

# Research on the Influencing Factors of Sports Tourism Consumers' Behavioral Intention: Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior

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**Abstract:** Guided by promoting the high-quality development of the sports tourism industry, this study introduces the variable of place attachment based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to explore the influencing mechanism of sports tourism consumers' behavioral intention. A theoretical model was constructed, and empirical analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling. The results show that behavioral attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control have significant positive impacts on sports tourism consumers' behavioral intention, among which perceived behavioral control has the most prominent influence. Place attachment plays a partial mediating role between the above three factors and behavioral intention, and also has a direct positive impact on behavioral intention. The study confirms that place attachment is a key emotional link connecting cognitive factors and behavioral intention, providing a theoretical basis for sports tourism destinations to optimize product design and marketing strategies.

## 1. Introduction

The "14th Five-Year Plan" period is a critical stage for China to "promote consumption and expand domestic demand". As a physical experience activity, sports tourism has become an important expression of the in-depth integration of sports and tourism and consumption upgrading in China<sup>[1]</sup>. In July 2023, the General Office of the State General Administration of Sport clearly deployed "deepening the integration of sports and tourism and further tapping the consumption potential in fields such as outdoor sports and green travel" in the Work Plan for Sports to Assist Stabilizing the Economy, Promoting Consumption and Stimulating Vitality<sup>[2]</sup>. This policy highlights sports tourism's role in economic development, and promoting sports tourism consumption has become a core fulcrum for serving the domestic demand strategy<sup>[3]</sup>.

Sports tourism has developed into a new industrial chain and consumption space as a new growth driver in the sports industry<sup>[4]</sup>. Its high quality development does not only promote modernization of the sports industry, reforms of tourism, but also meets the domestic economic restructuring and upgrading consumption needs<sup>[5]</sup>. Yet, the current literature on the behavioral intention of sports tourism consumers largely revolves around cognitive aspects of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) with no consideration of the emotional aspects of place attachment<sup>[6-7]</sup>.

Place attachment is the emotional connection of people with certain destinations that reflect a sense of reliance and belonging of tourists in sports tourism<sup>[8]</sup>. This paper builds on the TPB model by incorporating place attachment to understand how the consumer behavioral intention of sports tourism is formed. The results are expected to be used to support theoretically the destination operators in order to optimize products and develop marketing strategies and facilitate the overall development of the sports tourism industry and the local economy.

## **2. Theoretical Basis and Research Hypotheses**

### **2.1 Theoretical Basis**

#### **2.1.1 Theory of Planned Behavior**

Proposed by Ajzen, TPB holds that behavioral intention is jointly determined by behavioral attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control<sup>[9]</sup>. Behavioral attitude is an individual's evaluation of the desirability of a behavior; subjective norm refers to social pressure from important others or groups; perceived behavioral control reflects an individual's confidence in their ability to perform the behavior<sup>[10]</sup>. The theory has been widely applied in tourism research to explain the formation of consumers' behavioral intention.

### **2.2 Research Hypotheses**

#### **2.2.1 TPB and Behavioral Intention**

In sports tourism, a positive attitude toward the activity, supportive opinions from family/friends, and strong perceived control over participation are expected to enhance behavioral intention. Thus, we propose:

H1a: Behavioral attitude has a significant positive impact on behavioral intention

H1b: Subjective norm has a significant positive impact on behavioral intention

H1c: Perceived behavioral control has a significant positive impact on behavioral intention

#### **2.2.2 Mediating Role of Place Attachment**

Williams et al. (2003) found that place attachment mediates the relationship between tourists' perceptions and behavioral intention<sup>[11]</sup>. In sports tourism, TPB variables may affect behavioral intention by strengthening consumers' emotional bond with destinations. Thus, we propose:

H2a: Place attachment mediates the relationship between behavioral attitude and behavioral intention

H2b: Place attachment mediates the relationship between subjective norm and behavioral intention

H2c: Place attachment mediates the relationship between perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention

#### **2.2.3 TPB and Place Attachment**

Positive attitudes, social support, and perceived participation convenience may enhance consumers' emotional connection with destinations. Thus, we propose:

H3a: Behavioral attitude has a significant positive impact on place attachment

H3b: Subjective norm has a significant positive impact on place attachment

H3c: Perceived behavioral control has a significant positive impact on place attachment

#### **2.2.4 Direct Impact of Place Attachment on Behavioral Intention**

Strong place attachment increases the willingness to revisit or recommend a destination<sup>[12]</sup>. Thus, we propose:

H4: Place attachment has a significant positive impact on sports tourism consumers' behavioral intention

## **3. Research Design**

### **3.1 Questionnaire Design**

The questionnaire includes six parts with mature scales to ensure reliability and validity:

Demographic characteristics: Gender, age, education, occupation, income, etc.

Behavioral attitude: 5 items adapted from Ajzen et al. and Geng<sup>[13]</sup>

Subjective norm: 5 items adapted from Gao<sup>[14]</sup>

Perceived behavioral control: 5 items adapted from Li<sup>[15]</sup>

Place attachment: 4 items adapted from Williams et al. and Jia et al.<sup>[16]</sup>  
Behavioral intention: 3 items adapted from Jarvenpaa et al.<sup>[17]</sup>  
All items use a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

### 3.2 Questionnaire Collection

Questionnaires were distributed via the Wenjuanxing platform to respondents who had participated in sports tourism at least once. A total of 426 questionnaires were collected, with 36 invalid samples excluded, resulting in 390 valid responses (effective recovery rate: 91.5%).

## 4. Empirical Analysis

### 4.1 Sample Descriptive Statistics

Female respondents accounted for 55.1% of the sample, with most participants aged 26–35 (37.9%). Over 67% of respondents had a college degree or above, and 48.7% were married with children. Enterprise employees (34.1%) and freelancers (22.8%) were the main occupational groups, and over 53% had a monthly income of 5,001–9,000 yuan, indicating good representativeness.

### 4.2 Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients of all variables ranged from 0.860 to 0.914 (all  $>0.7$ ), and the overall Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.927 ( $>0.9$ ), indicating excellent internal consistency of the scale.

### 4.3 Validity Analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test: KMO value = 0.927 ( $>0.7$ ), Bartlett's sphericity test ( $\chi^2=5731.917$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), indicating suitability for factor analysis.

Convergent Validity: All factor loadings  $>0.7$ , CR values  $>0.8$ , AVE values  $>0.6$ , confirming good convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity: The square root of each factor's AVE was greater than its correlation coefficients with other factors, confirming good discriminant validity.

### 4.4 Common Method Variance Test

Harman's single-factor test showed that the maximum variance explained by a single factor was 39.835% ( $<40\%$ ), and the cumulative variance of 5 factors was 75.183%, indicating no serious common method variance.

### 4.5 Model Fit Test

The structural equation model (AMOS 23.0) showed good fit: CMIN/DF=1.207 ( $<3$ ), GFI=0.92, AGFI=0.90, IFI=0.98, TLI=0.98, CFI=0.98 (all  $>0.9$ ), meeting the fitting criteria.

### 4.6 Path and Mediating Effect Test

Behavioral attitude ( $\beta=0.178$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), subjective norm ( $\beta=0.285$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), and perceived behavioral control ( $\beta=0.309$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) positively affect behavioral intention (supporting H1a–H1c), with perceived behavioral control having the strongest effect.

Place attachment is positively influenced by behavioral attitude (0.218,  $p<0.05$ ), subjective norm (0.127,  $p<0.05$ ), and perceived behavioral control (0.24,  $p<0.05$ ).

Place attachment ( $\beta=0.19$ ,  $p=0.05$ ) has a positive influence on behavioral intention (in support of H4).

Place attachment partially mediates the relationships between TPB variables and behavioral intention (H2a–H2c), with indirect effects ranging from 0.024 to 0.046.

## 5. Conclusions and Implications

### 5.1 Research Conclusions

The variables of TPB directly influence behavioral intention: Perceived behavioral control is the

most significant one, and then subjective norm and behavioral attitude suggest that perceived participation confidence and social support of consumers are the significant factors to improve behavioral intention.

The place attachment has two effects: It has a direct positive effect on the behavioral intention, and partly mediates between TPB variables and the behavioral intention, which validates its status as an emotion bridge between cognition and behavior.

TPB variables have positive impacts on place attachment: Place attachment can be strengthened by positive attitudes, social support, and convenience of participation.

## 5.2 Management Implications

Enhance the feeling of control of behavior: Optimize infrastructure at the destination, streamline the process of online booking, and create a customer service department that responds quickly.

Enhance place identification: Incorporate the local culture into sports experiences, initiate programmes of loyalty, and incentivize individuals to post stories about destinations on social media.

Form shape positive attitudes and norms: cooperate with KOL to advertise sports tourism, organize thematic lectures, and invite celebrities to partake in the events to increase social support.

## 5.3 Limitations and Future Prospects

The limitation of this study is its scope of sampling and non-existence of moderating variables. Future studies ought to increase the sample to niche sports tourism contexts and understand the moderating variables to deliver specific market segmented strategies.

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