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Empowering Cultural and Creative Product Design through AIGC in Tourism Contexts: A Human–AI Co-Creation Perspective

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Abstract: Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC) has become a transformative force reshaping the intersection between digital creativity and cultural tourism. This study investigates how AIGC empowers cultural and creative product design in tourism scenarios and reconstructs the relationship between tourists, culture, and destinations. Building upon human–computer interaction and cultural sustainability theories, a "Human–AI Co-Creation Loop" is proposed to illustrate how cultural narratives can be encoded, visualized, and personalized through AI. Using multi-case analysis from Lijiang (China), Kyoto (Japan), and Barcelona (Spain), this study reveals that AIGC enhances cultural translation, aesthetic diversity, and participatory engagement while posing authenticity and ethical challenges. The research contributes theoretically by integrating AIGC into sustainable tourism design discourse and practically by offering a design-driven framework for cultural innovation in the AIGC era.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism; Human-AI Co-Creation; Cultural Sustainability

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1.Introduction

Tourism is entering an era of intelligent transformation, where creativity and digital technology intersect to redefine cultural expression and visitor experience. Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC) represents a new paradigm that enables the automatic generation of images, texts, and artifacts through large-scale machine learning models. Unlike earlier forms of automation, AIGC introduces a generative collaboration between human creativity and computational intelligence, blurring the boundaries between designer, user, and algorithm.

In the context of cultural tourism, AIGC offers both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it enables the dynamic visualization of cultural symbols and narratives, fostering interactive, personalized, and immersive tourism experiences. On the other hand, it raises critical questions about cultural authenticity, algorithmic ethics, and the preservation of intangible heritage. While museums, creative studios, and tourism boards increasingly adopt AI-based design tools, existing research rarely integrates AIGC into the theoretical discourse of tourism management. Most studies focus on technical or artistic aspects rather than understanding how AIGC reshapes value creation, stakeholder interaction, and destination identity.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill the theoretical and practical gap by proposing a conceptual framework of Human–AI Co-

Creation in Tourism Product Design. Specifically, it addresses three guiding research questions:

1.How does AIGC transform the design logic and creative process of tourism cultural products?

2.What co-creation mechanisms emerge among AI systems, designers, and tourists?

3.How can AIGC contribute to sustainable cultural experience and destination identity?

Theoretically, this research extends the scope of tourism management by integrating design thinking and human–computer interaction into the sustainability discourse. Practically, it provides a design-driven roadmap for applying AIGC to cultural innovation, enabling destinations to balance tradition, creativity, and technological evolution in the post-digital tourism era.

2.Literature Review

2.1 AIGC and Cultural Creativity

Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC) represents a generative paradigm in which creative outputs are co-produced by humans and algorithms. It extends beyond automation, emphasizing generative co-creation where AI acts as a partner in creativity rather than a passive tool (Zhao & Yu, 2023). Within the cultural and creative industries, this paradigm reshapes authorship, artistic agency, and aesthetic production (Liu, 2024). Diffusion-based models such as Stable Diffusion and DALL·E have enabled designers to visualize complex ideas rapidly, democratizing creative exploration and accelerating cultural innovation.

Recent research highlights AIGC's role in heritage preservation and reinterpretation. Guo et al. (2025) applied LoRA-based generative models to Yi ethnic embroidery, demonstrating that AIGC can preserve symbolic authenticity while allowing modern reinterpretation. Similarly, Dai et al. (2024) integrated Stable Diffusion with multi-criteria decision-making methods to regenerate traditional paper-cutting patterns. These studies suggest that AIGC not only generates imagery but also mediates cultural translation, enabling new pathways for heritage revitalization and cultural continuity.

2.2 AIGC in Tourism Design

Tourism product design plays a key role in transforming cultural narratives into tangible experiences. AIGC introduces a new design logic by enabling the automated generation and personalization of visual and experiential elements. Kim and Lee (2023) found that AI-generated storytelling enhances perceived authenticity and emotional immersion among visitors. Similarly, Zeng and Li (2022) argued that AI-mediated creative media extend destination narratives beyond physical boundaries, forming distributed tourism experiences across digital and real environments.

Moreover, AIGC promotes participatory engagement in cultural tourism. Wang and Sun (2024) showed that generative design platforms allow tourists to co-create souvenirs and interpret local symbols, marking a shift from passive consumption to active co-creation. This participatory turn aligns with the "experience economy" paradigm (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), where visitors become co-producers of cultural meaning. However, scholars also warn of ethical concerns such as authorship, data use, and the potential erosion of artisanal authenticity (Gretzel & Tussyadiah, 2023).

2.3 Theoretical Gap and Research Positioning

Although growing literature explores AI in creative industries, few studies systematically integrate AIGC into the theoretical landscape of tourism management. Three key gaps are identified:

1.Theoretical integration between AIGC and sustainable tourism design remains underdeveloped.

2.Empirical links between AIGC-driven design and visitor experience outcomes are limited.

3.There is a lack of methodological transparency and cross-cultural validation in AIGC-related tourism studies.

This research bridges these gaps by constructing a conceptual framework grounded in design thinking and human–AI collaboration. It situates AIGC not merely as a technology but as a cultural mediator that shapes co-creation, authenticity, and sustainability in tourism product design.

2.4 Comparative Summary Table

Research Focus	Representative Studies	Key Findings	Identified Gap
AIGC and Creativity	Zhao & Yu (2023); Liu (2024)	Generative co-creation enhances creative agency	Lack of cultural contextualization

Research Focus	Representative Studies	Key Findings	Identified Gap
AIGC and Heritage	Guo et al. (2025); Dai et al. (2024)	Enables digital regeneration of cultural motifs	Limited tourism application
AIGC in Tourism	Kim & Lee (2023); Zeng & Li (2022); Wang & Sun (2024)	Improves engagement and authenticity	Weak empirical validation
Sustainability & Ethics	Gretzel & Tussyadiah (2023)	Raises authenticity and governance concerns	No framework linking ethics and design

3.Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1 Conceptual Framework: The Human–AI Co-Creation Loop

This study establishes a conceptual model called the Human–AI Co-Creation Loop, grounded in human–computer interaction and design thinking. The framework conceptualizes AIGC as an interactive ecosystem where humans and AI continuously exchange creative inputs and feedback. The model includes four interconnected stages:

1.Cultural Input: Local cultural symbols, stories, and patterns are collected and digitally encoded (e.g., ethnic motifs, traditional crafts, oral histories).

2.AI Generation: Diffusion-based and transformer-based algorithms are applied to produce visual or textual outcomes derived from these cultural datasets.

3.Human Curation: Designers and cultural practitioners evaluate AI outputs, refining them through interpretive and aesthetic judgment.

4.Experiential Output: The co-created results are integrated into tourism cultural products, such as souvenirs, immersive installations, or digital exhibitions, shaping visitor experience and destination identity.

This cyclical interaction emphasizes mutual learning and cultural translation, suggesting that AI amplifies rather than replaces human creativity. The model bridges cultural authenticity with technological adaptability and serves as a design-driven roadmap for sustainable cultural tourism innovation.

3.2 Research Design

A qualitative multiple-case study approach (Yin, 2018) was adopted to capture the complexity of AIGC-enabled creative practices in diverse cultural settings. Three destinations—Lijiang (China), Kyoto (Japan), and Barcelona (Spain)—were selected for their representativeness of heritage, craft, and digital creativity.

Case selection criteria:

1.Active integration of AIGC or AI tools in creative production;

2.Strong cultural identity and heritage tourism base;

3.Evidence of local–global collaboration in creative industries.

Data Collection:

Between 2023 and 2025, data were gathered from multiple sources:

21 semi-structured interviews with designers, artisans, and tourism managers;

Archival materials and project reports (e.g., workshop records, design prototypes);

Online ethnography of AIGC creative communities and digital exhibitions.

Case Descriptions:

Lijiang: Focused on ethnic pattern workshops using AIGC to reimagine Yi embroidery; included 7 designers and 5 cultural practitioners.

Kyoto: Examined three heritage studios experimenting with AI-assisted textile visualization.

Barcelona: Investigated two creative startups co-developing AI-generated souvenirs with tourism boards.

All interviews were transcribed and analyzed with NVivo 14, following a three-step thematic coding (open, axial, selective). Two independent researchers cross-checked the coding for consistency, ensuring intercoder reliability.

To ensure credibility and transferability, triangulation was performed across cases and data types. The multi-case comparison

enables the identification of both shared mechanisms and local adaptations of AIGC-driven design.

3.3 Data Analysis and Coding

Data analysis was conducted inductively through a constant comparative method. The goal was to align emergent themes with the Human–AI Co-Creation Loop.

Step 1: Open coding – identification of recurrent patterns from raw transcripts.

Step 2: Axial coding – grouping related concepts into higher-level categories.

Step 3: Selective coding – integrating categories into theoretical dimensions.

Sample Coding Table

Raw Excerpt (Participant Quote)	First-Level Code	Second-Level Theme
"AI gave me unexpected ideas—it felt like working with another designer." (Lijiang designer)	Co-creation experience	Human–AI collaboration
"The generated pattern kept the spirit of Yi culture but modernized it." (Lijiang artisan)	Cultural reinterpretation	Authenticity mediation
"Tourists loved that they could tweak designs instantly on their phones." (Barcelona manager)	User participation	Experience personalization

This coding process ensured transparency and traceability between data and theoretical abstraction. Emerging themes—"collaboration," "reinterpretation," and "personalization"—formed the analytical foundation for cross-case comparison.

3.4 Cross-Case Comparative Insights

Comparative analysis revealed three co-creation patterns:

a.Cultural Translation (Lijiang): AIGC was used to reinterpret ethnic symbols while maintaining cultural integrity.

b.Collaborative Craftsmanship (Kyoto): AI-assisted artisans accelerated design iteration while preserving traditional aesthetics.

c.Participatory Personalization (Barcelona): Tourists engaged with AI-generated souvenirs, shaping experiential authenticity.

Despite contextual variations, all cases demonstrated AIGC's mediating role between authenticity and innovation, suggesting a universal mechanism of cultural-technical hybridity in creative tourism.

4.Results and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Findings

The analysis revealed that AIGC's application in tourism product design generates three interrelated co-creation mechanisms—cultural translation, collaborative craftsmanship, and participatory personalization—that correspond to distinct modes of human–AI interaction. These mechanisms collectively illustrate how AIGC mediates between cultural authenticity and technological innovation, creating new forms of sustainable cultural experience.

4.2 Cultural Translation in Lijiang

In Lijiang, AIGC became a tool for cultural reinterpretation. Local designers employed diffusion models to regenerate Yi embroidery motifs using prompts derived from traditional stories. Interviews indicated that AIGC allowed "translation" of intangible heritage into contemporary aesthetics while preserving symbolic meaning.

"AI gave me a new way to visualize our patterns—it doesn't replace my craft, but it helps me imagine modern forms that still feel Yi." — (Lijiang Artisan, Interview #6)

Participants emphasized co-agency between human intuition and algorithmic exploration. The process reflects a hybrid form of authorship where AI acts as a cultural interpreter rather than a mere generator. This aligns with recent scholarship suggesting that AIGC mediates between cultural continuity and creative disruption (Guo et al., 2025).

4.3 Collaborative Craftsmanship in Kyoto

In Kyoto, heritage studios adopted AIGC-assisted visualization to reinterpret textile patterns. The process did not aim to automate craftsmanship but to enhance iteration and ideation.

"The AI's suggestions speed up our prototype cycle, but the final judgment is always human." — (Kyoto Studio Director,

Interview #3)

Field notes show that artisans viewed AIGC as a "co-designer" that accelerated experimentation while maintaining the aesthetic integrity of Kyoto's heritage crafts. The symbiosis between algorithmic efficiency and manual refinement represents a collaborative authorship model, consistent with Boden's (2022) notion of "computational creativity."

4.4 Participatory Personalization in Barcelona

The Barcelona case illustrated a different form of co-creation where tourists directly interacted with AIGC systems to design personalized souvenirs. Through AI-driven design kiosks, visitors could modify patterns or generate visuals based on local icons (e.g., Gaudí architecture).

"Tourists enjoyed creating their own designs—it made them feel part of Barcelona's creative spirit." — (Startup Manager, Interview #2)

Observation data indicated that such participation enhanced emotional engagement and perceived authenticity. Tourists perceived AI as a playful medium connecting technology, art, and local culture. This finding supports Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy theory, where value emerges through active participation and personalization.

4.5 Cross-Case Discussion: Authenticity, Creativity, and Ethics

Across cases, AIGC functions as both a creative partner and a cultural mediator. However, its integration raises new tensions between authenticity, creativity, and ethics.

Authenticity: While AIGC facilitates reinterpretation, excessive algorithmic manipulation risks cultural dilution. Hence, human curation remains crucial for maintaining symbolic depth.

Creativity: The co-creation process demonstrates that AI expands human ideation capacity rather than replacing it, fostering pluralistic aesthetics and innovation.

Ethics: Participants expressed concerns over authorship and cultural data ownership. Some feared algorithmic bias might "flatten" nuanced heritage forms, echoing Gretzel & Tussyadiah's (2023) warnings about digital ethics in tourism.

Overall, AIGC's success in tourism product design depends on achieving a balance between automation and authorship, where human interpretation anchors algorithmic creativity within local cultural contexts.

5.Design Framework Proposal

5.1 Framework Overview

Building upon the empirical findings, this study proposes an expanded Human–AI Co-Creation Design Framework that illustrates how AIGC can systematically empower cultural and creative product design within tourism contexts. The framework synthesizes insights from the three case types—cultural translation, collaborative craftsmanship, and participatory personalization—into a unified model linking inputs, processes, and outcomes.

The framework integrates three key theoretical dimensions:

Cultural Continuity: Ensuring symbolic authenticity through heritage-informed datasets and local stakeholder involvement.

Technological Mediation: Leveraging AIGC for creative iteration, pattern generation, and user customization.

Experiential Value Creation: Translating AI-enhanced cultural products into immersive, participatory visitor experiences that reinforce destination identity.

Conceptually, the model illustrates a dynamic feedback system where AI outputs are continually refined through human judgment, resulting in adaptive cultural products that evolve with both user preferences and heritage integrity.

5.2 Structure of the Human–AI Co-Creation Framework

The proposed framework (Figure 1, textually described below) contains three layers:

Layer 1: Input (Cultural Knowledge Layer)

Includes cultural datasets, heritage archives, and narrative symbols that serve as the raw material for AIGC training or prompting.

Layer 2: Process (Generative Interaction Layer)

Encompasses human–AI collaboration, iterative co-design, and value negotiation between cultural meaning and algorithmic possibility.

Layer 3: Output (Experiential Layer)

Produces tangible tourism products and intangible cultural experiences, evaluated through visitor perception, emotional engagement, and authenticity satisfaction.

Feedback loops connect these layers: tourists' reactions inform new datasets; designers' curatorial decisions influence AI's aesthetic directions; and cultural communities assess alignment with heritage values. This loop operationalizes the "co-evolution" of human creativity and algorithmic intelligence in tourism design.

5.3 Theoretical Contribution

This framework advances the field of tourism management in three theoretical aspects:

a.Extending the Experience Economy: By embedding AIGC within design processes, the model updates Pine and Gilmore's (1999) framework to reflect the rise of algorithmic participation in co-created experiences.

b.Bridging Design Thinking and Sustainability: It connects aesthetic innovation with cultural sustainability, highlighting how AI-driven design can reinforce local identity rather than homogenize it.

c.Redefining Authenticity: The study proposes "algorithmic authenticity," referring to human-curated AI outputs that preserve symbolic depth while achieving creative renewal.

5.4 Practical Implications

For tourism managers, the framework provides strategic implications in three areas:

Design Management: Encourage multidisciplinary collaboration among technologists, designers, and heritage experts to align AI capabilities with cultural goals.

Destination Branding: Integrate AIGC-driven co-creation into branding narratives to attract creative-class tourists seeking participatory experiences.

Cultural Governance: Develop ethical guidelines for algorithmic use, ensuring cultural data ownership and community participation in creative decision-making.

5.5 Limitations and Future Directions

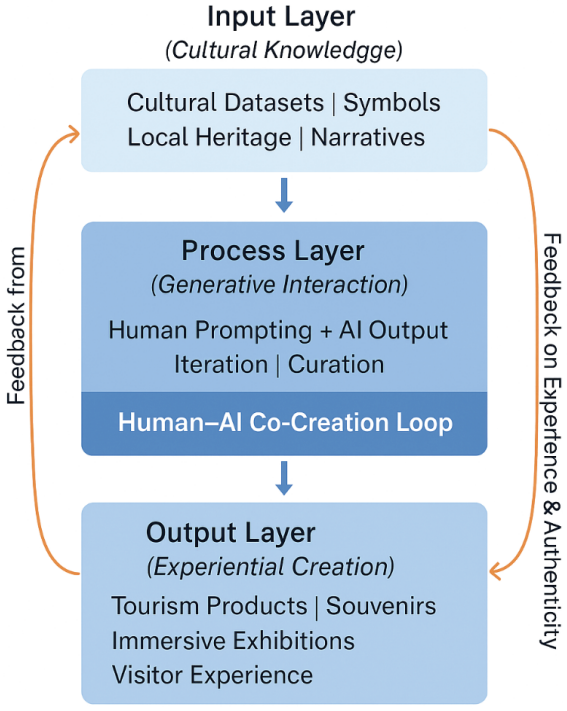
This framework remains conceptual and requires further empirical validation. Future research could:

a.Conduct quantitative studies on visitor perception of AIGC-enhanced experiences;

b.Apply experimental designs to measure the impact of AI-generated aesthetics on satisfaction and cultural connection;

c.Explore longitudinal effects of human–AI collaboration on cultural sustainability within tourism destinations.

Figure 1. Human-Al Co-Creation Design Framework



The framework visualizes a three-layer model linking cultural inputs, human–AI generative processes, and experiential outputs. Feedback loops connect tourists, designers, and AI systems, illustrating the co-evolution of creativity, authenticity, and cultural sustainability.

6.Managerial Implications and Theoretical Reflection

6.1 Managerial Implications

The findings of this study provide actionable insights for tourism managers, policymakers, and creative industry stakeholders seeking to harness AIGC for sustainable cultural innovation.

a.Integrating AI into Design Governance:

Tourism organizations should establish design governance frameworks that balance innovation with cultural authenticity. This involves forming interdisciplinary committees—including designers, technologists, cultural experts, and ethicists—to oversee AIGC deployment and ensure cultural sensitivity in data use and output evaluation.

b.Developing AI-Enhanced Experience Systems:

Destinations can adopt AIGC as part of their experience design ecosystem. For example, AI-enabled kiosks and digital exhibition platforms allow visitors to participate in real-time content generation, reinforcing co-creation and emotional attachment to the destination.

c.Empowering Local Communities:

The study underscores that AIGC should not replace local creators but empower them. Training programs that teach heritage artisans how to use AIGC tools can democratize innovation and sustain intangible cultural heritage within evolving tourism markets.

4.Ethical and Regulatory Frameworks:

Policymakers must address emerging ethical dilemmas—such as cultural data ownership, algorithmic bias, and authorship rights—through adaptive regulatory measures and transparent disclosure practices.

6.2 Theoretical Reflection

The study's theoretical reflection revolves around three critical dimensions—authenticity, co-creation, and technological agency—each reshaped by the rise of AIGC.

a.Revisiting Authenticity:

Traditional tourism research distinguishes objective and existential authenticity (Wang, 1999). AIGC introduces a third dimension—algorithmic authenticity—where cultural meaning is mediated through AI outputs but curated by human judgment. This expands the authenticity discourse from "being true to tradition" to "being true to cultural intention."

b.Reframing Co-Creation:

Building on Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) framework, AIGC redefines co-creation as triadic collaboration among humans, AI systems, and cultural environments. This transformation implies a new paradigm of tourism value creation based on interactive learning and dynamic adaptation.

c.Reconceptualizing Technological Agency:

The study challenges anthropocentric assumptions by recognizing AI as an active creative partner. Yet, this partnership must remain under ethical human oversight to preserve meaning, responsibility, and cultural accountability.

6.3 Theoretical Integration with Tourism Management

By integrating design thinking, human–computer interaction, and sustainability perspectives, this study contributes to bridging tourism management and creative design theory. AIGC operates not merely as a technological innovation but as a methodological transformation in managing cultural experiences, destination identities, and stakeholder relations.

6.4 Summary

This chapter positions AIGC as both a managerial tool and a theoretical lens for reimagining tourism innovation. The reflections underscore that the future of tourism management depends on cultivating responsible creativity—one that harmonizes artificial intelligence, human imagination, and cultural heritage.

7.Conclusion and References

7.1 Conclusion

This study explored how Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC) empowers cultural and creative product design within tourism contexts, addressing the interplay between technological innovation and cultural authenticity. Through a qualitative multi-case study of Lijiang (China), Kyoto (Japan), and Barcelona (Spain), the research developed and validated the Human–AI Co-Creation Design Framework, revealing three core mechanisms—cultural translation, collaborative craftsmanship, and participatory personalization.

The findings highlight that AIGC serves not as a replacement for human creativity but as a catalyst for cultural renewal, facilitating co-evolution between tradition and modernity. Human–AI collaboration enhances design efficiency, expands creative imagination, and deepens visitor engagement through participatory and personalized experiences.

Theoretically, this research introduces the notion of algorithmic authenticity, extending existing tourism authenticity theories (Wang, 1999) to account for AI-mediated creative production. Practically, it provides a governance-oriented framework for tourism destinations to balance innovation with cultural integrity.

Ultimately, the study concludes that sustainable tourism innovation in the AIGC era requires a triadic equilibrium among human creativity, technological agency, and cultural sustainability—a balance that ensures intelligent design serves not only economic value but also cultural meaning and ethical responsibility.

7.2 Contributions

Theoretical Contribution: Expands tourism management discourse by integrating AIGC into theories of co-creation, authenticity, and sustainable design.

Methodological Contribution: Provides a replicable qualitative model that bridges design research with tourism management inquiry.

Practical Contribution: Offers actionable strategies for integrating AIGC into destination branding, creative industry development, and cultural governance.

7.3 Future Research Directions

Future research can advance this study by:

a.Quantitatively measuring tourists' perception of AIGC-mediated authenticity.

b.Exploring cross-cultural differences in AI adoption across various tourism contexts.

c.Applying longitudinal approaches to assess the sustainability of Human–AI co-creation practices.

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