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Community Relations, Perceived Benefits, and Pro-Tourism Behavior: A Moderated Mediation Model (Postprint)

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Abstract

Destination residents, as important stakeholders in tourism activities, exert significant influence not only on tourists' perceptions and experiences through their behavioral attitudes toward tourism, but also on the sustainable development of destination tourism. Building upon existing research on tourism support attitudes and pro-environmental behavior, this study introduces the concept of pro-tourism behavior to capture residents' behavioral intentions to foster better tourism development in their locality. Grounded in the theoretical framework of social representation theory, a "community relations–benefit perception–behavioral attitude" model is constructed to empirically investigate the impact of community relations on pro-tourism behavior, while examining the mediating role of tourism benefit perception and the moderating role of tourism event attachment. The findings reveal that community relations significantly and positively influence residents' perceptions of economic, social, and environmental benefits, which in turn positively affect pro-tourism behavior. Residents' perceptions of economic, social, and environmental benefits serve as multiple chain mediators between community relations and pro-tourism behavior, suggesting that conventional mediation models underestimate the effect of tourism benefit perception. Furthermore, tourism event attachment positively moderates the relationships between community relations and perceptions of tourism social and environmental benefits. The conclusions provide theoretical insights into the influence mechanism linking community relations, benefit perception, and pro-tourism behavior within tourism intervention contexts, and offer practical implications for tourism development and management in destination communities.

Full Text

Community Relationship, Benefit Perception and Pro-Tourism Behavior: A Moderated Mediation Model

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Abstract

As important participants in tourism activities, destination residents' behavioral attitudes toward tourism not only influence tourists' perceptions and experiences but also play a crucial role in the sustainable development of destination tourism. Building upon research related to tourism support attitudes and pro-environmental behavior, this study proposes the concept of "pro-tourism behavior" to express residents' behavioral intentions to promote better tourism development in their locality. Grounded in the theoretical framework of Social Representations Theory, we construct a "community relationship-benefit perception-behavioral attitude" model to empirically examine the impact of community relationships on pro-tourism behavior, exploring the mediating role of tourism benefit perception and the moderating role of tourism event attachment. Results demonstrate that community relationships significantly and positively influence residents' perceptions of economic, social, and environmental benefits, which in turn positively affect pro-tourism behavior. Residents' perceptions of economic, social, and environmental benefits serve as multiple chained mediators between community relationships and pro-tourism behavior, indicating that traditional mediation models underestimate the influence of tourism benefit perception. Tourism event attachment positively moderates the relationships between community relationships and perceptions of social and environmental benefits. These conclusions provide a theoretical basis for revealing the influence mechanisms among community relationships, benefit perception, and pro-tourism behavior in tourism intervention contexts, and offer practical reference value for destination community tourism development and management.

Keywords: community relationship; benefit perception; pro-tourism behavior; moderating effect

1. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

Previous benefit perception research has predominantly relied on Social Exchange Theory as its foundation, positing that residents exhibit pro-tourism behavior only when they perceive that the benefits of tourism development outweigh its costs. However, this perspective overlooks the fact that residents' perceptions of tourism benefits are derived from social representations obtained through community interactions. Pearce first introduced Social Representations Theory from social psychology to explain the relationship between residents' tourism benefit perceptions and behavioral attitudes, challenging the logic that residents' perceptions directly determine their pro-tourism behavior. Social Representations Theory suggests that residents' understanding and responses to external environmental changes stem from community interactions. For destinations where residential communities integrate with tourist attractions, residents' pro-tourism behavior is closely related to community relationships. Simultaneously, as individuals with emotional value judgments, residents' emotional connections to tourism development play an important role in the relationship between community relationships and tourism benefit perception, though few studies have examined the potential moderating effect of tourism event attachment in this relationship.

Building upon this analysis, this study constructs a "community relationship-benefit perception-behavioral attitude" model based on the Social Representations Theory framework. Using residents from scenic areas and their surrounding regions in southern Xinjiang as research subjects, we explore: What factors influence pro-tourism behavior? How do community relationships affect residents' perceptions of tourism development benefits? Does tourism benefit perception mediate this relationship, and what are the internal mechanisms among the three types of benefits? Can tourism event attachment play a moderating role? By addressing these questions, we aim to empirically test the proposed theoretical model and hypotheses, providing a reference for future research.

1.1 The Influence of Community Relationship on Residents' Tourism Benefit Perception

Tourism benefit perception is primarily classified using two approaches: a dichotomous method analyzing perceived benefits and costs, and a trichotomous method examining economic, social, and environmental dimensions, with the latter increasingly adopted in recent research. Scholars such as Yin Lijie et al. argue that stronger community relationships lead to more positive perceptions of tourism development benefits, while Guo Anxi et al. contend that strong community relationships may heighten residents' sensitivity to negative tourism impacts. In economically underdeveloped areas, particularly contiguous poverty-stricken regions, residents typically have lived in a community for generations, possess relatively low education levels, and lack diverse livelihood skills. The low barriers to entry and strong multiplier effects of tourism generate considerable enthusiasm among residents, who consequently pay greater attention to benefits such as income generation, employment oppor-

tunities, and environmental improvement. Based on this analysis, we propose the following hypotheses:

- **H1a:** Community relationship has a significant positive impact on residents' perception of economic benefits.
- **H1b:** Community relationship has a significant positive impact on residents' perception of social benefits.
- **H1c:** Community relationship has a significant positive impact on residents' perception of environmental benefits.

1.2 The Relationship Between Tourism Benefit Perception and Pro-Tourism Behavior According to Bagozzi, behavioral intention is fundamentally based on cognitive evaluation. Residents' pro-tourism behavior is largely determined by their perceptions of tourism impacts. Previous studies by Yoon, Jiang Li, and Chen Long have demonstrated that stronger perceptions of economic, social, and environmental benefits from tourism development increase residents' intentions to exhibit pro-tourism behavior. For tourist destinations, tourism development significantly improves community living environments and social culture, particularly through upgrades to road systems, community environments, and cultural atmospheres. We therefore propose:

- **H2a:** Residents' perception of economic benefits has a significant positive impact on pro-tourism behavior.
- **H2b:** Residents' perception of social benefits has a significant positive impact on pro-tourism behavior.
- **H2c:** Residents' perception of environmental benefits has a significant positive impact on pro-tourism behavior.

1.3 Internal Relationships Among the Three Tourism Benefits The internal relationships among the three types of tourism impacts have gradually attracted scholarly attention. Li Jia et al. found that residents' perceptions of economic benefits positively influence their perceptions of social and environmental benefits. Lai Bin noted that social benefits are the least directly perceptible, with tourism development affecting social benefit perception indirectly through economic and environmental benefits. Accordingly, we propose:

- **H3a:** Residents' perception of economic benefits has a significant positive impact on environmental benefit perception.
- **H3b:** Residents' perception of economic benefits has a significant positive impact on social benefit perception.
- **H3c:** Residents' perception of environmental benefits has a significant positive impact on social benefit perception.

1.4 The Moderating Role of Tourism Event Attachment Tourism event attachment, derived from place attachment, refers to an individual's emotional connection to tourism events. Domestic and international scholars have produced substantial research on the relationship between place attachment and

benefit perception, as well as the moderating role of place attachment. Luo Zeshun et al., from a psychological perspective, indicated that community residents' attachment transforms from "implicit" to "explicit," significantly influencing individual cognition and emotion. Li and Zhao Xueyan et al. concluded that destination residents' attachment to tourism events positively influences tourism benefit perception. Within the Social Representations Theory framework, residents' sense of rootedness and belonging in a community affects their perception of tourism benefits, with tourism event attachment positively influencing this perception. We therefore propose:

- **H4a:** Tourism event attachment positively moderates the relationship between community relationship and economic benefit perception.
- **H4b:** Tourism event attachment positively moderates the relationship between community relationship and social benefit perception.
- **H4c:** Tourism event attachment positively moderates the relationship between community relationship and environmental benefit perception.

The conceptual model is illustrated in [Figure 1: see original paper].

2. Research Design

2.1 Questionnaire Design and Variable Measurement The questionnaire comprises two sections: the first measures the main variables in the model, and the second collects demographic characteristics. To ensure reliability and validity, all measurement items were adapted from established scales, with modifications based on the actual conditions of southern Xinjiang destinations and expert feedback. All items used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"). Community relationship was measured using four items from Williams et al.'s research. Benefit perception items were adapted from Gursoy and Feng Weilin et al., with economic, social, and environmental benefit perceptions each measured by four items. The pro-tourism behavior scale was adapted from Halpenny's pro-environmental behavior scale and Ramkission's support attitude scale, with appropriate modifications using four measurement items. Tourism event attachment was measured using four items adapted from Ramkission, with specific items detailed in Table 1.

2.2 Data Collection and Sample Profile The study targeted residents of Zepu Golden Poplar Scenic Area, Kashgar Ancient City Scenic Area, and Bosten Lake Scenic Area in southern Xinjiang. Data were collected through structural questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Considering local language customs, experts were hired to translate the questionnaire into local vernacular, with back-translation used to ensure accuracy. Random sampling and household (or shop) surveys were conducted, with questionnaires distributed and collected on-site to ensure authenticity and reliability. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 354 valid questionnaires after excluding those

with repetitive responses or incomplete data, for an effective response rate of 88.5%. As shown in Table 1, most respondents were long-term residents with relatively low education levels, consistent with the basic profile of residents in the case study areas, indicating good sample representativeness.

2.3 Common Method Bias Test Common method bias testing ensures scientific rigor by avoiding artificial inflation or deflation of correlations between dimensions due to single-source data. Following Podsakoff et al.'s recommendations and referencing Zhang Anmin et al.'s approach, we conducted Harman's single-factor test by performing factor analysis on all 28 items. Using unrotated principal component analysis, seven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted, with the first factor explaining 44.94% of variance, below the 50% threshold. This indicates no serious common method bias in our data.

3. Data Analysis

3.1 Reliability and Validity Test We used SPSS24.0 and AMOS24.0 to test the reliability and validity of the measurement scales. Following the eigenvalue extraction method, seven common factors were identified, cumulatively explaining 77.37% of variance, exceeding the standard threshold of 50%. Factor loadings ranged between 0.51 and 0.89, above the standard value of 0.5, indicating that each dimension was effectively reflected by its measurement indicators. All dimensions had Cronbach's α values greater than 0.7, demonstrating good internal consistency. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded standard thresholds of 0.7 and 0.5 respectively, indicating satisfactory convergent validity (Table 2). Following Fornell and Larcker's recommendation that the square root of AVE should exceed correlations between constructs, we found satisfactory discriminant validity, as each construct's AVE square root was greater than its correlations with other constructs (Table 3).

3.2 Goodness-of-Fit Test We used AMOS24.0 to test model fit. A χ^2/df ratio between 1 and 3 indicates good model fit; similarity indices (GFI, AGFI, TLI, CFI) above 0.9 suggest better data-model fit; and difference indices (RMSEA, SRMR) below 0.08 indicate good model fit. The results showed: $\chi^2/df = 1.67$, GFI = 0.91, AGFI = 0.89, TLI = 0.96, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.04, and SRMR = 0.05, indicating satisfactory model fit (Table 4).

3.3 Model Hypothesis Testing

3.3.1 Direct Effect Test As shown in Table 5, the standardized path coefficients for community relationship to economic benefit perception ($\beta = 0.451$), environmental benefit perception ($\beta = 0.448$), and social benefit perception (β

= 0.233) were all significant ($P < 0.001$), supporting H1a, H1b, and H1c. Economic benefit perception ($\beta = 0.612$), environmental benefit perception ($\beta = 0.143$), and social benefit perception ($\beta = 0.131$) all significantly influenced pro-tourism behavior ($P < 0.001$), supporting H2a, H2b, and H2c. Economic benefit perception significantly affected environmental benefit perception ($\beta = 0.288$, $P < 0.001$) and social benefit perception ($\beta = 0.131$, $P < 0.05$), supporting H3a and H3b. Environmental benefit perception significantly influenced social benefit perception ($\beta = 0.407$, $P < 0.001$), supporting H3c. The model path diagram with standardized estimates is shown in [Figure 2: see original paper].

3.3.2 Mediation Effect Test We employed the bias-corrected Bootstrapping method, which Mackinnon et al. demonstrated to be optimal among non-parametric approaches. Using 5,000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence intervals, we tested mediation effects. The results (Table 6) show that the total effect between community relationship and pro-tourism behavior was 0.612, with significant mediation effects through economic, environmental, and social benefit perceptions (confidence intervals exclude 0). Specifically, the mediating effects transmitted through environmental, economic, and social benefit perceptions were 0.064, 0.276, and 0.031 respectively, accounting for 10.5%, 45.1%, and 5.1% of the total effect. The chained mediation effect through economic and environmental benefits was 0.018 (2.9% of total effect), while the chained effect through economic, environmental, and social benefits was 0.007 (1.1% of total effect). Notably, the mediation paths “community relationship \rightarrow economic benefit perception \rightarrow environmental benefit perception \rightarrow pro-tourism behavior” and “community relationship \rightarrow economic benefit perception \rightarrow environmental benefit perception \rightarrow social benefit perception \rightarrow pro-tourism behavior” were significantly different from other paths, indicating that the three types of benefit perception serve as multiple chained mediators between community relationship and pro-tourism behavior.

3.3.3 Moderated Mediation Effect Test When testing moderation effects, data must first be centered. Hayes proved that centering reduces correlation between interaction terms and main effects, improving model estimation validity. Using the PROCESS module with 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals, we tested whether tourism event attachment moderated the mediation effects. Table 7 shows that the interaction term between community relationship and tourism event attachment did not significantly affect economic benefit perception (confidence interval includes 0), leading us to reject H4a. However, the interaction terms significantly affected environmental benefit perception and social benefit perception (confidence intervals exclude 0), indicating that tourism event attachment moderates the mediating roles of environmental and social benefit perceptions, thus supporting H4b and H4c.

Following Spiller et al.’s recommendation to use Johnson-Neyman technique to identify the range of the moderator where effects are significant, we determined the statistical significance intervals. As shown in [Figure 3: see original

paper], when residents' standardized tourism event attachment value exceeds -0.68, the moderating effect on the community relationship-environmental benefit perception link is significantly positive; below this value, the effect is non-significant. This indicates that higher tourism event attachment strengthens the positive impact of community relationships on environmental benefit perception. Similarly, [Figure 4: see original paper] reveals that when standardized tourism event attachment exceeds -0.73, the moderating effect on the community relationship-social benefit perception relationship is significantly positive; below this threshold, no significant effect exists. Thus, stronger tourism event attachment enhances residents' perception of social benefits.

4. Conclusions

This study, using southern Xinjiang tourist destinations as cases, constructs a structural equation model to verify the relationships among community relationships, residents' benefit perception, and pro-tourism behavior, while empirically testing the mediating role of tourism benefit perception and the moderating role of tourism event attachment. The findings are as follows:

- 1) Community relationships significantly and positively influence perceptions of economic, social, and environmental benefits, which in turn significantly and positively affect pro-tourism behavior. The influence magnitude ranks as: economic benefit perception > environmental benefit perception > social benefit perception. Evidently, stronger community relationships in southern Xinjiang tourist destinations enable residents to perceive positive tourism impacts more acutely, thereby fostering pro-tourism behavior. Southern Xinjiang, with its large impoverished population, has seen tourism introduction bring significant income and employment opportunities, making residents particularly sensitive to economic benefits. Comprehensive renovation of dilapidated housing, community beautification projects, and tourism skills training have substantially improved residents' living and production conditions, laying a foundation for enhanced environmental and social benefit perceptions. These conclusions align with the Social Representations Theory framework.
- 2) The three types of tourism benefit perception serve as multiple chained mediators between community relationships and pro-tourism behavior. This reveals that community relationships influence pro-tourism behavior not only through the direct effects of the three benefit types but also through indirect pathways where economic benefits enhance environmental benefits, which in turn improve social benefits. The multiple chained mediation model compensates for limitations in direct-effect models. Previous research seldom considered the internal relationships among the three types of tourism benefit perception, thereby underestimating their combined influence on pro-tourism behavior.

- 3) Tourism event attachment significantly and positively moderates the indirect effects of community relationships on pro-tourism behavior through environmental and social benefit perceptions. Specifically, stronger attachment intensifies these mediating effects. Further analysis of statistical significance intervals reveals that when standardized tourism event attachment values exceed -0.68 and -0.73 respectively, enhanced community relationships effectively promote residents' environmental and social benefit perceptions. Notably, tourism event attachment did not significantly moderate the relationship between community relationships and economic benefit perception, possibly because economic benefits still fall short of residents' expectations, weakening the moderating effect. This finding refines conclusions from Guo Anxi et al.'s research.

5. Implications

- 1) **Emphasize residents' benefit acquisition during tourism development.** The study finds that when perceived benefits meet or exceed expectations, residents exhibit pro-tourism behavior. Therefore, first, governments and tourism authorities should formulate clear benefit distribution policies to ensure residents share tourism development dividends, enabling tourism to truly serve poverty alleviation and wealth creation. Second, external capital should be carefully screened to ensure it plays a demonstrative and driving role while preventing "crowding out" effects, thereby safeguarding residents' participation rights and development opportunities. Third, scenic area management committees should be established to strengthen environmental governance and skills training, balancing development and conservation. While monitoring spatial carrying capacity, attention must also be paid to residents' psychological carrying capacity. Tourism development should preserve residents' normal living and production activities, and negative impacts should be mitigated through price supervision and visitor flow monitoring to foster pro-tourism behavior.
- 2) **Strengthen community relationships to promote sustainable tourism development.** Research shows that strong community relationships enhance residents' positive perceptions of economic, social, and environmental benefits, which are crucial factors influencing pro-tourism behavior. Therefore, the positive role of village officials should be leveraged to increase positive interactions among residents through organizing festivals and household visits, thereby strengthening community identity and dependence. Additionally, informal community organizations and social media should be utilized to publicize tourism development leaders, build community communication platforms, and organize community design competitions (for tourism souvenirs, scenic area logos, apparel, etc.), encouraging residents to participate in and promote community tourism development practically. This guides residents' mindset from

“individual” to “community” orientation, which is vital for sustainable tourism development.

- 3) **Actively publicize tourism’ s positive impacts to strengthen residents’ attachment to tourism events.** The study reveals that stronger tourism event attachment enhances the positive effect of community relationships on tourism impact perceptions. The more profound residents’ memories of past tourism events and the greater their expectations for future events, the stronger this attachment influences their perceptions. Therefore, first, governments and tourism enterprises should actively promote tourism’ s beneficial aspects to boost residents’ confidence and strengthen their “explicit attachment.” Second, tourism enterprises must fulfill social responsibilities, minimizing negative impacts to gain residents’ trust and secure their steadfast support for community tourism development. Finally, governments or tourism authorities can organize tourism activities for residents’ welfare, arranging visits to economically developed destinations to deepen their appreciation of tourism events and enhance their confidence in community tourism development.

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