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## The Behavioral Intentions of Foreign Students Towards Tourism in China

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### ABSTRACT

As China is gradually developing into an education destination for international students, this group of students constitutes an important segment of the tourism industry in China. The findings of this present research are intended to uncover the behavioral intention of the foreign students about tourism in the china mainly analyzing some vital factors which affect their travelling behaviour. The study reveals that the Theory of Behavioral Intention (TBI) can be used to develop predictive models of cultural knowledge, communication skills, perceptions of safety, costs of tourism, time constraints, and social media presence in the context of foreign students' tourism behavior. This study indicates that requirements for foreign students for deciding on Chinese tourist destinations are interest, safety, digital media, time and financial concerns. This research involved 310 foreign students from different Chinese universities and the research data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, regression as well as correlation analysis. Therefore the results would provide information to tourism authorities and businesses to market and to position tourism so as to reflect this segment's travel patterns. Beside, this study contributes not only to the academic knowledge regarding the dual role of foreign students in education and tourism, but also for the tourism marketing and policy making in China, especially on how socio-cultural and digital factors affect the travel behavior of foreign students.

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a versatile social phenomenon which is connected with interaction of various cultural and regional, social and economical elements. The Chinese tourism industry has been continuously developing within the recent past, and foreigners particularly the students form a greater part of the tourism market. It is important for the policy-maker and the service-providers to know these tourists' behaviors in order to facilitate their educational requirements as well as improving their travel experience (Ma *et al.*, 2022; Agyapong & Yuan, 2022; Hossain & Hena, 2024). This type of students has a different travel character from other travellers who visit a country for tourism reasons, in aspects such as familiarity with a culture, duration of stay and education mission in China (Wang *et al.*, 2023). This study will uncover the necessary information to provide a better understanding of the behaviors that the tourism industry in China needs to implement in order to attract the target market of the foreign student tourists. The present study seeks to explore the behavioral intentions of the international students in China: the factors that influence the outbound Chinese tourists to tour the Chinese tourist destinations and whether there is a difference from those of the traditional tourists (Xu *et al.*, 2022). The results will thus be beneficial to stakeholders in the tourism and educational industries to understand how to effectively market and cater for the needs of this group.

In the last one and half decades or so, tourism is among the most significant source of revenue generation and foreign exchange earnings in China besides being a popular attraction for international students. International

students visiting China for education have become a separate type of tourists, who have certain reasons for visiting, different behavior, and some peculiarities they can face. Since China is emerging as a major education receiving country of the world, its tourism behavior regarding international students can be useful for enhancing the overall services and policies for tourism industry. Various aspects such as culture, magnanimity, and safety ideas affect foreign students' behavioral intentions toward tourism in China: Favorability and communication effectiveness (Jin *et al.*, 2022; Long & Aziz, 2022). International student tourists can thus be considered to engage in different travel patterns and thus describe different travel patterns than conventional tourists. Tourists who are entrepreneurs have longer visitation rates and interact with the destinations' cultures in a more profound way as opposed to the regular visitor, and they also visit the tourist places for different reasons as compared to other visitors (Agyapong & Yuan, 2022). They have their travel behavior determined by their education background, cultural adjustment, cultural sensitivity, and cultural interactions availed in the travelled country (Wang *et al.*, 2023). Since China is home to millions of international students, knowledge in relation to these behaviors is useful for tourism organizations and policies.

However, little has been attempted to examine the tourism behavior of the international students in China. Prior literature has failed to capture the differences specifically experienced by the students who receive education and possibly tourism services while in the students' host countries. This research therefore seeks to fill this gap by

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providing an understanding of the behavioral intentions of the foreign students toward tourism in China. This paper aims at identifying factors affecting mobility of foreign students within the country and reveals extent to which students have adequate information concerning the culture, language and costs of travelling within the country. Knowledge of these aspects will help in improving the quality of tourism services for China targeting this particular group of clientele from their perspective of being foreign students in China. This research will add to the existing literature regarding the behavior of International Students regarding tourism in the host country, especially how educational and tourism facilities and services influence the decision making of international student travelers (Xu *et al.*, 2022; Jeon *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, the objective of this research is to examine the knowledge about cultural differences, communication ability and perceived safety with regards to their tourism intentions in China. Moreover, the study seeks to determine the influence that foreign students' perception has on the types and adopted traditional/modern tourist attractions. It will also try to establish the relationship between cultural distance and adaptability in shaping their attitudes toward visiting different parts of China. Altogether, it will aim at presenting practical conclusions and suggestions to the authorities and companies that may contribute to the alteration and improvement of the appeal to foreign students and their contribution in domestic tourism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the tourism behaviour of these foreign students has gained momentum with respect to educational travel and tourism. Many pieces of research work have been undertaken to establish several factors affecting the travel motivations of international students. The nature and occurrences the foreign students interact (Hossain, 2025) with in their duration of stay in China offer them chance to appreciate the Chinese cultural and tourism values. This is in line with the earlier studies that have confirmed that cultural knowledge and communication ability as factors that influence the travelling behaviours of foreign students (Wang *et al.*, 2023). Likewise, Jin *et al.* (2022) pointed that safety advantage and affordability were regarded as the most important factors influencing the decisions of the foreign students towards tourism-specific destinations. Zhang *et al.* (2023) also noted that cultural distance between home country and China had a direct impact on these students' adjustment and their willingness to venture out and visit new and untraveled tourist attractions. On the other hand, Long and Aziz, (2022), treated the role of digital tools, particularly the social media platforms and online resources in decision made towards travelling in the era of the COVID-19. Their study revealed that the availability of the web, discussing travel forums and applications provided additional efficiency to tourism for foreign students. In a

research by Luo *et al.* (2023), other factors which include social media engagement, time required and cost, was also considered to determine the behavioral intentions of international students. Overall the study revealed that the students with greater engagement in the digital media are possibly to consider domestic tourism options, meaning that the students' engagement displaces a significant role in defining the current and emerging travel patterns.

## Theoretical Framework

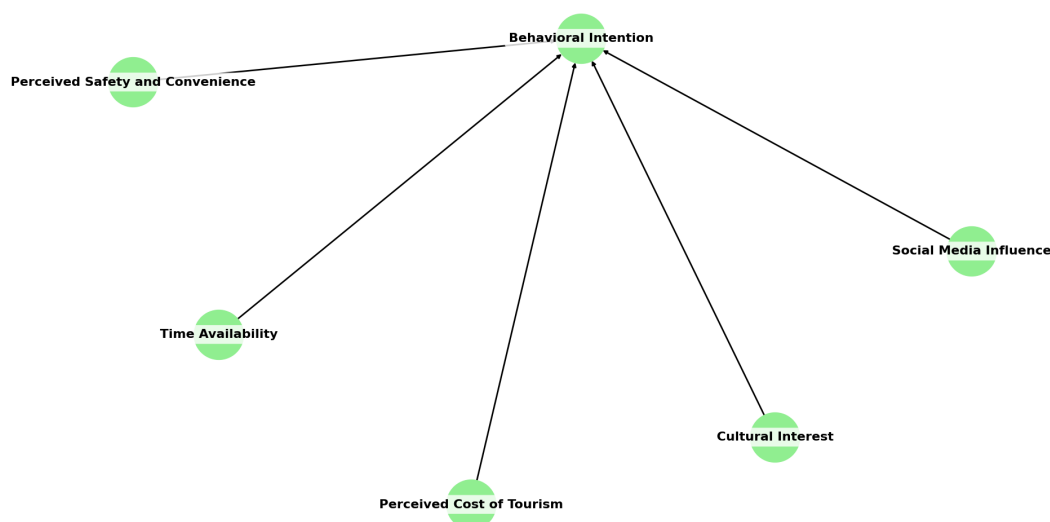
The choice model for this study is the Theory of Behavioral Intention (TBI) which is quite popular in analyzing consumer behavior more so with travellers. According to TBI by Ajzen (1991), intention to behave in a certain way was said to predict a person's behaviour in the best way. Perceived behavioral control is one of the social cognition theory constructs, the other two being optimism and perceived attitudes towards the behavior as well as perceived norms, in this case social pressure to engage or not engage the behavior. When it comes to the foreign students living in China, these variables can be adjusted to discover how the cultural, social, and economic factors affect the students' decision to engage in domestic tourism. In the proposed model given in the subsequent figure 1, cultural experiences attitude, communication effectiveness, perceived safety, and cost factors are the key antecedents of the behavioural intentions of the foreign students. It is deduced that each of the aforementioned variables affects the student's willingness to engage in tourism either directly or indirectly and hence underpin the theoretical model for the study.

## Behavioral intention

The behavioral intention in the area of tourism marketing contains the probability of foreign students to pursue activities that are associated with tourism for instance visiting tourist attraction sites, experience cultural diversity or have fun. To the marketers focusing on this segment, behavioral intention is one of the most important approaches to help them develop effective campaigns that meet the students' needs and wants, ranging from the passion for cultures to the constraints of time and money. Also, safety along with perceived convenience, cost and social networks affect the tourism intentions of the foreign students; the services offered being a factor of determination. In this way, the above-stated intentions can be helpful to tourism marketers to develop the focused and attractive-selling appeals that will prompt the students into turning their dreams into tangible experience. On this premise, the current conceptualization and deployment of behavioural intention make sure that marketing strategies are not only right but also will get the students from the stage of intention through the entire world of tourism.

## Proposed conceptual model

The model employed in this present research explores the impact of several independent factors on the behavioral



**Figure 1:** Conceptual model: Behavioral Intentions of Foreign Students Towards Tourism in China

intention of foreigner's students regarding tourism in China. The dependent variable, is a behavioral intention to take part in tourism activities in the households by the foreign students as influenced by certain perceptions, interests and available resources. The research independent variables are safety and convenience, time, pocket pinch, culture, and social networking. TPB states that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control have a direct impact on the intention to perform a behavior. In this regard, the level of perceived safety and convenience affects students' attitude because a positive attitude is likely to be attracted to those places that are safe and conveniently accessible for tourism. Time and cost are two variables in the TPB that relates to perceived behavioral control, as these two factors determine the perceived capacity or ability of the students to participate in tourism activities. Cultural interest influences attitude by creating permissive notes for students to gain culture details from tourism while social media influence acts as a mechanism of impacting on the perceived beliefs because the student rely on social media platforms in acquiring information and/or recommendations on various things including travelling. When all of these are incorporated into the model, then one gets a clear picture of the factors that define travel patterns of the foreign students.

I. Perceived safety and convenience (the extent to which students feel safe and find it easy to access tourist destinations) significantly influence their intentions to travel. Studies have shown that a higher sense of safety and greater convenience lead to more favorable attitudes towards engaging in tourism (Jin *et al.*, 2023).

II. Time availability, or the amount of free time foreign students have, directly impacts their ability to participate in tourism, making it a crucial factor influencing their behavioral intention (Ma *et al.*, 2022).

III. Perceived costs of tourism (how affordable students believe tourism activities to be) play a role in shaping students' intentions, as financial constraints often hinder travel intentions.

IV. Cultural interest (the degree to which students are interested in experiencing and learning about Chinese culture) is a strong motivator for engaging in tourism activities, as students with a higher cultural interest are more likely to explore various tourist destinations.

V. Social media influence (the impact of social media platforms such as WeChat, Instagram, or travel blogs) shapes students' perceptions of destinations and influences their decisions to visit particular tourist spots.

### Hypotheses

H1: Perceived safety and convenience have a positive impact on foreign students' attitudes towards tourism in China.

H2: Time availability positively influences foreign students' perceived behavioral control and their willingness to engage in tourism.

H3: Perceived costs of tourism negatively affect foreign students' intention to engage in tourism activities in China.

H4: Cultural interest positively influences foreign students' attitudes towards tourism, increasing their behavioral intention.

H5: Social media influence positively shapes foreign students' subjective norms, thus enhancing their intention to participate in tourism.

### Theoretical contribution

The present findings also advance the theory of behavioral intention by including both areas of digital and socio-cultural contexts onto the basic model. Although the TBI has been applied in the field of consumer behavior, there is limited understanding of how digital tools and social media affect behavioral intentions in the cross-cultural tourism domain. Therefore, including these factors gives a better model of the current state of affairs in the minds of the foreign students in China with a view of making a decision. It also presents further insights about the cultural sometime uncomfortable space, communication



efficacy, and digital connectivity that contributes to the whole picture of students' travel patterns. Hawley proposed the concept of the cultural comfort zone that is likely to be useful for investigating international students' experiences, as this construct is related to students in particular. This idea associates positive affect in cultural contexts with readiness to venture, thus putting a different spin on how the place attachment fosters student's behaviours as tourists. The introduction of time availability into the model and the specification of the impact of social media are also innovations that bring the theory to the level of the modern tendencies in international tourism.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research methodology section outlines a step-by-step approach to study execution through procedures and methods for investigating foreign student tourism behavior in China. Transparency and replicability in the study are achieved through a detailed description provided in this chapter about both data collection methods and analysis procedures.

### Data Collection

The researchers conducted their investigation using survey-based methods to discover what elements drive foreign students to behave regarding tourism in China. The survey structure consisted of questions to assess independent variables which included perceived safety and convenience alongside time availability and perceived costs of tourism and cultural interest and social media influence as they related to the dependent variable behavioral intention. The survey composed of Likert scale questions which used a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale for participants to indicate their agreement levels with every independent variable statement. Survey participants' answers led to the creation of scores that depicted the factors evaluated. Foreign students enrolled in Chinese universities from different academic institutions were chosen as the target recipients to obtain a diverse representation of the international student community. Participants could complete the survey through WeChat because the platform offered convenient access. Statistical analysis of the data became possible through an  $n = 310$  sample size which represented effective levels of data quantity.

### Analytical Techniques

Both descriptive statistics and regression analysis combined with correlation analysis served to evaluate the relationships between variables affecting behavioral intent. The first step involved descriptive statistics for data summarization to provide sample demographic statistics. Standard deviation together with mean values helped reveal the students' data central tendencies with statistical distributions. The researchers employed

multiple regression to study how the independent variables affect students' behavioral intention. Through a regression model the research evaluated its hypotheses while measuring the strength of key factors affecting students' intention to visit North Korea. The research applied the following structure to the regression analysis: Behavioral Intention (BI) =  $\beta_0 + \beta_1$ . Perceived Safety and Convenience +  $\beta_2$ . Time Availability +  $\beta_3$ . Perceived Costs +  $\beta_4$ . Cultural Interest +  $\beta_5$ . Social Media Influence Where

1. BI is the dependent variable (Behavioral Intention),
2. Perceived Safety, Convenience, Time Availability, Perceived Costs, Cultural Interest, and Social Media Influence are the independent variables,
3.  $\beta_0$  is the intercept term,
4.  $\beta_1$  to  $\beta_5$  are the coefficients representing the impact of each independent variable on Behavioral Intention,
5.  $\epsilon$  is the error term.

For measuring the relationships between independent variables and the dependent variable researchers conducted Pearson's correlation testing to determine directional and strength levels. By conducting this analysis researchers gained understanding about the variables which produced the strongest correlations with tourism intention among foreign students for behavioral driver analysis.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### Results

The analysis covers 310 foreign students through a table presentation of descriptive statistics for tested variables (Table 1). Results from the mean values show students demonstrate strong intentions to participate in Chinese tourism activities because they hold average scores of 4.029 for safety and 4.294 for behavioral intention and 4.361 for cultural interest and 4.423 for cost factors. Research results suggest foreign students demonstrate intermediate comfort levels and ability to connect with Chinese culture based on their responses regarding cultural comfort (3.890) and communication effectiveness (3.116). Most variables display standard deviation ranges between 4.071 and 4.058 which indicates students have diverse responses to questions about time availability and social media influence. Most students in the study belong to the younger demographic and the student population demonstrates gender parity. The data from the survey reveals that international students possess mostly positive attitudes toward Chinese tourism which is particularly influenced by digital technologies and cultural sensibilities but they encounter obstacles when adapting to Chinese culture and maintaining effective communications. The research model analysis in Table 2 demonstrates how independent variables affect behavioral intention regarding foreign students who may choose China for tourism activities. Research findings show older students have less intention to participate in tourism (Coef. = -0.256,

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Age	310	1.161	0.368	1	2
Gender	310	1.610	0.489	1	2
Educationlevel	310	2.268	0.582	1	3
CulturalComfort	310	3.890	0.956	1	5
CommunicationEffec~s	310	3.116	0.988	1	5
CulturalInterest	310	4.361	0.642	3	5
Adaptability	310	3.690	0.809	2	5
CulturalChallenges	310	2.819	1.120	1	5
Safety	310	4.029	0.698	3	5
Costfactors	310	4.423	0.612	3	5
Costimpact	310	3.974	0.851	3	5
Timeavailability	310	4.071	0.702	3	5
Timeallocation	310	4.035	0.703	3	5
socialmedia	310	4.058	0.901	2	5
Onlineresources	310	4.090	0.902	2	5
Digitaltools	310	4.348	0.624	3	5
Technology	310	4.419	0.700	3	5
Behavioralintention	310	4.294	0.716	3	5

$p = 0.003$ ) but males and students who have completed higher levels of education demonstrate increased participation (Coef. = 0.174,  $p = 0.005$  and Coef. = 0.169,  $p = 0.028$  respectively). Students who experience higher safety levels and have available time display stronger intentions to travel according to the research findings (Coef. = 0.424,  $p = 0.000$ ) and (Coef. = 0.630,  $p = 0.000$ ). The data demonstrates that higher student use of social media platforms produces a negative correlation (Coef. = -0.464,  $p = 0.000$ ) in tourism intentions. Students who show interest in cultural aspects tend to exhibit higher

tourism behaviors according to statistical results (Coef. = 0.407,  $p = 0.000$ ). Students who use online resources as a learning resource have positive outcomes according to statistical measures (Coef. = 0.119,  $p = 0.003$ ) yet digital tools exhibit a limited negative effect (Coef. = -0.161,  $p = 0.062$ ). A strong model relationship exists between independent variables and behavioral intention as indicated by R-squared = 0.783 where the dependent variable explains 78.3% of the variance. Additionally, the overall model achieves significant results at  $p < 0.000$  with both AIC and BIC values confirming its reliability.

**Table 2:** Regression Analysis

behavioralintention	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Age	-0.256	0.084	-3.030	0.003	-0.423	-0.090	***
Gender	0.174	0.061	2.830	0.005	0.053	0.295	***
Educationlevel	0.169	0.077	2.200	0.028	0.018	0.320	**
Safety	0.424	0.079	5.370	0.000	0.269	0.580	***
Costfactors	0.109	0.067	1.630	0.104	-0.023	0.240	
Costimpact	-0.057	0.041	-1.400	0.161	-0.137	0.023	
Timeavailability	0.630	0.044	14.430	0.000	0.545	0.716	***
Timeallocation	0.070	0.049	1.440	0.151	-0.026	0.166	
socialmedia	-0.464	0.048	-9.570	0.000	-0.559	-0.369	***
Onlineresources	0.119	0.040	2.980	0.003	0.041	0.197	***
Digitaltools	-0.161	0.086	-1.880	0.062	-0.330	0.008	*
CulturalInterest	0.407	0.084	4.820	0.000	0.241	0.574	***
Constant	-0.565	0.257	-2.200	0.029	-1.070	-0.059	**
Mean dependent var	4.294	SD dependent var			0.716		
R-squared	0.783	Number of obs			310		

F-test	89.246	Prob > F		0.000	
Akaike crit. (AIC)	223.896	Bayesian crit. (BIC)		272.471	

\*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$

The key study variables appear in Table 3 as their correlation matrix demonstrates the relationship intensity between paired variables. The variable cultural interest functions as a positive predictor for all three variables of cost factors (0.623), cost impact (0.568), and digital tools (0.742) among students who demonstrate cultural interest in their tourism choices. Students who demonstrate better adaptability levels tend to show increased interest in Chinese culture (0.365) based on analysis of variable 2 and variable 3. Students who feel positively about touristic safety tend to evaluate costs and times of tourism activities according to the results for both variables 3 (0.729) and time allocation (0.717). Students who utilize

social media (variable 8) show high correlations between cultural interest (0.506) and digital tools (0.338) which indicate these students have better cultural interest and use digital tools for their tourism choices. Students who demonstrate cultural interest and employ digital tools also consider technology as vital for tourism decisions since the two factors exhibit high correlation at 0.734 and 0.679 respectively (variable 10). The interdependent relationships among cultural involvement and digital media use together with time and cost elements have been confirmed through the established correlations which indicate these factors influence student tourism intentions significantly.

**Table 3:** Matrix of correlations

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) CulturalInterest	1.000									
(2) Adaptability	0.365	1.000								
(3) Safety	0.373	0.400	1.000							
(4) Costfactors	0.623	0.331	0.729	1.000						
(5) Costimpact	0.568	0.317	0.344	0.388	1.000					
(6) Timeavailability	0.359	0.494	0.293	0.420	0.344	1.000				
(7) Timeallocation	0.387	0.287	0.717	0.537	0.202	0.349	1.000			
(8) Socialmedia	0.506	0.371	0.465	0.630	0.318	0.418	0.436	1.000		
(9) Digitaltools	0.742	0.343	0.556	0.630	0.273	0.423	0.473	0.338	1.000	
(10) Technology	0.734	0.241	0.379	0.575	0.469	0.328	0.180	0.207	0.679	1.000

## Discussion

Several critical components affect the behavioral intentions of international students to participate in Chinese tourism activities according to this research analysis. Students reveal greater tourist behavior toward China when their interest in Chinese culture grows stronger. Foreign students show higher intentions to engage in Chinese tourism when they believe the environment is safe and have additional time on their hands. The amount of time students spend on social media networks increases their behavioral intention resistance which demonstrates that intensive digital consumption could hinder their actual travel plans probably because they become exhausted with decisions or prefer virtual encounters over actual physical exploration. Tourism intentions create a complicated network with technology because digital tools enable travel decisions while simultaneously causing potential barriers to tourism decision-making. The research emphasizes that developers of student tourism experiences need to balance cultural involvement against safety regulations and time limits as they create travel solutions for international students since social media cannot always boost travel motivation.

## CONCLUSION

The research highlights key factors influencing foreign student tourism behavior in China, offering valuable insights for tourism professionals and policymakers. It identifies cultural interest as a primary motivator for students, emphasizing the importance of providing tailored cultural experiences that resonate with their preferences. Safety and convenience, including accessible transportation, accommodations, and health measures, are crucial in shaping students' travel decisions. Flexible travel packages designed for students with demanding academic schedules, such as short weekend trips or daily themed tours, can enhance participation. The study also underscores the role of digital media, suggesting that social media and online resources complement real-world travel experiences, helping to inspire students. The findings recommend that tourism marketers focus on creating culturally relevant, safe, and flexible travel options, while also fostering a balance between digital engagement and physical travel experiences. By aligning their offerings with students' cultural tastes and time constraints, China's tourism industry can significantly boost foreign student involvement and facilitate meaningful cultural exchanges.

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