

## Tourists' green behavior: Co-creation and emotional experience

Jiahui Wang  
*Shandong University*

Guangxin Song  
*Shandong University*

Sujie Wang  
*Shandong University*

Emily Ma  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

Xinke Wang  
*Shandong University*

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# **Tourists' green behavior: Co-creation and emotional experience**

## **Abstract**

Based on the theory of inseparability nature of service, service-dominant logic, and the SOR model, this study examined the interactive relationships among tourists' co-creation of experience, self-esteem, satisfaction with travel experience, quality of life, and green behavior. Using data collected from 493 tourists in China, the results indicated that co-creation of experience directly influenced their self-esteem, satisfaction with travel experience, and green behavior. Besides, the findings found that emotional experience (satisfaction with travel experience, self-esteem, quality of life) partially mediated the relationships between co-creation experience and green behavior. Finally, co-creation affected tourists' green behavior through the chain mediating role of self-esteem, satisfaction with travel experience, and quality of life. Theoretical and practical implications were discussed as well.

**Keywords:** Co-creation of experience, Self-esteem, Satisfaction with travel experience, Quality of life, Green behavior

## **1 Introduction**

Sustainability has been a central concern for governments, destinations, and tourism organizations around the world (Wu et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). Green behavior, which refers to tourists' behaviors that do not harm or otherwise promote the destination environment, is essentially important for the success of sustainable tourism (Chiu et al., 2014; Juvan & Dolnican, 2016).

The inseparability of service production and delivery determines that tourists are an integral part of the service experience. In the current tourism industry, tourists are not only accepting products passively but are important participants in the process of tourism activities. Co-creation is to increase tourists' involvement in tourism through tourists-service providers interaction, and finally lead to the improvement of tourists' satisfaction with their own experience (Correia et al., 2017). In the co-creation experiences, tourists can get better consumption experiences such as environment, service, care, and respect, to produce positive behavioral feedback. (Lanier & Hampton, 2008).

Yet, limited empirical effort has been observed on how tourists' co-creation experience with service providers may affect their green behavior, leaving an important research gap that needs to be addressed. Font et. al (2021) also recall more research to examine the effect of customer co-creation on environmental sustainability. Therefore, the goal of the study is to explore how tourists' co-creation experience enhance their green behaviors at tourism destinations, particularly how co-creation may trigger psychological mechanism leading to green behavior through other variables.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Co-creation of experience (CE)**

The concept of value co-creation was first proposed by Ramaswamy and Prahalad (2000), then Vargo and Lusch (2004) started relevant research based on the service-dominant logic, which is another important branch. It is believed that consumers will put their knowledge, skills, and experience into value creation in the exchange process, and have a cooperative relationship with enterprises. In this way, consumers are co-creators of value. In the tourism context, the co-creation experience of tourists is manifested in the provision of various types of personal resources, such as time, knowledge, effort, and money. That is, tourists are not just consumers, they also play the role of producers.

## **2.2 Green behavior (GB)**

Green behavior was formally proposed in the late 20th century, with some similar expressions developed at the same time, such as “pro-environmental behavior”, “environmentally responsible behavior”, and “sustainable behavior” (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Reese & Jacob, 2015). Although the disciplinary positions and theoretical perspectives behind these concepts are slightly different, their cores are similar. In this study, tourists’ green behavior refers to tourists’ behaviors that do not harm or otherwise promote the destination environment.

Although the crucial role of tourists’ green behavior has been recognized in the tourism and hospitality literature, existing studies mainly focused on the impact of individual characteristics. For example, Liv et. al (2020) indicated that personal norms, habits, self-control, and subjective attitude would affect the performance of personal green behavior through a survey of 625 American tourists. There is rare literature that has discussed the relationship between tourists’ co-creation and their willingness to protect the destination environment.

## **2.3 Satisfaction with travel experience (STE)**

Satisfaction was defined as the subjective feelings of tourists when they use the services and experience (Otto & Ritchie, 1996), which was regarded as a post-consumption evaluation of whether or not expectations are met (Su et al., 2018). Tourist satisfaction is a key driver of behavioral outcomes such as revisit and recommendation intentions (Su et al., 2016; Moon & Han, 2019). For example, Pandza (2015) found that tourists’ satisfaction and fulfillment of expectations have a positive relation with behavioral intentions. Therefore, exploring the effect of tourists’ satisfaction with travel experience is vital for the development of tourism destinations.

## **2.4 Quality of life (QOL)**

In the 1990s, Professor Kaye Chon and others first paid attention to the issues of tourism development and community life quality (Chon, 1999). Previous studies have found that tourist characteristics, personality, travel characteristics, life domain satisfaction, and tourist satisfaction have a significant impact on QOL (Chen et al., 2016; Laing & Frost, 2017; Pyke et al., 2019). In recent years, a few studies have discussed the relationship between value co-creation and life satisfaction, but they are mainly based on the background of the hospitality or the perspective of residents, ignoring the predicting roles of self-esteem and other factors on QOL (Mathis et al., 2016).

## **2.5 Self-esteem (SE)**

Self-esteem is an overall self-evaluation of individuals' importance, value, or worth (Blascovich et al., 1991). In the field of tourism, existing literature has explored the predictive role of self-esteem on positive emotions and behavior intentions, such as tourists' satisfaction, travel intention, as well as citizenship behavior (Chan et al., 2016; Namasiyayam & Guchait, 2013).

## 2.6 Hypothesis

According to Stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theoretical framework, the external environmental stimulus could influence individuals' organisms as emotional and cognitive states and thus elicit a behavioral response. In the proposed model, CE works as a stimulus by inspiring positive self-evaluation and eliciting travel satisfaction and QOL, which in turn elicits corresponding behaviors. Based on the above discussion and research assumptions, the theoretical model is shown in the figure below (Figure 1).

Co-creation of experience has driving potential. Tourists with good co-creation experience will strengthen their self-efficacy due to the value realization while enjoying tourism services, and then form a behavioral intention. Green behavior is one of the behavioral outcomes of tourists. Unanue et al. (2016) have found that intrinsic life goals such as self-development and social relations can enhance tourists' green behaviors.

Additionally, according to the SOR theory, CE is an external stimulus, which can affect the overall travel experience and elicit positive psychological states (such as self-esteem and QOL). On the one hand, the more deeply tourists participate in the co-creation process, the more likely they are to get a positive sense of experience (Prebensen et al., 2013), thus travel satisfaction increases. On the other hand, social information processing theory indicated that individuals will better understand themselves while interacting with others, and form self-evaluation accordingly. The co-creating process makes tourists cognize their unique value, and enhances their self-esteem (Cova et al., 2011).

Finally, CE also contributes to tourists' QOL. Pham et al. (2019) explored the influence of consumers' value co-creation activities on the QOL from a psychological perspective, and found that value co-creation behaviors can affect psychological quality from four perspectives. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that:

**H1.** Tourists' CE with service providers positively influences their GB.

**H2.** Tourists' CE with service providers positively influences their STE.

**H3.** Tourists' CE with service providers positively influences their SE.

**H4.** Tourists' CE with service providers positively influences their QOL.

Bottom-up spillover theory believes that satisfaction with life domains can accumulate continuously, and produce spillover effects to affect their QOL (Kim et al., 2013). More attention has been paid to tourism as a means of life satisfaction driver (Uysal & Sirgy, 2019). For instance, Su et al. (2018) confirmed that the degree of destination satisfaction can significantly affect the subjective well-being of tourists in China. Thus:

**H5.** Tourists' STE positively influences their QOL.

Tourists with higher self-esteem often hold positive judgments about themselves. According to the theory of positive psychology, positive value judgments are an important factor in improving

happiness. Therefore, we proposed that self-esteem can effectively predict individuals' QOL. A research conducted by Namasivayam and Guchait (2013) found that beverage consumers' self-esteem levels can affect their satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Thus:

**H6.** Tourists' SE positively influences their QOL.

A few studies have tried to explore the relationship between QOL and pro-environmental behavior (Kaida & Kaida, 2019; Su & Swanson, 2019). According to social exchange theory, individuals take positive actions in response to the benefits they have got during the social exchange process. For instance, Su and Swanson (2019) found that individuals tend to take positive measures such as green behaviors to maintain the existing environment when they feel physically and mentally pleasing and happy. Thus:

**H7.** Tourists' QOL positively influences their GB.

## **2.7 The mediating roles of SE and STE**

Self-esteem means the beliefs about one's own worth and ability in general (Rosenberg, 1995). Beyond the comparative theory of self-esteem, McCall proposed that individuals' evaluation of themselves comes not only from comparison with other social groups but also from others' evaluations and views (McCall & Simmons, 1966). In addition, the existing literature has shown that there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction, and well-being (Baumeister et al., 2003). In short, self-esteem can mediate the effects between individuals' social connections and their mental health (Thoits, 2011). For instance, Wu et al. (2021) have tested an interactive model of child abuse-self-esteem-self-compassion-subjective well-being, and confirmed the mediating role of self-esteem.

As suggested by the literature, the function of feelings (e.g., SE, STE) between co-creation of experience and tourists' green behavior has been overlooked (Pena-Garcia et al., 2021). As such, we proposed that SE and STE will mediate the impact of co-creation experience with tourists' QOL and green behavior.

**H8.** Tourists' STE will mediate the effect of tourists' CE with service providers on tourists' QOL.

**H9.** Tourists' CE with service providers will affect tourists' GB through the chain mediating roles of STE and QOL.

**H10.** Tourists' SE will mediate the effect of tourists' CE with service providers on tourists' QOL.

**H11.** Tourists' CE with service providers will affect tourists' GB through the chain mediating roles of SE and QOL.

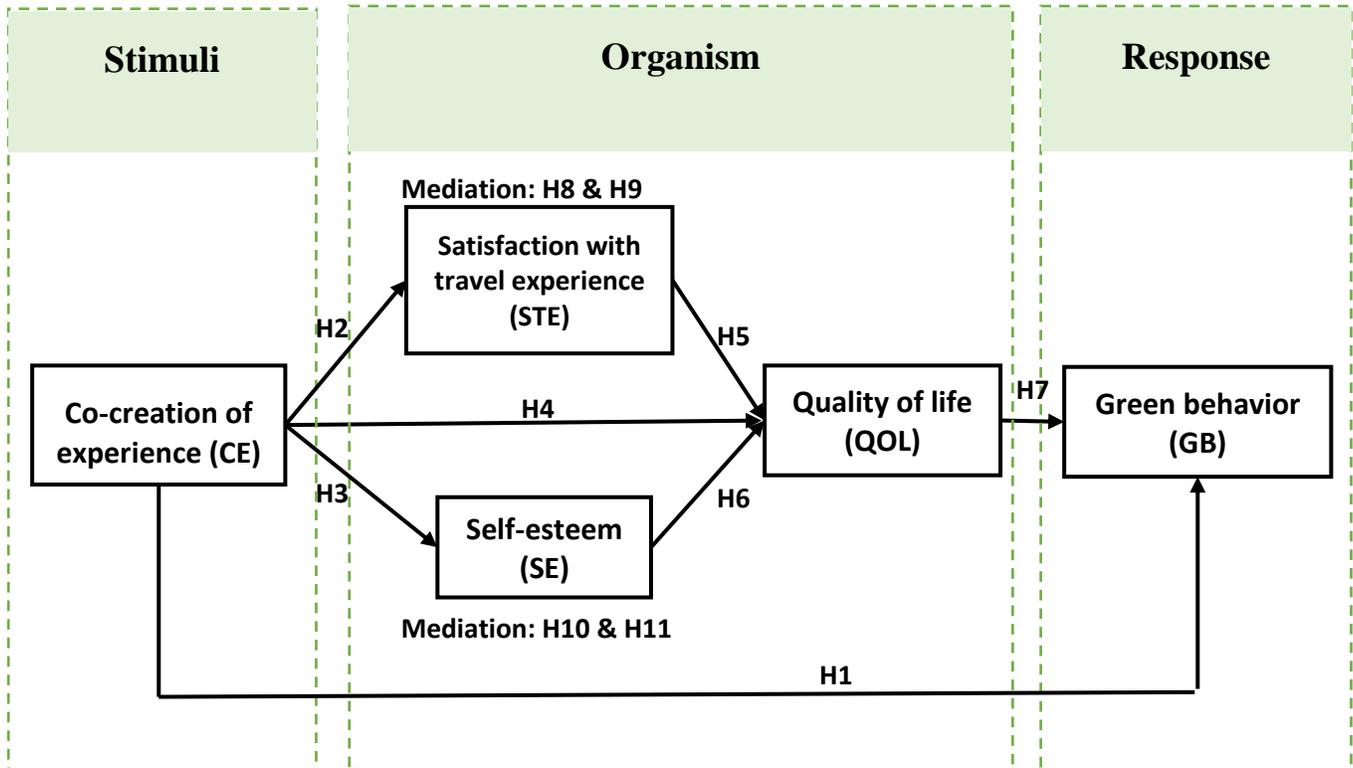


Fig. 1 Theoretical framework

### 3 Methodology

This study conducted online surveys of tourists in China with the tool of the questionnaire. The survey lasted four weeks from April to May 2021. Only the respondents who once traveled in the last 12 months and are older than 18 years old were asked to finish the survey. 493 questionnaires were collected totally. Scales evaluating those constructs were drawn from previous researches (Mathis et al., 2016; Rosenberg, 2015; Xu et al., 2019). A five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), was used to rate all scale items. A five-item scale developed by Mathis et al. (2016) was applied to measure the co-creation of experience. Three items from Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (2015) were applied to measure SE. A three-item scale established by Mathis et al. (2016) was used to measure STE. A six-item scale was used to measure the QOL (Mathis et al., 2016). A four-item scale was used to measure GB (Xu et al., 2019). SPSS and Mplus were used when doing the confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM), as well as testing the mediating role of self-esteem and STE and QOL.

### 4 Results

The performance of the measurement model was tested by a CFA with Mplus7.0 software, using maximum likelihood estimation. Results of the CFA are as followed:  $\chi^2$  (179 df) =250.578,  $\chi^2$  /df =1.40, p=0.000; TLI = 0.986; CFI = 0.988; SRMR= 0.034; RMSEA =0.030. All these indexes

have arrived at the threshold value, which means that the measurement model was fit with the sample data, and can be used with further analysis. Table 1 and Table 2 had shown the reliability and validity of the model. Firstly, the value of all variables' Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (0.843) ranged from 0.843 to 0.937, the composite reliability (CR) ranged from 0.845 to 0.937, they are higher than 0.7, exceeding the threshold. Secondly, all the standardized loadings are higher than 0.5, and the AVE of all the variables is higher than 0.5, which showed the convergent validity of the model. Lastly, for each variable, the squared root of the AVE was higher than their correlation coefficients with others, offering strong support for discriminant validity (Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson 2010). Therefore, both the reliability and validity of the model have been demonstrated.

**Table 1.** Measurement model results and correlation coefficients.

Constructs	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE	CE	STE	SE	QOL	GB
CE	0.904	0.892	0.624	<b>0.790</b>				
STE	0.878	0.879	0.707	0.227***	<b>0.841</b>			
SE	0.843	0.845	0.646	0.198***	0.125*	<b>0.804</b>		
QOL	0.937	0.937	0.713	0.338***	0.169**	0.353***	<b>0.844</b>	
GB	0.928	0.929	0.766	0.042	0.014	0.129*	0.152**	<b>0.875</b>

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

**Table 2.** Study constructs and measurement items.

Constructs		Factor loadings	T value	SE	SD
CE	CE1	0.845	48.151	0.018	1.139
	CE2	0.847	48.724	0.017	1.168
	CE3	0.785	36.257	0.022	1.142
	CE4	0.777	34.984	0.022	1.081
	CE5	0.683	24.111	0.028	1.143
STE	STE1	0.843	42.417	0.020	1.188
	STE2	0.844	42.912	0.020	1.124
	STE3	0.836	41.621	0.020	1.211
SE	SE1	0.878	40.193	0.022	1.121
	SE2	0.752	28.136	0.027	1.060
	SE3	0.776	30.632	0.025	1.101
QOL	QOL1	0.84	52.850	0.016	1.155

	QOL2	0.829	49.559	0.017	1.136
	QOL3	0.836	51.441	0.016	1.139
	QOL4	0.821	47.329	0.017	1.044
	QOL5	0.835	51.251	0.016	1.179
	QOL6	0.902	80.775	0.011	1.177
GB	GB1	0.884	67.439	0.013	1.247
	GB2	0.912	81.506	0.011	1.237
	GB3	0.877	64.892	0.014	1.197
	GB4	0.825	47.456	0.017	1.146

**Table 3.** Structural model results.

Direct effects	Support for hypothesis
H1: CE → GB	Y
H2: CE → STE	Y
H3: CE → SE	Y
H4: CE → QOL	N
H5: STE → QOL	Y
H6: SE → QOL	Y
H7: QOL → GB	Y
Indirect effects	Support for hypothesis
H8: CE → STE → QOL	Y
H9: CE → STE → QOL → GB	Y
H10: CE → SE → QOL	Y
H11: CE → SE → QOL → GB	Y

Table 3 shows the results of hypothesized model. The multiple mediation effect was calculated to clarify the influence of tourists' co-creation experience on their green behaviors. The impact of tourists' CE on GB is first mediated by STE and SE and then mediated by QOL. Therefore, all the hypotheses are supported except H4.

## 5 Conclusion and Discussion

In order to decrease the negative influence of tourism on the environment, increasing research focus on tourists' green behaviors. A great many frameworks have been proposed to explore the antecedents and mediations. However, only a few literatures have examined the impacts of co-creation experience and emotional state on tourists' green behavior. To fill in this gap, based on

SOR theory, the study put forward an integrative conceptual model to clarify the links among co-creation experience, self-esteem, and quality of life. This study is one of the early explorations aiming to incorporate these antecedents in a model to predict tourists' green behavior.

### **5.1 Theoretical Implications**

First of all, although more and more researchers have paid attention to green behavior, the current research still focuses on tourists' environmental norms, education, and attitudes. Bagozzi (1992) indicated that norms and attitudes cannot fully explain individuals' behavioral intentions. Therefore, this paper incorporates the psychological variable satisfaction, and constructs a tourism green behavior model from the perspective of tourists' interaction with service providers. The influencing factors and mechanisms of value co-creation on tourists' green behavior are discussed, or it may be a supplement to the research on tourism pro-environmental behavior.

Second, this study confirmed the applicability of SOR theory in green behavior models. The existing researches on green behavior are mainly based on the theory of planned behavior, rational action theory, and social exchange theory (Liv et al., 2020; Navratil et al., 2019; Wang, 2016; Ajzen, 1991). The SOR theory is widely used in consumer behavior research, but is rare in the context of tourism, this study expands the application scope of SOR theory.

Finally, this study is one of the earliest attempts to explore the mediating role of self-esteem in the green behavior model. The research objects of self-esteem in the field of tourism are mainly focused on hotel employees (Chan et al., 2016), and there is little empirical research on the self-esteem of tourists. Therefore, the study incorporates self-esteem into the green behavior model as a mediator, which has theoretical supplementary significance in the relevant field.

### **5.2 Practical Implications**

The current study will help us better understand tourists' green behavior. Thus, destination managers may consider enriching tourism activities that actively engage and involve tourists, due to the potential effect from co-creation to GB. Moreover, as the study may confirm the mediating role of self-esteem, satisfaction with travel experience, and QOL, destination policy-makers could pay more attention to visitors' emotional conditions.

### **5.2 Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, the young respondents accounted for about half of the sample, whose opinions may be different from the other respondents. We suggest further study should make the respondents more representative. Second, Ramkissoon (2020) reports locals' green behavior contributes to sustainable destination development. So, in the future, studies may concentrate more on residents' pro-environment behavior.

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