

# Incorporating on-site activity involvement and sense of belonging into the Mehrabian-Russell model – The experiential value of cultural tourism destinations

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## ABSTRACT

To examine tourists' intentions to revisit and recommend a cultural tourism destination, this study incorporates an “on-site activity involvement” variable into the Mehrabian-Russell model. We draw on a survey of over 500 tourists. Our findings reveal that aesthetics, service staff excellence, and playfulness affect tourists' satisfaction, which in turn affects their sense of belonging. In addition, sense of belonging positively influences tourists' behavioral intentions. Finally, on-site activity involvement moderates the influence of satisfaction on sense of belonging. Several implications of the study are identified, and avenues for future research are suggested.

## 1. Introduction

Cultural products are important to post-modern society and the economy (Throsby, 2008). Among a range of different cultural products, cultural tourism destinations are significant because they provide opportunities to present a snapshot of a region's image and history, symbolize a community's identity, and increase the vibrancy of local economies (Chen, Peng, & Hung, 2015; Hou, Lin, & Morais, 2005; Wansborough & Mageean, 2000). In addition to these benefits, cultural tourism destinations have the potential to become popular tourism attractions because tourists are more interested in cultural tourism and its associated activities now than they were in the past (Cuccia, Guccio, & Rizzo, 2016; Gnoth & Zins, 2013). Cultural tourism destinations are communities, regions, or institutions that provide tourists cultural products (e.g., historical, artistic, or lifestyle/heritage offerings) to consume (Altunel & Erkut, 2015; Silberberg, 1995).

Scholars, policymakers, and cultural organizations have studied cultural tourism destinations from different perspectives since the late 1990s (Armbrecht, 2014; Bonn, Joseph-Mathews, Dai, Hayes, & Cave, 2007; Chen et al., 2015; Cuccia et al., 2016; Hou et al., 2005; McCarthy, 2006; Pappalespore, Maitland, & Smith, 2014). However, the current tourism literature contains gaps that can be narrowed by studying cultural tourism destinations from tourists' perspectives. First, experiential value has been suggested as a key variable that can affect a consumer's subsequent attitude and/or behavioral intentions;

nevertheless, findings regarding the influence of experiential value have been inconsistent with regard to its relationship with service-based products. For example, Wu and Liang (2009) reported that experiential value is an important factor for diners' satisfaction; however, Shukla and Purani (2012) indicated that experiential/hedonic value had an insignificant influence on consumers of luxury goods. These inconsistencies undermine the effectiveness of experiential value in shaping tourists' behavioral intentions and limit the contribution of this concept to the tourism literature.

Second, existing studies on tourists tend to focus on their satisfaction toward a destination; however, tourism operators have been trying to stimulate tourists' sense of belonging as this factor is a more intense and enduring reaction than satisfaction (e.g., Hung et al., 2011; Lee, Kyle, & Scott, 2012; Lin, Fan, & Chau, 2014; Shukla & Purani, 2012). The social identity theory and literature on brand community have suggested that consumers will experience a sense of security when they are using products/brands that they have a strong emotional bond with (Sen, Johnson, Bhattacharya, & Wang, 2015). Moreover, they will act in favor of the brand if they feel that they belong to its community (Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013). Although there are studies on sense of belonging, the emphasis is more on consumer products and brands. Studies on tourism experiences, such as visiting cultural tourism destinations, have not fully indicated how to harness tourists' sense of belonging and how it may affect their behavioral intentions.

Third, researchers have found that tourists' experiences can be

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heavily influenced by their involvement (Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Wong & Tang, 2016). The present tourism literature tends to place more emphasis on the influence of involvement during the planning phase. However, researchers have noted that immersion in on-site activities could have a profound impact on tourists' experiences (Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Lu, Chi, & Liu, 2015; Martin, Collado, & Bosque, 2013). Therefore, researchers have suggested that the influence of on-site activities should be considered when examining tourists' sense of belonging and consumption of cultural destinations (Armbrecht, 2014; Choi, Papandrea, & Bennett, 2007; Gnoth & Zins, 2013; Throsby, 1995).

To close the research gaps mentioned above, this study investigates how the experiential value of cultural tourism destinations influences tourists' behavioral intentions by incorporating an "on-site activity involvement" variable into the Mehrabian-Russell model (M-R model). Through this proposed framework, this study aims to contribute to the literature and practices in the following ways. First, it examines the influence of experiential value variables (i.e., service staff excellence, aesthetic, playfulness, and consumer return on investment) on tourists' satisfaction. Second, it investigates how on-site activity involvement moderates the relationship between tourists' satisfaction and their sense of belonging. Third, the article outlines several strategic implications and provides avenues for future research.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. M-R model and on-site involvement

For the research framework in this study, we adapted the M-R model, which is rooted in the study of environmental psychology. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) studied the influence of environmental stimuli on individuals' emotions and behavior. Based on their study, they suggested that environmental stimuli can affect organisms, which in turn influences an individual's response. In consumption contexts, environmental stimuli include a range of atmospheric features, such as lighting, temperature, scent, and color (Chen et al., 2015). When exposed to these stimuli, individuals' emotions, such as the feeling of pleasure, arousal, and dominance, will be affected (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

The M-R model and its modifications have been applied in different contexts to examine the influence of environmental stimuli on consumers' evaluation of their consumption experiences and behaviors, such as retail (Ong & Khong, 2011), event management (Wong, Li, Chen, & Peng, 2017), restaurant management (Jang & Namkung, 2009), and tourist studies (Su & Hsu, 2013). For example, Wong et al. (2017) confirmed the service staff quality, atmospherics, and information rate can affect trade show visitors' emotions, which, in turn, can affect their intentions to revisit and recommend. Additionally, Chen et al. (2015) found diners' emotions are affected by the quality of food and drink, as well as the service staff quality, atmospherics, and their interactions with other customers. The proposition that stimuli affect consumers' emotions, which in turn influence their behavioral intentions (e.g., revisiting and/or recommending a restaurant), has generally been supported. The M-R model is suitable for this research because tourism destinations often contain some elements that can stimulate visitors' emotions, such as friendly tour guides, impressive exhibitions, and fun/interactive activities, as tourism operators believe these methods may lead to better evaluations from visitors (Kirillova, Fu, Lehto, & Cai, 2014; Pappalespore et al., 2014; Swanson & Hsu, 2009; Wu, 2007).

Scholars who have adapted the M-R model consider stimuli and behaviors that are relevant to their settings (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Wong et al., 2017). The present study focuses on the perceived experiential value of cultural tourism destinations. Pine and Gilmore (1999, 2011) have made significant contributions to the experience economy literature. They argued that in the experience economy organizations' revenue is associated with the experiential value that a

product can provide. Furthermore, these authors suggested that experience-based products are not identical to service-based products despite there are overlapping areas. In their view, the former more strongly emphasizes building memorable and personal experiences, while the latter is about delivering intangible and customized services (Chang, 2018). In terms of building memorable and personal experiences, Pine and Gilmore (1999) highlighted the importance of educational (e.g., desire to learn), entertainment (e.g., desire to be joyful), escapism (e.g., desire to get away from normal routines), and aesthetics (e.g., desire to be in a particular place).

Researchers who have adapted Pine and Gilmore's (1999) typology have modified the dimensions of experiential value that are relevant to their settings. For example, when studying luxury restaurant consumption, Wu and Liang (2009) focused on customer return on investment, aesthetics, service staff excellence, and escapism. When studying Internet shopping, Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon (2001) suggested that perceived experiential value consists of four dimensions: playfulness, aesthetics, consumer return on investment, and service excellence. This present study adapts Tsai and Wang's (2017) dimensions, which are playfulness, aesthetics, consumer return on investment, and service staff excellence, because they also focused on consumers' evaluation of tourism products. Consumer research and tourism studies have often treated experiential value as a unidimensional construct or a construct that has multiple sub-dimensions (e.g., Chen, Yeh, & Huan, 2014; Jamal, Othman, & Muhammad, 2011; Wu & Liang, 2009). However, Tsai and Wang (2017) suggest that exploring the effect of each dimension on tourists' consumption behavior can improve the understanding of tourism products' experiential value.

In this study, service staff excellence refers to tourists' overall perception of the relative inferiority or superiority of a cultural tourism destination's service staff (Chen et al., 2015). Consumer return on investment addresses tourists' perception of the cost and sacrifice involved in visiting a cultural tourism destination (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009). Playfulness is defined as a cultural tourism destination's ability to encourage tourists to be actively involved during their visits and to enjoy the activities it offers (Wu & Liang, 2011). Aesthetics refers to a tourist's perception of a cultural tourism destination's beauty and artistic value (Breiby, 2014).

To measure tourists' emotions when visiting cultural tourism destinations, this study examines satisfaction and sense of belonging (Lin et al., 2014). Lin et al. (2014) noted that satisfaction and sense of belonging are both emotional constructs. Sense of belonging is defined as a tourist's feeling of identification with or attachment to a cultural tourism destination that he/she has visited (Lin et al., 2014). Satisfaction is defined as a tourist's overall affective appraisal of a cultural tourism destination that he/she has visited (Dagger & David, 2012). When compared to satisfaction, sense of belonging is a more enduring reaction (Lin et al., 2014). By examining both variables, this study will be able to explore the connection between a relative short-term response to cultural tourism destinations' environmental stimuli and a more enduring connection between a cultural tourism destination and its visitors.

Researchers studying tourists have acknowledged that the relevance of tourist involvement has increased because of its effect on tourists' experience (Lee & Chang, 2012; Lu et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2013; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Wong & Tang, 2016). Kim and Ritchie (2014) noted that involvement can have a significant impact on tourism experiences when travelers plan for their trips (i.e., planning phase) and when travelers are at their destinations (i.e., on-site activities phase). The former refers to tourists' preparation for the trip, their motivations, and the personal relevance of the trip. The latter refers to how travelers engage with tourism activities and develop their interests (Martin et al., 2013).

A cultural tourism destination often offers a greater number of activities than other types of tourism destinations (Armbrecht, 2014; Choi et al., 2007; Throsby, 1995; Throsby, 1999; Wansborough & Mageean,

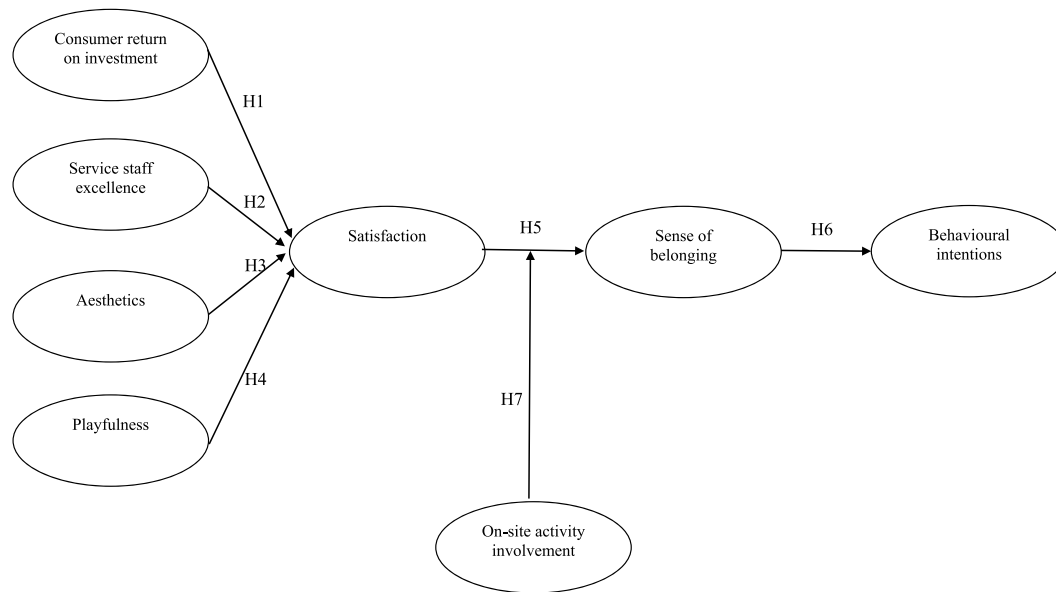


Fig. 1. Research framework.

2000). To account for the influence of cultural activities on tourists, the current study incorporates on-site involvement into the M-R model. In this study, on-site involvement is defined as the extent to which a tourist is interested and engaged in activities hosted by a cultural tourism destination (Lee & Chang, 2012; Lu et al., 2015). Research has shown that on-site activity involvement is a psychographic construct that can lead to tourists' satisfaction (Lee & Chang, 2012; Lu et al., 2015); nevertheless, its moderating effect remains to be explored.

## 2.2. Research hypotheses

Pursuant to the literature reviewed above and the study's research objectives, a research framework for the study is proposed (Fig. 1). In terms of the antecedents of tourists' behavioral intentions, this research focuses on the effects of sense of belonging, which can be influenced by satisfaction. As a factor that contributes to tourists' satisfaction, this study considers cultural tourism destinations' experiential value (i.e., consumer return on investment, aesthetics, service excellence, and playfulness). In addition, it examines the ability of on-site activity involvement to moderate the effect of satisfaction on sense of belonging.

The first hypothesis refers to the influence of consumer return on investment on tourists' satisfaction with cultural tourism destinations. Researchers who have studied the consumption of tourism/hospitality products have suggested that consumers compare the benefits derived from a product with the sacrifices made to obtain the product, such as financial sacrifices (Chen & Peng, 2018; Yang & Mattila, 2016). According to Tsai and Wang (2017) and Wu and Liang (2009), consumers are aware that tourism and hospitality products can be expensive, but they justify the cost because of the potential benefits, such as memorable experiences and personal wellbeing.

Similar to the consumption of non-essential products, such as dining at upscale restaurants, tourists must evaluate the cost and sacrifice involved before visiting a tourism destination (Yang & Mattila, 2016). Previous studies have confirmed that return on investment has a significant influence on tourists' satisfaction (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Prebensen, Vittersø, & Dahl, 2013). For example, in their research on how tourism products are perceived by Muslim tourists, Eid and El-Gohary (2015) confirmed that value for money is an important attribute that tourists consider.

Given that participating in tourism activity is not an essential consumption and that tourists sometimes must be selective about which

destination to visit, questions such as whether a cultural tourism destination can provide good value for the money remain concerns for tourists. This study hypothesizes that consumer return on investment has a significant impact on tourists' satisfaction with cultural tourism destinations (H1).

**H1.** Consumer return on investment has a positive effect on tourists' satisfaction with cultural tourism destinations.

The second hypothesis relates to the influence of service staff on tourists' satisfaction. At tourism destinations and tourism events, service staff guide visitors, provide information, and assist visitors when needed (Swanson & Hsu, 2009; Wu, 2007). Previous studies have confirmed that staff service quality affects consumers' satisfaction. If staff members are helpful, reliable, and knowledgeable about their products, then consumers are more satisfied with their experiences and the products that they have purchased (e.g., Ekinci & Dawes, 2009; Wu & Liang, 2009). Cultural tourism destinations may contain traditions and rituals that are unfamiliar to tourists, and the surroundings can be difficult to navigate (Gnoth & Zins, 2013); therefore, the helpfulness and competency of service staff might have an influence on tourists' overall evaluation of the destination. This study thus proposes that if a cultural tourism destination's service staff assist visitors in a timely manner and are competent, then tourists will be more pleased with the destination (H2).

**H2.** Service staff excellence has a positive effect on tourists' satisfaction with cultural tourism destinations.

The third hypothesis refers to the influence of playfulness on tourists' satisfaction. Perceived playfulness has been considered a factor that positively influences an individual's consumption experience (Hoffman & Novak, 2009; Kiili, 2005). Previous research has proposed that when people participate in activities of their own choosing, such as tourism and hospitality activities, their levels of satisfaction will improve if the activities are enjoyable (Ryu, Han, & Jang, 2010; Tsai & Wang, 2017; Vladimirov, 2012). Ryu et al. (2010) found that consumers' perception of playfulness can improve their satisfaction in the hospitality service industry. Providing hedonic value to visitors and the public is one of the purposes of cultural destinations (Armbrecht, 2014; Pappalespore et al., 2014). Based on the aforementioned studies, this study proposes that cultural tourism destinations will exceed tourists' expectations if tourists perceive the destinations as enjoyable and fun (H3).

**H3.** Playfulness has a positive effect on tourists' satisfaction with cultural tourism destinations.

The fourth hypothesis is related to the influence of aesthetics on tourists' satisfaction with cultural tourism destinations. Perceived aesthetics has been considered a key factor that can affect consumers' satisfaction with a consumption experience (Vieira, 2010; Wang, Hernandez, & Minor, 2010; Wang, Minor, & Wei, 2011). In their research on tourists' aesthetic judgment, Kirillova et al. (2014) noted that themes such as colorfulness and grandness are central to tourists' perceptions of whether a destination is aesthetically appealing. They also suggested that future studies should explore the linkage between destinations' perceived aesthetics and tourists' satisfaction, which has been underexplored. Some cultural tourism destinations and events build their image and attract tourists through highlighting their aesthetic value (Gnoth & Zins, 2013; Tsai & Wang, 2017; Zhang, Tang, Shi, Liu, & Wang, 2008); however, empirical evidence on this factor's influence is lacking. Building on Vieira (2010), Wang et al. (2010), Wang et al. (2011), and Zhang et al. (2008), the present research proposes that tourists' satisfaction with cultural destinations will be higher if they perceive them as attractive and/or impressive (H4).

**H4.** Aesthetics has a positive effect on tourists' satisfaction with cultural tourism destinations.

The fifth hypothesis tests the effect of satisfaction on tourists' sense of belonging when visiting a cultural tourism destination. The interaction between satisfaction and sense of belonging has been studied by consumer behavior researchers. For example, in their research on social network site users, Lin et al. (2014) noted that satisfaction and sense of belonging are both emotional constructs, but sense of belonging is a more enduring reaction than satisfaction. Furthermore, these authors proposed and confirmed that satisfied users are more likely to feel that they belong to a social network site's community. In the tourism literature, Lee et al. (2012) proposed and confirmed that a festival tourist's satisfaction can affect his/her sense of belonging with the event, the destination, and other participants. Building on Lee et al.'s (2012) findings, the present research extends the tourism literature by proposing that tourists who are very pleased with their cultural tourism destination visits will be more likely to feel a strong sense of belonging (H5).

**H5.** Satisfaction has a positive effect on tourists' sense of belonging to cultural tourism destinations.

The sixth hypothesis relates to the influence of sense of belonging on a tourist's behavioral intentions. Researchers studying brand communities and brand identification have proposed that sense of belonging is an important element of consumers' future behavioral intentions, such as intentions to recommend and intentions to purchase (Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008; Cheung & Lee, 2012; Lu, Zhao, & Wang, 2010). The concept of brand community has been explored in tourism destination contexts, including cultural tourism destinations (Chen et al., 2015; Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, & Preciado, 2013). The results have shown that being able to identify with a destination brand and its community can shape tourists' intentions to revisit and intentions to recommend. Based on the above discussion, this study hypothesizes that a tourist is more likely to recommend and to revisit a cultural tourism destination if he/she feels like a member (H6).

**H6.** Sense of belonging has a positive effect on tourists' behavioral intentions.

The seventh hypothesis examines the ability of on-site activity involvement to moderate the influence of satisfaction on sense of belonging. This relationship has been underexplored in tourism studies;

however, similar research has been conducted in the context of electronic-banking services (Sanchez-Franco, 2009). Sanchez-Franco (2009) found that consumers who are satisfied with a bank's e-banking services are more likely to be emotionally committed to the brand community if they are involved with the purchase process. The definitions of commitment and sense of belonging both include the concept of an enduring emotional reaction toward a community (Lin et al., 2014; Sanchez-Franco, 2009); therefore, it could be inferred that tourists' satisfaction with cultural tourism destinations has a greater impact on their sense of belonging if they participate in activities that they really want to do during their visit. We therefore hypothesize that the satisfaction of those tourists with high involvement in on-site activities influences their sense of belonging more significantly than it does for those with lower involvement (H7).

**H7.** On-site activity involvement moderates the relationship between tourists' satisfaction and their sense of belonging.

### 3. Research method

#### 3.1. Research context

To examine this study's proposed framework, we focused on Taiwan's cultural and creative parks. After observing the proposals by the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) and the benefits that cultural and creative industries brought to the United Kingdom, Taiwan's government made the promotion of these industries a top priority in 2002 (Chang, 2007). Central to this initiative was the planning of five cultural and creative parks (Chang, 2007): the Tainan Cultural and Creative Industrial Park, the Chiayi Cultural and Creative Industries Park, the Hualien Cultural and Creative Industries Park, the Taichung Cultural and Creative Industries Park, and the Huashan 1914 Creative Park.

These five parks were former wineries located in urban areas. They have been abandoned for a period of time due to various reasons such as pollution and high maintenance costs. Because these former factories occupy large spaces, can be modernized with reasonable effort and have cultural/historical significance. For example, the buildings in Taichung Cultural and Creative Industries Park were built during Japan's rule, and the Ministry of Culture considered them suitable candidates to be used as cultural and creative parks to attract creative workers and visitors while providing the region with regeneration opportunities. As a result of the support of government, businesses, and cultural/creative workers, these parks gradually opened to the public beginning in 2005. Between 2008 and 2016, the number of visitors to these five parks has increased from 490,000 to 6,799,000 (Ministry of Culture, 2018). Furthermore, by the end of 2016, there were 23 cultural and creative parks in Taiwan. Cultural and creative parks are characterized by high levels of on-site activities (Armbrecht, 2014; Choi et al., 2007; Gnoth & Zins, 2013; Throsby, 1995); therefore, tourists have many opportunities to visit cultural tourism destinations and to interact with the activities provided by operators.

#### 3.2. Expert panel

As of July 2017, there were 23 cultural and creative parks in Taiwan. We first needed to identify a suitable cultural tourism destination to include in this research. A list that contained Taiwan's 23 cultural and creative parks was submitted for review by five tourism researchers who are knowledgeable about Taiwan's cultural tourism destinations. The aims and objectives of the current study were explained to these experts. After the experts reviewed the list, five cultural and creative parks that the experts considered suitable for this research

were selected: Tainan Cultural and Creative Industrial Park, Chiayi Cultural and Creative Industries Park, Hualien Cultural and Creative Industries Park, Taichung Cultural and Creative Industries Park, and Huashan 1914 Creative Park. These five parks are popular among Taiwanese tourists (Ministry of Culture, 2018). This selection included parks situated in northern Taiwan, central Taiwan, southern Taiwan, and eastern Taiwan (Appendix 1). Furthermore, it included a diverse range of themes such as popular culture, ethnic minority culture, and colonial culture. The main aim was to increase the likelihood that this study's sample would include visitors from different regions who have a diverse range of interests in cultural and creative activities.

### 3.3. Sampling and data collection methods for the main study

To examine the proposed framework, the data collection involved trained interviewers. The interviewers were recruited to gather data from Taiwanese tourists who visited Tainan Cultural and Creative Industrial Park, Chiayi Cultural and Creative Industries Park, Hualien Cultural and Creative Industries Park, Taichung Cultural and Creative Industries Park, and Huashan 1914 Creative Park.

A non-probability respondent-driven sampling approach was used for the data collection. An on-site purposive sampling method was used to recruit the participants, and an interception technique was used to approach the tourists. The purpose of the study was explained to tourists who agreed to participate, and a set of screening questions was then asked. To be eligible for the interview, potential participants needed to be over the age of 18 years. Interviewers approached potential participants when they were about to leave. The survey was given to respondents who passed the screening process. The trained interviewers checked for missing data, debriefed the respondents, and thanked them for their assistance once the survey was returned. During the ten-week data collection period, a total of 508 usable surveys were collected. The effective return rate was 82.3%. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic information.

### 3.4. Questionnaire design

The participants completed a survey that consisted of two sections (Appendix 2). In the first section, participant demographics, such as gender and age, were collected. The second section consisted of 27 statements about tourists' behavioral intentions (Jang & Namkung, 2009), satisfaction (Taplin, 2013), on-site activity involvement (Kim & Richie, 2014), sense of belonging (Zhao, Lu, Wang, Chau, & Zhang, 2012), aesthetics (Tsai & Wang, 2017), consumer return on investment (Lee, Sung, Suh, & Zhao, 2017; Tsai & Wang, 2017), service staff excellence (Wong et al., 2017), and playfulness (Tsai & Wang, 2017). To make the questions relevant, the contexts of the original questions were modified to the context of this research; for example, "Tainanese food"

**Table 1**  
Characteristics of the participants (N = 508).

Demographic traits		%
Gender	Male	38.8
	Female	61.2
Respondent's age	Between 18 and 30 years old	12.8
	Between 31 and 40 years old	41.1
	Between 41 and 50 years old	38
	Between 51 and 60 years old	4.1
	61 years or older	4
Education	High school degree	9.6
	College degree	15.6
	University	40
	Postgraduate degree or above	34.8

was changed to refer to the cultural tourism destination visited by the participants. These statements were generated from a review of the previous tourism literature. To maintain consistency, a seven-point Likert-type scale was used in the item design. The items for each variable are presented in Table 2.

## 4. Data analysis and results

### 4.1. Model measurement

IBM SPSS AMOS 24 was used to examine the data. A two-step approach to structural equation modeling was used for data analysis (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). All factor loadings on the intended latent variables were significant and > 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and the squared-multiple correlations supported the reliability of the measurement items that were used. The construct reliability was upheld because all of the constructs had composite reliabilities that were > 0.7, the recommended threshold (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012).

The convergent validity was evaluated in terms of the factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 3, the AVE values ranged from 0.53 to 0.80, thereby confirming the convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Lastly, the discriminant validity was examined by comparing the AVE of each individual construct with the shared variances between each individual construct and all other constructs. The discriminant validity was confirmed given that the AVE value for each construct was greater than the squared correlation between constructs.

A common latent factor method was used to examine the common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Jeong-Yeon, & Podsakoff, 2003). A latent variable was added to this study's confirmatory factor analysis model and was then connected to all observed variables in the model. The standardized regression weights of the original model were then compared with those of the new model (Mulki & Wilkinson, 2017). The comparison demonstrated that the outcomes were similar between the two models, supporting the assumption that common method bias was not a significant issue for this study (Mulki & Wilkinson, 2017).

### 4.2. Structural model

After the overall measurement model was found to be acceptable, the structural model was tested. The model fit was good ( $\chi^2/df = 2.543$ ; RMSEA = 0.055; CFI = 0.957; NFI = 0.932). The results obtained from examining the proposed hypotheses are presented in Table 4. H1 was not supported ( $\beta = 0.10$ ;  $t = 1.45$ ;  $p > .05$ ); therefore, consumer return on investment had no significant impact on tourists' satisfaction. H2 suggested that service staff excellence would have a positive influence on tourists' satisfaction. The results ( $\beta = 0.15$ ;  $t = 2.46$ ;  $p < .05$ ) demonstrate that this relationship is positive and significant. H3 was supported because aesthetics was revealed to have a significantly positive impact on tourists' satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.20$ ;  $t = 2.43$ ;  $p < .05$ ). The results supported hypothesis H4 ( $\beta = 0.46$ ;  $t = 6.74$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and therefore confirmed that playfulness positively influences tourists' satisfaction. H5 was supported ( $\beta = 0.45$ ;  $t = 11.84$ ;  $p < .001$ ); satisfaction had a positive impact on tourists' sense of belonging. H6 suggested that sense of belonging would have a positive influence on tourists' behavioral intentions. The results ( $\beta = 0.37$ ;  $t = 9.30$ ;  $p < .001$ ) revealed that this relationship is positive and significant.

### 4.3. The moderating effects (H7)

H7 proposed that on-site activity involvement would moderate the relationship between satisfaction and sense of belonging. To examine

**Table 2**  
Descriptive analysis of the measures (N = 508).

Construct/Adopted from	Items
Consumer return on investment (CROI)/Tsai and Wang (2017); Lee et al. (2017)	CROI1: Visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X <sup>1</sup> has good economic value. CROI2: I am willing to wait in line to visit Cultural Tourism Destination X. CROI3: I am happy with the price of visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X. CROI4: The total expenditure of visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X is acceptable.
Service staff excellence (SE)/Wong et al. (2017)	SE1: Cultural Tourism Destination X's staff members are willing and able to provide service in a timely manner. SE2: Cultural Tourism Destination X's staff members make the effort to understand my needs. SE3: Cultural Tourism Destination X's staff members are competent (i.e., knowledgeable and skilful).
Aesthetics (A)/Tsai and Wang (2017)	A1: The environment of Cultural Tourism Destination X is aesthetically appealing. A2: Decorations of Cultural Tourism Destination X are attractive. A3: The style of Cultural Tourism Destination X is very impressive.
Playfulness (P)/Tsai and Wang (2017)/	P1: Visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X let me forget worries. P2: Visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X makes me feel like I am in another world. P3: I enjoy the style Cultural Tourism Destination X displayed. P4: I perceive the pure enjoyment of visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X.
On-site activity involvement (O)/Kim and Ritchie (2014)	O1: I visited a place where I really want to go. O2: While visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X, I enjoyed activities which I really wanted to do. O3: I was interested in the activities Cultural Tourism Destination X hosted.
Satisfaction (S)/Taplin (2013)	S1: I was satisfied with this visit to Cultural Tourism Destination X. S2: My expectations for this visit were exceeded. S3: I am pleased with this visit.
Sense of belonging (SB)/Zhao et al. (2012)	SB1: I feel a strong sense of belonging to Cultural Tourism Destination X. SB2: I feel I am a member of Cultural Tourism Destination X's community. SB3: I feel other Cultural Tourism Destination X community members are my close friends. SB4: I like other members of Cultural Tourism Destination X's community.
Behavioral intentions (BI)/Jang and Namkung (2009)	BI1: I would like to come back to Cultural Tourism Destination X in the future. BI2: I plan to revisit this cultural tourism destination in the future. BI3: I would recommend this cultural tourism destination to my friends or others.

In the survey, "Cultural Tourism Destination X" is replaced to the cultural and creative park visited by the respondents

**Table 3**  
Correlation between constructs following CFA.

	Mean	SD	CrA	CR	AVE	C	SE	A	P	S	SB	BI
<b>C</b>	3.87	0.59	0.80	0.82	0.53	<b>0.72</b>						
<b>SE</b>	3.40	0.86	0.85	0.86	0.67	0.37	<b>0.82</b>					
<b>A</b>	3.07	0.86	0.86	0.86	0.67	0.31	0.56	<b>0.82</b>				
<b>P</b>	3.03	0.87	0.88	0.88	0.64	0.31	0.52	0.66	<b>0.80</b>			
<b>S</b>	3.30	0.90	0.92	0.93	0.80	0.28	0.48	0.54	0.58	<b>0.89</b>		
<b>SB</b>	3.34	0.85	0.93	0.93	0.77	0.41	0.41	0.53	0.61	0.59	<b>0.87</b>	
<b>BI</b>	3.86	0.74	0.86	0.85	0.68	0.58	0.31	0.32	0.25	0.26	0.34	<b>0.85</b>

- a. Bold numbers on the diagonal parentheses are square root of each construct's AVE value.
- b. SD = Standard deviation; CrA = Cronach's Alphas; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted.
- c. C = Consumer return on investment; SE = Service excellence; A = Aesthetics; P = Playfulness; S = Satisfaction; SB = Sense of belonging; BI = Behavioral intentions.

**Table 4**  
Hypotheses tests (H1–H6).

Path	Standard estimate	t	Results
H1: C→S	0.10	1.45	Not support
H2: SE→S	0.15 <sub>*</sub>	2.46	Support
H3: A→S	0.20 <sub>*</sub>	2.43	Support
H4: P→S	0.46 <sub>***</sub>	6.74	Support
H5: S→SB	0.45 <sub>***</sub>	11.84	Support
H6: SB→BI	0.37 <sub>***</sub>	9.30	Support

C = Consumer return on investment; SE = Service excellence; A = Aesthetics; P = Playfulness; S = Satisfaction; SB = Sense of belonging; BI = Behavioral intentions.

\* p < .05.  
\*\*\* p < .001.

this hypothesis, a multi-group invariance analysis was performed, following the procedure recommended. This allowed participants to be divided into high (N = 233) and low on-site activity involvement groups (N = 275). The results revealed a significant difference between

them; therefore, H7 was supported (Table 5).

## 5. Discussion and managerial implications

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

This study incorporates on-site activity involvement into the M-R model. The findings reveal that the application of this study's proposed model to the context is appropriate. Moreover, on-site activity involvement can moderate the influence of satisfaction on sense of belonging. The following section further elaborates on this study's implications for theory and how the findings compare and contrast with those of similar studies.

First, the present literature confirms that aesthetics, playfulness, and service staff excellence can affect satisfaction (Chen et al., 2014; Jamal et al., 2011; Wu & Liang, 2009). In other words, tourists' satisfaction increases if a cultural tourism destination's environment is perceived as attractive (i.e., aesthetics), if it can allow visitors to forget their worries (i.e., playfulness), and if its service staff is helpful (i.e., service staff excellence). Through examining the effects of different dimensions of

**Table 5**  
Two group path model estimate (H7).

Path estimated	High involvement (N = 233)	Low involvement (N = 275)	Z-score	Results
H7: Satisfaction → Sense of belonging	0.71***	0.37***	3.483***	Support

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

experiential value on tourist satisfaction, the present research adds new insight to the literature on perceived experiential value.

Although previous studies have suggested that a product's (or service's) economic value/return on investment can have a direct impact on consumers (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Prebensen et al., 2013), this study's results do not support this contention. In this study, tourists' satisfaction with a destination was not significantly affected by whether they perceived that a cultural tourism destination had good economic value. Petrick's (2005) research on cruise passengers is one of the studies that have produced similar results. In his research, Petrick (2005) proposes that tourists might care little about the price of their trips unless they purchased a budget package. In alignment with Petrick's interpretation, it is possible that cultural tourism destinations are more attractive to tourists who place less emphasis on their return on investment. It is also likely that this result is due to the difficulties associated with putting a price on cultural goods, such as dance performances (Throsby, 2003); therefore, this relationship was not significant. However, these interpretations will require additional research.

Second, research employing the M-R model has consistently indicated that stimuli can positively influence organisms, which, in turn, can affect responses (Chen et al., 2015; Jang & Namkung, 2009). This study's findings are generally aligned with the literature. A tourist is more likely to revisit and recommend a cultural tourism destination and spread positive word-of-mouth if he/she feels a strong sense of belonging from feeling satisfied with these destinations' experiential value. The findings of this study support Pine and Gilmore's (1999, 2011) works on experiential economy theory, which states that an organization that sells experience-based products, such as tourism operators, can improve its performance by providing customers personalized and memorable experiences. Moreover, by incorporating a sense of belonging variable and testing its effects, this study makes an incremental contribution to the literature. As Lin et al. (2014) suggested, sense of belonging is a more enduring emotional construct than satisfaction. As the results show, satisfied tourists have a strong sense of belonging. This research further contributes to related tourism literature and paves the way for additional research to investigate the factors that contribute to brand community building.

Third, this study adds new information to the tourism literature through examining the moderating effects of on-site activity involvement. There are two phases of tourism experience in which tourists develop involvement: planning and on-site activities (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Researchers have noted that on-site activities could have a profound impact on tourists' experiences, but this has been scarcely studied (Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Lu et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2013). This study's finding shows that building environments in which tourists feel that they belong is a key success factor for tourism destinations because these visitors act in favor of the destination. It also demonstrates that it is easier to make visitors feel that they belong if their expectations are exceeded and if they have a good time through the activities provided by the tourism operators. This is similar to the consumption of e-banking services (Sanchez-Franco, 2009). This study is unique in capturing such a moderating effect and bringing together sense of belonging, satisfaction, and involvement.

## 5.2. Managerial implications

This study has several managerial implications for practitioners to

consider. First, to promote a deeply held commitment to revisit and recommend a cultural tourism destination among tourists, practitioners should focus on developing tourists' sense of belonging. Tourism operators could consider facilitating a sense of belonging through social events, such as annual gathering and festivals. Fournier and Lee (2009) found that shared experience through activities could be one of the key factors that bond a group of consumers together.

Because some consumers might not have access to these community events, practitioners could also consider facilitating a sense of belonging through social network sites. Potential visitors could obtain information from operators and form a bond with other tourists, and such sites could connect tourists who have visited because they shared similar experiences. Operators could consider promoting these virtual communities through traditional media, such as travel magazines, and social media, such as Instagram. Additionally, practitioners could provide information and opportunities for joining their communities during tourists' visits. Cultural tourism destination operators need to have a team dedicated to responding to visitors' and prospective visitors' concerns and feedback raised in destinations' official and unofficial discussion forums in order to build a virtual community to which consumers feel that they belong.

Second, to develop tourists' sense of belonging, practitioners must ensure that tourists' expectations are exceeded and that there are sufficient on-site activities in which tourists can be involved. Involvement has been demonstrated to have the ability to reinforce the influence of satisfaction on sense of belonging. When designing activities, tourists' ability to coproduce the meaning of cultural experiences should not be overlooked. Promoters of cultural tourism destinations may want to collaborate with creative workers, such as artists and performers, to increase the number of on-site activities, especially activities in which tourists can directly participate, such as dance lessons and painting classes.

Third, this study's findings can help cultural tourism destinations that have attracted tourists and intend to attract more tourists by assessing their perceived experiential value. As is the case with other tourism destinations, having a playful environment is essential to tourists' satisfaction with cultural destinations. Moreover, being able to impress visitors through superior service staff and through aesthetics, such as having artistic interior designs, can contribute to tourists' satisfaction. Tourism operators should not take advantage of tourists; however, when hosting tourists, they could set their price at a premium rate in order to improve their service staff quality, playfulness, and aesthetics.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are three gaps in the cultural tourism literature. First, findings regarding the effects of experiential value have been inconsistent. Second, few tourism studies have examined the influence of sense of belonging, which is a more intense and enduring emotional reaction than satisfaction. Third, researchers have recommended further investigating how tourists' experiences can be affected by their immersion in on-site activities. This study makes an incremental contribution to the literature by incorporating an "on-site activity involvement" variable into the M-R model. The results showed that aesthetics, service staff excellence, and playfulness affect tourists' satisfaction. Nevertheless, consumer return on investment cannot affect tourists' satisfaction significantly. Additionally, tourists' satisfaction can

affect their sense of belonging, which in turn affects their behavioral intentions. Finally, we confirmed that immersion in on-site activities could be crucial to the relationship between satisfaction and sense of belonging.

Although this research makes several contributions to the pertinent literature, it also has its limitations. First, the cultural tourism destinations included in this research are well known in Taiwan. Future studies should be extended beyond Taiwan to other countries that have a desire to develop their cultural and creative industries, including China, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand. Additionally, researchers could explore other types of cultural tourism destinations' experiential values such as museums and sites with religious significance. Second, as cultural tourism destinations do, festivals and theme parks contain many on-site activities. Future studies could consider applying this study's framework to these destinations to broaden its generalizability. Third, the percentage of the participants in this study who received higher education is higher than the national average, which is approximately 60% (Ministry of Interior, 2018). Future research might want to explore this phenomenon using different sampling methods, such as the quota sampling method, to see if cultural tourism destinations are more appealing to visitors with certain types of educational

backgrounds or if visitors with higher educational backgrounds are more willing to respond to surveys related to cultural product consumption experiences.

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**Statement of contribution**

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**Appendix A. Destination's location**

	Destination	Location	Main themes
1	Huashan 1914 Creative Park	Taipei (Northern Taiwan)	Cultural creative industries, lifestyle, and aesthetics
2	Taichung Cultural and Creative Industries Park	Taichung (Central Taiwan)	Integrating cultural creative industry with tourism
3	Chiayi Cultural and Creative Industries Park	Chiayi (Southwestern Taiwan)	Innovating traditional art and cultural activities
4	Tainan Cultural and Creative Industrial Park	Tainan (Southern Taiwan)	Creative industry, innovative living
5	Hualien Cultural and Creative Industries Park	Hualien (Eastern Taiwan)	Design, architecture, and art exhibitions

(Organized by authors)

**Appendix B. Survey used in this research**

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Please answer the following questions

A. My gender is:  Male  Female

B. My age is: 18–30 31–40 41–50 51–60  61 above

C. My highest education level is  Postgraduate degree or above University  College degree  High school degree  Other

D. My occupation is Manufacture sector  Service sector  Public sector  Student  Other/Retired

E. I have visited this destination \_\_\_ times.

F. I live in \_\_\_.

Please tick the box on each line to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

1. Visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X<sup>1</sup> has good economic value.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
2. I am willing to wait in line to visit Cultural Tourism Destination X.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
3. I am happy with the price of visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
4. The total expenditure of visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X is acceptable.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
5. Cultural Tourism Destination X's staff members are willing and able to provide service in a timely manner.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
6. Cultural Tourism Destination X's staff members make the effort to understand my needs.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
7. Cultural Tourism Destination X's staff members are competent (i.e., knowledgeable and skillful).  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
8. The environment of Cultural Tourism Destination X is aesthetically appealing.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
9. Decorations of Cultural Tourism Destination X are attractive.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
10. The style of Cultural Tourism Destination X is very impressive.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
11. Visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X let me forget worries.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
12. Visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X makes me feel like I am in another world.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
13. I enjoy the style and commitment Cultural Tourism Destination X displayed.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree



14. I perceive the pure enjoyment of visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
15. I visited a place where I really want to go.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
16. While visiting Cultural Tourism Destination X, I enjoyed activities which I really wanted to do.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
17. I was interested in the main activities of this tourism experience.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
18. I was satisfied with this visit to Cultural Tourism Destination X.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
19. My expectations for this visit were exceeded.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
20. I am pleased with this visit.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
21. I feel a strong sense of belonging to Cultural Tourism Destination X.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
22. I feel I am a member of Cultural Tourism Destination X's community.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
23. I feel other Cultural Tourism Destination X community members are my close friends.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
24. I like other members of Cultural Tourism Destination X's community.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
25. I would like to come back to Cultural Tourism Destination X in the future.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
26. I plan to revisit this cultural tourism destination in the future.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
27. I would recommend this cultural tourism destination to my friends or others.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.

<sup>1</sup> In the survey, "Cultural Tourism Destination X" is replaced to the destination visited by the respondents.

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