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A Moderated Mediation Analysis of the Relationship between Cultural Embeddedness of Regional Brand Products and Behavior Loyalty: A Case Study of Wudang Mountains in Hubei Province of China

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Abstract: This study examines how sustainable development of the cultural embeddedness of regional brand products (CERBP) can be maintained, which has received limited attention. Accordingly, it proposes a novel conceptual model by integrating the theory of planned behavior with local cultural resources to gain global competitive advantage. Based on the model, this study explores both the direct and indirect effects of CERBP, perceived value (PV), and attitude on behavior loyalty (BL) (H1–H5); it also examines how perceived authenticity (PA) might moderate the relationship between CERBP and PV (H1a). The model's validity was confirmed using a partial least squares–structural equation modeling technique based on the data collected from 397 survey responses. The results are as follows: (1) CERBP significantly and positively influenced PV and attitude. (2) PV significantly and positively influenced attitude and BL. (3) Attitude significantly and positively influenced BL. (4) PV and attitude significantly and positively mediated the relationship between CERBP and BL; compared with attitude, PV had more significant influence on BL, either directly or indirectly. (5) However, PA was an insignificant moderator of the relationship between CERBP and PV. These research findings from analysis results provide useful and important theoretical and practical implications for the sustainable development of cultural resources and regional economies.

Keywords: cultural embeddedness of regional brand products; theory of planned behavior; behavior loyalty; perceived value; perceived authenticity

1. Introduction

In 2013, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization placed culture at the heart of sustainable development policies [1]. Currently, cultural resources, including tangible culture (i.e., historical heritage) and intangible culture (i.e., local cultures) [2], are considered vital drivers of sustainable development [3]. The meaning of sustainable development is two-fold, incorporating conservation (i.e., preventing damage) and enhancement (i.e., promoting the intrinsic cultural value) of cultural resources [4]. The income from enhancement can be used for conservation and a sustainable development of cultural resource for future generations [5]. Thus, it is of paramount importance for realizing the development of culture resources through enhancement under the condition of conservation such as maintaining authenticity. The avenue to enhancement can be transforming cultural resources into cultural products. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals encourage the development of cultural products through tourism, which is considered as the primary source of income, while simultaneously promoting sustainable tourism and local culture [1]. Tadesse [6] emphasized that cultural tourism can help cultural resources realize their value and lead to sustainable development of the economy, environment, and society as a whole.

In addition, cultural resources usually have regional attributes, which make them suitable to be connected and promoted with regional brands. This study defines a regional brand as a network of associations and identities in consumers' minds based on a region's visual expression and values [7]. Regional brands have both regional characteristics and brand effects [8] based on regional resource advantages [9], which adds regional meaning and value to the products. Cultural resources also have regional characteristics, and their storytelling is a powerful strategy to create brand content and increase the role of helping consumers' identification of the products [10]. Thus, cultural resources and regional brands can be jointly harmonious through regional products embedded with culture to achieve the balance between the preservation and enhancement of cultural resources. Accordingly, cultural embeddedness of regional brand products (CERBP) refers to a certain cultural symbolism effectively embedded into regional brand products. Consumers are gradually using more products with symbolic meanings embedded in them rather than solely consuming the functions and benefits of products [11]. Thus, regional brand products embedded with cultural elements can usually attain a higher premium. Correspondingly, sustainability can win more value when cultural resources are turned into CERBP, as explained by Özgit et al. [5].

How to preserve cultural resources in order to render its sustainable development is an urgent issue. Many precious cultural resources are being overexploited, which causes damage to cultural heritage [12] or the degradation of heritage sites [13], resulting in the gradual loss of their authenticity. Accordingly, cultural resources cannot maintain their unique value or ensure sustainable development [5]; hence, the associated CERBP will gradually lose loyal consumers and eventually be unable to contribute to the regional tourism economy. Thus, it has become urgent to find ways to maintain and enhance consumers' behavior loyalty (BL) regarding CERBP. In this study, BL means that the consumers would likely select to buy, recommend, or positively provide online reviews of CERBP among similar cultural products, based on the research of Teng et al. ([14]) and Chen et al. [15]. Cultural sites can attract consumers and drive local economic development only if consumer loyalty is maintained; accordingly, more tourism income can be achieved and used for preserving local cultural resources and formulate a virtuous cycle for the sustainability of culture. Hence, this study has considered consumers' BL as an outcome variable in the proposed conceptual model.

Exploring the factors influencing consumers' BL has long been an important topic. Several previous studies have explored various influencing factors or antecedents of BL, such as attitude [16], engagement [17], value [18], and satisfactoriness [19]. Furthermore, existing research on BL covers a wide range of different domains, including food [20], tourism [14,21], cultural heritage [22], and mobile communications [19]. However, the role of CERBP and the relationship between CERBP and BL have rarely been discussed for the new scenario of cultural regional brand products. Considering the importance of realizing the sustainable development of culture resources, analyzing the role of CERBP and the cause–effect relationship between it and BL in order to fill the study gap motivates and drives our current research.

In order to investigate the aforementioned questions, a conceptual model is proposed based on relevant theory and research findings. One of the most influential psychological theories on behavior is the theory of planned behavior (TPB) [23], which stresses that individual behavior is affected by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Because loyalty is a kind of psychological process that influences behavior and is also a behavior that is psychologically processed [24], the relationship between CERBP and consumers' BL is suitable for analysis using the TPB. Specifically speaking, the purposes of this study are: (1) to explore the internal mechanism of the link between CERBP and consumers' BL; (2) to identify the rankings of the degree of influence among perceived value (PV) and attitude on the outcome variable of BL; (3) to explore the mediation effects of both PV and attitude on the link between CERBP and BL, where the relationship of

the mediators PV and attitude are also analyzed; (4) to explore the moderating effect of perceived authenticity (PA) on the relationship between CERBP and PV.

To fulfill these purposes, this work investigates the case of the Wudang Mountains in Hubei province of China. The main contributions of this study is four-fold: First, this research proposed a novel model by integrating the TPB with a new second-order construct of CERBP for the first time, which extends the applicability of TPB. Second, this work uncovered the internal mechanism by identifying the mediating effects of both PV and attitude on the relationship between CERBP and BL using the PLS-SEM analysis method. Third, this study explored and verified the moderating effects of PA on the link between CERBP and PV. Finally, for practitioners, such as government managers and business owners, the research offered information useful to predict consumers' BL and help them choose which aspects to emphasize in order to enhance consumers' loyalty. Through empirical analysis, the research findings and analysis results provide useful and important theoretical and practical implications for the sustainable development of cultural resources and regional economies for other regions around the world.

2. Case Description

The reason of choosing the Wudang Mountains as the location for obtaining the survey data is given below.

Chinese civilization has over five thousand years of history and China is one of the four ancient traditional civilizations and cultures worthy of study. Taoism is the only culture that is native and influential in its long history. Therefore, this research will be conducted in the Taoist holy land area of the Wudang Mountains, which is located in Hubei Province and is a national AAAAA (5A) tourist attraction on the World Heritage List due to its profound historical culture. Wudang Mountains are famous for their Taoist culture, which respects nature and pursues harmony between people and nature.

In the Wudang Mountains, tourists can experience Taijiquan (a traditional physical practice based on relaxed, circular movements and breath regulation) and Taoist clothing (loose and comfortable, the fabric is not spared, and a lot of material is used generously to tailor; the costume is worn by Taoists and belongs to the Han traditional dress system, it is also known as "Fa Fu" or "Taoist uniform"), the Wudang sword (some of the Wudang sword forms include the Eight Immortals' Sword, the Taiyi Daoist sword, and the Tai Chi sword. Mastering the sword is considered the highest achievement in martial arts), Wudang vegetarian food (it features natural food that mostly grows in the mountains), and cultural homestays (usually have a small number of specially designed guest rooms built on silent places around the mountains; some can also allow customers to experience Taijiquan or Taoist Medicine, one of the most ancient philosophies of healing).

3. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

3.1. The Influence of CERBP

According to Jakubanecs and Supphellen [11], the construct of cultural embeddedness of products (CEP) consists of two dimensions: descriptive CEP and ethnic identity-related CEP. Similar to CEP, there is a subtle difference: CEP is proposed for considering general products, while the CERBP discussed in this work is for regional brand products. Thus, based on CEP, we construct the meaning of CERBP as cultural elements, such as norms, values, and lifestyles, which are embedded into regional brand products. Correspondingly, CERBP comprises two dimensions of cultural awareness and identity, implying that CERBP is a second-order construct. CERBP is derived from cultural resources such as ancient architecture, heritage attractions, and local cultures [25,26], which uniquely enable tourists to learn about history or local beliefs [27]. When tourists visit cultural attractions, they assess the value of the products' PV by experiencing symbols, psychological well-being [28], or knowledge [29], which leads to the realization of the value of products [30]. Prior literature has verified that companies can employ scenarios to stimulate consumers' experiential value and feelings (e.g., [31,32]). Meanwhile, consumers can simply look at the historical

heritage and enjoy the great wisdom, which all provide people with leisure [33]. However, authenticity moderates the relationship between CERBP and PV [34]. Cultural authenticity is the extent of "experience-centered" authenticity, which depends on consumers' subjective perceptions and feelings [35,36]. In [37], it was argued that consumers' PA on heritage attraction affected their preferences and behaviors, and also compared different effects regarding economic values with high or low authenticity in the tourism industry. Based on the above discussion, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H1. *CERBP exerts a positive and significant influence on PV.*

H1a. *The link between CERBP and PV is moderated by PA, such that the relationship is stronger for higher PA levels.*

In addition, CERBP also impacts attitudes toward CERBP. In the TPB model, attitude is defined as "the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question" [23]. In the present study, attitude refers to like or unlike CERBP. After visiting or purchasing CERBP, consumers respond to cultural attractions in the form of attitudes [38]. Experiences pertaining to regional brands of cultural products are beneficial to consumers [39] and promote a realistic and coherent perception of what a consumer can experience on visiting the cultural heritage site in person [40]. By extension, the authors of [41] stated that the value of CERBP influences consumers' preferences. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. *CERBP has a positive and significant influence on attitude.*

3.2. The Influence of PV

PV is defined as the difference between what is received from and what is given to products or services based on perceptions [42,43]. Similar to ordinary brands, for regional brands, the relevance of consumers' "self" construct is vital to affect the perceived quality and brand attitudes [44]. In the field of tourism, PV is closely associated with tourist behavior such as recommending and repurchasing cultural products [45]. PV has also been stressed and discussed in various branches of marketing research [46]. Kim et al. [47] stated that PV could help companies gain competitive advantage for their businesses, and it is also a crucial factor for developing long-term links with consumers [42]. Chen and Lin [48] asserted that PV could determine consumers' experiences and purchase preferences. Indeed, PV is a psychological evaluation of tourists [49] and can positively and significantly impact tourist attitudes [18]. Considering the above literature findings, we develop the following hypothesis:

H3. *PV positively influences attitude.*

Additionally, we emphasize the significant nexus between PV and BL. Loyalty can be explained as the customers committing to keep going to or purchase a preferred product or service according to Lee et al. [50]. As far as BL is concerned, this means that the consumers would likely select to buy, recommend, or positively provide online reviews of products, based on the research of Teng et al. [14] and Chen et al. [15]. From Solakis et al. [51], the value (i.e., quality and price) of products can influence customers' perception; at the same time, PV is manifested by consumers' perception [52]. According to Solakis et al. [51] and Cheung et al. [53], perception can strengthen customers' behavior, such as willingness to pay and providing positive word-of-mouth. According to TPB, the values of objects are regarded as background factors and, consequently, are considered as antecedents of behavior [54]. From the perspective of consumers, when confronted with their purchase decisions, they often select particular types of products that can have a special value that is differentiated from others [20]. Akhoondnejad [21] revealed that PV positively affects loyalty. Using Muslim tourism as an example, Eid [55] showed that customer PV is an antecedent of customer loyalty. Fan et al. [56] indicated that the great influence of PV on consumers' experiences resulted in their BL. In China, Hu et al. [57] validated that cultural

experience positively impacts the regional brand loyalty of Wudang Taoist Tea. In cultural tourism, Wang and Leou [29] further emphasized the direct effect of cultural and heritage tourism on BL through PV. Thus, given these ideas, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4. *PV has a positive influence on BL.*

3.3. The Influence of Attitude

The TPB defines attitude toward behavior as "the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question" [23]. Attitude is an essential psychological construct [58] and mirrors an individual's favorable or unfavorable evaluations of conducting a particular behavior [59]. In this study, attitude refers to the attitude toward CERBP. Previous marketing studies have conveyed that consumers' attitudes pertaining to feelings and positive images influence their behavior [60]. In line with their argument, Hwang and Lee [61] and Kim et al. [62] empirically tested whether consumers having positive attitudes are more likely to formulate a stronger predisposition to BL performance. However, in the field of food products, there are two opposing consequences. Lim et al. [63] asserted that food safety attitudes impacted consumer food safety behavior. Aschemann-Witzel and Niebuhr Aagaard [64] and Elhaffar et al. [65] both signal that consumers often have positive attitudes toward organic foods, while their actual purchases remain low, which may be caused by income. Correspondingly, the research by Lou et al. [66] further specified that the more positive consumers' attitudes, the greater the possibility of behavioral implementation. In addition, Hasan et al. [18] asserted that the prior attitude of consumers significantly impacts BL. In the case of CERBP, due to the low frequency of visiting cultural resorts or purchasing products, there should also be a positive relationship between attitude and BL. Given the above analyses, we formed the following hypothesis:

H5. *Attitude toward CERBP positively influences BL.*

Based on the above discussion, all the hypotheses from the literature review are elaborated and listed as H1–H5 and H1a. The proposed conceptual model is described in Figure 1. It is emphasized here that CERBP is treated as a reflective–reflective second-order construct— consisting of two first-order constructs, cultural awareness, and cultural identity—to fully measure CERBP.
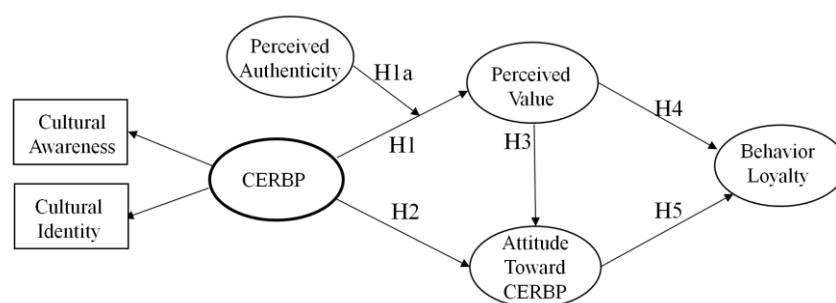

Figure 1. The proposed conceptual model, where CERBP is a reflective–reflective second-order construct and other constructs are first-order constructs.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Sample

To obtain the survey data for PLS-SEM analysis, we collected the answers from respondents face-to-face first and then online due to the COVID-19 and the control policy of China in 2022. Sojump provides an online, self-designed questionnaire and related professional service team. The use of online survey services has become increasingly widespread. Currently, Sojump is one of the largest online survey networks, with more than 6.2 million registered members having diverse sociodemographic characteristics.

These facts are why we chose Sojump to conduct an online survey to ensure the quality of the survey data is as good as possible. The eligible participants in the survey were adults understanding written Chinese that had visited the Wudang Mountains within one year.

The items of the primary questionnaires were from previous studies. Before administering the formal survey, both the pre-test and pilot-test are also implemented for ensuring the survey questionnaire to better match our study context. (1) For the pre-test, we conducted in-depth interviews to revise the initial description of the items in the questionnaire by asking the interviewee to answer the questions and listening to their revision suggestions. In order to identify possible questions that were hard to understand, we invited 15 visitors who had experienced Wudang cultural products within the past year to participate in a face-to-face survey. Next, we reworded those survey items that were ambiguous in meaning or could be easily misunderstood. We tried to ensure the respondents could easily and fully understand the questionnaire's content. (2) After revising the questionnaire, we performed a pilot test to check the survey's internal consistency and stability. According to the reliability coefficient criteria suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein [67], Cronbach's α during the pilot test was over 0.7, indicating that the survey's internal consistency and stability were favorable, hence the questionnaire is verified.

For the formal surveys, as mentioned above, the survey data are obtained from two kinds of sources. Because PLS-SEM makes practically no assumptions about the underlying data (e.g., in terms of data distributions), the convenience sampling method is good to adopt in the formal survey processes. For the face-to-face survey, when it was allowed to be conducted on-site, 56 valid responses were collected from 72 total responses; responses are treated as invalid if there are conflicting answers in meaning to some items, if there are enough numbers of the same repetitive answers, or if the entire answering time is too short. Subsequently, we sent the formal electronic survey questionnaire to Sojump to gather answers for all of the questions. All visitors who answered the questions were from around China and had previously visited the Wudang Mountains within the past year. During the survey process, to obtain a high-quality dataset, the professionally designed system of Sojump will check whether the answers are with the same repetitive answers to all the questions, with conflicting answers in meaning, or if the entire answering time is too short. Moreover, specially designed techniques such as asking questions such as "What is the third character in the word Wudang?" will pop up randomly to test whether the person answering the questions is paying adequate attention. Consequently, 356 questionnaires were returned, and there are 341 valid responses. In summary, there are 397 (=56 + 341) valid answers (valid rate: 92.75%), including both field and online survey replies.

Table 1 outlines the demographic characteristics. There were more female (53.90%) than male (46.10%) tourists. Most respondents were aged between 21 and 30 (44.08%) or between 31 and 40 (41.81%). Educational level was concentrated around university graduates (75.57%), postgraduates and above (10.33%), and college graduates (7.56%). Most respondents are employees or government servants (56.93%), and most of the monthly average household income is between 20,000 and 30,000 CNY (30.48%).

4.2. Measurement of the Variables

The study instrument, or the measurements of the latent variables, was determined by reviewing previous studies, and revisions and additions were made to fit this research. According to the recommendations of Foroudi et al. [68], a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) was used. The questionnaire has six parts, as presented in Table 2 below. First, CERBP was evaluated using two descriptors: cultural awareness and cultural identity, according to Jakubanecs and Supphellen [11]. Four items of cultural awareness were developed by Zhang et al. [69] and Jakubanecs and Supphellen [11], and three items of cultural identity were adapted from Zhang et al. [69] and He and Wang [70].

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Classification		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	183	46.10%
	Female	214	53.90%
Age (years)	Under 20	12	3.02%
	21–30	175	44.08%
	31–40	166	41.81%
	41–50	29	7.30%
	Older than 51	15	3.78%
Education	High school and below	26	6.55%
	College graduate	30	7.56%
	University graduate	300	75.57%
	Postgraduate and above	41	10.33%
Occupation	Student	28	7.05%
	Entrepreneur	54	13.60%
	Employee/public servant	226	56.93%
	Between jobs	10	2.52%
	Culture Related Jobs	36	9.07%
	Other	43	10.83%
Monthly household income (CNY)	Under 10,000	16	4.03%
	10,001–15,000	54	13.60%
	15,000–20,000	95	23.93%
	20,000–30,000	121	30.48%
	30,000–40,000	72	18.14%
	Above 40,000	39	9.82%

Table 2. Measures and literature sources.

Second-Order Constructs	First-Order Constructs	Items	Source(s)
CERBP	Cultural Awareness (**CA**)	(1) If I was asked about typical cultural products, I could mention this one. (CA1) (2) Taoist cultural product is a regional symbol that distinguishes from others. (CA2) (3) These cultural products are rooted in the ethnic traditions. (CA3) (4) China has a strong historical and cultural heritage. (CA4)	Jakubanecs and Supphellen [11]; Zhang et al. [69];
	Cultural Identity (**CI**)	(1) I am proud of cultural products from Wudang Mountain. (CI1) (2) I admire Important people from China's past who created cultural products. (CI2) (3) I am willing to learn more or experience cultural activities that identify as "typical culture". (CI3)	Zhang et al. [69]; He and Wang [70]
/	Attitude (**A**)	(1) I like the culture of Wudang. (A1) (2) I think the culture of Wudang is interesting. (A2) (3) I trust the products related to Wudang culture. (A3) (4) I support products related to Wudang culture. (A4)	Charton-Vachet et al. [71] Jalilvand and Samiei [72]

Table 2. *Cont.*

Second-Order Constructs	First-Order Constructs	Items	Source(s)
/	Perceived Value (**PV**)	(1) Compared with other regions, the culture resources here attract me very much. (PV1) (2) Compared with other regions, the culture resources here worth every penny. (PV2) (3) Compared with other regions, the culture resources meet my aim of travel. (PV3) (4) Compared with other regions, the time spend in Wudang Mountain is worthy and the experience is pleasant. (PV4)	Chen and Lin [48] France et al. [30] Zhang et al. [69]
/	Behavior Loyalty (**BL**)	(1) I will choose products regarding Wudang Mountain culture preferentially among similar cultural products. (BL1) (2) I will recommend the products regarding Wudang Mountain culture to my friends and relatives. (BL2) (3) I will positively give online review on cultural products regarding Wudang Mountain. (BL3) (4) I have willingness on buying cultural products regarding Wudang Mountain. (BL4)	Teng et al. [14] Chen et al. [15]
/	Perceived Authenticity (**PA**)	(1) The real feelings are consistent with what is expected in Wudang Mountain. (PA1) (2) The cultural experience satisfied my real needs. (PA2) (3) I felt the feature of the cultures about history and Taoism following nature in Wudang Mountain. (PA3) (4) The architecture, products and services inspired me. (PA4)	Chen et al. [15] Kolar and Zabkar [22]

The second part includes four items regarding attitude toward CERBP using diverse source scales (Charton-Vachet et al. [71]; Jalilvand and Samiei [72]). The third part focuses on PV, which is measured using four items borrowed from Chen and Lin [48], France et al. [30], and Zhang et al. [69]. The measurement of BL in part four consisted of four items derived from Teng et al. [14] and Chen et al. [15]. Part five is based on the research of Chen et al. [15] and Kolar and Zabkar [22], which measures PA with four items. Part six encompassed demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, education level, marital status, occupation, household income, and city) to render the consumers' demographic profile. The above scales were suitably adapted to fit the present research context.

4.3. Data Analysis

We applied the PLS method, a variance-based technique for SEM, to analyze the data collected for the conceptual model. The PLS-SEM has been widely used in social science and business research. PLS-SEM estimates the relationships between the constructs and determines how well the structural model explains the target constructs of interest. One advantage of PLS-SEM is that it does not require variables to meet multivariate normal distributions [73] and performs well even for small sample sizes [73,74]. Another advantage of using PLS-SEM is that it can avoid the indeterminacy problems of other SEM techniques, works well with complex models comprising second-order constructs [75], and is suitable for mediation and moderation analysis [76]. Therefore, PLS-SEM is appropriate for analyzing the data of this study owing to its state-of-the-art built-in statistical algorithms. To ensure the accuracy of the analysis results of the conceptual model, we used Smart PLS 4.0 software to perform the analysis for assessing each path and the mediating effects

based on 5000 bootstraps, as suggested in Nitzl et al. [77]. Furthermore, we used a repeated indicator approach to assess the higher-order constructs of CERBP [78].

5. Results

5.1. Common Method Bias

Two analyses were performed to statistically investigate the potential severity of common method bias (CMB). We initially used Harman's single-factor test [79], which allowed us to load all items into an exploratory factor analysis to examine the results of the unrotated factor analysis and determine the minimum necessary factors for explaining the variance of the variables. If only one factor is extracted, or if a factor has a very large explanatory power, then there is a serious CMB.

In our study, the first factor accounted for 40.64%, which is below the 50% benchmark value set by Podsakoff et al. [80], and confirmed that there was no obvious CMB. In addition, we employed the process of Liang et al. [81] to test for CMB. We developed a new measurement model with all indicators loaded onto a common method factor and then calculated and compared the variances of each indicator with the original measurement. As illustrated in Table 3, the findings suggest that the ratio of substantive variance to method variance was approximately 31:1, implying that there was no substantial CMB. Therefore, CMB was not a major concern for our study.

Table 3. Common method bias.

Construct	Indicator	Substantive Factor Loading (R1)	$R1^2$	Method Factor Loading (R2)	$R2^2$
A	A1	0.719	0.517	0.26	0.068
	A3	0.795	0.632	−0.015	0.000
	A4	0.745	0.555	−0.004	0.000
BL	BL1	0.799	0.638	−0.107	0.011
	BL2	0.730	0.533	0.019	0.000
	BL4	0.820	0.672	−0.236	0.056
CA	CA1	0.822	0.676	0.001	0.000
	CA2	0.677	0.458	0.050	0.003
	CA3	0.767	0.588	−0.213	0.045
CI	CI1	0.722	0.521	0.159	0.025
	CI2	0.768	0.590	0.266	0.071
	CI3	0.777	0.604	−0.105	0.011
PA	PA1	0.803	0.645	−0.032	0.001
	PA2	0.696	0.484	0.096	0.009
	PA4	0.777	0.604	−0.054	0.003
PV	PV1	0.782	0.612	−0.024	0.001
	PV3	0.797	0.635	−0.164	0.027
	PV4	0.755	0.570	0.100	0.010
Average		0.764	0.585	0.000	0.019

5.2. The Measurement Model

To evaluate the measurement model, reliability and validity were examined. As previously described, CERBP is a reflective–reflective second-order construct that has not been used in regional branding research to the best of our knowledge; therefore, a repeated indicator approach [78] should be employed to analyze it. According to the repeated indicator approach procedure, the second-order indicators are from first-order constructs, so we only need to analyze the reliability and validity of first-order constructs.

First, we tested the reliability of the items using factor loading, Cronbach's α, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 4, we deleted PA3, PV2, A2, and BL3 because their factor loadings were not within the acceptable range. The remaining factor loadings were greater than 0.7, except for CA2, which was close to 0.7. According to Hair et al. [82], all factor loadings were over the cut-off value

of 0.6, and simultaneously, all factor loadings were statistically significant. Similarly, all of Cronbach's α values exceeded the recommended threshold level of 0.7 [83]. The CR of all the constructs ranged from 0.795 to 0.827, exceeding the threshold value of 0.7 for all factors [84], indicating that we attained internal consistency of the constructs. Fornell and Larcker [84] argued that the AVE should be higher than 0.5. For our analysis results, the AVE values ranged between 0.571 and 0.614, implying high convergent validity. In light of the above results, it is suggested that first-order indicators have good reliability and validity.

Table 4. Measurement items from the second-order construct of GP and other constructs.

Second-Order Constructs	First-Order Constructs	Item	Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
CERBP	CA	CA1	0.823 ***	0.726	0.801	0.574
		CA2	0.679 ***			
		CA3	0.764 ***			
	CI	CI1	0.744 ***	0.725	0.800	0.571
		CI2	0.761 ***			
		CI3	0.762 ***			
/	PA	PA1	0.799 ***	0.732	0.804	0.577
		PA2	0.714 ***			
		PA4	0.764 ***			
/	PV	PV1	0.786 ***	0.774	0.821	0.604
		PV3	0.781 ***			
		PV4	0.765 ***			
/	A	A1	0.766 ***	0.708	0.795	0.564
		A3	0.766 ***			
		A4	0.720 ***			
/	BL	BL1	0.801 ***	0.785	0.827	0.614
		BL2	0.730 ***			
		BL4	0.817 ***			

Note: *** *p*-value < 0.001.

Second, we gauged the discriminant validity of the first-order measurement model using the criterion proposed by Fornell and Larcker [84]. Table 5 displays the detailed values of the discriminant validity analysis results. The diagonal values show the square root of AVE, ranging from 0.751 to 0.784. The largest value in the correlation coefficient between the factors was 0.678. As such, the square root values of the AVE for each construct were greater than the correlation coefficients between each construct and other constructs, and discriminant validity was considered favorable; that is, there were differences among latent variables.

Table 5. Discriminant validity analysis from first order measurement model.

	A	BL	CA	CI	PA	PV
A	**0.751**					
BL	0.648	**0.784**				
CA	0.573	0.560	**0.758**			
CI	0.620	0.646	0.641	**0.756**		
PA	0.626	0.695	0.545	0.658	**0.760**	
PV	0.652	0.729	0.592	0.649	0.678	**0.777**

Note: Bolded diagonal values are the square root of the AVE; others represent the correlation coefficient.

Lastly, we evaluated the second-order construct of CERBP with two first-order constructs: cultural awareness and cultural identity. The second-order construct of CERBP was measured utilizing the repeated indicators approach. The CR of CERBP was 0.841 with an AVE of 0.621, both exceeding the threshold values of 0.7 and 0.5 [84]. Moreover, all the

outer loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$, implying that CERBP had a strong association with its first-order components, including cultural awareness and cultural identity. The amount of explained variance in CERBP was reflected by its first-order components: cultural awareness (81.7%) and cultural identity (82.4%).

5.3. Structural Model

Prior to presenting the results of hypothesis testing, it is mandatory to use variance inflation factor (VIF) scores to examine whether there is collinearity among the constructs of the proposed structural model. To this end, and after calculation, the VIF of the inner model test produced result values ranging from 1.556 to 1.992, with scores inferior to the recommended value of 3.3 [85]. Hence, it can be concluded that there was no collinearity of the data in this study.

5.3.1. Model Fit Analysis

Chin [78] recommended a method for evaluating the structural model in PLS based on the determination coefficients R^2, effect size f^2 [73,74], and the Stone–Geisser test Q^2 [86,87], which are suitable for endogenous constructs. As listed in Table 6, the R^2 values of attitude, PV, and BL were 0.510, 0.561, and 0.583, respectively; these values are all above 0.5, which indicates the moderate explanatory power [78]. Furthermore, the f^2 values reflected the changes in R^2 associated with the unexplained variance of the endogenous variable, and the f^2 values of attitude and PV were 0.174 and 0.194, respectively, indicating a medium effect size [88]. The f^2 value of the BL was 0.391, indicating a large effect size [88]. In addition, Q^2 measures the predictive relevance of the latent variables of the structural model [89] obtained by blindfolding. As presented in Table 6, the Q^2 values of the attitude, PV, and BL were all greater than 0 [78], which guaranteed the model's predictive relevance.

Table 6. Model fit.

Item	R^2	Q^2 (=1 − SSE/SSO)	f^2
Attitude	0.510	0.274	0.174
PV	0.561	0.319	0.194
BL	0.583	0.343	0.391

5.3.2. Model Path Analysis of Direct Impact

Once we evaluated all the psychometric properties of the measurement instruments, the next step was to employ a structural model to estimate the proposed hypothesis, as shown in Figure 1, where the path coefficients represent the strength and direction of the causal relationship between the variables. Moreover, we performed the estimation by resampling the data, so the estimated values can be more precise than the commonly used approximate limit values [90]. As such, the bootstrapping method (N = 5000 resamples) in Smart PLS 4.0 was used for testing the hypothesis path.

Table 7 summarizes the hypotheses tested in the study. All path coefficients of direct impact in the conceptual model were significant with the p-values < 0.001. CERBP had a significantly positive link with both PV (β = 0.406, $p < 0.001$) and attitude (β = 0.401, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1a and H2. Similarly, PV had a significantly positive relationship with both attitude (β = 0.376, $p < 0.001$) and BL (β = 0.533, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3 and H4. Moreover, attitude significantly and directly affects behavioral loyalty (β = 0.300, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H5 is also supported. In summary, the results support H1–H5.

Table 7. Path coefficients.

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	t-Value	95% CILL	95% CIUL	Results
Direct effects					
H1: CERBP→PV	0.406 ***	4.680	0.232	0.567	Supported
H2: CERBP→A	0.401 ***	4.828	0.238	0.558	Supported
H3: PV→A	0.376 ***	4.727	0.220	0.528	Supported
H4: PV→BL	0.533 ***	8.025	0.387	0.651	Supported
H5: A→BL	0.300 ***	4.949	0.174	0.411	Supported
Moderating effect					
H1a: PA × CERBP→PV	−0.044	0.786	−0.134	0.088	Not supported

Note: Number of bootstrap samples = 5000. *** p-value < 0.001.

5.3.3. Mediating and Moderating Effect Analysis

To verify whether the main mediation effect was statistically meaningful, we used bootstrapping (with N = 5000 bootstrap resamples) to solve for the path coefficients and t-values of the indirect effects [91]. As showcased in Table 8, because the indirect effects of PV on the relationships between CERBP and BL (t = 4.177) and between CERBP and attitude (t = 3.176) were both significant, all the indirect effects were thus supported. Similarly, the indirect effects of CERBP→A→BL and PV→A→BL were significant.

Table 8. Results of the analysis of the mediating effects.

Indirect Effect Path	Indirect Effect Value	t-Value	95% Bias-Corrected CIs	Sig.
CERBP→PV→BL	0.216	4.177	(0.123, 0.325)	***
CERBP→A→BL	0.120	3.393	(0.055, 0.193)	***
CERBP→PV→A	0.153	3.176	(0.073, 0.263)	***
PV→A→BL	0.113	3.486	(0.060, 0.188)	***

Note: Sig.: significance; ***p-value < 0.001.

In addition, recent research [89] suggests using confidence intervals (Cis) to investigate mediating effects. Therefore, we adopted the 95% CI of the specific mediating effects obtained using 5000 bootstrapping resamples. As shown in Table 8, the value of zero was not contained within the 95% CI, so the mediation effects were again confirmed. Furthermore, all the results of the direct effects are shown in Table 7; we concluded that PV partially mediated (i.e., there are both mediated and direct effects of PV) the effects of CERBP on attitude and BL, and attitude partially mediated the effects of CERBP, PV, and BL.

An additional investigation was conducted to clarify whether PA moderates the relationship between CERBP and the mediated variable, PV. Following McLean and Osei-Frimpong [92], an interactive term was created by multiplying the independent variables (i.e., CERBP) and the moderating variable (i.e., PA) to test the interactive effects. As shown in Table 7, the moderating impact of PA on the relationship between CERBP and PV was insignificant (β = 0.533, t-value = 0.786, $p > 0.05$). Because the estimation of the interaction term showed a non-significant value, the influence of CERBP and PV did not vary significantly across different PA levels.

6. Discussion

This study proposed a theoretical research model and adopted an empirical research method to explore the internal mechanism between CERBP and consumers' BL by integrating the TPB with novel latent variables. The results of this research provide strong support for the validity of the proposed conceptual model because it explained 58.3% of the variance in consumers' BL. The results showed that PV partially mediated the effects of CERBP

on attitude and BL, and attitude partially mediated the effect of PV on BL. The results and findings can provide important implications from theory to practice for promoting regionally branded products with embedded cultures.

6.1. Main Findings and Theoretical Implications

For the proposed concept model with the novel latent variable of CERBP, the relationships of CERBP and BL are analyzed in detail, including the direct and indirect impacts of CERBP, PV, and attitude toward CERBP on BL toward CERBP, as well as the moderating effect of PA.

First, among all the path coefficients of direct effects, that of PV→BL is the greatest, indicating that PV has the most significant effect on BL. The effects of CERBP→PV (β = 0.406) and CERBP→Attitude (β = 0.401) are almost identical, implying that the values of embedding culture into regional brands are nearly the same for consumers' PV and attitudes toward CERBP. However, there are obvious differences in other direct effects, such as from PV to BL and from Attitude to BL. Compared with attitude, PV was found to have a more significant influence on BL (βPV = 0.533 > βA = 0.300), which indicates the importance of PV in yielding consumers' BL. Specifically, the stronger the PV by consumers, the more likely they are to form BL and vice versa. This result is in line with the claim by Wang and Leou [29] that, compared with tourism motivation, PV has a subtly stronger impact on destination loyalty. However, there is a contrary conclusion regarding the positive impact of attitude on behavioral loyalty. For example, Elhaffar et al. [65] revealed that although consumers generally hold positive attitudes toward organic foods, their purchasing behavior remains low due to their low price preferences. Moreover, we also underscore the critical nexus between PV and attitude toward CERBP, whose influence denotes the fourth-most intense relationship in the proposed hierarchical model. This finding means that consumers' positive attitude strongly depends on the enhancement of PV.

Second, another contribution is that the proposed hierarchical model opens the black box by revealing the mediating effects of both PV and attitude on the relationship between CERBP and BL. The total mediating effects of PV (CERBP→PV→BL (β = 0.216) and CERBP→PV→A (β = 0.153)) are more robust than the total mediating effects of attitude (CERBP→A→BL (β = 0.120) and PV→A→BL (β = 0.113)). It thus further demonstrated that consumers pay more attention and great concern to the value of cultural experience rather than just personal preferences.

Third, this study expands the applicability of the TPB, which is the first time it has been used to explore the link between CERBP and BL. In the field of cultural research, existing work on TPB has predominantly focused on the impact of culture on people's values. For example, Lou et al. [66] viewed Taoist cultural values as the antecedent variable of the TPB model, profoundly and indirectly affecting residents' waste-sorting behavior by affecting their psychological factors. With respect to culture, most research uses Hofstede's cultural dimensions to analyze objects, whereas research combining TPB and CEP is sparse. In addition, from the path estimate results by PLS, it was shown that H1a is not supported, indicating that the impact of CERBP on PV does not vary significantly across low or high PA levels.

6.2. Practical Implications

The empirical results also provide a basis for formulating policies, strategies, or guidance for management practices, especially for the sustainable development of regions rich in cultural resources.

First, PV had the most significant influence on BL, either directly or indirectly. Understanding the factors influencing BL can help relevant managers find the most critical factor. Thus, the managers should develop and promote CERBP so that CERBP can deliver superior value to consumers and meet their needs and wants. For example, managers should attach importance not only to the tangible functional quality of CERBP, but also to

the intangible aspects of service quality in their delivery process to enhance consumers' PV [18]. Additionally, deep extraction of the embedded cultural meanings in regional brands can distinguish competitive products, allowing consumers to feel internal values, yield positive attitudes, and form BL.

Second, although attitude toward CERBP is not the most significant influencing factor, it still significantly influences BL. Empirically speaking, the more positive the attitude consumers have toward CERBP, the more likely they are to form or maintain BL (A→BL: $\beta = 0.300$). This finding confirms the need to strive to build positive consumer attitudes. For example, during peak periods of tourism, if sufficient staff can be arranged to facilitate the travel and sightseeing of tourists, tourists will have a better travel experience to enforce their positive attitude. In addition, when consumers can enjoy CERBP or the perfect infrastructure of the region, they may acquire sufficient cultural knowledge or have a good impression of CERBP. As a result, consumers may have a favorable attitude and then may form BL gradually.

Finally, CERBP is the origin that influences BL, and the effects of CERBP→A ($\beta = 0.401$) and CERBP→PV ($\beta = 0.406$) are next only to the greatest effect of PV→BL ($\beta = 0.533$). Based on this observation, we recommend that governments and companies protect cultural resources and reasonably combine them to maintain their authenticity as much as possible. Thus, it can enforce consumers' PV, form a positive attitude, and ensure the sustainable development of the cultural region. Moreover, to enhance the popularity of CERBP, governments and companies can build platforms for the guidance and publicity of CERBP. For example, they show the essence of CERBP in a lively animation form by broadcasting publicity films on digital platforms or in shopping malls, subways, buses, communities, etc.

6.3. Limitations and Future Research

Although our findings have theoretical and practical contributions, the study has limitations that can be studied further. First, we designed our theoretical model for the unique context of China and distributed the questionnaire to consumers who have been to Wudang Mountain within one year, which has obvious regional characteristics. We have not yet analyzed its applicability and effectiveness in other countries' cultural regions. In the future, we can examine its applicability and improve it by further considering the behavior of CERBP in other countries or regions to improve the model's universality, especially in regions rich in cultural resources. Second, we explored the mediating role of PV and attitude toward CERBP in the relationships between CERBP and BL. However, to simplify the model, there may be other influential mediating or moderating variables that can be introduced to deepen the proposed model, such as by considering the mediating effect of satisfaction or the moderating effect of authenticity, which can be further analyzed. Third, the different personality traits of consumers have different influences on individual attitudes and choice behaviors [93], which is not considered in simplifying the current model. In future studies, consumers' personality traits (e.g., the Big Five personality traits) should be studied to explore and clarify how they lead to and maintain BL.

7. Conclusions

This study explored the internal mechanism of the link between CERBP and consumers' BL by integrating the factors from TPB in the concept model. This is among the first attempts to corroborate the roles of PV and attitude toward CERBP in impacting consumers' BL. The investigated model was examined empirically. It was found that PV is the key factor in shaping consumers' BL, partially mediating the relationship between CERBP and BL. The present study also examines the link between PV and attitude toward CERBP, which turned out to be the fourth-most intense relationship in the proposed hierarchical model. Furthermore, the moderating effects of PA on the path from CERBP to PV were examined. It was found that the moderating effect was insignificant.

Fundamentally, the research findings have crucial theoretical and practical implications. Relevant managers are encouraged to put sufficient emphasis on PV originating

from cultural embeddedness as a form of added value to regional products for achieving competitive advantage to guarantee sustainable regional development.

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