

LIFE CYCLE DIFFERENCES IN RURAL TOURISM PERCEIVED VALUE AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM HENAN PROVINCE, CHINA^{*}

Salinee Chaiwattanaporn¹ and Yapei Song²

¹Graduate School, Doctor of Philosophy Program in Business Administration,
Stamford International University, Bangkok, Thailand

²Business School, Department of Marketing and Tourism Management,
Zhengzhou Technology and Business University, Zhengzhou, Henan Province, China

Corresponding Author's Email: Salinee.chaiwattanaporn@stamford.edu

Received 6 March 2026; Revised 16 March 2026; Accepted 18 March 2026

Abstract

This research article objective this study 1) To examine differences in rural tourism perceived value across life stage groups. 2) To examine the effects of perceived value dimensions on tourists' Behavioral Intentions. 3) To propose marketing and management recommendations for rural tourism operators based on life stage differences in perceived value and behavioral Intentions. This quantitative study collected data from 395 tourists in rural tourist destinations in Henan Province, China. The study considered five dimensions of perceived value: landscape, service, emotional, social, and cost. Data analysis employed one-way ANOVA and multiple regression analysis within Levinson's Life Cycle Theory, five age group (20-25, 26-35, 36-45 and 56+ years)

Citation:



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Salinee Chaiwattanaporn and Yapei Song. (2026). Life Cycle Differences In Rural Tourism Perceived Value
And Behavioral Intentions: Evidence From Henan Province, China.

Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Development, 4(2), 907-936.;

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.>

Website: <https://so12.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JISDIADP/>

The research finding revealed that the five dimensions of perceived value differed significantly between age groups ($p < 0.05$). Landscape value showed the strongest difference ($F = 7.749$, $p < 0.001$), followed by service, emotion, social and cost value. Furthermore, the five perceived value dimensions had a positive impact on tourists' behavioral intentions ($p < 0.001$). The model explained 49.1% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.491$, $F = 75.140$), with emotional values found to be the most significant. Therefore, these findings provide practical guidance for rural tourism operators in designing age-targeted marketing strategies for tourists, such as creating emotionally and socially engaging experiences for older tourists and developing wellness or family-friendly packages for middle-aged tourists.

Keywords: Life Cycle, Rural Tourism, Perceived Value, Behavioral Intentions

Introduction

Rural tourism has gained considerable popularity in recent years. Many people want to escape from urban congestion and seek relaxation in natural environments. Lane (1994) first defined rural tourism as tourism activities that take place in rural areas. These activities combine nature, local culture, and authentic ways of life. Rural tourism offers several benefits. It helps reduce overcrowding in major tourist destinations. Tourists get to experience genuine rural lifestyles. Local communities gain income that improves their quality of life. Cultural heritage is preserved for future generations (UNWTO, 2020). Rural tourism promotes income distribution to local communities while supporting sustainable development.

However, tourists have different expectations. They evaluate and compare benefits with costs in terms of money, time, and effort. This evaluation is called perceived value. Qian and Li (2024) found that in the context of rural tourism in China, perceived value has a positive influence on tourists' behavioral

intentions, including their intention to return and recommend the destination to others. Perceived value has multiple dimensions: landscape value, service value, emotional value, social value, and cost value. Understanding these dimensions is key to developing tourist destinations that meet tourists' needs effectively.

Age is an important factor in tourism. Different age groups have different preferences, needs, and perspectives. If we understand these differences, we can design better marketing strategies. Tourism operators can develop destinations that match their target segments more effectively. Since perceived value is subjective and shaped by personal needs, financial capacity, and life priorities, tourists at different life stages are likely to evaluate the same destination differently.

Previous research has revealed gaps in studies regarding the differences in perceived value of rural tourism across age groups, and how this may affect intention to repeat visits and intention to share experiences with others. Most studies focus on overall relationships, lacking clear research on the specific patterns of perceived value between age groups. One possible reason for this gap is that many perceived value studies treat tourists as a homogeneous group, while paying limited attention to how different life stages may shape individuals' subjective evaluations of tourism experiences. In contrast, rural tourists evaluate the value of landscapes, services, cultural experiences, and travel costs based on their personal expectations and life circumstances. Furthermore, there is a lack of connection between age-based differences in perceived value and Behavioral Intentions. While some research (Collins and Tisdell (2002) and Jang et al. (2009) has examined tourist behavior by age group, none have systematically applied Life Cycle Theory to the perceived value of rural tourism in the Chinese context. This research therefore examines the relationship between five dimensions of perceived value: landscape, service, emotional, social, and cost, in conjunction with the Behavioral Intentions of tourists across

different age groups. The goal is to understand how different tourist groups prioritize these five dimensions of perceived value. The results will guide tourism operators and marketers in designing more appropriate and effective strategies that meet the needs of tourists of different age groups. Henan province is suitable for this investigation. because it is one of China's most populous provinces with a rich cultural heritage and a rapidly developing rural tourism sector, attracting a visitor base that spans multiple life stages (UNWTO, 2020)."

Objectives

- 1) To examine differences in rural tourism perceived value across life stage groups.
- 2) To examine the effects of perceived value dimensions on tourists' Behavioral Intentions.
- 3) To propose marketing and management recommendations for rural tourism operators based on life stage differences in perceived value and behavioral Intentions.

Hypotheses

H1: There are significant differences in rural tourism perceived value across life stage groups, H1a: Older adults (56+) will perceive higher landscape value than middle-aged groups.

H1b: Older adults (56+) will perceive higher service value than younger groups.

H1c: Older adults (56+) will perceive higher emotional value than other groups.

H1d: Older adults (56+) and young adults (20–25) will perceive higher social value than middle-aged groups.

H1e: Older adults (56+) will perceive higher cost value than middle-aged groups.

H2: The dimensions of perceived value significantly influence tourists' behavioral Intentions.

Literature Review

This study uses Life Cycle Theory as the theoretical framework. Levinson (1978) explained that people experience different life structures and goals at different stages. Each stage has distinct needs and perspectives that influence travel decisions. Levinson divided adult life into four eras. Each era is separated by a transition period of about five years. People develop a “life structure” in each era - their framework of how life should be. They are also driven by “the dream” that motivates their goals and behaviors. The five life stages can be described as follows: 20–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46–55, and 56+ years. This matches Life Cycle Theory. Collins and Tisdell; Li et al., 2023)) noted that tourism behavior differs significantly across age groups. Travel purpose, trip duration, financial resources, and health conditions often vary across life stages, which in turn influence tourists' motivations for rural tourism. Early young adults (20–25), who seek adventure and scenic landscapes suitable for photography. While middle adults (36–45) in this group prioritize family and family-friendly environments first. Adults (56+): This group values peace, simplicity, and cultural uniqueness qualities that rural tourism is well positioned to provide (Nimrod, 2008; Collins & Tisdell, 2002).

Perceived Value

This study builds on the Theory of Consumption Values by Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991). This theory explains that perceived value depends on decisions across multiple dimensions. We applied this to rural tourism by using five dimensions. Huang and Huang (2007) developed the Tourist Perceived

Value model. They showed that perceived value includes both tangible and intangible elements. We adopted their five main dimensions: 1) Landscape Value - How tourists perceive the attractiveness of natural scenery, landscapes, environment, and resources. This includes ecosystem integrity and peaceful atmosphere (Huang & Huang, 2007). 2) Service Value - How tourists perceive service quality, comfort, safety, and friendliness. This includes staff attitudes and willingness to serve (Scaglione & Mendola, 2017). 3) Emotional Value - How tourists perceive their feelings and emotional states during travel. This includes relaxation, happiness, memorable experiences, and emotional connection to places (Sheth et al., 1991; Huang & Huang, 2007). 4) Social Value - How tourists perceive social interactions. This includes relationships with locals and travel companions, new friendships, sharing on social media, and learning about culture (Sheth et al., 1991). 5) Cost Value - How tourists perceive value for money. This includes financial costs, time costs, effort, and perceived risk. It reflects the overall evaluation of the tourism experience (Huang & Huang, 2007).

These five dimensions are relationship. Landscape value, This is most evident in rural tourism, as it stimulates emotional responses such as happiness and relaxation, thus enhancing emotional value (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). Similarly, positive emotional experiences contribute to social interactions, linking emotional value to social value. Together, these perceptions shape tourists' overall cost-benefit evaluation.

Behavioral Intentions

Behavioral intention refers to a tourist's readiness to revisit the same tourist destination and recommend it to others (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Previous research has found that as the level of perceived value increases, tourists are more likely to revisit and recommend the destination to others (Chen & Chen, 2010; Cronin et al., 2000). In the context of China, cultural values play a significant role in shaping the perception of tourism values across age groups. The enduring influence of Confucian concepts, such as filial piety and the importance of

community, leads older adults to tend to travel in groups and choose destinations that foster family bonding, thereby enhancing both social and emotional well-being (Jang et al., 2009). Conversely, younger generations, influenced by digital culture and individualism, tend to prioritize aesthetically pleasing landscapes suitable for sharing on social media, reinforcing their perception of both landscape and social values (Liu et al., 2023).

Conceptual Framework

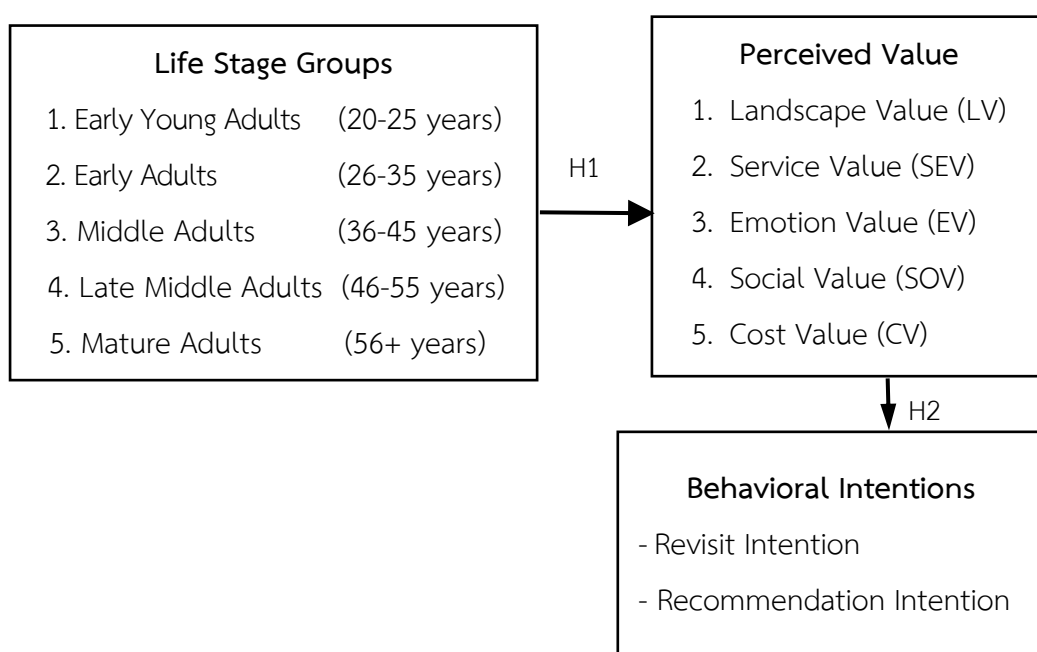


Figure 1. Conceptual framework illustrates the effects of five perceived value dimensions on Behavioral Intentions across life stage groups.

Source: Developed by the authors based on Levinson (1978) and Collins & Tisdell (2002)

Methodology

This is a quantitative study using survey and comparative research design. The data used in this study were derived from a doctoral dissertation completed

by Yapei Song (2025) at Stamford International University, The present author served as the principal advisor but was not directly involved in data collection. The original data collection received ethical approval from the university prior to implementation. Although the same dataset was used, the original research analyzed structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the indirect causal relationship of satisfaction. However, this study has a different objective, focusing on analyzing the differences in perceived value of rural tourism across age groups and analyzing the direct impact of the five dimensions of perceived value on behavioral intention. Therefore, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multiple regression analysis were used, which are suitable for this research objective. Analyzing secondary data in this format is considered an academically accepted approach because it can answer research questions from a new perspective using the same dataset without collecting new data, thus saving resources and time in conducting research.

This study examines differences in perceived value of rural tourism across age groups. Perceived value is divided into five dimensions 1) landscape value 2) service value 3) emotional value 4) social value and 5) cost value. In addition, the study investigates the relationship between the five dimensions of perceived value and tourists' Behavioral Intentions, which includes revisit intention and recommendation intention.

The population of this study consists of Chinese tourists who traveled to rural tourism destinations in Henan Province, China. We used convenience sampling because access to tourists in rural areas of Henan Province is difficult and there is no official tourist registry. Although this method may introduce sampling bias, it is widely accepted in tourism research in similar contexts (Collins & Tisdell, 2002). Respondents had to be at least 20 years old with at least one rural tourism experience. We excluded people who live in rural tourism destinations and those with incomplete responses. The population size was large and could not be precisely determined. We calculated sample size using

Cochran's (1977) formula for unknown populations. With 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, we needed 395 respondents. Data were collected by Yapei Song between December 2024 and January 2025. We categorized the sample into five age groups based on Life Cycle Theory.

The research instrument was a questionnaire developed based on relevant concepts, theories, and previous studies. The questionnaire consisted of four sections : Section 1 collected respondents demographic information, including gender, age, education level, occupation, and monthly income. Section 2 measured perceived value of rural tourism across five dimensions: Landscape Value (LV), Service Value (SEV), Emotional Value (EV), Social Value (SOV), and Cost Value (CV). Section 3 measured tourists' Behavioral Intentions, including intention to revisit, intention to recommend to others, and intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth. Section 2 and Section 3 used a five -pointed Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). And Section 4 included open-ended questions for additional comments and suggestions. The accuracy of the content was verified by three tourism and marketing experts and pilot-tested with 30 respondents prior to actual data collection. Cronbach's alpha coefficients across all dimensions were greater than 0.70, confirming satisfactory internal consistency.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics and study variables. Inferential statistics including one-way ANOVA and multiple regression analysis were employed to test the research hypotheses. The researcher used the LSD post-hoc test to examine differences between groups, even though the sample sizes of the groups were unequal. The researcher acknowledges that the Games-Howell or Tukey tests may provide more statistically. Therefore, future studies may consider using these methods to achieve greater statistical accuracy in the analysis.

Results

A total of 395 tourists who visited rural tourism destinations in Henan Province, China, were surveyed using a questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The results of the data analysis are presented the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Most respondents were female (210, or 53.2%), while male respondents totaled 185 (46.8%). For age, most were between 26–35 years (110, or 29.6%), followed by 36–45 years (110, or 27.8%), 20–25 years (92, or 23.3%), 46–55 years (56, or 14.2%), and 56+ years (20, or 5.1%). Most held a bachelor's degree (166, or 42.0%), followed by master's degree (144, or 28.9%), associate degree (57, or 14.4%), high school or below (33, or 8.4%), and doctoral degree (25, or 6.3%). The largest occupational group was professional specialists like teachers, lawyers, doctors, accountants, and architects (121, or 30.6%). This was followed by company employees (99, or 25.1%), students (60, or 15.2%), other occupations (37, or 9.4%), government officials (30, or 7.6%), and self-employed (28, or 7.1%).

Hypothesis Testing Results

To test Hypothesis 1, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA was employed to examine differences in the mean levels of perceived rural tourism value across five life cycle age groups (20–25 years, 26–35 years, 36–45 years, 46–55 years, 56 years and above). The significance level was set at 0.05. Before analyzing ANOVA, Levene's test was conducted to evaluate homogeneity of variance for all perceived value dimensions. Results confirmed that all five dimensions met this assumption ($P > 0.05$), supporting the use of standard one-way ANOVA. However, given the unequal group sizes, particularly the Mature Adults group ($N=20$), finding from this group should be interpreted with caution. shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Display the results of One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Variable	F	Sig
Landscape value (LV)	7.749	0.000***
Service value (SEV)	6.834	0.000***
Emotion value (EV)	3.690	0.006**
Social value (SOV)	2.716	0.030**
Cost value (CV)	2.547	0.045**

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The results indicate that all five dimensions of perceived rural tourism value differ significantly across the life cycle groups. Specifically, landscape value showed a significant difference ($F = 7.749$, $p < 0.001$), followed by service value ($F = 6.834$, $p < 0.001$), emotional value ($F = 3.690$, $p = 0.006$), social value ($F = 2.716$, $p = 0.030$), and cost value ($F = 2.547$, $p = 0.045$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1, which proposed that the five dimensions of perceived rural tourism value differ significantly across life cycle groups, is supported.

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Perceived Rural Tourism Value by Age Group

Age	N	Landscape value M (SD)	service value M (SD)	emotion value M (SD)	social value M (SD)	Cost value M (SD)
20-25 years	92	4.028 (0.731)	3.585 (0.747)	3.874 (0.670)	3.883 (0.689)	3.835 (0.690)
26-35 years	117	3.627 (0.845)	3.231 (0.761)	3.771 (0.666)	3.715 (0.701)	3.716 (0.692)

36-45 years	110	3.707 (0.744)	3.364 (0.681)	3.740 (0.599)	3.669 (0.610)	3.658 (0.619)
46-55 years	56	3.757 (0.690)	3.386 (0.698)	3.729 (0.726)	3.804 (0.687)	3.736 (0.660)
56+ years	20	4.450 (0.539)	4.010 (0.513)	4.300 (0.517)	4.100 (0.673)	4.110 (0.607)
Total	395	3.803 (0.783)	3.412 (0.738)	3.807 (0.660)	3.773 (0.676)	3.750 (0.668)

Table 2 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of perceived rural tourism value across different age groups.

Regarding landscape value, respondents aged 56 years and above reported the highest level of perception ($M = 4.450$, $SD = 0.539$), followed by those aged 20–25 years ($M = 4.028$, $SD = 0.731$). In contrast, the lowest mean score was observed among respondents aged 26–35 years ($M = 3.627$, $SD = 0.845$). One-way ANOVA results indicate that landscape value differs significantly across life cycle groups ($F = 7.749$, $p < 0.001$).

Regarding service value, the highest mean score was found in the 56 years and above age group ($M = 4.010$, $SD = 0.513$), followed by the 20–25 years group ($M = 3.585$, $SD = 0.747$). The lowest level of perceived service value was reported by respondents aged 26–35 years ($M = 3.231$, $SD = 0.761$). One-way ANOVA results reveal a statistically significant difference in service value among life cycle groups ($F = 6.834$, $p < 0.001$).

Regarding emotional value, respondents aged 56 years and above exhibited the highest perception level ($M = 4.300$, $SD = 0.517$), followed by those aged 20–25 years ($M = 3.874$, $SD = 0.670$). The lowest mean score was observed in the 46–55 years age group ($M = 3.729$, $SD = 0.726$). One-way ANOVA results

indicate that emotional value significantly differs across age groups ($F = 3.690$, $p = 0.006$).

Regarding social value, the highest mean score was reported by respondents aged 56 years and above ($M = 4.100$, $SD = 0.673$), followed by the 20–25 years group ($M = 3.883$, $SD = 0.689$). The lowest mean score was found among respondents aged 36–45 years ($M = 3.669$, $SD = 0.610$). One-way ANOVA results show a statistically significant difference in social value across life cycle groups ($F = 2.716$, $p = 0.030$).

Regarding cost value, respondents aged 56 years and above reported the highest perception level ($M = 4.110$, $SD = 0.607$), followed by those aged 20–25 years ($M = 3.835$, $SD = 0.690$). The lowest mean score was observed in the 36–45 years age group ($M = 3.658$, $SD = 0.619$). One-way ANOVA results indicate a significant difference in perceived cost value across age groups ($F = 2.547$, $p = 0.045$).

Table 3 LSD Post Hoc Test

Perceive Value	Comparative age groups (years)	Diff	p	Direction
Landscape value	20-25 - 26-35	0.401	0.001***	20-25 > 26-35
	20-25 - 36-45	0.321	0.002**	20-25 > 36-45
	20-25 - 46-55	0.271	0.027*	20-25 > 46-55
	20-25 - 56+	-0.422	0.016*	20-25 < 56+
	26-35 - 56+	-0.823	0.001***	26-35 < 56+
	36-45 - 56+	-0.743	0.001***	36-45 < 56+

	46-55 - 56+	-0.693	0.001***	46-55 < 56+
Service value	20-25 - 26-35	0.354	0.001***	20-25 > 26-35
	20-25 - 36-45	0.221	0.029*	20-25 > 36-45
	20-25 - 56+	-0.425	0.017*	20-25 < 56+
	26-35 - 56+	-0.779	0.001***	26-35 < 56+
	36-45 - 56+	-0.646	0.001***	36-45 < 56+
	46-55 - 56+	-0.624	0.001***	46-55 < 56+
Emotion value	20-25 - 56+	-0.426	0.009**	20-25 < 56+
	26-35 - 56+	-0.529	0.001***	26-35 < 56+
	36-45 - 56+	-0.560	0.001***	36-45 < 56+
	46-55 - 56+	-0.571	0.002**	46-55 < 56+
Social value	20-25 - 36-45	0.214	0.020*	20-25 > 36-45
	26-35 - 56+	-0.385	0.024*	26-35 < 56+
	36-45 - 56+	-0.431	0.005**	36-45 < 56+
Cost value	26-35 - 56+	-0.394	0.018*	26-35 < 56+
	36-45 - 56+	-0.452	0.003**	36-45 < 56+
	46-55 - 56+	-0.374	0.029*	46-55 < 56+

Note * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3 shows the results of the LSD post hoc comparisons examining differences in perceived rural tourism value across age groups.

1) Landscape value: Respondents aged 56 years and older showed significantly higher perceived value compared to other age groups (26–35, 36–45, and 46–55) at a significance level of 0.001. This was also significantly higher than the 20–25 years age group at $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.016$). In addition, respondents aged 20–25 years reported significantly higher perceived value compared to those aged 26–35 years ($p < 0.001$), 36–45 years ($p < 0.01$), and 46–55 years ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that older adults (56 years and older) and younger adults (20–25 years) have a more positive perception of the natural landscapes of rural tourist destinations than the primary working-age group (26–55 years).

2) Service value, Respondents aged 56 years and older showed significantly higher perceived service value compared to other age groups (26–35, 36–45, and 46–55) at a significance level of 0.001. This was also significantly higher than the 20–25 years age group ($p < 0.05$) ($p = 0.017$). Furthermore, respondents aged 20–25 years reported significantly higher perceived service value compared to those aged 26–35 years ($p < 0.001$) and 36–45 years ($p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that older adults (56 years and older) and younger adults (20–25 years) have a more positive perceived service value than individuals in the primary working-age group (26–55 years).

3) Emotional value, Respondents aged 56 years and older had significantly higher perception scores than all other age groups. Specifically, the 56 years and older group scored significantly higher than the 26–35 and 36–45 age groups ($p < 0.001$), and also significantly higher than the 46–55 age group ($p = 0.002$) and the 20–25 age group ($p = 0.009$) ($p < 0.01$). These results indicate that emotional value is perceived most clearly among older tourists (56 years and older).

4) Social value, Respondents aged 56 years and older had significantly higher perceived social values than the 26–35 years age group ($p < 0.05$), 36–45 years age group ($p < 0.01$), and 46–55 years age group ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the 20–25 years age group had significantly higher perceived values than the 36–

45 years age group ($p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that older adults and young adults place greater importance on social interaction and relationship building in the rural tourism context than middle-aged individuals.

5) Cost value, Respondents aged 56 years and older had significantly higher perceived cost value than those aged 26-35 years ($p < 0.05$), 36-45 years ($p < 0.01$), and 46-55 years ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that older tourists perceive rural tourism as offering greater value relative to cost compared to other age groups.

Overall, the post hoc analysis clearly demonstrates that respondents aged 56 years and above consistently reported the highest perceived value across all five dimensions of rural tourism. Additionally, respondents aged 20–25 years exhibited higher perceptions in several dimensions, particularly landscape, service, and social value, compared to middle-aged groups. These results highlight distinct patterns of perceived value across different stages of the life cycle.

Table 4 Overall Significance of the Regression Model (ANOVA)

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Regression	123.525	9	24.705	75.140***
Residual	127.897	389	0.329	
Total	251.422	395		

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4 shows the results of the ANOVA test for the overall regression model. The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 75.140$, $p < 0.001$). This means the five perceived value dimensions jointly have a significant effect on tourists' Behavioral Intentions. This result confirms that the model is appropriate for explaining variations in Behavioral Intentions in the context of rural tourism.

Table 5 Multiple Linear Regressions Results

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p	VIF
	β	Std. Error	β			
(Constant)	-0.458	0.214		-2.146	0.033*	-
Landscape Value	0.188	0.046	0.184	4.114	<0.001***	2.15
Service Value	0.188	0.051	0.174	3.671	<0.001***	2.34
Emotion Value	0.264	0.053	0.218	5.006	<0.001***	2.28
Social Value	0.226	0.053	0.191	4.251	<0.001***	2.12
Cost Value	0.211	0.052	0.177	4.028	<0.001***	1.98
R ²			0.491			
Adjusted R ²			0.485			

Note: *** $p < .001$

Table 5 shows the results of the multiple linear regression analysis examining the effects of five dimensions of perceived value on Behavioral Intentions. The standardized regression coefficients (β) were used to compare the relative importance of each predictor. Among the five dimensions

1) Emotional value had the strongest influence on Behavioral Intentions ($\beta = 0.218$, $t = 5.006$, $p < 0.001$), ranking first in importance. This result indicates that tourists' emotional experiences, such as feelings of relaxation, happiness, authenticity, and memorable impressions during rural tourism, exert the greatest

influence on their intention to revisit and to recommend the destination to others through word-of-mouth communication.

2) Social value ($\beta = 0.191$, $t = 4.251$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that social interactions and interpersonal relationships with local residents and travel companions significantly enhance tourists' Behavioral Intentions. This finding highlights the importance of social engagement and shared experiences in rural tourism settings.

3) Landscape value ranked third in importance ($\beta = 0.184$, $t = 4.114$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that natural scenery, environmental beauty, and rural landscapes play a significant role in encouraging tourists to revisit and recommend rural destinations.

4) Cost value ($\beta = 0.177$, $t = 4.028$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that tourists' perceptions of value for money, including financial and non-financial costs, positively influence their Behavioral Intentions.

5) Service value showed a significant but relatively weaker effect compared to the other dimensions ($\beta = 0.174$, $t = 4.028$, $p < 0.001$). Although service quality remains important, its relative impact on Behavioral Intentions was the lowest among the five perceived value dimensions.

Overall, the regression model explains 49.1% of the variance in Behavioral Intentions ($R^2 = 0.491$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.485$). The remaining 50.9% variance may be due to other factors such as weather conditions, travel companions, previous visit experiences, or personal personality traits, reflecting opportunities for future research to further study these other variables. This shows strong explanatory power. All five perceived value dimensions have significant positive effects at the 0.001 significance level. Multicollinearity diagnostics showed acceptable variance inflation factor (VIF) values from 1.98 to 2.34. This means multicollinearity is not a concern. The standardized coefficients allow direct comparison of the relative influence. This clearly shows that emotional and social values are the most

influential factors in shaping Behavioral Intentions in rural tourism. Based on these results, Hypothesis 2 is supported. All five perceived value dimensions have direct and positive effects on Behavioral Intentions. We can rank relative importance as emotional value, social value, landscape value, cost value, and service value.

Discussion

The results of research objective 1: This study reveals significant differences in perceived rural tourism value across life cycle groups for all five dimensions ($p < 0.05$). This findings match Life Cycle Theory (Levinson, 1978). And prior tourism research, Collins and Tisdell (2002). People at different life stages have distinct needs, priorities and perspectives. These influence value evaluation and travel decisions.

Landscape Value: The results indicate that tourists aged 56 years and above reported the highest level of perceived landscape value ($M = 4.450$), followed by the 20–25 age group ($M = 4.028$), both of which were significantly higher than those of early-to-middle adulthood groups (26–45 years). This matches Nimrod (2008), who found that older adults value natural beauty and tranquility more than adventure activities. They seek inner satisfaction, relaxation, and emotional restoration. Benckendorff (2010) found that older tourists prefer destinations characterized by scenic beauty and peaceful environments. The relatively high perception among younger tourists (20–25 years) can be explained by their strong interest in photography and social media sharing, where visually appealing landscapes play a central role (Liu et al. (2023). In contrast, individuals in early and middle adulthood (26–45 years) reported lower landscape value perceptions, likely due to greater work and family responsibilities, which shift their focus toward convenience, safety, and efficiency rather than scenic appreciation (Lehto et al., 2009).

Service Value: Tourists aged 56 years and above showed the highest perception of service value ($M = 4.010$), significantly exceeding all other groups ($p < 0.001$). Young adults aged 20–25 years ($M = 3.585$). The 26–35 age group reported the lowest service value perception ($M = 3.231$). This matches with Jang et al. (2009), who argued that older tourists have higher service expectations due to health, mobility, safety, concerns. Attentive and reliable service is particularly important. Additionally, Patterson et al. (2017) suggested that older adults are more willing to pay for comfort and convenience. This explains their heightened sensitivity to service quality. The relatively high perception among young adults may reflect their familiarity with fast, standardized, and technology-enabled services (Benckendorff et al., 2010). Early adults may have lower perceptions due to higher expectations derived from prior travel or financial constraints from family responsibilities (Bojanic, 2011).

For the 26–36 age group, perception of perceived value of service may reflect a gap between expectations and actual experience. This group is accustomed to technology-intensive, high-standard services in cities, leading to higher expectations. While rural tourism infrastructure in Henan Province is limited and may not adequately meet the needs of this tourist group (Bojanic, 2011). Therefore, this problem may not be solely due to psychological factors but also to other limitations, such as the lack of facilities suitable for modern families, including childcare facilities, family accommodations, and efficient transportation systems.

Emotional Value: Emotional value was perceived most strongly by the 56+ age group ($M = 4.300$), followed by 20–25 ($M = 3.874$). The 46–55 age group reported the lowest ($M = 3.729$). These results support Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen, 2021). Older individuals, recognizing limited future time, prioritize emotionally meaningful experiences that promote happiness, peace, and psychological well-being. This matches with Nimrod and Rotem (2010), who observed that older tourists prefer travel experiences that facilitate relaxation

and emotional fulfillment rather than excitement or challenge. Rural tourism environments, characterized by calmness and authenticity, effectively fulfilling these emotional needs.

From a management perspective, rural tourist destinations can design experiences that appeal to senior travelers. This could include providing local guides who share simple, relaxed cultural stories, or planning itineraries that prioritize relaxation over hectic activities. This aligns with Carstensen's (1995) Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST), which explains that as people age, they prioritize experiences that evoke positive feelings over excitement or novelty. When senior travelers receive experiences that cater to these needs, the likelihood of them returning or recommending the destination to others increases.

Social Value: The highest social value perception was found among tourists aged 56 years and above ($M = 4.10$), followed by the 20–25 age group ($M = 3.883$). The 36–45 age group reported the lowest ($M = 3.669$). This result aligns with Nimrod and Rotem (2010), who emphasized that social interaction and relationship-building become increasingly important after retirement. Travel provides opportunities to reduce loneliness and enhance quality of life (Dong et al. 2022). Young adults also reported high social value. They tend to share experiences, build connections, and create online content through social media (Lie et al. 2023). Middle-aged adults (26–45 years) may have limited time for social interaction due to work and family obligations. They travel in family-oriented formats (Schänzel & Smith, 2014).

Cost Value: The 56+ age group ($M = 4.110$), with significant differences observed across all other groups ($p < 0.001$), particularly when compared to the 36–45 age group ($p = 0.003$). This finding supports prior studies (Jang et al., 2009; Moschis et al., 2011). Older adults generally have greater financial stability, fewer family expenses, and higher savings. They prioritize quality over price and

perceive greater value for money. Patterson et al. (2017) found that older consumers are more willing to pay premium prices for high-quality experiences that deliver genuine value. In contrast, middle-aged adults tend to be more price-sensitive. They have substantial financial commitments like childcare, education, and housing costs (Lehto et al., 2009; Bojanic, 2011).

The results of research objective 2 : Regression analysis shows that all five perceived value dimensions have significant positive effects on Behavioral Intentions ($p < 0.001$). The model explains 49.1% of the variance, indicating strong explanatory power. This matches with Chen and Chen (2010), who emphasized the role of perceived value in driving revisit intention and recommendation behavior. Among the five dimensions, 1) Emotional value emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.218$). This highlights the importance of peaceful, authentic, and emotionally engaging experiences in fostering satisfaction, attachment, and loyalty (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Lee et al., 2012). 2) Social value ranked second ($\beta = 0.191$). This underscores the significance of interpersonal interaction and shared experiences in rural tourism (Liu et al., 2023). 3) Landscape value ($\beta = 0.184$), cost value ($\beta = 0.177$), and service value ($\beta = 0.174$) also contributed positively. While service value had the weakest relative influence, it remains a fundamental element supporting tourists overall experience, particularly in rural contexts where simplicity, sincerity, and authenticity may be valued more than luxury.

Therefore, this study highlights clear differences in perceived rural tourism value across life cycle groups and confirms the significant relationship between perceived value and Behavioral Intentions. Older tourists consistently show the highest perceived value across all dimensions, particularly emotional, social, and landscape values, which strongly influence their intention to revisit and recommend rural destinations. These insights provide valuable implications for developing age-specific marketing strategies and designing rural tourism products

that address distinct needs of different life cycle segments. By aligning tourism offerings with emotional, social, and experiential values, rural destinations can enhance competitiveness and promote sustainable tourism development.

The results of research objective 3: Research findings show that the elderly group (56 years and older) has the highest average perceived value in all dimensions, reflecting that rural tourism clearly meets the needs of this age group. After retirement, the elderly have more free time, according to the Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen, 1995). When the elderly realize that life is limited, they prioritize emotionally meaningful experiences over the pursuit of novelty. Rural tourism therefore aligns with this need, providing peace, authenticity, and a deep connection with nature and the community.

Research findings show that the middle-aged group (26–45 years) has the lowest perceived value in several dimensions, reflecting a lower perceived value compared to other groups. This may be due to work and family responsibilities leading them to have a higher standard of comparison and a tendency to evaluate tourism experiences more critically than other groups (Lehto et al., 2009). In addition, accumulated stress from daily life may reduce their ability to perceive and enjoy the value of the rural environment.

To resolve the low perceived value of travel among middle-aged tourists, which may stem from a feeling that trips are not worthwhile, it is advisable to design rural tourist destinations that offer experiences directly tailored to the lives of working people. Example, weekend packages could combine nature walks with mindfulness activities, or programs for children with caregivers to allow parents to relax without worrying, or create experiences for digital detox that help people temporarily disconnect from work (Lehto et al., 2009). What this group of tourists truly desires is the genuine feeling of relaxation. When tourist destinations can provide this, the perspective of middle-aged tourists is likely to change, and they will want to return.

Emotional perception has the greatest influence on Behavioral Intentions ($\beta = 0.218$), reflecting that tourists do not make decisions based solely on cost-benefit comparisons. This aligns with the concept of experiential consumption, which identifies feelings and emotional experiences as key drivers of consumer behavior (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010), particularly in the context of rural tourism that emphasizes tranquility, authenticity, and memorable experiences over numerical value.

Limitations of the Research

1) This study used a convenient sampling method, which may mean the sample is not representative of all rural tourists in Henan Province. Therefore, the research results should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, data collection was limited to Henan Province alone, and its cultural and social characteristics may differ from other areas in China.

2) This study is purely quantitative and therefore cannot fully explain the in-depth reasons behind the differences in perceived values between age groups.

3) The sample distribution across age groups was unequal. The 56+ group comprised only 20 respondents (5.1%), which may affect the precision of cross group comparisons. Future studies should ensure more balanced age group representation.

4) Future research could examine life Stage as a moderating variable between perceived value and behavioral Intentions using multi-group analysis to provide deeper theoretical insights.

5) In addition, the research findings may be influenced by Chinese societal values such as filial piety and the emphasis on family and group values, resulting in the elderly perceiving higher social and emotional values during travel compared to other groups. Future research should investigate whether similar outcomes occur in societies with different cultures.

Conclusion

This study examines the differences in perceived value of rural tourism across five dimensions: landscape value, service, emotion, society, and cost, through the lens of life cycle theory. Using a sample of 395 Chinese tourists in Henan Province, the research supports both hypotheses. H1. shows that the perception of the five dimensions of value differs significantly between age groups, and H2 confirms that all five dimensions have a positive influence on Behavioral Intentions, with emotional value having the greatest influence, followed by social value, landscape, cost, and service, respectively. This research contributes to academic research in two ways: systematically applying life cycle theory to the context of Chinese rural tourism, and demonstrating that emotional and social values are more important than rational values in determining tourist behavior. This finding has significant implications for developing target marketing strategies and designing sustainable rural tourism products. This research supports Levinson's life cycle theory in the context of rural tourism in China, finding that age can predict the five dimensions of perceived value by tourists. However, the 56+ age group consistently showed high levels of perceived value, especially in emotional and social aspects. This reflects the need to consider cultural factors when applying the theory in the Chinese context, particularly Confucian values emphasizing filial piety and group relationships, which place greater weight on social and emotional experiences in other cultures.

Recommendations

Research findings can help develop marketing strategies and management practices for rural tourism. These strategies can effectively meet the needs of different age groups. Emotional value has the strongest influence on revisit and recommendation intentions. Therefore, Rural tourism operators should focus on creating positive experiences and lasting impressions rather than competing on

price, designing offers tailored to the age groups of each traveler. The 56+ age group values stories and cultural depth; packages featuring local storytelling, wellness activities, or guided treks effectively cater to this group. The 20-25 age group connects with scenery and sharing experiences on social media, making beautiful natural landscapes suitable for photography a key attraction. Meanwhile, middle-aged travelers (26-45) often face time constraints; weekend family packages with activities for both children and caregivers are ideal for this group. At the policy level, the government should prioritize senior citizens and young adults, who possess high purchasing power and a greater awareness of the value of tourism, while simultaneously promoting sustainable tourism to achieve a balance between the economy, society, and the environment. In particular, infrastructure for the 56+ age group, such as accessible walkways, recreation facilities, and medical support, should be prioritized in rural tourist destinations. For the 20-25 age group, improving digital connectivity, such as high-speed internet and smart travel applications, will enhance the overall experience and encourage sharing on social media. For the middle-aged group (36-45 years old), policies should focus on developing family-friendly facilities such as childcare services and safe recreational areas in order to reduce barriers that limit this group's ability to fully enjoy rural tourism experiences. For the 46-55 group, experience-based packages emphasizing quality service and cultural enrichment would align with their growing interest in meaningful travel.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should employ a mixed-methods research design to gain deeper insights. In addition to quantitative data, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, or participant observation should be incorporated. This approach would help explain the reasons and lived experiences of tourists across different life-cycle stages, particularly older adults. It shows high perceived value across all dimensions. Conversely, qualitative data could also clarify why middle-aged tourists tend to perceive lower value in rural

tourism. This study was conducted exclusively in Henan Province, China, which may limit of the findings to other contexts. In the future research should expand the scope to include rural tourism destinations in other provinces or countries to compare perceived value across different cultural and regional contexts, the understand the distinctive characteristics and value perceptions specific to rural tourism.

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