The Influence of Creative Experience on Travel Benefits: Examining the Mediating Role of Brand Image and the Moderating Role of Learning Culture

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Abstract

The objective of the current study is to examine the influence of creative experiences on the benefits of travel, with a particular focus on the mediating role of brand image and the moderating role of cultural learning within the context of Iranian tourists. This study is classified as an applied research endeavor in terms of its purpose and employs a descriptive-survey methodology. Additionally, it is characterized as correlational in nature, utilizing structural equation modeling for analysis. The statistical population for this study comprised all Iranian tourists who were visiting the tourist sites within Tehran Province. The sample size was calculated utilizing the Cochran formula, resulting in a total of 384 participants. The selection of these participants was conducted through a simple random sampling method. A standardized questionnaire was employed to gather data. The construct validity of the questionnaire was assessed utilizing confirmatory factor analysis, while its reliability was evaluated through the application of standard reliability indicators. The data were analyzed employing SPSS and AMOS software, utilizing structural equation modeling techniques. The results of the study indicated that creative experience exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on the dimensions of peace of mind, liberation, unique involvement, and connectedness. Furthermore, creative experiences exert a direct and substantial influence on brand image, which in turn affects perceptions of travel benefits. The findings suggest that the benefits associated with travel have a direct impact on the well-being and health of tourists. Moreover, brand image serves as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between creative experience and travel benefits. Additionally, cultural learning functions as a substantial moderating factor in the association between brand image and travel benefits. Consequently, the cultivation of innovative experiences and the enhancement of the brand image associated with tourism destinations have the potential to yield significant benefits, both in terms of travel outcomes and in the elevation of the overall quality of tourists' experiences.

Keywords: Creative Experience, Travel Advantage, Brand Image, Cultural Learning, Tourism

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Introduction

In recent decades, the evolution of competitive markets, coupled with heightened consumer awareness, has resulted in an increased scholarly focus on the factors influencing customer selection, evaluation, and loyalty. This trend reflects a growing recognition of the complexities inherent in consumer behavior and the need for a deeper understanding of these dynamics within the context of market competition.

In the interim, brand image, recognized as a pivotal intangible asset for organizations and tourism destinations, significantly influences the formation of consumer attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. Consumers often exhibit a propensity to select goods, services, and destinations that align with their beliefs, values, and cognitive representations(1,2). Consequently, brand image significantly influences the assessment of product and service quality and plays a crucial role in decision-making processes, including selection and repeat purchasing behavior. Marketing scholars assert that brand image constitutes a collection of perceptions, beliefs, and associations that are established in the consumer's mind regarding a particular brand. This cognitive framework serves to distinguish the brand from its competitors. The more positive the perception of this image, the greater the likelihood that customers will select it and demonstrate loyalty(3).

In contemporary discourse, the significance of brand image extends beyond the realms of goods and services; it has emerged as a pivotal determinant of success for tourist destinations within the tourism industry. The tourism industry, recognized as one of the largest and most dynamic sectors globally, substantially contributes to economic growth, job creation, cultural development, and social interactions within nations (4). Nevertheless, the intensifying competition among tourism destinations has rendered it inadequate for destinations to rely solely on the presence of natural, historical, and cultural attractions to draw visitors. Under such circumstances, tourism destinations are compelled to position themselves within the cognitive frameworks of potential tourists by curating distinctive, valuable, and memorable experiences. From this vantage point, the notion of "creative experience" has been posited as a novel paradigm in the realms of tourism management and marketing (5).

Creative experience encompasses a series of interactions, activities, and events in which tourists actively engage in the experiential process. This involvement facilitates the acquisition of value and meaning that transcends the mere act of visitation. Such experiences often include elements of learning, social interaction, exploration of local culture, and participation in distinctive activities (6). In contrast to the traditional paradigm of tourism, which perceives the tourist primarily as a passive observer, the creative experience approach underscores the significance of active engagement by tourists in the co-construction of their experiences. Such experiences can afford tourists a sense of relaxation, alleviate the burdens of daily life, facilitate unique interactions with the destination's environment, and foster a more profound connection with the local culture and community (7). Therefore, it is

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expected that participation in creative experiences may improve tourists' perceptions of the destination and serve to strengthen the brand image of the destination. Recent studies have progressively highlighted that positive and lasting experiences of tourists play a significant role in shaping their mental representations of tourist destinations. When tourists actively participate in unique cultural, artistic, religious, and social practices at a destination, their comprehension of the destination's attributes is deepened, leading to the formation of a more positive perception of that locale. A favorable perception of a destination can significantly enhance visitor satisfaction, foster loyalty, increase the propensity for return visits, and encourage recommendations to potential tourists. Consequently, destination brand image can be regarded as the pivotal link between the tourist experience and the resultant outcomes of the trip(8).

Conversely, one of the most significant implications of tourism is the array of benefits that arise from travel activities. Travel benefits encompass the advantages accrued by tourists as a consequence of their travel experiences. The associated benefits may encompass enhanced mental well-being, improved physical health, alleviation of stress, increased vitality, opportunities for learning, the cultivation of social relationships, and an overall augmentation of quality of life. However, the attainment of these benefits is not exclusively contingent upon travel itself; rather, the quality of the tourist's experience and their perception of the destination are equally instrumental in the realization of these advantages. Consequently, it is reasonable to posulate that engaging in creative experiences may enhance the overall perception of the destination brand, thereby facilitating tourists' attainment of superior travel benefits (9) .

In addition to the aforementioned variables, cultural learning has been identified as a significant concept within the domain of cultural tourism research. Cultural learning denotes the process whereby individuals acquire the values, customs, lifestyles, and behavioral patterns characteristic of different societies through engagement with novel cultural contexts. During travel, particularly in destinations characterized by substantial cultural and historical significance, tourists are afforded the opportunity to engage with diverse cultural practices, thereby enhancing their cultural knowledge and awareness. This process of learning has the potential to influence individuals' perceptions of the destination and to alter their evaluation of the benefits associated with travel. Consequently, it is anticipated that cultural learning may serve as a moderating variable in the relationship between brand image and travel benefits(10).

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Notwithstanding the significance of the constructs of creative experience, brand image, travel benefits, and cultural learning, a comprehensive review of the extant literature reveals that the majority of research has predominantly focused on each of these variables in isolation. Moreover, there is a paucity of studies that investigate the interrelationships among these constructs concurrently. Furthermore, the mediating role of brand image in elucidating the impact of creative experience on travel benefits, as well as the moderating role of cultural learning within this relationship, has been relatively underexplored in the existing literature. This research gap is particularly pronounced within the Iranian tourism industry, which possesses significant cultural, historical, and religious resources. The current study aims to investigate the mediating effect of brand image and the moderating influence of cultural learning on Iranian tourists, with particular attention to the impact of creative experience on travel benefits. The primary research inquiry posits whether creative experiences can enhance the benefits of travel by reinforcing the destination brand image, and it further examines whether cultural learning influences the strength of this relationship. Addressing this question has the potential to inform the development of effective strategies for tourism, enhance destination branding, and improve the quality of traveler experiences.

Theoretical foundations and research background

Creative experience in tourism

In recent years, the tourism industry has transitioned from its conventional model, which predominantly emphasized the mere visitation of attractions, towards a focus on fostering unique and meaningful experiences for travelers. During this period, the concept of "creative experience" has emerged as a significant new approach to tourism, garnering considerable attention from both researchers and practitioners within this domain. Creative tourism refers to a distinct form of tourism that enables participants to engage in authentic and memorable experiences through active involvement in a variety of cultural, artistic, social, and educational activities. In contrast to conventional tourism, in which tourists assume the role of passive observers, creative tourism fosters an active engagement of tourists in the experience creation process. This approach enables tourists to generate value through meaningful interactions with the local community, the cultural context of the destination, and fellow travelers(11) .

Creative experience encompasses multiple dimensions, including cognitive engagement, experiences of liberation or respite from quotidian life, unique forms

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of involvement, and social interaction. These dimensions contribute to the evocation of positive emotions, heightened levels of excitement, enhanced learning experiences, and overall satisfaction among tourists. The theory of the experience economy posits that contemporary consumers prioritize the pursuit of unique and memorable experiences over the acquisition of goods and services. This shift in consumer preferences has rendered creative experiences a significant competitive advantage for tourism destinations(4). Recent empirical investigations indicate that creative experiences can markedly influence tourists' attitudes and behaviors. Recent studies indicate that the presence of creative spaces within tourist destinations positively influences the quality of the tourist experience. Moreover, these environments enhance overall satisfaction levels and strengthen the intention of visitors to return in the future (2,12). Research indicates that travel and engagement in innovative experiences can enhance the mental creativity of tourists and positively influence their perception of the destination. Consequently, the creative experience is acknowledged as a significant factor in the generation of value for tourists (13).

Tourist destination brand image

Brand image represents a fundamental construct within the fields of marketing and consumer behavior(1,14). Aaker conceptualizes brand image as a collection of associations, beliefs, and perceptions that are established in the consumer's cognitive framework regarding a particular brand. Keller posits that brand image serves as a mirror of consumer perceptions regarding a brand, and is constructed through the cognitive associations that individuals form in relation to it. A positive brand image serves to distinguish a brand from its competitors and enhances customer loyalty(15) .

In the context of the tourism industry, the concept of destination brand image is particularly significant, as tourists' decisions regarding the selection of a destination are substantially influenced by their cognitive perceptions of that destination. Destination brand image encompasses tourists' assessments of the natural, cultural, historical, social, and service attributes associated with a given location. A more favorable perception of the destination positively correlates with the likelihood of selecting that destination, the level of satisfaction experienced during the trip, and the propensity to recommend it to others. Researchers indicate that positive and creative experiences can cultivate a favorable mental representation of a destination within the cognitive framework of tourists (16). Chohan demonstrated that transformative tourism experiences exert a direct influence on both the image of the

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destination and the satisfaction levels of tourists. A substantial body of research indicates that brand image significantly influences customer loyalty, the intention to revisit, and the generation of travel-related benefits(3,17) . In nations such as Iran, which boast significant cultural, historical, and religious assets, the establishment of a favorable brand image can significantly enhance the attraction of both domestic and international tourists. The existence of cultural and religious attractions, notably historic mosques, serves as an effective foundation for cultivating a favorable perception of the destination and strengthening the nation's tourism brand.

Travel advantage

The benefits of travel encompass a diverse array of advantages and intrinsic values that individuals acquire as a consequence of engaging in travel activities. The aforementioned benefits encompass a range of positive outcomes, including enhanced mental tranquility, improved physical health, reduction in stress levels, increased vitality, the cultivation of social relationships, as well as opportunities for learning and personal development. Indeed, travel is deemed significant for tourists as it fulfills their psychological, social, and cultural needs.

The theory of perceived value posits that tourists engage in a comparative assessment of the benefits associated with travel against its associated financial, temporal, and psychological costs. A positive correlation exists between the perceived benefits and the level of satisfaction experienced by tourists; as the perceived benefits increase, so too does tourist satisfaction. Research indicates that engagement in creative experiences can enhance the advantages associated with travel by fostering a favorable perception of the destination(16) . Research indicates that the relationship between tourists and their natural and cultural environments positively contributes to enhanced feelings of tranquility, well-being, and overall satisfaction derived from travel experiences(9,18) .

Consequently, the advantages associated with travel can be regarded as a significant outcome of both creative experiences and brand perception. Destinations that are capable of generating memorable experiences and fostering positive mental associations for tourists are likely to yield enhanced advantages for these travelers.

Learning culture

Cultural learning encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and understanding pertaining to the values, beliefs, customs, and lifestyles of diverse

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societies. In the context of tourism, cultural learning is facilitated when travelers acquire an enriched comprehension of the destination's culture via direct engagement with the host community, as well as through encounters with historical monuments, local rituals, and traditions.

Cultural tourism serves as a significant avenue for acquiring knowledge and understanding of diverse cultures. In this form of tourism, individuals not only engage with various attractions but also gain insight into the lifestyle and cultural identity of the host community. This form of learning has the potential to influence tourists' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors, thereby enhancing their overall perception of the destination.

Research indicates that culture may serve a significant moderating role in the interactions among tourism variables(8) . Research indicates that the acquisition of cultural knowledge enhances perceived value, satisfaction, and the intention to revisit a destination(16) .

Numerous studies have explored the interrelationship between creative experiences, brand image, and tourism outcomes. In the research study entitled "The Effect of Creative Experience on Brand Image and Travel Benefits with the Moderating Role of Cultural Learning," the authors identified a positive and statistically significant relationship between creative experience and both destination brand image and travel benefits. Furthermore, the findings indicate that cultural learning functions as a moderating variable within this relationship. Research indicates that an environment characterized by creativity in a tourist destination significantly enhances tourist satisfaction and the propensity to revisit (2). In a separate investigation, researchers determined that transformative tourism experiences significantly enhance tourists' perceptions of destination image, overall satisfaction, and subsequent behavioral intentions (3) .

In a separate investigation, researchers determined that the co-creation of experiences alongside cultural authenticity can significantly augment the branding experience associated with a destination. Furthermore, these factors contribute to an increased propensity among tourists to engage in repeat purchases and visits (7). In a separate investigation, scholars demonstrated that tourists' engagement with both natural and cultural environments significantly contribute to the enhancement of their creativity, mental well-being, and overall satisfaction (9). Finally, other scholars have highlighted that culture may serve as a moderating variable, influencing the magnitude of the effects that various tourism factors exert on tourist

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behavior. A comprehensive review of the existing research literature indicates that, while a considerable number of studies have investigated the relationships among creative experience, brand image, and tourism outcomes, there remains a paucity of research that concurrently explores the mediating role of brand image and the moderating role of cultural learning within the relationship between creative experience and travel benefits. Consequently, this study aims to address the existing research gap within the framework of Iranian tourism (8).

Research Method

This research is characterized by an applied purpose and employs a descriptive-survey correlational methodology. In addition, structural equation modeling was employed to investigate the causal relationships among variables while concurrently assessing direct, indirect, and moderating effects. The statistical population for this research encompassed all Iranian tourists who visited tourist attractions within the Tehran province in the year 1403 in the Iranian calendar. In light of an infinite statistical population, the sample size was calculated to be 384 individuals utilizing the Cochran formula. Sampling was executed through a simple random sampling method, whereby questionnaires were administered and subsequently collected in person from tourists.

The data collection instrument utilized in this study was a standardized questionnaire, which comprised five primary constructs: creative experience, brand image, travel advantage, and cultural learning. The variable of creative experience was assessed through four distinct dimensions: relaxation experience, liberation experience, unique engagement, and connectedness. All items were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree. " To assess the construct validity of the research instrument, confirmatory factor analysis was employed. Additionally, the reliability of the measurement instrument was assessed through the application of Cronbach's alpha coefficient, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients exceeding 0. 70, along with average variance extracted (AVE) values surpassing 0. 50, were deemed acceptable thresholds for measurement validity and reliability.

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Table 1: Confirmatory factor analysis

Variable	Number of items	CMIN/DF	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	Result
Creative experience	14	1.426	1	0.99	0.99	0.98	1	0.045	Optimal fit
Learning culture	4	0.341	0.99	0.94	0.99	0.99	0.98	0.045	Optimal fit
Brand image	3	1.487	0.99	0.99	0.93	0.94	0.98	0.046	Optimal fit
Travel advantage	8	1.145	0.98	0.99	0.95	0.99	0.99	0.044	Optimal fit

The table indicates that all fit indices of the measurement model fall within the acceptable range. The ratio of the chi-square statistic to the degrees of freedom for the constructs of creative experience (1.426), cultural learning (1.341), brand image (1.487), and passenger advantage (1.145) is observed to be less than 3. Additionally, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values are reported at 0. 045, which suggests a strong fit for the model. Furthermore, the values of the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), and Relative Fit Index (RFI) for all constructs exceed 0. 90 This observation substantiates the adequacy of the measurement model and supports the construct validity of the research instrument employed in this study.

The data were analyzed employing two tiers of statistical methods: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. In the descriptive statistics section, the demographic characteristics of the respondents, which include gender, age, education level, and marital status, were analyzed utilizing frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviation metrics. In the inferential statistics segment, an initial assessment was conducted to evaluate the normality of the data, the presence of multicollinearity, and the adequacy of the measurement model fit. Subsequently, structural equation modeling was employed utilizing AMOS version 24 software to assess the research hypotheses. To assess the adequacy of the conceptual research model, several commonly utilized indices were employed, including the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), the comparative fit index (CFI), the incremental fit index (IFI), the goodness of fit index (GFI), the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). In this study, the criteria for determining optimal model fit were

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established as follows: chi-squared statistics (χ^2) relative to degrees of freedom (df) should be less than 3, while the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) should exceed 0.90 Additionally, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values should be below 0. 08.

The study examined the direct effects of the creative experience variable on both brand image and travel benefits. Additionally, it investigated the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between creative experience and travel benefits, as well as the moderating influence of cultural learning on the association between brand image and travel benefits. The significance level for the tests was established at 0.05.

Results

The statistical population for this study comprised 384 Iranian tourists visiting the tourist destinations within Tehran Province. These participants were selected through a simple random sampling methodology. The descriptive analysis indicated a satisfactory distribution of respondents across various demographic variables, including gender, age, and educational attainment. This balanced representation enhances the generalizability of the findings.

Prior to conducting hypothesis testing, an examination of the normality of the distribution of the research variables was performed. The findings indicated that the skewness index values for all constructs fell within the acceptable range, suggesting that the data distribution conforms to a normal distribution. Consequently, the application of structural equation modeling did not pose any significant challenges.

Table 2: Results of the normality test of variables

Variable	Skewness value (S.K)	Status
Creative experience	0.441	Normal
Brand image	0.385	Normal
Learning culture	0.362	Normal
Travel advantage	0.411	Normal

Confirmatory factor analysis was employed to assess the construct validity of the measurement model. The findings indicated that all items associated with the constructs of creative experience, brand image, cultural learning, and travel

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advantage exhibited adequate factor loadings. Furthermore, the measurement model demonstrated an acceptable level of fit. Consequently, the research instrument possessed the requisite validity to evaluate the structural model effectively.

The examination of the research hypotheses was conducted through the application of structural equation modeling. The conclusive model utilized for the examination of the research hypotheses is illustrated in Figure 1. This model was developed by modifying the output generated by the AMOS software. The findings indicated that all research hypotheses were substantiated.

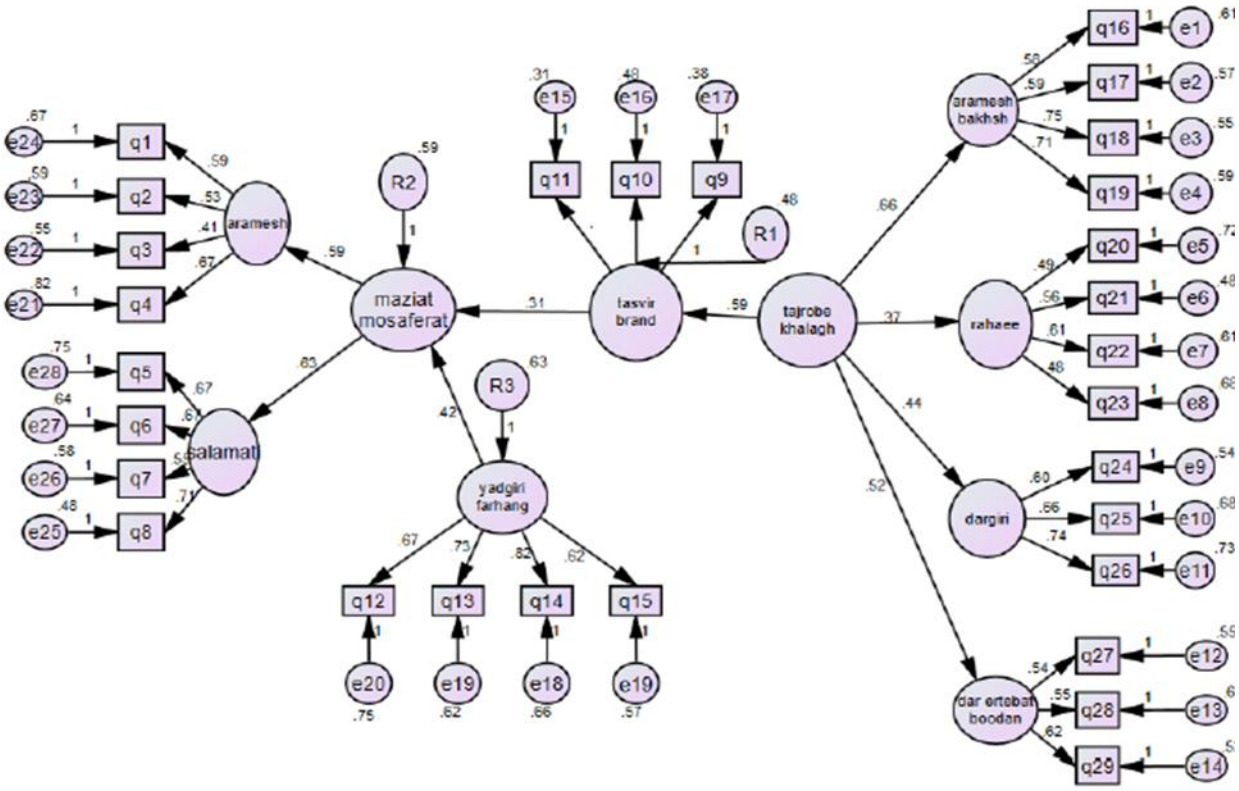


Figure 1: Results of validation of the final model of the relationship between research variables

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Table 3: Results of testing research hypotheses (structural model)

Hypothesis	Route	Standard coefficient (β)	t-statistic	Result
H_1	Creative experience → Peace of mind	0.66	9.122	Verified
H_2	Creative experience → Liberation	0.37	6.485	Verified
H_3	Creative experience → Unique conflict	0.44	7.394	Verified
H_4	Creative experience → Being in touch	0.52	8.422	Verified
H_5	Creative experience → Brand image	0.59	8.632	Verified
H_6	Brand image → Travel advantage	0.31	6.527	Verified
H_7	Learning culture → Travel advantage	0.42	7.769	Verified
H_8	Travel advantage → Peace	0.59	8.672	Verified
H_9	Travel advantage → Health	0.63	9.063	Verified
H_{10}	The mediating role of brand image in the relationship between creative experience and travel benefit	Meaningful	>1.96	Verified
H_{11}	The moderating role of cultural learning in the relationship between brand image and travel benefit	Meaningful	>1.96	Verified

The findings indicate that creative experiences exert a positive and statistically significant impact on multiple facets of the tourism experience. These dimensions encompass the attainment of peace of mind, alleviation of daily stresses, engagement in unique interactions, and enhanced social interactions with fellow tourists. Engagement in creative experiences significantly enhances the brand image of a tourism destination, thereby influencing the overall advantages associated with travel. Conversely, brand image exerts a direct and substantial influence on the perceived benefits associated with travel. This finding suggests that a more favorable perception of the destination brand among tourists is associated with greater benefits derived from travel experiences.

A structural model was employed to investigate the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between creative experience and travel benefits. The findings

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indicate that the indirect effect of creative experience on travel benefits via brand image is significant. Consequently, brand image functions as a mediating variable in this relationship. In summary, the creative experiences encountered by tourists initially contribute to the development of a favorable mental representation of a travel destination. Subsequently, this positive representation is associated with an increase in the perceived benefits of travel.

The findings from the moderating effect analysis indicate that learning culture serves as a significant enhancer of the relationship between brand image and perceived travel benefits. The coefficient associated with this relationship was determined to be 0.42, while the t-statistic was calculated to be 7.769, which exceeds the critical value of 1.96 Consequently, the findings substantiated the moderating role of cultural learning. This finding suggests that a higher level of cultural learning among tourists is associated with a more pronounced influence of destination brand image on perceived travel benefits. In addition, creative experiences exhibited a direct influence on four dimensions: peace of mind, liberation, unique involvement, and connectedness. Furthermore, the advantages associated with travel demonstrated a positive and statistically significant effect on two dimensions, namely peace of mind and health.

Table 4: Fit indices

Fitness index	χ^2/df	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Acceptable amount	<2	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	<0.1
Calculated value	1.478	0.999	0.992	0.991	0.989	0.991	0.039

The findings from the fit indices indicate that the structural model utilized in this research demonstrates a satisfactory level of fit. The ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df = 1.487) is below the threshold of 2, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is measured at 0.039 These findings suggest that the model exhibits a very good fit. Furthermore, the indices of the Normed Fit Index (NFI), Relative Fit Index (RFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) all exceed the value of 0.90 This finding substantiates the adequacy of the conceptual model employed in this research and demonstrates its appropriateness for the testing of the hypotheses.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to examine the influence of creative experience on travel benefits, with a particular focus on the mediating effect of brand image and

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the moderating impact of cultural learning among Iranian tourists visiting attractions within the Tehran province. The initial finding of the study indicates that creative experiences exert a positive and statistically significant influence on multiple dimensions of the tourism experience, specifically encompassing aspects such as peace of mind, a sense of liberation, unique engagement, and connectedness. The findings suggest that an increased availability of opportunities for tourists to engage in cultural, social, and interactive activities at a destination is positively correlated with elevated levels of both cognitive and emotional engagement. In accordance with the principles articulated in the experience economy theory proposed by Pine and Gilmore, contemporary individuals are increasingly inclined to seek consumption experiences that are both meaningful and personalized. This shift in consumer behavior suggests that the value attributed to these experiences is predominantly determined by their qualitative attributes, rather than by the mere provision of services. Consequently, when a tourist engages in the co-creation of an experience, they are likely to experience an enhanced sense of belonging, enjoyment, and overall satisfaction.

The current findings align with the results reported by other researchers in the literature (2,13,19).Researchers have demonstrated that the creative and collaborative environment of a destination significantly influences the quality of the visitor experience as well as tourists' intentions to return (2). Other studies have identified that tourists' engagement with innovative natural and cultural environments enhances their mental creativity, induces positive emotions, and contributes to overall satisfaction. Therefore, it can be concluded that creative experiences constitute a significant source of value creation within the context of contemporary tourism (9).

The second finding of the study indicated that creative experiences exert a positive and statistically significant influence on the brand image of a tourist destination. This finding can be elucidated through the lens of cognitive processing theory. According to this theoretical framework, brand image is conceptualized as the culmination of a variety of perceptions, memories, and experiences held by individuals. When tourists acquire positive, distinctive, and memorable experiences at a particular destination, they develop more favorable cognitive associations concerning that destination. Consequently, this process contributes to the enhancement of the overall brand image of the destination. Brand image is not solely constructed through advertising and marketing communications; rather, it emerges as a direct consequence of tourists' actual experiences. This finding aligns with the

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results observed in prior studies conducted by other researchers (3,7). Huang and Liu identified that creative experiences serve as a pivotal factor influencing the formation of destination brand image (16). Chohan demonstrated that transformative tourism experiences play a significant role in enhancing tourists' perceptions of the destination image. Consequently, it can be posited that investments aimed at enhancing creative experiences will, in turn, contribute to the fortification of the destination brand (3,14).

The third finding of the study indicated that brand image exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on the perceived benefits associated with travel. The findings indicate that a favorable mental perception of the destination has the potential to enhance the perceived benefits experienced by tourists. From the standpoint of perceived value theory, individuals assess the success of their travel experiences based on the extent to which the benefits derived from the trip surpass the associated costs. A favorable brand image has the potential to cultivate positive expectations among consumers, thereby enhancing their overall satisfaction and contributing to their sense of peace and mental well-being during their travel experiences. This outcome is in alignment with the findings from previous research. The results from these studies indicate that a robust brand image significantly affects destination selection and plays a critical role in enhancing tourists' satisfaction, loyalty, and perceived value. Consequently, brand image may be regarded as one of the most significant intangible assets associated with tourism destinations (8,20).

The principal finding of the current study is the substantiation of the mediating role played by brand image in the relationship between creative experience and travel benefits. The findings indicate that creative experience in isolation does not yield an enhancement in travel benefits; instead, this impact is mediated by the development of a favorable perception of the destination. In summary, creative experiences initially alter tourists' perceptions and beliefs regarding the destination. Subsequently, these enhanced perceptions result in an augmented realization of travel benefits. This finding aligns closely with the theoretical model proposed by Huang and Liu (16). Furthermore, the findings presented by Jag and Gomparti indicate that participatory and authentic experiences facilitate favorable behavioral outcomes among tourists by enriching the brand experience. Consequently, brand image may be regarded as the intermediary construct that connects creative experiences with the values derived from travel (7,21).

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The research findings indicate that cultural learning serves as a significant moderating variable in the relationship between brand image and perceived travel benefits. The observed outcome can be attributed to the fact that tourists who engage more extensively with the culture, customs, and lifestyle of the host society during their travels tend to develop a more profound understanding of the destination's brand image. Consequently, they derive greater value from their overall travel experience. Indeed, cultural learning significantly enhances the depth of the tourism experience and amplifies the impact of brand image on the perceived benefits of travel. This finding aligns with the results of studies conducted by other scholars who have highlighted that cultural interaction and cultural learning play a significant role in enhancing the relationship between tourists' perceptions and their subsequent behavioral outcomes. From a theoretical standpoint, this outcome underscores the significance of adopting a cultural and experiential tourism framework. It posits that the cultivation of cultural learning opportunities may contribute to augmented effectiveness of destination branding and the enhancement of travel-related benefits (22).

In light of the findings derived from the research, the following practical recommendations are put forth:

1.Tourism managers and planners should facilitate opportunities for tourists to engage actively in cultural, artistic, and social activities, thereby enhancing the potential for the development of creative and memorable experiences.

2 .Tourism organizations ought to prioritize the design and development of innovative tourism products that are rooted in indigenous culture, handicrafts, traditional arts, and local rituals.

3 .To enhance the brand image of a tourism destination, marketing initiatives should prioritize the conveyance of authentic experiences, cultural genuineness, and the distinctive attributes of the location.

4 .The application of contemporary digital technologies, including augmented reality and social media platforms, can significantly enhance the cultural and creative experiences associated with a destination. Such strategies are instrumental in elevating the brand image of the location and in attracting a broader spectrum of tourists.

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5 .Tourism destination managers should develop a variety of educational and cultural programs aimed at tourists to enhance their opportunities for engaging with and learning about the local culture during their visit.

6 .The establishment of cultural tours, interactive visits, educational workshops, and participatory programs in collaboration with the local community has the potential to significantly enhance the cultural learning experiences of tourists.

7. Considering the significant potential of Iran's religious and historical attractions, particularly its historical mosques, it is recommended that innovative tourism packages be developed and presented, focusing on the cultural and religious heritage of the region.

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