

Influence of the Dimensions of Rural Tourism Experience on Green Consumption in China

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Abstract. This study aims to explore the relationship between rural tourism and green consumption based on the theory of social interaction. The results of structural equation modeling show that rural tourism experience is a good predictor of green consumption. This study provides a new entry point for the study of rural tourism experience and green consumption on post-trip behavior.

Keywords: rural tourism experience, green consumption, theory of social interaction.

1. Introduction

Currently, the international landscape is undergoing rapid evolution, with disasters such as locust plagues in East Africa, mountain fires in Australia, and floods in New Zealand occurring frequently increasingly, serious environmental problems such as frequent haze, water shortages, and global warming, violent shocks in economic markets, and shocks to the global economy, which makes environmental protection become the consensus of the whole society. At present, the COVID-19 is triggering a profound reflection on the relationship between man and nature. The future of global climate governance is attracting more and more attention. Countries are facing serious challenges such as environmental pollution, climate change, and declining biodiversity. To build a global ecological civilization, all countries need to work together to promote and realize green, low-carbon, and sustainable development [1,2,3,4,5].

The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a wake-up call for us to fully grasp the need of establishing green development and lifestyles, and to prioritize promoting green development and lifestyles.

Green consumption combines environmental protection with human health and safety so that the public's consumption rights and interests are highly integrated with environmental protection and ecological security, and it also provides demand power for green development, which will be positively responded to by the public.

It has been noted that the demands proposed by Chinese tourists are further segmented as material life improves from mass tourism to in-depth tourism and the pursuit of a slow and healthy lifestyle [6], which leads to an increasing expectation for spending their weekend in the leisure place and temporarily having a rest in the countryside.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Green Consumption

Since the concept of green consumption was proposed, its connotation and extension have been continuously enriched and expanded. The "5Rs" principle of green consumption is now generally accepted internationally, namely: R1 (reduce) refers to reduce, including reducing the excessive consumption of resources and reducing pollution to the environment; R2 (revalue) refers to value reassessment, which means the rethinking of lifestyles and consumption patterns, and giving new values to green lifestyles and green consumption patterns; R3 (reuse) refers to reuse; R4 (recycle) refers to sorting and recycling, and R5 (rescue) refers to the protection of the natural ecology and the coexistence and co-prosperity of all things.

For the 5R principle, R1 and R2 are the rational thinking of the harmonious interaction between humans and nature, R3 and R4 propose specific practical methods, and R5 is the expression of goals and objectives.

Green consumption refers to the purchase of environmentally friendly products and the avoidance of products that harm the environment [7]. Green purchasing behavior is a complex ethical decision-making behavior that is considered socially responsible behavior. As a consumer who has the awareness of bearing the social responsibilities, the green consumer would “consider the public consequences of his or her private consumption and try to use his or her purchasing power to bring about a change to society”[8].

Regarding the factors influencing green product purchase intention, some studies have suggested that convenience, value orientation [9], willingness to contribute to the environment, and positive effect on green product purchase intention; while the level of effort consumers are willing to put into obtain a new product will have a negative effect on green product purchase intention[10].

Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB) was developed to predict the intentions/behavior of individuals. TPB theory is the extension of the theory of rational behavior (TRA), which assumes that a person engages in specific rational behavior based on decisions formed by volitional processes[11].

2.2. Rural Tourism Experiences

Pine & Gilmore proposed the concept of Experience Economy, which considers experience to be divided based on consumer participation (active or passive) and environmental factors (active or passive) into four experience dimensions: education, escapism, aesthetics, and entertainment.

Rural tourism experience involves the relationship between tourism consumers and tourism destinations. In previous studies, from the perspective of tourism consumers, most of the studies focus on consumer needs and motivations, and from the perspective of tourism destinations, the studies focus on topics such as rurality and experience marketing, while for the research on the relationship between the two, more research is about satisfaction, perception, and market segmentation[12].

According to Clemenson and Lane (1997), rural tourism refers to a set of niche activities (e.g., ecotourism, nature tourism, agritourism, adventure, sports, food and wine, cultural tourism) within a larger ecological niche, resulting in a complex, multifaceted enterprise conducts activity characterized by ever-increasing diversity (Lane, 2009) [13,14].The tourism experience is clearly increasing for a variety of reasons and purposes (Lane & Kastenholtz, 2015)[15].

Several studies have analysed the benefits of rural areas (Frochot, 2005; Kastenholtz, Davis and Paul, 1999; Molera and Albaladejo, 2007; Park and Yoon, 2009), providing compelling evidence for different target areas [16,17,18,19].The main motivation is being close to nature or relaxation, rest and physical activity, or authentic natural or even spiritual experiences (Kline, Greenwood, Swanson, & Cárdenas, 2014; Rodriguez, Kastenholtz & Morais, 2012; Sharpley & Jeppson, 2011)[20,21,22].

Face-to-face meetings between locals/cultures and guests, such as the provision of housing units in rural areas and in the context of villages, can also play a central role in the quality of the tourist experience in these areas (Kastenholtz, Eusébio, Carneiro and Figueiredo, 2013 ; Kastenholtz and Sparrer, 2009; Tucker 2003)[23,24,25]. Tourists are often associated with a rural tourism experience, which contrasts with the stress of urban life and other negatively perceived everyday conditions, as a reflection of the rural tourism experience.

Rural tourism in developing countries such as China is important as more than just a new economic catalyst for underdeveloped/rural areas, as well as in educating tourists such as how to live a more sustainable lifestyle and better preserve natural resources for the common good. Rural tourism will gain popularity in developing economies as the physical environment deteriorates as a consequence of rapid structural transformation and poor waste management, for example[26].

According to Pine & Gilmore (1999), educational experience means that participants can learn relevant knowledge and skills after experiencing activities, and their knowledge and skills can be improved by participating in such activities.

According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), entertainment experience is one of the most widely developed forms of activities at present. The purpose is to provide information and attract consumers’ attention. At this

time, consumers play a passive role in receiving information, such as watching and listening to performances, music, interactive games, film appreciation and other entertainment activities.

Aesthetic needs are at a high level in Maslow's motivation model. Aesthetic demand is an increasing demand that grows with people's engaging in aesthetic activities. The most common sense of aesthetic stimulation is pleasure.

Scholars found in research on rural tourism motivation, tourists first show is the original pressure relief, escape from daily life daily life at the same time, you leave away from the daily life also carries the multifarious affairs, bound himself in a rural environment to release[27].

2.3. Social Interaction Theory

The theory of social interaction refers to the expression of the interaction between the people, and the environment in a certain social and cultural context and its connotation is the dynamic process of mutual influence and interaction between the people, and groups, the groups in psychology and behavior. Social interaction is the activity of people interacting and influencing each other to meet certain needs, and the emergence of human nature and culture originates from social interaction. The theory of social interaction is a sociological theory that describes the relationship, patterns, and laws of interaction between society and individuals[28].

As in field of ecological and environmental protection research, existing literature began to pay attention to the influence of social contact on individual environmental behavior, and case study was used to investigate the impact mechanism of social interaction on environmental behavior in the workplace and at home. These researches discovered that individual environmental behavior is formed through social interaction, and that environmental behavior influencing factors are also influenced by social interaction. Some scholars believe that the individual environment behavior from the perspective of "life" to the construction, construction cannot copy western environmental behavior patterns, to respect their own traditional culture in the specification of the environmental behavior of individual role in social interaction, to activate the environmental wisdom of traditional culture, through the way of the public.

Social interaction refers to the manifestation of interaction between people and people, and between people and environment in a certain social and cultural context. Its connotation is the dynamic process of interaction between people, between people and groups, and between groups in psychological and behavioral aspects. Social interaction is the interaction and influence of people to meet certain needs. The generation of humanity and culture comes from social interaction. Social interaction theory is a sociological theory that expounds the interaction between society and individuals.

Existing researches mostly discuss how to increase green purchase intention from the psychological factors, ignoring the social attributes of green purchase. This study is based on the perspective of social interaction. Social interaction theory holds that the public is not an independent individual in the society, but carries out communication among members all the time. The generation of individual actions will be influenced by the awareness of the effect of their behavior on others and the expectation of others on their behavior. In the process of interaction, the attitudes and behaviors of other social members towards green purchase will have an important referential influence on individual green purchase behavior.

Previous research utilized the theory of planned behavior to study green consumption, but the examination of consumers' intention to green purchase would be inadequate if the social dynamics that caused green consumption were not included.

This research concentrated on the perspective of social interaction. According to social interaction theory, there are psychological and behavioral interactions between individuals, between persons and organizations, as well as between groups in complex social relationships, and such interactions and interactions reflect a dynamic tendency of diffusion. People will influence and constrain each other, gradually shaping their views and actions under the impact of society, and individuals will also react to society. Consumers improve knowledge learning and sharing through verbal and nonverbal connection, and are impacted by the symbolic meaning of social construction, so that they progressively accept other people's views and engage in symbolic interaction, eventually establishing a meaning system. The discussion and implementation of

Ecological civilization development in China, particularly in recent years, has made consumers more aware of the environment and pay more attention to environmental concerns. At the same time, under the influence of social interaction, when consumers hold uncertain attitudes towards the green purchase, the attitudes and behaviors of other social members will provide them with important references.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: Rural tourism experience dimensions of education positively influence green consumption.

H2: Rural tourism experience dimensions of esthetics positively influence green consumption.

H3: Rural tourism experience dimensions of entertainment positively influence green consumption.

H4: Rural tourism experience dimensions of escapism positively influence green consumption.

The conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

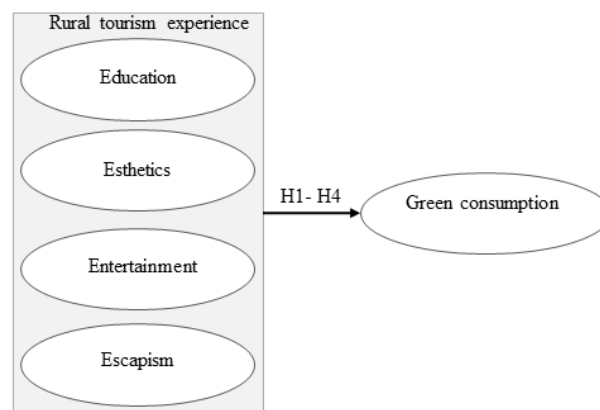


Fig. 1: Hypothesized model

3. Methodology

3.1. Variables and Measurement

Rural tourism experience was measured using 16 items adapted from Oh et al. (2007)[29]. A three items scale was operationalized to measure green consumption based on Kim et al., (2013)[30]. All items were rated using a 7-point Likert-type scale (from 1 - strongly disagree to 7 - strongly agree). Questionnaire questions such as :1. I will buy green products for personal use. 2. I am willing to buy green products for personal use. 3. I will make a certain effort to buy green products. The research group uses two methods: paper questionnaire on-site filling and online questionnaire survey.

The last part of the questionnaire concerned socio-demographic data: gender and age.

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

Using the measurement items described above, a questionnaire was prepared. The questionnaire was administrated online, in a snowball sampling approach. The formal survey was carried out from July to August 2021. Fifty pre-surveys were distributed earlier to test the quality of the scale. The target population comprised Chinese domestic tourists aged 18 years or above who have had already participated in rural tourism in the last five years. To minimize potential social desirability bias, the respondents were informed in advance of the complete anonymity of the survey and that the collected data were only applied for academic purposes. We asked the participants to think about their most recent rural tourism experience when filling out the survey. In total, 345 respondents completed the survey. 319 valid questionnaires were used after removing those invalid ones; the valid percentage is 92%.

3.3. Data Analysis

SPSS 22.0 and Amos 24.0 were the main tools used for the data analysis. First, SPSS 22.0 was used to help conduct the common method bias test on the collected data and determine the reliability based on

Cronbach's α . Then, Amos 24.0 was used to perform a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and composite reliability (CR), and convergence validity analysis on the measurement model and to perform any necessary model adjustments. Based on these results, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to examine the overall structural model and to verify the proposed hypotheses individually.

4. Results

A total of 345 questionnaires were recovered, incomplete invalid questionnaires with logical problems were eliminated, and 319 valid questionnaires were finally obtained, with an efficiency of 92.46%. Demographic information of the respondents is presented (as shown in Table 1). The results of confirmatory factor analysis (as shown in Table 2).

Table 1: The profiles of the respondents

	index	Number	Percentage (%)
gender	man	93	29.2
	woman	226	70.8
age	19-25	118	37
	26-35	102	32
	36-45	75	23.5
	46-55	19	6
	56 years old and above	5	1.6

Table 2: The Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (n =391)

Dimension	Item	t-value	CR	AVE	Cronbach Alpha
Education	RTE1		.950	.759	0.95
	RTE2	27.802			
	RTE3	23.129			
	RTE4	23.615			
	RTE5	22.623			
	RTE6	19.450			
Esthetics	RTE7		.933	.698	0.932
	RTE8	15.463			
	RTE9	18.777			
	RTE10	18.696			
	RTE11	16.416			
	RTE12	18.660			
Entertainment	RTE13		.941	.801	0.932
	RTE15	20.092			
	RTE16	20.069			
	RTE17	18.307			
Escapism	RTE22		.904	.762	0.912
	RTE23	24.188			
	RTE24	16.079			
green consumption	GPI1		.940	.839	0.938
	GPI2	33.622			
	GPI3	23.465			

As shown in Table3, all hypotheses in the study were supported except for the effect of rural tourism (escapism experience) on green consumption (H4). Among such hypotheses, the impact of rural tourism (esthetic experience) on green consumption (H2) is the largest, with a standardized estimate of 0.34. The impact of rural tourism (educational experience) on green consumption (H1) ranks the second position, with

a standardized estimate of 0.247. The impact of rural tourism (entertainment experience) on green consumption (H3) has the smallest standardized path coefficient of 0.132. The validation for the hypotheses of this paper is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Regression Paths of the Structural Model (n = 319)

Hypotheses	Estimate	O/STDEV	C.R.	P	Result
H1 EC -> GPI	0.247	4.788	4.725	***	Supported
H2 ES -> GPI	0.34	5.31	4.511	***	Supported
H3 ET -> GPI	0.132	2.14	3.754	0.032	Supported
H4 ESC -> GPI	0.027	0.819	7.527	0.413	Not Supported

5. Conclusions

Rural tourism experience consists of four dimensions, among which three dimensions of rural tourism, educational experience, esthetic experience, and entertainment experience, have significant positive effects on green consumption. Rural tourism (esthetic experience) has the greatest influence on green consumption, rural tourism (educational experience) has the second influence on green consumption, and rural tourism (entertainment experience) has the least influence on green consumption, so the following recommendations are made.

Rural tourism operators, rural tourism experience consumption on how to stimulate consumer education experience, aesthetic experience, entertainment experience, and ultimately lead to green consumption, rural tourism operators need to consider.

Focus on agricultural production, peasant life and folk customs, develop leisure farming and rural tourism, and create a group of folk farming culture projects with strong participation and experience. Focus on diversified development, focusing on cultivating high-end products such as leisure tourism, health vacation and cultural experience, with comprehensive functions such as leisure agriculture and rural tourism. Promote the coordinated development of rural tourism destination.

Innovation of the form of rural tourism elements, creating a rural tourism experience economy that integrates sightseeing, entertainment experiences, environmental education and aesthetic escape from reality, promoting the transformation of traditional agriculture into an experience economy, promoting the development of deep integration of agriculture and tourism. It not only meets the spiritual and cultural needs, but also promotes better economic benefits and consumption.

This study attempts to promote the revitalization of rural industries and the construction of beautiful countryside, to make the “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” become a consumption habit rooted in the heart of consumers, and generates a benign green consumption mechanism. We should not only consider the needs of human beings at present, but also the needs of nature and future generations, and grasp the “extent” of natural resources exploitation, to provide a new reference for the creation of harmonious coexistence of man and nature, livable and touristy.

6. Limitations and Further Study

There are some limitations in this study, which are mainly reflected in the following: firstly, due to resource constraints, although the volume of the sample recovered has been larger than the basic requirements of the study, the sample size collected is still relatively limited, and not comprehensive to cover various social classes, which affects the accuracy of the research results to a certain extent and limits the externality of the research results; secondly, other empirical methods can be considered in the future researches, such as experimental research, secondary data, etc. to explore the influence of other factors on green consumption intention, and the influence mechanism can be explored in-depth in the future; thirdly, the SEM models used to construct, estimate and evaluate formative SEM measurements are relatively

reflective and even less clear about the measurement framework. Therefore, the results and analysis have different interpretations. Other similar studies have used less accepted methods to further assess and assess the progression of formative constructs.

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