



Role of Attitude Toward Destination on the Relationship between Travel Motivation, Destination Image, Risk Perception, and Rural Tourism

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Abstract

Since the beginning of 2023, China has been in new normal conditions, and the tourism sector is gradually back to the previous level before the pandemic. It has primarily depended on domestic travellers in recent years as inbound tourism has almost stagnated. Rural tourism, as a primary type of tourism in China, has attracted most domestic visitors and has been considered an effective strategy to simultaneously promote the economy of rural areas. However, it is still unknown what makes visitors intend to go to rural tourism after experiencing many restrictions in China. The study has examined the direct and indirect effects of leading indicators, travel motivation, destination image, travel risk perception, and attitude toward destination on rural tourism intention with empirical research. Further, as quantitative research to estimate the mediating role of attitude toward destination, a simple random sampling is used to collect data via questionnaire. The Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is employed to predict the structural model derived from the sample size of Jiangxi Province's urban residents in China. A pilot study was conducted, and the reliability and validity of the constructs were tested with 320 respondents from Jiangxi Province. This study aims to provide both theoretical and empirical insights. The study sheds light on the needs and concerns of potential tourists, benefiting rural tourism stakeholders.

Keywords: Rural tourism; Travel intention; Attitude toward destination; China tourism

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Introduction

The tourism sector has gradually become the largest industry in the world, overtaking the petroleum and automotive sectors since the 1990s (Frederico et al., 2021). Some scholars estimated that tourism would create 65 million jobs and contribute 4 percent of the world's GDP yearly, with around 9.2 trillion U.S. dollars in the next decade (Jackson, 2021). The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reported 1.5 billion international visitors

worldwide, a 4% increase in 2019 (UNWTO, 2020). However, the booming development of the tourism sector was unexpectedly stopped by a worldwide epidemic. It has had a significant impact, particularly on consumer behavior in tourism, such as travel intention. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehend the current situation and promote sustainable tourism development after experiencing global emergencies.

During the past twenty years, the tourism industry of China, as a significant part of global tourism, is greatly dependent on domestic tourism since the number of domestic tourists far exceeds the number of inbound and outbound tourists. Moreover, domestic tourism makes a significant contribution to the economy. China's tourism priorities have reversed from inbound to domestic travel since 2008, realigning the three categories of travel: emphasis on domestic travel, proactive inbound marketing, and planned outbound travel growth (Wu et al., 2019). Data has shown a decrease of 3,127 million visits from domestic travelers in 2020 compared to the previous year and a decrease of around RMB 3.5 trillion in overall tourism earnings (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2023). During the unprecedented difficult time, when there were few overseas visitor arrivals amid the pandemic due to health risks and travel restrictions, the whole tourism sector of China depended on domestic tourism to survive. According to Kupa and Szemerédi (2021), the pandemic has substantially impacted traveler's travel behavior and destination preferences, enabling them to become more ecologically sensitive and gravitate toward interior locations near natural areas. Due to the abundance of natural landscapes and distinctive traditional customs in China's rural areas, rural tourism has gained much attention from travelers and other stakeholders.

Numerous factors influence tourist behavior, yet significant knowledge gaps remain, particularly in how the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) can comprehensively account for all aspects impacting travel intention, especially post-pandemic elements like travel risk perception. In recent studies, a popular trend is to use the theory of planned behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991) to examine the causal-predictive relationships between independent variables and the research objective, such as travel intention. Unfortunately, because of its limitations, the theory of planned behavior is unable to adequately account for all the aspects impacting travel intention in various settings (Fan et al., 2023). Furthermore, the extent to which elements that were theoretically significant after experiencing the pandemic, like travel risk perception, impact rural tourism intention is yet unknown.

As previously demonstrated, the pandemic has significantly impacted the tourism business globally. UNWTO (2023) reports that there has been a substantial decline in the worldwide tourism GDP contribution rate, which fell from 4.1 percent in 2019 to 1.8 percent in 2020. This decline coincides with a 34.3 percent decline in global visitor arrivals. Both GDP earnings and visitor numbers exhibit an industrial regression. The Chinese tourism sector is also facing this dilemma. The tourism industry's practitioners, such as destination marketing groups and business owners, are under pressure due to a decline in traveler numbers and revenues compared with prior years. Although many researchers have noticed the destructive effects, such as industrial shock and economic loss (Hao et al., 2021), effective and practical solutions for the industrial problems are still under trial.

There is significant research opportunity on tourist behavior and travel intention, mostly centering on how people perceive travel risks related to health after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in China. However, other important research topics related to tourist behavior in rural tourism also need to be studied since China has moved to the new normal in 2023. Finding a workable system and practical strategies to revive the rural tourism market

and drive it to a new prosperous stage based on research on tourist behavior shifts is a perplexing task. Therefore, the study raises the following questions:

1. What is the direct influence of travel motivation on rural tourism intention among urban residents of Jiangxi Province, China?
2. What is the direct effect of destination image on rural tourism intention among urban residents of Jiangxi Province, China?
3. What is the relationship between travel risk perception and rural tourism intention among urban residents of Jiangxi Province, China?
4. To what extent do travel motivation and travel risk perception indirectly affect rural tourism intention via the mediating effect of attitude toward destination among urban residents of Jiangxi Province, China?

The current study aims to identify the significant role of travel motivation, destination image, and risk perception that affect potential tourists' decision to travel in rural areas. The following purposes have been proposed for this study to investigate the relationship between travel motivation, destination image, risk perception, attitude toward destination, and rural tourism intention in Jiangxi Province of China under the context of revitalizing and promoting the tourism market.

1. To examine the direct impact of travel motivation on rural tourism intention among urban residents of Jiangxi Province, China.
2. To assess the direct impact of destination image on rural tourism intention among urban residents of Jiangxi Province, China.
3. To examine the direct impact of travel risk perception on rural tourism intention among urban residents of Jiangxi Province, China.
4. To investigate the indirect relationships between travel motivation, travel risk perception, and rural tourism intention via the mediating effect of attitude toward destination among urban residents of Jiangxi Province, China.

The study examines the influence of travel risk perception, destination image, and travel motivation directly on rural tourism intention and the indirect influence via attitude toward destination in Jiangxi, China. Using a questionnaire, the study relies heavily on data from a random sampling of urban residents in Jiangxi, China. The research respondents are to meet the following criteria:

- (1) Urban residents of Jiangxi Province, China as urban residents are the largest consumer group of rural tourism,
- (2) Respondents with age from 20 to 59 years old,
- (3) Respondents with past travel experience within the last two years,
- (4) Respondents who are interested in rural tourism.

Significance of the Study

Under the context of China's rural revitalization, rural tourism has been in a fast development process to raise the rural economy and employment and protect traditional culture, although interrupted by the overwhelming pandemic. However, there is no rich research on the changes in tourist behavior in rural tourism and the degree of the main factors influencing rural tourism intention. It is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Push and Pull Theory. Theoretically, the study contributes to supplementing the research topic by examining mediating structural effects of attitude toward destination between the proposed tourist behavioral factors and rural tourism intention. In addition, the current study

compiles several theories and models to establish and validate the earlier theoretical framework and offer new insights for future research.

Because of its vulnerability and sensitivity, the tourism industry and practitioners should learn lessons from the overwhelming pandemic. Based on the empirical findings, the study helps propose practical recommendations for developing the rural tourism market during the industrial recovery period and sustainable development (Mohammadi et al., 2017, 2021). Moreover, stakeholders such as business managers, operators, and destination marketing organizations can get feasible advice or insights from the findings of the study to keep rural tourism with a competitive advantage and stable, prosperous development, getting a better understanding of the effect of travel motivation, destination image, and risk perception on rural tourism intention via the interfering role of attitude toward destination.

Literature Review

Rural Tourism Intention

In a rural context, tourism may significantly strengthen the economies of a destination as a method of economic growth and diversification by generating income and job opportunities (Sharpley, 2002). Previous research indicates that tourism has the potential to expand rural residents' portfolios by serving as an additional source of income, that they can use current resources without a significant amount of additional investment, and maintain traditional economic activities (Kheiri and Nasihatkon, 2016). For this reason, tourism has long been regarded as a powerful accelerator for the growth and rejuvenation of rural areas. Moreover, overdeveloped urban resources and over-tourism in urban attractions make rural tourism an alternative to mitigate the negative effects of mass tourism in cities (Loureiro & González, 2008). The concept of rural tourism has been present in travel literature since 1994, when academics defined it as a complex and multifaceted form of tourism that encompasses more than just activities conducted in rural areas (Chi et al., 2020). However, there is still no consensus about the definition of rural tourism due to differences between countries and regions. Rural tourism generally includes essential aspects of original heritage, local customs, beliefs, and folklore (Su, 2011). Considering the Chinese background of this study, rural tourism refers to a complex tourism product with various patterns based on rural pastoral beauty, folk cultures, and farming activities. The main target customers of these tourism offerings are city residents (Zhang, 2017).

Travel intention, as a kind of behavioral intention, is defined as "the subjective probability of whether customers will perform particular actions linked to tourism services" (Rastegar et al., 2021). It has been usually regarded as a measurable indicator to predict a tourist's travel decisions in practice. When the travel intention is specific to rural tourism, it means rural tourism intention, also called travel intention toward rural tourism in some journal articles. It is generally believed that pinpointing possible variables influencing travellers' behavioral intentions can help them better comprehend the decision-making process in travel. Much of the research on travel intentions in the recent three years has been related to the impact of the pandemic. Travel intention during the pandemic is severely impacted by travellers' fear of traveling or being in crowded areas and their perception of behavior control over travel risk (Ivanova et al., 2021). There was a slightly higher intention for rural tourism during the particular period than other forms of tourism, although the whole sector struggled. A healthy rural lifestyle is ensured by the relatively stable rural population, large spaces, and self-sufficient sustainable food sources, by contrast with the congested metropolitan environment and complex residents (Jia et al., 2021). Previous research has

shown that travel intention is affected by many factors, such as travel motivation, risk perception, experience, and destination image (Karl et al., 2020).

Travel Motivation

Motivation is frequently described as an internal condition that energizes and guides an individual's behavior to meet people's physiological and psychological needs (Moutinho, 2000). In tourism, travel motivation arises when a person becomes aware of a need deficiency (Mill and Morrison, 2002). Travel motivation is the primary driving force behind potential tourists' actions, and it contributes to finding the deep-seated reason for individual travel decisions, such as travel intention.

Several theories have been used to study travel motivation, such as the theory of needs hierarchy, the travel career ladder, and the push-pull theory. Pearce (1991) has found potential for achieving self-actualization, love, and physiological needs draws travelers to vacation spots based on Maslow's theory from cases of travel experiences provided by tourists in four developed Western countries. However, some scholars have pointed out that the hierarchy theory excludes essential travel needs such as dominance and abasement (Witt and Witt, 1995). Then, a conceptual framework for comprehending travel motivation, the travel career ladder (TCL), was introduced based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs regarding self-actualization. According to Hsu and Huang (2008), the TCL holds that the needs or motivations of travelers are arranged in a hierarchy or ladder, with fulfilment needs at the top and relaxation needs at the bottom, which assumes tourists seek higher level needs as they gain more travel experience. The hierarchy or ladder further divides needs into safety/security, relationship, self-esteem, development, and self-actualization. Furthermore, some travelers may broadly "climb" the ladder. In contrast, others may choose to remain at a particular rung due to unanticipated events or limiting factors such as financial or health limitations. Nevertheless, despite the conceptual framework TCL's attractiveness and attention-grabbing, the fundamental assumptions of the theory are not well supported by empirical data (Ryan and Cessford, 2003).

According to Dann (1981), there are two types of motivation: "push" and "pull", which is widely accepted by many scholars. The former emphasizes an internal desire to travel. It is thought to be a sociopsychological need, while the latter, which is driven by external influences, reveals what draws people to a particular location after push motivation has emerged. While push motivators have a significant impact on travel intention, as some researchers highlight, Crompton (1979) has shown that push and pull motivators may have different effects on different stages of the travel decision-making process, which aims to connect these motivations to push and pull factors by stating that cultural motives are pull factors and socio-psychological motives are push factors for holidaymakers. Therefore, research on travel motivation has significantly benefited from Crompton's insightful work on identifying the nine motives for travel. However, Hsu and Huang (2008) state that there is debate over the belief held by certain academics that push variables serve as motivating elements while pull factors serve as destination features. This leads to different research focusing on travel motivation. According to Iso-Ahola (1983), tourists tend to take a leisure trip for two main reasons: seeking and escaping, which is quite similar to the push and pull theory. The push and pull theory has been popularly adopted in tourism research, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Travel motivation has a significant effect on travel intention. Gan et al. (2023) claim that distinct motivations positively influence behavioral intention in China based on visitors' behavioral intention in health and wellness tourism with the understanding of push and pull

theory. Mansfeld (1992) has acknowledged that travel motivation is a crucial stage that initiates travel decisions before an actual trip. Travel motivation is undoubtedly an essential variable in tourism studies, but the connection with travel intention deserves more academic attention. Some scholars focus on seniors' travel motivations and find that seniors would rather travel to places where they can maintain happiness or serenity. In terms of rural tourism in China, a hypothesis is proposed:

H1. Tourists' travel motivation has a positive influence on the intention to travel to rural areas.

Destination Image

According to Crompton (1979), the destination image is a mental representation of the qualities and advantages of a destination that a traveler is seeking, compiled from various beliefs and perceptions gathered over time through information processing from multiple sources. It generally includes cognitive and affective images, as Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) have mentioned. The former one refers to a traveler's logical appraisal of the destination's attributes, whereas the latter refers to tourists' emotional reactions to the location. Notably, destination managers and marketers seem to observe cognitive image more frequently when they need to know which elements have the greatest impact on visitors' future behavior, as the cognitive dimensions are more manageable to depict and implement (Chen, 2001). In addition, some academics clarified, from a supply-demand standpoint, two types of destination images: projected and perceived image (Kim and Lehto, 2013). Projected image refers to the understanding that a destination tries to instill in travelers' minds through tourism marketing initiatives, and perceived image means the perception that travelers hold of a destination. Significantly, previous research has demonstrated that the destination image has an essential impact on tourist behavior and their intentions to travel for the first time or revisit (Prayag, 2009).

For a few decades, the image of a city, area, or tourism destination has gained much attention from academics. It helps to establish a consensus that, when choosing a trip destination, destination image perception is a critical factor in travel intention (Crompton, 1979). However, what shapes the image of a destination does not get an agreement due to the complexity of different contexts. It can be related to various factors such as past travel experience, e-word-of-mouth, satisfaction, etc. Within the tourist sector, destination image perception has been applied in various research areas. With a focus on sustainable tourism, Azmi et al. (2023) explain how local governments and industry practitioners plan and upgrade current tourism resources to establish unique products of the tourism destinations in advance that will obtain a competitive advantage over the long run. Furthermore, El Sheikh (2020) employs empirical research to comprehend how the information provided online, the facilities of museums, leisure, socializing, and accessibility affect tourists' perception of a destination before the visit. Consequently, it is vital to establish a distinctive and appealing destination as a part of long-term tourism planning to increase the destination's popularity.

Some scholars have stated that destination image is closely connected with travel intention. A study on a historical destination in China by Lu et al. (2015) has shown the impact of destination image on many other marketing dimensions, such as satisfaction, loyalty, and intention to visit. Moreover, it is crucial to focus on all the elements that contribute to shaping an individual's mental image of the destination because how that person perceives the museum will influence whether they intend to visit museum tourism (Li, 2018). Thus, there is a hypothesis connecting destination image with rural tourism intention:

H2. Destination image has a positive influence on rural tourism intention.

Travel Risk Perception

Travel risk perception is another important factor influencing people's travel intention from a negative perspective. Cui et al. (2016) state that consumers' subjective assessments of tourism risk contribute to the unfavorable effects of travel due to the disparity between traveler's subjective perceptions and safety facts. Due to the tourism industry's inherent sensitivity and fragility to severe crises, avoiding a serious hit, such as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in countries is impossible. Perceived threat, one kind of individual risk perception, is the degree to which a person believes a threat will negatively impact their health (Chatterjee et al., 2020). Travelers tend to reject risky conduct, and the likelihood of avoiding an event that poses harm to their well-being increases with the perceived threat level of the event. People may perceive different risks, from feeling undervalued financially to fearing involvement in a terrorist attack or other criminal activity. However, the nature and importance of these risks may vary depending on the location or circumstance (Fuchs and Reichel, 2010). Tourism-related risks are divided into three categories by Sharifpour et al. (2014): (1) physical risks, (2) destination-specific risks, and (3) general risks in the study of Australian traveler's risk perception on visiting the Middle East. The perceived benefits of a planned trip can be greatly impacted by the level of risk associated with the destination (Lehto et al., 2008). However, it is important to note that potential tourists' perceptions of travel risk help shape their long-term impression of the destination, which is crucial in the decision-making process.

There has been abundant tourism risk research related to the pandemic in recent years. During the COVID-19 pandemic in China, Zhu and Deng (2020) investigated how risk perception influenced rural tourism intention. They did this by dividing risk perception into six dimensions by adding specific risks, such as equipment risk. According to Shin et al. (2022), a study on mutual trust among visitors indicates that if potential travelers think other visitors at a place would voluntarily observe safety rules, they are more likely to travel, illustrating how perceived travel risk has a direct and indirect impact on the intention and choice of potential tourists to travel. Therefore, individuals show a higher sensitivity to tourism or travel destinations within the special period when some major crises occur such as natural disasters, epidemics, and political riots. Tourists need enough time to get out of the psychological shadow caused by these crises and regain their confidence in traveling.

Research has demonstrated that a tourist's decision to visit or avoid a destination is significantly influenced by their perception of the risk involved (JamalKhan et al., 2017; Karl et al., 2020). Perceived risk is one of the most important elements determining travel intention, even though there is little actual risk (Godovykh et al., 2021). It drives tourists to consider strategies to minimize the possibility of travel risk when they make decisions (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006). Zhu and Deng's (2020) research also revealed a negative relationship between travel risk perception and rural tourism intention. Thus, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H3. Travel risk perception negatively and significantly affects rural tourism intention.

Attitude toward Destination

According to the theory of planned behavior, attitude is one of three factors that influence an individual's intention and action, as well as positive or negative opinion toward a product, service, or destination (Ajzen, 1985). It examines the characteristics of behavior-specific elements intended to forecast and interpret how people will behave in specific situations. An individual's attitude, whether favorable or not, directly affects how strongly they intend to

behave; the more strongly they intend to behave, the more likely it is that they will act (Kim et al., 2009). Moreover, McCarthy et al. (2021) use cognitive dissonance theory, another theory that has gained attention from the field of tourism research, to investigate the effects of travel-related cognitive dissonance of life events on traveler's attitudes toward travel. Through an exploratory panel study, they discover that individuals may adjust their behaviors or attitudes in an effort to achieve consonance, offering a useful theoretical framework for understanding "disagreement" between attitudes and behaviors. The tourist attitude is more about tourism destinations in many tourism studies. It refers to how travelers feel about a place and its tourism offerings based on how they perceive the destination's features and products (Bresciani et al., 2015). In addition, Um and Crompton (1990) have discovered that attitude plays a significant role in deciding whether a potential destination fits the tourist's demand. Therefore, it is universally acknowledged that a tourist's attitude toward a destination is an essential factor for travel decisions theoretically.

Prior research once demonstrated that travelers with stronger behavioral beliefs about push and pull motivation will have a more positive attitude regarding the destination, which successively influences their behavioral intention to visit (Huang and Hsu, 2008). Some researchers have explained that a visitor's perception of a destination can influence their attitude toward it by generating new opinions, changing preexisting attitudes regarding the place, or recognizing the opinions of other tourists (Kim and Richardson, 2003), which affects travel intention in the process of decision making. In addition, travel risk perception also has an influence on attitude and behavioral intention (Quintal et al., 2010). Due to the severe effects of COVID-19 these years, travelers are becoming more aware of travel risks. An unfavorable attitude about the destination, at least temporarily, will influence their desire to travel if they have a high-risk perception. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

- H4. Attitude toward destination has a positive influence on rural tourism intention.
- H5. Attitude toward destination can mediate travel motivation and rural tourism intention.
- H6. Attitude toward destination can mediate destination image and rural tourism intention.
- H7. Attitude toward destination mediates the relationship between travel risk perception and rural tourism intention.

Figure 1 demonstrates the conceptual framework of the study.

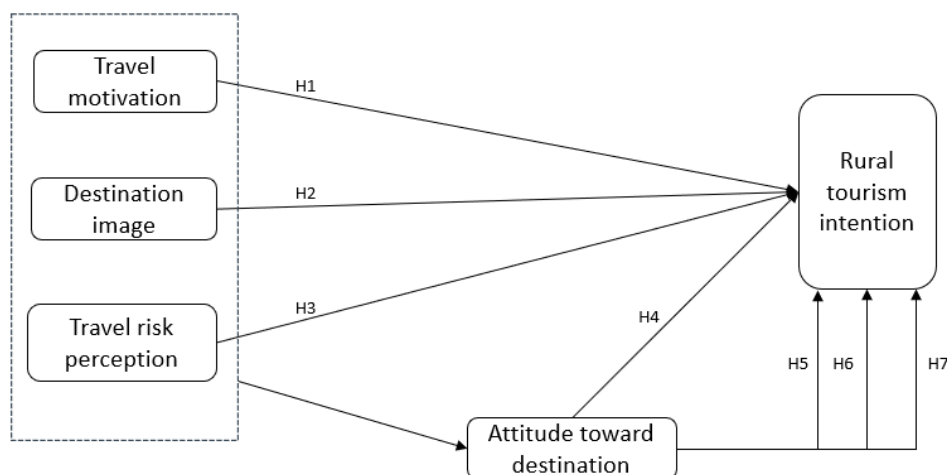


Figure 1 Research Framework

Methodology

Research Paradigm

This study primarily uses the research paradigm of positivism and a quantitative research approach. According to Schwandt (2001), a paradigm is "a shared worldview that expresses beliefs and values within a discipline and directs how problems are solved". Rather than seeking explanations and facts over subjective interpretation, positivism strongly emphasises precise measurement of one reality and the capacity to generalize and reproduce outcomes in comparable settings. Bourdeau (2018) mentions that positivism draws a distinction between metaphysical and empirical knowledge for forming a concept. The field of sociology can only emerge from the realization that social facts are genuine phenomena under study. Therefore, social science research is more likely to employ positivism, and the methods are often combined with the survey, causal-comparative, experimental, correlational, quantitative, and quasi-experimental. Numerous data and other materials have been gathered through experiments, studies, and statistical analysis on social phenomena, understanding why a social phenomenon occurred or how it will change by measuring the factors (Schwandt, 2001). As data analysis is the key part of positivism, it frequently employs quantitative research methods from a methodological perspective.

The fundamental methods of quantitative analysis are data analysis, data sorting and calculation, and a variety of analyses using mathematical modeling to determine the interconnection between the data (Hair et al., 2020). Quantitative data are measurements in which the characteristics of any given object are illustrated with numbers, which are provided in a manner that facilitates statistical analysis (Mohammadi, 2019). Researchers holding a positivist value precise quantitative data and frequently employ survey, statistical, and experimental techniques. Moreover, they look for "objective" research methodologies and strict measuring instruments and carefully examine the measured data to test theories. The research objective of the study is to examine the relationship between travel motivation, destination image, risk perception, attitude toward destination, and rural tourism intention. Obviously, quantitative research is proper to test and reflect the relationships by gathering data from the target population in the study. Based on Saunders et al., (2016), there are several most commonly used methodological choices such as interview, observation, and survey questionnaire (Sun et al., 2022). An extensive review of the most authoritative literature on travel intention and tourists' behavior also indicates that most significant empirical studies have employed a quantitative approach, primarily questionnaire surveys. It is a useful tool for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting quantitative data that can be employed to identify probable reasons for causal relationships. Therefore, the study applies a positivist paradigm and a quantitative approach via questionnaires to accomplish its research objective.

Population and Sampling

Due to limitations in funds, time, and access in practice, it is incredibly challenging to collect data from all individuals, organizations, and entities as study subjects. A procedure known as sampling is used to select a subset of the larger population as a representative sample, allowing researchers to estimate and draw conclusions about the population (Saunders et al., 2016). This implies that the researcher must have precise inclusion and exclusion criteria when selecting a target population. The study aims to investigate the impact of travel motivation, destination image, perception of travel risk, and attitude toward the destination on the intention of rural tourism in Jiangxi Province, China. The urban inhabitants of Jiangxi

Province, ranging from 20 to 59 years old, are the target research population as they are more likely to take a rural trip and are economically independent.

$$s = \frac{X^2 NP(1 - P)}{d^2(N - 1) + X^2 P(1 - P)}$$

s = required sample size.

X^2 = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.8416).

N = the population size.

P = the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size).

d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05).

The sample size is another critical issue for the research project. Many analytical techniques are often used, such as multiple regression analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and so forth (Rahi, 2017). The study follows the renowned and influential rules in the academy, the formula provided by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), to determine the sample size. The total population of Jiangxi Province was 4,518,860 thousand in 2020, according to the latest data from the government. By calculating, when $X^2=3.841$, $N=45188600$, $P=0.5$, $d=0.05$, then $s=384$. Therefore, the study is required to cover at least 384 samples of the target population. In terms of social research design, research sampling is a crucial process. It is closely connected to the goal and outcome of the study as well as to the data gathering, examination, and interpretation. In general, probability and non-probability sampling are most commonly used in different research occasions. According to Bougie and Sekaran (2019), probability sampling is the method that assigns a known, non-zero likelihood of inclusion in a sample to every member of the population to ensure a representative sample (Jie et al., 2023; Tingfeng et al., 2022). The study adopted simple random probability sampling techniques, which enabled it to grab each member of the target population equally to ensure a high representative sample and persuasive generalization of findings. Thus, the questionnaires are distributed randomly in different cities of Jiangxi Province for online data collection (Pan et al., 2023; Qi et al., 2023).

Scale Measurement

As the study applies positivism and quantitative research, the seven-point Likert scale marking from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” is proper, as it is used in many qualified academic papers on related research. Respondents are asked to use an ordered numerical or categorical scale to indicate how much they agree or disagree with a statement of the survey questionnaire on the Likert scale. In pilot testing, the questionnaire has shown good reliability and validity.

Measurement of rural tourism intention: The scale of rural tourism intention has been adapted from existing literature to be suitable for the current context of the study, using a 7-

point Likert scale. There are three items to describe the rural tourism intention, with Cronbach's $\alpha=0.852$ and AVE=0.772.

Measurement of travel motivation: Pearce and Lee (2005) have discovered that novelty, relaxation, and relationships are the most critical factors in travel motivation. They also noted that a basic set of motivational elements for travel, such as self-development, relaxation, enhancing relationships, and escapism, appeared to form the foundation of motivation for all travelers. The 7-point Likert scale is adopted to measure the nine items of travel motivation derived from extensive literature. It reveals adequate reliability ($\alpha=0.935$) and validity (AVE=0.630).

Measurement of destination image: Previous research has mainly concentrated on investigating destination image from a cognitive image perspective because of a destination's attributes. The study also follows this principle and reflects destination image with ten statements adapted from existing research, getting a pilot outcome $\alpha=0.943$, CR=0.952, and AVE=0.687.

Measurement of travel risk perception: Five categories of travel risk adapted from prior research are time, financial, performance, physical, and sociopsychological. Ten items are listed in the study to measure respondents' perceptions of travel risk. Similarly, a 7-point Likert scale is used to identify the level of agreement on the items. The load factor of each item is more than 0.80 ($\alpha=0.956$, AVE=0.714), showing that the questionnaire is of high quality.

Measurement of attitude toward destination: The degree to which tourists agree with the five statements, extracted from the study of Hsu et al. (2010) to be in accordance with the study's context, measures their attitude toward a rural destination. It gets a pilot result of $\alpha=0.874$ and AVE=0.665, and the load factor of each item is higher than 0.80.

Table 3.1: Construct Reliability and Validity Result

Indicator	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
TI	0.852	0.910	0.772
TM	0.935	0.944	0.630
DI	0.943	0.952	0.687
TR	0.956	0.961	0.714
ATT	0.874	0.908	0.665

Data Analysis

Data analysis is necessary after collecting sufficient data to get statistical evidence to support viewpoints. Numerous approaches and strategies are available for data analysis, depending on the study and survey objects, such as regression analysis and logistic analysis (Chen et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). However, as a second-generation statistical technique, structural equation modeling (SEM) allows researchers to build a complicated model with multiple variables and predict their inner relationships simultaneously, overcoming the limitations of previous techniques (Hair et al., 2022). To be more specific, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is more suitable for causal-predictive relations (Chin et al., 2020). Thus, PLS-SEM can help the study post a complicated structural model with multiple independent variables and a mediating determinant to examine their effects on rural tourism intention. In addition, PLS-SEM can assess a single regression formula sequence to check the result, as Hair et al. (2020) have explained. In practice, SPSS

software is employed for data analysis and verification. In contrast, SmartPLS 4.0 software is anticipated to test the relationship between independent and dependent variables in the study. The path coefficients are employed to test the study's hypotheses, together with the R^2 value, effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). Moreover, bootstrapping is used to test whether the mediating effect is significant in the study. Descriptive and demographic analyses are used to explain the target population's characteristics (Mohammadi, 2019; Song et al., 2023). As is shown (Table 4.1), each outcome Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) is less than 0.85. Further, each variable's AVE extraction square root is greater than the correlation between this variable and others, so the data is considered to have good discriminative validity.

Table 4.1: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT)

Indicator	ATT	DI	TI	TM	TR
ATT					
DI	0.044				
TI	0.230	0.327			
TM	0.165	0.152	0.254		
TR	0.344	0.067	0.190	0.053	

Future Study Recommendation

Future studies can delve deeper into understanding and explaining the relationship between travel motivation, destination image, and risk perception with rural tourism intention from different perspectives and under varying settings. Additionally, potential research may explore other factors influencing tourists' rural tourism intentions and support for destination recovery.

Due to the time constraints associated with data collection, the current study employs cross-sectional data from Jiangxi Province to test the hypotheses. Therefore, a more extensive research sample, including other countries or regions, from a longitudinal perspective can be considered to test the conclusions further. Moreover, examining rural tourism revisit intentions is another compelling topic that warrants further investigation based on the current study's findings.

Expanding the research to include diverse geographical locations and temporal dimensions could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play. Future research could also explore the role of digital marketing, social media influence, and cultural differences in shaping rural tourism intentions. Understanding these aspects offers valuable insights for destination marketers and policymakers aiming to promote sustainable rural tourism and enhance destination resilience. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, could enrich the data and provide nuanced insights into tourists' motivations and perceptions. A multi-faceted approach to future research, incorporating broader samples, longitudinal studies, and qualitative methods, will be instrumental in building a robust understanding of rural tourism dynamics and developing effective strategies to support and sustain this sector.

Conclusion

Rural tourism has been regarded as an effective strategy to promote the local economy and revitalize the traditional culture. However, due to the epidemic, Chinese tourists' consumption behavior and confidence have been greatly influenced. The study tries to find the direct effect of travel motivation, destination image, and travel risk perception on travel intention toward rural tourism, with the mediating role of attitude toward destination after

experiencing a difficult time. Moreover, the conceptual framework extends previous research focusing on rural tourism intention from theoretical and practical perspectives. Overall, the paper focuses on rural tourism development in China after a long pandemic period and aims to find the causal relationships between the proposed variables and rural tourism intention. With a high reliability and validity result of pilot testing from a small sample of Jiangxi Province, the direct effects of travel motivation, destination image, and travel risk perception on rural tourism intention can be proved. The mediating influence of attitude toward destination is evident on the relationships between travel motivation, travel risk perception, with rural tourism intention respectively at the current stage.

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