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**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM SOUVENIRS: FOSTERING
CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION THROUGH LOCAL
HANDICRAFT PRODUCT**

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Abstract:

The study aims to investigate the relationship between cultural tourism and traditional handicraft experiences on local handicrafts products namely souvenirs. It explores the significance of souvenir products through sustainable tourism practices and preserving cultural heritage. A qualitative approach is used to analyse the tourism souvenir in the market and proposes a new recommendation to meet the demands. Literature review, interviews, and case studies are employed to explore a strategy for enhancing the commercial value of tourism souvenirs. Interviews with master craftsmen, practitioners, and consumers provided insights the resource development, product innovation, production organisation, and market positioning. It also obtained a good understanding of customer experiences related to local handicraft products for effective marketing strategies based on customer experiences. The finding indicates that the sustainability of tourism souvenirs plays a crucial role in cultural heritage preservation, supporting the local economy, and enhancing overall tourism experiences for tourists as well as promoting traditional handicrafts, safeguarding indigenous knowledge, and facilitating cultural exchange between tourists and local artisans.

Keywords:

New Product Development, Cultural Tourism, Handicraft Souvenirs, Cultural Heritage, And Design Innovation And Creativity

Introduction

As global tourism continues to flourish, the significance of souvenirs and the preservation of cultural heritage has become crucial for the tourism industry. Handicrafts, cultural tourism, and souvenirs are integral components of the global tourism landscape, intertwined to offer enriching experiences for tourists while empowering local communities economically and culturally. Handicrafts represent valuable artifacts reflecting regional traditions and artistic expressions handed down through generations. However, with the rise of tourism, the function and form of traditional craft products have evolved, prompting artisans to adapt their crafts to cater to tourists' expectations for souvenirs (Torabian & Arai, 2016). Integrating these authentic and unique products into the tourism experience fosters deeper connections with local cultures. Cultural tourism has shifted the cultural object of tourism, with tourists seeking "authentic" elements of local culture and willingly paying a premium for these experiences (Richards, 2018).

Tourism souvenirs require a thoughtful presentation of cultural elements that align with market themes and local culture, effectively conveying their inherent value to tourists. Handicraft souvenir and cultural tourism development engage in a longstanding debate on the true nature of souvenirs as tangible cultural products or mere inexpensive, mass-produced objects. However, the role of souvenirs in the sustainable development of cultural tourism is garnering increasing attention (Peach, 2007; Tosun et al., 2007; Paraskevaidis & Andriotis, 2015; Torabian & Arai, 2016; Yu & Xu, 2019). As traditional handicraft products, souvenirs require protection and innovation to preserve cultural heritage, while tourism development necessitates the adaptation of cultural resources to meet market demands (Chen et al., 2022). Yet, the challenge of innovating from a cultural heritage perspective and effectively transforming traditional handicrafts into commercially valuable and marketable souvenirs often remains overlooked in academic discussions.

Handicrafts play a pivotal role in transforming cultural resources and contributing to the local economic development in tourist destinations. The limitation of creativity and a non-focused demand for handicraft souvenir development has become an issue due to less marketability. Hence, the objective of the study is to examine the relationship among handicrafts, cultural tourism, and souvenir development, with specific attention on the sustainability impact on cultural heritage conservation, cultural innovation, and commercial value.

Literature Review

Description of Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism has long been acknowledged for its dual benefits, supporting culture while creating attractions for tourism. The definitional scope of cultural tourism remains a subject of debate, given the diverse and interpretable nature of both culture and tourism. This has led to various definitional approaches without achieving a consensus (Vergori & Arima, 2020). Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that cultural tourism serves as a seasonal resource and attracts tourists with higher daily spending, particularly on authentic local goods. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) defined cultural tourism in 2017 as an activity in which travellers are primarily motivated to learn (Richards, 2018), discover, experience, and consume tangible and intangible cultural attractions and products of the destination (Wu & Lin, 2022). Approximately 39 percent of all tourism activities, cultural tourism includes both tangible and intangible heritage, contemporary culture, and creative industries. In China,

cultural tourism has contributed to poverty eradication by stimulating tourism consumption, capital accumulation, and structural transformation through high-quality cultural tourism integration (Liu, 2022). However, researchers have expressed differing viewpoints, especially regarding issues of integration and religion in cultural tourism, where concerns about cultural resources may outweigh those about tourism (Hunter, 2020).

The impact of emerging technologies on the cultural tourism experience is also a subject of consideration. Cultural tourism predominantly centres around major tangible heritage sites and encompasses the cultural environment, including destination scenery, values, lifestyles, and local heritage assets. Tourists value the integration and utilization of destination resources in cultural tourism, ranging from physical and intellectual aspects to spiritual and emotional features, such as art, architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries, living cultures, and traditions. Scholars have witnessed a gradual interest in the domain of cultural tourism and souvenirs, the interplay between cultural exploration through tourism and the acquisition of souvenirs has gained prominence as a subject of rigorous inquiry and examination. Simultaneously, scholarly also extends toward the sustainability dimension for souvenirs within the context of cultural tourism (Guo & Zhu, 2023; Soukhathammavong & Park, 2019). In addition, policymakers recognize the importance of integrating tourism with cultural and creative industries, and the redesigning of tourism products is becoming a priority (Wu & Lin, 2022). Creating awareness of the value of cultural resources is crucial to fostering meaningful synergies between tourism and culture. The prominence of intangible cultural heritage tourism research also offers promising prospects for the development of corresponding tourism industries.

Characteristics and Classification of Handicrafts

Handicraft is a term with multiple meanings, and its definition varies depending on the cultural and social context. Scholars have greatly studied the traditional handicrafts and recognized them as significant drivers of cultural heritage and local economies (Yang et al., 2018; Husa, 2020; Sun et al., 2023). Handicrafts' historical, cultural, social, and symbolic values are closely linked to local development. Researchers agreed that handicrafts always integrate with tangible and intangible resources and various categories of handicraft products are produced in different regions (Sun et al., 2023). The importance of handicrafts to consumers increases beyond their practical functions and expression into aesthetic awareness. Besides that, handicrafts also exhibit several distinct features that distinguish them from mass-produced industrial products, emphasising their manual and skilled nature and their significance in cultural, artistic, and economic contexts.

Handicrafts can be classified into various categories based on criteria such as the materials used, the techniques employed, and the purpose or function of the craft. Material-based classifications include textile crafts, ceramics, metal crafts, wood crafts, and glass crafts. Technique-based classifications include woven crafts, pottery, ceramic embroidery, carved crafts, and paper crafts such as paper cutting. Purpose-based classifications encompass decorative crafts like sculptures and vases, functional crafts for everyday use, ceremonial, or religious crafts for religious or ceremonial purposes, and souvenirs and gifts crafted specifically for visitors or special occasions. Handicrafts are typically handmade and involve manual skills, craftsmanship, and meticulous attention to detail. This aligns with the concept of craft as a handicraft, emphasizing the process of creating craft products.

Products carry deep-rooted traditions and cultural significance, often passed down through generations to preserve cultural heritage and historical connections (Yang et al., 2018). It reflects on the creativity and aesthetic sensibilities of artisans, crafts convey cultural stories, symbols, and meanings. They frequently use natural materials like wood, clay, fiber, or metal, showcasing local characteristics and promoting sustainability. Furthermore, in the mass consumption and tourism era, souvenirs often form part of the tourism market supply, and traditional crafts serve as the foundation for creating authentic and culturally significant tourism souvenirs (Brennan & Savage, 2012). Local artisans leverage their expertise to handcraft souvenirs that embody the essence of the destination, incorporating elements of the region's culture, architecture, folklore, or natural beauty into the design.

Value and Innovation of Handicraft Souvenir

The purchase of souvenirs is an important part of the travel experience, embodying both tangible elements of tourism consumption and intangible experiences (Naqvi et al., 2018). Through souvenirs, tourists can relive special moments and emotions associated with travelling and share aspects of a destination's cultural heritage with friends and family. Souvenirs carry the elements of local culture, including handicrafts, artifacts, traditional clothing, cuisine, and symbolic objects, and provide tourists with insights into local customs, artistic expressions, and historical heritage, promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. They play a vital role in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of a destination. They embody cultural knowledge, stories, and practices passed down from generation to generation in the same way as traditional craft products, making artisans and local communities key players in their production and in enhancing the sustainability of local economies and cultures (Shafi et al., 2021; Duan et al., 2023). Overall, souvenirs are of great value in enhancing the travel experience, preserving cultural heritage, supporting local economies, and promoting responsible and sustainable tourism practices. However, the mass production of generic souvenirs poses a challenge to the process of cultural transmission and diminishes their cultural significance.

Sustainable tourism practices, therefore, promote the use of authentic, locally made souvenirs, which requires that the process of souvenir development and design seeks to preserve classic elements while employing innovative forms of cultural creativity to ensure that tourists have a meaningful connection with the culture of the destination. Cultural innovation in souvenirs can be found around the world. Innovation of cultural handicraft souvenirs involves creativity to give authenticity and connection to the purpose. It increases the value and attractiveness of handicraft souvenirs for tourists while supporting the preservation and promotion of local traditions and crafts. For example, In Japan, local artists have redesigned traditional wooden wasabi dolls with contemporary designs, giving them a modern twist while preserving their cultural significance. Meanwhile, in Peru, traditional textiles and designs have been incorporated into contemporary fashion items such as scarves and bags, attracting travellers who love both history and fashion.

Souvenirs, Handicrafts and Cultural Tourism

Souvenirs and handicrafts play a vital role in cultural tourism, serving as a tangible bridge connecting tourists with the cultural identity of their destination. In the context of cultural tourism, the act of souvenir shopping differs from typical home shopping, as tourists seek mementos to concretize and preserve memories of their journey (Hu & Yu, 2007). Therefore, understanding the rationale behind travellers' souvenir purchasing behaviour becomes crucial.

However, traditional crafts and souvenirs, as embodiments of local cultural heritage, face challenges such as homogenization and over-exploitation (Duan et al., 2023). Preserving the value of traditional crafts in souvenir making becomes imperative to safeguard their cultural significance.

Peach (2007) argues that tourism generates demand for local craft products consumed as souvenirs, emphasizing the importance of culturally integrated and authentic souvenirs that reflect the destination's local identity and the tourists' experiences. Each souvenir holds unique meanings for individual tourists, prompting them to seek genuine and distinctive handicrafts as integral parts of their complete journey. Consequently, continued support for local aboriginal communities in producing and selling authentic crafts and souvenirs is essential for enhancing tourist experiences and satisfaction. The production and consumption of authentic souvenirs can contribute to sustainable cultural tourism. The synergies between handicrafts, cultural tourism, and souvenirs are crucial for fostering cultural exchange, preserving cultural heritage, and driving regional economic development in tourist destinations. The thriving tourism industry presents opportunities for the transformation of traditional crafts and artisans. Simultaneously, supporting local handicrafts through cultural tourism and souvenir purchases contributes to the preservation of traditional handicrafts, generates employment opportunities, and promotes sustainable development for the destination (Tosun et al., 2007).

Materials and Methods

A qualitative method was adopted to conduct semi-structured interviews in Zibo, Shandong Province, China, spanning from February 2023 to July 2023. Interviews were held at various locales including attractions, souvenir shops, and coffee houses, tailored to the preferences of the interviewees. The interviewees encompassed tourists and artisans, with most interviews lasting around 10 minutes. The duration was chosen to grasp their overall travel plans, motivations for visiting Zibo, and perceptions of souvenirs and purchasing preferences. The intention behind this approach was to capture the genuine thoughts of visitors without impacting their travel experience. Importantly, informed consent was secured from all interviewees before the interviews commenced. These participants were duly apprised of the interview's purpose and willingly agreed to partake in the discussions.

Interviews with tourists commonly commence by inquiring about their travel plans, setting the stage for discussions regarding souvenir acquisition, including motivations for such purchases. Following this, a series of queries are posed with the intent of uncovering the allure of the souvenirs. In addition, respondents organically delve into their preferences, expounding on specific attributes of the souvenirs that resonate with them. The exploration extends to examining the degree of synergy between these souvenirs and local traditional crafts, or how they symbolize distinctive facets of the destination. Conversely, interviews with craftspeople follow a divergent trajectory. The line of questioning covers the interviewees' backgrounds, motivations for embarking on traditional handicrafts, intricate details of their craft practice, the perceived value of souvenirs, and their strategies for promoting their wares within cultural tourism contexts. These inquiries are purposefully designed to elicit artisans' articulation of their viewpoints regarding traditional craftsmanship. The focus subsequently shifts to queries like, "In your perspective, do these souvenirs authentically embody Zibo culture?" and other comparable questions. Throughout these Interviews, the researcher documented moments of tourists engaging in souvenir purchases through photography and recorded observations during or after post-interviews.

Result and Discussion

Preserving and promoting traditional handicrafts and souvenirs it can enhance economic growth through a unique and authentic destination. In this study, the literature review offers intense information related to the subject and gains inclusive perception of culture and tourism.

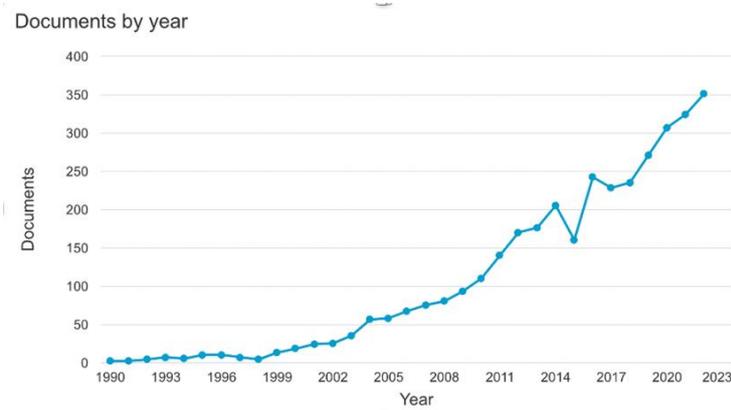


Figure 1: Cultural Tourism and Souvenirs Publications 1990-2022

Source by Scopus

Figure 1 shows the cultural tourism and souvenir study. Since 1990, cultural tourism has been a significant topic and increasing until nowadays. It involves analysing by scholars, researchers' industry, etc., to explore from a variety perspective of cultural tourism and souvenir. The exploration includes benefits, challenges, trends, and impacts of cultural tourism and the role of souvenirs as artisanal consumer goods in supporting regional economic and cultural sustainability.

Zibo Tourism Industry and Souvenir Product

Clarifying the symbiotic relationship between tourism, cultural heritage, and handicraft products is crucial in Zibo handicraft products. Zibo, a city in Shandong Province, China, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and traditional handicrafts. Zibo's booming tourism industry attracts many domestic and international tourists. The surge in tourism has naturally led to high demand in the souvenir market as tourists seek tangible mementos to encapsulate their travelling experience. With a rich cultural heritage spanning over a thousand years, Zibo has laid a solid foundation for nurturing a thriving souvenir industry that authentically showcases its traditions, crafts, and local arts. Known for its traditional handicrafts such as ceramics, Boshan glaze, paper-cutting, willow weaving, and wood carving, Zibo has the potential to transform these artistic expressions into unique and authentic souvenirs. At the same time, the success of the products depends on innovations in design and production techniques that emphasise the competing cultural identities embodied in these souvenirs. Exploration involves the integration of sustainable practices, a move that resonates with environmentally conscious tourists and enhances the appeal of these souvenirs.

As the focus on cultural tourism continues to grow, so does the demand for souvenirs that embody the essence of Zibo's cultural heritage. These souvenirs can significantly enhance tourists' understanding of and connection to local culture. However, development must be accompanied by several challenges. These include protecting the authenticity and quality of souvenirs, ensuring that artisans are compensated, and skilfully marketing and promoting tourist souvenirs to a wider audience. Zibo's souvenir industry has the potential to become not

only a source of valuable souvenirs for tourists, but also a powerful channel for preserving and promoting the city's cultural heritage. By capitalising on its unique handicrafts and cultural treasures, Zibo can become a unique and fascinating cultural tourism destination. The synthesis of authenticity, innovation, emotional value, and sustainability can propel Zibo into a distinctive and compelling destination, enriching both the visitor experience and the local community. It can be imperative for stakeholders, including artisans, businesses, and policymakers, to collaborate in crafting a future that celebrates the legacy of traditional crafts while embracing the dynamism of contemporary tourism.

Sustainable Tourism Souvenir

Interviews with master craftsmen, practitioners, and tourists has been provided new insights into traditional handicraft products specifically on their commercial value as tourism souvenirs. This study presents three (3) key recommendations 1) introducing new concepts and opportunities in the cultural tourism market, 2) establishing a direct link between local traditional crafts, creative tourism, and experiential offerings, and 3) promoting traditions that contribute to local development. The outcomes underscore the potential of souvenirs in fostering sustainable cultural tourism practices and encourage stakeholders to embrace innovative approaches to preserve cultural heritage and promote community well-being. Furthermore, there are three (3) other significant issues that should be taken into consideration by designer and industries during the design and development of traditional culture handicraft products are:

Consumer Preferences for Handicraft Souvenirs

In recent years, there has been a clear preference for authentic, locally made souvenirs. Travellers are increasingly inclined to opt for unique and meaningful souvenirs that truly reflect the essence of the region. This trend has sparked a renaissance in traditional crafts, offering unique alternatives to mass-produced, generic items. Souvenirs rooted in traditional crafts play a pivotal role in preserving cultural heritage. However, the souvenir industry faces the contemporary challenge of balancing authenticity with modern design and production techniques. Combining sustainable practices with innovative design can help keep these crafts relevant in a fast-moving world. Notably, customised souvenirs are gaining traction as younger generations are placing more emphasis on spiritual experiences.

Shaping Emotional Connections

Souvenir design continues to evolve, incorporating advanced technology and modern aesthetics while retaining cultural authenticity. Researchers are exploring how innovative design can enhance the appeal of souvenirs to modern tourists. Participation in cultural tourism promotes emotional connections and lasting memories. These experiences provide travellers with the opportunity to learn about different customs, traditions, and lifestyles, enriching their journey by broadening their horizons and promoting cross-cultural understanding. These emotional bonds often lead to positive word-of-mouth recognition and the sharing of experiences through various platforms, thus contributing to the promotion and reputation of the destination, which in turn boosts the regional economy.

Integration of Sustainable Concepts

The integration of sustainable concepts permeates all areas of cultural tourism, craft heritage, and souvenirs, injecting a new sense of mission and responsibility into these areas. Modern travellers are increasingly aware of the ecological and social impact of their actions. Travellers seek immersive experiences that enrich their understanding of local cultures and traditions. Souvenirs that are ethically produced, culturally recognised, and environmentally responsible have a special appeal to conscious consumers. Sustainable production of souvenirs must focus on environmentally friendly materials, waste reduction, and environmentally conscious production processes that provide direct economic benefits to local communities. Sustainability, a pervasive theme in modern tourism, assumes a central role in the souvenirs and traditional crafts ecosystem. Ethical considerations and environmentally conscious practices resonate with conscientious travellers, elevating the appeal of souvenirs that carry cultural weight and leave a minimal ecological footprint. This integration of sustainability reinforces the symbiotic relationship between cultural heritage, economic prosperity, and responsible tourism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the intricate interplay between cultural tourism, sustainable souvenirs, and traditional handicrafts has unveiled a dynamic tapestry of opportunities and challenges. As tourist destinations become increasingly saturated and commercialized, the quest for authentic cultural experiences has become a pivotal driver for travellers. This shift has elevated the role of souvenirs and traditional crafts, transforming them from mere keepsakes into potent vessels that encapsulate the essence of a destination. The preference for authentic, locally made souvenirs reflects a profound desire among modern travellers to forge genuine connections with the places they visit. This trend has reignited interest in traditional crafts, breathing new life into time-honoured practices and fostering cultural preservation. However, this resurgence comes with the imperative to strike a delicate balance between authenticity and contemporary design, a challenge that underscores the need for innovation and sustainable practices. It is worth noting that the growing inclination towards customized souvenirs speaks to the evolving expectations of younger generations, who seek not only physical tokens but also spiritual and emotional connections. It provides a tangible representation of personal journeys, embedding souvenirs with deeper significance and resonance.

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