has a positive and significant effect on engagement ($\beta = 0.241$, C.R. = 6.278, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1b. This suggests that richer and more immersive on-site experiences enhance tourists' emotional and behavioral involvement with the destination. In the context of film tourism, experiential elements such as cinematic landscapes and atmosphere play an important role in stimulating engagement.

Tourist motivation also exerts a significant positive influence on engagement ($\beta = 0.336$, C.R. = 8.481, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2b. The magnitude of this coefficient is relatively larger compared to that of tourist experience, indicating that motivational drivers

may play a more prominent role in shaping engagement. This implies that tourists who are strongly motivated by film-related interests are more likely to actively interact with the destination.

Similarly, perceived destination image significantly affects engagement (β = 0.236, C.R. = 5.566, p < 0.001), supporting H3b. This result highlights that favorable cognitive and affective evaluations of the destination contribute to deeper involvement, suggesting that both pre-visit expectations and on-site perceptions are important determinants of engagement.

With regard to revisit intention, tourist experience shows a positive and significant direct effect (β = 0.102, C.R. = 2.716, p = 0.007), supporting H1a. Although the effect size is relatively modest, it indicates that experiential quality still directly influences tourists' willingness to return. Tourist motivation demonstrates a stronger direct effect on revisit intention (β = 0.193, C.R. = 4.881, p < 0.001), supporting H2a, suggesting that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are important drivers of future behavioral intentions.

Perceived destination image also positively influences revisit intention (β = 0.156, C.R. = 3.728, p < 0.001), supporting H3a. This finding indicates that a favorable image of the destination not only enhances engagement but also directly contributes to tourists' intention to revisit.

Most notably, engagement has the strongest direct effect on revisit intention (β = 0.413, C.R. = 9.135, p < 0.001), supporting H4. This result underscores the central role of engagement within the model, suggesting that tourists who are more emotionally and behaviorally involved with the destination are significantly more likely to revisit. The relatively large coefficient further implies that engagement serves as a key proximal determinant of revisit intention.

Table 4.16 Direct Path Effects

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	β	S.E.	C.R.	P	Results
H1b	TE → ET	0.296	0.241	0.047	6.278	***	Supported
H2b	M → ET	0.409	0.336	0.048	8.481	***	Supported
H3b	PI → ET	0.315	0.236	0.057	5.566	***	Supported
H1a	TE → RI	0.13	0.102	0.048	2.716	0.007	Supported

Table 4.16 (continued)

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	β	S.E.	C.R.	P	Results
H2a	M → RI	0.245	0.193	0.05	4.881	***	Supported
H3a	PI → RI	0.217	0.156	0.058	3.728	***	Supported
H4	ET → RI	0.431	0.413	0.047	9.135	***	Supported

4.2.4.3 Path Analysis for Indirect Effects

To further examine the underlying mechanisms among the study variables, mediation and moderation effects were tested. Specifically, the mediating role of tourist engagement in the relationships between tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and revisit intention was assessed using the bootstrap method. In addition, the moderating effect of location on the relationship between engagement and revisit intention was analyzed.

The mediation effects were tested using a bias-corrected bootstrap procedure, which is widely recommended for its robustness in assessing indirect effects. As shown in Table 4.17, the indirect effects of tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image on revisit intention through engagement are all statistically significant.

First, the indirect effect of tourist experience on revisit intention through engagement is 0.099, with a standard error of 0.023. The 95% bias-corrected confidence interval ranges from 0.060 to 0.151 and does not include zero, indicating a significant mediation effect. This supports H5a and suggests that part of the influence of tourist experience on revisit intention is transmitted through enhanced engagement. In other words, experiential factors not only directly influence revisit intention but also indirectly shape it by increasing tourists' involvement with the destination.

Second, tourist motivation demonstrates a stronger mediation effect through engagement, with an indirect effect size of 0.139 and a standard error of 0.030. The confidence interval [0.087, 0.203] further confirms the statistical significance of this pathway, supporting H5b. Compared with tourist experience, the larger indirect effect suggests that motivation plays a more substantial role in influencing revisit intention via engagement. This indicates that highly motivated tourists are more likely to develop deeper engagement, which in turn strengthens their intention to revisit.

Third, perceived destination image also exerts a significant indirect effect on revisit intention through engagement, with an effect size of 0.097 and a standard error of 0.028. The confidence interval [0.052, 0.162] excludes zero, supporting H5c. This finding highlights that a positive perception of the destination contributes to revisit intention not only directly but also indirectly by fostering higher levels of engagement.

Across all three mediation paths, engagement consistently serves as a significant intermediary variable. Combined with the direct effects reported earlier, these results indicate a pattern of partial mediation, where antecedent variables influence revisit intention both directly and indirectly through engagement. This reinforces the central role of engagement as a key psychological mechanism linking experiential, motivational, and perceptual factors to behavioral intentions in film tourism contexts.

Table 4.17 Mediation Effect Bootstrap Test

Hypothesis	Mediation Path	Effect Size	SE	Bias-Corrected 95% CI	Results
H5a	TE → ET → RI	0.099	0.023	[0.060, 0.151]	Supported
H5b	M → ET → RI	0.139	0.03	[0.087, 0.203]	Supported
H5c	PI → ET → RI	0.097	0.028	[0.052, 0.162]	Supported

In addition to mediation effects, the moderating role of location was examined to determine whether the relationship between engagement and revisit intention varies under different levels of travel-related conditions. The results are presented in Table 4.18.

Model 1 tests the main effect of engagement on revisit intention and shows a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.506$, $p < 0.001$), consistent with the direct effect analysis. Model 2 introduces location as an additional predictor, revealing that location also has a significant positive effect on revisit intention ($\beta = 0.236$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that favorable travel conditions, such as accessibility, cost, and convenience, directly enhance tourists' likelihood of revisiting the destination.

Model 3 incorporates the interaction term between engagement and location (ET × LO). The interaction effect is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.136$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that location moderates the relationship between engagement and revisit

intention. The positive coefficient suggests that the impact of engagement on revisit intention becomes stronger when location conditions are more favorable. In other words, even if tourists are highly engaged, their intention to revisit is further reinforced when the destination is perceived as accessible and convenient.

The inclusion of the interaction term increases the explanatory power of the model, with R^2 reaching 0.43, indicating that a substantial proportion of variance in revisit intention is explained by the combined effects of engagement, location, and their interaction. This highlights the importance of considering contextual factors when examining behavioral outcomes in tourism research.

Table 4.18 Moderation Effect

Model	Key Findings	R^2
Model 1 (Main Effect)	Engagement positively affects revisit intention (β = 0.506, $p < 0.001$, significant)	—
Model 2 (Add Moderator)	Location positively predicts revisit intention ($\beta = 0.236$, $p < 0.001$)	—
Model 3 (Interaction Added)	Interaction ET × LO is significant ($\beta = 0.136$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a positive moderation effect	0.43

4.2.4.4 Total Effects

In order to comprehensively evaluate the overall influence of antecedent variables on revisit intention, total effects were calculated by combining both direct and indirect effects. The results are presented in Table 4.20, including effect sizes, standard errors, and bias-corrected confidence intervals obtained through bootstrap estimation.

As shown in Table 4.19, tourist experience exerts a total effect of 0.201 on revisit intention, with a standard error of 0.033 and a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.133 to 0.264. Since the confidence interval does not include zero, the total effect is statistically significant. This indicates that tourist experience influences revisit intention not only through its direct effect but also indirectly through engagement. Although the direct effect of tourist experience is relatively modest, the inclusion of the mediating pathway enhances its overall impact.

Tourist motivation demonstrates the strongest total effect on revisit intention, with an effect size of 0.332, a standard error of 0.029, and a confidence interval of [0.274, 0.389]. This result suggests that motivation is the most influential antecedent among the three variables. The relatively large total effect reflects both its substantial direct impact and its strong indirect effect via engagement. This finding highlights the critical role of motivational drivers in shaping tourists' behavioral intentions in film tourism contexts.

Perceived destination image also shows a significant total effect on revisit intention, with an effect size of 0.253, a standard error of 0.034, and a confidence interval of [0.183, 0.321]. This indicates that a favorable image of the destination contributes meaningfully to revisit intention through both direct perception-based evaluation and indirect engagement-driven mechanisms.

A comparison of the total effects reveals a clear hierarchy among the antecedent variables, with tourist motivation exerting the strongest influence, followed by perceived destination image, and then tourist experience. This pattern suggests that while experiential factors are important, motivational and perceptual dimensions play a more dominant role in determining revisit intention when both direct and indirect pathways are considered.

The results of the total effect analysis further reinforce the mediating role of engagement identified earlier. By integrating direct and indirect effects, the findings provide a more complete understanding of how different antecedents jointly contribute to revisit intention. This comprehensive perspective highlights the importance of considering both psychological mechanisms and direct influences when examining tourist behavior in film tourism settings.

Table 4.19 Total Effects

Effect Path	Effect Size	SE	Bias-Corrected 95% CI
TE → RI	0.201	0.033	[0.133, 0.264]
M → RI	0.332	0.029	[0.274, 0.389]
PI → RI	0.253	0.034	[0.183, 0.321]

The qualitative and quantitative findings of this study are integrated in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner. The qualitative phase, based on grounded theory, was primarily used to uncover the underlying meaning structures of film tourism experience in Zhangjiajie and to identify the core dimensions through which tourists interpret, engage with, and respond to the destination. Through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, the qualitative analysis revealed that film-related environment, cinematic engagement, media-shaped perception, nature–cinema fusion, and cultural significance were central elements in the formation of tourist engagement. These findings provided a conceptual foundation for understanding how tourists construct meaning from cinematic landscapes and how engagement emerges as a psychologically and experientially layered process.

The quantitative phase subsequently tested and validated these qualitative insights within a structured empirical model. The survey results confirmed that tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image are significant antecedents of engagement, and that engagement in turn significantly influences revisit intention. In addition, the mediation analysis demonstrated that engagement functions as an important transmission mechanism linking antecedent factors to revisit intention, while the moderation analysis further showed that location conditions strengthen the effect of engagement on behavioral intention. In this sense, the quantitative results did not replace the qualitative findings, but rather extended them by examining the strength, direction, and statistical significance of the relationships suggested by the qualitative phase.

More specifically, the two strands of evidence converge in several important ways. First, the qualitative finding that tourists' engagement is formed through immersive cinematic interpretation is reflected quantitatively in the significant effects of tourist experience, motivation, and perceived destination image on engagement. Second, the qualitative emphasis on emotional connection and immersive participation is supported by the strong effect of engagement on revisit intention in the structural model. Third, the qualitative identification of media influence and film-related expectation is quantitatively echoed in the significant role of perceived destination image and tourist motivation in explaining both engagement and revisit intention. Finally, the qualitative observation that tourists compare symbolic imagination with actual travel conditions is further enriched by

the quantitative finding that location moderates the engagement–revisit intention relationship.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has systematically presented the findings of both qualitative and quantitative analyses, providing empirical support for the proposed research framework. Drawing on grounded theory, the qualitative phase identified a set of key conceptual categories through open, axial, and selective coding. These categories reveal how film-related environmental elements, emotional connections, and perceived destination image collectively shape tourists' experiential interpretations. In particular, immersive encounters with cinematic landscapes and the integration of narrative meaning into the physical environment were found to be central to the development of tourist engagement.

The quantitative results further substantiate these insights. The measurement model demonstrates strong reliability and validity, as indicated by satisfactory Cronbach's alpha values, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and model fit indices. The structural model also shows a good fit with the observed data, confirming that the hypothesized relationships among constructs are empirically supported. The results of the structural equation modeling indicate that tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image all exert significant positive effects on both engagement and revisit intention.

Among these antecedents, tourist motivation exhibits the strongest total effect on revisit intention, followed by perceived destination image and tourist experience. This pattern suggests that motivational and perceptual factors play a more prominent role than experiential factors when both direct and indirect pathways are considered. Tourist engagement emerges as a key mediating variable, significantly transmitting the effects of experience, motivation, and perceived destination image to revisit intention. This highlights its central role in linking cognitive and affective inputs to behavioral outcomes.

In addition, the moderating analysis demonstrates that location significantly influences the strength of the relationship between engagement and revisit intention. The positive interaction effect indicates that favorable travel conditions, such as accessibility and affordability, enhance the impact of engagement on behavioral intention. This finding

underscores the importance of contextual factors in shaping the translation of psychological engagement into actual behavioral tendencies.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the discussion and conclusion of the study by synthesizing the key findings from both the qualitative and quantitative analyses and linking them to broader theoretical and practical contexts. It begins with a discussion of the theoretical implications, examining how the results contribute to the development of experience economy theory and image theory, and how they extend existing understandings of film tourism behavior. The chapter then moves to practical implications, focusing on how the findings can inform stakeholders in Zhangjiajie, including government authorities, tourism enterprises, and film companies, in enhancing tourist engagement and revisit intention.

Following this, the chapter outlines the limitations of the present research and identifies directions for future studies, providing a critical reflection on the scope and methodological constraints of the study. Finally, the chapter concludes by summarizing the main findings, highlighting their significance, and clarifying the new knowledge generated by this research. Through this structure, the chapter aims to connect empirical results with theoretical advancement and practical application, offering a comprehensive interpretation of the study's contributions.

RO1. To explore the underlying motivational, experiential, and perceptual factors that shape tourists' engagement with Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination.

This study set out to address RO1 by exploring the underlying motivational, experiential, and perceptual factors that shape tourists' engagement with Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination. The findings from both qualitative and quantitative analyses provide convergent evidence that tourist engagement is jointly influenced by tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image, with each factor contributing through distinct yet interconnected pathways.

From the qualitative perspective, grounded theory analysis revealed that tourists' engagement emerges from a combination of immersive cinematic environments, emotional connections to film narratives, and the integration of natural landscapes with

media-induced imagery. These findings highlight that engagement is not solely a behavioral response, but a multidimensional process involving cognitive interpretation, emotional resonance, and experiential immersion. In particular, categories such as cinematic immersion, film-related environment, and nature–cinema fusion demonstrate how tourists actively construct meaning through their interaction with film-related settings. This aligns with the conceptual understanding that engagement is shaped by both pre-visit expectations and on-site experiences.

The quantitative results further substantiate these insights. As shown in Table 4.16, tourist motivation has the strongest positive effect on engagement (M → ET: $\beta = 0.336$, $p < 0.001$), followed by tourist experience (TE → ET: $\beta = 0.241$, $p < 0.001$) and perceived destination image (PI → ET: $\beta = 0.236$, $p < 0.001$). These findings provide empirical support for hypotheses H1b, H2b, and H3b, confirming that all three antecedents significantly contribute to the formation of engagement. The relatively larger coefficient for tourist motivation suggests that internally driven factors, such as interest in film narratives and desire for immersive experiences, play a more prominent role in stimulating engagement compared to external experiential or perceptual factors.

The relationship between tourist experience and engagement (TE → ET) indicates that high-quality, immersive experiences in film-related environments enhance tourists' involvement with the destination. This is consistent with the qualitative findings, where sensory richness and cinematic authenticity were identified as key drivers of engagement. The influence of perceived destination image (PI → ET) further suggests that engagement is shaped not only by actual experiences but also by tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations of the destination. A favorable image, often constructed through media portrayals, can enhance tourists' readiness to engage with the environment upon arrival.

Moreover, the integration of qualitative and quantitative findings highlights a sequential mechanism underlying engagement formation. Tourist motivation initiates the process by shaping expectations and driving travel decisions, perceived destination image refines these expectations through cognitive evaluation, and tourist experience reinforces or reshapes these perceptions through direct interaction with the destination. These factors collectively contribute to the development of engagement, which represents a higher-order psychological state characterized by emotional involvement and active participation.

The mediation analysis further supports the central role of engagement in the overall framework. Although the focus of RO1 is on the antecedents of engagement, the significant indirect effects (e.g., TE → ET → RI, M → ET → RI, PI → ET → RI) indicate that engagement functions as a key mechanism through which experiential, motivational, and perceptual factors influence behavioral outcomes. This reinforces the argument that engagement is not only an outcome of these antecedents but also a critical process variable linking them to revisit intention.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that tourist engagement in film tourism contexts is shaped by a combination of motivational, experiential, and perceptual factors, with tourist motivation exerting the strongest influence, followed by tourist experience and perceived destination image. The empirical results support hypotheses H1b, H2b, and H3b, confirming the significance of these relationships. The use of directional paths (TE → ET, M → ET, PI → ET) highlights the structured nature of these influences, while the integration of qualitative insights provides a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms. Together, these findings offer a comprehensive explanation of how engagement is formed in the context of film tourism at Zhangjiajie.

RO2. To examine how tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and engagement influence revisit intention in the context of film tourism in Zhangjiajie.

RO2 aims to examine how tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and engagement influence revisit intention in the context of film tourism in Zhangjiajie. The results of this study provide clear empirical evidence that revisit intention is shaped by both direct and indirect pathways, forming a structured mechanism in which engagement plays a central role.

From the direct effects analysis (Table 4.16), all hypothesized relationships toward revisit intention are statistically significant. Tourist experience has a positive effect on revisit intention (TE → RI: $\beta = 0.102$, $p = 0.007$), supporting H1a. Although the magnitude of this effect is relatively modest, it indicates that high-quality on-site experiences, such as immersive cinematic environments and emotional resonance with film-related landscapes, directly enhance tourists' willingness to revisit. This finding aligns with experiential consumption theory, suggesting that memorable experiences contribute to future behavioral intentions.

Tourist motivation demonstrates a stronger direct influence on revisit intention (M → RI: $\beta = 0.193$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2a. This indicates that internally driven factors, such as interest in film narratives and desire for novel experiences, play a crucial role in shaping revisit decisions. Compared to tourist experience, motivation reflects a more enduring psychological driver, which may explain its stronger effect. This result is consistent with the idea that motivation not only initiates travel behavior but also sustains long-term behavioral intentions.

Perceived destination image also significantly affects revisit intention (PI → RI: $\beta = 0.156$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3a. This suggests that tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations of Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination directly influence their likelihood of returning. A positive image, reinforced by both media representations and on-site experiences, enhances destination attractiveness and strengthens revisit intention.

Among all predictors, tourist engagement exhibits the strongest direct effect on revisit intention (ET → RI: $\beta = 0.413$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4. This finding highlights engagement as the most proximal and influential determinant of revisit intention. Tourists who are more emotionally involved, cognitively absorbed, and behaviorally active during their visit are significantly more likely to develop a strong intention to revisit. This result reinforces the central position of engagement within the theoretical framework and confirms its role as a key mechanism translating antecedent variables into behavioral outcomes.

Beyond direct effects, the mediation analysis (Table 4.17) further demonstrates that engagement partially mediates the relationships between the three antecedent variables and revisit intention. The indirect effects TE → ET → RI (0.099), M → ET → RI (0.139), and PI → ET → RI (0.097) are all significant, supporting H5a, H5b, and H5c. These results indicate that the influence of tourist experience, motivation, and perceived destination image on revisit intention is transmitted not only directly but also through engagement. Notably, the mediation effect of motivation is the strongest, further emphasizing its dominant role in the overall mechanism.

The total effects analysis (Table 4.19) provides a more comprehensive comparison of the relative importance of each antecedent. Tourist motivation shows the largest total effect on revisit intention (M → RI: 0.332), followed by perceived destination image (PI → RI: 0.253) and tourist experience (TE → RI: 0.201). This hierarchy suggests that

motivational factors exert the greatest overall influence when both direct and indirect pathways are considered. It also indicates that while experience is important, its impact is more effectively realized when it enhances engagement.

In addition, the moderation analysis (Table 4.20) reveals that location significantly moderates the relationship between engagement and revisit intention (ET × LO → RI: $\beta = 0.136$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H6. This positive moderation effect indicates that the influence of engagement on revisit intention becomes stronger under more favorable location conditions, such as better accessibility, lower travel cost, and greater convenience. This finding highlights the importance of contextual factors in shaping behavioral outcomes, suggesting that even highly engaged tourists may be constrained in their revisit decisions if travel conditions are unfavorable.

Taken together, the findings reveal a multi-layered mechanism influencing revisit intention. Tourist motivation, experience, and perceived destination image act as foundational drivers, while engagement serves as the central pathway through which these factors exert their influence. The presence of both direct and indirect effects indicates a partial mediation structure, and the moderating role of location further refines this relationship by introducing contextual variability. These results provide strong empirical support for hypotheses H1a, H2a, H3a, H4, H5a–H5c, and H6, offering a comprehensive explanation of how revisit intention is formed in the context of film tourism at Zhangjiajie.

RO3. To investigate the mediating role of tourist engagement in the relationships between tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and revisit intention.

RO3 focuses on investigating whether tourist engagement functions as a mediating mechanism linking tourist experience, tourist motivation, and perceived destination image to revisit intention. The empirical findings provide consistent evidence that engagement plays a significant and systematic mediating role, thereby clarifying the internal process through which antecedent variables are translated into behavioral intention.

The mediation analysis based on bootstrap results (Table 4.17) shows that all indirect paths through engagement are statistically significant. Specifically, the indirect effect of tourist experience on revisit intention through engagement is 0.099 (TE → ET → RI), with a 95% confidence interval of [0.060, 0.151], supporting H5a. This indicates that experiential factors influence revisit intention not only directly but also by enhancing the

level of engagement. In the context of film tourism, immersive experiences such as interacting with cinematic landscapes and environments increase emotional involvement, which subsequently strengthens the intention to revisit.

Similarly, tourist motivation exhibits a significant indirect effect through engagement (M → ET → RI: 0.139, CI = [0.087, 0.203]), supporting H5b. This effect is the largest among the three mediation paths, suggesting that engagement is particularly effective in transmitting the influence of motivation to behavioral outcomes. This finding implies that tourists with strong intrinsic or film-related motivations are more likely to develop deeper engagement, which then translates into a stronger revisit intention. In this sense, engagement serves as a key channel through which motivational drivers are activated and expressed in behavioral terms.

Perceived destination image also demonstrates a significant mediated effect via engagement (PI → ET → RI: 0.097, CI = [0.052, 0.162]), supporting H5c. This suggests that a favorable cognitive–affective evaluation of the destination enhances engagement, which in turn increases revisit intention. The result highlights that destination image does not solely exert influence at the perceptual level, but also operates through a behavioral–emotional pathway represented by engagement.

Importantly, when these indirect effects are considered alongside the direct effects (Table 4.16), all three antecedent variables continue to exhibit significant direct relationships with revisit intention (TE → RI, M → RI, PI → RI). This indicates that engagement performs a partial mediating role rather than a full mediation. In other words, the effects of tourist experience, motivation, and perceived destination image on revisit intention are transmitted through both direct pathways and indirect pathways via engagement. This dual mechanism reflects the complexity of tourist decision-making processes in film tourism contexts.

From a comparative perspective, the strength of the mediation effects reveals a clear pattern. The mediation effect associated with tourist motivation (0.139) is stronger than those of tourist experience (0.099) and perceived destination image (0.097). This suggests that engagement is more sensitive to motivational drivers than to experiential or perceptual factors. In other words, while experience and image contribute to engagement, it is the underlying motivation that most effectively activates engagement as a psychological state, which then leads to behavioral intention.

These findings are also consistent with the qualitative results, where engagement was identified as a higher-order construct emerging from the interaction between cinematic immersion, emotional connection, and perceptual interpretation. The grounded theory analysis suggested that tourists do not passively receive experiences, but actively construct meaning and involvement through interaction with film-related elements. The quantitative mediation results empirically validate this mechanism by demonstrating that engagement serves as the key process variable linking antecedents to outcomes.

In summary, the results provide strong empirical support for hypotheses H5a, H5b, and H5c. The relationships TE → ET → RI, M → ET → RI, and PI → ET → RI confirm that tourist engagement functions as a central mediating mechanism in the model. The presence of partial mediation further indicates that engagement complements rather than replaces direct effects, forming a multi-pathway structure through which experiential, motivational, and perceptual factors influence revisit intention. These findings deepen the understanding of how engagement operates within film tourism and highlight its critical role in explaining tourist behavioral intentions.

RO4. To assess how location moderates the relationship between tourist engagement and revisit intention.

RO4 aims to assess whether and how location conditions influence the relationship between tourist engagement and revisit intention. The results provide clear empirical support for a significant moderating effect, indicating that the impact of engagement on revisit intention is contingent upon tourists' perceptions of location-related factors such as accessibility, travel cost, and convenience.

The moderation analysis (Table 4.18) shows that the interaction term between engagement and location is positive and statistically significant (ET × LO → RI: $\beta = 0.136$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H6. This result indicates that location strengthens the relationship between engagement and revisit intention. In other words, while engagement itself is a strong predictor of revisit intention (ET → RI: $\beta = 0.413$, $p < 0.001$), its effect becomes more pronounced when the destination is perceived as more accessible and convenient.

From a structural perspective, this finding suggests a conditional mechanism: engagement alone is not always sufficient to fully translate into revisit intention. Instead, the strength of this relationship depends on external contextual factors represented by location. When travel conditions are favorable, such as shorter distance, lower cost, and

easier access, the positive influence of engagement on revisit intention is amplified. Conversely, when location conditions are less favorable, the effect of engagement may be weakened, even if tourists report high levels of emotional and cognitive involvement.

This moderating pattern can be further interpreted by examining the hierarchical regression results. In Model 1, engagement significantly predicts revisit intention ($\beta = 0.506$, $p < 0.001$), confirming its central role as a direct determinant. In Model 2, location is introduced as an additional predictor and is also found to have a significant positive effect (LO → RI: $\beta = 0.236$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that favorable location conditions independently increase revisit intention. In Model 3, the inclusion of the interaction term leads to a significant improvement in explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.43$), demonstrating that the combined effect of engagement and location explains a substantial proportion of variance in revisit intention.

These results highlight that revisit intention is shaped not only by internal psychological factors but also by external situational constraints. Even when tourists are highly engaged, practical considerations such as travel distance and cost may influence their ability or willingness to revisit. Therefore, location acts as a boundary condition that either facilitates or constrains the behavioral expression of engagement.

The findings are consistent with the broader tourism literature, which emphasizes the role of perceived behavioral control and situational factors in shaping travel decisions. In this study, location can be interpreted as a contextual extension of perceived behavioral control, influencing how engagement translates into actual intention. This also complements the earlier results on mediation, suggesting that while engagement is a key mechanism linking antecedents to outcomes, its effectiveness is not uniform across different situational contexts.

In summary, the results provide strong support for H6 and confirm that location significantly moderates the relationship ET → RI. The positive interaction effect indicates that favorable location conditions enhance the influence of engagement on revisit intention. This finding enriches the overall model by incorporating contextual factors and demonstrates that tourist behavior in film tourism is shaped by both psychological engagement and situational feasibility.

Building on this, the findings across RO1 to RO4 collectively reveal a coherent and multi-layered mechanism underlying tourist behavior in the context of film tourism in

Zhangjiajie. With respect to RO1, the study identifies tourist experience (TE), tourist motivation (M), and perceived destination image (PI) as the key antecedents of engagement, with all corresponding paths (TE → ET, M → ET, PI → ET) being statistically significant. The relatively stronger effect of motivation suggests that internal psychological drivers are more influential in activating engagement than purely experiential or perceptual factors. This extends existing film tourism literature by empirically distinguishing the relative importance of these antecedents rather than treating them as equivalent contributors.

In relation to RO2, the results demonstrate that revisit intention is shaped through both direct and indirect pathways. Tourist experience, motivation, and perceived destination image all directly influence revisit intention (TE → RI, M → RI, PI → RI), while engagement exerts the strongest direct effect (ET → RI: $\beta = 0.413$). This confirms that engagement operates as the most proximal determinant of behavioral intention, translating upstream influences into concrete decision-making outcomes. The findings provide empirical validation for positioning engagement as a central construct in tourism behavior models, particularly in experience-intensive contexts such as film tourism.

Addressing RO3, the mediation analysis confirms that engagement functions as a critical transmission mechanism linking antecedents to revisit intention. All indirect effects (TE → ET → RI, M → ET → RI, PI → ET → RI) are significant, indicating a partial mediation structure. This suggests that while tourists may form revisit intentions directly based on experience, motivation, or perception, these effects are substantially strengthened when filtered through engagement. The prominence of the M → ET → RI pathway further highlights that motivation-driven engagement is particularly effective in shaping behavioral intention. This contributes to the theoretical understanding of engagement by demonstrating its dual role as both an outcome of antecedents and a process variable that facilitates behavioral transformation.

For RO4, the introduction of location as a moderating variable provides an important contextual extension to the model. The significant interaction effect (ET × LO → RI) indicates that the strength of the engagement–revisit intention relationship is contingent upon external conditions such as accessibility, cost, and convenience. This finding underscores that engagement alone is not sufficient to guarantee revisit intention; rather, its effectiveness depends on whether situational constraints allow the intention to

be realized. By integrating this moderating mechanism, the study moves beyond purely psychological explanations and incorporates practical considerations into the analysis of tourist behavior.

Taken together, the results suggest that tourist behavior in film tourism can be conceptualized as an integrated process characterized by "antecedents → engagement → behavioral intention," further conditioned by situational factors. Tourist motivation initiates the process, tourist experience and perceived destination image reinforce and shape engagement, engagement serves as the central transmission mechanism, and location determines the extent to which engagement is translated into revisit intention. This integrated framework not only provides empirical support for all proposed hypotheses (H1a–H6), but also advances the understanding of how cognitive, emotional, and contextual dimensions jointly influence tourist decision-making.

From a broader perspective, the findings of this study offer important contributions. Theoretically, the study refines the S-O-R framework by explicitly positioning engagement as a core "organism" variable that mediates multiple stimulus factors, while also incorporating a boundary condition through moderation analysis. Methodologically, the integration of grounded theory with structural equation modeling enhances the robustness of the findings by combining inductive insight with deductive validation. Empirically, the study provides context-specific evidence from Zhangjiajie, demonstrating how film-induced tourism operates through a combination of narrative imagination, experiential immersion, and practical feasibility.

Overall, the results highlight that successful film tourism development requires not only the creation of compelling cinematic experiences, but also the alignment of motivational appeal, destination image, and accessibility conditions. This comprehensive understanding of the engagement mechanism offers a meaningful basis for both theoretical advancement and practical application in tourism research.

5.1 Implication to Theories

5.1.1 Implication to Experience Economy Model

The findings of this study offer important implications for the further development of the experience economy model, particularly in the context of film tourism. The experience economy framework proposed by Pine and Gilmore (2013) emphasizes that

economic value increasingly derives from staged, memorable, and immersive experiences rather than from the provision of goods or services alone. In tourism research, this perspective has been widely adopted to explain how sensory stimulation, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetic appreciation shape tourist responses (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Oh et al., 2007). The present study supports this general logic, yet also suggests that the experience economy model requires further refinement when applied to film tourism destinations such as Zhangjiajie.

A first contribution of this study lies in extending the meaning of "experience" beyond the conventional emphasis on sensory pleasure and memorable consumption. Existing studies rooted in the experience economy model often focus on tourists' enjoyment, novelty, or immersion in designed settings (Oh et al., 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 2013). The findings of this study suggest that, in film tourism, experience is not only staged and consumed, but also interpreted through cinematic memory, narrative imagination, and symbolic association. Visitors do not simply encounter a scenic destination; they engage with a place already mediated by film images and prior visual expectations. In this respect, the study supports previous arguments that tourism experiences are meaning-laden and interpretive rather than purely sensory (Kim & Ko, 2012; Tung & Ritchie, 2011), while further demonstrating that film-induced narratives intensify this symbolic dimension. The experience economy model is therefore enriched by recognizing that experiences in film tourism are constructed not only through environmental design but also through media-based imagination and narrative recall.

A second theoretical contribution concerns the role of engagement within the experience economy process. Earlier applications of the experience economy model often assume that memorable experiences lead relatively directly to satisfaction, loyalty, or revisit intention (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Kim & Ko, 2012). The present study suggests that the relationship is more processual than such formulations imply. Experience does not operate as a self-sufficient endpoint; rather, its influence unfolds through a deeper state of tourist engagement. In other words, experiential value becomes behaviorally meaningful when it is internalized as involvement, absorption, and connection. This point is consistent with recent engagement-oriented research in marketing and tourism, which has called for greater attention to the psychological mechanisms that connect experiential inputs with behavioral outputs (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). The contribution of the

present study lies in embedding this argument within the experience economy tradition and showing that engagement should be understood as a key mechanism through which staged experiences acquire enduring significance.

A third implication of this study is that the experience economy model should give more explicit attention to pre-experience psychological conditions. Classical formulations tend to privilege the designed experience itself as the principal source of value (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). However, the results of this study suggest that tourists' motivations and destination image play an essential role in shaping how experiences are received, interpreted, and translated into later responses. In the case of Zhangjiajie, visitors do not arrive as blank recipients of staged experiences; they bring film-related interests, expectations, and image-based assumptions that frame the meaning of what they encounter. This complements earlier tourism studies which have emphasized the importance of motivation in initiating travel decisions (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981), but it also extends the experience economy model by showing that experiential value is partly conditioned before the on-site encounter begins. Experience, in this sense, is not an isolated event but part of a broader experiential trajectory shaped by anticipation, perception, and emotional investment.

A fourth contribution lies in the recognition of contextual constraints on experiential value. The original experience economy model tends to imply that compelling and well-designed experiences naturally generate favorable outcomes (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). The findings of this study indicate that this assumption is incomplete. Even when tourists develop strong involvement and attachment through film-related experiences, the translation of that engagement into revisit intention remains sensitive to practical conditions such as accessibility and locational convenience. This adds an important boundary condition to the theory. It suggests that the value of experience cannot be fully understood without considering situational feasibility. In this respect, the study extends prior tourism applications of the experience economy model by demonstrating that experiential effects are not entirely self-contained, but remain embedded in concrete travel realities.

A fifth implication concerns the relevance of the experience economy model for film tourism specifically. Previous film tourism studies have frequently concentrated on destination image, media exposure, and place promotion (Beeton, 2005; Connell, 2012).

While these studies have shown how films attract visitors, they have paid comparatively less attention to how the on-site experience itself is structured and how it becomes behaviorally consequential. The present study contributes by repositioning experience at the center of film tourism analysis. It shows that the cinematic destination functions not simply as a backdrop for viewing, but as a site where visual memory, narrative imagination, embodied encounter, and emotional engagement intersect. This broadens the applicability of the experience economy model to media-driven destinations and demonstrates that film tourism offers a particularly rich setting for theorizing how experiences are staged, interpreted, and sustained.

Compared with prior research, the main theoretical contribution of this study lies in moving the experience economy model away from a relatively linear understanding of staged experience and toward a more dynamic account of experiential meaning formation. Rather than treating experience as a direct source of value in itself, the study suggests that experiential influence depends on interpretation, engagement, prior motivation, destination image, and situational context. This does not reject the central insight of the experience economy model; instead, it develops it further by showing that memorable experiences are not simply delivered by destinations, but co-produced through psychological, symbolic, and contextual processes. Such a perspective strengthens the explanatory capacity of the model and makes it more suitable for understanding contemporary tourism settings shaped by media, narrative, and immersive consumption.

5.1.2 Implication to Experience Economy Model

Building upon the preceding discussion, this study further contributes to the development of the experience economy model by extending its explanatory relevance to film tourism and by refining the process through which experiential value is formed and translated into behavioral consequences. Pine and Gilmore (2013) conceptualized experience as a staged economic offering structured around entertainment, education, escapism, and esthetics. Later tourism research has largely applied this framework by emphasizing memorability, sensory stimulation, and immersive consumption (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Oh et al., 2007). The present study supports these foundational insights, but also shows that in film tourism settings experiential value is not simply staged and consumed. It is also interpreted through cinematic associations, internalized through engagement, and conditioned by contextual realities.

A first contribution of this study lies in extending the meaning of experience from a staged encounter to an interpretive process. Earlier applications of the experience economy model often position tourists primarily as receivers of designed experiences (Oh et al., 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 2013). By contrast, the findings of this study suggest that tourists in Zhangjiajie do not merely consume a scenic environment prepared for them. They actively reconstruct the destination through cinematic memories, media representations, and symbolic expectations. Film-related landscapes are understood not only as physical spaces, but also as narrative spaces shaped by prior visual imagination. This interpretation is broadly consistent with work on co-creation and symbolic tourism consumption, which argues that tourists participate in the production of meaning rather than simply receiving pre-packaged value (Mossberg, 2007; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). However, the present study goes beyond this by showing that film-induced imagery gives experiential interpretation a particularly strong narrative basis. In this sense, the experience economy model is advanced from a provider-centered logic of staging toward a more visitor-centered logic of interpretive meaning-making.

A second implication concerns the mechanism through which experiential value becomes behaviorally consequential. Traditional experience economy research often assumes that positive or memorable experiences naturally lead to desirable outcomes such as satisfaction, loyalty, or revisit intention (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Kim & Ko, 2012). The findings of this study suggest a more nuanced process. Experience does not simply produce revisit intention by itself. Its influence is partly realized through tourist engagement, which functions as a deeper psychological state of involvement, immersion, and connection. This means that experience becomes effective not only because it is memorable, but because it is internalized and transformed into a stronger relational bond with the destination. This argument is in line with more recent engagement-oriented scholarship, which has called for greater attention to the psychological mechanisms connecting experience and behavioral outcomes (Wang & Xiao, 2025). The theoretical contribution of this study lies in integrating this engagement mechanism into the experience economy model and demonstrating that experiential value is strengthened when it generates active involvement rather than remaining at the level of passive appreciation.

A third contribution is that the study situates experience within a broader pre-consumption and on-site system, rather than treating it as an isolated source of value. Much of the existing experience economy literature tends to foreground the designed experience itself as the central explanatory factor (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). The results of this study indicate that experience is shaped by prior tourist motivation and destination image, both of which influence how tourists interpret and evaluate what they encounter. In the case of Zhangjiajie, visitors arrive with film-related interests, expectations, and image-based assumptions that frame the meaning of the on-site experience. This resonates with classic tourism studies emphasizing the importance of push and pull motivations in travel decision making (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981), yet extends that literature by showing that motivation continues to shape experience after the journey begins. Experience, therefore, is not self-sufficient. Its value depends in part on the motivational and perceptual conditions through which it is received. This broadens the experience economy model by embedding on-site experience within a larger experiential system that includes anticipation, interpretation, and emotional investment.

A fourth contribution concerns the contextual boundary conditions of experiential value. Classical formulations of the experience economy model imply that well-designed experiences can generate strong positive outcomes if they are sufficiently immersive and memorable (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). The present study suggests that this relationship is more conditional. Even where tourists are highly engaged by cinematic experiences, the translation of that engagement into revisit intention remains influenced by practical factors such as accessibility, travel convenience, and locational feasibility. This finding brings the experience economy model into closer dialogue with behavioral perspectives that stress the role of situational constraints in shaping intention and action (Ajzen, 1991). The theoretical significance here is that experiential value should not be regarded as detached from context. It is produced and perceived within real-world travel conditions that may enable or limit its behavioral consequences. By introducing this conditionality, the study adds an important degree of realism to experience economy theory, especially in destination-based tourism research.

A fifth implication emerges from the application of the experience economy model to film tourism specifically. Earlier film tourism research has concentrated heavily on destination image, media exposure, and the promotional effects of film representation

(Beeton, 2005; Connell, 2012). Although such studies have shown how films attract visitors, they have paid less attention to how on-site experiences are constructed and how these experiences subsequently shape deeper involvement and future intentions. This study places experience at the center of the explanatory framework and shows that cinematic landscapes, narrative imagination, and emotional immersion are not secondary outcomes of media influence, but core elements in the value creation process. In doing so, it expands the applicability of the experience economy model to media-driven destinations and demonstrates that film tourism provides a particularly rich context for theorizing how experiences are staged, interpreted, and sustained over time.

In comparison with prior studies, the main contribution of this research lies in shifting the experience economy model away from a relatively linear understanding of experience as staged consumption and toward a more dynamic understanding of experience as a psychologically mediated and contextually conditioned process. Experience in this study is not merely an economic offering delivered by the destination. It is co-constructed through cinematic interpretation, strengthened through engagement, shaped by motivational and perceptual conditions, and filtered through situational feasibility. This perspective does not reject the core assumptions of the experience economy model. Rather, it develops them further by offering a more comprehensive account of how experiential value is generated and why it matters in contemporary tourism environments shaped by media, symbolism, and immersion.

5.1.3 Implication to Image Theory

The findings of this study provide important implications for the advancement of image theory in tourism research by offering a more dynamic and process-oriented understanding of perceived destination image. Traditional image theory conceptualizes destination image as a multidimensional construct consisting of cognitive and affective evaluations that shape tourists' decision-making and behavioral intentions (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). A substantial body of research has demonstrated that a favorable destination image contributes to positive outcomes such as satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intention (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007). While the present study is broadly consistent with these established conclusions, it extends image theory by showing that destination image operates within a more complex experiential and psychological process than previously assumed.

A first implication concerns the dynamic nature of destination image. Much of the existing literature treats image as a relatively stable pre-visit perception that shapes expectations and influences post-visit evaluations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). The findings of this study suggest that such a static view is insufficient in the context of film tourism. Tourists' perceptions of Zhangjiajie are continuously reconstructed through their on-site experiences, particularly through the interaction between cinematic imagery and real-world landscapes. Rather than simply confirming prior expectations, the experience often reshapes and reinterprets them. This observation is consistent with earlier studies that have emphasized the evolving nature of destination image across different stages of the travel experience (Kim & Richardson, 2003; Tasci & Gartner, 2007), yet it adds further depth by demonstrating that film-induced imagery intensifies this process of reinterpretation. Destination image, in this sense, is not fixed but constantly negotiated through the interplay between media representation and lived experience.

A second implication relates to the role of destination image in shaping deeper psychological involvement. Previous research has primarily positioned image as an antecedent of satisfaction and behavioral intention (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Prayag, 2009). The findings of this study suggest that destination image also plays a significant role in stimulating tourist engagement. A positive and vivid image does not merely influence evaluation; it encourages tourists to become more involved, attentive, and emotionally connected to the destination. This extends the explanatory scope of image theory by introducing engagement as an important internal state through which image exerts its influence. In this respect, destination image can be understood as a cognitive and affective foundation that facilitates deeper experiential involvement rather than functioning solely as an evaluative judgment.

A third contribution lies in clarifying how destination image is translated into behavioral outcomes. Traditional approaches often assume a relatively direct relationship between image and behavioral intention (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007). The present study suggests that this relationship is more complex. The influence of destination image unfolds through multiple pathways, including both direct effects and indirect processes associated with deeper psychological involvement. This indicates that image does not operate in isolation but interacts with experiential and emotional processes before

influencing behavior. Such a perspective contributes to a more nuanced understanding of image–behavior relationships by highlighting the importance of intermediate mechanisms.

A fourth implication concerns the role of media in shaping destination image. Classical image formation theory has emphasized information sources such as advertising, brochures, and word-of-mouth communication (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gartner, 1993). In the context of Zhangjiajie, however, film and media representations play a particularly influential role in constructing destination image. Cinematic depictions create vivid, emotionally charged, and symbolically rich images that shape tourists' expectations before their visit. This finding is consistent with film tourism research that highlights the impact of media exposure on destination perception (Beeton, 2005; Connell, 2012), but it also extends this line of inquiry by showing that film-induced images continue to influence how tourists interpret their on-site experiences and form deeper connections with the destination. Image formation, therefore, is not limited to pre-visit stages but continues throughout the experiential process.

A fifth implication is the recognition of contextual influences on the effectiveness of destination image. While a positive image contributes to favorable perceptions and intentions, its impact is not entirely independent of situational conditions. Practical factors such as accessibility, travel convenience, and spatial distance influence how image-related perceptions are translated into behavioral responses. This observation complements prior research linking destination image with perceived behavioral control and travel constraints (Ajzen, 1991; Lam & Hsu, 2006), and suggests that image should be understood in conjunction with contextual feasibility rather than as a purely psychological construct.

In comparison with previous studies, the main theoretical contribution of this research lies in repositioning destination image within a dynamic and interconnected system. Rather than treating image as a static predictor of tourist behavior, the study shows that it evolves through experience, interacts with motivational and experiential factors, and influences behavioral outcomes through multiple pathways. This process-oriented perspective aligns with more recent calls for integrative approaches in destination image research (Tasci & Gartner, 2007), and provides a more comprehensive understanding of how destination image functions in contemporary tourism settings shaped by media, narrative, and immersive experiences.

5.2 Implication to Practitioners

5.2.1 Implications for the Zhangjiajie Government

The findings of this study suggest that the Zhangjiajie government occupies a central position in shaping the long-term development of film tourism, not only through macro-level planning but also through the creation of conditions that enable tourist engagement to be transformed into revisit intention. One of the most important practical implications concerns the role of accessibility and locational convenience. The results indicate that favorable location-related conditions strengthen the effect of tourist engagement on revisit intention, which means that emotional involvement with the destination is more likely to develop into future travel behavior when the destination is perceived as accessible, convenient, and manageable. This highlights the importance of continued governmental investment in transportation infrastructure, destination accessibility, and integrated mobility systems. In the case of Zhangjiajie, this includes not only improving high-speed rail and airport connectivity, but also strengthening the efficiency of internal transportation networks, visitor transfer systems, and last-mile accessibility between major scenic spots and supporting service facilities.

A second implication relates to destination image management. The results of this study show that destination image is a key factor in shaping both tourist engagement and revisit intention, which suggests that the government should treat image construction as a strategic and continuous process rather than as a short-term promotional activity. For Zhangjiajie, this requires moving beyond a generic scenic-destination identity and further consolidating its distinctive image as a film tourism destination. The government should therefore develop a more coherent branding strategy that integrates cinematic symbolism, iconic film associations, and place-specific narratives. This is particularly important in light of Zhangjiajie's internationally recognized visual connection with film-related imagery such as the landscapes associated with Avatar. Official branding efforts should be designed in ways that preserve this symbolic uniqueness while also broadening the image to include cultural depth, authenticity, and experiential richness.

The study also suggests that government intervention should not be limited to destination promotion but should extend to the cultivation of demand through motivation-sensitive policies. Tourist motivation was found to be a particularly influential driver of engagement and revisit intention, which implies that policy support should be directed

toward stimulating not only visitation but also deeper interest and emotional attachment. In practical terms, this means that the Zhangjiajie government should actively support film-themed festivals, cinematic exhibitions, destination storytelling initiatives, and experiential cultural events that resonate with visitors' interests in film narratives, visual imagination, and immersive tourism. Such initiatives can help convert abstract interest in film-related landscapes into a stronger desire for meaningful and repeat destination experiences.

Another important implication concerns the government's coordinating role in ensuring the consistency and quality of the tourism experience. Since tourist experience significantly contributes to both engagement and revisit intention, the government should strengthen regulatory guidance and quality control across the local tourism system. This includes setting service standards, improving scenic area management, coordinating visitor flow, and encouraging coherence between film-related attractions and the broader destination environment. In the absence of such coordination, tourists may encounter fragmented or inconsistent experiences that weaken the emotional and symbolic appeal of the destination. The government therefore has an essential role in establishing institutional conditions under which experiential quality can be maintained across different tourism actors.

In addition, the findings indicate that film tourism in Zhangjiajie should not be developed solely through cinematic imagery, but also through the integration of local cultural resources. The qualitative results show that tourists' engagement is deepened when cinematic associations are enriched by cultural interpretation and contextual understanding. This implies that the Zhangjiajie government should encourage stronger connections between film tourism development and local heritage, folk culture, and regional narratives. Rather than treating film tourism and cultural tourism as separate domains, policy design should seek to integrate them into a more layered destination experience. This would allow Zhangjiajie to avoid overreliance on a single visual identity and instead develop a more sustainable and culturally grounded tourism model.

5.2.2 Implications for Zhangjiajie Tourism Enterprises

The findings of this study suggest that the Zhangjiajie government occupies a central position in shaping the long-term development of film tourism, not only through macro-level planning but also through the creation of conditions that enable tourist

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5.2.3 Implications for Zhangjiajie Film Companies

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of film companies in shaping tourists' perceptions, motivations, and subsequent behavioral responses within the context of film tourism. Unlike traditional tourism stakeholders, film companies influence the destination primarily through symbolic representation, narrative construction, and visual dissemination. The results indicate that both tourist motivation and perceived destination image play important roles in shaping engagement and revisit intention, which suggests that film companies are not only content producers but also key actors in the formation of tourism demand.

One important implication concerns the strategic use of cinematic representation in destination portrayal. The study shows that tourists' perceptions of Zhangjiajie are strongly influenced by film-related imagery, particularly when the visual representation of the destination is distinctive and emotionally engaging. Film companies should therefore pay closer attention to how landscapes are framed, narrated, and symbolically positioned within cinematic content. Rather than treating locations merely as backdrops, filmmakers can emphasize spatial identity, narrative meaning, and emotional resonance, thereby strengthening the association between the destination and the film. In the case of Zhangjiajie, its unique geological formations and established cinematic identity provide an opportunity for film companies to further consolidate its global recognition as a visually iconic and narratively meaningful destination.

A second implication relates to the continuity between pre-visit imagery and on-site experience. The findings suggest that tourists arrive with expectations shaped by media exposure, and these expectations influence how they interpret their actual experience. Film companies should therefore be mindful of the alignment between cinematic representation and the real characteristics of the destination. Excessive dramatization or unrealistic portrayal may create discrepancies that weaken tourists' sense of authenticity, whereas more grounded and contextually embedded representations can enhance the coherence between expectation and experience. This does not imply reducing creative expression, but rather encouraging a form of representation that balances artistic storytelling with spatial credibility.

Third, the study indicates that film-induced motivation is an important driver of deeper tourist engagement. This suggests that film companies should consider the broader experiential implications of their content. Narrative elements, character journeys, and emotional arcs can all contribute to the formation of tourists' interest in visiting a destination. By embedding destinations within compelling storylines and emotional contexts, film companies can stimulate not only initial curiosity but also a more sustained desire for immersive experiences. This aligns with the idea that film tourism is driven not only by visual attraction but also by narrative immersion and emotional connection.

Another implication concerns the role of collaboration between film companies and local stakeholders. The influence of film on destination image and tourist motivation suggests that closer cooperation between film producers, local governments, and tourism

enterprises can enhance the overall effectiveness of film tourism development. Joint initiatives such as location-based storytelling, co-branded promotional campaigns, and the development of film-themed visitor experiences can strengthen the link between cinematic representation and tourism consumption. For Zhangjiajie, such collaboration could help translate film-induced interest into structured and meaningful tourism products.

In addition, film companies can contribute to the diversification and sustainability of destination image. The findings suggest that while iconic imagery plays a strong role in attracting tourists, overreliance on a single visual association may limit the long-term development of the destination. Film companies are in a unique position to introduce new narratives, perspectives, and thematic elements that expand how the destination is perceived. By portraying different cultural dimensions, seasonal variations, and narrative contexts, filmmakers can enrich the symbolic landscape of Zhangjiajie and support a more diversified tourism appeal.

5.3 Limitation of the Study and Implications of Future Research

5.3.1 Limitation of The Present Research

Despite its theoretical and practical contributions, several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged.

First, the study is limited by its case-specific context and sampling approach. The research focuses exclusively on Zhangjiajie, a film tourism destination characterized by distinctive natural landscapes and strong cinematic associations. Although this context provides an appropriate setting for examining film tourism behavior, the findings may not be fully generalizable to destinations with different cultural characteristics, levels of media exposure, or stages of tourism development. In addition, the quantitative data were collected through convenience sampling, which may limit the representativeness of the sample and the broader generalizability of the findings.

Second, the cross-sectional research design restricts the ability to capture changes in tourist perceptions and behavioral intentions over time. Tourist experience, engagement, perceived destination image, and revisit intention may evolve across the pre-visit, on-site, and post-visit stages. The use of data collected at a single point in time therefore limits the examination of how these relationships develop after repeated visits or continued exposure to film-related media.

Third, the study relies primarily on self-reported questionnaire data and adopts an aggregated measurement approach for several constructs. Although reliability and validity tests were conducted, questionnaire responses may still be affected by social desirability bias and common method variance, while revisit intention may not necessarily translate into actual revisit behavior. Tourist experience and tourist motivation were examined as overall constructs rather than as separate experiential or motivational dimensions. In addition, location was measured through tourists' subjective evaluations of location-related travel conditions rather than objective geographic distance. The findings should therefore be interpreted within these measurement boundaries.

5.3.2 Implications for Future Research

Corresponding to these limitations, several directions for future research are proposed.

First, future studies could adopt comparative and multi-destination research designs to examine whether the relationships identified in Zhangjiajie remain consistent across different film tourism contexts. Urban filming locations, cultural heritage destinations, film studios, and emerging media-driven destinations may exhibit different patterns of tourist experience, engagement, and revisit intention. Probability-based or more diversified sampling strategies could also be employed to improve sample representativeness and external validity.

Second, longitudinal research could be conducted to capture the temporal development of tourist perceptions and behavioral responses. Tracking tourists across the pre-visit, on-site, and post-visit stages would provide a clearer understanding of how destination image, experience, engagement, and revisit intention evolve over time. Such designs could also examine whether stated revisit intention is eventually translated into actual repeat visitation.

Third, future studies could combine survey data with behavioral, qualitative, and objective indicators. Actual revisit records, online reviews, social media interactions, and digital engagement data could provide more direct evidence of tourist behavior. Tourist experience and tourist motivation could also be examined as multidimensional or higher-order constructs, while objective indicators such as actual travel distance, travel time, transportation frequency, and travel expenditure could be incorporated to complement tourists' subjective evaluations of location-related travel conditions.

5.4 Conclusion

This study set out to examine how tourist experience, tourist motivation, perceived destination image, and engagement interact to shape revisit intention in the context of film tourism, using Zhangjiajie as an empirical setting. By integrating qualitative exploration with quantitative analysis, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how tourists perceive, interpret, and respond to film-induced destinations. The findings demonstrate that tourist experience, motivation, and destination image all contribute to shaping engagement, which in turn plays a central role in influencing revisit intention. In addition, the study shows that contextual factors, particularly location-related conditions such as accessibility and convenience, influence how engagement is translated into actual behavioral intention.

In terms of what this study has found, the results indicate that tourist engagement functions as a key mechanism linking experiential and perceptual factors with revisit intention. Experience is not simply a direct determinant of behavior, but operates through deeper psychological involvement. At the same time, tourist motivation and perceived destination image play important roles in shaping how tourists engage with the destination, suggesting that both pre-visit expectations and on-site experiences jointly contribute to behavioral outcomes. The qualitative findings further reveal that film tourism experiences are characterized by a strong integration of cinematic imagery, narrative interpretation, and real-world landscapes, which together create a distinctive and immersive form of tourist experience.

The significance of this study lies in both its theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, the study advances existing frameworks by integrating experience economy theory, image theory, and engagement-based perspectives into a unified model. It provides a more dynamic understanding of tourist behavior by demonstrating that experience, motivation, and image operate within an interconnected system rather than as isolated factors. The study also extends film tourism research by shifting the focus from media influence alone to the processes through which experiences are constructed, interpreted, and transformed into engagement and behavioral intention. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for government authorities, tourism enterprises, and film companies in Zhangjiajie, highlighting the importance of infrastructure development, experience design,

destination branding, and content creation in enhancing tourist engagement and encouraging repeat visitation.

At the same time, the study is subject to several limitations. The focus on a single destination may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other tourism contexts. The cross-sectional research design limits the ability to capture changes in tourist perceptions over time, and the reliance on self-reported data may not fully reflect actual behavioral outcomes. These limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted with caution and provide opportunities for further investigation.

The most important contribution of this study lies in the new knowledge it offers regarding the mechanism through which film tourism influences tourist behavior. Rather than treating experience, motivation, and destination image as independent predictors of revisit intention, the study demonstrates that their effects are realized through a process in which engagement plays a central and integrating role, and where contextual conditions shape the final behavioral outcome. This process-oriented perspective provides a more comprehensive explanation of tourist behavior in film tourism settings and contributes to a deeper understanding of how media-induced destinations can sustain long-term tourist interest and attachment.

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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

The instruction of the questionnaire:

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

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Age:

☐ Under 18 ☐ 18-25

☐ 26-35 ☐ 36-45

☐ 46-55 ☐ Above 55

2. Gender:

☐ Male

☐ Female

3. Educational Level:

☐ Undergraduate

☐ Master's

☐ Doctoral

4. Monthly Income Level:

☐ Below 3,000 CNY ☐ 3,001–6,000 CNY

☐ 6,001–10,000 CNY ☐ 10,001–15,000 CNY

☐ 15,001–20,000 CNY ☐ Above 20,000 CNY

5. Residence:

- ☐ Northern China
- ☐ Eastern China
- ☐ Central China
- ☐ Southern China
- ☐ Southwestern China
- ☐ Northeastern China
- ☐ Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan
- ☐ Overseas

6. Occupation:

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Company employee
- ☐ Civil servant/Public institution
- ☐ Freelancer
- ☐ Business owner/Entrepreneur
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Others

7. How many times have you traveled specifically to visit film shooting locations in the past year?

- ☐ 1 time
- ☐ 2-3 times
- ☐ 4 times or more

8. What are your primary sources for obtaining travel information? (Multiple choices allowed)

- ☐ Social Media (e.g., TikTok, Weibo, Xiaohongshu)
- ☐ Online Platforms (e.g., Ctrip, Mafengwo, Qyer)
- ☐ Recommendations by Friends or Family
- ☐ Traditional Media (TV, Magazines, etc.)
- ☐ Travel Influencers/KOLs
- ☐ Others

Part 2 Tourist experience

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

Items	1	2	3	4	5
TE1. I found the film settings in Zhangjiajie enjoyable and entertaining.					
TE2. Experiencing the film-inspired landscapes made my visit feel lively and engaging.					
TE3. The cinematic elements of the destination provided a high level of entertainment during my trip.					
TE4. The film-themed attractions and environments captured my interest throughout the visit.					
TE5. My visit helped me learn more about the films, stories, or cultural themes associated with Zhangjiajie.					
TE6. The destination offered meaningful insights related to its cinematic background and cultural significance.					
TE7. I gained new knowledge about the narratives or cinematic elements that shaped Zhangjiajie’s film identity.					
TE8. Being in the film-related environment allowed me to temporarily escape from my daily routine.					
TE9. The immersive atmosphere of the destination made me feel mentally refreshed and detached from everyday life.					
TE10. The cinematic setting encouraged personal reflection and gave me a new perspective on myself.					
TE11. The film-inspired landscapes and viewpoints were visually appealing.					
TE12. The sensory experiences (e.g., scenery, atmosphere) at the destination were aesthetically pleasing.					
TE13. I appreciated the artistic or symbolic qualities of the film-related environment.					

Items	1	2	3	4	5
TE14. The natural and cinematic environment made me feel emotionally connected and in harmony with the surroundings.					

Part 3 Tourist motivation

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

Items	1	2	3	4	5
M1.Visiting filming location in Zhangjiajie was an important reason for my trip.					
M2.I wanted to experience new and exciting feelings inspired by the films associated with Zhangjiajie.					
M3. I was motivated to learn more about the films, stories, or cinematic elements connected to Zhangjiajie.					
M4. The scenic beauty shown in films encouraged me to visit Zhangjiajie in person.					
M5.I was motivated to explore the cultural or symbolic meanings portrayed in films featuring Zhangjiajie.					
M6. The location of Zhangjiajie made it convenient to include in my overall travel plan.					
M7. I was interested in participating in film-themed activities or exhibitions during my visit.					
M8. Sharing film-related travel experiences with others motivated me to visit Zhangjiajie.					
M9. I wanted to enjoy the unique atmosphere created by Zhangjiajie’s film-related landscapes.					
M10. Watching films featuring Zhangjiajie increased my desire to visit the destination.					
M11. I was motivated to engage in cinematic or film-inspired activities at the destination.					

Items	1	2	3	4	5
M12. My interest in various film formats (e.g., blockbusters, documentaries) strengthened my motivation to visit Zhangjiajie.					
M13. My visit was partly driven by professional or academic interests related to film or tourism.					
M14. My general enjoyment of cinema increased my motivation to visit Zhangjiajie.					
M15. I was motivated to experience relaxation in a setting associated with films I enjoyed.					
M16. I expected visiting film-related locations in Zhangjiajie to be entertaining and enjoyable.					
M17. I wanted to escape my daily routine by immersing myself in a film-related environment.					
M18. I was motivated by opportunities to connect with people who share an interest in film or film tourism.					

Part 4 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
PI1. Zhangjiajie is widely recognized for their strong reputations as iconic film tourism destinations.					
PI2. These destinations offer compelling cinematic elements—such as Zhangjiajie's Hallelujah Mountains that enhance their appeal.					
PI3. The quality of tourism services (e.g., film-themed tours, transport, accommodations) at Zhangjiajie meets the expectations of film-motivated tourists.					

Part 5 Engagement

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

Items	1	2	3	4	5
ET1. I feel passionate about visiting film tourism destinations like Zhangjiajie.					
ET2. I feel enthusiastic when exploring cinematic landscapes in Zhangjiajie, such as the Hallelujah Mountains from Avatar.					
ET3. I actively follow media content, films, and updates related to Zhangjiajie as a film destination.					
ET4. I enjoy meeting other tourists who share an interest in film tourism at Zhangjiajie.					
ET5. I participate in online discussions and forums about my film tourism experiences in Zhangjiajie.					
ET6. I enjoy sharing and exchanging travel stories related to my film tourism experiences in Zhangjiajie.					

Part 6 Location

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

Items	1	2	3	4	5
LO1. I can easily obtain information about traveling from my place of residence to Zhangjiajie.					
LO2. The overall travel distance and journey from my location to Zhangjiajie feel manageable and comfortable for me.					
LO3. The travel cost required to visit Zhangjiajie is affordable based on my personal financial situation.					
LO4. Transportation options from my location to Zhangjiajie are convenient and easy to access.					

Part 7 Revisit intention

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

Items	1	2	3	4	5
RI1. Among similar destinations, I would prioritize revisiting Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination.					
RI2. I plan to visit Zhangjiajie again in the future to experience its film-related attractions.					
RI3. I am likely to revisit Zhangjiajie within a short period of time.					
RI4. If I return to this region, I would definitely include Zhangjiajie as part of my itinerary.					

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

调查问卷的说明：说明：请检查· 并填写所有数据与您的信息。

第一节：人口统计信息

1. 年龄:

☐ 18 岁以下　　☐ 18-25

☐ 26-35　　☐ 36-45

☐ 46-55　　☐ 55 岁以上

2. 性别:

☐ 男

☐ 女

3. 教育程度：

☐ 本科

☐ 硕士

☐ 博士

4.月收入水平：

☐ 3000 元以下　　☐ 3001-6000 元

☐ 6001-10000 元　　☐ 10001-15000 元

☐ 15001-20000 元　　☐ 20000 元以上

5.居住地：

☐ 华北地区　　☐ 华东地区

☐ 华中地区　　☐ 华南地区

☐ 西南地区　　☐ 东北地区

☐ 港澳台地区　　☐ 海外

6.职业类型：

☐ 学生　　☐ 公司职员

☐ 公务员/事业单位　　☐ 自由职业者

☐ 企业主/创业者　　☐ 退休人员

☐ 其他

7. 过去一年内，您专程前往影视拍摄地旅游的次数？

☐ 1 次

☐ 2-3 次

☐ 4 次以上

8. 您获取旅游信息的主要渠道是什么？（可多选）

☐ 社交媒体（如抖音、微博、小红书等）

☐ 网络平台（如携程、马蜂窝、穷游等）

☐ 朋友或家人推荐

☐ 传统媒体（电视、杂志等）

☐ 旅游博主或网络名人

☐ 其他

第二部分旅游体验

（请在分数以下画一个√1-5，表示“强烈不同意，强烈同意”）

项目	1	2	3	4	5
TE1. 我觉得张家界的电影取景地既有趣又富有娱乐性。					
TE2. 体验电影启发的自然景观让我感到生动而投入。					
TE3. 目的地的电影元素为我的旅程提供了高度的娱乐性。					
TE4. 与电影相关的景点和环境在整个旅途中都吸引着我的兴趣。					
TE5. 此次旅行让我对与张家界相关的电影、故事或文化主题有了更多了解。					
TE6. 目的地为我提供了与其电影背景及文化意义相关的有益见解。					
TE7. 我获得了关于塑造张家界电影形象的叙事或电影元素的新知识。					
TE8. 身处与电影相关的环境，使我能够暂时逃离日常生活。					
TE9. 目的地的沉浸式氛围让我感觉精神焕然一新，暂时摆脱日常琐事。					
TE10. 电影化的场景促使我进行自我反思，并让我获得新的自我认知。					

项目	1	2	3	4	5
TE11. 电影启发的自然景观和观景点具有强烈的视觉吸引力。					
TE12. 目的地的感官体验（如景色、氛围）令人感到舒适而愉悦。					
TE13. 我欣赏该电影相关环境中的艺术性或象征性特质。					
TE14. 自然与电影化环境让我感到情感联结，并与周围氛围融为一体。					

第三部分 旅游动机

（请在分数以下画一个√1-5，表示“强烈不同意，强烈同意”）

项目	1	2	3	4	5
M1. 参观张家界的影视拍摄地是我此次旅行的重要原因。					
M2. 我希望体验由与张家界相关的电影所带来的新奇与刺激感受。					
M3. 我有动力了解更多与张家界相关的电影、故事或电影元素。					
M4. 电影中呈现的优美景色促使我想亲自前往张家界。					
M5. 我希望探索电影中呈现的与张家界相关的文化或象征意义。					
M6. 张家界的地理位置使其容易被纳入我的整体旅行计划。					
M7. 我对旅途中参与电影主题活动或展览感兴趣。					
M8. 与他人分享电影相关的旅行体验激励我前往张家界。					
M9. 我想体验由张家界电影相关景观所营造的独特氛围。					
M10. 观看以张家界为背景的电影增强了我前往该目的地的意愿。					
M11. 我希望在目的地参与电影相关或电影启发的活动。					
M12. 我对各种影片形式（如大片、纪录片）的兴趣增强了我访问张家界的动机。					

项目	1	2	3	4	5
M13. 我此次旅行部分受到与电影或旅游相关的职业或学术兴趣驱动。					
M14. 我对电影的普遍喜爱增强了我访问张家界的动机。					
M15. 我希望在与我喜爱的电影相关的环境中获得放松体验。					
M16. 我期待在张家界的电影相关地点获得娱乐与愉悦。					
M17. 我希望通过沉浸在电影相关环境中来摆脱日常生活。					
M18. 有机会与对电影或电影旅游感兴趣的人建立联系激励我前往张家界。					

第四部分 感知目的地形象

（请在分数以下画一个√1-5，表示“强烈不同意，强烈同意”）

项目	1	2	3	4	5
PI1. 张家界因其鲜明的电影旅游形象而广为人知，具有高度的目的地声誉。					
PI2. 该目的地拥有具有吸引力的电影元素，例如张家界“哈利路亚山”等标志性景观，显著增强其吸引力。					
PI3. 张家界的旅游服务质量（如电影主题游览、交通、住宿等）能够满足以电影为动机前来的游客的期望。					

第五部分 参与

（请在分数以下画一个√1-5，表示“强烈不同意，强烈同意”）

项目	1	2	3	4	5
ET1. 我对前往张家界等电影旅游目的地充满热情。					
ET2. 在探索张家界的电影景观（如《阿凡达》中的“哈利路亚山”）时，我感到十分兴奋。					

项目	1	2	3	4	5
ET3. 我会主动关注与张家界作为电影目的地相关的媒体内容、影片和最新资讯。					
ET4. 我喜欢在张家界与其他对电影旅游感兴趣的游客交流。					
ET5. 我会参与线上讨论或论坛，分享我在张家界的电影旅游体验。					
ET6. 我喜欢分享并交流与我在张家界电影旅游经历相关的旅行故事。					

第六部分 重访意愿

（请在分数以下画一个√1-5，表示“强烈不同意，强烈同意”）

项目	1	2	3	4	5
RI1. 在同类型目的地中，我会优先选择再次前往该影视旅游目的地。					
RI2. 我计划在未来再次前往同一影视旅游目的地。					
RI3. 我很可能在较短时间内再次访问该影视旅游地点。					
RI4. 如果将来再次前往该地区旅行，我一定会将该影视旅游目的地纳入行程。					
RI5. 即使周边存在其他旅游目的地，我仍然更愿意再次前往该影视相关地点。					

第七部分 地理位置

（请在分数以下画一个√1-5，表示“强烈不同意，强烈同意”）

项目	1	2	3	4	5
LO1. 我可以轻松获取从我居住地前往张家界的相关旅游信息。					
LO2. 从我所在地到张家界的整体旅行距离和行程对我而言是可接受且舒适的。					

项目	1	2	3	4	5
LO3. 前往张家界的旅行费用在我的个人经济能力范围内是负担得起的。					
LO4. 从我所在地前往张家界的交通方式便利且容易使用。					

第八部分 重访意愿

（请在分数以下画一个√1-5，表示“强烈不同意，强烈同意”）

项目	1	2	3	4	5
RI1. 在类似的旅游目的地中，我会优先选择再次前往张家界进行电影旅游。					
RI2. 我计划未来再次访问张家界，以体验其与电影相关的景点。					
RI3. 我有可能在较短时间内重访张家界。					
RI4. 如果我再次来到这一地区，我一定会将张家界纳入行程安排。					
RI5. 即使附近还有其他目的地，我仍然更愿意因其电影旅游魅力而重访张家界。					

APPENDIX C

Publication of Journal during Ph.D. Study

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

tourism and hospitality

MDPI

Article

From Screened Place to Lived Place: Cinematic-Place Negotiation Among Film Tourists

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Abstract

Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, widely associated with the landscapes depicted in *Avatar*, attracts tourists from around the world and has become an important film tourism destination. Film tourism destinations are not only physical places but also mediated symbolic spaces shaped by cinematic imagery, media memories, and symbolic expectations formed before travel. This study investigates how film tourists transform cinematically mediated expectations into situated engagement during their visits to Zhangjiajie. It adopts a qualitative process design informed by grounded theory and draws on semi-structured interviews with 30 film-aware tourists who had visited Zhangjiajie. The findings show that engagement unfolds through pre-visit cinematic imagination, embodied encounters, cinematic–real-world comparisons, social interpretation, authenticity negotiation, emotional connection, and cultural place-making. The study develops the concept of cinematic-place negotiation to explain how a screen-mediated place is transformed into a lived place through tourists' comparison, verification, revision, and extension of media-shaped expectations.

Keywords: film tourism; tourist engagement; grounded theory; Zhangjiajie; cinematic imagination

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1. Introduction

Film tourism has become an important form of contemporary cultural tourism because destinations are increasingly encountered through films, television, short videos, social media images, and other mediated representations before tourists arrive (Crespo-Almendros et al., 2025). In this context, a destination is not only a physical site but also a symbolic and affective space shaped by screen images, narrative memory, and circulating visual expectations. Earlier film-induced tourism studies have shown that screen exposure can enhance destination awareness, shape destination image, stimulate travel motivation, and increase visitor numbers (Northey et al., 2025). However, the transformation from mediated expectation to lived destination experience remains less fully explained.

Tourists do not simply consume cinematic images passively. They arrive with pre-visit expectations, search for recognizable views, compare screen memories with material landscapes, evaluate authenticity, take photographs, interact with guides and other visitors, and reinterpret the destination through local culture. Therefore, the central issue is not only whether cinema attracts tourists, but how cinematic imagination is compared, verified, revised, and extended during the visit.

Zhangjiajie, located in Hunan province, China, provides a theoretically strategic case for examining this process. It is a natural landscape destination whose sandstone pillar

scenery has been widely associated with *Avatar*-related visual imagination and cinematic fantasy (Hao et al., 2024). Unlike studio-based attractions or fully themed media destinations, Zhangjiajie is experienced simultaneously as a material landscape, a media-associated scenic icon, and a culturally meaningful place. This makes it suitable for investigating how tourists move from screened place to lived place through cinematic-place negotiation.

Film-induced tourism research has established that screen exposure can shape destination image (Northey et al., 2025). Film tourism scholarship has also shown that media exposure can support destination marketing and visitor movement (Beeton, 2016). Recent work further links film factors with destination image and travel intention (Northey et al., 2025). What remains insufficiently explained is how tourists transform pre-visit cinematic imagination into situated, embodied, and culturally meaningful engagement during the visit. To address this gap, this study aims to answer:

(1) How do film tourists negotiate the relationship between cinematic representations and their embodied encounters with Zhangjiajie?
(2) What process pathways and contextual conditions shape the reconstruction of place meaning and tourist engagement during cinematic-place negotiation?

By answering these questions, the study makes three contributions. Theoretically, it conceptualizes cinematic-place negotiation as a process through which screened destinations are transformed into lived places. Methodologically, it shows how a grounded theory-informed qualitative process design can capture tourists' evolving interpretations during film-related travel. Practically, it offers implications for designing interpretive routes, film-scene comparison experiences, and culturally grounded destination narratives in Zhangjiajie and comparable film-related destinations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Film-Induced Tourism and Mediated Destination Image

Film-induced tourism refers to tourist travel to places associated with films, television programs, or other screen media (Beeton, 2016). Films can increase visitor numbers at screened locations (Tooke & Baker, 1996). Motion-picture exposure can also shape destination image before travel (H. Kim & Richardson, 2003). Film tourism requires supporting initiatives rather than screen exposure alone (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). Film-induced tourism also works through destination-image narratives and story-based experience (Michopoulou et al., 2022). Movie images can influence destination choice when they become part of tourists' imagined travel options (Quintal & Phau, 2015). Connell (2012) further shows that film tourism has developed from a destination-promotion phenomenon into a broader research field concerned with tourist experience, destination meaning, and media-related travel practices.

International cases such as *Harry Potter*, *Game of Thrones*, *Star Wars*, *James Bond* and *The Lord of the Rings* show that screen texts can create powerful destination associations. These examples are important because they demonstrate how films and serial narratives can turn ordinary locations into symbolic tourism spaces, sometimes supported by official promotion, guided routes, themed interpretation and fan-generated sharing. These cases represent different mechanisms of screen tourism. Zhangjiajie differs from these cases because it is not primarily a studio attraction or a complete narrative-universe destination; it is a natural landscape whose meaning has been rearticulated through *Avatar*-related visual symbolism (Hao et al., 2024).

However, much of this research explains how films attract tourists rather than how tourists reinterpret a destination after arrival. Destination image explains pre-visit perception and travel intention, but it does not fully account for on-site comparison, sensory encounter, authenticity assessment, and the reconstruction of place meaning during the

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visit (Northey et al., 2025). For Zhangjiajie, this distinction is especially important. The destination is not merely promoted as scenery; it is encountered through *Avatar*-related imagery, social media images, destination branding, and tourist storytelling. The analytical focus must therefore move from destination image as a pre-visit influence to cinematic-place negotiation as an on-site interpretive process. Existing film-induced tourism studies explain awareness, motivation, destination image, and marketing effects, but they insufficiently explain tourists' on-site interpretive negotiation between cinematic representations and lived place experiences (Crespo-Almendros et al., 2025). This study therefore treats film tourism as a mediated destination experience in which cinematic associations are compared, verified, revised, and extended through embodied travel.

2.2. *Tourist Gaze, Place, Placeness, and Sense of Place*

Tourist Gaze theory argues that tourists do not view destinations neutrally; they see through media, social signs, visual culture, and prior imagination (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Zhangjiajie tourists therefore do not simply look at mountains. They arrive with *Avatar*-related imagery, short-video frames, destination promotion, and circulating media memories that organize what they notice and how they evaluate the landscape.

Tuan (1977) explains that place is produced through experience rather than physical setting alone. Relph (1976) shows why place meaning depends on attachment, familiarity, and the avoidance of placelessness. Cresswell (2014) further emphasizes that place is a meaningful location shaped through practice, memory, and interpretation. These perspectives help explain why Zhangjiajie becomes more than abstract scenic space during film-related travel.

Building on these place-based perspectives, recent tourism research shows that experience and involvement are among the strongest antecedents of tourist place attachment, through which on-site encounters acquire emotional and symbolic meaning (Cai et al., 2025). Rather than treating tourist–place bonds as static attitudes, contemporary research conceptualizes destination attachment as a dynamic process that unfolds before, during, and after travel through perceptual, bodily, emotional, and spatial mechanisms (Qu & Dong, 2026). Embodied sensory encounters can further generate emotional resonance and strengthen tourists' place identity, demonstrating how affective bonds emerge through situated and meaningful experience (Zhang et al., 2024). Recent tourism research also continues to conceptualize place attachment through place identity and place dependence, with the former capturing symbolic and affective identification with a destination and the latter reflecting its functional importance in supporting desired tourism activities (Saut & Ly, 2024), supporting desired tourism activities. Taken together, these perspectives explain how mediated expectations organize tourists' perceptions, while recent film tourism research indicates that the embodied and culturally grounded revision of cinematic expectations remains comparatively underdeveloped, thereby providing a direct conceptual bridge to tourist engagement, authenticity negotiation, and cultural place-making (Crespo-Almendros et al., 2025).

2.3. *Tourist Engagement, Authenticity, and Cultural Place-Making*

Tourist engagement can be understood as multidimensional cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement through which tourists direct attention, develop affective connections, and participate in destination-related activities (Rather et al., 2023). In digitally mediated tourism, destination images can attract attention, stimulate involvement, and encourage tourists to participate actively through sharing and electronic word-of-mouth behaviors (Abbasi et al., 2023). In film tourism contexts, tourist engagement has also been shown to contribute to memorable tourism experiences and tourists' post-visit emotional well-being (Yen et al., 2025). However, recent tourism research still commonly models

engagement through predefined antecedents and outcomes rather than examining how it develops as an unfolding interpretive process during the visit (Rasul et al., 2025).

This study therefore treats engagement as a process generated through cinematic expectation, embodied encounter, film–reality comparison, social interaction, authenticity assessment, and cultural meaning-making. In film-related destinations, tourists become engaged not simply because they have watched a film but because they actively connect cinematic signs and narratives with their practices in the material destination (Hao et al., 2024). Embodied sensory encounters can further transform cultural interpretation into emotional resonance and place identity, thereby providing an experiential basis for cultural place-making (Zhang et al., 2024).

Authenticity in film tourism should likewise be understood as experiential and contextually constructed because staged representations and existentially meaningful experiences can coexist at film-related tourism sites (Cui & Song, 2024). Natural, cultural, social, sensory, and functional aspects of the tourism experience-scape can shape perceived authenticity, while visitors' co-creation practices strengthen this relationship (Chen et al., 2024). For Zhangjiajie, authenticity is therefore relational: it emerges through tourists' negotiation between *Avatar*-related visual signs, the material landscape, and their embodied tourism practices rather than through exact visual correspondence between the screen and reality (Hao et al., 2024). Accordingly, engagement is conceptualized here as a cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and cultural process, while authenticity is interpreted through the evolving relationship between cinematic representation and lived place experience.

2.4. Fandom, Media Pilgrimage, and Film Tourism Practices

Fandom in popular-culture tourism is not simply a matter of liking a film; it is expressed through interpretive, performative, and participatory practices that connect media texts, fan identities, and travel behavior (Lexhagen et al., 2023). At destinations, these practices become visible through photographing recognizable locations, staging or reenacting narrative moments, and circulating these performances through social media (Tan, 2024). Through such embodied and shared practices, media-associated locations can become fan-pilgrimage sites whose meanings are produced not only by destination managers but also through the participation of fans, residents, and other local stakeholders (Thelen et al., 2025).

Popular culture and fandom can shape destination image and tourism experience through cross-media narratives and sustained interactions among tourists, local communities, tourism organizations, and media producers (S. Kim et al., 2026). Empirical research on *Game of Thrones* fans identifies affective identification with characters, perceived connections between fiction and history, and the desire for collective identity as important motivations for traveling to screen-related locations (Gómez-Morales et al., 2024). Guides and visitors collaboratively weave fictional narratives, personal biographies, places, and local histories into situated tourism experiences (Garrison & Wallace, 2025). Taken together, these findings indicate that screen tourism does not operate through a single universal mechanism but through different combinations of fan attachment, storytelling, destination interpretation, and stakeholder participation.

Recent popular-culture tourism research emphasizes that fan practices and destination placemaking vary across media genres, visitor communities, and local contexts (Lexhagen et al., 2023). Zhangjiajie therefore should not be treated as equivalent to strongly themed attractions or destinations organized primarily around a complete fictional universe. It is a natural landscape whose tourism meaning has been co-produced through *Avatar*-related signs, destination discourse, material scenery, and tourists' on-site practices (Hao et al., 2024). Zhangjiajie is consequently better understood as a media-aware natural

landscape destination, where cinematic recognition coexists with scenery, photography, leisure, and cultural interpretation rather than depending on strong fan identity alone.

In this study, fandom is treated as a continuum rather than a fixed identity category. Some visitors were strongly attached to *Avatar*-related imagery, some were casual viewers who recognized iconic symbols, and others were broader media-aware tourists whose cinematic awareness came mainly from destination promotion, short videos, or travel platforms. The sample includes strong fans, casual viewers, and broader media-aware tourists. This distinction is used analytically to avoid reducing all Zhangjiajie visitors to organized fan communities while still recognizing that fan-like practices, media memory, and *Avatar*-related symbolic recognition shaped many participants' experiences.

2.5. Conceptualizing Cinematic-Place Negotiation

Recent film tourism research increasingly emphasizes the interdependence of audiovisual representation, audience reception, and tourism-related effects rather than treating screen exposure as an isolated stimulus (Nieto-Ferrando et al., 2024). Building on this foundation, this study defines cinematic-place negotiation as the interpretive process through which film-aware tourists compare, verify, revise, and extend cinematic representations through embodied encounters, social interaction, authenticity assessment, emotional connection, and cultural meaning-making. Whereas destination-image research has largely concentrated on how screen exposure shapes destination perceptions, motivations, and travel intentions, cinematic-place negotiation focuses on how these representations are actively reworked after tourists arrive (Crespo-Almendros et al., 2025). It also moves beyond gaze-centered explanations by tracing how media-shaped ways of seeing operate within concrete interactions and situated tourism experiences (Apchain, 2025). In film-related tourism, staged and existential authenticity may coexist, supporting a relational understanding based on the meaning of the encounter rather than exact visual correspondence between screen representation and material reality (Cui & Song, 2024). cinematic-place negotiation further explains how film-related signs acquire place meaning through the interaction of tourists, media representations, material landscapes, and situated practices (Hao et al., 2024). Finally, although popular-culture tourism is frequently organized around fandom-related travel and expressive practices, cinematic-place negotiation also includes casual viewers and media-aware tourists whose interpretations are informed by cinematic associations without necessarily being structured around a strong fan identity (Lexhagen et al., 2023). Detailed distinctions between cinematic-place negotiation and adjacent concepts are summarized in Appendix A. These related perspectives provide important foundations but do not fully explain how tourists actively revise cinematic expectations through embodied encounters at the destination. Their conceptual distinctions from cinematic-place negotiation are summarized in Table A1.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design and Participant Recruitment

This study adopted a grounded theory-informed qualitative process design. It used grounded theory coding procedures to construct an explanatory process model, but it does not claim to follow strict classical grounded theory because formal theoretical sampling was not employed.

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling from tourists who had already visited Zhangjiajie and who were aware of its film- or media-related identity. Recruitment sources included scenic-area contacts, social media, travel communities, friend referrals, and travel-platform networks. Recruitment was conducted during the fieldwork period after participants had completed their visits.

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Screening questions confirmed whether participants had visited Zhangjiajie, whether they knew of its cinematic or media associations before or during the visit, and whether they could reflect on travel motivation, expectation, on-site experience, and destination meaning. No participant was invited to visit Zhangjiajie solely for this study; all participants had completed their visit before being interviewed. The final sample included 30 participants: eight first-time visitors and 22 repeat visitors.

Participants were classified as film tourists because each had visited Zhangjiajie and reported awareness of film, media, promotional, or visual associations connecting the destination with cinematic landscapes. Their cinematic involvement ranged from strong *Avatar*-related attachment to casual viewing and broader media-aware destination recognition.

3.2. Participant Profile

The sample included 30 participants, with eight first-time visitors and 22 repeat visitors. The main participant overview is reported in Table 1, while expanded variables requested by reviewers are provided in Appendix B to keep Section 4 readable. The expanded profile variables in Appendix B were used as qualitative contextual descriptors rather than standardized survey variables. Residence, trip type, main motivation, media-awareness source, and cinematic involvement were summarized from screening information, interview narratives, and coding records. These categories were used to support transferability and subgroup interpretation rather than statistical comparison.

Table 1. Participant overview.

ID	Gender	Age Group	Education	Visit Frequency
P1	Male	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P2	Female	36–45	Bachelor	Repeat
P3	Male	18–25	Bachelor	First Time
P4	Male	26–35	Master	Repeat
P5	Female	46–55	High School	Repeat
P6	Male	36–45	Bachelor	Repeat
P7	Female	26–35	Bachelor	First Time
P8	Male	26–35	Master	Repeat
P9	Male	36–45	High School	Repeat
P10	Female	18–25	Bachelor	First Time
P11	Male	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P12	Female	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P13	Male	36–45	Bachelor	Repeat
P14	Male	46–55	PhD	First Time
P15	Female	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P16	Male	26–35	High School	First Time
P17	Female	36–45	PhD	Repeat
P18	Male	18–25	High School	Repeat
P19	Female	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P20	Male	46–55	Bachelor	First Time
P21	Female	26–35	High School	Repeat
P22	Male	36–45	Bachelor	Repeat
P23	Female	26–35	PhD	Repeat
P24	Male	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P25	Male	36–45	High School	Repeat
P26	Female	18–25	Bachelor	First Time
P27	Male	26–35	Bachelor	Repeat
P28	Female	36–45	Master	Repeat
P29	Male	46–55	Bachelor	Repeat
P30	Female	26–35	Bachelor	First Time

3.3. Data Collection

The interview guide covered film and media awareness, travel motivation, cinematic expectation, authenticity judgment, film–reality comparison, photography and film-related activities, emotional connection, cultural meaning and place interpretation (Appendix C). Follow-up questions were used to clarify vague statements and obtain concrete examples. Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews. Interviews were conducted in the participants' preferred language, and quotations used in the manuscript were translated into English for presentation. Most interviews were conducted online, while a small number were conducted face-to-face when participants were available. Each interview lasted approximately 35–50 min. Recordings were transcribed, anonymized, and organized for coding. Participants were encouraged to recall concrete situations, comparisons, actions, and turning points rather than provide only general evaluations.

3.4. Data Analysis

NVivo 12 was used to organize transcripts and coding records, not to generate analysis automatically. The analysis was conducted by the researchers through iterative open coding, axial coding, selective coding, constant comparison, negative case examination, and analytical memoing. The analysis progressed from initial codes to focused categories, higher-order themes, process stages, and the core category of cinematic-place negotiation. The complete coding chain is presented in Table A2.

Open coding generated first-order codes close to participants' language, including media-shaped expectation, iconic landscape recognition, film–reality comparison, photography/check-in practices, guided cinematic interpretation, emotional cinematic connection, and cultural deepening. Axial coding grouped these first-order codes into five linked categories: pre-visit mediated frame, embodied encounter, interpretive negotiation, integrative mechanisms, and outcomes. These categories were used to explain how cinematic imagination moved from expectation into lived experience. Selective coding identified cinematic-place negotiation as the central category because it connected pre-visit cinematic imagination, embodied viewing, authenticity negotiation, emotional response, social interpretation and cultural place-making.

Constant comparison compared statements within and across interviews, including first-time and repeat visitors and participants with different degrees of cinematic involvement. Negative cases were examined, including participants for whom film was not the primary motivation or whose lived experience exceeded or changed screen-based expectations. Analytical memos were maintained throughout the coding process to document emerging ideas, category relationships, and decisions made during theoretical integration. Because strict classical theoretical sampling was not used, conceptual adequacy was judged by recurrence, variation, explanatory power, and late-interview stability rather than by claiming formal theoretical saturation.

3.5. Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was strengthened through repeated transcript reading, author cross-checking, analytical memoing, negative case analysis, and continual comparison between codes, quotations, and emerging categories. Credibility was supported by returning category claims to transcript excerpts; dependability and confirmability were supported through coding records and memo trails; and transferability was addressed by describing the case context and sample characteristics. The coding structure and process framework were reviewed by all authors, and interpretive disagreements were resolved through discussion and re-examination of the relevant transcript excerpts. All participants were informed of the research purpose, voluntary participation, audio recording, anonymization,

secure data storage, and their right to withdraw. Participant identities were replaced with codes from P1 to P30, and identifying information was removed from transcripts and quotations.

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, Sirindhorn College of Public Health, Yala (SCPHYL IRB), Thailand. The approval number was SCPHYLIRB-2569/469. The study was reviewed under an expedited review procedure, with approval granted on 28 February 2026 and valid until 28 February 2027. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews.

4. Results

4.1. Participant Profile and Analytical Overview

The 30 tourists in the qualitative sample had visited Zhangjiajie and were aware of its film or media associations. Repeat visitors accounted for 22 participants and first-time visitors for eight participants. Table 1 retains the core participant overview, while Table A4 provides expanded information on participants' residence, trip type, and main travel motivation, and Appendix B provides the expanded profile variables used to clarify local/non-local status, trip type, main motivation, media-awareness source, and cinematic involvement. As detailed in Table A5, participants differed in their sources of film-related awareness and levels of cinematic involvement, ranging from strong *Avatar* fans to casual viewers and non-fan but film-aware tourists.

The analytical overview indicates that participants moved from media-shaped expectation to embodied encounter, film–reality comparison, social interpretation, authenticity negotiation, emotional connection and cultural place-making. Table 2 reports the descriptive recurrence of main themes across the qualitative corpus, while Appendix A provides the full coding chain and the complete theme-frequency summary.

Table 2. Descriptive summary of main themes across interviews.

Theme/Category	Participants	First-Time/Repeat	Representative Evidence
Media-shaped expectation	24/30	6/18	P12 media portrayals made scenery surreal
Avatar/Hallelujah Mountains recognition	21/30	7/14	P3 cinematic elements were more vivid
Film–reality comparison	19/30	5/14	P19 real life gave a stronger sense of wonder
Photography/check-in practices	17/30	5/12	Photo-taking and viewpoint framing reported across interviews
Guided or themed activities	12/30	2/10	P21 film-themed tours connected the visit with cinematic identity
Emotional connection	16/30	4/12	P6 reported a deep connection to the film world
Authenticity judgment	14/30	3/11	Participants evaluated whether lived place confirmed or exceeded screen imagery
Cultural/local meaning	13/30	3/10	P30 described cultural heritage beyond cinematic association
Fandom or fan-like practices	9/30	4/5	Strong fans and casual fans planned check-ins or recognized iconic symbols
Film not being primary motivation	11/30	2/9	Film awareness appeared alongside leisure, scenery, and culture

The following counts are descriptive rather than inferential. They indicate the relative recurrence of themes in the qualitative corpus and should not be interpreted as statistical generalization.

Seven interrelated themes were identified across the interview data: pre-visit cinematic imagination, embodied encounter, film–reality comparison, social interpretation, authenticity negotiation, emotional connection, and cultural place-making. Their descriptive distribution across participants is presented in Table A3. These counts indicate the breadth of participant coverage rather than the statistical importance of individual themes.

4.2. Pre-Visit Cinematic Imagination and Anticipatory Place Meaning

The first stage of engagement construction occurred before the visit. Participants encountered Zhangjiajie through cinematic images, *Avatar*-related associations, destination promotion, short videos, and social media, so the destination had already been partly imagined before physical arrival.

For example, P12 stated, "The media portrayals definitely made the natural surroundings seem more surreal before I arrived." This quotation was coded as "media-shaped expectation" because the participant described Zhangjiajie as visually intensified through media before the visit. During axial coding, this code was grouped under "cinematic imagination" and placed in Level 1, the pre-visit mediated frame.

P14 similarly noted, "The natural beauty seemed stronger because I had heard stories about the films connected with this place." This quotation was coded as "narrative intensification of landscape" because the participant's expectation was shaped by both scenery and film-related stories. Together, these quotations show how pre-visit cinematic imagination operated as an anticipatory frame rather than a fixed motivation.

4.3. Embodied Encounter and Film–Reality Comparison

The second stage involved embodied on-site encounters. Participants not only looked at scenery, but they moved through viewpoints, recognized iconic landscapes, took photographs, joined guided or themed activities, and compared the physical environment with remembered cinematic images.

P3 stated, "The cinematic elements in Zhangjiajie were much more vivid than I expected, especially the Hallelujah Mountains." This quotation was coded as "iconic recognition" because the participant actively connected the material landscape with remembered cinematic imagery. It was grouped under "embodied confirmation" and placed in Level 2 of the model.

P7 explained, "Seeing the iconic film locations made me feel like I was part of the movie." This quotation was coded as "participatory cinematic presence" because the participant's experience moved beyond visual recognition toward embodied involvement. P19 stated, "Seeing it in real life gave me a sense of wonder I could not have imagined from the screen." This statement was coded as "lived landscape exceeding screen-based expectation" because the participant did not merely confirm the cinematic image but evaluated the actual landscape as affectively stronger than the mediated representation. During axial coding, this code was grouped under "film–reality comparison," which became part of the broader interpretive negotiation stage.

Photography, check-in practices, guided film-related interpretation and scene recreation also translated screen memory into action. These practices allowed visitors to frame the landscape, test cinematic associations and share their own interpretation of Zhangjiajie with others.

4.4. Cinematic-Place Negotiation: Authenticity, Emotion, Social Interaction, and Cultural Meaning

The third and fourth stages show how perception, comparison, verification, revision, extension, and social interpretation were integrated into authenticity negotiation, emotional connection, cinematic immersion, cultural interpretation, and sense of place.

Authenticity was not evaluated only by asking whether Zhangjiajie looked exactly like the screen image. Participants interpreted authenticity relationally by asking whether the actual landscape confirmed, exceeded, complicated, or extended the cinematic image they had carried into the visit.

P6 stated, "I could feel a deep connection to the film's world when I was there." This quotation was coded as "emotional cinematic connection" because recognition of a film-associated landscape became personally affective. It was grouped under "emotional integration" and placed at the integrative mechanism level.

Social interaction expanded individual viewing into shared interpretation. Guides, other tourists, and online sharing practices provided narrative cues through which visitors could explain the relationship between the cinematic symbol and the lived destination.

P21 noted, "Film-themed tours helped me connect the destination with its cinematic identity." This quotation was coded as "guided cinematic interpretation" because the participant's understanding was shaped through organized explanation rather than visual recognition alone. It shows how social and guided interpretation transformed screen memory into shared place meaning.

P30 explained, "The cultural heritage elements added a deeper layer beyond just the cinematic associations." This quotation was coded as "cultural deepening" because the participant moved beyond film recognition toward local cultural interpretation. It was grouped under "cultural place-making" and placed at the outcome level.

Together, these quotations show the coding chain requested by the reviewers: representative expression, initial code, axial category, aggregate dimension, and model level.

The evidence also shows why cinematic-place negotiation is a process rather than a static theme. Tourists moved between seeing, comparing, verifying, revising, and extending, and these actions shaped engagement over the course of the visit.

The descriptive coding summary in Table 2 shows that media-shaped expectation, *Avatar*/Hallelujah Mountains recognition and film–reality comparison were the most recurrent themes. These themes appeared across both first-time and repeat visitors, while repeat visitors provided richer accounts of comparison, reinterpretation and changing place meaning.

4.5. From CINEMATIC-Place Negotiation to Tourist Engagement and Cultural Place-Making

The final stage concerns outcomes. Tourist engagement emerged as cognitive, emotional, behavioral and cultural involvement produced through the interaction of cinematic expectation, embodied encounter, authenticity assessment, emotional connection, social interpretation, and cultural place-making.

Cinematic immersion was generated when visitors used media memory to inhabit the landscape imaginatively while also sensing its material scale, movement and atmosphere.

Emotional connection was strengthened when visitors felt that the lived landscape exceeded or deepened the film image rather than merely reproducing it.

Relational authenticity operated as a bridge between film representation and lived reality. Visitors judged whether the actual experience was believable, affectively powerful, and culturally meaningful in relation to the cinematic image.

Expectations were not fixed. They became benchmarks for comparison and were revised by direct encounter, photography, guide interpretation and local cultural narratives.

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Cultural engagement prevented Zhangjiajie from being reduced to a single film reference. Local heritage, geological distinctiveness, landscape history and cultural storytelling expanded the meaning of the destination beyond screen recognition.

The resulting tourist engagement was therefore not an automatic consequence of film exposure. It was constructed through active interpretation and through repeated movement between screened place and lived place.

Appendix A provides the complete coding chain and extended theme-frequency summary.

The stronger presence of repeat visitors in the sample have made comparison and reinterpretation especially visible, a point returned to in Section 5.4.

Fandom and fan-like practices were also relevant, but they formed only one pathway within a broader media-aware visitor spectrum. This affects how far the findings can be compared with strong fandom destinations.

The process model therefore explains a context-sensitive pathway rather than a universal typology of all film tourists.

Post-visit memory and sharing were also treated as part of the outcome level when participants described photographs, travel notes, online sharing, or retrospective storytelling after the trip. These accounts were coded as "post-visit memory/sharing" because tourists continued to circulate and reinterpret the relationship between screened place and lived place after the on-site visit.

Figure 1 integrates the five process levels and positions cinematic-place negotiation as the core mechanism linking pre-visit mediated frames, embodied encounters, integrative mechanisms, and engagement outcomes. The revised framework retains fandom/fan attachment, photography/check-in, guided film-related interpretation, scene recreation/social sharing, cultural interpretation, sense of place, and post-visit memory/sharing, while removing the duplicate side box from the previous figure.

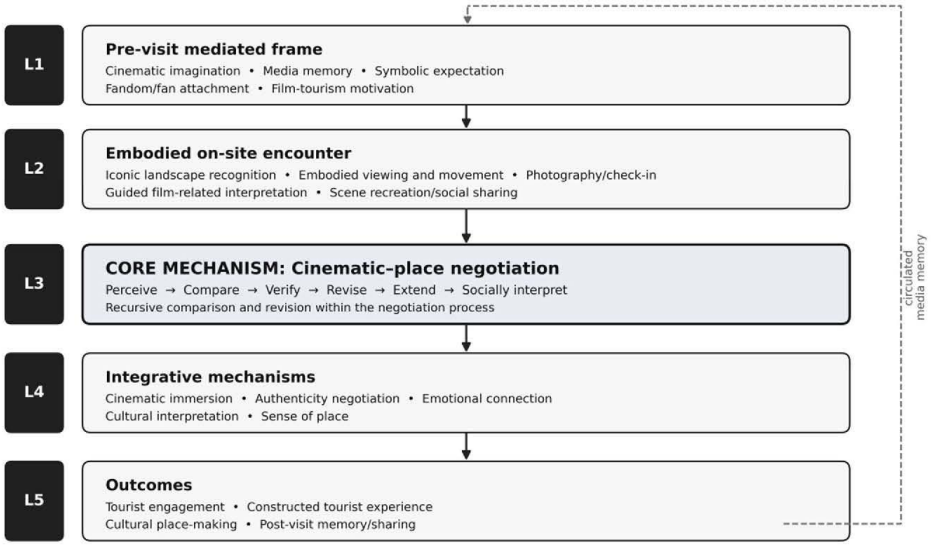

Figure 1. Cinematic-place negotiation from screened place to lived place: a grounded theory-informed process framework.

The framework shows that cinematic imagination provides a pre-visit mediated frame, embodied encounter activates comparison, interpretive negotiation develops through perception, comparison, verification, revision, extension, and social interpretation, integrative mechanisms connect authenticity, emotion, and culture, and the outcomes include tourist engagement, constructed tourist experience, cultural place-making, and post-visit sharing.

The model also explains how open codes entered the five-level framework: media-shaped expectation belongs to Level 1, iconic recognition and embodied confirmation to Level 2, film–reality comparison to Level 3, emotional integration and authenticity negotiation to Level 4, and cultural place-making to Level 5. The dotted feedback line indicates that post-visit memory and sharing may recirculate tourists' lived interpretations into broader media memory, thereby shaping future visitors' pre-visit mediated frames.

Cinematic-place negotiation is therefore the core mechanism linking screened place and lived place across the visit.

In summary, tourists bring cinematic expectations to the material environment of Zhangjiajie, perform these expectations through observation, movement, photography, and social sharing, and interpret the connection between screen images and lived experience. Engagement becomes strongest when this process produces emotional resonance, authenticity assessment, and a culturally grounded sense of place.

5. Discussion

5.1. Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that the transformation of a screened place into a lived place is not a direct consequence of film exposure, nor is it simply the confirmation of a pre-existing destination image. Rather, tourists' engagement with Zhangjiajie developed through a progressive and recursive process. Participants first arrived with media-shaped expectations and cinematic associations; these expectations were then activated through embodied encounters with the material landscape. During the visit, tourists compared cinematic representations with what they saw and experienced, evaluated whether the relationship between film and place was believable, revised earlier expectations when differences emerged, and extended cinematic meanings through guide narratives, photography, social interaction, emotional response, and cultural interpretation. The findings therefore identify cinematic-place negotiation as the central mechanism connecting pre-visit cinematic imagination with tourist engagement, relational authenticity, emotional connection, sense of place, cultural place-making, and post-visit memory and sharing. Importantly, this process was heterogeneous. Strong fans, casual viewers, and broader media-aware tourists did not engage with Zhangjiajie in the same way, and cinematic association was only one interpretive resource among scenery, leisure, photography, and local culture for many participants.

The first major finding is that cinematic representations continue to influence tourists after arrival, but their role changes from image formation to interpretive negotiation. Previous film tourism studies have primarily demonstrated that films influence destination awareness, destination image, travel motivation, and behavioral intention (Northey et al., 2025). The broader structure of the field has similarly remained concentrated around motivation, destination-image formation, marketing, and destination management (Crespo-Almendros et al., 2025). These studies have established why screen exposure can make a destination desirable, but they provide less explanation of what tourists subsequently do with cinematic expectations once they encounter the destination itself. The present study extends this research by showing that cinematic images remain active during the visit as reference points rather than fixed scripts. Participants repeatedly compared remembered images with material landscapes, confirmed some expectations, revised others, and incor-

porated new cultural and sensory meanings. This finding is consistent with recent attempts to connect audiovisual representation, audience reception, and tourism effects within a more integrated analytical framework (Nieto-Ferrando et al., 2024), but it goes further by identifying the interpretive operations through which such connections are produced during the visit. Cinematic influence, therefore, should not be understood only through an exposure–image–intention sequence; it also operates through a post-arrival process of comparison, verification, revision, and extension.

The second finding concerns the transformation of mediated seeing into embodied place experience. Tourist-gaze research has long argued that tourists do not encounter destinations neutrally because ways of seeing are structured by media representations, cultural signs, and prior expectations. More recent ethnographic work further emphasizes that the tourist gaze should be examined through situated practices and social interaction rather than treated as detached visual consumption (Apchain, 2025). The Zhangjiajie findings support this development but also specify how this transformation occurs. Participants did not merely recognize *Avatar*-related scenery. They moved through viewpoints, experienced the scale and atmosphere of the landscape, framed photographs, participated in check-in practices, listened to guide narratives, and discussed the relationship between the cinematic world and the physical destination. These embodied and social practices gradually changed the meaning of Zhangjiajie from a recognizable media image into an experienced place. This is consistent with research showing that sensory and embodied encounters can generate emotional resonance and strengthen place identity (Zhang et al., 2024), as well as research conceptualizing destination attachment as a process involving bodily, perceptual, emotional, and spatial mechanisms across the travel experience (Qu & Dong, 2026). The contribution of the present findings lies in explaining the transition mechanism: media-shaped perception becomes meaningful place experience when cinematic recognition is repeatedly reworked through movement, sensation, comparison, interpretation, and interaction.

A third finding is that tourist engagement emerged as an uneven and processual outcome, rather than as an automatic response to cinematic exposure. Previous engagement research has generally examined the antecedents and consequences of engagement, linking it with experience, emotion, satisfaction, behavioral intention, loyalty, and related tourism outcomes (Rasul et al., 2025). Film tourism studies have also shown that engagement can contribute to memorable tourism experiences and post-visit subjective well-being (Yen et al., 2025). The present study does not contradict these relationships, but it addresses a different question: how engagement actually develops during the tourism experience. The findings indicate that engagement intensified when cinematic recognition became connected with reality comparison, authenticity assessment, emotional resonance, social interpretation, and cultural meaning-making. This helps explain why equal levels of film awareness did not produce equal levels of engagement. For some participants, *Avatar* provided only a loose frame for viewing the landscape; for others, cinematic recognition generated stronger emotional involvement and fan-like practices. Engagement in film tourism should therefore be treated as differentiated and cumulative. Screen exposure may initiate attention, but deeper engagement depends on what tourists are able to do cognitively, emotionally, socially, and culturally with that cinematic association during the visit.

The fourth finding concerns authenticity. Participants did not generally judge Zhangjiajie according to whether the physical landscape reproduced a cinematic image exactly. Instead, authenticity was constructed relationally through the perceived coherence between cinematic imagination and lived encounter. This finding is broadly consistent with research showing that staged and existential forms of authenticity can coexist at film

tourism destinations (Cui & Song, 2024), and with studies demonstrating that perceived authenticity is shaped by cultural, social, sensory, and functional aspects of the tourism experience-scape rather than physical fidelity alone (Chen et al., 2024). It also resonates with Zhangjiajie-specific research emphasizing that the association among *Avatar*, Pandora, and Zhangjiajie is produced through interactions among cinematic signs, material landscapes, destination discourse, and tourist practices (Hao et al., 2024). However, the present study further demonstrates that difference itself may become productive. When the lived landscape exceeded, complicated, or differed from cinematic expectations, participants did not necessarily experience disappointment. Such differences could stimulate comparison, emotional surprise, reinterpretation, and personal meaning-making. Authenticity in this context is therefore not the successful reproduction of fiction in material form; it is the experiential credibility of the relationship tourists construct between media representation and encountered place.

Finally, the findings suggest that film tourism engagement cannot be reduced to fandom. Popular-culture tourism research increasingly recognizes considerable diversity across media forms, fan communities, tourist practices, and destination place-making processes (Lexhagen et al., 2023). Research on highly fan-oriented destinations has shown that affective identification with fictional worlds, connections between fiction and history, and desires for collective identity can motivate travel and participation (Gómez-Morales et al., 2024), while fan-pilgrimage places may be co-produced by visitors, residents, destination organizations, and other stakeholders (Thelen et al., 2025). Zhangjiajie presents a different configuration. Although fan attachment was evident among some participants, the sample also included casual viewers and tourists whose awareness of *Avatar* came from destination promotion, travel platforms, or social media rather than strong fan identity. Moreover, for many participants, the film was not the primary reason for visiting. The findings therefore identify Zhangjiajie as a media-aware natural landscape destination, where cinematic symbolism interacts with scenery, photography, leisure, social interpretation, and cultural meaning. This extends film tourism research beyond strong fandom settings and suggests that cinematic-place negotiation is particularly useful for understanding destinations in which media associations are influential but coexist with independent natural, cultural, and recreational attractions.

Taken together, these findings show that the significance of cinema in tourism lies not only in its capacity to attract visitors or shape destination image before travel. Its continuing influence depends on how tourists negotiate cinematic representations through material encounters, embodied practices, authenticity judgments, emotions, social interpretation, and cultural meaning-making. Cinematic-place negotiation therefore explains the intermediate process through which a destination initially encountered as a screened image can become an emotionally and culturally meaningful lived place.

5.2. *Theoretical Implications*

This study makes three theoretical contributions to film tourism research.

First, it repositions cinematic representation within the causal architecture of film tourism experience. Much of the existing literature treats cinematic exposure primarily as an antecedent that influences destination awareness, destination image, travel motivation, and behavioral intention before travel (Crespo-Almendros et al., 2025; Northey et al., 2025). Even more recent attempts to connect audiovisual narratives, audience reception, and tourism effects continue to begin analytically from the effects of mediated representation on audiences (Nieto-Ferrando et al., 2024). The results suggest that this formulation is incomplete because cinematic representations do not cease to matter once destination choice has been made. They remain available during the visit as interpretive resources against

which tourists perceive, compare, question, confirm, revise, and extend the meaning of the encountered landscape.

The theoretical significance of cinematic-place negotiation therefore lies not simply in extending film tourism research from the pre-visit stage to the on-site stage. More importantly, it changes the conceptual status of cinematic representation. Rather than treating screen imagery as a one-directional stimulus whose principal theoretical function is to produce attitudes or intentions, this study conceptualizes it as a recursive interpretive resource whose meaning can be modified through material encounter. The relationship between film and destination is therefore not fixed at the moment of media exposure. It is reconstructed through interaction between remembered representations, bodily experience, spatial perception, social interpretation, and local cultural narratives. This shifts the explanatory logic of film tourism research from a relatively linear model of media effects toward a recursive model in which mediated representation shapes experience while experience simultaneously reinterprets mediated representation. Cinematic-place negotiation thus provides a mechanism for theorizing how media-induced destination meaning remains open to modification after arrival.

Second, the study identifies cinematic-place negotiation as a meso-level mechanism between mediated perception and place-based engagement. Existing research on the tourist gaze explains how tourists' ways of seeing are socially and culturally organized, while recent work increasingly situates such looking within concrete practices and interactions (Apchain, 2025). Research on embodied tourism shows how sensory encounters contribute to emotional resonance and place identity (Zhang et al., 2024), whereas engagement research has tended to examine relationships between engagement and outcomes such as memorable tourism experience and post-travel well-being (Yen et al., 2025). These studies illuminate different parts of the tourism experience, but the theoretical transition from media-shaped perception to emotionally and culturally grounded engagement remains insufficiently specified.

This study addresses this gap by theorizing negotiation as the process through which mediated ways of seeing are converted into situated forms of involvement. In this formulation, embodied movement, photography, scene recognition, guided interpretation, social interaction, and film–reality comparison are not merely tourism activities occurring alongside engagement. They constitute the interpretive practices through which engagement is produced. Similarly, authenticity assessment, emotional connection, and cultural interpretation are not independent outcomes added after cinematic recognition; they are mechanisms through which tourists reorganize the relationship between representation and place. The contribution, therefore, is not simply to combine tourist gaze, place attachment, and engagement within one framework, but is to specify the missing process that connects them. Cinematic-place negotiation explains how a socially mediated gaze becomes situated interpretation, how situated interpretation becomes emotional and cultural involvement, and how repeated interpretive work contributes to the transformation of an externally represented destination into a personally meaningful place.

Third, the study decouples film tourism engagement from two assumptions that remain influential in the literature: representational fidelity and strong fandom. Authenticity research in film tourism settings has already demonstrated that staged and existential authenticity can coexist within the same experience (Cui & Song, 2024). Zhangjiajie-specific research likewise shows that the relationship among *Avatar*-related imagery, material landscape, destination discourse, and tourist practices is socially and symbolically constructed rather than given (Hao et al., 2024). At the same time, popular-culture tourism research has expanded the understanding of fandom by emphasizing differentiated identities, practices, media relationships, and place-making processes (Lexhagen et al., 2023).

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This study advances these arguments by showing that meaningful film tourism engagement does not require either exact correspondence between screen representation and material place or a strong fan identity. Authenticity emerged relationally from whether tourists could construct a convincing and meaningful connection between cinematic imagination and lived encounter. Perceived differences between representation and reality were therefore not necessarily failures of authenticity; under some conditions, they became interpretive resources that generated surprise, comparison, emotional intensification, and new cultural meanings. In parallel, cinematic-place negotiation was not only evident among strongly attached fans but also among casual viewers and broader media-aware tourists for whom cinematic association formed only one part of the destination experience.

This finding introduces media-aware natural landscape destinations as a theoretically important context that differs from highly themed attractions and organized fan-pilgrimage sites. In such destinations, cinematic meanings coexist with scenic appreciation, leisure, photography, cultural interpretation, and other travel motivations. Film tourism theory therefore needs to account for forms of engagement in which media awareness is influential without being motivationally dominant. By distinguishing cinematic awareness from strong fandom, and relational authenticity from representational similarity, the study broadens the scope of film tourism theory to explain how cinematic meanings operate in hybrid destinations where media symbolism is layered onto independently significant natural and cultural landscapes.

5.3. Practical Implications

Destination managers should design screen-to-site guided routes that connect film-related images, actual viewpoints, walking paths, and local interpretation. Film-scene comparison panels should be placed at key viewpoints to help visitors compare mediated images with actual landscapes and understand how differences between screen representation and lived reality can enrich authenticity.

Tour guides and interpreters should be trained to explain cinematic-place negotiation rather than simply repeat promotional claims. Guided interpretation should help visitors understand the relationship between *Avatar*-related visual imagination, Zhangjiajie's sandstone pillar landscape, geological formation, local culture, and embodied viewing experience.

Marketing teams should move beyond simple *Avatar*-related fame. Promotional materials should invite visitors to compare, reinterpret, and personalize the relationship between screen images and lived experience. This can reduce unrealistic expectations while encouraging deeper engagement.

Local cultural institutions should connect cinematic recognition with ecology, geomorphology, history, and regional culture. This can prevent Zhangjiajie from being reduced to a single film reference and support more sustainable cultural place-making.

Digital platforms can encourage visitors to share film–reality comparison, reflective photography, scene recreation, and post-visit narratives. Such practices can extend cinematic-place negotiation beyond the visit and support participatory destination storytelling.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

This research has several limitations. The sample size was 30 and was recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, so it does not provide statistical representativeness. The study also used grounded theory-informed coding procedures rather than strict classical theoretical sampling. Repeat visitors accounted for 22 participants, while first-time visitors accounted for eight participants. This imbalance may have strengthened themes of comparison, reinterpretation, and changing place meaning. In addition, variables such as fandom status, origin/residence, and overnight/day-trip status were treated as qualitative

profile categories rather than standardized survey measures, limiting fine-grained comparison among visitor subgroups. Some expanded profile variables, including cinematic involvement and media-awareness source, were summarized from interview narratives and coding records rather than collected through a standardized demographic questionnaire. Therefore, subgroup comparisons should be treated as interpretive qualitative comparisons rather than statistically definitive comparisons.

Zhangjiajie is a natural landscape film-related destination and differs from studio-based attractions, urban filming locations, heritage towns, and strong fandom destinations. The interview data are also retrospective, so they cannot record moment-by-moment changes in experience during the actual visit. Because the data were based on self-reported retrospective interviews, participants may have reconstructed their experiences through memory, post-visit reflection, and socially available narratives about Zhangjiajie and *Avatar*-related imagery.

The study did not systematically analyze official destination marketing materials or visitor-generated social media content, although these materials may shape cinematic-place negotiation before, during, and after the visit. Future research should compare natural landscape destinations, urban filming locations, studio-based attractions, heritage towns, and long-running television series destinations. It should also compare first-time visitors and repeat visitors, strong fans, casual viewers, and media-aware tourists in the future. In situ observation, travel diaries, visual elicitation, mobile methods, and visitor-generated content could capture experience as it unfolds, while mixed-methods or survey designs could test the cinematic-place negotiation framework across broader samples.

6. Conclusions

This study examined how Zhangjiajie film tourists move from screened place to lived place. The findings show that cinematic-place negotiation is the core mechanism through which tourists compare, verify, revise, and extend cinematic representations during embodied travel. Cinematic-place negotiation is an interpretive process through which tourists connect cinematic representations with lived, embodied, and culturally situated experiences. Engagement is not produced automatically by film exposure; it forms through embodied encounter, authenticity assessment, emotion, social interaction, and cultural place-making. The study therefore contributes a process-based and context-sensitive explanation of film tourism engagement. It explains how screened destinations become lived places while also recognizing that Zhangjiajie is a specific natural landscape destination rather than a universal model for all film tourists.

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Appendix A. Supplementary Conceptual and Coding Tables

Table A1. Conceptual distinctions between cinematic-place negotiation and related concepts.

Concept	Main Focus	Limitation	How Cinematic-Place Negotiation Differs
Destination image	Pre-visit perception and travel intention	Does not fully explain on-site reinterpretation	Explains how cinematic images are revised during lived experience
Tourist gaze	Media-shaped ways of seeing	Does not fully explain interaction and meaning reconstruction	Explains how gaze becomes comparison, verification, and extension
Authenticity negotiation	Perceived realness	Not always film-specific	Focuses on the relation between film representation and lived reality
Place-making	Construction of place meaning	Too broad	Explains how cinematic symbols enter place meaning
Fandom/media pilgrimage	Fan travel, route planning, and sharing	Does not apply equally to all visitors	Distinguishes hardcore fans from media-aware tourists
Cinematic-place negotiation	Comparing, verifying, revising, and extending screen images	Core concept of this study	Explains the transition from screened place to lived place

Table A2. Coding progression from initial codes to the cinematic-place negotiation framework.

Representative Evidence	Initial Code	Axial Category	Aggregate Dimension	Model Level
P12 media portrayals made scenery surreal	Media-shaped expectation	Cinematic imagination	Pre-visit mediated frame	Level 1
P3 cinematic elements were more vivid	Iconic recognition	Embodied confirmation	On-site encounter	Level 2
P19 real-life sense of wonder	Lived landscape exceeding screen image	Film–reality comparison	Interpretive negotiation	Level 3
P6 deep connection to film world	Emotional cinematic connection	Emotional integration	Higher-order mechanism	Level 4
P30 cultural heritage beyond cinema	Cultural deepening	Cultural place-making	Engagement outcome	Level 5

Note: The table illustrates the analytical progression rather than the frequency or statistical importance of individual codes.

Table A3. Descriptive distribution of themes across participants.

Theme/Category	Participants	First-Time/ Repeat	Representative Evidence
Media-shaped expectation	24/30	6/18	P12 media portrayals made scenery surreal
Avatar/Hallelujah Mountains recognition	21/30	7/14	P3 cinematic elements were more vivid
Film–reality comparison	19/30	5/14	P19 real life gave a stronger sense of wonder
Photography/check-in practices	17/30	5/12	Photo-taking and viewpoint framing reported across interviews
Guided or themed activities	12/30	2/10	P21 film-themed tours connected the visit with cinematic identity
Emotional connection	16/30	4/12	P6 reported a deep connection to the film world

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Table A3. *Cont.*

Theme/Category	Participants	First-Time/ Repeat	Representative Evidence
Authenticity judgment	14/30	3/11	Participants evaluated whether the lived place confirmed or exceeded screen imagery
Cultural/local meaning	13/30	3/10	P30 described cultural heritage beyond cinematic association
Fandom or fan-like practices	9/30	4/5	Strong fans and casual fans planned check-ins or recognized iconic symbols
Film not being primary motivation	11/30	2/9	Several participants treated film awareness as one frame among leisure, scenery, and culture

Note: Participant counts indicate the descriptive coverage of each theme within the interview dataset. They should not be interpreted as measures of statistical prevalence or theoretical importance.

Appendix B. Expanded Participant Characteristics

The following profile variables summarize participants' screening responses and interview narratives. They are intended to provide contextual information for qualitative interpretation, not to serve as statistically standardized demographic measures.

Table A4. Expanded participant profile: residence, trip type, and motivation.

ID	Origin/Residence	Local/Non-Local	Trip Type	Main Motivation
P1	Hunan/provincial	Local/provincial	Overnight	Scenery revisit and *Avatar*-related recognition
P2	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Leisure travel and landscape photography
P3	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Iconic *Avatar* landscape recognition
P4	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Scenic hiking and film-scene comparison
P5	Zhangjiajie/Hunan local	Local	Day trip	Family leisure and local scenic pride
P6	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Emotional connection with the film world
P7	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Feeling part of a cinematic landscape
P8	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Photography and comparison with media images
P9	Hunan/provincial	Local/provincial	Day trip	Repeat leisure and guide narrative
P10	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	*Avatar* check-in and youth travel
P11	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Nature escape and media memory
P12	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Surreal media-shaped landscape expectation
P13	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Repeat sightseeing and cultural storytelling
P14	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Scenery enhanced by film-related stories
P15	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Photography and landmark comparison
P16	Zhangjiajie/Hunan local	Local	Day trip	Local leisure and film branding
P17	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Cultural interpretation and scenic experience
P18	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Day trip	Youth hiking and visual check-in
P19	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Wonder of the real landscape
P20	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Leisure sightseeing with film awareness
P21	Hunan/provincial	Local/provincial	Day trip	Film-themed tour and repeat leisure
P22	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Family trip and iconic scenery
P23	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Cultural heritage and media symbolism
P24	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Nature photography and *Avatar* reference
P25	Hunan/provincial	Local/provincial	Day trip	Repeat leisure and visual check-in
P26	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	*Avatar* check-in with friends
P27	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Scenic hiking and film–reality comparison
P28	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Guided interpretation and cultural experience
P29	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Family sightseeing and destination fame
P30	Non-local domestic visitor	Non-local	Overnight	Cultural heritage beyond cinema

Cinematic involvement was coded analytically from participants' descriptions of *Avatar*-related awareness, media exposure, travel motivation, check-in practices, and film–reality comparison. The categories distinguish strong fans, casual fans/viewers, media-aware tourists, and non-fan but film-aware visitors.

Table A5. Expanded participant profile: media awareness and cinematic involvement.

ID	Film/Media Awareness Source	Fan Status/Cinematic Involvement	Reasons
P1	Travel platform and *Avatar* clips	Casual viewer; repeat media-aware visitor	Visited Zhangjiajie and compared *Avatar*-related scenery with lived landscape
P2	Short-video platforms and social media	Media-aware tourist	Visited after encountering cinematic and social-media images of Zhangjiajie
P3	*Avatar* clips and online film discussion	Strong *Avatar*-related fan	Connected on-site scenery with remembered cinematic elements
P4	Destination promotion and travel blogs	Casual viewer; repeat visitor	Discussed the difference between promoted film imagery and actual viewpoints
P5	Local tourism promotion	Non-fan but film-aware	Interpreted local landscape through its public film tourism identity
P6	*Avatar* and online fan communities	Strong fan	Reported a deep connection between the lived place and the film world
P7	*Avatar* imagery and travel vlogs	Casual fan	Described embodied presence in an iconic film-associated landscape
P8	Short videos and travel-platform images	Casual viewer	Used photographs and comparison to evaluate cinematic expectation
P9	Local promotion and guide interpretation	Media-aware repeat visitor	Linked repeat visits with guide narratives about the destination's cinematic identity
P10	Social media and *Avatar* clips	Casual fan	Visited with explicit attention to *Avatar*-related symbols and check-in practices
P11	Travel platform recommendations	Casual viewer	Recognized the destination through media images before evaluating the landscape on site
P12	Online visual media and destination videos	Media-aware tourist	Explained how media portrayals made the landscape feel surreal
P13	Friends and travel forums	Casual viewer; repeat visitor	Used prior visits and media stories to reinterpret Zhangjiajie
P14	Destination advertising and film stories	Casual viewer	Connected stories about filming with anticipatory place meaning
P15	Short-video platforms	Media-aware photographer	Framed the visit through cinematic viewpoints and photographic comparison
P16	Local tourism promotion	Non-fan but film-aware	Discussed how local scenery was rebranded through media and film associations
P17	Travel platform and destination guide	Media-aware tourist	Related cinematic recognition to cultural and place interpretation
P18	Short-video platforms	Casual fan	Visited film-associated viewpoints and described check-in practices
P19	Social media and travel guides	Casual viewer	Compared the lived landscape with screen-based expectation and found it stronger
P20	Destination advertising	Media-aware tourist	Understood Zhangjiajie as both scenic landscape and film-related destination

Table A5. *Cont.*

ID	Film/Media Awareness Source	Fan Status/Cinematic Involvement	Reasons
P21	Guide and film-themed tour	Casual fan	Used guided interpretation to connect the visit with cinematic identity
P22	Friends and user-generated travel content	Media-aware tourist	Recognized iconic scenery through shared media and travel stories
P23	Travel platform and guide explanation	Strongly engaged media-aware tourist	Linked film symbolism with deeper cultural interpretation
P24	Short-video platforms	Casual viewer	Used *Avatar* references to organize on-site photographic attention
P25	Local tourism promotion	Non-fan but film-aware	Visited repeatedly while recognizing the destination's film tourism label
P26	Social media and *Avatar* clips	Casual fan	Connected peer travel plans with *Avatar*-related destination recognition
P27	Travel platform images	Media-aware repeat visitor	Compared remembered media images with embodied scenic movement
P28	Travel agency and guide interpretation	Casual viewer	Used guide narratives to interpret the cinematic landscape
P29	Destination advertising and online travel content	Media-aware tourist	Associated destination fame with film-related visual identity
P30	Guide and local cultural interpretation	Media-aware cultural tourist	Extended cinematic recognition toward local cultural place meaning

Appendix C. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Number	Semi-Structured Interview Questions
Q1	What motivated you to visit Zhangjiajie as a film tourism destination? Could you describe any internal or external factors that influenced your decision?
Q2	How have films, media portrayals, or cinematic imagery shaped your expectations of Zhangjiajie before your trip?
Q3	Can you describe the specific aspects of Zhangjiajie that felt connected to the films you have seen? How did these elements influence your anticipation or emotional response?
Q4	During your visit, what experiences did you find most immersive, memorable, or meaningful? Why did these moments stand out to you?
Q5	How did the natural scenery, atmosphere, and cultural features of Zhangjiajie contribute to your overall experience?
Q6	What were your perceptions or mental images of Zhangjiajie during your visit? How did these compare with your pre-trip expectations shaped by film content?
Q7	In what ways did your visit make you feel more involved or engaged with the destination? Can you describe moments when you felt strongly connected, attentive, or emotionally absorbed?
Q8	Did any symbolic, aesthetic, or narrative elements of Zhangjiajie enhance your sense of engagement during the trip? If so, how?
Q9	How did interactions with film-related locations, viewpoints, or storytelling features influence your engagement with the destination?

Q10	Were there any aspects of the experience that strengthened or weakened your connection with Zhangjiajie during the visit? Please explain.
Q11	From your perspective, what characteristics make Zhangjiajie a compelling or distinctive film tourism destination?
Q12	Is there anything else about your motivations, experiences, or perceptions of Zhangjiajie that you feel contributed to your level of engagement with the destination?

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