

Immersive Cultural Tourism as an Experience-Based Mode of Cultural Communication: Impacts and Boundaries

Fangfei Lin

*Faculty of Arts, Design & Architecture, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
z5534427@ad.unsw.edu.au*

Abstract. Immersive cultural tourism has become a discussed issue in terms of cultural-tourism integration, but the formation of the meaning mechanism and boundaries of its spread remains to be explored thoroughly. This essay reviews the immersive cultural tourism experience-based cultural communication, with reference to communication studies. The paper adopts the perspectives of media geography, embodied communication, geographical narrative, and thematic as arguments that perception of the historical culture is converted into experience by spatial organization, involvement of the body, and structuring through themes. The results indicate that immersive cultural tourism cultures make cultural places more accessible through the conversion of past events, thus improving audience comprehension and cultural belonging. Meanwhile, experiential design might focus on emotional appeal and recognizable elements, which might make the complexities of history simpler and reduce the variety of understandings. Thus, the concept of immersive cultural tourism can be regarded as a rather broadly participatory and structurally tense communication. According to this, this essay asserts that it needs to strike a balance between emotional appeal and cultural responsibility in designing and sharing practices and enhance the ethics of communication and the contextual preservation of the historical context.

Keywords: Immersive Cultural Tourism, Experience-Based Communication, Cultural Translation

1. Introduction

The emergence of immersive cultural tourism in the Chinese context is grounded in the historical development of products in tourism and performing arts. Since the success of the large-scale landscape performance Impression: Liu Sanjie in 2004, tourism and performing arts have gradually become an important practical form for the integration of culture and tourism [1]. With the intervention of digital technology and the creative economy, tourism and performing arts are constantly changing in terms of experience structure, narrative mode, and space use, gradually promoting tourism experience from watching to experience, which lays a realistic foundation for the development of immersive cultural tourism.

In this background, immersive cultural tourism with experience and content as the core has gradually become an important form in Chinese cultural tourism practice. Unlike the traditional tourism model based on scenic spot tour and information acquisition, immersive cultural tourism

allows participants to enter the constructed cultural situation as "present", thus changing the presentation and acceptance path of cultural content. Immersive formats that have rapidly developed in the cultural tourism industry, such as immersive theatre, scenic sites, and theme parks, extend beyond technology-based immersion relying on VR or AR, and should instead be understood as integrated cultural forms centred on spatial construction and experience design [2].

In Chinese practice, immersive cultural tourism mostly takes local cultural resources as the main content carriers. With the wide application of digital media and imaging technology and experience design in museum exhibitions and public cultural spaces, the traditional cultural communication mode based on text interpretation and physical display has increasingly turned to narrative, situational and experiential expression [3]. In this process, history and culture are embedded in the immersive experience, changing from the "explained object" to "an enterable and experiential cultural situation". This translation process constitutes a key issue worth further analysis in immersive cultural tourism.

Based on the above background, the core problem of this article is: how to translate historical and cultural symbols in the process of experience generation of immersive cultural tourism and thus affect the public's understanding of history and culture. From the perspective of communication studies, this article understands immersive cultural tourism as a tourism-Related Attractions and experience-oriented cultural communication practice and focuses on how different experience mechanisms participate in the reorganization of historical and cultural significance in specific situations. While acknowledging its potential to expand cultural contact models and contextual participation, it also reflects on the potential for simplification and the boundaries of communication.

2. Definition and mechanisms: a theoretical analysis

2.1. The concept of immersive cultural tourism

Immersive cultural tourism has become one of the core terms in contemporary cultural tourism research. Unlike the narrow understanding of relying on Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and other technical means to provide visual or digital interactive experiences, the core of immersive cultural tourism is to make the subject produce a holistic on-site body through environmental design, situational construction and participation mechanism [2]. Under this framework, the media acts as an auxiliary approach to guide participants into a concrete and coherent cultural world.

Thus, in this article, immersive cultural tourism denotes the space narrative-based tourism model that is founded on the participation of experience and the use of thematics as the basis of cultural tourism. It enables the audience to engage cultural content on many levels, in practice, perception, and situational immersion through the design of space and experience process with its culturally significant elements.

2.2. Theoretical framework

2.2.1. Media geography and embodied communication perspectives

The concept of media geography concerns the bond of media-space-place. Media are enclosed by the spaces and places where they are created and consumed, and are also enclosed by those spaces and places [4]. As an analytical tool, media geography offers a strategy of looking at how spatial

organisation, flow paths, and perception lines of course act as mediating conditions of communication.

Just as media geography is concerned with how space conditions one of accessibility and movement, embodied cognition provides an alternative approach by highlighting how bodily perceptions and action constitute an experience. Embodied cognition points out the fact that cognition is based on bodily experience and that perception and action are constitutive in processes of making meaning [5]. This view is the foundational logic of embodied communicative practices in which the meaning is not revealed by working upon the abstract interpretation of the message, but rather produced by the embodied interaction with the designated experience of the body in given situations [6].

2.2.2. Spatial narrative and thematization perspectives

Spatial narrative is a concept of narrative mode that arranges the sense by space sequencing and arrangement of scenes, entrenching the development of content in the movement of participants in space. The study of museums has remarked that narratives in the exhibitions are produced by sequencing the spaces over and above using texts, which renders the narrative role of the spatial order [7].

By contrast, thematic space deals with the issue of the selection and composition of spatial elements in their response to recognition and coherence. According to thematic space theory, thematic space is described as an approach to space construction with a focus on culture awareness and experience capital. Thematic space selectively arranges symbols, images, and narrative in a way that incorporates a complex and partly understandable level of historical and cultural content into a logical and easily recognisable experiential system that allows the audience to experience a sense of spatial meaning and emotional orientation in a rather short amount of time [8]. This works via repetitive presentation of familiar cultural symbols, thus forming a stable system of cultural narrative perception and cultural legibility.

3. Influence of immersive cultural tourism as an experience-based cultural communication mode

The presented theory offers an analytical perspective on examining the mode of operation of immersive cultural tourism. It will also further examine the cultural impact and limits of immersive cultural tourism in action based on these analysis tools.

3.1. Positive impacts

3.1.1. Constructive mechanism of meanings and cultural accessibility

Spatial organisation occurs as an intermediating structure to control the movement, perception, and experience rhythm in immersive cultural tourism. Although the audience seems to exercise agency within semi-free movement, their path, pace, and attention are largely influenced by the overall spatial layout. Through the entrance, the transition area, and the key nodes marked by scale, light, sound, and performance, the physical movement of the participants becomes a structured process of perception and emotional participation. As the audience travels through space, the emotions generated by physical participation will gradually accumulate as embodied memory, shaping how subsequent cultural content is perceived and understood.

Building on this embodied engagement, meaning in immersive cultural tourism is structured through spatial sequencing and thematic organisation. Historical and cultural content is distributed in continuous scenes corresponding to different times or emotional stages, allowing the audience to gradually build understanding through movement in space. At the same time, the theme design selectively organises symbols, images, and narrative elements into coherent spatial units, so that the audience can quickly identify cultural meaning and emotional orientation. Through the combination of spatial narrative advancement and the stability of the subject, complex cultural content is transformed into an experience that is both easy to understand and easy to identify immediately.

These mechanisms can be observed in large-scale immersive cultural tourism projects such as Chang'an Shier Shichen Themed Block. In the immersive cultural tourism project Chang'an Shier Shichen Themed Block, the project translates the imagery of High Tang Chang'an into a series of highly typified and quickly identifiable scenes. All of the elements maintain strong consistency in visual style, performative behaviour, and environmental atmosphere, reinforcing the emotional cues of prosperity and order associated with a "Prosperous Chang'an." In such a system, various historical and cultural material is divided into experiential routes to which visitors can go, follow, and see, and be involved in order to interact with the cultural images of the Tang Dynasty. The case illustrates that there are spatial organisation, embodied motion, spatial sequencing, and thematic consistency that work together in making culture more accessible and in steering the cognition of the audience within a constrained experimental time frame.

3.1.2. Emotional engagement, memory formation, and cultural resonance

In terms of the experience economy, immersive cultural tourism works as a form of cultural consumption where emotional engagement and participative experience create value in its core. Through spatial arrangement, ambiance, and communication in relevant experiential groupings, cultural information is transformed into a form that can be emotionally accessed, body experienced, and consequently recalled by the viewers.

This emotionally charged involvement makes the development of embodied memory easy since cultural meanings are enjoyed even after the encounter. In the long run, such recalled experiences add to the modes of cultural identification since past images and local stories are ingrained into behaviour by way of affective and experiential connection as opposed to their acquisition of abstraction. In this respect, the experience economy will not only contribute to the overall accessibility of cultures by making them easier, but also help the audience to build personal and emotional connections with cultural storytelling. Certain researches have indicated that an immersive experience can be very effective in enhancing the cultural knowledge and emotional experience of tourists. These mental and emotional responses combined influence the process of cultural identity formation of the audience, which means that the level of immersion enhances the process of understanding and immersion [9].

3.2. Existing challenges and obstacles

3.2.1. Experience economy and the limitations of cultural consumption

Within the frames of the experience economy and cultural consumption logic, it is possible to conceive immersive cultural tourism as a type of cultural product, the prime products of which are a saleable cultural experience. Such positioning establishes a system of commercial and communicative constraints that dictate the ways through which cultural content may be ordered and

positioned. In the context of this, the structural effect of revenue designs, including tiered ticket designs, time-slot scheduling designs, and secondary consumption designs, can impact experiential design. Cultural narratives are most likely to be structured in highly recognisable icons and emotionally gratifying images, under the conditions of limited time and economic efficacy. This leads to the reduction of complex historical paths into a list of the historical situations regarded as typical, and unclear histories are pushed to the periphery.

This is already familiar to traditional debates of staged authenticity in tourism sociology, which opine that tourism sites are habitual in generating agreeable articulations of authenticity via frontstage and backstage disposition, organising experience into recognisable and digestible forms [10]. The same is observed in cultural tourism research, whereby there has been a wider movement towards experiential, narrative, and market-based practices wherein cultural resources are perpetually redesigned as they are experienced and consumed [11]. On the policy level, the World Tourism Organization needs to point out that the integration process of tourism and culture creates economic and communicative advantages; it also requires paying close attention to the problem of cultural expression and sustainability [12]. These considerations indicate that there are still ongoing tensions on experiential appeal, as well as cultural representation and complexity, which shall be elaborated later in the next section.

3.2.2. Dominance of emotions and simplification of historical significance

The given experience-based type of communication has its risks and limitations as well. The work of immersive design has tended to structure historical content by means of extremely well-known cultural images and an emotional situation. Although these techniques increase immediacy and emotional interest, they may also involve simplifying and hardening historical meaning, thus concealing the rich historical contexts and a range of interpretive levels.

Within environments influenced by market-oriented sensorial design, creators of projects tend to focus on the areas of sensory stimulation and emotional intensity in making their project more participatory and marketable. Project design tends to emphasise further sensorial shallowness and emotional depth to a degree, and constrain the scope and intricacy of presenting cultural content [13]. As a case in point, as part of the experience of certain historical blocks, gamified narrative and interactive design will project the historical scene into an experience that is hard to isolate true and false leading to the vision of authenticity mixed with experience entertainment. As a case in point, as part of the experience of certain historical blocks, gamified narrative and interactive design will project the historical scene into an experience that is hard to isolate true and false leading to the vision of authenticity mixed with experience entertainment [14]. Therefore, immersive cultural tourism contributes to the affective accessibility and sensitivity of historical communication, but on the other hand, it has a built-in tension between cultural richness and experience, which must be negotiated in the choice of symbols and design of the narrative forms.

4. Implications and recommendations

4.1. Space reserved for in-depth understanding

When developing and running immersive cultural tourism, there is a need to book the projection of the layers of historical and cultural knowledge, as opposed to steering all audiences towards a mono and monadic outcome. On one hand, the project can establish an optional branch trail in the outskirts of the total narrative and provide an opportunity to the audience to actively jump out of the main

line as per their own interests and background of knowledge and get accesses to more enriching or more diversified information about the cultural background. Conversely, through establishing various levels of understanding portals (point of entry), i.e., the basic perception layer, the situational interpretation layer, and the extended understanding layer, the audience has a chance of attaining the ability to learn more than the emotional experience can provide. This open and layered design serves to consider the demands of various audiences at the operational level, while making sure that it remains immersive and effective in business, providing a space to make a variety of interpretations and keep on learning about the past and the culture.

4.2. Communication ethics and boundary reflection

To avoid the rationality of understanding with the emotional appeal in the immersive cultural tourism, similar projects need to maintain the same amount of historical background and multiple worldviews in design, choosing of symbols and narrative layer, and not to overwork on the dramatic conflict and sensory appeal. In the meantime, online promotion techniques must be aimed at the complementation and interpretation of the cultural context, and not a simple emphasis on the viral emotional moments. Including the aspects of communication ethics and cultural depth in the design of experiences and the distribution of platforms, immersive cultural tourism will be able to remain attractive and yet retain the complexity and diversity of the historical expression.

5. Conclusion

This essay evaluates immersive cultural tourism as a cultural communication model that is experiential. It displays the rational process through which immersive cultural tourism creates meaning through spatial organization and bodily engagement through a detailed system of media geography, embodiment communication, spatial narrative, and a thematic theory. It was discovered that the emotional accessibility and involvement of historical culture are boosted through experiential design and also lead to heightened cultural awareness and identification. According to the logic of cultural consumption, historical content can be simplified, and emotional appeal can reduce the complexity of the historical background in certain instances. Hence, immersive cultural tourism is to be interpreted as a model of cultural communication where there are communication possibilities and structural constraints. This is its worth in accessibility to different cultures, though it demands a required balance between experience efficiency and cultural richness.

Future studies should additionally include empirical approaches in the comparison and analysis of the audience cognition and emotional reaction to various kinds of immersive projects, or study the adaptability and variation of immersive cultural communication in a cross-cultural manner.

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