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Research Article

## The Effect of Agglomeration Strategy on Rural Resilience from the Perspective of Homestay Tourism Operators

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### ABSTRACT

*Homestay tourism villages* (HTVs) represent a path for the transformation, revitalization, and sustainability of rural communities. However, due to the risks inherent in homestay tourism, they are often vulnerable to internal and external environmental changes which derive from the fragility and instability of integration of rural culture and tourism, unstable outcomes of science and technology, etc. Resilience theory provides a new perspective for homestay tourism rural sustainability research and is of great significance for exploring how rural tourism stakeholders can resist and resolve internal and external disturbances and enhance the capability of sustainable development. To address this issue, we conducted a qualitative and quantitative analysis of data from HTVs, proposed a theoretically hypothetical model of the impact of agglomeration strategy on the resilience of HTV, finding that homestay operators' agglomeration strategy promoted HTVs' resilience against environmental changes. Similarly, operators' willingness to reach a consensus regarding strategic decisions improved rural resilience. Therefore, homestay operators' agglomeration strategy can have a positive effect on HTVs' resilience by promoting consensus development. Our findings provide a guideline for homestay tourism and rural resilience in the post-pandemic era.

**Keywords:** Agglomeration strategy; Rural resilience; Consensus development; Rural revitalization; Rural homestay



## 1. Introduction

*Rural resilience* (RR) is a concept that refers to rural communities' capacity to cope with internal and external environmental disturbances. Rural resilience is not limited to rural communities' efficient capability to recover from crises, it is also evidence of sustainability and represents a competitive advantage (Cox & Hamlen, 2015; Roberts et al., 2017).

As the COVID-19 pandemic has been effectively curbed in China, the country's tourism industry has entered a post-pandemic stage. The conditions of this stage are intertwined with lingering problems from the pre-pandemic period, while various uncertainties associated with changes in the economy, policies, and markets have also emerged. In addition, various events, including natural disasters and trade disputes, have posed a major threat to the functioning and sustainability of rural tourism in recent years. Therefore, the development of rural resilience has become a research hotspot in the field of tourism management (Luthe & Wyss, 2014). Although there is no consensus among researchers as to what the generation and intervention mechanisms underlying rural resilience are, and an authoritative explanation and generalizable principle on this matter has not yet been formed (Cochrane, 2010; Dong et al., 2021), the effect of homestay operators' individual-level strategies on rural resilience has garnered significant interest from various scholars (e.g., Feihan et al., 2021).

Since Porter (1990) first developed the concept of industrial agglomeration, the theory surrounding this concept has developed rapidly in both academic research and industrial practice. The relationship between industrial agglomeration and regional economic growth has become an important research topic in economic geography and economic growth theory (Luo et al., 2009; Porter, 1990; Klarin, 2021). The essence of industrial spatial agglomeration and economic growth is the symbiosis between the two. According to Martin & Ottaviano (2010), the agglomeration of various industries and businesses stimulates regional economic growth; vice versa, regional economic growth is a driving force for industrial agglomeration (Ahmed et al, 2021). However, the tourism industry has outstanding geographical and spatial agglomeration effects due to its strong relevance (Li, 2009; Yang, 2012; He et al., 2021). Prior studies have focused on the agglomeration effects (Heffernon et al., 2000; Jackson & Murphy, 2006), scale effects (Novelli et al., 2006; Sigurðardóttir & Steinthórsson, 2018), external effects (Majewska, 2015), and regional competitiveness (Trinh, 2016) of regional tourism. Additionally, Chinese scholars have focused on the mechanism of the interaction between agglomeration in the tourism industry and regional economic growth. Additionally, they have discussed economic development strategies in regional tourism from the perspective of agglomeration in the tourism industry (Wang et al. 2019; Yao, 2019; Xu, 2020; Zhu, 2018; Feihan et al., 2021). Similarly, other scholars have explored the mechanism linking agglomeration in the tourism industry and regional economic growth from various theoretical perspectives, such as push-pull theory (He & Hu, 2018), the function model (Wang & Huo, 2018), and the spatial measurement model (Liu et al., 2013), improving our understanding of this interaction. Thus, few studies have carried out an empirical analysis of tourism operators' agglomeration strategies, and they have not presented an in-depth discussion of the relationship between operators' *agglomeration strategy* (AS) and rural resilience.

When exploring the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience, it is important to consider *consensus development* (CD) as an important intermediary in this relationship. Agglomeration strategy rarely directly affects group behavior and performance, but instead indirectly affects the rural level through individual-group value matching (Long & Zhao, 2009). The process of consensus development implies the consistent recognition of homestay operators' ru-

ral-tourism development strategies, objectives, and implementation methods of homestay operators (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Reaching a consensus regarding agglomeration strategy helps ensure the smooth progress of rural-tourism strategy adjustments and reforms (Huang, 2011). Accurately perceiving changes in the external environment and making quick strategic adjustments are important prerequisites for rural resilience (Kantur & Iseri-Say, 2015). Therefore, consensus development is likely to mediate the relationship between AS and rural resilience. Further, agglomeration strategy may also contribute to rural resilience by promoting consensus development.

In this study, we assessed whether homestay operators' agglomeration strategy can effectively improve the resilience of homestay tourism villages (HTVs) through consensus development. Specifically, this study explores the following issues through empirical research: (1) the effect of agglomeration strategy on rural resilience and (2) the mediating role of consensus development in said effect. This study presents valuable contributions to the field-relevant literature: First, it re-examines agglomeration and its positive role in promoting rural resilience during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic era, thereby enriching the literature on agglomeration, its effects, and consequences. Second, while prior research has focused on the macroscopic effects of agglomeration on the regional economy, this study explores the impact and mechanism of agglomeration on rural tourism stakeholders, complementing research on the antecedents of rural resilience at the micro level. Third, we developed a model of the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience treating consensus development as a mediator. At the practical level, this study provides new ideas for how to promote the development of homestay operators and HTVs, and could help tourism operators cultivate the synergy between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience.

## **2. Theory and hypotheses**

### ***2.1. Agglomeration strategy and rural resilience***

Several factors affect rural resilience on the macro (organization), meso (sector), and micro (individual) levels (Gibson & Tarrant, 2010). Among them, operators' positive outlook, group commitment, interpersonal-interaction motivation, and other individual characteristics have been widely recognized to have a fundamental role in resilience (Giustiniano & Cantoni, 2018). For example, when faced with a negative environment, maintaining a positive outlook (such as hope) can help individuals remain optimistic and adopt positive coping behaviors, thereby inducing individual-level resilience (Shin et al., 2012). Further, when the individual's positive emotions are threatened by a long-term confrontation with difficult circumstances, the sense of identity, trust, and responsibility engendered by group commitment can help individuals free themselves from negative emotions and replenish individual resilience in a timely manner (Sommer et al., 2016). Additionally, when faced with environmental challenges, individuals with high interpersonal-interaction motivation will likely develop a willingness to learn, share knowledge, and engage in teamwork beliefs (Britt et al., 2016). This way, individual resilience can extend to the group level (Meneghel et al., 2016), helping the group survive amidst difficult circumstances.

From this perspective, agglomeration strategy (as a higher-level concept than individual traits) can theoretically have a positive effect on group resilience. According to the theory of work values, when following the right set of values, individuals internalize the importance of work, which in turn inspires them to accomplish their goals and develop a strong sense of self-efficacy (Schwartz et al., 2012). Further, individuals with the right set of work values have positive emotions and enthusiasm for the work they are engaged in (Steele & Liu, 1983); they are willing to continuously improve their skills and behaviors by collaborating with their peers. Additionally,

pursuing and accomplishing internal goals can help fulfill the individual's needs. The satisfaction of basic psychological needs forms a strong psychological connection between the individual and their work, as well as with the group they are engaged in, thereby instilling them with a high level of work commitment and group commitment (Deci et al., 2017). Therefore, as a specific work value, agglomeration strategy can theoretically stimulate positive work-related emotions and motivate individuals to interact and collaborate with their peers, thereby promoting rural resilience.

Furthermore, combined with the conceptual framework of resilience constructed by Kantur and Iseri-Say (2015), this study posits that agglomeration strategy can have a positive effect on rural resilience. First of all, agglomeration strategy can help rural homestay operators improve their position perception, which is their group's self-perception, judgment of crisis situations, and coping skills when facing a crisis. Whether a group's position perception is accurate determines its subsequent coping strategies, and thus also forms the basis of rural resilience (Hind et al., 1996). Since the integrity of a group is undermined in a crisis, accurate position perception often requires the contribution of its members. The industry ideal of homestay rural tourism is a cognitive work value; it can inspire individuals to love their work and perform it with confidence, awe, and responsibility, while encouraging them to develop a high level of group commitment (Liu, 2018). Therefore, when a group faces a perception crisis, individuals with an *industry ideal* (II) can express their understanding and work toward a consensus within the group, helping the group strengthen its position perception and even repair any damages caused by the crisis.

Further, agglomeration strategy helps improve rural contextual-integration capability. Rural contextual-integration capability is the key to the smooth realization of rural risk-response strategies and to the construction of rural resilience. Studies have shown that increasing homestay operators' participation and improving the quality of their interactions in crisis management scenarios are important ways to improve their contextual integration capability (Mallak, 1998). *Mutual assistance* (MA) is an interpersonal work value that can guide operators to be willing to help others, thereby establishing a good interpersonal relationship of sharing and cooperation. Individuals with a strong willingness to help each other will introduce trust and integrity in the crisis management decision-making process, creating a harmonious and interactive decision-making atmosphere (Weick, 1993). Mutual assistance not only helps improve groups' adaptability during decision-making, but also helps them improve their ability to comprehensively allocate human resources. Mutual assistance among homestay operators is a process of continuous communication and reaching consensus on group goals, missions, and strategies. It helps build a supportive and caring group environment, and helps groups improve their ability to integrate and utilize environmental resources.

Finally, agglomeration strategy helps improve rural development stakeholders' strategy formulation and execution efficiency. The perception of crisis situations and its own situational integration reality, as well as the rational formulation and effective implementation of response strategies, are the main characteristics of rural resilience (Mallak, 1998). As traditional strategies are often inadequate when responding to real-world crises, HTVs should be supported to formulate and implement crisis-response strategies. However, the formulation of these strategies requires the extensive participation of critical, creative, and proactive homestay operators with a clear vision during the implementation of their strategy (Kantur & Iseri-Say, 2015).

*Willingness to improve* (WTI) is a power-based work value; operators with this value develop a sense of accomplishment through their reputation and influence. Encounters with abnormal

environments and major crises provide opportunities for individuals to demonstrate their individual skills and gain reputation and influence. Therefore, individuals with WTI have a strong motivation to participate in crisis management decision-making and strategy development. In addition, this type of operator pays attention to the improvement of personal skills and the stimulation of potential. For this reason, these individuals can approach their work goals with enthusiasm and perseverance, having developed strategic execution abilities. Therefore, we developed the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Agglomeration strategy has a positive effect on rural resilience.

### **2.2. The mediating role of consensus development**

In prior research, consensus development has been mainly regarded as the degree of recognition that the organization's strategic goals, strategic implementation methods, and implementation tools receive by individuals at the highest level within the organization (Bourgeois, 1980). Further, scholars have conducted in-depth discussions regarding the scope and structural dimensions of consensus development. In terms of the scope of the operators, the relevant operators are gradually expanded to the managers and all employees at all levels of the organization. Various researchers posit that ignoring the importance of employees' role in strategic management leads to friction and resource consumption within the organization during strategy implementation, resulting in failure to achieve company-wide strategic goals (Huo & Wang, 2017). In terms of its dimensional characteristics, Floyd, & Wooldridge (1992) pointed out that reaching a consensus within a group not only implies developing a shared understanding of a strategy (consensus understanding), but also implies developing an accompanying commitment (consensus commitment). Consensus understanding is the clear and collective understanding of strategic goals and means, which constitutes the cognitive elements of the consensus-development process. Meanwhile, consensus commitment comprises the emotional elements of the consensus-development process. The reason for the importance of consensus development is that to ensure the effectiveness of the implementation of the organization's strategies, it is not only necessary for employees at all levels of the organization to have a deep understanding of the established strategy, but also for them to generally agree and actively participate in its execution. Additionally, Huang (2011) states that employees' broad recognition of the consensus is equally important to ensure the effectiveness of the implementation of company-wide strategies. Therefore, the dimensional structure of consensus development is further subdivided into three aspects: *consensus understanding* (CU), *consensus recognition* (CR), and *consensus commitment* (CC). Thus, consensus development is not only the result of a reasonable and scientific strategic decision-making process, but also a prerequisite for the effective implementation of organizational strategies and the attainment of favorable results. Therefore, when an organization faces a crisis, the higher the degree of consensus among employees is, the more likely it is to implement a rational and effective response strategy (Välilikangas, 2020). Having an effective response strategy can help an organization recover quickly from a crisis and even achieve growth through organizational resilience. This suggests a natural connection between consensus development and rural resilience. Thus, we developed the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Consensus development has a positive effect on rural resilience.

Agglomeration strategy is a value centered on mutual assistance, willingness to improve, and industrial ideal that can continuously stimulate individuals' positive outlook regarding their careers, as well as towards the industry and their group. It is crucial to improve homestay operators' consensus development. Agglomeration strategy can help homestay operators deepen their consensus understanding, and the operators' cognitive ability and willingness to learn are decisive factors influencing their ability for consensus understanding. Operators with willingness to improve pursue a sense of accomplishment through reputation and influence, so they are willing to continue to improve their personal cognitive ability and skill level through active and persistent learning in order to achieve their goals. Meanwhile, said operators also value the group's evaluation of their own competence, so that they have a strong interest in group strategy and a strong motivation to link up individual goals with group goals, which enhances their understanding of strategic goals (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2003). Additionally, agglomeration strategy can improve homestay operators' consensus recognition. Generally, the degree of the operator's CR mainly depends on their expectations of the extent to which the implementation of the agreed-upon strategies (defined through consensus) can promote the realization of personal interests. Due to differences in personal abilities, ideals, and organizational levels, homestay operators' goals and interests vary, and there is also a certain degree of conflict between their goals and those of the group (Mi & Li, 2003). If the operator believes that implementation of the agreed-upon strategies represents a threat to their own goals and interests, this will directly hamper the group's capability to reach a consensus. Further, mutual assistance, as an interpersonal work value, can guide operators to resolve goal-related conflicts with other operators and with the group at large through active and effective communication; therefore, mutual assistance helps operators align with the group's consensus. Further, operators with agglomeration strategy awareness also tend to have a higher consensus commitment, which requires operators to have a high willingness to reach a group-wide consensus (Yan et al., 2015). Thus, we hypothesized the following:

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Agglomeration strategy helps promote consensus development.

Furthermore, agglomeration strategy can have a positive effect on rural resilience by promoting consensus development. There are three mechanisms to achieve this. The first way to achieve the aforementioned effect would be to improve a village's ability to perceive the event of a crisis and its impact. Operators with agglomeration strategy awareness are more likely to work toward consensus, and the higher their degree of alignment with this consensus is, the more likely they are to meet the performance expectations of a homestay village (Boudreau et al, 2001). According to the theory of internal incentives, individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the realization of group goals, whose own behaviors are in line with rural development expectations, will experience an excellent mental experience (Deci et al, 2017). This experience encourages operators to increase their engagement in pursuing the development goals of homestay-type villages, instilling them with positive attitudes and behaviors, such as self-confidence, optimism, and hard work (Carmeli et al., 2009). When a village faces a crisis, these positive attitudes and behaviors often engender a sense of responsibility to identify the crisis, thereby helping the village adjust accordingly.

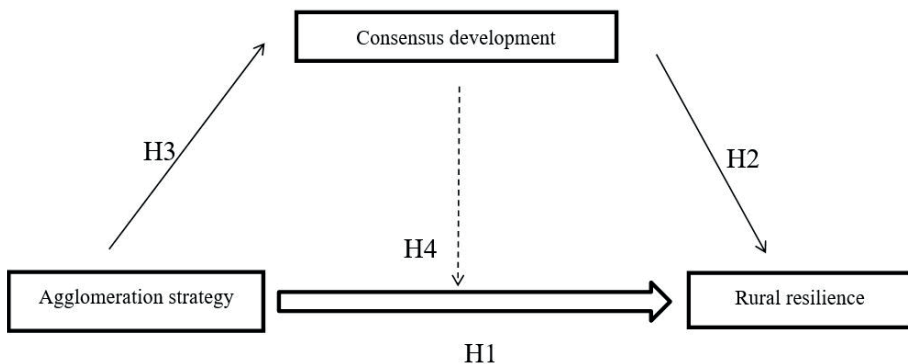
The second way to achieve the aforementioned effect would be to improve homestay villages' ability to accurately identify their own weaknesses in crisis situations. In addition to reducing task ambiguity and role conflicts, as well as contributing towards better business performance

(Boudreau et al, 2001), operators who work towards developing consensus will also exhibit a shared mental model (Barnes, 1997). Having a shared mental model is helpful for the high-quality knowledge exchange between operators regarding the village's weaknesses and coping capabilities during a crisis. It can also assist villages effectively integrate the internal and external resources needed to respond to crises through cooperation.

Finally, the third way to achieve the aforementioned effect would be to improve the village's ability to develop and implement effective response strategies. A high level of consensus alignment indicates that rural homestay operators are actively involved in consensus development and can accurately understand, agree with, and commit to the strategic goals of the rural homestay (Huang, 2011). Meanwhile, consensus development is an effective means to enhance the effectiveness of strategy execution. Additionally, the higher the degree of consensus alignment is, the process of implementation of the consensus of cooperation and coordination can be improved, the effect of the implementation of the better (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). According to the conceptual framework of resilience constructed by Kantur & Iseri-Say (2015), rural villages' ability to reach a consensus on how to efficiently respond to crisis situations is a manifestation of rural resilience to consensus. Consensus of rural resilience is an important part of rural resilience (Chen et al., 2019). Thus, we developed the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Consensus development plays a mediating role between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience.

Our hypothetical framework is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Proposed research model**

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Sample and data collection

In this study, we included homestay operators in homestay-type villages from *Jiangning District* (JND) and *Taihu Lake* (THL) in Jiangsu Province, *Dongtou* (DT) and *Moganshan* (MGS) in Zhejiang Province, and *Jiaochangwei* (JCW) in Guangdong Province. Jiangsu, Guangdong, and Zhejiang are economically developed provinces where homestay-type villages develop rapidly. The requirements for tourists are getting higher (Gu, 2013). Homestay operators in the aforementioned provinces need continuous innovation as their purpose and means of survival. After conducting

extensive theoretical and empirical research, we attribute the development of homestay tourism villages in these places to the implementation of an agglomeration economy model (Wang et al. 2019; Yao, 2019; Xu, 2020; Zhu, 2018; see Figure 2). Under top-down or bottom-up governance situations (see Table 1), homestay operators implement an agglomeration strategy to form an *economically-oriented agglomeration group* (EAG), a *governance-oriented agglomeration group* (GAG), or a *culturally-oriented agglomeration group* (CAG). EAGs transform local idle houses into homestays through space practice, realizing the possibility of consumption, and creating a local and gentrified consumption space. Meanwhile, GAGs strengthen the investment, construction, and management of the built environment, establish a local institutional space, and promote the production of the built environment space. Additionally, CAGs invest in the social field, promote the specialization of local homestays and the construction of local subjective values, and ultimately form rural resilience and promote the sustainable development of the countryside. Therefore, it can be said that the agglomeration strategy is the “foundation” of homestay operators.

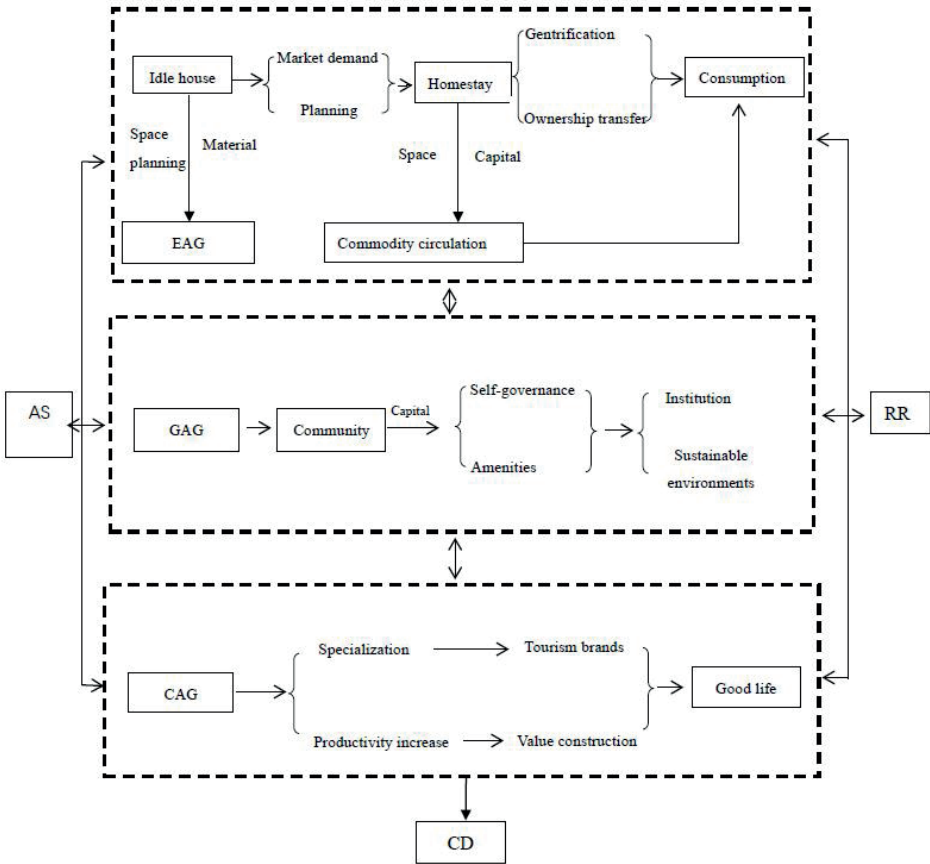


Figure 2: Homestay-tourism village model



However, due to the significant risks involved in homestay-tourism villages, they are prone to fail due to environmental uncertainty (You et al., 2019). Hence, improving rural resilience is key to the success of homestay tourism. To do so, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience from the perspective of homestay operators in homestay-type villages.

This study analyzes data obtained through a combination of field work and a survey. From 2011 to 2019, we conducted several field surveys and visited homestay villages in Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Further, we conducted an initial survey and a follow-up visit to a homestay village in Guangdong in 2012 and 2019, respectively. Based on this research, combined with the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we developed a survey on the resilience of homestay-type villages.

The questionnaire used for this study was created on an online survey platform (*wenjuanxing*). Subsequently, it was sent to potential responders either via an online link or by sending the paper version of the questionnaire by post. For each surveyed homestay, we simultaneously distributed two questionnaires (A and B). Questionnaire A comprised two sections, agglomeration strategy and consensus development, and it was intended to be answered by three or fewer homestay operators. Questionnaire B collected basic information data related to the homestays and rural resilience. Since homestay operators have a more comprehensive understanding of the general situation of homestays than ordinary employees, they answered questionnaire B. Questionnaires A and B were paired and coded with each homestay's name.

The survey period started in May 2020 and lasted until the end of October 2020. A total of 300 A questionnaires and 100 B questionnaires were distributed. Subsequently, 191 valid A questionnaires and 69 matched and valid B questionnaires were retrieved; thus, the effective response rates were 63.7% and 69%, respectively. Among the 69 sampled homestays, from the perspective of development stage, homestays in the growth stage were the most common (55%). The numbers of homestays in the start-up period (14.5%) and the mature period (15.9%) were similar, while the remaining homestays (14.6%) were in a recession, re-opening, or adjustment transition period.

**Table 1. Comparison of governance models of homestay tourism village**

	Top-down approach	Bottom-up grassroots approach
Site	JND; DT; THL	JCW; MGS
Resource endowment	Historical and cultural village; characteristic industry	Natural ecological resource
Development goal	Leisure slow life	Eco-tourism
Transformation mode	Capital dominance	Change people first, then create space
Management mode	External capital	Community-led
Sense of place	Revitalize local cohesion	Large numbers of villagers moved out; reconstruction of community values

### 3.2. Measures

The three dimensions of agglomeration strategy were measured using a scale we developed specifically for this study based on a set of three scales developed by other authors; we adapted these scales to the context of homestay tourism. The agglomeration strategy scale assessed industrial ideal, mutual assistance, and willingness to improve using the three following subscales. Homestay operators' industrial ideal was assessed using a subscale based on the Employee Occupational Engagement Scale (Saks, 2006), including 10 items, such as "I spend a lot of time working in the homestay every day." For mutual assistance, a scale drawn from Chattopadhyay (1999) was used to measure the interdependence of work tasks that includes six items, such as "Our

homestay operators must cooperate closely with each other to normally complete the rural development goals.” To measure operators’ willingness to improve (which reflects their pursuit of perfection at work), we adapted the Burns Perfectionism Scale (Burns, 1980) for which 10 items were rated, such as “setting a higher or even unrealistic consensus standard to evaluate self-worth.” Using exploratory factor analysis, we found that the cumulative variance contribution rate of the three factors extracted from all the above items was 82.1%, and that the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) of the overall AS scale was 0.771, indicating that it had good reliability and validity.

To analyze rural resilience, we developed a scale including items from two dimensions: adaptability and optimization ability. To measure adaptability, we adapted the scale developed by Kantur & Iseri-Say (2015), with seven items, such as “When needed, the group of homestay operators will adapt to take the necessary actions.” To measure optimization ability, we adapted the scale developed by Chen (2016) with three items, such as “The group of homestay operators can always learn from mistakes and problems in time to optimize or construct new coping models.” Exploratory factor analysis showed that the cumulative variance contribution rate of the two common factors extracted from all items was 81.1%, and that our rural resilience scale’s internal consistency coefficient was 0.823.

To measure consensus development, we adapted the three-dimensional metric table compiled by Huang (2011). Exploratory factor analysis showed that the cumulative variance contribution rate of the two common factors extracted from all 13 items was 77.8%, and that internal consistency coefficient of this tool was 0.845.

The items of all the above scales were scored on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 7, representing the degree of conformity with the group’s agreed-upon strategies from low to high. In addition, this study also controls the effect of the homestay’s life cycle (with 1 representing the mature period and 0 all other stages, including the start-up, recession, re-opening, adjustment, and transition periods) on the empirical results.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Common method variance (CMV)**

In order to minimize the common method deviations that may be caused by the same responding subjects, we implemented a combination of longitudinal design and a setting of reverse items to collect data for questionnaire A. First of all, at the first time point, we asked the operators to complete the agglomeration strategy scale, and added the reverse items on the consensus development to this scale. Second, after at least one week, we asked the same operators to complete the consensus development scale, and added the reverse items on the agglomeration strategy scale to this scale. Finally, we sorted out any conflicting or inconsistent items at two different time points. After explaining the meaning and purpose of these items to the homestay operators, they were to make a supplementary answer at the third time point. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS 20.0 software. Further, Harman’s single factor method was used to conduct a common method deviation test. We found that the three analyzed factors exhibited values greater than 1 for all items, while the variance contribution rate of the first factor was 25.10%, which is less than half of the total variance contribution rate (74.86%), showing that the deviation of the common method used in this study is within an acceptable range.

#### 4.2. Confirmatory factor analysis

Further, we used Mplus 7.4 software to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the three core variables (AS, RR, and CD) to examine their discriminative validity. We set the benchmark model as a three-factor model (M1), assuming that the three variables had a high degree of discrimination, so that the three common factors would be extracted. The candidate models included all three two-factor models: M2 (in which we assumed that agglomeration strategy and rural resilience had a low degree of discrimination, for which two common factors were extracted), M3 (in which we assumed that agglomeration strategy and consensus development had a low degree of discrimination, for which two common factors were extracted), and M4 (in which we assumed that rural resilience and consensus development had a low degree of discrimination, for which two common factors were extracted). Additionally, another candidate model was included, namely, a single factor model, M5 (in which we assumed that the three variables had a low degree of discrimination, for which we extracted a common factor). As shown in Table 2, the benchmark model in this study has an acceptable degree of fit ( $\chi^2/df = 2.211$ , CFI = 0.950, TLI = 0.933, RMSEA = 0.041); the benchmark model was significantly better than all candidate models, indicating that the three core variables have high independence and discrimination, and the discriminative validity of the scale of this study was good.

**Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis**

Model	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	IFI	NFI	RMSEA
M1 (AS, RR, CD)	2.211	0.950	0.933	0.939	0.929	0.041
M2 (AS + RR, CD)	4.137	0.875	0.799	0.804	0.794	0.092
M3 (AS + CD, RR)	4.561	0.852	0.758	0.761	0.751	0.115
M4 (RR + CD, AS)	4.863	0.810	0.712	0.720	0.708	0.126
M5 (AS + RR + CD)	6.867	0.693	0.514	0.528	0.509	0.161

#### 4.3. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of each variable and the correlation coefficient between the variables. It can be seen that agglomeration strategy is significantly positively correlated with rural resilience ( $r = 0.334$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which is consistent with H1, as expected in this study. Further, agglomeration strategy was significantly positively correlated with consensus development ( $r = 0.245$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), while consensus development was significantly positively correlated with rural resilience ( $r = 0.191$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This provides preliminary data support for the research hypotheses H2, H3, and H4. In addition, the correlation coefficients of the control variables showed some interesting results. For example, operators in the 28–35 age group and working in homestays in the growth stage exhibited better agglomeration strategies and consensus development practices, which made them important contributors to rural resilience.

**Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients of variables**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
AS	4.66	1.313	1					
CD	4.63	1.397	0.245***	1				
RR	4.93	1.264	0.334***	0.191***	1			
Gender	0.19	0.382	0.017	-0.033	0.046	1		
Age	4.79	1.434	0.309***	0.212***	0.489***	-0.011	1	
Growth stage	2.52	1.301	0.110**	-0.072	0.117**	0.028	0.030	1

Note: M stands for mean, SD stands for standard deviation; \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

#### 4.4. Tests of hypotheses

We used SPSS 20.0 software to perform a multiple linear regression analysis in order to test the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience (the main effect hypothesis) and the mediating effect of consensus development on the aforementioned relationship (the mediation effect hypothesis). The results of multiple linear regression analysis are shown in Table 4.

First, we tested the results of the main effect hypothesis. As shown in Table 4 (column 2), we found that after controlling for gender, age, and growth stage, agglomeration strategy had a significant positive effect on RR ( $\beta = 0.196, p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, H1 was verified. In order to have a clearer understanding of the mechanism underlying the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience, we investigated the internal relationship between the two variable dimensional structures (as shown in columns 6 and 7). The results show that the three major dimensions of agglomeration strategy are industrial ideal ( $\beta = 0.102, p < 0.05$ ), willingness to improve ( $\beta = 0.228, p < 0.001$ ), and mutual assistance ( $\beta = 0.237, p < 0.001$ ), all of which can significantly promote the *adaptive capacity* (AC) of rural areas. Additionally, willingness to improve ( $\beta = 0.141, p < 0.01$ ) and MA ( $\beta = 0.114, p < 0.05$ ) can also have a positive impact on rural communities' *optimization ability* (OA).

**Table 4. Hypothesis test results**

Variable	RR				CD	AC	OA
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gender	0.034 (0.817)	0.029 (0.703)	0.033 (0.806)	0.038 (0.907)	-0.036 (-0.763)	-0.077 (-1.791)	0.014 (0.294)
Age	0.487*** (11.809)	0.422*** (9.791)	0.391*** (8.985)	0.253*** (7.858)	0.181*** (3.666)	0.008 (0.149)	0.169*** (3.448)
Growth stage	0.020 (0.448)	0.036 (0.850)	0.027 (0.642)	0.007 (0.155)	0.066 (1.405)	0.069 (1.571)	0.062 (1.331)
AS		0.196*** (4.609)	0.183*** (4.309)		0.132** (2.853)		
CD			0.155*** (3.716)	0.160*** (3.795)			
II						0.102* (2.303)	0.081 (1.735)
WTI						0.228*** (4.382)	0.141** (2.570)
MA						0.237*** (4.553)	0.114* (2.069)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.254	0.286	0.304	0.275	0.179	0.219	0.135
Adj R <sup>2</sup>	0.244	0.275	0.292	0.263	0.164	0.203	0.117
F	25.405***	25.474***	23.856***	24.024***	8.340***	13.451***	7.449***

Note: t values is in the parentheses; \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001.

Next, we examine our findings vis-à-vis the mediation hypothesis. We found that agglomeration strategy can play a positive role in promoting rural resilience, as shown in columns 2, 6, and 7. The second step is to examine the impact of manufacturing consensus on rural resilience. Further, we found that the estimated coefficient of consensus development was significantly positive ( $\beta = 0.160, p < 0.001$ ), as shown in column 4, which supports H2. Additionally, we found that agglomeration strategy had a significant positive effect on consensus development ( $\beta = 0.132, p < 0.01$ ), which verified H3. The fourth step is to examine the mediating effect of manufacturing consensus on the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience. After incorpo-

rating consensus development as a variable, the impact of agglomeration strategy on rural resilience was significantly weakened, but it remained significant ( $\Delta\beta = 0.013, p < 0.001$ ). Column 3 shows that the positive effect of agglomeration strategy on rural resilience was partly transmitted through consensus development. Therefore, H4 was verified.

#### 4.5. Robustness check

One concern about the results of the main effects test is that the econometric model may have endogenous problems caused by self-selection. Homestay operators who value the development of rural resilience may prefer to use industrial ideal, mutual assistance, and willingness to improve as a group value guide. To control the above-mentioned endogenous problems caused by self-selection, we used the Heckman two-stage model. All calculations were performed using StataMP 14.0 software.

In the first stage, in the Probit model with agglomeration strategy (higher than the median value of 1, otherwise 0) as the dependent variable, the instrumental variable chosen was the *number of cultural and creative brands* (NCCB) formed as a result of the agglomeration of homestay operators (reflected by interconnected systems of rural governance and local products). Further, cultural and creative brands are the result of agglomeration strategies (Zhang, 2018). The greater the number of cultural and creative brands in a given homestay's location is, the more media campaigns may encourage homestay operators' agglomeration strategy. However, cultural and creative brands usually had no direct impact on rural resilience.

In the second stage, the *inverse Mills ratio* (IMR) was incorporated into the model as an independent variable to re-examine the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience, and to examine whether the main test results were robust to endogenous problems caused by self-selection. As shown in Table 5, the regression results of the first stage show that the regression coefficient of NCCB was significantly positive ( $\beta = 0.240, p < 0.01$ ), which indicates that the instrumental variables selected in this study had strong explanatory power. The second stage regression results show that the coefficient of IMR was significant ( $\beta = 0.106, p < 0.01$ ), which indicates that the self-selection problem does exist. More importantly, the estimated coefficient of agglomeration strategy was significantly positive ( $\beta = 0.171, p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the main effect test results remain robust to endogenous problem caused by self-selection.

**Table 5. Results of the main effect robustness test based on the Heckman two-stage model**

Variable	First stage	Second stage
	AS dummy variable	RR
	1	2
Gender	-0.075 (-0.539)	0.029 (0.731)
Age	0.046(1.272)	0.411*** (9.430)
Growth stage	-0.232*** (-9.973)	0.022 (0.525)
NCCB	0.240** (2.587)	
IMR		0.106** (2.515)
AS		0.171*** (3.991)
R <sup>2</sup>		0.296
Adj R <sup>2</sup>		0.283
Pearson $\chi^2/F$	138.586 (sig = 0.654)	22.880***

Note: The Z-test value is in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

The classic test method to assess the intermediary effect may be biased because it is difficult for the estimated coefficients to meet a normal distribution. Using SPSS20.0 software, we conducted a bias-corrected non-parametric percentile bootstrap test to assess the robustness of the mediating effect of consensus development in the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience. Based on the original sample data ( $N = 191$ ), 71 bootstrap samples were randomly selected repeatedly for testing. As shown in **Table 6**, for the impact of agglomeration strategy on rural resilience, the 95% confidence interval (0.038, 0.072) did not include 0, while the mediating effect of CD was significant ( $\beta = 0.177, p < 0.01$ ), accounting for 36.95% of the total effect. Further, we also found that all the three dimensions of consensus development, namely consensus understanding, consensus recognition, and consensus commitment, all had significant mediating effects in the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience. This indicates that the test results of the research hypotheses in this paper are robust.

**Table 6. Robustness test results of the mediation effect using bootstrapping**

Intermediary model	Direct effect	Indirect effect	95% confidence interval
AS→MC→RR	0.302*** (4.169)	0.177** (2.618)	0.038,0.072
AS→CU→RR	0.201* (2.463)	0.152*** (3.097)	0.026,0.051
AS→CR→RR	0.203*** (3.308)	0.115* (1.966)	0.033,0.085
AS→CC→RR	0.284*** (3.072)	0.082* (2.063)	0.020,0.043

**5. Discussion**

**5.1. Conclusions**

This article used qualitative data obtained from HTV operators through field surveys and online questionnaires to explore the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience. Drawing on prior literature of tourism strategy management, it discussed the mediating role of consensus development in the aforementioned relationship, thereby developing a homestay rural resilience framework. We found that agglomeration strategy (as a group value with industrial ideal, willingness to improve, and mutual assistance at its core) had a positive role in promoting rural resilience. Further, we found that consensus development had a positive effect on rural resilience, and that it could provide a strategic guarantee for the development of rural resilience. Additionally, we found that agglomeration strategy helped promote consensus development, and that homestay operators with an inclination to follow an agglomeration strategy are more likely to understand, recognize, and commit to the sustainable development of rural homestays. Moreover, we found that agglomeration strategy could have a positive effect on rural resilience by promoting consensus development. Furthermore, we found that the three dimensions of consensus development (consensus understanding, consensus recognition, and consensus commitment) played an intermediary role in the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience.

**5.2. Theoretical implications**

The possible theoretical contributions of this article can be classified into three categories. First, this study deepens our understanding of the connotation, impact, consequences, and mechanisms of agglomeration strategy in the field of tourism. To date, researchers have not yet reached a consensus regarding the definition and functions of agglomeration strategies. Unlike previous studies, this article defines agglomeration strategy as a specific group value with industrial ideal, willingness to improve, and mutual assistance at its core. This study enriches field-relevant re-

search on the pre-dependent variables of spatial resilience of groups from the level of individual factors. The exploration of the antecedent variables of rural resilience in this study is of great significance to attain an in-depth understanding of the origin and cultivation of rural resilience.

Additionally, we have found the “missing link” of the association between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience. Prior studies on the relationship between individual values and group behaviors mostly focused on this relationship from a psychological perspective. However, this article draws on the literature of strategic management in tourism, identifying the bridge between individual values and group behaviors.

### ***5.3. Managerial implications***

The managerial implications of this study are the following: First, attach importance to “the power of unity” and carry out the mental cultivation of group values from the height of values. In the current global context, agglomeration strategies are no longer limited to the agglomeration and complementarity of the industrial chain; rather, they have evolved to guide modern business operators to discover their own work values and beliefs, which can foster the sustainable development of groups or regions. Second, this study highlights the importance of cooperation and consensus development in decision-making and in strategy formulation and implementation. Homestay rural tourism has shifted from high-speed growth to high-quality development, resulting in consensus development becoming an increasingly complex process. As it is an important means to ensure implementation of development goals, consensus development has gained increasing prominence in the resilience of homestay tourism. Third, this study highlights the importance of turning crises into opportunities, formulating strategies suitable improvement of rural resilience.

To continuously improve rural resilience and actively grasp the valuable opportunities that come with it, it is necessary to effectively respond to the challenges posed by changes in the environment. It is necessary to actively foster cooperation among homestay operators and actively explore strategies for resilience-based growth. Additionally, it is necessary to seize the opportunities provided by the digital economy to empower HTVs’ position, resource integration, and strategy execution, building a systematic resilience mechanism adapted to the characteristics of specific HTVs.

### ***5.4. Limitations and directions for future research***

This research had some limitations. First, due to the inherent flaws of the questionnaire survey and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effective recovery rate of some survey sites was low, which affected the representativeness of our data. Simultaneously, due to time and resource limitations, the sample included only five homestay-type villages in three provinces, which may reduce the generalizability of our results.

In our future research, we plan to improve the scientific nature of our investigation and expand its scope. Additionally, we will analyze the relationship between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience in greater depth using a longitudinal multi-temporal tracking study. Second, as this study focuses on the effect of agglomeration strategy on rural resilience with consensus development as an intermediary factor, it did not consider the practical implications of this effect. In the future, we will search for appropriate boundary conditions to enhance the contextual characteristics of research. Third, this study only focused on consensus development as an intermediary of the effect of agglomeration strategy on rural resilience, and did not comprehensively and sys-

tematically analyze the complex mechanism of action between agglomeration strategy and rural resilience, even though there might be several underlying factors and complex mechanisms. Future research should explore the mechanism by which the tourism industry fosters rural resilience from different perspectives.

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