

A Literature Review on Leisure Constraints

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Abstract

As an important part of daily life, leisure activities play an irreplaceable role, since the early 1980s, the study of constraints on leisure activities has become an important topic in the field of foreign leisure research, while domestic academic research on leisure constraints lags behind, and there are fewer research results, to this end, this paper summarizes and analyzes the development history, research content of domestic and foreign leisure constraints research. For this reason, this paper combs, summarizes and analyzes the development history, research content of domestic and foreign leisure constraints research, aiming to provide reference for domestic leisure constraints research.

Keywords

Leisure constraints; research review; Constraint negotiation.

1. Introduction

Leisure constraints—a key topic in tourism management—have drawn growing scholarly and practical attention. As leisure plays an essential role in daily life, constraints significantly shape individuals' choices and participation. Rising living standards and diversifying tourism demands have made constraint research more complex and interdisciplinary, drawing on psychology, sociology, and economics to examine underlying factors and mechanisms. Yet gaps remain, particularly in theoretical integration, population-specific dynamics, and the interplay among constraints, motivation, negotiation, and tourism outcomes. This paper reviews the literature across five thematic areas: 1) theoretical models; 2) constraints among vulnerable or underrepresented groups; 3) links between constraints, motivation, and participation; 4) constraint negotiation processes; and 5) implications for tourism behavior and policy. The review aims to advance both conceptual clarity and applied relevance in the field.

2. Origins and conceptualization of leisure constraints

Leisure research began in the West in the 1980s. Scholars soon linked leisure with constraints. Crawford and Godbey ^[1] identified three constraint types: intrapersonal (e.g., stress, depression), interpersonal (e.g., lack of companions), and structural (e.g., time, family life cycle). Jackson and Godbey ^[2] proposed a three-stage hierarchical model: intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints affect leisure preferences, while structural constraints intervene between preference and participation. This model has been widely validated ^[3-4]. Li Hui found that structural constraints can positively stimulate travel intentions in certain contexts ^[5], and Liu Yuexiu further specified structural constraints as spatial encroachment and resource inequality ^[6]. Jackson defined leisure constraints as factors that inhibit or prevent leisure participation and enjoyment ^[7-8]. Other models include two-dimensional ^[9] and up to seven-dimensional frameworks. Early research used qualitative methods, while later studies adopted quantitative approaches such as SEM, PCA, and MSEM.

3. Leisure Constraints of Vulnerable Groups

By reviewing relevant literature, socially vulnerable groups—such as the elderly, women, people with mobility impairments, and those in disadvantaged labor positions—have become key research subjects in leisure constraints studies, particularly the elderly and women both in China and abroad. For the elderly, structural constraints are dominant. Gao Yuemin ^[10] found a "spindle-shaped" distribution of leisure time among elderly in Chengdu, with expanded leisure space on non-work days. Liu Fajian ^[11] noted that external constraints indirectly reduce satisfaction by weakening motivation. Junhyoung Kim et al.^[12] identified acculturation-related constraints (adaptation challenges, cultural norms, lack of opportunities) among elderly Korean immigrants. Gender involves both biological sex and social expectations. Women face greater leisure constraints than men due to age and family structure^[13]. Huang Dan ^[14] found that married working women experience "motherhood penalties" and fragmented leisure time. Gao Di ^[15] reported that women in Zhengzhou are constrained by safety concerns and lack of companionship, with satisfaction negatively correlated with social support. With improved accessibility, people with mobility impairments show stronger leisure/tourism needs. Gulsun Çelik et al. ^[16] analyzed disabled employees' leisure constraints and satisfaction, recommending tailored leisure services. Liu Le ^[17] found that mobility-impaired individuals actively negotiate various tourism constraints to achieve participation.

4. The Relationship Between Leisure Constraints, Leisure Motivation, and Leisure Participation

Leisure motivation and leisure constraints interact with each other. Gao Lujie found that among middle-aged women participating in yoga, high motivation can partially offset the negative effects of structural constraints, but excessively strong constraint perceptions can inhibit the transformation of motivation ^[18]. Cheng Chengqing's study showed a significant positive relationship between leisure motivation and leisure participation among residents of Haikou City ^[19]. In ski tourism research, leisure motivation indirectly promotes sustained participation through negotiation strategies, forming a "motivation-constraint-negotiation" chain reaction ^[20]. Constraints are not absolute barriers to leisure participation but rather triggers that stimulate negotiation behaviors. Domestic scholar Lin Hong proposed that sports and fitness participants overcome constraints through strategies such as time adjustment and interpersonal coordination ^[21]. Shenyang Sport University verified the key mediating role of environmental support strategies in sustained ski participation ^[22].

5. Leisure Constraints Negotiation

Research on leisure constraints negotiation began in the 1990s. Scholars recognized that constraints are not insurmountable; thus, attention shifted to negotiation, suggesting that constraints can be negotiated to varying degrees ^[23]. Based on the hierarchical constraints model, a negotiation model was proposed, indicating that leisure participation depends not on the presence or absence of constraints (though true for some) but on negotiating with them—often modifying rather than canceling participation. Studies show that people adopt various negotiation strategies at different levels to achieve leisure goals. Leisure constraints negotiation refers to individuals' efforts to face constraints and enhance adaptability through cognitive and behavioral strategies that facilitate participation ^[24]. As Jackson et al. stated, "leisure participation is not dependent on the absence of constraints but on negotiating through them" ^[25]. Jackson and Rucks (1995) confirmed that overcoming constraints enables successful initiation or continuation of participation, rather than passive non-participation.

The conceptual model of constraints negotiation has been established and empirically tested, advancing theoretical norms. Hubbard and Mannell viewed negotiation as a dynamic process and proposed four theoretical models based on relationships among constraints, negotiation, motivation, and participation. Using regression and SEM, they found the constraints–effect–mitigation model superior: encountering constraints prompts negotiation strategies, mitigating negative impacts on participation^[25]. Son et al. extended this to middle-aged and older adults using multidimensional leisure measures^[26]. White, in an outdoor recreation context, integrated social cognitive theory, showing that higher motivation encourages negotiation strategies to overcome constraints; negotiation ability depends on compatibility between leisure identity and other roles, with identity conflict/facilitation as prerequisites for perceived constraints and negotiation efforts^[27].

The mediating role of negotiation has also gained attention. Chung et al. extended the constraints–effect–mitigation model to solo travel and non-Western contexts, proposing a PBC–constraints–negotiation model. They found that perceived behavioral control (PBC) mediates between motivation and negotiation, with a direct path from motivation to participation^[28]. Ma et al. validated a social capital model, finding that negotiation partially mediates the relationships between constraints and participation, and between social capital and participation^[29]. The late 1990s and 2000s saw rapid development in leisure constraints research, with diversified methods and perspectives, yielding numerous findings. Building on the hierarchical/negotiation models proposed by Crawford & Godbey and Scott et al., empirical studies have greatly expanded the validity and representativeness of the negotiation model by analyzing internal negotiation mechanisms and strategies. Measuring negotiation strategies based on leisure constraints helps explain the formation of leisure preferences, motivation, participation, and experience.

6. Leisure Constraints and Tourism

Tourism is a form of leisure. Most theories combining leisure constraints and tourism are based on leisure constraint theory. For example, Nyaupane et al. (2004) used the three-structure leisure constraint model as a theoretical framework to compare constraints among nature tourists^[30]. Similarly, TAHIR ALBAYRAK et al. applied part of Crawford and Godbey's (1987) model to examine the impact of constraints on individual participation in adventure activities^[31]. In tourist satisfaction assessment, the leisure constraint model has been used to determine whether visitor participation in natural soundscapes positively affects satisfaction and to explore constraints influencing participation^[32]. Chinese scholars have investigated elderly tourism development^[33], ice-snow tourism^[34], and virtual tourism^[35] based on leisure constraint theory.

Empirical research combining leisure constraints and tourism is currently a leading topic, focusing on various tourism forms such as hiking, skiing, and paragliding. Huan Yue used literature review and questionnaire surveys to divide consumers in the Thaiwoo Town into ski tourists and sightseeing tourists, finding that infrastructure is good but snow products are incomplete, hotel types limited, and non-winter promotion needs improvement^[36]. Zhao Zhibin conducted an empirical analysis of constraints on paragliding tourism participants at the Linzhou International Paragliding Base, identifying differences between general public and club members^[37]. Niu Ziyue found that Beijing ski tourism participants face multiple constraints (skills, economy, personal interest), offering new perspectives for ski industry marketing^[38]. Dong Shali discussed cultural tourism towns' development and their impact on tourist quality of life, noting constraints such as complex cultural themes and lack of cultural depth^[39]. Current research features broad theoretical application, refined empirical analysis, and contextualized management recommendations, particularly contributing to outdoor sports

and cultural heritage tourism. Future efforts should integrate behavioral economics, spatial geography, and other multidisciplinary perspectives to build more predictive and interventionist constraint analysis frameworks, addressing the rapidly evolving tourism landscape.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Research Review

Leisure constraints research focuses on multidimensional factors that hinder leisure preferences and participation. Its scope has evolved from a single dimension to a complex system encompassing psychological, social, and environmental aspects. With social change and technological innovation, the forms and mechanisms of constraints continue to evolve, and research content, theoretical perspectives, and methodological systems are steadily deepening and expanding. A core analytical framework of "intrapersonal-interpersonal-structural constraints" has been established and is permeating subfields. For example, urban-rural dualism in leisure space has become a key issue: urban residents face time shortages due to long working hours, while rural residents are more constrained by income, facilities, and traditional attitudes. Digital technologies are reshaping constraint mechanisms—online entertainment platforms reduce spatial-temporal structural constraints but may exacerbate the digital divide. Research has also expanded from traditional leisure to emerging areas such as digital nomad lifestyles and post-pandemic "micro-vacations." Classic theories, such as Crawford and Godbey's hierarchical model, provide the foundation, while interdisciplinary integration drives innovation. Spatial equilibrium theory explains the effects of unequal urban-rural resource distribution; actor-network theory reveals power dynamics among multiple agents in leisure governance; and postmodern perspectives examine links between leisure constraints, social inequality, and cultural identity. Early research relied mainly on surveys and statistical analysis. Recent years show a trend toward multi-method approaches: at the macro level, spatial econometric models and big data analysis reveal geographic variations in structural constraints such as facility distribution and transport accessibility; micro-level case studies use in-depth interviews and ethnography to understand how individuals negotiate constraints. Digital technologies have enriched methodological tools, including GPS tracking and social media text mining. Mixed-methods research has become mainstream, for example combining fuzzy comprehensive evaluation with geographic detectors to quantify participation and identify dominant constraints.

7.2. Research Gaps and Prospects

Existing research has shifted from descriptive analysis to structural equation modeling and mixed methods, offering insights such as equitable resource allocation and negotiation capacity building. However, gaps remain: insufficient theoretical localization, lack of longitudinal perspectives, and weak interdisciplinary integration. Future research should address four directions. First, deepen study of digital technology's double-edged effects—while online entertainment mitigates spatial-temporal constraints, the digital divide and algorithmic bias (e.g., rural digital literacy disparities, homogenized leisure choices) require attention; integrating TAM with equity theory is needed. Second, strengthen interdisciplinary integration and expand beyond economic factors to include cultural, ecological, and psychological dimensions—drawing on ecological psychology and behavioral economics to examine multidimensional interactions. Third, focus on global risk contexts: post-pandemic short-distance leisure modes (camping, micro-vacations) and macro risks (climate change, geopolitical conflict) reshape constraints; resilience theory should be applied. Finally, pay particular attention to rural areas, which remain understudied compared to urban contexts, especially regarding tourism development's impact on local residents' leisure constraints.

Overall, leisure constraints research must break traditional paradigms, build indigenous theory, focus on negotiation strategies for special groups and crisis situations, and shift policy from "eliminating constraints" to "empowering negotiation" to achieve leisure equity and quality enhancement.

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