



Research on Perception and Optimization Strategies of Exhibition Tourism Experience from the Perspective of Generation Z: Empirical Analysis of Hangzhou West Lake International Expo Based on IPA Model

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Abstract: In the context of cultural-tourism integration and tourism consumption upgrading, Generation Z has emerged as the dominant consumer group in the exhibition tourism market. This study takes the Hangzhou West Lake International Expo as a case, develops a Gen Z-adapted exhibition tourism experience evaluation system based on Schmitt's five-dimensional experience theory, and conducts an empirical analysis with 385 valid questionnaires using the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) method. The findings indicate that Gen Z's demand for exhibition tourism presents a clear hierarchy: basic services as the foundation, digital experience as the core, cultural creativity as the priority, and social interaction as a supplement. IPA four-quadrant analysis shows that onsite staff service and transport accessibility are in the "Keep Up the Good Work" quadrant, while cultural and creative products and immersive technology are in the 'Keep Up the Good Work' quadrant (though with minor performance gaps), while ticket price value and supporting facilities fall into the 'Concentrate Here' quadrant, indicating urgent supply-demand mismatches. This study proposes targeted optimization strategies according to IPA results, which can offer empirical evidence and decision-making references for the youth-oriented transformation and high-quality development of traditional exhibition brands.

Keywords: Generation Z, exhibition tourism, experience gap, importance-performance analysis (IPA), youth-oriented transformation, West Lake International Expo

1. Introduction

The integration of culture and tourism has transformed the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) sector into a comprehensive form of tourism encompassing professional conferences, exhibitions and expos, incentive travel, and major cultural and sporting events (Zhou, 2001). This sector has become a key driver of urban development (Fang et al., 2020). According to the China MICE Economic Research Association (2022), the global MICE market is experiencing robust recovery with significant economic spillover effects. In 2023, the General Office of the State Council issued "Several Measures on Unleashing the Potential of Tourism Consumption and Promoting the High-Quality Development of the Tourism Industry" (State Council General Office Document No. 36 [2023]), explicitly supporting the integrated development of the "exhibitions plus tourism" business model, thereby providing policy support for the high-quality transformation of MICE. Concurrently, domestic tourism consumption has shown a robust recovery in consumption, with public demand for cultural and tourism consumption continuing to upgrade (Wu, 2020).

Against this backdrop, enhancing the perceived experience of MICE-participants' holistic, subjective evaluations and psychological feedback regarding MICE events and related tourism services has become a key issue for the high-quality development of the MICE industry. Currently, Generation Z has gradually emerged as the main consumer group in the MICE sector. Their consumption characteristics, which are "social, experiential, and personalized," are continuously driving the iterative upgrading of MICE business models (Li, 2023). These changes place higher demands on core experiential elements such as supporting facilities, public service systems, and the perception of experiential scenarios within exhibition venues (Wang & Shao, 2024).

The Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) method can effectively identify the differences between perceived importance and perceived performance. IPA is commonly used to measure MICE visitors' perceptions of venue public service facilities performance and their overall perceptions of regional MICE, providing scientific and quantitative evidence for facility configuration and service strategies (Liu et al., 2021; Zhang & Yan, 2020; Hu, 2023). However, existing research reveals that the academic community currently pays insufficient attention to Generation Z, an emerging key customer group. There is a lack of specialized empirical analysis of this group's consumption characteristics, making it difficult to accurately grasp their core consumption needs and experiential pain points. This research gap means that traditional MICE brands lack scientific decision-making grounds in their transformation process to cater to Generation Z, making them highly susceptible to practical issues such as lagging product iteration, imprecise marketing strategies, and weakened brand relevance.

As a national benchmark city for cultural and tourism consumption, Hangzhou exhibits vigorous Generation Z consumer activity. The West Lake International Expo (hereinafter referred to as the "West Lake Expo"), as a long-established and

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iconic local exhibition brand in Hangzhou, serves as a core vehicle for the city's exhibition and tourism development. However, judging by its current development trajectory, the West Lake Expo—despite its long history—is facing a developmental dilemma in which its traditional operational model struggles to align with the emerging consumption preferences of Generation Z amidst broader trends of cultural-tourism integration and the shift towards a younger audience.

To address the above gaps, this study pursues three objectives: (1) construct a Gen Z-tailored indicator system for exhibition tourism experience using Schmitt's five-dimensional framework; (2) empirically measure the importance-performance gaps via the IPA model, thereby revealing supply-demand mismatches; (3) provide quadrant-specific strategies to transform traditional exhibitions into youth-oriented brands.

Practical Value: This study aims to use the diagnostic conclusions of the IPA model as a new empirical perspective to precisely identify the shortcomings in the West Lake International Expo's exhibition tourism experience, propose targeted countermeasures and development pathways to enhance the performance of Generation Z exhibition tourism groups, and provide empirical references for the transformation of similar traditional exhibition brands.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on MICE

Research on MICE began relatively early abroad, and the theoretical framework is relatively mature. Zazueta-Hernández and Velarde-Valdez (2023) define MICE as a collective term for high-end tourism segments such as conferences, incentive travel, conventions, and exhibitions, and propose that resource endowments, destination management capabilities, environmental constraints, and demand characteristics constitute the four core dimensions of competitiveness. They were the first to introduce the IPA model for identifying priority areas for improvement. Dwyer et al. (2008), drawing on research from Australia, emphasize that collaborative governance between government and industry, alongside infrastructure upgrades, is key to addressing competition in the international market.

With the advancement of digital transformation, Martín Rojo and Gaspar González (2024) note that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift towards online MICE, with health and safety standards and personalized services becoming key marketing priorities. Concurrently, Taipakova et al. (2024) examine the intermediation process of the MICE value chain, concluding that while disintermediation is a slow but steady process, complete disintermediation is infeasible due to the high service standards demanded by the MICE market. In parallel, Vaid and Kesharwani (2018) explore the application of big data in social media marketing, proposing the use of user profiling to precisely target Generation Z customers. Complementing these findings, Rojas Bueno et al. (2020) argue that despite the ongoing trend towards disintermediation, professional intermediaries remain irreplaceable in high-end MICE services.

Domestic research began relatively late, with early studies focusing on conceptual analysis and development models. Li and Jiang (2011) redefine MICE from an industry convergence perspective as "the aggregate of tourism activities undertaken by MICE participants at the host location," thereby correcting the misconception that MICE is synonymous with tourism. Xie and Liu (2012) further point out that the essence of MICE lies in "the integration of business and leisure experiences." Dai (2014), on the other hand, advocates replacing related concepts with "exhibition and convention economy," focusing on the spillover effects of exhibitions and conventions on tourism. Wang (2008), drawing on fundamental tourism theory, proposes the concept of "non-continuous tourism status," attempting to construct an independent theoretical framework for exhibition and convention tourism, and introduces the "Exhibition and Convention Tourism Index" as a measurement tool, providing a theoretical reference for subsequent empirical research.

In terms of research on development models, Ye (2016) compares Wenzhou with cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou, identifies the issues facing Wenzhou, and proposes an industrial synergy strategy of "using commerce to drive tourism." Zheng (2018), taking the Canton Fair as an example, uses SWOT analysis to propose that international competitiveness should be enhanced through regional economic linkages, the improvement of policies and regulations, and the exploitation of distinctive resources. Zhu (2015) focuses on county-level economies, using Yiwu as a case study to emphasize the development of distinctive exhibition and tourism products based on industrial clusters. Analyses of cities such as Changsha and Chongqing indicate that low levels of marketization and inadequate supporting facilities are common issues, which require resolution through brand building and talent development (Huang & Ding, 2022; Qin et al., 2021).

Regarding market development and marketing strategies, Liu (2023) emphasizes the importance of brand promotion and regulatory improvements, whilst Li (2019) systematically outlines development strategies across seven dimensions: refining laws and regulations, establishing management bodies, constructing evaluation systems, expanding publicity, enhancing brand influence, and improving staff competence. Zhou (2016) employs the IPA analysis method to identify issues in online marketing, such as delayed information updates and insufficient interaction, and recommends optimizing technical support and customer relationship management. Li (2009) proposes the establishment of a conference and exhibition tourism marketing system that facilitates collaborative marketing among host cities, enterprises, and exhibitors.

2.2. Research on Perceptions of Tourism Experiences

Tourism experience perception refers to the comprehensive feelings formed through tourists' interactions with the people, events, and objects of a destination, involving a deep integration of sensory, emotional, and cognitive elements

(Yue,2024). Wen et al. (2025)using Wangjia Island in Dalian as a case study,construct an evaluation system comprising "location and environment-accommodation and catering services-natural landscapes-activity experiences," and find that visitors rate natural landscapes highly. In the field of technological immersion,Zhu et al. (2025) confirm that the realism,immersion,and interactivity of VR technology positively influence perceived quality and value through multisensory experiences.

Regarding the of perceived value dimensions,the "perceived cost - perceived benefit" contrast model proposed by Zeithaml (1988) has been widely applied in the tourism sector. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) further propose a four-dimensional model comprising quality,emotion,price,and social value,providing a mature framework for the quantitative measurement of experiential perception. Taking Guilin's East-West Alley as a case study,Xu et al. (2025) demonstrate that the perception of authenticity influences tourism memories through a chain-mediated effect involving "tourism experience-subjective well-being." Prebensen and Xie (2017) validate the logic of multidimensional measurement in adventure tourism,whilst Chen and Chen (2010) and Han et al. (2017) advocate for the measurement of perceived value from a holistic perspective.

Concurrently,the development of digital technology is reshaping the mechanisms underlying the generation of tourism experiences. Zhong (2024) notes that the perceived usefulness,entertainment value,and interactivity of digital media influence tourism decisions via intentions,with Generation Z demonstrating higher acceptance of immersive technologies. In research on revolutionary tourism,Wang (2024) finds that Generation Z exhibits a marked preference for digital products,yet existing offerings have not yet fully met their demand for immersive experiences. Research by Jafar et al. (2024) finds that immersion and enjoyment within metaverse scenarios can significantly enhance visitor loyalty. Furthermore,Tang et al. (2024) and Zhu et al. (2025) have respectively confirmed the role of restorative experiences in rural natural environments and VR multisensory experiences in enhancing visitors' perceived value.

Furthermore,there are significant differences in the perception of tourism experiences across different demographic groups. Research indicates that cognitive and emotional experiences influence cultural identity and loyalty through perceived value (Wei,2024; Li & Li,2023),focusing on Generation Z. Wang (2023) conducts an IPA analysis using Shanghai's Wukang Road as a case study,demonstrating that the image is key to experience quality. Wang (2024) finds that Generation Z's immersive needs remain unmet,necessitating enhanced innovation in new media. In the fields of ecotourism and rural tourism,perceptions of natural landscapes,cultural experience structures,and service facilities have emerged as key factors influencing performance (Zhou & Chen,2024; Luo,2017; Qian,2020),whilst the role of perceived authenticity in shaping tourism memories and performance has also been confirmed (Xu et al.,2025; Zuo & Zhang,2023).

3. Methodology

3.1. Design Rationale

This study is based on Schmitt's (1999) experience theory. Breaking through the traditional single-dimensional cognition,the theory defines experience as a holistic perception formed by the coordination of multiple brain functional modules,covering five interrelated and progressive dimensions: sensory,emotional,intellectual,behavioral,and relational experience. It captures the full process of individual experience perception and provides a systematic theoretical framework for MICE experience research.

To avoid generalized theoretical application and achieve deep adaptation among theory,group,and scenario,this study designs localized indicators for the five dimensions following the principle of "theoretical core + cohort characteristics + scenario attributes". On the one hand,Generation Z-raised in the digital technology era-exhibits core traits: strong desire for social sharing,pursuit of individuality and novelty,preference for immersive experiences,reliance on smart services,and emphasis on circle identity. On the other hand,the Hangzhou West Lake International Expo integrates cultural display,business exchange,leisure experience,and city promotion,covering multiple experience nodes such as exhibition layout,cultural performances,support services,and transportation connections.

Through literature review, expert consultation, and pre-survey interviews, this study derived 16 measurement indicators corresponding to Schmitt's five experiential dimensions. To ensure theoretical transparency and empirical traceability, each indicator was explicitly mapped onto its respective dimension as follows:Sensory experience (A - D): captures visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli-exhibition aesthetics (A), immersive cultural displays (B), cultural and creative product design (C), and overall on-site atmosphere (D).Emotional experience (E - G): reflects affective responses elicited by staff service (E), supporting facilities (F), and personalized services (G).Intellectual experience (H - J): focuses on novelty, cultural distinctiveness, and technological immersion-innovative exhibition themes (H), engaging cultural displays (I), and VR/AR/metaverse applications (J).Behavioral experience (K - M): assesses the ease and convenience of participation, including online booking (K), smart navigation (L), and transport accessibility (M).Relational experience (N - P): concerns social identity, community belonging, and value perception-offline networking areas (N), co-branded merchandise (O), and ticket price value (P).This systematic mapping ensures that the indicator system remains grounded in Schmitt's theoretical framework while being precisely tailored to the specific context of Generation Z exhibition tourism at the West Lake International Expo. The complete indicator system is presented in Table 1.

Corresponding Dimension	Measurement Indicator Number	Measurement Indicator Content
Sensory Experience	A	Exhibition design with a strong aesthetic appeal,featuring photogenic spots that are easy to capture,and suitable for sharing on social media
	B	Exhibitions showcasing local and traditional culture offer immersive sensory experiences
	C	Cultural and creative products feature innovative designs,offer excellent value for money and appeal to young people's tastes
	D	The overall atmosphere at the West Lake International Expo (sound effects,layout,lighting) creates a comfortable and distinctive ambience
Emotional experience	E	On-site staff are courteous and responsive
	F	The exhibition's supporting facilities were ample,clean and well-organized
	G	The exhibition offers personalized services such as bespoke itineraries and exclusive experience sessions,catering to diverse needs
	H	The exhibition's theme,exhibits and on-site activities are innovative and far from run-of-the-mill,appealing to the aesthetic tastes of the younger generation
Mindset Experience	I	The cultural displays at the West Lake International Expo are distinctive and engaging
	J	The exhibition utilizes technologies such as VR/AR,digital screens and the metaverse to provide an immersive experience
	K	The online booking,ticketing and information enquiry processes are seamless
Interactive experiences	L	The on-site smart navigation and positioning system is accurate and user-friendly
	M	The venue is conveniently located,with excellent public transport links and easy access
	N	The in-person exhibition features dedicated themed networking areas,making it easy to meet like-minded people and organize activities
Related Experiences	O	The West Lake International Expo launches co-branded merchandise and limited-edition perks,serving as an exclusive badge of participation and enhancing community identity
	P	Ticket prices for the West Lake International Expo are commensurate with the actual experience offered,providing good value for money and encouraging continued interest and participation

Table 1: Indicators of Gen Z's exhibition tourism experience mapped to Schmitt's five experiential dimensions

3.2. Questionnaire Structure

To ensure the scientific validity and applicability of the indicators,this study optimized the questionnaire through a systematic process. First,based on a literature review (Schmitt,1999; Wang & Shao,2024),measurement items were preliminarily drafted around five key experience dimensions. Next,through in-depth interviews with five experts in the field of exhibition tourism experience perception and fifteen Generation Z participants,the content validity and accuracy

of the item wording were assessed and revised; items that were semantically unclear or ambiguous in focus were removed or merged. This process resulted in a formal questionnaire comprising 16 core items to measure Generation Z participants' perceptions of the importance and performance evaluation of various elements of the West Lake International Expo's exhibition tourism experience. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = "Very Dissatisfied/Not Important" and 5 = "Very Satisfied/Very Important."

3.3. Sample Selection and Data Collection

Following the widely accepted demographic range, this study defines Generation Z as individuals born between 1995 and 2009. At the time of the survey (2026), they were aged 17 - 31. To capture intra-cohort heterogeneity, we divided the sample into three subgroups: Older Gen Z (born 1995 - 1999): aged 27 - 31, mainly young professionals; Core Gen Z (born 2000 - 2004): aged 22 - 26, predominantly university students; Younger Gen Z (born 2005 - 2009): aged 17 - 21, secondary school or early university students. This classification aligns with the common age cutoffs in Gen Z tourism research. The survey was restricted to Gen Z individuals who had physically attended the West Lake International Expo in 2026, excluding those who only browsed online.

Questionnaires were distributed both online (via WeChat and Douyin) and onsite at the expo exit. Of the 500 distributed, 320 were online and 180 were onsite; recovery rates were 94.1% and 97.2%, respectively. After excluding invalid questionnaires (completion time < 3 minutes, patterned answers, no actual exhibition attendance, or inconsistent birth year), 385 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective rate of 80.8%. The sample size meets the requirements for IPA analysis and statistical testing, and the data are representative.

3.4. Research Methods and Analytical Framework

To analyse the data, this study employed descriptive statistical analysis and the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) method. The specific analytical steps were as follows: (1) Means and standard deviations of each indicator's importance and performance scores were calculated. (2) A paired-sample t-test was conducted to examine whether the differences between importance and performance were statistically significant. (3) The overall mean of importance (3.92) and performance (3.78) were used as the quadrant origin. Each indicator was plotted on a two-dimensional matrix, with importance on the horizontal axis and performance on the vertical axis. (4) Based on the quadrant positions (High/Low Importance × High/Low Performance), indicators were classified into four quadrants: Keep Up the Good Work (Quadrant I), Possible Overkill (Quadrant II), Low Priority (Quadrant III), and Concentrate Here (Quadrant IV). By mapping the data into four quadrants (Strengths, Maintenance, Improvement, and Opportunity), the study visually identified the strengths and areas in urgent need of improvement within the exhibition tourism experience supply at the West Lake International Expo, thereby providing empirical evidence for subsequent optimization strategies.

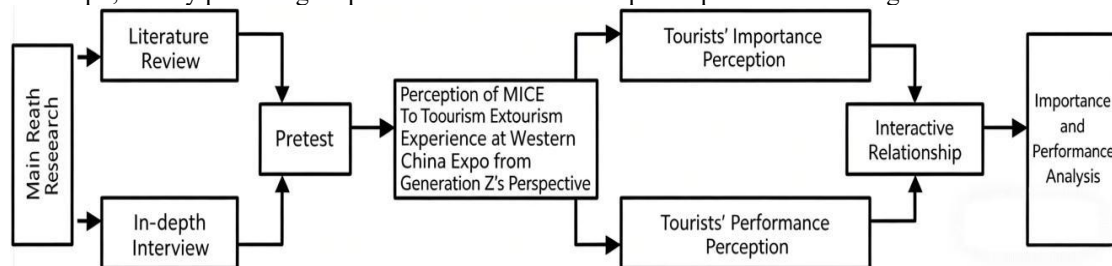


Figure 1: Empirical research framework for the perception of exhibition tourism experiences at the West Lake International Expo from a Generation Z perspective, based on the IPA model

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Sample

Following descriptive statistical analysis of the valid survey samples (Table 2), it was found that the gender ratio in the sample was largely balanced, with males accounting for 51.17% and females 48.83%. This balanced distribution effectively avoids bias in the evaluation of experience perceptions arising from a single-gender perspective. In terms of age, the sample was predominantly comprised of Generation Z individuals aged 18-35, accounting for 91.69% of the total. Within this group, the core Generation Z cohort (born between 2000 and 2004) constituted 45.45%, whilst the broader Generation Z cohort (born between 1995 and 1999) accounted for 8.31%, aligning with the study's target demographic for investigating Generation Z's perceptions of exhibition tourism experiences.

Regarding educational attainment, 13.21% held a master's degree or above, 67.79% held an undergraduate degree, and 19.00% had secondary education or below; the proportion of highly educated individuals (81.00%) was significant. This may be attributed to the Hangzhou West Lake Expo's status as a city-branded exhibition, which holds strong appeal for highly educated young people. In terms of occupation, students constituted the overwhelming majority at 67.79%, followed by corporate employees at 19.48% and freelancers at 6.23%, which aligns with the occupational structure typical of Generation Z. In terms of geographical distribution, respondents from cities within Zhejiang Province other than Hangzhou accounted for 43.12%, those from outside Zhejiang Province accounted for 31.17%, and local Hangzhou

residents accounted for 25.71%. Respondents from outside the city accounted for over 70%, reflecting the West Lake Expo's appeal to cross-regional visitors and aligning with the "out-of-town consumption" characteristic of exhibition tourism. The predominant travel pattern among visitors was "exhibition attendance combined with local and nearby tourism in Hangzhou", accounting for 63.90% of the total. This indicates that Generation Z generally integrates exhibition participation with city tourism in a profound manner, prioritizing multifaceted experiences. The primary channels for information acquisition centred on short-video platforms (Douyin, Xiaohongshu, Bilibili, etc.), accounting for 81.30%, whilst the WeChat ecosystem (official accounts/video channels/groups) accounted for 74.55%, reflecting Generation Z's behavioral trait of relying heavily on social media to obtain exhibition information.

Indicator	Item	Percentage/%
Gender	Male	51.17
	Female	48.83
Age	Younger Gen Z (born 2005 - 2009)	46.24
	Core Gen Z (born 2000 - 2004)	45.45
	Older Gen Z (born 1995 - 1999)	8.31
Educational attainment	Secondary school/vocational college or below	19.00
	Undergraduate/College	67.79
	Master's degree and above	13.21
Working professionals	Students	67.79
	Employed	19.48
	Freelancers	6.23
Geographical origin	Government/Public Sector	6.50
	Local to Hangzhou	25.71
	Within Zhejiang Province (outside Hangzhou)	43.12
How to participate	Outside Zhejiang Province	31.17
	Exhibition-only	17.92
	Exhibition + local and nearby tours in Hangzhou	63.90
Information channels	Exhibition + Offline Social Events	12.99
	Exhibition + Online Social Sharing	4.68
	Short-form video platforms (Douyin/Xiaohongshu/Bilibili, etc.)	81.30
Information channels	WeChat ecosystem (Official Accounts/Video Accounts/Community Groups)	74.55
	Recommendations from friends and family	56.36
	Official platforms/traditional media	42.34

Table 2: Statistical Table of Hangzhou West Lake Expo Survey Samples

4.2. Validity and Reliability Testing

Reliability analysis. Cronbach's α coefficient is used to assess the internal consistency of a questionnaire, i.e. its reliability. The Cronbach's α coefficient ranges from 0 to 1; a higher value indicates better internal consistency of the scale (Table 3). The results show that the Cronbach's α coefficient is 0.907, indicating that the scale has good internal consistency and an excellent level of reliability. This means that there is a high degree of consistency among the various items in the questionnaire, with strong correlations between items, enabling stable measurement of variables related to the perceived experience of MICE.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.907	16

Table 3: Table of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient Test Results

Validity Analysis. The KMO (Kurtosis-Mangan-O'Meara) measure of sampling adequacy is used to assess the suitability of data for factor analysis; its range is from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater suitability for factor analysis (Table 4). The results show a KMO value of 0.945, indicating that the data are highly suitable for factor analysis. The results of Bartlett's sphericity test show an approximate chi-square value of 2278.572, with 120 degrees of freedom and a significance level of $P < 0.001$. This indicates that the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is the identity matrix is rejected, suggesting that there is sufficient correlation between the variables to satisfy the conditions for factor analysis.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
KMO Sampling Adequacy Statistic		0.945
Bartlett's Sphericity Test	Approximate Chi-square	2278.572
	Degrees of freedom	120
	Significance	0.000

Table 4: Table of KMO and Bartlett test results

4.3. Gen Z's Perception of the Importance of Exhibition Tourism Characteristics at the Hangzhou West Lake Expo

To reflect the core needs and level of importance placed by Generation Z MICE tourists on the experiential elements of the Hangzhou West Lake Expo, this study conducted a quantitative measurement of the perceived importance of 16 MICE experience characteristics. By calculating the mean score and standard deviation for each characteristic and ranking them in descending order of mean score (Table 5), the perceived importance of each characteristic was evaluated using a 1 – 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = "not at all important" and 5 = "very important".

Hangzhou West Lake Expo Exhibition and Tourism Experience Characteristics	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Rank
M. Convenient location of exhibition halls, smooth public transport connections, and easy access	4.35	0.906	1
C. Cultural and creative products feature innovative designs, offer excellent value for money, and appeal to young people's tastes	4.29	0.875	2
P. The ticket prices for the West Lake International Expo are commensurate with the actual experience offered; it is good value for money, and I am keen to continue following and participating	4.25	0.922	3
J. The exhibition utilizes technologies such as VR/AR, digital screens and the metaverse to provide an immersive experience	4.23	0.925	4
K. The online booking, ticketing and information enquiry processes run smoothly	4.14	1.000	5
F. The exhibition's supporting facilities are ample, clean and well-organized	4.12	1.050	6
H. The exhibition theme, exhibits and on-site activities are innovative and varied, appealing to the tastes of the younger demographic	4.06	1.108	7
D. The overall atmosphere at the West Lake International Expo (sound effects, layout, lighting) creates a comfortable and distinctive ambience	4.03	1.076	8
E. On-site staff were helpful and responsive	4.01	1.063	9
A. The exhibition features a strong design aesthetic, with photogenic spots that are perfect for social media sharing	3.94	1.117	10
L. The on-site smart navigation/location system is accurate and user-friendly	3.94	1.052	10
B. The presentation of local and traditional culture offers an immersive sensory experience	3.86	1.149	12
I. The cultural displays at the West Lake International Expo are distinctive and engaging	3.76	1.145	13
G. The Exhibition offers personalized services such as bespoke itineraries and exclusive sessions to cater to diverse needs	3.38	1.234	14
N. The in-person exhibition features dedicated themed networking zones, facilitating connections with like-minded individuals and the organization of events	3.23	1.261	15
O. The West Expo launches co-branded merchandise and limited-edition perks, serving as a distinctive identity marker and enhancing community identity	3.06	1.341	16

Table 5: Ranking of average scores for the perceived importance of exhibition tourism experience characteristics at the Hangzhou West Lake Expo (N=385)

Comprehensive (Table 5) empirical data indicates that Generation Z's average perceived importance scores for the 16 experiential characteristics of the West Lake International Expo range from 3.06 to 4.35, placing them within the high range of "important" to "very important". This reflects Generation Z's generally high regard for various experiential elements of the West Lake International Expo's exhibition tourism. An analysis of dispersion reveals that, with the exception of indicators with strong social attributes such as co-branded merchandise, the standard deviation for most other indicators falls within 1.2. This indicates that there is little divergence in perceptions regarding the majority of core experience elements, and that group opinions are relatively unified. Consequently, targeted service optimization is highly likely to gain widespread acceptance among this demographic.

The top five elements align closely with Generation Z's hierarchical experience requirements for exhibition tourism, characterized by "basic services as the foundation, digital experiences as the core, cultural creativity as the priority, and social engagement as a supplement". Among these, the convenience of transport to exhibition venues ranked firmly first with a score of 4.35, serving as the core manifestation of the basic services dimension and highlighting the importance of travel efficiency as a fundamental requirement for attendance; The design of cultural and creative products ranks second with a score of 4.29, serving as a key vehicle for the cultural and creative dimension and aligning with Gen Z's core pursuit of aesthetic appeal and creative content; Ticket price value for money (4.25), immersive technological experiences (4.23) and online service processes (4.14) follow closely behind. The former demonstrates Generation Z's focus on value for money, whilst the latter two are central to the digital experience dimension, fully confirming the pivotal role of digital immersion and convenient online services in Generation Z's experiential needs. The ranking and distribution of scores for the top five factors clearly illustrate Generation Z's prioritization of the three core dimensions: basic services, digital experience and cultural creativity.

Meanwhile, personalized services, offline socializing and community-based merchandise ranked at the bottom, with scores all below 3.5, placing them in the "moderately important" range and categorizing them as non-core demands. This reflects Generation Z's behavioral characteristics of prioritizing online socializing and seeking minimalistic offline experiences; they place greater value on spontaneously forming social connections through creative content within existing contexts, rather than relying on so-called customized services.

Overall, Generation Z's perception of the importance of the West Lake International Expo reveals a clear hierarchical structure: "basic services as the foundation, digital experiences as the core, cultural creativity as the priority, and social interaction as a supplementary element". This structure not only accurately identifies the current strengths in experience provision but also provides a solid factual basis for subsequent experience optimization.

4.4. Gen Z's Perception of the Performance of Hangzhou West Lake Expo's Exhibition and Tourism Features

This study also conducted a quantitative measurement of the actual performance perceptions regarding 16 characteristics of the Hangzhou West Lake Expo's exhibition tourism experience, ranked in descending order of average scores (Table 6). The performance evaluations for each characteristic were based on a 1 - 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = "very dissatisfied" and 5 = "very satisfied", thereby reflecting Generation Z's perceptions of the actual performance of various experiential elements at the West Lake Expo.

Hangzhou West Lake Expo Exhibition and Tourism Experience Characteristics	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Rank
E. On-site staff demonstrate a positive attitude and respond promptly	4.13	1.005	1
M. The exhibition venue is conveniently located, with smooth public transport connections and easy access	3.97	1.093	2
I. The cultural exhibits at the West Lake International Expo are distinctive and engaging	3.93	1.042	3
A. The exhibition features visually striking, Instagrammable backdrops that are perfect for social media sharing	3.92	1.096	4
K. Smooth online booking/ticketing/information enquiry processes	3.89	1.031	5
H. Exhibition themes, exhibits and on-site activities are innovative and varied, catering to the tastes of the younger generation	3.86	1.120	6
C. The design of cultural and creative products is innovative, offers good value for money, and appeals to the tastes of young people	3.85	1.117	7
J. The exhibition utilises technologies such as VR/AR, digital screens and the metaverse to provide an immersive experience	3.83	1.113	8
O. The West Lake International Expo has launched co-branded merchandise and limited-edition perks, serving as exclusive status symbols and enhancing community identity	3.81	1.114	9
P. The West Lake International Expo's ticket prices are commensurate with the actual experience offered; it is good value for money, and I am willing to continue following and participating	3.78	1.049	10

Table				
	B.The display of local and traditional culture offers an immersive sensory experience	3.76	1.116	11
	L.On-site smart guided tour/location system is accurate and user-friendly	3.76	1.147	11
	D.The overall atmosphere at the West China Fair (sound effects,layout,lighting) creates a comfortable and distinctive ambience	3.75	1.145	13
	F.The exhibition's supporting facilities are ample,clean and well-organized	3.64	1.187	14
	N.In-person exhibitions feature dedicated themed networking areas,facilitating the meeting of like-minded individuals and the organization of activities	3.36	1.217	15
	G.The exhibition offers personalized services such as customized itineraries and exclusive experience sessions to meet diverse needs	3.16	1.294	16

6:Ranking of average scores for the perceived performance of exhibition tourism experience characteristics at the Hangzhou West Lake Expo (N=385)

As shown in (Table 6),the average scores for the 16 performance perception characteristics range from 3.16 to 4.13,falling within the "moderately satisfied" to "satisfied" range. The overall scores are significantly lower than the importance perception scores (4.35 - 3.06),indicating that Generation Z's actual experience of the various elements at the West Lake International Expo fell short of their expectations,and their core needs were not fully met.At the same time,the standard deviation of performance perception ranged from 1.005 to 1.294,indicating a relatively high level of dispersion. This suggests that Gen Z's actual evaluations of the various experiences varied considerably,with marked differences in individual perceptions,forming a stark contrast to the highly unified group perception observed in the importance perception.

In terms of score ranking,the two experiential features receiving the highest approval from Generation Z were on-site staff service (4.13) and transport accessibility to the exhibition halls (3.97). Among these,on-site staff service was the only item to score above 4.0,demonstrating that the West Lake International Expo possesses core strengths in basic staff service and transport provision,effectively meeting Generation Z's fundamental travel and service needs.Furthermore,cultural content presentation (3.93),social media check-in spots (3.92) and online service processes (3.89) ranked among the top five,indicating that the West Lake International Expo largely aligns with Generation Z's fundamental needs in terms of cultural outreach,scene creation and basic online services,and possesses certain service advantages.

The five items with the lowest performance scores were customized and personalized services (3.16),offline themed interaction zones (3.36),exhibition support facilities (3.64),the overall on-site atmosphere (3.75) and immersive displays of local culture (3.76). Among these,customized experience services ranked last with a score of 3.16,making it the experience item with the lowest performance; this indicates that the West Lake International Expo has significant shortcomings in the provision of personalized services.It is worth noting that core elements ranked highly in terms of perceived importance-such as cultural and creative products,immersive technological experiences,and value for money-all achieved performance scores in the mid-range,indicating a significant gap between actual delivery and the research group's psychological expectations. This confirms that the West Lake International Expo's insufficient provision across the three dimensions of creativity,technology and value for money represents a core experiential pain point that urgently requires resolution.

Furthermore,social elements such as co-branded merchandise and offline interaction zones-which received lower priority in the importance perception rankings-achieved mid-range performance scores. As the gap between their performance scores and corresponding importance scores was relatively small,this indicates that the Expo's current performance in these non-core social experiences largely aligns with Generation Z's expectations. These areas do not constitute significant shortcomings in the visitor experience; consequently,there is no need to allocate excessive resources for prioritized optimization. Instead,maintaining the current standard or implementing low-cost improvements would suffice.

4.5. IPA Analysis of Gen Z's Perceived Importance and Performance of Exhibition and Tourism Features at the Hangzhou West Lake Expo

To further analyze the gap between Z Generation's expectations and actual performance perceptions regarding the West Lake Expo conference and exhibition tourism experience,and to precisely identify the degree of matching between experience supply and demand,this study adopted a paired-sample t-test to calculate the significance of differences in importance and performance perceptions of each experience characteristic. This provides scientific data support for the subsequent IPA quadrant classification. The specific test results are shown in Table 7 .

Experience Item	Mean Importance	Standard Deviation of Importance	Mean Performance	Standard Deviation of Performance	t-value	Significance (P)
A.Exhibition design with a strong aesthetic appeal,featuring photoworthy spots that are easy to capture,and suitable for sharing on social media	3.94	1.117	3.92	1.096	0.312	0.755
B.The presentation of local culture/traditional culture offers an immersive sensory experience	3.86	1.149	3.76	1.116	1.512	0.131
C.Cultural and creative products feature innovative designs,offer excellent value for money,and appeal to young people's tastes	4.29	0.875	3.85	1.117	7.134	0.000
D.The overall atmosphere at the Expo (sound effects,layout,lighting) creates a comfortable and distinctive ambience	4.03	1.076	3.75	1.145	3.954	0.000
E.On-site staff were friendly and responsive	4.01	1.063	4.13	1.005	-1.863	0.063
F.The exhibition facilities are well-equipped,clean and well-organized	4.12	1.050	3.64	1.187	6.695	0.000
G.The Exhibition offers personalized services such as bespoke itineraries and exclusive sessions to meet diverse needs	3.38	1.234	3.16	1.294	3.095	0.002
H.The exhibition's theme,exhibits and on-site activities are innovative and varied,catering to the aesthetic preferences of the younger demographic	4.06	1.108	3.86	1.120	2.909	0.004
I.The cultural displays at the Expo are distinctive and engaging	3.76	1.145	3.93	1.042	-2.380	0.018
J.The Exhibition utilizes VR/AR,digital screens,the metaverse and other technological tools to provide an immersive experience	4.23	0.925	3.83	1.113	6.521	0.000
K.The online booking/ticket purchase/information enquiry process is smooth	4.14	1.000	3.89	1.031	4.149	0.000
L.On-site Smart Guiding/Positioning System: Accurate and user-friendly	3.94	1.052	3.76	1.147	2.735	0.007
M.Hall is conveniently located with excellent public transport links	4.35	0.906	3.97	1.093	6.397	0.000
N.offline exhibitions feature dedicated themed discussion areas,making it easy to meet like-minded people and organize activities	3.23	1.261	3.36	1.217	-1.826	0.069
O.The West Lake International Expo launches co-branded merchandise and limited-edition benefits,serving as a distinctive identity marker and enhancing community identity	3.06	1.341	3.81	1.114	-10.204	0.000
P.The ticket price for the P-Expo is commensurate with the actual experience offered; it is good value for money,and I am keen to continue following and participating	4.25	0.922	3.78	1.049	7.723	0.000

Table 7: Results of the paired t-test on the importance-performance perception of Generation Z's West Lake International Expo experiences (N=385)

According to the paired-sample t-test results, the 16 experience dimensions show differentiated characteristics in perception differences. At a significance level of $P < 0.05$, there are significant differences between importance and performance perception for 12 indicators including cultural and creative products, on-site atmosphere, supporting facilities, technology immersion, and price matching. This indicates that Z Generation has obvious dislocation between psychological expectations and actual experience for such elements. Conversely, for 4 indicators including exhibition check-in scenes, traditional culture immersive display, on-site staff service, and offline thematic exchange areas, the significance $P > 0.05$ and failed the significance test. This shows that the difference between importance expectation and actual performance perception does not possess statistical significance, meaning the audience's expectations and actual experience are basically matched, and supply-demand matching is relatively balanced.

Based on the above difference test results, this study further adopts the IPA model. Using the total mean of 16 experience dimension importance and performance as quadrant division thresholds, it classifies each experience dimension into corresponding quadrants. This intuitively distinguishes advantage sections from areas needing optimization, thereby precisely proposing targeted experience improvement strategies.

After calculation, the total mean of 16 experience feature importance in this study is 3.92, and the total performance mean is 3.78. Using these as division standards, the mean of both is used as the origin point to construct a quadrant analysis diagram, where the horizontal axis is importance and the vertical axis is performance. Following the principle "Importance $>$ Mean 3.92 is high importance, ≤ 3.92 is low importance; Performance $>$ Mean 3.78 is high performance, ≤ 3.78 is low performance", all experience items are classified into the corresponding four quadrants: Quadrant I (High Importance-High Performance), Quadrant II (Low Importance-High Performance), Quadrant III (Low Importance-Low Performance), and Quadrant IV (High Importance-Low Performance). The specific classification and analysis of each quadrant are as follows.

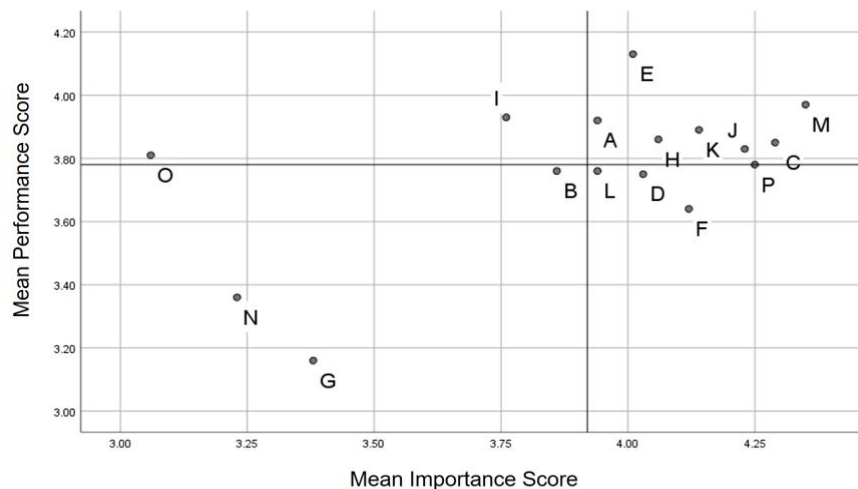


Figure 2: IPA Evaluation Diagram of West Lake Expo Conference and Exhibition Tourism Experience Perception from Z Generation Perspective

According to Figure 2: Quadrant I, High Importance-High Performance (Keep Advantages Area): The importance scores of all experience characteristics in this quadrant are higher than the horizontal axis threshold of 3.92, all belonging to core experience dimensions that Z Generation focuses on when participating in the West Lake Expo, covering seven core areas A, C, E, H, J, K, M, which are key contents affecting the audience's overall experience. At the same time, the performance scores of all items are higher than the vertical axis threshold of 3.78, actual experience performance meets the standard, and the matching degree of importance and performance is relatively high, which is an advantage section in the existing West Lake Expo conference and exhibition experience.

Combined with the paired-sample t-test results, items A and E show significance $P > 0.05$, indicating no statistically significant difference between importance and performance perception, meaning Z Generation's psychological expectation and actual experience for such indicators are highly matched, with good supply-demand matching degree. For the remaining C, H, J, K, M items, $P < 0.05$, there is significant perception gap between importance and performance. Although they are generally in an advantage zone, there is still some experience deviation at the detail level.

Among them, item E (on-site staff service) has the best performance score, audience actual perception is even slightly higher than expectation, service reputation is outstanding. Item M (exhibition hall traffic) has the highest importance score, performance meets standards simultaneously, basic travel guarantee system is perfect. Item A (check-in scene design) fits Z Generation social sharing needs, expectation and actual experience are basically flat, supply-demand adaptability is strong. H exhibition novelty, C cultural creative products, J technology immersion experience, K online service process all maintain a healthy pattern of high importance and high performance, only having small perception gap at details. For projects in this quadrant, no drastic rectification is needed subsequently, just maintain existing operation and service standards, continuously consolidate advantages, can optimize details, further amplify scene, service, and digital experience highlights, solidifying the West Lake Expo's core competitiveness in Z Generation group.

Quadrant II, Low Importance-High Performance (Maintain Status Quo Area): Includes items I, O, experience characteristics importance scores are all lower than 3.92, performance scores are all higher than 3.78, indicating such content is not Z Generation's core demand when participating in the West Lake Expo, overall audience attention is not high, demand priority is relatively low, but actual experience performance exceeds audience expectation, existing supply can fully satisfy audience needs, belonging to resource investment is reasonable, no need to add extra force sections. Combined with paired-sample t-test results, items B, N have P values greater than 0.05, importance and performance perception have no significant statistical difference, meaning Z Generation's expectation for such content itself is not high, actual experience and psychological expectation are basically flat, low-level supply-demand structure is relatively stable; item G $P < 0.05$, importance and performance have significant gap, although not belonging to core demands, still obvious experience shortcomings exist.

Overall, the negative impact of such elements on Z Generation's overall conference experience is limited, rectification priority is relatively low. Specifically, B traditional culture immersive display, N offline thematic exchange areas have low attention, actual experience and expectation have no obvious gap, no need to deliberately increase investment; G customized personalized services have obvious perception gap, have room for small optimization. Subsequently for such projects, no need to invest large resources for key rectification, only need to adopt low-cost, incremental optimization strategies, slightly improve experience texture, for example simplify customized service process, optimize culture display form, small-scale create offline exchange space, no need to tilt resources excessively.

Quadrant IV, High Importance-Low Performance (Key Improvement Area): This quadrant is the core short-board area urgently needing key rectification in this IPA analysis, containing variables D, F, L, P, all variable importance scores are far higher than 3.92, all are core experience elements highly concerned by Z Generation, but performance scores are all lower than 3.78 threshold, some project scores have obvious gap with importance expectation, importance and performance seriously unmatched, directly pulling down audience overall experience feeling. From specific items, D exhibition on-site atmosphere creation, F supporting facilities construction, L intelligent guide services, all belong to exhibition basic hardware and environment experience, are Z Generation's conference basic guarantee, importance is high but actual experience is not good; P ticket price cost-performance ratio, is the key factor affecting audience repurchase and word-of-mouth communication, importance score is close, but performance just steps on threshold, failed to reach audience expectation. Such projects are the top priority for subsequent West Lake Expo optimization upgrade, need to preferentially allocate resources, targeted formulate rectification plans, comprehensively complete hardware facilities, service process, consumer value perception and other aspects of shortcomings, work hard to narrow supply-demand gap, fit Z Generation core experience expectation.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Research Conclusions

This study takes Z Generation as research object, West Lake Expo as case, based on 16 conference and exhibition tourism experience perception characteristics, combined with paired-sample t-test and IPA model to carry out empirical analysis. Through importance-performance quadrant classification, it can clearly distinguish the matching degree of each experience indicator, intuitively reflecting Z Generation's psychological expectation and on-site actual experience difference characteristics.

Research finds that Z Generation conference and exhibition tourism demand presents a hierarchical structure with basic service as foundation, digital experience as core, cultural creativity as key, social as auxiliary. From statistical test and IPA results, some experience indicators' importance and performance have no significant difference, Z Generation expectation and actual experience are basically matched; but cultural creative products, technology immersion, price matching, supporting facilities and other core dimensions have significant supply-demand mismatch, actual performance failed to reach audience psychological expectation. West Lake Expo's artificial service, traffic guarantee and other basic sections perform stably and perception matching degree is good, but in terms of young-oriented cultural creative development, technology scenario implementation, supporting service improvement and other aspects still have obvious short boards.

This study still has certain limitations, research sample geographical coverage is limited, and adopts static cross-sectional analysis, difficult to fully reflect conference and exhibition tourism experience's dynamic evolution law. Future research can expand sample scope, adopt longitudinal tracking research, further explore multi-element interaction effect and digital technology empowerment mechanism. In addition, Shang Yunfeng's (2025) proposed eco-agricultural-commerce-culture-tourism integration mode can also provide theoretical reference for subsequent conference and exhibition tourism and rural revitalization, ecological economy cross-research.

5.2. Countermeasure Suggestions

Based on this study conclusions, to effectively narrow the gap between Z Generation's experience expectation and actual experience perception of West Lake Expo, promote traditional conference and exhibition brand's youth transformation, the following targeted suggestions are specially proposed, providing strategic-level resource allocation and optimization key guidance for West Lake Expo management decision-making.

- **Prioritize resource focus, vigorously improve "High Importance-Low Performance" core shortcomings**

Combined with IPA and paired t-test results, on-site atmosphere, technology immersive experience, ticket price value, venue supporting facilities, etc. belong to high importance and exist significant perception difference dimensions, are core short boards that Z Generation highly concerned but actual experience is weak. Suggest preferentially tilting operation and innovation resources, optimize fair overall atmosphere creation, promote VR/AR and other technology applications toward deep immersive experience, establish reasonable flexible ticket price system, and systematically improve venue supporting facilities' comfort and layout rationality.

● **Consolidate and make fine-tune "High Importance-High Performance" existing advantages**

On-site service, convenient transportation, social check-in and other seven advantage sections overall perform well, among them some indicators' importance and performance have no significant difference, audience expectation and actual experience are highly matched. Subsequently no need for large-scale rectification, focus on solidifying existing high-standard service processes, rely on short videos, social platforms to guide tourists to spontaneously share, convert offline experience advantages into online brand influence, continuously consolidate core competitiveness.

● **Implement low-cost agile optimization for "Low Importance-Low Performance" items**

Such items are mostly Z Generation's non-core demands, some indicators' importance and performance difference are not significant, long-term in low-level equilibrium state; only personalized services and other few dimensions have small perception gap. No need for large-scale investment rectification, adopt lightweight, low-cost optimization thinking, through recommending theme tour routes, adding small-scale culture interactive scenes and other ways, gently improve experience richness.

● **Maintain "Low Importance-High Performance" projects' existing operation level**

Cultural display, co-branded merchandise and other projects audience attention is not high, but actual performance is better than expectation, and perception difference is stable. Suggest maintaining existing resource investment and operation modes, regularly monitor performance changes, concentrate limited energy on core short-board areas.

In summary, the core of this study's countermeasure suggestions lies in, according to IPA analysis revealing perception differences, implementing differentiated resource allocation strategies. Traditional conference and exhibition brands should establish a dynamic optimization mechanism driven by Z Generation experience data, while consolidating service foundation, firmly direct innovation resources to key links most affecting this group's overall performance, thereby realizing the fundamental transformation from supply-oriented to demand-oriented.

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