

The Role of Cultural Atmosphere in Enhancing Consumer Satisfaction of Small and Medium-Sized Beverage Catering Enterprises in Chongqing

Xian Chen^{1, a}, Xuegang Zhan^{2, b, *}

Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand

^a chen.xian@rmutr.ac.th; ^b zhan.xuegang@rmutr.ac.th

Abstract: With the deep integration of consumption upgrading and the experience economy, small and medium-sized beverage catering enterprises in Chongqing are facing the severe challenge of intensified homogeneous competition. How to enhance consumer satisfaction amid fierce market competition has become the key to their survival and development. As a core element of the dining experience, the creation of cultural atmosphere directly affects consumers' perception and evaluation of brands. Taking small and medium-sized beverage catering enterprises in Chongqing as the research object, this paper analyzes the changing trends in consumer demands for dining experiences, explores the significance of cultural atmosphere in the catering industry, and reveals the mechanisms through which cultural atmosphere influences consumer satisfaction, including its effects on consumer perception, emotional experience, and behavioral intentions. Furthermore, it proposes targeted strategies such as exploring Bayu culture, innovating spatial experiences, and organizing diverse activities, providing theoretical reference for empowering these enterprises with culture to enhance market competitiveness and consumer satisfaction, and helping them achieve differentiated development in the market.

Keywords: Chongqing; Small and medium-sized beverage catering enterprises; Cultural atmosphere; Consumer satisfaction.

1. Introduction

With the continuous growth of disposable income and the upgrading of consumption concepts in China, dining consumption has shifted from meeting basic functional needs to diversified experiential demands. As the birthplace and inheritor of Bayu culture, Chongqing's beverage catering market both embodies local culinary traditions and faces competitive pressure from the expansion of chain brands and the rise of emerging formats. Small and medium-sized catering enterprises, as an important component of Chongqing's beverage market, are often disadvantaged in product innovation and brand building due to constraints of capital and scale. Creating a cultural atmosphere provides a feasible path for such enterprises to break through homogenization dilemmas [1-2]. By integrating local culture and lifestyle elements into consumption spaces, they can enhance consumers' emotional identification and experiential value, thereby influencing satisfaction and repurchase intentions. Based on consumer behavior theory and the cultural characteristics of Chongqing, this paper systematically examines the role of cultural atmosphere in consumer satisfaction within beverage-oriented SMEs, and proposes concrete strategies to guide enterprise practices.

2. Changing Trends in Consumer Demand for Dining Experiences

The rapid rise of the experience economy and evolving consumption concepts have led dining consumption to shift from satisfying functional needs to experiential pursuits. According to the *2024 Annual Report on China's Catering Industry* by the China Hospitality Association, 78.3% of consumers listed "scene experience" as an important factor in

choosing catering brands—an increase of 42 percentage points compared with 2019—while the annual average growth rate of cultural theme dining venues reached 23.5%. During traditional dining consumption phases, consumers primarily focused on taste and price, with requirements for the dining environment limited to basic hygiene and comfort. However, consumer demands now show significant upgrading, as dining is increasingly viewed as an experience encompassing emotional, social, and cultural dimensions. The popularization of social media has further reinforced this trend, as consumers pay attention to distinctive settings and cultural depth when selecting restaurants, seeking experiences that are shareable and can serve as a vehicle for self-expression.

In Chongqing's beverage consumption market, young consumers have become the dominant group. According to the *2023 Chongqing Beverage Consumption Report* by Meituan, the 18–35 age group accounts for as much as 72% of total consumers, and 63% of them indicated they would prioritize beverage shops with a "unique cultural atmosphere." Compared with non-cultural-themed shops, their repurchase rate was 34% higher. Such consumers demonstrate stronger demands for personalization and cultural identity: they not only expect distinctive beverage products but also wish to experience atmospheres linked to local culture and lifestyle during consumption [3-4]. Incorporating elements such as Chongqing hotpot culture and wharf culture into the spatial design and service processes of beverage shops satisfies consumers' desire to explore and identify with local culture. These shifts in consumer demand are driving catering enterprises to move from a "product-oriented" to an "experience-oriented" approach, making the creation of cultural atmosphere a critical factor in enhancing the consumption experience.

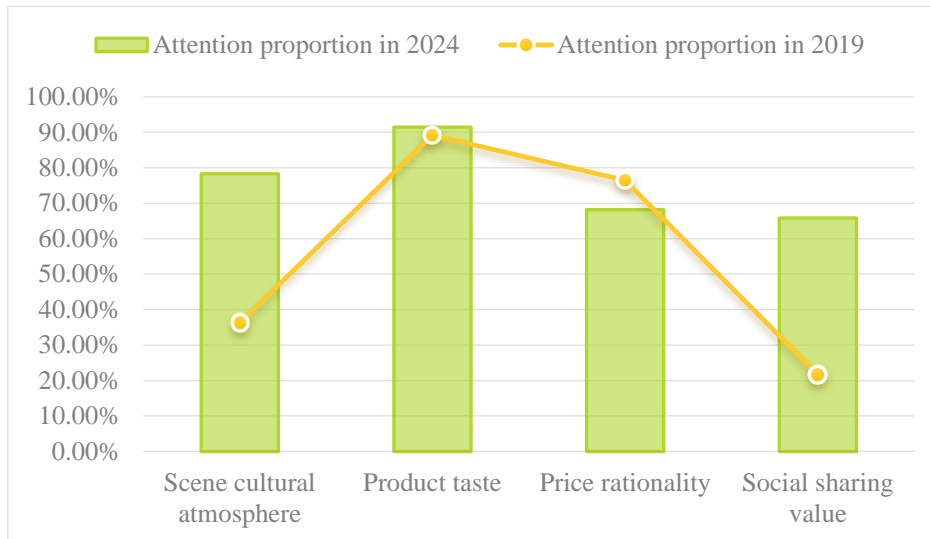


Figure 1. Changes in Consumer Attention to Dining Demand Dimensions, 2019 vs. 2024

3. The Importance of Cultural Atmosphere in the Catering Industry

3.1. Shaping a Unique Brand Image

In the increasingly competitive catering market, brand differentiation is the key for enterprises to gain a competitive edge. When faced with a multitude of homogeneous choices, consumers are often drawn to brands with distinctive characteristics, and cultural atmosphere serves as the core element in shaping such uniqueness. As an external manifestation of a brand's core values, cultural atmosphere provides a distinctive identity that differentiates a brand from its competitors. For small and medium-sized beverage enterprises in Chongqing, extracting elements of Bayu culture and transforming them into tangible expressions in spatial design, product layout, and service standards can create an exclusive brand identity. This identity is not only reflected at the visual level but also embedded in the values and lifestyle attitudes that the brand conveys. Over time, a unique brand image can effectively attract consumer attention, gradually accumulate into brand equity, and enhance consumer brand recognition, thereby positioning enterprises more competitively in the market.

3.2. Resonating with Customers Emotionally

Establishing emotional connections with customers is crucial for the long-term development of catering enterprises, as it strengthens customer attachment and reduces churn rates. Dining consumption is not merely a material exchange but also a social activity infused with emotional interactions, where consumer decisions are often influenced by affective factors. Cultural atmosphere can evoke consumers' latent cultural memories and regional emotions, enabling deep emotional engagement with the brand. Local consumers in Chongqing have a natural emotional bond with Bayu culture, while non-local consumers are driven by curiosity to explore regional cultural characteristics [5-6]. Beverage SMEs that create environments infused with authentic cultural connotations and convey the warmth of culture can provide customers with a sense of belonging and pleasure. Such positive emotional experiences translate into favorable recognition and evaluations of the brand.

3.3. Driving Innovation in the Catering Industry

Innovation enables enterprises to break through developmental bottlenecks and adapt to ever-changing consumer demands. The creation of cultural atmosphere provides abundant inspiration and direction for innovation. Rather than being a superficial accumulation of cultural elements, this process encourages enterprises to engage in in-depth exploration and integration, linking cultural connotations with all aspects of catering operations. For Chongqing's small and medium-sized beverage enterprises, internalizing Bayu culture leads to naturally embedding cultural features into beverage recipe design, production process adjustments, and spatial arrangement, thereby producing innovative outcomes that differ from traditional models. Such innovation not only enhances the uniqueness of products and services but also expands the functional and value boundaries of the catering industry, helping enterprises maintain attractiveness in competitive markets and providing strong support for sustainable development.

3.4. Enhancing the Dining Experience

The quality of the dining experience directly shapes consumers' evaluations of catering enterprises, thereby affecting both their survival and long-term development. This experience is not confined to a single stage but encompasses the entire sensory and psychological journey from entering the venue to leaving it. The creation of cultural atmosphere can optimize this comprehensive experience across multiple dimensions. From the sensory perspective, integrating cultural connotations into spatial design, soundscapes, and visual symbols provides distinctive perceptual stimuli. From the psychological dimension, the values and emotions embedded in culture evoke resonance, making consumers feel understood and recognized. From the interactive perspective, culturally contextualized service methods can make consumers perceive authenticity and warmth, reducing social distance. For beverage SMEs, creating an atmosphere rich in Bayu cultural features transforms simple beverage consumption into a holistic experience that combines material satisfaction with spiritual pleasure, leaving customers with lasting impressions.

4. The Mechanism of Cultural Atmosphere Construction on Consumer Satisfaction

4.1. Impact on Consumer Perception

By constructing systematic perceptual cues, cultural atmosphere reshapes consumers' evaluative dimensions and criteria, thereby strengthening their positive cognition of the brand. In Chongqing's small and medium-sized beverage enterprises, the integration of regional cultural elements provides consumers with multifaceted perceptual stimuli. In terms of spatial environment, architectural symbols characteristic of Bayu culture—such as the structural lines of stilted houses and the stone steps of mountain paths—combined with highly recognizable colors, like the gray-blue tone of the Jialing River or the bright red of hotpot chili oil, create a visually and auditorily distinctive ambience when paired with background audio of Sichuan River chants and decorative depictions of Huangge trees. These elements reinforce consumers' assessments of environmental quality. From the perspective of product presentation, the use of local ingredients, such as Jiangjin peppercorns in specialty drinks or wrapping cups with Rongchang summer cloth, together with explanations of traditional dockside culinary practices, allows consumers to deepen their understanding of product value during the process of tracing ingredients and production logic [7-8]. Such multidimensional positive perceptions do not exist in isolation but rather interweave and reinforce one another, collectively forming a multi-layered evaluation of the dining experience and laying a solid foundation for consumer satisfaction.

4.2. Impact on Consumer Emotional Experience

Emotional experience represents the deep psychological responses formed during dining consumption, and the presence of positive or negative emotions directly influences the continuity of consumer behavior. As a latent catalyst for emotion, cultural atmosphere can activate consumers' cultural cognition and value orientations, thereby eliciting positive emotional responses. Chongqing possesses a unique and profound cultural heritage: local consumers naturally harbor an emotional affinity toward Bayu culture, while non-local consumers often have a strong curiosity about this distinctive and unfamiliar cultural context. By embedding cultural symbols into every detail of the consumption scenario, small and medium-sized beverage enterprises can effectively align with consumers' emotional needs [9]. When consumers immerse themselves in such an atmosphere and feel the familiarity or novelty imparted by culture, they naturally develop emotional resonance and engagement. These positive emotional experiences further enhance their favorable impressions of the brand, thereby directly promoting higher levels of satisfaction.

4.3. Impact on Consumer Behavioral Intentions

Consumer behavioral intentions directly reflect their recognition of a catering brand and are closely linked to the value perceptions and emotional bonds formed during consumption experiences. These intentions profoundly influence enterprises' market expansion and revenue scale. For example, the local tea brand *Chucha Huayue* in

Chongqing has successfully integrated Bayu culture into its tea products through distinctive offerings and spatial design, creating a strong cultural atmosphere. According to Meituan data, the number of group-buying orders for “new Chinese-style” teahouse packages in Chongqing increased by 260% year-on-year. On weekends and holidays, *Chucha Huayue* outlets often see long queues of customers. By incorporating Chongqing specialties such as *mahua* (fried dough twists) and *tuocha* (compressed tea) into beverages, and naming products with both traditional and regional characteristics, the brand fosters strong consumer identification. Customers are more willing to share their experiences on social media, generating organic promotion [10]. On average, *Chucha Huayue*-related content receives over 5 million monthly views, and the emotional dependence formed through cultural identity significantly enhances consumers' repurchase intentions. Compared with ordinary tea shops, the repurchase rate is 30% higher, and cultural value recognition reduces consumers' price sensitivity, with customers accepting prices 15%–20% higher than standard market rates (see Table 1).

Table 1. Outcomes of Cultural Atmosphere Construction on Consumer Behavioral Intentions

Behavioral intention	Specific manifestations	Data shows
Sharing intention	Average monthly exposure on social media	Over 5 million transactions
Repurchase intention	Comparison of repeat purchase rate	30% higher than ordinary tea shops
Willingness to pay a premium	Price acceptance level	15% - 20% higher than ordinary tea beverages

5. Strategies to Enhance the Cultural Atmosphere of Small and Medium-Sized Beverage Enterprises in Chongqing

5.1. Deeply Exploring Bayu Culture to Forge a Unique Brand Identity

Bayu culture is rich in spiritual connotations and cultural symbols, encompassing the bustling vibrancy of dockside life, the resilience of mountainous terrain, and the deep-rooted traditions of local customs. Enterprises should extract transformable elements from these cultural contexts and integrate them into the core values and operational logic of their brands [11]. In product development, the accumulated wisdom of traditional cuisine can be combined with local ingredients to create beverage series that resonate with regional taste memories, making products tangible carriers of culture. In terms of spatial design, the structural aesthetics and color preferences of Bayu architecture can be employed to construct an environment that is both regionally distinctive and comfortable, enabling consumers to experience cultural immersion the moment they enter. During brand communication, it is essential to extract elements of Bayu culture that align with modern consumer values and present them through innovative discursive strategies, shaping a brand image that is historically grounded yet dynamic. Through in-depth cultural excavation and transformation, enterprises can escape homogenized competition, generate unique cultural markers, and establish distinctive recognition in consumers' minds.

5.2. Innovating Spatial Experiences to Create an Immersive Cultural Atmosphere

Against the backdrop of consumption upgrading and the integration of the experience economy, competition in small and medium-sized beverage enterprises has extended beyond product flavor to encompass cultural atmosphere and experiential settings. In Chongqing, where young consumers dominate and cultural-tourism activities are vibrant, consumers expect not only beverages but also emotional resonance and cultural enrichment. Innovating spatial experiences and creating immersive cultural atmospheres thus become central to competitive breakthroughs. Local cultural integration can be vividly embodied: the rhythm of Sichuan River chants can inspire spatial partitions, stilted wooden structures can be adapted into semi-open seating

booths, and flooring can emulate the stone pavements of mountain paths [12-13]. Bamboo lanterns hanging from the ceiling can recreate the shadows of old teahouses. Interactive settings further enhance experiences: a “Beverage Story Wall” illustrated with comics narrates the origins of eagle tea, a DIY tea-pack station provides consumers with specialty teas and Chongqing-themed packaging, while a message wall combined with a “Chongqing Flavor” photo campaign strengthens participatory engagement. Multi-sensory designs amplify perception: wooden tables paired with Huangge tree plants, copper utensils reflecting a retro style, signature “Fog City” drinks aligned with local features, and a fusion of scents with light-rail announcements and dialect ballads—all immerse consumers in the culture of the mountain city (see Table 2).

Table 2. Cultural Scene Construction Schemes for Beverage Shops

Innovative perspective of spatial experience	Specific Implementation Strategies	Forms of Cultural Atmosphere Presentation
Integration of regional culture	Extract representative Chongqing elements such as the river chants of boat trackers (Chuanjiang Haozi), stilted houses (Diaojiailou), and mountain city stone steps, integrating blue-stone textures into floor paving and using bamboo lanterns to recreate the lighting ambiance of old teahouses.	Create a “Mountain City Memories” theme zone featuring display cabinets with miniature Diaojiailou (stilted house) models and background audio of local dialect folk songs.
Construction of interactive scenarios	Establish a “Beverage Story Wall” to showcase the historical origins of local Chongqing drinks (e.g., Laoying Tea, Sour Plum Soup), and provide a DIY tea bag experience station with packaging featuring mountain city illustrations.	Provide interactive installations where consumers can post handwritten messages on the walls and participate in a “Taste of Chongqing” themed photography activity.
Sensory linkage design	Employ wooden tables and chairs combined with green plants to recreate the atmosphere of old Chongqing alleys, use vintage copper utensils at the bar, and launch drinks such as the “Fog City Special Blend” to echo the local climate.	Infuse the space with a blended fragrance of jasmine tea and citrus, while background music intersperses the sounds of light rail announcements and other urban auditory cues.

5.3. Hosting Diverse Activities to Enhance Cultural Interaction and Communication

In promoting cultural atmosphere construction, diverse activities serve as vital approaches to strengthen cultural interaction and dissemination. Given Chongqing’s unique blend of Bayu culture, dockside traditions, and modern popular culture, enterprises can design a series of thematic events. Regularly held “Chongqing Flavor” beverage tasting sessions can invite local tea masters to share the traditional preparation secrets of drinks such as eagle tea and tuo cha, while pairing them with intangible cultural heritage performances like Sichuan opera face-changing or bamboo clapper shows, allowing consumers to appreciate cultural depth during beverage consumption [14-15]. A “Mountain City Beverage Story Collection” campaign can encourage customers to record memories related to local drinks through writing or images, with outstanding works displayed in-store and promoted via WeChat public accounts, thereby facilitating secondary dissemination. Interactive experiential activities tied to traditional festivals, such as “DIY Tea Bag + Dragon Boat Painting” for the Dragon Boat Festival or “Osmanthus Oolong Blending + Mid-Autumn Lantern Making” for the Mid-Autumn Festival, enable consumers to deepen cultural understanding through hands-on practice, thereby strengthening loyalty and expanding the influence of brand culture.

upgrading and the experience economy, cultural atmosphere construction has become a core lever for enhancing consumer satisfaction among small and medium-sized beverage enterprises in Chongqing. By reshaping consumer perception, activating emotional resonance, and driving positive behavioral intentions, it provides critical support for enterprises to break through the dilemma of homogenized competition. This culture-centered development path not only strengthens market competitiveness but also simultaneously meets consumers’ diverse experiential needs, while promoting the contemporary inheritance and innovative expression of Bayu culture. Through the deep integration of regional cultural values with dining consumption scenarios, it injects unique vitality into the sustainable development of small and medium-sized beverage enterprises in Chongqing, helping them build an inimitable competitive advantage in the market.

References

- [1] Xu, Y.; Song, M.; Zhu, Y. Analysis of Factors Influencing Residents’ Food Safety Satisfaction in China. *Food Ind.* 2018, 39, 257–261.
- [2] Zhang, Y. Discussion on the Microbiological Sampling and Testing Results of Food in Small and Large Restaurants in a City. *Chin. Rural Health* 2021, 13, 90–93.
- [3] Mi, H.; Zhang, T.; Ren, Z.; Zhou, W. Analysis of Driving Factors of Household CO₂ Emissions in the Process of Urbanization. *China Environ. Sci.* 2016, 36, 3183–3192.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, against the backdrop of consumption

- [4] Guo, Z.; Bai, L.; Gong, S. Government regulations and voluntary certifications in food safety in China: A review. *Trends Food Sci. Technol.* 2019, 90, 160–165.
- [5] Wang, J. Survey on China's Residents' Food Safety Satisfaction. *Jiangsu Soc. Sci.* 2012, 5, 66–71.
- [6] He, Z. Evaluation Study on the Effectiveness of Transformative Community Public Spaces from the Perspective of Social Networks. Ph.D. Thesis, South China University of Technology, Guangzhou, China, 2014.
- [7] Liu, Z.; Lu, P.; Yao, Y. The Inspirations of Japan's Food Management System for China's Food Industry. *J. Hebei Agric. Univ. (Soc. Sci. Ed.)* 2020, 22, 62–67.
- [8] Sarah, D.; Ignace, G.; Joeri, M.; van Tienoven, T.P.; Djiwo, W. Convenience on the menu? A typological conceptualization of family food expenditures and food-related time patterns. *Soc. Sci. Res.* 2015, 51, 205–218.
- [9] You, L.; Huo, X.; Du, W. Absolute Income, Social Comparison, and Farmers' Subjective Well-being: An Empirical Study Based on Two Entire Villager Households in Shaanxi. *Agric. Technol. Econ.* 2018, 4, 111–125.
- [10] Chen, Y.; Wang, S.; Hou, C.; Li, J.; Yuan, J.; Liu, W.; Liu, H.; Wang, Y. Analysis of the Status and Influencing Factors of Food Safety Satisfaction among Urban Residents in Gansu Province. *Mod. Prev. Med.* 2014, 41, 1756–1758.
- [11] Laar, A.; Barnes, A.; Aryeetey, R.; Tandoh, A.; Bash, K.; Mensah, K.; Zotor, F.; Vandevijvere, S.; Holdsworth, M. Implementation of healthy food environment policies to prevent nutrition-related non-communicable diseases in Ghana: National experts' assessment of government action. *Food Policy* 2020, 93, 101907.
- [12] Fu, Z. Exploration of Food Safety and Catering Management. *Food Saf. Guide* 2020, 27, 67–68.
- [13] Liang, X. An Empirical Study on the Impact of Social Security and Urban-Rural Income Disparity on Residents' Consumption. Master's Thesis, Jilin University, Changchun, China, 2013.
- [14] Ma, Y.; Zhao, Y. Analysis of Public Satisfaction and Factors Influencing Food Safety in Beijing. *Beijing Soc. Sci.* 2009, 3, 17–20.
- [15] Wu, L.; Qiu, G.; Xu, G.; Chen, X. The Impact of Policy on the Harmless Treatment of Diseased Pigs on Pig Farmers' Behavior. *Chin. Rural Econ.* 2017, 2, 56–69.