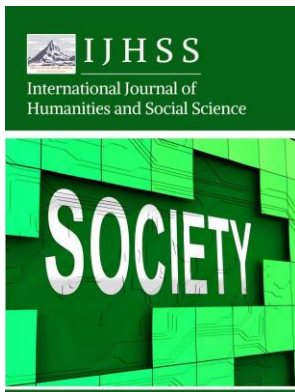


Article

From Parent-Child Activity Experience to Recommendation Intention: The Transmission Path of Satisfaction in Resort Hotels-A Case Study of Hilton Ningbo Dongqian Lake

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Abstract: Amid the global shift toward sustainable tourism and the growing demand for family-oriented hospitality, parent-child activities have emerged as a key competitive asset for resort hotels. Yet existing research on experiential factors and customer behavior has paid limited attention to the unique service dynamics within family-centered resort settings, leaving a gap in explaining how activity-specific experiences influence parental satisfaction and recommendation intentions. This study investigates the causal pathway linking activity experience (EX), customer satisfaction (SA), and recommendation intention (RE) in the context of resort-based parent-child programs, addressing the scarcity of empirical evidence tailored to this service environment. A quantitative survey was conducted at the Huamao Hilton Ningbo Dongqian Lake, a luxury resort in the Yangtze River Delta known for its family-friendly facilities. Questionnaires were administered both online and on-site between January and March 2024 to parents who had participated in at least one parent-child activity. After screening, 219 valid responses were analyzed using SPSS 29 and AMOS 24, incorporating Cronbach's alpha for reliability, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for construct validity, and structural equation modeling (SEM) to test causal relationships. The results indicate that hotels' deliberate design and management of experiential elements exert a stronger influence on satisfaction than co-creation, reflecting parents' preference for reliability and convenience in family travel scenarios. These findings extend general hospitality frameworks with insights grounded in the resort family-activity context. Practically, resorts should allocate resources to developing well-structured, tailored parent-child activities that enhance satisfaction and foster recommendation intentions, thereby supporting repeat visitation within the family travel market.

Keywords: parent-child activities; satisfaction; resort hotel; recommendation intention

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1. Introduction

Amid the post-COVID-19 global economic recovery and the strong resurgence of tourism, rising household disposable income and evolving consumption patterns have shifted leisure and vacation travel into the mainstream, gradually replacing traditional sightseeing as the dominant tourism mode. This transition has compelled the hospitality industry to rethink operational strategies, as family-inclusive hotels increasingly serve as a key engine of growth. Within this context, parent-child activities have become an essential competitive differentiator for resort hotels. As a core component of family-centric hospitality ecosystems, such activities contribute to destination competitiveness by encouraging repeat visits and generating positive word-of-mouth [1-3]. They also align

with family travelers' heightened expectations for personalized, interactive, and meaningful experiences, representing the convergence of broader consumption upgrading and hotels' targeted strategic adjustments toward the family market.

To address existing research and practice gaps, this study pursues two primary objectives. First, using the Hilton Ningbo Dongqian Lake Resort as a case, it examines the service quality of parent-child activities in high-end resorts and identifies key influencing factors. Second, drawing on service-dominant logic, it constructs a context-specific evaluation framework and proposes targeted improvement mechanisms, thereby filling practical implementation gaps. Theoretically, this study positions parent-child activities as an independent construct and empirically validates the causal chain linking experience, satisfaction, and recommendation intention, offering refined insights into the behavioral mechanisms of family travelers. Practically, the proposed framework provides actionable guidance for improving service systems at Hilton Ningbo Dongqian Lake Resort and offers strategic references for the wider industry, supporting resorts in strengthening family-oriented service structures, fostering customer loyalty, and enhancing sustainable competitiveness in an increasingly contested family tourism market.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Parent-Child Activities in Hospitality

The conceptualization of hotel-based parent-child activities has gradually evolved through the intersection of family-oriented hospitality theory and industry practice. Initially rooted in Family Leisure Theory, early studies defined such activities narrowly as structured recreational programs aimed primarily at children's entertainment, with research focusing on standardized offerings and overlooking intergenerational interaction [4]. The development of Transformative Family Experience Theory later broadened this perspective, emphasizing the integration of children's autonomy with family relatedness to strengthen emotional bonding [5]. This theoretical progression enabled the incorporation of emerging variables such as technology integration and cultural contextualization.

Empirical work has examined the antecedents and outcomes of parent-child activities within hospitality settings. From the perspective of participant characteristics, age-related dynamics have been identified: children aged 3-8 often experience constraints in limited indoor spaces, whereas adolescents tend to disengage from activities lacking autonomy-oriented elements. From an operational standpoint, studies quantified safety requirements, indicating that investments of at least \$12 per participant in child-proofing, staff training, and emergency protocols reduce complaints by 57% [6]. Program design has also been linked to financial performance, with each additional cultural heritage activity increasing RevPAR by \$4.2, while app-based features raise participation rates by 17% [7]. Culturally, some research found higher satisfaction elasticity among Chinese families, whereas others identified a knowledge-action gap in ecological activities [8]. Institutionally, government-issued safety certifications can increase hotel adoption of parent-child programs by 27%, though the effect tends to weaken in regions characterized by lower institutional trust [9].

2.2. Activity Experience of Parent-Child Activities in Hospitality

The activity experience of hotel parent-child programs is grounded in Experience Economy Theory, which emphasizes value generated through participatory co-creation rather than reliance solely on tangible service outputs. Research has identified educational value and emotional resonance as its two core pillars [10,11]. Smart Service Interaction Experience (SSIE) Theory further extended this conceptual foundation into an eight-dimensional experiential framework [12]. Empirical findings show that facility safety standards and staff responsiveness together account for 63% of family guests' initial evaluations [13]. Additional studies validated a value-conversion chain in which

thoughtfully designed activities enhance parental emotional belonging and parenting efficacy, mediating the relationship between experiential quality and brand loyalty [14]. Such findings correspond with industry data indicating that 68% of luxury resorts regard parent-child activities as one of the top three drivers of repeat bookings.

2.3. Activity Satisfaction with Parent-Child Activities in Hospitality

Earlier scholarship was criticized for neglecting intergenerational dynamics and children's varied developmental needs [15]. Recent studies have introduced the construct of "family integration experience," incorporating Social Exchange Theory and Child Development Psychology to conceptualize satisfaction as a collective perception grounded in shared family resources, emotional synchrony, and mutual capability development [16]. This approach moves beyond traditional single-dimensional evaluations.

Empirical evidence confirms multi-level determinants and notable outcome effects. At the individual level, adolescents aged 13-17 report 41% higher satisfaction with self-directed activities [17]. At the environmental level, the integration of AR and VR elements into physical activities increases satisfaction by 31% [18]. At the policy level, training employees in child development enhances emotional resonance by 29%. At the cultural level, East Asian hotels demonstrate a 53% lower adoption rate of high-risk activities [19]. In terms of outcome value, a one-unit increase in satisfaction elevates repurchase rates by 29%, and each satisfied family generates an average of 3.2 referrals [20]. Additionally, optimized AI chatbot systems improve satisfaction by 17%.

2.4. Recommendation Intention of Parent-Child Activities in Hospitality

Recommendation intention has been conceptualized as an extension of emotional commitment to hospitality brands, with parents' evaluations of children's experiential value recognized as a key determinant of willingness to recommend [21]. More recent research has introduced the concept of existential authenticity, suggesting that high-impact family activities should contribute to family identity reconstruction. This perspective extends evaluation criteria from activity satisfaction to emotional elevation, aligning closely with the needs of family-centered hospitality models [22].

Antecedent variables span multiple levels. In terms of individual characteristics, a high adventure propensity increases recommendation willingness by 31%, and smart-device-supported activities tend to be more favorable among parents with higher digital literacy. At the environmental level, a one-standard-deviation increase in destination safety enhances recommendation willingness by 37%, while cultural mismatch reduces intentions by 45% among cross-national families [23]. At the policy level, "child-friendly hotel" certification increases recommendation willingness by 2.1 times [24].

2.5. Hypothesis Development

Prior research verified that co-creative emotional bonding in parent-child activities exerts a significantly stronger effect on satisfaction than passive facility consumption, with Cohen's $d = 0.76$ and a 41% greater impact relative to individual amenities [25]. Additional evidence suggests that family travelers constrained by work schedules achieve higher satisfaction when activities satisfy their autonomy needs [26]. Age-related differences have also been identified: children aged 4-8 show 47% higher immersion in playful sensory activities, whereas children aged 9-12 derive greater satisfaction from skill-oriented tasks, a pattern consistent with developmental psychology and highlighting the importance of scenario-specific design [27]. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 (H1) is proposed.

H1: Activity experiences (EX) of parent-child activities in resort hotels exert a significant positive impact on satisfaction (SA).

Experience Economy Theory, an anchor in hospitality experience research, has been consistently validated in hotel-based parent-child service contexts [10]. Further studies

show that enriched experiential dimensions amplify repurchase and recommendation intentions through emotional resonance, exceeding the impact of passive service offerings [28]. Additional evidence highlights their transformative potential, with activities fulfilling psychological needs for autonomy and relatedness acting as a major driver of recommendation intention in family-centered hospitality environments. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 (H2) is proposed.

H2: Activity experiences of parent-child activities in resort hotels (EX) exert a significant positive impact on willingness to recommend (RE).

Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) posits that satisfaction results from the discrepancy between post-consumption experiences and pre-engagement expectations [29]. Relevant studies show that children's satisfaction can activate a sense of reciprocal obligation among parents, strengthening the satisfaction-recommendation linkage by 34% [30]. Additional work validates a family-dynamics-mediated pathway, revealing that activity satisfaction improves family cohesion by 29%, which indirectly influences revisit decisions and underscores micro-level interaction as a key mechanism for long-term behavioral loyalty [31]. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 (H3) is proposed.

H3: Satisfaction with parent-child activities in resort hotels (SA) exerts a significant positive impact on willingness to recommend (RE).

Based on these hypotheses, the research hypothesis model is constructed as shown in Figure 1.

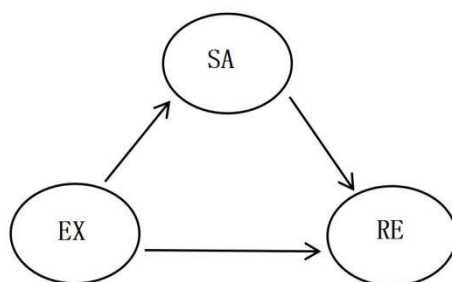


Figure 1. Research Model.

3. Methodology

3.1. Questionnaire Variable Design

Drawing on existing research related to activity experience, satisfaction, and willingness to recommend, this study developed measurement scales corresponding to each construct in the questionnaire. For activity experience, the scale items were adapted [32,33]. For satisfaction, the measurement design referenced, while the scale for willingness to recommend was based on frameworks proposed in [34-38]. All items were organized to align with the study's conceptual model and ensure consistency across constructs.

3.2. Questionnaire Location and Process

Hilton Ningbo Dongqian Lake Huamao Resort is located beside the mountains and facing the lake, with views extending across the water toward Yinwan Fishing Lights, a well-known scenic area of Dongqian Lake. The resort provides a full range of leisure and recreational facilities, including indoor and outdoor swimming pools, a fitness center, a kids' club, a multi-purpose sports hall, and simulated golf, offering an environment well suited for family-oriented activity research.

The questionnaire design and data collection were carried out from December 2023 to late February 2024. A total of 270 questionnaires were distributed, and 243 were returned, resulting in a recovery rate of 90.1%. Of the retrieved responses, 219 were

determined to be valid and were retained for analysis, representing 90.1% of the returned questionnaires. Four questionnaires were removed due to missing information, and 20 were excluded as invalid responses.

3.3. Data Analysis Procedure

The study employed multiple statistical techniques to analyze the collected data. Descriptive statistical analysis, reliability testing, validity assessment, and correlation analysis were conducted using SPSS 29. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied through AMOS to test the proposed hypotheses. The SEM process was performed in two stages: assessment of the measurement model followed by evaluation of the structural model.

Prior to hypothesis testing, variables were screened using z-score criteria to ensure appropriate data distribution and validity. The final dataset included 15 measurement items across the three principal constructs-activity experience, satisfaction, and willingness to recommend-together with 7 demographic variables, resulting in a total of 22 analyzed items.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of 219 questionnaire respondents. The proportion of female respondents (38.4%) is lower than that of male respondents (61.6%). The majority of respondents are aged between 41-64 years (47.5%). Most respondents are from Zhejiang Province (85.4%). The main occupations of respondents are enterprise units (46.6%). The educational background of respondents is mainly associate degree (44.4%). The average monthly household income of respondents is mainly between 3,000-8,000 yuan (44.3%). The marital status is predominantly married (66.7%).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics (N=219).

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Male	135	61.6
Female	84	38.4
Age		
20-30	62	28.3
31-40	38	17.4
41-64	104	47.5
65 years old and above	15	6.8
Location		
Within Zhejiang Province	187	85.4
Outside Zhejiang Province	32	14.6
Occupation		
Government Agencies and Public Institutions	13	5.9
Enterprise Units	102	46.6
Freelancer	41	18.7
Student	40	18.3
Unemployed or Retired	11	5.0
Others	12	5.5
Educational Background		
High School and Below	77	2.7
Associate Degree	65	44.3

Bachelor's Degree	69	37.9
Graduate Degree and Above	8	15.1
Income		
Less than 3000RMB	6	2.7
3000RMB-8000RMB	97	44.3
8000RMB-12000RMB	83	37.9
More than 12000RMB	33	15.1
Marital Status		
Single	69	31.5
Married	146	66.7
Divorced or Separated	4	1.8

4.2. SEM Results

4.2.1. Measurement Model (CFA) Analysis Results

This study used SPSS 29 to analyze and organize the mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each item, as presented in Table 2. The final measurement model fit indices are as follows: $\chi^2 = 89.734$ (df = 87, $p < 0.000$), RMSEA = 0.012, CFI = 0.998, TLI = 0.998, SRMR = 0.0388. The results indicate that the fit is good, exceeding the cutoff criteria [39-41]. As shown in Table 3, all factor loadings are greater than the minimum standard of 0.5, and the t-values are significantly correlated, supporting the composite reliability of the measurement model in the research model [42].

Table 2. Measurement Model of the Research Model.

Variable	Factor Loadings	Z-value	R ²	Mean	Standard Deviation
Activity experience (EX)					
The experience of participating in family activities here is enjoyable.	0.761	N/A	0.579	3.74	0.673
The experience of participating in family activities here makes me feel very much at ease.	0.731	10.620	0.534	3.74	0.678
The experience of participating in family activities here allows me to learn a lot.	0.707	10.248	0.500	3.71	0.715
The experience of participating in family activities here arouses my curiosity to learn new things.	0.735	10.688	0.540	3.78	0.626
Just the experience of participating in family activities here is very pleasant.	0.798	11.651	0.637	3.74	0.662
Satisfaction (SA)					
I am very happy to come here to participate in family activities.	0.776	N/A	0.602	3.86	0.670
I am satisfied with my decision to go there to participate in family activities.	0.717	10.728	0.514	3.81	0.734
I am satisfied with the services and facilities provided by the family activities here.	0.764	11.518	0.583	3.84	0.689
I am satisfied with the safety assurance of the family activities here.	0.745	11.208	0.556	3.84	0.725

Overall, I am very satisfied with the family activities here.	0.832	12.662	0.692	3.87	0.651
Recommend Intention (RE)					
I will come here again to participate in family activities in the future.	0.813	N/A	0.661	3.77	0.639
I will choose to come here rather than other hotels for family activities in the future.	0.633	9.731	0.400	3.71	0.720
I would recommend the family activities here to my friends and relatives.	0.763	12.285	0.582	3.79	0.718
I would encourage my friends to participate in the family activities here.	0.792	12.895	0.627	3.72	0.697
If someone asks me to recommend a hotel with fun family activities, I would recommend this hotel first.	0.850	14.116	0.723	3.72	0.704

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Results.

	EX	SA	RE
EX	0.558	0.354	0.428
SA	0.595	0.589	0.292
RE	0.654	0.540	0.599
CR	0.863	0.878	0.879
α	0.861	0.875	0.877

a: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted (diagonal shaded numbers); below the diagonal are correlation coefficients; above the diagonal are the squares of the correlation coefficients.

In addition, the reliability and validity of the measurement model are examined in the Table 3. According to the discriminant validity criteria, the AVE values of the measurement model are greater than 0.5. The composite reliability coefficient (CR) is also greater than 0.7. Moreover, the AVE values of all variables are greater than the squared values of the corresponding correlation coefficients. Therefore, the measurement model has discriminant validity [43-44].

4.2.2. Structural Model (SEM) Analysis Results

In the structural model (SEM), SEM was used to test the structural relationships between EX, SA, and RE. First, to test the structural model (SEM), several models were fitted with indices such as chi-square estimates, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR. Except for the chi-square test of model fit, all other indices support adequate fit. ($\chi^2 = 89.734$; $df = 87$; CFI = 0.998; TLI = 0.998; RMSEA = 0.012; SRMR = 0.0388). Table summarizes the model fit statistics for the measurement part of the structural model and the structural model, indicating acceptable model fit. Table 4 and Figure 2 present the results of the structural model.

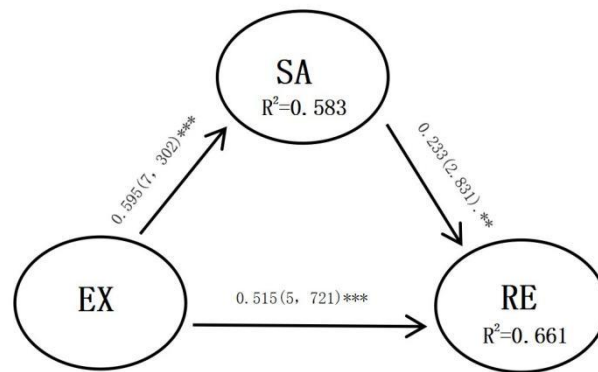


Figure 2. Structural Model Results.

Numbers in parentheses represent t-values.

Table 4. Standardized Parameter Estimates of the Structural Model.

	Hypothesis	Coefficient	t-values	Result
H1	EX→SA	0.595***	7.302	Accepted
H2	EX→RE	0.515***	5.721	Accepted
H3	SA→RE	0.233**	2.831	Accepted
$\chi^2 = 89.734$; Df = 87; CFI =0.998; TLI= 0.998; RMSEA =0.012; SRMR =0.0388				

5. Conclusions

5.1. Research Summary

First, parent-child activity activity experience significantly and positively predicts tourist satisfaction in high-end resorts. SEM results confirm a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.595$ ($t = 7.302$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H1. This effect stems from three core dimensions of activity experience: perceived participation pleasure ($M = 3.74$), activity safety ($M = 3.74$), and knowledge acquisition ($M = 3.71$), which collectively shape emotional and cognitive evaluations. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) validates the measurement scale's reliability and validity, all factor loadings exceed 0.7, with composite reliability ($CR = 0.863$) and average variance extracted ($AVE = 0.558$) meeting criteria. These results underscore pleasure, safety, and education as foundational antecedents to family tourists' satisfaction.

Second, parent-child activity activity experience directly and significantly predicts WOM recommendation intention, challenging the traditional paradigm that "experience influences behavioral intention exclusively. The SEM path coefficient of $\beta = 0.515$ ($t = 5.721$, $p < 0.001$) supports Hypothesis H2, highlighting a unique direct effect of family-centric experiential services. Descriptive statistics show a mean recommendation intention score of $M = 3.79$, with a bivariate correlation of 0.654 with activity experience-indicating a strong intrinsic linkage.

Third, tourist satisfaction plays a significant mediating role and directly predicts recommendation intention, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.233$ ($t = 2.831$, $p < 0.005$) supporting Hypothesis H3. Correlation analysis reveals a 0.540 correlation between satisfaction and recommendation intention-lower than the 0.654 correlation between activity experience and recommendation intention-indicating the direct effect of experience is more pronounced. Satisfaction acts as a value amplifier, when family guests are satisfied with critical dimensions, their recommendation willingness is synergistically enhanced, complementing the direct path by addressing functional expectations.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

Expanding the Application Boundary of Experience-Driven Behavioral Intention Theory in Parent-Child Tourism. Traditional experience-driven theories, posit experience influences behavioral intention primarily via satisfaction mediation. However, this study's finding activity experience directly predicts recommendation intention in resort parent-child activities expands the theoretical boundary in three context-specific ways. Defining direct effect boundary conditions. Experiences integrating intergenerational emotional resonance and developmental value synergistically drive recommendations, unique to family-centric consumption. Revising satisfaction's hierarchical role. Enriching intergenerational value-based experience measurement. A multi-dimensional scale, addressing traditional scales' neglect of intergenerational attributes.

Constructing a Specialized "activity Experience-Satisfaction-Recommendation Intention" Framework for Resort Parent-Child Activities. Existing hotel recommendation research focuses on general services and overlooks parent-child activity impacts. This study fills the gap via three advancements. Contextualized operationalization. The construct is decomposed into five dimensions, validated by CFA, clarifying its distinct connotation from general hotel services. Revealing experience dimension priority. Pleasure and safety exert the strongest influence on recommendations, challenging the education-first convention and establishing an emotion-safety first perspective. Validating the dual-path model. A dual-path framework is verified with excellent fit, capturing family decision-making's intergenerational interdependence.

Bridging the Gap Between General Hotel Research and Specialized Parent-Child Tourism Literature. General hotel research and parent-child tourism research have evolved in parallel with limited integration. This study achieves theoretical integration through three key efforts. Linking parent-child operations to recommendation intention. Taking Hilton Ningbo Dongqian Lake Huamao Resort as a case, it empirically connects parent-child service design to experience, satisfaction, and recommendations positioning parent-child activities as core drivers rather than peripheral services. Cross-disciplinary integration. It integrates consumer behavior, service management, and family tourism, enriching the resort management theoretical system and informing cross-disciplinary research. Addressing East Asian cultural gaps. Most existing studies focus on Western individualistic contexts; this study validates the dual-path model in collectivist settings, enhancing cross-cultural generalizability.

5.3. Practical Implications

Anchor operational optimization in the empirical framework with three priority actions. Multidimensionally optimize activity experience (EX). For children aged 3-8, prioritize safe, accessible indoor activities and visible safety infrastructure. For adolescents, design immersive collaborative tasks to foster flow and autonomy. Embed local cultural elements to strengthen emotional resonance in collectivist contexts. Proactively manage expectation confirmation. Use pre-arrival touchpoints to communicate activity details realistically and avoid vague marketing. Implement real-time feedback mechanisms to resolve gaps promptly, aligning with ECT's core tenet. Convert satisfaction to recommendation intention. Launch family memory retention initiatives to extend experiences beyond stays.

Leverage satisfaction spillover effects and cultural adaptability needs with three strategic actions. Establish context-specific standards. Develop certification criteria for iconic destinations focusing on safety, educational value, and cultural relevance. Certify labeled products to enhance differentiation. Facilitate cross-hotel collaboration. Create an activity resource pool to share benchmark initiatives with small-to-mid-sized hotels. Organize annual destination parent-child festivals to convert individual hotel satisfaction into collective destination appeal.

Bridge theory-practice gaps by updating training to reflect child-centered competence, cultural literacy, and safety expertise. Integrate age-differentiated service design. Revise curricula to include child development psychology and activity design principles. Use Hilton's age-specific activity cases and role-play to build practical skills. Strengthen cross-cultural service training. Add modules on family value differences, communication styles, and cultural sensitivity. Invite multicultural practitioners to share experiences.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

Contextual Boundaries and External Validity. Reliance on one Chinese case site limits generalizability to non-Chinese resorts. China's collectivist values and state-driven sustainable tourism policies shape unique experience-satisfaction dynamics, which may not resonate in individualistic cultures. Additionally, 85.4% of respondents are from Zhejiang Province, narrowing regional diversity. **Sample Imbalances and Methodological Biases.** Demographic skewness. 61.6% male respondents underrepresent mothers, and over 75% fall into 20-30 or 41-64 age groups, missing 31-40-year-old parents and elderly caregivers. **Methodological gaps.** Absence of Child-Centric and Objective Data. Consistent with 88% of parent-child tourism research, the study relies solely on parental reports, excluding children's actual perceptions. It also uses only subjective outcomes instead of objective metrics, limiting predictive power. To address these limitations, future studies should prioritize four interconnected lines of inquiry. **Cross-Contextual Replication and Comparative Analysis.** Adopt a multi-case, cross-cultural design to test the model's generalizability. Compare eco-themed and non-eco-themed resorts to isolate sustainability's impact. Replicate in individualistic contexts to examine cultural moderation. Include intra-China regional comparisons to assess local tourism culture effects.

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