

Analysis of the Differences in Host-guest Interaction Willingness and Behavior from the Perspective of the New Generation of Tourists

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ABSTRACT

With the generational change of tourism subjects, the new generation of tourists (born after 1990) has gradually become the main force in the tourism market. Their stronger desire for expression, pursuit of individuality and high dependence on digital media have led to their unique behavioral characteristics in the interaction between host and guest. Although this group generally expects to achieve deep communication with local residents, their actual behavior mostly stays at a shallow level of interaction, showing a misalignment phenomenon of "expecting depth but stopping at the surface". Based on the grounded theory, this paper selected 30 new generation tourists for in-depth interviews, identified five core categories of interaction willingness, actual behavior, behavior restriction factors, alternative paths and self-regulation, and constructed a theoretical model of "willingness-behavior misalignment" in the interaction between host and guest of the new generation of tourists. The study found that social anxiety, communication barriers and unfamiliar environment are the key factors that restrict deep interaction. After perception is restricted, tourists tend to rely on digital media for information acquisition and indirect communication, and alleviate the psychological gap through a variety of self-regulation strategies. This study systematically reveals the psychological and behavioral paths of the obstructed transformation of interaction willingness, and provides a new perspective and practical reference for understanding the social behavior characteristics of the new generation of tourists and optimizing tourism experience.

KEYWORDS

New Generation Tourists; Host-guest Interaction; Intention and Behavior; Grounded Theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the rise of the experience economy, the interaction between hosts and guests in tourism has become a core factor affecting service quality and tourist experience. As early as 1971, Cohen pointed out through his research on the interaction between local Arab boys and female tourists that hosts and guests form an intricate social network through interaction in tourism activities^[1], and the quality of their interaction will have a significant impact on tourists' travel experience, perceived value and happiness^[2].

Host-guest interaction, also known as host-guest communication, originated from the theory of "interaction ritual" and emphasizes procedural social interaction with the function of meaning construction^[3]. Foreign scholars regard it as direct face-to-face communication between different cultural groups^[4], and believe that tourists hope to seek authentic tourism experience through interaction with local people^[5]. Domestic scholars also have multiple interpretations of this: Du Jiang defines host-guest interaction as the mutual contact and influence between residents of the tourist destination and tourism practitioners and tourists during the tourism process^[6]; Wang Jianqin

emphasizes the establishment of relationships in the interaction process and the sum of behaviors generated from it ^[7]; Zhou Chunfa, from a cultural perspective, believes that host-guest interaction can be broadly understood as the collision and intersection of cultures between the source and destination societies ^[8].

As a generational group that grew up in an environment of the Internet and social media, the new generation of tourists has a distinct preference for interaction and participation in their travel behavior. This group refers to the "post-90s" and "post-00s" people born after 1990, with a total population of over 300 million. Compared with traditional tourists, they place more emphasis on participation, interactivity and cultural contact ^[9], and often have high expectations for interaction goals such as "integrating into the local community", "deep experience" and "making friends" before departure ^[10]. However, in the actual travel process, their interaction with local residents is usually superficial, such as simple functional interactions such as asking for directions, ordering food, shopping, etc., and rarely achieves deep social interaction or cultural integration in the true sense. This phenomenon of "expecting depth but stopping at the surface" raises a question worth exploring: Why is there a clear inconsistency between tourists' willingness to interact and their behavior?

Social psychologist Festinger once proposed that there is often a discrepancy between an individual's attitude or belief and his or her actual behavior. This cognitive contradiction is called cognitive dissonance ^[11]. Bhattacharjee and Sandford further proposed that although willingness is a prerequisite for behavior, it is not a sufficient condition. The transformation of behavior is also constrained by many factors ^[12]. The deviation between willingness and behavior may be caused by internal factors of the individual. For example, Reuter et al. found that with age, the gap between the willingness and actual behavior of individuals in physical exercise will gradually narrow ^[13]. It may also be affected by the external environment. For example, Shirokova's study on the relationship between college students' entrepreneurial willingness and actual entrepreneurial behavior showed that a good policy atmosphere and external support can effectively promote the consistency between the two ^[14]. In summary, there is currently little research on the disconnect between tourists' willingness to interact and their actual behavior, and the theoretical construction of related mechanisms is also insufficient. The complex psychological motivations, social styles and high dependence on digital media of the new generation of tourists may all be potential factors causing their "willingness-behavior misalignment" in interaction. Based on this, this paper takes the new generation of tourists as the research object and uses grounded theory to analyze in-depth interview data, aiming to reveal the reasons for their misalignment, expand research on host-guest interaction, and provide practical references for tourism destinations to optimize product and relationship management.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1. Data Sources

This study uses semi-structured in-depth interviews to obtain first-hand data. In-depth interviews can not only prompt researchers to ask interviewees questions around specific issues and explore the potential logical relationships and dynamic changes between variables, but also help researchers discover content from the interviews that is not covered by the original theories and hypotheses, thereby enriching the research results ^[15]. The research subjects of this paper are new generation tourists born between 1990 and 2010. Purposeful sampling is used to screen out interviewees who have interacted with local residents during their travels, or have the desire to interact but have not been satisfied. The interviews focus on tourists' expectations of interaction, actual behavior, and the differences between the two. Question design refers to existing literature and previous exploratory research results to form a preliminary interview outline. A total of 30 people (15 males and 15 females) were interviewed, with an age distribution between 21 and 34 years old. The interviews lasted 25 to 40 minutes and were conducted offline face-to-face and online voice/video. With the consent of the

interviewees, the entire process was recorded and transcribed into a transcript, forming a total of about 150,000 words of original data. All data have been anonymized to protect the privacy of the interviewees.

2.2. Data Analysis

Table 1. Open Coding Examples

Original statement	Conceptualization and its scope
"I really enjoy chatting with locals about their customs and culture. That feeling brings me closer to the soul of a place."	Cultural interests
"If someone takes the initiative to talk to me during the trip, I will feel particularly happy and more accepted."	Emotional belonging
"I want to leave some unique memories in strange places, not by taking photos, but by having real conversations with locals."	Identity construction
"I really want to chat with locals, but sometimes I worry about disturbing others or being rejected."	Social anxiety
"I really want to hear some local history and stories from them, but I don't know how to start."	Lack of interactive skills
"It's not easy to be in a strange city for the first time. It takes time to adapt to the environment, and I don't dare to start a conversation."	Adapting to unfamiliar environment
"We are just tourists, not friends with them, so we should be wary of strangers."	Emotional distance
"They spoke with a heavy accent and I couldn't understand them very well."	Communication barriers
"In fact, there is already a lot of information online, including where to go, how to get there, basic navigation and strategies."	Digital information dependence
"Before I go out, I always check Xiaohongshu or Bilibili. I just follow what others say and just follow the check-in route."	Media dependence
"I chatted with the driver a little that day, but mainly asked about routes and places to eat, that's all."	Surface interaction
"On many occasions, the interaction between me and the locals was limited to a nod or a thank you, but there was no communication at all."	Short communication
"I think they are too busy and don't have time to pay attention to me. Maybe it's not that they don't want to, but it's just objective reasons."	Self-rationalization
"In fact, the main purpose of traveling is to see the scenery. It is not so important whether you chat with people or not."	Expected adjustment
"Although I didn't have in-depth exchanges with people, I was able to take a lot of beautiful photos, which was a kind of satisfaction."	Alternative satisfaction

As a qualitative research method, grounded theory emphasizes the development of theories from original data and is suitable for exploring the essential characteristics of specific phenomena at the micro level^[16]. Compared with quantitative research, grounded theory can better restore the overall psychological process of tourists' "willingness-behavior" asymmetry in host-guest interaction. This paper adopts a bottom-up approach to code the collected interview texts step by step. First, open coding is carried out, that is, the original data is decomposed, examined, compared, conceptualized and categorized^[17]. After multiple rounds of coding and revision, a total of 87 initial concepts were

extracted, which were further summarized into 15 initial categories (see Table 1). The second stage is axial coding. This stage focuses on the categories formed by open coding. Through systematic comparison and continuous return to the original data, the internal connection between the categories is explored, thereby extracting key categories ^[18]. Finally, this study summarizes 5 main categories from the 15 initial categories: interaction willingness, behavioral limiting factors, alternative paths, actual behavioral performance, and self-regulation (see Table 2). Then we entered the selective coding stage, which is the process of finding the core categories at a higher level of abstraction. After two rounds of coding, while tracing back the research topic and purpose, this paper identified "the interaction willingness-behavior differences of the new generation of tourists" as the core category, and thus constructed a theoretical model of willingness-behavior dislocation. Finally, a theoretical saturation test was conducted. When the new data no longer generates new categories or concepts, it is considered to have reached theoretical saturation. This study interviewed three new generation tourists again and obtained about 12,000 words of supplementary data. After coding and analysis according to the grounded theory procedure, no new categories or concepts were found, indicating that the research has reached theoretical saturation.

Table 2. Main Axis Coding

Main axis category	Initial category	Category connotation
Willingness to interact	Cultural interests	Hope to satisfy curiosity about foreign culture through interaction
	Emotional belonging	Desire to gain acceptance and recognition in communication.
	Identity construction	We look forward to strengthening our self-image and cultural identity through interaction.
Behavior limiting factors	Social anxiety	Avoiding communication due to fear of being rejected or expressing oneself inappropriately.
	Lack of interactive skills	Lack of topic guidance, expression or communication experience.
	Adapting to unfamiliar environment	The unfamiliar environment causes tension and withdrawal.
	Emotional distance	There is a lack of closeness and trust with the locals.
Alternative path	Communication barriers	Differences in dialects and expressions lead to difficulties in understanding and communication barriers.
	Digital information dependence	They prefer to obtain travel information through online platforms.
Actual behavior	Media dependence	Rely on social media as a substitute for interacting with locals.
	Surface interaction	Communication is limited to simple practical information.
	Short communication	The interaction time is short and the frequency is low.
Self-regulation	Self-rationalization	Attributing the lack of communication to external reasons, such as "the other person is too busy."
	Expected adjustment	Actively lower your expectations for communication and alleviate the psychological gap.
	Alternative satisfaction	Get a sense of compensation by taking photos, checking in, recording and sharing.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Content Analysis

Through the systematic coding and sorting of in-depth interview data, this paper focuses on the deviation between the "interaction expectations" and "actual behaviors" of the new generation of tourists during their travels. Starting from the micro-interaction process, five main axis categories are identified, namely: willingness to interact, behavioral limiting factors, alternative paths, actual behavioral performance, and self-regulation. The following is an analysis of the contents of the five categories:

3.1.1. Willingness to Interact

Willingness to interact refers to the psychological tendency of tourists to actively seek to establish communication and connections with the residents of the destination during their travels ^[19]. The interview results show that the new generation of tourists generally have high expectations for communication with local residents and have a strong willingness to interact, which is mainly reflected in three core motivations: cultural interest, emotional belonging and identity construction. For this group, traveling is not only about appreciating natural or cultural landscapes or relaxing the body and mind, but also an important process of deeply understanding the culture of the destination, experiencing local life, gaining emotional identification and building a unique self-identity.

"I have always felt that traveling is not only about seeing the scenery, but more importantly, getting to know people, especially the locals, so that I can better understand the place."

"If I can make a local friend on this trip, it will be worth it."

"Even if I just listen to them talk about the history of a certain store, I will feel that I am not just passing by."

Interaction plays an important role in the overall travel experience of the new generation of tourists. They are eager to establish real and meaningful communication relationships with local people. Their willingness to interact has both emotional appeals and social expressions, reflecting the high importance that the new generation of tourists attach to social travel experiences.

3.1.2. Actual Behavior

Actual behavioral performance refers to the specific interactive content and the depth of communication that tourists exhibit during their travels. Although the new generation of tourists generally have a strong willingness to interact, in actual situations, their interactive behaviors show a certain degree of contraction and restraint, and the interactive content tends to be functional and short-term. The interview results show that the communication between this group and the residents of the destination mostly stays on the surface, mainly focusing on practical interactions such as asking for directions, shopping inquiries, and food recommendations, and rarely involves in-depth communication on local culture, residents' lives or emotional levels.

"In fact, I rarely take the initiative to chat with people. Basically, I only ask when I encounter problems."

"I usually meet those more enthusiastic locals, that is, I ask where there are delicious and fun things to do, and I basically don't ask anything else."

This phenomenon of "willingness-behavior" asymmetry in interaction indicates that the new generation of tourists may face certain obstacles in real tourism scenarios, making it difficult for them to transform their original expectations of deep interaction into actual behavior.

3.1.3. Behavior Limiting Factors

Through coding analysis, the reasons why tourists fail to achieve deep interaction can be summarized into five limiting factors: social anxiety, lack of interaction skills, adaptation to unfamiliar environments, emotional distance, and communication barriers. These factors cover both the psychological and ability levels, including tourists' subjective emotions and cognitive limitations, as well as cultural differences and language barriers in the external context, which together constitute the interaction dilemma of "wanting to speak but not daring to, being able to speak but not being able to".

"Sometimes I really want to know about their daily lives, but I'm afraid that my questions will be too abrupt and make people uncomfortable."

"I'm not the kind of person who likes to talk. If I can't get something started, I'll give up easily."

"If you travel alone, you don't dare to talk to strangers casually."

"I don't really understand their dialect, so I can only smile and nod."

the new generation of tourists try to interact in unfamiliar tourism situations, they usually face some psychological barriers and expression pressure, which makes it difficult for the host and guest to communicate deeply. Their behavioral restriction factors are the important breakpoints between the willingness to interact and the actual behavior, and are one of the important inducements for the misalignment of "willingness-behavior".

3.1.4. Alternative Paths

In the case that the expectation of real-life interaction is difficult to achieve, the new generation of tourists tend to take the media alternative path to meet their needs for information acquisition and cultural contact. On the one hand, they consult guides, select food and attractions through platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Bilibili, and Douyin, which greatly reduces the need to ask locals for help or actively communicate; on the other hand, they achieve indirect cognition and situational imagination of local culture through interaction in the comment area, browsing bullet screens, or obtaining other people's experience. This alternative form of interaction based on digital media not only meets tourists' cognitive needs for "understanding the destination", but also alleviates the discomfort and anxiety caused by face-to-face communication to a certain extent. However, it also quietly weakens the frequency and depth of host-guest interaction in real situations, causing the host-guest relationship to shift from "real contact" to "online imagination", further exacerbating the rift between tourists' "willingness-behavior". It can be said that the media alternative path is both the result of limited interaction and a strategic choice for the new generation of tourists to adjust the host-guest relationship in the digital environment.

3.1.5. Self-regulation

Faced with the gap between the willingness to interact and the actual behavior, the new generation of tourists often use self-regulation to maintain emotional stability and the integrity of the overall travel experience. The main methods include self-rationalization, expectation adjustment and alternative satisfaction. On the one hand, tourists tend to attribute the limited communication to external factors to relieve psychological pressure, such as "Everyone's time is precious, and others have things to do, they don't ignore me on purpose"; on the other hand, they reduce the sense of gap by actively lowering their expectations, such as "I didn't expect to communicate more, I just want to have fun by myself". In addition, many tourists also obtain alternative satisfaction by taking photos, checking in, and recording moments to fill the gap caused by the lack of interaction, such as "Although I didn't communicate much with the locals, I took a lot of photos, which still felt good." Tourists failed to achieve the deep interaction they expected, but they still maintained the integrity of their travel experience through self-repair at the cognitive and emotional levels, showing the flexible coping strategy of the new generation of tourists to social gap.

3.2. Construction of a Theoretical Model of Interaction Willingness and Behavioral Dislocation among New Generation Tourists

In order to reveal the phenomenon of "willing but superficial behavior" in the interaction between the new generation of tourists, this paper constructs a "willingness to interact-behavior dislocation" mechanism model. The model takes tourists' willingness to interact as the starting point, which originates from tourists' deep needs for cultural understanding, emotional identification and self-construction, and reflects the intrinsic motivation to actively contact and integrate into the destination society. However, in real tourism scenarios, tourists are often constrained by factors such as social anxiety, communication barriers and adaptation to unfamiliar environments, resulting in superficial and short-term interactive behaviors that fail to meet their psychological expectations. Faced with limited communication and psychological gaps in reality, tourists tend to use digital media platforms (such as Xiaohongshu, Bilibili, etc.) to obtain information and achieve indirect interaction, forming a media alternative path; at the same time, they will also self-regulate through self-rationalization, expectation adjustment and alternative satisfaction to maintain a positive perception of the overall tourism experience. In general, the model presents a psychological-behavioral dynamic chain consisting of "generation of interaction intention → behavior restriction → behavior shallowness → alternative path and self-regulation", revealing the misalignment mechanism between the interaction expectations and actual behaviors of the new generation of tourists in the process of host-guest interaction. The relevant theoretical framework is shown in Figure 1.

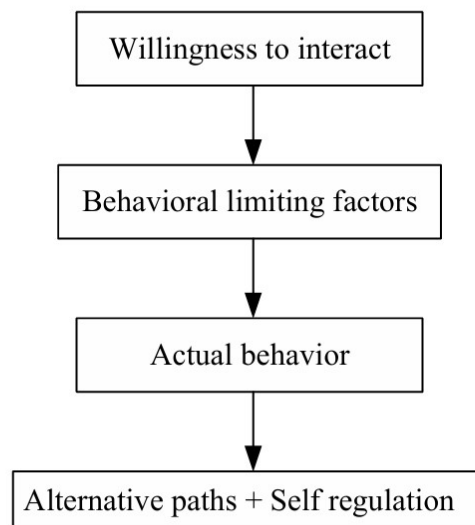


Figure 1. The "Interaction Willingness - Behavioral Misalignment" mechanism model of the new generation of tourists

4. RESEARCH CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

4.1. Conclusion

Guided by grounded theory, this study focuses on the differences in the interaction "intention-to-behavior" of the new generation of tourists during the travel process. Through text analysis and coding induction, a mechanism model of the interaction "intention-to-behavior misalignment" of the new generation of tourists is constructed. The study shows that the new generation of tourists generally

have a strong willingness to interact, and expect to achieve cultural understanding, emotional belonging and self-construction through communication with local people. However, in actual tourism scenarios, due to multiple factors such as social anxiety, communication barriers and environmental unfamiliarity, their interactive behaviors are mostly short-term, functional and superficial. In response to this, tourists tend to form alternative paths through digital media, and make up for the interaction gap through self-regulation mechanisms to maintain a positive evaluation of the overall tourism experience. This model systematically reveals the psychological-behavioral chain of the new generation of tourists from interactive expectations to realistic responses.

4.2. Suggestions

Based on the above conclusions, the following suggestions can be made to tourist destinations and tourism service providers: First, tourist destinations should optimize the communication environment, create a relaxed and friendly social atmosphere, and lower the psychological threshold for tourists to participate in interaction. Second, tourism service providers should enhance participation awareness and actively stimulate tourists' communication motivation; at the same time, they should guide tourists to use digital media reasonably and strengthen their positive value of real-life interaction ; and pay attention to tourists' emotional compensation needs, provide appropriate expression space and social support, so as to better meet the expectations of the new generation of tourists for deep social experience.

4.3. Deficiencies and Prospects

This study is mainly based on qualitative analysis, with a limited number of samples, and the extrapolation of the conclusions still needs to be strengthened; the research subjects mainly focus on the new generation of tourists, and fail to cover tourist groups of different ages and cultural backgrounds; in terms of theory, relevant theories such as tourist behavior theory and social exchange theory can be further introduced for integrated modeling. Future research can combine quantitative methods, multi-scenario comparisons and platform behavior data to expand the research boundaries of the host-guest interaction mechanism and deepen the multi-dimensional understanding of tourist interactive behavior.

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