# Investigating tourism experiences and attention allocation of outbound tourists through the lens of the two-factor theory: A grounded theory analysis of Chinese tourists' travelogues in Malaysia

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

A top-notch travel experience is vital for boosting a destination's competitiveness. Outbound travel notes of online travel agency capture tourists' experiences and emotions during their journeys, providing valuable insights for understanding tourist consumption behavior and improving tourism service policies. This study analyzes 1,012 travel blogs of Chinese tourists visiting Malaysia using grounded theory methodology. A dual-factor theoretical model is developed through open coding, spindle coding, and selective coding, illustrating the attention allocation problem of outbound tourists in their travel experiences. The study's hygiene factors comprise basic features, management aspects, and transportation components, while motivational factors include cultural elements, resource considerations, emotional factors, media influences, and commercial aspects. Research findings indicate that outbound tourists prioritize motivational factors, such as interpersonal service attributes and inherent emotional components. These factors play a crucial role in stimulating travel motivation and crafting memorable experiences. Moreover, hygiene factors, like infrastructure and security conditions, also impact tourists' experiences and are crucial for reducing dissatisfaction among outbound travelers. These results provide fresh perspectives on the factors influencing outbound tourists' experiences and their focal points during trips. The findings have significant implications for public sectors and industry professionals in tourism. By addressing the motivating and hygiene factors important to outbound tourists, they can enhance and fine-tune tourism service policies, ultimately increasing destination competitiveness. Measures such as improving infrastructure, raising service quality, and amplifying cultural experiences at the destination can all contribute to better travel experiences for tourists.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Research background

With the continuous growth of the economy, per capita income and consumption levels have been steadily rising year after year, fueling people's desire to explore the world. Concurrently, the maturation of internet technology, ongoing enhancements to tourism information-sharing platforms [1], relative decreases in international travel costs, and the continuous easing of outbound tourism policies have further boosted people's inclination and engagement in outbound tourism. As China's economic and social standing improves and residents' consumption capacity strengthens, Chinese citizens have demonstrated a robust interest in traveling abroad. Consequently, the demand for outbound tourism in China has rapidly expanded, becoming one of the fastest-growing market sources [2,3] and a significant driving force in the global tourism industry [4]. Chinese outbound tourism presents distinct spatial orientation characteristics and exhibits a consistent growth pattern. Tourist destinations predominantly include Asian countries and regions, followed by Europe, the Americas, and Oceania. The scale of outbound tourism has surged from 10 million trips in 2000 to 155 million trips in 2019, with a corresponding continuous growth in outbound tourism consumption capacity. In 2019, Chinese outbound tourists spent over 133.8 billion US dollars. The flourishing development of China's outbound tourism demand has spawned a noteworthy area of study, concentrating on the experiences and attention allocation of outbound tourists, exemplified by Chinese travelers.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the tourism market, a trend of recovery and resurgence has become apparent since 2022. The "China Outbound Tourism Development Annual Report (2022–2023)" reveals that China suffered considerable losses in outbound tourism during the pandemic, with over 400 million fewer outbound tourists. As countries worldwide downgrade their COVID-19 prevention and control measures and continue to lift testing requirements for inbound travelers, the global tourism industry, particularly outbound tourism, is exhibiting distinct signs of revitalization. The United Nations World Tourism Organization's recently published World Tourism Barometer predicts that the total number of international tourists globally could bounce back to 80% to 95% of pre-pandemic levels in 2023, with international tourism in Europe and the Middle East likely to exceed pre-pandemic figures. In 2021, the number of outbound tourists from China was nearly 26 million, a decrease of 83% compared to 2019. With the relaxation of pandemic prevention and control protocols, Chinese tourists have displayed a noticeable shift in their willingness to travel abroad. According to data from China's Ctrip Travel Network, outbound tourism bookings during the 2023 Chinese New Year surged by 640% year-on-year, overseas hotel reservations increased more than fourfold, and cross-border flight orders grew over fourfold. Consequently, the global tourism market, particularly the outbound tourism sector, is on the ascent.

As the capabilities of online travel agency (OTA) platforms continue to advance, obtaining destination information, processing travel bookings, and sharing travelogues and reviews online have become common practices. This is particularly evident in the outbound tourism market, where web-based travel platforms have transcended geographical barriers and information hindrances between countries, ensuring seamless outbound travel channels. People have grown accustomed to sharing their travel experiences and insights, or researching tourism-related information via OTAs. As a result, traveler reviews and travelogue data have become essential factors influencing tourists' decision-making, positioning OTAs as a vital hub for travel information exchange. With the increasing acceptance of online reviews, user-generated content (UGC) has emerged as a trustworthy and invaluable information source for both travelers and hotels. Consequently, promoting UGC on travel websites fosters the spread of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). At the same time, with the expanding internet user base and activity levels [5], e-WOM has assumed a critical role in shaping the perceptions of outbound tourists [6].

## 1.2. Research gap and research objectives

As the global economy progresses into the experience economy era, fueled by social, economic, and technological advancements, high-quality tourism experiences that meet or even surpass tourists' expectations establish a strong foundation for the enduring economic success of tourism businesses. Consequently, under the context of the high-quality development of the tourism industry, enhancing the quality of tourism experiences undoubtedly becomes one of the primary objectives for tourism destination development. The fundamental issue in improving tourism experiences is identifying and defining tourists' experiences. Particularly in the realm of outbound tourism, significant differences in language and lifestyle habits among tourists from various countries result in a lack of precise understanding of their motivations and demands. Existing research on outbound tourism primarily concentrates on policies [5], demands [7], tourist behavior [8], and the effects of outbound tourism [9]. Research on tourist experiences primarily concentrates on various aspects including the definition of tourist experiences [10,11,12], categorization of sensations [13], constitutive elements [14,15], influencing factors [6,16,17], and measurement methodologies [18,19,20,21]. The focus of outbound tourists is extensive and uncertain, and it differs substantially from that of domestic tourism. However, existing research has seldom focused on the travel experiences of outbound tourists. Additionally, scholars, based on their diverse academic backgrounds, have proposed questions concerning outbound tourism and travel experiences, effectively advancing the progress of tourism management research. Nonetheless, the factors influencing the travel experiences of outbound tourists, how to measure these factors, as well as the interrelations and inherent variances amongst these factors, have not yet been elucidated. These are the issues that our research urgently seeks to address. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to bridge this gap. Specifically, by employing a grounded theory analysis of travelogue texts from Chinese tourists visiting Malaysia, this article investigates the experience and attention distribution of outbound tourists based on the two-factor theory. This research holds significant implications for identifying the consumption behavior of outbound tourists. This research can effectively illustrate the constitutive factors that affect the attention allocation of outbound tourists during their travel experiences. Moreover, it further explicates the complex relationships and inherent disparities among these influencing

factors. As such, our study provides a valuable reference for research on tourists' travel experiences. By enriching the discussion on tourism experiences and consumption behavior, this study benefits public sectors in tourism by offering a comprehensive understanding from the tourist's perspective, and aids in pinpointing key aspects to enhance the travel experiences of outbound tourists, and extends its practical value to other developed countries in the tourism industry, offering a valuable reference for formulating and refining cross-border tourism policies.

### 1.3. Research contributions

The main research contributions of this article can be summarized in the following points. First, this article provides an enlightening contribution to the theoretical study of tourism experiences, demonstrating referential theoretical value through literature review and analysis. The findings indicate that based on the two-factor theory, outbound tourists pay attention to both hygiene factors, including basic characteristics, management factors, and transportation factors, as well as motivators such as cultural factors, resource factors, emotional factors, media factors, and commercial factors during their travel. These elements jointly form the attention distribution map of outbound tourists' experiences. Second, the study of outbound tourists' experiences and attention distribution serves as a crucial research direction for understanding tourism consumption behavior, strengthening our grasp of complex consumption behavior and broadening the depth of existing literature on the subject. Third, the two-factor theoretical framework, derived from grounded theory, elucidates the constitutive factors of outbound tourists' experiences. This framework provides a more applicable and valuable reference for the public sectors in tourism to formulate differentiated and targeted tourism service policies. It offers theoretical support and practical guidance for optimizing cross-border tourism services and further enhancing service quality in the public sectors in tourism.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Outbound tourism

Scholars have conducted research on the outbound tourism market, which can be divided into macro analysis and micro analysis. Macro analysis focuses mainly on outbound tourism policy [14,15], demand [7], and effects [9], while micro analysis mainly focuses on outbound tourism behavior [8]. Policies have positive implications for the development of the tourism industry, and effective operation of the tourism industry depends on good policy design and arrangement [22]. Lockhart [23] believes that the national environment is an important influencing factor for implementing tourism policies, while Baum [24] believes that a country's economic environment is an important factor in tourism policy development and implementation.

The factors that influence outbound tourism demand are the logical starting point for outbound tourism research, and research on these factors is mainly based on the economic demand model, exploring the effects of institutional factors [25], industry factors [26], and population characteristics [27] on outbound tourism demand. For example, Wang believes that cultural resources and comfortable climate are key motivators for outbound tourism demand [26], which also stimulates people's curiosity. The tourist behavior of outbound tourists is mainly reflected in travel motivation [28] and tourism experience [29]. The two reflect the intrinsic driving factors and actions of outbound tourists. Travel motivation is the basic determining factor for tourist behavior, and exploring the motivations of outbound tourists is aimed at answering questions such as why they choose outbound tourism and why they choose specific tourist destinations. Relaxation, novelty-seeking, knowledge acquisition, reputation enhancement [30], cultural background [31], and technological factors such as smartphones [32] are all important motivators influencing outbound tourism. As an effective medium for disseminating outbound tourism information, OTA has experienced rapid growth. Book.com, Trip Advisor, Trivago.com, Ctrip, Qunar.com have emerged as primary portals for accessing outbound tourism information, purchasing tickets online, and posting online reviews [33]. Through exploring online review texts, Liu et al. [34] discovered that satisfaction levels can vary for the same user depending on the travel mode adopted. Fazzolari and Petrocchi [35] collected online reviews spanning eight years for a tourist site in Italy, indicating that relevant tourism platforms can extract valuable information from online reviews to formulate highly targeted action strategies. Dolan et al. [36] argued that negative reviews posted by tourists on social media should be given more attention, as these critiques or complaints constitute an interactive value-formation process.

Previous research has also discussed issues such as outbound tourism policy, demand, and motivation, and has provided valuable theoretical and practical contributions. However, there are few studies that focus on the attention allocation of outbound tourists themselves, and there is a lack of in-depth analysis of the internal emotional cognition and behavioral motivations of outbound tourists. Therefore, based on the perspective of attention allocation of outbound tourists during the tourism process, this study focuses on the core elements and behavioral logic that affect the tourism experience of outbound tourists.

### 2.2. Tourist experience

Currently, there is no unified definition of tourist experience in academia. Ryan believes that tourist experience includes leisure activities that involve entertainment or learning [11]. Tourist experience research covers themes such as tourist motivation, tourist interactions, authenticity, and experience quality evaluation. Some scholars define tourist experience from the perspective of destination marketers or the tourism industry, viewing tourists as consumers, and the economic and marketing significance of tourism activities lies in their consumption and expenditure [10,12]. Quan and Wang [37] believe that tourists travel to experience something different from their daily lives, which they refer to as a peak experience. However, McCabe [13] believes that tourist experience, as a

whole, includes both peak tourist experiences and ancillary tourist experiences such as eating, sleeping, and playing. The latter is essential to the existence of the former. Dittmer and Griffin [14] argued that food consumption is not only a means of creating income for the destination but also an essential component of the tourist experience. Urry [15] regards tourist experience as a special type of gaze that incorporates the power of the tourism industry and mass media institutions and is trained and shaped by culture, values, and mainstream discourse.

Tourist experience is feedback on the tourist's travel process and influences their post-trip evaluation and behavioral intentions. Factors such as personal characteristics of tourists [15,16,17], tourism modes [38], security measures [6], and tourism resources [39] also affect tourists' travel experience. For example, different tourism modes directly impact tourists' travel experience. Caber et al. [40] believe that professional tour guides play an important role in tourist satisfaction and the success of travel agency businesses because they directly interact with tourists and are responsible for managing tourism. Lim et al. [38] suggest that the services provided by traditional group tours may not meet tourists' interests, and they may wish to travel with companions. Therefore, new tourism modes, such as personalized group tours, need to be developed on the basis of traditional group tours. In addition, Moscardo and Pearce [29] argue that tourism intermediaries and transport suppliers also promote tourist experiences. Regarding the measurement of tourist experiences, Grönroos [41] was among the first to define, from a theoretical perspective, the concept of service quality based on tourist perceptions and the basic measurement model of customer satisfaction. Hui et al. [19] integrated the concept of the expectation-disconfirmation paradigm, employing a conceptual model to evaluate tourist satisfaction across different visitor groups. Lee et al. [42] utilized the LISREL program to conduct confirmatory factor analysis and SEM model analysis, exploring tourists' satisfaction experiences with travel resources and their tendency to recommend them. Choi et al. [43] used content analysis to study internet text, treating high-frequency feature words in the sample as indicators for measuring the image of tourism destinations. In addition, grounded theory is a significant method in tourism experience research. Grounded theory was first proposed by Glaser and Strauss [44]. It is a qualitative research method that does not propose theoretical hypotheses prior to field investigation but is rooted in empirical data and constructs theories through standardized and rigorous research procedures [18,45]. As experience is one of the most important application fields of grounded theory [46], and tourism experience is at the core of fundamental theoretical research in tourism studies, the application of grounded theory in tourism experience research has become increasingly widespread [20,21,47, 48].

Previous research has provided in-depth explanations of tourist experiences, applied various research methodologies to measure tourist experiences and analyzed factors that affect tourist experiences from various levels. However, as the factors that affect tourist experiences are multifaceted and complex, there is little research that analyzes the composition of the factors and internal differences that affect tourist experiences. Therefore, this article focuses on exploring the relationship and internal differences among the factors that affect tourists' travel experience, particularly during outbound tourism.

### 2.3. The tourist experience of outbound tourists under the two-factor theory

Satisfaction is a psychological feature, while dissatisfaction is a physiological feature [49]. The two-factor theory proposed by the famous American psychologist Herzberg was initially applied to the study of employee satisfaction in enterprises [50], where hygiene factors can only eliminate people's dissatisfaction but not create satisfaction, and only motivational factors can make people feel satisfied. Emotion plays a significant role in the process of recollection, and travel narratives are imbued with intense emotional significance [51]. This emotional significance reflects the deep-seated feelings of tourists' satisfaction cognition. Arasli et al. [52] highlighted the importance of identifying service perceptions of satisfied and dissatisfied customers. Based on this theory, Noe and Francis [53] and Uysal et al. [54] divided the factors influencing customer satisfaction into operational factors and expressive factors, in order to measure the quality of travel experience. With the promotion of high-quality tourism development, scholars have also continuously delved into the study of travel experiences. Some scholars have divided travel experiences into peak travel experiences and auxiliary travel experiences based on tourists' travel motivation and experience goals [13,37]. Olorunsola et al. [51] analyzed the general trends of tourist experiences and the process of forming higher and lower satisfaction experience cognitions from the perspective of tourists. Alegre [55] further expanded the factors influencing customer satisfaction into three factors: basic factors, excitement factors, and performance factors. Basic factors are factors that only lead to customer dissatisfaction. Excitement factors are factors that do not reduce satisfaction when not provided, but can increase customer satisfaction when provided. Performance factors are factors that may either lead to customer dissatisfaction or increase customer satisfaction. Woodside et al. [56] believes that a travel experience is a personal past event related to travel that is so intense that it enters long-term memory, and when the travel experience is continuously remembered, it will also have a huge impact on the behavioral intention of potential customers, forming a memorable travel experience (MTE).

Existing research has systematically analyzed and theoretically constructed the factors that affect customers' travel experiences based on the two-factor theory. However, when existing literature subdivides the factors that affect customers' travel experiences into two or three factors, it has not defined whether this type of travel experience belongs to outbound or domestic tourism. Due to the influence of language and living habits, both have an important impact on the formation of travel experiences. In addition, existing literature has not analyzed and compared the internal differences in the factors that influence customers' travel experiences. In view of this situation, this study focuses on the travel experiences and attention allocation of outbound tourists, filling a gap in existing research.

## 3. Research design

### 3.1. Theoretical underpinnings

This study employs the dual-factor theory to interpret the travel experiences and attention allocation of outbound tourists. The dual-factor theory, proposed by the renowned American psychologist Herzberg, was initially applied in research on employee satisfaction [50], posited that motivational factors are those that can lead to employee satisfaction, while hygiene factors are those that can eliminate employee dissatisfaction. Since satisfaction is a psychological characteristic, while dissatisfaction is a physiological one [49], Herzberg argued that hygiene factors can only eliminate dissatisfaction but cannot create satisfaction. Only motivational factors can bring about a sense of satisfaction. Building on Noe and Francis [53], Alegre and Garau [55], Woodside et al. [56] and Uysal et al. [54], who applied the dual-factor theory to the tourism industry and satisfaction research, this study uses the dual-factor theory to analyze the experiences and attention allocation of Chinese tourists traveling to Malaysia. This helps to explain the interrelationships and internal variations among factors influencing the travel experiences of outbound tourists.

### 3.2. Research methods

Grounded theory was jointly proposed by Glaser and Strauss [44] in the 1960s. It inherited the tradition of positivism and completed theoretical construction through continuous and systematic comparison of empirical materials. Grounded theory emphasizes constructing theory from raw data, and the core is the continuous comparison of concepts and categories [45], especially suitable for exploring micro, action-oriented, and process-oriented problems. Hood [18] and Strauss [57] both emphasized the focus on process in grounded theory. Through continuously coding, inducting and comparing original materials such as interviews, newspapers, policy texts, etc., grounded theory extracts and generates theoretical problems, forming a process of continuous evolution from empirical and substantive theory to formal theory. With the increasing application of grounded theory, and the influence of phenomenology, postmodernism, and other schools of thought, internal differences have emerged, developing into three major schools: the classic grounded theory school represented by Glaser and Strauss [44], the programmatic grounded theory school represented by Strauss and Corbin [58], and the constructivist grounded theory school represented by Charmaz [59] with ongoing debates between the different schools. This study adopts Charmaz's viewpoint, believing that the objectivity of theory is paramount, while also emphasizing that neither the subjectivity of individuals can be overstated nor ignored.

The purpose of this study is to explore the attention allocation of Chinese outbound tourists during their travel experience in Malaysia using Grounded Theory methodology. The use of Grounded Theory methodology was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, tourism experience is one of the most important application areas of Grounded Theory [46], and tourism experience research is well-suited to this method. Secondly, attention allocation during tourism experience is a core research area in tourism studies, but there is currently no mature theoretical system for studying the attention allocation of outbound tourists. Grounded Theory offers a useful method to explore this phenomenon. Thirdly, traditional research methods, such as questionnaires, may set boundaries for tourists' psychological activities and behavior processes, which may not fully reveal the actual and complete attention allocation of tourists. Grounded Theory methodology, with its open-ended data collection and coding, can avoid this problem.

### 3.3. Sample selection and sources of information

Outbound tourism has become a common way of travel for people, and Malaysia, with its unique tropical islands and coastal scenery and other rich tourism resources, has become an important choice for Chinese citizens' outbound tourism, with China also becoming a major source of tourists for Malaysia. From January to September 2019, the number of Chinese tourists to Malaysia reached 2.4 million, a year-on-year increase of 5.7%. As the number of Chinese outbound tourists continues to increase, their post-travel reviews can fully reflect their real feelings during outbound travel. At the same time, Malaysia, as a significant international tourism market with a mature tourism service system and strong tourism competitiveness, is capable of attracting tourists from China and worldwide. This provides effective support for accumulating more authentic and diverse tourism evaluations. Based on this, selecting travelogues published by Chinese citizens after traveling to Malaysia on OTA as the research object can reflect the core tourism experience and focus of Chinese outbound tourists.

The data for this article comes from the travelogues published on Ctrip, a global leading one-stop travel platform, by Chinese citizens. Ctrip was founded in 1999 and went public on NASDAQ in December 2003 and on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in April 2021. Its website has a wide coverage of travelogue content, spans a long period of time, and has high data quality, which can effectively support the research in this article. The author searched for 1,133 relevant online travelogues using the keyword "Malaysia" and finally selected 1,012 travelogues as the data source for this article based on actual content. The coding, extraction, and comparison of travelogues is a repeated and cyclic process until the content of the travelogues no longer produces new concepts, reaching information saturation, and stopping the data sorting work. The selected travelogue data covers different travel times, different travel destinations, different amounts of expenditure, and different travel companions, and has good representativeness. At the same time, compared with the simple expression of positive and negative emotional attitudes in travel reviews, the travelogue content selected in this article can identify the areas of focus of tourist attention during travel and provide more targeted research references for studying the tourism experience and attention allocation of outbound tourists.

The statistical characteristics of the obtained travelogue text are as follows. The travelogues published by Chinese tourists on Ctrip for traveling to Malaysia cover the years from 2018 to 2023, with the most travelogues published in 2019, reaching 436. Due to the

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of travelogue publications sharply decreased from 2020 to 2022. The average number of days for Chinese tourists to travel to Malaysia is 6.8 days, and the per capita consumption is 5,918.1 yuan. As Malaysia has a tropical rainforest climate, with an average annual temperature between 26 °C and 30 °C, the choice of travel season by Chinese tourists is relatively evenly distributed, but the proportion of travel during spring and summer is higher, accounting for 29.6% and 28.6%, respectively. As the tourism characteristics of Malaysia are mainly tropical style, ocean islands, and entertainment experiences, Chinese tourists tend to travel to Malaysia with friends or partners, with the highest proportion of travel with friends, accounting for 55.2%. Regarding the choice of destination cities, Chinese tourists prefer Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kota Kinabalu, and Semporna, with the highest proportion of choosing to travel to Kuala Lumpur, accounting for 18.8%. This is mainly because Kuala Lumpur is the capital and largest city of Malaysia and is a highly influential international metropolis in Southeast Asia with high international recognition. At the same time, Kuala Lumpur International Airport is the main choice of airport for flights between China and Malaysia, with convenient transportation. The statistical characteristics of the number of travelogues, average per capita consumption, and travel days over the years are shown in Fig. 1. The statistical characteristics of travel seasons, travel companions, and destination cities are shown in Fig. 2.

## 4. Research based on grounded theory

### 4.1. Research process

This study, based on the grounded theory approach, systematically analyzes 1,012 travelogues of tourists using the NVivo 12 Plus software. After completing the preliminary data collection, the study proceeds to the data analysis stage. Firstly, open coding is conducted on the textual materials, extracting concepts from the raw data and developing these concepts in terms of attributes and dimensions, forming initial categories. Then, during the axial coding phase, concepts are compared and validated repeatedly, refining and differentiating initial categories, exploring relationships and underlying logic between categories, and extracting main categories. In the selective coding phase, core categories that can encompass all other subcategories are identified from the main categories, and the relationships among core categories, main categories, and initial categories are established. Finally, by examining the theoretical saturation of five preselected travelogue texts, an attention allocation explanatory framework for outbound tourist experiences based on the two-factor theory is constructed.
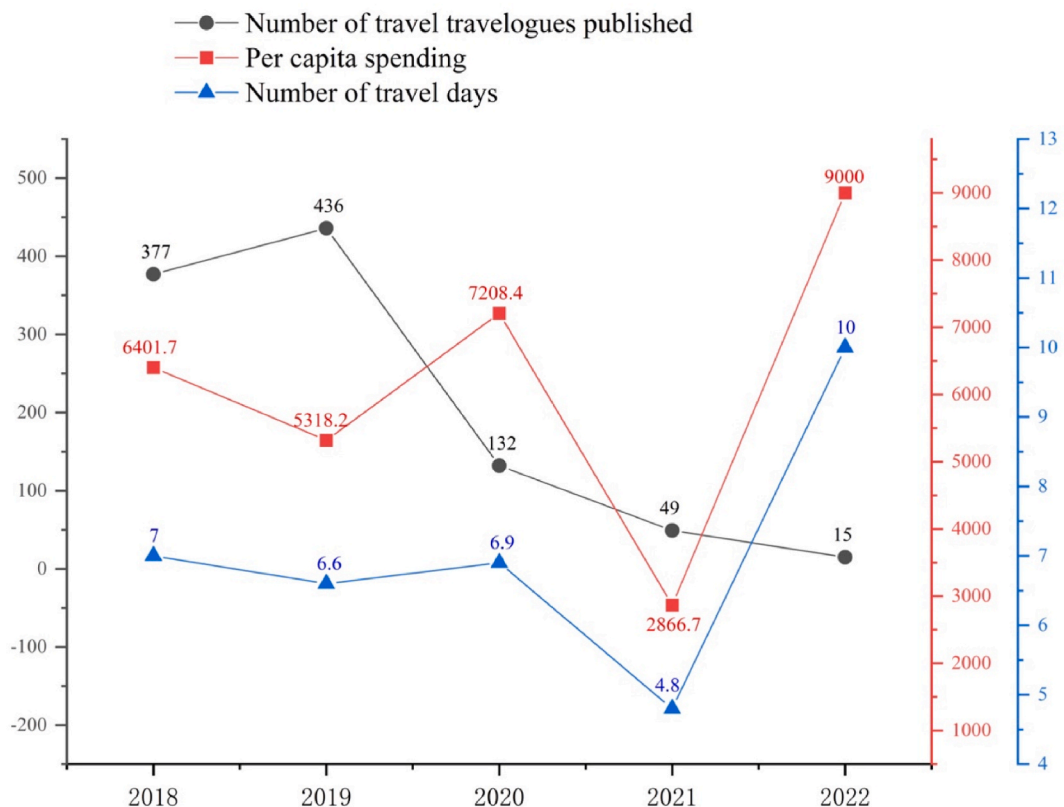


**Fig. 1.** Statistical characteristics of the number of travelogues, per capita consumption and travel days over the years.
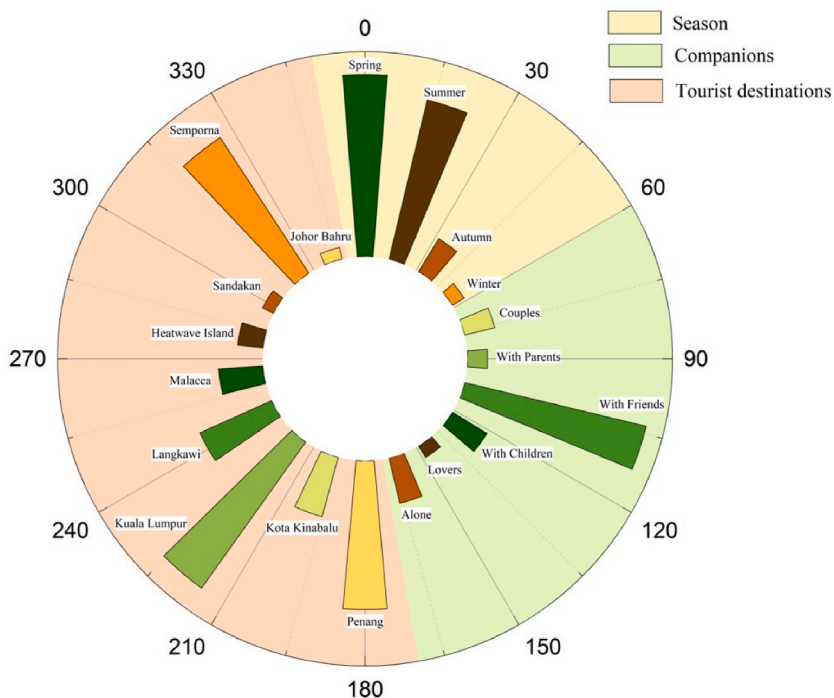
**Fig. 2.** Statistical characteristics of travel seasons, peers, and cities visited.

### 4.2. Open coding

Open coding is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing textual materials. During this stage, the raw materials are thoroughly analyzed. After excluding content unrelated to the research topic or containing contradictory statements, 1,012 travelogue texts of Chinese tourists visiting Malaysia were imported into the NVivo 12 Plus software, and the auto-coding feature generated 10,601 raw statements. The coded texts must be related to travel experiences, with each description counting as a single reference point. According to the research needs, the study further identified the connotations of the organized raw statements' concepts. Eventually, after eliminating initial concepts with fewer than three reference points, a total of 1,041 initial concepts and 50 initial categories were summarized, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**
Spindle coding results.

| Code/Serial Number | Typical Node Data Sheet | Code (Reference Points) | Initial Concept | Code (Reference Points) | Initial Scope |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AA23/3 | Kuching is also a coastal city, which is about 35 km away from the coast. | AA23(3) | Sea Town | AA(305) | Urban Characteristics |
| AA24/4 | This "smart garden city" retains the essence of Malaysia's traditional heritage. | AA24(14) | Garden City | | |
| AA21/5 | Today, Penang is already a metropolis reflecting the unique feelings of the East and the West, known as the "emerald of the Indian Ocean". | AA21(5) | Metropoles | | |
| AB16/3 | Malaysia is a non-tipping country, so there is no need to tip when staying in a hotel. | AB16(3) | Non-Tip Countries | AB(102) | National Characteristics |
| AB13/8 | Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country. | AB13(8) | Nation-State | | |
| AB8/5 | Malaysia is an emerging economic country that has been booming since the 1990s. | AB8(4) | Economic Countries | | |
| … … | | | | | |
| BX1/1 | The most convenient thing here is the Wechat that can add the service center. | BX1(6) | Service Center | BX(70) | Commercial Service |
| BX6/2 | There are no hotels on the island and only resort or travel company arrangements, so there are not many visitors. | BX6(9) | Tour Operator | | |
| BX11/4 | The entrance is a little more shabby, but the two visitor centers function the same. | BX11(4) | The Visitor Center | | |

### 4.3. Spindle coding

By employing the axial coding method, the study explores the potential categories of open coding, further refining and distinguishing the coding results, and uncovering the relationships and underlying logic among various subcategories. Ultimately, based on the potential logical relationships between different subcategories and the paradigm model, the 50 initial categories were summarized into eight main categories. Among them, the coverage ratio of reference points for resource factors was the highest at 25.2%, followed by cultural factors and management factors, accounting for 22.3% and 15.4%, respectively. This indicates that the attention allocation of outbound tourists' travel experiences mainly focuses on the core tourism resources of the destination and the local management level. The details are shown in Table 2.

### 4.4. Selective coding

Selective coding is the process of refining and integrating primary categories at a higher level of abstraction, uncovering the core relationships that construct these primary categories. Specifically, by summarizing the storyline of all phenomena and continuously linking and comparing analyses, the core category that governs all primary categories is identified, forming an organized theoretical framework. The two-factor theory is widely applied in tourist satisfaction and travel experience quality studies, as it can be used to research people's satisfaction with a certain object. Based on the basic meanings of the two-factor theory and primary categories, this article identifies the typical logical relationships that exist within them. Basic characteristics, management factors, and transportation factors constitute the hygiene factors of outbound tourists' travel experience attention allocation. Hygiene factors have a fundamental guarantee role; their absence can affect tourists' travel experience but will not significantly increase memorable travel experiences. Cultural factors, resource factors, emotional factors, media factors, and commercial factors make up the motivating factors in the allocation of attention for outbound tourists' travel experiences. Motivating factors are the core contributing factors to enhance tourist satisfaction, but their absence will not lead to significant dissatisfaction among tourists. The two-factor theory model of outbound tourist attention allocation is shown in Fig. 3.

### 4.5. Theoretical saturation test

A theoretical saturation test was conducted on the travelogue text content of five pre-collected outbound tourist travelogues. Through open coding set analysis, no new concepts or logical axes emerged from the collected data. The existing initial concepts, initial categories, and primary categories encompass the information within the test data, and no new structural relationships were found. This indicates that the theoretical analysis of attention allocation for outbound tourist travel experiences based on the travelogue content is stable. After going through the three stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, the 1,041 initial concepts and 50 initial categories obtained have covered the essential elements for constructing the theory. This demonstrates that the two-factor theory model of attention allocation for outbound tourist travel experiences has reached theoretical saturation.

### 4.6. Theoretical model interpretation of outbound tourists' experience attention allocation

Applying the two-factor theory perspective to the field of outbound tourism, the core influencing factors impacting outbound tourists' travel experiences consist of hygiene factors and motivation factors. Hygiene factors are basic conditions that support the smooth operation of tourism activities, such as the urban features, infrastructure, catering services, and transportation facilities of the destination, which provide essential services. Motivation factors are key elements that enhance unforgettable travel experiences for

**Table 2**
Spindle coding results.

| Main Categories | Reference Point Coverage Rate | Initial Categories |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Basic Features | 12.6% | Urban Features (AA), National Characteristics (AB), Political System (AC), City Squares (AD), Architectural Features (AE) |
| Management Factors | 15.4% | Catering Services (AF), Basic Facilities (AG), Accommodation Conditions (AH), Ticket Management (AI), Financial Services (AJ), Tour Guide Services (AK), Security and Protection (AL), Hotel Selection (AM) |
| Transportation Factors | 5.6% | Urban Transportation (AN), Outbound Travel Requirements (AO), Airport Facilities (AP) |
| Cultural Factors | 22.3% | Local Characteristics (AQ), Exotic Atmosphere (AR), Historical Sites (AS), Humanistic Concern (AT), Local Culture (AU), Daily Customs (AV), Chinese Gathering (AW) |
| Resource Factors | 25.2% | Climate and Environment (AX), Flora and Fauna (AY), Recreational Activities (AZ), Cultural Landscapes (BA), Tropical Ambience (BB), Island Resources (BC), Theme Parks (BD), Diving Experience (BE), Temples and Places (BF) |
| Emotional Factors | 12.2% | Emotional Attachment (BG), Culinary Experience (BH), Leisure Places (BI), Travel Impressions (BJ), Travel Expectations (BK), Emotional Involvement (BL), Travel Purpose (BM) |
| Media Factors | 2.9% | Social Media Check-ins (BN), Photographic Effects (BO), Film and Television Promotion (BP), Authoritative Evaluations (BQ), Travel Records (BR), Opinion Leaders (BS) |
| Commercial Factors | 3.9% | Consumer Domain (BT), Brand Recognition (BU), Handicraft Accessories (BV), Consumption Costs (BW), Commercial Services (BX) |
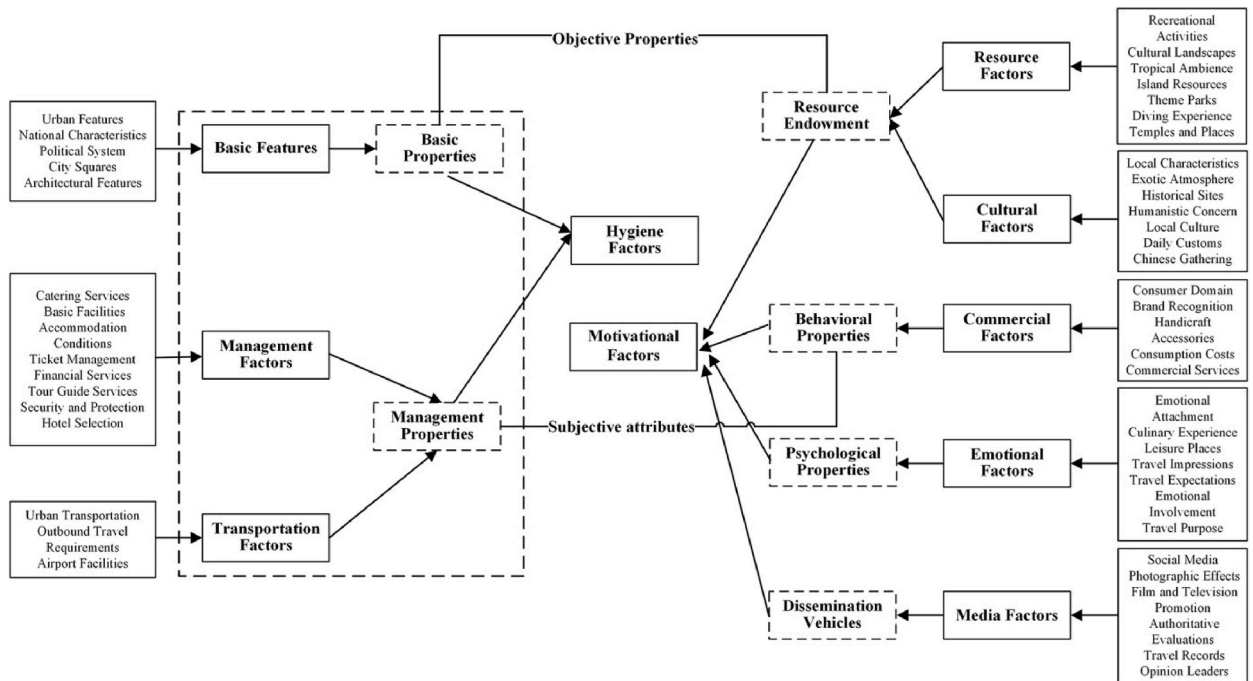
**Fig. 3.** The two-factor theory model of attention allocation in outbound tourists' travel experience.

outbound tourists, mainly reflected in differentiated tourism supply at the destination and serving as critical attractions that stimulate tourists' motivation. The study found that there were 3,288 reference points for hygiene factors in this article, including 1,230 basic feature reference points, 1,505 management element reference points, and 553 transportation factor reference points. There were 6,512 reference points for motivation factors, including 2,190 cultural factor reference points, 2,466 resource factor reference points, 1,191 emotional factor reference points, 283 media factor reference points, and 382 commercial factor reference points. Among them, motivation factors accounted for 66.4% of the total reference points, indicating that outbound tourists pay more attention to motivation factors in their travel experiences. Outbound tourists' travel motivations mainly stem from being attracted by the destination's tourism resources and cultural connotations, as well as their intrinsic emotional and spiritual needs. In the composition of motivation
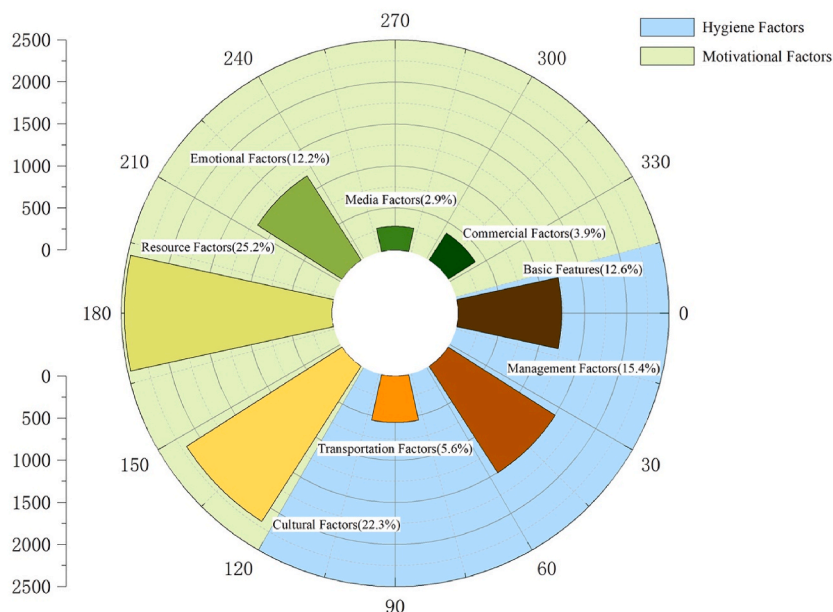


**Fig. 4.** The distribution map of reference point coverage.

factor reference points, the proportions of tourism resources and cultural connotations in the total reference points are 25.2% and 22.3%, respectively, while the proportion of emotional factors is 12.2%. The distribution map of reference point coverage is shown in Fig. 4.

In addition, among the eight axial codes formed through axial coding, basic features, resource factors, and cultural factors belong to objective attributes; management factors, transportation factors, and commercial factors belong to subjective attributes; emotional factors belong to psychological attributes; and media factors belong to communication carriers. Specifically, the basic attributes based on basic features in hygiene factors, as well as the resource endowments constituted by resource factors and cultural factors in motivation factors, belong to objective attributes, which have unique and unchangeable characteristics in the short term. The management attributes constituted by management factors and transportation factors in hygiene factors, as well as the behavioral attributes based on commercial factors in motivation factors, belong to subjective attributes, which have improvable and promotable characteristics. Along with the psychological attributes constituted by emotional factors in motivation factors and the communication carriers constituted by media factors, an interpretative logical framework for outbound tourists' travel experience attention allocation is constructed, in which objective and subjective attributes act on the target through communication carriers.

The objective attributes that influence outbound tourists' travel experiences are not easily changed in the short term within the scope of the public sectors in tourism. These attributes are the focus of outbound tourists and the core elements that influence their travel motivation. Therefore, improvements and optimization are required at a higher level to strengthen the tourism attraction of destinations. The subjective attributes that affect outbound tourists' travel experiences are the primary areas of concern for the public sectors in tourism, including both hygiene factors and motivation factors that influence travel experiences, which are comprehensive in nature. The public sectors in tourism have more significant room for improving tourism quality in subjective attributes, and the results are easily achievable. Communication carriers belong to media, through which objective and subjective attributes are transmitted to outbound tourists. Although they have third-party media characteristics, there is room for optimization. The quality of tourism information dissemination can be improved through enhancing communication efficiency, eliminating communication impurities, and optimizing communication information. Psychological attributes belong to the inner feelings of outbound tourists, influenced by multiple factors, including objective attributes, subjective attributes, and communication carriers, and have uncontrollable characteristics, resulting from the combined effects of these factors.

## 5. Discussions and conclusions

### 5.1. Discussions

According to the two-factor theory, this study has made an exploratory contribution to the literature by analyzing the hygiene factors and motivational factors that outbound tourists focus on during their travel experiences through grounded theory. The research results show that in the attention allocation of outbound tourists, hygiene factors account for 33.6%, and motivational factors account for 66.4%. Motivational factors are the core factors that stimulate outbound tourists' travel motivation and form the critical conditions for unforgettable travel experiences. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of Park et al. [60] and Singh and Alhamad [6]. Park et al. believe that when tourists embark on a trip, their impression is that they are visiting Paris or London, not a package tour offered by a travel company. Singh and Alhamad found that both satisfied and dissatisfied customers affect a hotel's online rating in religious destinations such as Mecca, but the impact of satisfied customers is slightly greater than that of dissatisfied customers. However, this viewpoint contradicts that of Olorunsola et al. [51]. In the research by Olorunsola et al. tourists expressed dissatisfaction with "carriages" and "animals" as heritage resources, which is contrary to the viewpoint in this article where Cultural Factors are seen as satisfactory motivational factors. Specifically, within the hygiene factors, the proportions of basic features, management factors, and transportation factors in attention allocation are 12.6%, 15.4%, and 5.6%, respectively. Within the motivational factors, the proportions of Cultural Factors, Resource Factors, Emotional Factors, Media Factors, and Commercial Factors in the attention allocation of outbound tourists are 22.3%, 25.2%, 12.2%, 2.9%, and 3.9% respectively. Outbound tourists primarily focus on the hygiene factors of basic characteristics and management elements, and the motivational factors of humanistic factors, resource factors, and emotional factors. This finding is similar to Balmer and Baum's view [61]. They believe that hotel facilities are one of the sources of dissatisfaction. Hotel facilities do not necessarily satisfy tourists, but they can cause dissatisfaction. We found that the hygiene factors of outbound tourists' travel experiences mainly depend on the destination's infrastructure and security conditions, while the motivational factors that form unforgettable travel experiences are mainly influenced by interpersonal service characteristics and intrinsic emotional factors. This conclusion coincides with those of Johnston [62], Chan and Baum [63]. Johnston believes that satisfaction is related to interpersonal service features, while dissatisfaction is related to operational or physical service features. Chan and Baum argue that satisfaction is related to intangible elements, while dissatisfaction is related to tangible ones. Furthermore, we also found that in the structural path of outbound tourists' attention allocation, the subjective and objective attributes of tourism resources affect tourists' emotional cognition through the media carriers. This finding further corroborates the role played by tourism websites, travel blogs, and other media carriers in tourism experiences as posited by Underberg-Goode and Parrish [64] and He et al. [65]. It also serves as a valuable extension to Crompton's research [66] on overall perception of tourism destinations and Pike's research [67] on multi-dimensional factors influencing tourism experiences. The above research results provide innovative insights for understanding the influencing factors of outbound tourists' travel experiences and the areas of concern during their travel process.

## 5.2. Theoretical implications

Our research provides theoretical references for the academic community in the study of tourism experiences. Firstly, the results of this study expand the application of the two-factor theory in the tourism industry, especially in outbound tourism, such as in Malaysia. Previous studies have not strictly distinguished between outbound tourism and domestic tourism in terms of travel experience [55], or have only focused on single tourism consumption behaviors such as hotels [6] and recreational facilities [49] during the travel process, lacking attention to the tourist experience in the outbound tourism market. Secondly, this study breaks through the limitations of traditional research paradigms by using grounded theory to conduct a textual analysis of 1,012 travelogues. Through the three steps of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, we constructed a theoretical framework for outbound tourists' travel experiences. Based on previous research results, this article analyzes the impact of basic characteristics, management factors, and transportation factors as hygiene factors on the basic guarantees of outbound tourists' travel experiences. Meanwhile, by quantifying the factors, we effectively delineated the internal differences in the factors affecting the tourism experience of outbound tourists. This is a valuable extension to traditional qualitative research on influencing factors. Tourists show sufficient attention to both hygiene factors and motivational factors during their travels, but the existing literature, limited by research methods and approaches, rarely mentions the differences in attention to the two. This article, based on the distribution differences of reference points in the composition elements of hygiene factors, motivational factors, and their constituents in Nvivo12 Plus software, sorts out the differences in the composition of factors affecting outbound tourists' travel experiences. Thirdly, this article further summarizes the pathways through which the influencing factors of tourism experience affect outbound tourists, condensing the structural path in which the subjective and objective attributes of tourism resources affect the emotional cognition of outbound tourists through media carriers. It can provide useful references for the study of tourists' travel experiences.

## 5.3. Practical implications

This section discusses the possible impacts of the research results on policy makers. Our research provides a new perspective, based on the two-factor theory, to quantitatively demonstrate the interrelationships and internal differences in the factors affecting the attention allocation of Chinese tourists traveling to Malaysia. As China is a major source of tourists for Malaysia, our study sets a practical strategic direction for Malaysia's public sectors in tourism, tourism product operators and managers, and local government authorities. This helps to formulate more effective tourism policies, improve local tourism service quality, and increase local tourism revenue. Firstly, motivational factors are the main factors leading to satisfaction among outbound tourists. The core focus of tourists choosing outbound travel is the novelty and differentiation of the experience. Cultural factors and resource factors account for 22.3% and 25.2% respectively in attention allocation, which are the areas Chinese tourists are most concerned about. According to the cognitive-affective model, customers' evaluations of a destination may affect their attitudes, which in turn can influence future behavior [68]. Therefore, to create high-quality motivational factors, the focus should be on strengthening and expanding existing tourism resources and characteristic services. For example, the public sector should deeply develop existing tourism resources, with a focus on increasing investment and improving the quality of tourism projects that young people care about, such as cultural architecture, leisure facilities, and amusement facilities. For example, the public sector of Malaysia's tourism industry can cooperate with local mainstream or online travel agencies in China, set up representative offices in major cities in China, and promote Malaysia's unique tourism resources [69].

Secondly, the public sector of Malaysia's tourism should pay attention to the guarantee and upgrade of basic services such as catering, hotels, and transportation facilities, ensuring that outbound tourists have no worries about their travel experience at their destinations. Our research shows that the proportion of management factors, including catering, hotels, and financial services, in the overall focus of outbound tourists' travel experience is 15.4%, while the proportion of transportation factors is 5.6%. The public sectors in tourism need to systematically plan basic services involved in the outbound tourism process and build a complete service system for outbound tourism experiences. For instance, tourists are increasingly inclined towards low-contact and high-tech service solutions, and can explore providing these "non-contact" services and smart tourism services [70,71]. Thirdly, outbound tourists and local tourists have significant differences in lifestyle habits, regional familiarity, and language expression. As Govier [72] said, trust and distrust form the basis of our interpretation of our own and others' words and actions. And tourism can promote cross-cultural communication and trust [73]. So, the public sector of Malaysia's tourism should strengthen cooperation and communication with other public sectors to address specific issues for outbound tourists in areas such as safety, transportation, and financial services. It can help to address issues of distrust in cross-cultural tourism.

## 5.4. Limitations and future research directions

This study analyzes the healthcare and motivational factors that influence the tourism experience of outbound tourists. However, like all studies, this research has some limitations. Firstly, this article is mainly based on travelogue data from Chinese tourists traveling to Malaysia. Meanwhile, Malaysia's tourism resources have strong regional characteristics, making the analysis of outbound tourists' tourism motivation and behavior unique. This may cause deviations in the application of practical significance in research by the public sectors in tourism in other countries. Future research should expand to other countries' outbound tourists' tourism behaviors for comparative analysis. Secondly, during the three-level encoding process of grounded theory, the Spindle Coding and Selective coding stages are coded by the authors based on the travel notes of Chinese tourists going to Malaysia, which may have subjective bias. Thirdly, the research data in this article comes from travelogue content written by tourists on internet platforms after the trip. Travel

notes on OTA tend to lean towards those who prefer to share their experiences, and it is possible to overlook factors that affect outbound tourists' travel experiences, which may have a certain impact on the universality of the research. Future researchers could validate these findings through the use of additional data. Future experience will help provide more forward-looking policy recommendations. However, these limitations provide important opportunities for future research.

*5.5. Conclusion*

This article, from the perspective of two-factor theory, uses the research method of grounded theory and NVivo 12 Plus software to analyze 1012 travel notes of Chinese tourists going to Malaysia. We found that in the influencing path of outbound tourists' attention allocation, the subjective and objective attributes of tourism resources act on tourists' emotional cognition through the dissemination medium. Outbound tourists pay more attention to motivating factors, which are the core factors stimulating outbound tourists' travel motivation and the key conditions for forming unforgettable travel experiences. At the same time, outbound tourists mainly focus on hygiene factors including basic features and management elements, and motivation factors including cultural factors, resource factors, and emotional factors. In addition, the hygiene factors of outbound tourists' travel experience mainly depend on the infrastructure and safety conditions of the destination, while the motivating factors that form memorable travel experiences are mainly influenced by interpersonal service characteristics and internal emotional factors. This study can provide a useful reference for the study of tourist travel experience, and provide a theoretical basis for the public sectors in tourism to formulate more effective tourism policies, thereby improving the quality of tourism services.

**Author contribution statement**

Xu Li: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper. Weijuan Cui: Conceived and designed the experiments; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper. Wei Ming Chee: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.

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**Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Weijuan Cui, upon reasonable request.

**Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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