

AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECT OF AESTHETICS ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION OF CULTURAL AND CREATIVE PRODUCTS

GUAN TIAN ¹, SIEW POH PHUNG ², FRAH RUKHSAR KHAN ³ and
WANG YUJIAO ⁴

^{1, 2, 3, 4} Limkokwing Graduate School, Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, Cyberjaya, Malaysia.
Wuchang Institute of Technology, Wuhan, China.

³Email: 108057107@qq.com

Abstract

This research aims to improve consumer purchase intention by examining the influencing factors of consumer purchase intention for cultural and creative products in Hubei, China, so as to not only meet the actual needs of consumers, but also to promote the healthy development of cultural and creative companies and industries. This study uses culture as the mediating variable and science and technology as the moderating variable to illustrate the relationship between the purchase intention and the influencing factors of Generation Y and Generation Z consumers in Hubei Province.

Keywords: Cultural and Creative Products; Consumer Purchase Intention; Aesthetics; Culture; Technology.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definition

Cultural and creative products exist not only as carriers of abstract culture but also as microcosms of numerous cultural contents that can convey emotions and facilitate communication in People's Daily interactions. From transmission to memory to presents, it is possible to assert that they have immense practical and existential value (Sun, 2018). More specifically, cultural and creative products are those that integrate culture, art, and daily life. It is not only a distinctive method for teaching young people to value culture and art, but also a novel approach to sharing traditional customs with other regions of the world (Yuan, 2022).

The primary characteristics of cultural and creative products are culture, artistic, nationalism, and commemorative.

Culture: The core content is a form of emotional premium provided by culture, not only for its practicality but also to purchase a culture and lifestyle.

Artistic: should be fully familiar with the characteristics of materials, processes, and forms, combined with cultural customs and lifestyles, etc., the design of the external form in line with the rule of formal beauty and contemporary aesthetic needs, the internal story can give consumers a taste, from different angles to reflect the product's unique artistic aesthetic value.

Nationality: local culture; various nationalities express distinct cultural traits; prior to designing products, we must comprehend the spiritual core of national culture and identify its

commonalities and distinctions. When extracting cultural materials, we should categorise people's stories, ornamentation, implements, etc., excavate them in advance while respecting national customs, design products with a national aesthetic, and more effectively preserve and transmit national culture.

Commemorative: Assist individuals in reviewing history, gaining a better understanding of themselves and the world, and providing the meaning of commemorative to products that evoke specific recollections.

1.2 Problem Statement

Both the Chinese cultural and creative industry and its market have expanded consistently. Due to the late start and accelerated market expansion of Chinese cultural and creative products, numerous development issues have emerged. They manifest in aesthetics and cultural connotation of the product (L. Li, 2019). It led to the suspension and recall of the final products and negatively impacted the sales of the brand's other cultural and creative products (Shu, 2022).

According to Zheng (2022), director of the Museum of Fudan University and professor in the Department of Cultural Relics and Museums, "although the growth of cultural and creative products is upbeat Chinese cultural products in museums and tourist attractions are still in their beginnings." In addition, he emphasised the importance of increasing the intention to purchase products and intensifying research on the culture and aesthetics of products (Zhong et al., 2022).

Obviously, the cultural connotation and aesthetics of contemporary Chinese cultural and creative products are problematic. This has a negative impact on consumer purchase intent and is not beneficial to the continued growth of the cultural and creative products market. This research will evaluate the connection between the variables that influence and consumer purchase intention of cultural and creative products in order to improve consumer purchase intention of cultural and creative products.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Underpinning Theories

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The technology acceptance paradigm was first introduced in Davis' 1986 doctoral dissertation. The model is primarily used to predict the acceptance pattern of information systems by consumers in the workplace. In addition, it supplies an important theoretical foundation for explaining the motivation of technology consumers. Davis proposed the technology acceptance model (Davis et al., 1989) after assimilating the three factors of behaviour attitude, behaviour intention, and actual behaviour based on the theory of rational behaviour (Davis et al., 1989). The basis of particular applied research was established by the technology acceptance model's constant evolution. Due to the constant evolution of the current digital environment, research objects and application domains are also continuously evolving.

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). Arnould and Thompson (2005) categorised the content of CCT's research into four main areas: consumer identity, market culture, social and historical models of consumption, market ideology systems under mass media, and consumer interpretive techniques. They define CCT as the investigation of how customers actively reconfigure and modify the metaphorical significance implicit in marketing, branding, the surroundings, and physical products. Thus, the theory of their individuality, identity, social position, and life purpose can be realised.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

Hypothesis 1: *Aesthetics has a significant impact on consumer purchase intention through the mediating effect of culture.*

According to previous studies, the aesthetics of cultural and creative products are rich and diverse, which can be communicated to consumers via the cultural characteristics of the products and encourage their interest in purchasing them. The tangible and visual design features could attract consumers through presenting cultural connotation, function, and symbolic meaning of a product (X. Li, 2022). Some studies have pointed out that consumers show stronger purchase intention for products with high design aesthetics (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2014). Consumers' reactions to products with high design aesthetics have a positive impact on their judgement of products (X. Li, 2022). That means design aesthetics with rich symbolic meanings can positively influence consumer purchase intention (Zhou & Xu, 2022). Therefore, products with high design aesthetics may trigger consumers' interest more easily than those with low design aesthetics. And high design aesthetics have a positive impact on consumer purchase intention. For cultural and creative products, high design aesthetics represent rich cultural elements. This shows that cultural and creative products combined with cultural connotation and design aesthetics can have an impact on consumer purchase intention (Liu, 2019).

Hypothesis 2: *Culture mediates between aesthetics and consumer purchase intention.*

In accordance with previous studies, culture as a non-market factor has an increasing effect on consumer purchase behaviour and can directly influence consumer purchase intention. In the interim, it has been shown that cultural variables are an important factor impacting consumer behaviour (F. Chen & Kui, 2023; Seth & Meng, 2023). As a consequence of the combination of social culture and brand culture, the cultural significance of the products that consumers purchase is enhanced. The purchase intent or behaviour of consumers for culturally-based products transcends utilitarian and monetary qualities. It also represents the cultural connection and consumption factors of consumers and influences their preferences and attitudes towards consumption. Furthermore, it has a substantial effect on consumers' cognition and behaviour (Jin et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 3: *Aesthetics has a direct relationship with consumer purchase intention.*

As demonstrated by previous research, the aesthetics of cultural and creative products can aid consumers in understanding the products through the aesthetic language, thereby increasing

purchase intent. This is because organizations and companies must adhere to the aesthetic principle when developing cultural and creative products (Q. Chen, 2020). On the one hand, design aesthetics can enhance product functionality, increase consumer trust in products, and increase perceived product value (Zhou & Xu, 2022). Alternatively, design aesthetics can increase the potential value of a product and influence consumer preferences (Toufani et al., 2017). Existing research indicates that design aesthetics combined with cultural elements can significantly affect consumer behaviour (X. Li, 2022), and that product design aesthetics can affect consumers' initial impressions (Xu, 2022). When the design of a product appeals to the consumer's interest or emotion, they may not care as much about the price. Yang (2022) demonstrates that the aesthetics of a product have an effect on consumer purchase intent and that perceived value can influence purchase intention (Y. Li & Li, 2022).

Hypothesis 4: *Technology has a moderating effect on consumer purchase intention.*

As previous research has demonstrated, technology has influenced the approach and atmosphere of consumer purchase behaviour, and a seamless and effective shopping experience might improve consumer purchase intent. This is because the prevalence of smart phones has linked everyone, and Internet-based technologies have enabled the change of people's consumption methods and increased consumption. The evolution has also had an impact on ordinary life. Consumers expect a more pleasant, convenient, and digital purchasing experience. Therefore, mobile Internet and contemporary technological advances increase consumer intent to purchase. Partnership between the cultural and creative industries and e-commerce is the new path for future economic expansion. At present, cultural and creative e-commerce has demonstrated a great deal of energy, which encourages confidence among cultural and creative designers and increases the revenue of the cultural and creative industry (M. Chen, 2022).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sampling

The target population of this study belongs to Generations Y and Z in age. Generation Y refers to people born between 1980 and 1995. They have experienced the rapid popularization of computers and the Internet, thus forming a life attitude and values completely different from Generation X. Most of them are confident, optimistic, frank, independent and well-informed. Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2010, are digital natives. The Internet and digital products are part of their natural and daily life (China Daily, 2022). The sample size in this study was referred to the literature of Krejcie and Morgan (1970). When the total number of target population exceeds one million, the sample size is 384. The target population of this study is Generation Y and Generation Z consumers in Hubei, China. According to the latest data from the Chinese Bureau of Statistics (2022), China's population is 1.4 billion, and Hubei's population is 58.44 million (Bureau of Statistics of China, 2023). Therefore, according to the literature of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), it can be concluded that the sample size of this study is 384. This study will adopt simple random sampling method in probability sampling.

Because simple random sampling has the advantage of objectively measuring the reliability of the inference in a probabilistic way, so that the inference can be based on science.

3.2 Measurement

5-level Likert Scale was adopted to measure in this study. In the pilot study of this study, the sample size was set at 30 participants. Isaac and Michael (1995) suggested that “samples with N’s between 10 and 30 have many practical advantages” (Isaac & Michael, 1995). In the pilot study, 35 online questionnaires were randomly distributed and 30 valid questionnaires were collected to target Y and Z generation consumers in Hubei. The analysis in Smart PLS 4.0 comes to a conclusion, that the values of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability of each variable are above 0.70. AVE values exceed 0.50. Therefore, the overall result is qualified and the questionnaire meets the reliability standard (Hair, Sarstedt, et al., 2019).

3.3 Data Collection

This study collected data from June to August 2023, targeting consumers of Generation Y and Generation Z in Hubei Province of China. The sampling technique was a five-level Likert scale, which was prepared as an online questionnaire for distribution. The sampling method was random sampling with a sample size of 384 people (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). A total of 530 questionnaires were collected until August, 2023. Among all the questionnaires, there were 384 valid questionnaires, accounting for 72.45% of all questionnaires.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Sample Characteristics

Among the 384 valid questionnaires in this study, the statistics of the respondents' personal information is shown in table 1:

Table 1: Statistics of Respondents’ Personal Characteristics

Items		Percentage	Items		Percentage
Gender	Male	46.35%	Annual income (RMB)	Less than 36,000	23.70%
	Female	53.65%		36,001-144,000	23.96%
Age (Years Old)	Below 17	10.94%		144,001 -300,000	24.74%
	18-28	47.40%		300,001 -420,000	13.28%
	28-43	41.67%		420,001 and above	14.32%
Educational Level	Below high school	10.42%			
	Undergraduate	60.68%			
	Postgraduate	28.91%			

4.2 Assessment of Reflective Measurement Model

Based on the above references (Diamantopoulos et al., 2012; Drolet & Morrison, 2001) (Hair, Risher, et al., 2019), the standard of internal consistency and reliability is Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.70 and composite reliability ≥ 0.70 . The standard of convergent validity is that the average variance extracted (AVE) is 0.50. As shown in table 3, the convergent validity of the constructs is satisfied.

Table 2: Internal Consistency Reliability and Convergent Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho a)	Composite Reliability (rho c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
AES	0.895	0.897	0.927	0.761
CPI	0.849	0.851	0.898	0.689
CUL	0.910	0.911	0.937	0.788
TECH	0.901	0.902	0.931	0.771

According to the research of Henseler et al. (2019) and Franke and Sarstedt (2019), the threshold value of Heterotrait -monotrait (HTMT) in this research is below 0.85. As shown in table 4, the discriminant validity is good, and there are conceptually different constructs (Hair, Risher, et al., 2019).

Table 3: Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	AES	CPI	CUL	INV	PV	QUA	TECH
AES							
CPI	0.497						
CUL	0.530	0.554					
TECH	0.351	0.500	0.323	0.354	0.310	0.177	

4.3 Assessment of the Structural Model

Based on the research of Hair et al. (2017) and Kock (2015), the threshold of the path coefficients is two-tailed: T-values >1.69, P-values < 0.01; T-values >1.96, P-values < 0.05; T-values > 2.57, P-values < 0.01 (Kock, 2015). As can be seen in table 6, the path coefficient of aesthetics to culture is 0.266 and has a significant difference (t >1.96, p<0.05), indicating that aesthetics has a significant impact on culture; The path coefficient of aesthetics on consumer purchase intention is 0.123 and has a significant difference (t >1.96, p<0.05), indicating that aesthetics has a significant impact on consumer purchase intention.

The path coefficient of culture on consumer purchase intention is 0.256 and has a significant difference (t >1.96, p<0.05), indicating that culture has a significant impact on consumer purchase intention.

The path coefficient of culture on consumer purchase intention is 0.256 and has a significant difference (t >1.96, p<0.05), indicating that culture has a significant impact on consumer purchase intention.

The path coefficient of technology on consumer purchase intention is 0.187 and has a significant difference (t >1.96, p<0.05), indicating that technology has a significant positive on consumer purchase intention; The influence coefficient of technology with culture on consumer purchase intention is 0.173, and there is a significant difference (t >1.96, p<0.05), indicating that the moderating variable technology plays a strengthening role in the relationship between culture and consumer purchase intention, then the moderating effect is established.

Table 4: Significance Testing Result of the Direct Effect

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values
AES -> CPI	0.123	0.122	0.051	2.405	0.016
AES -> CUL	0.266	0.266	0.054	4.930	0.000
CUL -> CPI	0.256	0.254	0.051	5.009	0.000
TECH -> CPI	0.187	0.189	0.054	3.499	0.000
TECH x CUL -> CPI	0.173	0.172	0.036	4.886	0.000

4.4 Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses test standards are: T-values >1.69, P-values < 0.01; T-values >1.96, P-values < 0.05; T-values > 2.57, P-values < 0.01 (Hair, Sarstedt, et al., 2019; Kock, 2015).

According to the standard, **the alternative hypotheses** are H1-H4 in Table, because all the T-values are all greater than 1.96, and all the P-values are all less than 0.05.

Table 5: Significance Testing Result of Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Relationship	T values	P values	Significance (p<0.05)
H1: Aesthetic has a significant impact on consumer purchase intention through the mediating effect of culture.	AES -> CUL -> CPI	3.229	0.001	Supported
H2: Culture mediates between perceived value, innovation, aesthetic, quality and consumer purchase intention.	PV -> CUL INV -> CUL AES -> CUL QUA -> CUL CUL -> CPI	4.385 2.310 4.930 3.045 5.009	0.000 0.021 0.000 0.002 0.000	Supported
H3: Aesthetics has a direct relationship with consumer purchase intention.	AES -> CPI	2.405	0.016	Supported
H4: Technology has a moderating effect on consumer purchase intention.	TECH -> CPI TECH x CUL -> CPI	3.499 4.886	0.000 0.000	Supported

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the discussion of demography and research questions in this study, the recommendation is for the companies and institutions in charge of culture and creative products. The purpose of recommendations is to increase consumer purchase intention and promote the development of cultural companies or institutions, to provide more comprehensive and clear management advice to companies and institutions.

Firstly, during the development phase, cultural companies and institutions in Hubei should examine Generation Y and Generation Z as the primary consumer groups. According to the

results of the questionnaire, Generation Y and Generation Z are the primary consumer categories for cultural and creative products in Hubei. Therefore, companies and institutions in Hubei should focus on the demographic characteristics of Generation Y and Generation Z consumers during both the early development stage and the later marketing and sales stages.

Secondly, companies and institutions involved in the design, production, marketing, and sales phases should fully integrate cultural characteristics, improve the aesthetics of cultural and creative products. According to research findings, aesthetics can increase consumers' intent to purchase via culture. In order to satisfy the spiritual requirements of consumers and increase their propensity to purchase, products should incorporate cultural characteristics into their aesthetic appearance, marketing and sales strategies, and fine production processes.

Thirdly, cultural enterprises or institutions should recognise that the aesthetics of cultural and creative products are not a meaningless sense of beauty, but rather always communicate the product's cultural characteristics. According to the results of questionnaire, some consumers did not purchase cultural and creative products because they were dissatisfied with their appearance. Cultural and creative products should interpret the connotation of traditional culture through design language during the phases of development and design. In the later stages of marketing, the company or organisation must demonstrate that the product incorporates cultural and aesthetic qualities. This can enhance the perception of the aesthetics of cultural and creative products held by some consumers.

6. CONCLUSION

From the preceding analysis, it can be inferred that the findings of this study were exhaustively examined. The process of examination is based first on the theories supporting the framework of this research, and then the appropriate research methodology is selected and implemented. After data collection and analysis, a series of hypotheses derived from the research questions and objectives are assessed to determine whether or not they have been confirmed. All results indicate that the findings of the research are exhaustive. Meanwhile, the discussion for businesses is detailed and specific, guiding them in their efforts to increase consumer willingness to purchase cultural and creative products. It will expand opportunities for future investigations of consumer intent to purchase cultural and creative products.

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