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Identification and Analysis of Symbolic Elements in the Mountain Tourism

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Abstract As a traditional tourist type, mountain tourism now is highly focused on and it has already accumulated a great many academic papers in different types of researches. However, there still exists improvement in positive and qualitative study. This paper uses Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) as the study method to identify, sort and present all the typical elements in the mountain tourism context, aiming to find out the potential expectations and needs hiding in the subconscious of the mountain tourist.

Key words Mountain tourism, Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), Element

1 Introduction

Mountain scenic area is a beautiful geographical complex in which mountain is the basic tourist resource carrier and component. After decades of development, China's mountain scenic area, especially famous scenic spot, has become an important tourist destination. It has played a crucial role in the development of China's tourism industry (Xie, 2007). Behind the booming mountain tourism, there are a series of problems. For example, due to the lack of geographical features and regional culture, China mountain tourism development model is similar, and the important thing is scale but not quality, so the products are shoddy. Mountain scenic area should focus on innovation of tourism products in order to meet the constantly changing needs of tourists (Liu *et al.*, 2013). This shows that some kinds of mountain tourism have not been able to effectively display the qualities of mountains, local characteristics, and their unique mountain tourism situation. In order to solve the above problems, with regard to the research about present situation of mountain tourism, the development problems and development model, the practitioners and researchers have been going on. It is meaningful when the research conclusion can guide the practice. From the perspective of tourist experience, this article attempts to use the method of qualitative analysis to identify the symbolic elements of mountain tourism experience, extract the main elements, and provide reference and guidance for mountain tourism developers.

2 Research methods

In order to find out the symbolic elements, this article is based on the perspective of tourist's experience, starting from the mountain-based tourists to understand their awareness of mountain tourism

area, grasp their symbolic recognition about the mountain tourism, and summarize, classify these elements. Finally, we strip out the basic elements of mountain tourism landscape composition. Through this study, the researchers hope to provide some theoretical reference for mountain tourism area in the development and operation. Based on these basic symbolic elements, the manager can produce the mountain tourist products in accordance with the market demand and highlight the geographical and cultural aspects of the region's specialties. The main method used in this study is the ZMET. For the traditional research methods, consumers are often unable to accurately express their intentions and expectations. That is to say, there are many thoughts and feelings that are not expressed precisely in language. Maybe a lot of ideas are unaware because they are hidden in the consumer's subconscious. And a large part of expressions are based on non-literal language, while ZMET refers to the use of a kind of not easily be identified (such as pictures, paintings, stories, *etc.*) so that the respondents surveyed do the reaction in the absence of any restriction conditions (Zaltman *et al.* 1995). ZMET assumptions: According to the potential needs, emotions and values, the tourists interpret the given information and put their own feelings, expectations and intentions on object, third party, or the environment in the way of answer the questions. With questionnaires and interviews, respondents are easily affected by social expectations or intentions of the researchers. Using projection techniques with interviews and questionnaires in the study, it will enable us to improve the accuracy of the study. This research method is applied in mountain tourism scenic areas to find the symbolic elements for the first time in China.

3 Research design

Technical problem needed to solve in this paper is to explore the tourists' expectations and feelings. The order of the design is sample selection, in-depth interviews, sorting, extracting constructs, analysis of constructs' intrinsic relationship, and eliciting final contracts, *etc.*

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3.1 Sample selection This study is qualitative research, and it needs to use in-depth interview method, so it takes a small sample of interviews (Zaichkowsky, 1985). In order to ensure the validity of the findings, from more perspectives, the study explores the cognition of tourists' tourist situation, and focuses on sampling factors -gender, age, education, occupation and whether there was experience of mountain tourist to finalize the 24 valid samples, of which 12 were women, 12 men, aged 17 – 60 years old in the distribution range. After selecting respondents, the researchers need to send the details and description of research topics to the respondents. Respondents are required to understand the research topics clearly. Then, the respondents select 8 – 10 pictures by themselves to represent their own feelings and ideas for research topics, and the interviews will be conducted in 3 – 7 days later.

3.2 In-depth interviews During the interview, respondents tell the story about the pictures one by one. They also need to describe the lost picture. The author should try to find out behind each picture represented constructs to guide the relationship between the constructs, to extract the constructs behind the thinking and behavior, so that there is a more accurate description of the respondents' experience and feeling. At this stage, the respondents describe a total of 546 basic constructs, and express cognition and experience about symbolic elements of mountain tourism. The author found that most respondents, either describing a landscape, building, or conducting activities, tended to think of a situation, atmosphere or feeling (Zaitman, 2003).

3.3 Sorting and analysis of constructs In this study, the constructs are means of expression that tourists' specific ideas which summarize ideas of others with simple and clear words. The constructs are not real idea, just a note to capture and express ideas. During the interview process, the research will make a further enquiry about the constructs the respondents mentioned, ask origin and outspread feeling of the construct and relationship between constructs, and make the respondents express their ideas fully. After continuous discussing and organizing, 24 respondents mentioned 546 basic constructs, and then the researcher sorted them. Based on the principle of constructs' property, the same or similar constructs were merged. Fig. 1 is construct consistency trend diagram. As shown in Fig. 1, although the number of respondents continues to increase, the new constructs are in decline. Respondent A puts forward 114 constructs, respondent F has 62 new constructs, while newly increased constructs decline to 5 – 0 from U to X. This shows that constructs provided by 24 respondents have internal consistency, and also proves that the 24 respondents can reveal the typical elements of mountain tourism. Firstly, the researchers extract and merge the relevant constructs mentioned by all respondents, and then order them by frequency. We get 84 key constructs, as shown in Table 1. Through the observation, we can find that there are two sorts: one is group of typical elements which include 58 elements (*italics underlined*); the other group includes 26 elements which present the experience and feelings of respondents. Finally, the researchers elicit 3 types of constructs

from the complicated relationship between constructs: basic constructs, link constructs, and ultimate constructs. Basic constructs are some basic landscapes, such as alpine, forest, sunrise, *etc.* They are the start point of all experience. Link constructs are the middle part which means a situation, a feeling, and an atmosphere. It is caused by basic constructs. The ultimate constructs are the final experience obtained by tourist through basic constructs, for example, "alpine" is basic construct, "magnificent" is link construct and achievement is ultimate construct.

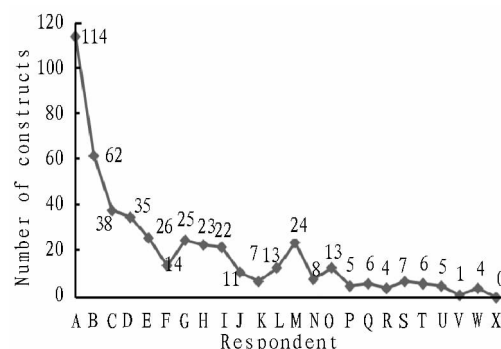


Fig.1 Construct consistency trend

3.4 Ultimate construct elicitation Through the sorting of typical elements and experiential results, the researchers analyze the causality of constructs, and divide the experiential results of typical elements in mountain tourism into 3 types: relaxation, pleasure, and achievement. They are the ultimate constructs which represent the ultimate experience of tourists.

4 Identification and analysis of typical elements

Some main typical elements mentioned repeatedly are discarded because of the obscure relationship between the elements and other constructs, especially ultimate constructs (pleasure, relaxation, and achievement). Finally, we select 19 valid typical elements: alpine, forest, mountain road, steps, pavilion, special plants, odd rocks, mountain spring, twitter, the sound of water, sunrise, sunset, porter, forest guard, allusions legends, celebrity ruins, squirrels, monkeys, welcoming pine. Here the typical elements are divided into two types: static elements and dynamic elements. According to the ZMET, the researchers extract the static elements (Alpine, Forest, Mountain road, Steps, Pavilion, *etc.*). All these constitute the frame of mountain tourism which is dependent on material and space as a unique existence. The tourists' perception of the characteristics of the mountain tourism is not the simple perception, but the deep emotion or experience caused by association, therefore, the dynamic factors such as Mountain spring, twitter, The sound of water, *etc.* must be integrated into the outline, the image of mountain tourism will be completed, and the tourists can get relaxed, pleasurable and accomplished tourist experience.

Table 1 The frequency of key constructs

Number	Construct	Frequency	Number	Construct	Frequency	Number	Construct	Frequency
1	<i>Alpine</i>	22	2	<i>Trees</i>	22	3	<i>Mountain road</i>	21
4	<i>Back to nature</i>	21	5	<i>Steps</i>	19	6	<i>Fresh air</i>	19
7	<i>Weed</i>	18	8	<i>Steep</i>	18	9	<i>Pleasure</i>	18
10	<i>Relax</i>	17	11	<i>special plants</i>	17	12	<i>Odd rocks</i>	17
13	<i>Magnificent</i>	17	14	<i>Temple</i>	16	15	<i>Exercise</i>	16
16	<i>Mountain spring</i>	16	17	<i>Wild flowers</i>	16	18	<i>Like</i>	15
19	<i>Quiet</i>	15	20	<i>Cool</i>	15	21	<i>Fog</i>	15
22	<i>Antique building</i>	15	23	<i>Wind</i>	14	24	<i>Birds</i>	14
25	<i>Accomplishment</i>	14	26	<i>Fun</i>	14	27	<i>Gate</i>	14
28	<i>Allusions legends</i>	13	29	<i>Pilgrims</i>	13	30	<i>Pavilion</i>	13
31	<i>Comfortable</i>	13	32	<i>Squirrel</i>	12	33	<i>Away from the hustle and bustle</i>	12
34	<i>Fatigue</i>	12	35	<i>Buddha</i>	12	36	<i>status</i>	11
37	<i>Monkey</i>	11	38	<i>hot</i>	11	39	<i>Welcome Pine</i>	11
40	<i>Stone</i>	11	41	<i>stress Relieve</i>	10	42	<i>Sound of the wind</i>	10
43	<i>Sunrise</i>	10	44	<i>Cliff</i>	10	45	<i>Monks</i>	10
46	<i>The sound of water</i>	10	47	<i>Hillside</i>	10	48	<i>Fish</i>	10
49	<i>Free</i>	9	50	<i>grass</i>	9	51	<i>Beautiful</i>	9
52	<i>Old trees</i>	9	53	<i>Wild fruit</i>	9	54	<i>Stream</i>	8
55	<i>Want to experience</i>	8	56	<i>cabin</i>	8	57	<i>Ship</i>	8
58	<i>Taoist temple</i>	8	59	<i>Lack of supply</i>	8	60	<i>Fallen leaves</i>	8
61	<i>Sunset</i>	8	62	<i>Bells</i>	7	63	<i>twitter</i>	7
64	<i>Avenue</i>	7	65	<i>Sea of clouds</i>	7	66	<i>Curious</i>	7
67	<i>Customs</i>	7	68	<i>Incense</i>	7	69	<i>aspire</i>	7
70	<i>Travel poem</i>	7	71	<i>Muyu</i>	6	72	<i>Simple folk</i>	6
73	<i>Couplets</i>	6	74	<i>Fresh</i>	6	75	<i>High threshold</i>	6
76	<i>The original ecology</i>	6	77	<i>porter</i>	6	78	<i>Cable car</i>	6
79	<i>Celebrity ruins</i>	5	80	<i>Miss</i>	5	81	<i>Cottage</i>	5
82	<i>Forest guard</i>	5	83	<i>Insect</i>	5	84	<i>Trash can</i>	3

Table 2 Classification of typical elements

Classification	Elements
Static elements	Alpine, Forest, Mountain road, Steps, Pavilion, special plants, Odd rocks, Sunrise, Sunset, Allusions legends, Celebrity ruins, welcome pine
Dynamic elements	Mountain spring, twitter, The sound of water, porter, forest guard, Squirrel, Monkey

5 Conclusions

As a traditional tourist type, mountain tourism now is highly focused on and it has already accumulated a great many academic papers in different types of researches. However, there still exists improvement in positive and qualitative study. This paper uses Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) as the study method to identify, sort and present all the typical elements in the mountain tourism context, aiming to find out the potential expecta-

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