The Mediating Role of Travel Agency Social Media Intervention in Tourism Experience and Tourist Well-Being: An Empirical Analysis Based on the Xi'an Region

Juanfei Zhang[1,*], Boon Liat Cheng[2]

[1] *Faculty of Business & Accounting, Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 43000*

[2] *Faculty of Business, Information & Human Sciences, Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 43000*

** Corresponding Author: zhangjuanfei@sina.cn*

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Abstract

Travel experiences and post-travel well-being are relevant to tourism services and social media engagement. Drawing on stimulus-organism-response theory, tourism experience theory and the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, this article proposes a model in which sensory, emotional, cognitive and social experiences relate to hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, followed by travel-agency social media intervention and pro-tourism behavior; gender is examined as a potential moderator. The manuscript reports 200 distributed questionnaires and 186 valid responses from the Xi'an tourism context. Its original abstract reports positive relationships, mediation and gender moderation, but the available report does not include the measurement results, path estimates, uncertainty intervals or moderation tests needed to assess those claims. The model and reported findings should therefore be treated as provisional until the underlying evidence and complete analyses are available. Research and practice implications are discussed conditionally.

Keywords: *travel agency social media intervention; travel experience; tourist well-being; pro-tourism behavior; S-O-R theory; Xi'an*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

1.1.1 Overall Situation

The global tourism industry is experiencing rapid growth, and social media has become deeply embedded in everyday life. Travel experiences have shifted from traditional "itinerary consumption" to the "continuous construction of emotions and memories." Post-trip psychological well-being—including positive emotions, a sense of life meaning, and social connections—has emerged as a key metric for assessing tourism value. China's "14th Five-Year Plan" for tourism development highlights that the tourism industry should fully leverage its role in benefiting and pleasing the people, becoming a "happiness industry" with significant contemporary characteristics. It particularly emphasizes the social function of tourism in enhancing national well-being (Tang et al., 2026). However, issues such as post-travel psychological adjustment, memory fading, and the lingering effects of negative experiences can affect tourists' overall satisfaction, brand loyalty, and revisit intention. In this context, how travel agencies can actively and continuously intervene through social media to extend the service chain and enhance tourists' post-travel psychological well-being has become a critical topic at the intersection of tourism management and mental health (Chen et al., 2023; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2023).

1.1.2 International Level

Zhao et al. (2025) systematically reviewed research on memorable tourism experiences (MTE) abroad, redefining MTE as "a post-trip experience that can be retained in long-term memory" and categorizing four measurement methods. Their study found that hedonism and participation are the most common dimensions predicting tourist behavior, while knowledge has the weakest predictive power. Antecedents of MTE were classified into three categories: destination attributes, tourist psychology, and interaction processes. The effects of MTE are primarily reflected in tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. The review identified five key themes: MTE frontiers, MTE modeling, cultural heritage tourism and experience co-creation, destination attributes and experience management, and MTE and well-being. It suggests that future research should focus on potential dimensions such as social interaction, perceived randomness, and negative feelings.

1.1.3 National Level (China)

In general, travel experiences not only stimulate tourists' identification with the country and organizations but also help them appreciate the value of a good life, thereby reinforcing their life satisfaction and happiness (Wang et al., 2026). China's "14th Five-Year Plan" for Tourism Development emphasizes that the tourism industry is increasingly becoming an emerging strategic pillar and a significant livelihood industry with distinct era characteristics—a "happiness industry." It calls for accelerating the construction of a strong tourism nation to better serve a good life, maintaining high-

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quality experiences, responding to the growing trend of experiential consumption, investing in people, and launching more tourism products and services that provide good experiences and empathy (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2026).

The Xi'an region is a typical case, combining a profound sense of historical culture with modern "internet celebrity" attributes, which can lead to "cultural shock" or "emotional disconnection" for tourists, resulting in significant post-travel psychological adjustment needs. Local travel agencies are actively deploying social media platforms (e.g., Douyin, Xiaohongshu, WeChat groups), but their interventions are mostly concentrated on pre-trip marketing and in-trip services, with systematic post-trip psychological support still in the exploratory stage (Zhang et al., 2022). Domestic research often focuses on tourism marketing and tourist satisfaction, with relatively little exploration of post-travel interventions from a "psychological well-being" perspective. There remains a lack of in-depth empirical case studies and mechanism analysis regarding the moderating role of social media in tourism emotion management (Sun et al., 2023).

1.1.4 Importance

The significance of this study lies in the following aspects: First, it is widely acknowledged in academia that well-being should be understood not only from a hedonic perspective (e.g., positive emotions such as joy, relaxation, and pleasure) but also from a eudaimonic perspective (e.g., self-actualization, personal growth, relational needs, and life meaning) (Lü & Yu, 2026). Second, by 2024, the global social media user base has reached 5.04 billion, accounting for 62.3% of the total population. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on social media platforms, characterized by rapid dissemination, broad reach, and long-lasting information, has become a key factor influencing travelers' decisions (Zuo et al., 2026). Service design guided by psychological well-being can help mitigate negative tourism effects (e.g., "post-travel depression") and enhance the long-term appeal of Xi'an as a friendly destination (Chen et al., 2023). Meanwhile, "Belt and Road" countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand have positioned tourism as a pillar industry and have a strong demand for tourism management research, making them ideal international arenas for China's tourism management knowledge system to "go global." In the future, China's tourism management discipline can develop globally (Xu et al., 2026). This study takes Xi'an as a case, focusing on the impact of travel agency social media interventions on tourists' post-travel well-being, aiming to bridge international theoretical frontiers with local Chinese practices, fill the research gap in tourism emotion management and digital CRM, and provide solutions for the high-quality development of the tourism industry that incorporate both humanistic care and business wisdom.

1.2 Research Questions

How do travel agencies' proactive interventions on social media (e.g., information push, interactive communication, emotional support, crisis response) affect tourists' travel experiences and well-being? What insights into pro-tourism behavior can be drawn from this process and its outcomes?

1. In the Xi'an travel context, what types of social media intervention strategies are mainly used by travel agencies (e.g., pre-trip information consultation and expectation

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shaping, real-time guidance and problem-solving during travel, post-trip sharing incentives and memory reinforcement, emotional interaction and community building)?

2. How can tourists' overall experience during travel in Xi'an (sensory, emotional, cognitive, and social connection experiences) and tourists' well-being (hedonic and eudaimonic) be effectively measured?

3. Does travel-agency social media intervention mediate the association of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being with pro-tourism behavior, after accounting for travel experience?
4. In Xi'an's tourism market, where historical and cultural resources are central, what distinctive characteristics do these relationships exhibit, including cultural interpretation and crowd-flow guidance?

5. How can the effective pathways of social media intervention identified in this study help travel agencies build a more refined and emotionally oriented full-lifecycle tourism CRM model? For example, how can travel agencies shift from "transaction-oriented" to "relationship- and well-being-oriented" approaches, thereby improving customer loyalty and lifetime value?

6. How can social media interventions that aim to improve tourists' experience and well-being indirectly promote the sustainable development of destinations? For example, by guiding tourist behavior through interventions (e.g., staggered visits, civilized/responsible tourism, supporting local communities), strengthening tourists' respect for and awareness of protecting destination culture, thereby reducing the negative impacts of overtourism and achieving socio-cultural sustainability?

1.3 Research Objectives

In the context of Xi'an, this study examines a proposed sequence linking multidimensional travel experience, tourists' hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, travel-agency social media intervention and pro-tourism behavior, with gender as a potential moderator of selected pathways.

Empirically test the direct impact of tourists' travel experiences in Xi'an (including emotional, affective, and cognitive experiences) on tourists' well-being (e.g., positive emotions, life satisfaction, stress relief).

2. Examine whether social media intervention mediates associations between the two well-being dimensions and pro-tourism behavior, and whether gender moderates the specified pathways.

3. Conduct an in-depth analysis of how the distinctiveness of Xi'an as a world-class historical and cultural tourism destination (e.g., rich historical culture, viral "photo-check-in" spots, large-scale live performances, and the interweaving of tradition and modernity) shapes tourists' specific experiences, and how the local social media ecosystem influences this process.

4. Identify, in the Xi'an context, which dimensions of travel experience (e.g., "sense of cultural identity," "sense of historical awe," "digital guided-tour experience") and which forms of social media intervention (e.g., "Douyin short-video dissemination,"

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"Xiaohongshu recommendation posts," "online word-of-mouth reviews") have the most significant impact on tourists' well-being.

5. Construct social media-based strategies for enhancing the "tourism experience–tourist well-being" relationship, such as designing shareable experiential touchpoints, managing online word of mouth, and establishing psychological recovery communication after crisis public-relations events.

6. From a socio-cultural sustainability perspective, study how social media guidance can promote tourists' deeper understanding and respect for local culture, reduce tourism conflicts, and improve the well-being of both hosts and tourists.

This study is grounded in S-O-R theory, tourism experience theory, and the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, and builds a moderated mediation model with travel agency social media intervention as the core mediator and gender as the moderating variable.

The proposed model treats multidimensional tourism experience as an external stimulus associated with hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. It hypothesizes that these well-being dimensions are related to tourists' acceptance of travel-agency social media intervention, which in turn is related to pro-tourism behavior. These pathways are hypotheses and require evaluation using the reported data.

Gender is included as a potential moderator of selected paths. Any differences across gender groups must be established by appropriately reported interaction or multigroup tests, rather than assumed from the conceptual framework.

1.4 Contribution

This study takes the Xi'an region as an example to explore the role of travel agencies' social media interventions in enhancing post-travel psychological well-being, optimizing customer relationship management, and promoting sustainable tourism behavior, along with its regulatory mechanisms. This holds multi-faceted significance. The following elaborates from the perspectives of literature review, the Chinese government, theoretical discussions, consumers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs):

First, existing research has mainly focused on pre-trip decision-making or in-trip experiences, with insufficient attention to the sustained impact on psychological well-being after travel. This study focuses on the "post-travel" phase, exploring how social media interventions can extend tourism benefits, thereby expanding the temporal dimension of tourism psychology. This research combines tourism management, psychology (e.g., positive psychology and self-determination theory), communication studies (social media interaction theory), and consumer behavior to provide a new theoretical perspective for the study of the long-term effects of travel experiences.

If supported by complete empirical reporting, this framework may inform discussion of tourism well-being, post-travel services and cultural-tourism policy in Xi'an. Policy implications should remain conditional on the strength, uncertainty and generalizability of the evidence.

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Traditional customer relationship management often emphasizes transactions and short-term satisfaction. This framework considers well-being as a potential part of longer-term relationships and examines social media intervention as a hypothesized link between well-being and pro-tourism behavior. The strength and practical meaning of that link require empirical testing.

For tourists, social media may provide channels to share travel memories, express preferences and offer feedback to service providers. Whether these interactions improve longer-term well-being requires direct measurement and should not be inferred solely from participation.

If supported by complete evidence, the framework may inform collaboration among travel agencies and non-governmental organizations on culturally sensitive and responsible tourism services. Such applications remain potential implications rather than outcomes demonstrated by this report.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory (S-O-R Theory)

The stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) theory, proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), suggests that external environmental stimuli (S) influence an individual's internal emotional and cognitive states (O), leading to approach or avoidance behavioral responses (R). This model is applicable to explain the complete logical chain of "external experiential stimuli → psychological perception → mediating marketing responses → tourist behavior" (Zhang & Bai, 2019).

Accurate matching with the research model:

- Stimulation (S): Multidimensional travel experience (sensory, emotional, cognitive, social)- Organism (O): Tourists' internal psychological state, namely hedonic and eudaimonic well-being

Mediating Transmission Mechanism: Travel agency social media intervention-Behavioral Response (R): Pro-tourism behaviorThe S-O-R theory clearly supports the progressive action logic of "tourism experience → well-being → travel agency social media intervention → pro-tourism behavior" in this study, providing a core theoretical basis for the mediating mechanism of travel agency social media intervention.

2.2 Tourism Experience Theory

Tourism experience theory indicates that the tourism experience is a comprehensive subjective perception formed by tourists throughout the entire travel process, encompassing four core dimensions: sensory, emotional, cognitive, and social (Xie, 2018; Prayag et al., 2013). A diverse and high-quality tourism experience can comprehensively meet tourists' physical and psychological needs, awakening positive emotions and value perceptions, and significantly enhancing tourists' hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. This theory provides a solid theoretical foundation for the selection of antecedent variables in this study and the hypothesis of the positive impact of tourism experience on well-being.

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2.3 Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions

The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions posits that positive emotions can widen individuals' cognitive thought processes, enhance their willingness to accept information, and increase their trust in external positive information (Fredrickson, 1998). Tourists in a high state of happiness tend to have more relaxed minds and higher levels of agreement, leading to stronger acceptance and lower resistance to marketing content, brand promotions, and activity promotions released by travel agencies on social media, resulting in better marketing conversion effects (Liu & Huang, 2021).

This theory precisely explains the core logic of this study: perceived well-being significantly enhances the effectiveness of travel agency social media interventions, which in turn drives pro-tourism behaviors, providing foundational theoretical support for the mediating pathway of travel agency social media interventions.

2.4 Variable Relationship

Explanatory variables (stimuli): sensory, emotional, cognitive and social-connection experiences. Proposed mediators: hedonic well-being, eudaimonic well-being and travel-agency social media intervention. Outcome: pro-tourism behavior. Potential moderator: gender. The two well-being dimensions precede social media intervention in the proposed serial paths.

The full transmission path is: Four-dimensional travel experience → hedonic/eudaimonic well-being → travel agency social media intervention (mediator) → pro-tourism behavior (outcome variable).

The model draws on stimulus-organism-response theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), travel experience theory (Xie, 2005; Tung & Ritchie, 2011) and the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998). It hypothesizes that travel experiences relate to well-being, which relates to acceptance of social media intervention and subsequently to pro-tourism behavior. Gender is considered as a possible moderator of specified links; the proposed sequence requires testing.

2.5 Gap

The study focuses on Xi'an; any findings, if supported by complete evidence, may not generalize to other cultural cities, natural destinations or regions with different economic and social media environments. The use of platforms such as WeChat and Xiaohongshu may also limit transfer to contexts with different digital ecosystems.

Psychological well-being, tourism experiences, and other variables often rely on self-report scales, which are susceptible to social expectation bias, recall bias, or immediate emotional influences, leading to insufficient objectivity. Sustainable tourism intention is affected by multiple factors (e.g., economic conditions, time constraints, destination image), and the moderating effects of social media interventions may be obscured or interact with other variables, necessitating more refined model analyses. Tourism customer relationship management relies not only on social media but also involves offline services, after-sales support, and the integration of multiple channels, with research potentially overly focusing on online interventions.

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2.6 Research Hypotheses

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this study.

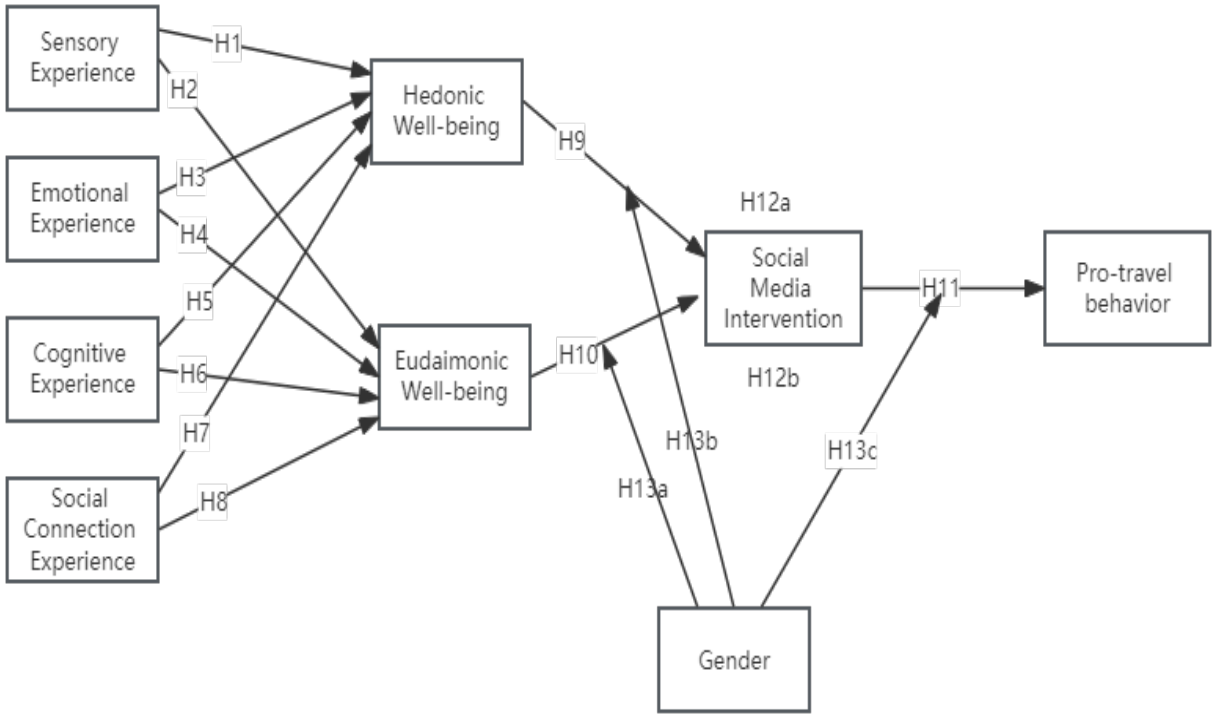


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

[Solid line box: Stimulus–Organism–Response model; Broaden-and-build theory of positive emotion; Tourism experience theory]

2.6.1 The Impact of Travel Experience on Tourists' Happiness Hypothesis

Tourism experience is the comprehensive perception and psychological gain that tourists acquire in tourism settings, and it is an important external stimulus source driving the formation of positive psychological states (Prayag et al., 2013). Multidimensional tourism experiences can meet tourists' varying psychological needs at sensory, emotional, cognitive, and social levels, thereby enhancing tourists' hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: *Sensory experience has a significant positive impact on tourists' hedonic well-being.*

H2: *Sensory experience has a significant positive impact on tourists' eudaimonic well-being.*

H3: *Emotional experience has a significant positive impact on tourists' hedonic well-being.*

H4: *Emotional experience has a significant positive impact on tourists' eudaimonic well-being.*

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H5: *Cognitive experience has a significant positive impact on tourists' hedonic well-being.*

H6: *Cognitive experience has a significant positive impact on tourists' eudaimonic well-being.*

H7: *Social connection experience has a significant positive impact on tourists' hedonic well-being.*

H8: *Social connection experience has a significant positive impact on tourists' eudaimonic well-being.*

2.6.2 The Impact of Tourist Well-Being on Travel Agency Social Media Interventions Hypothesis

According to the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, tourists' positive psychological emotions can broaden the scope of individual cognitive acceptance, enhancing their tolerance and recognition of external marketing information (Fredrickson, 1998). The stronger the sense of happiness among tourists, the better their acceptance and perceived effectiveness of the promotional content, brand building, and interactive marketing interventions conducted by travel agencies on social media platforms. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H9: *Hedonic well-being has a significant positive impact on travel agency social media interventions.*

H10: *Eudaimonic well-being has a significant positive impact on travel agency social media interventions.*

2.6.3 The Impact of Travel Agency Social Media Interventions on Travel-Related Behavior Hypothesis

As an important corporate marketing stimulus, social media interventions by travel agencies can continuously strengthen tourists' destination impressions and brand trust, effectively promoting positive behaviors such as revisiting, recommending, and word-of-mouth communication. Therefore, this paper hypothesizes:

H11: *Travel agency social media interventions have a significant positive impact on tourists' pro-tourism behavior.*

2.6.4 The Mediating Effect Hypothesis of Travel Agency Social Media Interventions

The proposed stimulus-organism-response framework considers whether travel-agency social media intervention mediates the associations of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being with pro-tourism behavior (Zhang & Bai, 2019). The following two pathways are hypotheses; their indirect effects require appropriate estimates and uncertainty intervals.

H12a: *Travel agency social media intervention mediates the association between hedonic well-being and pro-tourism behavior.*

H12b: *Travel agency social media intervention mediates the association between eudaimonic well-being and pro-tourism behavior.*

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2.6.5 Hypothesis of Gender Moderating Effect

The model considers gender as a possible moderator of three specified paths. Whether these relationships differ by gender is an empirical question that requires appropriately reported tests.

H13a: *Gender moderates the effect of eudaimonic well-being on travel agency social media interventions.*

H13b: *Gender moderates the effect of hedonic well-being on travel agency social media interventions.*

H13c: *Gender moderates the effect of travel agency social media interventions on pro-tourism behavior.*

3. Research Methods

The manuscript describes a questionnaire-based quantitative study in Xi'an and reports 200 distributed questionnaires and 186 valid responses. For an illustrative fixed-model multiple regression omnibus F test of R^2 different from zero, seven predictors, $f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$ and power = 0.80 imply a minimum sample of 103 under the noncentral F calculation. This calculation is an approximation for that regression test; it does not demonstrate adequate power for the measurement model, indirect effects or gender interactions. The response-level data and the statistical output are not included in the available report.

The proposed model includes four travel-experience dimensions, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, travel-agency social media intervention, pro-tourism behavior, and gender as a potential moderator. A complete assessment would require item definitions and measurement results, reliability and validity statistics, structural-path estimates, confidence intervals for indirect effects and the relevant moderation tests. These results are not reported in the available manuscript.

3.1 Population and Sampling Design

3.1.1 Research Overview

The overall goal of this study is to examine adult travelers (age ≥ 18) who have purchased and completed at least one leisure or vacation travel product through travel agencies (including online and offline channels) in the past 12 months, and who continue to use at least one mainstream social media platform (such as WeChat, Xiaohongshu, Douyin, websites, etc.) after their trip.

3.1.2 Sampling Framework

To accurately reach the target population, a multi-source sampling framework is adopted: Cooperative travel agency client database: Obtain an anonymous contact list of clients that meet the "core overall" criteria from 3–5 cooperative travel agencies (including traditional agencies, OTAs, and customized travel agencies) with digital customer management systems.

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Travel agencies' own social media channels: Recruitment information is published through the WeChat official accounts, communities, and membership centers of partner travel agencies.

3.1.3 Sampling Method

Adopt a mixed sampling strategy and conduct it in phases: First Stage: Stratified Sampling – According to the client feature stratification in the travel agency CRM system, ensure sample diversity:

Layer 1: Travel Types (Group Tour, Independent Travel, Customized Tour)-

Layer 2: Customer Value Hierarchy (High/Medium/Low value customers based on spending amount and travel frequency)

Layer 3: Social Media Usage Intensity (High Activity, Moderate Activity)- Second Stage: Combination of Random Sampling and Voluntary Participation – Randomly select potential participants from each layer to send invitations, ensuring representativeness. Recruit voluntary participants through social media advertising to supplement sample size and enhance external validity.

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4. Results and Reporting Limitations

The manuscript reports 186 valid responses and summarizes positive associations between travel experience and well-being, a mediating role for social media intervention, and gender moderation. These are the authors' reported summary claims. The available manuscript does not contain the underlying observations, model estimates, standard errors, fit or validity results, indirect-effect confidence intervals, or gender interaction tests. Their magnitude and statistical support cannot therefore be evaluated from this report.

The reported sample size should not be treated as verification of the proposed measurement or structural models. A complete results section should document the sample and questionnaire, measurement properties, model specification and estimation method, path coefficients and uncertainty, and the tests corresponding to H1–H13. No numerical estimates are inferred here.

5. Discussion

The conceptual framework connects travel experience with two aspects of well-being and treats social media intervention as a possible link between well-being and pro-tourism behavior. This sequencing is a theoretical proposition, not an established causal chain. A questionnaire alone does not establish temporal order, and unmeasured influences, self-reporting and selection into the survey may affect the observed relationships. Any gender interpretation requires the relevant interaction or multigroup evidence and should avoid generalizations about all travelers.

6. Conclusion

The Xi'an framework offers a basis for investigating tourism experiences, well-being, social media intervention and pro-tourism behavior. The reported empirical claims remain provisional because the analysis results are not available in the present report. Complete evidence and appropriate uncertainty estimates are needed before drawing conclusions about mediation or moderation.

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Author Contributions

J.F.Z.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing — Original Draft, Visualization. B.L.C.: Formal analysis, Validation, Writing — Review and Editing, Supervision, Project Administration.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Generative AI Statement

The authors used generative artificial intelligence to assist with language editing and drafting. The authors take full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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