



Yi Ethnic Group's Cigarette Box Dance Culture Marketing in Yunnan Rural Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Rich Yi ethnic group's Cigarette Box Dance culture has becoming the unique tourism attraction in Yangwu Town of Southwest China's Yunnan province. Based on the experience marketing theory, this case study analyzed the marketing strategies of rural tourism in Yangwu Town. The results demonstrated the key marketing factors as follows should be improved: unbalanced township recourses allocation among the stakeholders, diverse demands from various tourists, gap between tourism sector and local economic development, event marketing such as "Special Folk-flavored Catering" in Yangwu Town. The findings also unveil the Core stakeholders' interaction and integrated rural development are playing crucial roles in promoting rural tourism.

1.Introduction

As the 21st century enters the era of the experience economy, consumers have shifted from the initial pursuit of material goods to the satisfaction of spiritual and emotional needs. Rural tourism offers unique natural landscapes, distinctive cultures, and local customs, all of which are unique resources thanks to the natural, historical, and ethnic diversities in Yunnan Province of Southwest China. Yangwu Town, located in Central Yunnan (Xinping Yi and Dai Autonomous County, Yuxi city), is the exact example of rural tourism renowned for Cigarette Box Dance.

The Yi people's Cigarette Box Dance is a traditional folk art form with a long history, wide popularity, and complete preservation, deeply loved by the Yi people. So far, the Yangwu Yi Cigarette Box Dance Festival has been held for seventeen consecutive years. And Yangwu Town has been honored with numerus titles such as "Yunnan Province's Folk Art Town for Yi Cigarette Box Dance" for the years 2023-2025, "National Key Town", "Provincial Civilized Village", "National Civilized Town and Village", and "Yunnan Forest Village." The Festival is currently the best way to understand the Yi culture of Yangwu Town.

2.Literature Review

Rural tourism has gradually become a popular activity for people to relieve stress, the market size of rural tourism continues to expand and is expected to grow steadily in the coming years under the national policy such as rural revitalization in China.

To meet the demands of tourists for experiences, it is imperative for the rural tourism industry to carry out effective experience marketing which focuses on the psychological needs of consumers, providing distinctive activities and allowing them to experience the characteristics of rural areas, the lifestyles of local residents, and relaxation through multiple senses such as vision, touch, and taste, in order to fulfill tourists' yearning and pursuit of rural life. Rural tourism is no longer limited to surface-level experiences but highlight on moderate and even deep experiences.

Furthermore, the advancement of the Internet and the popularity of social media have greatly supported the experience marketing of rural tourism. Through the operation of the Internet, the publicity channels for rural tourism have been broadened, enabling more potential tourists to choose the rural tourism they like, thereby promoting the development of local rural tourism and ultimately driving the prosperous development of the rural tourism market.

2.1 Current Foreign Research

European and American countries have studied rural tourism experience marketing relatively early. Through investigation and research on the behavior and attitude of tourists, researchers found that tourists' demand for travel experience is increasing, and tourism needs to provide personalized and unique experiences to attract tourists.

Frater (1983) is the main researcher of stakeholders. He believed that tourists, businesses, villagers and the government play an important role in the marketing of rural tourism experience. Find the balance of their interests from these characters, and finally achieve the satisfactory results of several characters.

Haven-Tang and Sedgley (2014) found that different villages have different cultures, resources and economies through research on rural tourism experiences in Japan and Australia. Therefore, it is concluded that the tourism marketing model of each village should be changed according to the village itself, so as to achieve tourist satisfaction.

Yuquan (2007) pointed out that problems such as product copying, loose tourism management, and inadequate resource development reflect that brand marketing must be strengthened to develop good rural tourism. If the brand needs to be in line with the characteristics of rural culture, it can be promoted by advertising, public relations and the Internet.

Walmsley (2013) believed that place marketing is very important in rural tourism marketing. People living in cities will forget their troubles and get close to nature when they come to the countryside.

Bernd (2014) thought that experience marketing is composed of the customer's lifestyle, emotional expression, feelings, identity, and the culture of the region.

2.2 Current Domestic Research

Domestic scholars' research on rural tourism marketing mainly focuses on the development path, marketing strategy and combination of rural tourism marketing.

Zheng (2022) believed that short videos occupy the main position in today's society, which can attract tourists from the optimization of the content of short videos, the professional training of anchors and other staff, and the real-time explanation of tourist destinations.

Wang and Cui (2005) believed that rural tourism is a product that can effectively solve the three rural problems and drive the rapid development of China's rural tourism industry. Huang (2018) believed that rural tourism experience should be integrated into local local culture, and tourists should be the main body. Therefore, more activities should be held to involve tourists.

Cao and Zhang (2015) in their research on the development of rural online marketing in Xiaonan Village, Dalian, suggested that online video campaigns should be launched, along with both online and offline activities, to jointly drive the growth of rural tourism.

Zhang (2014) pointed out that experience marketing should be diversified. The combination of experience marketing and farmhouses improves the satisfaction of tourists and makes the rural tourism industry develop rapidly.

2.3 Summary

Through an overview of domestic and foreign research on rural tourism experience marketing, it can be observed that foreign studies on this topic began relatively earlier. Researchers generally employ quantitative methods to ensure the accuracy of their conclusions. They typically analyze from a micro perspective, focusing on the following three aspects: 1. Analyzing the specific characteristics of tourists' rural tourism experiences to identify areas for improvement in the rural area and propose solutions; 2. Seeking a balance of interests among all participants in rural tourism during the process to enhance the overall tourism experience; 3. Emphasizing the differentiation of rural tourism for different villages to avoid homogenization. Additionally, the ultimate goal of rural tourism experiences is to enable tourists to relieve stress, get close to nature, and attain a positive mood.

Due to the relatively later start of domestic research, Chinese researchers primarily utilize qualitative methods to explore the development paths and marketing strategies of rural tourism experiences. They typically adopt a macro perspective to analyze the following three aspects: 1. Employing modern technologies, such as online marketing; 2. Diversifying experience marketing; 3. Implementing short-video strategies, among others.

Based on the findings of both domestic and international researchers, it can be concluded that the rural tourism experience is the most crucial factor in rural tourism, and a good rural tourism experience will promote the development of rural tourism.

3. Rural Tourism and Experience Marketing

3.1 Rural Tourism

Rural tourism is a form of tourism that utilizes the unique resources of rural areas as tourist attractions to meet the needs of tourists for leisure, vacation, experience, sightseeing, entertainment, and other related activities. In general, as an innovative integrated industry, rural tourism closely combines agriculture, culture and tourism, providing new opportunities for the development of rural economy, and also providing unprecedented opportunities for the protection and inheritance of traditional culture (Li et al., 2025).

The characteristics of rural tourism are as follows:

(1) It has a unique natural landscape. For example, Shengshan Town, Shengsi County, Zhoushan City, Zhejiang Province, is known as the "Chinese version of the Wizard of Oz", which has beautiful natural scenery and unique island culture (Lv, 2024).

(2) Most of the intangible cultural heritages are distributed in villages, and the folk culture of each village is the core attraction. For example, Danzhai, Guizhou, has 9 national intangible cultural heritages, including batik, ancient papermaking, brocade chicken dance, silver jewelry making, etc (Bi, 2025).

(3) Tourists can deeply experience rural tourism activities, such as local picking, fishing, and other special activities.

(4) Rural tourism is actually an "escape tourism". People who have been under high pressure from life and work for a long time will come to the countryside to experience innocence and simplicity in order to relieve their stress (Zhong, 2022).

3.2 Rural Tourism Experience Marketing

Experience marketing was first developed by American expert Bernd proposed that experience marketing is mainly carried out through five aspects of consumers, namely senses, emotions, thinking, actions and associations. He broke the traditional inherent awareness of consumers that consumers are rational. And it is emphasized that consumers should be a combination of sensibility and rationality. Furthermore, in the relationship between consumers and enterprise management, the emphasis is on consumers' experience before, during and after consumption. And experience marketing focuses on the word "experience" by providing customers with a valuable experience process, it attracts customers to buy products and finally enterprise benefit from it. Therefore, the experience is that people's missing needs in life are satisfied in the experience (Zheng, 2007).

Travel experience can be divided into surface experience, moderate experience and in-depth experience (Deng, 2018). The surface experience is mainly based on traditional optical tourism products, and tourists visit the local nature and humanities. Surface experience has quite high requirements for local tourism resources, so as to leave a deep impression on tourists. The moderate experience involves engaging with local culture and folk customs through multiple sensory perspectives to achieve stress relief. It emphasizes the active participation and interactivity of tourists by participating in various special activities to obtain an in-depth understanding of the local culture and lifestyle. In-depth experience refers to tourists comprehensively feeling and experiencing the local characteristics and culture. For example, staying in a local home-stay for a long time, experiencing local food, culture and life in depth; exploring nature in depth, exploring the mysteries of wild animals and plants through close

contact with nature. Therefore, travel is experience, and experience is travel.

Experience is the core of rural tourism (Xu & Zou, 2007). During the rural tourism process, offer tourists the enthusiasm to experience folk customs and the simplicity of farm life. Therefore, the government and enterprise should combine tourists' emotional preferences and rural characteristic projects to enable tourists to have a better experience evaluation during rural tourism experiences, and ultimately achieve a win-win situation. And the 3 main forms of rural tourism experience are:

(1) Rural cultural experience: The reason why tourists prefer rural tourism lies in the cultural disparities between cities and rural areas, with greater differences being more appealing. Therefore, when developing rural tourism, it is necessary to deeply explore the cultural connotation and characteristics of the countryside, such as festivals, customs, folklore, etc.

(2) Local customs experience: The pastoral scenery and lifestyle of the countryside are different from those of the city, and its quiet and peaceful atmosphere is attractive to tourists. When carrying out rural tourism, it is necessary to develop tourism experience projects with local characteristics on the basis of protection according to the cultural context and geographical vein of the countryside to avoid excessive urbanization.

(3) Rural entertainment experience: Recreational rural tourism is mainly through the development of various themed agricultural projects and amusement parks, so that tourists can participate in interactive experience activities while visiting. For example, restore almost out-of-print agricultural tools or musical instruments and cooking utensils used by local people. Let them have a deeper understanding of the long history and culture of the countryside in the process of playing. The design of tourism products should pursue diversification, so that tourists can customize different products according to their own preferences and emotional needs, such as making straw hats, carving wooden combs, etc. This way can not only make full use of the rich tourism resources of the countryside, but also allow tourists to have a pleasant and entertaining experience in the process of participation.

Tourism experience marketing is a new marketing strategy that focuses on the needs of tourists, the in-depth participation and personal experience of tourists (Tong & Zhang, 2024). The following are the three main characteristics of tourism experience marketing.

(1) The core selling point of attracting tourists is "experience". The main concern of travel experience is what kind of travel experience tourists want, and what kind of emotional impact tourists can get when buying travel products. For example, tourists experienced the folk customs, authentic farmhouse food and the enthusiasm of the local people.

(2) The determination of experience themes based on local characteristics. In tourism experiences, it is essential to establish at least one themed scene, where customers can gain profound experiences and feelings in a specific aspect through themed environment arrangement and the creation of a particular atmosphere. It should be noted that the theme should be determined based on local characteristics to avoid homogenization.

(3) Products and services around experience. In the process of designing products and services, placing customer experience at the forefront is crucial, aiming to create profound and memorable experiences for tourists during the entire activity. For example, each area of

Disneyland has distinctive themes, such as "Mickey Street", "Garden", "Tomorrow land", etc. Each theme area creates an environment that matches the theme through architectural style, decorative details, musical atmosphere, etc., making visitors feel like they are in another world.

Tourism experience marketing is centered on tourists. Therefore, enterprise should design themes and develop tourism products and services from the perspective of tourists. The several factors revealed by this model can only achieve the ultimate goal of tourism experience marketing when they interact with each other.

4.Methodology and Procedures

The research selects Yangwu Town as the case to analyze the current situation and problems of rural tourism experience marketing, proposes countermeasures, and ultimately promotes sustainable development.

From the 1980s to the 1990s, rural tourism emerged alongside the reform and opening-up policy. Yangwu Town responded positively and held the first Yi ethnic group's Cigarette Box Dance Festival in 2005 attribute to the convenient transportation, ethnic cultures, local specifics, and unique folklores. Yangwu Town have contributed to rural revitalization through technological innovation, agriculture and township industry. Yangwu is a key town in China that has rich tourism resources, intangible cultural heritage, folk customs, and revolutionary culture.

In the research process, this study applied qualities approach to inquiries official websites of Yangwu Town government, visit the local education and sports bureau to gain a preliminary understanding of the economic, cultural, and educational development in Yangwu Town.

5.Results and Discussion

This study shows that the core stakeholders of Yangwu Town are the government, enterprise, local residents and tourists which interact with and influence on each other:

As the policy maker and coordinator, the government develops the tourism industry of Yangwu Town by introducing investment and formulating reasonable tourism policies. Through this measure, it will promote the economic development of local enterprise and residents. But if there is a policy bias, it may lead to enterprises ignoring the rights and interests of residents, resulting in the contraction of the three parties intensifying.

As the main developers, enterprise rationally exploit tourism resources according to the government's development to reap high profits. But excessive development of resources by enterprises may lead to the depletion of tourism resources in Yangwu Town, causing residents' dissatisfaction and affecting the experience of tourists; as cultural carriers and direct participants, local residents obtain employment opportunities and income through the development of tourism. But enterprise and the government do not coordinate and cooperate, which may lead to residents' protests;

As the feedback and driver of the tourism experience, tourists consume in Yangwu Town to increase the residents' income. However, the influx of a large number of tourists may lead to price increases, damage to the environment of Yangwu Town, and interfere with residents' lives.

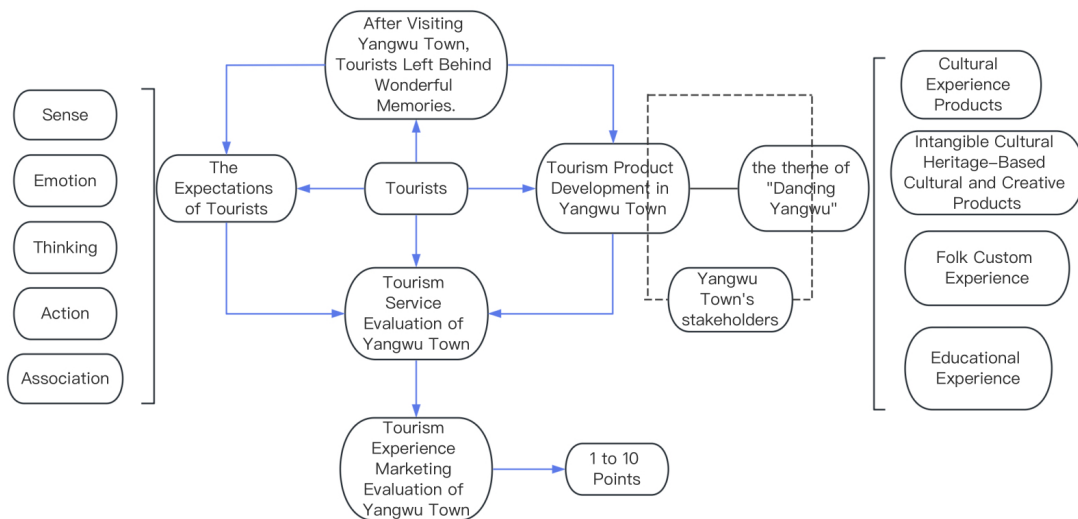


Figure 1.1: Relationship Diagram of Tourists - Yangwu Town - Cigarette Box Dance

Meanwhile, Place Marketing was being highly applied and can be better promoted in of Yangwu Town; with the advent of the information age, Place Marketing has drawbacks in geographical position, leading to many tourists coming only from the townships around Yangwu Town. Therefore, brand marketing and online marketing are necessary; these strategies could improve the popularity of rural tourism by establishing the "Yi Culture" and "Cigarette Box Dance" brands, as well as creating official accounts in Yangwu Town.

6. Conclusion and Suggestion

Improving rural tourism experience is grand program which needing the coordination and integration of community including government, enterprise, local residents and tourists. The following marketing strategies could improve the rural tourism experience in Yangwu Town.

(1) Determine the experience theme. The government cooperates with enterprise to integrate the tourism resources of Yangwu Town, and create a new rural tourism experience centered on the Yi ethnic group's Cigarette Box Dance. For example, tourists can participate in the cultural performance; learn the Yi ethnic mountain songs; watch the performance; taste the local specialties.

(2) Create opportunities for interaction with tourists and integrate multiple sensory stimuli including the senses, emotions, thinking, actions, and associations of tourists.

(3) Develop tourism souvenirs. The government and enterprise scheme the "Dancing Yangwu" theme to enhance tourists' participation and experience. They can create exquisite Cigarette Box souvenirs that let the tourists remember the unique experiences in Yangwu Town.

In order to stand out in the increasingly fierce rural tourism market, Yangwu Town must focus on strengthening its brand marketing awareness as follows.

Last but not least, for the Online Marketing Strategy, Yangwu Town should emphasis social media marketing which adopted for external publicity.

(1) Establish tourism public accounts on WeChat, TikTok, Kuaishou and Weibo respectively. Fully showcase the beautiful landscapes, rich experience activities, and characteristic catering and accommodation of Yangwu Town. The public accounts need to be updated dynamically, respecting and valuing the experiences and feedback of every tourist.

(2) Make full use of search engines. Yangwu Town can cooperate with mainstream search engines such as Baidu, Google, and 360 Browser. By leveraging their powerful search functions, it can effectively promote rural cultural tourism and attract a large number of tourists.

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