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Article

Modelling tourists' travel intention: Role of tourism destination image, perceived value and situational involvement

Yongyi Li, Songyu Jiang*

Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand

*** Corresponding author:** Songyu Jiang, jiang.song@rmutr.ac.th

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Abstract: Promoting travelling intention within social media is significant for stakeholders to grasp a new tourism market and cultivate a new model for development of tourism industry. This study aims to understand path of destination image affecting travelling intention, and to investigate the mediation role of perceived value, furthermore, to uncover the role of moderator of situational involvement. This paper conducts a survey on tourists visiting Guilin, collecting 435 questionnaires, and uses the structural equation modeling method to explore how the image of the tourism destination affects tourists' willingness to travel. The research results indicate that cognitive image, emotional image, and projected image all have a significant positive impact on perceived value, perceived value as a significant mediator to bridge the relationship among the destination image and tourists' travel intention. Furthermore, situational involvement plays a negative moderating role in the mediating effect of emotional value. This study endeavor will serve to enrich the understanding of perceived value theory, destination image theory, and tourism consumer behavior theory. It will also provide theoretical foundations and policy recommendations for guiding tourism consumer behavior, analyzing destination image perception, and destination marketing.

Keywords: social media; tourism destination image; tourists' travel intention; perceived value

1. Introduction

In the era of smart tourism characterized by digitalization, networking, and intelligence, the tourism industry is continuously evolving and improving through contemporary information technologies such as big data, the Internet, and cloud computing, moving towards a high-quality and sustainable development direction. As the primary channel for tourists to access information about tourism destinations and disseminate destination images (Haobin Ye et al., 2021), social media plays a significant role in the field of tourism. Social media has the ability to break through temporal and spatial constraints, altering tourists' perceptions of time and space, thereby enhancing the perceived value of the travel experience (Li et al., 2022). The destination image disseminated through social media not only satisfies tourists' desire for novel experiences but also triggers positive emotions, leading to the formation of tourist consumption behavior (Lee et al., 2021). Therefore, exploring the relationship between destination image and consumer behavior in the context of social media has important academic value and practical implications.

In the study of the impact of tourism destination image on consumer behavior, its influence primarily manifests in three dimensions: purchase decision, satisfaction, and post-purchase behavior (Wang et al., 2022). Firstly, the destination image

deliberately created by governments, destination marketing organizations, and tourism platforms affects consumers' purchase decision by shaping their psychological perceptions and evaluations (Seo and Um, 2022; Yang et al., 2021). Consumers' emotional impressions of a destination can influence their choice to visit a place and whether they will revisit. Secondly, tourists' satisfaction reflects whether their travel experience meets their expectations and needs, including satisfaction with products or services, overall destination satisfaction, and loyalty (Chaulagain et al., 2021). Finally, post-purchase behavior refers to tourism-related behaviors that may occur after the trip (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2021). The perception of consumers regarding the destination image and the actual experience during the trip can impact their subsequent behaviors. Different elements of the image will affect tourists' willingness to revisit and their willingness to recommend to others to varying degrees.

Perceived value and situational involvement have garnered significant attention (Jiang and Sun, 2021). Perceived value refers to consumers' overall utility evaluation of products or services based on a balance between perceived benefits and perceived losses (Llodra-Riera et al., 2015). During the tourism process, tourists' expectations no longer revolve solely around product functionality but also encompass emotional, social, and aesthetic values (Whang et al., 2016). The tourism destination image represents tourists' comprehensive perception and evaluation of the destination, directly shaping the formation of perceived value. Consumer learning and the construction of perceived value during the travel experience play a crucial role in tourism decision-making and behavior, further influencing their attitudes toward the destination and their willingness to recommend it to others. Furthermore, situational involvement refers to the interest and behavior that consumers generate in a specific context within a short period (Hsia et al., 2020). Situational involvement reflects tourists' level of interest and emotional responses to tourism activities, which directly impact the shaping of the tourism destination image and tourists' travel intention (Zhang and Guo, 2022). The products and services offered by a tourism destination can trigger changes in tourists' psychological states, influencing their emotional experiences and evaluations, thus enhancing their perception of the tourism value.

It appears that current research has predominantly focused on the exploration of general theories and concepts, with relatively limited empirical studies on how specific social media platforms influence the image of tourist destinations and tourists' intention to travel. Furthermore, despite extensive discussions on factors like perceived value and situational involvement, the specific relationships and underlying mechanisms remain to be thoroughly elucidated. Additionally, in the era of social media, with changes in how tourists acquire information and choose destinations, further in-depth research is needed to understand how these shifts impact tourists' intention to travel. Based on the theories of tourism destination image, perceived value, and consumer involvement, this study aims to delve into the following three key questions:

(1) In the context of social media, how does tourism destination image affect tourists' travel intention?
(2) What role does perceive value play in influencing tourists' travel intention

regarding tourism destination image?

(3) How does situational involvement play as a moderate role?

2. Literature review

2.1. Tourism destination image

The image of a tourist destination refers to the collection of beliefs, viewpoints, and impressions people hold about the destination (Yu and Zhang, 2020), which has a significant impact on the construction of tourism infrastructure and policy analysis. It primarily comprises three dimensions: cognitive image, emotional image, and projected image. Cognitive image and emotional image respectively depict tourists' cognitive identification and emotional affiliation with the tourism destination. On the other hand, projected image represents the distinctive image that the tourism destination consciously shapes by integrating and refining various resource elements, selectively conveying it among tourists (Smith et al., 2015). In the era of prevalent social media, social media has become a vital channel for tourists to acquire tourism information and a crucial means for destination operators to craft their online image. This facilitates the molding of the destination image from various perspectives, gradually influencing tourists' travel intention throughout different stages of their journey—pre-travel, during travel, and post-travel. Consequently, it has an impact on tourists' travel decisions (Chaulagain et al., 2019).

2.2. Perceived value theory

Perceived value represents the benefits that consumers expect to derive from using a product, and its connotations vary in different contexts. From a rational perspective, perceived value can be defined as consumers' overall evaluation of the "gains and losses" they perceive after purchasing a product or service (Ng et al., 2023). From an emotional perspective, perceived value includes not only consumers' preferences, cognitions, feelings, and assessments of the product but also the satisfaction they experience and the psychological emotions they undergo during consumption (Yuen et al., 2023). Perceived value can be divided into three dimensions: functional value, emotional value, and social value (Luo et al., 2022; Lian, 2020). Since tourism behavior is primarily influenced by individual factors, and its correlation with social value is relatively weak, this paper mainly considers the two dimensions of perceived value: functional value and emotional value.

2.3. Consumer involvement theory

Consumer involvement theory is a theoretical framework that explains consumers' focus and degree of involvement in the purchasing process. It primarily encompasses consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to products or services, emphasizing that the level of involvement is influenced by individual interests, values, and experiences (Zaichkowsky, 1985). It includes two different types of involvement: enduring involvement and situational involvement. Enduring involvement refers to consumers' sustained level of interest in a specific product category or service (Beckman et al., 2020). Situational involvement refers to

consumers' temporary level of interest in a particular product or service within a specific purchase scenario. Situational involvement can serve as a moderating variable that affects consumers' information search, evaluation, and decision-making during the purchasing process (Matoati et al., 2017). Introducing situational involvement as a moderating variable in research helps further explain differences in consumers' tourism decision-making and behavior.

3. Hypotheses development

3.1. Tourism destination image and perceived value

(1) The impact of cognitive image on perceived value

The destination's cognitive image refers to tourists' perception and understanding of the characteristics of a tourism destination. It exerts an impact on both tourists' travel decisions and their perceived value (Japutra and Loureiro, 2020). When tourists' cognitive image aligns with the authentic attributes of the destination, it contributes to enhancing the functional value of the destination (Kashyap and Bojanic, 2000). High levels of perceived cognitive image reinforce tourists' desires and functional needs, making them feel that the benefits outweigh the costs, thereby enhancing self-image and attaining higher functional value (San Martín and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008). Furthermore, the destination's cognitive image can stimulate tourists' imagination and expectations by creating an attractive image, guiding tourists to have positive expectations of their travel experiences (Chen and Cheng, 2021). When this image aligns with tourists' interests and values, it deepens their emotional connection and identity, further increasing their emotional value perception of the destination (Chathoth et al., 2020). In social media and traveler reviews, cognitive image enhances the emotional value of the destination by generating emotional evaluations, emotional resonance, and identification. Based on this, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H1. Cognitive image has a significant positive impact on perceived value.

H1a. Cognitive image has a significant positive impact on functional value.

H1b. Cognitive image has a significant positive impact on emotional value.

(2) The impact of emotional image on perceived value

In the realm of tourism activities, a destination's brand image, promotional efforts, and word-of-mouth communication all serve as pivotal avenues in shaping the emotional image (Di-Clemente et al., 2022). This positive emotional image not only has the capacity to arouse tourists' interests, expectations, and satisfaction, consequently elevating their perception of the destination's value and cognizance (Zhu et al., 2022), but it also underscores the functional value of the destination, catering to tourists' specific expectations and needs (Marinao-Artigas and Barajas-Portas, 2021). In the context of social media, tourists tend to gather online reviews from travel websites or virtual communities to construct their emotional image of a destination (Akgün et al., 2020). Emotional value reflects tourists' emotional experiences during their travel journeys. Through emotional attitudes and experiences, the destination's emotional image further influences tourists' cognitive perception of its value (Sharma and Nayak, 2019a). Consequently, positive

emotional experiences have the potential to deepen tourists' involvement and ignite their passion for exploring the destination (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023). Based on these premises, this paper posits the following hypothesis:

H2. Emotional image has a significant positive impact on perceived value.

H2a. Emotional image has a significant positive impact on functional value.

H2b. Emotional image has a significant positive impact on emotional value.

(3) The impact of projected image on perceived value

The projected image is a representative image projected by a tourism destination, wherein resource elements are integrated, refined, and selectively shaped and disseminated among potential tourists through specific channels (Lian and Yu, 2019). This image can influence tourists' perception and expectations of the destination's functional value, primarily reflecting their evaluation of the destination's actual benefits and convenience, such as transportation, accommodation, environment, and services, among others (Smith et al., 2015). When tourists acquire information about a destination's popularity and value through social media, tourism promotion, or word-of-mouth, they may develop heightened expectations for their travel experiences (Kim et al., 2019). Effective image promotion can incline tourists towards choosing the destination for their travel (Zhu et al., 2022). Simultaneously, the projected image is equally pivotal in enhancing tourists' emotional value. When the image projected by the destination aligns with tourists' expectations and desires, it deepens their trust, sense of security, and emotional experiences, fostering an emotional connection with the destination (Lai et al., 2021). This emotional connection not only strengthens the emotional bond between tourists and the destination but also elevates the emotional value of the destination in tourists' minds. Based on these premises, this paper posits the following hypotheses:

H3. The projected image has a significant positive impact on perceived value.

H3a. The projected image has a significant positive impact on functional value.

H3b. The projected image has a significant positive impact on emotional value.

3.2. Perceived value and tourists' travel intention

Social Cognitive Theory posits that individuals determine their behavior through the cognition of external information. In the context of social media, perceived value reflects tourists' subjective cognition of the value of products or services offered by a tourism destination, serving as a direct factor influencing tourists' behavioral tendencies (Li et al., 2020). When viewed from the dimensions of functional and emotional aspects of perceived value, functional value reflects tourists' perception of the value of product or service attributes possessed by a tourism destination. It constitutes a pivotal antecedent factor affecting tourists' travel intention (Kwon et al., 2016). Functional value aids tourists in perceiving the tourism value of a destination, subsequently assisting them in making travel decisions prior to their journeys. Furthermore, functional value, as the foundation of tourists' post-travel sharing behaviors, also influences the travel intention of other tourists in the context of tourism social media (Chen and Cheng, 2021). Emotional value pertains to the satisfaction of tourists' curiosity brought about by the services provided by a

tourism destination, as well as the pleasure derived from acquiring related products and extended services (Wang et al., 2016). The emotional value offered by a tourism destination can induce changes in the psychological state of tourists, exerting a significant impact on tourists' psychological experiences and emotional evaluations. It can heighten tourists' interest in the tourism destination, prompting them to actively pay attention to and gather relevant information, thereby enhancing their travel intention (Xu et al., 2020). Based on these foundations, this paper posits the following hypotheses:

H4. Perceived value has a significant positive impact on tourists' travel intention.

H4a. Functional value has a significant positive impact on tourists' travel intention.

H4b. Emotional value has a significant positive impact on tourists' travel intention.

3.3. Mediating effect of perceived value

Building upon the in-depth analysis conducted earlier, it is evident that the relationship between a tourism destination's image (encompassing cognitive, emotional, and projected aspects) and tourists' travel intention is not direct and straightforward. Instead, there may exist a complex mediating mechanism. Specifically, the destination image, at a primary level, shapes and influences tourists' perceived value, including their assessment of the destination's functional and emotional value. These perceived values, in turn, affect tourists' travel intention. Based on this, this study posits the following hypotheses:

H5. Cognitive image affects tourists' travel intention through the mediating effect of perceived value.

H5a. Cognitive image affects tourists' travel intention through the mediating effect of functional value.

H5b. Cognitive image affects tourists' travel intention through the mediating effect of emotional value.

H6. Emotional image affects tourists' travel intention through the mediating effect of perceived value.

H6a. Emotional image affects tourists' travel intention through the mediating effect of functional value.

H6b. Emotional image affects tourists' travel intention through the mediating effect of emotional value.

H7. Projected image affects tourists' travel intention through the mediating effect of perceived value.

H7a. Projected image affects tourists' travel intention through the mediating effect of functional value.

H7b. Projected image affects tourists' travel intention through the mediating effect of emotional value.

3.4. Moderating effects of situational involvement

Situational involvement describes the degree of engagement and investment of

tourists at a tourism destination (Sharma and Nayak, 2019b). It is a dynamic process capable of moderating the impact of a tourism destination's image on perceived value (Hsia et al., 2020). Tourists with high situational involvement tend to seek in-depth experiences, being less influenced by the initial destination image. In contrast, tourists with low situational involvement are more susceptible to the influence of the destination's prior image, significantly impacting their travel evaluations (Leso et al., 2021). Regarding cognitive image, highly situationally involved tourists focus more on the actual travel experience rather than their previous impressions, resulting in a decreased influence of cognitive image on perceived value. Conversely, tourists with low situational involvement rely more on the destination image to assess its value (Ha and Lennon, 2010). Concerning emotional image, highly situationally involved tourists may be overly critical, leading to a decrease in emotional value, whereas less involved tourists are more driven by emotional experiences (Liu et al., 2023). As for projected image, highly situationally involved tourists, with overly idealized images, may experience a decrease in perceived value. In contrast, tourists with low situational involvement form foundational awareness through advertisements and word-of-mouth. When they perceive the destination's attractiveness, their willingness to travel increases due to the projected image (Chathoth et al., 2020).

Based on the above analysis, this study posits that situational involvement may moderate the mediating effect, wherein perceived value plays a mediating role between destination image and tourists' travel intention, but the magnitude of this mediating effect is influenced by the degree of tourists' situational involvement. Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H8. Tourists' situational involvement negatively moderates the mediating effect of perceived value between destination image and tourists' travel intention. When tourists have higher situational involvement, the relationship between destination image and perceived value becomes weaker, leading to a smaller influence of perceived value on tourists' travel intention; conversely, when situational involvement is lower, the effect is stronger. Specifically:

H8a. Tourists' situational involvement negatively moderates the mediating effect of functional value between cognitive image and tourists' travel intention.

H8b. Tourists' situational involvement negatively moderates the mediating effect of emotional value between cognitive image and tourists' travel intention.

H8c. Tourists' situational involvement negatively moderates the mediating effect of functional value between emotional image and tourists' travel intention.

H8d. Tourists' situational involvement negatively moderates the mediating effect of emotional value between emotional image and tourists' travel intention.

H8e. Tourists' situational involvement negatively moderates the mediating effect of functional value between projected image and tourists' travel intention.

H8f. Tourists' situational involvement negatively moderates the mediating effect of emotional value between projected image and tourists' travel intention.

The theoretical research model constructed in this paper is illustrated in **Figure 1**. Tourism destination image promotes the formation of tourists' perceived value, and the perceived value further positively affects tourists' travel intention. Tourists' situational involvement negatively moderates the mediating effect of perceived value between destination image and tourists' travel intention.

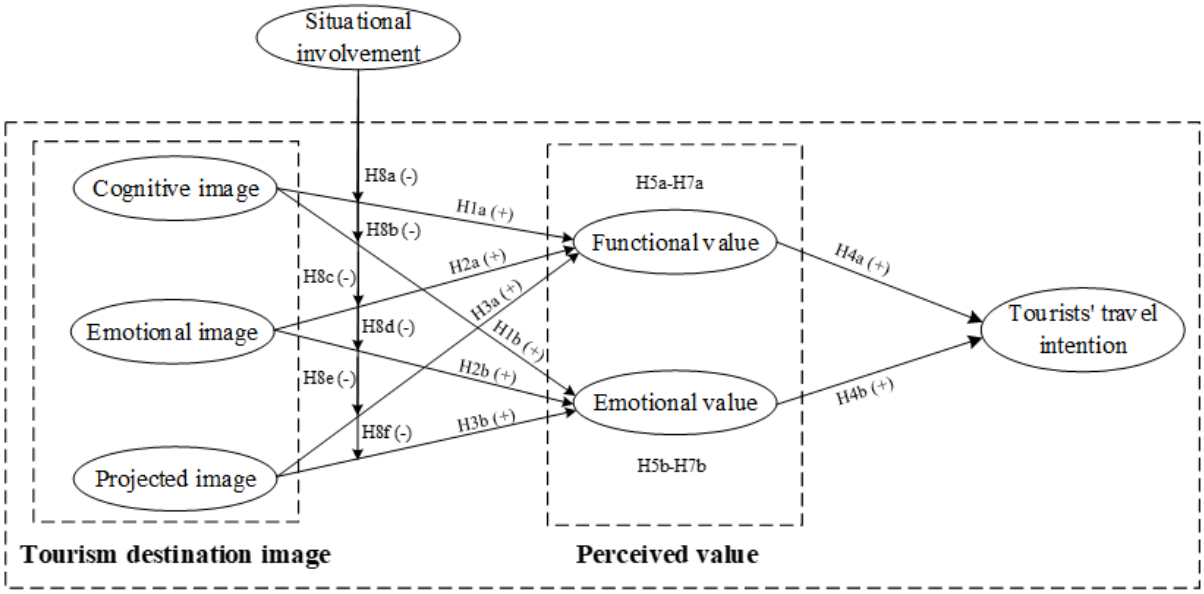

Figure 1. Theoretical research model.

4. Research method

4.1. Questionnaire design

The survey questionnaire designed for this study comprises three main sections: questionnaire instructions, respondent demographics, and measurement of tourist destination image, perceived value, and tourists' travel intentions. The tourist destination image section encompasses three variables: cognitive image, emotional image, and projected image. The perceived value section comprises two variables: functional value and emotional value. In addition, there are measures for situational involvement and tourists' travel intention. Specifically, the cognitive image scale (4 items), emotional image scale (4 items), and projected image scale (4 items) were primarily adapted from the research conducted by Lin and Shen (2022) and Picazo et al. (2019). The functional value scale (4 items) and emotional value scale (4 items) were primarily based on the research of Wang et al. (2016). The situational involvement scale (4 items) and tourists' travel intentions scale (4 items) were derived from the research by Huang and Choi (2019) and Marine-Roig and Ferrer-Rosell (2018). These items were measured using a 1–7 Likert scale, with level 1 representing 'strongly disagree' and level 7 representing 'strongly agree'. The specific measurement items for each variable are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Results of convergent validity analysis of sample data.

Variable	Item	Measuring question	Standardized factor loading	Cronbach's α	Cronbach's α of Variables	Convergent validity	
						CR	AVE
CI	CI1	Through social media, I can sense that Guilin hotel is very comfortable	0.763	0.825	0.860	0.897	0.686
	CI2	Through social media, it helps me understand the climate conditions of Guilin	0.763	0.820			
	CI3	Through social media, it helps me learn about the scenic spots and historical sites of Guilin	0.789	0.816			
	CI4	Through social media, I find that shopping in Guilin is very easy	0.797	0.815			
EI	EI1	Through social media, I find that Guilin is an exciting place	0.877	0.911	0.932	0.923	0.751
	EI2	Through social media, I find that Guilin is a pleasant place	0.844	0.925			
	EI3	Through social media, I find that Guilin is an inspiring place	0.910	0.900			
	EI4	Through social media, I find that Guilin is a vibrant place	0.895	0.907			
PI	PI1	Through the promotion of the local government, I believe that Guilin is very suitable for outdoor entertainment	0.750	0.898	0.897	0.900	0.694
	PI2	Through media advertising, I can learn about the architectural style of Guilin	0.852	0.857			
	PI3	Through media advertising, I can appreciate the folk customs and sentiments of Guilin	0.892	0.843			
	PI4	Through media advertising, I can experience the local characteristics of Guilin	0.831	0.862			
SI	SI1	Guilin's hardware facilities are safe and reliable.	0.820	0.846	0.880	0.921	0.745
	SI2	Guilin is equipped with complete dining, accommodation, and entertainment facilities	0.756	0.853			
	SI3	Guilin places great emphasis on the development of tourism products	0.869	0.820			
	SI4	Guilin has high standards for tourism services	0.777	0.861			
FV	FV1	Traveling to Guilin, I can relax my body and mind	0.885	0.899	0.926	0.896	0.684
	FV2	Traveling to Guilin makes me very happy	0.887	0.901			
	FV3	Traveling to Guilin, I can experience some new things	0.850	0.907			
	FV4	Traveling to Guilin strengthens my connections with friends and family	0.855	0.901			
EV	EV1	Traveling is very meaningful to me	0.918	0.870	0.916	0.924	0.753
	EV2	When I prepare for a trip, I carefully choose the destination	0.902	0.878			
	EV3	I believe that choosing to travel to Guilin is the right choice	0.848	0.893			
	EV4	Going to Guilin can express my true self	0.768	0.920			
TI	TI1	I hope to travel in the near future	0.753	0.911	0.912	0.879	0.647
	TI2	If objective conditions permit, I will travel to Guilin	0.823	0.883			
	TI3	If given the opportunity, I will spread positive news about traveling to Guilin to others	0.897	0.870			
	TI4	Traveling to Guilin is worth my time and energy	0.918	0.872			

4.2. Data collection

This paper selects six scenic spots in Guilin city, China: The Seven Star Park, Elephant Trunk Hill Park, Two Rivers and Four Lakes, Solitary Beauty Peak Royal City, Guilin Eternal Love, and Reed Flute Cave, and employs the questionnaire survey method for data collection. These six scenic areas are all famous 4A and 5A

level tourist attractions in Guilin, with extremely high visibility and a rich flow of tourists, which can represent the image of Guilin's tourist destinations. During the period from May to June 2023, a random sampling method was used to collect sample data face-to-face in the morning from 10:00 to 12:00 over 15 days. First, the purpose, significance, and privacy guarantee of this survey were introduced. Then, the basic information of the respondents was surveyed, including gender, age, educational background, professional title, and monthly income. Finally, the measurement of the four variables of tourism destination image, perceived value, tourists' travel intention, and situational involvement was completed.

Guilin, as one of China's earliest tourism cities to open up to the world, with its abundant natural resources and pristine ecological environment, annually attracts a significant number of domestic and international tourists who come from far and wide to experience its beauty. In a way, the development of tourism in Guilin mirrors the broader trends in the evolution of China's tourism sector. However, as we entered the new century, Guilin, being a traditional tourism city, found that its sightseeing tourism products were no longer sufficient to meet the demands of modern travelers. According to tourism reports by platforms like "Mafengwo," from 2015 to 2023, Guilin fell out of the top 30 list of popular tourist destinations. This indicates a gradual decline in Guilin's appeal to tourists. Consequently, there is an urgent need to explore the reconstruction of Guilin's tourism destination image. In light of this, this study uses Guilin as a case study, utilizing survey data and employing structural equation modeling to investigate the impact and mechanisms between a tourism destination's image and tourists' intention to travel. The goal is to provide a scientific foundation for the development of Guilin as a world-class tourism city, while also offering insights for other tourism cities seeking to optimize their tourism spatial structure and enhance the efficiency of tourism resource development.

The questionnaire for this study was initially designed through expert modifications and in-depth interviews. Subsequently, it underwent refinement through a pilot survey to develop the final formal questionnaire. A total of 514 questionnaires were distributed for this research, and to ensure questionnaire quality, 79 invalid questionnaires were removed. This resulted in 435 valid questionnaires. The final effective response rate for this study was 84.6%, meeting the requirements for. In terms of gender distribution in the survey, males accounted for 46.7%, while females made up 53.3%, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution. Regarding age groups, the majority fell into the 18–25 and 26–35 age brackets. 82.8% of the respondents have a bachelor's degree or higher. Furthermore, 62% of respondents reported traveling more than once a year, suggesting a positive travel behavior among the respondents. Regarding social media usage experience, approximately 41.6% of respondents had over six months of experience with social media usage.

4.3. Data analysis

Given that the variables related to destination image and perceived value in this study are latent variables, and considering the complexity and large number of

variables involved, principal component analysis and factor analysis (both exploratory and confirmatory) are employed to assess the reliability and validity of the questionnaires. Additionally, structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to analyze model fit. Regression analysis approaches are employed to verify the proposed hypotheses. The primary analytical tools utilized in this study are SPSS for data analysis and AMOS for structural equation modeling.

Structural equation model testing generally includes three parts: overall model evaluation, measurement model testing, and structural model testing. The overall model evaluation generally adopts the fitting index as the evaluation standard. In this study, eight indicators, including Chi square degree of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), GFI, PGFI, NFI, IFI, CFI, RMSEA, SRMR, are selected as the overall model evaluation indicators. The test of measurement model is analyzed by the significance, combined reliability and AVE value of the factor loads of each potential variable. This study has completed the reliability and validity analysis of the survey samples. The structural model test is analyzed by the significance of path coefficients between potential variables, and this study is completed in the path coefficient analysis.

5. Results analysis

5.1. Descriptive statistics

5.1.1. Descriptive statistics of survey respondents

This study utilized the SPSS software to organize the demographic information of the collected and screened 435 valid sample data. A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted, focusing on the respondents' gender, age, and educational levels, resulting in the compilation of demographic statistics for the valid sample. Among the sample participants, males accounted for 46.7% while females constituted 53.3% of the sample, indicating a fairly even gender distribution. In terms of age, the majority fell within the 21–30 and 31–40 age groups, with 82.8% of the respondents have a bachelor's degree or higher. Furthermore, a majority of the respondents reported a monthly post-tax income of less than 2000 yuan, meeting the requirements of the experimental sample.

5.1.2. Descriptive statistics of measurement items

After organizing the demographic information of the 435 valid sample data, we conducted a descriptive statistical analysis of the measurement items used in the study. From the overall perspective, the data range for the measurement items ranged from 1 to 7, indicating a diverse range of evaluations from the respondents. The mean values for the measurement items ranged from 5.31 to 5.97, suggesting that most respondents assigned relatively high ratings to the assessed items. In terms of dispersion, the standard deviation ranged from 1.022 to 1.218, indicating a relatively small degree of variation in the respondents' responses. The variance ranged from 1.045 to 1.484, further confirming both the consistency and variability in the respondents' responses. Based on the analysis presented above, it is evident that respondents' evaluations of the measurement items exhibit both a tendency towards consensus and a degree of variability. This provides a strong statistical foundation for further exploration and analysis of the specific attitudes, preferences, or

underlying reasons of the respondents.

5.2. Common method bias testing

Common method bias refers to the covariation between predictor variables and criterion variables due to common features such as the same data source, raters, measurement environment, or project context. This covariation can introduce significant confusion into research outcomes and potentially lead to misleading conclusions, constituting a systematic error (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Therefore, in the questionnaire design process, to ensure the quality of the questionnaire, this study initially conducted a pre-survey of the questionnaire and revised its semantics based on feedback from respondents. Subsequently, the latent variable control method was employed to examine the presence of common method bias.

Table 2. The result of common method bias.

Model	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI	△χ^2/df	△RMSEA	△SRMR	△CFI	△TLI
M1	2.887	0.071	0.040	0.946	0.937					
M2	2.646	0.060	0.047	0.962	0.956	−0.241	0.011	0.007	0.016	0.019

The results of the common method biases testing are presented in **Table 2**. In this study, two models were constructed: Model M1, which is a confirmatory factor analysis model without a method factor, and Model M2, which includes a method factor. By comparing the main fit indices between M1 and M2, the following changes were observed: △χ^2/df = −0.241, △RMSEA = 0.011, △SRMR = 0.007, △CFI = 0.016, △TLI = 0.019. It can be observed that the fit indices for Model M2 do not differ significantly from the original Model M1. Additionally, the changes in RMSEA and SRMR are less than 0.05, while the changes in CFI and TLI are less than 0.1. This suggests that the inclusion of common method factors did not lead to a substantial improvement in model fit (Weijters and Baumgartner, 2021). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no substantial evidence of common method bias in the measurements used in this study.

5.3. Reliability analysis

This study conducted measurements of both the overall Cronbach's α coefficient for the survey questionnaire and the Cronbach's α coefficients for all variables. The overall Cronbach's α coefficient for the survey questionnaire was found to be 0.973. As indicated in **Table 1**, all Cronbach's α coefficients for the variables exceeded 0.7, demonstrating a high level of reliability (Hayes, 2017). Additionally, with the exception of PI1 and EV4, all variables' Cronbach's α coefficients were higher than the Cronbach's α coefficient when the respective items were removed. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the survey questionnaire designed for this study exhibits strong reliability and conforms to the established standards for questionnaire design.

5.4. Validity analysis

Before conducting the validity analysis, this study utilized the KMO test and

Bartlett's sphericity test to assess the suitability of the sample data for factor analysis. The results indicated that the KMO values for all variables exceeded 0.6, and the significance level of Bartlett's sphericity test was $p < 0.000$. These findings suggest that the sample data are suitable for factor analysis (Nasidi et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2022). Subsequently, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out. The results revealed that all measurement items for destination image and perceived value had factor loadings exceeding 0.5, meeting the criterion proposed by Cudeck and O'dell (1994) of a factor loading greater than 0.5. Therefore, this study concludes that the scale items for destination image and perceived value are in excellent condition. Then there is a formal validity analysis, and **Table 1** shows the combined reliability (CR) of all measurement items and the average extracted variance (AVE) values. In the research model, the CR values for all measurement items are greater than 0.6 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), indicating that the scales designed in this paper exhibit high internal consistency. Furthermore, the AVE values for all measurement items range from 0.647 to 0.753, all falling within an acceptable range. Based on this, it can be concluded that the convergent validity of all measurement variables in this study is satisfactory.

5.5. Hypothesis testing

5.5.1. Direct effects test

This study begins by examining the direct effects. According to the results of path regression analysis from the model (**Table 3**), cognitive image in the destination's image has a significant positive impact on both functional value (β = 0.341, $p < 0.001$) and emotional value (β = 0.306, $p < 0.001$) in perceived value, supporting H1, H1a, and H1b. Emotional image in the destination's image has a significant positive effect on both functional value (β = 0.243, $p < 0.001$) and emotional value (β = 0.202, $p < 0.001$) in perceived value, confirming H2, H2a, and H2b. Projected image has a significant positive impact on functional value (β = 0.300, $p < 0.001$) and emotional value (β = 0.314, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H3, H3a, and H3b. Functional value (β = 0.258, $p < 0.001$) and emotional value (β = 0.618, $p < 0.001$) both have significant positive effects on the intention to travel, validating H4, H4a, and H4b.

Table 3. Path coefficient regression results.

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	*P*
CI → FV	0.341	0.084	4.055	0.000
CI → EV	0.306	0.073	4.217	0.000
EI → FV	0.243	0.063	3.855	0.000
EI → EV	0.202	0.054	3.713	0.000
PI → FV	0.300	0.064	4.662	0.000
PI → EV	0.314	0.055	5.657	0.000
FV → TI	0.258	0.060	4.292	0.000
EV → TI	0.618	0.073	8.508	0.000

5.5.2. Mediated effects test

In this study, a model 4 from the PROCESS program was employed to examine the dual mediation effect, building upon the classical method of testing mediation effects. Following Hayes' (2017) recommendations, the non-parametric percentile bootstrap method (with 5000 samples drawn) was used to calculate the corresponding estimates, balancing validity and statistical power. The results of the mediation analysis are presented below.

Firstly, the study examined the dual mediation mechanism of cognitive image, as shown in **Table 4**. According to the results, the indirect effect of functional value is 0.167 (Percentile 95% CI = [0.076, 0.255], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [0.083, 0.257]), and the indirect effect of emotional value is 0.365 (Percentile 95% CI = [0.258, 0.480], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [0.259, 0.480]). Both intervals do not contain 0, indicating significant mediation effects for functional value and emotional value. Therefore, hypotheses H5a and H5b are supported. The dual mediation effect with both functional value and emotional value as mediators is 0.532 (Percentile 95% CI = [0.422, 0.644], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [0.429, 0.650]), and the direct effect of cognitive image on tourists' intention to travel is 0.101 (Percentile 95% CI = [0.012, 0.191], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [0.012, 0.191]). The interval for the direct effect does not include 0, indicating a significant direct effect of cognitive image on tourists' intention to travel. In summary, the mediation effect on perceived value is significant, supporting H5.

Table 4. Results of the bootstrap test on the cognitive image mediating effect.

Effect type	Point estimate	Bootstrapping (5000)					
		Product of coefficients		Bias-corrected 95% CI		Percentile 95% CI	
		S.E.	*t*	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Total effect	0.633	0.010	3.462	0.047	0.238	0.024	0.328
Direct effect	0.101	0.046	2.222	0.012	0.191	0.012	0.191
Indirect effect	0.532	0.055		0.429	0.650	0.422	0.644
Ind 1: CI → FV → TI	0.167	0.044		0.083	0.257	0.076	0.255
Ind 2: CI → EV → TI	0.365	0.056		0.259	0.480	0.258	0.480

Furthermore, this study validated the dual mediation mechanism of emotional image, and the results are presented in **Table 5**. According to the examination results, the indirect effect with functional value as a mediator is 0.141 (Percentile 95% CI = [0.056, 0.221], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [0.056, 0.221]), and the indirect effect with emotional value as a mediator is 0.320 (Percentile 95% CI = [0.221, 0.429], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [0.222, 0.426]). Both intervals do not include 0, indicating significant mediation effects for functional value and emotional value. Therefore, H6a and H6b are supported. The dual mediation effect with both functional value and emotional value as mediators is 0.462 (Percentile 95% CI = [0.362, 0.570], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [0.365, 0.570]), and the direct effect of emotional image on tourists' intention to travel is 0.144 (Percentile 95% CI = [0.061, 0.227], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [0.061, 0.227]). Both intervals do not include 0, indicating a significant direct effect of emotional image on tourists' intention to

travel. In summary, the mediation effect on perceived value is significant, supporting H6.

Table 5. Results of the bootstrap test on the emotional image mediating effect.

Effect type	Point estimate	Bootstrapping (5000)					
		Product of coefficients		Bias-corrected 95% CI		Percentile 95% CI	
		S.E.	*t*	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Total effect	0.606	0.010	3.462	0.013	0.425	0.034	0.245
Direct effect	0.144	0.042	3.428	0.061	0.227	0.061	0.227
Indirect effect	0.462	0.053		0.365	0.570	0.362	0.570
Ind1: EI → FV → TI	0.141	0.042		0.060	0.220	0.056	0.221
Ind2: EI → EV → TI	0.320	0.052		0.222	0.426	0.221	0.429

Lastly, this study validated the dual mediation mechanism of projected image, and the results are presented in **Table 6**. According to the validation results, although the indirect effect with functional value as a mediator is 0.178 (Percentile 95% CI = [0.091, 0.267], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [0.091, 0.266]), and the indirect effect with emotional value as a mediator is 0.382 (Percentile 95% CI = [0.264, 0.502], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [0.269, 0.504]), and the dual mediation effect with both functional value and emotional value as mediators is 0.559 (95% CI = [0.435, 0.684]), all of these confidence intervals do not include 0. However, the direct effect of projected image on tourists' intention to travel is 0.059 (Percentile 95% CI = [−0.061, 0.227], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [−0.032, 0.149]), and this interval includes 0, indicating that the direct impact of projected image on tourists' intention to travel is not significant. In summary, the mediation effect on perceived value is not significant, indicating that H7a and H7b are not supported.

Table 6. Results of the bootstrap test on the projected image mediating effect.

Effect type	Point estimate	Bootstrapping (5000)					
		Product of coefficients		Bias-corrected 95% CI		Percentile 95% CI	
		S.E.	*t*	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Total effect	0.618	0.010	3.462	0.013	0.425	0.034	0.245
Direct effect	0.059	0.046	1.274	−0.032	0.149	−0.061	0.227
Indirect effect	0.559	0.063		0.445	0.687	0.435	0.684
Ind1: PI → FV → TI	0.178	0.045		0.091	0.266	0.091	0.267
Ind2: PI → EV → TI	0.382	0.061		0.269	0.504	0.264	0.502

5.5.3. Moderated mediation effects test

As the mediation effect of projected image did not pass, this study only examines the moderating effects of situational involvement on the dual mediation of cognitive image and emotional image. Following the testing method proposed by Hayes (2009), Model 7 from the PROCESS plugin was used for validation.

(1) Moderation Effect of Situational Involvement on the "Cognitive Image-Perceived Value-Tourists' Intention to Travel" Path.

The results of the moderation effect of situational involvement on the "Cognitive Image-Perceived Value-Tourists' Intention to Travel" path are shown in **Table 7**. **Table 7** indicates that the moderated mediation effect with functional value as a mediator is −0.0021 (Percentile 95% CI = [−0.0107, 0.0060], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [−0.0123, 0.0046]). This suggests that the moderated mediation effect with functional value as a mediator is not significant, thus H8a is not supported. The moderated mediation effect with emotional value as a mediator is −0.0249 (Percentile 95% CI = [−0.0442, −0.0089], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [−0.0468, −0.0104]). This indicates that the moderated mediation effect with emotional value as a mediator is significantly negative, supporting H8b. To further reveal the mechanism of the moderating effect of situational involvement, robustness tests were conducted with situational involvement at one standard deviation above and below the mean, as shown in **Table 8**. The results demonstrate that when situational involvement is at both lower and higher levels, the moderated mediation effect with emotional value as a mediator remains significantly negative, providing further evidence for supporting H8b.

Table 7. The moderation analysis of situational involvement on the mediation of perceived value.

Path	Index	Boot SE	Percentile 95% CI		Bias-corrected 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
CI-FV-TI	−0.0021	0.0041	−0.0107	0.0060	−0.0123	0.0046
CI-EV-TI	−0.0249	0.0089	−0.0442	−0.0089	−0.0468	−0.0104
EI-FV-TI	−0.0035	0.0038	−0.0108	0.0043	−0.0125	0.0029
EI-EV-TI	−0.0278	0.0073	−0.0411	−0.0128	−0.0442	−0.0158

Note: Bootstrap = 5000.

Table 8. Robustness testing of the moderated mediation effect.

Path	Variable	Effect	BootSE	Percentile 95% CI		Bias-corrected 95% CI	
				Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
CI → EV → TI	SI(M − 1SD)	0.1864	0.0345	0.1240	0.2595	0.1254	0.2587
	SI(M)	0.1624	0.0323	0.1026	0.2302	0.1045	0.2308
	SI(M + 1SD)	0.1384	0.0325	0.0778	0.2072	0.0798	0.2081
EI → EV → TI	SI(M − 1SD)	0.1886	0.0334	0.1229	0.2556	0.1296	0.2623
	SI(M)	0.1618	0.0307	0.1013	0.2234	0.1072	0.2310
	SI(M + 1SD)	0.1350	0.0295	0.0781	0.1951	0.0824	0.1994

Note: Bootstrap = 5000.

(2) Moderation Effect of Situational Involvement on the "Emotional Image-Perceived Value-Tourists' Intention to Travel" Path

The results of the moderation effect of situational involvement on the "Emotional Image-Perceived Value-Tourists' Intention to Travel" path are shown in **Table 7**. **Table 7** indicates that the moderated mediation effect with functional value as a mediator is −0.0035 (Percentile 95% CI = [−0.0108, 0.0043], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [−0.0125, 0.0029]). This suggests that the moderated mediation effect with functional value as a mediator is not significant, thus H8c is not supported. The

moderated mediation effect with emotional value as a mediator is −0.0278 (Percentile 95% CI = [−0.041, −0.0128], Bias-corrected 95% CI = [−0.0442, −0.0158]). This indicates that the moderated mediation effect with emotional value as a mediator is significantly negative, supporting H8d. Similarly, robustness tests were conducted with situational involvement at one standard deviation above and below the mean, as shown in **Table 8**. The results demonstrate that when situational involvement is at both lower and higher levels, the moderated mediation effect with emotional value as a mediator remains significantly negative, providing further evidence for supporting H8d.

6. Discussion and conclusion

6.1. Theoretical significance

Firstly, this study focuses on the cognitive, emotional, and projected images of destinations. By exploring the impacts of these three types of images on travel intentions, it unveils the multi-dimensional mechanisms of destination image influence, broadening the perspective in destination image research. This study not only offers a more comprehensive theoretical framework for explaining how destination images influence tourists' travel intentions but also deepens the understanding of how tourists process information, form preferences, and make travel decisions based on cognitive, emotional, and projected images of destinations. The findings enrich the theoretical model of travel intention formation, enhance insights into tourist behavioral decision-making, and further uncover the decision-making process and its underlying psychological mechanisms.

Secondly, this study reveals the mediating effects of functional and emotional values between destination image and tourists' travel intentions, emphasizing the pivotal role of perceived value in travel decision-making, thereby enriching the theory of tourist consumer behavior. By considering these two types of perceived values as mediating variables, the study not only uncovers the significant impact of perceived value on travel intentions but also offers a clearer understanding of the roles of functional value (such as cost, convenience) and emotional value (such as pleasure, sense of belonging) in the mediation mechanism, deepening the application of perceived value theory in travel decision-making.

Lastly, by introducing situational involvement as a moderating variable, this study enriches the multi-dimensionality of theoretical construction. The study found that situational involvement only plays a moderating role in the path where emotional value acts as a mediator, highlighting the variability of emotional experiences in different contexts. This provides a more nuanced explanation for understanding the relationship between emotional experiences and tourists' travel intentions. Additionally, this study expands the discussion on situational involvement, including how it influences tourists' interpretation and processing of destination information, and the variability in tourists' decision-making across different situations. This discovery offers a fresh perspective for research on emotional experiences and the theory of tourist consumer behavior.

6.2. Practical significance

Firstly, Guilin City should cultivate a positive image as a tourist destination. Social media provides extensive outreach channels for Guilin tourism, enabling rapid connection with potential global tourists. By implementing strategic content sharing across multiple platforms, Guilin City can effectively convey its unique image information and stimulate the interest of a broader target audience. In terms of cognitive image, managers can enhance tourists' understanding by providing detailed travel information, historical background, and cultural characteristics. In terms of emotional image, managers can touch tourists' emotions by sharing engaging stories, beautiful landscape photos, and moving visitor experiences. In terms of projected image, managers can attract tourists' imagination by showcasing the uniqueness and extraordinary experiences of the destination.

Secondly, Guilin City should create a more attractive tourism environment. The enhancement of functional and emotional value is crucial for attracting and satisfying tourists, and tourism managers in Guilin should adopt strategies to address these aspects to shape an attractive tourism environment. From a functional value perspective, managers can optimize tourism facilities and services to provide a high-quality travel service environment. For example, by offering personalized travel recommendations through custom apps or websites based on tourists' interests, the functional value can be increased through customized experiences. From an emotional value perspective, creating themed events, cultural experiences, and seminars allows tourists to gain unique emotional experiences at the destination, thereby increasing their perceived value. Storytelling, whether through tour guides, interactive exhibitions, or digital media, can effectively convey the destination's history, traditions, and culture, evoking tourists' emotional resonance.

Lastly, attention should be paid to the negative effects of excessive situational involvement. To address the potential negative impacts of situational involvement, managers in Guilin should adopt a balanced strategy. On the one hand, a variety of tourism experiences should be provided. For example, a tourist area can offer a blend of cultural, adventure, relaxation, and educational activities. This diversity allows tourists to choose experiences that match their interests, thereby reducing the likelihood of excessive involvement in one activity. On the other hand, effective communication and transparency of information are essential for managing tourists' expectations and reducing dissatisfaction stemming from excessive involvement in the situation. Clear, accurate, and comprehensive information about each activity should be readily available. This includes detailed descriptions, realistic expectations, and user reviews on destination websites and social media platforms. Moreover, offering virtual tours or experience previews can help tourists make informed decisions, aligning their expectations with reality.

6.3. Conclusion

The dimensions of tourist destination image exhibit significant positive impacts on both perceived value dimensions. The conveyance of information related to destination facilities and classical attributes within the cognitive image enhances tourists' propensity to perceive the destination as capable of fulfilling their travel

needs, thereby augmenting the destination's functional value. At the same time, a positive cognitive image can also influence tourists' perception of the destination's functionality, thereby enhancing tourists' satisfaction. Positive emotional image can evoke emotional experiences in tourists related to scenic beauty, cultural experiences, etc., thus enhancing the emotional value of the destination on an affective level. Furthermore, a positive emotional image also raises tourists' expectations of the destination, further enhancing their evaluation of the destination's functional value. The projected image is a carefully crafted and promoted image by official authorities or the destination itself, reflecting the destination's core characteristics, cultural values, and allure. These officially disseminated messages have the potential to influence tourists' perception of the destination, enabling them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the destination's characteristics, thereby laying the foundation for the formation of perceived value.

The dimensions of perceived value exhibit significant positive relationships with tourists' travel intention. On one hand, functional value exerts a significantly positive influence on tourists' travel intention. This reflects that tourists often prioritize destinations that offer practical functional value, meeting their travel needs, such as tourism facilities and cultural activities, when selecting a destination and deciding to travel. On the other hand, emotional value also exerts a significantly positive influence on tourists' travel intention. Emotional experiences such as joy, satisfaction, and emotional resonance can inspire tourists to be more inclined to choose a particular destination. In other words, tourists' desire for emotional experiences can influence their evaluation and selection of a destination.

The results of the mediation analysis indicate that cognitive image and emotional image influence tourists' travel intention through their impact on perceived value, while the mediating effect of perceived value on the relationship between projected image and tourists' travel intention is not supported. When tourists have a positive cognitive image of the tourist destination, they are more likely to believe that they can derive high emotional value and functional value from the destination, thereby enhancing their travel intention. Emotional image fosters a profound emotional connection between tourists and the destination, influencing tourists' perception of the emotional value and functional value of the destination, thereby enhancing their travel intention. Projected image does not influence tourists' travel intention through perceived value. This may be because, for tourists, they are more concerned about what the destination can offer them, namely emotional value and functional value, rather than how the destination aligns with their self-image.

The results of moderation analysis reveal a negative moderating effect of situational involvement on the mediating relationships between destination image, emotional value, and tourists' travel intention. Under conditions of low situational involvement, any evaluations of destination's cognitive, emotional, and projected images are more likely to be amplified, thereby triggering stronger emotional responses in tourists. This deepens tourists' emotional connection and identification with the destination, ultimately enhancing their travel intention; The moderating effect of situational involvement on the mediating relationships between destination image, functional value, and tourists' travel intention is not significant. This

indicates that tourists' assessments of the destination's functional attributes and services are grounded in objective facts and are not easily swayed by external influences.

6.4. Limitations and future prospects

Firstly, the sample size of the study is relatively limited, which may restrict the generalizability of the research findings. Future research could consider expanding the sample range to include respondents from different age groups, professions, and cultural backgrounds in order to achieve more comprehensive research conclusions. Second, the research methods employed in this study primarily consist of questionnaire surveys, and this self-reported measurement approach may be subject to common method bias issues. Future studies could introduce a variety of research methods, such as in-depth interviews and experiments, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between destination image and travelers' visit intentions. Finally, this study also has limitations in terms of research theories and contexts. While this research is based on the theories of perceived value and consumer behavior, within the context of social media research, limitations in data acquisition prevented the use of technology acceptance models. Future research may consider incorporating such models into the research framework.

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