

Urban Culture and City Brand: A Study on Food Experience

Mu Zhang^{1*}, Luyao Wang¹, Jiayun Zhou¹, Rob Law²

¹Jinan University, Guangzhou, China

²University of Macau, Macau, China

Email: *zhangmu@jnu.edu.cn, lywang.wen@foxmail.com, jennyzhou.y@foxmail.com, roblaw@um.edu.cn.mo

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Abstract

Urban culture is the foundation and lifeblood of a city's sustainable development. A city's brand is often rooted in its culture, showcasing and then reviving the urban culture. Characteristic and traditional food, as an element that can quickly bring urban culture and its stakeholders closer, may be able to reconcile conflicts in the development of urban culture and city brands. Taking Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, China as a case site, this study for the first time takes food experience as an intermediary variable to construct a structural equation model to empirically examine the influence mechanism of urban cultural cognition on city brand. Research results show that food experience plays a partial intermediary role in urban cultural cognition and city brand identity. This study supplements the research on urban cultural perception and city brand perception and provides suggestions for the revival of urban historical culture and sustainable urban branding practices through characteristic and traditional food.

Keywords

Urban Culture, City Brand, Sustainable Development, Food Experience, Guangzhou

1. Introduction

With the rapid progress of urbanization, the number and volume of cities are increasing, and competition among cities is becoming increasingly intense. Creating city brands is an effective way for cities to enhance their competitiveness and achieve sustainable development. It has also become a time-tested marketing strategy in the development of major cities. However, in some cases, city branding has caused unintended consequences. Some cities have lost their individual-

ity and historical and cultural outlooks in the wave of economic development, with unique historical architecture and cultural elements yielding to the heterogeneous influence of new buildings and modern commercial culture. Guangdong Province is a famous cultural tourism destination in China, in which food plays a prominent role. However, in recent years, as Guangzhou's leisure tourism revenues have continued to reach new highs, a crisis in the city's historical and cultural status, especially as a place for food experiences, has begun to emerge.

As part of the pre-survey, this study utilizes the review data of the top 20 traditional specialty restaurants in Guangzhou, with a total of 120,973 words in terms of hotness during the National Day. The author selected the top 100 vocabulary words for high-frequency word analysis and thematic category construction to gain a preliminary understanding of the overall cognitive characteristics and affective tendencies of Guangzhou food consumers. The results show that: in terms of emotional tendencies, although the top high-frequency words intensively reflect the positive emotional tendencies of "good", "recommend", there are also some neutral words such as "so-so" and various words that reflect disappointment and negative emotions such as "disappointing" and "bad". In terms of cognitive characteristics, through further analysis of more comment texts, we can find some problems: 1) there were some negative comments about food's taste and portion. 2) Some comments indicate that the service awareness and service efficiency of management and service personnel need to be improved. 3) The interior and facade decoration of the restaurant need to create a suitable atmosphere. 4) Some time-honored restaurants blindly increase their chain restaurants regardless of quality control. Disrespect for traditional food culture, such as follow-the-trend marketing. 5) The superficial "take the perfect Wechat Moments snap at an internet-famous restaurant" behavior is currently the main food activity.

Guangzhou has a deep historical heritage, and there is great enthusiasm for tourism and leisure in the city. Internet celebrity shopping is frequent in Guangzhou, and tourists arrive in an endless stream. However, from the results of online text analysis, it can be seen that local residents feel that the quality of food experience in the city has declined, and there is a lack of awareness of the urban history and culture behind its food resources. As a result, the Guangzhou city brand, with food as the key, is now being questioned. Perhaps, the city's traditional urban cultural image should be reexamined, and a more sustainable development of the city brand should be sought. To do so, Guangzhou must confront the problems of food experience in the city and work to optimize the experience of food consumers. In the process, Guangzhou can also discover how to use food culture to revitalize the city's culture, build a city brand, improve the overall quality of leisure life, deepen the tourism and cultural experience, and promote sustainable urban development.

This study constructs a structural equation model of the influence of urban culture on city brand identity; revises the related scales of urban culture percep-

tion, food experience, and city brand identity; and uses food experience as a mediating variable for the first time to study the influence of urban history and culture on city brand. In recent studies on urban cultural industries and urban cultural spaces, urban culture has been neglected to a certain extent, and few studies have focused on the relationship between urban culture and consumers' psychological behavior. The present study focuses on the history and culture of the city and on residents' and tourists' perceptions of the city's history and culture, thereby filling the gap in related research. In addition, given that research on city branding focuses on brand building and communication, few studies have included brand identity as a result of brand building and communication. From this perspective, this study may help drive the research to the next stage of city brand perception research.

2. Research Review

2.1. Research Progress of Urban Culture

After the Industrial Revolution, with the rise of the urbanization movement, study on urban culture in the West formally started (Simmel, 2012; Whitt & Zukin, 1995). In the latest research, the scope and geographical scale of urban culture research is expanding. From a simple exploration of the functions of urban culture to an interdisciplinary study of urban culture, the connotations and extensions of urban culture have been increasing. Urban culture is constantly enriched (Huggins & Thompson, 2019; Robinson, 2016).

In addition to cultural communication, urban cultural industry has also been a major research hotspot in recent years. On the one hand, scholars continue to focus on urban macro-cultural industries, including attention to industrial agglomeration (Xiong, Xiao, & Lian, 2017; Yuan et al., 2020) and industrial upgrading (Zhong, 2016). On the other hand, micro-city cultural space has received considerable attention. Many of the research objects of urban cultural space studies can be broadly divided into historical urban cultural spaces and modern cultural spaces. The study of historical urban cultural spaces focuses on explaining the paths and guiding ideas for the conservation (Pan et al., 2019), reuse and reproduction (Wang & Li, 2018), and contemporary transformation (Wang, 2019) of historical urban buildings. Modern research on cultural spaces mostly explores the relationship between specific urban cultural spaces, such as theme parks, and urban culture (Gao, 2020; Zhao, 2018).

This study mainly draws on the urban culture system constructed by Hou Qing in the study of Guangzhou's urban brand (Hou, 2014). Thus, the city's historical and cultural perception system was constructed from three dimensions, namely, folk, religious, and historical cultures.

2.2. Research on City Brand and Image

A city brand is a product formed by a combination of resources within a city, which is communicated to a target audience through certain channels (Wang,

Yang, & Luo, 2014). In the West, city brands are mostly viewed from a marketing perspective. With the growing richness of branding concepts in the West and the growing urbanization movement, some scholars have begun to focus on its special role in the urban sphere (Zhang, 2019b). City branding research has now entered a new phase of critical development and brand co-creation (Green et al., 2016). In the latest research, new branding approaches and rebranding have become hot topics (Belabas et al., 2020; Wäckerlin et al., 2020).

The mainstream of relevant research in China is still at the stage of applying and adapting existing branding theories. Such research can be subdivided into three categories, namely, brand building, brand communication, and brand perception. From the current situation, imitation is common in city branding (Yang, Hou, Yang, & Ran, 2019). In response to this phenomenon, researchers have made suggestions for city branding based mainly on historical and cultural elements (Huang, 2019; Ren, 2016), physical and geographical resources (Ren, 2016; Wu & Xu, 2019), and the political context of the times (Li, 2017; Wu & Xu, 2019). Brand communication is another topic of interest. Similar to city culture, city branding scholars have also paid attention to the communication effect of festival events on city branding (Chen, 2017; Peng, 2018).

Although the perception and shaping of a city brand image can be said to be complementary, only a few scholars have studied city brand image recently compared with the extensiveness of city branding research (Ji & Zeng, 2017; Song & Zhang, 2017). The actual results of a large number of branding studies have not been empirically tested to obtain timely and effective feedback. The lack of perception studies has also led to neglecting the feelings of local residents in city branding. This problem is serious, given that city branding is the embodiment of the city's personality and a window into the culture and identity of the city. Therefore, this study aims to complement and advance the research on city brand perceptions.

2.3. Food Experience Research Review

As the material basis of leisure tourism activities, food provides consumers with leisure experiences with great regional characteristics and cultural connotations. Due to its economic benefits and cultural characteristics, it has gradually attracted the attention of stakeholders (Hou, 2017; Liu, 2020).

Development and communication are still the mainstream of food research (Xu, 2018; Xu & Bao, 2017; Zhou et al., 2018). The literature indicates that most of the studies on food are based on previous research experiences. Quantitative empirical studies are few, and reliability and validity must be further tested. Few quantitative empirical studies on perceived food experience are limited to IPA (Importance-Performance Analysis) methods, which usually take food characteristics, price level, hardware facilities, service quality, food safety, and interaction experience as perceptual dimensions (Chen, 2019; Liang et al., 2016). Given the dual role of food culture as an important representation of city culture and a key

element of city branding, this study draws on the research findings of Brakus, Wan, and Bian to construct a partial scale of food experience research (Brakus et al., 2009). Bian further identified three dimensions of sensory, emotional, and relational experiences to constitute the food experience scale (Bian et al., 2012). A portion of this scale was used in this study. Particularly, sensory experience is mainly related to appetite, affective experience describes positive emotions, and relational experience deals with the thoughts triggered among people.

In summary, in the study of urban branding, excessive attention has been paid to brand building and communication, and stakeholder recognition has been neglected. At the same time, urban cultures are becoming heterogeneous in many cases, and city brands are converging. By virtue of its cultural, economic, and experiential nature, food may be an opportunity to reverse these trends, reconcile contradictions, and promote sustainable development and more distinctive city brands.

3. Research Hypothesis and Model

3.1. Influence of urban Culture on City Brand Identity

Almost every city has its own culture, which is the soul of a city. Some scholars have paid attention to the importance of city culture in city branding. Zeng argued that city culture is the core value of city image and took city image as an important part of city culture branding (Zeng, 2009). According to Li, the process of city culture branding is to express city culture through a name, logo, symbol, or design and other related elements to distinguish the cultural characteristics of different cities, thereby forming a unique cultural image and generate cultural recognition and identity of the city (Li, 2010).

Major cities in Europe and North America have used cultural resources to win outside investment, attract high-end tourists, strengthen regional identity, and gain local support; thus, Chinese cities have followed suit in an effort to brand their cities and increase their visibility and competitiveness (Luo & Hou, 2015). City branding can indeed bring economic benefits (Ma et al., 2016). However, the key to city branding lies in the identity of urban subjects. In the process of city branding with the help of external forces, city branding will undoubtedly fail if local residents have a negative attitude toward it (Zhen & Rong, 2019). In the process of building a city brand, cities must abandon the drawbacks of seeking foreign visitors, dig inward to their original history and culture, and pay attention to the positive influence of city culture on the city brand. In summary, the following hypotheses are proposed regarding the influence of city culture on city brand identity.

H1: Urban cultural cognition has a significant positive effect on city brand identity

3.2. Influence of Urban Culture on Food Experience

In a sense, food experience is the experience of food culture, including the use of

food raw materials, the production of food and other materials, and the cultural connotations of customs and concepts related to food. The formation of food culture is influenced by local culture. Yang studied the influencing factors of food tourism based on DEMATEL model (Yang, Hou, Yang, & Ran, 2019). Each city has its own unique cuisine, which is an inseparable part of local culture. These cuisines are deeply influenced by urban culture and have developed distinctive styles over time, reflecting local history and culture and influencing consumers' food experiences. In the case of China, the dockside history of the Chongqing region has given rise to the spicy and tasty "hot pot" food custom, which stimulates appetite and enhances positive emotions. Guangzhou's food culture is heavily influenced by Taoist culture. Some important concepts in Guangzhou's food culture, such as the pursuit of immortality, reverence for nature, and restraint of desires, are derived from Taoist culture. On the basis of Taoist culture, the traditional dietary health concepts in Guangzhou's food culture have been formed and can resonate with contemporary people's health-conscious lifestyle (Brakus et al., 2009). In summary, the following hypotheses are made regarding the influence of urban culture on the eating experience.

H2: Urban cultural cognition has a significant positive influence on food experience.

3.3. Influence of Food Experience on City Brand Identity

Many places brand their cities with food and use food as a promotional tool. For example, Chengdu is the "Food Capital" of the United Nations Creative Cities Network. Food is based on local culture and is presented as a highly differentiated cultural element that allows people to experience a city's culture while promoting economic development. It is also an integral part of a city's brand and a key tool for marketing the city's brand.

On the basis of the nature of food, food culture is the easiest to spread and the most easily recognized cultural element by internal and external stakeholders (Zhang, 2019a). Especially for external stakeholders, culinary experience can help build a city's reputation based on the pre-perceptions of its culture (Zhang & Zhang, 2006). Bian found that the sensory experience of a restaurant brand directly affects attitudinal loyalty. Sensory, emotional, and relational experiences all have an indirect influence on brand loyalty through perceived value and customer satisfaction (Zeng, 2009), which in turn, affect building a city brand and revitalizing its culture. In summary, the following hypotheses are proposed for the influence of food experience on city brand identity.

H3: Food experience has a significant positive influence on city brand identity.

3.4. Mediating Role of Food Experience

According to Baron's research, intermediate variables explain the intermediate mechanism in which independent variables influence dependent variables

(Baron & Kenny, 1986). Three conditions must be satisfied for the existence of mediation effect. First, when no mediating variables are introduced, the influence of independent variables on dependent variables is significant. Second, the mediating variable has a significant influence on the dependent variable. Finally, when the influence of the independent variable on the mediating variable and that of the mediating variable on the dependent variable are controlled, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is no longer significant. Therefore, satisfying these conditions indicate a complete mediation, and when the path coefficient becomes significantly smaller, it is a partial mediation. To test the mediating role of food experience, this section will be divided into three parts, namely, the influence of urban cultural system on food experience, the influence of food experience on city brand identity, and the mediating role of food experience. On the basis of the above analysis, this study proposes that food experience plays an intermediary role between urban culture and city brand identity. The specific assumptions are as follows:

H4: Food experience plays an intermediary role between urban cultural cognition and city brand identity.

4. Research Design

4.1. Questionnaire Design

This study's questionnaire design was based on the current literature review results and is divided into four parts. The first part is the demographic variables of the research object, including eight aspects such as gender, age, location, education level, occupation, monthly income, and relationship with Guangzhou. The second part of the questionnaire is based on the research results of Hou (Hou, 2014) on Guangzhou City's cultural brand, taking religious, folk, and historical cultures as the three dimensions to measure Guangzhou's culture. The third part of the questionnaire was revised according to Sun's (Sun, 2016) and Cai's (Cai et al., 2015) scales to develop the Guangzhou City Brand Measurement Scale. The fourth part is the measurement of food experience. According to Bian (Zeng, 2009), based on the consumers' consumption experience in the catering industry, sensory, affective, and relational experiences were selected for measurement. In addition, this part of the questionnaire was compiled with reference to the scale proposed by Brakus et al. (Wan & Sun, 2009). The second, third, and fourth parts of the questionnaire were based on a five-point Likert scale method, with 1 to 5 indicating "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree" and "strongly agree", respectively. **Table 1** shows the design of question items for urban culture, city brand identity, and food experience.

4.2. Data Collection and Demographic Analysis

Given that the questionnaires in this study were mainly distributed during the COVID-19 pandemic, online questionnaires were mainly used to collect data, and the questionnaire links were distributed to online public communities, such

Table 1. Item design of the research scale.

Variable	Dimensions	Item	Test item	Source
Urban culture	Folk culture	FC1	Guangzhou has its own unique architectural style	Hou (2014)
		FC2	Guangzhou retains its traditional lifestyle	
		FC3	Guangzhou has unique local customs	
		FC4	Guangzhou has a local business culture	
		FC5	There are many folk arts in Guangzhou	
	Religious culture	RC1	Guangzhou has a certain number of religious places	
		RC2	There is high traffic in Guangzhou religious places	
		RC3	There are many religious believers in Guangzhou	
		RC4	Guangzhou is a gathering place for religious believers everywhere	
		RC5	There are many stories of religious figures circulating in Guangzhou	
	Historical culture	HC1	Guangzhou has a long history	
		HC2	There are many old buildings in Guangzhou	
		HC3	Guangzhou has had major historical events	
		HC4	Guangzhou has preserved precious cultural relics	
		HC5	There are many historical celebrities in Guangzhou	
City brand identity	Popularity	BP1	Guangzhou is a famous city in China	Ren (2008), Cai et al. (2015), and Sun (2016)
		BP2	I can quickly recall major events in Guangzhou	
		BP3	I know the city characteristics of Guangzhou	
		BP4	Guangzhou is a city with unique charm	
	Cognition	BC1	I know the brand identity of Guangzhou City	
		BC2	I can distinguish the brand identity of Guangzhou from other cities	
		BC3	I think the quality of life in Guangzhou is good	
		BC4	Whenever I hear or see “the happiest city in China,” I can always think of Guangzhou	
	Reputation	BR1	Good service quality in public places in Guangzhou	
		BR2	Guangzhou has cultural heritage	
		BR3	The local people in Guangzhou are of high quality	
		BR4	Guangzhou has a high level of urban management	
	Loyalty	BL1	As a local resident, I am willing to live here forever	
		BL2	I would like to extend my stay in Guangzhou because I am satisfied with the city	
		BL3	I would like to recommend people around me to live, play, work, or study in Guangzhou	
		BL4	I am willing to come to Guangzhou again	

Continued

Food experience	Sensory experience	SE1	Guangzhou food makes me feel very cordial	Brakus et al. (2009), Wan & Sun (2009), and Bian et al. (2012)
		SE2	I like Guangzhou food very much	
		SE3	I have the urge to eat when I see Guangzhou delicious food	
		SE4	Talking about Guangzhou cuisine can arouse my appetite	
	Affective experience	AE1	Guangzhou cuisine can bring me spiritual enjoyment	
		AE2	I'm looking forward to tasting Guangzhou cuisine	
		AE3	Tasting Guangzhou cuisine makes me feel happy	
		AE4	Tasting Guangzhou food brings me pleasure	
		AE5	Tasting Guangzhou cuisine makes me feel relaxed	
	Relational experience	RE1	The diners who tasted Guangzhou delicious food belong to the same category as me	
		RE2	Guangzhou cuisine suits my personality very well	
		RE3	Guangzhou cuisine is very suitable for my identity	
		RE4	I am willing to talk about Guangzhou cuisine with other diners who taste it	
		RE5	Guangzhou cuisine resonates with certain lifestyles	

as QQ and WeChat groups. A total of 1082 questionnaires were received from June to July 2020 after passing through two rounds of surveys. Each question was set to require a response to avoid missing values in the data. To ensure the efficiency of the online questionnaire survey, six trap questions were placed in the questionnaire, and failure to pass any one of them was regarded invalid. The first data set yielded 287 valid questionnaires, and the effective rate was 36%. Through Cronbach's α , KMO, and Bartlett spherical tests and after manual screening, 311 valid questionnaires were obtained in the second round. The sample demographic variables showed the following characteristics: the proportion of men and women was fair, with slightly more men, accounting for 50.48%; the respondents were mainly young people between 18 and 30 years old; education level was mainly undergraduate or junior college, accounting for 68.49%; the respondents were engaged in various occupations, with the majority being sales personnel, production personnel, and full-time students, accounting for 22.83%, 19.29%, and 16.4%, respectively; the average monthly income was normally distributed, with the range of 5001 - 8000, accounting for 30.23%; and only 5.79% of the samples were not from Guangzhou and had never been to Guangzhou. The structural proportion of effective samples showed that the survey samples are representative and can be used for subsequent data analysis. **Table 2** demonstrates the results of the questionnaire regarding demographics.

5. Data analysis and Results

5.1. Reliability and Validity Test of Questionnaire

In this study, SPSS and AMOS were used to analyze the collected data. First,

Table 2. Demographic analysis.

Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	157	50.5
	Female	154	49.5
Age	Under 18	6	1.9
	18~25	90	28.9
	26~30	124	39.9
	31~40	69	22.2
	41~50	19	6.1
	51~60	3	1.0
	Profession	Full-time students	51
Production staff		60	19.3
Salesperson		71	22.8
Marketing/PR staff		35	11.3
Customer service		15	4.8
Administration/Logistics staff		10	3.2
Human Resources		9	2.9
Finance/Auditor		9	2.9
Clerical/Office staff		11	3.5
Technical/R&D personnel		7	2.3
Manager		11	3.5
Teacher		1	.3
Consultant/Consulting		2	.6
Professional		10	3.2
Other		9	2.9
Educational Level	High School/Secondary School/Technical School	71	22.8
	Undergraduate/College	213	68.5
	Master degree and above	27	8.7
Monthly Income	No income	20	6.4
	Below 1000	9	2.9
	1001 - 3000	37	11.9
	3001 - 5000	83	26.7
	5001 - 8000	94	30.2
	8001 - 10,000	40	12.9
	More than 10,000 yuan	28	9.0

Continued

Have you ever been to Guangzhou	I am a native of Guangzhou	165	53.1
	I am not from Guangzhou, but I am living in Guangzhou	72	23.2
	I am not from Guangzhou, but I have lived in Guangzhou	47	15.1
	I am not from Guangzhou, but I have been to Guangzhou	9	2.9
	I am not from Guangzhou and have never been to Guangzhou	18	5.8
All		311	100.0

reliability analysis of urban culture, city brand, and food experience was conducted. The Cronbach's α coefficient of all variables exceeded 0.7, indicating that the internal consistency of the scale was good. Then, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the three dimensions. The KMO values were 0.962, 0.959, and 0.962, which were greater than 0.9. The Bartlett's test of sphericity² values were 4924.005, 3422.268, and 3131.732, with significant levels of 0.000, indicating that the three variables were suitable for exploratory factor analysis.

After exploratory factor analysis, three factors were extracted from the urban culture. On the basis of the analysis results, after the original scale types FC5, RC1, RC5, HC3, and HC5, the loads of all items were greater than 0.5. This result is consistent with the expected results.

On the basis of the factor analysis result, the city brand extracts two dimensions of reputation and cognition, and the load of all items is greater than 0.5. Although brand popularity is not the same as brand cognition, from the perspective of the development trend of city brands, the traditional city brand "popularity" tends to be gradually replaced by city brand "cognition" (Ren, 2008). In this study, popularity does not completely replace familiarity, but rather shows a trend of consolidation, which is in line with the law of development of things. This finding may be the result of people's cognitive advancement and deepening in the era of mass leisure. However, loyalty was excluded in this exploratory factor analysis, which may be due to the fact that residents' loyalty and tourist loyalty could not be classified, resulting in complete separation in rotary extraction.

Two factors were extracted from the food experience. AE5 was deleted from affective experience, RE4 was deleted from relational experience, and the load of all items was greater than 0.5. Excluding the sensory experience, the original sensory experience scale and the affective experience scale have overlapping contents, and the description of the senses is not comprehensive, resulting in poor validity. Combined with previous research experience, the sensory experience scale could be redesigned from the perspectives of color, aroma, taste, meaning, and form.

Thereafter, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the three variables of reconstructed urban culture, food experience, and city brand. On this basis, the hypotheses of this study were further refined, as shown in **Figure 1**.

5.2. CFA

Urban culture belongs to high-level constructs. This study used AMOS software to perform first- and second-order CFA on urban historical and cultural data. The fitness coefficient of the model reached the fitness standard, with a better goodness of fit. And the structural validity of the urban culture scale in this study is relatively good. The first-order factor analysis results indicates good convergent validity. Thus, the part of the urban historical and cultural system had excellent convergent validity and reliability. According to **Table 3**, the results of CFA fully show that the urban historical and cultural system consists of three dimensions: folk, historical, and religious cultures.

A CFA was conducted on the cognition and reputation dimensions of city brand. The fitting degree of the model could be evaluated by referring to the index data of model suitability evaluation, and the fitting degree of this model was better. The result also indicated that the value co-creation behavior scale possessed good reliability and its internal quality was high. The results of CFA fully showed that the city brand identity system comprises two dimensions, namely, cognition and reputation.

A CFA was conducted on the affective and relational experience dimensions of food experience. The fitting degree of the model was evaluated and determined to be good by combining the model fitness evaluation index data. The result also indicated that the inherent quality of the food experience scale reached the ideal level and continued to maintain a good inner quality. The CFA results showed that the food experience system consists of two dimensions, namely, affective and relational experiences.

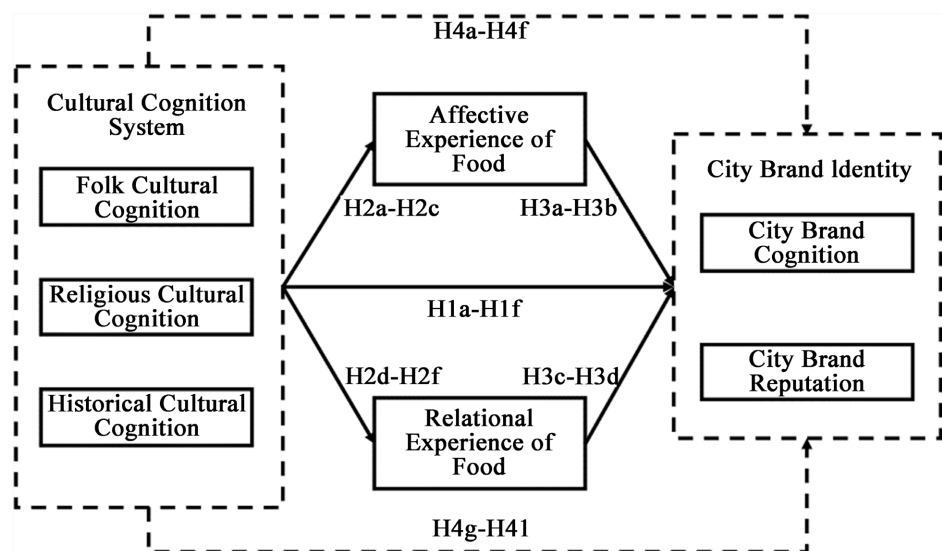


Figure 1. Refined theoretical hypothesis model.

Table 3. CFA.

Variable	Measurement items	Validity		Reliability	
		Factor loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach's α
Folk culture	FC1	0.778	0.553	0.8313	0.831
	FC2	0.798			
	FC3	0.718			
	FC4	0.674			
Historical culture	HC1	0.750	0.6062	0.8219	0.822
	HC2	0.785			
	HC3	0.800			
Religious culture	RC1	0.795	0.6046	0.8206	0.817
	RC2	0.818			
	RC3	0.716			
Urban cultural system	Religious culture	0.906	0.8586	0.9479	0.915
	Folk culture	0.957			
	Historical culture	0.916			
CMIN/DF = 2.076, P = 0.000, RMSEA = 0.059, GFI = 0.959, AGFI = 0.930, NFI = 0.961, CFI = 0.979,					
Cognition	EC1	0.800	0.5992	0.8819	0.882
	EC2	0.736			
	EC3	0.747			
	EC4	0.787			
	EC5	0.798			
Reputation	FC1	0.714	0.5835	0.8749	0.873
	FC2	0.771			
	FC3	0.742			
	FC4	0.780			
	FC5	0.809			
CMIN/DF = 2.252, P = 0.000, RMSEA = 0.064, GFI = 0.953, AGFI = 0.924, NFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.977,					
Affective experience	AE1	0.832	0.6716	0.891	0.891
	AE2	0.842			
	AE3	0.812			
	AE4	0.791			
Relational experience	RE1	0.809	0.6232	0.8684	0.867
	RE2	0.848			
	RE3	0.735			
	RE4	0.761			
CMIN/DF = 2.969, P = 0.000, RMSEA = 0.08, GFI = 0.955, AGFI = 0.915, NFI = 0.965, CFI = 0.976,					

5.3. Hypothesis Testing

5.3.1. Regression Analysis Results of the Mediating Effect

First, taking food affective experience as the intermediary variable, this study explored the influence of urban cultural cognition on tourists' city brand identity. Regression analysis showed that under the 95% confidence interval (CI), the linear relationship and coefficient of each regression equation were significant, as shown in **Table 4**. Folk culture, religious culture, and historical culture had a significant influence on city brand cognition. Similarly, folk culture, religious culture, and historical culture had a significant influence on reputation. Therefore, the validation of H1a-H1f was supported. Folk culture, religious culture, and historical culture had a significant effect on food affective experience. Therefore, the validation of H2a-H2c was supported, and the validation of H3a and H3b was fully supported.

Then, food relational experience was used as the intermediary variable to explore the effect of urban cultural cognition on tourist city brand identity. Regression analysis showed that (see **Table 4**) under the 95% CI, the F and t tests indicated that the linear relationship and coefficient of each regression equation were significant. H1 has been verified previously in this study; thus, it will not be repeated here. Folk culture, religious culture, and historical culture had a significant influence on food relational experience. Therefore, assuming that H2d-H2f

Table 4. Regression analysis results of the mediating effect.

Model	β	F	t	P	95% CI	
					Lower limit	Upper limit
X1 → Y1	0.81***	325.32***	18.04	0.000	0.72	0.89
X1 → Y2	0.81***	568.13***	23.84	0.000	0.74	0.87
X2 → Y1	0.62***	271.51***	16.48	0.000	0.54	0.69
X2 → Y2	0.54***	256.16***	16.01	0.000	0.47	0.61
X3 → Y1	0.72***	277.91***	16.67	0.000	0.63	0.70
X3 → Y2	0.67***	333.93***	18.27	0.000	0.59	0.74
X1 → M1	0.77***	380.57***	19.51	0.000	0.66	0.85
X2 → M1	0.52***	196.64***	14.02	0.000	0.45	0.59
X3 → M1	0.70***	343.13***	18.52	0.000	0.62	0.77
M1 → Y1	0.71***	237.75***	15.42	0.000	0.51	0.90
M1 → Y2	0.77***	567.12***	23.69	0.000	0.62	0.91
X1 → M2	0.75***	246.91***	15.71	0.000	0.66	0.85
X2 → M2	0.61***	251.17***	15.85	0.000	0.53	0.68
X3 → M2	0.71***	262.21***	16.19	0.000	0.62	0.79
M2 → Y1	0.74***	392.37***	19.81	0.000	0.57	0.93
M2 → Y2	0.64***	350.22***	18.71	0.000	0.50	0.81

had been established, the validation of H2 was fully supported. Culinary relational experience had a significant effect on city brand cognition and reputation. Therefore, assuming that H3c-H3d had been established, the validation of H3 was fully supported.

5.3.2. Indirect Effect Mediation

As shown in **Table 5**, when the food affective experience was used as an intermediary, the six indirect effects were all significant. The influence of urban cultural cognition on city brand cognition through food affective experience was tenable, and H4a-H4f were thus established. Therefore, the cognitive system of Guangzhou's urban culture, which is composed of folk, religious, and historical cultures, had an influence on city brand cognition and reputation through the partial mediation of food affective experience. That is, food affective experience had a mediating effect between urban historical and cultural cognition and city brand cognition. Thus, H4 was assumed to be partially supported. When the food relational experience was used as an intermediary, the six indirect effects were all significant. The influence of urban cultural cognition on city brand recognition through food relational experience was tenable. Therefore, assuming that H4g-H4l had been established, the validation of H4 was fully supported.

6. Conclusion and Implications

6.1. Research Conclusion

The empirical results initially indicate that city culture perceptions have a significant positive influence on city brand identity. Specifically, city history and folk,

Table 5. Indirect effect mediated by food affective experience and food relational experience.

Model	Indirect effect	Boot SE	P	95%BootCI	
				LLCI	ULCI
X1 → M1 → Y1	0.237***	0.097	0.000	0.077	0.446
X1 → M1 → Y2	0.339***	0.070	0.000	0.222	0.488
X2 → M1 → Y1	0.215***	0.057	0.000	0.108	0.329
X2 → M1 → Y2	0.313***	0.045	0.000	0.236	0.410
X3 → M1 → Y1	0.255***	0.075	0.000	0.100	0.396
X3 → M1 → Y2	0.396***	0.054	0.000	0.290	0.500
X1 → M2 → Y1	0.365***	0.085	0.000	0.206	0.540
X1 → M2 → Y2	0.230***	0.056	0.000	0.146	0.362
X2 → M2 → Y1	0.318***	0.067	0.000	0.192	0.453
X2 → M2 → Y2	0.270***	0.049	0.000	0.183	0.375
X3 → M2 → Y1	0.366***	0.062	0.000	0.239	0.484
X3 → M2 → Y2	0.278***	0.062	0.000	0.172	0.407

religious, and historical cultures in the city culture have a significant positive influence on the perception and reputation of the city brand. On the one hand, the city brand demonstrates the history and culture of the city. On the other hand, the brand is rooted in the history and culture of the city. City brand identity is also influenced by city culture. That is, the more comprehensive and profound the knowledge of the city culture is, the more it can cause residents or tourists to identify with the city brand. Second, city culture perception has a significant positive influence on food experience. Food is an important expression of city culture. Cultural cognition will inevitably affect food experience. With the understanding of Guangzhou's historical and cultural background, people's food experience not only stays at the sensory level but also helps bring about high-level food emotional experience and food-related experience. Third, food experience has a positive influence on city brand identity. Although local residents recognize traditional cuisine, food experiences also enhance visitors' city brand image. This study shows that positive food emotional experiences and relational experiences deepen the city brand identity of residents or visitors and improve the overall brand evaluation of the city. Fourth, food experiences play a mediating role in the influence of city culture on city brand identity. Specifically, food affective experiences and food relational experiences play a partially mediating role in city culture perception and city brand identification.

However, this study and its findings also have some limitations. First, this study focused only on Guangzhou, and whether the findings have general applicability remains to be studied. Relevant studies could be conducted in other historical food cities, such as Chengdu, China and Jeonju, Korea. Second, this study was conducted mainly during the COVID-19 pandemic. For security reasons, the questionnaire was mainly online, and the questionnaire was returned in a slightly homogeneous method. As mentioned above, resident and visitor loyalty could be designed separately for future related scales. The sensory experience scale could be designed in terms of color, aroma, taste, meaning, and form.

6.2. Research Implication

First, in response to the heterogeneity of urban culture and the dilemma of urban brand integration, relevant departments can consider returning to urban culture and carrying out urban branding from the perspective of urban culture; reviving historical culture and promoting sustainable development of urban culture; actively building urban history museums and maintaining historical and cultural spaces, such as ancient streets and buildings; excavating and protecting traditional living habits and festival customs; and conducting historical and cultural propaganda and education to deepen residents and other stakeholders' awareness of the city's culture and enhance the city's brand image. At the same time, given its cultural, economic, and experiential characteristics, food may be an opportunity to break the status quo and reconcile the contradictions among residents, tourists, and the cultural economy. Relevant authorities should ex-

plore and support traditional specialties and appropriately expand their influence in tourism promotion and leisure life. In addition, for relevant food and beverage businesses, given that a city's historical and cultural perceptions affect the dining experience, this study encourages food and beverage businesses to pay attention to corporate history in their operations. On the one hand, they should strive to build old brands, and on the other hand, they should pay attention to the history of their products. Traditional specialty food businesses can create a greater sense of history in their environmental atmosphere, such as showing diners the history of their food through mini museums and cultural walls. In addition to focusing on the sensory experience of color, aroma, taste, meaning, and form that food brings to diners, businesses should also focus on the emotional and relational experience of diners and should strive to help diners maintain positive emotions before, during, and after the meal, especially for visitors to empathize with the food. Most importantly, restaurant managers need to be aware of their social responsibility and assume the role of city branding in sustainable development. Third, visitors and residents must realize that they are the cells of the city's cultural construction and city branding, and they have the right and obligation to participate in it. On the basis of the positive relationship between city history and culture cognition, food experience, and city brand identity, people should also actively expand and deepen their knowledge of city culture through various channels in their daily life to enhance their tourism experience and leisure life quality while observing public order.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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