Chinese Volunteer Tourists' Perceived Value Analysis

An Exploration Study Based on Netnographic Method

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Abstract—As a typical post-modern tourism form, volunteer tourism provides multi-value perceptions for volunteer tourists. Using by netnographic research process, grounded on perceived value theory, the present study went deep into Chinese volunteer tourism`s online community, collected Chinese volunteer tourism`s online field data and analyzed in-depth 4 Chinese volunteer tourists` perceived values qualitatively including the social network enhancement and maintenance under the social construction which has been defined as volunteer tourists` perceived social value; the utilitarian value of volunteer tourists based on their rational reflection; personal development and growth value based on volunteer tourists` sense of being and self-reflection, the cross-cultural competence enhancement and the deepening of Chinese culture and nation identity; and the sense of continuity of volunteer tourists based on the memory creation. The results contribute to understanding the marketing characters of Chinese volunteer tourism under the context of Chinese cultural change and the market segment of Chinese volunteer tourism.

Keywords—Chinese volunteer tourism; perceived value; cultural change; netnographic research

I.   INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of the maximization of value is the core of the formation of individual behavioral intentions. Human beings always make intentional decisions in the process of pursuing the weigh between gains and losses [1]. Therefore, exploring the value perception of a market group in engaging in an activity is of great significance to targeted market positioning and market planning.

Under the background of China's tourism, with the accelerated economic development in China, more and more Chinese are unable to perceive the maximization of value under the traditional mass tourism patterns. Thus, the pursuit of individuality and niche tourism that highlights self-identity gradually becomes the dominance of tourist market in China [2]. On the other hand, the accelerating process of urbanization and modernization has led Chinese urban residents to be unable to feel self-renewal and cultural identity in the cities. Gradually increasing sense of alienation has caused individuals to be anxious to get away from their daily lives and feel the real heart and nostalgic in other places [3]. Against this background, the "primitive, backward and mysterious" past has gradually become the values pursued by current post-modern Chinese travelers. Volunteer tourism is precisely one of the tourist forms that satisfy the postmodernist value perception of tourists [4].

Volunteer tourism is defined as "participating in a series of pro-social activities in a certain organized manner in the tourism process, including local material assistance, ecological protection and scientific research conducive to local social ecology." Participants in volunteer tourism should first of all have certain altruistic and pro-social motivations. That is, the results of their actions contribute to community or human development [6]; secondly, volunteer tourism has the particularity in deciding the destination since the destinations are mostly economically backward places or social and ecologically fragile areas. Volunteer tourism provides tourists with both the people to gaze at, and volunteer activities for participatory experiences. The multiple meanings and value perceptions it gave visitors allowed it to rapidly develop in the late twentieth century [7].

The surveys related to volunteer travel can be divided into conceptual exploration, research on organizational form of volunteer travel, participants' motivation, perceived value and social impact on the region [5, 6]. It is the recent trend of volunteer tourism research to explore the motivation and diversity of perceived value by taking participants of volunteer tourism as the object [7, 8].

However, existing studies related to perceived value of volunteer tourism have some shortcomings in applying to Chinese volunteer tourists. First, most of them focuses on the Occidentalism perspective, namely taking the tourists from western countries as the research object and exploring their volunteer tourism experience in "the third world", which is essentially the reflection of Western "post-colonialism"[9], ignoring the thinking from the perspective of oriental culture. Secondly, the cultural background of tourists is the basis of the formation of their value perception and the codes of conduct. At present, the research on how cultural values under the background of Chinese cultural change are reflected in the value perception of Chinese volunteer tourists has not been given enough attention [10].

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore the value perception of Chinese volunteers in the journey by taking the Chinese volunteer tourists as the research object and using the analysis of netnographic, rooting in the perceived value theory so as to provide basic theoretical support for the segmentation of market and market practice for the Chinese voluntary tourism market.

II. VOLUNTEER TOURISTS' PERCEIVED VALUE

Zeithaml believes that perceived value is a subjective cognitive evaluation of customers comparing the perceived benefits of the product or service with the costs they pay. That is, perceived value is the result of weighing the gains and losses between customer experiences of the product or service. The essence of consumer consuming products or services is the process of resource transactions. The resources transacted include emotions, money, goods, information, services and social status. The rarity of the different resources transacted and the residual value after the transactions are reflected in the value perception of customers and thus affect the customer's overall satisfaction with the product or service, as well as their behavioral intention to purchase (such as re-purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention) [12].

Tourism as a typical experiential product, on the one hand, tourists with different motivation have difference in perceived value dimension. On the other hand, under different tourism situations, tourists perceive the transacted resources intertwining together to form their Gestalt subjective judgment [13]. That is, under the condition of tourism, the tourists do not measure the gains and losses completely rationally, and their perceived value is often subjective feeling and perception based on a particular tourism situation. For example, Zhang Hongmei et al. study and analyze the six dimensions of the visitor's perceived value in the wetland park taking Xixi and Lihu Lake as an example: environmental value, special value, service value, management value, knowledge and education value and cost value [14]; Wang Zhaohui et al. explore the perceived value of domestic tourists on large-scale event by taking Shanghai World Expo as an example, which includes 6 measurement dimensions of service value, aesthetic value, utility value, pleasure value, perceived price, and convenience value[15].

Because of the different cultural backgrounds and social values, and the motivation of tourism participation promoted by social norms, volunteer travelers are in unstable state on the two-dimensional axis of altruistic motivation and utilitarian motivation, prompting the differences in their measurement of gains and losses, and thus showing different value perception [4, 5]. Brown summarizes the perceived value of volunteer tourism, includes interaction with local communities, mindfulness of experience, self-actualization, personal growth and enhancement of family relationships [16]; Broad views the volunteer tourism experience as an important turning point in life and proposes volunteer tourism helps participants to increase self-confidence, knowledge and skills, and enhance self-awareness and cognition of the changes of world [17]. Lo and Lee, taking

the volunteer tourists in Hong Kong, conduct a qualitative study of volunteer tourism participants' understanding of changes in life, enhancement of social relations, personal development and growth, expansion of view, acquisition of memory experience, and the impact on future career, learning and life goals [18].

Accordingly, the maintenance and expansion of social relations, career/ learning progress, personal growth and self-realization, changes in world outlook and outlook on life, and self-reflection are the perceived value of volunteer tourists that is widely mentioned in current researches. However, it is still unclear whether the social values and social norms of Chinese volunteer tourists in the context of cultural changes brought about by the rapid economic growth in China and the traditional values of China are reflected in perceived value of volunteer tourism of Chinese volunteer tourists. Therefore, this research aims at combing the perceived value of Chinese volunteer tourists on an overall level.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to explore the perceived value of volunteer tourists in Chinese context. At present, the destinations and tourism-generating region of volunteer tourists in real sense in China are scattered, and there are difficulties in conducting face-to-face surveys [18]. In addition, the development of Chinese network culture at this stage has prompted the emergence of various online communities. More and more tourists establish "digitized self" through online community interaction (such as blog community and public account), or online sharing (such as WeChat Moments, microblog, travel sharing community), and the presentation of digitized self to some extent, is the process of individual's preserving the evidence of self-presence by staring at the tourist field and photos, etc., and interpreting the meaning through content elaboration [19]. By exploring the digitized self-constructed by a group of members and deeply deconstructing their network footprint (comments and travel notes, etc.) in their communities, the life experience and meaning construction can be effectively analyzed. This research method of exploring social groups with the convenience of an online community is defined as "netnographic" [20]. Bu Yumei thinks "it is a method that takes the network virtual environment as the main research background to explore and explain the Internet and related social and cultural phenomena by using the expression platform of Internet and interactive tools to collect information" after concluding the study on the research of netnographic in China and Western countries [21].

Similar to ethnographic research, the core of netnographic is the process of gaining information through observing and interpreting the network footprint and behavior and formal or informal interviews deeply into a networked cultural field or community of members of a group. Kozinet demonstrates the implementation process of netnographic through five stages and reflect in this research, which is shown in "Fig. 1" [22].
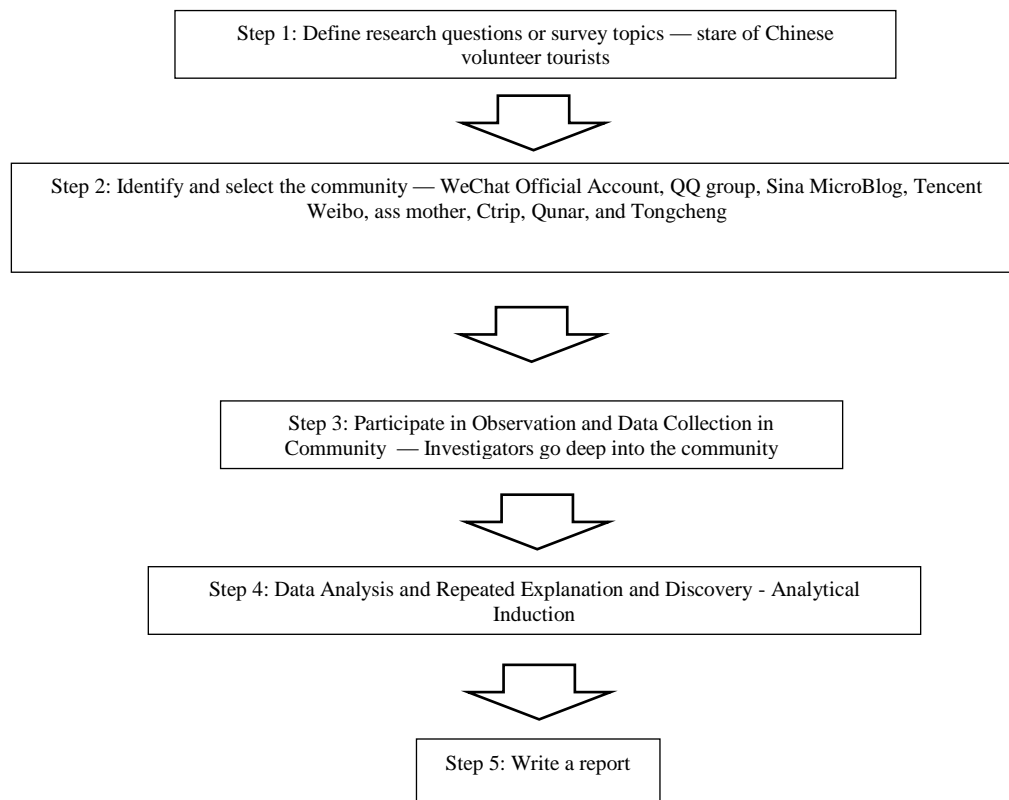
Step 1: Define research questions or survey topics — stare of Chinese volunteer tourists

Step 2: Identify and select the community — WeChat Official Account, QQ group, Sina MicroBlog, Tencent Weibo, ass mother, Ctrip, Qunar, and Tongcheng

Step 3: Participate in Observation and Data Collection in Community — Investigators go deep into the community

Step 4: Data Analysis and Repeated Explanation and Discovery - Analytical Induction

Step 5: Write a report

Fig. 1. Netnographic research process.

The research teams locate the volunteer tourists group deeply in related network community such as WeChat Official Accounts, QQ group, Sina microblog, Tencent microblog, ass mother, Ctrip, Qunar, and Tongcheng. In the process, members of the survey team collected information through collecting related travel notes, photos, and comments of volunteer tourism and inviting in-depth interviews after going deep into community. The final collected information includes a total of 95 travel notes, 338 photos, and 28 in-depth interviews (by way of remote calls or WeChat interactive mode). The interviewees are volunteers who have participated in volunteer tourism within one month, and travel notes and photos are released after February 2016. The travel destinations of volunteer tourism in China mainly include Gansu, Yunnan and Tibet while the main destinations for foreign volunteer tourism are Bali and Sri Lanka, as well as Vietnam, Kenya, Nepal, Cambodia, India, and Turkey, etc. The majority of volunteer tourists adopt the way of organizational participation, including Grapper, Monarch, NVC, IVHQ, Yolo Planet and other organizations, and a small number of participants choose the way of traveling alone. Respondents include 12 volunteer tourists in China and 16 volunteer tourists abroad. To protect the personal privacy of respondents, the digital signatures and destinations of volunteer tourism were distinguished during the study (such as: N1, Lantian). Information is collected from April to November 2017, and the use of the data is permitted by the respondents and online community leaders.

The analysis of the data adopts three levels of induction, which is the grounded analysis method that determine the nature of data through the convergence procedure of the open coding-sub topic-core topic, which facilitates the integration of fragmented textual content and textual forms (photos, interviews, and reviews, etc.) to derive an overall textual explanation.

IV. ANALYSIS RESULTS

A. Social Value Perceptions in Social Construction

Tourism is the process of an individual fleeing the daily life and entering the antistructure threshold state [23]. In the process, the individual's inherent identity is abated and they can experience the communita of interaction with others. Wang Ning defines the interactive experience of individuals in such communita as an interactive and authentic experience [24]. In the context of volunteer tourism, tourists also experience interaction with different objects, including companions, local people and other volunteer tourists. They give different meanings to different interactions and then perceive different social values.

On the one hand, volunteer tourists experience the interaction with different interactive objects, of which the essence is the process of maintaining or expanding social networks. The travel motivation of most volunteer tourists includes the motivation to extend the relationship, while their value perception also involves the expansion of the relationship.

"More importantly, I also met a group of friends who share the difficulties and Lao Ganma. I believe we will meet again in the future." "(Ctrip, Kenya)

The relationship maintenance is equally important to volunteer tourists. In particular, for Chinese volunteer tourists, typical groups with collectivist values, maintaining or strengthening their existing social relations through travel is also the social value perception frequently mentioned by respondents.

"I always have this idea, and I decided to go with them when my friends put forward." (N2, Bali)

The expansion of the comprehensive relationship and the maintenance of the relationship are all essentially the value perceptions of volunteer tourists based on cultural and social identities. That is, volunteer tourists expand and maintain their self-image and make self-labeling through relationship, while cultural and social identification are the hallmarks that they filtrate the social relationship networks to be expanded and maintained. Not only volunteer tourists hope to differentiate themselves from "mass tourists" by marking themselves as "volunteers" and "travelers" ("Comparing with travel by skimming the surface, I prefer to travel like volunteers, live in a city, see all kinds of people, and visit countless streets, having time to quietly think. Beauty of Angkor needs you to walk slowly, take a slow look, and quietly comprehend" (Ctrip, Cambodia) to obtain the sense of superiority of travel form. They also hope to differentiate themselves with "western volunteer tourists" through marking "orient" volunteer tourists to obtain the social value perception with orientalist values and cultural identities.

"Asians always come early consciously, then pour tea, and prepare bread, and bananas, and then European and American volunteers came to line up for breakfast very consciously. Similarly, Asian volunteers consciously wash the cup, wipe the cup, and clean up to the end after finishing eating, while the European and American volunteers always throw the cup to them consciously and politely say thank you. I'm not to say that this should be done by whom or to say no one force you to do it. I just feel that we come here to be volunteers to serve the entire mother Teresa system, which naturally includes the willing to do the things within their power when providing free breakfast for all volunteers, rather than just for the elderly, child and patients. Why Asians have this awareness, but people in developed countries such as Europe and the United States do not? "(Ctrip, Kolkata)

Different social and cultural identities are embedded in the social value perception of Chinese volunteer tourists, which not only affect the relationship expansion and maintenance bias in the travel experience ("I hate those Spanish volunteers ... and built deep friendship with many Japanese girls. (Ctrip, Calcutta)), but this social value perception based on cultural and social identities also did not end with the end of the tour and extended to the construction of the virtual social network of volunteer tourists. By joining volunteer tourism network community (e.g., Grapper), and posting relevant information on social media (e.g., ass mom travel), volunteer tourists build self-image and perform

impression management, the essence of which is the process of marking self-imaged [25].

On the other hand, the travel experience of Chinese volunteer tourists carries the typical "eastern hospitality" perception [24], which promotes Chinese volunteer tourists to instinctively gaze at the hospitality symbol of residents in tourism destination.

"With these preparatory works, we are confident about everything. Although we are worried about encountering the bad phenomenon about the Chinese people on the Internet, it is a fact that Bali greets us with full enthusiasm and goodwill." (Ctrip, Bali)

This kind of hospitality is endowed with the meaning of true colours by travelers. Volunteer tourism is essentially a relief effort for cultural or social and ecological fragile areas conducted by individuals while traveling. And the primitive and backward travel destinations is gazed by volunteer tourists and interpreted as the base of hospitality and simplicity of local residents, of which the essence is the "postcolonial" gaze of volunteer tourists.

"Only in this pristine place can we see innocent and flawless smiles of children and the inhabitants here are friendly and kind, and we do not have to worry about Chinese-style blackmail and intrigue. Whenever I was plagued by the foul smell of modernization, that experience reminded me to keep my heart and treat people sincerely. "(Donkey mother, Bali)

The hospitality that Chinese volunteer tourists are gazing at is based on the true color of social construction under the social comparison. This kind of hospitable society encourages self-reflection and its result plays the role of value guidance in building new social relations in the future.

Accordingly, the social value perception of Chinese volunteer tourists is reflected in the maintenance and expansion of their social network and construction of future social relations under the background of self-reflection. The essence of social value perception is the result of social construction in the orientalist values and social context.

B. Utilitarian Value: Rational Reflection

Babin divides perceived value of customer into utilitarian value and pleasure value, in which utilitarian value is the "rational" return provided by consumption and service perceived by consumers, or the extent to which they assist customers to accomplish "existing tasks" [26], such as the quality of consumer goods, and service quality. Volunteer tourism is a result of volunteer travelers' balance of motivation between altruism and utilitarian self and most participants have the utilitarian value perception at rational level.

According to the data collected by researchers in the fields of the network and the in-depth interviews data, the utilitarian values perceived by Chinese volunteer tourists include "volunteer certification" that they can get in participating in volunteer tourism. Most of volunteer tourism is organized travel patterns [7] and volunteer travel

participants can obtain the qualification certificate of "visa-free" travel in some countries through specific organizations. Some volunteer tourists can get convenient opportunity of traveling abroad by participating in volunteer tourism.

Second, some volunteer tourists mentioned the international volunteer tourists provide them with English language learning opportunities. That is, they can obtain the opportunity to communicate with volunteers of English-speaking countries (such as Europe and the United States) through international volunteer tourism or make volunteer tourism in English-speaking countries to obtain the opportunities of improving social skills in English (eg Kenya).

Some Chinese universities require students to complete social practice reports during the holidays, while volunteer tourism as a typical social practice is recognized as a high-powered social practice in some universities. Chinese volunteer tourists in colleges can be provided with the opportunities of adding comprehensive quantitative points, joining the party and getting scholarships if they complete the social practice of volunteers during holiday. For example, in the interview, a sophomore of a university took advantage of summer vacation to provide supportive teaching activity in a poor mountainous village in Gansu, which adds weight scores for the acquisition of scholarships. Similarly, some volunteer tourists mentioned their volunteer travel participation assists them in applying for admission to overseas universities.

During an online fieldwork, researchers found that religion is also an important part of the perceived utilitarian value of Chinese volunteer tourists. In particular, for religious believers, volunteer tourism is an important opportunity for them to practice religious beliefs and receive religious baptism. For example, a Christian traveled to Turkey to pursue the path of saints and carried out volunteer activities along the way. In the process, he gained a deeper understanding of Christian doctrine and accomplished spiritual sublimation. Some non-religious people can also perceive religious values in a religious atmosphere. For instance, a college student who goes to a temple school in Thailand to support education says "Although I am not a Buddhist, I may get Buddha blessings if I work for the sake of others under the Buddha light." (Grapper, Thailand). Volunteer tourism is given "sacred" meaning, and the perceived religious value is the "superstition" based on traditional cultural values [27].

C. Self-development Value

Self-development is the self-improvement perceived by volunteer tourists during their participation in voluntary tourism activities [4]. It includes both self-reflection of volunteer travelers when they enter into the threshold state of travel and such self-reflection encourages individuals to feel rich life experience and the shift in values ("laughing in sunny days and quarreling in carefree air, like a loved one, it is them who taught me what is the eternal value and I will be an iron lady who is outwardly gentle but inwardly stern after returning to my country." (Weibo, Australia) and the

individual's sense of being, which motivates the individual to perceive the continuity of ego [2, 28].

"When I am tired of the hustle and bustle of the city, the tranquility here makes me feel relaxed. When I cover the nose in the smoke of cars, the air here let me to take a deep breath. When I eat various biochemical foods in the city gingerly, the natural ingredients here make my taste buds dance, and when I sniff at the various masks, people's smiles here without impurities lift me up. "(Ctrip, SF Express, Meizhou)

"We did not give them anything; on the contrary, they gave us a holy time journey. Through this journey, we recall many lost memories. Compared with them, we are just vulgarian and passers-by. "(N12, Sri Lanka)

Sharpley regards tourism as the resistance of tourists to modernity. The social and individual alienation brought about by modernity urges tourists to escape from daily life and look for self-actualization to others [29]. The escape of people going to other places is apparently the process of tourists' experiencing the threshold of space, but it is essentially the process of tourists looking for the time threshold of "nostalgia". During the shifting process of time and space, tourists perceive the changes in life and the world, thus completing the self-renewal experience [28].

"I did not know there were people who don't have enough food to eat and can't eat meat a week when I gobble down the food in luxurious restaurant until I went there. When I went in and out of the top brand clothing stores, people's clothes are mended again and again. When I enjoy the air conditioning in the office, some people still work in the field in the hot sun although they are 80 years old. "(Ctrip, SF Express, Meizhou)

Rapid modernization in China has made it hard for individuals to feel the ego's existence in the city when letting them to accept the changes [5], while the "backward and lagging" others provide them with the opportunity to reflect on life, which not only supply the blank of the continuation of their life, but also provides an opportunity for them to reflection on social development.

On the other hand, the cultural interaction properties carried by volunteer tourism make volunteer tourists feel the impact of culture and thus influence the improvement of intercultural competence [30]. It is not only reflected in the change in the cultural stereotypes of others (volunteer tourists in other countries, and culture of destination) made by volunteer tourists ("Although we are worried about encountering the bad phenomenon about the Chinese people on the Internet, it is a fact that Bali greet us with full enthusiasm and goodwill." (Ctrip, Bali) "), but also embodied in the deepening of the culture and national identity of volunteer tourists in cross-cultural situation.

"For a time, I really wanted to give up. It was a long and hopeless day to think of the next three days. I just did not know how to hold on and even regret to apply to come here. Whenever the limit is approaching, I think this is a small international group and I am not an individual but a

representative of China, so I keep my chin up." (Ctrip, Australia)

The collectivism values of Chinese volunteer tourists drive them always to perform as the representatives of Chinese tourist and their codes of conduct are embedded with the meaning of representing China's image, thereby deepening their cultural and national identity.

D. Memory Creation: The World Is So Big and I Want to See It

Memory is the key for individual to construct self-identity and maintain self-continuity. The process of travel experience is essentially the process of tourists creating memories [2] ("The world is so big and I want to see it, so that I won't regret when I am old. (N14, Sri Lanka) "). By creating autobiographical memories of travel experiences, volunteer tourists accomplish the meaning giving and value perception of the travel process, and through memories, volunteer tourists interpret the meaning of travel for second time, which will affect their values.

"How can I say goodbye. When I sit down quietly, recall the past, what I think of are those simple Balinese and children who I still miss. They bring me too many memories that I won't forget for this life." (Ctrip, Bali)

V. CONCLUSION

As a typical postmodern tourism form, volunteer tourism provides multi-level value perception for volunteer tourism participants. Using the netnographic research system, the researchers go deep into the network community of Chinese volunteer tourism and root in the theory of perceived value to collect and analyze the network field information of volunteer tourism and converge four types perceived value of volunteer tourists, including the maintenance and expansion of the social network of volunteer tourists under the background of social construction, namely the perceived social value of volunteer tourists; the utilitarian value perception of volunteer tourists based on rational reflection; the self-development value perception of volunteer tourists based on self-actualization and self-reflection and the improvement of their intercultural competence and deepening of cultural identity; and the self-continuity perceived by volunteer tourists through memory creation.

The perception of its value is always influenced by its cultural values and social norms. Taking the value perception of Chinese volunteer tourists in the mother group of this study as an example, it is influenced by Chinese traditional cultural values and cultural changes. The former endows the value perception bias of collectivism, oriental hospitality and superstition with Chinese volunteer tourists. The social alienation brought about by the rapid urbanization in China drives individuals to look for "other reality", self-existence and value of "nostalgia" in volunteer tourism experiences [3]. China's accelerated modernization has led individuals to generate stare at "post-colonialism" and perceive the changes in social progress and life of China through social comparison. [18]

The result of this study, on the one hand, analyzes the particularity of the perceived value of volunteer tourists under the social and cultural context in China. The findings confirm that the perceived value of tourists is the result of the subjective construction of tourists from different cultural contexts. On the other hand, with the Chinese market entering the era of post-modern tourism, the postmodern tourists pursuing individuality and characteristics have gradually become the main force in the tourism market, so understanding the value perception of tourists in the market segments helps the tourism developers maximize the tourists' interests to increase market satisfaction. Therefore, the results of this study contribute to the segmentation and personalized development of Chinese volunteer tourism market. Third, as Chinese tourists become an important part of the world travel market, it is increasingly important to explore the value perception of Chinese tourists. Chinese cultural changes caused by the accelerating urbanization and modernization in China promote the acceleration of the changes in travel form of Chinese tourists' and their perceived value (such as the world is so big and I would like to see.) It should be the core concern of Chinese tourism researchers and market developers in the future to understand changes in China's culture and embed it in the Chinese tourism market. Fourthly, on the one hand, the online community is a way for travelers to manage their self-image, build self-identity and expand social networks. On the other hand, it is the virtual place for tourists to save their memories and make the second gaze. Therefore, netnographic research helps to analyze traveler's experience, gaze, motivation and value perception. This research again confirms the validity of collecting data through fieldwork rooted in Kozinet's netnographic research process.

Although this study is of some value in the theoretical development, practice and methodology of volunteer tourism, this study mainly adopts a qualitative analysis method. First, the relationship between variables such as travel motivation and perceived value is not confirmed in the complicated data. Second, we found that there are significant differences in the value perception of different types of Chinese volunteer tourists in the course of the study, but the important relative differences have not been confirmed through content analysis. Therefore, in the future, on the one hand, the research needs to build a model in order to find the significant variables that affect the formation of perceived value of Chinese volunteer tourists through quantitative research methods; on the other hand, we need to explore the relative importance of perceived value of Chinese volunteer tourists through the frequency analysis of content analysis.

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