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Developing intangible cultural heritage IPs of the Dong ethnic group and converting them into cultural tourism revenue from the perspective of short-video media empowerment

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of rural revitalization and the rapid growth of short-video media, the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of the Dong ethnic group in Guizhou possesses distinctive cultural value, yet its reach on short-video platforms and its conversion into cultural tourism revenue remain markedly underdeveloped. This study surveyed short-video users in Xi'an through 43 valid questionnaires and conducted a semi-structured interview with one expert in Dong cultural tourism. It examined users' short-video viewing habits, their awareness of Dong ICH, the effectiveness of short-video-enabled cultural communication, and the conversion of online exposure into cultural tourism consumption. The findings reveal a structural mismatch in the supply of platform content: scenic landscapes and homestay experiences account for 67.4% of the content, whereas traditional festivals and folk customs that genuinely represent the cultural essence of the Dong ethnic group account for only 16.28%. More importantly, although approximately 70% of respondents had encountered content related to Dong ICH, fewer than 10% expressed an intention to visit the destination after viewing such content, indicating a substantial gap between online cultural communication and tourism conversion. In response, this study proposes developing distinctive cultural IPs through innovative formats such as micro-short dramas, safeguarding cultural authenticity, and cultivating local talent in short-video content creation and operation.

Keywords: short videos, intangible cultural heritage of the Dong ethnic group, cultural IP, cultural tourism economy, willingness to pay

1. Introduction

Short videos have become a major channel for cultural tourism communication[1], profoundly transforming how people discover, perceive, and select tourist destinations. The Dong ethnic group possesses a rich array of

[1] China Economic Net. (2024). Short videos effectively promote the development of the cultural and tourism industries. Retrieved September 1, 2026, from https://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/gdxw/202408/06/t20240806_39095209.shtml

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intangible cultural heritage, including Grand Song of the Dong, batik, drum towers, and wind-and-rain bridges. However, the visibility and depth of communication of this heritage on short-video platforms remain disproportionate to its cultural value[2]. Meanwhile, the rural cultural tourism economy in Dong-inhabited areas, such as Liping County in Guizhou Province, remains at an early stage of development, with homestays lying vacant during the off-season and tourist flows exhibiting pronounced seasonal fluctuations. Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on three central questions: What are users' short-video viewing habits? How familiar are they with content related to the intangible cultural heritage of the Dong ethnic group? How effective are short videos in promoting Dong culture, and what forms of economic conversion into cultural tourism do they generate? Methodologically, the study surveyed short-video users in Xi'an and collected 43 valid questionnaires. It also conducted an in-depth, semi-structured interview with an expert with extensive experience in Dong culture and rural cultural tourism. By combining quantitative breadth with qualitative depth, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of short-video media in promoting Dong ICH and facilitating its conversion into cultural tourism revenue.

2. Literature review and research hypotheses

Existing studies generally affirm the empowering role of short videos in destination marketing. Through their low barriers to entry, strong interactivity, and algorithm-driven distribution, short videos significantly reduce the cost of disseminating cultural tourism information and effectively stimulate the interest of potential tourists. Empirical research on destination short videos indicates that the narrative transportation and sense of presence generated by such videos can improve viewers' attitudes toward a destination and strengthen their travel-related behavioral intentions [1, 2]. Regarding the communication of intangible cultural heritage, scholars have noted that content limited to superficial depictions of landscapes and homestays struggles to convey the underlying cultural essence. Studies of ICH short-video communication further show that content homogenization and the "Matthew effect" dilute cultural transmission, while the absence of culturally rich content featuring festivals, singing and dancing, and traditional handicrafts weakens the depth of cultural communication [3]. With respect to the conversion of cultural tourism exposure into economic returns, relevant studies emphasize the conversion chain of "exposure–interest–action," and demonstrate that emotional attachment, content authenticity, and cultural identity act as key mediating variables influencing willingness to pay and travel decisions [4].

Taken together, existing literature has primarily focused on the overall effects of cultural communication, with relatively little empirical investigation into the gap between content supply, cultural identity, and tourism behavior in the context of the specific ethnic culture of the Dong. Accordingly, this study advances a central proposition: short videos featuring Dong ICH exhibit an imbalanced content structure, and their communication effects have not yet been effectively translated into tourism behavior. This constitutes the primary point of departure for the present study.

[2] People's Daily. (2024). Short videos create new spaces for the presentation of traditional culture. People.cn. Retrieved September 1, 2026, from https://ent.people.com.cn/n1/2024/0806/c1012-40293006.html

3. Research findings

3.1. Basic characteristics of the sample

A total of 43 valid questionnaires were collected, covering respondents across age groups from 18 to over 46 years old. Office workers constituted the largest occupational group, accounting for more than 40% of respondents, while students and professionals in cultural tourism and ICH-related fields also represented considerable proportions of the sample. Women accounted for 62.79% of respondents, compared with 37.21% for men, a distribution consistent with the relatively high proportion of female users on short-video platforms. Although the sample exhibited a certain degree of diversity, its small size means that the findings should be interpreted as exploratory.

3.2. Structural mismatch between content supply and cultural identity

The survey showed that more than 60% of respondents had either never visited Dong-inhabited areas or had visited them only once, indicating limited familiarity with Dong culture. In terms of content consumption, nearly half of the respondents used short-video platforms frequently, with usage among young and middle-aged groups notably higher than among older respondents. Notably, although approximately 70% of respondents had encountered content related to Dong ICH on short-video platforms, exposure was concentrated among middle-aged and older users aged over 46, revealing a pronounced generational mismatch in content dissemination. In terms of content structure, existing short videos predominantly feature rural cultural tourism landscapes and homestay experiences, which together account for as much as 67.4% of the content. By contrast, categories that genuinely embody the cultural essence of the Dong ethnic group, such as festivals, singing and dancing, and traditional handicrafts, account for only a small proportion. Festival and folk-custom content, in particular, represents just 16.28%. Meanwhile, cultural symbols that users strongly associate with Dong cultural IPs, including Dong drums, wind-and-rain bridges, and Dong cloth, have barely entered the mainstream of short-video production. These findings indicate a significant mismatch between platform content supply and the cultural associations through which users identify with Dong culture. Traffic is concentrated on landscapes and homestay experiences, while the very symbols capable of establishing distinctive cultural recognition remain marginalized.

3.3. From "being seen" to "taking action": a failure of conversion

The survey further revealed that fewer than 10% of respondents developed an intention to visit Dong-inhabited areas after watching short videos about Dong culture. Engagement behaviors, including interaction and commenting, were also limited. This gap between exposure and action is consistent with the interview findings. Respondent A01 noted that homestays in Dong-inhabited areas of Liping primarily attract visitors during the summer and winter holidays, while rooms remain largely vacant and occupancy rates are very low during the rest of the year. This suggests that the overall economic impact of cultural tourism in Dong-inhabited areas remains at an early stage of development[3]. The interview also revealed several underlying causes: local areas lack companies and professionals familiar with short-video operations, while the quality of existing content is relatively low and its narratives remain superficial, making it difficult to motivate audiences to travel. These findings demonstrate that online traffic generated through cultural communication does not

[3] China Tourism Academy. (2023). Research on the impact of short videos on tourists' destination choices and consumption intentions [Research report]. Beijing: China Tourism Academy.

automatically translate into tourism demand and consumption. A substantial gap remains between exposure and actual travel intentions.

4. Discussion and recommendations

The above findings are consistent with the argument in existing studies that mere exposure does not necessarily translate into action, because the sense of presence and emotional attachment generated by short videos must first be converted into positive attitudes and cultural identification before travel intentions can form [2, 4], while further identifying two underlying causes: an imbalanced content structure and a shortage of qualified personnel. Drawing on communication effectiveness theory and the in-depth interview, this study proposes three recommendations.

First, priority should be given to developing distinctive ICH IPs for the Dong ethnic group by incorporating innovative formats such as micro-short dramas. More than half of the respondents expressed recognition of the Dong region's distinctive landscapes and cultural tourism resources, making this the most highly rated aspect in the survey. This provides a foundation for IP development. Content featuring the Grand Song of the Dong, batik, and stories associated with traditional festivals could be adapted into narrative-driven micro-short dramas, bringing culturally rich material into mainstream traffic flows and correcting the structural imbalance in content supply[4] [5].

Second, cultural authenticity must be preserved to prevent excessive commercialization and entertainment-oriented adaptations from eroding the intrinsic value of the culture. During the interview, expert A01 noted that over the past decade, large numbers of local young people had left their communities to seek employment elsewhere, contributing to a trend toward the gradual homogenization and decline of Dong culture. The development of cultural IPs should therefore strike a balance between commercial communication and cultural preservation, with authenticity serving as the foundation for sustained cultural identification [5].

Third, local talent in short-video production and operation should be cultivated to address the dilemma of "having content but lacking effective dissemination." Through university–enterprise partnerships and training programs for young people returning to their hometowns, individuals familiar with Dong culture could acquire skills in filming, editing, and platform operations. Improving the quality of cultural content in this way could help generate stable tourism demand. This approach also aligns with practical efforts to increase rural cultural tourism revenue through short-video media[5] [6].

Research limitations. The sample comprised only 43 respondents, all surveyed in Xi'an, which limits its representativeness. In addition, the study did not employ econometric models to verify causal relationships among the variables. Future research could expand the sample and introduce structural equation modeling to further examine the mediating effect of cultural identity in the relationship between short-video exposure and tourism intention.

5. Conclusion

Using a combination of questionnaires and interviews, this study identifies two major problems in the short-

[4] Liuzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television and Tourism. (2024). Report on the protection of Dong ethnic culture and the integrated development of culture and tourism [Research report]. Liuzhou.

[5] China Internet Information Center. (2024). Digital communication empowers rural tourism and revitalization. Retrieved September 1, 2026, from https://travel.china.com.cn/txt/2024-01/08/content_116925615.shtml

video communication of Dong ICH: a mismatch between content supply and cultural identity, and the failure to translate communication outcomes effectively into tourism behavior. The findings indicate that the main bottleneck in converting Dong cultural tourism resources into economic benefits lies not in the availability of online traffic, but in the quality and cultural depth of the content attracting that traffic. Only by developing distinctive cultural IPs grounded in high-quality, authentic cultural content and addressing the shortage of local professionals in short-video production and operation can the communication potential of short-video media be transformed into sustained momentum for cultural tourism development, enabling cultural dissemination and economic benefits to reinforce one another.

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