Counter-Cyclical Growth Mechanisms and Marketing Strategies for Local Creative Integrated Catering in Cultural Tourism Scenic Spots from the Perspective of Rational Consumption

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Abstract Consumers now make buying decisions more rationally. This shift brings clear changes to cultural tourism and catering industries. Many local operators no longer chase endless scale expansion. They choose to focus on tangible value creation instead. This study reviews published papers and actual cases. It explores how creative local catering projects maintain steady growth amid tough market environments.The analysis shows rational shoppers look for offerings with good value and unique cultural features. Catering brands can stand out by drawing on local cultural traits. This helps them stay away from the trouble brought by identical business patterns. Carefully built immersive settings lift visitors' overall experience. They also make guests stay longer on site. Online platforms grow rapidly these days. New media supports steady brand building. It spreads content, draws potential customers, and helps maintain brand influence over time.In general, local integrated creative catering cannot be regarded as a simple combination of different commercial formats. Its core advantage lies in the organic integration of cultural themes, onsite spatial design, and digital marketing strategies. According to the analysis results, scenic-area catering projects can improve their comprehensive competitiveness through vivid cultural interpretation, personalized development strategies, and stable all-day operational arrangements. To further enrich relevant research conclusions, future studies may adopt expanded sample data to verify the practical effectiveness of these development strategies in diverse scenic contexts.

Keywords Rational Consumption; Integration Of Cultural Tourism; Local creativity; Growth Against The Trend; Marketing Strategies

1. Introduction

China's consumer landscape is currently undergoing significant changes. Previously popular conspicuous spending and blind consumption upgrading are gradually being replaced by more rational and value-based purchasing behaviors. Modern consumers are less willing to accept excessive brand premiums or low-value products, focusing instead on practical benefits and experiential satisfaction in their consumption decisions [1].This ongoing shift creates clear challenges for conventional catering businesses within scenic spots, which have long depended on location advantages and highly standardized, homogeneous product structures. In comparison, emerging catering formats that deeply integrate local culture, adopt creative combinations of services, and maintain flexible operational styles show better adaptability and risk resistance under current market changes.In this paper, counter-cyclical growth refers to the sustainable development ability shown by local culturally integrated catering businesses. Even as overall consumption becomes more rational and traditional scenic catering faces operational pressure, these innovative businesses still achieve stable growth through value restructuring rather than simply benefiting from economic cycle fluctuations. These models tap into unique local cultural resources. They deliver richer guest experiences and do not require large spending on physical expansion. This approach helps scenic catering players fight homogenization, keep costs in check, and run more

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efficiently. Researchers overseas have built solid theoretical frameworks covering the experience economy, consumption scenarios, and the fusion of culture and tourism. Chinese scholars have also examined business innovation amid consumption upgrades. Still, systematic research about scenic catering's adaptation to rational consumption and divided consumer groups remains limited [2]. We still lack enough discussion on two key points. Local cultural values shape visitors' decisions, and growth mechanisms must work alongside marketing plans. This study addresses the gap above. It examines integrated cultural catering from four practical angles: market demand, product supply, spatial experience design, and brand communication. It unpacks the inner logic behind counter-cyclical growth. It also puts forward tailored marketing tactics for scenic sites with different operating conditions.

2. Analysis of the Current Status of the Cultural Tourism Catering Industry under the Background of Rational Consumption

2.1 Overall Market Environment: Three Trends in Short-Video Marketing

Short-video marketing now follows three important trends. These trends reshape how cultural tourism and catering businesses attract visitors and turn views into consumption.

The first was, brands no longer rely on broad, blind exposure to grab traffic. They divide audiences into precise groups instead. Scenic catering operators create vertical content. These short videos reach viewers who care about local food culture and travel. This marks an industry shift. Businesses stop chasing traffic blindly and prioritize value-driven communication. Whether the content matches audience needs matters more than how many people see it [8].And then i found, today's short videos combine interesting content with shopping guidance. Merchants show their dishes, cooking steps and real dining scenes. These clips narrow the information gap between sellers and guests. They also raise what visitors expect before they arrive. Based on the Stimulus–Response theory, this visual content works as an outside stimulus. It changes how customers judge value and shapes their later consumption choices [8].

Then i found the importance of cooperation, online and offline cooperation grows more essential. Online promotion alone cannot form a complete business loop. Brands can keep customers only when online exposure connects closely with offline experiences, booking tools and continuous user care. When targeted online promotion, in-person scene experience and long-term customer management work together, local catering brands achieve more reliable value conversion [9].

2.2 Existing Dilemmas of Traditional Catering

Nowadays,scenic catering operators are facing three connected operational challenges. We will discuss these challenges in detail in the fourth section of this paper. The main troubles look like this: similar product designs, heavy reliance on location price advantages, and too much focus on one-off sales instead of delivering cultural and experiential value.

Product homogenization stands out as the first big problem. It erodes distinctive local cultural features. Tourists become less willing to come back and buy again. The second challenge comes from scenic spot price premiums. If visitors think products and services are not worth the price, this pricing strategy cannot last for long. Besides these two issues, most traditional catering shops only aim to finish single deals. This limited way of running a business leaves little room for cultural exploration. It also stops the overall dining experience from getting better.

3. Counter-Cyclical Growth Mechanism of Local Creative Integrated Catering in Scenic Spots

3.1 Demand Side Mechanism: Rational Consumption Breeds "Quality-Price Ratio" and Local Cultural Experience

Modern cultural tourism consumers no longer value brand prestige above all else, as they increasingly focus on inner experiential quality and embodied cultural value. Repetitive travel experiences have made many tourists weary of identical urban commercial scenery, pushing them to pursue authentic local catering experiences that establish genuine emotional connections with tourist destinations [2]. Contemporary tourist demands have surpassed basic physiological satisfaction, with most visitors seeking in-depth emotional immersion reflected through local cultural symbols and regional customs. Moderate price premiums become acceptable to consumers when dining services contain distinctive historical and cultural connotations. The Fanji Braised Pork Burger outlet in Xi'an's "Twelve Hours of Chang'an" scenic area fully reflects such consumption trends. Breaking the unified decoration and display modes of mainstream fast-food brands, this store shapes its service atmosphere based on Tang Dynasty street culture and demonstrates complete food production processes on site. Tourists can taste authentic Guanzhong cuisine while experiencing local historical culture and participating in diverse themed interactive activities. This typical case verifies the positive effects of integrating high-quality catering products with vivid cultural scenes. Even so, cultural attraction does not equate to universal consumer willingness to pay extra, and recognition of cultural price premiums cannot be generalized to all tourism and catering scenarios [2].

3.2 Supply Side Mechanism: Adaptability Strategy of Local Culture Empowerment and Light-Asset Operation

Scenic catering brands can strengthen core competitiveness through supply-side upgrades, and the key lies in creating unique products grounded in local characteristic resources. Operators can adopt seasonal raw materials, traditional dietary customs, and intangible cultural cooking techniques to preserve exclusive local flavors and raise the threshold for peer imitation. Scenic spot tourism inevitably features unstable passenger flow, and catering stores also face high fixed operational expenses. In this context, the light-asset operating model serves as a practical choice for most scenic projects, yet it cannot be regarded as a universal solution. Merchants should adjust their investment layouts and operational schemes according to their actual business conditions. Reducing unnecessary capital input and optimizing cost structures help catering businesses adapt to fluctuating tourist volume and ease the pressure of rigid profit thresholds [5]. Modern supply-side transformation no longer centers merely on product quality optimization, but leans toward experience-driven upgrading. While meeting tourists' basic dining needs, operators can add personalized services and interactive experiences to leave deeper impressions and stimulate repeat visits. Products with reliable quality, unique experiential value and reasonable pricing match the characteristics of rational consumption, improving consumer acceptance of pricing and repurchase intention. The flagship Chen Mapo Tofu store in Chengdu Kuanjie Alley perfectly illustrates this development logic. The brand integrates local cultural endowments with flexible operational modes. Special regional ingredients and inherited cooking crafts maintain product uniqueness, while interactive activities such as on-site Mapo Tofu production workshops turn customers' waiting time into immersive cultural participation. This classic case provides a viable development path instead of a universal standard for all scenic catering businesses. Overall, properly applied light-asset operations can alleviate operational pressure brought by fluctuating tourist numbers and high fixed costs, with its practical effects depending on balanced coordination between authentic cultural presentation, stable service quality and flexible asset allocation.

3.3 Scene Side Mechanism: Immersive Spatial Narrative and Extension of Consumption Link

Dining spaces nowadays are not only just supporting facilities for meals. They slowly turn into key consumption destinations that draw tourists to stay for visit. Most venues build immersive ambience by using cultural storytelling and local design instead of costly hardware renovation, and this change mirrors the ongoing industry transition [6]. Coherent scene design helps lift customers' perceived value and prompts them to stay longer. Once catering services are paired with cultural creativity and interactive segments, restaurants can move beyond relying only on food sales and gain diversified revenue streams [7]. The "Songcheng Night Banquet" inside Hangzhou Songcheng Scenic Area is a clear example of this trend. Its market-oriented spatial layout, professional lighting and sound design, plus live interaction between performers and audiences, blend regular dining with deep themed cultural immersion. Tourists in this setting do not just eat; they also take part in Song Dynasty cultural performances.Supported by cultural and creative product sales, the whole consumption chain expands continuously, covering dining, performance watching and commodity shopping. Such extended experience helps enrich visitor perception and raise overall income levels. While this case provides a practical reference for diversified profit development of scenic catering businesses, relevant conclusions about staying time and economic benefits still need more accurate and independent operational data for further verification [6,7].

3.4 Communication Side Mechanism: Short-Video Content and Online-to-Offline Conversion

When looking at market communication effects, local featured catering resources have great sharing potential. Food making processes, local cultural stories and unique space scenes can all be converted into distinctive short-video material that is easy for online audiences to recognize and spread. This form of content narrows the psychological gap between tourists and unfamiliar travel destinations. In many cases, users are willing to travel long distances just for the unique cultural charm and personalized experience of a local catering brand. Short-video platforms realize public display of local ingredients, traditional cooking skills, humanistic features and scenic landscapes. In this way, they facilitate cultural spreading and substantially guide tourists' consumption choices [8]. Smooth traffic conversion requires close coordination between online publicity and offline operational support. Specific measures include converting content exposure into physical visitor flow, as well as maintaining continuous user contact through booking channels, ordering systems, navigation services and regular customer retention plans [9]. Even with strong digital drainage capability, online traffic cannot cover up essential operational flaws, including insufficient product competitiveness and substandard service experience. Digital communication only acts as a medium to deliver authentic brand value and stabilize long-term user connection. It is unable to replace the core cultural connotation and basic operational capability that support long-term brand development. For this reason, high-quality products and services remain the most fundamental driving force for sustainable growth of scenic catering businesses.

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4. Realistic Dilemmas and Challenges of Local Creative Integrated Catering

Although local creative integrated catering shows potential for counter-cyclical growth, its development still faces three structural problems: superficial cultural integration, homogenized format innovation, and weak operational resilience. These problems correspond to the three strategy groups developed in Section 5.

4.1 Superficial Cultural Empowerment: Symbol Stacking and Core Deficiency

Many cultural tourism catering projects misunderstand the true meaning of localization. Most only stack superficial visual cultural elements while ignoring the importance of matching in-depth cultural connotation with actual dining experience [10]. Excessive reliance on decorative symbols often weaken cultural logic and narrative's integrity. Although local features have been contained in customized tableware and interior decorations ,but they have less correspond to dish origins or folk customs.As unique as these designs had at the visual level ,they were failed to bring immersive storytelling experience and even the emotional resonance to tourists [10]. Such simplified cultural integration may also damage traditional local cooking techniques and original special flavor characteristics. Some catering merchants adjust ingredients and production steps in a casual way to pursue higher short-term profits. This behavior will weaken product uniqueness and create obvious separation between displayed cultural symbols and real dining perception [10]. In another way, the insufficient taste experience and interactive design also restrict the quality of scenic catering services. Craft demonstrations, culinary culture explanations and intangible heritage experiential sessions.Without these supportive activities, it is difficult for catering projects to leave deep impressions on visitors, greatly reducing tourists' willingness to stay and consume onsite [13].

4.2 Homogenization of Format Innovation and Blind Following

Faster information transmission speeds have greatly compressed the innovation cycle in the catering industry. Mature catering products and service models can be quickly copied and standardized across markets.So turning unique creative designs into unified assembly-line services is not a difficult thing. This trend further intensifies industry homogenization and fierce market competition. Research finds a terrible thing that market replication speed often surpasses actual innovation efficiency. Once a certain scenic catering style or specialty dish becomes popular in local area, the identical products and immersive scenarios will soon appear in other tourist areas, gradually making consumers feel aesthetically fatigued [10]. As product differentiation continues to weaken, some catering brands have no choice but turning to rely on price competition to maintain market share. Without outstanding product features or exclusive experiential value, businesses cannot effectively retain quality-focused tourists who pursue authentic local characteristics.These behaviors will negatively affect the formation of a stable and healthy industry competition environment [11]. In addition, many scenic catering operators are lack of systematic resource development awareness. Most projects fail to fully explore local raw material advantages, traditional cooking skills and unique cultural endowments. A large number of valuable local resources remain underdeveloped, while simple internet-driven operation modes gradually occupy the mainstream market [12].

4.3 Weak Operational Resilience: Seasonal Dependence and Off-Season Losses

Scenic catering industries are naturally affected by seasonal tourism changes due to special geographical and industrial attributes. Many local merchants fail to formulate targeted operational strategies for peak and off-peak periods, making annual business performance unstable. Most catering projects rely heavily on seasonal passenger flow, with their main income generated passively from tourist gatherings during peak seasons. Once tourism enters the off-season, sharp declines in visitor volume directly reduce operating income, while fixed expenditures such as venue rent and staff costs remain unchanged. This common imbalance between revenue and expenditure has become a typical industry problem for scenic catering businesses. Another prominent issue lies in incomplete service coverage and insufficient local market adaptation. Most scenic catering menus and service systems are designed purely for tourist groups, ignoring the daily dining demands of nearby residents, including breakfast, light meals and other routine catering needs [13]. Such single-group positioning limits income sources in off-peak seasons and prevents businesses from sharing fixed operational costs through more stable local customer groups. Restricted product lines and insufficient off-season marketing planning further limit business development space. Without customized seasonal products, community-based cooperation and targeted promotional arrangements, annual income will face severe instability, weakening the long-term development foundation of local catering brands [12].

5. Counter-Cyclical Growth Marketing Strategies under the Background of Rational Consumption

5.1 Deepening Cultural Narrative and Experience Integration

Businesses need to embed core cultural logic into product design and service settings instead of simply stacking separate visual symbols to avoid shallow cultural presentation. To fix the drawbacks brought by superficial

decorative elements, operators can dig into local cultural resources and translate these resources into easy-to-follow food stories and service routines, weaving historical backgrounds and folk customs into the real dining experience [10]. Hosting hands-on activities, where guests can take part in ingredient handling, cooking sessions or traditional skill learning, helps lift the overall experiential value of catering products [10]. After these interactive sessions, operators can collect visitor feedback to support product updates and cultural content sorting. This method helps dishes, space arrangements and service procedures fit local features well, and lowers the risk of cultural homogenization and the loss of original food flavors [12].

5.2 Counter-Cyclical Growth Strategy from Homogenized Involution to Differentiated Deep Cultivation

To lower the risk of product homogenization, catering businesses ought to strengthen the uniqueness of both products and consumption scenarios, and stop depending too much on short-term tourist flow. Based on the findings of this study,i found that operators can turn intangible cultural heritage skills and regional cultural meaning into special flavors and service experiences, so as to build unique brand recognition [4,10]. Besides, it is workable to combine catering services with cultural creative events and educational tourism activities . Immersive interactive designs can broaden the functions of restaurants and also break the restriction of pure dining scenarios [7,12]. On top of that, merchants may set up a product updating mechanism in a regular way. By making the use of seasonal local ingredients and narrating original brand stories, they are able to keep consistent core brand identity even when the market keeps changing [3,8].

5.3 Implementing All-Time Scene Planning and Dynamic Operation to Reduce Seasonal Dependence

Catering businesses can reduce excessive seasonal dependence by designing all-round operational plans suitable for both peak and off-season periods.At the same time, serving diversified groups including tourists and local residents is a good choice. In terms of product arrangement, merchants can launch targeted breakfast, light food and late-night catering products to fit the daily dining habits of nearby residents at different time slots. Time-differentiated promotion plans and flexible pricing strategies can keep consumer demand's balance across the whole year, effectively breaking the single reliance on tourist consumption [11]. Furthermore, digital management systems,intelligent reservation and ordering tools can greatly optimize market prediction and inventory allocation. Analyzing real-time reservation data, store operators can adjust stock levels scientifically, cut unnecessary material waste, and achieve more flexible cost control even during low-traffic off-peak seasons [11].

6. Conclusions and Outlook

This research is focus on how locally featured and creatively integrated catering models achieve counter-cyclical growth under the current rational consumption environment. Based on comprehensive analysis, i found four core driving factors support such growth trends. Modern tourists increasingly pursue the cost-effective products with genuine value. Local cultural resources will enrich catering brands to stand out and achieve unique dining experiences and extend consumption scenarios. Furthermore, short-video content and coordinated online-offline operations effectively attract public attention to complete traffic conversion.Except analyzing driving forces, this paper also summarizes three typical obstacles restricting long-term stable operation. Many scenic catering products just to adopt superficial cultural elements without deep cultural embedding. Additionally, innovative business models are easy to copied, leading to gradual homogenization. Also,most scenic catering projects rely heavily on tourist peaks, making their income extremely seasonal. These drawbacks weaken product uniqueness, shorten the sustainable cycle of innovative projects, and make businesses more vulnerable to passenger flow fluctuations. To resolve the above problems,this study proposed a targeted optimization strategy.Businesses should integrate local historical heritage and folk culture into dish design, service processes and spatial layout, rather than merely adding superficial cultural symbols. Relying on user data analysis, merchants can optimize product portfolios and service arrangements to form diverse and differentiated business models. Customized products and phased marketing plans for different seasons will also help enterprises diversify income sources and reduce over-reliance on peak-season tourism.It is necessary to acknowledge the research limitations of this paper. The current analysis is mainly based on qualitative discussion and typical case observation,which lacking the large-scale quantitative data such as passenger statistics, operating income, repurchase rate and consumer willingness to pay. I hope that future studies can build unified evaluation standards and expand scenic area sample sizes. It will be also worthwhile to further discuss whether the growth mechanism varies across different city levels, tourist seasons and operational types. Relevant empirical research will support the transformation of cultural tourism catering, to help the industry step away from traffic-dependent expansion and move toward stable, value-based development.

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