

1 **Is it a persistent ailment for cities? Urban resident perceptions and attitudes toward**
2 **informal employment in tourism**

3 **Abstract:** Informal employment in tourism is an important component of urban economies. A
4 mixed-method approach using a questionnaire survey combined with in-depth interviews was
5 used to analyze urban resident perceptions and attitudes toward tourism informal employment
6 in Beijing, while considering the residents as both hosts and consumers. The results showed
7 that: (1) resident perceptions toward tourism informal entrepreneurs are positive and negative,
8 and the latter is comparatively stronger. (2) Favorable evaluations positively influence
9 retention willingness and regulate management willingness. (3) Negative evaluations
10 negatively influence retention willingness whilst positively influencing regulative management
11 willingness. (4) Retention willingness negatively influences regulative management
12 willingness. (5) Consumption experience moderates the relationship between retention
13 willingness and regulative management willingness. This study extends the theoretical research
14 on informal employment and informs decision-making for effective city management.

15 **Keywords:** urban tourism, informal economy, tourism informal employment, informal tourism
16 entrepreneur, resident perceptions, resident attitudes

17 **Introduction**

18 Informal employment is an important part of the urban labor market that plays a significant
19 role in alleviating urban and rural poverty by creating employment opportunities, improving
20 urbanization levels, and promoting urban economic growth (Chen, 2016; Chen, Huang, Huang,
21 & Yang, 2021). Tourism occupies an important position in the modern urban services industry
22 and creates numerous formal and informal work opportunities in its various components.
23 Informal employment has become an significant force in the sustainable development of city
24 tourism and urban economies (Dahles, 1998; Chen, 2016). This form of commerce offers
25 convenient and affordable products and services, enriches local tourism services, and provides
26 authentic experiences for visitors (Steel, 2012; Nilsson, Petersen, & Wanhill, 2005; Çakmak,

27 Lie, & Selwyn, 2019). However, without effective regulation, informal employment may cause
28 problems such as customer exploitation, price undercutting, occupation of streets, and sale of
29 fake and low-quality goods, which can seriously affect a city's image and annoy visitors
30 (Truong, 2018; Recchi, 2020). Therefore, informal employment may need to be regulated to
31 guide its healthy development and enhance its positive aspects.

32 Urban residents are city experts and animators and users of urban leisure spaces. A
33 significant portion of informal tourism entrepreneurs, often self-employed, are migrant
34 workers from the countryside or laid-off workers (Tian & Guo, 2021). In general, informal
35 tourism entrepreneurs operate in urban parks, tourist attractions, shopping malls, transportation
36 hubs, and other public spaces, and directly impact the daily lives of urban residents.

37 The consumers of the products and services provided by informal tourism entrepreneurs are
38 not only limited to tourists, but also include locals. The relationship between the two groups is
39 often complex. Interaction not only occurs in neighborhoods but also there are trading (buying
40 and selling) relationships. Such resident consumption experiences can become a significant
41 influence in subsequent behavior and decision-making (Yoon, 2010). Accordingly, this
42 research posed the following questions: How do city dwellers evaluate tourism informal
43 employment (hereinafter informal employment)? What impact do they think informal
44 employment has on the city? How willing are residents to accommodate informal tourism
45 entrepreneurs in urban tourism? What are resident attitudes toward informal tourism
46 entrepreneurs (e.g., laissez-faire or regulative management)? How do resident consumption
47 experiences affect their perceptions and attitudes?

48 Prior studies have focused on the demographic characteristics of tourism informal
49 entrepreneurs (Çakmak & Çenesiz, 2020; Cukier & Wall, 1994; Rogerson, 2018), business
50 characteristics (Damayanti, Scott, & Ruhanen, 2017, 2018), and social and economic impacts
51 (Lv, 2020; Timothy & Wall, 1997). Few have examined this field from the perspectives of
52 residents as urban tourism stakeholders. Thus, this research focused on the business behavior
53 and management challenges of informal employment entrepreneurs from the perspective of
54 urban residents.

55 Taking Beijing as the case, a city with a relatively mature tourism market, the relationship
56 between resident perceptions and attitudes toward the business behaviors of informal tourism
57 entrepreneurs is investigated. Consumption experience is introduced as a moderator to explore
58 a boundary condition in these relationships. The results are expected to provide a reference for
59 city management and the governance of urban tourism, while also producing new insights on
60 informal employment.

61 **Literature review and hypothesis development**

62 *Informal employment in tourism*

63 Informal employment stems from the phenomenon of the informal economy, also known as
64 the shadow or underground economy (Çakmak & Çenesiz, 2020). Informal employment
65 encompasses economic activities that lack official recognition and legal protection, for these
66 exchange activities are unrecorded in government auditing and accounting systems (Schneider
67 & Enste, 2000; Williams & Lansky, 2013; Çakmak, Lie, & McCabe, 2018). Informal
68 employment refers to employment conditions in which workers are not protected by labor
69 regulations (Montero-Moraga, Benavides, & Lopez-Ruiz, 2020), and involves informal
70 entrepreneurs and workers. An informal entrepreneur is someone who starts a business or who
71 is the owner/manager of a business engaging in paid work that it is not declared to the state for
72 tax, social security and/or labour law purposes (Williams, 2009). Informal workers are
73 individuals who are employed without employer contributions to social protection by formal
74 or informal enterprises (Chen, 2016). In many cases, informal employment is a form of self-
75 employment, in which the entrepreneur is both the employer and the employee (Tian & Guo,
76 2021). Informal entrepreneurs are often the poorly-educated, low-skilled group that are
77 marginally employed with unstable income (Huang, Zhang, & Xue, 2018; Ghose, 2017). Their
78 business activities are characterized by low scale, low technological content, high flexibility,
79 and high spatial fluidity (Webb, McQuaid, & Rand, 2020).

80 Informal employment in tourism is being engaged in tourism-related business activities that
81 lack formal and stable labor relations (Slocum, Backman, & Robinson, 2011), including

82 informal employment in the formal and informal tourism sectors. The former refers to flexible
83 temporary employment in government registered tourism enterprises, including temporary and
84 seasonal workers. The latter refers to the informal employment of those engaged in tourism-
85 related business activities without the permission of government departments and outside of
86 government supervision, including itinerant vendors at scenic spots, unlicensed tour guides,
87 ticket scalpers, and illegal passenger transportation (Çakmak et al., 2018). This research
88 focused on employment in the informal tourism sector, where the production and operating
89 scale of enterprises are small, and employment is flexible and labor-intensive.

90 Informal employment is an indispensable part of tourism and a critical supplement to formal
91 tourism employment. Informal employment has a major impact on local economies by
92 alleviating regional employment pressures, minimizing income gaps, and promoting the
93 transfer of surplus labor from rural to urban areas (Çakmak et al., 2018; Lv, 2020). In some
94 destinations, informal employment has become a distinctive local feature that adds to the
95 significance of places and acts as an attraction (Timothy & Wall, 1997). Also, informal tourism
96 entrepreneurs, such as musicians, artists, craftsmen, and street vendors, provide local products
97 and services, which meet immediate needs as well as enriching city lifestyles (Çakmak et al.,
98 2019; Çakmak, & Çenesiz, 2020).

99 However, informal employment generates negative impacts that cannot be ignored. Informal
100 business activities in public places are often accompanied by noise and littering that not only
101 damage city images, but also cause inconvenience for locals (Yotsumoto, 2013). Without
102 sufficient regulation, these business activities sometimes include the sale of counterfeit goods,
103 customer harassment, frauds, and other unethical business practices (Truong, 2018). Informal
104 entrepreneurs often inconvenience tourists and are guilty of unethical, illegal or criminal
105 behaviors that threaten the sustainable development of tourism, social harmony, and stability
106 (Recchi, 2020).

107 Informal employment can be effectively managed and controlled. Some scholars argue that
108 although many city managers want to regulate it (Çakmak et al. 2018), informal employment
109 is vulnerable and excessive intervention may seriously affect the business of informal

110 entrepreneurs, causing them to lose their competitive advantages and even become bankrupt
111 (Slocum et al., 2011; Truong, 2018). Other researchers suggest that if informal employment is
112 not regulated, the negative effects will increase and overtake the positives, and damage city
113 image (Timothy & Wall, 1997). Balancing the advantages and disadvantages of informal
114 employment and how to appropriately guide this commerce are challenges that many city
115 managers face. This is also an issue that needs greater exploration in tourism academic research.

116 Since various tourist sites are located in cities or are part of urban public spaces, the business
117 activities of informal entrepreneurs affect tourists and impact the daily lives of city dwellers.
118 Consumers of urban tourism include residents and non-local visitors. Although residents are
119 not tourists, their daily lives are intertwined with tourism; they at the very least witness the
120 business activities of informal entrepreneurs. Residents are direct stakeholders in informal
121 employment. However, few studies have examined the perceptions and attitudes of urban
122 dwellers regarding informal employment, thus masking a comprehensive understanding of the
123 relationship between the roles of the “self” (city dwellers) and the “other” (informal
124 entrepreneurs) in the development of urban tourism and the healthy and orderly management
125 of informal employment.

126 Resident perceptions of impacts are closely related to their attitudes toward tourism
127 development. The greater the perceived positive impacts, the more the residents support
128 tourism development, and vice versa (Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2008). Informal entrepreneurs
129 are an important subject in urban tourism development (Xu, 2021). These business activities
130 directly affect city images and the daily lives of residents. Therefore, the perceptions and
131 attitudes of residents toward informal employment should be included in the category of
132 perceptions and attitudes to tourism impacts. Based on the existing research, this study
133 investigated the perceptions and attitudes of residents regarding informal employment at a
134 micro level, and further clarified the influences to provide evidence for more effective
135 management of informal employment, to ensure the orderly development of urban tourism
136 destinations.

137 ***Resident perceptions and attitudes toward tourism***

138 As core stakeholders of destinations, urban resident perceptions and evaluations of tourism
139 impacts are critical indicators of sustainable development (Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013).
140 Community resident perceptions of tourism impacts are positive and negative (Long, Perdue,
141 & Allen, 1990). Most scholars view the positive and negative perceptions of tourism impacts
142 as two parallels. Hitherto, the positive-negative model has become the core research framework
143 for resident perceptions of tourism impacts and has been widely applied (e.g., Zamani-Farahani
144 & Musa, 2008; Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Kock, & Ramayah, 2015).

145 Social exchange theory (SET) is often adopted to underpin the theoretical framework for
146 understanding resident perceptions and attitudes (Wang & Pfister, 2008). SET was proposed
147 by Emerson (1976) as a sociological theory and generally refers to a two-sided reward process
148 involving two or more social groups (Boley, McGehee, Perdue, & Long, 2014). Since the
149 1990s, SET has been extensively applied to explain the perceptions and attitudes of community
150 residents toward tourism development (e.g., Jurowski, Uysal, & Williams, 1997). According
151 to SET, resident perceptions of impacts are the foundation for their attitudes towards tourism
152 development. Residents with positive perceptions of impacts are inclined to express positive
153 attitudes, therefore supporting tourism development. Alternatively, residents perceiving
154 negative tourism impacts may oppose tourism development (Kang & Lee, 2018).

155 Informal entrepreneurs are a highly relevant topic in the development of urban tourism.
156 Hence, the perceptions and attitudes of urban residents towards informal employment should
157 be incorporated into the category of perceptions and attitudes of tourism impacts. However,
158 few previous studies consider resident perceptions and attitudes toward informal employment.
159 Based on SET and the characteristics of informal employment, this investigation explored the
160 perceptions and attitudes of residents towards informal employment and clarified the
161 influential factors.

162 *Hypothesis development*

163 The perceptions and attitudes of city dwellers are key concerns for the regulation and orderly
164 development of informal entrepreneurship and employment. However, few studies have
165 addressed the perceptions and attitudes of community residents towards this form of urban
166 commerce. Hypotheses were proposed by referring to the existing research on resident
167 perceptions and attitudes toward tourism and consumer behavior, and the characteristics of
168 informal employment.

169 The literature review showed that resident perceptions of tourism impacts tend to
170 significantly influence their attitudes (Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2008). How do urban
171 residents perceive informal employment? How significantly do these evaluations influence
172 their attitudes? To answer these questions, this research used two variables, positive and
173 negative evaluations, to measure perceptions of the impacts of informal entrepreneurs. There
174 are many social issues in urban informal employment at present including market disruption
175 and calls for greater regulation of informal business activities. Therefore, the two variables of
176 retention and standardization management willingness were used to measure resident attitudes
177 towards informal entrepreneurs. Retention willingness indicates to what degree residents want
178 urban informal employment to continue to exist. Regulatory management willingness
179 represents to what degree residents want government to standardize its management. The
180 following hypotheses were proposed:

181 H₁: Urban resident positive evaluations of informal employment have significant positive
182 impacts on retention willingness.

183 H₂: Urban resident positive evaluations of informal employment have significant negative
184 impacts on regulatory management willingness.

185 H₃: Urban resident negative evaluations of informal employment have significant negative
186 impacts on retention willingness.

187 H₄: Urban resident negative evaluations of informal employment have significant positive
188 impacts on regulatory management willingness.

189 Irregular operations and a lack of unified management of informal employment often cause
190 social problems that urban residents then oppose. Lagos (1995) noted that informal
191 employment can be confused with illegality because it does not comply with relevant laws and
192 regulations, and that strict regulation and standardization are key to solving the associated
193 social problems. Liang and Bao (2012) found out that informal employment in Beijing's Happy
194 Valley area has created numerous problems that have affected community living and the
195 business environment, causing dissatisfaction and antipathy. Accordingly, the following
196 hypothesis was proposed:

197 H₅: Urban resident retention willingness toward informal employment negatively affects
198 regulatory management willingness.

199 The consumers of informal entrepreneurs inevitably include residents. Resident
200 consumption experiences exert an influence on their behaviors and attitudes (Rodgers, Negash,
201 & Suk, 2005). Gilal, Zhang, and Gilal (2018) suggested that consumption experience plays a
202 positive moderating role between product design, consumer willingness to purchase, and word
203 of mouth influence. Residents who have such consumption experiences are more familiar with
204 this form of employment. If they have strongly positive experiences (e.g., greater convenience,
205 lower prices), they are more inclined to retain this form of commerce and support its unfettered
206 development (less disposed to government regulation). Conversely, if they have negative
207 experiences (e.g., inferior products, overcharging), they are more in favor of greater regulation
208 (low retention intention), and support standardized management and greater control. Hence,
209 the following hypotheses were put forward:

210 H₆: Consumption experiences moderate the relationship between positive evaluations and
211 retention willingness.

212 H₇: Consumption experiences moderate the relationship between positive evaluations and
213 regulative management willingness.

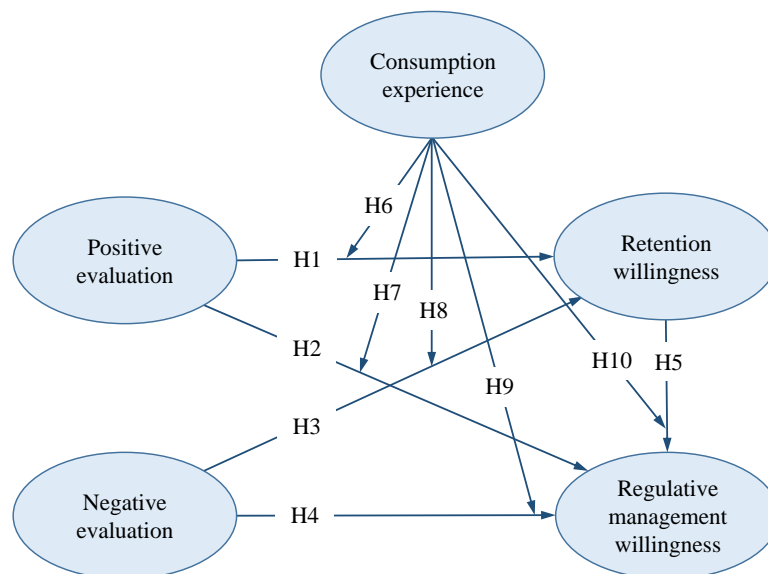
214 H₈: Consumption experiences moderate the relationship between negative evaluations and
215 retention willingness.

216 H₉: Consumption experiences moderate the relationship between negative evaluations and
217 regulative management willingness.

218 H₁₀: Consumption experiences moderate the relationship between retention and regulative
219 management willingness.

220 *Conceptual research model*

221 Based on these hypotheses, the research model shown in Figure 1 was constructed. The model
222 reflects the relationships between resident perceptions and attitudes towards informal
223 employment by applying social exchange theory.



224

225 **Figure 1.** Conceptual research model.

226 **Methodology**

227 *Study area*

228 Beijing, a world-famous urban tourist destination, was selected as the study area. As the
229 political and cultural center of China, Beijing has a permanent population of 21.536 million
230 and an urban population of 18.65 million (as of 2019). After more than 40 years of development,
231 tourism has become a major pillar of the city's economy. A total of 322 million tourists visited
232 Beijing in 2019, generating a total tourism revenue of 622.46 billion yuan (Beijing Municipal

233 Bureau of Statistics, 2019). As a result of the growth in its tourism industry, Beijing has
234 absorbed many informal entrepreneurs who provide a significant stimulus for the city’s tourism
235 development. However, due to the lack of effective supervision, many informal entrepreneurs
236 are guilty of cheating customers, forgery, poor workmanship, and other misbehaviors. This has
237 negatively affected the image of China’s capital city. Recently, Beijing has implemented
238 various measures to regulate the tourism market and crack down on illegal business activities.
239 However, some issues are more difficult to address and continue to affect tourism. The problem
240 of informal employment in Beijing is representative of urban tourism management challenges
241 in China, and it is of great practical significance to study the phenomenon.



242 *Notes.* Photos 1-4 show four types of tourism informal employment in Beijing. Picture 1 is a “black” motorcycle driver
243 awaiting visitors in need; photo 2 is a vendor selling local handicrafts; photo 3 is a folk craftsman providing a sketching service
244 for visitors; photo 4 is a street vendor selling Beijing local specialties and snacks.

245 **Questionnaire design**

246 The questionnaire was designed in three parts. The first part dealt with resident evaluations of
 247 informal employment. Evaluations were divided into positive and negative dimensions
 248 (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005). Given the lack of a mature scale, the research
 249 team developed a preliminary design of a positive and a negative evaluation scale by referring
 250 to relevant studies (e.g., Jimu, 2004; Truong, 2018) combined with field investigations. The
 251 positive and negative evaluation scales included five and eight measurement items,
 252 respectively. The second part sought resident attitudes toward informal employment, covering
 253 retention and regulative management willingness. Informal entrepreneurs have generated a
 254 series of social issues that have disrupted markets and damaged Beijing’s image. Therefore,
 255 the current pressure for greater regulation of this commerce is strong. Hence, through field
 256 investigation and expert opinion, as well as referring to the research of Reyes (2013) and Liang
 257 and Bao (2012), an item “*I hope informal employment will continue to exist in Beijing*” was
 258 developed to measure retention willingness, while an item “*I hope the government could*
 259 *standardize the management of the business activities of informal employees*” was designed to
 260 measure regulative management willingness. The third part gathered the profile characteristics
 261 of respondents (age, gender, occupation, education, years of residence, and consumption
 262 experiences). The consumption experiences of the products and services provided by informal
 263 entrepreneurs were measured by “*the number of times purchased the products or services*
 264 *provided by informal entrepreneurs during the last year*”. In the first two parts, respondents
 265 were asked to rate their answers on five-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree (1)
 266 to strongly agree (5).

267 **Table 1.** Measurement index system of resident perceptions and attitudes towards ITE.

Constructs	Items	Sources
Positive evaluations	<i>I think ...</i> the business activities of ITE improve travel experiences. the business activities of ITE meet tourist needs. the goods and services provided by ITE are cheaper.	Jimu, 2004; Nilsson & Petersen,

	the goods and services provided by ITE are relatively novel.	2005; field investigations
	the business activities of ITE enrich the culture of scenic areas and cities.	
Negative evaluations	<i>I think ...</i> there is a safety issue in the business activities of ITE. there is a quality problem with the business activities of ITE. there is a phenomenon of ripping off customers in the business activities of ITE. the business activities of ITE damage the image of scenic areas and cities. the business activities of ITE affect the environmental conditions of scenic areas and cities. the business activities of ITE often lead to traffic congestion in scenic areas and cities. the business activities of ITE disturb the order of the tourism market. the business activities of ITE are not conducive to the management of scenic areas and cities.	Henderson & Smith, 2009; Truong, 2018; field investigations
Retention willingness	I want informal employment to continue to exist in Beijing.	Reyes, 2013; field investigations
Regulative management willingness	I want the government to standardize the management of the business activities of ITE	Liang & Bao, 2012; field investigations

268 *Notes.* ITE denotes informal tourism entrepreneurs.

269 ***Data collection and analysis***

270 ***Questionnaire survey***

271 To comprehensively investigate resident perceptions and attitudes towards informal
272 employment, a questionnaire survey combined with in-depth interviews were employed. The

273 questionnaire survey data were used to quantitatively analyze the structural influences on
274 perceptions and attitudes, and in-depth interviews further clarified the results of the quantitative
275 study, and revealed more about social situations and entrepreneur-customer-resident
276 relationships. A combination of online and offline questionnaire surveys was employed. Online
277 surveys are less limited by time and place, and are mostly used in public opinion surveys, for
278 market analysis, and in other social science research. This is an efficient data collection method
279 whose effectiveness and credibility have been widely recognized by tourism academics (e.g.,
280 Lin, Chen, & Filieri, 2017). In the offline questionnaire survey, Chaoyang District, Fengtai
281 District, Yanqing District, and five residential areas (public rest areas) of Beijing were selected
282 for survey locations. Most of the residential areas are located near one of Beijing's famous
283 tourist attractions, where residents are more likely to encounter informal workers. Additionally,
284 they all belong to relatively large communities, so the sample size was comparatively large.
285 For the online questionnaire survey, a network survey platform was used, combined with
286 instant chat software and Baidu Post Bar. From January 20th to 30th, 2018, the research team
287 conducted a pilot survey offline and online, adjusted and optimized the layout of the
288 questionnaire and the statements according to the survey results and the feedback of the
289 respondents, and formed the final questionnaire. The formal offline and online questionnaire
290 surveys were conducted from January 31st to March 20th, 2018. The offline survey was
291 conducted through convenience sampling, combined with snowball sampling. The online
292 survey used convenience sampling to distribute questionnaires. To maximize the diversity and
293 authenticity of the responses, the questionnaires were sent out through three Chinese popular
294 platforms: Tencent QQ, Baidu Post Bar, and WeChat. A total of 1,882 questionnaires were
295 collected in the offline (859) and online (1,023) surveys; 399 responses were removed because
296 either their response times were under two minutes or respondents had selected the same
297 answer for all questions. Finally, 1,483 valid questionnaires (offline: 643; online: 840)
298 remained, an effective response rate of 78.8%. The profile characteristics of the respondents
299 are summarized in Table 2.

300 SPSS 25.0 and AMOS 24.0 were used to analyze the questionnaire data. First, descriptive
 301 analysis was employed to depict the basic situation for the main variables. Then, an exploratory
 302 factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were conducted on the
 303 evaluation scale for residents to determine its structural dimensions. A total of 1,483 valid
 304 questionnaires were randomly divided into two sample sets to ensure reliability of the results:
 305 S1 ($n = 716$) and S2 ($n = 767$). S1 was used for EFA and S2 for CFA. Then, a structural equation
 306 model (SEM) analyzed the relationship between resident perceptions and attitudes. Multi-
 307 group SEM was used to verify whether consumption experiences moderated the relationship
 308 between resident perceptions and attitudes. Finally, the survey was followed up with in-depth
 309 interviews.

310 **Table 2.** Profile of survey respondents ($n = 1,483$).

Attributes	Levels	Frequencies	%
Gender	Male	753	50.8
	Female	730	49.2
Age	Under 18	20	1.4
	18-30	651	43.9
	31-40	389	26.2
	41-50	277	18.7
	51-60	107	7.2
	60 or older	39	2.6
Education	Junior high and below	56	3.8
	Senior high	124	8.3
	Middle special school	47	3.2
	Junior college	230	15.5
	Undergraduate	657	44.3
	Master and above	369	24.9
Occupation	Students	298	20.1
	Civil servant	71	4.8
	Company employee	475	32.0
	Teacher and technician	139	9.4
	Businessperson	79	5.3

	Farmer	55	3.7
	Freelancer	141	9.5
	Emeritus and retired	52	3.5
	Unemployed	21	1.4
	Others	152	10.3
Length of residence	5 years or less	402	27.1
	6-15 years	358	24.1
	16-30 years	354	23.9
	30 years or more	369	24.9
Consumption experiences	None	874	58.9
	1-2 times	432	29.2
	3-4 times	113	7.6
	5 times or more	64	4.3

311 *Field observations and in-depth interviews*

312 This study used qualitative methods, i.e., field observations and in-depth interviews based on
313 survey results, to conduct additional research to better understand the perceptions and attitudes
314 of residents toward informal employment and to explore social situations and relationships.
315 The researchers carried out field investigations from December, 2017 to May, 2018 in scenic
316 areas and leisure places with high visibility, and in areas with high aggregations of Beijing
317 residents. To assure the representativeness and integrity of the samples, the investigators
318 adopted a combination of random and fixed-point sampling, followed the principle of
319 theoretical saturation, and finally selected 13 Beijing residents for in-depth interviews (Table
320 3). Semi-structured interviews were conducted and included three core aspects: (1) local
321 resident understanding and evaluations of informal entrepreneurs; (2) the impact of informal
322 employment on local residents and urban development; and (3) the attitudes of local residents
323 on the development and management of informal employment.

324 **Table 3.** Respondents for in-depth interviews.

Number	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation
A01	Female	73	Middle special school	Retired

B02	Male	45	Senior high school	Company employee
C03	Male	73	Bachelor	Retired
D04	Male	70	Primary school	Retired
E05	Male	29	Unknown	Company employee
F06	Female	18	Bachelor	Students
G07	Male	50	Master	Civil servant
H08	Male	Unknown	Senior high school	Company employee
I09	Male	40	Master	Company employee
J10	Male	40	Bachelor	Civil servant
K11	Male	39	Unknown	Civil servant
L12	Male	Over 40	Unknown	Taxi driver
M13	Male	Over 20	Senior high school	Security guard

325 Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data and delve into the social meanings
326 and micro situations behind the interviews. First, the interview recordings were transcribed and
327 interview notes were summarized for one-to-one comparison and systematic sorting. Second,
328 a thematic analysis of the textual material was conducted through repeated reading and
329 sentence coding to derive core themes. Finally, the researchers returned once more to the text
330 and the real situation, and repeatedly reflected on the results (research findings) to be as close
331 to the truth as possible. Through these procedures and repeated reading, two central themes
332 were finally extracted from the interview data: (1) urban resident evaluations of informal
333 entrepreneurs, containing both positive and negative dimensions. (2) the complex attitudes of
334 urban residents towards informal entrepreneurs based on their perceptions, and the relationship
335 between perceptions and attitudes.

336 **Results and analysis**

337 *Descriptive analysis*

338 A descriptive statistical analysis of the main variables was conducted. Under the positive
339 evaluation dimension, the mean values of items situated between 2.60 and 3.23 (Table 4). The

340 item “*I think the business activities of ITE can meet tourist needs*” had the highest score, while
 341 “*I think the goods and services provided by ITE are relatively novel*” was the lowest. This
 342 suggested that most respondents had moderately positive evaluations of informal employment.
 343 Under negative evaluation dimension, the mean values of items ranged between 3.06 and 3.90.
 344 “*I think there is a safety issue in the business activities of ITE*” was the highest (3.90), followed
 345 by “*I think there is a phenomenon of ripping off customers in the business activities of ITE*”
 346 (3.89), and “*I think there is a quality problem with the business activities of ITE*” (3.87). The
 347 lowest mean value was for “*I think the business activities of ITE are not conducive to the*
 348 *management of scenic areas and cities*” (3.06). For retention willingness and regulative
 349 management intention, the mean values were 3.23 and 3.61, respectively. This indicated that
 350 most respondents wanted informal entrepreneurs to continue to exist and hoped the
 351 government would standardize the management of their business activities.

352 **Table 4.** Descriptive analysis.

Variables	Items	Mean values	Standard deviations
PE	PE1	3.06	1.014
	PE2	3.23	1.003
	PE3	2.71	1.020
	PE4	2.60	0.900
	PE5	2.74	1.049
NE	NE1	3.90	0.865
	NE2	3.87	0.865
	NE3	3.89	0.904
	NE4	3.50	1.026
	NE5	3.42	0.991
	NE6	3.32	0.995
	NE7	3.54	1.024
	NE8	3.06	1.014
RW	RW	3.23	1.003
RMW	RMW	3.61	1.005

353 Notes. PE denotes positive evaluations, NE denotes negative evaluations, RW is retention
 354 willingness, RMW is regulative management willingness.

355 ***Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)***

356 Since this research was exploratory lacking a mature measurement scale, EFA was conducted
 357 using sample data S1 ($n = 716$) to determine the structural dimensions of resident perceptions
 358 of informal employment,. The KMO score (0.916) verified that the dataset was adequate for
 359 factor analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Principal components analysis and the
 360 maximum variance orthogonal rotation method were used to extract factors with eigenvalues
 361 greater than one. Two factors were identified with a cumulative variance contribution of 64.4%,
 362 exceeding the threshold value of 60% (Hinkin, 1998). These were named as positive (F1) and
 363 negative evaluations (F2), respectively.

364 **Table 5.** Exploratory factor analysis of resident evaluations ($n = 716$).

Item	Factor loadings	Eigenvalues	Percentages of variance %	Cumulative percentages of variance %	Mean values
F1: Positive evaluations		3.447	26.514	26.514	
PE1	0.801				3.04
PE2	0.831				3.20
PE3	0.708				2.65
PE4	0.757				2.60
PE5	0.705				2.73
F2: Negative evaluations		4.931	37.930	64.444	
NE1	0.720				3.87
NE2	0.759				3.85
NE3	0.754				3.89

NE4	0.758	3.50
NE5	0.793	3.38
NE6	0.734	3.31
NE7	0.781	3.54
NE8	0.760	3.62

365 ***Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)***

366 CFA was performed using sample S2 ($n = 767$) to ensure the validity and reliability of the two-
367 factor structure. The fitting indexes of the measurement model were as follows: $\chi^2/df = 1.506$,
368 GFI = 0.985, AGFI = 0.973, NFI = 0.988, CFI = 0.996, RMSEA = 0.026, SRMR = 0.023,
369 suggesting that the observed variables had strong explanatory power for the latent variables.
370 The CRs and AVEs of each dimension were all higher than the threshold values of 0.7 and 0.5,
371 respectively, indicating good validity (Fornell & Larker, 1981).

372 **Table 6.** Discriminant validity and the correlations of variables ($n = 767$).

Latent variables	Mean values	AVE	CR	F1	F2
F1: Positive evaluations	2.893	0.535	0.847	1	
F2: Negative evaluations	3.645	0.603	0.899	-0.566**	1

373 *Note.* ** $p < 0.01$

374 ***Structural equation model analysis***

375 AMOS 24.0 was used to verify hypotheses H₁ to H₁₀. First, the maximum likelihood method
376 was used to check the model fit. The fit indexes were: $\chi^2/df = 2.542$, GFI = 0.984, RMSEA =
377 0.032, RMR = 0.020, NFI = 0.987, CFI = 0.992, IFI = 0.992, PNFI = 0.658, indicating that the
378 SEM fit the data well. Positive evaluations had a positive impact on retention willingness ($\beta =$
379 0.361, $p < 0.001$) and regulative management willingness ($\beta = 0.081$, $p < 0.05$), thus, H₁ was
380 supported and H₂ was not (Table 7). Negative evaluations exerted negative impacts on retention
381 willingness ($\beta = -0.599$, $p < 0.001$) and regulative management willingness ($\beta = 0.419$, $p <$

0.001), thus H₃ and H₄ were supported. Additionally, retention willingness had a negative impact on regulatory management willingness ($\beta = -0.069, p < 0.05$), supporting H₅.

Table 7. Tests of model hypotheses.

H	Influencing paths	β	CR	Sig.	Results
H ₁	Positive evaluations → Retention willingness	0.361	8.529	0.000***	Supported
H ₂	Positive evaluations → Regulatory management willingness	0.081	1.968	0.049*	Not supported
H ₃	Positive evaluations → Retention willingness	-0.599	-13.424	0.000***	Supported
H ₄	Negative evaluations → Regulatory management willingness	0.419	9.225	0.000***	Supported
H ₅	Retention willingness → Regulatory management willingness	-0.069	-2.572	0.010*	Supported

Note. *** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.05$

Moderating effect of consumption experiences

To test the moderating effect of consumption experiences (H₆–H₁₀), a multi-group analysis was conducted. First, AMOS 25.0 was used to divide the total sample data ($n = 1,483$) into two groups: C1 (no consumption experiences, $n = 874$), the group that had not purchased the products or services offered by informal entrepreneurs, and C2 (consumption experiences, $n = 609$), the group that had purchased them. Then, multi-group analysis was used to compare C1 and C2. Two models were set: the unconstrained model (i.e., the benchmark model without any parameter restrictions) and the constrained model (i.e., the structural error model), and the regression path coefficients, factor loadings and covariances of the two models were set as equal.

396 The fit index values of both the unconstrained and constrained models were in the ideal
 397 range (Table 8), indicating that both possessed cross-group validity. The critical ratio of the
 398 chi-square variation to the degree of freedom variation (43.119/19) was at the 0.01 level,
 399 indicating a significant difference between the two models. This suggested that consumption
 400 experiences had a significant moderating effect on the model.

401 The possible differences of each path between the two groups were compared to test
 402 hypotheses H₆–H₁₀ (Table 9). The results were that there was only a significant difference in
 403 the path between retention and regulative management willingness ($CR = 2.232 > 1.96$); there
 404 were no significant differences in the other paths ($CR < 1.96$). Hence, H₆–H₉ were rejected. In
 405 H₁₀, compared with urban residents with consumption experiences ($\beta = -0.007, p > 0.5$), those
 406 without any consumption experiences ($\beta = -0.120, p < 0.001$), retention willingness had a
 407 greater negative impact on regulative management willingness, indicating that consumption
 408 experiences negatively moderated the relationship between the two attitudes; thus, H₁₀ was not
 409 supported.

410 **Table 8.** Results of the multiple-group analysis.

Model	Model fit								Variance significance test		
	χ^2/df	RMR	GFI	NFI	IFI	CFI	PNFI	RMSEA	<i>df</i>	CMI N	<i>p</i>
Unconstrained model	2.04	0.021	0.98	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.56	0.026	120	244.6	0.000
Constrained model	2.07	0.040	0.98	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.65	0.027	139	287.7	0.000
Ideal value	1~3	<0.05	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.5	<0.08	—	—	—
Model comparison	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	19	43.12	0.001

411

412 **Table 9.** Results of regression path between groups with and without consumption

413 experiences.

Hypotheses	Influence paths	NRC1	NRC2	CR
H ₆	Positive evaluations → Retention willingness	0.377***	0.373***	-0.048
H ₇	Positive evaluations → Regulative management willingness	0.154***	-0.002	-1.956
H ₈	Positive evaluations → Retention willingness	-0.546***	-0.620***	-0.94
H ₉	Negative evaluations → Regulative management willingness	0.434***	0.367***	-0.819
H ₁₀	Retention willingness → Regulative management willingness	-0.120***	-0.007	2.232

414 *Notes.* NRC1 and NRC2 denote normalized regression coefficients of C1 and C2 groups,
415 respectively; *** $p < 0.001$.

416 ***Supplementary analysis of qualitative data***

417 The quantitative analysis presented resident evaluations and attitudes toward informal
418 entrepreneurs and their relationships. To further explore social meanings and hidden logic, on-
419 site observations and in-depth interviews were conducted. They showed that residents harbored
420 both positive and negative evaluations of informal entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs are
421 widely dispersed and the goods and services they provide are often unique, and able to meet
422 the immediate needs of tourists and residents. Field observations showed that many “feral
423 guides/black guides” (informal or unlicensed tour guides), “black cars” (informal vehicles),
424 and mobile street vendors are prevalent in areas visited by tourists and locals for leisure and
425 recreation, and are able to change locations in response to changing flows of people, thus
426 meeting the immediate needs of consumers. When researchers asked why unlicensed tourist
427 cars exist, K11 said: *(sometimes) after the tourists come out (from scenic areas), it is really not*
428 *convenient to take the bus. Hence, they can only take the black motorcycles. The demand*
429 *certainly exists for this.”* Informal entrepreneurs are often more flexible and can provide goods

430 and services in multiple time periods and locations, and some residents acknowledged this
431 convenience. K11 pointed out, *“Although these people are ‘black’, I have heard one or two*
432 *black tour guides (informal tour guides) talk about it, which is really good, because they have*
433 *been here for a long time and know the Summer Palace very well, which is better than what*
434 *the (regular) tour guides talk about. Some small groups (tourists) like black tour guides.”*

435 Additionally, since the goods and services they offer are often cheaper than those from
436 formal shops, there are more buyers. I09 noted, *“The goods are cheaper than those sold in*
437 *scenic areas.”* Therefore, some tourists and residents, *“...will buy the goods from small*
438 *vendors.”* H08 added, *“A black guide is cheaper than a formal one, who charges 300 yuan for*
439 *a tour of the scenic area, whereas they (black guides) take 200 yuan.”* B02 agreed, *“That kind*
440 *of black guide, the price is not high, I once met one who asked 50, one a 100, do you think that*
441 *is high? It is much lower than that for the formal tour group.”* It can be concluded that
442 convenience, specialization, and low prices are the focus of resident positive evaluations of
443 informal entrepreneurs. These advantages and characteristics give informal entrepreneurs
444 viability in the city.

445 Conversely, when interacting directly or indirectly with informal entrepreneurs, residents
446 often encounter misconduct, leading to strong negative evaluations. First, the commodities and
447 services provided by tourism entrepreneurs may have quality defects, thus infringing on
448 consumers’ legitimate rights and interests. D04, who was from South Luogu Lane, noted, *“On*
449 *this black three-wheeler, we should not sit. One the one hand, they extort you for money; on*
450 *the other hand, they are nonsense, they don’t know anything (the history and culture of South*
451 *Luogu Lane); they cannot be believed.”*

452 Some commodities sold by informal entrepreneurs are not standard manufacturer products,
453 but fake or shoddy or even dangerous reproductions. That said, informal entrepreneurs may
454 cause problems due to forced buying and selling (touting and harassment), and false
455 promotions that disrupt the market. D04 raised objections to the improper business activities
456 of informal entrepreneurs: *“(Black tour guide encourages tourists to) go and shop, (they) ask*
457 *you to buy something by all means.”* Similarly, resident C03 pointed out: *“Black tour guides*

458 *are in a mess, and why? They force tourists to buy gifts, expect them to buy things, and those*
459 *shops then give them kickbacks.”* Additionally, improper activities negatively impact the image
460 of scenic areas and urban governance. I09 commented: “*(Informal employment brings negative)*
461 *effects ... the first is the scenic image, they have no sense of responsibility. Those who sell fruit,*
462 *baked potatoes, snakes, they produce all kinds of garbage, just throw it away and nobody cares.*
463 *They may also commit fraud. To be honest, this kind of behavior can be attributed to a scenic*
464 *area, which is not very good for it.”* Similarly, J10 believed: “*There are definitely (negative)*
465 *effects. The first is the appearance of the city (that becomes unaesthetic). The second is that it*
466 *creates a lot of garbage. You can see that there are so many people and so many cars, which*
467 *creates a safety hazard.”* The negative impacts of informal employment mainly relate to poor
468 quality, disorderly business operations, and reputation damage to scenic areas and urban order.

469 Some residents believed that informal employment should be banned to reduce its negative
470 effects. H08 proposed, “*The illegal tour guides should be arrested and removed, in fact, they*
471 *are taking advantage of loopholes in the law.”* Most residents, however, were more tolerant
472 and believed that they should be regulated rather than banned. For example, F06 proposed ways
473 of regulating the development of feral/black guides: “*I don’t think it’s easy for them. By*
474 *centralizing management or through a formal examination, it is bound to screen out a bunch*
475 *of malicious (black guide) operators. There are actually some people who do this for a living,*
476 *but there are a variety of factors that make them black guides. I think there may be a place for*
477 *this.”* Similarly, K11 added, “*Managing informal entrepreneurs should combine dredge and*
478 *block, guide mainly, because they have become a type of business, and even regular travel*
479 *agencies cannot do without them.”* Further, some residents said they were helpless regarding
480 the management of informal entrepreneurs. “*We ordinary people dare not intervene (A01)*”,
481 and “*Even if we prevent them from soliciting business, you cannot get them to leave*” (M13).
482 It is, therefore, necessary to manage informal employment via regulation.

483 A further analysis of the interview texts revealed that residents with stronger perceptions of
484 negative impacts more wanted to ban this group and regulate their activities. Conversely, those
485 with higher positive evaluations wanted to retain them and regulate their management.

486 Residents with stronger attitudes for retaining informal entrepreneurs were unwilling to
487 regulate them. They felt that traditional regulations (such as delimited business areas and fixed
488 booths) would negate some advantages of informal employment, such as convenience (K11),
489 thus affecting the consumption experiences of tourists and residents. Notably, resident
490 evaluations of informal entrepreneurs also affected their attitudes. For example, F06 once used
491 a black guide tour and had a pleasant experience. As a result, she had a positive evaluation of
492 informal entrepreneurs and strongly supported their regulative management. Hence,
493 consumption experiences influenced resident evaluations and attitudes toward informal
494 entrepreneurs.

495 **Conclusions and discussion**

496 This research explored the perceptions and attitudes of residents toward informal entrepreneurs.
497 According to the quantitative and qualitative results, the main conclusions were as follows.

498 First, resident perceptions of informal entrepreneurs were positive and negative, the latter of
499 which were stronger. Residents have strong awareness of safety issues, customer rip-offs, and
500 quality problems, although they do recognize that informal entrepreneurs make travel easier
501 and meet immediate needs. This is consistent with the findings of Yotsumoto (2013) and
502 Recchi (2020). They argued that the quality of the goods and services provided by informal
503 entrepreneurs cannot be guaranteed, which may run contrary to the interests of consumers,
504 affect the images of destinations, and may even be illegal. However, the positive values of
505 informal employment should not be neglected, especially the positive roles played in providing
506 employment opportunities, solving social conflicts, enhancing and facilitating travel
507 experiences, and enriching city lifestyles. Hence, how to enhance the positive effects of
508 informal entrepreneurs and avoid the negative effects are critical issues for urban tourism
509 governance.

510 Second, resident positive evaluations of informal entrepreneurs positively influenced
511 retention and regulative management willingness. The higher the positive evaluations, the more
512 residents hoped the informal entrepreneurs could be retained and regulated by government.

513 This verifies the conclusions of previous studies (Kim et al., 2013; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2015),
514 i.e., the more positive residents perceive the impacts of tourism, the more willing they are to
515 support local tourism development. This research found that the stronger were resident positive
516 evaluations of informal entrepreneurs, the more they wanted this commerce to be regulated to
517 avoid the negative effects and increase the positive outcomes. This indicated that, although
518 residents realize that informal entrepreneurs bring many benefits, they believe that only
519 through standardized management by government departments can it be ideally developed to
520 make greater contributions to society.

521 Third, negative evaluations of informal entrepreneurs adversely influenced retention
522 willingness, while positively influencing regulative management willingness. Residents with
523 stronger negative evaluations of informal entrepreneurs, did not want them to continue to exist.
524 This resonated with Chen and Chen's (2010) findings in that negative perceptions of tourism
525 diminish resident supportive attitudes. This research in Beijing found that when perceptions
526 about the negative effects of informal entrepreneurs are strong, people are more willing to have
527 the government standardize their management to reduce adverse impacts. Thus, informal
528 employment appears to follow the general patterns of resident perceptions and attitudes
529 towards tourism impacts; the stronger are the positive perceptions, the more willing are
530 residents to support tourism development, and vice versa. Resident perceptions and attitudes
531 are not just about opposing or supporting informal employment, but also involve
532 considerations of market governance, safety, urban pollution, and fair trading practices.

533 Fourth, retention willingness negatively influenced regulative management willingness.
534 Residents who were more willing to retain this group did not want government to impose strict
535 regulations on them. They felt that official standardized management would hinder the free
536 development of this form of commerce. Lince (2011) argued that government regulation of
537 informal employment weakened entrepreneurs' control over their livelihoods and put them in
538 a disadvantageous position. In addition, standardized management may diminish the unique
539 characteristics and advantages of the products and services provided. The existence of informal
540 entrepreneurs is largely due to their flexible operating modes and convenient services.

541 Therefore, too strict management measures might cause a dilution of these features and benefits,
542 which residents do not want to see happen.

543 Fifth, consumption experiences moderated the relationship between retention and regulative
544 management willingness. Compared to residents with consumption experiences, their
545 counterparts' retention willingness had a stronger negative effect on regulative management
546 willingness. This result is consistent with Gilal et al. (2018), in that buying experiences play
547 an important role in regulating consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. The findings
548 clarify the negative moderating effect of consumption experiences by contrasting two forms of
549 attitudes. Residents who have never bought the products or services provided by informal
550 entrepreneurs may lack a deep knowledge and understanding of this group, and can be more
551 prone to negative evaluations or misunderstandings of this commerce. Therefore, they are less
552 willing to retain these entrepreneurs and more willing to support standardized management to
553 maintain market order and protect destination images. In contrast, residents who have
554 purchased the products or services provided by informal entrepreneurs are more familiar with
555 this group, perhaps resulting in cordial relationships and purchasing preferences. Therefore,
556 for residents with consumption experiences, there is a weak negative relationship between
557 retention and regulative management willingness.

558 *Theoretical implications*

559 The theoretical implications of this research are three-fold. First, the perceptions, attitudes, and
560 influences of urban dwellers toward informal employment were examined. The existing
561 literature examines the characteristics and social and economic contributions of informal
562 employment; however, few studies discuss this commerce from the perspective of residents.
563 The findings contribute to a broader understanding of the “host-guest” relationship between
564 residents and informal workers, and expand the field of study on informal employment. Second,
565 the boundary conditions in the influence paths between resident retention and regulatory
566 management willingness were explored by introducing consumption experiences as a
567 moderating variable. The results indicated that resident contact with informal employment

568 significantly influenced their attitudes toward this group and fostered greater understanding of
569 this special form of employment. Third, a mixed method research design comprehensively
570 revealed resident perceptions and attitudes towards informal employment. The qualitative
571 study confirmed the quantitative results and provided deeper evidence as to how perceptions,
572 attitudes, and influences are formed, which offers a useful research paradigm worthy of greater
573 investigation.

574 ***Practical implications***

575 There are implications for the management of informal employment in urban tourism. First,
576 governments should actively provide vocational training and employment guidance to improve
577 the skills and service quality of entrepreneurs and workers in informal tourism. In addition,
578 they should guide the development of such informal employment and maximize its positive
579 effects to contribute to the urban economy and tourism. Second, administrative departments
580 should strengthen the supervision and management of tourism markets and create appropriate
581 market environments for the informal entrepreneurs. Also, governments should not intervene
582 and restrict this group too much, but should give it sufficient scope for free and reasonable
583 development, thereby retaining the unique operational characteristics and advantages, so as to
584 better serve urban residents and tourists. Third, governments should develop a greater
585 understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of residents toward informal employment. To
586 create a good environment for urban development and community life, efforts should be made
587 to reduce the negative impact of informal entrepreneurs and to build a more harmonious
588 environment of “host-guest” sharing.

589 ***Limitations and future research***

590 It is acknowledged that there are several shortcomings in this analysis, offering new directions
591 for future research. First, although this study had an extended survey period, it neglected the
592 potential trends and changes in resident perceptions and attitudes. Future scholars should carry
593 out longitudinal research to analyze changing perceptions and attitudes. Second, the case area

594 of this study is relatively unique; different types of cities, including small and medium-sized
595 ones, should be incorporated in the future to examine these findings. Third, this research
596 investigated two types of resident perceptions and attitudes towards informal entrepreneurs.
597 Future studies should incorporate more detailed dimensions and other perceptual and
598 attitudinal items, as well as social, cultural, and economic factors, demographic characteristics,
599 and other variables to enrich the theoretical research in this field and enhance its practical value.
600 Also, this research did not consider the role of informal entrepreneurship and employment in
601 meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that may provide further
602 justification for this form of commerce.

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