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Luyao Wang

Guangxin Song

Xinke Wang

Sujie Wang

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# **Showing more kindness to disabled tourists because of understanding: The interaction among the perceived level of information, affection and altruistic behavior intention**

## **Introduction**

The rapid growth of tourism industry has made it possible for people to realize their right to travel (Gascon, 2019). People with disabilities have the same need and desire to travel as non-disabled people. However, it is difficult for them to get their travel right realized due to the barriers in their journey (Smith, 1987). According to statistics, an estimated 1.3 billion people experience significant disability. This represents 16% of the world's population, or 1 in 6 of us. (WHO, 2023). It is predicted that by 2030, Americans with disabilities will reach 100 million (Burnett & Baker, 2001). Physical disabled tourists account for the largest proportion of the disabled, and physical disabled tourists are also more likely to run into various difficulties in their tourism (M. J. Daniels et al., 2005). It can be seen that how to make it easier for physical disabled tourists to travel is a very crucial problem faced by the destination management organization and the society.

It has been shown that ordinary tourists' unfriendly attitudes towards disabled tourists may bring interpersonal barriers to the disabled tourists (Wilken, 2002). On the contrary, the public's kindness to disabled tourists may make their journey warm and smooth. For a long time, scholars in tourism have focused on altruistic behavior between hosts and tourists (Plaza-Mejia et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2021) and altruistic behavior between tourism practitioners and tourists (Chang & Chen, 2011; Kim et al., 2012). However, current research has overlooked the altruistic behavior among tourists, especially between groups of tourists with different characteristics. To fill in this gap, this study will examine ordinary tourists' altruistic behavior towards tourists with disabilities and advances better understanding of research on altruistic behavior in the tourism literature.

According to Social Cognitive Theory, perceived level of information greatly influences individuals' behaviors (Bandura, 1999). As such, ordinary tourists' perceived level of information about travel barriers of disabled tourists and appropriate help skills may be an important antecedent that affects their altruistic behavior towards disabled tourists. However, the predictive variables of altruistic behavior explored by the existing research mainly focus on the environment (Li et al., 2018; Perenc & Peczkowski, 2018; Thompson et al., 2014) and other external factors, neglecting individuals' internal factors. Thus, it's essential to better understand the altruistic behavior in tourism from ordinary tourists' perceived level of physical disability.

In order to fill the above research gap, this study will examine the following questions by applying the Tri-component attitude model:

Firstly, Study 1 analyzed the mechanism of ordinary tourists' perceived level of disabled tourists' travel barriers on their altruistic behavior intention towards physical disabled tourists. Specifically, the study developed a research model with perceived level of information as a cognitive dimension, empathy for physical disabled tourists

and discomfort from interaction with physical disabled tourists as emotional factors, and altruistic behavior intention of physical disabled tourists as behavioral factors. Emotional variables were treated as mediator in the model.

Secondly, Study 2 explores the specifics of the ordinary tourist's perceived level of information about helping visitors with disabilities through in-depth interviews, and the ways by which more information about the proper help with physical disabled tourists can be learned. It made up the questions that study 1 could not answer.

Overall, theoretical and practical implications of this research are as follows. Firstly, this paper explores the factors influencing the altruistic behavior of ordinary tourists towards tourists with disabilities in a tourism context, filling a gap in previous research on altruistic behavior between these two groups; secondly, this study tests the role of perceived level of physical disabled tourists information, proving the influence of individual perceived level on altruistic behavior, and advances the antecedent variables of altruistic behavior in tourism. Finally, the findings of this paper can guide the government, tourism destination managers and other organizations so that they can take effective measures to guide ordinary tourists to engage in helping physical disabled tourists, thus promoting the willingness to travel and tourism satisfaction of the physical disabled tourists' group.

## **Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **The Tri-component attitude model**

The Tri-component attitude model was first proposed by Rosenberg (Rosenberg, 1960). It was originally applied to consumer behavior research to explain consumer behavior. (Chih et al., 2015). The process of forming behavioral attitudes consists of three layers. The process of forming behavioral attitudes consists of three layers of effects: a standard learning layer based on perceived information processing (perception → emotion → behavior intention), a low-intervention layer based on behavioral learning processes (perception → behavior intention → emotion) and an experience layer (emotion → behavior intention → perception) (Solomon, 2020). The three hierarchical effects are mainly distinguished by the extent to which individuals rely on experience and the amount of time and effort they invest in the decision-making process (Hu et al., 2021). The altruistic behavior of physical disabled tourists is relatively uncommon and infrequent in daily lives, and most ordinary tourists lack experience so they will shape their behavioral attitudes with a high level of involvement. Therefore, to address altruistic behavior intention of physical disabled tourists, this study adopts the hypothesis of the standard learning hierarchy, i.e. perception is the basis of emotion and behavior intention, emotion is the core of attitude and also a mediating variable of perception and behavior intention, and behavior intention is the result of perception and emotion (Rosenberg, 1960). The Tri-component attitude model has been applied in the tourism field, mainly based on the standard learning hierarchy, to investigate the mechanisms of behavior intention formation in travel (Hu et al., 2021; Qu et al., 2018; Yeap et al., 2020).

Perception refers to the consumer's thought processes and active interpretation of attitudes and objects (Kwon & Vogt, 2010) and the knowledge, awareness, opinions, perceptions and beliefs that emerge from this process (Ho et al., 2017). Therefore, perceived level of physical disabled tourists information was selected as the variable for the perception dimension in this study.

Emotions include emotional responses (Kwon & Vogt, 2010) and feelings in response to specific stimuli experienced in one's daily life (Anand et al., 1988). The two types of emotions that people tend to feel when in contact with an external group are empathy and discomfort (Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017), which are also often experienced when dealing with people with disabilities (Batson et al., 1991; Gething, 1994). Therefore, empathy for physical disabled tourists and discomfort in interaction with physical disabled tourists were chosen as the variables for the emotion dimension in this study.

Behavior intentions in this study are consistent with those in the Tri-component attitude model, i.e. behaviors or behavior intentions associated with behavioral attitudes. As the actual behavior is often difficult to assess, it is generally more appropriate to examine behavior intention as a variable in empirical studies (Kang, Juan & Li, 2020). Therefore, in this study, altruistic behavior intention of physical disabled tourists was chosen.

The theoretical underpinnings of the study structure and related hypotheses are presented in the following sections. The following sections explain the role of perceived level of physical disabled tourists information in influencing altruistic behavior intention of physical disabled tourists, and the role of empathy for physical disabled tourists and discomfort in interaction with physical disabled tourists.

### **Perceived level of physical disabled tourists information(PLPDTI)**

The perceived level of information refers to the extent to which ordinary tourists know about disabled people, including the difficulties they face and how they can be helped (Gething, 1994). In this study, it refers to the level of information that ordinary tourists perceive about the difficulties faced by disabled tourists during tourism and how they can be helped.

People with disabilities are perpetually discriminated against, excluded and alienated due to long-standing prejudices and cultural factors (Melville, 2005). The more they know about disabled tourists, the more they can reduce prejudice and discrimination and make better decisions in favour of the disabled; at the same time, people with higher levels of perceived information tend to know how to properly assist visitors with disabilities (Gething et al., 1997), and therefore have a higher sense of self-efficacy and are more likely to do altruistic behavior of physical disabled tourists. Based on this, this study hypotheses are as follows.

H1: Perceived level of physical disabled tourists information of ordinary tourists has a significant positive effect on their altruistic behavior intention of physical disabled tourists.

### **Empathy for physical disabled tourists(EPDT)**

Empathy refers to an individual's understanding of another person's emotional state with similar emotional experiences and reactions to others (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). In this study, empathy refers to the emotional reactions of ordinary tourists towards perceived difficulties of physical disabled tourists during a tour (Sharma et al., 2021).

According to Mischel's Cognitive-Affective Personality Systems Theory (CAPS), changes in perception also lead to changes in emotion (Mischel W, 1999). The better ordinary tourists know about the disabled tourists, the better they can identify the emotional states of physical disabled tourists, and the more likely the ordinary tourists will develop an empathetic emotion towards the recipient when physical disabled tourists is in distress. Based on this, this study hypotheses are as follows.

H2: Perceived level of physical disabled tourists information of ordinary tourists has a significant positive effect on empathy for physical disabled tourists.

### **Discomfort in interaction with physical disabled tourists (DIPDT)**

Discomfort in interaction with physical disabled tourists refers to the uncomfortable feelings that ordinary people experience when meeting or communicating with the disabled (Forlin et al., 1999). In this study, it refers to the uncomfortable behavior or reaction of ordinary tourists when encountering a physical disabled tourists while travelling.

People tend to stereotype people with disabilities as hostile, prejudiced, incompetent, etc. (Fiske et al., 2002). And the fear of hurting the self-esteem of the disabled through inappropriate actions results in people's attitudes towards the disabled being less friendly in their lives (Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005). This excessive social alienation can be reduced by increasing understanding through inter-group contact. Both direct contact, through direct communication, and indirect contact, such as through media campaigns, can bring different groups closer together and reduce stereotypes (Graf et al., 2020; Schieferdecker & Wessler, 2017) , allowing ordinary people to become more natural when dealing with the disabled. Based on this, this study hypotheses are as follows.

H3: Perceived level of physical disabled tourists information of ordinary tourists has a significant negative effect on discomfort in interaction with physical disabled tourists.

### **Altruistic behavior intention of physical disabled tourists(ABIPDT)**

Altruistic behavior, originally proposed by the sociologist Comte, refers to individuals who engage in certain activities for the benefit of others (Sharma et al., 2021) and sometimes even forgo their interests. In this study, it refers to the willingness of ordinary tourists to help physical disabled tourists out of a difficult situation when they encounter them during travels.

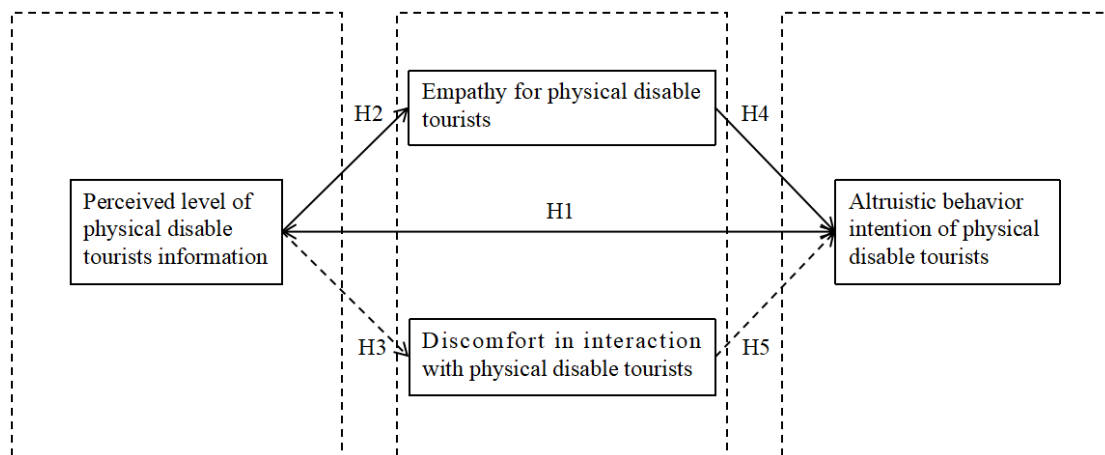
Empathy is a key motivator for altruistic behavior (Weng et al., 2013). According to the empathy-altruism hypothesis, people naturally empathize with vulnerable people or

those in distress (Lucas & Kteily, 2018). The higher the level of empathy, the more likely people are to engage in altruistic behavior to help others in distress (Batson et al., 1991).

Ordinary tourists who do not know enough about disabled tourists cannot break the inherent stereotypes. And due to different group behavior, ordinary tourists often feel uneasy when encountering disabled tourists, which discourages them from interacting with disabled tourists and doing altruistic behavior of physical disabled tourists. Based on this, this study hypothesizes that

H4: The level of empathy of ordinary tourists for physical disabled tourists has a significant positive effect on their altruistic behavior intention of physical disabled tourists.

H5: Discomfort in interaction with physical disabled tourists has a significant negative effect on the altruistic behavior intention of physical disabled tourists.



## Methodology

A mixed research approach was used in this study. Study 1 was a quantitative study in which data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire, and Study 2 was a quantitative study in which qualitative data was obtained through in-depth interviews. The sequential explanatory research elaborated the results of the quantitative analysis in-depth, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of respondents' perceptions of the study variables (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2019). Thus, Study 1 explored the impact PLPDTI of ordinary tourists on ABIPDT, and the role of EPDT and DIPDT. Study 2 aims to reveal the ordinary tourists' understanding of the barriers and help information of disabled tourists, like the information sources, so that to gain deeper insight into the perceived level of information.

## Study 1

The questionnaire was used to collect the data, and the data from the questionnaire was processed by using the structural equation modelling method to test the influence of the ordinary tourist's own perceived level of information on ABIPDT and other hypothetical relationships from the perspective of the ordinary tourists. The data were

collected via Wenjuanxing (<https://www.wjx.cn>), the largest online survey platform in China. At the same time, the quality of the questionnaire data will be ensured by screening the completion time, eliminating duplicate IP addresses and setting reverse questions. It is expected that 500 questionnaires will be collected with an effective rate of 90%.

### **Questionnaire design**

The questionnaire consists of 2 sections.

In the first section, the four constructs of PLPDTI, EPDT, DIPDT and ABIPDT were measured. All scales were drawn from established scales in SSCI journals. These included the Interactions with disabled Person's Scale, first proposed by Gething (1994) and later modified by Forlin et al. (1999), which included 4 items on PLPDTI, 4 items on the level of DIPDT (Forlin et al., 1999); the measure of EPDT was adapted from the Elche et al.'s scale including 4 items (Elche et al., 2020); the measure of ABITPD is based on Chen et al.'s scale including 5 items (Chen et al., 2021). All constructs were assessed with a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

In the second section, tourists' socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education and average monthly household income were gathered.

### **Study 2**

Study 2 proposes to conduct in-depth interviews with 10 visitors, who met disabled tourists in their journey in the last 12 months, Each interview will last between 30-40 minutes. The transcripts of the recorded interviews will be then collated and the data analyzed through thematic analysis.

## **Results**

### **Study 1**

Firstly, SPSS will be used to conduct reliability and validity analysis on the sample data. Reliability (Cronbach's coefficient and combined reliability CR for different variables to confirm internal consistency) will be examined together with convergent validity (average variance extracted, AVE) and discriminant validity (the square root of the AVE value is greater than the correlation coefficient between the variable and the other variables in the model).

Secondly, Mplus will be used to test the structural model equations. The structural equation model study consists of two steps: firstly, testing the model fit (chi-square/degrees of freedom, RMSEA, GFI, GFI); secondly, conducting a hypothesis test (Bootstrap 5000 method, p-values, t-values, confidence intervals).

## **Study 2**

In-depth interviews will be conducted with 10 visitors, who met disabled tourists on their journey in the last 12 months, and thematic analysis will be applied.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

### **Conclusion**

The results of study 1 will approve or reject the relationships between the variables in the model.

The available researches suggest that factors such as the gender of ordinary tourists, personal psychological state, social normative pressure, and urgency to help physical disabled tourists may influence ordinary tourists' ABIPDT.

### **Theoretical implications**

The findings provide theoretical and practical implications.

Firstly, there is a lack of research on altruistic behavior among different types of tourists. This study investigates the factors and mechanisms that influence ordinary tourists' ABIPDT, which may enhance the better understanding of the mechanism of altruistic behavior among heterogeneous groups.

Secondly, most of the previous studies have mainly investigated the influence of external environmental factors on altruistic behavior, the individuals' internal factors overlooked. This study examines the effect of ordinary tourists' PLPDTI on their ABIPDT, and the results contribute to advancing the understanding of altruistic behavior from both external and internal perspectives.

### **Practical implications**

The number of people with disabilities has been growing, and the physically disabled account for the largest proportion. They have great difficulty enjoying the basic right to travel due to mobility and interpersonal barriers (Smith, 1987). However, staff in the tourism industry, who lack scientific training and comprehensive information, are often ill-prepared to assist physical disabled tourists (M. Daniels et al., 2005). Thus ordinary tourists should assist and care for them to reduce their barriers to travel.

This study investigates the factors influencing the ABIPDT and verifies the influence of the ordinary tourist's PLPDTI. This inspires the government and tourism destination managers to indirectly help disabled tourists, such as through social media, signage and other means to share the right information about helping tourists with disabilities, aiming to offer a friendly environment for the journey of physical disabled tourists.

### **Limitations and further research**



There are limitations in this study. Firstly, the samples selected in both studies were tourists of Chinese nationality, and the results are hardly representative of the whole world; future studies could be conducted with a more diverse sample. Secondly, this study only focuses on physical disabled tourists, while there are a large number of disabled tourists with non-physical disabilities, and future studies should also consider disabled tourists with non-physical disabilities to determine whether the findings of this paper could apply to different disability groups.

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