

# "From 'Ownership' to 'Experience': The Rise Mechanism of Non-Accommodation Short-Term Rental Consumption in Tourism"

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**Abstract:** Over the past five years, tourism consumption has undergone a profound transformation from "ownership-oriented" to "experience-oriented", fueling the explosive growth of experience-oriented short-term rentals across diverse tourism scenarios. Existing studies have predominantly focused on shared accommodation and standardized travel services, neglecting this segment characterized by immediate experience as the core, scenario-specific equipment/costumes as carriers, and digital platform matching as support. This study constructs an "Access-Experience-Identity-Sustainability (A-E-I-S) framework" and adopts a mixed research method to explore its rise mechanism and industrial impact. Findings indicate that such rentals arise from the joint effect of experience economy demand, access-based consumption supply, and digital platform empowerment, with motivations upgrading from "cost-driven" to "value-driven". They promote destinations from "landscape marketing" to "experience co-creation", serving as an important carrier for cultural and tourism integration. This study enriches theoretical research on tourism consumption transformation and provides practical insights for destination management, platform operation, and policy supervision.

**Keywords:** Tourism Consumption; Short-Term Rental; Experience Economy; Access-Based Consumption; A-E-I-S Framework

## 1. Introduction

Over the past five years, the value dimension of tourism consumption has shifted profoundly from "ownership-oriented" to "experience-oriented". A 2024 report by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) shows that 62% of young tourists worldwide regard "obtaining unique experiences" as their core travel demand, far exceeding the 28% who prioritize "material ownership" [1]. This shift has triggered the

explosive growth of experience-oriented short-term rentals, including cold-proof equipment in high-altitude scenic spots, traditional costumes in cultural ancient cities, camping gear for outdoor activities, and shared mobility tools for urban roaming. With core advantages of accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and low burden, the rental model connects tourist demands and scenario experiences. More notably, through User-Generated Content (UGC) dissemination on social media, it forms a value amplification effect of "experience consumption-content production-word-of-mouth diffusion", reshaping destination brand narrative logic.

Existing studies on tourism short rentals have mostly focused on shared accommodation (e.g., Airbnb) and standardized travel services (e.g., shared bicycles), paying insufficient attention to experience-oriented short-term rentals. The core feature distinguishing them from traditional accommodation short rentals is that their value lies not only in "temporary use of space or tools" but also in "creation and transmission of experiences". Based on this research gap, this study constructs an "Access-Experience-Identity-Sustainability (A-E-I-S) analytical framework" from four dimensions: consumer behavior logic, platform operation mechanism, cultural participation path, and sustainable development guarantee. It systematically explains the driving factors, operation mechanism, and industrial impact of experience-oriented short-term rentals, and verifies the framework with multi-scenario cases.

This study addresses three core research questions:

- (1) What are the multiple motivations and decision-making logics behind tourists' preference for renting over purchasing in the context of material affluence?
- (2) How does short-term rental enhance tourism experience through "tool empowerment" and affect destination image construction?
- (3) How can digital platforms and scenic spots achieve sustainable business and management

standardization through short-term rentals?

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Basis

### 2.1 Synergy between Experience Economy and Access-Based Consumption Theory

Pine and Gilmore (1998) first defined "experience" as the third type of economic offering besides goods and services in The Experience Economy, emphasizing its core value of creating unforgettable emotional memories for consumers [2]. This theory provides a key perspective for understanding the experience-oriented transformation of tourism consumption. Csikszentmihalyi (2000)'s "peak experience" concept further indicates that scarce, participatory activities are more likely to form in-depth emotional connections [3], and experience-oriented short-term rentals create conditions for such peak experiences by providing scarce equipment/scenarios.

Belk (2010)'s "access-based consumption" theory points out that modern consumers' utility satisfaction has shifted from "ownership possession" to "access to use" [4]. Rental reduces sunk costs and risk costs through "temporary use + low-cost investment", which is particularly suitable for tourism's "one-time, high-value, scenario-specific" consumption demands. The synergy between the two theories indicates that experience-oriented short-term rentals are essentially the product of "experience economy demand" and "access-based consumption supply", with the core logic of "exchanging access for experience value".

Kamięrzak et al. (2025) verified through questionnaire surveys that tourists' short-term rental decisions are driven by both "price sensitivity" and "experience demand", and low-cost rental services meeting scenario-specific experience needs are more likely to gain consumer recognition [5].

### 2.2 Platform Trust Mechanism in the Sharing Economy

The core contradiction of the sharing economy is "lack of trust between strangers", and digital platforms' trust mechanisms have enabled the large-scale development of experience-oriented short-term rentals [6]. Rothbard identified three core mechanisms:

(1) "information transparency" through user reviews and qualification verification to achieve information symmetry;

(2) "risk control" via standardized contracts, performance insurance, and deposit mechanisms;

(3) "service standardization" through unified cleaning, disinfection, and maintenance processes.

In tourism scenarios, the platform's trust mechanism has upgraded to a "content-transaction-service" closed loop [7]: algorithm-recommended scenario-specific content stimulates demand, credit evaluation simplifies transactions, and offline service outlets ensure experience, significantly reducing tourists' decision-making costs and usage thresholds. Zhang et al. (2025) supplemented that "sentiment-aware neural recommendation" technology can further enhance platform trust [8].

### 2.3 Intersection of Cultural Participation and Sustainable Consumption

Cultural tourism research shows that "immersive cultural participation" is a key path to enhance destination identity [9]. Experience-oriented short-term rentals such as costume rental enable tourists to transform from "cultural onlookers" to "participants".

A 2023 report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) points out that the waste rate of idle equipment in the tourism industry is as high as 41% [10]. Experience-oriented short-term rentals reduce environmental pressure through "resource recycling", achieving dual cultural and ecological values and becoming an important starting point for cultural and tourism integration and green development [11].

## 3. Theoretical Framework: Construction of the A-E-I-S Framework

Based on the above theoretical basis, this study constructs a four-dimensional A-E-I-S analytical framework, forming a progressive relationship to explain the rise mechanism of experience-oriented short-term rentals, promoting them from "supplementary consumption" to "structural consumption".

### 3.1 Basic Layer: Access-Threshold Reduction Mechanism

Access solves tourists' core pain points through "cost control + convenience improvement". High-value equipment's purchase cost far exceeds single-use value, and rental realizes cost sharing through "time-sharing payment" (Belk,

2010). Platforms solve carrying problems through "online booking + offline pick-up and return outlets", such as camping equipment rental with "pick-up at scenic spot entrance and return upon departure". In addition, credit deposit exemption and flexible rental periods further reduce psychological and time costs (Zhang et al., 2025).

### 3.2 Core Layer: Experience-Peak Creation Mechanism

Experience value creates tourism peak experiences through "scarce supply + scenario adaptation". Rental provides scarce equipment difficult for tourists to obtain, such as snow mountain oxygen tanks and professional photography equipment, which directly determine "whether the experience is possible" and "experience quality" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Meanwhile, in-depth adaptation of equipment and scenarios enhances immersion, such as ethnic costume rental in Miao villages combined with local festivals, upgrading experience from "sightseeing" to "integration".

### 3.3 Communication Layer: Identity-Social Amplification Mechanism

The symbolic attributes of equipment and costumes provide a carrier for tourists' identity expression, amplified by social media. Drawing on Bourdieu's "symbolic capital" theory, tourists construct identity labels such as "cultural enthusiasts" and "trend explorers" by renting symbolic items. The "experience-shooting-sharing" process forms UGC communication, bringing social identity to tourists and free promotional content for destinations (Zhang et al., 2025).

### 3.4 Guarantee Layer: Sustainability-Long-Term Operation Mechanism

Sustainability ensures long-term development through "resource recycling + standardized operation". Rental extends equipment service life, such as a piece of Hanfu rented more than 50 times a year (UNEP, 2023). Platforms realize cost control and quality assurance through "unified procurement, regular maintenance, and standardized disinfection" (Rothbard, 2015), such as the "three-level quality inspection system" for outdoor equipment rental. This dual attribute of ecological and commercial sustainability endows experience-oriented short-term rentals with long-term development

potential.

## 4. Research Design and Data Sources

To verify the A-E-I-S framework, this study adopts a mixed research method combining multi-case comparison, exploratory survey, and literature triangulation.

### 4.1 Research Methods

**Multi-Case Comparison:** Six typical scenarios (technology-assisted, safety and cold-proof, cultural costume, outdoor camping, image recording, urban mobility) are selected, with 2-3 representative cases each. First-hand data are collected through in-depth interviews (platform operators, scenic spot managers, tourists) and field observations. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and informed consent was obtained.

**Exploratory Questionnaire:** A "motivation-experience-satisfaction" scale is designed and distributed online (Ctrip, Mafengwo) and offline (Badaling Great Wall, Yulong Snow Mountain), recovering 528 valid questionnaires (78.6% recovery rate). Sample structure: 67.2% aged 18-35, 82.1% cross-provincial tourists, 63.5% with short-term rental experience.

**Literature Triangulation:** Academic papers, industry reports (iResearch, 2024), platform operation data, and policy texts are sorted out for cross-validation with first-hand data.

### 4.2 Data Analysis

NVivo 12 is used for coding interview texts to extract core categories. SPSS 26 is used for descriptive statistics and correlation analysis, verifying the positive correlation between "Access, Experience, Identity" and "re-rental willingness" (correlation coefficients 0.62, 0.78, 0.69 respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ).

## 5. Case Verification: Multi-Scenario Analysis Based on the A-E-I-S Framework

### 5.1 Technology-Assisted Category: Exoskeleton Mountaineering Equipment Rental (Badaling Great Wall)

Data for this case were collected through field observations at the Badaling Great Wall, interviews with rental service operators, and tourist experience feedback obtained during the research process.

**Access:** Equipment unit price ~12,000 yuan, daily rental 199 yuan, credit deposit exemption,

3 pick-up/return points; 89.3% of users value cost-effectiveness.

Experience: Reduces physical consumption by 30%, elderly summit rate rises from 28% to 65%, with voice guide function.

Identity: 45.6% of users post "climbing the Great Wall with mechanical legs" on social media, constructing "trendy elderly" and "technology explorer" identities.

Sustainability: 320 annual rentals per unit, 60% lower depreciation, complaint rate <0.5%.

Inference: Core competitiveness lies in functional empowerment + topic attribute, suitable for high-physical-consumption, high-popularity scenic spots.

### 5.2 Safety and Cold-Proof Category: Rental of Down Jackets and Oxygen Cylinders (Yulong Snow Mountain)

Data for this case were collected through field observations at Yulong Snow Mountain, interviews with equipment rental operators, and tourist usage feedback recorded during the research process.

Access: Package daily rental 50-80 yuan (vs. ~500 yuan purchase cost), online booking, cross-location return; 92.1% of users value cost-saving and convenience.

Experience: Pressure-warning oxygen cylinders and windproof down jackets reduce altitude sickness complaint rate from 12.3% (2019) to 3.1% (2024), experience satisfaction 91.5%.

Identity: 32.4% of tourists rent after social media exposure, forming a "must-have experience" word-of-mouth effect.

Sustainability: Unified disinfection, oxygen cylinder recycling, peak season turnover rate 95%.

Inference: Core is risk management + standardized service, suitable as basic support for scenic spots with special environmental conditions.

### 5.3 Cultural Costume Category: Hanfu Rental (Xi'an, Huimin Street-Big Wild Goose Pagoda)

Data for this case were obtained through field observations in Xi'an cultural tourism districts, interviews with Hanfu rental businesses, and tourist participation feedback collected during the research process.

Access: Basic Hanfu daily rental 80-120 yuan, package with makeup 200-300 yuan, on-site service, response time <30 minutes.

Experience: High scene adaptation with historical landmarks creates "immersive time-travel", combined with intangible cultural heritage experiences.

Identity: 82.7% of users post photos on social media, 15.3% overseas tourists spread Chinese culture through Hanfu experience.

Sustainability: Single Hanfu rented >200 times annually, some brands use eco-friendly fabrics.

Inference: Core value is scenario adaptation + service integration, serving as a key carrier for destination cultural branding.

### 5.4 Supplementary Verification of Other Scenarios

Data for this section were compiled from supplementary field observations, tourism platform information, and secondary tourism industry reports.

Outdoor Camping (Moganshan): Lightweight packages meet aesthetic and practical needs, standardized operation ensures equipment lifecycle management.

Image Recording (Qinghai Lake Aerial Photography): Drone/camera rental meets high-quality image demands, credit deposit-free reduces use threshold.

Urban Mobility (Chengdu Shared Electric Bikes): Solves "last three kilometers" problem, big data optimizes parking layout.

Conclusion: All scenarios follow the A-E-I-S mechanism, confirming the framework's universal explanatory power.

## 6. Discussion: Core Logic and Industrial Impact

Before discussing the implications of the findings, it should be noted that the empirical results of this study are primarily based on correlation analysis. These correlations indicate associations rather than causal relationships. Therefore, the observed relationships among access, experience, identity, and re-rental willingness should be interpreted as indicative patterns rather than definitive causal effects.

### 6.1 Consumption Motivation: From "Cost-Driven" to "Value-Driven" Upgrade

Motivation shows dual-drive characteristics: basic motivation is "cost control" (68.3% avoid equipment idleness, 62.7% cite lower rental costs); core motivation is "value acquisition" (76.5% pursue better experiences, 59.2% seek unique travel). Group differences exist: young

tourists (18-30) prioritize identity expression (67.4% mention social sharing), middle-aged tourists (31-50) focus on practical value (72.1% value convenience/cost-saving), elderly tourists (>50) value functional support (81.3% aim to reduce physical burden).

## 6.2 Platform Role: From "Matcher" to "Experience Ecosystem Builder"

Platforms play three core roles: (1) Trust construction via a three-dimensional system (user evaluation 40%, merchant certification 30%, insurance 30%), 89.7% of tourists rely on platform evaluations; (2) Content empowerment, with 23.5% conversion rate from content click to transaction (4.5x higher than traditional advertising); (3) Data-driven operation, optimizing inventory and services based on passenger flow and user feedback.

## 6.3 Destination Impact: From "Landscape Marketing" to "Experience Co-Creation"

Experience-oriented short-term rentals enrich destination connotations and expand tourist groups (e.g., exoskeleton rentals attract elderly tourists to the Great Wall). They stimulate UGC spread (e.g., "Hanfu travel in Xi'an" has 50 billion+ Douyin plays) and enhance emotional connection: tourists with rental experience have an emotional identity score of 8.2/10, 1.7 points higher than non-renters.

## 6.4 Operational Challenges

Key challenges include: (1) Equipment loss (15-20% annual rate) and high maintenance costs for high-tech gear; (2) Non-standard services (67.3% of complaints relate to unclear costumes, unclear compensation); (3) Tension between personalization (hard to scale) and standardization (lacks uniqueness).

## 7. Conclusion and Implications

### 7.1 Core Conclusions

Experience-oriented short-term rentals arise from experience economy demand, access-based consumption supply, and digital platform empowerment, following the A-E-I-S mechanism.

While scenario-specific, all models adhere to "cost-value-communication-long-term effect" logic, with motivations upgrading to value-driven.

They optimize tourist experiences, drive

destination transformation to "experience co-creation", and realize dual cultural and ecological values, becoming a key carrier for high-quality tourism development.

## 7.2 Practical Implications

### 7.2.1 Destination management

Incorporate short-term rentals into tourism infrastructure planning, layout rental points around core scenarios.

Develop characteristic products based on local cultural symbols (e.g., Suzhou Cheongsam + gardens).

Use UGC data to optimize marketing (e.g., curate excellent rental experience notes as promotional content).

### 7.2.2 Platform operation

Build a "standardization + personalization" service system (unified equipment standards + customized packages).

Strengthen trust with blockchain technology to record equipment lifecycle and ensure review authenticity.

Adopt data-driven precise operation (predict tourist flow, adjust inventory/pricing).

### 7.2.3 Policy supervision

Formulate industry standards (equipment quality, service procedures, deposit management) and a blacklist system.

Establish "platform-government" collaborative supervision with big data monitoring and random inspections.

Support green development via tax incentives for rental enterprises using eco-friendly materials.

## 7.3 Research Limitations and Future Outlook

Limitations include concentrated case selection (domestic popular destinations) and cross-sectional design. Future research can expand to cross-border scenarios, adopt longitudinal tracking to explore long-term impacts, and use experimental methods to verify micro psychological mechanisms of rental decisions.

Experience-oriented short-term rentals represent a structural shift in tourism consumption. With improved service standards and industrial ecology, they will become a core link connecting tourist demand and destination value, injecting new vitality into the global tourism industry.

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