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Research Review on Brand Popularity of Guizhou Local Characteristic Catering: Taking Sour Soup Hot Pot as the Research Context

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Abstract

As people's living standards get better, special local food becomes one of top choices for tourists. Guizhou's tourism gets new chances. Sour soup beef hot pot mixes the features of Kaili red sour-soup from Guizhou and fresh beef from Chaoshan. It is very popular in Guizhou. Now there are several strong competitors in this market: Guichu Sour Soup Beef, Hu Zige Sour Soup Beef and Niu Zi Wei Sour Soup Beef. According to researching, these big sour soup beef hot pot restaurants have little difference in food quality and taste. But they are quite different in popularity and sales volume. This paper tries to raise Niu Zi Wei's popularity from four parts: brand recognition, brand recall, brand image association and brand communication. Based on marketing knowledge, the four factors above greatly influence Niu Zi Wei's brand popularity. This paper gives some practical advice. We suggest improving brand design, making customers' dining experience better, learning new media skills and using social media to interact with customers. In these ways, more customers can remember Niu Zi Wei and its brand popularity will grow.

Keywords

Guizhou Sour Soup Beef Hot Pot; Brand Popularity; Brand Association; Brand Image

1. Introduction

Since 2025, China's consumer market has returned to normal growth after quick recovery. In the 15th Five-Year Plan period, people's consumption turns from fast rebound to slow and reasonable growth. People spend money not only on goods but also on services.Official data shows that Chinese people's average personal spending reached 29,476 yuan in 2025. It rose by 4.4 percent compared with the year before. Among this money, 13,602 yuan went to service consumption, up 4.5 percent.

In 2025, Chinese people spent 8,631 yuan for food, drinks and tobacco on average. Food spending made up 29.3 % of total personal spending. This number dropped

0.5 % year-on-year. People prefer to spend money for better life and personal development. The catering market also grows. In 2025, China's total restaurant income hit 5,798.2 billion yuan, rising 3.2 %.In Guizhou, local people's average personal spending was 21,770 yuan in 2025, with a 4.3 % year-on-year increase. More people eat outside and look for special experience when dining. But the growth speed slows down. The food industry no longer simply attracts customers by low prices. Good brand image plays a more and more important role when people choose restaurants.

Tourism brings lots of visitors for local special food. In 2025, Chinese people took 6.522 billion domestic trips. It increased 16.2 %. Tourists spent 6.30 trillion yuan during these trips, up 9.5 %.

Guizhou has beautiful mountains and rich ethnic culture, so its tourism becomes hotter. In 2025, the number of tourists and total tourism income of Guizhou rose by 8.9 % and 11.1 %. More tourists came from other provinces. In the first quarter of 2026, Guizhou still kept good growth in tourism. Tourists spend more money for each trip.Sour-soup is a special food symbol of Guizhou. The skill of making Kaili sour-soup fish belongs to national intangible cultural heritage. Kaili red sour-soup also gets national geographical-product protection. Sour-soup industry grows quickly. In 2025, Guizhou's whole sour-soup industry reached about 8 billion yuan in total value. There are 71 legal sour-soup factories. Their total yearly production can reach 270,000 tons. Kaili sour-soup industry value passed 8 billion yuan. In the first half of 2026, its value hit 5.387 billion yuan, up 41.84 %. The local government wants to make sour-soup industry even stronger.Now there are around 9,000 sour-soup hot-pot shops all over China. Guizhou sour-soup hot-pot market has reached 100-billion-yuan level. Big food brands like Haidilao and Freshippo also launch sour-soup hot-pot bases. Sour-soup changes from a local taste to a popular food across the whole country. Competition focuses more on brand building.

Sour-soup comes from Guizhou's Miao and Dong people with hundreds of years of history. It creates popular dishes such as sour-soup fish and sour-soup beef. Niu Zi Wei is one of the early sour-soup-beef restaurants in Guiyang. It has run for more than ten years. In recent years, more and more sour-soup-beef shops open. Products and store styles look much the same. Competitors often use low-price sales to win customers. Niu Zi Wei loses some customers and market share. When Guiyang locals want to eat sour-soup beef, many of them choose Guichu, Hu Zige or other small restaurants instead. Its sales go down. So Niu Zi Wei must improve its brand popularity.This paper takes Niu Zi Wei as research object. We study its brand position, brand image and customer experience. We offer practical advice for its real-world situation. We hope to make more people know, talk about and like Niu Zi Wei. Then more customers will choose this restaurant. Its sales and market share can rise.

2. Research Significance

2.1. Theoretical significance

Guizhou sour-soup hot-pot market becomes bigger, but few papers study its marketing and brand management. When we search "sour-soup" on CNKI, we get 530 results. Most papers talk about sour-soup's making skills and food quality. Only a small number discuss its business and marketing.

Now the internet develops fast. Brand building matters more for food companies. This study about Niu Zi Wei can give reference for other special-food restaurants. It adds research materials for local food brand management.

2.2. Practical significance

Sour-soup has hundreds of years of ethnic history in Guizhou. But it is less famous than Sichuan-Chongqing hot pot or Cantonese hot pot. Guizhou receives large numbers of tourists every year. We should push its special local food to more visitors.

Our research helps Niu Zi Wei improve its business. Good brand helps restaurants communicate with customers. If more people know and like Niu Zi Wei, they will spend money here. Its sales will go up. Besides, it can build a new famous food card for Guizhou and push the whole local food market forward.

We read papers from CNKI, Wanfang, Google Scholar. We learn different ideas about brand, brand popularity and food brand management. These materials lay a solid theoretical base for this paper.

3. Literature Review

Foreign scholars start brand research earlier. They have more studies about brand and brand popularity. This part talks about the CBBE brand pyramid model, brand popularity and its influencing factors, and what affects tourists' restaurant choices. From past studies, two key factors stand out: brand communication and brand association. Tourists also care a lot about brands when they eat in travel places.

3.1. CBBE Model

Keller put forward the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model in 1993. This model builds on customers' knowledge of one brand. It includes six parts: salience, performance, imagery, judgments, feelings and resonance. It has two paths. One is rational path with performance and judgments(Keller, 1993).The other is emotional path with imagery and feelings. Finally both paths reach brand resonance(Keller and Lehmann, 2006).

Romaniuk and Sharp explain brand salience. It means how easily people can think of one brand in different buying situations. If salience is high, the brand will enter people's choice list more easily. So we can use CBBE model to judge a restaurant's brand value and popularity level.

A brand is a mix of names, signs, pictures and designs. It helps customers tell one

product or service from others. Seven main brand elements include brand name, URL, logo, brand character, slogan, brand song and package. Companies use these elements to show their values and build emotional links with customers. Good brand elements leave deep memory in people's minds and bring competitive advantages(Romaniuk and Sharp, 2004).

3.2. The meaning of brand popularity

Brand popularity shows how familiar target customers are with one brand. It has two parts: brand recognition and brand recall. Brand recognition works more for people who have not tried the brand. Brand recall matters more for people who have used its products. Both parts affect customers' buying decisions.

Brand popularity is the base of brand reputation and brand loyalty. It plays an important part in making marketing plans. For people who have not tried Niu Zi Wei, we need to make them know this brand. For old customers, we need to help them remember it well. Niu Zi Wei is an old local restaurant. But new competitors take away its market. Its old brand image does not leave deep impression on customers any more. So we use brand communication for new customers. We use brand association and brand elements for old customers.

3.3. Factors that influence brand popularity

Old-style ads and social-media posts both change people's ideas about brands. Nostalgic-theme ads can wake up customers' old memories. Social media turns one-way information sending into two-way talk between companies and customers. Restaurants can post interesting content online to keep public attention. They also use official WeChat accounts to keep good relationships with customers.

For local food business, special food forms part of travel-place image. But many governments and restaurants do not do enough to spread local food culture. When we spread food culture, we should think about visitors' needs. We can use many different channels to make the brand better-known.

Brand association

Brand association means what ideas come into customers' minds when they see or hear one brand. It has three dimensions: attribute association, attitude association and benefit association.

1. Attribute association: It describes features of products or services. For example, what the food looks like, how packages feel and customers' real-life dining feelings. It is the most basic kind of brand association.

2. Attitude association: It shapes customers' total opinion of one brand. Good or bad feelings will directly influence their buying choices.

3. Benefit association: It refers to personal value customers get from products or services. Good dining value will leave long-lasting memory for customers.

Customers form brand association from their real dining experience. Good product

show and nice service help build strong brand association. Brand elements such as logos and slogans are very important here. Good visual design and multi-sense experience help customers recognize and recall brands. Modern diners care not only about food taste. They also pay attention to sight, touch and sound in restaurants. So special-food shops need multi-sense design for brand competition.

3.4. Factors influencing tourists' restaurant choices

Niu Zi Wei's customers include local Guiyang people and tourists from other places. Tourists consider many things before they choose a restaurant.

Special food experience is very important for tourists. Food taste, food sanitation, restaurant environment and table decoration all change visitors' feelings. Even if food taste is just so-so, nice store environment and small details can improve tourists' whole experience(Choe and Kim, 2018).

For travelling visitors, brand is an important clue for picking restaurants. Brands help tourists cut decision-making time and lower their worry. Brand equity comes from brand popularity, brand association and perceived product quality. When tourists look for restaurants on the internet, brand is one of their first considerations. During and after dining, service quality and store details shape their final judgement.

Nowadays brands greatly affect people's consumption decisions. Brand communication and brand association improve brand equity and brand popularity. For local-food restaurants, we cannot ignore tourist customers. Tourists care about brand culture, service quality, store image and product details.

To study Niu Zi Wei's brand-popularity improvement, we should first learn its real brand position and customers' feedback for its communication. Then we check customers' brand-association level and memory of its brand elements. We compare it with competitors to find solutions. At last, we study tourist groups and their dining-choosing habits. With these steps, we find Niu Zi Wei's real problems and work out solutions. We hope to raise its public exposure, influence and acceptance.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Deepen brand element design to improve brand recognition

Brand elements carry brand meaning and value. They show product features and send quality signals to tell one business from others(Dawar and Parker, 1994). Niu Zi Wei has slogans and IP images, but most customers do not remember them well. Their communication effect is weak.

Guizhou has rich Miao and Dong ethnic culture. Niu Zi Wei should dig out stories about Miao eating habits and sour-soup culture. It can add intangible-cultural-heritage elements into its brand design. Then its brand image will become richer. It may create hot public topics and get more attention.

4.2. Improve sight-hearing-touch-smell experience to strengthen brand

recall

We can divide customer experience into three periods: before dining, during dining and after dining. Good multi-sense experience makes customers remember the brand and choose it again. Besides food taste, we should improve sight, hearing, touch and smell inside restaurants.

Sight: Store decoration should match its Miao-culture idea. Use simple old-style building materials and wood-colored paint. Put Miao wax-print and Miao embroidery as decorations(Gustafsson, 2015).

Hearing: Make short, easy-to-remember brand music mixing Miao language and Chinese. Customers can feel local culture in the restaurant and recall the brand after leaving.

Touch: Design tableware with old-style Miao features. Print brand logo on cups, plates and washrooms. Keep tables and public areas clean and comfortable. Prepare small toys for kids and special care for old people, pregnant women and mothers with babies. Offer free drinks and snacks for waiting guests.

Smell: Use soft natural smell inside dining areas, like wood-fire scent. Put fresh light fragrance in washrooms. Do not use too-strong perfume.

All these small details deepen customers' memory and brand recall.

4.3. Improve new-media marketing skills for better communication

Now restaurants spread information through traditional media and social-network media. Social media has wide users and quick two-way interaction. Niu Zi Wei runs WeChat official account, WeChat channel, Douyin, Dianping and Meituan. But its online work does not get good results. It seldom updates official accounts. Its Douyin videos are short and low-quality, getting little traffic.

Niu Zi Wei should set up a special new-media team. Give team members professional training. Dig deep into its Miao-sour-soup culture. Make high-quality short videos and articles. Send clear brand information to online users and raise brand popularity.

4.4. Increase social-media interaction to get more public exposure

Short-video platforms such as Douyin, Xiaohongshu and Bilibili let ordinary users share daily life. Restaurant check-in and food-exploring videos bring large numbers of new customers.

Niu Zi Wei should make high-quality online content. For example, make short videos introducing sour-soup knowledge and Miao culture. Hold online activities: give small prizes for users who like, comment or share posts. Improve public participation, create hot online topics and attract more potential customers(Chu and Kim, 2011).

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