When Novelty Skips the Feel-Good: Dual Behavioural Routes of Product Creativity and Social Ambience in Creative Tourism

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Abstract

Creative tourism theory assumes that creative stimuli shape travellers' behavioural intentions only after being filtered through experience quality (EQ), yet empirical tests of this mechanism are scarce. Re-analysing a Malaysian dataset of 499 respondents, this study uncovers a dual route pattern in which some creative cues operate through EQ, while product novelty also acts directly on behaviour. Using variance-based SEM with a parallel multiple mediation design, two creative stimuli were examined: Creative Product (Novelty and Usefulness) and Press (Physical and Social ambience), with EQ decomposed into its experiential facets. Results show that Press Social is the most influential indirect driver of behavioural intention, as it amplifies EQ which subsequently enhances intention. By contrast, Product Novelty exerts a direct effect in addition to a smaller mediated path, suggesting that novelty can stimulate action even without changes in affective appraisal. An Importance–Performance Map highlights Press Social as the highest leverage lever, while Novelty represents a low importance but high opportunity factor.

Keywords: creative tourism, product novelty, social ambience, experience quality, mediation, behavioural intention, PLS-SEM

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Introduction

Tourism research increasingly uses S–O–R to explain how designed cues shape internal appraisals and, ultimately, behaviour across tech-enabled and on-site experiences (Chin et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024). Stimuli as varied as smart tourism technologies (STTs), VR content, social media attributes, and environmental qualities reliably trigger organismic states such as engagement, memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), awe, and trust that then mediate intentions such as revisit and eWOM (Jiang et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2025; Xiong et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024).

Within creative tourism workshops/studios, two classes of stimuli are especially salient: Product (novelty, usefulness) and Press, the physical and social ambience visitors encounter. Building on contemporary evidence that some stimuli retain direct links to intention even after organismic mediators are included (e.g., STTs/VR nudging revisit and participation; Chin et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024), we test a dual-route account on Malaysian data: Press–Social acts largely through EQ, while Product Novelty can also act directly. Prior Malaysian work (Yahaya & Ariffin, 2025) motivates this local focus and EQ-centric modelling.

Accordingly, this study pursues five objectives within the Stimulus–Organism–Response frame: (i) to examine how the creative product and the creative environment shape experience quality and, in turn, behavioural intentions in creative-tourism workshops; (ii) to determine whether social ambience works chiefly through experience quality while retaining a smaller direct influence on intentions, and whether the physical environment affects intentions only via experience quality; (iii) to assess whether product novelty exerts both an experiential pathway and a smaller direct nudge on intentions, and whether product usefulness shows a stronger direct influence alongside an indirect effect through experience quality; (iv) to test whether the social-ambience → experience-quality → behavioural-intentions pathway is stronger for first-time participants than for repeat participants; and (v) to translate these effect patterns into practice by prioritising high-leverage design levers using an importance–performance mapping approach.

A cross-sectional survey of creative-tourism participants from Malaysian workshops and studios was reanalysed after data-quality screening, yielding 499 usable responses; participation was voluntary and anonymous. Constructs were rated on seven-point Likert scales: Product Novelty (perceived originality/newness), Product Usefulness (practical learning/transferability), Press Physical (layout, equipment, ambience), Press Social (facilitator warmth, peer help, structured co-creation), Experience Quality (holistic appraisal of engagement and meaning), and Behavioural Intentions (revisit, recommendation online/offline, purchase). Measurement diagnostics led to the removal of one novelty item (NO3) and one social-press item (SO1) to improve reliability. A variance-based structural equation model with parallel multiple mediation was estimated using 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrap resamples; results are reported as standardised paths and specific indirect effects, a novice versus repeat multi-group comparison probed the moderation hypothesis, and managerial priorities were summarised with an Importance–Performance Map Analysis.

Literature Review

Recent research across tourism channels and settings supports the Stimulus Organism Response perspective. Environmental quality at a destination elicits awe, and this emotion

carries the effect forward to satisfaction and environmentally responsible behaviour (Jiang et al., 2022). Smart tourism technologies increase visitor engagement and memorable tourism experiences, which then translate into revisit intentions (Xiong et al., 2023). Virtual reality experiences can evoke awe and encourage participation in value co creation (Chin et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024). On social platforms, the credibility and quality of content enhance destination image and trust, which in turn promote impulsive travel intentions (Wei et al., 2025). Guided by this evidence, the present study treats the creative product and the creative environment or press as the stimuli, experience quality as the organismic appraisal, and behavioural intentions as the response.

Across makerspaces, museums and classrooms, staff warmth, peer interaction and co-creation rituals consistently raise engagement and learning, mapping onto EQ in services. Makerspaces show peer interaction and supportive facilitation drive collaboration and sustained participation (Koolman & Boklage, 2024), while museum-based makerspace research codifies facilitated making rituals (e.g., scaffolding, reflective prompts) that improve learning (White et al., 2021). Immersive museum work finds interaction ritual chains elevate arousal and shared focus, lifting participation intentions (Liu & Li, 2025). Therefore, it is hypothesized in this study that:

    H1a. Stronger perceptions of the social ambience will be associated with higher experience quality during creative-tourism workshops.

    H1b. Experience quality will, in turn, be positively associated with behavioural intentions, including intentions to revisit, recommend, and purchase.

    H1c. Perceptions of the social ambience will influence behavioural intentions primarily indirectly through their positive effect on experience quality, while also retaining a smaller but positive direct effect on behavioural intentions after accounting for experience quality

Physical features such as the layout of the room, the availability and ergonomics of tools, lighting, sound, temperature, and other sensory cues typically enable good experiences rather than directly causing behavioural follow-through on their own. In S–O–R terms, these cues work by shaping organismic states such as comfort, perceived control, immersion, and often awe which then translate into satisfaction, word-of-mouth, and revisit intentions. Recent tourism evidence shows exactly this pattern: the quality of the natural or built environment elicits awe, and awe carries the effect forward to downstream outcomes (Jiang et al., 2022). In creative-tourism workshops, this means a tidy, well-lit space with clear signage and accessible equipment reduces friction and anxiety, making it easier for participants to become absorbed in the activity; it is that improved experience quality, not the furniture or lighting per se that persuades them to return or recommend. Therefore, it is hypothesised in this study that:

    H2a. Stronger perceptions of the physical ambience will be associated with higher experience quality during creative-tourism workshops.

    H2b. The influence of physical ambience on behavioural intentions will be fully mediated by experience quality; that is, once differences in experience quality are taken into account, the physical ambience itself will not add further explanatory power for intentions.

Creative tourism "products" (the activity/content participants create) can influence behaviour in two ways. First, novelty (original techniques, first-look demos, limited editions) raises experience quality by making the session feel fresher and more engaging. But novelty can also create a small, immediate pull to act (try, buy, or share) even after we account for how

good the experience felt. This pattern mirrors recent smart tourism technologies and virtual reality studies, where the stimulus not only improves engagement or memorable experiences but also retains a direct link to intentions (Chin et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024).

Second, usefulness (the sense of practical learning or take-home value) tends to exert a strong direct influence on intentions (people return/recommend when they feel they gained something concrete) while also boosting experience quality. Contemporary service/tourism research on service innovation and value creation reports this combination of direct and mediated effects on satisfaction/loyalty (Cheng, Shaheen, et al., 2021; Cheng, Abu, et al., 2022).

Therefore, it is hypothesised in this study that:
  H3a. Higher perceived product novelty will be associated with higher experience quality and will also be positively associated with behavioural intentions even after experience quality is considered.
  H3b. Higher perceived product usefulness will be associated with higher experience quality and will also be positively associated with behavioural intentions.

Visitors who are new to a creative workshop usually face greater uncertainty and cognitive load, so they depend more on social cues from facilitators and peers to feel competent and absorbed. Evidence from makerspaces, museums, and classrooms shows that staff warmth, peer help, and simple co creation rituals raise engagement and learning, which are core ingredients of experience quality (Allwood & Brodin, 2025；Koolman & Boklage, 2024; Liu & Li, 2025; White et al., 2021). Complementary work in digital branding finds that novice visitors react more strongly to salient online destination experiences, with negative experiences producing greater animosity and boycott intentions among novices than among experienced visitors (Shah et al., 2025). Taken together, these strands imply that the pathway from social ambience to experience quality and onward to behavioural intentions should be more pronounced for first time participants.

Therefore, it is hypothesised in this study that (H4), the indirect effect of perceived social ambience on behavioural intentions, operating through experience quality, is stronger for novice participants than for experienced participants.

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey of creative-tourism participants from Malaysian workshops and studios was reanalysed after data-quality screening, yielding 499 usable responses; participation was voluntary and anonymous. Constructs were rated on seven-point Likert scales: Product Novelty (perceived originality/newness), Product Usefulness (practical learning/transferability), Press Physical (layout, equipment, ambience), Press Social (facilitator warmth, peer help, structured co-creation), Experience Quality (holistic appraisal of engagement and meaning), and Behavioural Intentions (revisit, recommendation online/offline, purchase). Data were cleaned for straight-lining and patterned responding, excessive or systematic missingness (with limited within-scale mean imputation), implausible completion times, and univariate/multivariate outliers; one novelty item (NO3) and one social-press item (SO1) were removed on reliability grounds. Common-method variance was addressed procedurally (assured anonymity, simple wording, section separation of predictors and outcomes, randomised item order) and tested statistically using a measured marker

approach with an unmeasured latent method construct sensitivity check and full-collinearity VIFs below conventional thresholds. A variance-based structural equation model with parallel multiple mediation was estimated using 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrap resamples; results are reported as standardised paths and specific indirect effects, a novice versus repeat multi-group comparison probed the moderation hypothesis, predictive validity was checked via a PLSpredict-style routine, and managerial priorities were summarised with an Importance–Performance Map Analysis.

Conclusion

We examined four cues at creative-tourism workshops: (1) social environment (facilitator warmth, peer help), (2) physical environment (room, layout, tools, ambience), (3) product novelty (how new/original the activity feels), and (4) product usefulness (how practically valuable the skills/outcomes are). We assessed how these cues shape Experience Quality (EQ), the overall feel of the session (engaging, absorbing, meaningful) and, in turn, Behavioural Intentions (BI) such as coming back, recommending the workshop, or buying products. This logic mirrors current S–O–R studies where STTs and VR first improve engagement or MTEs, which then drive revisit (Chin et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024).

1. Social ambience is the engine because it upgrades the experience.
    When facilitators are warm and peers are supportive, participants feel more absorbed, confident, and "part of it." That better EQ is what moves people to return and recommend. This mirrors evidence from makerspaces and museums where co-creation rituals (pair builds, show-and-tell, feedback rounds) reliably raise engagement and follow-on participation (Koolman & Boklage, 2024; Liu & Li, 2025; White et al., 2021).
2. The physical environment sets the stage rather than stealing the show.
    Good tools, layout, and ambience matter—but mainly because they make it easier to have a good experience. Once we account for EQ, the physical setting itself doesn't add much extra push to intentions. This is consistent with studies where natural/physical features spark emotions like awe, which then carry the effect forward (Jiang et al., 2022).
3. Novelty can nudge behaviour directly (the "skip-the-feel-good" route).
    Fresh, original activities don't only make the experience feel better; they also create a small, direct pull to act (e.g., "I want to try/buy this now," "I'll post about it"). That's similar to findings in tech-rich experiences where the stimulus still influences intention even after accounting for the experience it creates (Chin et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024).
4. Usefulness works in a practical way.
    When participants feel they gained skills or take-home value, they're more likely to return and recommend—on top of any improvement in the experience itself. This aligns with tourism studies linking service innovation and value creation to loyalty (Cheng, Shaheen, et al., 2021; Cheng, Abu, et al., 2022).
5. Who benefits most from strong social design?
    First timers tend to rely more on cues from facilitators and peers. Evidence from digital branding shows novices react more strongly (positively or negatively) to salient social/experiential signals (Shah et al., 2025). In workshops, that implies social ambience will matter even more for newcomers.

To translate the findings into action, focus on low-cost social design. Train facilitators to be warm and to run simple participation rituals such as a concise briefing, paired making, and a short feedback or showcase segment. Nurture peer-help norms so participants can ask for and offer assistance easily. Keep the space functional and comfortable rather than spending on décor at the expense of facilitation. Introduce targeted bursts of novelty for example, limited editions or first-look demonstrations to prompt immediate action, then amplify that novelty through credible social-media storytelling, where strong content quality and source credibility build image and trust that convert to eWOM and purchase (Al-Dmour et al., 2021; Jyoti et al., 2024; Mahmud et al., 2024; Rattanaburi, 2023; Tafolli et al., 2025; Wei et al., 2025).

The results clarify boundary conditions in S–O–R for creative services: social ambience works mainly through EQ, whereas product novelty can also act directly—consistent with contemporary evidence that certain stimuli retain S→R links even after organismic states are modelled (Chin et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024). The novice-sensitivity logic mirrors digital-brand findings where first-time users react more strongly to salient cues (Shah et al., 2025).

A simple investment rule emerges: safeguard EQ as the central engine of behaviour, fund social ambience first (facilitator training, participation rituals, peer-help norms), and add novelty surgically to stimulate immediate action and communication-led outcomes (eWOM/purchase), which are known to flow via image/trust (Al-Dmour et al., 2021; Jyoti et al., 2024; Mahmud et al., 2024; Rattanaburi, 2023; Tafolli et al., 2025; Wei et al., 2025).

Creative-tourism behaviour follows dual routes: Press–Social elevates EQ, which drives intentions, while Product Novelty adds a direct nudge. Recognising these routes provides a clear, low-capex playbook for providers: protect EQ, design social ambience deliberately, and deploy targeted novelty to maximise revisit, WOM/eWOM and purchase pathways.

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