

TRAVELLING EXPERIENCE AFFECTING OLDER ADULT TOURISTS' WELL-BEING: EVIDENCE FEOM GUIZHOU PROVINCE, CHINA

Zhimei Tang

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Program in Management
Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship
Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin
Academic Year 2026
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2026



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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were (1) to examine the various dimensions of tourism experience for older adult tourists' well-being, (2) to explore the path of tourism experience values affecting the well-being of older adult tourists, and (3) to investigate the mediating roles of social involvement and satisfaction in the relationship between the tourism experience values and older adult tourists' well-being in Guizhou Province, China.

This study adopted a mixed-method approach. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews from eight older adult tourists with at least two prior experiences of traveling in Guizhou, eight tourism destination operators, and eight tourism enterprise managers located in Guizhou. The qualitative analysis was conducted by using content analysis. Quantitative data were obtained through online and onsite survey targeting older adult tourists who had visited Guizhou. A total of 490 valid responses were collected. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was adopted for data analysis.

Major findings: (1) On the issue of the various dimensions of tourism experience for older adult tourists' well-being, four core experiential value dimensions included emotional, cognitive, social, and functional value comprising distinct sub-dimensions, for example cognitive enrichment, social bonding, social support, existential reflection, accessibility, supportive environment satisfaction, safety perception, emotional discomfort, emotional fulfillment, and cultural resonance collectively shaped older adult tourists' well-being; (2) On the issue of the path of tourism experience values affecting the well-being, functional, situational, and social values significantly and positively influenced older adult tourists' well-being, while emotional value showed no direct impact, indicating differentiated effects of experiential dimensions; and (3) On the issue of the mediating roles, satisfaction and involvement both acted as significant mediators in the relationship between tourism experience values and well-being, with satisfaction demonstrating a broader mediating role across all value dimensions, while involvement mediated only the effects of functional, situational, and social values.

Keywords: Older adult tourists, Tourism experience value, Well-being, Customer satisfaction, Social involvement

Advisor's Signature .....

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Zhimei Tang

October 2025

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List of Abbreviation and Glossary

Abbreviation / Glossary	Explanation
AARP	American Association of Retired Persons
AGFI	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CIP	Consumer Involvement Profile
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
EV	Tourism expertience Emotional Value
FV	Tourism experience Functional Value
GFI	The Goodness of Fit Index
GWPCA	Geographic Weighted Principal Component Analysis
IKD	Lecturer Performance Index
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
MTE	Memorable Tourism Experiences
NFI	The Normed Fit Index
RMSEA	The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SOV	Tourism expertience Social Value
SV	Tourism expertience Situational Value
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
TI	Tourism involvement
TS	Satisfaction of elderlt tourists
TW	Well-being of the elderly traveling
UTAUT	Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Chapter One introduces the study context, emphasizing the increasing significance of older adult tourism within the rapidly aging demographic landscape of China, specifically focusing on Guizhou Province due to its rich cultural heritage, diverse ecological resources, and progressive infrastructure initiatives aimed at older adult tourists. It highlights the demographic, policy, economic, and social backgrounds underpinning older adult tourism's growth and underscores existing gaps within interdisciplinary study exploring older adult tourists' psychological well-being through tourism experiences. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to systematically investigate the impact of tourism experience dimensions on older adult tourists' well-being, elucidating the mediating roles of satisfaction and social involvement, thereby contributing theoretically to older adult tourism literature and practically informing inclusive, sustainable tourism strategies supportive of active aging.

1.1 Background of the Study

1.1.1 Research Problem Statement

The world is experiencing an unprecedented demographic transformation characterized by rapid population aging. According to the United Nations (2023), by 2050, one in six people globally will be aged 65 years or older, compared with one in eleven in 2019. This demographic shift poses significant challenges to healthcare systems, social welfare, and sustainable development but also generates new opportunities for industries catering to older adults (Zhao et al., 2023). Globally, the proportion of older adult individuals is increasing rapidly, and by 2050, more than 30% of China's population is expected to be aged 60 and above (Bao et al., 2022). Exploring the health benefits of tourism for the older adults not only contributes to gerontology and public health study but also informs practical interventions to promote healthy aging. Moreover, older adult tourists represent a critical economic force.

Among these, tourism has emerged as a promising avenue to promote active aging and enhance subjective well-being. Travelling experiences are increasingly recognized not only as leisure activities but also as holistic interventions that can improve physical health, psychological resilience, and social connectedness among older adult tourists. Against this backdrop, understanding how tourism experiences contribute to the well-being of older adults has become a pressing concern for both policymakers and researchers, especially in rapidly aging societies such as China.

Tourism for well-being emphasizes the role of travel experiences as more than leisure activities, framing them as holistic interventions that support physical health, psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and social connectedness (Huang et al., 2024). Unlike medical or institutional approaches to healthy aging, tourism provides experiential and voluntary pathways for older adults to achieve active engagement with their environment, cultivate positive emotions, and strengthen interpersonal relationships. This perspective positions tourism as a vital contributor to the broader agenda of promoting healthy aging and quality of life in later life (Smith & Diekmann, 2017).

Guizhou Province, located in southwestern China, presents a compelling case for such study. The province's rich cultural diversity, breathtaking natural landscapes, and expanding tourism infrastructure make it an ideal setting for studying older adult tourism experiences (Lei, 2023). However, despite these advantages, elderly tourists in Guizhou often encounter multiple travel barriers that limit their overall satisfaction and well-being. Inaccessible transportation networks in mountainous areas, a lack of barrier-free facilities, and age-unfriendly accommodation and dining options undermine the functional value of their travel experience. Scenic spots frequently lack clear signage and information systems tailored to older visitors' cognitive and physical needs, reducing their sense of safety and situational comfort, which reflects insufficient situational value (Huang, 2024).

Guizhou is home to multiple ethnic minority groups, including the Miao, Dong, and Buyi, whose vibrant festivals, traditional customs, and community practices offer unique opportunities for cultural immersion (Fan & Huo, 2020). Yet, many older travelers find it difficult to actively participate in these cultural activities due to language barriers, limited interpretation services, and the absence of inclusive programming, which constrains opportunities for meaningful social engagement and limits social value. Studying how older adult tourists engage with these cultural experiences can deepen

understanding of the relationship between cultural exposure and psychological well-being (Li & Chan, 2020; Wang et al., 2023). Furthermore, Guizhou's natural beauty, including its karst landscapes, waterfalls, and ecological parks, provides therapeutic environments conducive to mental and physical health (Wei, 2023). However, travel anxiety, fatigue from long journeys, and safety concerns diminish the emotional benefits of tourism, indicating a gap in the design of age-sensitive emotional support and emotional value delivery.

Recent government initiatives under the "Colorful Guizhou" brand have also focused on creating age-friendly and sustainable tourism destinations, enhancing the province's relevance for older adults-focused tourism study (Fan & Huo, 2020; Xu, 2018). Yet, there remains a clear disparity between policy ambitions and elderly travelers' lived experiences, highlighting the urgency of evidence-based research to pinpoint which dimensions of tourism experience value—functional, situational, emotional, or social—most strongly influence tourism involvement, well-being, and satisfaction.

Understanding older adult tourists' needs, preferences, and behaviors is essential for the tourism industry to create age-inclusive services and experiences (Hao et al., 2025; Lee, 2025). In addition to the older adults tourists, travel has been shown to have significant positive effects on older adult individuals' cognitive functioning, emotional well-being, and physical vitality (Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023). Compared with younger travelers, they often possess greater disposable income and flexibility, making them a promising market for tourism enterprises aiming to achieve sustainable growth (Streimikiene et al., 2021).

Despite the recognized potential of tourism to foster health and well-being among older adults, existing research has not sufficiently addressed how specific travel experiences shape different dimensions of well-being in the Chinese context. Particularly in Guizhou, where tourism development is rapidly advancing yet infrastructural and service barriers persist, there remains limited empirical evidence on how functional, situational, social, and emotional aspects of travel experiences influence older tourists' overall well-being. This gap underscores the necessity of conducting a systematic study to identify the determinants of well-being outcomes among older adult tourists, thereby contributing to both academic understanding and practical strategies for creating age-inclusive and health-promoting tourism environments.

1.1.2 Research Gap Statement

Despite increasing scholarly attention to older adult tourism and well-being, several critical research gaps remain. These gaps can be identified across four major dimensions: regional context, interdisciplinary integration, experiential mechanisms, and theoretical applications.

(1) Regional and Contextual Gaps

Most studies generalize findings from national or urban samples and pay insufficient attention to how cultural and environmental features shape seniors' experiences in specific destinations (Wang et al., 2023). In China, the aging context is pronounced—over 267 million people aged 60 and above by 2021 (National Health Commission & National Working Commission on Aging, 2022)—and tourism has been incorporated into national strategies such as the Strategic Plan for Expanding Domestic Demand (2022–2035) and the 14th Five-Year Plan for Aging Industry Development (State Council, 2022). Guizhou is a theoretically informative setting where tourism contributes over 70% of regional GDP and older tourists account for nearly 30% of domestic travelers (Zhang & Wen, 2022). What is missing in prior work is rigorous, site-anchored evidence that links such contextual features to seniors' experience evaluations and well-being using replicable designs. The present study addresses this by grounding both the qualitative and quantitative components in Guizhou's concrete destination conditions.

(2) Experiential Mechanism Gaps

Although a growing literature links tourism to later-life health and well-being, the mechanisms that convert specific facets of the travel experience into well-being remain weakly specified. Much of the evidence establishes broad associations in cruise, cultural, and leisure contexts but does not unpack how particular value appraisals operate for older cohorts (Bagheri et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2024; Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023). In parallel, research has advanced the meaning, dimensionality, and antecedents of tourism experience across hotels, restaurants, scenic areas, hot springs, and theme parks (Chen et al., 2023; Ying, 2024), and it has proposed perception-based, situation-based, and hierarchical experiential-value models (Çelik & Rasoolimanesh, 2023; Hosany et al., 2022). These strands consistently show that perceived experiential value relates to positive affect, engagement, and meaning, with demonstrable links to well-being (Bagheri et al., 2024b; Chen et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2024).

Despite these advances, three interlocking gaps persist. First, construct resolution for senior samples is limited: many studies rely on global "overall experience" indices or single affective outcomes, obscuring theoretically distinct functional, situational, emotional, and social components that are likely to be age-salient (Chen et al., 2023; Hosany et al., 2022; Çelik & Rasoolimanesh, 2023). Second, transmission pathways and boundary conditions are rarely tested. Although tourism engagement is associated with well-being—and can differ by age group and by urban–rural context (Li & Chan, 2020)—few studies model how value appraisals translate into outcomes through tourist satisfaction (evaluative pathway) or tourism involvement (behavioral pathway), or when these links strengthen or weaken across destinations and cultures (Zhang et al., 2025). Third, methodological integration is uneven: qualitative depth on experience meanings and quantitative generalization on scale relations are often pursued in isolation, limiting the development of a validated nomological network that connects value facets to well-being (Bagheri et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2024).

Accordingly, this study operationalizes elderly tourism experience along four value dimensions—functional, situational, emotional, and social—using senior-appropriate, destination-anchored wording, and tests a value-process-outcome chain in which satisfaction and tourism involvement function as the principal transmission mechanisms within a sequential mixed-methods design.

(3) Theoretical and Conceptual Gaps

The study of well-being remains fragmented. Tourism research has been dominated by subjective well-being (SWB), whereas authentic/eudaimonic well-being—concerned with meaning, self-realization, and growth—remains underexplored (Martela & Sheldon, 2019; Sheldon et al., 1997; Zheng et al., 2022). Meanwhile, both internal (e.g., personality, mindset, self-esteem) and external (e.g., demographics, family environment, economy, culture, tourism) influences are recognized (Bagheri et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2021), but how these factors operate specifically for older tourists—for example, how social connection, health maintenance, and cultural engagement translate into value appraisals and psychological benefits—has not been systematically modeled. Positioned at this interface, the present study operationalizes well-being as SWB for comparability with mainstream quantitative work, while the qualitative phase deliberately surfaces eudaimonic themes (e.g., existential reflection, personal growth). In doing so, we provide

a testable SWB model that remains conceptually open to eudaimonic content and set an agenda for subsequent research to extend the framework with validated eudaimonic measures and to examine whether transmission mechanisms differ by outcome type.

(4) Synthesis and Research Need

In sum, population aging, economic potential, policy support, and theoretical advancement converge to make elderly tourism a compelling field of inquiry. Yet, existing research has not sufficiently addressed:

1. the regional specificity of elderly tourism in Guizhou,
2. the interdisciplinary integration of tourism, gerontology, and psychology,
3. the mechanisms through which experiential value impacts well-being, and
4. the application of broader well-being theories to elderly tourism contexts.

Accordingly, this study seeks to systematically investigate the impact of travel experiences on the well-being of older adult tourists within the distinctive sociocultural and natural environment of Guizhou Province. By unpacking the mechanisms through which elderly tourism contributes to subjective well-being, this research aims to make both theoretical contributions—advancing the literature on tourism and aging—and practical contributions—informing inclusive, sustainable tourism strategies that support active and healthy aging..

1.2 Significance of the Study

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the interdisciplinary domains of tourism management, psychology, and gerontology. By examining the experiential values of elderly tourism and their effects on well-being, the research extends existing theories and introduces new insights. The theoretical significance can be summarized into four major areas:

1) Positioning Elderly Tourism Experience as a Determinant of Well-being

Most studies of elderly well-being emphasize health, social relationships, and financial security (Camfield & Skevington, 2008; Nyqvist et al., 2013). Leisure and tourism have often been treated as secondary. This study reconceptualizes tourism as a core determinant of subjective and psychological well-being in later life. By doing so, it expands the scope of gerontology and tourism research, showing that travel experiences

contribute not only to temporary enjoyment but also to long-term life satisfaction, emotional resilience, and social identity.

This contribution aligns with the global paradigm shift toward positive aging and active aging, which emphasize continued participation and fulfillment in later life (García & Trascastro, 2021). By highlighting elderly tourism as a serious domain of inquiry, the study broadens the conceptual foundation of well-being research and gives greater legitimacy to leisure and travel in aging studies.

2) Clarifying Mechanisms Linking Experience and Well-being

A second contribution lies in revealing the pathways through which tourism experiences shape well-being. Existing literature often confirms general positive effects of travel, but the mediating processes remain underexplored (Li & Chan, 2020). Using Customer Value Theory (Holbrook, 1999; Woodruff, 1997), this study conceptualizes tourism experiences as multi-dimensional values and introduces satisfaction and involvement as mediators.

The findings clarify that satisfaction has a broad mediating role across all experiential values, while involvement is more selective, mediating functional, situational, and social values. This offers a nuanced, process-based explanation of elderly tourism's effect on well-being, moving beyond simplistic direct-effect models (Nawijn & Mitas, 2012). Theoretically, this advances the explanatory power of both Customer Value Theory and Involvement Theory by situating them in an aging context.

3) Refining the Experiential Value Framework for Elderly Tourists

The third theoretical significance is the refinement of experiential value frameworks. Widely used models, such as Memorable Tourism Experiences (Kim et al., 2012; Kim & Ritchie, 2014), emphasize novelty, hedonism, and aesthetics, which reflect younger or general tourist groups. This study demonstrates that for older adults, experiential value is multidimensional but age-specific.

The empirical analysis validates four key dimensions—functional, situational, emotional, and social value—each tied to elderly travelers' unique needs. Functional value emphasizes accessibility and safety; situational value relates to comfort and environmental harmony; emotional value concerns stress relief and peace of mind; and social value highlights bonding and cultural engagement. By tailoring the framework to senior

travelers, the study extends the MTE model and provides a demographically relevant construct for future elderly tourism research.

4) Integrating Humanistic Geography into Elderly Tourism

Finally, this study contributes by linking elderly tourism with humanistic geography. Research on aging and tourism often overlooks how place and spatial context shape experiences (Sun et al., 2015). By situating the analysis in Guizhou Province, the study emphasizes how ecological landscapes, cultural diversity, and spatial accessibility influence elderly tourists' psychological outcomes.

This perspective moves the discussion from behavior alone to behavior-in-place, where meaning, memory, and identity are co-constructed through interaction with space (Losada et al., 2019). The integration of geographical thinking enriches tourism theory by showing that well-being is not only a personal outcome but also a place-based experience shaped by culture, environment, and policy context.

1.2.2 Practical Significance

Beyond theoretical contributions, this study also carries strong practical significance for tourism management, policy, and society. By focusing on the elderly tourism market in Guizhou Province, the research offers actionable insights for business operators, government agencies, service providers, and communities. The practical significance may be summarized into four main areas:

1. Enhancing Tourism Industry Strategies for Aging Populations

The study underscores the importance of repositioning tourism enterprises to better serve older adults. Elderly travelers represent a growing and profitable segment of the market, given their relatively higher disposable income, free time, and focus on meaningful leisure activities (Streimikiene et al., 2021). However, tourism providers often overlook their specific needs, such as barrier-free facilities, accessible transportation, and age-sensitive customer service.

By identifying the four experiential value dimensions—functional, situational, emotional, and social—the study provides a framework for businesses to design age-inclusive tourism products and services. For example, tour operators can emphasize safety and accessibility in functional value, comfort and clear signage for situational value, stress-relief packages for emotional value, and community-based interactions for social value. Applying these insights can help enterprises segment the market more accurately, reduce

information asymmetry, and improve customer loyalty among senior travelers (Del Chiappa & Baggio, 2015).

2. Informing Policy Makers and Government Planning

The findings also contribute to public policy and governance of tourism. China's central and local governments have launched multiple initiatives to promote the "silver economy" and age-friendly tourism, including the 14th Five-Year Plan for Aging Industry Development and Guizhou's "Colorful Guizhou" tourism brand (State Council, 2022). Yet, as this study highlights, gaps persist between policy intentions and the lived experiences of older tourists.

By showing how satisfaction and involvement mediate tourism experiences and well-being, the study provides evidence for designing evidence-based interventions. For instance, local governments can invest in senior-friendly infrastructure such as accessible transport hubs, digital literacy programs for older adults, and multilingual cultural interpretation services. Policy makers can also integrate health and wellness components into tourism planning, recognizing travel as a form of preventive public health intervention that reduces social isolation and enhances life quality (Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023). In this sense, tourism development becomes aligned with broader goals of healthy aging and social harmony.

3. Supporting Service Providers and Frontline Staff

Another practical implication lies in professional training and service delivery. Frontline employees—tour guides, hotel staff, and community hosts—play a central role in shaping elderly tourists' perceptions of value. Studies show that older adults often require more personalized assistance, including guidance through digital booking systems, medical support awareness, and empathetic communication (Luiu et al., 2017).

The study's insights can guide the design of training programs for hospitality and tourism staff, helping them to understand not only the physiological limitations of elderly tourists (mobility, fatigue, dietary requirements) but also their psychological needs (safety, dignity, companionship). Service innovations, such as slow-paced itineraries, stress-free logistics, and companionship-based group tours, can be tailored to enhance satisfaction and involvement. By aligning services with the identified experiential values, providers can foster deeper trust and repeat visits, thereby ensuring the sustainable growth of the senior tourism market (Chen et al., 2023).

4. Promoting Community Engagement and Active Aging

Finally, the study emphasizes the broader social and community significance of elderly tourism. Travel is not only an economic activity but also a social intervention that strengthens intergenerational bonds, preserves cultural heritage, and promotes local development. In Guizhou, where ethnic diversity and ecological assets are central to tourism, involving older adults in cultural immersion fosters both social value for visitors and cultural pride for host communities (Qin et al., 2024). By highlighting the mediating role of satisfaction and involvement, the study suggests that tourism experiences can enhance not only individual well-being but also collective community benefits. For instance, senior tourists participating in cultural festivals or wellness retreats contribute to cultural preservation and economic revitalization. Moreover, tourism provides a pathway for elderly individuals to maintain active lifestyles, reinforcing the principles of positive aging (An et al., 2023). This dual impact—improving the well-being of elderly tourists while supporting sustainable local economies—makes tourism a powerful tool for inclusive regional development.

1.3 Statement of Research Questions

RQ1:What are the tourism experience values dimensions for older adult tourists' well-being?

RQ2:How do the tourism experience values affect well-being of older adult tourists in the context of tourism in Guizhou province, China?

RQ3:How do social involement and satisfaction mediate the relationship betweent the tourism experience values and older adult tourists' well-being?

1.4 Statement of Study Objectives

RO1: To identify the various dimensions of tourism experience value for older adult tourists' well-being.

RO2: To explore the path of tourism experience values affecting the well-being of older adult tourists in the context of tourism in Guizhou province, China.

RO3: To investigate the mediation roles of social involement and satisfaction in the relationship betweent the tourism experience values and older adult tourists' well-being.

1.5 Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method study design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively examine the factors influencing the well-being of older adult tourists in Guizhou Province, China, as shaped by their travel experiences. Guided by the study' s overarching study objectives, the methodological framework was organized into three distinct yet complementary phases.

The first phase focused on exploring the various dimensions of tourism experience values for older adult tourists' well-being. A qualitative design grounded in phenomenological inquiry was employed to capture tourism experience values of the elderly in the context of tourism. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 older adult tourists with at least 2 times of visits of traveling in Guizhou, 8 tourism destination operators, and 8 managers from tourism enterprises in Guizhou. Participants were purposefully sampled to ensure variation in background, travel motivation, and engagement level. Thematic analysis, supported by NVivo 12.0 software, was used to code and categorize data through a three-stage process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This analysis yielded foundational insights into the dimensions of tourism experience, including emotional satisfaction, social interaction, and cultural engagement, as well as their perceived impact on subjective well-being.

The second phase aimed to develop and validate a measurement model based on the quantitative findings and extant literature. A structured questionnaire was designed, incorporating items adapted from validated scales and refined through expert review and pre-testing. The instrument measured constructs such as tourism experience values, satisfaction, social involvement, and older adult tourists well-being. A pilot survey was conducted with 39 participants to assess the clarity, reliability, and internal consistency of the scale items. Feedback from the pre-test informed minor adjustments to item wording and structure, ensuring the instrument's contextual appropriateness for elderly respondents.

The third phase employed a quantitative approach to test the hypothesized structural relationships among the variables. A total of 490 valid responses were obtained through purposive sampling method from older adult tourists across key destinations in Guizhou Province. Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS software. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to evaluate the

measurement model's reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Structural model assessment followed, including evaluation of model fit indices, path coefficients, and mediating effects. Bootstrapping procedures were applied to test the significance of indirect effects. This multi-phase design enabled a comprehensive understanding of how travel experiences influence the well-being of older adult tourists, both conceptually and empirically.

1.6 Definition of Terms

1.6.1 Tourism Experience Values

Tourism experience values are the perceived benefits of travel, commonly grouped into functional, emotional, social, and situational dimensions (Holbrook, 1999; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012). For elderly tourists, these values directly affect satisfaction and overall well-being by fulfilling both practical needs, such as safety and accessibility, and psychological desires, such as peace and belonging. In this study, tourism experience values are treated as the core independent variables influencing the well-being of older adults in Guizhou.

1.6.2 Functional Value

Functional value refers to the practical and utilitarian benefits derived from travel, such as infrastructure, accessibility, and service quality (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991; Woodruff, 1997). For elderly tourists, this includes senior-friendly facilities, reliable transportation, and safe accommodation. When functional value is strong, older adults can participate in tourism comfortably and securely. In this study, functional value is emphasized as a critical experiential dimension that directly shapes satisfaction and contributes to positive well-being outcomes.

1.6.3 Emotional Value

Emotional value is the affective response to tourism experiences, such as joy, nostalgia, relaxation, or stress relief (Orth, Limon, & Rose, 2020). For elderly tourists, emotional value enhances psychological vitality and reduces loneliness, making travel a source of comfort and meaning. In this study, emotional value is conceptualized as an experiential factor that indirectly contributes to well-being, by reinforcing affective engagement with places and experiences, even though its direct impact on satisfaction may be less significant than other values.

1.6.4 Social Value

Social value refers to the benefits that arise from social interaction and cultural exchange during travel, including family bonding, friendships, and community engagement (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). For older adults, social interaction is crucial in reducing isolation and fostering a sense of belonging (Nyqvist, Forsman, Giuntoli, & Cattan, 2013). In this study, social value highlights tourism's role as both a personal and social activity, contributing to improved psychological and social well-being among elderly tourists.

1.6.5 Situational Value

Situational value is defined as the benefits created by the context of tourism, such as natural beauty, cultural authenticity, seasonal festivals, and perceptions of safety (Petrick, 2002). For elderly tourists, situational value emphasizes comfort, environmental harmony, and immersive experiences that enhance satisfaction and involvement. In this study, situational value is considered especially important within Guizhou's cultural and natural attractions, where contextual conditions strongly shape older tourists' perceptions and their overall sense of travel quality.

1.6.6 Satisfaction of Older Adult Tourists

Satisfaction is the overall evaluative judgment that arises when tourism experiences meet or exceed expectations (Oliver, 1980). For elderly tourists, satisfaction includes enjoyment, need fulfillment, and feelings of safety (Del Bosque & San Martín, 2008). In this study, satisfaction serves as a mediating variable between experiential values and well-being. Elderly tourists who report high satisfaction with their travel are more likely to perceive long-term psychological benefits, reinforcing tourism's role in enhancing life quality in later years.

1.6.7 Tourism Involvement

Tourism involvement is the degree of personal importance, interest, and commitment individuals attach to travel (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). For older adults, involvement reflects lifestyle centrality, symbolic meaning, and emotional investment in travel. In this study, involvement is defined as a mediating factor that explains how functional, social, and situational values translate into deeper

engagement and well-being. High involvement indicates stronger attachment to tourism, reinforcing its contribution to elderly life satisfaction and vitality.

1.6.8 Well-Being of Older Adult Tourists

Well-being refers to a multidimensional psychological state that combines positive emotions, vitality, and a sense of life purpose (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). For elderly tourists, travel enhances well-being by fostering happiness, resilience, and social connection (Nawijn & Mitas, 2012). In this study, well-being is treated as the dependent variable, representing the final outcome of experiential values, satisfaction, and involvement. It reflects tourism's role as a pathway to active aging and quality of life improvement for older adults.

1.7 Delimitation of the Thesis

This study is delimited by several geographic, demographic, and conceptual boundaries, which define the scope and context within which the study findings can be interpreted and generalized. Geographically, the study is confined to Guizhou Province in Southwest China, a region selected for its growing prominence as a wellness tourism destination and its substantial elderly population engaging in domestic tourism. While this regional focus enables a context-specific understanding of older adult tourists' wellness travel experiences, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other provinces or countries with differing sociocultural, infrastructural, or tourism development characteristics.

Demographically, the study exclusively targets older adult tourists aged 60 and above who have participated in tourism activities in Guizhou. This age-specific delimitation allows for a focused examination of the well-being outcomes associated with tourism among elderly individuals. However, it limits the applicability of the findings to younger tourist cohorts or those with different mobility, cognitive, or motivational profiles. Furthermore, the study primarily considers tourists who are relatively healthy and capable of independent travel, excluding individuals with severe physical or cognitive impairments who may experience tourism differently.

Conceptually, the study is delimited to the investigation of four dimensions of tourism experience values—functional, situational, emotional, and social—and their effects on older adult tourists' perceived well-being. Other potentially relevant constructs,

such as environmental sustainability, destination branding, or intergenerational tourism dynamics, fall outside the scope of this study. The study also focuses on two key mediating variables—tourism satisfaction and tourism involvement—while excluding other psychological or behavioral mediators that may influence well-being, such as resilience, perceived autonomy, or digital engagement.

These delimitations were made to ensure analytical clarity and methodological feasibility. While they enhance the study's internal validity and contextual relevance, they also constrain the broader applicability of the results. Future study is encouraged to test the robustness of the proposed model across different regions, age groups, and theoretical constructs to enhance the generalizability and theoretical advancement of tourism well-being studies.

1.8 Outline of the Thesis

This study is organized into five chapters, each addressing a distinct component of the study process, from conceptual foundations to empirical analysis and theoretical implications.

Chapter One introduces the study background, highlights the significance of studying older adult tourists' well-being within the context of wellness tourism in Guizhou Province, and outlines the study problems, objectives, and questions. It further presents the theoretical framework, methodological orientation, study scope and delimitations, and concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant theoretical and empirical literature on wellness tourism, elderly well-being, and tourism experience value. It critically examines key theories, including Customer Value Theory and Involvement Theory, and identifies study gaps that inform the development of the study' s conceptual model.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological design adopted for the study, which employs a mixed-methods approach. It details the procedures for qualitative data collection and grounded theory coding, the development and pre-testing of the quantitative survey instrument, and the sampling and data analysis techniques, including Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Chapter Four presents the findings from both qualitative and quantitative analyses. It first details the grounded theory results through open, axial, and selective coding, identifying ten key dimensions of tourism experience affecting elderly well-being. It then reports on the quantitative analysis, including descriptive statistics, validity and reliability tests, and the structural model results, with specific attention to the direct and mediating effects among the study variables.

Chapter Five interprets the findings in light of the study objectives and theoretical frameworks. It discusses the theoretical contributions to Customer Experience Value, Satisfaction, and Involvement theories, as well as practical implications for tourism stakeholders, including destination managers, service providers, and policy makers. The chapter concludes by acknowledging the study' s limitations, proposing directions for future study, and summarizing the overall contributions of the thesis.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the foundational context for the study by outlining the significance of exploring older adult tourists' well-being within the framework of wellness tourism in Guizhou Province, China. It introduced the study problem, emphasized the growing societal and academic interest in aging populations and their experiential needs, and articulated the study objectives and questions that guide the inquiry. The chapter also presented the theoretical framework, drawing upon customer experience value theory and involvement theory to conceptualize the multidimensional relationships among tourism experience, involvement, satisfaction, and well-being. Methodological strategies, including the adoption of a mixed-methods design integrating grounded theory and structural equation modeling, were summarized to highlight the empirical rigor of the study.

Additionally, the chapter delineated the scope and delimitations of the study, addressing both the geographical and population-specific boundaries that define its applicability. By establishing a clear roadmap and outlining the structure of the thesis, this chapter sets the stage for the subsequent literature review and empirical investigations.

In sum, this study seeks to fill research gaps by systematically examining how different facets of tourism experience values contribute to the well-being of older adult travelers. The insights generated are expected to inform both scholarly understanding and

tourism development practices tailored to aging populations in wellness destinations. The next chapter will engage in a comprehensive review of relevant literature to situate this study within the broader academic discourse and identify key conceptual underpinnings that support the study’ s framework.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter synthesizes the literature that informs this study. It situates the research within China's demographic aging, policy agenda, and the Guizhou wellness-tourism context; establishes the study's entire theoretical foundation—Customer Value Theory and Involvement Theory; and then defines and operationalizes the focal constructs used in the model. Drawing on the experiential extension of Customer Value Theory, experiential value is conceptualized as functional, emotional, social, and situational. Involvement Theory is used to capture motivational relevance and psychological engagement. Building on these lenses, the review specifies tourist satisfaction as the mediator between experiential value and subjective well-being, and tourism involvement as the moderator that conditions these links. The synthesis highlights gaps in region-specific and interdisciplinary evidence and the limited evaluation of policy effectiveness, thereby motivating the mixed-method design and the choice of Guizhou as the empirical setting.

2.1 Contexts of the Study

2.1.1 Older Population as Tourists in China

China's rapid population aging is reshaping consumer markets and service systems. Since entering an aging society in 1999, the number and share of older adults have continued to rise, expanding the potential scale of senior travel demand. Figure 2.1 compares China's trajectory with global trends. These shifts signal a steadily enlarging senior travel segment and elevate the need for barrier-free, age-friendly environments that underpin functional and situational dimensions of tourism experience value.

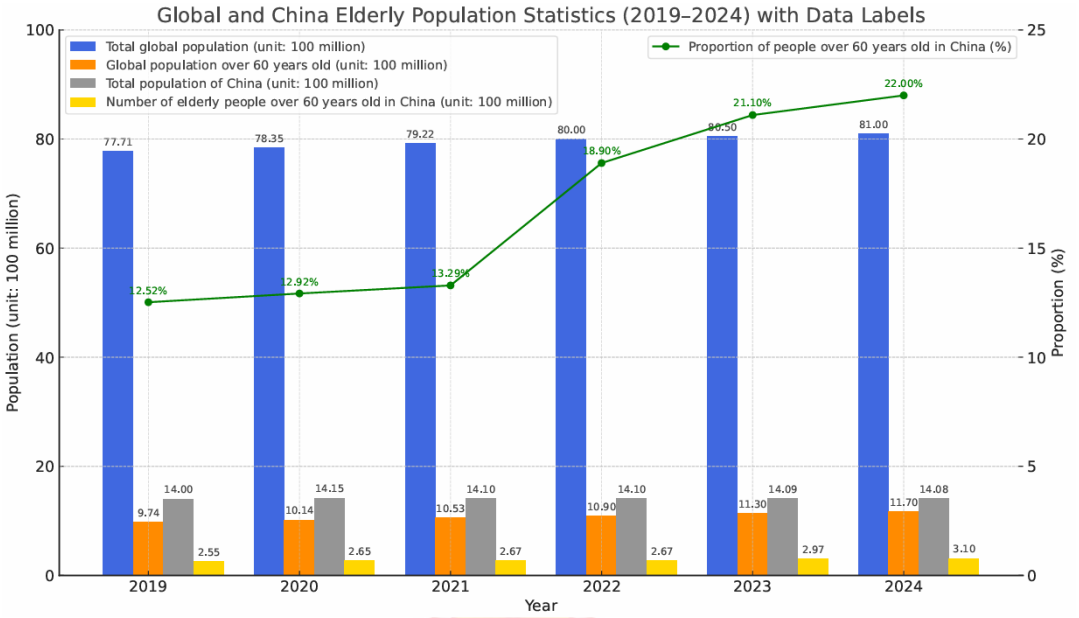

Figure 2.1 Number of people over 60 in the world and in China

Source: http://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/

In response, China has enacted a coordinated policy agenda to promote age-inclusive tourism. Recent directives emphasize infrastructure upgrades and barrier-free standards, digital accessibility and streamlined public services, and the expansion of wellness, cultural, and rural tourism models as part of the silver economy. Collectively, these measures support functional/situational value (e.g., accessibility, safety, wayfinding) and enable emotional/social value through culturally enriching and health-oriented programs These initiatives are summarized in Table 2.1, which outlines the core provisions of each document and demonstrates a coordinated effort to promote elderly-friendly tourism as part of the silver economy.

Table 2.1 Chinese Government Policies on Older Care-Tourism Integration (2020–2025): Key Reports and Strategic Directives

Policy Document	Key Provisions	Issuing Authority	Year
Action Plan for Increasing Senior Tourism Trainer	Aims to launch 2,500+ senior tourism trainer by 2027, with 100+ premium railway routes and optimized accessibility features.	NDRC & 9 Ministries	2025

Table 2.1 (continued)

Policy Document	Key Provisions	Issuing Authority	Year
Guidelines on Developing the Silver Economy	Expands elderly-oriented tourism services (e.g., wellness tours, cultural experiences) and mandates scenic area accessibility upgrades.	State Council	2024
Work Plan for Barrier-Free Transport Services	Prioritizes public transport adaptations (e.g. senior-friendly stations) to improve travel mobility for older adult tourists.	Ministry of Transport	2024
Guidelines on Tourism Public Services	Enhances digital accessibility, streamlined procedures, and age-adaptive modifications in tourist attractions.	Ministry of Culture & Tourism	2024
Government Work Report	Reinforces silver economy growth through elderly tourism-culture synergies and regional health-tourism hubs.	State Council	2024

In parallel, China's economic growth and rising living standards have contributed to a growing demand for leisure and spiritual enrichment among older adults. The tourism industry has become an important medium for this purpose. As a key pillar of national consumption and service innovation, tourism has experienced rapid growth. Guizhou Province, in particular, exemplifies this development. In 2019, tourism revenue accounted for over 70% of the province’s GDP (Liu et al., 2022). Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp contraction in 2020 and 2022, tourism activity in Guizhou showed strong signs of recovery by 2023 and 2024. Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3 depict the trends in tourist volume and revenue in Guizhou from 2019 to 2024.

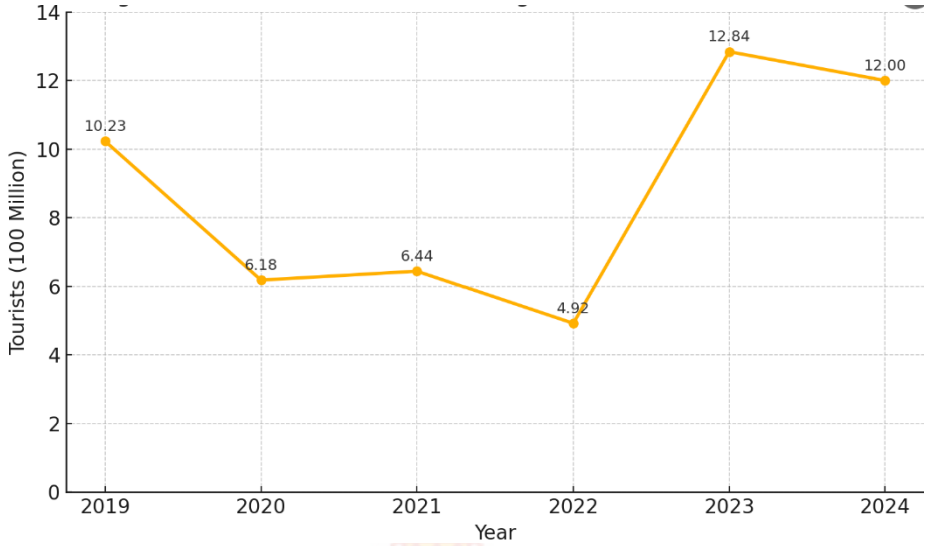

Figure 2.2 Number of tourists in Guizhou Province

Source: 2019-2024 Guizhou statistical yearbook



Figure 2.3 Tourism income in Guizhou Province in 2019-2024 year

Source: 2019-2024 China statistical yearbook

Moreover, Guizhou's efforts to align ecological protection with green tourism strategies have gained national and international recognition. Initiatives like the "Colorful Guizhou" and "Mountain Park Province" brands have promoted the province's karst landscapes, ethnic cultural diversity, and ecological resources as unique tourism assets. In this context, the growing number of older adult tourists reflects not only lifted travel restrictions but also deeper shifts in social values and health priorities. As Figure 2.4

shows, the number of elderly travelers in China has steadily increased, accounting for approximately 30% of domestic tourists in recent years.

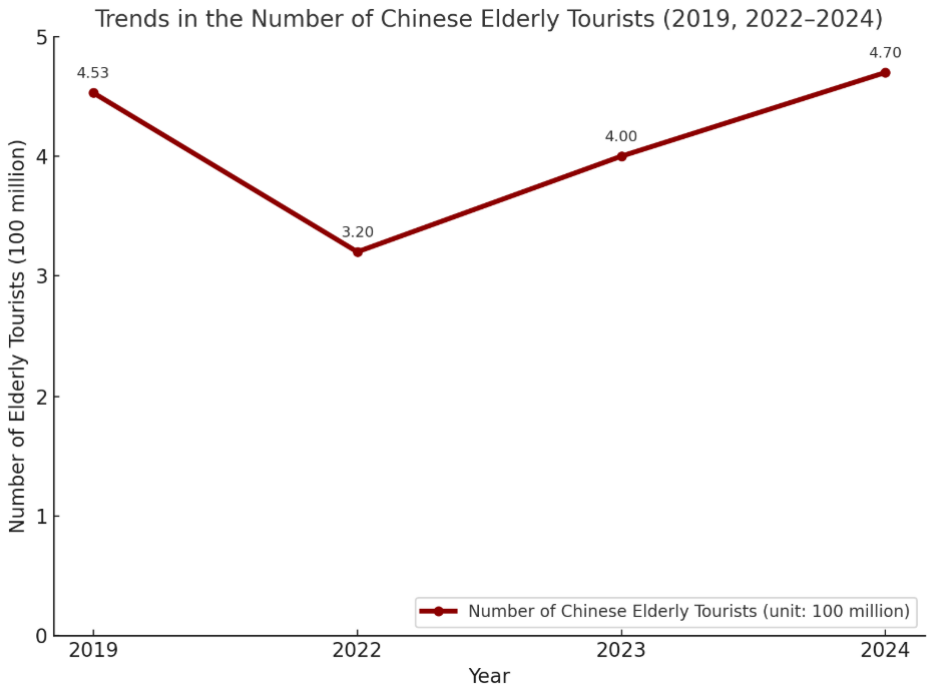

Figure 2.4 Trends of the number of Chinese older adult tourists in 2019-2024 year
Source: http://eng.ctaweb.org.cn

Guizhou is uniquely positioned as a study site for elderly tourism. Its cultural richness, shaped by ethnic groups such as the Miao, Dong, and Buyi, offers abundant opportunities for immersive cultural tourism (Qin et al., 2024). The therapeutic potential of its natural environment—ranging from forest parks and waterfalls to hot springs and ecological zones—has been shown to support mental and physical health in older adults (Lee et al., 2025). The province has also made significant progress in transportation and digital infrastructure, ensuring improved accessibility across its mountainous terrain. These developments have strengthened Guizhou's role as a national pilot zone for ecological civilization and age-friendly tourism.

From a resource perspective, Guizhou holds numerous national-level scenic areas, protected zones, forest parks, and cultural heritage sites. These are detailed in Table 2.2, which tracks the province's ecological and cultural tourism assets between 2019 and 2024. Notably, the forest coverage rate increased from 60% to an estimated 64% during this period, and the number of national scenic and cultural relic sites has remained stable, demonstrating a consistent commitment to environmental and heritage preservation.

Table 2.2 Overview of Guizhou Resources (2019 – 2024)

Type	Index	Year					
		2019	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
Forest resources	Forest area (10,000 hectares)	1056.13	1083.63	1094.02	1106.16	1115.00	1125.00
	Forest coverage rate (%)	60.00	61.51	62.12	62.81	63.50	64.00
	Forest stock (billion cubic meters)	5.97	6.09	6.23	6.30	6.40	6.50
Nature reserve	Nature reserve (number)	106	106	106	106	106	106
	National nature reserve (number)	11	11	11	11	11	11
Forest Park	Forest Park (number)	97	97	97	97	97	97
	National forest park (number)	30	30	30	30	30	30
Scenic spot	National scenic spot (number)	18	18	18	18	18	18
	Provincial scenic spots (number)	53	53	53	53	53	53
	National key cultural relics protection units (number)	81	81	81	81	81	81

Source: "Guizhou Statistical Yearbooks", 2020-2025

Beyond infrastructure and environmental quality, older adult tourism is increasingly supported by theoretical developments in aging and well-being. The shift from a medicalized view of aging to the framework of "positive aging" highlights the importance of health, participation, and security in later life (García & Trascastro, 2021). Positive aging emphasizes not just physical health but also social engagement and personal meaning-making (An et al., 2023; Iwasaki et al., 2018). In tourism contexts, this perspective aligns with the value older adults derive from emotionally fulfilling, socially interactive, and culturally enriching travel experiences.

Scholars have confirmed the psychological and physiological benefits of tourism for elderly individuals. Travel contributes to emotional vitality, cognitive resilience, and enhanced self-worth through social interaction and self-discovery (Laing & Frost, 2017). However, constraints still exist—older tourists often face challenges related to mobility, digital literacy, and service mismatch (Xu et al., 2023). As tourism services expand, more attention must be paid to accessibility, customization, and emotional resonance.

The current study builds on these foundations by applying theoretical models such as the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Paradigm (Oliver, 1980) and Comparison Level Theory (Jasso, 2001) to interpret older adults' tourism satisfaction. These frameworks help explain how expectations, previous experiences, and social comparisons shape the subjective well-being derived from tourism.

Despite growing academic attention, several knowledge gaps remain. Most existing studies focus on generalized or urban contexts, neglecting regional and cultural specificity (Cox & Evenhuis, 2020). There is also limited interdisciplinary research that connects tourism studies with gerontology, health psychology, and cultural studies. Moreover, while policy enthusiasm for elderly tourism is high, empirical evaluations of its effectiveness are still rare (Patterson & Balderas, 2020). Addressing these gaps is essential not only for theoretical advancement but also for informing age-inclusive and sustainable tourism strategies.

Accordingly, this study focuses on the elderly tourism experience in Guizhou Province—a region characterized by ecological richness, cultural depth, and evolving infrastructure. It aims to investigate how emotional, social, and situational dimensions of tourism value influence older adults' involvement and well-being. In doing so, the study

contributes to both academic understanding and practical innovation in elderly-friendly tourism design.

2.1.2 Guizhou Tourism

In 2023, Guizhou Province formulated a strategic vision centered around the "three major elements" of resources, tourists, and services, aiming to expedite the establishment of a world-class tourist destination (Hu et al., 2023). This endeavor involves the development of global-standard tourism resources, the creation of world-class tourist attractions, and the collaborative effort to construct a world-class tourism destination. Zhang and Wen (2022) pointed out that since 2015, the tourism industry in Guizhou has witnessed remarkable progress, emerging as the fastest-growing sector in the province's history. It has ascended to the forefront of China's tourism development, with culture and tourism becoming integral components of Guizhou's economic and societal advancement. Furthermore, the leading role of the modern service industry within the region has become increasingly prominent.

Figure 2.5 presents a geographic overview of Guizhou Province, highlighting the most frequently visited scenic attractions among older adult tourists. This map distinctly identifies four key destinations: Huangguoshu Waterfall, located near Anshun, recognized for its natural grandeur; Shiqian Hot Spring Group, situated in Tongren, known for its therapeutic thermal waters; Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, positioned in Qiannan, celebrated for its ecological diversity; and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village, located within Qiandongnan, famous for its vibrant ethnic culture. Collectively, these scenic spots represent the core attractions driving elderly tourism in Guizhou, underscoring the province's diverse natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and health-oriented tourism resources. This spatial depiction facilitates an understanding of regional tourism dynamics and supports strategic planning for elderly tourism development.



Figure 2.5 The most popular scenic spots among older adult tourists visiting Guizhou Province

Source: Liu (2024)

Over the past five years, Guizhou has experienced substantial tourism growth, driven by infrastructural improvements and proactive government initiatives. Investment in transportation infrastructure, notably the expansion of high-speed railways and expressways, has significantly enhanced the province's accessibility, facilitating a surge in domestic tourist arrivals (Li & Chen, 2020). Ecotourism and rural tourism have become central pillars of Guizhou's tourism strategy. The province has capitalized on its natural endowments by promoting destinations such as Huangguoshu Waterfall, Fanjing Mountain, and the Libo Karst Forest, all of which are recognized UNESCO World Heritage Sites or national-level scenic areas. Furthermore, Guizhou's rural revitalization programs have integrated tourism with poverty alleviation efforts, creating community-based tourism models that involve local residents directly in tourism operations (Huang, 2024). This model has been credited with promoting inclusive growth, preserving cultural heritage, and enhancing tourists' authentic cultural experiences.

Despite the rapid growth, challenges persist in areas such as service quality, seasonal concentration of tourists, and sustainable management of natural and cultural resources. Several studies have highlighted the need for the province to focus on upgrading tourism infrastructure quality, improving hospitality training, and enhancing digital marketing strategies to cater to a more diversified tourist base (Huang, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Additionally, post-pandemic recovery strategies have emphasized the importance

of health tourism and senior-friendly tourism services, positioning Guizhou to cater to the rising demand for wellness tourism among elderly travelers.

Overall, Guizhou's tourism sector reflects a dynamic interplay between natural conservation, cultural preservation, infrastructural modernization, and market-driven innovation. Its experience offers valuable insights into how less-developed inland regions can leverage ecological and cultural resources to achieve sustainable tourism development. Understanding the evolution and characteristics of Guizhou's tourism industry is crucial for contextualizing the present study, which examines how travel experiences in Guizhou impact the well-being of older adult tourists.

2.1.3 Older Adult Tourists

The literature on older adult tourists dates back to the 1980s when senior travelers were described by the American tourism industry as the "new love" due to the industry's recognition that older adults have ample time and financial resources to engage in tourism activities compared to the middle-aged and younger markets (Fleischer & Pizam, 2002). Due to the multidimensional changes experienced by older adults, including physiological, psychological, and social changes, there is a strong interactive relationship between cognitive, behavioral, and specific aging factors, leading to continuous changes in perceptual functions among older adults. study indicates that there are dimensional differences between older adults and other age segments in the tourism market. These differences encompass various aspects such as travel motivations, destination selection, accommodation preferences, information search behavior, tourism service demands, and service satisfaction levels (Bauer, 2012). According to a report by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), older adults tend to travel more frequently and cover longer distances compared to non-elderly individuals (Gotham, 2005). Based on Senior Travel Statistics in 2025, in 2024, seniors aged 60 and above accounted for approximately 37% of all travelers, highlighting their significant contribution to the travel industry. Within this demographic, the 60-74 age group was particularly active, generating 23% of trips and 26% of tourism nights (total number of overnight stays by tourists in accommodation facilities) for private purposes. A study using secondary data obtained from the National Travel Survey to investigate the behavioral differences between the elderly tourism market and the non-elderly tourism market in the United States. The study

revealed that older adult tourists tend to travel longer distances compared to the non-elderly tourism market (Reece, 2004).

Chu (2024) pointed out that the population born in the 1965s has now entered the elderly population. Compared to the previous generation of elderly individuals, this cohort has stronger purchasing power, not only being financially stable and having more leisure time but also having innovative ideas. As a result, they have a strong demand for tourism. Studies have found that older adults require significant assistance during their travel journeys, including the need for companionship from dedicated individuals, prompt access to medical assistance, reduction of transportation barriers, professional itinerary planning, and special dietary arrangements (Luiu et al., 2017). Older adults tend to have relatively weak awareness of travel safety (Szeto et al., 2017). A study was the first to apply cluster analysis to quantitatively study the travel demands of older adults (Shoemaker, 2000). Based on this study, Shoemaker (2000) categorized elderly travelers into three types: family-oriented, who prefer short trips with family members and repeated visits to the same destinations; active, who prefer enriching holidays and visiting historical landscapes; and senior, who prefer all-inclusive package tours or resort vacations. To obtain more favorable prices and avoid the peak tourist season, older adults prefer to travel during the off-peak.

The aforementioned studies indicate that as the final stage in the human life cycle, the elderly stage exhibits distinct characteristics compared to other life stages. These characteristics encompass not only physiological aging, psychological maturity, and the evolution of social functioning and roles but also significant differences between older adult tourists and other tourists.

2.1.4 Tourism Resources for Older Adults in Guizhou

Guizhou Province in southwestern China has become a prominent destination for elderly tourism due to its distinctive ecological and cultural assets. The province's extensive forest coverage, diverse karst landforms, and favorable climatic conditions create an environment conducive to restorative and health-oriented travel experiences (Huang et al., 2022). These natural advantages, together with Guizhou's positioning as a national pilot zone for ecological civilization, support the development of wellness-focused tourism products tailored to older adults' needs for tranquility, safety, and scenic immersion.

Cultural resources further enrich the travel experiences of senior visitors. Guizhou's multi-ethnic heritage, represented by the Miao, Dong, and Tujia communities, offers opportunities for deep cultural interaction through traditional festivals, folk rituals, crafts, and architectural heritage. These experiences foster cultural continuity and intergenerational connection, aligning closely with older tourists' pursuit of emotional enrichment and meaningful engagement during travel.

In addition to its natural and cultural advantages, Guizhou has invested extensively in age-friendly tourism infrastructure. Scenic destinations are equipped with elevators, ramps, barrier-free pathways, and handrails to ensure safe mobility, while community-based elder care stations provide on-site medical support and rest facilities. Digital tourism platforms have been developed with large-font interfaces, voice navigation, and simplified booking systems to accommodate older users. These initiatives enhance both the functional value and situational value of tourism by improving accessibility and reducing physical and cognitive barriers for elderly travelers.

The integration of ecological preservation, cultural vitality, and inclusive infrastructure makes Guizhou a model region for elderly tourism development. By offering restorative natural settings, culturally immersive experiences, and customized services, the province demonstrates how age-friendly tourism strategies can maximize emotional, social, and functional benefits for older adults, thereby reinforcing the role of tourism as a pathway to healthy aging and overall well-being.

2.1.5 Elderly Travel Preferences and Behaviors

Over the past decade, elderly tourism has evolved from a marginal market segment into a globally recognized driver of inclusive and sustainable tourism development. Globally, aging populations in countries such as Japan, Germany, and China are reshaping tourism demand by favoring health-conscious, culturally enriching, and low-intensity experiences tailored to older adults' physical and psychological needs. Older adult tourists increasingly prioritize destinations that offer emotional well-being, accessibility, medical support, and meaningful social interaction (Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

In the context of Guizhou, China, elderly travelers display a distinct behavioral pattern shaped by regional socio-cultural and environmental characteristics. Known for its karst landscapes, mild climate, and rich ethnic diversity, Guizhou offers a favorable setting

for older tourists seeking leisure experiences aligned with well-being and cultural engagement. Older adult tourists in Guizhou prefer slow-paced travel, scenic rural destinations, and wellness programs integrated with traditional Chinese medicine and local ethnic customs (Wang et al., 2025). Group travel remains the dominant format among this demographic, often facilitated by community organizations or senior clubs, where social bonding and safety are emphasized (Dhanani et al., 2024). In particular, forest-based wellness tourism, minority village exploration, and hot spring therapy have gained traction as preferred activities, revealing a preference for low-impact, multi-sensory, and emotionally resonant tourism experiences. These preferences are further shaped by infrastructural accessibility, the availability of age-friendly facilities, and government-led initiatives that integrate elderly care with cultural tourism (Yang et al., 2025). Overall, the behavioral traits of older adult tourists in Guizhou reflect a convergence of functional needs, emotional aspirations, and cultural continuity, suggesting that tourism strategies targeting this group must embrace a holistic understanding of aging as both a physiological and sociocultural process.

2.1.6 Community-Based Tourism

2.1.6.1 Community-Based Tourism and Active Ageing: Integrating Cultural Immersion, Authenticity, and Intergenerational Learning into the Well-being Framework

Community-based tourism (CBT) has become an increasingly important paradigm in tourism research and practice, particularly in regions where cultural heritage and local community participation serve as the foundation for visitor experiences. In Guizhou Province, China, where ethnic minority groups such as the Miao, Dong, and Buyi maintain distinctive traditions, CBT provides not only an economic model but also a cultural and social system that preserves local identity and facilitates meaningful tourist engagement. For older adult tourists, CBT offers a platform that combines cultural immersion, authenticity, intergenerational learning, and age-friendly practices, all of which contribute to well-being outcomes. These outcomes align closely with international frameworks on positive and active ageing, particularly the World Health Organization's (WHO) Active Ageing Policy Framework (2002) and the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021–2030.

2.1.6.2 Community-Based Tourism and Cultural Immersion

CBT emphasizes local ownership, decision-making, and distribution of tourism benefits. Unlike mass tourism models that often lead to over-commercialization, CBT foregrounds the agency of community members in shaping tourism narratives and experiences (Hu, Wang, & Xu, 2022). This approach is critical in Guizhou, where ethnic minorities face both opportunities and challenges from integration into the national tourism economy. By allowing community members to control the way their cultural practices are represented, CBT ensures that experiences are rooted in local authenticity rather than commodified spectacle.

Cultural immersion is central to this process. Research on cultural tourism indicates that immersive experiences generate stronger psychological, emotional, and cognitive outcomes than superficial encounters (Richards, 2021). In Guizhou, participation in traditional festivals, handicraft workshops, or local culinary practices enables older adult tourists to move beyond observation to active involvement. For example, silver jewelry making in Miao villages or Dong choral traditions allow visitors to engage in processes of cultural creativity that foster both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Richards (2022) has argued that such creative participation enhances existential authenticity—experiences that resonate with personal identity and meaning. For older adults, these moments of authenticity can reinforce self-worth, cultural learning, and a sense of belonging.

Empirical studies confirm that cultural atmosphere, accessibility of services, and direct interaction with local residents significantly improve tourist satisfaction, which serves as a mediator between experiential value and well-being (Wang, Shuib, Sthapit, & Garrod, 2025). This suggests that functional and situational values—such as safe infrastructure, barrier-free pathways, and responsive interpretation—are critical foundations, while social and cultural immersion provide the transformative dimension that enables well-being outcomes.

Authenticity itself is multi-layered. Tangible authenticity involves heritage sites, artifacts, and physical settings, while intangible authenticity arises from ritual practices, storytelling, and symbolic meaning. Research shows that intangible forms of authenticity are often more powerful in producing meaningful tourist experiences (Lan, Wang, & Zhang, 2025). For older adult tourists in Guizhou, engagement in workshops or

festivals not only generates enjoyment but also links them to enduring cultural narratives, reinforcing identity and social connection. This supports the claim that emotional value alone may not sustain well-being unless embedded in relational and cultural contexts.

2.1.6.3 Intergenerational Learning in CBT

CBT also facilitates intergenerational learning, a process whereby knowledge, skills, and cultural practices are transmitted across age groups. In Guizhou, elders serve as custodians of intangible heritage, passing on skills such as embroidery, woodcarving, or folk music. Tourists, including older adults, can participate in this process through guided workshops and storytelling sessions. These activities connect different generations within the community while also bridging the generational gap between hosts and visitors.

Research highlights that intergenerational engagement enhances the perceived meaning of tourism experiences for older adults. Liu et al. (2024) demonstrated that intergenerational relationships influence travel motivations and participation, particularly in family-based travel. For senior tourists, the ability to interact with younger hosts or travel with younger family members provides opportunities to strengthen bonds and derive emotional satisfaction. This resonates with socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1999), which posits that as people age, they prioritize emotionally meaningful experiences and relationships over novelty or future-oriented goals. CBT settings, where elders and youth co-create cultural experiences, align perfectly with this orientation by providing emotionally rich, socially embedded encounters.

Intergenerational learning also enhances cultural sustainability. Studies across Asian rural contexts reveal that CBT helps preserve traditional crafts and rituals by creating markets and audiences that validate their continued practice (Qu, 2025). For instance, youth who might otherwise migrate to cities find opportunities to engage in cultural entrepreneurship, while older adults serve as mentors and teachers. Tourists act as learners and participants, reinforcing both the supply and demand for cultural heritage. For older adult tourists, this provides a sense of participation in preserving cultural continuity, thereby reinforcing psychological well-being through purpose and contribution.

2.1.6.4 Linking CBT to Active and Positive Ageing

The WHO Active Ageing Policy Framework (2002) and the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) provide a global framework for understanding how environments, participation, and health intersect to support older adults in achieving well-being. Active ageing emphasizes optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security, while positive ageing emphasizes dignity, equity, and fulfillment (WHO, 2002, 2020, 2021). CBT aligns with these principles in multiple ways.

First, CBT contributes to age-friendly environments by improving accessibility, safety, and comfort for older adults. Guizhou's tourism development initiatives increasingly include barrier-free pathways, rest areas, and community-based hospitality that support functional ability. This corresponds with WHO's call for enabling environments that sustain independence and mobility (Keating & Rowles, 2022).

Second, CBT enhances participation and meaningful roles for older adults. Rather than being passive spectators, older tourists in Guizhou are encouraged to join cultural workshops, storytelling circles, and festival preparations. These activities allow them to contribute actively, reinforcing dignity and reducing feelings of social marginalization.

Third, CBT supports equity and cultural identity. When ethnic minority communities manage tourism enterprises, they protect cultural integrity and reduce risks of staged or superficial performances. This empowerment ensures that both hosts and visitors experience dignity and authenticity. For older adult tourists, participation in authentic cultural practices validates their own identity as learners and contributors, reinforcing psychological well-being.

Finally, CBT integrates health, culture, and ecology. Many CBT initiatives in Guizhou are located in ecologically rich areas, combining cultural immersion with restorative nature experiences. Activities such as forest walks, hot spring visits, and eco-cultural trails contribute to physical and mental health. By embedding tourism in sustainable environments, CBT mirrors the WHO's holistic view that health involves not just medical care but the ability to live meaningfully in supportive contexts.

2.1.6.5 Toward a CBT–Well-being Framework

Integrating CBT with the study's theoretical framework yields a robust model for understanding older adult well-being. The core dimensions of experiential value—functional, situational, social, and emotional—are directly reinforced through CBT practices. Functional and situational values arise from accessible infrastructure and safe environments, social value is embedded in intergenerational and intercultural exchanges, and emotional value becomes meaningful when situated within cultural authenticity and relationships.

Satisfaction and involvement mediate these relationships by translating experiences into subjective and eudaimonic well-being. Satisfaction reflects the immediate evaluation of services and activities, while involvement reflects a deeper psychological investment in cultural practices. This dual mediation process demonstrates how CBT operates both at the level of service quality and at the level of meaning-making.

In this way, CBT not only validates Customer Value Theory and Involvement Theory but also extends them by embedding them within the frameworks of positive and active ageing. The alignment between CBT practices and WHO's global ageing agenda shows how micro-level tourism experiences connect with macro-level policy goals. Guizhou thus becomes both a case study in ethnic cultural tourism and a model for linking tourism development with sustainable well-being for older adults.

Building on Mehrabian and Russell's environmental psychology paradigm, the present study adopts the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) structure to situate elderly tourism well-being within a clear process model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In our context, Stimuli (S) are the four experience-value facets—functional, situational, emotional, and social—conceptualized under Customer Value Theory and refined by expectation–disconfirmation logic in tourism encounters. Organism (O) denotes tourists' internal affective/evaluative and motivational states, operationalized as satisfaction (overall evaluative judgment) and involvement (personal relevance and engagement). Response (R) captures the psychological well-being of older adult tourists, aligned with positive/active ageing perspectives that emphasize health, participation, and meaningful functioning in later life.

This integrated scaffold clarifies how supporting theories map onto S-O-R: Customer Value Theory supplies the multidimensional stimuli (value appraisals);

Expectation–Disconfirmation explains how perceived performance versus expectations shapes satisfaction; Involvement Theory accounts for motivational engagement as a complementary organismic route; and Active/Positive Ageing frames well-being as the target outcome of age-friendly tourism environments. Accordingly, our empirical model (Figure 2.6) operationalizes S-O-R by testing paths from value stimuli to the two organism mediators (satisfaction, involvement) and onward to the response (well-being), while allowing theoretically expected covariances among exogenous value facets.

2.2 Parent Disciplines

2.2.1 Customer Value Theory

Customer Value Theory provides a foundational lens through which consumer decision-making and post-purchase evaluations are understood. Zeithaml (1988) initially defined perceived value as the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. Zeithaml's means–end model of perceived value elaborates this definition into a structured causal framework linking marketing actions to consumer behavior. In this model, marketing stimuli—such as product attributes, branding, advertising, pricing strategies, and distribution channels—shape two primary perceptual constructs: perceived quality and perceived price. These perceptions jointly determine perceived value, which Zeithaml (1988) defines as "the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given." This trade-off emphasizes that value is not an inherent property of a product but rather a subjective judgment resulting from balancing perceived benefits (e.g., quality, convenience, and service) against perceived sacrifices (e.g., price, time, and effort). Perceived value subsequently drives consumer outcomes such as purchase intention, satisfaction, and loyalty, positioning this framework as a cornerstone of marketing and service research, and providing a theoretical basis for value assessment in tourism and hospitality contexts.Building upon this foundation, Holbrook (1999) extended Customer Value Theory by introducing an experiential interpretation, emphasizing that value is an interactive, relativistic, and context-dependent phenomenon involving emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions. Rather than replacing the original value-for-money logic, Holbrook's framework enriches Customer Value Theory by recognizing the affective and symbolic components of value creation.

In contemporary tourism research, scholars have therefore adopted Customer Value Theory—particularly in its experiential formulation—to capture not only functional utility but also the multidimensional experiential values perceived by tourists (Abid et al., 2022). Experiential value, as a derivative and application of Customer Value Theory, refers to the subjective perceptions and affective responses that arise from direct interaction with tourism products, services, and environments (Tsai et al., 2024). It encompasses dimensions such as emotional satisfaction, aesthetic pleasure, social connectedness, and personal growth, which collectively contribute to the overall well-being and memory formation of tourists (Zhu et al., 2024). In wellness and elderly tourism in particular, experiential value plays a pivotal role in shaping travel satisfaction and behavioral intentions, as older tourists increasingly seek meaningful engagement, therapeutic environments, and cultural enrichment (Hu et al., 2023). Thus, this study adopts Customer Value Theory—especially its experiential interpretation—as the theoretical foundation for understanding how older adults derive psychological and emotional benefits from tourism experiences in destinations like Guizhou.

While early studies from sociology, psychology, and marketing (e.g., Jurowski, 2009; Jain et al., 2017; Palmer, 2010) explored the psychological and sensory dimensions of customer experience, these works collectively support the experiential branch of Customer Value Theory rather than forming a separate theoretical paradigm. They highlight that customers seek symbolic, emotional, and aesthetic satisfaction in addition to functional benefits, which aligns with the multidimensional view of value proposed by Holbrook (1999).

As early as 1954, Peter Drucker pointed out that customers do not buy and consume products per se, but rather value. In 1985, Porter's concept of competitive advantage from Harvard University sparked widespread resonance in the academic and theoretical communities. This led to the continuous exploration of practical approaches and related theories for achieving sustainable competitive advantage, including value chain theory, quality management, business process reengineering, resource-based and capability-based management, customer satisfaction, and more. However, the application of these theories and methods has always revolved around the central idea of how to provide exceptional value to customers that surpasses that of competitors.This consistent academic emphasis

on value provision reinforces the theoretical significance of Customer Value Theory as a meta-framework across disciplines.

Scholars have defined the essence of customer value based on different study perspectives and applied it in practical studies. Guo (2008) views customer value as the perceived evaluation by customers of how the purchased product attributes, effects, and usage outcomes facilitate (or hinder) the achievement of their goals and intentions within a specific usage context. This definition emphasizes the three factors in customer value judgment: product attributes, perceived outcomes, and usage context, and has gained wide recognition among scholars.

With the continuous deepening of customer experience theory study, this theory has gradually extended to the field of tourism study, becoming the theoretical foundation for the study of "tourism experience" and "experiential tourism" (Chang & Lin, 2015; Huang et al., 2019; Rajaobelina, 2018).

Grønholdt et al. (2015); Klaus and Maklan (2013) conducted a systematic analysis of customer experience states and the dimensions of customer experience value structure, focusing on customers' subjective understanding and perception of the consumption object. Aust et al. (2022) categorized experience value into eight dimensions: stimulation, flow, control, boredom, relaxation, apathy, worry, and anxiety, based on the interaction between perceived skills and perceived challenges. Positive dimensions of experience value, such as relaxation, control, and stimulation, as well as negative dimensions like apathy, worry, anxiety, and boredom, arise when there is a mismatch between perceived skills and perceived challenges. When perceived skills and perceived challenges are perfectly matched, customers experience a state of psychological flow. Ek and Hultman (2008) argue that during the flow experience, customers are completely immersed in the experience process, experiencing positive emotions and a strong sense of control over the environment. It is evident that there is no clear boundary between the flow experience and other experiential states in this theory. The evaluation relies solely on customers' psychological perception. Therefore, ensuring the alignment of perceived skills and perceived challenges becomes a core function of experience marketing management.

Takatalo et al. (2008) argue that the customer experience in a real environment is not only influenced by the match between perceived challenges and perceived skills but also affected by the interactive relationship between customers and the environment.

Specifically, it consists of three dimensions: immersion, contextual coherence, and competence. Building upon this perceptual experiential dimension model, within the context of aging, this study suggests considering the situational value of elderly tourism experiences as a study variable to investigate its impact on the well-being of older adult tourists.

Many scholars, drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, believe that experiential value is a hierarchical concept and have explored the dimensions of experiential value from a hierarchical perspective.

Table 2.3 summarizes how scholars have operationalized Customer Value Theory through its experiential dimensions, reflecting a hierarchical structure of value perception. Table 2.3 demonstrates that various scholars have conceptualized customer experiential value as a hierarchical and multidimensional construct, aligning closely with the theoretical notion that different types of experiences fulfill customers' needs at different levels. Across the studies summarized, a consistent pattern emerges where experiential value is divided into functional, emotional, social, and cognitive or symbolic dimensions, each corresponding to distinct layers of consumer needs.These scholars propose that experiential satisfaction is the result of meeting different levels of consumer needs from a longitudinal hierarchical viewpoint. They argue that there is an inherent connection between the structural dimensions of experiential value and different levels of needs. Fan and Cai (2017); Fan (2006) roughly categorizes customer experiential value into functional value dimension, emotional value dimension, and social value dimension, which respectively satisfy customers' diverse experiential needs at different levels.

Table 2.3 Overview of Hierarchical Dimensions of Customer Experiential Value in Existing Study

Scholars	Dimensions
Sheth et al. (1991)	Functional Value, Conditional Value, Social Value, Emotional Value, Epistemic Value
Lai (1995)	Functional Benefits, Social Benefits, Emotional Benefits, Knowledge Benefits, Perceptual Benefits, Pleasure Benefits, Situational Benefits, Holistic Benefits

Table 2.3 (continued)

Scholars	Dimensions
Naylor (1996)	Experiential Benefits, Functional Benefits, Symbolic Benefits
de Ruyter and Kasper (1997)	External Value, Internal Value, System Value
Williams and Soutar (2000)	Functional Value, Emotional Value, Social Value, Knowledge Value
Michie and Gooty (2005)	Emotional Value, Social Value, Functional Value, Functional Value
Smith and Colgate (2007)	Practical Value, Hedonic Value, Symbolic Value
Fan (2006); Mascarenhas et al. (2006)	Functional experiential value, emotional experiential value, social experiential value
Raharja et al. (2022)	Functional Value, Emotional Value, Situational Value, Cognitive Value, Social Value

To avoid misattribution, the schematic previously labeled “Figure 2.6” is removed because Schmitt (1999) does not report that specific diagram. Instead, the conceptualization is stated explicitly in prose. Building on Customer Value Theory and experiential value accounts (Holbrook, 1999; Smith & Colgate, 2007), this study treats experiential value as a multidimensional construct that captures how older tourists appraise a destination episode. Four value facets are most salient in later-life travel: functional (e.g., accessibility, reliability, and service adequacy), situational (aesthetic fit, ambiance, and contextual coherence of service encounters), emotional (hedonic and affective responses), and social (bonding, recognition, and relational meaning). These facets correspond to different types of needs often activated during travel—security and comfort (functional), harmony and meaning in context (situational), affective gratification (emotional), and belonging or identity affirmation (social)—and together form the basis on which seniors evaluate the episode.

Customer Value Theory provides the evaluative mechanism linking these appraisals to satisfaction: tourists compare the multi-faceted value they receive against expectations; higher perceived value increases satisfaction (Klaus & Maklan, 2013; Grønholdt et al., 2015). In turn, satisfaction contributes to subjective well-being by consolidating favorable judgments of the experience. Accordingly, the present study models experiential value (functional, situational, emotional, and social) as the key antecedents, satisfaction as a mediating evaluative response, and well-being as the focal outcome in older-adult tourism (Smith & Colgate, 2007; Holbrook, 1999).

2.2.2 Involvement Theory

Involvement Theory has been widely established in consumer behavior and psychology research to explain how motivational relevance and psychological engagement shape decision-making processes and behavioral outcomes. Early conceptual foundations trace back to Social Judgment Theory (Granberg, 2012), which examined the connection between attitude strength and message acceptance, but Involvement Theory itself evolved into an independent, systematic framework through marketing and behavioral science. Johnson and Eagly (1989) defined involvement as a motivational construct determining information processing depth and responsiveness to persuasive messages. Zaichkowsky (1985a) further formalized involvement as the perceived personal relevance of an object, issue, or situation, laying the groundwork for the widely adopted Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) scale. Laurent and Kapferer (1985) advanced this conceptualization with a multidimensional framework capturing interest, perceived importance, hedonic value, and risk assessment, which has since been empirically validated in diverse decision-making contexts.

Subsequent research demonstrates that Involvement Theory provides measurable constructs and predictive models rather than being a loose concept. Huang et al. (2010), for instance, explicitly titled their study “Involvement Theory in Constructing Bloggers’ Intention to Purchase Travel Products,” building and validating a structural equation model where involvement significantly predicted online purchase intention in tourism. Wu et al. (2022) extended this work in “Involvement Theory with Market Segmentation,” demonstrating that product, advertising, and situational involvement levels reliably moderated consumer responses to misleading health claims, further proving the theory’s robustness and managerial applicability. Foreman and Retallick (2013) applied

Involvement Theory beyond consumption, showing that involvement in extracurricular activities predicted leadership development in higher education, confirming its explanatory breadth for engagement-related outcomes. These studies collectively validate Involvement Theory as a scientific, generalizable framework that captures motivational dynamics and affective-cognitive processes across multiple disciplines, including tourism, marketing, and education.

In tourism research, Involvement Theory has been extended and contextualized, particularly through Havitz and Dimanche (1997)'s Tourist Involvement Model, which conceptualizes involvement as affective and cognitive engagement throughout travel planning, participation, and evaluation. Empirical studies highlight its value in predicting tourist motivation, satisfaction, loyalty, and emotional attachment (Su et al., 2011; Yi et al., 2018). Tourism decisions often involve non-rational elements, making Involvement Theory an essential tool for analyzing consumer "black box" processes, where external stimuli interact with psychological relevance to drive travel-related choices.

For elderly tourism specifically, Involvement Theory provides a systematic lens to examine emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement in travel experiences. Tourism consumption differs from daily consumption due to its complexity, intangibility, and simultaneous production and consumption (Christodoulides et al., 2021; Dixit, 2021). Elderly travelers invest time, resources, and emotions throughout motivation formation, information search, evaluation, and travel participation, making involvement a pivotal construct to explain satisfaction and well-being outcomes. As this study focuses on aging populations, the theory is particularly relevant: higher involvement strengthens emotional resonance, cognitive evaluation, and meaningful engagement, which translate into enhanced subjective well-being.

By explicitly applying Involvement Theory, this study bridges consumer behavior theory with tourism studies, providing a validated theoretical structure to examine how elderly tourists' involvement mediates the relationship between perceived experience value and psychological outcomes. This approach not only confirms whether tourism activities improve well-being but explains the mechanisms—through involvement intensity—by which travel experiences create lasting positive effects on aging populations.

2.3 Immediate Disciplines

2.3.1 Situational Value

Situational value is widely recognized as a crucial dimension in consumer value research and tourism experience studies, referring to the benefits and meaning that travelers derive from the specific context in which tourism activities occur (Kou et al., 2024). Rather than originating from a single "experiential value theory," situational value has been conceptualized within broader paradigms of consumer value and service-dominant logic, particularly the value-in-context framework (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). This perspective emphasizes that value is co-created through the interaction between individuals and their immediate environment, making situational value a key lens for understanding how physical settings, cultural ambience, and service encounters shape perceived benefits in tourism (Leong et al., 2024).

In the context of tourism, situational value reflects travelers' evaluation of environmental aesthetics, cultural atmosphere, and service quality, leading to sensory and emotional engagement (Zhang & Xu, 2020). For elderly tourists, these perceptions are especially important: they often evaluate destinations through environmental atmosphere (visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile cues), thematic features of attractions, and the friendliness of service personnel. Ruiz et al. (2021) demonstrated that distinctive environmental settings significantly enhance visitor satisfaction, while Peng et al. (2024) confirmed a positive link between the natural and cultural aesthetics of national parks and tourist loyalty. Similarly, Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2021) found that situational value significantly influences destination image, satisfaction, and revisit intention, highlighting its role in tourism decision-making.

These studies collectively emphasize that situational value is not a static property of a product but a dynamic construct shaped by direct interaction with the tourism environment. It encompasses multi-sensory experiences, cultural context, and service interactions, all of which are integral to destination image formation and tourist satisfaction. Building on these perspectives, this study defines situational value as a context-driven evaluation of tourism settings by elderly travelers, where environmental, cultural, and interpersonal elements jointly create perceived benefits. Situational value will be examined as an independent variable influencing emotional responses, satisfaction, and

subjective well-being, allowing for a deeper exploration of how destination context contributes to meaningful and enriching travel experiences for older adults.

2.3.2 Function Value

Functional value, as one of the core categories of tourism experiential value, represents the functional and practical attributes of tourism products. his study adopts the experiential value theory developed by Mathwick et al. (2001), which conceptualizes consumer value as a multidimensional construct comprising functional, emotional, social, and epistemic dimensions. Within this framework, functional value refers to the utilitarian benefits derived from service performance, reliability, and operational efficiency.

Aho (2001) analyzed the functional value from the perspective of tourists and identified three main dimensions of tourist destinations: transportation convenience, infrastructure, and service quality. It was found that places with beautiful scenery, pleasant environments, and good order are more likely to attract tourists. Lee and King (2019) conducted study on the needs of tourists and found that functional value can influence the willingness to engage in tourism experiences. Tourist destinations with high functional value attract the attention of a majority of tourists and increase their probability of visiting. Leong et al. (2023), focusing on safety, discovered that tourists' willingness to engage in tourism experiences increases when the tourism industry, including hotels, accommodations, and sales, possesses a strong safety image. In other words, the better the safety image, the more interested tourists are in visiting. Chen and Lee (2017) introduced tourism transportation and its price into a logit regression model to analyze their specific impact on the willingness to engage in tourism experiences. Durán-Román et al. (2021) conducted surveys and analysis of tourists, identifying the key factors that influence their willingness to engage in tourism experiences, including tourism transportation, services, facilities, the price of tourism products, travel distance, and time costs. Based on statistical analysis of Mount Heng tourism scenic area, Lin et al. (2022) pointed out that factors such as the image and service level of the staff, local service facilities, scenery and environment, promotion and information, as well as the convenience of various facilities, positively affect tourists' willingness to revisit. Chansuk et al. (2022) explored the situation of overseas tourists engaging in domestic tourism, using SPSS statistical analysis methods to identify factors that influence the willingness and factors for tourism experiences among

overseas tourists, and found that most people are attracted by China's tourism resources and products.

Based on the above, it related that travelers perceive and evaluate the transportation convenience, scenic planning and design, infrastructure (parking, toilets, water and power supply, communication, etc.), service facilities (dining, accommodation, entertainment, shopping, etc.), tourism service quality, and safety conditions of tourist destinations. These evaluations contribute to the formation of their perception of the functional value of the destination. Therefore, in this study, functional value is defined as the perception of the functional and practical attributes of tourism products by elderly individuals. Functional value will be treated as an independent variable, and the study will be conducted on six dimensions of functional value: transportation convenience, planning and layout, infrastructure, service facilities, service quality, and safety conditions. The aim is to explore the relationships between functional value and other variables.

2.3.3 Emotional Value

Emotional value refers to the perceived evaluation of whether the emotional experience of tourists is satisfied or enhanced. Emotional experiences derived from tourism have long-term effects that surpass the experiences gained from other short-term leisure activities (Chen & Petrick, 2013; Choi & Park, 2017). Kwon and Lee (2020), through longitudinal data analysis using latent growth modeling, discovered that even a month after tourism, tourists still maintained a high level of well-being, effectively improving their overall quality of life, despite returning to their regular living environment. Additionally, Zsarnoczky (2017) found that tourism development can contribute to the economic growth of a destination and provide various benefits to local residents, enhancing their sense of well-being. Chen et al. (2016) argue that tourism allows individuals to replenish personal energy and resources, leading to feelings of well-being and the ability to maintain well-being in their daily lives. Ramos-Soler et al. (2019) point out that the positive experiences during the tourism process can help individuals increase their sense of well-being, life satisfaction, and improve family relationships. The psychological stress experienced during the tourism process and the attitude of the tourists toward their travels can influence the overall tourism experience to a certain extent. Chang et al. (2022) found that tourists exhibit positive emotions during tourism activities, and this positive state of mind allows them to seek meaning in their travel experiences.

Based on the above, during the tourism process, tourists generate certain emotional experiences. They are initially attracted to the tourist destination, experiencing feelings of joy and comfort, and are able to unload burdens and stress. Through engaging in tourism activities, they feel a sense of affinity towards the destination, integrating themselves into the local life and feeling a sense of familiarity. Therefore, in this study, emotional value is defined as the perception of whether the emotional experiences of elderly individuals are satisfied. Emotional value will be treated as an independent variable, and study will be conducted on six dimensions of emotional value: attractiveness, joy, comfort, escapism, affinity, and integration. The aim is to explore the relationships between emotional value and other variables.

2.3.4 Social Value

Social value is perceived and obtained by tourists through their connections and interactions with local residents or other tourist groups within the community (Wu et al., 2023). Tourism is pursued to experience something different from everyday life, and tourists engage in continuous interactions with the destination. The experiences and emotions formed during the tourism process reconstruct the special meaning of the place for individuals.

During the tourism process, tourists generate social experiential value. They experience a different lifestyle from their place of origin, immerse themselves in the local culture, interact and communicate with local residents and fellow tourists, which leads to a sense of belonging and identification with the destination. Moreover, they transform the events and experiences into cherished memories. Volo (2021) argue that places are not static; tourists continuously interact with the destination, and their experiences and emotions reconstruct the special meaning of the place for individuals. Symbolic, functional, and social attachments to the destination are derived from satisfying tourism experiences (Cao et al., 2021). Based on sampling analysis, Wang et al. (2022) focuses on analyzing overseas tourists visiting Beijing, Shanghai, and Xi'an and finds that their travel intention are primarily influenced by landscapes, historical sites, and local customs. Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) conducted a study using Zhouzhuang as an example and constructed a structural equation model, which revealed that people's intention to visit the ancient town is significantly influenced by the perceived quality of the experience, and the presence of attractive features enhances the tourism experience intention.

The aforementioned studies indicate that tourists establish connections and relationships with local residents and other tourist groups during the tourism process. Therefore, in this study, social value is defined as the perception of the relationship and connection between older adults and local residents or other tourist groups at the destination. Social value is considered as the independent variable, and the study will be conducted based on five dimensions: life experiences, cultural experiences, interactive communication, sense of identification, and cherished memories. The objective is to explore the relationships between social value and other variables.

2.3.5 Satisfaction of Older Adult Tourists

Tourist satisfaction among older adults refers to the evaluative judgment formed after comparing expected travel experiences with actual outcomes; it captures how well a trip and its services meet the needs, preferences, and emotions of elderly travelers (Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023; Yen et al., 2023). As a core construct in consumer behavior and marketing, the concept of customer satisfaction has been widely used to understand post-purchase evaluations and to guide managerial strategies. Previous scholars have mainly applied customer satisfaction in studies related to business marketing, post-purchase behavioral intention, and firm performance (Kennedy & Kundu, 2022; Ma et al., 2022). As research has deepened, customer satisfaction has gradually extended into the field of tourism studies and become the basis for studying “tourist satisfaction (Nguyen et al., 2023).”

Customer loyalty and customer satisfaction are closely related. Customer satisfaction increases the likelihood of repeat purchases and encourages customers to recommend the product or service to others (Singh et al., 2023). In other words, customer satisfaction not only increases a company's profits through repeat purchases but also attracts new customers. Companies often enhance key factors that influence customer satisfaction to reduce customer complaints, improve customer loyalty (Khan et al., 2022), minimize customer defection, establish a positive company image, and generate positive word-of-mouth. By focusing on improving customer satisfaction and optimizing resource allocation strategies based on customer satisfaction surveys, companies aim to maximize customer retention and enhance their reputation.

Therefore, the concept of customer satisfaction has been examined from multiple perspectives and widely applied in consumer behavior, business marketing, and tourism

studies. Research on tourist satisfaction has significant practical implications for analyzing tourist behavior, rational development of tourism resources, improving tourism service levels, and establishing the image of tourist destinations (Wenting et al., 2021). The high rate of repeat visits and loyalty of tourists, as well as the sustainable development of the regional tourism industry, depend on continuously improving tourist satisfaction (Kusumah, 2024). Furthermore, customer satisfaction has been applied to the study of tourism firm performance. Scholars have found significant correlations between customer satisfaction and factors such as profit margin and market share at the micro level. Research has also shown that customer satisfaction significantly influences a company's return on investment, and there is a balance point between customer satisfaction and market share that allows the company to achieve long-term profitability (Hidayat & Idrus, 2023). Therefore, customer satisfaction has been applied in the fields of tourist behavior and organizational performance of tourism enterprises in both academic and practical studies.

Based on the in-depth study on the definition, measurement, and evaluation of customer satisfaction, this construct has been widely explored and applied in the fields of marketing management and consumer behavior, providing a basis for formulating marketing strategies and understanding consumer behavior. Extensive studies on customer satisfaction have led to the development of various models, suggesting that factors such as perceived value, perceived quality, and emotions positively influence customer satisfaction (Marcos & Coelho, 2022; Tuncer et al., 2021). Building upon this, the present study defines tourism satisfaction as the degree to which elderly individuals perceive satisfaction after comparing their expected travel expectations with their actual travel experiences. It considers tourism satisfaction as the mediating variable to further explore the relationship between older adult tourists' travel experiences and tourism satisfaction, as well as the relationship between older adult tourists' satisfaction and their sense of well-being.

2.3.6 Tourism Involvement

Based on psychological and tourist behavior perspectives, Selin and Howard (1988) were the first to apply the theory of ego involvement to the field of tourism research, which gradually evolved into the study of tourism involvement.Tourism involvement refers to the degree of personal relevance and psychological connection that an individual perceives in relation to tourism activities. In recent years, scholars have focused their study

on the conceptualization, measurement, and influencing factors of tourism involvement. Some scholars have also explored the relationship between tourism involvement and tourism experience value, tourist well-being, and tourist satisfaction (Bagheri et al., 2024b; Liu et al., 2023).

Research on the dimensions of tourism involvement has yielded abundant results, and the study conclusions are not always consistent. However, attractiveness, self-expression, centrality, and pleasure are among the more frequently mentioned dimensions (Table 2.4). Zhou et al. (2023) measured tourism involvement based on three dimensions: attractiveness, self-expression, and centrality. Attractiveness refers to the perceived importance of tourism products and the enjoyment value obtained during tourism experiences (Han & Zhu, 2022). Self-expression refers to tourists' pursuit of self-realization and the reinforcement of personal image through participation and identification with tourism activities (Kim & Kim, 2024). Centrality refers to the degree of impact that tourism activities have on tourists' lives and the level of relevance between tourism experiences and their social networks (Maia et al., 2023).

For example, Crowley-Cyr et al. (2022) divided tourism involvement into five dimensions: importance, pleasure, symbolism, risk probability, and risk consequences. Zhou et al. (2023) categorized tourism involvement into three dimensions: attractiveness, self-expression, and centrality. Peng et al. (2023) divided tourism involvement into three dimensions: importance, pleasure, and symbolism.

Table 2.4 Dimension Involvement

Author	Tourism involvement
Selin and Howard (1988) Crowley-Cyr et al. (2022)	Importance, Pleasure value, Symbolism, Risk probability and consequences
Zhou et al. (2023)	Attraction, Self-expression, Centrality
Peng et al. (2023)	Importance, Pleasure, Symbolism
Chao et al. (2015)	Pleasure, Risk probability, Risk consequence
Hellervik et al. (2019)	Attraction, Symbolism, Centrality
Whiting and Hannam (2015)	Attraction, Self-expression, Symbolism, Centrality
Im and Ha (2011)	Perceptual involvement, Cognitive involvement

Table 2.4 (continued)

Author	Tourism involvement
Chalaby (2018)	Entertainment interest, Risk probability, Risk consequences
Marin and Ruiz de Maya (2013)	Attraction, Centrality, Social connection, Identity and presentation

Scholars have primarily focused on studying the conceptual meaning and influencing factors of tourism involvement. Additionally, some studyers have explored the relationship between tourism involvement and dimensions such as tourism experience value, tourist well-being, and visitor satisfaction (Bagheri et al., 2024b). Based on the understanding of the conceptual meaning and dimensions of tourism involvement, scholars have conducted in-depth study on its measurement. The main scales used to measure tourism involvement include: Personal Involvement Inventory (PII), Consumer Involvement Profile (CIP) and Enduring Involvement Scale (EIS) (Lisha et al., 2022).

Based on the aforementioned studies, scholars have investigated the relevant study on tourism involvement and explored causal or influential relationships among related variables. Building upon this, the present study defines tourism involvement as the personal significance and emotional connection that tourists attribute to their travel experiences, reflecting the psychological state of activated motivations and interests. In this study, tourism involvement will be considered as a moderating variable to further examine the relationship between travel experiences and satisfaction among older adults, as well as the relationship between satisfaction and well-being among older adult tourists.

2.3.7 Well-Being of Older Adult Tourists

Well-being of older adult tourists refers to older travelers' subjective evaluations of life satisfaction and affective states associated with travel—how tourism experiences generate positive emotions, reduce negative affect, and contribute to a sense of meaning in life (Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023). In this study, tourism well-being for older adults is conceptualized as a tourism-attributed state of flourishing that emerges during and after the trip. It captures two complementary facets: subjective well-being—trip-related life satisfaction, elevated positive affect, and reduced negative affect; and

eudaimonic/psychological well-being—feelings of vitality, autonomy, purpose, and social connectedness that travel helps cultivate in later life.

Zhang (2023) found that satisfaction with travel services enhances satisfaction with leisure life, which in turn contributes to overall well-being, evidencing a spillover process from tourism to broader life domains. Huan et al. (2025) conceptualized subjective well-being as comprising life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect, a formulation widely applied across psychology, sociology, and tourism studies. Early examinations of tourists' well-being often relied on qualitative methods (e.g., interviews) to explore how travel affects well-being (Gao et al., 2025; Huang et al., 2024). Subsequent work compared well-being before and after trips to estimate tourism's impact. Huang et al. (2024) introduced the notion of tourism well-being within activity settings, arguing that travel can serve as a pathway to well-being. Using grounded theory, Chevtaeva et al. (2024) analyzed blog narratives of physical and psychological experiences, highlighting tourism well-being as a fundamental motivation for travel and summarizing its temporal and content components. With continued development, studies of tourists' well-being increasingly integrate insights from psychology and sociology alongside accumulating empirical evidence.

At the destination level, tourists derive sensory enjoyment, acquire knowledge, connect with local culture, and accumulate experiences through interactions with natural and cultural landscapes. Bao et al. (2022) proposed a four-dimensional experience model (education, aesthetics, entertainment, escapism) widely applied in tourism-experience research. From an experience-economy perspective, Liu et al. (2023) showed that education, entertainment, and escapism significantly influence well-being among golf-tournament tourists, whereas aesthetics did not. Dwyer (2022) synthesized evidence on how tourism experiences affect health and well-being, underscoring tourism's contributory role. Within experience research, memorable tourism experiences have attracted sustained attention: Thornton and Brotchie (1987) identified four key dimensions (emotion, expectation, outcome, reminiscence), and Yi et al. (2022) used structural equation modeling to demonstrate effects of memorability on well-being. In line with this framing, memorable tourism experiences (MTE) are treated as qualities of the experience that can enhance satisfaction and subsequent outcomes; they are not the outcome itself. In our model, well-being denotes the resulting hedonic and eudaimonic states attributable to

the trip, whereas MTE indicators (e.g., emotion, expectation, outcome, reminiscence) function as antecedent experiential characteristics. Positive and negative tourism experiences significantly affect subjective well-being and psychological well-being (Su et al., 2023). Compared with a non-vacation control group, Mokhtarian and Pendyala (2018) showed that expectations and actual vacation experiences influence overall life satisfaction, domain-specific satisfactions, and affect; anticipating a vacation is associated with greater well-being and fewer negative feelings. De Bloom et al. (2010) further corroborated vacation effects on well-being using pre/post and comparison groups.

Operationally, tourism well-being is modeled reflectively, using items that tap life satisfaction, positive and negative affect (negative affect reverse-coded), and travel-induced meaning/vitality/connectedness. All items are anchored to respondents' most recent trip to Guizhou, covering on-trip and immediate post-trip evaluations to ensure attribution to the focal experience.In this study, well-being of older adult tourists is defined as the emotional and evaluative outcomes that older individuals derive from enjoyable and fulfilling tourism experiences, contributing to a sustained sense of life meaning. It is treated as the dependent variable, and the analysis examines its relationships with the study's other focal constructs.

2.4 Theoretical Model and Hypotheses Statement

This study primarily examines the relationship between the value of senior tourism experiences and tourists' well-being, as well as the mediating and moderating effects of tourist satisfaction and travel involvement on this relationship. Based on a literature review, the value of senior tourism experiences can be categorized into four dimensions: functional value, situational value, emotional value, and social value. Additionally, this study adopts a "well-being" perspective to explore issues related to tourists' well-being and treats tourists' well-being as a variable.

2.4.1 Hypotheses Statement

Functional value in senior tourism refers to older adults' perception and evaluation of the practical and service-related aspects of tourism destinations. When older adult tourists arrive at their destination, they immediately form impressions about transportation convenience, layout and design of scenic areas, infrastructure facilities (such as parking lots, restrooms, water and power supply, communication), service amenities (including

dining, accommodation, entertainment, shopping), tourism service quality, and the safety conditions of the destination. These tangible elements serve as key components in shaping the tourists' cognitive assessment of the functional value of the experience. Park and Ahn (2022) suggest that tourism activities enhance positive emotions and increase life satisfaction, while Bagheri et al. (2024b) emphasize the determinant role of tourism experiences in fostering well-being. The perceived quality and reliability of functional components enable older tourists to engage more fully with tourism activities, thereby facilitating positive emotional states and immersive experiences. Vada et al. (2019) further confirm the positive linkage between tourism experience value and tourist well-being. In this regard, a high level of functional value may contribute to the generation of meaningful and satisfying travel experiences, allowing older adults to derive lasting value and psychological benefit from their tourism participation. Based on this reasoning, this study posits the following hypothesis:

H1: Functional value positively impacts the well-being of older adult tourists.

In the course of tourism, older adults often perceive and evaluate the natural environment and situational ambiance of the destination, which contribute to the formation of sensory enjoyment encompassing visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory dimensions. They also interact with and assess the thematic features of tourism offerings and the friendliness and service attitude of personnel. These situational elements together create a specific experiential context through which elderly tourists derive meaning, emotional resonance, and satisfaction. Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2021) found that situational value—including aspects such as environmental atmosphere, service quality, and contextual immersion—plays a crucial role in shaping tourist satisfaction, destination image, and revisit intentions. Similarly, Wu et al. (2018) revealed that the experiential value derived from specific tourism contexts significantly influences tourists' satisfaction, willingness to revisit, and intention to recommend. Breiby and Slåtten (2018) further emphasized that a distinctive environmental atmosphere at tourist destinations enhances the pleasantness of tourist experiences, while Kou et al. (2025), through a mixed-method study in national parks, established a positive association between tourists' perception of environmental aesthetics and their satisfaction and loyalty.

Building on these insights, it becomes evident that the immersive and sensory-rich conditions of tourism environments foster emotional uplift and well-being for older

travelers. When elderly individuals experience the uniqueness of a destination's ambiance, thematic richness, and personalized service, they develop favorable cognitive and emotional evaluations that translate into heightened life satisfaction and positive affect. These positive emotional states and sensory engagements contribute meaningfully to the perception of life purpose and fulfillment during later life travel. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Situational value positively impacts the well-being of older adult tourists.

In the process of tourism, elderly individuals often generate a wide range of emotional experiences that significantly influence their well-being. Upon arrival at a tourism destination, older tourists may feel joy and comfort due to the appeal and aesthetic value of the environment. As they engage more deeply in tourism activities, they begin to release accumulated stress and experience a sense of escapism. Through sustained participation, they gradually develop an emotional affinity with the destination, ultimately achieving a sense of integration and belonging. This emotional progression—from initial attraction to deep psychological connection—constitutes the core of emotional value in the tourism context.

Prior studies have highlighted the importance of emotional value in shaping tourist well-being. For instance, Zhang et al. (2019) and Li et al. (2024) found that the emotional gains from tourism often have long-lasting effects that surpass other short-term leisure activities. Chen et al. (2016), using latent growth modeling and longitudinal data, demonstrated that even one month after a tourism experience, tourists retained elevated levels of well-being and life satisfaction, indicating the prolonged influence of positive emotions derived from travel. Pyke et al. (2016) emphasized that tourism not only enhances tourists' personal well-being but also benefits local communities through shared emotional and economic gains. Wong et al. (2023) argued that tourism provides opportunities for emotional restoration, allowing individuals to replenish psychological resources and improve everyday life well-being. Furthermore, Chen et al. (2016) found that tourism experiences strengthen family bonds, increase life satisfaction, and offer sustained emotional enrichment, although psychological stress and tourists' attitudes may modulate the strength of these effects. Knobloch et al. (2017) added that during tourism activities, individuals are more likely to exhibit positive emotional states, which in turn lead to the search for personal meaning and emotional fulfillment through travel.

Given these insights, emotional value—comprising feelings of attraction, joy, comfort, escapism, affinity, and integration—plays a pivotal role in enhancing older adults' subjective well-being. The unique capacity of tourism to evoke and sustain positive emotional states contributes to the long-term enhancement of quality of life, particularly among aging populations. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Emotional value positively impacts the well-being of older adult tourists.

During tourism activities, elderly tourists not only engage in personal leisure and relaxation but also actively participate in social interactions and cultural exchanges. These interactions encompass communication with local residents and fellow travelers, cohabitation in new environments, and shared participation in tourism events and customs. Through such engagements, tourists experience social value, which is rooted in interpersonal connections, cultural identification, and a sense of belonging to the tourism destination.

Existing research has consistently underscored the significance of social value in enhancing tourists' well-being. For instance, Morgan et al. (2015) and Dickinson et al. (2017) emphasized that tourism provides a platform for older adults to engage in meaningful social experiences, which foster emotional bonding and strengthen their sense of identity. In the context of tourism, the creation of social value is closely tied to the emotional fulfillment derived from living in a different cultural environment, immersing oneself in local traditions, and building interpersonal relationships. Friman et al. (2017) further illustrated that emotional connection and social engagement during travel can lead to higher levels of psychological satisfaction and personal meaning. Nezlek et al. (2002) also affirmed that such interactions allow individuals to replenish emotional energy and maintain mental well-being in their daily routines.In a similar vein, Su and Swanson (2020) highlighted that positive tourism experiences foster social connections and enhance life satisfaction, while also contributing to stronger family relationships. These findings suggest that tourism enables elderly individuals to develop a shared identity with the host community, experience cultural resonance, and generate positive memories that persist beyond the duration of the trip. Ultimately, these social encounters serve not only as sources of joy and engagement but also as catalysts for long-term improvements in overall life satisfaction and well-being.

In this study, social value is conceptualized as encompassing the lived experiences of tourists, their immersion in local culture, and their interactions with others during travel. By evaluating these dimensions, this research aims to explore how the perception of social value contributes to emotional satisfaction and meaning-making among older adult tourists. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Social value positively impacts the well-being of older adult tourists.

Functional value constitutes the foundation of travel experiences for elderly tourists, who often evaluate destinations based on tangible, practical attributes such as transportation convenience, infrastructure reliability, safety, and overall usability. When these components meet or exceed expectations, tourists are likely to perceive greater satisfaction. Scholars such as Kan (2022) and Choi et al. (2018) have emphasized the significant role of functional value in shaping positive evaluations during travel. Similarly, Sien Leong Liew et al. (2021) highlight that service efficiency, facility quality, and logistical arrangements contribute substantially to tourist satisfaction, especially for elderly individuals who are more sensitive to physical accessibility and service adequacy. These findings suggest that higher perceived functional value is closely associated with greater satisfaction. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H5: Functional value positively impacts the satisfaction of older adult tourists.

Situational value, comprising environmental ambiance, thematic elements, service personnel attitudes, and sensory experiences, plays a vital role in determining tourists' subjective evaluations. When elderly tourists find the tourism environment aesthetically pleasing and emotionally engaging, they are more likely to report satisfaction with their experiences. Liu et al. (2022) demonstrated that contextual stimuli such as friendly service and environmental aesthetics significantly influence destination satisfaction and loyalty. Shamim et al. (2025) further confirmed that immersive contextual value improves emotional appraisal and increases positive evaluations of travel. Wen et al. (2024) also noted that national park aesthetics and sensory quality correlate strongly with overall tourist satisfaction. These studies affirm that situational value directly contributes to tourists' positive perceptions and satisfaction levels. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H6: Situational value positively impacts the satisfaction of older adult tourists.

Emotional value refers to the affective benefits tourists gain from their experiences, including feelings of joy, comfort, escapism, affinity, and integration. For older adults, emotional restoration and inner peace are primary motivations for travel. When these emotional expectations are fulfilled, satisfaction is enhanced. Chen et al. (2016) found that positive emotional responses derived from tourism have lasting effects on life satisfaction. Similarly, Gao et al. (2019) highlighted that tourism-induced emotions continue to improve well-being even weeks after travel. Câmara et al. (2022) showed that emotional fulfillment during tourism not only enhances mood but also strengthens interpersonal relationships and psychological resilience. Given these insights, emotional value serves as a key determinant of tourist satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Emotional value positively impacts the satisfaction of older adult tourists.

Social value in tourism reflects the quality of interpersonal interactions, cultural engagement, and shared social experiences, all of which significantly shape older tourists' satisfaction. When tourists engage meaningfully with local residents and fellow travelers, they are more likely to perceive their experiences as memorable and satisfying. Mokhtarian (2019) argued that social interactions during travel not only enhance subjective well-being but also build lasting emotional bonds with destinations. Hagerty et al. (1996) observed that social connection contributes to a sense of belonging and psychological security. Li et al. (2025) further demonstrated that tourists who experience strong social immersion and community participation report significantly higher satisfaction levels. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is presented:

H8: Social value positively impacts the satisfaction of older adult tourists.

Adinegara et al. (2018) suggested that tourist satisfaction is one of the main factors influencing tourists' well-being. Tourist satisfaction has a positive impact on tourists' well-being, with higher satisfaction levels leading to greater well-being. Tourist satisfaction is also considered a predictor of tourists' well-being (Bowen & Clarke, 2002; Liew et al., 2021; Lyu, 2017).

Firstly, one of the purposes of senior citizens' tourism is to seek enjoyment and a pleasurable life through travel activities. The satisfaction of older adult tourists can affect their acquisition of positive emotions during the travel experience (Wang et al., 2023).

Secondly, older adult tourists expect to engage and immerse themselves in a wonderful travel lifestyle, actively participating in various travel activities (Patterson &

Balderas-Cejudo, 2023). Tourist satisfaction, as the result of the comparison between their expectations and actual experiences, can influence whether older adult tourists can fully immerse themselves in the travel lifestyle and actively engage in the experience.

Lastly, depending on the different motivations of older adult tourists, they may travel to soothe homesickness, foster harmonious relationships with family and friends, get closer to nature, or pass the time, among other reasons. In the process of achieving their travel goals, older adult tourists may derive certain meanings related to life or existence to varying degrees (Fu et al., 2022). The fulfillment of tourists' expectations in their travel experiences is directly related to the attainment of meaning in their travel, and thus, tourist satisfaction can impact their ability to derive higher levels of travel experiential value and enduring life significance.

Therefore, this study hypothesizes that tourist satisfaction may have a direct positive impact on tourists' well-being. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H9: Tourist satisfaction positively impacts on the well-being of older adult tourists.

Functional value, often reflected through service infrastructure, convenience, and safety, plays a foundational role in shaping elderly tourists' satisfaction. When older tourists perceive high levels of functional value—such as accessible transportation, adequate facilities, and reliable services—they are more likely to feel satisfied with their travel experiences (Kim et al., 2015; Lättman et al., 2019). This satisfaction in turn becomes a psychological basis that facilitates enhanced well-being. Li et al. (2021) emphasized that functional attributes affect life satisfaction through the mediation of perceived experience satisfaction. Similarly, Zheng et al. (2024) noted that tourist motivations and perceived value influence overall satisfaction, which subsequently impacts post-travel psychological states. Based on this chain of influence, it is reasonable to infer that satisfaction mediates the pathway from functional value to well-being. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H10: Tourist satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between functional value and well-being among older adult tourists.

Situational value encompasses ambient elements such as environmental atmosphere, service friendliness, and sensory stimuli. When these context-specific

experiences meet or exceed elderly tourists' expectations, they generate positive affective reactions and satisfaction. Studies by Li et al. (2021) have shown that environmental aesthetics and service warmth significantly enhance satisfaction in tourism contexts. This satisfaction, as Newman et al. (2014) point out, acts as a mediator linking experiential input (such as contextual value) to outcome states like well-being. Su et al. (2016) also confirmed that perceived contextual quality impacts satisfaction, which is an antecedent to long-term psychological well-being. Thus, situational value leads to satisfaction, which in turn promotes well-being among elderly tourists. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

H11: Tourist satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between situational value and well-being among older adult tourists.

Emotional value refers to feelings of joy, comfort, escapism, and emotional integration during tourism experiences. These emotions are particularly crucial for older adults, who often travel for emotional restoration and inner peace. According to Jia et al. (2023), positive emotional engagement during tourism has long-lasting effects on tourists' life satisfaction. Bagheri et al. (2024) confirmed that emotional experiences in tourism elevate both satisfaction and well-being. Furthermore, Mulcahy et al. (2024) demonstrated that emotional resonance during travel predicts sustained improvements in overall quality of life. These findings suggest that emotional value first enhances satisfaction, which then serves as a channel toward well-being outcomes. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H12: Tourist satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between emotional value and well-being among older adult tourists.

Social value arises from interpersonal interactions, cultural immersion, and shared activities, which can have a significant emotional and psychological impact on older tourists. When tourists develop meaningful social connections and feel a sense of belonging, they are more likely to experience satisfaction. Fatima et al. (2018) emphasized the mediating function of satisfaction in translating relational experiences into psychological benefits. Li et al. (2025) and Morgan et al. (2015) further demonstrated that social engagement through tourism contributes to enhanced life meaning, facilitated by feelings of satisfaction and inclusion. Given that tourist satisfaction is not only an evaluative outcome but also a psychological transition toward well-being, the role of

satisfaction as a mediator becomes critical in understanding how social value affects the elderly's well-being. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H13: Tourist satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between social value and well-being among older adult tourists.

Functional value reflects the degree to which a tourism experience satisfies elderly individuals' practical needs—such as relaxation, pleasure, accessibility, and social interaction—which serve as critical motivators for travel participation (Kim et al., 2015). When older tourists perceive strong functional value, they are more likely to mobilize their psychological and emotional resources, leading to a higher level of behavioral and cognitive engagement in travel activities. This is particularly relevant in senior tourism, where safety, comfort, and logistical convenience play crucial roles in shaping travel behavior. According to Hwang and Lee (2019), functional benefits significantly predict the extent to which older adults invest attention, time, and emotion in tourism. Their findings suggest that fulfillment of basic practical expectations—such as facility quality, accessibility, and service delivery—can directly foster involvement by reducing travel anxiety and enhancing intrinsic motivation. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H14: Functional value positively impacts older adult tourists' travel involvement.

Situational value, also referred to as contextual value, captures the appeal of a destination's natural, cultural, and atmospheric elements—such as scenery, ambiance, and service interactions—that contribute to the immersive quality of tourism experiences. Rich and attractive contextual features can spark interest, awaken curiosity, and stimulate sensory and emotional engagement, all of which are essential for deepened travel involvement. For older tourists, picturesque environments, thematic resonance, and cultural heritage sites not only provide enjoyment but also evoke nostalgia and emotional investment. Blumenthal and Jensen (2019) argue that environmental and cultural immersion often drive active exploration and commitment to tourism experiences. Santos et al. (2022) further emphasize that engaging physical and social environments have the potential to deepen both emotional and behavioral involvement in tourism. Thus, heightened perceptions of situational value may significantly amplify participation levels among older adults. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H15: Situational value positively impacts older adult tourists' travel involvement.

Emotional value refers to the affective benefits derived from tourism, such as joy, relaxation, comfort, escapism, and emotional resonance with the destination. These experiences are central to motivating tourists to continue engaging in activities with emotional and psychological intensity. When elderly travelers derive positive emotional experiences, they are more inclined to increase their participation and deepen their involvement. According to Shin et al. (2025), emotionally enriching experiences not only foster momentary satisfaction but also reinforce continued cognitive engagement and lasting bonds with the travel destination. Furthermore, Sheldon (2020) and Knobloch et al. (2017) demonstrated that emotional value encourages deeper involvement by enhancing the internal meaning and psychological fulfillment tourists derive from their travels. Therefore, when older adults experience emotional pleasure, comfort, or connection, their commitment to tourism activities intensifies. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H16: Emotional value positively impacts older adult tourists' travel involvement.

Social value in tourism arises from meaningful interactions with local residents, fellow travelers, and cultural communities, as well as from a sense of contributing to broader societal or community development. For older adults, the opportunity to form new relationships or strengthen family and peer ties during travel often increases the emotional and symbolic meaning of the experience. As noted by Stone and Petrick (2013), when individuals perceive that their travel has a positive impact—such as supporting local economies or fostering intercultural understanding—they become more emotionally and psychologically invested. Su et al. (2021) also support the view that social value positively shapes tourists' willingness to engage and participate in travel activities. This value motivates tourists to interact, communicate, and immerse themselves more deeply in tourism experiences, leading to higher involvement. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H17: Social value positively impacts older adult tourists' travel involvement.

In the investigation by Xu et al. (2019) exploring the relationship between rider involvement and subjective well-being in the context of leisure riding, three items were identified from the final measurement of leisure involvement as behavioral involvement, and one item as the interest dimension. The analysis deduced that due to leisure riding being a relatively novel activity in the domestic context, riders' cognitive perception

primarily lies in the emotional aspect at a psychological level (Tunnicliff et al., 2011). This leads to a situation where people exhibit more positive behavior but lack sufficient emotional trust.

However, this present study focuses on the tourism activities of older adult tourists. Tourists possess mature cognition in both behavioral and emotional aspects when engaging in tourism activities. Participation in such activities can spark the interests and curiosity of senior citizens, facilitating a more proactive and enjoyable travel experience, ultimately enhancing their well-being. Therefore, higher levels of travel involvement among senior citizens are likely to amplify their sense of well-being. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H18: Travel involvement among older adult tourists positively impacts on their travel well-being.

Functional value represents the perceived utility, convenience, and practicality of tourism services and infrastructure—factors especially critical for older adult tourists. Prior research has established that when tourism experiences effectively meet these functional needs, they foster increased personal relevance and psychological engagement, leading to greater tourism involvement (Câmara et al., 2023; He et al., 2023). Empirical evidence from De Vos et al. (2013) supports the notion that travel motivation activates involvement, which subsequently enhances satisfaction and well-being. Chatterjee and Mandal (2020) further highlight how functional attributes, when aligned with travelers' emotional expectations, encourage deeper affective and cognitive engagement, ultimately improving one's perceived life meaning and subjective well-being. Given this theoretical foundation, the current study proposes the following hypothesis:

H19: Tourism involvement exerts a positive mediating effect on the relationship between functional value and well-being.

Situational value encompasses the destination's environmental aesthetics, cultural atmosphere, sensory richness, and contextual uniqueness—key elements that can spark emotional resonance and motivation among older tourists. Previous research suggests that exposure to such contextual value strengthens tourists' interest and curiosity, prompting them to invest more emotional and cognitive resources in their travel experiences (Li et al., 2025; Maghrifani et al., 2024). Hosany et al. (2021) emphasize that context-specific stimuli, such as ambient landscapes and themed experiences, elevate involvement by

engaging travelers emotionally. Additionally, Holman et al. (2009) point out that situational allure can indirectly enhance well-being through increased involvement. In light of this, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H20: Tourism involvement exerts a positive mediating effect on the relationship between situational value and well-being.

Emotional value in tourism refers to the degree to which travel experiences evoke positive affective responses such as joy, comfort, and escapism—key drivers of psychological well-being in older adults. As indicated by Baloglu et al. (2019), emotionally rewarding experiences heighten the personal significance of tourism and encourage sustained involvement. Su et al. (2025) argue that emotional fulfillment during travel leads to deeper participation and interaction, reinforcing satisfaction and well-being. Moal-Ulvoas (2017) further confirm that positive emotions drive travelers to cognitively and emotionally engage with destinations, strengthening their sense of meaning and enhancing life quality. Based on these findings, this study proposes:

H21: Tourism involvement exerts a positive mediating effect on the relationship between emotional value and well-being.

Social value stems from meaningful interactions with other travelers and local communities, providing a sense of belonging, identity, and shared cultural appreciation—elements particularly enriching for older adults. Moghavvemi et al. (2017) note that when individuals perceive tourism to have social significance, they are more inclined to commit psychological and emotional resources to their involvement. Rather et al. (2019) also assert that tourism's interpersonal dimension is a critical antecedent of engagement. Furthermore, Huang et al. (2024) reveal that social connectedness derived from tourism facilitates both emotional investment and sustained participation, which are instrumental in fostering long-term well-being. Based on this theoretical rationale, the following hypothesis is posited:

H22: Tourism involvement exerts a positive mediating effect on the relationship between social value and well-being.

Table 2.5 Statement of Hypothesis

Hypothesis Number	Hypothesis Statements
H1	Functional value positively impacts the well-being of older adult tourists.
H2	Situational value positively impacts the well-being of older adult tourists.
H3	Emotional value positively impacts the well-being of older adult tourists.
H4	Social value positively impacts the well-being of older adult tourists.
H5	Functional value positively impacts on the satisfaction of older adult tourists.
H6	Situational value positively impacts on the satisfaction of older adult tourists.
H7	Emotional value positively impacts on the satisfaction of older adult tourists.
H8	Social value positively impacts on the satisfaction of older adult tourists.
H9	Tourist satisfaction positively impacts on the well-being of older adult tourists.
H10	Tourist satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between functional value and well-being among older adult tourists.
H11	Tourist satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between situational value and well-being among older adult tourists.
H12	Tourist satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between emotional value and well-being among older adult tourists.
H13	Tourist satisfaction mediates the positive relationship between social value and well-being among older adult tourists.
H14	Functional value positively impacts older adult tourists' travel involvement.
H15	Situational value positively impacts older adult tourists' travel involvement.
H16	Emotional value positively impacts older adult tourists' travel involvement.

Table 2.5 (continued)

Hypothesis Number	Hypothesis Statements
H17	Social value positively impacts older adult tourists' travel involvement.
H18	Travel involvement among older adult tourists positively impacts on their travel well-being.
H19	Tourism involvement exerts a positive mediating effect on the relationship between functional value and well-being.
H20	Tourism involvement exerts a positive mediating effect on the relationship between situational value and well-being.
H21	Tourism involvement exerts a positive mediating effect on the relationship between emotional value and well-being.
H22	Tourism involvement exerts a positive mediating effect on the relationship between social value and well-being.

2.4.2 Empirical Model

Anchored in Customer Value Theory—particularly its experiential interpretation (Customer Experiential Value)—and Involvement Theory, the theoretical model of this study (see Figure 2.6) aims to systematically explain how different dimensions of tourism experience influence the well-being of older adult tourists through both direct and mediated pathways. Specifically, this model integrates four experiential value dimensions—functional, situational, emotional, and social value—as independent variables that reflect tourists' comprehensive cognitive and affective evaluations of the travel experience. These value perceptions correspond respectively to the utilitarian efficiency of services, the fit of the contextual environment, the psychological pleasure derived from experiences, and the sense of social belonging and interaction.

Drawing on Customer Value Theory, the model posits that each of the four value dimensions directly enhances the well-being of elderly tourists (H1–H4), while also exerting a significant positive effect on tourist satisfaction (H5–H8), which itself functions as a key mediator between experience value and well-being (H9–H13). This reflects the theoretical proposition that experiential value not only creates immediate hedonic or

utilitarian benefits but also fosters a cumulative sense of fulfillment that enhances subjective well-being through satisfaction.

In addition, Involvement Theory provides the conceptual grounding for incorporating tourism involvement as a second mediating variable. The theory suggests that personal relevance, emotional engagement, and attentional investment are central to shaping how individuals process and respond to tourism experiences. Accordingly, the model hypothesizes that all four dimensions of experiential value positively influence the level of tourism involvement among older adults (H14–H17), which in turn directly promotes their well-being (H18). Furthermore, tourism involvement mediates the indirect effects of experiential value on well-being (H19–H22), highlighting its role in bridging perceived value and long-term psychological benefits.

As illustrated in Figure 2.6, the model integrates 22 hypotheses to examine both the direct effects of experience value on well-being, and the indirect effects channeled through satisfaction and involvement. This dual-theory framework not only aligns with prior research on consumer psychology and travel behavior, but also provides an enriched analytical lens to capture the complex psychological mechanisms underlying the tourism–well-being nexus in aging populations. Through this integrated approach, the model contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how travel experiences may function as catalysts for healthy aging and emotional fulfillment in later life.

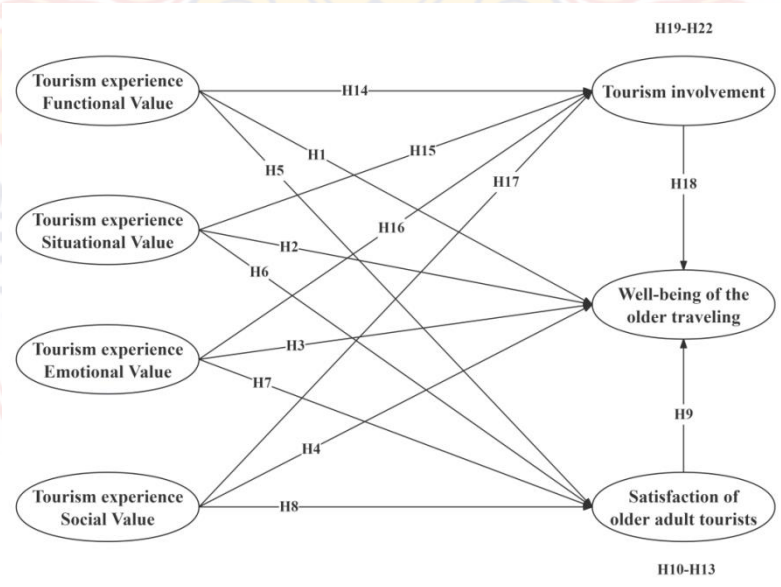

Figure 2.6 Empirical Model

Consistent with S-O-R, functional, situational, emotional, and social values serve as stimuli; satisfaction (evaluative route) and involvement (motivational route) represent the organism states; and older adults' well-being is the response. Hypotheses H5–H8 and H14–H17 specify the transmission from stimuli to organism; H9 and H18 link organism to response; and H1–H4 capture any direct stimulus–response effects permitted by theory. This specification ties the conceptual foundations to the empirical test and clarifies how the model advances value-to-well-being mechanisms in senior tourism.

Anchored in Customer Value Theory and Involvement Theory, the empirical model in Figure 2.6 specifies two theoretically distinct transmission routes from experiential value to older tourists' well-being. First, following Customer Value Theory, functional, situational, emotional, and social value are posited to exert direct effects on well-being (H1–H4) and, crucially, to enhance tourist satisfaction (H5–H8), which then transmits value appraisals to well-being (H9–H13). Satisfaction therefore captures the evaluative mechanism through which perceived benefits are converted into global judgments with downstream consequences for well-being. Second, drawing on Involvement Theory, the same four value dimensions are hypothesized to raise tourism involvement (H14–H17)—a state of personal relevance, attentional investment, and action readiness—which in turn promotes well-being (H18) and thus mediates the value → well-being link (H19–H22). This behavioral mechanism complements the evaluative pathway by emphasizing motivated engagement as a conduit from value to psychological gain in later-life travel.

This mapping also anticipates plausible contingencies. In aging contexts, emotional value may contribute strongly to satisfaction yet show weaker direct links to either involvement or sustained well-being relative to functional or social appraisals, which more directly address accessibility, safety, and belonging needs.

This mapping also anticipates plausible contingencies. In aging contexts, emotional value may contribute strongly to satisfaction yet show weaker direct links to either involvement or sustained well-being than functional or social appraisals, which more directly address accessibility, safety, and belonging needs. This specification accords with the empirical pattern summarized in the earlier literature review: value appraisals typically elevate satisfaction—and, in some settings, involvement—with downstream

effects on well-being, whereas the direct associations of emotional value with participation and durable well-being can be comparatively modest for older travelers.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter conducted a comprehensive literature review to explore the theoretical and empirical foundations of elderly tourism experience and its relationship with tourist well-being. By systematically analyzing prior studies and synthesizing key insights from relevant fields, it established a conceptual basis for the development of this study's theoretical model. Building on two central theories—Customer Value Theory and Involvement Theory—this chapter proposed a set of hypotheses to investigate how different dimensions of tourism experience influence the well-being of older adult tourists, both directly and through mediating mechanisms.

Grounded in Customer Value Theory, the study identifies four key dimensions of tourism experience value—functional, situational, emotional, and social value—which are hypothesized to have a direct positive impact on the well-being of elderly travelers. These dimensions capture both the utilitarian and affective aspects of travel experiences that older adults perceive during their journeys. Additionally, these value dimensions are expected to influence tourist satisfaction, which in turn is hypothesized to positively contribute to tourist well-being. Furthermore, tourist satisfaction is proposed as a mediating variable linking each dimension of experience value to well-being, reflecting the mechanism through which value perception translates into psychological outcomes.

Complementing this, the framework integrates Involvement Theory to account for the role of tourism involvement in shaping elderly tourists' psychological responses. Based on this theory, the model posits that all four experience value dimensions exert positive effects on tourism involvement, which itself enhances tourist well-being. Moreover, tourism involvement is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between experience value and well-being, providing a second explanatory pathway that emphasizes emotional and cognitive engagement as key drivers of well-being outcomes.

To summarize, the model tests a total of 22 hypotheses, comprising direct effects and mediation effects, all derived from the theoretical foundations of Customer Value Theory and Involvement Theory. These hypotheses collectively form the analytical core of this research and will guide the empirical examination in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins by discussing the study paradigm and subsequently delves into the various methods used to address the study questions. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study methods utilized in this study, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative study methodologies. It introduces the specific population and samples, sampling techniques, and data analysis approaches. Finally, ethical considerations relevant to this study will also be discussed.

3.1 Overview and Justification of Study Paradigm

3.1.1 Post-Positivism

After the 1970s, new study pathways solidified the position of empiricism (Syed & McLean, 2021). Post-empiricist figure Alexander (1987) continued the traditional empirical thought and transformed empiricism from the perspective of neofunctionalism (Stinchcombe, 2020). Buechler (2008) argues that empiricism overly emphasizes the role of empirical observation and confirmation, leading to a significant reduction in the scope of empirical analysis. This can result in experiential generalizations remaining at a superficial level of simple correlational analysis. On the other hand, non-empiricism tends to overlook the significance of empirical observation in scientific study. Both of these methodological orientations hinder the development of science itself. Therefore, Alexander et al. (2016) proposed that science emerges within distinct realms: the world of empirical observations and the metaphysical world of non-empirical inquiry. Building upon this premise, he constructed a scientific continuum bridging the empirical environment to the metaphysical environment. This continuum, to a certain extent, not only transcends the speculative nature of metaphysics but also overcomes the one-sidedness of empiricism and naturalism (Cotgrove, 2020). As a result, a more sophisticated and dialectical methodology of empirical inquiry is formed.

In contrast to traditional empiricism, Alexander et al. (2016) formulated four fundamental principles of post-empiricist methodology: Firstly, all scientific data are

inherently structured by theory. Secondly, the commitment to experience cannot solely rely on empirical evidence. Thirdly, under normal circumstances, general theories are dogmatic rather than skeptical, and they are also horizontal rather than vertical. Fourthly, fundamental shifts in scientific beliefs occur only when alternative theoretical frameworks emerge to address new experiences. Thus, theoretical debates constitute one of the driving forces behind scientific evolution.

In summary, this study aims to explore the significance of elderly individuals' well-being in tourism, elucidate the representative and important role of Guizhou as a tourist destination, investigate the influencing factors of elderly individuals' tourism well-being, discuss how various dimensions of tourism experience value, tourist satisfaction, and tourism involvement impact the well-being of older adult tourists. Furthermore, the study aims to construct a structural equation model for the well-being of elderly individuals in tourism, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of the elderly tourism market. This study seeks to understand the relationships between variables, and importantly, all variables in this study are observable and measurable. The discussions presented align with the ontological, epistemological, and methodological stance of post-empiricism. Therefore, the post-empirical paradigm is applicable to this study (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Research Proposal

No.	Research purpose/ objective	Research methodology	Researchstudy tools/ Researchstudy instrument
1	To delve into the various dimensions of tourism experience for older adult tourists' well-being.	Qualitative research	In-depth interviews (using semi-structured interview guides), observation forms (non-participant structured observation checklist)
2	To explore the path of tourism experience values affecting the well-being of older adult tourists in the context of tourism in Guizhou province, China.	Quantitative research	Questionnaires

Table 3.1 (continued)

No.	Research purpose/ objective	Research methodology	Researchstudy tools/ Researchstudy instrument
3	To investigate the mediation roles of social involement and satisfaction in the relationship betweent the tourism experience values and older adult tourists' well-being.	Quantitative research	Questionnaires

To facilitate auditability and replication, a side-by-side summary of the two phases (populations, eligibility, sites, sample sizes, and methodological justifications) is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.2 Consolidated Overview of the Qualitative and Quantitative Phases

Category	Qualitative Phase (Exploratory Interviews)	Quantitative Phase (Survey for SEM)
Sampling Method	Purposive sampling (information-rich cases across tourists, operators, managers/policymakers)	Stratified sampling across prefectures; convenience intercept sampling within destinations/festivals
Target Population	Older adult tourists (≥60 years), tourism operators, managers/policymakers	Older adult tourists (≥60 years) visiting Guizhou cultural/ethnic minority attractions
Inclusion Criteria	(a) Age ≥ 60 years (tourists only); (b) participation in Guizhou tourism within past 12 months; (c) willingness to be interviewed	(a) Age ≥ 60 years; (b) non-resident of Guizhou; (c) visited at least one ethnic destination or festival; (d) able to complete questionnaire
Exclusion Criteria	Local residents; individuals <60 years; those unwilling/unable to consent	Guizhou residents; individuals <60 years; incomplete questionnaires (>20% missing data)

Table 3.2 (continued)

Category	Qualitative Phase (Exploratory Interviews)	Quantitative Phase (Survey for SEM)
Study Sites / Regions	Xijiang Miao Village, Zhenyuan Ancient Town, Libo Karst, Guiyang cultural offices	Qiannan, Qiandongnan, Qianxinan prefectures; major sites: Xijiang Miao Village, Zhenyuan Ancient Town, Libo Karst, minority cultural festivals
Sample Size	24 participants (12 tourists, 6 operators, 6 managers)	490 valid survey responses (out of ~520 collected; 30 excluded for incompleteness)
Justification	Saturation achieved by the 22nd interview; 24 conducted to ensure redundancy. Aligned with 20–30 interviews recommended for phenomenological studies. Ensured stakeholder diversity.	Exceeds SEM thresholds: ≥200 minimum (Kline, 2016); ~45 parameters × 10 = 450 cases needed (Hair et al., 2019); simulation benchmarks suggest ≥400–500 cases for stable SEM estimation (Wolf et al., 2013). Stratification improved representativeness.
Key References	Patton (2015); Guest et al. (2006); Creswell & Creswell (2018)	Hair et al. (2019); Kline (2016); Wolf et al. (2013); Veal (2017); National Bureau of Statistics of China (2022)

3.2 Research Design

This study employs a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, starting with a qualitative phase to explore the dimensions of tourism experience and well-being among older adult tourists. In-depth interviews were conducted with three categories of participants: older adult tourists, scenic area managers, and tourism enterprise managers. The qualitative findings were used to identify key constructs and inform the development of the measurement model. Based on the qualitative results, a quantitative survey was then designed to test the proposed hypotheses using a larger sample of older adult tourists. This

design allows for an in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon in the first phase and statistical validation of the conceptual framework in the second phase, ensuring both theoretical depth and empirical robustness.To operationalize the qualitative–quantitative linkage, insights from the interview phase were used to (a) anchor wording to senior-friendly, destination-specific expressions; (b) screen item pools for conceptual overlap; and (c) pilot-test revised stems for readability and equivalence. Adaptation followed a minimal-change principle (context anchoring without altering construct meaning), with item retention/removal based on item–total correlations and cross-loading diagnostics in the pilot.

3.3 Qualitative Study

This study adopts a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, in which qualitative research serves as the initial phase to explore the multidimensional nature of tourism experience and its relationship with the well-being of older adult tourists. As the first step of data collection, qualitative inquiry is instrumental in uncovering latent meanings, context-specific interpretations, and participant-driven insights that inform the development of the subsequent quantitative instrument. Qualitative research plays a crucial role in constructing grounded conceptual frameworks, enabling the researcher to move beyond preconceived categories and engage directly with the lived experiences of participants. In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with older adult tourists, tourism professionals, and local stakeholders in Guizhou Province. These interviews aimed to capture the nuanced perspectives and subjective evaluations of tourism experience, including functional, situational, emotional, and social dimensions. While qualitative data provide rich, context-sensitive understanding, they are limited in generalizability and causal inference. Therefore, this qualitative phase is intended to serve as a foundation for questionnaire development, allowing for theoretical refinement and contextual adaptation. The findings from the interviews guide the operationalization of constructs in the second-phase quantitative survey, thereby enhancing the validity and relevance of the overall research model.In sum, the qualitative phase in this study not only addresses the first research objective but also ensures that the ensuing quantitative investigation is theoretically grounded, empirically informed, and contextually meaningful.

3.3.1 Unit of Analysis

The selection of research units in this study is grounded in the contextual richness of Guizhou's senior tourism environment, which is characterized by diverse forms of travel such as forest tourism, hot spring vacations, rural leisure trips, and ethnic cultural experiences. These travel forms align with the conceptual basis of "senior tourism experience value" and ensure consistency with the study's sampling criteria. Accordingly, four representative scenic areas were chosen—Huangguoshu Scenic Area, Shiqian Hot Spring Scenic Area, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village—each offering distinctive tourism resources relevant to older adult travelers, including natural landscapes, health-oriented amenities, and cultural immersion.

In parallel, four tourism enterprises were purposively selected based on a comprehensive evaluation of their scale, service coverage, reputation, and active engagement in elderly-focused travel services. These include:

Guizhou China International Travel Service Co., LTD

Guizhou Comfort International Travel Service Co., LTD

Guizhou Dingtai International Travel Service Co., LTD

Guizhou Xingyi Nanyue International Travel Agency Co., LTD

These firms were identified from the 2023 directory issued by the Guizhou Provincial Tourism Bureau and are recognized for their strategic roles in planning and delivering senior tourism products across multiple destinations.

Accordingly, the unit of analysis in this study includes three core groups: (1) older adult tourists who have experienced the selected scenic spots, (2) scenic area managers who oversee local operations and tourist services, and (3) tourism enterprise managers responsible for designing and managing tourism services tailored to senior needs. Older adult tourists provide firsthand insights into experiential and well-being outcomes; scenic area managers offer operational perspectives on tourist behavior and service responsiveness; and tourism managers contribute institutional knowledge regarding market planning and service strategy. Together, these groups enable a triangulated and holistic understanding of the interaction between tourism experience value and the well-being of older adult tourists in Guizhou. The detailed unit distribution is presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Unit of the Information Provider

Research Unit	Information Provider
Huangguoshu scenic spot	Older adult tourists (visitors aged 60+ with prior travel to Guizhou); Scenic area operation manager
Shiqian hot spring Group scenic area	Older adult tourists (same criteria); Hot spring tourism service manager
Libo Zhangjiang scenic area	Older adult tourists (same criteria); Scenic zone planning manager
Xijiang thousand households Miao village	Older adult tourists (same criteria); Community tourism site manager
Guizhou China International Travel Service Co., LTD.	Manager responsible for elderly tourism product development
Guizhou Comfort International Travel Service Co., LTD.R	Manager of operations in elderly tourism services
Guizhou Dingtai International Travel Service Co., LTD.R	Senior manager in elderly group travel planning
Guizhou Xingyi Nanyue International Travel Agency Co., LTD.R	Executive responsible for strategic service delivery

3.3.2 Sampling Techniques

This study employed purposive sampling as the primary technique for identifying participants, a method well-suited for qualitative research aimed at accessing information-rich cases aligned with specific research objectives. As Campbell et al. (2020) emphasize, purposive sampling allows for the deliberate selection of individuals possessing relevant experiences, insights, or characteristics.

Three distinct respondent groups were purposively selected for this study. First, older adult tourists were recruited at four representative scenic destinations in Guizhou Province—Huangguoshu Scenic Area, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village. Participants were approached in the field and screened according to two criteria: aged 60 years or above, and having visited Guizhou for tourism purposes on at least two occasions. These conditions ensured that participants had

sufficient experiential depth to meaningfully reflect on their tourism experiences and associated well-being.

Second, tourism enterprise managers were selected from four major travel service companies in Guizhou. These firms—Guizhou China International Travel Service Co., LTD., Guizhou Comfort International Travel Service Co., LTD., Guizhou Dingtai International Travel Service Co., LTD., and Guizhou Xingyi Nanyue International Travel Agency Co., LTD.—were chosen based on company scale, market reputation, service scope, and their active engagement in developing and managing elderly tourism products.

Third, scenic area operators at each of the selected destinations were interviewed for their insights into the operational design, visitor services, and on-site adaptations aimed at older tourists. Their perspectives helped illuminate how destination-level practices shape the tourism experience and influence visitor satisfaction and well-being.

This tripartite sampling strategy ensured triangulation across consumer, enterprise, and site-level perspectives. Guided by the principle of theoretical saturation, interviews continued until no new themes or categories emerged. This design enhanced the comprehensiveness, relevance, and analytical rigor of the study's qualitative data.

3.3.3 Sample Size

A total of 24 participants were purposively selected for this qualitative study, representing three distinct respondent groups: older adult tourists, scenic area managers, and tourism enterprise managers. This tripartite composition ensures the triangulation of perspectives across consumer experiences, operational site management, and institutional planning within the context of elderly tourism in Guizhou Province. Specifically, eight older adult tourists with at least two prior travel experiences to Guizhou were interviewed to capture reflective evaluations of tourism experience and well-being. Additionally, eight scenic area managers from four representative tourist sites were engaged to provide firsthand insights into service delivery, site management, and tourist behavior. The third group consisted of eight managers from leading tourism enterprises responsible for designing and implementing tourism products tailored to the needs of senior travelers.

The purposive sampling strategy was guided by the principle of information power (Zadeh, 2015), which posits that focused research aims and information-rich cases justify smaller sample sizes. In parallel, the study adhered to the criterion of theoretical saturation,

wherein interviews continued until no new themes or conceptual variations emerged. The interviewee distribution is presented in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 Source of Key Information Providers

Source of key information providers	Key information providers	No. of Informants
Huangguoshu scenic spot	older adult tourists	2
	Scenic area manager	2
Shiqian hot spring Group scenic area	older adult tourists	2
	Scenic area manager	2
Libo Zhangjiang scenic area	older adult tourists	2
	Scenic area manager	2
Xijiang thousand households Miao village	older adult tourists	2
	Scenic area manager	2
Guizhou China International Travel Service Co., LTD.R	Managers of tourism enterprises	2
Guizhou Comfort International Travel Service Co., LTD.R	Managers of tourism enterprises	2
Guizhou Dingtai International Travel Service Co., LTD.R	Managers of tourism enterprises	2
Guizhou Xingyi Nanyue International Travel Agency Co., LTD.R	Managers of tourism enterprises	2
Total		24

A role-stratified purposive strategy was adopted (older tourists, site managers, tour-operator managers). Sample size followed the saturation principle rather than fixed quotas. Twenty-four interviews were completed, and thematic saturation was reached by the 22nd interview; two additional interviews confirmed no new codes. Sessions lasted 45–90 minutes ($M \approx 58$). Two coders double-coded 20% of transcripts, yielding acceptable agreement; discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

3.3.4 Study Tools

This study employed semi-structured questions and in-depth interviews as the primary data collection tool for the qualitative study component. Semi-structured interviews are particularly effective in exploring the complex, contextualized experiences of individuals, allowing for both predetermined thematic inquiry and the flexibility to pursue emergent insights (Blandford, 2013). The interview protocol was developed based on the study objectives and theoretical framework, covering themes related to older adult tourists' experiential values, well-being, satisfaction, and involvement, as well as management practices of tourism enterprises and scenic areas.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes, depending on the depth of participant responses and their willingness to elaborate. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in convenient,and comfortable locations, such as community centers, cafes near tourist destinations, or on-site offices for tourism practitioners. All interviews were audio-recorded with prior informed consent and supplemented by the studyer's field notes. These notes captured non-verbal cues, environmental context, and the studyer's immediate reflections, enhancing the richness of the data. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of data, all recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data were subsequently coded and analyzed in accordance with grounded theory procedures. Throughout the data collection and management process, strict ethical standards were upheld, including the anonymization of transcripts and secure storage of audio files, in compliance with institutional guidelines on participant confidentiality and data protection.The semi-structured guide covered functional, situational, emotional, and social appraisals; satisfaction, involvement, and well-being outcomes; and contextual prompts on accessibility and safety. The complete guide is provided in Appendix A.

3.3.5 Data Analysis

This study employed NVivo software to systematically analyze qualitative interview data using a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory methodology was adopted to inductively derive the core and sub-categories of experiential value in senior tourism, emphasizing “discovery logic” over hypothesis testing or pre-established theory verification (Thornberg & Dunne, 2019). Researchers approached the data with an open and flexible analytical stance, allowing theoretical concepts to emerge from the iterative process of coding and categorization (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

Following the procedures of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, key categories were identified and refined through constant comparison. This analytical process led to the development of a context-specific theoretical framework that captures the underlying dimensions and mechanisms through which tourism experiences influence the well-being of older adults. The resulting theory was grounded in empirical data and aligned with the study's core objectives, reflecting the essential features of experiential value within the senior tourism context (Turner & Astin, 2021).

The study methodology of grounded theory involves selecting a sample from the study phenomenon based on the requirements for theory construction, followed by data collection, coding, and analysis. The next steps of data collection are then determined through data coding or analysis memos (Clark & Vealé, 2018). NVivo is a software that supports qualitative study methods and mixed study methods. It is a significant qualitative study analysis tool suitable for processing non-numerical information such as group discussions, interviews, surveys, videos, audio recordings, and social media content. It facilitates the extraction and synthesis of diverse format files through nodes and coding. The specific data analysis process will be carried out through the following steps:

Step 1: Data preparation and organization create a new project in NVivo, specifying the project name and storage location. Organize and store the collected interview records, notes, or other text data within the project created in NVivo.

Step 2: Open coding marks the initial stage of grounded theory study. In this phase, the studyer systematically analyzes data line by line or segment by segment, identifying meaningful units and assigning descriptive labels or codes to these units. To ensure reliability and effectiveness of the coding, interviews are conducted concurrently with open coding. After each interview, data is organized and coded.

Step 3: Axial coding follows open coding and occurs when some preliminary codes have been established. During this stage, the studyer starts analyzing the relationships and connections between codes. Axial coding aims to identify primary concepts, relationships, patterns, and their interconnections. The relationships between categories become clearer and more specific through axial coding. During the analysis of lateral relationships between categories, it is important to explore the genuine thoughts and motives of the subjects from their perspective, to experience their true emotions. This aids in forming a comprehensive theoretical structure.

Step 4: Selective coding occurs after axial coding. In this phase, the studyer selects the core concepts or themes and focuses on these central concepts. The studyer delves deeper into analyzing these core concepts to further develop the theory and construct the core propositions or themes of the entire study.

Step 5: Data analysis utilize the visual project model tool in NVivo 12.0 to generate a visual representation of the project model, presenting an overview of nodes and their hierarchical relationships. This helps in providing a more intuitive depiction of the hierarchy of influencing factors. Subsequently, continue with a micro-level description of each node, aiding in interpreting these factors using supportive data.

3.4 Quantitative Study

This study adopts a quantitative study approach to examine the structural relationships among the key variables influencing older adult tourists' well-being within the context of Guizhou Province, China. Specifically, it aims to achieve two core study objectives:

RO2: To explore the path of tourism experience values affecting the well-being of older adult tourists in the context of tourism in Guizhou province, China.

RO3: To investigate the mediation roles of social involement and satisfaction in the relationship betweent the tourism experience values and older adult tourists' well-being.

Quantitative methods enable the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data, providing generalizable insights and statistical evidence to support the proposed conceptual framework. This methodological choice ensures objectivity, enhances measurement precision, and allows for the testing of complex causal pathways among latent variables, which are central to validating the theoretical propositions of the study.

Insights from the qualitative phase defined construct boundaries, standardized wording anchors, and prioritized content for older travelers in Guizhou. The four value domains were retained as latent variables; their salient attributes (e.g., accessibility, safety, aesthetics, social support) were translated into brief, senior-friendly items with destination anchoring to reduce ambiguity while preserving the semantics of the source scales. The same narratives also motivated the inclusion of tourist satisfaction (evaluative appraisal) and tourism involvement (personal relevance and action readiness) as mediators. In this

way, the quantitative measures and hypotheses are traceable to participant language, ensuring conceptual continuity across phases and enhancing contextual validity.

3.4.1 Quantitative Study

This section reports the quantitative design used to test the relationships among experiential value, tourist satisfaction, tourism involvement, and well-being of older adult tourists. Conceptually, experiential value is treated as a four-dimensional appraisal during the focal trip:

Functional value—perceived utilitarian benefits from performance, reliability, safety, accessibility, and service efficiency of tourism offerings.

Situational value—perceived benefits arising from the destination and service setting, including environmental aesthetics and cleanliness, cultural ambience, crowding, signage/wayfinding, and barrier-free facilities.

Emotional value—pleasant affective states elicited by the trip (joy, comfort, relaxation, affinity, escapism, sense of integration).

Social value—gains from interactions and relationships during travel, such as connection with residents/other tourists, cultural identification, and creation of cherished memories.

Tourist satisfaction denotes the overall evaluation formed by comparing expected with actual travel experiences for the focal trip.

Well-being of older adult tourists denotes trip-attributed improvements in life satisfaction and positive affect (with reduced negative affect) and enhanced meaning/vitality/social connectedness; items are anchored to respondents' most recent trip to Guizhou.

Tourism involvement captures perceived personal relevance and depth of psychological engagement in planning, participation, and evaluation; in the model, satisfaction mediates the effect of experiential value on well-being, and involvement moderates the value→satisfaction and satisfaction→well-being links. The measurement items and bibliographic sources are summarized in Table 3.6.

3.4.2 Research Tool

3.4.2.1 Operational Definition of Variables

Table 3.5 provides concise operational definitions for the study's core constructs, each grounded in established literature.

Table 3.5 Operational Definition of Variable

Variable	Definition	Source
Well-being	The degree to which elderly individuals perceive emotional pleasure, sensory stimulation, psychological immersion, personal meaning, and value realization derived from tourism experiences in Guizhou.	Disabato et al. (2016); Nawijn and Mitas (2012); Peterson et al. (2005); Sie et al. (2021)
Satisfaction	The overall positive evaluation of their tourism experience in Guizhou, encompassing emotional fulfillment, perceived decision quality, needs satisfaction, and general contentment with senior tourism services.	Hwang et al. (2005); Lee et al. (2014); Lee (2016); Lee (2009); Zeng and Yi Man Li (2021)
Tourism involvement	The degree of personal relevance, emotional attachment, social engagement, and behavioral commitment that older adult tourists exhibit toward their travel experiences in Guizhou.	Laurent and Kapferer (1985); Zaichkowsky (1985b) Santos et al. (2022); Zhang and Lu (2010)
Experience Value	A multidimensional construct comprising: (1) **functional value**, referring to perceptions of accessibility and facility utility; (2) **situational value**, referring to emotional resonance, enjoyment, and immersion within tourism context; (3) **social value**, referring to interpersonal interactions and cultural engagement during travel.	Khairi and Darmawan (2021); Kim et al. (2012); Sien Leong Liew et al. (2021); Paulino et al. (2021); Sudigdo and Khalifa (2020); Suhartanto et al. (2020); Wang et al. (2020)

3.4.2.2 Tourist Well-Being Scale

To ensure scientific parsimony and comparability, the survey adopts ten verbatim items from two extensively used well-being instruments: the WHO-5 Well-Being Index Diener et al. (2010) and the Flourishing Scale Diener et al. (2010). Both scales have

a long record of careful item construction and field application; their concise wording and unobtrusive response demands are appropriate for older respondents and for administration proximate to travel.

Adaptation follows a minimal-change principle. Rather than rewriting items into tourism language, a single context anchor precedes the item set—respondents answer with reference to their most recent trip to Guizhou and the two weeks thereafter—while all items retain their original English stems and are presented on a unified 7-point agreement scale for questionnaire coherence. This preserves item semantics and cross-study interpretability, avoiding ad hoc phrasing that could shift what the items actually measure.

The resulting module is therefore methodologically clean and reasonable: it draws on established items, applies only non-substantive contextualization, and deliberately excludes content from adjacent constructs (e.g., involvement, flow, perceived value) that had appeared in earlier drafts but do not belong to a well-being measure. Table 3.5 lists the ten unchanged stems and sources; the adaptation logic makes the instrument suitable for the present setting without compromising the integrity of the original measures.All well-being items were kept verbatim from the WHO-5 and the Flourishing Scale. A single context anchor preceded the block: “Please answer with reference to your most recent trip to Guizhou and the two weeks thereafter.” Items were rated on a 7-point agreement scale. No lexical substitutions were made at the item level to preserve construct meaning and comparability.

Table 3.6 Measurement of Well-Being of Older Adult Tourists

Variable	Original items	Measurement Item	Source
Well-being	I have felt cheerful and in good spirits.	1.Travelling to Guizhou makes me feel involuntarily happy	Diener et al. (2010)
	I have felt calm and relaxed.	2.When choosing a trip to Guizhou, I always consider whether it will be enjoyable	
	I have felt active and vigorous.	3.I like Guizhou tourism experiences that stimulate my senses	

Table 3.6 (continued)

Variable	Original items	Measurement Item	Source
	I woke up feeling fresh and rested.	4.I think a satisfying Guizhou tourism is one that makes me happy	
	My daily life has been filled with things that interest me.	5.A pleasant Guizhou tourism experiences always makes time go by quickly	
	I lead a purposeful and meaningful life.	6.When choosing a tour in Guizhou, I always have to consider whether I will immerse myself in it	
	My social relationships are supportive and rewarding.	7.During my travels in Guizhou, I was rarely distracted by what was going on around me	
	I am engaged and interested in my daily activities.	8. Tourism activities for the aged in Guizhou are of high value	
	I am optimistic about my future.	9.Traveling in Guizhou can give me continuous meaning in life	
	I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me.	10.I have a responsibility to make senior tourism in Guizhou better.	

Note: "Original items are reproduced verbatim; only a context anchor was added before this block. No item-level paraphrasing was performed."

3.4.2.3 Tourist Satisfaction Scale

Tourist satisfaction is captured with four global evaluative statements adapted from established tourism instruments that elicit (a) expectation confirmation, (b) post-choice appraisal, (c) need fulfillment, and (d) overall evaluation. The expectation item

derives from a destination context (“My visit to Istanbul met my expectations”; (Atsız & Akova, 2021), while the remaining three stem from a wellness-tourism satisfaction battery (“wise choice,” “met my needs,” “generally satisfied”; (Liu et al., 2023). These sources provide concise, single-clause judgments commonly used to index satisfaction in travel settings.

Given the present focus on older visitors and a specific destination, the items were contextualized rather than paraphrased. Adaptation targeted the referent (substituting “Guizhou” or “senior tourism in Guizhou” for generic objects), and, where helpful for respondents, added a brief qualifier to secure the intended criterion (e.g., “for a satisfying tourism experience” following the expectations stem). Such changes increase contextual clarity and face readability for older adults while preserving the evaluative polarity and judgment target of the originals: the first item remains an expectations–performance judgment; the second a global post-choice appraisal; the third a need-satisfaction statement adapted to the senior segment; and the fourth an overall satisfaction verdict.

Although the wording changes are visibly larger than mere noun substitution, the measurement function remains equivalent: each adapted sentence continues to function as a reflective indicator of the same underlying evaluative construct as in the source scales, with identical grammatical form, judgment focus, and response format. Table 3.7 presents the one-to-one crosswalk between original stems and their Guizhou-anchored counterparts, documenting the locus of change (referent/qualifier) and maintaining conceptual continuity with the parent instruments (Atsız & Akova, 2021; Liu et al., 2023).

Table 3.7 Measurement of Satisfaction of Older Adult Tourists

Original items	Measurement Item	Source
11. My visit to Istanbul met my expectations.	11. Travelling in Guizhou generally meets my expectations for a satisfying tourism experience.	Atsız and Akova (2021)
12. I think it is a wise choice to engage in wellness tourism.	12. Traveling in Guizhou is a wise choice	
13. The wellness tourism experience met my needs.	13. Senior tourism in Guizhou meets my travel needs	Liu et al. (2023)

Table 3.7 (continued)

Original items	Measurement Item	Source
14. I am generally satisfied with the wellness tourism experience.	14. I am generally satisfied with senior tourism in Guizhou.	

3.4.2.4 Tourist Involvement Scale

Tourist involvement is indexed with a destination-specific instrument that operationalizes three well-established facets—pleasure, centrality, and self-expressive sign—using concise, single-clause statements. The item pool is drawn from Filo et al. (2013) destination involvement scale, which offers a parsimonious, activity/destination-anchored alternative to legacy involvement batteries (e.g., PII; CIP) and is readily interpretable by older respondents.

Adaptation follows a conservative, context-anchoring logic. Original English stems are used as the template and linked to the present setting through minimal substitutions (e.g., Destination X → Guizhou; visiting → travelling), while maintaining the grammatical form and evaluative focus of the source items. Where preliminary wording risked drifting into adjacent constructs—such as social bonding ("made a lot of friends"), monetary outlay ("like to spend money"), or behavioral frequency ("travel a lot")—the phrasing was normalized back to reflective involvement content by aligning each statement with its intended facet (centrality, pleasure, sign). This preserves conceptual equivalence with the parent scale and avoids importing non-involvement variance.

The resulting six statements (Items 15–20 in Table 3.8) thus map transparently onto the three facets: centrality (e.g., has a central role in my life; lots of my time is organized around…), pleasure (e.g., I really enjoy…; …is pleasurable), and sign (e.g., allows me to really be myself; …says a lot about who I am). All items are presented on a unified seven-point agreement scale. Table 3.8 documents the side-by-side correspondence between the Filo et al. stems and their Guizhou-anchored counterparts, clarifying the locus of contextual substitution versus substantive alignment.

Table 3.8 Measurement of Tourism Involvement

Variable	Original items	Measurement Item	Source
Tourism involvement	15. Destination X has a central role in my life.	15. Travelling in Guizhou is an indispensable activity in my life	Filo et al. (2013)
	16. Visiting Destination X allows me to really be myself.	16. I made a lot of friends during my Guizhou tourism.	
	17. I really enjoy visiting Destination X.	17. I like to spend money on Guizhou tourism.	
	18. Visiting Destination X says a lot about who I am.	18. Traveling in Guizhou makes me feel important	
	19. Lots of my time is organized around Destination X.	19. I travel a lot to Guizhou	
	20. Visiting Destination X is pleasurable.	20. I like to spend time traveling in Guizhou.	

The involvement module intentionally retains the wording decisions made at the instrument-development stage for this study. Items were adapted to be senior-friendly and destination-anchored while preserving the three canonical facets—centrality, pleasure, and self-expressive sign—that define involvement. Apparent references to spending, frequency, or social bonding in some items were not intended to introduce new constructs; rather, they operationalize how older travellers in this setting recognize and express centrality and sign (e.g., allocating time/resources to Guizhou travel; signalling identity; deriving enjoyment). Content equivalence was checked in three ways: (i) expert review during the qualitative–quantitative handover ensured each item mapped to its target facet; (ii) a 30-case pilot confirmed readability and a single-factor solution within the involvement block; and (iii) in the full sample, CFA loadings, CR, and AVE (reported in Chapter 4) met accepted thresholds, with discriminant validity against satisfaction and value dimensions. Together these checks indicate that the current wording is conceptually

coherent and psychometrically adequate for the study population without altering the underlying construct.

3.4.2.5 Senior Tourist Experience Value Scale

Senior tourist experience value is operationalized across four established facets—functional, situational, emotional, and social—using items sourced from tourism-specific instruments and minimally adapted to the Guizhou context. Functional value draws on operational/organizational quality indicators (Saha et al., 2023); situational value employs esthetic and sensory appraisals from the experience-economy battery (Oh et al., 2007); emotional value follows the Destination Emotion Scale affect labels (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010); and social value relies on memorable-experience items capturing local culture and interpersonal exchange (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015). The aim is a parsimonious, context-sensitive module whose wording remains brief and age-appropriate while retaining the domains of the source measures.

Adaptation proceeded by context anchoring rather than wholesale rewriting. Source stems were converted into declarative statements and linked to Guizhou and its representative attractions through proper-noun substitution and concrete referents. For functional value, event-quality cues such as “well organized,” “consistent quality,” and “acceptable standard” were re-expressed as destination-level proxies salient to older travelers—accessibility, planning/layout, and the adequacy of infrastructure and service facilities—thus preserving evaluative polarity while aligning the referent with mobility and comfort needs. Situational value items were retained in their original esthetic/sensory logic (harmony, multi-sensory pleasure, attention to thematic design) and rendered as plain statements. Emotional value kept the DES affects (fascinated, happiness, comfortable, affection) but presented them as complete sentences (“Traveling in Guizhou makes me …”) to ease comprehension. Social value maintained the emphasis on engaging with local culture and friendly interactions; the bonds item was streamlined into a reminiscence-based phrasing (“fond memories”) to express socially grounded meaning in a form readily understood by older respondents.

The resulting set (Table 3.9) preserves the construct boundaries of the parent instruments while tailoring the referents and sentence form to the study setting and population. Each dimension is represented by three to four concise items, balancing

coverage with respondent burden and maintaining a clear one-to-one correspondence between original stems and their Guizhou-anchored counterparts.

Table 3.9 Measurement of Older adults Tourist Experience Value

Variable	Original items	Measurement Item	Source
Functionality value	**Consistent quality**	21. Guizhou, like Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village, is easily accessible	Saha et al. (2023)
	Everything was done well during festival	22.The planning and layout of Guizhou's tourist destinations make my travel experience more convenient and organized.	
	Acceptable standard of quality	23. Guizhou, like Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village has perfect infrastructure	
	Well organized	24. Guizhou, like Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village has perfect service facilities	
Situational value	I felt a real sense of harmony.	25.The atmosphere of Guizhou's tourist destinations feels peaceful and culturally integrated.	Oh et al. (2007)
	The setting provided pleasure to my senses.	26.Travelling in Guizhou allows me to see, hear, smell, taste and other sensory enjoyment	

Table 3.9 (continued)

Variable	Original items	Measurement Item	Source
	The setting really showed attention to design detail.	27.The theme of the Guizhou, like Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village is distinctive	
Emotional value	Fascinated	28. Guizhou, like Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village is attractive	Hosany and Gilbert (2010)
	Happiness	29.Traveling in Guizhou makes me happy	
	Comfortable	30.Traveling in Guizhou makes me forget my worries and stress for a while	
	Affection	31.Traveling in Guizhou makes me feel close	
Social value	I closely experienced the actual local cultures.	32.During the tour, I felt the local customs of the Guizhou.	Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015)
	Local people I encountered were genuinely friendly.	33.Local residents and tourists in Guizhou interact with me in a friendly way	
	It enhanced the existing bonds with my friends and travel companions.	34.I have fond memories of travels in Guizhou.	

Note: Each dimension of the Senior Tourist Experience Value Scale consists of three to four measurement items, totaling 14 items (Functional Value: 4; Situational Value: 3; Emotional Value: 4; Social Value: 3). Item numbering (21–34) corresponds to the sequential coding used in the questionnaire.

The four-facet experience-value battery (functional, situational, emotional, social) was adapted using a context-anchoring approach: items explicitly reference Guizhou and the four representative attractions to maximize salience for older respondents. Repetition of site names within items is purposeful—participants were instructed to answer with their experiences in Guizhou, and the concrete referents reduce ambiguity without changing construct meaning. Content validity was secured via (i) role-based qualitative elicitation that confirmed the salience of accessibility, layout, aesthetics, affect, and interpersonal exchange for seniors; (ii) expert review aligning each item to its intended facet; and (iii) pilot testing for clarity. In the main survey, the measurement model reported in Chapter 4 shows adequate factor loadings, convergent validity (CR/AVE), and discriminant validity vis-à-vis satisfaction, involvement, and well-being. These results support the reasonableness of the present wording choices and their suitability for the elderly travel context studied.

All questionnaire items administered to respondents were in Chinese and were produced through a standardized forward–back translation workflow to ensure semantic, conceptual, and measurement equivalence with the original English sources. Two independent bilingual translators first generated Chinese versions; discrepancies were reconciled by a small panel with expertise in tourism methods and gerontology to retain concise, senior-friendly wording. A third bilingual scholar, blind to the originals, back-translated the reconciled items into English, after which the team adjudicated any residual mismatches with priority on preserving evaluative polarity, construct referents, and facet coverage (e.g., expectation confirmation vs. global satisfaction; involvement centrality/pleasure/sign; functional, situational, emotional, and social value). Brief cognitive probes with older adults confirmed comprehensibility and the intended response process. Finally, all items were harmonized onto a common 7-point agreement format and anchored to the focal trip to Guizhou to maintain a consistent frame of reference across scales. This procedure was applied uniformly to the well-being, satisfaction, involvement, and experience-value measures, thereby supporting the appropriateness and scientific adequacy of the adapted instruments for the study population.

3.4.3 Data Collection Administration

3.4.3.1 Target Population

This study focused on older adult tourists aged 60 and above in the tourism market of Guizhou Province. The categorization of an aging population often relies on the proportion of olderly individuals in the total population. Therefore, determining the starting age for classifying individuals as "senior citizens" is a crucial parameter for identifying the study's target demographic. The criteria for defining the age at which an individual qualifies as a senior citizen have undergone a gradual evolution. Up to the present time, two widely recognized and extensively adopted standards exist globally. The target population comprises older adult tourists aged 60–74 who had visited at least once one or more of the following attractions within the past five years: Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village in Guizhou. Based on recent administrative statistics, senior visitors (60+) generated approximately 656.92 million person-visits to Guizhou during 2018–2022. For the four focal sites, the accessible population used to set quotas totals about 8.05 million person-visits, distributed as follows: Huangguoshu ~1.374 million (20%), Shiqian ~0.916 million (10%), Libo ~5.670 million (65%), Xijiang ~0.090 million (5%). These figures serve only to define relative site weights for sampling.

In China, the age of 60 is commonly referred to as the hua jia year, and individuals aged 60 and above are generally recognized as senior citizens. Additionally, this age has been established as the retirement age (Zhao et al., 2014). The Chinese government has set the official retirement age at 60 for males and 55 for females. The revised "Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly" explicitly states that elderly persons refer to citizens aged sixty and above. Setting the starting point of the olderly population at 60 aligns with the practical circumstances in China. Therefore, this study adopted the age of 60 as the initial threshold for defining the senior population within the scope of this study.

Based on recent tourism reports and travel guides, the most popular scenic spots among older adult tourists visiting Guizhou Province include Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village. These destinations are favored for their natural beauty, cultural richness, and accessibility (Liu, 2024). Based on Senior Travel Statistics, in 2024, 60-74 age group

was particularly active, generating 23% of trips and 26% of tourism nights for private purposes.

This study selected older adult tourists aged between 60 and 74 years who had visited Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village in Guizhou Province as the target population.

3.4.3.2 Questionnaire Design

The quantitative study section of this study collected data through a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part covered the respondents' basic information, including gender, age, family structure, education level, occupation, monthly income, and other personal demographics. The second part focused on the travel consumption characteristics of older adult tourists, including types of experiential activities at the travel destination, travel motivations, travel timing, travel modes, duration of the trip, travel companions, per capita expenditure, and travel frequency, among other basic travel-related aspects. The third part assessed older adult tourists' perceptions and evaluations related to travel experience value, travel well-being, tourist satisfaction, and perceived involvement in the travel experience. All questionnaires used the Likert scale for measurement.

In survey questionnaire Likert 7-point scale are commonly used to measure observations and attitudes, in which "1" means "strongly disagree" and "7" means "strongly agree". (Buttle, 1996). These rating scales contain either five or seven response categories and have their own pros and cons. Supporter of 5- point Likert-type scale states that, it was used to increase response rate and quality with special focus of reducing respondent frustration level. Literature suggests that a 5 point scale is readily comprehensible to respondents and enables them to response their views in a better way (Cox & Isham, 1980). However few studyers prefer to do analysis with seven-type Likert scale.Symonds (1924) was the first to propose that reliability is optimized with seven-type Likert scale. In line with Miller (1956), stated that human mind has span of absolute judgment that can differentiate objects till seven categories beyond seven might be useless. Thomas and Lewis (1993) posited that seven-point scales depicted better correlations with t-test results. Seven-point Likert scale appears to be more suited in electronic survey. Literature confirms that data from Likert items becomes significantly less accurate when the number of scale drops 5 or above 7 (Johns, 2010). Authors like Dolnicar et al. (2011)

have stated that if the focus of the study is on individuals behavior then five to seven-point Likert can be selected to measure the items. In light of findings there is some support with seven-point scale but the popularity of five-point Likert scale seems to be less justified (Preston & Colman, 2000; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007).

3.4.3.3 Sampling Techniques

A non-probability, multi-stage design was used to reach the target population of seniors. First, purposive sampling identified four high-volume, senior-friendly sites—Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village. Second, quota sampling allocated the overall target number of questionnaires across these sites proportionally to the 2022 site-level visitor volumes reported in the official statistics listed in Table 3.10.Third, on-site convenience intercepts recruited eligible respondents. Eligibility required being 60–74 years old and having visited at least once one or more of the focal sites within the past five years.The quotas used in fieldwork are reported in Table 3.9. They were set to balance coverage across sites and to guide interviewer allocation; they do not imply probability sampling nor population estimation.

Table 3.10 A Quota Sampling Method

Select spot	Total No. of older adult tourists in each selected spot	Percentage	No. of Sample size
Huangguoshu scenic spot	1,374,000	20%	80
Shiqian hot spring Group scenic area	915,660	10%	40
Libo Zhangjiang scenic area	5,670,000	65%	260
Xijiang thousand households Miao village	90,000	5%	20
Total	8,049,660	100%	400

Note. Visitor counts in Column 2 are taken from the official statistics of Guizhou Province: Guizhou Statistical Yearbook 2023 (tourism chapter) and the 2022 Statistical Bulletin of Culture and Tourism Development, Guizhou Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism.

This study's preliminary questionnaire was scheduled to begin on September 20, 2023, and be completed by September 30, 2023. The official survey was run from October 1, 2023, to October 30, 2023. The sample for this study comprised of older adult tourists aged 60 and above who have traveled to Guizhou within the last five years. This questionnaire primarily utilizes online distribution methods. However, recognizing potential limitations in olderly participants' ability to complete online surveys and potential challenges due to misunderstandings or other factors affecting response accuracy, the study also employs the distribution of paper-based questionnaires.

For the research-based approach, the study involved collaboration with staff members at relevant tourist sites. They initially explained the purpose of the study to participants, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and that responses remained anonymous. Data collection was conducted under legal protection. Utilizing the Survey Star platform, relevant staff assisted in sampling and distributed questionnaires to selected older adult tourists.To enhance response rates, participants who completed the online questionnaire had a chance to win a small prize through a randomly assigned Chinese lottery ticket, while those who completed the paper-based version received a souvenir.This study adhered to the principles of the Helsinki Declaration, ensuring that all participants who signed informed consent forms did so voluntarily. Participant privacy and wishes were respected, and they were informed that they could refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

3.4.3.4 Sample Size

The sample size is primarily determined by the study objectives, study questions, and subsequent study design (Vasileiou et al., 2018). This study focuses on elderly individuals visiting Guizhou for tourism. Between January 2018 and December 30, 2022, over the span of nearly five years, there were a total of 656.92 million visits by individuals aged 60 and above to Guizhou Province. We are using this data as the total population for our sampling, thus making the total sample size for this study 656.92 million visits (Data source: Guizhou Statistical Yearbooks for 2018-2022).

In order to ensure that the survey results are representative and statistically robust, it is necessary to calculate an appropriate sample size based on this known population. Given the very large population size, the following widely accepted formula for sample size estimation in survey study is employed (Cochran, 1977):

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)}{e^2}$$

where:

n= required sample size,

Z= z-value corresponding to the desired confidence level (for 95% confidence,),

p= estimated proportion of the population with the attribute of interest (conservatively set at 0.5 to maximize sample size),

e= margin of error (typically set at 5%, or 0.05).

Substituting the standard values:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$n = 384.16$$

Thus, the initial required sample size is approximately 384.

Since the population of elderly visitors (656.92 million) is exceedingly large, the correction factor for finite population size (the finite population correction, FPC) becomes negligible. However, for precision, the FPC can be applied using the following formula:

$$n_{\text{adjusted}} = \frac{n}{1 + \left(\frac{n-1}{N}\right)}$$

Where N=656920000

Calculating:

$$n_{\text{adjusted}} = \frac{384}{1 + \left(\frac{383}{656{,}920{,}000}\right)} \approx \frac{384}{1 + 0.000000583} \approx 384$$

Thus, the adjusted sample size remains approximately 384.

Considering potential issues such as non-responses, missing data, or invalid questionnaires, it is common practice to inflate the sample size by 20% to ensure valid analysis. Therefore:

$$n_{\text{final}} = 384 \times 1.2 = 460.8$$

Thus, the final minimum recommended sample size for this study is approximately 461 respondents. Actually, a total of 490 valid responses were collected

3.4.4 Data Analysis

3.4.4.1 Pre-Test

The pre-test serves as a crucial preliminary phase, allowing studyers to fine-tune the questionnaire and validate the measurement instruments before the main data collection process (Singha & Yogesh, 2025). This iterative process helps ensure that the survey instruments are sound and appropriate for capturing the desired data from the target demographic of older adult tourists in Guizhou.

A pre-test with a sample size of 20 to 30 participants is generally considered sufficient to identify problems in question wording, flow, and logic (Singha & Yogesh, 2025). In this pre-test, 30 valid questionnaires were collected from older adult tourists aged 60 and above who had visited Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village in Guizhou Province.Through the preliminary analysis of the data in this stage, the measurement items in the questionnaire were carefully revised and optimized, and the clarity and applicability of the scale were further improved. Subsequently, the study conducted a systematic test of the reliability and validity of the pre-test data, laying a solid foundation for the formal investigation.

As shown in Table 3.10, this study conducted a reliability test on each measurement dimension of the questionnaire before the formal test. The results showed

that the Cronbach's α coefficients of all variables were higher than the general standard of 0.7, indicating that the scale has a high internal consistency (Wang et al., 2023). Among them, the dimension of "well-being of the elderly traveling" contains 10 measurement items, and the α value is 0.943, indicating that the internal indicators of this variable have strong consistency and stability. The α value of the dimension of "satisfaction of elderlt tourists' satisfaction" is 0.874, which also reaches an excellent reliability level, verifying that the questionnaire is reliable in measuring satisfaction. In addition, the α coefficients of the two dimensions of "tourism involvement" and "tourism expertience emotional value" are 0.917 and 0.890 respectively, reflecting that the subjects' cognition in this type of experience perception is relatively concentrated, and the measurement dimensions have good internal structural consistency. The reliability coefficients of the dimensions of "tourism expertience functional value", "tourism expertience situational value" and "tourism expertience social value" are 0.838, 0.780 and 0.830 respectively, all at a high level, indicating that the measurement tool is stable and reliable in capturing the multidimensional value perception of tourism experience.

Table 3.11 Pre-test Reliability Statistics

Study variables	Number of questions	Cronbach's α
Well-being of the elderly traveling	10	0.943
Satisfaction of elderlt tourists	4	0.874
Tourism involvement	6	0.917
Tourism expertience Functional Value	4	0.838
Tourism expertience Situational Value	3	0.780
Tourism expertience Emotional Value	4	0.890
Tourism expertience Social Value	3	0.830

As shown in Table 3.12, the study conducted a structural validity test on the pre-test sample data, using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling suitability measure and the Bartlett sphericity test as the main criteria. The KMO value is 0.711, which exceeds the common judgment standard of 0.7, indicating that the correlation between the variables in the sample is strong and suitable for factor analysis. This result verifies that the common factor structure required by the sample data in the factor extraction process is reasonable,

and confirms the feasibility of subsequent exploratory factor analysis from a methodological perspective. At the same time, the approximate chi-square value of the Bartlett sphericity test is 1836.115, the degree of freedom is 561, and the significance level is 0.000, which meets the requirements of statistically high significance (Wang et al., 2023). This test result rejects the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between the variables, further confirming that the data is statistically suitable for structural exploration.

Table 3.12 Pre-Investigation KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.711
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1836.115
	df	561
	Sig.	.000

Data screening and assumptions. Item-level missingness was < 3%. Descriptives used mean imputation; SEM used FIML. Univariate outliers were screened via $|z| > 3.29$; multivariate outliers via Mahalanobis D^2 ($p < .001$). Skewness and kurtosis were within |2| and |7|, supporting ML estimation with robust standard errors. Common-method bias was probed by Harman's single-factor test and a latent common-factor check; no single factor dominated the variance.

3.4.4.2 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis is employed to assess the internal consistency and stability of the initial questionnaire. Cronbach's coefficient is commonly used to evaluate the internal consistency among questionnaire items (Tabandeh et al., 2022). Hence, the proposal is to use Cronbach's coefficient to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. When the value of Cronbach's alpha (α) exceeds 0.7, it indicates a high level of internal consistency among the questionnaire items, suggesting good reliability.

By calculating Cronbach's alpha for each scale within the questionnaire, this study will determine the extent to which the items within each scale are measuring the same construct. A higher Cronbach's alpha indicates that the items are more internally consistent, which adds to the questionnaire's reliability. This analysis helps ensure that the items within each scale are closely related and are collectively measuring the intended construct effectively.

3.4.4.3 Validity Analysis

Validity is primarily used to assess the effectiveness of a questionnaire, which involves examining whether the observed variables in the study accurately reflect the characteristics of the relevant dimensions. The main goal of collecting data through a questionnaire survey is to obtain results with high validity. High validity indicates that the questionnaire is effective and suitable for further study. In this study, both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses are conducted to assess the validity level.

The initial step involves conducting exploratory factor analysis on the observed variables corresponding to travel experience value, tourist well-being, elderly tourist satisfaction, and tourism involvement. The study utilizes the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure for this purpose. In empirical study, scholars generally adhere to certain criteria: a KMO value above 0.9 indicates excellent suitability, 0.8 indicates good suitability, 0.7 indicates acceptable suitability, 0.6 indicates mediocre suitability, and values below 0.5 suggest unsuitability (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020).

Using SPSS, this study has performed KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity on the observed variables related to elderly tourism experiences. This step is essential for confirming the initial validity of the measurement instruments and ensuring that the variables appropriately represent the underlying constructs.

3.4.4.4 Structural Equation Modeling

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is a type of structural equation model specifically designed to address the measurement model, which involves the relationships among observed measurements. The objective of a latent variable measurement model is to establish the number and nature of factors that explain the variation and co-variation among a set of indicators (Alavi et al., 2020). A factor is an unobservable variable that influences more than one observed measurement. CFA is an essential analytical tool in structural validation. The results of CFA provide strong evidence for the convergence and discriminant validity of the theoretical structure. This also explains the correlations among these observed measurement methods (Marsh et al., 2020). CFA assesses the reliability and validity of the measurement model by estimating factor loadings, composite reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and model fit indices such as CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and χ^2/df (Sathyanarayana & Mohanasundaram, 2024). The analysis confirms

whether each item significantly loads onto its respective construct and whether the constructs demonstrate convergent and discriminant validity.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a method for establishing, estimating, and testing causal models. This model includes both unobserved external variables and latent variables (Amrhein et al., 2019). Correlation analysis is a statistical technique used to measure the strength of the relationship between two or more variables. This analysis is based on the assumption of a linear relationship between the two variables represented on the X and Y axes of a scatterplot. This statistical measure gauges the strength and direction of the association between two variables. The result of correlation analysis is a correlation coefficient, with values ranging from -1 to +1. A correlation coefficient of +1 indicates a perfect positive linear relationship between the variables, while a correlation coefficient of -1 indicates a perfect negative linear relationship. A correlation coefficient of zero signifies the absence of a linear relationship between the variables.

In a Structural Equation Model (SEM), latent variables are measured and estimated through observed variables to reflect certain abstract concepts (Collier, 2020). The fitness of the hypothesized model is assessed using the Structural Equation Model (SEM). To determine the validity of the structural equation model, it is necessary to evaluate the fit indices of the model. When the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) is less than 3, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is less than 0.08, and fit indices such as the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) are all greater than 0.9, it indicates a good fit of the model and a satisfactory level of model fit (Wang & Rhemtulla, 2021).

Path analysis was used to assess the strength and direction of the hypothesized relationships between latent variables. This includes estimating standardized path coefficients (β values), which indicate the magnitude of influence one construct has on another (Kline, 2015). For each path, statistical significance was tested using critical ratios (CR) and p-values. To assess mediation effects-specifically the roles of satisfaction and involvement-the study utilized the bootstrapping method recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), which provides confidence intervals for indirect effects and helps to determine the presence of full or partial mediation. This methodological approach ensures

robust and empirically grounded inferences regarding the mechanisms through which experiential value influences well-being among older tourists.

The model fit was evaluated using multiple fit indices including the Chi-square/df ratio, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), following established SEM evaluation criteria (Hu & Bentler, 1999). This comprehensive structural modeling approach allows for both theory testing and the exploration of underlying mechanisms in the wellness tourism experience context for the elderly in Guizhou Province.

Prior to model estimation, standard assumptions were examined and data were treated using established procedures. Univariate normality was screened via skewness and kurtosis (|skew|≲2, |kurtosis|≲7 as acceptable bounds), and multivariate normality was inspected with Mardia's coefficients; where departures were material, maximum-likelihood estimation was complemented by bootstrap standard errors/Bollen–Stine correction to safeguard inference. Multicollinearity was assessed through inter-construct correlations (<.85) and VIF for composite scores (target <3, conservative <5), with no remedial action required when thresholds were met. To mitigate common method bias, procedural remedies included anonymity, proximal separation of constructs, varied item stems, and mixed scale anchors; statistically, a single-factor test and a latent common-method factor/marker-variable check were used to verify that any common variance did not dominate the measurement structure. Missing data were summarized and evaluated for mechanism; when data were plausibly missing at random, full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) was used in CFA/SEM to retain cases without biasing parameters. Outliers were flagged using Mahalanobis distance ($p<.001$) and inspection of standardized residuals; influential cases were reviewed for data entry errors and retained or excluded based on substantive and statistical considerations. Detailed diagnostics and numerical results are reported alongside the measurement and structural model outputs in the results chapter.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

The study protocol was approved by the institutional ethics committee. Participation was voluntary, written informed consent was obtained, and all records were anonymized and stored securely. Drawing on the Belmont Report, a report issued by the U.S. National Commission in 1978 on the protection of human subjects in social and behavioral research, and incorporating the six ethical principles proposed by Arrey-Ndip (2020). It is considered ethical to provide practical strategies for tourism practitioners by gaining an understanding of the older adult tourists' experience value and well-being in Guizhou Province, China. Furthermore, the participation in the questionnaire is voluntary, and responses are anonymous. The study is conducted within the scenic areas and requires the consent of the scenic area managers. Researchers should act with integrity and honesty, fully report the survey results, minimize or eliminate biases in the methods, disclose fundamental assumptions, and refrain from fabricating data, falsifying results, or omitting relevant data. This study investigates participants' subjective perceptions of tourism experience, tourist satisfaction, tourism involvement, and tourism well-being, but does not probe into tourism trade secrets. This study is deemed "low-risk" as the sole harm to participants is the investment of time in answering the questionnaire. Participation Participants have the right to refuse participation and withdraw from the survey at any time. All respondents engage voluntarily, without any form of coercion. The completed study will be published on the internet. Researchers interested in this topic will always have access to read this study. During the process of social survey, utmost care is taken to protect participants' personal information. The study is treated confidentially and handled anonymously, avoiding any negative impact of information leakage on the participants.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter begins by discussing the study paradigm and subsequently explores various approaches to problem-solving. It provides a comprehensive overview of the study methods employed in this study, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative study methodologies. The chapter details the distinct populations and samples, sampling techniques, and data analysis methods utilized in the study. Lastly, ethical considerations employed in the study are also introduced. The subsequent chapter will further discuss the

outcomes of the measurement model evaluation and present the results of the structural model testing.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

This chapter results the empirical findings derived from both qualitative and quantitative analyses, aiming to explore how tourism experiences influence older adult tourists' well-being within the context of Guizhou Province, China. This chapter begins with a detailed report of the qualitative phase, grounded in the principles of grounded theory, to uncover the multi-dimensional experiential constructs shaping older adult tourists' well-being perceptions. Through open, axial, and selective coding of 24 in-depth interviews, ten core categories and associated variables are identified, offering a theoretically saturated model of wellness travel experience. This model is then theoretically validated through triangulation and presented in a conceptual framework encompassing emotional, cognitive, social, and functional values. Following this, the chapter transitions to the quantitative phase, where descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM) are applied to a sample of 490 older adult tourists. The measurement model is tested for reliability, validity, and model fit, while the structural model assesses direct, indirect, and total effects of experiential value dimensions on well-being. The integration of these dual approaches provides robust empirical support for the study's conceptual framework and sets the stage for theoretical interpretation and practical implications in the subsequent chapter.

4.1 Results of the Qualitative Study

A total of 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study, yielding approximately 116,000 words of transcribed text. From these transcripts, 452 discrete meaning units were identified as relevant for initial analysis. Through line-by-line open coding, a total of 178 open codes were extracted across the four primary dimensions—emotional, cognitive, social, and functional. These codes were subsequently organized into 20 refined thematic categories. The coding process also resulted in the identification of over 200 recurring keywords or phrases, which served as conceptual indicators of

participants' experiences and values. This descriptive overview provides the empirical basis for the multi-dimensional coding structure that follows in the subsequent sections

4.1.1 Open Coding

Open coding represents the first stage of grounded theory data analysis, focusing on the identification, conceptualization, and categorization of discrete phenomena emerging from raw qualitative data (Corbin, 2021). During this phase, interview transcripts are examined systematically and inductively, with studyers assigning conceptual labels—or codes—to distinct segments of data that encapsulate meaningful experiences, emotions, reflections, or actions described by participants. Open coding aims to fracture the data, allowing the emergence of initial analytic categories while remaining as close as possible to the participants' original language and perspectives.

In this study, open coding was conducted through a line-by-line and incident-by-incident review of 24 semi-structured interview transcripts. After initial coding, a process of conceptual consolidation was undertaken, during which synonymous or closely related codes were grouped under broader thematic labels. This refinement resulted in a structured set of approximately 20 core themes, each encompassing a range of related open codes. These themes represent the multi-dimensional aspects of older tourists' experiential constructions, encompassing emotional, cognitive, social, and functional domains.

The detailed organization of the open coding results is presented in Table 4.1. This table systematically outlines each refined theme alongside the specific open codes extracted from participants' narratives. By presenting the coding structure in this way, the study provides transparency into how raw qualitative data were systematically transformed into meaningful analytic categories, laying the empirical foundation for subsequent axial and selective coding processes.

Table 4.1 Open the Coding Table

Refined Theme	Extracted Open Codes (Keywords/Phrases)
Feeling of Emotional Fulfillment	Feeling peaceful, Emotional relaxation, Joyful experiences, Sense of happiness, Inner contentment, Emotional satisfaction, Harmony with nature, Tranquility, Feeling blessed, Emotional revitalization, Emotional comfort, Spiritual renewal

Table 4.1 (continued)

Refined Theme	Extracted Open Codes (Keywords/Phrases)
Emotional Shifts during Travel	Pre-trip excitement, Anticipation before journey, Relaxation during activities, Sense of achievement, Post-trip nostalgia, Emotional ups and downs, Emotional fatigue, Emotional renewal, Sense of completion, Mixed emotions
Emotional Discomfort	Loneliness at destination, Disconnection from group, Emotional isolation, Frustration with service gaps, Unmet emotional needs, Feeling ignored, Emotional distance, Moments of homesickness, Group exclusion, Disappointment with organization
Learning New Wellness Knowledge	Learning about spa therapies, Traditional health practices, New dietary knowledge, Mindfulness techniques, Breathing exercises, Herbal remedy learning, Fitness program insights, Self-care strategies, Meditation practice, Traditional healing rituals
Personal Growth and Insight	Self-reflection on life stages, Health awareness, Personal improvement goals, New perspectives on aging, Self-empowerment, Realization of well-being importance, Personal health mission, Understanding aging positively, Motivational thinking, Renewed life enthusiasm
Cognitive Stimulation Activities	Attending lectures, Participating in workshops, Cultural site exploration, Local wisdom learning, Trying new therapies, Experiencing unfamiliar traditions, Engaging in mental games, Discovery learning, Curiosity-driven activities, Reflective discussions
Positive Social Interaction	Making new friends, Shared experiences, Trust-building activities, Supportive communication, Collaborative learning, Informal group chats, Emotional closeness, Shared laughter, Group enthusiasm, Interpersonal warmth

Table 4.1 (continued)

Refined Theme	Extracted Open Codes (Keywords/Phrases)
Supportive Social Environment	Encouragement from peers, Empathetic listening, Receiving help from group members, Group solidarity, Inclusive atmosphere, Emotional sharing, Trust in group leaders, Sense of group protection, Social security, Peer care
Sense of Belonging	Feeling accepted, Group identity formation, Emotional connectedness, Comfort in social participation, Sense of home in group, Being cared for, Emotional bonding with others, Shared group rituals, Mutual support, Trust among travelers
Accessibility of Facilities	Easy transportation, Facility accessibility, Barrier-free design, Smooth movement, Adapted activities for seniors, Accessibility signage, Wheelchair access, Convenient room layouts, Shuttle services, Friendly navigation aids
Health and Wellness Services	Availability of doctors, Health check-ups, Tailored dietary services, Physical therapy access, Emotional counseling, On-site emergency aid, Fitness activities, Sleep quality programs, Stress management workshops, Personalized health monitoring
Safety and Security Perception	Sense of personal security, Reliable emergency protocols, Trust in local guides, Comfort in unfamiliar spaces, Visible security presence, Accessible health support, Safe travel environments, Crisis response readiness, Emotional safety, Safety reassurance
Comfort of Physical Environment	Comfortable accommodation, Fresh air quality, Cleanliness of facilities, Pleasant room temperature, Natural lighting, Peaceful surroundings, Green landscapes, Calming interior design, Quietness at night, Accessible nature trails
Motivation to Improve Health	Desire for healthier lifestyle, Self-initiated health goals, Pursuit of active aging, Will to maintain fitness, Exercise participation, Diet modifications, Mental health focus, Wellness program involvement, Setting walking targets, Improving sleep habits

Table 4.1 (continued)

Refined Theme	Extracted Open Codes (Keywords/Phrases)
Nostalgia and Cultural Connection	Emotional attachment to cultural heritage, Remembrance of past travels, Traditional cultural performances, Revisiting familiar cultural symbols, Experiencing ancestral traditions, Nostalgic emotional triggers, Memory evocation, Cultural storytelling, Deep emotional connection, Emotional immersion in heritage
Emotional Expression Opportunities	Group sharing sessions, Personal storytelling, Reflective journaling, Emotional support groups, Expressive therapy sessions, Open dialogue opportunities, Cathartic conversations, Memory sharing, Creative expression workshops, Safe spaces for emotion
Challenges in Wellness Travel	Physical exhaustion, Difficulty adjusting to schedules, Health management difficulties, Travel-related stress, Adapting to unfamiliar foods, Language barriers, Mobility challenges, Weather discomfort, Mental fatigue, Navigating crowded spaces
Satisfaction with Services	Attentive staff, Fast service response, High-quality food, Personalized care, Friendly customer service, Professional guidance, Wellness-oriented service delivery, Customized activity options, Flexible arrangements, Reliability of services
Unmet Expectations	Delays in service delivery, Inadequate health facilities, Lack of personalized attention, Miscommunication issues, Limited choice of activities, Inconsistent quality, Cultural mismatch, Limited accessibility, Overcrowding, Service rigidity
Long-term Benefits of Travel	Adoption of wellness habits, Strengthened social networks, Emotional resilience enhancement, Continued physical activity, Renewed life motivation, Better health awareness, Strengthened identity, Greater adaptability, Renewed sense of purpose, Sustained social bonds

To visually complement the open coding process, a keyword word cloud was generated based on the extracted open codes from participants' interview narratives, as presented in Figure 4.1. The word cloud graphically represents the relative prominence of key experiential concepts by varying the size of each keyword according to its frequency of occurrence across the dataset. Larger and more centrally positioned terms indicate themes that were more frequently emphasized by older participants during discussions of their wellness tourism experiences.

As shown in the figure 4.1, keywords such as "emotional," "group," "health," "activities," "service," and "learning" dominate the visual field, reflecting the centrality of emotional engagement, social interactions, health maintenance, and active participation in shaping older tourists' experiential value. Additionally, terms like "trust," "comfort," "personal," and "traditional" highlight the importance of emotional security, personal relevance, and cultural resonance in the participants' narratives. This visual depiction provides an intuitive overview of the major thematic areas identified through open coding and serves as a bridge to the more structured thematic development undertaken in the subsequent axial coding phase.



Figure 4.1 Keyword word cloud

To further elucidate the emotional characteristics embedded in the open coding results, two visual analyses were conducted based on the extracted open codes. Figure 4.2 presents the top 30 keywords ranked by their sentiment strength, measured through polarity scores. In this figure, keywords positioned to the right with positive polarity values

(indicated in green) represent experiences associated with positive emotional states, such as "Expressive therapy sessions," "Sense of happiness," "Supportive communication," and "Greater adaptability." These keywords highlight aspects of wellness tourism that significantly contributed to emotional upliftment, cognitive engagement, and social connectedness among older tourists. In contrast, a limited number of keywords with negative polarity values (indicated in red), such as "Disappointment with organization" and "Nostalgic emotional triggers," reflect occasional challenges or emotional tensions encountered during the travel experiences.

Complementing this detailed view, Figure 4.3 illustrates the overall sentiment distribution across all open code keywords in the form of a percentage-based pie chart. As shown, the majority of keywords were classified as positive, reflecting the predominance of favorable emotional, cognitive, social, and functional experiences among older participants. Neutral sentiments accounted for a smaller but notable proportion, indicating descriptive or context-specific aspects that did not evoke strong emotional reactions. Negative sentiments constituted a minor share, suggesting that adverse experiences were relatively limited in the participants' overall wellness travel narratives.

Together, these visual analyses reinforce the interpretation that wellness tourism tends to generate predominantly positive experiential value for older travelers, while also highlighting the nuanced presence of emotional complexity within individual experiences. This pattern sets the foundation for the axial coding phase, where deeper interrelationships among emotional, cognitive, social, and functional themes will be systematically explored.

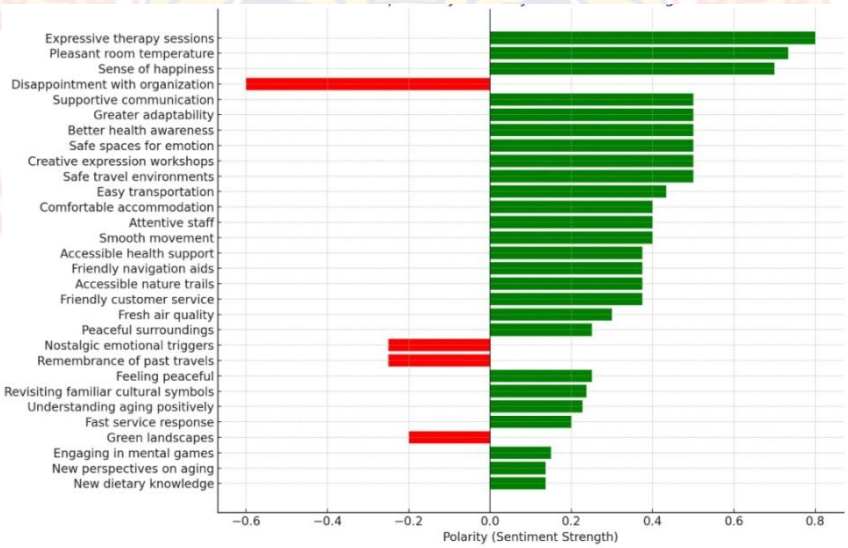

Figure 4.2 Top 30 Chart of keyword sentiment strength

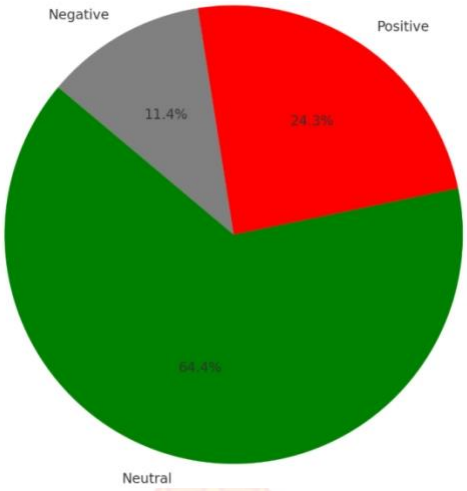

Figure 4.3 Sentiment Distribution of Open Code Keywords (Percentage)

4.1.2 Axis Coding

Axial coding constitutes the second phase of grounded theory analysis, wherein the open codes generated during the initial phase are systematically reassembled into broader conceptual structures. Unlike open coding, which focuses on fragmenting and labeling discrete phenomena, axial coding emphasizes the relational integration of concepts by grouping them around more abstract categories and subcategories (Corbin, 2021). This analytical progression allows researchers to move beyond surface-level descriptive insights and toward a deeper theoretical understanding of the mechanisms underlying the studied phenomenon.

In this study, axial coding was conducted to synthesize the diverse experiential elements articulated by older tourists during their wellness travel journeys. Through iterative comparative analysis, ten major conceptual categories were identified, each encompassing distinct yet interrelated subcategories. These categories collectively capture the emotional, cognitive, social, functional, and cultural dimensions that structure older travelers' perceived value and well-being in tourism contexts. Rather than narrowly focusing on physical health or medicalized care, the coding scheme highlights the broader and more holistic pathways through which well-being is constructed during travel—including emotional engagement, meaning-making, social inclusion, and cultural resonance.

The updated categorization deliberately shifts emphasis away from purely health-centric interpretations toward a multi-dimensional model of well-being tourism. For instance, the category "Lifelong Learning and Cultural Discovery" incorporates both

wellness-related knowledge and broader cultural learning experiences, underscoring the cognitive enrichment that travel affords. Similarly, “Existential Reflection and Personal Growth” reframes earlier health-focused reflections into a broader narrative of self-awareness, motivational reorientation, and personal meaning reconstruction. The category “Supportive Service Environment”, while acknowledging the availability of wellness services, de-emphasizes clinical interventions in favor of a more inclusive view of comfort, assistance, and environmental support. Together with “Aesthetic Resonance” and “Social Belonging”, these categories reflect how travel can holistically shape older individuals' subjective well-being beyond utilitarian or therapeutic functions.

The detailed structure of the axial coding results is presented in Table 4.2 Each major category is listed alongside its core subcategories and was inductively derived from participants’ narratives, reflecting the experiential richness of wellness travel as a vehicle for enhancing emotional vitality, cognitive engagement, social connectedness, cultural immersion, and existential affirmation.

Table 4.2 Axis Coding

Major Category	Subcategories
Emotional Fulfillment	- Positive emotional resonance - Emotional renewal through travel
Emotional Challenges	- Emotional discomfort - Emotional isolation or disappointment
Lifelong Learning and Cultural Discovery	- Acquisition of wellness knowledge - Cultural learning experiences
Existential Reflection and Personal Growth	- Reevaluation of personal health and life - Self-empowerment and motivation
Social Connection	- Building new relationships - Enhancing group belongingness
Social Support and Security	- Receiving emotional support - Feeling protected within the group
Functional Convenience	- Accessibility and mobility - Facility and transport convenience

Table 4.2 (continued)

Major Category	Subcategories
Supportive Service Environment	- Availability and quality of health care - Tailored wellness support services
Safety and Risk Management	- Personal security perceptions - Emergency response availability
Cultural and Nostalgic Resonance	- Emotional connection to heritage - Evocation of personal and collective memories

4.1.3 Selective Coding

Selective coding represents the final stage of grounded theory analysis, wherein categories generated during open and axial coding are systematically integrated to develop a cohesive and theoretically saturated explanatory framework (Corbin, 2021). This phase involves identifying core variables that most meaningfully capture the central phenomenon—in this case, the experiential mechanisms through which older adults construct a sense of well-being through tourism. Rather than treating previously coded elements as isolated findings, selective coding reassembles them into interconnected constructs, prioritizing those with the greatest explanatory power and empirical grounding in participants' narratives.

In this study, selective coding was conducted through iterative analysis and abstraction, drawing from the conceptual patterns established in the earlier phases. Redundant or weakly supported categories were consolidated or excluded to preserve analytical clarity. Throughout the process, emphasis was placed on retaining fidelity to the lived experiences of older tourists while identifying overarching variables that structure their experiential value formation.

As a result, ten key variables were identified, each representing a distinct yet interrelated facet of tourism experience that contributes to older adults' holistic well-being. These variables span emotional, cognitive, social, functional, and cultural domains. Table 4.3 presents the revised variable names and refined definitions, grounded in participants' experiential accounts and aligned with the overarching aim of this study.

Table 4.3 Key Variables Identified from Open and Axial Coding

Key Variable	Definition
Emotional Fulfillment	Affective states of joy, tranquility, and revitalization that elevate older adults' psychological well-being through travel.
Emotional Discomfort	Unpleasant emotional experiences, such as loneliness or alienation, that diminish older travelers' sense of enjoyment and comfort.
Cognitive Enrichment	The stimulation of curiosity, learning, and mental engagement gained through exposure to new knowledge and cultural experiences.
Existential Reflection	The deep introspection on life meaning, aging, and personal identity that is inspired by meaningful travel encounters.
Social Bonding	The development of close and positive relationships that reinforce feelings of belonging and interpersonal satisfaction.
Social Support	The emotional and practical reassurance provided by peers or group contexts that nurtures a secure and inclusive travel experience.
Accessibility Convenience	The ease with which older individuals engage with tourism environments, enabling autonomy and reducing physical or psychological stress.
Supportive Environment Satisfaction	The perceived adequacy of facilities and services that ensure comfort, dignity, and agency for older tourists.
Safety Perception	The confidence in environmental and interpersonal safety that fosters a relaxed and trusting tourism experience.
Cultural Resonance	The emotional and symbolic connection to cultural heritage, traditions, or memories that supports identity affirmation and meaning.

Together, these variables illuminate the multi-dimensional nature of tourism experience value as perceived by older adults. Emotional fulfillment and social bonding emerged as dominant drivers of well-being, while accessibility convenience and satisfaction with supportive environments served as critical enabling conditions. Cognitive enrichment and existential reflection offered internal pathways for personal growth, while cultural resonance fostered deeper meaning and identity continuity. Meanwhile, emotional discomfort and perceived safety constituted boundary conditions that either constrained or facilitated overall well-being during travel.

This integrated structure forms the conceptual backbone of the study's theoretical model. It offers a comprehensive explanation of how older adults derive well-being from tourism not merely through leisure consumption, but through a layered interplay of emotional, cognitive, social, and cultural meaning-making processes. The identification of these ten variables provides a solid empirical foundation for the subsequent development of the conceptual model in the next chapter, where the dynamic relationships among these experiential elements will be further elaborated.

4.1.4 Theoretical Validation and Model Development

Triangulation serves as a fundamental strategy for enhancing the credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of qualitative study findings. In grounded theory study, where theoretical constructs emerge inductively from empirical data, triangulation is essential for confirming the robustness of categories, relationships, and conceptual structures identified during the coding process. By integrating diverse sources of data, analytic techniques, and theoretical perspectives, triangulation helps to reduce subjectivity and ensures that the emerging framework reflects a consistent and well-substantiated pattern grounded in participants' experiences (Patton et al., 2015).

In this study, triangulation was implemented through three complementary strategies: data triangulation, methodological triangulation, and theoretical triangulation. Methodological triangulation combined open-ended narrative analysis with sentiment-based emotional profiling to reinforce both depth and breadth in the exploration of experiential dimensions. Theoretical triangulation was conducted by iteratively comparing grounded categories with established literature in wellness tourism, aging studies, and consumer value theory, ensuring conceptual alignment while maintaining empirical authenticity.

Based on the cumulative results from open, axial, and selective coding, this study developed a conceptual model that systematically illustrates how older tourists construct experiential value during wellness travel. The model identifies four core value dimensions—Emotional Value, Cognitive Value, Social Value, and Functional Value—each of which comprises two to three key sub-dimensions extracted from participant narratives.

Emotional Value captures both positive and negative affective responses during the travel experience. This includes emotional fulfillment, which refers to feelings of peace, joy, and revitalization, and emotional discomfort, such as loneliness, frustration, or emotional detachment that detract from well-being.

Cognitive Value refers to mental and reflective gains achieved during travel. It is composed of cognitive enrichment, which involves learning new knowledge and engaging in culturally stimulating activities, and existential reflection, referring to introspective processes about personal identity, aging, and life purpose.

Social Value emphasizes the interpersonal and communal aspects of travel. It includes social bonding, or the creation of meaningful relationships with peers, and social support, which involves the perception of emotional encouragement, group protection, and inclusion.

Functional Value centers on the practical conditions that enable a comfortable and secure travel experience. It encompasses accessibility convenience (e.g., barrier-free facilities and ease of mobility), supportive environment satisfaction (e.g., adequacy of services and infrastructure), and safety perception (e.g., trust in emergency response and perceived physical security).

Figure 4.4 presents the resulting conceptual model, placing the central phenomenon—older adult tourists' Wellness Travel Experiences—at the core, surrounded by four interrelated value dimensions. Each dimension branches into its associated sub-constructs, reflecting the rich and multi-layered structure of older tourists' experiential narratives.

This model affirms that older tourists' wellness travel experiences are shaped by the integration of emotional, cognitive, social, and functional value processes. Rather than viewing these as isolated domains, the model highlights their interdependence and cumulative contribution to perceived well-being. It offers a theoretically grounded and

empirically validated framework that advances understanding of how wellness travel enhances older adults' quality of life and informs future design of age-inclusive tourism experiences.

Figure 4.4 represents a qualitative, grounded-theory framework that organizes the emergent dimensions of older tourists' wellness travel experiences. It is not a statistical model, but an analytic map derived from interview data. For parsimony and conceptual clarity, the value space is summarized into four higher-order experiential domains—Functional, Situational, Emotional, and Social—while the narratives also point to two process mechanisms that frequently link experiences to well-being, namely tourist satisfaction and tourism involvement. Cognitive themes such as cognitive enrichment and existential reflection are embedded within these domains (primarily within emotional and social meaning-making) rather than treated as a separate factor, because participants' accounts described them as intertwined with affective and relational experiences. Read in this way, the figure serves as a qualitative foundation that structures construct definitions, item wording, and the subsequent hypothesis space, without presupposing any particular statistical specification.

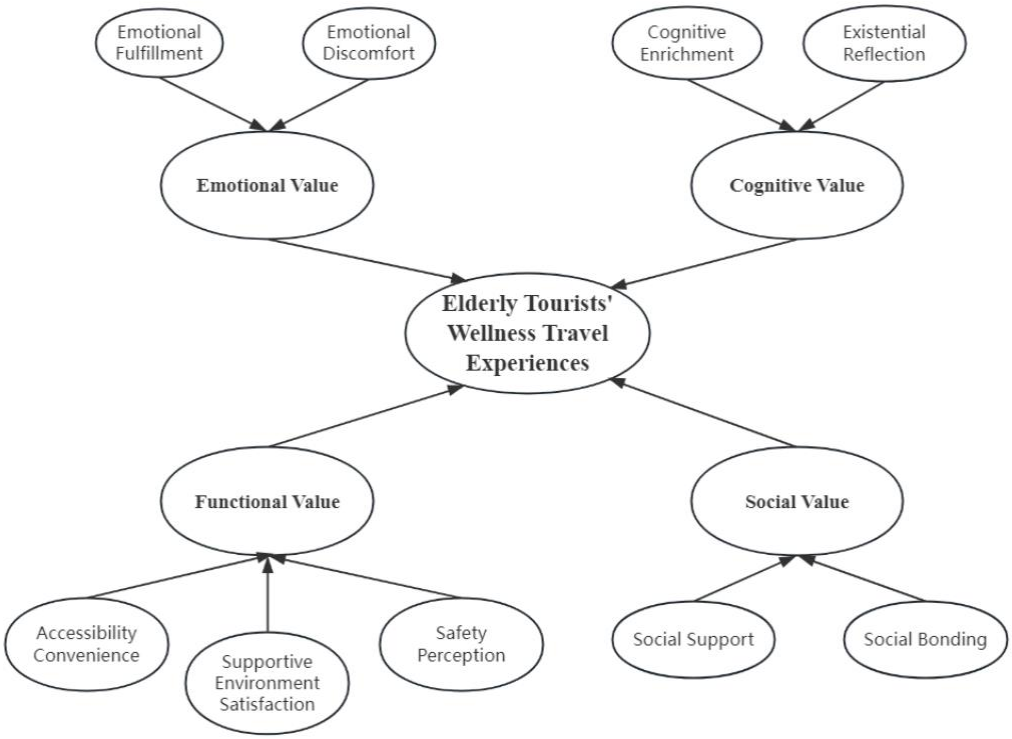

Figure 4.4 Qualitative Emergent Framework of Multi-Dimensional Influences on Older Tourists' Wellness Travel Experiences (Grounded Theory Results

This study identified a comprehensive framework of experiential factors that contribute to older adult tourists' well-being during wellness-oriented travel in Guizhou Province. Through systematic open, axial, and selective coding, ten key variables were inductively derived: emotional fulfillment, emotional discomfort, cognitive enrichment, existential reflection, social bonding, social support, accessibility convenience, supportive environment satisfaction, safety perception, and cultural resonance. These variables were further categorized into four higher-order experiential value dimensions—emotional, cognitive, social, and functional value—which collectively shape the subjective well-being of older travelers.

The findings highlight that emotional value, particularly emotional fulfillment and social bonding, emerged as dominant contributors to well-being, reflecting the importance of affective engagement and interpersonal connection in later-life tourism. Cognitive enrichment and existential reflection further support internal psychological development by offering opportunities for learning and introspection. Functional conditions such as accessible infrastructure and supportive environments were found to be critical enablers, facilitating ease of participation and comfort during travel. Additionally, cultural resonance played a pivotal role in fostering identity affirmation and deeper emotional engagement. This multi-dimensional experiential structure advances the understanding of how older adults construct well-being through tourism, underscoring the importance of holistic travel design that integrates emotional, intellectual, social, and environmental factors.

Figure 4.4 synthesizes interview themes into four value domains—functional, situational, emotional, and social—that directly instantiate the latent constructs used in the empirical model. Subthemes such as accessibility, supportive environment, and safety perception load onto functional value; aesthetics, harmony, and multi-sensory stimulation instantiate situational value; emotional fulfillment/comfort and reduced strain ground emotional value; and social support/bonding and cultural connectedness underlie social value. These domains motivated two transmission mechanisms articulated in the model: an evaluative route (value → satisfaction → well-being) and a behavioral route (value → involvement → well-being). In particular, accounts of convenience, safety, and supportive facilities justified the hypothesized positive links from functional/situational value to both satisfaction and involvement, while narratives about companionship and community

recognition supported the social value paths. Reports that emotional uplift was vivid yet sometimes short-lived informed the expectation that emotional value would affect satisfaction more strongly than sustained involvement or well-being. Thus, Figure 4.4 maps one-to-one onto the latent variables and paths (H1–H22) tested in the empirical model and explains why the two mediators are theoretically warranted in an aging-tourism context

4.2 Results of Quantitative Study

4.2.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.2.1.1 Sample Characteristics

As shown in Table 4.4, a total of 490 valid responses were collected. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with females accounting for 55.5%, slightly higher than males (44.5%). The majority of participants were between the ages of 60 and 69, comprising 80% of the sample, indicating a strong representation of the targeted elderly tourist group. Regarding family structure, 37.3% lived only with their spouse, and 28.4% lived with children, reflecting a prevalent pattern of accompanied living. In terms of education, nearly half (48.6%) had a junior high school education or below, while 19.8% held a bachelor's degree or higher, showing a generally low but diverse educational background. Monthly income levels were mostly concentrated between RMB 2,001–4,000 (28.0%) and RMB 4,001–6,000 (21.6%), indicating a predominance of middle- to low-income individuals. As for travel activities in Guizhou, the most popular experiences included cultural and heritage site visits (62.9%), shopping and leisure (60.0%), and hot spring wellness activities (58.2%), highlighting older adult tourists' strong preference for cultural, recreational, and health-related experiences.

Regarding travel motivation, beyond the common purposes of leisure and relaxation (21.6%) and health and wellness (18.6%), the most frequently selected category was "other" (27.3%), suggesting diverse and individualized travel motivations. The typical duration of travel was three to eight days (53.4%), reflecting a preference for short- to mid-term immersive trips. In terms of transportation, high-speed rail (18.2%) and air travel (19.8%) were the most common, underscoring the role of transportation convenience in facilitating travel. Average individual spending per trip centered on RMB 5,001–7,000 (23.7%), suggesting a relatively strong consumption capacity among older adult tourists.

In the past year, 64.1% of respondents had traveled to Guizhou only once, but over 30% reported repeat visits, indicating potential for destination loyalty. Travel expenses were mainly funded through pensions (32.7%) and personal savings (28.6%). As for seasonal preferences, spring (31.0%) and summer (29.2%) were most favored, with preferences relatively evenly distributed across seasons. Collectively, these data illustrate the demographic, economic, and behavioral diversity of the sample, offering a solid foundation for subsequent structural modeling.

Table 4.4 Sample Information

Information and options		**Frequency (n=490)**	**Percentage**
Gender	Male	218	44.5
	Female	272	55.5
Age	60–64 years	208	42.4
	65–69 years	184	37.6
	70–74 years	98	20.0
Family Structure	Living alone	89	18.2
	Living with spouse only	183	37.3
	Living with children	139	28.4
	Living with spouse and children	79	16.1
Education level	Primary school and below	94	19.2
	Junior high school	144	29.4
	High school or technical secondary school	81	16.5
	College diploma	74	15.1
	Bachelor’s degree	55	11.2
	Master’s degree and above	42	8.6

Table 4.4 (continued)

Information and options			Frequency (n=490)	Percentage
Monthly Income (RMB)	Below 2,000 yuan		53	10.8
	2,001–4,000 yuan		137	28.0
	4,001–6,000 yuan		106	21.6
	6,001–8,000 yuan		68	13.9
	8,001–10,000 yuan		54	11.0
	Above 10,000 yuan		72	14.7
Types of Experiential Activities Participated in During Guizhou Tourism (You may select multiple options)	Sightseeing and photography	Yes	249	50.8
		No	241	49.2
	Hot spring and wellness activities	Yes	285	58.2
		No	205	41.8
	Cultural and heritage site visits	Yes	308	62.9
		No	182	37.1
	Rural and eco-tourism experiences	Yes	208	42.4
		No	282	57.6
	Shopping and leisure activities	Yes	294	60.0
		No	196	40.0
	Participating in ethnic festivals or local events	Yes	215	43.9
		No	275	56.1
	Other	Yes	339	69.2
		No	151	30.8
Main Motivation for Visiting Guizhou	Leisure and relaxation		106	21.6
	Health and wellness tourism (e.g., hot springs)		91	18.6
	Cultural exploration and learning		65	13.3
	Visiting family and friends		44	9.0
	Religious or spiritual tourism		50	10.2
	Other		134	27.3

Table 4.4 (continued)

Information and options		**Frequency (n=490)**	**Percentage**
Typical Duration of Each Trip to Guizhou	1–2 days	143	29.2
	3–5 days	134	27.3
	6–8 days	128	26.1
	9–12 days	38	7.8
	More than 12 days	47	9.6
Primary Mode of Transportation to Guizhou	High-speed train	89	18.2
	Regular train	85	17.3
	Airplane	97	19.8
	Long-distance bus or coach	59	12.0
	Private car/self-driving	53	10.8
	Tour group transportation	49	10.0
	Other	58	11.8
Average Spending per Person per Trip (RMB)	Below 1,000 yuan	40	8.2
	1,001–3,000 yuan	104	21.2
	3,001–5,000 yuan	107	21.8
	5,001–7,000 yuan	116	23.7
	7,001–10,000 yuan	67	13.7
	Above 10,000 yuang	56	11.4
Frequency of Travel to Guizhou in the Past Year	Once	314	64.1
	2–3 times	82	16.7
	4–5 times	73	14.9
	More than 5 times	21	4.3
Primary Source of Travel Expenses	Personal savings	140	28.6
	Retirement pension	160	32.7
	Financial support from children	125	25.5
	Other	65	13.3

Table 4.4 (continued)

Information and options		Frequency (n=490)	Percentage
Preferred Season for Traveling to Guizhou	Spring	152	31.0
	Summe	143	29.2
	Autumn	78	15.9
	Winter	50	10.2
	No particular preference	67	13.7

4.2.1.2 Descriptive Statistics

As shown in Table 4.5, the descriptive statistical analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the central tendency, dispersion, and distribution characteristics of each observed item across the study variables. The mean values for all items range between 4.54 and 4.71 on a 7-point Likert scale, indicating that respondents generally held a relatively high level of agreement with statements pertaining to their well-being, satisfaction, involvement, and travel experience dimensions. The standard deviations (S.D.), which reflect the degree of dispersion in responses, vary between 1.31 and 1.49. This suggests a moderate level of variability in participants' perceptions, indicating that while most older adult tourists expressed favorable views, some individual differences in experience and evaluation were present across dimensions.

In terms of distributional properties, skewness values for all items are negative, ranging from approximately -0.82 to -1.10, which indicates that the distributions are moderately left-skewed. This pattern suggests a concentration of responses toward the higher end of the scale, reflecting a generally positive evaluation of the tourism experiences and associated well-being among the elderly sample. Furthermore, kurtosis values mostly fall between -0.23 and 0.46, signifying that the response distributions are close to normal with slight variations in tail weight. These values remain within the acceptable threshold of ±2, confirming that the data distributions do not significantly deviate from normality, thereby supporting the suitability of the dataset for subsequent multivariate analyses such as factor analysis and structural equation modeling.

Table 4.5 Descriptive Statistics Results

Study variables	Items	Mean	S.D.	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Value	S.E.	Value	S.E.
Well-being of	TW1	4.620	1.396	-1.021	0.110	0.134	0.220
the elderly	TW2	4.650	1.378	-1.001	0.110	0.004	0.220
traveling	TW3	4.590	1.345	-0.964	0.110	0.176	0.220
	TW4	4.660	1.380	-0.991	0.110	0.257	0.220
	TW5	4.640	1.370	-0.945	0.110	0.168	0.220
	TW6	4.690	1.337	-1.015	0.110	0.456	0.220
	TW7	4.620	1.382	-1.090	0.110	0.394	0.220
	TW8	4.640	1.359	-1.033	0.110	0.249	0.220
	TW9	4.620	1.376	-0.908	0.110	-0.082	0.220
	TW10	4.670	1.385	-1.042	0.110	0.402	0.220
Satisfaction of	TS1	4.620	1.403	-0.966	0.110	0.157	0.220
elderlt tourists	TS2	4.540	1.353	-0.898	0.110	-0.166	0.220
	TS3	4.650	1.351	-0.999	0.110	0.253	0.220
	TS4	4.630	1.337	-0.947	0.110	0.252	0.220
Tourism	TI1	4.630	1.377	-0.922	0.110	0.079	0.220
involvement	TI2	4.670	1.382	-0.931	0.110	0.141	0.220
	TI3	4.650	1.361	-1.008	0.110	0.294	0.220
	TI4	4.680	1.370	-0.867	0.110	-0.053	0.220
	TI5	4.600	1.392	-0.817	0.110	-0.233	0.220
	TI6	4.580	1.386	-0.966	0.110	0.195	0.220
Tourism	FV1	4.630	1.328	-0.999	0.110	0.135	0.220
expertience	FV2	4.600	1.433	-0.950	0.110	0.011	0.220
Functional	FV3	4.630	1.357	-1.011	0.110	0.246	0.220
Value	FV4	4.650	1.318	-0.866	0.110	-0.159	0.220
Tourism	SV1	4.620	1.490	-0.892	0.110	-0.097	0.220
expertience	SV2	4.620	1.315	-1.009	0.110	0.301	0.220
Situational	SV3	4.630	1.366	-0.951	0.110	0.040	0.220
Value							

Table 4.5 (continued)

Study variables	Items	Mean	S.D.	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Value	S.E.	Value	S.E.
Tourism	EV1	4.670	1.343	-0.915	0.110	0.060	0.220
expertience	EV2	4.710	1.407	-0.890	0.110	-0.043	0.220
Emotional Value	EV3	4.600	1.378	-0.957	0.110	-0.011	0.220
	EV4	4.690	1.313	-1.025	0.110	0.274	0.220
Tourism	SOV1	4.620	1.339	-1.020	0.110	0.282	0.220
expertience	SOV2	4.700	1.344	-1.101	0.110	0.411	0.220
Social Value	SOV3	4.630	1.392	-1.008	0.110	0.085	0.220

4.3 Structural Equation Model

The Structural Equation Model (SEM) is a statistical method used for constructing, estimating, and testing causal relationship models. Also referred to as covariance structure analysis, SEM examines relationships among variables from the covariance (or correlation) matrix and evaluates whether a theoretically specified model is consistent with the observed data (Bollen, 1989; Jöreskog, 1978).It follows a theory-driven, a posteriori logic: researchers specify a network of relations grounded in prior theory and evidence, estimate parameters, and then assess overall model fit alongside the statistical significance of structural paths to judge model adequacy (Hair, 2009; Kline, 2023).SEM integrates factor analysis and path analysis and is therefore well suited to modeling complex systems with multiple latent and observed variables (Bollen, 1989; Kline, 2023).Conceptually, an SEM consists of two core components: the measurement model, which links latent constructs to their indicators, and the structural model, which specifies directional (causal) relations among latent constructs—an architecture frequently used to evaluate mediating mechanisms and causal pathways in applied research (Kline, 2023; Lomax, 2004).

4.3.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

4.3.1.1 Measurement Model and Fit Metrics

Figure 4.5 presents the measurement model developed in this study, constructed using Amos to illustrate the relationships between latent constructs and their observed indicators. In the diagram, ellipses represent latent variables, including Well-being, Satisfaction of older adult tourists, Tourism involvement, and the four dimensions

of tourism experience value (Functional, Situational, Emotional, and Social Value). Rectangles denote observed variables derived from questionnaire items. Each latent variable is connected to its respective indicators via unidirectional arrows, with standardized factor loadings all exceeding 0.7, indicating strong associations and confirming satisfactory convergent validity. The bidirectional curved arrows between latent variables represent inter-construct correlations, with standardized coefficients showing moderate to high levels (e.g., 0.657 between well-being and satisfaction, 0.684 between involvement and emotional value), supporting the theoretical coherence of the model. Measurement errors are indicated by e1 through e34, reflecting the unexplained variance in each observed item.

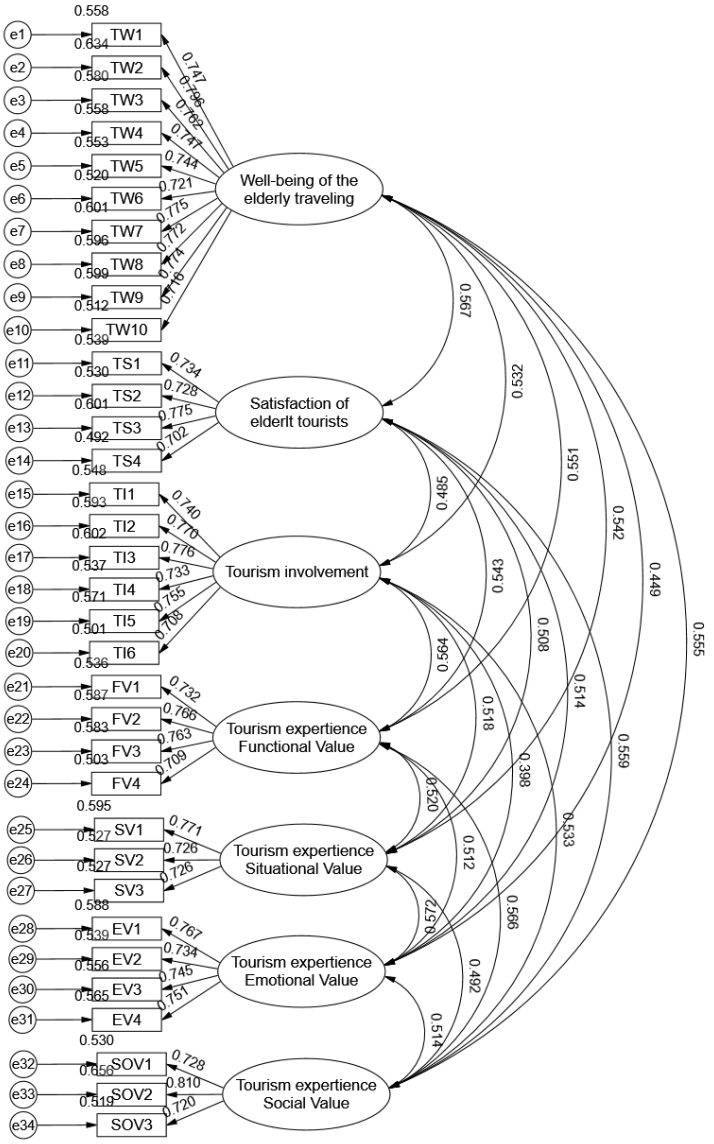

Figure 4.5 Measurement model in AMOS

As shown in Table 4.6, the fit indices of the measurement model indicate a strong overall model fit. First, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) is 1.111, which is well below the recommended threshold of 3, suggesting a high level of consistency between the model structure and the sample data (Kline, 2023). The RMSEA value is 0.015, significantly lower than the 0.08 cutoff, indicating minimal residual error and excellent model fit. In terms of absolute fit indices, the GFI (0.939) and AGFI (0.928) both exceed the recommended benchmark of 0.9, further confirming that the model aligns well with the observed data. Regarding incremental fit indices, the NFI (0.936), TLI (0.992), and CFI (0.993) all reach high levels, surpassing the 0.9 criterion, which demonstrates the model's superior explanatory power compared to the null model in capturing the covariance structure among variables (Fang et al., 2022).

Table 4.6 Measure Model Fit Metrics

Fit index	χ2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Reference standards	<3	<0.08	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9
Result	1.111	0.015	0.939	0.928	0.936	0.992	0.993

4.3.1.2 Convergent Validity

As shown in Table 4.7, the convergent validity of the measurement model was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis using Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) as key criteria. The results indicate that all latent constructs have CR values significantly above the threshold of 0.7, ranging from 0.785 to 0.930, suggesting a high degree of internal consistency among the measurement items within each construct. Additionally, all AVE values exceed the recommended cutoff of 0.50, with values ranging from 0.541 to 0.571, indicating that the proportion of variance captured by the constructs is greater than the variance due to measurement error, thereby confirming strong convergent validity. Further examination of the standardized factor loadings reveals that all items load between 0.702 and 0.810, well above the conventional benchmark of 0.7, indicating strong linear relationships between each construct and its respective indicators. Notably, the construct "Well-being of the elderly traveling" exhibits the highest CR value (0.930) and includes ten observed indicators, reflecting both

structural robustness and empirical consistency (Cheung et al., 2024). In sum, the statistical indicators presented in Table 4.9 provide compelling evidence that the measurement model possesses sound convergent validity.

Table 4.7 Convergence Validity

Latent variables	Observation indicators	Factor loading	CR	AVE
Well-being of the elderly traveling	TW1	0.747	0.930	0.571
	TW2	0.796		
	TW3	0.762		
	TW4	0.747		
	TW5	0.744		
	TW6	0.721		
	TW7	0.775		
	TW8	0.772		
	TW9	0.774		
	TW10	0.716		
Satisfaction of elderlt tourists	TS1	0.734	0.825	0.541
	TS2	0.728		
	TS3	0.775		
	TS4	0.702		
Tourism involvement	TI1	0.740	0.883	0.559
	TI2	0.770		
	TI3	0.776		
	TI4	0.733		
	TI5	0.755		
	TI6	0.708		
Tourism expertience Functional Value	FV1	0.732	0.831	0.552
	FV2	0.766		
	FV3	0.763		
	FV4	0.709		

Table 4.7 (continued)

Latent variables	Observation indicators	Factor loading	CR	AVE
Tourism expertience Situational Value	SV1	0.771	0.785	0.549
	SV2	0.726		
	SV3	0.726		
Tourism expertience Emotional Value	EV1	0.767	0.837	0.562
	EV2	0.734		
	EV3	0.745		
	EV4	0.751		
Tourism expertience Social Value	SOV1	0.728	0.797	0.568
	SOV2	0.810		
	SOV3	0.720		

4.3.1.3 Discriminant Validity

As shown in Table 4.8, the discriminant validity of the measurement model was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, whereby the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each latent construct (represented on the diagonal) should exceed the correlation coefficients between that construct and all other constructs (off-diagonal elements). The square roots of AVE values range from 0.736 to 0.756, all of which are greater than the respective inter-construct correlation coefficients. For example, the square root of AVE for Well-being is 0.756, which is higher than its correlations with Satisfaction (0.567), Tourism involvement (0.532), and the remaining constructs. This pattern is consistently observed across all constructs, thereby confirming satisfactory discriminant validity. Moreover, the inter-construct correlations are all below 0.6, and the differences between the AVE square roots and the highest correlation values within each construct pair are substantial enough to rule out multicollinearity or conceptual overlap (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). For instance, the strongest correlation—between Satisfaction and Social Value (0.559)—is still noticeably lower than either construct's AVE square root. These results affirm that each latent construct measures a distinct conceptual domain

within the model and that the observed variables adequately differentiate between constructs.

In addition to the Fornell–Larcker assessment, zero-order Pearson correlations among the composite scores were examined (off-diagonal entries in Table 4.10). All correlations are positive and significant ($p < .001$) and below .60, providing preliminary support for the hypothesized associations while suggesting no multicollinearity issues. For example, Satisfaction–Social Value r = .559 and Well-being–Satisfaction r = .567, both of which are clearly lower than their corresponding √AVE values on the diagonal, reinforcing discriminant validity alongside the theoretical linkages discussed.

Table 4.8 Discriminant Validity Test

Latent variables	TW	TS	TI	FV	SV	EV	SOV
Well-being of the elderly traveling	0.756 ***						
Satisfaction of elderlt tourists	0.567 ***	0.736 ***					
Tourism involvement	0.532 ***	0.485 ***	0.748 ***				
Tourism expertience Functional Value	0.551 ***	0.543 ***	0.564 ***	0.743 ***			
Tourism expertience Situational Value	0.542 ***	0.508 ***	0.518 ***	0.520 ***	0.741 ***		
Tourism expertience Emotional Value	0.449 ***	0.514 ***	0.398 ***	0.512 ***	0.572 ***	0.750 ***	
Tourism expertience Social Value	0.555 ***	0.559 ***	0.533 ***	0.566 ***	0.492 ***	0.514 ***	0.754 ***

Note: The diagonal is the square root of the corresponding dimension AVE

TW:Well-being of the elderly traveling; TS: Satisfaction of elderlt tourists; TI: Tourism involvement; FV: Tourism expertience Functional Value; SV: Tourism expertience Situational Value; EV: Tourism expertience Emotional Value; SOV: Tourism expertience Social Value.

***: P<0.001.

4.3.2 Structural Model Path Analysis

4.3.2.1 Model Fit Metrics for the Structural Model

As shown in Table 4.9, the fit indices for the structural model reveal an excellent level of overall model fit. The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) is 1.116, well below the recommended threshold of 3, indicating minimal discrepancy between the observed and model-implied covariance matrices. The RMSEA value stands at 0.015, substantially lower than the cutoff value of 0.08, reflecting a very small residual error and a highly satisfactory approximation of the model to the empirical data. Absolute fit indices, including GFI (0.938) and AGFI (0.927), both exceed the benchmark of 0.9, further confirming the structural model's consistency with the observed data structure. Incremental fit indices also demonstrate strong support for the model's adequacy. Specifically, the NFI, TLI, and CFI values are 0.936, 0.992, and 0.993, respectively, all significantly surpassing the conventional standard of 0.9 (Fang et al., 2022).

Table 4.9 Model Fit Metrics

Fit index	χ2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Reference standards	<3	<0.08	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9
Result	1.116	0.015	0.938	0.927	0.936	0.992	0.993

4.3.2.2 Path Analysis for Direct Effects

Table 4.10 reports the direct path effects for hypotheses H1–H18. The results reveal that several dimensions of tourism experience significantly shape the well-being of elderly tourists. Functional value (H1: β = 0.150, p = .015, C.R. = 2.444), situational value (H2: β = 0.187, p = .003, C.R. = 2.984), and social value (H4: β = 0.175, p = .005, C.R. = 2.793) all exert significant positive effects on well-being. In contrast, emotional value (H3: β = 0.004, p = .941, C.R. = 0.074) does not show significance, indicating that elderly tourists' well-being depends more on practical, contextual, and social aspects than on emotional experiences.

Regarding tourist satisfaction, all four experiential dimensions are significant predictors. Functional value (H5: β = 0.222, p < .001, C.R. = 3.402), situational value (H6: β = 0.271, p < .001, C.R. = 4.086), emotional value (H7: β = 0.161, p = .013, C.R. = 2.495),

and social value (H8: $\beta = 0.174$, $p = .009$, C.R. = 2.615) positively affect satisfaction, with situational value being the strongest driver. Satisfaction itself strongly predicts well-being (H9: $\beta = 0.215$, $p < .001$, C.R. = 3.632), reinforcing its mediating role.

For tourism involvement, functional value (H14: $\beta = 0.306$, $p < .001$, C.R. = 4.754), situational value (H15: $\beta = 0.255$, $p < .001$, C.R. = 3.899), and social value (H17: $\beta = 0.259$, $p < .001$, C.R. = 4.039) show significant positive effects, while emotional value (H16: $\beta = -0.036$, $p = .565$, C.R. = –0.575) does not. Finally, tourism involvement significantly contributes to well-being (H18: $\beta = 0.153$, $p = .006$, C.R. = 2.771).

The findings emphasize that functional, situational, and social values are the strongest predictors of elderly tourist well-being, operating both directly and indirectly through satisfaction and involvement. Emotional value, however, remains non-significant in its direct relationships, suggesting that senior-friendly tourism strategies should prioritize accessibility, service quality, and social connectedness.

A confirmatory factor analysis was estimated for all latent constructs.meeting conventional thresholds (e.g., $\chi^2/df < 3$, CFI/TLI $\geq .90$, RMSEA $\leq .08$, SRMR $\leq .08$). All standardized factor loadings were significant and exceeded .50, supporting indicator reliability. Convergent validity was established with composite reliability (CR) $\geq .70$ and average variance extracted (AVE) $\geq .50$ across constructs. Discriminant validity held under the Fornell–Larcker criterion, as the square root of AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs.

In summary, the structural equation model validates the majority of hypothesized paths, confirming the robust interrelationships among tourism experience values, satisfaction, involvement, and well-being. The repeated non-significance of emotional value in direct paths to well-being and involvement highlights a boundary condition of its influence, suggesting its effects may be more latent or indirect, possibly mediated by satisfaction or shaped by personal traits such as emotional resilience or cultural expectations.

Table 4.10 Direct Path Effects

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	β	S.E.	C.R.	P	Results
H1	FV→TW	0.161	0.150	0.066	2.444	0.015	Supported
H2	SV→TW	0.169	0.187	0.057	2.984	0.003	Supported
H3	EV→TW	0.004	0.004	0.058	0.074	0.941	Not-supported
H4	SOV→TW	0.187	0.175	0.067	2.793	0.005	Supported
H5	FV→TS	0.235	0.222	0.069	3.402	***	Supported
H6	SV→TS	0.286	0.271	0.070	4.086	***	Supported
H7	EV→TS	0.161	0.161	0.064	2.495	0.013	Supported
H8	SOV→TS	0.156	0.174	0.060	2.615	0.009	Supported
H9	TS→TW	0.218	0.215	0.060	3.632	***	Supported
H14	FV→TI	0.321	0.306	0.068	4.754	***	Supported
H15	SV→TI	0.227	0.255	0.058	3.899	***	Supported
H16	EV→TI	-0.035	-0.036	0.061	-0.575	0.565	Not-supported
H17	SOV→TI	0.270	0.259	0.067	4.039	***	Supported
H18	TI→TW	0.156	0.153	0.056	2.771	0.006	Supported

Note: TW: Well-being of the elderly traveling; TS: Satisfaction of elderlt tourists; TI: Tourism involvement; FV: Tourism expertience Functional Value; SV: Tourism expertience Situational Value; EV: Tourism expertience Emotional Value; SOV: Tourism expertience Social Value.
Diagonal entries are the square roots of AVE. Off-diagonal entries are inter-construct correlations. Asterisks denote the level of statistical significance for the correlations ($p < .05$, *$p < .01$, **$p < .001$) and do not affect the Fornell–Larcker decision rule.
***: $p<0.001$

Clarification on metrics in Table 4.10. The Estimate column reports unstandardized path coefficients (in raw-score units), whereas β reports the standardized coefficients (unit-free, comparable across paths). C.R. in this table denotes the Critical Ratio (Estimate / S.E.), which follows a z-approximation; $|C.R.| \geq 1.96$ indicates $p < .05$. This C.R. (Critical Ratio) is different from the CR (Composite Reliability) reported in the measurement section (Table 4.7).

Explanation for “not supported” paths (H3 and H16). The paths EV→TW and EV→TI are nonsignificant because the emotional value items capture short-term hedonic affect, whereas well-being and involvement in this study reflect more enduring, evaluative/behavioral outcomes among older adults. In this cohort, functional accessibility, situational harmony, and social support are the primary proximal drivers of well-being and participation; emotional responses are indirect—they raise satisfaction (H7 supported) and then contribute to well-being via the mediated path (EV→TS→TW significant in the bootstrap). This pattern is theoretically consistent with later-life travel where pragmatic assurance and social embeddedness outweigh transient affect in motivating engagement and eudaimonic wellness.

Figure 4.6 illustrates the structural model developed in this study. In the diagram, ellipses represent latent variables, rectangles represent observed indicators, and the arrows indicate causal relationships, with standardized path coefficients labeled on each path. The results show that Functional Value, Situational Value, and Social Value of the tourism experience exert significant positive effects on well-being, whereas Emotional Value shows an extremely weak path coefficient (0.004) and is not statistically significant. Additionally, both “Satisfaction” (β = 0.215) and “Involvement” (β = 0.153) have significant direct effects on well-being. All dimensions of tourism experience significantly and positively influence “Satisfaction” and “Involvement,” with the exception of “Emotional Value,” which does not significantly affect involvement.

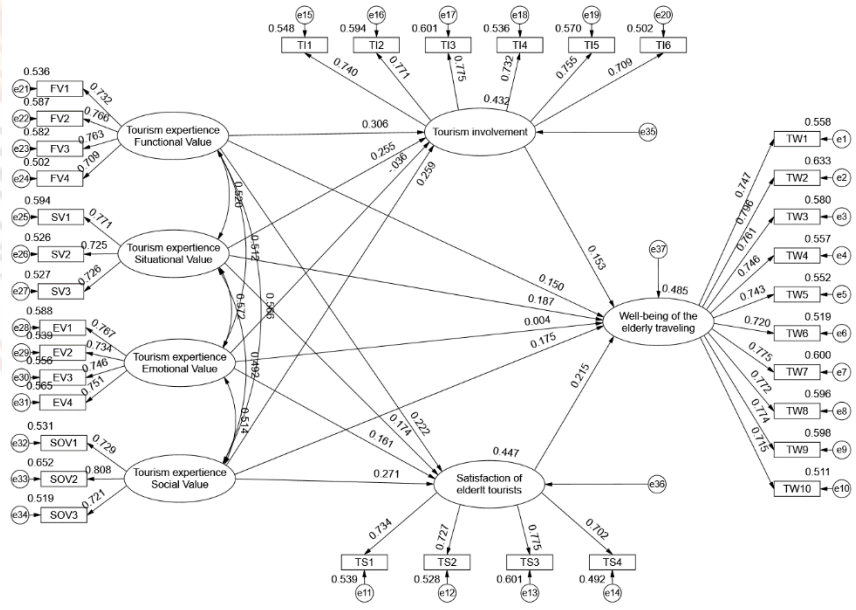

Figure 4.6 Structural model diagram

The structural model demonstrates the relationships among tourism experience dimensions (functional, situational, emotional, social), tourism satisfaction, tourism involvement, and the well-being of elderly tourists.

Direct effects on well-being

Functional value ($\beta = 0.150$, $p = .015$), situational value ($\beta = 0.187$, $p = .003$), and social value ($\beta = 0.175$, $p = .005$) significantly and positively affect elderly well-being.

Emotional value shows no significant effect ($\beta = 0.004$, $p = .941$), indicating that emotional aspects of tourism alone do not directly enhance well-being for older adults.

Effects on tourist satisfaction

All four experiential dimensions—functional ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < .001$), situational ($\beta = 0.271$, $p < .001$), emotional ($\beta = 0.161$, $p = .013$), and social value ($\beta = 0.174$, $p = .009$)—positively predict satisfaction.

Situational value is the strongest driver, showing that service environment and contextual quality are especially important for older tourists.

Mediating role of satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction has a strong effect on well-being ($\beta = 0.215$, $p < .001$). This confirms that satisfaction serves as a critical mediator between tourism experiences and life outcomes.

Effects on tourism involvement

Functional value ($\beta = 0.306$, $p < .001$), situational value ($\beta = 0.255$, $p < .001$), and social value ($\beta = 0.259$, $p < .001$) significantly increase tourism involvement.

Emotional value again shows no significant effect ($\beta = –0.036$, $p = .565$).

Mediating role of involvement

Tourism involvement significantly predicts well-being ($\beta = 0.153$, $p = .006$). This suggests that when elderly tourists are actively engaged, they experience greater well-being.

The curved double-headed arrows in Figure 4.6 represent covariances among four exogenous experience-value constructs—Functional Value (FV), Situational Value (SV), Emotional Value (EV), and Social Value (SOV); they do not indicate reciprocal causation. This specification follows established structural-equation modeling practice for conceptually related exogenous factors measured within the same episode of experience (Bollen, 1989). Estimating these covariances avoids imposing unrealistic independence

constraints and helps prevent omitted-correlation bias in the directional paths to satisfaction, involvement, and well-being (Kline, 2015).

The four value constructs correspond to distinct, theory-grounded components of tourism experience. Functional Value captures utilitarian and quality appraisals—accessibility, safety, reliability, and service efficiency—consistent with value formulations that emphasize the trade-off between what is received and what is given. Situational Value reflects value-in-context arising from environmental aesthetics, thematic fit, and service warmth as tourists interact with specific settings and service encounters (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). Emotional Value denotes hedonic affective responses to the experience, such as joy, comfort, or escapism, which are central to experiential value accounts Mathwick et al. (2001). Social Value represents relational and identity meanings that emerge from interaction, cultural identification, and shared participation during travel Williams and Soutar (2000).

With respect to the direct-effects model, two propositions were not supported: H3 (EV→TW), $\beta = 0.004$, $p = .941$, and H16 (EV→TI), $\beta = 0.036$, $p = .565$. All other specified paths were supported: FV, SV, and SOV positively predicted Well-being (H1, H2, H4); all four value dimensions positively predicted Tourist Satisfaction (H5–H8); FV, SV, and SOV positively predicted Tourism Involvement (H14, H15, H17); and both Satisfaction and Involvement positively predicted Well-being (H9, H18). The observed pattern indicates that utilitarian/quality, contextual, and relational appraisals function as direct antecedents of later-life well-being, whereas hedonic affect raises evaluative judgments without, in this dataset, exerting a direct influence on long-term wellness or participatory engagement (Oliver, 1980).

The covariance links among FV, SV, EV, and SOV are theoretically expected because value facets are co-produced as tourists simultaneously appraise functional features, atmospheric cues, emotions, and social meanings within a single trip Holbrook (1999) . Empirical work in tourism routinely reports inter-correlations among these components because destination design and social interaction shape them in tandem. Treating the four value constructs as correlated exogenous factors therefore preserves theoretical validity while keeping the causal structure focused on hypothesized paths to satisfaction, involvement, and well-being (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010).

Taken together, the supported paths and the theoretically warranted covariances provide a coherent account of how experience value relates to downstream outcomes in senior tourism. The results identify which value facets act as direct levers of well-being (functional, situational, social) and which operate primarily through evaluative channels (emotional), thereby establishing a clear basis for the mediation tests that follow for satisfaction- and involvement-based transmission mechanisms.

4.3.2.3 Path Analysis for Indirect Effects

As shown in Table 4.11, the study employed a bias-corrected bootstrap method to examine the indirect effects of tourism experience dimensions on older adult tourists' well-being (TW) via the mediators of satisfaction (TS) and involvement (TI). The mediation paths were assessed based on three key indicators: effect value (indicating the strength of the indirect path), standard error (SE), and the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (CI). For a mediation effect to be considered statistically significant, the confidence interval must not contain zero (Wang et al., 2020). In terms of indirect effects via satisfaction, four hypotheses (H10–H13) were supported. Specifically, Functional Value (H10, FV→TS→TW, effect = 0.051, CI [0.008, 0.141]), Situational Value (H11, SV→TS→TW, effect = 0.034, CI [0.004, 0.096]), Emotional Value (H12, EV→TS→TW, effect = 0.035, CI [0.001, 0.112]), and Social Value (H13, SOV→TS→TW, effect = 0.062, CI [0.015, 0.153]) all showed significant mediating paths through satisfaction, suggesting that positive evaluations of these experience dimensions can enhance well-being by first increasing tourists' satisfaction.

Similarly, four additional hypotheses (H19–H22) explored the mediating role of tourism involvement in the relationship between tourism experience dimensions and well-being. The results support three of these hypotheses. Specifically, Functional Value (H19, FV→TI→TW, effect = 0.050, SE = 0.033, CI [0.005, 0.129]), Situational Value (H20, SV→TI→TW, effect = 0.035, SE = 0.024, CI [0.001, 0.094]), and Social Value (H22, SOV→TI→TW, effect = 0.042, SE = 0.030, CI [0.002, 0.117]) demonstrated significant indirect effects via involvement. This implies that tourists who perceive functional, situational, or social value from their tourism experiences are more likely to become engaged participants, which in turn contributes to enhanced well-being. Notably, Emotional Value again failed to show a significant mediating effect through involvement

(EV→TI→TW, effect = -0.006, CI [–0.047, 0.022]), as the confidence interval includes zero, leading to the rejection of H21.

These findings emphasize the differentiated roles of satisfaction and involvement as mediating mechanisms in translating tourism experience into psychological well-being. Satisfaction appears to be a more robust mediator for Emotional Value, while involvement plays a stronger role for Functional and Situational Value. The statistical robustness of these indirect effects—demonstrated through narrow standard errors and confidence intervals that exclude zero—adds empirical support to the structural assumptions of the model.

Table 4.11 Indirect Effect Bootstrap Analysis

Hypothesis	Mediation path	Effect value	SE	Bias-Corrected 95%CI		Results
				Lower	Upper	
H10	FV→TS→TW	0.051	0.034	0.008	0.141	Supported
H11	SV→TS→TW	0.034	0.024	0.004	0.096	Supported
H12	EV→TS→TW	0.035	0.027	0.001	0.112	Supported
H13	SOV→TS→TW	0.062	0.034	0.015	0.153	Supported
H19	FV→TI→TW	0.050	0.033	0.005	0.129	Supported
H20	SV→TI→TW	0.035	0.024	0.001	0.094	Supported
H21	EV→TI→TW	-0.006	0.017	-0.047	0.022	Not-supported
H22	SOV→TI→TW	0.042	0.030	0.002	0.117	Supported

Note: TW: Well-being of the elderly traveling; TS: Satisfaction of elderlt tourists; TI: Tourism involvement; FV: Tourism expertience Functional Value; SV: Tourism expertience Situational Value; EV: Tourism expertience Emotional Value; SOV: Tourism expertience Social Value.

Clarificatory note on H21 and implications from H22. The non-significant mediation EV→TI→TW arises because the antecedent link EV→TI is small and non-significant ($\beta = –0.036$, $p = .565$); given a positive TI→TW, the product approaches zero and the bootstrap CI crosses zero, hence the “not-supported” decision for H21.

Substantively, among older adults the affective uplift captured by Emotional Value primarily heightens satisfaction rather than activating behavioural involvement. By contrast, the significant chain SOV→TI→TW (H22; effect = 0.042, 95% CI [0.002, 0.117]) indicates that strengthening socially supportive, relationship-rich experiences is an effective lever for well-being via increased involvement—for example, small-group, slow-paced itineraries that foster peer interaction, structured host–guest contact and community activities, staff training for inclusive communication, and dedicated social spaces or club-style programs that sustain bonding.

4.3.2.4 Total Effects

Table 4.12 presents the total effects of all key predictor variables on the core latent constructs within the structural model, including both direct and indirect pathways. In terms of their influence on tourism involvement (TI), the total effect of Functional Value (FV) was the strongest (effect size = 0.321, SE = 0.096, 95% CI [0.136, 0.501]), followed by Social Value (SOV, effect = 0.270, SE = 0.091, CI [0.080, 0.436]) and Situational Value (SV, effect = 0.227, SE = 0.082, CI [0.079, 0.389]), all of which are statistically significant. Emotional Value (EV), however, had a negative and non-significant total effect on TI (effect = –0.035, SE = 0.092, CI [–0.202, 0.139]), indicating that this construct does not meaningfully contribute to older adult tourists' behavioral engagement in this model.

Table 4.12 Total Effects

Effect path	Effect size	SE	Bias-Corrected 95%CI	
			Upper	Lower
SOV→TI	0.270	0.091	0.080	0.436
FV→TI	0.321	0.096	0.136	0.501
EV→TI	-0.035	0.092	-0.202	0.139
SV→TI	0.227	0.082	0.079	0.389

Figure 4.7 illustrates the validated structural model based on the proposed hypotheses examining the effects of tourism experience value dimensions on the well-being of older adult tourists. The model incorporates four primary dimensions of tourism experience value—functional value, situational value, emotional value, and social value—

and their respective direct and indirect influences mediated through tourism involvement and satisfaction of older adult tourists.

The results indicate that functional value (β = 0.150, H1), situational value (β = 0.187, H2), and social value (β = 0.175, H4) each exert significant direct effects on the well-being of older adult tourists, whereas emotional value shows a nonsignificant effect (β = -0.004, H3, not supported), as indicated by the dashed line. In addition, satisfaction (β = 0.215, H9) and tourism involvement (β = 0.153, H18) both significantly contribute to well-being, confirming their mediating roles. From a mediating perspective, the model shows that functional value (β = 0.306, H14), situational value (β = 0.225, H15), and social value (β = 0.259, H17) significantly enhance tourism involvement, while emotional value (β = -0.036, H16) does not. Similarly, all four dimensions of tourism experience value significantly affect satisfaction, with situational value (β = 0.271, H6) having the strongest effect, followed by functional value (β = 0.222, H5), social value (β = 0.174, H8), and emotional value (β = 0.161, H7). Overall, the structural model underscores that functional, situational, and social values are robust antecedents of well-being, both directly and indirectly, through their influence on satisfaction and involvement. Emotional value, despite contributing to satisfaction, does not directly or indirectly enhance well-being or involvement, indicating a more nuanced or context-dependent role in elderly tourism experience. The model offers strong empirical support for the mediating mechanisms and theoretical pathways hypothesized in the study.

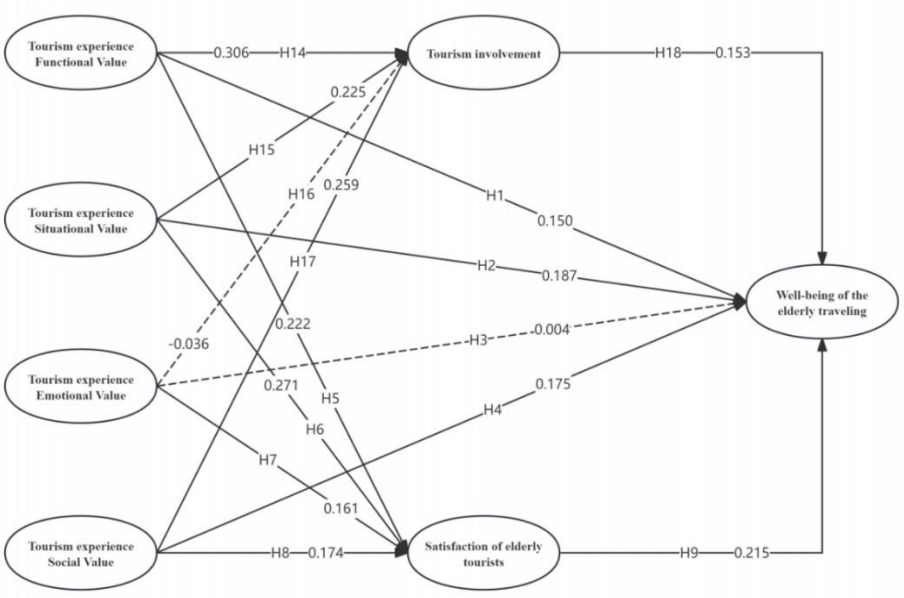

Figure 4.7 Model for predict well-being of older adult tourists

The direct-effect hypotheses were largely supported. Functional value (H1), situational value (H2), and social value (H4) exerted significant positive effects on well-being, whereas emotional value did not (H3, not supported). All four value dimensions significantly predicted tourist satisfaction (H5–H8 supported), and satisfaction in turn positively predicted well-being (H9 supported). For involvement, functional value (H14), situational value (H15), and social value (H17) showed significant positive effects, whereas emotional value did not (H16, not supported); involvement positively predicted well-being (H18 supported). Bootstrap mediation tests further indicated that satisfaction mediated the effects of all four value dimensions on well-being (H10–H13 supported). In contrast, involvement mediated the effects of functional, situational, and social value (H19, H20, H22 supported), but not emotional value (H21, not supported). Decisions follow the rule that an indirect effect is considered supported when the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval excludes zero.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has systematically examined the empirical results obtained through quantitative analysis, validating the conceptual model developed to explore the effects of tourism experience on older adult tourists' well-being. The descriptive statistics confirmed that the sample was demographically appropriate and exhibited consistent patterns across key constructs. Exploratory factor analysis supported the theoretical structure of the instrument, and subsequent reliability and validity tests demonstrated high internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity across all latent variables. These preliminary analyses provided a robust measurement foundation for the subsequent structural evaluation.

The structural equation modeling further confirmed the theoretical assumptions of the study. Direct path analyses revealed that functional, situational, and social values significantly influence well-being both directly and indirectly via satisfaction and involvement. Emotional value, however, showed limited explanatory power in this context. Indirect effect testing using bootstrapping verified multiple significant mediating pathways, highlighting the importance of affective and behavioral responses in the tourism-well-being relationship. The total effect analysis underscored the dominant influence of social and functional values. Overall, the empirical evidence substantiates the

proposed model, offering solid analytical support for the theoretical and managerial discussions presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter offers an integrative discussion of the study's key findings in relation to the study objectives and the broader theoretical and empirical landscape. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative results, the chapter explores how older adult tourists construct well-being through their travel experiences in Guizhou, and how experiential value dimensions—functional, situational, emotional, and social—interact with satisfaction and involvement to shape psychological outcomes. The discussion is guided by three core study objectives, focusing respectively on unpacking the dimensions of tourism experience, identifying the pathways to well-being, and examining the mediating roles of satisfaction and involvement.

The remainder of the chapter is organized into four key sections. The first section (5.1) discusses the main results and their alignment with existing literature. The second section (5.2) reflects on the theoretical implications and contributions to the applied frameworks. The third section (5.3) outlines practical implications for tourism destination stakeholders, wellness program designers, and local policymakers. The fourth section (5.4) addresses the study's limitations and outlines directions for future study. The chapter concludes in last Section with a synthesis of the study's contributions to academic knowledge and practical understanding in the field of senior tourism and well-being.

5.1 Discussion

The discussion section critically interprets the empirical findings presented relation to the study's study objectives and extant literature. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative results, it systematically analyzes how various dimensions of tourism experience—namely functional, situational, emotional, and social values—affect the well-being of older adult tourists in Guizhou. Through structural equation modeling and grounded theory analysis, the section reveals not only the direct influences of these experiential components but also highlights the mediating roles of satisfaction and tourism involvement. By situating the findings within contemporary scholarly discourse, the

discussion offers nuanced insights that confirm, extend, or challenge prior studies in the fields of wellness tourism, aging, and consumer value theory. Ultimately, this section establishes the empirical foundation for the theoretical contributions and practical implications elaborated in the subsequent parts of the chapter.

Functional value (H1: $\beta = 0.150$, $p = 0.015$, CR = 2.444), situational value (H2: $\beta = 0.187$, $p = 0.003$, CR = 2.984), and social value (H4: $\beta = 0.175$, $p = 0.005$, CR = 2.793) exerted significant direct effects on well-being, whereas emotional value did not (H3: $\beta = 0.004$, $p = 0.941$, CR = 0.074). All four value dimensions significantly increased satisfaction (H5–H8; situational value highest, $\beta = 0.271$, $p < .001$), and satisfaction in turn predicted well-being (H9: $\beta = 0.215$, $p < .001$, CR = 3.632). Involvement was enhanced by functional, situational, and social value (H14–H15, H17; all $p < .001$) and also improved well-being (H18: $\beta = 0.153$, $p = 0.006$, CR = 2.771); emotional value did not affect involvement (H16: $\beta = -0.036$, $p = 0.565$). Bootstrap tests supported indirect effects via satisfaction for all four values (H10–H13) and via involvement for functional, situational, and social value (H19, H20, H22), but not for emotional value (H21).

RO1: To delve into the various dimensions of tourism experience for older adult tourists' well-being.

Discussion of RO1

The first research objective sought to examine the influence of functional, situational, emotional, and social values on the well-being of older adult tourists in Guizhou Province. The findings revealed a differentiated pattern: functional and situational values emerged as the strongest predictors of well-being, social value contributed moderately, and emotional value exerted no significant direct effect. These results provide important insights into how older adults construct meaningful travel experiences and how these experiences contribute to their overall quality of life.

Functional and Situational Values as Foundations

The prominence of functional and situational values confirms the importance of accessibility, safety, and service infrastructure in shaping older tourists' experiences. Prior studies have consistently demonstrated that physical comfort, health-supportive infrastructure, and ease of mobility are decisive factors for older adult travelers (Li & Cai, 2022; Chen & Shoemaker, 2014). The present study aligns with this literature by showing that without functional security, well-being benefits cannot materialize. In fact, these

findings resonate with the WHO Active Ageing Policy Framework (2002; updated 2021), which identifies functional ability and enabling environments as prerequisites for participation and life satisfaction in later life.

Situational value, which encompasses service responsiveness, cultural atmosphere, and contextual quality, also demonstrated a strong effect. This supports the argument that well-being in later life is shaped not only by physical accessibility but also by relational and environmental contexts. Positive service interactions, respect from frontline staff, and a supportive cultural atmosphere enhance dignity and psychological resilience, reinforcing socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1999), which suggests that older adults prioritize emotionally meaningful contexts over novelty.

Social Value and the Role of Relationships

The moderate effect of social value highlights the relational nature of travel for older adults. Tourism provided a platform for strengthening family ties, maintaining social connections, and engaging with ethnic minority hosts. These results echo earlier findings that intergenerational and intercultural interactions enrich older adults' psychological well-being (Liu et al., 2024; Qu, 2025). However, the weaker influence compared with functional and situational values suggests that social benefits cannot fully compensate for barriers in accessibility or service quality. In other words, relationships enrich the experience but cannot substitute for the absence of age-friendly infrastructure or safe conditions.

The Limited Direct Effect of Emotional Value

One of the most intriguing findings was the limited role of emotional value as a direct predictor of well-being. This result diverges from some tourism studies that position emotions as central to positive experiences (Sthapit & Jiménez-Barreto, 2018). For older adults in Guizhou, emotional enjoyment such as nostalgia, joy, or relaxation appeared insufficient to sustain long-term well-being unless integrated within functional, situational, or social contexts. This suggests that while hedonic pleasure is appreciated, it is not the decisive factor in later-life well-being. Such a result aligns with eudaimonic perspectives, which emphasize purpose, meaning, and dignity over short-lived pleasures (Ryff, 1989).

RO2: To explore the path of tourism experience values affecting the well-being of older adult tourists in the context of tourism in Guizhou province, China.

Discussion of RO2

The second research objective focused on the mediating roles of tourist satisfaction and involvement in the relationship between tourism experience values and the well-being of older adult tourists. The findings revealed that satisfaction fully mediated the effects of functional and situational values, while involvement mediated the influence of social value. Emotional value exerted only indirect effects through both mediators. Together, these results highlight the complex psychological mechanisms that transform tourism experiences into enduring well-being outcomes.

Satisfaction as a Mediator of Functional and Situational Values

The mediation of satisfaction confirms that older adults' well-being is shaped not only by tangible conditions but by their cognitive evaluation of whether expectations were met or exceeded. Functional and situational values provided the necessary conditions for safe, comfortable, and supportive travel, but their effect on well-being was realized only when tourists felt satisfied with those experiences. This supports Oliver's (1997) satisfaction theory, which posits that fulfillment of expectations creates positive psychological states. For older adults, who often prioritize predictability and security, satisfaction served as the bridge between accessible infrastructure, responsive services, and subjective well-being.

These results also align with prior tourism studies showing that satisfaction mediates the link between service quality and psychological outcomes (Chen & Chen, 2010). In the context of ageing tourists, the findings extend this understanding by confirming that satisfaction transforms practical values into meaningful well-being gains. Without satisfaction, even well-designed infrastructure or attentive service may fail to produce lasting benefits.

Involvement as a Mediator of Social Value

The mediation of involvement underscores the importance of active participation in converting social opportunities into well-being. Older tourists who engaged in workshops, festivals, or community-based activities reported higher involvement, which enhanced their sense of purpose and belonging. This pathway supports Involvement Theory (Zaichkowsky, 1985), which emphasizes personal relevance and psychological immersion as conditions for meaningful outcomes.

The finding resonates with socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1999), which argues that older adults prioritize emotionally meaningful experiences. In Guizhou's context, social value alone—such as being surrounded by family or meeting locals—was insufficient unless paired with active involvement. Participation transformed social interactions from passive observation into purposeful engagement that contributed directly to well-being. This insight reinforces the role of community-based tourism as a platform for intergenerational learning and cultural continuity (Qu, 2025).

The Indirect Role of Emotional Value

The limited direct effect of emotional value, but its indirect influence via satisfaction and involvement, suggests that emotions are filtered through appraisal and engagement processes before contributing to well-being. Joy, nostalgia, and relaxation enhanced satisfaction when tourists evaluated their trips positively, and they deepened involvement when tied to social or cultural exchanges. This finding supports the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), where stimuli (tourism values) shape internal states (satisfaction, involvement), which then produce outcomes (well-being). Emotional experiences, though present, required interpretive and participatory mechanisms to become enduring.

RO3: To investigate the mediation roles of social involement and satisfaction in the relationship betweent the tourism experience values and older adult tourists' well-being.

This study revealed that both social involvement and satisfaction serve as significant mediating mechanisms in translating tourism experience values into older adult tourists' perceived well-being. Specifically, satisfaction significantly mediates the effects of functional value, situational value, emotional value, and social value on well-being. These results suggest that when older tourists positively evaluate the comfort, emotional environment, and cultural resonance of their tourism experiences, their psychological well-being is enhanced primarily through increased satisfaction. This is consistent with recent studies that affirm satisfaction as a proximal determinant of subjective well-being in the context of senior travel (Grover et al., 2024). Similarly, social involvement significantly mediates the impact of functional value, situational value, and social value on well-being. These findings indicate that access to supportive infrastructure and immersive, interactive environments facilitates deeper behavioral engagement, which in turn contributes to higher

well-being—aligning with recent literature emphasizing the importance of active participation and social connectivity in elderly wellness tourism (Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023). However, emotional value did not significantly influence well-being through social involvement, suggesting that while emotional resonance may enhance affective satisfaction, it lacks the capacity to drive behavioral engagement among older tourists.

This divergence may stem from the passive nature of emotional reactions, which, although personally meaningful, do not necessarily motivate social interaction or involvement—a distinction supported by findings in the work of Zsoldos and Hot (2024), who emphasize the limited behavioral activation stemming from passive emotional gratification among senior groups. Collectively, this study underscore the nuanced role of mediators in the experiential value–well-being nexus and highlight the necessity of distinguishing between affective and behavioral pathways when designing age-friendly wellness tourism experiences.

These mediating pathways suggest that satisfaction operates primarily as an affective integrator, consolidating sensory and evaluative impressions into a coherent sense of psychological benefit, whereas social involvement functions as a behavioral translator of perceived value into meaningful interaction and participation. This dual mediation reflects a distinction between hedonic fulfillment and eudaimonic engagement, aligning with contemporary aging theories that highlight both emotional contentment and active social functioning as components of senior well-being (Charles & Carstensen, 2010).

This study contributes new theoretical insights by revealing that situational value-comprising environmental ambiance, service context, and sensory engagement-is the most influential factor driving satisfaction, involvement, and ultimately well-being among older adult tourists, particularly in rural tourism contexts like Guizhou. Contrary to much prior literature that emphasizes the primacy of emotional value, this study found no significant direct effect of emotional value on well-being or involvement (H3 and H16 rejected), challenging assumptions in Customer Value Theory that prioritize affective engagement. Instead, the findings demonstrate that functional and social values, such as accessibility, supportive environments, and social bonding, play more substantial roles in shaping older adults' travel outcomes. By integrating grounded qualitative data and quantitative

modeling, this study reframes the experiential priorities of older adult tourists, offering a localized, multidimensional model of value that both affirms and refines existing theories in tourism and aging study.

The pattern therefore comprises two routes—an evaluative route (value → satisfaction → well-being) and a behavioral route (value → involvement → well-being)—with emotional value primarily functioning in the former and functional/situational/social value in both. This provides the empirical platform for the theoretical contributions articulated next.

The qualitative narratives and the SEM results converge on a coherent mechanism linking experiential values to well-being among older adult tourists in Guizhou. First, functional and situational values predicted satisfaction, which in turn predicted well-being (see Tables 4.10–4.12). Interviewees repeatedly emphasized barrier-free access, places to rest, health preparedness, respectful service, and a calm, predictable atmosphere. These accounts clarify why the statistical effects of functional and situational values are largely indirect: for seniors, accessible and dignified environments operate through a cognitive appraisal of satisfaction rather than producing well-being on their own. Second, the non-significant direct path of emotional value is consistent with narratives describing emotions (joy, nostalgia, relaxation) as short-lived unless anchored in safety and acceptance; quantitatively, emotional value contributed to well-being via satisfaction rather than directly. Third, social value translated into well-being mainly through involvement: participants valued hands-on, participatory encounters (e.g., community crafts, choral activities, festival preparation) that fostered belonging and purpose, which accords with the significant social value → involvement → well-being chain. Finally, both satisfaction and involvement emerge as the organismic mechanisms in the S-O-R framework that convert contextual stimuli into psychological outcomes; the qualitative material explains why these mechanisms are salient for seniors—age-friendly design enables appraisal (satisfaction), while community-based and participatory formats enable engagement (involvement). Together, the integrated evidence validates the proposed process model and explains the asymmetry between strong indirect and weaker direct effects for certain value dimensions.

5.2 Implication to Theories

5.2.1 Implication to Customer Value Theory

This study empirically tested and refined the Customer Value Theory framework within the context of wellness tourism for older adults in Guizhou, China. Customer Value Theory was conceptualized through four interrelated dimensions: functional, emotional, social, and situational value. This study offers critical insights into the differential impact of these value dimensions on older adult tourists' well-being. Notably, while functional, social, and situational values exhibited significant direct and indirect effects on well-being, emotional value showed a limited and statistically insignificant influence. This diverges from earlier findings that emphasized the primacy of emotional experiences in tourism (Awan et al., 2022; Samsa, 2023), suggesting that in the context of senior tourism, utilitarian and social aspects may outweigh affective components.

Unlike younger tourists who seek novelty or escapism, older tourists in Guizhou prioritized accessible infrastructure, reliable service environments, health support, and interpersonal warmth—factors that align more closely with functional and social value (Juliana et al., 2022; Omar et al., 2021). Furthermore, the diminished role of emotional value challenges the assumption found in recent digital tourism study that affective stimulation is the dominant driver of perceived value (Bozhenko et al., 2022; Buhalis et al., 2022). This contextual specificity suggests that customer experience frameworks must be adapted based on life-stage, health needs, and travel purpose, rather than generalized across demographic groups.

Additionally, the empirical model clarified the structure of interrelationships among value dimensions. Social value—defined through perceived support, group belonging, and cultural immersion—emerged as the strongest total contributor to well-being. This finding confirms recent assertions about the relational underpinnings of value co-creation (Arıca et al., 2022; Nangpiire et al., 2022), particularly in wellness and heritage-based tourism, where intersubjective experiences reinforce identity and emotional security. The functional value dimension also showed high explanatory power, corroborating studies that emphasize the necessity of ease-of-use, service adequacy, and health infrastructure in enhancing senior tourism satisfaction (Azhar & Evanthi; Bozhenko et al., 2022).

In terms of theoretical development, this study advances theCustomer Value Theory by integrating existential and cognitive enrichment aspects into the understanding of value—particularly evident in qualitative results such as “existential reflection” and “cultural resonance.” These additions bridge gaps identified in earlier value proposition literature (Agapity & Mugobi, 2023) and extend the Customer Experience Value framework into the aging and wellness tourism subfield. This not only aligns with the recent movement toward value co-creation in later life tourism but also offers a more holistic model that reflects the layered experiences of older adult tourists.

In conclusion, this study contributes both theoretically and practically. It revises the Customer Value Theory framework by highlighting the hierarchical and contextual salience of value types, particularly underlining the relative marginality of emotional value in senior tourism. The model was validated empirically and grounded in the lived experiences of elderly travelers. This study not only enrich academic discussions on customer value but also inform tourism service providers, policymakers, and community managers in designing age-inclusive, socially engaging, and functionally supportive tourism products We specify which value facets most efficiently convert to senior well-being (functional/situational/social > emotional, directly), and how they do so (dual mediation via satisfaction and involvement). This refines Customer Value Theory by identifying an age-and-context-sensitive hierarchy of value salience and by clarifying the process architecture linking value to eudaimonic outcomes.

5.2.2 Implication to Involvement Theory

This study extends involvement theory within the context of elderly wellness tourism, particularly in Guizhou Province, by examining how various experiential values contribute to tourists’psychological well-being through the mediating role of tourism involvement. Involvement theory posits that individuals who perceive personal relevance and emotional connection to an activity exhibit heightened engagement and cognitive processing (Zaichkowsky, 1985), and recent tourism study has reaffirmed this framework across diverse contexts. In rural tourism, experience involvement significantly mediates the relationship between perceived destination quality and memorable tourism experiences (Nugraha et al., 2021). In the context of Chinese heritage tourism, proposed the Cultural Tourism Tendency–Involvement–Experience (TIE) model, which demonstrates that tourists' cultural learning tendencies stimulate greater involvement, leading to richer

heritage experiences (Xu et al., 2022). In the digital sphere, virtual reality tourism of the Yellow Crane Tower in Wuhan and reported that higher levels of virtual involvement foster stronger place attachment and behavioral intentions (Wang et al., 2022).We delineate experiential antecedents of involvement that are non-hedonic—environmental facilitation and social embedment—and document a limit case in which affective arousal alone is insufficient to mobilize engagement among older adults. Involvement thus emerges as a capability enabled by accessibility and social scaffolding rather than a mere by-product of emotion.

This study confirms that functional value, situational value, and social value significantly enhance older adult tourists' involvement during wellness travel experiences. The mediating effect of involvement on the relationship between these values and well-being underscores the motivational and affective dimensions of involvement as proposed in classical models. For instance, functional value (e.g., accessible services and physical convenience) encourages behavioral engagement because it enables older adult tourists to navigate travel environments with autonomy and dignity—paralleling findings on destination quality and positive engagement in rural tourism (Nugraha et al., 2021).

Moreover, the significant path from social value to involvement affirms that meaningful interpersonal interactions and group solidarity stimulate a sense of belonging, which in turn deepens psychological participation in tourism. This supports that social inclusion and empowerment (e.g., among women in tourism cooperatives) foster stronger personal and communal ties to tourism activities (Guo et al., 2023). Similarly, situational value—such as the immersive quality of the environment—was found to boost engagement, aligning with the findings of Wang et al. (2022), who revealed that immersive virtual environments enhance place attachment via involvement mechanisms.

Emotional value did not significantly predict involvement in this study, diverging from some prior study that has highlighted the role of affective arousal in stimulating tourist engagement (Jin, 2024). Although positive emotions contribute to well-being, they may not always translate into behavioral or cognitive engagement unless coupled with practical or social incentives. This reveals a unique insight—that emotional resonance alone may be insufficient for deep involvement among older adults, unless supported by functionality or social interaction, a nuance previously underexplored in involvement theory.

This study contributes a refined understanding of involvement by illustrating that in the context of elderly wellness tourism, involvement is driven more by environmental facilitation and social integration than by emotional gratification alone. This study nuances existing models by suggesting that different types of involvement—emotional, behavioral, and cognitive—may have varying salience across demographic and contextual lines. Moreover, the conceptual model tested here enriches involvement theory by situating it within a broader experiential framework that includes well-being as a key outcome, thus responding to recent calls for more integrative and psychologically grounded involvement study (Erul et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2022).

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence that supports and extends involvement theory by identifying specific experiential antecedents that influence older adult tourists' engagement and well-being. It underscores the importance of designing tourism experiences that foster accessibility, social connection, and environmental richness to enhance involvement. These insights not only contribute to academic discourse on involvement theory but also offer practical guidance for creating inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable tourism experiences for older populations.

5.3 Implication to Practitioners

5.3.1 Implications for Tourism Destination Managers and Operators

The findings of this study underscore that functional value (e.g., accessibility, infrastructure, safety) and situational value (e.g., quality of facilities and services) are the strongest predictors of elderly tourists' well-being. For destination managers, this highlights the necessity of rethinking destination design with inclusivity at the forefront. Prioritizing barrier-free environments, clear signage, handrails, shaded resting areas, and emergency medical support significantly improves the confidence of older tourists in engaging with tourism spaces (Li & Cai, 2022). Beyond infrastructure, safety remains paramount; destinations that incorporate visible security presence, reliable transportation, and health-supportive services are more likely to attract repeat visits from elderly populations.

From a strategic perspective, investing in age-friendly tourism infrastructure can serve as a competitive advantage in a rapidly aging society. According to the United Nations (2020), by 2050 one in six people worldwide will be over the age of 65, indicating

a growing tourism segment with specific needs. Incorporating Universal Design principles ensures destinations are usable by all, regardless of age or ability (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011). Managers should therefore engage in cross-sector collaboration with healthcare providers, urban planners, and community organizations to enhance accessibility standards and service provisions.

Additionally, functional and situational improvements can contribute to destination branding and image building. Destinations that become recognized for age-friendly facilities often develop reputational capital, attracting not only elderly travelers but also family groups traveling with older relatives (Patterson & Balderas, 2020).

5.3.2 Implications for Tourism Service Providers and Frontline Staff

Frontline staff represent the "human interface" of the tourism experience, and this study confirms their critical role in influencing tourist satisfaction and involvement. Elderly tourists often evaluate their experiences not only through physical infrastructure but also through interpersonal interactions. Even though emotional value did not significantly predict well-being, it remains influential in shaping satisfaction (Chen & Shoemaker, 2014). This suggests that staff should emphasize empathy, patience, and culturally sensitive communication when interacting with senior travelers.

To achieve this, specialized training programs are needed. Staff should be equipped to handle age-related needs such as slower mobility, sensory limitations, and dietary requirements (Jang, Bai, Hu, & Wu, 2009). Training should include techniques for active listening, conflict resolution, and non-verbal communication, which are especially relevant for elderly groups who may feel overlooked in fast-paced tourism settings.

Additionally, staff empowerment is vital. When frontline workers feel supported and motivated, they are more likely to deliver positive and attentive service. Service culture should shift from transactional to relational, where the focus is on building trust, comfort, and personal connection (Kim, Park, & Lee, 2017).

Tourism providers should also consider service innovation, such as personalized check-in assistance, guided mobility support, and priority seating. These relatively small interventions can significantly influence satisfaction levels, reinforcing the mediating role of satisfaction in well-being identified in this study.

In sum, implications for frontline staff stress that interpersonal quality is as vital as infrastructure. Empathetic, well-trained, and motivated staff enhance elderly tourists' involvement and satisfaction, which in turn strengthens overall well-being.

5.3.3 Implications for Health and Wellness Program Designers

The study's findings reveal that tourism well-being outcomes are closely tied to health-supportive experiences, aligning with broader concepts of wellness tourism. Program designers should incorporate activities such as light exercise classes, meditation sessions, healthy meal planning, and culturally relevant healing practices (Voigt, Brown, & Howat, 2011). These elements address not only the physical but also the psychological dimensions of elderly tourists' well-being.

Importantly, wellness program designers must account for the heterogeneity of the elderly population. While some seniors may prioritize physical rehabilitation, others may seek stress relief, spiritual enrichment, or social connection. Therefore, modular program design—allowing tourists to choose from a menu of wellness options—can better accommodate diverse needs (Smith & Puczkó, 2014).

Integration with local healthcare and community services also enhances credibility. Collaborations with hospitals, fitness centers, and nutritionists can help ensure that wellness offerings are both safe and effective for older travelers. Such programs also align with public policy goals promoting "active aging," a framework supported by the World Health Organization (2015).

Finally, wellness programs should not be isolated from cultural and environmental experiences. Elderly travelers increasingly seek authentic and holistic tourism that blends recreation with personal development. Designers can integrate mindfulness in natural settings, heritage-based healing rituals, and intergenerational learning activities to reinforce the social value dimension identified in this research.

The implication is clear: health and wellness tourism is a central pathway through which destinations can deliver long-term well-being benefits to elderly tourists while simultaneously aligning with global health agendas.

5.3.4 Implications for Policy Makers and Local Governments

The study demonstrates that elderly tourists' well-being is strongly influenced by functional and situational values, as well as satisfaction and involvement. These findings imply that policy makers and local governments must actively integrate age-friendly

tourism strategies into regional development planning. Infrastructure improvements such as barrier-free transportation systems, accessible public toilets, and community-based healthcare support are essential to ensuring elderly tourists can travel confidently and safely (UNWTO, 2020).

Policy makers should adopt inclusive tourism frameworks consistent with the World Health Organization's (2015) active aging agenda. This involves cross-sector collaboration, where health, urban planning, and tourism authorities work together to develop environments that meet senior travelers' mobility and wellness needs (Alén, Domínguez, & Losada, 2012). Incentive structures, such as subsidies for senior-focused tour operators or tax breaks for businesses that invest in accessibility, can further encourage private-sector participation.

Local governments must also recognize the economic potential of senior tourism. By 2050, the global population of seniors is expected to double, with older adults commanding significant purchasing power (United Nations, 2020). Developing policies that reduce barriers—such as simplified visa processes, affordable travel insurance, or senior discounts—can help position destinations as leaders in the silver economy (Patterson & Balderas, 2020).

Importantly, policies must emphasize sustainability and social inclusion. Elderly travelers often prefer authentic community experiences, and governments should ensure that growth in this market supports local culture rather than displacing it. Participatory planning that involves community elders and tourism associations ensures that policies remain sensitive to cultural values.

5.3.5 Implications for Marketing Professionals and Tour Operators

This study reveals that elderly tourists' satisfaction and involvement are strongly shaped by functional, situational, and social values. Marketing professionals should therefore craft strategies that highlight these dimensions in communication campaigns. Clear information on accessibility, safety, and medical support should be emphasized in promotional materials, as these are critical to building trust with elderly travelers (Jang & Wu, 2006).

Marketing strategies must also focus on social and group-oriented experiences. Many elderly tourists prefer traveling with family, friends, or organized groups, and campaigns should highlight packages that facilitate intergenerational or community-based

travel (Hung & Petrick, 2012). Group discounts, cultural immersion activities, and storytelling about shared heritage can strengthen perceptions of social value, which in turn boosts involvement and well-being.

Digital platforms play an increasing role in reaching older consumers, but accessibility remains a challenge. Simplified websites, larger fonts, and intuitive booking systems reduce barriers for seniors who may not be digital natives (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011). At the same time, traditional marketing channels such as print media and travel agencies remain effective for this demographic and should not be neglected.

Tour operators should design tailored itineraries that balance relaxation, safety, and cultural enrichment. For example, shorter travel distances, slower-paced schedules, and health-conscious dining options align with the findings that functional and situational values are central to satisfaction. Incorporating wellness elements such as spa visits, gentle exercise, or mindfulness sessions also connects to seniors' growing interest in holistic health (Voigt et al., 2011).

Ultimately, marketing professionals and tour operators must position senior tourism not as a niche but as a mainstream market segment with distinct values. Aligning communication and package design with these findings ensures higher satisfaction, deeper involvement, and stronger well-being outcomes.

5.3.6 Implications for Community and Cultural Heritage Managers

Community-based and cultural heritage tourism plays a critical role in meeting elderly tourists' preference for social value and authentic experiences. This study confirms that social interactions significantly enhance both involvement and well-being, suggesting that cultural heritage managers should design programs that foster interpersonal connection and cultural exchange (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009).

Elderly travelers are often motivated by nostalgia, memory, and identity affirmation. Incorporating storytelling, traditional performances, and opportunities for intergenerational learning enables older tourists to engage meaningfully with local culture (Coleman & Kearns, 2015). These experiences not only contribute to their personal well-being but also support community resilience by preserving intangible cultural heritage.

Community managers should prioritize inclusive participation by involving local elders as guides, hosts, or mentors in tourism programs. Such involvement enriches authenticity while simultaneously empowering older community members. At the same

time, capacity-building initiatives should ensure local residents have the skills to manage senior-friendly experiences, including training in health awareness and accessible service design (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009).

Heritage managers must also balance conservation with accessibility. While preserving cultural sites is essential, modifications such as ramps, seating areas, and interpretive signage in multiple formats (visual, auditory) make heritage experiences more inclusive for elderly tourists (McKercher & du Cros, 2002).

The broader implication is that community-centered and heritage-based tourism strategies not only enhance elderly tourists' satisfaction and well-being but also sustain cultural identity and strengthen local economies. Social value becomes a bridge between the personal fulfillment of older visitors and the collective benefits of cultural preservation.

5.4 Limitation of the Study and Implications of Future Study

5.4.1 Limitation of the Study

Despite offering significant empirical and theoretical contributions, this study is not without limitations, which must be acknowledged to contextualize the scope and applicability of its findings. These limitations pertain to the theoretical framework, methodological design, sample characteristics, contextual specificity, and measurement constraints.

In terms of theoretical scope, while the study integrates Customer value theory and Involvement Theory, the explanatory power of these frameworks may not fully capture the complexity of older adult tourists' well-being, particularly in culturally embedded and emotionally nuanced tourism experiences (Steptoe et al., 2015). For instance, although the proposed model accounted for cognitive, emotional, functional, and social dimensions of experience, scholarship on wellness and spiritual aspects of leisure suggests additional pathways not explicitly modeled here (Heintzman, 2010; Smith & Kelly, 2006). Potential spiritual, ecological, or intergenerational dimensions—often critical in aging-related tourism experiences—were not explicitly modeled. This may limit the comprehensiveness of the theoretical framework in explaining all pathways to well-being.

The methodological approach—particularly the use of cross-sectional survey data and semi-structured interviews—inherently constrains causal inference and temporal generalizability (Maxwell & Cole, 2007). Although the structural equation modeling

(SEM) provides robust insights into the relationships among constructs, the cross-sectional nature of the data restricts the ability to assess how older adult tourists' well-being evolves before, during, and after travel experiences. Longitudinal or experimental designs could better illuminate the dynamic interplay of satisfaction, involvement, and experiential value over time.

The study's sample composition presents another limitation. The quantitative data were collected exclusively from older adult tourists who had visited wellness destinations in Guizhou Province, China, and the qualitative sample consisted of 24 elderly participants engaged in wellness tourism experiences. While this focus allowed for context-specific depth and cultural sensitivity, it may limit the generalizability of the findings to elderly populations in other regions of China or in cross-cultural tourism contexts. Regional socioeconomic conditions, cultural perceptions of aging, and destination characteristics may vary significantly, influencing the relevance of the study's conclusions elsewhere.

The study relied on self-reported measures for key constructs such as well-being, satisfaction, and perceived value. Although widely accepted in social science study, self-reported data are susceptible to social desirability bias, recall bias, and response tendency—especially among older populations who may exhibit acquiescence or fatigue during questionnaire completion (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This may have influenced the precision of certain observed relationships.

Certain constructs that may influence older adult tourists' well-being—such as health status variability, emotional resilience, or digital competence in travel planning—were not directly observed or included in the model due to measurement constraints or scope limitations. Their omission might have excluded relevant mediators or moderators, potentially influencing the robustness of the findings.

The triangulation strategy, while methodologically sound, could be strengthened by incorporating more diverse data sources—such as ethnographic fieldwork, longitudinal diary studies, or mobile tracking data—to enrich understanding of real-time experiences and post-travel outcomes (Shiffman et al., 2008). Such methods could uncover dimensions of well-being that are less observable in conventional surveys or interviews.

In summary, while the study offers valuable insights into the experiential mechanisms shaping older adult tourists' well-being, its findings should be interpreted within the confines of its theoretical boundaries, methodological choices, and contextual

specificity. These limitations provide critical guidance for future studies aiming to build upon and expand the understanding of aging, tourism, and well-being in more diverse and longitudinal frameworks.Finally, because emotional value showed only indirect contributions, future work should test whether alternative operationalizations (e.g., discrete emotions vs. valenced affect) or nonlinear effects change its direct association with well-being in senior cohorts.

5.4.2 Implications of future study

Building upon the findings and limitations of this study, several avenues for future study are proposed to deepen the understanding of older adult tourists' well-being and to enhance the theoretical and practical contributions of this domain. These implications span theoretical refinement, methodological expansion, and contextual diversification.

While these models proved effective in capturing the experiential pathways influencing well-being, future studies may incorporate complementary perspectives such as self-determination theory, socioemotional selectivity theory, or the salutogenic model of health to account for motivational, temporal, and resilience-related aspects of aging and tourism. These theories could provide a more nuanced understanding of how autonomy, purpose, and emotional regulation contribute to sustained well-being through travel.

Second, the methodological design could be enhanced by adopting longitudinal or panel studies to track changes in well-being over time and across multiple tourism experiences. Such an approach would offer insights into the long-term effects of tourism on elderly individuals'physical, emotional, and social functioning. Additionally, mixed-methods study could be enriched by including ethnographic techniques, mobile experience sampling, or digital diary methods to capture the dynamic and context-dependent nature of experiential value as it unfolds in real time.

Third, the sampling frame should be diversified to include older adult tourists from different geographical regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural settings. Comparative studies involving domestic and international older adult tourists—especially within cross-cultural or multi-destination contexts—could uncover cultural and regional variations in how experience value is perceived and how it contributes to well-being. This would also address the current study's limited generalizability and support the development of globally applicable wellness tourism strategies.

Fourth, future studies should seek to integrate latent contextual factors that were not fully explored in this study but may significantly affect older adult tourists' well-being. These include variables such as health status, emotional resilience, family dynamics, travel frequency, and digital literacy. Understanding how these individual differences moderate the relationships among experience, satisfaction, involvement, and well-being would contribute to the personalization and inclusivity of senior tourism design.

Fifth, additional attention should be given to emerging forms of tourism such as virtual reality tourism, intergenerational travel, or community-based cultural tourism, which are gaining relevance in aging societies. Investigating how these novel formats influence elderly participants' cognitive engagement, social connection, and perceived purpose would provide fresh insights into the evolving landscape of wellness travel.

Finally, future study should aim to translate theoretical insights into intervention-based or design-oriented studies, where tourism experiences are co-created, tested, and evaluated in collaboration with older adults. Such participatory approaches would not only validate theoretical constructs but also promote the practical application of study findings in policy and destination development.

In conclusion, the next generation of studies on older adult tourists' well-being should be theoretically integrative, methodologically innovative, and contextually inclusive. By addressing the gaps identified in this study, future study can significantly contribute to the optimization of age-friendly tourism experiences and the advancement of tourism as a tool for healthy and meaningful aging.

5.5 Conclusion

RO1

The first research objective was to examine the influence of tourism experience values—functional, situational, emotional, and socializing in the well-being of older adult tourists in Guizhou Province. The results confirmed that these values are not equally influential. Functional and situational values exerted the strongest effects, followed by social value, while emotional values showed limited direct influence. This demonstrates that the well-being of older tourists is anchored less in hedonic enjoyment and more in the stability and security provided by accessible environments, quality services, and supportive social contexts.

Functional value was the most significant predictor of well-being. Accessibility, health-supportive infrastructure, safety features, and convenience determined whether older adults could travel with confidence and independence. When these needs were met, participants reported greater physical comfort and psychological reassurance. Situational value, which encompassed the quality-of-service encounters, environmental conditions, and the cultural atmosphere, also strongly influenced well-being. Older adults responded positively to respectful staff, safe natural environments, and well-organized activities, linking these situational features directly to their satisfaction and happiness.

Social value contributed meaningfully but to a lesser extent. Interpersonal connections with family, peers, and local residents enriched the experience and reinforced feelings of belonging and identity. Travel became a relational act, supporting psychological well-being through social bonding and cultural affirmation. Emotional value, by contrast, was not a significant direct predictor of well-being. Although joy, nostalgia, and relaxation were evident, these emotions alone did not sustain long-term well-being unless embedded in functional, situational, or social contexts.

RO2

The second research objective was to investigate the mediating roles of tourist satisfaction and involvement in the relationship between tourism experience values and well-being. The results established that both satisfaction and involvement are essential mechanisms through which values are translated into well-being outcomes.

Satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between functional and situational values and well-being. Older tourists judged their experiences by evaluating whether expectations of accessibility, comfort, and service quality were fulfilled. Once satisfaction was achieved, it contributed directly to enhanced psychological outcomes. Without satisfaction, functional and situational values alone did not translate into well-being, demonstrating that cognitive appraisal was the crucial link between service delivery and personal outcomes.

Involvement mediated the relationship between social value and well-being. Social opportunities, such as cultural exchanges, intergenerational learning, and community interactions, yielded benefits only when tourists were actively engaged. Older adults who participated in workshops, festivals, or collective activities reported deeper psychological investment, which in turn enhanced well-being. This confirms that passive exposure to

social contexts is insufficient; involvement transforms social opportunities into meaningful experiences.

Emotional value indirectly influenced well-being through both satisfaction and involvement. While emotions did not exert a direct effect, they enhanced satisfaction when tourists evaluated the overall journey positively and strengthened involvement when emotions were tied to social or cultural engagement. This layered relationship underscores that emotional experiences are filtered through evaluative and engagement mechanisms before contributing to enduring well-being.

RO3

The third research objective was to explore the implications of community-based tourism (CBT), age-friendly strategies, and cultural immersion for promoting positive ageing among older adult tourists. The findings show that CBT, when combined with age-friendly infrastructure and authentic cultural engagement, is highly effective in enhancing the well-being of senior travelers.

CBT in Guizhou provided opportunities for older adults to interact with ethnic minority communities, participate in cultural workshops, and experience festivals. These activities fostered intergenerational learning and cultural continuity, leading to deeper satisfaction and involvement. Authentic encounters, where tourists engaged in creative participation rather than passive observation, were particularly effective in supporting eudaimonic well-being.

Age-friendly tourism strategies were also critical. Barrier-free infrastructure, health preparedness, and comfort-oriented services allowed older adults to participate confidently and securely. These features directly supported functional and situational values, reinforcing the importance of accessibility and safety as prerequisites for well-being. Their presence aligned with international policy frameworks that emphasize functional ability and enabling environments as foundations for positive ageing.

Cultural immersion added further depth by connecting older tourists to meaningful social and cultural contexts. Engagement in traditional crafts, performances, and community rituals reinforced social value and involvement pathways, which were shown in RO2 to mediate well-being outcomes. By situating travel in authentic cultural spaces, CBT promoted dignity, belonging, and purpose—key elements of positive ageing.

This chapter has critically interpreted and synthesized the study findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of how tourism experience values influence the well-being of older adult tourists in the context of Guizhou Province, China. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative evidence, the study successfully addressed the three core study objectives: to explore the multi-dimensional structure of older adult tourists' experiences, to identify the causal pathways linking experience values and well-being, and to examine the mediating roles of satisfaction and involvement in these relationships.

The qualitative findings revealed that older adult tourists derive well-being from a rich spectrum of emotional, cognitive, social, functional, and cultural experiences. These dimensions were theoretically structured into ten core variables—such as emotional fulfillment, cognitive enrichment, social bonding, and cultural resonance—offering an empirically grounded and context-sensitive framework for understanding wellness tourism among aging populations. The quantitative phase confirmed the robustness of this framework through structural equation modeling, establishing that functional value, situational value, and social value significantly enhance older adult tourists' well-being, both directly and indirectly via satisfaction and involvement. Notably, emotional value showed limited direct influence, suggesting that deeper emotional gratification may be contingent on other experiential dimensions or mediated processes.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Customer Experience Value theory by empirically extending it to the domain of elderly wellness tourism and by identifying emotional, cognitive, and social drivers specific to this demographic. It also refines satisfaction as a key mediator that transforms tourism experiences into well-being outcomes. Furthermore, the study advances Involvement Theory by demonstrating the significant mediating role of personal engagement in the experiential process, particularly in aging contexts where active participation is closely linked to identity maintenance and psychological resilience.

Practically, the study provides actionable insights for tourism destination managers, service providers, wellness program designers, policymakers, marketers, and cultural heritage stewards. It calls for the implementation of inclusive, age-sensitive design strategies that enhance accessibility, emotional security, service personalization, and cultural meaning. These practical implications are grounded in the specific patterns and preferences revealed through empirical data from older tourists in Guizhou, offering a

localized roadmap for improving tourism services and fostering sustainable senior tourism markets.

However, the study acknowledges certain limitations that constrain the generalizability of its findings. The use of a region-specific sample limits the applicability of the results beyond the Guizhou context. Furthermore, the cross-sectional study design precludes causal inference over time, and certain individual variables—such as physical health or previous travel experience—were not fully captured. Future study is encouraged to adopt longitudinal, cross-regional, and multi-method designs to deepen and broaden the understanding of older adult tourists' well-being across diverse cultural and experiential contexts. Theoretically, we offer a contextualized value hierarchy and dual-route mechanism for senior well-being. Methodologically, we show that destination-anchored scale adaptation can recover clean constructs in elderly samples. Practically, we provide a design playbook centered on accessibility, situational fit, and social embedment.

In sum, this study contributes to both academic discourse and practical applications by illuminating how elderly individuals construct, interpret, and benefit from tourism experiences. It confirms that well-being in later life can be enhanced through meaningful travel, especially when designed with experiential richness, social inclusion, and cultural sensitivity in mind. These findings affirm the transformative potential of wellness tourism in promoting healthy aging and offer a scholarly foundation for future innovations in theory, policy, and practice.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire (English Version)

Appendix A. Questionnaire (English Version)



Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship
Of Rajamangala University of Technology, Rattanakosin

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this academic study study. This questionnaire is part of a doctoral dissertation entitled "Travelling Experience Affecting older adult tourists' Well-being: Evidence from Guizhou Province, China." The purpose of this study is to explore how travel experiences in Guizhou Province impact the perceived value, satisfaction, involvement, and overall well-being of older adult tourists.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and all responses will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for academic purposes. There are no right or wrong answers; please answer each question based on your personal experiences and genuine feelings. Your insights are extremely valuable and will contribute significantly to the development of academic study on senior tourism and tourism service improvements.

The questionnaire is divided into three parts:

Part I: Basic demographic information

Part II: Travel expenditure patterns

Part III: Perceptions of travel experiences, satisfaction, involvement, and well-being

Please note that the questionnaire is designed to be completed within approximately 10 minutes. All items in Parts II and III are rated using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Completely Disagree, 7 = Completely Agree).

Thank you again for your valuable contribution.

Part one. Basic information

1. Are you 60 years old or above? (If you are under 60 years old or above, you do not need to fill in the following form.)

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. Have you been to Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village in Guizhou? (If you have never been there, you do not need to fill in the following form)

☐ Yes

☐ No

3. Gender

☐ Male

☐ Female

4. Age

☐ 60–64 years ☐ 65–69 years

☐ 70–74 years ☐ 75–79 years

5. Family Structure

☐ Living alone ☐ Living with spouse only

☐ Living with children ☐ Living with spouse and children

6. Educational Level

☐ Primary school and below ☐ Junior high school

☐ High school or technical secondary school ☐ College diploma

☐ Bachelor's degree ☐ Master's degree and above

7. Monthly Income (RMB)

☐ Below 2,000 yuan ☐ 2,001–4,000 yuan

☐ 4,001–6,000 yuan ☐ 6,001–8,000 yuan

☐ 8,001–10,000 yuan ☐ Above 10,000 yuan

Part two. Travel Expenditure Patterns of older adult tourists

8. Types of Experiential Activities Participated in During Guizhou Tourism (You may select multiple options)

☐ Sightseeing and photography

☐ Hot spring and wellness activities

☐ Cultural and heritage site visits

☐ Rural and eco-tourism experiences

☐ Shopping and leisure activities

☐ Participating in ethnic festivals or local events

9. Main Motivation for Visiting Guizhou

☐ Leisure and relaxation

☐ Health and wellness tourism (e.g., hot springs)

☐ Cultural exploration and learning

☐ Visiting family and friends

☐ Religious or spiritual tourism

10. Typical Duration of Each Trip to Guizhou

☐ 1–2 days ☐ 3–5 days

☐ 6–8 days ☐ 9–12 days

☐ More than 12 days

11. Primary Mode of Transportation to Guizhou

☐ High-speed train ☐ Regular train

☐ Airplane ☐ Long-distance bus or coach

☐ Private car/self-driving ☐ Tour group transportation

12. Average Spending per Person per Trip (RMB)

☐ Below 1,000 yuan ☐ 1,001–3,000 yuan

☐ 3,001–5,000 yuan ☐ 5,001–7,000 yuan

☐ 7,001–10,000 yuan ☐ Above 10,000 yuan

13. Frequency of Travel to Guizhou in the Past Year

☐ Once ☐ 2–3 times

☐ 4–5 times ☐ More than 5 times

14. Primary Source of Travel Expenses

☐ Personal savings

☐ Retirement pension

☐ Financial support from children

15. Preferred Season for Traveling to Guizhou

☐ Spring ☐ Summer

☐ Autumn ☐ Winter

☐ No particular preference

Part three

(1) older adult tourists travel well-being

This scale measures the extent to which older adult tourists perceive psychological and emotional well-being derived from their travel experiences in Guizhou. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 =

Somewhat Disagree and 4 = Neutral (Neither agree nor disagree); 5 = Somewhat Agree; 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly Agree.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Travelling to Guizhou makes me feel involuntarily happy.							
When choosing a trip to Guizhou, I always consider whether it will be enjoyable.							
I like Guizhou tourism experiences that stimulate my senses.							
I think a satisfying Guizhou tourism experience is one that makes me happy.							
A pleasant Guizhou tourism experience always makes time go by quickly.							
When choosing a tour in Guizhou, I always consider whether I will immerse myself in it.							
During my travels in Guizhou, I was rarely distracted by what was going on around me.							
Tourism activities for the aged in Guizhou are of high value.							
Travelling in Guizhou can give me continuous meaning in life.							
I have a responsibility to make senior tourism in Guizhou better.							

(2) Satisfaction of older adult tourists

This scale measures the overall satisfaction of older adult tourists with their travel experiences in Guizhou, including emotional fulfillment, perceived decision quality, needs satisfaction, and general evaluation of senior tourism services. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Disagree and 4 = Neutral (Neither agree nor disagree); 5 = Somewhat Agree; 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly Agree.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Traveling in Guizhou makes me very happy							
12. Traveling in Guizhou is a wise choice							
13. Senior tourism in Guizhou meets my travel needs							
14. I am generally satisfied with senior tourism in Guizhou.							

(3) Tourism involvement

This scale measures the degree of personal significance, social connection, financial and temporal commitment, and emotional importance that older adult tourists attribute to their travel experiences in Guizhou.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Travelling in Guizhou is an indispensable activity in my life							
16. I made a lot of friends during my Guizhou tourism.							
17. I like to spend money on Guizhou tourism.							
18. Traveling in Guizhou makes me feel important							
19. I travel a lot to Guizhou							
20. I like to spend time traveling in Guizhou.							

(4) Senior Tourist Experience Value

This scale assesses older adult tourists' perceptions of the functional, situational, emotional, and social value derived from their travel experiences in Guizhou, focusing on accessibility, infrastructure, environmental quality, sensory enjoyment, emotional fulfillment, cultural immersion, and social interactions.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. Guizhou, like Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village, is easily accessible							
22. Guizhou tourism destination planning and design layout is reasonable							

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. Guizhou, like Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village has perfect infrastructure							
24. Guizhou, like Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village has perfect service facilities							
25.The environment of Guizhou, like Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village is harmonious.							
26.Travelling in Guizhou allows me to see, hear, smell, taste and other sensory enjoyment							
27.The theme of the Guizhou, like Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village is distinctive							
28. Guizhou, like Huangguoshu Waterfall, Shiqian Hot Spring Group, Libo Zhangjiang Scenic Area, and Xijiang Qianhu Miao Village is attractive							
29. Traveling in Guizhou makes me happy							
30. Traveling in Guizhou makes me forget my worries and stress for a while							
31. Traveling in Guizhou makes me feel close							
32. During the tour, I felt the local customs of the Guizhou.							
33. Local residents and tourists in Guizhou interact with me in a friendly way							
34. I have fond memories of travels in Guizhou.							

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Your responses will provide important insights into the relationship between older adult tourists' travel experiences in Guizhou and their well-being. The findings will not

only contribute to academic study but also offer practical recommendations for enhancing tourism services tailored to elderly travelers.

We sincerely appreciate your participation and support in advancing knowledge in this important field.



APPENDIX B

Questionnaire (Chinese Version)

Appendix B. Questionnaire (Chinese Version)

拉达那哥欣国际创意创业学院

拉加曼加拉理工大学拉达那科欣

尊敬的参与者：

感谢您抽出时间参与本次学术研究。本问卷是博士论文《旅行体验对老年游客福祉的影响：来自中国贵州省的证据》的一部分。本研究旨在探讨贵州省的旅行体验如何影响老年游客的感知价值、满意度、参与度和整体福祉。

您的参与完全自愿，所有回复将严格保密，仅用于学术研究。答案没有对错之分；请根据您的个人经历和真实感受作答。您的见解非常宝贵，将对老年旅游学术研究的发展和旅游服务改进做出重要贡献。

问卷分为三个部分：

第一部分：基本人口统计信息

第二部分：旅行支出模式

第三部分：对旅行体验、满意度、参与度和福祉的感知

请注意，本问卷大约需要在 10 分钟内完成。第二部分和第三部分的所有项目均采用 7 点李克特量表进行评分（1 = 完全不同意，7 = 完全同意）。

再次感谢您的宝贵贡献。

第一部分 基本信息

1. 您是否年满 60 周岁？（未满 60 周岁无需填写下表。）

☐ 是

☐ 否

2. 您是否去过贵州黄果树瀑布、石阡温泉群、荔波樟江风景区、西江千户苗寨？（如果您从未去过，则无需填写以下表格）

☐ 是

☐ 否

3. 性别

☐ 男

☐ 女

4. 年龄

☐ 60-64 岁　　☐ 65-69 岁

☐ 70-74 岁　　☐ 75-79 岁

5. 家庭结构

☐ 独居　　☐ 仅与配偶同住

☐ 与子女同住　　☐ 与配偶和子女同住

6. 受教育程度

☐ 小学及以下　　☐ 初中

☐ 高中或中专　　☐ 大学专科

☐ 学士学位　　☐ 硕士及以上

7. 月收入（人民币）

☐ 2000 元以下　　☐ 2001-4000 元

☐ 4001-6000 元　　☐ 6001-8000 元

☐ 8001-10000 元　　☐ 10000 元以上

第二部分老年游客的旅游支出模式

8.贵州旅游体验活动类型（可多选）

☐ 观光摄影　　☐ 温泉养生

☐ 文化遗址参观　　☐ 乡村生态旅游体验

☐ 购物休闲　　☐ 参加民族节日或当地活动

9.前往贵州的主要动机

☐ 休闲放松　　☐ 康养旅游（例如温泉）

☐ 文化探索与学习　　☐ 探亲访友

☐ 宗教或精神旅游

10.每次前往贵州的典型时长

☐ 1-2 天　　☐ 3-5 天

☐ 6-8 天　　☐ 9-12 天

☐ 12 天以上

11.前往贵州的主要交通方式

☐ 高速火车　　☐ 普通火车

☐ 飞机　　☐ 长途汽车或长途客车

☐ 私家车/自驾　　☐ 旅行团交通

12.人均单次出行花费（元）

☐ 1000 元以下　　☐ 1001-3000 元

☐ 3001-5000 元　　☐ 5001-7000 元

☐ 7001-10000 元　　☐ 10000 元以上

13.过去一年来贵州旅游的次数

☐ 1 次　　☐ 2-3 次

☐ 4-5 次　　☐ 5 次以上

14.旅行支出的主要来源

☐ 个人储蓄

☐ 退休金

☐ 子女资助

15.来贵州旅游的首选季节

☐ 春季　　☐ 夏季

☐ 秋季　　☐ 冬季

☐ 无特别偏好

第三部分

（1）老年游客旅游幸福感

本量表旨在衡量老年游客对贵州旅游经历所带来的心理和情感幸福感的感受程度。所有条目均采用 7 点李克特量表进行测量，其中 1 = 强烈不同意，2 =不同意，3 = 稍微不同意，4 = 中立（既不同意也不反对）；5 = 稍微同意；6 =同意，7 = 强烈同意。

项目	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
去贵州旅行让我感到由衷的快乐。							
选择贵州之旅时，我总是会考虑它是否会令人愉快。							
我喜欢那些能刺激感官的贵州旅游体验。							
我认为令人满意的贵州旅游体验是让我感到快乐的体验。							
愉快的贵州旅游体验总是让人感觉时间过得很快。							
选择贵州旅游时，我总是会考虑自己是否会沉浸其中。							
在贵州旅行期间，我很少被周围的事物所干扰。							

项目	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
贵州的老年旅游活动非常有价值。							
在贵州旅行能让我的生活充满意义。							
我有责任让贵州的老年旅游变得更好。							

（2）老年游客满意度

本量表旨在衡量老年游客对贵州旅游体验的总体满意度，包括情感满足度、感知决策质量、需求满足度以及对老年旅游服务的总体评价。所有条目均采用 7 点李克特量表进行测量，其中 1=强烈不同意，2=不同意，3=稍微不同意，4=中立（既不同意也不反对）；5=稍微同意；6=同意，7=非常同意。

项目	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.贵州旅游让我很开心							
12.贵州旅游是一个明智的选择							
13.贵州老年旅游满足我的旅行需求							
14.我对贵州老年旅游总体满意。							

（3）旅游参与度

本量表衡量老年游客对贵州旅游经历的个人重要性、社会联系、经济和时间投入以及情感重视程度

项目	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.去贵州旅游是我生活中不可或缺的活动。							
16.我在贵州旅游期间结识了很多朋友。							
17.我喜欢在贵州旅游上花钱。							
18.在贵州旅游让我感到自己很重要。							
19.我经常去贵州旅游。							
20.我喜欢花时间在贵州旅游。							

（4）老年游客体验价值

本量表评估老年游客对其在贵州旅游体验的功能性、情境性、情感性和社会性价值的感知，重点关注可达性、基础设施、环境质量、感官享受、情感满足、文化沉浸和社会互动。

项目	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21、贵州黄果树瀑布、石阡温泉群、荔波樟江风景区、西江千户苗寨等交通便利							
22.贵州旅游目的地规划设计布局合理							
23、贵州黄果树瀑布、石阡温泉群、荔波张江风景区、西江千户苗寨等基础设施完善							
24、贵州黄果树瀑布、石阡温泉群、荔波张江风景区、西江千户苗寨等服务设施完善							
25、贵州黄果树瀑布、石阡温泉群、荔波樟江风景区、西江千户苗寨等环境和谐。							
26.在贵州旅行，我得到了视觉、听觉、嗅觉、味觉等感官的享受。							
27.贵州的主题景点，如黄果树瀑布、石阡温泉群、荔波樟江风景区、西江千户苗寨等，都很有特色。							
28.贵州的景点，如黄果树瀑布、石阡温泉群、荔波樟江风景区、西江千户苗寨等，都很有吸引力。							
29.在贵州旅行让我感到快乐。							
30.在贵州旅行让我暂时忘却烦恼和压力。							
31.在贵州旅行让我感到亲近。							
32.在旅途中，我感受到了贵州的风土人情。							
33.贵州当地居民和游客与我互动很友好。							
34.在贵州旅行，我留下了美好的回忆。							

感谢您完成这份问卷。

您的回答将为老年游客在贵州的旅行体验与其幸福感之间的关系提供重要的见解。调查结果不仅有助于学术研究，还能为提升老年游客的个性化旅游服务提供切实可行的建议。

我们衷心感谢您的参与和支持，以推动这一重要领域的研究发展。

APPENDIX C

Stakeholders' Interview Questions (English Version)

APPENDIX C. Stakeholders' Interview Questions (English Version)

Interview questions for older adult tourists	Interview questions for tourism destination operators	Interview questions for Managers of tourism enterprises
1.Can you recall and narrate your travel experience for this trip?	1. What is the proportion of older adult tourists among the total number of visitors in your tourist destination? What are the distinctive characteristics of their travel needs?	1. Please provide an introduction to your tourism enterprise, including its name, type, and scale.
2.What was your motivation for choosing this trip?	2. Have you implemented any measures within the tourist area to cater to the needs of older adult tourists? For example, providing convenience facilities, accessible pathways, etc.	2. What do you consider to be the main trends in the current elderly tourism market?
3.Please describe your feelings, emotions, and sentiments after the conclusion of the trip.	3.older adult tourists might have health-related concerns. How do you address these concerns?	3. In your opinion, what are the primary factors that older adult tourists prioritize when choosing travel destinations and experiences?
4.Which tourism activities left a deep impression on you?	4.How do you provide information about the tourist destination to senior visitors? Do you have customized communication channels for them?	4. Does your enterprise offer specialized tourism products or services designed specifically for older adult tourists? If so, could you discuss the motivations and strategies behind this development?

Interview questions for older adult tourists	Interview questions for tourism destination operators	Interview questions for Managers of tourism enterprises
5.What factors do you think could influence your travel experience?	5. Have you arranged any relaxed and enjoyable activities for older adult tourists during their travel? Are these activities well-received?	5. When designing tourism products and services for elderly travelers, how do you consider and accommodate their specific needs and preferences?
6.What kind of experiences and feelings do you expect elderly tourism to bring you?	6. Have you taken into consideration the economic situation of older adult tourists in your pricing policy? Do you offer any discounts or special pricing for them?	6. Have your staff members received training regarding the needs and interactions with older adult tourists while providing services?
7.What was the most significant takeaway for you from the travel activities?	7. How do you gather feedback and opinions from older adult tourists? What kind of improvements have you implemented based on their feedback?	7. Does your enterprise collaborate with other institutions, communities, or organizations to provide improved services for older adult tourists? How have you established and maintained these partnerships?
8.Did senior tourism meet your expectations? Why or why not?	8. What are your predictions for the future trends in senior tourism? Do you have plans to further expand services and activities tailored to older adult tourists?	8. What are your expectations for the future development of the elderly tourism market? Does your enterprise have plans to expand its elderly tourism services?

APPENDIX D

Stakeholders' Interview Questions (Chinese Version)

APPENDIX D. Stakeholders' Interview Questions (Chinese Version)

老年游客访谈问题	旅游目的地运营者访谈问题	旅游企业管理人员访谈问题
1.您能回忆并讲述一下您这次旅行的体验吗？	1.您的旅游目的地老年游客占游客总数的多少？他们的旅游需求有哪些显著特点？	1.请介绍一下您的旅游企业，包括其名称、类型和规模。
2.您选择这次旅行的动机是什么？	2.您在旅游区内是否采取了哪些措施来满足老年游客的需求？例如，提供便利设施、无障碍通道等。	2.您认为当前老年旅游市场的主要趋势是什么？
3.请描述您在旅行结束后的感受、情绪和感受。	3.老年游客可能会有健康方面的顾虑，您是如何解决这些问题的？	3.您认为老年游客在选择旅游目的地和体验时，主要考虑哪些因素？
4.哪些旅游活动给您留下了深刻的印象？	4.您如何向老年游客提供旅游目的地的信息？是否有专门为他们定制的沟通渠道？	4.您的企业是否提供专门针对老年游客设计的旅游产品或服务？如果有，请您谈谈背后的动机和策略？
5.您认为哪些因素会影响您的旅行体验？	5.您在旅行中是否为老年游客安排了轻松愉快的活动？这些活动是否受到欢迎？	5.在为老年游客设计旅游产品和服务时，您如何考虑并满足他们的特殊需求和偏好？
6.您希望老年旅游能给您带来什么样的体验和感受？	6.您的定价政策是否考虑了老年游客的经济状况？您是否为他们提供折扣或特价？	6.您的员工在提供服务时是否接受过有关老年游客需求和互动方式的培训？
7.您从旅行活动中获得的最大收获是什么？	7.您如何收集老年游客的反馈和意见？根据他们的反馈，您实施了哪些改进？	7.您的企业是否与其他机构、社区或组织合作，为老年游客提供更好的服务？您是如何建立和维持这些合作关系的？

老年游客访谈问题	旅游目的地运营者访谈问题	旅游企业管理人员访谈问题
8.老年旅游是否达到了您的预期？为什么？	8.您对老年旅游的未来趋势有何预测？您是否计划进一步扩展针对老年游客的服务和活动？	8.您对老年旅游市场未来的发展有何预期？您的企业是否有计划扩展老年旅游服务？

APPENDIX E

Publication of Journal during Ph.D. Study

APPENDIX E. Publication of Journal during Ph.D. Study

JOURNAL OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Tourism Experience Value Shaping Older Adults Tourists' Well-being: Qualitative Insights from Guizhou Province, China

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ABSTRACT

Population aging is profoundly reshaping global societies, intensifying the need to promote healthy aging and enhance older adults' well-being through leisure and travel experiences that address emotional, cognitive, social, and practical needs. This study explores the multidimensional structure of experiential value as perceived by older tourists during well-being-oriented travel. Data were collected through 24 semi-structured interviews with older individuals who had participated in relevant tourism activities in Guizhou province. Guided by grounded theory, this research developes a conceptual model comprising four core value dimensions—emotional, cognitive, social, and functional—and ten refined variables. These variables illustrate how older tourists construct well-being through interrelated affective, intellectual, relational, and practical experiences. Sentiment analysis further revealed that most experiential keywords were positively valenced, underscoring the affective benefits of such travel. The study contributes theoretically by extending experiential value theory to aging-specific contexts and incorporating cultural resonance within existing dimensions, while offering practical guidance for designing emotionally supportive, cognitively enriching, socially inclusive, and functionally accessible travel experiences tailored to older populations.

Keywords: Cognitive Experience; Cultural Resonance; Emotional Experience; Experiential Value; Grounded Theory; Older Tourism; Wellness Travel

INTRODUCTION

Population aging has become a defining demographic trend of the 21st century, profoundly reshaping societies and economies worldwide. According to the United Nations World Population Ageing Report (2023), the global population aged 65 and older is expected to double from 761 million in 2021 to over 1.6 billion by 2050, accounting for nearly 17% of the world's total (Gölçek, 2025). China, in particular, faces an accelerated trajectory of aging. Data from China's seventh national census (2020) indicate that the number of people aged 60 and above has reached 264 million, representing 18.7% of the total population, with projections suggesting this proportion will surpass 30% by 2050 (Bao et al., 2022). This demographic shift highlights the urgent need to promote healthy aging and to develop services that support the physical, emotional, and social well-being of the older.

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Against this backdrop, the pursuit of well-being in later life has emerged as a critical agenda in both academic and policy discourse. Unlike purely biomedical approaches that emphasize disease prevention or physical decline, contemporary frameworks of aging—such as active aging, healthy aging, and successful aging—underscore the importance of enabling older adults to lead fulfilling, meaningful, and socially integrated lives (Gadhave et al., 2024; Suwankhong & Liamputtong, 2025). Well-being, therefore, is no longer narrowly construed as the absence of illness, but as a multidimensional state encompassing emotional vitality, cognitive engagement, relational connectedness, and existential purpose (Ryff, 2021). This reorientation reflects a broader paradigm shift in gerontology and public health that recognizes aging as a dynamic life phase with unique opportunities for personal development and social contribution. As such, exploring how older individuals construct and experience well-being—particularly through leisure and travel—has become a pressing research imperative with profound theoretical and practical implications.

Tourism, has been increasingly recognized as an important avenue for addressing these challenges. Tourism contributes to well-being by fulfilling psychological, emotional, and social needs—dimensions that constitute core components of subjective well-being (Liang et al., 2021). For older adults in particular, tourism facilitates positive affect, life satisfaction, and social connectedness, which are widely recognized as key indicators of enhanced well-being.The "Healthy China 2030" blueprint emphasizes the promotion of health-related leisure activities and the construction of wellness tourism destinations, aiming to expand older-focused services within the broader health industry, which is projected to reach 16 trillion yuan (approximately 2.5 trillion USD) by 2030 (Ning et al., 2024; Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023).

Parallel to this, the "National Fitness Program (2021–2025)" encourages the integration of physical activity, leisure travel, and preventive health care, particularly targeting the aging population. Market evidence supports these policy initiatives: according to the China Tourism Academy (2023), older tourists accounted for 22.3% of domestic tourism trips and contributed approximately 28.5% of total tourism revenue in 2022 (Ye et al., 2023). Furthermore, a survey by Ctrip (2023) reported that wellness-themed travel products targeting seniors saw a 58% year-on-year growth, reflecting rising demand for experiences that combine relaxation, cultural immersion, and health preservation. Despite strong policy support and promising market momentum, many tourism practices aimed at older adults remain insufficient in addressing their holistic well-being (Hu et al., 2023). Current travel designs often emphasize physical itineraries or generic group arrangements, while neglecting the nuanced emotional, cognitive, and relational dimensions that constitute older individuals' lived experiences of happiness. As a result, the deeper experiential processes through which well-being is meaningfully constructed—such as emotional resonance, cultural identity affirmation, and intersubjective connection—remain largely unexplored in mainstream tourism offerings (Chen & Hsu, 2024; Zhang & and Xiao).

Guizhou Province, China, offers an ideal context for investigating how tourism experiences shape older adults' well-being. Beyond its rich ecological landscapes and ethnic diversity, Guizhou has been actively promoted as a key destination under national strategies such as "All-for-One Tourism" and "Beautiful China," with a strong emphasis on inclusive and human-centered tourism development (Yin et al., 2024). In 2022 alone, the province welcomed over 744 million domestic tourists, reflecting its growing appeal among diverse demographic groups, including older travelers seeking emotional satisfaction, cultural immersion, and social connection.To support well-being-oriented tourism for aging populations, Guizhou has implemented a range of senior-friendly initiatives. For example, major sites such as Huangguoshu Waterfall and Qingyan Ancient Town have integrated barrier-free design, shuttle systems, and rest stations to enhance comfort and accessibility. Cultural heritage villages host intergenerational storytelling activities, traditional music performances, and hands-on craft workshops that foster emotional resonance and self-identity. Additionally, community-based slow travel programs promote reflective experiences through nature walking trails, folk rituals, and participatory festivals. These efforts collectively provide fertile ground for exploring the emotional, cognitive, social, and existential dimensions of well-being that this study aims to conceptualize.

While tourism's contribution to subjective well-being has gained increasing scholarly attention, most empirical studies focus primarily on general indicators such as life satisfaction, perceived health, and emotional positivity (Filep & Deery, 2010; Nawijn et al., 2010). These studies demonstrate that travel enhances psychological well-being by offering opportunities for relaxation, emotional renewal, and temporary escape from daily routines. For instance, Sirgy et al. (2010) developed a tourism satisfaction–well-being model linking travel-related affect and satisfaction to life satisfaction, while Kim et al. (2015) found that restorative and social components of travel are significant predictors of happiness among older tourists. However, these outcome-based models often treat well-being as a post-trip evaluative state and fail to capture the dynamic, processual nature through which well-being is constructed during travel.

Recent literature has begun to explore affective, cognitive, and relational mechanisms that mediate tourism's impact on well-being (Voigt et al., 2011), yet these frameworks remain fragmented. Research frequently privileges short-term emotional gain or health benefits, while overlooking dimensions such as cultural resonance, personal

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growth, existential reflection, or identity continuity—elements especially relevant for older adults. Furthermore, relatively few studies have adapted experiential value theory to systematically analyze how these multidimensional travel experiences translate into enduring well-being for aging populations (Huang et al., 2023). This study addresses this gap by proposing an integrated framework that accounts for the emotional, cognitive, social, functional, and cultural dimensions shaping older travelers' well-being trajectories.

Older tourists constitute a significant and growing proportion of this influx, making Guizhou an important microcosm for understanding the intersection of wellness travel and older well-being. Hence, this study seeks to conceptulize the framework of experience values that shape older tourists' sense of well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism for Well-Being

Well-being has emerged as a pivotal construct in psychology, sociology, and public health, encompassing both subjective and objective dimensions of human flourishing. The concept is often operationalized through the lens of subjective well-being (SWB), which comprises three interrelated components: the presence of positive emotions, the absence of negative emotions, and the overall evaluation of life satisfaction (Proctor, 2023). In parallel, psychological well-being (PWB), as proposed by Ryff (1989), emphasizes self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and positive relationships. These conceptualizations have become foundational for evaluating how various life domains, including leisure and tourism, contribute to individual well-being. In the context of an aging population, well-being extends beyond physical health to include psychological fulfillment, social integration, and existential meaning, all of which are particularly relevant to older adults seeking quality of life in later stages of life.

Tourism has been increasingly acknowledged as a significant contributor to well-being, providing opportunities for emotional renewal, cognitive stimulation, social engagement, and self-actualization. Unlike routine consumption activities, tourism is inherently immersive and transformative, offering individuals the chance to escape from daily stressors and re-engage with personal values and aspirations. Empirical studies have shown that participation in tourism is positively associated with increased life satisfaction, heightened positive affect, and reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression (Filep & Deery, 2010; Nawijn et al., 2010). Moreover, tourism fosters interpersonal connections and community belonging, thereby addressing the relational dimension of well-being. These effects are particularly salient in health-related or wellness-oriented tourism, where the integration of physical rejuvenation, mental restoration, and cultural enrichment enhances holistic health outcomes.

For older adults, tourism plays an even more crucial role in fostering well-being, as it compensates for age-related social losses and psychological vulnerabilities. Research has demonstrated that tourism participation among older individuals enhances their emotional vitality, reduces perceived isolation, and contributes to a renewed sense of purpose (Kim et al., 2015). Wellness tourism, in particular, aligns with older adults' aspirations for healthy aging by combining restorative practices with opportunities for self-discovery and social inclusion. However, existing studies often adopt a simplified, outcome-driven perspective, focusing on happiness levels or health indicators, while overlooking the deeper experiential processes through which tourism generates well-being (Yun et al., 2025). They tend to treat well-being as a static end state rather than a dynamic process shaped by emotional, cognitive, and social experiences during travel. Moreover, the unique needs of older adults—such as their emotional sensitivity, desire for cultural resonance, and pursuit of intergenerational connection—remain underexplored in tourism well-being literature (Wang et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

By employing a grounded theory approach, this research moves beyond mere outcome measurement to explore how older tourists construct, internalize, and reflect upon their experiences to derive meaning and satisfaction. In doing so, it responds to the need for a more nuanced theoretical framework that captures the affective, relational, and existential dimensions of well-being within tourism, especially in aging-specific contexts. This perspective not only enriches the understanding of the tourism–well-being nexus but also lays the foundation for designing more inclusive, emotionally responsive, and culturally embedded wellness tourism offerings.

Experiential Values in Tourism

Experiential value, originally formulated within the broader field of consumption studies, offers a framework for capturing the multifaceted ways in which individuals perceive benefits and meaning from their interactions with products, services, and environments (Holbrook, 1999; Mathwick et al., 2001). Experiential value as the subjective perception of appreciation arising from consumption experiences, emphasizing that value is phenomenological, relational, and contextual rather than inherent in the product or service itself. Experiential value

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is categorized into intrinsic versus extrinsic, self-oriented versus other-oriented dimensions, resulting in various value types such as emotional, epistemic, social, and functional value (Gilliland, 2021; Kim et al., 2025).

Table 1. Experiential Value Framework Summary

Variable	Definition	Recent Research Evidence
Emotional Value	Emotional value refers to the affective states generated through consumption experiences, such as joy, comfort, or emotional resonance (Holbrook, 1999; Sánchez et al., 2006).	Shi et al. (2025) used physiological measures to show emotional spatial design enhances user calmness; Nguyen and Nguyen (2025) found emotional value mediates social media influencers' impact on second-hand luxury purchases; Reisi and Ghoddousi (2025) linked emotional intelligence to perceived emotional value and job satisfaction.
Epistemic Value	Epistemic value denotes the consumer's pursuit of knowledge, novelty, and intellectual stimulation through new experiences (Holbrook, 1999; Mathwick et al., 2001).	Paul and Roy (2025) showed epistemic value drives ecotourism participation; Campolo (2025) critiqued the epistemic priority in AI benchmarking; Wiśniewski (2004) framed Socratic proofs as epistemic value generators in logical discourse.
Social Value	Social value captures the benefits individuals receive from social approval, relational enhancement, or community affiliation (Holbrook, 1999; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).	Lo Presti and Maggiore (2025) explored bloggers' co-creation of social value via media networks; Ouédraogo et al. (2025) found urban forests foster health and cultural continuity; van Van Vliet et al. (2025) developed a communicative ethics model enhancing equity and social value in end-of-life care.
Functional Value	Functional value reflects the utilitarian and performance-related benefits perceived by consumers in terms of efficiency, usability, or reliability (Sánchez et al., 2006; Sheth et al., 1991).	Sun et al. (2025) demonstrated high emulsification and solubility in plant proteins as industrial functional value; Zhang et al. (2025) proved medicinal biopolymers reduce inflammation in mice; Hou et al. (2025) showed deep-learning-enhanced sensors offer significant functional value in gas detection.

The application of experiential value to tourism has evolved alongside a broader shift from viewing travel as a transactional, service-based activity to recognizing it as an immersive and meaning-rich process. Tourists increasingly engage in experiences that involve emotional, sensory, cognitive, and social dimensions, reflecting a deepening demand for personalization and authenticity (Zatori et al., 2018). As such, constructs like aesthetic appreciation, escapism, and self-actualization have gained prominence within tourism studies (Hosany & Gilbert, 2009; Williams & Soutar, 2009), signaling a move beyond satisfaction or loyalty toward investigating how value is constructed rather than merely received.

However, current experiential value research sometimes lacks contextual sensitivity when addressing diverse traveler segments, including older tourists, family groups, solo explorers, or digital nomads. For instance, older tourists may exhibit distinct patterns of value perception influenced by accumulated life experience, shifting motivations, and changing social dynamics (Hsu et al., 2007). Although some studies have explored how emotional, cognitive, and social elements of value intersect within specific tourism contexts, further investigation is warranted to clarify how these experiential dimensions interact across diverse settings, rather than concentrating solely on wellness or niche markets (Gössling et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2019). Broadening the scope of research will allow a more nuanced understanding of how travelers—regardless of demographic—construct, interpret, and derive value from tourism.

Tourists' Experiences value and Well-being

As populations age, tourism is increasingly valued not only as a form of recreation but also as a meaningful experiential activity that can enhance emotional, cognitive, and relational dimensions of well-being. A growing body of research explores how diverse dimensions of tourists' experiences contribute to physical, psychological, and social outcomes (Liu et al., 2024; Volo, 2021). Older tourists, in particular, have been shown to benefit from tourism participation through improved vitality, enhanced life satisfaction, reduced isolation, and strengthened self-identity. These findings highlight how travel-related experiences offer a platform for generating well-being outcomes that are closely tied to the ways tourists interpret, internalize, and value their experiential interactions (Hao et al., 2025; Sie et al., 2021).

Much of the existing literature, however, tends to operationalize the relationship between tourism and well-being using outcome-centric measures—such as life satisfaction, perceived health, or resilience—without fully accounting for the richness and subjectivity of the experiential value process itself (Shipp & Jansen, 2021). Such linear conceptualizations risk overlooking how tourists derive well-being through multi-dimensional, ongoing

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engagement with their environment, companions, and self-perceptions. As Sirgy et al. (2010) suggest, the dynamic interplay between emotional arousal, cognitive stimulation, and social connection is central to understanding how value is constructed within the tourism experience.

Within this framework, it becomes essential to move beyond simplified input-output models and attend instead to how specific experiential value dimensions—emotional, epistemic, social, and functional—interact to shape tourists' well-being trajectories. While studies have acknowledged the influence of affective, cognitive, and relational factors (Voigt et al., 2011), there remains limited investigation into how these factors are activated, evolve, and intersect during the course of the travel experience. For instance, the role of emotional value in enhancing mood states, epistemic value in stimulating curiosity, or social value in reinforcing identity and belonging are often discussed in isolation but not synthesized in relation to their collective impact on well-being (Kashdan et al., 2018).

Moreover, the ways in which different tourists perceive and prioritize experiential value are far from uniform. Older travelers, for example, may seek emotional resonance, intergenerational connection, or nostalgic meaning, but such preferences vary according to health status, cultural background, and life history (Wang et al., 2023). Existing research too often applies generalized models developed for broader consumer groups, without adapting the experiential value framework to accommodate diverse motivations and capacities (Laukkanen & Tura, 2022; Riar et al., 2022). To capture the full spectrum of tourists' experience-based well-being, future research should focus more explicitly on how experiential value dimensions are internalized, integrated, and transformed into personally meaningful outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research design follows an exploratory qualitative framework, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection technique. Semi-structured interviews offer a balance between consistency across participants and the flexibility to probe deeply into emerging themes (Sankar & Jones, 2007). The interview guide was structured around key dimensions of experiential value—emotional, cognitive, social, and functional—while allowing participants to freely narrate their personal experiences, reflections, and meanings associated with wellness travel.

The key information providers for this qualitative study comprise 8 olderly tourists with at least 2 prior experiences of traveling in Guizhou, 8 tourism destination operators, and 8 managers from tourism enterprises in Guizhou.To facilitate traceability during data analysis, the three respondent groups were coded as follows: olderly tourists were assigned identifiers E1 to E8, tourism destination operators were labeled D1 to D8, and tourism enterprise managers were coded M1 to M8. These codes were consistently used throughout the coding and analysis phases to maintain source clarity and ensure analytical rigor.Sample size determination adhered to the principle of theoretical saturation—the point at which no new significant themes or variations emerged from the data (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). After conducting 24 interviews, it was determined that theoretical saturation had been achieved, as subsequent interviews consistently reiterated previously identified experiential dimensions without contributing substantively novel insights.

The data collection process involved scheduling individual interviews at locations convenient for participants, such as community centers, cafes, or via secure online platforms when necessary. Each interview lasted between 45 to 90 minutes, depending on participant willingness and depth of responses. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and supplemented by field notes capturing contextual observations and initial analytical reflections. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy, and data were managed securely with strict adherence to confidentiality and privacy protection protocols.

Interview Protocol Design

Drawing upon Holbrook (1999)'s experiential value theory, the interview framework encompasses four major dimensions: emotional value, cognitive value, social value, and functional value. This theoretical foundation reflects the understanding that experiential value is a multifaceted and dynamic construct, shaped by affective, cognitive, relational, and practical aspects of consumer experiences. The detailed organization of the interview topics and corresponding questions is presented in Appendix 1.

Following the data collection, all interview transcripts were subjected to grounded theory analysis using a three-phase coding strategy: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin, 2021).

Data Analysis

This analytical approach facilitated the systematic identification, categorization, and integration of themes embedded within participants' narratives. NVivo software was employed to assist with data management and

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coding consistency. The iterative process of constant comparison ensured that emergent codes were grounded in participants' language, and that conceptual categories were refined through progressive abstraction. This rigorous methodology enabled the development of a conceptual model that accurately reflects the multi-dimensional structure of experiential value in wellness tourism among older adults.Grounded theory was selected as the analytical foundation due to its capacity to inductively generate theoretical insights from rich, contextualized qualitative data. In this study, grounded theory facilitated a bottom-up construction of meaning, enabling researchers to move from concrete participant narratives to abstract conceptual categories through iterative constant comparison. The process involved identifying recurring expressions (open coding), grouping them into higher-order concepts (axial coding), and refining them into a core set of variables and dimensions (selective coding) that reflect the experiential pathways through which older adults construct well-being during tourism. This approach aligns with the exploratory nature of the research and supports the development of an empirically grounded framework rather than imposing pre-existing theoretical structures.

RESULTS

Descriptive Overview of the Coding Data

A total of 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study, yielding approximately 116,000 words of transcribed text. From these transcripts, 452 discrete meaning units were identified as relevant for initial analysis. Through line-by-line open coding, a total of 178 open codes were extracted across the four primary dimensions—emotional, cognitive, social, and functional. These codes were subsequently organized into 20 refined thematic categories. The coding process also resulted in the identification of over 200 recurring keywords or phrases, which served as conceptual indicators of participants' experiences and values. This descriptive overview provides the empirical basis for the multi-dimensional coding structure that follows in the subsequent sections.

Open Coding

Open coding represents the first stage of grounded theory data analysis, focusing on the identification, conceptualization, and categorization of discrete phenomena emerging from raw qualitative data (Corbin, 2021). During this phase, interview transcripts are examined systematically and inductively, with researchers assigning conceptual labels—or codes—to distinct segments of data that encapsulate meaningful experiences, emotions, reflections, or actions described by participants. Open coding aims to fracture the data, allowing the emergence of initial analytic categories while remaining as close as possible to the participants' original language and perspectives.

In this study, open coding was conducted through a line-by-line and incident-by-incident review of 24 semi-structured interview transcripts. After initial coding, a process of conceptual consolidation was undertaken, during which synonymous or closely related codes were grouped under broader thematic labels. This refinement resulted in a structured set of approximately 20 core themes, each encompassing a range of related open codes. These themes represent the multi-dimensional aspects of older tourists' experiential constructions, encompassing emotional, cognitive, social, and functional domains.

The detailed organization of the open coding results is presented in Table 2. This table systematically outlines each refined theme alongside the specific open codes extracted from participants' narratives. By presenting the coding structure in this way, the study provides transparency into how raw qualitative data were systematically transformed into meaningful analytic categories, laying the empirical foundation for subsequent axial and selective coding processes.

Table 2. Open the coding table

Refined Theme	Extracted Open Codes (Keywords/Phrases)
Feeling of Emotional Fulfillment	Feeling peaceful (**E2**), Emotional relaxation (**E2**), Joyful experiences (**E6**), Sense of happiness (**D3**), Inner contentment (**E6**), Emotional satisfaction (**E2**), Harmony with nature (**E7**), Tranquility (**E6**), Feeling blessed (**E3**), Emotional revitalization (**E6**), Emotional comfort (**E2**), Spiritual renewal (**E1**)
Emotional Shifts during Travel	Pre-trip excitement (**E3**), Anticipation before journey (**E5**), Relaxation during activities (**E2**), Sense of achievement (**E7**), Post-trip nostalgia (**E6**), Emotional ups and downs (**E4**), Emotional fatigue (**E2**), Emotional renewal (**E6**), Sense of completion (**E3**), Mixed emotions (**E5**)
Emotional Discomfort	Loneliness at destination (**E4**), Disconnection from group (**E5**), Emotional isolation (**E4**), Frustration with service gaps (**E5**), Unmet emotional needs (**E6**), Feeling ignored (**E4**), Emotional distance (**E6**), Moments of homesickness (**E7**), Group exclusion (**E5**), Disappointment with organization (**E7**)

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Learning New Wellness Knowledge	Learning about spa therapies (**E1**), Traditional health practices (**D5**), New dietary knowledge (**E2**), Mindfulness techniques (**E6**), Breathing exercises (**D3**), Herbal remedy learning (**E4**), Fitness program insights (**M4**), Self-care strategies (**D2**), Meditation practice (**E3**), Traditional healing rituals (**D6**)
Personal Growth and Insight	Self-reflection on life stages (**E4**), Health awareness (**E2**), Personal improvement goals (**E5**), New perspectives on aging (**D1**), Self-empowerment (**E3**), Realization of well-being importance (**E6**), Personal health mission (**D3**), Understanding aging positively (**E5**), Motivational thinking (**E6**), Renewed life enthusiasm (**E3**)
Cognitive Stimulation Activities	Attending lectures (**E6**), Participating in workshops (**E3**), Cultural site exploration (**D4**), Local wisdom learning (**D6**), Trying new therapies (**E1**), Experiencing unfamiliar traditions (**D2**), Engaging in mental games (**E5**), Discovery learning (**E4**), Curiosity-driven activities (**E2**), Reflective discussions (**E7**)
Positive Social Interaction	Making new friends (**E3**), Shared experiences (**E5**), Trust-building activities (**E2**), Supportive communication (**E4**), Collaborative learning (**D2**), Informal group chats (**E6**), Emotional closeness (**E5**), Shared laughter (**E3**), Group enthusiasm (**E1**), Interpersonal warmth (**E4**)
Supportive Social Environment	Encouragement from peers (**E5**), Empathetic listening (**E4**), Receiving help from group members (**E2**), Group solidarity (**E3**), Inclusive atmosphere (**D5**), Emotional sharing (**E6**), Trust in group leaders (**D4**), Sense of group protection (**E7**), Social security (**E2**), Peer care (**E3**)
Sense of Belonging	Feeling accepted (**E4**), Group identity formation (**E5**), Emotional connectedness (**E3**), Comfort in social participation (**E6**), Sense of home in group (**E2**), Being cared for (**E3**), Emotional bonding with others (**E6**), Shared group rituals (**D1**), Mutual support (**E4**), Trust among travelers (**E5**)
Accessibility of Facilities	Easy transportation (**E1**), Facility accessibility (**D3**), Barrier-free design (**M2**), Smooth movement (**E2**), Adapted activities for seniors (**M3**), Accessibility signage (**D6**), Wheelchair access (**E4**), Convenient room layouts (**E2**), Shuttle services (**M5**), Friendly navigation aids (**E6**)
Wellness Services	Availability of doctors (**M3**), Health check-ups (**E2**), Tailored dietary services (**M1**), Physical therapy access (**E6**), Emotional counseling (**D5**), On-site emergency aid (**D3**), Fitness activities (**E4**), Sleep quality programs (**E3**), Stress management workshops (**M6**), Personalized health monitoring (**D4**)
Perceived Safety	Sense of personal security (**E3**), Reliable emergency protocols (**M4**), Trust in local guides (**E2**), Comfort in unfamiliar spaces (**E5**), Visible security presence (**D6**), Accessible health support (**D3**), Safe travel environments (**E1**), Crisis response readiness (**M2**), Emotional safety (**E6**), Safety reassurance (**E4**)
Comfort of Physical Environment	Comfortable accommodation (**E5**), Fresh air quality (**E2**), Cleanliness of facilities (**E6**), Pleasant room temperature (**E4**), Natural lighting (**D3**), Peaceful surroundings (**E2**), Green landscapes (**E6**), Calming interior design (**E3**), Quietness at night (**E1**), Accessible nature trails (**D2**)
Motivation to Improve Health	Desire for healthier lifestyle (**E3**), Self-initiated health goals (**E4**), Pursuit of active aging (**E2**), Will to maintain fitness (**E6**), Exercise participation (**D4**), Diet modifications (**E5**), Mental health focus (**E6**), Wellness program involvement (**M1**), Setting walking targets (**E2**), Improving sleep habits (**E3**)
Cultural Resonance	Emotional attachment to cultural heritage (**E4**), Remembrance of past travels (**E3**), Traditional cultural performances (**D2**), Revisiting familiar cultural symbols (**E6**), Experiencing ancestral traditions (**E2**), Nostalgic emotional triggers (**E5**), Memory evocation (**E6**), Cultural storytelling (**D5**), Deep emotional connection (**E3**), Emotional immersion in heritage (**E4**)
Emotional Expression Opportunities	Group sharing sessions (**E3**), Personal storytelling (**E4**), Reflective journaling (**E5**), Emotional support groups (**D2**), Expressive therapy sessions (**E6**), Open dialogue opportunities (**E2**), Cathartic conversations (**E4**), Memory sharing (**E6**), Creative expression workshops (**E5**), Safe spaces for emotion (**E3**)
Challenges in Wellness Travel	Physical exhaustion (**E6**), Difficulty adjusting to schedules (**E3**), Health management difficulties (**E5**), Travel-related stress (**E2**), Adapting to unfamiliar foods (**E4**), Language barriers (**E5**), Mobility challenges (**E6**), Weather discomfort (**D4**), Mental fatigue (**E6**), Navigating crowded spaces (**E3**)
Satisfaction with Services	Attentive staff (**E2**), Fast service response (**M3**), High-quality food (**E4**), Personalized care (**D2**), Friendly customer service (**E6**), Professional guidance (**M1**), Wellness-oriented service delivery (**D5**), Customized activity options (**E5**), Flexible arrangements (**E3**), Reliability of services (**E4**)
Unmet Expectations	Delays in service delivery (**E3**), Inadequate health facilities (**E6**), Lack of personalized attention (**E4**), Miscommunication issues (**E2**), Limited choice of activities (**E5**), Inconsistent

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	quality (**E6**), Cultural mismatch (**E4**), Limited accessibility (**E6**), Overcrowding (**E5**), Service rigidity (**E3**)
Long-term Benefits of Travel	Adoption of wellness habits (**E3**), Strengthened social networks (**E4**), Emotional resilience enhancement (**E6**), Continued physical activity (**E5**), Renewed life motivation (**E3**), Better health awareness (**E2**), Strengthened identity (**E6**), Greater adaptability (**E5**), Renewed sense of purpose (**E4**), Sustained social bonds (**E6**)

To visually complement the open coding process, a keyword word cloud was generated based on the extracted open codes from participants' interview narratives, as presented in Figure 1. The word cloud graphically represents the relative prominence of key experiential concepts by varying the size of each keyword according to its frequency of occurrence across the dataset. Larger and more centrally positioned terms indicate themes that were more frequently emphasized by older participants during discussions of their wellness tourism experiences.

As shown in the figure, keywords such as "emotional," "group," "health," "activities," "service," and "learning" dominate the visual field, reflecting the centrality of emotional engagement, social interactions, health maintenance, and active participation in shaping older tourists' experiential value. Additionally, terms like "trust," "comfort," "personal," and "traditional" highlight the importance of emotional security, personal relevance, and cultural resonance in the participants' narratives. This visual depiction provides an intuitive overview of the major thematic areas identified through open coding and serves as a bridge to the more structured thematic development undertaken in the subsequent axial coding phase.



Figure 1. Keyword word cloud

To further elucidate the emotional characteristics embedded in the open coding results, two visual analyses were conducted based on the extracted open codes. Figure 2 presents the top 30 keywords ranked by their sentiment strength, measured through polarity scores. In this figure, keywords positioned to the right with positive polarity values (indicated in green) represent experiences associated with positive emotional states, such as "Expressive therapy sessions," "Sense of happiness," "Supportive communication," and "Greater adaptability." These keywords highlight aspects of wellness tourism that significantly contributed to emotional upliftment, cognitive engagement, and social connectedness among older tourists. In contrast, a limited number of keywords with negative polarity values (indicated in red), such as "Disappointment with organization" and "Nostalgic emotional triggers," reflect occasional challenges or emotional tensions encountered during the travel experiences.

Complementing this detailed view, Figure 3 illustrates the overall sentiment distribution across all open code keywords in the form of a percentage-based pie chart. As shown, the majority of keywords were classified as positive, reflecting the predominance of favorable emotional, cognitive, social, and functional experiences among older participants. Neutral sentiments accounted for a smaller but notable proportion, indicating descriptive or context-specific aspects that did not evoke strong emotional reactions. Negative sentiments constituted a minor share, suggesting that adverse experiences were relatively limited in the participants' overall wellness travel narratives.

Together, these visual analyses reinforce the interpretation that wellness tourism tends to generate predominantly positive experiential value for older travelers, while also highlighting the nuanced presence of emotional complexity within individual experiences. This pattern sets the foundation for the axial coding phase, where deeper interrelationships among emotional, cognitive, social, and functional themes will be systematically explored.

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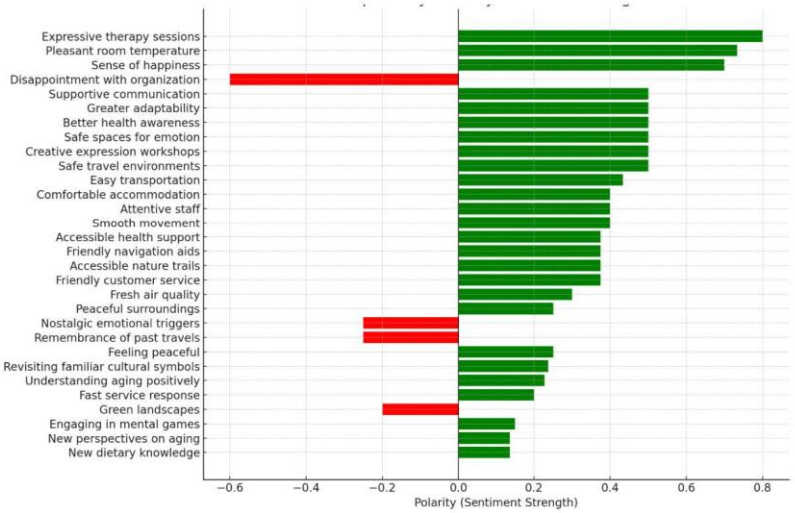

Figure 2. Top 30 Chart of keyword sentiment strength

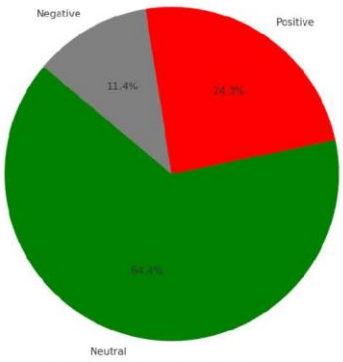

Figure 3. Sentiment Distribution of Open Code Keywords (Percentage)

Axis coding

Axial coding constitutes the second phase of grounded theory analysis, wherein the open codes generated during the initial phase are systematically reassembled into broader conceptual structures. Unlike open coding, which focuses on fragmenting and labeling discrete phenomena, axial coding emphasizes the relational integration of concepts by grouping them around more abstract categories and subcategories (Corbin, 2021). This analytical progression allows researchers to move beyond surface-level descriptive insights and toward a deeper theoretical understanding of the mechanisms underlying the studied phenomenon.

In this study, axial coding was conducted to synthesize the diverse experiential elements articulated by older tourists during their wellness travel journeys. Through iterative comparative analysis, ten major conceptual categories were identified, each encompassing distinct yet interrelated subcategories. These categories collectively capture the emotional, cognitive, social, functional, and cultural dimensions that structure older travelers' perceived value and well-being in tourism contexts. Rather than narrowly focusing on physical health or medicalized care, the coding scheme highlights the broader and more holistic pathways through which well-being is constructed during travel—including emotional engagement, meaning-making, social inclusion, and cultural resonance.

The updated categorization deliberately shifts emphasis away from purely health-centric interpretations toward a multi-dimensional model of well-being tourism. For instance, the category "Cognitive Enrichment" integrates both wellness-related learning and cultural engagement, reflecting the intellectual stimulation derived from travel. Similarly, the category "Self-Transformation" reframes earlier health-focused reflections into a broader narrative

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of self-awareness, motivational reorientation, and personal meaning reconstruction. The category "Supportive Service Environment", while acknowledging the availability of wellness services, de-emphasizes clinical interventions in favor of a more inclusive view of comfort, assistance, and environmental support. Together with "Cultural Identity Resonance" and "Social Belonging", these categories reflect how travel can holistically shape older individuals' subjective well-being beyond utilitarian or therapeutic functions.

The detailed structure of the axial coding results is presented in Table 3. Each major category is listed alongside its core subcategories and was inductively derived from participants' narratives, reflecting the experiential richness of wellness travel as a vehicle for enhancing emotional vitality, cognitive engagement, social connectedness, cultural immersion, and existential affirmation.

Table 3. Axis coding table

Major Category	Subcategories
Emotional Fulfillment	-Positive emotional resonance -Emotional renewal through travel
Emotional Challenges	-Emotional discomfort -Emotional isolation or disappointment
Cognitive Enrichment	-Acquisition of wellness knowledge -Cultural learning experiences
Self-Transformation	-Reevaluation of personal health and life -Self-empowerment and motivation
Social Connection	-Building new relationships -Enhancing group belongingness
Social Support	-Receiving emotional support -Feeling protected within the group
Accessibility Convenience	-Accessibility and mobility -Facility and transport convenience
Supportive Service Environment	-Availability and quality of health care -Tailored wellness support services
Safety Perception	-Personal security perceptions -Emergency response availability
Cultural Identity Resonance	-Emotional connection to heritage -Evocation of personal and collective memories

Selective Coding

Selective coding represents the final stage of grounded theory analysis, wherein categories generated during open and axial coding are systematically integrated to develop a cohesive and theoretically saturated explanatory framework (Corbin, 2021). This phase involves identifying core variables that most meaningfully capture the central phenomenon—in this case, the experiential mechanisms through which older adults construct a sense of well-being through tourism. Rather than treating previously coded elements as isolated findings, selective coding reassembles them into interconnected constructs, prioritizing those with the greatest explanatory power and empirical grounding in participants' narratives.

In this study, selective coding was conducted through iterative analysis and abstraction, drawing from the conceptual patterns established in the earlier phases. Redundant or weakly supported categories were consolidated or excluded to preserve analytical clarity. Throughout the process, emphasis was placed on retaining fidelity to the lived experiences of older tourists while identifying overarching variables that structure their experiential value formation.

As a result, ten key variables were identified, each representing a distinct yet interrelated facet of tourism experience that contributes to older adults' holistic well-being. These variables span emotional, cognitive, social, functional, and cultural domains. Table 4 presents the revised variable names and refined definitions, grounded in participants' experiential accounts and aligned with the overarching aim of this study.

Table 4. Key Variables Identified from Open and Axial Coding

Key Variable	Definition
Emotional Fulfillment	Affective states of joy, tranquility, and revitalization that elevate older adults' psychological well-being through travel.
Emotional Discomfort	Unpleasant emotional experiences, such as loneliness or alienation, that diminish older travelers' sense of enjoyment and comfort.
Cognitive Enrichment	The stimulation of curiosity, learning, and mental engagement gained through exposure to new knowledge and cultural experiences.
Existential Reflection	The deep introspection on life meaning, aging, and personal identity that is inspired by meaningful travel encounters.

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Social Bonding	The development of close and positive relationships that reinforce feelings of belonging and interpersonal satisfaction.
Social Support	The emotional and practical reassurance provided by peers or group contexts that nurtures a secure and inclusive travel experience.
Accessibility Convenience	The ease with which older individuals engage with tourism environments, enabling autonomy and reducing physical or psychological stress.
Supportive Environment Satisfaction	The perceived adequacy of facilities and services that ensure comfort, dignity, and agency for older tourists.
Safety Perception	The confidence in environmental and interpersonal safety that fosters a relaxed and trusting tourism experience.
Cultural Resonance	The emotional and symbolic connection to cultural heritage, traditions, or memories that supports identity affirmation and meaning.

To ensure analytical consistency and align with the theoretical framework of experiential value, the ten core variables distilled through selective coding were conceptually organized under five overarching value dimensions: emotional, cognitive, social, functional, and cultural. This classification reflects the intrinsic logic embedded in participants' narratives and maintains coherence with the axial coding phase. Emotional value comprises the variables Emotional Fulfillment and Emotional Discomfort, capturing the affective states that either enhance or hinder subjective well-being during travel. Cognitive value encompasses Cognitive Enrichment and Existential Reflection, reflecting processes of knowledge acquisition and introspective evaluation that contribute to psychological depth and personal meaning. Social value includes Social Bonding and Social Support, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal connectedness, relational trust, and perceived inclusion. Functional value consists of Accessibility Convenience, Supportive Environment Satisfaction, and Safety Perception, which collectively address the structural and environmental conditions that enable ease, comfort, and psychological security for older tourists. Lastly, cultural value is represented by Cultural Resonance, which expresses the emotional and symbolic attachment to heritage and tradition as a means of identity affirmation. This value-based categorization provides a robust interpretive lens through which the multi-dimensional nature of tourism experience value can be understood in relation to the construction of well-being among aging populations.

Together, these variables illuminate the multi-dimensional nature of tourism experience value as perceived by older adults. Emotional fulfillment and social bonding emerged as dominant drivers of well-being, while accessibility convenience and satisfaction with supportive environments served as critical enabling conditions. Cognitive enrichment and existential reflection offered internal pathways for personal growth, while cultural resonance fostered deeper meaning and identity continuity. Meanwhile, emotional discomfort and perceived safety constituted boundary conditions that either constrained or facilitated overall well-being during travel.

This integrated structure forms the conceptual backbone of the study's theoretical model. It offers a comprehensive explanation of how older adults derive well-being from tourism not merely through leisure consumption, but through a layered interplay of emotional, cognitive, social, and cultural meaning-making processes. The identification of these ten variables provides a solid empirical foundation for the subsequent development of the conceptual model in the next chapter, where the dynamic relationships among these experiential elements will be further elaborated.

Theoretical Validation and Model Development

Triangulation serves as a fundamental strategy for enhancing the credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings (Ahmed, 2024). In grounded theory research, where theoretical constructs emerge inductively from empirical data, triangulation is essential for confirming the robustness of categories, relationships, and conceptual structures identified during the coding process. By integrating diverse sources of data, analytic techniques, and theoretical perspectives, triangulation helps to reduce subjectivity and ensures that the emerging framework reflects a consistent and well-substantiated pattern grounded in participants' experiences (Treude, 2024).

In this study, triangulation was implemented through three complementary strategies: data triangulation, methodological triangulation, and theoretical triangulation. Data triangulation was realized by including a heterogeneous sample of older tourists varying in age, gender, travel experience, and physical health, which enabled the cross-verification of patterns across demographic subgroups. Methodological triangulation combined open-ended narrative analysis with sentiment-based emotional profiling to reinforce both depth and breadth in the exploration of experiential dimensions. Theoretical triangulation was conducted by iteratively comparing grounded categories with established literature in wellness tourism, aging studies, and consumer value theory, ensuring conceptual alignment while maintaining empirical authenticity.

Based on the cumulative results from open, axial, and selective coding, this study developed a conceptual model that systematically illustrates how older tourists construct experiential value during wellness travel. The model

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identifies four core value dimensions—Emotional Value, Cognitive Value, Social Value, and Functional Value—each of which comprises two to three key sub-dimensions extracted from participant narratives.

Emotional Value captures both positive and negative affective responses during the travel experience. This includes emotional fulfillment, which refers to feelings of peace, joy, and revitalization, and emotional discomfort, such as loneliness, frustration, or emotional detachment that detract from well-being.

Cognitive Value refers to mental and reflective gains achieved during travel. It is composed of cognitive enrichment, which involves learning new knowledge and engaging in culturally stimulating activities, and existential reflection, referring to introspective processes about personal identity, aging, and life purpose.

Social Value emphasizes the interpersonal and communal aspects of travel. It includes social bonding, or the creation of meaningful relationships with peers, and social support, which involves the perception of emotional encouragement, group protection, and inclusion.

Functional Value centers on the practical conditions that enable a comfortable and secure travel experience. It encompasses accessibility convenience (e.g., barrier-free facilities and ease of mobility), supportive environment satisfaction (e.g., adequacy of services and infrastructure), and safety perception (e.g., trust in emergency response and perceived physical security).

Figure 4 presents the resulting conceptual model, placing the central phenomenon—olderly Tourists' Wellness Travel Experiences—at the core, surrounded by four interrelated value dimensions. Each dimension branches into its associated sub-constructs, reflecting the rich and multi-layered structure of older tourists' experiential narratives.

This model affirms that older tourists' wellness travel experiences are shaped by the integration of emotional, cognitive, social, and functional value processes. Rather than viewing these as isolated domains, the model highlights their interdependence and cumulative contribution to perceived well-being. It offers a theoretically grounded and empirically validated framework that advances understanding of how wellness travel enhances older adults' quality of life and informs future design of age-inclusive tourism experiences.

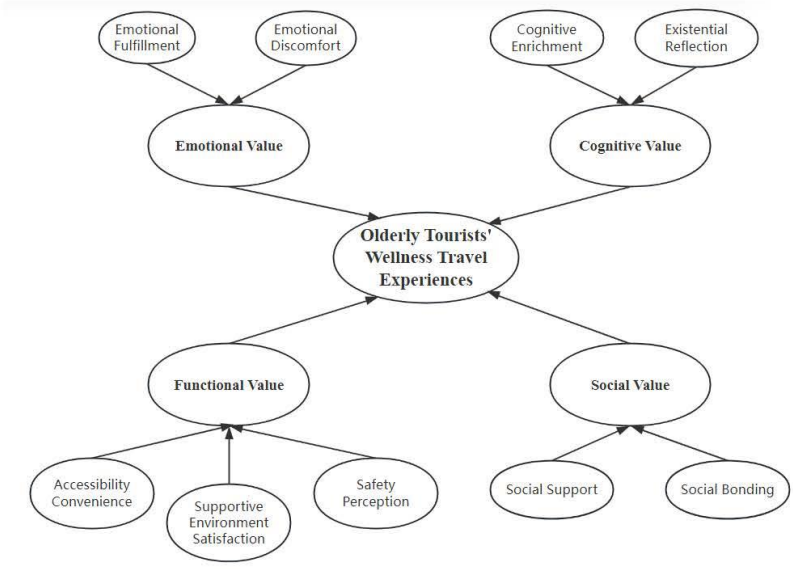

Figure 4. Conceptual Model of Multi-Dimensional Influences on older Tourists' Wellness Travel Experiences

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the deepening of experiential value theory by investigating how older adults derive well-being from tourism through dynamic, multidimensional engagements. Unlike previous tourism studies that often treat senior well-being as a post-consumption outcome—focusing narrowly on life satisfaction or health status—

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this research adopts a grounded, process-oriented approach that maps the emotional, cognitive, social, and functional mechanisms through which well-being is constructed in aging-specific travel contexts.

In extant tourism literature, emotional value is often equated with hedonic pleasure, relaxation, or enjoyment (Hosany & Gilbert, 2009; Kim et al., 2015). These studies tend to emphasize transient affective states such as joy or tranquility experienced at leisure destinations. However, such formulations inadequately capture the affective complexity of older adults, who frequently face emotional vulnerability, loneliness, and psychological uncertainty during later life stages.

This study expands the construct of emotional value by identifying two distinct subdimensions: emotional fulfillment and emotional discomfort. Emotional fulfillment encompasses feelings of spiritual renewal, tranquility, and emotional revitalization arising from meaningful engagement with people and places. Emotional discomfort, conversely, addresses experiences of isolation, disappointment, or emotional insecurity—factors rarely acknowledged in prior frameworks. This reconceptualization reflects a more realistic spectrum of emotional responses and emphasizes the dual role of tourism as both a space for joy and an arena for emotional regulation. In doing so, it contributes to a more inclusive theorization of affective experience in aging-specific contexts.

The concept of cognitive value in tourism has traditionally focused on knowledge acquisition, novelty seeking, or mental stimulation (Kim & Ritchie, 2013). While these elements are indeed central to travel experiences, they are often treated as superficial engagements with the environment, such as encountering new landscapes or information.This study introduces a novel subdimension—existential reflection—that expands cognitive value from external information processing to internal meaning-making. Older tourists in this study did not simply learn about destinations; they used travel as a reflective process to reassess personal identity, aging, and life goals. This finding aligns with psychological theories of later-life development and offers a conceptual bridge between cognitive stimulation and emotional depth. By integrating both cognitive enrichment and existential reflection, the study advances cognitive value theory by embedding it in the reflective, life-stage-sensitive realities of older adults.

Most prior research on social value emphasizes companionship or group participation as a source of satisfaction (Chaturvedi et al., 2023). While group dynamics are relevant, such understandings often reduce social value to visible group interaction, overlooking deeper psychological and interpersonal dimensions.This study delineates social bonding and social support as two separate mechanisms. Social bonding refers to the emotional closeness and trust cultivated through shared experiences and ritualized interaction (e.g., communal meals, storytelling), while social support captures feelings of protection, empathy, and being cared for by peers and staff. These subdimensions suggest that older adults' social experiences are not merely functional or utilitarian but profoundly affective and identity-affirming. This refined interpretation aligns with relational well-being theory and underscores the importance of emotional inclusion in later-life tourism experiences.

Traditional definitions of functional value in tourism revolve around service efficiency, convenience, and physical accessibility (Williams & Soutar, 2009). However, for older adults, functional value entails more than logistical convenience—it relates to psychological safety, physical autonomy, and environmental reassurance.This study expands the functional domain by identifying supportive environment satisfaction, accessibility convenience, and safety perception as distinct subdimensions. Supportive environment satisfaction encompasses perceptions of well-designed spaces, empathetic service, and physical ease that collectively foster emotional security. Safety perception, on the other hand, includes trust in medical readiness, crisis response, and the predictability of unfamiliar environments. Together, these insights deepen the understanding of functional value as a psychosocial construct—not merely an operational one—particularly relevant in aging-sensitive tourism design.

In contrast to earlier frameworks that treat value dimensions as discrete, generalizable constructs, this study proposes a contextualized and interdependent model. Emotional, cognitive, social, and functional values are not viewed in isolation but as co-constitutive dimensions that interact to shape the tourism-based well-being of older adults.

To summarize, the theoretical contributions of this study are fourfold: 1)It shifts the analysis from static post-travel outcomes toward a dynamic, experience-centered construction of well-being. 2)It refines and expands each value domain by introducing empirically grounded subdimensions such as existential reflection, social support, and supportive environment satisfaction. 3)It contextualizes experiential value theory within aging-specific psychological, emotional, and environmental needs.4)It proposes a theoretically integrated framework that captures the layered interplay of affect, cognition, social interaction, and infrastructure in shaping older adults' travel-based well-being.

Practical Contribution

This study investigates how older tourists construct experiential value during well-being-oriented travel, identifying ten key variables across emotional, cognitive, social, and functional domains. By building an integrative conceptual model, the findings reveal that older adults' tourism experiences are not merely about functional access

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or physical health maintenance, but involve complex and meaningful processes of emotional satisfaction, mental engagement, social connection, environmental support, and cultural resonance. These insights provide actionable guidance for stakeholders engaged in the development, management, and policy design of tourism offerings for aging populations.

For destination managers and tourism service providers, the findings call for a shift away from narrow service models that focus solely on standardized activities or physical recovery programs. Instead, tourism environments should be designed to support emotional comfort, social participation, and psychological security. This includes creating inclusive atmospheres where older travelers feel a sense of belonging, as well as offering programs that stimulate intellectual curiosity and self-reflection—such as intergenerational workshops, cultural storytelling, or nature-based mindfulness activities. Practical infrastructure should enhance accessibility and reduce uncertainty, enabling older tourists to move freely and feel safe throughout their journeys. A multidimensional design approach that considers emotional, cognitive, relational, and physical comfort will allow service providers to address the nuanced needs of aging tourists and foster stronger long-term engagement.

At the policy level, the study underscores the importance of developing age-inclusive tourism systems that go beyond promoting physical vitality or preventive health. Policy frameworks should aim to cultivate travel experiences that contribute to older adults' emotional resilience, mental clarity, and cultural identity. Incentives such as destination certification, training standards, and subsidies can motivate tourism operators to incorporate well-being elements into their offerings. Furthermore, collaboration between tourism departments, cultural institutions, and senior care organizations can enhance both the diversity and depth of experiences available to older travelers.

Finally, the conceptual model generated in this research offers a blueprint for the strategic planning of well-being-focused tourism. By viewing older tourists not as passive users of leisure resources but as individuals seeking layered, transformative experiences, tourism developers can better align products and destinations with the aspirations of this growing demographic. Experience design should integrate value elements—such as emotional fulfillment, social recognition, personal reflection, and cultural affinity—throughout the entire customer journey. Marketing efforts, likewise, should foreground these deeper experiential qualities to authentically connect with older tourists' pursuit of meaning, connection, and self-continuity through travel.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the experiential mechanisms through which older tourists construct well-being during participation in well-being-oriented travel. Using grounded theory methodology, 24 semi-structured interviews were systematically analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding. The analysis revealed that older adults' travel experiences are shaped by multi-dimensional and dynamic processes involving emotional fulfillment, cognitive engagement, social connection, functional support, and cultural resonance. Rather than treating tourism as a static or health-focused activity, the study conceptualizes it as a layered, meaning-making experience in which affective, cognitive, relational, and existential elements interact to foster a sense of holistic well-being among older individuals. This perspective shifts the understanding of aging-related travel from one of physical maintenance to one that centers on emotional enrichment, identity continuity, and social inclusion.

Theoretically, this study contributes by redirecting scholarly attention from static outcome indicators to dynamic experiential constructions. It extends experiential value theory into aging-specific tourism contexts and incorporates cultural resonance as a meaningful component within the broader experiential framework. These contributions help refine how experiential value is conceptualized in the context of later-life travel, acknowledging the evolving motivations and psychological needs of older populations.

Practically, the findings provide guidance for tourism service providers, destination planners, and policymakers. The study emphasizes the need to design emotionally supportive, cognitively engaging, socially inclusive, functionally accessible, and culturally resonant tourism experiences tailored to the unique expectations of older travelers. By addressing these integrated dimensions of value, the tourism industry can better serve the aspirations of aging populations and support their pursuit of life satisfaction and well-being through meaningful travel.

Nonetheless, this study has several limitations. The sample, while diverse in life experience and background, was geographically situated within a specific cultural region of China, which may limit the broader applicability of findings across international or culturally distinct contexts. Additionally, while qualitative methods allowed for in-depth understanding of subjective meaning-making, they do not offer generalizable metrics regarding the relative weight of each experiential factor. Future research should consider cross-cultural comparative studies to explore how sociocultural factors mediate older tourists' value constructions. Mixed-method approaches combining qualitative depth with quantitative breadth could enhance the empirical robustness of the model.Furthermore, future research should capitalize on the rich, nuanced narratives embedded in qualitative interviews by employing more interpretive strategies, such as thematic layering, narrative reconstruction, and emotional discourse analysis.

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This will deepen the understanding of how meaning and well-being are negotiated across different experiential dimensions. In addition, methodological triangulation could be enriched by incorporating expert panel discussions or observational techniques in real-time travel settings. Such approaches would allow for the validation of experiential constructs in situ and help uncover contextual cues that might be overlooked in self-reported data. From a practical standpoint, future studies may also explore how experiential value dimensions translate into targeted market strategies. For example, segmenting older tourists based on value preferences (e.g., emotion-driven vs. identity-driven) may support more customized experience design, branding narratives, and communication strategies. Integrating these interdisciplinary approaches will advance both theoretical and applied insights in aging tourism research.

Appendix 1. Interview Outline

Interview questions for olderly tourists	**Interview questions for tourism destination operators**	**Interview questions for Managers of tourism enterprises**
1.Can you recall and narrate your travel experience for this trip?	1. What is the proportion of senior tourists among the total number of visitors in your tourist destination? What are the distinctive characteristics of their travel needs?	1.Please provide an introduction to your tourism enterprise, including its name, type, and scale.
2.What was your motivation for choosing this trip?	2. Have you implemented any measures within the tourist area to cater to the needs of senior tourists? For example, providing convenience facilities, accessible pathways, etc.	2. What do you consider to be the main trends in the current olderly tourism market?
3.Please describe your feelings, emotions, and sentiments after the conclusion of the trip.	3.Senior tourists might have health-related concerns. How do you address these concerns?	3. In your opinion, what are the primary factors that olderly tourists prioritize when choosing travel destinations and experiences?
4.Which tourism activities left a deep impression on you?	4.How do you provide information about the tourist destination to senior visitors? Do you have customized communication channels for them?	4. Does your enterprise offer specialized tourism products or services designed specifically for olderly tourists? If so, could you discuss the motivations and strategies behind this development?
5.What factors do you think could influence your travel experience?	5. Have you arranged any relaxed and enjoyable activities for senior tourists during their travel? Are these activities well-received?	5. When designing tourism products and services for olderly travelers, how do you consider and accommodate their specific needs and preferences?
6.What kind of experiences and feelings do you expect olderly tourism to bring you?	6. Have you taken into consideration the economic situation of senior tourists in your pricing policy? Do you offer any discounts or special pricing for them?	6. Have your staff members received training regarding the needs and interactions with olderly tourists while providing services?
7.What was the most significant takeaway for you from the travel activities?	7. How do you gather feedback and opinions from senior tourists? What kind of improvements have you implemented based on their feedback?	7. Does your enterprise collaborate with other institutions, communities, or organizations to provide improved services for olderly tourists? How have you established and maintained these partnerships?
8.Did senior tourism meet your	8. What are your predictions for the future trends in senior tourism? Do you have plans to	8. What are your expectations for the future development of the olderly tourism market?

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expectations? Why or why not?	further expand services and activities tailored to senior tourists?	Does your enterprise have plans to expand its olderly tourism services?

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