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VALUE CO-CREATION MODEL: IDENTIFYING CULTURAL RESOURCES FOR BAIJIU TOURISM IN BOZHOU, CHINA

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Abstract:

This study intends to explore the value co-creation model in identifying cultural resources for emerging tourism niche, Baijiu tourism in China. However, according to the data statistics of the Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Sports of Bozhou City in Anhui region, since 2020, the number of tourists visiting Bozhou has shown a downward trend, and the revenue is also not optimistic. the concept of cultural tourism resource development in Bozhou city is still relatively conservative. The tourist attractions in the city are still mainly shallow sightseeing tourism, lacking a hierarchical model system. This study explores the role of multi destination stakeholders in collaborating with each other to create values for the Baijiu tourism industry in Bozhou city. This is a qualitative explorative study, and data are collected through 20 participants in semi-structured interviews and participation observations. The study found that various stakeholders in Baijiu tourism, including tourists, Baijiu consumers, Baijiu enterprises, government and local community, made significant contributions through their collaboration in preserving cultural heritage in identifying those resources for Bozhou city, a city with rich historical background and important cultural sites. Suitable tangible and

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intangible type of cultural resources related to Baijiu tourism had been identified by stakeholders. Besides that, by identifying the cultural resources, the collaboration between various destination stakeholders with one another could create a cultural heritage framework and has a great potential in promoting Bozhou city as Baijiu tourism hub. The study concludes with the idea that stakeholders' mechanisms could also create a brand output value to enhance Baijiu tourism industry. It recommends Baijiu tourism can be further enhanced by considering the China's rating system for tourist destinations to achieve excellent 5A rating level for cultural resources identified in Bozhou.

Keywords:

Baijiu Tourism; Tourism Resources; Value Co-Creation; Cultural Heritage; Stakeholder Engagement; Bozhou

Introduction

Chinese liquor culture, carried by Chinese Baijiu, is an important part of traditional Chinese culture which gradually integrates with the continuous development and expansion of the industry tourism industry, forming a new tourism format (Bu, 2019).

Despite the vigorous development of Baijiu tourism in recent years, academic research on this topic in China still lags behind as there is no dedicated study on the concept of Baijiu tourism in the academic circle and no consensus has been reached. Based on the existing domestic literature, various terms such as *wine cultural tourism*, *Chinese spirit industrial tourism* or *tourism with Baijiu liquor culture* have been used to describe and interpret tourism with Baijiu as its main theme.

Industrial tourism in China refers to the integration of industrial sites and processes into tourism experiences, allowing visitors to explore and learn about the operations, history, and cultural significance of various industries. This form of tourism has gained momentum as a means to preserve industrial heritage, educate the public, and promote regional economic development. Researchers mainly focus on the perspectives of Baijiu culture and Baijiu industry (Bu, 2019). According to Bu (2019), the development of Baijiu tourism in China is gaining momentum, driven by the active participation of numerous Baijiu enterprises. Baijiu enterprises are increasingly integrating their brand influence into tourism development. Industrial tourism integration with culture has become an inevitable trend for industrial upgrading, transformation, and development in the new era. This trend is poised to establish Baijiu tourism as a distinct and rapidly growing sector within China's broader tourism industry. However, to ensure its sustainable growth, it is crucial to undertake comprehensive academic research from multiple perspectives.

In the culture tourism industry, tourism resources serve as the foundational basis for fostering sustainable development and the expansion of the industry (Wang et al., 2023; Sergeyeva et al., 2022). These resources encompass a wide array of elements, including natural attractions, cultural heritage sites, infrastructure, human capital, and hospitality services. The assessment of tourism resources is crucial for developing specialized tourism products where travel

experiences are designed to cater to niche groups to provide in-depth, authentic and immersive experiences.

Current research on developing specialized tourism products focuses on evaluating various types of resources, such as ecological tourism resources in different scenarios, rural tourism resources in different regions, resources suitable for health and recreation tourism, and the development potential of folklore tourism resources. Additionally, niche evaluations of popular special tourism products, like wetland, ice and snow, and wine tourism resources, are also being explored (Wen, 1998; Sæþórsdóttir et al., 2010; Cibinskiene, 2015).

In Baijiu tourism research, researchers employ various theoretical frameworks to analyze the integration of cultural heritage, industrial processes, and sustainable tourism development. A notable example is the study by Bu et al. (2024), which utilizes the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to evaluate 27 indicators related to Baijiu tourism resources. This approach assesses the value, characteristics, and development potential of Baijiu tourism sites, offering a comprehensive evaluation system to guide sustainable development practices.

In contrast to wine tourism of Western countries which has received extensive academic attention both domestically and internationally, Baijiu tourism remains relatively underexplored. Globally, wine tourism has become a primary motivator for tourists to visit certain regions, offering immersive experiences centred around winemaking traditions and local cultures. In China, Baijiu tourism is still in its infancy stage and has not garnered sufficient focus from academic and industry circles. Present literature review also indicates that studies by current researchers have not probed deep into the concept, characteristics and scope of tourism resources of Baijiu tourism.

Besides that, there is insufficient research on the development and operation models, management models, motivations and behaviours of Baijiu tourists, and the role positioning of related interest groups as a result of lack of comprehensive theoretical understanding of Baijiu tourism as a new form of tourism. Liu et al. (2019) examined the integration of the baijiu and tourism industries through the lens of value co-creation. They proposed strategies to establish a collaborative framework that balances the interests of various stakeholders involved in both sectors. In response to the competitive and cooperative challenges within the Baijiu industry, Liu et al. (2019) emphasized the necessity of establishing a novel value creation framework.

The aim of this study is to identify the cultural resources in Bozhou city in the Anhui region of China where the concept of value co-creation is utilised and which emphasizes the active participation of Baijiu enterprises, Baijiu consumers, tourists, local communities, government and tourism operators in creating meaningful and enriched travel experiences. This approach aims to foster business model innovation and develop a multi-stakeholder value co-creation system. By involving not only Baijiu producers and consumers but also stakeholders from related sectors such as tourism and local businesses, this integrated model seeks to collaboratively advance the Baijiu tourism industry. Thus, this study is conducted to fill in the knowledge and theoretical gap and contribute to the literature relating to Baijiu tourism.

Literature Review

Cultural Heritage in China

Cultural heritage encompasses the tangible and intangible assets or resources inherited from previous generations, reflecting the identity, values, and history of communities. In cultural tourism, a tourism product encompasses both tangible and intangible elements that offer visitors an immersive experience into a destination's cultural heritage. Tangible resources include monuments, buildings, artworks, artifacts, and natural sites of historical significance while intangible cultural heritage comprises traditions, languages, rituals, and knowledge systems passed down through generations. Recognized globally, cultural heritage is safeguarded through international frameworks like UNESCO's World Heritage Convention, aiming to preserve these treasures for future generations. China's cultural heritage boasts 59 UNESCO sites with 40 of them are cultural sites and has more than 5,000 years of history with iconic tangible sites like the Great Wall, the Forbidden City and the Terracotta Army while its intangible heritage covers traditions such as Chinese opera, calligraphy and martial arts. Cultural heritage has the purpose to fosters a sense of belonging, promotes cultural diversity, and contributes to sustainable development.

Tourism frameworks serve as structured approaches to understanding and managing the complexities of tourism systems, guiding the development and enhancement of tourism products. These frameworks encompass various components such as destination management, stakeholder collaboration, infrastructure development, and sustainability practices. Starting with Tourism Production Function (Smith, 1994), Smith's model conceptualizes tourism as a layered system comprising five concentric elements: 1) Physical Plant (core), 2) Service, 3) Hospitality, 4) Freedom of Choice, and 5) Involvement. These layers represent the increasing intangibility and consumer involvement in the tourism experience. The second framework refers to Robusticity vs. Market Appeal Matrix (du Cros, 2000) which evaluates cultural heritage assets based on their market appeal and robustness. High market appeal combined with high robustness (A1) indicates assets suitable for significant tourism activity, as they can attract tourists and endure substantial use. Building upon du Cros's framework, McKercher and Ho (2006) introduced Cultural Tourism Assessment Indicators, a four-dimensional assessment tool for cultural and heritage attractions: 1) Cultural Value, 2) Physical Value, 3) Product Value, and 4) Experiential Value. This model aids in evaluating the tourism potential of smaller cultural sites.

China's rating system for cultural heritage resources is a structured framework established by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to assess and classify tourist attractions, ensuring quality and consistency across the country. Since 2003, the system comprises five-tier classification levels i.e. from basic A to the highest level, AAAAA (5A) that offers a balance between cultural significance and visitor satisfaction. To ensure a positive experience for visitors and to promote the preservation of cultural sites, the evaluation criteria of the system consider the following factors: 1) Cultural and Historical Value, 2) Visitor Experience, 3) Management and Maintenance, 4) Accessibility and Safety, and 5) Environmental Sustainability.

The purpose of this study is to identify Baijiu related cultural resources instead of fulfilling the criterion in the rating system mentioned above. Therefore, it is not the intention of this research to identify the qualification of each tourism site in Bozhou to fit the criteria of the rating system.

Instead, the multiple stakeholders are going to contribute their knowledge, perception and expertise to suggest suitable cultural resources for Baijiu tourism in Bozhou.

Baijiu Tourism in China

Baijiu tourism started in the 1990s where Xu et.al (2016) first introduced the concept of Chinese wine culture by highlighting its rich and historical significance. After 2003, academicians started to pay attention to Baijiu tourism with Wang and Li (2023) further advanced this field by categorizing wine culture from a tourism resource perspective, identifying specific types such as wine customs, historical sites, brewing techniques, associations with notable individuals, and connections to literature. This classification provided a clear framework for Baijiu enterprises to develop wine culture tourism. Consequently, the "wine culture +" model emerged as a predominant approach for the development of Baijiu cultural tourism resources in China. Apart from that, researchers also examined the dynamic interplay between Baijiu culture and regional tourism development in China that focused on renowned Baijiu production areas and distilleries such as Maotai Town in Guizhou, Wuliangye in Yibin, Fengjiu in Xinghuacun, Shanxi and Luzhou Laojiao in Sichuan. (Wu et.al (2012); Bao et.al (2018).

American geographer Hartshorne (1939) posited that while regions may share similar elements, their unique combinations result in distinct characteristics. This uniqueness allows for the creation of strong alliances among neighboring administrative areas, enabling them to collaboratively develop resource-rich tourism zones.

Zhang et. al. (2018) considered the feasibility of integrating the Sichuan Baijiu industry with the tourism and cultural industries and proposed a development path under the "Sichuan Baijiu + Tourism + Culture" model, emphasizing the synergy between these sectors to enhance the overall tourism experience and promote sustainable development. Yang et al. (2016) who used Hubei Baiyunbian Liquor Industry as a case study, analyzed common issues in Baijiu industrial tourism and introduced a "four-dimensional" improvement approach focusing on cultural, product, experience, and marketing aspects. Meanwhile, Chen and Yu (2022) classified Baijiu tourism as a subset of industrial tourism and explored its relationship with corporate brand culture. Liu et al. (2019) made references to international industrial tourism models and considered Guizhou Moutai Group's specific resources and development conditions before applying immersive experience and systems theory to propose targeted strategies. They emphasized the need for integrating Moutai's industrial tourism with the broader cultural industry. Hu et.al (2021) accurately depicted the entire process of the "Experience + Immersion" marketing project of Lidu Distillery, which is a common tourism route in the field of Baijiu tourism. Baijiu tourism from a marketing perspective mainly targets Baijiu consumers rather than general tourists. This situation has resulted in a focus on promoting Baijiu to consumers rather than tourists, leading to a relatively poor experience for visitors. This imbalance underscores the need for a more visitor-centric approach in Baijiu tourism development.

Bao et al (2018) noted that current offerings fall short in addressing the varied interests of tourists, leading to relatively low satisfaction levels. Based on these findings, they proposed that the future of Baijiu cultural tourism should focus on creating immersive, in-depth cultural experiences for visitors.

Through a review of the literature, it is evident that the development of Baijiu tourism in China is characterized by the intertwining of cultural tourism and industrial tourism. The Baijiu industry is increasingly integrating with other sectors, including tourism, which has significantly promoted the growth of Baijiu tourism. Consequently, the integration of the Baijiu tourism industry has become a prominent research focus in recent years.

Value Co-creation Model

Value is defined as the importance, worth, or usefulness of something, and is distinct from values, which are the beliefs or ideals held by individuals or groups (Brown et al., 2015; Getz, 2018). Value co-creation refers to the joint creation of value by interconnected entities within the entire ecosystem. Value creation serves as the core driving force of industrial development, and the alignment between value creation and industrial and market structures is directly related to the industry's value creation capacity and development degree (Liu et al. 2019).

The concept of value co-creation emerged in the 19th century, particularly within the field of service economics. Ramírez (1999) highlighted that the service process necessitates collaboration between producers and consumers, indicating that both parties jointly determine the service outcomes and value creation.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) introduced the concept of value co-creation, emphasizing the collaborative process between customers and suppliers in the co-conceptualization, co-design, and co-development of new products. This approach signifies a shift from a company-centric model to a consumer-centric perspective, where both parties actively participate in the creation of value. They argue that consumers are not just end-users but integral contributors to the firm's capacity expansion. Therefore, businesses should focus on providing resources and activities that foster long-term collaborative relationships with consumers, rather than solely concentrating on creating core products.

According to Vargo and Lusch (2008), value is uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the 'actors' who is always a co-creator of value or resource integrators through their direct interactions with firms and indirect interactions with customers within a service ecosystem (Payne et al., 2008; Gummerus, 2013; Grönroos and Voima, 2013; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Since customer values, perceptions, beliefs and expectations are diverse, value co-creation processes can vary significantly (Ruiz et al., 2008).

In tourism context, Luo et al. (2015) analyzed the differences between value creation in the Internet era and traditional value creation from the perspective of changes in the carrier, method, and logic of value creation. Jian and Xiao (2015) used the case study method to analyze Ctrip's service innovation and value co-creation under the background of the Internet. Yang et al. (2021) studied the mechanism of value co-creation in the automobile industry based on experience marketing.

In the context of Baijiu tourism in Bozhou, tourists are not passive consumers; instead, they actively engage with the local culture, history, and experiences—visiting ancient distilleries, participating in festivals, interacting with local people—which enables them to co-create meaningful value. Government regulates the relevant policies to support the Baijiu tourism industry. Likewise, Baijiu enterprises and local communities co-design experiences that align

with tourists' expectations, thereby transforming intangible cultural assets into tangible brand value.

Stakeholder Collaboration In Co-Creating Tourism Value

The value co-creation ecosystem in the Baijiu industry transcends traditional boundaries, encompassing a diverse array of stakeholders beyond the core producers and consumers. This multi-stakeholder collaboration involves various entities that contribute to the holistic development and value generation within the industry. The **Table 1** summarizes the stakeholders and their area of collaboration with one another:

Table 1: Summary Of Stakeholders' Role and Area of Collaboration

Stakeholders	Role	Area of collaboration
Baijiu Enterprises	producer, raw material suppliers	Production process, distillation process, brewing techniques
Baijiu Consumers	Baijiu product end-user	Drive Baijiu demand, influence consumption patterns
Tourists	Cultural exchanger	Influence market trends
Government	Policy maker, fund provider	Infrastructure, policymaking, Baijiu tourism expansion
Tourism Operators	Cultural tour providers	Integration of Baijiu experience, Travel packages, visitations to distilleries and tasting
Local Communities	Cultural custodian, manpower	Local businesses, storytelling, Economic participation

Source: Author's Own Compilation (2025)

Baijiu enterprises play the role as Baijiu producer and raw material suppliers. They are responsible for the production and distillation process as well as the brewing techniques. The quality and consistency in the product must be ensured. Secondly, consumers are the end-users who engage with Baijiu products. They drive the demand for Baijiu products through feedback and consumption. Tourists engage in cultural exchange and participate in travel experiences which can influence market trends through their sharing of experience. Apart from them, government has the role as policy maker and provide financial support to the Baijiu and tourism industry. Government has to formulate liquor, licensing and tax related policies which can benefit local businesses and protect cultural preservation. Tourism operators integrate Baijiu experiences into travel packages, cultural tours including visitation to distilleries and tasting experience to enhance cultural appeal of Baijiu tourism. Lastly, local communities include the residents and local businesses who provide manpower and protect the culture through storytelling, local knowledge sharing and authentic live experience.

As mentioned before, Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic developed by Vargo and Lusch (2018) presents a paradigm where service is the fundamental basis of exchange and value is always co-created by resource integrators and which is determined by the beneficiary. The value co-creation of Baijiu industry includes *experience value co-creation*, *concept value co-creation* and *cultural value co-creation*. (Liu et al. 2019)

The value co-creation of Baijiu industry and tourism mainly revolves around the cultural value, experience value and conceptual value of Baijiu. The value co-creation with *cultural value* as the starting point includes Baijiu historical and cultural tourism, Baijiu regional cultural tourism and baijiu heritage tourism. By tapping the historical and cultural value of Baijiu industry, ethnic regional cultural value, and the cultural value of the site of the birthplace of Baijiu brewing, it forms various Baijiu travel packages and tours as tourism products.

In the evolving landscape of the Baijiu industry, value co-creation centered on *experiential value* encompasses various tourism models, including Baijiu industry tourism, liquor town cultural tourism, and liquor expo tourism. These models aim to engage consumers actively in the production and cultural narratives of baijiu, enhancing their overall experience and perceived value.

Baijiu town style tourism is a niche segment that combines industrial tourism with cultural heritage, focusing on regions renowned for their baijiu production. Since this tourism segment integrates the cultural essence of baijiu with elements of fashion and leisure, it creates tourism products that allows visitors to engage with Baijiu culture through various entertainment activities, enhancing their understanding and conceptual appreciation of Baijiu. According to research, conceptual value encompasses dimensions such as attitude, significance, and recognition, which go beyond the meanings and beliefs that individuals associate with their experiences. Therefore, Baijiu town style tourism serves as a platform for *conceptual value co-creation*, where tourists actively participate in shaping their experiences, leading to a richer and more meaningful engagement with baijiu culture.

Conceptual Framework

A proposed conceptual model linking cultural heritage, stakeholder co-creation, and brand value generation illustrates a dynamic, participatory process where cultural assets identified in Bozhou serve as foundational elements for brand identity of that city. Stakeholders comprising Baijiu enterprises, consumers, tourists, government, tourism operators and local communities actively engage in co-creating the brand narrative, ensuring authenticity and relevance to promote Baijiu tourism in Bozhou. This collaborative approach enhances the brand's value by fostering deeper visitor experiences and ensuring that the brand resonates with cultural significance. The model emphasizes the importance of collective input from various stakeholders in shaping a brand that reflects its unique cultural heritage of Bozhou. The conceptual framework in **Figure 1** shows the process involved to answer the following research questions: 1) Which cultural resources in Bozhou support Baijiu tourism? 2) How do stakeholders collaborate to creating value co-creation mechanism for Baijiu tourism in Bozhou? and 3) How can cultural resources support brand value output in Baijiu tourism in Bozhou?

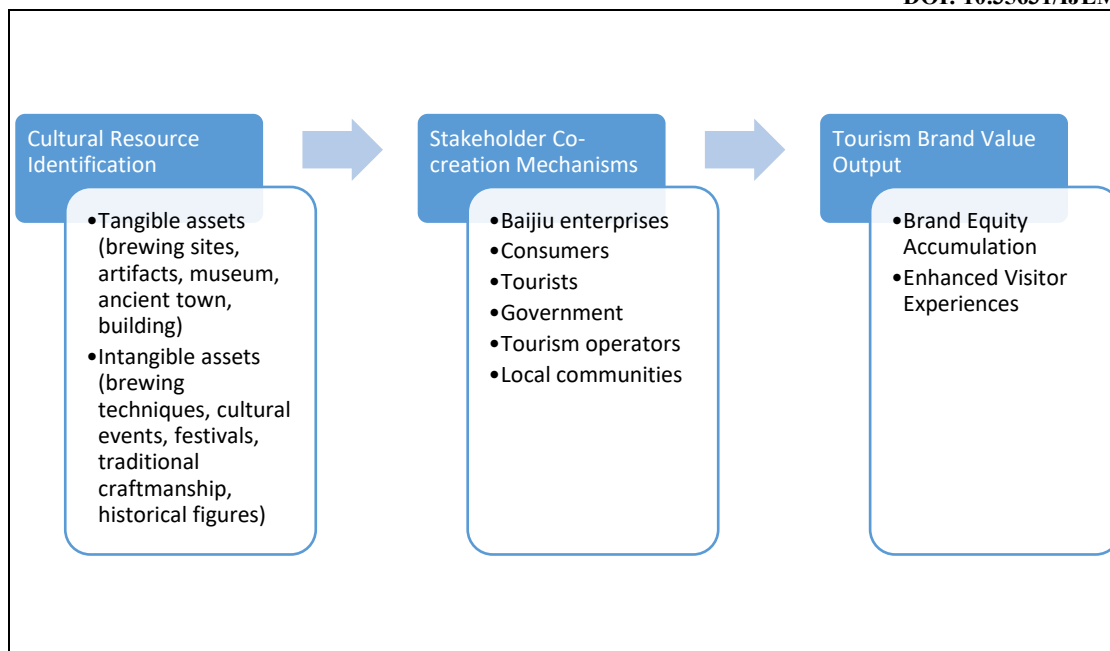


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative methodology which focuses on subjective interpretations rather than objective measurements and regards the co-creation experiences that can be accessed and facilitated (Rihova et al., 2015b; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Interpretive researchers aim to understand how individuals perceive and make sense of their world within natural settings, acknowledging that these perceptions are influenced by cultural, historical and social contexts.

Grounded Theory (GT) is designed to develop theories grounded in data, making it ideal for exploring how cultural resources are co-created in tourism settings. GT excels in examining process model and interactions among stakeholders. In the context of tourism, this includes the roles of tourists, local communities, and organizations in co-creating value through cultural resources. This methodological approach facilitates understanding how these interactions contribute to the shaping of brand value for Baijiu tourism.

Site Selection: Bozhou

Today, wine culture is recognised as a valuable tourism asset, contributing to the development of wine-themed museums, distillery tours, and cultural festivals across China (Xu et al, 2016). In this study, Bozhou is selected as the research site for Baijiu tourism due to its cultural and historical significance compare to other liquor brewing regions.

As a famous ancient liquor-producing city in China, Bozhou is a city in Anhui region that flourishes and becomes famous because of several significant factors. Firstly, a large amount of archaeological evidence found indicates that as early as 5000 years ago, Bozhou area was already a settlement for the ancestors and had a highly developed brewing culture. The earliest trace of the brewing industry in Bozhou can be traced back to the Neolithic Daiwukou culture period over 5000 years ago. Secondly, due to geographical factor where Bozhou city is located

in the northwestern border of Anhui Province and the southern end of the Huanghuai Plain. This location of Bozhou between the subtropical monsoon climate and the warm temperate semi-humid monsoon climate creates a favourable microbial growth environment for Baijiu fermentation process. The unique water resources of Bozhou City are made up of the Huaihe River water system which is crucial for the production of Baijiu for Anhui and Jiangsu regions.

Lastly, Bozhou has several cultural attractions that have been recognized for their appeals where these sites have been designated with 3A and 4A-level tourist attraction national standards. For example, Huaxi Tower, Cao Cao Underground Military Transport Road, Anhui Gujing Wine Culture Expo Garden, Bozhou Museum, Weiwu Temple, Nanjing Lane and Huatuo Memorial. However, studies on these places and Bozhou are very limited thus became the motivation factor to study the implication of the site to tourism research.

Data Collection

A qualitative exploratory study employed semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights from a diverse group of stakeholders through purposive and snowball sampling of 20 participants, comprising 12 males and 8 females volunteers who are tourists, local government representative, tourism operators, local residents and Baijiu producers and distributors. The data collected was analyzed using content and thematic analysis. Besides that, observation had been carried out at well-known tourist attractions in Bozhou city. The observation was analysed using content analysis. Table 2 and 3 summarise the demographic information of participants of this study.

Table 2: Demographic Information of Participants

Code	Age	Gender	Role	Employment	Years of experience
BL01	27	Female	Baijiu consumer	media professional	5
BL02	38	Female	Baijiu consumer	teacher trainer	15
BL03	42	Male	Baijiu consumer	lawyer	20
BL06	40	Female	Local community	company director	18
BL07	32	Male	Local community	bank clerk	10
BL08	38	Male	Baijiu enterprise	independent liquor producer	18
BL09	32	Female	Local community	reporter	10
BL11	28	Male	Local community	Software engineer	5
BL12	45	Male	Government	local officer	20
CO01	50	Male	Government	Cultural organisation representative	24
GC01	35	Male	Baijiu enterprise	Cultural director	10
BD01	42	Male	Baijiu enterprise	liquor distributor	20
BD02	44	Male	Baijiu enterprise	liquor distributor	21
BL05	28	Female	Tourism operator	company director	4
TA01	30	Male	Tourism operator	tour agent	8

Source: Author's Own Compilation (2025)

Table 3: Demographic Information of Participants as Tourists

Code	Age	Gender	Employment	Current location	Travel date to Bozhou
TF01	29	Female	Teacher	Shangqiu, Henan	March 2023
TF02	34	Female	Tour guide	Xingtai, Hebei	April 2024
TF03	26	Female	Student	Shanghai city	March 2024
TM01	27	Male	Engineer	Xuzhou, Jiangsu	April 2024
TM02	32	Male	Public Functionary	Mohe, Heilongjiang	April 2023

Source: Author's Own Compilation (2025)

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is widely used as an effective research method that focuses on identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within data for people to make sense of their experiences, thoughts, and social contexts in a systematic but flexible way (Humble & Mozellus, 2022). This kind of analysis allows researchers to provide rich, detailed, and complex accounts of data, offering insights into the underlying meanings and patterns within qualitative information. The thematic analysis in this research used Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step process to analyse the data collected from the interviews.

Besides thematic analysis, the interview transcripts were analysed using content analysis to obtain quantitative frequency data to count the occurrences of tourist attractions mentioned by participants of the study. Firstly, interview transcripts were organized into a consistent format for easier analysis. A coding frame was created to identify 'tangible' and 'intangible' cultural resources before frequency of each code was counted in order to identify patterns and trends within the qualitative data. The frequency counts indicate the popularity of tourist attractions among tourists, consumers, local community and tourism operators. The findings of content analysis were presented in **Table 4**.

For the observation data, content analysis was employed. Firstly, the observation data was recorded in field notes that adopted Holloway et al. (2010) and Taylor et al. (2016) field note criteria. Participation observation was carried out at Gujing Baijiu Autumn Festival 2024 in September 2024 and Gujing Baijiu Spring Festival 2025 in March 2025. Besides that, observation was also carried out at several tourist attractions of Gujing Distillery, Gujing Wine Expo Park, Cao Cao Underground Great Wall, Huaxilou Tower, Kangmei TCM Trading Centre and Huazu Temple. Because this was a participation observation, researchers were actively engaged with the group being observed. After following the developed observation protocol, the observations were conducted on Baijiu cultural festivals and several tourist attractions. Field notes were transcribed and coded before drawing conclusions based on researcher analysis.

Reliability, validity, and ethical considerations are fundamental to ensuring the rigor and integrity of thematic analysis in qualitative research. In this research, researchers independently code the same data and compare results to ensure consistency. On the other hand, validity or often referred as trustworthiness, involves ensuring the findings accurately represent the participants' perspectives and the phenomena under study. Here, participants were shown of the interview transcripts to check before confirming the content of the interview. Ethical considerations are paramount in thematic analysis to protect participants and uphold the integrity of the research. All the participants of this research had given their consent and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured.

Findings

Cultural Heritage Resources for Baijiu Tourism

From the semi-structured interviews, it was found that tourists, Baijiu consumers, local communities, tourism operators and even local government representative identified several famous tourist destinations and cultures. Table 4 shows a list of tourist sites and cultures in Bozhou that are identified and mentioned by participants of the research.

Table 4: List Of Tourist Sites and Frequent of Occurrences

Tourist site	Type	Sub-type	Frequency
Huaxilou (Huaxi Tower)	tangible	building	4
Cao Cao Underground Great Wall	tangible	building	5
Nanjing Lane Bank	tangible	building	3
Laozi Temple	tangible	building	2
Huazu An (HuaTuo Memorial)	tangible	monument	6
Huatou Baicao Garden	tangible	cultural landscape	1
Gujing distillery/wineries	tangible	brewing site	3
Bozhou Museum	tangible	museum	2
Gujing town	tangible	ancient town	1
Gujing Wine Expo Park	tangible	building	2
Yuchi Temple	tangible	building	2
Brewing techniques/technology	intangible	traditional craftsmanship	12
Traditional Chinese Medicine culture	intangible	traditional medicine	8
Bozhou ancient city culture	intangible	oral tradition	6
Cultural festivals	intangible	festive event	4
Historical figure origin	intangible	oral tradition	8

Source: Author's Own Compilation (2025)

Stakeholder Value Co-creation Mechanism

Strategic value co-creation requires systematic collaboration among diverse stakeholders. In tourism branding and place marketing, value creation is not linear, but emerges from multi-directional, dynamic interactions among the following actors:

Baijiu enterprises

The enterprise is the creator of immersive experience project for tourists. Baijiu enterprises have to diversify their strategies in creating fun and attractive experience for tourists. The enterprises have to ensure tourists and visitors can have memorable experience through enhanced tourist attractions, be it existing or new.

Anhui Gujing Distillery Company Ltd has made a lot of active exploration in this aspect, such as the development of immersive experience project, so that tourists can personally participate in the process of wine making, and truly feel the fun and cultural connotation of wine making. At the same time, combining with traditional festivals and local characteristic activities, various liquor cultural festivals will be held to create a strong festive atmosphere and create a more attractive tourism scene – TA01

Baijiu enterprises collaborate with other related industries from primary to tertiary sector in order to promote Baijiu culture and industry in Bozhou.

The enterprise cannot produce wine, if there are no other supporting things, such as good packaging, effective marketing and other links, the product is difficult to push to the market. Just for example, wine cannot just take a bucket to directly sell loose wine. With appropriate and high-quality packaging and

other supporting services, the value of the product can be better reflected, and then promote the development of liquor culture and tourism related industry – BL07

Further cooperation can take place between Baijiu enterprises, tourism operators and local businesses to enhance the collaboration between industries.

Some liquor enterprises or dealers have had cooperation. For example, when they hold some activities, our media company will help them, which is a kind of cooperative interaction. When they organize some tasting activities, I (travel company) will also attend, through this way can also strengthen the interaction with them – BL07

Baijiu Consumers

Baijiu consumers become the driver of liquor sale and consumption behaviour. Consumers can even promote to others certain Baijiu brands through celebrations and festival events.

I mainly buy baijiu as a gift when visiting relatives and friends during festivals, and usually buy some baijiu to drink it by myself. Sometimes I will have a few drinks with my friends and feel the liquor culture in the process – TF02

Tourists

In terms of integrated tourism framework, distributors identify the role of tourists as marketing agent of Bozhou brand besides enhancing the value and popularity of Bozhou Baijiu brands through various activities such as cultural festivals and wine tours. Another strategy is to include cultural elements in promotional activities and packaging and publicity design materials. Besides that, it is through tourists to widen the brand influence when they use social media channels and various platforms.

Activities such as baijiu culture festivals can attract tourists from all over the country. With the help of multimedia extensive reports and diversified exposure channels, it can effectively enhance the brand exposure frequency and popularity. In addition, tourists will use social media platforms to share the content related to Bozhou tourism and liquor brand experience. This communication behavior will help to further expand the brand influence and make it gain attention and recognition in a wider range. – BD02

Baijiu enterprises and tourism operators can collaborate through storytelling or narratives and promotional display of Baijiu products and traditional crafts with cultural elements.

The display of these traditional crafts through the winery tour can enhance the credibility of the brand. At the same time, the use of the historical and cultural resources of Bozhou to tell good brand stories and carry out these interactive activities can be carried out to promote the emotional connection of consumers and expand the influence of the brand with the help of the communication of new media – BD01

Tourism operators

Tourism operators spearhead the organising of tour guides as culture experts in spreading Bozhou local cultures to tourists by bringing them to gain valuable historical and cultural knowledge through participation of various activities collaboration with Baijiu enterprises.

As a travel agency, it is itself an important medium to spread local culture. Our company will often organize tour guides to attend tasting courses to learn professional wine tasting knowledge. At the same time, we will also arrange tour guides to go to the Chinese medicinal materials market to have an in-depth understanding of the cultural connection between Chinese medicinal materials and liquor. When visitors to Gujing Gongjiu winery, tour guide will play an important role, not only explain the wine culture knowledge, more important is through the field led visitors experience, let them understand the inheritance of brewing process, at the same time, skilfully integrate the Cao Cao related historical

allusions and other cultural elements into the explanation. This is to let the visitors who come to Bozhou to experience a research trip where they can learn a lot of valuable knowledge – TA01

In order to promote Baijiu tourism and to attract tourists to Bozhou, tourism operators suggest integration of culture with tourism products and to encourage the participation of tourists in immersive brewing experience and festivals.

In order to make Bozhou liquor culture tourism more attractive, we have made a lot of efforts in product and service design by keeping up with the pace of the development of time, and actively seeking innovation and breakthrough. In addition, we constantly enrich the types of cultural products by launching all kinds of cultural and creative products with Bozhou cultural characteristics so that tourists can bring Bozhou culture home and further expand the influence of Bozhou liquor culture – TA01

We focus on creating immersive brewing experience projects, so that tourists can have transposition experience, as if they have become a professional brewing master, deeply involved in the whole process of brewing, enhance the sense of participation and experience of tourists. At the same time, we will seize the excellent opportunity of traditional festivals to hold a grand and local liquor culture festival to create a strong festive atmosphere and show the charm of Bozhou liquor culture in an all-round way – TA01

Local Communities

The interplay between local resident community and tourists shows positive effect to the Baijiu tourism industry. Local residents become the host and enrich the visitor experience with their unique culture and traditions. It is important for local residents to create a warm hospitality atmosphere in welcoming their friends, relatives and visitors.

If foreign friends come to Bozhou play, I will enthusiastically lead them to visit our local winery, in the process of visit, to introduce and share Bozhou long wine culture knowledge, like we have a special liquor exhibition hall, which shows the rich history of liquor, brewing equipment, etc. I will take my friends there to experience, let them more intuitive, deeply feel the unique charm of liquor culture – BL08

The residents of the community, on the other hand, can enhance the overall tourism atmosphere and create a high-quality cultural experience environment for tourists – BL03

The community residents also have a unique role. They can participate in the display of the local lifestyle, expand their influence by recommending them to their friends, and create a more real and vivid cultural experience environment for tourists. – BL02

Government

The first crucial role of government is to formulate appropriate laws and policies that can support the Baijiu industry which is important for the healthy development of the industry. The government plays an important role in enacting laws related to Baijiu industry as well as various supporting industries. For the past few decades, the government has introduced a series of Baijiu supporting policies to guide and regulate the production and sales of the Chinese Baijiu brands. This also includes tax policies which provide a strong support to development of the Baijiu industry.

With the appropriate policy support, the winery can better operate, liquor culture tourism industry can be more orderly and healthy development – BL07

First, the role of the government is crucial. By formulating relevant policies, the government provides support for the liquor industry and guarantees the convenience of liquor production and sales. For example, in the tax policy, industrial support and other aspects to give strong support – TF02

As for the government, it provides guidance and guarantee for the orderly and healthy development of liquor tourism from the macro level by formulating relevant policies and plans that meet the needs of industrial development – BL02

The government provides financial support to promote the Baijiu industry and the facilities as well as the promotional efforts to publicise the Baijiu brand. Baijiu industry actually contributes significantly to the economic growth of Bozhou city. The local government shoulders the responsibility to develop the city and to boost the Baijiu industry through various economic activities and plans.

As far as the government is concerned, it can provide strong support in terms of capital, which plays a key role in the aspects of industrial development infrastructure and project promotion – BL02

Not only to support the Baijiu industry, the government has the duty to develop and promote the tourism industry in general and specifically in this case, the Baijiu tourism industry in Bozhou. As one of the main stakeholders in this industry, the government has supported the industry through infrastructure construction, tourist attraction strategy planning, brand promotion for liquor industry.

Through policy support and infrastructure construction, government departments can create a good environment for industrial development. Then when it comes to this tourism, we can develop some characteristic routes with liquor, and then customize some products to improve the experience of tourists. – BL06

The government plays a planning and guiding role, such as carefully building various tourist routes, reasonable layout of scenic spots, so as to build a good framework for the whole liquor culture tourism industry. – BL12

Discussion

Cultural Resources in Bozhou That Support Baijiu Tourism

Cultural resources in Bozhou consists of those related to Baijiu industry and those that do not. The city boasts at least 18 key cultural relics sites which are under state and provincial-level protection and 36 sites under municipal protection. **Figure 2** indicates the cultural resources in Bozhou which are divided into tangible and intangible type that are related to Baijiu tourism and these tourist attractions play an important role in creating a cultural heritage framework for Baijiu tourism in Bozhou (**Figure 3**).

This research reveals that identifying the cultural resources related to Baijiu tourism is essential for several reasons. Firstly, both tangible and intangible cultural heritage can be preserved and protected. Based on **Figure 2**, the identified tourist attractions that relate to Baijiu tourism are rated as three-tier and four-tier classifications levels under China's rating system for cultural heritage resources. These include notable landmarks such as Huaxilou, Cao Cao Underground Great Wall, Yuchi Temple and Huazu Temple. Obtaining a high level of classification will offer a better protection of the cultural heritage due to its significance and popularity among visitors. This can help to highlight the richness of heritage to tourists and promote cultural continuity. Traditional brewing techniques of Gujing Gong liquor has long been recognised as an integral part of China's Baijiu culture which should be preserved and protected. Secondly, identification of cultural resources in a systematic manner ensures the unique elements of Baijiu and its traditions are integrated into tourism development strategies. A systematic process leads to a comprehensive cultural heritage framework that guides preservation and tourism development efforts. Stakeholders can be guided into making informed decisions about which aspects of Baijiu culture that align with preservation efforts and enhanced visitor experiences. Thirdly, integration of Baijiu tourism with the industry supports the economic development and community engagement in preserving Baijiu culture. Economic benefits can

be reaped by stakeholders and community is empowered to share traditions and heritage with tourists.

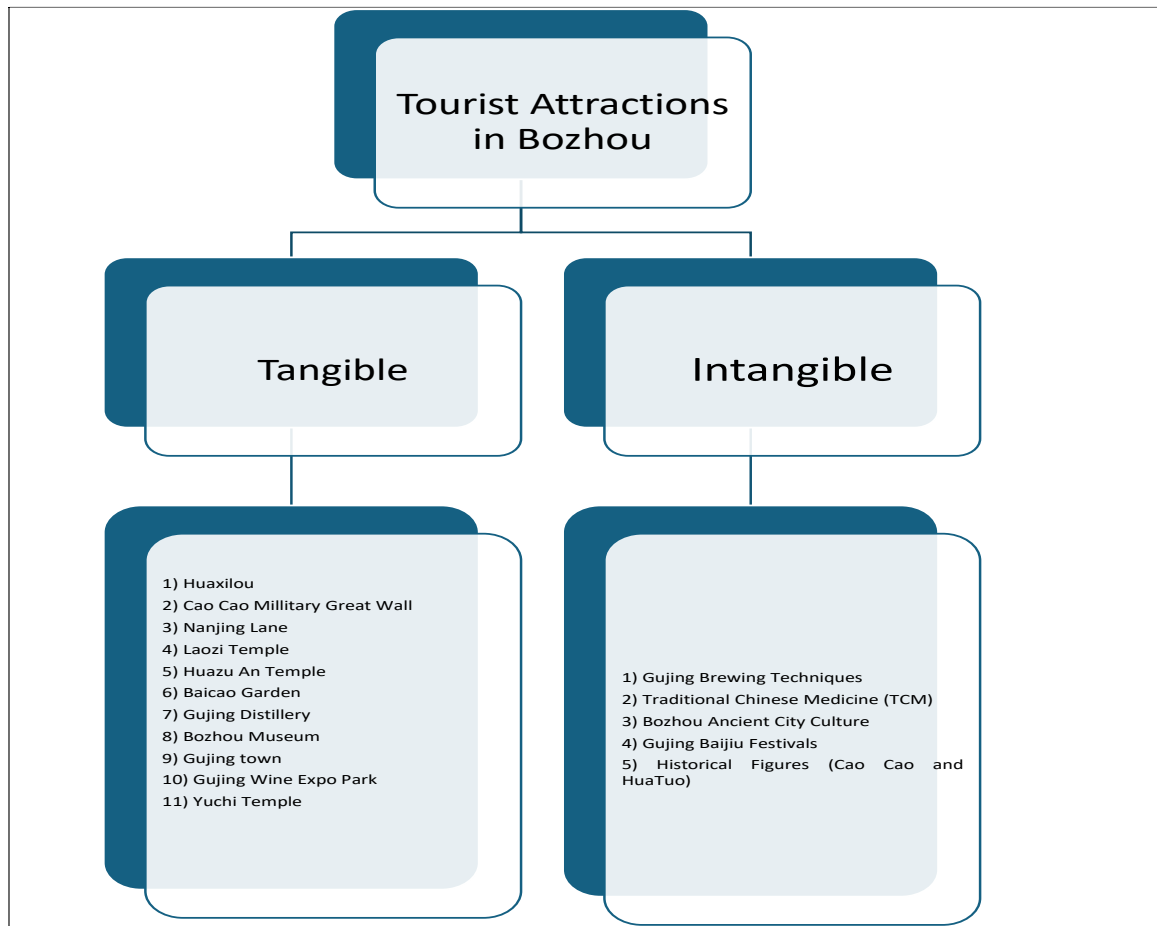


Figure 2: Tangible and Intangible Cultural Resources Identified in Bozhou

Source: Author's Own Compilation (2025)

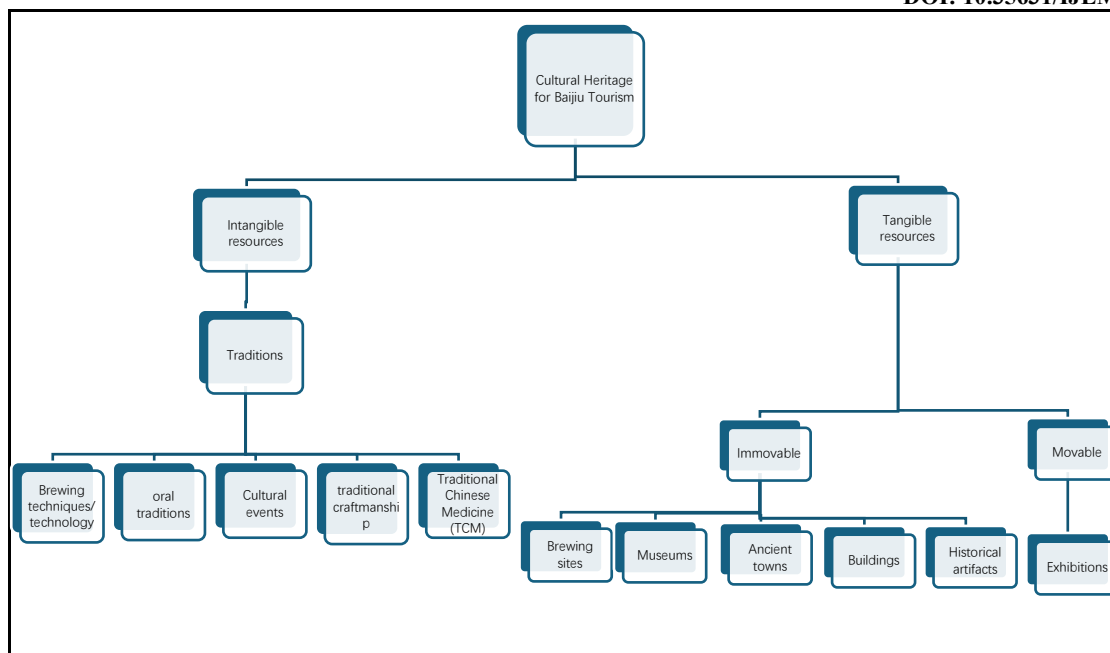


Figure 3: Cultural Heritage Framework for Bozhou

Source: Author's Own Compilation (2025)

Collaboration Between Stakeholders in Creating Value Co-Creation Mechanism for Baijiu Tourism in Bozhou

The Baijiu tourism industry is a dynamic and interconnected system that relies on the cooperation and coordination of multiple stakeholders in shaping Bozhou city's appeal, maintaining its infrastructure and enhancing the visitor experience. Each stakeholder has a role to play in ensuring the value co-creation mechanism work effectively for Baijiu tourism.

The Baijiu enterprises bear the responsibility of promoting Baijiu product and culture, create immersive experience for tourists by collaborating with tourism operators, enhancing existing and new tourists' attractions and publicising the brand image of their Baijiu production. On the other hand, tourism operators manage tourists, act as a medium of communication in spreading local cultures and to provide tour guides with cultural knowledge. Local communities and consumers support the Baijiu tourism through personal consumption of Baijiu products. Local residents can enhance tourism atmosphere through their sharing of knowledge, culture and experience in storytelling. Local businesses have knowledge on Baijiu culture for tourism purpose, promote Baijiu industry, integrate Baijiu with TCM, develop Baijiu and non-baijiu related products and become the driver of economy in Bozhou. Government bears the responsibility in formulating supporting policies and tax policies that support the Baijiu industry, provide financial support for the promotion of economic development, support development of Baijiu tourism industry and promotion of Baijiu culture.

These multifaceted stakeholders contribute to the success of the industry through collaboration and alignment of these groups. When stakeholders work together, they can build a better ecosystem that benefits everyone involved. However, there is a lack of regulatory framework for Bozhou city thus analysing the relationship between various stakeholders can foster a stronger partnerships and more sustainable practices within the industry.

From the perspective of value co-creation theory, consumers are not pure value consumers, but value co-creators who can interact with Baijiu enterprises and tourism service providers. Through the development, design and consumption process of baijiu tourism products and online and offline channels such as community space, consumers put forward their own personalized needs for baijiu experience, culture and tourism, and achieve effective interaction between consumers and enterprises, which will enable Baijiu enterprises and tourism operators to provide high-quality products and services more targeted.

The business interaction between Baijiu enterprises and other stakeholders shows the need for stakeholders to cooperate for the economic growth of Bozhou city. The integration of primary, secondary and tertiary industry related to Baijiu encourage the spread of the culture. The Baijiu enterprise is also responsible to cooperate with support services industry, supply chain services and sales channels to promote and push products to the market.

The relationship between the government and other stakeholders is important to develop the Baijiu tourism industry. Baijiu enterprises meet their tax obligation which contribute to the development of the tourism industry by improving Bozhou's places of attractions and tourist experience. Finally, the interplay between local resident community and tourists shows positive effect to the Baijiu tourism industry. Local residents become the host and enrich the visitor experience with their unique culture and traditions.

Brand Value Output in Baijiu Tourism in Bozhou

Cultural resources can support Baijiu tourism in Bozhou through brand equity accumulation and to enhance visitor experiences. Baijiu enterprises and government shoulder the responsibility to develop and promote the Baijiu and its brand image so that Baijiu tourism could be promoted and benefitted from it economically.

Brand equity accumulation refers to the strategic process by which Baijiu brands enhance their brand value via cultural integration, immersive experiences and global outreach. Firstly, Baijiu brands in Bozhou can embed themselves within cultural narratives and local traditions. For example, Anhui Gujing Distillery Co Ltd organised Gujing Baijiu Festivals annually that showcases Baijiu heritage through tribute rituals and cultural performances, fostering a deeper connection with spectators.

For immersive experiences, tourism operators and Baijiu enterprises develop travel products such as distillery tours and Baijiu tasting sessions which allows consumers and tourists to engage directly with the brand's heritage and brewing craftsmanship. Finally, through global outreach, Baijiu enterprises collaborate with international partners and participate in global events to expand Baijiu brands to reach international markets. For example, Anhui Gujing Distillery Co Ltd are partnering with cognac house, Camus to create a whisky with "Chinese characteristics" and participated in the World Expo 2025 in Osaka to enhance Chinese Baijiu brand awareness.

Secondly, cultural resources significantly enhance visitor experiences in Baijiu tourism by offering immersive, educational, and sensory-rich experience that connect tourists to China's rich heritage. Tourist agencies or operators are responsible in managing tourists who visit Bozhou especially in travel planning, routes and in participating activities related to Baijiu culture. This is the role of tourism operators as part of support service to promote the tourism

industry. Local community can participate in co-creation efforts by providing local knowledge, traditions and sharing of experiences which are essential for authentic value creation. They can act as hosts, guides, artisans and performers to showcase Bozhou cultural heritage to both domestic and international tourists. Both tourists and consumers can share content and narratives via social media and their feedback to Baijiu enterprises and tourism operators can help shape the perceived brand of Baijiu.

Theoretical And Practical Implication

In relation to theoretical implication, this study contributes to the expansion of value co-creation theory. Since the concept of value co-creation was introduced by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), the role of customers within the industrial value chain has become increasingly prominent. Studies to explore value co-creation in Baijiu tourism are often limited to China since the country is the major producer of such liquor thus making this area of research is still in its infancy stage with the need to have comprehensive theoretical framework yet to be established. Moreover, due to significant differences in economic, social, cultural and ideological contexts between China and Western countries, it will not be feasible to directly apply Western research and theoretical models into Baijiu context where China operates under a socialist market economy with prominent governmental role while Western countries are market-driven capitalist economies. While researchers have investigated the economic, seasonal, and climate-related factors that may influence tourism demand (Wu et al., 2017), the inclusion of social and cultural factors in these analyses remains limited.

From practical perspectives, this study offers new insights for Baijiu tourism marketing. In the service economy era, the relationship between customers and enterprises has undergone significant transformations. The experience value of tourists stems from their interaction with the local communities and Baijiu enterprises in a cultural enriched environment. Their interactions, in turn, influence subsequent response and intentions, resulting in collective value co-creation by all stakeholders.

Conclusion

This study is conducted to discuss the potential role of stakeholders in promoting Bozhou as a Baijiu tourism hub. Since the rise of Baijiu tourism, the tourism operators and Baijiu enterprises have unanimously regarded cultural tourism development as the keynote of Baijiu tourism development. This study elaborated the role of various stakeholders in Bozhou where they co-create values together and collaborate in the cultural heritage aspect for Baijiu tourism. In Bozhou, China, strategic initiatives can be taken by different stakeholder groups including government, Baijiu enterprises, tourism operators, Baijiu consumers, tourists along with local communities such as local residents and local businesses. As discussed in the current study, each stakeholder group made significant contributions in identifying suitable cultural resources for Baijiu tourism in Bozhou. In addition, their collaboration with each other extended the value in cultural heritage needed for preservation and brand continuity. This can be seen under the brand output value where two outcomes, i.e. brand equity accumulation and enhanced visitor experience through immersion show that products related to Baijiu industry and tourism can actually be promoted. Brand equity accumulation in Baijiu tourism is a multifaceted strategy that combines cultural storytelling, immersive consumer experiences, global expansion, and product innovation. By focusing on these areas, Baijiu brands can strengthen their market position, foster consumer loyalty, and enhance their overall brand value in both domestic and international markets. Finally, it is suggested that Baijiu tourism framework for

Bozhou to be enhanced by considering the criterion in China's rating system and achieve higher levels for the existing tourist destinations identified under Baijiu tourism.

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