

THE EFFECTS OF TOURIST DESTINATION
PERCEPTION AND CUSTOMER DELIGHT
ON VALUE CO-CREATION BEHAVIOUR
AMONG TOURISTS IN XI'AN CHINA

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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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PERCEPTION AND CUSTOMER DELIGHT
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CHEN WEIXIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effect of tourist destination perception and customer delight on tourist value co-creation behaviour (participation behaviour and citizenship behaviour). This study used a survey-based quantitative approach. Data were collected using questionnaires involving 411 group tourists who have previously visited Xi'an. Respondents were chosen using multistage sampling technique. To analyse the data, covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) was conducted using AMOS 24.0. Based on the outcomes, 46 percent of the variance in the participation behaviour is explained by tourist destination perception and customer delight, while 47 percent of the variance in citizenship behaviour is explained by tourist destination perception and customer delight. The findings also showed that tourist destination perception positively affects participation behaviour ($\beta=0.377$, $p<0.001$), citizenship behaviour ($\beta=0.346$, $p<0.001$), and customer delight ($\beta=0.453$, $p<0.001$). Further, customer delight positively affects participation behaviour ($\beta=0.418$, $p<0.001$) and citizenship behaviour ($\beta=0.456$, $p<0.001$). This study also showed that customer delight served as partial mediator between tourist destination perception and value co-creation behaviour. This research contributes to the customer value co-creation literature by considering tourist destination perception and customer delight as antecedents and quantifying their influences on tourist value co-creation behaviour. This study has important practical implications, emphasising that enhancing tourists' overall perception of destination and customer delight can effectively promote value co-creation behaviour, thereby strengthening the competitive advantage of destination.

**PENGARUH PERSEPSI DESTINASI PELANCONGAN DAN
KEGEMBIRAAN PELANGGAN TERHADAP TINGKAH
LAKU PENCIPTAAN NILAI DALAM KALANGAN
PELANCONG DI XI'AN CHINA**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti kesan persepsi destinasi pelancongan dan kegembiraan pelanggan terhadap tingkah laku penciptaan nilai pelancong (tingkah laku penyertaan dan tingkah laku kewarganegaraan). Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif berasaskan tinjauan. Data telah dikumpulkan menggunakan soal selidik melibatkan 411 pelancong berkumpul yang pernah melawat Xi'an. Responden telah dipilih menggunakan teknik persampelan pelbagai peringkat. Untuk menganalisis data, pemodelan persamaan berstruktur berasaskan kovarians (CB-SEM) telah dijalankan menggunakan AMOS 24.0. Berdasarkan hasil kajian, 46 peratus varians dalam tingkah laku penyertaan dijelaskan oleh persepsi destinasi pelancongan dan kegembiraan pelanggan, manakala 47 peratus varians dalam tingkah laku kewarganegaraan dijelaskan oleh persepsi destinasi pelancongan dan kegembiraan pelanggan. Dapatan juga menunjukkan bahawa persepsi destinasi pelancongan memberi kesan positif terhadap tingkah laku penyertaan ($\beta=0.377$, $p<0.001$), tingkah laku kewarganegaraan ($\beta=0.346$, $p<0.001$), dan kegembiraan pelanggan ($\beta=0.453$, $p<0.001$). Seterusnya, kegembiraan pelanggan memberi kesan positif terhadap tingkah laku penyertaan ($\beta=0.418$, $p<0.001$) dan tingkah laku kewarganegaraan ($\beta=0.456$, $p<0.001$). Kajian ini turut menunjukkan bahawa kegembiraan pelanggan berfungsi sebagai pengantara sebahagian antara persepsi destinasi pelancongan dan tingkah laku penciptaan nilai. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada literatur penciptaan nilai pelanggan dengan mengambil kira persepsi destinasi pelancongan dan kegembiraan pelanggan sebagai anteseden serta mengukur pengaruhnya terhadap tingkah laku penciptaan nilai pelancong. Kajian ini mempunyai kepentingan praktikal yang penting, menekankan bahawa meningkatkan persepsi keseluruhan pelancong terhadap destinasi pelancongan dan kegembiraan pelanggan dapat secara berkesan menggalakkan tingkah laku penciptaan nilai pelancong, sekali gus memperkukuh kelebihan daya saing destinasi pelancongan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Amenities and Attractions
AE	Activities and Entertainment
AGFI	Adjusted Goodness-of-fit Index
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structure
AS	Accessibility
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
Ave-CVI	Average Content Validity Index
CB	Citizenship Behavior
CB-SEM	Covariance Based Structural Equation Modeling
CCTV	China Central Television
CD	Customer Delight
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CMB	Common Method Bias
CMIN/DF	Chi-square Degrees of Freedom Ratio
CNY	Chinese Yuan
CR	Composite Reliability
CVI	Content Validity Index

.





EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFI	Goodness-of-fit Index
GOF	Goodness-of-fit
I-CVI	Item-level Content Validity Index
LC	Local community
PB	Participation Behavior
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Based Structural Equation Modeling
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
RO	Research Objectives
RQ	Research Questions
S-CVI	Scale-level Content Validity Index
SEM	Structural Equation Model
SET	Social Exchange Theory
TDP	Tourist Destination Perception
UA-CVI	Universal Content Validity Index
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
VCB	Value Co-creation Behaviour
VIF	Variance Inflation Factors
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council



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- B Cover Letter and Research Questionnaires for Respondents in English
- C Cover Letter and Research Questionnaires for Respondents in Chinese
- D List of Xi'an Travel Agency (Total of 540)
- E List of Research Publications

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

As society and the economy develop, living standards improve, and leisure time increases, the tourism industry is experiencing rapid growth (Cui et al., 2016). Tourism development has increasingly become a significant driver of economic growth in China and around the world.

In the dynamic and interactive field of tourism industry, tourists play a vital role as essential collaborators and supporters of destinations (Xu et al., 2021). On one hand, with the arrival of the experience economy era, tourists' approach to travel extends beyond the conventional sightseeing model, evolving into a more profound, customized, and experiential form of tourism. In contrast to merely following predefined travel plans, certain tourists are inclined to actively engage throughout the entirety of the tourism process (Lan et al., 2021). On the other hand, the process of

tourists engaging in interaction and cooperation not only leads their distinctive and unforgettable tourism experiences but also benefits service providers (Teng & Tsai, 2020). The active engagement of tourists fall under the category of value co-creation behaviour (Tommasetti et al., 2017; Yi & Gong, 2013). Tourist value co-creation behaviour is significant in the field of tourism (Teng & Tsai, 2020). There has been a growing focus on the behaviour of co-creating value in tourism activities (Assiouras et al., 2019; Eletxigerra et al., 2021; Font et al., 2021).

This study delved into the intricate relationship between tourist destination perception and value co-creation behaviour while exploring the mediating role of customer delight in this dynamic. The chapter provides a succinct overview of the research, covering background information, the problem statement, research objectives, research questions, and research hypotheses. Furthermore, it clarifies the conceptual framework, underscores the study's significance, delineates the research scope, offers operational definitions, and concludes with a summary. Through this comprehensive presentation, a clear understanding of the study's context, aims, methodology can be gained, setting the stage for a thorough exploration of the interplay between tourist destination perceptions, value co-creation behaviour, and customer delight.

1.2 Background of Study

The tourism industry plays a significant role in global development, with correlations to the economic growth of the world economy (Khan et al., 2020). The tourism

industry is broadly acknowledged as one of the largest economic sectors worldwide (Mai et al., 2020). It is a vast and swiftly expanding industry that significantly impacts both local and global economies (Zhong & Chen, 2019). As highlighted in the 2023 report by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism contributes over \$10 trillion per year to the global economy, comprising approximately 10% of the world's GDP (Aslanova, 2025). At the same time, the tourism industry supports approximately 334 million jobs (Čikeš, 2024). In 2023, data showed that international tourist arrivals hit 1.4 billion (Otaboyev, 2024). Tourism is important to economy. Thailand's tourism industry holds significant economic importance, with the sector contributing 11.5% to the country's GDP in 2023 (Soh et al., 2024). Similarly, tourism has played a key role in boosting Malaysia's GDP and revenue, accounting for 10.5% of its GDP (Soh et al., 2024). Croatia demonstrates a strong dependence on tourism, with the industry making up 19.6% of GDP and directly supporting 6% of the national workforce (Čikeš, 2024).

The tourism industry also has a significant impact on tourist destinations. Tourist destinations can be classified as cities, regions, or countries (Tavares & Tran, 2019). Destinations, regardless of their scale, have prioritized the development of tourism due to the economic benefits it brings to the respective locations (Kim et al., 2018). Thailand carries out tourism marketing campaigns such as "Amazing Thailand" to showcase its beauty, hospitality, and culture to the world. Not only has this work generated significant income for the country, but it has also elevated Thailand to one of the world's top tourist destinations (Fakfare et al., 2022). Portorož and Opatija are two of the most popular seaside destinations in the northeastern region of the Adriatic (Vodeb & Nemec Rudež, 2016).

Following policy reforms, China has embarked on a path of increased openness with regards to trade, investment, and international relations. In 2017, China saw a surge in international tourism and generated over \$10 billion in revenue from foreign visitors, which was a 2.9% increase compared to the previous year, cementing its status as a rapidly growing global tourism destination (Zhang et al., 2019). China ranked among the top visited countries globally, trailing only France, Spain, and the United States of America (USA), while generating billions of dollars annually from tourism revenues (Ahmad et al., 2018). Meanwhile, China's domestic tourism industry had experienced rapid growth. Although China was affected by COVID-19, its tourism industry has demonstrated a notable recovery. The number of domestic tourist trips and tourism revenue in China in recent years are shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Development of Domestic Tourism in China From the year of 2016 to 2023

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of tourists (One hundred million)	44.35	50.01	55.39	60.06	28.79	32.46	25.30	48.91
Tourism revenue (One hundred million Chinese yuan)	39390	45561	51278	57251	22286	29191	20444	49000

Source: 2023 Statistical Bulletin on Cultural and Tourism Development of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China

Overall, in recent years, the tourism industry in China has experienced rapid development. However, the current state of tourism resources, facilities, and services still falls short of meeting the growing demand for tourism. Furthermore, the industry has yet to evolve into a modern service sector that achieves higher levels of public satisfaction. This highlights the urgent need for the tourism industry to shift from rapid growth to high-quality development (Lu, 2022). High-quality development of the tourism industry has become one of China's development strategies (He et al., 2024). In accordance with the requirements of China's *14th Five-Year Plan for Tourism Development*, the tourism industry in various destinations is facing new demands for high-quality development. High-quality development of the tourism industry requires destinations to achieve innovation, quality improvement, and efficiency enhancement (P. s. Daily, 2024).

Tourist destinations, in addition to facing policy requirements, are also confronted with intense competition. As China's tourism industry recovers, competition in the tourism market is becoming increasingly fierce (Shiyang, 2024; yan, 2023). Many of China's leading destinations set tourism development goals which is very challenging. The tourism development plan reports of these destinations show that with 2025 as the time point, Chongqing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Xi'an will need to achieve total tourism revenues of 750 billion Chinese yuan, 700 billion Chinese yuan, 600 billion Chinese yuan, and 500 billion Chinese yuan, respectively (C. M. P. s. Government, 2022; S. M. P. s. Government, 2021; News, 2021; Times, 2021). The growth rates of these destinations need to be 30.80 percent, 22.08 percent, 34.69 percent, and 58.93 percent compared to 2019 before COVID-2019 (Table 1.2). In order to achieve the goal, these tourist destinations have proposed measures to

strengthen promotion and marketing. Apart from these tourist destinations, others also have taken various measures to attract tourists. For example, some tourism directors appear in promotional short videos with unique personas to promote their hometowns (Daily, 2023). This would have been unimaginable in the past, which indirectly reflects the intensity of competition among tourist destinations.

Table 1.2

Expected Gross Tourism Revenue for Some Leading Tourist Destinations in China By 2025

Tourist destinations	Total Tourism Revenue 2019 (billion Chinese yuan)	Expected total tourism revenue in 2025 (billion Chinese yuan)	Expected growth rate (%)
Chongqing	573.40	750.00	30.80
Shanghai	573.37	700.00	22.08
Guangzhou	445.46	600.00	34.69
Xi'an	314.61	500.00	58.93

Source: Official local government websites and local newspaper websites.

According to *UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2017* the tourism industry is projected to grow at an annual rate of 3.3%, with tourist arrivals anticipated to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 (UNWTO, 2016). The increase in the number of tourists visiting various global destinations has intensified competition among tourist destinations (Cronjé & du Plessis, 2020). Another situation cannot be ignored that new destinations are emerging in the market, and new strategic alliances are being established. This situation has also intensified the competition between tourist destinations (Mottironi & Corigliano, 2012).

Of course, one factor that cannot be overlooked is that the short duration of holidays in China exacerbates competition among tourism destinations. According to the *Regulations on National Annual Holidays and Commemorative Days*, China implements a two-day weekend system with 11 days of statutory public holidays, which is very close to the global average. However, there is a significant gap between the number of paid annual leave days for employees in China and the global average. Moreover, the implementation of paid leave faces challenges, with nearly half of employees not benefiting from paid annual leave. As a result, the overall level of vacation time for Chinese workers is significantly lower than the global average (CCTV.com, 2023; People.cn, 2013). In other words, within a limited travel budget and vacation time, if tourists choose to visit destination A, they are unlikely to visit destination B.

While facing intense competition, tourist destinations also face high marketing costs. Specifically, with increasing competition among destinations, destination management organizations are increasingly focusing on marketing. As a result, destination marketing organizations invest significantly in promoting their destination (Bastiaansen et al., 2022). According to *Global Entertainment and Media Outlook (2015-2019)*, despite the rapid expansion of internet-based marketing, TV commercials are expected to remain the most widely used channel for promoting products and services in the coming years. In 2022, more than 300 organizations, including provinces, regions, and cities across China — such as Shandong, Anhui, Xinjiang, Jiangsu, Guizhou, Guangdong, Fujian, Hebei, Jiangxi, Henan, and Shanxi — along with their subordinate cities and scenic spots, as well as large cultural and tourism enterprises like Huaqiang Fantawild and Chimelong Group, aired tourism

promotional videos on China Central Television (CCTV). Taking Guangdong Province as an example, a 15-second tourism promotion ad broadcast on CCTV for just three months cost as much as 9 million yuan (Province, 2021). There has been a significant increase in investment in destination marketing funds, which has led to significant challenges for destination management (Yanzheng et al., 2015).

Faced with the demands for high-quality development driven by national policies, intense competition, and the pressure of high marketing costs, tourism destinations urgently need to find reasonable solutions to address these challenges.

High-quality development of the tourism industry, aimed at pursuing quality improvement and efficiency enhancement, is a value co-creation process among stakeholders (Liaoji et al., 2021). Tourists is a main entity that promote high-quality development in tourism. They play an important roles in tourist destination high-quality development (Wang, 2021). In other words, tourist value co-creation behaviour plays a crucial role in supporting the high-quality development of the tourism industry.

In the face of a highly competitive environment, competitiveness is crucial for a tourist destination's success and long-term prosperity (Cronjé & du Plessis, 2020). It is therefore essential for destinations to understand what actions are needed to enhance their competitiveness over others. In an era of rapid development in the service economy, researchers and practitioners alike recognize that proactive customer value creation behaviour, rather than passive customer purchasing behaviour, plays a crucial role in an organization's competitive advantage (Gong et al., 2016). In a highly



competitive and intricate industry such as tourism (Eletxigerra et al., 2021), tourist value co-creation behaviour plays an important role for tourist destinations and enhances their competitiveness (Viglia et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2017). First of all, the tourism industry is considered an ideal environment for value co-creation (Shaw et al., 2011). Tourist value co-creation behaviour have the potential to generate distinctive and unforgettable tourism experiences (Busser & Shulga, 2018; Frías Jamilena et al., 2017) that offer advantages to both tourists and service providers (Assiouras et al., 2019; Morosan & DeFranco, 2016; Reichenberger, 2017; Teng & Tsai, 2020). Second, tourist engage in value co-creation can help service providers and Organizations stand out from competitors (Delpechitre et al., 2018; Eletxigerra et al., 2021). On one hand, By engaging tourists in the service creation process and customizing experiences to meet their preferences, businesses can create unique and appealing offerings, giving them a competitive advantage in the market (John & Supramaniam, 2024). For example, hotels that provide an exceptional customer experience through value co-creation generate 5.7 times more revenue than other hotels , while customers are indeed willing to pay up to 14% more for a personalized experience (Roy et al., 2020). On the other hand, value co-creation behaviour fosters innovation by facilitating collaboration and the exchange of ideas between service providers and tourists. They can harness tourist insights and creativity to create new services, enhance existing ones, and remain ahead of market trends (John & Supramaniam, 2024). All in all, more and more tourism service providers and organizations begin to recognize these advantages and actively encourage tourists to perform value co-creation behaviour, aiming to achieve positive results in a reciprocal manner (Busser & Shulga, 2018).



Improving marketing effectiveness is an important way to reduce the pressure on marketing spending (Solcansky & Simberova, 2010). In the tourism sector, top managers are often encouraged to implement effective marketing strategies to attract tourists and ensure their long-term retention (Khan et al., 2022). Effective destination marketing necessitates the participation of diverse stakeholders within the destination and relies on collaboration with other organizations and individuals (Sotiriadis, 2020). In other words, For destination management organizations, they must bring together the best efforts of a number of partner organizations and individuals (stakeholders) to achieve the greatest success in destination marketing (Sotiriadis, 2020). Among them, tourist value co-creation behaviour plays an important role in destination marketing. For example, advocacy, as a key aspect of value co-creation behaviour, contributes greatly to the development of a positive destination reputation, promotion of their products and services, higher service quality evaluations, and increase in tourist base size through positive word-of mouth (Yi & Gong, 2013).

In summary, tourist value co-creation behaviour is a key solution for tourism destinations to address the demands of high-quality development driven by national policies, intense competition, and the pressure of high marketing costs. Since the concept of value co-creation was introduced in 2004, it has gradually gained importance in the field of tourism (John & Supramaniam, 2024).

Tourist destinations are holistic ecosystems that bring together a diverse range of tourism products and services to provide tourists with integrated and cohesive experiences (Boes et al., 2016). The tourism industry is heavily influenced by tourist destination perception (Philemon, 2018). Tourist destination perception is a

psychological process in which tourists form an understanding of the destination under the joint action of the destination object factor and the tourist subject factor (Zhong, 2015). It refers to that tourists are envisioned as perceiving a destination holistically, as a multi-attributed tourism product which contains Accommodation, Amenities, Attractions, etc. Positive tourist destination perception among tourists can motivate them to revisit the destination and recommend it to their family and friends. Conversely, negative tourist destination perception may discourage them from visiting again and dissuade others from considering the destination (Philemon, 2018). Previous research has shown that tourist destination perception indirectly positively influence word of mouth (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017). Further, some Chinese scholars have conducted research on the effect of tourist destination perception on tourist citizenship behaviour and concluded that tourist destination perception has a significant positive impact on tourist citizenship behaviour (Yanju et al., 2023). Tourist destination perception is a necessary pre-condition for tourist behaviour (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017). In other words, tourist destination perception influences tourists' positive behaviour.

Recently, the concept of customer delight has drawn growing interest from both researchers and practitioners (Kim et al., 2015; Terrah et al., 2022). Customer delight is a positive emotional state that individuals experience when their expectations are exceeded to an unexpected and surprising extent, and it is defined as “emotion composed of joy, exhilaration, thrill, or exuberance” (Oliver et al., 1997). Customer delight prompts a highly positive response, with even high impacts on post-consumption behaviour (Terrah et al., 2022). According to previous studies, customer delight, as a positive emotion, can lead to positive behaviour such as

customer loyalty (Lee & Shea, 2015; Liu & Keh, 2015). Customer delight has consistently demonstrated a positive correlation with increased repurchase intentions (Meyer et al., 2017; Widodo, 2021). Customer delight positively affects a higher likelihood of positive word-of-mouth and recommending behaviour (Jiang, 2020; Terrah et al., 2022). Overall, customer delight influences customers' positive behaviour.

1.3 Problem Statement

Academic literature indicates that the field of tourism destination marketing has made significant advancements over the past three decades and has reached a stage of maturity (Sotiriadis, 2020). The diversity and breadth of the published research in these field are considerable (Dolnicar & Ring, 2014). Tourist destination marketing has become a well-established field which forms its own distinct body of knowledge, and the analysis of tourist behaviour is one of the important topics (Sotiriadis, 2020).

A thorough understanding of tourist behaviour is essential for developing tourism enterprises that cater to destination selection, destination evaluation, and future behavioural intentions of tourists (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020). Therefore, there are many researches on tourist behaviour (Kock et al., 2018; Pizam, 2012; Xue & Zhang, 2020), among which tourist environmentally responsible behaviour and value co-creation behaviour matter a great deal in the field of marketing (Sahabuddin et al., 2021; C. Wang et al., 2019; Xie et al., 2020). Both tourist environmentally responsible behaviour and value co-creation behaviour are essential for the success of

destination in the long term (John & Supramaniam, 2024; Su et al., 2020; Teng & Tsai, 2020). However, unlike tourist environmentally responsible behaviour, tourist value co-creation behaviour focuses more on the unique aspects of value co-creation (Teng & Tsai, 2020). The idea that tourists actively participate in value co-creation with organizations is gaining greater recognition in tourism marketing (Rihova et al., 2015). Tourist value co-creation behaviour plays an important role for tourist destinations and enhances their competitiveness (Viglia et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2017). Tourist value co-creation behaviour can significantly contribute to building a positive destination reputation through factors such as positive word-of-mouth (Yi & Gong, 2013). Tourist value co-creation behaviour are crucial to tourism (Teng & Tsai, 2020).

However, there is a fact that it has to be admitted: the literature specifically focusing on value co-creation behaviour among tourists in different tourism contexts remains limited (Ahn et al., 2019). The existing research of customer value co-creation behaviour mainly focuses on virtual community users (Rubio et al., 2020). Although tourists' value co-creation behaviour have attracted some attentions from academia and the industry (Xu et al., 2021), there is still a relative scarcity of theoretical research. As some scholars have suggested, future research should examine customer value co-creation in diverse tourism contexts (Roy et al., 2020). Research on tourist value co-creation behaviour in the context of ancient city tourism destinations, with Xi'an as a typical representative, remains unexplored. Xi'an served as the capital for some of the most significant dynasties in Chinese history (Xu et al., 2021). It is among the largest cities globally and symbolizes the prosperity of classical Chinese culture (Yin et al., 2019). According to the 2024 May Day holiday tourism trend



report released by Ctrip, Xi'an received three labels during the May Day holiday in China: domestic popular destinations, destinations favored by the post-2000s generation, and inbound tourism hotspots (CNR.cn, 2024). As an ancient city tourism destination, Xi'an attracts a large number of tourists. For example, in 2023, the total number of tourists in Xi'an reached 278 million.

Tourist value co-creation behaviour is crucial for the development of tourist destinations (Chuangxin et al., 2024). Exploring the factors that can promote tourist value co-creation behaviour is an important issue in this field (Xu et al., 2021). Many studies have attempted to examine the influence of various factors on customer value co-creation behaviour, such as perceived fairness (Roy et al., 2020), trust (Shen et al., 2020), relational and cultural embeddedness (Laud & Karpen, 2017), interaction (Buonincontri et al., 2017; Yen et al., 2020), employee engagement (Chathoth et al., 2020), product or service innovation (Yen et al., 2020), corporate social responsibility etc. (Luu, 2019). Despite all the efforts, studies on customer perception and customer emotion, which may be important antecedents have been largely neglected.

There is a growing trend in exploring the formation mechanisms of tourist behavioural intentions from both cognitive and affective perspectives (Lee & Park, 2019). On one hand, the introduction of perception in the mechanisms influencing value co-creation behaviour represents a promising avenue for future research (chenlu & juan, 2022). On the other hand, scholars tend to explain the mechanism of tourist behavioural intentions formation by attributing it to customer delight (Ali et al., 2018; Jiang, 2020).



From the cognitive perspective, previous research has shown that tourist destination perception indirectly positively influence word of mouth (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017). Word of mouth is very similar to advocacy, which is an important component of tourist value co-creation behaviour (Lee et al., 2017). Certainly, they are nonetheless distinguishable. In concrete terms, advocacy is a powerful form of positive word-of-mouth where customers actively promote and defend a service provider (Lee et al., 2017). Further, some Chinese scholars have conducted research on the impact of destination perception on tourist citizenship behaviour and concluded that destination perception has a significant positive impact on tourist citizenship behaviour (Yanju et al., 2023), which provides some research base support for this study. However, it should not be overlooked that the study mentioned takes provincial destinations as an example and that tourist citizenship behaviour is only one branch of tourist value co-creation behaviour. There is still a gap in research that explores whether destination perceptions have a positive impact on tourist citizenship behaviour and tourist participation behaviour, taking urban destinations as an example. All in all, empirical research on whether tourist destination perception directly influences tourist value co-creation behaviour is still relatively lacking.

From the affective perspective, emotions are very important to tourist behaviour in the field of tourism studies (Jiang, 2020; Seyidov & Adomaitienė, 2016). According to the compilation of tourism destination marketing literature, previous scholars have pointed out that the role of emotion is a largely unexplored area and future research endeavor in the area of destination marketing (Sotiriadis, 2020). Researchers have thoroughly explored how positive emotional responses can

significantly affect satisfaction (Serra-Cantalops et al., 2018) and loyalty (Gracia et al., 2011) and so on. As a positive emotion, customer delight is a growing concept that has recently captured the interest of both researchers and practitioners (Barnes et al., 2021; Barnes et al., 2020; Torres et al., 2020). Customer delight refers to a positive emotional state that individuals experience when their expectations are exceeded to an unexpected and surprising extent, and it is defined as “emotion composed of joy, exhilaration, thrill, or exuberance” (Oliver et al., 1997). Research on customer delight in tourism can be broadly divided into two streams. A significant portion of the literature examines hospitality contexts, with an emphasis on the relationship between service quality and guest delight in hotels (Magnini et al., 2011; Torres et al., 2014; Torres & Kline, 2013). The other line of research explores the impact of customer experiences on customer delight in settings such as theme parks (Ma et al., 2013), airports (Ali et al., 2016), and tourist destinations (Jiang et al., 2016). These reflect a lack of attention to the behavioural consequences of customer delight in the context of tourism (Jiang, 2020).

These oversights are particularly notable where customer delight could play a critical role in shaping tourist positive behaviour (Jiang, 2020). In marketing research, customer satisfaction is an important concept (Dam & Dam, 2021; Kurdi et al., 2020; Otto et al., 2020). Customer satisfaction and customer delight are both related and different. They both relate to customer expectations. The difference is that customer delight is often described as a positive outcome exceeding his expectations whereas customer satisfaction is fully fulfilling one's expectations (Prabhu & Aithal, 2022). The study found that, even when customers express satisfaction, they do not always become loyal customers (Barnes et al., 2020; Torres & Ronzoni, 2018). The academic



skepticism regarding the effectiveness of satisfaction in predicting behavioural intentions (Ahrholdt et al., 2017). The focus shifted from merely meeting expectations to something beyond. Compared with customer satisfaction, the effect of customer delight is better to predict customer behaviour, especially in the field of tourism (Ali et al., 2018). It has been demonstrated that customer delight positively influences tourists in favor of positive corporate behaviour such as positive word of mouth (Jiang, 2020). It is important to note that while customer delight have a positive impact on word of mouth, as mentioned earlier, word of mouth is not the same as advocacy, one of the dimensions of value co-creation. Overall, as a positive behaviour that benefits the service provider, value co-creation behaviour has yet to be confirmed as being positively influenced by customer delight.



Although existing studies have acknowledged the importance of customer delight in service management, the specific mechanisms through which it affects tourist behavioural responses remain underexplored (Shoukat & Ramkissoon, 2022). To further clarify the role of customer delight, it is essential to develop a more comprehensive theoretical framework that examines its interactions with other key constructs. However, the existing research lacks integrated models centered on customer delight, which could offer valuable insights into its relative and interactive relationships with related variables (Jiang, 2020). In particular, a mediation model in which customer delight acts between tourist destination perception and value co-creation behaviour has not received sufficient academic attention or empirical testing.



Accordingly, this study attempts to address these gaps by investigating whether positive destination perceptions among tourists enhance customer delight, thereby leading to increased tourist value co-creation behaviour. In other words, this research want to enhance the understanding of whether tourist destination perception influences tourist value co-creation behaviour and explore how tourist destination perception influences tourist value co-creation behaviour based on the cognition-affect-behaviour theory and social exchange theory.

1.4 Objectives of The Study

The concept of value co-creation behaviour can be categorized into participation behaviour (in-role behaviour) and citizenship behaviour (extra-role behaviour) (Yi & Gong, 2013). In view of the proceeding discussion, the research objectives are as follows:

1. To examine the effect of tourist destination perception on participation behaviour.
2. To examine the effect of tourist destination perception on citizenship behaviour.
3. To examine the effect of tourist destination perception on customer delight.
4. To examine the effect of customer delight on participation behaviour.
5. To examine the effect of customer delight on citizenship behaviour.
6. To examine the mediating role of customer delight towards the relationship between tourist destination perception and participation behaviour.

7. To examine the mediating role of customer delight towards the relationship between tourist destination perception and citizenship behaviour.

1.5 Research Questions

The study focuses on the following research questions:

1. Does tourist destination perception positively affect participation behaviour?
2. Does tourist destination perception positively affect citizenship behaviour?
3. Does tourist destination perception positively affect customer delight?
4. Does customer delight positively affect participation behaviour?
5. Does customer delight positively affect citizenship behaviour?
6. Does customer delight mediate the relationship between tourist destination perception and participation behaviour?
7. Does customer delight mediate the relationship between tourist destination perception and citizenship behaviour?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

In view of the preceding discussion, the hypotheses of the study are:

H1: Tourist destination perception positively affect participation behaviour.

H2: Tourist destination perception positively affect citizenship behaviour.

H3: Tourist destination perception positively affect customer delight.

H4: Customer delight positively affect participation behaviour.

H5: Customer delight positively affect citizenship behaviour.

H6: Customer delight mediates the relationship between tourist destination perception and participation behaviour.

H7: Customer delight mediates the relationship between tourist destination perception and citizenship behaviour.

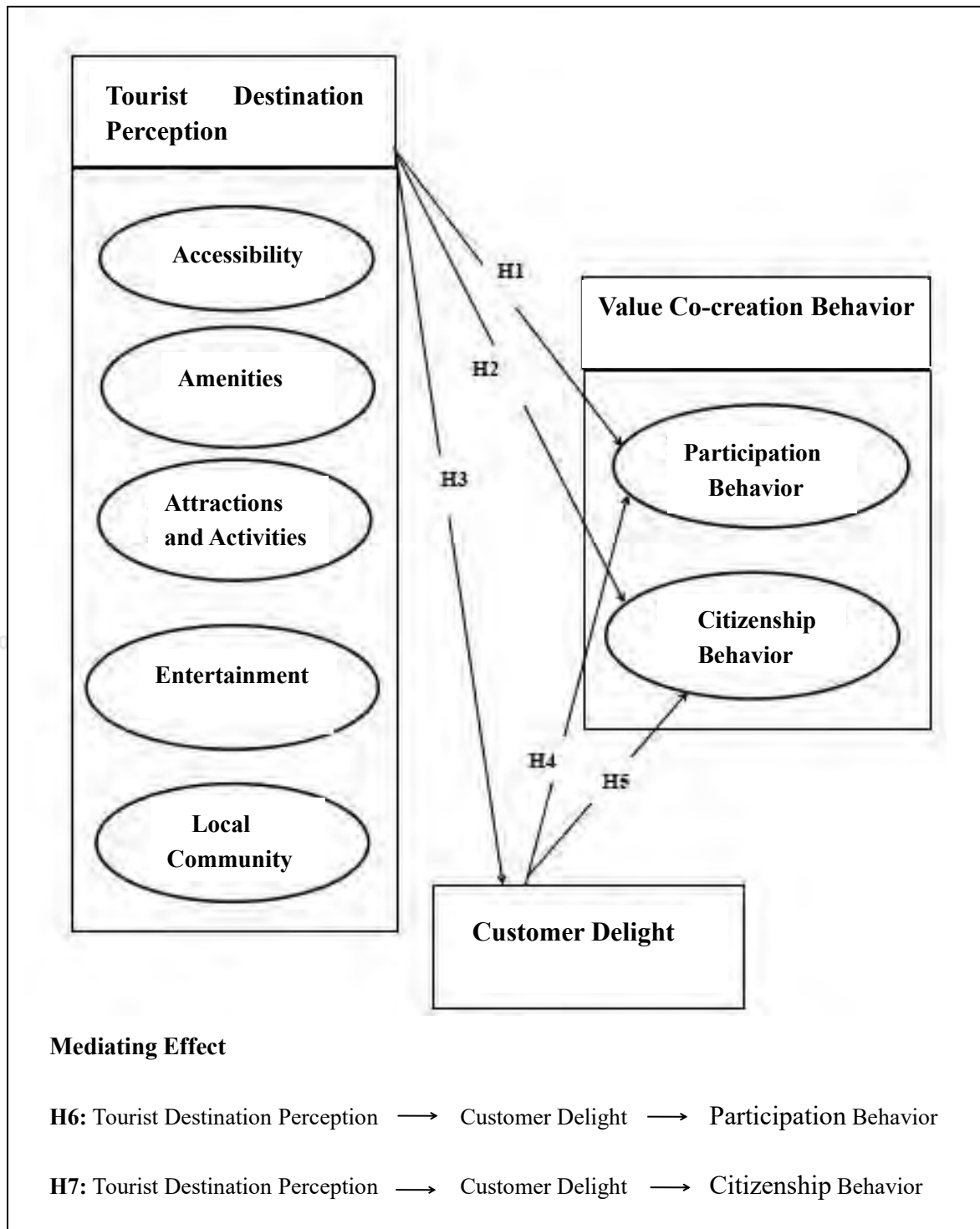
1.7 The Conceptual Framework of Research

The conceptual framework of this study is an interpretive summarisation of relationship among the elements of value co-creation behaviour, tourist destination perception as well as customer delight. Specifically, according to the theory of cognition-affect-behaviour and research objectives, the independent variable in this study is tourist destination perception. The dependent variable in this study is value co-creation behaviour. The mediating variable is customer delight.

A unique aspect of this article is that it introduces a mediating variable in the study of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. That is because in experimental and correlational business research, mediating variables are identified to clarify the type and effects of the relationship between independent and dependent variables (Namazi & Namazi, 2016). This helps to more accurately and effectively determine the nature of the study. A Mediator Variable, also known as an “intervening variable” or “process variable”, serves as a bridge between the independent variable (commonly referred to as the causal or independent variable) and the dependent variable (also known as the outcome or dependent variable). In this

mediational model, it is assumed the independent variable initially impacts the mediator variable, which in turn affects the dependent variable. Thus, there is a causal chain of effects that defines the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. One reason for testing mediation is to comprehend the mechanism by which the causal variable influences the outcome. Furthermore, in most causal or structural models, the mediational component often represents the most intriguing aspect of the model (Namazi & Namazi, 2016).

This study introduces the concept of “customer delight” as a mediating variable between tourists' perception of the destination and their engagement in value co-creation behaviour, an aspect that has been notably scarce or even absent in prior research. However, customer delight as a mediating variable has been explored in other research contexts and can serve as a valuable reference (Widodo, 2021). For example, customer delight was taken as a mediating variable between authenticity and positive word-of-mouth (Jiang, 2020). Customer delight has also been used as a mediating variable between customer experience and customer loyalty in the context of upscale hotel research (Lee & Park, 2019). In the present study, tourist destination perception consists of five parts: (1) accessibility, (2) amenities, (3) attractions and activities, (4) entertainment, and (5) local community. Value co-creation behaviour includes two dimensions: participation behaviour and citizenship behaviour. The proposed conceptual framework of research is shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1*Proposed Conceptual Framework of Research*

1.8 Operational Definitions

The definitions of the terms used in this study are based on previous research and have been adapted accordingly. They are as follows:

1.8.1 Tourist Destination Perception

Tourist destination perception is a psychological process in which tourists form an understanding of the destination under the joint action of the destination object factor and the tourist subject factor (Zhong, 2015). As a multi-attribute tourism product, the tourists are assumed to perceive tourist destination as a whole (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017). Destination attributes are frequently utilized in empirical studies to assess tourists' perceptions of a destination (Philemon, 2018). Although tourist destination attributes encompass many aspects, the 5As, which contain Accommodation, Amenities, Attractions, Accessibility, Activities, are the main destination attributes (Kumara & Senarathna, 2022). Additionally, in the eyes of Chinese tourists, the attribute of hospitality is highly regarded as a motivating factor for generating satisfaction and revisit intentions (Moon & Han, 2018).

Therefore, in this study, tourist destination perception refers to tourists' multi-attribute perception of a destination, encompassing a comprehensive perception of accommodations, facilities, attractions, accessibility, activities, and the local community.

1.8.2 Customer Delight

Customer delight is an essential topic of research for marketers (Prabhu & Aithal, 2022). It is different from customer satisfaction (Barnes & Krallman, 2019). Customer delight is often described as a positive outcome exceeding his expectations whereas customer satisfaction is fully fulfilling one's expectations (Prabhu & Aithal, 2022). Specifically, according to Oliver, customer delight refers to a positive emotional state that individuals experience when their expectations are exceeded to an unexpected and surprising extent, and it is defined as “emotion composed of joy, exhilaration, thrill, or exuberance” (Oliver et al., 1997). In other words, customer delight can be well-defined as delighting the customer to the point of amazing him with the product or service (Prabhu & Aithal, 2022).

In this study, when it involves the tourist field, customer delight refers to a strong positive emotional response of tourists, which combines feelings of pleasure and arousal triggered by a tourism experience (Ali et al., 2018; Torres et al., 2018).

1.8.3 Value Co-creation Behaviour

In this study, value co-creation behaviour refer to customers' proactive engagement in creating value throughout the physical, virtual, and mental processes of utilizing a firm's products or services (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). This behaviour is characterized by positive proactivity, strong purposefulness, and autonomy (Teng & Tsai, 2020). It

can be divided into customer participation behaviour (in-role behaviour) and customer citizenship behaviour (extra-role) (Yi & Gong, 2013).

In the tourism context, tourist participation behaviour refers to the series of processes in which tourists engage in the production of tourism services, demonstrating their willingness to seek out, share, and engage in responsible behaviour regarding relevant information (Yang et al., 2024). It is a required basic in-role behaviour of tourist value creation. Tourist citizenship behaviour, which is a voluntary behaviour that aids value creation, refers to tourists providing service improvement suggestions to tourism operators, helping other tourists, and spreading positive word of mouth. It primarily encompasses feedback, advocacy, helping, and tolerance (Shamim & Ghazali, 2014; Yi & Gong, 2013). In this study, as participants of prearranged group tours with relatively fixed itineraries, the tourists' opportunities to exhibit citizenship behaviour may have been somewhat limited. However, most group tour schedules include certain periods of free time, during which tourists still have opportunities to engage in citizenship behaviours.

1.8.4 Tourists of Group Package Tour

Individuals become tourists when they willingly depart from their usual surroundings, such as their place of residence, to explore a different environment (Camilleri & Camilleri, 2018).

In accordance with different organizational methods, tourists are divided into independent tourists and tourists of group package tour (Yin & Poon, 2016). An independent tourist is a person who has booked only a few travel arrangements, including transport, accommodation and a choice of attractions and activities, prior to departure (Hsiao & Chuang, 2015). Independent tourists have the flexibility to plan their own itineraries and make their own accommodation arrangements. They are often associated with a tendency to seek novelty and adventure (Hsiao & Chuang, 2015). Tourists of group package tour means that, tourists make a single payment to a travel agent prior to their scheduled tour, then the travel agent takes care of all travel-related services, including accommodation, meals, transportation, sightseeing, and ticket arrangements (Ren, 2022). In this study, tourists of group package tour refer to tourists who participated in organized group tours to Xi'an, China, and were officially received by Xi'an-based travel agencies.

1.9 Significance of The Study

This study is expected to enrich empirical evidence, theory and practice in the field of value co-creation behaviour. Understanding tourists' behaviour can help marketers and destination management organizations determine when to intervene in that behaviour to achieve the desired outcomes (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2020). From an empirical perspective, this study illustrates that the key factor helping to enhance the value co-creation behaviour of tourists should be tourist destination perception and customer delight.

Therefore, this study promotes an new approach to understanding the value co-creation behaviour of tourists. This study, through a systematic empirical analysis, will determine the impact of tourist destination perception and customer delight on value co-creation behaviour of tourists. To be specific, the finding of this study points out the path of understanding how tourist destination perception influences value co-creation behaviour mediated by customer delight.

The contributions of this study can be elaborated in two aspects: theoretical implications and practical implications. On the one hand, from a theoretical perspective, this research is likely to provide new ideas for the field of value co-creation. Customer delight is frequently used to explore the relationship with tourist loyalty. Unlike previous studies, customer delight plays a mediating role between tourist destination perception and value co-creation behaviour in this study. On the other hand, from a practical perspective, the finding of the study is helpful for the city tourism to pay more attention to factors of tourism destination.

Furthermore, comprehending tourist destination perception helps to stimulate continuous good condition in Xi'an, thus triggering customer delight and value co-creation behaviour, and promoting the sustainable development of Xi'an's tourism industry into a virtuous cycle. Because for more than 20 years, sustainable tourism has become a key development concept and initiative actively supported and advocated by international organizations and governments, as well as a focal point and hot topic in tourism academic research (Jun Fan et al., 2014). Tourist destinations serve as the spatial carriers for sustainable tourism development. Xi'an, as a typical tourist destination, is worth studying.

The finding of this study also shows that how customer delight influences value co-creation behaviour. Moreover, through proper management of destination, Xi'an will continuously inspire customer delight and lead to value co-creation behaviour which are important factors for their short-term and long-term development.

The study makes the following theoretical contributions. First, according to Assiouras et al, the significance of customer value co-creation has been progressively rising within the tourism and hospitality sectors. They proposed that researchers should examine the factors that influence customer value co-creation behaviour (Assiouras et al., 2019). Some scholars suggested that future research should examine customer value co-creation in diverse tourism contexts (Roy et al., 2020). This study responded to the suggestions put forth by Assiouras et al. (Assiouras et al., 2019) and Roy et al. (Roy et al., 2020) by investigating the antecedent variables that affect the tourist value co-creation behaviour in the tourism domain. The specific mechanism that explains the connection between tourist destination perception and value co-creation behaviour are still a black box. This study focused on examining the significant role of customer delight in the link between tourist destination perception and value co-creation behaviours. Through the examination of the relationships among the variables in this study, a deeper understanding can be gained regarding the association between tourist destination perception and value co-creation behaviour.

This study on the mechanisms of inducing co-creation behaviour of tourist value at the destination level is aimed at enriching the theoretical understanding, and in practice, inspiring destination managers to drive tourist value co-creation behaviour in

a reasonable manner, thereby promoting the sustainable development of tourist destinations through a co-creation mindset.

1.10 Scope & Limitation

In order to optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of this study, the research scope will be specifically delineated into four primary domains. Firstly, the investigation will be centered on tourist destination perception, customer delight, and value co-creation behaviour within the framework of China's vibrant tourism industry. This entails a comprehensive examination of how these factors interact and influence tourist behaviour within the Chinese context. Secondly, the research will underscore the intricate relationship among tourist destination perception, customer delight, and value co-creation behaviour within China's tourism sector, with a particular emphasis on fostering a conducive environment for achieving a heightened level of value co-creation behaviour. This involves probing deeper into the dynamics between tourists' perceptions of destination, and the behavioural choices they ultimately make. Thirdly, the survey population and sample will be rigorously confined to group tourists visiting Xi'an city in China. Xi'an, as a renowned tourist destination in China, boasts abundant tourism resources and a steady stream of tourists. Choosing Xi'an as the representative for studying destination perception in China's tourism industry is an excellent decision. Lastly, the proposed research model will serve as a practical guideline for tourism destinations and enterprises operating within China's tourism industry. By offering insights into the complex interplay between tourist destination perception, customer delight, and value co-creation behaviour, this model equips



stakeholders with valuable tools and strategies to enhance their operational performance. Through these concerted efforts to refine the research scope, this study aims to deliver actionable insights and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge within the field of tourism research, particularly within the unique context of China's dynamic tourism landscape.

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, while hypotheses were validated using tourists from Xi'an tour groups, the exclusion of tourists from tour groups visiting other destinations limits the generalizability of the findings. Including a more diverse sample could provide a broader understanding of tourist behaviours and perceptions. Secondly, the use of self-report methodology to measure about tourist destination perceptions, customer delight, and value co-creation behaviour, may introduce response bias. Participants may provide socially desirable responses or inaccurately recall their experiences, affecting the reliability and validity of the data collected. Thirdly, the cross-sectional study design used in this research may limit the ability to infer causal relationships between variables. Cross-sectional studies provide a snapshot of data at a single point in time, making it challenging to determine the directionality of relationships or identify temporal patterns. Longitudinal studies that track participants over time would offer a more robust method for examining causal relationships and capturing changes in perceptions and behaviours over time.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes valuable insights into the dynamics of tourist behaviour and tourist destination perception. Future research could address these limitations by including a more diverse sample, employing



multiple research methods, and adopting longitudinal study designs to provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing tourist perception and behaviours.

1.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, a comprehensive exploration of numerous facets pertinent to the research endeavor is undertaken. The discussion encompasses the research background, providing contextual understanding. The problem statement is meticulously crafted, accentuating the critical importance of undertaking this study within the broader scholarly discourse. Moreover, the research objectives are clearly delineated, serving as guiding beacons throughout the inquiry process. Research questions are meticulously formulated to probe pertinent issues and guide the investigative process effectively.

The significance of the research is expounded upon, elucidating its potential contributions to the academic field and practical implications. Furthermore, a robust theoretical framework is constructed, drawing from established literature to underpin the study's conceptual underpinnings. The research scope is meticulously defined, outlining the boundaries within which the study operates and the extent of its generalizability. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the research design and methodology. Additionally, operational definitions are provided to ensure clarity and precision in conceptualizing and measuring key variables within the study. Collectively, these elements lay the foundation for a rigorous and insightful research endeavor.