

A Study on Consumers' Willingness to Pay a Premium for Cultural Travel Photography in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan

-- An Empirical Analysis Based on Perceived Value, Risk Perception, and the Theory of Planned Behavior

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Abstract: This paper focuses on consumers' willingness to pay a premium for cultural travel photography in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan. Based on perceived value, risk perception, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study uses 540 questionnaires and conducts structural equation modeling, multi-group analysis, and cluster analysis on 501 valid samples. The results show that emotional value and unique experiential value are the main sources of premium formation. Perceived value positively influences willingness to pay through attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, while risk perception significantly weakens the transformation from value recognition to payment intention. The findings provide support for product design, trust building, and segmented marketing in the cultural travel photography market.

Keywords: Yunnan-Guizhou-Sichuan; cultural travel photography; willingness to pay a premium; perceived value; risk perception; Theory of Planned Behavior.

1. Introduction and Background

Cultural travel photography is a composite consumption product that combines travel experience, local cultural expression, and professional image services. Compared with ordinary travel photography, it not only meets the needs of memory keeping, recording, and aesthetics, but also carries functions of identity expression, emotional experience, and social sharing. In recent years, platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin have continued to boost the popularity of content like ethnic-style travel photography, old-town travel photography, and destination travel photography. As a result, travel photography has gradually shifted from a niche service to a new type of cultural tourism consumption with strong scene-based, symbolic, and social characteristics. Because of this, price competition in the travel photography market is no longer just about cost and technical ability. More importantly, it depends on whether consumers are willing to pay an extra premium for cultural expression, immersive experience, and the symbolic meaning of the destination [1].

Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan are rich in ethnic cultural resources and diverse natural landscapes, and they are highly recognizable and visually attractive in online communication. For this reason, the region has become very popular in the cultural travel photography market. However, market popularity has not automatically turned into stable transactions. On the one hand, consumers generally recognize the cultural appeal and visual uniqueness of travel photography in these areas. On the other hand, the purchase of high-priced products is still restricted by price sensitivity, uncertainty about final results, opaque service processes, and weak trust in long-distance consumption. Especially under the influence of platform-based content promotion,

consumers often develop strong interest first, but then show obvious hesitation when it comes to placing an order. This makes high attention but low conversion a typical problem in the current cultural travel photography market [2].

Based on this reality, this paper focuses on three core questions. First, which dimensions of perceived value are the key factors driving consumers' willingness to pay a premium for cultural travel photography in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan? Second, does risk perception significantly weaken consumers' support for paying? Third, under the real situation of high interest but low conversion, how do attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control jointly affect payment decisions? Compared with existing studies on cultural tourism consumption, this paper integrates perceived value, risk perception, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, and tries to explain the premium mechanism of cultural travel photography from the three levels of value formation, psychological transformation, and behavioral decision-making [3].

Existing studies on tourism consumption and cultural premium pricing mostly focus on general tourism experiences, destination image, or the purchase of cultural and creative products. There is still relatively limited attention to cultural travel photography as a composite service that combines local culture, visual production, and social communication. The marginal contribution of this paper lies in three points: first, it places the research in the specific setting of cultural travel photography in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan, which has strong regional features and clear platform communication characteristics; second, it tests the inhibitory role of risk perception in the relationship between value and payment; third, it discusses differences in conversion across consumer groups based on clustering results, so as to provide a more practical explanatory framework for service upgrading and differentiated marketing in cultural tourism destinations [4-

2. Research Questions and Design

This study adopts a research design that combines quantitative survey methods with qualitative interviews. The questionnaire covers six latent variables: perceived value, behavioral attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, risk perception, and willingness to pay a premium. Most scale items were adapted from studies on perceived value theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, and were revised according to the context of cultural travel photography in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan. For the offline survey, the research team distributed questionnaires in 12 scenic areas rated 4A or above across six cities in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan. Online samples were collected through a questionnaire platform as a supplement. In total, 540 valid questionnaires were obtained, of which 501 met the requirements for model analysis.

In terms of analytical methods, this paper first uses Cronbach's alpha and KMO tests to examine the reliability and validity of the scale. Second, a structural equation model is used to test the path relationships among the variables. Third, multi-group analysis is conducted to examine the moderating effect of risk perception. Finally, K-means clustering is used to identify structural differences across consumer groups. Based on theoretical reasoning, the study proposes the following hypotheses: functional value, emotional value, social value, and unique experiential value positively affect overall perceived value; perceived value positively affects behavioral attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control; behavioral attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control positively affect willingness to pay a premium, while risk perception negatively affects willingness to pay a premium.

As shown in Table 1, the research design, sample source, survey scope, and analytical methods of this study are summarized below.

Table 1. Research Design and Sample Description

Item	Content
Respondents	Visitors to Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan (aged 18-55, with independent spending ability)
Sample source	Online questionnaire + offline scenic area survey
Survey scope	Six cities in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan; 12 scenic areas rated 4A or above
Sample size	540 valid questionnaires collected, of which 501 were included in the structural model analysis
Methods	Reliability and validity tests, SEM, multi-group analysis, K-means clustering

3. Results Analysis and Discussion

The scale test results show that the overall Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire is 0.817, and the alpha values of all core variables are above 0.80. The overall KMO value is 0.914, and Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant, indicating that the scale has good reliability and structural validity. The fit indices of the structural equation model are also within an acceptable range: chi-square/df = 1.832, CFI = 0.941, TLI = 0.932, and RMSEA = 0.049, which suggests that the model has good explanatory power.

From the perspective of how perceived value is formed, all four dimensions have significant positive effects on overall perceived value. Among them, emotional value has the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$), followed by unique experiential value ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$). Functional value ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.001$) and social value ($\beta = 0.17, p = 0.003$) are also significant. This shows that what really supports consumers' willingness to pay a premium is not only the technical quality of travel photography or its social display function, but more importantly the emotional resonance and irreplaceable immersive experience brought by the cultural setting.

From the path of the Theory of Planned Behavior, perceived value has significant positive effects on behavioral attitude ($\beta = 0.51, p < 0.001$), subjective norm ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$), and perceived behavioral control ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.01$), with the strongest effect on behavioral attitude. Looking further, behavioral attitude has the greatest effect on willingness to pay a premium ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.001$). Subjective norm ($\beta = 0.17, p = 0.009$) and perceived behavioral control ($\beta = 0.14, p = 0.029$) also show significant positive effects, while risk perception has a significant negative effect on willingness to pay a premium ($\beta = -0.29, p < 0.001$). This indicates that whether consumers are willing to accept a higher price depends first on whether their overall evaluation of product value can be turned into a positive attitude, and it is also constrained by others' opinions, perceived difficulty of action, and judgments about risk.

The multi-group analysis further shows that risk perception has a clear inhibitory effect. In the low-risk-perception group, perceived value has a strong and significant effect on willingness to pay a premium ($\beta = 0.50, p < 0.001$). In the high-risk-perception group, this path becomes much weaker and is no longer significant ($\beta = 0.18, ns$). This means that when consumers worry about possible differences in final results, inflated prices, opaque service processes, or uncertainty in the environment, they may still fail to form actual payment support even if they recognize the cultural value of the product.

Cluster analysis further reveals the heterogeneity within the market. The first group can be described as rational but cautious potential consumers. Their attitude, subjective norm, and sense of control are all relatively high, but their actual experience rate is comparatively low, which means their main barrier lies in the lack of a strong conversion trigger. The second group can be called opportunity-driven experience consumers. Their attitude and social motivation are weaker, but they are more likely to make an actual purchase when stimulated by the travel situation. The third group can be described as interest-constrained intention consumers. They hold a positive view of cultural travel photography, but are more obviously restricted by budget, time, access to information, and trip complexity. This shows that the cultural travel photography market in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan is not a single market, but a differentiated demand structure shaped by multiple decision-making logics.

The results of this study suggest that the premium formation mechanism of cultural travel photography in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan has clear characteristics of experience-based consumption. Compared with general tourism products, consumers care more about emotional arousal, cultural identity, and immersive experience, rather than only photography skills or social display benefits. This

finding means that if product design stays at the level of standardized copying of makeup, costumes, and scenes, it will be difficult to support high-end pricing in the long run. Truly effective value expression should be built on the integration of ethnic cultural narratives, scene design, and personalized experience.

At the same time, the significant negative effect of risk perception shows that the transaction logic of high-priced cultural travel photography is not only about value attraction, but also about trust building. If the pricing structure is not transparent, if sample photos differ too much from actual results, if after-sales guarantees are missing, or if consumers feel uncertain about cross-regional travel and local culture, then value recognition will be difficult to convert smoothly into willingness to pay. Therefore, if the cultural travel photography market in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan wants to achieve a stable premium, it needs not only to tell cultural stories well, but also to build a standardized service system.

From a theoretical perspective, this study verifies that the premium of experience-oriented cultural tourism products is not driven only by functional benefits. Instead, it is built on the joint effect of emotional arousal, cultural identity, and perceived behavioral controllability. To some extent, this result adds to the traditional explanation in price acceptance

research that higher price simply means higher quality. It shows that in the context of cultural travel photography, consumers care more about whether they can obtain a unique experience that can be perceived, shared, and confirmed. Therefore, whether cultural elements are effectively translated into consumer value that is understandable, participatory, and presentable is a key factor in determining whether high-priced travel photography can be accepted.

From the perspective of market operation, the clustering results suggest that businesses should not adopt a homogeneous promotion strategy. For rational but cautious consumers, layered packages, schedule guarantees, and limited-time benefits can be used to strengthen the trigger for placing an order. For opportunity-driven consumers, it is more important to highlight cost performance, process transparency, and convenience for immediate decisions. For interest-constrained consumers, lighter product options, itinerary assistance, and risk commitments can help improve their sense of behavioral control. Compared with one unified promotion strategy, segmented operation is more helpful for improving conversion efficiency.

As shown in Table 2, the main structural paths and statistical results of the model are summarized below.

Table 2. Key Paths and Statistical Results

Path	Standardized Coefficient	Significance	Finding
Emotional value -> perceived value	0.33	***	Significant positive
Unique experiential value -> perceived value	0.29	***	Significant positive
Perceived value -> behavioral attitude	0.51	***	Strongest effect
Subjective norm -> willingness to pay a premium	0.17	0.009	Significant positive
Perceived behavioral control -> willingness to pay a premium	0.14	0.029	Significant positive
Risk perception -> willingness to pay a premium	-0.29	***	Significant negative

Note: *** indicates $p < 0.001$. The overall model fit is good, with chi-square/df = 1.832, CFI = 0.941, TLI = 0.932, and RMSEA = 0.049.

4. Conclusion

Based on the consumption context of cultural travel photography in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan, this paper constructs and tests an integrated model of perceived value, risk perception, and the Theory of Planned Behavior. The study finds that, first, emotional value and unique experiential value are the core sources of overall perceived value, which means that consumers are willing to pay higher prices for travel photography products with local cultural characteristics and emotional commemorative meaning. Second, perceived value affects willingness to pay a premium through attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, among which attitude plays the strongest mediating role. Third, risk perception significantly weakens the transformation from perceived value to willingness to pay, which shows that transactions for high-priced travel photography depend not only on value attraction, but also on trust assurance. Fourth, there are clear differences across consumer groups in payment logic and conversion barriers, so firms need to optimize their product and communication strategies accordingly.

Based on the above conclusions, this paper proposes three practical implications. First, at the product level, businesses should highlight ethnic cultural narratives, immersive scenes, and emotional value expression, and avoid homogeneous

assembly-line travel photography. Second, at the management level, transparent pricing, authentic sample photos, standardized procedures, and refund or rescheduling guarantees should be used to reduce risk perception and strengthen consumer trust. Third, at the marketing level, package combinations, content presentation, and conversion triggers should be optimized for different consumer groups, so as to achieve an effective conversion from being seen to being purchased. For local cultural tourism authorities, service standards, merchant certification, and more standardized cultural content expression can also help improve the overall quality and reputation of the regional cultural travel photography market.

This paper still has some limitations. The sample mainly comes from online questionnaires and part of the offline survey, so the regional and age structure may affect the generalizability of the conclusions. At the same time, the study focuses on willingness to pay rather than actual purchase behavior, and the discussion of long-term repurchase, word-of-mouth communication, and the influence of platform algorithms is still limited. Future research can further expand cross-regional samples and combine experimental methods, platform review texts, or actual transaction data to continue testing the dynamic mechanism behind premium formation in cultural travel photography.

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