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Sensory Marketing and Trust in Tourism: Examining the Impact on Traveling Intentions to Jiangxi Province, China

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of sensory appeal on tourists' travel intentions, with a specific focus on Jiangxi Province, China. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, Emotional Response and Attachment Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the research explores how sensory stimuli—encompassing visual, auditory, gustatory, and tactile elements—affect perceived authenticity, perceived enjoyment, and emotional engagement, and how these factors drive travel intentions. Additionally, the study examines the moderating role of cultural familiarity, providing a nuanced understanding of how tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds respond to sensory marketing. Data collected from 383 respondents were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings reveal that sensory appeal significantly enhances perceived authenticity and enjoyment, which in turn, positively influence emotional engagement and travel intentions. Moreover, cultural familiarity moderates these relationships, suggesting that marketing strategies must be tailored to resonate with both domestic and international audiences. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on sensory marketing in tourism and offers practical implications for enhancing the appeal of under-marketed destinations.

Keywords: Sensory marketing, Travel intentions, Perceived authenticity, Emotional engagement, Cultural familiarity, Jiangxi Province, Tourism marketing, Structural Equation Modeling.

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Introduction

Tourism is inherently a sensory experience, where the sights, sounds, tastes, and textures of a destination profoundly shape how tourists perceive and enjoy their visits. In the context of an increasingly competitive global market, understanding the key factors that drive travel intentions is paramount for destinations seeking to attract and retain visitors. In 2019, the global tourism sector contributed a substantial 10.4% to the world's GDP, with international tourist arrivals reaching a staggering 1.5 billion (WTTC, 2021). However, in this dynamic and crowded marketplace, traditional marketing strategies that rely predominantly on

information dissemination and visual content are becoming insufficient. To effectively capture and sustain the interest of potential tourists, there is an urgent need to engage multiple senses through sensory marketing—a strategy that crafts immersive and memorable experiences by appealing to all five senses (Agapito *et al.*, 2017; Rahman *et al.*, 2017).

Jiangxi Province in China, renowned for its rich cultural heritage, breathtaking natural landscapes, and distinctive local flavors, presents a compelling case for exploring how sensory appeal can influence tourists' perceptions and travel intentions. Despite its considerable potential, Jiangxi attracted only 80.2 million domestic and international tourists in 2019—a figure that pales in comparison to more prominent destinations like Beijing, which welcomed over 320 million visitors in the same year (Hongyu, 2024). This stark disparity suggests that Jiangxi has yet to fully capitalize on its sensory and cultural assets to attract a broader and more diverse audience.

Existing research underscores the critical importance of sensory experiences in shaping consumer behavior across various domains, including tourism, hospitality, and retail (Cascio Rizzo *et al.*, 2023; Haase *et al.*, 2018; MOREIRA *et al.*, 2017). Sensory marketing has been empirically shown to enhance customer satisfaction, strengthen behavioral intentions, and build trust within the hospitality industry (Lee and Lee, 2018; Saengchai *et al.*, 2019). However, much of the existing literature has disproportionately focused on visual stimuli, often neglecting the comprehensive impact of engaging the full spectrum of sensory experiences (Saribaş and Demir, 2024). Scholars such as Agapito *et al.* (Agapito *et al.*, 2012) have advocated for a more holistic approach that incorporates all five senses into tourism marketing strategies. Despite this, a significant gap remains in understanding how these sensory elements influence psychological constructs such as perceived authenticity, enjoyment, and emotional engagement—particularly within the tourism sector (Antunes and Veríssimo, 2024).

The central problem this research addresses is the lack of a comprehensive understanding of how multi-sensory marketing influences tourists' travel intentions, especially in culturally and heritage-rich destinations like Jiangxi Province. While traditional tourism marketing has largely emphasized cognitive appeals, there is an imperative need to delve deeper into the sensory and emotional dimensions that critically shape consumer decision-making processes. Previous studies have demonstrated the benefits of sensory marketing in industries such as hospitality and retail (Moreira *et al.*, 2017; Saengchai *et al.*, 2019), yet there is limited exploration of how sensory stimuli directly impact tourist behavior, particularly in under-marketed destinations that possess significant untapped potential (Rahman *et al.*, 2017).

The objectives of this study are therefore as follows:

1. To examine the relationship between sensory appeal and perceived authenticity within the context of tourism in Jiangxi Province, China.
2. To investigate the impact of sensory appeal on perceived enjoyment and how this, in turn, influences tourists' emotional engagement with Jiangxi Province.
3. To explore the mediating roles of perceived authenticity, perceived enjoyment, and emotional engagement in the relationship between sensory appeal and travel intentions.
4. To assess the moderating role of cultural familiarity on the relationships between sensory appeal, perceived authenticity, perceived enjoyment, emotional engagement, and travel intentions.

The theoretical frameworks underpinning this research—the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, Emotional Response and Attachment Theory, and the Theory of Planned

Behavior (TPB)—are well-established in consumer behavior studies but have yet to be comprehensively applied to the context of tourism marketing that emphasizes sensory experiences. The S-O-R model provides a framework for understanding how sensory stimuli (stimulus) influence internal psychological states (organism), such as emotional engagement, which then drive behavioral responses like travel intentions (response)(Cascio Rizzo *et al.*, 2023). Emotional Response and Attachment Theory further suggest that sensory cues can forge strong emotional bonds and attachments, thereby enhancing tourists' connections to a destination (Kim, 2021). Meanwhile, TPB offers insights into how attitudes shaped by sensory experiences, along with perceived behavioral control and subjective norms, influence travel intentions (Ajzen, 1991).

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study not only seeks to advance the existing literature but also aims to provide actionable insights for tourism marketers and policymakers. The findings will offer practical guidelines on how to design sensory-rich, culturally sensitive marketing strategies that can elevate the appeal of destinations like Jiangxi Province. For instance, leveraging sensory marketing might involve developing campaigns that highlight the unique sounds, flavors, and textures of Jiangxi, thereby engaging tourists on multiple sensory levels and fostering deeper emotional connections to the region.

In conclusion, this study addresses a critical gap in tourism research by investigating the influence of sensory appeal on perceived authenticity, enjoyment, emotional engagement, and travel intentions, with a particular emphasis on the moderating role of cultural familiarity. By doing so, it aims to contribute both theoretical advancements and practical recommendations that can assist under-marketed destinations like Jiangxi Province in realizing their full potential and attracting a wider audience.

Literature Review

Theoretical underpinning

This study investigates how sensory marketing and trust influence travelers' intentions to visit Jiangxi Province, China, by integrating the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, Emotional Response and Attachment Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework to understand the complex interplay between sensory appeal, perceived authenticity, perceived enjoyment, emotional engagement, cultural familiarity, and travel intentions.

The S-O-R model explains how external stimuli influence internal psychological states and subsequent behaviors. In tourism marketing, sensory stimuli such as online travel reviews, sensory marketing cues, and travel influencers affect travel intentions through cognitive responses and trust (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024; Anubha *et al.*, 2023; Saengchai *et al.*, 2019; Seçilmiş *et al.*, 2022). Electronic word-of-mouth impacts travel intentions, mediated by destination preference and moderated by consumer involvement (Yadav *et al.*, 2021). The use of short video applications and virtual reality experiences underscores the importance of authentic sensory experiences in shaping tourists' internal responses and intentions (Kim *et al.*, 2018; Li, 2019). Social media marketing and e-reputation influence visit intentions by enhancing destination image (Baber and Baber, 2022).

Applying the S-O-R model, sensory appeal created through marketing efforts (Stimulus) influences tourists' perceptions of authenticity and enjoyment (Organism), which then affect their emotional engagement and travel intentions (Response). Sensory marketing strategies enhance customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions in hospitality and virtual reality contexts (Kim *et al.*, 2018; Saengchai *et al.*, 2019). This demonstrates that sensory

stimuli effectively stimulate cognitive and emotional responses leading to increased travel intentions.

The Emotional Response and Attachment Theory explains how sensory experiences elicit emotional responses, leading to place attachment and influencing behavioral intentions. Sensory cues enhance tourists' emotional responses and attachment to destinations (Lee *et al.*, 2018; Yen *et al.*, 2015). In rural tourism, sensory marketing fosters place attachment and positive customer responses (Kastenholz *et al.*, 2020). Sensory marketing contributes to emotional attachment and brand loyalty even in luxury retail settings (Shahid *et al.*, 2022). A holistic approach engaging all five senses is recommended to strengthen emotional bonds and enhance tourist experiences (Agapito *et al.*, 2012).

Integrating this theory with the S-O-R model provides a deeper understanding of how sensory stimuli not only impact cognitive evaluations but also elicit emotional responses that lead to attachment and increased behavioral intentions. Emotional engagement acts as a crucial mediator between sensory appeal and travel intention.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) offers a structural framework for predicting intentional behavior based on attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. TPB has effectively predicted travelers' intentions in various tourism contexts (Lam and Hsu, 2004; Yuzhanin and Fisher, 2016). Attitude, perceived behavioral control, and past behavior significantly influence travel intentions (Sujood *et al.*, 2021). Sensory marketing cues impact behavioral intentions by shaping favorable attitudes and enhancing perceived behavioral control in the hospitality industry (Saengchai *et al.*, 2019). The use of smartphones for travel information search has been examined using TPB, revealing additional causal paths (DACINIA CRINA And FLORINA, 2020). User-generated content plays a significant role in travel planning, demonstrating TPB's applicability in modern travel behaviors (Mendes Filho *et al.*, 2012). Incorporating perceived risk into TPB during the COVID-19 pandemic effectively predicted travel intentions, highlighting trust factors in decision-making (Sujood *et al.*, 2021).

By integrating TPB, the study examines how perceived authenticity and enjoyment (attitudes) influence travel intentions, with cultural familiarity (subjective norms) moderating these relationships. This acknowledges the importance of cognitive, emotional, and social factors in shaping travel intentions.

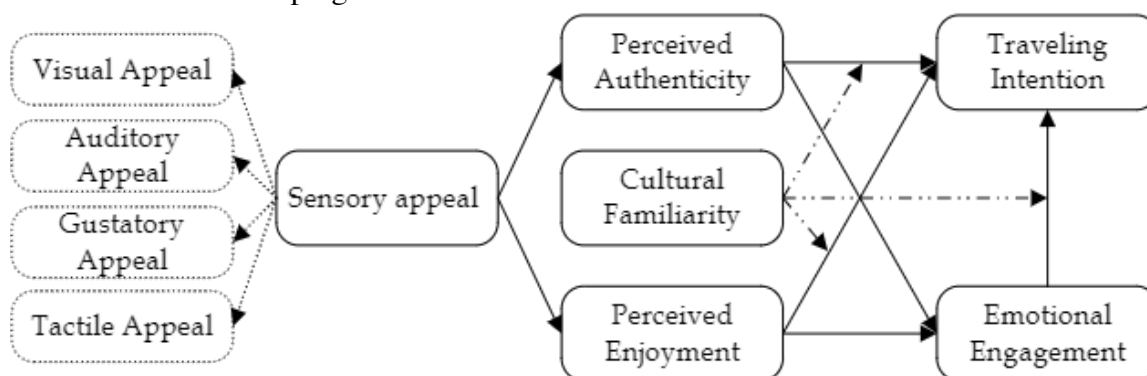


Figure 1: Research framework

The integration of these theories (figure 1), enriched by recent literature, provides a robust framework for understanding how sensory marketing and trust influence travelers' intentions. Combining the S-O-R model, Emotional Response and Attachment Theory, and TPB offers valuable insights for tourism marketers in developing effective strategies to enhance travel intentions to Jiangxi Province. This approach addresses gaps in each

individual theory and provides a nuanced explanation of tourist behavior by combining cognitive, emotional, and cultural factors.

Hypothesis development

Sensory Appeal and Perceived Authenticity

Sensory marketing plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions by engaging their senses through vivid and immersive experiences. Rizzo et al.(2023) demonstrated that the use of sensory language in influencer marketing enhances perceived authenticity, leading to higher consumer engagement and purchase intent.

In the realm of food tourism, sensory appeal significantly contributes to tourists' behavioral intentions by eliciting affective responses (Li *et al.*, 2022). The sensory richness of a destination's portrayal can make experiences seem more authentic, thereby increasing its appeal. Haase et al(2018) found that sensory imagery in advertising positively affects consumer perception and product design, making products appear more authentic and appealing. Furthermore, for traditional products, incremental packaging innovation that emphasizes sensory elements can enhance the perceived origin dimension of authenticity (Pantin-Sohier et al., 2015). Brand authenticity, influenced by factors such as heritage and nostalgia, has a positive impact on brand relationship quality and consumer behavior (Fritz et al., 2017). In local food consumption, Huang (2023) highlighted that brand authenticity indirectly influences word-of-mouth through sensory experiences, underscoring the importance of sensory appeal in shaping authenticity perceptions.

Perceptions of authenticity generate increased appeal and value across various settings (OConnor et al., 2017). For instance, in agricultural landscapes, the presence of productive elements is perceived as both authentic and appealing, enhancing the overall experience (Nazariadli *et al.*, 2017). Collectively, these studies indicate that:

H1: Sensory appeal positively influences perceived authenticity.

Sensory Appeal and Perceived Enjoyment

Engaging consumers' senses not only influences their perceptions of authenticity but also enhances their enjoyment of the experience. Moreira et al.(2017) highlighted that sensory stimulation positively affects brand experience, brand equity, and purchase intentions. This implies that sensory-rich marketing can elevate the enjoyment consumers derive from interacting with a brand or product.

In advertising, sensory imagery has been shown to enhance product design perception and consumer attitudes, leading to greater enjoyment (Haase *et al.*, 2018). Imtiyaz et al. (Imtiyaz *et al.*, 2021) found that in the context of convenience food, sensory appeal is a key determinant of purchase intention, consumption, and satisfaction, as it directly impacts the consumer's enjoyment of the product.

For tourist destinations, sensory impressions contribute to loyalty by enhancing visitors' enjoyment beyond the abstract destination image (Lv et al., 2020). In retail environments, Duong et al. (2022) observed that multisensory stimulation leads to more positive emotional responses and perceptions, increasing the overall enjoyment of the shopping experience. Ahn et al. (2019) noted that sensory fit between partner brands influences co-branding evaluations, suggesting that harmonious sensory experiences enhance consumer enjoyment.

Moreover, both explicit and implicit sensory perceptions play vital roles in shaping brand experiences and performance, contributing to overall enjoyment and satisfaction(Haase *et al.*, 2018). Lund (2015) posited that appealing to multiple senses can

create memorable brand experiences, positively impacting consumer behavior by enhancing perceived enjoyment. These findings collectively suggest that:
H2: Sensory appeal positively influences perceived enjoyment.

Perceived Authenticity, Perceived Enjoyment, and Emotional Engagement

Perceived authenticity and perceived enjoyment are critical factors that enhance emotional engagement across various contexts. In the hospitality industry, authenticity has been shown to improve customer engagement, well-being, and behavioral intentions (Rosado-Pinto and Loureiro, 2023; Sutton, 2020). When consumers perceive a service or experience as genuine and enjoyable, they are more likely to become emotionally engaged, leading to increased loyalty and advocacy.

Kim (2021) found that in traditional restaurant settings, perceived service authenticity significantly enhances positive emotions and revisit intentions, highlighting authenticity's role in driving emotional engagement. In online environments, authentic and enjoyable brand initiatives foster customer engagement and positive brand evaluations, as consumers appreciate genuine and pleasurable interactions (Eigenraam et al., 2021; Kumar and Kaushik, 2022). Men and Tsai (2014) demonstrated that perceived authenticity and transparency in social media communications positively influence public engagement and advocacy behaviors.

Perceived enjoyment also plays a vital role in fostering emotional engagement. Lyons et al. (2014) observed that in active video games, enjoyment mediates the relationship between engagement and energy expenditure, indicating that more enjoyable activities lead to greater emotional and physical engagement. Chen et al. (2006) noted that in online gaming, enjoyment fosters deeper emotional engagement among players, emphasizing the link between enjoyment and emotional investment.

In educational settings, Lu et al. (2023) found that situational interest and perceived skill, which enhance enjoyment, positively predict emotional engagement. Yoo (2015) demonstrated that perceived enjoyment enhances emotional engagement through increased motivation and positive emotions. These findings indicate that:

H3a: Perceived authenticity positively influences emotional engagement.

H3b: Perceived enjoyment positively influences emotional engagement.

Emotional Engagement and Travel Intention

Emotional engagement is a strong predictor of travel intentions and behaviors. When tourists are emotionally invested in a destination, they are more likely to form strong travel intentions and advocate for it. Vittersø et al. (2017) found that emotional experiences, particularly feelings of engagement and interest, predict intentions to revisit destinations and recommend them to others.

Joo et al. (2023) demonstrated that anticipated emotional solidarity positively impacts destination image formation and travel intention, indicating that emotional engagement influences both perceptions and behaviors related to travel. In the context of travel vlogs, emotional resonance experienced by viewers enhances engagement behaviors, leading to increased travel intentions and electronic word-of-mouth (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Silaban *et al.*, 2022). Silaban et al. (2022) further confirmed that emotional connections fostered by travel vlogs significantly influence travel intention and e-WOM behavior.

Prayag et al. (2016) found that tourists' emotional experiences act as antecedents of perceived overall image and satisfaction, which affect the intention to recommend the destination.

Additionally, Ali et al. (2021) observed that user engagement with travel apps positively impacts satisfaction, app attachment, and behavioral intentions. Thus:

H3c: Emotional engagement positively influences travel intention.

Perceived Authenticity Mediating the Relationship between Sensory Appeal and Travel Intention

Perceived authenticity is a critical factor influencing tourists' behavioral intentions. When tourists perceive a destination as authentic, it enhances their intention to visit, both directly and indirectly, through mediators such as destination image, perceived value, and experiential values (Atasoy and Eren, 2023; Chang *et al.*, 2021; Li and Li, 2022). Authentic experiences satisfy tourists' desire for genuine cultural immersion, increasing the attractiveness of the destination.

Sensory appeal in tourism marketing amplifies this effect by providing vivid and engaging stimuli that enhance perceptions of authenticity. Wei et al. (2022) found that sensory appeal and stimulation contribute to visit intentions by improving perceived usefulness, credibility, and attractiveness of the destination. By engaging multiple senses, marketing efforts create a more realistic and immersive portrayal of the destination, strengthening the perception of authenticity.

Furthermore, the relationship between authenticity and behavioral intentions is mediated by factors such as memory, destination attachment, and flow experience (Li *et al.*, 2022; Zhang *et al.*, 2019). Authentic sensory experiences are more memorable and can foster a deep emotional attachment to the destination, which enhances the intention to travel. Authenticity also influences attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—key components that shape behavioral intentions (Girish and Lee, 2019). The interplay of these factors suggests that:

H4: Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between sensory appeal and travel intention.

Perceived Enjoyment Mediating the Relationship between Sensory Appeal and Travel Intention

Perceived enjoyment is another crucial factor that mediates the effect of sensory appeal on travel intention. Sensory impressions enrich tourists' experiences, contributing to destination loyalty, digital engagement, and brand love (Lv *et al.*, 2020; Lv and Wu, 2021). When marketing efforts successfully engage the senses, they enhance the enjoyment of potential tourists, making the destination more appealing.

These sensory experiences influence both cognitive and affective destination images, which are essential in shaping travel intentions (Nghiêm-Phú and Bagul, 2020). For example, Chen et al. (2014) demonstrated that the perceived relevance and enjoyment of travel blog content, including sensory descriptions, significantly impact behavioral intentions to visit destinations. Similarly, in the context of travel apps, atmospheric cues based on sensory elements influence user emotions and behaviors, enhancing perceived enjoyment (Wu et al., 2021).

Moreover, sensory appeal in digital media, such as YouTubers' videos, affects parasocial interaction and purchase intentions by increasing viewers' enjoyment and engagement (Chen et al., 2021). In food tourism, both food authenticity and sensory appeal contribute to tourists' behavioral intentions through affective responses, with enjoyment playing a mediating role (Ahmed and Aziz, 2024; Li *et al.*, 2022). These findings suggest that:

H5: Perceived enjoyment mediates the relationship between sensory appeal and travel intention.

Cultural Familiarity Moderating the Relationship between Perceived Authenticity and Travel Intention

Cultural familiarity plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions and their intentions to visit a destination. Research indicates that perceived authenticity positively affects destination image, perceived value, and behavioral intentions in cultural and heritage tourism contexts (Atasoy and Eren, 2023; Li and Li, 2022; Ramkissoon and Uysal, 2011). This effect is amplified among tourists with higher cultural familiarity, as they place greater value on authenticity (Jin and Hwang, 2024; Liu *et al.*, 2018). Authenticity perception also affects experience quality, which in turn impacts behavioral intentions (Li *et al.*, 2016). Thus, cultural familiarity strengthens the positive relationship between perceived authenticity and travel intention.

Similarly, cultural familiarity enhances the relationship between perceived enjoyment and travel intention. Studies have shown that cultural similarity and familiarity positively influence travel intentions by enhancing perceived enjoyment and reducing cultural travel risks (Li and Kworntnik Jr, 2020; S. Ng *et al.*, 2009). Tourists familiar with a destination's culture derive more enjoyment due to a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural nuances, leading to stronger travel intentions (Bazarova and Choi, 2022; Liu *et al.*, 2014).

Moreover, cultural familiarity deepens emotional connections with a destination, amplifying the impact of emotional engagement on travel intention. Familiarity not only improves cognitive and affective perceptions but also fosters meaningful emotional bonds that motivate the decision to visit (Kim and Ko, 2019; Yang *et al.*, 2009). Studies have found that cultural similarity is a consistent positive predictor of travel intentions across different nationalities (Ng *et al.*, 2009). Factors such as destination familiarity enhance flow experiences and creative travel intentions (Kuo and Chang, 2024), while cultural values and brand familiarity moderate the influence of external factors like online reviews on booking intentions (Ruiz-Equihua *et al.*, 2019). These findings collectively suggest:

H6a: Cultural familiarity positively moderates the relationship between perceived authenticity and travel intention.

H6b: Cultural familiarity positively moderates the relationship between perceived enjoyment and travel intention.

H6c: Cultural familiarity positively moderates the relationship between emotional engagement and travel intention.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to explore the influence of sensory marketing, perceived authenticity, perceived enjoyment, emotional engagement, and cultural familiarity on travel intentions to Jiangxi Province, China.

The target population for this study comprised potential tourists, both domestic and international, with an interest in cultural and heritage tourism in Jiangxi Province. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure the sample was representative of the broader population. The population was stratified based on age, gender, nationality,

and prior travel experience to ensure that all relevant subgroups were proportionately represented (KISH, 1965).

A total of 383 respondents were surveyed, a sample size determined through statistical power analysis to ensure adequate power for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The sample was stratified across several demographic categories to ensure representativeness. The age distribution included 120 respondents aged 18-29 years, 140 respondents aged 30-44 years, 80 respondents aged 45-59 years, and 43 respondents aged 60 years and above. Gender representation was balanced, with 190 male respondents and 193 female respondents. In terms of nationality, the sample comprised 230 Chinese domestic tourists and 153 international tourists. Additionally, the sample accounted for prior travel experience to Jiangxi Province, with 240 respondents being first-time visitors and 143 being repeat visitors. This stratified approach ensured that the sample accurately reflected the diversity of the target population.

Data collection process

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period, from June to August 2024. The survey was distributed via online platforms, including social media channels (e.g., WeChat, Facebook), travel forums, and tourism-related websites. Participants were recruited through targeted advertisements and posts in relevant social media groups and travel forums. Interested individuals accessed the survey through a provided link, which directed them to a secure online survey platform. Upon accessing the survey, participants were first presented with a consent form detailing the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights as participants, including the confidentiality of their responses and the option to withdraw at any time. The survey achieved a response rate of 62%, which is considered robust for online surveys.

Measurement items development

The measurement items for this study were carefully developed based on a comprehensive review of existing literature, ensuring that each construct is measured with precision and academic rigor. The constructs include Sensory Appeal (divided into Visual, Auditory, Gustatory, and Tactile Appeal), Cultural Familiarity, Emotional Engagement, Perceived Authenticity, Perceived Enjoyment, Tactile Appeal, and Travel Intention. Sensory Appeal reflects the impact of sensory experiences on tourists' perceptions and intentions to visit Jiangxi Province. Items for Auditory Appeal were informed by Spence and Shankar (2010) and Perez-Cruz et al. (2012), who explored the influence of auditory cues and music on perception. Visual Appeal was guided by Jang and Namkung (2009) and Childers and Houston (1984), focusing on the effects of visual stimuli on emotions and memory. Cultural Familiarity measures tourists' knowledge of and connection to the cultural heritage of Jiangxi, drawing from Poria et al. (2006) on heritage management, Litvin and Kar (2004) on cultural moderation, and Baloglu and McCleary (1999) on destination image. Emotional Engagement, which captures the emotional connection tourists feel towards Jiangxi, was developed based on Vivek et al. (2012), Hollebeek et al. (2014), and Brodie et al. (2013), all of whom have explored consumer engagement in various contexts. Perceived Authenticity focuses on tourists' perceptions of the genuineness of cultural experiences in Jiangxi. This construct draws from Kolar and Zabkar (2010), Wang (1999), and Chhabra et al. (2003), who have extensively studied authenticity in tourism.

Perceived Enjoyment, reflecting the anticipated pleasure of visiting Jiangxi, was informed by Shankar et al. (2008), Davis (1989), emphasizing the importance of satisfaction and experiential enjoyment. Tactile Appeal, concerning the role of physical touch in shaping

tourist experiences, is based on research by Peck and Childers (1984) and Balaji et al. (2011), who highlighted the significance of tactile input in consumer behavior. Finally, Travel Intention, which assesses the likelihood of visiting Jiangxi, was developed using the Theory of Planned Behavior as applied in tourism by Lam and Hsu (2004), Hsu and Huang (2012), Quintal et al. (2010), and Sparks and Pan (2009). These measurement items, grounded in robust academic sources, provide a reliable and valid framework for evaluating the factors influencing travel intentions to Jiangxi Province. The approach ensures that the study maintains high academic standards while capturing the complex interplay of sensory appeal, cultural familiarity, emotional engagement, and perceived authenticity in shaping travel behavior.

Data Analysis

The demographic analysis (refer to table 1) of the respondents provides a comprehensive understanding of the sample's characteristics within the context of this study on travel intentions to Jiangxi Province, China. The age distribution shows that the majority of respondents are relatively young, with 31.3% in the 18-29 age group and 36.6% in the 30-44 age group, which indicates a significant portion of the sample consists of individuals who are likely to be active travelers. This is consistent with the broader tourism market, where younger individuals often exhibit a higher propensity for travel and exploration. The gender distribution is nearly balanced, with 49.6% male and 50.4% female respondents. This balance suggests that the findings can be generalized across genders without significant bias, reflecting diverse perspectives in travel intentions and preferences. In terms of nationality, 60.1% of respondents are Chinese domestic tourists, while 39.9% are international tourists. This composition highlights the study's relevance both to the local market and to an international audience, offering insights into how sensory appeal and other factors influence travel intentions across different cultural backgrounds. Prior travel experience shows that 62.7% of respondents are first-time visitors to Jiangxi Province, while 37.3% are repeat visitors. This indicates a strong interest in the region from new tourists, while also capturing the perceptions of those who have already experienced what Jiangxi has to offer, providing a well-rounded view of tourist intentions. Educational background reveals that over half of the respondents (54.8%) hold an undergraduate degree, and an additional 30.8% have a graduate degree or higher. This indicates that the sample is relatively well-educated, which may influence their sensitivity to cultural and sensory experiences, as well as their travel decisions. Occupational data show that 60.1% of respondents are employed full-time, suggesting a stable income base, which is important for travel planning. The presence of students (22.2%) and part-time workers (6.5%) also reflects a diverse economic background within the sample, adding depth to the analysis of travel intentions.

Table 1: Demographics of the respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18-29 years	120	31.3
	30-44 years	140	36.6
	45-59 years	80	20.9
	60 years and above	43	11.2
Gender	Male	190	49.6
	Female	193	50.4
Nationality	Chinese (Domestic)	230	60.1
	International	153	39.9
Prior Travel Experience	First-time Visitors	240	62.7
	Repeat Visitors	143	37.3
Education Level	High School or Less	55	14.4
	Undergraduate Degree	210	54.8
	Graduate Degree or Higher	118	30.8
Occupation	Student	85	22.2
	Employed (Full-time)	230	60.1
	Employed (Part-time)	25	6.5
	Retired	23	6.0
	Unemployed	20	5.2
Monthly Income (USD)	Less than \$1,000	70	18.3
	\$1,000 - \$2,999	150	39.2
	\$3,000 - \$4,999	100	26.1
	\$5,000 and above	63	16.4
Marital Status	Single	170	44.4
	Married	190	49.6
	Other (Divorced/Widowed)	23	6.0

Monthly income levels indicate that a significant portion of the respondents (39.2%) earn between \$1,000 and \$2,999, with another 26.1% earning between \$3,000 and \$4,999. These income brackets suggest that the majority of respondents have disposable income available for travel, which is critical in assessing the feasibility of travel intentions. Finally, marital status data show that nearly half of the respondents (49.6%) are married, with 44.4% single, which could influence travel preferences and decision-making, as these groups might have different priorities when planning trips. Overall, this demographic profile provides a solid foundation for understanding the factors influencing travel intentions to Jiangxi Province, reflecting a well-balanced and diverse sample that is representative of both local and international tourists, across various age groups, educational levels, and income brackets.

Measurement model

The measurement model statistics provided in Table 2 and supported by Figure 2 illustrate the robustness and reliability of the constructs used to assess travel intentions to Jiangxi Province, China. The outer loadings (OL) for each item across the constructs are consistently above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating high item reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2021). For example, items under Auditory Appeal (AA) show loadings between 0.805 and 0.873, which suggests that these items are strong indicators of the construct. Similarly, items under Emotional Engagement (EE) display exceptionally high loadings, ranging from 0.891 to 0.923, further reinforcing the reliability of the measurement model.

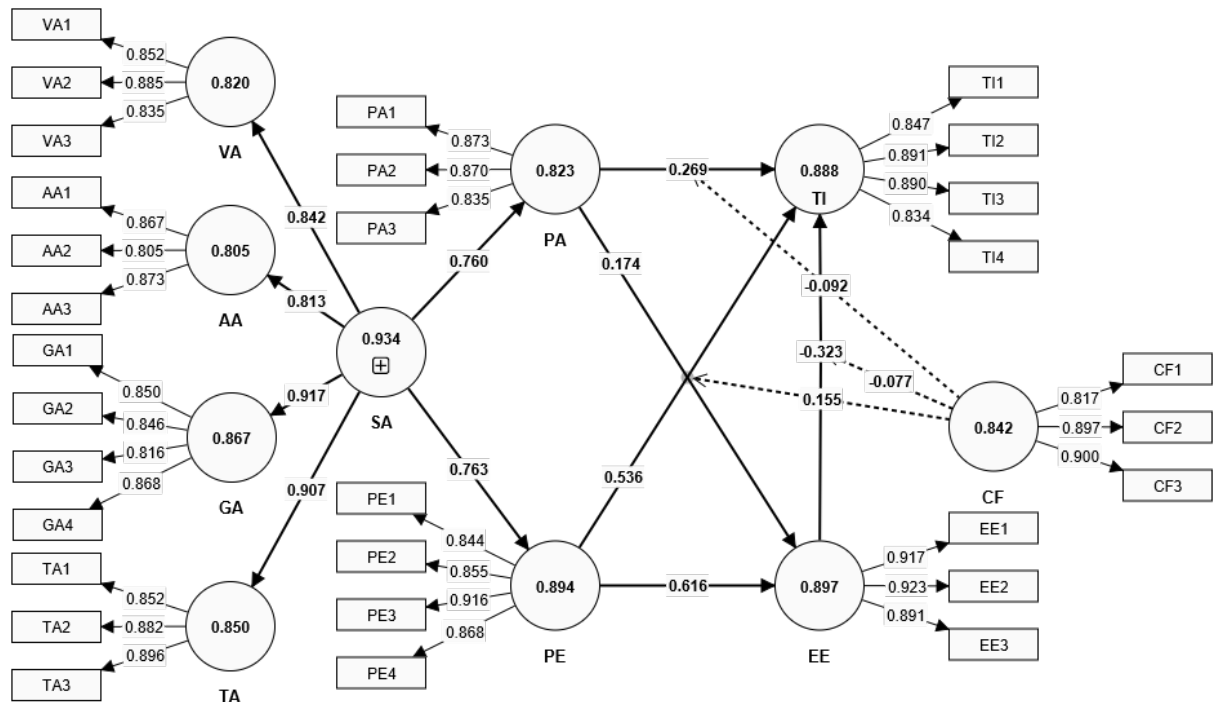


Figure 2: Measurement model

Multicollinearity, often a concern in complex models, is addressed through the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. As seen in Table 2, all VIF values are well below the critical value of 5, with most falling between 1.532 and 3.352. For instance, the VIF values for Emotional Engagement (EE) range from 2.333 to 3.140, suggesting that multicollinearity is not an issue, thus ensuring that the regression estimates are stable and reliable (Hair *et al.*, 2021).

Table 2: Measurement model statistics

		OL	VIF	CA	CR (rho_c)	AVE
AA	AA1	0.867	1.942	0.805	0.885	0.720
	AA2	0.805	1.532			
	AA3	0.873	1.949			
CF	CF1	0.817	1.666	0.842	0.905	0.760
	CF2	0.897	2.358			
	CF3	0.900	2.439			
EE	EE1	0.917	3.074	0.897	0.936	0.829
	EE2	0.923	3.140			
	EE3	0.891	2.333			
GA	GA1	0.850	2.080	0.867	0.909	0.715
	GA2	0.846	2.102			
	GA3	0.816	1.963			
	GA4	0.868	2.317			
PA	PA1	0.873	1.931	0.823	0.894	0.738
	PA2	0.870	1.950			
	PA3	0.835	1.722			
PE	PE1	0.844	2.245	0.894	0.926	0.759
	PE2	0.855	2.363			
	PE3	0.916	3.352			
	PE4	0.868	2.353			
TA	TA1	0.852	1.841	0.850	0.909	0.769
	TA2	0.882	2.222			
	TA3	0.896	2.309			
TI	TI1	0.847	2.288	0.888	0.923	0.749
	TI2	0.891	2.798			
	TI3	0.890	2.808			
	TI4	0.834	2.285			
VA	VA1	0.852	1.874	0.820	0.893	0.735
	VA2	0.885	2.137			
	VA3	0.835	1.671			

The internal consistency of the constructs is further supported by Composite Reliability (CR or rho_c) and Cronbach's Alpha (CA) values, both of which exceed the 0.70 threshold across all constructs, as shown in Table 2. For example, the CR values range from 0.885 to 0.936, indicating that the items within each construct are consistently measuring the underlying concept (Nunnally, 1978). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, all above 0.50, with Emotional Engagement (EE) at 0.829 and Perceived Enjoyment (PE) at 0.759, confirm the convergent validity of the constructs, meaning that the items are well-correlated with their respective constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Discriminant validity, which ensures that the constructs are distinct and measure different concepts, is confirmed through two methods: the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio) analysis and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. Table 3 presents the HTMT ratios, all of which are below the critical threshold of 0.85, confirming that the constructs are discriminant from each other (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). For instance, the HTMT ratio between Auditory Appeal (AA) and Cultural Familiarity (CF) is 0.411, well below the threshold, indicating that these constructs are distinct.

Table 3: Discriminant validity (HTMT)

	AA	CF	EE	GA	PA	PE	TA	TI	VA	CF x PA	CF x PE	CF x EE
AA												
CF	0.411											
EE	0.532	0.452										
GA	0.798	0.456	0.581									
PA	0.694	0.552	0.726	0.820								
PE	0.678	0.550	0.831	0.776	0.814							
TA	0.797	0.492	0.591	0.802	0.826	0.802						
TI	0.734	0.541	0.392	0.736	0.649	0.658	0.741					
VA	0.685	0.448	0.661	0.808	0.827	0.796	0.801	0.634				
CF x PA	0.282	0.287	0.400	0.264	0.445	0.470	0.335	0.320	0.362			
CF x PE	0.287	0.255	0.404	0.314	0.486	0.513	0.382	0.302	0.369	0.848		
CF x EE	0.233	0.149	0.517	0.265	0.400	0.392	0.265	0.223	0.361	0.742	0.780	

Table 4 further supports discriminant validity through the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. The square root of the AVE for each construct (displayed along the diagonal of Table 4) is greater than the correlations with other constructs, such as the square root of the AVE for Emotional Engagement (EE) being 0.910, which is higher than its highest correlation with any other construct. This confirms that each construct shares more variance with its items than with any other construct, thus supporting discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 4: Discriminant validity (FLC)

	AA	CF	EE	GA	PA	PE	TA	TI	VA
AA	0.849								
CF	0.342	0.872							
EE	0.454	0.392	0.910						
GA	0.671	0.392	0.518	0.845					
PA	0.566	0.457	0.624	0.697	0.859				
PE	0.579	0.479	0.743	0.689	0.730	0.871			
TA	0.661	0.416	0.516	0.777	0.691	0.700	0.877		
TI	0.623	0.471	0.353	0.650	0.555	0.589	0.645	0.866	
VA	0.557	0.372	0.567	0.686	0.681	0.682	0.710	0.542	0.857

The higher-order construct of Sensory Appeal (SA), as depicted in Table 5, shows strong outer loadings with its sub-dimensions (Auditory Appeal, Gustatory Appeal, Tactile Appeal, and Visual Appeal). The loadings for these dimensions range from 0.814 for Auditory Appeal (AA) to 0.909 for Tactile Appeal (TA), with t-statistics well above the critical value, confirming the statistical significance of these loadings (Hair *et al.*, 2021). These results

indicate that the sub-dimensions are strong and valid indicators of the broader Sensory Appeal construct.

Table 5: Outer loading composition of the higher order construct.

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (IO/STDEVI)	P values
AA <- SA	0.814	0.813	0.031	26.585	0.000
GA <- SA	0.904	0.904	0.014	65.502	0.000
TA <- SA	0.909	0.909	0.014	64.884	0.000
VA <- SA	0.854	0.853	0.023	36.743	0.000

In conclusion, the measurement model exhibits excellent reliability, validity, and discriminant validity, as evidenced by the comprehensive statistics presented in Tables 2 through 5. The strong measurement properties suggest that the constructs are well-defined and distinct, providing a solid foundation for testing the hypothesized relationships in the structural model. This robust measurement model ensures that the subsequent analysis of the factors influencing travel intentions to Jiangxi Province will be both reliable and meaningful.

Model fit and prediction

The model fit and prediction relevance statistics provided in Table 6 demonstrate the robustness and predictive accuracy of the structural model used in this study. The R-square values, which measure the proportion of variance explained by the model, indicate that the model explains a substantial amount of variance in the key constructs. For instance, the R-square values for Emotional Engagement (EE) and Perceived Authenticity (PA) are 0.567 and 0.577, respectively, suggesting that approximately 56.7% and 57.7% of the variance in these constructs is explained by the predictors in the model. Similarly, the R-square value for Perceived Enjoyment (PE) is 0.583, indicating strong explanatory power (Hair *et al.*, 2021).

Table 6: Model fit and prediction relevance

	R ²	R ² adjusted	Q ² predict	RMSE	MAE
EE	0.567	0.564	0.345	0.821	0.608
PA	0.577	0.576	0.574	0.658	0.501
PE	0.583	0.582	0.580	0.654	0.483
TI	0.455	0.443	0.479	0.727	0.570

The adjusted R-square values, which account for the number of predictors in the model and provide a more accurate measure of the explanatory power, are slightly lower but still robust, ranging from 0.443 for Travel Intention (TI) to 0.582 for Perceived Enjoyment (PE). These values suggest that the model remains strong even when adjusted for potential overfitting, reinforcing the reliability of the findings.

Predictive relevance, assessed through the Q²predict values, indicates the model's ability to predict unseen data. The Q²predict values for Perceived Authenticity (0.574) and Perceived Enjoyment (0.580) are particularly high, indicating that the model has substantial predictive relevance for these constructs. The Q²predict value for Emotional Engagement is also strong at 0.345, while Travel Intention has a Q²predict of 0.479, all of which exceed the threshold of 0.02 for small, 0.15 for medium, and 0.35 for large predictive relevance (Hair *et al.*, 2021). These values highlight the model's effectiveness in predicting key outcomes related to travel intentions.

Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) and Mean Absolute Error (MAE) are used to assess the accuracy of predictions. Lower values of RMSE and MAE indicate better model performance, with RMSE values ranging from 0.654 for Perceived Enjoyment to 0.821 for Emotional Engagement, and MAE values ranging from 0.483 for Perceived Enjoyment to 0.608 for Emotional Engagement. These values suggest that the model's predictions are reasonably accurate, with the lowest errors observed for Perceived Enjoyment, indicating high precision in predicting this construct.

Overall, the combination of high R-square values, strong Q^2 predict values, and acceptable RMSE and MAE values demonstrates that the model not only fits the data well but also has substantial predictive power. This suggests that the structural model is both reliable and valid in explaining and predicting the factors influencing travel intentions to Jiangxi Province, thereby offering meaningful insights into the role of sensory appeal, emotional engagement, and other related constructs in shaping tourist behavior. The findings support the theoretical framework and provide a robust basis for future research and practical applications in tourism marketing.

Hypothesis testing and discussion

The hypothesis testing results presented in Table 7 and illustrated by the structural model in Figure 3 offer significant insights into the relationships between sensory appeal, perceived authenticity, perceived enjoyment, emotional engagement, cultural familiarity, and travel intention. The findings validate most of the hypothesized relationships, underscoring the importance of these constructs in influencing travel behavior, while also revealing some unexpected dynamics that warrant further discussion.

Starting with Hypothesis H1 (SA $\rightarrow$ PA) and H2 (SA $\rightarrow$ PE), both are strongly supported, with sensory appeal showing a substantial positive influence on perceived authenticity ($\beta = 0.760$, $t = 27.515$, $p < 0.001$) and perceived enjoyment ($\beta = 0.764$, $t = 25.928$, $p < 0.001$). The large effect sizes ($f^2 = 1.366$ for H1 and $f^2 = 1.400$ for H2) further highlight the significance of sensory appeal in shaping tourists' perceptions. This is consistent with Rizzo et al. (2023), who emphasized the role of sensory marketing in enhancing perceived authenticity, particularly in contexts where vivid, multi-sensory experiences are leveraged to create a more genuine and immersive consumer experience. The findings also align with Moreira et al. (2017), who noted that sensory stimuli not only enhance brand perception but also significantly boost the overall enjoyment derived from the experience.

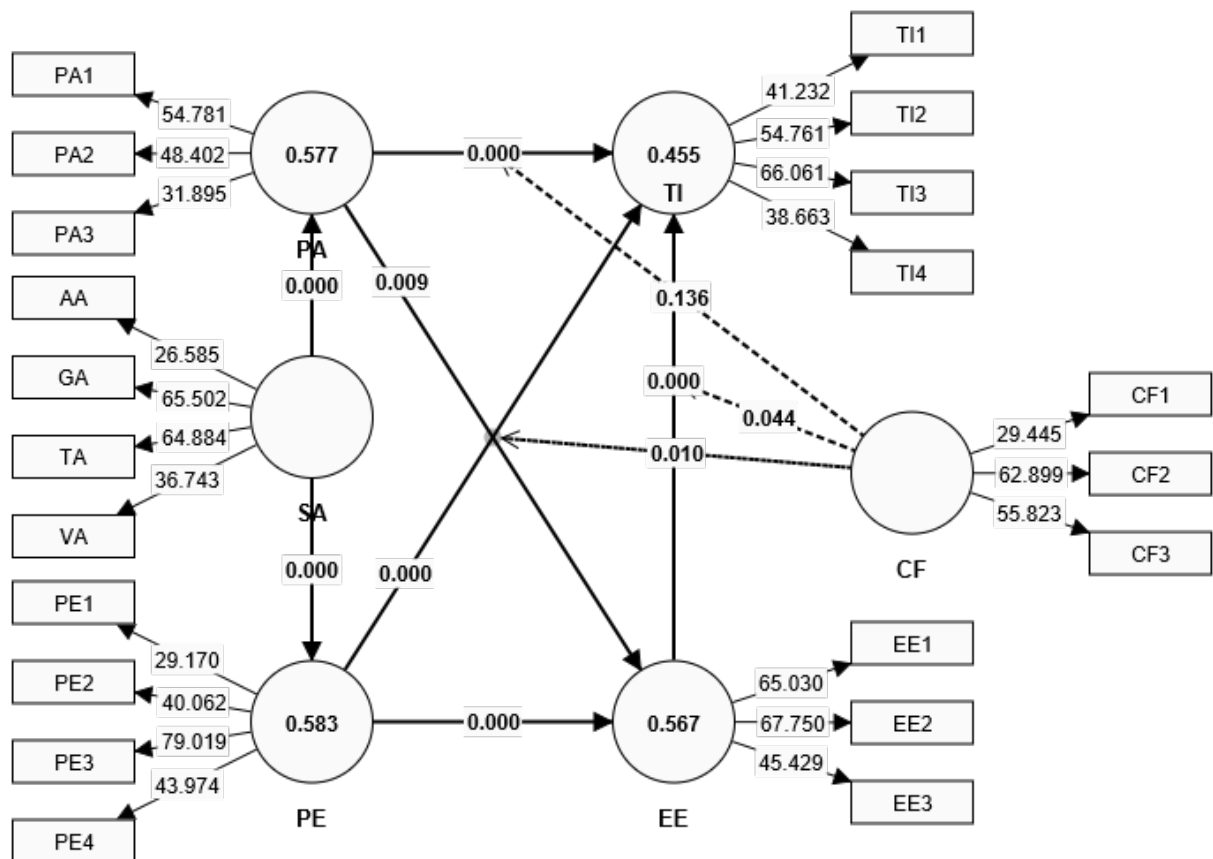


Figure 3: Structural model

However, the substantial effect sizes also suggest that sensory appeal may be an overwhelmingly dominant factor in shaping these perceptions, potentially overshadowing other elements that contribute to authenticity and enjoyment. This raises a critical consideration for marketers: while sensory appeal is essential, overemphasis on it could lead to a form of sensory saturation, where the authenticity and enjoyment perceived by consumers are excessively influenced by sensory stimuli, potentially at the expense of other important factors such as cultural significance or personal relevance (Pantin-Sohier *et al.*, 2015).

The relationships between perceived authenticity, perceived enjoyment, and emotional engagement, as tested in Hypotheses H3a (PA → EE), H3b (PE → EE), and H3c (EE → TI), further elucidate the importance of these constructs in driving deeper emotional connections. H3a shows a modest but significant positive influence of perceived authenticity on emotional engagement ($\beta = 0.174$, $t = 2.609$, $p = 0.009$), with a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.033$). This suggests that while authenticity contributes to emotional engagement, its impact may be more limited compared to other factors. This finding aligns with Rosado-Pinto and Loureiro(2023), who argued that while authenticity is crucial, its ability to foster emotional engagement depends on the context and the extent to which consumers resonate with the authentic elements presented.

H3b, on the other hand, reveals a much stronger relationship between perceived enjoyment and emotional engagement ($\beta = 0.616$, $t = 8.661$, $p < 0.001$), with a moderate effect size ($f^2 = 0.409$). This finding underscores the critical role of enjoyment in driving emotional engagement, supporting the assertions by Lyons et al. (2014) and Yoo (2015) that enjoyable experiences are more likely to engage consumers emotionally, leading to deeper and more sustained interactions with the destination. The implication here is that while

authenticity contributes to emotional engagement, enjoyment is the more powerful driver, suggesting that efforts to enhance tourists' emotional connections should prioritize creating pleasurable and satisfying experiences.

Table 7: Structural model statistics

		Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	f-square	
H1	SA -> PA	0.760	0.760	0.028	27.515	0.000	1.366	Yes
H2	SA -> PE	0.764	0.764	0.029	25.928	0.000	1.400	Yes
H3a	PA -> EE	0.174	0.171	0.067	2.609	0.009	0.033	Yes
H3b	PE -> EE	0.616	0.618	0.071	8.661	0.000	0.409	Yes
H3c	EE -> TI	-0.323	-0.325	0.065	4.935	0.000	0.064	Yes
H4	SA -> PA -> TI	0.204	0.203	0.053	3.851	0.000		Yes
H5	SA -> PE -> TI	0.409	0.412	0.064	6.383	0.000		Yes
H6a	CF x PA -> TI	-0.092	-0.092	0.062	1.491	0.136	0.008	No
H6b	CF x PE -> TI	0.155	0.161	0.060	2.577	0.010	0.019	Yes
H6c	CF x EE -> TI	-0.077	-0.080	0.038	2.014	0.044	0.009	Yes

Hypothesis H3c (EE -> TI) presents a more complex picture, with a negative path coefficient ($\beta = -0.323$, $t = 4.935$, $p < 0.001$) and a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.064$). This negative relationship is counterintuitive, as existing literature typically suggests a positive link between emotional engagement and behavioral intentions (Vittersø *et al.*, 2017). One possible explanation could be that heightened emotional engagement raises expectations, leading to a more critical evaluation of the destination, which may result in a more cautious or selective approach to travel intentions. This finding challenges the straightforward assumption that emotional engagement always leads to positive outcomes, suggesting that the nature of the emotional engagement—whether it is predominantly positive or negative—might be a crucial determinant of its impact on travel intentions. This highlights the need for further research to explore the dual nature of emotional engagement and its potential to both enhance and inhibit travel intentions depending on the context and the emotional tone of the engagement (Prayag *et al.*, 2016).

The mediating role of perceived authenticity and perceived enjoyment between sensory appeal and travel intention, as explored in Hypotheses H4 (SA -> PA -> TI) and H5 (SA -> PE -> TI), is strongly supported. The significant mediation effect of perceived authenticity ($\beta = 0.204$, $t = 3.851$, $p < 0.001$) and perceived enjoyment ($\beta = 0.409$, $t = 6.383$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that these factors serve as key mechanisms through which sensory appeal influences travel intentions. This finding is consistent with Atasoy and Eren (2023), who demonstrated that authenticity and enjoyment not only enhance the direct appeal of a destination but also strengthen the overall intention to visit by providing a richer, more engaging experience. The strong mediation effect of perceived enjoyment, in particular, suggests that creating pleasurable experiences is a highly effective strategy for translating sensory appeal into actionable travel intentions.

The moderation effects of cultural familiarity, as examined in Hypotheses H6a (CF x PA -> TI), H6b (CF x PE -> TI), and H6c (CF x EE -> TI), reveal nuanced insights. While H6a is not supported ($\beta = -0.092$, $t = 1.491$, $p = 0.136$), indicating that cultural familiarity does not significantly enhance the relationship between perceived authenticity and travel intention, H6b ($\beta = 0.155$, $t = 2.577$, $p = 0.010$) and H6c ($\beta = -0.077$, $t = 2.014$, $p = 0.044$) are supported, albeit with differing directions of effect. The positive moderation in H6b suggests that tourists who are culturally familiar with Jiangxi derive more enjoyment from

the experience, which in turn strengthens their intention to visit, aligning with findings by Li and Kwortnik Jr. (2020) and Liu (2014).

The negative moderation observed in H6c is intriguing, as it suggests that while cultural familiarity enhances the emotional connection, it may also lead to higher expectations or more critical evaluations, which could dampen the overall intention to visit. This complex dynamic is consistent with the idea that familiarity can sometimes breed higher standards or a more discerning attitude, as suggested by research on cultural values and consumer behavior (Ruiz-Equihua et al., 2019). The mixed results on the moderation effects of cultural familiarity highlight the importance of understanding the specific contexts and individual differences that shape how cultural knowledge and familiarity influence travel decisions.

In conclusion, the hypothesis testing provides strong evidence for the critical roles of sensory appeal, perceived authenticity, and perceived enjoyment in shaping travel intentions, while also revealing the complex interplay of emotional engagement and cultural familiarity. These findings offer valuable insights for destination marketers, suggesting that while sensory appeal is a powerful tool for enhancing perceptions and intentions, it must be balanced with an understanding of how authenticity, enjoyment, and cultural familiarity interact to influence tourist behavior. The study underscores the need for a nuanced approach to sensory marketing, one that considers both the immediate impact of sensory stimuli and the broader cultural and emotional context in which these experiences are perceived.

Implications

Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of this study make significant contributions to the understanding of consumer behavior within the frameworks of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, Emotional Response and Attachment Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The study provides strong empirical support for the S-O-R model by illustrating how sensory appeal (stimulus) directly influences internal psychological states such as perceived authenticity, perceived enjoyment, and emotional engagement (organism), which in turn drive travel intentions (response). This underscores the critical role of sensory stimuli in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors, particularly within the context of tourism marketing. The study extends the S-O-R model by offering a nuanced understanding of how different sensory modalities—such as auditory, visual, tactile, and gustatory cues—collectively contribute to the perceived value of a destination, thereby influencing decision-making processes in consumers.

Integrating Emotional Response and Attachment Theory, the findings deepen our understanding of how emotions serve as pivotal mediators between sensory stimuli and behavioral intentions. The results reveal that perceived authenticity and perceived enjoyment are key precursors to emotional engagement, which subsequently influences travel intentions. This finding aligns with Emotional Response and Attachment Theory, which posits that strong emotional connections and attachments are crucial for forming lasting consumer behaviors. Notably, the study uncovers a complex aspect of emotional engagement: while it generally enhances travel intentions, there is an unexpected negative relationship that suggests heightened emotional investment might lead to more critical or selective decision-making. This challenges the traditional view that positive emotional engagement always correlates with stronger behavioral intentions, indicating that a more sophisticated application of Emotional Response and Attachment Theory is needed—one

that considers the dual nature of emotional engagement, including its potential to both enhance and complicate consumer intentions.

Regarding the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study sheds light on how attitudes formed through sensory experiences, combined with perceived behavioral control and subjective norms, shape behavioral intentions. The mediation effects of perceived authenticity and perceived enjoyment underscore the importance of these attitudes in driving intentions, which is central to TPB. Moreover, the study highlights the moderating role of cultural familiarity, which interacts with these attitudes to influence travel intentions. While TPB traditionally focuses on rational decision-making processes, this study's findings suggest that sensory and emotional factors—often less rational and more experiential—play a crucial role in forming the attitudes that underlie planned behavior. This implies a need to expand TPB to more explicitly incorporate the affective and sensory dimensions of decision-making, especially in tourism contexts where experiential factors are paramount.

Overall, this study not only validates and extends these theoretical frameworks but also challenges them to account for the complexity of sensory and emotional influences on behavior. By integrating the S-O-R model with Emotional Response and Attachment Theory and TPB, the research offers a more holistic understanding of consumer behavior in tourism, suggesting that future theoretical models should consider the interplay of sensory stimuli, emotional responses, and cultural contexts to fully capture the intricacies of consumer decision-making processes.

Practical implications

Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for tourism marketers, destination managers, and policymakers aiming to enhance travel intentions through strategic sensory and emotional engagement. The results suggest that marketing strategies should prioritize the multi-sensory appeal of destinations by integrating visual, auditory, tactile, and gustatory elements in promotional materials. By creating vivid, immersive experiences through sensory-rich content, marketers can significantly boost perceived authenticity and enjoyment—two critical drivers of emotional engagement and, ultimately, travel intention.

Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) can leverage these insights by developing campaigns that showcase the authentic sounds, sights, and flavors of locations like Jiangxi Province. Utilizing high-quality visuals, soundscapes, and interactive digital experiences can effectively engage potential tourists. These sensory elements should be crafted to reflect the genuine cultural and environmental aspects of the destination, enhancing tourists' perceptions of authenticity and making the destination more appealing.

Moreover, fostering emotional connections with potential tourists is essential. Marketing efforts should focus on storytelling and content that resonates emotionally with target audiences, such as highlighting personal stories of local experiences or emphasizing the emotional rewards of visiting the destination. Ensuring that the destination's offerings align with tourists' expectations for authenticity and enjoyment can lead to higher levels of advocacy and repeat visits.

The study also emphasizes the importance of considering the cultural familiarity of target audiences. For international tourists, campaigns might benefit from educational content that bridges cultural gaps, helping potential visitors understand and appreciate the local culture, thereby enhancing their enjoyment and intention to visit. For domestic tourists or those already familiar with the culture, marketing can focus on reinforcing the authenticity and emotional value of the experience.

Additionally, marketers should be aware of the potential complexity in the relationship between emotional engagement and travel intention. While engaging content is crucial, managing expectations is equally important to ensure that heightened emotional investment does not lead to overly critical assessments, which could dampen travel intentions. This could involve providing clear, realistic portrayals of the destination that balance emotional appeal with practical information, helping to align tourists' expectations with their actual experiences.

Finally, destination managers can use these insights to enhance the on-ground visitor experience, ensuring that the sensory and emotional appeal promoted in marketing materials is consistently delivered during the visit. This might involve curating sensory experiences that are both authentic and enjoyable, such as local food tastings, cultural performances, and immersive tours, thereby reinforcing the positive perceptions formed through marketing and increasing the likelihood of positive word-of-mouth and repeat visits.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

In conclusion, this study offers comprehensive insights into the complex relationships between sensory appeal, perceived authenticity, perceived enjoyment, emotional engagement, cultural familiarity, and travel intentions within the context of tourism to Jiangxi Province, China. By integrating the S-O-R model, Emotional Response and Attachment Theory, and TPB, the research underscores the critical role that sensory and emotional factors play in shaping tourist behavior. The findings confirm that sensory appeal is a powerful driver of perceived authenticity and enjoyment, which are key mediators leading to emotional engagement and travel intentions. However, the study also reveals complexities, such as the nuanced role of emotional engagement and the mixed effects of cultural familiarity, suggesting that these relationships require careful consideration in both theoretical models and practical applications.

Looking forward, future research could delve deeper into the dual nature of emotional engagement, particularly how it can both enhance and complicate travel intentions. Further studies could also explore the role of cultural familiarity in different cultural contexts and among various demographic groups to better understand its moderating effects. Another promising area of research is to investigate the long-term impacts of sensory and emotional marketing strategies on destination loyalty and repeat visitation, considering the evolving expectations of tourists in a rapidly changing global tourism landscape. Moreover, integrating digital and virtual reality technologies to enhance sensory appeal and emotional engagement presents a compelling avenue for future research, particularly in understanding how these innovations can further influence tourist behavior in an increasingly digitalized world.

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Measurement items

Construct	Code	Measurement Item	Source
Auditory Appeal	AA1	The sounds and music related to Jiangxi Province enhance my interest in visiting.	(Perez-Cruz <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Spence and Shankar, 2010)
	AA2	I find the traditional music and sounds of Jiangxi Province appealing.	
	AA3	The auditory elements of Jiangxi Province's culture make it a more attractive destination for me.	
Cultural Familiarity	CF1	I am familiar with the cultural practices of Jiangxi Province.	(Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Litvin and Kar, 2004; Poria <i>et al.</i> , 2006)
	CF2	I have a good understanding of the cultural heritage of Jiangxi Province.	
	CF3	My familiarity with Jiangxi's culture enhances my desire to visit the province.	
Emotional Engagement	EE1	I feel emotionally connected to the idea of visiting Jiangxi Province.	(Brodie <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Hollebeek <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Vivek <i>et al.</i> , 2012)
	EE2	The thought of experiencing Jiangxi's culture excites me.	
	EE3	I would describe my interest in Jiangxi as emotionally compelling.	
Gustatory Appeal	GA1	The food and culinary experiences in Jiangxi Province are an important factor in my desire to visit.	(Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Zarrouk and Ouerghemmi, 2019)
	GA2	I am intrigued by the flavors and tastes associated with Jiangxi's cuisine.	
	GA3	Jiangxi Province's culinary offerings enhance my interest in visiting.	
	GA4	The unique gastronomy of Jiangxi Province is a significant attraction for me.	
Perceived Authenticity	PA1	The cultural experiences in Jiangxi Province are authentic.	(Chhabra <i>et al.</i> , 2003; Kolar and Zabkar, 2010; Wang, 1999)
	PA2	I trust that what I see in Jiangxi reflects true local culture.	
	PA3	Jiangxi provides an unfiltered cultural experience.	
Perceived Enjoyment	PE1	I would enjoy the cultural experiences offered in Jiangxi Province.	(Davis, 1989; Shankar <i>et al.</i> , 2008)
	PE2	Visiting Jiangxi would be a pleasurable experience for me.	
	PE3	I expect to feel satisfied with the experiences Jiangxi has to offer.	
	PE4	I anticipate having a fun and enjoyable time in Jiangxi Province.	

Tactile Appeal	TA1	The textures and physical feel of traditional crafts in Jiangxi Province add to my interest in visiting.	(Balaji <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Peck and Childers, 2003)
	TA2	Experiencing the tactile elements of Jiangxi's culture (e.g., crafts, textiles) would enhance my travel experience.	
	TA3	The hands-on experiences offered in Jiangxi Province contribute to its appeal as a travel destination.	
Travel Intention	TI1	I intend to visit Jiangxi Province within the next year.	(Hsu <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Lam and Hsu, 2004; Quintal <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Sparks and Pan, 2009)
	TI2	I plan to travel to Jiangxi Province on my next vacation.	
	TI3	I am likely to choose Jiangxi Province as my travel destination.	
Visual Appeal	TI4	I am determined to visit Jiangxi Province soon.	(Childers and Houston, 1984; Jang and Namkung, 2009)
	VA1	The visual aspects of Jiangxi Province, such as its landscapes and architecture, are appealing to me.	
	VA2	I am attracted to the colors and visuals associated with Jiangxi Province in its promotional materials.	
	VA3	The visual beauty of Jiangxi Province enhances its attractiveness as a travel destination.	