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A Study on the Mechanism of Video Games in Stimulating Tourism Intention Based on the CAC Framework

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Abstract:

Using the cognitive-affective-conative (CAC) framework and place attachment theory, this study examines how the video game "Black Myth: Wukong" impacts tourism motivation for Shanxi's Xiaoxitian in Xi County. Structural equation modeling reveals that gaming experiences positively influence tourism intentions through dual mediation of destination image perception (β=0.498) and place attachment (β=0.244), creating a chain mediation effect (effect size 0.146). The study shows that video games boost cultural and tourism consumption via a "cognition reinforcement emotion sedimentation behavior transformation" mechanism. It suggests destinations collaborate with the gaming industry to use digital scenes and cultural symbols to spread heritage digitally and convert it into tourism.

Keywords:

Black Myth: Wukong ; video games; destination image perception; place attachment; travel intention

As media continues to evolve, tourism marketing strategies have been constantly updated, transitioning from traditional advertising to films, short videos, and even AR and VR technologies. Video games, as an important means of cultural extension, have also begun to influence tourism promotion(Wu.2007). Xu et al.(2017) indicated that the innovative concept of video game tourism can benefit the tourism industry through various channels. Dubois et al.(2018) discovered that video games, particularly those set in real cities, can significantly impact players' tourism motivations and destination choices, thereby generating "video game-induced tourism." In China, the release of the video game "Black Myth: Wukong" has significantly enhanced Shanxi's cultural tourism appeal, leading to a substantial increase in tourist numbers and tourism consumption, and becoming a phenomenal marketing event for Shanxi's cultural tourism. Notably, Xiaoxitian in Xi County has seen a remarkable rise in visitors. Throughout 2023, the attraction only received 133,600 visitors. However, during the 2024 National Day Holiday, it welcomed 91,722 visitors, thanks to "Black Myth: Wukong". This makes it a classic case of tourism spurred by video games. Therefore, using the game "Black Myth: Wukong" as the research subject, this paper delves into the mechanism by which video games stimulate tourists' travel intentions through a structural equation model.

1.Literature Review and Hypotheses

1.1.Cognitive-Affective-Conative Framework

The cognitive-affective-conative (CAC) framework is a psychological theory that explains the interplay between perception, emotions, and behavioral intentions. Cognition refers to an individual's beliefs and knowledge acquisition about an object, such as their perception of a destination's image. Emotion involves affective responses related to attitudes, like liking or a sense of belonging(Peng et al.2023).Conation refers to behavioral tendencies driven by cognition and emotion, such as decisions to travel. This framework has been applied in tourism research.(Lu et al.2023) For example, Li et al.(2021) confirmed its logic through cognitive evaluation, emotional reactions, and loyalty behaviors in Airbnb experiences. Huang et al.(2024) found that the cognitive aspects of service robots can evoke user emotions and usage intentions. By analyzing online texts, this study found that video games align with the CAC framework's theoretical path by reshaping tourists' cognitive images and emotional attachments. This provides a theoretical basis for analyzing the chain effects of video games on tourism intentions.

1.2.The Impact of Video Gaming Experiences on Tourism Intentions

The formation of tourism intentions is a complex, multi-dimensional issue that has given rise to research on tourism destination marketing. As digital technologies continue to develop, Rainoldi et al.(2022) have pointed out that video gaming experiences can influence tourists' intentions through various mechanisms. Dubois et al.(2018) have shown that video games can significantly affect players' tourism motivations and destination choices, especially when the games are set in real cities. Additionally, Shaheer.(2022) found that heritage sites featured in video games can become attractions in the real world, influencing tourism intentions. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Video gaming experiences have a positive impact on tourism intentions.

1.3.The Mediating Role of Destination Image Perception

The concept of Tourism Destination Image (TDI), first introduced by Hunt(1975), encapsulates the entirety of tourists' beliefs, perceptions, and impressions of a destination. It comprises two aspects: the cognitive image, which relates to tourists' understanding and views of a destination's characteristics; and the affective image, which pertains to their attitudes and emotional responses toward the destination. Together, these two elements form the overall image of the destination(Chunyang et al.2013). Zhang et al.(2015) suggest that the experience of video gaming involves players' cognitive and emotional reactions as they interact with game elements within a specific gaming environment. Research by Shuhua et al.(2024) has shown that video gaming experiences can significantly enhance players' perception of a tourism destination's image, both cognitively and affectively, and in turn, influence their tourism intentions. Based on these insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Destination image perception plays a mediating role in the impact of video gaming experiences on tourism intentions.

1.4.The Mediating Role of Place Attachment

Place attachment refers to the deep emotional bond and sense of belonging that tourists develop towards a specific location or area. It is formed through the interaction of emotions, functions, cognitions, experiences, and beliefs(Dalavong et al.2024). Wu et al.(2023) have shown that place attachment can enhance tourists' emotional experiences of a destination, thereby increasing their intention to visit. Zheng et al.(2022) discovered that virtual attachment generated through virtual tourism can strengthen place attachment to actual tourist destinations and significantly enhance the intention to travel there. Since video games often provide virtual settings and environments that allow players to explore and interact, they share a similar core concept with virtual tourism. Thus, video games can be considered a form of virtual tourism. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Place attachment plays a mediating role in the impact of video gaming experiences on tourism intentions.

1.5.The Chain Mediating Role of Destination Image Perception and Place Attachment

The CAC framework emphasizes that cognition drives emotion, and both jointly influence behavioral intentions(Lu et al.2023). In tourism, destination image perception (the cognitive dimension) refers to tourists' rational understanding of a destination's features, such as landscape and cultural value. Place attachment (the emotional dimension) reflects emotional belonging and identity(Zhang et al.2015). Zhou et al.(2022) found that cognition positively impacts emotional attachment, which in turn enhances tourism intentions by strengthening emotional identification. Zheng et al.(2022) further suggested that virtual cognition (e.g., from game settings) can reinforce real place attachment and on-site travel intentions.Based on this, the study proposes:

H4: Destination image perception and place attachment sequentially mediate the effect of gaming experiences on tourism intentions. That is, gaming experiences influence destination image perception, which then affects place attachment, ultimately generating tourism intentions.

In summary, the study's hypothesis model is a chain mediation model, as shown in Figure 1.

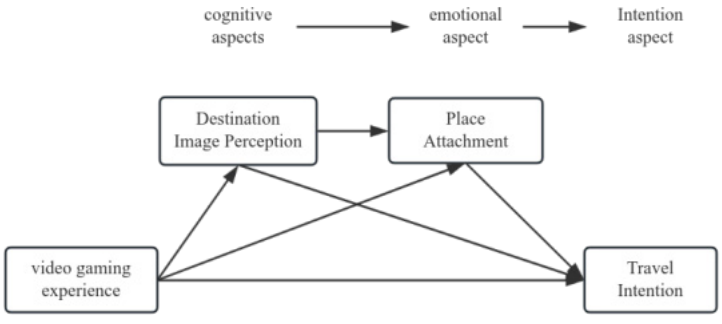

Figure 1 Research Hypothesis Model

2.Research Design

2.1.Scale Development and Survey

The questionnaire, based on existing literature, has six parts: Part 1 uses dichotomous questions to filter out non-target tourists (those completely unfamiliar with the destination or who have already visited Xiaoxitian in Xi County); Part 2 collects demographic information; Part 3 employs Denisova et al.(2017)'s 3-item video game experience scale; Part 4 uses Wu et al.(2017)'s 4-item heritage tourism image perception scale; Part 5 integrates Jia et al.(2016) and Yu et al.(2017)'s 5-item place attachment scale (including place dependence and identity); and Part 6 uses Wu H C et al.'s 4-item tourism intention scale. The questionnaire items are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Specific Items of the Questionnaire Content

Category	Item	Measure
True/False Items	Are you aware of Xiaoxitian in Xi County but have never traveled there?	
Demographic Characteristics	See Table 2	
Video Gaming Experience Scale	I feel that I have learned new knowledge while playing the game "Black Myth: Wukong."	GP1
	I feel that the game "Black Myth: Wukong" is exciting.	GP2
	I have put in a lot of effort while playing the game "Black Myth: Wukong."	GP3
Destination Image Perception Scale	I believe that traveling to Xiaoxitian in Xi County will provide me with an interesting and beneficial educational experience.	DI1
	I think the cultural relics displayed in Xiaoxitian in Xi County are excellent.	DI2
	I think the items, materials, and information in Xiaoxitian in Xi County demonstrate high-quality cultural and historical value.	DI3
	I believe that visiting Xiaoxitian in Xi County will be a satisfying experience.	DI4
Place Attachment Scale	Xiaoxitian in Xi County is a good place for experiencing tourism.	PA1
	Xiaoxitian in Xi County is very special to me.	PA2
	If I could, I would like to spend more time here.	PA3
	Xiaoxitian in Xi County is very meaningful to me.	PA4
	I really love the Xiaoxitian in Xi County as a tourist attraction.	PA5
Travel Intention Scale	If I could, I would definitely visit Xiaoxitian in Xi County.	TI1
	I would highly recommend Xiaoxitian in Xi County to my friends and relatives.	TI2
	When it comes to Xiaoxitian in Xi County, I always say positive things about this cultural heritage to others.	TI3
	I would recommend Xiaoxitian in Xi County to others.	TI4

After a pre-survey of 80 questionnaires and subsequent optimizations, the formal survey was distributed via a "Wenjuanxing" link through platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu, and it was specified to be filled out only by players of "Black Myth: Wukong.", using a snowball sampling method (each respondent refers two others). Of the 532 collected, 410 were valid after excluding those with insufficient completion time or obviously unreasonable answers.

2.2.Data Analysis

SPSS27.0 and AMOS28.0 were used for data analysis. Firstly, frequency analysis was conducted via SPSS27.0 to obtain basic characteristics of valid data. Then, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to assess reliability coefficients of measurement tools. Standardized factor loadings and composite reliability (CR) were analyzed to check reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) values were evaluated to ensure convergent validity. Additionally, KMO values and Bartlett's Sphericity Test Sig. values were analyzed for significance to confirm data suitability for factor analysis. Finally, using Amos28.0, CFA was performed to test the chain mediation model's fit via indices like CMIN/DF, and path and effect decomposition analyses with P-value tests were conducted.

3.Results

3.1.Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics reveal a reasonable sample distribution. The gender split is relatively even, with 58.30% male and 41.70% female respondents. The majority of participants are aged between 19 and 39 (45.7%), with monthly incomes primarily ranging from 1000 to 3000 yuan (34.5%). Most respondents hold university or college degrees (56.4%), and the primary occupations are student (38.1%) and general employee (20.3%).

Table 2 Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Categories	Proportions	Variables	Categories	Proportions
Gender	male	58.30%	Education Level	Junior High School or Below	13.30%
	female	41.70%		Vocational and High School	24.60%
Age	18 Years Old or Younger	26.50%		Undergraduate	56.40%
	19-39 Years Old	45.70%		Postgraduate or Above	5.7%
	40-59 Years Old	24.20%	Occupation	Student	38.10%
	60 Years Old or Above	3.60%		Private Business Owner	12.70%
Monthly Income	Below 1000 Yuan	14.90%		General Staff	20.30%
	1000-3000 Yuan	34.50%		Professional and Technical Personnel	8.90%
	3000-5000 Yuan	24.60%		Civil Servants/Government and Institution Staff	9.50%
	5000-8000 Yuan	15.60%		Retirees	2.30%
	Above 8000 Yuan	10.40%		Others	8.20%

3.2.Reliability and Validity Testing

The reliability of variables was assessed using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient in SPSS27.0. As shown in Table 3, the Cronbach's Alpha values for video gaming experience, destination image perception, place

attachment, and tourism intention all exceeded 0.800, indicating high reliability. For validity, which included convergent and discriminant validity, all variables had factor loadings above 0.700, average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.600, and composite reliability (CR) above 0.800, showing good convergent validity. The KMO value was 0.828, and Bartlett's Sphericity Test was significant (Sig. = 0.000), confirming the data's suitability for factor analysis.

Table 3 Reliability and Convergent Validity Test Results

Variables	Measure	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loadings	AVE	CR
Video Gaming Experience	GP1	0.823	0.877	0.7388	0.8954
	GP2		0.867		
	GP3		0.834		
Destination Image Perception	DI1	0.834	0.847	0.6678	0.8894
	DI2		0.815		
	DI3		0.796		
	DI4		0.81		
Place Attachment	PA1	0.86	0.831	0.6416	0.8994
	PA2		0.825		
	PA3		0.743		
	PA4		0.808		
	PA5		0.795		
Travel Intention	TI1	0.834	0.814	0.6683	0.8896
	TI2		0.822		
	TI3		0.824		
	TI4		0.81		

3.3.Structural Equation Modeling Analysis

The measurement model was assessed using CFA. As shown in Table 4, all model indicators met the discriminant validity criteria, confirming the model's suitability for structural equation modeling.

Table 4 CFA Measurement Model Test Results

Indicators	Reference Standards	Actual Measured Results
CMIN/DF	1-3 is excellent, 3-5 is good	1.741
RMSEA	<0.05 is excellent, <0.08 is good	0.043
IFI	0.9 is excellent, >0.8 is good	0.977
TLI	0.9 is excellent, >0.8 is good	0.972
CFI	0.9 is excellent, >0.8 is good	0.977

In AMOS24.0, we used structural equation and Bootstrap methods to test hypotheses H1-H4, with results in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5 Structural Equation Model Path Relationship Test Results

Path Relationships			Effect Sizes	S.E.	C.R.	P
Destination Image Perception	<---	Video Gaming Experience	0.498	0.059	8.504	***
Place Attachment	<---	Destination Image Perception	0.56	0.065	8.676	***
Travel Intention	<---	Place Attachment	0.523	0.063	8.306	***
Place Attachment	<---	Video Gaming Experience	0.244	0.063	3.899	***
Travel Intention	<---	Destination Image Perception	0.246	0.053	4.624	***
Travel Intention	<---	Video Gaming Experience	0.151	0.047	3.222	0.001

Table 6 Bootstrap Mediation Effect Test Results

Hypothesis	Path	Effect	Effect Size	95% Confidence Interval		P	Conclusion
H1	Video Gaming Experience → Travel Intention	Direct Effect	0.151	0.033	0.279	0.018	Valid
H2	Video Gaming Experience → Destination Image Perception	Mediation Effect	0.138	0.050	0.251	0.002	Valid
H3	Video Gaming Experience → Place Attachment → Travel Intention	Mediation Effect	0.122	0.036	0.237	0.009	Valid
H4	Video Gaming Experience → Destination Image Perception → Place Attachment → Travel Intention	Chain Mediation Effect	0.146	0.083	0.252	0.000	Valid

Video gaming experiences significantly enhance tourism intentions ($\beta = 0.151$, $p = 0.001$). For instance, the "Assassin's Creed" series and "Black Myth: Wukong" integrate real - world heritage sites, driving players to explore these locations virtually and boosting real - world visits. During the National Day holiday, this trend caused a significant increase in tourist numbers at Shanxi's Xiaoxitian.

The deeper impact unfolds through cognitive and emotional pathways. In the cognitive pathway, video gaming experiences strengthen destination image perception ($\beta = 0.498$, $p < 0.001$) via 3D scanning and AR interaction, which in turn raises tourism intentions ($\beta = 0.246$, $p < 0.001$). This mediation effect accounts for 24.78% (effect size 0.138). In the emotional pathway, game narratives infuse virtual scenes with emotional meaning, fostering place attachment ($\beta = 0.244$, $p < 0.001$) and significantly enhancing tourism intentions through a sense of belonging and identity ($\beta = 0.523$, $p < 0.001$), contributing 21.9% of the mediation effect (effect size 0.122).

More importantly, the cognitive and emotional pathways are interconnected, forming a chain: "Video game experience → Destination image perception (β = 0.56) → Place attachment → Tourism intention" (effect size 0.146, accounting for 26.21%). This reveals the complete logic chain of "technology - enhanced cognition, narrative - driven emotion, and behavior - oriented action." This mechanism is particularly evident in the Xiaoxitian case. The game digitally presents sculpture art and integrates Buddhist cultural narratives. Players first form a cognitive image of "Ming - dynasty colored sculptures" and develop an emotional attachment to the "Zen Buddhism site" through immersive narratives, eventually transitioning from virtual exploration to real - world tourism consumption.

4.Conclusions and Implications

Based on the CAC framework and structural equation modeling, this study confirms that video gaming experiences stimulate tourism intentions through a dual-path chain mechanism: destination image perception and place attachment. Video gaming experiences directly enhance tourism intentions (β=0.151) and strengthen this effect via cognitive-emotional synergistic pathways. Firstly, video games use 3D modeling to vividly showcase heritage site landscapes, such as digitized sculptures, significantly improving tourists' cognitive perception of a destination's cultural and aesthetic value (β=0.498) and driving tourism intentions (β=0.246). Secondly, game narratives, like those of the Mahavira Hall, endow virtual scenes with emotional meaning, fostering tourists' place attachment (β=0.244) and substantially strengthening tourism intentions through emotional belonging (β=0.523). Notably, these two aspects form a chain mediation path: "Game experience → Cognitive enhancement → Place attachment → Behavioral intention" (effect size 0.146). This reveals that video games, by leveraging technological empowerment and content co-creation, reshape tourists' decision-making logic, shifting it from rational cognition and emotional resonance to actual on-site experiences.

Based on these findings, we propose two practical strategies. Firstly, in terms of technological integration, tourism destinations should collaborate with game developers. They can digitize heritage site elements, like architecture and artifacts, embed them into games using 3D scanning, and enhance immersive experiences. This concretely showcases the destination, reinforcing tourists' cognitive perceptions.Secondly, in content design, it's essential to build a conversion chain from "cultural symbols to narrative transmission, and then to emotional memory." For example, develop game-exclusive storylines around heritage sites. Transform historical contexts, such as Ming-dynasty Buddhist culture, into emotional touchpoints for players. This deepens their place attachment through virtual exploration.

The case of "Black Myth: Wukong" is a prime example. By restoring suspension sculpture art and incorporating Zen Buddhism narratives, it spurred a significant increase in tourists to Shanxi's Xiaoxitian in Xixian County. This validates the feasibility of the "game IP + cultural tourism" model. Looking ahead, we can explore in-game tourism booking systems and real-world scene replication. These integrated mechanisms can form a closed loop of "virtual engagement to real - world conversion," offering a sustainable model for digital - cultural integration in tourism.

5.Future Directions

This study used "Black Myth: Wukong" to test the "game IP + cultural tourism" model's viability, though its broad applicability needs more research. Future research could expand by comparing how different game types (e.g., open-world, role-playing) affect tourism intentions and by studying the roles of cultural distance and player engagement as moderating variables. Additionally, the sustainable development of digital cultural tourism requires attention to long-term effects, such as maintaining tourist numbers and the durability of emotional attachment to places after a game's popularity declines. The introduction of dynamic tracking studies is recommended to uncover the long-term impact mechanisms of video games on tourism intentions. Finally, as technology advances and virtual and real spaces integrate deeply, reshaping tourism experiences, optimizing the "cognition - emotion - behavior" conversion efficiency through transmedia storytelling and interactive design will be crucial for innovation in digital cultural tourism.

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