

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Marketing Strategies for Sustainable Rural Tourism Development in Zhuogan Village, China

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of sustainable rural tourism in Zhuogan village, China, focusing on destination marketing tactics and the viewpoints of the local community. Purposive sampling, a qualitative research methodology is employed in this study to establish a connection with a small but diverse group of 15 local residents. This group includes village committee members, small business owners, and farmers. The sampling technique thoroughly and accurately represents the community and offers insightful information. The study's main objective is to highlight the marketing strategies for sustainable rural tourism development in Zhuogan village. The study also examines the local perceptions of tourism growth and suggests a customized marketing plan in line with the objectives of rural regeneration. Conclusions show the community's optimistic view of tourism and highlight the difficulties and opportunities in striking a balance between economic expansion and preserving the environment and culture. This study enhances comprehension of rural tourism's complex structure and provides concrete suggestions for fostering sustainable and inclusive growth in rural tourist environments. It addresses a gap in the literature on rural tourism in China by thoroughly examining Zhuogan village's unrealized potential. It highlights the critical role that unique resources play in shaping plans for developing and marketing rural tourism, providing a model that can be replicated in other similar rural environments in China and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

Along with developing rural tourism worldwide, the rural tourism concept has many interpretations (Baoren 2011). For instance, Bramwell and Lane (1994) argued that rural tourism could include activities and interests in farms, nature, adventure, sports, health, education, arts, and heritage taking

place in the countryside as a multifaceted activity rather than farm-based tourism only.

In the contemporary era, rural tourism has become increasingly pivotal for socioeconomic advancements in regions like Zhuogan village and Luquan County. This village is an enclave rich in cultural and ecological wealth, yet remains under-researched in tourism academia. The existing literature (Zhu and Ding, 2020;

Muhi, 2010; Roberts and Hall, 2001; Shi et al., 2021; Wu and Ji, 2023; Yang et al., 2021) acknowledges the potential of rural tourism in economic development and rural revitalization, but there is a notable gap in micro-analyses of individual villages like Zhuogan, with unique sociocultural and ecological contexts.

Significant obstacles may arise from the lack of customized marketing plans and in-depth research studies that consider the viewpoint of local people. Over tourism, the deterioration of cultural integrity, and economic inequality are among the risks. The most recent research on rural tourism development strategies by Ronizi et al. (2023) and Duarte et al. (2023) is intriguing, but it just scratches the surface. It does not explore the intricate dynamics, available resources, and local perspectives inside specific communities. Additionally, Junaid et al. (2023) propose customizing marketing strategies to suit the requirements of regional enterprises. Nevertheless, Wijijayanti et al. (2023) and Li et al. (2023) underscore the spatial significance of the relationship between rural tourism and traditional villages and the criticality of carefully devised strategies for rural tourism. Furthermore, the research conducted by Tang and Xu (2023) regarding the incorporation of culture into the development of rural tourism underscores the critical nature of cultural integration. However, it needs to delve sufficiently into the specific rural contexts where this integration can be effectively accomplished. The flaws also mentioned in studies by Liang (2021), Wardana et al. (2020), and Islam (2021), which underscore the importance of community-based rural tourism, often do not delve into the unique dynamics of specific villages such as Zhuogan.

Furthermore, research like that of Xuyan and Na (2021) warns of the unintended consequences of increased tourism, such as rising local prices, which could adversely impact local communities. The need for more nuanced, context-specific research is evident. Such research must consider the complexities of rural revitalization, community involvement in tourism dynamics, and the application of tailored tourism destination marketing strategies. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on Zhuogan village, examining its unique challenges and potential amid the broader landscape of rural tourism development. Addressing this research gap, this study aims to evaluate Zhuogan

village's potential through qualitative exploration, considering the perspectives and readiness of the local community towards tourism and crafting an effective destination marketing plan. The study is guided by three objectives:

- To identify and assess the natural and cultural resources in Zhuogan village and their potential for rural tourism development.
- To understand the local community's perception of tourism development and their readiness to participate.
- To propose a destination marketing strategy for Zhuogan village, considering its unique resources and potential for rural tourism. At its core, this research envisages to be the linchpin in ushering in a sustainable trajectory of rural tourism for Zhuogan village, harmoniously integrating its distinctive resources and driving a rural renaissance.

Though the role of rural tourism in socioeconomic growth is becoming more widely acknowledged, particularly in densely populated urban areas where people are looking for genuine experiences, other places, such as Zhuogan village in China, still need to be explored. For this community to experience a sustained economic and cultural rebirth, it must receive extensive scholarly examination and realistic measures for sustainable tourism development, notwithstanding its abundance of natural and cultural assets. The research questions were proposed:

RQ1: What are the significant natural and cultural resources in Zhuogan village that can be leveraged for rural tourism development?

RQ2: What are the perspectives and attitudes of the local community towards tourism development and their role in it?

RQ3: How can a destination marketing strategy be designed to effectively promote Zhuogan village as a rural tourism destination based on its unique natural and cultural resources?

This study offers both theoretical and practical insights, which makes it an essential contribution to the field of rural tourism. Theoretically, it advances scholarly discourse by emphasizing the need for holistic models of tourist growth that integrate community perspectives and place equal focus on sociocultural and economic impacts. As

Látková and Vogt (2012) noted, the study's idea of village tourist development aligns with Social Exchange Theory (SET). This theory provides a solid framework for evaluating and measuring locals' attitudes toward tourism development in rural towns while considering economic, environmental, and sociocultural factors. According to SET, exchanges occur when visitors and host communities work together to maximize benefits and minimize expenses. This viewpoint is essential for assessing and encouraging local communities to embrace and support tourism-related efforts. Social exchange theory suggests that perceived benefits and costs influence residents' support or opposition to tourism growth, which helps to understand the complex nature of those reactions. These could have to do with ecological (changes to local ecosystems and infrastructure), social and cultural (impacts on local traditions, customs, and social cohesiveness), or economic (jobs, revenue, etc.) aspects.

In the context of village tourism development, as outlined for Zhuogan village, SET supports the idea by emphasizing the importance of:

Community involvement in decision-making: Ensuring that tourism development projects align with the community's interests and preferences, thereby increasing the perceived benefits and reducing potential costs or negative impacts.

Sustainable tourism practices: Addressing the environmental costs and ensuring that tourism development does not deplete local resources or harm the environment is vital for maintaining long-term social exchange relationships.

Sociocultural preservation: Highlighting the necessity to preserve local culture and traditions, which can enhance the sociocultural benefits for the community and enrich tourists' experiences.

Economic benefits with cultural and environmental preservation: Balancing the economic advantages of tourism with the need to protect cultural heritage and the environment, this approach aligns with the holistic approach suggested by SET, which considers the overall quality of life of the community.

By taking these factors into account, the application of the social exchange theory in the development of village tourist concepts contributes to the creation of a tourism model that is more egalitarian,

sustainable, and culturally sensitive. Practically, the research provides actionable strategies for Zhuogan village, recommending sustainable tourism practices, community involvement in decision-making, and digital integration for effective tourism promotion. It also underscores the importance of training local communities in hospitality and tour management, developing eco-friendly infrastructure, and implementing feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement. These recommendations balance tourism growth with cultural and environmental preservation, providing a model for other rural destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although much research has been done on rural tourism in China, the main focuses have been on the significance of rural tourism development, conditions and patterns, rural tourism planning and design, development strategies, and learning from the experience of rural tourism development in foreign countries and Taiwan (He, 2004; Ho, 2019). Despite those efforts, there remains little understanding of the core issues of rural tourism: the connotation, development principles, successful models and the future directions of rural tourism in China, which directly affect the sustainable development of China's rural tourism.

Theoretical background

Scholars have written various works. It offers a theoretical background for marketing strategies for rural tourism development. Wilson et al. (2001) emphasize the value of tourism in rural areas for generating income, employment, and retail growth. It underlines the potential of tourism as a novel approach to rural development. That underscores the economic and entrepreneurial aspects of rural tourism. To take advantage of these chances, it lays the foundation for marketing strategy. Pato and Kastenholz (2017) shed light on the professional activities of rural tourism suppliers, indicating that many are engaged in other professions alongside running tourist lodgings. Understanding the many roles and experiences of rural tourism participants is made more accessible by knowing how these operators interact with one another. This knowledge can then be used to develop tailored

marketing strategies that speak to the diverse professional identities of those involved in rural tourism. According to Li et al. (2022), the idea of intelligent tourism in rural areas has now come into its own within the Internet of Things (IoT) framework. It forms the cornerstone of marketing strategies that leverage the Internet of Things (IoT) and other cutting-edge technology to improve visitor experiences and place management. These initiatives centre on integrating data-driven techniques with technology in rural tourism.

The utilization of digital technology in rural tourism marketing strategies, preservation of cultural assets, organic growth processes, and stakeholder engagement are all underlined by Singh et al. (2023). This underscores the importance of a holistic marketing approach encompassing community involvement, cultural preservation, and digital innovation, aligning with sustainable and inclusive marketing strategies. Additionally, because of the changing marketing landscape caused by technological breakthroughs, Lei et al. (2022) suggest a new digital rural tourist marketing model that differs from traditional marketing tactics. This emphasizes the necessity of creating innovative advertising formats that adapt to the needs of contemporary customers and their changing tastes in the digital age. To sum up, the theoretical framework of marketing techniques for rural tourism development includes viewpoints from economics, entrepreneurship, technology, and community development. By integrating ideas from many theoretical frameworks, academics can design marketing tactics that efficiently tackle the intricate nature of rural tourism.

Rural tourism and rural revitalization

Rural tourism has become a powerful force in reviving rural communities, promoting sustainable development, creating more job opportunities, and boosting local economies (Muhi, 2010; Muhi and Jovanović, 2012; Jam et al., 2014). While promising, some scholars have lauded this resurgence, while others point out its potential shortcomings. The rural revitalization plan was widely acknowledged for its systematic efforts to boost the rural economy, particularly in the Chinese setting (Yang et al., 2021). However, the prism through which this rejuvenation is viewed varies considerably among researchers.

Zhu and Ding (2019), for example, advocates for the use of rural ecotourism to address economic inequality; however, they do not address the long-term environmental consequences of this approach or the subtle sociocultural shifts it may bring about.

Furthermore, even though Yang et al. (2021) emphasize the benefits of rural rejuvenation, a more thorough analysis may question their fairness. Do certain people receive disproportionate benefits, or are benefits distributed fairly to all individuals? Muhi (2010) makes a compelling case for rural tourism's role in community rejuvenation. Still, empirical validation from diverse contexts is necessary for such a claim to be more broad and optimistic. The study by Yuan et al. (2021) emphasizes the relevance of prioritizing tourism in rural regeneration efforts. They contend that strengthening infrastructural development and integrating cultural elements will help achieve this. However, it sparks inquiries on how such a prioritization might inadvertently sideline other equally pivotal developmental facets. The call to incorporate local farmers is commendable, but the practicalities and challenges of their inclusion, especially in the decision-making echelons, remain a nebulous area. While Xuyan and Na (2021) view rural tourism as a conduit for poverty reduction and uplifting villagers' economic standings, such perspectives can sometimes eclipse potential pitfalls. For instance, in particular situations, an increase in tourism may inadvertently lead to a rise in local prices, which could hurt the local community. The question of whether or not it is suitable to transplant urban approaches into rural environments without adequate modification is raised by Yang et al. (2021) investigation of urban-centric mechanisms for boosting rural tourist competitiveness. Yibi et al. (2020) examination of rural tourism as a driving force for rural economic growth, while insightful, potentially skirts around addressing the inherent flaws and limitations within rural tourism practices in China.

Indeed, the overarching sentiment among scholars seems optimistic about the future of rural tourism in China, especially as a tool for revitalization. However, there is still a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the micro-analysis of small villages, such as Zhuogan village. These villages have unique

sociocultural structures, hence necessitating a more targeted approach. This evident lack of focused, context-specific studies on such villages underscores the importance of extending research beyond broad generalizations to more nuanced examinations.

Community perspectives and rural tourism development

The need for genuine and sustainable rural tourism experiences drives the rise of community-based rural tourism or CBRT. The emphasis on active local community involvement and stakeholder participation is central to this paradigm (Liang, 2021; Wardana et al., 2020). Existing research emphasizes the benefits of community involvement, but a closer look uncovers underlying complications and gaps. Notably, research conducted by Heleno et al. (2021) and Kaufmane and Paula (2020) emphasizes the crucial role of local community engagement in enhancing the competitiveness and growth of rural destinations. However, it is essential to acknowledge that this research, while pertinent, may encounter criticism for oversimplifying the dynamics' complexities. For instance, how do local communities negotiate their representation in the tourism narrative? Is there a risk of commodifying culture for the sake of competitiveness? The interplay of governance in rural tourism also emerges as a critical theme. Islam (2021) opines that rural tourist competitiveness hinges on governmental intervention, emphasizing top-down approaches. This assertion raises questions about how power dynamics play out in community-centric models. Could over-reliance on government intervention erode the agency of local communities, thereby undermining the essence of CBRT? Mingjing and Wong (2023) assertion about CBRT's potential to usher socioeconomic benefits seems promising, but it spawns questions about scalability and long-term sustainability. Are these gains consistent across varied rural contexts? Liang (2021) juxtaposition of community-based tourism's positive ramifications with the advancement of intelligent algorithms for consumer satisfaction perhaps skirts the ethical nuances of data privacy and the commodification of local experiences for algorithmic analysis. The perspective presented by Wardana et al. (2020) moderates the prevailing excitement around community engagement by

highlighting its restricted scope. This viewpoint can initiate a discourse: Is the extent of communities' involvement in tourism truly restricted, or is this outcome attributable to systemic factors such as insufficient resources or training? Nova (2021) emphasis on aligning community-based tourism with sustainable growth and local needs is laudable. Still, the specifics of balancing local needs and external tourist expectations remain an area rife for further investigation. As Kun and Wenrong (2024) mentioned, the coordinated development of urban and rural economies requires a link: the township enterprises serve as a transition and buffer between the city and the countryside. Kuuder et al. (2020) recommendation to ensure broad resident participation in decision-making is invaluable. However, what methodologies are employed to accomplish this objective? Although the extra suggestions for loans to support the craft industry's growth are creative, they can unintentionally result in excessive commercialization or trap artisans in a cycle of debt if not carefully supervised. The burgeoning practice of homestays, as discussed by Pasanchay and Schott (2021), illuminates the intricacies of the nexus between local communities and tourism. While the potential benefits are tangible, there is a looming question: Are local communities equipped with the necessary skills and resources to manage and derive optimal benefits from homestays?

A recent study has centred around community viewpoints and rural tourism development. Studies have explored the perception and capacity for collective action in Rural Community-Based Tourism (RCBT) (Isaza and Salas, 2024). Analysis of indigenous peoples' contributions to tourist development has also shown how eager they are to provide resources and how higher self-esteem affects rural tourism's ability to compete (Amin et al., 2023). Research on the (dis)empowerment processes in rural tourist development and the connected expressions of power in this setting has recognized empowerment as a critical component of sustainable tourism (Park et al., 2023). Despite broad recognition of the community perspective's importance in shaping rural tourism trajectories, there remains a clear gap in the literature. There is a need for more granular, context-specific studies, especially for locales like Zhuogan village.

Such studies could unmask the often-overlooked intricacies and challenges communities face at the grassroots level, thus enriching the broader discourse on sustainable rural tourism.

Tourism destination marketing strategy: The research on destination marketing strategy for tourism provides a thorough overview of the various elements of creating effective campaigns, including brand positioning and social media tactics. However, a closer inspection exposes details and holes that need further investigation.

Holistic understanding vs financial targets: (Suarja et al., 2021) argue that the marketing plans for tourism villages aim for both financial success and resident well-being. This dual objective can be a tricky balance. The lack of thorough exploration regarding the conflict between business ambitions and the authentic welfare of people is evident. Are there trade-offs? If so, how do destinations negotiate these tensions?

DMOs and complex marketing: George (2021) posits that Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) manage a more intricate process than just marketing individual tourism products. While this distinction is crucial, it begs the question: How do DMOs differentiate themselves in an increasingly saturated market, and what complexities are exclusive to them that are not present in individual product marketing?

Social media's double-edged sword: Hadianfar (2021) and Yamagishi et al. (2021) emphasize social media as a pivotal tool in tourism marketing. While social media's strengths are apparent, its challenges—such as the risk of overtourism, misrepresentation, or reduced authenticity—aren't as prominently addressed.

Communication and attracting foreign visitors: Astuti (2021) suggest about using social media advertising to lure more foreign visitors seems pragmatic. However, this perspective might need to pay more attention to the cultural nuances of targeting international audiences. How are marketing strategies tailored to diverse cultural perceptions and expectations?

Consumer discounts and loyalty: Ganatra et al. (2021) observation about offering discounts to satisfied customers sounds intuitive but might be simplistic. Is a discount the primary motivator for repeat business in tourism, or are there more intangible aspects, like unique experiences or emotional connections, that

drive loyalty?

Digital performance metrics: While Callejón-Gómez and Rojas-de-Gracia (2021) discuss measuring the efficacy of digital marketing via tools like SEO and analytics, the challenge remains in quantifying qualitative outcomes such as visitor satisfaction or cultural exchange.

Resource management with modern portfolio theories : Johar et al. (2022) introduce modern portfolio theories intriguingly. Still, implementing this notion in real-world scenarios is problematic due to unpredictable variables like geopolitical conflicts, health crises, or climate change.

Tailoring to specific circumstances: Syaripuddin (2021) advice on the importance of customization based on regional specifics is well-taken. Nevertheless, there is a visible absence of frameworks or methods that guide destinations in this adaptation process, particularly in smaller locations.

In conclusion, despite the wealth of research on destination marketing tactics for tourism, there are times when it runs the risk of being overly general or reductionist. Based on Zhuogan village's cultural, ecological, and socioeconomic fabric, more context-specific insights are essential for understanding such a complex destination. The task at hand involves incorporating these well-established marketing ideas into the village's inherent character while making sure they do so in an authentic way.

Despite the literature on rural tourism, revitalization, community viewpoints in rural tourism development, and tourism destination marketing methods, thorough context-specific research focusing on distinctive communities such as Zhuogan village is conspicuously lacking. The discipline is frequently typified by broad generalizations and disseminating techniques that might only sometimes be appropriate for specific communities' particular sociocultural, economic, and environmental circumstances. In particular:

- Rural revitalization's complexities, especially in terms of equitability and long-term environmental and sociocultural implications, are often glossed over.
- Insufficient examination is done of the intricacies surrounding the dynamics of local community engagement in tourism, specifically

concerning their capacity to derive maximal benefits, representation, and agency.

- The application of tourism destination marketing strategies tends to be generic, often disregarding the need for tailored approaches suitable for unique rural destinations.

Given these observations, there is a compelling need for research that delves into the specificities of destinations like Zhuogan village, aiming to understand their unique challenges and potential in the face of generic tourism development practices.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Qualitative researchers repeatedly get closer to the action to better understand the phenomena under study. There are three distinct approaches to defining qualitative research: avoiding definition altogether, defining it differently for various studies

or techniques, and doing so systematically. Using a working definition, researchers can simultaneously evaluate many approaches to the same problem (Aspers and Corte, 2019). Due to the in-depth nature of the study questions and objectives, a qualitative methodology is used to explore Zhuogan village's potential and formulate an appropriate marketing plan. This methodology allows for a comprehensive examination of local attitudes and facilitates the collection of extensive information.

Sampling

Participants are drawn from the local population of Zhuogan village using a purposeful sampling strategy. The goal is to get a good representation of the community's thoughts on tourist potential and marketing from 6 residents, 4 community leaders, and 5 local business owners, all included in the sample. To obtain representative data and explore many angles, we will conduct in-depth interviews with 15 people (Table 1).

Table 1: Interviewees with their information.

No.	Gender	Role	Interview Time
S1	Male	Village's Committee Member	64 mins
S2	Male	Village's Committee Member	52 mins
S3	Female	Village's Committee Member	50 mins
S4	Male	Village's Committee Member	51 mins
S5	Male	Grocery Shop Owner	60 mins
S6	Female	Grocery Shop Owner	59 mins
S7	Male	Restaurant Owner	58 mins
S8	Male	Homestay Owner	65 mins
S9	Female	Homestay Owner	62 mins
S10	Male	Farmer	55 mins
S11	Male	Farmer	62 mins
S12	Male	Farmer	59 mins
S13	Male	Farmer	51 mins
S14	Female	Farmer	55 mins
S15	Male	Farmer	53 mins

Source: Developed by the author (2023)

Data collection

The participant selection process was carried out via a purposive sampling strategy, which is employed to ensure sufficient representation of predefined categories or types of individuals within the study sample. The primary criterion for the selection process was the level of engagement exhibited by members within the Zhuogan village community. The aim was to gather a diverse range of viewpoints and develop a complete knowledge of the village's tourist potential and marketing strategies.

Specific criteria for participant selection:

Village's committee members: These individuals, who serve as the village's administrative and decision-making body, possess valuable knowledge of the hamlet's strategic perspective on tourism, possible obstacles, and the community's overall attitudes. During the selection process, a gender equality perspective was prioritized, resulting in the participation of three male and one female member.

Local business owners: It was vital to understand the perspectives of entities that can gain from tourism, whether directly or indirectly. The selected businesses—two grocery shops, a restaurant, and two homestays—represent a mix of essential services that tourists might use. These owners can provide insights into business readiness, potential synergies, and challenges with the tourism influx.

Farmers: Farmers represented a significant portion of the residents, and their perspectives provided an in-depth understanding of the community's sentiment towards the tourism industry. Their role in potentially diversifying from traditional agriculture to Agri-tourism, their willingness to participate in tourism initiatives, and the possible impact on their livelihoods make their input invaluable.

The gender distribution was predominantly male, with four female participants. While this might reflect the gender roles and distributions in the village's key positions, future studies could aim for a more balanced gender distribution to capture broader perspectives.

Research instrument

Interviews with residents of Zhuogan village were used as research instruments to gather information for this study. The researchers utilized a qualitative methodology to gain insight into interviewees' values, beliefs, and assumptions (Choy, 2014). In order to obtain thorough and detailed answers from the participants, this study employed open-ended questions. The researchers identified a judgment sample using a qualitative and non-probabilistic approach. In judgment sampling, the researchers rely on their discretion in selecting participants for the study, believing that their judgment will lead to insights into specific issues by choosing a few individuals who can provide detailed information on the subject (Reddy and Ramasamy, 2016). Participants were asked to recommend other individuals keen on participating in the study. The locations where the interviews occurred ranged from the respondents' residences to nearby stores and restaurants. In this semi-structured interview, participants were each given tea and desserts to help them relax and open up for 50 to 70 minutes. The technique of determining the sample size and data saturation was applied (Guest et al., 2006), with saturation being reached when no

new ideas emerged. All interviews were recorded in diaries and transcribed into the language used, which was the local language for reiterating and recognizing questions. Researchers in this study used and verified self-administered surveys. To obtain participants' agreement, researchers explained the goal of the study. The questionnaire comprised two parts: identifying and assessing resources for rural tourism development and understanding the local community's perception and readiness (The questionnaire is attached in the appendix. Each section contained five questions targeted at different demographics, totalling 30 questions across both sections. A guide who spoke the dialect was hired to get to know the people better, and questions were posed in both Mandarin and the dialect. All recorded interviews were translated into Chinese and ultimately organized into English for final coding.

Data analysis

We will use theme analysis to examine the transcripts. Thematic analysis is commonly used in content analysis and fieldwork for qualitative research. Data pattern analysis is a part of this (Coker, 2021). The data will be used to produce initial codes, which will eventually be merged into more prominent themes. Thematic analysis is a qualitative approach to organizing and describing available data by identifying potential themes. The qualitative research findings give a deep and comprehensive description of the phenomena examined; hence, thematic analysis has been chosen as the primary study method. This analysis type is especially recommended for complex structures (Braun and Clarke, 2006). According to Decrop (2004), researchers and local guides used researchers' triangulation and open encoding for each interview to improve the reliability of the analysis. They then compared the preliminary explanations and agreed on the main thematic categories. Further, researchers have revised the transcript several times, and through discussion, the number of topics has decreased and become more concise and precise. The researchers independently analyzed the papers and agreed on the topics described in the findings. According to the data from the semi-structured interview, a conceptual research framework was generated for this research (Figure 1).

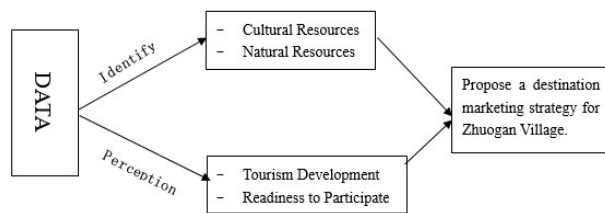


Figure 1: The conceptual research framework.
(Source: Developed by author)

The current study collected qualitative information through two in-person interviews that spanned one month, particularly from early January to the end of January 2023. The interview occurred at Zhuogan village, located in Tuanjie Township, within Kunming. Tuanjie Township is located in the northern part of Luquan Yi and Miao Autonomous County, Kunming City, Yunnan Province. It is 27 kilometres away from the urban areas of Luquan Yi and Miao Autonomous County, with a total area of 191.6 square kilometres. By the end of 2019, the registered resident population of Tuanjie Township was 27079. As of June 2020, Zhuogan village is one of the eight administrative villages under the jurisdiction of Tuanjie Township. Near Zhuogan village, there are tourist attractions such as Jiaozi Snow Mountain Scenic Area, Jiaopingdu of Jinsha River in Luquan, Fengshi Ancient City, and Kunming Jiaozi Mountain Nature Reserve. There are specialties such as Luquan Saba Ham, Sani steamed stuffed bun, and Bitter Buckwheat Paste, as well as folk cultures such as Kunming Diao (a type of ethnic music), Ashima, and Shuanghe Yi Yanglao Drum Dance. In the first week of January 2023, an initial casual visit was undertaken, whereby a concise meeting was convened with select committee members residing in the village.

Additionally, a comprehensive visit to Zhuogan village was arranged, and two representatives from the village committee were accompanied. During the visit, the researcher had the opportunity to visit many notable attractions, including the village history museum, which highlights the construction of tourism-related infrastructure and institutions that showcase the handicrafts of minority communities. Ultimately, the researcher fortuitously entered a rural dwelling and conducted informal interviews with indigenous agriculturalists, local proprietors of small businesses, and two representatives of the village committee. The primary focus of the meeting

is on the optimal utilization of local natural and cultural resources for tourism development, along with strategies to enhance the local population's income.

The second field trip was scheduled for the end of January 2023, from January 28 to January 30, and included a three-day semi-structured interview. This endeavour yielded a total of 15 significant interview records. Before any interviews, all participants will be briefed about the study's goals and allowed to provide their informed permission. Everyone's anonymity and safety will be rigorously maintained. Several methods, such as member checking (in which participants are requested to verify the findings) and triangulation (in which the results are compared to relevant literature), will be utilized to ensure the reliability of the results. This technique will allow for an in-depth investigation of Zhuogan village's tourist potential and the creation of an individual marketing plan based on the research objectives and questions, as well as considering the discovered research gaps.

The study's research questions served as a foundation for the interviews.

RQ1: What are the natural and cultural resources in Zhuogan village that can be leveraged for rural tourism development?

RQ2: What are the perspectives and attitudes of the local community towards tourism development and their role in it?

RQ3: How can a destination marketing strategy be designed to effectively promote Zhuogan village as a rural tourism destination based on its unique natural and cultural resources?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: What are the significant natural and cultural resources in Zhuogan village that can be leveraged for rural tourism development?

This study unveiled a variety of unique natural and cultural resources in Zhuogan village. The interviewed village committee members and local small business owners mentioned that the natural and cultural resources are abundant and suitable for tourism development. For example, "Our Zhuogan village has abundant natural resources, especially abundant forest resources. Of course, our village is also multi-ethnic. It is worth mentioning that our village also has

its history museum, which witnesses the history of our village's development." (S1, S2, S3, S4, S7, S8, S9)

In light of the literature, the discovery of Zhuogan village's inherent natural and cultural resources provides both potential and problems for the rural tourist industry. Zhuogan, with its vast forest resources, rich ethnic diversity, and a museum reflecting its historical lineage, provides compelling evidence for the rural tourism potential underscored by Muhi (2010) and Muhi and Jovanović (2012). The community illustrates the advantages of rural tourism to local communities by increasing employment prospects and promoting economic development. Such findings echo the broader discourse around the merits of rural tourism in revitalizing rural landscapes (Yang et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, like any storytelling, there is an alternative perspective. While Zhu and Ding (2020) extols the virtues of rural tourism as a panacea for economic discrepancies, the long-term ecological and sociocultural ramifications remain an area of contention. In the meantime, the respondents had opposing points of view. Nearly all the interviewed locals expressed concern about the development of tourism. Some mentioned, *"Tourism increases our income, but the arrival of numerous tourists will disrupt our peaceful and simple life. While income is important, I still prefer our hometown as it is now. We do not want to be disturbed by outsiders."* (S10, S12, S13) Others stated, *"We were initially apprehensive that tourism development would greatly impact our lives and culture. However, with the recent strong national support for rural revitalization, especially in rural tourism, the government's investment has attracted many young people working outside to return home. The younger generation is more knowledgeable than us and can help us in various aspects of tourism development. This is our third major advantage beyond our natural and cultural resources."* (S11, S14, S15) The abundant natural resources and ethnic diversity discovered in Zhuogan village are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, cultural heritage sites are great resources for attracting visitors.

Conversely, these locations risk being exploited to the point that their originality is lost. Balancing tourism's economic imperatives with environmental stewardship and cultural preservation is a delicate act,

and the journey of Zhuogan offers a case in point. The unique local ceremonies, events, and architectural marvels of Zhuogan are evidence of the merging of cultural aspects with infrastructure development, as highlighted by Yuan et al. (2021). However, the question persists: How does one prioritize tourism without overshadowing other crucial developmental dimensions? The allure of tourism might eclipse critical facets like agricultural self-sufficiency, local education, or health infrastructure. While the call for the involvement of local farmers in tourism is great, it also brings a complex dynamic. While their inclusion ensures local ownership and might enhance the authenticity of the tourist experience, the modalities of their integration, particularly in decision-making structures, need careful calibration. The challenges highlighted by Xuyan and Na (2021) provide a cautionary tale. As rural tourism surges, the inadvertent rise in local prices might marginalize the community it aims to uplift. The findings from Zhuogan village necessitate a proactive approach, ensuring that tourism remains a boon and not a bane. Additionally, as illuminated by Amin et al. (2023), it is essential to ponder the prudence of grafting urban strategies onto rural canvases without adequate contextual adaptation.

In conclusion, the study's revelations regarding Zhuogan village's treasure trove of natural and cultural resources underscore rural tourism's immense potential. While these findings align with literary works emphasizing the virtues of rural tourism, they also serve as a clarion call. This call is for meticulous planning, sustainable strategies, and the inclusive participation of local communities to ensure that tourism remains a force of rejuvenation and not degeneration.

RQ2: What are the perspectives and attitudes of the local community towards tourism development and their role in it?

Interviews with community members revealed positive attitudes towards tourism development. For example, the local small business owner mentioned, *"We all know that the country is implementing a rural revitalization strategy, although we have overcome extreme poverty and significantly improved our lives. However, as tourism has grown in other areas, the local population's income has correspondingly increased. We*

think our village can also develop tourism. I hope the government can formulate a tourism development plan suitable for our village's development." (S5, S6, S7, S8) Many participants saw it as an opportunity for economic growth and improvement of community facilities. The participants' overall favourable attitude towards Tourism growth corresponds to the claims made by Heleno et al. (2021) and Kaufmane and Paula (2020). The community's cognizance of improved economic outcomes from tourism in adjacent regions is a testament to the grassroots realization of CBRT's potential. However, echoing the literature, there is a palpable recognition of the complexities within this dynamic. All the village committee members interviewed unanimously agreed that *"although there is huge potential for rural tourism development in the area, it should not be developed blindly. It is essential not to copy the successful experiences from other places simply but to pay more attention to their past failures. Of course, when designing tourism development plans, it is essential to comply with national policies and develop accordingly based on local conditions and characteristics."* (S1, S2, S3, S4)

As the community hopes for a tailored tourism development plan, the conversation around how they shape their representation, as highlighted in previous research, becomes pivotal. It brings questions about the potential commodification of their culture or traditions for boosting tourism appeal. The insights provided by the community members also shed light on the significance of governance in rural tourism. As Islam (2021) expounded upon governmental intervention as a catalyst, the community's aspiration for an apt tourism development plan further reinforces this argument. However, the challenge remains to ensure that such interventions both undermine the agency of the local populace and dilute the CBRT essence. Environmental and cultural concerns voiced by the participants, such as fears of environmental degradation and cultural decay, further contextualize the discussions raised by Nova (2021) and Liang (2021). Some local interviewees also mentioned concerns about land degradation and cultural impacts. For example, *"The development of tourism here will attract outside investors. We are apprehensive that tourism development might lead to the requisition of our fertile lands, potentially causing*

land degradation and affecting our agricultural yields. We want to live a simple life, increasing our income by growing economically beneficial crops. While tourists bring economic benefits, they will undoubtedly disrupt our traditional culture." (S11, S14, S15)

The endeavour to strike A balance between tourism-driven economic prosperity and the preservation of the natural and cultural milieu poses a problem. Moreover, the community's reservations about overcrowding, reminiscent of the commercialization concerns raised by Kuuder et al. (2020), augur the necessity for reasonable planning. Ultimately, small business owners also expressed their opinions. For example, *"Someone expressed their belief that we have similar worries to the local people, who are concerned about the potential invasion of outsider funds into their property. We are also worried that foreign investment might drive us out of business, as we all operate on a small scale. If we could unite and establish our local businesses, we would no longer have any concerns."* (S5, S7, S9)

This confirms what Kun and Wenrong (2024) stated about establishing township enterprises as a transition and buffer between urban and rural areas. Facing the countryside, township enterprises can drive the transformation of traditional agriculture, find new avenues for agricultural products, promote employment, and transfer surplus labour, enhancing the essential quality and professional skills of the labour force and facilitating a shift in the mindset of farmers. Facing the city, township enterprises can propel the development of urban industries, providing a competent workforce for industrial jobs, expanding markets, and supplying new demands. The research findings suggest that while there is a genuine enthusiasm for such tourism models, their efficacious implementation is contingent upon equipping the local community with the requisite skills and resources. It is about forging a path where tourism rejuvenates economies but reveres the environment and celebrates cultural heritage. In sum, the research results, intertwined with the academic discussions, illuminate the multifaceted nature of CBRT.

The community's aspirations and valid concerns underscore the necessity for a rural tourism strategy that is inclusive, sustainable, and adaptable; such an

approach should guarantee prosperity while avoiding concessions.

RQ3: How can a destination marketing strategy be designed to effectively promote Zhuogan village as a rural tourism destination based on its unique natural and cultural resources?

Data analysis suggested that a successful marketing strategy for Zhuogan village should emphasize its unique natural and cultural resources. For example, *"The primary advantage of fostering tourism in our village is widely acknowledged to be the utilization of our abundant natural resources and preservation of our unique ethnic minority culture. If we develop tourism in the future, we should make good use of forest resources and develop interesting tourism projects. For tourists to experience our ethnic minority culture, I think we can consider opening more homestays where we can sell our handicrafts. Of course, it also allows tourists interested in delicious food to taste our authentic ethnic cuisine."* (S1, S2, S3)

A suggested tourism destination marketing strategy for Zhuogan village has been formulated based on the findings of Research Question 1 and Research Question 2.

Destination marketing strategy for Zhuogan village

Contextual understanding: Before developing a marketing strategy, it is essential to thoroughly understand Zhuogan village's unique cultural, ecological, and socioeconomic dynamics. Engage anthropologists or local historians to map the village's heritage, folklore, traditions, and environmental assets.

Holistic development approach: Balancing Financial and Social Well-being: Collaborate with local leaders, stakeholders, and community members to understand their aspirations and concerns. Create tourism products that ensure revenue generation and sociocultural preservation. Establish consistent channels of communication and feedback with the inhabitants to maintain the integrity of the village while simultaneously fulfilling financial objectives.

Distinguish DMOs with unique offerings: Leverage the village's unique attributes not typically found in standard tourism products. It could be unique festivals, traditional crafts, or local cuisine. Create storytelling campaigns around these unique elements,

emphasizing the genuine, one-of-a-kind experience Zhuogan village offers.

Intelligent social media utilization: Positive Narratives: Use social media to showcase success stories and positive impacts of tourism on the community.

Authentic representation: Avoid sensationalism. Let locals take the lead in content creation to ensure authenticity.

Education & Responsible Tourism: Use platforms to educate tourists on respecting local culture, minimizing environmental impact, and understanding village norms.

Culturally nuanced communication: To target international audiences and collaborate with cultural consultants. Understand and respect different perceptions and expectations, and tailor content accordingly. Employ multilingual campaigns, focusing on visual storytelling that transcends language barriers.

Beyond discounts- Building loyalty: Offer tourists participation in exclusive village events or workshops as incentives for repeat visits. Create loyalty programs based on unique experiences (e.g., local craft workshops, cooking classes) rather than mere discounts.

Comprehensive performance metrics: In addition to standard digital metrics, conduct periodic surveys among tourists and locals to gauge qualitative aspects like satisfaction, cultural exchange quality, and perception shifts. Use feedback to refine the marketing approach continually.

Flexibility & crisis management: Incorporate learnings from modern portfolio theories, but always have a crisis management plan. Preparing for potential challenges, such as international disputes, epidemics, or natural calamities, is advisable. Ensure a section of the revenue generated is reserved for crisis management and sustainable development projects.

Customization based on village dynamics: Develop marketing campaigns that emphasize the uniqueness of Zhuogan village, addressing its distinct sociocultural, economic, and environmental attributes. Create digital tools (like interactive apps or websites) that offer tourists a virtual experience, allowing them to tailor their visit based on interests, cultural immersion, nature exploration, or relaxation.

Continuous education and training: Regularly train villagers in hospitality, sustainable tourism practices, and digital tools to ensure they remain central stakeholders and benefit directly from tourism. Use a portion of the tourism revenue for community development projects and continuous training.

Collaborative marketing: Partner with nearby villages or attractions to create a comprehensive regional tourism package. This way, Zhuogan village can benefit from broader campaigns while highlighting its unique offerings.

Feedback & iteration: Continually solicit feedback from both tourists and locals. Adapt and refine the strategy based on real-world insights, ensuring it remains aligned with the village's evolving context and aspirations.

By intricately weaving Zhuogan village's distinct fabric into the marketing strategy and balancing commercial aspirations with genuine community well-being, Zhuogan can be positioned as a must-visit, authentic rural tourism destination.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate the viability of Zhuogan village as a rural tourism site, focusing on its distinctive natural and cultural assets. The study also aimed to identify community attitudes toward tourism development and devise a marketing strategy that effectively promotes Zhuogan village, aligning with the Chinese government's rural revitalization policy. Zhuogan village is a living example of rural China's abundant natural and cultural assets. The village, endowed with pristine landscapes, biodiverse environments, and cultural treasures, presents a robust proposition for rural tourism. However, the journey towards harnessing these potential demands careful navigation to ensure that while tourism flourishes, the essence of the village remains preserved. This study indicates that Zhuogan village might become a sought-after rural tourism destination with the right strategies. Nevertheless, achieving success necessitates the delicate equilibrium between promoting tourism and implementing sustainable methodologies. Our study gives us a starting point, but it is up to the local community, the government, and other interested parties to turn these results into policies and actions that have an effect.

Recommendations

Sustainable tourism: It is vital to balance the influx of tourists with preserving the village's environment and culture. Strict guidelines regarding waste management, tourist behaviour, and visitation numbers should be established.

Community involvement: The village's residents should be integral in decision-making processes. Initiatives like community-led tours, workshops, and fairs can ensure direct local benefits.

Digital integration: Utilize digital platforms for reservations, virtual tours, and interactive content, ensuring controlled yet wide-reaching tourism promotion.

Theoretical implications

This study presents a supplementary contribution to the expanding compilation of academic publications that emphasize the significance of countryside tourism in indigenous societies and the financial systems. The results suggested that the theoretical model for tourism development should take a more comprehensive view of the community, focusing on economic benefits and sociocultural impacts.

This study's exploration of rural tourism development in Zhuogan village is deeply anchored in a rich theoretical framework that spans social exchange, economic, entrepreneurial, technological, and community-oriented perspectives. The appropriate theory that supports the idea of village tourism development in Zhuogan village is the Holistic Tourism Development Theory (HTDT). This theory advocates for a comprehensive approach considering economic growth, social equity, environmental preservation, and technological innovation as interconnected pillars of tourism development. Successful tourism strategies should integrate community viewpoints, digital innovation, and sustainable practices to ensure the long-term prosperity of rural destinations.

Practical implications

Implication in Zhuogan village

Community involvement and empowerment: Encourages residents to participate in decision-making processes of tourism development to ensure their views are considered. Regular community meetings, consultative meetings, and community-led tourism committees can achieve this goal.

Cultural preservation and promotion: preserving and promoting the unique cultural heritage of villages, such as traditional customs, festivals, and handicrafts. This could include organizing events, providing guided tours to cultural sites, and promoting local artisans through publicity and training.

Digital integration and marketing: Use digital technologies to promote and manage tourism in Chandigarh. Build a comprehensive online presence through user-friendly websites, social media channels, and digital marketing campaigns targeting major tourism industries. Consider using a mobile app to provide visitor information and booking services.

Sustainable infrastructure development: Investments in environmental infrastructure projects will support sustainable tourism practices in the village of Chongqing. The goal is to minimize negative environmental impacts while improving accommodation facilities, transport networks, and waste management systems.

Rural tourist destinations affecting other countries

A community-centred approach: Emphasizing community involvement and empowerment as a tourist destination for other villages in the world, promoting local pride while ensuring the equitable distribution of tourist benefits.

Digital innovation: In other rural destinations, applying digital technology to marketing and management approaches can expand audiences and improve the visitor experience.

Cultural conservation: Focusing on protecting and promoting cultural heritage can inspire similar actions in other countries to enhance cultural identity and attract visitors' interest in profound experiences.

Sustainable practices: Sustainable tourism technologies, such as responsible tourism and environmental protection, can pave the way for more sustainable growth in rural regions worldwide, minimizing adverse effects on local inhabitants and the environment.

China's tourism policy and international development recommendations

Community engagement: includes policies prioritizing community involvement in tourism planning and decision-making processes. Community tourism committees and the inclusion of community

representatives in tourism management can achieve this objective.

Capacity-building: Providing the required training and education to the local community and those involved in the tourist sector so that they can play an active role in the industry's growth and management.

Environmental protection: Through legislation and incentives, tourists are encouraged to take sustainable action to reduce carbon emissions and protect natural resources. Sustainable tourism efforts and eco-certification schemes could constitute solutions.

Digital transformation: Investing in the digital infrastructure to facilitate and manage tourism. These infrastructures include the creation of online platforms for booking, destination marketing, and visitor data.

Preservation of cultural heritage: formulation of policies and incentives to preserve and promote cultural patrimony, including traditional customs, festivals, and historical sites. This could include designating cultural heritage protected areas and funding for projects.

Limitations and future studies

The study primarily focused on Zhuogan village's assets and community perspectives, potentially sidelining other stakeholder views, such as those of potential tourists or tourism agencies. The recommendations are also biased towards the village's preservation over aggressive tourism development. Future research might be conducted from the following three aspects:

Tourist perspective analysis: Research into potential tourists' expectations, satisfaction levels, and feedback can offer more rounded insights.

Economic impact analysis: It would be crucial to study the direct and indirect impact of the proposed tourism initiatives on the economy.

Comparative studies: Comparing Zhuogan village's journey with other rural tourism destinations in China and globally can yield best practices and common pitfalls to avoid.

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