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# Research on the Marketing of Rural Tourism on the Basis of Market Segmentation

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**Abstract** With the development of modern agriculture and the further improvement in balancing urban and rural development, rural tourism ushered in a new opportunity for development. However, due to lack of market segmentation, rural tourism in China is facing many problems. The rural tourists will be classified based on the market segmentation in this article, and then put forward four aspects from the use of different target market strategy, develop network marketing, Implements the region brand strategy and international marketing strategy. The aim is to offer advices and suggestions to the sustainable development of the rural tourism.

**Key words** Rural tourism, Market segmentation, The region characteristics, Network marketing, China

With the development of modern agriculture and the further progressing of urbanization, rural tourism is facing a new chance of development. However, because of lacking marketing segmentation, rural tourism in China has been facing a lot of difficulties during the process of development. I classify rural tourism into several groups on the basis of marketing segmentation. And then I put forward marketing countermeasures in terms of the following four aspects. They are marketing strategy from disparity goals, carrying out on-line marketing, brand-establishing marketing regionally and operating international marketing. The paper aims to afford some theoretical help to the sustainable development of rural tourism in China.

## 1 Literature review

During the middle period of 19th century, rural tourism emerged in Europe and gained rapid development. Based on the practical situation, western learners paid attention to rural tourism very early and researches on the marketing of rural tourism had emerged gradually. Especially the recent 10 years of researches on the marketing of rural tourism hint the practical situations of China. Martin Opperman had made a very early study on the conception, infrastructure and products of rural tourism<sup>[1]</sup>. Duncan Hilchey began to pay attention to the behaviours of rural tourists<sup>[2]</sup>. Middleton put forward the views of marketing segmentation, pointing out that the segmentation of marketing could be carried out in terms of geography, population, psychology, social culture, economy and purchasing behaviours and so on. This kind of marketing strategy is beneficial to competition and servicing customers<sup>[3]</sup>. Vellas *etc.* had put forward 3 typical marketing problems. They are non-differentiated marketing strategies, differentiated marketing strategies

and intensified marketing strategies<sup>[4]</sup>.

Based on the abroad researches, the systematic theories of the rural tourism marketing have not yet come into being.

Rural tourism in China is late in starting and researches on marketing of rural tourism by the academics begun in the early of the 20th century. Huang Jin *etc.* respectively made researches on the motives and marketing demands and needs of rural tourism<sup>[5]</sup>. Xiong Yuanbin<sup>[6]</sup> and Zhao Lizeng<sup>[7]</sup> discussed on the marketing strategies, the modes and even the innovation points of the rural tourism respectively. HE Xuehuan pointed out the different influences of educational levels on the consumption behaviours of rural tourism<sup>[8]</sup>. FANG Tian points out that the development of rural tourism should be clear in the aimed markets and segment the tourism markets from different aspects<sup>[9]</sup>.

Although researches on the rural tourism marketing start late in China, researches on rural tourism marketing are getting more and more popular. And also, most of researchers make researches on rural tourism in a whole entity. Researches on the development rural tourism from a perspective of marketing segmentation is few.

## 2 The conception and types of rural tourism

**2.1 The conception of rural tourism** Rural tourism is a newly borned charming industry by the combination of agriculture and tourism. With the successive development of rural tourism, researches on the conceptions of rural tourism both abroad and at home are more and more abundant. After summarizing all kinds of definitions of rural villages both abroad and at home, I give out its definition. The rural tourism is a kind of new tourism form combining tourism, leisure and shopping together which has the rural spatial environment as the background, having the natural sceneries, living styles, production situations and local cultures as the objects, making uses of the differences between urban and rural areas to program, plan and compose tourism products<sup>[10]</sup>.

**2.2 The classification of rural tourism** According to the

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features of rural tourism activities, this paper classifies the rural tourism into the following 6 types.

**2.2.1 Rural leisure tourism.** Rural leisure tourism includes sceneries appreciation, wild animals and plants supervision, flying kites, rural vacation, rural restaurants and so on.

**2.2.2 Rural sporting tourism.** Rural sporting tourism includes wandering, horsing, bicycle riding, fishing, swimming, boating, tennis, golf and other huntings like, floating, skiing, hot balloons, exploration, high mountain skiing and climbing and so on.

**2.2.3 Rural local culture tourism.** Rural local culture tourism includes local cultural festivals, attending rural agricultural festivals, tasting local diets and visiting agricultural and industrial enterprises and so on.

**2.2.4 Local agricultural experiencing tourism.** Local agricultural experiencing tourism includes seeding, harvesting, husbandry, milking, fishing, picking, wining and agricultural products processing and so on.

**2.2.5 Rural business activities tourism.** Rural business activities tourism includes medium-sized or small-sized meeting, expansion training and visiting researches and so on.

**2.2.6 Rural learning tourism.** Rural learning tourism includes rural camping, drawing, learning of local handy products and gardening training and so on.

### 3 Classification of rural tourists on the basis of marketing segmentation

The marketing segmentation of rural tourism refers to an activity process of dividing the whole market into two or more than two rural tourism groups with similar demanding characteristics according to the disparities of rural tourists' features and demanding. After the segmentation of marketing, each tourist group with the similar demanding features is a segmentation marketing<sup>[11]</sup>. I classify the rural tourists into the following several groups according to the segmentation standards such as natural features (wide region, cities or alike, urban and rural areas and so on), civilization features (income, age, gender, educational degrees and so on), behaviour features (the purchasing brands, purchasing time and prices and so on), attitude (the purchasing motives and usages) and psychological features (values and attitudes and so on).

**3.1 Rural tourists on business trip in urban** Tourists in urban on business trip include entrepreneur, personal employer, staffs and businessman and so on. This kind of tourists on a business trip in rural areas aims to service customers, company treatment, holding meetings and visiting, researching and so on with the rural beautiful natural sceneries and taking an advantage of adjacent geography. They are insensitive to prices, but pay more attention to whether or not the complete business infrastructure, the clean and healthy dining environment and the comfortable living conditions, convenient transportation and so on<sup>[12]</sup>.

**3.2 Middle-class tourists in rural tourism** The middle-class (including CEO, the top clerks of enterprises and educational employees and so on) has a relatively higher salary and higher educational degrees. They are getting married late and

giving birth to babies late. They have stronger abilities to purchase products and newer concepts to consume than other generous workers and they are the high-qualified tourists. The middle-class tourists usually prefer a comfortable, high-qualified rural tourism. They like better natural environment and are keen on unique rural culture. They usually like to drive by themselves to enjoy tourism, enjoying being alone or inviting friends together. The middle-class tourists are the important sources of tourists of the rural vacation.

**3.3 Blue-and-white class tourists in rural tourism** tourism to blue-and-white class is usually trip to natural sceneries around cities. The short-term trips cover larger proportion. tourism for blue-and-white class tourists are usually named generous consumption which are the main force of short-term tourism in China nowadays. They are also the main body of rural tourism markets at home. With the further improvement of urban or around transportation, the tourism of this kind of tourists is usually organized with a unit of enterprises or families, or friends getting together and so on in large numbers. They pay more attention to the convenient transportation and the diversities of rural tourism programs.

**3.4 Students tourists in rural tourism** Students are the huge source to the rural tourism. The markets of students tourists can be classified into preliminary students, middle-school students and university students. There are large disparities among each segmentation markets. From a perspective of tourism goals, the older they are, the stronger awareness of increasing experience. The middle-school students and preliminary students are more likely to get close to nature and the university students are more likely to the historical tourism places. From a perspective of tourism forms, the older they are, the larger proportion of being alone or getting together. There are two kinds of ways of middle-school and preliminary students that are attending the organized activities by school and following parents to go our for tourism; university students tends to be alone or getting together while tourism. From a perspective of tourism distance, middle-school and preliminary students are more one-day tourism. But the recent rural camping is getting more and more popular. University students are usually to have rural tourism and rural sporting tourism on weekends and in summer and winter holidays.

**3.5 The grey-head tourists in rural tourism** In tourism, the seniors are usually generalized as the grey-heads. The grey-head tourists have much freer time than others who are not constrained by festivals and holidays when going out for tourism. They have a mind to avoid the summit of tourism who are the main sources of bleak seasons of tourism. What the grey-head tourists demanding are the slow but high-qualified tourism. They like to have a fixed living place and have some tourism near around. The grey-head tourists are the main sources of rural vacation tourism. In China, because of the short historical period of urban development and most of urban seniors being born in the rural areas have deep feelings to rural areas and care much about the development of rural areas. Besides them, those seniors who were born and worked in ur-

ban areas but favor the natural rural leisures are the potential markets who cannot be ignored.

**3.6 Rural villagers tourists in rural tourism** With the improvement of living standards of rural villagers, villagers go out for tourism become more and more, and the markets are larger and larger. In the first and second larger cities, because of the extension development of cities and the comprehensive development of urban and rural areas, villagers earn more and more. Adjacent villagers have tourism mutually in counties and learning programs about agriculture become more and more popular. To those rural tourism which have famous name over the country and have formed a branded rural tourism, such as Chengdu Sansheng Flower Town, have attracted more and more tourists who are usually villagers engaged in rural tourism from other provinces to visit, supervise and research every year. While comparing to the urban citizens, rural tourists are in far distance in numbers.

**3.7 Abroad tourists in rural tourism** The developed countries of rural tourism, such as Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom, receive large amounts of international rural visitors. The number of international tourists in rural tourism may be viewed as a signal of higher development of rural tourism. Therefore, it is an important method to increasing the comprehensive tourism attraction of a city, enriching the tourism experiences of tourists and upgrading the profits of tourism of a country by increasing the rural tourism marketing to foreign tourists and attracting international rural tourists. Local cultural activities in rural areas in China are attractive to foreign tourists to a large degree, such as local building, local national costumes, cultural festivals, handy products and local songs and so on<sup>[12]</sup>.

## 4 The problems of rural tourism marketing and marketing countermeasures

**4.1 Problems** Because the rural tourism markets lack segmentation, the direction of markets is fuzzy which further results in a series of problems such as uncompetitive marketing. At present, the main problems existing in rural tourism marketing in China are the following types. The first is the current marketing of rural tourism views tourists as a whole entity as well and only have a general marketing way with a lower identification of brand. So, it is hard to get the ideal results. The second is the small scale of marketing and low coverage of markets. Because the single household and enterprise is limited in finance. They cannot afford the high costs with media marketing. The third is the rare usage of network and other medium. The rural tourism areas lack abundant researches on the guests resources, such as their hobbies and their likes and so on. The main source of out-going tourists are at ages from 18 to 35 who are characterized with obtaining information and points by surfing internet or mobile phone. While at present, although there are improvements on the construction of internet in rural tourism places, the systems have not yet formed from a whole view. And even many places have not yet covered with internet. Taking Chengdu as example, Chengdu is a place publicly known as the bed of rural tourism in China where have fa-

mous rural tourism and brands such as Sansheng Flower Town, Pi County Agricultural Village, Longquan International Peach Flower Festival and so on. However, until now, they do not have their own web sites. It is unbelievable that they do not have their own web sites in such a developed internet world. It is almost blank in information publishing through mobile phone<sup>[12]</sup>.

### 4.2 Marketing countermeasures

**4.2.1 Adopting countermeasures of differentiated goals markets.** The goal market countermeasures refers to methods and strategies in deciding and selecting aimed markets by enterprises on the basis of markets segmentation. The aimed market countermeasures usually have 3 types. They are non-differentiated markets strategy, intensified markets strategy and differentiated markets strategy. The non-differentiated markets strategy views the whole tourism market as a large aimed market, without considering the differences of segmentation markets and only affording one product, the single marketing group to customers, meeting all needs of customers and trying best to focus on the similarities of all customers. The intensified strategies refers to enterprises focus on a small and fixed subordinate markets with all efforts and meet the needs of this markets with itself special and definite marketing group. The differentiated strategies refers to that the enterprises manage several segmentation markets at the same time and design different marketing strategies for different segmentation markets. The development of rural tourism has adopted an extensive way for the recent 20 years in China, so, there are lots of problems nowadays. With the further development of rural tourism and the upcoming markets of vacation spending, this kind of extensive strategies has already become the bottleneck constraining the development of rural tourism. The intensified strategies are more likely adopted by the single rural tourism places. To the whole markets of rural tourism in China, the differentiated marketing strategy is the only way to get rid of the difficulties which the development of rural tourism are facing, realizing the sustainable development. The detailed measures can be fixed according to the segmentation tourists markets of the seven types classified by the paper. Explore and design different products and services of rural tourism, adopting the shifting media channels of segmentation markets to carry out marketing and then finally form the brands of segmentation markets.

**4.2.2 Promoting and perfecting the internet marketing.** With the development of internet, rural tourism should make good use of it, change the backward situation and perfect the owned information platform. In nowadays internet times, people used to depend on internet to search the destination and the arranged agenda while taking a trip. Among tourists in rural tourism, self-driving tourists and independent students are the most. And self-driving tourists largely depend on internet information which call for a strong information platform to meet their needs. At present, the supply of internet services does not match with the demanding very well. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the cooperation with information department in a short term, constructing the web sites systems of rural tourism

completely and forming information net. It demonstrates the rural tourism, meanwhile, tourism areas should accelerate the updating speed of information and have on-line services. To those large famous web sites, international channels should be established step by step, such as editions of English, French, Japanese and Korean and so on to increase the familiarity of rural tourism in China to the world. At the same time, the currently popular blog, face-book and M-Commerce like mobile phone, PDA and lineless terminals laptop and so on could be borrowed to propagate rural tourism in China.

**4.2.3** Operating the regional brand strategy of rural tourism. Brand is the basis and soul of experience. The brand strategy operated by rural tourism can increase the acknowledgement and feelings of tourists toward the products and services of rural tourism. The specialized and meaningful brand of rural tourism can motivate absolutely the feelings of tourists and strengthen the psychological experiencing of tourists. To establish the brand of rural tourism is a better way to solve the assimilation problems of the products and services of rural tourism. At present in China, in the developed areas of rural tourism, branded rural tourism should be established firstly to promote the development of the whole rural tourism<sup>[6]</sup>.

With the development of modern agriculture and the sustainable development of urban and rural areas, scaled and featured development of rural tourism has become the trend. Modern rural agriculture has broken through the original single closed economy and formed the intensified economic state guided by marketing economy. This kind of economic state are embodied with unite programming, constructing, managing and marketing. Rural agriculture has formed a situation of intensification, scale and industrialization and so on<sup>[9]</sup>. The whole modern rural agriculture is no more a industry supplying and consuming all by itself, but a comprehensive industry with all steps depending on with each other and promoting the development mutually. The coming-into-being industrial chains afford total and complete supplying guarantee for rural tourism. Intensification of land, labour resources and estate makes the development of rural tourism extend itself into regionalization and brand-establishment, becoming a large rural tourism industry with an one-stop services of foods, housing, acting, visiting, purchasing and entertaining. The exploitation of regional scaled rural tourism may bring a specially obvious destination of rural tourism which can promotes the economic development of the local and accelerates the construction of new-countryside<sup>[12]</sup>. There are some good examples about this aspect in Suzhou. Suzhou began to operate the intensified development of rural tourism in 2008. The western area around Taihu lake, the northern area along river, the central area with lakes and the southern area with old towns have their segmentation markets. The four large intensified scenery of rural tourism are definitely classified into the following segmentation parts. The green vacation and cultural leisure region of western area around Taihu lake should focus on the development of products for experiencing. Such as rural vacation center, cultural villages with local culture as topics ( ancient villa-

ges), modern agricultural parks and fishing culture and tea culture and so on; the river&sea culture and rural scenery region of the northern area along river should focus on the main characteristics of itself, such as the environment experiencing of agriculture and new-countryside, agricultural studying and tourism and so on; the foods experiencing and biological leisure region of central area with lakes should focus on the development of featured diets, such as crabs, rural tourism products which are business aims; the visiting and cultural experiencing of old towns region of the southern area should be dominated by demonstration of lifestyle in Wu period and the traditional culture.

**4.2.4** Carrying out international marketing. Rural tourism is a window for international tourists knowing something about China. Some rural tourism products, such as local features, festivals and celebrations, foods and local building, costume, are all important factors attracting international tourists. In those areas where rural tourism has gained better development and have better conditions of infrastructure, the rural tourism products can be invented and explored for international tourists according to their tastes to promote the international development of rural tourism in China. However, nowadays, the serving objects of rural tourism of China are the local residents with few foreign tourists and from other places. There is a huge gap from international developed level<sup>[5]</sup>. Taking Beijing for example, a survey on the tourists of rural tourism near around Beijing which is done by tourism research and planning center of Beijing University in June, 2005 shows that tourists from other places covers only 13% and foreign tourist is 0. Contrasting to Spain, Italy and England and other countries receive abundant international tourists on a rural tourism trip. The number of international tourists can be viewed as a signal measuring a higher development of rural tourism. In this aspect, the development of rural tourism in China should be upgraded. The future development of rural tourism would form a diversified levelled situation. The top-branded rural tourism should set Sicilia Island in Italy, Sardinia and Sabah tree house in Malaysia as examples to develop the rural vacation tourism products<sup>[13]</sup>.

From a perspective of international tourism, rural vacation tourism have some advantages in China. To the well-developed and famous rural tourism at home, such as Chengdu, Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Yunnan and Guizhou, some excellent rural tourism brands should be refined. The construction and marketing of an international brands not only afford services for the local residents, not only the leisure tourism, but also can explore the medium or far distance vacation markets, attracting international tourists<sup>[15]</sup>. It seems to be a distant goal, in fact the appearance of the vacation center of Yue Rongren Anzang Village in Yunnan Shangri-la is a success.

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level of local governments set up special department for dealing with the development issues of rural micro enterprises, enhance their relations and cooperation with universities and colleges, especially with those specialized in management and finance, encourage those universities to open up training majors and courses for the people in rural micro enterprises, the government provides funds or free on-the-job training for those employees in the micro enterprises, through training, the comprehensive quality of those employees would be greatly improved. Thirdly, through formulating related policies, such as tax deduction, financial support, assisted propagation and so on, the government could absorb good vocational education and training institutions to settle down in rural areas and provide various long-term training services so as to facilitate the related training of employees in rural micro enterprises. On the other hand, the competition among enterprises is actually the competition of talents<sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, apart from the training of employees, the employers should put some of their attention on the introduction of talents, the broad propagation of rural micro enterprises would change the attitude of university students towards the difficult development of rural micro enterprises, and encourage their initiatives in going down to grass-root units to exercise; the leaders of rural micro enterprises should construct competitive salary and welfare system and normal wage increase system, expand the proportion of performance wage, and provide opportunities of on-the-job training and paid vacation, so as to attract talents and lay material foundation.

**3.3 Strengthening the construction of enterprise system and improving leadership** The effective operation of enterprises needs outstanding leaders and managers, but relies more on the construction of management system and operation mode of leaders. The leaders of rural micro enterprises could design by their own or invite professional management consulting company to formulate management system and employee rules which accord with the practical situation of their own enterprises. The enterprise leaders should set a good example with their own conducts, do everything according to the prescribed rules of the enterprises, improve their communicating

skills with employees and listen to the opinions of the masses, in this way could the dictatorial and patriarchal management pattern be gradually transformed into the democratic and masses-involved management mode. Moreover, enough attention should be paid to the construction of enterprise culture, through creating a good and harmonious working environment, the working enthusiasm of employees would be greatly motivated, thus improving the operating efficiency of enterprises.

#### 4 Conclusion

To develop rural micro enterprises is an important path to increasing the incomes of farmers and relieving the employment pressures of cities. China has isolated the concept of micro enterprises from that of SMEs, and implemented some supportive policies for the development of micro enterprises, which has great significance to their growth. As a systematic engineering, the development of rural micro enterprises calls for both the support of government policies and marketized cultivating. With the constant development of socialist market economy, especially the improvement of the marketization of vast rural areas, rural micro enterprises would develop rapidly, which improves the industrial structure of China and further promotes the integration process of urban and rural areas.

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