

## Amish in Rural Tourism: Representation of Subcultures in Tourism Marketing

Yuanxin Zhang Ph.D  
*Tsinghua University*

Jonathon Day Prof.  
*Purdue University*

Zhenhao(Mark) Meng Prof.  
*Indiana University - Kokomo*

Chengyu Xiong Prof.  
*Tsinghua University*

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## **Amish in Rural Tourism: Representation of Subcultures in Tourism Marketing**

Ethnic culture heritage, as a subculture, provides an important resource for US rural tourism. However, the commodification of culture heritage has affected the representation of cultural heritage in tourism marketing. This study examines 13 counties of Indiana where Amish are a significant proportion of the population and explores how the destination presents Amish culture in their promotional materials. This article conducts content analysis and semiotic analysis of Amish icons and website information through data collection and coding of 50 websites and 458 images. The results calculated the geographic location, symbols and text distribution of Amish elements in Indiana, and also compared the different usage proportions, meanings and functions of Amish icons and texts in DMO & commercial websites. And it is also analyzed the Amish meaning system of symbols and culture codes through semiotic models in DMO & commercial websites.

### **Introduction**

Amish are social and cultural heritage groups with special surnames and high-context culture (Cross, 2004; Knight, 1980). The three largest Amish gathering areas are in the United States. And the special models of Amish society make it adhere to a lifestyle different from the American social system. The special community coexists commonwealth, sectarian society, folk society, and high-context culture (Hostetler, 1993). And it also owns a special identification system, subject, discourse, practice, and values (Amoamo & Thompson, 2010). Also, the Amish community is defined as the actual geographical distribution space of the Amish population in sociology and anthropology, which makes the spatial concept of the Amish community serves as the basis for the study of the Amish sense of place, community order, local cultural values, and population flow in space (Cross, 2004; Lamme & McDonald, 1993).

Farming as the main occupation of Amish, this makes them live in the U.S. countryside or rural places. Like other rural towns in the USA, Amish rural community in their quest to become tourist destinations. As cultural heritage has become an important tool for marketing and destination development projects in tourism. Tourism is considered a tool for the commercialization and industrialization of cultural heritage (Strong et al., 2017). As the rural tourism based on ethnic heritage, Amish's heritage includes handcrafted techniques, food, instruments, objects, artifacts, expressions, representations, as well as the value system of the community and cultural spaces. The Amish Church plays a central role in maintaining the inherent life mode of Amish, which produces religious practices, means of production, teachings, customs, and continues the non-material habits of the Amish people (Lamme & McDonald, 1993).

This article will explore the Amish subculture representation in tourism marketing. The research points to the mutually beneficial development of ethnic heritage and rural tourism. In the goal of mutual benefit, sub-culture is an important component of rural tourism, and tourism is used as an emergency authenticity building platform to promote the contemporary development of community heritage.

## **Literature Review**

### **2.1 Amish sub-culture as an important component in rural tourism offering**

#### **2.1.1 US rural tourism**

Rural tourism is an important element of tourism in the US, it revives stagnant or declining economies of some rural towns (Ioannides & Timothy, 2010). Normally, the local area achieves the construction of tourist destinations through the industrialization of natural amenities, historic history, ethnic heritage, famous person, and also existing events & festivals. For destinations without any geographical and historical advantages, the destination try to take advantage of their portrayal in a popular movie, or engineer an artificial image of an ethnic past, restoring a site of earlier economic activities and buildings, and even invent the heritage of the town (Ioannides & Timothy, 2010).

#### **2.1.2 Amish sub-culture in rural tourism offering**

Amish rural tourism was appeared in the 20th century. At first it was run in the form of bus tours and brochures, and later integrated into package tours, tourism products, and hotel expansion (Trollinger, 2012). The Amish rural tourism provides authenticity and uniqueness of the rural life "nostalgic" imagination (Trollinger, 2012; Walbert, 2002). As a myth different from modern mature civilization, Amish culture helps visitors recall the origin of farm culture and maintain the vitality of rural traditions. The value and cost of mythology are better than advertising (Walbert, 2002)p67-100. Tourism serves as a stage for performing social dramas, showcasing the organized way of Amish culture, which provides an ideal picture of Amish life for tourists. Also, the old order Amish participate the tourism job by acting as a new identity on the stage. Tourism is a pleasant intermediate experience which satisfying tourists while protecting the Amish culture (Trollinger, 2012)p25-46.

### **2.2 The role of culture heritage in tourism marketing**

#### **2.2.1 Economic value of cultural heritage in tourism marketing**

The ever-growing tourism treats all forms of cultural heritage as marketable assets, thus forming the culture heritage to heritage industry (Bucurescu, 2015). The transformation of heritage values into economic values is a common demand for heritage management and industrialization. Cultural heritage directly affects the economy by creating jobs and providing income, and it has an indirect effect by promoting tourism and hospitality (Tonta, 2016). Heritage value draws attention to the value of assets to future generations. These values may be transformed into economic values, but their origins depend on values other than currency (Hølleland et al., 2017). Cultural heritage serves as the local civilization wealth and traditional memory, and it also serves as the world's culturally diverse existence and development power (Liu, 2015). Heritage pricing can help raise public awareness (Hølleland et al., 2017). In the sustainable urban growth strategy, cultural sustainability is regarded as the fourth pillar beside the economy, society, and environment (Skrede & Berg, 2019).

### **2.2.2 Commercialization of cultural heritage in tourism marketing**

Heritage began to appear in very similar forms in different places (Strong et al., 2017). In the global tourism market, the process of establishing a local identity and culture may lead to the reshaping of cultural attributes and the threat of people's privacy and cultural invasion (Mac Con Iomaire, 2018). When tourism develops from organized commercial activities/products into a "community lifestyle", it will cause cultural degradation of intangible cultural heritage and loss of identity. The community and its culture and traditions have been pushed aside by new regulations and neoliberal economic conditions (Ruhanen & Whitford, 2019). The commercialization of culture is embodied in the change of the meaning of cultural products and interpersonal relationships. Once 'real', became a staged performance, a cultural commodity (Cohen, 1988)

## **2.3 Destination image and its representation**

### **2.3.1 Research object of destination image**

The destination image describes the perception of a location and serves as an alternative to a location photo (Day et al., 2002). It is composed of cognitive (the number of external stimuli received by objects), affective (destination choice motivation), and conative (Gartner, 1994). The destination is not a single object in the research. According to research statistics, destinations are mostly countries, followed by states and cities (Pike, 2002). The destination image includes two types: induced image and organic image. Among them, the induced image represents an image formed artificially according to market demand; The overt induced images include traditional forms of advertising from tour operators, and wholesalers; And the covert induced images are from the recognizable spokesperson, travel writers, or special interest media groups.

### **2.3.2 Representation of the destination image**

The destination image represents the local identity, space, time, meaning reproduction, ideology, rights, cultural system, and deconstruction. The representation of the rhetorical form describes the uniqueness of the destination (Y. (Alex) Wang, 2016). Different kinds of tourism media and movies are used as cultural texts to help create and reproduce meaning, and thus shape tourists' understanding of the social world. At the same time, they produce and replicate the way of expression, meaning, and cultural structure sharing (Cordeiro, 2011). Culture representation in tourism is not presented as a reality, but a high degree of ideology and cultural knowledge choice (Meng et al., 2011). Processes of representation construct is a kind of negotiation, rather than being a reflection of objective knowledge. It is restricted by sociocultural systems (Y. (Alex) Wang, 2016). The mechanisms of power according to the dominant ideology of a particular value system, meaning and strengthening of cultural representation for packaging, which directly affects the perception of tourists (Amoamo & Thompson, 2010).

## **2.4 Research Questions**

**Q1. How prominently is Amish culture presented in tourism marketing?**

## Q2. Are Amish represented differently in commercial versus destination (DMO) marketing communications?

### Methodology

This study uses content analysis and semiotic analysis to sample Amish websites from 13 counties in Indiana where Amish are a significant proportion of the population, and explores how these destinations present Amish people and culture in their promotional materials. 50 website samples and 458 image samples are obtained.

Table 1. Image category construction table

First-level indicators	Second-level indicators	Third-level indicators
Basic info	Image geographic location by county	1=LaGrange; 2=Adams; 3=Daviess; 4=Parke; 5=Jay; 6=Switzerland; 7=Martin; 8=Elkhart; 9=Marshall; 10=Orange; 11=Allen; 12=Noble; 13=Kosciusko; 14=Others
	Function of images	1=Tour; 2=Furniture; 3=Shopping; 4=Restaurants; 5=Hotels; 6=Activities; 7=Others; 8=Not available
Image icons	Content items and activities	1=Natural scenery; 2=People; 3=Relic; 4=Lifestyle; 5=Apparel; 6=Building; 7=Outdoor activities; 8=Wildlife; 9=Art/handicraft; 10=Domestic animals; 11=Plant; 12=Tourist facilities; 13=City view; 14=Rural landscape; 15=Food; 16=Leisure activities; 17=Means of transportation; 18=Festival/ritual; 19=Tour recommendation; 20=Indoor activities; 21=Others
	Person in the picture	1=Amish people; 2=Other people; 3=Not available
Image text information	Text ads in images	1=Products; 2=Destination; 3=Activities; 4=Person; 5=Time; 6=Amish; 7=Market; 8=Tourism; 9=Attraction; 10=Contact way; 11=Others; 12=Not available

Based on the website and image information, a three-level classification standard table and information identification reference table have been established, which are used as a basis for statistics and analysis of website and image information.

Table 2. The oppositional relationship analysis model from Berger

Signifier	Amish icon	The oppositional relationship object	
	Signified	Oppositional relationship1	Signified
	Signified	Oppositional relationship2	Signified
	Signified	Oppositional relationship3	Signified
	...		
	(Berger, 1999)		

Table 3. The two stages of signification analysis model from Roland Barthes

Signifier 1		Signified 1 (The implicit layer)
Amish icon	Though the oppositional relationship analysis	
Signifier 2		Though the meaning system of symbols and culture codes analysis
Signified 2 (Culture themes, concepts and meanings)		

And according to the oppositional relationship analysis model from Berger and the two stages of signification analysis model from Roland Barthes, the meaning system of symbols and culture codes of Amish icons and texts in DMO & commercial websites are analyzed.

## Results

A. The figure 1 showed the geographical representation of Amish rural tourism in Indiana.

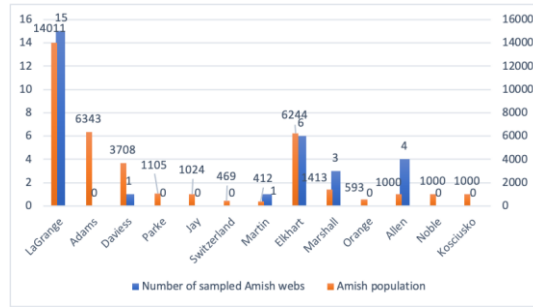


Figure 1. Amish population of 13 counties in Indiana &  
The distribution of sampled Amish websites in 13 counties in Indiana

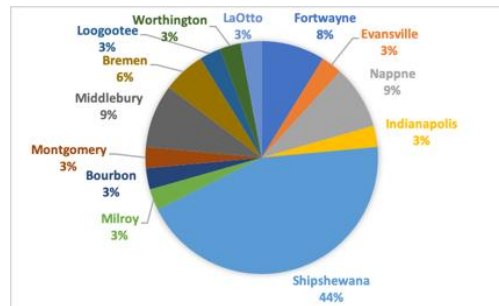


Figure 2. The distribution of Amish attractions and retails & restaurants in  
13 attractions of Indiana

B. The table 1 showed the most photographed Amish elements in destination images.

Table 4. The representation of Amish icons in non-profit/govt web images, attractions web images and retail & restaurants web images

Content items	Non-Profit/Govt web images		Attractions web images		Retail & Restaurants web images	
People	58	(17%)	38	(21%)	27	(6%)
Means of transportation	33	(10%)	12	(7%)	3	(1%)
Domestic animals	33	(10%)	13	(7%)	8	(2%)
Building	25	(7%)	12	(7%)	48	(11%)
Art / handicraft	23	(7%)	30	(17%)	297	(68%)
Natural scenery	22	(7%)	0	(0%)	13	(3%)
Lifestyle	18	(5%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
City view	19	(6%)	2	(1%)	1	(0%)
Food	17	(5%)	17	(9%)	12	(3%)
Rural landscape	13	(4%)	13	(7%)	1	(0%)
Outdoor activities	12	(4%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)

Apparel	11 (3%)	16 (9%)	10 (2%)
Plants	11 (3%)	6 (3%)	11 (3%)
Festival/ritual	9 (3%)	8 (4%)	1 (0%)
Tourist facilities	7 (2%)	3 (2%)	3 (1%)
Ruins	7 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Leisure activities	6 (2%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)
Wildlife	5 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Tours recommendation	4 (1%)	4 (2%)	0 (0%)
Indoor activities	2 (1%)	5 (3%)	0 (0%)

C. The table 2 and table 3 showed the he Amish meaning system of symbols and culture codes through semiotic models in DMO & commercial websites.

Table 2. Symbol system analysis based on the oppositional relationship of the Amish icons in retail & restaurant websites

Art / Handicraft	Amish quilts	Present info	Unquilted duvet or comforter
	Commodity/culture heritage	Images	Commodity
	Design with Amish style. etc.	logo	Not available
	Amish. etc.	Business owner	Not available
	Commodity	Text advertisement	Commodity
Decorative function, material, design, handcraft		Category	Material
Abrie kits, yardage, precuts panels		Material	Down and cotton
Hand, longarm, & custom quilting		Craftmanship	Mass-produced
	Show with products	Price showcase	Show with products
Amish furniture		Ready-to-assemble furniture	
	Commodity/culture heritage	Images	Commodity
	Design with Amish style. etc.	logo	Not available
	Amish. etc.	Business owner	Not available
	Commodity	Text advertisement	Commodity
Decorative function, material, design, handcraft		Category	By function
	Solid wood	Material	Synthetic material



	Retro, Plain, and Modern stye by hand-made	Craftmanship	Mass-produced
	Contact for detail price	Price showcase	Show with products
<b>Food</b>	<b>Amish restaurant food</b>	<b>Fast food</b>	
	Commodity/culture heritage	Images	Commodity
	Design with Amish style. etc.	logo	Not available
	Amish. etc.	Business owner	Not available
	Commodity	Text advertisement	Commodity
	Not available	Category	Not available
	Organic	Material	Non-organic
	Home-made	Craftmanship	Mass-produced
	Visit for detail price	Price showcase	Show with products
	<b>Amish food products</b>	<b>Mass-produced food in grocery</b>	
	Commodity/culture heritage	Images	Commodity
	Design with Amish style. etc.	logo	Not available
	Amish. etc.	Business owner	Not available
	Commodity	Text advertisement	Commodity
	Material	Category	Material
	Organic	Material	Not available
	Hand-made	Craftmanship	Mass-produced
	Show with products	Price showcase	Show with products

Table 3. The decoding of Amish icons in retail & restaurant websites

	<b>Signifier 1</b>	<b>Signified 1= Signifier 2</b>	<b>Signified 2</b>
Amish Quilts	Multiple functions, materials, and craftsmanship		
Amish furniture	Various styles of handmade craftsmanship, solid wood materials, can be customized privately	Pecuniary canons of taste	Leisure class system
Amish restaurant food	Organic, homemade		
Amish food products	Organic, homemade		

## Conclusion and Discussion

- A. The statistical results show the geographic location, symbols, and text distribution of Amish elements in Indiana. Among the 13 counties, LaGrange, Elkhart, and Adams are the three most active counties for Amish tourism, and 44% of all Amish attractions in Indiana are concentrated in Shipshewana.
- B. By comparing the difference of Amish representation in DMO & commercial marketing communication, the statistical results show the different proportions, meanings and functions of Amish icons and texts in DMO & commercial websites. Firstly, the statistical results show the different usage proportions of Amish texts in DMO & commercial websites. Among them, Amish texts is less used in DMO website. Relatively, Amish texts are widely used in commercial websites. Secondly, Amish's highest frequency icons in DMO websites present a typical stereotyped image. The information on for-profit websites implies more opportunities to interact with Amish people. Thirdly, Amish icons and texts play different roles in DMO & commercial marketing communication. DMO websites focus on destination promotion and tourist experience. Relatively, Amish representation are used as brand promotion in most for-profit websites.
- C. Through the relative positions of the Amish icons, the meaning of Amish icons point to the opposite of modern civilization. Relatively, the relative positions of the Amish icons in retail & restaurant websites, the meaning of Amish icons in their oppositional relationship present consumer products with a sense of beauty and honor.

In terms of theoretical implications, the article innovates the research object from traditional destination images to icons and website information in tourism marketing communication. And from the perspective of semiotics, this research puts forward the importance of the symbol system and tourist decoding of Amish representation in the tourism marketing. Moreover, the analysis of culture system, symbol system rules and culture codes of the Amish icons, will help predict the representational meaning of Amish symbols and the decoding of tourists in DMO & commercial websites, which also will help the spread of ethnic cultural heritage communication and tourism promotion.

All in all, the practice of representation of Amish subculture in rural tourism marketing reveals the process of tourism giving Amish meaning through Amish icons. Also, it reveals the current commercial negotiation of Amish cultural heritage in rural tourism. The ever-changing meaning of heritage in each society and in different historical periods makes the presentation of the “rules” of meaning identification in the practice of representation equally important. Nevertheless, the study showed that there is a lack of cultural strategy support related to heritage tourism in websites’ marketing communication. This means that the way in which cultural heritage is represented in tourism marketing lacks culture codes to assist in interpretation. Similarly, the sustainable balance between heritage and economy in rural tourism requires people to pay more attention to the cultural perspective of the heritage communication of subculture groups. And how to integrate heritage

communication strategies into tourism market economic strategies will be one of the practical studies that need more discussion in the future.

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