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Building a Cultural and Creative Platform to Guide Regional Cultural Consumption-Northeast China as an Example

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ABSTRACT

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Cultural and creative industries have emerged as a significant driver of economic growth, valued for their intellectual capital and low environmental impact. The rapid expansion of this industry necessitates the cultivation of skilled professionals to ensure sustainable development. Universities play a crucial role in fostering creative talents, generating high-quality research, and facilitating the transformation of knowledge into marketable innovations. Given their unparalleled resource integration capabilities, universities are well-positioned to establish research platforms that connect academia, industry, and policy-making. This paper explores the necessity of constructing a university-based cultural and creative industry research platform, emphasizing the "industry-university-research" integration model to enhance knowledge application, innovation, and commercialization in cultural and creative industries.

1. Introduction

The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) have emerged as a crucial driver of economic growth worldwide, playing a significant role in cultural dissemination, economic transformation, and social innovation [1]. Since the British Creative Industries Path Document (1998), many countries have prioritized the development of cultural and creative industries to enhance their national cultural soft power and economic competitiveness. This document defines creative industries as sectors that rely on individual creativity, skills, and enterprise to generate wealth and employment through intellectual property development [2]. Creativity serves as the foundation of the cultural and creative industries, fostering innovation in design, production, and business models [3].

In China, cultural and creative industries are regarded as a key mechanism for optimizing economic structures and strengthening cultural soft power [4]. The national 14th Five-Year Plan explicitly outlines strategies for fostering high-quality cultural industry development, reinforcing the integration of culture and technology, and cultivating internationally influential cultural brands [4].

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Government policies have significantly improved cultural market structures and increased public demand for cultural consumption. However, despite this progress, several challenges persist in China's cultural and creative industries, including excessive commercialization, lack of originality, product homogeneity, and insufficient integration of traditional Chinese cultural elements into creative products [5].

Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in knowledge production, talent cultivation, and industry incubation within the cultural and creative industries. Many universities have established cultural and creative industry bases, entrepreneurship incubators, and research platforms that facilitate collaboration among academia, industry, and policymakers. Universities provide theoretical support for cultural and creative industries while also driving design innovation, technological empowerment, and market expansion.

Given the increasing influence of cultural and creative industries on economic and social development, it is essential to examine the role of cultural and creative platforms in fostering regional economic growth. Cultural and creative platforms not only serve as hubs for innovation but also function as mechanisms for translating creative concepts into marketable products, thereby enhancing local economic structures. Additionally, universities act as key facilitators in this process, bridging the gap between academic research and industry application [6]. By integrating research, education, and industrial practice, universities contribute to talent cultivation and the dissemination of cultural knowledge while actively participating in cultural industry development. Furthermore, the collaboration between academia, industry, and research institutions is instrumental in driving product innovation and market transformation. This synergy allows for the efficient commercialization of creative products, ensuring that cultural resources are effectively utilized to generate economic and social value.

Through a combination of literature review and case study analysis, this paper examines how universities leverage research platforms in the cultural and creative industries to foster regional cultural consumption and optimize the commercialization pathways of cultural creative products under the industry-university-research model. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for policymakers, university administrators, and professionals in the cultural and creative industries [7].

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the role of cultural and creative industry platforms in regional economic growth, particularly within the context of universities. Given that cultural and creative industries rely heavily on intellectual capital, creative expression, and cultural integration, a qualitative approach is best suited for capturing the complex interplay between academia, industry, and policymakers in fostering cultural innovation. The study follows a triangulation approach, integrating literature review, case study analysis, and expert interviews to ensure a comprehensive and multi-faceted analysis of cultural and creative industry platforms. This methodological framework provides a deeper understanding of how universities contribute to talent cultivation, innovation, and commercialization of cultural creative products by examining theoretical perspectives, institutional practices, and industry insights.

The literature review forms the theoretical foundation of the study by analyzing existing academic research, government policies, and industry reports that focus on the development and challenges of cultural and creative industries. The review explores key topics such as the evolution of cultural and creative industry policies, particularly in China, where government strategies such as the 14th

Five-Year Plan emphasize the integration of culture and technology to enhance competitiveness [9]. Additionally, the study examines the impact of digital transformation on the creative industry, considering how technological advancements influence the production, distribution, and commercialization of cultural products. Furthermore, existing research on university-industry collaboration is reviewed to assess how academic institutions contribute to creative innovation and entrepreneurship. By synthesizing these perspectives, the literature review establishes the conceptual framework that guides this study's analysis.

The case study analysis investigates how universities contribute to cultural and creative industries by examining the practices of Tsinghua University and Chongqing University, two leading institutions that have actively engaged in cultural entrepreneurship and creative industry development. The selection of these universities is based on their well-established cultural and creative platforms, which integrate academic research, industry collaboration, and technological innovation. The case study analysis explores the role of university-led creative industry platforms in bridging academic knowledge with real-world applications. Furthermore, the study examines how these institutions support cultural and creative entrepreneurship through specialized programs, incubators, and strategic partnerships with local businesses and government agencies. By analyzing the initiatives undertaken by these universities, the research identifies effective models of industry-university-research integration that contribute to the commercialization of cultural products and the expansion of creative industries.

The expert interviews provide an additional layer of qualitative insights by capturing the perspectives of academics, industry professionals, and policymakers who are directly involved in the cultural and creative sector. These interviews explore the challenges and opportunities associated with the development of cultural and creative industry platforms, with a particular focus on issues related to funding availability, policy support mechanisms, and market trends. Furthermore, the study investigates the role of universities in shaping creative economies, particularly in the context of curriculum development and the alignment of educational programs with industry demands. By analyzing expert perspectives, the research also examines strategies for commercializing cultural and creative products, ensuring that academic research is effectively transformed into market-driven innovations. Through a systematic thematic analysis of the interview data, the study identifies key patterns in cultural industry transformation and offers practical recommendations for enhancing collaboration between academia, industry, and government.

A qualitative research approach is particularly well suited for this study, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the dynamic interactions between cultural innovation, higher education institutions, and economic transformation. Unlike quantitative methods, which emphasize statistical analysis and measurable outcomes, qualitative research provides a nuanced understanding of the contextual factors influencing cultural and creative industry development. Given the multifaceted nature of cultural industries, which encompass policy interventions, technological advancements, and socio-cultural influences, a qualitative methodology enables the study to remain grounded in real-world industry dynamics while maintaining a theoretical foundation based on existing research and case study findings. By integrating literature review, case study analysis, and expert interviews, this study develops a holistic perspective on the role of cultural and creative industry platforms in fostering economic and social transformation, particularly within the higher education sector.

2.2 Literature Review and Policy Analysis

The development of cultural and creative industries has become a focal point in economic research and policy formulation, as these industries significantly contribute to economic

development, innovation, and cultural sustainability. A growing body of literature explores how cultural and creative industries function as engines of economic transformation, particularly in knowledge-based economies where intellectual capital and creative skills are key drivers of growth. Scholars have examined the increasing integration of technological advancements, digital platforms, and market-oriented innovation in shaping the evolution of cultural production and consumption. Studies suggest that the creative economy not only generates employment opportunities but also enhances cultural identity and social cohesion through artistic and design-driven initiatives.

The role of cultural and creative industries in regional economic development has been widely discussed in academic literature, with researchers highlighting their capacity to revitalize urban areas, create employment, and foster cross-sector innovation. Cities that strategically invest in cultural and creative hubs tend to experience higher economic diversification and increased competitiveness in global markets. Additionally, the role of universities as catalysts for creative entrepreneurship has received considerable attention, with studies emphasizing how academic institutions foster creative talent, facilitate industry partnerships, and drive research-led innovation in design and digital media sectors. By incorporating multidisciplinary research and industry collaboration, universities have played a crucial role in advancing creative economies and supporting the commercialization of cultural knowledge.

Government policies have also played an essential role in structuring the development of cultural and creative industries. China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) serves as a key policy framework that outlines strategic objectives for enhancing cultural industry competitiveness, integrating technology with creative sectors, and promoting global cultural exchange [8]. The policy document emphasizes the importance of digital transformation in cultural production, advocating for the adoption of big data, artificial intelligence, and new media platforms to drive innovation. Additionally, policy initiatives such as the establishment of cultural industry zones, tax incentives for creative enterprises, and grants for cultural startups have been instrumental in accelerating the growth of China's creative economy [8]. Research indicates that these policy interventions have significantly impacted the commercialization of cultural products, the expansion of cultural tourism, and the sustainability of heritage-based creative industries.

Academic research, industry reports, and policy documents collectively inform the conceptual framework of this study, providing a comprehensive understanding of how cultural and creative industry platforms operate within the broader socio-economic landscape. Scholarly analyses contribute theoretical perspectives on creative economies, design thinking, and cultural entrepreneurship, while industry reports offer real-time insights into market dynamics, consumer preferences, and technological disruptions affecting the creative sector. Furthermore, policy documents serve as a regulatory foundation, highlighting the strategic priorities set by governments to foster innovation in cultural industries. By synthesizing these diverse sources of knowledge, this study establishes an interdisciplinary approach that bridges theoretical discourse with practical applications, ensuring that the research remains relevant to both academic inquiry and industry practice.

2.3 Case Study Analysis

The case study approach in this research examines how Tsinghua University and Chongqing University have established and managed cultural and creative industry platforms, contributing to talent cultivation, industry partnerships, and the commercialization of cultural products. These universities were selected based on their leading role in cultural innovation, strong industry-academic collaboration, and substantial contributions to the creative economy. By analyzing their

institutional strategies, educational programs, and industrial integration models, this study identifies best practices for fostering cultural and creative industries within higher education settings.

The selection of Tsinghua University as a case study is primarily due to its pioneering efforts in design education, cultural research, and creative entrepreneurship. Tsinghua has developed multidisciplinary cultural innovation programs, integrating design, technology, and business into creative product development. The university has established research centers such as the Tsinghua Cultural and Creative Development Research Institute, which focuses on digital culture, heritage preservation, and creative industry transformation. Additionally, Tsinghua collaborates with national and international cultural institutions to support cultural entrepreneurship among students and faculty. The Tsinghua Science and Technology Park, launched in 1999, has become a hub for cultural and creative startups, facilitating the commercialization of academic research into market-driven cultural products. Through initiatives such as the Beijing Design Week and innovation-driven incubators, Tsinghua has successfully positioned itself as a key player in China's creative economy.

Similarly, Chongqing University was selected for its regional impact on cultural industry development and its commitment to fostering cultural creativity within a local economic context. The university has established the Chongqing Cultural and Creative Industry Research Center, which serves as a platform for collaborative research, design experimentation, and industry partnerships. Chongqing University is known for its integration of traditional Chinese craftsmanship with modern design principles, particularly in areas such as heritage-based product innovation and sustainable cultural design. The university has played a crucial role in supporting local artisans and creative entrepreneurs, ensuring that traditional crafts such as lacquerware, embroidery, and bamboo weaving are preserved and adapted for contemporary markets. Furthermore, through partnerships with local government agencies and cultural enterprises, Chongqing University has developed programs that promote the economic viability of cultural creative industries in Western China as shown in Figure 1.

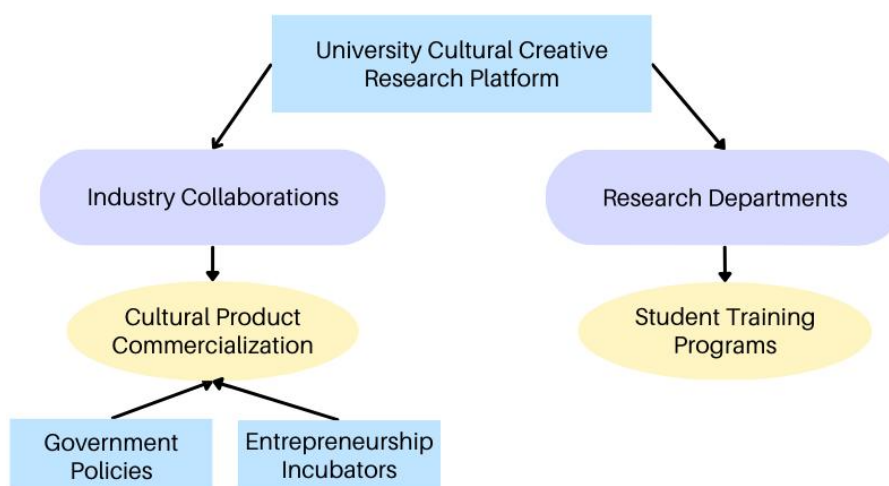


Fig. 1. The organizational structure of these university research platforms

Both universities have significantly contributed to talent cultivation by embedding cultural and creative industry training into their academic curriculums. At Tsinghua University, students engage in cross-disciplinary cultural projects that incorporate design thinking, digital technology, and market strategies. These initiatives allow students to develop practical skills in cultural product innovation, ensuring that graduates are well-equipped to enter the creative economy. Chongqing University, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on experiential learning and industry collaboration, offering

internship programs, field research opportunities, and workshops with cultural heritage practitioners. This approach ensures that students gain hands-on experience in developing creative products that are both culturally meaningful and commercially viable.

In terms of industry partnerships, both universities have actively engaged with government bodies, private enterprises, and cultural institutions to enhance creative industry integration. Tsinghua University has formed strategic alliances with technology firms, museum networks, and cultural foundations, enabling the development of smart cultural products, digital heritage exhibitions, and interactive design innovations. Similarly, Chongqing University collaborates with regional industries and community stakeholders to foster sustainable cultural production models, ensuring that local cultural traditions are preserved while being adapted for contemporary markets.

Finally, the commercialization of cultural products serves as a critical outcome of these universities' efforts in cultural and creative industry development. At Tsinghua, startups emerging from university incubators have successfully launched products ranging from digital heritage applications to contemporary art-inspired consumer goods. Many of these ventures have received government funding and venture capital investments, demonstrating the economic viability of university-led cultural innovation. Chongqing University, with its focus on cultural sustainability and craftsmanship integration, has contributed to the revitalization of local crafts by developing market-driven product lines that appeal to both domestic and international consumers.

Through an in-depth examination of these universities, this case study analysis highlights effective strategies for bridging academic research with creative industry practices. The findings underscore the importance of university-led cultural industry platforms in shaping talent, fostering collaborations, and driving innovation in the cultural economy. By examining these case studies, this research offers actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and industry leaders seeking to enhance the role of higher education in cultural and creative industry development.

2.4 Expert Interviews and Data Collection

This study employs semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method to gain qualitative insights into the challenges, opportunities, and commercialization strategies in China's cultural and creative industry. The semi-structured format ensures that while core research themes are explored, respondents also have the flexibility to discuss unanticipated issues that arise from their industry experiences. Since the interviewees are all industry practitioners actively involved in cultural and creative product design, their perspectives provide firsthand knowledge of market trends, consumer behavior, and the integration of traditional cultural elements into modern design.

The participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach, ensuring that all interviewees had extensive industry experience in cultural and creative product design. The study targeted practicing designers, product developers, and industry professionals who have been actively engaged in designing and selling cultural and creative products in China. The interviewees ranged in age from 23 to 60 years old, with 2 to 10 years of experience in the field. All participants had their products available for sale on online and offline platforms, including e-commerce sites (such as Taobao, JD.com, and Xiaomi Youpin), offline stores, and tourism-related retail channels.

A total of 15 interviews were conducted, covering designers from major cultural and creative industry hubs such as Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Shenzhen, Nanjing, Harbin, Chengdu, and Shenyang. The profile of interview participants was in the Table 1 below. These cities were selected due to their active creative industry ecosystems, government-supported cultural innovation policies, and high consumer engagement with cultural products.

Table 1
Profile of interview participants

No.	Location	Role	Product Type	Sales Channel
1	Beijing	Cultural Product Designer	Great Wall & Tsinghua-themed cultural products	Offline retail
2	Beijing	Designer	Forbidden City & campus cultural products	Tourist sites, campus stores
3	Beijing	Packaging Designer	Product packaging	Taobao, Pinduoduo, Douyin
4	Shenzhen	Designer	Modern calligraphy tools, UFO audio speakers	Slow Material Cultural Store, Xiaomi platform
5	Nanjing	Professor/Designer	Painting and craft products	Xiaomi platform
6	Harbin	Designer	Wu Gui Wu products	Wu Gui Wu sales platform
7	Harbin	Designer	Jianyang High-Rise Noodles	e-commerce, community marketing
8	Harbin	University Lecturer/Designer	Intangible cultural heritage embroidery products	Online platforms
9	Shanghai	Designer	Estee Lauder cultural collaboration	JD.com
10	Shanghai	University Lecturer/Cultural Product Designer	Tea set series	Enterprise sales
11	Shenyang	Graphic Designer	Lei Feng cultural creative products	Online, offline
12	Shenyang	Designer	Campus souvenir phone cases & campus maps	Campus stores
13	Chengdu	Designer	Shiqiao High-Rise Noodles	Community marketing
14	Hangzhou	Industrial Designer	Small home appliances & cleaning tools	Xiaomi, Taobao, JD.com, Amazon
15	Beijing	Cultural Product Designer	Great Wall & Tsinghua-themed cultural products	Offline retail

2.4.1 Thematic areas explored in interviews

The interviews focused on three major areas related to cultural and creative industry development.

- i. Challenges and opportunities in cultural and creative industry development: Participants widely discussed the structural challenges that cultural and creative enterprises face, including funding shortages, high market competition, and difficulties in protecting intellectual property. Many interviewees expressed concerns that early-stage cultural startups struggle to obtain long-term investment, limiting their ability to scale production and expand distribution networks. Additionally, intellectual property protection remains a challenge, with several designers noting that unauthorized reproductions of their work by competitors erode originality and reduce market competitiveness. However, interviewees also highlighted significant opportunities within the industry. The expansion of e-commerce platforms and the increasing popularity of social media marketing have lowered the barriers to entry for independent designers, allowing them to reach broader audiences. Additionally, government initiatives to promote cultural heritage protection have provided new avenues for designers to develop innovative products that blend traditional Chinese aesthetics with modern consumer preferences.
- ii. Industry strategies for product innovation and university collaboration: Many designers emphasized the importance of strategic collaborations in enhancing product innovation and cultural branding. Some interviewees reported that working with traditional artisans allowed

them to preserve cultural heritage while modernizing product aesthetics, ensuring that designs remained relevant to younger consumers. Others discussed the role of digital tools, such as AI-assisted design and 3D printing, in optimizing product prototyping and enabling small-batch production. Interestingly, while several designers acknowledged the potential benefits of collaborating with universities, they also pointed out that such partnerships remain limited and underutilized. A few designers suggested that stronger industry-academia linkages, such as research-driven design projects and student internships could foster a more dynamic ecosystem for cultural product innovation as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Collaboration models in the Cultural and Creative Industry (CCI)

Collaboration Type	Example	Key Benefits
Traditional Artisan Partnership	Designer working with embroidery masters	Preserves craftsmanship, enhances cultural authenticity
Technology Integration	AI-generated designs & 3D printing	Increases production efficiency, supports rapid prototyping
University Collaboration	Industry-funded research projects in product design	Access to academic expertise, fosters experimental innovation

- iii. Strategies for commercializing cultural creative products: A recurring theme in the interviews was the evolving commercialization strategies in China's cultural and creative industry as shown in Table 3. Designers stressed the importance of brand storytelling, with many incorporating historical narratives and local heritage into their products to differentiate them in a competitive marketplace. Some participants highlighted how social media marketing, short video platforms (such as Douyin/TikTok), and influencer collaborations have become essential tools for consumer engagement. Additionally, e-commerce was identified as a crucial channel for cultural product distribution. Many designers reported that platforms like Taobao, JD.com, and Xiaomi Youpin allow them to target niche consumer segments, including young urban professionals and cultural enthusiasts. Despite the advantages of online sales, some interviewees noted challenges in scaling operations, particularly in ensuring quality control and maintaining consistent brand messaging across multiple platforms.

Table 3

Cultural and creative product sales channels

Sales Channel	Advantages	Challenges
Traditional Retail	High-quality consumer interaction; heritage branding opportunities	Limited audience reach; high operational costs
E-commerce Platforms	Wider market access; lower overhead costs	High competition; dependency on digital marketing
Social media & Live streaming	Strong brand engagement; impulse-driven sales	Requires continuous content creation; influencer reliance

2.5 Data Analysis Methods

This study employs qualitative content analysis to examine the data collected from expert interviews, utilizing a thematic coding approach to identify key insights related to challenges, opportunities, and commercialization strategies in the cultural and creative industry. By

systematically categorizing responses, the analysis ensures that findings align with the study's research objectives and provide a structured interpretation of industry perspectives.

Thematic analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the interview transcripts were carefully reviewed to gain an overall understanding of the responses. Next, initial coding was performed by identifying recurring ideas and categorizing them into meaningful units of analysis. These codes were then grouped into broader themes, such as funding constraints, branding and digital marketing, market expansion, and collaboration barriers as shown in Table 4 below. Through refinement and validation, themes were adjusted to ensure they were mutually exclusive and representative of the insights shared by participants.

Table 4

Thematic analysis of expert interviews

Theme	Description	Example Quote from Interviews
Funding Constraints	Difficulty in securing investment for cultural start-ups.	"It is challenging to find stable financial support to scale production."
Market Expansion	Importance of e-commerce in increasing sales reach.	"Online platforms like Taobao and JD.com allow us to reach a wider audience."
Branding & Storytelling	Cultural brands use heritage narratives to attract consumers.	"Consumers are drawn to the story behind the product, not just its function."
Collaboration Barriers	Limited partnerships between academia and industry.	"There is potential for university collaboration, but industry needs faster solutions."

To enhance the validity and reliability of the analysis, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was used to cross-check findings with secondary sources, such as industry reports, policy documents, and previous research on cultural and creative product commercialization. Additionally, participant verification was conducted, where selected interviewees reviewed the summarized themes to ensure that their views were accurately reflected. Inter-coder reliability was also ensured by having an independent researcher analyze a subset of the interview data, allowing for cross-validation of thematic interpretations. Additionally, by employing this structured qualitative approach, the study ensures that its findings are systematic, transparent, and reliable, providing a strong foundation for further discussions on cultural and creative industry development.

2.6 Research Limitations

Despite the robustness of the methodology, this study has certain limitations that must be acknowledged as shown in Table 5 below. The first limitation concerns the sample size and generalizability of the findings. This study is based on 15 expert interviews, which, while providing rich qualitative insights, may not fully represent the diversity of the cultural and creative industry across China. The selected participants come from specific urban centers, meaning that perspectives from smaller cities or rural areas may not be adequately captured. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating a larger sample size and using quantitative survey methods to gather statistically generalizable data on industry trends.

Table 5

Study limitations and proposed solutions

Limitation	Description	Proposed Solution
Small Sample Size	Only 15 interviews conducted.	Expand to a larger participant pool; include survey data.

Regional Focus	Research focused on specific Chinese cities.	Compare with data from other regions or countries.
Subjectivity in Responses	Industry professionals may have biased opinions.	Triangulate data with policy documents and case studies.

Another key limitation is the focus on industry practitioners, which may introduce perspective bias in the findings. Since all interviewees are directly involved in cultural product design, commercialization, and branding, the study does not reflect the viewpoints of academics, policymakers, or consumers, who also play crucial roles in shaping the industry. This industry-centric perspective means that insights into government policy formulation or the theoretical underpinnings of cultural product innovation are not extensively explored. Future research could mitigate this limitation by incorporating a multi-stakeholder approach, ensuring that perspectives from government officials, scholars, and consumers are also included in the analysis. Additionally, selection bias may be present, as participants were chosen based on their availability and expertise in cultural and creative industries. While this method ensures that all respondents possess practical industry knowledge, it may also lead to an overrepresentation of certain viewpoints, particularly those from well-established designers and entrepreneurs rather than emerging industry players. Future studies could adopt randomized selection techniques or stratified sampling methods to enhance the diversity of perspectives and improve the representativeness of the findings.

Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the commercialization challenges, industry strategies, and market trends in the cultural and creative sector. The findings serve as a foundation for further research and can inform business strategies, policy decisions, and academic discourse related to the development of cultural and creative industries.

3. Results

3.1 Overview of Findings

The expert interviews provided valuable insights into the challenges, opportunities, and commercialization strategies in China's cultural and creative industry. The findings highlight key barriers such as funding constraints, intellectual property issues, and the lack of strong collaboration between academia and industry. At the same time, the research also reveals growing market opportunities, particularly through e-commerce, digital branding, and government policy support.

A strong emphasis was placed on branding, storytelling, and digital platforms as essential commercialization tools, with industry professionals highlighting the role of influencer marketing, social media engagement, and strategic partnerships in reaching broader audiences. Furthermore, although collaboration between universities and industry remains limited, there are indications that academic research and industry-driven product innovation can be aligned for greater mutual benefit. These findings directly address the research questions, particularly in identifying critical factors affecting the cultural and creative industry, evaluating market-driven strategies, and understanding how industry-academic cooperation can be enhanced.

3.2 Challenges in Cultural and Creative Industry Development

The findings indicate that several key challenges continue to hinder the growth of China's cultural and creative industries. The most frequently cited obstacles include funding difficulties, intense market competition, intellectual property risks, and the weak integration of academic research with industry needs as shown in Table 6 below.

Many interviewees reported that securing long-term funding remains one of the biggest challenges. Cultural entrepreneurs often struggle to attract stable financial investment, making it difficult to scale production, expand marketing efforts, and sustain creative development. As one designer stated:

"Cultural creative businesses require consistent investment, but many financial institutions still hesitate to support them due to the perceived instability of the market."

The cultural and creative market has become increasingly competitive, with many businesses facing pressure from low-cost imitations. Several designers expressed concerns about unauthorized reproductions of their work, making it challenging to maintain originality and uniqueness. One interviewee noted:

"A successful design is copied within weeks. Without stronger intellectual property enforcement, it's difficult to sustain long-term business advantages."

Despite the potential for universities to contribute research-driven innovation, many interviewees found that existing industry-academic collaborations are weak and inefficient. Several designers suggested that while universities offer theoretical research and concept development, their outputs rarely translate into market-ready solutions.

Table 6
Summary of challenges identified in interviews

Challenge	Description	Example Quote
Funding Constraints	Difficulty in obtaining financial support for cultural start-ups.	"Without stable investment, it's hard to scale operations."
Market Competition	High saturation of cultural creative products, making differentiation difficult.	"We have to constantly innovate to stay ahead of low-cost competitors."
Intellectual Property Issues	Lack of legal protection leads to widespread imitation.	"It's frustrating to see our designs copied within weeks of launching."
Academia-Industry Collaboration	Weak integration between academic research and commercial product development.	"Universities have research potential, but their outputs often lack market practicality."

3.3 Challenges in Cultural and Creative Industry Development

Despite the challenges, the cultural and creative industry in China is experiencing significant growth, driven by digital transformation, government support, and increasing consumer demand for heritage-based products. Many industry professionals noted that e-commerce and digital platforms have become essential tools for market expansion. Online retail has enabled businesses to connect with a wider audience, reducing their reliance on traditional retail channels. Platforms such as Taobao, JD.com, and WeChat Mini Programs have allowed designers to sell directly to consumers, providing greater control over branding and pricing. One designer emphasized the importance of this shift, stating that:

"E-commerce allows independent designers to connect with consumers directly, reducing reliance on traditional retail."

This transformation has lowered entry barriers for emerging cultural entrepreneurs, allowing small-scale designers to showcase their work without the high costs associated with physical store operations.

The increasing consumer interest in heritage-based cultural products has further driven industry growth. Many designers observed that younger consumers are actively seeking products that integrate traditional aesthetics with modern lifestyles. Items inspired by Chinese calligraphy, embroidery, folklore, and historical landmarks have gained popularity in both domestic and international markets. The growing demand for these products suggests a shifting consumer preference towards culturally meaningful and aesthetically rich designs, which encourages designers to explore creative ways of modernizing traditional craftsmanship. By incorporating heritage elements into contemporary product design, businesses have been able to differentiate themselves in a competitive marketplace, appealing to consumers who value both cultural authenticity and innovative aesthetics.

Government support has played a crucial role in shaping the cultural and creative industry. Several interviewees highlighted that government-backed funding programs and industry incentives have helped sustain and expand businesses in this sector. Policies such as startup grants, tax incentives, and financial assistance for cultural innovation projects have provided designers with the resources needed to develop and commercialize their products. Additionally, initiatives aimed at promoting cross-border cultural trade have allowed Chinese cultural brands to enter global markets, increasing international recognition for traditional Chinese craftsmanship and creative industries. By fostering a policy environment that supports creative entrepreneurship and heritage preservation, the government has contributed to the sector's long-term stability and innovation potential.

3.4 Commercialization Strategies of Cultural Products

The findings suggest that successful commercialization of cultural products relies heavily on branding, storytelling, and digital marketing. Many interviewees emphasized that consumers are not only interested in the functionality of a product but are also drawn to the cultural narratives and historical significance behind it. Storytelling has become a key element in branding, as successful cultural brands often build their identity around heritage, craftsmanship, and traditional aesthetics. By crafting a compelling brand story, designers can establish an emotional connection with consumers, making their products more than just commodities but rather a representation of cultural values and identity. This approach has proven to be particularly effective in differentiating cultural creative products in a highly competitive market.

In addition to branding, the use of digital marketing strategies has become a crucial factor in the success of cultural creative products. Social media platforms such as Douyin (TikTok), Xiaohongshu, and WeChat have provided designers with powerful tools to enhance product visibility and engage with consumers more effectively. Many designers highlighted that live streaming and influencer collaborations have significantly boosted sales, as they allow for real-time interaction with potential buyers and create a sense of urgency and exclusivity around limited-edition cultural products. Influencers play a key role in shaping consumer preferences and driving trends, making their endorsements a valuable asset for cultural brands. With the increasing reliance on digital platforms, designers and businesses must continuously adapt to new marketing techniques and changing consumer behaviors to maintain a competitive edge in the industry as shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7

Comparison of traditional and digital marketing strategies

Marketing Strategy	Advantages	Challenges
Traditional Retail Marketing	Strong brand presence in physical stores, direct consumer interaction.	High operational costs, limited audience reach.
E-commerce & Social Media Marketing	Expands consumer reach, lower costs, real-time engagement.	Requires constant content creation, high competition.

3.5 Role of University-Industry Collaboration

Although collaboration between academia and industry remains limited, successful case studies demonstrate the potential benefits of stronger partnerships. For example, the cases of Tsinghua University and Chongqing University illustrate that when academic research aligns with industry needs, it can drive cultural product innovation. These institutions have facilitated design competitions, established entrepreneurship incubators, and conducted industry-driven research projects, effectively transforming academic findings into practical applications that support industry development.

Despite these positive examples, interviewees reported that bureaucratic barriers, slow academic processes, and misalignment with commercial priorities remain key challenges that hinder deeper collaboration. These obstacles create a disconnect between academia and industry in terms of cooperation models, research objectives, and application of findings, ultimately reducing the efficiency and effectiveness of partnerships. To foster stronger university-industry collaboration, it is essential to implement measures that optimize cooperation mechanisms, shorten the research-to-application cycle, and enhance alignment with industry demands. Such efforts will facilitate knowledge exchange, research application, and talent development, ensuring mutually beneficial outcomes in Figure 2.

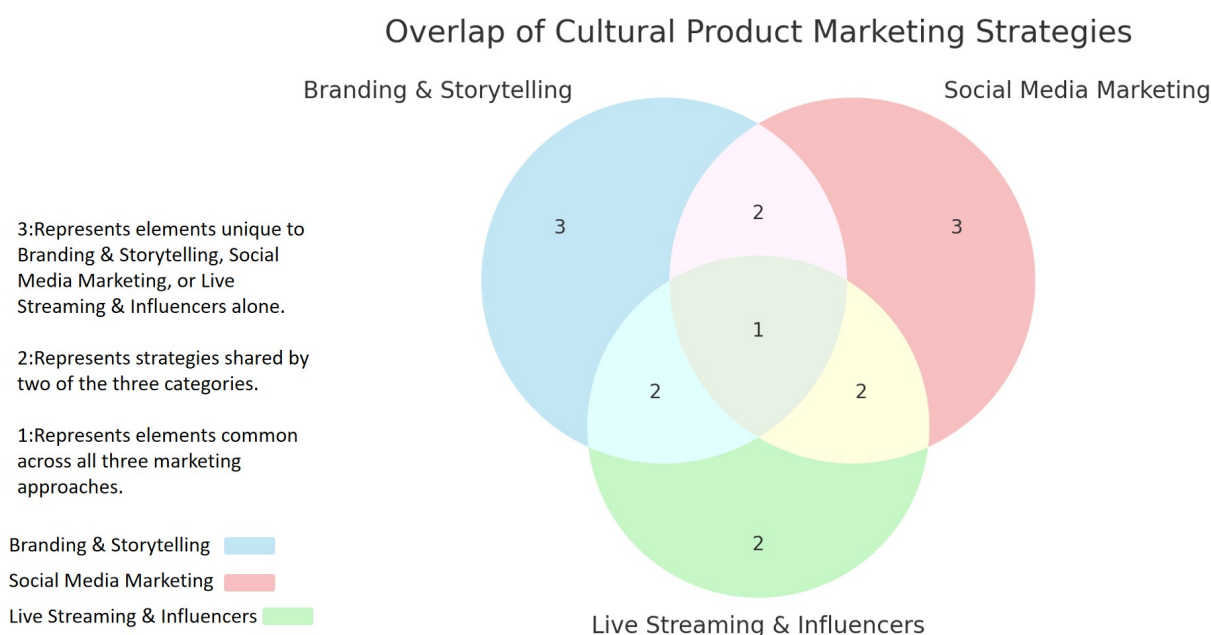


Fig. 2. Overlap of cultural product marketing strategies

4. Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight the key challenges, opportunities, and commercialization strategies within China's cultural and creative industry. Through expert interviews and case studies, it was evident that while the industry is experiencing significant growth, several structural barriers continue to hinder its full potential. One of the primary concerns raised by industry professionals is the difficulty in securing financial support for cultural creative businesses. Many entrepreneurs struggle with long-term funding sustainability, making it challenging to scale their operations or invest in product innovation. Furthermore, intellectual property protection remains a major issue, as designers frequently face unauthorized reproductions of their work, which weakens market competitiveness and discourages original creativity.

Despite these challenges, the industry continues to expand, driven by digital transformation and the growing consumer demand for cultural products that incorporate heritage and storytelling. The rise of e-commerce platforms has provided designers with new opportunities to reach broader audiences while reducing dependence on traditional retail distribution. Platforms such as Taobao, JD.com, and Xiaohongshu have allowed independent designers to establish direct connections with their consumers, improving market accessibility and brand visibility. Additionally, social media marketing and live streaming have emerged as powerful tools in enhancing consumer engagement and boosting product sales. Many designers have successfully leveraged digital content strategies to build strong brand narratives, using influencer collaborations and live product demonstrations to attract a larger customer base.

Government support has also played a vital role in shaping the cultural and creative industry's development. Policy incentives, such as start-up grants and financial aid for cultural innovation, have provided critical resources for businesses to expand. Moreover, the promotion of cross-border cultural trade has facilitated the entry of Chinese cultural products into international markets, further strengthening the global influence of the country's creative industries. However, some industry professionals noted that while these policies are beneficial, their implementation could be more targeted to address the specific needs of cultural entrepreneurs, particularly in the areas of financial assistance, market protection, and intellectual property enforcement.

Another key finding of this study is the limited but emerging collaboration between industry and academia. While universities possess significant research potential that could contribute to cultural product innovation, many designers expressed concerns that academic outputs are often not aligned with market demands. The case studies of Tsinghua University and Chongqing University demonstrate that well-structured university-industry partnerships can be beneficial in fostering innovation, but challenges such as bureaucratic constraints and differences in research and commercial timelines need to be addressed. Strengthening collaborations between academia and industry could lead to more practical and market-driven innovations, ensuring that cultural creative products maintain both artistic and commercial value.

While this study provides valuable insights into the commercialization strategies and challenges of the cultural and creative industry, it has certain limitations. The research is based on a qualitative analysis of industry professionals, meaning the findings are largely shaped by the perspectives of practitioners rather than a broader range of stakeholders such as policymakers or consumers. Additionally, the study is limited to specific urban centers in China, which may not fully reflect the experiences of cultural entrepreneurs in other regions or international markets. Future research should consider expanding the sample size and incorporating quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive analysis of industry trends. Furthermore, additional studies could explore the role of

artificial intelligence and emerging technologies in optimizing cultural product design and commercialization.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving landscape of China's cultural and creative industry. By analyzing the commercialization strategies employed by designers and the influence of digital transformation, this research offers practical insights for entrepreneurs seeking to enhance their market presence. The findings also provide useful recommendations for policymakers and academic institutions on how to better support the industry's growth. As the cultural and creative sector continues to evolve, fostering stronger collaborations between designers, businesses, government agencies, and academic researchers will be essential in driving sustainable innovation and ensuring the long-term success of cultural creative products.

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