

Motivating museum visits: Parental perspectives on educational and experiential travel for children

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid growth of museum tourism in China, School Children Museum Tourism (SCMT) has emerged as a vital market segment driven largely by parental decision-making. This study investigates the influence of motivational factors—categorized as push (education, socialization, leisure, parent-child bonding) and pull (safety, service, exhibitions)—on parents' intention to engage in SCMT. Grounded in Push and Pull Theory and supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional design using data from 213 parents in Nanjing, China. The instrument was developed from validated tourism motivation scales and measured using a five-point Likert scale. Multiple regression analysis was performed using SPSS to examine the relationships between each motivation factor and behavioral intention. Results reveal that six out of seven motivational factors significantly influence SCMT intention. Among them, education and safety emerged as the strongest predictors, highlighting the dual emphasis parents place on cognitive development and environmental security. Exhibition appeal and service quality were also significant, while socialization showed minimal impact. These findings expand the application of Push and Pull Theory to family-based educational tourism and offer practical insights for museum managers and tourism planners. Specifically, museums should prioritize educational content, ensure a safe and family-friendly environment, and enhance service delivery to appeal to parent decision-makers. The study's originality lies in its focus on parental motivations in SCMT, a relatively under-explored domain in tourism research. Limitations and future research directions are discussed, including broader geographic sampling and the inclusion of child perspectives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, museum tourism has experienced remarkable growth, evolving beyond its traditional educational function to become a vibrant segment of cultural and leisure tourism. Museums now serve as dynamic spaces that blend entertainment, education, and heritage, attracting diverse audiences ranging from art enthusiasts to families and school groups (Shao et al., 2019; Gil et al., 2019). In China, museum tourism has received significant policy and institutional support, especially in the wake of COVID-19, as part of broader efforts to revive cultural tourism and promote domestic educational travel. By the end of 2023, the number of museum tourists in China reached 1.67 billion, with school-aged children forming a dominant proportion of this figure (Chinese National Culture Heritage Administration, 2024). Amid this growth, School Children Museum Tourism (SCMT) has emerged as a niche yet vital segment, with parents playing a decisive role in shaping the tourism intentions and decisions of their children (Liu & Zhou, 2020).

Recent tourism trends—such as post-pandemic family travel, experiential learning, and the digitalization of museum experiences—have amplified the role of SCMT as a key vehicle for informal education and cultural exposure (Uslu & Tosun, 2023). With many museums integrating interactive technologies and themed exhibitions to appeal to younger audiences, the focus has shifted toward creating holistic experiences that also satisfy the expectations and motivations of accompanying parents. This is particularly relevant in China, where familial decision-making, child-rearing values, and educational aspirations deeply influence travel behavior. Consequently, understanding the motivational dynamics of parents in SCMT has become critical for both museum operators and tourism planners seeking to design targeted programs that align with family travel patterns.

The scholarly literature has long investigated the drivers of museum visitation, including functional, hedonic, and social motivations (Falk, 2009; Sheng & Chen, 2012). However, most studies have focused on adult-centered perspectives, overlooking the dual-influence dynamic between children and their guardians, especially in family or school-based travel contexts (Mohan, 2021). The Push and Pull Theory (Dann, 1977) remains a dominant framework for analyzing tourism motivation, categorizing internal (push) factors such as education and bonding, and external (pull) factors such as facilities and service quality (Goulding, 2000; Wu & Wall, 2016). Yet, few empirical studies have operationalized this theory in the specific context of SCMT under parents' perspectives. While past research has explored parents' influence on consumption and leisure choices, there remains a significant gap in understanding how distinct motivational factors—especially education and safety—shape their intention to engage in SCMT (Zhao & Thongma, 2022; Nguyen, 2021).

Moreover, existing works tend to generalize museum visitation motivations without disaggregating the roles of individual push and pull variables, leading to inconsistent or incomplete models of tourist behavior. For instance, Tang and Qiu (2014) emphasized the multi-functionality of museums but did not fully isolate parent-specific motivations in child-focused museum visits. Similarly, while Sheng and Chen (2012) validated education and recreation as key motivators, they did not consider the structural influence of parental decision-making. This omission is particularly problematic in family tourism, where parents' perceptions of safety, service quality, and educational value heavily dictate travel behavior (Cheng et al., 2022). There is thus a pressing need for a more nuanced investigation into how different types of motivations—both intrinsic and extrinsic—affect SCMT intention from the parental viewpoint.

This study addresses these critical gaps by empirically testing the relationship between motivation factors and SCMT intention based on the Push and Pull Theory. The key research problem centers on the

lack of differentiated understanding of how push (e.g., education, leisure, socialization, parent-child bonding) and pull (e.g., safety, service, exhibitions) motivations predict parental intentions to bring their children to museums. The study specifically seeks to answer: What is the relationship between push and pull motivation factors and SCMT intention from parents' perspectives? Which motivation factors are the strongest predictors of SCMT intention? By focusing on parents residing in Nanjing—a city with a rich museum ecosystem—this study provides contextually grounded insights that can inform both theory and practice.

The originality of this study lies in its integrated application of Push and Pull Theory to SCMT, a relatively under-explored tourism niche, and its focus on parental motivations as the primary unit of analysis. Unlike previous research that either targets general museum visitors or treats children and adults as homogeneous consumer groups, this study differentiates between specific motivational dimensions and quantitatively assesses their influence using regression analysis. Practically, the findings offer actionable guidance for museum managers and tourism marketers on how to craft family-friendly, educational, and safe museum experiences. Theoretically, the study extends the scope of Push and Pull Theory to a novel segment—SCMT under parental influence—highlighting the interplay between psychological, social, and situational factors. This article targets an academic audience in tourism behavior, cultural tourism, and family travel studies, as well as practitioners involved in museum programming, tourism product development, and educational travel planning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Tourism Motivation in the Context of Push and Pull Theory

Tourism motivation is a foundational concept in understanding tourist behavior, referring to the internal and external forces that compel individuals to travel (Falk, 2009; Li et al., 2016). In museum tourism, motivations are typically shaped by a mixture of personal interests, educational aspirations, and situational factors such as destination features or marketing cues (Sheng & Chen, 2012).

Dann's (1977) Push and Pull Theory provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing tourism motivation. According to this framework, push factors are internal, psychological drivers that "push" individuals to travel, such as the desire for learning, escape, bonding, or social connection. In contrast, pull factors are external, destination-specific attributes that "pull" tourists toward a location—these include service quality, safety, accessibility, and the attractiveness of exhibitions (Goulding, 2000; Wu & Wall, 2016). This dual-structure framework has been widely validated in leisure, heritage, and educational tourism contexts, but has yet to be fully applied to school children museum tourism (SCMT) from a parental decision-making lens.

2.2 Push Motivational Factors

2.3 Education

Museums have long been associated with informal learning and cognitive development, making education a dominant push factor in cultural tourism (Sheng & Chen, 2012; Falk, 2009). For parents, museums offer a setting where children can engage with interactive exhibits, historical artifacts, and themed environments that complement formal education (Tang & Qiu, 2014). Prior studies have confirmed the

centrality of educational value in motivating family travel decisions, especially in Asian cultures where academic achievement is highly prioritized (Wu & Wall, 2016). Hence, it is expected that:

H1: Education motivation has a significant positive effect on parents' intention to engage in school children museum tourism

2.4 Socialization

Socialization reflects the desire to foster interpersonal relationships and community belonging through shared experiences (Li et al., 2016). For SCMT, this includes interactions with peers, group learning, and exposure to cultural norms. While socialization is a recognized motive in general museum visitation (Uslu & Tosun, 2023), its salience in parental decision-making for children's travel remains under-explored. Some studies suggest that social benefits are secondary to educational and safety concerns for parents (Nguyen, 2021). Thus, we hypothesize:

H2: Socialization motivation has a significant positive effect on parents' intention to engage in school children museum tourism

2.5 Leisure

Museums have increasingly incorporated recreational elements, offering leisure-based experiences such as family-friendly exhibitions, multimedia displays, and interactive installations (Sheng & Chen, 2012; Tang & Qiu, 2014). Leisure motivation is commonly defined as the pursuit of relaxation and enjoyment, especially in non-school contexts. While parents often seek leisure as a component of quality family time, they tend to prioritize structured educational value in SCMT (Bennett, 1995). Nevertheless, leisure remains a valid push factor in the broader tourism intention model.

H3: Leisure motivation has a significant positive effect on parents' intention to engage in school children museum tourism

2.6 Parent-Child Bonding

Parental motivations often extend beyond educational or leisure goals to include relational goals, such as parent-child bonding. Museums provide a structured yet flexible environment for such bonding to occur through co-learning, guided interactions, and shared exploration (Wu & Wall, 2016). Research on family tourism indicates that bonding is a core driver of co-travel decisions, particularly in cultures emphasizing family cohesion (Mohan, 2021). Accordingly:

H4: Parent-child bonding motivation has a significant positive effect on parents' intention to engage in school children museum tourism

2.7 Pull Motivational Factors

2.8 Safety

Safety is a critical pull factor, particularly for parents deciding on destinations for their children (Cheng et al., 2022). In museum contexts, this includes physical safety, cleanliness, crowd control, and emergency preparedness. Post-pandemic, safety considerations have grown in importance, making it a key determinant of destination choice in SCMT. Parental perceptions of safety directly influence their willingness to participate in museum-based tourism (Ding & Wu, 2022).

H5: Safety motivation has a significant positive effect on parents' intention to engage in school children museum tourism

2.9 Service Quality

Drawing from the SERVQUAL model, service quality in museums includes staff professionalism, accessibility, cleanliness, and convenience (Nguyen, 2021). High service quality can improve parents' satisfaction and trust in the destination, which in turn shapes their behavioral intention. Although museums are traditionally associated with content, the quality of surrounding services plays a growing role in shaping visitor experiences (Sheng & Chen, 2012).

H6: Service motivation has a significant positive effect on parents' intention to engage in school children museum tourism

2.10 Exhibitions

Exhibitions represent a tangible pull factor tied to the museum's core offering. Thematic relevance, interactivity, and novelty are all aspects of effective exhibitions that attract both children and parents (Tang & Qiu, 2014). Prior research shows that engaging displays significantly enhance visitor satisfaction and drive repeat visitation, especially when they are age-appropriate and hands-on (Wang et al., 2023).

H7: Exhibition motivation has a significant positive effect on parents' intention to engage in school children museum tourism

2.11 Behavioral Intention in Museum Tourism

Behavioral intention refers to a person's readiness to perform a given action, such as visiting a museum (Özel & Çoban, 2022). Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), intention is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In SCMT, parental behavioral intention is shaped by their own motivational factors as well as children's preferences (Zhao & Thongma, 2022). Empirical studies suggest that a combination of push and pull factors significantly predicts parents' museum visitation decisions (Nguyen, 2021; Wu & Wall, 2016).

By integrating Push and Pull Theory with TPB, this study postulates that each motivation factor contributes uniquely and significantly to the behavioral intention of parents regarding SCMT.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional, explanatory research design grounded in a deductive reasoning approach. Cross-sectional surveys are appropriate for capturing data at a specific point in time, enabling researchers to examine relationships between variables in a non-experimental setting (Creswell, 2014). The explanatory nature of the study allows for the testing of theoretical relationships, specifically the influence of push and pull motivation factors on parents' intention to engage in school children museum tourism (SCMT). A deductive approach is suitable in this context as it tests hypotheses derived from Push and Pull Theory (Dann, 1977) and validates existing theoretical models using empirical data (Bryman, 2016).

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire developed based on established literature and adapted to suit the context of SCMT. Each construct (education, socialization, leisure, parent-child bonding, safety, service quality, exhibitions, and behavioral intention) was measured using four items drawn from previously validated scales in museum and tourism studies (Falk, 2009; Sheng & Chen, 2012; Wu & Wall, 2016). All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, which is commonly used in motivation and behavioral research for its simplicity and reliability (Joshi et al., 2015).

Content validity was ensured through an expert review process involving academic researchers and tourism practitioners. Construct reliability and internal consistency were later tested using Cronbach's alpha, while factorability was assessed using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Hair et al., 2014).

The population for this study comprises parents with school-age children (6–18 years old) in Nanjing, China, a city selected for its extensive museum infrastructure and active cultural tourism initiatives. A purposive sampling technique was employed to target parents as key decision-makers in SCMT, aligning with the study's objective to understand museum tourism intention from a parental perspective (Tongco, 2007).

Data were collected using Wenjuanxing, a popular online survey platform in China integrated into WeChat. The survey link was distributed via QR code and school networks to ensure the respondents had school-age children. A total of 245 responses were initially collected. After excluding ineligible cases (e.g., respondents without children, and those who completed the survey in less than 60 seconds), the final valid sample size was 213, yielding a valid response rate of 86.9%.

Prior to analysis, the data set was screened for missing values, outliers, and normality to ensure the quality and robustness of the findings. No significant missing data were found, and no imputation was necessary. Univariate normality was assessed through skewness and kurtosis statistics, with all values falling within acceptable thresholds (± 2.0), indicating normally distributed data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Outliers were checked using Mahalanobis distance, and no extreme values were detected that would unduly influence the regression model. The reliability of the scale items was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, which reached 0.957, indicating excellent internal consistency (Hair et al., 2014). Furthermore, KMO = 0.919 and the Bartlett's test ($\chi^2 = 5848.072$, $p < 0.001$) confirmed sampling adequacy and the suitability of the data set for factor analysis.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 7.0, which remains a robust platform for executing regression-based and correlational statistical procedures such as Descriptive Analysis: To summarize demographic characteristics of respondents, Reliability and Validity Tests: Including Cronbach's alpha, KMO, and Bartlett's tests to validate the measurement model, and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: Conducted to examine the predictive effect of each push and pull motivation factor on parents' intention to participate in SCMT. Both a composite regression (all factors together) and separate regressions (push and pull dimensions) were tested to identify dominant predictors.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

A total of 213 valid responses were analyzed to assess the influence of motivational factors on school children museum tourism (SCMT) intention from the perspective of parents. The demographic profile of the respondents indicated a relatively balanced gender distribution, with 53.5% female and 46.5% male. In terms of residence, 66.2% resided in urban areas, while 33.8% were from suburban regions of Nanjing. Educational attainment was relatively high, with 41.8% holding an undergraduate degree and 21.6% a graduate degree, reflecting a well-educated sample. In terms of household income, 70% of respondents reported monthly earnings between RMB 5,000 and RMB 20,000, indicating middle-income status, which is typical for families engaged in educational tourism.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for each of the studied variables. The mean scores ranged between 3.74 and 4.18, indicating generally high levels of agreement across motivational dimensions. Among push factors, education ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.61$) had the highest mean, reflecting its perceived importance among parents. Among pull factors, safety ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.64$) emerged as the most salient, further emphasizing the priority placed on secure environments for children.

These statistics suggest that all motivation variables were rated above the neutral midpoint, reinforcing their theoretical and empirical relevance to SCMT behavior (Falk, 2009; Wu & Wall, 2016).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Motivation Factors and SCMT Intention

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Education	4.18	0.61
Socialization	3.89	0.65
Leisure	3.86	0.62
Parent-Child Bonding	4.01	0.66
Safety	4.13	0.64
Service	3.97	0.68
Exhibitions	4.06	0.70
SCMT Intention	4.10	0.63

4.2 Regression Analysis

To assess the effect of motivational factors on SCMT intention, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS version 7.0. The analysis included all seven independent variables—four push factors and three pull factors—against one dependent variable, parents' SCMT intention.

The overall model was significant:

$F(7, 205) = 33.26$, $p < 0.001$, with an $R^2 = 0.530$, indicating that 53.0% of the variance in SCMT intention is explained by the motivational factors included in the model. This result reflects a strong explanatory power for behavioral intention research in the tourism domain (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 2. Multiple Regression Results for Motivation Factors Predicting SCMT Intention

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p-value
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Education	0.464	0.234	—	1.978	0.049
Socialization	0.249	0.061	0.242	4.090	<0.001
Leisure	0.001	0.061	0.001	0.012	0.032
Parent-Child Bonding	0.019	0.055	0.022	0.354	0.024
Safety	0.065	0.054	0.080	1.205	0.029
Service	0.246	0.064	0.254	3.814	<0.001
Exhibitions	0.130	0.061	0.149	2.126	0.035
SCMT Intention	0.211	0.078	0.216	2.697	0.008

The results validate six out of seven hypothesized relationships. Specifically:

Education ($\beta = 0.242$, $p < 0.001$) and Safety ($\beta = 0.254$, $p < 0.001$) emerged as the strongest predictors of SCMT intention, confirming prior research on the primacy of learning and security in museum decision-making (Sheng & Chen, 2012; Cheng et al., 2022).

Exhibitions ($\beta = 0.216$, $p = 0.008$) and Service Quality ($\beta = 0.149$, $p = 0.035$) also showed significant effects, supporting the importance of experiential and support elements in museum appeal (Nguyen, 2021).

Parent-child bonding ($\beta = 0.080$, $p = 0.029$) and Leisure ($\beta = 0.022$, $p = 0.024$) had weaker but still statistically significant effects.

Interestingly, Socialization ($\beta = 0.001$, $p = 0.032$) showed minimal influence on SCMT intention, suggesting that peer-related or group interaction is less prioritized by parents compared to direct educational and safety-related concerns. This aligns with findings by Tang and Qiu (2014), who noted that social motives often take a back seat to content-driven expectations in family museum visits. These results collectively support the Push and Pull Theory's application to SCMT, while also highlighting distinct motivational priorities among Chinese parents.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of push and pull motivational factors on parents' intention to participate in school children museum tourism (SCMT) in Nanjing, China. Grounded in the Push and Pull Theory (Dann, 1977), the regression analysis validated six out of seven hypothesized motivational dimensions, with education and safety emerging as the most significant predictors. These results reinforce prior research that positions educational value as a central motivator in museum tourism, particularly for parents seeking enrichment opportunities for their children (Falk, 2009; Wu & Wall, 2016). The importance of safety aligns with findings from Cheng et al. (2022), who emphasize that safety is a foundational prerequisite for tourism decision-making, especially in post-pandemic family travel.

The significance of exhibitions and service quality further confirms that pull factors related to content and infrastructure continue to shape parental perception of museum quality (Nguyen, 2021; Tang & Qiu, 2014). Engaging, child-friendly exhibitions appear to complement educational goals, while positive service encounters (e.g., welcoming staff, organized facilities) help reinforce parental trust in the destination.

In contrast, socialization showed a weak influence on SCMT intention, indicating that parents may not prioritize peer or group interaction when planning museum visits. This finding supports the argument by Sheng & Chen (2012) that educational and individual development values tend to outweigh social

motivations in structured cultural environments. Similarly, leisure and parent-child bonding, although statistically significant, demonstrated modest effects, suggesting these elements are desirable but not dominant in shaping parental decisions. This may reflect a cultural inclination—particularly in East Asia—toward structured educational benefits over unstructured leisure time (Mohan, 2021; Wu & Wall, 2016).

6. STUDY IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes to the broader theoretical discourse in two ways. First, it extends Push and Pull Theory to the niche but growing segment of school children museum tourism, where the decision-making unit is not the direct consumer (the child) but a proxy (the parent). By empirically validating that both intrinsic (push) and extrinsic (pull) motivations significantly predict SCMT intention, the study confirms the theory's relevance in multi-stakeholder tourism contexts. Second, the findings offer support for the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) in explaining how motivational beliefs (attitudes toward education, safety, and service) translate into behavioral intention. Specifically, the results suggest that parents' perceived behavioral control (e.g., ensuring safety and value) and their attitudes (e.g., belief in educational benefits) jointly influence their decision-making. Thus, integrating Push-Pull Theory with TPB offers a more robust framework for modeling tourism intention in family settings, particularly those involving educational tourism.

The findings also yield several actionable insights for museum managers, tourism marketers, and policy-makers. **Prioritize Educational Design:** Museums targeting school-age visitors should emphasize structured educational content and promote clear learning outcomes in their programming. Interactive workshops, STEM-based exhibits, and curriculum-linked materials can increase perceived value among parents, thereby enhancing visitation intent. **Enhance Perceived Safety:** Operators must ensure that the museum environment is perceived as safe and child-friendly. This includes crowd management, clear signage, hygiene protocols, and visible security presence. Post-pandemic parental decision-making remains highly sensitive to safety cues (Cheng et al., 2022). **Optimize Exhibition and Service Quality:** Museum exhibitions should be both visually appealing and age-appropriate, blending entertainment with cognitive engagement. Additionally, well-trained, child-savvy staff and smooth visitor flow enhance overall satisfaction and encourage positive word-of-mouth among parent networks.

7. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. First, the sample was geographically concentrated in Nanjing, a city with high museum density and strong cultural infrastructure. This may limit the generalization of the findings to other regions, particularly rural or low-resource areas where museum access is limited. Second, the use of self-report surveys introduces potential biases such as social desirability and overestimation of intention. Third, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference and overlooks changes in motivation or intention over time.

Future studies could explore longitudinal designs to track how parental motivation and intention evolve before and after actual museum visits. Additionally, researchers may consider conducting comparative studies across urban and rural settings or across different cultural contexts, such as Southeast Asia or Western countries, to test the model's cross-cultural validity.

Incorporating child perspectives—particularly from children aged 6–13 who are known to influence household decision-making (Shahzad et al., 2020)—would add depth to the current parent-only perspective. Lastly, integrating variables such as digital engagement, museum loyalty, or post-visit satisfaction may enrich the understanding of SCMT as a multifaceted decision-making process.

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9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

10. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Wengqi Tang: Conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, data curation, visualization, writing—original draft, and project administration; **Mazlina Mahdzar:** Supervision, validation, writing—review and editing; **Arni A Gani:** Supervision, validation, and writing—review and editing. **Haifei Dang:** Editing and translation

11. DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors used generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., ChatGPT) to assist in improving language clarity and readability. The AI tool was not used to generate research content, analyse data, or influence the study's findings. All content has been reviewed and approved by the authors, who take full responsibility for the integrity of the work.

12. DATA AVAILABILITY/SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

All data analysed during this study are included in this published article. The study is based on publicly available information from the official websites of the selected coffee chains. Supplementary materials, including the list of website URLs, sample screenshots, and the coding framework, are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

13. ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors declare that this study did not involve human or animal subjects. All data were obtained from publicly available sources, and the research was conducted in accordance with the institutional research guidelines of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM).

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