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The Impact of Destination Image and Online Reviews on Chinese Tourists' Outbound Travel Intention: The Mediating Role of Perceived Value and Perceived Risk

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study examines the influence of destination image and online reviews on Chinese tourists' travel choice intention in the context of outbound tourism, using Thailand as a case study. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and related theories, a conceptual framework integrating destination image, online reviews, perceived value, and perceived risk was developed. Data from in-depth interviews and 875 valid questionnaires reveal that destination image and online reviews positively influence travel choice intention, with perceived value acting as a positive mediator and perceived risk as a negative mediator. Notably, the mediating effect of perceived value is stronger than that of perceived risk. The findings suggest that Thailand should deepen tourism product development, innovate marketing strategies, enhance service guarantee systems, and strengthen Sino-Thai cooperation to amplify tourists' perceived value and mitigate risk perceptions, thereby further stimulating Chinese tourists' travel intentions to Thailand. **Keywords:** Destination Image; Online Reviews; Travel Choice Intention; Chinese Outbound Tourists

INTRODUCTION

Amidst global tourism recovery and China's expanding outbound travel market, Thailand confronts intensifying competition from Southeast Asian destinations. While destination image and online reviews significantly shape travel intentions, existing studies inadequately address their mediating mechanisms through perceived value and risk, particularly in China-Thailand tourism contexts. Integrating theoretical frameworks, this study constructs a structural equation model validated by 875 questionnaires. Results reveal that perceived value exerts stronger positive mediation than perceived risk's negative effects, offering actionable insights for Thailand to refine

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destination management strategies through enhanced value perception and risk mitigation.

Research Objectives

This study establishes the following research objectives through integrated theoretical and empirical analysis:

Objective 1: Identify the core impact pathways through which destination image and online reviews influence Chinese outbound tourists' choice intentions, empirically validating their causal relationships.

Objective 2: Develop a theoretical framework incorporating perceived value and perceived risk as dual mediators, systematically elucidating the multidimensional mechanisms linking destination image, online reviews, and tourist decision-making processes.

Objective 3: Propose a marketing strategy framework grounded in destination branding optimization and online review governance, delivering actionable guidelines for precision marketing in China's outbound tourism market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism destination image (TDI) and online reviews (OR), as core determinants of tourist decision-making, shape travel intentions through the mediating roles of perceived value (PV) and perceived risk (PR). The multidimensional construct of TDI (cognitive, affective, conative) and OR's informational credibility, emotional valence, and dynamic dissemination collectively drive tourists' value judgments and risk-avoidance behaviors (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Theoretical perspectives have evolved from static analyses of single variables to dynamic multi-path interactions. For instance, TDI formation integrates organic inputs (e.g., personal experiences) and induced stimuli (e.g., advertisements), with measurement tools expanding from structured scales to text mining techniques. Affective TDI has been validated as a critical mediator between cognition and behavioral intentions (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Stylos & Bellou, 2019).

As user-generated content (UGC), ORs influence decisions through volume, valence, quality, and presentation formats. Negative reviews exert stronger inhibitory effects on destination choice than the promotional impacts of positive ones (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Review sentiment and specificity indirectly affect trust by modulating psychological distance (Qiao et al., 2022), while platform algorithms and cross-cultural disparities further shape dissemination efficacy. PV encompasses functional value (e.g., service quality) and emotional value (e.g., experiential pleasure), directly driving recommendation intentions, whereas PR's multidimensional risks (financial, safety, social) demonstrate contextual dependency—e.g., health risks during pandemics significantly suppress outbound travel intent (Zheng et al., 2021). TDI mitigates risk perceptions (e.g., safety image), while ORs reduce uncertainty through informational transparency.

Existing studies have outlined the TDI-OR-PV-PR decision pathways but lack cross-cultural comparisons and dynamic mechanism exploration. Future research could integrate neuroscience and AI-driven techniques (e.g., sentiment analysis) to advance decision modeling. This study contributes by: (1) unifying a dual-path framework integrating TDI and OR; (2) validating the parallel mediation of PV and PR; (3) providing localized strategies for China's outbound tourism market, such as optimizing destination branding and UGC governance.

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Research Framework

The conceptual framework of this study systematically integrates "Destination Image" (DI) and "Online Reviews" (OR) as independent variables, introduces "Perceived Value" (PV) and "Perceived Risk" (PR) as mediating variables, and ultimately targets the dependent variable "Travel Choice Intention" (TCI). The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1:
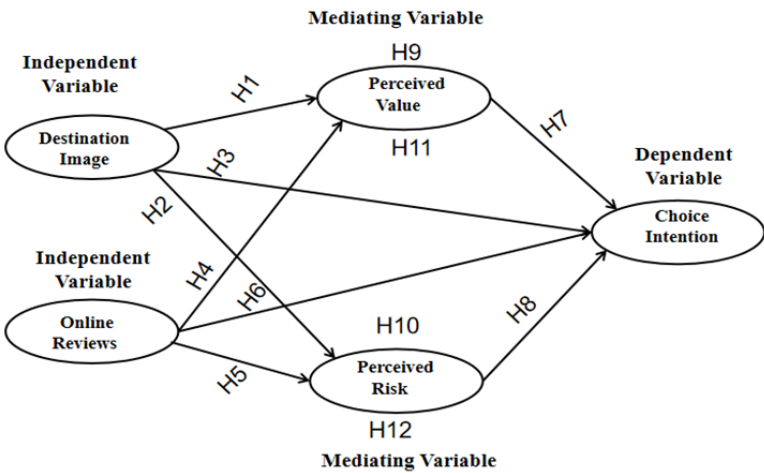

Figure1 Research Conceptual Framework

Based on the conceptual framework and relevant theoretical models of this study, 12 research hypotheses are proposed, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Research Hypotheses

No	Hypotheses
H1:	Destination image has a significant positive impact on perceived value (DI → PV)
H2:	Destination image has a significant negative impact on perceived risk (DI → PR)
H3:	Destination image has a significant positive impact on selection intention (DI → TCI)
H4:	Online reviews have a significant positive impact on perceived value (OR → PV)
H5:	Online reviews have a significant negative impact on perceived risk (OR → PR)
H6:	Online reviews have a significant positive impact on selection intention (OR → TCI)
H7:	Perceived value has a significant positive impact on selection intention (PV → TCI)
H8:	Perceived risk has a significant negative impact on selection intention (PR → TCI)
H9:	Perceived value mediates the relationship between destination image and selection intention (DI → PV → TCI)
H10:	Perceived risk mediates the relationship between destination image and selection intention (DI → PR → TCI)
H11:	Perceived value mediates the relationship between online reviews and selection intention (OR → PV → TCI)

H12:	Perceived risk mediates the relationship between online reviews and selection intention (OR → PR → TCI)

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating literature analysis and empirical testing. First, through a systematic literature review grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Perceived Value Theory, and Risk Perception Theory, a theoretical model is developed to examine how destination image and online reviews influence outbound travel intention through perceived value and perceived risk. Research hypotheses are proposed accordingly. A questionnaire was designed based on established scales, covering five variables: destination image, online reviews, perceived value, perceived risk, and travel intention, measured using a 5-point Likert scale. A pilot survey (N=50) was conducted to refine the questionnaire items, ensuring reliability and validity. Content validity was further verified by experts in tourism management to ensure clarity and applicability of the items.

The final questionnaire was distributed through online platforms targeting mainland Chinese residents with recent plans for outbound travel, yielding 875 valid responses. SPSS 26.0 was employed for descriptive statistics and reliability/validity tests to verify data quality. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was constructed using AMOS 28.0, with path coefficients estimated via the maximum likelihood method to examine direct effects between variables and the mediating roles of perceived value and perceived risk. The Bootstrap method (5,000 resamples) was applied to test the significance of mediation effects, while controlling for covariates such as age and income. Combining quantitative analysis with theoretical deduction and empirical validation, this study ensures the scientific rigor and practical relevance of its conclusions.

Results

1. Analysis of Basic Questionnaire Information

This study conducted descriptive statistical analysis on the basic demographics of 875 valid questionnaire respondents, covering five main aspects: gender, age, education level, occupation, and monthly income, to reflect the structural characteristics of the sample group in outbound tourism.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Demographic Profile

Profile	Categories	Frequency	Percentage(%)□	Cumulative percentage(%)□
Genders	Male	429	49.03	49.03
	Female	446	50.97	100
Age	18-25	148	16.91	16.91
	26-35	150	17.14	34.06
	36-45	179	20.46	54.51

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	46-55	168	19.2	73.71
	56 and over	230	26.29	100
	High school and below	160	18.29	18.29
Highest level of education	Junior college	233	26.63	44.91
	Undergraduate	323	36.91	81.83
	Bachelor's degree	104	11.89	93.71
	PHD and above	55	6.29	100
	Learners	129	14.74	14.74
	Enterprise staff	427	48.8	63.54
Profession	Civil Service/Enterprise	94	10.74	74.29
	Freelancer	72	8.23	82.51
	Retiree	111	12.69	95.2
	Other	42	4.8	100
	Less than 5000	419	47.89	47.89
Monthly income (CNY)	5001-10000	258	29.49	77.37
	10001-15000	86	9.83	87.2
	15001-20000	85	9.71	96.91
	20001 and above	27	3.09	100
Total		875	100	100

Note. Adapted from SPSS Software Result.

The respondents exhibited a balanced gender distribution (male: 49.03%, female: 50.97%), with a predominance of middle-aged and older adults: those aged 56 and above accounted for the largest proportion (26.29%), followed by the 36–45 (20.46%) and 46–55 (19.2%) age groups. Education levels were concentrated among bachelor's degree holders (36.91%) and college graduates (26.63%), with individuals holding a bachelor's degree or higher constituting 55.1% of the sample. This highlights the dominant role of highly educated groups in outbound travel decision-making, as they prioritize cultural experiences and online information. Occupations were primarily corporate employees (48.8%), followed by retirees (12.69%) and students (14.74%). Income distribution showed a bimodal pattern: individuals with a monthly income <5,000 RMB represented the largest group (47.89%), while those earning 5,001–10,000 RMB (29.49%) formed the primary consumer base. High-income earners (>20,001 RMB, 3.09%) demonstrated significant potential. These findings underscore the central role of middle-aged/older, highly educated, and middle-income groups in Thailand's tourism market.

2. Reliability and Validity Analysis Results

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The reliability of the scales was tested using Cronbach's α coefficients in SPSS. The overall scale achieved an α value of 0.855, indicating high internal consistency. The reliability of all sub-constructs met or exceeded 0.85, with specific values as follows: destination image (0.917), online reviews (0.902), perceived value (0.858), perceived risk (0.856), and travel intention (0.867). Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) values ranged from 0.63 to 0.75, and deleting any item did not significantly improve the α coefficients, confirming the robustness of the scale design. Validity tests revealed a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.937 for the overall scale (Bartlett's test significant, *p* < 0.01), with KMO values for all sub-constructs exceeding 0.8, supporting the suitability of factor analysis. Five factors were extracted via principal component analysis, cumulatively explaining 63.767% of the variance. Post-rotation factor loadings exceeded 0.65, with no cross-loading observed, thereby validating the structural validity of the scales.

3. Regression Analysis Results

SPSS regression analysis demonstrated that destination image (β= 0.094, *p* < 0.01), online reviews (β= 0.189, *p* < 0.01), and perceived value (β= 0.161, *p* < 0.01) exerted significant positive effects on travel intention, whereas perceived risk (β= -0.238, *p* < 0.01) showed a significant negative impact. The model's overall explanatory power was 26.9% (adjusted R² = 0.269). Mediation analysis revealed that destination image and online reviews significantly enhanced perceived value (β = 0.253 and 0.324, *p* < 0.01) and reduced perceived risk (β = -0.334 and -0.268, *p* < 0.01). All models exhibited Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values below 1.5 and Durbin-Watson (D-W) values close to 2, confirming the absence of multicollinearity and autocorrelation, thus ensuring result robustness.

4. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis

The initial structural equation model was iteratively refined based on empirical data, resulting in an optimized final model. The revised path diagram (Figure 2) illustrates all significant relationships between primary variables and specifies connections among latent factors.
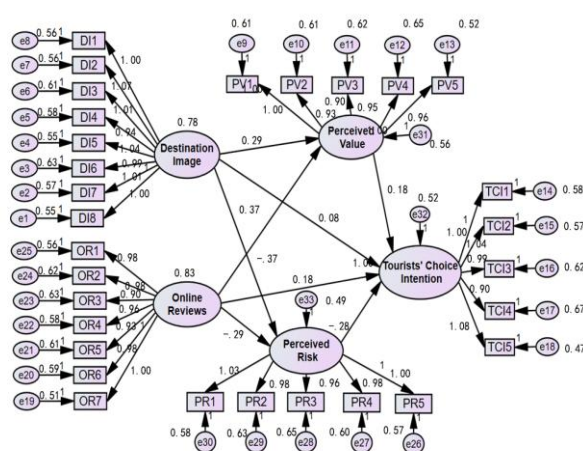

Figure 2   Revised Model - Standardized Structural Model Diagram

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The revised model's fit indices were evaluated across three categories: absolute fit indices (GFI=0.923, AGFI=0.910, RMSEA=0.047), incremental fit indices (NFI=0.919, IFI=0.945, CFI=0.945, RFI=0.912), and parsimonious fit indices (χ^2/df=2.918, PGFI=0.788). All indices met the established criteria, indicating excellent overall model fit, minimal residual errors, a parsimonious structure, and high congruence between the data and theoretical framework.

Based on the revised path analysis and mediating effect tests, the study systematically summarizes the support for each research hypothesis, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	P	Standardized Estimate	Conclusion
H1	PV ← DI	***	0.293	Support
H2	PR ← DI	***	-0.367	Support
H3	TCI ← DI	0.035	0.082	Support
H4	PV ← OR	***	0.370	Support
H5	PR ← OR	***	-0.293	Support
H6	TCI ← OR	***	0.182	Support
H7	TCI ← PV	***	0.177	Support
H8	TCI ← PR	***	-0.283	Support
H9	Perceived value has a mediating effect between destination image and choice intention	0.003	0.041	Partial Support
H10	Perceived risk has a mediating effect between destination image and choice intention	0	0.080	Partial Support
H11	Perceived value has a mediating effect between online reviews and choice intention	0.001	0.053	Partial Support

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H12	Perceived risk has a mediating effect between online reviews and choice intention	0	0.065	Partial Support

Note. Adapted from Amos Software.

The results show that all hypothesized paths (H1–H8) were supported, indicating that destination image and online reviews significantly influence tourists' travel intention through perceived value and perceived risk. Additionally, the mediating hypotheses (H9–H12) were partially supported, confirming that perceived value and perceived risk play partial mediating roles between destination image, online reviews, and travel intention.

DISCUSSION

This study, utilizing SPSS and structural equation modeling (SEM), reveals that destination image and online reviews significantly affect perceived value and perceived risk: positive destination image and online reviews enhance tourists' perceived value while reducing perceived risk. Perceived value and perceived risk act as partial mediators between destination image, online reviews, and travel intention, meaning that destination image and online reviews not only directly influence travel intention but also indirectly affect it by enhancing perceived value and mitigating perceived risk. Furthermore, perceived value exerts a significant positive effect on travel intention, whereas perceived risk shows a significant negative impact, underscoring the importance of optimizing value perceptions and reducing risk awareness. The structural equation model demonstrated excellent fit indices, validating the reliability of the theoretical framework. The findings suggest that in the social media era, destination image construction and online review management are critical pathways for influencing tourism decision-making, offering practical implications for enhancing tourist experiences and decision-making intentions. This study provides empirical evidence for tourism destinations to formulate marketing strategies and establishes a theoretical foundation for exploring additional potential influencing factors in future research.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the mechanisms through which destination image and online reviews influence Chinese outbound tourists' travel intention, testing 12 research hypotheses. The results indicate that destination image directly promotes travel intention through positive perceptions of natural landscapes, cultural resources, and services, while online reviews exhibit a stronger influence via their quality, credibility, and volume. Perceived value, as a core mediator, amplifies these effects by enhancing tourists' positive perceptions in economic, emotional, and social experiences. Although perceived risk demonstrates a negative mediating role, concerns about safety and hygiene conditions only marginally weaken travel intention. Model validation highlights that enhancing the authenticity of online reviews, optimizing destination-specific resources, and reducing risk perceptions are key strategies for improving market competitiveness. These insights offer actionable guidance for destination marketing and lay a theoretical groundwork for future studies on additional influencing factors.

Research Recommendations

Based on the research conclusions and the current status of Thailand's tourism market, and in response to the

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upgraded needs of Chinese tourists, this paper proposes strategic recommendations from four dimensions: product development, marketing innovation, service optimization, and Sino-Thai cooperation, to enhance Thailand's tourism competitiveness and promote sustainable development.

1. Deepening Tourism Product Development

To address Chinese tourists' demand for natural and cultural experiences, Thailand should build a diversified product system that integrates ecological exploration, cultural themes (such as Buddhist study tours, traditional festivals), and family-friendly interactive projects to strengthen emotional connections. It should develop low-carbon environmental protection routes and community-based sustainable projects to attract environmentally conscious tourists. Upgrading entertainment experiences with technologies like AR/VR, creating night market cultural brands, and offering high-end customized services (e.g., private tours, luxury resorts), while designing cross-regional travel routes to cater to multi-level market demands from mass tourism to in-depth experiences.

2. Innovating Marketing Strategies

Leverage digital platforms like Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and WeChat Video Accounts to precisely reach young audiences, segment the target market based on tourists' demographics (age, income, education, travel experience), and tailor promotional content and campaigns. Strengthen brand recognition through cross-industry collaborations with Chinese film/TV producers and variety shows, integrating Thailand's iconic attractions into cultural works. Encourage user-generated content (UGC) with incentives such as discount vouchers or souvenirs to amplify word-of-mouth effects, while actively monitoring and managing online reviews to promptly address tourist feedback and demonstrate commitment to improving experiences. Highlight Thailand's cultural identity as the "Land of Smiles" and its luxury tourism resources (tropical island resorts, golf clubs, spa services), and design themed promotions around Chinese holidays (e.g., Spring Festival, summer vacation) to enhance brand appeal and market penetration.

3. Enhancing Service Systems and Safeguards

Optimize direct flight connections between China and Thailand, especially from China's second-tier cities to major Thai tourist destinations, and improve transportation links between cities and scenic areas to enhance travel convenience. Install Chinese-language signage and service counters in airports, hotels, and attractions, and provide cross-cultural training for service staff to create a friendly environment. Promote smart tourism services such as intelligent navigation systems, online booking platforms, and real-time feedback tools to enhance satisfaction through technology. On the safety front, establish a sound security early-warning mechanism, cooperate with the Chinese government for real-time information sharing, strengthen food safety supervision, improve first-aid facilities in scenic areas, and build an efficient emergency response system to protect tourists' health and safety, thereby enhancing destination trust.

4. Promoting Sino-Thai Bilateral Cooperation

Expand direct flight coverage between major cities, optimize cross-border transportation networks, and develop

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unified service standards for safety, quality, and information sharing to facilitate seamless travel experiences. Jointly organize tourism promotion events, exhibitions, and cultural exchanges to integrate resources for historical heritage tours and cultural theme routes, while establishing a collaborative mechanism for sharing market data to inform evidence-based policy-making. Deepen cultural exchanges through joint festivals, art exhibitions, and academic forums, and launch educational study tours for students to foster understanding and interest in Thai culture among the younger generation, laying the foundation for long-term tourist markets. Through resource integration and multi-level cooperation, Sino-Thai tourism can achieve synergistic development and inject sustained momentum into bilateral cultural and economic integration.

These initiatives will systematically enhance Thailand's attractiveness to Chinese tourists, facilitate tourism recovery, and deepen Sino-Thai cultural and economic synergy, providing a model for sustainable regional tourism development.

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