International Journal of Economics, Business & Sustainable Management
ISSN 3139-0919 (Online)

Article History
Received: 14 Aug 2026
Accepted: 12 Oct 2026
Published: 27 Oct 2026

International Journal of Economics, Business & Sustainable Management
Volume 2 Issue 4 (Oct – Dec) 2026

DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.23691598

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Keywords: Push Motivation, Pull Perception, Destination Image, Social Media Informational Dependency, Tourism Intention, Yunnan Tourism, University Students.

From Push - Pull Motivation to Visit Intention: Destination Image and Social Media Informational Dependency among University Students in China

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were (1) to examine the effects of Push Motivation and Pull Perception on Tourism Intention toward Yunnan; (2) to examine the effects of Push Motivation and Pull Perception on Destination Image; (3) to investigate the mediating role of Destination Image in the relationships between Push Motivation, Pull Perception, and Tourism Intention; and (4) to examine the moderating role of Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID) in the relationships between Push Motivation, Pull Perception, and Tourism Intention.

This quantitative study employed an online questionnaire and convenience sampling to collect data from university students enrolled in higher education institutions in mainland China. A total of 532 valid responses were obtained. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis, bootstrapped mediation analysis, and moderation analysis with interaction terms and simple slopes.

The major findings were as follows: (1) Push Motivation and Pull Perception had significant positive effects on Tourism Intention; (2) Push Motivation and Pull Perception had significant positive effects on Destination Image; (3) Destination Image partially mediated the relationships between Push Motivation, Pull Perception, and Tourism Intention; and (4) SMID significantly and positively moderated the relationships between Push Motivation, Pull Perception, and Tourism Intention, with both relationships becoming stronger at higher levels of SMID. All nine hypotheses were supported.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China's tourism industry has continued to recover, accompanied by increasing digitalization and demand for personalized and experiential travel. With its natural landscapes, diverse ethnic cultures, and distinctive tourism experiences, Yunnan remains an important tourism destination in China. In 2025, Yunnan received 782 million tourist visits and generated RMB 1.27 trillion in tourism expenditure, representing year-on-year increases of 11.8% and 11.5%, respectively (Yunnan Daily, 2026). As the tourism market expands, understanding the preferences and decision-making processes of specific tourist groups has become increasingly important.

University students constitute a relevant segment of the tourism market because their travel decisions involve individual preferences, destination evaluations, and information-search behaviors. A survey conducted across 23 Chinese universities reported that 85.43% of respondents enjoyed traveling, 47.91% traveled at least once per semester, and 67.85% preferred independent travel (Lingwei, 2014). Although these findings reflect an earlier period and cannot represent current university students as a whole, they provide historical evidence of students' interest in tourism and independent travel planning.

Meanwhile, digital platforms have become increasingly important in tourism information acquisition. According to the 55th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development, China had 548 million online travel-booking users and approximately 1.04 billion short-video users by December 2024 (China Internet Network Information Center, 2025). These figures illustrate the scale of digital tourism services and short-video consumption, although they do not directly establish how individuals use such information when making travel decisions. Previous research has identified social media as an important source of online tourism information Xiang and Gretzel (2010). Through short videos, user-generated content, online reviews, and shared travel experiences, potential tourists can obtain information about destinations before making travel plans.

Yunnan has also expanded its digital tourism services and online destination communication. According to information released by the Standing Committee of the Yunnan Provincial People's Congress, the "Travel in Yunnan with One Mobile Phone" platform had recorded 601 million service uses, while online content associated with "There Is a Life Called Yunnan" had accumulated more than 40.258 billion views Standing Committee of the Yunnan Provincial People's Congress (2024). These figures indicate the substantial reach of Yunnan's digital

tourism services and promotional communication. However, the scale of online exposure does not necessarily indicate how potential tourists evaluate the destination or whether they intend to visit.

Against this background, it is important to examine how university students develop Tourism Intention toward Yunnan and whether their reliance on social media information is associated with differences in this process. While destination attractions and individual travel motivations may shape Tourism Intention, students may also differ in their overall Destination Image and their level of Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID). Understanding these relationships can provide a basis for examining the formation of Tourism Intention within Yunnan's increasingly digital tourism environment.

Existing tourism research has extensively examined tourism motivation, Destination Image, and the influence of social media on tourism behavior. Push–Pull Theory explains tourists' internal travel needs and the attractiveness of destinations, while Destination Image reflects tourists' overall evaluations and is associated with their behavioral intentions (Crompton, 1979; Kim et al., 2003; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). However, further investigation is needed into how these factors operate together in explaining university students' Tourism Intention toward Yunnan.

First, although previous studies have established the importance of Push Motivation and Pull Perception in tourism decision-making, their relationships with Tourism Intention may also involve tourists' evaluations of a destination. Previous research has demonstrated associations between Destination Image and behavioral intentions (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Chen & Tsai, 2007), while tourism motivation has also been linked to Destination Image and subsequent behavioral responses (Pereira et al., 2022). Building on these findings, further research is needed to distinguish Push Motivation from Pull Perception and examine whether Destination Image mediates their respective relationships with Tourism Intention in the context of university students traveling to Yunnan.

Second, existing research on social media in tourism has examined information quality, user-generated content, platform characteristics, and online interactions in relation to destination evaluations and behavioral responses (Kim et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2024). However, these perspectives do not fully explain individual differences in reliance on tourism-related social media information. Media System Dependency Theory emphasizes that individuals develop different levels of dependency on media resources to achieve information-related goals (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Related research has also examined informational dependency in

information acquisition and use (Kim & Jung, 2017; Lee & Choi, 2018). Accordingly, examining Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID) may provide additional insight into whether the relationships of Push Motivation and Pull Perception with Tourism Intention vary across different levels of informational dependency.

To address these research gaps, this study integrates Push–Pull Theory, Destination Image, and Media System Dependency Theory to investigate university students' Tourism Intention toward Yunnan. Rather than proposing a new theory, the study examines the direct relationships, the mediating role of Destination Image, and the moderating role of SMID within an integrated research framework. Specifically, the study pursues four research objectives:

RO1: To examine the direct effects of Push Motivation and Pull Perception on Tourism Intention toward Yunnan.

RO2: To investigate the effects of Push Motivation and Pull Perception on Destination Image.

RO3: To examine the mediating role of Destination Image in the relationships between Push Motivation, Pull Perception, and Tourism Intention.

RO4: To examine the moderating role of Social Media Informational Dependency in the relationships of Push Motivation and Pull Perception with Tourism Intention.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

Push–Pull Theory provides an important framework for understanding tourism motivation and destination choice. Originally introduced by Dann (1977) and further developed by Crompton (1979), the theory distinguishes between internal psychological needs that motivate individuals to travel (push factors) and external destination attributes that attract them to particular destinations (pull factors). Subsequent studies have applied this framework to different tourism contexts, demonstrating the importance of both motivational factors in tourism decision-making(Kim et al., 2003; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Ayoub and Mohamed (2024) investigated push and pull motivations alongside country image and visit intentions, providing support for examining tourism motivations in relation to overall destination evaluations.

The present study adopts Push–Pull Theory primarily because its theoretical logic is highly consistent with the proposed research model. First, push motivation reflects university students' internal psychological needs that generate the desire to travel. Second, pull perception reflects students' perceptions and evaluations of the external attributes of Yunnan as a tourism destination. These two constructs correspond respectively to the internal driving forces and

external attractions proposed in Push–Pull Theory. Furthermore, based on the fundamental logic of the Push–Pull framework, this study introduces destination image to further examine how university students' internal travel needs and perceptions of Yunnan's external attributes are associated with their overall evaluation of Yunnan as a destination and their ultimate tourism intention.

Media System Dependency Theory, proposed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976), explains how individuals develop dependency relationships with media resources to achieve specific goals, such as obtaining information and understanding their environment. Ball-Rokeach (1985) further emphasized that media dependency varies according to individual goals and information needs. Unlike media use frequency, media dependency reflects the importance of media resources in satisfying these needs.

With the development of social media, Kim and Jung (2017) extended this theoretical perspective to social networking services (SNS), demonstrating the relevance of media dependency in digital environments. (Lee & Choi, 2018) further examined SNS informational dependency, emphasizing individuals' reliance on social media for obtaining and using information. These studies provide a theoretical basis for distinguishing Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID) from general social media use.

This theoretical development is highly applicable to tourism research. Tourists generally need to search for information and evaluate destinations before actual travel and to learn in advance about destination landscapes, transportation, accommodation, tourism activities, and the experiences of other tourists. Tourism decision-making therefore involves substantial information needs. Recent tourism research has also shown that digital tourism information tools have become deeply involved in tourists' information search and destination evaluation. For example, (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021) found in the context of smart tourism applications that tourists' perceptions of digital tourism applications were associated with destination image and subsequent behavioral intention, while information search behavior played an important role in the tourism decision-making process.

Therefore, this study does not focus on whether university students use social media or how much time they spend using it each day. Instead, it focuses on the extent to which social media becomes an important information resource when students need to obtain, evaluate, and update tourism-related information about Yunnan. This focus is consistent with the "individual goals–media resource dependency relationship" emphasized by Media System Dependency Theory and

is also directly conceptually related to the informational dependency examined by (Lee & Choi, 2018).

2.2 Hypothesis Development

2.2.1 Push Motivation and Tourism Intention

Push Motivation refers to the internal psychological and socio-psychological needs that stimulate individuals' desire to engage in tourism activities. According to Push – Pull Theory, push factors explain the internal reasons individuals develop travel needs, whereas pull factors explain why particular destinations are selected (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977). Previous tourism studies have identified escape, relaxation, social interaction, personal growth, and novelty seeking as important psychological motivations underlying tourism behavior (Lee & Crompton, 1992; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). More recent studies have further emphasized the multidimensional characteristics of push motivation across different tourism contexts (Ayoub & Mohamed, 2024; Yang et al., 2023).

In the context of university student tourism, push motivation encompasses four dimensions: escape from stress, social interaction, self-growth, and novelty seeking. Escape from stress reflects students' desire to obtain psychological relaxation and temporary relief from academic and everyday pressures through tourism (Ayoub & Mohamed, 2024; Crompton, 1979; Yang et al., 2023). Social interaction represents the desire to establish and strengthen interpersonal relationships through shared travel experiences, while self-growth concerns opportunities to acquire knowledge, develop personal perspectives, and enrich individual experiences. Novelty seeking reflects the motivation to encounter unfamiliar environments, cultures, and experiences (Ayoub & Mohamed, 2024; Lee & Crompton, 1992; Yang et al., 2023).

These psychological needs provide internal motivational foundations for future travel decisions. When university students perceive tourism as an opportunity to satisfy their needs for relaxation, social interaction, personal development, and novelty, their willingness to engage in tourism activities is expected to increase. Tourism intention represents an individual's readiness to undertake future tourism behavior, consistent with the conceptualization of behavioral intention proposed by Ajzen (1991). Previous studies involving Chinese university students have examined tourism intention in relation to mobile tourism application experiences and social media destination information (Wu et al., 2022; Wang & Park, 2023). Destination-specific tourism intention has also been examined in relation to electronic word-of-mouth and destination-related evaluations (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Push Motivation has a positive effect on Tourism Intention.

2.2.2 Pull Perception and Tourism Intention

Pull Perception refers to tourists' perceptions and evaluations of the external characteristics that contribute to the attractiveness of a tourism destination. In contrast to Push Motivation, which originates from internal psychological needs, Pull Perception concerns destination attributes that influence tourists' evaluations and destination selection. Previous research has identified natural attractions, cultural resources, tourism activities, and accessibility as important destination-related pull factors (Kim et al., 2003; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

The specific characteristics of pull factors differ across destinations and tourism contexts. Valencia et al. (2022), in their examination of farm tourism in the Philippines, identified natural landscapes, rural environments, local culture, lifestyles, and tourism activities as important destination attractions. Similarly, Duong et al. (2023), in their study of domestic tourism in Vietnam's Central Highlands, incorporated destination information and accessibility into the examination of pull motivation. These studies highlight the importance of evaluating destination-specific characteristics when explaining tourism-related decisions.

In the present study, Pull Perception consists of four dimensions: natural attractions, cultural attractions, distinctive experiences, and accessibility. Natural attractions represent university students' evaluations of Yunnan's natural landscapes and ecological resources (Kim et al., 2003; Valencia et al., 2022). Cultural attractions concern perceptions of ethnic traditions, historical resources, and local cultural environments (Kim et al., 2003). Distinctive experiences reflect the perceived attractiveness of local cuisine, lifestyles, and characteristic tourism activities (Valencia et al., 2022). Accessibility refers to perceived transportation convenience and the availability of transportation options for traveling to and within Yunnan (Duong et al., 2023; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Pull Perception has a positive effect on Tourism Intention.

2.2.3 Push Motivation and Destination Image

Destination Image refers to tourists' overall impressions and evaluations of a particular destination. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) emphasized that destination image involves both perceptions of individual destination attributes and broader overall impressions. Baloglu and

McCleary (1999) further distinguished cognitive and affective components of destination image, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding how destination-related perceptions and emotional evaluations are formed.

Subsequent studies have continued to examine the multidimensional characteristics of destination image. Yang et al. (2022) investigated relationships among cognitive, affective, and conative destination image, while Hernández-García (2022) validated a destination image measurement scale comprising affective, cognitive, and global image components. These studies indicate that destination image incorporates different forms of destination evaluation and provides an important basis for understanding tourism-related responses.

Push Motivation contributes to destination image formation by influencing the psychological needs and expectations through which individuals interpret tourism destinations. Tourists motivated by relaxation, social interaction, personal development, or novelty are likely to evaluate destinations in relation to their capacity to satisfy these needs. Within the Push – Pull framework, internal motivations therefore provide a psychological basis for interpreting destination characteristics (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

For university students, Yunnan's tourism environment can be evaluated in relation to opportunities for relaxation, cultural exploration, interpersonal experiences, and personal development. Students with stronger push motivations are expected to develop more favorable overall impressions and emotional evaluations when they perceive Yunnan as capable of satisfying their tourism-related needs. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Push Motivation has a positive effect on Destination Image.

2.2.4 Pull Perception and Destination Image

Destination image formation is closely associated with tourists' evaluations of destination attributes. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) explained that tourists' overall destination impressions are connected to their perceptions of specific destination characteristics. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) further demonstrated the conceptual importance of cognitive and affective evaluations in understanding destination image. The relationship between destination attributes and overall destination evaluations is also reflected in more recent research. Yang et al. (2022) examined cognitive, affective, and conative components of destination image, while Hernández-García (2022) distinguished cognitive, affective, and global image in destination image measurement. Together, these studies provide a foundation for examining how evaluations of destination characteristics contribute to broader destination impressions.

Pull Perception concerns tourists' evaluations of external destination characteristics, including natural attractions, cultural resources, distinctive experiences, and accessibility. Previous studies have emphasized these characteristics in explaining destination attractiveness and tourism-related evaluations (Kim et al., 2003; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Valencia et al. (2022) further highlighted natural environments, cultural characteristics, and tourism experiences, whereas Duong et al. (2023) incorporated accessibility and destination information into the examination of destination-related pull factors.Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Pull Perception has a positive effect on Destination Image.

2.2.5 Destination Image and Tourism Intention

Destination Image has been widely examined as an important concept in understanding tourists' evaluations and future behavioral responses. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) conceptualized destination image as encompassing both specific attribute perceptions and overall impressions, while Baloglu and McCleary (1999) emphasized cognitive and affective evaluations. More recent studies have further investigated the relationships among cognitive, affective, and conative destination image components (Yang et al., 2022; Hernández-García, 2022).

Tourism Intention refers to individuals' willingness and readiness to undertake future tourism activities. Ajzen (1991) explained that behavioral intention represents an individual's readiness to perform a particular behavior. Within tourism research, destination-related evaluations and information have been examined in relation to future travel intentions (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

Studies focusing on Chinese university students have also demonstrated the relevance of tourism intention as an outcome variable. Wu et al. (2022) investigated tourism mobile application experiences and travel intention, while Wang and Park (2023) examined social media destination information search in relation to domestic travel intention and recommendation intention. These studies establish the relevance of tourism intention for understanding students' prospective tourism decisions.Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Destination Image has a positive effect on Tourism Intention.

2.2.6 The Mediating Role of Destination Image

Push – Pull Theory explains tourism behavior through the interaction between internal travel motivations and external destination characteristics (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977). Push Motivation reflects tourists' psychological needs, while Pull Perception represents evaluations of

destination attractiveness (Kim et al., 2003; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Although both constructs provide foundations for tourism-related decisions, their relationships with behavioral intention can also be understood through destination image formation.

Destination image research emphasizes that tourists develop overall and affective evaluations of destinations through the interpretation of destination-related information and experiences (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). More recent research has continued to examine the relationships among cognitive, affective, and conative destination image components (Yang et al., 2022; Hernández-García, 2022). These perspectives provide a theoretical basis for examining Destination Image as an intervening construct between tourism motivations, destination perceptions, and future tourism intention.

Push Motivation represents the internal needs that encourage individuals to consider tourism activities. Escape from stress, social interaction, self-growth, and novelty seeking influence the expectations students associate with travel (Lee & Crompton, 1992; Ayoub & Mohamed, 2024; Yang et al., 2023). These motivations can shape students' overall impressions and emotional evaluations of Yunnan. When students perceive Yunnan as a destination capable of satisfying their psychological and experiential needs, they are expected to develop a more favorable destination image. This favorable image, in turn, provides an evaluative foundation for stronger tourism intention.Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Destination Image mediates the relationship between Push Motivation and Tourism Intention.

Pull Perception concerns tourists' evaluations of external destination characteristics, including natural attractions, cultural resources, distinctive experiences, and accessibility. These characteristics have been examined as important components of destination attractiveness in previous tourism studies (Kim et al., 2003; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Valencia et al., 2022; Duong et al., 2023). Positive perceptions of destination attributes can contribute to favorable overall impressions and emotional responses. For university students evaluating Yunnan, perceptions of attractive natural landscapes, distinctive ethnic cultures, diverse tourism experiences, and convenient transportation are expected to strengthen Destination Image. In turn, a favorable destination image is expected to increase students' willingness to visit Yunnan and their preference for the destination. This reasoning is consistent with the conceptual distinction between specific destination attributes and broader destination image evaluations emphasized by Echtner and Ritchie (1993), Baloglu and McCleary (1999), and Hernández-García (2022).

Consequently, Pull Perception is expected to influence Tourism Intention both directly and indirectly through Destination Image. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Destination Image mediates the relationship between Pull Perception and Tourism Intention.

Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID) refers to the extent to which individuals rely on social media resources to satisfy their information needs. Drawing on Media System Dependency Theory, Kim and Jung (2017) extended media dependency research to social networking services, while Lee and Choi (2018) examined informational dependency in relation to obtaining and using information. Unlike general social media usage, informational dependency emphasizes the extent to which individuals depend on social media as an information resource. In tourism contexts, social media provides access to destination information that individuals use when evaluating travel opportunities and considering future tourism activities. Wang and Park (2023) examined destination information search on social media in relation to domestic travel intention and recommendation intention among Chinese university students. Wu et al. (2022) also investigated the relationship between tourism mobile application experiences and travel intention, highlighting the relevance of digital information environments to students' prospective tourism decisions. In this study, SMID represents students' dependency on social media for acquiring, utilizing, and updating tourism-related information about Yunnan. Following Lee and Choi (2018), these aspects are treated as measurement content within a single informational dependency construct rather than separate dimensions. From a media dependency perspective, individuals who rely more strongly on social media information are expected to incorporate such information more extensively into their tourism-related evaluations and decisions. Accordingly, the relationships between tourism motivations, destination perceptions, and tourism intention are expected to differ according to the degree of informational dependency.

Push Motivation originates from internal psychological needs, including relaxation, social interaction, self-growth, and novelty seeking (Crompton, 1979; Lee & Crompton, 1992; Ayoub & Mohamed, 2024; Yang et al., 2023). However, the translation of these motivations into destination-specific tourism intention also involves information about available travel opportunities. Students with higher SMID rely more extensively on social media to obtain, interpret, and update tourism information. Such dependency is expected to strengthen the relationship between internal tourism motivations and future tourism intention because information about Yunnan's attractions and experiences can help students connect their

psychological travel needs with a specific destination. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: Social Media Informational Dependency positively moderates the relationship between Push Motivation and Tourism Intention, such that the positive relationship is stronger at higher levels of Social Media Informational Dependency.

Pull Perception reflects evaluations of external destination characteristics, including natural attractions, cultural resources, distinctive experiences, and accessibility (Kim et al., 2003; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Valencia et al., 2022; Duong et al., 2023). These evaluations provide important information for destination selection. However, their relationship with tourism intention is expected to depend partly on how extensively students rely on social media as a source of tourism information. Based on Media System Dependency Theory and previous research on social media informational dependency (Kim & Jung, 2017; Lee & Choi, 2018), the following hypothesis is proposed:

H9: Social Media Informational Dependency positively moderates the relationship between Pull Perception and Tourism Intention, such that the positive relationship is stronger at higher levels of Social Media Informational Dependency.

2.3 Theoretical Model

Based on Push – Pull Theory, destination image research, and Media System Dependency Theory, this study proposes an integrated theoretical model to explain Chinese university students' tourism intention toward Yunnan.The model incorporates Push Motivation and Pull Perception as independent variables, Destination Image as a mediating variable, Social Media Informational Dependency as a moderating variable, and Tourism Intention as the dependent variable. Nine hypotheses are developed to examine the proposed relationships. H1 – H5 address the direct relationships among Push Motivation.H1–H5 concern direct associations, H6–H7 concern mediation, and H8–H9 concern moderation. These hypotheses form the basis of the proposed conceptual framework, as illustrated in Figure 1.

International Journal of Economics, Business & Sustainable Management
ISSN 3139-0919 (Online)

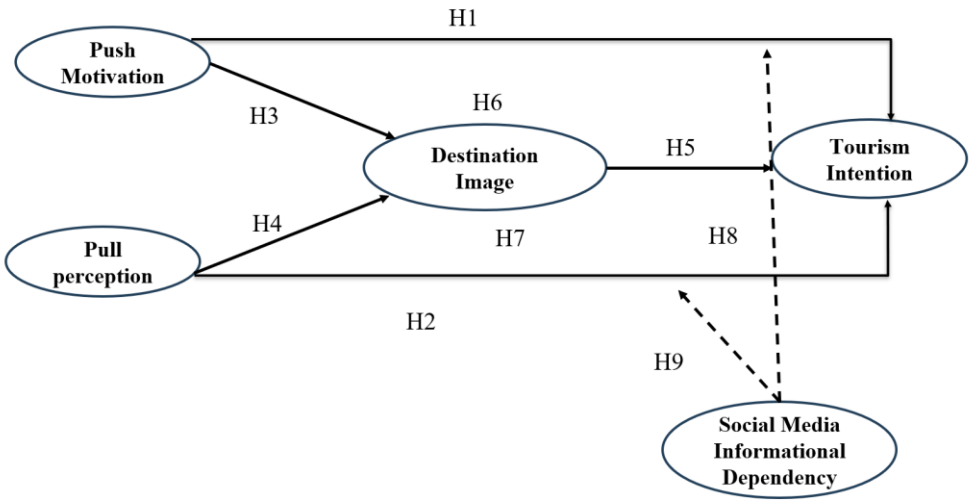


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Instrument and Measurement

This study employed a structured questionnaire to measure five constructs: Push Motivation, Pull Perception, Destination Image, Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID), and Tourism Intention. All 34 measurement items were adapted from previous studies and contextualized to university students' tourism intentions toward Yunnan. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)(Likert, 1932).

Push Motivation was measured using 12 items across four dimensions: Escape from Stress, Social Interaction, Self-growth, and Novelty Seeking, based on (Crompton, 1979; Lee & Crompton, 1992), and Yang et al. (2023). Pull Perception comprised 12 items covering Natural Attractions, Cultural Attractions, Distinctive Experiences, and Accessibility, adapted from (Kim et al., 2003; Yoon & Uysal, 2005), and related tourism studies.

Destination Image was measured using four items reflecting overall image and affective image, based on Baloglu and McCleary (1999). SMID was assessed using three items concerning information acquisition, utilization, and updating, adapted from Lee and Choi (2018). Tourism Intention was measured using three items addressing future visit intention, destination preference, and travel planning, adapted from Jalilvand and Samiei (2012).

3.2 Target Population

The target population of this study consisted of students aged 18 years or above who were currently enrolled in higher education institutions in mainland China, including junior college, undergraduate, masters, and doctoral students. No fixed upper age limit was imposed, as students' ages vary across different levels of higher educationMinistry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2017) .

The formal questionnaire included screening questions to verify respondents' age and current enrollment status. Only students aged 18 or above who were formally enrolled in higher education institutions in mainland China were eligible to participate. Age ranges were also collected as demographic information.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Method

This study employed non-probability convenience sampling, which involves recruiting accessible and willing participants from the target population (Singh & Masuku, 2014). This method was adopted because university students were distributed across different regions of China, making it impractical to obtain a complete sampling frame or implement probability sampling.

The questionnaire was developed and distributed through Wenjuanxing, with respondents recruited primarily through online platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Weibo. Participants accessed the questionnaire through a survey link and completed eligibility screening questions before proceeding. Participation was voluntary and limited to respondents meeting the study's inclusion criteria.

Although convenience sampling facilitated access to geographically dispersed university students, it may introduce selection bias because voluntary participants may differ from non-participants. Therefore, the sample cannot be considered statistically representative of all university students in mainland China. The findings are interpreted primarily in relation to the 532 valid respondents, and generalization to the broader population should be made cautiously.

3.4 Sample Size Determination

An appropriate sample size is important for ensuring the adequacy of subsequent statistical analyses. This study used the Cochran (1977) formula as a reference for planning the formal survey sample size:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

Where n_0 represents the required sample size, represents the standard normal value corresponding to the selected confidence level, p represents the estimated population proportion,

and e represents the allowable margin of error. When the population proportion is unknown, p=0.50 is used. At a 95% confidence level, Z=1.96, and the allowable margin of error is set at 5% Cochran (1977). Therefore, the reference sample size is calculated as follows:

$$n_0 = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.50 \times (1 - 0.50)}{0.05^2} = 384.16$$

The calculated reference sample size was approximately 385. Considering potential exclusions due to ineligible respondents, failed attention checks, incomplete responses, or other data-quality issues, the study established a minimum target of 400 valid questionnaires and planned to collect approximately 500–550 responses. This target also considered the requirements of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), regression analysis, and mediation and moderation testing.

Because the study employed convenience sampling, the Cochran formula served as a planning reference rather than providing a probability-based guarantee of sampling precision.

3.5 Data Collection and Quality Control

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire developed through Wenjuanxing and distributed primarily via Xiaohongshu, Bilibili, and WeChat. Online distribution enabled the researcher to reach university students across different regions of mainland China and collect information concerning tourism-related perceptions and Tourism Intention toward Yunnan.

Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed of the research purpose, anonymity, voluntary participation, and academic use of the collected data. Eligibility screening questions confirmed that participants were at least 18 years old and currently enrolled in higher education institutions in mainland China. Respondents who did not meet these criteria were excluded.

To ensure data quality, attention-check items were incorporated into the questionnaire. Following data collection, responses were screened to exclude ineligible participants, failed attention checks, incomplete questionnaires, and clearly invalid response patterns. Data collection and screening resulted in 532 valid questionnaires for subsequent statistical analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis Methods

This study employed SPSS, AMOS, and the PROCESS Macro to analyze the collected data. The analytical procedure comprised three stages: data preprocessing, measurement assessment, and hypothesis testing.

First, SPSS was used for data cleaning and descriptive statistical analysis to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and the distributions of the study variables. Cronbach's

α was employed to assess the internal consistency of the constructs and their relevant dimensions(Cronbach, 1951). The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure, Bartlett's test of sphericity, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were subsequently conducted to evaluate the suitability of the data for factor analysis and examine the preliminary factor structure.

AMOS was used to evaluate the measurement model rather than to test the structural paths of the proposed hypotheses.

Third, Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis were conducted using SPSS to examine relationships among the study variables. Regression analysis tested the direct effects of Push Motivation and Pull Perception on Tourism Intention (H1–H2), their effects on Destination Image (H3–H4), and the effect of Destination Image on Tourism Intention (H5).

Mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Macro Model 4 with Bootstrap confidence intervals to examine the indirect effects of Push Motivation and Pull Perception on Tourism Intention through Destination Image (H6–H7). An indirect effect was considered statistically significant when its Bootstrap confidence interval excluded zero.

Moderation analysis was performed using PROCESS Macro Model 1 to examine whether Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID) moderated the relationships between Push Motivation and Tourism Intention (H8) and between Pull Perception and Tourism Intention (H9). Interaction terms were used to assess the moderating effects, and significant interactions were further interpreted through conditional effects and simple slope analysis.

Finally, regression diagnostics, including multicollinearity assessment, were conducted to evaluate the appropriateness of the regression models and the stability of the estimated results.

4. Research Results and Data Analysis

4.1 Descriptive analysis

During the formal survey stage, data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Wenjuanxing using a convenience sampling approach. The target respondents were students aged 18 years and above who were currently enrolled in higher education institutions in mainland China. Following the eligibility screening and data-quality review procedures, a total of 532 valid questionnaires were retained for the final statistical analysis. The sample included university students with different demographic backgrounds and previous travel experiences in Yunnan.

To provide a comprehensive overview of the respondents, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted across five demographic and travel-related characteristics: gender, age, education level, monthly disposable income, and previous travel experience in Yunnan. The detailed distribution of the 532 valid respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample basic information (N = 532)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	226	42.5
	Female	306	57.5
Age	18–20	170	32.0
	21–23	245	46.1
	24–26	95	17.9
	27–30	20	3.8
	31 and above	2	0.4
Education level	Junior college/Higher vocational	51	9.6
	Undergraduate	338	63.5
	Master's	124	23.3
	Doctoral	19	3.6
Monthly disposable income	≤ RMB 1,500	201	37.8
	RMB 1,501–3,000	229	43.0
	RMB 3,001–5,000	82	15.4
	> RMB 5,000	20	3.8
Previous travel experience in Yunnan	Never visited	219	41.2
	Once	166	31.2
	Twice	73	13.7
	Three times or more	74	13.9

To further examine the overall distributional characteristics of the main study variables, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted for Push Motivation, Pull Perception, Destination Image, Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID), and Tourism Intention. The analysis focused on the sample size, minimum value, maximum value, mean, and standard deviation.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of the main study variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)
Push Motivation	532	2.00	4.75	3.970	0.520
Pull Perception	532	1.67	4.75	3.757	0.566
Destination Image	532	1.50	4.75	3.856	0.752

Social Media Informational Dependency	532	1.00	5.00	3.664	0.829
Tourism Intention	532	1.00	5.00	3.360	0.752

Note: All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

Descriptive statistics, including the sample size, minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation, were calculated for the five main study variables. As shown in Table 2, Push Motivation had the highest mean score (M = 3.970, SD = 0.520), indicating relatively strong internal travel motivations among respondents. Destination Image (M = 3.856, SD = 0.752) and Pull Perception (M = 3.757, SD = 0.566) also showed relatively high mean scores, suggesting generally positive evaluations of Yunnan as a tourism destination. Social Media Informational Dependency (M = 3.664, SD = 0.829) reflected a moderate-to-high level of informational dependency, while Tourism Intention had the lowest mean score (M = 3.360, SD = 0.752).

Regarding the standard deviations, the SD values of the five variables ranged from 0.520 to 0.829. Social Media Informational Dependency showed the largest standard deviation (SD = 0.829), indicating relatively greater individual differences among respondents in their level of dependency on social media for tourism-related information. Push Motivation had the smallest standard deviation (SD = 0.520), suggesting that respondents' answers regarding their internal travel motivations were relatively more concentrated.

4.2 Reliability and validity analysis

This section assesses the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument using Cronbach's α, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test, Bartlett's test of sphericity, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

4.2.1 Reliability analysis

Cronbach's α was used to assess the internal consistency of each study variable. Cronbach's α is a commonly used measure of internal consistency in social science research, with values closer to 1 generally indicating higher internal consistency among the items within a scale.Stefana et al. (2025) suggested that Cronbach's α values of approximately 0.70–0.90 generally indicate good reliability, while values of 0.90 or above indicate a high level of reliability. Recent scale validation studies have also commonly adopted $\alpha \geq 0.70$ as the criterion for acceptable internal consistency.

Cronbach's α was used to assess the internal consistency of each study variable. Values of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ indicate acceptable reliability, while values of $\alpha \geq 0.80$ and $\alpha \geq 0.90$ indicate good and high

internal consistency, respectively (Stefana et al., 2025). As Cronbach's α does not independently establish construct validity, further validity assessments were conducted using factor analysis.

Table 3 Reliability analysis results of the formal survey

Study variable	Number of items	Cronbach's α
Push Motivation	12	0.851
Pull Perception	12	0.868
Destination Image	4	0.861
Social Media Informational Dependency	3	0.850
Tourism Intention	3	0.837

As shown in Table 3, Cronbach's α coefficient ranged from 0.837 to 0.868. Pull Perception exhibited the highest reliability (α = 0.868), while Tourism Intention had the lowest (α = 0.837). All five constructs exceeded the 0.80 threshold, indicating good internal consistency.

4.2.2 Validity Analysis

The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity were conducted to assess the suitability of the data for factor analysis. A KMO value of 0.60 or above indicates acceptable sampling adequacy, while values between 0.80 and 0.89 indicate good adequacyStefana et al. (2025) . A significant Bartlett's test ($p < 0.05$) indicates sufficient correlations among measurement items for factor analysis (Bartlett, 1954). All 34 core measurement items were included in these tests, and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 KMO and Bartlett's test results

Test	Statistic	Result
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of Sampling Adequacy	KMO	**0.872**
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	**6937.655**
	df	**561**
	Sig.	**0.000**

As shown in Table 4, the KMO value for the formal survey data was **0.872**, which exceeded the basic criterion of 0.60 and fell within the range of 0.80–0.89, indicating good sampling adequacy. In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (**$p < 0.001$**), indicating sufficient correlations among the measurement items. Therefore, the results of the KMO and Bartlett's tests jointly demonstrate that the data were suitable for exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

4.2.3 Exploratory factor analysis

After confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the 34 core measurement items. Eigenvalues greater than 1 and factor loadings of 0.40 or above were adopted as reference criteria for factor retention and item interpretation (Abd ElHafeez et al., 2022).

The EFA extracted nine factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for a cumulative variance of 50.672% (Table 5). This result reached the commonly adopted reference level of 50% for cumulative variance explained Abd ElHafeez et al. (2022).

Table 5 Total variance explained by exploratory factor analysis

Factor	Variance explained after rotation (%)	Cumulative variance explained (%)
1	20.524	20.524
2	9.068	29.592
3	5.600	35.192
4	5.157	40.349
5	3.707	44.056
6	1.855	45.911
7	1.724	47.634
8	1.605	49.239
9	1.433	**50.672**

Factor loadings represent the strength of the association between a measurement item and its underlying factor, with higher loadings indicating a stronger relationship between the item and the corresponding factor. Recent EFA studies have continued to use 0.40 as the minimum reference value for identifying a substantively meaningful factor loading Mendoza-Torres et al. (2023); (Sigudla & Maritz, 2023). Accordingly, the empirical factor structure of the formal survey data was evaluated by considering both the primary factor loadings of the individual items and their theoretically specified dimensions.

Table 6 Exploratory factor analysis factor loading results

Theoretical construct/dimension	Item	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9
Push Motivation — Novelty Seeking	**PU12**	**0.671**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	PU10	**0.621**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	PU11	**0.582**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Push Motivation — Escape from Stress	**PU1**	**0.471**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	PU2	**0.406**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	PU3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Pull Perception — Accessibility	PP10	—	0.803	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	PP12	—	0.760	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	PP11	—	0.666	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pull Perception — Cultural Attractions	PP5	—	0.489	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	PP4	—	0.406	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	PP6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Destination Image	DI4	—	—	0.851	—	—	—	—	—	—
	DI1	—	—	0.816	—	—	—	—	—	—
	DI2	—	—	0.771	—	—	—	—	—	—
	DI3	—	—	0.634	—	—	—	—	—	—
Social Media Informational Dependency	SMID1	—	—	—	0.834	—	—	—	—	—
	SMID2	—	—	—	0.829	—	—	—	—	—
	SMID3	—	—	—	0.767	—	—	—	—	—
Tourism Intention	TI3	—	—	—	—	0.831	—	—	—	—
	TI2	—	—	—	—	0.781	—	—	—	—
	TI1	—	—	—	—	0.731	—	—	—	—
Pull Perception — Distinctive Experiences	PP8	—	—	—	—	—	0.733	—	—	—
	PP7	—	—	—	—	—	0.563	—	—	—
	PP9	—	—	—	—	—	0.560	—	—	—
Pull Perception — Natural Attractions	PP3	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.682	—	—
	PP1	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.560	—	—
	PP2	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.524	—	—
Push Motivation — Self-growth	PU7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.598	—
	PU9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.594	—

Push Motivation — Social Interaction	**PU8**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	**0.570**	—
	PU4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	**0.576**
	PU6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	**0.522**
	PU5	**0.473**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	**0.488**

Note: Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) was used as the extraction method with Promax oblique rotation and Kaiser normalization. "—" indicates that the loading was below the display threshold specified in SPSS and was therefore not displayed in the Pattern Matrix. PU5 loaded on both Factor 1 and Factor 9; therefore, both loadings were retained and reported as obtained. The values presented above are consistent with the original Pattern Matrix.

As shown in Table 6, the measurement items for Destination Image, Social Media Informational Dependency, and Tourism Intention were clearly grouped under Factors 3, 4, and 5, respectively. The items for Distinctive Experiences, Natural Attractions, and Self-growth also showed identifiable factor groupings. Their reported primary loadings exceeded the reference criterion of 0.40.

However, some dimensions of Push Motivation and Pull Perception did not align perfectly with the theoretically specified structure. Items from Novelty Seeking and Escape from Stress loaded together on Factor 1, while items from Accessibility and Cultural Attractions loaded together on Factor 2. PU5 exhibited cross-loadings of 0.473 and 0.488, whereas PU3 and PP6 did not display loadings reaching the specified threshold. These findings suggest some divergence between the exploratory factor structure and the proposed theoretical dimensions. As item retention should consider statistical evidence and theoretical justification (Mendoza-Torres et al., 2023), the original dimensions were retained for further evaluation through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS.

4.2.4 Common method bias

Because all core study variables were measured using the same self-report questionnaire, common method bias (CMB) was considered a potential concern Podsakoff et al. (2024).

Harman's single-factor test was conducted as a preliminary assessment of common method bias. All 34 core measurement items were included in an unrotated exploratory factor analysis, and the variance explained by the first factor was examined. A first-factor variance exceeding 50% was used as a preliminary indication of potentially substantial common method bias.

As shown in Table 7, the analysis extracted nine factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, with the first factor accounting for 21.942% of the total variance. As this value was below the 50% reference threshold, the test did not indicate a dominant single factor. However, Harman's single-factor test alone cannot rule out common method bias, and the findings should therefore be interpreted cautiously.

Table 7 Common method bias test results

Test method	Number of measurement items	Number of extracted factors	Variance explained by the first factor (%)	Criterion
Harman's single-factor test	34	9	21.942	< 50%

4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Following the exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS to evaluate the theoretically specified measurement model and assess measurement reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

According to the theoretical model of this study, Push Motivation and Pull Perception were specified as second-order constructs. Push Motivation consisted of four first-order dimensions: Escape from Stress, Social Interaction, Self-growth, and Novelty Seeking. Pull Perception consisted of four first-order dimensions: Natural Attractions, Cultural Attractions, Distinctive Experiences, and Accessibility. Destination Image, Social Media Informational Dependency, and Tourism Intention were included in the measurement model as separate latent constructs.

The CFA measurement model was evaluated from three aspects. First, multiple model fit indices were used to assess the overall fit between the theoretically specified measurement model and the sample data. Second, standardized factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were used to evaluate composite reliability and convergent validity. Finally, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was employed to examine the discriminant validity among the core study constructs. The CFA measurement model was evaluated using overall model fit indices, standardized factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

4.3.1 Measurement Model Fit

Figure 2 presents the CFA measurement model and its standardized estimates.

International Journal of Economics, Business & Sustainable Management
ISSN 3139-0919 (Online)

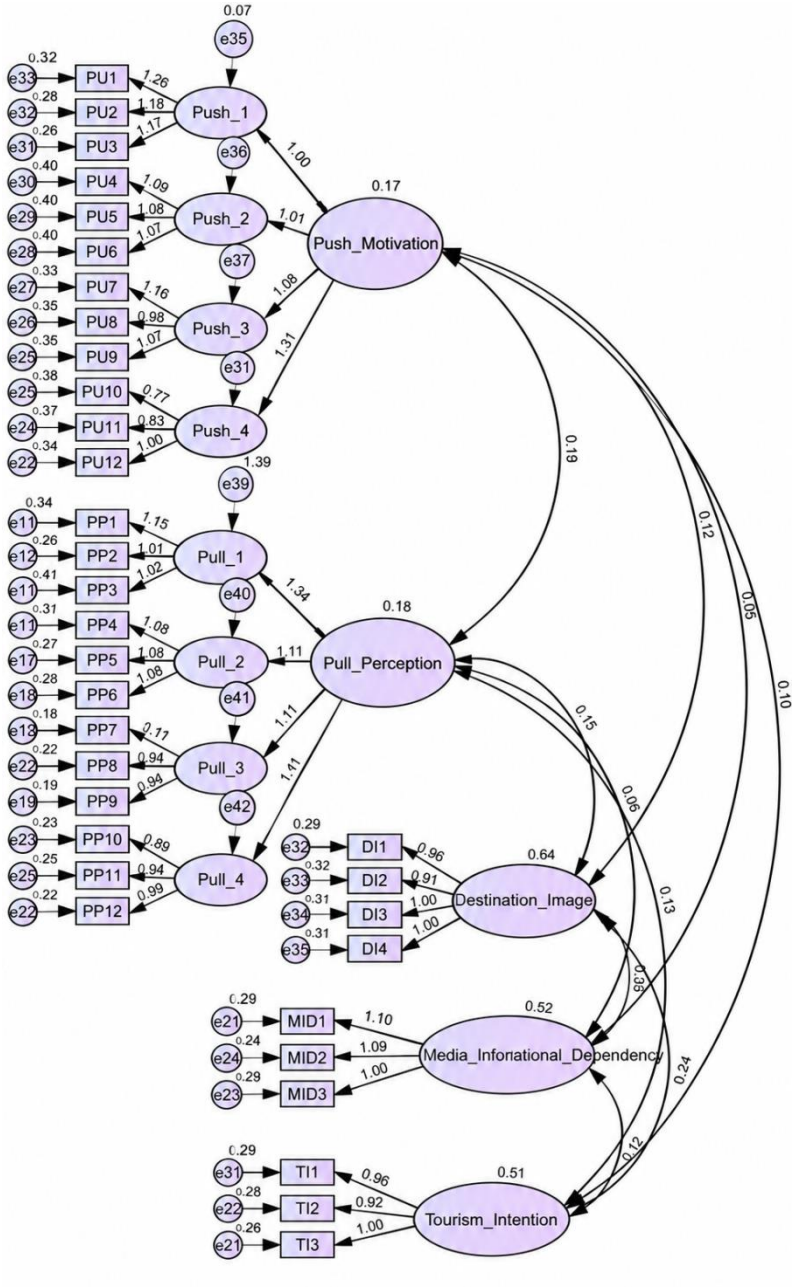


Figure 2 CFA measurement model

The overall fit of the CFA measurement model was assessed using multiple fit indices, including χ^2/df, RMSEA, CFI, TLI, GFI, AGFI, NFI, IFI, and RMR. Commonly adopted reference criteria include χ^2/df < 3.00, RMSEA < 0.08, CFI and TLI ≥ 0.90, and values above 0.90 for other incremental and absolute fit indices where applicable. These thresholds were treated as general guidelines rather than absolute criteria (Goretzko et al., 2024).

Table 8 CFA measurement model fit results

Fit index	Result	Reference criterion
χ^2	691.297	—
df	509	—
χ^2/df	1.358	< 3.00
GFI	0.929	> 0.90
AGFI	0.917	> 0.90
NFI	0.903	> 0.90
IFI	0.972	> 0.90
TLI	0.969	> 0.90
CFI	0.972	> 0.90
RMR	0.027	< 0.05
RMSEA	0.026	< 0.08

Note: χ^2/df = chi-square divided by degrees of freedom; GFI = Goodness-of-Fit Index; AGFI = Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index; NFI = Normed Fit Index; IFI = Incremental Fit Index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMR = Root Mean Square Residual; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

As shown in Table 8, the CFA measurement model demonstrated a good overall fit (χ^2 = 691.297, df = 509, χ^2/df = 1.358, RMSEA = 0.026, CFI = 0.972, and TLI = 0.969). The remaining fit indices, including GFI, AGFI, NFI, IFI, and RMR, also met their respective reference criteria. These results indicate that the measurement model was acceptable for further assessment of composite reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

4.3.2 Convergent validity

Convergent validity was assessed using standardized factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), based on the AMOS CFA results. Standardized factor loadings ≥ 0.50, CR ≥ 0.70, and AVE ≥ 0.50 were adopted as reference criteria Cheung et al. (2024). The results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9 Standardized factor loadings, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted

Construct/Dimension	Measurement indicator	Standardized factor loading	CR	AVE
Push Motivation (second-order)	Escape from Stress	0.840	**0.878**	**0.642**
	Social Interaction	0.793		
	Self-growth	0.777		
	Novelty Seeking	0.797		
Escape from Stress	PU1	0.722	0.701	0.44
	PU2	0.675		
	PU3	0.586		
Social Interaction	PU4	0.682	0.703	0.441
	PU5	0.667		
	PU6	0.642		
Self-growth	PU7	0.719	0.746	0.459
	PU8	0.686		
	PU9	0.705		
Novelty Seeking	PU10	0.616	0.723	0.466
	PU11	0.640		
	PU12	0.784		
Pull Perception (second-order)	Natural Attractions	0.810	**0.893**	**0.677**
	Cultural Attractions	0.821		
	Distinctive Experiences	0.832		
	Accessibility	0.822		
Natural Attractions	PP1	0.718	0.718	0.459
	PP2	0.718		
	PP3	0.594		
Cultural Attractions	PP4	0.661	0.733	0.479
	PP5	0.754		
	PP6	0.656		
Distinctive Experiences	PP7	0.682	0.724	0.467
	PP8	0.700		
	PP9	0.669		
Accessibility	PP10	0.711	0.770	0.528
	PP11	0.703		
	PP12	0.763		
Destination Image	DI1	0.817	**0.865**	**0.619**
	DI2	0.813		
	DI3	0.616		

	DI4	0.872		
Social Media Informational Dependency	SMID1	0.849	**0.850**	**0.655**
	SMID2	0.817		
	SMID3	0.763		
Tourism Intention	TI1	0.786	**0.838**	**0.633**
	TI2	0.778		
	TI3	0.820		

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted. The CR and AVE values for Push Motivation and Pull Perception were calculated based on the standardized loadings of their four first-order dimensions on the corresponding second-order constructs. The CR and AVE values for each first-order dimension were calculated based on the standardized loadings of its corresponding observed items.

As shown in Table 9, the five cores constructs—Push Motivation, Pull Perception, Destination Image, Social Media Informational Dependency, and Tourism Intention—demonstrated acceptable standardized factor loadings, with CR values ranging from 0.838 to 0.893 and AVE values ranging from 0.619 to 0.677. These results indicate satisfactory composite reliability and convergent validity at the core construct level.

However, seven of the eight first-order dimensions had AVE values slightly below 0.50 (0.440–0.479), with Accessibility being the only dimension exceeding this threshold (AVE = 0.528). Although their CR values exceeded 0.70, the convergent validity evidence for these first-order dimensions was less satisfactory under the strict AVE criterion.

Considering the standardized factor loadings, CR, and AVE collectively, the five core constructs met the adopted convergent validity criteria, although the lower AVE values of several first-order dimensions should be acknowledged as a measurement limitation Cheung et al. (2024).

4.3.3 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity among the five core constructs was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion Cheung et al. (2024). According to this criterion, the square root of each construct's AVE (√AVE) should exceed its correlations with the other constructs. The results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10 Fornell–Larcker discriminant validity results

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
Push Motivation	**0.801**				
Pull Perception	0.306	**0.823**			
Destination Image	0.375	0.451	**0.787**		
Social Media Informational Dependency	0.178	0.198	0.163	**0.809**	
Tourism Intention	0.339	0.420	0.427	0.232	**0.796**

Note: The bold diagonal values represent the square root of the AVE (√AVE) for each construct, while the off-diagonal values represent the correlations between constructs.

According to the Fornell–Larcker criterion, discriminant validity is considered acceptable when the √AVE of each construct is greater than its correlations with the other constructs Fornell and Larcker (1981) . The correlations presented in the table are the latent construct correlations obtained from the AMOS measurement model.

As shown in Table 10, the square root of AVE for each core construct exceeded its correlations with the other constructs. The highest inter-construct correlation was observed between Pull Perception and Destination Image (r = 0.451), which remained below their respective √AVE values of 0.823 and 0.787. These results support acceptable discriminant validity among the five cores constructs.

4.4 Hypothesis testing

This section tests the nine research hypotheses proposed in Chapter 2. Pearson correlation analysis and multiple regressions were used to examine associations and direct effects (H1–H5). PROCESS Model 4 with bootstrap resampling was employed to assess the mediating effects of Destination Image (H6–H7), while PROCESS Model 1 and simple slopes analysis were used to evaluate the moderating effects of Social Media Informational Dependency (H8–H9).

4.4.1 Correlation analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the five core constructs, with statistical significance assessed at $p < 0.05$ (Papageorgiou, 2022) . Correlation analysis identifies associations rather than causal relationships, and hypothesis decisions were based on the subsequent regression and PROCESS analyses.

As shown in Table 11, all five constructs were positively and significantly correlated. Tourism Intention was positively correlated with Push Motivation (r = 0.271), Pull Perception (r = 0.346), and Destination Image (r = 0.369), while Social Media Informational Dependency showed

relatively weak positive correlations with the other constructs (r = 0.147–0.194). These findings provided preliminary evidence of associations among the study variables.

Table 11 Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations of the core study variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Push Motivation	3.970	0.520	**1**				
Pull Perception	3.757	0.566	0.242**	**1**			
Destination Image	3.856	0.752	0.297**	0.381**	**1**		
Social Media Informational Dependency	3.664	0.829	0.148**	0.165**	0.147**	**1**	
Tourism Intention	3.360	0.752	0.271**	0.346**	0.369**	0.194**	**1**

Note: N = 532. **p < 0.01 (two-tailed)

As shown in Table 11, the core study variables were positively and significantly correlated with one another. Push Motivation and Pull Perception were positively correlated with Tourism Intention (r = 0.271 and r = 0.346, respectively, both p < 0.001). Both variables were also positively correlated with Destination Image (r = 0.297 and r = 0.381, respectively, both p < 0.001). In addition, Destination Image was positively correlated with Tourism Intention (r = 0.369, p < 0.001), indicating that a more positive destination image was associated with stronger tourism intention.

Social Media Informational Dependency was positively correlated with Push Motivation (r = 0.148, p = 0.001), Pull Perception (r = 0.165, p < 0.001), Destination Image (r = 0.147, p = 0.001), and Tourism Intention (r = 0.194, p < 0.001). These correlations were relatively weak in magnitude.

4.4.2 Direct effect testing

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test H1–H5. Model 1 examined the effects of Push Motivation and Pull Perception on Destination Image (H3–H4), while Model 2 examined the effects of Push Motivation, Pull Perception, and Destination Image on Tourism Intention (H1, H2, and H5). Model fit and predictor significance were assessed using R^2, adjusted R^2, F-tests, and regression coefficients. Multicollinearity and residual independence were assessed using VIF and Durbin–Watson statistics, respectively (Roustaei, 2024; Trunfio et al., 2022). VIF values ranged from 1.062 to 1.235, and Durbin–Watson statistics were 1.836 and 1.762, indicating no

apparent serious multicollinearity or residual autocorrelation under the adopted reference criteria. The results are presented in Table 12.

Table 12 Multiple regression results for direct effects

Dependent variable	Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	VIF
Destination Image	Push Motivation	0.314	0.058	0.217	5.388	<0.001	1.062
	Pull Perception	0.437	0.054	0.329	8.158	<0.001	1.062
Tourism Intention	Push Motivation	0.211	0.059	0.146	3.561	<0.001	1.120
	Pull Perception	0.290	0.056	0.218	5.145	<0.001	1.196
	Destination Image	0.242	0.043	0.242	5.619	<0.001	1.235

Table 12 Multiple regression results for direct effects (continued)

Model statistics

Regression model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	p	Durbin–Watson
Push + Pull → Destination Image	0.436	0.190	0.187	62.027	<0.001	1.836
Push + Pull + Destination Image → Tourism Intention	0.452	0.205	0.200	45.280	<0.001	1.762

Note: B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor.

The overall model was statistically significant (F = **62.027**, p < **0.001**), with an R^2 of **0.190** and an Adjusted R^2 of **0.187**, indicating that Push Motivation and Pull Perception jointly explained approximately **19.0%** of the variance in Destination Image.

The regression model was statistically significant (F = 62.027, p < 0.001), explaining 19.0% of the variance in Destination Image (R^2 = 0.190). Both Push Motivation (β = 0.217, p < 0.001) and Pull Perception (β = 0.329, p < 0.001) had significant positive effects on Destination Image, supporting H3 and H4. Comparison of the standardized coefficients indicated that Pull Perception had a stronger predictive effect on Destination Image than Push Motivation.

The second regression model was statistically significant (F = 45.280, p < 0.001), explaining 20.5% of the variance in Tourism Intention (R^2 = 0.205). After controlling for the other predictors, Push Motivation (β = 0.146, p < 0.001), Pull Perception (β = 0.218, p < 0.001), and Destination Image (β = 0.242, p < 0.001) all had significant positive effects on Tourism

Intention, supporting H1, H2, and H5. Among these predictors, Destination Image exhibited the strongest standardized effect, followed by Pull Perception and Push Motivation.

Table 13 Direct effect hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Hypothesized path	β	t	p
H1	Push Motivation → Tourism Intention	0.146	3.561	< 0.001
H2	Pull Perception → Tourism Intention	0.218	5.145	< 0.001
H3	Push Motivation → Destination Image	0.217	5.388	< 0.001
H4	Pull Perception → Destination Image	0.329	8.158	< 0.001
H5	Destination Image → Tourism Intention	0.242	5.619	< 0.001

4.4.3 Mediation effect testing

PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap resamples was used to test the mediating role of Destination Image in the relationships between Push Motivation and Tourism Intention (H6) and between Pull Perception and Tourism Intention (H7). An indirect effect was considered statistically significant when its 95% bootstrap confidence interval excluded zero (Tibbe & Montoya, 2022). The results are presented in Table 14.

Table 14 Bootstrap mediation effect test results for Destination Image

Hypothesis	Mediation Path	Effect Size	Direct Effect (B)	BootSE	Bootstrap 95% CI		Result
					Lower Limit	Upper Limit	
H6	PU → DI → TI	0.1357	0.2558	0.0280	0.0846	0.1930	Supported
H7	PP → DI → TI	0.1406	0.3194	0.0265	0.0902	0.1942	Supported

Note: PU = Push Motivation; PP = Pull Perception; DI = Destination Image; TI = Tourism Intention; Bootstrap = 5,000 resamples.

Push Motivation was positively associated with Destination Image (B = 0.4290, p < 0.001), which was subsequently positively associated with Tourism Intention (B = 0.3164, p < 0.001). The total effect of Push Motivation on Tourism Intention was significant (B = 0.3916, p < 0.001), and the direct effect remained significant after including Destination Image as the mediator (B = 0.2558, p < 0.001).

The indirect effect through Destination Image was significant (B = 0.1357, BootSE = 0.0280, 95% Bootstrap CI [0.0846, 0.1930]), as the confidence interval excluded zero. Since both the

indirect and direct effects were significant, Destination Image exhibited a partial mediating effect, supporting H6.

Pull Perception was positively associated with Destination Image (B = 0.5738, p < 0.001), which was subsequently positively associated with Tourism Intention (B = 0.2772, p < 0.001). The total effect of Pull Perception on Tourism Intention was significant (B = 0.4600, p < 0.001), and the direct effect remained significant after including Destination Image as the mediator (B = 0.3194, p < 0.001).

The indirect effect through Destination Image was significant (B = 0.1406, BootSE = 0.0265, 95% Bootstrap CI [0.0902, 0.1942]), as the confidence interval excluded zero. Since both the indirect and direct effects were significant, Destination Image also exhibited a partial mediating effect, supporting H7.

4.4.4 Moderation effect testing

PROCESS Model 1 was employed to examine the moderating effects of Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID) on the relationships between Push Motivation and Tourism Intention (H8) and between Pull Perception and Tourism Intention (H9). Moderation effects were assessed using the interaction coefficients, their statistical significance and 95% confidence intervals, ΔR^2, and F-change (Fang & Wen, 2022). The results are presented in Table 15.

Table 15 Moderation effect test results for Social Media Informational Dependency

Hypothesis	Moderating Path	B	SE	t	p	95% CI	ΔR^2	F-change	Result
H8	PU × SMID → TI	0.5403	0.0709	7.6168	< 0.001	[0.4009, 0.6796]	0.0893	58.0154	Supported
H9	PP × SMID → TI	0.4354	0.0613	7.0993	< 0.001	[0.3149, 0.5558]	0.0750	50.3999	Supported

Note: PU = Push Motivation; PP = Pull Perception; SMID = Social Media Informational Dependency; TI = Tourism Intention; continuous variables were mean-centered before the interaction terms were constructed; CI = Confidence Interval; ΔR^2 represents the increase in the proportion of variance explained after the interaction term was added to the model.

For H8, the interaction between Push Motivation and SMID was significantly positive (B = 0.5403, SE = 0.0709, t = 7.6168, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.4009, 0.6796]). The interaction term accounted for an additional 8.93% of the variance in Tourism Intention (ΔR^2 = 0.0893, F-change

= 58.0154, p < 0.001). These results indicate that SMID significantly and positively moderated the relationship between Push Motivation and Tourism Intention, supporting H8.

For H9, the interaction between Pull Perception and SMID was significantly positive (B = 0.4354, SE = 0.0613, t = 7.0993, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.3149, 0.5558]). The interaction term accounted for an additional 7.50% of the variance in Tourism Intention ($\Delta R^2 = 0.0750$, F-change = 50.3999, p < 0.001). These results indicate that SMID significantly and positively moderated the relationship between Pull Perception and Tourism Intention, supporting H9.

To further interpret the significant interaction effects, simple slopes analysis was conducted at low (M − 1 SD), mean (M), and high (M + 1 SD) levels of SMID(Park & Yi, 2022). The results are presented in Table 16.

Table 16 Simple slopes analysis results at different levels of SMID

Relationship	SMID Level	Effect	SE	t	p	95% CI
PU → TI	Low	0.0626	0.0692	0.9045	0.3661	[−0.0734, 0.1986]
	Mean	0.4228	0.0580	7.2937	< 0.001	[0.3089, 0.5367]
	High	0.9631	0.0980	9.8290	< 0.001	[0.7706, 1.1555]
PP → TI	Low	0.1983	0.0613	3.2347	0.0013	[0.0779, 0.3188]
	Mean	0.4886	0.0527	9.2788	< 0.001	[0.3851, 0.5920]
	High	0.9239	0.0870	10.6256	< 0.001	[0.7531, 1.0947]

Note: PU = Push Motivation; PP = Pull Perception; TI = Tourism Intention; Low, Mean, and High represent low (M − 1 SD), mean (M), and high (M + 1 SD) levels of SMID, respectively; CI = Confidence Interval.

As shown in Table 16, the conditional effect of Push Motivation on Tourism Intention was not significant at low SMID (Effect = 0.0626, p = 0.3661), but became significant at mean (Effect = 0.4228, p < 0.001) and high SMID (Effect = 0.9631, p < 0.001). In contrast, Pull Perception had a significant positive conditional effect on Tourism Intention at all three levels of SMID, with the effect increasing from 0.1983 at low SMID to 0.9239 at high SMID. These findings indicate that

the positive associations between both predictors and Tourism Intention became stronger as SMID increased, although their significance patterns differed at low SMID.

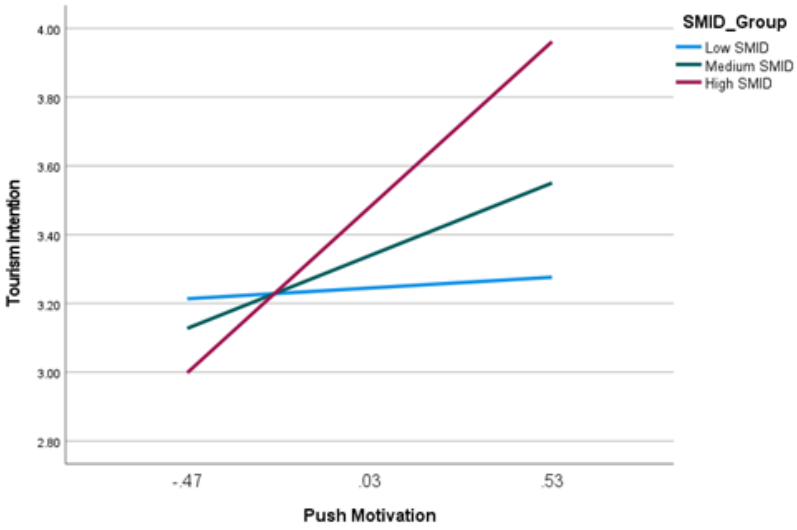


Figure 3 Moderating effect of SMID on the relationship between Push Motivation and Tourism Intention

Figure 3 illustrates the increasingly steep positive relationship between Push Motivation and Tourism Intention as SMID increases, consistent with the conditional effects reported in Table 16.

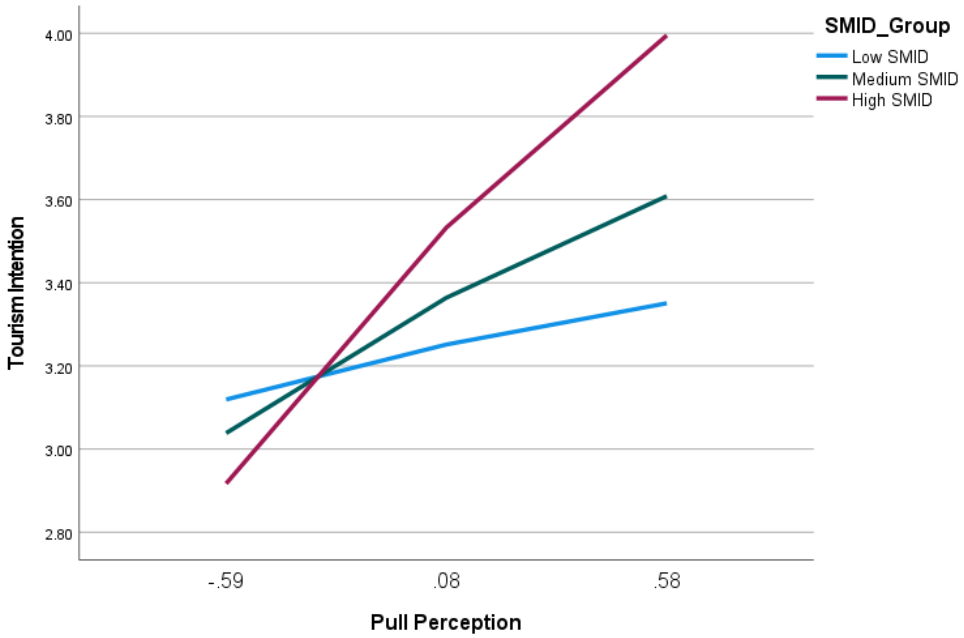


Figure 4 Moderating effect of SMID on the relationship between Pull Perception and Tourism Intention

Figure 4 shows that the positive relationship between Pull Perception and Tourism Intention becomes stronger at higher levels of SMID. Unlike Push Motivation, Pull Perception remains a significant positive predictor even at low SMID, consistent with Table 16.

Overall, all nine research hypotheses were supported. The findings demonstrated significant direct relationships among Push Motivation, Pull Perception, Destination Image, and Tourism Intention, partial mediating effects of Destination Image, and positive moderating effects of Social Media Informational Dependency.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

Both Push Motivation ($\beta = 0.146$, $p < 0.001$) and Pull Perception ($\beta = 0.218$, $p < 0.001$) were positively associated with Tourism Intention, supporting H1 and H2. This pattern accords with the distinction in Push–Pull Theory between internal reasons for traveling and destination attributes that attract visitors (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). The positive association for Push Motivation is consistent with evidence on travel needs and visit intention (Ayoub & Mohamed, 2024; Yang et al., 2023). For students, stress relief, social interaction, self-growth, and novelty seeking provide reasons to travel, but do not by themselves identify which destination should be chosen.

Pull Perception captures a different, destination-specific evaluation: Yunnan's landscapes, cultural attractions, distinctive experiences, and accessibility. Its positive association with intention aligns with destination-attractiveness research and with the findings of Ayoub and Mohamed (2024). This distinction matters in Yunnan because enthusiasm for travel can coexist with uncertainty about whether a particular destination fits students' interests and practical constraints.

The standardized coefficient for Pull Perception ($\beta = 0.218$) was numerically larger than that for Push Motivation ($\beta = 0.146$). This descriptive difference should not be interpreted as a statistically established difference in effect sizes, since no formal coefficient-comparison test was reported. Nevertheless, the pattern is compatible with the argument that destination-specific evaluations provide information beyond general travel motivation when explaining intention to visit Yunnan.

Push Motivation (β = 0.217) and Pull Perception (β = 0.329) were both positively associated with Destination Image, supporting H3 and H4. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) distinguished personal and stimulus-related inputs to destination image formation; the present findings provide a context-specific illustration of these two inputs. Students' internal needs appear relevant to their overall and affective evaluations, while their perceptions of what Yunnan offers are more directly tied to destination-specific impressions.

The positive association between motivation and image is compatible with Maghrifani et al. (2022), who linked travel motivations with destination image and intention. In contrast, the association of Pull Perception with image highlights the role of tangible and experiential destination attributes. This is important because the study measures Destination Image through overall and affective evaluations rather than repeating the specific attributes included in Pull Perception. The conceptual distinction helps explain why both constructs can contribute information to the model.

The coefficient for Pull Perception was numerically larger than that for Push Motivation (0.329 versus 0.217), but the difference was not formally tested. Moreover, the exploratory factor analysis identified imperfect separation of some first-order dimensions. Accordingly, the relative magnitude and conceptual distinction should be interpreted alongside the reported measurement limitations rather than as conclusive evidence that one motivational source dominates the other.

Destination Image was positively associated with Tourism Intention (β = 0.242, $p < 0.001$), and the bootstrapped indirect effects were positive for Push Motivation (B = 0.1357, 95% CI [0.0846, 0.1930]) and Pull Perception (B = 0.1406, 95% CI [0.0902, 0.1942]). These results support H5–H7 and align with the destination image–intention association documented by Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020). The persistence of positive direct associations indicates statistical partial mediation, not that Destination Image fully accounts for students' intentions.

The indirect association involving Push Motivation is consistent with the literature connecting travel motivation, destination image, and intention (Maghrifani et al., 2022; Ayoub & Mohamed, 2024). A plausible interpretation is that general travel needs become more relevant to Yunnan-specific intention when students also evaluate Yunnan favorably. Because motivation, image, and intention were measured at the same time, the analysis cannot establish the temporal sequence implied by the mediation framework.

The Pull Perception pathway similarly links evaluations of Yunnan's attributes with a favorable overall and affective image, which in turn is associated with intention. This is compatible with

Baloglu and McCleary's (1999) image-formation perspective. The indirect effects were obtained from separate PROCESS Model 4 analyses; they should not be treated as a formal comparison of the two indirect effects or as proof that the same pathways would persist in a jointly estimated causal model.

SMID positively moderated both predictor–intention relationships: Push Motivation × SMID (B = 0.5403, $p < 0.001$) and Pull Perception × SMID (B = 0.4354, $p < 0.001$). These findings support H8 and H9 and extend the application of Media System Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) to tourism intention. The results concern dependence on social media as an information resource, rather than social media exposure or usage frequency.

The conditional patterns were not identical. At low SMID, Push Motivation was not significantly associated with Tourism Intention (B = 0.0626, p = 0.3661), whereas Pull Perception remained positively associated (B = 0.1983, p = 0.0013). Both conditional associations increased at higher SMID. This suggests that dependence on tourism information is particularly relevant to the association between general travel needs and Yunnan-specific intention, whereas perceived destination attractions retain an association even among students less dependent on social media.

Prior research has considered social-media-related moderators in travel intention (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020; Rachmandani, 2024). The present findings differ in focusing specifically on informational dependency. They also complement studies of social media information and destination image (Kim et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2024), without demonstrating that any particular platform, content type, or information-quality mechanism caused the observed interaction.

Taken together, the findings suggest a distinction between an evaluative link (Destination Image) and an informational boundary condition (SMID). This combination helps interpret why internal travel needs and destination-specific perceptions are associated with intention in different ways. The results remain specific to the sampled students and the observed cross-sectional associations; further longitudinal or experimental research is needed to establish the proposed processes.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to Push–Pull Theory by distinguishing internal travel needs from destination-specific perceptions in a single model (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). They further situate Destination Image as a statistical explanatory link, consistent with image formation and behavioral intention research (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Maghrifani et al., 2022). Finally, the moderation findings provide a context-specific application of Media System Dependency Theory: reliance on social media tourism

information conditions the strength of the associations between motivation or destination perception and intention (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Kim & Jung, 2017; Lee & Choi, 2018). These contributions integrate established perspectives rather than establishing a new theory or a causal sequence.

5.3 Practical Implications

The findings provide practical recommendations for destination management organizations, tourism businesses, and local cultural and creative tourism operators in Yunnan. Given the positive relationships of Push Motivation, Pull Perception, and Destination Image with Tourism Intention, as well as the moderating role of Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID), tourism stakeholders should consider both students' travel needs and the availability of reliable destination information.

For destination management organizations, priority could be given to providing accessible and regularly updated tourism information through official websites and social media platforms. Information on travel budgets, transportation, accommodation, seasonal conditions, and recommended itineraries could help university students evaluate Yunnan and plan their visits. Promotional content could also connect students' interests in relaxation, social interaction, and personal growth with Yunnan's natural and cultural attractions, while maintaining accurate and consistent destination information.

For tourism businesses, the findings suggest the potential value of student-oriented products with transparent pricing, flexible itineraries, and clearly communicated services. Travel agencies and accommodation providers could offer affordable short-duration travel options that combine natural attractions, cultural experiences, and convenient transportation. Providing detailed booking information, service descriptions, and cancellation conditions through digital platforms may also help students assess whether tourism products meet their needs.

For local cultural and creative tourism operators, participatory cultural experiences, such as traditional craft workshops and guided cultural activities, could enhance the visibility of Yunnan's distinctive tourism offerings. Cooperation with tourism businesses and destination organizations may improve access to these experiences. Such initiatives should involve local communities, respect cultural authenticity, and provide fair opportunities for local practitioners. As these specific recommendations were not directly tested, their effectiveness should be evaluated through visitor feedback, pilot programs, and actual tourism outcomes.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional research design limits causal interpretation and does not capture changes in tourism motivations, Destination Image, or Tourism Intention over time. Future studies could employ longitudinal designs to examine these relationships at different stages of travel decision-making.

Second, convenience sampling was used to collect data from university students, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research could include students from more diverse institutions and regions and adopt probability-based sampling methods to improve representativeness.

Third, this study examined Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID) as an overall construct without distinguishing among social media platforms or tourism information types. Future studies could investigate whether different information sources, content formats, and levels of information credibility influence these relationships. Fourth, although Destination Image was identified as a significant partial mediator, other psychological factors, such as Perceived Risk, Perceived Value, and Destination Familiarity, were not examined. Future research could investigate additional explanatory pathways while assessing the robustness of the existing framework.

Finally, the study measured Tourism Intention rather than actual travel behavior. Students' intentions may not always result in visits because of financial, academic, or practical constraints. Future research could incorporate follow-up surveys or actual visitation data to examine whether Tourism Intention translates into travel behavior.

5.5 Conclusion

This study examined the relationships among Push Motivation, Pull Perception, Destination Image, Social Media Informational Dependency (SMID), and Tourism Intention among university students considering travel to Yunnan. The findings showed that both Push Motivation and Pull Perception were positively associated with Tourism Intention and Destination Image, while Destination Image was positively associated with Tourism Intention and partially mediated both relationships. Furthermore, SMID positively moderated the relationships between Push Motivation and Tourism Intention and between Pull Perception and Tourism Intention. Notably, Push Motivation was not a significant predictor of Tourism Intention at low SMID, whereas Pull Perception remained significant.

Overall, the study provides context-specific empirical support for an integrated framework combining Push–Pull Theory, Destination Image, and Media System Dependency Theory. The

findings highlight the importance of both internal travel needs and destination-specific perceptions, while identifying Destination Image as an explanatory link and SMID as a boundary condition associated with Tourism Intention. These insights may help tourism stakeholders in Yunnan better align destination promotion, tourism information, and visitor experiences with university students' travel needs.

Article Publication Details
This article is published in the **International Journal of Economics, Business & Sustainable Management**, ISSN 3139-0919 (Online). In Volume 2 Issue 4 (Oct – Dec) 2026.
The journal is published and managed by **IRPG**.

Acknowledgements
We sincerely thank the editors and the reviewers for their valuable suggestions on this paper.

Funding
The authors declare that no funding was received for this work.

Data availability
The study analyzed questionnaire responses from 532 participants. Data access conditions should be confirmed by the corresponding author before publication.

Declarations

Consent for publication
The author(s) declare that this is not applicable.

Competing interests
The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

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