

Tourism Experience Value Shaping Older Adults Tourists' Well-being: Qualitative Insights from Guizhou Province, China

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ABSTRACT

Population aging is profoundly reshaping global societies, intensifying the need to promote healthy aging and enhance older adults' well-being through leisure and travel experiences that address emotional, cognitive, social, and practical needs. This study explores the multidimensional structure of experiential value as perceived by older tourists during well-being-oriented travel. Data were collected through 24 semi-structured interviews with older individuals who had participated in relevant tourism activities in Guizhou province. Guided by grounded theory, this research develops a conceptual model comprising four core value dimensions—emotional, cognitive, social, and functional—and ten refined variables. These variables illustrate how older tourists construct well-being through interrelated affective, intellectual, relational, and practical experiences. Sentiment analysis further revealed that most experiential keywords were positively valenced, underscoring the affective benefits of such travel. The study contributes theoretically by extending experiential value theory to aging-specific contexts and incorporating cultural resonance within existing dimensions, while offering practical guidance for designing emotionally supportive, cognitively enriching, socially inclusive, and functionally accessible travel experiences tailored to older populations.

Keywords: Cognitive Experience; Cultural Resonance; Emotional Experience; Experiential Value; Grounded Theory; Older Tourism; Wellness Travel

INTRODUCTION

Population aging has become a defining demographic trend of the 21st century, profoundly reshaping societies and economies worldwide. According to the United Nations World Population Ageing Report (2023), the global population aged 65 and older is expected to double from 761 million in 2021 to over 1.6 billion by 2050, accounting for nearly 17% of the world's total (Gölçek, 2025). China, in particular, faces an accelerated trajectory of aging. Data from China's seventh national census (2020) indicate that the number of people aged 60 and above has reached 264 million, representing 18.7% of the total population, with projections suggesting this proportion will surpass 30% by 2050 (Bao et al., 2022). This demographic shift highlights the urgent need to promote healthy aging and to develop services that support the physical, emotional, and social well-being of the older.

Against this backdrop, the pursuit of well-being in later life has emerged as a critical agenda in both academic and policy discourse. Unlike purely biomedical approaches that emphasize disease prevention or physical decline, contemporary frameworks of aging—such as active aging, healthy aging, and successful aging—underscore the importance of enabling older adults to lead fulfilling, meaningful, and socially integrated lives (Gadhav et al., 2024; Suwankhong & Liamputpong, 2025). Well-being, therefore, is no longer narrowly construed as the absence of illness, but as a multidimensional state encompassing emotional vitality, cognitive engagement, relational connectedness, and existential purpose (Ryff, 2021). This reorientation reflects a broader paradigm shift in gerontology and public health that recognizes aging as a dynamic life phase with unique opportunities for personal development and social contribution. As such, exploring how older individuals construct and experience well-being—particularly through leisure and travel—has become a pressing research imperative with profound theoretical and practical implications.

Tourism, has been increasingly recognized as an important avenue for addressing these challenges. Tourism contributes to well-being by fulfilling psychological, emotional, and social needs—dimensions that constitute core components of subjective well-being (Liang et al., 2021). For older adults in particular, tourism facilitates positive affect, life satisfaction, and social connectedness, which are widely recognized as key indicators of enhanced well-being. The "Healthy China 2030" blueprint emphasizes the promotion of health-related leisure activities and the construction of wellness tourism destinations, aiming to expand older-focused services within the broader health industry, which is projected to reach 16 trillion yuan (approximately 2.5 trillion USD) by 2030 (Ning et al., 2024; Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023).

Parallel to this, the "National Fitness Program (2021–2025)" encourages the integration of physical activity, leisure travel, and preventive health care, particularly targeting the aging population. Market evidence supports these policy initiatives: according to the China Tourism Academy (2023), older tourists accounted for 22.3% of domestic tourism trips and contributed approximately 28.5% of total tourism revenue in 2022 (Ye et al., 2023). Furthermore, a survey by Ctrip (2023) reported that wellness-themed travel products targeting seniors saw a 58% year-on-year growth, reflecting rising demand for experiences that combine relaxation, cultural immersion, and health preservation. Despite strong policy support and promising market momentum, many tourism practices aimed at older adults remain insufficient in addressing their holistic well-being (Hu et al., 2023). Current travel designs often emphasize physical itineraries or generic group arrangements, while neglecting the nuanced emotional, cognitive, and relational dimensions that constitute older individuals' lived experiences of happiness. As a result, the deeper experiential processes through which well-being is meaningfully constructed—such as emotional resonance, cultural identity affirmation, and intersubjective connection—remain largely unexplored in mainstream tourism offerings (Chen & Hsu, 2024; Zhang & and Xiao).

Guizhou Province, China, offers an ideal context for investigating how tourism experiences shape older adults' well-being. Beyond its rich ecological landscapes and ethnic diversity, Guizhou has been actively promoted as a key destination under national strategies such as "All-for-One Tourism" and "Beautiful China," with a strong emphasis on inclusive and human-centered tourism development (Yin et al., 2024). In 2022 alone, the province welcomed over 744 million domestic tourists, reflecting its growing appeal among diverse demographic groups, including older travelers seeking emotional satisfaction, cultural immersion, and social connection. To support well-being-oriented tourism for aging populations, Guizhou has implemented a range of senior-friendly initiatives. For example, major sites such as Huangguoshu Waterfall and Qingyan Ancient Town have integrated barrier-free design, shuttle systems, and rest stations to enhance comfort and accessibility. Cultural heritage villages host intergenerational storytelling activities, traditional music performances, and hands-on craft workshops that foster emotional resonance and self-identity. Additionally, community-based slow travel programs promote reflective experiences through nature walking trails, folk rituals, and participatory festivals. These efforts collectively provide fertile ground for exploring the emotional, cognitive, social, and existential dimensions of well-being that this study aims to conceptualize.

While tourism's contribution to subjective well-being has gained increasing scholarly attention, most empirical studies focus primarily on general indicators such as life satisfaction, perceived health, and emotional positivity (Filep & Deery, 2010; Nawijn et al., 2010). These studies demonstrate that travel enhances psychological well-being by offering opportunities for relaxation, emotional renewal, and temporary escape from daily routines. For instance, Sirgy et al. (2010) developed a tourism satisfaction–well-being model linking travel-related affect and satisfaction to life satisfaction, while Kim et al. (2015) found that restorative and social components of travel are significant predictors of happiness among older tourists. However, these outcome-based models often treat well-being as a post-trip evaluative state and fail to capture the dynamic, processual nature through which well-being is constructed during travel.

Recent literature has begun to explore affective, cognitive, and relational mechanisms that mediate tourism's impact on well-being (Voigt et al., 2011), yet these frameworks remain fragmented. Research frequently privileges short-term emotional gain or health benefits, while overlooking dimensions such as cultural resonance, personal

growth, existential reflection, or identity continuity—elements especially relevant for older adults. Furthermore, relatively few studies have adapted experiential value theory to systematically analyze how these multidimensional travel experiences translate into enduring well-being for aging populations (Huang et al., 2023). This study addresses this gap by proposing an integrated framework that accounts for the emotional, cognitive, social, functional, and cultural dimensions shaping older travelers' well-being trajectories.

Older tourists constitute a significant and growing proportion of this influx, making Guizhou an important microcosm for understanding the intersection of wellness travel and older well-being. Hence, this study seeks to conceptualize the framework of experience values that shape older tourists' sense of well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism for Well-Being

Well-being has emerged as a pivotal construct in psychology, sociology, and public health, encompassing both subjective and objective dimensions of human flourishing. The concept is often operationalized through the lens of subjective well-being (SWB), which comprises three interrelated components: the presence of positive emotions, the absence of negative emotions, and the overall evaluation of life satisfaction (Proctor, 2023). In parallel, psychological well-being (PWB), as proposed by Ryff (1989), emphasizes self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and positive relationships. These conceptualizations have become foundational for evaluating how various life domains, including leisure and tourism, contribute to individual well-being. In the context of an aging population, well-being extends beyond physical health to include psychological fulfillment, social integration, and existential meaning, all of which are particularly relevant to older adults seeking quality of life in later stages of life.

Tourism has been increasingly acknowledged as a significant contributor to well-being, providing opportunities for emotional renewal, cognitive stimulation, social engagement, and self-actualization. Unlike routine consumption activities, tourism is inherently immersive and transformative, offering individuals the chance to escape from daily stressors and re-engage with personal values and aspirations. Empirical studies have shown that participation in tourism is positively associated with increased life satisfaction, heightened positive affect, and reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression (Filep & Deery, 2010; Nawijn et al., 2010). Moreover, tourism fosters interpersonal connections and community belonging, thereby addressing the relational dimension of well-being. These effects are particularly salient in health-related or wellness-oriented tourism, where the integration of physical rejuvenation, mental restoration, and cultural enrichment enhances holistic health outcomes.

For older adults, tourism plays an even more crucial role in fostering well-being, as it compensates for age-related social losses and psychological vulnerabilities. Research has demonstrated that tourism participation among older individuals enhances their emotional vitality, reduces perceived isolation, and contributes to a renewed sense of purpose (Kim et al., 2015). Wellness tourism, in particular, aligns with older adults' aspirations for healthy aging by combining restorative practices with opportunities for self-discovery and social inclusion. However, existing studies often adopt a simplified, outcome-driven perspective, focusing on happiness levels or health indicators, while overlooking the deeper experiential processes through which tourism generates well-being (Yun et al., 2025). They tend to treat well-being as a static end state rather than a dynamic process shaped by emotional, cognitive, and social experiences during travel. Moreover, the unique needs of older adults—such as their emotional sensitivity, desire for cultural resonance, and pursuit of intergenerational connection—remain underexplored in tourism well-being literature (Wang et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

By employing a grounded theory approach, this research moves beyond mere outcome measurement to explore how older tourists construct, internalize, and reflect upon their experiences to derive meaning and satisfaction. In doing so, it responds to the need for a more nuanced theoretical framework that captures the affective, relational, and existential dimensions of well-being within tourism, especially in aging-specific contexts. This perspective not only enriches the understanding of the tourism–well-being nexus but also lays the foundation for designing more inclusive, emotionally responsive, and culturally embedded wellness tourism offerings.

Experiential Values in Tourism

Experiential value, originally formulated within the broader field of consumption studies, offers a framework for capturing the multifaceted ways in which individuals perceive benefits and meaning from their interactions with products, services, and environments (Holbrook, 1999; Mathwick et al., 2001). Experiential value as the subjective perception of appreciation arising from consumption experiences, emphasizing that value is phenomenological, relational, and contextual rather than inherent in the product or service itself. Experiential value

is categorized into intrinsic versus extrinsic, self-oriented versus other-oriented dimensions, resulting in various value types such as emotional, epistemic, social, and functional value (Gilliland, 2021; Kim et al., 2025).

Table 1. Experiential Value Framework Summary

Variable	Definition	Recent Research Evidence
Emotional Value	Emotional value refers to the affective states generated through consumption experiences, such as joy, comfort, or emotional resonance (Holbrook, 1999; Sánchez et al., 2006).	Shi et al. (2025) used physiological measures to show emotional spatial design enhances user calmness; Nguyen and Nguyen (2025) found emotional value mediates social media influencers' impact on second-hand luxury purchases; Reisi and Ghoddousi (2025) linked emotional intelligence to perceived emotional value and job satisfaction.
Epistemic Value	Epistemic value denotes the consumer's pursuit of knowledge, novelty, and intellectual stimulation through new experiences (Holbrook, 1999; Mathwick et al., 2001).	Paul and Roy (2025) showed epistemic value drives ecotourism participation; Campolo (2025) critiqued the epistemic priority in AI benchmarking; Wiśniewski (2004) framed Socratic proofs as epistemic value generators in logical discourse.
Social Value	Social value captures the benefits individuals receive from social approval, relational enhancement, or community affiliation (Holbrook, 1999; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).	Lo Presti and Maggiore (2025) explored bloggers' co-creation of social value via media networks; Ouédraogo et al. (2025) found urban forests foster health and cultural continuity; van Van Vliet et al. (2025) developed a communicative ethics model enhancing equity and social value in end-of-life care.
Functional Value	Functional value reflects the utilitarian and performance-related benefits perceived by consumers in terms of efficiency, usability, or reliability (Sánchez et al., 2006; Sheth et al., 1991).	Sun et al. (2025) demonstrated high emulsification and solubility in plant proteins as industrial functional value; Zhang et al. (2025) proved medicinal biopolymers reduce inflammation in mice; Hou et al. (2025) showed deep-learning-enhanced sensors offer significant functional value in gas detection.

The application of experiential value to tourism has evolved alongside a broader shift from viewing travel as a transactional, service-based activity to recognizing it as an immersive and meaning-rich process. Tourists increasingly engage in experiences that involve emotional, sensory, cognitive, and social dimensions, reflecting a deepening demand for personalization and authenticity (Zatori et al., 2018). As such, constructs like aesthetic appreciation, escapism, and self-actualization have gained prominence within tourism studies (Hosany & Gilbert, 2009; Williams & Soutar, 2009), signaling a move beyond satisfaction or loyalty toward investigating how value is constructed rather than merely received.

However, current experiential value research sometimes lacks contextual sensitivity when addressing diverse traveler segments, including older tourists, family groups, solo explorers, or digital nomads. For instance, older tourists may exhibit distinct patterns of value perception influenced by accumulated life experience, shifting motivations, and changing social dynamics (Hsu et al., 2007). Although some studies have explored how emotional, cognitive, and social elements of value intersect within specific tourism contexts, further investigation is warranted to clarify how these experiential dimensions interact across diverse settings, rather than concentrating solely on wellness or niche markets (Gössling et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2019). Broadening the scope of research will allow a more nuanced understanding of how travelers—regardless of demographic—construct, interpret, and derive value from tourism.

Tourists' Experiences value and Well-being

As populations age, tourism is increasingly valued not only as a form of recreation but also as a meaningful experiential activity that can enhance emotional, cognitive, and relational dimensions of well-being. A growing body of research explores how diverse dimensions of tourists' experiences contribute to physical, psychological, and social outcomes (Liu et al., 2024; Volo, 2021). Older tourists, in particular, have been shown to benefit from tourism participation through improved vitality, enhanced life satisfaction, reduced isolation, and strengthened self-identity. These findings highlight how travel-related experiences offer a platform for generating well-being outcomes that are closely tied to the ways tourists interpret, internalize, and value their experiential interactions (Hao et al., 2025; Sie et al., 2021).

Much of the existing literature, however, tends to operationalize the relationship between tourism and well-being using outcome-centric measures—such as life satisfaction, perceived health, or resilience—without fully accounting for the richness and subjectivity of the experiential value process itself (Shipp & Jansen, 2021). Such linear conceptualizations risk overlooking how tourists derive well-being through multi-dimensional, ongoing

engagement with their environment, companions, and self-perceptions. As Sirgy et al. (2010) suggest, the dynamic interplay between emotional arousal, cognitive stimulation, and social connection is central to understanding how value is constructed within the tourism experience.

Within this framework, it becomes essential to move beyond simplified input-output models and attend instead to how specific experiential value dimensions—emotional, epistemic, social, and functional—interact to shape tourists' well-being trajectories. While studies have acknowledged the influence of affective, cognitive, and relational factors (Voigt et al., 2011), there remains limited investigation into how these factors are activated, evolve, and intersect during the course of the travel experience. For instance, the role of emotional value in enhancing mood states, epistemic value in stimulating curiosity, or social value in reinforcing identity and belonging are often discussed in isolation but not synthesized in relation to their collective impact on well-being (Kashdan et al., 2018).

Moreover, the ways in which different tourists perceive and prioritize experiential value are far from uniform. Older travelers, for example, may seek emotional resonance, intergenerational connection, or nostalgic meaning, but such preferences vary according to health status, cultural background, and life history (Wang et al., 2023). Existing research too often applies generalized models developed for broader consumer groups, without adapting the experiential value framework to accommodate diverse motivations and capacities (Laukkanen & Tura, 2022; Riar et al., 2022). To capture the full spectrum of tourists' experience-based well-being, future research should focus more explicitly on how experiential value dimensions are internalized, integrated, and transformed into personally meaningful outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research design follows an exploratory qualitative framework, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection technique. Semi-structured interviews offer a balance between consistency across participants and the flexibility to probe deeply into emerging themes (Sankar & Jones, 2007). The interview guide was structured around key dimensions of experiential value—emotional, cognitive, social, and functional—while allowing participants to freely narrate their personal experiences, reflections, and meanings associated with wellness travel.

The key information providers for this qualitative study comprise 8 elderly tourists with at least 2 prior experiences of traveling in Guizhou, 8 tourism destination operators, and 8 managers from tourism enterprises in Guizhou. To facilitate traceability during data analysis, the three respondent groups were coded as follows: elderly tourists were assigned identifiers E1 to E8, tourism destination operators were labeled D1 to D8, and tourism enterprise managers were coded M1 to M8. These codes were consistently used throughout the coding and analysis phases to maintain source clarity and ensure analytical rigor. Sample size determination adhered to the principle of theoretical saturation—the point at which no new significant themes or variations emerged from the data (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). After conducting 24 interviews, it was determined that theoretical saturation had been achieved, as subsequent interviews consistently reiterated previously identified experiential dimensions without contributing substantively novel insights.

The data collection process involved scheduling individual interviews at locations convenient for participants, such as community centers, cafes, or via secure online platforms when necessary. Each interview lasted between 45 to 90 minutes, depending on participant willingness and depth of responses. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and supplemented by field notes capturing contextual observations and initial analytical reflections. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy, and data were managed securely with strict adherence to confidentiality and privacy protection protocols.

Interview Protocol Design

Drawing upon Holbrook (1999)'s experiential value theory, the interview framework encompasses four major dimensions: emotional value, cognitive value, social value, and functional value. This theoretical foundation reflects the understanding that experiential value is a multifaceted and dynamic construct, shaped by affective, cognitive, relational, and practical aspects of consumer experiences. The detailed organization of the interview topics and corresponding questions is presented in Appendix 1.

Following the data collection, all interview transcripts were subjected to grounded theory analysis using a three-phase coding strategy: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin, 2021).

Data Analysis

This analytical approach facilitated the systematic identification, categorization, and integration of themes embedded within participants' narratives. NVivo software was employed to assist with data management and

coding consistency. The iterative process of constant comparison ensured that emergent codes were grounded in participants' language, and that conceptual categories were refined through progressive abstraction. This rigorous methodology enabled the development of a conceptual model that accurately reflects the multi-dimensional structure of experiential value in wellness tourism among older adults. Grounded theory was selected as the analytical foundation due to its capacity to inductively generate theoretical insights from rich, contextualized qualitative data. In this study, grounded theory facilitated a bottom-up construction of meaning, enabling researchers to move from concrete participant narratives to abstract conceptual categories through iterative constant comparison. The process involved identifying recurring expressions (open coding), grouping them into higher-order concepts (axial coding), and refining them into a core set of variables and dimensions (selective coding) that reflect the experiential pathways through which older adults construct well-being during tourism. This approach aligns with the exploratory nature of the research and supports the development of an empirically grounded framework rather than imposing pre-existing theoretical structures.

RESULTS

Descriptive Overview of the Coding Data

A total of 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study, yielding approximately 116,000 words of transcribed text. From these transcripts, 452 discrete meaning units were identified as relevant for initial analysis. Through line-by-line open coding, a total of 178 open codes were extracted across the four primary dimensions—emotional, cognitive, social, and functional. These codes were subsequently organized into 20 refined thematic categories. The coding process also resulted in the identification of over 200 recurring keywords or phrases, which served as conceptual indicators of participants' experiences and values. This descriptive overview provides the empirical basis for the multi-dimensional coding structure that follows in the subsequent sections.

Open Coding

Open coding represents the first stage of grounded theory data analysis, focusing on the identification, conceptualization, and categorization of discrete phenomena emerging from raw qualitative data (Corbin, 2021). During this phase, interview transcripts are examined systematically and inductively, with researchers assigning conceptual labels—or codes—to distinct segments of data that encapsulate meaningful experiences, emotions, reflections, or actions described by participants. Open coding aims to fracture the data, allowing the emergence of initial analytic categories while remaining as close as possible to the participants' original language and perspectives.

In this study, open coding was conducted through a line-by-line and incident-by-incident review of 24 semi-structured interview transcripts. After initial coding, a process of conceptual consolidation was undertaken, during which synonymous or closely related codes were grouped under broader thematic labels. This refinement resulted in a structured set of approximately 20 core themes, each encompassing a range of related open codes. These themes represent the multi-dimensional aspects of older tourists' experiential constructions, encompassing emotional, cognitive, social, and functional domains.

The detailed organization of the open coding results is presented in Table 2. This table systematically outlines each refined theme alongside the specific open codes extracted from participants' narratives. By presenting the coding structure in this way, the study provides transparency into how raw qualitative data were systematically transformed into meaningful analytic categories, laying the empirical foundation for subsequent axial and selective coding processes.

Table 2. Open the coding table

Refined Theme	Extracted Open Codes (Keywords/Phrases)
Feeling of Emotional Fulfillment	Feeling peaceful (E2), Emotional relaxation (E2), Joyful experiences (E6), Sense of happiness (D3), Inner contentment (E6), Emotional satisfaction (E2), Harmony with nature (E7), Tranquility (E6), Feeling blessed (E3), Emotional revitalization (E6), Emotional comfort (E2), Spiritual renewal (E1)
Emotional Shifts during Travel	Pre-trip excitement (E3), Anticipation before journey (E5), Relaxation during activities (E2), Sense of achievement (E7), Post-trip nostalgia (E6), Emotional ups and downs (E4), Emotional fatigue (E2), Emotional renewal (E6), Sense of completion (E3), Mixed emotions (E5)
Emotional Discomfort	Loneliness at destination (E4), Disconnection from group (E5), Emotional isolation (E4), Frustration with service gaps (E5), Unmet emotional needs (E6), Feeling ignored (E4), Emotional distance (E6), Moments of homesickness (E7), Group exclusion (E5), Disappointment with organization (E7)

Learning New Wellness Knowledge	Learning about spa therapies (E1), Traditional health practices (D5), New dietary knowledge (E2), Mindfulness techniques (E6), Breathing exercises (D3), Herbal remedy learning (E4), Fitness program insights (M4), Self-care strategies (D2), Meditation practice (E3), Traditional healing rituals (D6)
Personal Growth and Insight	Self-reflection on life stages (E4), Health awareness (E2), Personal improvement goals (E5), New perspectives on aging (D1), Self-empowerment (E3), Realization of well-being importance (E6), Personal health mission (D3), Understanding aging positively (E5), Motivational thinking (E6), Renewed life enthusiasm (E3)
Cognitive Stimulation Activities	Attending lectures (E6), Participating in workshops (E3), Cultural site exploration (D4), Local wisdom learning (D6), Trying new therapies (E1), Experiencing unfamiliar traditions (D2), Engaging in mental games (E5), Discovery learning (E4), Curiosity-driven activities (E2), Reflective discussions (E7)
Positive Social Interaction	Making new friends (E3), Shared experiences (E5), Trust-building activities (E2), Supportive communication (E4), Collaborative learning (D2), Informal group chats (E6), Emotional closeness (E5), Shared laughter (E3), Group enthusiasm (E1), Interpersonal warmth (E4)
Supportive Social Environment	Encouragement from peers (E5), Empathetic listening (E4), Receiving help from group members (E2), Group solidarity (E3), Inclusive atmosphere (D5), Emotional sharing (E6), Trust in group leaders (D4), Sense of group protection (E7), Social security (E2), Peer care (E3)
Sense of Belonging	Feeling accepted (E4), Group identity formation (E5), Emotional connectedness (E3), Comfort in social participation (E6), Sense of home in group (E2), Being cared for (E3), Emotional bonding with others (E6), Shared group rituals (D1), Mutual support (E4), Trust among travelers (E5)
Accessibility of Facilities	Easy transportation (E1), Facility accessibility (D3), Barrier-free design (M2), Smooth movement (E2), Adapted activities for seniors (M3), Accessibility signage (D6), Wheelchair access (E4), Convenient room layouts (E2), Shuttle services (M5), Friendly navigation aids (E6)
Wellness Services	Availability of doctors (M3), Health check-ups (E2), Tailored dietary services (M1), Physical therapy access (E6), Emotional counseling (D5), On-site emergency aid (D3), Fitness activities (E4), Sleep quality programs (E3), Stress management workshops (M6), Personalized health monitoring (D4)
Perceived Safety	Sense of personal security (E3), Reliable emergency protocols (M4), Trust in local guides (E2), Comfort in unfamiliar spaces (E5), Visible security presence (D6), Accessible health support (D3), Safe travel environments (E1), Crisis response readiness (M2), Emotional safety (E6), Safety reassurance (E4)
Comfort of Physical Environment	Comfortable accommodation (E5), Fresh air quality (E2), Cleanliness of facilities (E6), Pleasant room temperature (E4), Natural lighting (D3), Peaceful surroundings (E2), Green landscapes (E6), Calming interior design (E3), Quietness at night (E1), Accessible nature trails (D2)
Motivation to Improve Health	Desire for healthier lifestyle (E3), Self-initiated health goals (E4), Pursuit of active aging (E2), Will to maintain fitness (E6), Exercise participation (D4), Diet modifications (E5), Mental health focus (E6), Wellness program involvement (M1), Setting walking targets (E2), Improving sleep habits (E3)
Cultural Resonance	Emotional attachment to cultural heritage (E4), Remembrance of past travels (E3), Traditional cultural performances (D2), Revisiting familiar cultural symbols (E6), Experiencing ancestral traditions (E2), Nostalgic emotional triggers (E5), Memory evocation (E6), Cultural storytelling (D5), Deep emotional connection (E3), Emotional immersion in heritage (E4)
Emotional Expression Opportunities	Group sharing sessions (E3), Personal storytelling (E4), Reflective journaling (E5), Emotional support groups (D2), Expressive therapy sessions (E6), Open dialogue opportunities (E2), Cathartic conversations (E4), Memory sharing (E6), Creative expression workshops (E5), Safe spaces for emotion (E3)
Challenges in Wellness Travel	Physical exhaustion (E6), Difficulty adjusting to schedules (E3), Health management difficulties (E5), Travel-related stress (E2), Adapting to unfamiliar foods (E4), Language barriers (E5), Mobility challenges (E6), Weather discomfort (D4), Mental fatigue (E6), Navigating crowded spaces (E3)
Satisfaction with Services	Attentive staff (E2), Fast service response (M3), High-quality food (E4), Personalized care (D2), Friendly customer service (E6), Professional guidance (M1), Wellness-oriented service delivery (D5), Customized activity options (E5), Flexible arrangements (E3), Reliability of services (E4)
Unmet Expectations	Delays in service delivery (E3), Inadequate health facilities (E6), Lack of personalized attention (E4), Miscommunication issues (E2), Limited choice of activities (E5), Inconsistent

	<p>quality (E6), Cultural mismatch (E4), Limited accessibility (E6), Overcrowding (E5), Service rigidity (E3)</p>
<p>Long-term Benefits of Travel</p>	<p>Adoption of wellness habits (E3), Strengthened social networks (E4), Emotional resilience enhancement (E6), Continued physical activity (E5), Renewed life motivation (E3), Better health awareness (E2), Strengthened identity (E6), Greater adaptability (E5), Renewed sense of purpose (E4), Sustained social bonds (E6)</p>

To visually complement the open coding process, a keyword word cloud was generated based on the extracted open codes from participants' interview narratives, as presented in Figure 1. The word cloud graphically represents the relative prominence of key experiential concepts by varying the size of each keyword according to its frequency of occurrence across the dataset. Larger and more centrally positioned terms indicate themes that were more frequently emphasized by older participants during discussions of their wellness tourism experiences.

As shown in the figure, keywords such as "emotional," "group," "health," "activities," "service," and "learning" dominate the visual field, reflecting the centrality of emotional engagement, social interactions, health maintenance, and active participation in shaping older tourists' experiential value. Additionally, terms like "trust," "comfort," "personal," and "traditional" highlight the importance of emotional security, personal relevance, and cultural resonance in the participants' narratives. This visual depiction provides an intuitive overview of the major thematic areas identified through open coding and serves as a bridge to the more structured thematic development undertaken in the subsequent axial coding phase.



Figure 1. Keyword word cloud

To further elucidate the emotional characteristics embedded in the open coding results, two visual analyses were conducted based on the extracted open codes. Figure 2 presents the top 30 keywords ranked by their sentiment strength, measured through polarity scores. In this figure, keywords positioned to the right with positive polarity values (indicated in green) represent experiences associated with positive emotional states, such as "Expressive therapy sessions," "Sense of happiness," "Supportive communication," and "Greater adaptability." These keywords highlight aspects of wellness tourism that significantly contributed to emotional upliftment, cognitive engagement, and social connectedness among older tourists. In contrast, a limited number of keywords with negative polarity values (indicated in red), such as "Disappointment with organization" and "Nostalgic emotional triggers," reflect occasional challenges or emotional tensions encountered during the travel experiences.

Complementing this detailed view, Figure 3 illustrates the overall sentiment distribution across all open code keywords in the form of a percentage-based pie chart. As shown, the majority of keywords were classified as positive, reflecting the predominance of favorable emotional, cognitive, social, and functional experiences among older participants. Neutral sentiments accounted for a smaller but notable proportion, indicating descriptive or context-specific aspects that did not evoke strong emotional reactions. Negative sentiments constituted a minor share, suggesting that adverse experiences were relatively limited in the participants' overall wellness travel narratives.

Together, these visual analyses reinforce the interpretation that wellness tourism tends to generate predominantly positive experiential value for older travelers, while also highlighting the nuanced presence of emotional complexity within individual experiences. This pattern sets the foundation for the axial coding phase, where deeper interrelationships among emotional, cognitive, social, and functional themes will be systematically explored.

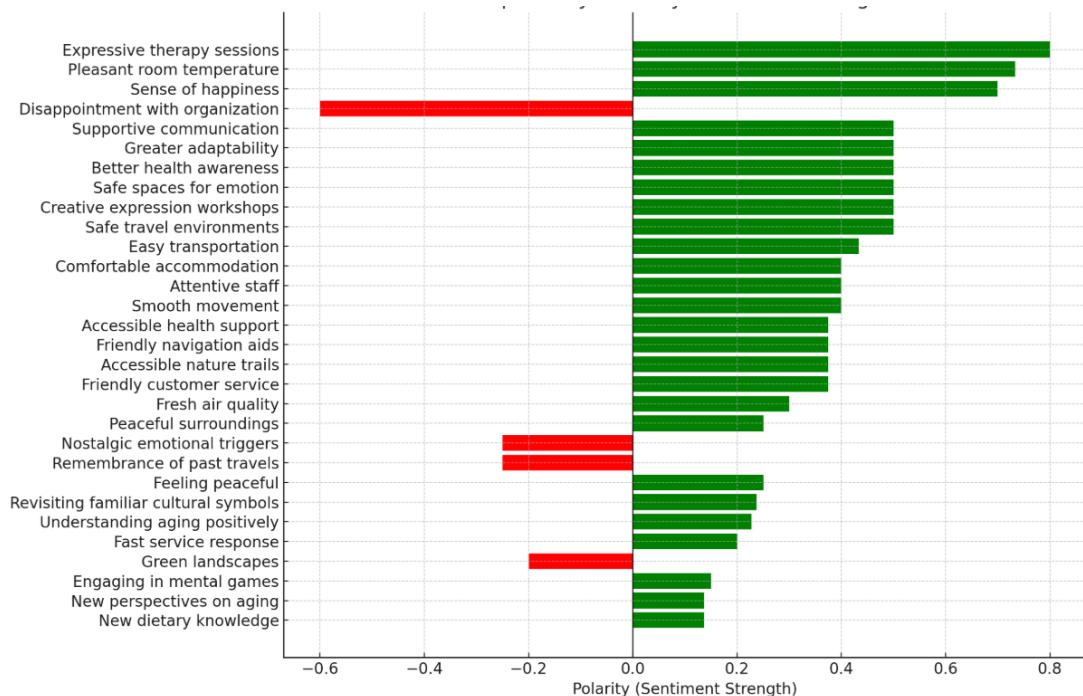


Figure 2. Top 30 Chart of keyword sentiment strength

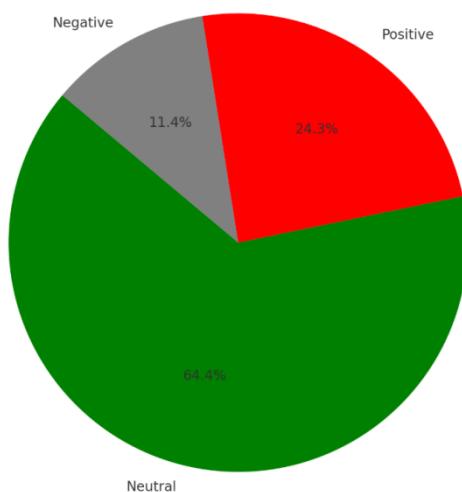


Figure 3. Sentiment Distribution of Open Code Keywords (Percentage)

Axis coding

Axial coding constitutes the second phase of grounded theory analysis, wherein the open codes generated during the initial phase are systematically reassembled into broader conceptual structures. Unlike open coding, which focuses on fragmenting and labeling discrete phenomena, axial coding emphasizes the relational integration of concepts by grouping them around more abstract categories and subcategories (Corbin, 2021). This analytical progression allows researchers to move beyond surface-level descriptive insights and toward a deeper theoretical understanding of the mechanisms underlying the studied phenomenon.

In this study, axial coding was conducted to synthesize the diverse experiential elements articulated by older tourists during their wellness travel journeys. Through iterative comparative analysis, ten major conceptual categories were identified, each encompassing distinct yet interrelated subcategories. These categories collectively capture the emotional, cognitive, social, functional, and cultural dimensions that structure older travelers' perceived value and well-being in tourism contexts. Rather than narrowly focusing on physical health or medicalized care, the coding scheme highlights the broader and more holistic pathways through which well-being is constructed during travel—including emotional engagement, meaning-making, social inclusion, and cultural resonance.

The updated categorization deliberately shifts emphasis away from purely health-centric interpretations toward a multi-dimensional model of well-being tourism. For instance, the category "Cognitive Enrichment" integrates both wellness-related learning and cultural engagement, reflecting the intellectual stimulation derived from travel. Similarly, the category "Self-Transformation" reframes earlier health-focused reflections into a broader narrative

of self-awareness, motivational reorientation, and personal meaning reconstruction. The category “Supportive Service Environment”, while acknowledging the availability of wellness services, de-emphasizes clinical interventions in favor of a more inclusive view of comfort, assistance, and environmental support. Together with “Cultural Identity Resonance” and “Social Belonging”, these categories reflect how travel can holistically shape older individuals' subjective well-being beyond utilitarian or therapeutic functions.

The detailed structure of the axial coding results is presented in Table 3. Each major category is listed alongside its core subcategories and was inductively derived from participants' narratives, reflecting the experiential richness of wellness travel as a vehicle for enhancing emotional vitality, cognitive engagement, social connectedness, cultural immersion, and existential affirmation.

Table 3. Axis coding table

Major Category	Subcategories
Emotional Fulfillment	-Positive emotional resonance -Emotional renewal through travel
Emotional Challenges	-Emotional discomfort -Emotional isolation or disappointment
Cognitive Enrichment	-Acquisition of wellness knowledge -Cultural learning experiences
Self-Transformation	-Reevaluation of personal health and life -Self-empowerment and motivation
Social Connection	-Building new relationships -Enhancing group belongingness
Social Support	-Receiving emotional support -Feeling protected within the group
Accessibility Convenience	-Accessibility and mobility -Facility and transport convenience
Supportive Service Environment	-Availability and quality of health care -Tailored wellness support services
Safety Perception	-Personal security perceptions -Emergency response availability
Cultural Identity Resonance	-Emotional connection to heritage -Evocation of personal and collective memories

Selective Coding

Selective coding represents the final stage of grounded theory analysis, wherein categories generated during open and axial coding are systematically integrated to develop a cohesive and theoretically saturated explanatory framework (Corbin, 2021). This phase involves identifying core variables that most meaningfully capture the central phenomenon—in this case, the experiential mechanisms through which older adults construct a sense of well-being through tourism. Rather than treating previously coded elements as isolated findings, selective coding reassembles them into interconnected constructs, prioritizing those with the greatest explanatory power and empirical grounding in participants' narratives.

In this study, selective coding was conducted through iterative analysis and abstraction, drawing from the conceptual patterns established in the earlier phases. Redundant or weakly supported categories were consolidated or excluded to preserve analytical clarity. Throughout the process, emphasis was placed on retaining fidelity to the lived experiences of older tourists while identifying overarching variables that structure their experiential value formation.

As a result, ten key variables were identified, each representing a distinct yet interrelated facet of tourism experience that contributes to older adults' holistic well-being. These variables span emotional, cognitive, social, functional, and cultural domains. Table 4 presents the revised variable names and refined definitions, grounded in participants' experiential accounts and aligned with the overarching aim of this study.

Table 4. Key Variables Identified from Open and Axial Coding

Key Variable	Definition
Emotional Fulfillment	Affective states of joy, tranquility, and revitalization that elevate older adults' psychological well-being through travel.
Emotional Discomfort	Unpleasant emotional experiences, such as loneliness or alienation, that diminish older travelers' sense of enjoyment and comfort.
Cognitive Enrichment	The stimulation of curiosity, learning, and mental engagement gained through exposure to new knowledge and cultural experiences.
Existential Reflection	The deep introspection on life meaning, aging, and personal identity that is inspired by meaningful travel encounters.

Social Bonding	The development of close and positive relationships that reinforce feelings of belonging and interpersonal satisfaction.
Social Support	The emotional and practical reassurance provided by peers or group contexts that nurtures a secure and inclusive travel experience.
Accessibility Convenience	The ease with which older individuals engage with tourism environments, enabling autonomy and reducing physical or psychological stress.
Supportive Environment Satisfaction	The perceived adequacy of facilities and services that ensure comfort, dignity, and agency for older tourists.
Safety Perception	The confidence in environmental and interpersonal safety that fosters a relaxed and trusting tourism experience.
Cultural Resonance	The emotional and symbolic connection to cultural heritage, traditions, or memories that supports identity affirmation and meaning.

To ensure analytical consistency and align with the theoretical framework of experiential value, the ten core variables distilled through selective coding were conceptually organized under five overarching value dimensions: emotional, cognitive, social, functional, and cultural. This classification reflects the intrinsic logic embedded in participants' narratives and maintains coherence with the axial coding phase. Emotional value comprises the variables Emotional Fulfillment and Emotional Discomfort, capturing the affective states that either enhance or hinder subjective well-being during travel. Cognitive value encompasses Cognitive Enrichment and Existential Reflection, reflecting processes of knowledge acquisition and introspective evaluation that contribute to psychological depth and personal meaning. Social value includes Social Bonding and Social Support, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal connectedness, relational trust, and perceived inclusion. Functional value consists of Accessibility Convenience, Supportive Environment Satisfaction, and Safety Perception, which collectively address the structural and environmental conditions that enable ease, comfort, and psychological security for older tourists. Lastly, cultural value is represented by Cultural Resonance, which expresses the emotional and symbolic attachment to heritage and tradition as a means of identity affirmation. This value-based categorization provides a robust interpretive lens through which the multi-dimensional nature of tourism experience value can be understood in relation to the construction of well-being among aging populations.

Together, these variables illuminate the multi-dimensional nature of tourism experience value as perceived by older adults. Emotional fulfillment and social bonding emerged as dominant drivers of well-being, while accessibility convenience and satisfaction with supportive environments served as critical enabling conditions. Cognitive enrichment and existential reflection offered internal pathways for personal growth, while cultural resonance fostered deeper meaning and identity continuity. Meanwhile, emotional discomfort and perceived safety constituted boundary conditions that either constrained or facilitated overall well-being during travel.

This integrated structure forms the conceptual backbone of the study's theoretical model. It offers a comprehensive explanation of how older adults derive well-being from tourism not merely through leisure consumption, but through a layered interplay of emotional, cognitive, social, and cultural meaning-making processes. The identification of these ten variables provides a solid empirical foundation for the subsequent development of the conceptual model in the next chapter, where the dynamic relationships among these experiential elements will be further elaborated.

Theoretical Validation and Model Development

Triangulation serves as a fundamental strategy for enhancing the credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings (Ahmed, 2024). In grounded theory research, where theoretical constructs emerge inductively from empirical data, triangulation is essential for confirming the robustness of categories, relationships, and conceptual structures identified during the coding process. By integrating diverse sources of data, analytic techniques, and theoretical perspectives, triangulation helps to reduce subjectivity and ensures that the emerging framework reflects a consistent and well-substantiated pattern grounded in participants' experiences (Treude, 2024).

In this study, triangulation was implemented through three complementary strategies: data triangulation, methodological triangulation, and theoretical triangulation. Data triangulation was realized by including a heterogeneous sample of older tourists varying in age, gender, travel experience, and physical health, which enabled the cross-verification of patterns across demographic subgroups. Methodological triangulation combined open-ended narrative analysis with sentiment-based emotional profiling to reinforce both depth and breadth in the exploration of experiential dimensions. Theoretical triangulation was conducted by iteratively comparing grounded categories with established literature in wellness tourism, aging studies, and consumer value theory, ensuring conceptual alignment while maintaining empirical authenticity.

Based on the cumulative results from open, axial, and selective coding, this study developed a conceptual model that systematically illustrates how older tourists construct experiential value during wellness travel. The model

identifies four core value dimensions—Emotional Value, Cognitive Value, Social Value, and Functional Value—each of which comprises two to three key sub-dimensions extracted from participant narratives.

Emotional Value captures both positive and negative affective responses during the travel experience. This includes emotional fulfillment, which refers to feelings of peace, joy, and revitalization, and emotional discomfort, such as loneliness, frustration, or emotional detachment that detract from well-being.

Cognitive Value refers to mental and reflective gains achieved during travel. It is composed of cognitive enrichment, which involves learning new knowledge and engaging in culturally stimulating activities, and existential reflection, referring to introspective processes about personal identity, aging, and life purpose.

Social Value emphasizes the interpersonal and communal aspects of travel. It includes social bonding, or the creation of meaningful relationships with peers, and social support, which involves the perception of emotional encouragement, group protection, and inclusion.

Functional Value centers on the practical conditions that enable a comfortable and secure travel experience. It encompasses accessibility convenience (e.g., barrier-free facilities and ease of mobility), supportive environment satisfaction (e.g., adequacy of services and infrastructure), and safety perception (e.g., trust in emergency response and perceived physical security).

Figure 4 presents the resulting conceptual model, placing the central phenomenon—olderly Tourists' Wellness Travel Experiences—at the core, surrounded by four interrelated value dimensions. Each dimension branches into its associated sub-constructs, reflecting the rich and multi-layered structure of older tourists' experiential narratives.

This model affirms that older tourists' wellness travel experiences are shaped by the integration of emotional, cognitive, social, and functional value processes. Rather than viewing these as isolated domains, the model highlights their interdependence and cumulative contribution to perceived well-being. It offers a theoretically grounded and empirically validated framework that advances understanding of how wellness travel enhances older adults' quality of life and informs future design of age-inclusive tourism experiences.

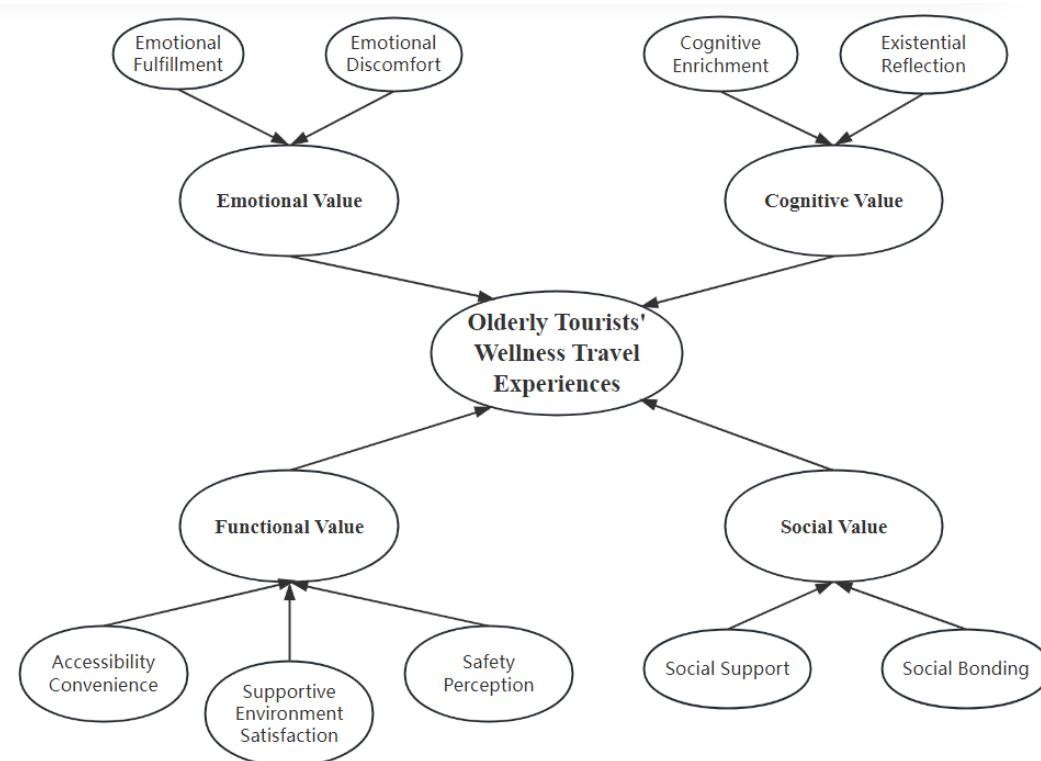


Figure 4. Conceptual Model of Multi-Dimensional Influences on older Tourists' Wellness Travel Experiences

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the deepening of experiential value theory by investigating how older adults derive well-being from tourism through dynamic, multidimensional engagements. Unlike previous tourism studies that often treat senior well-being as a post-consumption outcome—focusing narrowly on life satisfaction or health status—

this research adopts a grounded, process-oriented approach that maps the emotional, cognitive, social, and functional mechanisms through which well-being is constructed in aging-specific travel contexts.

In extant tourism literature, emotional value is often equated with hedonic pleasure, relaxation, or enjoyment (Hosany & Gilbert, 2009; Kim et al., 2015). These studies tend to emphasize transient affective states such as joy or tranquility experienced at leisure destinations. However, such formulations inadequately capture the affective complexity of older adults, who frequently face emotional vulnerability, loneliness, and psychological uncertainty during later life stages.

This study expands the construct of emotional value by identifying two distinct subdimensions: emotional fulfillment and emotional discomfort. Emotional fulfillment encompasses feelings of spiritual renewal, tranquility, and emotional revitalization arising from meaningful engagement with people and places. Emotional discomfort, conversely, addresses experiences of isolation, disappointment, or emotional insecurity—factors rarely acknowledged in prior frameworks. This reconceptualization reflects a more realistic spectrum of emotional responses and emphasizes the dual role of tourism as both a space for joy and an arena for emotional regulation. In doing so, it contributes to a more inclusive theorization of affective experience in aging-specific contexts.

The concept of cognitive value in tourism has traditionally focused on knowledge acquisition, novelty seeking, or mental stimulation (Kim & Ritchie, 2013). While these elements are indeed central to travel experiences, they are often treated as superficial engagements with the environment, such as encountering new landscapes or information. This study introduces a novel subdimension—existential reflection—that expands cognitive value from external information processing to internal meaning-making. Older tourists in this study did not simply learn about destinations; they used travel as a reflective process to reassess personal identity, aging, and life goals. This finding aligns with psychological theories of later-life development and offers a conceptual bridge between cognitive stimulation and emotional depth. By integrating both cognitive enrichment and existential reflection, the study advances cognitive value theory by embedding it in the reflective, life-stage-sensitive realities of older adults.

Most prior research on social value emphasizes companionship or group participation as a source of satisfaction (Chaturvedi et al., 2023). While group dynamics are relevant, such understandings often reduce social value to visible group interaction, overlooking deeper psychological and interpersonal dimensions. This study delineates social bonding and social support as two separate mechanisms. Social bonding refers to the emotional closeness and trust cultivated through shared experiences and ritualized interaction (e.g., communal meals, storytelling), while social support captures feelings of protection, empathy, and being cared for by peers and staff. These subdimensions suggest that older adults' social experiences are not merely functional or utilitarian but profoundly affective and identity-affirming. This refined interpretation aligns with relational well-being theory and underscores the importance of emotional inclusion in later-life tourism experiences.

Traditional definitions of functional value in tourism revolve around service efficiency, convenience, and physical accessibility (Williams & Soutar, 2009). However, for older adults, functional value entails more than logistical convenience—it relates to psychological safety, physical autonomy, and environmental reassurance. This study expands the functional domain by identifying supportive environment satisfaction, accessibility convenience, and safety perception as distinct subdimensions. Supportive environment satisfaction encompasses perceptions of well-designed spaces, empathetic service, and physical ease that collectively foster emotional security. Safety perception, on the other hand, includes trust in medical readiness, crisis response, and the predictability of unfamiliar environments. Together, these insights deepen the understanding of functional value as a psychosocial construct—not merely an operational one—particularly relevant in aging-sensitive tourism design.

In contrast to earlier frameworks that treat value dimensions as discrete, generalizable constructs, this study proposes a contextualized and interdependent model. Emotional, cognitive, social, and functional values are not viewed in isolation but as co-constitutive dimensions that interact to shape the tourism-based well-being of older adults.

To summarize, the theoretical contributions of this study are fourfold: 1) It shifts the analysis from static post-travel outcomes toward a dynamic, experience-centered construction of well-being. 2) It refines and expands each value domain by introducing empirically grounded subdimensions such as existential reflection, social support, and supportive environment satisfaction. 3) It contextualizes experiential value theory within aging-specific psychological, emotional, and environmental needs. 4) It proposes a theoretically integrated framework that captures the layered interplay of affect, cognition, social interaction, and infrastructure in shaping older adults' travel-based well-being.

Practical Contribution

This study investigates how older tourists construct experiential value during well-being-oriented travel, identifying ten key variables across emotional, cognitive, social, and functional domains. By building an integrative conceptual model, the findings reveal that older adults' tourism experiences are not merely about functional access

or physical health maintenance, but involve complex and meaningful processes of emotional satisfaction, mental engagement, social connection, environmental support, and cultural resonance. These insights provide actionable guidance for stakeholders engaged in the development, management, and policy design of tourism offerings for aging populations.

For destination managers and tourism service providers, the findings call for a shift away from narrow service models that focus solely on standardized activities or physical recovery programs. Instead, tourism environments should be designed to support emotional comfort, social participation, and psychological security. This includes creating inclusive atmospheres where older travelers feel a sense of belonging, as well as offering programs that stimulate intellectual curiosity and self-reflection—such as intergenerational workshops, cultural storytelling, or nature-based mindfulness activities. Practical infrastructure should enhance accessibility and reduce uncertainty, enabling older tourists to move freely and feel safe throughout their journeys. A multidimensional design approach that considers emotional, cognitive, relational, and physical comfort will allow service providers to address the nuanced needs of aging tourists and foster stronger long-term engagement.

At the policy level, the study underscores the importance of developing age-inclusive tourism systems that go beyond promoting physical vitality or preventive health. Policy frameworks should aim to cultivate travel experiences that contribute to older adults' emotional resilience, mental clarity, and cultural identity. Incentives such as destination certification, training standards, and subsidies can motivate tourism operators to incorporate well-being elements into their offerings. Furthermore, collaboration between tourism departments, cultural institutions, and senior care organizations can enhance both the diversity and depth of experiences available to older travelers.

Finally, the conceptual model generated in this research offers a blueprint for the strategic planning of well-being-focused tourism. By viewing older tourists not as passive users of leisure resources but as individuals seeking layered, transformative experiences, tourism developers can better align products and destinations with the aspirations of this growing demographic. Experience design should integrate value elements—such as emotional fulfillment, social recognition, personal reflection, and cultural affinity—throughout the entire customer journey. Marketing efforts, likewise, should foreground these deeper experiential qualities to authentically connect with older tourists' pursuit of meaning, connection, and self-continuity through travel.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the experiential mechanisms through which older tourists construct well-being during participation in well-being-oriented travel. Using grounded theory methodology, 24 semi-structured interviews were systematically analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding. The analysis revealed that older adults' travel experiences are shaped by multi-dimensional and dynamic processes involving emotional fulfillment, cognitive engagement, social connection, functional support, and cultural resonance. Rather than treating tourism as a static or health-focused activity, the study conceptualizes it as a layered, meaning-making experience in which affective, cognitive, relational, and existential elements interact to foster a sense of holistic well-being among older individuals. This perspective shifts the understanding of aging-related travel from one of physical maintenance to one that centers on emotional enrichment, identity continuity, and social inclusion.

Theoretically, this study contributes by redirecting scholarly attention from static outcome indicators to dynamic experiential constructions. It extends experiential value theory into aging-specific tourism contexts and incorporates cultural resonance as a meaningful component within the broader experiential framework. These contributions help refine how experiential value is conceptualized in the context of later-life travel, acknowledging the evolving motivations and psychological needs of older populations.

Practically, the findings provide guidance for tourism service providers, destination planners, and policymakers. The study emphasizes the need to design emotionally supportive, cognitively engaging, socially inclusive, functionally accessible, and culturally resonant tourism experiences tailored to the unique expectations of older travelers. By addressing these integrated dimensions of value, the tourism industry can better serve the aspirations of aging populations and support their pursuit of life satisfaction and well-being through meaningful travel.

Nonetheless, this study has several limitations. The sample, while diverse in life experience and background, was geographically situated within a specific cultural region of China, which may limit the broader applicability of findings across international or culturally distinct contexts. Additionally, while qualitative methods allowed for in-depth understanding of subjective meaning-making, they do not offer generalizable metrics regarding the relative weight of each experiential factor. Future research should consider cross-cultural comparative studies to explore how sociocultural factors mediate older tourists' value constructions. Mixed-method approaches combining qualitative depth with quantitative breadth could enhance the empirical robustness of the model. Furthermore, future research should capitalize on the rich, nuanced narratives embedded in qualitative interviews by employing more interpretive strategies, such as thematic layering, narrative reconstruction, and emotional discourse analysis.

This will deepen the understanding of how meaning and well-being are negotiated across different experiential dimensions. In addition, methodological triangulation could be enriched by incorporating expert panel discussions or observational techniques in real-time travel settings. Such approaches would allow for the validation of experiential constructs *in situ* and help uncover contextual cues that might be overlooked in self-reported data. From a practical standpoint, future studies may also explore how experiential value dimensions translate into targeted market strategies. For example, segmenting older tourists based on value preferences (e.g., emotion-driven vs. identity-driven) may support more customized experience design, branding narratives, and communication strategies. Integrating these interdisciplinary approaches will advance both theoretical and applied insights in aging tourism research.

Appendix 1. Interview Outline

Interview questions for elderly tourists	Interview questions for tourism destination operators	Interview questions for Managers of tourism enterprises
1. Can you recall and narrate your travel experience for this trip?	1. What is the proportion of senior tourists among the total number of visitors in your tourist destination? What are the distinctive characteristics of their travel needs?	1. Please provide an introduction to your tourism enterprise, including its name, type, and scale.
2. What was your motivation for choosing this trip?	2. Have you implemented any measures within the tourist area to cater to the needs of senior tourists? For example, providing convenience facilities, accessible pathways, etc.	2. What do you consider to be the main trends in the current elderly tourism market?
3. Please describe your feelings, emotions, and sentiments after the conclusion of the trip.	3. Senior tourists might have health-related concerns. How do you address these concerns?	3. In your opinion, what are the primary factors that elderly tourists prioritize when choosing travel destinations and experiences?
4. Which tourism activities left a deep impression on you?	4. How do you provide information about the tourist destination to senior visitors? Do you have customized communication channels for them?	4. Does your enterprise offer specialized tourism products or services designed specifically for elderly tourists? If so, could you discuss the motivations and strategies behind this development?
5. What factors do you think could influence your travel experience?	5. Have you arranged any relaxed and enjoyable activities for senior tourists during their travel? Are these activities well-received?	5. When designing tourism products and services for elderly travelers, how do you consider and accommodate their specific needs and preferences?
6. What kind of experiences and feelings do you expect elderly tourism to bring you?	6. Have you taken into consideration the economic situation of senior tourists in your pricing policy? Do you offer any discounts or special pricing for them?	6. Have your staff members received training regarding the needs and interactions with elderly tourists while providing services?
7. What was the most significant takeaway for you from the travel activities?	7. How do you gather feedback and opinions from senior tourists? What kind of improvements have you implemented based on their feedback?	7. Does your enterprise collaborate with other institutions, communities, or organizations to provide improved services for elderly tourists? How have you established and maintained these partnerships?
8. Did senior tourism meet your	8. What are your predictions for the future trends in senior tourism? Do you have plans to	8. What are your expectations for the future development of the elderly tourism market?

expectations? Why or why not?	further expand services and activities tailored to senior tourists?	Does your enterprise have plans to expand its elderly tourism services?
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