

# The Influence Mechanism of Diploma Value Perception on the Willingness to take the Chinese Postgraduate Entrance Exams -- Based on Qualitative research of the Mental Tension System

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## Abstract

With the impact of the epidemic and the employment situation, the number of Chinese students preparing for postgraduate entrance examinations has increased sharply, and the students have a new understanding of the diploma value. The paper interviewed 24 Chinese students and adopted the method of the grounded theory to analyze the interview content based on the theory of the mental tension system. The paper found that Mental Efficacy is the internal driving force of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination, Individual Function is the internal basis for the formation of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination, Social Function is the external condition for the construction of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination, and Environmental Effect is the external driving force of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examinations. The diploma value has an important impact on the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination from many dimensions, which changes the traditional standard of measuring the diploma value, and prompts individuals to insist on their learning ideas and goal motivation in the process of postgraduate entrance examination.

## Keywords

Diploma value; The willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination; The mental tension system; The influence mechanism; grounded theory.

## 1. Introduction

From 2019 to 2023, the number of people preparing for postgraduate entrance examinations in China is rising from 2.9 million to 4.74 million. The number still continues to rise (China Education Online, 2023). The problematic situation of the postgraduate entrance examination highlights the importance of diploma value. The growth of investment in cultural products may enhance the degree of dominance in society (Collins, 2018, p.114), and the diploma value has a strong position on the social selection ability of individuals. However, researchers often ignore the Chinese postgraduates about the personal perception of the diploma value, only using quantitative research methods to investigate the influencing factors of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination (Van de Werfhorst, 2005; Van de Werfhorst, 2009), which makes it difficult to explore individual unique life experience and social experience; or only considering the economic function of education (Araki & Kariya, 2022; Kariya, 2011), it is difficult to analyze the education value systematically; or criticizing the defect of the examination system (Ishida & Slater, 2009), but it is difficult to explain the causes behind the examination. Therefore, The paper will use the grounded theory method to explore the impact of diploma value on the willingness to take postgraduate entrance examinations.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The diploma value

One manifestation of questioning the diploma value is the disconnection between academic certificates and practical skills. The curriculum content that makes up the vast majority of entrance examinations has little impact on students' lives except taking the exam itself (Ishida & Slater, 2009, p.89). Another manifestation of questioning the diploma value is that a diploma does not represent learning ability. Indeed, many Chinese students rely on training institutions for postgraduate entrance examinations and even thinking about participating in the training decides the success of postgraduate entrance examinations (Tang, 2022). The way of improving diploma value through exam training has little to do with learning ability.

### 2.2. The depreciation of academic qualifications

In China, Many students want to obtain a bachelor's degree, because they believe that this degree will give them a high-paying job (Wong, 2021). When students pursue diplomas and chase limited jobs, the diploma value will inflate, and the best response to the decline in the diploma value is to obtain more education(Livingstone, 2016). The phenomenon is also known as over-education. Generally, over-education refers to an under-utilization of workforce potential, and a surplus of educational qualifications, skills, or knowledge relative to existing job requirements (Livingstone, 2019). The escalation of the education arms race will continue to lead to more learning and knowledge underemployment(Livingstone, 2012). when an overly high degree of education has far exceeded the profession's needs, students with a high degree still can not obtain this occupation, they may ask themselves the meaning of education.

### 2.3. The willingness to take postgraduate entrance examinations inspired by the depreciation of diploma

Although the potential danger of education inflation is emerging, the Chinese postgraduate entrance examination has not cooled down. Since 2016, the number of Chinese postgraduate entrance examinations has entered a high growth stage (surging news, 2022). The 2021 survey on the motivation for postgraduate examinations in Chinese universities showed 39.44% of students wanted to pass the examination to obtain a higher degree, which is the highest proportion in total(Chen & Fang, 2021). The sample data of the Chinese survey conducted in the same year also showed if the postgraduate entrance examination failed in 2021, 63.55% of the graduates will choose to continue to apply for the examination in the second year, which is slightly higher than 63.30%, 2020(Li et al., 2022). Even in cultivating applied students, many Chinese senior students have significantly increased their willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination and weakened their willingness to participate in practical training (Shi & Zhang, 2022). Based on this, under the social background of education value inflation and fierce competition in the labor market, this paper mainly conducts an in-depth discussion on the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination from the perspective of Chinese students' perceived diploma value.

## 3. Theoretical Basis

The mental tension system is the fundamental dynamic concept in Lewin's psychology (Shen, 1999, p.31). Lewin used the word "quasi-need" to emphasize this cognitive meaning; the purpose is often a quasi-need, such as to complete a job, to be admitted to a particular university, and others. Whether it is a real need (such as hunger and thirst, and others.) or a quasi-need, only when it breaks the original inner psychological balance, will it cause a certain psychological tension(Shen, 1999, p.36). In today's grim situation, the "quasi-demand" for postgraduate entrance exams is affected by the depreciation of diplomas. The pressure of

employment, and the rising scores of the postgraduate entrance examination, make Chinese students have unfinished nervousness during the postgraduate entrance examination (Shen H., 1999, p.34). Lewin believes this is the beginning of using experience to study the psychological environment, which has produced psychological field theory (Shen, 1999, p.34). In other words, the perception of the diploma value is a cognitive construction of multiple fields, such as social and school environments. The essence of the perception of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination is to explore the relationship between the individual and the environment. Lewin's mental tension system includes this relationship between people and the environment (Shen, 1999, p.36).

## **4. Research Design**

### **4.1. Research methods**

Grounded theory is a research method that scholars Strauss and Corbin proposed to derive theoretical structure from qualitative data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.17). It focuses on abstracting theories from empirical facts, which is considered a better deal with the relationship between theory and experience (Chen, 2000, p.328). In qualitative research, grounded theory can understand the thoughts of research objects through interviews and other methods, thus making the research more in-depth and socially meaningful. In addition, the perception of diploma value and the willingness to take postgraduate entrance examinations need to personally ask individuals to gain a deep understanding of different attitudes and ideas. Thus, grounded theory is closely related to this research topic.

### **4.2. Data Sources**

To better achieve the purpose of the interview, this study adopts the method of in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews extract more detailed information or a deeper understanding of a topic or concept (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). This study interviewed a total of 24 people in this study, and each interview lasted about 40 minutes, forming interview materials of more than 240,000 words of transcripts. The principles for selecting interviewees: firstly, the interviewee is preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination or willing to take the postgraduate entrance examination; secondly, the interviewee has received a specific education and will have a thorough understanding of the diploma value. The study selected 20 interview records randomly for coding analysis and used the remaining four for theoretical saturation testing. The statistics of the respondents show in Table 1.

### **4.3. Category Refinement and model building**

#### **4.3.1. Open Coding**

Open Coding is a brainstorming method of analysis, and researchers are ready to label the data with explanatory concepts only after considering all possible meanings and carefully examining the context; conceptualizing data not only reduces the amount of data researchers have to deal with but also provides a language for discussing data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.206). After sorting out the data collected by 20 respondents, this study sorted out 22 initial categories and 42 initial concepts, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Basic information of interviewees (as of November 25, 2022)

No.	Gender	Age	education level	Occupation	graduated school	profession
S1	female	24	undergraduate	unemployed	Yantai Nanshan University	English
S2	female	24	specialist	working	Rizhao Vocational and Technical College	food biotechnology
S3	female	20	undergraduate	student	Qufu Normal University	Drama Film and Television Literature
S4	female	24	undergraduate	unemployed	Ludong University	Tourism management
S5	female	24	specialist	unemployed	Rizhao Vocational and Technical College	food biotechnology
S6	female	21	undergraduate	student	Qufu Normal University	Physics (Normal)
S7	male	21	undergraduate	student	Changsha University of Science and Technology	Electronic Information Science and Technology
S8	female	21	undergraduate	student	Qufu Normal University	psychology
S9	male	22	undergraduate	student	Quzhou University	Chinese Language and Literature (Normal)
S10	female	21	undergraduate	student	Qufu Normal University	psychology
S11	male	21	undergraduate	student	Qufu Normal University	Physical Education
S12	female	21	undergraduate	student	Qufu Normal University	Chemistry (Normal)
S13	male	20	undergraduate	student	Shandong University of Arts	Chinese painting
S14	female	21	undergraduate	student	Qufu Normal University	pharmaceutical engineering
S15	male	22	undergraduate	student	Jining Medical College	computer science and Technology
S16	female	21	undergraduate	student	Qufu Normal University	psychology
S17	male	20	undergraduate	student	Qufu Normal University	Physical Education
S18	male	22	undergraduate	student	Jiangsu Institute of Technology	statistics
S19	male	20	undergraduate	student	Shandong University of Political Science and Law	computer
S20	male	22	undergraduate	student	Nanjing Forestry University	Internet of Things engineering
S21	male	22	undergraduate	student	Zhejiang Normal University	e-commerce
S22	male	21	undergraduate	student	Shandong Huayu Institute of Technology	Electrical Engineering and Automation
S23	female	23	undergraduate	student	Jiangnan University	pharmaceutical engineering
S24	female	21	undergraduate	student	Zhejiang Normal University	Biotechnology

Source: This paper compiles.

**Table 2.** Concepts and initial categories formed by Open Coding

initial category	Raw statement example (initial concept)
A1 Goal Satisfaction	My goal is to go to a graduate school (a1 personal goal); I want to make myself better (a2 personal appreciation)
A2 Curiosity Satisfaction	I am very yearning to study in this field, and I like to do academics in this field (a3 academic Interest); I am interested in education or psychology, and I want to change my current major and then do more for a few years (a4 professional Interest)
A3 Sense of Compensation	After a year of complex study, I feel that if I can become a graduate student, all the hard work is worth it (a5 reward for complex study); I will feel relieved (a6 goal achieved)
A4 Sense of Cognitive Gain	I want to learn more knowledge and see more things by obtaining a postgraduate status (a7 broaden one's horizons); I hope to increase my actual skills and hard power by going to graduate school (a8 professional knowledge)
A5 Backup Function	This graduate degree is a way out for those who have not participated in the Public institution (a9 substitute option); I can find a relatively stable job with a graduate degree (a10 pursues stability)
A6 Tool Function	Because education is an open sesame, knocking on the door of the career we want to go to (a11 open sesame value); After graduate school, I am qualified to choose a career that I enjoy (a12 springboard value)
A7 Money Function	A person who uses his diploma to obtain a footboard purpose is hoping that he will obtain a benefit exchange (a13 equivalent exchange); with a graduate degree, I will earn more money (a14 salary return)
A8 Employment Function	In the process of job hunting, or some other aspects, sometimes I feel that my undergraduate degree is not enough in knowledge and ability (a15 employment advantage); Most people's jobs without a diploma are not as good as those with a diploma (a16 degree monopolizes the job market)
A9 Resource Acquisition	The school I want to take the postgraduate entrance examination has a good major, and the teachers there are capable. The environment of this university is relatively good, and it is relatively close to home ( a17 the high-quality resources of the target college); during the graduate study process, I can meet people with a higher level of culture (a18 expands contacts)
A10 Opportunity Acquisition	The higher the academic qualifications, the better. Higher education means more job opportunities (a19 job opportunity value); I did not get into this school during the college entrance examination, and I want to continue to take this school for the postgraduate entrance examination(a20 educational opportunity value)
A11 Transition Meaning	Without a degree, I can only do physical work (a21 class mobility); Chinese graduate students have a higher social status than undergraduates (a22 higher social status)
A12 Identity Meaning	Taking a graduate student because I think it is very face-saving (a23 decent identity); even if we do not fully understand a person and know his degree first, we will unconsciously have certain impressions of him; for example, the graduate student is outstanding, and the

	junior college student does not work hard and so on (a24 education stereotype)
A13 Family Influence	Parents' words are the most important; I do not want to let them down (a25 Parents' attitude); my family supports the postgraduate entrance examination (a26 Family support)
A14 School Expectation	At that time, I did not want to study, and I failed the test scores in several subjects, so I did not get my degree certificate. My school only issued a degree certificate after obtaining the qualification for the postgraduate entrance examination interview (a27 graduation requirement); the teacher of professional courses would also suggest that we take the postgraduate entrance examination (a28 encouraged by teacher )
A15 Employment Situation	Employment is sluggish now (a29 employment is sluggish); everyone around me wants to take the postgraduate entrance examination. (a30 popular trend)
A16 Policy Impact	Our village has a policy that admits to a good university to give 300 yuan (A31 policy support); there are few postgraduates in rural areas, and after the examination, the villagers will think that he is excellent (A32 environment encouragement)
A17 Academic Anxiety	I do not take the postgraduate entrance examination and feel inferior to others (a33 Peer pressure); my undergraduate school is very ordinary, and I have no advantage in finding a job. Now there are more and more masters and doctors, so I still hope to improve my education to increase competitive advantage in hunting jobs (a34 Competitive pressure)
A18 Occupational Anxiety	I do not want to go to work, want to go to school to play (a35 job burnout); I am afraid to step into society and deal with people in that kind of society (a36 social fear)
A19 Driven by the Behavior of the Postgraduate Entrance Examination	The postgraduate entrance examination itself is a thing to test my will. If I can stick to it, I will have a great sense of achievement. (a37 postgraduate entrance examination behavior expectation)
A20 Prosocial Behavior Drive	I want to be a graduate student majoring in pedagogy, and I want to change some of the disadvantages of the country's existing education system (a38 creates value for the society); whether it is a social environment or a small family, good academic qualifications and education are conducive to harmonious development (a39 has excellent social value)
A21 Mate Selection Intention	I may meet a suitable person in graduate school, and I hope that the other person will match me a little bit (a40 Intent to choose a spouse); if I go on a blind date, I will be highly regarded by others (a41 Advantage in choosing a spouse)
A22 Return Intention	If I take the postgraduate entrance examination, I will think more and have the ability to repay my parents (a42 repaying my parents)

Source: Organized by this article

#### 4.3.2. Axial Coding

Axial Coding shows the relationship between two or more concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.236) after combing each concept and logical relationship in this research, obtaining five main categories and 11 Subcategories. As shown in Table 3.



**Table 3.** The main categories and corresponding subcategories formed by the Axial Coding

main category	Subcategory	subcategory
C1 Mental Efficacy	B1 Self-Satisfaction	A1 Goal Satisfaction
		A2 Curiosity Satisfaction
	B2 Self-Acquisition	A3 Sense of Compensation
		A4 Sense of Cognitive Gain
C2 Individual Function	B3 Reserve Function	A5 Backup Function
		A6 Tool Function
	B4 Economic Function	A7 Money Function
		A8 Employment Function
C3 Social Function	B5 Social Interest	A9 Resource Acquisition
		A10 Opportunity Acquisition
	B6 Symbolic Interest	A11 Transition Meaning
		A12 Identity Meaning
C4 Environmental Effect	B7 Educational Environment	A13 Family Influence
		A14 School Expectation
	B8 Social Environment	A15 Employment Situation
		A16 Policy Impact
C5 Subjective Will	B9 Prospect Anxiety	A17 Academic Anxiety
		A18 Occupational anxiety
	B10 Behavior Drive	A19 Driven by the Behavior of the Postgraduate Entrance Examination
		A20 Prosocial Behavior Drive
	B11 Intention Drive	A21 Mate Selection Intention
		A22 Return intention

Source: This article compiles.

#### 4.3.3. Integrating Categories

Integrating Categories is linking categories around core categories and refining and pruning the resulting theory building (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.351). Therefore, this paper makes a further analysis from the above five main categories; Mental Efficacy, Individual Function, Social Function, and Environmental Effects sum up as the core category of educational value, and subjective will refine the core category of willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination. Moreover, this study finds that willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination is intrinsically related to the categories such as Mental Efficacy, Individual Function, and Social Function. As shown in Table 4.

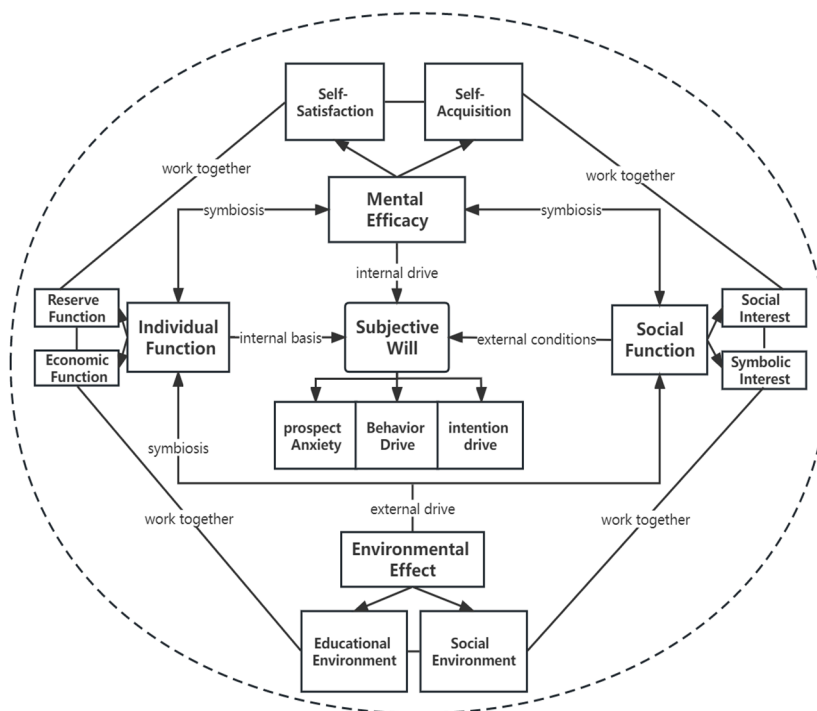
**Table 4.** Shows the relationship between the core category and the main category

Main Category	Influence Mechanism	Relationship to core categories
Mental Efficacy	internal drive	It is the internal driving force of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination
Individual Function	internal basis	It is the internal basis for the formation of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination
Social Function	external conditions	It is an external condition for the formation of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination
environmental Effect	external drive	It is the external driving force of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination

Source: Organized by this article

**4.3.4. Model building**

Through the coding analysis of the interview data, this study constructs a model of the influence mechanism of diploma value perception on the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination, as shown in Figure 1. The model is a closed loop produced by the circulation between the main category and the core category of Mental Efficacy, Individual Function, and Social Interest, and jointly acts on the occurrence mechanism of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination in the process of Environmental Effect.



**Figure 1.** The Mechanism Model of the Impact of Educational Value Perception on the Willingness to Take the Postgraduate Entrance Examination

**4.3.5. Theoretical Saturation Test**

Theoretical saturation is the point at which all categories in the analysis are well-developed regarding attributes, dimensions, and variations. More data collection and analysis add little to



conceptualization, although change can always be detected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.351). Through theoretical sampling, this study conducted three-level Coding on the interview data of the remaining four postgraduate entrance examination students. After testing, no new concepts and categories generate, indicating that the theoretical model of the impact mechanism model of academic value perception on postgraduate entrance examination willingness has reached saturation.

## 5. Explanation of the Mechanism of Action

Based on the content of interviews with 24 Chinese students, this paper summarizes the value of academic qualifications perceived by Chinese students into four dimensions, Mental Efficacy, Individual Function, Social Function, and Environmental Effectiveness. Mental Efficacy is the internal driving force of postgraduate entrance examination students and the real needs of individuals. This demand directly determines the results of postgraduate entrance examinations, so it plays a vital role in the willingness to take postgraduate entrance examinations. If the Mental Efficacy given by the diploma value is not strong, the individual quasi-demand also plays a solid alternative role in the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination, such as Individual Function and Social Function. Individual Function emphasizes present function, and Social Function emphasizes long-term return. The Environmental Effect has once again verified Lewin's mental tension system theory, which reflects the relationship between people and the environment. The diploma value is the perception and judgment of the surrounding environment by students to take the postgraduate entrance examination, thus stimulating the individual willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination.

### 5.1. Real needs: Mental Efficacy is the internal driving force of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination

This study found that Mental Efficacy refers to the psychological changes of individuals after obtaining a graduate degree, a positive psychological state that mainly includes Self-Satisfaction and Self-Acquisition. Self-Satisfaction means that individuals meet their development needs through graduate degrees, including Goal Satisfaction and Curiosity Satisfaction. Self-Acquisition means that individuals obtain psychological compensation and cognitive improvement through graduate education. Mental Efficacy is the internal driving force behind the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination and the critical core to promote self-growth. In the original interview materials, more than ten interviewees discussed the tremendous psychological benefits of the postgraduate entrance examination.

*I am very eager to study in this field. (S9, November 17, 2022) The postgraduate entrance examination is a journey that I must go through in my life. (S14, November 19, 2022) I want to have something that I can stick to, something that I can stick to for a long time. (S23, November 20, 2022)*

These all reflect that postgraduate study is a process of satisfying the pursuit of individual goals and interests. In the process of postgraduate study, it is not only the acquisition of cognition but also the process of getting what you want.

*I got much more during this exam preparation than the diploma itself. (S7, November 19, 2022) I want to learn and know more things with a new identity. (S15, November 19, 2022) After a year of hard work, I can get into my favorite school. It feels like it is worth it. (S18, November 19, 2022)*

Mental Efficacy can also confirm in self-determination theory. The research field of self-determination theory investigates people's inner growth tendencies and inner psychological needs, which are the basis for their self-motivation and personality integration, and Conditions that facilitate these positive processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students take the postgraduate

entrance examination with self-determination; achieving the goal can gain deep satisfaction from self-efficacy. Therefore, Mental Efficacy in the diploma value plays a decisive role in the individual's willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination and is the fundamental demand of the individual for the postgraduate entrance examination.

## **5.2. Quasi-needs: Individual Function and Social Function are the internal basis and external conditions for the formation of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination**

### **5.2.1. Individual Function is the internal basis for the formation of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination**

This study found that Individual Function refers to the fact that an individual can effectively guarantee individual development after obtaining a postgraduate degree, mainly measuring from two aspects: Reserve Function and Economic Function. Reserve Function means individuals achieve the ultimate goal through education, including Backup Function and Tool Function. Economic Function refers to the economic interest obtained by an individual with a postgraduate degree, mainly improving the quality of employment and realizing wage increases. The Individual Function is the internal basis for the formation of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination. It is related to personal interests, directly manifests the diploma value, and is the original driving force for the postgraduate entrance examination. In the content of the original interview materials, more than 20 interviewees talked about the actual function of graduate education for individuals.

*A postgraduate degree also has advantages in finding a job, even if the learned major differs from the job. (S15, November 18, 2022) I want to get a permanent job through the postgraduate entrance examination. (S16, November 19, 2022) I hope to obtain a kind of interest exchange using academic qualifications. (S23, November 20, 2022)*

These all reflect the preparatory Effect of academic qualifications regarding Economic Function, reflecting the value of academic qualifications through intuitive salary packages.

*Salaries for postgraduates are higher than for undergraduates. (S1, November 16, 2022) Under certain circumstances, opportunities will be available only when the employer requests a high degree of education. (S13, November 18, 2022) The salaries of postgraduates and undergraduates are different. (S20, November 20, 2022)*

Confirming the Individual Function of academic qualifications in the rational choice theory proposed by Becker G., The purpose of individual behavior under cognitive rationality is to avoid risks and obtain interest to the greatest extent (Boudon, 2003). The Individual Function obtained by improving the diploma is the internal basis for the current reality and the pursuit of future development, and it is an essential guarantee for future personal development and living standards. Therefore, as a rational choice for short-term investment and long-term income, the postgraduate entrance examination directly determines the scope of individual choices and quality of life and is a strategic consideration for future career planning.

### **5.2.2. Social Function is the external condition for forming the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination**

Social Function refers to the convenient conditions individuals obtain in social existence after a postgraduate degree, which can measure from Social and Symbolic interests. Social Interest refers to the significant benefits of interacting with others after a postgraduate degree, including the convenience of resource acquisition and the possibility of opportunity acquisition. Seventeen respondents talked about Social Interests.

*If you are a good school student, your chances of getting an internship in a big factory must be much greater than that of the average school or even those who have already entered the workplace. (S20, November 19, 2022) The most important thing is that it benefits me from a work*

*threshold. (S21, November 19, 2022) Postgraduate entrance examinations can meet people with higher culture. (S22, November 20, 2022)*

Symbolic Interest refers to the image representation of an individual with a postgraduate degree, which manifests social identity, mainly including the meaning of social identity and class transition. Nine respondents talked about Symbolic Interest. Some people in the interview believed that obtaining a postgraduate degree:

*Its value also relies on educational qualifications breaking our current class restrictions, and I want to move upward. (S8, November 19, 2022) The status of a graduate student has a higher value. (S11, November 19, 2022) Even if we do not understand a person comprehensively and know his education first, we unconsciously have certain impressions of him, such as graduate students are outstanding and junior college students do not work hard. (S14, November 18, 2022) It is the kind of happiness and satisfaction in the identity. (S18, November 19, 2022)*

These all confirm the symbolic Interest of the diploma value. The content of the original interview data shows that Social Interest is the external condition for the formation of the postgraduate entrance examination willingness, which indirectly responds to the fact that the postgraduate entrance examination is a convenient way to reserve social resources. In Hogg's uncertainty-identity theory, If we are uncertain about ourselves or things related to ourselves, or if we are uncertain about who we are, how we get along with others, and how we position ourselves in society, we are mainly motivated to reduce uncertainty (Hogg, 2007). The identity characteristics endowed by academic qualifications are conducive to individuals building target cooperation groups, integrating into corresponding social and cultural circles, and enjoying the Social Interest obtained after successfully taking the postgraduate entrance examination, thus reducing the sense of identity uncertainty.

### **5.3. Psychological field: The Environmental Effect is the external driving force of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination**

Environmental Effect means that when an individual interacts with others, others easily influence him and the environment and reflect his life direction through the behavior of others. This is a kind of environmental pressure and an individual's autonomous choice. It has an external driving effect on the individual's willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination. It mainly measures from two aspects: the Educational Environment and Social Environment. The Educational Environment is mainly aimed at the student group and easily influences people, including Family Influence and School Expectations. The macro-environment of the nation influences the Social Environment, such as the Employment Situation and Policy Impact, which prompts individuals to make personalized choices that conform to the social situation and development trend, mainly including the employment situation and policy influence. The field of communication is the external driving force behind the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination. In the original interview materials, more than ten interviewees talked about the critical influence of the surrounding environment on their decision to take the postgraduate entrance examination.

*Three hundred yuan will give to those who attend top universities in rural areas. (S4, November 19, 2022) My family also supports the postgraduate entrance examination. (S10, November 17, 2022) The previous seniors also admit to graduate school, which is an incentive and driving effect. (S16, November 19, 2022)*

These all reflect the Educational Environment and Social Environment that support individual decision-making for postgraduate entrance examinations and have played an encouraging role in individual decision-making for postgraduate entrance examinations. Bourdieu's field theory also suggests that corresponding social actions arise in relations between structured spaces of places and positions mediated by habitus, understood from specific relatives. This appears to happen from the vantage point of another standpoint (Ferrare & Apple, 2015). Every action of

a person is affected by the field where the action takes place and which multiple environments influence to make an individual's realistic choice. The social environment and educational environment will encourage individuals to re-examine the value of their academic qualifications and actual situation, connect with their reality, and refer to the successful experience of others to form the personal goal of the postgraduate entrance examination.

## 6. Conclusion and Discussion

### 6.1. Research Conclusion

After the above discussion, this paper finally drew the following conclusions: (1) It is proved that the value of educational background includes four dimensions: Mental Efficacy, Individual Function, Social Function, and Environmental Effects. (2) Based on the research situation of the postgraduate entrance examination, the concepts of Mental Efficacy, Individual Function, Social Function, and Environmental Effects are defined and divided into their dimensions. (3) The theoretical model of the influence mechanism of diploma value perception on the willingness to take postgraduate entrance examinations is constructed.

### 6.2. Theoretical Contribution

The study updates the Individual Function, and Social Function embodied in the diploma value, adds Mental Efficacy and Environmental Effect based on the individual and social values from previous studies, and establishes a new relationship with the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination. The study proves that educational background value is the core driving force of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination. At the same time, constructing the mechanism model of the influence mechanism of diploma value perception on the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination reflects that Mental Efficacy is the internal driving force of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination, and Individual Function is the internal basis of the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination. Social Function is the external condition for the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination. Environmental Effect is the external driving force for the willingness to take the postgraduate entrance examination.

## 7. Research Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study bases on small samples. Because of this, future research should further test validity and reliability. Moreover, when conducting in-depth interviews, this study found that the respondents had a pendulum phenomenon in the postgraduate entrance examination, sometimes insisting on and sometimes giving up. The psychological adjustment in the process of the postgraduate entrance examination needs in-depth theoretical discussion.

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